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OLD LOVE STORIES RETOLD

The Second Meeting of Dante and Beatrice

Old Love Stories Retold

By

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"The Quest of the Golden Girl," "How to Get the Best Out of Books," "An Old Country House," etc., etc.

New York

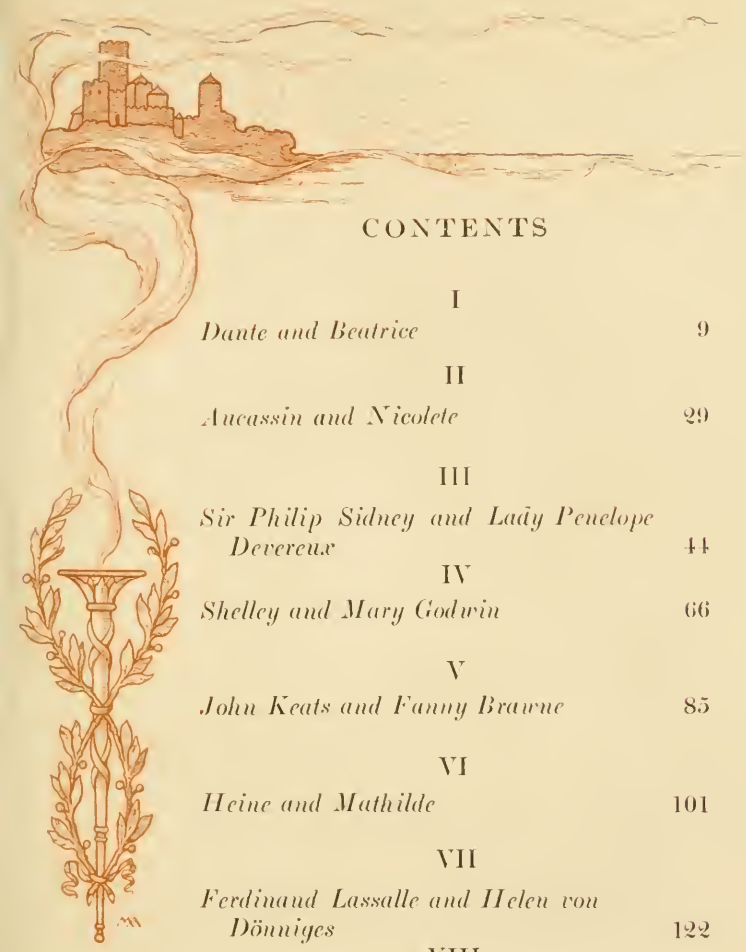
The Baker & Taylor Co.

33-37 East 17th Street

(Union Sq., N.)

Published, October, 1904

The Plimpton Press, Norwood, Mass., U. S. A.



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The writer desires to thank Mr. John Brisben Walker *for his kindness in allowing him to reprint six of the following stories, which originally appeared in* The Cosmopolitan. *The papers on "Abélard and Héloise" and "Keats and Fanny Brawne" have not been printed before.*

ILLUSTRATIONS

To my friend
CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

Dante and Beatrice

THE great historic love stories of the world are like the great classics of art and literature. They have become universal symbols of human experience. There are many ways of loving, many shapes of story taken by the fateful passion of love in a difficult world, which, though it may love a lover, seldom shows its love in the form of active sympathy while the story is in the making. The great love stories fix either the type of loving after the manner of one or another temperament, or the type of dramatic expression imposed upon love by circumstance. Thus the story of Tristram and Iseult stands for a love irresistibly passionate, stormily sensual, a very madness of loving. It represents a quality of, a way of, loving. The significance of the

story of Paolo and Francesca, on the other hand, is less in the love of the lovers themselves than in the shape of destiny which it took under the pressure of circumstance. Lanciotto is no less important, is even more important, to the story than the lovers themselves, whereas in the case of Tristram and Iseult we never give a second thought to King Mark. Our eyes are held by the spectacle of the superb passion of the lovers, as by some awe-inspiring display of the elements. The love of Paolo and Francesca, however, strikes no individual characteristic note — the lovers themselves have no personality — and it is merely one of the elements in the making of a picturesque shape of tragedy, a shape which, before and since, love-history has been constantly taking, and to which in the case of Paolo and Francesca the genius of a great poet has given an accidental immortality.

Dante's own love-story belongs to the

first, more significant, class. His love for Beatrice is important because it stands for a way of loving. As many have loved and still go on loving the way of Tristram and Iseult, so many have loved and still go on loving Dante's way, though such a fashion of loving is perhaps less common. Yet, is it so rare, after all, for a man to carry enshrined in his heart from boyhood to manhood, and on to old age, the holy face of some little girl seen for a brief while in the magic dawn of life, lost almost as soon as seen, yet seen in that short moment with such an ecstasy of sight as to become for him a deathless angel of the imagination, a lifelong dream to keep pure the heart?

A poet's love is apt to be a lonely, subjective passion, even when it is returned; for the woman whom the poet loves is often as much his own creation as one of his own poems. Like Pygmalion he loves the work of his own dreams. But never was any poet's love — not even that

of John Keats for Fanny Brawne — so entirely one-sided as that of Dante for Beatrice. Save as the object of Dante's worship, Beatrice has no share in the story at all. She seems to have had no more care for Dante's love, and indeed to have been hardly more aware of its existence, than a new star has care for, or is aware of, its discoverer. "The beloved," says Hafiz, "is in no need of our imperfect love." Dante was free to worship her afar off if he pleased. It was not her fault if she preferred the less portentous attentions of the society young fellows of her set. A lover like Dante might well bewilder, and even alarm, a young miss, whose thoughts, for all her mystical beauty, ran — innocently and properly enough — on her sweetmeats and her next dance. But, if that saying of Hafiz be true, it is open to the retort that a lover like Dante can dispense with a return of his affection. All he asks is to dream his dream. To have his love returned might be disastrous to his dream. It is no mere flippancy to suppose that had Dante had fuller opportunities of knowing the real earth-born Beatrice, the divine Beatrice would have been

Salutation of Beatrice

lost to him and to us. Fortunately, their intercourse seems to have been of the slightest. For Beatrice Dante was hardly more than an acquaintance, who, after the fashion of his day, paid court to her in sonnet and ballata — forms of devotion at that time hardly so serious as a serenade. For it was the period of the courts and colleges of love, when a poet might write in the name of a strictly poetical "mistress," with hardly more thought of scandalous realities behind his song than if to-day a poet should dedicate his new volume, by permission, to some noble lady. Dante's uniquely beautiful record of his love-story, the "Vita Nuova," is cast in just that formal fanciful mould of literary and mystical love-making which was then fashionable, and were it not that the form of it is quite powerless to suppress the intense sincerity and youthful freshness of an evidently real feeling, it might have passed for a brilliant piece of troubadour make-believe. As it is, however, the very artificiality of the form is turned to account, and seems rather to accentuate than detract from the impression of youthful ecstasy. Young love is

ever curious to invent some form of exquisite ritual for the expression of its worship. Common words are not rare enough for the fastidious young priest who thus bows his head in the awful sanctuary of his first love. So the very artifice with which in the "Vita Nuova" we see Dante delighting to fret little golden "chambers of imagery" for the honey, and delicate lachrimatories for the sorrow, of his love, is in itself an added touch of reality.

Very youthful and lover-like is the vein of mystical superstition which runs through the confession, as, for example, the insistence on the number nine in the opening sentences and throughout. Not without hidden significance, it seemed to the young poet, was it that he should have met Beatrice when she was almost beginning her ninth year and he almost ending his. Here alone was an evidence that they were born for each other. Who can forget his hushed account of his

first meeting with that "youngest of the angels"?

"Nine times already since my birth had the heaven of light returned to the self-same point almost, as concerns its own revolution, when first the glorious Lady of my mind was made manifest to my eyes, even she who was called Beatrice by many who knew not wherefore. She had already been in this life for so long as that, within her time, the starry heaven had moved towards the eastern quarter one of the twelve parts of a degree; so that she appeared to me at the beginning of her ninth year almost, and I saw her almost at the end of my ninth year. Her dress, on that day, was of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age. At that moment, I say most truly that the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses

of my body shook therewith; and in trembling it said these words: Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi [Here is a deity stronger than I; who, coming, shall rule over me]."

It is probable that this historic meeting thus mystically described had come of Dante's father one day taking the boy with him to a festa — or, as we should say, a party — given by his neighbour Folco de Portinari. Dante's father was, it would appear, a well-to-do lawyer, with old blood in his veins, but still of the burgher class; whereas Portinari was probably richer and in a higher social position.

Another nine years was to pass before Dante and Beatrice were even to speak to each other — for it does not appear that they had spoken on that first meeting — and by that time she had been given in marriage to a banker of Florence, one Simon de Bardi. Meanwhile, Dante may have caught glimpses of her in church or on the street, but beyond such slight sustenance his love had had nothing to feed on all those years. Once again Dante dwells on the recurrence of the significant number nine in his history. "After

Dante's Dream

the lapse," says he, "of so many days that nine years exactly were completed since the above-written appearance of this most gracious being, on the last of those days it happened that the same wonderful lady appeared to me dressed all in pure white, between two gentle ladies elder than she. And passing through a street, she turned her eyes thither where I stood sorely abashed; and by her unspeakable courtesy, which is now guerdoned in the Great Cycle, she saluted me with so virtuous a bearing that I seemed then and there to behold the very limits of blessedness. The hour of her most sweet salutation was exactly the ninth of that day; and because it was the first time that any words from her reached mine ears, I came into such sweetness that I parted thence as one intoxicated."

What were the words, one wonders, that sent the poet walking on air through the streets of Florence, and shut him up in the loneliness of his own room to dream of her, and to write mystical sonnets for the interpretation of his fellow poets, as was the manner of that day? They can hardly have been more than a "Good-morn-

ing, Messer Alighieri. We have missed your face in Florence for ever so long." But then the voice and the smile that went with the ordinary words! It almost seems as though they must have conveyed a rarer message to the poet's heart. Or did the poet merely misinterpret according to his hopes an act of conventional graciousness?

It is to be feared that he did. But, be that as it may, that "most sweet salutation" sufficed so to fan the flame of love in the poet's heart that he grew thin and pale from very lovesickness, so that his friends began to wonder at him and make guesses at the lady. Dante, perceiving this, and seeing that he must protect Beatrice from any breath of gossip, conceived the plan of making another lady the screen for his love. It chanced that, one day Dante being in the same church with Beatrice, a lady sat in a direct line between Beatrice and himself, and, as she looked round at him several times,

and his eyes, in reality burning upon Beatrice, might well seem to be answering hers, the gossips concluded that she it was who had brought him to such a pass of love. Becoming aware of the mistake, Dante saw in it the needed means of shielding Beatrice, and he diligently set about confirming the gossips in their error by writing poems which seemed to point to the other lady, but were in reality inspired by Beatrice. At this time, he tells us, he made a list in the form of a "sirvente" of the names of the sixty most beautiful women in Florence, and he bids us take note of a strange thing: "that having written the list, I found my lady's name would not stand otherwise than ninth in order among the names of these ladies!"

In course of time, travel took his beautiful "screen" from Florence, and it became necessary for him to find a substitute. This he was presently enabled to do, and soon he became so identified with

his fictitious lady, and rumour began to speak such evil of them both, that his own true lady, "the destroyer of all evil and the queen of all good," meeting him one day, denied him her salutation. Thereon, in bitter grief, Dante took counsel of Love, and composed a veiled song which should reveal the truth to Beatrice and yet hide it. But how she received it, or whether or not she took him back into her favour, is not made clear. It hardly seems as though she had done so from the next occasion on which we see them in each other's company. This was one of great sorrow and bitterness, and is described so vividly by Dante himself that I will transcribe his own words:

"After this battling with many thoughts, it chanced on a day that my most gracious lady was with a gathering of ladies in a certain place; to the which I was conducted by a friend of mine. . . . And they were assembled around a gentlewoman who was given in marriage that day; the custom of the city being that these should bear her company when she sat down for the first time at table in the house of her hus-

band. Therefore I, as was my friend's pleasure, resolved to stay wi. him and do honour to those ladies.

"But as soon as I had thus resolved, I began to feel a faintness and a throbbing at my left side, which soon took possession of my whole body. Whereupon I remember that I covertly leaned my back unto a painting that ran round the walls of that house; and being fearful lest my trembling should be discerned of them, I lifted mine eyes to look upon those ladies, and then first perceived among them the excellent Beatrice. And when I perceived her, all my senses were overpowered by the great lordship that Love obtained, finding himself so near unto that most gracious being, until nothing but the spirits of sight remained to me. . . . By this, many of her friends, having discerned my confusion, began to wonder; and, together with herself, kept whispering of me and mocking me. Whereupon my friend, who knew not what to conceive, took me by the hands, and drawing me forth from among them, required to know what ailed me. Then, having first held me at quiet for a space until my perceptions were

come back to me, I made answer to my friend: 'Of a surety I have now set my feet on that point of life beyond the which he must not pass who would return.'"

From that moment Dante's passion was an open secret among his acquaintance, and his lovelorn looks were matter of jest among them. We read of no more meetings with Beatrice, except a chance encounter in the street as she walked with a beautiful friend named Joan. Whether she gave or withheld her salutation on this occasion, Dante does not tell us. Meanwhile, her father had died, and Dante had written her a poem of sympathy; also he himself had been so sick that thoughts of death had come close to him, and with them a prophetic vision of the death of Beatrice, all too soon to be fulfilled. Dante tells how he was busied with a long, carefully conceived poem in celebration of her beauty and her virtue, and had composed but

one stanza, "when the Lord God of justice called my most gracious lady unto Himself, that she might be glorious under the banner of that blessed Queen Mary whose name had always a deep reverence in the words of holy Beatrice." Heaven had need of her. Earth was no fit place for so fair a spirit.

A love such as Dante's, dream-born and dream-fed, and never at any time nourished on the realities of earthly loving, would necessarily be intensified by the death of the beloved. That mysterious consecration which death always brings with it especially transfigures the memories of the young and the beautiful. She had come nearer to him rather than gone farther away. So, at least, he could feign in his imagination, where he was now free to enthrone her forever as the bride of his soul — without the thought of any Simon de Bardi to break in upon his dream. In life she could never be his, but in her death they were no longer divided.

Yet before this dream could grow into an assured reality for him, bringing firmness and peace to his heart, there were many months of bitter human grief to pass through. Beatrice was indeed a saint in heaven, but ah! she no longer walked the streets of Florence. Like any other bereaved lover, he sought many anodynes for his grief — some unworthy ones, for which his conscience reproached him at the time and long years after. With the instinct of the poet, he first sought the consolation of beautiful words. As some men fly to wine in sorrow, the poet flies to verse. "When my eyes," he says, "had wept for some while, until they were so weary with weeping that I could no longer through them give ease to my sorrow, I bethought me that a few mournful words might stand me instead of tears. And therefore I proposed to make a poem, that weeping I might speak therein of her for whom so much sorrow had destroyed my spirit; and I then began 'The eyes that weep.'"

"Beatrice is gone up into high Heaven,
The kingdom where the angels are at peace;
And lives with them: and to her friends is dead.

Dante on the Anniversary of Beatrice's Death

"Not by the frost of winter was she driven
Away, like others; nor by summer-heats;
But through a perfect gentleness, instead.
For from the lamp of her meek lowlihead
Such an exceeding glory went up hence
That it woke wonder in the Eternal sire,
Until a sweet desire
Entered Him for that lovely excellence,
So that He bade her to Himself aspire;
Counting this weary and most evil place
Unworthy of a thing so full of grace.

"Wonderfully out of the beautiful form
Soared her clear spirit, waxing glad the while;
And is in its first home, there where it is.
Who speaks thereof, and feels not the tears warm
Upon his face, must have become so vile
As to be dead to all sweet sympathies. . . ."

Later, he tells us how he found consolation in the sympathy of a certain "young and very beautiful lady," consolation so tender and kind that he confesses, in self-reproach, that his "eyes began to be gladdened overmuch by her company, through which thing many times I had much unrest, and rebuked myself as a base person."

That he also experimented with the commoner anodynes of grief seems certain from this stern sonnet addressed to him by his first of friends, Guido Cavalcanti:

"I come to thee by daytime constantly,
But in thy thoughts too much of baseness find:
Greatly it grieves me for thy gentle mind,
And for thy many virtues gone from thee.
It was thy wont to shun much company,
Unto all sorry concourse ill inclin'd:
And still thy speech of me, heartfelt and kind,
Had made me treasure up thy poetry.
But now I dare not, for thine abject life,
Make manifest that I approve thy rimes;
Nor come I in such sort that thou mayst know.
Ah! prythee read this sonnet many times:
So shall that evil one who bred this strife
Be thrust from thy dishonoured soul and go."

That Guido Cavalcanti did not write thus without cause, is proved by Beatrice's solemn reproach of him in the "Purgatorio." Indeed, she implies that his way of life at this time was the cause of his vision of the Inferno:

"So low he fell, that all appliances
For his salvation were already short,
Save showing him the people of perdition."

In the same poem he admits:

"The things that present were
With their false pleasure turned aside my steps,
Soon as your countenance concealed itself."

But, through all, the dream of his love was growing more bright and sure; and soon it was to ascend above all earthly fumes, and shine down on him, the fixed guiding star of a life that, in its turbulent vicissitudes and bitter sorrows, was, more than most, to need the sustaining light of such a spiritual ideal.

Dante was to marry, and his wife Gemma was to bear him seven children — a wife who cannot have been unsympathetic to his dream, for she allowed him to name their daughter Beatrice; Florence was to become the second passion of his life; he was to descend into hell, and eat the bitter bread of exile: but through all, growing brighter with the years, shone down upon his rough and devious pathway the white girl-star of Beatrice. His first love was his last. Commentators have endeavoured to explain her away as a metaphysical symbol, and Dante himself came to think of Beatrice as an impersonation of Divine

Wisdom. In the close of his long and strenuous life, it might well seem to him that her having lived on earth at all was a dream of his boyhood, so far away that dreaming boyhood of the "Vita Nuova" must have seemed; but, for all that, we know that it was just a young girl's face that led this strong stern man of iron and tears safely through his pilgrimage of the world.

> "All ye that pass along Love's trodden way
> Pause ye awhile,"

and meditate upon this marvel.

II

Aucassin and Nicolete*

THOUGH the song-story — "cante-fable" — "C'est d'Aucassin et de Nicolete," has long had an antiquarian interest for scholars, it is only during the last twenty years or so that it has taken its place in the living literature of the world, and given two of the most fragrant names to the mythology of lovers. Monsieur Bida in France, and Mr. Andrew Lang and Mr. F. W. Bourdillon in England, are to be thanked for rescuing this precious pearl from the dust-heaps of philological learning. In England Mr. Bourdillon was first with a very graceful and scholarly translation. Walter Pater in his famous essays on "The Renaissance" early directed to it the

* Though Aucassin and Nicolete are not historically authenticated lovers, being the children of a troubadour's imagination, I have ventured to include their story, because they have long since been real to us — through romance.

attention of amateurs of such literary delicacies; but practically Mr. Lang is its sponsor in English, by virtue of a translation which for freshness and grace and tender beauty may well take the place of the original with those of us for whom Old French has its difficulties. Nine years before, Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman had introduced the lovers to American readers in "A Masque of Poets." There in a single lyric Mr. Stedman has so skilfully concentrated the romance of the old story that I venture to quote from it, particularly as Mr. Stedman has done readers of his poetry the mysterious unkindness of omitting it from his collected poems:

"Within the garden of Biaucaire
He met her by a secret stair, —
The night was centuries ago.
Said Aucassin, 'My love, my pet,
These old confessors vex me so!
They threaten all the pains of hell
Unless I give you up, ma belle,' —
Said Aucassin to Nicolette.

"'Now, who should there in heaven be
To fill your place, ma très-douce mie?
To reach that spot I little care!
There all the droning priests are met; —
All the old cripples, too, are there
That unto shrines and altars cling,
To filch the Peter-pence we bring'; —
Said Aucassin to Nicolette.

. . . . . .

"'To purgatory I would go
With pleasant comrades whom we know,
Fair scholars, minstrels, lusty knights
Whose deeds the land will not forget,
The captains of a hundred fights,
The men of valor and degree:
We'll join that gallant company,' —
Said Aucassin to Nicolette.

. . . . . .

"'Sweet players on the cithern strings
And they who roam the world like kings
Are gathered there, so blithe and free!
Pardie! I'd join them now, my pet,
If you went also, ma douce mie!
The joys of heaven I'd forego
To have you with me there below,' —
Said Aucassin to Nicolette."

Here the three notes of the old song story are admirably struck: the force and freshness of young passion, the troubadourish sweetness of literary manner, the rebellious humanity. Young love has ever been impatient of the middle-aged

wisdom of the world, and fiercely resisted the pious or practical restraints to its happiness; but perhaps the rebelliousness of young hearts has never been so audaciously expressed as in "Aucassin and Nicolete." The absurdity of parents who, after all these generations of experience, still confidently oppose themselves to that omnipotent passion which Holy Writ itself tells us many waters cannot quench; the absurdity of thin-blooded, chilly old maids of both sexes who would have us believe that this warm-hearted ecstasy is an evil thing, and that prayer and fasting are better worth doing — not in the most "pagan" literature of our own time have these twin absurdities been assailed with more outspoken contempt than in this naïf old romance of the thirteenth century. The Count Bougars de Valence is at war with Count Garin de Biaucaire. The town of Biaucaire is closely besieged and its Count is in despair, for he is an old man, and his son Aucassin, who should take his place, is so overtaken with a hopeless passion that he sits in a lovesick dream, refusing to put on his armour or to take any part in the defense

of the town. His father reproaches him, and how absolutely of our own day rings his half-bored, half-impatient answer. "'Father,' said Aucassin, 'I marvel that you will be speaking. Never may God give me aught of my desire if I be made knight, or mount my horse, or face stour and battle wherein knights smite and are smitten again, unless thou give me Nicolete, my true love, that I love so well. . . .'"

Father — *can't* you understand? How strange old people are! Don't you see how it is?

"Father, I marvel that you will be speaking!" It is the eternal exclamation, the universal shrug, of youth confronted by "these tedious old fools!"

Now Nicolete is no proper match for Aucassin, a great Count's son — though, naturally, in Aucassin's opinion, "if she were Empress of Constantinople or of Germany, or Queen of France or England, it were little enough for her" — because she is "the slave girl" of the Count's own Captain-at-arms, who had bought her of the Saracens, reared, christened and adopted her as his "daughter-in-God." Actually she is the daughter of the King of Carthage, though no

one in Biaucaire, not even herself, knows of her high birth. The reader, of course, would naturally guess as much, for no polite jongleur of the Middle Ages, addressing, as he did, an audience of the highest rank, would admit into his stories any but heroes and heroines with the finest connections.

Father and son by turns have an interview with the Captain. The Captain promises the Count to send Nicolete into a far country, and the story goes in Biaucaire that she is lost, or made away with by the order of the Count. The Captain, however, having an affection for his adopted daughter, and being a rich man, secretes her high up in "a rich palace with a garden in face of it." To him comes Aucassin asking for news of his lady. The Captain, with whose dilemma it is possible for any one not in his first youth to sympathize, lectures Aucassin not unkindly after the prescribed formulas. It is impossible for

Aucassin to marry Nicolete, and were he less honest, hell would be his portion and Paradise closed against him forever. It is in answer to this admirable common sense that Aucassin flashes out his famous defiance. "Paradise!" he laughs — "in Paradise what have I to win? Therein I seek not to enter, but only to have Nicolete, my sweet lady that I love so well. For into Paradise go none but such folk as I shall tell thee now: Thither go these same old priests, and halt old men and maimed, who all day and night cower continually before the altars and in the crypts; and such folk as wear old amices and old clouted frocks, and naked folk and shoeless, and covered with sores, perishing of hunger and thirst, and of cold, and of little ease. These be they that go into Paradise, with them have I naught to make. But into hell would I fain go; for into hell fare the goodly clerks, and goodly knights that fall in tourneys and great wars, and stout men-at-arms, and

all men noble. With these would I liefly go. And thither pass the sweet ladies and courteous that have two lovers, or three, and their lords also thereto. Thither go the gold, and the silver, and cloth of vair, and cloth of gris, and harpers, and makers, and the princes of this world. With these I would gladly go, let me but have with me Nicolete, my sweetest lady."

Aucassin's defiance of priests as well as parents is something more significant than the impulsive utterance of wilful youth. It is at once, as Pater has pointed out, illustrative of that humanistic revolt against the ideals of Christian asceticism which even in the Middle Ages was already beginning — a revolt openly acknowledged in the so-called Renaissance — and a revolt growingly characteristic of our own time. The gospel of the Joy of Life is no mere heresy to-day. Rather it may be said to be the prevailing faith. Aucassin's spirited speech is no longer a lonely protest. It has become a creed.

Finding Aucassin unshaken in his determination, the Count his father bribes him with a promise that, if he will take the field, he shall be

Nicolete Weighs How She May Escape from the Tower

permitted to see Nicolete — "even so long," Aucassin stipulates, "that I may have of her two words or three, and one kiss." The compact made, Aucassin does so mightily "with his hands" against the enemy that he raises the siege and takes prisoner the Count Bougars de Valence. But the father refuses the agreed reward — and here, after the charming manner of the old story-teller himself, we may leave prose awhile and continue the story in verse — the correct formula is "Here one singeth":

"When the Count Garin doth know
That his child would ne'er forego
Love of her that loved him so,
Nicolete, the bright of brow,
In a dungeon deep below
Childe Aucassin did he throw.
Even there the Childe must dwell
In a dun-walled marble cell.
There he waileth in his woe,
Crying thus as ye shall know:
'Nicolete, thou lily white,
My sweet lady, bright of brow,
Sweeter than the grape art thou,
Sweeter than sack posset good
In a cup of maple wood . . .

"'My sweet lady, lily white,
Sweet thy footfall, sweet thine eyes,
And the mirth of thy replies.

"'Sweet thy laughter, sweet thy face,
Sweet thy lips and sweet thy brow,
And the touch of thy embrace.
Who but doth in thee delight?
I for love of thee am bound
In this dungeon underground,
All for loving thee must lie
Here where loud on thee I cry,
Here for loving thee must die,
For thee, my love.'"

Now Nicolete is no less whole-hearted and indomitable in her love than Aucassin. She is like a prophecy of Rosalind in her adventurous, full-blooded girlhood. When her master has locked her up in the tower, she loses no time in making a vigorous escape by that ladder of knotted bedclothes without which romance could hardly have gone on existing. Who that has read it can forget the picture of her as she slips down into the moonlit garden, and kilts up her kirtle "because of the dew that she saw lying deep on the grass"? —

"Her locks were yellow and curled, her eyes blue and smiling, her face featly fashioned, the nose high and fairly set,

the lips more red than cherry or rose in time of summer, her teeth white and small; her breasts so firm that they bore up the folds of her bodice as they had been two apples; so slim she was in the waist that your two hands might have clipped her, and the daisy flowers that brake beneath her as she went tiptoe, and that bent above her instep, seemed black against her feet, so white was the maiden."

As Nicolete steals in the moonlight to the ruinous tower where her lover lies, she hears him "wailing within, and making dole and lament for the sweet lady he loves so well." The lovers snatch a perilous talk, while the town's guards pass down the street with drawn swords seeking Nicolete, but not remarking her crouched in the shadow of the tower. How Nicolete makes good her escape into the wildwood and builds a bower of woven boughs with her own hands, and how Aucassin finds her there, and the joy they have, and their wandering together in

strange lands, their losing each other once more, and their final happy finding of each other again — "by God's will who loveth lovers" — is not all this written in the Book of Love? —

> "Sweet the song, the story sweet.
> There is no man hearkens it,
> No man living 'neath the sun
> So outwearied, so foredone,
> Sick and woful, worn and sad,
> But is healèd, but is glad,
> 'Tis so sweet."

The story is simple enough, of a pattern old and familiar as love itself, but the telling of it is a rare achievement of artistry, that artistry which is so accomplished as to be able to imitate simplicity; for, roughly connected as are certain parts of the story, "Aucassin and Nicolete" in the main is evidently the work of one who was a true poet and an exquisite literary craftsman. The curious, almost unique, form of it is one of its most characteristic charms; for it is written alternately in prose and verse. The verse sometimes repeats in a condensed form what has already been related in the prose, sometimes elaborates upon it, and sometimes carries on the

Aucassin Finds Nicolete in a Bower in the Wood.

story independently. The formula with which the prose is introduced is: "So say they, speak they, tell they the Tale," and the formula for introducing the verse, as already noted, is: "Here one singeth." These formulas, and the fact that the music for some of the songs has come down to us on the precious unique manuscript preserved in the Bibliothêque Nationale, lead critics to think that the romance was probably presented by a company of jongleurs, with music, and possibly with some dramatic action. The author is unknown, and the only reference to him is his own in the opening song:

> "Who would list to the good lay,
> Gladness of the captive gray?"

M. Gaston Paris suggests that the "viel caitif" lived and wrote in the time of Louis VII. (1130), and Mr. Lang draws a pretty picture of the "elderly, nameless minstrel strolling with his viol and his singing-boys . . . from castle to castle in 'the happy poplar land.'" Beaucaire is better known nowadays for its ancient fair than for its lovers. According to tradition, that fair has been held annually for something like a

thousand years — and our lovers have been dead almost as long. Still, thanks to the young heart of that unknown old troubadour, their love is as fresh as a may-bush in his songs, the dew is still on the moonlit daisies where Nicolete's white feet have just passed, and her bower in the wildwood is as green as the day she wove it out of boughs and flowers. As another old poet has sung, "the world might find the spring by following her" — so exquisitely vernal is the spirit that breathes from this old song story. To read in it is to take the advice given to Aucassin by a certain knight. "Aucassin," said the knight, "of that sickness of thine have I been sick, and good counsel will I give thee . . . mount thy horse, and go take thy pastime in yonder forest, there wilt thou see the good flowers and grass, and hear the sweet birds sing. Perchance thou shalt hear some word, whereby thou shalt be the better."

Aucassin and Nicolete

The reader will do well to take the knight's advice, and follow into the woodland "the fair white feet of Nicolete."

III

Sir Philip Sidney and Lady Penelope Devereux

IT is strange that a love story connected with so illustrious a name as that of Sir Philip Sidney should, practically, be forgotten. Sidney lives in the popular imagination by the famous anecdote of the cup of cold water, and as the type of all that was gallant and gentle in the Elizabethan gentleman. But it is doubtful whether, in spite of Charles Lamb's attempt to refresh the memory of time, any one, outside scholars and enthusiasts for the old-fashioned gardens of English poetry, ever reads either his once famous romance of "Arcadia" or his much more important poems. Sonnet anthologies usually contain the sonnet, "With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the sky," but the sequence of which it is but one constituent, that fascinating, heartfelt sequence of sonnets and songs which tells of the loves of "Astrophel and Stella," is,

I imagine, very seldom taken from its dusty shelf. Yet, what an ever-fragrant garden it is, and how vividly its old passionate story still tells itself in the old, ever young, words.

Doubtless it suffers with the general reader from its old spelling and its euphuistic conceits, and its general air of archaism. Nothing frightens your general reader like long "s's" and unnecessary "e's." It may be said that when a poet is great enough, he is sure to be printed without these marks of the antiquity from which he comes. Shakespeare's sonnets, for example, are in their original spelling no less ruffed and doubleted than Sidney's, but we know them in the spelling of our own time. Chaucer, however, is a great poet whom we have to take as he himself spelled or not at all. And so with Sidney — though, of course, his archaism is nothing like so difficult. Actually, of course, to the true lover of old poetry there is a positive charm in the quaint look of the old spelling, and a real gain in atmosphere. There is, too, something naïve and appealing about it, similar to the charm that sometimes belongs to the accent

of a foreigner talking English. It is the fascinating broken accent of antiquity. Take this sonnet with which the love-journal of "Astrophel and Stella" opens:

"Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,
That she, deare She, might take some pleasure of my paine, —
Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine, —
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe;
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine,
Oft turning other's leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sunne-burn'd braine.
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay;
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Studie's blowes;
And others' feete still seem'd but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with childe to speak, and helplesse in my throwes,
Biting my trewand pen, beating myselfe for spite;
Foole, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart, and write."

Thus Sidney looked into his heart and wrote, so sincerely and simply that we,

all these years after, can, if we care, looking into his book, look into his heart also. Many of the sonnets are affected after the manner of the time, stuck full of "vain amatorious" fancies, as Milton said, but no more so than Shakespeare's own, and very soon, underneath all the literary laces and fripperies, we are aware of a brave heart beating, and almost breaking, with a love "that never found its earthly close."

Certain editors and biographers have protested against the natural interpretation of Sidney's sonnets, as interested editors and biographers will, but the editor of Sidney whose opinion matters most, Mr. A. W. Pollard, is in favor of the natural reading. Most editors seem to consider it a point of honour to whitewash their heroes out of all their common humanity and to reduce them as much as possible to models of abstract power and perfection. In Sidney's case, some of us may find a character of such legendary excellence gain rather than lose by a story

which reveals him possessed too of like human passion and frailty with ourselves. Sidney's grace and gentleness, as often happens with people of gentle manners and delicate natures, have somewhat unfairly sweetened and sanctified his memory, so that the world has forgotten that he was a brave soldier as well as a graceful courtier; a man of stern moral courage — as witness his outspoken criticism of Queen Elizabeth's proposed Spanish match; an impulsive and intrepid antagonist — as witness his unaccepted challenge to the brutal and bullying Earl of Oxford; and a fiery and fearless lover whose passion was far from expending itself in sonnets.

It appears probable that Astrophel first set eyes upon his Stella in the summer of 1575, at Chartley Castle, the seat of the Earl of Essex, on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's visit there. Sidney, though as yet not twenty-one, was already a gallant and accomplished figure at court, and *persona grata* with the Queen, in whose train he arrived at Chartley, fresh from Kenilworth and those historic festivities of his magnificent uncle,

the Earl of Leicester. The little Lady Penelope Devereux, eldest daughter of his host and hostess, was only twelve, but already of a strange and striking beauty. Being, too, as her subsequent career proved, of a romantic temperament, she could hardly fail to have been interested in the brilliant young courtier, though indeed, so far as we can judge, neither Sidney nor she appears to have fallen in love at first sight. Sidney definitely speaks for himself on this point in his second sonnet:

" Not at the first sight, nor with a dribbèd shot,
Love gave the wound, which, while I breathe,
will bleed;
But knowne worth did in mine of time proceed,
Till by degrees it had full conquest got.
I saw, and liked; I liked, but lovèd not;
I loved, but straight did not what Love decreed:
At length, to Love's decrees I, forc'd, agreed,
Yet with repining at so partiall lot."

And there seems good reason to think that Penelope's love was of even still slower growth. Nevertheless, Sidney appears to have lost no time in following up the acquaintance thus begun at Chartley, and very soon we find him a frequent visitor at Durham House and high in

the affections of Penelope's father, who, it is said, was wont to call him his "son by adoption" and who, on his death-bed, in the September of 1576 — when Sidney was hastening toward him, to arrive, alas! too late — left him this touching message: "Oh, that good gentleman, have me commended unto him. And tell him I sent him nothing, but I wish him well — so well, that if God do move their hearts, I wish that he might match with my daughter. I call him son — he is so wise, virtuous, and godly. If he go on in the course he hath begun, he will be as famous and worthy a gentleman as ever England bred."

It appears soon to have been common talk at court that the dying Earl's wish was to take, or had already taken, the form of a definite engagement. So matters stood in the autumn of 1576, when the darkness of time suddenly falls upon the story, and the historian is left to conjecture; till once more, in 1581,

the startling fact emerges that Penelope has been married, not to Sidney, but to Lord Rich, a man of very different type, coarse and cruel, and, it would appear, by no means Penelope's own choice. There exists a letter from the Earl of Devonshire to James I. in which the Earl states that, Penelope "being in the power of her friends, she was by them married against her will unto one against whom she did protest at the very solemnity and ever after." The reason of this enforced marriage is very plausibly suggested by Mr. Pollard, who has pieced together the whole story with skill. Two years after her husband's death, the Dowager Countess of Essex (that is, Penelope's mother) was married to Philip's uncle, the Earl of Leicester. Up to that time Philip had been his uncle's heir, and, therefore, one of the best matches in England, but with that marriage and the subsequent arrival of a cousin, Philip, as Mr. Pollard points out,

became a poor, even a very poor, gentleman. Penelope's mother and friends might, therefore, be anxious to find her a wealthier husband. So Mr. Pollard, with great probability, accounts for Lord Rich's place in the story. Surely, if this conjecture be correct, it must have seemed the bitterest of ironies for the two lovers that the marriage of Stella's mother to her lover's uncle should thus destroy the happiness of their lives.

Whether or not Philip and Penelope had been formally engaged during this interval, it is certain that he and she saw much of each other at the houses of mutual relatives and friends, and that they were still seeing each other in the summer and the late autumn of 1580. Though the love up till then seems to have been mainly, if not entirely, on Sidney's side, and Penelope's attitude rather that of a coquette, attracted but still unwon, there seems no reason for thinking that Lord Rich was as yet a factor in her future; and, indeed, her forced marriage with him may have come to her with no less shock of cruel surprise than it appears to have come with to Sidney himself. Judging by one of Sidney's songs, his first

Portrait of Sidney in Armor
From Original Engraving

anger seems to have been directed against Penelope herself, and one may add that a man of Sidney's calibre would hardly inveigh against a woman in the fashion of this stanza without her having given him the excuse of at least great hopes of her love:

"Ring out your belles, let mourning shewes be spread;
For Love is dead:
All Love is dead, infected
With plague of deep disdaine:
Worth, as nought worth, rejected,
And Faith faire scorne doth gaine.
From so ungratefull fancie,
From such a femall franzie,
From them that use men thus,
Good Lord, deliver us!"

Before writing the last stanza of the poem, however, which reads like a postscript, Sidney appears to have realized the truth: that Stella was not unfaithful to him, but that she, rather than he, was the victim:

"Alas, I lie: rage hath this errour bred;
Love is not dead;
Love is not dead, but sleepeth
In her unmatchèd mind,
Where she his counsell keepeth,
Till due desert she find.

"Therefore from so vile fancie,
To call such wit a franzie,
Who Love can temper thus,
Good Lord, deliver us!"

And, with the realization that she was in no true sense the wife of Lord Rich, he seems to have determined that such a so-called marriage should be no bar to his true love, but that Penelope Devereux virtually, and even virtuously, remained Penelope Devereux still; a woman still honourably to be wooed and rightfully to be won. So, at least, it seems natural to interpret this stanza which concludes a poem entitled "The Smokes of Melancholy":

"For me, alas, I am full resolv'd
Those bands, alas, shall not be dissolv'd;
Nor breake my word, though reward come late;
Nor faile my faith in my failing fate;
Nor change in change, though change change my state:
But alwayes one myselfe with eagle eyde Trueth, to flie
Up to the sunne, although the sunne my wings do frie;
For if those flames burne my desire,
Yet shall I die in Phœnix' fire."

That Sidney followed up this resolve with a determination which had perhaps never before marked his wooing is proved by something like two-thirds of the entire "Astrophel and Stella." In these sonnets and songs the story of his heart can be read, as it were, from day to day. And if we can judge by two outspoken sonnets punning on the hated name of Rich, he appears to have made no secret of his hatred for the man who had bought the woman he loved against her will. Here is one of them:

"Towárd Aurora's Court a nymph doth dwell,
Rich in all beauties which man's eye can see;
Beauties so farre from reach of words, that we
Abase her praise saying she doth excell;
Rich in the treasure of deserv'd renowne,
Rich in the riches of a royall hart,
Rich in those gifts which give th' eternall crowne;
Who, though most rich in these and everie part
Which make the patents of true worldly blisse,
Hath no misfortune but that Rich she is."

If no true blame attaches to Sidney for his refusal to recognize such a marriage, surely it was not wrong in Penelope

(who, it must be remembered, was so lately a woman — she was only eighteen on her marriage) to realize for the first time by the cruel contrast of her marriage what she had lost by her possible previous coquetry with Sidney, and to give to his wooing a value and a hearing such as, in her unawakened, irresponsible girlhood, she had never thought or cared to give it before. A girl married, as she was married, brutally against her will, could hardly be blamed for even more serious forms of rebellion than giving ear to a noble lover whom too late she had learned to love. We can, therefore, do no injustice to Penelope in deducing from Sidney's sonnets that it was not till after she became Lady Rich that her love for Sidney really awoke. We may do this with the less fear of injustice for two good reasons. Sidney was not the man to pursue Stella with a love which she had manifestly and definitely shown him she did not desire; nor, therefore, was he the man to write falsely about the incidents of his wooing, even in the licensed form of the sonnet. Again, everything he tells us is eminently in Stella's favour. He reveals

indeed that, after patient importunity, he had persuaded her to acknowledge her love, but he reveals too with what reluctance the confession had been drawn from her, how innocent were the tokens she had given of her love, and how she had striven with his more lawless passion — striven, as the lofty feeling and resolution of the concluding sonnets prove, with a gentle firmness far from in vain.

To illustrate the story by adequate quotations would take up too much space, and indeed many of the sonnets most significant historically are of least worth poetically, and may well be left for the reader to peruse for himself. Here, however, is one that can hardly be omitted, as it proves at once Stella's love for Sidney and the fine nature of that love:

"Late tyr'd with wo, even ready for to pine
With rage of love, I cald my Love unkind;
She in whose eyes love, though unfelt, doth shine,
Sweet said, that I true love in her should find.
I joyed; but straight thus watred was my wine:
That love she did, but loved a love not blind,
Which would not let me, whom she loved, decline
From nobler course, fit for my birth and mind:
And therefore, by her love's authority,

"Wild me these tempests of vaine love to flie,
And anchor fast my selfe on Vertue's shore.
Alas, if this the only mettall be
Of love new-coind to helpe my beggery,
Deare, love me not, that ye may love me more."

This is followed by a playful sonnet which, as with many of the poems that tell us this sad old story, is all the more appealingly human for its very playfulness. Stella had said "No, no!" to some loving advance of Sidney's. Accepting her rebuff, Sidney reminds her of the old grammatical rule that two negatives make an affirmative:

". . . For late, with heart most high, with eyes most low,
I crav'd the thing which ever she denies;
She, lightning love, displaying Venus' skies,
Least once should not be heard, twise said, No, No!
Sing then, my Muse, now Io Pæan sing;
Heav'ns envy not at my high triumphing,
But grammer's force with sweet successe confirme:
For grammer sayes, — O this, deare Stella, say, —
For grammer sayes, — to grammer who sayes nay? —
That in one speech two negatives affirme!"

The reference is perhaps to an occasion still more poignantly celebrated in one of the songs, which the reader may care to find for himself — with the refrain:

> "Take me to thee, and thee to me:
> 'No, no, no, no, my Deare, let be.'"

It is evident that when Sidney determined to be Penelope's lover in earnest, he was impatient with half-measures, and it may well have seemed to his soldierly sense of action that such a husband as Lord Rich was a man to fight, and if necessary kill, for the release of such a wife. But Penelope, though later in life she was to take short cuts to a happiness perhaps less worthy than Sidney offered her, would give no ear to his desperate proposals. Once, we read, she was angry with him for some time because, having come upon her while she dozed, he had stolen a kiss. She seems to have forgiven him the theft, and afterwards, on rare occasions, to have saved him from being again a thief by a timely gift. But

the ardours and hopes which even such a guarded graciousness aroused in Sidney appear to have grown too perilous for her conscience, and in one of the sweetest reproofs in poetry — a reproof whose very tenderness means the very gift that is denied — she begs Sidney to desist: for her and honour's sake. I quote only a few verses, the artificial pastoral style of which must not disguise for the reader the vital significance beneath:

"In a grove most rich of shade,
Where birds wanton musicke made,
May, then yong, his pide weedes showing,
New-perfumed with flowers fresh growing:

"Astrophel with Stella sweete
Did for mutual comfort meete,
Both within themselves oppressèd,
But each in the other blessèd.

"Him great harmes had taught much care,
Her faire necke a foule yoke bare;
But her sight his cares did banish,
In his sight her yoke did vanish."

Astrophel growing too eager in his love, Stella thus admonishes him:

"Astrophel, sayd she, my love,
Cease, in these effects, to prove;
Now be still, yet still beleeve me,
Thy griefe more than death would grieve me.

Sidney's Birthplace

"If that any thought in me
Can tast comfort but of thee,
Let me, fed with hellish anguish,
Joylesse, hopelesse, endlesse languish . . .

"If to secret of my hart,
I do any wish impart,
Where thou art not foremost placèd,
Be both wish and I defacèd.

"If more may be sayd, I say,
All my blisse in thee I lay;
If thou love, my love content thee.
For all love, all faith is meant thee.

"Trust me, while I thee deny,
In my selfe the smart I try;
Tyran honour doth thus use thee,
Stella's selfe might not refuse thee

"Therefore, deere, this no more move,
Least, though I leave not thy love,
Which too deep in me is framèd,
I should blush when thou are namèd."

Did a loving woman ever deny her lover in words of more heavenly tenderness and purity, and did ever a lover interpret such a denial with so fine a touch? The whole poem seems to have a prophetic accent of Lovelace's famous cry a hundred years later:

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more."

But, mirror of chivalry and soul of honour as Sidney was, it seems to have taken him some time to accept the lesson Stella thus taught; and, indeed, it might well seem that the true honour was on the side of his honourable love rather than on the side of a dishonourable marriage. Indeed, when at last we find him bidding his noble farewell to the love that was the very life of his pure heart, the terms of his farewell do not indicate that he abandoned that love from any sense of its dishonour in that worldly sense of which Stella had reminded him, but because — as some saint might abandon the world for the service of God, or as some patriot might sacrifice his domestic ties to the service of his country — he had determined to abandon earthly love altogether. Stella could not, would not, be his, and as time proved her determination to be irrevocable, Sidney, in spite of all his ardent worship for her, could but at length come home to his

own soul, and realize that for one of his soaring spirit and ambitious mind there was other employment than the soul-sickness of a disappointed lover. It was, we may imagine, with some such realization of his duties to himself, rather than in any recognition of unworthiness in a love that can never have seemed other than sacred to him, that he wrote this sonnet, in which the love story of Astrophel and Stella is, as it were, carried up to heaven with strains of angelic music:

"Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust;
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;
What ever fades, but fading pleasure brings.
Draw in thy beames, and humble all thy might
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedomes be;
Which breakes the clowdes, and opens forth the light,
That doth both shine, and give us sight to see.
O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide
In this small course which birth drawes out to death,
And think how evill becommeth him to slide,
Who seeketh heav'n, and comes of heav'nly breath.
Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see:
Eternall Love, maintaine thy life in me."

That Sidney, indeed, found himself, and that he devoted the few remaining years of his life to the "great cause which needs both use and art," to which he refers in the last sonnet but one, and which, if at the moment of his writing it had a more particular meaning, is for us to-day sufficiently particularized as the service of his country, is well enough known from the familiar histories. It was probably in the autumn of 1581 that Astrophel took that solemn farewell of his Stella. That he was married in the March of 1583 to Frances, daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham, does not seem to be a fact of any special significance to our story. Disappointed lovers usually marry, and Sidney was now once more a distinguished man of this world, who might necessarily wish to marry for many reasons — none of which need be counted forgetfulness of Stella. On the 17th of October, 1586, he died, as all the school-children know, from a wound inflicted at the battle of Zutphen on September 22d — and even in his own day, so romantic seemed the death of such a man, that, although he was, in a sense, only a private gentleman of no great official

importance, he was buried like a king in old St. Paul's. The court wore mourning for him, and it is pleasant to read that Stella's grief was naked and unashamed.

Poor Stella! Her after-life reads like a curious paradox. In spite of her husband's brutality, she remained his faithful wife for some nine years after Sidney's death. But about this time she formed an attachment for Sir Christopher Blount, and the virtue which had resisted Sidney succumbed to him. She fled with her lover and lived publicly with him for many years, finally being divorced from Lord Rich and sharing with Blount his subsequent honors as Earl of Devonshire and his ultimate disgrace. One may be pardoned for wishing for Sidney's sake that her virtue had withstood to the end. Yet, no doubt, the simple answer is that she loved Blount better than she loved Sidney. If, like Astrophel, you love a star, you must be content to see it shine. It is very seldom that the star will love you in return.

IV

Shelley and Mary Godwin

THE piteous end of Shelley's first wife, Harriet Westbrook, has naturally deflected the sympathy of the world in her direction; and it is, of course, well that we should give ear to the plea on her behalf so beautifully made by Mr. William Watson:

"A star looked down from heaven and loved a flower
Grown in earth's garden — loved it for an hour;
O you that watch his orbit in the spheres,
Refuse not to a ruined rosebud tears."

Yet there was really no danger of the world refusing its tears to that ruined rosebud. The danger has rather been that in giving its sympathy to Harriet it has somewhat forgotten that Shelley and Mary had a claim on its sympathy too, and really a more serious claim. Stars have their rights as well as rosebuds,

and if Shelley's marriage with Harriet was a tragic mistake for Harriet, it was surely no less tragic a mistake for Shelley. To find oneself married to the wrong woman at the early age of nineteen is a terrible enough mistake to begin one's life with for any man. For a nature such as Shelley's it was a spiritual tragedy of the most serious kind.

When, at last, it was clearly seen that the mistake was past mending — and seen the more clearly by Shelley, because in meeting Mary Godwin he felt, and felt rightly, that he had met his true mate — Shelley saw but one way out, and surely there was no other way. Life with Harriet had become impossible for both of them. That they had made a schoolboy and schoolgirl mistake seemed no reason for their perpetuating and aggravating it. Love could alone justify their continuing together, and their illusive love was dead.

Was a false marriage to stand in the

way of a true marriage? Shelley and Mary decided that it should not, and though the world of their day was against them, time has been on their side. Their love story has come to have a value for humanity at large. It belongs to the important world-series of First Examples. Many lovers, indeed, before Shelley and Mary, had taken the law into their own hands, but the difference between their stories and this story is that they have rather represented lawlessness, whereas Shelley and Mary break an old law only to make a new and better law, or, at least, merely to illustrate its necessity. Shelley and Mary stand, not so much for rebellious passion, as for common sense in the regulation of the difficult partnership of the sexes. They represent the right of human beings to correct their matrimonial mistakes, a right even yet stupidly and superstitiously denied. Their example was not, as often misrepresented, in favour of any facile promiscuity. Quite the reverse, its significance was that of a marriage conceived on the principles of the only real monogamy, an instinctive monogamy, based on natural selection, spiritual, mental,

Percy Bysshe Shelley

and physical — a spontaneous, even an eager, monogamy, and not merely an arbitrary legal fiat. Of all people, Shelley and Mary held the doctrine of One Man for One Woman — only, they insisted, it must be the Right Man for the Right Woman.

Shelley first became acquainted with Harriet through his sister Mary, who was her schoolmate at Mrs. Fenning's genteel academy for young ladies, at Church House, Clapham. In January, 1811, Shelley had called at the schoolhouse with a letter of introduction to Harriet, and also a present to her from Mary. Harriet was then about fifteen and a half, Shelley about eighteen and a half. Harriet was sixteen on August first, and Shelley nineteen on August fourth. Harriet appears to have been a pretty, attractive girl, of what one might call the May queen type. Good-natured, bright in her manner, and accomplished after polite boarding-school standards, she was the typical, pretty, popular queen of the school. Her nature, while essentially commonplace, was sympathetically open to the influence of more definite natures, and capable, chameleon-like,

of taking its colour from her intimates — a pleasing but dangerous gift. She was the daughter of one John Westbrook, a retired "coffee-house" keeper — otherwise publican — a man so Jewish in appearance as to be nicknamed "Jew Westbrook." Her mother counted for nothing, and her home was ruled jointly by her father and a forbidding sister, Eliza Westbrook, a narrow-minded, strong-willed and common-natured woman, at least twice her age. It was, of course, well known at Mrs. Fenning's school that the fantastic young poet, who occasionally called there to see his sisters, was heir to a baronetcy and six thousand pounds a year. Shelley, very susceptible — and pathetically young — was quickly attracted by Harriet's engaging, popular ways and her pretty simulation of a mind; and it was only human nature that Eliza Westbrook should dream of, and even plan for, this possible aristocratic alliance for her sister.

Shelley had lost no time in filling poor Harriet's head with his very youthful rationalism on every subject, from theology to vegetarianism. At first, Harriet had been horrified to hear him call himself an "atheist" — one of his favourite misrepresentations of himself. If ever there was a mind less accurately answering to all that the word "atheist" carries with it, it was Shelley's — but Harriet became accustomed to the terrible word before long, and in a few weeks began really to think that she thought the same as Shelley. She had, at all events, superficially assimilated his views sufficiently to suffer some persecution for them at school, and, it was said, in her own home. This "persecution" was all that was needed to make Shelley conceive himself her champion and protector, and it was a boyish chivalry, as noble as it was unwise, rather than the impulse of love, that prompted Shelley to take the false step of marrying Harriet.

Long before Shelley had met Mary, life with Harriet had become impossible for him, and even if Mary had not entered into the story, it is highly improbable that Shelley and Harriet could have continued to live together. It must be added, too, that before he finally parted from her, Shelley firmly believed, rightly or wrongly, that Harriet had been unfaithful to him; also that he was scrupulously careful to make proper provision for her after their separation; that he believed, too, that she desired the separation no less than himself; and finally, that Harriet's suicide was not the direct result of Shelley's leaving her, but the result of her desertion by a subsequent lover.

Shelley had been married to Harriet on August 28, 1811 — "the united ages of bride and bridegroom," as has been said, "making thirty-five." It was in May or June of 1814 that he first saw Mary, when already the distress and disappointment of his marriage were weighing heavily on his heart and mind. The daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, brought up in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom, and, indeed, so to say, heiress to a revolutionary tra-

dition, was naturally predisposed toward the sad young rebel, who not only looked up to her father as his master, but was giving such unselfish proof of his reverence by that generous financial assistance which Godwin was never ashamed to seek — even when, with preposterous moral loftiness, he was ostentatiously disapproving of Shelley's love for his daughter. It was during one of Shelley's calls on Godwin, for the purpose of thus assisting him, that he saw Mary for the first time. She was in her seventeenth year, and is thus described by Professor Dowden: "Shapely, golden head, a face very pale and pure, great forehead, earnest hazel eyes, and an expression at once of sensibility and firmness about her delicately curved lips." Her nature was more conservative than that of either her father or her mother, which made her all the more suitable as a wife for Shelley, with his inflammable idealism and headlong experimentalism. She seems, too, to have combined a firm mental balance with powers of strong feeling which were deep, but not demonstrative, and Hogg, a shrewd observer, was struck by the impressive quietness of her manner.

Here is an extract from his account of a call which he and Shelley made at Godwin's house, in Skinner Street, on June 8, 1814. Godwin was out, and while they awaited his return, Shelley impatiently paced up and down the room. "He appeared to be displeased," writes Hogg, in his ironical manner, "at not finding the fountain of Political Justice. 'Where is Godwin?' he asked me several times, as if I knew. I did not know, and, to say the truth, I did not care. He continued his uneasy promenade; and I stood reading the names of old English authors on the backs of the venerable volumes, when the door was partially and softly opened. A thrilling voice called: 'Shelley!' A thrilling voice answered: 'Mary!' And he darted out of the room, like an arrow from the bow of the far-shooting king. A very young female, fair and fair-haired, pale indeed, and with a piercing look, wearing a frock of tartan, an unusual dress in London at

that time, had called him out of the room. He was absent a very short time — a minute or two; and then returned. 'Godwin is out; there is no use in waiting.' So we continued our walk along Holborn. 'Who was that, pray?' I asked; 'a daughter?' 'Yes.' 'A daughter of William Godwin?' 'The daughter of Godwin and Mary.' This was the first time . . . that I beheld a very distinguished lady, of whom I have much to say hereafter. It was but the glance of a moment, through a door partly opened. Her quietness certainly struck me, and possibly also, for I am not quite sure on that point, her pale, piercing look."

Before the end of June, Shelley was writing verses to her like these:

"Mine eyes were dim with tears unshed;
Yes, I was firm — thus wert not thou;
My baffled looks did fear yet dread
To meet thy looks — I could not know
How anxiously they sought to shine
With soothing pity upon mine.

"To sit and curb the soul's mute rage
Which preys upon itself alone;

"To curse the life which is the cage
Of fettered grief that dares not groan,
Hiding from many a careless eye
The scornèd load of agony.

"Upon my heart thy accents sweet,
Of peace and pity, fell like dew
On flowers half dead; — thy lips did meet
Mine tremblingly; thy dark eyes threw
Thy soft persuasion on my brain,
Charming away its dream of pain.

"We are not happy! sweet; our state
Is strange and full of doubt and fear;
More need of words that ills abate;
Reserve or censure come not near
Our sacred friendship, lest there be
No solace left for thee and me."

Mary was devoted to the memory of her mother whom she had never seen, as she had died when Mary was born. Her step-mother, the second Mrs. Godwin, was not sympathetic to her, and one of Mary's favourite haunts was her mother's grave in St. Pancras churchyard, then situated among green fields, and not as now in the lap of railway termini. She would often sit there, reading and enjoying that solitude which is so hard to get among the living; and it is not improbable that Shelley was aware of her solitude. And, sentiment apart, could there have been a more

Field Place, Sussex. The Poet's Birthplace

appropriate altar for their love than the tomb of the brave woman who had courage when such unconventional courage as Mary Wollstonecraft's really meant something, not as now, when it is not only a drug in the market, but a hackneyed feminine device?

To the dispassionate onlooker Mary Godwin may lack certain qualities which are popularly supposed to inspire great passions in men. There was a certain primness about her. She had been begotten, so to say, on revolutionary principles, and there was the taint of propaganda about her. Still Shelley, assuredly, had no distaste for propaganda, and Mary was a woman too.

Any one capable of comprehending the situation can well understand, and sympathize in, the joy Shelley must have felt at meeting, for the first time in his life, the positive — not merely the placidly corroborative — feminine of himself. Harriet had been the prettiest of mental parrots. But Shelley — who, for all his idealism, was no fool — knew that he had made her, knew that she was to him merely a ventriloquist's dummy of the mind. To meet a woman who could really

talk back to him, a woman who had not learnt all from him, a woman whose mind was no mere feminine clay in the hands of the masculine potter, and a woman, too, who was also — a woman, gifted with charm and mystery and motherhood! Surely Shelley, of all men, merited the true wife of himself. It was as absurd as it was unhappy that he should have mated with a plump, little, rose-pink schoolgirl like Harriet. And oh, the wonderful refreshment and stimulus of Mary!

A copy of "Queen Mab" is in existence, given by Shelley to Mary, thus inscribed: "Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, P. B. S. . . . You see, Mary, I have not forgotten you." On a fly-leaf, at the end of the volume, is this impassioned avowal, in Mary's handwriting, dated July, 1814: "This book is sacred to me, and as no other creature shall ever look into it, I may write in it what I please — yet, what shall I write — that I love

the author beyond all powers of expression, and that I am parted from him, dearest and only love. By that love we have promised to each other, although I may not be yours, I can never be another's. But I am thine, exclusively thine.

"'By the kiss of love, the glance none saw beside,
The smile none else might understand,
The whispered thought of hearts allied,
The pressure of the thrilling hand,'

I have pledged myself to thee, and sacred is the gift. I remember your words — 'You are now, Mary, going to mix with many, and, for a moment, I shall depart, but in the solitude of your chamber I shall be with you' — yes, you are ever with me, sacred vision —

"'But ah! I feel in this was given
A blessing never meant for me;
Thou art too like a dream from heaven
For earthly love to merit thee.'"

Very soon Shelley was definitely to admit that there was no life for him apart from Mary. Harriet was out of London in July, and on July 14 Shelley wrote, beg-

ging her to come to town. When she came, he opened his mind and heart to her. Their marriage was a failure, and he suggested that they should part, though he would, of course, continue to provide for her, and saw no reason why they should not remain true and affectionate friends to each other. Harriet, who was expecting her second child in December, was made quite ill by the disclosure, and, for some days, Shelley was distracted between tenderness and pity for her, and his love for Mary. Harriet, woman-like, threw all the blame on Mary, though we know that Mary was in no way the initial cause of Shelley's separation from Harriet, a separation to which it would seem Harriet had not explicitly agreed, though she may have accepted it as the inevitable. The presence of her sister at her sick bedside would not help to mend matters, and, therefore, by July 27, 1814, Shelley and Mary had decided that they must act courageously, according to their own sense of right. Between four and five o'clock on the morning of July 28, 1814, Mary and Shelley — accompanied by Jane Clairmont, the second Mrs. Godwin's

daughter, by a former marriage — were starting for Dover, on their way to the Continent. Mary and Jane Clairmont left the house as if for a morning walk, and met Shelley at the corner of Hatton Garden, William Godwin having no suspicion of what was afoot.

Shelley's account of their flight in his journal still beats like a heart with the breathless excitement, the tremulous joy and fear, of the occasion. Here are one or two extracts:

"July 28 — The night preceding this morning, all being decided, I ordered a chaise to be ready by four o'clock. I watched until the lightning and the stars became pale. At length it was four. I believed it not possible that we should succeed; still there appeared to lurk some danger even in certainty. I went; I saw her; she came to me. Yet one quarter of an hour remained. Still some arrangement must be made, and she left me for a short time. How dreadful did this time appear; it seemed that we trifled with life and hope; a few minutes passed; she was in my arms — we were safe; we were on our road to Dover. . . .

"At Dartford we took four horses, that we might outstrip pursuit. We arrived at Dover before four o'clock. Some time was necessarily expended in consideration — in dinner — in bargaining with sailors and custom-house officers. At length we engaged a small boat to convey us to Calais; it was ready by six o'clock. The evening was most beautiful; the sands slowly receded; we felt safe. . . ."

They had a stormy and even dangerous passage. Shelley continues:

"Mary did not know our danger; she was resting, between my knees, that were unable to support her; she did not speak or look, but I felt that she was there. . . . The morning broke, the lightning died away, the violence of the wind abated. We arrived at Calais, whilst Mary still slept; we drove upon the sands. Suddenly, the broad sun rose over France.

"Friday, July 29 — I said, 'Mary,

look; the sun rises over France.' We walked over the sands to the inn. . . ."

"Mary, look; the sun rises over France." How full of hope and the exaltation of the new great life, at last really begun, are the words! Nor was the future to disappoint the hopes of that happy dawn. Shelley and Mary had lived side by side for nearly eight years, when, on July 8, 1822, death so cruelly separated them, and though, indeed, their married life was not without some passing shadows such as must occasionally darken even the closest and happiest union of two natures each so strongly individual, there never seems to have been a doubt in either heart that they were each other's true and final mate, and that they had done what life meant them to do in taking each other in defiance of the common usages of the world. Mary, indeed, is clearly seen to have been the ideal wife for Shelley, particularly in the wisdom with which she took the occasional — purely Platonic —

passions for other women to which his poet's sensibility made him liable. Possibly his very enraptured feeling for the Countess Emilia Viviani made the greatest demands on Mary's powers of "understanding" him, but Mary loved his work too well to be jealous of a feeling that had inspired, perhaps, the loftiest love poem in English — "Epipsychidion." She knew of what a poet's heart is made, how passionately sensitive to beauty, how subject to passing emotional possessions, and she knew that only so could a poet create for us his beautiful dreams. It was for a poet's wife to understand a poet's nature, and Mary understood. She knew that whatever light of beauty should attract his eyes for a moment, she was, as he had called her in the beautiful dedication to "The Revolt of Islam," — his "own heart's home":

> "So now my summer task is ended, Mary,
> And I return to thee, mine own heart's home;
> As to his Queen some victor Knight of Faëry,
> Earning bright spoils for her enchanted dome. . . ."

V

John Keats and Fanny Brawne

IT is surprising that the love stories of great poets should so often disappoint the romantic — and, one may add, the æsthetic — sense. From such lovers of love, and such passionists of beauty, one naturally expects not only the ideal passion, but the ideal object. Of all poets one would say this of John Keats, the one poet whose name has come to be synonymous with beauty; and it is certainly a particularly ironical paradox that the lady irritatingly associated with his name should be the least congruous of all the many commonplace women transfigured by the genius they could not understand, and the love of which they were not worthy. Most women honoured by the love of great poets have at least been inoffensive, placidly pretty, domestically devoted. They have been that, or they have been — devils. To both statements, there

are, of course, exceptions. Generally speaking, they have been neither beautiful nor intelligent. The poor poet, of course, thought they were both, — because he was a poet. A poet would hardly be a poet if he did not make such divinely absurd mistakes, and one might almost state it as the first necessity of his being a poet at all that he should make that grand mistake about the woman he loves. In this respect, the English poets have been particularly fortunate. Beatrice and Laura were indeed graceful nonentities, but there is something dainty and distinguished about their names that allows us to think of them without impatience as decorative and docile adjectives to the great names with which they are pathetically linked. One could mention no few poets of other nations who have succeeded in giving the names of the women they loved a significance hardly second to their own. But with such exceptions as, say Shelley

and Browning, Rossetti and William Morris, the English poets have proved singularly unable to sing their loves up among the stars. Of course, there is — Ann Hathaway. And there is also — Fanny Brawne.

Probably the reason of this is that most English poets have sprung from the middle classes, were born in the provinces, or lived in the suburbs. Beautiful women are born either among the very rich or the very poor. The English poet, as a rule, has been born between these extremes, and his lines have fallen neither in Mayfair nor Whitechapel — but in Clapham. He has come in contact neither with the noble lady, nor the beautiful peasant. His German-silver fate has been the water-colour miss of the academies for young ladies. Shelley met such a fate in silly little Harriet Westbrook, and Keats met another in the still sillier Fanny Brawne.

Fame, that loves to humour its poets,

has consented to glorify the names of many unimportant poor relations of genius, but there has never been a more insignificant name upon its lips than the name of Fanny Brawne. But John Keats loved a suburban miss of that name — and, perforce, Time, and perhaps even Eternity, must do her honour. One writes so, remembering not only the tortures to which she subjected a noble spirit with her dancing-class coquetries, but remembering too this passage in Sir Charles Dilke's Memoirs of his grandfather:

"Keats died admired only by his personal friends, and by Shelley; and even ten years after his death, when the first memoir was proposed, the woman he had loved had so little belief in his poetic reputation, that she wrote to Mr. Dilke, 'The kindest act would be to let him rest for ever in the obscurity to which circumstances have condemned him.'"

Ten years after his death the woman whom Endymion loved was still unable, not only to appreciate "the ode to a Grecian urn," but the immortal honour he had done her. Such an utterance makes one wish that Keats had lived

a year or two longer, not for the sake of his work — for he could have reached no higher perfection — but to recover from an absurd infatuation, which began in calf-love and grew hysterical with the advance of inherited consumption. That Keats would have recovered from his suburban passion, and passed on to some higher and completer love, his letters to Fanny Brawne herself sufficiently prove. So long as he was comparatively well and occupied with poetry he absented himself from the felicity of her presence with a prosaic deliberation which must have seemed strangely unloverlike to "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." It was only when illness gave a neurotic intensity to all his feelings that Fanny Brawne gained a painful importance. The sick have many fancies. When Keats was himself, before that drop of arterial blood upon the sheet, which told the surgical-student poet that he must die, he wrote like this to his happily married brother George: "Notwithstanding your happiness and your recommendations, I hope I shall never marry: though the most beautiful creature were waiting for me at the end of a journey or a

walk; though the carpet were of silk, and the curtains of the morning clouds, the chairs and sofas stuffed with cygnet's down, the food manna, the wine beyond claret, the window opening on Winandermere, I should not feel, or rather my happiness should not be, so fine; my solitude is sublime — for, instead of what I have described, there is a sublimity to welcome me home; the roaring of the wind is my wife; and the stars through my window-panes are my children; the mighty abstract Idea of Beauty in all things, I have, stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness. An amiable wife and sweet children I contemplate as part of that Beauty, but I must have a thousand of those beautiful particles to fill up my heart. . . . Those things, combined with the opinion I have formed of the generality of women, who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar-plum than my time, form

a barrier against matrimony which I rejoice in. . . ."

Yet before this he had met a beautiful girl whom history would fain substitute for Fanny Brawne, and for whom awhile she was mistaken, a beautiful girl whom he thus vividly describes: "She is not a Cleopatra, but is, at least, a Charmian: she has a rich Eastern look; she has fine eyes, and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes the same impression as the beauty of a leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of herself to repulse any man who may address her: from habit she thinks that *nothing particular*. I always find myself more at ease with such a woman: the picture before me always gives me a life and animation which I cannot possibly feel with anything inferior. I am, at such times, too much occupied in admiring to be awkward or in a tremble: I forget myself entirely, because I live in her. You will, by this time, think I am in love with her, so, be-

fore I go any further, I will tell you I am not. She kept me awake one night, as a tune of Mozart's might do. I speak of the thing as a pastime and an amusement, than which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman, the very 'yes' and 'no' of whose life is to me a banquet. I don't cry to take the moon home with me in my pocket, nor do I fret to leave her behind me. I like her, and her like, because one has no *sensations:* what we both are is taken for granted."

Critics for some time mistook this for a description of Fanny Brawne, but it has since transpired that Keats was here describing a Miss Charlotte (or, according to Rossetti, Jane) Coxe.

His first impression — or inventory — of Miss Brawne was, indeed, by no means so complimentary.

"Shall I give you Miss ——? She is about my height, with a fine style of countenance of the lengthened sort; she wants sentiment in every feature; she manages to make her hair look well; her nostrils are very fine, though a little painful; her mouth is bad and good; her profile is better than her full face, which, indeed, is not full, but

John Keats

pale and thin, without showing any bone; her shape is very graceful, and so are her movements; her arms are good, her hands bad-ish, her feet tolerable. She is not seventeen, but she is ignorant; monstrous in her behaviour, flying out in all directions, calling people such names that I was forced lately to make use of the term — Minx: this is, I think, from no innate vice, but from a penchant she has for acting stylishly. I am, however, tired of such style, and shall decline any more of it. She had a friend to visit her lately; you have known plenty such — she plays the music, but without one sensation but the feel of the ivory at her fingers; she is a downright Miss, without one set-off. We hated her, and smoked her, and baited her, and, I think, drove her away. Miss —— thinks her a paragon of fashion, and says she is the only woman in the world she would change persons with. What a shape, — she is as superior as a rose to a dandelion."

This verbal description tallies, almost with exactness, with the only extant portrait of Miss Brawne, a silhouette by M. Edouart, which Mr.

Sidney Colvin thus convincingly puts into words: "A brisk and blooming, very young beauty, of the far from uncommon English-hawk blonde type, with aquiline nose and retreating forehead, sharp-cut nostril and gray-blue eye, a slight, shapely figure rather short than tall, a taking smile and good hair, carriage and complexion."

It is rather a pity that Miss Brawne's letters have not been preserved, though it would not be difficult, I think, to imagine them. It is not necessary to be Keats to have received such colourless young-lady-like scrawls — which, poor fellow, he, doubtless, kissed and treasured, "even as you and I." Yet, it must not be thought that Miss Brawne was without character or parts. On the contrary, she seems, from Mr. Buxton Forman's naïve description, to have been something like a virago of the accomplishments. "She had the gift of independence or self-sufficingness in a high

degree," says the good Mr. Forman, "and it was not easy to turn her from a settled purpose. Without being in general a systematic student, she was a voluminous reader in widely varying branches of literature; and some out-of-the-way subjects she followed up with great perseverance. One of her strong points of learning was the history of costume, in which she was so well read as to be able to answer any question of detail at a moment's notice. . . . She was an eager politician, with very strong convictions, fiery and animated in discussion; a characteristic she preserved till the end."

Whatever else Fanny Brawne lacked, Mr. Forman wishes us to remember that "one of her strong points of learning was the history of costume, etc. . . ." — also that "she was an eager politician. . . ."

O weep for Adonais!

Mr. Forman is nothing if not gallant — but now it is perhaps time to remember that John Keats loved this Fanny Brawne.

He loved her — yes! — and yet!

Yes! In his second letter [10 July, 1819] he writes: "I never knew before, what such a love as you have made me feel, was; I did not believe in it; my Fanny was afraid of it, lest it should burn me up."

In his third letter [27 July, 1819] he writes: "You absorb me in spite of myself — you alone: for I look not forward with any pleasure to what is call'd being settled in the world; I tremble at domestic cares — yet for you I would meet them, though if it would leave you the happier I would rather die than do so. I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute."

In the fifth letter, dated Winchester, August 16th, however, we find that John Keats has been at Winchester four days, and yet has not written to his lady. With almost clumsy frankness — even harshness, as he admits — he confesses that poetry has got hold of him, with so imperious a preoccupation that he could at the moment no more write "soothing words" to Fanny Brawne

than if he were "engaged in a charge of cavalry." Continually afterwards we find him placing his work on his poems before her. He dare not see her lest she should distract him from his masterpiece. And later, when he falls ill, we find him, for a lover, curiously cautious. He seems indeed to have been as careful of his health as of his poetry; for, although the two lovers lived next door to each other at Hampstead, Keats was so afraid of the perturbation of his lady's presence, that days and days went by without his venturing to allow her to pay him a brief call; and he seems well content to have her written "Goodnight," or to see her from his window. The only apparent vitality of his love was his unreasonable jealousy of his friend, Charles Brown; which was merely a sign of that coming neurosis through whose exaggeration Fanny Brawne was to seem so pathetically more important than she really was, or ever could have been, had he not been so sick a man.

That Keats *thought* he loved Fanny Brawne his letters to others, rather than his official love-letters to her, vehemently, even hysterically,

prove. There is no doubt that he believed he was dying of — her! To Charles Brown — the friend of whom he had been jealous, and yet to whom he wrote his last letters — he wrote on November 1, 1820: "As I have gone thus far into it, I must go on a little; — perhaps it may relieve the load of *wretchedness* which presses upon me. The persuasion that I shall see her no more will kill me. My dear Brown, I should have had her when I was in health, and I should have remained well. I can bear to die — I cannot bear to leave her. Oh, God! God! God! Everything that I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear. The silk lining she put in my travelling cap scalds my head. My imagination is horribly vivid about her — I see her — I hear her. There is nothing in the world of sufficient interest to divert me from her a moment. . . . O that I could be buried near where she lives! I am afraid to write to her —

to receive a letter from her — to see her handwriting would break my heart — even to hear of her anyhow, to see her name written, would be more than I can bear. My dear Brown, what am I to do? Where can I look for consolation or ease? If I had any chance of recovery, this passion would kill me."

Also, there need be no doubt that, when Keats sailed from England for the last time, on the *Maria Crowther*, bound for Pisa, on September 18, 1820, he was thinking of Fanny Brawne as he wrote his last and greatest sonnet:

"Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art!
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors:
No — yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever — or else swoon to death."

It is strange to think that such infinitesimal femininity as Fanny Brawne should inspire a dying man to write such undying words — O! why were they not written to Cleopatra — or "at least a Charmian!" — but the heart of the poet is a divine mystery.

VI

Heine and Mathilde

THE love story of Heine and his Mathilde is another of those stories which fix a type of loving. It is the love of a man of the most brilliant genius, the most relentless, mocking intellect, for a simple, pretty woman, who could no more understand him than a cow can understand a comet. Many men of genius have loved just such women, and the world, of course, has wondered. How is it that men of genius prefer some little Mathilde, when the presidents of so many women's clubs are theirs for the asking? Perhaps the problem is not so difficult as, at first sight, it may seem. After all, a man of genius is much like other men. He is no more anxious than any other man to marry an encyclopedia, or a university degree. And, more than most men, he is fitted to realize the mysterious importance and satisfaction of simple beauty —

though it may go quite unaccompained by "intellectual" conversation — and the value of simple woman-goodness, the woman-goodness that orders a household so skilfully that your home is a work of art, the woman-goodness that glories in that "simple" thing we call motherhood, the woman-goodness that is almost happy when you are ill because it will be so wonderful to nurse you. Superior persons often smile at these Mathildes of the great. They have smiled no little at Mathilde Crescence Mirat; but he who was perhaps the greatest mocker that ever lived knew better than to laugh at Mathilde. The abysses of his brain no one can, or even dare, explore — but, listen as we will at the door of that infernal pit of laughter, we shall hear no laugh against his faithful little Mathilde. It is not at Mathilde he laughs, but at the precious little blue-stocking, who freshened the last months of his life with a final infatuation — that still unidenti-

fied "Camille Selden" whom he playfully called "la Mouche."

"La Mouche," naturally, had a very poor opinion of Madame Heine, and you need not be a cynic to enjoy this passage with which she opens her famous remembrances of "The Last Days of Heinrich Heine":

"When I first saw Heinrich Heine he lived on the fifth floor of a house situated on the Avenue Matignon, not far from the Rond-Point of the Champs-Elysées. His windows, overlooking the avenue, opened on a narrow balcony, covered in hot weather with a striped linen awning, such as appears in front of small cafés. The apartments consisted of three or four rooms — the dining-room and two rooms used by the master and the mistress of the house. A very low couch, behind a screen encased in wall-paper, several chairs, and opposite the door a walnut-wood secretary, formed the entire furniture of the invalid's chamber. I nearly

forgot to mention two framed engravings, dated from the early years of Louis Philippe's reign — the 'Reapers' and the 'Fisherman,' after Leopold Robert. So far the arrangements of the rooms evidenced no trace of a woman's presence, which showed itself in the adjoining chamber by a display of imitation lace, lined with transparent yellow muslin, and a corner-cupboard covered with brown velvet, and more especially by a full-length portrait, placed in a good light, of Mme. Heine, with dress and hair as worn in her youth — a low-necked black bodice, and bands of hair plastered down her cheeks — a style in the fashion of about 1840.

"She by no means realized my ideal Mme. Heine. I had fancied her refined, elegant, languishing, with a pale, earnest face, animated by large, perfidious, velvety eyes. I saw, instead, a homely, dark, stout lady, with a high colour and a jovial countenance, a person of whom you would say she required plenty of exercise in the open air. What a painful contrast between the robust woman and the pale, dying man, who, with one foot already in the grave, summoned

sufficient energy to earn not only enough for the daily bread, but money besides to purchase beautiful dresses. The melancholy jests, which obliging biographers constantly represent as flashes of wit from a husband too much in love not to be profuse, never deluded anybody who visited that home. It is absurd to transform Mme. Heine into an idyllic character, whilst the poet himself never dreamed of representing her in that guise. Why poetize at the expense of truth? — especially when truth brings more honour to the poet's memory."

One is sorry that Heine has not risen again to enjoy this. One can easily picture his reading it and, turning tenderly to his "Treasure," his "Heart's Joy," with that everlasting boy's look on his face, saying: "Never mind, Damschen. We know, don't we? They think they know, but we *know*." And with what a terrible snarl he would say, "My ideal Mme. Heine!"

"My ideal Mme. Heine!" No doubt "la Mouche" thought she might have been that, had all the circumstances been different, had Heine not already been married for years and had he

not been a dying man. We may be quite sure what Heine would have thought of the matter, and quite sure what she was to him. Mathilde, we know, was unhappy about the visits of the smart young lady who talked Shakespeare and the musical glasses so glibly, and who held her husband's hand as he lay on his mattress-grave, and wore a general air of providing him with that intellectual companionship which was so painfully lacking in his home. Yet we who know the whole story, and know her husband far better than she, know how little she really had to fear from the visits of "Camille Selden." To Heine "la Mouche" was merely a brilliant flower, with the dew of youth upon her. His gloomy room lit up as she entered, and smelled sweet of her young womanhood hours after she had gone. But "the ideal Mme. Heine"? No! Heine had found his real Mme. Heine, the woman who had been faithful to him for years,

had faced poverty and calumny with him, and had nursed him with laughing patience, day in and day out, for years. Heine had good reason for knowing how "the ideal Mme. Heine" would have treated him under such circumstances; for little bas-bleue "Mouche" had only to have a bad cold to stay away from the bedside of her hero, though she knew how he was counting the minutes to her coming, in the nervous, hysterical fashion of the invalid. One of his bitterest letters reproaches her with having kept him waiting in this way:

"Tear my sides, my chest, my face, with red-hot pincers, flay me alive, shoot, stone me, rather than keep me waiting.

"With all imaginable torture, cruelly break my limbs, but do not keep me waiting, for of all torments disappointed expectation is the most painful. I expected thee all yesterday afternoon until six o'clock, but thou didst not come, thou witch, and I grew almost mad. Impa-

tience encircled me like the folds of a viper, and I bounded on my couch at every ring, but oh! mortal anguish, it did not bring thee.

"Thou didst fail to come; I fret, I fume, and Satanas whispered mockingly in my ear — 'The charming lotus-flower makes fun of thee, thou old fool!'"

"Camille Selden" made the mistake of her life when she imagined that Heine loved her, and did not love that somewhat stout and high-coloured Mme. Heine who had such bad taste in lace and literature.

Mathilde, as we know, was far from being Heine's first love. She was more important — his last. Heine himself tells us that from his boyhood he had been dangerously susceptible to women. He had tried many cures for the disease, but finally came to the conclusion that "woman is the best antidote to woman"— though, "to be sure, this is driving out Satan with Beelzebub." There had been many loves in Heine's life before, one day in the Quartier Latin, somewhere in the year 1835, he had met saucy, laughing Mathilde Crescence Mirat. There had

been "red Sefchen," the executioner's daughter, whose red hair as she wound it round her throat fascinated Heine with its grim suggestion of blood. There had been his cousin Amalie, whose marriage to another is said to have been the secret spring of sorrow by which Heine's laughter was fed. And there had been others, whose names — imaginary, maybe, in that they were doubtless the imaginary names of real women — are familiar to all readers of Heine's poetry: Séraphine, Angélique, Diane, Hortense, Clarisse, Emma, and so on.

But she is loved best who is loved last; and when, after those months of delirious dissipation in Paris, which all too soon were to be so exorbitantly paid for by years of suffering, Heine met Mathilde, there is no doubt at all that Heine met his wife. His reminiscent fancy might sentimentalize about his lost Amalie, but no one can read his letters, not so much to, as about, Mathilde without realizing that he came as near to loving her as a man of his temperament can come near to loving any one.

Though, to begin with, they were not married

in the conventional sense, but "kept house" together in the fashion of the Quarter, there seems no question that Heine was faithful to Mathilde — to whom in his letters to his friends he always referred as his "wife" — and that their relation, in everything but name, was a true marriage. Just before he met Mathilde, Heine had written to his friend and publisher, Campe, that he was at last sick to death of the poor pleasures which had held him too long. "I believe," he writes, "that my soul is at last purified of all its dross; henceforth my verses will be the more beautiful, my books the more harmonious. At all events, I know this — that at the present moment everything impure and vulgar fills me with positive disgust."

It was at this moment, disgusted with those common illusions miscalled pleasure, that Heine met Mathilde, and was attracted by what one might call the fresh elementalism of her nature. That

his love began with that fine intoxication of wonder and passion without which no love can endure, this letter to his friend August Lewald will show: "How can I apologize for not writing to you? And you are kind enough to offer me the good excuse that your letter must have been lost. No, I will confess the whole truth. I duly received it — but at a time when I was up to my neck in a love affair that I have not yet got out of. Since October nothing has been of any account with me that was not directly connected with this. I have neglected everything, I see nobody, and give a sigh whenever I think of my friends. . . . So I have often sighed to think that you must misunderstand my silence, yet I could not fairly set myself down to write. And that is all I can tell you to-day; for my cheeks are in such a flame, and my brain reels so with the scent of flowers, that I am in no condition to talk sensibly to you.

"Did you ever read King Solomon's

Song? Just read it, and you will there find all I could say to-day."

So wrote Heine at the beginning of his love. When that love had been living for eight years, he was still writing in no less lover-like a fashion. "My wife," says he to his brother Max in a letter dated April 12, 1843, "is a good child — natural, gay, capricious, as only French women can be, and she never allows me for one moment to sink into those melancholy reveries for which I have so strong a disposition."

When Heine wrote this letter, Mathilde had been his "legal" wife for something like a year and a half. Heine had resorted to the formalizing of their union under the pressure of one of those circumstances which compel a man to think more of a woman than of an idea. He was going to fight a duel with one of his and her cowardly German traducers, and that there should be no doubt of her position in the event of his death, he duly married her. Writing to his friend Lewald once more, on the 13th of October, 1841, he says: "You will have learned that, a few days before the duel, to make

Heinrich Heine

Mathilde's position secure, I felt it right to turn my free marriage into a lawful one. This conjugal duel, which will never cease till the death of one or the other of us, is far more perilous than any brief meeting with a Solomon Straus of Jew Lane, Frankfort."

His friend Campe had been previously advised of "my marriage with the lovely and honest creature who has lived by my side for years as Mathilde Heine, was always respected and looked upon as my wife, and was defiled by foul names only by some scandal-loving Germans of the Frankfort clique."

Heine's duel resulted in nothing more serious than a flesh-wound on the hip. But alas! the wild months of dissipation before he had met Mathilde were before long to be paid for by that long, excruciating suffering which is one of the most heroic spectacles in the history of literature. It is the paradox of the mocker that he often displays the virtues and sentiments which he mocks, much more manfully than the professional sentimentalist. Courage and laughter are old friends, and Heine's laughter — his later laughter, at

least — was perhaps mostly courage. If for no other reason, one would hope for a hereafter — so that Charles II. and Heine may have met and compared notes upon dying. Heine was indeed an "unconscionable long time a-dying," but then he died with such brilliant patience, with such good humour, and, in the meanwhile, contrived to write such haunting poetry, such saturnine criticism.

And, all the time, during those ten years of dying, his faithful "Treasure" was by his side. The people who "understood" him better, who read his books and delighted in his genius, somehow or other seemed to forget the lonely Prometheus on the mattress-rock at No. 3 Avenue Matignon. It was 1854 when Heine was painfully removed there. It was so long ago as the May of 1848 that he had walked out for the last time. His difficult steps had taken him to the Louvre, and, broken in body and nerves — but never in spirit — he had burst

into tears before the Venus of Milo. It was a characteristic pilgrimage — though it was only a "Mouche" who could have taken Heine seriously when he said that he loved only statues and dead women. There was obviously a deep strain of the macabre and the bizarre in Heine's nature; but it must never be forgotten that he loved his Mathilde as well.

That Heine was under no illusion about Mathilde, his letters show. He would laugh at her on occasion, and even be a little bitter; but if we are not to laugh at those we love, whom are we to laugh at? So, at all events, thought Heine. Superior people might wonder that a man with Heine's "intellect," et cetera, could put up, day after day, with a little bourgeoise like Mathilde. But Heine might easily have retorted: "Where anywhere in the world are you going to find me a woman who is my equal, who is my true mate? You will bring me cultivated governesses, or titled ladies who preside

over salons, or anemic little literary women with their imitative verse or their amateurish political dreams. No, thank you. I am a man. I am a sick, sad man. I need a kind, beautiful woman to love and take care of me. She must be beautiful, remember, as well as kind — and she must be not merely a nurse, but a woman I can love. If she shouldn't understand my writings, what does it matter? We don't marry a wife for that. I am not looking for some little patronizing bluestocking — who, in her heart, thinks herself a better writer than myself — but for a simple woman of the elements, no more learned than a rose, and as meaningless, if you will, as the rising moon."

Just such a woman Heine found in his Mathilde, and it is to be remembered that for years before the illness which left him, so to speak, at her mercy, he had loved and been faithful to her.

There are letters which seem to show that Mathilde had the defects of those qualities of buxom light-heartedness, of eternal sunshine, which had kept a fickle Heine so faithful. Sometimes, one gathers, she as little realized the

tragedy of Heine's suffering as she understood his writings. As such a woman must, she often left Heine very lonely; and seemed to feel more for her cat, or her parrot "Cocotte," than her immortal, dying husband.

"Oh, what a night we have had!" Heine exclaimed one day to his friend Meissner. "I have not been able to close an eye. We have had an accident in our house; the cat fell from the mantelpiece and scratched her right ear; it even bled a little. That gave us great sorrow. My good Mathilde remained up and applied cold poultices to the cat all night long. For *me* she never remains awake."

And another time, he said, even more bitterly, to another friend: "I felt rather anxious yesterday. My wife had finished her toilet as early as two o'clock and had gone to take a drive. She promised to be back at four o'clock. It struck half-past five and she had not got back yet. The clock struck eight and my anxiety increased. Had she, perhaps, got tired of her sick husband, and eloped with a cunning seducer? In my painful doubt I sent the sick-nurse to her chamber to

see whether 'Cocotte' the parrot was still there. Yes, 'Cocotte' was still there. That set me at ease again, and I began to breathe more freely. Without 'Cocotte' the dear woman would never go away."

A great man like Heine must necessarily have such moods about a little woman like Mathilde; but the important fact remains that for some twenty years Heine was Mathilde's faithful husband, and that the commonplace, pretty, ignorant, pleasure-loving, bourgeoise Mathilde was good and faithful to a crippled, incomprehensible mate. Perhaps, after all, the wonder in this marriage is even more on the side of Mathilde than of Heine. Think what such a woman must have had to forego, to suffer, to "put up with," with such a man — a man, remember, whose real significance must have been Chinese to her. Surely, all of us who truly love love by faith, and the love of Heine for Mathilde, and of

Mathilde for Heine, alike is only to be explained by that mysterious explanation — faith.

That Heine understood his love for Mathilde, so far as any man of genius can understand his love, and was satisfied with it so far as any man of genius can be with any love, we may be quite sure. His many letters about her, and to her, prove it. All the elemental simplicities of her nature — the very bourgeoise traits which made his friends wonder — alike interested him, and drew him closer toward her. When she weaves a rug for his friend Lewald, how seriously he takes it! He could laugh at all things in heaven and earth, but when Mathilde weaves a rug for his friend he takes life seriously.

How "domestic" Heine could be is witnessed by a letter of his — to Mathilde from Hamburg in 1823 — in regard to her buying a hat for his sister and another for his niece — giving careful directions as to style and price. Mathilde and he had

then been each other's for over eight years, but none the less — nay, let us say all the more — he ended his letter: "Adieu! I think only of thee, and I love thee like the madman that I am."

Perhaps the truest proof of Heine's love for Mathilde is the way in which, in his will, he flattered his despicable cousin, Carl Heine, for her sake, so that she might not suffer any loss of his inheritance. There is no doubt that Heine knew the worth of his Mathilde. If so terrible a critic of human nature was satisfied to love and live with her for so many years, we may be sure that Mathilde was a remarkable woman. She didn't indeed talk poetry and philosophy, like little "Mouche," but then the women who do that are legion; and Mathilde was one of those rarer women who are just women, and love they know not why.

In saying this, we mustn't forget that "Camille Selden" said it was ridiculous to sentimentalize about Mme. Heine. Yet, at the same time, we must remember Heine's point of view. When "Camille Selden" first sought his acquaintance, he had been living with Mathilde for some

twenty years. Men of genius — and even ordinary men — are not apt to live with women they do not love for twenty years; and that Heine did perhaps the one wise thing of his life in marrying his Mathilde there can be very little doubt.

To a man such as Heine a woman is not so much a personality as a beautiful embodiment of the elements: "Earth, air, fire and water met together in a rose." If she is beautiful, he will waive "intellectual sympathy"; if she is good, he will not mind her forgetting the titles of his books. When she becomes a mother, he — being a man of genius — understands that she is a more wonderful being than he can ever hope to be.

Much has been said about the unhappy marriages of great writers. The true reason too often has been that they have married literary amateurs instead of women and wives. Heine was wiser. No one would, of course, pretend that Mathilde was his mate. But, then, what woman could have been? Certainly not that little literary prig he called his "Mouche."

VII

Ferdinand Lassalle and Helene von Dönniges

THERE are two women still living somewhere in the world whom I always think of as figures peculiarly tragic, and whom I often find myself thinking of together. They are both women with historic love stories, and love stories — here is the link of association between them — in which not only their own destinies were concerned but great national issues disastrously involved. There was a moment, a few years ago, when it really seemed possible that Ireland's long dream of freedom was about to come true. Parnell's patient strength had suddenly found a Titanic ally in Gladstone's tremendous

moral prestige, and for a brief moment the issue hung tremulous in the scales of Time. It was a fateful moment in Ireland's history which can hardly come again. It was her one desperate opportunity in a hundred years. How and why she lost it, the world well knows.

The story of Ferdinand Lassalle and Helene Von Dönniges is similarly the story of a "lost leader" and his great passion; and, if the fall of Parnell was the deathblow to Irish liberty, who shall say what the great democratic movement throughout the world has lost by the tragically frivolous death of Lassalle? He, too, fell at one of those fortunate, fateful moments in the history of a great cause when the moment can only be seized by some magnetic, masterful leader and if not so seized is lost, the advance that might have been made indefinitely postponed, and even the ground already won reconquered by reaction.

In remarking these tragic interfer-

ences of the passion of love in national destinies, it is, I hope, needless to say that none but narrow natures can feel bitterly toward the sad women so disastrously beloved, or hold the absurd doctrine that public men should keep themselves aloof from the inspiring passions of our common nature. I say "inspiring" advisedly, for whereas such stories as the one I have to retell illustrate the sheer malignity of ill-luck which sometimes attends the loves of even private, as well as public, persons, the instances are far more numerous where lives of great public usefulness have been throughout secretly nourished and inspired by the love that moves not only the sun and stars but even parliaments and field-guns.

Thus is a man created — to do all his work for some woman,
Do it for her, and her only, only to lay at her feet;
Yet in his talk to pretend, shyly and fiercely maintain it,
That all is for love of the work — toil just for love of the toil.
Yet was there never a battle, but side by side with the soldiers,
Stern like the serried corn, fluttered the souls of the women,
As in and out through the corn go the blue-eyed shapes of the flowers:

Yet was there never a strength but a woman's softness upheld it,
Never a Thebes of our dreams, but it rose to the music of women —
Iron and steel it might stand, but the women had breathed on the building:
Yea, no man shall make or unmake, ere some woman hath made him a man.

One occasionally encounters in history a great career in which woman has played no such part, but the rule unquestionably is that the greater personalities of the world, whether they be statesmen, soldiers, artists, or even philosophers, have been exceptionally subject to the influence of woman. Of no famous man has this ever been truer than of Lassalle. Years before he met Helene von Dönniges he was as well known for his love affairs as his politics; for, strikingly handsome and masterful, he possessed, too, just that dash and brilliancy which women find irresistible.

He was born on April 11, 1825, in Breslau, Prussia, of Jewish parents, and himself outwardly always professed the Jewish religion. His father, being a merchant, had destined him for a business career, but the son's inclinations were in other directions, and he went to the university

instead. Philosophy and philology were the studies most attractive to him. From the university he went to Düsseldorf, and thence to Paris, where, at the age of nineteen, he made the acquaintance of Heine, who, with his customary insight, divined the force and significance of his nature, and, with his customary aptness, found for him the appropriate phrase. He was born to die like a gladiator, he said, with a smile on his lips. A gladiator indeed he was, though it was hardly a gladiator's death a blundering destiny called upon him so ignominiously and wastefully to die. So impressed was Heine with the work he deemed Lassalle capable of doing, that he even hailed him as "The Messiah of the Nineteenth Century."

As Lassalle's public life ends with the name of a woman, so does it begin. From Paris Lassalle returned to Düsseldorf, and there made the acquaintance of a woman who was to be intimately

associated with him continuously till his death. This was the Countess Hatzfeldt, a woman who was suffering at the hands of a brutal husband just such a wrong as was calculated to set Lassalle's chivalrous, combative nature on fire. Count Hatzfeldt, a dissolute nobleman of immense wealth, lived openly with his mistress, Baroness von Meyerdorf, at his castle near Düsseldorf; and his Countess, who had left him, taking her two children with her, tried in vain to obtain a divorce and a suitable settlement for herself and the children. On becoming her friend, Lassalle took up the fight with characteristic energy, — a fight which was to last nine years, — and won it at last by his brilliant and patient advocacy. Meanwhile, Lassalle lived with the Countess in her Düsseldorf home, and one cannot wonder that the world had something to say on the matter, for, though indeed the Countess was twice his age, a beautiful woman of thirty-eight might well be

something more than a mother to a handsome young man of nineteen.

During these years Lassalle also threw himself vehemently into politics, becoming one of the leaders of the Social-Democratic party, and undergoing a six-months' imprisonment for one of his daring speeches. At the conclusion of the Countess' case he was a marked man, and universally regarded as one of the most powerful and dangerous personalities in the Liberal camp. The Countess and he now left Düsseldorf, and settled in Berlin, where Lassalle speedily made a place for himself in the best intellectual society of the capital. Humboldt called him a "Wunderkind," and became his close friend; and Bismarck, though so opposed to his political theories, made no secret of his admiration for his great gifts, and of the interest he took in his conversation.

Although, as I have said, Lassalle was highly susceptible to the charms of women, none of his earlier love affairs seem to have taken any serious hold upon him. The women to whom he made love were aware that ambition held the first

place in his heart, and he took care to make it clear that marriage did not enter into the scheme of his life.

One story goes, however, that some two years before he met Helene, the possible charm of the married state had been momentarily revealed to him by a brief attachment to a young Russian lady named Sophie Solutzeff. But Sophie, it is said, while admiring Lassalle as a genius, was not drawn to him as a lover, and his own feeling for her being half-hearted, the relationship died a natural death. An acute critic of Lassalle's story (Mr. Clement Shorter in his interesting introduction to Mr. George Meredith's "Tragic Comedians") throws discredit at this tale, coming as it does through Countess Hatzfeldt, who, as will be seen later, had her own reasons for wishing to show that the passion which proved fatal to Lassalle was no isolated experience in his life, but rather one of a number and of a nature to which his friends were so accustomed that they grew naturally to underrate their seriousness. Those friends, alas! from first to last were to play an unfortunate part in the tragedy — no doubt,

after the manner of friends, with the best intentions. It was friends who, before Ferdinand Lassalle and Helene von Dönniges had met or even heard of each other, prepared them to fall into each other's arms by stimulating Helene's curiosity in a certain brilliant and dangerous "Lassalle." Why, they were so evidently born for each other! They must meet!

"Surely you know Lassalle?" said young Baron Korff to Helene at a ball, one evening in 1862. "Only a woman who knows him, and shares his opinions, can speak like that!"

But Helene apparently had never even heard the name of the man who was soon to mean so much in her life.

"Then I pity you both every hour that you remain apart, for you were made for each other," was Korff's prophetic reply.

Again, at a dinner-party, Dr. Karl Oldenberg had exclaimed: "You are the

only woman I ever met who seems fitted to be Lassalle's wife!"

If only other friends of the two fated ones had realized their ordained affinity, their story might have been different; and what wonder, with such stimulating predictions in her mind, that Helene — practised coquette, too, as she already was — should have developed a mood of inflammatory expectancy for the moment when she did actually meet her man of destiny.

That fateful meeting at last took place at an evening party given by a friend, Frau Hirsemenzel, who was in Helene's confidence, and so dramatically instantaneous was their recognition of affinity that their fellow guests were conscious of it, too, and remembered the electrical flash and suddenness of it years after.

"And this is how you look! This is you! Yes, yes, it is as I thought, and it is all right!" were Lassalle's first words, as he looked at her, even before they had been introduced to each other. Intro-

duced! What need had they of introduction!

"What is the use?" Lassalle had added, laying his hand on her arm. "We know each other already. You know who I am; and you are 'Brünhilde,' Adrienne Cardoville, the 'fox' Korff has told me about — in one word — Helene!"

Never was such a whirlwind wooing. Helene felt herself, as Meredith phrases it, "carried off on the back of a centaur." Each felt so absolutely and irrevocably each other's that formalities seemed silly. Lassalle spoke to Helene with the familiar "Du," as though they had been each other's for years, and when the party broke up at four in the morning, he carried her in his arms down the steps of the house, — and yet even to her chaperon, a lady quite demure and strict in her opinions, it all seemed the natural thing to do — as, of course, it was.

"It was rather bold and unusual," this lady had said afterward, "but if he had taken you by the hand, and walked off with you altogether, I should not have thought it strange; you seemed to belong to each other so entirely."

In fact, Lassalle and Helene had acted with the simplicity of a great feeling, and such simplicity always brings with it its own fitness, and, however astonishing, compels our respect, like any other masterful play of the elements.

Nature had thus manifestly joined these two people. It was now for man to put them asunder.

Lassalle was for immediately making formal application for her hand, but Helene, with that vacillation which was to prove their ruin, begged him to wait. She was already aware of the probable attitude of her family toward Lassalle. When she had first heard his name, she had inquired about him of her grandmother, with whom she was living in Berlin, and had been told that he was a shameless demagogue, whom it would be impossible for her to know. Stories, too, about his relations with Countess Hatzfeldt had been brought to her; and how her father, a stern old aristocrat, high in the diplomatic service, would entertain the idea of an alliance with the Socialist Messiah she could surmise.

Besides, she was already half engaged to a young Wallachian prince, Yanko von Racowitza,

a gentle lad, whom she treated much like a pet animal, and called her "Moorish page." Yanko was the last of a long series of amourettes which had no doubt somewhat sapped her power of serious loving. He was an engaging companion, a fine musician, and her devoted slave, fetching and carrying for her, and obedient to her every whim. There is something appealingly pathetic about this young prince, and of all the secondary actors in the tragedy now about to begin, he is the only gracious, if piteous, figure.

Helene was nineteen and Lassalle thirty-eight when they first met. Their second meeting did not take place for some months. Meanwhile, Helene's family had "cut" the lady at whose house the first eventful meeting had taken place, and Lassalle had tried in vain to see her. Chance brought them together again at a concert in Berlin. Helene was then with Lawyer Holthoff

and his wife, old friends of her family, and friends, too, of Lassalle. The Holthoffs, therefore, played good angels to the lovers, and several times connived at their meeting, with the result that their first feeling for each other was confirmed and deepened. Still, Helene weakly kept up her relationship with Yanko, telling him, however, that if ever Lassalle should want her, she would break their engagement, and give up everything, to go to him. Yanko docilely accepted the situation, saying she must do what was best for her own happiness. If the issue had been left to poor Yanko, our lovers would never have been tragic comedians.

But sterner and more selfish personalities than Helene's Moorish page were soon to be engaged on both sides, and even friends who wished their story well were to blunder on their behalf. Holthoff, surely with the best will in the world, had approached Helene's grandmother in Lassalle's interest. The grandmother had

written to Herr von Dönniges, and from him had come an uncompromising refusal to consider Lassalle's offer under any circumstances. The idea of his daughter marrying one who was at once a Jew and a "shameless demagogue" would naturally seem preposterous to him.

At this point of the story it is impossible not to feel a certain lull in the feelings of both lovers. For several months they were both within reach of each other in Berlin, and, though no doubt there were social difficulties in the way of their meeting, they do not seem to have been insuperable. Yet they never met, though they continued to hear of each other through the Holthoffs. When one remembers their first fiery meeting, with all its wild vows, and then sees these months going by, with Helene apparently content with her life as a social butterfly, and Lassalle whole-heartedly absorbed in his political career, we cannot help wondering if the two were, after all, as much in love as they thought. For, when they really wished to meet, there seems to have been no trouble about arranging it, as before, through the Holthoffs. Lassalle's sister,

Frau von Friedland, was on a visit to Berlin, and desired to meet Helene, so Helene and she met, to their mutual liking, at the Holthoffs'.

Presently it was suggested that Helene should call Herr Holthoff from his library. On opening the door she found him there — with Lassalle.

From this interview we miss the splendid impatience of the night of the whirlwind wooing. A leisurely diplomacy had taken its place. It was March now — March, 1863. Helene had just had a birthday, which Lassalle had remembered with violets and rosebuds and a poem. When the summer came, he was, as if accidentally, to make the acquaintance of Helene's parents, and rely on his conquering charm to win them round.

When the summer did come, Helene was busily nursing her grandmother, who remained ill all the rest of the year, and died early in the winter; and, also in that summer, with that culpably frivolous vacillation which characterized her throughout, she had, strangely enough, formally betrothed herself to Yanko von Racowitza. After the grandmother's death, Helene

returned with her mother to Geneva, where the family now lived, Herr von Dönniges having been appointed chargé d'affaires at Berne. In March, 1864, Yanko joined them, and, with his pleasant ways and various social accomplishments, won himself into the good graces of Herr von Dönniges and the whole family circle.

In May, Helene fell ill with a fever, and on her convalescence, still being weak and nervous, she was sent by her doctor to a mountain resort near Berne, where she lived with some English and American friends.

Meanwhile, Lassalle had been working like a giant, fighting lawsuits with which the government vainly attempted to paralyze his political activity, founding his great Working Men's Society, and making an almost regal campaign through the country, punctuated with daring speeches and wild popular enthusiasm. For one of these speeches he was sen-

tenced to a year's imprisonment, which his brilliant appeal succeeded in reducing to six months. Pending his imprisonment, however, feeling the need of rest after the long strain upon his energies, he sought his favorite retreat, Rigi-Kaltbad, in Switzerland.

He had been there a few days, when, one afternoon — the afternoon of July 25, 1864 — while he was busy on his correspondence with his political colleagues, a message was brought to him that a lady wished to see him. It was Helene. She had ridden up the mountain with her two lady friends, having heard from the friendly Holthoff that Lassalle was staying there.

Lassalle proceeded with the party to Rigi-Kulm, where they were to spend the night and see the sunrise. But they were to be disappointed of their sunrise by a fog. "How often," Helene writes in her subsequent reminiscences, "when in later years I have stood upon the summit of

Rigi, and seen the day break in all its splendour, have I recalled this foggy, damp morning, and Lassalle's disappointment."

On this occasion, they discussed their future more seriously than ever before, and though Helene still pleaded for further compromise instead of an immediate marriage, which Lassalle strongly urged as their wisest course, she seems on this occasion to have been braced by contact with his strong spirit into a mood of firmness which promised him loyalty against whatever opposition. They parted, elate and confident in the power of their love to win their battle.

At every stage of her journey, the post and the telegraph brought her fiery and tender messages from her lover, and three days later Lassalle himself followed her to Wabern. Meanwhile, she had written him a passionate letter in which she solemnly promised to become his wife, whatever difficulties might stand in their way.

"You said to me yesterday: 'Say but a sensible and decided "yes!" — *et je me charge du reste.* Good: I say "yes" — *chargez vous donc du reste.* I only require that we first do all in our power to

win my parents to a friendly attitude. To me belongs, however, a painful task. I must slay in cold blood the true heart of Yanko von Racowitza, who has given me the purest love, the noblest devotion. With heartless egotism I must destroy the day-dream of a noble youth. But, for your sake, I will even do what is wrong."

For eight days, Lassalle and Helene were at Wabern together — eight days of happy, uninterrupted companionship — in which, as they learnt more and more of each other, every moment taught them how unerring had been their first swift sense of their instinctive affinity. In Helene Lassalle found that exquisitely matched wife of heart and brain, of spirit and sense, who is the dream of every man of genius — a dream not fulfilled once in a hundred years; and in Lassalle Helene had found her "eagle of men," that dominating, strong lord of her life, who was her dream, as he is the dream of every woman, but of whose existence her girl's career of easy conquest had made her somewhat confidently sceptical. Life seldom brings together two human beings so absolutely mated, so surely born for

each other. It was elated with a very solemn sense of this union that Helene and Lassalle bade each other good-by at Wabern station on the morning of August 3, 1864. Helene was due at Geneva at two o'clock, Lassalle was to follow by a later train. "Here end my happy memories," is Helene's sigh in her record of this time. Neither indeed could have thought that before August had ended Lassalle would have done with work and dreams, and that the rooms of the Working Men's Society in Düsseldorf, as he had strangely prophesied, would be "hung in black."

Helene found her family in festival spirits, and her mother in an unwonted mood of tenderness, owing to the recent betrothal of her sister Margaretha to Count Kayserling. Alas! this rare geniality not unnaturally prompted Helene to take a false step against which Lassalle had specifically warned her. She confided in her seldom-softened mother —

with the result that, as with the advent of some wicked fairy, all the merriment suddenly fled with shrieking, and with horror-lifted hands. An alliance with that unspeakable Jew, that shameless demagogue! Why, the mere thought of it was enough to frighten away the arduously captured count! How could she, abandoned girl, ruin her sister's prospects, and smirch the social record of the whole family! The father, called to the rescue, made a terrifying scene, heaped filthy slanders on Lassalle's name, and forbade Helene to leave the house.

The battle had now begun in real earnest, and her father's violence finally awakened Helene to the radical impossibility of her dreams of peaceable compromise. Lassalle was right. There was only one way, and here Helene rose strongly to the situation, and acted with instant resolution and courage. Lassalle was to have left Wabern for Geneva by a train starting a few hours later than

Helene's, and on raising the storm at home, but before her father's interference, she had immediately despatched a letter by her maid to meet him on his arrival. Her father's treatment, however, decided her to leave home instantly, and, once for all, to unite her life with Lassalle's. Slipping some money and a small dagger into her pocket, she managed to escape from the house unobserved, and arrived at Lassalle's hotel just as he was reading her letter. He received her somewhat sternly, reproaching her for having disobeyed him by the confidence in her mother; and, to her intense astonishment and disappointment, refused to go away with her, though he himself, during the days they had just spent together, had pleaded so forcibly for that very course. He insisted that she should return home, and leave him to win her from her parents — a feat which, with his sublime confidence in himself, he was sure of accomplishing. Helene, still vibrating with the scene she had just gone through, and too truly measuring the force of the resistance to be encountered, endeavoured to convince Lassalle of the utter hopelessness of his attempt, and

besought him with tears to take advantage of the moment.

But, alas, Lassalle's fighting-blood was up, and his haughty pride on its mettle. Arrogantly sure of his strength, fatally underestimating the task before him, he remained obdurate, and presently escorted Helene to the house of a lady who was not only Helene's own friend, but a friend, too, of the family. They had hardly arrived there when Helene's mother and sister also arrived. Lassalle declared the meeting most opportune, and immediately applied all his famous resources of persuasive eloquence to the situation, only to prove how right Helene's judgment had been. Lassalle's usually victorious arts were not only utterly wasted on Frau von Dönniges, but that lady assailed and insulted him in the most violent and contemptuous fashion. Helene, thus more than ever confirmed in her foresight, again begged him, in her mother's presence, to take her away with him, but alas! the gods had already bound his eyes for the stroke of his doom, and he paid no heed. Though Frau von Dönniges insolently told him that, should he

attempt to call on her husband, the servants would throw him out of the house, and that, should he write, his letters would be returned unopened, he still maintained a pacificatory attitude of punctilious courtesy, and still insisted on surrendering Helene to the care of such a mother, with a fanatical gallantry which was no doubt very satisfying to his pride, but which was certainly most disastrously ill-timed. Helene's eagle among men had indeed made a very unaquiline mistake. Here, if ever, was his moment to swoop and carry the white lamb of the house of von Dönniges safe to his unscalable eyrie. But no! he chose instead to pose picturesquely in an attitude of nobly surrendering a prey which it was obviously in his power any moment to recapture. Nothing, indeed, would satisfy his aquiline pride but that the family which had dared thus to scorn him should beg him upon its knees to do it the honour of flying away with one of its daughters!

The image does indeed not unfairly represent the hopelessness of the demands of his pride. There was to be a conflict of wills. His could not fail to be the stronger.

"I give you back your child," said he, magnificently, to Frau von Dönniges. "Listen to me. I, who can do with your daughter what I wish, resign her to your care, but only for a short time. She goes with you because I wish her to; never forget that. And now, farewell!"

Then, turning to Helene, and tenderly embracing her, he said: "Farewell, for a little while! What you are doing for me now, I will never forget. I can never thank you enough for your compliance. I require nothing more from your will, your strength. I know this is much to ask; all the rest is my affair. Do not allow yourself to be maltreated; otherwise, submit to what is required of you. I shall know all that happens, and on the slightest ill-treatment, I will take you away at once: in any case, they shall not

keep you long. Resign yourself for a short time to their will; mine is stronger; we shall conquer at last. And now, good-by for a little while."

It was magnificent, but, indeed, it was not war; and what Lassalle failed to see was that the pride which thus prompted him so desperately to hazard not only his own but also Helene's happiness was in its essence as bourgeois as the pride he was fighting, was indeed identical. All that he could hope to accomplish was the wresting of an empty formality from a society whose conventions both himself and Helene professed to despise, a sanction gained at the sword's point of which neither felt any need, an authority, in the opinion of both, obsolete and ridiculous. But such are the occasional paradoxes of the revolutionary.

Can we wonder if in Helene's eyes her eagle moulted some feathers for this unlooked-for action, and that her love was set a-thinking? Could he really love her and act so? and if indeed he loved her, her brain told her that he had made a mistake at a critical moment. Eagles among men should never make mistakes. Possibly, too, her fine, feminine sense found some-

Ferdinand Lassalle

thing underbred in this anxious assertion of pride in a situation where a truer pride would have disdained to measure itself with such vulgar standards. Some such half-formed thoughts may well have worked in Helene's mind, and contributed to the slackening of a will all too susceptible to varying influences and changes of mood; and soon she was to be a prisoner, cut off from the spiritual fount of her being, and instead daily and hourly breathing an atmosphere of her own doubts and her father's lies.

Herr von Dönniges was an opponent whose obstinacy and resource Lassalle had not counted with, and whose brutal and unscrupulous methods he could not have been expected to conceive. An ordinarily severe parent Lassalle might well have considered himself a match for; but Herr von Dönniges was to display a barbarity, a ferocity, of disapproval which one does not expect to encounter in a modern parent, however tyrannical, and he at once set about the subjugation of his disobedient daughter in the thoroughgoing spirit of a medieval baron. Lassalle had hardly left the house before this terrific parent appeared,

hatless, so to speak, with rage, and with a large knife in his hand. Seizing Helene by the hair, he dragged her home, and locked her in her room, the window of which he nailed up with his own hand. Here she was kept close prisoner, her food was pushed in at the door, without her seeing who brought it, and her father threatened to shoot any one who should hold communication with her, or act as go-between for her and Lassalle. At short intervals, he would come, and ask her decision, always receiving the answer: "I shall marry Lassalle."

Had Helene continued steadfast as she thus began, and opposed her father's bugaboo methods with quiet determination, the story could only have ended one way. Disquieting and even alarming as Herr von Dönniges' fury might be, her common sense might have told her that it was mainly stage thunder, and that there was really nothing to fear, so

long as she and Lassalle remained true to each other.

After all, she was not really living in the Middle Ages, and her father knew quite well that he could only fulfil his threats at the risk of his public position. Here was Lassalle's point of vantage, and he lost no time in setting in motion the high forces at his disposal — for, revolutionary though he was, he was not without powerful friends.

That he would have fulfilled his boast, and forced Herr von Dönniges to restore his daughter's freedom, there can be no doubt. Alas! it was Helene herself who had made his spirited tactics of no avail. Space does not permit of my following, step by step, the development of a struggle to which Herr von Dönniges presently brought not only violence but brilliant, unscrupulous cunning. On the side of the lovers it is a heartbreaking tragedy of errors and misunderstandings, complicated, too, with such cross-purposes as

those of the Countess Hatzfeldt, whose jealousy of Helene is clearly seen to have been one of the cruel threads in the fatal web. Of course, the greatest danger of all in such a situation is that the lovers, cut off from direct communication, may lose faith in each other. At the best, love is a feeling childishly sensitive to doubts and fears. For the truest lovers separation is full of anxious disquiet. Time and Distance are evil fairies. They have been known to work sad mischief with the greatest passions. Who would dare answer for the love of another across say a year of separation and silence?

> "Canst thou be true across so many miles —
> So many days that keep us still apart?"

What lover would dare to answer the question to his own heart with an affirmative?

Had Helene but kept her lover's parting words in mind, and done nothing but sit firm in quiet determination, awaiting her certain deliverance, all would have been well; but, unfortunately, the fibres of her will all too soon relaxed; and, whatever she still felt in her heart, the threats of her father and the entreaties of her

sisters presently had their way with her. Not only did she promise to give up Lassalle, but she set her name to letters to family friends announcing that determination, letters which her father had written for her to sign. She has pleaded intimidation as an excuse for this; but, even when the opportunity was given to her of free speech with one of Lassalle's most powerful ambassadors, Colonel Rüstow, and of transmitting through him a letter to Lassalle, she used it coldly to repudiate her lover. Herr von Dönniges, with the specious diplomacy which characterized his clever management of the affair at this stage, had sought an interview with Colonel Rüstow, for the purpose of convincing him that Helene was acting with her own free-will. Asked if Helene might receive and read for herself a letter from Lassalle, Herr von Dönniges promptly agreed, and Helene, entering the room, left it to read her letter. Soon she returned, and without a trace of emotion said to Colonel Rüstow as she handed him a note: "Tell Herr Lassalle that I have read his letter; but it makes no difference

as regards the contents of the note I have just given you for him."

This was the note:

"Herr Lassalle: —

"Having with all sincerity and with the deepest regret acknowledged my fault to my betrothed bridegroom, Yanko von Racowitza, and been comforted by his forgiveness and the assurance of his unchanged affection; having also informed your friend Holthoff of my decision before receiving his letter advising me to give you up, I now declare to you, of my own free-will, that a union with you is not to be thought of, that I consider myself released from my engagement to you, and that I am determined to devote my future life to my betrothed husband in true and faithful love.

"Helene von Dönniges."

Though this may well have shaken Lassalle's faith in Helene, he refused to believe that it was written of her own

free-will — and, in fact, according to Helene's own statement later, the whole scene had been carefully planned by her father for the purpose of impressing Colonel Rüstow. He himself had dictated the letter, and made her promise that in the event of Colonel Rüstow bringing a letter from Lassalle, she was to leave the room, give it unread into the hands of Yanko von Racowitza, and return, after a proper interval, with the previously prepared note. We cannot but feel that a nature so easily dominated was, after all, no true mate for Lassalle.

A similar scene a few days later, still more diabolically conceived and callously acted, proved even too much for Lassalle's stubborn faith in her loyalty. Her letter had only moved him to fresh efforts. He had come so far as to win the assistance of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Munich, who authorized an advocate, Doctor Haenle, to endeavor to arrange the affair amicably with Herr von Dön-

niges, and, if that proved impossible, to summon Helene before a notary to declare her decision in Lassalle's presence, and away from her father's influence. So little, for all her father's medieval methods, was there any need for Helene to fear them. She had not only Lassalle, but the law on her side — and yet, will it be believed, she declined in the presence of Doctor Haenle and Colonel Rüstow the proffered chance of freedom. She would not go before a notary, and refused to meet Lassalle.

"What good would it do?" she said. "I know what he wants to say, and I am tired of the whole business."

In addition, she spoke with incredible levity of Lassalle: "Lassalle likes to talk; he would scarcely get through what he has to say in two hours," — and generally conducted the interview with such heartless frivolity that no wonder Lassalle's ambassadors went back to their friend, convinced that a woman who could talk so was utterly unworthy of him. And, certainly, though Helene was acting once more under intimidation, and, as she afterward explained, from a misunder-

standing of Rüstow's and Haenle's relations to Lassalle (for her father kept her throughout ignorant of the chances in her favor, and she feared "false friends" of Lassalle among the dangers that surrounded her), yet it was surely unnecessary to play her part with such sincerity.

Can we wonder that Lassalle's faith in Helene was unequal to this cruel blow? At last he must agree with his friends. She was not worth the struggle.

"I have given up the affair," he telegraphed Richard Wagner, who had stood his friend throughout, "on account of the utter unworthiness of the person. But thanks for kind intentions. Do nothing more. Lassalle."

So he advised his other friends; and then, in his natural anger, he sent the following challenge to Helene's father:

"Herr von Dönniges: —

"Having learned through the report of Colonel Rüstow and Doctor Haenle that your daughter is a shameless hussy, and having therefore no intentions of dishonouring myself by marrying

her, there is no longer any reason for withholding a demand for satisfaction on account of the various insults which you have offered me. I therefore request you to make the necessary arrangements for a duel with my two friends by whom I send this message.

"F. Lassalle."

And it had been one of Lassalle's cardinal principles never, under any circumstances, to fight a duel! So had love enervated the strong thinker.

Herr von Dönniges refused to fight, and fled to Berne, but young Racowitza took on him to defend the family honour. Lassalle was known to be a fine shot, and Helene has since told us how she looked on Racowitza as already dead. She had already pictured his being carried to her home, and planned that in the confusion that would ensue she would steal out of the house — to Lassalle. Such was her weak and witless depend-

ence on circumstances. But the issue was to be otherwise. At the first exchange of shots, Lassalle was fatally wounded; and he died two days later — August 31, 1864 — aged thirty-nine years and five months. He is buried in the Jewish cemetery at Breslau, and on the headstone is this short epitaph:

"Here rests what was mortal of
Ferdinand Lassalle,
Thinker and Fighter."

So a weak woman and a tyrannical father had brought to nothing one of the strongest personalities and the most valuable intellects of the nineteenth century. So ended that stormy, starry wooing of that night in May; and surely there never was a story filled with more cruel reading, with so much pitiful matter of wantonly tangled complication, and, it would seem, easily avoidable tragic mistakes. Certainly no story in the history of love more terribly illustrates the mad and criminal folly of arbitrary interference with that

elemental instinct of human hearts. For not even Herr von Dönniges achieved his end. The disgrace he feared came upon him tenfold. His daughter left him. Racowitza died a year or two after — though Helene had once more illustrated her curious nature by becoming his wife. The Countess Hatzfeldt was heartbroken. Not a single actor in the story was happy — and all because society, in the person of Herr von Dönniges, wickedly, cruelly insisted on putting asunder two whom Nature had so manifestly joined together.

Such is the revenge of a thwarted natural force — and such is the lesson society seems eternally incapable of learning.

VIII

Abélard and Héloise

"THERE lived in Paris a young girl named Héloise." So Abélard in his autobiographical letter to an unknown, and possibly hypothetical friend, tells in one sentence, more eloquent even than his wonted eloquence of the schools, a whole history. He wrote in Latin, but it sounds prettier in his own language, as most things are apt to sound in French: "*Il existait à Paris une jeune fille nommée Héloise.*" Ah me! what long-lost joy, what ancient heart-break, are contained in that simple statement.

Yet all would have been well — or not so well! — if there had not also lived in Paris at the same time a certain brilliant teacher of philosophy named Peter Abélard.

The year was 1118 and Abélard not only lived in Paris, but in a real sense may almost be said

to have been one of its makers. As the walls of Thebes rose to music, Paris builded itself to the music of Abélard's tongue: for on his lips, indeed, of all men, philosophy was not

> "Harsh and crabbèd, as dull fools suppose,
> But musical as in Apollo's lute."

Think of the wonder of the teacher on the one hand, and the wonder of the student thirst for knowledge on the other, that between them could build a city — all out of enchanting speech and enchanted hearing. For Paris literally began that way. So many scholars flocked from all parts of Europe to listen to that nightingale of knowledge, that Paris, a mere embryo city when Abélard first came there, had to grow bigger and bigger to hold them. It seems fitting that our modern Alexandria should have been made out of learning and a love story.

Abélard was a young nobleman from Pallet in Brittany, of an old family, and with much confidence in himself. Though

the eldest son of his father, a man of considerable culture for his day, he early chose for himself the wandering pilgrimage of the scholar rather than that military way of life most affected by young men of his class. Wherever the reputation of some famous teacher drew him, he rambled, and of all his teachers, Jean Roscelin, Canon of Compiègne, was probably the earliest, as he was certainly the most influential. From him it may well be that Abélard's natural bent towards taking the common-sense rationalistic view of the hair-splitting scholastic controversies of his day gained strength and direction; for Roscelin was a well-known champion of freedom of thought, and looked upon as anything but sound on the question of the Trinity.

With a rationalistic temper of mind thus already well-formed, Abélard at length arrived in Paris, and put himself under the teaching of a scholar of a very different type, the famous William of Champeaux, a brilliant pillar of orthodoxy.

A certain philosophic controversy of supreme importance then, of supreme unimportance now, was agitating the learned world. We needn't pause even to state what it was. All that concerns us is that William of Champeaux championed the orthodox, logic-chopping side of the controversy, and that Abélard, by a sudden flash of his radiant common sense, won such a victory for the other side that the authority of his teacher was disastrously impaired, and his own reputation as a daring thinker and subtle dialectician made with a single blow.

Abélard's success decided him to open a school of his own, and at Melun, some thirty miles from Paris, and presently at Corbeil, he began to draw the world of wandering scholars to his chair. Suddenly his health gave way, and seven years of exile in his country home followed. Meanwhile, William of Champeaux had delegated his chair to a substitute, and himself retired into the priory of Saint Victor. In his retirement, however, he gave lectures on rhetoric, which Abélard, on his return to Paris, cynically attended — to the further discomfiture of the teacher. So the

battle between the rival teachers went on. With its details we need not here concern ourselves. Suffice it that, at length, in the year 1118, after various twists and turns of the scholastic conflict, Abélard found himself firmly seated in William of Champeaux's long-coveted chair of the Episcopal school, under the shadow of Notre Dame. Soon there were some five thousand students, a motley picturesque crowd indeed, thronging Paris just to hear Abélard talk. "It has been estimated," says his most recent and most luminous biographer, "that a pope, nineteen cardinals, and more than fifty archbishops and bishops were at one time among his pupils." The handsome, brilliant, and somewhat worldly young teacher was the idol of the city, and Héloise, in a passage of her letters pathetic with womanly worship, recalls how the women used to run to see him as he passed from his lodging on the hill of Ste. Geneviève (now the Latin Quarter and the scene of the greatest of his earlier triumphs) to the schools. "Who was there," she cries, "that did not hasten to observe when you went abroad, and did not follow you with strained neck and

staring eyes as you passed along? What wife, what virgin, did not burn? What queen or noble dame did not envy my fortune?"

In 1118 Abélard was in his thirty-ninth year, and at the height of his fame. The intoxication of fulfilled ambition and personal popularity was his daily and hourly drink. Wealth as well as fame was his, but so far he had not known love.

Now Abélard, by rumour of her rare gifts and graces, and unusual accomplishments of learning, had by this time become aware that *il existait à Paris une jeune fille nommée Héloise*, and, by his own confession, he presently set himself to win her love. Héloise lived with her "uncle" — gossip tongues said her father — Fulbert, a canon of Paris. Abélard found himself in need of a new lodging, and Fulbert was glad to welcome so distinguished a boarder. It is not difficult to imagine the excitement in the heart of

Héloise. For it had been arranged that Abélard should partly repay Fulbert for his hospitality by giving various learned lessons to his niece. Héloise was but seventeen or eighteen — so much a child (though, indeed, she had been brought up by the somewhat worldly nuns of Argenteuil — a fact not to be forgotten in Abélard's defence) that her guardian gave Abélard permission to chastise her if she neglected her lessons!

Neither seem to have entirely neglected their lessons, for it is probable that Héloise's knowledge of Greek and Hebrew came from Abélard, who also instructed her in theology and dialectics. But soon, as with Paolo and Francesca, the books were forgotten, and Abélard confesses that before long there were "more kisses than theses," and that "love was the inspirer of his tongue." Yet, if the books were temporarily forgotten, they were not merely "love's purveyors," for this love of Abélard and Héloise was one of those

rare loves in which the rapture of union is not merely in the heart, but in the brain. Each could say to the other, as Robert Browning wrote to Elizabeth Browning — "Where the heart is, let the brain lie also." Theirs was that keen, complete love which unites the spirit and the senses and the intellect in an ecstasy which no tongue, not even Abélard's, can tell.

But, if Abélard did not entirely neglect the mental training of his beloved pupil, she was soon the only pupil to whom he paid any regard; too soon his love for her so completely possessed him that he half forgot his lecture-room and the five thousand pilgrim scholars, and, when he did lecture, lectured in a weary, unprepared fashion very unlike the old spirited way which had won him his fame. But, if his lectures were disappointing, there were soon love songs of his making on all the singing lips of Paris; and every one knew what and who it was that had wrought this change in the master. Every one, for a long time, except — Fulbert; and then at last Fulbert too. With Fulbert's discovery of the attachment, Abélard and Héloise ceased to live under

the same roof. The happy lessons violently ceased, and the lovers might only meet rarely and with difficulty. As usual, however, the guardian had made his discovery too late, and there came a day when Héloise realized that she was soon to become a mother, and wrote telling Abélard the wonderful news — "with transports of joy." It is necessary to emphasize Héloise's attitude in presence of a contingency which most women would naturally, and necessarily, regard as tragic, as it is characteristic of her part — so much the nobler part — in the whole story. What was she to do? she asked. Abélard's answer was to take her one night, during Fulbert's absence, to his home at Pallet, where, under his sister's care, she, in due course, gave birth to a boy, to whom the parents gave the name of "Astrolabe" — a name which bears curious witness to that love of learning which had meant so much in bringing them together.

Fulbert's rage at these circumstances may be judged too well from his subsequent action. To appease it Abélard at length proposed marriage with Héloise, though it is impossible to say that

the form of his proposal, as reported by himself, raises him in one's esteem. He had done nothing, he urged, that need surprise anyone who understood the violence of love and knew into what abysses, since the beginning of the world, women had hurled the greatest of men!

Remembering his own earlier statement that he had deliberately sought the love of Héloise, he was hardly in a position to make this oldest and meanest of all masculine pleas — the woman tempted me! Still, he was willing to make a reparation which, he quaintly says, went beyond anything Fulbert could have hoped! He would marry Héloise — on condition that the marriage was kept a secret. For, you see, Héloise knew but one love — the love of Abélard; Abélard loved two, and I fear that for him Ambition was the greater of the two. Think of a man who loved a woman considering, at such a crisis of their lives, and at a moment when even an evident

duty might be expected to appear attractive — think of him coldly thinking of his "reputation." "I proposed to him," says he, "to marry her whom I had seduced, on the sole condition that the marriage was to be kept secret, so that it should not injure my reputation!"

If, as I have said before, the love of Dante and Beatrice was entirely the love of Dante, it is surely equally certain that the love of Abélard and Héloise was mainly the love of Héloise. It is a humiliating comment on Abélard to hear how differently Héloise took the situation. With all her womanly eloquence, backed by no end of learned authority, she pleaded with him — not to marry her! What odium the marriage would bring upon the Church. What tears it would cost philosophy! Think, too, how deplorable for a man whom nature had created for the whole world thus to be enslaved by a woman and bent under a dishonourable yoke!

Reasoning all too much after Abélard's own heart! — but all the same the marriage really took place. Leaving little Astrolabe with Abélard's sister at Pallet, the two lovers returned to Paris, and after a night of vigil in a church, were married, on a certain dawn, in presence of Fulbert and many friends of both parties. At the church door they separated, Abélard going his way, Héloise hers. For the world was not to know! However, according to Abélard, Fulbert was determined that it should — and can we blame him! — and, in consequence of his various loud whispers, Abélard had Héloise secretly conveyed to her old convent of Argenteuil, near Paris, where, without taking the veil, she was to live the life of a nun.

This act of Abélard's was misunderstood, wilfully maybe, by Fulbert, who professed to regard it as a first step to Abélard's annulment of the marriage, in the interests of his ecclesiastical ambitions — for this natural enemy of priests and priestly sophistry appears really to have had his heart set upon church preferment, after all. Acting on this, possible, misconception, Fulbert

took his terrible historic revenge upon Abélard; and Abélard and Héloise saw each other no more for many years. Beside himself with rage and shame, it was not unnatural that Abélard — selfish as it actually was of him — should command Héloise to consummate her uncompleted vows, and take the veil in earnest. This she did, her warm human heart protesting, as it still remained warm enough to protest after years of monastic life, and, who can doubt that reads her wonderful letters, protested to the end.

Abélard's life in the long interval belongs rather to the literature of theology than to the literature of love. Though the rich human spring in him which had given that worldly charm to his lectures, and turned a philosopher into a troubadour, was for ever dried up; and though, indeed, he was soon to wither to an asceticism which regarded his love for Héloise as a sinful lust of the flesh, yet his head retained enough of its vital originality to keep him still and always a pioneer of honest thinking, and, therefore, a rebel in the eyes of the church. To-day Abélard's heresies have become a part of official Christian doctrines,

as is the way with any heresies whatsoever; but several centuries have gone by in the interval, and the way of the honest thinker is easier to-day — if he is careful to choose his subjects! Though Abélard grew more and more of an ascetic moralist, he does not appear to have lost his courage as a masculine thinker, and, as long as he lived, he was ever ready to take the perilous chances of truth. This, necessarily, made his life eventful, and even stormy, for the next few years, and finally drove him into a sort of exile, resulting in the foundation of that lonely little monastery, in the valley of Arduzon, the name of which, the Paraclete, is so consecrated to romance. Once more the old miracle of his silver speech took place. Distant and almost uninhabitable as was the valley where, with a brother or two, he had taken up his exile, though, as he tells us, you had to build your rough cabin for yourself, and had to be content with moss and mud to lie on,

and the grassy bank to eat from, still the pilgrim audience somehow found its way, as inevitably the sleuth-hounds of heresy found theirs also. For there is no spot on the earth, however lonely, where it is absolutely safe to tell the truth. It was that popular and industrious Saint Bernard of Clairvaux that this time made things uncomfortable for Abélard; and with that usual luck of his, which seemed to make every change in his life for the worse, Abélard accepted an invitation to preside over the Abbey of St. Gildas at Rhuys in Brittany. The Abbey of St. Gildas was rich and worldly, and it is more than likely that the good monks had been attracted to Abélard rather by the heterodoxy of his reputation than by his piety. Their disappointment was to be keen and bitter, for how different was this austere, atrophied Abélard to the gay monk of the world they had looked forward to see. Nor were they long in expressing their disappointment. Soon

they were violently to oppose his authority and even to drop poison into his food.

Abélard had been abbot of Saint Gildas but three or four years when news came to him that Héloise was in trouble too. The nuns of Argenteuil, of which monastery she had been prioress, had been turned out of their home, owing more to the ecclesiastical avarice of the Abbot Suger of St. Denis — who fished up an old document to prove that Argenteuil really belonged to the monastery of St. Denis — than to the probably exaggerated accounts of the worldliness of the nuns. On hearing this news, Abélard transferred the Paraclete, still his property, into Héloise's keeping, and, within a year or two, the nunnery thus founded became one of the most famous in the kingdom, respected, and, as we would say, fashionable. The goodness and high-mindedness of Héloise are as apparent in her success as is her charm. Nobles and prelates smiled gifts upon her little abbey, and noble ladies anxious to take the veil thought first of the Paraclete. Well might a world-weary, perhaps love-thwarted, girl seek out such a spiritual mother; for, good

and pure and spiritual as Héloise was, her letters tell us that the spring of an undying love still kept her nature sweet and sympathetic to the human needs. A young monk seeking Abélard would indeed have made no such happy choice of spiritual director. Ask the monks of St. Gildas! These perhaps over-human fathers seem at length to have so violently resisted Abélard's stern purpose to reform them, as to have driven him from the Abbey in very fear for his life; though it must not be forgotten that in the midst of all these various "calamities" of which presently he was so feelingly to write, Abélard still remained Abbot of St. Gildas, and enjoyed an abbot's revenue. The monks, however, found it possible still to make his life a burden, and his calumniators were not slow to take their side against him. One day, sick at heart, and apparently anxious to tell his own truth about himself, Abélard sat down and wrote to an unknown friend "The Story of my Calamities," a document of the first importance to our understanding of his nature, but more important still, because, accidentally being read by Héloise in her quiet

nunnery, it prompted her to write the first of her beautiful heartfelt letters: "To her lord, yea, father; to her spouse, yea, brother; from his servant, yea, daughter — his wife, his sister; to Abélard from Héloise." His spiritual daughters, the good sisters of the Paraclete,— "they who have given themselves to God in the person of her who has given herself exclusively to thee," — were alarmed to hear such news of him, and begged that he would write to ease their anxious hearts. "A letter would cost thee so little," cried Héloise reproachfully, and quotes Seneca on the epistolary duties of friends. In the interval between Abélard's making over the Paraclete to Héloise, and the writing of "The Story of my Calamities," he had paid many visits to her abbey, very strictly in the character of her spiritual patron and director. The tongues of the world wagged over these visits, but we have only to read Abélard's "dusty answers"

to Héloise's letters to realize that the world was all too wrong. The Abélard that had taught Héloise her Greek and Hebrew, and floated love-songs through the lattice to the ears of an eaves-dropping Paris, was dead. He was now a serious doctor of divinity, with a strong leaning towards asceticism. The old warm-blooded, angel-eyed dream that Héloise could still write of with stirring bosom, after so many years, and still regard — for all her ecclesiastical diginity — as the crown of her woman's life, was for poor Abélard a folly and a foulness. To her burning words he answered with dry counsels of perfection — in letters which, from the human point of view, are the most pitiful things in literature.

But, on the other hand, where in literature has a woman so daringly laid bare her heart with so splendid and so pure a shamelessness! When we consider, too, the time in which she lived, all the disabilities under which a woman eager to

"utter all herself upon the air" must have laboured, the courage of such an emotional sincerity constitutes an achievement before which Abélard's intellectual audacities seem mere college triumphs. Ah, listen how this twelfth century abbess dared to love:

" . . . All your wishes I have blindly fulfilled, even to the point that, not being able to bring myself to offer you the least resistance, I have had the courage, on a word from you, to lose myself. I have done still more: ah! — strange indeed — my love has turned to such madness that it has sacrificed, without hope of ever recovering it, that which was the one object of its desire; at your command, I have, with a new habit, taken another heart, just to show you that you are as much the only master of my heart as of my body. Never, God is my witness, have I ever sought from you anything but just yourself; it is you only, and not your possessions, that I love. I have never given a thought either to any questions of marriage or marriage dower, or indeed to any joys or wishes of my own. It has been yours alone, as you well know, that I have

had at heart. Although the name of wife appears more sacred and more binding, I myself would have liked better the name of mistress, or even — let us say it — that of concubine or courtesan: in the thought that the more I humbled myself for you, the more I should win the right to your good graces, and the less impaired the glorious renown of your genius.

"You yourself in writing that letter of consolation to a friend have not entirely forgotten these sentiments of mine. You have not disdained to recall some of those reasons for which I did my best to dissuade you from our fatal marriage, but you have passed over in silence almost all those which made me prefer love to marriage, liberty to a chain. I take God to witness that if Augustus, master of the world, had deemed me worthy of the honour of his alliance, and assured me of the Empire of the universe for ever, the name of courtesan with thee would have seemed sweeter and nobler than the name of empress with him; for it is not riches, not power, that makes greatness: riches and power are things of fortune; greatness depends upon merit."

Abélard has his place in the history of philosophy, but his name would hardly have attained its familiarity on the lips of men, had it not been for his love story, and the real love in the story was that of Héloise. For such a love the history of love has but few parallels, and what picture could be more dramatically poignant than that with which the story closes. At last, all his battles fought, Abélard came to die, and Héloise, by connivance of a friendly abbot, contrived that his body should be brought in secret to the Paraclete. The Abbot of Cluny deserves well of romance for that good deed. Héloise survived Abélard twenty-one years, and much of that time she must have watched over his sleep in that quiet chapel in the lonely valley of Arduzon. Surely no love story in the world has a more touching end than this, an end more picturesque in its pathos. As time passed, that vigil must have grown less and less the vigil

of a wife's heartbreak, and more and more the vigil of a mother over the sleep of her tired child. For a woman's love is always a mother's love — most of all, perhaps, the love for her husband.

A pretty story tells that when Héloise died she was buried in the same tomb as her husband, and that the dead man opened wide his arms to receive her. Certain it seems that the ashes of the two lovers were, at one time or another, mingled, and that Abélard and Héloise now rest together in Père La Chaise.