Eugène Sue



Arthur

Tome I

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ARTHUR

BY

EUGÈNE SUE

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—

ARTHUR, Vol. I.

—

INTRODUCTION

ARTHUR.

CHAPTER I

THE POST-ROAD

A strange chance put me in possession of this journal. I had established myself for several months

in a central city in one of our southern departments, whose shore is bathed by the Mediterranean, and I was desirous of purchasing a country place in that marvellously picturesque land. I had already looked at several pieces of property when, one day, the notary, who had been giving me some necessary directions for one of my explorations, said to me: "I have just received notice that at about eight leagues from here, in one of the most beautiful situations in the world, neither too far nor too near to the sea, there is a country house for sale. I know nothing of it whatever; but if you would like to see it, monsieur, here are the precise directions how to find it. You will have to arrange the affair with the curé of the village of ——."

"What!" said I, "with the curé? You don't suppose that it is the presbytery that is for sale?"

"I know nothing about it," answered the lawyer; "but, judging from the high price that they ask, I hardly think it can be a parsonage. Besides," added he, with a sly and convincing look, "it seems as though there would be a thousand ways of arranging an advantageous and private sale, because it is sold in consequence of sudden departure or a sudden death, I don't know exactly which; the fact is, there have been told so many absurd and stupid stories on the subject, that I should make myself ridiculous in repeating them all to you. What is certain, however, monsieur, is that such an opportunity is always a good one, and my correspondent assures me that there has been no end of money spent on the property."

"A swift departure! A sudden death! Who, then, lived on the place?" I asked.

"I know nothing, absolutely nothing. My

correspondent tells me nothing more, and 'tis by the greatest accident that he has even heard of this good opportunity; because out of a hundred people in this department, you will scarcely find ten who could tell you anything about the village of ——."

I know not why, but for some reason this information, vague as it was, excited my curiosity; I decided to set forth immediately, and consequently ordered horses to be put to the carriage.

"Oh," said the notary, "I advise you not to think of venturing to travel in a carriage over those dreadful roads. 'Tis a post-road, to be sure, but the nearest relay to —— is still five leagues off, and to get there they say one has to go through regular sand-pits, where one sinks so deep that 'tis a thousand chances to one if you ever get out again. If you take my advice you will go on horseback."

I took his word for it, and had a portemanteau fastened behind my saddle, and thus, preceded by a postilion, I started for the village of ——, which was eight leagues from the city where I was staying.

I got over the first three leagues in about an hour, changed horses at the relay, and then struck into the open country.

It was towards the middle of the month of May, a delicious morning, cooled by a gentle northerly breeze. The roads, deep with a sand as yellow as ochre, though detestable for carriages, which would sink in to the hubs of the wheels, were not at all bad for horseback riding. The farther I advanced towards the interior of the uncultivated and wild country, the more nature became grand and majestic, though perhaps at the same time somewhat monotonous. Before me stretched out great plains of rose-coloured

heather towards a horizon of bluish mountains; to the left were numerous wooded hills, while to the right was a continuous curtain of verdure, formed by the willows and poplars which bordered a shallow but very clear stream, always fordable but very swift, which we were continually crossing; for it wandered with many turnings across the road, which sometimes descended between high banks, covered with hawthorn, mulberry, and wild rose bushes, sometimes, emerging from these hollows, ascended to the plain that could be seen straight before us as smooth as a tennis-court.

"Have you ever been to ——?" I asked my guide, whose strongly marked face, extreme neatness, and easy seat denoted a soldier whose term of service was over. I had heard his companions at the post call him "the hussar," and everything about the man was such a contrast to the negligent appearance and noisy familiarity of the rest of these Southerners! "Have you ever been to ——?"

"Yes, monsieur, twice in my life," he replied, stopping his horse and placing himself a little behind me; "I went there once two years ago, and then I went there three months ago, but *dame!* the two goings were not much alike!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, the first time," said he, in an excited way, still animated by the remembrance of such a glorious journey, "that was the fine ride! *Cent sous* for the guide! A courier! Six horses to the berlin!"

And by way of illustration my guide began cracking his whip in a way that almost deafened me.

Not being content with this manner of describing the rank of the travellers, I asked him:

"But who was in that carriage? Who paid the courier?"

"I don't know, monsieur, the blinds of the berlin were pulled down. On the seat behind sat a man and a woman, both elderly folks who looked as though they might be confidential servants."

"And the courier, had he nothing to say?"

"The courier? Not he, a ferocious looking fellow with never a word to say! The only time I heard him speak was when he ordered the horses, and that didn't take long, *allez*, monsieur! He jumped from his horse, put two louis d'or in the hand of the *maître de poste*, and said: 'Six horses for the carriage and one riding-horse, *cent sous* for the guide, forty sous paid in advance.' And then off he went at a gallop."

"And he never gave his master's name?"

"*Non*, monsieur."

"What sort of livery did the courier wear?"

"Stop a bit, monsieur, and I'll try to remember. Yes —a green jacket, with gold braid on all the seams, a cap just like the jacket, red silk sash, coat-of-arms on his buttons, a hunting-knife—moustaches—oh, the whole business—grand style—but too fierce to suit me, *parole d'honneur!*"

"And since then have you never found out who you led to ——?"

"*Non*, monsieur."

"And the carriage, when did it come back?"

"But, monsieur, it never did come back."

"What!" said I, much surprised, "but there must be a good many country houses at ——?"

"*Non*, monsieur, there is only one in the place; all the rest are only little huts for the peasants."

"Then there is another road besides this one?"

"Oh, *non*, monsieur; this is the only possible way of getting back."

"And nobody ever came back this way?"

"*Non*, monsieur."

"It is most extraordinary! And how long ago did all this happen?"

"Very nearly two years, monsieur."

"Now tell me about your other journey," said I to my guide, hoping to get at some explanation of the mystery.

"Oh, that is a journey never to forget! I'll remember that one for many a day! Ah, the old scoundrel! The old brigand! The sly old fox!"

"*Voyons*, come, tell me about it, *mon garçon*; the thought of it seems to put you in an ill temper."

"Ill temper! You better believe it does, and a good reason. It is not so much for the trick he played on me as for the mean way he did it,—and then to think of his having called me his good friend, the old monster! *Son bon ami!*

"You shall hear the whole story, monsieur.

"That ride was about three months ago. It was my turn next to ride. I was warming myself in the stable between my horses, for it was very cold. About eleven o'clock in the morning I heard click-clack, click-clack, a cracking of the whip for all the world as if for another hundred sous for the guide, and the voice of Jean Pierre all out of breath calling out,

'Two carriage horses!'

"'*Bon*,' said I, 'here is a good thing and it is my turn to go; 'so I went out to get a look at the traveller.

"Well, there stood a sort of an old gig with a leather apron, a thing we used to call a berlingot; the whole affair so covered and spattered with mud that you couldn't tell its colour.

"I said to myself: 'Good! 'Tis a doctor who is hurrying to see some one at the point of death.' But, *saprejeu!* What do I hear but the voice of the dying man himself calling out from the depths of the berlingot, calling as loud as it could call—half a cough—half a sniffle:

"'Ah, beggar of a postilion! Ah, miserable wretch! Do you mean to kill me tearing over the roads like this?'

"The fact is Jean Pierre had dragged the old thing along at such a pace that the hubs were smoking.

"'Hope you've got the worth of your money, *not'-bourgeois*,' said Jean Pierre, in a furious voice to the old berlingot.

"'There'll be four francs for the guide, won't there?' said I to Jean Pierre, who was unhitching his horses and swearing like a pagan.

"'Four francs! Not much! Ah, no, not much; the old beast only pays twenty-five sous.'

"'Twenty-five cents? The tariff? And you galloping him along as though he were a prince?'

"'Yes; and the only thing I'm sorry for is that I couldn't jounce him any faster.'

"'You are a great stupid,' said I to Jean Pierre.

"'You'll do just as I did.'

"'Not much,' said I to Jean Pierre.

"Well, they finally brought me my mount. I had named him Devastator because he was continually committing injuries to others. It was a way he had, that beast; man or horse, 'twas all the same to him, so that he could get in a bite or a kick, in front or behind, anywhere in fact. Poor Devastator!" added my guide, with a sad sigh.

Then he continued: "They brought me my horse, and before mounting him I saw a great, dried-up, bony hand as dark as walnut-wood stretched out of the leather apron of the berlingot to pay Jean Pierre his twenty-five sous.

"Seeing Jean Pierre get only his twenty-five sous, I shuddered—and I said to myself:

"'All right, old consumptive, you're going to get a famous promenade for your twenty-five sous. We're going to take it at a walk.'

"'Where are we going, monsieur?' I asked the berlingot, for I saw no one, even the big, dried-up, yellow fist had disappeared.

"'We are going to ——,' answered a voice, but so feebly, so faintly, that it was as the voice of a dying man; and then the voice added, always half coughing, half sniffling, 'But I must tell you one thing, my good friend—'

"His good friend!" repeated my guide, in a rage.

"'I must warn you that the slightest jolt gives me frightful pain; I am almost dead from the horrible bumpings that your miserable comrade has inflicted on me. I wish to travel gently, very gently, at the

least little trot, slowly, do you understand? because'—and he coughed as though he were breathing his last—'because the least little shock might kill me—and I mean to pay only the tariff that the law allows, twenty-five sous for the guide, my good friend.' And thereupon he began a fit of coughing as though he were about to expire, the old wreck!

"'Ah, you only pay twenty-five sous! And you call me your *bon ami!* Aha! So it hurts you to go too fast, does it? Wait a bit! Wait a bit, old miser!' said I, as I jumped a-straddle Devastator's back. 'I'll give you your gentle trot, yes, a nice gentle little trot!' And crack! off I go full blast, and I joggle the old gig as though I meant to shake it to pieces, but fast, ah, but so fast, that if the old fox had been paying a thousand francs to the guide (as they say the great Napoleon used to do), he could not have gone any faster. And let me tell you that I took in all the ruts and gullies on the way.

"Pretty soon I got the horse into a real gallop,—oh, something like a gallop! *V'lan!* You should have seen the jumps that the old berlingot took in flying over the ground; but to do justice to every one, I will say that the old berlingot must have been solidly built not to have gone all to pieces a thousand times."

"Unhappy man," said I to my guide, "you might have killed that poor sick man!"

"Kill him! Ah, well, yes! Kill him indeed, the old brigand! I had no such good luck as that; but we went at such a pace, monsieur, that in spite of these sandy roads, and with only one extra horse, I got him to —— (and that is two posts and three-quarters) in an hour and a half."

"The devil you did!" said I. "Well, that was a ride!"

"But hold on, monsieur. Wait till you hear the end. The voice in the berlingot told me not to go into the village; so when we got to a hill about two hundred yards from —— we came to a halt, and I unhitched poor Devastator for the last time, for he was foundered and died afterwards, died from that race; so dead that my master put me on the retired list for fifteen days, and that same scamper cost me more than a hundred crowns; yes, me, poor devil as I am!

"But you must admit, monsieur, that it is hard lines to be made to take twenty-five cents, and then to be called '*mon bon ami*' by such a scoundrel as that. One is apt to forget himself."

"Continue," said I.

"Well, monsieur, I unfasten my horse and open the door, expecting to see my old invalid lying fainting in the bottom of the old wagon, for I hadn't heard a sound for the last hour. Thousand thunders! what do I see? A great strong fellow who was clacking his tongue against the roof of his mouth, and corking up a bottle of rum; and who says to me, in a great deep voice fit for a cathedral singer:

"'Hey, stupid, now you have learned how one can travel like a prince at the lowest figure. Ever since leaving Paris I have made three leagues and a half every hour, without a courier, and never have paid more than twenty-five sous.' And so saying, he jumps out of the carriage as lightly as a stag, the monster!"

I could not prevent myself from laughing at this strange way of getting over the ground swiftly and cheaply, and my guide continued:

"You understand, monsieur, how furious one was

only to be paid twenty-five sous, and to be called *mon bon ami?* The more the sly old fox begged to be taken gently, the more one wished to get even with him by jolting him over the road at the devil's own gait; while all the time the faster one went the better he was pleased, old miserable! Hey, monsieur, did you ever hear of such an old bandit? One must be without a heart to pretend to be ill when one is vigorous and solid as an old post-horse! But that is not all yet; I asked him where he was going. He replied:

"'Wait for me here, and if I am not back in an hour you can go about your business.'

"'And how about the carriage?' said I.

"'If I don't return, you can take it back to the post-house, and some one will come to get it.'

"'And your baggage?'

"'I take it with me.'

"And he showed me a long box, flat, square, and quite heavy, which he carried under his arm, and then he disappeared in the undergrowth, which is very thick in that place.

"In this cursed village there is no inn, so I fed my horses and waited; but poor Devastator was so blown that he couldn't eat. I was hungry enough, however, and so I took a bite, and at the end of an hour my old deceiver had not got back. Well, I wait two hours and no one comes yet, so I start for the village which is in the distance, for say I to myself, he must be in the country house of the folks of the six horses and the courier. So I ring at the little door, and then at the big door,—nobody. I knock and pound as though I meant to break the door down,—nobody.

"Finally I got tired, and came back and waited another half-hour; still nobody came. My faith! So then I went back to the post-house. We put the old berlingot under a shed, and from that time until now no one has been to claim it. So probably the old brigand finds himself well off where he is, and where you are going, monsieur; but all the same it is a curious kind of a town,—folks go there, but nobody ever comes back."

Like my guide, I was much struck by this strange story, and became more and more curious.

"But that man," said I, "the last one that you took to ——, was he very old?"

"Pretty well on, about fifty years I should say, dry as a chip, hair perfectly white, but eyes and eyebrows black as charcoal. And now I think of it, when I asked him about his baggage, and he showed me the big box, he laughed,—ah, but such a laugh, he almost foamed at the mouth; and I noticed that his teeth were very pointed and wide apart, which they do say is a sign of wickedness; but that doesn't surprise me when a man is infamous enough to offer the guide twenty-five sous, and then to call him his *bon ami!*"

"And what did he wear?" I asked, in spite of myself, more and more interested in the recital.

"Oh, he was well clothed: a great dark-coloured redingote, a black cravat, and the cross of honour. With all this a face the colour of copper and a large bony frame, quite in the style of my old commandant Calebasse, chief of squadron in the Ninth Hussars,—a great old tough, all muscles and bones."

"And have you never heard him spoken of since?"

"*Non*, monsieur. Ah, I forgot to tell you that while I was waiting there I heard something like two or three shots. That is all; perhaps some one was shooting thrushes in the vineyards."

The heavy square box had made such an impression on my mind that I shivered, thinking that here, perhaps, had taken place in this lonely spot some bloody and unwitnessed duel, had not the ruse resorted to by this personage, in order to be driven rapidly and at little expense, seemed to contradict all idea of a combat. Such a foolish idea seemed unnatural in such a solemn time. What struck me as extremely singular was that no one had returned from this strange village, where, as my guide said, "folks go, but never come back."

However, the notary had assured me that the only important habitation was the one that was offered for sale. What, then, had become of the travellers in the first carriage? And where was he who went in the berlingot?

I puzzled about it all until my head felt dizzy, and I longed to be at —— so as to clear up this strange mystery.

When my guide had told me about the carriage with the blinds pulled down, I had thought of a runaway match, but the courier and the servants seemed ill suited to the secrecy desired in an elopement.

However, this old man who arrived two years afterwards, his strange manners, the pistol-shots, and then the sudden disappearance of every one,—certainly these were extraordinary circumstances and my curiosity was at the highest pitch.

"Here we are at last at ——, monsieur," said the

guide. "You will admit that there is a fine view. And, see, monsieur, it is right here near this dead plantain-tree that I set down the old fellow of the berlingot."

We had, in fact, arrived on the heights which overlook the village of ——.

CHAPTER II

THE COTTAGE

Seen from the hilltop, the little village was beautiful to behold. Its few houses, all half-way up the hill, were built of a yellowish stone, over which grape-vines were climbing. Some of the houses were roofed with red tiles; others had thatched roofs, on which were growing every sort of beautiful green and velvety moss, mingled with tufts of wall-flowers in bloom; while all this rustic picture was framed in great groups of plantains, live-oaks, and Lombardy poplars, from the midst of which rose the modest church tower of gray stone.

I descended by a steep, winding path, and very soon arrived in the little village square. On the left, I saw the gate of the cemetery; on the right was the church porch, and noticing very near the latter a house rather larger than the rest, and which only differed from them by its remarkable cleanliness, I decided that it must be the presbytery. I got off my horse and knocked. I had not been mistaken.

A woman, clothed in black, still young, but

horribly misshapen, and very ugly, whose face, however, appeared to have an expression of extreme goodness, came to open the door for me. She asked, in a very pronounced Southern accent, what I wished.

"I have come, madame," said I, "to see the country place that is for sale in the village. M. V——, the notary, sent me to see M. le curé, who, he tells me, has the property for sale."

"My brother will be back in an instant," replied the woman, with a sigh, "and if you would like to rest while waiting for his return, be pleased to follow me into the presbytery."

I accepted her offer, and, leaving my guide and his horses, I entered the house.

Nothing could have been more simple, more cleanly, more barren, than the interior of this humble home; notwithstanding which one could not help noticing traces of thoughtful solicitude for the comfort of the master.

I accompanied the curé's sister into a low hall, whose two white-curtained windows opened on a pretty little green garden.

The simple furniture of this room shone with cleanliness; a single armchair, covered with old embroidery, placed near a little table, on which stood a book-rack made of black wood, and an ivory crucifix, seemed to be the habitual seat of the priest. His sister's chair and her spinning-wheel stood near the other window. She seated herself, and began to spin, without vouchsafing a word. Believing her to be silent out of reserve, or from shyness, and wishing, besides, to satisfy my curiosity which the guide had so roused, I asked the woman if the place had been

for sale a long time. The priest's sister answered me, with another sigh:

"It has been for sale for the last three months, monsieur."

"But, madame, do not the owners live in it any longer?"

"The owners," replied she, with a look of intense sadness, "*non*, monsieur, they do not live there any more." And, seeing that I was about to continue my questions, she added, with tears in her eyes: "Excuse me, monsieur, my brother will tell you all about it."

More and more astonished, but not daring to insist, I fell back on ordinary topics of conversation, the view, the beautiful situation, etc. In about half an hour some one knocked; it was the curé. His sister went to open the door for him, and informed him of the reason of my visit.

The priest, who was about thirty years old, wore the severe costume of his class. He was not misshapen, but in other respects was extremely like his sister. There was the same ugliness joined to the look of excessive goodness and sweetness, added to which was a frail and suffering appearance, for he was small, delicate, and pale. His Southern accent was less pronounced than that of his sister, and his manner, though reserved, was more polite than hers.

The abbé received me with a coldness which I attributed to his fear of finding me only another troublesome person come out of idle curiosity to inspect the place; for from the few words that his sister had let fall, I believed that some fatal event had taken place in this house, and that the curé might think that I, having heard some vague rumour, had come to find out some more circumstantial

details.

Wishing to put him at ease, I told him frankly, and at once, that I was looking for a little country home, very isolated, very quiet, very lonely; that I had heard of this one as fulfilling all these requirements, and that I had been sent to him for full information on the subject. The glacial coolness of the abbé did not melt at my advances. After exchanging some insignificant remarks, he simply asked me if I would like to see the house.

I told him that I was absolutely at his orders, and we then rose to go out.

Then his sister took a bunch of keys from out of a closet, and gave them to him, saying, with tears in her eyes, "*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* Joseph, this will be a great trial to you, for you have not been there since —"

The young priest pressed her hand tenderly, and replied, with resignation, "It can't be helped, Jeanne. It had to come sooner or later."

So we went out.

The stubborn silence in which the curé persisted, as to the events which had excited my curiosity, was very distasteful to me; but, feeling that the least question on a subject which affected so profoundly these simple people would be unkind, and most probably useless, I decided to remain strictly in my rôle of a visitor and a prospective purchaser. We went out of the presbytery, and, climbing up a steep little street, arrived before a small door, on each side of which extended a long and very high wall.

The appearance of everything was quite primitive. This wall of undressed stone, joined together by firm

cement, seemed half ruined; the door was worm-eaten, but when the abbé had once got it open, I entered upon a perfect paradise hidden by this same high wall, and I began truly to understand and admire more than ever the wise though selfish taste of the Orientals, who strive to make the outside of their habitations the most insignificant, and even dilapidated, in the world, while, on the contrary, they adorn the interior with the most dazzling and refined luxury.

This custom has always seemed to me charming, as a contrast firstly, and, secondly, because I admit that I have never understood this lavish decoration with painting and sculpture of the outside of homes, where it simply is done for the gratification of the passer-by, who usually returns his thanks by covering with filth these architectural and monumental beauties. This, too, is a contrast, but one that displeases me. In a word, does it not seem to be better taste to hide some delightful retreat, and there enjoy happiness in secret, than to make a vulgar display and pompous parade before the eyes of all the world, and only excite the envy and hatred of every one?

But to return to the paradise of which I was speaking. As soon as the little door was opened, I entered with the curé; he closed it carefully, and said, "This, monsieur, is the house."

Then, doubtless overcome by some sad remembrances, and wishing to give me leisure to examine everything, he crossed his arms on his breast, and remained silent.

As I have said, I was overcome with astonishment, and the sight was so charming that I forgot all my curiosity in gazing on so lovely a scene. Of the high

wall of which I have spoken not a stone was to be seen, so entirely was it hidden by a long clipped arbour of linden-trees and a high row of immense oaks.

And there in the centre of a vast velvety lawn stood a middle-sized house of the most irregular construction.

The main body of the building was of but one story in height; on the right was a rustic gallery which formed a greenhouse, and ended in a sort of pavilion which only seemed to be lighted from the roof; on the left, at right angles to the main house, and much higher than it, was a long gallery with four Gothic windows of stained glass. This gallery ended at a very high tower which overlooked the rest of the house.

Nothing could be more simple in appearance than the arrangement of this cottage; but these buildings were, so to speak, simply the framework, for all the elegance and beauty of the building came from an innumerable quantity of brilliant climbing plants, which—except the openings of the windows, where great branches of jasmine and honeysuckle waved before the tracery of the woodwork—had taken possession of the house, and covered it with a mantle of gay flowers of every colour, from the ground floor to the summit of the tower, which seemed like the trunk of some immense tree covered with vines. Then a large flower bed of red geraniums, tender lilac heliotropes, and oleanders ran all around the base of the walls, hiding with its thick leaves and brilliant blossoms the thin stalks of the climbing plants, which only display their variegated treasures at some height from the ground.

Scotch ivy, climbing roses, the Virginia creeper,

gobeas with their blue bells, clematis with its white, starry flower, entwined themselves thickly around the rustic pillars of the greenhouse and the supports of the front porch, which was also of wood, and was reached by ten steps, carpeted with fine Lima matting. On each step was an immense vase of Japanese porcelain, white, red, and gold, each one containing a large purple flowering cactus, and, as the stems of these plants are always rough and straggling, the charming little Smyrna convolvulus with its orange-coloured bells hid in a yellow and green tracery the barrenness of the cactus plants. The porch led up to an oaken door of very simple design, on each side of which stood a large Chinese settee made of reeds and bamboo.

Such, then, was the aspect of this truly enchanting cottage, this fresh and sweet-smelling oasis, which bloomed like an unknown and magnificent flower in this provincial solitude. It is impossible to express in words all the splendour of the picture which drew from nature alone all its dazzling richness of colour. Who can describe the thousand caprices of the Southern sun, glittering on the bright enamel of so many shades of colouring? What can give an idea of the murmuring of the breeze, which seemed to caress with its kisses the undulating, expanding corollas? And this nameless perfume made up of all these different odours, and the sweet smell of moss and verdure, added to the penetrating aroma of the laurel, the thyme, and the green trees, who can express it in words?

But what would be harder still to describe, would be the thousand different and overpowering thoughts which came into my mind, as I contemplated this most adorable retreat that a man tired of the world's

pleasures could have imagined; for I was witness to the fact that this enchanting spot was sad, deserted, abandoned, in spite of so much sunshine, verdure, and flowers; that some frightful misfortune had without a doubt surprised and crushed those who had cherished such sweet dreams of happiness. The choice of such a solitary spot, so far from any great city, the luxury and good taste of everything, showed plainly that the resident of this lovely home expected to spend many long and happy years in serene meditation in this beautiful solitude, so dear to thoughtful or unhappy minds.

These ideas saddened and absorbed me for some time. Awakening from my reverie I looked at the curé; he seemed paler than ever, and quite lost in thought.

"Nothing could be more charming than this house, monsieur," said I.

He trembled suddenly, and replied politely but still coldly, "In truth it is charming, monsieur." And with a heart-breaking sigh, he added, "Would you like to see the interior of the house?"

"Is the house furnished, monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur, it is to be sold just as it is, that is, all but some family portraits, which will be withdrawn." And he sighed again.

We entered by the vine-covered porch of which I have spoken.

The first room was an entrance-hall, lighted from above, and filled with pictures which appeared to be excellent copies from the best Italian masters. Some bas-reliefs and a few marble statues, antiques of a pure style, stood in the corners of the hall, and four

admirable Greek vases were filled with flowers, now withered, alas! for there were flowers everywhere, and in this hall they must have marvellously suited the treasures of art.

"This is the antechamber, monsieur," said the curé.

We passed through it, and entered a room furnished with the beautiful carvings of the Renaissance; four large paintings of the Spanish school hid the tapestries on the walls, and flowers had once filled the great jardinières which stood before the windows.

All of the rooms were comparatively small, but the accessories were of the greatest elegance and in the best taste.

"This is the dining-room," said the curé, continuing his glacial nomenclature. Then we passed by an open door, only closed by portières, into a salon, whose three windows opened on to that part of the park that I had not yet seen.

The salon had a gilded frieze, and was hung with cherry-coloured satin damask. The furniture was of the best epoch of the reign of Louis XIV., and was also gilded, and several consoles of marquetry, covered with every kind of splendid porcelain, completed the ornamentation of the room.

But what pleased me above all was that this luxuriousness, which one might expect to find in a city residence, was in such a delightful contrast to the almost wild solitude of the place, especially contrasting with the grand, though pleasing, landscape which could be seen from the windows of the salon.

It was an immense prairie of the beautiful fresh

green grass that I had already so much admired. Across this field meandered a clear and swiftly running river, doubtless the one I had crossed so many times before arriving at ——. On each side of the meadow extended a great curtain of oaks and of lindens, leafy and green to the very ground, while two or three groups of silvery-barked birch-trees were studded here and there over the field, where several fine Swiss cattle were peacefully grazing; finally, on the horizon overlooking several ranges of hills, one could see the cloudy and bluish crests of the mountains which form the last of the chain of the Eastern Pyrenees. The view was truly magnificent, and, as I have said, this grandiose nature, framed as it was in the satin and gold of this pretty salon, had a most singular effect on me.

"This is the salon," said the curé, and then we entered the greenhouse, which was built of rustic wood. There we saw a great number of exotic plants planted deeply in the ground, so that in winter this conservatory must have looked like a beautiful alley in a garden. There was a door at the far end of the alley, before which the curé stopped.

Instead of opening the door he retraced his steps. But I said to him, pointing to the door, which was beautifully carved in a Gothic design,—Flemish work no doubt, for it was as delicate as lace,—"Where does that door lead to, monsieur? Can one not see that apartment?"

"You can see it, monsieur, if—you absolutely desire to do so," said the curé, with a sort of grieved impatience.

"I certainly wish to see it, monsieur," I replied; for the more closely I examined the house the more interested I was becoming. All that I had so far seen

had revealed to me not only the greatest elegance and refinement, but noble habits of art and of poetry. I felt sure that no vulgar mind could have so selected and so ornamented his residence.

"Be so kind then, monsieur, as to enter without me," said the abbé, as he handed me a key. "It was her—" Then with an effort controlling himself, he said, "It is the morning-room, the living-room."

I entered.

The room, which had evidently been ordinarily used by a woman, had remained in absolutely the same condition in which its occupant had left it. On a tapestry frame was a half finished piece of embroidery; further on stood a harp before a music-stand still laden with music; on a table were a vinaigrette and an unfolded handkerchief; an open book was lying on the workbasket. I looked at it: it was the second volume of "Obermann."

Profoundly touched by the thought that some frightful and sudden misfortune should have ended an existence which seemed to have been so poetic and so happily occupied, I continued to observe with the most minute attention everything that surrounded me. I saw a tolerably large bookcase filled with the works of the best poets of France, Germany, and Italy. Near by stood an easel, on which was the most delicious sketch of a child's head that one could imagine,—the adorable little face of a child of about three or four years old, with blue eyes and long brown hair.

I know not why it should have occurred to me that only a mother could have made such a picture, and that she only could have thus painted her own child.

All these discoveries, while they saddened me

exceedingly, only excited more and more my interest and my curiosity. I therefore determined to use every possible means of finding out the secret so obstinately kept by the curé.

This portrait of a child, of which I speak, was placed near one of the windows that lighted the room. Without thinking of what I was doing, I drew the curtain to one side. What did I behold? At about a league's distance, certainly not more, there was the sea, the Mediterranean! which sparkled like a great azure mirror, and reflected the glowing sunshine,—the sea that one beheld between the slopes of the two hills.

The view was magnificent, and I thought how it must have revealed all its splendours to the poetic soul which had left in this home so many touching traces of its noble and elevated nature.

I turned away my head for a moment from this majestic spectacle to rest my eyes, in order to enjoy the more a second view of the scene. I then perceived an object that I had not at first noticed. It was the portrait of a man. It was placed on an easel, which was draped with blue velvet. In the sort of oval formed at the top of the easel, where the two branches met in a curve, I saw a monogram composed of an A and an R, surmounted by a count's crown.

This portrait was drawn in pastel. As I have some knowledge of painting, I easily recognised the same hand that had sketched the child's head.

The head, set on its long and slender neck, stood out pale and clearly from a background of a dark, reddish brown, while the costume was entirely black, fancifully cut after the manner of the Van Dyck

portraits. This young and bold face had such a striking expression of great intelligence, resolution, and grace, that I shall never be able to forget it.

The face was of a long oval, the forehead high, prominent, and uncovered, smooth, except a very decided line which separated the eyebrows, whose arch was almost imperceptible, so straight were they.

The hair was light chestnut brown, fine and silky, thrown back, and slightly waving at the temples. The large, very beautiful velvety brown eyes, with their iris of orange, looked almost too round, but their proud, deep, meditative expression seemed to denote a mind of the highest order; finally, an aquiline nose, and a square, prominent, and dimpled chin, would have given to the physiognomy a haughty and almost hard look, if around the thin and scarlet lips a subtle and almost imperceptible smile, very charming to see, had not softened, lighted up, so to speak, those features which were too energetic and too decided.

For some moments I stood lost in contemplation before this expressive and beautiful face, wondering if this could be the hero of the mysterious adventure that I was trying to discover. Then I noticed that, with the exception of the eyes, which in the child were blue and long, there were many traits of resemblance between this unknown man and the delicious sketch of the angelic child which stood near by. But very soon I heard the trembling voice of the abbé, who, still standing outside, wished to know if I had seen everything sufficiently. I rejoined him, he closed the door, and we once more traversed the gallery.

It was childish, no doubt; but as we passed the door of the salon, I noticed something which oppressed me cruelly. It was a gilded cage, in which I

saw, lying dead, several poor little bengalis and love birds.

Sadly depressed, and more and more interested, I longed to take the priest into my confidence, by expressing to him how much I was touched by all I had seen, I, who knew not even the names of those who had lived here; but whether he could not control his emotion, or whether, he thought it a profanation to speak of his grief before a stranger, he evaded all my efforts to open the subject, and said to me, with a great effort:

"All that remains to be seen now, monsieur, is the other gallery, which leads to the tower, where there is another study."

We went back through the entrance-hall, then through a library, through the long Gothic-windowed gallery, which was filled with pictures, sculptures, and curiosities of every sort, and thus arrived at the tower, which communicated with the gallery by a short flight of steps.

I entered. This time the abbé accompanied me resolutely, though I could see that from time to time he wiped with his hand his eyes, which were moist with tears. In this vast circular hall, everything revealed studious and reflective tastes.

It was furnished in a severe style; there were many valuable arms, and four large family portraits, which seemed to include five centuries, with an interval of a hundred and fifty years; for the oldest portrait recalled the costume of a warrior of the end of the fourteenth century, whereas the costumes of the others belonged to the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, the most recent representing a man who wore the dress of a general of the Empire,

with the *cordon rouge* across his breast.

I noticed, also, many maps and topographical plans, all marked with abridged and hieroglyphical notes; but what I saw first of all was a woman's portrait, placed on an easel, exactly like the one I had already seen, only it had no crown carved on its summit, there being simply the interlaced initials M and V. By a happy idea of the painter, this portrait, painted on a gold ground, recalled, by its naïve expression, one of the adorable heads of the Virgin, which belong to the Italian school of the end of the sixteenth century. All that Raphaël had ever dreamed of candour and purity in the expression of his Madonnas, beamed from this divine face.

The smooth and shining brown hair was parted simply over a charming forehead, where it was encircled by a little golden chain; then following the line of the temples, which were so dazzlingly clear one could almost see the blue veins, it fell in soft masses below the delicately rosy cheeks.

Her large blue eyes, which were serenely pensive and almost melancholy, seemed to follow me with a gaze that was calm, noble, and good. Her rosy lips were not smiling, but they had an expression of serious graciousness impossible to describe, while their form, as well as that of the straight and thin nose, was exquisitely beautiful and of an antique purity of line.

A tunic of very pale blue, which barely showed the snowy whiteness of the shoulders, and was fastened around the well-shaped form by a circlet of dull gold, completed this portrait, which was a model of elevated simplicity, charm, and poesy.

After examining a long time this ideally perfect

face, I found in the eyes an expression which reminded me of the child's face, for the eyes of that angel were also of a deep and clear blue, but the lower part of its face and the broad forehead recalled the man's portrait which had so much interested me.

I know not why I should have imagined that the child belonged to these parents. But where was he? Where were now the father and mother? The father with his proud and resolute beauty; the mother so sweet and pure? Had he, had she, had both, or all three, perhaps, been overtaken by a frightful misfortune?

"Ah," said I, "if looks are not deceptive, in what an Eden these noble beings must have lived!" What could one desire more than to live thus with a beloved child in the midst of this delicious and profound solitude, embellished by all the treasures of nature and art?

To have enough appreciation of happiness and goodness, to be able to live alone among geniuses of every kind; to be able, when the heart longs for silence, to sit rapt in silent ecstasy, to pass from one delight to another; to speak to one another of love, through the sublime voices of the divine poets of all the ages, or through the celestial harmonies of the great masters whose melodies enchant us when called forth by a loving hand; to compare the exquisite beauty of the idolised being, the expression of her features, with all the wonders of art, and to be able to say with pride, "She is still more beautiful!" to be able to draw forth from this threefold source of inspiration, and to behold our love, fecundated by the divine dew, become each day more radiant and more expansive; to glorify the Creator in everything, in the felicity we enjoy, in the woman we love, in the

magnificent nature which delights our eyes and charms our soul,—oh, what a glorious existence it must have been, that led by these two beings!

But the sad voice of the abbé recalled me from these imaginings.

I sighed and followed him, quite determined to penetrate his secret.

Very soon the sky became overcast. The morning, which had been beautiful, became sombre; great clouds swept over the sky and some drops of rain began to fall.

"There is no inn here," said the curé, "you are on horseback, monsieur, there is a mountain storm gathering, and, if a hurricane comes on, the little river, which you found fordable, will become in a few hours a rapid torrent. Allow me to offer you such poor hospitality as I can in the presbytery until the violence of the storm is over. Your guide and his horses will find a shelter in the barn."

I accepted his offer, delighted by the hope that I might have an opportunity of satisfying my curiosity. We entered the house.

"*Eh bien*, Joseph?" said Jeanne to the curé, overcome with emotion.

"*Hélas!* Jeanne, may God's will be done! But it was a great trial to me, and I had not the courage to enter her room."

Jeanne wiped away her tears, and began to busy herself about receiving me as well as possible in their modest home.

Very soon the storm broke with the greatest violence, and I finally decided to spend the night at

the presbytery of ——.

CHAPTER III

THE CURÉ'S TALE

After a sojourn of three days at the presbytery of —— I had so far gained the curé's confidence that he opened his heart to me, and related all that he knew as to the history of those persons in whom I had become so singularly interested.

I will try to tell the tale in his grave and simple words.

"I had been the curé of this parish for about four years, monsieur, when the house that we have been to look at was bought by an agent, for M. le Comte Arthur de ——, whose portrait you have seen. I am still ignorant as to his family name, but I presume that the count was of a noble and ancient lineage. I judge so, at least, from his title, and from the almost religious respect he paid the old family portraits which hung in his study.

"Before the arrival of Count Arthur (for I never heard him called by any other name) in the village, there came a confidential servant, accompanied by an architect and several workmen from Paris, who changed the plain and unpretending country house that then stood here into the charming habitation you have so much admired. When this was finished the workmen all went away, and the confidential

man alone remained to await his master.

"Although it was neither in accordance with my avocation nor my nature to seek information about the people who came to dwell in our little village, it was impossible to avoid hearing certain rumours, spread abroad, no doubt, by the foreign workmen. According to these tales, the count, who was very rich, was coming to live among us with a lady who was not his wife. Moreover, the life of this gentleman had been, they said, of such scandalous and shameless immorality that, though he had not positively been banished from good society, the sort of repulsion which he inspired, because of certain adventures, was so great that he felt it would be better for him to live henceforth in retirement.

"You can easily conceive, monsieur, that my first impression, if it was not hostile, was certainly very unfavourable to this stranger. It is true, I did not know him, but supposing that these rumours had some foundation, here he was coming, I say, to set a bad example to our poor mountaineers, in whose eyes the fortune and rank of the newcomers would seem to authorise their culpable behaviour.

"These thoughts gave me a great distrust of the count, and I promised myself, if by a scarcely probable chance he should make me any personal advances, to meet them with a severe and inexorable coldness, thus protesting against the immorality of the life he was leading.

"It was two years ago, then, that the count established himself here with a young woman and a child, whose portraits you have seen. A few days after his arrival I received a note from him, asking the favour of an interview. I could not very well refuse, and consequently the count presented himself

at the presbytery. Although my resolution, my habits, my character, my principles, and the way I have of looking at certain things and certain men, all prejudiced me against him, I could not help being immediately prepossessed by his remarkable individuality. You have seen his portrait, monsieur. I was also captivated by his grave, polished, and dignified manners, and, above all, by the extent and nobility of mind which he revealed in the long conversation we had together, that very first day.

"He began by saying that, coming to dwell in the village of ——, he considered it a duty and a pleasure to pay me a visit, and that he would be under a great obligation to me if I would be willing to supervise the disbursement of twenty-five louis a month which he wished to place at my disposition, either for the poor of the parish or for the amelioration of their condition in whatever way I judged most suitable. He also begged me to talk things over with the doctor of the village, who would probably know more of the suffering and necessity of the poor than any one else.

"He furthermore begged me to believe that any request destined to lighten suffering or prevent misfortune would be heard and granted by him with the greatest gratification. What shall I say, monsieur? How shall I tell it to you? The count showed himself to be such a wise and enlightened philanthropist that, notwithstanding my resolutions and prejudices, I could not help being struck with astonishment, almost with admiration, at the sight of a man, still young, and who had, so they said, surfeited himself on all the pleasures which the rich and fortunate in this life enjoy, who was able to understand so truly the sorrows and misery of the obscure, and how to

go about helping them in the surest way.

"But alas! at the end of this conversation, which had held me under an inexplicable charm, though I struggled against it in vain, my dislike returned stronger; and I know not to this day whether to my glory or to my shame, for the count avowed to me shamelessly, as though wishing to proclaim his impiety, that he 'had no faith in our religions,' but that he respected them sufficiently to amuse himself with them, and that I must therefore understand that I need never expect to see him in church.

"What did he mean by those words, 'he had no faith in our religions?' I ignore the meaning still. Did he mean the religions of Europe? Did he wish to have it understood that he was neither Catholic nor Protestant, nor a member of any one of the dissident sects which diverge from Catholicism, though clinging still to it by the root of Christianity? I am still ignorant of his creed, though I saw him in his last dreadful hour.

"As I have told you, monsieur, this resolution of his, never to take part in the celebration of our holy mysteries, caused me a feeling of indignation. I saw in it only a disdainful pretext used to hide a total indifference or a culpable estrangement. Thus I could only see a scarcely meritorious commiseration in the liberal display of almsgiving, which his brilliant position and fortune enabled him to make at no personal sacrifice.

"I was wrong in this, because he confined himself not merely to the bestowing of gold; he had discussed at length with me the misery of the poor, and had sought my advice as to the best means of being helpful; but as I keep telling you, his want of faith in our religion rendered me unjust, oh, very

unjust, as you will see, for I allowed the blow of my righteous indignation to fall on one who was completely innocent.

"On the Sunday following my conversation with the count, I saw kneeling in the church the young woman who lived with him, and who, they said, did not bear his name. This was the truth, as I have since found out. The liaison was culpable in the eyes of God and men; but alas! if the crime of these unfortunate beings was great, their chastisement was terrible.

"Pardon me for being so touched by this remembrance. I was telling you," said the abbé, as he wiped away his tears, "that I saw, one Sunday, this lady kneeling in the church.

"I mounted the pulpit stairs, and went so far in my sermon as to make direct and even cruel allusions to the detestable immorality of the rich of this earth, who hoped, I added, to extenuate their faults by disdainfully throwing alms to the poor. I exalted the poor unfortunate who prays, believes, and divides the bread for which he is famishing with one more miserable than himself; while I had only a few cold words of eulogy to give to the rich man, whose beneficence is only of his superfluity. I did more; I went further; I exalted the peaceful and virtuous existence of the poor man who seeks forgetfulness of his ills in the sweetness of a union blessed by God, and I raised my voice violently against the rich, who seem to trample underfoot all received morality, and take a wicked delight in setting at defiance those duties which, in their impious pride, they regard as beneath their station, and only suitable for the lower classes.

"Ah, monsieur, I do not reproach myself for those

bitter words, for they but expressed my horror of a conduct which at this hour I think as criminal as I did then. But can you believe it? since that time I have been weak enough to bitterly repent of all I then said.

"That Sunday, on hearing my discourse, to which my indignation lent great energy, the eyes of all our mountaineers were turned towards this unfortunate woman who was humbly kneeling in their midst. She bent her head lower, and covered her face with the folds of her veil, while from the convulsive movements of her shoulders she seemed to be weeping bitterly. I was elated with triumph, for I thought I had awakened the spirit of remorse in a guilty soul. When holy service was over I returned to the presbytery.

"While I had no fear for the anger of the count, who might justly take offence at my allusions, I was nevertheless preoccupied as to the effect on him of my discourse.

"The next day he came to see me.

"When my sister came to announce his visit, I could not help feeling a certain emotion, but his manner was as cordial as on the former occasion. He said not a word about the sermon of the previous day, but spoke about the needs of our poor people. He had come to speak to me of a project he had of establishing a school for the children of the parish under my direction, communicated to me his ideas on the subject, showed what I thought to be a wise and remarkable distinction between the education which ought to be given to children who were destined to manual labour, and that which would be suitable for those who intended to follow the liberal professions. He disclosed in this conversation, during

which I again fell under his charm, the highest and broadest views, and a spirit of maturity and justice. Then he quitted me.

"Alas! monsieur, how inexplicable are the weaknesses of our poor human nature! I was almost offended by the count's apparent indifference to my sermon, whereas he showed, by the moderation of his behaviour, a respectful submission to the duty which my convictions and my nature imposed on me.

"Soon afterwards, one of the great festivals of the Church drew nigh. I went to the church to hear the confessions of our mountain people, and as I was about to enter the confessional I saw among the peasants this same woman, who was humbly kneeling like all the rest on the cold, moist stone floor. She waited there a long time, and came in her turn to the penitential tribunal.

"I am far from indulgent towards our peasants, but I know not why I should have felt myself disposed to be unusually severe to a person whose rank seemed to place her above them. The lady's voice was trembling with emotion, her accent was timid and sweet; and without here disclosing one of our greatest, one of our most sacred secrets, since, alas! monsieur, I only tell you the facts which have since been made public by a frightful event, I recognised that day, and from thenceforth, a most noble and repentant soul, but at the same time most weak and guilty in its criminal attachment to the count. This attachment resembled a sort of exaltation which, were it not almost a profanation of the words, I might describe as holy and religious.

"What more can I tell you, monsieur! After six months' residence in our part of the country, the count and this lady, whom our peasants in their

grateful simplicity called 'l'Ange Marie' (for no one had ever heard her called by any name but Marie),—the count and this lady had been so charitable that one could hardly find an unhappy creature in the whole parish. What is more, such was the strange confidence that our mountaineers had in the inexhaustible beneficence of this sweet soul, that if sometimes I would seek to deter them from some perilous hunting excursion by reminding them of their families, should any of them perish, they would reply to me, 'Father, the Angel Marie will take care of them.' In short, this lady had become the providence of the village, and the poor folks relied on her goodness as on the *bon Dieu.*

"At the end of a year this beloved and blessed lady fell dangerously ill. At the sad news, I cannot describe to you, monsieur, the fear or the despair of our peasants, the prayers, the *ex-voto* which they offered for her, the desolation which reigned in the village.

"Fearing to compromise the rigorous severity of my character, although the count had been to see me every day I had never been to return any of his visits; but when that lady was very ill, and asked for me, and the count came and besought me to go to her, I could not refuse to do so. I found her apparently dying.

"It was a dreadful moment. Never until now had her piety been revealed to me in all its depth and fervour. I consoled her, I exhorted her. For eight days we watched her with the greatest anxiety. Finally, her youth saved her.

"I cannot describe to you, monsieur, the frightful state of mind of the count during this illness. One night, when we had given up all hope of saving the

sick woman, he terrified me, for, by some words which escaped him, I realised that, should death be the result of this illness, he would throw himself from the region of high aspirations and generous sentiments into an abyss of the greatest perversity, and in that moment I believed in the reality of all the stories I had heard told about the count. At last l'Ange Marie was restored to health. Little by little beauty returned to this noble and charming face, where remorse for a great fault and the consciousness of a great happiness constantly struggled for supremacy. Ah, monsieur, as I have said, I had fully determined never to return to that house, fearing to compromise my dignity, but I continued to go there. I was wrong, no doubt, but perhaps in the sight of God I may be forgiven, for that woman and the count were so charitable to the poor. Thanks to him and thanks to her, I was enabled to do so much good that I have faith in the pardon of God for not having repulsed the hand that scattered abroad his alms with so much kindness and discernment.

"And then, poor priest as I was, I loved science, I was a student, and there was no one in the village with whom I could converse, while in the count I discovered one of the most brilliant intellects I have ever encountered, I will not say among men, for I am very inexperienced in men and things, but in the books that I had read. His learning was vast, profound, and almost universal. He appeared to have travelled a great deal, and yet not to have neglected public life, for when by chance we would discuss some political question, he would discourse with a powerful and energetic conciseness. His judgment was clear, penetrating, and went straight to the point; but strange to say, whether from reflection,

indifference, or contempt, he appeared to be devoid of all party prejudice or sentiment of caste; it amounted to what you might call a frightful impartiality. What alarmed and shocked me the most was that I never heard him pronounce a single word which might lead one to believe that he entertained the slightest faith in any form of religion. Although it was tacitly understood between us that we were never to discuss religious opinions, it would sometimes happen, in the course of the conversation, he would let fall some words on these formidable questions which would seem so coldly disinterested that I should, for the hope of his salvation, have preferred an attack or a denial of these eternal truths; for then his conversion might have seemed possible at some future time, whereas this icy indifference left me no hope on that subject.

"And yet his conduct was a practical example of the most splendid application of the principles of Christianity, it was the spirit without the letter. Neither did I ever hear between him and l'Ange Marie any religious conversation whatever, although their child was piously reared by its mother in our faith. Though I have frequently seen the count's eye moistened with tears when the woman he loved would join the hands of this little angel and make it repeat its prayer to God, I think his emotion was caused more by the sight of the beautiful face of the child, and the innocent accents of its voice, than by any devotional words it may have uttered.

"The lady had received a solid and varied education. She had a remarkable mind, and, above all, an ineffable indulgence which reached all classes.

"If the count, whose speech was sometimes biting or sarcastic, attacked some person or event,

contemporaneous or historical, she would always try to discover in the vilest soul, or the saddest event, some kindly feeling, some generous instinct, which might serve as an excuse. Then tears would come into my eyes as I fancied it must be self-reproach, an unceasing remorse, which rendered this poor woman so forgiving to every one, as though, feeling her own guiltiness, it was not for her to raise her voice in accusation of whomsoever it might be.

"And the count, monsieur, if you could have seen with what profound and respectful tenderness he addressed her! How he would listen to her! With what delicate pride he knew how to appreciate and draw out all that was great and noble in the mind and heart of the one he loved so well! How his face would beam, at the sight of her! Many a time I have seen him thus silently gaze on her, and then, as though words failed him to express his admiration, he would join his hands and raise his eyes to heaven, with a look of indescribable happiness.

"Ah, monsieur, how many long and happy evenings have I thus passed in the intimacy of these two persons, so culpable and yet so virtuous! How many times has this fatal and bizarre contrast almost troubled my reason! How many summer evenings, in quitting them, have I, instead of returning to the presbytery, gone to wander on the mountain slopes, to meditate in silence in the sight of God alone! 'Oh, Lord,' cried I, 'how impenetrable are thy ways! This woman is an adulteress, and is fully conscious of her fault, since she constantly deplores it. She is very guilty in thy sight and in the sight of men, and yet, what life could be more exemplary, more beneficent, more practically touching and virtuous, than the one she leads? How many times have I not heard her

chanting hymns in thy praise, in a voice so filled with religious fervour as to carry conviction of her faith! Oh, dear Lord, what dangerous things are vice and crime, when they clothe themselves under such deceptive appearances! Must we hate them more? Ought we to have pity on them? Should they not deserve our pardon? And he, that strange man who says he has no faith in our religions, of what religion is he? What can be that ignored religion which imposes on him a life of such goodness and generosity, which makes him so humane, which causes him to be loved and blessed by every one? From what unknown source does he derive those principles of a wise and far-reaching charity? And yet they say that he has respected nothing that men hold holy and sacred, that he has trampled underfoot every law of social life. And it must be true, for if his love of to-day is unlawful, his former life was more criminal still; they say so, and I believe it; for, as by a flash of lightning one can see the immensity of the abyss, so, in that fearful moment in which he feared to lose the one he loved, I had penetrated into the depths of his soul, and I had shuddered with terror. And yet his conduct has never given the lie to the nobility of his sentiments. Oh, God, thy ways are impenetrable!' I repeated more undecided than ever, as I humbled myself before the mysterious designs of Providence. I was soon to have a terrible proof of how his inexorable justice inevitably reaches the guilty.

"Alas! monsieur, my tale is nearing its end, and that end is a frightful one.

"Three months ago, one evening, I was talking with my sister about an occurrence which had greatly alarmed me. Two peasants had assured me that they

had seen an old man, with white hair and black eyebrows, whose face was the colour of copper, and who appeared to be very vigorous for his age, climb over the wall of the count's garden. Soon afterwards they had heard two pistol-shots. I had just made up my mind to go and find out what it all meant, when some one came rushing in and begged me to go with all speed to the count. Ah, monsieur, imagine my terror! I found the count and the lady, each one pierced by a ball. One of the two shots had also reached the poor little child, who was lying in the sleep of death in his cradle.

"The count had not two minutes to live. His last words were these: 'Marie will tell you all—care for her first.' Then he turned towards the lady and said, 'Adieu, Marie!—alas!—'tis for ever! Ah,—it is my fault! If I only had believed you—However—!' And he was dead.

"The lady scarcely survived him a quarter of an hour; and, before expiring, she confided to me this terrible adventure, to the end that justice might be done, and to prevent a false accusation of the innocent.

"In a word, as you have perhaps already guessed, monsieur, the old man was the husband of this unfortunate woman. Availing himself of the fearful right which the law gives him, finding his wife and the count seated near the cradle of their son, he had fired on them twice at close range. The same ball that killed the mother had killed the child."

"But the old man, what became of him?" I asked the curé, whose story had greatly affected me.

"I never could find out, monsieur. All that I know is, that a little Genoese schooner, which had been

riding at anchor off the coast for about eight days, got up sail the evening of this triple murder."

You can conceive the interest this recital awakened in me, and you may easily fancy that, after hearing the terrible story, I had very little desire to purchase a place which was connected with such a sad past, and which seemed to me to be accursed.

I remained at the presbytery until, the time allowed by law for a private sale having passed, the house was sold to a retired merchant, who, finding the furniture out of date, put it up at auction.

I bought at the sale, as souvenir of this sad adventure, the harp on which Marie used to play, a marquetry cabinet which had belonged to the count, and a few other articles of small value, which I begged the curé to accept. According to the count's wishes, as expressed in his will, the price of the house and of its contents (with the exception of all the family portraits, which were to be burned) was left to the commune of ——, to be employed in the assistance of its poor.

I left the village full of sad reflections on the mournful tale I had heard. I had sent to my home the marquetry cabinet.

One day, as I was examining the latter very minutely, I discovered a drawer with a double bottom. In this secret place was hidden quite a voluminous manuscript. It was the count's journal.

These fragments appeared to me remarkable in their spirit of analysis, and by a succession of adventures, very simple, very natural, and perhaps worthy of interest and study, inasmuch as they portray some facts common to the lives of most men.

They consist of the following fragmentary sketches, which I will try to give as nearly as possible in all their simplicity and curious scepticism. The memoirs seem to include a period of about twelve years.

Although they relate the life of this *inconnu* from the age of twenty, and seem by the last date to have been continued until the day preceding his death, one can see by the note that the story of the first seven years was written by the count only about five years before his death, while the history of the last five years constitutes a journal written almost day by day, and according to the circumstances.

The handwriting of this journal was fine, correct, and often hastily current, as though the hand and mind had been carried away by the rush of memories. At other times it was calm and distinct, as though traced by an iron hand. On the margins were an infinite number of portraits and silhouettes sketched with a pen with much facility and grace, which must have been excellent likenesses. Finally, interpolated here and there were many letters in various handwritings, which were evidently intended to verify the truth of the statements in this singular manuscript.

HÉLÈNE

CHAPTER IV

THE BEREAVEMENT

I was twenty years old, and had just returned from a long sojourn in England and in Spain, where I had gone under the guidance of my tutor, a good, modest, firm, and enlightened man.

On my return to Serval, our country-seat, where my father had been living for many long years in retirement, I found him seriously ill. Never in my life will I forget the sight of him on my arrival.

The château, which was extremely secluded and overlooked a straggling village, raised itself in solitary grandeur on the confines of a great forest. It was a vast Gothic edifice built of bricks which had become black with age. The interior was composed of vast echoing apartments, which were but dimly lighted by their long diamond-paned windows.

The servants were all in mourning for my mother, who had died while I was still absent. They were almost all elderly retainers of the house, and nothing could have been more lugubrious than the sight of them walking silently about in those immense gloomy rooms, where their figures were scarcely perceptible against the red or dark green hangings which covered the walls of that ancient habitation.

On descending from the carriage I was received by my father's *valet de chambre*, who said not a word, but his eyes were filled with tears. I followed him, and traversed a long gallery which had been the terror of my childhood's nights as it had been the joy of its days. I found my father in his study. He tried to raise himself to embrace me, but his strength failed

him, and he could only stretch out his arms to me in welcome. He appeared to me frightfully changed; when I had quitted him he was still alert and vigorous; I found him weak and broken down. His tall frame was bent, he had become very thin, he was pale and expressionless, except that a nervous smile, caused by the continuity of his sufferings, gave to his naturally severe face an indescribable expression of habitual pain.

I had always greatly feared my father. His mind was vast, serious, meditative, concentrated, and occasionally coldly ironical. His knowledge was prodigious on every sort of subject. His character was masterful. In manner he was grave, thoughtful, and taciturn, but extremely cold. High principled to a striking degree, his devotion to me was extreme in every act of his life, but he was never demonstrative. Thus he had inspired me with a profound and timid veneration, a respectful gratitude, rather than a confiding and expansive affection, such as I felt for my mother.

Having quitted the service while still young, in spite of the wishes of Napoleon, who admired his iron will and indefatigable activity, my father had almost always resided at his château, but, strange as it may seem, he received no company. The Reign of Terror in '93 had so thinned the ranks of our family that, with the exception of a sister of my father, we had no near relations, simply some very distant connections whom we never saw. Now that my age and experience permit me to appreciate and compare my souvenirs, I can say that my father remains in my mind as the only really misanthropic man I have ever met; for he was not one of those misanthropists who like to live among men for the pleasure of telling

them how despicable they are, but he was a misanthropist who had positively fled society, and broken off all connection with his kind. I have searched in vain among my childish memories to find that my father possessed a single friend, or even what might be called an intimate acquaintance.

My mother, my aunt, and my cousin Hélène, who was three years younger than I, were the only persons who, from time to time, came to see us. This is no exaggeration, my mother has assured me of the fact; during the thirty years' residence of my father at Serval, not a single visitor ever came near the place.

My father was a great hunter, but always went alone; he was passionately fond of horses and extended agriculture. These occupations, as well as my education, which he personally superintended, until he gave me a tutor, and sent me to see the world, filled up his whole leisure. Then his fortune was considerable, and as he never would consent to have an intendant, he, with the assistance of my mother, whose sense of order was extremely keen, attended to the administration of his property himself; the rest of his time was taken up with reading, scientific experiments, and long, solitary walks.

When I started for that fatal voyage, during which I was to lose my mother, she had seen in a dream a warning of her death, and had told me about it; but we hid it from my father, not because she feared him, but because, having always had a certain awe of his superiority, she dreaded his severe sarcasm, which never spared any poetical, exaggerated, or romantic sentiment.

I was thus prevented from taking a last farewell of my mother. I say nothing of my grief; she was the

only person in the world to whom I had ever dared to tell everything freely and confidentially.

My aunt and her daughter Hélène had come to reside at Serval after my mother's death, almost in spite of my father, whose habitual need of solitude and silence seemed to become stronger as he became more and more feeble.

I led in those days a most distressing and harrowing life. Every morning my father would send for me to come to his bedside; his *valet de chambre* would then bring him the great strong box, where were kept the books containing the administration of our property, and day by day he would explain to me the state of affairs with an icy clearness which chilled me to the heart. One day he made me read aloud his will, with the same appearance of insensibility. My voice was choked with the effort I made to suppress my sobbing; he did not even seem to notice it. He would generally end this sort of initiation into the future management of the fortune he meant to leave me by some counsels he would give me in a brief manner, a long silence following each sentence.

These conversations revealed the most direct and exact judgment, and the deepest and truest knowledge of the miseries, or, as he said, the moral necessities of the human race, for a very striking trait of my father's character was the calm and disinterested manner with which he could discuss the inherent weaknesses of our species. According to his idea, we were obliged to admit that certain facts, certain low and selfish instincts, from which even noble minds could not escape, were the consequences of our moral organisation. He thought it as idle to hide or deny this defect as it would be to

blame men for being attainted by it.

Thus, if any one ever asked of him a favour, he would generally consider that he would in return only receive ingratitude; nevertheless, he would render the service with the most perfect benevolence.

To sum up all, the moral sense of the conversations I had with him, and which on his part consisted of short, concise, and decided phrases, affirmed that the pivot on which everything turned was gold, since the noblest characters when pressed by need would descend to the lowest degradation, even to infamy,—it was necessary to remain rich so as to be sure of remaining honest; that there was an object in every sacrifice; that every man was corruptible, but that the time or the price of each man varied according to the nature of the individual; that all friendship had its negative pole, and that, therefore, it would be folly to count on a sentiment which would assuredly fail you in your need; and, to conclude, I should, according to these direful maxims, count myself as fortunate in the fact that I had neither brother nor sister, and was thus free from the guilt of venial fratricide, man being so constituted that he scarcely ever sees anything in fraternity but a diminished inheritance; "for," said my father, "there are very few, even of the purest souls, who can deny having thought, at least once in a lifetime, in calculating the fortune that they were to divide, 'If I were the only one!'"

I can not express how these axioms, in one sense strictly true perhaps, but of an affirmation so exaggerated and so disheartening, filled me with dismay, when I heard them coldly stated as a proposition by my dying father.

My tutor, who was a man of good sense, but of

mediocre intellect, had never in his life started any philosophical discussion in my presence. Upon such subjects my mind had thus far remained unawakened and inert, but, being prepared by education and by a precocious habit of reflection due to my solitary life, and the experience I had gained by travel, was ready to receive the germs of any idea, good or bad, which the ardour of my imagination would inevitably cause to expand.

It was thus that these discouraging and bitter sentiments took deep root and became the sole source of all my thoughts. Later in life I was enabled to modify them, to graft on them, so to speak, other ideas, but the later buds partook of all the bitterness of the original sap.

After one of these melancholy seances with my father, which generally lasted about two hours, he would allow himself to be dressed, or rather to be wrapped in warm and very light clothing (for his old wounds had become open and heavy clothing caused him to suffer cruelly); then, seated in a bath-chair, he would have himself rolled up and down in the sunny paths of the park.

Through a strange caprice, my father, who had hitherto taken the greatest pleasure in keeping this park in luxurious beauty, prohibited, so soon as he believed himself to be seriously ill, every one from making the most necessary and ordinary improvements.

Nothing can be imagined more desolate than the aspect of these wide driveways, which were now taken possession of by grass and weeds; of these arbours and bowers of elm-trees, which, formerly clipped so symmetrically, were now abandoned and left to grow in every wild way; of these great flower

beds, where all the dead summer flowers, that should have been pulled up by the roots at the beginning of autumn (for it was now that season), were still displaying their tall blackened stems.

Nothing, I repeat, could have been more dismal than this spectacle of neglect and ruin around a house which was still inhabited. My father had even forbidden any one to make the most ordinary repairs to the house itself. If a shutter was unhinged or a chimney blown down by a storm, it was allowed to remain just as the wind had left it. After his airing, which my father generally took in silence, his head bowed on his breast, while beside him walked either I, my aunt, or Hélène, he would be taken into his study. I can see the room still, lighted by its three great windows which opened on the park, its numerous old family portraits, its pictures and priceless curiosities. A great black bookcase filled one entire side of the room; from the ceiling swung a great chandelier of rock-crystal. But what gave the place its look of utter desolation was the same sort of neglect which devastated the park.

The pictures and the furniture were heavy with dust; a *valet de chambre* having once dared to dust a few articles, my father had flown into such a rage that the dust was allowed to settle where it pleased from that day, and the spiders to spin their webs where they pleased.

My father would remain there alone during two or three hours, after which we would go and take him out for a second promenade, which was the only time when he would seem to arouse himself from the sullen apathy into which he had fallen.

The object of our promenade was to go to a vast enclosure where some horses were allowed to run at

liberty. There were, I believe, seven or eight, of which three were old hunters which had been favourite mounts during many years; the others were carriage horses, also very old. As soon as my father had known that it would in future be impossible for him to either ride or drive, he had caused his horses to be turned loose in this enclosure; one of the clauses of his will expressly ordered that these horses were to remain at liberty and never to be worked any more until their death.

As I said before, it was on these occasions alone that my father ever had anything to say. He would sometimes speak of one of his hunting parties, where a certain horse had distinguished himself; he would recall some road that another had travelled over with surprising speed; then, the promenade over, he would return home to dine. Although for quite a long time he had only been able to take the lightest nourishment, he insisted that his table, of which he was rather vain, should be served with the same dainty abundance as when he was in health, but he never partook of anything. My aunt and Hélène assisted at these silent repasts, where we were waited on by the old white-headed servants, dressed in their funereal black. My father never spoke at meal-times, and as we had noticed how the least noise seemed to distress him, we confined our conversations to exchanging a few remarks spoken in an undertone.

After dinner, which was soon over, we would go into the parlour, and, getting out the chess-board, I would sit down to it opposite my father. I would arrange the chessmen and we would begin the pretence of a game; for my father was entirely too absent-minded to really play any more. At long

intervals he would push one of his men from one square to another on the board, and for the form of it I would advance one of mine,—all this was done in perfect silence; for it was a sort of mechanical occupation rather than an amusement that my father sought in this simulation of chess-playing. While we were so occupied my aunt would read and Hélène seat herself at the piano for about an hour's time.

This musical hour, except the visit to the horses' pound, was the only other incident of our daily life which appeared to make any impression on my father; for as he continued to push about his pieces in an aimless way, he would say to Hélène, in his low and penetrating voice: "Hélène, I should like you to play such or such an air for me."

Sometimes, though very rarely, he would ask her to repeat the same piece for him two or three times, when he would place his elbows on the chess-board, and, hiding his head in his two hands, would seem lost in meditation.

One day, only after having asked a second time for a song, I noticed when he raised his venerable head, where suffering had marked such deep lines, that his eyes were filled with tears.

The airs which he liked best to have Hélène repeat to him were few in number and very old-fashioned. I remember among others "Pauvre Jacques," the cavatina of "Don Juan," one of the Beethoven symphonies, and two or three romances by Paësiello. One of these last, a simple, sweet, and sad melody called "La Mort d'Elvire," seemed to affect him more profoundly than any of the others, so that he would say, after a deep sigh, "That is enough, Hélène. Thank you, my child." And as soon as the music ceased, a deep silence would fall on us.

It would be impossible to describe the melancholy thoughts which the daily repetition of such a scene caused to spring up in my mind. I would listen with rapt attention to those old songs, whose simple rhythm suited so well the freshness and purity of Hélène's voice.

The room in which we assembled in the evenings was called the salon of the Crusader, because above the great fireplace of carved stone was the representation of one of our ancestors, who bore the holy cross. This apartment was very large, and its walls were all tapestried with dark red damask.

As my father's eyesight was very bad, we had two lamps, covered with green silk shades, placed on the piano in a manner to light the music desk only; thus, while the rest of the room remained in almost total obscurity, Hélène, seated at the piano, shone out in beautiful clearness.

I can still see her beautiful blonde hair, her pretty throat, which looked so white against her large black fichu. And I can see my father as he sat by the chess-board, his head bowed in meditation, only visible in the red and dancing light reflected from the fire on the hearth.

Towards ten o'clock my father would ring for his servants, who then assisted him to his own rooms, whither I accompanied him, and helped him to his bed.

I slept in the room next to his, and very often in the night, being restless and agitated, I would get up to listen to his breathing. I would creep up cautiously to his bedside, but always found him with wide-open eyes, whose gaze was fixed on mine, for he never slept. This frightful insomnia, which the doctors

attributed to the abuse of opium, and which they attempted in every manner to overcome, this continuous insomnia was what caused him to suffer the most. The tears still come into my eyes when I recall the tone of calm resignation with which he would say to me, "I am not asleep, I am not in need of anything,—go and rest yourself, my child." I sometimes shudder as I remember that for a period of seven months my father never slept a moment. Each day and each night he waited for the end, which he could see was slowly approaching. I have already said that his knowledge was almost universal; for this reason, although he had no practical knowledge of medicine, he was, unfortunately, sufficiently acquainted with its principles to understand and judge with certainty of his own condition.

Eight months before his death he astounded the doctors by discussing with them his disease, and showing them his reasons for believing that it would inevitably end fatally,—even the time he probably had to live. And, however, with the terrible conviction that every day was bearing him nearer to the tomb, he never showed the least weakness nor the slightest regret. Never a complaint, never a word in allusion to his approaching end! Silence, always silence! and his life until the day of his death was such as I have described.

The day before this frightful event, he caused me to go through a long and serious examination on the manner in which I was to manage my fortune; this with remarkable lucidity and apparent satisfaction. He then said to me: "I have doubled the means my father left me; this increase of fortune has been my steady object in life, because my constant aim has

been your future happiness. Make a good use of these riches if you are able. Remember, my child, that gold is all-powerful: honour and happiness. Above all things, try to live alone; that is the great science of life. If you should find a woman like your mother, marry her, but be on your guard against adorers who will simply be after your fortune; in a word, never trust in any appearances before having sounded their secret depths." Then showing me his great secretary, he added: "You are to have that piece of furniture burned, just as it stands, with all it contains. I have taken out all our family papers, and you should be perfectly indifferent as to the rest. Adieu, my child, I have always been satisfied with your conduct."

And as through my tears I spoke to him of eternity, of my grief if I should have the frightful misfortune to lose him, he faintly smiled and said to me, in his calm and steady voice: "My child, why do you speak to me of these vanities? There is nothing eternal, there is nothing even durable in human feeling, joy and gladness are but transitory emotions,—grief and sadness are still more fleeting. Remember this, my poor child. You are generous and affectionate—you love me tenderly—you are grievously afflicted at the thought of losing me. Your actual grief is really so intense that it hides from you for the time being the coming separation,—and yet this diseased body can not, ought not, to continue to live; sooner or later after I am gone, you will begin to regret me less; little by little you will turn your mind to other thoughts, then you will begin to be consoled,—and after awhile I shall be forgotten!"

"Never," I exclaimed, and, throwing myself on the foot of his bed, I took his hand and covered it with

my tears.

He placed his hand, which was already cold, on my forehead, and continued: "Poor dear child! Wherefore deny that which is self-evident,—why try to escape the inexorable law of our race? In this series of changes which, starting at violent grief, ends by forgetfulness, there is nothing as I see it either odious or guilty. Nothing is more natural, nothing is more consistent with our human nature. More than this, one of these days you will be able to enjoy the wealth I am leaving you without the slightest feeling of sadness. You will remember me, I hope and desire, from time to time, but seldom, and without anguish. The remembrance of me will never interfere with your enjoyments, your pleasures, the pursuits of your daily existence; so at last I shall count in your bright young life only as the dust of the old tree, which, having lived its time, now only serves as a nourishment to its young shoots. Nothing is more simple, more human, more natural, I tell you so once more."

"Ah, never believe such a thing as that," I cried out in terror. "This fortune will be hateful to me,—nothing will ever be any consolation to me."

But my father added:

"Make no foolish promises, my son; eighty thousand francs a year can never be hateful, and the most poignant grief is capable of consolation. Do I not know it from my own experience? Did not I feel thus when my father died? Will your sentiments not be the same as mine were? And if you ever have a son, will he not feel the same grief when you die? Believe me, my child, true wisdom consists in being thus able to envisage the inexorable reality of things, and never to indulge in vain hopes. When you once

understand this truth, when it once causes the phantom of falsehood to dissolve, then you will neither hate nor despise men for being thus constituted, because you know yourself to be like them,—you will then pity them and help them, for you will often feel greatly unhappy! If you find men ungrateful, alas! look into the depth of your own soul, and you will often see such base ingratitude that you will be enabled to forgive others. Understand this, my poor child, that to forgive all is to know all. Finally, a time will come when the sight of their unknown or hidden vices will be so saddening or repugnant to you that you will do as I did, you will leave them and live alone. Then, my child, instead of having constantly before your eyes the harrowing sight of the moral infirmities of mankind, you will only have your own, and in the contemplation of a splendid nature, in meditation, in the inexhaustible and maternal sweetness of study, you will be able to forget and forgive the sins of our poor humanity."

The day after this conversation, my father was no more.

CHAPTER V

HÉLÈNE

In recalling these souvenirs of my past life, I have no other aim than the firm determination, if that be possible, of reviewing, as a cold and disinterested

spectator, the scenes of my most secret thoughts, as well as the struggles of my instincts, whether good or evil; not to be ashamed to own up to a single one of them, no matter how base or paltry.

I believe myself to be neither better nor worse than the common run of men, and what gives me the courage to admit everything to myself is the conviction that possesses me, that, should the greater number of men ask themselves the same questions, and reply to them with the same frankness, their answers would in most instances be the same as mine.

To go back to the death of my father: my grief was most profound, but it was not my predominating sentiment at the first. My first sensation was a sort of terrified stupefaction at finding myself, at twenty-two years old, perfectly free, and master of a large fortune. My next feeling was an inexplicable anguish at the idea that from henceforth I was without any natural protector. Come vice or virtue, glory or obscurity, my life from henceforth would interest no one; besides, the eccentric life my father had led, isolated for so long from all the world, had placed me almost in the position of a stranger to that society which my rank and fortune entitled me to enter. The future seemed to extend itself before me like a vast desert crossed by a thousand paths, but no souvenir, no interest, nor even any family or caste patronage could I claim which might show me which of these paths was the right one.

As in all else, thanks to the lapse of time, this impression was fated to be modified and then radically altered; but the transition was a long one.

Some time later this timidity gave place to, or rather was mingled with, a tinge of pride, as I

considered that all the great domains of our family belonged to me alone, and that, though the responsibility of their regency might be burdensome, it would be its own compensation. When still very young I had mechanically acquired a habit of self-interrogation, so when I perceived that my profound affliction had begun to take on these first tints of personality, I shuddered as I remembered those terrible words of my dying father, "You are generous and kind, you love me tenderly, and yet, sooner or later after my death, you will begin to miss me less and less, then you will be entirely consoled, and finally you will forget me altogether."

I have heard stories giving many examples of men to whom a tragic and premature end had been foretold, and who, goaded by some unexplainable fatality, had taken upon themselves the task of realising these sad predictions. It is the same way, I believe, with certain thoughts which are repugnant, even hateful to you, against which you struggle vainly, and to which you finally succumb; thus it was with the prediction of my father; I fought against it a long time, but at last I was conquered.

But this struggle was certainly one of the most distressing periods of my life. To recognise little by little the uselessness of our grief, to become cruelly convinced of this formidable vulgarity, that those feelings which nature has most deeply rooted in our hearts can fade, wither, die, and disappear under the icy breath of time,—ought not such thoughts to cut us to the quick? Are they not heart-breaking? Such were the thoughts which caused me to curse my ingratitude, but my curses were in vain.

It was the month of January, for I had remained all

the winter at Serval, with my aunt and Hélène. Every morning I mounted my horse and went for a long ride in the forest, where I would spend three or four hours. The gray, cloudy, foggy weather pleased me, the wide driveways covered with snow, or littered with dead leaves, which the wind scattered hither and thither, had a dreary aspect which suited the colour of my thoughts. Leaving the reins loose on my horse's neck, I would ride along in a state of utter abstraction, scarcely thinking of anything,—of the future, of the road I meant to follow,—making no plans whatever, for I was still too much dazzled by my newly attained importance. I had lived for so long a time entirely dependent on my father, having no will but his, making no plans but his; even during my long voyage his will, represented by that of my tutor, had governed me so incessantly that the absolute and perfect freedom I now enjoyed was both overpowering and alarming. After one of these long rides I would return to find Hélène and her mother awaiting me; we would talk about my father, and my aunt would try to persuade me to overcome the repugnance I felt in attending to business; but as all these business transactions reminded me too cruelly of the many conversations I had with my father on these subjects, I could not bring myself yet to consider all these details, but left them to the charge of my tutor.

At the end of the third month my grief had lost much of its bitterness. I began, so to speak, to awake and look around me, my ideas became clearer and more definite as to the use I was to make of my newly acquired liberty,—this freedom which still disturbed and made me anxious, but which alarmed me no longer.

The thread of our thoughts does not always escape exterior and purely physical influences. I was beginning to find this out. Springtime was approaching, and I felt as if with the dreary winter the first bitterness of my sorrow would pass away, and that vague projects and sweet hopes for the future would blossom with the smiling foliage of May.

We were now getting on towards the middle of April; since my father's death I had never been able to make up my mind to visit the village cemetery, in which stood our family monument, so fearful was I of the cruel impression such a visit would have upon me. One day, as I deplored my weakness, Hélène said to me, "Try to be more courageous, Arthur; come, I will go with you."

As Hélène's mother was not very well, she could not go with us; so we set forth together. My emotion was so violent that I was trembling and could scarcely stand. Hélène, who was, perhaps, quite as much unnerved as I, showed it less. When we arrived at the entrance door of the vault, I fainted away.

When I came to myself, I saw Hélène kneeling beside me. I felt her warm tears fall on my cheek, for she was holding my head in her two hands. For the very first time, strange as it may seem, in spite of the sacredness of the place, in spite of the heartrending thoughts with which I was prepared to be overcome, for the first time in my life I was struck with Hélène's beauty. This first sensation passed rapidly as a dream, and my deep sadness again possessed me. I remained weeping for a long time, and then we returned to the château.

After that I went with Hélène almost daily to the cemetery, and, instead of my sharp and violent grief,

I began to indulge in a sweet melancholy, which was not without a certain charm. I began to admit to myself with a sense of pleasure that I was ineffably grateful for the memory of my father, and I blessed him with pious admiration for having been able to show me always such deep and far-seeing affection, having such terrible convictions as he had on the forgetfulness of the living for those who are no longer among them.

Emerging from my state of stupor, I began at length to appreciate the splendid position that he had made for me, and I promised that I would remain eternally grateful to him, but after awhile, as I began to contemplate my position in all its brilliancy, I would sometimes tremble, as I thought I discovered in the depths of my mind a frightful reaction of egotistic satisfaction.

I have told what a long time it was before I began to notice Hélène's beauty. Though this may have been strange, you must remember that she had always seemed to me like a sister. When I had started on my travels she was at a convent school, almost a child; and during the last few months of my father's life I had been so cruelly preoccupied with his sufferings, and Hélène had shown such a devoted and filial affection for him, that the sort of fraternal feeling I cherished for her had never changed.

Hélène was three years younger than I; she was blonde and pale; her manner was kindly, but cold, and her large blue eyes, her aquiline nose, her large, fine forehead often bent forwards, gave her an imposing and, at the same time, a melancholy expression. As a child she had always been quiet; hers was a silent and self-contained nature, indifferent to the joys and pleasures of her age;

always very sedentary and very nonchalant, she laughed seldom, and dreamed a great deal. Her eyebrows were of a darker shade of blonde than her magnificent hair,—they were thick, and perhaps too well marked. Her foot was charming, and her hand, though rather long, was of antique beauty; her tall, slight, and willowy figure was remarkably perfect, but she held herself very badly, and almost always, through indolence, kept her white and round shoulders bowed forwards, in spite of her mother's continual scoldings. As to her mind, I had never paid any attention to it before; she had always shown herself thoughtful and solicitous in the affection she evinced towards my father, and, as I have said, her behaviour to me was always of a sisterly kind.

She was altogether of an affectionate and tender nature, charitable and benevolent towards every one, but she was very proud and high-spirited at times, and extremely susceptible to the slightest allusion she suspected any one about to make on the subject of her poverty. I very well remember that, before my father's death, Hélène had sulked at me for quite a long time because I had been stupid and thoughtless enough to say before her that young girls without fortunes were almost always from their birth destined for gouty old fellows who were tired of society, and wanted some nice young girl of good family who would be willing to pass the rest of her life in their peevish society.

Hélène's mother, who was my father's sister, was a weak, heedless woman, but she was good, witty, and very *distinguée*. Her husband held for a long time a high diplomatic position, but being very prodigal, a gambler, loving display and all that was luxurious, in his desire to represent his country as sumptuously as

possible, he had entirely wasted his own fortune as well as that of his wife; so that the latter was left at his death, if not in absolute poverty, at least in honourable but poor circumstances.

I had never in my life taken into consideration the disproportion of fortune that existed between Hélène and myself. Neither did I think about it at all, when I began to notice her beauty, for I believe that one of the most salient traits of the young who find themselves rich without any labour is to try to colour everything with a golden tinge reflected from their own gay prism.

From the moment when I saw that Hélène was beautiful, without attempting to analyse the sentiment I was perhaps already beginning to feel, I became quite another being; I shortened the duration of my horseback rides, I began to be very careful as to my toilet, and often felt ashamed when I remembered my former negligent ways in regard to dress.

My aunt had a friend who was also a widow and the mother of a daughter about Hélène's age. This daughter was threatened with serious lung trouble, which caused her mother the greatest alarm and distress. I had heard my aunt speak of her poor friend, and instinctively feeling that I would have more opportunities of being alone with Hélène, were our family circle larger, I asked my aunt to invite her friend and her daughter to come to Serval, and remain for some time where the air was perfectly pure. My aunt accepted this invitation joyfully, and very soon Madame de Verteuil and her daughter, a poor child of eighteen, not at all pretty, but with such a look of suffering resignation as to be deeply interesting, came to live with us at the château.

CHAPTER VI

THE AVOWAL

Two months after the arrival of Madame de Verteuil at Serval, the sad aspect of the ancient house was entirely changed; to my eyes all was blooming, gay, radiant,—I was in love with Hélène.

Several of our neighbouring landowners, who had been alienated by my father's misanthropic disposition, made friendly advances towards me, and I felt so perfectly happy that, with the easy good nature happiness brings, which really is indifference for all that does not concern our love, I accepted their kindly visits, and very soon Serval, without being gay, was at least much more cheerful and lively than it had been for many a long year.

I was so entirely absorbed in my love that I scarcely gave a thought to the great change that had taken place in my grief. It was just nine months since I had lost my father, and already the remembrance of his death, at first so constant and so bitter, was beginning little by little to fade away. I had begun by going every morning to the cemetery, then I went only once in awhile, sometime later I substituted for this pious visit some few hours spent in meditation before my father's portrait. I had caused this portrait to be placed in a frame which closed with two folding panels, thinking it a profanation to leave the image of those we hold most dear exposed to the

gaze of the thoughtless and indifferent; besides, I considered that such contemplation, from which we hope to receive elevated and serious thoughts, should be premeditated and not due to our having by chance given a hasty look at the beloved face. The frame which contained the portrait became for me, thus, a sort of tabernacle, which I never opened without a solemn and pious sense of meditation. But alas! these contemplations, daily at first, soon became less frequent, from the very fact that my eyes could not become accustomed to look with indifference on this sacred image, which I gazed on more and more rarely. I can never explain the almost frightened impression with which I would unlock the panels: my heart would beat violently on beholding the pale and stern face of my father, who seemed to step out of the canvas with his imposing look of calmness and sadness, and to reproach me for my ingratitude and forgetfulness of his memory, which, alas! he had predicted.

Then, quite terrified, I would close the frame suddenly, and would weep bitter tears over my indifference; but these harrowing regrets lasted but a short time, and I would be overcome with shame as I said to myself: "For the time being I am grievously distressed, and yet to-morrow, this evening perhaps, I shall have forgotten him altogether and shall be smiling and happy in the society of Hélène."

No, nothing can give an idea of the painful resentment such a thought caused me. It was an insult to my grief, showing me the uselessness of it, even at the very moment of my truest and most heartbroken despair.

At last, I tell it to my shame, having gone a whole month without opening the picture-frame, I had the

inconceivable cowardice to really dread a sight of it, so much did I fear this sort of apparition. At a later day I braved it, however, and you will see how the act, insignificant as it was, reacted on all my ensuing destiny.

These impressions, which I can now coldly analyse, excited and confused me at the time; but though I was steeped in the intoxication of a first love, I could yet feel their painful and deadening influence.

I have said that I loved Hélène; the phases of this love were very strange, and revealed to me feelings of the most miserable selfishness, pride, and incredulity, which, until then, had been dormant in my heart.

Never, alas! will I dare to blame my father for having given me those terrible counsels of which I have spoken. My future happiness was his most ardent desire, but as certain vigorous wild plants, transplanted into a soil too poor to nourish them, exhaust it quickly, and fade away before bearing either flower or fruit, so my moral nature was evidently not strong enough to profit by such formidable teachings. In the case of my father, these fierce and sombre convictions blossomed at least with flowers of benevolence and pardon for all; in my case the generous and hardy sap was wanting, and the stalk was destined to remain in all the barren nakedness of its dried-up bark, and never to bring forth a flower.

Let us return to Hélène, even though some of these recollections now cause me to blush for shame.

It was my heart's first love, and, like every first love, it was naïf, thoughtless, careless, allowing itself to float idly on the smiling and pure stream of

passion, lulled by the harmony of the first wakenings of the heart, and, like the old mythological emblem, with eyes closed for fear of seeing the horizon.

These three months, with their freedom from all thought of the future, were, nevertheless, delightful, and it is with delight that I recall the smallest detail of their happy moments. Soon after the arrival of Madame de Verteuil and her daughter at Serval, I asked Hélène one day to ride on horseback, like her friend, who took that exercise for her health. I had caused two very gentle ponies to be brought from England, for Hélène was extremely timid. Before I could prevail on her to accompany Mlle. de Verteuil and myself on one of our excursions outside of the park limits, it was necessary, in order to overcome her first alarms, for me to walk beside her pony for quite a long time.

Nothing could be more charming than the little shadows of fear that would creep over her lovely face, the upper half of which, shaded from the sun by a large straw hat, was seen in a luminous golden half obscurity, while her red lips and rosy chin shone in the bright sunshine. She always wore white dresses and a wide gray moiré sash to mark the waist, which was so slender and flexible that she would bend like a reed before the breeze at each jolt of the little black Scotch pony, whose thick mane and long tail went streaming in the wind.





I held the bridle, and Hélène, at the least movement of little Black, would suddenly place her hand on my shoulder. This foolish timidity caused much merriment to Mlle. de Verteuil, who, much braver than her friend, and wishing to encourage her, would often gallop off and leave us alone.

We usually took these promenades on the green turf of a long avenue of leafy oak-trees. As long as Mlle. de Verteuil remained with us I was gay and talkative, and Hélène, who was naturally dreamy, would brighten up and become quite animated; but as soon as Sophie left us we fell into interminable silences, of which I was quite ashamed, but which seemed to me perfectly blissful.

I soon afterwards wrote to a friend in London to send me some fine horses, several grooms, and two or three carriages of different sorts. My season of mourning was about to end. The arrival of all these equipages made a sort of little fête at Serval. I had kept it a secret, and I well remember Hélène's childish and simple pleasure, when one beautiful evening in August, upon expressing a wish to drive in the forest, she saw, instead of one of our ordinary carriages, a charming calèche, with four black

horses, harnessed *en d'Aumont*, and mounted by two little English postilions, dressed in pearl gray velveteen.

She climbed into the chariot, accompanied by her mother and her friend. I rode beside them on horseback through that magnificent forest, and we returned slowly to the château, in the beautiful moonlight, which shone so picturesquely through the long, dark avenues of grand old trees.

While speaking of this drive, I should wish to state that I have never met with a woman who seemed more in keeping with luxurious surroundings, or, rather, one who heightened the effect of luxury more than Hélène; she possessed such stateliness, joined to such an enchanting and involuntary grace, that it was impossible to think of her except as constantly surrounded by every object of the best and most cultivated taste.

Thus without being extraordinarily beautiful, Hélène would have become one of those rare women, whose dress, equipage or home, we never think of admiring, no matter how supremely elegant they all may be,—the pervading woman harmonising and assimilating all these beautiful accessories. So many people are simply an advertisement of, or a contrast to, their wealth, and so few know how to cast upon their luxury that beautiful reflection, which, like a ray of sunshine, embellishes even the most magnificent object!

One evening, on returning from our drive, and as we were waiting for tea to be served, Hélène proposed that we should remain without lights in the salon, and that the windows should be opened so that the soft rays of the moonlight might shine into the room; to this her mother gave consent. Nothing

was ever more melancholy than this vast apartment thus illuminated; so that from talking gaily, we gradually all became silent.

My aunt had spoken of my father; this remembrance saddened us all, though in different ways: my aunt remembered that she had lost a much loved brother; Madame de Verteuil, in thinking upon his death, remembered the state of her daughter's health, and the sad fate which probably menaced her; while I was once more overcome with shame of my guilty forgetfulness.

We were soon all perfectly silent; I was seated beside Hélène, my head on my hands. I know not why, but I began to reproach myself for the display I was already beginning to make. I experienced a puerile remorse in thinking how, instead of taking our drive in the great heavy carriage that had belonged to my father, with his faithful old servants seated on the box, I had been riding in a light, elegant, modern turnout, with foreigners seated on the backs of my horses. Certainly nothing could be sillier or more inane than such ideas, and yet they affected me quite painfully.

After some time passed in reflection, I let my hand fall on to the arm of my chair, and found that I had placed it on the hand of Hélène; I blushed, and my heart began to beat strangely. When Hélène felt my hand, hers became suddenly cold, as though all the blood in her veins had rushed towards her heart. I dared neither take away my hand nor press hers, which I could feel growing warmer and warmer until presently it became burning hot. By the nervous trembling of her beautiful arm I could count the throbbing of her breast. I was entirely overcome and was filled with both unutterable joy and sadness.

Oh, ingenuous serenity of first emotion, what can ever replace thee! Oh, spring, so pure at thy source! How delicious is thy cool freshness when murmuring peacefully along, furtive and undiscovered, under the tufts of green leaves; but, alas! how soon does all this charm vanish when, coming boldly out of the shade and reflecting alike every shore, the current of thy troubled waters is soiled by the débris they carry along.

I loved Hélène passionately, I idolised her, and yet, I had not dared as yet to make her an avowal of my love.

One day when we were out walking with Mlle. de Verteuil, who had been at the convent school with Hélène, we began by I know not what chance to speak of anniversaries and fêtes; suddenly Sophie de Verteuil exclaimed, as she looked towards me: "Do you remember, Hélène, our great excitement when we were little girls and celebrated *his* fête?"

Hélène blushed scarlet, and, with a shrug, replied to her friend, "I don't understand you." The poor child said no more, and we came back home quite soberly.

The next day, meeting Mlle. de Verteuil in the library, I asked her to tell me the meaning of those words which had, the day before, made such an impression on Hélène. After hesitating a long time, she ended by avowing that, when at the convent, Hélène had every year celebrated my fête with childish solemnity. The preparations consisted in buying a great bouquet of flowers, that she tied up with a fine ribbon, on which she had mysteriously embroidered the initials of my name; after which she would place the bouquet in an old marble vase, which stood in a lonely corner of the convent

garden; here she would spend the hours of her recreation in prayer before her shrine, begging God to grant me a prosperous voyage.

Mlle. de Verteuil never tired in telling me of Hélène's terror of being surprised whilst embroidering the ribbon, and of her thousand and one attempts (sometimes unsuccessful) to procure a fine enough bunch of flowers.

How can I tell how it came about that these childish doings told so simply by Mlle. de Verteuil filled me with delighted surprise and touched me to the heart? For before starting on my voyage, during a short visit that Hélène made to Serval, I had never considered her as anything but a child.

From the evening when I had, by accident, felt her hand under mine, Hélène appeared to avoid me; her habitual taciturnity became greater; her manner, until then sweet and equable, became brusque; she would remain for hours shut up in her own room with the blinds closed in perfect obscurity.

I was very unhappy myself; I was restless and preoccupied; I believed that an avowal on my part was all that was wanting to render Hélène calm and happy; but a timidity which I was not able to overcome sealed my lips to such a declaration.

One evening, however, when Hélène was less dejected and less sad than usual, I went with her for a horseback ride. I vowed to myself that I would have the courage to tell her of my love,—I would tell it as soon as we were riding in the great avenue of oaks I have spoken about. We arrived there,—my heart beat fearfully, but I dared not speak.

Ashamed and mortified, I came to a new decision, and I told myself that the marble temple at the end

of the avenue should be the place where I would make a second attempt.

When we arrived there, I became dizzy, my heart seemed to stop beating, I could only say in a choking voice, "Hélène!" then I became dumb.

She turned her great moist eyes on me; she appeared paler than usual; her bosom heaved; she looked at me as though her gaze would penetrate the depths of my heart.

"Oh, Hélène!" I began again, and I know not what insurmountable timidity prevented me from saying a single word more.

She then, with a look of grief and despair I can never forget, cried out, "Ah, you will never love any one! You will be miserable always!"

Then, as if frightened at her own words, she gave a stroke of the whip to her pony, and dashed off at a gallop. Rooted to the spot, I watched her as she rode, and saw her rapidly approaching a gate which closed the end of the avenue. I sat there and shuddered; but she, who was usually such a coward, jumped her horse over the barrier at a single bound, and I soon lost sight of her in the depths of the forest.

When I found myself alone, the words uttered by Hélène with so much bitterness, "Ah, you will never love any one! You will be miserable for ever!" caused me a grievous sense of pain. I understood now that my silence had amounted almost to a declaration of love.

Then at last, remembering her confusion and her reticence, I began to believe that she also loved me, and the sort of avowal she had made filled me with such delight that, intoxicated with joy, I wandered

about here and there like a crazy man, with no thought, no plan for the future, but happy,—oh, who can tell how happy?—ineffably happy and radiantly proud.

At last, night having come, I returned to the château. On entering the parlour, Hélène was there; her cheeks were glowing, her eyes shone with a strange light; seated at the piano she was playing very slowly, and with great expression, "The Last Thought," by Weber, that musical phrase of so much sweetness and melancholy. When Hélène saw me she said, "Come, admit that I frightened you, did I not?" And, without waiting for me to answer, she stopped playing the morceau, as though fearing it might betray the sadness of her thoughts. She began a brilliant waltz, singing to the music from time to time with a voice which was noticeably tremulous.

Her mother and Mlle. de Verteuil looked at each other, as stupefied as myself by this sudden access of gaiety, which was so unlike Hélène.

Hélène paid no attention, but continued playing her waltz with all the noisy liveliness of a child.

Somehow all this unnatural joyfulness wounded and shocked me, so wild did Hélène appear. In fact, after this spasmodic behavior had gone on about half an hour, she became suddenly very pale and then fainted away.

A week after this scene Hélène knew of my love and had acknowledged her love for me.

CHAPTER VII

THE LETTER

The three months that followed our avowal passed like a dream. These moments were certainly the happiest of my life. Everything was in harmony with our innocent young love,—the delightful season of the year, our sumptuous and picturesque home. Every adjunct of our daily life was of the most luxurious and elegant kind, a sort of poetry in action always of an inestimable value,—the gilded frame which adds to the effect of even the most beautiful painting.

In the midst of the park was a large lake. I had a gondola or barge constructed, rigged with awnings, curtains, and carpets; besides, there were soft cushions and a tea-table; here very often, when the evenings were fine, Hélène, her mother, Sophie, and I would spend delightful hours. In the middle of the lake was a small wooded island, crowned by a kiosk for music, and frequently I sent to the neighbouring town, where there was a military garrison, for three excellent German musicians who, hidden in the pavilion, played us lovely trios for alto, flute, and harp.

In order to be alone in the barge, and to prevent feeling the motion of the oars, I had it towed at the end of a long rope fastened to a small boat, which two of the men servants rowed ahead of us.

How often thus rocked by the waves, dreamily listening to the drip of the distant oar, breathing the aroma of the tea, or cooling our lips with snowy sherbets, we would suddenly be enchanted by a sudden burst of harmony coming to us from the

island, while around us the fields and great forest-trees were bathed in the clear moonlight!

How many long evenings have I passed thus at Hélène's side! How intoxicating were these waves of melody, now sweet and sonorous, now dying in sudden silence! I remember that these pauses caused us to feel the most delicious sadness. The ear at last becomes weary of sounds, no matter how harmonious they may be, but music, interrupted now and then by a pause, which gives one the time to think of what has gone before, to listen, as it were, in your heart to the echo of those last plaintive vibrations,—music thus interrupted has an added charm, and makes one sigh for more.

During these delightful moments I was always seated at Hélène's side, holding her hand in mine; and we thus, by a gentle pressure, which was for us a mute language, exchanged our heartfelt and varied thoughts; sometimes even—intoxicating and chaste privilege!—I seized the opportunity, which a moment of obscurity afforded me, of leaning my head on Hélène's white shoulder. Her slender figure would then bend in a more languishing curve than ever.

But, alas! these beautiful dreams were doomed to have a bitter awakening.

It was at the close of a November day; I was on the way home to the château, on foot, with Hélène, Mlle. de Verteuil, and my tutor, who had now become my intendant.

The weather was dark and cloudy; the sun was about to set; we were walking along the edge of the forest, which was already here and there brightened

by the tints of autumn.

The silvery-barked birch-trees seemed to be showering down golden leaves; the thorn-bushes, the creepers, and the wild blackberries had all turned a beautiful glowing red.

To the right of us was a newly ploughed hillside, whose deep brown tones contrasted violently with a broad zone of orange-coloured light thrown on them by the setting sun; overhead great masses of deep blue-gray clouds piled themselves up like aerial mountain chains. Here and there, where weeds were burning on the hillsides, the light spirals of their smoke arose in white clouds, and slowly mingled with the vapours of the evening mists. To complete all, on the crest of the hill some cattle were slowly moving along to the monotonous jangling of their bells. As they stood out, so black, against the horizon, crimsoned as it was by the last glow of daylight, they seemed to be of colossal size.

Why was it that such a scene, so calm and peaceful, should have affected me so painfully? Hélène was thoughtfully leaning on my arm. After a long silence she said: "I do not know how to explain it, but I seem to be chilled to the heart."

Absorbed as I was by the sad thoughts I was trying to conceal from Hélène, this community of impressions struck me forcibly. "It is only nervousness," said I; "it is because of this dark and dismal weather." After this we continued our walk in silence.

In truth, I am ashamed to avow the cause of my discontent; it was childish, weak, even silly. It was the first time in my life that I was taken possession of by that insurmountable desire for independence and

solitude, whose influence I so often felt in after life, sometimes even in the midst of the utmost gaiety and dissipation. I loved Hélène, almost to adoration; every moment spent away from her was torture to me, and yet on that day, without any reason, and not out of spitefulness, Hélène having been as sweet and affectionate towards me as she always was, for some unknown reason I felt that I was really unhappy. It made me wretched to think that I should be obliged to appear in the salon that evening to be polite to my guests, and to reply to the tender appeals of Hélène.

After being so impressed by the melancholy aspect of nature, it would have been pleasant to be able to spend my evening in dreaming, meditating, reading, in the midst of profound silence, one of my favourite books; but, above everything, I wanted to be entirely alone.

Nothing was to prevent my going to my own rooms and remaining there; but I knew that there were people in the house. I should have to give some reason for my behaviour; I should have to answer questions, kindly ones, no doubt, as to my state of health, but which would be intolerable to me; therefore, I made up my mind that I was a perfectly miserable being because I would not be able to spend my evening all alone.

I only cite this puerile fact for the reason that this capricious and strange desire for solitude, amid the happy life I was then leading, was so unusual at my age that it now seems to me to have been an inherited taste. While on this theme, I remember that my mother told me how, before his retirement to Serval, when, on account of his position, my father was obliged to see a great deal of society in Paris, that on reception days his moroseness and habitual

misanthropy would take possession of him to an extraordinary degree; and yet, when he would once force himself to make the plunge, if I may say so, no one could receive, with more grace, more entire politeness, more delicate and perfect tact. It was, my mother said, as though all these three or four hours of hypocrisy, that he knew he would have to go through with, worked him up to a frightful state of exasperation beforehand; and yet, when remarking on his gracious and noble face, his charmingly affable and dignified manners, strangers would suppose that he could never be contented to live except in the world of society, where he appeared to such rare and excellent advantage.

But I must return to that sad November day, when, for the first time, I experienced that extraordinary desire for isolation.

We at last reached the château.

As I was going up to my room to dress, one of my aunt's maids told me that my aunt begged me to come to her room for a few moments. I had no reason to dread such an interview, and yet I felt a great weight at my heart. I hastened to my aunt's room; she was seated beside her work-table, on which I noticed an open letter; I noticed also that she had been weeping.

"My friend," she said, "there are very wicked and very infamous people in this world. Read this." Then she handed me the letter, and replaced her handkerchief over her eyes.

I read. It was an anonymous and "friendly" warning to Hélène's mother, charitably informing her that my familiar intimacy with her daughter had brought irreparable ruin to her reputation. In a word,

she was given to understand, by means of the confused phraseology usual in such cases, that Hélène was "looked upon as my mistress," and that, by her unpardonable weakness and carelessness, my aunt had countenanced the odious rumour.

It was false, absolutely false; it was a horrible calumny; but I was stunned, for I saw in an instant that appearances would give a terrible credit to the accusation.

I felt as if I were wakened from a dream. I have told how I allowed myself to be swept on by the current of this sweet and chaste affection with neither forethought nor reflection, with all the delightful inconsistency of happiness. This letter put the reality before my eyes and I was crushed.

My first movement was noble and generous. I tore up the letter, saying to my aunt, "Believe me, the reputation of my cousin Hélène shall be vindicated in the most satisfactory manner."

My aunt smiled sadly, and said to me, "My friend, you must feel that after such rumours we must live separate lives; to remain at Serval any longer would be to justify these calumnies. I know my daughter, and I know the purity of your sentiments; this is sufficient for me. But, my child, appearances are against us; the confidence I so legitimately have in your honour would be called weakness and carelessness. I should have remembered, alas! that the purest life has always been at the mercy of those who desire to cover it with disgrace. You know our position. Hélène is poor; she has nothing in the world but her good name. May it please God that these frightful lies have not gone so far as to do fatal and irreparable injury!"

"Has Hélène been told of this?" I asked my aunt.

"No, my friend; but she is of sufficiently strong mind to be told everything without concealment."

"Well, then, my aunt, promise me to be gracious enough not to tell her until to-morrow."

My aunt consented to my request and I went up to my own room.

You may readily suppose that my vague and passing wish for solitude quickly vanished now that I was in real mental distress.

The dinner was a sad affair; afterwards we returned to the salon. Hélène loved her mother too well and was also too fond of me not to perceive at once that we were worried; besides, I had not, in those days, enough dissimulation to hide my resentment.

A thousand confused ideas were working in my brain; I could come to no decision; I recalled my long talks with Hélène, our frequent solitary walks, which were authorised by the familiarity of relationship and dated from our childhood; I thought of our simple pleasures, the involuntary preference I had always shown for Hélène's society; when walking she always had my arm; when on horseback I was always at her side; in fact I never quitted her. I saw then that to the most unprejudiced eyes such persistent attention must have gravely compromised Hélène. Then again, I remembered the thousand looks and signals arranged, beforehand between us, mute and amorous language not destined to escape the notice of the visitors we received. Fatal charm of first love, so engrossing as to leave us no thought except of ourselves! stupefying atmosphere in which we had been living so happy and so free from all care, and

which we foolishly believed was impenetrable to the idle gaze of the world!

As the veil with which until then my conduct had been hidden was gradually raised, I began to understand my inconceivable thoughtlessness, and, like all young people, I began to exaggerate my imprudence still more. I saw Hélène's future life ruined; because, as she was without worldly goods, the irreproachable purity of her life was doubly precious to her. Then in a transport of joy I remembered her love, the sweet and devoted affection which dated from her childhood, her serious and noble qualities, her kindness, her beauty, her exquisite elegance. Finally, I thought of how Hélène, though perfectly innocent, might appear guilty in the eyes of the world, and how, as it was through my fault that this blight might fall on her reputation, the only possible reparation which was worthy of my offering and of her acceptance was the offer of my hand.

Then I beheld myself living peacefully and happily in our old château at her side, living as we had always lived,—what a marvellously calm and radiant horizon! As I contemplated such a future my soul seemed to expand and become more noble. A voice seemed to say to me: "Thou art on the threshold of life; two ways are open before thee: the one mysterious, vague, indefinite; the other fixed and assured. In one the past allows you to judge as to what the future will be, it is the beginning of a happiness which only depends on you to follow. See what a sweet and smiling existence,—the serenity of a country life, family souvenirs, a peaceful home. Thou art rich enough to live surrounded by all the prestige of luxury and amid the benedictions of those

to whom thou may'st bring help and comfort; Hélène has loved thee since her infancy, thou lovest her. See, there is thy happiness; lay hold upon it. If this chance escapes thee thy life shall be given over to all the storms of thy passions."

It was with ecstasy that I listened to this species of revelation, and for a moment happiness seemed assured to me should I decide to pass my life thus at the side of Hélène.

These convictions were so tranquillising that my face beamed with joy, my features bore the impress of the purest felicity; I was so transported with my happiness that I cried out in response to my most secret thoughts:

"Oh, yes, Hélène, all this shall come to pass; this is my life's destiny."

Imagine the astonishment of my aunt, of Madame de Verteuil, of Sophie and Hélène, on hearing this sudden and unintelligible exclamation.

"Arthur, you have gone mad," said my aunt.

"No, my good aunt, never in my life have I said a wiser thing." Then I added, "Remember your promise." And kissing Hélène's hand, I said to her as I said every evening, "*Bon soir*, Hélène." Then I left the salon and went to my own room.

I have told how for a long time I had not dared to open the frame containing my father's portrait; but my happiness made me so brave that I found myself courageous enough to look upon that face which had so terrified me.

And, besides, I thought that on such a solemn moment in my life I should take counsel with my father; so, trembling in spite of my resolution, I

opened the frame of the portrait.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PORTRAIT

It was night; the light from the candles shone brightly on the portrait. Why was it that, in spite of my joyful state of mind caused by my decision in regard to Hélène,—why should I feel so suddenly overcome with sadness as soon as I beheld the austere face of my father? Never had his sad and gloomy nature impressed me more powerfully. His high and bare forehead was preëminent; the deep-set eyes, overshadowed by their thick gray eyebrows, stared at me with piercing fixedness; the high cheek-bones, the hollow cheeks, the proud and severe expression of the mouth, even the dark colour of the vestments, hardly distinguishable from the background,—all was as I had last seen it and produced the same effect on me. I could see nothing but that pale face shining out of the obscurity.

I knelt down and remained a long time in meditation.

When I raised my head something quite natural in itself frightened me so badly that I shivered involuntarily. I fancied I saw, or rather I really did see, something like a brilliant tear roll down the cheeks of the portrait, and then fall in a cold drop on my hand, which was placed on the frame.

No words can express my terror; I remained for some moments paralysed with fright.

Then, overcoming this childish alarm, I went nearer to the portrait, and discovered that the combined heat and moisture of the room had caused a sort of dew to form on the canvas, which had been kept closed for such a length of time. I smiled sadly at my fright, but the impression had been so violent, that I could not get over my resentment. As I became more calm, I seated myself before the portrait.

Little by little my long conversations with my father returned to my mind; so did his cold-blooded maxims, and his doubts as to the reality and duration of any earthly affection. As I had so recently felt my heart expand and dilate with pleasure, so now I felt it contracting with agony. The remembrance of my indifference, of my forgetfulness, disgusted me with myself; but wishing to escape from the circle of these bitter fancies, I attempted to consult my father mentally on the decision. I had just arrived at the point of marrying Hélène. Still thinking of that future which appeared so smiling and beautiful, I fixed my eyes on that pale and mute visage, and wildly demanded of it an answer to my questionings. I implored its approval of my resolution, but its imperturbable and disdainfully sad smile froze my blood.

"I love Hélène with the deepest, purest love," I cried, extending my hands towards the portrait. "I am not deceived as to my feelings; the noble and generous resolution I have taken will certainly secure my own and Hélène's happiness,—is it not true, my father?"

And I waited eagerly for an answer from these motionless features, believing in that momentary

hallucination that I would receive a sign of affirmation.

But the white and wrinkled forehead bowed not; then I thought I could hear from the most secret recesses of my heart the steady voice of my father, saying:

"You loved me once with this profound, unchanging love; I have done more for you than Hélène has, I have given you both life and fortune. And it is in the enjoyment of that fortune I am forgotten! Poor child!"

Overcome with terror, I continued:

"But Hélène loves me sincerely, does she not, father?" And as I steadfastly gazed on the motionless figure, whose silence so overpowered me, I repeated in my anxiety:

"Do you not believe in her love? I am, then, mistaken in what I suppose to be the love I bear to her, since you stare upon me thus, oh, my father!"

"Did I not warn you against trusting in the admirations your fortune would excite, and tell you never to trust to deceitful appearances?"

"But, great God! what deception can Hélène be capable of,—such a noble and candid young girl, she who always loved you as a father and me as a brother? Has she not given herself freely to me, confiding in my love, careless of all the rest, and so absorbed by it that she has even recklessly exposed her reputation—her sole treasure—to the evil tongue of slander?"

Alas! pardon, oh, my father! Perhaps it was but a base and sordid instinct of my own which I mistook for your answer. Doubtless, ashamed to acknowledge

my own baseness, I was willing to attribute to your influence the vile, infernal thought, this first horrible doubt which has come to trouble for ever the smiling and pure stream of my beliefs; pardon, father, pardon once more, if in that moment when, overcome with anguish, I asked you, "What reason can Hélène have for feigning love for me?" my brutal selfishness answered, "Your fortune, for Hélène is poor!"

Since that fatal day, constantly tormented by an incessant and absorbing idea, for ever tortured by doubt,—that two-bladed sword which wounds both him who wields it, and him against whom it is raised,—I have persistently sought, and, to my sorrow, generally believed myself to have discovered, the most infamous motives hidden under the most innocent appearances, the most odious projects under the most expansive and generous devotion. I have very often, alas! pitilessly killed with a word the tenderest and sweetest enthusiasms; but never, O God! never can I forget the grievous, heartrending shock with which scepticism tore out from my heart its sacred and primal faith.

From that instant, it was as though a funereal crêpe was banded over my eyes, disfiguring everything I looked at. Hélène's face, so candid and pure, now seemed filled with falseness and cupidity. The blackest plot was unfolded to my view: my aunt's carelessness was a base calculation; that letter, drawing her attention to the rumours in circulation, was a part of the scheme; then, with a cruel pride, I applauded myself for having been so clever as to discover and overturn this shameless compact into which they had all entered against me; they had

taken me, then, for their dupe.

Then, by a swift and inexplicable reaction, all my love was turned to hatred and despite; the tenderest effusions appeared to me as disgraceful pretences. Oh, shame! Oh, grief! my execrable doubting went so far as to disbelieve in the childish affection that Hélène had demonstrated when in the convent; and in my secret heart I even dared to accuse Madame de Verteuil and her daughter with being the accomplices of Hélène and her mother, and to have invented that episode in order to blind me the more surely.

Certainly the supposition of so base a deception was odious and stupid; it was horrible and incredible to be thus possessed with doubt when barely twenty-three years old; when, in all my life so far, no bitter experiences, no past deceptions justified me in such scepticism!

Alas! it was a sorry benefit, for one cannot deny that, when clothed in such a cuirass of doubt, and armed with such wise distrust, one braves with impunity the falsehoods and deceits of the world. But, as the steel corselet, while protecting you from the enemy's sword, renders you insensible to the warmth of a friendly hand, so unbelief, that iron armour, so cold and polished, protects you from the deceitfulness of a scoundrel, but makes you, alas! impenetrable to the ineffable belief in pure affection.

Since now I can analyse and get to the root of the influences, instincts, or natural organisation, which were the causes of this sudden germination and development in my mind of the distrust henceforth to be the centre around which all my thoughts were

to gravitate, no matter in how apparently indubitable a position I might be, I can remember my father telling me frequently: "I am glad to see that you distrust your own motives. When we can distrust ourselves, we can defy others, and in this there is great wisdom."

Then, by a singular contrast, my mother, blinded by maternal pride, which sublime egotism is to women what personality is to men, after vainly attempting to work me up to a fit of self-glorification, would say, sadly: "My poor, dear child, I am in despair when I see how little confidence you have in yourself; by dint of distrusting yourself, you will lose your belief in others, and that will be a terrible misfortune."

Now I am certain that my insurmountable self-distrust was one of the principal causes of my doubting others; having no faith in the opinions people professed to have of me, for they seemed false and exaggerated, I consequently was always on the watch for some interested or underhand reason for their admiration of me. What confirmed me in this opinion is, that I have never found more persistent, more imperturbable believers than among foolish and vain people. The want of intelligence of the fool prevents him from observing, reflecting, or comparing, while the conceited man's self-satisfaction never permits him to doubt as to the certain and prodigious effect he is sure of producing.

To return to my projects of a union with Hélène: from the day that doubt entered my mind, my plans were for ever changed.

I passed a sleepless and unhappy night.

The next day I was weak enough to avoid my aunt

and Hélène; I mounted my horse early in the morning, and went to one of my farms, where I spent the whole day.

I returned home late in the evening, and, pretending to be excessively tired, I did not appear in the salon.

On entering my room, I saw on my study-table these words in Hélène's handwriting (they were in a book which she had returned me): "My mother has told me all. I will be at the pavilion of the pyramid to-morrow morning at nine o'clock. Meet me there. Ah, how much you must have suffered!"

Though in my state of mind such an interview would be painful and distasteful, I could not very well avoid it, therefore I resolved to go.

CHAPTER IX

THE PAVILION

The pavilion where I was to meet Hélène was situated in the depths of the forest; to get there I had to traverse long, dismal paths, all choked up with dead leaves. The morning mist was so heavy and thick that I could hardly see ten steps before me, though it was nine o'clock. My meditations of the night before had confirmed me in my doubt and my decision. Having once admitted that Hélène's conduct was the result of base cupidity, it became, unhappily, only too easy to misinterpret all her

actions. Thus the involuntary avowal that had escaped her lips, that chaste cry of love which had long been withheld and hidden in her tender heart, became in my eyes nothing more than a shameless enticement.

What shall I say? That, as I walked along to the pavilion, my ideas were a frightful mixture of selfishness, wounded pride, and cruel resolutions, also of bitter regret to have dispelled so fair an illusion, to have lost all hope of consoling myself some day by the remembrance of a pure and disinterested first love. What is horrible and ridiculous to admit is, that never for a moment did the thought that I might be mistaken ever enter my mind; that, having admitted the possibility of evil, I should also be willing to admit the chances of good; that, after all, taking no account of Hélène's character and the nobility of her mind, there were a thousand circumstances, a thousand reasons, which would prove beyond a doubt that her love was pure and without a selfish thought; and, then, my fortune being part of my condition, was not Hélène obliged to take me as she found me, and, finding me rich, love me, rich though I was?

But, no, my one idea was so fixed in my mind, and possessed me with such brutal ferocity, that I never attempted to find a single excuse in favour of the woman I so cruelly suspected.

Long years have passed since then, and now that I review my past conduct, I have the consolation of knowing that it was not to avoid the fulfilment of my duty that I forced myself into this blind faith in evil; for I knew that the stories in circulation had an appearance of truth to the eyes of the world, though they were utterly false in every respect. I knew that I

owed it to Hélène to make the reparation my first impulse had shown me was the right one. She was my relative, she had been like a daughter to my father. I knew her excellent qualities, and I had been convinced that I would become the happiest man in the world, should I become her husband.

But my conduct towards her was not dictated by one of those sordid instincts which we are ashamed to admit but whose tool we allow ourselves to become. Later in life I should not have been able to deliberately deceive myself, but then I was so young, so confident in my incredulity, and I remember perfectly that what caused me the most smarting mortification was not the fact that I had been duped, but the unspeakable regret that I had not been able to inspire Hélène with a real affection.

At last I arrived at the pavilion. When I entered I found Hélène waiting for me seated near the door; she was wrapped in a black cloak, and trembling with cold. When she saw me she rose, and, holding out her hands to me, said, in a tone of the deepest sadness: "Ah, you have come at last! How much we have suffered these last two days!"

Then, no doubt struck by the stern and unkind expression of my features, she added, "Good God! What is the matter, Arthur? You frighten me."

Thereupon, with that mocking and silly cruelty fit for children, or happy, selfish people, who have never suffered, I put on a gay and careless manner, and, kissing her hand, replied: "What, I frighten you! That is not the effect I hoped to have on you in such a charming rendezvous!"

The ironical way in which I uttered these words was so different from my habitual way of addressing

Hélène that she opened her great eyes in astonishment, knowing not what I meant. Then, after a moment of silence, she added, "Arthur, my mother has told me all."

"Ah, indeed!" I answered, with indifference. Then, closing the collar of her mantle, I added: "Take care, the fog is very damp and penetrating; you might catch cold."

The poor child thought she must be dreaming.

"What!" said she, joining her hands in stupefaction, "you don't see that it is all horrible, infamous?"

"What does it all matter, since it is all a lie?" I answered, without changing countenance.

"What does it matter? Does it make no difference to you that the woman who is to bear your name should be dishonoured before she becomes your wife?"

At these words, which seemed to me the height of effrontery and the flagrant proof of the truth of my suspicions, I was seized with an uncontrollable desire for revenge, all my scruples vanished, and to-day I bless the hazard that retained on my lips the horrible words that came into my mind. Fortunately for me, I was disposed to be ironical, and I contained myself.

"Hélène," said I, "our conversation should be grave and serious; be so good as to listen to me. You who are candour, loyalty, and disinterestedness personified," said I, with an accent of disgusting insolence,—which she never even noticed, so far above all suspicion was she conscious of being,—"I beg of you, answer me with perfect loyalty; our whole future is in the balance."

With that instinctive divination which rarely is

mistaken, Hélène guessed at my treachery, for she cried out in anguish: "Stop, Arthur, something extraordinary is passing in your mind. I have never seen you with such an icy, defiant look; you alarm me! In heaven's name, what have I done to you?"

"You have done me no harm; but since you mean to bear my name, since you expect to be my wife,—and I am infinitely obliged to you for the confidence you have in the future, it does honour to both of us," I continued, with a smile which terrified her,—"you must reply to my questions."

"Good God, with what a look you say that, Arthur! I don't understand; what does it all mean? What must I answer?"

"Hélène, when for the first time you began to interest yourself in my presence, or my future, when you began to love me, what was your object, your motive?"

"My object, my motive? I tell you again that I don't understand you," said she, shaking her head; then overcome with astonishment: "Stop, Arthur, you are torturing me; in the name of your mother, explain yourself clearly. What do you want of me? What is the meaning of all these questions?"

"Very well, then! I will follow your example, and speak with equal frankness, liberality, and clearness; like you I give free rein to my sudden impulses, without the least *arrière-pensée*, without the slightest calculation; and as there is no doubt about your becoming my wife, and when that delightful hour arrives we will wish to be in each other's confidence, I will tell you how and why I have loved you, but before doing so I mean to exact from you a similar confession. It will be a mutual exchange of generous

and tender sentiments which will be a consolation to my poor troubled heart, do you not think so?" I said all this with a cold, cruel, and ironical manner which wounded the poor child to the quick, and distressed her greatly, though she could not understand the withering allusions with which I blighted her pure and unselfish love.

Now that I can calmly reflect on this scene, I shudder to think how much Hélène must have suffered in hearing me speak to her thus for the first time. I can see her yet, standing pale, cold, and trembling with anxiety in the middle of that pavilion, with its rustic furniture and its open windows where the thick fog was drifting in; I blush with shame when I remember that it was to an acknowledged enemy, defiant and determined to interpret everything to his own justification, she was summoned to reveal all those chaste and tender feelings which had preceded her avowal,—those treasures unknown to the lover which disclose the joys, alarms, and pains that he has unwittingly caused.

At last, Hélène, overcoming her agitation, said:

"Arthur, I cannot conceive of what is passing in your mind; you wish me to tell you how and why I have loved you. Ah!" said she, her eyes filled with tears, "it is very simple. *Mon Dieu!* When I was still a very little child, I heard my mother constantly speaking about you, of the solitary life your father made you live, without any of the amusements suited to your age, without any young friends, occupied almost all the time with serious study, and deprived of almost every joy and pleasure of youth. The first impressions of you were that you were very unhappy and much to be pitied, and I pitied you because, in

knowing how much I possessed, I thought of all that you missed: I had young companions whom I loved; my mother, always tender and good, entered into all our childish pleasures. So that sometimes, without knowing wherefore, I felt ashamed of myself for being so happy while you were living a life that seemed to me so forlorn and isolated.

"I think that was the beginning of my dislike of playing with the other children, their games displeased me because I knew you to be deprived of companionship; in a word, Arthur, it is because you seemed to me so much to be pitied that I was so much interested in you. Later, when you started off on your first voyage, the dangers you encountered, and which I, no doubt, exaggerated, made me tremble for your life and redoubled my affection. That was the time Sophie told you of, when at the convent school I was childish enough to celebrate your birthday, and when every day I would pray to God for your safety. Still later, when your poor mother died, it seemed as though that fearful loss was to bind you to me all the nearer, for then I believed you were entirely alone, unhappy, and deprived of the only person you could confide in. It was then that we came to live here, to dwell with your father. My mother had often told me that, though excessively good to us, your father was cold and severe. In fact, he seemed to be so grave, so sad, and you were always so timid and so uneasy in his presence, so gloomy after the conversations you had with him every morning, that I pitied you more bitterly than ever, and my love for you increased as I thought of all the trials you had to suffer.

"However, as much as I dreaded your father I could not prevent myself from loving him; he suffered so

much! And besides, in showing myself always attentive and thoughtful to him, I meant to prove my love to you.

"Finally, Arthur, when you had the misfortune of losing him, seeing you quite alone in the world, I fancied that from thenceforth my fate was allied to yours, that the destiny of my life had always been and should always be to love you, to make you happy, that henceforth my heart was to become your only refuge. You had never told me that you loved me, but I thought that you did, that it must be so, that such a thing was inevitable, seeing that my vocation was the consecration of my life to your service; so each day I confidently awaited an avowal on your part, and when, despairing of ever hearing that avowal, I exclaimed unintentionally, 'Ah, you will never love any one! You will never be happy!' it was because I had an involuntary presentiment that you would be unhappy all your life, if you would not love me,—love me who loved you so dearly, who believed myself necessary to your happiness! Since then you have declared to me that you love me. I have been happy,—happy beyond expression; but that has been no surprise to me.

"Yesterday my mother caused me the greatest pain by repeating to me all those frightful calumnies. Not seeing you all day, I believed that you were as much distressed as I, that you shared my grief in this matter. This is all I have to tell you, Arthur, this is how I came to love you, the way I love you now; but be merciful and cease to torment me thus, become what you have always been to me! Why are you so changed? I beseech you to tell me—what have I done?"

While Hélène was telling me all this with such

naïve and truthful simplicity, I had never taken my eyes off her; instead of being touched by her tender recital, I had been watching her with all the cruel and wary suspicion of a hostile and prejudiced judge; however, when she raised her beautiful eyes, so gentle and moist under their long lashes, she looked into mine with such candid assurance and so much serenity, that I must have been blind indeed, not to have read in them the noblest and deepest love.

But, alas! when one is possessed by stubborn doubt, everything that tends to destroy that doubt irritates you beyond measure, and appears to be dictated by perfidy and falsehood; you persist all the more in your conviction, because you believe you would be tricked if you gave it up. The most undeniable truths become adroit lies, and the noblest and most sudden inspirations become so many snares deliberately set for you. It was thus with me, so I continued to play the unworthy part I had imposed on myself.

"That is all very perfectly and cleverly thought out," I replied. "The causes and effects follow each other in the most perfect and logical succession; the fable is very plausible, and a stupider man than I would believe the whole story."

"The fable! What fable?" said Hélène, who could not conceive my suspicions.

But without answering her, I continued:

"Since you can reason so wisely, how was it that you never reflected that, in permitting me to show you such assiduous preference, it was possible for you to be gravely compromised?"

"I never thought of it, I never reflected, because I loved you; besides, how could I think that anything

we did was wrong, when I was certain of your affection?"

"Then from the very beginning you meant to marry me?"

Hélène scarcely seemed to hear me, and said:

"What did you say, Arthur?"

"I said this," said I, impatiently, "that you felt perfectly sure that I meant to marry you?"

"But," replied Hélène, more and more surprised, "I don't understand the meaning of the questions you ask me, Arthur. Think of what you are telling me! Heavens! after our vows of love! Have I ever had any doubts of you—of—?"

Then interrupting herself, she cried out:

"Ah, don't vilify yourself like that!"

Her perfect assurance, or rather the blind confidence she had in my loyalty, so shocked my stupid pride that I had the horrible courage to add ('tis true that I spoke slowly and that my lips became dry as I uttered the words):

"And in those fine projects of our union, which will probably never amount to anything more than projects, did you never think of my fortune?"

When I had once uttered these hateful words, I would have given my whole life to recall them, for so long as I had only thought them, I had not perceived the whole of their ignoble significance; but when I heard myself answer in this way the ingenuous, noble, and touching avowal just made by Hélène, who when yet a child had only loved me because she thought me unhappy,—when I realised the incurable wound I had given this generous girl who was so

proud, so shy, and so sensitive, I was seized with horrible and vain remorse.

Alas! I had plenty of time to realise the horror of my position, for Hélène was a long time in understanding my words, and still longer in recovering from her stupefaction when she had at last understood them.

But when I saw depicted on her beautiful face those expressions of grief, of indignation, and of utter contempt which gave it a majestic and even a threatening look, I felt in my heart such violent emotion that, joining my hands together, I fell on my knees before Hélène, and cried out:

"Pardon! Pardon!"

But she, still seated there with cheeks aflame and sparkling eyes, leaned towards me; then, taking my two hands, she shook them violently as she fixed on me a look of implacable disdain which I shall never forget, then she said, slowly:

"I had designs on your fortune,—I—Hélène!"

She gave to those two words, "I—Hélène!" such an accent of scorn and wounded pride, that, overcome with shame, I bowed my head before her and broke into sobbing.

Then she, without adding another word, arose quickly and went out from the pavilion with firm and steady step.

I remained where I was, utterly annihilated. It seemed to me that from henceforth my life was irreparably devoted to evil and misfortune.

In spite of which I was resolved to see Hélène once more.

CHAPTER X

THE CONTRACT

For four days after the scene in the pavilion, it was impossible for me to see either Hélène or my aunt; I knew only from their women servants that they were both extremely ill.

Those days were frightful ones for me. Since the fatal moment when I had so brutally crushed the tender and delicate affections of Hélène, my eyes had been opened. I had repeated word for word her innocent recital wherein she had told the history of her life, that is to say, the story of her love for me; the more I analysed each phrase, each expression, the more I became convinced of the purity of her sentiments, for I remembered many occasions when she had manifested the rarest delicacy.

Then, as it always happens when all hope is for ever ruined, her precious qualities shone with a brighter lustre. I saw and recognised, one by one, all the chances of happiness that I lost. Where should I ever find so many conditions of felicity united,—beauty, tenderness, grace, elegance? And then the thought of the future without Hélène terrified me. I knew that I was neither strong enough to live a retired and solitary life, or to traverse without misfortune the thousand experiences of an aimless and adventurous existence.

I foresaw the violence of my passions,—everything

would tend to lead me into excesses. I was independent, rich, and young; yet, however desirable such a life of pleasure might be for another in my position, the idea of it was distressing to me; it was a torrent which I could see rushing along, but knew not whither it would lead me. Would it plunge into a bottomless gulf? Or, later, calming the impetuosity of its waters, would it become a peaceful current?

Then, hard and defiant, as I had just found myself capable of becoming towards Hélène, who was so noble and so good, in what love would I ever have faith in the future? I should never even be able to enjoy those rare moments of effusive confidences that sometimes shine so brilliantly from out the stormy clouds of passion. In a word, isolation alarmed me,—it would crush me under its weight of coldness and dullness,—and without knowing the reason, the life of society affrighted me. Like a wretched man, seized with vertigo, I saw the abyss in all its horror, and yet a fatal and irresistible attraction dragged me towards it.

Filled with such thoughts and such fears, I determined to make every attempt to destroy in Hélène's heart the dreadful impression I must have left there.

The fifth day after that fatal scene I was permitted to pay a visit to my aunt. I found her very pale, very much changed. In our long conversation I confessed everything to her, my frightful doubts and what had caused them, my heartless conduct towards Hélène, her indignation and scorn upon hearing my miserably sordid suspicions. But I also told her under whose influence I had yielded in acting so cruelly; I recalled to her the soul-chilling maxims of my father; I sought an excuse by telling her of the indelible

impression those precepts had made on me; I showed her what an unfortunate position Hélène would hold in the eyes of the world, should she persist in her determination to have no more to do with me. These rumours were calumnies, as we knew, but they existed; and then on my knees, and in the name of Hélène's future, I begged her mother to intercede in my behalf.

My aunt, being kind and generous, was touched, for my grief was profound and real; she promised to speak with her daughter, to try and overcome her objections, and to induce her to accept my hand.

Hélène continued to refuse to see me.

At last, two days afterwards, my aunt came to inform me that, having at last overcome Hélène's violent objections to seeing me, she had induced her to grant me an interview, but she was entirely ignorant as to what decision Hélène would come.

I went with her mother to her room. I was in a state of excitement impossible to describe. When I entered, I was greatly shocked at Hélène's appearance; she seemed to have suffered greatly, but her manner was cool, calm, and dignified.

"I have sent for you, monsieur," said she, in a firm and penetrating voice, "to inform you of the decision I have taken after much reflection. It is very humiliating to me to remind you of an avowal which was so cruelly received, but I owe it to myself and to my mother. I loved you, and believing myself sure of the nobility and truth of the sentiments you had declared to me, trusting in the elevation of your nature, more from instinct than reflection, I had placed such blind confidence in you that our affectionate relation to one another passed in the

eyes of the world for a guilty love,—so that at this very hour, monsieur, my reputation has been shamefully defamed."

"Hélène, believe me," I cried, "that my whole life —"

But imperiously making me a sign to be silent, she continued, "I have no one in the world but my mother to protect me; and, besides, if the most unfounded calumny always leaves an indelible stain, a calumny which is based on undeniable appearances ruins a woman's character for ever. I find, myself, then, monsieur, placed between dishonour, if I do not exact from you the only reparation public opinion ever accepts, or a miserable existence, in case I accept from you this reparation; for the doubts that you have expressed, and the words you have spoken, will remain engraved in my mind for ever and ever."

"No, Hélène," I cried out, "the tenderest and truest words, the most sincere repentance will chase those dreadful words from your heart, if you will only be generous to be guided by a heaven-sent inspiration!" And I threw myself at her knees.

She made me rise, and continued, with a *sang-froid* which chilled my blood: "You must understand, monsieur, that, being perfectly indifferent to the opinion of a man whom I no longer esteem, and clear in my conscience, I prefer to pass in your eyes as mercenary—"

"Hélène! Hélène! have pity on me!"

"Than to pass in the eyes of the world as infamous," she added; "therefore, that reparation which you have offered me, I accept it."

"Hélène, my dear child," said her mother, throwing herself into Hélène's arms, "Arthur, too, is generous and good; he has been out of his senses; have pity on him."

"Hélène," said I, with exaltation, "I know your character,—you would have preferred dishonour to that life with a man you despise, if your instinct had not told you that, in spite of a moment of frightful error, I was still worthy of your love!"

Hélène shook her head, and, blushing with the recollection of the indignity put upon her, added:

"Do not believe it. At such a solemn time, I neither wish to deceive you, nor ought to do so. The wound is incurable; never, no, never, shall I forget that once you suspected me of being vile."

"Yes, yes! you will forget it, Hélène, and I know in the depths of my heart that the future will be as happy as the past."

"I shall never forget it, I tell you," said Hélène, with her habitual firmness. "So reflect upon what you are about to do. There is still time; nothing binds you, except your honour. You can still refuse me what I have required you to do; but do not believe that I shall ever change. I tell you that for all the remainder of my life my heart is separated from yours by a dreadful abyss."

"Believe it then, be it so," said I to Hélène, for I felt reassured by the promptings of all my former tenderness. "Believe it if you must! What does it matter to me? But your hand,—but the right to make you forget all the misery that I was the cause of, this is what I claim, this what I desire, what I accept, what I beg of you on my knees."

"You really wish this?" said Hélène, fixing a penetrating look on me, and seeming for a moment to hesitate.

"I implore it of you as I desire my eternal salvation; I beg it of you as my life's only destiny! Ah," said I, with the tears in my eyes, "I beg it of you with as much religious fervour as though I were asking it of God."

"Then it shall be so; I grant you my hand," said Hélène, as she turned away her eyes to hide the first sign of emotion she had exhibited since the beginning of our interview.

I was the happiest of men. I knew too well Hélène's susceptibility not to have expected all these reproaches. Her heart had been so cruelly stricken that the wound would remain for a long time open and bleeding. I knew that it would take many days, many years of tender and delicate care to heal this wound; but I felt so certain of my love, so happy in my belief in the future, that I had no doubt as to my success. Noble and loyal as I knew Hélène to be, her promise showed me that, though she still felt resentment, she had not lost all esteem for me; that she had read my secret thoughts, and was persuaded that, in expressing the horrid thought which had so grievously distressed her, I had only been the involuntary echo of my father's pessimistic maxims.

We soon after started for the city of ——, where Hélène and her mother had always lived.

Our marriage, which was announced with certain formality, was set for a date in the near future, for I

had besought Hélène to hasten the happy moment as much as the exigencies of the necessary publicity would allow.

My heart beat high with hope and love. Hélène never appeared so beautiful. Her ordinary expression of sweetness and tenderness had given place to a proud and melancholy look, which gave to her features an expression of superiority. I saw grandeur and noble self-esteem in the determination she had shown in thus braving my offensive suspicions, being conscious all the time of her own innocence. So I allowed myself to form all kinds of smiling plans for the future. I was almost pleased by the coolness with which Hélène continued to treat me, because I took it as a sign of a generous nature which suffers all the more keenly because of its more exquisite sensibility.

The cruel indecision which had so alarmed me when thinking of my future had changed into a serene and peaceful certitude. All was radiant on the horizon. It was to be a life such as I had dreamed of and already begun to experience at Serval; a calm and contented existence; and then every victory I should win over Hélène's sad resentment would be a delight. I thought, with inexpressible joy, that I would have to begin all over again to gain Hélène's love. With what pleasure I contemplated the means I would take to heal that sad wound! I felt in myself such a wealth of tenderness, of devotion, and of love that I felt certain of bringing back to that adorable face its old look of confiding and ingenuous goodness, of fixing for ever on those charming lips their ineffable smile of other days, in place of the serious disdain which they now expressed. I hoped to see that stern and scornful look soften little by little, —from scornful become severe, then sad, then

melancholy—kindly—tender—and finally to read in its smiling azure this blessed word, Pardon!

Everything delighted me, even to the most trifling details of the preparations for our union; I was as interested in them all as a child. As I did not wish to be separated from Hélène, I had written to a friend of my mother, a woman of the most perfect taste, to send me from Paris everything she could think of that was elegant, select, and splendid for the wedding *corbeille* of Hélène.

I remember how all these presents were brought by my intendant from Serval, in two of my carriages. I had made a great show of this ceremony of presentation. The two carriages, the servants, and the horses were all gaily decorated, and went at a respectful walk to the door of Hélène's house, to the great admiration of the townsfolk.

When all these marvels of taste and sumptuousness were spread out in my aunt's salon, and Hélène came in, my heart beat with joy and excitement as I watched to see her look of surprise at the sight of such beautiful presents.

The look was indifferent, absent-minded, even ironical.

At first this caused me horrible chagrin; my eyes filled with tears; I had, alas! spent so much time, so much thought, in the selection and presentation of these first gifts. But very soon I began to think that nothing could be more natural and to be expected from Hélène, as I had always known how little she cared for useless luxury. After having accused her of mercenary motives, how could she be pleased at this foolish display of my wealth?

At last the day for signing the contract arrived. In provincial towns this is a great solemnity, and numerous friends were invited to assist at this function.

Hélène was still at her toilet, we waited for her some time in my aunt's salon; while I was receiving all sorts of stupid congratulations with the most politeness I could summon, the notary came and asked me if nothing was to be changed in the conditions of the contract, so strange did they seem to his clerk; I replied "no," with a great deal of impatience.

In this contract, which I had kept secret, I had left to Hélène the whole disposition of my fortune. The only thing that surprised me was that Hélène should have allowed me to make such an arrangement, but I attributed this to the extreme repugnance she must feel to enter into any business details. At last Hélène appeared in the salon: she was rather pale and seemed somewhat moved. I can see her still as she entered, wearing a simple white dress, with a pale blue sash. Her splendid hair fell on each side of her face in soft fair curls, and was simply twisted up at the back of her head, Nothing could have been more enchanting, fresher, or more charming than this apparition, which seemed to suddenly change the aspect of everything in the salon.

Hélène sat down beside her mother and I seated myself at her side.

The notary made a gesture recommending silence, and began the reading of the contract.

When he came to the clause in which I willed all my fortune to Hélène, my heart beat fearfully, and covered with confusion, almost shame, I cast down

my eyes, fearing to meet her glance. At last that clause was read.

Every one was aware of the mediocrity of my aunt's fortune, and therefore my generosity was received with a murmur of approbation. It was only then that I at last dared to raise my eyes and glance at Hélène; she saw me, and the look she gave me caused me to shudder, so cold was it, so disdainful, almost malicious.

The reading of the contract was over.

Just when the notary arose to present Hélène with the pen in order that she might affix her signature, she arose, and, standing erect and imposing, said these words:

"I wish now to say that, for a reason which does not reflect on the honour of M. le Comte Arthur, my cousin, it is impossible for me to bestow upon him my hand." Then, turning towards me, she handed me a letter, saying: "This letter will explain to you the motive of my conduct, monsieur, for we need never meet each other again." And bowing with modest confidence, she left the room, accompanied by her mother, who shared in the general amazement.

Every one left the room.

You can imagine what commotion and scandal such an adventure as this would make in the little town and in the whole province.

I found myself alone in the salon,—I was completely crushed. It was not until some moments afterwards that I remembered Hélène's letter and concluded to read it.

This letter, which I have kept ever since, was as follows. Eight years have passed since then. I have experienced very varied and distressing emotions; but I yet feel an aggrieved and vindictive glow when I read these lines so filled with an uncontrollable and overwhelming scorn.

"After the calumnious reports which had attainted my reputation, and which were brought about by the levity of your conduct towards me, it was needful that I should have public and notorious reparation; I have had it,—I am satisfied. In seeing me thus renounce, voluntarily, a union which, so far as money was concerned, would have been so advantageous to me, the world will easily believe that marriage was not necessary for my rehabilitation, since I have openly declined it.

"You have been very blind, very presumptuous, or else devoid of all generous resentment, since you have been able to believe for a moment that I did not altogether and for ever despise you from the time you said to me,—to me, Hélène, who had loved you from childhood, and who had just made you an avowal in all confidence and loyalty: 'Hélène, you planned it all; your vows, your affection, your souvenirs, were all falsehoods and deceptions; it is only an infamous speculation, for all you care for is my fortune.' Such suspicion kills the most intense affection. I would have pardoned you for anything else, deception, inconstancy, *abandon*, because, no matter how culpable or criminal a passion may be, the very word passion serves as an excuse for it; but that cold, hostile, and hideously selfish distrust, which, brooding over its treasure, can suspect the most generous feelings to be caused by base cupidity

or a sordid nature, is unpardonable. You lie and blaspheme, when you dare to invoke the memory of your father. Your father was unfortunate enough to believe in evil, but he was generous enough to do good. Do not speak to me of repentance. Your first thought was a vile one. All the rest came on reflection, from shame of your own baseness. I think all the worse of you on this account, for you have not even energy enough to persist in evil; you are ashamed of it, but not sorry for it."

I can never give an idea of the confusion, the rage, the hate, the despair, that took possession of me after I had read this letter, and found myself so mocked at and unjustly accused; for, after all, this doubt had entered my mind from some superhuman influence, I did not feel that I was vile. My regret, my resolve to marry Hélène in spite of her disdain, the disposition I had made of my fortune, proved to me that I was capable of noble and generous inspirations.

Nevertheless, on remembering how tenderly I had been loved, and beholding myself so deeply despised, I understood that all hope was lost; and then I felt, as before, a sort of vertigo come upon me as I saw such a sudden change come over my life; it was as though from that moment I resolutely abandoned myself to destruction, and, with a heartbroken cry of regret, I exclaimed:

"Hélène, you have been pitiless to me; perhaps one day you will have to answer for my ruined life."

That same night I set forth for Paris, wishing to arrive there in midwinter and in the heart of the season, when I could benumb my griefs by the

distractions of its exciting and dissipating life.

MADAME LA MARQUISE DE PËNÂFIEL

CHAPTER XI

PORTRAITS

A year after my arrival in Paris, the peaceful days that I had passed with Hélène at Serval seemed like a beautiful dream, so much in contrast with my new sensations that I hardly cared to recall it. From that time I was convinced that the pretended "pleasures of memory" are all falsehoods, for from the moment we begin to regret the past, memory is only a bitterness, and, by comparison, the present becomes distasteful.

The publicity of Hélène's refusal had deeply wounded both my love and my vanity. I was too proud to admit that I was unhappy, and so I succeeded in forgetting my imagined wrongs. I soon became transported with delight at finding myself so completely my own master, and in musing on the employment of my newly found liberty. Then I readily found a way to excuse myself for my ungrateful neglect of my father's memory. I told myself that it was in pious obedience to his counsels that I had brought to naught the mercenary projects

of Hélène, for I still sometimes found a miserable consolation, or, rather, a base excuse, for my behaviour in devising new and unworthy motives for the conduct of that good girl, who had now left her native province to travel in Germany with her mother.

However, as formerly, in spite of my regret for the past, its remembrance soon became dim, and then was entirely obliterated from my mind.

It was most probably the excitement of the Parisian life which brought about this forgetfulness of those happy days which were so dear to my heart.

I had not come to Paris as an unsophisticated provincial. I had spent two brilliant seasons in London, and, thanks to the long and intimate relations of my uncle with our ambassador, an intimacy which my father and my aunt had reminded him of in introducing me to him when I was on my voyage, I had been presented to the best and most aristocratic society in England.

Now the English aristocracy, proud, overbearing, and justly vain of its incontestable superiority in wealth and influence to all the other aristocracies of Europe, is excessively reserved towards strangers who seek to enter its charmed circle; but when one has gone through this ordeal, nowhere is one treated with more perfect cordiality or put more at one's ease.

Nevertheless, in the "*vie Parisienne*," which cannot in any way pretend to rival or approach that splendid existence that one leads in London, there is to be found that which must be sought vainly in London or elsewhere; it is a fascinating charm not to be explained, which even the most calm and stolid natures seldom escape.

Parisian society, in its real acceptation and perfect flower, is limited to the elegant and refined existence led by the élite of five or six salons, in the one or two quarters of the city that are the rendezvous of all pleasure-seekers of the upper class.

On my arrival in Paris, I fortunately did not have to undergo that apprenticeship to material life which generally costs strangers so much money and so many disappointments. My father had lived there such a long time that, being well informed as to the most comfortable mode of existence, I was able to

avoid mistakes. Thus, instead of housing myself at a high price and with very little space in one of those swarming and noisy apartment-houses five or six stories high, which begin on the ground floor in a magnificent store, and end in a miserable garret, I rented a little house near the Champs Élysées, brought my horses and servants from Serval, and started my establishment in a proper way.

I called on several relatives or distant connections of my family, who received me with great cordiality, some on account of my name and the respect they bore to my father, others because they had daughters to marry, and I was doubtless in their eyes what is called a "great catch;" while some were polite because idle people are always delighted to have one more visitor on their list, and thus to be able to pass one more of their unoccupied hours.

Among these last was to be found M. le Comte Alfred de Cernay; one of my former London friends who knew him intimately had given me letters to him, and had given me very credible information about him, whose character I found had been truthfully described.

I may as well describe him here, for, though not an eminently distinguished man, M. de Cernay was the very type of a "man of fashion," in the best and least vulgar acceptance of the word. Now, a man of fashion of our day is a person of a well-recognised type. M. de Cernay was about thirty years old, of a very handsome face, and not wanting in ready wit of a certain kind. He was subtle, something of a scoffer, though at the same time he affected a high-toned good nature which gave him the reputation of being a "good fellow," though people said that he had to reproach himself with some perfidious actions and

several mischievous falsehoods. He was very elegant in his dress, though, with some attempt at originality of appearance, he tried to look unlike other men; however, he always looked extremely well dressed. He was a good judge and very fond of horses, had the handsomest turnouts you could wish to see, and posed for as distinguished a sportsman as a man of fashion.

M. de Cernay was very rich, very selfish, and uncommonly well versed as to business, which latter quality is particularly noticeable among men of our epoch, and which seems to exclude all ideas of beauty or display. M. de Cernay denied himself nothing; he lived luxuriously, but he paid his servants himself, and settled all accounts, being inexorable for every outlay that did not pay, at least in outward show, for what it was worth. He was a wily speculator, and had no scruples about serving a notice on any one of his farmers who was behind with his rent. He made out his leases himself, for (must the enormity be made public?) he had studied law in the most profound secrecy, under the direction of an old attorney. But it must be admitted that no glimpse of this legal knowledge was visible in the count's behaviour. His manners were perfect; he came of an ancient and noble race, and was as much of the "grand seigneur" as one can be in these days; and his sense of saving in superfluities and economy in luxuries was only known to the few people who had to ask some favour of him, and those are the last ones to tell of having been refused such a service.

Nothing can be wiser nor more praiseworthy than to live with so much prudence and foresight. I insist on this significative peculiarity because it belongs to our epoch, which is becoming so strictly material

and positive. Nowadays nobody ruins himself. It is considered very bad form to be in debt, and nothing appears more ridiculous and shameful than that wild and disorderly existence (sometimes even indelicate and dishonourable), which was for a long time tolerated as a type of what was called "delightful French gaiety," of the vagabond life of those "harebrained but good-hearted" fellows, who, on the contrary, had very cool heads and very bad hearts, and were generally the greatest villains in the world.

Now, on the contrary, nothing is considered better form than to talk of one's property, of your lands, the improvements you mean to make, your agricultural experiments, the care of your forests and woodlands, and the beauty of the cattle that you raise in your fields. Every one nowadays talks like an overseer, and every one is right, because these last named personages are the only ones who are living like masters in the few magnificent old residences that yet remain in France. The time that is spent at the country place is prolonged every year, and there is an evident reaction towards the life at the château for eight months of the year, and life at the clubs in Paris during the winter months.

But to return to M. de Cernay, he was a very great, and, above all, a very intelligent gambler. This seems in contradiction of those principles of order and economy of which I have just spoken? Not at all. For most men of the world, play is only a frightful challenge that is thrown to fate, a means of burning excitement and terrible emotions; it is more of a necessity than an amusement.

Men have their money for play, which is a given sum that they never exceed. It is a capital which they try to render as profitable as possible by good

management, by running no great risks, and by studying the chances and combinations of the game with an incredible ardour; in comprehending its every detail, and in playing constantly, so as to keep in good practice; also by experimenting with the deepest attention in order to make new discoveries; so that in this way the capital brings in, if the season has been a good one, from fifteen to twenty per cent, to a cool, prudent, and skilful player.

And, besides this, play having become an affair of exact science, of interest, and generally of perfect honesty, the forces of the players are generally so equally matched that one can allow himself the excitement of a stake of twelve or fifteen hundred louis, because it is well known that at the end of a bad season the losses and gains are about equal.

Nothing is more curious in our epoch than this strange struggle between a wise and cool forethought which looks to the future, and the ardent passions natural to men; which they find in this way the means of satisfying to a certain degree, by a sort of insurance against bad luck.[1]

M. de Cernay, they say, has been very successful with women; but in growing old, as he said, he had found it more satisfactory, as it gave him more liberty and saved him from worry, besides giving him more chances for display (this was one of his salient points), to put to one side a certain sum of money annually, for his favourite of the season. This amount, which he never went beyond, he laid regularly at the feet of one of the theatrical beauties most in vogue.

I had sent my card with the letters of our mutual friend to M. de Cernay. Two days after he came to see me, but I was out; a few days later I called on

him one morning. He lived alone in a very pretty house, which seemed to be the very triumph of all that was comfortable, joined to an elegant simplicity. His *valet de chambre* begged me to wait an instant in a salon, where I noticed some beautiful hunting scenes by Géricault.

Five minutes after my arrival, M. de Cernay entered. He was tall, slender, and graceful, with a most agreeable face, and manners which were those of the most polished society.

The count received me charmingly, spoke to me of our mutual friend, and offered me his services in the most obliging way. I perceived that he was watching me closely. I had just arrived from the provinces, but I had travelled a great deal and had lived a long time in England; thus he was hesitating, I thought, to find out if he should treat me as a provincial, or as a man already in society. I believe what decided him to treat me as the latter was the vexation which I thought he felt at not seeing me more overpowered with his great elegance. Envied, imitated, flattered, he perhaps found me too much at my ease, too polite, and not sufficiently astonished.

Now I admit that this slight shade of vexation on M. de Cernay's face caused me to smile.

He asked me to have a cup of tea with two of his friends, and an Italian renegade who had taken service with Méhémet-Ali. This Italian, he said, was a man of great bravery, who had gone through the most extraordinary scenes and romantic adventures, been obliged, in fact, to assassinate two or three women and as many men, to save himself and escape from a delicate situation.

I was very little astonished at hearing about this

peculiar person, for I had already been told that M. de Cernay had a perfect mania for celebrities of every kind; and that no sooner did an Arab, a Persian, an Indian, or any foreigner of distinction arrive in Paris, than M. de Cernay would fly to be presented to him. Was it by way of attracting attention to himself, that he liked to be surrounded with extraordinary acolytes, or had his reputation as a fashionable man reached beyond the shores of the Ganges and Nile? I can't say why, but the fact was so. "Will you stay and take tea with me?" said, therefore, M. de Cernay. "Leaving aside my renegade, you will meet one of the most eccentric and clever men that I know of, and one of the silliest and most ridiculous: the first one is Lord Falmouth, the other is M. du Pluvier."

"I have frequently heard Lord Falmouth spoken of," said I, "and I shall consider myself very fortunate in being able to meet him; but I thought he was in India?"

"He has only been back for the last month," said M. de Cernay; "but you must be aware of the way he decided on that voyage. You may perhaps know that Falmouth always goes to bed at six in the morning. Well, one day, about eighteen months ago, he waked up about four o'clock in the afternoon; he had slept very badly, was restless, excited, nervous; besides, he had just been winning enormous sums at play, and so was deprived of those feelings of interest which sometimes awaked him from the lethargy of his colourless life; the fact is, he was more than usually bored to death. He calls his *valet de chambre* and asks him what the weather is like. The weather was gloomy, dismal, foggy. 'Ah, this everlasting fog! Never a ray of sunshine!' says Falmouth, yawning

fearfully; then in his coolest way he adds, 'Send for the horses.' The horses arrive, his travelling carriage is always in readiness; they harness the horses; his *valet de chambre*, who is accustomed to his master's ways, packs up the trunks, and two hours afterwards my lord came down-stairs and said to his hall porter, 'If any one asks for me you can say I have gone—'and he hesitated a moment between Constantinople and Calcutta. Finally deciding for the latter, he said, with a yawn, 'Gone to Calcutta.' In fact he had gone there, and there he remained for three months, and now he comes back as imperturbable as ever, as if he had simply gone off to Baden and back again."

"Lord Falmouth is an extremely distinguished man?" said I to the count.

"He has a great deal of *esprit* and of the best kind," he answered me, "a prodigious amount of learning, and a no less marvellous practical experience of men and things, having travelled in the four quarters of the globe, and seen all the courts of Europe as only an English peer can visit them. Son of one of the greatest lords in the three kingdoms, he possesses five or six hundred thousand francs of revenue in his own right; and yet, with all this, Falmouth is the only really blasé and bored man that I know of, he has exhausted everything, nothing amuses him any more."

"And M. du Pluvier," said I to M. de Cernay, "what is he like?"

"Oh, M. le Baron Sébastien du Pluvier," said the count, with a scornful and mocking air, "M. du Pluvier is I don't know who, and he comes from I don't know where; I was forced to be presented to him. He has disembarked from some old castle in Normandy, I believe, with his miserable twenty or

thirty thousand francs income, which he is stupidly going to melt away in this hell of Paris, in two or three winters. He will be one of those numerous pale meteors which shine for an instant in the blazing sky of the great city, and suddenly disappear for ever, in darkness and forgetfulness, amidst the jeers of those they leave behind. But he is a good speaking-trumpet; as soon as I want to spread abroad any absurd rumour or any news from that other *monde*, I pick up M. du Pluvier, put him to my mouth, and—well, he does the rest! I don't mind making fun of him, because he is not contented with being a fool, but he must be conceited and vain as well. You should see the mysterious way in which he shows you the envelopes he receives that are sealed with coats of arms, all addressed to him, by the way; you should hear the tone in which he asks you, as he plumes himself with pride, 'Do you know the handwriting of the Countess of ——? of the Marquise of ——? of the Duchess of ——?' (Such an ordinary word as madame is beneath his notice.) And then the little man will show you such and such handwritings, which are letters from lady patronesses, enclosing tickets for charities, balls, lotteries, nobody knows what; for all the women of my acquaintance, to whom I introduce him, are sure to victimise him without the smallest scruple, so that he is the most ridiculously philanthropic fellow that I know of.

"But," said M. de Cernay, interrupting himself, "I hear a carriage, I would wager it was Du Pluvier; you shall see something that is worth admiring."

We then went to the window, and saw entering into the courtyard an open carriage drawn by two very handsome horses; but both carriage and harness were loaded down with ornaments in the worst

possible taste. His men, dressed in liveries all covered with gold braid, looked like church beadles, and all this ridiculous and dazzling parade was to go and take lunch with a man in the morning.

Very soon M. du Pluvier entered noisily. He was a stout little man, short, puffy red as a cherry, fair, and, though he only looked to be about twenty-five, he was quite bald. His eyes were greenish and dull; he spoke loudly with a Norman accent; he was dressed with the most ridiculous show and pretension, wore jewels, a waistcoat with silver embroidery, and more than I can think of that was out of place. M. de Cernay presented us to one another, and as soon as he had spoken my name M. du Pluvier exclaimed: "Ah, *parbleu*, I have seen you some place."

This impoliteness shocked me, and I replied that I did not believe that I had ever had that pleasure, as I certainly should never have forgotten him.

A few moments after Lord Falmouth was announced.

He had come on foot, and was dressed with the most perfect simplicity.

I shall never forget the singular impression that he made on me. His face was pale, regular, white and expressionless as marble, and was illuminated, so to speak, by two brown eyes, which were placed very near to his nose; his slightly mocking smile also impressed me, and, without attaching any importance to the idea, the thought of a vampire came into my mind, for I could not have imagined a more suitable body had I been making a sketch of that fantastic creation.

M. de Cernay presented me to Lord Falmouth, and

we exchanged the customary politenesses. We were only waiting now for the Italian renegade, that the count called his assassin, to sit down to the table.

At last the *valet de chambre* announced M. Ismaël; it was the renegade.

He was of medium height, brown, nervous, magnificently costumed as an Egyptian, and had a very handsome face, though its expression was sombre. Ismaël could not speak a word of French; his language was composed of vulgar Italian and some scraps of the Frankish tongue.

Very soon the *maître d'hôtel* of M. de Cernay opened the doors of the dining-room.

The lunch was served in the English style; the silver was from Mortimer's, the porcelain was old Sèvres, and the glassware from Venice and Bohemia.

Ismaël ate like an ogre and never uttered a word; but as there was nothing to drink on the table except tea, coffee, and chocolate, he bravely asked for wine, and drank it freely.

M. de Cernay seemed to be very much annoyed at the obstinate silence of his assassin, whom M. du Pluvier kept continually worrying with grotesque phrases, such as "*mamamouchi*," which he probably had borrowed from the reception of M. Jourdain.

Not responding to these advances, Ismaël, from time to time, would growl like a chained-up bear, and glance impatiently aside at Du Pluvier, who seemed to irritate him extremely.

All this time I was talking to Lord Falmouth, and I remember that our conversation was principally about a remark he had made me, and to which I assented, on the subject of the rococo style of luxury,

almost feminine indeed, that many young men had begun to use in the interior decoration of their apartments. He laughed very heartily to think that all these mirrors, framed in gold and surrounded by cupids, doves, and garlands of flowers, would nevermore reflect any but masculine faces, looking innocently out from clouds of cigar smoke. While, by way of contrast, instead of making use of all this magnificence, instead of doubling the charm by surrounding it with mysterious luxury, instead of exposing all these beautiful creations of art to the vulgar gaze, if one of these young beaux had to wait, with amorous impatience, for one of those sweet and secret apparitions that deserve to be surrounded with all that is beautiful and luxurious, it is generally way off in some dirty part of the city, in some mean and out-of-the-way hole, that are passed those rare and enchanting hours, which stand out in glowing colours among the other pale souvenirs of our lives.

We concluded, then, with this aphorism, that for a man of tact, of taste, and of experience, the known and visible dwelling should be all that is comfortable and severely simple; but the unknown and invisible abode, the hidden diamond of our lives, should be a triumph of luxury, and all that was dazzlingly beautiful and rare.

After breakfast we went into the smoking-room (the universal use of tobacco makes this sort of subdivision of an apartment necessary), which was furnished with large armchairs and broad divans. It was ornamented with an admirable collection of pipes and tobacco of all kinds, from the East Indian hookah, glittering with gold and precious stones, to the vulgar clay pipe, the *brûle-gueule* of the Parisian workman; from the brown and perfumed leaf of the

l'Atakia or Havana, with its pale amber shade, to the strong and black tobacco, called Régia, whose pungent and corrosive savour some palates are depraved enough to like.

There was to be that day a race of gentleman-riders in the Bois de Boulogne; M. de Cernay was one of the judges, and invited me to go. He was to take his lion, Ismaël, in his phaëton.

M. du Pluvier made me shudder by offering me a seat in his mountebank's chariot, but I escaped this man-trap, for I had fortunately ordered my cabriolet to wait for me. Then M. du Pluvier fell upon Lord Falmouth, who replied with his usual *sang-froid*, "I am sorry not to be able to accept, my dear M. du Pluvier, but I have to start immediately for the House of Parliament."

"To the House of Peers? Very well, I can take you there. What difference does it make? My horses are made for that."

"And they would do it beautifully," replied Lord Falmouth. "But unfortunately I am going to London; I wish to speak on the East Indian question, and as the discussion will open to-morrow night, I want to get there on time. I have found out at what hour the packet-boat leaves, and I expect to be in London to-morrow afternoon."

I was still smiling at such a singular excuse, when we heard the jingling bells of post-horses, and very soon Lord Falmouth's travelling coupé entered the courtyard. I looked at M. de Cernay with surprise, and, while Lord Falmouth was out of the room giving some directions to his man, I asked the count if it was true that Lord Falmouth was going to London.

"He is really going there," said M. de Cernay. "He

often takes the notion of speaking on some political question which pleases him, and which he always treats with unquestionable authority; but he so detests both London and England that he leaves his carriage at Westminster, takes his seat, makes his speech, gets into his carriage, and returns to Paris."

Lord Falmouth just then returned. He was gracious enough to ask me to call on him at some future time. His courier started off, and he got up into his carriage.

"The race is to come off at two o'clock," said M. de Cernay. "The weather is superb. I have sent my horses around to the Porte Dauphine; if you would like to take a turn in the Bois, I have a horse that is at your service."

"Many thanks," said I, "I have sent my horses there, too. But will this race be an interesting one?"

"It is, unfortunately, only too interesting: two miles to run, three hedges four and a half feet high, and, to finish, a barrier fixed at five feet to leap over."

"That is impossible!" I cried out. "For finish a barrier five feet high! But there are not two horses out of a hundred that could take such a leap, with any degree of certainty, after such a race; and if the horse should fail to take the bar, the rider would be instantly killed."

"That is just it," said the count, with a sigh. "I am in despair at having been chosen judge, or rather witness, of this deadly challenge which may cost the life of one or both of these brave gentlemen, perhaps both, but it was absolutely impossible to refuse."

"What do you mean by that?" said I to M. de Cernay.

"Oh," replied he, "it is quite a romance and a secret as sad as it is incredible; but I can tell you about it now, for if for certain reasons no one has yet been told of it, in an hour from now, on beholding the last terrible obstacle in this race, which is undertaken through a pretext, every one will see what is really a duel between the two young riders, and will easily guess the cause and the object."

I tried to read in M. de Cernay's face whether or not he was speaking seriously; but if he were joking my penetration was at fault, so much in earnest did he seem to be.

"I will tell you," said he, "the real story about this race, which is quite extraordinary.

"One of the prettiest women in Paris, Madame la Marquise de Pënâfiel, has among the number of her adorers two who are rivals, and whose devotion to her is well known, or, rather, guessed at. Having one day exchanged some hasty words in regard to a mutual rival, who was each one's enemy without helping the cause of either, and being too well-bred to fight about a woman they both loved, and who would be seriously compromised by the scandal of a duel,—to avoid this inconvenience and gain the same object, they chose this deadly way of settling their quarrel.

"Their chances are equal, as they are both splendid riders and have magnificent horses, but the result is not to be doubted; because if there is any horse capable of running a race of two miles, and leaping over three hedges, and yet being equal to taking a jump over a fixed barrier five feet high, it is almost impossible that there should be two horses who would be so tremendously lucky. Thus, you see, there is no possible chance that this race can end in

any other way than by a terrible accident. If they escape this time, they will try it again at some future day, as a duel is begun over again after the principals have vainly exchanged shots."

All this seemed to be so strange, so unusual,—though there was no reason why it should therefore be absolutely impossible,—that I was quite stupefied.

"And Madame de Pënâfiel," I asked M. de Cernay, "does she know anything of this fatal contest of which she is the cause?"

"Certainly she does; and to give you an idea of her character, it is not at all impossible that she may come to look on."

"If she should come," said I, this time with a very marked smile of incredulity, "Madame de Pënâfiel will find it quite as natural as to assist at the bloody fights of the toreadors of her own country; for, from her name and her ferocious disregard of our customs, I judge that this savage marquise is some Spanish amazon of the very bluest blood,—one of those black-eyed daughters of Xérès, or of Vejer, who to this day carry a knife in their garter!"

M. de Cernay could not refrain from a laugh, and said to me:

"You are not anywhere near the truth. Madame de Pënâfiel is a Frenchwoman, born in Paris, and a Parisienne in every sense of the word. Furthermore, she is a very distinguished person, and allied to some of the best families in France. She is a widow, and her late husband, the Marquis de Pënâfiel, was a Spaniard."

"Come, now," said I to the count, laughing in my turn, "I see how it is; you are trying to awaken an

interest, a romantic and fantastic interest, about a race of which you are to be the judge. I wonder all Paris does not go to look on."

"I assure you I am speaking in all seriousness," said he, and he really looked solemn.

"But seriously, then, I might be made to believe that a woman could not help it if two crazy men wanted to break each other's necks, but I never will believe that any well-bred woman would go to look on at such a contest, when she knew that she was the cause. She would lay herself open to the greatest blame, and to universal contempt."

"In the first place, Madame de Pënâfiel cares very little about what people say; and, secondly, she is the only person who knows the real cause of this species of duel."

"But, even admitting that she has no fear of her secret being betrayed by this event, she shows herself to be abominably heartless and cruel."

"Oh, she has the hardest and coldest heart imaginable; think of it, when she is only twenty-five, and as beautiful as an angel!"

"And how comes it that you have not dissuaded these two intrepid young men from this foolish danger? For if, as you say, every one knows why they run this race, all their generous desire to shield the lady amounts to nothing."

"To tell you the truth," said the count, "they did not tell me their secret. I found it out by a strange accident, therefore could not allow myself to make the smallest observation on what I was presumed to know nothing about. I spoke seriously to them, but as to putting too much stress on the dangers of the

race, it was almost as much as to doubt their courage, and thus it was impossible. If they had consulted me, I should have told them that they were behaving like two crazy men, because no one would ever be got to believe that for two hundred louis, which was announced as the stake, two men of their fortune and position would almost risk losing their lives; consequently, every one would be wild to discover the real motive of their duel, and that would cause a great scandal, and bring discredit on Madame de Pënâfiel."

"How do you know, then, that this race has anything to do with her?" I asked the count.

"How do I know it? Every one says so; and as for me, I have been acquainted with Madame de Pënâfiel for a long time, and my certainty on the subject is based on the pretended indifference with which she behaves to both of these young men, for on some occasions I have known her to show the deepest dissimulation."

There was, in all this story of M. de Cernay's, such a strange mixture of likelihood and improbability, that I found it hard to decide whether I believed it or not.

"I can scarcely believe," said I, "from what you have told me, that Madame de Pënâfiel can really be in good standing. Who goes to see her?"

"She entertains the most distinguished men and women in society, for she has one of the handsomest houses in Paris, an enormous fortune, and receives in an almost royal style; besides this, her salon has great weight in intellectual circles, but all this does not prevent Madame de Pënâfiel from being detested according to her deserts."

"And what kind of a woman is she outside of all this? Is she clever?"

"Enormously clever, but she can say very sharp, very biting things; and then she is scornful, capricious, excessively overbearing, for she is used to having everything give way to her, because certain positions are so elevated that, whether or no, you are expected to be obsequious. It is needless to tell you that her coquetry passes all limits, and as to describing her, she has the most ridiculous pretensions. She undertakes to know all about—guess what! The abstract sciences, art, everything you can imagine! Oh, I assure you, she is a strange, charming, and ridiculous woman. As I am one of her very good friends, I would propose to you to call and be presented to her, warning you, however, that she is as dangerous as she is peculiar; but she is so capricious and changeable that I cannot promise that you will be well received, for what she refuses to-day she cries for to-morrow.

"But," said the count, as he looked at the clock, "it is getting to be late, it is two o'clock; let us send for the carriages." And he rang the bell.

We all went out. The miraculous turnout of M. de Pluvier went ahead, and the little man threw himself triumphantly into it, missing the step as he did so.

I had fancied that for the last few minutes M. de Cernay showed signs of uneasiness. I imagined that he was somewhat curious to find out if I was worthy (by my horses at least) to gravitate around such a brilliant planet as he.

As my cabriolet drew up, M. de Cernay looked it over with a connoisseur's glance. It was very simple, very plain, the harness was all black; but the bay

horse was very large and of perfect form, and his action was almost equal to the celebrated "Coventry's."[2]

"*Diable!* but that is a beautiful turnout, and you certainly have there the finest cabriolet horse in Paris!" said M. de Cerval, in a tone of approbation, in which there seemed to be just the smallest possible shade of envy.

From that moment I felt that the count had placed me high in his estimation. His phaëton drove up; he got into it beside Ismaël.

It is impossible to describe the elegance and lightness of this charming light green carriage. Neither could anything do justice to the ensemble of the turnout, which consisted of one gray and one sorrel horse of medium size. All was perfect, even to the two little grooms of exactly the same build and size, who mounted lightly to the back seat. It was the first time I had seen horses with their manes docked, and this especially suited M. de Cernay's horses, so arched and full of race were their necks. We set off for the Bois de Boulogne.

[1]In contrast to our present manners, I cannot help quoting this note of Madame la Princesse de Henin to Madame de Créquy, which is given in the delightful and witty Souvenirs de Madame de Créquy. "I shall not say 'you who know everything,' because you are weary of that formula, but you who are ignorant of nothing, my dear, have the goodness to explain to me something which I cannot understand, and which, it seems, is important to my financial interests (pardon for such a reason). I

will begin by telling you that M. Lally is at St. Germain, and that Madame de Poix does not know how to answer the question that vexes me; her children are away; and so you will see why I write to you at the far end of Paris. The Chevalier de Thuysi writes to me word for word: 'I warn you to be on your guard against M. Lefèvre; I have been notified that he is about to settle his accounts.' (I must tell you that this Lefèvre has become my man of business.) But what can the chevalier mean by this warning? Tell me, I beg of you, what does it mean to 'hand in his cheque-book?' for these are his words. Madame de Poix thinks it is a metaphor of some sort, and that is all we can guess."

[2]A famous carriage horse of Lord Chesterfield's.

CHAPTER XII

THE GENTLEMAN-RIDERS

True or false, M. de Cernay's story had awakened my curiosity to such a point that I was in the greatest hurry to arrive on the race-course.

We started off for the Bois de Boulogne. It was a beautiful day in February; the sun was shining brightly; the pure fresh air, not too cold to be pleasant, gave a healthy colour to the ladies who were riding in open carriages on their way to the races.

We stopped at the Porte Dauphine to mount our saddle-horses. Mine had to submit to another examination from M. de Cernay, who was apparently confirmed in the good opinion he had formed of me. This you may be sure flattered my vanity.

As for his own horses, they were, like everything else he owned, perfect in every respect.

M. du Pluvier proved himself to be the demonstration of a theory of mine, namely, that there are some men so constituted that they inevitably make themselves ridiculous; he was hardly on his horse's back before he allowed himself to be run away with. We supposed him to be some distance behind us, when he suddenly shot by us like an arrow. We watched him for some time, but his horse, turning into a cross-road, gave him such a shock that he lost his hat, and then he disappeared.

We arrived tranquilly on the ground with Ismaël, laughing at this mishap. I should mention the fact that De Cernay, being the owner of a beautiful black Arab horse, and wishing to be as gracious as possible to his "lion," had offered it to Ismaël as a mount. The renegade had accepted, and his characteristic, dark face, and strange, brilliant costume contrasted violently with, and served, as no doubt M. de Cernay had foreseen, to accentuate the Parisian elegance of the latter.

Once on the ground, I got off my horse and mingled with the habitués of the races, among whom I found several of my acquaintances. It was then that I saw the frightful obstacle which was to be leaped over, after the two miles had been run and the hedges crossed.

Fancy a beam raised five feet above the ground,

and nailed across two perpendicular posts like a gate across a road.

It was then that the story M. de Cernay had told me, strange as it was, and contrary to all our usual customs, began to seem credible, and to explain why these two young men were about to run such a terrible risk.

There was quite a crowd of people around the barrier, who were quite as incredulous as I. They asked each other why two young men, who were rich and in the best society, should risk their lives in such a way as this. They wondered if the race was for an enormous sum of money, as that might in a certain way justify such foolish bravery; but the purse was but two hundred louis.

At last, after many foolish conjectures, several of the spectators, who were conversant with the happenings in high life, arrived, either from their own convictions or from being prompted by M. de Cernay's story,—arrived, I say, at the same conclusion as he did, and gave the same interpretation to this deadly duel.

This hypothesis was very generally admitted; because, in the first place, it had the irresistible attraction of maliciousness; and, secondly, because any explication of the silliest as well as the most serious question, which appears to solve the long and vainly sought answer to the enigma, is hailed with delight.

So that very soon I heard here and there such exclamations as the following: "Is it possible?" "Ah, really! now that explains it all." "What utter folly!" "What thoughtful tact!" "How foolhardy to run such risks for a scornful coquette!" "It is just like her to

permit such behaviour!" "The devilish little marquise! It is disgusting!" "Incredible!" etc.

I had not the time to question M. de Cernay as to any details about the performers in this extraordinary entertainment, so while the public was venting its indignation on Madame de Pënâfiel, I happened to notice Sir Henry ——, a great sportsman of my acquaintance, and thought that perhaps he could give me some interesting information.

"Well," said I, "this race will be exciting enough, I hope! Can you tell me which is the favourite?"

"Opinions are very equally divided," said he, "so that there does not seem to be any favourite. As for the horses, they both come of good stock; one, Beverley, is by Augustus out of Cybele, and the other, Captain Morave, is by Camel out of Vengeress; both of them have spent two hunting seasons in England. As for the gentleman-riders, they are the Baron de Merteuil and the Marquis de Senneterre, and have each acquired a tremendous reputation among the upper crust of the habitués of Melton. They are said to equal our intrepid Captain Beacher, who broke his last sound limb (the left forearm) in last year's steeplechase, at St. Albans. One must be brave to face such danger. I have seen many races, I have been to hunts and steeplechases in Ireland, where they have stone walls instead of hedges, but the walls are never more than three or four feet high. To tell the truth, I have never seen anything worse than that bar," said Sir Henry ——, turning again towards the terrible barrier.

At every moment new carriages were arriving, and the crowd of spectators becoming greater. This crowd was divided into two distinct parties; the first,

which was the greater majority, consisted of persons who knew nothing of the rumours of society, and only saw in this race a sort of show, whose peril they never suspected.

The smaller number, enlightened as to the reason and object assigned to this challenge, understood perfectly well the danger these gentleman-riders were about to expose themselves to.

But I must say that all of the spectators, especially these last, were waiting for the hour of the race with an impatience that I shared with them, and was almost ashamed of. Very soon the crowd rushed towards the centre of the circle.

Messieurs de Senneterre and de Merteuil had just got out of a carriage, and were mounting their horses to go to the starting-point.

M. de Merteuil looked to be no more than twenty-five, of an elegant and graceful figure, and a charming face; he was calm and smiling, though rather pale. He wore a silk jacket, half black and half white, with a cap to match, his breeches were of pale yellow buckskin, and, to complete his costume, he wore top-boots. He rode Captain Morave.

Captain Morave was a splendid bay horse, in such good condition that you could almost see the blood circulating in the veins under his fine, silky coat, which fairly reflected the light. You could have counted each one of his strong muscles, so divested of all superfluous fat was his firm flesh.

M. de Merteuil stopped a moment at the winning-post, to speak to M. de Cernay. M. de. Senneterre's horse was cooler, and did not need the quarter of a mile gallop that M. de Merteuil was taking on his way back to the starting-place. So he was riding a

very pretty piebald back, curiously marked with black and white. He was about the same size as M. de Merteuil, and had quite as pleasant a face. Under his long overcoat could be seen his purple silk jacket; Beverley awaited him at the start. He approached his rival with a smile on his lips, and held out his hand. They shook hands with apparently the greatest cordiality, which I thought was dissimulation, but in good form, considering the terms on which they were supposed to be.

These two charming young men created a universal and disquieting interest, so real was the peril they were about to face in this thoughtless, heedless way. In fact, no matter what it undertakes, bravery is always admired. An elderly gentleman with white hair, and of very dignified appearance, approached M. de Merteuil, and evidently made some remarks to him about the perils of the race. His observations were received with the most perfect politeness, but had no effect, for, in the presence of that attentive crowd, Messieurs de Merteuil and de Senneterre could not now seem to shrink from danger, whatever it might be.

At last, it was time to go to the starting-place. One of M. de Cernay's friends went with the gentleman-riders to superintend the weighing, and give the signal.

The assemblage was now worked up to a breathless state of curiosity, for now it was about to be satisfied.

At this moment, hearing a confused murmur of voices, which was fast becoming a clamour of noise and confusion, I turned and beheld that unfortunate man, Du Pluvier, who, hatless, his hair streaming in the wind, his body thrown backward, and his legs

forward, was stiffening himself with all his might, and trying to stop his runaway horse; who, dashing across the open race-course like an arrow, very soon disappeared in one of the contiguous paths, amidst the shouting and derision of the spectators.

This, ridiculous episode was hardly finished when another object attracted my attention.

I saw a very handsome orange-coloured coupé drive up, drawn by two magnificent black horses of the largest size, and yet of the finest race and style. The silver mountings of the harness glittered in the sun, and on the ample blue draperies of the coachman's seat I noted two coats-of-arms, richly embroidered in coloured silk, surmounted by the crown of a marquis worked in gold. I was gazing curiously into this carriage, when M. de Cernay, who was passing near me, said, "I was sure of it, there is Madame de Pënâfiel. It is infamous!" And, without giving me time to question him, he rode up to the door of the carriage, around which several men of Madame de Pënâfiel's acquaintance were pressing. She seemed to receive M. de Cernay with rather a careless affability, giving him the tips of her fingers. The count was very talkative and gay.

I looked again into the carriage, and could see Madame de Pënâfiel distinctly.

Through the white blonde veil which fell from her simple little mauve capote, I saw a very pale face, very regularly oval, and of a creamy white. Her large eyes, which she kept half closed, were of a changeable greenish shade, almost iridescent, and her eyebrows were beautifully arched above them. Her smooth, white forehead was slightly prominent, and was framed in a mass of light chestnut hair, whose golden shade reminded one of a portrait by

Titian. Her nose was small but rather too straight, and her mouth, though rosy, was large, and the thin lips were so disdainfully closed that her face had an expression which was at the same time weary, sardonic, and scornful. The nonchalant pose of Madame de Pënâfiel, half reclining in her carriage, all wrapped in a black cashmere shawl, increased this look of languor and want of interest.

While I was gazing at Madame de Pënâfiel's features, she hardly seemed conscious that De Cernay was speaking to her. Suddenly she turned her head, in an absent-minded way, in the opposite direction from the count. At once her pale face brightened, and she leaned forward towards M. de Cernay, as though to ask him the name of some person she glanced at, with a look of lively curiosity.

I followed the direction of her eyes, and saw Ismaël, whose horse was impatiently rearing, though the renegade, who was a splendid horseman, had him well under control. The long flowing sleeves of his red and gold vestment were fluttering in the wind, and his white turban set off his handsome dark face. He frowned savagely while striking his horse's sides with the blades of his Moorish stirrups. Seen thus, Ismaël was a type of fierce and powerful beauty.

I turned my head, and saw Madame de Pënâfiel, who, until then, had been so uninterested, watching with the greatest anxiety every movement of the renegade.

All at once, the horse of the latter reared so suddenly on its hind legs that he was on the point of falling over backwards.

When this happened Madame de Pënâfiel threw

herself back in her carriage, and covered her eyes with her hand. However, as Ismaël's horse did not fall, Madame de Pënâfiel, whose face for an instant had shown how terribly alarmed she was, became quite serene again, and fell back in her careless attitude.

All this scene took place in less than five minutes, and yet it gave me an uncomfortable feeling. Under any other circumstances, the curiosity Madame de Pënâfiel had shown in noticing Ismaël, whose picturesque costume and brilliant colouring attracted universal attention, would have appeared the most natural thing in the world. It was perfectly natural, too, when the renegade's horse almost fell on him, that she should have been suddenly terrified; what struck me as strange and peculiar in her conduct, was that she should manifest so much solicitude about a man she was not acquainted with, while at the same time she could be hard-hearted enough to come and look on at a deadly struggle, which might end in the death of one of those young men who were in love with her.

As soon as Ismaël's horse became quieted, Madame de Pënâfiel resumed her nonchalant and bored attitude, then giving M. de Cernay a nod, she closed the windows of her carriage, probably because she was afraid of the cold, which was getting to be severe.

At this moment some men on horseback hurried towards the race-track, crying, "They are off!"

M. de Cernay instantly stepped to the winning-post; a murmur of excitement and curiosity ran through the assemblage; every one kept clear of the space on each side of the terrible bar, which reared itself on the hard and stony ground; while two

doctors, sent in case of accident, stood beside the dismal litter which is one of the obligatory accessories of every race-course.

After having felt any of the thousand emotions which are excited by a race,—the vanity of ownership, the real affection a man has for a noble horse, the pride of a looked-for triumph, the fear or the hope of losing or winning large sums of money, —we can easily understand the breathless suspense that pervades the crowd at such a scene.

But on this occasion every spectator seemed to have an immense and fearful interest at stake, so convinced was the crowd of the fearful danger these gentlemen were running. I remember that, with the tact that exists, and always will exist, among well-bred people, not a single bet was made between any members of the upper classes who were witnesses of this race, for its issue might be so fatal that the only thing thought of was the chances of escape these young men might have, for they were well known to all.

Every one waited eagerly for their appearance. All the opera and field glasses were brought to bear on the two-mile track, for nothing could be clearly distinguished.

At last a universal outcry showed that the jockeys had been sighted.

At the farthest end of the course we could see them bending over their saddles. When they got to the first hedge they leaped it together. Then they ran neck to neck over the distance between the first and second hedges.

Then we saw the two horses' heads as they neared the second hedge,—then the two riders who passed

over it royally—both at once!

It was a magnificent race; the applauding was tremendous, but the nervous excitement was even greater,—we were breathless, we were frightfully oppressed.

At the third hedge M. de Merteuil had the advantage of a length, but after the leap M. de Senneterre caught up with him, and they were now again head to head, and were nearing the last terrible barrier with incredible speed.

I had gone into the counter alley some feet from the winning-post, so as to see the faces of the two rivals.

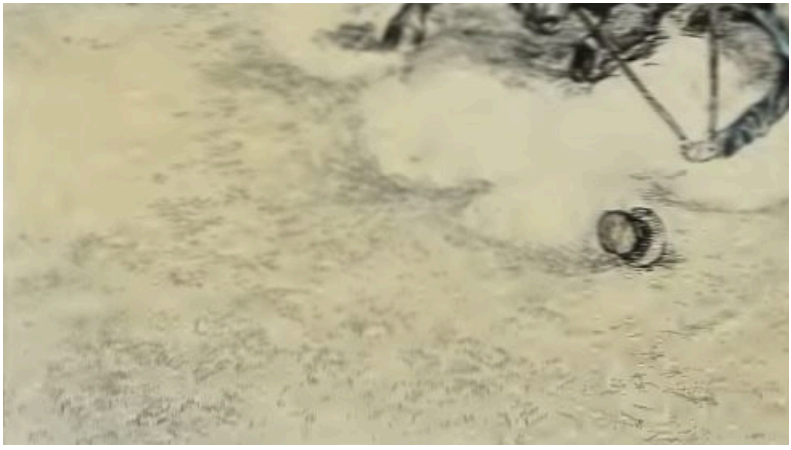
Very soon we heard the dull resonance of the ground under the shock of the galloping horses. Like a flash they passed before me still head to head. They were sweeping over the ground at a marvellous pace, their coats were scarcely damp, their nostrils were open and trembling, their heads were stretched out, their tails down, and their ears set back on their necks.

The gentleman-riders, pale, bent over their horses' necks, clutched the pommels with their bare hands, and pressed their horses between their muscular legs with almost convulsive energy.

As they passed before me they were neither of them ten feet from the bar. At this moment I saw M. de Merteuil give a vigorous blow of the whip to his horse, attacking at the same time with the spur, intending in this way to lift him over the bar with greater certainty. The brave horse leaped instantly forward before his rival could get to the bar, for he was then about half a length behind; but whether his strength gave out, or whether he had been

imprudently urged at that moment, instead of being allowed to gather himself together so that he might take more time to the leap, Captain Morave charged so blindly at the beam that he struck it with his fore feet.





Then, hearing that great crowd utter a single and formidable cry, I saw the horse and his rider turn a somersault, and roll on the track, at the moment when M. de Senneterre, either on a better horse, or a better rider, dashing up, made Beverley take an enormous leap, and cleared the bar, which he soon left far behind him, as it was impossible for him to stop the impetuous speed of his horse for some seconds.

Every one immediately surrounded the unfortunate M. de Merteuil. Not daring to go near him, so much did I dread such a sight, I turned to where I had seen Madame de Pënâfiel. Her carriage had disappeared.

Did she leave before or after this horrible accident?

Soon this dreadful murmur, "He is dead!" went through the throng.

CHAPTER XIII

THE OPÉRA

M. de Cernay having invited me to fill a vacant seat in a box at the Opéra, which he and Lord Falmouth leased together, I was glad to accept, and went there the very night of this unfortunate race, which, by the way, happened on a Friday.

As I ascended the staircase, I was accosted by a certain M. de Pommerive, who was an amusing sort of parasite in good society. He was from fifty to sixty years old. He had more curiosity and malice than any man I ever knew, and, besides, was the greatest gossip and liar that you can imagine.

"Well," said he, as he joined me with an air of great consternation, "do you know what has happened? That unfortunate M. de Merteuil is dead! Ah, *mon Dieu, mon Dieu*, what a dreadful misfortune! I have just been dining with Count ——; I can't remember a single thing I have eaten, I was so overcome!"

"It was a frightful accident!"

"Frightful, frightful, frightful! But what is worse still, is the cause of the challenge. You know what people say?"

"I know what they say," I replied, "but I do not know the facts of the case."

"It amounts to the same thing," said M. de Pommerive; "but don't you think it was the height of insolence in Madame de Pënâfiel to go to that race? Because she has one of the most elegant houses in Paris, because she is witty enough to say the most clever and cutting things, this imperious marquise thinks she may be permitted to do anything she pleases. It is revolting! My word of honour,—she

ought to be made to feel it! And since, after all, people will go to her house, because they are well received and dine well there, it would be a shame, it would be an indignity, it would be positively wicked, I say, to be quiet about such a scandal. We would all seem to be the slaves of her caprices; perfect slaves!" said he, with indignation.

"You are quite right," said I; "you show your independence, and your noble contempt for benefits that you have received; nothing could be more manly. But do they really say that De Merteuil and De Senneterre had any quarrel about Madame de Pënâfiel, and that their challenge was in consequence of it?"

"Certainly; people say so, every one repeats the same story, and every one believes it though they themselves, that is to say Senneterre, for he is the only one left, will never admit it. I met him awhile ago as I went to inquire for that poor De Merteuil, who only lived two hours after his fall. I met Senneterre at the door looking perfectly wretched,—such a face!

"I began to sound him about Madame de Pënâfiel, but he had sufficient control over himself to pretend not to understand a word I was saying. But after the way Madame de Pënâfiel treated them both on the race-course, Senneterre could not admit the real cause of the challenge without being thought a fool."

"How could that be?" said I.

"What, haven't you heard the good story about the marquise and the Turk?" exclaimed M. de Pommerive, suddenly elated with joy.

As I had scarcely taken my eyes off Ismaël during the whole period of the race, I was curious to know

how much of his story could be true; so I told M. de Pommerive that I had heard nothing at all about such a story.

Then that infernal mountebank began the following tale, accompanying it with ridiculous gestures and malicious pantomime, so as to make it more mischievous by making it amusing.

"Imagine, then, my dear monsieur," said De Pommerive, "that at the very moment when these two unfortunate young men were about to risk their lives, from an exaggerated sense of what was due to her reputation, Madame de Pënâfiel was amusing herself by falling suddenly in love with a Turk. Yes, monsieur, for an infernal scoundrel of a Turk, who is as handsome as he can be, and whom De Cernay is infatuated with, nobody knows why. But to get up such a sudden passion for a Turk; can you conceive of such a thing? I can readily believe it, for every one knows how capricious and how blasé she is, that marquise! Nothing that she could do would astonish me. But women generally try to hide such exhibitions of their feelings,—not she, not at all."

"That is a very strange story," said I.

"There is not the slightest doubt about its truth," replied he. "Cernay, who was one of the judges, told me all about it, for it was of him that Madame de Pënâfiel had asked, with almost indecent haste, who was that Turk; for no sooner had she laid eyes on that remarkable specimen, then she had no eyes, no thoughts, for any one else. (Here M. de Pommerive spoke in a falsetto voice in supposed imitation of Madame de Pënâfiel). 'Ah, *mon Dieu*, how handsome he is! Where did he come from? Ah, what an adorable costume! Ah, how different from your hideous clothes! (She never thinks anything is

handsome.) *Mon Dieu*, what an adorable face! What a noble figure! Oh, there is nothing of the common herd about him! What daring! How splendidly he holds his horse,' etc. I suppress the etcetera," added De Pommerive, as he returned to his natural voice, "because it would take me until to-morrow to repeat all of her impassioned exclamations. But, can you believe it? She ordered her driver to go up as close as possible, so that she might see him nearer, that lovely Turk, that adorable Turk!"

"You are quite right. It was a sudden and violent passion. It was almost African," said I to M. de Pommerive, hardly able to keep from laughing outright at this truthful recital.

"Ah, but wait," said he, "you have not yet heard the best of the story! Thanks to Madame Pënâfiel's cursed curiosity, one of her carriage horses ran against the crupper of the Grand Turk's horse, and the latter began to rear, to plunge, to paw the air with his fore feet; then, the marquise, almost fainting with alarm, terrified for the safety of her dear, delightful Turk, commenced to utter shrieks and lamentations.

"'Take care!'" exclaimed Pommerive, in his former falsetto, imitating Madame de Pënâfiel's cry of alarm. "'Take care! Hold his horse! Ah, heavens, the poor man! I have killed him! It was my fault! Save him, save him! Help, help! If he is killed I shall never forgive myself! Ismaël! Ismaël!' Till at last," said M. de Pommerive, "the marquise was so beside herself that she was half hanging out of the window of her carriage, waving her arms, and stretching them out towards her dear Turk, with such an accompaniment of sobs and stifled cries that people took her for a woman who had suddenly become insane. She was

as pale as death, her features were all convulsed, and, with her eyes starting almost out of her head and streaming with tears, you can imagine what she looked like and what a sensation she created. All that might have passed for overexcitement or weak nerves, and thus have simply appeared ridiculous, if we who knew the whole story did not know it to be worse than ridiculous, it was abominable; for since Madame de Pënâfiel had braved public opinion so far as to come and look on at the race, of which she knew herself to be the cause, she might have behaved decently, and not made a spectacle of herself in such an indecorous way, and for whom, pray? *Bon Dieu*, for a devil of a Turk, that five minutes before she didn't know from Eve nor from Adam!"

Every word of De Pommerive's story was revoltingly stupid and false; there were twenty people, at least, who could deny it with as much certitude as I. But when it came to calumniating and belittling Madame de Pënâfiel, from whatever motive I knew not, these absurdities would probably find an echo among people of the best society, for calumny needs no foundation, and can feed upon itself.

"Well, what have you got to say to it? Is it not abominable?" said De Pommerive, snorting with indignation, and panting with fatigue from his efforts in mimicry and the strain on his voice.

"I have got to say this, my dear M. de Pommerive," said I, "that your information is entirely unreliable, and your story utterly false. I am simply astounded, that a man of your sense and experience could have put the least particle of faith in such a romance."

"How is that?"

"I was at the race; by accident I was standing very close to Madame de Pënâfiel's carriage and I saw her all the time."

"Very well, and what then?"

"Madame de Pënâfiel did what any other woman would have done in her place; she simply asked, in an indifferent sort of way, the name of the man whose striking costume had necessarily attracted the attention of every one, and when the Egyptian's horse reared, and he was in danger of being thrown off backwards and killed, by having the horse fall on him, Madame de Pënâfiel was naturally overcome with terror for a minute or so. She covered her eyes with her hand, and threw herself back in her carriage without saying a word; this is the exact and entire truth."

M. de Pommerive looked at me in a mysterious manner, which he tried to render as sly as possible, and said to me, as he half closed his deceitful eyes under his gold spectacles:

"Come, come, you are also under her spell, she has bewitched you too, you are in love with her already. The devil take me if that woman ever does anything else; she is a veritable siren."

All this was so silly, and I had spoken so seriously, that I became flushed with impatience and anger; but containing myself on account of M. de Pommerive's age, I said to him, very coldly:

"Monsieur, I do not understand you, neither do you understand me. What I have told you about Madame la Marquise de Pënâfiel, whom I have not the honour of being acquainted with, is the exact truth. In the tale you have told me, she is made the victim of a malicious falsehood. You should be very much

obliged to me for correcting your information, and enlightening you as to the truth of this ridiculous calumny."

Just then M. de Pommerive interrupted me, and made me many incomprehensible signals, then he bowed very low several times to some one that I did not see, for we were standing in the corridor, and I had my back turned to the staircase.

At the same instant, a man's voice said, very politely, and with a foreign accent:

"I beg pardon, gentlemen, but madame wishes to pass."

I turned quickly. It was Madame de Pënâfiel, accompanied by another lady; they were on their way to their opera box, and I was standing in the passage-way. I stepped to one side and bowed; M. de Pommerive disappeared, and I kept on to my box.

I was very much irritated, for I thought that perhaps Madame de Pënâfiel had heard what I was saying. Perhaps, after all, some of the other stories people told about her were partly true, and I was ashamed and angry with myself for having undertaken to defend a woman that I did not know; then giving credit to others for being distrustful and calculating like myself, I was enraged to think that Madame de Pënâfiel might fancy I only spoke thus because I knew she was near me, and wanted to make a favourable impression on her.

When I reached my box, I hid behind the curtain, and looked around the tiers of boxes for Madame de Pënâfiel. I saw her very soon in a box on the first tier, which was hung with blue damask. She was seated in a gilt armchair, and wore over her shoulders a long ermine-lined cloak. The other lady I

had seen was near her, and an elderly gentleman sat in the back of the loge.

Very soon Madame de Pënâfiel took off her cloak, and handed it to the old gentleman. She wore a dress of straw-coloured crêpe, very simply made, and she had a great bouquet of Parma violets in her corsage, and another in her hair, which was caught in bandeaux just below the temples, and then fell in soft curls on her neck and shoulders. Her complexion, which was heightened by the slightest touch of rouge, was perfectly dazzling by lamplight, and her two great, half closed eyes shone under their long black lashes.

Hidden behind my curtain, I watched Madame de Pënâfiel through my opera-glasses. The expression of her face was as it had been that morning,—restless, nervous, and even somewhat anxious or weary. She held her head bent over a bouquet of violets, which she pulled to pieces in an absent-minded way.

Her companion was a striking contrast to her in every way. Imagine a young girl of not more than eighteen, in the very first bloom of youth. Her countenance was frank and sympathetic, and her features regular. She wore a white dress, and her black hair was parted smoothly over her forehead. Her eyebrows were dark and well defined, and her astonished blue eyes gleamed with the infantile wonder of a young girl who, for the first time, enjoys with pleased and eager curiosity the splendour of scenery and the rapture of music.

From time to time, Madame de Pënâfiel would speak to her, scarcely turning her head towards her; the young girl would reply with the greatest deference, though she seemed constrained.

As for Madame de Pënâfiel, after having glanced carelessly around the theatre two or three times, she seemed to become perfectly unconscious of the beautiful music of "William Tell," which was being performed that night. She appeared so disdainful, so tired of the sameness of pleasure, her pale face, in spite of its youth and harmonious outline, expressed such indifference and vexation, that I was seized with this conviction, "There is a woman to be pitied."

They were near the end of the second act of "William Tell," and were singing the magnificent trio of the Three Swiss. Never had this wondrously powerful *morceau* been sung with so much spirit and ensemble, never had it created more enthusiasm; the young girl at Madame de Pënâfiel's side bent forward eagerly towards the stage in rapt attention. All at once she raised up her head in a proud and resolute way, as though her gentle and timid soul had involuntarily felt the enthusiasm and bravery which this sublime trio is meant to inspire.

Perhaps Madame de Pënâfiel was jealous of the deep emotion of her companion, who had scarcely taken notice of the last few words which had been addressed to her, for when the marquise spoke to her again, it was to say something so unkind that I saw tears shining in the young girl's dark eyes, and a shadow pass over her face; then, shortly afterwards, she took up her silk mantle, and, wrapping it around her shoulders, she went out with the old gentleman who had accompanied Madame de Pënâfiel. He probably put the young girl in the carriage, for he very soon returned alone.

I was pondering on the meaning of this scene, of which I had doubtless been the only attentive spectator, when M. de Cernay came into our box,

and said, quickly, "Well, is it true then? Is Madame de Pënâfiel here to-night? It seems she is perfectly wild about my assassin; it is quite delightful! People are talking of nothing else; the news spread with telegraphic rapidity. But where is she? I am sure she is looking as though she knew nothing whatever about it."

"It certainly would be quite impossible to appear more indifferent," I answered M. de Cernay. The count stepped forward, looked at her through his glass, and said:

"That is true. There is no one in the world can brave a thing out as she can! The very evening after poor Merteuil's death, after all the stories that are going around,—for it is the talk of all Paris,—to dare to come here to the opera, in her own box! It passes everything!"

I carefully noticed M. de Cernay's face, and believed I saw there an expression of spite, not to say hatred, which I had already seen when he spoke of Madame de Pënâfiel. I had a great mind to tell him that no one knew better than he that every word of the story about Ismaël was false and stupid, and that Madame de Pënâfiel could not behave in any other way than in following the course she was now pursuing; for, if the stories were true, she owed it to her self-respect to give them the lie by affecting an entire indifference; while if they were false, her indifference was perfectly natural.

But as I had no reason to take up her defence a second time, I contented myself with asking some questions about her, after the count's strange indignation had spent itself.

"Who is that very pretty brunette that was with

Madame de Pënâfiel until just now?" I asked.

"That is Mlle. Cornelia, her companion. The Lord knows what a life she leads, that poor girl; her mistress treats her with the greatest cruelty, and with unequalled tyranny. She pays dearly for the bread she eats, so they say. She has been living with her three years, and is so afraid of her that she doesn't dare to leave her."

This strange reason made me smile, but I kept on.

"And who is the old gentleman with the white hair?"

"He is the Chevalier don Luiz de Cabrera, a relation of her husband's. During the lifetime of the marquis he lived at the residence of De Pënâfiel, and he continues to live there as a sort of chaperon for his cousin. He looks after the way the house and equipages are kept up, though she is ridiculous enough to keep an equerry, absolutely like in the days of the old régime, an old fellow that doesn't eat in the servants' hall, but has his meals served in his own room. I tell you she can't do like other people,—the foolish things she does are incredible. But," said the count, interrupting himself, "who is that lady entering her box? Ah, it is Madame la Duchesse de X ——. She has gone to be polite to her, so as to be able to take some one with her to the concert to which all Paris would like to be invited, because Madame de Pënâfiel has so bewitched Rossini that he is going to play for her an unpublished morceau. Ah, who is going in her box now? Why, to be sure, it is old, fat Pommerive. The old beggar! He goes to pay his compliments in hopes of a dinner at the Hôtel de Pënâfiel, and after uttering his thousand platitudes he will go away and tell stories that he ought to be hung for."

"Is he one of her friends?" I asked M. de Cernay.

"He is one of her diners,—that is all; for he has the worst tongue that exists in the world, perfidious as a snake, never spares any one.

"But is it not a pity," continued the count, "that Madame de Pënâfiel, who has so many charming qualities, is beautiful, witty, too witty in fact, and has an enormous fortune, should manage to make herself so universally disliked? She does just what she pleases and cares for no one's opinion; so she only gets what she deserves."

"It seems to me," said I, "that a visit from such an important personage as Madame la Duchesse de X —— shows that if people detest her they take care to keep it to themselves."

"That can not be helped,—society is so indulgent," the count answered me.

"Yes, indulgent to its own pleasures," I said to him; "but there is one thing that surprises me: it is not that every one slanders Madame de Pënâfiel, who seems, though she may have her faults, to have everything else in the world to create envy; but why, for the sake of strengthening her position, she does not marry again!"

Whatever was the reason I know not, but when I had spoken in this way, M. de Cernay's face flushed up, and he looked confused as he answered me, "Why do you put such a question to me?"

"Simply because there are only two of us in this box, and so I have no one else to question."

The count perceived the foolishness of his question, but he continued:

"You must not fancy that I am as intimate with Madame de Pënâfiel as all that. But see, fat old Pommerive has left her box now, and there he is in the box of those two beautiful women who are such devoted friends,—Orestes and Pylades in petticoats. Ah, see, what can he be telling them with his ridiculous gesticulations, and his side-glances at Madame de Pënâfiel? How the ladies are laughing! Good Heavens! what a silly buffoon that man is, and at his time of life, too, it is disgusting."

By Pommerive's pantomime, I easily recognised the story about Ismaël, which he probably meant to tell every one in the house.

"By the way," said M. de Cernay to me, with a smile, "although I am not sufficiently intimate with Madame de Pënâfiel to know why she does not marry again, I know her quite well enough to present you to her if you wish for an introduction, and if she does; which is more than I can answer for, because she is fanciful and has her whims; but as I am going to pay her a visit, I can ask her, if you say so."

Thinking how ridiculous and in what bad taste this request would seem to Madame de Pënâfiel, should she have overheard my defence of her, and fearing lest M. de Cernay would really do as he threatened, I said to him, quickly and very seriously:

"For a reason which I do not wish to give, I beg you, indeed I really desire you, not to mention my name to Madame de Pënâfiel."

"Really!" said the count, as he looked at me attentively; "and why not? What an idea!"

"I must beg you most seriously not to do anything of the kind," I repeated slowly, as I wished to impress M. de Cernay with the fact that I did not wish to be

mentioned at all.

"Very well," he said, "it shall be as you wish; but you are wrong, for you will miss an opportunity of seeing how fascinating she can be."

He went out, and I also went to pay my respects to several of my lady acquaintances. The scandal of the hour was that Madame de Pënâfiel was responsible for the death of M. de Merteuil, and that now she had fallen a victim to a sudden passion for Ismaël. Nobody could talk about anything else. To all the women who repeated this story to me, with numerous variations on the theme, and various exclamations on such hard-heartedness and levity, I replied (presuming that all these fair ladies were assiduous guests at all of Madame de Pënâfiel's entertainments)—I replied, I say, with a melancholy tone, that nothing could be more deplorable, more odious, more unfortunate, but that, thanks to the respect society owed to its own dignity, this shameless marquise, who had fallen so furiously in love with a Turk, would be surely made to suffer for her abominable behaviour; for surely no self-respecting woman would ever again set her foot inside the door of the Hôtel de Pënâfiel. Then I bowed and returned to my loge.

I found M. de Cernay there, and M. du Pluvier, who had finished his involuntary race of that morning by a fall, which, fortunately, was not a dangerous one.

"Ah," said the count, "this is worse than all."

"Is it another coat of black for Madame de Pënâfiel?"

"You do well to laugh; I was hardly in her box when who do you think she asked me to introduce to

her,—guess?"

"How should I know?"

"Guess. It is the strangest thing, it is unheard of, inconceivable, prodigious!"

"It is unheard of, inconceivable!" repeated M. du Pluvier, imitating De Cernay.

"It was not you, Du Pluvier," said the count, "you need not be uneasy; guess again." Speaking to me then, he said, "Come, try and find out."

"I do not know."

"Ismaël."

"Ismaël!"

"The very same."

"Oh, what a good story!" cried out Du Pluvier, "what a good story to tell!"

I will admit that what the count said surprised me so much that I in my turn asked him if it was not a joke. He answered me quite seriously that it was true, and he appeared somewhat annoyed at such a request.

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, she asked it without the slightest hesitation: she said in the most careless and trifling way (to hide the importance of the request no doubt), 'M. de Cernay, your Turk is very interesting, you must bring him to see me.'"

"She said that to you, seriously?"

"Very seriously, I give you my word."

This affirmation was made in such a grave way that I believed it.

M. du Pluvier started off like an arrow to repeat

this next proof of Madame de Pënâfiel's inconsequence, and by the end of the opera this final chapter was added to the rest of the entertaining recital.

I went to call at one of the embassies, and then returned home.

As soon as I was alone and left to reflection, I felt that I had been terribly saddened by the events of the day.

I had seen something of the world and society; but this heaping up of falsehoods, absurdities, deliberate assertions of what was known to be untrue; this furious slandering of a woman, who seemed to authorise it by certain frivolous actions which were unexplainable; these men who could repeat every malicious and odious thing that they heard about her, and then go the next instant and bow before her in servile homage,—all this, though it was as old as humanity, was none the less vile and disgusting to me. However, by a strange contradiction, I felt that I was becoming interested in Madame de Pënâfiel, for the very reason that she occupied so high a position that none of these hateful stories would ever reach her ears. What is the most frightful thing in these society slanders, which attack persons whose importance commands the respect, or rather the base flattery, of every one, is that those in high places live in an atmosphere of lies and hatred, the air they breathe is saturated with falsehood, and yet they are unconscious of it all.

Thus it was impossible, seeing the gracious smiles of the women, the obsequious bows of the men who greeted her as she left the Opéra, it was impossible

that Madame de Pënâfiel should ever dream of a thousandth part of the miserable scandal of which she was the subject. As I was saying, all this was miserable, and left me in a state of overwhelming sadness. I had just passed a whole day of that life of pleasure, as it is called, that luxurious existence which is only permitted to the few to enjoy, and now I found myself at the end of it with this frightful void at my heart. Then, following this train of thought, I compared this false, hollow, sterile, and glittering life with the vivifying, expansive, and generous existence that I had led at Serval! Poor old paternal château! Peaceful and smiling horizon, towards which my heart always turned when overburdened with grief or wounded by heartlessness!

Oh, what desperate remorse I felt as I thought of Hélène, whom I had lost by an infamous doubt; of that noble girl, so adorable in her halo of candour, and so chastely surrounded by her atmosphere of angelic purity that nothing had ever clouded, but which, for a moment only, on one memorable morning, had been obscured by her love for me! Hélène! Hélène! One of those divine natures which are born and die, like a swan on some solitary lake, pure and spotless.

And then descending from the high sphere of thoughts that shone with such pure lustre, I tried to find some means of dulling the sad memories they awakened in my breast. I tried to hope that, at some far-off day, my heart might find consolation, and I thought of the involuntary interest I already began to feel in Madame de Pënâfiel. But I felt that, for a woman who had been so blasted by calumny, so tarnished with abuse, however undeserved, it would never be possible for me to feel the ardent, deep, and

holy love of which one is as proud as of a noble action.

When the world throws discredit on a woman's reputation, that modest and sacred veil which even a breath can destroy, that first flower of life, so delicate and ethereal, it smirches by its vile accusations her good name, and it destroys for ever her future chances of happiness; for she is henceforth deprived of the sad consolation of inspiring a devoted, sincere, and enduring love. It forces her into the degrading caprices of short-lived attachments, in which are to be found neither respect nor faith. For what man will ever see in a woman, who has been suspected of such shameful actions, anything but a charming fantasy, the desire of yesterday, the joy of to-day, and the forgetfulness of to-morrow? Who in her presence would dare to give way to those bursts of passionate confession, during which one longs to tell the one woman he believes worthy of his confidence, the joys, the sadness, the mysteries, the ravishments of the soul that she fills with love, and that only God can understand? Who is there, that in the midst of such moments of rapture, would not dread to hear the echo, the mocking and sinister echo, of all these slanderous tales about the woman at whose feet he is about to throw himself, to whom he longs to kneel?

What reverence can we have for the idol we have so often seen treated with disrespect, outraged and insulted?

CHAPTER XIV

A FRIEND

One morning, five or six days after the evening I had seen Madame de Pënâfiel at the Opéra, M. de Cernay entered my room. He was radiant.

"Well," said he, "she has gone away. She has left Paris. She went yesterday, in the very height of the season. Does not that strike you as peculiar? But it was the only thing left for her to do; the scandal was too great. Society has laws that can not be disobeyed with impunity."

"How is that?" said I to him. "Why has Madame de Pënâfiel quitted Paris?"

"It is probable," he replied, "that some of her relations, out of respect for the good name of their family, have charitably told her that, until the bad impression she has made by her ridiculous and sudden passion for Ismaël, and by De Merteuil's death, was somewhat forgotten, it would be proper for her to go and spend some time at one of her country-seats; contrary to her usual custom, she has acceded to this advice, and gone to conquer her love in some solitude."

"Did you ever present Ismaël to her, as she requested you?"

"Impossible," replied the count, "he is as savage as a bear, capricious as a woman, and stubborn as a mule. I never could prevail on him to accompany me to the Hôtel de Pënâfiel, so I fancy it is more out of spite than from any respect of public opinion that Madame de Pënâfiel has decided to leave town."

I admit that this sudden departure in the middle of

the gay season seemed as strange as the request to be presented to Ismaël. But while I wished to continue on a subject which interested me, I was weary of all this revolting gossip, so I said to the count:

"What sort of a man was the Marquis de Pënâfiel?"

"A very illustrious and powerful lord of Aragon, grandee of Spain, and ambassador to Rome; it was there he met for the first time Mlle. de Blémur, now Madame de Pënâfiel, who was travelling in Italy with her uncle and aunt."

"Was the marquis young?"

"He was about thirty-five years old," said the count, "besides being very handsome and agreeable, and a grand seigneur in every way; and yet they say it was not a love match, but only a marriage of *convenance*. M. de Pënâfiel had a colossal fortune, but Mlle. de Blémur was enormously rich. She was an orphan and her own mistress. Why, then, did she decide to marry a man she did not love? Nobody knows. The marquis had always been extremely desirous of living in France; so as soon as they became engaged he hastened to Madrid to see the king and hand in his resignation, then he left Spain for ever, and came to Paris, where he married Mlle. de Blémur. After they had been married two years, he died of some long sickness that ends in 'is,' whose diabolical name I don't remember."

"And before her marriage, what did people say about Mlle. de Blémur?"

"Well, although she was as beautiful as the graces themselves, she had already made herself unpopular by her coquetry and her affectations, but above all by her pretensions to scholarship, which were worthy of one of the *femmes savantes* of Molière; for

she had made her uncle, who did whatever his niece desired, give her masters in astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, and I know not what all besides! So, thanks to the fine education she had received, Mlle. de Blémur thought she had the right to behave with great contempt, and ridicule the men of her acquaintance who had not studied all those wonderful things. Now you easily see how many friends she made by her airs of superiority; but all this did not prevent her being flattered and surrounded with admirers, for, after all, one is willing to put up with a great deal from an heiress who has four hundred thousand francs a year in her own right, and who is of such a disposition that she will marry anybody she may take a fancy to; so that when she married a foreigner she made enemies of all the young men who had aspired to her hand."

"That I can readily believe, so many hours and so many sighs were all thrown away. But, at least, this enmity was patriotic," said I, with a smile. "Then this marriage was only one of convenience, you say, although M. de Pënâfiel was very agreeable."

"It seemed to be so," replied M. de Cernay. "They were never very demonstrative to each other; but when the marquis became ill, Madame de Pënâfiel showed great devotion to him; that means nothing, however, as you very well know."

"It means a great deal of devotion or a great deal of hypocrisy, for she probably had as many lovers before her widowhood as afterwards."

"People believe she had, at least, and people are not often mistaken," said the count; "but she is clever, and so careful! She never writes any but most trifling and insignificant little notes to any one. As for Ismaël, her conduct towards him has been an

incomprehensible folly, which is quite unlike her usual behaviour, and can only be explained by the violence of the sudden passion he inspired; there is a story, too, of her having disguised herself, and gone to some little house, in a distant, lonely part of town. In a word, it is very evident to sensible people that, if Madame de Pënâfiel was in love with any honourable man, she would not hide it; but as, on the contrary, she permits every sort of contradictory rumour to be spread abroad concerning her, in order to mislead investigation, there can be no doubt that she gives herself up to the wildest fancies, and carries on the worst intrigues in secrecy. Then, why is she such a coquette? Why does she always take such pains to make herself agreeable? If you ever go to her house you will see how it is. Now when a woman has such a passion for being fascinating, she is never contented with disinterested admiration."

"But," said I to M. de Cernay, "what has become of the winning man in that extraordinary race, which, by its publicity, must have greatly upset the mysterious ways of Madame de Pënâfiel? M. de Senneterre, what has become of him?"

"Oh," said the count, "Senneterre was sacrificed, shamefully sacrificed; for, to say nothing about her crazy passion for Ismaël, she is capable, merely in a spirit of contradiction, of weeping for the dead lover, and hating the living one. A proof of this is that Senneterre has now the tact and good sense to insist upon it that Madame de Pënâfiel had nothing whatever to do with the race, which, he now tells every one who will listen to him, came about by a wager he made with that unfortunate De Merteuil, when they were both in high spirits.

"He says they had both been dining with Lord

——, and as they left, each one had begun to boast of the rare accomplishments of his horse, each one praising his own. They talked until they became excited, and the fatal challenge was the result of their boasting. The next day, when their enthusiasm had somewhat cooled down, they recognised the danger of their proposition; but neither wished to appear to shrink from it, and so from pure bravado they carried out their plan. That is all a very plausible tale, but it is not true, at least I do not believe it, for I know the real cause of their duel, and you must admit that De Senneterre's story is probable. After all, though, after hearing what rumours have connected Madame de Pënâfiel with their race, he is only behaving like a gallant gentleman in denying it all as he does."

Many years have passed since all this happened, and I still wonder how such puerile gossip should yet be so distinctly remembered.

It is because they formed a part of a very painful experience in my life, and because they were the exact type of certain sorts of conversations, and an example of the discussions, the praises, the attacks, and the malicious falsehoods that interest and occupy the minds of idle society people. If this statement of mine seems overdrawn or exaggerated, you have only to remember the last piece of gossip you heard yesterday, or your conversation of this morning, to find that I am right.

But to return to M. de Cernay. As there was, after all, an appearance of logic in the absurd propositions of which he was the cause, as well as the echo,—in fact, quite enough logic to appease the conscience of slander,—I did not attempt to defend Madame de Pënâfiel to the count. What was more, I fancied that

I saw the cause of his persistent attacks on her; for all these rumours, that had been holding the best society in Paris spellbound for the last five or six days, had evidently no other author than he.

As for the other long conversation on the antecedents and character of Madame de Pënâfiel, I only repeated it because it exactly coincided with all that I had heard said, and it might be taken as the general opinion of the world as to Madame de Pënâfiel.

"Let us hope," said I to the count, "that Paris will not be very long deprived of the society of a woman who furnishes such a wonderful subject for conversation. We certainly will give her the credit of having entertained everybody for the last five or six days, for no one else has been spoken of."

"I would lay a wager that you wanted to see her back again," said M. de Cernay, as he gave me an inquisitive look.

"Without wanting to see her very badly, I am willing to admit that she inspired me, if not with interest, at least with curiosity."

"From curiosity to interest there is but a single step, and from interest to love there is but one more, and so I am sure that you will become at last wildly in love with Madame de Pënâfiel. But take care!"

"In spite of all the dangers I might encounter, I should be delighted to think that your prediction could be fulfilled; for there is nothing in the world so happy as a man who is in love, even if he is hopelessly in love."

"That is just the reason why I have thought it right to let you know the real character of Madame de

Pënâfiel, so that you might be on your guard if you ever were presented to her. Really, I should have been sorry to see you fall a victim to her fascinations," said the count to me, with such an expression of kindliness that I could hardly believe it to be feigned. "Between gentlemen," said he, "there are certain services one should render one another; but really, it must have been the great interest I take in you, or the desire I have to be useful to you, that made me warn you so frankly; because really—" and the count hesitated for a moment, and then began again in a serious way, in which there seemed to be a real tone of affectionate solicitude:

"Come now, would you like to know just what I think?"

"Certainly I would," said I, quite surprised at this sudden transition.

"Well, then, you know that between men there can be nothing more stupid than complimentary speeches; in spite of which I mean to tell you that there is something about you which attracts one from the very first, but after that charming first impression there seems to be something in your manner, something that is either stiffness, coolness, or a haughty reserve, that repels people. You are young, but you have neither the enthusiasm nor the trustfulness of youth. There is a contrast in your nature that I have not yet been able to explain. When you take part in a conversation of young men who are jovial, careless, and free, your face brightens up, you say things that are wilder and gayer than the gayest and the wildest; and then, when you have said the last words, you put on an air of coldness, of weariness, and seem as though you were bored to death, so that no one knows what to think of gaiety

which is so closely followed by such gloomy sadness. So I will frankly tell you that it is devilish hard to take you into one's confidence, no matter how much one would like to."

You can be sure that I did not believe a word that the count said about my wonderful powers of attraction, and as I could not understand why he should want to flatter me, except for some purpose of his own, and as these compliments seemed stupid and vulgar, I decided to show him how I felt about it, and to show myself in such a light that he would spare me any such confidences in the future.

"You are right," said I to the count. "I know that it is not easy to be confidential with me, for I am by nature very hypocritical, and, knowing myself, put very little faith in others. Consequently, it is quite impossible that any one should ever feel attracted towards me or that I should ever desire such sympathy."

The count looked as though he were seriously astonished; then he said, in an injured tone:

"Your dissimulation is not very dangerous, since you acknowledge it."

"But I have never wanted to be dangerous," said I, smiling.

"Ah, so; and where do you suppose you are going to find any friends if you talk like that?"

"Friends? And pray, what would I do with them?"

There probably was, in the expression of my features, in the tone of my voice, such an appearance of truthfulness, that the count was really surprised.

"Are you speaking seriously?" said he.

"Very seriously, I assure you; what is there to astonish you in such a question?"

"And you are not afraid to confess such an opinion?"

"Why should I be afraid?"

"Why?" replied the count, with a bewildered look. "Come, it is a paradox that amuses you. It is very amusing and original, no doubt, but I am certain that in your heart you do not believe a word you are saying."

"Very well; let us talk about something else."

"No, but seriously," he replied, "can you really mean to say, 'Of what use are friends?'"

"Certainly I do. For example, what good am I to you? What good are you to me? Suppose we were never to meet after to-day, what would you lose? What would I? When I say you and I, I generalise. I mean, so far, at least, as I am concerned, those commonplace, trite affections for people we really care nothing about, to which the world gives the name of friendships."

"I grant you that one can easily get along without any such friendships as those, or, rather, that they are so easy to find that nobody takes the trouble to seek for them. What I mean is real, true, deep, devoted friendship."

"Nisus and Euryalus, Castor and Pollux?"

"Yes. Would you say 'what to do with them' if you were ever fortunate enough to meet with such friends?"

"I should surely say, 'What shall I do with them?' For, suppose I should ever find a Nisus, I know I

never could become an Euryalus, and I hope I am too honest a man to accept what I never could return.

"But, suppose I should really find that true, deep, sincere friendship that you spoke of just now. It would be perfectly useless and even a dead weight while I was happy, for then I hate confidences; so it would only be of any use to me when I was miserable. Now it is mathematically impossible that I shall ever be miserable."

"How can that be?" said the count, more and more amazed.

"For a very simple reason. My health is perfect, my name and connections place me on a level with any one, my fortune is in landed property, I have always two years' income ahead of my expenditures, I never play high, I never loan money,—how, then, am I ever to be miserable?"

"But then you imagine there are no other troubles than physical pain or material embarrassment? And the sorrows of the heart?" said the count, and he really looked grieved. But I answered by such a burst of laughter that he seemed stunned; then he said:

"If you can look at things like that, it is evident that you will never need anybody, and all I can say for you is, that I pity you very much. But, come now," said he, almost impatiently, "admit that if I came to-morrow to ask a favour of you, you would not refuse me, even if you should grant it only out of respect of the world's opinion; that is all the world cares for."

"But even admitting that I would render you a service, what would that prove? Only that you had need of me, not I of you—"

"And thus you believe you will never be in need of any one?"

"Yes, that is my principal luxury, and I hold fast to it."

"So let it be; your fortune is in land, it is safe; your position is equal to the very best, you do not believe in any heartaches, or, if they should come, you will suffer alone; but, for instance, suppose you ever have to fight a duel, you will have to ask some gentleman to be your second; that is a great obligation! You see you may need others to help you in this world."

"If ever I have a duel, I shall walk into the first barracks I come to, I shall pick up the first two non-commissioned officers or soldiers that I lay my hand on, and there I shall have two excellent seconds, and ones that no man of honour could take exception to."

"What a devil of a man you are!" said the count to me. "But suppose you are wounded, who will come to see you?"

"Nobody, thank the Lord! In physical suffering I am like a wild beast, I want only solitude and the dark night."

"But in the world, to talk to, to live with, to live in the world you must live with others."

"Oh, for all that, the others will not fail me any more than I shall abandon them. The world of society is a concert, where the most miserable musicians are placed on the same footing as the greatest artists, and where each one plays his one note, but such chance acquaintances cannot be called friends. Such attachments are like strong, free-growing plants, which have neither sweet perfume nor brilliant colouring, but which are ever green, and

which we are not afraid of crushing; the proof is that, after all we have been saying to each other, we will remain on the same good terms as heretofore; to-morrow we will shake hands before everybody, we will talk about Madame de Pënâfiel's adorers, or of anything else you may please; and in six months we will call each other 'dear fellow,' but in six months and a day, should you or I disappear from this happy earth, either you or I would be perfectly indifferent to the other's disappearance. And it is perfectly natural that this should be the case. Why should it be otherwise? What right have I to exact any other sentiment of you? And why should you require it of me?"

"What you say is very uncommon; every one does not think as you do."

"I hope they do not for their own sakes. I fancy that I am like no one because I am like all."

"And, no doubt, with such principles, you despise all alike, both men and women."

"In the first place, I do not despise men," said I, "for a very simple reason; I am no better nor worse than another, and I have often had a mental struggle to decide one of those questions which prove a man's honesty, or show that he is a scoundrel."

"Well?" said the count.

"Well, as I have always been very severe in my self-examinations, I have often doubted my own motives more than those of other people; thus, being no better than other men, I cannot despise them. As for women, as I know no more about them than you do, it is impossible for me to give any opinion on the subject."

"No more than I?" said De Cernay, who was evidently displeased. "I know nothing about women?"

"Neither you, nor I, nor any one can say that he perfectly understands women," said I, with a smile. "What man is there who even knows himself? Where is one who knows how he would act under any conceivable circumstances? How much less, then, could he pretend to understand not women, but a single woman, even were she his mother, his mistress, or his sister? Of course, I do not discuss this subject with every one, nor am I expected to go through such a catechism, which would be about as reasonable as a manual for learning to speak a language, in which every conceivable question is given with its proper answer."

"In that you are quite right," said the count; "but stop, I am delighted at a chance of making you contradict yourself. I am going to do you a kindness: you would like to know Madame de Pënâfiel; some one, either I or another, will have to present you to her."

"Nothing could be more amiable," said I, "and though I am a bankrupt in friendship, I certainly would find some means of requiting such a generous offer. Madame de Pënâfiel is charming; I believe all the wonderful tales you have told about her. I know that it is considered a compliment to be invited to her salon, which is very exclusive; but really and truly, I beg you, as I would any one else, not to ask her to receive me."

"What reason have you for doing so?"

"Because whatever pleasure I might receive from being acquainted with her would be more than

overbalanced by the humiliation I should feel in case she refuses to meet me."

"What childish vanity!" said the count. "Not very long ago Lord Falmouth wished to present to her the young Duke of ——, who is related to the royal family of England. Would you believe it? Madame de Pënâfiel flatly refused to see him."

"You are too well-bred, my dear count, not to understand that my position places me on a certain social footing, and that I ought not to risk such a refusal. You may think me foolish, but it is thus; don't let us speak of it again."

"Yes, one word more," said the count; "will you wager two hundred louis that, when she returns, you will be presented to, and received by Madame de Pënâfiel inside of a month?"

"At my own request?"

"No; on the contrary."

"How could it be on the contrary?"

"Certainly it could. I bet you that Madame de Pënâfiel, meeting you frequently in society, and seeing that you take no pains to be presented to her, will manage, out of pure contradiction, to have it brought about in spite of your opposition."

"That would be a triumph to be very proud of,—but I do not believe it will ever happen. In fact, I have so little confidence in it that I will accept your wager, which is this: A month after her return, I shall *not* have been presented to Madame de Pënâfiel."

"But," said De Cernay, "it must be understood that, if such a proposition comes from her, you are not to refuse."

"It is so understood," said I, interrupting him. "I certainly would never answer so honourable and flattering a proposal by a rudeness; so, as I repeat to you, I will accept your wager."

"Your two hundred louis are as good as mine," said the count as he left me. "But stop a moment," he added, as he held out his hand; "thanks for your frankness."

"What frankness?"

"What you said about friendship,—your thoughts on the subject which you expressed so bluntly. It shows that you are very honest."

"With discretion, or rather dissimulation, honesty is my other virtue," said I, shaking his hand cordially. And so we parted.

CHAPTER XV

PROJECTS

After M. de Cernay had gone, I felt grieved to think of his friendly advances and how I had repulsed them. But what he said about my great attractiveness seemed a ridiculous untruth, and made me distrust him. Then the bitter hatred with which he pursued Madame de Pënâfiel gave me but a poor idea of the kind of a friend he would make.

Perhaps I was mistaken, for women, in men's eyes, are outside of the law, if that can be; and the unkind

things they say about women to each other, and which they say with a certain self-glorification, in no way injure their reputation as men of honour. M. de Cernay might then have possessed all the good qualities of a warm and steadfast friend; but it was impossible for me to receive him as such, or to behave to him in any other way.

I took great satisfaction, too, in having been able to conceal my real nature from him, and to have given him an absolutely false idea, or a singularly indefinite one, of myself.

It was always hateful to me to be understood or divined by people I cared nothing about; and for an enemy to do so was dangerous. Indeed, I liked to have even a friend kept out of my secret thoughts.

If there is in our moral organisation a culminating point, the source and termination of all our thoughts, our longings, our desires, if we are conscious that any one idea, whether good or evil, is steadily throbbing with every beat of our heart, this palpitating spot is the one that must be most sedulously hidden, most carefully defended from sudden attack, for there is the weak, the sore place, the infallibly vulnerable spot in our nature.

If envy, pride, or covetousness are your predominating characteristics, you should attempt to appear modest, kind, and disinterested, as compassionate and generous persons sometimes hide their kindliness under a rough exterior; for through education we instinctively conceal our vices and our virtues, as nature gives to certain animals the means of protecting themselves when attacked in their weakest place.

I had therefore pretended to the count that I was a

terrible egotist and cynic, simply because I still felt an unconquerable yearning towards virtue and generosity. But, alas! it was only a yearning. The terrible lessons my father had taught me, besides filling my mind with distrust of all good motives, had developed to the highest degree my vanity and susceptibility. In fact, what I most dreaded, was to be taken for a fool, should I follow the enthusiastic instincts of my nature.

But though day by day suspicion and vanity were drying up the germs of these noble instincts, their souvenir still remained with me, and, like fallen man, I remembered the lost Eden. I could understand, though I felt it not, all the divine ravishment there must be in self-sacrifice and confidence.

On my part there was a continual aspiration towards an ethereal, radiant sphere, from the midst of which the most devoted friendships, the most passionate loves, smiled on me.

But, alas! my implacable, shameful, distrusting spirit would whisper in my ear that all these adorable apparitions were but deceitful appearances, and his icy breath would dispel in an instant the enchanting visions.

I knew that I did not deceive myself as to my own nature. What was mean, selfish, and weak in it, was stronger than what still remained of noble and generous sentiments.

My conduct towards Hélène had proved this to be the case. The man who can calculate and meanly weigh the result of his impulses, who refuses a generous feeling of attraction, for fear of being repulsed, is devoid of strength of purpose, liberality,

and kindness.

Distrust is the next thing to cowardice. From cowardice to cruelty there is only one more step. I was to suffer miserably for my distrust of others, and to cause others to suffer as well.

And yet I was not of a hateful or spiteful disposition. I was filled with the most pleasurable sensations when I had secretly rendered any one a service that I was not afraid of having to blush for. Then I loved to contemplate the beauties of nature, which is a sentiment that thoroughly wicked and perverse souls are not capable of. The sight of a magnificent sunset gave me intense delight. I was happy when I found the description of noble and generous actions in the books I read, and the deep sympathy I felt proved that all the noble cords of my heart were not yet broken. As much as I admired Walter Scott, that sublime benefactor of unhappy minds, whose genius leaves one so refreshed and purified, just so much did I detest Byron, whose sterile and desolating scepticism only leaves a taste of gall and bitterness.

I had so just an appreciation of every kind of trouble or affliction that I carried my delicacy and fear of wounding the feelings of the unfortunate or lonely to a ridiculous length. I was seized with pity and tenderness for no apparent reason. I felt sometimes an immense need of loving some one, of devoting my life to some one. My first impulses were always sincere and unselfish; but then came reflections and second thoughts to blight everything. There was a perpetual struggle going on in my mind and heart. One said: Believe, love, hope; and the other said; Doubt, despise, fear.

I was in this way constantly impelled by two

opposite forces. I seemed to feel with my mother's heart and think with my father's mind; but the intellect was always stronger than the affections.

I also possessed the terrible faculty of comparing myself with others, by the aid of which I found a thousand reasons why I was not lovable, consequently I considered every one in the light of a flatterer.

My mother had adored me, and I had forgotten my mother; or, rather, I only thought of her when I was in desperate trouble. But when I was completely happy, when my vanity was satisfied, and I was dazzled with my own importance, all such pious recollections as I had momentarily evoked vanished into the shade of the maternal tomb.

I owed everything to my father, and I only remembered him to curse the fatal experience he had given me. Hélène had loved me with the truest and purest affection, and I had returned her innocent love by insult and suspicion.

Thus being always ungrateful, suspicious, and forgetful, what right had I to expect from others love and devotion?

In vain I would say to myself: "My father, my mother, and Hélène loved me just as I was; why, then, should not others do the same?" But my father was my father, my mother was my mother, and Hélène was Hélène (for I very properly placed Hélène's love for me among the innate, natural family affections). And yet the aversion with which I had inspired her had been so great that the love she had borne me in her heart from her earliest childhood was destroyed in a day.

Ah, that was a fearful and useless punishment, and

I had been both the victim and the executioner; but all my useless grief had made me no better, nor more useful to myself or my fellow men.

I will return to Madame de Pënâfiel. I had not told my plans to M. de Cernay, because his intervention might be useful to me, and I knew that the best of all accomplices is one who is unconscious and perfectly honest. I felt the greatest desire to become acquainted with this strange woman, in spite of all the ill things that were said of her, or, perhaps, because, in at least one instance, I had known that they were slanderous exaggerations; but my defiant and proud nature saw an insurmountable obstacle in this very desire.

When I had undertaken to defend Madame de Pënâfiel against the attacks of De Pommerive, that night at the Opéra, when he was telling his story about Ismaël, she might have heard me. Now if this were the case, I thought that to ask to be presented to her would be the height of bad taste, as my discussion with De Pommerive might appear simply a prelude to such a request.

My scruples may have been exaggerated, but they were real, and I had firmly resolved to make no attempt to be admitted to the circle of Madame de Pënâfiel's acquaintances. I hoped, however, that if she knew that I had defended her she would appreciate my reserve, and, with the tact of a well-bred woman, would find some very simple way of having me presented to her, for she would frequently meet me in society. In this way my self-respect would not suffer.

What made it all the easier for me to reason in this

way, and wait for developments, was the fact that, on the whole, my desire to meet Madame de Pënâfiel was not strong enough to preoccupy my mind so as to exclude all other interests. If I should receive a refusal, it would not greatly disappoint me.

Neither did I fear in any sense (except in the improbable possibility of my falling very much in love with Madame de Pënâfiel) that danger with which M. de Cernay had threatened me. I did not believe there could be any danger for me, because I was certainly able to hide any wounds my vanity might receive, and was surely able (so wise and suspicious did I think myself) to see through any of her attempts at deception, in case she meant to play me false. Only I felt that, in case I meant to range myself among the number of her adorers, so many and so invisible though they appeared to be, it would be well that, on her return from her voyage to Brittany, I should be, or at least seem to be, interested in some one, so as to appear to sacrifice another to Madame de Pënâfiel, for a woman is always the most pleased when, in addition to doing her homage, a man sacrifices a former affection for her sake. Then there is not only triumph, but triumph over another woman.

I therefore resolved, that before Madame de Pënâfiel returned, I would become assiduous in my attentions to some well-known woman of fashion, to one who had some officially recognised admirer.

I insisted on both of these conditions, for, in this way, my supposed interest would be talked about all the more and the sooner.

This was a very simple calculation, inasmuch as, when my pretended admiration should be noticed, rumour would, with its usual charity and veracity,

instantly proclaim the downfall of the former admirer, and my promotion to his place.

I decided, then, to persuade some fashionable lady to receive my attentions.

What really saddened me was that, as I coldly calculated such a series of lies and deceptions, I perfectly understood their meanness. I had not the excuse of passion, not even any very great desire of pleasing Madame de Pënâfiel. It was simply as a means of distraction, and the necessity of occupying my restless and discontented spirit, that I forced myself to seek, in the miserable chances and changes of mundane life, some unforeseen event that might save me from the mournful and deadening apathy that was crushing my life out.

Strange enough, when I was once in for it, I recovered my spirits, my youthfulness, my gaiety, and many joyful hours of contented vanity. It seemed as if there were two of me, so astonished was I to hear myself talk in this extravagant way, and then, as soon as I was left alone with my reflections, my mind became agitated by my old painful, baseless worries, and by a thousand uncertainties as to myself, every one, and everything.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREEN ALBUM

Whoever has been in society must know that, without any self-glorification, it is not at all difficult for any man who is fairly well-bred and properly presented to attract the attention of a fashionable woman, if he firmly wishes to do so.

What a singular existence is that of a woman of fashion, a life made up of a series of efforts to charm the most selfish and ungrateful half of the human race. When once a woman is recognised as a leader of fashion, when it is admitted that she dresses well, and always in the latest and most becoming style, that she is charming or witty, the poor woman no longer belongs to herself. She is simply one of the stars of that brilliant crown that Paris wears on its forehead every evening.

She is obliged to show herself at every fête; joyous or sad, she must be there, always there; her dress must be the most elegant, her hair must be dressed in the latest way, her face must wear its sweetest smile; she must be always gracious and accessible, polite to every one; the stupidest fool in the room has a right to expect to be received as though she were enchanted to meet him.

There is a regular warfare between women of fashion,—a quiet but bitter warfare, in which flowers, ribbons, precious stones, and smiles are the weapons. It is a mute but terrible struggle, full of cruel suffering, unshed tears, unknown despair; a struggle that leaves deep and painful wounds, for wounded pride leaves incurable scars. But what does it matter? If one wishes to reign as sovereign over this society of the chosen few, she must be more charming than this one, more coquettish than this other one, more polite and suave than all the rest, but, above all, she must show no preference for any

one, for, as she wishes to please all, she must permit every one to believe that he will be the favoured one.

But you should hear him, this favoured one, the last favourite, the favourite of to-day, of to-night, of the last waltz, the last cotillon, the winner in that charming contest, in which flowers have battled with flowers, and graces with graces. You should see him in his ugly black coat, as he sits at supper, telling the other favourites (who tell him other tales in return) all the delightful things he has had said to him; how he only has to throw his handkerchief among so many eager beauties, who rival each other in their attentions to him; his disdain for them all.

In listening to these mysterious and veracious confidences, one is sometimes tempted to ask, Where am I? and who are these men talking about? and to admire more than ever the self-abnegation of women, who give themselves body and soul to fashion, that cruel and brutal goddess, whose priests are these men, and who renders only indifference or scorn for all these years of youth spent in her service. But as I also wished to appear to profit by the abnegation of one of these charming victims, among all the beauties that were blooming at that time, I attached myself to a very pretty young woman. She was blonde, fresh, and rosy, too rosy almost, but she had beautiful large black eyes, that were both tender and bright; her lips were scarlet, and she had beautiful white teeth, real little pearls set in coral, and she showed them on all occasions, and was quite right.

The only thing that I did not like was her adorer, a splendid young fellow, as handsome as possible, who, unfortunately for himself (and for her, poor woman, for it showed her bad taste), was called

"Beau Sainville." That epithet, "beau," is fearfully ridiculous, and if one is ever unlucky enough to take it seriously, by attempting to live up to it, one is ruined for ever.

Certainly, if I had had more leisure to choose, I should have selected a more worthy rival than Beau Sainville, but the lady was pretty and facile, and I had not much time to spare, so I was obliged to appear as his adversary in this contest for her heart. As I had supposed, he was a perfect fool, and when I was presented to the lady he honoured with his attentions, he began almost immediately to manifest every sort of ridiculous jealousy.

Wishing to show what he probably considered his rights, he began to treat the poor young woman in the rudest and most compromising manner, which distressed me very much, for I could not offer her any compensation for her loss, neither did she desire any. But at last she became justly provoked at the brutal behaviour of her strange adorer, and, to avenge herself, flirted with me in an innocent sort of way. Very soon M. de Sainville did more for me than I had even hoped, for after two or three scenes, in which he gave vent to his wounded feelings, he passed from wounded dignity to cold irony and rude indifference; finally, he went and made love, with all his might, to another poor young thing, who didn't know what to make of it.

So that although it was almost entirely untrue, the world very soon gave me the credit and glory of being preferred to Beau Sainville. It served me right for my duplicity, but I had to stand it. As for the proofs the world had of my good fortune, they were of the most positive evidence, such as the world always can show on like occasions. First, I had once

called for the carriage of the lady because there was no one else at hand; then she had offered me a place in her loge at one of the small theatres; I had hastened to offer her my arm, and we had made the tour of a crowded reception-room together in sight of all Paris; finally, last and flagrant proof, she had remained at home one evening, instead of going to a concert, and my carriage had been seen that same evening standing at her door. In the face of such convincing evidence, it was a duly established fact that I was the luckiest of mortals.

In the midst of this felicity, I learned, through M. de Cernay, of Madame de Pënâfiel's return. In order to win his wager, the count served my purposes uncommonly well, whether Madame de Pënâfiel had overheard my defence of her or not.

As soon as she came back to Paris, therefore, M. de Cernay never saw her without commenting on my strange behaviour, in neglecting to ask for a presentation, especially as I moved in precisely the same circle, and could hardly help meeting her every evening, to say nothing of my knowing that the count was one of her intimate friends, and would gladly procure me this favour, which so many desired. But, said M. de Cernay, it was rumoured that I was seriously attached to a charming young woman, who, no doubt, had made me promise never to go near the Hôtel Pënâfiel, which was supposed to be a sort of palace of Alcina, from which no one came out except in a state of enchantment, and hopelessly in love.

At last, by dint of heaping up so many silly stories, and constantly harping on this one subject, or from some unknown reason, Madame de Pënâfiel became either tired of hearing him, or provoked at my

apparent indifference. As she was habitually sought after and flattered, she began to think my neglect was a want of respect to herself and to social customs.

Finally, as M. de Cernay was one day discoursing as usual on my strange behaviour, she said to him, haughtily, and with some show of injured dignity, "That although she knew it was difficult to be admitted to her circle, it would have been a proof of respect worthy of a well-bred man, whom she met so frequently, to have at least manifested a desire to visit the Hôtel Pënâfiel."

I remained deaf to these insinuations of the count; and so Madame de Pënâfiel, like any woman who is seeing every one obedient to her slightest whim, became so irritated by my reserve, that one day, when I was conversing to a circle of her lady friends, she came and entered into the conversation, and did all in her power to cause it to become general. I said not a word to her, and as soon as I could do so with politeness I bowed, and retired from the circle. A few days afterwards she spoke of this to the count, and complained of my ill manners. He replied that, on the contrary, I was very formal, and had, probably, not thought it either polite or well-bred to address a lady to whom I had never had the honour of a presentation.

Madame de Pënâfiel turned her back on him, and for the next fortnight I heard nothing more of her.

Although my curiosity was extreme, I would not, for the reasons I have given, make any advances. I kept strictly to my rôle, and led the count to believe that I was happy in the possession of the fair blonde's affections, and that through weakness, or to show the extent of my devotion, I had promised to take no

step towards a presentation to a woman who was known to be so dangerous and seductive as Madame de Pënâfiel. I feared, too, that I would meet with a refusal, as I had shown so little eagerness at first, and that now it was too late to alter my behaviour.

About fifteen days after this last conversation with the count, Don Luiz de Cabrera, the relative of Madame de Pënâfiel, whom I had frequently met at the count's and in general society, and with whom I had become quite intimate of late, wrote to tell me that a beautiful collection of intaglios he had bought in Naples, and which he had spoken to me about, had arrived, and if I would take breakfast with him some morning we could examine these antiquities at our leisure.

The Chevalier Don Luiz lived in the entresol of the Hôtel de Pënâfiel, where he was almost constantly occupied in scientific research. He only went out occasionally to accompany his cousin, and then only when she desired him to do so.

As the chevalier resided in the house of his cousin, I thought I saw in this invitation, which was, in reality, very natural and simple, a hidden meaning of which Madame de Pënâfiel was cognisant.

The Chevalier de Cabrera gave me the impression of a sly, clever, secretive, and sensual old man, who, being only possessed of a moderate fortune of his own, found it suitable and convenient to purchase all the luxuries of a magnificent existence by performing the light duties of a chaperon to his cousin, for such seemed to be his vocation at the Hôtel de Pënâfiel. It is needless to say that this immense establishment contained everything one could imagine that was sumptuous and elegant.

The chevalier was a great connoisseur, and his apartment was filled with every sort of curiosity. He showed me his intaglios, which were remarkably beautiful, and we talked of pictures and antiquities.

It was nearly one o'clock, when there was a knock at the door, and the *valet de chambre* of Madame de Pënâfiel came from his mistress to ask the chevalier for the green album. Don Luiz opened his eyes very wide, and said that he had not the album, that he had given it back to madame la marquise a month ago. The servant went away, and we continued our conversation.

Very soon there was another knock; the *valet de chambre* came back to say that madame la marquise wished to have the green album, the one that was ornamented with enamel, and which she was sure the chevalier had never returned to her.

Don Luiz knew nothing about it, he wished himself with the devil. He took a pen, and, asking my pardon, wrote a few words to his cousin, then he gave the note to the lackey. Again we resumed our interrupted talk. But again we were disturbed for a third time. Now it was Don Luiz's *valet* who opened the door, and announced "Madame la marquise!" Madame de Pënâfiel was dressed in a street costume, as if she were just going out. We rose, and I bowed respectfully.

"Really, my dear cousin," said she to the old chevalier, acknowledging my bow with a polite but very cold smile, "really I must want my album very badly to be willing to enter your alchemist's den; but I am sure you must have those drawings, and I am going out and would like to take them to Madame de ——, as I promised her I would, for I always try to keep my engagements."

There were new protestations on Don Luiz's part. He was sure he had returned the book. New researches took place, which led to nothing except my presentation to Madame de Pënâfiel by the chevalier.

It was impossible for me to say anything else but that I had long desired this honour, to which commonplace remark she answered, in a lofty way, that she received on Saturdays, but that she was always at home Wednesdays *en prima-sera*, and hoped I would not forget to come.

To this I replied by another bow, and the usual phrase, that it was too great a favour to be forgotten.

Then the chevalier offered her his arm to her carriage, which was waiting under the porte-cochère, and she drove off.

I never knew whether the chevalier was her accomplice in that forced presentation.

As I have said, Saturday was the day of general reception at the Hôtel de Pënâfiel, but Wednesday was the marquise's day of *prima-sera*. On these evenings she only received until ten or eleven o'clock the few friends who came to call before going to more formal entertainments elsewhere.

The next day but one would be one of these Wednesdays; I awaited it impatiently.

I forgot to say that I sent M. de Cernay the same day the two hundred louis that he had won.

CHAPTER XVII

PRIMA-SERA

Before starting for the Hôtel de Pënâfiel, I compared my present state of anxiety and distrust with the careless abandonment of my former life, and the days I spent with Hélène, when, no matter at what time I entered the old salon at Serval, I was sure of being received with pleasant smiles from every one.

Without dreading this interview with Madame de Pënâfiel, I knew that, although by common consent she was abused and calumniated, her salon was held in high consideration. It had great importance in the fact that its judgment was not to be impeached; right or wrong, its stamp was the valuation that would henceforth be accepted by the world.

The number of such salons, whose influence is so great that it irrevocably decides the rank of each individual in good society, is already restricted, and grows less every year. The reason is this, there are no longer any men who are willing to submit to its restrictions. The life of the club and the representative chamber, that other great political club, has swept away the life of the salon. Between to-day's speech and that of yesterday, between a game of whist or a revenge of two or three thousand louis, the anxious and absorbing interest in a race in which a favourite horse is entered for an enormous sum, there remains very little time for that intimate, flowery, and elegant conversation, which has no "echo in the country," as the monomaniacs of the tribune say, and helps you neither to win nor lose at whist or on the turf. And then the life of the salon is

a constraint. You must appear in evening dress to go and smother in a heated reception, and then be frozen while waiting for your carriage; whereas it is so much easier and pleasanter to stretch out in a soft armchair at the club, where you take a comfortable nap after dinner, from which you awake refreshed, and ready for an exciting game of whist, with no interruption but that of your cigar.

However, at the period of which I write, there were still a few houses where people conversed, and the Hôtel de Pënâfiel was one of these eccentricities.

Madame de Pënâfiel, among all her defects, was not what was called a bluestocking, but she was something worse, for she was a woman of real erudition, and a linguist, speaking three or four languages well, and having high scientific attainments, they said. If I had no better ground for believing all this than the word of a savant such as De Cernay, I should have had my doubts as to its truth, but I recalled a strange circumstance which was a proof of Madame de Pënâfiel's learning. Having been fortunate enough when in London to meet the celebrated Arthur Young, he had spoken to me with great admiration of a young compatriot of mine who was remarkably well read, although very pretty and in the best society. He said she had complimented him in the most intelligent and scientific manner on his famous theory of Interferences, but had attacked him on the subject of the syllabic or dissyllabic value he applied to hieroglyphics, in which his system was entirely at variance with that of Champollion.

This had struck me as very singular, especially when told me by such a great savant, and I had even made a note of it in my diary.

It was only on my return to Paris, and some time after having seen and heard of Madame de Pënâfiel, that I confusedly recalled the conversation of Arthur Young. I then got out my note-book, and found these details, as well as the name of the marquise.

All that I had heard of Madame de Pënâfiel was far from creating a pleasant impression. Her strange caprices, her artistic and perpetual desire to attract attention, her poses, which they said were constantly studied to the end of making a beautiful portrait of herself, her fantastic disposition, her scientific studies, were all unbecoming in a woman of her standing, and were all thoroughly distasteful to me.

Women who are constantly talked about and discussed from various points of view are rarely influential; all they really care for is to exhibit their various qualities. A woman who is serious, dignified, and calm, of whom nobody says or knows anything, can have much more influence and be more imposing.

And then a man who is naturally cold and reserved, even though he may not be a social success, will always be well received and perfectly on a level with the best company that he meets, for it is only the extremely agreeable or the very ridiculous who attract much attention.

I repeat, then, that it was without any embarrassment, but with a great deal of rather ill-natured curiosity, that I presented myself at the Hôtel de Pënâfiel one Wednesday, after the opera.

The house was kept up in a really princely way. In the vestibule, which was lofty and decorated with statues and immense marble vases filled with flowers, were several footmen, who wore powder

and liveries of blue and orange, braided with silver.

In a vast antechamber, where there were some fine paintings and magnificent Faïence vases also filled with flowers, was another footman, whose livery was orange colour with a blue collar, and braided on all the seams with silk passementerie, and embroidered with the crest of De Pënâfiel. Finally, in a third waiting-room, were two *valets de chambre* who, instead of being clothed in funereal black, wore suits of light blue plush, lined with orange-coloured silk and ornamented with crested gilt buttons.

When I was announced, there were with Madame de Pënâfiel five or six ladies and two or three men.

She was dressed in black on account of some court mourning or other, and had jet ornaments in her soft brown hair. I thought her dazzlingly beautiful and, though I may be mistaken, that she blushed beneath her rouge when she received me in her most formal and ceremonious manner. Perhaps it was the blush that made me think her so beautiful. After I had spoken a few polite words, the conversation which my arrival had interrupted was continued.

They were discussing the latest scandal, in which a woman's honour and two men's lives were at stake; the story was told in the most guarded language, but with so feeble an attempt at disguise, and such transparent withholding of details, that to have mentioned proper names outright would have been less significant.

As it almost always happens by one of those coincidences that luck brings about, just as every one was having his little word or sharp little witticism on the subject, the husband and wife who were being discussed were announced. This conjugal entrance

astonished no one. It was explained by an unexpected return to Paris, which necessitated a first visit.

Though every one who was in the salon was quite used to such impromptus, there was for a second an embarrassing silence, but Madame de Pënâfiel, with the most natural and perfect ease, addressed me as though we were continuing an interrupted conversation:

"You think then, monsieur, that this new maëstro's opera shows great promise?"

"It shows that he possesses a talent of unquestionable charm and melancholy, madame," I replied, quite naturally. "Perhaps the music is wanting in vigour, but it is full of sweetness and inexpressible grace."

"And pray who is the new musical luminary?" said, in an impertinent way, the young woman who had just entered the room, and who had been the subject of the previous discussion.

"M. Bellini, madame," said I, with a bow, wishing to save Madame de Pënâfiel the trouble of answering.

"And the title of the new opera, madame la marquise?" asked the husband, with an air of great interest, and unwilling to drop such a subject for conversation.

"I forgot to tell you, madame, that the name of the new opera is 'La Norma,'" I hastened to say, addressing Madame de Pënâfiel. "The subject is the love of a priestess of the Gauls." Madame de Pënâfiel immediately took up this theme, and enlarged on it in a very entertaining way, showing what a good

subject it was for a drama.

She then seized the opportunity of showing her erudition on the religion of the Druids; she talked about the Celtic stones, and I felt sure that, by an easy transition, she would soon arrive quite naturally at the syllabic value of hieroglyphics, and the discussion of which Arthur Young had spoken. It so happened that I chanced to be very much interested in this study, for my father, who was an intimate friend of M. de Guignes, had in his last years been a student of those alphabetical problems. I could have continued the conversation by drawing Madame de Pënâfiel into a discussion, in which she probably would have shone at my expense; but her pretension to being learned shocked me, and I warded off a hieroglyphic attack, which I thought imminent, by declaring my perfect ignorance of the subject, whose aridity I said frightened me.

My avowal of ignorance seemed to lift a weight off the minds of the other men present, because they would have been mortified at being left out of such a conversation, which would show an unusual fondness for studies that were quite beyond an ordinary education. I do not know whether Madame de Pënâfiel was provoked at my speech, which had lost her the opportunity of showing her learning, or if she believed my ignorance was affected. She did not pretend to hide a slight movement of annoyance, but, with great tact and infinite skill, she resumed her conversation about the Druids, passing from the Celtic inscriptions to the picturesque costume of the priestesses of the Gauls, their long, clinging robes, and the charming effect of the holly leaves in either blonde or brown hair. She brought down the conversation naturally from the scientific heights on

which she at first had started to the vulgar plains of every day costume, and then it became general. I admit that these transitions were skilfully managed by Madame de Pënâfiel, and that any one but a person who was well-read, clever, quick, and used to society, would have failed entirely.

I was far from being astonished, for I had not expected to find candour and inexperience, so as I was tired of so much senseless babble, and saw that this was not the opportunity I desired of studying and observing at my ease this person, who was said to be so singular, I rose to go out unperceived, as a new arrival was being announced; but Madame de Pënâfiel, near whom I was seated, said to me as she saw that they were bringing the urn and the waiters into the other little salon:

"Monsieur, will you not have a cup of tea?"

I bowed and remained.

That night there was a grand ball at the house of one of those easy-going foreigners, who, on the express condition that they may be permitted to remain in their own salons, and look on at the fête which is given at their expense, are willing to lend their houses, their servants, and their supper to the fashionable circle, who take it all as a matter of course.

Almost all of Madame de Pënâfiel's visitors were going there. I was hesitating about going also, when, as good luck would have it, Lord Falmouth was announced.

I had not seen him since his sudden departure for the House of Lords, where he went to speak on the India question which interested him. There was such a difference between his original mind and most of

the people I met habitually, that I decided to remain longer than I had at first intended at the Hôtel de Pënâfiel.

After tea, Lord Falmouth and I were left alone with madame la marquise. I have forgotten to mention that, in a far-off corner of the salon, behind the marquise's armchair, unobserved and forgotten, there was a distinguished young stranger, Baron Stroll, who seemed very timid, and who, to hide his embarrassment, had been for the last half-hour turning over the pages of the same album. The young baron was quite red, and his eyes were staring fixedly, while he held his hat tightly between his knees. Lord Falmouth called my attention to him, and said, in a low voice, with his mocking air, the well-known words of the Vizier Maréco to the Sultan Chaabaam, who was looking at the goldfish: "Let him alone, he has got occupation enough for another hour yet."

Madame de Pënâfiel had not noticed this stranger, for, as I say, he was seated behind the very high back of her armchair, beside a table that was covered with albums; for she did the honours of her salon too well to have neglected a guest. She began the conversation by graciously reproaching Lord Falmouth for not coming to see her oftener. To which he replied that he was unfortunately so stupid, and so terribly communicative, that out of a hundred persons that he wanted to converse with, only one or two were strong-minded enough to resist the contagion of his stupidity, and not to become as dull as himself after a quarter of an hour's conversation. It was a dreadful effect he had on most persons, and he deplored it with the most comical humility, and reproached himself for having made an infinite

number of victims, whose names he cited as living witnesses of his fatal influence.

"Ah, madame la marquise," he said, shaking his head in a disconsolate way, "I have done a great deal of mischief by my stupidity, as you can plainly see."

"There is no doubt of it, but you are very much to be blamed for having only half killed your victims, for they come to life again, and annoy people in every sort of way," said Madame de Pënâfiel, "and unfortunately the species is as varied as it is abundant and tiresome. Really there is nothing I know of that is more positively distressing than the presence of a bore; there is something in his dreadful influence that is painful to you, that saddens you in a twofold manner, as you might feel remorse for a wicked deed you had not committed."

"For my part," said Lord Falmouth, "I ask your forgiveness for the stupidity of such a trivial comparison; but we are not able to control our impressions. Well, when it happens that I have to submit to a bore, I feel exactly the same sensation as when I hear any one sawing a cork; yes, it is a sort of dull, grinding, squeaking, monotonous sound, which makes me quite understand the ferocity of Tiberius and Nero. Those tyrants must have been uncommonly bored by their courtiers."

"As far as I am concerned," said I, "one of my weak points is that I am very fond of stupid people. When you talk with a clever person, you are always filled with regret when you come to the end of the conversation. Whereas, if you are trying to talk to a fool, oh, there comes a moment, a precious, single moment which compensates you for more than you have suffered! It is the moment when a kind Providence takes him off your hands."

"The fact is," said Lord Falmouth, "that we should look upon such a trial in the light of discipline or mortification, and then it would be of benefit to us. But never mind, if, by saying a word, a single word, they could all be annihilated, would you be sufficiently philanthropic to speak that word, madame la marquise?"

"Annihilate them?" said Madame de Pënâfiel. "Annihilate them bodily?"

"Certainly, for they are already annihilated spiritually. I mean to annihilate them altogether, flesh, and bones, and cravat," said Lord Falmouth.

"In fact, that is all there is to them. But it would be a very violent remedy. Still, if by pronouncing a single word— It is very tempting," replied the marquise.

"A single word," I said to her,—"by pronouncing, let us say, your name, as they utter some sacred word to chase away an evil spirit."

"But it would be a dreadful massacre," she said.

"Very well, madame, but have we not just decided that stupidity is deadly?" said Lord Falmouth. "Then you need have no scruples, and afterwards you will be able to breathe more freely. You will find how much purer the atmosphere will be, cleansed of all its malarial germs, that bring on attacks of dismal gaping. You will be able to go freely and fearlessly everywhere."

"Come, I think I will be tempted to say 'Let there be no more bores,'" replied the marquise; "for, truly, it is a perpetual source of anxiety. One has to be always on guard as to what one is saying, and it is an intolerable annoyance. But, with all this folly, you

have reminded me of a very strange story that I lately read in an old German book, which might be taken for a touchstone, or thermometer, to measure human selfishness by, if every one would but truly answer the question asked in the story.

"The story tells of a poor student in Leipsic, who, in a fit of despair, invoked the wicked spirit, who appeared, and proposed to make this strange compact with him.

"'Every wish of yours shall be granted, but on this condition, that you pronounce aloud this word, *Sathaniel*; and that every time you utter the word one of your fellow creatures shall die; a man in some distant country shall die. You will not see him suffer, and no one in the world but yourself will know that the realisation of your desires has cost the life of one of your fellow men.' 'And may I choose the country, the nation of my victim?' said the student. 'Certainly.' 'Shake hands, master, it is a bargain,' said he to the demon. Now the Turks were besieging Belgrade at that period, and it was at their expense that the student satisfied all his wishes, which amounted to fifty or sixty thousand Turks. It is a very vulgar story," said the marquise, "but I should like to know if there are many human beings who, if they were assured of secrecy, could resist the temptation of pronouncing the fatal word, if they were sure of realising an ardently desired wish."

"It is simply what might be called a venial homicide," said Lord Falmouth; "and, as for me, if the wish was worth the trouble, if it were some impossible thing, as if, for example, it were a question of being honoured by your friendship, madame la marquise, I certainly would not hesitate at such a trifle as the life of some obscure inhabitant

of Greenland, for example, or a Laplander, because, as he is the smallest sort of a man, the sin would no doubt be less."

The marquise smiled and shrugged her shoulders, saying to me, "And you, monsieur, do you think that most men would hesitate very long between their wish and the fatal word?"

"I believe there would be so little hesitation, madame, even among the most honourable of men, that if in our golden age the wicked spirit should make such a proposition, the world would become a wilderness in eight days; and, perhaps, you, madame, you and Lord Falmouth and I, would be immolated by the caprice of one of our intimate friends, who, instead of taking the trouble of going all the way to Greenland for a victim, would treat us in a neighbourly way."

"But I have an idea," said Lord Falmouth; "suppose that the caprices and desires of humanity, by dint of satisfying themselves on the human race, had reduced the inhabitants of the world to two people in some far corner of this earth, a man who passionately loved a woman who detested him in return, and that Satan, according to his system, said to him: 'My terms are still the same; pronounce the redoubtable name, she will love you, but she will die, and you will have caused her death.' Should the man say the word?"

"To pronounce the word would be to prove that he loved desperately," said I to Lord Falmouth.

"Yes, if he were a good Catholic," said Madame de Pënâfiel; "because then he would have purchased love at the price of eternal punishment, without which it is only ferocious selfishness."

"But, madame, permit me to observe that, since there is a question of Satan, it is evident that they would both be good Catholics."

"You are quite right," replied Lord Falmouth, "and your observation reminds me of the joyful and hopeful exclamation of a poor man who was saved from shipwreck. On getting to land, the first thing he saw was a gallows. 'God be praised,' said he, 'I have landed in a civilised country.'

"But," said Lord Falmouth, "is it not enough to bring one to the verge of despair, to think that even now there are some people so happily, so wonderfully endowed, that they spend three or four hours every morning trying to see the devil,—evoking and invoking the evil one? I lately came across one of those credulous individuals in the Rue de la Barillerie. I assure you he is perfectly convinced that one of these days he will succeed, and I must admit that I greatly envy him his credulity, for he has an occupation that he will never become tired of; for a constant desire sustained by unfailing hope seems to me to come very near to perfect happiness."

"But," said I to Lord Falmouth, "did not your great poet Byron amuse himself with such follies at one time?"

"Byron! Ah, do not speak to me of that man!" exclaimed the marquise, with a look of dislike that almost amounted to hatred.

"Ah, take care, monsieur," said Lord Falmouth, smiling. "With no ill intention, you have called up a diabolical spirit, that madame la marquise will have to exorcise, for she detests him."

I was quite astonished, for I was far from expecting to find Madame de Pënâfiel an anti-Byronian. On the

contrary, everything that I had heard of her fantastic and bold character was quite in harmony with that disdainful and paradoxical genius. I therefore listened very attentively to the rest of her conversation. She continued, with a scornful smile:

"Byron! Byron! so cruel and so desperate! What a hard and wicked heart! When we think how, by some inexplicable fatality, every youthful mind, with its wealth of imagination, wastes itself in admiration of this scornful and insatiable demon, it is enough to convince us of the law of contraries."

"There is nothing truer than the attraction of contraries," said Lord Falmouth. "Does the charming little butterfly, for example, intelligent little aerial creature that he is, does he ever fail, so soon as he perceives a beautiful, bright, hot flame, to hasten with all the speed of a son of Zephyr and Aurora, and roast himself in an ecstasy of delight?"

"I cannot bear to think," said Madame de Pënâfiel, in a state of exaltation, that made her more beautiful than ever, "I cannot bear to think of so many noble and trusting souls being made for ever desperate by the malevolent genius of Byron! Oh, how well he has depicted himself in Manfred! Manfred's Castle, so dark and desolate, well represents Byron's poetry. It is his terrible spirit. You enter this castle full of confidence, its wildness and grandeur captivate your imagination, but when you are once within its walls, under the spell of its pitiless host, all regret is in vain; he despoils you mercilessly of your purest and fondest beliefs. And then, when the last spark of faith is extinct, and your last hope is torn from you, the great lord chases you away with an insulting smile; and should you ask him what he is to give you in return for all these riches of your soul, that he has

thus profaned and destroyed—"

"Madame," said I, allowing myself to interrupt her, "Lord Manfred answers, 'I have given you *doubt,—doubt,*—the wisdom of the wisest.' But," I added, being curious to see if Madame de Pënâfiel shared in my admirations as well as my antipathies, "if you have such a strong dislike to Byron, does not his noble country offer you an antidote to his dangerous poison, in Walter Scott?"

"Oh," said she, as she clasped her hands with almost infantile grace, "how charming it is, monsieur, to hear you speak thus! Is it not true that the great, the good, the adorable Scott is the counterpoise of Byron? Ah, when wounded to the heart you fly in despair from the terrible Castle of Manfred, with what grateful relief do you find yourself in the smiling and peaceful abode of Scott, that kind old man, so grave and so serene! How tenderly he receives you, how touching is his pity for you, how he comforts and consoles you! In what a pure and radiant light he shows you the world, exalting all that is noble, good, and generous in the human heart! He raises your self-respect as much as Byron has degraded it. If he can never restore your lost illusions, which, alas! is an impossibility, he can, at least, tranquillise and soothe your incurable grief by his beneficent stories. Is it not, monsieur, true glory to be as great as Walter Scott? Which man is more truly grand and powerful, he who afflicts or he who consoles? For, alas! monsieur, it is so easy to get people to believe in evil," added the marquise, with a grieved expression.

Though all this was very true and very well stated, it would have seemed too prearranged for a conversation, had there not been something else that

surprised me more.

No doubt every one has felt the same inexplicable sensation. It is this: you feel, for the space of one or two seconds, that you have positively seen or heard already the things you are seeing or hearing, although you have the absolute certainty that the place you see or the person who speaks has never been seen or heard by you before.

The opinion that Madame de Pënâfiel had just expressed on Byron and Scott gave me this strange sensation. It was so like my own that it seemed the echo of my own thoughts. At first I was almost stupefied, but reflecting that, after all, it was but a simple and natural comparison between two minds that were diametrically opposed to one another, I continued calmly, for I was determined not to be influenced by my feelings, although Madame de Pënâfiel had been very eloquent, and really seemed to feel what she said.

"No doubt, madame, the genius of Byron is very saddening, and that of Scott very consoling, and one seems very superior to the other; but these despairs and consolations are quite superfluous nowadays, for at the present epoch nobody is distressed or pleased by such trifles."

"How is that?" asked she.

"It appears, madame, that we no longer live in the age of imaginary joys and misfortune; we have come to the wise conclusion of substituting reality and material comfort for dreamy, foolish ideality and passion; so in all probability we are much nearer happiness than we ever have been before, for there is nothing more difficult, more impossible to realise, than the ideal, while, with a little common sense,

every one can arrange for himself a comfortable existence according to his own taste."

"Then, monsieur," said Madame de Pënâfiel, with some show of impatience, "you deny the existence of passion? You say that in our day it does not exist?"

"I was mistaken, madame, if I said that, for there is still one passion remaining, and only one, and in this one passion all others are concentrated. Its influence is tremendous; it is the only one which, being well managed, carries any weight in society nowadays; it controls our customs so completely that, though we are still a thousand leagues away from the gracious ways of the great period of gallantry and pleasure, the passion that I speak of, madame, is able to change every salon of Paris into a Quaker meeting or an assemblage of American citizens."

"How could that be?" said she.

"To be brief, madame, would you wish to see the strictest prudery reign in all conversation? Would you wish to hear endless invocations (by unmarried men, you understand) on the sanctity of marriage and the duty of married women? Would you wish to see the Utopia dreamed of by the sternest moralists realised?"

"For my part, I should like to see it once, just for a minute or two," said Lord Falmouth, pretending to be alarmed at the idea, "but that would be sufficient; I should utter a protest if it were to last any longer."

"Tell us what this passion is, monsieur," said Madame de Pënâfiel, "this passion that can perform all these miracles,—what is it?"

"It is selfishness, or the passion for material comfort, madame; a passion that can be translated by

a trivial and very significant word,—money."

"And how will you utilise the excessive love of money in the development of this excessive and threatening virtue, of which you have drawn such an exaggerated picture that I am still quite overcome?" said Lord Falmouth.

"Just as they do in your country, monsieur, by punishing every infraction of duty by an enormous fine. How else can it be done? In our epoch of materialism we no longer fear anything except that which touches our daily life, our pocket; this being the case, the system of fines applied to the maintenance of good morals will certainly be the most powerful social lever of the period. For instance, imagine that a confirmed, inexorable moralist was determined to put a stop, suddenly and brutally, to those weaknesses that society pardons,—a man entirely devoted to his sense of duty, or, if you like it better, take a man who is very ugly, very tiresome, and consequently very envious of certain charming sins that he has never been lucky enough to commit, but that he is determined to exterminate, —suppose that this blood-thirsty moralist is a legislator, and that one day in the halls of state he discloses a most deplorable state of affairs, and then demands and obtains, after some discussion, from the majority, whom you can, without any great stretch of imagination, suppose to consist of men who are also very ugly, old, and tiresome, the passage of a bill organising a secret police, destined to ferret out and unmask every act that threatens private life: imagine that finally a law is promulgated, which punishes by a fine of fifty thousand francs the tender crime whose victims fill our tribunals, and that the fine shall be doubled in case of a second arrest. This fine

is not to be offered in the shameful form of damages to the injured party, but employed, let us suppose, in the education of abandoned children,—so that the superfluous would help the necessitous."

"And do you believe, monsieur," cried the marquise, "that the ignoble fear of paying a given sum would render the majority of men less attentive, less devoted to women?"

"I believe it so firmly, madame, that I can give you an excellent sketch of the two very different aspects of a salon, filled with the same persons, on the day before and the day after the promulgation of such a law.

"The day before you would see all the men smiling, expansive, charming, using their softest tones and tenderest looks to prove by every grace of look and accent the amorous principles of such logic as this: 'Whatever is pleasant is right.' 'Discretion is the only virtue.' 'Your heart was not consulted when they gave you your tyrant.' 'There are certain feelings that are inevitably sympathetic."Your soul longs for its twin sister, take my soul.' (This piece of a soul, by the way, has enormous moustaches, or side-whiskers.) 'When it has reached a certain stage, guilty love becomes a sacred duty,' etc. I will excuse you, madame, from hearing a variety of other excellent reasonings, which generally do not deceive those that hear them, any more than those that give utterance to them.

"But on the evening after the promulgation of this terrible law, when there would be danger of the fine, what a difference! As all those pretty paradoxes of night before last might end, after all, in the payment of a heavy sum, and as that sum would reduce by just so much the luxury and comfort which are the

necessities of an essentially material life, while love is only a delightful superfluity, you would see all the men suddenly become serious, pompous, dignified, frightened at the slightest attempt at conversation from a woman, if she was at all removed from the rest of the company; prudish and scared as schoolgirls before their head teacher, you would hear them cry out aloud so that every one could hear them, and in their most solemn voice, the voice that they use when they make political speeches, refuse requests, and later scold their wives and children with: 'After all, good morals are the foundation of society.' 'We must draw the line somewhere!' 'There are some duties that a gallant man ought to respect.' 'I had a mother once.' 'I shall be a father some day.' 'There is no real pleasure except in the satisfaction of conscience,' etc. For I will spare you, madame, a quantity of other formulas more or less moral, which, as soon as the question of a fine came up, might be translated thus: 'Ladies, I know that you are all as charming as possible; but I love my opera box, my house, my table, my stable, my gaming, my journey to the summer resorts or to Italy, my pictures, my bric-à-brac; shall I risk all of these for a few moments of felicity, as rare as it is intoxicating? No!'"

"It is infamous," said the marquise; "out of a hundred men, not one would answer in this way."

"Permit me, madame, to be of an absolutely opposite opinion. I believe the men of our day are pitilessly attached to material comfort, and willing to sacrifice everything else to it, and, more than all the rest, that which is called love."

"You believe that?" said Madame de Pënâfiel with profound astonishment. "You believe that? And how

old might you be, monsieur?"

The question was so strange and so impolite, besides being so difficult to answer without being extremely ridiculous, that I bowed respectfully and said at haphazard:

"My star was so favourable, madame la marquise, that I was born the day before your birthday."

Madame de Pënâfiel drew herself up with a haughty expression of impatience, and said, in a lofty way, "I was speaking in earnest, monsieur."

"And it is in all seriousness, madame, that I have the honour of answering; the question that you were so kind as to ask is too flattering a proof of your interest to allow me to answer it in any other way."

"But how do you know my age?" she asked me, with surprise and curiosity.

"It will be many long years from now, madame, before this secret need give you any uneasiness, and, by that time, I hope that I shall have been so long in your good graces that I shall have forgotten all about it."

At this very instant a terrible sneeze, all the more sonorous from having been restrained, was heard in the direction of the young stranger, who, as Lord Falmouth had predicted, had been turning over the pages of the same album for the last hour, in profound silence. The noise caused Madame de Pënâfiel to start with surprise, and she turned her head quickly, when, to her great consternation, she saw M. de Stroll. But she made such profound and gracious excuses to the young baron for her apparent neglect of him, that he found her conduct quite natural, and seemed rather pleased to have sneezed

so loud.

It was now late, and I left.

I was waiting for my carriage in one of the entrance salons, when Lord Falmouth and M. de Stroll came to find their servants.

"Well," said Lord Falmouth to me, "what do you think of Madame de Pënâfiel?"

Whether from false shame at having to acknowledge myself already under the spell, or from pure dissimulation, I answered, pleasantly: "Madame de Pënâfiel appears to be extremely unassuming in manners, she possesses a candid mind devoid of all pretentiousness, an enchanting personality, and has an innocent way of saying just what she thinks."

"Upon my word," replied Lord Falmouth, with his grave irony, "your judgment is a true one, as true as that we are now standing at noonday in the middle of a thick forest listening to the songs of the birds." Then he added, seriously: "The most infernal thing about her is her falseness. I am quite sure that she does not believe a word of all she said to us about Scott and Byron, for she has about as much heart as that," said he, striking with his cane the base of a colossal Japanese vase filled with flowers that he was standing near; "or rather," he said, taking from the vase a beautiful crimson camellia, and holding it up to me; "she resembles this flower,—colour and brilliance, nothing more; no more soul than this flower has perfume. After all, though, when she wants to, she can talk very charmingly. But people say you should hear her when one of her guests has just left,—how she can take them to pieces! One of these days we will play at that game; you shall go out and I will stay behind, then I will tell you all that

she has said about you, and you shall do as much sometime for me."

Just then our carriages came up. Lord Falmouth went off to the club to make a night of it; after a moment's hesitation as to accompanying him, I decided to go home.

In spite of Lord Falmouth's opinion and what I myself had said about Madame de Pënâfiel, I had quite agreed with her, and what she said about Byron had made a deep impression on me; for I thought that I detected hidden under this discussion, the signs of mental anguish and heartfelt loneliness, and this gave me much to reflect upon, because I believed I had perceived something of her true character, which was absolutely in opposition to all that they said about Madame de Pënâfiel.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON WHAT THE WORLD SAID AND ON COQUETRY

There is nothing more difficult, not to say impossible, than to successfully defend in society a poor young woman, who is so unfortunate as not only to occupy a prominent position both as to name and fortune, but who is beautiful both in face and figure, has a remarkable mind, is talented and extremely well informed.

When once she has unchained the world's wrath, on account of this insolent reunion of advantages,

her every action, the best as well as the most unimportant, her virtues, her graces, all are criticised with the most artistic perfidy, and people are only lenient in regard to her defects.

There is nothing more saddening than to observe the contrary effect of this persistent belittling. If the woman against whom such unanimous hatred is shown is the mistress of a splendid home, every one is eager to go there, no effort is too great to gain admittance to her circle of friends. Is she considered too fast? What does it matter? All the mothers take their daughters to call on her, no doubt in order to return good for the evil that they themselves have done, and to show that they pay no attention to the scandals they themselves have spread abroad.

These remarks are spoken apropos of Madame de Pënâfiel, whom I began to see quite frequently, and very soon saw every day.

As it usually happens, I found her totally different from the descriptions that had been given me. She had been described as haughty and imperious, I had found her only dignified; ironical and scornful, I had never seen her so except towards low-lived persons, who well deserved such treatment; unkind and hateful, she had seemed to me kind and pitiful; fantastic, capricious, and morose, I had seen her sad, but very rarely.

Now this marked dissimilarity between what I heard and what I saw, ought it to be credited to the deep dissimulation with which Madame de Pënâfiel was accused? I do not know.

I do not know even if I was in love with Madame de Pënâfiel, but I felt for her, as I became more and more intimate, a very lively interest, caused as much

by her fascination, her mind, by the simplicity with which she admitted certain defects, as by the persistent way that she was continually attacked, a persistence that had cost me many violent discussions.

It is not without a certain amount of vainglory that I recall this circumstance, for nothing is more frequent than the cowardly way that we join the backbiters, when they tear our absent friends to pieces.

Besides, I had begun to discover the falseness of the many absurdities that at first I had given credence to.

Thus when I knew her well enough to speak confidentially, I told her frankly that her presence at that fatal race, where M. de Merteuil had been killed, had appeared strange to every one.

With a surprised look she asked me why?

I told her that, as M. de Merteuil and M. de Senneterre were both her intimate friends, her devoted admirers indeed—

But without giving me time to finish, she exclaimed that it was an outrageous falsehood, that she received M. de Merteuil and M. de Senneterre only on her days of reception; that she hardly ever saw them in the morning; that she was ignorant of the danger they ran. Knowing nothing of their wager, she went to the race as she had gone to many another, and only was prevented remaining until the finish because she was cold.

In reply, I told her of the rumour and the public opinion in consequence of it, which was as follows: "She had known both Messieurs de Merteuil and de

Senneterre to be in love with her, having inexcusably encouraged their rival attentions; she was thus responsible for this murderous challenge, and her careless departure from the ground before the end of the race had given as much offence as her presence on the race-course; finally, her appearing that night in a conspicuous box at the Opéra was the height of disdainful heartlessness."

Madame de Pënâfiel could not at first believe these miserable stories; when I had convinced her she was greatly distressed, and asked me how it was that well-bred persons could be so stupid or so blind as to think that a woman of her position and breeding could play such a part.

To this I answered that good society resigned itself with most Christian humility, and, forgetting all the experience that the world had taught it, was willing to descend to the most stupid and commonplace credulity, the moment there was any question of believing a slander.

I then told her the story of Ismaël. She said that she had in fact noticed and admired, as an artist might have done, his characteristic costume, and that for an instant she had been afraid of seeing the unfortunate man thrown from his horse. But when it came to the rest of the tale, and the conviction of the public that she had asked to have Ismaël presented to her, she burst out laughing and told me how she had said at the Opéra to M. de Cernay, who it seems was quite provoked, "Nothing nowadays is more vulgar than these Chasseurs and Heiduques; when you have shown off your lion sufficiently, and have had all the benefit you care for in parading him as a contrast to yourself, you can send him to me, and I will have him sit behind my carriage with a *valet de*

pied; it will be very original and something new."

"Very well, madame," said I, laughing too, "here is the rest of the story: While Messieurs de Merteuil and de Senneterre were risking their lives to please you, with perfect indifference to their rash struggle, whose object you knew, you had no eyes for anything but the Turk, your admiration was expressed in a thousand signs and transports that were almost frenzied. When that evening you appeared at the Opéra, after the death of one of your devoted admirers, your first thought was to beg M. de Cernay to present Ismaël to you. Finally, taking the advice of your friends and wishing to escape the deep impression that this savage foreigner had made, you had the resolution to leave town suddenly, and take refuge way off in Brittany."

Madame de Pënâfiel asked me if it were not M. de Cernay who had started these false and slanderous reports. As I attempted to elude this question, though there was no reason why I should protect the count, she said, after an instant's reflection:

"Confession for confession. M. de Cernay, after having paid me some attention, ended by making me an offer of marriage, which was not accepted any more than a declaration of love would have been. For as I had no desire to do a foolish thing, I could not think seriously of committing such an irreparable mistake. As M. de Cernay had no more reason to be vain of my refusal than I had to be vain of his offer, the secret was scrupulously kept between us; now that he calumniates me it shall be a secret no longer; use it as you see fit and 'give your authority,' as my venerable friend, Arthur Young, would say. Now as to this hurried journey to Brittany, you may have noticed at the Opéra that night that I spoke rather

sharply to that poor Cornelia, my lady companion. I had told her the day before that I meant to start for the country. She began to make a thousand objections, on the weather, the cold, etc., and ended by making me angry, because if the weather was good enough for me it was good enough for her. Now, it was not absolutely to escape the terrible Turk that I was going away, but simply to pay a last visit to the woman who had nursed me. She was ill and believed herself dying unless I would come to see her, which she thought was the only thing that would restore her to health. As I am very much attached to this excellent creature, I started off, and what is very strange is that now she is perfectly well again, so I am not at all sorry that I was courageous enough to undertake such a tiresome journey in midwinter."

I made Madame de Pënâfiel laugh when I told her how deeply I had pitied her companion for having to submit to such tyrannical treatment, etc., the night I saw the poor young girl's annoyance at the Opéra.

I only cite these particulars, as I believe them to be specimens of the absurd rumours which are often absolutely credited in the social world, and which are capable of doing so much injury.

I could not understand this perpetual resentment against a young woman who, the more intimately I became acquainted with her, the less I understood her character; for, although she was always agreeable, and possessed a singularly cultivated mind, she was frequently paradoxical, and had some pretensions to scientific knowledge (this was considered one of her failings). Moreover, she very rarely showed any genial cordiality or real enthusiasm.

As to her innermost sentiments, she appeared to be constrained or oppressed, as though weighed down by some sad secret; then, again, she would evince traits of deep-felt commiseration and kindness, which did not seem spontaneous or natural, but, rather, the result of comparison or the recollection of some great misfortune, as though she said, "I have suffered so much that I am worthy of compassion."

At other times she gave way to the most violent explosions of contempt for all these spiteful and envious persons, and would break forth with the most cutting sarcasms, sparing no one. This was one of the reasons of her having so many bitter enemies.

A circumstance that I thought strange was that, in spite of all that was said about her levity, I had never seen a single man who appeared to be on terms of intimacy with her, or any one in whom she could be supposed to take any affectionate interest.

If, then, I loved Madame de Pënâfiel, it was not with that fresh, pure, passionate love I had felt for Hélène, it was a sentiment in which love and curiosity were strangely allied to distrust; for, although I condemned the absurd calumnies of the world, I was often quite as foolish and quite as unjust as other people.

Although I had seen Madame de Pënâfiel constantly for nearly three months, I had never breathed a word of gallantry. This was as much through calculation as distrust. I had found her to be so essentially different from the portrait the world had drawn of her, that I could not help thinking at times of what I had heard, and wondering if she were as false as she was accused of being. Therefore, I wished to study her more fully, before allowing myself to be carried away on the current of a

declaration, whose refusal I did not wish to risk, for I am ready to declare that Madame de Pënâfiel was very seductive.

Among her other delightful faults, what charmed me most was her coquetry, which was quite peculiar.

It was not shown by any pretended demonstrations of solicitude, or by a flattering way of receiving a friend, flattery which is usually as deceptive as it is encouraging. No; her nature was too proud and independent to permit her to stoop to such means of winning admirers.

Her coquetry was entirely in the perfect gracefulness that she wished, and knew how, to impart to her every motion, to those poses that were apparently the least studied. No doubt all that grace was calculated, reasoned out, if I may say so, but habit had so harmonised the enchanting art with the native elegance of her manners that it was impossible to gaze on anything more charming. Besides, when it is a question of exquisite manners, naturalness can never bear a comparison with studied politeness, any more than the pale wild flower of the eglantine can compare in size, colour, and perfume with the cultivated hothouse rose.

Madame de Pënâfiel admitted, with delightful sincerity, that she took the greatest pleasure in dressing beautifully and tastefully, so that she might look pretty; that she loved to see her graceful attitudes reflected in a mirror; and that she did not see why a woman should be ashamed any more of adorning her body than cultivating her mind,—that people should study how to take an elegant and proper pose as well as to speak properly and wittily.

She declared that she practised these graces more

to please herself than others, who, she said, never knew how to flatter her properly, while she herself knew exactly how much she was entitled to; so she preferred her own admiration, and always craved it.

One would scarcely believe to what a point Madame de Pënâfiel carried this art of making pictures.

Thus, as she was very fond of painting, she had a sort of parlour, which was at the same time a salon, library, and studio. It was arranged with perfect taste, and here she preferred to receive. According to the way she felt, her toilet, or the events of the day, by means of shades and a clever combination of old stained glass windows, the room would be more or less lighted, and with the most admirable and poetical knowledge of light and shade and the many intelligent resources of artistically opposed colourings.

For example, if she were nervous and pale, and all clothed in white, her beautiful brown hair with its golden gloss arranged in bandeaux, if she happened to be seated in a half light, which fell from above, and threw great shadows in the apartment, you should have seen how this dim light, falling on her fair forehead, her pale pink cheeks, and her ivory throat, left all the rest of her face in a marvellous half-tone. Nothing could be lovelier to look at than such a white and vapoury figure, shining in soft light upon a very dark background.

Then, besides this, carefully arranged light would glitter here and there like sparks of fire, on the gilded carving of an armchair, on the glossy folds of some piece of satin, on the tortoise-shell and mother-of-pearl of a piece of furniture, or on the polished surface of the porcelain vases that were filled with

flowers. The light thus distributed not only gave the appearance of a charming picture to this elegant figure, but to all its surrounding accessories. This manner of lighting an apartment pleased me very much, because it coincided with my own ideas, for, if there is anything shocking, it is the complete ignorance, or the deplorable neglect architects show in this matter.

Thus, without taking into consideration the style or the epoch, or, if a woman is concerned, her appearance or the type of her beauty, an architect thinks he has done everything, and has done it to perfection, when, by means of two or three enormous windows, ten feet high, he has thrown a dazzling sheet of light from every side of a room, enough to blind one. Now in this prodigal and unskilful way light is neutralised, and loses its effect; it neither shows off pictures, materials, nor sculptures, because, shining indifferently on all, it gives value to none.

In a word, as résumé, it seems to me that an apartment—not a place of reception, but of intimacy—should be lighted with as careful study, as much art, as though it were a picture.

Therefore, a great many things must be sacrificed in the shadow and the half-tone, in order to bring out the high lights. Then the eye and the mind are refreshed and rested, as they gaze with pleasure, love, and a sort of poetic contemplation, on such an interior.

It is a real picture, a living picture, that we admire as though it were painted on canvas.

But it needs a certain elevation of the mind, a certain instinctive ideality, perhaps an exaggerated

sense of the beautiful, to cultivate this domestic art, and find in it the constant sources of meditative enjoyment, which are incomprehensible to most people.

If I insist upon speaking of this peculiarity, it is because I was much pleased with this similarity in Madame de Pënâfiel's tastes with my own, and it showed her coquetry in such a way that I loved her to adoration.

I remember that nothing angered me more than the rudeness of all the men of her acquaintance, who were all perfectly furious on the subject of what they called her intolerable and hateful coquetry. It was, they said, with strange ill-nature, it was a ridiculous pretension on her part, a sort of wager that she had made with herself, to be always gracious and charming. Never was she to be seen unless she was exquisitely dressed; all was prearranged and studied out, from the dim light to the colouring of the curtains, which harmonised with her complexion as though she expected to clothe herself with them. And then, oh, horror! on her writing-table there were natural flowers in a vase, and, could you believe it? they were chosen to match the colour of her hair, as though she meant to wear a head-dress of natural flowers! But that was not all. She had a foot as small as a child's, the finest arms that ever were seen, and an exquisite hand. Well, was it not intolerable? No one could help noticing and admiring her foot, her arm, or her hand, for she was so clever that these charms were always in evidence. It was odious, scandalous, not to be put up with.

Now, even if all this were true,—and in a certain way it was true,—could there be anything in the world more absurd or idiotic than to hear a lot of

men, dressed in the careless and even untidy way that is permissible nowadays for morning visits, and who went like caterpillars—an old expression that might be revived—to pass an hour at a lady's house, to hear them, I say, complaining bitterly because she had received them surrounded by all that taste, art, and refinement could add to her natural graces?

For my part, on the contrary, I took the greatest pleasure in these delightful coquetries of Madame de Pënâfiel, in the contemplation, even though it were simply as a work of art, of such a delicious living picture, which was sometimes so animated, sometimes so sad and languishing.

I forgot to say that among the most violent detractors of Madame de Pënâfiel were several young Christians of her acquaintance. Since I have written these words, they require some explanation; for the young Christian of the salon, a pretentious and grotesque type, that will soon be displaced by another equally ridiculous, deserves to be properly described, so that his exhilarating personality may be handed down to posterity.

CHAPTER XIX

ON PARLOUR CHRISTIANITY

Parlour Christianity is divided into two classes: the first, pretentious and grotesque, and the second,

respectable, because its members have at least an exterior, a language and manners that are not in too ridiculous a contrast with their specialty.

These mundane apostles can also be divided into two sorts,—the young Christian who dances, and one who does not. This classification will be sufficient to enable one to recognise them at a glance.

The first, the dancing Christians, are more or less plump and rosy, curled, frizzled, cravated, stiffened, starched, and perfumed. They are the beaux, the cavaliers, the lions of parlour Christianity, of tea-table Catholicism; they eat, drink, talk, laugh, sing, shout, dance, waltz, galop, dance the cotillon and mazurka, and make love (when they get a chance) as enthusiastically as the most austere Lutheran or the most hardened sinner. Some of them, remembering that David danced before the ark, have even gone so far as to study the cachucha, no doubt with a view of rendering Christian homage to that adorable dance, which is so popular in Spain, the most Catholic of countries. Some of them, however, more strict than these, before consenting to rival the most agile of the "Majos," have demanded that cachucha shall be rebaptised "the inquisition." The question is now under consideration.

However this may be, when we see these young apostles in kid gloves and high pompadours arrive, all panting, from a galop, and abandon themselves to a delirious waltz, devouring their partners with their eyes; when we see them afterwards trying to forget or remembering their charming partners in the exciting intimacy of the Pierettes of the Bal Musard, we can hardly believe that they are very much more Christian than Abd-el-Kadir.

But thanks to certain indiscreet revelations on the

topography of divine religions, to certain compromising confessions as to the duration of eternal punishment, and more than all, by their triumphant fatuity, we divine, we almost can see the supernumerary angel under the terrestrial veil of these young Christians.

The only thing I can reproach them with is that they do not take more pains to conceal the fact of their intimacy with Jehovah, their hand-in-glove acquaintance with a kind Providence, that they have lots of influential friends up there, and that the seraphim are their most humble servants.

But, while waiting orders to return to the King of kings, who, in a moment of generosity, kindly loaned us these plump cherubs to lighten our sorrows, these young Christian dancers practise our profane joys faithfully, without, however, neglecting their sacred pleasures. In fact, the young Christian dancer should possess his chronicle of church and sacristy, as an habitué of the Opéra keeps his record of all that goes on behind the scenes. The dancing Christian should know all the fashionable preachers, their manners, their habits, anecdotes of their private life; should be able to tell how the Abbé —— does not write his own sermons; how Abbé —— has ousted the Abbé ——; how Abbé —— is very graceful or very awkward when he preaches; how rudely one of the vicars of St. Thomas of Aquinas squabbled with his curé; how some pious soul discovered, on the hat of a lady who is no longer young, but youthful looking and well preserved, several yards of splendid old lace that she herself had offered to the jovial curé of S ——, to make an altar cloth for his church. The dancing Christian should, in a word, know which are the best places in church to see and hear the

preacher; he must never lose the first hearing of a sermon or a conference, and must always be on hand afterwards, to report as to its success or failure, exactly as though it were a new opera that was under discussion.

Thanks to this perpetual haunting of the pulpit and the sacristy, and to the vigour of his calves, the young Christian dancer, who is recognised as such, enjoys all the privileges that are attached to his eccentric position.

Always a Christian, everywhere a Christian, at a ball, at the theatre, at the table, in the country, in town, standing, sitting down, in bed, dreaming or awake, he is intolerant, inquisitorial, indignant; he assigns you at once your place, either in heaven or hell; he fulminates fearful anathemas on the new Gomorrah while he drinks his punch, or cries "Babylon! Babylon!" as he sups like an ogre. Finally, with a terrible cry of desolation, he announces the near and threatening probability of the last judgment, and then goes off to dance the cotillon.

After which, worn out, overcome by the fatigues of the sermon and the ball, he goes to bed, and is very soon oppressed by a frightful nightmare. He dreams he is a father confessor, and that his last partner, with whom he discussed the honest modesty of Joseph fleeing from Potiphar's wife, comes to confess to him that she committed all sorts of ravishing sins with a Jansenist, two Calvinists, eleven deists, and she does not know how many atheists.

Far from the dancing Christians who flourish under the brilliant chandeliers, blooms the young Christian who does not dance. If the former are the Cavaliers of this parlour religion, the latter are its Puritans,—grave, pale, austere, thin, dismal, negligent, more

bashful than St. Joseph, it would give them real pleasure to cover themselves with ashes, but they go about dragging here and there their melancholy and their religiously pure and transparent lives. Taking no interest in our profane joys, which they witness but do not associate in, they are entirely taken up by their divine aspirations, their celestial visions; they are tolerant, kind, and full of pity for human error; these are the tender Fénélons of this mundane church, while the dancing Christians are the merciless Bossuets, for the dancing Christian is implacable, unapproachable, impossible. As soon as there is any question of human weakness, not in himself, but in another, there is no compromise, no mean term, it is the devil and hell, the devil with his horns and tail; it is perfectly clear, there is no escape.

The Christian who does not dance is extremely fond of purgatory. Extremes disgust his pious soul. He is scrupulous and charitable, he would hesitate a long, long time, he would need the proof of many dreadful iniquities, before he could bring himself to say positively, "Alas, my poor, dear brother, it appears to me that, unless you amend your ways, you will one of these days be claimed by the great devil of hell."

The dancing Christian, on the contrary, sends you off there at once and for ever, for the smallest little sin, with frightful assurance.

As for the future of the human race, the Christian who does not dance seems still to have some hopes that the world will be saved in spite of the crimes and errors of mankind. He presumes, though he will not assert it positively, that at the last judgment, there may be a general amnesty which will remit the sins of the damned. The Christian who does not

dance seems to count on the inexhaustible mercy of God, who is as kind as he is powerful, he says, and one might think that he was very well informed as to celestial politics; but the dancing Christian, who comes to take part in the conversation while eating an ice, overturns with a single word all these pleasant and comforting thoughts. Then he holds forth only threats and menaces. There is no more hope,—nothing but the smell of sulphur and bitumen which give you a foretaste of a future of eternal flames, eternal pitchforks, and everlasting gridirons. There is nothing left for poor human beings but to weep with despair and to moan over their fatal destiny, and so, while awaiting the terrible predictions of the young Christian dancer, they give themselves up to an endless galop, or an orgy in the two worlds of society, worthy of Belshazzar's feast.

CHAPTER XX

THE PARLOUR

I have now reached an event in my life that was very blissful and yet cruel. The thought of it still causes me many a sigh of pleasure and of pain.

I found myself one day, for no reason whatever, in a singular state of hatred and distrust. I felt greatly provoked with Madame de Pënâfiel, because I began to perceive that the thought of her influenced me more than I meant it should. This irritated me, for I feared that I had as yet formed no real opinion as to

her true nature, and it made me uneasy and apprehensive.

That day, when I went to the Hôtel Pënâfiel, contrary to the usual custom of the house, which was marvellously strict, when the footman had opened the door from the vestibule, I saw no *valet de chambre* in the waiting-room who could announce me. Before reaching the parlour, one had to pass through three or four other rooms, which had no doors, but only portières. Not expecting me, she could scarcely hear me coming, as the carpets were so thick as to entirely prevent the sound of my footsteps.

I had reached the portière which shut off the parlour, and could see Madame de Pënâfiel before she perceived me, unless the reflection from a mirror had betrayed my presence. I shall never forget my astonishment at the sight of her pale and woebegone countenance. She looked weary, sorry, hopeless, if a face is capable of expressing all three of these feelings at the same moment.

I can see her still. She usually sat on a little low armchair. It was of gilt wood, covered with brown satin embroidered in little roses. In front of it was a long ermine rug, on which she placed her feet, and beside it against the wall was a little cabinet of buhl, whose upper half opened with doors like a bookcase; these doors were half open, and within them I saw, to my great astonishment, an ivory crucifix.

She had probably slid from off her chair, for she was half kneeling, half seated on the ermine rug, her hands were clasped on her knees, and her face was turned towards the crucifix, while a ray of light that shone on her forehead showed how intense was her sadness.

Nothing could be more beautiful or touching than the sight of this young woman, surrounded by all the prestige of luxury and elegance, and yet crushed under the burden of an untold sorrow.

After my first sensation of astonishment I was lost in sad contemplation, and with much distress I attempted to imagine what could be the cause of her grief.

But alas! almost immediately, by some mysterious fatality my habitual distrust, added to Madame de Pënâfiel's reputation for duplicity, suggested that this scene was only a tableau arranged for my benefit. That hearing me approaching, she had assumed this melancholy attitude, from what motive I will explain later.

I know that it was absurd and ridiculous to believe in such a deliberate piece of coquetry when apparently overcome by such a weight of sorrow; but whether it was the result of her habitual desire to

appear charming, or was merely accidental, it would be impossible to see anything more perfect than the expression of her uplifted eyes, shining so beautifully through the limpid crystal of her tears; her slender, graceful form thus bending on the carpet, her swan-like throat with its lovely curve, and even her charming foot with its high instep, that was exposed by the disorder of her costume, as well as her ankle and the lower part of a delicate limb bound with the ribbons that fastened her black satin slippers,—the whole picture was ravishing.

After my first astonishment and my doubt as to the reality of her grief, my only feeling was one of admiration at the sight of so much perfection.

I hesitated for an instant, to decide whether I would enter suddenly, or whether go back to the door of the salon, and, by coughing slightly, give warning of my approach. Deciding on the latter, immediately I heard the doors of the little cabinet close suddenly, and in an alarmed voice Madame de Pënâfiel called out:

"Who is that?"

I advanced, giving many excuses, but saying how there had been no one to announce me. She answered:

"I beg your pardon, but as I felt far from well, I had ordered no one to be admitted. I supposed my orders had been carried out."

I could only offer a thousand excuses, and turn to go away. But she said:

"If the companionship of a poor nervous and miserable woman does not alarm you, I beg that you will stay. It would give me real pleasure."

When she told me to remain, and said that she had given orders to let no one in (which explained the absence of the *valets* in the waiting-room), I had no more hesitation in believing the scene of the crucifix was a piece of acting, and that the servant's orders were to let no one enter but me.

Of course this fine piece of reasoning was but the height of folly and impertinence, such a thing being quite improbable, but I preferred being conceited enough to think a woman of Madame de Pënâfiel's position capable of deceiving me by a miserable comedy, than to believe that she was suffering one of those terrible hours of mental agony, when we can only implore the aid and protection of God.

If for a moment I had reflected how often I, who also was young and in the enjoyment of every worldly pleasure, had been subject to just such an overpowering sense of causeless chagrin, the sad state in which I found Madame de Pënâfiel would have been quite clear to my mind. But no, my incarnate distrust and fear of deception paralysed my reason and generosity.

So without a moment's hesitation, instead of sympathising with such deep-felt grief, I came to the following conclusions, which, infamous as they were, seemed at the time perfectly probable. Alas! they were all the more dangerous for that very reason.

"Being so capricious," said I to myself, "Madame de Pënâfiel is provoked that I have not yet declared myself, not that she cares the least in the world for my devotion, but that it spoils her plans. Though seeing her constantly for the last three months, I have never spoken of love. I cannot discover any other admirer. If what the world says is true, it is not because she is virtuous, but because she delights in

mystery.

"She wishes to utilise me, and to be revenged for my pretended indifference, by using me as a cloak to hide her real love affair from the eyes of the world. It is a very easy thing,—finding her alone, overwhelmed with sorrow, the least I can do is to ask the cause of her distress, to offer what consolation I can, and thus to be led on to a declaration which would suit her plans, and make me her plaything.

"Or else, having discovered my sadness, and the spells of melancholy I often succumb to and of which I never speak, she simulates this fit of despair, so that from sympathy, I will be led to some misanthropic confessions about my lost illusions, my sad soul, etc., perhaps other things more ridiculous still, and then she means to deride my sentimental maunderings."

Now when I was once firmly convinced of such suppositions, I declared that nothing I could say would be too outrageous. I would show her that I would not submit to be used as her tool.

All these reasons were completely absurd, these cowardly, underhand motives. Now that I can calmly think it over, I wonder why I never thought that, to have arranged such a scene, she needed to be sure of the day and the hour of my visit, and that to take me as a cloak to hide another affection would compromise her as surely as the liaison she endeavoured to hide, finally, that the mere pleasure of forcing a confession of my trials, which I had the good sense to keep to myself, would certainly not be worth such a clever piece of dissimulation.

But when it is a question of monomania (and I think that my intense distrust amounted to monomania), wise and sensible ideas are the last that

ever come into our minds.

It was all in vain, then, that I had laughed at those wicked stories that had been constructed from the most ordinary occurrences. Without for a moment reflecting on my inconsequence, I was about to do what was a thousand times worse than forge a slander. I was about to calumniate that sacred thing, grief; to profit by what I had accidentally discovered. Involuntary witness of one of those hours of extreme sadness, in which noble souls give vent to their sorrow in the solitude of their chamber, I was about to question the truth of this sorrow which in secret had prayed to God for what he alone could give,—consolation and hope.

It was with such a spirit of doubt and sarcasm, and with the wicked brutality of those enemies of hers, whom I far surpassed in both of these qualities, that I seated myself, with a scornful air, on a chair that stood opposite to Madame de Pënâfiel, who had risen and resumed her seat. I remember almost every word we said.

CHAPTER XXI

THE AVOWAL

Madame de Pënâfiel remained very pensive for a few moments, and seemed gazing into vacancy; then, as though she had come to a sudden determination, she said with a familiarity that our three months of intimacy would excuse:

"I believe that you are my friend?"

"A most devoted one, and a very happy one to be able to tell you so, madame," I replied in a mocking way, to which she paid no attention.

"By the word friend I do not mean an acquaintance, a person who really cares nothing for us, a friend in the usual sense of the word; no, I think better of you than that. In the first place you have never uttered a word of gallantry to me, and for that I thank you sincerely; you have spared me that insulting species of courtship, which, I know not why, some persons think they have the right, or, perhaps, the permission, to honour me with." She said this with a sad smile. "You have enough tact, sense, and generosity to understand that a woman who has been the victim of odious calumnies finds nothing more offensive than such idle compliments, which only add fresh insult, because they are apparently authorised by the injurious reports that preceded them.

"I believe your mind is sadly precocious through bitter experiences. I know that, though you are much in the world, you have none of the world's petty hates and jealousies. I think you are neither conceited nor even vain, and that you are one of those honest men who never try to discover any hidden motive for a confession; also that you will take no thought of my behaviour should it seem strange. Besides," she continued, with an air of mournful dignity that impressed me deeply, "as to be taken into a woman's confidence is one of the ways in which an honest man is most honoured, I have no fear of speaking freely to you.

"You are kind and generous; I know that you have often defended me bravely and loyally, and, alas! I

am unaccustomed to be so defended. I know how one evening at the Opéra— Oh, yes, I overheard what you said," she continued, as she saw how astonished I was. "That was the reason I took the initiative in having you presented to me, and your reserved manner of accepting my hospitality gave me a high opinion of your dignity. Thus I have every confidence in you, and will consider you a true friend; for I must speak,—I must tell some one," she said, with an accent of despair,—"I must tell you—yes, you—why I am the most unfortunate of women."

She burst into tears and hid her face in her hands.

There was that in her words, and in the pitiful look that accompanied them, something so touching, that in spite of my ill temper I was moved to compassion. Instantly, though, returned the evil thought that this was only the rôle she was playing to force me to a declaration. I hastened to say, in a very supercilious manner, that I hoped I was worthy of her confidence, and if my devotion or my advice could be of the least use to her, I was entirely at her service, and other such commonplace and glacial speeches.

As she did not appear to notice the chilly way I received her complaint, I saw only another reason for thinking she was deceiving me, and had scornfully resolved not to be interrupted in her rôle, but to play it to the end, and I was excessively irritated.

Now that I know all, I can understand her inadvertence, but at the time it was a positive and aggravating proof of her duplicity.

She was inattentive, because the relief caused by the disclosure of a long hidden trouble is so exquisite that, overcome by the blessed effusion, we neither know nor care for the impression we produce.

It is only later, when the heart, already lighter, feels refreshed by this divine outpouring, that we look up hopefully, expecting to see in our friend's eyes some sympathetic tears, or some expression of commiseration.

Thus, when two friends meet after a long and painful separation, in the rapture of the first embrace neither thinks of noticing if the other is changed.

Having thus, as it were, broken the ice, Madame de Pënâfiel continued, after passing her hand over her tearful eyes:

"It would be very easy for me to explain the extraordinary confidence I have in you. I know that, although you have often defended me from slander, you have never attempted to reap any advantage from your loyal conduct; then the isolation in which you live, although moving in the gay world, your reserve, your superiority of mind, which is unlike others, and entirely your own, virtues and defects,—everything tends to my accepting you as a sincere and generous friend, to whom I can tell all my sorrows and all I suffer."

Without showing the least feeling, I replied that she could count on my discretion, which was trustworthy, and besides, as I had no one to talk to, it was all the more safe. "For," said I, "we are only indiscreet with our intimate friends, and I cannot reproach myself with having a single one."

"That," said she, "is the very reason why I am encouraged to speak to you as I do. I fancied that you also were alone, that you also had some secret chagrin that you dared not speak of, suffering from your isolated position as I do from mine, for, like

you, I have no friends; people hate me, they say wicked things about me, and why? *Mon Dieu!* have I deserved such treatment? Why is the world so unjust and cruel towards me? Whom have I injured? Oh, if you only knew! If I could tell you all!"

Her complaining seemed so childish and weak, her reticence so ill calculated to excite my curiosity, that, assuming a cheerful manner, I began an apology for the world in general.

"Since you give me permission to speak as a friend, madame, allow me to say that we must not be too fierce in our attacks on society. Ask yourself what we exact from society. Fêtes, excitement, smiles, homage, flowers, and gilded salons. With all these, the greatest possible latitude in regard to morals, and all the liberty we desire. Now, if society gives us all these, and you must admit that it does, has it not done its entire duty? Then why this constant complaining and railing at the poor world, when all we can reproach it with is its prodigality?"

"But you know very well that they are all false. Those smiles, that homage, those attentions, are all lies, you know it! If you receive at home, when the last visitor leaves, you say, 'Well, that is over!' If you go to a brilliant reception, as soon as your foot touches the sill of your own home you say again, 'Well, that is over!'"

"Thank Heaven, madame," I answered, pretending not to understand her, for she appeared surprised at my sudden conversion to mundane pleasures, "I assure you I am never so miserable as to be glad that a fête is over. If I ever say, 'Well, it is over!' on my return, it is because I am fatigued with enjoyment, of which, as I said, the world is only too prodigal. As to what you call its deceit and falsehood, it is perfectly

right in not being willing to exchange its graceful and pleasing exterior for one that would be horribly disagreeable. Besides, it does not really lie, it but speaks its own language, a language that we perfectly understand. Society is not selfish and exacting, but you are. Why should you wish to insist upon its changing its charming manners, and adopting your romantic ideas of friendship, of endless love, which would make it stupid, and which it does not care for? Trust yourself to it, enter gaily into its giddy whirl, and it will lighten your burdens, and make your life bright and joyful.

"If it lies about you to-day, what matter? To-morrow's falsehood will obliterate the story of to-day. Do you fancy it even believes its own stories? Does it not worship you? Is it not always at your feet? Why should you attach more importance to its words than it expects you to? 'Please and be pleased' is the world's motto. A very convenient one, and easy to follow. What more can you want?"

Madame de Pënâfiel sat staring at me in amazement, remembering, no doubt, the many serious conversations we had on this subject, and, surprised at the sudden levity I affected, she said:

"But when calm reflection succeeds to the bewildering pleasures of society, and we analyse these delights, how vain and unsatisfying they are. What are we then to do?"

"I am quite in despair, madame, at not being able to answer that question. I enjoy these pleasures that you apparently despise, and hope to enjoy them for a long time yet, and more than any one, for it is in the lightness and the ease with which the world's fetters are broken that their charm consists. 'Pardon the outrageous stupidity of the comparison,' as Lord

Falmouth says, but if ever the used-up expression, 'a chain of flowers,' was justified, it was in applying it to the obligations of society, which are as bright, as gay, as frail, and as easy to wear. But it is what the world calls love that charms me most, madame. It is the story of the phoenix who is constantly reincarnated, always more golden, more empurpled, and beautiful than before. Is not everything about this love charming, even its ashes, poor remains of love-letters that give out a perfume even as they are consumed? Is anything more delightful than the fact that in this adorable world love follows the divine law of metempsychosis? For, if to-day it dies of old age, after a month's duration, to-morrow it is born again more exquisite than ever, under another form, or for another form."

Madame de Pënâfiel could not yet understand why I should affect such gaiety, when she had just made me the confidant of her sorrows. I could see by her expression that my heedless and unkind words made a painful impression. At first she supposed I was joking, but, as I continued my speech with such an impertinent air of conviction, she knew not what to think, and, looking me in the face, she said, in a voice that was almost a reproach:

"Then you are perfectly happy!"

"Perfectly, madame, mundane life never appeared to me under the form of a more radiant and seductive vision."

Madame de Pënâfiel gazed at me for some moments with her great astonished eyes, and then said, in a firm and very decided way: "All that is not true; you are not happy; it is impossible that you should be. I know the truth; why will you not admit the truth, and then I could tell you—" Then she

hesitated and cast down her eyes as though she were on the point of revealing a secret.

"If it will give you the least satisfaction, madame," I replied, smiling, "I will hasten to declare myself the most unfortunate, melancholy, dismal, sophisticated of mortals, and from henceforth I will go about proclaiming only, Anathema! Fatality!"

After contemplating me for some moments with inexpressible amazement, she said, as though speaking to herself: "Can I have deceived myself? Was I mistaken?" Then continuing, "No, no, it is impossible, if you were as happy and indifferent as you pretend to be, would I not have known it instinctively? Would I have opened my heart to you and exposed my grief? Would I have risked a confession only to have derision in return? No, no, my heart whispered the truth when it said, 'Speak to him, tell him all, he is your friend, a friend who will pity you, for he also is lonely and wretched.'"

Her strange persistence in making me acknowledge some imaginary sorrow, in order to deride me afterwards, astonished and irritated me.

"Madame," I said, "why do you persist in believing me to be so miserable?"

"Why, why?" said she, quite impatiently. "Because there are some confessions that one never makes to the gay and careless; because, to understand the bitterness of certain woes, there must exist some sort of harmony between the soul that bewails its grief, and the one who hears its complaining; because, had I thought you careless, merry, flippant, happy in the enjoyment of the life of frivolity whose charms you were just now vaunting, I never would have dreamed of telling you why I am so wretched, or explaining

the secret of a life which must seem fantastic and bizarre. I would never have wished to tell you, as to a devoted and true friend, a brother, indeed, the reason I am so overwhelmed with sorrow."

I had reached such a point of irritation and distrust, that when she said the words "friend, brother," another idea suggested itself to me. Remembering Madame de Pënâfiel's reticence and a thousand other incidents which had passed unnoticed until now, I decided that her nameless sorrow, her disgust for everything, her weariness of the world, resembled very strongly an unrequited passion, and that she was in love, but that her love was not returned. I therefore believed her willing to make me the discreet confidant of her pains and longings.

This last hypothesis woke the most violent and mortal jealousy in my breast, and showed me plainly the extent of my love for Madame de Pënâfiel, as well as the ridiculous rôle I was expected to play if my last supposition were true.

I was about to reply, when, by moving the folds of her dress, she uncovered on the carpet at her feet a medallion, which had probably fallen from the buhl cabinet, when, in order to hide the crucifix (and, perhaps, the medallion as well), she had so suddenly closed its doors. It was a man's portrait, but I could not see the features.

I had no longer the least doubt, all my other imaginings vanished before this evident proof of Madame de Pënâfiel's duplicity; then, tortured by jealousy and wild with anger and wounded pride, I arose, and said, with perfect coolness:

"You are my friend, madame?"

"Oh, a very devoted and sincere one," she replied, with such a joyful look of gratitude.

"Then I can speak freely to you?"

"Speak as you would to a sister," she said to me, as she held out her hand, smiling, and pleased to find that at last we understood each other.

I took her beautiful hand and kissed it; then I continued:

"As to a sister? Well, let it be so, for no doubt, in this amusing comedy, you expect me to take the part of an honourable but stupid brother, who bemoans with his sister her unrequited love."

She looked wildly at me; her hands fell again on her knees; she was unable to utter a word. I continued:

"But we will not speak of that. I wish to tell you, as a friend, the various convictions which, thanks to my knowledge of your frankness, have passed through my mind since I saw you bowed at the foot of the crucifix. As for that charming pantomime, I must say that you were in a most artistic pose. Your eyes raised to heaven, your clasped hands, your tears,—it was a beautiful piece of acting; so, as I had no faith in your grief, but a great deal in your talent for mystification, I waited to see the comedy acted out."

"A comedy!" said she, not seeming to understand my words.

"A mystification, madame, of which I should have been the ridiculous object, had I been weak enough to offer to console you, or to make you any sentimental speeches on the subject of melancholy, misanthropy, lost illusions, and other strange nightmares that were supposed to be wearing my life

away."

"This is all very dreadful!" said she, as though stunned by a blow. "I am horrified, and yet I do not understand—"

"Then I must speak more clearly, madame. The confession you wished me to make was to serve as amusement for your friends, when you should tell it in your charmingly malicious way,—like the way you told me about M. de Cernay's offer of marriage."

"But what you are saying is horrible!" she cried, wringing her hands in alarm. "Could you believe—?"

"Yes, I believed it at first, but after your confession of disgust for the world, and a nameless sorrow, which I now can easily understand, I recognised that the second rôle I was to play was even worse than this; for, in the first rôle, I was to force a woman of your rank to play a comedy to puzzle me, and it was so well performed, that I was quite proud to serve in any capacity that would give you an opportunity of exercising your rare talent for serious comedy."

"Monsieur," cried Madame de Pënâfiel, rising to her full height, "do you understand that you are speaking to me?" But she suddenly changed her haughty accent, and, clasping her hands, said: "It is enough to make me insane. I beseech you, explain yourself. What is it that you mean? Why should I wish to puzzle you? What rôle did I wish you to perform? Ah, be merciful, and do not blight the only moment of confidence, the only appeal for sympathy that I have given way to for so many long, weary months. If you only knew."

"I know," said I, in the fiercest and most insulting way, as I approached her, so that I might place my foot on the medallion, and crush it,—"I know,

madame, that if I were a woman, and a man should scorn my love, I would rather die of shame and despair than to make the first comer, who cared nothing about them, such humiliating confessions, as weak and silly for the one who tells them as they are revolting and wearisome to the one who is obliged to hear them."

"Monsieur, how dare you be so audacious? How dare you to suppose—?"

"This!" said I, pointing with a scornful look at the portrait at her feet; then, pressing my boot on the medallion, I crushed the crystal.

"It is a sacrilege!" cried out Madame de Pënâfiel, quickly stooping to seize the portrait, which she took in her two hands, and turned on me her eyes that were blazing with indignation.

"It may be sacrilege, madame, but I treat your divinity as well as he treats you." Then I bowed myself out.

CHAPTER XXII

CONTRADICTIONS

After this interview, my anger and jealousy were for some hours so furious that the only thing I regretted was not to have been even more cruel and insolent to Madame de Pënâfiel.

By the violence of these transports of rage, I recognised the extent of my love for her,—a love whose depths I had not before sounded.

This medallion that I had discovered was to my eyes sufficient proof of the truth of my last suspicions, and if they were true, why should not those other stories be true, that had distressed me so at first? Now I no longer believed that she had wished to force me into confiding in her so that she might mock at me afterwards. I thought that another refused to requite the love that I would have given my life to obtain.

Then the calm of reason succeeded to the tumultuous excitement of passion; I could think calmly of my real position towards Madame de Pënâfiel. I had never alluded in any way to the great affection I bore her; why, then, should I be astonished at her confession, and the secret I thought I had discovered? How could I have treated her so? A woman, suffering perhaps from an unreturned affection, an incurable love, who was ignorant of my feelings towards her, and, relying on my generosity, came to me, if not for consolation, at least for my sympathy and pity. But my watchful jealousy and my anger were not to be quieted by these wise reflections. Who was that man whose portrait I had meant to crush? I had been in constant attendance on Madame de Pënâfiel for a long time, and I had seen no one that I could suppose to be the object of this unrequited passion that I suspected.

Her grief and her regrets, therefore, had existed for a long time. I understood now many singularities that were never clearly seen before, and that were so variously interpreted by the world, her sudden silences, her ennui, her disdain, her wild outbursts of

enthusiasm which some souvenir would evoke, and which, as often as not, ended in fits of regret or despair. There was some object in her coquetry and her constant desire to please, but when could this mysterious personage enjoy the sight of all these charms? I sought the answer to this enigma in vain, though I remembered the reticence of her last conversation, and her embarrassment when, no doubt, she was on the point of telling me her secret sorrow.

But who could be the object of this fervent and unfortunate passion? Of this love that had caused her for the last few weeks a more profound grief than ever before?

Loving Marguerite as I loved her, ought I to attempt to offer her the tenderest of consolations? Might I hope to supplant in her heart this painful souvenir? Would I succeed if I made the attempt, should I dare to try? Tortured by regret and despair, this unhappy woman, who was so noble and refined, had become so susceptible through suffering, and so shy, that, for fear of wounding her sensitive nature, I could not, without the greatest tact, speak to her of a happier future.

And yet, in asking me to bewail her sufferings, had she not with rare delicacy and tact understood that certain great misfortunes invest one with such dignity, such majestic sorrow, that the most devoted, the most loving are compelled to be silent, and to wait until the victim of this royal grief speaks first, as other princes are obliged to do, and says, "Come to me, for my misfortune is great."

What hope could I now have, even supposing

Madame de Pënâfiel to have given way to a secret liking for me when she addressed me with such confidence? My language to her had been so brutal, so strange, that it was impossible for me to imagine what the consequences might be.

Sometimes the very excess of my insolence reassured me. My answers had been so insulting, so violent, such a contrast to my former behaviour towards her, not to seem incomprehensible. Knowing her own merit, surrounded by every attention, and constantly flattered, she must have been more astounded than angered by my words, and she is probably still at a loss to discover the key to my conduct.

I am not sure whether this thought was inspired by hope or despair. But though I felt thoroughly ashamed of my impertinence, I ended by persuading myself that the outrageousness of my conduct, far from injuring my prospects, might be of great service to me, and, had I planned it all, I could not have managed it better.

In every love affair, the main thing, I think, is to excite and fill the imagination. To attain this end there is nothing more successful than a contrast. Therefore, it is above all things necessary that the impression you are to make should be essentially different from all those hitherto received, though at some later day, by your devotion and love, you may have to obliterate any bad impression you have made in the beginning.

If a woman has ordinarily but few friends, and is unused to flattery, there is no better way of captivating her mind, and afterwards her heart, than by the most extreme carefulness of her comfort, by the most delicate attentions; her vanity rejoices in

these thousand respectful and tender proofs of solicitude, to which she had never been accustomed. It is in this manner we can explain the frequent and wonderful success of men who are no longer young, but who have great refinement and persistence. Such men can completely subjugate young girls, and even young married women.

On the other hand, does a woman fill a high position? is she continually and basely flattered? Then severity and haughtiness often have a powerful effect on her. Some women have to be treated as clever courtiers treat princes, with a certain amount of firmness, even brusqueness. If the rude outspoken language does not please them at first, it surprises, astonishes, and often subjugates them; for it is such a contrast to the commonplace and stupid things they hear every day, from every class of men, that it is frequently far from injuring the man who dares to make use of it. Applying these thoughts to my position, I said to myself: "The hardness and disdain with which I received Madame de Pënâfiel's confidences, my anger at the sight of the portrait she attempted to hide, can easily be attributed to the violence of my love, which she has, no doubt, guessed by this time; now, rages caused by love are always excusable, especially in the eyes of the woman who is loved, and as Marguerite is high-minded and generous, she will understand how miserable I was when I believed her about to entertain me with a tale of her unrequited affection."

Sometimes, arguing in another way, I thought I might be mistaken, and that, after all, Madame de Pënâfiel was not in love with any one else. Then my old suspicions returned, and I wondered why I should ever have dismissed them. This portrait was

only one of the accessories of the comedy I accused her of acting. Then, as I had but a poor and mean opinion of myself, which was not improved by the realisation of my latest conduct, it was, I believed, impossible that Madame de Pënâfiel should have any sympathy for me, so I tried to explain her apparent confidence by assigning her the meanest motives.

This aroused my anger more than ever, and I applauded my insolence.

In the midst of this uncertainty and anxiety this restless and agonising fever, I received the following note from Madame de Pënâfiel:

"I am waiting for you. Come—you must—come immediately.

M."

It was nine o'clock, I started off instantly almost wild with joy. She had sent for me. I might still hope.

CHAPTER XXIII

MARGUERITE

On entering the room, I was overcome with astonishment at finding Madame de Pënâfiel in almost the same attitude as when I left her.

Her face was deadly pale, fearful to see; it was like a marble mask.

This sickly paleness that had so suddenly changed

her appearance, this expression of grief and resignation, touched me so deeply that all my reasonings and all my miserable suspicions vanished in an instant; it seemed as though I loved her for the first time with the most confiding and sincere love. I had no thought, even of asking her forgiveness for all that was hateful in my behaviour towards her.

I had no thoughts to waste on the miserable past. By I know not what magic, all I thought of now was how to console her for some dreadful grief of which I knew nothing. I was about to throw myself at her knees, when she said, in such an altered voice that I scarcely recognised it, although she attempted to give it an accent of firmness:

"I have sent for you, because I wished to see you for the last time, I wished to ask you the meaning of the strange words you said to me this morning,—that is, if you can explain them to yourself; I wished to tell you—"

Here her pale lips contracted tremulously, with that involuntary movement one feels when with tearful eyes an attempt is made to prevent sobbing. "I wished—" said Madame de Pënâfiel in a faint voice. Then as she could say no more, as she was weeping, she hid her head in her hands, and I only heard these words pronounced in a stifled voice, "Ah, poor unhappy woman that I am!"

"Oh, pardon—pardon, Marguerite!" I exclaimed, falling at her feet; "but do you not know how I love you—how I love you!"

"You love me?"

"Wildly, madly!"

"He loves me! He dares to say that he loves me!" she said, with indignation.

"This morning the secret of my soul was twenty times on my lips; but when I saw how unhappy you were—when I listened to your confession—"

"Well!"

"Well! I believed, yes, I believed, that it was love for another, a love that was not returned, scorned perhaps, and that such unrequited love was the cause of all the grief which you said was without cause and unreasonable."

"You believed that,—you!" and she raised her eyes to heaven.

"Yes, I believed it; and then I became wild with hate and despair, for every one of your confessions was a wound, an insult, an agony to me,—to me who loved you so fondly."

"You could believe that,—you!" repeated Marguerite, gazing on me with painful emotion, while two tears trickled slowly down her pale cheeks.

"Yes, and I believe it still."

"You believe it still. But you must think me infamous. Do you not know?"

"I know," I cried out, interrupting her, "I know that I love you to distraction. I know that another man causes you such suffering as I feel for you. Well, then, such thoughts have made me desperate, and I am going away."

"You are going away?"

"Yes, this very night. I did not dare to see you again. I need all my courage, and I will have it."

"You are going to leave me! But *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*—and I!"—cried out Marguerite, and she joined her hands in a gesture that was both suppliant and despairing, and then fell on her knees before a chair that stood near by.

How can I ever tell the joy that was awakened in me by that last word of Marguerite's, "and *I*!"

It was not simply an avowal of love that I heard, but the agonising cry of her broken heart, which no longer had any hope but in my affection.

Although I still believed her to be under the influence of an unrequited passion, I had not the courage to renew the scene I had witnessed in the morning. Still I could not refrain from saying, sadly:

"And that portrait?"

"Here it is," she replied, handing me the medallion, whose crystal was half broken off.

When I held the portrait between my hands I endured for a moment the bitterest anguish; I dared not look at the face, fearing to see the likeness of some one that I knew. When I had overcome this childish terror, I looked at it. It was the face of a stranger! I saw a noble and handsome face whose expression was both mild and severe; the hair was brown, the eyes blue, the whole physiognomy expressed refinement and grace; the costume was very simple, the only decoration being a broad orange ribbon with white edges, and a golden medal worn on the left side of the coat.

"And whose portrait is this?" said I, sadly, to Marguerite.

"It is the portrait of the man I most loved and respected,—M. de Pënâfiel."

She burst into tears and hid her face in her hands.

Then I understood it all, and believed that I should die of shame and remorse.

This one word tore the veil from the past, and showed me the frightful injustice of my suspicions.

"Ah, how you must despise and hate me!" I cried out in my distress. She gave no answer, but held out her hand that I knelt before and kissed with as much veneration as love.

After some time Marguerite became calm. Never in my life can I forget the first look she gave me when she raised her tear-stained face towards mine; in that look there was reproach, pardon, and pity.

"You have been very cruel, or else out of your mind," said she, after a long silence, "but I cannot be angry with you. I should have told you everything; twenty times at least, I have tried to do so, but I was afraid, you were so ironical and cold, your sudden and extraordinary conversion to the pleasures of the world,—everything repelled me."

"Ah, I believe it, I believe it, how can you ever pardon me? But, yes; you will forgive me when I tell you how much I have suffered by this frightful suspicion. Ah, if you knew how unjust and hateful grief can make a man! If you knew what it was to say, 'I love her to distraction, I idolise her, there is not a charm of her mind, her soul, or her person that I do not appreciate and admire, she is for me all in all,—and yet another—' ah, can you not see how such an idea is enough to set one wild, to make a man wish to die? Think of it, and you will have pity

on me,—you will excuse because you will understand my rages, which I scarcely am ashamed of because I was wild from suffering."

"Did I not pardon you when I said to you, 'Return,' after that frightful morning?" said she, with the greatest gentleness.

"Oh, my life, my whole life shall be spent in expiation of this hour of folly. Marguerite, I swear that in me you will have the most devoted friend, the kindest brother; let me only come and worship you, let me come each day to contemplate in you the treasures of nobility, candour, and goodness that for an instant I misunderstood. You shall see that I am worthy of your confidence."

"Oh, now I believe you, and you shall know everything. I will tell you all, I will tell you what I have never dared to confide to any other; and yet you must not think that I am about to tell you any extraordinary secret. Nothing is simpler than what you are going to hear. It is only the proof of the saying, 'If the world can always discover false and guilty sentiments, it never believes there are any sentiments that are natural, true, and generous.'"

"Ah, what shame, what remorse must it ever be to me to have shared such stupid and malicious prejudices! Why did I not listen to the inward voice that said to me, 'Believe, have faith in her?' With what noble exultation could I now have said, 'I alone was able to understand her pure and generous nature!'"

"Comfort yourself, my friend, for I will teach you how to understand me. Does not that show that I have more confidence in you than you have in yourself? If I am willing to tell you all, does it not

prove that you are the only person whose good opinion I care for? So if I desire to explain to you the apparent singularity of my life, which has been so misunderstood, it is because I wish, I hope, in the future to be able to give utterance to every thought in your hearing. This avowal requires some knowledge of the past; listen to me, then, my story will be short because it is true.

"I was a very rich heiress, free to choose whom I wished, spoiled by the homage that was paid as much to my fortune as to myself. At eighteen I had never loved any one. On a voyage I made to Italy, with M. and Madame de Blémur, I met M. de Pënâfiel. Though he was still young, he was the Spanish ambassador to Naples at a time when political troubles were very complicated; this will show you what a superior man he was. When, in addition, he was handsome,"—here she showed me the portrait,—"with charming manners, high principles, an extremely noble character, perfect taste, superior education, appreciative sense of all the arts, an illustrious name and a large fortune, you will be able to know his worth. I met him, I appreciated him, I loved him. The incidents of our marriage were very simple, for all interests were united. Only, soon after our first interview, he begged me to tell him if I authorised him to ask for my hand, as, knowing that I was entirely free in my choice, he wished to spare me any advances that my uncle might have to make in his name. I told him very innocently the great joy his proposal was to me, but I besought him to give up a career that would necessarily keep him always at a distance from France, and to promise not to live in Spain. His answer was noble and prompt. 'I will sacrifice cheerfully my dreams of ambition,' he said, 'but not

the interests of my country. When my mission here is accomplished, I will return to Spain to thank the king for his confidence in me, and render him an account of what I hope to be a successful negotiation; then I will belong entirely to you and do as you think best.' It was thus that he acted. He obtained all that his government had wished, went to Madrid to make his adieux to the king, returned, and we were married. I shall not speak again of our happiness, but I will now tell you that it was perfect and mutual. However, as in the eyes of the world the arrangements had been so suitable, the world would never admit that it had been a love match, but insisted that it was simply a marriage of convenience."

"That is true, at least it is what I have always been given to understand; indeed, it is generally believed that, while you and M. de Pënâfiel were always the best of friends, your existence was, as often happens, quite apart from his."

"How false! What an absurdity! but it must have been believed, for our happiness was so simple and natural that the world, not understanding true love, could not give us credit for it. Besides, we liked to make a sort of mystery of our felicity, so how could society, accustomed as it is to scandal, suppose for an instant that a young wife and a charming husband of equal position and birth could go the length of adoring and wishing to live for one another? Alas! though, nothing was ever more true."

"Now, at last, all is explained clearly to my mind. Do you remember the absurd and malicious interpretation of that race and the story about Ismaël?"

"Of course I do."

"Very well; your marriage was interpreted with about as much truth. As nothing was more evident than the irreproachableness of your conduct, slander arranged for you a mysterious subterranean life. I assure you it is astonishing to listen to. They even told of disguises and a little far away house in the suburbs."

"If I was not so sad, I would smile with you, my friend, at all these wicked falsehoods, but I have got to a period in my souvenirs when all is so cruel, so distressing," and she held out her hand to me, "that I have hardly courage enough to speak of it. After three years of complete and passionate happiness,—after—"

Marguerite could say no more, she burst into tears, and it was some moments before she continued.

"Yes, yes, I know," said I to her as I knelt before her, "I know how admirable and devoted you were all that dreadful time. Now that I have looked into your soul, now that I know who it was that filled it, and fills it still with his souvenir, I understand how agonising such an eternal separation must be to you."

After a few moments of silence Marguerite began again: "Thanks, thanks, for understanding me thus. *Mon Dieu!* Since that dreadful moment this is the first time that my grief is not unbearable, my tears not bitter, for I can relieve my heart by speaking of my sorrows. I can tell how much I loved and how much I have suffered. Alas! while in the midst of so much felicity I needed no friend to talk about it, but since,—oh, since all this affliction has come to me I have been so lonely! If you only knew what a life I have led! Obliged to hide my grief, my sad regrets, as I used to hide my delights! To whom could I tell them? Who was there to console me? The world

sometimes has pity for a guilty love, but for a sacred sorrow like mine it has nothing but abuse, for it is either ridiculous or a lie. Weep thus for one's husband! Regret him so bitterly! Live only in the remembrance of one who was so dear! Who ever would believe that? And then why should I speak of it? And to whom? My relations were quite too worldly to understand my grief; and then I had been so selfish in my happy days that I had never tried to make friends. He—he alone was all I cared for. To whom would I have cared to tell how happy I was? To him, and to him alone! Besides, with all the carelessness of boundless felicity, I never even thought that misfortune could come near me."

"Alas, poor friend, how miserable you must have been! To suffer alone is so frightful!"

"Yes, yes, I have suffered, believe me. Sometimes, through a timidity of which I am ashamed, I was afraid of being alone. In the darkness and silence my grief would almost overpower me. It grew upon me that at times I was terrified, and then I took refuge in society. I detested it, but I needed its noise and excitement to take my mind off thoughts that were strained to such a point that I feared for my reason. When this strain was over and I was calm once more, I railed at the vain joys of the world for having caused me to forget my grief. I lamented my cowardice, and thus my days passed in constant moods of contradiction. This is not all. I knew that my sorrows were the cause of slanderous tales, and yet I neither would nor could justify myself. Oh, if you only knew how cruel it is to have nothing but the truth as a defence,—the truth which, in your eyes, is so sacred, so venerated, that it would seem a profanation to tell it to the incredulous and careless."

Marguerite again wept silently. She continued, after a pause: "Now you can understand my disdain for every one and everything. Soured by my trouble, I became irritable and capricious, and as no one understood the cause, I was called fantastic. The people that surrounded me seemed vulgar when compared to the one whose souvenir shall always be sacred; and so they said I was scornful or deceitful. The useless coquetry that I was reproached with, and to which they assigned the worst motives, was but another tribute to his memory. I wore these beautiful clothes because he loved to see me wear them. All these beautiful surroundings, these flowers, this half-light in which he used to veil my features, alas! they were all so many precious souvenirs. Finally, those scientific smatterings that people chose to call pretentious were only sad reflections of past days, for, being a savant himself, he loved to talk to me of his various attainments.

"What more can I say, my friend? Living alone, the manner of my living seems too ostentatious, and so I am called haughty and vain, and yet it is because this house was his home that I keep it up as he did. Now you know the secret of my life. Before I met you I cared very little whether the world approved of me or not. I was called a vain, extravagant flirt. What did it matter? I cared nothing for their odious tales; they were perfectly uninteresting to me; but since I have learned to appreciate all your good qualities, and have seen how easily you were influenced by the world's ill-natured opinion of me, I set such price on your esteem, your affection, that I could not bear to have you judge me as others do. And besides, you have often generously undertaken to defend me, and I wished to prove to you that your natural instincts were noble and just. And now I have still a painful

confession to make to you."

"Marguerite, I implore you—"

"Yes," she continued, blushing, "I have struggled against it a long time. This morning, when you found me so wretched, so forlorn, I had been praying God for strength to resist the need I felt of rehabilitating myself in your sight."

"Why, oh, why? Am I not worthy of your confidence?"

"Yes, yes, you are; you always will be. I believe it, but I reproached myself bitterly that I was not so sure of the purity of my motives, the sincerity of my regrets, to remain indifferent as to the effect the world's calumnies might have on you, for I tremble for the future."

Here there are many pages missing in the "Journal."

CHAPTER XXIV

DAYS OF SUNSHINE

There are but few persons, I imagine, who have not created for themselves a sort of intimate language, which they use to separate and classify the different emotions and events of their lives. It was thus that I gave the name of "days of sunshine" to those few fortunate hours that brightened my existence, which were fixed in my memory in such

vivid colours that even the remembrance of them sufficed to cheer the dullest days of my after life.

At such times, when, by a turn of her wheel, fortune seems to amuse herself by raising a man to the very height of his fondest desire, on such "days of sunshine" everything that happens to us is not only just as we would wish, but the environment is such that our senses are doubly gratified.

And who is there that has not had his day of sunshine once at least in his life? One of those days when everything is beautiful and splendid, when the soul is filled with an ineffable sense of satisfaction, and Nature herself seems to contribute to our felicity? When if a long-cherished friend said, in a trembling voice: "To-night!" the night was so beautiful, the heavens so clear, the woods beautiful in their fresh foliage, the flowers glistening, the air saturated with perfume, and everything that you gazed on was smiling and peaceful.

No shadow of sadness came to obscure your luminous aureole. Is it needful to say how such rare and divine harmony delighted you? New and happily turned expressions came spontaneously to your lips; your lively wit sparkled in a thousand graceful pleasantries; when that is silent your heart murmurs ineffable tenderness. You feel yourself to be so brave, so proud, so gifted, that to your dazzled eyes the future is boundless, the perspective illimitable and glorious, and you say to yourself, "No misfortune can come to me while I am under the guidance of the radiant genius who shelters me with his golden wings."

Since Marguerite had declared her love, a love so

long and sadly struggled against by every souvenir of her past happiness, my incurable distrust had succumbed, at least for the time being, to the most intoxicating proofs of her affection.

There never were happier or more beautiful days than those that followed this avowal.

Almost every evening, on returning home, I had written in my journal a memento of these charming days.

Therefore it is with tender and respectful emotion that in writing this memoir I transcribe these fragments which were written during one of the most delightful periods of my life.

I

APRIL, 18—.

I have been fortunate enough to-day to spare Marguerite a moment's annoyance, but poor Candid is dead.

I have just seen him die. Brave, noble horse! I loved him well!

George does not weep for him, he is in a stupid despair; he said to me in English, with a horrified look as he pointed to the expiring beast: "Ah, monsieur, to die like that! and never to have run against any one, never to have run a race!"

Poor Candid! his end was peaceful, he went down on his knees, then he fell over, two or three times he raised his noble head and opened his great bright

eyes,—then he half closed them, gave a sigh, and was dead.

I never loved a horse so well, nor will I ever care for another one as I did for him, he was so intelligent and beautiful, he had so much energy and adroitness, besides being perfectly intrepid! He never balked at anything; was there an obstacle at the sight of which another horse would have hesitated, he came up to it proud, calm, and brave, and leaped over it as though it were play.

And then he looked so free and joyous under the bridle, one would have said that the valiant animal was under no restraint, but wore the bit as an ornament.

Poor Candid! his courage was my pride! Confiding in his strength, I dared to face dangers that otherwise would have affrighted me.

Trusting in his speed and stubborn energy, I accepted every wager. Poor Candid! it was his speed and stubborn energy that were the causes of his death.

He was the only horse I owned that could have done what he did, what very few would have attempted; he accomplished his task valiantly and gained me a smile from Marguerite.

Poor Candid! I did not know to what risk I exposed him, and now—I do not know whether I should have the courage to do it again. This is the cause of Candid's death:

This morning we went with Don Luiz to see the Château of ——, that Marguerite wishes to purchase; this château is at a distance of three leagues and a half from Paris. In visiting the apartments I gave my

arm to Marguerite, and we were followed by Don Luiz and the overseer of the château.

When we were in the library, we noticed a very fine portrait of a lady of the seventeenth century; the hands were adorable in their delicacy and beauty of form.

They were so adorable that they resembled Marguerite's.

She denied it; so I begged her to take off her glove and let us compare her hands with those of the portrait. They were strikingly alike. How could I see such beautiful hands without kissing them?

We heard Don Luiz's step, and we continued our examination of the library.

After seeing the château we returned to Paris. As Marguerite felt tired, she asked me to come and spend a quiet evening with her. I promised to do so.

When I arrived there I found her pale and sad; she was evidently quite overcome.

"What is the matter?" said I to her.

"You will laugh at me,"—she had tears in her eyes,—"but I have lost a bracelet that belonged to my mother; I had it on this morning. You know how I prize it, and will understand how grieved I am. I have sought for it everywhere. It is nowhere—nowhere!"

As she told me this, I remembered confusedly having seen, when Marguerite took off her glove, something that shone brilliantly, and which fell to the floor just as I was kissing her hand in the library, but, being so enchanted by the kiss, I paid no attention to anything else.

"I am so foolishly superstitious about the possession of that bracelet," said Marguerite, "that I will be dreadfully unhappy if it is really lost, but what hope can I have? Have I any? Ah, pardon, my friend, for my showing such sorrow for anything which does not concern you, but if you only knew how much that bracelet meant to me— Ah, what a sad night I shall spend, how unhappy I shall be!"

There flashed through my mind one of those ideas that come to us when we are desperately in love. I had a very fast race-horse,—it was Candid; it was three leagues and a half from Paris to the Château of ——; the night was fine, the moon shone clear, the road was a splendid one. I wished to spare Marguerite not only a night, but an hour, even a few moments of grief, by finding out in the least time possible if the bracelet had been left in the library of ——, even at the risk of killing my horse.

"Pardon for my selfishness," said I to Marguerite, "but your distress and the loss you have sustained have reminded me that I foolishly left the key in the lock of a little chest which contains important papers. I have every confidence in my *valet de chambre*, but others besides he might enter my room. Permit me, then, to write a note, that I will send back by the carriage, to tell him to get the key, and bring it to me."

I wrote the following words:

"George is to saddle Candid instantly, he must go to the Château de —— and ask the overseer if he has not found a bracelet in the library. When George gets this note it will be ten o'clock, by eleven o'clock you must either bring the bracelet or the answer to the Hôtel de Pënâfiel."

The letter was sent.

It was rather more than three leagues and a half to the Château de —— from Paris. He would have to travel seven leagues in an hour. Such a thing was possible with a horse like Candid, but it was a hundred to one that it would ruin him. Until ten o'clock I had sufficient control over myself to amuse Marguerite and take her mind off her loss.

Eleven o'clock struck, George had not returned. At five minutes past eleven a *valet de chambre* came in, bringing on a waiter a small package, which he presented to me.

It was Marguerite's bracelet.

I cannot express the transports of joy with which I received it.

"You will pardon me," I said to Marguerite, "the tardiness of my servants. Not knowing the value you set on that bracelet, I stole it from you, but seeing your extreme annoyance, I pretended that I had forgotten my key, and wrote to my *valet de chambre* to send me a little package that he would find in my coffer."

"Oh, I have found it, I have found it! I forgive you!" cried Marguerite, in a transport of joy; then, holding out her hand, she added: "Ah, how kind you are to have taken pity on my weakness, and how I thank you for having sent to your house for the bracelet, in order to save me a few moments' distress."

I admit that, in spite of Marguerite's joy and gratitude, I was horribly anxious when, at half-past eleven, I quitted the Hôtel de Pënâfiel. At midnight, my anxiety was all over. Poor Candid! He had just expired, I told George, by way of explanation, that I

had laid a wager for three hundred louis that Candid could go to —— and back by night in an hour.

II

APRIL, 18—.

I met Marguerite in the Champs Élysées. She spoke of horses, and said to me: "Why do you not make Candid run oftener? They say he is so fast, so handsome, and that you are so fond of him,—oh, so fond, that I am almost jealous," she added, laughing.

At this moment M. de Cernay, who, like myself, was on horseback, rode up to the side of Madame de Pënâfiel's carriage. He bowed to her, and said to me:

"Is this true that I hear? Is Candid dead?"

Marguerite looked at me with amazement.

"He is dead," said I to M. de Cernay.

"That is what I was told, but it does not surprise me,—to travel more than seven leagues at night, in an hour and four minutes! No matter how full-blooded a horse was, it would be hard for him to stand such a trial as that, and when he was not in condition! And your wager was for three hundred louis, I believe?"

"Yes, three hundred louis."

"Well, between us, you have done a foolish thing, for I have seen you refuse more than that for him, and very properly, too, for you would never get such a horse for five hundred louis. I tell you this because

he is dead now," he added, with great simplicity.

"A horse's reputation, then, seems to be like that of a great man," I said, laughing, "jealousy prevents him from being appreciated while he is alive."

Marguerite's expressive look almost repaid me for the loss of Candid.

III

APRIL, 18—.

What a bewildering day! It has been so filled with happy hours that I fondly listen to their distant echoes in my heart.

It has been a radiantly beautiful day. As we had agreed upon yesterday, I met Marguerite in the Bois; her face, which is still rather pale, seemed to bloom afresh in the sunlight. She was on foot, and before joining her I followed her at some distance in the Alley of the Acacias. Nothing could be more elegant than her walk, or than her figure, whose suppleness and grace was only half hidden by the shawl that was wrapped around her. I also watched for some time her little feet, as, at each step, they raised the flowing edge of her dress.

I joined her, and she blushed deeply when she saw me. I am more than ever convinced of the value of this symptom. As soon as it ceases, as soon as the sight of the beloved one no longer causes the blood to rush from the heart to the face, real love, ardent and young, has disappeared; a weak and chilly

affection has come in its place; indifference and forgetfulness are not far off.

I gave her my arm. As she scarcely touched it, I begged her to lean on it more.

The air was pure and mild, the turf was beginning to look green, the violets to blossom. We spoke very little at first. From time to time she turned her face up to mine, and looked smilingly at me, while her large eyes seemed to swim in clear crystal; then her nostrils would dilate, as she said, eagerly, "Oh, how good it is to breathe thus the springtime and happiness!"

When we saw the Heights of Calvary we talked about the country, the great forests, the fields, and the beautiful and vast treasures of nature. Our conversation was often interrupted by long pauses. After one of these, she said to me: "I wish you could come to Brittany; we would take long, long walks together, and I would plant you in our woods, so that later, when I was all alone, I should gather in a rich harvest of tender recollections."

I replied that I had nothing to tell her in return for such charming flattery, and I was really glad it was so, for nothing is more tiresome than those persons who repay you instantly, by returning a pretty compliment or delicate attention, as though they wished to rid themselves at any price of an intolerable debt. We met several men and women of our acquaintance on foot as we were. After they had passed us and we had exchanged bows, we laughingly declared that we would like to know what they were saying about us.

While telling of our walk, I wish to say that Marguerite told me that Paris was becoming odious

to her; that she had formed a fine project, but would not disclose it to me until the first of May. Impossible to make her tell any more.

At four o'clock the old Chevalier Don Luiz rejoined us, and we all three continued our walk for awhile. Madame de Pënâfiel and I each had some visits to make and so I left her. That night she was to go to a ball, and we agreed that I should go to see her at ten o'clock to have the first glimpse of her toilet, of which she made a great mystery.

On leaving Marguerite I called on Madame de ——. Our happiness is already very well known. Formerly, people would speak very freely about Madame de Pënâfiel in my presence; now no one ever pronounces her name before me, or, if they do so, it is always accompanied with the most exaggerated praise. I noticed this for the first time at Madame de ——'s.

One of her friends who has just arrived from Italy, and is ignorant of the latest liaisons in society, said to her, after having received information about several ladies of his acquaintance: "And what about Madame de Pënâfiel? I hope you have got some good story to tell me about her. Come, tell us who is the fortunate or unfortunate man of the hour? Tell me all about it. You owe that much to a man who arrives from the antipodes and knows nothing of what is going on; besides, unless I have some information I shall make some terrible blunders."

"But you are crazy," replied Madame de ——, blushing deeply, and glancing towards me; "you know how I perfectly detest such gossip, especially when it is about one of my best friends; for my affection for Marguerite dates from our childhood." She said this very meaningly.

"One of your best friends! Ah, that is charming, ah, yes," replied this stupid man, who understood nothing. "One of your best friends, 'tis very good! But then, you know they say, 'Who loves well chastises well,' and you used to tell me hundreds of entertaining tales about her, each one more spiteful than the other."

Madame de ——'s embarrassment was so great that I took pity on her.

"Then I am not the only one that you have attempted to draw into that trap," I said to her, laughing.

"A trap?" said the newcomer.

"A trap, monsieur," I answered, "a trap baited with malice, into which even I, who am one of Madame de Pënâfiel's sincerest and most devoted friends, had almost fallen."

"Ah, do you believe me capable of such treachery?" replied Madame de ——, smiling, but not understanding my meaning.

"Certainly, madame, I think you are, for it is an excellent way of discovering our friends' partisans; you pretend to have heard some dreadful scandal concerning an intimate friend, and, according to the way your acquaintances defend or attack the truth of your statement, you can judge of their kindly or inimical feelings; so that afterwards, when your friend hears their protestations of affection, she will be able to accept them at their true value."

"Ah, you are terribly indiscreet," said Madame de ——, with the pretence of a smile. The newcomer from Italy was quite astounded. Another visitor entering, I went out.

At ten o'clock I went to Marguerite's. I hoped I should have to wait for her, for I find it delightful to be for awhile alone, and dreamily enjoy the quiet of a salon in which the beloved one passes so much of her life, and then to see it suddenly illumined by her presence. But I had not this pleasure, for she was already there and waiting for me. This victory that I had won over the important and pleasing duties of the toilet, this delicate and unusual attention of being ready to receive me, gave me the greatest delight.

Marguerite was adorable. She wore a dress of pale green moire, trimmed with lace and bows of rose-coloured ribbon, from the centre of which blossomed great pink roses. One of these flowers was in the corsage, and another one in her hair. She brought me one of her bracelets to fasten for her, which I did, but not without imprinting a kiss on that beautiful arm so white and round.

I wished her to tell me her great secret of the first of May, but she said that this springtime of hope must still remain a mystery.

I told her about my morning visit to Madame ——, and we both laughed at it; but Marguerite said she was too happy now to care for the falsehoods that were said of her. Then we spoke of a very beautiful foreigner, who had made a great sensation in society, and she thanked me gaily for having shown so much attention to that charming person.

"And why should you thank me for that?" I asked.

"Because when a man flirts with other women, it is a sure sign that he is absolutely certain of the heart of the one woman he loves. Thus, you see, I am very

proud to have inspired such confidence, and such security."

At eleven o'clock she ordered her carriage.

As I was expressing my gratitude at this opportunity of being entirely alone, Marguerite answered: "This is nothing; wait until my first of May."

I went for a short visit to the Opéra. It was very brilliant. I found M. de Cernay in our box. What he calls my good fortune continues to annoy him; for he never forgets to tell me how pleased he is to see her so seriously attached to me; it was sure to happen one day or another. Besides, she must be tired of leading such a life of excitement. Her craze for Ismaël was but a piece of folly; her inclination for M. de Merteuil was only a caprice; her other mysterious but well-known adventures were simply to satisfy a wild imagination, while the affection she had for me was quite another thing.

According to my custom, I obstinately denied my good fortune, whereupon M. de Cernay accused me of dissimulation, of trying to hide what all Paris was aware of. He finished by predicting that, if I persisted in remaining so secretive, I would never have a friend in the world. This prediction really caused me serious annoyance.

I went to Madame de ——'s ball to join Marguerite. On entering the salons I had not to go far to find her. Who can explain that instinct, that strange faculty, thanks to which an instant and a single look suffice for a man to discover in a crowded room, among hundreds of other men and women, the person of all others he desires to meet?

Marguerite was conversing with Madame de ——, when I discovered her. She received me with a perfect graciousness and a marked preference, although she was surrounded by several others. I speak of this peculiarity, because most women who have special interest in some particular man think they show a great deal of tact in receiving the one they care for most with affected indifference or even positive rudeness.

Madame de —— is very lively, intelligent, and gay, of a frank and sensible disposition, indulgent, but not commonplace, and very fierce and disagreeable, when any of her absent friends are attacked. Marguerite and I are fortunate enough to be favourites of hers. They sat down on a small sofa, and I taking a chair behind them, we made a thousand amusing remarks about every one and everything. Finally we spoke of pictures, and Madame de —— said to me:

"I know that you have a charming collection of paintings. Why do you not give us a supper some evening and invite some of our friends, so that we can all admire your marvels?"

"With the greatest pleasure," I replied. "But it must be understood that I will not invite any of the husbands; they spoil everything, like a man in a ballet."

"Quite the contrary," she said to me, "it will be very entertaining, for in many liaisons there is as much tiresome stupidity and jealousy as in conjugal life. Many husbands are very amiable, and the only thing against them is that they are husbands." After having discussed the question for some time, we agreed to invite a reasonable proportion of both husbands and lovers.

It was getting late. Marguerite begged her cousin, Don Luiz, to call the carriage. While she was waiting for it, I threw her cloak over her beautiful shoulders, and said, in a low voice, "At eleven o'clock, to-morrow?"

She blushed deeply, and softly pressed my hand when I gave her the fan.

I understood what it meant.

Don Luiz offered his arm, and they went away.

Returning home, I have just written the details of this day, which was apparently so devoid of interest and yet has been filled with charming episodes. Yes, a series of charming little episodes. Nothing in themselves, but the making of a memorable day when linked together. It is, then, a bouquet composed of a thousand happy souvenirs as intoxicating as the perfume of a thousand sweet-smelling flowers.

IV

APRIL, 18—.

I went to her house at three o'clock.

I found her as tender and affectionate as ever, but serious, pensive, and almost sad.

There was no regret or reproachfulness in this sadness; it was a calm, melancholy mood, a sweet reverie. All her thoughts were elevated and serious.

I was amazed at this change in her.

In the souls of certain women there are inexhaustible treasures of delicacy.

With them everything is purified by sacrifice and idealised by the religious ardour of their love, by a sentiment of sacred duty that they find in loving, and a melancholy contemplation in which all thought of the future overwhelms them.

With us the horizon is much more restricted. When once our passion and our vanity are satisfied by possession, nothing can be more positive, more decided, than our sensations. The best of us are sometimes tender and grateful, but most of us are sated and sulky. With some women, however, it is just the opposite; they are happy and sad by turns, generally more sad than happy, for melancholy predominates in their nature, and what they feel is inexpressible. It is both joy and despair, regret and hope, burning shame and purest love, terrible remorse, and the intense desire to surrender herself once more.

I remained a long time with Marguerite. Our conversation was delightfully intimate. She asked me about my family, about my father. For awhile I was very much saddened by such unaccustomed thoughts. I confessed everything to her, my ingratitude and indifference to his memory.

Then Marguerite could not restrain her tears, and said to me: "You believe, though, in the eternal duration of other affections, since you dare to ask for my love."

I was so intensely happy that I succeeded in reassuring her as to the future, and when her melancholy mood had passed she spoke with

ineffable and almost maternal tenderness of my projects, of her annoyance at seeing me lead such a barren and idle life, whose uselessness she believed to be the source of all my unhappiness. I replied that at the present hour her reproaches were without foundation, and that she should no longer think of me as idle or unhappy, for, as I was to spend my time in worshipping her, I would be the happiest and best occupied of men.

And as to all this I added a thousand lively speeches, Marguerite took my hand, and said, with an inexpressible look of goodness, love, and kind reproach in her lovely eyes, which were filled with tears: "You are very gay, Arthur!"

"That is because I am so happy, so supremely happy."

"It is strange," said she. "I, too, am happy, completely happy. And yet you see I am weeping. I have to weep."

Then we talked of signs and omens, and, finally, of divination and fortune-tellers. As we were wont to do, we discussed the worn out theme, Is there such a thing as foretelling the future? We ended by coming to the decision that to-morrow we would meet at Mlle. Lenormand's in the Rue de Tournon, and have our fortunes told.

I left Marguerite's at half-past six. She forbade me to come again in the evening, as she said she wished to spend it in writing letters.

When I was alone, and only influenced by my own thoughts, I was more than ever surprised at the great

difference between the impressions of men and those of women.

After such a morning of sensual intoxication, Marguerite needed silence, reverie, and solitude, while I felt a positive want of noise, excitement, and animation. Though intense, my happiness was exuberant. I felt gay, talkative, amiable, perfectly contented with everything. In such a mood the gay world, with all its joy and splendour, was the only place to display my felicity.

Before going to one or two soirées, I went to the theatre to hear the second act of "Othello." I saw Madame de V—— alone in her box. She looked, as she always does, charming and exquisitely dressed.

There is nothing prettier ever seen than a beautiful, smiling woman's face, standing out in brilliant light, against the dark background of an opera box.

In the entr'acte I went to pay Madame de V—— a visit. She received me very graciously, I would almost say in a coquettish and provocative manner, if it were not her usual way, she being born coquettish and provoking as some women are born blonde or brunette. She is so original, and bright, and wild, and says everything in such a graceful, lively way, and with such innocent maliciousness, that people are willing to forgive her for anything she does.

She began by a lively attack on my devotion to a certain marquise, saying that the belle marquise was fortunate in being one of her enemies, as otherwise she would have taken great satisfaction in disturbing the serenity of our love scenes.

"How is that? You refrain from revenge because

she is an enemy?"

"Certainly, we save those nice little treacheries for our best friends," said she, "and it is a great pity, for in twenty-four hours, if I chose, I could make you so much in love with me that you would have to be tied hand and foot."

"But you did that long ago, and without taking the least trouble," said I. Then, through one gallant speech to another, I rang the praises of those ephemeral amours of former days, of those heart to heart communions which were so ravishing, but which in our days were unfortunately so rare. Charming meetings, with no yesterday nor to-morrow, and which leave only a delicious souvenir, —a single pearl.

"I don't agree with you," said she, very gaily; "when it comes to pearls, I prefer a necklace to a ring."

"Yes, madame; but all the pearls of a necklace are exactly alike, of equal size, and very monotonous, whereas some pearls are inestimable, merely on account of their singularity, and are worth more than a whole necklace."

"That is the reason, no doubt, monsieur, why you have always seemed to me so precious and peculiar."

Thanks to our chatter, "Othello" was hardly listened to. I say this to my shame. People were beginning to leave the boxes. "Come, let us be going," said Madame de V——, "my husband is not here, and I am all alone again."

"Your husband,—I can understand that, for you know they say, 'It is only the rich that undervalue their wealth,' but what does surprise me is that—"

And as I hesitated, she said, very deliberately:

"What surprises you is that M. de —— is not here to give me his arm and call the carriage for me; is not that what you wished to say?"

"That is just what, through ferocious envy and a tigerish jealousy, I did not wish to say at all."

"I have sent him hunting for a week, so as to take him into my good graces once more," replied Madame de V——, negligently, "for his absences are delightful."

"Delightful for every one, for I shall be indebted to him for a charming privilege, if you will accept my arm to go to the door."

"Certainly I will; I was waiting for you to offer it."

"And will my privileges stop at such a small favour as that? Alas!"

"You are very curious and very indiscreet."

"Perhaps so, I should like to be curiously eager, and then indiscreetly happy."

"But," said she, without answering me, and pointing out a woman whose appearance was perfectly ludicrous, "look at that poor Madame B ——. They all say she has such stupid eyes. Ridiculous! I think they are the brightest eyes in the world, for they look as though they wished to run away from her ugly head."

I forget all the other malicious observations she made, laughing aloud, as we descended the staircase, she on one step, and I on another.

At last, just as she was leaving, she reminded me that it was a long time since I had been to see her sketches; that she was very proud of the progress she had made, and would like to have my opinion on the

subject.

"Madame, I shall be delighted either to criticise or admire so many marvels, only as I am very severe, and like to give my opinion frankly, I should be seriously annoyed by the presence of a third party; so I hope you will close your doors to visitors while I am there."

"But, monsieur, that would seem like a tête-à-tête, a rendezvous."

"Exactly so, madame."

"And my servants?"

"Tell them you do not wish to see any one but your notary."

"And you would pass yourself off—"

"For the notary, for an attorney, for anything you please; if necessary I will get a package of papers and green spectacles, and then we can talk as long as we please, without raising any suspicions,—we can talk business."

"About a will, for instance."

"Certainly, the will of poor ——, whose inheritor I would so like to be."

"Heavens! how well you act your rôle!" cried Madame de V——.

Just then her carriage was called.

"Very well," said I, as I accompanied her, "then you will expect to see your notary at three o'clock to-morrow?"

"He can come, and perhaps I will be able to see him."

"Are you going to Madame T——'s concert to-night?"

"No, I am on my way home."

"What, so early?"

"Yes, I have to put my papers in order, for to-morrow I shall have an interview with the most terrible and tiresome of lawyers."

Saying these words, and still laughing, she got into her carriage.

I went under the portico to wait for mine; there I was accosted by fat old Pommerive, who in passing me said: "Faithless, already! It is very soon, or very late."

I shrugged my shoulders, and smiled.

I went to the concert, the crowd was too great. For my part I cannot enjoy music unless I am comfortably seated. I have just returned and found a long and tender letter from Marguerite awaiting me.

In our conversation of this morning I chanced to say how fond I was of Parma violets. I find two enormous baskets of them in my salon.

Such a souvenir, such a delicate attention, touches and charms me, but it does not make me feel really ashamed of my assiduity towards Madame de V——, who is so pretty and so charmingly vivacious.

However, I read Marguerite's letter with the greatest fondness; it is tender and sweet, and full of melancholy; she has spent a long, quiet evening thinking only of me. In the postscript she reminds me that to-morrow at three o'clock we are to meet at Mlle. Lenormand's to have our fortunes told.

Now it is at three o'clock that I have promised

Madame de V—— to go and see her drawings. What is to be done? Certainly, I do not mean to compare the profound and real affection I have for Marguerite with the intense but ephemeral fancy I have taken to Madame de V——, who is as great a flirt as she is seductive and pretty.

I am perfectly sure of Marguerite's love, it is a sincere and lasting affection; the passing fancy that I feel for, Madame de V—— could in no way interfere with such a tender and serious intimacy. When a woman is known to be as changeable and inconstant as Madame de V——, a lost opportunity is lost for ever. Hazard is her god. I certainly will go to see her to-morrow. I can easily find an excuse for putting off our visit to Mlle. Lenormand until day after to-morrow. What excuse shall I give? Business with a notary? No, that would be too childish a pretext. What am I to say? I have decided at last, but by way of compensation I shall write Marguerite a most passionate love-letter.

I have just read over the letter I mean to send Madame de Pënâfiel. It is very well written, full of feeling, of tenderness and passion, and it is unfeigned and entirely truthful. I feel every word in it is true. How strange it is that at this moment, when I have fully made up my mind to deceive her, my love is greater and more sincere than it ever was before! There is no reason why I should deceive myself about this. I can almost hear my own thoughts. This is the real truth, I love Marguerite more than I have ever loved her. Formerly I might have hesitated at some sacrifice she imposed on me, now I would gladly give up anything she might ask of me, and yet, I repeat, I am planning how to be false to her!

Does such an idea cause me any shame, remorse, or regret? No.

Would I hesitate an instant if I thought that Marguerite would discover my infidelity, and be distressed by it? No.

In my infatuation for Madame de V——, is there any noble feeling and real affection? No; it is an ardent desire which I know will be as quickly extinguished as it was kindled.

And yet, see what a strange thing it is, I say it again, I love Marguerite better than ever. Why should this love be stronger than before? Is it an illusion, a deceitful phantom called up by the consciousness of my deceit? Is it not an excuse that I am trying to find for myself! Am I only pretending that I care for her so much? No, no, I search my thoughts, and it seems that I assuredly love her more than ever.

What a singular contradiction in my soul! What a perverse nature! Can it be that my love for Marguerite will become greater and greater, according to the grief I feel I shall cause her?

V

APRIL, 18—.

Days of sunshine? Alas! no; these radiant days of happiness that had lasted more than two months were about to be obscured by dark clouds.

What a strange day this has been!

This morning, on awakening, I received a note from Marguerite. She is quite irritated at having this fortune-telling postponed. As to-day was the anniversary of her birth she believed it to be the most suitable, because the most lucky or unlucky.

As she wished to make some purchases in Saxony and Sèvres porcelains, she begged me to meet her at half-past two at ——'s, which was then the most fashionable china store, to give her my opinion in the selection.

I went there.

In going with her to look at some marquetry furniture in the back part of the store, we were left alone for a few moments. Marguerite then asked me to come to her in the evening, when she promised she would tell me about her secret plan for the first of May.

I thanked her tenderly. She appeared prettier than ever before; she wore a straw hat trimmed with lace and *bleuets* that was exceedingly becoming.

I left her at three o'clock, and went to see Madame V——.

In spite of our foolish bargain of the day previous, according to which I was to assume the character of a notary, if I wished to enjoy a tête-à-tête, I gave my own name to the servant, and I found her alone.

She showed me her water-colours, which were really clever, for Madame V—— is a very gifted woman. However, I pretended to think them very ordinary, the drawing incorrect, the colour bad and too glaring, and the handling weak and undecided.

"You know nothing about it," said she, laughing. "I have a great deal of talent; but as you paint also, it is

because you are jealous."

"We can never agree on this subject, madame; you consider your water-colours good, I think they are very bad. Don't let us speak of them again. Let us find some other subject on which we can agree."

"And what subject can we agree on, monsieur?"

"Your intelligence and your beauty."

"You are very much mistaken, monsieur; for now that you have so unjustly criticised my drawings, it is my turn, and I frankly tell you, that, though you may think me charming, I am sure that I am detestable, for I have a thousand bad qualities. So as I am perfectly sure we will never agree on this subject, let us talk of something else."

"Alas! you are too hard on yourself, madame; unfortunately for me, you have not all the charming imperfections I could wish,—one imperfection at least."

"You are certainly crazy; do you wish to know how wicked I can be?"

"It is the thing of all others I most desire."

"Listen, then, to me, and don't interrupt me. One of my intimate friends, who was as bad as I am, wished to be revenged on a lady of her acquaintance,—the reason doesn't matter to you. My friend was beautiful, or rather pretty, gay, giddy; you may call these good qualities or faults just as you please, and you can add that she was very entertaining and charming, and with plenty of 'go,'—excuse the vulgarity of the word,—and there you have her portrait.

"The woman on whom my friend wished to be

revenged was also beautiful, but pretentious, haughty, false to the last degree; she was, however, seriously interested in a man who was—why should I not say it?—was agreeable, but rather eccentric, in fact, not just like every one else; to-day he would be gay, amusing, and amiable; to-morrow sulky, peculiar, and tiresome. In one of his reasonable days, a day of good humour, and good sense, he showed himself to be very fond of my friend, who found him, she tells me, a very nice fellow, perhaps too nice. These being the circumstances, she came to ask my advice—"

"And you told her, I hope, what I should have advised her myself, to revenge herself on this haughty woman by making the eccentric man happy in secret. A schoolgirl would have known that much. The easiest way is always the best."

"Do not interrupt me, please. As my friend wished for my advice, I tried to sound the character of the eccentric man, to see if he were true and sincere, or indiscreet and a trifler."

"Well, madame?"

"Well, monsieur, I found him to be one of the few men that a woman can trust, who understand and appreciate everything, admit everything, and say just what they think, but who are quite incapable of betraying any confidence that may have been placed in them. 'If he is all this,' said I to my friend, 'you have only one thing to do,—be rash, inconsequent, bold, be what we women never are, outspoken and true to yourself; say to your eccentric friend, you wish to please me, but I know you are interested elsewhere. Now I have no desire to share your affections, but if I accept them I mean to make it impossible that you should ever have a reconciliation

with the person you are to sacrifice to me. I demand that you send me all of her letters with a very compromising letter of your own; do this for me, and "live and be happy ever afterwards."'

"That was my advice to my friend," said Madame de V——. "Do you think it was terribly immoral?"

"I could answer you, madame, by continuing your allegory, and instantly inventing a friend of my own who might be that very same eccentric man your friend told you about, but it is not worth while. Come, let us not confuse ourselves, let us speak plainly. You know me well enough to know me safe. Do you ask me to commit such treachery? Is it only on such a condition that you will consent to all I mean to ask?"

"Monsieur, you must be crazy!"

"Not at all."

"Why should you suppose that what I said about my friend was only a pretext to speak of my own feelings? Why should you dare to think that I have any intention of accepting your attentions?"

"Very well, just as you please. You can fancy that the eccentric man was speaking and not I."

"Ah, that is sensible; now at least we can understand each other. Would you have told my friend that she was asking you to be a traitor, and if she said yes, what would you answer?"

"That, for her sake, I would gladly commit every sort of infidelity,—but not treason."

"And if my friend would only bestow her favours at such a price?"

"That could never be."

"Why not?"

"Because I would only consider such a proposition as a joke, and would obstinately refuse to be a party to such pleasantry."

"Why would it be a pleasantry?"

"Because there is not a woman living who would be capable of such a base thought."

"That is putting it very strong."

"That is what I think."

"No living woman?"

"Not one."

"But I just told you that I gave such advice to my friend."

"Permit me to think that you are mistaken."

"You are unbearable! The thought was mine, and that was the advice I gave her, I tell you."

"It is impossible for me to believe you; I know how high-minded you are. You should not expect me to believe you when you so slander yourself."

"Suppose I should say such a thing to you?"

"To me?"

"Yes, to you."

"I cannot suppose what would be impossible."

"But I do say it to you now."

"Seriously? You say such a thing seriously? You offer me such conditions?"

"Yes; seriously."

"Well, then, you are trying to make a fool of me."

"You are very humble, certainly."

"On the contrary, I am very proud to prove to you that I am incapable of such a piece of cowardice. But come, let us quit speaking of others; let us talk of ourselves. Accept my attentions; take me unconditionally, or rather on condition of making me the most faithless of men."

"And those letters?"

"Again? Don't you suppose I can see that all this is a very clever trick to prove me; to find out if I am perfectly trustworthy; that you can safely confide in my discretion and my love? Between you and me, I think it augurs well for our future happiness,—all these precautions on your part."

"You are not wanting in confidence, at least."

"Do you consider it vanity to hope and desire?"

"Those letters? Those letters?"

"Now you are joking again. As to this trial you have seen fit to submit me to, I forgive you for it, for what woman could ever have a particle of confidence, esteem, or affection for a man who was capable of such a treacherous act? Would she not be certain that at some future day her own letters—?"

"Certainly; she might fear the same fate for her letters if she were ever fool enough to write any," said Madame de V——, with a self-possession that astounded me.

Before the end of our interview I discovered that I could not hope to win any favour from Madame de V —— except on these treasonable conditions.

This calculation on her part was doubly odious to me, because it wounded my vanity. It proved that

Madame de V——'s desire to be revenged on Madame de Pënâfiel (for which she had never given any reason) was stronger than any passing affection she ever had for me.

I left Madame de V—— a very much disappointed man. I had counted on an interview which, if not more decisive, would have at least been more tender. Madame de V——'s reputation for levity was such that I had expected an unconditional surrender, whereas the conditions she exacted were as exorbitant as they were inadmissible.

It is strange, though, that, as yesterday when contemplating this infidelity to Marguerite, my love for her was stronger than ever, so now, after being checked in my miserable attempt to betray her, my affection seems to be on the wane. It is only ephemeral, this change in me. I exaggerate, perhaps, but it is the truth. As I think of the evening I am about to spend with her, I feel that I would be much more amiable, much more affectionate, if I had something to reproach myself with and to hide from her. I feel that I acted honourably in refusing what Madame de V—— hoped for, but my conscience is not satisfied with that much, for I really love Marguerite much better than her enemy, and so I have sacrificed nothing. Still, I can not help feeling violently angry with Marguerite for having caused Madame de V—— to hate her so, for if this hatred had not existed, I should have been able to enjoy this short-lived passion, which I feel sure would have been charmingly piquant.

Nothing could be more unjust, more selfish, or more ridiculous than the irritation I feel towards Marguerite for having deprived me of a pleasure which might have been a serious menace to her

happiness.

I admit these are base sentiments, but this is how I feel, and it is in such a state of mind that I am about to go to Marguerite. How will it end? I know not, but I am filled with sad forebodings.

CHAPTER XXV

SUSPICION

Fatal, fatal night! Why do I attempt to recall thee? The remembrance is still so vivid. Such grief is never to be forgotten.

It was half-past nine when I reached the Hôtel de Pënâfiel, and I was cross and sullen.

"How late you are!" said Marguerite, with a smile, as she approached me in this friendly way; "but I am so eager to tell you my secret, my project for the month of May, that I don't mean to waste any time in scolding you. Sit down there near me, and be very quiet."

Pleased with this command which gave me an opportunity of hiding my ill-humour, I kissed Marguerite's hand, saying, in a very serious voice which she believed to be feigned:

"See how solemn I am, and how very attentively I am listening."

"What I am waiting for is to see how quickly your gravity and attentiveness will vanish when you hear

the unexpected news I am about to tell you," said Madame de Pënâfiel, laughing. "No matter; don't interrupt me. I wanted to go this morning to see Mlle. Lenormand, not only about my birthday, but because I was curious to know if that wonderful mind-reader would be able to foretell the greatest happiness of my life, that I have ever dreamed of, was about to be realised. This is my dream: the first of May I quit Paris."

"You are going away!"

"Be silent," said Marguerite, putting her pretty finger on her lips; "see how excited you are already; what will it be by and by? I shall begin again: I am going away the first of May, taking no one with me but a confidential man servant, and my old *femme de chambre*, Mlle. de Vandeuil. The apparent object of my journey is a visit of some months to one of my country places in Lorraine that I have not seen for a long time."

"I understand."

"You do not understand at all. When I get six leagues away from Paris I halt; I leave my carriage with my maid's father, who is devotedly attached to me, and I return to Paris. Guess where?"

"Truly, that is more than I can tell."

"To a modest and pretty little villa in a far distant quarter, and there I am to install myself under the name of Madame Duval, a young widow, who has come from Brittany to Paris to attend to a lawsuit. Well, what did I tell you? You are even more astonished, more startled than I expected," said Marguerite.

It was neither astonishment nor stupefaction that I

felt, but something very different. Whether it was the irritated state of mind that I was in, or my natural distrust, I know not, but no sooner did I hear of this plan of hers than I suddenly remembered one of the scandalous stories that I heard about Madame de Pënâfiel, and the mysterious doings that they said had taken place in some little villa that she possessed. Marguerite had denied it, like so many other absurd falsehoods, which, not being able to produce any evidence, were reduced to inventing a thousand wonderful incidents. Lulled by the ideal happiness that I had been tasting for the last two months, this brief season of felicity and forgetfulness, I had put away from my mind all thoughts of the past. While near this charming woman, I had blindly believed that which is so convenient, so pleasant, and so wise to believe, that I was her only love. I had blindly believed the noble explanations she had given me for her conduct. I had even forgotten the cowardly and miserable suspicions that had made me so cruelly unjust towards her. Why, then, did I suddenly fall, on hearing of this project, into my former abominable state of distrust? I know not why, alas! But doubt took possession of my mind.

"As soon as I am settled in my little home," continued Marguerite, "I will have a visit from my brother; this brother,—it is you, for you must remain ostensibly in Paris, from time to time you must show yourself at the Opéra, in society; then quickly leaving these brilliant but tiresome scenes, you will come quietly here, every day, and spend long hours with your well-beloved sister, all the time that you can spare from your mundane apparitions. Well, Arthur, what have you to say to this wild scheme, this folly? Will it not be charming? Oh, my friend, if you only knew the childish joy I have promised myself in such

an existence, when so intimately shared by you, what happiness we will find in this obscurity, this mystery, in our long walks, in our evenings, spent far from an importunate and jealous world, in these long days which will belong to us alone, and which we will fill with such varied pleasures!

"For you must know, Arthur, that we are to have a salon, where we will be able to paint, and make music, where you will find the books you care for, and I, those that I like. The house is small but comfortable, the garden is large and shady. Our household—don't sneer too much at these minor details—our household will consist of my *femme de chambre*, and another woman that she is to engage, and a man servant for you. I am promising myself already the greatest satisfaction in being able to prove that one can be perfectly happy, though living in the simplest way, and to judge for myself how so many modest lives are spent in a manner that we rich never even suspect; indeed, dear friend, I mean to live there until you are weary of the solitude of such a life. And then, though it seems childish, I think it will be very amusing to live alone so near Paris. It will amuse me, if our happiness leaves me any time for amusement.

"Besides, such a project as this can succeed nowhere except in Paris, for if we were both to disappear at the same time, our secret would very soon be discovered; by remaining in town you will put every one on the wrong track. What will be best of all, will be to hear the comments on my absence, the stories of every sort that will be told, and the proofs of their veracity. *Mon Dieu!* When I think of all that you are going to hear I envy you. You see I have abused the right I claimed in not being

interrupted; it is so hard to be silent when the subject is a long desired pleasure,—desired, yes, with all the strength of love and hope," added Marguerite, with enthusiasm, as she held out her hand to me.

I had scarcely heard what she said. Her projects, as I have said, had awakened those horrid suspicions that for two months of supreme delight were dormant in my breast. The profound and pious adoration of her former husband, which I had taken as an explanation of Marguerite's way of living, was nothing but a vulgar fable invented to deceive me. I believed more obstinately than ever in the truth of all the stories I had heard. I was enraged to think that, in a moment of sentimental confidence, I should have forgotten all my wise maxims, and lost my powers of penetration and sagacity. An overpowering resentment filled my heart. Taking for granted that what Marguerite had just proposed to me with so much affectionate graciousness had been proposed to others in the same manner, and with the same pretended simplicity, and revolting from such gratuitous falsehood, I saw that I would be playing a most detestable rôle should I pretend to believe in this sudden desire for love in a cottage, which I was supposed to have awakened in Marguerite's heart. Gathering all my hatred and scorn into one ironical frown, I replied:

"Your plan is certainly a very charming one, and your idea of a mysterious retreat in the heart of Paris would be very original if it were not a copy. For my part, there are certain circumstances that would make such a plan seem very flat and uninviting."

"*Mon Dieu!* How can you treat my proposal with such coldness?" said Marguerite, noticing my changed appearance. "I longed so to please you, I

hoped you would share my pleasure, I was so happy, so intensely happy, in this future of mysterious love."

"That delightful joy shows the perpetual youth of your feelings. Were it not for this rejuvenating power of yours, you would, probably, be rather weary of mysterious love by this time!"

"What do you mean to say?"

"I mean to say that it would not be the first time your beautiful and secret retreat had witnessed such mysterious and passionate love scenes as those in which I am expected to enact the hero's part."

"Truly, I do not understand you, Arthur,—ah, for Heaven's sake, explain yourself! I know not why, but you seem to have turned me to ice."

"You wish for an explanation? So shall it be. To hear the answer to well-known riddles is another one of your whims, but it is no more than a fancy for trying each successive lover's devotion by a dose of solitude. It is the last experiment, and, if successful, each man can be classified according to his merit."

"Arthur, I told you I did not understand you, your cold, ironical look distresses me, it recalls that dreadful day when— Speak to me, tell me what is on your mind, explain yourself. *Mon Dieu!* What can I have done to offend you so? Does this plan displease you? I give it up, then, let us think no more about it; but in Heaven's name, tell me what is the matter? What has changed you so suddenly? Yesterday, this very morning even, you were so kind, so affectionate, your last letter was so full of tenderness!"

"Yesterday, and even this morning, I was a blind fool; I am as great a fool as ever, perhaps, but at least

I have my eyes open."

"Your eyes open!" said Marguerite, stupidly.

"As to my last letter, you know as well as I, perhaps better, that though it may be difficult to act a lie in speech and look and gesture, nothing can be easier or commoner than to lie in studied phrases, and with plenty of time at our disposal. Thus, when I wrote you that last letter, so full of tender things, you say, I had just obtained the promise of a rendezvous with Madame de V——."

"Arthur, Arthur! this is very cruel pleasantry. It may be amusing to you, but you surely can not know how cruel it is to me."

"It does not amuse me at all, madame; and it is no pleasantry. I swear it is not. On the contrary, I am speaking very seriously, as a friend, so that you may no longer be deceived by my falseness, or I be your dupe."

"Dupe? dupe of my falseness?"

"Yes."

"My falseness! my dupe! What strange language from you! And why should you be my dupe? What does it mean? It is inexplicable. And why should you say such things to me? *Mon Dieu!*"

"You know why I say such things better than I do. It is because I am not the first one of your lovers to whom you have proposed this entertaining suburban *pastorale*."

Marguerite clasped her hands and let them fall on her knees. She stared at me with wide-open eyes, that were full of sorrow and amazement. But I was quite determined to go on, though my heart was

beating wildly, and the souvenir of my last meeting with Hélène flashed through my mind like a scorching tongue of flame.

"You see, my dear friend, amid the distractions of society, one can find time to play the lover, and have the good sense to ignore all former occupants in the beloved one's affections; for why should we worry about the past? Does it belong to us? We have the future, and the devil knows what it has in reserve for us.

"As for filling in any reputable way the part of the 'lover without ancestry,' in that mystery play of yours, with you and your femme de chambre as spectators, performing as others have done this rôle of lover in your play, 'Love in a Cottage,' one must be a better comedian than I am. Really, my dear Marguerite, I fear I should not act as well as my predecessors, and I wish to retain the good opinion you have always had of me."

"Ah, good God, am I dreaming? It is a frightful dream, and it has made me ill," said she, placing her trembling hands on her head.

My heart was beating as though it would break. I was partly conscious of the terrible distress I was causing this sweet woman, as with crushing irony and coarse insolence I destroyed the beautiful picture her love had painted. I shuddered to think of how she must suffer, if this really was her first affection since her husband's death. But my furious distrust worked itself to a higher and higher pitch, at the remembrance of all the odious stories I had heard told of Marguerite, and by my fear of being cheated, being taken for a dupe; so I stifled these gleams of reason, and found no words too strong to express my scorn of what I called the outrageous duplicity of this

woman.

She soon was completely overcome, and fell to weeping bitterly.

She showed no signs of indignation at my words! She could tolerate such insults! Truth would not have been so patient; only falsehood is cowardly. She had given herself to me; why not to others? These were the only thoughts that her silent and tearful grief awoke in me.

She wept in silence for a long time.

I said no word of consolation. I stood there staring at her with my frowning look of anger towards her and irritation towards myself.

Suddenly Marguerite raised up her pale face, looked around as if dazed, rose up, and took two or three steps forward, saying:

"No, no, 'tis not a dream; 'tis reality. It must be." Then, as though her strength had all gone from her limbs, she sank on an armchair.

Wiping her eyes, she said to me, in a steady voice: "Pardon me this weakness. It is the first time since I told you all that you have ever treated me in such a manner. I believe, though, that you are not so cruel as you seem. It is impossible that you should cause me such suffering, unless you have a very good reason to believe in my treachery. No, that were impossible! So I shall not be angry with you. You have been deceived. You have heard some slanderous story, and you have believed it. Ah, well, dear friend, neither you nor I will throw away our future chances of happiness on some such miserable falsehood. You will therefore confide in me, and tell me what has caused this distrust, of what I am

suspected, and what proofs you believe you have of my falseness. You will tell me what is this accusation, and with a single word I will destroy it. Do you hear me? With a single word, for the language of truth is irresistible. Again I tell you, Arthur, I am not angry with you. To treat a woman as you have treated me, when radiant with hope and love she came to offer you— No, no, we will say no more of that. But to treat a woman with such scorn and severity, you should have some serious proof of her treachery. Say then, tell me, tell me, I beg of you, what have I done?"

This calm and noble language only irritated me the more, as it made me ashamed of my conduct. Could I dare to tell her that it was only my miserable, incurable spirit of doubt, only the vague recollection of a slanderous story, only the spite I felt at not succeeding as soon as I hoped with Madame de V ——, that had provoked my brutal and insolent words? Thus I was too proud to admit that I had acted like a crazy man, and continued to be cruel and unjust,—or, rather, fiendishly spiteful.

"Madame," said I, in a lofty way, "I am not called on to explain my convictions; they are quite sufficient for me, and I shall stick to them."

"But they are not sufficient for me! Some one has told you lies about me, and I wish to justify myself!"

"No one has told any lies. I believe what I have to believe."

"He believes! Great God, he believes! You are not ashamed to believe that I have ever spoken to another as I have to you? And you dare to believe that I am so vile, so cowardly, so base, as to spend my whole life in a continual series of falsehoods, that

infamy has become a matter of habit?"

"There is neither infamy nor cowardice, neither baseness nor falsehood; you have made a great many men happy, none can know how happy better than I. You have related to me a lovely story of conjugal fidelity, which even survived the dear departed one, exactly like the widows in Malabar.

"This souvenir of the dear absent one, who was adored, fêted, caressed, as though he were still living, was a rather free translation of your life which was so amorously spent. It was a very clever plan you laid to entrap me into the belief that I was the only one. I replied to your wiles by a trick of my own, which was simply to pretend that I was your fool, and did not see through your schemes; besides, I was supposed to be the first to triumph over the poor dear marquis,—not a very flattering contest,—with a dead man—"

"How dare you!" cried out Marguerite, interrupting me, and standing erect, majestic, almost menacing, her eyes flashing, and her cheeks blazing with indignation. Then leaning suddenly on a console, she said, in a low voice, as though crushed by remorse: "I have deserved this, I have deserved it all. Suffer, miserable woman; who will ever pity you now?"

In the midst of the tumultuous waves of hate and anger that were surging in my breast, I was seized with the deepest sense of pity and terror; perhaps I should then have returned to my senses and listened to the voice of reason, when Marguerite, having wiped away her tears, said, in a solemn voice: "For the last time, monsieur, do you believe in a single one of the scandalous stories you have heard about me? Take time to answer, for your answer will decide my destiny and your own!"

This threatening tone drove me perfectly wild. I became almost crazy,—the puppet of an insane fury.

Going close up to Marguerite, I said, as I held her by the waist:

"Positively, dearest, indignation is as becoming to you as one of Madame Baudrand's bonnets; you never looked so beautiful. Come, my angel, my feminine Don Juan, let us deceive yesterday's lovers and those of to-morrow, let us commit one more infidelity in honour of the poor dear marquis—"

At first she looked at me with amazement, then, with a heartrending cry, she repulsed me violently, and disappeared in her bedroom, locking the door after her.

I came home like a drunken man.

I had only a confused recollection of what had taken place.

That night I was taken ill with a violent attack of fever. I was delirious all night long. The next day my valet handed me a sealed package.

It contained the letters I had written to Marguerite.

"Who brought this?" I said to him.

"Mlle. Vandeuil, monsieur, at two o'clock this morning."

"And Madame de Pënâfiel?"

"Madame la marquise started off last night in her carriage. Her people do not know her destination."

CHAPTER XXVI

AN ENCOUNTER

It would be useless to tell of all my remorse and regret after the departure of Madame de Pënâfiel. I went over again (only on another theme) all the tortures which followed my rupture with Hélène. Only, before I finally renounced for ever that noble girl, there remained to me the hope of at some time obtaining her hand; while now I knew I should never see Marguerite again. As it always happens, the affection she had shown me appeared in all its intoxicating sweetness when I had lost it for ever, and by a fatal contradiction I knew that I loved her more passionately than ever.

I dwelt with a sort of cruel enjoyment on all I had so unworthily sacrificed, not to distrust, but to a species of monomania as wicked as it was stupid; to be sure, it had brought terrible suffering on me, but what of that? A crazy man suffers, too; but is the harm he does any the less harmful?

What more can I say? The vision of that seductive woman appeared more beautiful, more voluptuous, than ever before. The saddening vulgarity of the saying that we only know the worth of happiness when we have lost it, was the dolorous theme upon which my despair played every sort of variation.

Overcome by such crushing regrets, what could I do?

Alas! when a man is of such an unfortunate disposition that neither love, ambition, study, nor social obligations suffice to occupy his mind and his

heart, above all, when he despises or misunderstands that beneficent spiritual nourishment which religion offers him as a salutary and never failing aliment, his soul, thus deprived of all life-giving principles, reacts upon itself. Then nameless chagrins, mournful and pale ennui, gnawing doubts, phantoms of despair, are almost always born of these gloomy, solitary, and sickly nocturnal meditations.

If, on the contrary, man applies that self-destroying energy to the rigorous observance of the laws imposed on him by God and humanity, if he succeeds in thus limiting his career to the fulfilling of his duties, in tracing out for himself a definite and straight road which ends in a hope of immortality, his life becomes logical, and is the natural consequence of the principles which govern him and the goal towards which he aspires. Then all becomes an admirable sequence, each deed has its cause and its effects. Instead of wandering miserably, with neither interest, hope, nor restraint, he advances towards a definite object. False or true, at least he is travelling along a road, and if the magnificent perspectives in which it ends, and on which he gazes so eagerly, are only a dazzling mirage, what does it matter, since this divine and consoling mirage has led him on to the end of his existence, his heart filled with joy, with hope, and with love?

Alas! these noble thoughts vainly filled my mind; I felt neither the desire nor the energy to follow them.

So that I fell again with all the weight of my dejection into the void. I understood my disease, but had not the courage to try to cure it. I acted with the weakness of those sick people who, stubborn in their sufferings, obstinately prefer a constant pain to the

heroic but beneficent action of the knife or the fire.

I led a miserable life; in the daytime I closed my door to the few visitors that my reserve and selfish happiness had not alienated. Sometimes I would give myself up to violent exercise, I would ride on horseback, I would have a furious bout at fencing, so as to tire myself out, thinking thus to dull the mind by fatiguing the body.

Then when night came, I felt a strange and melancholy pleasure in enveloping myself in a cloak, and thus wandering alone about Paris, especially when the weather was cloudy or stormy.

I gave myself up on these occasions to a sort of scornful rage, as ridiculous as it was puerile, whenever I would pass before a splendid residence, or a brightly lit up theatre, where the carriages were rapidly driving up from every direction. I, too, if I desire it, can have my place in these gay salons, amid this splendid and envied throng; if I so willed it my restive horses would now be bearing me to these very fêtes! The existence I scorn would be the joy and pride of most men, and yet, from I know not what caprice, which thus insults the ready-made happiness that fate has bestowed upon me, I prefer to wander thus on foot, dragging my incurable sadness through these muddy streets.

A woman who was both beautiful and young, noble and clever, who united in herself all that could flatter a man's vanity, has deigned to ravish me with the most perfect love, and, after two months of ideal bliss, without reason or shame, I have insanely and brutally trampled this love under my feet with anger and scorn! And now I have no longer the courage to

be angry and spiteful; I weep; I am the most miserable of men; I go about, hiding myself like a criminal; and these indecent creatures, who shamelessly wander about here and there in the mud, they dare to speak to me,—to me. To me, who at this very hour might be at the feet of a woman who is admired by all for her elegance, wit, and beauty! A woman who offered me the realisation of my fondest dream of happiness, and who, perhaps, might even now be holding my hand in hers, saying in her enchanting voice, while her eyes became humid with love, "My life is thine,—my life and my soul!"

Truly it was frightful, and yet, through the strange perversity of my unfortunate nature, I took a sort of gloomy and inexplicable delight in contrasting this dismal and abject present with such a dazzling and bewildering past.

One night, five or six days after Marguerite's departure, I was at the height of one of these painful paroxysms of grief. The night was dark, a drizzly, cold rain was falling; I enveloped myself in my cloak, and went out.

I had never been aware of the dismal aspect of the streets of Paris at this hour; nothing could be more forlorn and lugubrious than the pale reflection of the street-lamps on the pavements, as they shone on the fetid mud that covered the sidewalks, and in the stagnant water of the gutters. Wandering thus, I often thought of the miserable state of a homeless man, without bread, without resources, wandering thus as I wandered. I will admit that, when such thoughts assailed me, if I met on my road, in such stormy weather, some poor woman carrying a child

already bearing the impress of misery, or some lean, old, trembling beggar, I would bestow on them liberal alms; and, although vice was probably the cause of their miserable condition, I always felt a moment of the greatest satisfaction in seeing with what a stupefied look they would touch a piece of gold. And then the whole terrible picture of misery would expose itself to my view! Not the misery of the man who, building a hut of leaves, or hiding himself in the cleft of a rock, can, at least, breathe pure and invigorating air, and have the consolation of the sunshine and solitude; but the sordid and swarming misery of great cities, which herds together in infected shelters in order to keep warm.

Then an insurmountable terror would come over me as I would imagine myself by some unforeseen calamity forced to live the same life pell-mell with these unfortunate creatures who are depraved as much through poverty as crime.

I would become pale with affright at such a thought, for the most laborious condition, with a life in the open air, and solitude, had no terrors for me, but when I thought of this herding together, the hideous and perpetual contact of prisoners and *galériens*, for example, I was sometimes so wild and so terrified that it was an overwhelming relief to me to return to my home, which I found all lighted up, and where attentive servants, my books, my pictures, my portraits, all the peace and comforts of seclusion, awaited me, and where I could fly as to a haven of refuge.

Oh, then it was that on my knees I gratefully thanked my father for all he had done for me in leaving me rich. It was but a poor sort of gratitude, which had need of being thus terrified before it could

awaken in my heart and revive for an instant those souvenirs which were already so far distant and so forgotten!

But to return to my nocturnal promenades. One night, as I almost aimlessly wandered along the streets, I arrived at the Boulevard de la Bastille. The moon threw an uncertain light through the flying clouds that obscured her disc, for it was very windy, and a drizzling rain was falling steadily. It might have been about nine o'clock.

Among some of the detached houses, situated near the old garden of Beaumarchais, I noticed one because it seemed newer than the others, and singularly clean and neat. It was very small, and a railing breast-high protected a little square garden like those we see before houses in England. Opening on to the garden, and at one of the corners of the house, was a green door with a brass knocker; the house was only one story high above the ground floor; three windows down-stairs, and three on the upper floor. In the closed shutters I noticed three small holes, destined, no doubt, to allow the light to enter; a bright light shone out from these openings, which were just on a level with my eye. I gave way to momentary idle curiosity, and peeped in.

The curtains had been drawn aside, and I could see through the window-panes the interior of the apartment.

But what was my astonishment, good God, when I recognised Hélène!

I was stupefied, for I believed her to be still in England with her mother.

For an instant I turned away my eyes, for I was breathless with emotion.

My heart beat so violently that its pulsations were painful; but, prompted by burning curiosity, I looked again.

Oh, how beautiful Hélène had become! She was no longer frail and stooping, as formerly; her shoulders were broader, her form more developed and rounder, but her waist as small and as supple as ever. Then her fresh and rosy cheeks, her calm, fair forehead, her whole person, revealed an appearance of quietude and serenity which, I admit, gave me a terrible shock; for I knew that she had altogether forgotten me,—since she seemed no longer to suffer.

She wore a black silk dress; her beautiful blonde hair fell in thick curls on her forehead and neck, and, as always, she wore the daintiest slippers.

As my eye became gradually used to looking through such a small space, the horizon which I could take in became larger, and how can I tell what I felt, when through an open door I saw a child's cradle!

Hélène, seated in an armchair, her pretty feet crossed one over the other, was reading by the light of a lamp, whose green silk shade reminded me of our salon at Serval. From time to time she placed her book on her knees, and, with a movement that thrilled me with sweet and bitter souvenirs, she rested her round white chin on the back of her left hand, whose little finger was raised along the side of her cheek, where the polished finger-nail shone like a pink shell.

From time to time Hélène gave an uneasy glance towards the clock, and then again towards the fire,

which burned cheerfully on the hearth; sometimes, too, she listened attentively to any sound that might come from the cradle, then she would go on with her reading; while reading she would mechanically pull at one of the elastic, silky rings of her long, fair hair and bring it up to her lips; which was another one of her childish tricks, for which her mother had often taken her to task, and which, alas! was another sad souvenir of my happy days at Serval. The interior of this little parlour was of the greatest simplicity; beside Hélène, on a table which was covered with a pretty cloth, I recognised a Saxony vase, which had belonged to her mother. It contained one of her favourite flowers. The walls of the room were papered with red, and covered with a quantity of water-colours and sketches in simple oak frames. Besides these there were many plaster casts from well-selected antique models, and two or three beautiful proofs of Rembrandt's etchings. These were all the ornaments of the apartment.

While I was examining all this with the most painful interest, I heard the noise of an approaching carriage, and hastily fled.

I had scarcely got back to the boulevard when a cab stopped before the house, and a very tall man, whose face I could not see, descended from it, passed very close to me, and opened the little green door, which quickly closed after him.

Then, more curious than ever, I went back to the window blinds, but the light had entirely disappeared.

After taking a note of the number of the house, I returned home.

It would be useless to attempt to tell what a state

this new complication of sadness put me in.

So Hélène was married; but to whom? Where was her mother? How was it that I, her nearest relative, had never been informed of this union? Hélène's aversion to me must be very obstinate, since she had never taken the trouble to treat me with mere formal politeness. But who was this husband of hers? Judging from what I had seen, he must be a man of very limited means. Could Hélène live happily in this way? Alas! her charming face, so placid and contented, told me how happy she was. For I knew from experience what grievous and deep traces sorrow had imprinted on her features.

She was living happily, then! Happy without me! Happy, though apparently poor! Could that be possible? Did wealth count for so little in making up the sum of our life's pleasure? No wonder I had inspired her with such odious scorn, when I had so meanly accused her of being mercenary.

I passed a wretched night. Fortunately for me, my impatient curiosity to know more about Hélène's circumstances diverted my grief by turning it into another channel, if I may say so.

Wishing to know as fully as possible every detail regarding my cousin, I thought over every way in which I could discover something about her.

I had in my service a man who had served in the capacity of courier when I had travelled; he was a young fellow of great activity, adroitness, and intelligence. For a moment I had an idea of calling on him to secretly find out all I wished to know; but fearing that in some way he might annoy Hélène, I decided to do everything myself.

Success seemed hardly possible, for the house was

isolated. There were neither any neighbours nor any janitor to question, and for nothing in the world would I have gone to call on Hélène. I decided, though, to carry out my plan.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE EXHIBITION

The means I employed in finding out who was Hélène's husband were very simple, and a lucky chance helped me to the discovery. The next morning I went in a cab, whose blinds I carefully closed, to a point just opposite the little house of the Beaumarchais garden, to see if some unforeseen circumstance would not help me in my projects. I did not have to wait long; about nine o'clock a man, carrying a package of newspapers, knocked at the green door and handed a paper to an elderly woman, whom I recognised as having been in my aunt's service.

I ordered my driver to follow the news-carrier; and when, after having distributed three or four other papers to several houses on the boulevard, he went off into a side street, I got out of the cab and accosted him:

"Tell me the names of the five people to whom you have just left your papers. You will earn two louis."

The man looked at me stupefied.

"I am asking you this because it is a bet I have

made," said I. "Besides, this information, which you can give me if you choose, can't make any possible difference to you," and I put the two louis in his hand.

"My faith, monsieur, I'll give it to you willingly; as the bands of my papers are all printed, it will not be any great harm in showing them to you."

I took a pencil, and wrote down the names as he read them off to me. He named three or four which were perfectly uninteresting to me, and, finally, giving the number of Hélène's house, said, "M. Frank, artist." I asked him, in order to put him on a false track, if, in the list of his subscribers who lived on the boulevard, there was not a M. de Verneuil.

He examined his list, replied that there was no such person, thanked me, and I returned home almost happy.

The name Frank was evidently that of a foreigner; Hélène must then have married during her voyage to Germany, and married an artist who, to all appearances, was as yet very little known, for I had never heard his name before.

I went, however, that very day to the exhibition of paintings, hoping to find in the catalogue some notice of Hélène's husband.

What inexplicable interest made me do all this? Almost certain that Hélène was happy, my discoveries could only result in misery to myself; but, whether I saw in all this interest in Hélène only a means of distracting my thoughts from the remembrance of Marguerite, or whether I was only following the influence of a sentiment which was still smouldering in my heart, I awoke from the apathy which had been dulling my senses for so many days,

and began my investigations with an energy that astonished me.

The exposition was drawing to its close; I entered the gallery, where there were very few people. I opened the catalogue, and there I found the name of M. Frank, Boulevard Beaumarchais, No. —. One painting and two water-colours were inscribed with his name.

One was a fragment from a scene in Goethe's "Egmont."

The painter had chosen the end of the charming interview between Claire and Egmont, who, at the request of his naïve mistress, has come to the humble abode where she dwells with her mother, clothed in all the splendid vesture which he wore to the court. "What splendour," cries Claire, as she admires, with childish joy, the dazzling costume of the man she loves with such profound and candid passion. "And this velvet," continues she, "and these embroideries! I know not where to begin. And the collar of the Golden Fleece! You told me once that it was a distinction of great merit. I can compare it, then, to your love for me, for I wear it here, next my heart."

This is the notice of the picture as it was printed in the catalogue.

No. —. M. Frank, Painter.
Claire and Egmont.

Claire.—Ah, let me be silent! Let me embrace thee! Let me fix my eyes on thine, and there find all things,—consolation, hope, joy, and sorrow. (She clasps him in her arms and gazes on him.) Tell me,

tell me,—it seems so strange,—art thou, then, Egmont? Count Egmont? The great Egmont, who makes such a stir in the world, who figures in the Gazette, who is the hope of the country?

Egmont.—No, Claire, I am not he.

Claire.—How?

Egmont.—Listen, Claire! Let me sit down! (He seats himself, and she kneels before him on a footstool, rests her arms on his knees, and gazes in his eyes.) That Egmont is a morose, solemn, cold Egmont, obliged to be for ever on his guard, to appear now this and now that; harassed, misunderstood, and worried, when people think him gay and light-hearted; beloved by the people who know not their own minds, surrounded by friends in whom he does not confide, observed by men who desire to supplant him, toiling and tiring himself for no object nor any reward. Oh, let me hide him, let me not speak of his feelings. But this Egmont, Claire, is calm, sincere, happy; he is loved and known by the best of hearts, which he knows and loves in return, and which he presses to his own with boundless confidence and love. (He takes her in his arms.) This is thy Egmont.

Claire.—Thus let me die; the world has no further joy.

The choice of subject for a picture has always appeared to me to show the real limit of an artist's intelligence; there is his thought, his poesy. Now I admit that the scene as described by the catalogue was admirably depicted.

I looked for the painting, nevertheless, with a secret hope that I should find it mediocre and

unworthy the high inspiration the artist had demanded from one of the *chef-d'œuvres* of Goethe.

Hélène had seemed to me too happy. If I had found her sad, this wicked and envious thought would never have entered my mind.

I sought this picture for a long time. At last I discovered it placed in a most unfavourable light, and half hidden by the gigantic and massive frame of a large portrait.

Frank's canvas was what is called an easel picture; it was about three feet high by two feet and a half wide.

I have said that, to my shame, I arrived before the picture with a determination to find fault with it; but what immediately caused my malevolent feelings to disappear in an instant was, first, my surprise, and then my involuntary admiration, as I recognised the sweet face of Hélène, who had, doubtless, posed for the personage of Claire.

It was Hélène, whose charm and unspeakable grace were still more idealised by the divine power of art, for art alone can give to the features it reproduces, and reproduces with fidelity, that inexplicable character, grandiose and almost superhuman, which is to the living features that which historic perspective is to events.

The more I examined the picture, the more I admired, in spite of the pangs of my hateful jealousy, a talent full of freshness, melancholy, and elevation, joined to an intimate knowledge of nature and the passions.

As to Egmont, no one could find a physiognomy more masculine and more expressive. If the slight

frown on the forehead showed the indelible trace of political cares, though his pallor betrayed the absorbing and concentrated reaction of that ambition which Egmont concealed under frivolity, one saw that at least, when he was at the side of Claire, free from all annoyances, forgetful of his hazardous schemes, he came to cool his burning brow by the soothing touch of this angel of devotion and candour, who, as Goethe tells us, had so often lulled this great child to sleep.

The count's smile was full of calmness and serenity, his eyes were bright with confidence and love; his pose, so joyfully casting aside court etiquette, was one of graceful negligence, while with his two beautiful hands he pressed those of Claire, who, kneeling before her Egmont, with her elbows on his knees, was gazing upon him with idolatry. In this profound and admiring look of Claire, you could imagine her saying, "I, poor, obscure girl, I am beloved of Egmont,—of the great Egmont." Simple and enchanting modesty, which makes that young girl's love so chaste, so humble, and so passionate!

As to the accessories of the picture, their extreme simplicity had been carefully and skilfully thought out, so as to show to all the more advantage Egmont's splendid costume. It was the interior of a poor Flemish house, there was Claire's spinning-wheel, some pieces of furniture with well-polished twisted columns; on the left a little window with leaded panes, which was shaded by the hop-vine that, climbing on the outside of it, half hid the bird cage that hung there. It was from this window, no doubt, that Claire had seen Egmont for the first time, when, passing by mounted on his beautiful battle-steed at the head of his army, the count, with his

unparalleled grace, had saluted her with his golden sword, and a bow of his waving plumes. And finally, above the high chimney piece, with its serge curtain, one could see a rude and naïve popular print representing the great Egmont. Wretched picture as it was, Claire had often dreamily gazed on it, little thinking that one day the great captain would be at her knees! Or rather that she would be kneeling before Egmont; for it was with admirable sagacity that the painter had thus chosen Claire's attitude, as symbolising the love of that admirable child, who, so timidly kneeling, shows her gratitude for the love she bestows.

A soft exquisite light illumined the picture, which was almost all painted in a beautiful clair-obscure, for the colouring, though bold, strong, and vigorous, was of a marvellous harmony and mellowness; in the accessories there was nothing bright or staring to attract the eye. Claire wore the simple black dress of a young Flemish girl, and Egmont's costume was of brown velvet, embroidered with silver; thus all the interest of the picture was absolutely concentrated on those two admirable faces.

I must admit that, in spite of the ill-feeling I had entertained for Frank, with the exception of M. Delacroix's "Charles the Fifth," the "Marguerite and Faust" of Ary Scheffer, and "The Children of Edward" by M. Delaroche, I had scarcely ever been more profoundly touched by the irresistible power of genius.

Giving myself up to its charming influence, thinking only of enjoying its beauty, I lost myself in the thousand impressions this picture awakened in me; but when this first effervescence of involuntary admiration was somewhat calmed, my envious

feelings returned with a sharper sting than ever, for I appreciated all there was great and elevated in the talent of Hélène's husband.

I looked in the catalogue; this beautiful picture had not yet been sold. A mean frame, whose cheapness was noticeable and displeasing to me, surrounded this *chef-d'œuvre*, which was barely visible, consigned as it was to the very end of the gallery among all the miserable daubs which are thrust to one side. I judged from this fact that Frank was but little known. He had probably just arrived from Germany, without friends and without protection, and had simply abandoned his picture to all the hazards of the exposition.

They say that some of the most talented men die unknown, or live misunderstood. I do not believe this. A first attempt may not be successful, but true merit inevitably rises at last to its own level. I made this reflection, which I believe a just one, as I thought bitterly that sooner or later the remarkable talent of Frank would become recognised, and that his obscurity, over which I was now rejoicing, would be but a thing of the past.

I looked again in the catalogue for the numbers and subjects of his water-colour sketches. Like the painting, they demonstrated the poetic intelligence of the artist.

The subject of one was from Shakespeare's "King Lear;" the other was from Goethe's beautiful drama of "Goetz of Berlichingen."

Not far from Frank's oil-painting I discovered these two sketches, which were of large dimensions.

The subject of the first was that sad and touching scene, in which Cordelia, the noble daughter of the

old king, notices in her father the return of reason, the cruelty of his other daughters having driven him crazy.

He exclaims:

"Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight! I am mightily abused. I should e'en die with pity, to see another thus. I know not what to say, I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see, I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured of my condition!"

"Oh, look upon me, sir," sweet Cordelia replies, "and hold your hands in benediction o'er me; no, sir, you must not kneel," she cries, holding in hers her father's hands, who, pale and trembling, wishes to kneel before his daughter, saying: "Pray do not mock me. I am a very foolish fond old man, forescore and upward, not an hour more nor less; and, to deal plainly, I fear I am not in my perfect mind. Methinks I should know you, and know this man; yet I am doubtful: for I am mainly ignorant what place this is; and all the skill I have remembers not these garments; nor I know not where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me; for, as I am a man, I think this lady to be my child Cordelia."

"And so I am, I am," cries Cordelia, weeping, and wetting his hands with her tears.

"Be your tears wet? Yes, 'faith. I pray, weep not: if you have poison for me, I will drink it. I know you do not love me; for your sisters have, as I do remember, done me wrong: you have some cause, they have not."

All the fearful sadness of the poor king, all the courageous tenderness of Cordelia, were exhaled from this beautiful drawing, which bore the imprint of the sombre and melancholy genius of

Shakespeare.

The other water-colour offered a remarkable contrast to the first; there, one beheld the wildness and rusticity of the German nature. The scene was laid in the vast and antique kitchen of old Goetz's château, which had been transformed into a magazine and hospital during the siege of his feudal habitation by the troops of the Empire.

Elizabeth, his wife, is busy in attending to the needs of a wounded man; the men are all on the ramparts, and so the women and children are hurrying here and there, moulding bullets or preparing food for the besieged. Old Goetz has just entered. His rude physiognomy, frank and warlike, shows the stubbornness and bravery of this man of iron; armed with his breastplate, he has placed, for an instant, his casque and his arquebuse on a massive oak table, on which is stretched out the half of a deer, that no one has had the time to cut up. Goetz passes one of his great hands over his forehead, from which he wipes the moisture, and in the other hand holds a large pewter mug, from which he means to quench his thirst and renew his strength.

"Thou hast a hard time, poor wife?" says he to Elizabeth. "I hope to have it a long time," she answers; "but we will hardly hold out." "Some charcoal, madame!" asks a servant maid. "What for?" "To melt bullets, we have no more." "How are you off for powder?" "We waste none of our shots, madame."

In order to give an idea of the powerful and varied beauty of the principal figures in this drawing, it will suffice to say that they perfectly expressed the savage energy which Goethe ascribes to them.

As I returned home, thinking of this unknown man, who had held me so long under the irresistible spell of his talent, my jealousy, my hateful irritation, gave way to a sort of sadness, which was calmer, but harder to bear. For the first time in my life, I was ashamed of my own idleness, as I compared the pure and elevated emotions, the noble resources, that the man I detested, this Frank, must find in his art, to the aimless life I was dragging along in such obscurity, without even having enough vulgar common sense to enjoy the sensual delights that were offered me.

I could not, however, hide from myself the fact that regret and envy were the sole motives of such reflections. Had Hélène married a man who was rich, idle, and well born, in the same social position as myself, I should never have had such thoughts; therefore, I was enraged when I reflected that fame would put an enormous and insurmountable distance between this Frank and myself. Sooner or later, he would be able to bestow on Hélène, not only the fortune that I could have given her, but the distinction of a great name, a name to be illustrious for ever, perhaps one of those glorious names that thrills with pride the woman who bears it!

Oh, how frightful all this seemed to me! For me there was no consolation, no possible hope. I found consolation, however, in this thought, which came to me through dragging to the surface every shameful and mean thought that was buried deep in my envious soul.

I hoped that Frank, in spite of his talent and his poesy, would prove to be of a vulgar and repulsive appearance. Besides, he could never have received that refined education, which results in elegance in the smallest details of daily life, a charm which

Hélène, who was a woman of such distinction, knew so well how to appreciate. Remembering, with a childish maliciousness, how few of the men of talent or genius I had met had an education and charm of manner on a level with the splendours of their mind, I had hopes that Frank would not be among the number of these privileged few.

Shall I dare to tell it? It was with the greatest conceivable impatience that I waited for night to come, so that again I might take my station before the shutters of Hélène's house, and find out if I had been mistaken on the subject of Frank.

Nothing could be wilder or more ridiculous than this kind of espionage. And, besides, why should I wish to continue in the fatal round? Why open a wound which was already so sore? I know not, but my curiosity was insurmountable.

I could not go too soon before Hélène's house, for fear of attracting the attention of people who might pass by. It was, therefore, ten o'clock at night when I reached that lonely boulevard.

The light was shining clearly from the little holes in the shutters. I crept quietly up to the house.

The little salon was lighted up; but at first I did not see Hélène.

Near the mantelpiece a man was drawing, by the light of a lamp. This man could be no other than Frank.

On beholding him, I felt myself torn to pieces by jealousy and hatred, for I could see that he was very young and remarkably handsome. The clear light from the lamp shone on his profile, whose noble contour showed a striking and extraordinary likeness

to the portraits of Raphaël at twenty-five.

His mouth had a smile both sweet and serious, and his eyelashes were so long that they threw a shadow on his delicate pale cheeks. His hair was chestnut brown, and, as was the fashion among German students, he wore it falling in soft curls on his neck, whose grace and elegance were apparent; for Frank wore a sort of black velvet jacket, belted around the waist with a purple silk cord. His long, white hand, which from time to time dipped a paint brush into a glass cup, was admirably shaped.

Nothing could be more despicable than my real despair at the revelation of Frank's beauty. But are the secret and disgraceful sores of pride any the less agonising, because they are hidden out of sight, in the very recesses of our hearts?

But with the insatiable avidity of despair, that wishes to drain its bitter cup to the dregs, I looked again into the parlour, leaning my burning forehead against the damp panel of the window blinds.

I cast my eyes towards the door which led into that other room; where the day before I had seen the cradle, I now saw, through that door which was standing wide open, Hélène sleeping beside her child.

Frank kept on with his drawing, though from time to time he would give a tender glance towards the enchanting group.

Never in my life shall I forget the sublime spectacle of this noble young man working thus in the silence of night, and the sacred tranquillity of the domestic hearth, to assure the existence of the wife and child who were sleeping so peacefully under his protection.

All the blackness of my envy could not withstand a scene so simple and so grand. My soul, until then cold and inflexible, was gently and insensibly penetrated by admiration. I understood how much hope and strength this young man must possess in order to struggle, talented and unknown, against the evil days now present and the terrible uncertainty of future success.

How beautiful Hélène was while thus sleeping! How blissful seemed her slumbers! What an angelic calm was on her closed eyelids; what serenity on her pure white brow, encircled by the waves of blonde hair; with what maternal grace she abandoned one of her beautiful hands to her child, who, still asleep, clasped it with his little fingers! Hélène had, no doubt, hesitated to withdraw it for fear of awakening him. What a serious charm her features had taken on! It was the melancholy and sweet smile of the young wife, happy and proud in her dignity of being a mother.

How despairing was my regret! With what bitterness I again recalled all I had lost as I contemplated this touching and chaste picture, in admiring that home which was so poor and yet seemed so blessed of God.

I know not how long a time I remained absorbed in such thoughts, but it must have been late when I again looked into the salon, for Frank was standing and contemplating his work with the fugitive and pleased look of an artist who is charmed and proud of his work. This satisfaction, rapid and ephemeral as it is, which only lasts a moment, reveals to the artist in that one moment the resplendent beauty of his work in all its perfections. Then, strange

phenomenon, this divine lustre once gone, this consciousness of genius once extinct, the artist loses all remembrance of it. It is no more than a vague and far-off dream, whose memory excites him without reassuring him, and he becomes crushed to earth under the terrible doubt as to the real worth of his talents,—eternal torture to a sensitive soul who can compare the limitations of art to the grandeur of nature.

After having contemplated his drawing, Frank smiled sadly, covered it over, and went towards a little secretary which stood on the other side of the fireplace. He opened a drawer, took out a purse, and, having put to one side some pieces of gold, he sighed as he looked at the little that remained.

Almost at the same instant he glanced quickly and sadly at his wife and her child; then with his forehead bent on his hands he remained for some time with his elbows on the mantelpiece.

I understood it all.

No doubt this brave man was experiencing one of those terrible alarms during which the reality of his position crushes him with its chilling, deadening weight. The radiant wings of his bright genius, which for a moment he had spread out so gloriously, had dashed against that hideous phantom, which always stands like an open sepulchre,—want! And he had a wife, a child,—and that wife was Hélène!

However, after a moment of reflection, Frank proudly raised his beautiful head; his eyes, though moistened with tears, shone with courage and with hope. It may have only been by chance, but his gaze, so touching, and so full of energy, fell on "The Descent from the Cross," by Rembrandt, one of the

engravings which ornamented the salon.

Thus, as he contemplated this symbol of suffering on earth, Frank's features gradually became serene and grave. Perhaps he was ashamed of his weakness and discouragement, when he remembered the immeasurable sorrow and the angelic patience of the One whose Calvary was so high and whose cross was so heavy.

I returned home sadder but less unhappy. Some kindly feelings cooled the burning regrets that were consuming me. I no longer had the heart to begrudge Frank his happiness; nor did I rejoice over his poverty when I had seen how courageously he bore it. The love I bore to Hélène, the remembrance of my mother, who had loved her so much, of my father, to whom she had been like a daughter, brought better and more generous thoughts into my mind. I wished that I might be of some service to them both, and to this end I went the next day to see Lord Falmouth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE DEPARTURE

My idea was to beg Lord Falmouth to buy for me, in his own name, the oil-painting and the two water-colours by Frank; and afterwards to order, still in his name, a set of drawings on subjects from the works of Schiller, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Walter Scott.

My object was to assure the future for a certain

length of time to Hélène and Frank by this easy and pleasing work, which would not interfere in any way with that inspiration necessary to more serious labours, and in doing this I hoped to liberate this noble young man from those sad and annoying preoccupations which often react with fatal effect on even the greatest geniuses.

I addressed myself to Lord Falmouth in preference to any other man, because, in spite of his reputation as a man who was perfectly blasé, and his disdainful and profound scepticism of all and everything, he was the only man among my acquaintances that I dared to take so much into my confidence. I had noticed in him—doubtless to give credit to that common saying, that extremes meet—a great inclination, not to feel, but at least to contemplate, all emotions that were young, innocent, and happy.

It was anything but easy to get to see him before four o'clock in the afternoon, the hour at which he got up; however, he received me.

"Where do you come from?" said he; "for the last eight days no one has caught a glimpse of you anywhere. I know very well that Madame de Pënâfiel has left town, but you are not the kind of man to be inconsolable; besides, a departure is always flattering —when one stays behind."

"I want to speak to you very seriously," said I, fearing that if our conversation took on such a bantering tone, he would interpret the service I was about to ask of him in a false manner.

"What is it, then?" said he.

"In two words, then, it is this: A young foreign painter of great talent, but who is absolutely unknown here, has married my first cousin, who was

like a sister to me, who grew up at our home, whom I wish you to believe that I respect as much as I love. An unfortunate lawsuit against my aunt, a suit which I may be said to have instigated and gained, much to my regret, by the abuse of a procuration, which my lawyers made use of without my knowledge, has caused a great deal of coolness between my cousin and myself, at least on her part; for, not knowing the whole truth, she believes my conduct to have been frightfully grasping. The amount I gained by this suit is very little for me, but it would be a great help to my cousin and her husband, who I admit to you are poor. On the other hand, as we never see each other any more, and as I know what a proud, sensitive nature the young woman has, it is absolutely impossible for me to restore to her what I have gained in spite of my wishes. I have then thought of a means which will conciliate everything, if you will only be so extremely obliging as to come to my aid. This young painter has exposed an oil-painting and two water-colours which show a great and incontestable talent; but his name is unknown. I wish, then, that you should buy the pictures as though for yourself, and furthermore, that you command under your own name a set of drawings from different works of Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, and Scott, for the sum of fifty thousand francs. You see it is an indirect manner, not of giving back the money that cursed lawsuit gained for me (for that is impossible), but at least of being of some use to my cousin and her husband, whom fortunate circumstances and certainty of work will surely place in the position he merits."

In keeping with his imperturbable nature, Lord Falmouth never manifested the least surprise, neither did he make the slightest objection, but, in the most

amiable way, promised to do what I had requested him, and we agreed to go the next day to the gallery to see Frank's pictures.

More than this, he promised that he would immediately recommend the artist to five or six of his friends, who were great connoisseurs, and who would very soon be able to elevate Frank from his obscure position, if he really possessed the talent that I gave him credit for. I went then the next day to the Museum with Lord Falmouth. He had formerly been very fond of pictures himself, but, being bored with everything, was quite indifferent to them now. He was struck, however, with the indisputable talent which was so suddenly revealed in Frank's works; he admired above all the painting of Claire and Egmont, criticised it with marvellous appreciation, and admitted that, though he had distrusted my enthusiasm, he was obliged to recognise in it the work of a great painter.

Lord Falmouth was to go to see Frank the next evening, having written him a note that morning to find out if he could be received. Under the pretext of taking Lord Falmouth the money I destined for these purchases, I called on him, urged to do so by my curiosity to know Frank's answer. It was very simple, but very dignified, and neither full of that pretended modesty, that obsequious humility, which, too often, ruin the finest minds.

"If you will come and take supper with me," said I to Lord Falmouth, as I was leaving the salon, "after your visit to our great artist, I will wait for you. But not later than six o'clock in the morning," I added, laughingly.

"I will be at your house before midnight," he replied, "however extraordinary that may seem to

you. The fact is, that for the last five or six days I have not been playing any more; I am in constant good luck, and that is a bore. Play for its own sake seems to me decidedly stupid. I have not the courage to play high enough to ruin myself, and, considered simply as an amusement, the loss and gain are not worth the trouble."

"And at what o'clock do you go to see Frank?"

"I am going at nine o'clock, for that is what he asks me to do in his reply to my letter. By the way, you will perhaps think me peculiar or ridiculous," added Lord Falmouth; "but I always notice the way a letter is written, and even how it is folded, for I gain from these small indications very sure knowledge as to the *savoir-vivre* of the writer, and on this score our young painter appears to be a perfect gentleman."

I left Lord Falmouth.

I shall not attempt to hide the fact that this last observation on his part, apropos of these trifling circumstances, which he found so full of meaning, and which I had also noticed in Frank's letter, awoke in my breast, and in spite of all my good and generous intentions, a new and cruel fit of envy.

Then, prompted by this new access of jealousy, I began for the first time to insult my noble conduct towards Frank and Hélène; I mocked at my delicacy with bitter irony. I said that I was a ridiculous fool to do all this for people who most likely never spoke of me except with scorn; then, by a miserable chain of thought, I arrived at a state of mind in which I was again capable of bringing up accusations against Hélène. If she had consoled herself so soon, it was because she had never really loved me; in spite of my love, my regret, my remorse, she had been merciless

to me; her refusal of my hand was only a high-strung display of her false pride. She was still prouder than she was egotistical and mercenary, I said to myself. Fortunately, she will never know the source of this help, and, with the exception of Lord Falmouth, whose discretion I can count on, and from whom I have hidden the veritable pretext of my conduct, no one shall ever be aware of my silly generosity. And after all, I added, seeking to find by no matter what means a selfish motive for my conduct, "I have got the painting and the drawings; and when Frank will have become a celebrity, they will be very valuable, and I shall have made a good speculation!"

It was thus, alas! that I found the means of withering and falsifying my good action, through the odious fear I had of being the dupe of a high and honourable sentiment.

In spite of these fancies which for awhile dimmed the only ray of happiness whose blest influence had come to refresh me, I wished to see Hélène once more, if it were possible, and also to be an invisible witness of the manner that she and Frank would receive Lord Falmouth.

I took up my station there, on the boulevard, at nine o'clock, not daring to approach the house until after the arrival of Lord Falmouth. I did not wait long; very soon a carriage stopped, it was his. Again I leaned my forehead against the window-blinds.

By a noticeable display of good breeding, which showed me that Hélène was still the same, there had, evidently, been no preparations made in her modest home, there was nothing to indicate an expected visit from a Mæcenas. Everything was arranged with its

usual taste and simplicity.

When Lord Falmouth entered, he bowed respectfully to Hélène, who received him with a polite dignity which was full of charm. Frank, in his manner, seemed to understand perfectly the exact point where the pride of an artist should give place to the affability of a man of the world. Then, no doubt at the request of Lord Falmouth, he showed him some of his sketches, and I noticed that Lord Falmouth's face, which was usually so expressionless, brightened up with something that looked almost like enthusiasm, as he contemplated I know not what drawing; while Hélène blushed with pride and pleasure on hearing these praises which Frank was receiving with so much modesty and serious good breeding.

After a half-hour's visit, Lord Falmouth took leave of Hélène, who, without rising, returned his bow in the most affable manner. Frank rang the bell, accompanied Lord Falmouth as far as the door, and bowed to him. I hid myself when Lord Falmouth came out, and until he had entered his carriage, then I returned to the window.

Frank and Hélène were no longer in the salon; they had both gone to look on their child, and I saw them smiling, as they stood besides its cradle, and gazed on it with loving eyes, as though they wished to bestow on the angelic little creature the unexpected good fortune which had come to them.

For one last time I looked towards the house with grief in my heart, and then silently bidding farewell to Hélène, I hastened away.

On returning home I waited for Lord Falmouth

impatiently, for I wished to know the impression Hélène and Frank had made on him. He was soon announced.

"Do you know," said he to me on entering, "that your cousin is a *très grande dame?* that it would be impossible to find more grace or more distinction? that she converses most agreeably, and that I can easily conceive your anger with your lawyers for causing you to gain a suit that could bring distress to such a charming woman?

"And what about Frank?" I asked him.

"Our great painter? Before the year is out that man will have risen to his proper level. I am sure of it; and his position will be a fine one. I predict this more from his conversation than from his admirable picture, though we talked but little, after all; but in some of the sketches he showed me, and in some beautiful ideas that he developed very simply and naturally, I beheld veritable ingots of the purest and finest gold, which only awaited the stamp of the mint to become more valuable and splendid still. And with all this, everything in their simple home is in such good form and breathes such an air of native elegance that it is quite touching to see these two beautiful young people, so reserved, so noble, and so dignified in their poverty. I thank you for the sweetest impression I have felt for these many years. Your errand is done, the pictures are yours, our Frank is going to set to work on the drawings; as to the price, he is to draw on my banker at sight. I also ordered two pictures for myself, for he rekindled in me the love of art, and I am going to send two or three eminent connoisseurs to see him, who will know how to help him, so that you will see him in six months earning all the money he wants, and then

he will lose the only thing that spoils him, which is the proud reserve of his manner; for fortune expands great minds, whereas it shrivels up narrow ones, until they are all that is sublimely ridiculous and insolent."

The praises bestowed On Frank, by a man who was as habitually cold and reserved as Lord Falmouth, caused me intense suffering, because they confirmed in an unmistakable way all the good qualities I had, in spite of my malevolence, discovered in Hélène's husband. I thanked Lord Falmouth for his kindness, but he appeared to perceive my unkind thoughts, and said:

"You seem to be worried."

"I really am; and as you are one of the few men to whom one may tell the truth, I am willing to admit it," said I.

"To tell you the truth, I like you better so disposed than if you were very gay," he replied. "I don't know why, but I am bored more than usual these last few days." Then after a long pause: "Does the life you are leading here amuse you enormously?" said he.

"Great God, no!" I exclaimed.

"Speaking seriously?"

"Oh, very seriously."

At this moment supper was announced.

"Be so good as to have all we will be likely to need placed on the side-tables, and send away your servants; we will talk more freely," said Lord Falmouth, in English, as we were going into the dining-room.

"Thanks to God," said he, "I never have such a good

appetite as when I am bored to death. It seems as though I had at such times to nourish the beast that is within me."

"I am also very gourmand, but in fits and starts," I replied, "and then I go to impossible lengths, and when I would like to find an inventive and creative genius I only stumble on a cook. And you may laugh if you please; but I need to have an excuse to really dine conscientiously, if you will allow me to say so; for example, after a long hunt, when I can stretch out in a great armchair. I then feel a real sensual enjoyment; but to make a study of my dinner, to seriously reflect on what I am going to eat, that is too limited a pleasure; for one soon falls into repetition and then comes satiety."

"Well," said Lord Falmouth, "I had once a veritable Christopher Columbus, in his way, who discovered for me unknown worlds, but unfortunately he is dead, poor fellow! Not a suicide like your Vatel, but in a real duel with the head butler of M. de Nesselrode; for my poor Hubert deeply despised all that concerned the pantry; he would sometimes busy himself there by way of pastime, for amusement, he would say. He pretended that the *pudding glacé à la Nesselrode* was the result of one of these leisure hours, and that his rival was simply a plagiarist. But alas! how sad is our fate here below! My poor Hubert was doubly the victim, for the name of the great diplomat who christened the pudding is the only name that it bears in the legend of good livers."

"What a singular thing it is," said I to Lord Falmouth, "that duelling and suicide should descend so low, and how truly it is said that the passions only change their names!"

"Ah, for my poor Hubert the cuisine was a real

passion. To satisfy hunger was only a vile trade, he said, but to make people eat when they were not hungry, he considered a fine art, and one he placed higher than many another."

"And he was quite right," said I to Lord Falmouth; "for if we all were virtuous enough only to care for sensual pleasures, how deadly stupid life would be! The most admirable thing about the cravings of physical appetite is that they can always be appeased, and being satisfied, bring us a torpor, a dullness, which has a certain charm, while the desires of the mind, its most splendid imaginings, only fill us with regret and bitterness."

"I think as you do," said Lord Falmouth, "it is evident that every abstract thought pursued too long a time only leaves us in a state of lassitude and chagrin, because it is not given to the human species to comprehend the eternally true, nor to attain to the eternally perfect, while a physical appetite liberally satisfied leaves the organisation calm and contented, because in this man has fulfilled an exact want of nature."

"That is true; thought wears one out and destroys one."

"And besides," said Lord Falmouth, as he slowly emptied his glass, "all this time life is passing, every day we exclaim, 'What a bore!' but that doesn't prevent, Lord be praised! the hours from gliding along all the same."

"And so we arrive," said I, "at the end of our term of life, day by day,—hour after hour."

Lord Falmouth made a gesture of resignation, filled his glass, and pushed the decanter over to me.

We remained this way some moments without speaking a word. Lord Falmouth was the first to break the silence. He said to me: "Is your travelling carriage in order?"

"To be sure it is," said I, very much surprised at such a sudden question.

"Listen," said he, as though he were speaking of the most ordinary topic. "At the present hour you are extremely unhappy. You have not told me why, consequently I am ignorant as to the cause of your grief. Paris is as hateful to you as it is a bore to me. I have sometimes dreamed of a wild project which I have always wished to carry out, so seductive has it seemed to me, but to do so I need a companion who feels in himself the energy and desire to attain to new and powerful emotions, perhaps at the risk of his life." I looked steadily at Lord Falmouth. He continued to drain his glass in little sips. "I needed, in order to put this plan into execution, to find some one who, in order to become my associate, would be ready, as the country folks say, to go to the devil,—not through want, but from a superabundance of the joys and good things of this life."

I continued to watch Lord Falmouth, thinking that he was joking; he remained just as calm and serious as he always was.

"Well," said he at length, "are you willing to be that companion?"

"But what is it that I am expected to undertake?" I asked him, with a smile.

"I can not tell you yet; but if you accept my offer this is what you will have to do: First you must expect to travel a year or more, or even—"

"Or even for all eternity. Yes, I understand. And afterwards, what else?"

"You are only to take with you one man, but he must be trustworthy, healthy, and brave."

"I have such a one among my servants."

"Very well; then you must bring fifteen or twenty thousand francs, not more."

"What else?"

"Provide yourself and your man with the best possible arms."

I continued to smile as I watched Lord Falmouth. "It is getting to be serious," said I.

"Allow me to finish, afterwards you can act as you see fit," he continued. "You must provide yourself with excellent arms, get your passport, and send immediately for your horses."

"What! start off to-night?"

"This very night,—this very hour; you must give me what I need to write to my *valet de chambre*, my waiting man will take it to him, and will return with all I shall want and my carriage, for it is important that you should have your carriage and I should have mine."

"Ah, come, now, are you speaking seriously?"

"Give me a chance to write, and you shall soon find out."

And in a few moments Lord Falmouth had written his letter, and one of his men had started off with it.

"But," said I, "my clothes—my trunks?"

"If you will take my advice you will only carry

with you the necessary linen for your voyage."

"But how long is that journey to be? What road do we take?"

"The road to Marseilles."

"Are we going to Marseilles?"

"Not exactly, but to a little port which is near that city."

"And what to do there?"

"We are to embark."

"And in what direction are we to sail?"

"That is my secret; trust in me and you will not regret it. However, I should tell you, perhaps," added he, in a tone which moved me deeply, "I ought to tell you without any silly trifling, that you will do as well to arrange any business you may have on your mind, in case of our not returning."

"You mean I am to make my will?" I cried out, laughing at such an idea.

"Do as you please," said Lord Falmouth, in the most uninterested way possible.

Still continuing to believe this voyage in the light of a mystification in which I was willing to indulge him, I was so desirous of quitting Paris, where such cruel souvenirs continued to sadden my life, that I decided to write a few last words as a measure of prudence; however, I said to Lord Falmouth:

"Oh, I see, it is a bet you have made, to get me to make my will."

"Then don't make it," said he, without changing his expression.

I knew that on several occasions Lord Falmouth had started off in this impromptu way on very long voyages. I thought then, that, perhaps, after all, he felt the desire for a sudden change. Now his companionship was very agreeable to me, and the object of the voyage, which he tried to hide from me (doubtless to excite my curiosity) by an appearance of mystery, might suit me very well. Perhaps, though, it might have unforeseen consequences, and so I might as well write a few directions in case we should not return, as he said.

This sudden determination looks as strange to me to-day as were the results it brought about; but I had been so forlorn lately, I was so perfectly free from any attachment, any affection, any duty, that the suddenness of the determination pleased me, as any strange new thing pleases us when we are but twenty-five years old.

I sent for my old tutor, and left him my directions and full power to attend to my affairs.

At the end of an hour's time my preparations were all finished, and the carriage of Lord Falmouth was waiting for us. I got into it with him. Our men servants were to follow us in mine.

Ten minutes afterwards we had left Paris.

LORD FALMOUTH

CHAPTER XXIX

PLANS

I left Paris with Lord Falmouth under the weight of an overwhelming sorrow. Although indifferent at leaving a worldly life for a peregrination, of whose mysterious end I was still in ignorance, the memory of affections so incompletely severed, which I was leaving behind me, would, I knew, pursue me and overtake me in the midst of the distractions of this journey.

Hélène, Marguerite! sad names which fate cast at me every day as a cruel joke, a remorse, or as a challenge,—I could not forget you, and my conscience avenged you!

Once cracked, let the cup be broken! It matters not. But what folly to cast it still full at their feet! To feel one's lips parched and dry when one might still drink from a fresh, pure spring! It was frightful. In analysing my impressions, I recognised everywhere my instinct of habitual egotism. Never, never did I dream of the horrible wrong that I had done to Marguerite or to Hélène. I thought always of the great happiness, the loss of which I deplored.

I was leaving Paris, but I was still held, so to speak, in spite of myself, to this centre of bitter regrets, by a thousand invisible ties. If I sometimes allowed myself to entertain the hope of again seeing, of one day finding, Marguerite again, suddenly the reality of the past came to check my heart's throb, by one of those quick, heavy, so to speak, electric blows, which go straight to the soul and make the whole being tremble painfully.

I was also overcome when I contemplated with what indifference I thought of my father; and yet if I thought of him, it was to make a sacrilegious comparison between the trouble that his death had formerly caused me and the grief of love which I felt.

Must it be, alas! confessed to my shame? In considering with an experience so unfortunately hasty these different kinds of griefs, this last pain seemed to me less intense, but more bitter; less deep, but more violent; less oppressive, but more poignant than the first.

There are, I believe, two orders of suffering: suffering of the heart, legitimate and hallowed; suffering of pride, shameful and miserable.

The first, however desolating it may be, has no bitterness; it is immense, but one is proud of this immensity of grief, as one would be of the religious accomplishment of some great and sad duty!

Then, also, the tears caused by this suffering flow abundantly, and without any trouble; the soul is disposed to the most touching emotions of pity, or is full of commiseration and of love; in a word, all misfortunes are the cherished and respected sisters of our misfortune.

On the contrary, if you suffer for an unworthy cause, your heart is drowned in hatred; your concentrated grief resembles dumb fury which shame bridles with a sharp bit that vanity conceals; envy and hatred gnaw you, but your eyes are dry, and the unhappiness of others can alone draw from you a sad and mournful smile.

Such, at least, were the two shades of grief, very defined, which I felt after the death of my father, and after my rupture with Hélène and Marguerite.

That was not all. Scarcely had I left Paris with Lord Falmouth, than, by a miserable caprice, I regretted having undertaken this journey; not that I feared its results, but I should have preferred to be alone, in order to have looked my sorrow well in the face, to have struggled with it hand to hand, and, perhaps, to have triumphed over it.

I have often found when one suffers, nothing is more fatal than to wish to be distracted from one's grief.

If during some moments you become stupefied by your misfortunes, the awakening is horrible.

When you find yourself suddenly precipitated into an abyss of moral suffering, after the terrible shock which stuns, which bruises even the most delicate fibres of your heart, that which is, above all, most frightful, is this sudden night, black and profound, of the soul, which does not permit one to see even the thousand wounds by which it is torn.

Frightfully bruised, you lie annihilated in the midst of a chaos of nameless pains; then, little by little, thought follows the vertigo. As sight becomes accustomed to distinguishing the objects in the gloom, you begin, so to speak, to recognise yourself in your despair.

Then, sinister and fading as spectres, slowly one by one the harrowing regrets of the past spring up around you, and the charming visions of a future which will never be; then appear before you the phantoms of the happiest, the most radiant, the most brilliant hours of former times,—for your grief forgets nothing,—the most distant echo, the faintest perfume, the most mysterious murmur, all are mercilessly reproduced in your thoughts; but this

mirage of a lost happiness is strange and sinister. You believe you see a magnificent landscape, bathed in azure, of light and sun, across the glassy pupil of a dying man, and all seems veiled in a gray and sepulchral mist.

The suffering is then in its paroxysm, but it can only diminish; it is sharp and penetrating, but it can be analysed; your enemies are numerous, are threatening, are terrible, but you see them, you can fight them.

You struggle so, or, like a wounded wolf, which, in the depths of its cave, awaits his recovery only in time, wrapped in your solitary suffering, you can, near or far, assign a term to your grief, and hope, at least, in forgetfulness. Forgetfulness,—this only inexorable reality of life! Forgetfulness,—this fathomless ocean, wherein come unceasingly to be lost all sorrow, all love, and all curses.

And yet, strange impotency which is called human philosophy! You know that one day,—that soon, perhaps,—time must efface many griefs, and this certain conviction can in no way calm or alleviate your torment.

It is for this reason, I repeat, that it has always seemed to me that to divert oneself from one's sorrow, instead of confronting it resolutely, is to begin each day this cruel initiation of suffering, instead of exhausting it by its own excess.

It will therefore be seen that, in the disposition of mind in which I found myself, this journey, adventurously undertaken, might sometimes seem to me painful.

We had travelled the whole night. We were about forty leagues from Paris. Falmouth awakened soon, took me by the hand, and said: "Night induces counsel. Now that I reflect upon everything, my plan may seem very stupid to you. I also wish to tell you my secret while we are still quite near to Paris, in

order that you may be able to return there to-night, if what I have to propose is not agreeable to you."

"Let us see,—tell me this mysterious plan."

"Here it is, then," replied Falmouth. "Do you know the Yacht Club?"

"Yes,—and you are, I believe, one of its members."

"Well, as such I own a charming schooner now moored off the Islands of Hyères, near Marseilles. This schooner is armed with eight carronades, and equipped with a crew of forty men."

"It is, then, a veritable cruise which you propose to me?"

"Almost; but you should first know that the crew of my yacht, from the captain to the last sailor, is entirely devoted to me."

"I can readily believe it."

"You should know further that my yacht, which is named the *Gazelle*, is worthy of its name; it does not sail, it bounds over the water. It has three times beaten the brig of Lord Yarboroug, our president, in the races at the Isle of Wight, and has taken the prize of the Yacht Club; in a word, there is not a warship of the royal navy of France or of England, that my yacht cannot distance as easily as a race-horse outstrips a cart-horse."

"I know that nearly all these pleasure-boats of your aristocracy swim like fishes; but what more?"

"Life now seems to you weary and monotonous, does it not? Well, would you like to give it some savour?"

"Without doubt."

"But first," said Falmouth, with an air of grave sarcasm, "I must declare to you that I am not the least in the world friendly to the Greeks; on the contrary, I have a leaning, and a very marked inclination towards the Turks."

"What?" I said to him, in astonishment. "And what connection is there between our journey and the Turks or friendliness towards the Greeks?"

"A very simple connection: I am going to propose to you to go to Greece."

"For what?"

"Have you heard of Canaris?" said Falmouth.

"Of that intrepid corsair, who has already burned all the Turkish vessels with his fireships? Certainly."

"Ah, well, and have you never been tempted to go to see that?"

"But go to see what?"

"Go to see Canaris set fire to a Turkish vessel?" replied Falmouth, with the most indifferent air in the world, and as if it had been a question of taking part in a race, or visiting a manufactory.

"I confess," I replied, unable to suppress a smile, "that until the present moment I have never had such a curiosity."

"It is surprising," replied Falmouth; "for myself, for six months I have dreamed only of Canaris and his fireships; and I have had my yacht brought from the Isle of Wight to Marseilles with the only intention of gratifying this fancy; so that if you consent to it we will set out from Marseilles for Malta, on board my schooner. Once arrived at Malta, I shall obtain authority from Lord Ponsonby to serve with my

yacht, in aid of the Greeks, although, I repeat, I am not friendly to the Greeks, and go to increase the squadron of Lord Cochrane. Now if you wish, for a few months, we will lead a life on board ship, which will have a little of the life of wandering knights or of pirates. We shall find there dangers, combats, tempests,—who knows? Finally, all kinds of things new, and a little adventurous, which will take us out of this worldly life which weighs upon us, and we shall perhaps have the pleasure of seeing my fixed idea realised, that of seeing Canaris burn a Turkish vessel, for I shall not die satisfied until I shall have seen that. What do you say to it?"

Although I thought Falmouth's taste a singular one, experimenting with incendiaries, I saw no serious objection to his proposition. I was unacquainted with the Orient; my thoughts had often wandered with love towards its beautiful skies. This idle and sensual life had always charmed me; and then, although having travelled much already, I had no idea what a voyage somewhat serious might be, and I felt a sort of curiosity to know how I might face some great danger.

Aside from the risks which one might run in associating with one of Canaris's expeditions, I knew that, since the Grecian insurrection, the Archipelago was infested with pirates, either Turks, renegades, or Algerians, and that a boat as weak as Falmouth's had every chance of being attacked. Upon the whole, this proposition did not displease me, and I replied, after a long silence, the result of which Falmouth appeared to await with impatience:

"Although, be it said to my great shame, the curiosity to see Canaris burn a Turkish ship is not positively what decides me, I agree entirely with

your plan, and you may consider me one of the passengers on your schooner."

"Then we shall be together there for a long time!" said Falmouth to me. "So much the better, for I have to free you well from prejudices."

I looked at him with surprise, and begged him to explain himself; he evaded.

The object of our voyage decided, it was expedient that we should set out from the Hyères Isles for Malta upon our arrival at Marseilles.

Little by little the sight of exterior objects, the experiences of the journey, calmed or rather benumbed my sufferings; but it was with uneasiness that I yielded to this sort of transient well-being. I knew that my griefs would soon return, keener than before. This beneficent sleep must have a cruel awakening. It must be said, too, that Falmouth showed the most affectionate cordiality, the most amiable cheerfulness of a most even character.

His conversation and his wit, moreover, pleased me greatly; I had sincerely appreciated his delicacy and his gracious kindness at the time of his relations with Hélène's husband.

In spite of my apparent coldness, and my continual sarcasms against friendship,—this sentiment to which I pretended to be so indifferent,—I felt at times drawn towards Falmouth by a lively sympathy.

Then, I repeat, this voyage appeared to me under a charming aspect; instead of regarding it as a disagreeable and tiresome distraction, I had golden dreams in thinking of all that might be agreeable, if I saw, if I met in Falmouth a tender and devoted friend.

There were the long and intimate conversations of the voyage, hours so favourable for disclosing one's inmost thoughts, and for confidences; there were the cruises, fatigues, even perils to share as brothers in an unknown country,—confidences, cruises, fatigues, perils, that might be so pleasant to recall later, in saying to each other, "Do you remember?" Sweet words, sweet echo of the past which makes the heart leap!

"Without doubt," I said to myself, "the satiety of pleasures is bad, but at least happily surfeited are they who, satiated with all the delicacies of the most refined existence, have the valiant caprice to go to temper again their souls at the conflagration of Canaris."

Interpreted in this manner, was not this voyage noble and grand? Was there not something touching and chivalrous in this community of dangers so fraternally shared?

When I quietly yielded to these impressions their beneficent influence softened my heart, so grievously occupied; a precious balm shed itself upon my wounds, I felt better; I still sorrowfully deplored the past, but I no longer hated it, and the generous faith that I had in myself for the future soothed the bitterness of my regrets.

Finally, during the pure and pious aspirations of my heart towards a consoling friendship, I could not express the happiness which transported me; as God embraces with a single glance all the ages of eternity, with the sudden radiance of my young hope it seemed to me to disclose all at once the horizon of the happiness which I imagined, a thousand new raptures, a thousand enchanting joys, with these words, "a friend." I felt awaken within me the noblest

instincts, the most generous enthusiasm. I was then, doubtless, well worthy of inspiring and of sharing this great and lofty sentiment, for I felt all the sympathy of it, I understood all the pious duties in it, and I experienced all the happiness of it.

But, alas! this ecstasy lasted but a short time, and from this radiant sphere I often fell again into the black abyss of the most detestable doubt, of the most humiliating scepticism.

My distrust of myself and my fear of being the dupe of the feelings which I experienced became magnified to the most suspicious monomania.

Instead of believing Falmouth attracted to me by a sympathy equal to that which I felt for him, I sought to learn what interest he could have had in inviting me to accompany him. I knew his fortune to be so large that I could not see in his offer any desire to diminish by half the expense of the voyage that he wished to make by proposing to me to undertake it with him. Nevertheless, in thinking of the contradictions of human nature, so extreme and so inexplicable, and of the more than modest simplicity which Falmouth assumed at times, I did not regard this miserable afterthought as absolutely inadmissible.

Without disclaiming this shameful supposition, I still saw in his proposition the disdainful indifference of a man, blasé, who would take by chance, indifferently, the arm of the first who came along,—take a long promenade, provided this first comer followed the same direction as himself.

Such were the mental reservations which often came in spite of myself to blemish a future which I sometimes dreamed of as so beautiful!

Oh, my father! my father I how fatal is the terrible gift which you have made me, in teaching me to doubt! I have put on your armour of war, but I have not been able to fight with it; it crushes me under its weight. Driven back, turned back upon myself, I feel my feebleness, my misery, and I exaggerate it still more.

We arrived at Marseilles and soon at the Hyères Islands without any remarkable episode.

CHAPTER XXX

THE YACHT

As we stopped in Marseilles only to change horses, we soon arrived at the Hyères Islands. We found Falmouth's yacht moored in the bay of Frais-Port in the Porquerolles harbour.

The *Gazelle* was a marvel of luxury and elegance; nothing could be prettier or more coquettish than this little boat. The whole interior had been reserved for Falmouth's habitation. This apartment was very commodious, consisting of a saloon and two bedrooms, each with a bath-room. The cabins of the captain and the lieutenant of the yacht were forward. The crew numbered forty sailors; they wore blue

jackets with buttons bearing the Falmouth arms; red woollen sashes fastened their white trousers, and broad black ribbons floated from their straw hats.

On the deck of the schooner, dazzlingly clean, were eight carronades of bronze carefully fixed on their mahogany carriages; swivel-guns of copper, an armory symmetrically furnished with guns, pistols, sabres, spears, and axes, completed the armament of this pretty boat.

The captain of the yacht, whom Falmouth presented to me, and whom he called Williams, was a tall, robust man of about twenty-five years of age, with a gentle and open face. He was—so Falmouth told me—the son of one of his Suffolk farmers. The greater number of the sailors belonged also to his county, where my lord owned much property near the sea. The lieutenant, a younger brother of Williams, was named Geordy. Younger by five or six years, he strongly resembled his brother, with the same appearance of strength, quiet, and gentleness.

The manner of these two young officers towards Falmouth was extremely respectful; they called him "my lord" and he addressed them with a familiarity that was friendly and almost paternal.

It was early in the month of June; the weather was magnificent; the wind, quite brisk and very favourable to our voyage, was from the north. After having consulted Williams as to the time of our departure, Falmouth decided that we should set sail the following morning.

In order to take a route towards the south it was necessary that we should reconnoitre the western coasts of Corsica, Sardinia, and of Sicily, and put into port at Malta; then, after having seen the governor

and taken a pilot on board we would set sail to the northeast, and enter the Grecian Archipelago, in order to reach Hydra, where Falmouth hoped to meet Canaris.

The bay of Frais-Port, where the *Gazelle* was moored, was situated south of Porquerolles, and frequented only by fishing-boats or small Sardinian ships which cruised along its shores.

When we reached this harbour, we found there, at anchor, some distance from the *Gazelle*, a large mystic, flying a Sardinian flag.

Night came on, the moon rose with all its dazzling brilliancy in the centre of a magnificent starry heaven; the air was perfumed with the odour of orange-blossoms from the gardens of Hyères.

Falmouth proposed a walk along the shore, so we set out. We followed a range of perpendicular rocks, rising from twenty-five to thirty feet above the shore which they outlined, and upon which the large waves of the Mediterranean broke, and died peacefully.

From the height of this sort of natural terrace, we discovered, at some distance before us, an immense sea, whose sombre azure was furrowed by a zone of silver light,—for the moon was still rising radiant and bright. In the west we could distinguish the entrance of the bay of Frais-Port, where the yacht was moored, and in the east the mountainous point of Cape Armes, whose white cliffs cut boldly into the deep blue of the sky.

We were much impressed by this calm and majestic picture; no sound disturbed the profound silence of the night, except from time to time the low, monotonous murmur of the waves breaking on

the beach.

I had fallen into a deep reverie, when Falmouth pointed out to me, by the light of the moon, the mystic of which I have spoken, advancing out of the bay, towed by its long-boat. Some minutes later it cast anchor at the extreme point outside the port, as if it wished to hold itself in readiness to set sail at the first signal.

"Our yacht will pass the night alone in the bay," said Falmouth, "for the mystic appears disposed to set sail."

"Between ourselves, your *Gazelle* will have little regret for its company," I replied, "for I have seen this boat by day, and it would be impossible to meet a ship of worse appearance; compared with your elegant and coquettish schooner it has the air of a hideous beggar before a pretty woman."

"So be it," answered Falmouth, "but the beggar has good legs, I can tell you. I, too, have noticed this boat; it is frightful, and, therefore, I am sure that it travels like a dolphin. See, look at the immense spread of the lateen sails which it has just hoisted."

I interrupted Falmouth to show him, thirty feet below, his Lieutenant Geordy, who, advancing cautiously along the shore, seemed afraid of being seen. He had to cross a part of the beach lighted by the moon. Instead of walking directly, he made a détour, in order to crouch behind some masses of rock which bordered the shore in this place, and dragged himself crawling along.

"What the devil is Geordy doing?" said Falmouth, looking at me with astonishment.

We continued to follow Geordy with our eyes;

suddenly we saw him stop, throw himself into the cleft of a rock, and lie close to the ground.

With an instinctive act of imitation, Falmouth and I stopped at the same time. Then, hearing the sound of voices, we cautiously lifted our heads, and saw the long-boat which had towed the mystic approach and touch at the point of the bay.

A dozen sailors, wearing long caps of red wool and brown jackets with camail, manned this small boat. A sailor seated at the stern steered it; he was clad in a black mantle, whose turned-up hood would not permit us to distinguish his features; however, his whole appearance gave me an unpleasant impression.

When the towboat reached the shore, the man with the mantle remained alone, and threw a rope to the sailors, which they fastened to a rock.

These men first looked carefully and suspiciously about them, then passed rapidly towards the large rock which concealed Geordy.

At their approach he took from his pockets a pair of pistols.

Falmouth and I exchanged glances, uncertain as to what we ought to do; the rock was perpendicular, its slope far distant; in case of attack, it seemed impossible to help Geordy other than by our cries, and even if they put these sailors to flight, in ten minutes their boat could reach the mystic and set sail with him.

We were in this state of perplexity when the sailors stopped in front of the rock which served as a hiding-place for Geordy. With iron levers they laboriously raised a large stone, which closed an opening,

doubtless very spacious, for they hastily took from it several boxes and some very heavy barrels, which they carried to their boat.

At the risk of being discovered, Falmouth burst into a shout of laughter, saying to me:

"These are bold smugglers, who have concealed their booty for fear of a visit from the custom-house officers or the French coast-guards, and who are preparing to put to sea to-night with this forbidden fruit. That explains why they have a ship which can travel so fast."

"But," said I, "if that were so, why does the lieutenant of our brig, who is neither a coast-guard nor custom-house officer, come to watch also?"

"You are right," replied Falmouth; "I am wrong there; let us, then, see the end of all this."

Ten minutes after the transportation of the boxes, the long-boat, so loaded that it sank almost to the level of the water, set out for the mystic, which had just hoisted its last sail.

Scarcely had the craft stood away, than Geordy leaped from his concealment, and ran rapidly in the direction of the bay where the yacht was moored; but this time the lieutenant, instead of gliding behind the rocks, followed the edge of the beach, and the seamen of the long-boat saw him by the light of the moon.

Immediately the man with the black mantle, seated at the helm, arose, left the rudder, took a gun, and quickly covered Geordy.

A flash shone in the darkness as the shot was fired. Although a second shot followed the first, Geordy appeared not to have been wounded, for he

continued to run until, by a turn in the shore, he was lost to our sight.

"Let us return to the yacht," said I to Falmouth. "There will, perhaps, be time to board this mystic, and obtain justice for his attack."

Hurrying precipitately along the range of rocks, we saw the long-boat continually urging the oars, in order to reach their boat.

In a few moments it had reached it, was hoisted aboard, and the ship, spreading to the north wind its great sails like two immense wings, soon disappeared in the dark shadows of the horizon.

"Too late," said Falmouth, "there they go."

We hastened to a miserable inn, situated near the wharf of Frais-Port, and there we found Geordy. He was not wounded.

"Explain to me now," said Falmouth to him, "what you were doing on shore, and why those wretches fired two shots at you?"

Geordy, surprised to find that Falmouth knew this circumstance, gave him the following details:

It appears that this Sardinian mystic was already moored in the bay when the yacht arrived, expecting soon to set sail. Although they pretended to have the ballast on board, and were returning from Barcelona to Nice without cargo, the presence of the English schooner seemed to change the captain's mind.

His stay at Porquerolles becoming more and more prolonged, Williams and Geordy had good reason to be surprised that such a poor merchant ship should lose so much valuable time; moreover, its crew

consisted of twenty men, a singularly large number for a vessel of its size, which, lying unemployed, could hardly afford to pay for such an armament. The two Englishmen, wishing to judge for themselves as to what this boat might be, went aboard, under the pretext of asking a slight service of the captain. They had been able to examine the interior of the ship, which seemed to them much better adapted to racing than to commerce; but they saw neither arms nor munitions of war, for all was open from the hold to the bridge; they had in vain tried to meet the captain, who was no other than the man with the black mantle. But he had constantly avoided an interview. Finally, in their trifling visit aboard this mysterious boat, as well as in their inspection of the captain's papers, the French custom officers had found nothing to suspect.

Geordy said among the men who formed the crew were five or six Italians; the rest were Spaniards and Americans, and appeared to be pirates of sinister and patibulary countenances. That which above all had contributed to excite the suspicions of the Englishmen, was that nearly every day, during the absence of the captain for a certain time, the crew of his ship was increased little by little, and the boat had set sail with nearly fifty sailors, an exorbitant number of seamen for so small a ship.

"But," said Falmouth to Geordy, "why did you watch them so this evening?"

"As these people, whom I believe to be pirates, prepared to set sail at the same time as your Grace's yacht, or, perhaps, before," replied Geordy, "I suspected that at the time of departure they would perhaps go ashore to seek some concealed arms, since we had seen none on board; so, when I saw

them presently leave the ship with their long-boat and go towards the rocks at the north, I ran along the shore, and arrived in time to prove what my brother Williams and I had thought to be true."

"That is to say, these people are really pirates," said Falmouth.

"Without doubt, my lord; the boxes are filled with arms, the barrels with powder; they had found a means of putting them there before the first visit of the French custom officers."

"And have you heard them talk?"

"Yes, my lord, I heard an American sailor say to his companion, when showing him the barrels of powder, 'There is the glue which will catch the English fly,' that is to say, your Grace's schooner."

"It is marvellous," I said, smiling to Falmouth; "we are still in port, and yet danger threatens us already. You are indeed marked by fate."

"I understand their plan perfectly," replied Falmouth. "They calculate, without doubt, to replace their ugly mystic with my pretty *Gazelle*. It would be an excellent acquisition for them; for once possessors of my yacht, no ship-of-war could overtake them, and no merchant ship could escape them."

"It is superfluous to add," said I, "that as our presence would incommode them so much, they would, doubtless, throw us into the sea for fear of indiscretions."

"It is one of the usual customs of this kind of an exchange, but we shall find a way of preventing them," said Falmouth. Then he added, "I have no need, Geordy, once at sea, to recommend you to constantly watch the horizon, in order that we may

not be surprised by these scoundrels. You are at all times a vigilant and brave seaman, the worthy brother of Williams. You have both been rocked from infancy upon the salt water, so I sleep tranquilly when the yacht is in your hands. I have seen you both face to face with many dangers, in the midst of frightful tempests. Ah, well, would you believe," added Falmouth, turning to me and pointing to Geordy, "would you believe that with this quiet and timid manner he and his brother are lions in danger?"

At this praise Geordy smiled modestly, cast down his eyes, blushed like a young girl, and went to join his brother Williams to prepare everything, for we were to set sail from the bay of Porquerolles the next morning at sunrise.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE VOYAGE

It was three days since we had left France; the wind, until then favourable, had become contrary ever since we sighted Sardinia.

Without being positively sure of being attacked by the mysterious ship whose departure had been so sudden and so hostile, Falmouth had recommended the captain of his yacht to be constantly upon his guard. The carronades of the *Gazelle* were loaded with grape-shot, the arms prepared on the false deck, and at night a sailor remained on watch to prevent

any surprise.

I could not but admire the calmness and sweetness of the two young officers of the schooner, their silent activity, and the feeling full of tenderness which seemed to attach one to the other, and to put—if so it may be called—in their most indifferent actions a touching union.

I remarked, also, that when the management required that Williams or Geordy should give an order before Falmouth, their voices preserved a respectful accent for the lord as long as they were obliged to give orders in his presence. This shade seemed to me to be an exquisite tact, or rather the expression of a very refined nature.

Geordy obeyed his elder brother Williams with a joyous submission. Nothing could be more charming to observe than the mutual affection of these two brothers, constantly exchanging looks as they attended to the details of their service, with rare sagacity, or rather with marvellous congeniality.

I had the curiosity to inspect the forward cabin which they occupied.

I saw there two hammocks as white as snow, a small table, and a wash-stand shining like a mirror; two portraits, coarsely but naturally painted,—the one, their mother, with a grave, sweet face (both resembled her greatly), the other, their father, whose masculine and open countenance showed good humour and loyalty. Between these two portraits, and for ornament alone, their arms were fastened to the oaken wainscoting of their little room.

Often when the schooner, well under way, ploughed its furrow of white foam across the quiet waters of the Mediterranean, Williams and Geordy

would seat themselves side by side upon a gun, and there, with locked arms, serious and pensive countenances, they piously read an old Bible with brass fastenings, resting it upon their knees, and only interrupting their reading to cast an occasional melancholy glance upon the broad and solitary horizon,—a distraction which was an act of homage to the greatness of God.

At other times, when this religious reading was finished, the two brothers would fall into long talks.

One day I had the curiosity to overhear one of their conversations. I seated myself near the cannon, where they usually sat, and, after exchanging a few words with them, I pretended to be asleep.

I heard them then exchanging innocent confidences of their hopes, recalling pleasant memories of their country, encouraging each other to serve Falmouth well, this noble protector of their family, for whom they showed this respectful, almost filial, attachment that is maintained sometimes among us for several successive generations by followers of the family (in the feudal acceptation of the word)[3] for the noble houses which patronise them.

When the two brothers spoke of the lord, it was always without irreverence, without envy, and, more than all, without any bitter and jealous reflection upon their own obscure and poor condition.

Once they related some particulars in the life of Falmouth which struck me with surprise. This man, whom I had believed so blasé as to all human feelings, had a thousand times manifested the most generous kindness, the most exquisite delicacy. Williams and Geordy spoke of it with admiration.

In proportion as I lived more intimately with Henry, my surprise increased.

Each day I discovered in him the noblest qualities, so opposite to the fictitious or real character under which I had known him before. His disposition was of a serenity without its equal; his penetration, his ingenuity, prodigious; his mind of a rare dignity.

Soon, in our long conversations, I noticed that his irony became less sharp, his observation less caustic, his scepticism less implacable; it might be said that little by little he put off pieces of armour which he recognised as useless.

It was with pleasure that I saw Falmouth's character so completely transformed.

I felt touched by the cordial and touching persistency with which he sought my friendship. I enjoyed eagerly this lively and sincere feeling, whose consoling sweetness I experienced for the first time; no sacrifice could be too great to assure myself of this precious affection in the future, and as I experienced it generously, bravely, I felt worthy to inspire it.

Pleased with my confidence, it was with a tone of deepest gratitude that Falmouth thanked me for having believed in his friendship. In this way passing our life, the one well supported by the other, he told me, all one's troubles could be defied; for the deceits of love, of pride, of ambition, always so painful because they are self-centred, would lose all their bitterness by being poured out into the heart of a friend.

The accents of his voice were so true, his features had an expression of such sincerity, that I had entirely forgotten my mistrust; I yielded with

happiness to the impulse of an affection which I had never known before.

Then came the endless conversations, whose attractions I know not how to describe. Falmouth's imagination was lively and brilliant, his wit well embellished. We both possessed quite varied and extended knowledge; we never for a moment felt wearied with one another, in spite of the long hours of the voyage.

In proportion as our intimacy increased, my faith in myself and in Falmouth increased. I felt happy and better, a new future opened before me; I had plenty of courage not to subject this happiness, so fresh and young, to a withering analysis. I gave myself up innocently to impressions which I found so pure and so refreshing.

We had been at sea five days.

One evening, quite late, towards eleven o'clock, having left Falmouth in the saloon, I ascended to the deck to enjoy the freshness of the night, and seated myself in a yawl suspended in the stern of the schooner.

I had been some time absorbed in my dreams, when the sailor on watch hailed an approaching ship.

I arose.

The watch hailed a second time.

Almost immediately I saw sailing silently towards us, and at a very short distance from us, a ship, whose immense sails I recognised as those of the Sardinian boat of the bay of Porquerolles.

The night was clear, the boat sailing rather fast; upon the deck of this long, narrow ship a great number of men were crowding against one another. From the mast was hung a ship's lantern. Lighted by its red, uncertain reflection, I distinguished at the helm, and holding the tiller, the man with the black cowl that I had already noticed during the approach of the long-boat.

Strange encounter, the consequences of which were to be still more strange!

The mystic withdrew; the noise of its track died away.

For a few minutes I could follow it with my eye, thanks to its white sails; then they became less distinct, and, finally, altogether effaced, until I could see only a luminous point in the darkness, which in time disappeared with the play of the ship's sails, like a star under a cloud.

Upon the appearance of this suspicious boat, Williams had ordered his brother to look for Falmouth.

"Well, Williams," said the latter, mounting the bridge, "we are again meeting our ugly acquaintance of Porquerolles!"

"The mystic has just passed athwart us, my lord."

"And what do you advise?"

"Save for the order of your Grace, my advice would be to put ourselves at once on defence, for I think that this pirate, held like ourselves in these quarters by the contrary winds, will attack us, not believing us ready to receive it, and reckoning, moreover,

upon the number of its crew."

"Let us prove, then, to these pirates, that they are mistaken, my brave Williams, and that forty John Bulls are worth more than this gang of scoundrels, than this cosmopolitan specimen of gallows-game. Ah, well," added Falmouth, seeing me, "here, my friend, is something which works admirably; this adventure delights me. It is an excellent introduction to our frolic with Canaris; it is the overture of our opera!"

"In truth *dilettanti*" I replied, "let us prepare to do our part, and seek for our arms."

I descended to my room.

Falmouth entered almost as soon as I.

Inasmuch as he had appeared to me pleased and resolute on deck, so now I found him with an air sad and troubled.

He took my hands with emotion, and said: "Arthur, I am now in despair with this folly!"

"Of what folly do you speak?"

"If you should be wounded, dangerously wounded," casting upon me an affectionate glance, "I should never forgive myself."

"And do you not run the same risks?"

"Without doubt; but that you, you should suffer the consequences of my mad freak,—it is that which I find horrible!"

"What an idea! Are we not making this voyage 'Dutch treat?' Ought we not to share all? Why, this is an accident on the way,—nothing more. Were we not agreed to seek adventures like veritable knights-errants? And finally, had not you, yourself, just now

the air of one well pleased with this meeting?"

"I was then before my people, and I did not wish them to guess my thought,—but to you I can say all. Ah, well! now I am in despair with all this; and instead of amusing ourselves with vain boasting, I wish very much to profit by the speed of my schooner to—"

"Do not think of it," I cried. "What would they say at the Yacht Club? That one of its members had run before a pirate! And then, my dear Henry," said I, laughing, "remember that your fears are not very flattering to my honour."

"Ah, stop,—that is dreadful! For the first time in my life, I find a friend such as I have dreamed of, and through my own fault I risk losing him," cried Falmouth, throwing himself on a chair and burying his head in both hands.

"My dear Henry," I replied, deeply touched by his tone, "on the contrary, let us thank this chance which has furnished us this proof. Does not the emotion that we both feel show us that this friendship is already first in our hearts? Could we have found a similar revelation in the ordinary uniform life of the world? Believe me, we see in this a good fortune; let us bless it and profit by it. It is by fire that pure gold is proved."

A sailor descending precipitately, came to beg Falmouth to ascend to the deck.

When he had gone, Henry threw himself into my arms with effusion, and said: "You have a noble heart,—my instinct has not deceived me."

I remained alone.

If Falmouth feared the chances of this combat for

me, I also feared them keenly for him.

This uneasiness revealed to me all the strength of the affection I bore him.

By what miracle had this friendship so suddenly developed? How came its roots to be already so deep, in spite of my distrust, in spite of my habitual incredulity?

I do not know, but it was so, and we had travelled together scarcely one month.

Perhaps this rapid progress would seem less surprising, if one considered the secret instinct which had attracted us to each other before our departure.

I took up my arms.

I had then a moment of frightful agony.

In thinking of the danger we were to run, I feared being cowardly, or, rather, that my courage might not reach the height of a noble sacrifice; I asked myself if, in supreme danger, I could sacrifice my life to save Falmouth's, and, I confess to my shame, I dared not reply with certainty.

It is true, I knew myself to be brave, with a cool, stubborn bravery. I had had a duel in which my calm energy had done me honour: but was that true courage? Can a man, well born, refuse a duel? Can he bear himself becomingly, except through good breeding or pride?

I did not know, therefore, if I should have the thoughtless, fulgurating courage which turns to danger as steel to the magnet, which exalts itself still more in a bloody conflict, and which, hovering above all danger, directs its blows with a sure hand,

choosing its victims.

I believed I felt, in a word, the cool and inert bravery of the artillery man, who, near his battery, awaits a bullet without turning pale, but not the excited intrepidity of the partisan who, sword in hand, throws himself, with ferocious zeal, into the midst of the carnage.

And, nevertheless, it was doubtless into a hand to hand combat in the boarding of a ship that we were to defend our lives. And if I failed,—and if before these foreigners, if before Falmouth, I should appear cowardly, or weak! If my instinct of self-preservation should make me stupid!

No, I could not say what dreadful thing I might bring upon myself in this moment of hesitation and uncertainty. But I confess that which I feared most was, that in case Falmouth's life might absolutely depend upon my courage, I might find myself unequal to this noble duty.

[3] That is to say, forming part of the house, not considered as servants; pages, riding-masters, and esquires were domestics in this acceptation.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE COMBAT

I again ascended to the deck.

I had taken a double-barrelled carbine, and a heavy Turkish damaskeened battle-axe, formerly bought as an object of curiosity, and which, under these circumstances, became an excellent weapon, for, besides its heavy blade, it ended in a very sharp iron spear.

I tried to discover the pirate, but whether because the ship had put out its light, or because it had greatly prolonged its tack, I could no longer see it. The yacht's crew had been promptly armed.

By the glimmer of some gun-lighters, fixed by their iron points in some buckets filled with water, we saw the sailors placed in charge of the guns, standing near the carronades; others, placed on either side of the schooner, were loading their guns, while an old gray-haired boatswain had just taken the tiller from the hands of one of his much younger comrades, whose experience was, doubtless, not sufficient to enable him to take this important post, during the combat.

All this took place in profound silence; one could hear only the dull noise of the ramrods on the wads, or the sound of the butt end of the muskets on the bridge. Williams, at the stern, stood on his quarter-deck, giving the last order. Geordy, charged with the direction of the gunners, superintended this part of the service.

Falmouth stood on the bridge. He had again put on his mask of habitual indifference.

"All is ready, my lord," said Williams to him. "Does your Grace wish to fight this pirate under sail or shall we board her?"

"Which do you prefer, a fight on board or a fight under sail?" Falmouth asked me, as if he were asking me to choose between Bordeaux or Madeira wine.

"I am absolutely indifferent," I replied, smiling; "let us act without ceremony; trust to the judgment of Williams, it is safer."

"What do you think, Williams?" demanded Falmouth.

"That we keep under sail. With the artillery of your Grace's yacht we can destroy this pirate without its being able to approach us, or do us much harm; for I do not suppose it could have taken artillery aboard."

"And the boarding?" asked Falmouth.

"I believe my lord knows the crew of the yacht well enough to be certain that, after a good contest, the pirates will be repulsed, or perhaps that their boat will remain in our power. But," suddenly cried Williams, pointing to a white spot with the end of his spy-glass, "the ship has put about; here it is returning upon us, my lord."

In fact, I soon saw its white sails appear in the darkness as it rapidly approached.

I loaded my carbine, put my axe near me, and waited.

I remember perfectly what I saw in my radius of action, not having had, I confess, the courage to isolate myself enough from my personal preoccupations to comprehend this bloody scene.

I was standing at the stern and off the side of the yacht.

A few feet in front of me, at the foot of the mizzenmast, with his back to me, an old sailor

worked the helm.

Williams, on his quarter-deck, was giving some orders to a boatswain, who listened hat in hand. Falmouth, mounted on a cannon, holding to the shrouds with one hand, his gun in the other, was looking in the direction of the mystic.

The most profound silence reigned on board the yacht; this was a moment of grave and solemn expectation.

As for me, that which I felt reminded me very much, if I may be excused this childish comparison, of the uneasy emotion that I felt in my childhood when I was waiting minute by minute the shot from a gun fired in the scene of a play.

Then, must I acknowledge another weakness in my character? I had never faced any danger without imagining immediately all its fatal risks for myself. As in the duel of which I have spoken, a maddening duel, I thought not of death, but of the hideous mutilation which might result from a wound. At the moment of the boarding of this vessel, I had the same preoccupation. I saw myself with horror deprived of an arm or a leg, and thus made a repulsive object of pity to every one.

A light touch on the shoulder aroused me from my reflections.

I turned around; Falmouth, without interrupting the "Rule Britannia" which he whistled between his teeth, showed me with the end of his gun something white on the horizon which was gradually approaching us.

I began to distinguish perfectly the mystic.

Suddenly, I was dazzled by a sheet of light which

for a moment illuminated the horizon, the sea, and all that I saw of the yacht. At the same time I heard the successive detonation of many firearms and the whistling of bullets passing near me.

From the sharp noise, from the crackling which followed the detonation, from some splinters of wood which fell at my feet, I knew that the balls had lodged either in the masts or in the hull of the ship.

My first motion was to turn back, my second to prepare and to fire in the direction of the mystic, but reflection restrained me.

My impatience, my curiosity, then became intense. I say curiosity, because this word alone seems to me to well express the eager impatience which agitated me.

I felt my veins throb violently, the blood rush to my heart, and my forehead flush.

Hardly had the echo of the detonation died away than the pirate came out of a thick cloud of smoke, having one of its sails half-brailed.

It was a strange spectacle.

By the uncertain light of the moon, the body of this ship and its rigging was outlined in black upon the whitish cloud that the wind blew towards us.

An instant afterwards the ship lay alongside the yacht from stern to bow, almost touching her.

By the light of the ship's lantern we could see the man with the black cowl still at the helm; with one hand he worked the tiller, with the other he pointed to the yacht, and I heard him call in Italian to the pirates who were pressing tumultuously to his side: "Fire no more; board her! Board her!"

According to the manœuvres of the pirates, the boarding would take place on the right, and all the crew of the yacht precipitated themselves from this side.

The gunners seized the cords which operated the pan-covers of the carronades.

I covered the man with the black cowl perfectly with the muzzle of my carbine.

At the moment when I pressed the trigger, Williams shouted, "Fire all!"

I fired, but was unable to see the effect of my ball.

A great explosion shook the yacht. It was the four starboard carronades loaded with grape-shot, which were fired almost at short range on the mystic pirate, without doubt at the moment when they boarded the yacht, for the latter received so violent a shock that I was almost thrown down.

Several balls whistled around my head.

A heavy body fell behind me, and I heard Falmouth call to me, in a feeble voice:

"Take care of yourself."

I turned anxiously towards him, when a man, wearing the Catalan bonnet, leaped upon the deck, caught me with one hand by my cravat, and with the other fired a shot from a pistol so near me that the priming burned my hair and beard.





Making a quick movement and throwing myself backward, I averted the ball which grazed my shoulder. I was holding my carbine loaded with one shot. At the moment when the pirate, seeing he had missed me, struck me on the head with the butt end of his pistol, I thrust the barrel of my carbine full against his chest, and fired.

The concussion was so strong that my arms were benumbed.

The pirate wheeled violently, stumbled against me, and fell on his back, gasping convulsively.

I turned about and trod upon some one; it was Falmouth, who was lying at the foot of the mainmast.

"You are wounded?" I cried, throwing myself upon him.

"I believe that I have something like a broken thigh; but pay no heed to me!" he exclaimed. "Take care! there comes another of those robbers, I see his head, face him or you are lost!"

My heart was broken at the sight of Falmouth

extended on the deck.

I did not for a moment dream of the danger I was running; I wished first of all to rescue Henry from a certain death, for being thus unable to defend himself, he would be inevitably massacred.

Fortunately I saw the scuttle, which had not been closed (it was an opening three feet square, which communicated with the common saloon). I immediately took Falmouth under the arms, dragged him as far as this opening, in spite of his resistance, for he struggled, crying:

"There is that brigand, he is going to leap upon you!"

Without replying, and using all my strength, I seated him on the edge of the scuttle, his legs hanging within, and said to him, "Now let yourself slide, you, at least, will be in safety."

"Too late! You have lost your life in saving me!" cried Falmouth, with a tone of anguish.

As he said these words, with a last effort I made him slide into the interior of the chamber, where he had nothing more to fear.

All this had happened in less time than it has taken to write it.

I was still down on one knee, when an iron hand seized me by the neck, a strong knee pressed against my loins, and at the same time some one gave me a violent blow on the shoulder. This blow was followed by a sharp sensation of cold.

My boarding-axe was on the deck at my side; I seized it, and, in making a desperate effort to raise myself, I struck behind me, and by chance a furious

blow, without doubt, reached my adversary, for my axe was stopped by a hard body, and the hand which held me slackened its hold at once. I was then able to straighten myself.

Scarcely was I on my feet when the man with the black cowl, who had attacked me when I lowered Henry into the saloon, threw himself upon me.

I was without arms. Having let my boarding-axe fall, we laid hold hand to hand, and an exciting struggle began.

His mantle, with the cowl turned up, enveloped him almost entirely, and concealed his face. He twisted one of his legs strongly around mine, in order to throw me; then squeezing me in order to choke me, he attempted to lift me from the deck and throw me over the side of the schooner.

If he was strong, I was no less so.

The ardent desire to avenge Falmouth, the anger, and, shall I so call it? this puerility, the disgust of feeling the breath of this brigand on my cheek, gave me new strength.

Disengaging one of my hands from both his powerful ones, I could fortunately take the pirate by the throat. There I felt the cord of a scapular. I twisted it around my hand and quickly gave it two or three turns.

I probably was beginning to strangle my enemy, for I noticed that his embrace weakened, when, by a lucky chance, a motion of the boat made us both stumble.

Already exhausted, the pirate fell, his back arched on the gunwale,—a last effort, and I was about to succeed, I was about to throw myself upon him with

my whole weight, when he madly bit me in the face.

Although at this instant several shots flashed a bright light, and the cowl of the pirate was a little loosened, I could not distinguish his features, for his face was covered with blood.

Only in throwing me backward I saw that his teeth were singularly white, sharp, and separated.

Hurling myself again upon him, I succeeded in lifting him from the deck, placing him lengthwise on the gunwale, and at last in throwing him over the railing of the yacht.

But when he saw himself thus suspended above the sea, the pirate made a last effort, held with one hand to my neck, the other to my hair, and held me seized in this way, he outside the boat, and I within.

I was seeking to disengage myself when I received a violent blow on the head.

The hands of the man with the cowl relaxed, and I swooned.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DOCTOR

Very irksome is the task which I have imposed upon myself.

Here again is one of the phases of my life which I wish to be able to utterly efface from my memory,—one of those moments of terrible vertigo, during

which—

But the hour of this fatal revelation will arrive, alas, too soon!

Stunned by the blow which I had received, I swooned at the moment when the captain of the pirates fell into the sea.

When I revived I was in bed in my chamber, my head and shoulder enveloped in bandages.

Falmouth's physician, of whom I have forgotten to speak, a grave and very learned man, was near me.

My first thought was for Henry.

"How is Lord Falmouth?" I asked the doctor.

"My lord is doing very well, sir; fortunately his wound is not dangerous."

"Has he not a broken hip?"

"A very great contusion, more painful, perhaps, than a fracture, but less serious."

"And the pirates?"

"They have escaped, and again set sail, after having lost five of their crew in this attack, but, doubtless, they have a great number of wounded."

"And have we lost many?"

"Three sailors and a boatswain have been killed, besides which, nine of our sailors are wounded more or less seriously."

"It seems to me to be day; what time is it, doctor?"

"Eleven o'clock, sir."

"Indeed, I believe I am dreaming,—all this has passed, then?"

"This night."

"And where are my wounds?"

"A wound on the head, and a blow from a poignard on the left shoulder. Ah, sir, an inch lower, and this last would have been mortal. But how do you feel this morning?"

"Oh, I feel a little smarting in my left shoulder; that is all; but Falmouth, Falmouth?"

"My lord will not be able to walk for several days. In spite of his wound, he has desired to help me in caring for you and in watching this night, but since one o'clock his strength has left him, and I have ordered him to his room. He is sleeping now. As soon as he awakens he will wish to be near you again, for he is in great haste to express his thanks to you, sir."

"Do not speak of that, doctor."

"Why not speak of that, sir?" exclaimed the doctor. "Have you not, in the midst of this mad combat, forgotten your own safety, to drag my lord from great peril? Have you not been wounded in accomplishing this act of friendship? Ah, sir, will my lord ever forget that it is to you that he owes his life? And we, ourselves, shall we ever forget that it is to you that we owe his preservation?"

"The attack, then, was very vigorous, doctor?"

"On all sides, it was terrible; but our sailors, however inferior in number, have intrepidly repulsed it. In a word, their bravery rivalled yours, sir; for your coolness, your struggle hand to hand with the captain of those pirates, have been the admiration of all of our crew."

"And you assure me that Falmouth's wound is not

dangerous?"

"No, sir; but if you will permit me, I will go and see if he needs me."

"Go, go, doctor, and return and tell me when I may see him."

I remained alone.

CHAPTER XXXIV

FRIENDSHIP

Henry owed his life to me!

I cannot tell with what pride I continually repeated these words:

"I have saved Henry's life."

How I blessed the fortunate chance that permitted me to prove to Falmouth that my friendship was warm and true.

Until then, though I was entirely absorbed in my affection for him, I felt that there was wanting some great sacrifice, which would be a solemn consecration of my devotedness.

If my act had any value in my own eyes, it was because I should stand higher in his. It showed me that I was capable of a generous resolution, and reassured me on the firmness of my attachment to Falmouth.

Now, with a nature like mine, to believe in myself

was to believe in him; to think of myself as a true, warm, and devoted friend, was to believe myself capable of inspiring true, ardent, and devoted friendship.

I felt that intrepid confidence of the soldier who, being perfectly sure of his conduct under fire, waits impatiently and securely for another occasion to show his courage. The reaction of this self-reliance was so great that it influenced even my former sentiments.

Proud of my conduct towards Falmouth, I understood that Hélène and Marguerite had loved me for qualities they saw in me, and which I had never discovered until now. For the first time I knew real happiness. I at last was able to understand all the devotion these two noble beings had bestowed on me.

An hour after the doctor left me, the door of my chamber opened, and I saw Falmouth, who was carried in by two of his servants.

His armchair was scarcely at my bedside, before Henry threw himself in my arms.

In this mute embrace, his head was leaning on my shoulder, and I could feel his tears and his trembling hands; he was only able to say these words: "Arthur, —Arthur,—my friend, my friend!"

Although this was so long ago, and black care has dimmed the radiance of that happy day, nothing has ever wiped out the remembrance of it, which is still vivid enough to quicken my heart's pulses and thrill me with delight.

It would be impossible to tell with what delicacy and effusion Falmouth expressed his gratitude. Words can never describe his accent, his look, nor his voice.

The head winds lasted for several days longer, and prevented our reaching Malta as soon as we had hoped.

Lord Falmouth's wound was healing rapidly, but mine was making very slow progress towards improvement.

Henry, in the meantime, tended me with the most affectionate solicitude.

With what sad anxiety would he watch the doctor's face, when my wound was dressed every morning! How many eager questions he would ask as to the probable time of my recovery! How much impatience he showed when the doctor would shorten or prolong the date.

Shall I speak of the many trifling, but charming ways in which he revealed his affectionate thoughtfulness for my comfort, all of which I appreciated and enjoyed?

Falmouth told me the whole story of his life, and I hid nothing from him in relation to mine.

He was twelve years older than I; he spoke eloquently and convincingly. He had seen much of the world, and his words began to have great weight with me, as he spoke with singular authority.

Nothing could be more elevated or liberal than his moral or political convictions.

I was overwhelmed with astonishment and

admiration, in thus discovering, every day, some new jewel of exquisite feeling, lofty reason, or deep learning, under the cold and sarcastic exterior that Falmouth usually affected.

What a surprise it was to find, under the sceptic and mocking mask of a Byronic Don Juan, the warm and valiant heart of Schiller's Posa, with its ardent and holy love of humanity, its sincere faith in the good. He had the same generous faith in men, the same splendid plans for the good of humanity.

If Falmouth now appeared to me in this new light, it was because, during our long voyage, we had touched on all these subjects.

Until this period of my life, I had been totally indifferent to all political questions. I now began to feel the vibration of a new chord in my being, as, transported with indignation, Henry told me of the long arguments he, a peer of England, had sustained in Parliament, against the Tory party, which he considered the disgrace of his country.

It was impossible to remain unmoved before such eloquent emotion, such keen regret as Falmouth's. He deplored the futility of his efforts, but most of all his culpable weakness in having abandoned the contest before his party had given up all hope of obtaining a victory.

I enter into all these details because they lead to one of the most painful episodes in my life.

For two days Falmouth appeared to be lost in thought. Several times I besought him to confide the subject of his preoccupation to me. He always answered with a smile, that I was not to worry, as he was working for both of us, and that I should very soon know the result of his ponderings.

In fact, one morning Henry entered my room with a solemn air, gave me a sealed letter, and said, with emotion: "Read this, my friend,—it concerns your future, our future."

Then he pressed my hand and went out.

Here is his letter.

Here are the few simple pages, where Falmouth's noble soul revealed itself in all its greatness.

What was my answer?

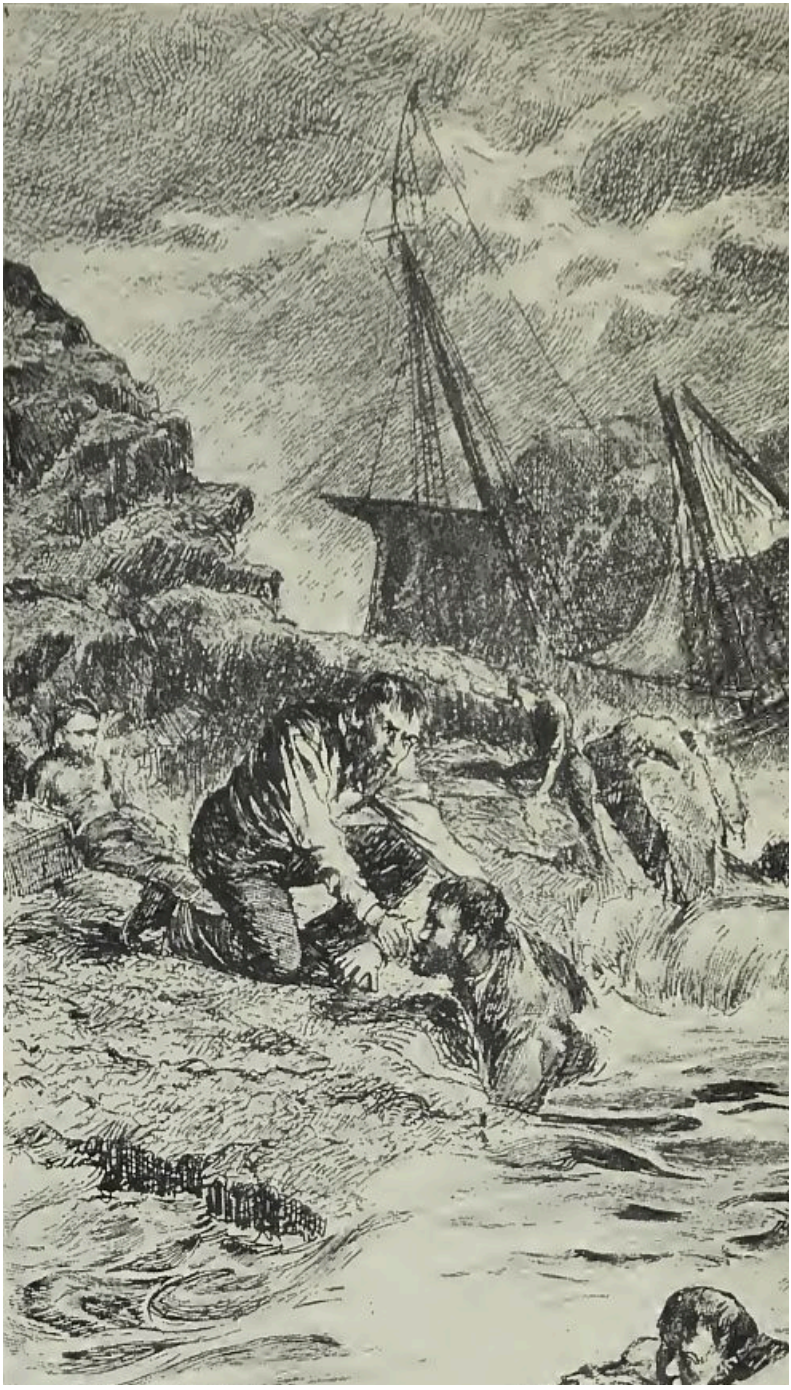
Alas! it is the most abominable of my souvenirs.

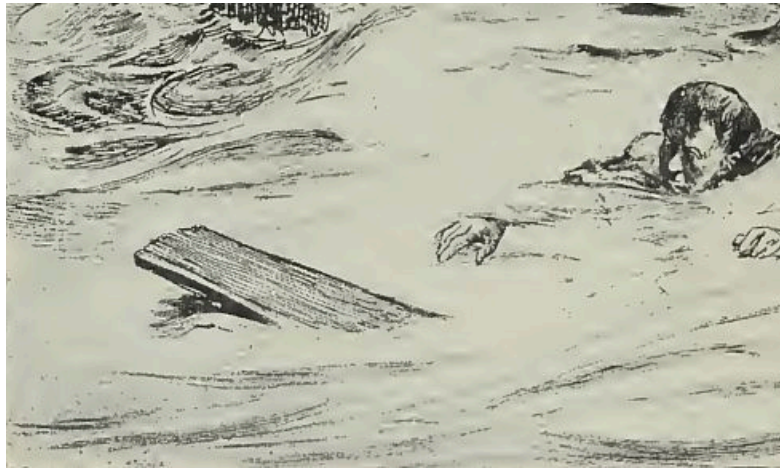
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ARTHUR

CONTINUED

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ARTHUR

CHAPTER I

THE LETTER

Lord Falmouth to Arthur.

"ON BOARD THE YACHT *Gazelle.*"

13 June, 18—.

"I might have told you all that I now mean to write, dear friend, but that I desire you to keep this letter.

"If the projects that I now propose are ever realised, we will read this with pleasure some future day and remember that it was the starting-point of the glorious career that I have imagined for both of us.

"If, on the contrary, fate should separate us, these pages will remain as the true story of the

circumstances that inspired the sincere attachment I have for you.

"The first time I met you was at a breakfast given by M. de Cernay. Your agreeable conversation pleased me at first; then, from a peculiar habit of thought I noticed in you, I saw that, with all your charm and cordiality, you would remain for ever separated from your fellow men by an unsurmountable barrier.

"From that moment I began to take a lively interest in you.

"I knew from experience that eccentric characters such as yours suffer cruelly from the isolation to which they condemn themselves; for these proud, sensitive, and easily offended natures can not readily assimilate themselves with the rest of mankind,—they are constantly being wounded or taking offence, and they instinctively create for themselves a solitude in the midst of society.

"I left for England under the domination of such thoughts as these.

"In London I met several of your friends, who spoke in such a way as to confirm the opinion I had formed of you.

"I found you some months after in the house of Madame de Pënâfiel, in whom you seemed much interested.

"As at that time I shared the ill-feeling that was manifested in society towards her, and you had not yet told me of her real worth, I was astonished to see you, of all men, seeking happiness in a liaison with a woman who was recognised as a flirt, for I thought that your great susceptibility must of necessity be

continually wounded in such a relation with Madame de Pënâfiel.

"Men like you, my friend, are endowed with such extraordinary tact, finesse, and clear-sightedness, that they are very seldom mistaken in the women on whom they choose to bestow their affections. Is not this true? Were not Hélène and Marguerite both worthy of your love? Therefore, let me advise you in this much, always trust blindly in your first impressions.

"I tell you this because I feel how much I love you, and it must be that you instinctively love me, too.

"Pardon me this digression; let us return to the marquise.

"As long as I saw that you were happy I was only interested in you because so much evil was said about you.

"But very soon this war that was being waged against you became so general and violent, the calumnies were so fierce, that I began to believe Madame de Pënâfiel was worthy of your love and that you deserved hers. Later, you told me everything and I recognised my first error; then came your cruel rupture.

"You have been cruelly punished for your doubts! May Heaven forgive you!

"When you asked me to assist you in helping the husband of your cousin Hélène, the delicacy of your conduct towards him was so touching that you took a higher place in my estimation, a profound admiration; yes, my friend, I admired your disinterestedness more than your manner of acting, because I had discovered that through a fatal quality

in your nature you would always find some means of belittling in your own eyes all the merit of this generous act, and that you would not even have the satisfaction of your own conscience.

"For a long time I have been contemplating a voyage to Greece; I saw that you were unhappy and I believed the moment favourable to propose that you should join me in this journey. I shrouded it in mystery in order to excite your curiosity, and when you finally decided to accompany me I was very happy.

"Why was I so happy, my friend? Because, without at all resembling you, bad luck, or my own exigencies, had until now deprived me of tasting the joys of friendship, and I felt myself drawn towards you by a great similarity of character and mind; because I believed that this voyage would be a useful distraction for you; and because I found in it a precious means of binding you to me in fast and enduring bonds of affection.

"I knew that I should have great difficulty in overcoming your distrust, that I would have deep-rooted doubts to conquer, but that did not discourage me, for I had great faith in the persistence of my attachment and the sagacity of your heart; it had chosen Hélène and Marguerite for you to love, why should not I be chosen as your bosom friend?

"However, when I saw what slow progress I was making in your affections, I was afraid that you did not see through the coldness and indifference that I habitually affected.

"Little by little, though, you began to trust me, and a few days after our departure from France we were like brothers.

"The rapid growth of our friendship did not surprise me; there was between us such an affinity, our souls were so magnetised by sympathy, that at the first contact they were joined for ever.

"Once sure of your affection, I began to examine my treasure at my leisure.

"I was like those antiquaries who, when they finally come into possession of a long-coveted rarity, spend hours in examining and admiring its beauty. It was thus that I learned to appreciate your learning and good sense. It was then that I undertook to awaken the good instincts that I believed existed in your nature.

"I was not mistaken. When I had once made this discovery, you were no longer in my eyes a poor, nervous, and irritable child, that we love because it is weak and suffering, but a proud and venturesome young man, with a strong mind, great intelligence, and persuasiveness, who had all defects that were the natural opposites of his virtues.

"The Sardinian mystic attacked us. I had a fearful presentiment, and wished to avoid the combat. That was impossible, and I now thank the fates, for you are almost well again, and I owe my life to you.

"Yes, Arthur, I owe you the life of my body in that I exist; I owe you the life of my soul, because you have become my friend.

"Do you know that unless I felt the strength of my gratitude I should be alarmed.

"For a long time I have been seeking a way to increase your happiness, you have done so much for mine.

"My task has been difficult, for you are possessed

of every advantage,—youth, intelligence, name, fortune, and a generous and noble disposition. But I had perceived a fatal tendency which would annihilate all these rare gifts.

"There was the source of all your misfortunes. That was the stream I must ascend to its source, and turn in another direction. If I can only deliver him from this spirit of doubt, I said to myself, would he not then be indebted to me for the enjoyment of all those advantages which doubt now renders useless?

"You have often told me that your fits of defiance and misanthropy were the sole real misfortunes of your life; but do you know what causes these spells of moroseness? The moral inaction in which you live.

"You have a lively, ardent imagination, and, as you give it no aliment, it feeds on you as its victim.

"From this continual reaction of your mind on your heart, from this insatiable need of occupying your thoughts, is born the fatal habit of self-examination, that entices you to such horrid study of your own conduct, and the spirit of analysis that leads you to the discovery of such unworthy motives in others.

"Believe me, my friend, for during many nights I have reflected deeply on your character, and I think I say the truth; believe me, from the moment you give some noble and glorious object to this devouring activity that possesses you, it will be with delight, with ineffable confidence that you will indulge yourself in the tenderest of sentiments. You will then believe blindly, for you will have no time to spend in doubt.

"Before knowing your real value, this voyage to Greece seemed a sufficient occupation for you; but now that I understand you better, I feel that this

journey is no more in proportion with the powers of conception I recognise in you. Now that I can count on you as on myself, new horizons are open to my view. It is not in sterile enterprises that I would employ our courage and our intelligence. I have a higher mark, perhaps you will call it a chimera; but reflect awhile, and you will recognise that there are many chances of its proving successful.

"The problem I set myself to solve was this: To render you happy without harm to myself, that is to say, without having to give you up; to give occupation to your fine mind, so that it should not stand between our friendship, and to put to some useful employment those precious gifts which, left idle, change their nature and become hurtful like some generous substances that fermentation changes into poisons. When I spoke to you about England, of her future, of the part I took in the struggle that was to decide the fate of nations, I noticed that you were attentive, curious, moved; noble and eloquent words escaped your lips; you suggested new ideas, which had all the simple boldness of inspiration. I studied your actions, your features, your accent, and all convinced me that if you wished, my friend, you could have a powerful influence on men. Your learning is great, you have studied well, you have an ardent and proud nature, an independent position, and a worthy name. Listen to my project.

"We will go first to Malta, and there we will wait until your recovery, and take the rest that you need. We will give up the fire-ship of Canaris, and will return to England.

"When you were travelling in my country, you were not interested in any serious study; this time, under my guidance, you will study the workings of

the English government, her interests, her economics, etc. Then we will go and continue the same studies in Germany, in Russia, and the United States, in order to finish your political education.

"If I had not confidence in your precociousness, my friend, I might tell you not to be alarmed at this serious programme. As we are both young, rich, gay, intelligent, healthy, and bold, we will go, like two brothers who can rely on each other, advancing steadily to our goal, enjoying, in turn, study and pleasure.

"Our social position, and the studies we propose to take up, will oblige us to come in contact with persons of every degree in the social scale, and will force us to meet in each country that we visit all that is best in rank, intellect, and fortune. Can you imagine what is to be the far-off horizon of this brilliant existence, of this ambitious use of all your faculties, the lowest as well as the highest? Do you know what is to be your recompense for such persistent occupation, which is to be mingled with worldly pleasures, and constantly shared by the most affectionate of friends? Do you know? Perhaps the destinies of a great people may be entrusted to your care; you may become a cabinet minister, a premier.

"As to the means we are to employ to attain this end, which may appear to you unattainable, we will talk about it, and you will find that with your name, your fortune, your long political studies, the experience of men and things that we will have gained in our travels, will open every door to you, whether you wish to present yourself in the Chamber of Deputies, or wish to enter a diplomatic career by accepting some important post.

"In any case, my friend, your decision shall be

mine. If you remain at Paris as a member of the government, I will accept, at the court of France, a mission that I have heretofore refused; if you desire to be attached to some foreign court, I can confidently rely upon having sufficient influence to be sent to join you there.

"I know that our position is such that neither you nor I have need of these places in order to meet again, and continue the intimacy that we have enjoyed; but, as I have already told you, we must fight with all our strength against your mortal enemy, which is idleness, and fight in a manner worthy of your intellect. Now, my friend, can we have a nobler ambition than the interests of our own two countries, to see our friendship serve as a bond of union for their interests, and make them but as one, as it has served to unite our hearts.

"And say not that this is a dream, a chimera. Men of but mediocre ability have reached the end I propose to you. Even though the success of the journey is uncertain, is not the route a delightful one? How full of future enjoyment will your attempts have been, even admitting that they have failed in their object.

"Come, come, Arthur, take courage; make a noble use of the gifts that have been so liberally bestowed on you; and, above all, my friend, fly from that deadly inaction, which has such a fatal influence on your peace of mind and your heart.

"Oh, yes! Escape from it; for now I assure you your friendship is so dear to me, your happiness so precious, that there is nothing in the world I would not attempt to see them both secured to you, and sheltered by a noble ambition.

"These are my projects,—these are my hopes. What do you think of them, my friend? I have written all this to you because I fear that, should I speak thus, a jest, a doubt on your part, would dull my eloquence, and, as my first aim is to convince you, I have taken this means of being the only speaker.

"By way of being peculiar until the very end, I beg that you will send me a written answer.

"According to your acceptance or refusal of this offer of my sincere friendship, your letter will mark one of the happiest or most unfortunate days of my life.

"H. F."

CHAPTER II

DISTRUST

Before receiving this letter I was perfectly happy; I was filled with confidence and a sense of security in Falmouth's affection for me; I had perfect faith in my love for him; why should these simple and touching pages have turned such a brilliant day into the gloomiest night?

I read over the letter twice.

What struck me at first was the sublime and inexplicable devotion of Lord Falmouth, who, to save me from the idleness he considered fatal to my happiness, invited me to share his voyages, his

studies, and even the career that he hoped I would be successful in.

What astonished me very much (indeed, it almost offended me), was the derisive exaggeration in which he spoke of my merits, which, according to him, were quite sufficient to make a cabinet minister of me, or an ambassador, at least.

Unfortunately, I was not born to comprehend such magnificent exaltation of friendship; for Falmouth's offer was so exorbitant, so out of proportion and above any proof I had been able to give him of my affection, that several times I said: "Can it really be to me that he makes such an offer? What have I ever done to deserve it?"

If what I had done for him was quite unworthy such devotion, what motive could he have in making me such an offer,—so much for so little?

It was not without a hard struggle that I gave myself up to such questions, for I could foresee a terrible access of suspicion.

Several times I attempted to turn my thoughts away from the fatal declivity towards which they were dragging me, but I felt myself approaching nearer and nearer the fatal abyss of doubt.

Overcome with alarm, I was on the point of going to Henry, and begging him to save me from myself. I would ask him to explain all that was beyond my comprehension in his admirable devotion, to lift me to his own level, for I was so unused to this radiant and all-powerful friendship, which I could not gaze on without becoming dizzy. But a false and miserable shame held me back. I thought it weak and cowardly, and a humiliating proof of inferiority, when it would have been a touching proof of my

confidence and reliance.

In spite of myself, I had the horrible feeling that my affection for Falmouth would share the same fate of all my former affections. This friendship had attained its greatest development, it was about to fill my life with delight, enlarge my future. It was fated that I should destroy it.

I was possessed by a strange sensation,—it was as if my spirit were falling rapidly from an ideal sphere, peopled by the most enchanting beings, towards a dark and boundless desert.

A physical comparison will explain this moral impression. The wings that had so long sustained me in the region of divine faith suddenly failed me, and I fell on the arid and desolate soil of analysis in the midst of the ruins of my first hopes. The faith I had until now preserved of the purity and holiness of friendship was to augment these melancholy ruins.

The more I pondered on Falmouth's admirable proposition, the more I admired its careful, almost paternal solicitude, the less worthy of it I found myself.

I could neither understand nor believe that the service I had rendered him in saving him from threatened danger was worth so much self-sacrifice on his part. This train of thought very soon led me to denying that there was anything really deserving in my conduct towards Henry.

Strange monomania! Contrary to those men who commit base acts, and then employ every means of proving that their conduct was honourable, I succeeded, by dint of sophisms, in vilifying in my

own sight an action for which I should have been proud.

After all, said I to myself, what enormous service was it, that Falmouth should make me such a magnificent offer? I saved his life, true; but I would have saved Williams, or the meanest sailor on his yacht, had he been in the same danger.

It was, then, simply an instinctive movement on my part, and not the result of any fixed purpose.

And then had that action been any sacrifice on my part? No, I had not hesitated an instant. Then there was very little merit in it, because value of an action can only be judged by the sacrifice it involves.

A millionaire, giving a gold piece to a beggar, does nothing that appeals to our sympathy; but the beggar, dividing his louis with one who is more unfortunate than himself, appears sublime.

When I once began to consider the truth of such paradoxes, I never could stop.

My bravery was none the less belittled in my eyes.

When I behaved with so much bravery in my struggle with the pirates, did I for an instant think of sustaining the name of Frenchman or the honour of my country before those Englishmen, of chasing from the sea those pirates that infest it, of showing Falmouth that, in spite of the moral weakness of my nature, I at least possessed the courage of action? No; I had simply obeyed the instinct of self-preservation; I had struck blow for blow. I wished to kill, in order not to be killed. Therefore, there was no more greatness nor bravery in my conduct than in the desperate rage of the animal that is brought to bay, and turns ferociously on its enemy.

Then as a last argument against myself, I said: Why is my heart filled with bitterness and sadness? Had my action been really grand, the high sentiments it aroused in me would not already have vanished, to give place to such doubts about Falmouth and myself.

Alas! the terrible conclusion of all these accursed doubts was not far off.

Now that I can reflect on my cruel blindness, I think that I must have been urged on to this pitiless analysis by a miserable jealousy that I dared not admit.

Not being capable of such devotion as that of Falmouth, I doubtless wished to account for it by some vile motive.

Perhaps I wished to escape from his influence that I was beginning to dread.

I made a sort of inventory of what Falmouth offered me, and what he owed me. It was almost like the catalogue of articles left by a dead man.

This was very evident, that the price Falmouth set on the service I had rendered was exorbitant.

Why did he offer me such an exorbitant price?

I had so reviled myself, I felt so ignoble and debased, that I could not believe a word of what he said about the sympathy he felt for me. Had he not told me that, by a delicate sense, he had always been able to select the choice souls for whom he felt an affinity?

How, then, should such a generous nature feel any attraction towards me, so unworthy, so incapable of

inspiring affection?

What interest had he to feign this exaggerated affinity?

His name is much more illustrious than mine, his fortune is enormous, his position is of the highest. It is not vanity, then, that draws him towards me.

His courage is well known, he needs no one to defend him.

His mind is lively and original, and for years he has lived alone. He does not want me to amuse him by my conversation.

I was a long time, I admit, trying to discover what was Lord Falmouth's motive.

Suddenly, by dint of plunging into the abyss of hideous instincts, an infernal idea came into my mind.

I had a moment of execrable triumph: I had guessed it.

I thought all could be explained, all could be understood by this abominable interpretation.

I was seized with a horrible vertigo.

CHAPTER III

THE DUEL

I wrote the following hasty lines in answer to Lord Falmouth's admirable letter.

I rang the bell and sent him the note.[4]

Just as it has always happened, no sooner was the letter gone than I came to my senses, and when I was able to think of the infamous outrage I had committed, I was overcome with horror.

What if I were mistaken?

I would have given my very life to have been able to recall those dreadful lines.

It was too late.

My cabin was only separated from Lord Falmouth's by a slight partition.

Seized by the most frightful anxiety, I listened. When the servant who had taken my letter to Falmouth closed the door, there was a dead silence. Then suddenly an impetuous movement upset a chair, and I heard Falmouth start towards the door with heavy and uncertain steps, for he could scarcely walk as yet.

He was coming.

My heart beat as though it was going to break.

His heavy steps came nearer.

I felt that I was breaking into a cold perspiration.

I was afraid!

My door was suddenly opened. He entered holding himself up on his cane.

In all my life—no, never in all my life shall I forget the look of fiery rage that gleamed in his eyes. His face was like a marble mask lit up by two blazing

eyeballs.

"Defend yourself!" cried he, in a voice that shook with indignation, and holding out my letter in his hand; "where is your weapon?"

A frightful remorse seized me, so violent was it that a cowardly retraction of my infamy was on my lips.

"Henry!" said I, in despair, pointing to my letter, "pardon!"

"Pardon! You don't mean to fight?" cried Falmouth, in a fury.

The blood rushed to my face, the shame of being thought a coward exasperated me, and I answered, "Monsieur, I will fight with whatever weapon you choose."

"Thanks for such extreme politeness. What weapon do you fight with? I have had enough of this," repeated he, savagely.

I was almost bursting with rage, but remembering that Falmouth was on his own yacht, I controlled myself.

"Both you and I," said I, "are too badly wounded to use our swords,—pistols would be the most suitable arm."

"That is quite true," said Falmouth, as he sank into an armchair.

He rang the bell.

One of his servants entered.

"Beg Mr. Williams to come below," said Falmouth. The *valet* went out.

"Williams and Geordy will be our seconds," said

Falmouth, imperiously.

I gave a mechanical sign of assent,—I was annihilated.

Williams came down into the cabin.

"Where are we, Williams? What is the nearest land?"

"The wind has been from the north all the morning, my lord, and we are well on our way to Malta. If it keeps on at this rate, we will get there to-morrow evening."

"Try, then, my brave fellow, to get us there as soon as possible,—and give me your arm to help me back to my own cabin."

I was alone.

There is no need to say that I was plunged in despair.

Revived by a burning fever, my wound began to give me terrible pain.

Tossing every moment on the great waves that the north wind had raised up, and which were growing higher momentarily, the schooner leaped wildly forward.

This ploughing the sea caused me such agony that I could scarcely help screaming aloud. The doctor came to see how I was getting on, and from childish obstinacy I hid my suffering.

The man was paid for his services by Falmouth. I was determined to accept his services no longer.

What hours I passed! Great God, it was horrible!

The excitement that I had undergone, added to the fever, had raised my nervous sensibility to such a

degree that, doubled up in bed, I hid my face in my hands, for the light was intolerable to me, and I wept bitterly. Usually tears were a relief to me, but these were bitter and scalding.

Then, when my despair was at its height, I contrasted it, in my usual way, with my sensations of only a few hours before. I compared that which was with that which had been,—that which might have been,—had I not with my own hand crushed, blighted, deliberately destroyed so many new opportunities for happiness!

Instead of hiding my shame in solitude and darkness, instead of these dreary and sad thoughts and this isolation which my own outrageous conduct had brought upon me, I should be tranquilly seated by my friend,—my heart filled with grateful affection.

This man who now hated and despised me, who eagerly awaited the hour when he should wipe out with my blood the insult he had received, would be still there at my side, kind and solicitous for my comfort. These groans, wrung from me by physical suffering and which I tried so hard to stifle, would have been answered by the pitying voice of a brother in his attempt to comfort me.

And to think, great God! I cried out, that the reality of my dream of friendship was so near! To think that once again in my life, by the most unheard-of combination of circumstances, I had only to accept the happiness that was offered to me!

To think that once again a fatal monomania had forced me to exchange all these promises of felicity for the most fearful and lifelong remorse!

Then seeing that my grief was incurable, ideas of

suicide came into my mind.

I reproached myself for being only a burden to myself and every one else. I asked myself, Of what use am I, and what have I done with the advantages that fortune had bestowed on me,—youth, health, strength, wealth, intelligence, and courage?

To what use had I put these precious gifts so far? To ruin all those who had loved me.

Thus I resolved that in this duel with Falmouth I would blindly expose my life and respect his.

I felt that in firing on him I should commit fratricide.

By a strange caprice I wished to read his letter once more.

Inexplicable fatality! for the first time I understood its greatness,—its imposing generosity.

Then it was that I finally understood the irreparable, tremendous loss I had sustained. But alas, alas! it was now too late, all was over, the end had come.

[4]The whole of this letter is carefully erased in the Journal of an Unknown.

CHAPTER IV

THE PILOT

For the last few moments, the plunging of the yacht had become worse and worse. I could hear a continuous roaring, which became constantly more violent. Very soon there were flashes of lightning, followed by the deep rolling of distant thunder.

Sometimes I heard the hurried steps of the sailors overhead, then again the sound was hushed, and I heard the loud voice of Williams, giving orders.

I could no longer doubt of it; we were overtaken by a tempest. I could no longer remain inactive.

Feeble as I was, I tried to get up, hoping that the fresh air would do me good. I rang the bell, and, with the aid of my *valet de chambre*, succeeded in dressing.

I had almost completely lost the use of my left arm.

I went up on deck. Falmouth was not there.

The waves were furious.

Though it was only four o'clock, it was so dark that I could scarcely see.

On the horizon, the immense undulations of the waves were outlined against a band of gleaming light, the colour of red-hot iron.

Above this strip of blazing sky, the clouds were piled in heavy masses of ochre and black; the vault of the firmament was reflected in the sea, and the waves seemed to have lost their azure or emerald transparency, and looked like solid mountains streaked with foam.

The wind whistled through the ropes loudly and furiously. Though blowing a gale, the wind was hot, and the water that it raised up in solid sheets, and

dashed over the deck of the yacht, was warm.

Very soon the doctor came up on deck. "You are very imprudent," said he to me, "to leave your cabin."

"I was stifling down there, doctor, the motion of the ship made me almost crazy. I feel better up here."

"What frightful weather!" said the doctor. "If we can only get to Malta to anchor before night!"

"Are we not some distance off yet from that island?"

"We are very near, but that heavy cloud prevents our seeing land. In about an hour the yacht will put up a signal for a pilot, provided that in such a storm they can hear our cannon and see our signal."

An hour afterwards the sky became more clear.

We saw ahead of us, on the horizon, high hills, which were still covered with clouds; Williams said this was Cape Harrach, the northern point of the island of Malta, on the height of which was built the tower of Espinasse, which was used as a lookout. Williams then brought the yacht to, and fired several shots to call for a pilot.

"The wind is so strong," said the doctor, "that the pilots of Harrach don't dare to put out to sea."

In spite of which, after several salvos from the ship, we saw appear and disappear on the crest and in the trough of the waves a little lateen sail which was skilfully managed.

"Those Maltese must be intrepid sailors," said the doctor, "for, in spite of this tremendous sea, they are coming right out in the teeth of the wind."

The pilot-boat approached nearer and nearer, but as it was sometimes hidden by the high waves, and

only reappeared after a long interval, at each one of its progressive appearances on the wave's crest it would seem to become unaccountably larger. This was a very natural circumstance, but it struck me as unnatural and ominous. At length the boat was only about a gunshot off from the yacht.

By Williams's orders, a rope was thrown to it.

I leaned over the rail to get a better view of these hardy mariners.

There were five of them; four were busy managing the sails, while one held the rudder. After having very cleverly run alongside the yacht to catch the rope that had been thrown to them, the man who was steering, profiting by the moment when a great wave lifted up his boat almost to the deck of the yacht, leaped on board and clung to the shrouds.

The pilot, after saluting Williams, walked along the deck with a perfectly sure footing, in spite of the plunging of the yacht. One could see that he was an experienced navigator. Very soon he stopped, raised his head, and gave a connoisseur's look at the appointments of the yacht; they seemed to please him, for he gave a mute sign of approbation.

In spite of the tempest, and the dangers that the yacht was in, for night was coming on and the wind showed no signs of going down, this man was so calm and secure that the sailors of the yacht, who were beginning to show signs of anxiety, brightened up and were quite cheerful again. It was as if the pilot had brought with him this sudden sense of security, as the arrival of the family physician brings confidence and hope to an anxious mother.

As I stood near the bulwarks on which I had been leaning so as not to be thrown down by the plunging

of the ship, I had not yet had a good look at the pilot, but he soon came near me.

The man was apparently about forty. He was tall, thin, and bony; his face very sunburnt, his cheeks hollow; his eyes were green, and his hair black and very thick. He wore a Scotch cap of red and blue plaid woollen stuff, which was pulled down to his eyebrows. A cape of heavy brown cloth, dripping with salt water, hung down to the tops of his great fisherman's boots, and completed his costume.

It seemed to me that I had met this man before. I had a vague remembrance of just such a sinister face, though I found it impossible to recall the circumstances or place of our meeting; but there came over me an uncomfortable feeling which I attributed to my feverish condition.

"Can we get in to anchor at Malta to-night, pilot?" said Williams to him.

After having looked at the compass and questioned the state of the sky, the sea, and the wind, the pilot answered in very good English: "We might get to an island to-night, but not to the island of Malta, sir."

"No!" cried Williams; "and why not?"

"Because you can't, it is impossible," said the pilot, carelessly.

"But," continued Williams, "though the wind is very strong, and blowing from the north, it is not strong enough to send us ashore. The yacht sails beautifully, she rises with every wave."

"Could she resist a current that runs seven or eight knots an hour, sir, and that driving us right ashore the same way the wind is doing?"

"I tell you, pilot," replied Williams, "that two years ago I ran into the harbour of Malta in a worse storm than this."

"But not worse than what we are to have to-night," said the pilot.

"To-night?" replied Williams, incredulously.

"Yes, to-night," replied the pilot, firmly.

"How do you know that we will have a bad night, pilot?"

"The point of Tamea and the rocks of Kamich are all under water at sundown, and that is the sign of a terrible storm."

"That is all superstition and old women's tales!" exclaimed Williams.

The pilot gave him a look out of his piercing green eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and smiled. When the man smiled, I felt as though I had the nightmare, or an oppressive dream, for I recognised the sharp, white, pointed teeth of the pirate with whom I had struggled hand to hand when the yacht had been attacked.

My astonishment was so great, that I strode forward and stared at the pilot in a state of stupefaction; but he withstood my gaze with perfect indifference, and it was I who lowered my eyes, all abashed by the calm, unconcerned look he gave me.

Williams, who was impatient at the pilot's silence, and had noticed my astonishment, said to him, "But then, what do you propose to do?"

"If the weather continues to grow heavier, which I have no doubt of, sir, instead of running the risk of having your yacht driven ashore by the wind and the

currents before it gets into the port of Malta, I advise you to double Point Harrach, and, instead of going ashore on the northern side of the island, to land on the southern coast in the little harbour of Marsa-Siroco, where you will find good anchorage. If, as you say, your yacht rises well to the wind, there will be nothing to prevent her manœuvring when she is once under shelter of the island, and, in case the storm grows worse, she will run no risk of being dashed ashore, because she will have before her the hundred leagues that separate Malta from the north coast of Africa."

"That proposition is a cowardly one, pilot," cried out Williams; "a Flemish tub would do better than that. My lord wishes positively to anchor in the port of Malta to-night, and I say it can be done."

"Then you must take the wheel yourself, sir," replied the pilot, with his independent air; then going astern, he called in English to the sailors who had remained in his sailboat, "Hello! Hello, there; get ready to cast off, we are going back to Harrach."

When I heard the clear and penetrating voice of the pilot, except the different language, it surely sounded like the voice and accent of the man in the black hood, who, a moment before the boarding of the yacht, cried out to his pirate crew, "Don't fire! Board her!"

Williams, seeing that the pilot was really getting ready to leave, told him to wait a moment, and he would go and consult with my lord; then he disappeared.

I remained on deck in a state of the greatest perplexity.

I was almost sure that I recognised the voice and

the peculiar teeth of this man, but could not this be a remarkable case of similarity? What chance was there that a man who had been wounded and thrown into the sea, barely eight days ago, should be this Maltese pilot, so vigorous and strong?

I continued to watch the pilot steadily; he never changed countenance. Tired, no doubt, of being so fixedly stared at, he advanced towards me, and said, boldly:

"What have you got to say to me, monsieur?"

"Have you been a pilot at Malta any length of time?" I asked him.

"For the last seven years, monsieur," and he showed me his large silver medal, hung on a long chain of the same metal, which he wore under his cape.

On the medal I read the name Joseph Belmont, royal pilot, No. 18. On the other side of the medal were the royal arms of England.

"But you are a Frenchman," said I to him, speaking French.

"*Oui*, monsieur," he replied.

I was more astonished even than before.

Williams now appeared on deck, and, addressing the pilot, said:

"Go ahead, do as you think best. My lord has given his consent."

"The sea is getting so rough," said the pilot to Williams, "that I am going to tell my sailors to heave off the tow-rope, and follow us a little ways off." So the sailboat, abandoning the tow-rope, continued to follow in our wake.

Night was coming on.

According to the usual custom, Williams handed his speaking-trumpet, the sign of command, to the pilot.

The predictions of the latter as to the weather were soon realised, for though the new direction we had taken put us, in a short time, under the lee of the island, and in a sheltered position, the tempest augmented in violence.

The pilot, standing at the helm, gave his orders with perfect calmness, and Williams admitted that he managed the ship with rare ability and coolness.

While waiting for the moon to rise, which would facilitate our coming to anchor, we were skirting along the coast, parallel to the southern shore of the island of Malta.

The night was very dark.

The lamps of the compasses, shut up in their copper boxes, shone in a pale circle on the deck, at the foot of the mainmast.

This light shone only on the pilot and the helmsman, while the rest of the yacht remained plunged in an obscurity that the contrasting luminous circle only made darker. Lit up from below, as actors are by the footlights of the theatre, the features of the pilot had a peculiar expression of audacity, deceit, and wickedness.

Although the sea was tremendous, so that the prow of the yacht was almost constantly covered by the furious waves, from time to time I could see the pilot rub his hands with savage satisfaction, and laugh in a way that showed his white, sharp, and wide apart teeth.

In these moments I believed thoroughly that I recognised the pirate with whom I had fought. This idea became so fixed in my mind that, in spite of my resolve to say nothing on the subject, I could not help asking Williams if he was perfectly sure of the man.

"As sure as one can be of anything! Our marine council of the port of Malta never gives a pilot's commission except to reliable and experienced men. This man showed me his patent, it is according to the regulations. Besides, you can see for yourself what a skilful sailor he is, and I begin to believe he was right. Though we are sheltered by the land, you see how the ship is straining under the violence of the wind. Such a storm, with a strong current setting in towards the coast, would have easily wrecked the yacht."

"You may think I am out of my mind," said I to Williams, after some hesitation, "but I am sure I know who this pilot is."

"Who is he, monsieur?"

"The pirate captain that I fought with, and that I thought was at the bottom of the sea."

"It is so dark that I can't see your face, monsieur," said Williams, "but I am sure you are laughing at me."

"No; I swear I am speaking very seriously."

"But, monsieur, remember that is quite impossible. I tell you that the position of a pilot is only given to trustworthy men; they cannot leave their posts except to pilot ships that wish to enter the harbour. Remember that the mysterious pirate had already been anchored for more than a month off

Porquerolles before my lord's yacht got to the island of Hyères. Remember that—but," said Williams, interrupting himself, and leaving me, "there is the moon rising, and the clouds are clearing away; the moonlight will help us to get to the anchorage. Excuse me, monsieur, but I am going to get out the anchors."

The reasons Williams gave me were not at all convincing, though they seemed sensible. However, seeing that the hour of debarkation was approaching, and that experienced sailors considered that the pilot had managed the ship very skilfully and prudently, I was forced to suspend my judgment, for, so far, no one had a word of reproach for the man I suspected.

The doctor came up on deck, gave me the news of Falmouth, and asked how I was feeling.

"The fresh air has done me good," said I, "and my wound pains me less."

"Thanks be to God for that," said he. "My lord is feeling better also; his contusion was a bad one, but the effect will soon go off. Just now he was able to walk by himself. The pilot was right," added the doctor, as he pointed to the waves; "see how calm the sea is growing, now that we are getting near the shore of the island."

In fact, sheltered from the violence of the wind by the circle of high rocky hills that form the southern shore of Malta, the waves were going down more and more. Soon the moon, coming entirely out from the clouds that had hidden her until now, shone brightly on an immense wall of rocks which was stretched out before us, the waves dashing against their base.

The yacht was then a cannon's shot distant from

the shore we were sailing past; the pilot-boat was a little way behind us.

"Are we almost to the harbour of Marsa-Siroco?" said Williams, who knew the different anchorages of the island.

"We will very soon be there; but, as we have to pass between the Black Rocks and the Point de la Wardi, and as the passage is very dangerous on account of the breakers, I will, if you please, monsieur, take the rudder," said the pilot to Williams. On a sign from the latter, the helmsman left the bar.

I remember all this as though it happened yesterday.

I was seated on the bulwarks.

Before me stood Williams, very near the pilot who had taken the helm, looking attentively at the compass, the shore, and the sails of the yacht.

The doctor, leaning over the stern, watched the sea in our wake. At some distance we could see the pilot-boat; she did not appear to be following us any more, but was going in another direction. This was very singular, I thought.

In front of us, and very close at hand, rose an enormous mass of perpendicular rocks.

Though the sea had become much more calm, it was still raised by a tremendous swell whose waves crashed against the shore with a formidable noise.

The pilot had ordered another sail to be put up, no doubt to augment the speed of the yacht. This was scarcely done when a frightful cry was heard from the bow, "Helm aport! We are on the breakers!"

I never knew how the pilot obeyed this order, or how he managed the yacht; for, at the instant the cry of warning was heard, a horrible crash, followed by a loud, cracking sound, stopped the yacht short.

The shock was so violent that I, Williams, and two of the sailors, were thrown on the deck.

"The yacht is ashore!" cried Williams, as he got up. "Damn the pilot!"

My wound prevented me from rising as quickly as Williams. I was still lying on the deck, when some one rushed past me rapidly, a heavy body fell into the sea, and the pilot was no longer to be seen at the helm or on the deck.

Remembering my suspicion of the man, and forgetting the danger we were in, I rose up, and saw, at a gunshot's distance from us, the pilot-boat; its sailors were rowing hard towards a black spot, surrounded by foam, that I could easily see in the moonlight.

It was the pilot, who was swimming to get back to his boat.

"A gun! Give me a gun!" I cried out. "I knew it was he!"

At this moment the yacht struck for the second time on the rocks, and the mainmast fell, with a terrific crash.

Following the crash, there was a moment of silence and stupefaction, in which I heard these words in French, "Remember the mystic of Porquerolles!"

It was the pirate,—the yacht was a wreck.

The last scene of this drama was so confused, so hurried that I can scarcely recall it. Everything was

confusion and chaos, frightful scenes followed one another, as thunder-claps succeed one another in a storm. At the third shock the yacht was raised up by an immense wave, and fell with all its weight on a ledge of sharp rocks. Already split in two, the keel went to pieces. I heard the water rushing into the ship's hold with a horrible sound.

The ship had filled with water!

In spite of my wound, which kept one of my hands bound to my side, I was about to jump into the sea, when I saw Falmouth come up from below; he was assisted by Williams.

At this moment another great wave took the ship sideways, and completely engulfed it.

I felt myself rolling to the edge of the ship, then I was lifted up and stunned by a crushing weight of water which passed over me roaring like thunder.

From that moment I lost all perception of what was happening to me.

All that I can remember is that I felt a frightful weight. I stifled when I opened my mouth for breath. I swallowed great mouthfuls of warm salt water, my ears were bursting with pain, a great weight prevented me from seeing. I felt that I was drowning. With all this, I continued my desperate efforts to swim. Then I seemed to breathe more freely. I saw the sky, and near me a mass of reddish rocks. I felt a strong hand raise me by my hair, and I heard the voice of Falmouth, who said, "Now we are quits! Good-bye."

I remembered nothing more, for I very soon fell into a painful numbness, and then became insensible.

DAPHNÉ—NOÉMI—ANATHASIA

CHAPTER V

THE ISLAND OF KHIOS

I find this fragment of memoirs written a year after the wreck of Lord Falmouth's yacht off the coast of Malta.

If I had the least literary pretension, I would not dare to say that these pages, written on the spur of the moment, depict very accurately the enchanting scenes in the midst of which I had been living for the last year in the sweetest of *far-nientes*.

In truth, the paradise I had created for myself seems to come again before my eyes, with its luxury of antique beauty, its palace of white marble gilded by the sunshine, its intoxicating perfumes coming from the orange groves that stand off against the blue sky that frames so magnificently the dark waters of the coast of Asiatic Europe.

That year should have been the happiest year of my life; for those few charmed days never caused me the least moral suffering. Not once did I feel any remorse, not once did I feel my heart.

But, alas! why was not the soul killed in such

scenes of happiness? Why was not the mind overpowered by the senses? Why did thought survive the struggle?

Thought! that power of man! Man's true power, in fact; for it is fatal, like all powers.

Thought, that blazing crown, that burns and consumes the forehead that wears it!

According to my custom of classifying pleasant memories, I had entitled this fragment, "Days of Sunshine."

The light and careless tone that frequently appears in this souvenir offers a singular contrast to the sombre and heart-breaking events of the former chapters in this journal.

Days of Sunshine.

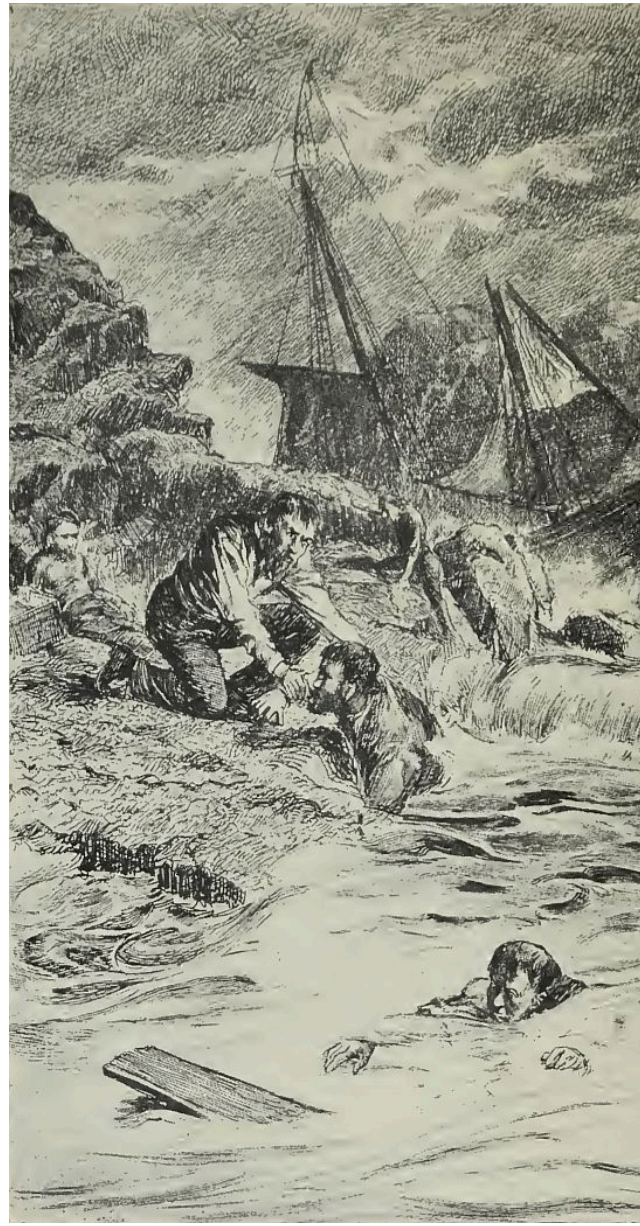
ISLE OF KHIOS, 20 June, 18—.

I know not what the future has in store for me, but, as I often said in my days of sadness and desolation, "one must distrust one's self more than one's destiny." I hope one day, as I read these pages, to be able to see again the smiling scenes amidst which I am now living so happily.

I write this the 20th of June, 18—, in the palace of Carina, situated on the eastern coast of the island of Khios, about a year after the loss of the yacht.

In that great peril, poor Henry saved my life. In spite of his wound, he was swimming vigorously towards shore, when, seeing me about to drown, for I could scarcely use my left arm, he seized me with one hand, and, fighting the waves with the other, he

landed me on the shore in a dying condition.



My strength was quite exhausted by the excitement of the combat, by my wound, and by my desperate efforts at the time of the wreck; for I was for many long days a prey to burning fever and wild delirium from which I was restored to health by the excellent care of the doctor whom Falmouth had left behind.

I was so dangerously ill that I had to be carried to Marsa-Siroco, a little Maltese suburb, near the coast where the yacht had gone ashore. I remained in that village until my complete recovery, when the fever left me, and I was able to converse; the doctor told me the circumstances I have just recorded, and handed me a letter from Falmouth, which I copy in this journal.

"After all, my dear count, I prefer having saved you from drowning, to having put a bullet in your head, or perhaps having received from you a similar proof of friendship.

"I hope that the vigorous *douche* that you have received will have a good effect on you, and save you from another fit of insanity.

"My plans are changed, or rather become what they were at first. I desire more than ever to satisfy my fancy about that incendiary, Canaris; but as that diabolical piratical pilot (May he come to the gallows!) has wrecked my poor yacht, I have chartered a vessel at Malta, and am off for Hydra.

"Good-bye. If we ever meet again we will laugh at all this.

H. FALMOUTH."

"P. S. I leave you the doctor, for the Maltese doctors are said to be detestable. He will hand you a letter of recommendation to the lord governor of the island.

"Send me the doctor when you have no further need of his services."

I have become so stupid from the life of pleasure I have been leading, that I scarcely remember the effect this sarcastic letter had on me.

When I arrived at Malta I called on Lord P——, who showed me great courtesy. He caused active search to be made for the pretended pilot. That wretch had actually been at one time a member of the Royal Navy, but, for two years past, he had given up his position as pilot in the island of Malta.

A description of him was sent throughout the whole Archipelago, where he was supposed to be engaged in piracy.

At Lord P——'s I met a certain Marquis Justiniani, a descendant of that ancient and illustrious family, the Justiniani of Genoa, which had given dukes to Venice and sovereigns to some of the Grecian islands. The marquis owned many country places in the island of Khios, which had just been ravaged by the Turks. He spoke to me about a palace called the Carina Palace, built towards the end of the sixteenth century by the Cardinal Angelo Justiniani. The marquis had for a long time rented the palace to an aga. The description of the palace and the climate seduced me, so I proposed to go to Khios, to visit the palace and the park, and to rent or buy the place if it

suited me.

We left together, and disembarked here after a three days' voyage. The Turks had left bloody traces of their passage everywhere; they were in garrison in the castle of Khios.

As I was a Frenchman, thanks to the firm attitude of our navy and our consuls in the Orient, I would be in perfect security in case of my deciding to dwell in Khios.

I inspected the palace, it suited me, and the business was settled.

The next day my interpreter brought to me a renegade Jew, who proposed that I should purchase a dozen beautiful Grecian slave girls, the spoils of the last Turkish raid in the islands of Samos and Lesbos.

Of these twelve girls, the eldest of whom was only twenty, there were three who were too refined and delicate to be put to work, and were therefore suitable for companionship.

The nine others, tall, robust, and very beautiful, could work either in the garden or in the house. He only demanded two thousand piastres apiece, about five hundred francs of our money.

In order to induce me to buy them, the renegade told me, confidentially, that a Tunisian officer, purveyor of the Bey's harem, had made him an offer; but that he liked to see his slaves well treated and so preferred selling them to me, knowing what harsh treatment the poor creatures would receive on board the Barbary *chebek* that was to take them to Tunis.

I expressed a desire to see the slaves.

The marvellous type of Grecian beauty has been so

well preserved in this favoured clime, that, out of these twelve girls of every sort and condition, there was not one who was not really pretty, and three of them were perfectly beautiful women.

The bargain concluded, I sent the twelve women to the Carina Palace with two negro dwarfs, who were so deformed as to be positively picturesque, that the renegade presented me with by way of a contrast. They were all under the surveillance of an old Cypriote, that the Jew recommended as a housekeeper.

This sudden resolution to go to the Isle of Khios, and there to live at leisure, forgetting all things and every one, had been suggested to me a year ago, by the torturing remembrance of the great sorrow that overwhelmed me.

After my quarrel with Falmouth, whom I had so basely provoked, fully aware that I was unworthy of all generous affection, since I was constantly seeking the meanest motives, I believed that a perfectly sensual life would admit of neither these fears nor doubts.

What had made me so unhappy until now? Was it not from a dread of being deceived by my feelings? The dread of being mistaken should I allow myself to love? What, then, should I risk in devoting the remainder of my life to material love?

Nature is so rich, so fecund, so inexhaustible, that I can never weary of admiring her marvels, from henceforth I would doubt of nothing.

The perfume of a beautiful flower is not imaginary, the splendours of a magnificent landscape are real,

beautiful forms are not deceptive. What interested motive could I impute to the flower that perfumes the air, the bird that sings, the wind murmuring softly through the leaves, the sea breaking on the beach, to nature, that unfolds so many treasures, colours, melodies, and fragrances?

It is true I will be all alone to enjoy these marvels, but solitude pleases me. I possess a deep sense of material beauty, which will be sufficient to make up for my want of faith in moral beauty.

The sight of luxuriant nature, of a fine horse or dog, a flower or a beautiful woman, or even a lovely sunset, has always given me exquisite pleasure, and though religious faith is unfortunately lacking in me, when I behold the splendours of creation I always feel transports of heartfelt gratitude towards the unknown power that heaps such treasures on us.

Regretting the faculties of which I am deprived, I will at least make the most of those I possess; and since I can not be happy through the mind, let me be so through the senses.

This I said to myself, and I was not mistaken, for never have I enjoyed such perfect happiness.

Falmouth was the best, the noblest of men. I know it. But when I compare my present life of felicity with the life of study and politics that Henry depicted in such glowing colours, the only thing I regret is the friendship that I destroyed by my awful suspicions.

Henry was quite right when he said that idleness was the source of all my miseries; so I have spent my time in the making of living pictures on which I can at all times gaze. It has taken much toil, and even study, to surround myself with all these marvels of

creation, to get together all the scattered riches of this Garden of Eden.

Sages may tell us that these are but childish pleasures, but it is their simplicity that constitutes their pleasantness.

Serious immaterial joys are but perishable, while the thousand little pleasures a youthful nature can always discover in his reveries, though trifling and momentary, are constantly being renewed, for the imagination that produces them is inexhaustible.

Now that I have lived in such adorable independence, the life of society, with its exigencies, appears to me as a sort of order whose rules are as strict as those of the "Trappists."

I do not know which I would prefer, to be comfortably clothed in a serge gown, or cramped up in a tight coat; to breathe the pure fresh air of the garden I cultivated or the stifling atmosphere of a crowded salon; to kneel through the service of matins, or to stand all evening at some reception. In fact, I think I should as willingly choose the meditative silence of the cloister as the chatter of the salon; and say with about as much interest, "Brother, we must die," of the religious order, as "Brother, we must amuse ourselves," of the social order.

One thing only astonishes me, it is that I have been so long without knowing where true happiness lies.

When I think of the burdensome, obscure, and narrow life that most men impose upon themselves, through routine, in unhealthy cities, in damp climates, with hardly a ray of sunshine, without flowers, without perfume, surrounded by a degenerate, ugly, and sickly race, when they could live as I do without a care, as a monarch among the

exquisite beauties of nature in a marvellous climate, I sometimes fear that my paradise will suddenly be invaded.

Thus I congratulate myself every day on my determination, my cup runs over with pleasure, my most painful remembrances fade away from my mind, and my soul has become so dulled from intoxicating joys, that the past has become a mere dream of misery.

Hélène, Marguerite, Falmouth, the remembrance of you is growing dim, far away, hidden under a beautiful cloud. I sometimes wonder how we could have caused each other so much suffering.

But what do I hear under my windows? It is the sound of the Albanian harp. It is Daphné, who invites Noémi and Anathasia to dance the national dance, the Romaïque.

May this description of all that surrounds me, the smiling scene that I gaze on while writing these lines, here in Khios, in the Carina Palace, remain on these unseen pages as a faithful picture of a charming reality.

No doubt these details would seem childish to any other than myself, but it is a portrait I wish to paint, and a portrait by Holbein, seen and painted with scrupulous fidelity; for, if ever I should happen to regret this happy period of my life, every stroke of the brush would be of inestimable value to me.

CHAPTER VI

DAYS OF SUNSHINE—THE PALACE

Like all palaces of modern Italy, the Palace of Carina, built by the Genoese when the island of Khios was one of their possessions, the Palace of Carina is immense. The apartments are splendid, but unfurnished. The Mussulman who occupied it before me had furnished one wing of the vast building after the Oriental fashion.

It is that wing that I live in. It is there that I retire during the burning heat of the day, for the windows open towards the north, and there is a delightful breeze.

Window-screens of fragrant bamboo half close the windows and permit me to enjoy the view while remaining in a soft obscurity.

The walls are covered with a silvery stucco, which glimmers like white satin, and are divided into panels of alternate lilac and green, where can be read in golden letters several verses of the Koran. The ceiling is richly painted, and divided into panels of lilac and green, with borders of golden arabesques.

A thick Persian carpet covers the floor. At the end of this room, a fountain of limpid water gushes from a basin of Oriental jasper, and falls in cascades with a gentle murmur. Great blue and gold vases, filled with flowers on which some tame doves come and perch, surround the fountain, and the aromatic perfume of the flowers reaches me in a fragrant mist.

Must I admit this fact? The pleasures of the senses are dear to me, and I delight in their satisfaction.

Thus, near me on a table, that is covered with a thick Turkish table-cloth of a yellow shade, embroidered with blue flowers that glitter with silver threads, are sorbets of oranges and the wild cherry, in porous vases that are covered with an icy moisture; golden pineapples, slices of watermelon, with their green rind and red pulp,—all these are shining through pieces of ice that fill great Japanese bowls; on another dish is a pyramid of exquisite fruit, that the dark-eyed Daphné has intermingled with flowers.

In a few moments the sprightly Noémi will fill my crystal cup with the generous wine of Cyprus or Scyros or Madeira, which have been standing in their Venetian decanters exposed to a tepid atmosphere.

If I wish to indulge in soft reverie, to fill my idle brain with delightful dreams, Anathasia, the blonde, will smilingly offer me my narghile filled with jasmine water, or my long pipe with the amber mouthpiece, whose bowl she will fill with the fragrant tobacco of Latakia.

And finally, should I wish to abandon my day-dreams, and give myself up to the thoughts of others, I have them near at hand, the works of the poets I love: Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Scott; the great, the divine, the modern Homer,—Byron, whose black yacht I saw pass on the horizon yesterday.

Although the air is cool, it is saturated with perfume; the vapours of aloes and myrrh, burning in small ruby jars, mingle their odour with that of the flowers, for since I mean to live for the senses, let me not forget the sense of smelling.

I have given myself up enthusiastically to my enjoyment of delightful smells, a sense so

misunderstood or so blamed. I have realised my dream of arranging a scale of perfumes, beginning at the faintest, and gradually ascending to the most powerful odours, the inhaling of which causes a sort of intoxication, which adds a new ecstasy to voluptuousness.

Besides, one could almost live on perfumes on the island of Khios, for it is the island which furnished all the perfumes to the harems, the essences of rose, jasmin, and tuberose, which are used in the seraglio of the sultanas.

Khios alone produces the precious lentisk, whose gum the dreamy and indolent odalisk chews between her ivory teeth; Khios, whose commerce even has a charming suggestion of elegance, for her exports are silks, tapestries, flowers, fruits, birds, and honey. And it is young girls and beautiful women of the purest antique type who gather the treasures of the island, the most favoured of all the islands of Ionia.

From the windows of the apartment I occupy, in one of the wings of this immense dwelling, I gaze on a beautiful scene.

May its remembrance be an everlasting regret, if ever I leave this adorable retreat for some dark and noisy city, with a horizon of high walls, filthy streets, and close atmosphere.

On my left is the front of the palace, whose carved porticos, arcades, and white marble staircases seem endless.

From its porphyry inlaid basement, to its roof, adorned with balustrades, statues, and great vases filled with myrtle and oleanders, the whole building is bathed in sunshine, and its golden silhouette stands out against a sky of that sapphire blue which

is only seen in the East.

In the distance the azure of the sky would blend with the azure of the sea, were it not for a wavy line of purplish red. This is the chain of the mountains of Roumania, whose summits are bathed in brilliant clouds.

On the right hand, as a contrast to that dazzling mass of marble and of sunshine, there is a lawn of clover, where some of the large Syrian sheep, with their heavy tails, are grazing, also a few gazelles with silvery coats. Beyond the lawn, and extending in a parallel direction with the palace, I see a deep, damp, and shady wood.

The gigantic tops of the oak-trees, the cedars, and the secular platanes form an ocean of dark verdure. The sun is setting, and, with its glowing rays, throws a golden light on those masses of foliage.

On that waving curtain of dark and opaque green, a thousand other shades of green are visible, which become more faint and transparent as they approach the banks of the River Belophano, which, widening in front of the palace, forms a sort of lake.

The banks are planted with bladdernut-trees, umbrella pines with their reddish trunks, satin-leaved poplars, arbutus, and buckthorn. On these, once in awhile, shines a ray of sunlight, which slips beneath the great domes of verdure whenever the sea breeze lifts their branches.

Near the shore, there are fan-leaved latanias, whose trunks are hidden beneath vines that bear orange-coloured bell-flowers, and hydrangeas, whose flowers are rose-coloured.

Then there are wide green avenues, where the

sun's rays scarcely ever penetrate, which are carpeted by soft grass, and lead to a hemicycle of foliage, quite near the palace.

These paths are so long and shady that I cannot see their end, through the bluish vapour that veils them.

Lastly, in the foreground, and on a level with my window, is a terrace of white marble, adorned with vases and statues. From this, you can descend to the banks of the canal.

Protected by the palace, one half of the staircase is in the shade, the other is bathed in the sunlight. On one of the lower steps a black dwarf, that I have dressed in a scarlet doublet in Venetian style, is sleeping beside two greyhounds of great size and beautiful form.

By a caprice of the sunlight, the dwarf is in the dazzling zone of its rays, which seem to cover each step with gold dust, while the greyhounds are in the shadow, which is unequally traced on the staircase, and throws its cool, blue, transparent shadows on the white coats of the sleeping dogs.

A little farther on, a peacock sits perched on the balustrade in the bright sun. His feathers flash like a rain of rubies, topazes, and emeralds, glittering against a background of ultramarine.

Swans swim slowly in the canal, and seem to drag behind them thousands of silvery ribbons; tall, rose-coloured flamingoes walk solemnly along the shore, while, farther off, two crimson parrots quarrel for the fruit of the latania-trees. When they unfold their turquoise wings, they display their long wing-feathers, tinted with gold and purple.

On a tuft of amaryllis, a beautiful yellow popinjay,

whose neck reflects the tints of the rainbow, opens out his long white tail-feathers, while the swallows and kingfishers lightly skim over the waters of the canal.

I have just read over these pages, which give a perfect description of the marvellous scene that I look on. All is mentioned. But how feebly words can depict such a spectacle! The relation they bear to the reality is only such as the dry nomenclature of the naturalist to the beautiful object he describes.

CHAPTER VII

DAYS OF SUNSHINE—THE GREEK NATIONAL DANCE

I hear peals of silvery laughter, and beyond the last steps of the staircase, which half conceals them, the playful figures of some of my slave girls appear. They are bathing in the river.

Some of them, holding their beautiful arms above their heads, twist their long brown hair, from which a rain of liquid pearls rolls down on to their bosoms and their bare backs. Others, holding each other's hands, advance timidly on the sandy shore of the lake; they bow their heads, and pretend to be afraid.

Nothing could be more beautiful than their pure and delicate profiles, which stand out like alabaster against the luminous horizon, like white cameos on a

transparent stone.

Their hair is twisted in a knot low on the back of their heads, and leaves their little ears exposed; their necks are round and white, and all the lines of their bodies are as elegant as those of the ancient Greeks.

Not far from this charming group, skipping on the close-cut grass that extends from the wood to the banks of the canal, Noémi and Anathasia, wearing the beautiful costume of the island of Khios, are dancing the "Romaïque," to the music of the Albanian harp which Daphné plays.

The verdant hemicycle protects them from the oblique rays of the sun. Great beds of roses, wallflowers, Persian lilacs, and tuberoses surround their leafy parlour.

These flower beds are constantly plundered by thousands of gaudy butterflies: the "Ulysses," whose wings are bright green with amethyst spots, the "Marsyas" of a deep blue, or the "Danaë," which is a velvety brown, striped with mother-of-pearl.

Happy girls! How well they love to dance to the sound of Daphné's lyre! Daphné is one of three girls the renegade told me were only fit for amusement.

Daphné was carried off from Lesbos by the Turks. Her noble proportions and severely beautiful face remind one of the grand type of the Venus de Milo.

She is seated on a mossy bank. Her complexion is of a rosy white; her eyes, her eyebrows, her eyelashes, and her hair are as black as ebony; a string of gold coins passes over her forehead, and is fastened in the thick braid of hair behind her head.

Daphné wears a straw-coloured tunic and a white robe; she bends slightly forward, and curves her

white naked arms around the Albanian lyre that rests on her knees. One leg stretched forward reveals a charming ankle, covered with a bright pink silk stocking, such as they weave here in the island, and a little black Turkish slipper embroidered with silver is on her foot.

According to the custom of modern Greeks, Daphné sings as she plays, while the two girls who dance repeat the refrain.

This is a translation of their words; there is nothing very remarkable about them, and yet they fill one with passionate languor when sung as Daphné can sing them. A young bridegroom is speaking to his bride:

"I am wounded by thy love, alas!

Ah, young maiden! I am consumed by
thy love.

I am stricken to the heart.

Let me possess your charms and the
flames devour your dower.

Oh, young maiden, I love thee with all
my soul,

And thou hast abandoned me,

Like a withered plant."

Noémi and Anathasia seem to act the words by their expressive pantomime.

Noémi, the brunette, who takes the part of the

lover, is manly and resolute, while the poses of the blonde Anathasia are timid, supplicating, and chaste, like those of a young girl who shuns or fears the caresses of her lover.

Noémi is tall and slender. Her hair is a golden auburn; her eyebrows and lashes are thick and black, and her eyes are dark gray.

Nothing is more voluptuous than those large, liquid eyes. Her brown skin is perhaps rather too dark, and her mocking, sensual lips too brilliantly scarlet, so violently do they contrast with her white teeth; her smile almost too passionate. Her upper lip is shaded by the slightest possible streak of brown, and her pink nostrils dilate at each movement of her breast, which rises and falls, as she dances, under her close-fitting "yellak," or jacket of cherry-coloured satin. Two long tresses, tied with red satin ribbon, fall from under her scarlet "fez" and reach below her round, flexible waist, that seems smaller by contrast with her broad hips, under their orange-coloured skirt. Nothing was ever more nimble than her little feet, shod in red morocco slippers embroidered with gold.

Anathasia, on the contrary, is petite. Her beautiful fair hair falls in plaits on each side of her cheeks, which are as fresh and rosy as a baby's. Her complexion is dazzlingly fair, and her sweet blue eyes, under their long lashes, seem to reflect all the azure of the Ionian skies.

When the ardent Noémi, singing the words of the despairing lover, approaches her with supplicating and passionate gestures, Anathasia's little mouth, as scarlet as a cherry, becomes quite serious, and she assumes a candid and adorable expression of alarmed innocence. She recoils with a frightened look, and

clasps her pretty hands, that are as white as ivory.

Anathasia is all in white.

I had often dreamed of a sylph lightly touching the grass with the tips of its slender feet. Such a fairy is Anathasia, whose tiny proportions are of exquisite refinement.

Never was there such a combination of beauty. My fancy had dictated this arrangement, which included all that was lovely in nature.

I was young; all this beauty belonged to me; my life was divided between sensual ravishments and the delights of the intellect.

What further happiness could I imagine than to live for ever in this enchanting land, forgetful of the past, and hopeful for the future, which must always be as happy; for would not gold ensure me the possession of such wealth as was now before me?

I am so completely happy that I feel an imperative need of giving thanks to the power that bestows on me so many blessings.

CHAPTER VIII

BELIEF

ISLE OF KHIOS, October, 18—.

I take up my journal again after three months of interruption. I left off at the description of the Carina Palace and its inhabitants,—such a minute description that it was like an architect's working drawing, or a slave merchant's inventory.

I consult my moral thermometer. I find myself very well, my head is perfectly clear, and I am cheerful and gay.

I feel as though I were dreaming when I look over the pages of my journal that I brought with me from France, and find that I used to be sad, dreamy, and melancholy.

September has just come to an end; the rainy weather which precedes the equinox has cooled the atmosphere. The west wind whistles through the long galleries of the palace. I have left the ground floor for a more cosy and comfortable apartment. I am almost deafened with noise.

Awhile ago the parrots, the peacocks, and the popinjays, showing their sagacity, and, no doubt, feeling the approaching change in temperature, all began to shriek at once in the most atrocious manner. Such a proof of their intelligence made me terribly nervous.

Why is Nature so inconsistent in her gifts? Dazzling plumage, discordant voice!

This is not all; frightened by the racket, the greyhounds began to bark furiously. Then the dwarfs came with whips and yells, and augmented the noise while trying to stop it.

I have taken refuge here, but can still hear the infernal screaming of the parrots. All these charming accessories of the scenes that surround me are lovely

to look at when they are in their proper place, but I do not care for "tableaux" that shriek.

From animals let us pass to human beings; the transition will not be difficult, for the minds of my beautiful girls are not much more developed than the brains of the parrots and popinjays, and though sometimes they are as noisy as the latter, their screams have not the advantage of foretelling rainy or clear weather.

Speaking of screams, I am sorry that Noémi and Daphné have had a quarrel, but the excessive violence of those good creatures is the result of their want of education. Nevertheless, and although I am tolerant, it seems to me that stabbing one's comrade in the arm is carrying things too far, so I have given Noémi a serious scolding.

I strongly suspect Anathasia, the blonde, with her childish and innocent air, to be the cause of the quarrel, and to have slyly excited those two brave girls to fight each other like two fighting-cocks. To be sure, this was suggested to me by the wicked old Cypriote, and she detests everything that is young or pretty.

Noémi, in fact, is growing more and more ill-tempered. The other day she slapped Chloë, my gardener, violently, Chloë, who has such white teeth and such black eyes. She beat her because she brought in the fruit too late, and so my dessert was behindhand.

After all, Noémi has some good points, but she is deucedly irascible and fierce.

One thing that astonishes me is the fact that these girls are completely insensible to the beauties of nature.

Thanks to the Greek I learned at college, I am able to understand and speak modern Greek passably well, and I have often tried to awaken in these girls some poetic sentiment. All was in vain; nothing was ever more barbaric or uncultivated than their minds.

With the exception of some Greek national songs, they know nothing at all.

They can neither read nor write. Their rivalries, their jealousies, their calumnies, and a few exaggerated tales of Turkish cruelty, furnish the subjects of their usual conversation.

In other ways they are the best of girls. I remember a scene, which shows marvellously well the characters of my three favourites.

I was mounting a Syrian horse I had purchased, for the first time. He became excited, reared, and fell on me. Noémi flew at the horse, caught him by the bridle, and beat him with a whip. Daphné ran to help me up. Anathasia never moved, but burst into tears and then fainted away.

Some time ago I tried to awaken the souls of these poor girls to some remembrances of their Fatherland, —a sentiment that is so strong in half-civilised natures.

It was not without some hesitation that I made the attempt. I felt a certain remorse at the idea of awakening sad recollections.

Poor girls! They lived in slavery, and their melancholy thoughts must often turn with regret to the land of their youth. Poor caged swallows! they only awaited an opportunity of flying home to their nests.

I feared it would be cruel to raise false hopes in their breasts; still, I assembled my household, and told them that I was going to leave the island, and send them all back to their respective homes.

I must declare, and with a certain amount of satisfaction, that they immediately broke into lamentations that would have done honour to the funeral of Achilles, or the dirge of some illustrious Albanian chieftain.

Daphné wrapped her head in her veil, and sat silent and motionless on the ground, like an antique statue of grief. Noémi manifested her rage by beating one of the black dwarfs, while the fair Anathasia, falling on her knees, took my hand and kissed it; then raising her beautiful tearful eyes to mine, said, in her soft Ionian tongue:

"Oh, master! master! When you have gone, what will become of your poor Grecian girls?"

"But your aged fathers! Your poor old mothers! Your brave brothers and your handsome lovers!" I exclaimed. "Do you never think of them, forgetful creatures that you are?"

Feeling sure that such magical words would have an effect, I drew my cloak around me with a majestic air.

But the crying and sobbing only grew the louder, and they all cried out, in what I thought a threatening way:

"We will never leave the roof of the good Frank; we are happy at Khios; we will stay at Khios with the good Frank."

Though I was their "good Frank," I could not help having but a poor idea of their patriotism; the

preference they gave me over their native soil and its accessories was certainly flattering.

I resolved to make another attempt, and told them that I would give each of them two thousand piastres and their clothes, and let them go wherever they wished, for I meant to leave the island.

The screams and curses that were the result of my innocent proposition so alarmed me, that for a moment I feared I should share the fate of Orpheus.

Letting go of her dwarf, Noémi sprang towards me like a tigress, seized my yellak, for I wore the Albanian costume, and said to me, her eyes blazing with anger:

"If you try to go away, and leave us here, we will set the palace on fire, and, holding you in our arms, we will all be burned together."

The majority of the rebels seemed to be delighted with such an idea, for they screamed out louder than ever:

"Yes, yes, let us take the good Frank in our arms, and all perish with him in the flames of his palace."

I observed a trait that was worthy of La Bruyère. The gentle Anathasia was one of the most ferocious of the incendiary party.

Although this threatened mode of death was worthy of Sardanapalus, I preferred to live as I was, and being now quite convinced that I was adored by my household, I told them that I renounced my projects of departure.

My modesty forbids me saying with what effusion, what transports of joy, my decision was welcomed by those good girls.

The whole twelve of them took hold of each other's hands, and formed a circle. Noémi, as the antique theorist, improvised these simple words, which her companions repeated to the air of their national hymn, "The Swallows."

"At Khios we remain,

Dance, sisters, dance,

At Khios we remain,

We stay with the good Frank.

"He never beats us, he treats us well,

Dance, sisters, dance,

We will always have beautiful fezzes,

Beautiful embroidered yellaks,

Beautiful silk sashes.

"We will eat tender roasted kids,

Fat partridges and quails,

Honey from Hymettus, wine from Scyros.

Dance, sisters, dance,

The good Frank lets us stay.

"Dance, sisters, dance,

We till the soil no more,

No more we mend the roads,

Dance, sisters, dance.

"We will bathe beneath the sycamores,

We will not work at all,

Only pluck fruit and flowers for him,

The good Frank who keeps us."

If I had been blinded by any conceit, I should have had my self-respect somewhat wounded on learning that the roast kid, fat partridges, Scyros wine, beautiful clothes, and idleness, were prominent features in the intense affection these simple creatures bore me.

But, fortunately, I am wiser than that, and can see through their devotion. Formerly I had some doubts as to my powers of attraction, but now, how can I help believing in the charm with which I was invested if it can attach these slaves to me so devotedly?

My charms are easily understood, they are the fat partridges, the roasted kids, the golden belts, and embroidered yellaks.

Oh, happy future! As long as there are any embroiderers and silk weavers in the Isle of Khios, I will be sure of admiration.

I, who until now could never believe in disinterested affection, am obliged to have blind faith in the love I inspire.

It is surely easy to believe these truthful creatures, when they tell me that they love to be elegantly clothed, well fed, and not beaten. I cannot accuse them of duplicity when they say that they like to do nothing harder than pick fruit and flowers, or bathe in the marble pool, in the shade of the plane-trees.

In order to create doubt in my mind, they would have to tell me that they preferred to give up an indolent life for one of hardship, to abandon the sensual life they live here, and return to their household avocations.

Have they ever told me that it would be a joy to them to go back to their homes, and till the soil, or mend the roads?—manly occupations that the women of Albania perform admirably.

No, they have energetically declared their willingness to be burnt alive with me in my palace, at the first proposal I made them to give up silk for homespun, the *far-niente* of idleness for hard work, a life of pleasure for household duties.

They have innocently expressed their preference for remaining with the good Frank, and I believe them. When we consider their reasons for staying here, how can we doubt their truth?

This time selfish motives are so apparent, that I shall have no occasion to torment myself with doubts.

But what do I hear? It is a salute from a ship, the sound of a cannon!

What does it mean?

CHAPTER IX

RECOGNITION

There is nothing very remarkable about the incident I am about to relate, but I am very curious and excited.

A Russian frigate has just come in from Constantinople; fearing bad weather, she has put into Khios, instead of going on to Smyrna, or the Oulach Islands.

That frigate fired a cannon-shot for a pilot, and that was the salute I heard this morning.

Who is that lady who, in spite of the high wind, came on shore as soon as the vessel was anchored? The sight of that simple little blue bonnet, the cashmere shawl drawn snugly over the shoulders, that little foot so well shod, that little hand so well gloved, has operated a retrograde movement in regard to my ideas of beauty.

From the antique Greek I have passed to the Parisian type. I would now give all the Noémis, the Anathasias, and the Daphnés in the world, with all their fezzes, their yellaks, and embroidered belts, to be able to offer my arm to that pretty stranger; for she is pretty, I could see that much from the trellis of my kiosk. She is tall and slender, and has beautiful blue eyes, which is something very charming in a fair-skinned brunette.

The gentleman whose arm she leans on is middle-aged, and has a fine, intelligent face.

Who can these strangers be?

KHIOS, October, 18—.

What a strange meeting! Events are so strange that it is well worth while to continue my journal.

Yesterday I sent my old Cypriote to find a Calabrian, who fills the position of port-warden, and attends to the Marquis Justiniani's business, and ask him who were the travellers on the frigate.

That ship is commanded by the Duke of Fersen, ex-ambassador of Russia to the Sublime Porte; he is on his way to Toulon, with the princess, his wife, and several distinguished persons. It was Madame de Fersen that I saw yesterday on the landing.

This morning, about one o'clock, I was lazily stretched on my divan, smoking my Turkish pipe, whose bowl Noémi held, while Anathasia was burning some perfumes in a silver pan, when the curtains of my apartments were suddenly thrust aside, and Daphné entered triumphantly, leading a party of strangers, among whom were M. and Madame de Fersen.

I could have strangled Daphné, for I was furious to be caught in my Oriental costume.

My hair and beard had grown quite long, and my neck was bare. I wore the long, white skirt of the Albanians, a cherry-coloured jacket embroidered with orange silk, red morocco gaiters, embroidered with silver, and an orange-coloured sash.

It was probably very picturesque, but it seemed

terribly ridiculous, and so like a masquerade, that I grew red with shame, as a young lady might do if she were caught playing with a doll. (The comparison is silly, but it expresses how I felt.)

Hoping to be mistaken for a real Albanian, I remained very serious, to complete the deception.

The prince, accompanied by his Greek interpreter, stepped forward and excused himself for his indiscretion, asking me to pardon his wife's curiosity, but that she had found the palace so beautiful, and the gardens so enchanting, that she asked permission to visit them, while the ship waited for a favourable wind.

I replied by a low bow, putting my left hand on my breast, and my right hand on my forehead, as the Albanians do; then I bowed my head to the princess, without getting up from the divan.

I was about to say a few polite words to the interpreter, when I heard a shrill voice, and at the same time I saw,—whom do you suppose?—Du Pluvier!

I was stunned.

It was he, as ridiculous as ever, decked out in gold chains and an embroidered waistcoat, noisy, talkative, and never still for a moment. The little man was redder and fatter than ever. He was evidently a member of the French legation at Constantinople, for he wore a blue coat with buttons bearing the king's initials.

That infernal bore held one of my dwarfs by the ear, and, showing him to Madame de Fersen, said, "Here, madame, is one of the monsters of the Middle Ages."

Then, on a sign from the prince that the master of the house was present, Du Pluvier turned around, and looked at me.

I trembled, for I knew that he recognised me.

It would be impossible to depict Du Pluvier's astonishment; his eyes rolled in his head, he stretched forward his arms, and, stepping towards me, cried out:

"What! are you here, my dear Arthur? You! disguised as a Mamamouchi! This is a strange meeting! Why, I have not seen you since the first representation of 'The Comte d'Ory' at the Opéra. You were there with Madame de Pënâfiel."

The prince, his wife, the interpreter, and some Russian officers who accompanied the ambassador, all of whom understood French perfectly well, were quite as much surprised as Du Pluvier. Madame de Fersen looked at me curiously, but could not refrain from smiling.

I bit my lips, cursing my costume, Daphné, and, above all, Du Pluvier, whom I wished the devil might take. He kept on with his protestations of friendship, while all eyes were fixed on us.

I had either to stick to my rôle of Albanian, and let Du Pluvier pass for a fool, or to admit my foolish disguisement.

I bravely chose the latter course.

I rose, and went respectfully to bow to Madame de Fersen, and beg her pardon for having for an instant deceived her. I frankly admitted that, caught in the act of playing the Oriental, I had preferred to be taken for an Albanian, than for a silly Frenchman.

She received my excuses with charming grace, which was, however, a little sarcastic, when she expressed her astonishment at finding a man of the world under the garb of an Oriental.

It is useless to say that Madame de Fersen speaks French like a Russian, that is to say, perfectly.

CHAPTER X

COMPARISONS

KHIOS, October, 18—.

I have again adopted the European costume, which I had so indolently cast aside, and have been on board of the *Alexina*, to pay a visit to M. and Madame de Fersen.

Madame de Fersen is not so young as I at first thought her to be. She must be about thirty or thirty-three.

Her hair is very black, her eyes very blue, her complexion is fair, and her hands and feet are beautiful. She has an expressive face, and seems witty, though not malicious. What appears to be her predominant trait, is to discuss, understandingly, European politics.

I cannot say how far her pretensions on this subject are justified, for I am quite ignorant of all these questions. I stated this fact to Madame de Fersen, who laughed at me, and evidently did not

believe a word that I said.

M. de Fersen is a very intelligent, agreeable, and cultivated man. By way of relaxation, and as a change from his diplomatic duties, he has given himself up to the study of light French literature, which taste he shares with the dean of European diplomats, Prince Metternich.

I was astonished at M. de Fersen's memory, when he quoted, with the fidelity of a catalogue, the titles of long-forgotten vaudevilles, and recited passages from them; for he also delighted in acting comedy.

Unfortunately, I am as little versed in vaudevilles as in politics, and could therefore not fully appreciate M. de Fersen's learning in this specialty.

The prince only expressed one wish: it was to get to Paris as soon as possible, in order to see the great actors of the minor theatres, who were at once his heroes and his rivals.

M. and Madame de Fersen are exceptionally well bred, and seem to have been born to fill the high position they hold in society.

To much native dignity, they unite that charming affability and cordiality that are often found in distinguished members of the Russian aristocracy; for in such alone can we now find the sprightly elegance of the *Ancien Régime*.

I went on board the frigate to-day, and spent a delightful evening.

There were only five of us: Madame de Fersen and her husband, the captain of the *Alexina*, a distinguished young officer, Du Pluvier, and I.

Du Pluvier had been attaché to the French legation in Constantinople, but had soon become tired of his duties there, and had asked to be recalled. He had profited by the visit of the Russian frigate to return to Toulon.

It is so long since I have seen anything of society, that my visit had all the attraction of novelty.

I made quite a study of Madame de Fersen, who sketched for me several portraits, among them that of the British minister at Constantinople, with a wit and power of description quite remarkable.

I have never met the honourable Sir ——, but his portrait is now for ever imprinted on my memory.

I have always supposed that nothing could be more insupportable than a woman who liked to talk politics. I have almost changed my mind since listening to Madame de Fersen.

There is nothing vague or nebulous about her way of talking; she sometimes explains events of serious importance by the human passions that give rise to them, and by showing what private interests they conflict with; thus going from effect to cause, from the infinitely great to the infinitely small, she reaches very piquant and unexpected conclusions.

Her theories suit me so well that I undoubtedly look on them with great partiality; however, I think that I am safe in claiming for Madame de Fersen a distinguished position among eminently clever women.

The prince having been entrusted with numerous missions to the different European powers, his wife had naturally been intimately acquainted with the most distinguished persons of each nation; nothing

could be more amusing than her conversation, as she passed in review these well-known personages, and told the wittiest things about them.

Her dress was beautiful, and I was quite sure it was French, for such toilets can only come from Paris.

It was with real delight that I noticed the long tresses of her black hair, half hidden under a blonde lace barbe, in which she had fastened a spray of geranium blossoms. She wore a robe of white India muslin, adorably fresh and delicate, and her little feet were encased in black satin slippers.

It was all so fresh and simple and new to me, that the bright coloured yellaks and embroidered fezzes of the Grecian girls seemed horribly crude and vulgar, and their gold and silver made me think of the tinsel dresses of rope-dancers.

I know not whether to rejoice or be alarmed at what has happened.

I have been seized with a sudden disgust at the life I have been leading here for the last year.

When I compare my gross pleasures and solitary reveries to the conversation I have just had with that young, beautiful, and intelligent woman, to such an exchanging of pleasant and clever thoughts, to the necessity of disguising whatever would be a shock to refined feelings; when I compare my indolent life of a satrap, who gives orders and is obeyed, to the charming necessity of pleasing, to that choice language and manner that a woman like Madame de Fersen imposes on you, even though you are but a mere acquaintance.

When I compare the present with the past, I am

astonished that I could have lived so long in such a way.

I have, however, lived for eighteen happy months at Khios. If the future shows itself under a more seductive form, I must not condemn the happy days that I may live to regret.

I am terribly perplexed. What shall I do?

If I remain here regretfully, if my future life in Khios becomes wearisome, it were better to leave the island at once. M. de Fersen has kindly invited me to go with him back to France.

I know not what to do. I must wait; besides, Du Pluvier is to breakfast with me to-morrow. I will make him talk about Madame de Fersen.

CHAPTER XI

THE DEPARTURE

ON BOARD THE FRIGATE ALEXINA.

October, 18—.

It is all over. I have left the island.

Yesterday morning Du Pluvier came to breakfast with me.

He seemed singularly preoccupied.

"My friend," said he, "you live here the life of a veritable pasha,—a sybarite, a true odalisk. On my

word of honour, it is charming; neither I nor the princess can understand it."

"How so?"

"*Parbleu!* She and the prince make wild suppositions as to the reasons which prompted you to lead such a life. The princess particularly seems puzzled; but as I know nothing, I can tell her nothing."

"My dear Du Pluvier, tell me, have you seen much of M. and Madame de Fersen during your sojourn in Constantinople?"

"Very often, nearly every day; the Russian embassy was one of the most agreeable houses of the Christian quarter. Little comedies were given there twice a week, and my duties prevented my skipping a single rehearsal."

"Your duties?"

"Yes, I was under-prompter,—our first secretary was naturally prompter-in-chief."

"Oh, without doubt. But what was said of Madame de Fersen at Constantinople?"

"A proud woman,—a second Joan d'Arc. She ruled the embassy with a rod of steel,—she did everything. They say she even carried on a direct correspondence with the Czar, and during that time the excellent prince was acting one of Potier's rôles. In such a capacity he is perfection personified! I have seen him act 'Les Frères Féroces,' and thought I should die with laughter!"

"And did Madame de Fersen also act?"

"Not a bit of it; she had other things to do, *ma foi!* Believe me or not, just as you wish, but I have never

heard a single evil word said against her."

"No doubt she was entirely taken up with politics?"

"She thought of nothing else; which fact did not prevent her from being gay and agreeable, as you noticed, no doubt. But as to her heart,—it is a protocol lacking a signature."

"Always witty," said I to Du Pluvier, who was laughing at his own joke. "But what makes you think Madame de Fersen so cold-hearted?"

"*Parbleu!* the complaints of those whom she has repulsed; firstly, Villeblanche, our first secretary, the prompter-in-chief. You remember Villeblanche? Well, he wasted his time like all the others, and if any one could have succeeded, most assuredly that man was Villeblanche."

"Who is Villeblanche?"

"Villeblanche is—well, just Villeblanche, *le beau* Villeblanche— *Parbleu!* of course you know Villeblanche, you know him well."

"But I don't know him at all, I tell you."

"Is it possible you are not acquainted with *le beau* Villeblanche? The soul of our diplomatic corps! A fellow of many resources, to whom the foreign office owes the invention of double seals called 'à la Villeblanche.' How does it happen that you have never met him?"

"It is a great pity, but some persons, are very ignorant."

"It was at the Congress of Verona that Villeblanche's diplomatic career was assured, for then it was that he rendered the government such a service as only he could render."

"But I thought that France's greatest man, who was entrusted to represent her at that congress, was the only one to whom the treaty was due?"

"Who? Châteaubriand?"

"Yes, Châteaubriand."

"I do not wish to lessen his glory, but if it was he who did the thinking, it was Villeblanche who accomplished the work, and Châteaubriand, with all his genius, could never have done what Villeblanche did; after all, one should judge according to actions, not according to words."

"Besides which?"

"In truth, I cannot understand how it happens that you do not know. It is universal, it is European! Well, know then that, during the congress, Villeblanche, entrusted with the most important despatches, travelled first from Verona to Paris, from Paris to Madrid, where he stayed one hour; then from Madrid he came back to Paris, and left there immediately for St. Petersburg. Nor is this all. From St. Petersburg he returned to Verona, and left there like a flash of lightning for Madrid by way of Paris. This is a mere nothing. From Madrid he again returned to Verona by way of Paris, and finally he returned to Paris, passing through Vienna and Berlin on his way. How is that, my friend?"

"But your diplomat's book of services must be a regular posting book," said I.

"And to think," said Du Pluvier, with admiration, "to think that Villeblanche has never stopped in any European capital except just the time that was necessary to deliver and receive his despatches,—and yet, whenever he got down from his carriage he was

charming, as well dressed as though he had just been taken out of a box! That is what not one of his colleagues can ever understand," added Du Pluvier, with a mysterious air. "For two months to live in a travelling carriage without getting out of one's harness,—it is wearisome, fatiguing to the last degree, while this devilish Villeblanche always managed to look fresh as a rose. It is stupefying! Besides, it has made him no end of enemies, jealous, perhaps, for they now talk of sending him as minister to some German court."

"I am quite of your opinion; Châteaubriand, with all his genius, could never have done all that, but, fortunately for our diplomacy, there are numerous Villeblanches. By the way, how could Madame de Fersen remain insensible to such merits? She was doubtless afraid that, from mere habit, the handsome diplomat would ask her to go too far!"

I only permitted myself this piece of pleasantry out of a feeling of hospitality, and I was rewarded for the sacrifice by hearing Du Pluvier break out in such a fit of laughing that the dogs barked and the parrots began their screaming.

When all was quiet again, he continued, "Yes, my dear Arthur, Madame de Fersen resisted Villeblanche and all the fine flowers of foreign diplomacy in Constantinople. That is sufficient, is it not, alas! to show that her virtue is not to be corrupted?" he added, with a deep sigh.

"Wherefore such a sigh?"

"It is because Madame de Fersen's virtue is like all the other colossal virtues that I have been shipwrecked on since ever I came into the world. It is frightful to think how virtuous women can be!" said

Du Pluvier, in a very discouraged way. "And yet, to hear some fellows talk, you would suppose one only had to choose."

"Admitting," said I to Du Pluvier, to console him a little,—"admitting that those fellows are not liars, but simply indiscreet, is it not better to do like you, and inspire a woman with an exalted idea of her duty, to make her fond of her husband, no matter how ugly or disagreeable he may be, than to inspire her with the guilty desire of disturbing the peace of her family? For, my dear friend, your rôle is much superior to that of a seducer, it being so much more difficult to do good than to do evil."

"You are quite right; I tell myself so frequently," said Du Pluvier; "it is much more moral, but I swear it becomes tiresome at last. I entered the diplomatic corps in order to be successful in society. Well, it has done nothing of the kind."

"I have felt just the same way, seeing, with horror, that people were growing more and more high-principled; and wishing to respect social laws, I sought a more primitive place, and established myself here, where certain principles and social laws are no more spoken of than in Otähiti."

"That is what I thought," said Du Pluvier, with a meditative air. "Since seeing you so well established, I have had an idea. I said to myself, 'What am I to do in the future? If I return to Paris, I certainly will not find things any more amusing than formerly. I am as free as air. There is that dear Arthur, living all alone on his island like Robinson Crusoe. A companion is always agreeable, even necessary, for one might fall ill. Very well, then, as I am so fond of this dear Arthur, let me show my friendship for him. If he is Robinson, let me become his Friday. Stay with him

six months,—a year,—ten years,—or as long as he remains on his island, and live there, *pardieu!* like a pair of sultans.' There, my friend, these are the results of my last night's reflections. What do you think of them? You see the night brings counsel. I will become your Friday!"

I was terrified, for I had never dreamed of such a thing as this.

I said nothing, though, for fear of making things worse by contradicting him. I pretended at first to be charmed with his plan, then I began to throw every kind of difficulty in his way.

I spoke of a threatened raid by the Turks,—he feared nothing, for he knew I was brave as a lion.

I exaggerated the expenses of my establishment that he wished to share,—he had just come into a large inheritance from an uncle at Saintonge.

He pressed me so hard that I had to avow my passion for solitude, saying that it had now become a perfect monomania, and that sometimes, for whole weeks and months, I could scarcely endure the sight of any one,—he said he would vanish like a sprite (what a sprite!) until my fit of loneliness was over.

At last, as a final argument, I said it would be impossible for me, from certain reasons, to give him a lodging in the Carina Palace,—he said he could easily find some villa in the neighbourhood, having decided to live in Turkish fashion, and never to leave me.

The situation was becoming extremely serious.

Du Pluvier, like all obstinate and narrow-minded persons, might persist in doing as he said, and then my sojourn on the island would be unbearable.

This thought, added to the singular revulsion of feeling that Madame de Fersen had produced in me, made me seriously think of abandoning Khios.

Perhaps, had it not been for this strange caprice of Du Pluvier's, I might have hesitated to take this step. Perhaps I might have struggled against this desire of reëntering society.

But, placed between the alternatives of returning to France with Madame de Fersen, who was charming, or of remaining in Khios with my slaves, that were beginning to be hateful to me, and sharing my solitude with Du Pluvier, I had no hesitation in leaving the island.

I have always come to grave decisions with promptness.

As Du Pluvier continued to insist, I told him that I had not yet given him my real reason for declining his offer, but that, since he forced me to it, I must tell him that I was obliged to return to France.

"Leave your beautiful palace,—those adorable women,—that light your pipe, and pour out your wine,—who dance for you as though you were at the Opéra,—real houris! It is impossible!"

"Unfortunately, my dear Du Pluvier, there are some confessions that are hard to make even to a friend, but to tell the truth, I have sustained losses, and my diminished fortune obliges me to return to France, and live less like a sultan."

"Really, really, my dear count," said Du Pluvier, who seemed sincerely grieved, "you can't tell how sad that makes me. But what are you going to do with all this establishment?"

"I am going to free the women, the birds, the dogs,

and the dwarfs, pay an indemnity to the Marquis Justiniani, and sell all the furniture in Khios."

"You have decided to do that?"

"Quite decided."

"Positively?"

"Yes, yes, yes,—a hundred times yes."

"Then, my dear Arthur, you will not reproach me if I profit by your decision?"

"How can that be? What do you mean?"

"This is my scheme. The life you are living in this earthly paradise has turned my head. Will you sell me all of these treasures,—palace, women, dogs, dwarfs, and parrots?"

I thought that he was joking, and looked at him incredulously.

"Is it a bargain? You will lose less than in selling everything piecemeal," said he, with a resolute air. "But what do you ask for the slaves and the furniture?"

"It is useless for you to ask the price of the slaves, for I will only leave them with you on condition that when you leave the island you will set them free."

"But how do you expect to get back to France?"

"I shall ask M. de Fersen to allow me to take your place on the frigate."

"But the ship is to sail to-day."

"What difference does that make? If you are quite decided, I can leave to-day."

"I am perfectly decided. Shake hands, my dear Arthur; I only need the time it will take me to go on

board and get my baggage."

"Then it is agreed."

And Du Pluvier left me.

This sudden resolution of his did not greatly astonish me. Du Pluvier was one of those essentially imitative natures, who, never having any ideas of their own, are always ready to appropriate those of others, and disport in them, whether suitable or not. Like those persons who wear a costume without stopping to see if it fits them, Du Pluvier had doubtless been struck by the eccentricity of my existence, and thought himself very original in adopting it.

No doubt the passengers on the frigate had spoken of my strange conduct, and had either praised, blamed, or exaggerated the singular disposition of a man of the world that could bring him to desire to lead such a life; but, as they probably had, in spite of blame or praise, thought it was quite out of the ordinary course, Du Pluvier thought he would distinguish himself from the vulgar by taking my place. Perhaps the idea of such a sensual life was seductive.

I got ready to leave the island. For a moment I admit that I was vaguely sad; I was leaving the certain for the uncertain. This material existence that I was beginning to despise had its disenchantments; but nothing is perfect in this world. The most ideal and spiritualised life, is it not also sometimes a disappointment?

But how could I hesitate when I thought of living with Du Pluvier?

Before leaving, I wished to assure myself of the future welfare of my slaves. I sent for them, and presented them each with eight hundred francs, which was a considerable sum for them; but they received it with perfect indifference.

Then I sent for the renegade of Khios, who attended to the affairs of the Marquis Justiniani, and told him that I left Du Pluvier in my stead as tenant of the palace and master of the slaves. I warned him to say no word about it until the frigate had weighed anchor.

Du Pluvier returned in ecstasy. He begged me to leave him my Albanian costumes, as he wished to install himself immediately, and had not time to buy himself a costume.

I consented and even helped him to dress. He was perfectly ridiculous thus rigged up.

He asked me, then, to present him to the slave girls as their future master.

I took care to do nothing of the kind, being conceited enough to believe that there would be another revolt among the good creatures, if they thought I was about to abandon them.

I told them, on the contrary, that I was going again on board the ship as I had several times gone before, and that they must try and amuse my friend during my absence.

Noémi looked at Du Pluvier with a deceitful smile, Daphné looked disgusted, and Anathasia began to pout.

Having my misgivings on the future harmony in

which the girls were to live with Du Pluvier, I shook his hand, and, quite overcome by my feelings, left the palace.

The ship's boat was waiting at the wharf, and I was soon on board.

M. de Fersen was very gracious and obliging to me, and the Russian captain granted me my passage with the greatest hospitality.

Two hours after leaving the palace we were under way.

Du Pluvier's decision was the subject of our pleasantries for quite a long time.

After tacking a few times, we arrived opposite the Carina Palace, which was half-way up the hillside; a portion of the park extended down to the waterside.

With a field-glass I gazed sadly on this beautiful spot, that I was about to leave for ever, when a strange sight attracted my attention.

No doubt the renegade had told of my departure, and they had seen the frigate sailing away, for I saw the slaves, rush suddenly down the bank, and over the lawn, and assemble on the beach, where they stretched out their arms towards the frigate in attitudes of despair.

Then, seeing that the ship was going farther and farther away, Noémi tore off her fez in a rage, threw it on the ground, and stamped on it with both feet; soon her thick black hair was flying in the wind. She looked like a beautiful fury.

Daphné, who perhaps had not yet given up all hope, waved her silken scarf by way of a signal.

Anathasia, the blonde, was kneeling on the beach.

Soon I beheld Du Pluvier, very much at his ease in my Albanian costume, rush down to the beach, followed by the old Cypriote and the two dwarfs, who were indulging in a thousand capers.

Doubtless the new sultan was inviting his odalisks to return to their seraglio.

But unfortunately the odalisks were not very obedient, and the sultan was not very persuasive, for after some exchange of words, with the old Cypriote as an interpreter, all the women fell like so many furies on Du Pluvier, who was lost to sight amid their raised and threatening arms.

I never saw the end of this entertaining sight, for the vessel rounded a promontory which completely hid the palace from our sight.

Half an hour afterwards the captain said to me:

"I would like to know the meaning of that thick smoke that is going up from the upper part of Khios, in the direction of the villa you lived in."

Noémi's threat to burn the palace if I abandoned her flashed through my mind.

Had these furious maidens carried her project to its execution? What had become of Du Pluvier? Had he perished in the flames entwined in the arms of his slaves? I could not answer the question, and we very soon were out of sight of the island, and in a terrible state of anxiety as to the fate of poor Du Pluvier.

THE PRINCESSE DE FERSEN

CHAPTER XII

THE ALEXINA

Such were the impressions left upon me by a year's sojourn in the island of Khios, such the motives of my abrupt departure for France on board the Russian frigate *Alexina*.

Having introduced in its proper place this fragment of my journal of former days, I resume my narrative.

I find myself in a state of mind eminently suitable to take up this narrative and follow up the incidents, be they gay or sad, pathetic or tragic.

The last and violent emotions that I have felt since my journey to the East, up to this moment when I am writing these lines, have so worn out my heart, I find myself so indifferent to the future and the past, that I can relate this new episode of my life with the most profound detachment, as if it in no way concerned me.

The reading of these pages, dated from the island of Khios, and written in the East three years ago, has still further increased my indifference to all that relates to myself.

When I once again return to calmness and reason, I find myself so unquiet, so restless, so frenzied, so little made for the happiness which fate seemed to

bestow on me (perhaps for the very reason that I never would profit by it), that I judge myself with an extreme and perhaps unjust severity.

From the point of view in which I have placed myself, having but little self-esteem, being prejudiced against myself, deficient in pride and self-conceit, I exaggerate still more my defects, and the absence of vanity in my character often prevents my esteeming at their full value some truly generous actions of which I might be justly proud.

Hence, I believe if these pages were ever made known (which never can happen, as I shall take good care to prevent it), they would give a very poor opinion of my character.

And yet, would many have acted as I have?

If formerly I attributed to Hélène the most hateful duplicity, have I not in my despair attempted everything, done everything, to repair my fault? Had she been willing to accept my hand, would I not have given up to her my fortune? And later, when I became aware that Frank was poor, did I not come to his assistance as delicately as I could?

If I have been unjustly cruel towards Marguerite, at least I had for a long time courageously defended her against the calumnies of the world, even before I was known to her.

And that duel,—that fierce duel of which she has ever been ignorant?[5]

If, led astray by an attack of incurable frenzy, I outrageously insulted Falmouth, had I not saved his life at the risk of mine?

The good I have done certainly does not acquit me of the evil imputed to me, but is it not dreadful to think that all that was worthy and noble in my conduct will ever vanish under the flood of bitterness and hate to which my distrust gave birth?

But after all, what matter is the past now to me! These lines are written that I may once more see the events of my life roll by before my eyes; that they may shorten the long and weary hours of solitude in which I live at present at Serval, in the old and gloomy ancestral castle so long abandoned by me.

We therefore left the island of Khios in perfect ignorance as to the fate of Du Pluvier.

Although we entered the equinox, the crossing was fine, though frequently delayed by contrary winds.

The Russian sailors appeared to me quite different from the English. These are submissive to the hardships of the most despotic military discipline; they are, by nature and custom, full of deference for the officers belonging to the highest aristocracy, officers of whom they are above all proud, just as negroes pride themselves in belonging to a white master rather than to a mulatto. Everything in them, however, reveals that unconquerable national pride, that insolent British arrogance, which renders the English sailor one of the best sailors in the world, because he is always driven or sustained by an exaggerated sentiment of his own value, and by his profound faith in the superiority of his own country over all other maritime nations.

Now, however deluded they may be, fanaticism and faith always work prodigies.

The Russian sailors, on the contrary, displayed a passive, almost religious, obedience, a blind resignation, a mechanical submission to the will of their superiors, in whom they almost appeared to acknowledge a nature superior to their own. One felt, indeed, that a word, a sign, from these officers might elevate the resignation and intrepid devotion of the Russian sailors, even to the heroism of personal self-sacrifice.

Strange difference between the character of these two people and that of the French,—of the French, sometimes strictly obedient, but never respectful, gaily obeying superiors, of whom they make fun, or bravely dying for causes which they revile!

I was led to these various reflections by observing the calm customs, almost cloister-like, prevailing on board the Russian frigate, which, after a few days, caused a very strange reaction upon us passengers.

Nothing, in fact, was more singular than the appearance of this vessel; it was silence amidst the solitude of the waters. Except the orders of the officers, not a word was ever heard. Mute and attentive, the crew answered to the orders of the officers only by the noise of the manœuvres, which were executed with mechanical precision.

At sundown, the chaplain read prayers, all the sailors humbly kneeling, after which they descended into the forecastle.

But everywhere and always, an inexorable silence. If they were whipped for some fault, never a cry; if they rested from their labours, never a song.

The captain and his lieutenant, at whose table M. and Madame Fersen, as well as I, sat, were well-bred men, and excellent sailors, but their minds were not

remarkably cultivated.

M. de Fersen read almost incessantly from a collection of French dramatic works.

Madame de Fersen and I, therefore, were left almost isolated in the midst of this little colony; neither men, things, nor events could distract us from our individual preoccupations.

In the midst of this profound calm, this seclusion, this silence, the slightest fancies became firmly impressed on the frame of so simple a life; in a word, if one may so express it, never was canvas more evenly prepared to receive the impressions of the painter, however varied, however eccentric, they might be.

At noon we assembled for breakfast, followed by a walk on deck; then M. de Fersen returned to the reading of his beloved plays, and the officers to their nautical observations.

Madame de Fersen usually occupied the saloon of the frigate; thus every day I chatted with her with scarcely any interruption from two o'clock until the approach of the dinner-hour caused her to withdraw and make a fresh, and always charming, toilet.

After dinner, when the weather permitted, coffee was served on deck. Once more we took a walk, and about nine o'clock we again assembled in the saloon.

Madame de Fersen was an excellent musician, and would often seat herself at the piano, to the great delight of the prince, who then begged her to accompany him in some vaudeville airs, which he sang remarkably well. At other times, one of the officers of the frigate, who had a pleasant voice, sang some quaint and very agreeable Russian songs.

With music and conversation, in which M. de Fersen took an active part, and which he enlivened with sparkling and refined gaiety, the evening passed agreeably until eleven o'clock, at which hour tea was served, after which each one retired as he felt disposed.

It may be seen that, apart from the limit of the walks, we led the life of a château, the most intimate and the most secluded.

On the third day after our departure from Khios, an incident occurred, very slight, apparently, but which had, which was bound to have, a very strange influence on my destiny.

Madame de Fersen had a little daughter called Irene, towards whom she displayed a fondness almost approaching idolatry. It was impossible to dream of anything more perfect, more ideal, than this child.

She was of a severe and stately beauty. Many mothers would have preferred for their daughters a more childish and smiling face. I must acknowledge I myself could not avoid, at times, a feeling of sadness, while gazing on this adorable countenance, expressive of an indefinable melancholy, incomprehensible at so tender an age.

Irene's brow was broad, her complexion bore a healthy pallor, and her rounded checks denoted robust health. Her dark brown hair, very abundant, fine, and silky, curled naturally about her neck; her large eyes, of a liquid and velvety black, had a remarkably deep look, more especially when, with that faculty natural to children, she would gaze at you fixedly, without lowering the dark fringes of her eyelids. Her nose was slender and beautiful, her

mouth small and coral red, and her lower lip slightly pouting and disdainful, if disdain had not seemed incompatible with her youth. Her form, her hands, and her feet were of a rare perfection.

Irene, by a touching superstition of her mother's, after a long illness, had been dedicated to wear only white; the almost religious simplicity of this garb gave marked individuality to her appearance.

As I have already stated, it was the third day of our departure from Khios.

Irene, who until then had appeared to observe me with a kind of restless mistrust, and who by degrees had become more friendly, came resolutely towards me and said, with childish solemnity:

"Look at me, that I may see whether I am going to love you."

Then after having fixed upon me one of those long, piercing glances of which I have spoken, and which compelled me to lower my eyes, Irene continued:

"Yes, I shall love you very much." And after a renewed silence, she turned to Madame de Fersen, saying:

"Yes, my dear mother, I shall love him very much. I shall love him as I loved Ivan!"

In saying these words, her childish face assumed such a fascinating expression of gravity that I could not avoid smiling.

But my astonishment was great when I saw Madame de Fersen look with amazement, first at Irene, and then at me, as if she attached a great importance to what her little girl had just said to me.

"Although I have nothing now to envy the happy

Ivan, this is a declaration, madame, which I much fear will be forgotten ten years hence," said I to the princess.

"Forgotten! Irene forgets nothing. See her tears at the remembrance of Ivan."

In fact two large pearls were rolling down the child's cheeks, while she continued to fix upon me a glance at once sweet, sad, and questioning.

"But who, then, was Ivan?"

Madame de Fersen's features darkened, and she answered me, with a sigh: "Ivan was one of our relatives who died quite young,"—she hesitated a moment,—"died a violent and frightful death two years ago. Irene had become so attached to him that I was almost jealous. I can hardly tell you of the incredible grief of this child when she no longer saw Ivan, for whom she asked incessantly. She was then four years old, and so deep was her sorrow that she fell seriously ill, and came nigh unto death. At this time it was that I dedicated her to the wearing of white, and implored God to spare her to me. But what astonishes me exceedingly, is that, for the past two years, you are the only person to whom Irene has said that she would love him."

Irene, who had listened to her mother with all attention, now took my hand, and, with an almost inspired air, she raised to heaven her eyes still wet with tears, and said:

"Yes, I shall love him like Ivan, for soon he will go up there, like Ivan."

"Irene, my child, what are you saying? Ah, pardon her, monsieur!" cried Madame de Fersen, almost with terror, looking at me with an imploring glance.

"Were I even to purchase it with the same end as poor Ivan," said I, smiling, "allow me, madame, the enjoyment of so touching an affection."

I am neither weak nor superstitious, but I can hardly describe the strange impression produced upon me by this childish speech which I will explain presently. There is no half-way. Such incidents are either of the utmost absurdity, or they act powerfully on certain minds.

By a happy chance, M. de Fersen came in at this moment to beg his wife to accompany him in a vaudeville song, and thus a strange scene came to an end.

I noticed that Madame de Fersen did not mention to her husband the strange declaration that Irene had made me.

That day, after dinner, the princess complained of a bad headache, and retired to her room.

[5]Here some lines were erased in the "Journal of an Unknown." The narrative of this duel not being found in the episode of Madame de Pënâfiel, and Arthur again alluding to it at the time of the pirate's fight against the yacht, it is probable that this omission was the result of an involuntary or premeditated forgetfulness.—*Note by the Author, E. S.*

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRINCESSE DE FERSEN

The next morning Madame de Fersen did not appear at breakfast. She was not well, the prince said, and had spent a restless night. Then, abruptly, to my great astonishment, he spoke to me most freely and confidentially, regarding the character, the mind, the habits of his wife, and the life led by her, perhaps to warn me of the futility of my aspirations, in the event of my having dreamed of paying my court to Madame de Fersen. I can in no other way explain his incomprehensible whim in entering upon such details with me.

The following is the substance of what I learned from M. de Fersen about his wife.

Mlle. Catherine Metriska, daughter of Count Metriska, governor of one of the Asiatic provinces of the Russian Empire, was seventeen years of age when she married M. de Fersen. She possessed a naturally fine mind, and a highly cultivated education developed an intellect precociously mature. At the time of the marriage, the prince was ambassador at Vienna.

At first he feared for the inexperience of his wife, burdened at so early an age with all the responsibilities devolving upon the ambassadress of so great a power at a court so austere, so solemn, and so imposing in its etiquette as the Austrian court. But Madame de Fersen, wonderfully gifted, satisfied every demand of her position, thanks to the exquisite tact, to the delicate shading, to the perfect balance, she was able to bring in so difficult an intercourse.

"Quite young, full of grace and wit," said the prince, "you may well imagine that Madame de Fersen was at once surrounded by the cream of foreigners arriving at the court of Vienna.

"A husband should no more speak of his wife's virtue, than a man should boast of the nobility of his race," added the prince smiling, "yet I can say I believe, nay, I know, that Cæsar's wife has never been suspected, though Cæsar was fifty years of age. I had married less perhaps for love, though Catherine was charming, than because there are certain embassies which are not entrusted to bachelors, and because in my position I wished to have near me a frank and disinterested person, upon whom I could try the effect of certain combinations, something, save the ferocity of the combination," said the prince, laughing, "as some Roman patricians tried the effect of certain poisons on their slaves. Experience has proved to me that extreme purity was often harder to be deceived than extreme craft, just as children almost always guess intuitively the snares set for them. Hence, when I see Catherine countenancing certain projects, certain ideas, skilfully disguised it is true, in order that her nature, sensitive, delicate, and generous, may not be shocked, I have no fear later in putting forth this idea, that I may irritate the susceptibility of my dear colleagues, whose conscience is usually tolerably tough.

"Little by little," continued the prince, "Madame de Fersen became interested in politics, for, to continue my experiences, I entrusted to her, under various aspects, many of the questions that I must solve. Do not believe, however, that her policy was dry and selfish. No; an exalted love of humanity was her sole impulse. When she spoke of European nations, she

spoke as of beloved sisters, not her country's rivals. You may think me in my dotage in speaking thus seriously of what seems to you, doubtless, the dreams of a young and romantic woman; but, you cannot tell of what service has been to me that turn of mind which makes her so wonderfully enthusiastic for universal peace and happiness. Wisdom consists, does it not, in holding to the middle way at an equal distance from all extremes. When, therefore, I have an important decision to make, the generous and conciliatory policy of Madame de Fersen marks one boundary, while, on the other hand, our traditional selfish and cunning policy gives me the other limit. I may then, without difficulty, choose a wise and prudent middle course between these two extremes.

"I reaped another advantage from this mental tendency of Madame de Fersen: that of being able to affirm that Cæsar's wife has never been suspected, for when the powers of love and devotion in a woman's heart find a brilliant scope through her intelligence, she does not seek other employment for them, more especially when her feminine vanity is flattered by the influence thus acquired.

"Add to this a fact of which I should have spoken earlier, but as one of your most celebrated women, Madame de Sévigné, has said: 'Often the gist of a letter is to be found in its postscript.' Well, without referring to my attachment to my wife and her affection for me, without speaking of the puritanic severity of her principles, do you know what, above all, has preserved her from the indiscretions of youth? Her devoted, her passionate love for her daughter. You could not comprehend its excess, its exaltation. Doubtless, our Irene deserves such devotion, but I sometimes tremble when I reflect

that, if an unforeseen disaster like that which has already menaced us should bereave us of that child, her mother would assuredly lose her reason or her life."

M. de Fersen was in the prime of life; he had an almost European reputation as a diplomat. His appearance denoted a distinguished man, called by his superior gifts to the exercise of those high functions which he had always filled; I could not but be astonished at the confidence reposed in one so young and so complete a stranger to him.

As I could not suspect that a man long accustomed to handle public affairs of the most difficult and serious character would act without reflection on matters which interested him personally, I concluded that M. de Fersen's discourse held a hidden purpose, and that it was not without design that he had laid aside the reserve imposed by our age and position.

I repeat, I could see in this eccentric confidence no other aim than to prove to me that Madame de Fersen was unapproachable.

On the other hand, I had been disagreeably impressed when the prince spoke of his wife as of an instrument necessary to his diplomatic career. When he spoke of her, I had detected the most absolute heartlessness, and in his daily intercourse with Madame de Fersen, not only he showed no jealousy, —he was too much a man of the world to become ridiculous,—but he appeared even indifferent.

I asked myself, then, what object he could have in confiding to me that which I have just related.

I was thus plunged in an extreme perplexity.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRADITION

I had not seen Madame de Fersen from the time that Irene had made the strange prediction which had seemed to alarm her mother so greatly.

The uncommon affection shown to me by this child astonished me very much. As soon as she was alone, she would come close to me. If I were reading in the saloon, fearing doubtless to be troublesome, she would sit on a cushion, resting her chin on her little hands, and I could not raise my eyes without meeting her profound and solemn glance.

Sometimes I endeavoured to amuse her with childish games, but she appeared disinclined for them, and said to me solemnly with her childish treble: "I prefer staying here near you, and looking at you as I used to look at Ivan."

I was formerly much more superstitious than I am now; but in thinking over the strange fascination I seemed to have for this child, I recalled with a certain heart pang (I must confess the weakness) a singular Sanscrit tradition which my father had often read to me, because, he said, he had witnessed two events which confirmed its text.

According to this tradition, "those predestined to an early and violent death have the gift of fascinating children and lunatics."

Now, in fact, Ivan had fascinated Irene, and he

died a violent death.

I also fascinated Irene, who, in total ignorance of the tradition, had predicted for me a violent death.

This uncommon analogy was, to say the least, most extraordinary, and sometimes forcibly preoccupied me.

Even now that time has elapsed since these occurrences, Irene's prediction at times comes back to my mind.

This tradition had been translated by my father, and was written with some other notes in a book containing the description of his travels in England and the East Indies. I had brought this manuscript with me from France, with other papers which were saved from the wreck of the yacht.

The day following the one when the princess was confined to her room by indisposition, she came into the saloon about two o'clock; I was there alone with her child.

Madame de Fersen's face was pale and sad.

She saluted me graciously; her smile seemed to me more than usually friendly.

"I very much fear, monsieur, that my daughter is troublesome," said she, seating herself and taking Irene on her lap.

"It is I, rather, madame, who may be accused of being troublesome, for Irene has shown me several times, by the gravity of her demeanour and speech, that she considered me too much of her age, and not enough of mine."

"Poor child!" said Madame de Fersen, embracing

her daughter. "Have you no ill-will towards her, for her strange, her absurd prediction?"

"No, madame, for in turn I shall make a forecast, and then we shall be quits. Mlle. Irene," said I, very seriously, taking her little hand in mine, "I shall not tell you that you will go up there, but I promise that ten or twelve years hence a beautiful angel will come down here from up there expressly for you. He will be beautiful like you, good like you, charming like you, and will lead you to a gorgeous palace, all marble and gold, where you will live a long, long time, the happiest of the happy with this beautiful angel, for he will love you as you love your mother; and then, one day, this palace being no longer beautiful enough for you, you and your angel together will fly away to go and occupy a more beautiful one up there."

"And will you be there in that palace, with my mamma?" asked the child, fixing her large, inquiring eyes by turns on Madame de Fersen and on me.

It was folly, but I could not help feeling delighted at the association made by Irene in speaking of her mother and of me.

I know not whether Madame de Fersen noticed the sentiment, but she blushed, and said to her daughter, doubtless to avoid answering her question:

"Yes, my child, I shall be there,—at least I hope so."

"But will you be there with him?" persisted the child pointing at me with her little finger.

Whether she was annoyed at Irene's strange insistence, or whether she felt embarrassed, Madame de Fersen kissed her tenderly, took her in her arms

and pressed her to her heart, saying, "You are a little goose; go to sleep, my pet."

Then with an absent air she looked through the window of the saloon, saying, "It is a lovely day! How calm is the sea!"

"Very calm," said I, with some irritation at seeing the conversation taking another turn.

Irene closed her eyes and seemed about to go to sleep. Her mother, with infinite grace, caught some of her child's curls and drew them across her eyes, saying softly with motherly fondness, "Sleep, my child, now that I have closed your pretty curtains."

In the early phases of love, there are entrancing trifles which give delight to sensitive souls.

It seemed to me delightful to be able to speak to Madame de Fersen in a half whisper, under pretext of not waking the child. There was in this apparently slight shade of difference something tender, mysterious, veiled, which entranced me.

Irene soon closed her eyes.

"How beautiful she is!" I whispered to her mother. "How much happiness may be read in that lovely face!"

Shall I say that I waited almost with anxiety Madame de Fersen's reply, to know whether she also would whisper back to me?

Shall I say that I was happy, oh, so very happy to hear her reply in the same tone?

"May you be a true prophet," she said; "may she be happy!"

"I could not tell her all I could foresee, madame, she would not have understood; but will you permit

me to tell you what I would dream for her?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, madame, let us not speak of the happiness which is assured to her so long as she lives by your side; that would be too easy a prophecy. Let us speak of the moment so cruel to a mother's heart, when she must abandon her idolised child to the care of an unknown family, of an unknown man. Poor mother! she can scarcely believe it. Her daughter, so timid, so retiring, so sensitive a nature, that to her mother alone she spoke without blushing, and with joyous assurance! Her daughter,—whom she has never left by day or by night! Her daughter,—her pride, her care, her solicitude, and her glory! Her daughter,—that angel of grace and candour, whom she alone can understand, whose joys and sorrows, susceptibility and diffidence she alone can divine! She is now in the power of a stranger, one who has ingratiated himself solely by coming daily for two months under the eyes of her parents to talk to her of conventional trifles, or, perhaps, of the duty that a wife owes her husband. They are now united; and here, madame, I spare you the horribly vulgar and suggestive pageantry with which we lead a young girl to the altar, under the eyes of an unblushing crowd, with great parade, in the glare of daylight, and with the blare of music and of pomp. In Otähiti they act with more modesty, or at least with more reserve. At length, after the ceremony, this man carries off his prey to his home, saying, 'Follow me, wife!' Well, madame, should my predictions be realised, he who before God and before men would have the right to say so harshly to your daughter, 'Wife, follow me!' should rather say to her, in a soft, timid, supplicating voice, 'Come, my betrothed!'"

Madame de Fersen looked at me with astonishment.

"Yes, madame, above all, that man will respect with pious adoration, with religious veneration, the chastely sublime terror of the maiden, torn from her mother's arms, from her virgin couch, to be thrown suddenly in a strange household. That deep and instinctive fear, that sorrowful regret which his wife feels, he will calm by degrees, with charming attention, with simple kindness, which will tame that poor shrinking heart. He will know how to make himself beloved as the best of brothers, in the hope of being some day the happiest of lovers."

"What a pity that dream is only a charming folly!" said Madame de Fersen, with a sigh.

"Is it not a pity? Confess that nothing would be more adorable than the mysterious phases of such a love, exalted as hope, passionate as desire, and yet legitimate and authorised. The day on which the young wife, after a prolonged courtship, inspired by passion, should confirm by a tender avowal those rights so ardently desired, which her husband would accept solely from her,—that day would be treasured in her heart as an entrancing and enduring memory. When she had thus freely bestowed herself she would find later that the gallantry and temptations of the world pale before the memory of that dazzling, ardent happiness ever present to her mind. Such a memory would assuredly protect a woman from all sinful allurements, which could never offer to her the ineffable rapture which she had found in a sacred and legitimate union."

Whilst I was talking, Madame de Fersen regarded me with increasing astonishment. At last she said:

"Do you really hold on marriage views of such excessive delicacy?"

"Assuredly, madame, or at least I borrow them for my prediction from the man who some day shall be so fortunate as to be entrusted with your daughter's happiness. Do you not think that a husband such as I predict for her, handsome, young, well born, intellectual, attractive, who should hold these opinions, do you not think that he would offer the greatest possibilities for durable happiness? I am sure that Mlle. Irene is endowed with all those precious gifts of the soul which can inspire and appreciate such a love."

"Of course, it is but a beautiful dream; but I must repeat that I am greatly astonished that you should have such dreams," she said to me, with a slightly mocking air.

"And why, madame?"

"What! you, monsieur, who came to the Orient to seek the idealisation of material life!"

"It is true," I murmured, gazing at her fixedly; "but I renounced that life from the moment when chance brought to my knowledge, and gave me the opportunity of adoring, an idealisation of its opposites, of intellect, grace, and love."

Madame de Fersen looked at me severely.

I do not know what she was about to say, when her husband entered and asked me if I knew an air called "Anacreon and Polycrates."

Since the day on which the avowal passed my lips, Madame de Fersen seemed carefully to avoid remaining alone with me, although before our travelling companions her manner was unchanged.

Thanks to the singular affection, however, with which I had inspired Irene, the princess found it difficult to carry out her project.

Whether I appeared on deck or in the saloon, the child took me by the hand, and led me to Madame de Fersen, saying:

"Come, I like to see you with my mother."

At first I could hardly refrain from smiling at Madame de Fersen's vexation at being thus forced into a tête-à-tête which she desired to avoid.

But I feared that this vexation of which I was the involuntary cause might make her take a dislike to me, and I tried to repulse Irene's advances. When she insisted, I refused brusquely two or three times.

The poor child said not a word, two great tears trickled down her cheeks, and she went silently and sat down at a distance from me and her mother.

The latter tried to approach her, to console her, but Irene gently repulsed her caresses.

That evening she ate nothing, and her nurse, who passed the night at her bedside, said that she had hardly slept, and had had several fits of silent weeping.

M. de Fersen, who was not aware of the cause of his daughter's trifling ailment, made light of it and attributed it to the child's excessive nervous susceptibility.

But Madame de Fersen gave me a look of irritation.

I understood her.

My avowal, by placing her on her guard, had made her avoid opportunities of being alone with me.

Irene felt considerably aggrieved at this apparent coldness; the princess naturally looked upon me as the primary cause of her daughter's grief, and she loved her with mad devotion.

Madame de Fersen had therefore good cause to dislike me. I resolved to end Irene's unhappiness.

I took advantage of a moment when I was alone with Madame de Fersen to say to her:

"Madame, forgive an insensate avowal. I regret it the more that it has not been alien to the sorrow and suffering of poor little Irene. I pledge you my word that I will never again say a single word which might trouble your maternal joys and thus expose me to forfeit your good graces which I so highly value."

Madame de Fersen gave me her hand, with charming gratitude, and said:

"I believe you, and thank you with all my heart, for you will thus no longer separate me from my daughter!"

CHAPTER XV

THE ADIEUX

I soon regretted having promised Madame de Fersen never to address her a word of gallantry. Since she felt entirely at her ease with me, she appeared to me more and more charming, and each day I became more deeply in love.

Constant to our meetings in the saloon, where we were almost always alone with Irene, our intercourse soon became quite friendly and intimate.

I very skilfully displayed my total ignorance of politics so that they should be entirely banished in our conversations. Having mastered the situation, I succeeded in always bringing back our talks to the thousand subjects relating to tender or passionate sentiments.

Sometimes, as though fearing the tendency of our intercourse, Madame de Fersen insisted on speaking politics. Then I would profess my ignorance, and the princess would wittily accuse me of acting like those lovers who pretend to dislike sport, in order that they may stay at home with the ladies while their husbands go tramping across the fields.

When the tediousness of navigation had given rise to a certain degree of intimacy between me and the officers of the Russian frigate, our conversation often introduced the name of Madame de Fersen, and I was surprised at the profound respect with which they always spoke of her. Calumny, they said, had never attacked her, be it in Russia, Constantinople, or at the different courts where she had resided.

A reputation of unimpeachable purity has, I believe, an irresistible charm, especially when found in a young, beautiful, and intellectual woman, of an exalted position; for she must be endowed with a powerful moral strength, to disarm envy, or to blunt its darts, and inspire, as did Madame de Fersen, a general sentiment of benevolence and respect.

In comparing my love for Madame de Pënâfiel to what I felt for Madame de Fersen, I appreciated the lofty and alluring charm of this seduction.

Marguerite had, doubtless, been shamefully maligned,—of this I had received indisputable proofs; but, however false may be the rumours that attack the woman you love, they will ever produce a feeling of resentment.

Admitting, even, that you succeed in convincing yourself of the falsehood of the rumour, you then accuse the woman who is its victim of not possessing the wit to assert her virtue.

Hélène's life had been pure, and yet she had been attacked. My attentions to her had alone occasioned those odious rumours, and yet, in my unjust frenzy, I accused her of not having known how to hold herself above suspicion.

Apart from the grace, the beauty, and intellect of Madame de Fersen, what contributed most to the feeling of adoration in me was, I repeat it, her reputation for exalted and calm virtue.

Most men, when they persist in combating the resistance of a woman seriously attached to her duties, are only led on by the love of contention, by the anticipation of a proud victory!

These were not the sentiments that made me persist in my love for Madame de Fersen. It was an unlimited reliance on the purity of her heart, in the nobility of her character; it was the certainty of loving her with all the chaste delights of the soul, without fear of being deceived by feigned severity or false prudery.

Moreover, I had given myself up to such coarse materialism during my stay at Khios, that I had an inexpressible desire to abandon myself to the exquisite refinement of a pure and lofty sentiment.

Our crossing, delayed by equinoctial winds, and followed by a long quarantine at the Toulon lazaretto, lasted six weeks.

I did not think I had made any progress in the affections of Madame de Fersen, for her manner towards me had become more and more unconstrained and friendly. She had frankly confessed her pleasure at what she was pleased to call my witty discourse, and expressed a hope that during her stay in Paris we should renew as frequently as possible "our conversations of the saloon."

It was evident Madame de Fersen considered me absolutely unimportant. However unpleasant this discovery was to my vanity, such was my love for Catherine, that I only thought of the happiness of seeing her as frequently as possible, and hoped in the sincerity of my affection for her.

At the end of our quarantine we landed at Toulon, and remained some days to visit that port. M. de Fersen proposed to me that we should not yet separate, and continue our journey together as far as Paris.

I accepted.

I sent for my carriage, which I had sent back to Marseilles when we started from Porquerolles, and we left for Paris towards the beginning of November.

M. de Fersen and his wife travelled in one coach; his daughter, with her nurse, in another. As my travelling carriage was of the same description, and could only accommodate two persons, every day,

when about to start after breakfast, M. de Fersen would beg me to take his place in his wife's carriage, while he took his customary siesta in mine.

Irene, who had shown much sorrow at the mere idea of separating from me, always joined us at these times, and our "conversations of the saloon" continued thus up to Paris.

Notwithstanding the promise I had made Madame de Fersen, I determined on the last day of our journey, to renew my avowal of love.

Until then I had scrupulously kept my word, because I feared by not doing so I would forfeit the privilege of our tête-à-tête during the journey.

My hope had been to become, at least for Catherine, a daily thought, and to captivate and interest her mind so that little by little she should become keenly sensitive to my presence or my absence.

I believed that I had achieved this end. I loved Madame de Fersen ardently. I had an excessive longing to please her, and except the word "love," which never passed my lips, I put in my attentions to her all the eagerness, all the tenderness, of the most passionate lover.

Without studying my conversation too deeply, I endeavoured to speak to Catherine only on subjects that were new to her.

She knew neither Paris, nor France, nor England, nor Spain, and I was thoroughly acquainted with them all. I tried, therefore, to amuse her with my accounts of these places, and my descriptions of the customs and habits of these nations.

I succeeded almost always, as I could perceive by

the serious attention given to my words, and the interested questions they elicited; then, in spite of myself, I showed my happiness and delight in having interested her.

Madame de Fersen had too much tact not to notice the great impression she continued to make upon me, and she seemed grateful to me for my reserve.

Especially, every time that I found the way, without grieving Irene too deeply, to avoid the embarrassments which the child's strange affection for me brought about at every moment, Madame de Fersen would thank me by an enchanting glance.

One of Irene's chief delights was to take one of my hands, and, having placed it between her mother's, she would silently gaze at us.

This slight favour would have been precious to me had it been granted spontaneously by a tender sentiment on the part of Madame de Fersen; but, not wishing to obtain it otherwise, each time that Irene had this caprice I would carry her little fingers up to my lips without giving her a chance to place my hand in her mother's.

The day before reaching Paris, I was resolved to make another attempt at declaring my love, when a strange incident, which should perhaps have encouraged me to take this step, deterred me from it.

I had not yet been able to ascertain whether or no Madame de Fersen was jealous of her daughter's affection for me; sometimes she had spoken of it in a gaily bantering manner, at other times, on the contrary, she had alluded to it with sadness, almost with bitterness.

That day Irene, who occupied a place in her mother's carriage, asked her if I should have a handsome room in Paris.

I hastily answered the child that I would have a house of my own, and would not live with them.

At these words, Irene as usual silently wept.

Madame de Fersen, seeing her tears, exclaimed, with grieved impatience: "*Mon Dieu!* what is the matter with the child? Why does she love you thus? It is hateful!"

"She loves me, perhaps, for the same reason that she loved Ivan," said I.

As Madame de Fersen did not seem to understand my words, I explained to her the meaning which I attached to them, and spoke of the Sanscrit tradition.

Madame de Fersen thought I was joking.

I have already said that this tradition was written by my father in a book full of notes relating to one of his journeys to England.

Fortunately, this manuscript was in my carriage, for quite recently I had sought in it some particulars in order to explain to Madame de Fersen certain customs which in Scotland are handed down from generation to generation.

At one of the relays, I went for the manuscript, and showed it to Madame de Fersen.

The date was so clear, the writing so faded, that Madame de Fersen could not doubt its authenticity.

I shall never forget the tearful look which Madame de Fersen fixed on me as she let the book fall on her lap.

Doubtless she experienced the same strange emotion I felt when I considered Irene's affection for Ivan and his death, with the writing of this extraordinary tradition:

"Those predestined to an early and violent death have the gift of fascinating children and lunatics."

Irene displayed for me the same fondness she had for Ivan. Might not my fate be the same?

To understand, moreover, all the interest felt by Madame de Fersen at this discovery, one should know that I had frequently frankly confessed to her my excessive superstition, and had so greatly impressed her by relating many singular incidents of this character, that the germs of the same weakness had been laid in her mind.

I must confess, I seemed to discover in Madame de Fersen's look, in her emotion, in her agitation, more than friendship, more than the expression of a touching regret.

Wild with hope, a fresh declaration sprang to my lips; but fortunately I held back, for I would have committed an irreparable mistake.

If Madame de Fersen's sentiments were really tender, would it not have been stupid in me to arouse her vigilance, which, under her imperious will and sense of duty, would have smothered the first vague instinct of love awakening in her heart?

On the contrary, if the interest which Madame de Fersen showed me was simply friendly, my presumption would have covered me with ridicule in her eyes.

The turn soon taken by our conversation led easily to a proposition which I wished to make to Madame

de Fersen, as much as a safeguard to her reputation as in the interest of my affection.

We were speaking of Irene.

"Poor child!" said I to her mother, "how can she get accustomed not to see me?"

"But she will retain, I hope for her and for me, this charming intercourse," replied Catherine, "for it has been agreed that once in Paris our 'conversations of the saloon,' as we call them, would continue. M. de Fersen's position and mine, being most independent at the Court of France, I shall not be submitted to any duties but such as I am willing to assume, and I assure you that no pleasures, no diversions, will induce me to miss these pleasant, friendly chats of daily recurrence, if, however," added Madame de Fersen, smiling, "if your old friends will allow you to think of your new friends. But I count very much on my claims as a stranger, and on your perfect French gallantry, to oblige you to be my cicerone, and to do the honours of Paris for me, for I wish to see nothing, to admire nothing, unless under your guidance."

I will confess, I had need of all my courage, all my love, and a great terror of the withering calumnies of the world, to enable me to thrust aside the delightful prospect which Madame de Fersen dreamt for us both.

After a few minutes of silence, "Madame," said I, with deep and sad emotion, "you cannot doubt my respectful attachment for you?"

"What a question! On the contrary, I believe in it firmly; yes, I believe I would be wretched if I could not believe."

"Well, then, madame, permit a true and devoted

friend to tell you what he might say to a sister; and when you will have heard me, do not permit yourself to yield to your first impression, for it would be unfavourable to me; but second thoughts will prove to you that what I am going to say is dictated by the strongest and most sincere affection."

"Speak then, I beg you—speak—you alarm me."

"Until now, madame, you have never known calumny; it did not, it could not, attack you. It is that sublime confidence in your own high-mindedness that has saved you from the fear of evil speaking. Yet, believe me, madame, were I to avail myself of the delightful prospect you hold out to me, the irreproachable purity of your principles would not guarantee you from the most perfidious attacks."

"Never shall I abandon my friends from fear, my conscience suffices me," said Madame de Fersen, with the courageous indifference of a woman sure of herself.

"How can you tell, madame?" I exclaimed. "Have you struggled, to be so sure of victory? Never! Until now the dazzling purity of your life has sufficed to guard you. How could you have given rise to slander? But reflect now. I have come with you all the way from Khios, all the way from Toulon to Paris. I am aware that I am of not the slightest importance; you know me now well enough to believe that I do not exaggerate my importance for the sake of a miserable paltry vanity. But what is that to the world so long as it can malign? Does it not know, moreover, that slander is all the more odious when the object of the guilty love it supposes is least worthy of that love? We shall associate with the same people, I shall be seen every day at your house, escorting you in your walks, in society with

you, and you believe, you insist, that jealousy, envy, and hatred will not seize upon the opportunity of revenging themselves for your wit, your beauty, and your exalted position; and above all for your shining virtue, the most precious jewel in your noble crown! But think of it, madame, the arch-type of our judge-executioners has said: 'Give me four lines of writing of the most honest man in the world, and I will undertake to have him hung.' The world, that judge-executioner, may say with equal assurance, 'Give me four days of the life of the purest woman in the world, and I will undertake to have her disgraced.'"

For some time Madame de Fersen had been gazing at me with an astonishment she could not disguise. At first she seemed almost shocked at my refusal and my remarks.

It was not unexpected. Then her features assumed a more amiable expression, and she said, with a shade of coldness:

"I will not discuss with you as to your views of the world, especially of Parisian society, which I am aware is most brilliant and dangerous; but I believe you exaggerate the risk one would run, and above all the effect of slander upon me."

"And why then, madame, should calumny have no effect on you? What am I to you that you should hereafter hesitate for one instant to sacrifice me to the imperious demands of your reputation? Would you put in the balance the guardianship of your honour, your responsibility for your child's future, with the charm of our daily conversations? Most assuredly not, and you would be right; for if you persisted in your project, if I were base enough to encourage you in it, when slander reached you, you would have the right to turn upon me with scorn and

say: 'You pretended to be my friend! You were false! You took advantage of my indiscretion to draw me into an intimacy where appearances may be most damaging. Go; I shall never see you again!' And once more you would be right, madame. Can you realise how much courage it takes to speak to you as I do,—to refuse what you offer? Think of what you are, of all that you are, and say if the pride and vanity of a less honest man than I would not be gratified and flattered by those very rumours from which I strive to save you. For, after all, what do I risk in aiding you to compromise yourself? What do I risk? To assist the world to misinterpret, to wither with its customary malice our intercourse, however innocent it may be? But, you reply, in that case you would drive me from your presence. What does that matter? Do you know how the world would interpret this deserved banishment? It would be said that a discord had arisen between us. If the world were well disposed towards you, it would say you had discarded me in favour of some other lover. If it was unfavourable to you it would say that I had abandoned you for another mistress."

"Ah, monsieur, monsieur!" exclaimed Madame de Fersen, pressing her hands together almost in terror. "What a picture! May it never come true!"

"It is but too true, madame; if the world were wise and clear-sighted as it is supposed to be, it would be less dangerous, for it would keep to the truth; but it is wicked, coarsely credulous, and a gossip, which renders it most mischievous. The world clear-sighted! It is too willing to slander to be clear-sighted. Has it time and leisure to penetrate the sentiments it supposes? It loves too well to keep on the outside, and conjecture from appearances which frequently

are displayed without mistrust because they are guiltless,—that is enough for the infernal activity of its envy. Ah, believe me, madame, had I not the sad experience I possess of men and things, the instinct of my attachment to you would enlighten me, for you never can know how precious to me is all that concerns you, how distressed I should be to see that radiant halo which now enhances your beauty tarnished. I repeat it, the honour of my mother, of my sister, are not more precious to me than yours. Think how dreadful it would be for me if I were the cause of slander which should attack that treasure in which I glory. I will confess another weakness. Yes, it would be hateful to me to think that the world should speak with its insolent and brutal scorn of that which was my happiness and my pride. Yes, my dream is that this charming intimacy, which will ever be one of the most delightful recollections of my life, shall remain unknown to this world, for its shameless word would destroy the purity of this intercourse,—and this dream, I shall realise it."

"Then," said Madame de Fersen, with an almost solemn air, "we must give up all thought of meeting in Paris?"

"Not so, madame, not so! We shall meet the evenings you receive, just like all the other people you receive. Later, perhaps, you will permit me occasionally to call on you of a morning."

Madame de Fersen remained for some time in silent meditation, her head bent low; then suddenly she drew herself up; her face was slightly tinged with colour, and, with a voice betraying much agitation, she said: "You have a generous heart. Your friendship is austere, but it is great, strong, and noble. I understand the duties which it imposes and I will be

worthy of it. From this moment," and she gave me her hand, "you have won a sincere and unalterable friendship."

I kissed her hand respectfully.

At the same moment we reached one of the last post-stations.

I left Madame de Fersen's coach, and sought her husband, who was asleep in my chaise.

"My dear prince," I said to him, "I wish to ask a service of you."

"Speak, my dear count."

"For a reason which I must keep secret, I wish that no one should know that I come from Khios, and consequently that I travelled from Toulon to Paris with you. I am a personage of so little importance that my name will not have been noticed on our journey. I shall stop at the next relay, make a long round to reach Fontainebleau, where I shall remain several days, and will thus arrive in Paris some time after you. All that I ask of your friendship is that you will receive favourably the request of one of my friends who will ask permission to present me to you. I should regret it keenly were I obliged to suspend an intercourse so delightful to me."

M. de Fersen, with his usual tact, made no objection, and promised all that I asked.

At the next relay, I informed Madame de Fersen that I was unfortunately obliged to take my leave of her, and delegated to the prince, who was present, the task of explaining to her why I was deprived of the pleasure of continuing the journey with her.

She gave me her hand, which I kissed.

Then I tenderly embraced Irene, throwing a sad farewell glance at her mother.

Fresh horses were put to the carriages of the prince, they started, and I remained alone.

My heart was broken.

Little by little the consciousness of having acted nobly towards Madame de Fersen soothed my mind.

I reflected that I should thus learn without in any way endangering her reputation whether Madame de Fersen felt for me a true friendship, perhaps even a more tender sentiment, or whether I owed to isolation, to idleness, and to the absence of all comparison, the interest which she had shown me.

If she loved me, the constraint, the necessity of no longer seeing me, would be irksome to her, would perhaps be painful, and this sorrow, this regret, would assuredly betray itself.

If, on the other hand, I had only been an agreeable acquaintance who had helped to while away the long hours of the journey, I should, without doubt, be sacrificed to the first more entertaining conversation, or the slightest worldly consideration.

I would never willingly expose myself to be superseded, and I thus avoided it.

I would doubtless suffer much, should I find that Madame de Fersen's sentiments for me were so weak that they were easily effaced, but in acting otherwise I would have had the same sorrow and mortification besides.

I remained eight days at Fontainebleau and then left for Paris.

CHAPTER XVI

A MINISTER IN LOVE

I reëntered Paris, from which I had been absent eighteen months, with a certain heartache. I had a faint hope, or rather some dread, of meeting Hélène or Marguerite.

I fancied myself completely cured of my fatal monomania of distrust; my great love for Madame de Fersen had, in my eyes, performed this prodigy. I promised myself, in case I should meet my cousin, or Madame de Pënâfiel, frankly to ask their forgiveness, and to endeavour by the most affectionate and friendly attentions to make amends for the hateful follies of the lover of former days.

I met M. de Cernay, who from the Opéra had transferred his amorous worship to the Comédie-Française, in the suite of Mlle. ——, a most enticing soubrette.

M. de Pommerive was heavier, more slanderous, and more wearisome than ever. Cernay greeted me with effusive cordiality, and asked me about my travels with Falmouth, for as yet nothing had transpired.

As I was very reserved on this subject, as much by natural tendency as by premeditation, Cernay and Pommerive ended by imagining the most unheard-of things on the pretended mystery of my adventures.

In accordance with my arrangement with the prince, I begged a man of my acquaintance, very intimate with the Russian ambassador, to present me to Madame de Fersen.

The prince had rented a handsome furnished mansion in the Faubourg St. Germain.

Before long his salons were the customary meeting-place of the *corps diplomatique* and of the cream of Parisian society, regardless of political opinions.

Madame de Fersen's appearance in the world caused a sensation. Her beauty, her name, and her reputation as a woman versed in politics and interested in the great topics of the day, the respect which she inspired, all contributed to place her very high in public estimation.

In a short time the just appreciation of the rare qualities that distinguished her was followed by the most pronounced infatuation.

The women who shared her austere principles were delighted and proud to strengthen their ranks with such a recruit. Those, on the contrary, who might have dreaded her coldness, taking it as a mute censure of their flightiness, were charmed and surprised at her great amiability. Assured of not finding in her a rival, they became enthusiastic regarding the beautiful stranger.

I can scarcely express my happiness at Madame de Fersen's success.

I went to her house for the first time one evening, five or six days after my arrival in Paris.

Though rather late, there were as yet few people assembled.

She greeted me very gracefully; but I observed in her a certain reserve, uneasiness, and sadness.

I fancied she wished to speak to me in private.

I was striving to ascertain what could be her anxiety, when, in the course of conversation, M. de Sérigny, at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs, spoke of children in connection with an admirable portrait which Lawrence had just exhibited at the Salon.

Madame de Fersen gave me a rapid glance, and then complained that her daughter was ailing and sad at finding herself thrown among strangers, and that no distraction had availed to draw her out of her melancholy,—neither games nor walks in the large gardens surrounding the mansion.

"But, madame," said I, hoping to be understood, "would it not be better to send your daughter to the Tuileries Gardens? She would find there companions more of her own age, and their gaiety would doubtless divert her."

A touching glance from Madame de Fersen showed me she had understood, for she replied, quickly: "*Mon Dieu!* you are right, monsieur. I am very sorry I did not think of that sooner. From to-morrow, I shall always send my little girl to the Tuileries. I am sure she will be very happy there, and already I feel assured she will get well."

I was happy to see from this mysterious interchange of thoughts that Madame de Fersen's heart read mine.

Fresh visitors interrupted the conversation, the circle grew larger, and I rose to go and chat with some ladies of my acquaintance.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Madame de ——, "M. de Pommerive here! That man thrusts himself everywhere, then?"

In fact, there was Pommerive, with a less impudent air than usual, following in the steps of the *chargé d'affaires* of some little German court, who was doubtless leading him up to Madame de Fersen.

"It is a presentation," said Madame de —— to me.

"If there were justice," I replied, "it would be an exposition."

"But how can Madame de Fersen receive affably so slanderous and false a man?" said Madame de ——.

"To prove, doubtless, the weakness of that man's calumnies," replied I.

Pommerive made a profound bow to Madame de Fersen, then followed the *chargé d'affaires*, and both went in search of M. de Fersen.

A few minutes later, I found myself face to face with Pommerive.

"Hello! Are you here?" he cried.

This exclamation was so absurdly impertinent, that I answered:

"If I were less polite, M. de Pommerive, I might express my astonishment at finding you here."

"I am not at all astonished at it," said Pommerive with an impudent assurance, for which he was indebted to his age, and to a reputation for cynic cowardice, which I should have stated he was wont to boast of. "I did not expect to meet you; that is all. But listen." Then, taking my arm, he led me to the recess of a window, saying as we moved along: "Do you know the Prince do Fersen very well?"

Pommerive was repugnant to me, but I was curious to know if people had heard of my having travelled with the princess, and as Pommerive was sure to pick up the slightest report, true or false, he might enlighten me on this subject.

"I do not know M. de Fersen any better than you know him," I said.

"Then you know him very well," he replied, conceitedly.

"How is that?"

"Certainly. I dined with him yesterday, a miserable dinner it is true, at Baron ——'s, *chargé d'affaires* of ——, who brought me here just now in his carriage! And what a carriage! a wretched concern with a glass window in the back, a regular rattletrap. It is indeed a carriage which seems made expressly to help to digest his bad dinners, so hard is it; for that miserly fellow scrapes up dowries for his six hideous daughters from the allowance made him for entertaining; and he is right, for without dowry who the devil would look twice at any of his daughters? But I come back to the prince."

"Very unfortunate for him, M. de Pommerive."

"Oh, not at all! I shall be careful of the dear prince, for he appreciates me, and I have come to make an appointment for our business."

"And what business, M. de Pommerive? May one, without being indiscreet, inquire into this diplomatic secret?"

"Oh, it is quite plain; he asked that miserly baron —" and here Pommerive opened a parenthesis to insert another piece of malice. "Speaking of this miserly baron," he continued, "would you believe it?

when he gives his wretched dinners, a sort of *Maître Jacques* goes once around the table with a miserable bottle of champagne, not iced, which he holds tightly in his arms, just as a nurse holds her precious nursling; and he says very quickly, as he passes on still more quickly, 'Monsieur does not drink champagne,' without any point of interrogation, the wretch, but with an accent of affirmation."

"See now the value of punctuation, M. de Pommerive! But come back to the prince."

"Well, M. de Fersen having asked the baron to point out to him some one of enlightenment and good taste who could coach him on theatrical matters, and give him information about the actors, the baron has had the good sense to present me."

"Ah, I understand," I replied, "you are going to be M. de Fersen's dramatic cicerone."

"That is it exactly; but, between us, I find this fondness for the theatre very ridiculous in a man like the prince. To judge by this sample he must be a poor sort of a fellow, this Fersen. I am not surprised at people saying that his wife directs all the diplomatic affairs. She has the appearance of a strong-minded woman, sharp and hard; and, moreover, they say a thirty-six carats virtue. What do I care about her virtue? I do not grudge it to her, though there is not a dissenting voice. It is astonishing!"

"There is something even more astonishing, M. de Pommerive."

"And what is it, dear count?"

"It is that some straightforward, honourable man has not the courage to go to M. de Fersen and repeat

word for word all the insolent things you have permitted yourself to say about him, so that he might kick you out of his house."

"Dash it! no one would surely go and repeat to him what I have said! I feel pretty safe on that score; but if any one did I would not care, I would stand by my words."

"You are boasting, M. de Pommerive!"

"What, I boasting! That does not prevent that on one occasion they repeated to Verpuis—you know Verpuis, who was such a duellist—that I had said that he had only the courage of foolhardiness. Verpuis comes to me with his bullying air and asks me in the presence of twenty persons, 'Did you make use of these words, yes or no?' 'No, sir,' I replied, also putting on a bullying air, 'I said, on the contrary, that you had only the foolhardiness of courage.'"

"You certainly did not say that, M. de Pommerive!"

"I did, and the proof of it is that he kicked me. I then said that it was cowardly to insult a man who would not fight; and he took that."

This disgusting boast of cowardice, for Pommerive had never quite lowered himself to that extent, revolted me. I turned my back upon the man, but could not shake him off readily.

"You will see," said he, "one of your old flames, the pretty Madame de V——, with whom M. de Sérigny, Minister of Foreign Affairs, is madly in love. They say really that he is crazy enough to be shut up in a lunatic asylum since he has been pursuing that little woman; he knows neither what he says, nor what he does. This diplomatic *céladon* would make you die with laughter, if he was not such a pitiable object.

But here he comes. I must go and beg him not to forget my recommendation of my nephew. Let us hope that his ridiculous love affair has not made him lose his memory as well as his wits."

And this insolent person approached M. de Sérigny with abject salutations.

At this moment Madame de V—— was announced.

I had not seen her since my return to Paris. I found her, if possible, looking younger, so much freshness, piquancy, and sparkle did that lively, mobile countenance display.

Madame de V—— dressed in a manner quite her own, but never showy or eccentric, and always with the most perfect taste.

The minister, who had got rid of Pommerive, watched with an anxious and jealous eye the numerous salutations which she acknowledged on all sides with her sparkling coquetry. He seemed somewhat easier when he saw Madame de V—— seated between Lady Bury and another lady.

M. de Sérigny, at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs, was a man of about fifty years of age, rather insignificant and careless in his appearance. He affected a brusqueness of manner, a heedless indifference, which, assumed or not, had always, people said, been of remarkable service to him in his career. He was a man of fine, broad mind, but in society he rarely made use of his intellectual faculties. His superiority was summed up in his taciturnity, and the sole expression of his countenance was concentrated in a smile. Now this silence and this smile, completing, interpreting, and explaining one another, could in turns be so admirably flattering, sarcastic, wicked, or absent,

that this language had really a great significance.

Jealous to an excess, his passion for Madame de V —— was intense, at least according to the world of whom Pommerive was the faithful echo.

When a man of the age, character, and position of M. de Sérigny becomes seriously enamoured of a woman so frivolous and coquettish as Madame de V ——, his amorous life can only be a prolonged torture.

As I wished to observe M. de Sérigny in his rôle of martyr, I slid behind the easy chair in which sat Madame de V——, and went to salute her.

I well knew the vivacity of her demeanour, and was quite prepared for the explosive friendly recognition. I had formerly rejected the conditions which might have made me succeed in obtaining her favours, but we had parted on the best of terms, and I had kept secret all that passed between us. Now Madame de V——, who unfortunately had more than once exposed herself to being roughly handled, was naturally grateful to me for my prudence.

Scarcely had she heard my voice, therefore, than she turned abruptly, and holding out her hand exclaimed, with her customary volubility:

"What a delightful surprise! and how happy I am to see you once more! But have you fallen from the clouds that no one knew of your return? and I who have really so much to thank you for! Now then give me your arm, and we will settle ourselves in some solitary nook in the next parlour, for you cannot imagine all I have to say to you."

Thereupon, up she jumps from her seat, and, making her way through the crowd surrounding the

easy chair, she takes my arm, and we walk out of the big salon into another room which was nearly empty.

Standing talking at the entrance of this room were Madame de Fersen and M. de Sérigny.

Madame de V—— had such compromising ways that nothing with her was insignificant, and she found means during our short progress from one room to the other to call attention to herself by her affectation in whispering to me and then bursting into peals of laughter.

Just as we passed in front of Madame de Fersen, the latter, astonished at Madame de V——'s noisy ways, gave me a look which seemed uneasy and almost inquiring.

The minister stared at me moodily, coloured up a little, assumed his most affable smile, and said to Madame de V——-, with a foppish air, without being heard by the princess: "You are going to establish there a colony of admirers which will soon become more populous than the metropolis."

"Provided you do not interfere in its administration," retorted Madame de V——, laughing playfully; then she added, in a low voice, "You must confess that there is nothing like love to make an idiot of a man. M. de Sérigny is a man of great intellect, and yet you heard him! Is it flattering to inspire a sentiment which is expressed so stupidly under pretence of being sincere?" While saying these words, she seated herself near a table covered with albums. I took a place near her, and we chatted.

During this conversation, two or three times my eyes met those of Madame de Fersen, who, each time she perceived I was looking at her, quickly turned her gaze.

M. de Sérigny watched Madame de V—— all the time and seemed on thorns.

A woman came up; Madame de Fersen took her arm and went into the salon.

The minister was doubtless coming towards us when he was arrested by Baron ——, who, according to Pommerive, accumulated his daughters' dowries from the appropriation for entertainments.

I do not know if the subject of his talk with M. de Sérigny was very important, but I have my doubts as to the attention given him by the minister, so engaged was he in watching Madame de V——.

"Well," said I to my companion, "it is then true? Those charming hands hold the fate of Europe? The reign of female sovereigns and of enslaved ministers is returning? How delightful! It looks as rococo as possible and seems very pretty. See now, for instance, at this very moment you are entangling wildly the destinies of the grand duchy of ——, for the *chargé d'affaires* of that poor little court seems to me to have exhausted all his arguments, and you look as if he had spoken Greek."

"Let us for once exhaust this miserable subject of conversation," said Madame de V—— with vivacity, "never to return to it. Yes, M. de Sérigny pays furious court to me, and I do not reject his attentions. I am even very coquettish with him, because it amuses me to tyrannise over a man in so high a position; and then, as they attribute to me as much influence over him as they attribute to him worship of me, you can have no idea of the snares laid for me by the *corps diplomatique* to make me talk. For my own amusement, I make quite innocently the most absurd half confidences, but you can well see that all this

can hardly afford amusement to a boarding-school miss. This is my confession; grant me plenary absolution, at least out of pity, for M. de Sérigny is a wearisome sin. And now, in your turn, tell me of your travels, your adventures, your love affairs, and I will see if I can grant you absolution."

"To speak in your own language, I will confess, in the first place, that my greatest sin is being still in love with you."

"Hold!" said Madame de V——, changing voice, manner, and expression, and taking a tone until now unknown to me. "You behaved nobly as regards Madame de Pënâfiel; she was worth a thousand times more than I. I hated her, perhaps I envied her, for she deserved all your love. I demanded of you a base act which might have ruined her, and you refused. Nothing was more simple for you. But this shameful proposition, which I have not ceased to blush having made you, you have kept it secret; you have not made use of this weapon to strike a woman whom every one attacks, perhaps because she deserves it; and true, true as I am a dolt, I shall never, in all my life, forget how good and generous you have been to me in this matter." Madame de V—— looked at me with a softened glance, and for a moment I saw tears in those eyes usually bright and sparkling like brilliants.

I was at first tempted to attribute these tears to a skilful flash, but the mind of this woman was so mobile and inconstant that I believed in the sincerity of this temporary emotion, and I was touched by it. Softness in this woman, however, could only be an accident, and I replied:

"I have done for you what any honourable man would have done; but you, do something for me truly

meritorious; come, love me frankly in your own way, as a coquette, heedlessly, faithlessly, if you will, and I will imitate you. One is never more amiable than when one has to implore forgiveness, therefore we shall be mutually charming. Nothing more delightful; we shall confide our faithlessness to one another, and will betray each other in the frankest way possible."

"M. Arthur," said Madame de V——, still with a serious, softened air and with a voice trembling with emotion, "I am going to say something which to any other but you would appear improper and incomprehensible; but remember this, and believe that I honour you too much—I love you too much—to have you appear as M. de Sérigny's successor."

In spite of myself I was struck by the expression with which Madame de V—— uttered these words.

This attack of sensitiveness, however, was of short duration; for she soon commenced answering with her accustomed gaiety and bantering to the minister's gallantries. He, with considerable difficulty, had shaken off the Baron de V——, and had come up to us.

Caring very little to be a third in M. de Sérigny's company, I rose. Madame de V—— then said: "Do not forget that I am always at home on Thursdays, so as to avoid me on those days which are devoted to bores; but on the other days, if your triumphs leave you leisure, do not neglect an old friend. You are pretty sure to find me in the mornings, and sometimes even of an evening before I make my evening toilet." With these words, which she accompanied with a most gracious smile, she rose, took M. de Sérigny's arm, and said: "I would like a cup of tea, for I am cold."

"I am at your service, madame," said the minister, who happily had assumed his most absent and indifferent smile, while Madame de V—— invited me to call and see her.

Returning to the salon, my eyes sought Madame de Fersen; I met her glance, which seemed austere.

I went home.

When I was no longer under the charm of Madame de V——'s attractive face, I compared that daring levity with Madame de Fersen's dignified and serious grace. I also compared the profound respect and almost obsequious reserve with which men approached her to the cavalier deportment they exhibited towards Madame de V——, and I felt more and more how powerful is the attraction a virtuous woman possesses, and I felt my love for Catherine still increasing.

I was glad that I might look forward to meeting Irene at the Tuileries, and that I had been so well understood by Madame de Fersen. I fancied also—was it an illusion of love?—that Madame de Fersen had seemed almost sad at my long conversation with Madame de V——.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TUILERIES

I waited with extreme impatience the hour for going to the Tuileries to meet Irene.

I attached a thousand thoughts of love and noble devotion in reflecting that child was coming to me covered with the bloom of her mother's kisses, and doubtless bringing me a thousand secret wishes.

About one o'clock, though the air was opaque with a slight autumnal fog, I saw Irene approaching, accompanied by her nurse, an excellent woman who had filled the same position to Madame de Fersen.

Generally at Toulon, or Lyons for instance, where we had made a few days' stay, one of the princess's maids, followed by a footman, had always accompanied Irene in her walks.

I noticed with pleasure that Madame de Fersen, by entrusting her little girl this time to the nurse, of whose attachment she felt sure, had understood the necessity of keeping these meetings secret.

Tears sprang to my eyes when I saw how much Irene had changed. Her charming face was pale and pinched; no longer with its habitual pallor, delicate and roseate, but with a sickly pallor; her large eyes had dark rings under them, and her cheeks, formerly plump and round, were now slightly hollowed.

Irene did not see me at first; she walked close to her nurse, her pretty head bent down, her arms hanging, and with the tips of her pretty feet she crushed the dead leaves which littered the path.

"Good morning, Irene," I said to her.

Scarcely had she heard the sound of my voice, than she gave a piercing cry, threw herself into my arms, closed her eyes and fainted.

I carried her to a bench near by with the help of Madame Paul, her nurse.

"I feared this shock, monsieur," she said to me; "fortunately, I brought a bottle of salts with me. Poor child! she is so nervous."

"Look—look," said I, "the colour returns to her cheeks; her hands are not so cold; she is regaining consciousness."

In fact, this attack passed, Irene raised herself, and when she could sit up she hung to my neck, shedding silent tears which fell hot upon my cheeks.

"Irene, Irene, my dearest, do not weep thus. I shall see you every day."

I pressed her hands while my eyes sought hers.

She held herself up, and with a familiar motion of her head, full of grace and vivacity, she threw back the big curls which half concealed her tear-stained eyes. Then fastening upon me one of her steady, piercing glances, she said to me:

"I believe what you say. Will you not come to see me here, since you cannot come to our house?"

"Yes, Mlle. Irene," answered the nurse. "Monsieur will come to see you every day, if you promise to be very good,—not to cry, and to do what the doctor orders you."

"Certainly, my dear child; for unless you promise that, you will not see me again," I added, with great seriousness.

"You would never again see monsieur," rejoined Madame Paul, with an air of severity.

"But, Paul," exclaimed Irene, stamping her little foot with charming fractiousness, "you know very well I shall no longer cry. I shall not be ill any more, for I shall see him every day."

The good nurse gave me a touching glance. I quickly embraced Irene, and said to her, "Explain to me, little one, why you are so glad to see me?"

"I don't know," she replied, shrugging her shoulders and shaking her brown curls, with an air of sweet, unconscious simplicity. "When you look at me, I cannot help going to you, your eyes draw me; and when you do not look at me, then I feel so badly here," and she placed her hand on her heart. "And then at night, I see you in my dreams, with me and the angels up there." She raised her little finger and her large eyes solemnly towards heaven. Then with a sigh she added, "And, besides, you are good, like Ivan."

I could not help starting.

Madame Paul, evidently informed of this mysterious adventure, exclaimed: "Mademoiselle, remember what your mother told you."

But engrossed in her thoughts, and seeming not to have heard her nurse's remark, Irene continued:

"Only, when I dreamt of Ivan and the angels, I never saw my mother up there; but since I dream of you, my mother is always with us. I told mamma so," Irene added, seriously.

Madame Paul looked at me again, and bursting into tears said: "Ah, monsieur, all my dread is that this child will not live; her beauty, her gravity, like her ideas and her character, are not suited to her age, are not of this world. Would you believe it, except to the princess, to you, and to me, she never speaks to any one of what she has just said? The princess has impressed upon her not to mention to any one that she saw you here, and I am very sure she never will. Ah, monsieur, I pray Heaven daily

that this child may be spared to us."

"And she will be spared, be assured! Children who are silent and thoughtful are always dreamy and excitable; it is not surprising. Do not be uneasy. Well, good-bye, Irene; and you, Madame Paul, assure the princess of my respectful regards, and say how grateful I am for the promise she made me to send me daily my little friend."

"Adieu, then, till to-morrow, Irene," and I kissed her tenderly.

"Till to-morrow," repeated the child, with a happy but grave and serious smile.

Then her nurse wrapped her warm pelisse around her, and Irene went off, turning several times, however, to say adieu with her little hand.

Superstitious as I am, and inclined to tender and lofty sentiments by my love for Catherine, this conversation had aroused in me the most varied emotions,—emotions at once sombre and beaming, cruel and radiant.

I was happy. The strange predictions which Irene repeated to her mother must, if Catherine loved me, recall me to her heart daily, and it was the voice of her child, her beloved child, which continually uttered my name!

And this strange, fatal connection between Ivan's death and the fate that might be awaiting me,—must it not act upon Madame de Fersen's imagination and excite her interest in me? If she saw but little of me, did she not know that this reserve on my part was a cruel sacrifice I imposed upon myself for her sake?

At other times, I acknowledge the weakness, the persistency of Irene's predictions, in spite of myself, chilled me.

I experienced a sort of vertigo, of fearful attraction, similar to that which draws you to look down a precipice when you are walking at its edge.

Unless the weather was too cold or rainy, the nurse brought Irene to me every day.

By degrees she returned to blooming health.

About a fortnight after our first meeting, she brought me a large bouquet of roses, telling me her mother sent them, but, unfortunately, they were not as beautiful as the roses of Khios.

This souvenir of Catherine's overjoyed me, for I had spoken to her with enthusiasm of those lovely roses.

Every day after that Irene brought me roses; and every day also she told me, with an air of mystery, without ever making a mistake, what her mother would do that evening, whether she was going to court, or in society, or to the theatre.

Thanks to this amiable forethought of Madame de Fersen, I met her very frequently. I went regularly to her receptions, and, therefore, saw her almost every evening; but as in society I confined myself to greeting her most respectfully, exchanging merely a few ceremonious words, our meetings were unobserved.

Once or twice I called on her of a morning; but by a singular chance, or rather in consequence of the assiduities with which she was surrounded, I never

found her alone.

Had I asked her for a private interview she would have granted it, but, true to the plan I had mapped out, I would not ask for it at present.

Besides, a smile, a glance that we mysteriously exchanged in the crowd, did it not repay me a thousand times for my reserve and my discretion?

Would I not give the most public and most marked attentions for the slightest favour which should be unknown to the world!

Notwithstanding the daily intercourse which I maintained with Madame de Fersen through Irene, notwithstanding our exchange of flowers (for each day I also brought Irene a beautiful bouquet of roses, which her mother wore at night), not a soul suspected this delightful intimacy.

As a measure of prudence I would meet Irene in turn at the Tuileries, at the Luxembourg, at Mousseaux, or on the boulevards. I never made use of my horses to go to these meetings, for fear of attracting attention.

I wrapped myself up in a cloak, and took delight in putting as much mystery in these meetings as if Madame de Fersen herself had been in question.

It was perfect folly, but I waited for the hour of meeting with this child full of candour and innocence with a loving, restless, ardent impatience; I counted the minutes, the seconds; I feared and hoped by turns; in fact, I experienced all the irritating and delicious emotions of the most passionate love.

I commented eagerly on each of Irene's words, to seek, to discover, her mother's secret thought! And when I fancied I could interpret this thought in a manner more tender than usual, I returned home with paradise in my heart.

Inexhaustible treasures of a pure and chaste love! Philosophers, atheists, or the strong-minded in love will, doubtless, mock me. I myself, before my sojourn at Khios, would not have understood all its charm.

I was now more than ever in love.

By the rare versatility of her endowments, Madame de Fersen achieved an exalted position in society. Calumny itself admired her and praised her beyond measure, doubtless to give a colour of impartiality, whereby its accusations became more dangerous.

My interviews with Irene had continued for about three weeks.

One evening at one of Madame de Fersen's receptions, the prince said to me, in confidence:

"The frivolous and subtle air of Paris is fatal to serious thought; the trifles of the world gain the mastery over reason. Would you believe it, Cæsar's wife has become quite indifferent to the interests of the empire! In a word, can you realise that Madame dc Fersen has become totally heedless of politics? Can you imagine such a thing?"

I compared this symptom with the signs of impatience and uneasiness shown by Catherine during my long conversation with Madame de V——, and I resolved to push further my observations.

The next evening at a ball at the English embassy,

at which Madame de Fersen was present, I again met Madame de V——.

I paid assiduous attentions to her the whole evening, and observed Madame de Fersen's countenance; it was impassible.

Next day I feared, or rather I hoped, that Irene would not appear at her accustomed hour, or that she might come perhaps without her bouquet. I would have considered this change as a mark of resentment or jealousy on the part of Madame de Fersen; but Irene and the bouquet of roses appeared as usual.

Piqued by this indifference, and wishing to ascertain if it were real; desirous, also, of completely misleading public opinion, I continued to pay the most marked attentions to Madame de V——.

Delighted to have found a means of annoying the minister, and of keeping him constantly agitated and on the watch, Madame de V—— encouraged me with all her might.

She called this exhibition of cruel coquetry "heaping fuel upon the fire."

Now, at the risk of being taken for a log (as Pluvier would have said), I so skilfully fed the devouring jealousy of the minister that, after eight or ten days of this kind of courting, Madame de V—— and I found ourselves horribly compromised; and it was generally recognised and taken for granted that the reign, or rather the bondage, of the minister was at an end.

I became aware of the gravity of these absurd rumours by the friendly, courteous, and gracious tone of the minister, who was too much a man of the

world to appear cold or sulky towards his supposed rival.

This discovery enlightened me as to the folly of my conduct, which not only might wound Madame de Fersen, if she loved me, but might lower me irreparably in her estimation. Instinctively I felt that I had pushed things too far.

These fears were increased by a singular circumstance.

One evening at a concert at Lord P——'s, I had been for some time chatting with Madame de V——. We were in a small parlour where only a few persons were gathered. Little by little, these adjourned to the tea-room, leaving Madame de V—— and myself perfectly alone.

I was preoccupied from a very natural cause; Madame de V—— had just informed me of the receipt of a letter announcing the arrival of Madame de Pënâfiel in Rome.

While talking, I happened to look at a mirror, reflecting the door of the salon. What was my amazement when I saw Madame de Fersen, whose eyes were fastened on me with a most sorrowful look!

I quickly rose, but she disappeared.

I awaited the morrow with anxiety.

Irene came, as usual, with her bouquet of roses, and told me her mother was going that night to the Variétés.

I made her twice repeat to me this information, for the choice of the theatre seemed extraordinary, but, reflecting on the prince's taste for vaudevilles, I

explained it to myself.

I sent to secure a stall, and in the evening went to that theatre.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BEAR AND THE PACHA

Among other plays at the Variétés that evening, they were giving "The Bear and the Pacha." This was one of M. de Fersen's triumphs at Constantinople, where he had taken, with great success, the part of Schaabaham, and he was most eager to see Brunet playing the same part.

Madame de Fersen arrived about nine o'clock, with her husband and the Duchess of ——. They took their places in a proscenium box, of which the lattices were half raised.

Catherine saw me, and gave me a gracious bow.

I found her pale and changed.

I have no recollection of the piece they played, and on the fall of the curtain I went to Madame de Fersen's box.

She was not well. I was looking at her attentively, when the prince said: "Be our umpire; you rarely see Madame de Fersen, and can better than any one notice a change; do you not find she has fallen away very much?"

I said I did not think so; that Madame de Fersen

seemed to me in perfect health. The prince proclaimed me an impudent flatterer, etc.

The curtain rose, and I left the box.

I returned to my seat.

They began "The Bear and the Pacha."

This burlesque did not bring a smile to Madame de Fersen's countenance, but her husband applauded frantically, and I must confess I shared the general merriment.

One of those loudest in laughter was a man seated just in front of me, and of whom I could only see the thick, gray, curly locks.

I had never heard such ringing, joyous laughter,—at times it became almost convulsive. At these times the man clung with both hands to the barrier dividing the stalls from the orchestra, and, strengthened by this prop, gave full scope to his hilarity.

Nothing is more contagious than laughter; the witticisms of the play had already excited my risible faculties, and, in spite of myself, the wild uproariousness of this man so affected me that I soon was nothing more than his echo, and to each of his immoderate bursts I responded with a no less boisterous explosion of laughter.

In short, I had not noticed that Madame de Fersen had left the theatre.

The curtain fell, and I rose.

The man who had yielded to such boisterous mirth also rose, turned towards me as he put on his hat, and exclaimed, with a return of joyful glee: "What a buffoon that Odry is!"

Amazed, I leaned on the back of my stall.

I had recognised the pirate of Porquerolles, the pilot of Malta.

I remained riveted to my seat, which was the end one of the orchestra. His seat was in front of mine, no one had to pass by us, and the spectators were slowly filing out.

It was indeed he!

It was his look, his bony, bronzed face, his thick, black eyebrows, his sharp teeth pointed and divided, as I could see, for he smiled with his strange smile, as he gazed at me audaciously.

The footlights were lowered, and the theatre became dark.

"It is you!" I cried, at length coming out of my stupor, and as if my chest had thrown off an enormous weight.

"Yes, certainly 'tis I. You remember me, then? Porquerolles and Malta! that is the password."

"Wretch!" I exclaimed.

"How, wretch?" he replied, with astounding effrontery. "We had a good free fight, I hope! If in boarding I stuck a knife in your shoulder, you answered me with a sharp axe on the head, my good friend! On the other hand, if your English dogs thrashed the crew of my mystic, I had the good luck to rip up your lord's yacht on the reefs of La Wardi. Hence we are even. And now we both meet splitting our sides at 'The Bear and the Pacha;' and, instead of finding the encounter droll, you get mad. Do you know that is a pretty low trick, my good friend?"

I must acknowledge that his audacity paralysed

me. "But if I were to have you arrested?" I cried, rising and seizing him by the collar.

The pirate answered imperturbably, without seeking to free himself:

"That would be a fine trick to play. You may reckon besides how easy it would be to prove to an idiot of a Parisian police commissioner how I boarded your yacht off Cape Spartel, and how I wrecked her on the rocks of La Wardi, sou'west by south of the southern coast of the island of Malta. He'd think you were talking Greek, and would say you were crazy, my friend. Now, crazy you are not. You are a lad with a good stout fist, and not afraid of anything. If my life did not belong for the moment to my bride, to my charming bride," he added mockingly, and emphasising the word, "I should propose to take up our conversation where we left off on boarding the yacht. But, my word! my little wife is waiting for me, and I prefer her conversation to yours."

"Here, now, gentlemen, we are going to shut up," cried the watchman of the theatre.

"That's so! and here we are chattering like two magpies. Adieu, young man, farewell," said the pirate.

And in two strides he disappeared.

I was so dazed that I did not leave the theatre until a second call from the watchman recalled me to my senses.

When, on my return home, I thought over my stupid amazement at meeting the pirate of Porquerolles, I charged myself with vacillation, and

reproached myself for not having the rascal arrested; but, as he very wisely remarked, it would have been most embarrassing to me to prove forthwith my accusations, and on second thoughts, considering the difficulties presenting themselves, I concluded that my course of action was more judicious than I had thought at first.

Nevertheless, I wished to inform M. de Sérigny of the presence of this wretch in Paris, and of his double crime, which especially interested England; M. de Sérigny, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, could alone countenance and favour such steps as might necessarily be taken by Lord Stuart, then ambassador to France, to gather proofs of the crime, and obtain the extradition of the culprit.

The next morning, therefore, I wrote a few words to the minister, requesting the favour of a few minutes' interview.

CHAPTER XIX

THE INTERVIEW

I was preparing, to go to the Luxembourg, where I expected to meet Irene, when I received a note from Madame de Fersen, asking me to call on her about two o'clock.

Since her arrival in Paris I had never met her alone.

To what should I attribute the wish she expressed?

To her desire to see me? To her secret vexation at the rumours spread regarding my intimacy with Madame de V——? Catherine might think these rumours well founded, since she had surprised me alone with Madame de V—— at the concert at Lord P——'s house.

I could not say, but I waited for our interview with restless happiness and irresistible agitation.

I was going to see Catherine once more, to see her alone! At this thought my heart beat with hope and ecstasy at last; a word from her would reward me for my self-denial, for the generous sacrifice I had made, for the assiduous cares to which her beloved child almost owed her return to health.

From this interview I would draw fresh strength to devote myself still further; and then, I had so much to say to her! I felt so proud of my love, so happy to feel my heart still young enough to appreciate the pure joys which enchanted me; to feel that confidence in the strength, in the sincerity, of my attachment which enabled me to hope that some day my love would be reciprocated.

At the appointed hour, I went to Madame de Fersen's.

She received me in a small parlour which she usually occupied, but which I had not yet seen.

"What a long time since I have seen you!" I cried with effusion as I held out my hand.

Madame de Fersen coldly gave me hers, and answered:

"I believe I had the pleasure of seeing you last night at the Variétés, monsieur."

"You call that seeing one another!" I replied, with sad astonishment. "Ah, I was right when I feared that the 'conversations of the saloon' would soon be forgotten by you!"

"I shall never forget our pleasant voyage," answered Madame de Fersen, in the same cold tone. "I am greatly obliged to you for the trouble you have taken in coming to see me this morning. I wish to thank you a thousand times, monsieur, for your kindness in yielding to my daughter's capricious fancies. She is now quite well, and I fear— I do not wish any longer to take advantage of your goodness towards her, monsieur."

Madame de Fersen's tone was icy, almost scornful. What she said seemed so true, so natural, so little influenced by resentment, that I was thunderstruck. I suffered horribly, and could find no word of reply.

My silence was so marked, that Madame de Fersen found herself obliged to add, very coldly:

"I doubtless appear to you very ungrateful, monsieur?"

"Madame," I said, with deep emotion, "I do not know how I have deserved such a reception."

"And what claim have you to a different reception from me?" proudly inquired Madame de Fersen.

My painful astonishment was at its height; for a moment I deluded myself, and endeavoured to attribute to jealousy this reception so different from what I had anticipated, but I repeat, Madame de Fersen's countenance betrayed no sign of repressed or concealed emotion.

I resolutely took my stand. I could not answer Madame de Fersen's question without reminding her

of my noble and generous conduct towards her; and unwilling to lower myself by uttering reproaches, I was silent on that subject, and only said to her, endeavouring to conceal my emotion:

"The object of the interview you requested is doubtless attained. May I ask, madame, if you have any further orders to give me?"

"None, monsieur, but I again wish to express my grateful acknowledgments," said Madame de Fersen, rising.

This harshness shocked me. I was about to answer with some bitterness, when I became aware of something which I had not yet remarked, and which renewed a faint hope.

During our short interview, Madame de Fersen had not once raised her eyes from the embroidery upon which she was working.

Wishing to assure myself of the correctness of my observation, I stayed on some moments without uttering a word.

Catherine remained with her eyes lowered, instead of inquiring by a look the meaning of my silent presence.

"Adieu, madame," I said.

"Adieu, monsieur."

And I left without her granting me one single look of compassion or sorrow.

Her hand alone seemed to tremble slightly on her embroidery as she said adieu.

I took my departure heartbroken.

I had too great and too conscious a distrust of myself and my deserts to have the slightest hope of any success with Catherine.

I could not yield to my customary suspicious impulse, for I had implicit faith in Madame de Fersen's sincerity, and I doubted of ever having aroused any sentiment in her heart. "She feels no tender affection for me, and her friendship even has vanished in the glare of brilliant worldly diversions."

I had been away from her almost always, and the effects and results of absence are unbounded and varied.

At times it strengthens a woman's secret sympathy, by concentrating her thoughts on the man who has attracted her, and whose charm is exaggerated by the distant mirage. A woman finds a proud, sad, and mysterious delight in the bitterness of her solitary regrets; she scorns the indifferent ones who occupy a place near her, which she so ardently wishes to see filled by one precious to her, and she detests those eager in their attentions because they are base enough to be there while the preferred one is far away.

Often, however, absence is forgetfulness, for some hearts are like mirrors, and only reflect objects that are present.

I therefore believed myself entirely forgotten by Madame de Fersen. I had anticipated the possibility of this cruel predicament, and, if it gave me deep sorrow, it did not occasion me great surprise.

In the climax of my despair, I made a thousand projects. I determined to shake off this grief, to give myself up to all life's dissipations, to seek amorous distraction in some fresh entanglement; but it takes

time and a strong will for a heart deeply smitten to transfer its worship.

When a man knows he is loved, and is in possession of the woman he loves, he never experiences the slightest remorse at committing an infidelity; but when he is passionately desirous, and still anxiously looking for an avowal, faithlessness is an impossibility. He has the resolution to maintain fidelity only so long as he has not the right to offer it.

CHAPTER XX

A MISSION

The day after my interview with Madame de Fersen I was sadly preoccupied, when my servant announced M. de Sérigny.

I was much astonished at his visit, for which, however, he accounted very graciously, saying that, passing by my door on his way to the Chambers, he had come in on the chance of saving me the trouble of going to the Foreign Office for the interview which I had requested.

This alacrity on his part did not at first seem natural to me; but, on reflection, I thought the rumours current about me and Madame de V—— had induced the minister to do something in excellent taste by showing himself so considerate.

In a few words I related to him the history of the pirate, and our singular encounter at the Variétés.

M. de Sérigny said that he was going immediately to confer with the British ambassador, and that he would consider the means to be used in order to seize so great a scoundrel.

Our conversation having fallen on travels, M. de Sérigny asked me with interest about those I had undertaken. He then became very flattering, insinuating, and amiable; told me he had known my father very well under the Empire; spoke of him as a man of fine attainments, great determination, and infinite tact, who had a remarkable knowledge of the world and of men. He said that the Emperor would assuredly have employed him outside the military service, by entrusting him with some important mission, if my father's open and positive character could have submitted to Napoleon's caprices.

I was endeavouring to fathom the meaning of these flattering remarks, when M. de Sérigny said to me, with an air of charming good nature:

"Will you permit an old friend of your family to

ask you a question? If it seems to you indiscreet, pray attribute it solely to the interest I take in your father's name."

"I am listening to you, monsieur, and can only be grateful for the good-will you show me."

"Well, how is it that, with your education, your name, your fortune and position, with the experience you have acquired in your numerous travels, in fact with all your excellent connections, you have never thought of taking up some serious occupation,—of entering, for instance, into public affairs?"

"In the first place," I replied to the minister, "I am far from possessing all the advantages you attribute to me; moreover, I have not the slightest ambition, and my idle life pleases me hugely."

"But your country?"

"What about my country?"

"Do you not owe it a few years, at least, of your existence?"

"And what would it do with such a gift?"

"Come, come, it is impossible that you deceive yourself to such an extent, be your modesty ever so great. You know full well that your success in the world would not be what it is, if you were not of special value. No man in society is less conspicuous, or more spoken of, than you. Unless you have a great historic French name, unless you are a great poet, a celebrated artist, or a great statesman, what is the hardest thing to acquire in society—you may rely on my extensive experience—is that indescribable something which causes people to turn and look at you when your name is announced in a salon. Well, that is a privilege you enjoy; you are young, and yet

you have influence, you have authority in the world, since people busy themselves very much about what you do and what you do not do."

These exaggerated flatteries were so transparent that I clearly saw that M. de Sérigny wished, if I may be pardoned the expression, to work upon my feelings, to induce me as a point of honour to renounce my flirtation with Madame de V——. In spite of my sadness, this little comedy amused me, and I endeavoured to make it last as long as possible, by seeming to be caught by M. de Sérigny's praises.

"But," said I, with a modest smile, "admitting, monsieur, that which is merely, I believe, a delusion of your kind nature; admitting, I say, that I have had some success in the world, and that, relatively to my years, I am even considered of some account, I do not well see what use my country could derive from these advantages."

"No one can inform you better than I," replied the minister, with awkward alacrity, which proved to me that he had expected this question. "People talk a great deal, make a great fuss, over what is called diplomacy. Now do you know what the great art of diplomacy is?" he asked, with a good-natured smile.

I shook my head with an air of humility.

"Well, it is simply the art of pleasing. As diplomacy consists in asking and refusing, he who can please most will always gain his point; while if he is obliged to refuse, he will make his refusal sufficiently gracious, to avoid its wounding. Here lies the whole secret."

I had some difficulty in suppressing a great inclination to laugh, for it struck me that the minister, jealous of my attentions to Madame de V

——, was going to propose to attach me to a foreign embassy, so as to get rid of me.

This was doubtless the solution of this scene; but I found the situation so amusing that I determined not to terminate it abruptly.

"I thought," said I, "that the able negotiators of the most fertile epoch of great treaties and great diplomatic victories, I thought," I continued, "that such men as D'Avaux, Courtin, Estrade, Ruvigny, and Lyonne were possessed of other attributes than the simple talent of pleasing."

"If they did not possess the art of pleasing," said, with some embarrassment, M. de Sérigny, who seemed ignorant of the historic traditions of his special department like the true constitutional minister that he was,—"if they did not possess the art of pleasing, they made use of some other seduction."

"You are right," I rejoined, "they had gold without limit."

"You see, then," cried the minister, "it is always the same; only in modern society the art of pleasing has superseded the seduction by gold."

"In the first place, it is more economical," I said.

"And safer," he rejoined; "for all thrones are not representative. There are, God be praised! kings in Europe who are absolute kings, and walk without leading-strings. Well, these kings are men, and, in a word, are subject like men to sympathies and antipathies. Frequently, the ambassador that is sent to them, even if he possesses the greatest genius, the loftiest character, can obtain nothing for his court,—and why? Simply because he is not pleasing; while, on the contrary, a man of moderate ability will often

obtain by the simple power of his manners, because he can please, he will obtain, I say, what the man of genius was not able to obtain."

"This is true, and your system facilitates matters, since men who please are much more plentiful than men of genius."

"Certainly! Therefore, I am convinced, firmly convinced, that you, for instance, supposing you wished to enter the diplomatic career, could be of the greatest service to France; for you not only possess the art of pleasing, your success in society attests it, but you have also solid and eminent qualities."

I was right in my surmises; the proposition which I had anticipated, without doubt, was about to follow the ringing of my praises. Wishing to lend myself with a good grace to the minister's whim, I replied with a semblance of modest and confused astonishment:

"How can you think so,—I, monsieur, I, enter so difficult a career? My ambition has never been crazy enough to aspire to such a future."

"Listen to me," said M. de Sérigny, with a serious and paternal air.

And he made the following disclosure, which seemed to me an abominable falsehood.

"Your father rendered me a great service." Here the diplomat paused and sighed heavily, then he raised his eyes to Heaven, repeating: "Yes, yes, a great service! I could not tell you, my dear M. de ——, how happy I would consider myself in being able to demonstrate to you, his son, all my gratitude, since unfortunately I was not able to give proof of it to

himself."

"I was quite ignorant of this circumstance, which my father never mentioned to me."

"I can well believe it," exclaimed M. de Sérigny, "for I myself can give you no particulars on this subject. It concerns a third party, and honour demands my silence. I repeat it," he continued, "I have just found an opportunity to acknowledge your father's goodness, and to secure another worthy servant to my country, if, however, you are disposed to utilise the rare advantages with which you are gifted."

"But I have told you, monsieur, however much I might desire to enter your honourable career under such happy auspices, I never could believe my merit equal to this ambition."

"Once again, you do not know yourself, or you do not wish to know yourself," resumed the minister with some degree of impatience, "and fortunately your opinion in this matter is not of consequence. As to me, it is quite evident that, if you wish it, you can fill an important mission; for you must feel that you are not one of those young beaux, who, having nothing but their name and their fortune, esteem themselves very happy when they are appointed attachés to foreign embassies. No, no, such proposals are not made to such as you. You must enter by the wide door; you must, above all, have the opportunity to show your full value. Unfortunately, with us," he added, hesitatingly, "with us, the necessities, the traditions, of government are so imperative, that European missions are very much restricted, and at the present moment they are all filled."

I looked straight at M. de Sérigny. It took all my

command over myself not to burst out laughing. From the turn his proposal had taken, it no longer seemed a question of exile, but of transportation.

"But you must be aware," said I, preserving my composure, "that, in the event of this conversation having any sequence, I have not the ridiculous pretension to aim at one bound at a European mission."

"You must understand one thing," continued the minister, with ever increasing satisfaction, "missions are more or less important just as you make them. There are some very insignificant ones in Europe, while there are some vastly important ones in Asia, for instance. It cannot be disguised that it is not in Europe, but in the Orient, that the fate of Europe will in future be decided. The future policy of Europe is in the East! Europe has her eyes fixed on the East! There is the field of battle where the great negotiators of our times must be formed! For instance," said M. de Sérigny, looking steadily at me, "at this very moment I would like to find a man of good birth, with a keen, subtle intelligence, agreeable manners, and firm, resolute character, to whom I could entrust one of the most delicate missions. It is a question of securing the good-will and support of an important Oriental power, without arousing the suspicions, the susceptible jealousies, of Russia and England, our eternal rivals in the East."

"This mission, in fact, seems to me of great importance," I said, with the most disinterested air in the world.

"Is it not? Well, I may almost venture to say that I could secure that legation for you, so great is my confidence in your capacity, so much have I at heart to make some return for your father's kindness."

"Such a mission, to me!" I exclaimed, feigning the utmost astonishment.

M. de Sérigny assumed a deep, mysterious air, and said:

"M. de ——, I am speaking to a man of honour; whether or not you accept the proposition I have just made, will you give me your word that all this will remain secret between us?"

"I give you my word, monsieur."

"Well," he continued, not less mysteriously, "under the frivolous pretext of carrying rich gifts from his Majesty, the King of France, to the Shah of Persia, the object is to skilfully, adroitly, and forcibly gain the ascendency over the mind of that Asiatic prince so as to dispose him to accept favourably, at some later date, overtures of considerable importance which would hereafter be communicated to the envoy charged with this weighty negotiation. These interests, I will allow, are of the highest consequence. The gifts are ready, the instructions are drawn up, the vessel awaits,—and it is expected you should leave without delay."

My suppressed merriment was at its height, on hearing the minister propose to me seriously to start off immediately in order that I might exercise my powers of pleasing on the Shah of Persia, to further a mission of the most absurd insignificance, in spite of M. de Sérigny's efforts to make it appear of vast importance.

The minister waited for my reply with unconcealed anxiety.

I felt a certain remorse at making a man of his age and position play so foolish a part, and at prolonging

this comedy.

This proposition, unacceptable as it was, had aroused in me certain slumbering ideas. Unhappy in my love for Madame de Fersen, realising that it would be impossible for me, for some time at least, to entertain another affection, and dreading inactivity above all, I determined to utilise, if possible, M. de Sérigny's good-will.

"Monsieur," I said, "although the difference in our ages is great, will you permit me, in my turn, to speak to you with the fullest, I might say with the most brutal, freedom?"

"Certainly," said the minister, greatly astonished.

"If the praiseworthy and generous motives that you have set forth, monsieur, indicate your firm intention to try me in the diplomatic career, I trust you will not take exception at my endeavouring to give you a proof of the extent of my penetration?"

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"Let us speak freely, M. de Sérigny: you are in love with a charming woman that we both know; my attentions to her annoy you, and you propose to get me out of the way by sending me to the Shah of Persia!"

"Monsieur!" cried the minister, in an offended tone.

"Permit me to continue," said I. "There is no need of my leaving to reassure you. I give you my word of honour that my intercourse with the lady of whom I have the honour to speak is simply of a friendly nature, and, with the exception of an innocent and trifling flirtation, nothing can justify your suspicions."

M. de Sérigny appeared at first greatly irritated; nevertheless he said, with a forced smile: "After what has passed between us, it is inevitable either that we cut each other's throat, or become fast friends."

"Your choice is mine, monsieur."

"My choice is made," said M. de Sérigny, holding out his hand.

There was so much cordiality in his movement, he exercised so great a self-control to drive back his proud susceptibility and wounded self-love in the presence of a man of my years, that, deeply touched by his action, I said:

"If you believe all the good you have said of me, monsieur, you will attach no importance to this conversation. Attribute only to your high reputation for wisdom my earnest desire to demonstrate that I could penetrate your views. Pardon me for being so foolishly proud of my victory, for it was very flattering to me. As to fancying myself your rival with a certain charming person, my word must have reassured you regarding the past and the present. As to the future, there is one infallible way of setting aside your suspicions,—it is by asking a favour of you. Bound to you by gratitude, I would be base indeed were I to endanger your happiness in the slightest degree."

After a few moments of silence, M. de Sérigny said to me, with infinite good nature: "You speak so frankly, that it is impossible, I see, to hide one's meaning; one must deny all, or acknowledge all, and I prefer the last, for you are a man of honour, and very safe. All the same, it is very odd. Here am I, a man of my age, confiding my *amourettes* to a young man who has been very wittily making fun of me,

and has said so to my face, and has so embarrassed me by confiding to me not his, but my love affairs, that I find myself in the most absurd position possible. Fortunately, you tell me that I may in some way do you a good turn, which saves me from being absolutely ridiculous," he added, with perfect graciousness.

"Well then, monsieur, here is the point in question: although I do not consider my qualifications sufficient to bewitch the Shah of Persia—"

"Let us say no more about that!" gaily said M. de Sérigny. "You strike a foe when he is down."

"I will confess your proposal has aroused in me, not ambition, but a desire to become acquainted with political matters, that I may see if my mind could some day turn. I do not know whether you find in me now the same qualifications."

"Ah, M. le comte, M. le comte!" said M. de Sérigny, shaking his finger at me menacingly.

"Admitting it then, all that I would ask of your kindness would be that, in the event of your needing hereafter a private secretary, you will admit me for a few hours each day in your study. In this capacity, I will place myself entirely at your service, and you may entrust me with such papers as you think you may hand to a safe, trustworthy man. After this trial, I shall really know whether I have any aptitude for business; and later, if I thought I could fill successfully a modest diplomatic mission, I would then remind you of the debt you still owe my father."

"Another epigram!" said M. de Sérigny; "but what matters! And really now, do these tiresome duties not frighten you? Will you have the courage to come and work with me daily for three or four hours in my

study?"

"I will have the courage."

"Perhaps you will not believe that your proposal comes most opportunely; and yet every one is aware that my private secretary has just been appointed to the legation at Florence. I do not offer you the position, but I offer you the share he had in my work."

"And I accept with all my heart, and most gratefully." Touched by his kindness, and wishing to dispel the annoyance he might still feel at the advantage I had attained over him in this interview, I continued: "Look at the eccentricities of the human mind, and how by contrary ways one reaches the same end. You came to me with two very firmly set ideas: you wished to get out of your way a rival whom you feared, and to attach to the service of your country a man whose worth, you say, you discerned. I firmly declined your offers; and yet, not by the power of your will, but by mine, you obtain the desired end; for now I can no longer be a subject of jealousy to you, and I am going to share your work. After that," I exclaimed, "who will dare to say that I have tricked you? Come, come, M. de Sérigny, I am compelled to acknowledge that you are vastly above your reputation, and what I called my victory is no more than a fortunate defeat."

I made an appointment for the following day with the minister, and we parted.

CHAPTER XXI

DIPLOMACY

When M. de Sérigny had left me, I fell back into the bitter thoughts from which this interview had drawn me.

In spite of my efforts to drive away all thought of Madame de Fersen, I could not succeed. I suffered greatly, but my grief, though deep, had a certain charm which I had not previously known.

I was conscious of having conducted myself nobly towards Catherine, of not deserving her severe disapproval, and this comforting consciousness gave me a proud and courageous resignation.

I have always faced boldly the most cruel phases of my life. No hope was left to me of ever gaining Madame de Fersen's love. I therefore gathered religiously in my heart and memory the slightest traces of this ineffable love, as one gathers the sacred and precious remnants of a departed being, to come daily and contemplate them with dreamy sadness, and ask of them the melancholy charm of memory.

Not wishing, however, to be prostrated, and hoping to find some distraction in work, I went assiduously to M. de Sérigny's study.

He was truly an excellent man.

He showed himself full of kindness to me. Having doubtless assured himself of my scrupulous discretion, he soon gave me a flattering mark of his confidence in me, by entrusting me to make a clear and concise summing up of his diplomatic correspondence. This brief was to be handed daily to the king.

This work, it is true, appeared of much greater importance than it really was, since there was at that time no great political question pending in Europe. Almost all these despatches, written mostly in very faint ink, and very poor French, contained only vague and trifling particulars about foreign courts, particulars which had frequently even been discounted in the public print.

I convinced myself of that which I had always surmised, that in modern times, and with a representative government like ours, diplomacy which may be called current is almost nothing; the vital questions of nations are fought on fields of battle, in the Chambers, or in congresses.

Most of the time (I speak only of representative governments) diplomatic positions are mere sinecures which ministers use as a means of action or corruption, by disposing of them by political expediency.

I was all the more struck by the futility of the correspondence under my eyes, because my father had formerly made me almost go through a whole course of political law, and I had studied with him the most famous negotiators of the latter half of the seventeenth century. My great-great-grandfather having filled certain missions conjointly with Messieurs d'Avaux, de Lyonne, and Courtin, we had at Serval a duplicate of his despatches and theirs, and I must confess that the reading of these documents had made me very fastidious.

M. Sérigny himself was a man of second-rate ability; but he had enough tact, shrewdness, and perspicacity to enable him to respond to the modest requirements of his position. When he fought the Opposition in the Chambers, he could extinguish,

drown, the most heated discussion with the clear flow of his abundant words, cold and monotonous as a waterfall.

From the constitutional point of view M. de Sérigny could just as well have been Minister of Marine, of Justice, or of Finances as Minister of Foreign Affairs, but from the real, special point of view of these ministries, he was incapable of filling any.

I kept to myself my opinion of M. de Sérigny. He had been kind to me, and I was not Pommerive. Far from it, I defended my minister with all my might.

My duties amused me a good deal, for the very reason that their futility contrasted in a flagrant manner with their supposed importance.

The knowledge of these facts aroused in me charitable sentiments; I became very tolerant of that pitiless and affected self-importance, thanks to which most of our diplomatic agents always deceive the public on the value and the necessity of their position.

Without this prestige, they would cease to exist.

If I have never had the whim to become the associate or the dupe of a juggler, neither have I been malicious enough, when I fancied I had discovered his tricks, to proclaim it aloud, thus depriving the poor devil of his audience; for I never could picture to myself the future of a juggler deprived of his trade. I would, therefore, advise poor parents who destine their sons to a diplomatic career to be wise enough, to have sufficient foresight, to make them also learn some good solid trade which may some day be a useful resource should unexpected accidents deprive them of their first

career.

This is not a brutal paradox. The essential specialty of our diplomats, consisting in worthily representing France, that is, in having a grand house and retinue at the expense of the state, in leading a luxurious, worldly, and amusing life, in receiving and writing insignificant despatches, it is difficult to imagine how these fine qualities could be employed when no longer exercising the profession which required them.

My new position with M. de Sérigny soon became known, and gave me singular authority in the world. People knew that I had not sought a place, in devoting myself assiduously to the work on which I was engaged, and they naturally concluded that my apprenticeship must lead to high destinies.

Circumstances occurred which contributed to these exaggerated rumours.

It was at a ball at the Duchesse de Berri's.

M. de Sérigny was laid up with the gout, and therefore could not be present. Lord Stuart, the British ambassador, who had earnestly urged our government to take the most active steps to discover the pirate of Porquerolles, came up to tell me that they were on the tracks of the wretch, hoped soon to reach him, and asked me for further particulars of the affair. He took my arm, and we had a half-hour's talk in the recess of a window.

This was enough to make people believe that I was far advanced in what is benignantly called "secrets of state."

This was not all: about eleven o'clock I was going to leave the ball just at the moment the king was

taking his departure.

I had had the honour to be presented to him; he stopped in front of me, and said, with his customary gracious affability:

"I read your reports every day. I am pleased with them, they interest me; they are very satisfying, and, thanks to you, I have the harvest without the trouble of reaping."

"The king overwhelms me," I said to his majesty, "and his approbation is a favour which imposes new duties; and I will endeavour to prove myself worthy of them."

Instead of leaving the ball, the king seated himself on a sofa near at hand, and said to me:

"But tell me, what is all this I hear from Lord Stuart? It is very extraordinary, and sounds like a romance."

When the king seated himself while speaking to me, the persons who accompanied him held themselves discreetly aside.

I related to the king the history of the pirate of Porquerolles; he listened with interest, put several questions to me, thanked me very graciously, and withdrew.

When the king had left, I became the centre of attraction; they could make nothing out of it. His majesty was leaving, he happens to meet me, and thereupon he remains a quarter of an hour in particular conversation with me.

Decidedly, I must be a man of the highest importance.

I know that nothing is more ridiculous than to

appear to take pride in such a success, and I prepared to quit the ball, when I saw Madame de Fersen coming towards me. I had not seen her for some time, and she seemed so changed, so fallen away, that I was shocked.

I saluted her without waiting for her, and retired, though she looked entreatingly at me, and she was evidently coming towards me with the intention of speaking to me.

The next day I received a letter from her.

She begged me in touching terms to come and see her, apologising for her ingratitude, and making some gracious allusions to the past.

My first impulse was to go to Catherine at once.

I reflected, however, that this meeting was not likely to change the fate of my love. I remembered the harshness with which Madame de Fersen had behaved, and foolishly fancied my dignity required that I should not yield to the first advance.

I wrote a very cold and polite letter, apologising for not going to her as she requested, and said she could not fail to understand my reasons.

To this she made no answer.

I concluded that she had not a very great desire to see me since she did not insist. I therefore congratulated myself on the course I had taken.

I soon heard that the prince had been called back to Russia by his court, and was surprised, I must confess, that his wife did not accompany him.

As to Madame de V——, I had implored her, for the sake of the friendship she professed for me, to

cease tormenting so cruelly M. de Sérigny, declaring I would no longer lend myself to her coquettish manœuvres; that, moreover, she was compromising herself frightfully, and that sooner or later she would find herself ill-received in society.

She answered that I spoke like a Quaker, but for the joke of the thing she was going to live without a shade of coquetry.

One month after this glorious determination she came to express her gratitude to me, saying that, though this new life was deadly wearisome, it had made a tremendous sensation, and wagers were laid as to whether she would persist in her conversion or not. As to the minister, she said, since he had passed from the stupidity of jealous irritation to the stupidity of blind adoration, she neither gained nor lost in no longer tormenting him.

Consequently, the rumours which had been current about Madame de V—— and myself soon ceased, and I was accused of having deserted her.

I could not avoid smiling sometimes when I observed the obsequiousness of those around me, for I continued, as I may say, in sheer idleness my work at M. de Sérigny's.

Cernay, whom I sometimes met, concealed his envy under the semblance of the most exaggerated admiration. "You are a very able man," he said; "you should have, and you will have, all kinds of success. You are now a statesman, intimate with ministers and ambassadors. The king even takes notice of you; you are considered, my good fellow, and you can have all you wish for, for you have such tact! if you will excuse the word, such cunning!"

"What do you mean?"

"Come, now, don't play the innocent. At that ball at the Tuileries, where you had in turn two interviews at once so remarkable and so much remarked, the one with Lord Stuart and the other with the king, who remained in conversation some time with you, instead of taking his departure in accordance with his expressed desire, what did you do, you shrewd fellow? Instead of doing as so many others who would have foolishly remained to strut after receiving such distinction, you quickly disappeared. That was shrewdness, or rather genius, and your absence created a prodigious effect."

"The cause of this disappearance was very simple, my dear De Cernay; I had a frightful headache, and wanted to get home."

"Nonsense," said Cernay, with charming naïveté; "you cannot make me believe that any one has the headache when the king has been talking with him for an hour."

A fortnight had passed since I had last met Madame de Fersen at the Tuileries ball, when one of my business agents came to me one morning with an air of consternation.

It was a question of preventing a disastrous failure, by which I might lose about fifty thousand dollars, which had been invested in one of the most esteemed business houses at Havre.

The failure had not yet been declared, but it was imminent, and was already suspected.

My agent therefore proposed that I should at once start with him, and go to rescue my funds from this

house.

The amount was so considerable, that I did not hesitate one moment about going to Havre.

A power of attorney, however wide its scope, could never provide for all the eventualities that might occur; under such circumstances, the presence of the interested party is often of the greatest consequence.

I wrote a few lines to M. de Sérigny, telling him that an affair of the greatest importance had called me to Havre, and I left orders with my people to forward my letters to that town.

Two hours later I was on the road.

We were approaching the last relay before reaching Havre, when I heard the hurried tramp of horses galloping behind us, the sharp cracking of a whip, and a voice not unknown to me crying out, "Stop! Stop!"

My postilions looked at me inquiringly. I made them a sign to stop, and, suddenly, I saw at the door of my carriage Madame de Fersen's courier, whose horse was covered with foam and torn by spurs.

This man was so breathless from his rapid race that he could only utter these words in handing me a letter:





"M. le comte, this is a letter from the princess. I have gained four hours upon M. le comte. I could do no more."

The letter just contained these words:

"My daughter is dying—is dying—and my sole hope is in you."

"You must turn back," I cried to the postilions, "return to the stage. And you," I said to the courier, "can you gallop all the way back to Paris, and have horses ready for me at the stages?"

"Certainly, M. le comte."

"Then mount, and be off."

The good fellow turned back at full speed on the road to Paris.

"But, monsieur," said my man of business, in dismay, "you cannot go back to Paris; here we are just at Havre."

I looked at him in astonishment.

"Why not?"

"But this failure, monsieur," he exclaimed; "an hour may lose all, and fifty thousand dollars are at stake!"

I had entirely forgotten the purport of my journey.

"You are right," said I. "You are not more than a mile from Havre; oblige me by walking that distance, and arrange matters as best you can."

I had the carriage door opened.

"But, monsieur, once more, it is impossible," resumed the astounded man; "without you I can do nothing. I do not even have your power of attorney. Without you my presence is utterly useless. Come at least as far as Havre; we shall go to a notary, you will give me a power of attorney, and then—"

I was boiling with impatience. "Monsieur," said I, hastily, "you will go on to Havre without me, or you will return to Paris with me. The door is open; you can get down, or remain."

"But, monsieur—"

"Close the door, and off for Paris!" I exclaimed.

The agent at once left the carriage, saying to me, with an air of despair, "As you please, monsieur. I shall have nothing to reproach myself with. You may as well look upon these fifty thousand dollars as lost. Send me, at least, your power of attorney, registered, etc."

I did not hear the rest. The horses had started at full speed.

In my whole life, I had never travelled with such velocity.

At Versailles, I gave orders to stop in Paris a little

way, before reaching Madame de Fersen's door.

When I arrived, I saw the street was strewn with straw.

Reflecting that I might possibly have to remain at Madame de Fersen's, and not wishing to have it known, I instructed my servant to take my carriage home, and tell my people that I had remained at Havre, and would return by the steamer.

I entered the mansion.

CHAPTER XXII

IRENE

The slightest details of this dreadful scene are still present to my mind.

Midnight struck as I entered the antechamber of Madame de Fersen's apartment.

It was dark, and I found none of her people about. This seemed to me very strange. Led by a dim light, I crossed several rooms, only one of which was faintly lighted; my heart shrank with terror.

As I reached a half-open door, stifled sobs greeted my ear.

Noiselessly I pushed the door open.

Gracious heavens! what a picture!

Irene's cot, placed next to her mother's bed, occupied the end of the room facing the door.

Kneeling by the bedside, Catherine held one of the child's hands in hers.

I could not see the face of the unfortunate mother, only from time to time a sudden, convulsive movement shook her frame.

At the left side was Frank, the great painter, Hélène's husband.

Seated on a low chair, he sketched Irene's dying countenance.

A harrowing remembrance, which, no doubt, Madame de Fersen wished to preserve.

Frank, by means of a shade, had so arranged the lamp that the full light fell on Irene's face.

The rest of the apartment was plunged into almost total darkness.

A tall man, in a fur-lined coat, stood at the foot of the cot. His hair was white; his prominent bald forehead shone like old ivory; a ray of bright light brought out his sharply marked profile.

This was Doctor Ralph, Madame de Fersen's medical attendant.

He seemed watching with an anxious eye the slightest change in Irene's face.

In a dark corner of the room the nurse was seated, leaning her head against the wall, and scarcely able to smother her sobs.

As I entered, her sobbing became so uncontrollable that, holding her handkerchief to her mouth, she left the room.

I, also, was weeping bitterly at the sight of that

angelic, childish face, so tender, so resigned, which, in spite of approaching death, preserved a character of sublime serenity.

Brilliantly lighted, her pale face stood out vividly against the white pillows; her beautiful black locks fell in disorder, covering her forehead; her large eyes half closed, and encircled by dark rings, showed under the heavy lids her half-extinct pupils. From her pretty half-open mouth, from her lips, formerly so roseate, and now so discoloured, came forth a panting breath, and often a feeble plaintive murmur. This poor little face, formerly so plump, so fresh and childlike, was already becoming livid.

From time to time the unhappy child moved her hands restlessly into space, or turned her head heavily on her pillows, with a deep sigh. Then she again became frightfully still.

Frank's face, which I had not seen for two years, wore an expression of heart-breaking sadness.

He, also, could not repress his tears every time he glanced at the face of the dying child.

The calmness, the silence of this scene, which I seized at one glance, made such an impression upon me that for an instant I stood rooted to the threshold.

Madame de Fersen turned towards the clock, then shook her head, with a gesture of despair.

I understood, she was beginning to lose faith in me.

I pushed the door open.

Catherine saw me; in an instant she was at my side, and drawing me to the cot, she said, in a heartrending tone, "Save her! have pity on me, and

save her!"

Madame de Fersen's voice was low and broken; her beautiful face was tear-stained and worn; yet under this appearance of weakness one felt the superhuman energy which always sustains a mother, so long as her child needs her.

"One moment," said Doctor Ralph, in a low, solemn voice. "This is our last hope, let us not take too great a risk."

The unhappy woman hid her face in her hands.

"I have told you, madame," said the doctor, showing a vial containing a dark liquid, "this potion will restore this child to consciousness, will light up the faint spark of intelligence which still remains, perhaps. Then the sight of the person who exercises on her so strange an influence may work a miracle, for, alas! madame, nothing but a miracle can bring your child back to life."

"I know it, I know it," said Catherine, choking back her tears, "I am prepared for the worst. But, tell me, the potion,—what effect will it have?"

"I can answer for its immediate effects; but not for the consequences that may follow."

"What is to be done? *Mon Dieu!* what is to be done?" cried Catherine, in accents of anguish.

"Do not hesitate, madame," I said; "since all hope is gone, accept the only chance that remains!"

"I am of the same opinion, do not hesitate, madame," said Frank, who shared our emotion.

"Proceed, monsieur," whispered Madame de Fersen, in an accent of desperate determination; and she knelt down by her child's cot.

Her lips moved in prayer.

She, Frank, and I fixed upon the doctor sorrowing and apprehensive looks.

He alone was calm, as with slow and silent steps he approached Irene's bedside.

At the sight of his tall figure, his austere countenance, his long white hair, his peculiar garb, one might have supposed him a man gifted with some occult power, ready to perform by a potion some mysterious charm.

He poured into a golden spoon a few drops of the liquid contained in the vial.

Madame de Fersen took it, and approached the spoon to the child's lips.

But her hand trembled to such an extent that the liquid was spilled.

"I am afraid," said she, with a frightened look.

She gave back the spoon to the doctor. He filled it once more, and with a firm hand put it to Irene's lips.

The child swallowed it without reluctance.

It is impossible to express the intense alarm, the mortal anguish, with which we watched the effects of the potion.

The doctor himself, eagerly bending over the bed, watched Irene's face with anxious eyes.

Soon the potion began to work.

By degrees, Irene began moving her arms and hands, and her cheeks assumed a faint tinge of colour. Several times she quickly turned her head on her pillow, moaned piteously, closed her eyes, and then opened them.

The lamp was in front of her, and the bright light seemed painful, for she covered her eyes with her hands.

"She sees! she sees!" cried the doctor, with an alacrity that seemed to us of good omen.

"She is saved!" exclaimed Catherine, clasping her hands, as if in thanks to Heaven.

"No rash expectation, madame!" said Doctor Ralph, austerely and almost harshly. "I have already told you this semblance of life is deceptive. It is like galvanism which gives motion to a dead body, and a breath may snap the invisible cord which binds this child to life." Then, turning to me, he added: "It will be your turn, monsieur, presently to endeavour to strengthen that feeble thread. I solemnly declare, if that child lives, which, alas! I scarcely dare to hope, it is to you she will owe it, for known science does not work such miracles."

"God alone can work them," said Frank, in a solemn voice.

"Or certain mysterious and magnetic influences which one must concede without understanding them," added the doctor.

The stimulus of the potion upon Irene became more and more apparent. Two or three times she sighed deeply, held forth her arms, and then murmured, in a feeble voice: "Mother! Arthur!"

"Now," said the doctor, "take one of the child's hands in yours, monsieur, and let the other be in her mother's; come as close to her as possible, and call her, softly, slowly, so that the sound may have time to reach her feeble hearing."

I took hold of one of Irene's hands, her mother

held the other.

Her hand was cold and moist.

I leaned over Irene. Her big eyes, looking still larger since her illness, wandered around as if in search of some one.

"Irene—Irene—I am here," I said, in a low voice.

"Irene—my child—your mother is here also," said Catherine, with an accent of passionate and fearful anxiety impossible to describe.

At first the child did not seem to hear us.

"Irene—it is your friend—it is Arthur and your mother. Do you not hear her?"

"Your mother—*mon Dieu!* your mother is near you!" repeated Catherine.

This time the child's look no longer wandered. She moved her head suddenly, as if a sound from afar had reached her.

"How is her hand?" inquired the doctor, in a whisper.

"Still cold," I answered.

"Still cold," rejoined the mother.

"That is bad, you are not yet *en rapport*,—continue."

"Irene—dear child—angel—do you hear me? It is I—Arthur," I whispered.

Irene raised her eyes, and met mine fastened on her.

I had often heard magnetic attraction spoken of, and this time I experienced its action and reaction.

I fixed an eager and despairing glance upon Irene. By degrees, as if her eyes took life from mine, they lost their dullness, they became clear, bright, beaming with intelligence.

On her countenance, returning to life, I could follow the progress of her thoughts, of her awakening mind.

She threw out her arms, and an angelic smile lighted on her lips.

Too weak to raise her head, she sought her mother with her glance.

Catherine bent over the bed, still holding, as I did, one of Irene's hands.

After looking at us for a moment, the child gently brought together her mother's hand and mine; her eyes suffused with tears, and she wept freely.

When my hand touched Catherine's, my heart received an electric shock. For a moment I heard no more, I saw no more. I held Catherine's and Irene's hands in mine, and became unconscious of the contact.

It seemed to me that a flood of electricity surrounded us, and blended us in one.

This impression was deep, inexplicable, almost painful. When I regained consciousness, I heard the doctor exclaiming, "She has shed tears! she is saved!"

"You have given her back to me," said Catherine, falling on her knees before me.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GROVE

This healing crisis saved Irene.

During the month of convalescence I left her neither by day nor by night.

In the early days of spring, Doctor Ralph urged Madame de Fersen to go to the country with her daughter, and recommended the vicinity of Fontainebleau.

Madame de Fersen having seen a very pretty cottage, called the Grove, had secured it, and the necessary repairs having been made, it was decided we should take up our residence there the first days of May.

If my continuous abode at Madame de Fersen's house had been known, it would have provoked the most odious comments. Consequently, the morning after the crisis, which had proved so favourable to Irene, I told her mother that she must forbid access to her apartment to every one, with the exception of the doctor, the nurse, and one of her maids, on whose discretion she could rely.

I had occupied during Irene's illness a vacant entresol, of which the windows opened on an uninhabited piece of ground, thus my return to Paris and my presence at Catherine's house was unknown to every one.

Madame de Fersen took to Fontainebleau only the same people who had been in attendance on her during her little girl's illness, the nurse and two

maids. The rest of the household remained in Paris.

She asked me to follow her to the Grove in two days.

She took her departure.

The next morning I received from her most detailed instructions about finding my way to the small park gate at the Grove.

At the appointed hour I was at that gate; I knocked, and it was opened.

The sun was about setting, but it still threw some warm rays across the green lacework and violet clusters of an arbour of *glycynia*, under which Catherine was waiting for me with Irene, whose hand she was holding.

Was it intentional, or was it mere chance? I know not, but like the day when for the first time I saw her on board the Russian frigate, Catherine wore a gauzy white gown and a lace head-dress ornamented with a spray of red geranium.

The trials through which she had passed had made her fall away, but she was still beautiful, and even more lovely than beautiful. Her figure, as heretofore, was elegant and stately; her countenance noble, gracious, and pensive; her large, soft eyes of a perfect blue were fringed with long, dark lashes; the heavy tresses of her jet black hair framed her brow, lofty and sad, and her face paled by sorrow.

Irene, like her mother, was dressed in white; her long dark hair was tied with ribbons and fell to her waist, and her lovely face, though still pensive and sad, showed scarcely any traces of her recent sufferings.

Catherine's first impulse was to take her child in her arms, and, placing her in mine, she said, with great emotion, "Is she not now your Irene also?"

And amid her tears her eyes shone with joy and gratitude.

There are emotions which one cannot attempt to describe, for they are as vast as the infinite.

This first outburst of happiness passed, Madame de Fersen said to me, "Now I must show you to your apartment."

I offered Catherine my arm, Irene took my hand, and allowed them to lead me.

For some time we kept silent.

After following a long avenue, rapidly becoming dark as the sun sank below the horizon, we came to a clearing on the outskirts of the wood.

"Here is your cottage," said Madame de Fersen.

My cottage was a sort of Swiss chalet, half hidden in a mass of pink acacias, of linden-trees and lilacs. It was built on the edge of a small lake, on a foundation of great boulders of that flinty rock found in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau. This structure having been erected as a point of observation, every advantage had been taken to make the most of its charming position.

A thick carpet of periwinkles, of ivy, of moss, and wild strawberry covered almost entirely the whitish rocks, and from each cranny sprouted a tuft of iris, of rhododendron, or heather.

On the other side of the lake a beautiful lawn, surrounded by the woods, rose in a gentle incline up

to the front of the house occupied by Madame de Fersen, and which might be seen from a distance.

The sight was limited on all sides by a ring of verdure, formed by the thick woods surrounding the high walls of the park, and hiding them completely.

One might have wished more variety in the prospect; but as our life at the Grove was to be surrounded by the most profound mystery, this extensive and impenetrable barrier of leafage was very precious.

After a few minutes we reached the foot of the steps leading to the cottage. Madame de Fersen drew a small key from her belt and opened the front door.

At a glance I saw that she had been the presiding genius in the arrangement of the two rooms. Everything was of excessive but elegant simplicity. I found flowers on every side; also a piano, a painter's easel, and some books which she had heard me mention as my favourites.

Pointing out to me an ebony cabinet frame with doors richly inlaid with mother-of-pearl, Madame de Fersen asked me to open it. On one side I found the exquisite sketch which Frank had made of the dying Irene, and on the other side a recent portrait of Irene also painted by Frank.

I took Catherine's hand and carried it to my lips, with a feeling of inexpressible gratitude.

She herself pressed her hand to my lip with an impulse full of tenderness. She then turned and passionately embraced her child.

I closed the panel, still more touched by this mark of Catherine's remembrance, for I had expressed to her my views regarding portraits exposed to the gaze

of all.

When we left the cottage, the purple and gold of the dying sun was mirrored in the bosom of the lake. The acacias were dropping their roseate and fragrant petals. No sound was heard; on all sides the horizon was bounded by dark masses of verdure; we found ourselves in the midst of the most profound solitude, the most peaceful, the most mysterious.

Impressed by the sight of this sad and touching picture, Catherine leaned on the balcony of the chalet, and remained a few minutes plunged in reverie.

Irene sat at her feet, and began to gather roses and honeysuckle to make a bouquet.

I leaned against the door, and could not help feeling a pang of anguish as I looked upon Madame de Fersen.

I was going to pass long days near this woman, so passionately loved, and delicacy forbade my speaking one word of this deep and ardent love, which circumstances recently had combined to increase.

I knew not if I was beloved, or, rather, I despaired of being loved; it seemed to me that fate, which had brought Madame de Fersen and me together, by the death-bed of her child, during a month of terrible anguish, had been too tragic to end in so tender a sentiment.

I was absorbed in these sad thoughts, when Madame de Fersen made a quick movement, as if she were aroused from a dream, and said to me, "Pardon me, but it is so long since I breathed air so fragrant and invigorating that I selfishly enjoy this lovely

nature."

Irene divided her bouquet in two, gave one half to her mother, the other to me, and we then started towards the house.

We reached it after a long walk, for the park was very extensive.

CHAPTER XXIV

DAYS OF SUNSHINE

THE GROVE, 10th May, 18—.[6]

It is eleven o'clock; I have just left Madame de Fersen. Here am I in the chalet, which, henceforward, I am to occupy near her!

I experience a strange emotion.

Events have succeeded each other with such rapidity, my heart has been torn by such conflicting passions, that I feel the necessity of reviewing my memories, my desires, and my hopes.

I therefore resume my journal, interrupted after my departure from Khios.

My thoughts press so confusedly upon my brain that I hope to clear them by writing. I act like those who, unable to make a mental calculation, are obliged to have recourse to pencil and paper.

What for me will be the end of this love? Doctor

Ralph has formally declared to Madame de Fersen that, for a long time yet, my presence is indispensable to Irene's perfect recovery, and that, for two or three months longer, it was absolutely necessary to soothe the child's imagination, and not give her the slightest shock or the least sorrow, these emotions being the more dangerous for her in that they were so profoundly concentrated.

Doctor Ralph attributes the attraction which I have for Irene to magnetic and mysterious affinities and he cites many examples, both among human beings and animals. He is unable, however, to offer any explanation of this. As I said, this attraction places me in a singular position.

The effect of my presence or absence upon this child is a proven and undeniable fact. For the past year Irene has had three or four attacks, sometimes slight, others serious and almost fatal, whose sole origin was her grief at not seeing me, and, above all, at not seeing me near her mother; for the nurse has since told me that even our meetings at the Tuileries did not quite satisfy Irene, who pined for the time spent on board the frigate.

My presence, therefore, is, one may say, the tie that binds Irene to life.

Were it not for my love, my passion for Catherine, were it not for the deep interest her child inspires in me, this imperious obligation to remain ever at Irene's side would be both painful and embarrassing.

But I worship her mother! When I compare other passions which I have experienced to that which she inspires, I find this the truest of all; and, seeing her daily, brought near her by the most startling and mysterious circumstances, most apt to bring the most

passive love to a point of exaltation, I still must be silent; Catherine for me must be sacred as a sister, as a friend!

Can I, in the name of my past devotedness, in the name of the fatal influence I exercise over Irene, approach Catherine, professing my love, and expressing my hopes?

It would be base, it would be despicable.

And if the unhappy mother were to think—oh, Heaven!—that I demanded her love as the price for my presence near her child!

Ah, this thought is horrible!

My resolution is taken, irrevocably taken.

Never shall a word of love pass my lips.

THE GROVE, 11th May, 18—.

My best deeds bring me bad luck,—one reason the more for keeping silent.

This morning the newspapers were brought in.

Madame de Fersen opened one, and began to read.

All at once she ceased to read, I saw her shiver and blush deeply; then, with an expression of dumb surprise, lowering her hands to her knees, she shook her head, as if she were saying, "Is this really possible!"

Looking at me with eyes filled with tears, she quickly rose, and left the room.

Not knowing what might have caused this keen emotion, I picked up the newspaper, and the

following lines soon explained to me Madame de Fersen's dismay.

"It is well known that a month ago the firm —— & Co. failed for a sum amounting to several millions. The head of the firm secretly embarked for the United States. A few creditors, warned by alarming rumours as to the solvency of the firm, were in time to withdraw a portion of their funds. M. Dumont, business agent of M. le Comte de ——, involved in this bankruptcy to the amount of one hundred and fifty thousand francs, has not been equally fortunate; although he had come to Havre to ward off this disaster, he was not provided with the necessary papers, and as the bankruptcy was considered fraudulent, he laid his complaint before the district attorney, but in view of the assets amounting to scarcely eighty thousand francs, the numerous creditors of the firm —— must look upon their funds as lost."

Madame de Fersen knew of my hurried departure for Havre, for her courier had overtaken me before I reached that town. I had returned immediately, and the date of my return coincided with that of the bankruptcy. It was therefore evident to Catherine that my eagerness to return to the dying Irene was the sole cause of the severe loss I had sustained. Thus now, more than ever, should I appear to demand a reward for my sacrifices.

While mechanically skimming the newspaper, beneath the article which I have quoted, I came upon the following paragraph, which also concerned me.

The paper which I was reading was a semi-official journal, and might be considered well informed.

"Many changes are imminent in our *corps diplomatique*. Among those mentioned as likely to be called to a prominent position in foreign affairs is M. le Comte Arthur de ——, who, though still young, has strong claims to this favour on account of his travels, his researches, and the conscientious work to which he has devoted himself for some time past, as chief secretary of his Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs. These particulars, for whose accuracy we can vouch, prove clearly that when high birth and the advantages of fortune accompany an eminent and recognised capacity, everything may be expected from the favours of the king's ministry."

This article evidently emanated from the office of M. de Sérigny, who thought, perhaps, that it would give me pleasure if, during my absence, he asked the king some favour for me.

I must confess, this piece of news left me indifferent, and I went in search of Catherine.

I found her in an avenue of the park.

"I know all," she said, holding out her hand. "Another sacrifice," she continued, raising her eyes to heaven. "And I, what have I done for him?"

These words went to my heart, and produced so great, so sweet an emotion, that, in spite of myself, my hopes once more were aroused, but, controlling my thoughts, and wishing to change the subject, I said:

"Do you not congratulate me on my future successes?"

She looked at me in amazement.

"What successes?"

"Have you not read to-day's paper?"

"Yes, I have. But of what success are you speaking?"

"They say in this paper that very soon I shall be called to a very important position at the Foreign Office."

Catherine, without appearing to have heard me, replied:

"Will you make me a promise?"

"What is it?"

"I shall send Irene to you to the chalet, but I do not wish to see you to-day. You will not be vexed with me?" she said, sadly, to me, holding out her hand.

"No, certainly not," I said, much surprised, however, at this sudden determination.

THE GROVE, 13th May, 18—.

How long is it since this journal was interrupted? I know not. I cannot remember.

Besides, what do I know now? What do I remember?

All that has happened, is it not a dream, a dream so dazzling that I ask myself where is the limit of reality? Where ends the dream? Where commences the awakening?

Dream, memory, awakening! These are vain words, and faded, which I used before this day.

I wish now for new words to describe what I had

never before felt.

Not only does it seem to me impossible to use the words of other days to describe my feelings of to-day, it seems to me a blasphemy, a profanation.

Am I not the dupe of a delusion? Is it I, my own self, who is writing this at the Grove, in the chalet?

Yes, yes, it is my own self. I am looking at the clock which points to the hour of five. I see the lake reflecting the rays of the sun. I hear the trees rustling in the breeze. I scent the fragrance of the flowers, and in the distance I see her dwelling,—hers.

It is not, then, a dream?

Let me see, let me gather my thoughts, let me go back step by step to the source of that torrent of happiness which intoxicates me.

What day is this? I know not. Ah, yes, it is Sunday. She went to mass this morning, and there she wept, she wept abundantly.

Blessed be those precious tears!

But when did we receive those papers? Ah, here they are,—it was the day before yesterday.

The day before yesterday! 'Tis strange! If years had passed since that day it would not seem to me further away!

Between the past of yesterday, which was almost indifferent to us, and the present to-day, which is all in all to us, is there not the distance of centuries?

Yes, it was the day before yesterday that Catherine begged me to leave her to herself.

I obeyed her wishes, but felt very sad.

Irene came to play on the steps of the chalet.

The dinner bell sounded.

Instead of appearing at table, as usual, Catherine sent word begging me to dine by myself, for she was suffering.

In the evening the air was sultry. Catherine came down to the parlours. I found her looking very pale.

"I am stifling," she said, "I am restless, nervous, agitated, the weather is so stormy."

She then asked me to give her my arm, as she was going to walk in the park. Contrary to her custom, she requested Madame Paul, Irene's nurse, to follow us with the little girl.

We followed the winding avenue of the woods, and soon came upon the arbour, covered with *glycynia*, where she had waited for me with Irene the first day of my arrival at the Grove.

I know not whether it was emotion, or fatigue, or indisposition, but Catherine complained of feeling tired, and seated herself on a bench.

The sun had just set; the sky was covered with clouds, gilded by the last rays of the sun. Almost continuously the entire hemisphere was illumined with vivid flashes of summer lightning, which Irene watched with a curious and tranquil air.

Catherine did not speak, and seemed deeply absorbed.

Twilight had begun to darken the woods, when Irene, who was resting on her nurse's lap, fell asleep.

"Madame," said Madame Paul, "Mlle. Irene is falling asleep, and the doctor was very particular that she should not be exposed to the damp evening air."

"Let us go home," said Catherine, as she rose.

She felt so weak that she leaned on my arm with her whole weight.

We walked a few steps, but very slowly; Madame Paul was in front with Irene.

Suddenly I felt Catherine giving way, and she said, in a broken voice, "I cannot take another step, I am prostrated."

"Just make an effort," I said to her, "to reach the chalet, which is close at hand, and you can rest on the bench at the door."

"But, Irene!" she exclaimed, anxiously.

A turn in the road hid the nurse, who was already some way in advance.

I supported Catherine, and a few seconds later she was seated at the entrance of the chalet.

The threatening clouds had dispersed; at our feet we saw the lake reflecting the stars as they made their appearance; the perfume of flowers, rendered more acute by the warm and sultry weather, permeated the atmosphere; there was not a breath of air, not a sound.

The night was so soft, so balmy and clear, that in the uncertain light I could perfectly distinguish Catherine's features. My whole being seemed concentrated in my heart, which was beating violently.

Like Catherine, I felt overpowered, unnerved, by the warm, perfumed air which surrounded us.

Madame de Fersen was seated, resting on cushions, her head leaning on her hands.

The calm was so intense that I could hear Catherine's panting breath. I fell into a deep reverie, at once sad and blissful.

Never, perhaps, would I have a more favourable opportunity to unbosom myself to Catherine; but my scruples, and the dread of seeming to ask reward for a service rendered, kept me silent.

Suddenly she exclaimed:

"I implore you, do not leave me to my thoughts; let me hear your voice. Tell me all you wish, but speak to me; in the name of Heaven, speak to me!"

"What shall I say?" I replied, submissively.

"What matters!" she cried, clasping her hands in supplication; "what matters! only speak to me, drive from me the thoughts which possess me, have pity, or, rather, be pitiless,—accuse me, overwhelm me, tell me I am a thankless, selfish woman, base enough not to have the courage to be grateful," she continued, with increasing excitement, as if a secret long suppressed was now escaping her. "Do not soften your reproaches, for you cannot tell how deeply your resignation wounds me, you cannot tell how I long to find you less generous. For what can be said of a woman who meets a true, discreet friend, and for six months permits him to surround her with the most delicate, most assiduous, and respectful attentions, sees him devote himself to the least whims of her poor, suffering child, and who, one day, in all thanklessness, and for the idlest and most puerile of motives, coldly dismisses this friend? And this is not all. When this woman, in a terrible dilemma, again has need of him,—for she knows he alone can save her child's life,—she forthwith recalls him, well aware that she can demand everything

from the self-denial of this brave heart; and he, sacrificing all, instantly returns to draw this child from the very jaws of death!"

"Hold, I pray you! Let us not recall these sad memories, let us only think of our present happiness," said I.

But Catherine appeared not to hear me, and continued with an ever increasing excitement which alarmed me:

"This friend, so good, so noble, has he ever attempted by a single word to speak of his admirable conduct? He has been the protecting genius of this woman and her child when both were suffering; and when he has saved them,—for to save the child is to save the mother,—he goes, proudly, silent, and reserved, happy doubtless in the good he has done, but seeming to fear the thanklessness or disdain the gratitude he has inspired."

Catherine's voice was growing more and more broken and gasping. I was almost frenzied by her words, but they seemed to me drawn from her by feverish excitation, and contrasted so forcibly with her habitual reserve that I feared her reason, until now so strong and clear, had yielded to the tardy reaction of the terrible experiences which had shaken her for the past six weeks.

"Catherine, Catherine!" I exclaimed. "You are too passionately devoted to your child for me ever to have doubted of your gratitude,—my dearest, most precious reward."

Catherine heard my reply, for she alluded to my words as she continued in a still more passionate accent:

"Oh, yes, yes; tell me, then, that the intoxicating, invincible sentiment that invades me at this moment is gratitude; tell me that nothing is more sacred, more holy and legitimate, than what I feel. A woman has certainly the right to devote her life to him who has restored her child to her, more especially when he, as generous as he is considerate, has never attempted to say one word of his hopes; therefore, is it not for her—for her—to come to him, and ask with joy, with pride, How can I ever reward so much love?"

"By returning it!" I exclaimed.

"By confessing that I have always returned it," said Catherine, in a subdued voice.

And her hands languorously fell into mine.

THE GROVE, 16th May, 18—.

Woe! Woe!

Since yesterday I have not seen her. Doctor Ralph arrived last night. He found her in great danger. He attributed this devouring fever, this terrible delirium, to reaction from the anguish which the unfortunate woman had repressed during her child's illness.

He does not know all.

Ah, her remorse must be terrible! How she must suffer, and I am not there, by her side,—and I cannot be there.

Ah, yes, I love her, I love her with all my strength. This intoxicating memory, which yesterday made me almost frenzied with love, to-day I curse it!

The sight of Irene hurts me. This morning the child

came towards me, and I repulsed her. She is fateful to her mother, as, perhaps, she will be fateful to myself.

Doctor Ralph has just left me; there is no change for the better.

I observed a strange difference in him. This morning, on his arrival, he gave me his hand as usual cordially; the austere expression of his face generally assumed a look of benevolence on meeting me. This evening I gave him my hand, he did not grasp it. His glance seemed to me severe, interrogative. After having briefly informed me of the state of Catherine's health, he coldly left the room.

Can Catherine have betrayed herself in the wanderings of fever?

This thought is dreadful. Happily, there is near her no one but Irene's nurse and Doctor Ralph.

But what matter! what matter! This nurse is only a servant, and this doctor is but a stranger! And is she, so proud, because heretofore she had a right to be so, condemned henceforth to blush before these people!

If she has spoken, she is not aware of it, perhaps may never know it, but they know it, they, perhaps, have her secret and mine.

If with a word one could annihilate two persons at once, I believe I would utter that word.

THE GROVE, 17th May, 18—.

What is to be done, what will become of us, if Catherine so rapidly gets worse? Doctor Ralph will no longer take the sole responsibility, he will call in

some consulting physicians, and then—

I cannot continue to write, my sobs stifle me.

This morning something very strange happened.

When the doctor announced to me that Catherine was worse, I came back here in the chalet; I wished to write down what I felt, for I cannot and will not confide to any one my joys and sorrows; so, when my heart overflows with grief or happiness, it is a great relief to me silently to confide to this journal.

When I heard of Catherine's renewed danger, my sufferings were so great that I wished to write, that is, to pour out my anguish.

This was impossible. I could only trace with a trembling hand the few lines at the head of this page, but was soon interrupted by my tears.

Then I went out into the park.

There, for the first time, I regretted—oh, bitterly regretted—that I possessed neither religious faith nor hope.

I might have prayed for Catherine.

There is certainly nothing more heartrending than to recognise the utter futility of addressing prayers to Heaven for a beloved being whom you fear to lose. In prayer you have some minutes of hope, you are fulfilling a duty, your sorrow at least has a language, which you believe is not quite barren.

But not to be able to say to any human or superhuman power, "Save her!" It is terrible.

I so painfully felt this helplessness, that in despair I fell on my knees, without having consciousness to

whom my prayer was addressed. But firmly convinced, in that momentary hallucination, that my voice would be heard, I cried aloud: "Save her! Save her!" Then, in spite of myself, I experienced a glimmer of hope, I felt the consciousness of a duty fulfilled.

Later I blushed for what I called my weakness, my puerility.

Since my mind could not grasp, could not believe, the assertions which constitute the various human religions, what God was I imploring?

What power had succeeded in tearing from me this prayer, this last cry, this the last utterance of despair?

The crisis which the doctor feared did not take place.

Catherine is no better, but she is not worse, and yet her delirium continues.

Doctor Ralph's coldness towards me is still excessive.

Since her mother's illness, Irene has given frequent proofs of tenderness and feeling, which, though childlike, are serious and resolute like her character.

This morning she said to me: "My mother suffers very much, does she not?"

"Very much, my poor Irene."

"When a child is suffering, her mother comes to suffer in her stead, so that the little one may not suffer any more, is it not so?" she inquired, gravely.

Astonished at this reasoning, I looked at her

attentively without replying. She continued:

"I wish to suffer in my mother's place, take me to the doctor."

This childish trait, which, under other circumstances, would have made me smile, gave me a heart pang, and I kissed Irene to conceal my tears.

THE GROVE, 17th May, 18—.

There is hope; the delirium ceases; an alarming prostration has followed. Doctor Ralph dreaded the heat of her fevered blood. Now he fears excessive languor, heart failure.

Her consciousness has returned. Her first utterance was her child's name.

The nurse told me that the doctor had not yet allowed Irene to go near her mother.

Twenty times have I been on the point of asking Madame Paul if Catherine had inquired after me, but I dared not.

THE GROVE, 18th May, 18—.

To-day, for the first time, Doctor Ralph permitted the nurse to take Irene to her mother.

I waited with anxious and irritable impatience for the moment when I would see Irene, hoping from her to have some particulars about her mother, perhaps a word, a remembrance, from Catherine.

Once returned to consciousness, I know not what course Madame de Fersen will take towards me.

During the paroxysm of remorseful despair which follows a first fault, a woman often hates the man to whom she has succumbed; she overwhelms him with reproaches as violent as her regrets, as vehement as her sorrow; it is on him alone the sole responsibility weighs for their guilt; she is not his accomplice, but his victim.

If her soul has remained pure, notwithstanding that for a moment she was involuntarily led astray, she takes the sincere resolution never again to see the man who has seduced her, and to have to weep over one sole betrayal, one sole defeat.

To this resolution she at first remains faithful.

She seeks, not to excuse, but to redeem her error, by the rigorous fulfilment of her duties; but the remembrance of her fault is there, ever there.

The more noble the heart, the more austere the conscience, so will the remorse be the more implacable. Then, alas! she suffers terribly, the poor creature, for she stands alone, and is compelled in secret to devour her tears, while to the world she still wears a smile.

Sometimes, again, she becomes frightened at her isolation, at that wordless concentration of her grief, and she resigns herself to ask for comfort and strength of the man who is the cause of her fall. She then implores him, for the sake of her remorse, to forget a moment of madness, and to be for her no more than the truest of friends, the confidant of the sorrows he has brought upon her. But, alas! almost always the unhappy woman has still more tears to shed.

Man, with the coarser instincts of his sex, does not realise the sublime struggle which woman endures

between love and duty. The incessant torture, the menacing terrors aroused in her by the remembrance of outraged religion and family honour, these dreadful tortures are treated by man as ridiculous whims, as childish scruples, or the absurd influence of the confessional.

If the struggle is prolonged, if the unhappy woman passes her life in efforts to conceal a sorrow caused by her dishonour, and valiantly resists the commission of a second fault, the man is irritated, and revolts against these pruderies which wound his self-love and his eager and brutal passion to the quick; for one last time he reviles her virtue, her sorrows, and her courage by saying to this miserable woman that her return to high principles is somewhat tardy. Frenzied by a base desire for revenge, he at once rushes with his cynical nature to make a notorious display of some other intrigue.

He has been loved, he is still beloved! A virtuous and beautiful woman has jeopardised, for his sake, her happiness, her future, and that of her children! while he basely recoils from the least sacrifice.

How comes it that this man is so worthless, and yet so worshipped? Because woman loves man more for the qualities she attributes to him, and with which her sensitive nature adorns him, than for those he really possesses.

If, on the contrary, by a rare exception, a man realises all that is saintly and beautiful in this remorse, if he endeavours to comfort the sorrow of which he is the origin, the woman's gentleness and resignation may prove for her another pitfall.

Catherine,—will she be pursued by incessant remorse?

Like those women who, from an insatiable yearning for sympathy, or, with the chastity of sorrow, conceal their woes, and make only a display of their joys, will Catherine leave me in ignorance of the anguish she suffers?

Knowing her as I do, I believe, after I have seen Irene, and gathered from her the substance of her conversation with her mother, I shall be able to divine Catherine's sentiments towards me.

Hence I look forward with eager impatience to the child's visit.

Heaven be praised! I see her running, holding in her hand a bouquet of roses.

My heart did not deceive me; Catherine sends it to me.

She forgives me my happiness.

[6]Arthur, according to his custom, introduces here some fragments from his journal, interrupted after leaving Khios, and doubtless, resumed on his arrival at the Grove. The preceding chapters are intended to fill the gap separating the two periods, during which time Arthur appears to have neglected to keep his memorandum.

CHAPTER XXV

A WOMAN IN POLITICS

Here come to an end the fragments of the journal I formerly wrote at the Grove.

During the four months which followed Catherine's confession of her love, and which we passed in this total isolation, my life was so engrossed by the delights of our ever growing love that I had neither time nor inclination to make a record of emotions so entrancing.

Catherine confessed to me that she had felt greatly attracted to me ever since our departure from Khios.

I asked her why she had treated me so harshly on one occasion, when she had requested me not to see her little girl any more. She answered that her despair at feeling herself at the mercy of the affection I inspired, added to her jealousy and grief when she saw me smitten by so giddy a woman as Madame de V——, had alone decided her to put an end to the mysterious intimacy of which Irene was the bond, however painful to her was this determination.

Later on, when she learned of the termination of my supposed intrigue with Madame de V——, and finding that absence, instead of diminishing, only increased the power I had gained over her, she endeavoured to renew our former relations. Moreover, Irene commenced to be seriously affected by my absence. "Love is so inexplicable in its contrasts and its sensitiveness," said Catherine to me, "that this very reason, added to your seeming

coldness and disdain, made me hesitate frankly to come to you, fearing that this step might have appeared to you simply dictated by my anxiety for my child's health.

"The condition of that poor child became so much worse that I resolved to conquer my timidity and tell you all at that ball at the Tuileries, but your greeting was so freezing, your departure so abrupt, that it became impossible for me. The next day I wrote to you; you did not answer. It was not, alas! until Irene's life was despaired of that I dared once more to write to you at Havre! God only knows with what admirable generosity you responded."

After the first bitterness of her remorse, Catherine's love for me became calm, dignified, almost serene.

One felt that, having exercised all her might to resist an unconquerable passion, this woman was prepared to endure with courageous resignation the consequences of her weakness.

The four months we spent at the Grove were for me, for her, the ideal of happiness.

But wherefore speak of happiness? This is now but Dead Sea ashes!

What matter, alas! Let me continue the sad task I have imposed upon myself.

When I was able to snatch some moments from the love which engrossed me, I wrote to M. de Sérigny to thank him for his good intentions towards me, which I had learned from the article in the official newspaper, and informed him that I would be absent

for some months yet, that I was unable to disclose to him my place of abode, but begged him, in case any one inquired of him for me, to answer in such a way as might lead people to infer that I was in a foreign country.

In the month of September Catherine heard that her husband would return towards the close of the year, and informed me that she intended returning to Paris.

Catherine's intention surprised and grieved me.

We had considerably discussed whether or not I should resume the duties I had taken upon me with M. de Sérigny.

Catherine had persistently urged me to do so.

I vainly represented to her that those hours devoted to uncongenial work would be stolen from our love, and that I should find very tedious an occupation which I had sought simply as a distraction to my grief. In vain I told her that all the correspondence with which I was entrusted treated of the most futile subjects, and in no way interested me.

To this she replied that at no distant period questions of the greatest importance would necessarily be discussed in high political spheres, and that I would then regret having abandoned that position. She felt so proud, so happy, of the distinction drawn upon me by the king's recognition of my merits, she said, she so gloried in my success, that I ended by promising to do as she wished.

It was therefore decided between us that I should resume my position with M. de Sérigny.

To avoid returning to Paris at the same time as

Madame de Fersen, and in order that people might suppose I had been travelling for some time, I left the Grove for London, and came back to Paris, where I found Catherine on my arrival, after fourteen days' sojourn in London.

M. de Sérigny had ably fulfilled my wishes, and in society it was generally supposed that an important foreign mission had been the cause of my absence from home.

The minister seemed quite pleased at having me once more sharing his labours; for the king, he told me, had frequently inquired as to the period of my return, expressing his regret that the briefing of despatches was no longer made by me.

To the eyes of the world, I did not at first visit Madame de Fersen more assiduously than before our sojourn at the Grove; but little by little my visits became more frequent without being so noticeably.

My character as an ambitious man, wholly absorbed by state affairs, and Madame de Fersen's high reputation were too firmly established in public opinion for society, so constant to its routine habits, not to accept this situation; and appearances very contrary to these ideas would have been needed to make it change its point of view towards us.

The impenetrable mystery surrounding our love redoubled it.

I frequently regretted our radiant days at the Grove,—days so calmly happy, so peaceful,—but on the other hand, in Paris, when I exchanged with Catherine a tender glance, unperceived by all, I felt that joyful pride which one always experiences when in possession of a secret at once formidable and enticing, from which depends the honour, the

existence, and the future of the woman beloved.

Some time before his departure, M. de Fersen had confided to me that his wife had become indifferent to political matters, which until then had engaged her attention to a great extent.

After returning to Paris I noticed, with astonishment, that Catherine by degrees resumed her former relations.

Her salon, where I visited assiduously, was, as formerly, the habitual meeting-place of the *corps diplomatique*. Before long, subjects which were spoken of daily became so serious that, with the exception of the ministers and some influential speakers of the two chambers, the elegant and frivolous French society disappeared almost entirely from the gatherings at Madame de Fersen's.

Although serious, these discussions had no true importance; either they rose so high as to become abstract and impracticable theories, or they descended to such paltry and positive interests that they became frivolous and narrow.

The discussions were as infinite and barren as ever on this well-worn theme: "Would the Restoration resist or yield to democratic influence?" etc.

Catherine always surprised me by the subtlety of her intellect and the liberal tendencies of her convictions. One of her great triumphs was in demonstrating the advantages which France would derive by preferring the Russian to the English alliance. When I complimented her on this subject, she laughingly told me that I was France, and that the sole secret of her eloquence was that.

I might as well have answered that she was my

diplomacy; for to please her I conquered my profound aversion to the European gossip of the diplomats who habitually met at her house, and I persevered with my work under M. de Sérigny. Perhaps, also, I remained in this position from a feeling of pride, which I would not acknowledge, and which, no doubt, the marked distinction with which the king honoured me had given rise to, as well as from the sort of importance which it gave me in the world. Thanks also to my duties, my assiduous presence at Madame de Fersen's might be attributed to purely political associations.

What charmed me in Catherine was, perhaps, less the influence which she possessed over those surrounding her, than the exquisite grace with which she renounced this highly esteemed influence with me. This woman, with a strong, lofty, even judicial mind, who was listened to with rare deference, whose least words were heard with respect, showed herself in our intimacy what she had been at the Grove,—kindly, simple, and gay, of an effusive tenderness, I might almost say of a submission full of grace and consideration, always placing her triumphs at my feet, and laughing with me at their conceit.

Then, for the sake of our love, I would implore her to abandon this life so uselessly employed.

On this subject alone, did I find Catherine ever intractable. She would set forth that M. de Fersen would return to Paris; that she had been guilty of a fault, a grave fault, and that she should at least atone for it by devoting herself to her husband's wishes. Before his departure he had bid her most expressly to maintain, and even to extend, the relations which she had established; and she was obeying his injunctions more to satisfy her conscience than for

her own pleasure.

As much as I, she regretted the former conversations of the saloon on board the frigate, and, above all, the four months spent at the Grove: this period of the heart's paradise, as she called it, those priceless days which shine but once, and never return in life,—no more than youth returns.

There is nothing more exclusive, more madly absolute than passion. While acknowledging the truth of Catherine's observations, I could not avoid feeling wretched at these obligations imposed upon her by remorse for a fault which I had caused her to commit.

Catherine, however, showed herself so tender, so considerate! With an incredible tact, she found means to speak to me covertly of ourselves, even in the midst of apparently serious conversations, and thus won me to bear in patience the obstacles to our love.

There is nothing, in fact, so delightful as this conventional talk, by means of which lovers can speak of themselves, their hopes, and their memories, in the midst of the gravest company. Nothing amused me more than to see the most solemn men innocently taking part in our ambiguous conversations.

But these people often made me pay cruelly for these mysterious joys. They robbed me almost entirely of Catherine's society of an evening, for they generally met at her house; and frequently of a morning a letter from one or the other, asking for an interview with Madame de Fersen, disarranged all our plans.

Catherine suffered from these obstacles as much as

I, but how could it be avoided? Under what pretext could she refuse the request for an interview? I, who had carried to the most scrupulous sensitiveness the fear of compromising in the slightest degree her reputation, could I encourage her in so perilous a step?

No, certainly not; but I suffered cruelly from the thousand obstacles ever recurring which continually irritated the jealous impatience of my heart.

Our happiness at the Grove had been so perfect! Enchanting season, lovely country, complete isolation, mysterious and extreme freedom, everything had been so beautifully arranged by chance that the comparison of that past with the present was a continuous source of irritation.

These regrets did not prevent my enjoying the delightful moments that remained to us. I had perfect faith in Madame de Fersen's love; my attacks of distrust of myself and others yielded to the influence of her noble character, and the conviction that I had this time conducted myself towards Catherine as few men would have conducted themselves in my place, and that I, therefore, was deserving of all her tenderness.

I felt so sure of myself that I ventured on certain analytical thoughts which I would formerly have dreaded. In a word, I had fruitlessly sought the hidden motives of Madame de Fersen's love; and I confess that, seeing her high rank, her great influence, her wealth and position, I could not, in spite of my inventive shrewdness and the resources of my suspicious mind, I could not, I say, discover what interest Catherine could have in pretending to love me.

CHAPTER XXVI

SOCIETY GOSSIP

We were at the beginning of November, a Friday, ominous day for me.

For some time, Madame de Fersen, informed of her husband's approaching return, desirous of dispelling suspicion, had thought best to be at home at all times, and accessible to every one. Still, she had pledged herself to give me a few hours to myself.

Our private meetings had become so rare, so difficult to arrange, on account of the crowd which beset her, that we both attached great value to this day of happiness. Catherine had been preparing for some time for this blissful meeting by postponing or putting an end to a thousand trifling engagements which are like invisible fetters in which a woman of society, however free she may appear, is daily entangled. The previous evening, at tea-time, Catherine had renewed her promise, in the presence of her wonted circle, by telling me, in accordance with the understanding between us, that she hoped it would be fine weather for her walk on the morrow.

I remember that Baron de ——, a walking encyclopedia, thereupon opened a learned meteorologic and astronomic parenthesis, and a lively discussion ensued upon planetary influences and atmospheric causes.

Several times Catherine and I could scarcely suppress a smile, as we thought of the mysterious and bewitching cause which served as a basis for the learned lucubrations of so many wise people. We had to exercise the greatest control over ourselves to refrain from laughing aloud at the excellent reasons the papal nuncio gave as a proof that the next day the weather would be splendid. I was so strongly of this opinion, that I wildly launched myself on his side, and between us we got the better of a devilish *chargé d'affaires* of the United States, who rabidly predicted, envious republican that he was, execrable weather.

I therefore left Catherine in a state of hopeful excitement, and as impatient as in the first days of our love.

It seemed to me that my love was greater this day than other days. I had a thousand golden dreams regarding this meeting, and my heart overflowed with love and hope.

That evening Catherine had seemed to me even more beautiful and witty. She had been more admired and more deferred to than usual; and, to our shame be it said, the praise or censure of the indifferent or envious invariably cause love to fluctuate between fervour and coldness.

The next morning I was on the point of leaving home, when I received a line from her. Our meeting could not take place. She had learned that a discussion of the highest importance, which had been supposed adjourned, was to take place that very day in the Chamber of Deputies, and that she was to go there with M. P. de B——, the Russian ambassador.

My regrets, my vexation, my anger and sorrow, were excessive.

The hour for the opening of the debate had not arrived, so I went at once to Madame de Fersen's.

The footman, instead of announcing me, told me that the princess had denied herself to every one, as she was then in conference with the Prussian minister.

If all the ancestors of the Marquis de Brandebourg had been in the drawing-room I would have entered. I therefore ordered the footman to announce me.

As a culmination to my despair, Catherine had never been more lovely, and my vexation, my ill temper, increased still more.

She seemed amazed at my entrance, and the aged Comte de W—— was visibly annoyed, which, however, was quite immaterial to me.

He took his departure, saying to the princess that they would resume their conversation later.

"How miserable I am at this disappointment!" said Catherine, sadly, "but it is nearly one o'clock; the meeting begins at two, and our ambassador—"

"Eh, madame!" I exclaimed, interrupting her, and violently stamping my foot, "say no more about Chambers and ambassadors; it is a question of choosing between my love and the interests of countries to which you devote yourself. The connection is ridiculous, I admit, but your unreasonable ways provoke it."

Madame de Fersen gazed at me in profound and pained astonishment, for I had never accustomed her to such acrimonious methods.

I continued:

"I am moreover delighted to find this opportunity of telling you, once for all, that your parleys and continual verbiage with these tiresome and self-sufficient persons are very displeasing to me, and make me impatient beyond all expression. I never find you alone. You are for ever surrounded by these people, who find it very convenient to make your parlours an annex to their legations. I would infinitely prefer that you should be surrounded by a bevy of the most elegant and the wittiest young men, and that you showed yourself towards them as great a coquette as Madame de V——! At least I could be jealous of somebody, I could vie with some rival in attentions and tenderness for you. But here, against whom can I struggle? Whom shall I call to account? —the various nations? I declare to you that I find nothing more humiliating, more abject, than being reduced to feel jealous of Europe, or to contest for the heart of the woman I love with orators in the Chambers, as I am doing this day."

"My dearest, are you speaking seriously?" said Madame de Fersen, with a timid, shrinking, and yet bantering uncertainty, which would have enraptured me if Catherine had been less desperately beautiful, and if certain vexations did not drive you senseless as well as wicked. Madame de Fersen's question, moreover, exasperated me, for it showed me that my exhibition of anger approached the comic.

"Loving hearts and generous minds divine the impressions, and do not question. If you are reduced to asking me what I feel, I pity you. As for me, I am more clear-sighted, and understand but too well that you no longer love me."

"I not love you!" exclaimed Madame de Fersen,

clasping her hands in distressed amazement; then she repeated: "I not love you! You say that—to me?"

"If you loved me, you would for my sake sacrifice all this following which I detest, because it hampers me, because it is useless, because it warps your mind. If you loved me, you would sacrifice the gratification of your vanity to my happiness."

"The gratification of my vanity! It is then from vanity that I preserve, that I cultivate these relations! *Mon Dieu!* Must I then repeat to you, Arthur, what I never say without sorrow and shame? I have been guilty, let me, at least, do all I can not to aggravate my error."

"Now you are beginning with your remorse," said I, harshly; "a rupture is not far distant, but, let me tell you, you might be anticipated."

"Ah, what are you saying? It is dreadful,—have I deserved it?" cried Catherine, her eyes filling with tears.

"His Excellency the Russian ambassador," announced the footman.

Madame de Fersen had barely time to disappear behind the portière which concealed the door between the parlour and her bedchamber.

"I am, like you, waiting for Madame de Fersen," I said to M. P. de B——, "she is doubtless finishing her toilet. You are going to the Chambers, I believe?"

"Yes; it will be a most brilliant and interesting sitting; they say that Benjamin Constant, Foy, and Casimir Perier are going to speak, and that M. de Villèle will answer."

Catherine entered, calm and composed, as if

nothing had passed between us.

Her control over herself angered me.

After a few unmeaning words M. P. de B—— remarked that it was getting late, and it was best to start at once in order to find places in the diplomatic gallery. He offered his arm to Madame de Fersen, who suggested that I should go with them, accompanying the proposal with an imploring glance to which I was insensible.

I left Madame de Fersen in a state of irritation, dissatisfied with her and with myself.

My carriage drove me to the Tuileries, where I got down for a walk.

By chance I met Pommerive.

I had not seen him since I left Paris in the spring.

I felt so sad, so gloomy, that I was not sorry to find some distraction for my thoughts.

"Where do you come from, M. de Pommerive?" I inquired.

"Don't speak of it! I have been for three months in Franche-Comté, at St. Prix, with the D'Aranceys. Don't speak of it, it is disgusting!"

"They are certainly rich enough to give you some of those excellent dinners you are so fond of, and for which you show yourself so grateful, M. de Pommerive."

"The only way to show one's gratitude for a good dinner is to eat it with pleasure," said the cynic. "I don't complain of the table at D'Arancey's, they have first-rate fare. The father of D'Arancey has stolen enough by his contracts and otherwise; he has brought about enough fraudulent bankruptcies to

enable his son to display all that luxury. By the bye, do you know that he has as much right to call himself D'Arancey, as I have to call myself Jeroboam! His name is simply something like Polimard; now, this common, low name is not pleasing to this fine gentleman, so, by means of a slight change, skilfully substituting D'Aran for Poli, and cey for mard, he has changed the distinguished name of Polimard into D'Arancey. He likes that better. You may tell me that this bankrupt's son had no reason to cling to his name, since he had none at all, for he had never been acknowledged by old Polimard, who died the victim of an epizooty, which made havoc in his district. This, however, is not a reason for him to take the name of the D'Aranceys, and what is worse, their arms, which that vulgar and impudent little creature, forsooth, calls her arms, and which she displays, I believe, even on her scullery maids' kitchen aprons. This is certainly very nice for the escutcheon of the D'Aranceys, whose name unfortunately is extinct; without that, the Polimards, male and female, should be whipped and branded, as ought to have been done to old Polimard, the first of the name."

This time I did not have the courage to censure Pommerive; these people were, in fact, such low-bred parvenus, their effrontery was so plebeian, their back-stairs insolence so ridiculous, that I freely and willingly relinquished them to his tender mercies. "But what has made you so indignant with your excellent friends, M. de Pommerive?"

"Everything; because everything is first-class, and that their presence spoils all. Surrounded by this household of common folks, it seemed to me all the time that I was being entertained by the steward and

housekeeper of some absent lord, who were having fine sport in the absence of their master. But that is not all. Would you believe it? This Polimard-d'Arancey gets a fancy to set up a hunting retinue, and he has dared, actually dared, to engage as his first huntsman the famous La Brisée, who had just left the kennels of his Highness the Duke of Bourbon. Of course you will understand that I made La Brisée feel so ashamed at being chief huntsman to a M. Polimard, that I made him desert, giving him, however, a recommendation to the Marquis D. H ——, where, at least, he will have an honourable position and be appreciated."

"I see, M. de Pommerive, that you are not much changed; you are as ever the most amiable of men."

"But you,—what are you doing? Still a statesman! A diplomat? Ah, by the bye, talking of diplomats, do you still go to that idiot of a Russian prince, that bad substitute for Potier and Brunet? I never set my foot now inside his door, or rather inside his wife's door, for happily for us he has taken himself away."

"And for what reason is the Princesse de Fersen deprived of the honour of seeing you, M. de Pommerive?"

"Why? Because I generally do like every one else; and, excepting diplomats and a few strangers, nobody in society sets a foot inside the princess's door."

"And why is this?" I inquired, almost mechanically, of M. de Pommerive.

"Forsooth! It is no secret, everybody knows it. The beautiful Muscovite is just simply a spy in high life."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAST EVENING

One more effort, and this cruel task will be at an end.

In vain I call upon my memory; I cannot remember what I said to Pommerive, and believe I made no reply.

I only remember that I felt neither indignant nor angry, as I would have been had this man uttered a calumny or an insult; on the contrary, I was utterly overwhelmed in the presence of this terrible accusation! It suddenly illumined the past with a sinister light, it abruptly aroused those implacable suspicions, of which I at once felt the sharp sting.

My grief was such that my brain was frenzied.

Mechanically I returned home, finding my way by instinct.

By degrees, I regained the thread of my ideas.

I had already suffered so much from similar causes that I endeavoured to struggle with all my might against this new suspicion.

I hoped to sift truth from falsehood, by submitting the past to the horrible interpretation given to Madame de Fersen's life.

Armed with this infamous accusation, cold and calm, like a man about to stake his life and honour on a chance, I set myself to this work of hateful

analysis.

This time, also, I cleared my thoughts, by writing them down, and I find these notes. They contrast cruelly with the preceding radiant pages, with those days of sunlight written formerly at the Grove.

PARIS, 13th December, 18—.

Let us examine the facts.

Madame de Fersen is accused of being a spy.

What credit does her conduct give to these infamous suspicions?

I meet Catherine at Khios. After several days of intercourse, I attempt a declaration, which she severely repulses; then I surround her with the most respectful attentions, I give her counsels the most delicate and disinterested. If I do not utter the word love, everything in my tender and eager attentions reveals this sentiment.

She remains cold, and offers me her friendship.

I again meet Catherine in Paris. In spite of my blind submission to Irene's painful whims, in spite of the numberless proofs of the deepest and most noble passion, one day, without cause, without hesitation, under the most frivolous pretext, Catherine cruelly breaks with me.

Later, it is true, she tells me that jealousy alone was responsible for her conduct.

She said that; but I remember the harshness of her accent, her steely glance, which struck me to the heart.

She was doubtless feigning; she can, therefore, dissimulate; she is false. I did not believe it.

The mysterious affection of which Irene was the bond is now broken. Catherine loves me no more! She shows herself even ungrateful, as a friend. I see her no more.

In despair, I seek distraction in work. I accept a position of apparent importance with the minister; public opinion attributes to me an exaggerated share in state affairs. From this time, Madame de Fersen, until now so inflexible towards me, by degrees becomes less cold when she meets me in society; her looks, the tone of her voice, do not harmonise with the conventional trifling of her conversation; and, at last, at a ball at the château, she comes resolutely towards me, with the view of renewing our interrupted relations. I meet coldly these advances, and the next morning she writes to me.

This she has confessed to me. This sudden change in her affections she attributes to her joy at my breaking with Madame de V—— and to the alarming condition in which her child had once more fallen.

I wish to believe her, for it would be odious to think that the abrupt change from disdain to tenderness should have been brought about by the hope of securing to herself a tool in the very heart of the French cabinet.

I leave for Havre. Irene is at death's door; her mother recalls me. I hasten, I save her.

During a whole month that I am by the child's bedside, does Catherine utter one word of gratitude, one word of tenderness?

No.

We go to the Grove; she shows the same calm, cold feeling towards me.

But one day an official publication announces that I am to be called to a high post, where state secrets culminate.

The evening of that very day, this woman, until then so austere, so reserved, so chaste, throws herself suddenly into my arms.

It is true, she says she was drawn by her grateful admiration for a sacrifice unknown to her until then.

If she is to be believed, what is her heart made of?

I have saved her child's life, and Catherine remains insensible.

I sustain a financial loss, and Catherine forgets all for my sake.

And yet I prefer to believe Catherine more sensitive to material sacrifices, and almost indifferent to the soul's devotion, than to believe she unblushingly gave herself to the future confidant of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Those four months passed at the Grove were radiant, oh, very radiant for me, whose happiness was pure, and not tinged with shame.

Only, at this moment, circumstances strike me which I had not previously observed.

At the Grove, Catherine plied me with questions as to my labours with M. de Sérigny; she interrogated me minutely as to the impressions or memories which I retained. When I confessed frankly their insignificance, and chose rather to speak of our love, she was annoyed and pouted, she reproached me with being either too discreet or too frivolous.

When I wished to abandon the ungrateful career which I had adopted in idleness, Catherine employed all the resources of her mind, all her influence, all her power over me to deter me from resigning my position.

It is true that these questions and this persuasion were alike used in the name of the profound interest which she felt for me.

I believe it, for it would be outrageous to suppose that her reluctance to see me abandon my career was prompted by her reluctance to forfeit the price of her long premeditated error.

Since her return to Paris, what has her life been? Did she sacrifice at my request her accustomed social relations? On the contrary, she increased them, and her drawing-room has become a centre of diplomatic intrigue.

Our long days of tender affection have given place to occupations which are not those of a woman dominated by love.

If I sadly reproach her for this unhappy change, her answer is that she must obey her husband's expressed wishes,—wishes that are all the more sacred to her since she has been guilty of so censurable an error.

I believe her in this case, without hesitation. I believe her very anxious to please the prince.

But I also have some rights.

I saved her child's life.

And what did she give me in return?

Herself, yes, she gave me herself.

This sacrifice of her honour, of her duties, has been

either terrible and intoxicating, or it has only been an infamous, an odious calculation!

If this proof of love has been for her what it ever is for a virtuous, passionate woman, a most agonising sacrifice, why did she then refuse to abandon interests that were of the utmost insignificance in comparison with the irreparable fault she had committed?

Are these interests dearer to her than her love? Is her love only secondary to them?

It is, then, only a means, a pretext?

So be it; I have been the puppet of an intriguing woman, but she is very beautiful, and I am only half her dupe.

Such was the abominable theme I developed with the diabolical power of paradoxes.

I was so incensed that I firmly believed I had wrestled against these frightful suspicions; and I became convinced of these horrors with the same bitter satisfaction of the man who discovers the vile snare into which he has fallen.

As an executioner I struck pitilessly, as a victim I moaned bitterly.

The remembrance of Hélène, of Marguerite, of Falmouth,—nothing could bring me to my senses.

From the confirmation of so much infamy to the hate and scorn it inspired, there was but one step for my fierce monomania.

From this point of view, all that was noble and generous in my conduct seemed to me shamefully ridiculous.

I was oppressed by these reflections when this letter from Catherine was handed to me:

"A sad, unhappy petitioner asks you to be kind and indulgent towards her; she wants you to pardon all that she has suffered to-day; she hopes to be alone this evening, and will expect you. Come; she is, moreover, resolved that Europe shall no longer be your rival."

In my state of mind, this letter so tenderly imploring, this simple allusion to my reproaches, seemed to me so humbly offensive, so coldly insulting, that I was on the point of writing to Madame de Fersen that I would never again see her.

But I changed my mind.

I wrote to her that I would call on her that evening.

I waited for the hour with frightful anxiety.

I had laid my plan.

At ten o'clock I went to Madame de Fersen's, expecting to find her alone.

A thousand confused thoughts were rushing through my mind. Anger, hate, love, a remorseful anticipation of the wrong I was about to commit, a vague instinct of the injustice of my suspicions, all combined to put me in a feverish exasperated condition, the consequences of which I could not foresee.

Contrary to my expectations, Catherine had several persons with her.

This new proof of what I called her falsehood incensed me; for a moment I was on the point of turning back and abandoning my purpose, but an irresistible force drove me, and I entered.

The sight of people, and the control which I had always possessed over myself, at once changed my violent anger into a polished, cold, and biting irony.

This scene is still present to me. Catherine, seated near the fireplace, was chatting with a friend.

My first look was doubtless very terrible, for Madame de Fersen, bewildered, suddenly turned pale.

The conversation continued; I shared in it with the greatest calmness, even asserting my superiority, for I was gay, almost brilliant.

For those who were unacquainted with the circumstances, there was nothing extraordinary; it was a pleasant evening of friendly conversation, like a thousand other evenings; but between Catherine and me, a mute, mysterious, tragic scene was being enacted.

Our way of understanding each other by half words, of seeking and divining the value of an inflection of the voice, of a gesture, or a smile, enabled me now to make Catherine undergo the reaction of my odious thoughts.

At my entrance, Catherine was amazed.

She endeavoured, however, to recover herself, and, to show me that she had received people against her will, she graciously thanked M. de —— for having forced an entrance to acquaint her with the result of the vote which had been taken at a very late hour. "Without that," continued Catherine, "I would have

been deprived of the pleasure of seeing several of my friends, who took advantage of the breach you made to invade my solitude."

An imploring glance at me accompanied these words. While continuing my conversation with M. de ——, my neighbour, I replied by so scornful a smile that Catherine all but betrayed herself.

What shall I say? All these attempts which she indirectly made to calm me, or to grasp at the cause of so deep a resentment, were thus cruelly repulsed.

She knew too well the various expressions of my countenance, her heart was too much in unison with mine, she was of too sensitive a nature, not to divine that it was not a question of a lover's quarrel, but that a great danger menaced her love.

She had a presentiment of this danger; in despair she sought its cause, and was obliged to smile, and to follow an indifferent conversation.

This torture lasted one hour.

By degrees, her strength and self-control abandoned her; two or three times her absent-mindedness had been noticed; and, at last, there was such a change in her features that M. de —— inquired if she were not well.

This question confused her; she answered she was well, and rang the bell for tea.

It was eleven o'clock.

She took advantage of the momentary disturbance caused by the preparations for tea to come near me, saying:

"Will you come and see a picture which is offered me for sale? It is there in the small parlour."

"I am not much of a connoisseur," I replied, "but if I cannot venture on advising you, madame, I promise to give you truthfully my impressions."

I followed her into the next room.

At the risk of being seen, she took my hand, and in a voice almost extinct she said: "Arthur, have pity on me! What I am suffering is beyond my strength, beyond my courage!"

At this moment, M. de —— also entered the parlour to see the picture.

Madame de Fersen had so completely lost her head, that I had abruptly to withdraw my hand from hers.

I believe M. de —— noticed the movement, for he appeared confused.

"This picture is very good," I said to Catherine, "the expression is charming. Art has never more closely approached to nature."

Madame de Fersen was so weak that she leaned upon an easy chair.

M. de —— admired the picture complacently. The servant announced to the princess that tea was ready.

We returned to the drawing-room. Catherine could scarcely stand.

According to her custom, she stood near the table pouring out the tea; she offered me a cup, and was gazing at me almost wildly, when the cracking of a whip and the jingling of bells were heard in the courtyard.

Struck by a terrible presentiment, Catherine allowed the cup to slip from her fingers just as I was

about to take hold of it, and cried, in a strangled voice: "What is that?"

"A thousand pardons for my awkwardness, madame, and for the noise those wretches are making. As I take my departure to-night, I have taken the liberty to order my travelling carriage to come for me here, not wishing to lose one moment of the precious time I might enjoy your society."

Catherine could not resist this last shock; she forgot herself completely, and, in a smothered voice, resting her trembling hands upon my arm, she cried: "It is impossible, you are not leaving, you shall not leave! I will not allow you to leave!"

At the movement of general consternation, at the confused, embarrassed expression of the spectators of this scene, I could see that Madame de Fersen's reputation, hitherto unassailed, was now for ever lost.

I remained inflexible.

Gently disengaging my arm from her hands, I said:

"I feel so happy and proud, madame, at the regret my departure seems to give you, that I would already be thinking of my return, were it not unfortunately impossible to predict it." Then in saluting her I added: "Here, madame, are the particulars you asked of me."

And I handed her a duplicate of the commentary I had written on her love.

Catherine no longer heard me; she had fallen prostrated into an armchair, mechanically holding in her hands the notes I had left her.

I took my departure.

The next evening I was here,—at Serval.

Three months ago I heard that Irene was dead,—dead, doubtless, of grief at seeing me no more.

Madame de Fersen has returned to Russia with her husband.

To put the crowning stroke to my remorse and despair, I also learned that the Prince de Fersen had been on the point of obtaining the post of Russian ambassador to France, but that suddenly he had withdrawn.

This explained Catherine's persistence in her diplomatic relations.

She wanted to assist her husband in obtaining an important post, in order that they might remain in France, and be with me.

Since the day following that terrible evening I reside at Serval, this old and gloomy ancestral château.

When I heard of Irene's death, I became almost insane.

I loathe myself as her murderer.

My life here is isolated and desolate.

For the last six months I have seen no one, not a soul.

Each day I meditate for hours before my father's portrait.

I had charged myself with the task of writing this journal.

My task is now accomplished.

I have been the cause of suffering to some innocent creatures, but I, also, have suffered much. Ah, *mon Dieu!* am I not still suffering?

What is my future?

Before me life is dark and gloomy; I am pursued by remorse for the past.

What is my fate?

Am I to perish by suicide? Am I to die the violent death Irene predicted for me?

What thoughts!

And this very day I am twenty-eight.

MARIE BELMONT

CHAPTER XXVIII

MARIE BELMONT

SERVAL, January 20, 18—.

Who would have said six months ago that I would ever take up this journal again, or, rather, that I would ever recover from the apathy of heart and mind into which I had been thrown by my rupture

with Madame de Fersen, by the death of Irene?

Such, though, is the case.

And yet my despair was frightful!

To-day, though the remembrance of that time gives me sore pain, a distant hope, new sensations mitigate that soreness.

I smile, sadly when I read in my journal, which I have just been looking over, these words repeated so often:

"Never was there greater sorrow—"

"Never was there more happiness—"

"Never can I forget—"

And now new joys have obliterated those sorrows; new troubles have faded those joys. Thus day after day, forgetfulness, that dark, cold tide, creeps up higher, higher, and swallows up in the black abyss of the past the souvenirs that time has discoloured.

My mother! my father! Hélène! Marguerite! Catherine! you to whom I owe so much sorrow and so much felicity! Space or the tomb now separates you all from me; and I scarcely think of you at all!

Perhaps, alas! it will be even so with the feelings and impressions that fill my mind at the present time.

In spite of which I cannot help believing that they will last for ever.

Ah, my father! my father! you told me a very dreadful, a very dangerous truth, when you affirmed that forgetfulness was the only reality of our lives.

Thus, then, will I open this journal that I believed was closed for ever.

I believed, too, that my heart was closed to all tender and happy impressions.

But since I can still suffer, I will continue to write:

Three months ago on a cloudy autumn morning I went out early. A cold, thick fog was falling. I followed the edge of the forest, and was walking dreamily along, while behind me came an old black pony, the venerable Black that my cousin Hélène used to ride so often in the old days.

As I went along thus, with my head bowed towards the ground, I saw the newly made tracks of a great wild boar.

Having lately been seeking to divert myself by violent exercise, I had brought thirty fox-hounds over from London, and begun to hunt in fairly good style, to the great delight of old Lefort, one of my father's "whippers-in," whom I had retained as head keeper.

In following, out of curiosity, the trace of the boar, whose presence in the forest had been unknown up to this time, I left the edge of the woods and plunged deep into the undergrowth. After walking about three leagues I arrived at a little farm, called the *ferme des Prés*, which was situated on the confines of immense fields. Here I lost trace of the wild boar.

This farm had recently been leased to a widow, named Madame Kerouët. My superintendent had spoken to me of the great activity of this woman, who came from the neighbourhood of Nantes, the death of her husband having caused her to quit the place that she helped him to farm in Brittany. I thought I would profit by the chance that had led me

to the farm to make the acquaintance of my new tenant.

La ferme des Prés was in a very picturesque situation. Its principal building, surrounded by a vast courtyard, backed up on the edge of the forest. This habitation, which had formerly been a hunting lodge, was built in the form of a little castle, flanked by two towers. An arched doorway, surmounted by a coat-of-arms, led in to the ground floor. Time had given a gray colouring to these old walls, which were built with antique solidity. The tiles of the roof were all covered with moss, and clouds of pigeons swarmed around the pointed cone of one of the towers which had been changed into a pigeon-house.

Contrary to the custom of most of our farmers, the courtyard of the farm, instead of being littered with rubbish, was extremely clean and well kept. The ploughs, the harrows, the drills, were all newly painted of a fine olive-green colour, and were symmetrically arranged under a vast shed, along with the harness of the workhorses and yokes of the oxen.

A thick trellis divided the courtyard in its entire length, and separated it into two parts, one of which was given up to fowls of every kind, while the other was well sprinkled sand the colour of yellow ochre, and led up to the arched door of the little manor-house, on each side of which were great clumps of hollyhocks and sunflowers.

I was examining with satisfaction the exterior of the farmhouse, when I heard with the greatest surprise the harmonious warbling of a sweet, clear voice.

These sounds seemed to come from a little

window. It was high and narrow, and was placed near the middle of one of the towers, where it was curtained by the thick vines of the morning-glory and nasturtiums.

After preluding thus, the voice was silent for awhile, but soon broke out again, singing the romance of the willow from Rossini's "Othello."

The voice was of remarkable quality, and showed high cultivation. It was very expressive, and full of sweetness and sadness.

I was greatly astonished. The song had ceased and I was still listening, when I saw a woman of fifty or thereabouts appear on the sill of the little arched doorway. She wore a black dress and a cap which was as white as the snow.

When she noticed me, she gave me a look of uneasy interrogation.

She was of medium height, sturdy, brown-eyed, and sunburnt. Her face had a remarkable expression of frankness and good temper.

"What can I do to serve you, monsieur?" she asked, with a half courtesy, which was no doubt due to my poor old pony, and my costume of gentleman-farmer, as the English say.

"It is beginning to rain, madame. Will you permit me to wait here awhile under shelter, and tell me if I am very far from the village of Blémur?"

This question was nothing but a pretext to gain time, and try to discover the Desdemona.

"The village of Blémur, blessed Virgin! but you will never get there before the black night, monsieur, though you have got a famous little horse there," said

the *fermière*, as she examined Black with the eye of a connoisseur.

"Must I follow the highroad of the forest to go to Blémur?"

"Straight ahead, monsieur; one way you go to Blémur, and the other way to the château de Serval, and it is three good leagues, they say so at least, for I haven't been very long in this part of the country."

"Then you will allow me, madame, to wait here under the shed until the shower is over?"

"I can do better than that, monsieur; you will be much better off here in the house, come in if you please."

"I will be very glad to accept your offer, madame, though seeing such a beautifully kept shed, I could easily fancy myself in a salon."

This compliment pleased Madame Kerouët immensely, for she said, in an important way:

"Ah, *dame!* that is the way we always keep our farms in our Brittany."

All the while I was talking with the *fermière* I had not taken my eyes off the little window in the tower; several times I fancied I saw a white hand cautiously push aside some branches of the verdure which covered the window.

Madame Kerouët preceded me into the farmhouse. I tied up Black, and followed the good woman into her home.

To the left of the entrance door was a kitchen ornamented with all its accessories of copper and tin, which two strong peasant girls were busily scouring and which shone like gold and silver.

On the right we entered a great chamber, where there were two beds with twisted columns hung with curtains of green serge which were embroidered in red. These two beds were separated by a high chimneypiece where a good fire of pine cones was flaming. On the mantelpiece the only ornaments were an old looking-glass with its frame of red lacquer, and two wax statuettes under glass shades, —a St. John with his lamb, and a St. Genevieve with her fawn.

Between the two windows with their little diamond panes there hung on the wall an antique clock called a cuckoo; it was of gray wood painted with pink and blue flowers, and its two weights hung down on two cords of unequal length.

There was a spinning-wheel, a great armchair covered with tapestry, which was sacred to the mistress, a chair for Desdemona, two stools for the servant-maids, and a dresser loaded with faience. These articles, with a round, well-waxed walnut table, completed the furniture of the room, which served as a parlour, dining-room, and bedroom.

From the diamond window-panes to the floor everything shone with cleanliness. From the brown beams which crossed the ceiling were hanging long garlands of grapes dried for use in winter, and the whitewashed walls were ornamented with a set of coloured engravings framed in black wood, which illustrated the story of the Prodigal Son.

The mistress received my compliments on the neatness of her house with evident pride. While I was speaking the door opened, and the young woman who sang so well came in. When she saw me, she blushed, and started out again.

"Stay with us, Marie," Madame Kerouët said to her, affectionately.

I could not look on the enchanting beauty of that face without thinking of the Holy Virgins of Raphaël.

My admiration was so marked, my astonishment so great, on finding such beauty hidden in a farmhouse, —and I took no pains to conceal my feelings,—that Marie was quite taken back.

"This is my niece, monsieur," said the *fermière*, who neither noticed my surprise nor Desdemona's trouble. "She is the daughter of my poor brother, lieutenant in the Old Guard, who was killed at Waterloo. Thanks to the protection of Monseigneur the Bishop of Nantes, we were permitted to send Marie to St. Denis, where she was educated like a demoiselle. She remained there until her marriage, which took place at Nantes about a year ago." Madame Kerouët said this with a sigh. Then she continued: "But sit down, monsieur; and thou, Marie, go get a bottle of wine and a bit of warm *galette*."

"A thousand thanks, madame," said I, "I would rather not take anything. As soon as the rain is over I will continue on my journey."

To keep herself in countenance, Marie sat down to her aunt's spinning-wheel.

"Perhaps you are on your way to the château de Serval?"

"Non, madame; I told you I was going to Blémur."

"Ah, yes, to be sure, to Blémur; pardon, monsieur, —so much the better for you."

"How is that, madame? Is the master of Serval inhospitable?"

"I don't know anything about that, monsieur; but they do say that he has no more wish to see human faces than human faces have to see him," replied Madame Kerouët.

"And why is that? Does he wish to live alone?"

"Hum, hum!" said the *fermière*, shaking her head, "I have only just come to these parts, and don't know the truth of the ugly stories they tell about him; besides, monsieur, the count is our master, and a very good master, they say; so I won't speak of what is none of my business. But, Marie, you are tangling all my flax again," she called out to the young woman. "Never wilt thou know how to use a distaff; hand it to me."

"And you, madame," I said to Marie, "have you any more certain information than madame your aunt as to the redoubtable inhabitant of Serval?"

"No, monsieur, I have only heard them say that M. the count lived a very retired life; and as I love solitude myself, I can understand that others care for it as well."

"You have so many means of charming your retreat, madame, that I can readily believe it must be attractive; in the first place, you are an excellent musician. I can say so, because I have just been fortunate enough to hear you sing."

"And she can draw and paint, too," added Madame Kerouët, admiringly.

"Then, madame," said I to Marie, "I must beg you, in the name of the cherished occupation which we share in common, to ask your aunt to grant me the permission of making some sketches of this farm whose situation I find so charming."

"You have no need of asking Marie's aid for that," said Madame Kerouët; "you can make as many sketches as you wish, it can do nobody any harm." I thanked the *fermière*; and, not wishing to make too long a first visit, I mounted my pony and started off.

Through caprice, I desired to keep up my *incognito*, which would be easy enough for awhile at least, for the Field Farm was quite a distance from Serval, and the tenants and farm hands from the one place hardly ever came over to the other.

The day after my first interview with Marie I furnished myself with the complete outfit of an artist; for since my return to Serval, I, too, had sought distraction in painting, and, mounted on good old Black, I started for the Field Farm.

Thanks to my frequent visits, a certain amount of friendliness was established between Marie, her aunt, and myself.

As I never saw any M. Belmont, I supposed him to be on a journey, and asked no questions about him. I drew the farm from every point of view, and I gave two or three of the sketches to Madame Kerouët, who was enchanted with them. Very often Marie came out and sketched with me. She had a great deal of talent.

Contrary to the habit of most young girls, Marie had profited by the excellent education that is afforded in such establishments as St. Denis. Fond of learning, she had neglected none of her studies, none of the useful or agreeable arts that were taught in that institution; so that, being naturally gifted, she had cultivated her talents to the utmost. To a solid, extended, and varied instruction, she added a real vocation for art. But Marie was quite unconscious of

the rarity of such an assemblage of delightful talents. She never showed the least vanity in her superiority, but would often, with a schoolgirl's satisfaction, tell me of her former successes in history, painting, or music, as I had heard other women tell of their triumphs in coquetry.

Marie was only eighteen, and had the happy and fanciful imagination of a child. When she was in a confidential mood, I found her to be simple, sweet-tempered, and gay. She possessed that innocent gaiety which is the outcome of a serene soul and a life of intelligent and noble occupation. The more I studied her guileless nature, the more attached to her I became.

I did not feel for Marie a violent and wild passion, but when she was near me I was so perfectly and entirely happy that I had no desire for anything further, nor any regret for the turmoil of a passionate love. Strangely, though Marie was so angelically beautiful, though her form was charming, I was more interested in her wit, her candour, and the thousand aspirations of her young soul, than in her physical perfections. I had never made her the least compliment on her beauty, but I had never made any secret of the interest I felt in her talents and her exquisite natural gifts.

Although she was a married woman, she possessed such a mysterious and virginal charm that my behaviour towards her was respectful and even singularly timid.

Madame Kerouët, Marie's aunt, was a woman of rare good sense. She was high-minded and kind-hearted. Her piety, which was sweet and fervent, inspired her to do the most charitable actions. No poor person ever left the farm without having

received, besides a trifling sum of money, some of those words of encouragement more precious than alms.

Little by little I discovered in this good woman a very treasure-house of kindness and practical virtue. Her conversations were always interesting to me, for she could tell me many curious facts concerning agriculture. Sometimes her perfect faith gave an elevation to her thoughts that surprised me, and I would say to myself, "What is the secret of a religion that can so illuminate a simple mind?"

I had been visiting the farm assiduously for two months when one day Madame Kerouët said to me:

"It must astonish you to see Marie thus living the life of a widow. As you are our friend I am going to tell you the whole sad story. Figure to yourself, monsieur, that my husband and I had the lease of a farm at Thouars near Nantes. The farm belonged to M. Duvallon, a rich ship-owner of the town, who owed the beginning of his fortune to having sailed as a pirate during the war with England.

"Though he was surly, M. Duvallon was kind; he was very fond of my husband. One day Kerouët told him about our niece, who was soon to come home from St. Denis. With her fine education, that dear child could not marry a peasant, and we were not rich enough to marry her to a monsieur. Seeing our state of embarrassment, M. Duvallon said to Kerouët: 'If your niece is reasonable I will take it upon myself to settle her in life.'

"'With whom?' asked my husband.

"'With one of my old comrades, a sea captain who wishes to give up the sea and live as a good bourgeois. He has just come here. He is rich. He is

not a dandy, but he is as good as gold and as true as steel, and I am sure he will make your niece perfectly happy.'

"Kerouët came home and told me all this. It was a rare piece of good luck for us and, above all, for Marie, the poor orphan.

"This was in the month of October last year. Marie being now eighteen years old could no longer remain at St. Denis. So we sent for her to come to the farm, and arranged for a day on which M. Duvallon should bring his friend, M. Belmont, to see our niece before coming to any conclusion, you understand.

"That day, it was a Sunday, our farm was as clean as a pin. Kerouët, Marie, and I were all decked out in our best, when M. Duvallon arrives in a cabriolet with his friend. What could we do, monsieur? Without doubt his friend was not what you call a *joli garçon*, but he had the cross of honour, the look of a brave man, and he seemed very well preserved for his age, which might be from forty-five to fifty.

"This monsieur was very amiable to us. From time to time I would look at Marie; she did not seem to be particularly taken with M. Belmont, but I knew she was reasonable, and then, monsieur, with her education I felt that what she needed above all things was a certain amount of means, and that we ought to sacrifice a great many things to that end. It was a misfortune, no doubt, but we were not in a position to choose. When those messieurs were gone, we told Marie frankly what it was all about.

"*Dame!* monsieur, we all shed a lot of tears, she and I and my poor Kerouët, for our poor dear child was very young, and M. Belmont was very old for her, but at least Marie would be provided for in the

future and we could die in peace and tranquillity.

"She understood all that and was resigned, so the next day when M. Duvallon came back we gave him our word.

"For a fortnight M. Belmont came to see us every day. Folks say that sailors are rough and surly. He was very polite, very kind, very complaisant to Marie, so she ended by seeing him without dislike and was touched by the proofs of affection that he showed her.

"Then what was more pleasing to us was that Marie was not to be separated from us, for he meant to buy a little country place near Thouars, and so we should be able to see each other every day.

"Well, at last she got so used to seeing M. Belmont that she consented to paint his portrait. She keeps it up there in her study in the tower, where she doesn't permit any one to enter. It is as like as like can be.

"About the last of December, M. Belmont told us that he was going to Paris to buy the wedding presents, the marriage was to take place at Nantes during the month of January.

"At the end of a fortnight, M. Belmont came back with splendid things for Marie.

"Since the sad event which has separated us, I have remembered that after his return from Paris M. Belmont often seemed to be very much depressed; but he was always good and kind to us; only he insisted that instead of waiting until the first of February, the date fixed for the marriage, the wedding should take place sooner.

"We consented to this, and they were married on the seventeenth of January; it was a Friday. In the

morning we signed the contract. M. Belmont settled on Marie six thousand francs a year. For folks like us it was very fine, was it not, monsieur?

"After signing the contract we went to the *mairie*, and then to the church, and we all came back to dinner to the country house of M. Duvallon, who was M. Belmont's best man.

"We were all seated at the table and had got as far as dessert. M. Belmont had just begun to sing some verses he had composed on his marriage, the poor dear man, when all of a sudden there arrived from Nantes one of M. Duvallon's servants. He hands a letter to his master. M. Duvallon turns pale, gets up from the table and cries out, 'Belmont! listen!' I remember that poor Belmont was singing at that moment a verse that began like this: 'Hymen waves his torch.'

"M. Belmont gets up, but he has hardly read the letter which Duvallon shows him when he makes a face,—ah, monsieur, such a terrible face, that I have yet to understand how a man who had ordinarily such a kind look could ever take on such an expression of ferocity.

"Then, controlling himself, he goes up to Marie, kisses her, and says: 'Don't worry about me, my *petite femme*, thou shalt have news of me very soon;' then he disappeared with Duvallon, who said to us, as he went out: 'Belmont is compromised in a political affair like—*carbonaro*.' Yes, that is the word, *carbonaro*," added Madame Kerouët, in recalling her souvenirs. "'He must escape, his life depends on it. If they come here to arrest him, try and keep the *commissaire* here as long as possible.'

"They had hardly been gone a quarter of an hour

when an officer of the gendarmerie arrives in a carriage with a *commissaire* of police, as they had foreseen. They ask for M. Belmont, sea captain.

"You know very well that we said never a word. They seek everywhere, but find no one, and they keep that up for at least two hours.

"The *commissaire* was about to give it up when some one of the company, having by accident spoken of the three-master *La Belle Alexandrine,* which was to sail that day from Nantes, the brigadier of gendarmerie cried out: 'And the tide is high at three o'clock! And now it is five! Before we can get back to Nantes it will be seven o'clock. If our man means to get away on that ship, he will be out of the mouth of the river by seven o'clock this evening, and beyond our reach.'

"Thereupon they all get into the carriage with the *commissaire*, and start back for Nantes at a gallop; but they got there too late. That poor dear Belmont had been lucky enough to embark on *La Belle Alexandrine*, and was off to Havana. M. Duvallon came the next day to tell us all about it.

"Alas! monsieur, misfortunes never come alone. Two months after all these events, my poor Kerouët died of lung fever.

"M. Duvallon sold the farm he owned at Thouars, and I should have been without resources if the superintendent of the château of Serval, who was acquainted with Kerouët, and knew that I was capable of managing a farm, had not proposed that I should rent this one, where I am very contented, but alas, I regret every day my poor Kerouët, and am still very uneasy as to the fate of M. Belmont, who has only written to us once by a vessel from Nantes

which *La Belle Alexandrine* met at sea.

"In his letter, Belmont told us not to worry, and that one of these days he would return and surprise us. As for Marie, I cannot say that she grieves very much for M. Belmont, the poor dear child, she knew him too little for that; but, monsieur, I am sorry for all this on her account, for should I die to-morrow what would become of her?

"To complete all, she is so scrupulous that it is impossible to get her to decide to touch a cent of the six thousand francs which M. Belmont settled on her, and which M. Duvallon sends her every three months. We take the money to a notary at Nantes, and there it will stay until Belmont comes back again, and that will be the Lord knows when."

Such was the recital of Madame Kerouët.

In fact, about the time of M. Belmont's departure, the police had discovered several Liberal plots. It was a time when secret societies were organising on a formidable scale; therefore, it was quite possible that he had been seriously mixed up in a conspiracy against the government.

Since having this confidential conversation with her aunt, Marie appeared lovelier than ever to me, and more charming.

So I continued my daily visits to the farm; sometimes even, when it was snowing or excessively cold, good Madame Kerouët invited me to stay there all night, and became quite provoked when I proposed starting off in the dark to go through the forest by the ill-kept road which led to Blémur, where I was supposed to live.

If I decided to remain, Marie would innocently

show how pleased she was; there would be almost a little fête at the farm. Madame Kerouët busied herself about the details of the dinner, and Marie, who slept in her aunt's room, with attentive and gracious hospitality saw that nothing was wanting in the little room destined for me, which was up in one of the towers.

That hospitality so kindly and thoughtful touched me deeply; but what proved to me the purity of sentiment of these two women, and their generous confidence in me, was the fact, that they never thought for a moment that the frequency of my visits might compromise them. My arrival always pleased them; I enlivened and brightened their solitude; and if I thanked them with effusion for all their kindness to me, Madame Kerouët would say, naïvely: "Should not we poor country women rather be grateful that you, monsieur, an artist (they supposed I was a painter), should help us to pass our long winter evenings so pleasantly, coming almost every day, three leagues to come and three leagues to go back again,—such horrid weather, too! *Tenez*, M. Arthur," said the good-hearted woman. "I don't know how it has come about, but now you are like one of our own family, and if you had to give up your visits we would be quite miserable and sad, is not that so, Marie?"

"Oh, certainly we would, my aunt," said Marie, with adorable candour.

I knew that Marie had very few books. She spoke perfectly well both English and Italian. I therefore sent to Paris for a set of books, and ordered them to be sent by way of Nantes, and from Nantes to be forwarded to the farm.

Just as I had hoped, the present of the books was

attributed to M. Belmont, or to his friend, M. Duvallon.

By such means, I succeeded in surrounding Marie and her aunt with a certain degree of comfort which was until then wanting. Little at a time furniture and carpets arrived at the farm, and were received joyfully as an attention from the exile or his friend.

Filled with gratitude, Marie wrote a charming letter of thanks to M. Duvallon, who answered her saying that he did not understand a word of Madame Belmont's gratitude.

Fearing discovery, I begged Madame Kerouët not to speak any more of these presents, making her believe that M. Belmont had good reasons for wishing for secrecy.

Marie's birthday was soon to be celebrated. On that anniversary she was to permit me to enter the mysterious little room she called her study, and which I had not been allowed to see before.

Knowing that the room was exactly like the one I inhabited in the opposite tower, such times as I slept all night at the farm, I had sent from Paris, still by the way of Nantes, all that was needed to furnish it with elegance. One of Marie's greatest regrets was that she had neither piano nor harp. I sent then for these two instruments, which were to arrive at the farm in time for Marie's birthday. All these details gave me infinite satisfaction.

Every day, well wrapped up, I started from Serval on my pony, braving the rain and the snow. I arrived at the farm, where I found a bright fire crackling in my room. I dressed myself with some care in spite of the everlasting teasing of the worthy *fermière*, who reproached me for being too *coquet*, then I went

down into the *grande chambre.*

If the weather was not too bad, Marie took my arm and we sallied forth to affront the wind and cold, climb the mountainsides, where we gathered plants for Marie's herbarium, or tramp through the forest, where we would amuse ourselves by startling the doe with her faun, from her hiding-place in these solitary glades.

During these long walks, Marie, who was always lively, laughed and joked like a schoolgirl, and treated me like a brother. In her chaste innocence she often made me undergo severe trials. Sometimes it was her fur collar to fasten, sometimes to push up her long hair under her hat, or to fasten the lace of her shoe, which had become undone.

So, in those long tramps, as I would gaze on the lovely face of Marie, which under its curls, all powdered with sleet, looked like a rose covered with snow,—how many times an avowal came to my lips! How often was I on the point of declaring my love! But Marie, crossing both of her arms on mine, would lean on me with such confidence, would look at me with such candour and security, that each day I was fain to put off this declaration until the next.

I was fearful that, if I risked a premature word, I might destroy all this tranquil happiness.

I waited then patiently. I was not deceived as to the sentiments I had inspired in Marie's breast; without being foolishly conceited or ridiculously vain, I could not withstand the evidence of my own eyes. For the last two months and more I had seen her almost every day. My attentions to her, to one so young, so unsophisticated, so little accustomed to the ways of the world, had made a deep impression on

her; but I had recognised in her such high principles, such decided religious sentiment, and such a deep sense of duty, that I felt I would have to undergo a long struggle, perhaps a painful one, although a thousand trifles showed me that Marie cared for me with a measure of affection of which she herself was most likely ignorant.

In the evening, after one of my dinners at the farm, Madame Kerouët, seated in her great armchair at the chimney-corner, would spin off a distaff of flax, while Marie and I, seated at the same table, arranged the plants we had collected for our herbariums in the course of our winter walks.

When fixing the slight stalks on paper, our hands would often touch. Often when we were both leaning over the table my hair would be pressed against Marie's forehead, or I would feel her warm breath caressing my cheek.

At such times she would blush, her breast would heave rapidly, and sometimes her hand would tremble on the paper.

Then, as if awakening from a dream, she would say to me, pretending to be reproachful: "See, now, how badly you have placed that plant."

"It is your fault," I would answer, laughing. "You neither help me, nor hold the paper."

"Not at all. It is you who have not the least patience, you are always afraid of getting gum on your fingers when you are pasting the little bands."

"Ah, what terrible wranglers!" said Madame Kerouët, "one of you is no better than the other!"

At other times, we took turns at reading aloud some of the works of Walter Scott, in which Madame

Kerouët took great interest. Marie had a clear, sweet voice, and one of my greatest pleasures was to listen to her as she read.

But it was a greater pleasure still to watch her. So, when the time came for me to read, if I found any allusion to my love, I would first read the phrases with my eyes, and then repeat them aloud from memory, fixing on Marie a passionate look. Sometimes Marie would lower her eyes, and put on a severe expression, but then, at others, she would blush, and with the end of her pretty forefinger make me an imperious sign to keep my eyes on my book.

Another trick that I invented was this: I would improvise whole passages, and introduce them into the book I was reading, so that when the situation permitted me I could give Marie a more distinct insight as to my love for her.

Thus, one evening, in that chaste and passionate scene where Ivanhoe declares his love for the beautiful Saxon, I substituted for the speech of the Crusader a long monologue, in which I made the most direct allusions to Marie and myself, by recalling a thousand souvenirs of our walks and talks.

Marie seemed quite overcome,—troubled. She looked at me reprovingly.

I stopped reading.

"I don't wish to interrupt you, M. Arthur," said Madame Kerouët, "for I don't think I ever heard you read so well as you have to-day."

Then putting down her distaff, she said, naïvely: "Ah, a woman would surely have a heart of stone not to have pity on a lover who talked like that. I know

very little about it, but it seems to me that one could say no more than what Ivanhoe says,—it is all so true and natural."

"Oh, it is really all very beautiful," said Marie, "but M. Arthur must be tired. I will read now in my turn."

As she took, in spite of my resistance, the book from my hand, she looked for the improvised passage, and not finding it said, saucily:

"The pages that you have just been reading are so beautiful that I want to read them over again."

"Thou art right, Marie," said her aunt; "I, too, would like to hear them once more."

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, ten o'clock, already!" said I, to change the subject. "I must be going."

"So it is, already!" said Madame Kerouët, as she looked at the clock.

Usually, when I started to go, Marie would go to the window to see what sort of weather it was. This evening she remained motionless.

Her aunt said to her: "Why don't you look to see if it is snowing, my child?"

Marie rose up and came back, saying, "It is snowing hard."

"It snows hard. What a heartless way you say that! You don't seem to remember that M. Arthur has three leagues to ride in the pitch-dark, and right through the forest."

I tried to meet Marie's eyes. She turned away her head; so I said to her, sadly, "*Bon soir*, madame."

"*Bon soir*, M. Arthur," she replied, without looking at me.

I heard the impatient whinnying of Black; the farm boy was bringing him from the stable. I was just leaving the room, when Marie, seizing an opportunity when her aunt was not looking, came close to me, and, taking my hand, said, with deep emotion:

"I am very angry with you. You do not know how much you have distressed me!"

The words were not precisely an avowal; and yet, in spite of the dark, in spite of the storm, I rode back to Serval with a joyful heart.

From that evening I began to take hope.

That was a week ago.

To-morrow is Marie's birthday, a solemn festival, when we are going to inaugurate the mysterious room in the tower.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PORTRAIT

SERVAL, 10th December, 18—.

I can scarcely believe what I have seen to-day.

What a strange fate is mine!

This morning, as we had agreed, I went to the farm.

It was the anniversary of Marie's birth; she had promised to allow me to enter the mysterious chamber that she occupies in one of the towers. It is there that she has had placed the harp and piano which recently arrived from Nantes.

"Come and see my retreat," said Marie to me, after breakfast.

We went up into the tower with Madame Kerouët.

We enter the room; what do I behold?

Facing me, in a large gold frame, there stands the portrait of the pirate of Porquerolles! the pilot of Malta!

"How did you come by that picture? Do you know who that man is?" I cried out, addressing the two women, who were staring at me in the greatest astonishment.

"Why, I painted that portrait myself, and that is M. Belmont," said Marie, with surprise.

"That is M. Belmont?"

"Certainly; that is my husband. But what is the matter with you, M. Arthur? Why are you so astonished, so overcome?"

"Have you ever seen M. Belmont anywhere?" asked Madame Kerouët.

I thought I was dreaming, or the victim of some extraordinary resemblance.

"The fact is," said I to Madame Kerouët, "I have met M. Belmont somewhere in my travels, or it might have been some one who is remarkably like him; for, on account of the circumstances under which we met, I cannot believe that the person I speak of can be the M. Belmont of this portrait."

"There is a very easy way of finding out if your M. Belmont is ours. What are your M. Belmont's teeth like?" said Marie's aunt.

"There is no longer the slightest doubt. It is he!" thought I.

"His teeth are like no one else's," I said, "they are sharp, and very wide apart."

"That is just how they are," said Madame Kerouët, laughing, "and so for fun we call him the ogre."

Then it was he!

Everything was explained now.

In the ballroom at the château, the English ambassador had told me that they were on the track of the pirate, and hoped to capture him. The ball had taken place about the middle of January, just the time that Belmont had returned to Nantes, to hasten his union with Marie.

Our rencontre at the Variétés, and the fear of discovery, had, doubtless, caused the anxiety Madame Kerouët noticed in his behaviour subsequent to that time.

Thus, had it not been for the note of warning, the *commissaire* and the officer of gendarmerie would have arrested this miserable man on the day of his marriage. And I quite understood that M. Duvallon, the pirate's best man, should have held him up to the eyes of Marie and her aunt in the light of a political victim, in order to deceive them as to the real cause of his arrest.

Did Duvallon know the vile traffic of Belmont, or had he, too, been deceived by him?

All these thoughts and questions rushed confusedly

through my mind, and excited me so much that I left the farm much earlier than usual, under the pretext of a headache. Marie and her aunt were annoyed and worried by my sudden departure.

Thus the day, which was to have been a little fête to us, ended very sadly.

What ought I to do?

I love Marie with all the strength of my soul. It would be no crime to carry her off from Belmont, that brigand, that assassin; it would be a noble and generous action.

Marie has been basely deceived. Her family thought they were uniting her to a brave and honest sailor, and not to a vile murderer. This marriage is void, in the name of reason and honour.

It should also be null in the sight of men! This very day I will tell everything to these unhappy women.

But will they believe what I have to say? What proof can I give them of my truthfulness?

And then there would be, in such a denunciation on my part, something low and mean, which is revolting.

After all, Marie is the legitimate wife of Belmont. I am in love with Marie. Such a love almost puts that man on a level with me.

Now it is to be, henceforth, open war between us. I have already the advantage, for he is absent; it would not be fair to augment my chances of success by turning informer. So, finally, if Marie loves me enough to vanquish her scruples to forget her duty towards a man whom she believes to be honest and good, shall I not take more pride in my conquest

than if she believed herself only sacrificing a vile creature, who was unworthy of her and who had deceived her, a man that the law might claim as its prey?

Decidedly, I shall say nothing at all.

But suppose that man should return? My God, what a frightful thought!

Marie is his wife after all, and it is only by a extraordinary hazard that she has been saved from being defiled by that infamous man.

My scruples are crazy, are stupid. Why should I hesitate to tell Marie all?

But what good would it do? Would such a disclosure hasten, or would it hinder this man's return?

He may come back at any time.

What shall I do? What shall I do?

SERVAL, 12th December, 18—.

My *incognito* has been discovered, Marie knows who I am.

Yesterday I went to the farm.

I was still irresolute as to what I ought to say in regard to the pirate.

I was talking with Marie and her aunt when my overseer entered.

I became very red, very much embarrassed; the man never noticed it; he made me a low and respectful bow.

"*Tiens*, you know M. Arthur?" asked Madame Kerouët.

"Have I the honour of knowing M. le comte?" repeated the overseer, with surprise.

"M. le comte!" cried out at the same time Marie and her aunt as they rose up with bewildered looks.

Fearing the man would put a bad interpretation on my reasons for hiding my name, I said to him: "You are very stupid, Rivière. I wished to get some information about the state of cultivation of this farm, as I thought of raising the rent, now you have come and spoiled all. Please go and wait for me at Serval, for I want to talk about it with you."

The overseer went out.

"You have deceived us, M. le comte!" said Madame Kerouët to me, with much dignity. "It was very wrong in you."

Marie said not a word, but disappeared without even looking at me.

"And why was it wrong?" said I to that excellent woman. "If I had told you who I was, your scruples would never have allowed you to treat me with such freedom and cordial affection as you have always manifested towards me. I should have remained towards you the master of this farm, and would never have become your friend."

"There can be no safe, no possible friendship except between equals, M. le comte," said Madame Kerouët, with great coolness.

"But in what way are our positions different at the present hour? If my friendship was pleasant to you until now, why should we change our relations? Why

should we forget four or five months of charming intimacy?"

"I shall not forget them, M. le comte, but they shall give place to sentiments more suitable to the modest position of Marie and myself."

One of the farm women came then to find Madame Kerouët, and begged her to go to Marie.

She bowed to me respectfully and went out. I left the farm in a violent rage with my overseer.

Then I reflected that, after all, this *incognito* could not be kept up for ever, and, though the discovery might have been a shock to Marie, it certainly would not alter her love for me.

SERVAL, 15th December, 18—.

I have seen Marie once more.

For some days she was sad and distressed at my dissimulation, which she could not understand. She asked why I had thus concealed my name. I told her that, knowing false and malignant stories had reached her ears, which showed me in the very worst colours, I had preferred being unknown.

It was hard to convince her, but I finally succeeded in chasing all these unhappy impressions from her mind.

Though Madame Kerouët frowns on me sometimes, our intimacy, which for a time was threatened, has resumed all former charm.

SERVAL, 20th December, 18—.

Marie loves me, she loves me, I can no longer have any doubt. May this day remain ever engraved in my heart!

SERVAL, 30th December, 18—.

What a terrible thing has happened! No, no, a

thousand times no; she shall not leave me. Now that I have the right to watch over her, never will I abandon her.

This morning a farm servant came over to the château. He brought me a letter from Marie.

She besought me to come to her instantly.

An hour after I was at the farm.

I found Marie and her aunt both in tears.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" I cried out.

"We have had a letter," said Madame Kerouët, "a letter from M. Duvallon; he says that he is coming here to-day to take away Marie, by order of M. Belmont."

"And you would allow her to go?" I exclaimed. "And you, Marie, would you consent to go?"

Marie, pale as death, passed her hands over her eyes and cried out: "What an awakening! *Mon Dieu!* what shall I do? I am lost."

I made an expressive sign to Marie. Her aunt, preoccupied by her own distress, had not heard her.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" said Madame Kerouët. "Give up my child! I never will have the strength to do it."

"You shall not give her up, you ought not, good mother! You must not give her up to such a man as Duvallon."

"Alas! monsieur, what objection can we make? Is not M. Duvallon the intimate friend of M. Belmont? Has he not received his orders?"

"It is just because he is the intimate friend of a man like Belmont that you must be on your guard against

him."

Marie and Madame Kerouët stared at me with astonishment, but I continued: "Listen to me, you, Madame Kerouët, and you, Marie. Allow me to receive M. Duvallon; I will take it upon myself to make him listen to reason. When do you expect him to arrive?"

"If he comes when he says he will, it will be by the diligence from Bourges. He will get here at three o'clock," said Madame Kerouët.

"Make him no promises, but send him to me, and let us hope for the best."

And on a signal from Marie I went out.

After awhile, at five o'clock, I heard the noise of a *carriole* in the courtyard of the château. I could not repress an exclamation of anger. I felt the blood rush to my face, and my temples throb violently.

M. Duvallon was ushered in.

I beheld a robust man of great height, apparently about sixty years of age. His complexion was high-coloured, his manner impertinent, vulgar, but self-satisfied. He was dressed like a Frenchman on a journey, that is to say, shabbily.

I made him a sign to be seated, and he sat down.

"Monsieur," said I to him, "I beg your pardon for any trouble I may have given you, but I am charged by Madame Kerouët, who leases one of my farms, and who has some confidence in me—"

"*Parbleu!* her niece has confidence in you, too, and a great deal too much of it!" cried out the man, rudely interrupting me.

"It is true, monsieur," said I, trying to keep my

temper, "I have the honour of being one of Madame Belmont's friends."

"And I am one of M. Belmont's friends, monsieur, and as such am commissioned to bring his wife back to him at Nantes, where she will remain under the surveillance of my spouse until the return of her husband, my friend Belmont, which will not be very long."

"You call yourself the friend of Belmont?" said I to Duvallon, staring at him fixedly. "Do you know what that man is?"

"That man,—that man is as good as any other man, *morbleu!*" cried out Duvallon, rising quickly from his seat.

I remained seated.

"That man is a brigand, monsieur! That man is an assassin, monsieur! a murderer!" and I accented with an imperious and resolute nod each one of these charges.

"If you were not in your own house!" said Duvallon to me as he doubled up his fists.

"I am not a child, monsieur, and your threats are ridiculous. Let us speak frankly and have it out. The proof that your friend is an assassin is that I was wounded by him on board of a yacht that he attacked in the Mediterranean; is that clear? The proof that your friend is a brigand is that I was on board of the same yacht, which he villainously wrecked off the coast of the island of Malta; is that clear? And to conclude, the proof that these accusations are true is that the English ambassador to France and the Foreign Office, informed by me of the presence of this wretch in Paris, have taken

measures for his arrest, which would have been successful if you, on his wedding day, had not helped him to escape from justice."

Duvallon looked at me stupidly; he bit his lips with rage. I continued:

"Neither Madame Belmont nor her aunt have heard a word of all this, monsieur; but I solemnly declare to you that, if you insist upon carrying away Madame Belmont from her aunt, I will tell them the whole story, and at the same time advise them to seek legal advice, or put this affair in the hands of justice."

"Thousand thunders!" cried out Duvallon, stamping with his foot, "not a word of all that is true. I mean to carry off that wench from under your very nose, *mort-Dieu!* or you will see what will happen."

"If you were not the intimate friend of Belmont, you would pay dearly for your lies and your threat. Leave the room instantly, monsieur."

"I defy you, I dare you to order me out of here!" said the old corsair, as he stepped towards me with a threatening scowl.

But on second thoughts, as he compared his age to my age and his strength to mine, he restrained himself, contenting himself with saying, in a very concentration of fury:

"You mean, then, to raise up yourself in opposition to me, fearing that I will carry off your mistress? Any one can see that. But I have said that I would take her off, and I mean to take her, *mort-Dieu!* Don't you suppose that I know all that has been going on here? Don't I know all about the presents you have made her? And haven't I been getting these letters of

thanks from those two foolish women, letters that I could not understand, thanking me for all those fine presents? But it has all come to an end, it has got to stop; do you hear? Belmont is on his way home, and in the meantime I take the demoiselle, whether or no, by force if I must."

Not wishing to answer this man, I rang the bell.

"Pierre," said I to the servant-man, "I wish you to saddle two horses, one for myself and one for George, who must go with me. I also wish you to tell Lefort to mount his horse, and tell his son to do the same. They are to go to the *ferme des Prés* and wait for me."

The servant went out.

"Now, monsieur," said I to Duvallon, "reflect well on what you are about to do. If you do not instantly quit this part of the country I will tell all to Madame Belmont and her aunt, and shall advise them to put themselves under the protection of the law. I am going immediately to the Field Farm. I shall wait there for you, monsieur, and I shall see if you dare to come."

Then ringing again for Pierre, I said: "Show monsieur out."

Without waiting for a reply from Duvallon, I went out, mounted my horse, and set off for the farm.

Lefort and his son had already started ahead of me.

SERVAL, 31st December, 18—.

Yesterday Duvallon did not dare to come to the farm.

He wrote to Marie telling her that he had gone back to Nantes. The letter was filled with the grossest insults. He threatened her with the return of Belmont.

Marie is plunged in the darkest despair. To-day I was not able to see her.

There is but one thing left for me to do: that is to persuade Marie to follow me.

What can her life be from this time?

If Belmont comes back he will sooner or later be arrested, whether I denounce him or no.

If he is acquitted, he is Marie's master: she is his wife; she will be obliged to go with him.

If he is found guilty, if he is condemned, what a horrible fate for Marie! And what is to become of me? My life belongs to her, as hers does to me.

If she refuses to come with me, what is to be done?

The former crimes of this man will not annul the marriage, or if they do, what publicity, what disgusting revelations, will Marie have to submit to!

She must do it, she must follow me, it is the only thing she can do.

What has she to keep her here, poor orphan girl?

Her aunt, that excellent woman.

But perhaps she would come with us,—no, no. If she suspected the truth; if she knew that there was between us a sweeter bond than that of friendship, that we belonged to each other for ever and always; if she knew—

No, no! it is not to be thought of.

But will Marie ever consent to leave her?

However, it must be done!

If Marie will follow me, what a future! We would retire to some solitary place, where I would spend the rest of my life at her side.

Though I am young, I have seen so much of life, I have suffered so much, I have learned so much about men and things, and have been so weary of them, that it would be rapture to me, this solitary and peaceful life of trusting love.

And besides she has in herself so many resources that fit her for such a life of isolation: heart, soul, mind, artistic talents, an angelic disposition, adorable simplicity, the imagination of a young girl who can please, occupy, or amuse herself with the veriest trifle.

She must follow me, she will follow me.

CHAPTER XXX

THE FLIGHT

SERVAL, 10th March, 18—.

I open again this journal which I have not written a line in for three months.

I wish to write one more date, one last page here at Serval, in this poor old paternal château that I am about to leave, perhaps, for ever.

Strange coincidence! It was here that my mundane life began with my love for Hélène.

It is here my mundane life is to end with my love for Marie.

Henceforth she and I mean to live in the greatest seclusion. Oh, if we are only able to realise our dreams, our life will be one of enchantment.

But by how many cruel trials it will have been purchased.

For three months Marie has been weeping in secret! but little by little I have been able to overcome her resistance.

At last she has consented to fly with me.

Besides, she dare not, she cannot, remain here; she is about to become a mother!

And now, my faithful George, who has been living in Nantes to keep a watch on Duvallon, wrote me this morning that a man I cannot fail to recognise as Belmont arrived last night at the house of the old corsair.

I told Marie of his return, and then she decided.

How would she dare to appear before her husband?

And how could she bear the reproaches of her aunt?

To-morrow night, then, we are to depart secretly.

So as to be sure of no mistakes, let me set down what I have arranged to do.

Send relays of horses before me as far as ——, across the country, so as to leave no traces; it is twenty-five leagues shorter.

Take the mail coach at ——, and in thirty hours we will be at the frontier.

Once outside of France, and the first noise of our elopement calmed, we will wait to see what happens. Perhaps we will return, perhaps Belmont will be arrested.

DOUX REPOS,
September, 18—.

You have asked me, Marie, to tell you the story of my whole life.

We have broken off all connection with the world.

Retired from society, here in this peaceful and charming abode, we have been living for two years with our dear child, and ineffably happy.

You have been my angel, my saviour, my god, my love, my only treasure, because you possess all the riches of heart, mind, and soul.

In the midst of our solitude, each day brings a new joy that makes you dearer to my heart.

Thus the pearls of the sea owe their imperishable lustre to the shadows of each succeeding wave.

You often tell me, Marie, that my nature is noble, generous, and, above all, good.

When you will have read this journal of my whole life, Marie, my beautiful and gentle Marie, you will find out that I have often been hard-hearted and wicked.

That goodness for which you praise me, it is to you that I owe it!

Under your holy influence, my beautiful guardian

angel, all my bad instincts have disappeared, all my highest sentiments have been exalted; in a word I have loved you, I love you now as you deserve to be loved.

To love you thus, and to be loved by you, Marie, is to believe oneself the first and noblest of men, to despise glory, ambition, fortune, to feel above them all.

It is to have gone beyond the limits of all possible happiness.

This superhuman happiness would alarm me, had we not purchased it by your sorrow and remorse, poor Marie!

This remorse has been, and still is, your only grief; the time has come to deliver you from it.

You shall be told the truth about the man you married, whom you have believed to be in prison as a political criminal, for these last two years.

Later you will know why I hid this secret from you until now.

These lines which I now write in this journal retrace almost all the events of my life, up to the moment when we quitted Serval together. They will be the last I shall write in it.

Why should I henceforth need such a cold confidant?

It is in your angelic heart, Marie, that I will trace all my thoughts; or, rather, it is there that I will leave the imprint of the perfect bliss that intoxicates me.

You will read this journal, Marie; you will see that I have been very guilty, that I have suffered greatly.

You will read the story of our love from its very

inception.

Since leaving Serval I have ceased to write in this journal. What could I have written? Whatever I have said, Marie, will apply to the future years I shall spend with you.

You will not find here the date of the birth of our Arthur,—our child,—the greatest joy of my life. Nor will you find the date of that terrible day on which I trembled for your life, my day of most fearful torture.

While the paroxysm of that unknown joy, of that unknown grief, lasted, I neither thought, reflected, nor acted, I did not exist.

When one still has the consciousness of one's sufferings, when one can contemplate one's own joy, then neither has joy nor sorrow arrived at its highest degree.

I had thus far suffered atrociously. I had experienced the most intense delights, but I had never been so absorbed as to lose self-consciousness, or the power of self-investigation.

I have spoken of an unknown happiness, Marie, and yet the date of the blissful day when I no longer doubted of your love is written in this journal, while the date of our Arthur's birth is not found here.

Your tender soul will understand and appreciate the difference, will it not?

As for our child, Marie, our beautiful and adorable child, we will think of his future, and—

These were the last words of the journal of an unknown.

By looking at the dates, and comparing them with the information given me by the curé of the village of ——, in the first volume, one can see that this last passage must have been written the day or the day before the triple assassination of the count, Marie, and their child, by Belmont, the pirate of Porquerolles, who, having escaped from prison, and knowing the retreat of the count, wished to wreak upon him a terrible vengeance before leaving France for ever.

THE END.

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