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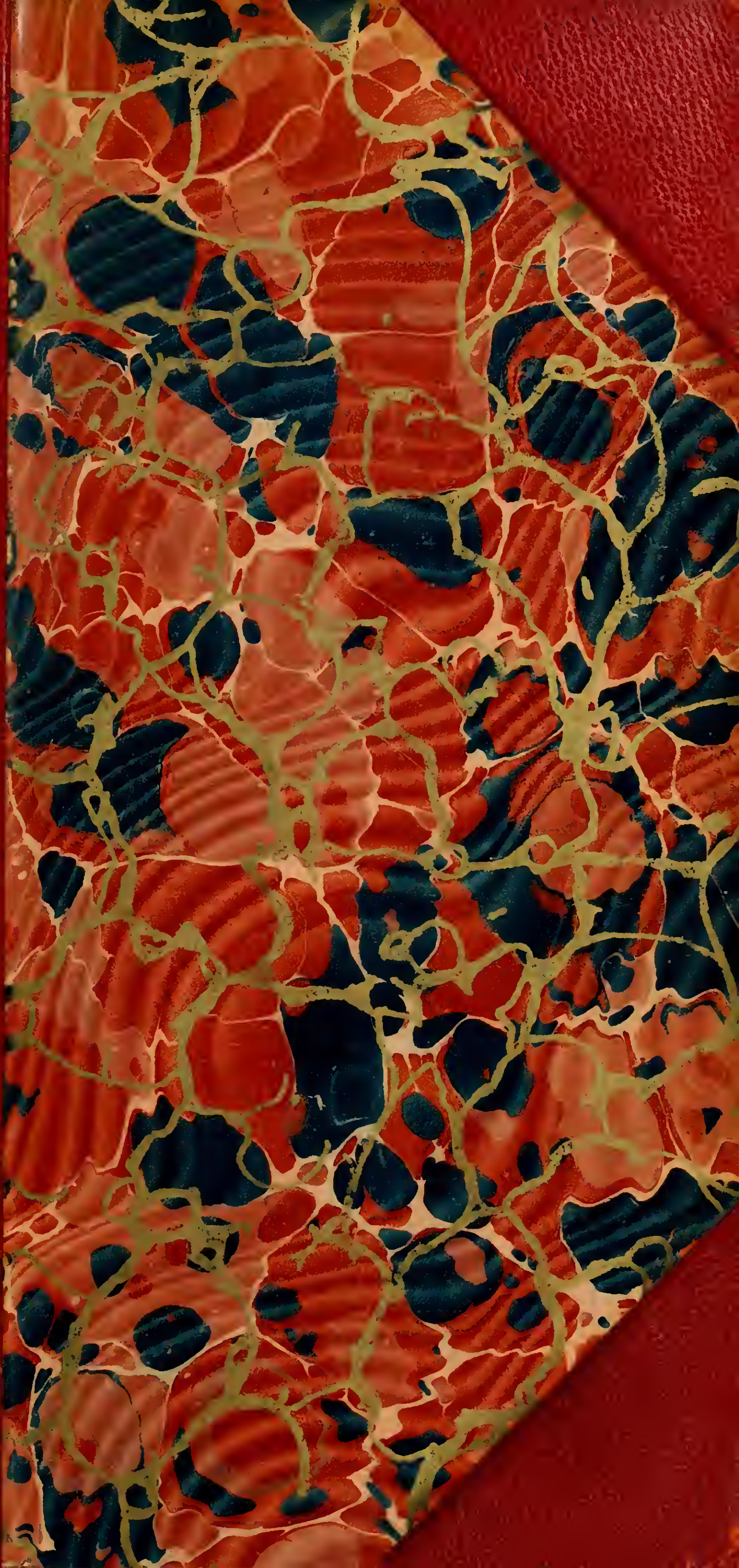

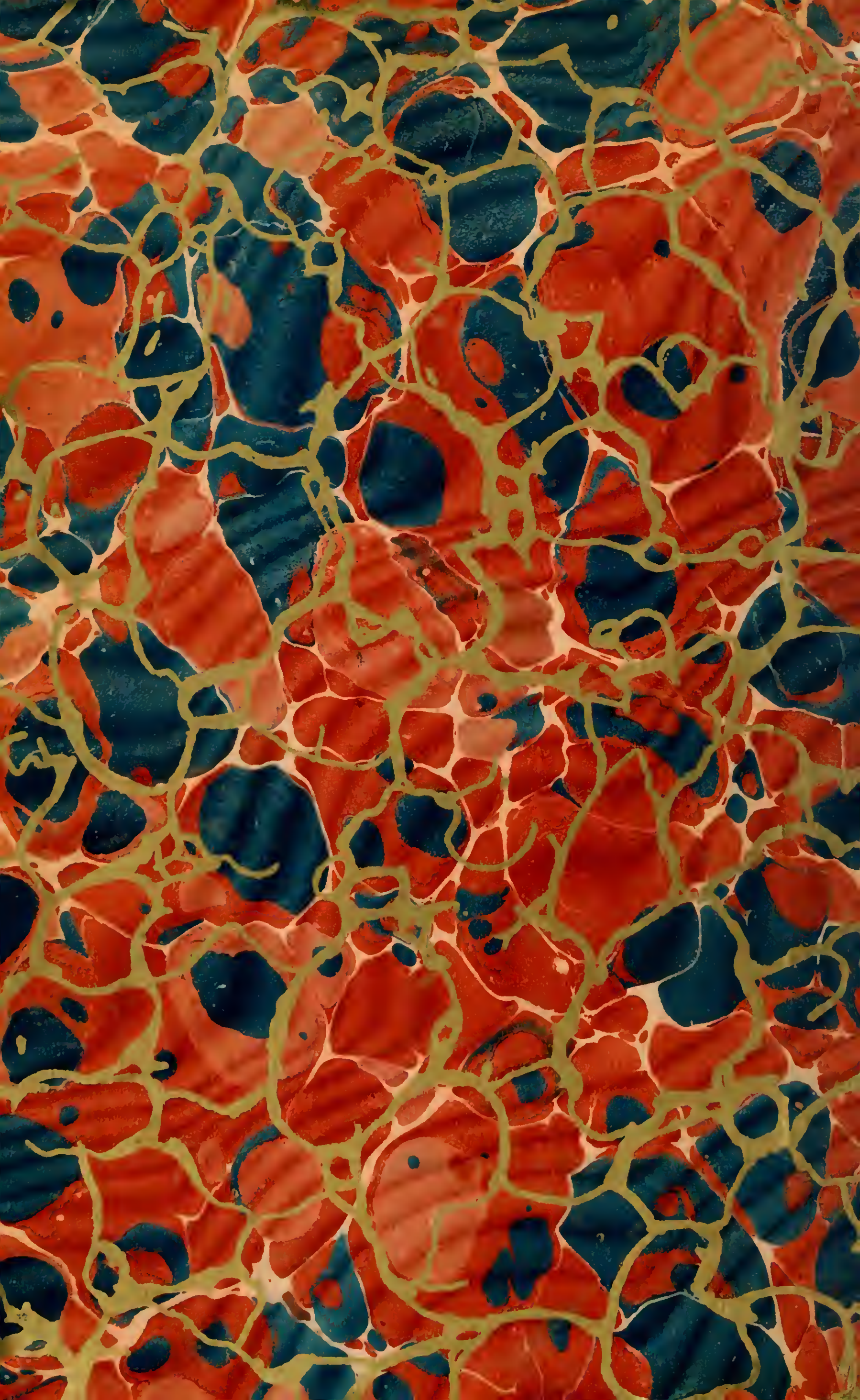

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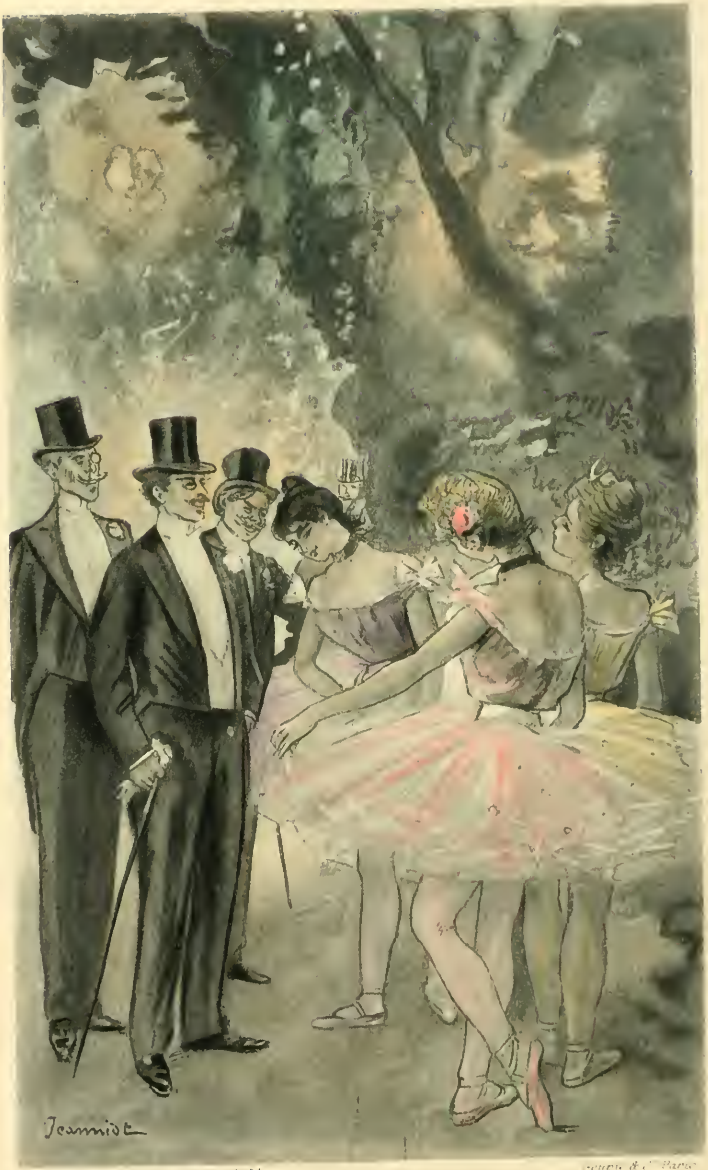

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The Coulisse of the Theatres.

THE NOVELS, ROMANCES
AND MEMOIRS OF

ALPHONSE DAUDET

PROVENÇAL EDITION

KINGS IN EXILE

SOCIETY OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH
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TO

EDMOND DE GONCOURT

TO THE HISTORIAN OF QUEENS AND FAVOURITES
TO THE WRITER OF "GERMINIE LACERTEUX"
AND OF "FRÈRES ZEMGANNO"
I OFFER THIS ROMANCE OF MODERN HISTORY
WITH MY GREAT ADMIRATION

ALPHONSE DAUDET

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

One is at a loss which to admire more, the boldness of Daudet in selecting crowned heads as the persons of a modern realistic novel, or the masterly way in which he used his materials. I doubt if any other of his romances strikes a finer and more elevated tone at the outset and preserves that tone better throughout, or if there be one in which the literary artist is more evident from beginning to end.

It is safe to guess that the experience of the Empress Carlotta in Mexico had much to do with the genesis of "Les Rois en Exil"; indeed, he seems to have given the clue in descriptions of the land whence the Queen of Illyria fled, which tally with the home of Carlotta on the Adriatic, and again in the passages where Méraut refers to his previous engagement as tutor to an imperial prince, when he promptly recognized that the situation was an impossible one for a straightforward, earnest man, owing to the cabals at the Court. Méraut does not say that he crossed the Atlantic, but Daudet seems to have had the Court of Maximilian in mind. The description of the Queen of Illyria's previous visit to Paris, during the reign of Napoleon III, when she was a guest at the Tuileries, adds strength to the conjecture.

But it must be said that in the Queen of Illyria the author has drawn a woman very different from the unhappy empress who still lives in her beautiful palace of Miramar with darkened mind, and that the king is an absolutely different person from Maximilian the too ambitious. Only in the subsidiary character of the debauched prince royal of another line, the boon companion of that *roi fainéant* the King of Illyria, do we find a close resemblance to the scion of a royal house of the Netherlands, whose escapades once filled Paris with scandalous joy.

In Méraut, tutor to the hapless heir apparent of the Illyrian house, Daudet has used some of his own reminiscences, especially where the tutor recalls his early days in the home of that stanch royalist, the weaver in the Southern town. There we find Daudet's father again and see the way in which the banished King of France tried to encourage his adherents with hopes of his restoration. The little prince is one of those doomed children who are described in characters like "Jack," doomed, not through the brainless selfishness of an Ida de Barancey, but rather through the inevitable march of events political and the sickly constitution inherited from corrupt ancestors.

The Queen is the opposite of Jack's mother and the tutor is the opposite of Jack's tutor and step-father. Yet the results are the same. The little prince and Jack are pots of clay broken by the pots of iron as they float down the river of life.

There is a Japanese proverb: "Taishô ni tané ga nashi," meaning that great men have no children. France has realized the truth of this in the present century. Where are the sons of Napoleon the Great and Napoleon the Less?

One source for the character of Élysée Méraut the tutor may have been Auguste Brachet, a teacher of the Empress Eugénie, who wrote a book called "The Italy one Sees, and the Italy one does Not See," and had in preparation a "Comparative Psychology of the Europeans." Daudet seems to have combined for this character the fervent and thoroughly honest loyalism of his own father, the silk-weaver of Nîmes, with the breadth of views and talent for generalization he admired in Auguste Brachet. Of him he said to his son: —

"I may be able to see individuals and discern the motives for their action, but Brachet judges the masses, nations and national events with an unrivalled sagacity. Listen attentively to him and profit by him. You have before you one of the finest brains of modern times!"

In Tom Lévis and his wife Séphora Leemans we have two character parts that affect us with a sense of regret, because we would like to hear more of them and their deeds of guile. That is a delightful chapter in which Leemans, the old dealer in *bric-à-brac*, has asked to dinner the other conspirators against the pocket of Christian II, when the men vie one with another in anecdotes of the tricks by which they have beguiled, not only the ordinary public, but the big collectors.

M. Anatole France has recently touched the same theme in "L'Anneau d'Améthyste." The astute Hebrew baron sees M. de Terremonde coming out of the Hôtel Drouot with a little Ruysdael under his arm, a genuine canvas he has picked up for thirty francs. The amateur shows him his bargain with triumph, but the baron says, "My dear sir, you ought to have paid ten thousand! If you had, it would be worth thirty thousand in your hands. But now, when you wish to hold your sale, that little picture which cost only thirty francs will scarcely bring five hundred! You should be reasonable. Goods cannot jump at one bound from thirty to thirty thousand francs!"

The novel by Anatole France recalls Daudet in more ways than one, though not in certain indecencies that are not needed for the development of the story; but it deepens the impression of Daudet's genius by its manifest inferiority. To be sure, it is a pamphlet against the anti-Semites; but its force as a pamphlet is weakened by the contemptible traits of its Hebrew characters. How different would have been Daudet's way of showing France the folly and brutality of the anti-Semitic movement! In "Rois en Exil" the old fabricator of antiques and Séphora the siren are human beings who act in harmony with their origin and bringing up; they exhibit a certain appreciation of drollery, a certain humour in their various scampish acts.

Not for the first time in this novel did Daudet show the growth of great events from trivial causes; but rarely has he approached so closely as in this case a distinct moral. The King of Illyria's passion for low amours lands him at last in the meshes of a passed mistress of blackmail, who prevents the expedition to rescue the crown of Illyria from accomplishing anything, stops the king on the French coast and brings him to the verge of selling his claim to the throne. And when the hopes of the exiles are raised once more by Christian's voluntary abdication in favour of his son, it is a piece of pure chance, the glancing of a bullet fired for sport, that destroys their hopes of a restoration. So in "L'Anneau d'Améthyste" Anatole France hinges the elevation of the priest Guitrel to the bishop's chair on the foolish desire of a youth. The degenerate son of Baron Jules de Bonmont, originally an Austrian Jew named Gutenberg, wishes to figure conspicuously at the hunts given annually by the Duc de Brécé. He manages to have Guitrel appointed bishop, so that the latter shall procure this social honour for him out of gratitude. The social struggler, a Catholic, but the son of a Jew, is all-powerful in deciding an important election in the Catholic church. In Daudet's book it is the prospect of fleecing Christian II out of several hundred millions of francs, which his former subjects are willing to pay in order to be rid of his claims to the throne, that sets Séphora and her husband and old Leemans in motion. Anatole France takes advantage of the Dreyfus case to write a timely novel; but Daudet was before him in satirizing the seamy side of the Hebrews without so charging the colours as to make his Israelites unreal.

We should recall the fact that Daudet could not have published this book in France under the Empire, though he had the Duc de Morny for patron. It was only the Republic that allowed a novel crammed with *lèse majesté* to appear. He would have been compelled to adopt the practice of a former century and issue it in another country. We may feel sure that it would not have been written had the Empire continued, and thus we should have lacked a modern classic that permits us to "sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings," or, as Gray puts it, —

"With me the Muse shall sit and think
(At ease reclined in rustic state)
How vain the ardour of the Crowd,
How low, how little are the Proud,
How indigent the Great!"

Charles de Kay.

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	The First Day	1
II.	A Royalist	30
III.	The Court at Saint-Mandé	62
IV.	The King makes Fête	86
V.	J. Tom Levis, Foreigners' Agent	122
VI.	The Bohemia of Exile	152
VII.	Popular Joys	180
VIII.	The Grand Stroke	198
IX.	At the Academy	228
X.	Family Scene	254
XI.	The Watchers	271
XII.	The Night-Train	300
XIII.	In the Chapel	328
XIV.	A Solution	335
XV.	The Little King	353
XVI.	The Dark Room	364
XVII.	Fides, Spes	379
XVIII.	The End of a Race	396

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

From Drawings by Georges Jeanniot.

The Coulisse of the Theatres . . . . *Frontispiece*
"'The King will not play again, M. le Duc'" 159
King and Queen 268

KINGS IN EXILE.

I.

THE FIRST DAY.

FREDERICA had slept since morning. A sleep of fever and fatigue, with dreams of her distresses as fallen, exiled queen; a sleep still shaken by the din and agony of a two months siege, broken by bloody, hostile visions, sobs, shudders, spasms of strained nerves, from which she waked with a start of terror.

"Zara? . . Where is Zara? . ." she cried.

One of her women came to the bedside and reassured her softly. H. R. H. the Comte de Zara was sleeping quietly in his room; Mme. Éléonore was with him.

"And the king?"

"Gone out since mid-day in one of the hotel carriages."

"Alone?"

No. His Majesty had taken the Councillor Boscovich with him. While the woman was speaking in her Dalmatian patois, hard and sonorous as a flood rolling pebbles, the queen felt her fears diminish; little by little the peaceful hotel chamber, which she had scarcely seen on arriving in the early dawn, seemed by its very commonplaceness to be comfortable and reassuring, with its light hangings, its tall mirrors, the woolly white of its carpet, on which the silent flight of the swallows fell in shadow through the blinds, crossing one another like large night moths.

"Already five o'clock! . . Come, Petscha, dress me quickly. . . I am ashamed to have slept so long."

Five o'clock, and the loveliest day with which the summer of 1872 had as yet delighted the Parisians. When the queen stepped out upon the balcony, that long balcony of the Hôtel des Pyramides, above which its fifteen windows veiled in pink cambric look down upon the finest part of the Rue de Rivoli, she marvelled. Below, in the broad roadway, mingling the sound of their wheels with the light rain of the water-carts, was an uninterrupted line of carriages going to the Bois with a twinkling of axles, harness, and gay dresses, flying past in a gale of haste. Then, beyond the crowd which pressed against the gilded railings of the Tuileries, the fascinated eyes of the queen fell on a luminous confusion of white gowns, blond hair, dazzling silks, aërial games, and all that gayety of Sunday-best and childhood with which the great Parisian garden fills its terraces on sunny days, until they rested delightedly on the dome of verdure, the vast green roof of broad and spreading leafage made by the horse-chestnut trees, which sheltered, at this particular hour, a military band, to the brass bursts of which the shouts of the children answered. The bitter rancour in the heart of the exile subsided, little by little, before that scene of gayety. A comfortable warmth seemed to wrap itself about her, clinging yet supple as a silken net; her cheeks, faded by privations and long night-watches, renewed their rosy life. The thought came to her: "*Dieu!* how good this is!"

The heaviest misfortunes have these sudden and unconscious comforts. It is not from human beings that they come, but from the multiplying eloquence of things. To this deposed queen, cast with her husband and child into a land of exile by one of those sudden upheavals of a people that make one think of earthquakes accompanied by yawning abysses, flashes of lightning, and volcanic eruptions, — to this woman, whose brow, rather low but still so proud, bore the mark, and, as it were, the furrow of one of the noblest crowns of Europe, no human words could have brought consolation. Yet here was Nature, joyous, fresh, and renewed in this wondrous summer of Paris, which has something of a hothouse and of the soft coolness of river lands, speaking to her of hope, of pacification, of resurrection.

But while she thus allowed her nerves to relax, her eyes to drink in rest from that verdurous horizon, suddenly the exiled woman quivered. At her left, over there, near the entrance of the garden, a spectral building reared itself, made of calcined walls and scorched columns, roofless, the windows mere blue holes looking into space, the frontage opening to a perspective of ruin, while quite at the end, above the Seine, was a pavilion, almost entire, merely touched and gilded by the flames which had blackened the iron of its balconies. That was all that remained of the palace of the Tuileries.

The sight caused her deep emotion, the giddiness of a sudden fall, heart-foremost, on those walls. Ten years ago, but it was not yet ten — oh! what sad chance was this, and how prophetic it seemed to her to come and lodge before these ruins — ten years ago she had lived in that palace with her husband. It was in the spring of 1864. Just three months married, she was travelling to the various Courts in all her joys as hereditary princess and wife. Everybody liked her and welcomed her. Especially at the Tuileries, what balls, what fêtes! Beneath those crumbling walls she saw them again. She saw the vast and splendid galleries dazzling with lights and jewels, the Court robes floating on the grand stairway between two hedges of glittering cuirasses; and that invisible music now rising in gusts from the garden, seemed to her Valdteufel's orchestra in the Salle des Maréchaux. Was it not to that gay, springing tune that she had danced with her cousin Maximilian just one week before he started for Mexico? . . Yes, indeed it was. . . A quadrille of emperors and kings, of queens and empresses, whose stately interweavings and august faces this air from La

Belle Hélène brought back before her. . . Max, so anxious, gnawing his blond beard; Carlotta facing him next to Napoleon, radiant, transfigured by this joy of being empress. . . Where were they now, the dancers of that beautiful quadrille? All dead, exiled, or mad! Was God no longer on the side of kings? . .

Then she remembered all she had suffered since the death of old Leopold, which placed upon her head the double crown of Illyria and Dalmatia: her daughter, her first-born, carried off in the midst of the coronation fêtes by one of those strange, nameless maladies which prove the exhaustion of a blood and the end of a race; and so suddenly that the tapers of the death-watch mingled with the illuminations of the town, and no time was given to take down the flags in the Cathedral for the day of the funeral. Then, beside this great sorrow, beside the transports of fear caused incessantly by the feeble health of her son, other sorrows known to herself alone lay hidden in the most secret corners of her woman's soul. . . Alas! the heart of the peoples is not more faithful than that of kings. One day, without knowing why or wherefore, this Illyria, which had always so fêted them, was disaffected to its princes. Then followed misconceptions, obstinacy, distrust, and finally hatred, — that horrible hatred of a whole nation, that hatred which she felt in the air, in the silence of the streets, the irony of glances, the frowning of bent brows; a hatred which made her fear to show herself at a window, and held her back in the depths of her carriage in her short, infrequent drives. Oh! those shouts of death beneath the terraces of her castle of Leybach! As she looked at the ruins of the palace of the kings of France she thought she heard them still. She saw the meeting of the Council, the ghastly ministers wild with fear entreating the king to abdicate . . . then the flight in peasants' clothes through the darkness, across the mountains . . . the villages uprisen and howling, drunk with liberty like the towns . . . bonfires everywhere on the heights . . . the burst of tender tears that came to her in the midst of this great disaster on finding milk in a hut for her child's supper . . . and lastly, the sudden resolution with which she inspired the king to throw himself into Ragusa, still faithful to them, and the two months there . . . months of privations and anguish, the town besieged, bombarded, her child ill, almost dying of hunger, the shame of a surrender at last, the dreadful embarcation in the midst of a silent and weary crowd . . . and then the French ship bearing them away to other miseries, to the chill, the unknown of exile; while behind them floated the flag of the Illyrian Republic, new and all-conquering, above their battered castle. . . The Tuileries, in ruins before her, recalled all this.

" Paris is fine, is it not? " said a voice behind her that was young and joyous in spite of its nasal tone.

The king had come out upon the balcony, holding in his arms the little prince, and was showing him that horizon of trees, roofs, cupolas, and the rush of the street in the beautiful light of the closing day.

"Oh, yes! very fine! . ." said the child, a poor little boy some five or six years old, with drawn, sharp features, hair too blond and closely cut, as if after illness. He looked about him with the gentle little smile of a sufferer, surprised to hear no longer the cannon of the siege, and brightening visibly from the gayety about him. To him, exile came in happy fashion. Nor did the king seem sad; he had brought back from his two hours on the boulevard a brilliant, exhilarated countenance which formed a contrast to the grief of the queen. They were, in any case, two absolutely distinct types: he, slender, delicate, a dead-white skin and crisp black hair and moustache, which he twisted perpetually with a hand too pale and supple, handsome eyes but rather shifty, and something in his glance that was irresolute and childish and made a spectator say, although he was past his thirtieth year: "How young he is!" The queen, on the contrary, a robust Dalmatian with a grave air and little gesture, was the real male of the two, in spite of the transparent splendour of her complexion, and her magnificent hair, of that Venetian auburn in which the Orient seems to have mingled the tawny, ruddy tones of its henna. Christian, in her presence, had the constrained, rather embarrassed manner of a husband who has accepted too much devotion, too many sacrifices. He inquired gently about her health, whether she had slept, and how she felt after her journey. She replied with measured gentleness, full of condescension, but in reality was thinking only of her son, whose nose and cheeks she felt, and whose motions she watched with brooding anxiety.

"He is already better than he was down there," said Christian, in a low tone.

"Yes, the colour is coming back to his cheeks," she replied in a tone of intimacy they never used except when speaking to each other of the child.

As for him, he smiled to both of them, and drew their foreheads close together in his pretty caress, as if aware that his two little arms formed the sole real link between these beings so dissimilar. Below them, on the sidewalk, curious spectators, already informed of the arrival of the princes, had stopped to raise their eyes to this King and Queen of Illyria, whose heroic defence of Ragusa made them celebrated, and whose portraits were figuring on the front page of all the illustrated papers. Little by little, just as people look at an escaped parrot or the pigeons on a roof, idlers had gathered, their noses in the air, without knowing really what they gazed at. A crowd formed itself in front of the hotel and presently all eyes were fixed on this young couple in travelling costume, the child's fair head above them, as though uplifted by the hope of his vanquished parents and the joy they felt in having brought him alive through that awful storm.

"Are you coming in, Frederica?" said the king, annoyed by the notice of so many persons.

But she, her head high, like a queen well-used to face the antipathy of crowds —

"Why should I?" she said; "I am very well here on this balcony."

"Because . . . I was forgetting it . . . Rosen is here, with his son and daughter-in-law. . . He asks to see you. . ."

At the name of Rosen, which recalled to her so many good and noble services, the eyes of the queen lighted up.

"My brave duke! I was expecting him . . ." she said; and then, as she turned to cast a haughty glance upon the street before re-entering the room, a man in front of her sprang upon the stone base of the Tuileries railings, over-topping for a moment the whole crowd. This was what had happened at Leybach when shots were fired through their window. Frederica threw herself back with a vague expectation of something of the same kind. A noble brow, a raised hat, hair that was streaming in the sunlight, while a calm, strong voice cried out above the noises of the crowd, "Vive le roi!" was all that she saw of that unknown friend who dared, in the face of republican Paris, before the crumbling Tuileries, to offer a welcome to these discrowned sovereigns. This sympathetic greeting, of which she had been so long deprived, made an impression on the queen like that of a brightly burning fire after a march through bitter cold. She was warmed from the heart to the skin, and the sight of old Rosen completed this vivid and beneficent reaction.

The Duc de Rosen, general and former chief of the Royal military household, had quitted Illyria three years earlier, when the king took from him his post of honour and confidence to give it to a liberal; favouring thus the new ideas to the detriment of what was then called at Leybach the queen's party. Certainly he had reason to blame Christian, who sacrificed him coldly, and suffered him to go without regret, without farewell — him, the victor of Mostar, of Livno, the hero of the grand Montenegrin wars. After selling his castles, estates, and property, thus characterizing his departure with all the dignity of a protestation, the old general settled in Paris, married his son there, and during three long years of vain expectation felt his anger against royal ingratitude increased by the griefs of emigration and the melancholy of a life unoccupied. Yet, the moment that he heard of the arrival of his princes he went to them at once without hesitating; and now, stiff and erect in the middle of the salon, his colossal form rising almost to the height of the chandelier, he was awaiting with such emotion the favour of a gracious welcome that his long pandour legs could be seen to tremble, his broad, short breast in a tight blue military coat to pant beneath the grand cordon of the Order. His head alone, the small head of a hawk, steely glance, and beak of prey, remained impassible, with its scanty white hair bristling, and the hundred little wrinkles of a skin shrivelled up under fire. The king, who did not like scenes and was rather embarrassed by this interview, got through it by taking a playful tone of off-hand cordiality.

"Well, general," he said, coming up to him with outstretched hands, "you were right, after all . . . I let the reins drop too much . . . I allowed myself to be flung — and flat, too."

Then, seeing that the old servitor bent his knee, he raised him with a motion full of dignity and pressed him long against his breast. But no one could have prevented the duke from kneeling before his queen, to whom the respectfully passionate caress of that ancient moustache on her hand caused a strange emotion.

"Ah! my poor Rosen! . . my poor Rosen! . ." she murmured.

Gently she closed her eyes that her tears might not be seen. But those she had shed for years had left their trace upon the delicate, crimpled skin of her eyelids, together with the vigils, the distresses, the disquietudes, all those murderous wounds that a woman believes she is keeping in the depths of her being while they mount to the surface — just as every agitation of the water is seen to furrow it in visible rings. For the space of a second that noble face with its pure lines had a weary, sorrowful expression, which did not escape the eye of the old soldier. "How she must have suffered!" he thought, as he looked at her. Then, to hide his emotion, he rose abruptly, turned to his son and daughter-in-law, who had remained at the farther end of the room, and, in the same stern tone with which he had shouted in the streets of Leybach, "Sabres up! . . Charge that canaille! . ." he commanded: —

"Colette, Herbert, come here and salute your queen."

Prince Herbert de Rosen, almost as tall as his father, with the jaw of a horse, innocent and doll-like cheeks, came forward, followed by his young wife. He walked with difficulty, leaning on a cane. Eight months earlier, at the Chantilly races, he had broken a leg and a few ribs. The general did not omit to remark that if it had not been for that accident, which put his son's life in danger, they would both have hastened eagerly to shut themselves up in Ragusa.

"And I should have gone with you, father," interrupted the princess, in a tone of heroism not at all in keeping with her name of Colette and her gay and lively little cat's nose beneath frizzles of light hair.

The queen could not restrain a smile as she held out her hand very cordially. Christian, twisting his moustache, stared, with the interest of an amateur and eager curiosity, at this frisky little Parisian, this pretty bird of fashion with its long and variegated plumage, all petticoats and flounces, whose decked-out daintiness was so great a change from the noble features and majestic type of the land from which he came. "That devil of a Herbert! how did he manage to get such a jewel?" thought the king, envying the companion of his childhood, the tall booby with prominent eyes, and hair parted in the middle and plastered down in the Russian fashion on either side of a short and narrow forehead. Then the idea came to him that if this type of woman was lacking in Illyria, in Paris it filled the streets; and exile began to seem to him very definitely endurable. At any rate, this exile could not last long. The Illyrians would soon have enough of their republic. It was only an affair of two or three months to be spent away from his own country, a royal holiday, which he would certainly employ as gayly as possible.

"What do you think, general?" he said laughing; "they are already trying to make me buy a house. . . A gentleman, an Englishman, came to me this morning. . . He engages to provide me with a magnificent mansion, furnished, carpeted, horses in the stable, carriages in the coachhouse, linen, plate, servants, establishment all complete, in forty-eight hours and in whatever quarter I like best."

"I know your Englishman, Sire; that is Tom Levis, an agent for foreigners. . ."

"Yes, I think it was . . . the name sounded like that. . . Have you had dealings with him?"

"All strangers coming to Paris receive a visit from Tom and his cab. . . But I wish for your Majesty's sake the acquaintance may end there. . ."

The particular attention with which Prince Herbert, as soon as mention was made of Tom Levis, began to consider the ribbons on his low shoes and the stripes of his silk stockings, and the furtive glance the princess cast at her husband, notified

Christian that if he wanted information about the illustrious speculator of the Rue Royale those two young persons could furnish it. But how, he said aloud, could the services of the Levis agency be useful to him? He wanted neither house nor carriages, expecting to pass the few months of their stay in Paris at this hotel.

"Is not that your opinion, Frederica?"

"Oh! certainly, yes; that is wisest," replied the queen, though in her heart she shared none of the king's illusions as to their return, nor his liking for transient settlement.

Old Rosen, in his turn, risked a few observations. This inn life seemed to him scarcely suitable to the dignity of the house of Illyria. Paris, at this moment, was full of exiled sovereigns. They all lived in sumptuous state. The King of Westphalia occupied a magnificent residence in the Rue de Neubourg, with a pavilion annexed for the household service. The house of the Queen of Galicia in the Champs Élysées, was a perfect palace of luxury and kept in royal state. The King of Palermo had a fine establishment at Saint-Mandé, numerous horses in the stables, a battalion of aides-de-camp. Even down to the Duke of Palma in his little house at Passy, none of them were without the semblance of a Court, and five or six generals at their table.

"No doubt, no doubt," said Christian, impatiently. . . "But it is not the same thing. . . Those people will never leave Paris again; for them, things are decided, finished, whereas for us . . . Besides, there is a very good reason why we should not buy a palace, friend Rosen. They have taken all we had, over there. . . A few hundred thousand francs with the Rothschilds in Naples, and our poor crown, which Mme. de Silvis saved in a hat-box, that is all we have left. . . Just fancy the marquise making that long journey into exile, on foot, in trains, in carriages, always holding her precious hat-box in hand. 'T was droll, oh, so droll!"

His childishness getting the upper hand, he began to laugh at their distress as if it was the funniest thing in the world.

The duke did not laugh.

"Sire," he said, "you did me the honour to assure me just now that you regretted having kept me so long out of your councils and your heart. . . Well, I now ask the favour of reinstatement. . . As long as your exile lasts, give me the functions I had at Leybach near your Majesties . . . as chief of your civil and military household."

"See his ambition!" cried the king, gayly. Then he added in a tone of friendship: "But there is no household, my poor general, neither civil nor military. . . The queen has her chaplain and two women . . . Zara, his governess . . . I have brought Boscovich to do my correspondence, and Lebeau to shave my chin. . . That is all. . ."

"I still further solicit, Sire. . . Will your Majesty be so kind as to take my son Herbert as aide-de-camp, and give the princess, my daughter-in-law, here present, as reader and lady of honour to the queen? . ."

"Granted on my part, duke," said the queen, turning her beautiful smile upon Colette, quite dazzled by her new dignity.

As for the prince, he gave by way of thanks to his sovereign, who granted the brevet of aide-de-camp with equal courtesy, a graceful neigh, — a habit he had acquired by dint of frequenting Tattersall's.

"I will present the three appointments for signature to-morrow morning," added the general, respectfully, in a business tone which indicated that he considered himself as having already entered upon his functions.

Hearing that tone, that formula, which had so long and so solemnly pursued him, the young king let an expression of ennui and discouragement come upon his face; then he consoled himself by looking at the princess, whom joy had embellished and transfigured, as it does all pretty faces without points, the charm of which lies in the piquant and ever changing surface of their countenances. Imagine! lady of honour to Queen Frederica, she, Colette Sauvadon, niece of Sauvadon the great wine-merchant of Bercy! What would be said in the Rue de Varennes, the Rue Saint-Dominique, in those exclusive salons to which her marriage with Herbert de Rosen admitted her on great occasions, but never intimately? Already her worldly little mind was travelling in a land of fancy. She thought of the visiting-cards she would order printed, the renewal of her wardrobe, a gown of the Illyrian colours, with cockades of the same for the heads of her horses. . . But the king's voice, speaking near her, interrupted these thoughts.

"This is our first meal in the land of exile," he was saying to the general in a tone half-serious and designedly emphatic. "I wish the table to be gay and surrounded by our friends."

Then, noticing the alarmed air of the general at this brusque invitation, he added: —

"Ah! yes, very true, etiquette, propriety. . . Bah! we have lost the habit of all that since the siege; the chief of our household will find many reforms to make. . . But I request that he will not begin them until to-morrow."

At this moment the *maître d'hôtel*, throwing open both sides of the double door, announced the dinner of their Majesties. The princess drew herself up, all glorious, to take the arm of the king; but he offered it to the queen, and, without further notice of his guests, conducted her to the dining-room. All the ceremonial of a Court had not been abandoned, whatever he might say, in the casemates of Ragusa.

The transition from sun to artificial light struck every one on entering. In spite of the chandelier, the candelabra, and two large lamps on the sideboards, it was difficult to see clearly; as if the daylight, brutally excluded before its time, had left on all things the haziness of twilight. This melancholy effect was increased by the length and disproportion of the table to the number of guests, a table conforming in shape to the exigencies of etiquette, for which a search had been made throughout the hotel, and where the king and queen now took their seats together at one end, with no one beside them and no one opposite; an arrangement which filled the little Princesse de Rosen with surprise and admiration. Invited once during the last days of the Empire to dine at the Tuileries, she remembered very well that the emperor and empress sat opposite to each other, like any bourgeois couple at their wedding feast. "Ah! this" thought the little parvenue, closing her fan with a resolute gesture and laying it beside her with her gloves, "this is legitimacy! . . there 's nothing like it."

That thought transformed to her eyes this dreary sort of depopulated *table-d'hôte*, the aspect of which recalled the splendid inns of the Italian Corniche between Monaco and Saint-Remo at the beginning of a season, when the rush of the tourists has not yet begun. The same mixture of people and costumes; Christian in a sack coat, the queen in her travelling-dress; Herbert and his wife in boulevard *watteau;* while the Franciscan habit of Père Alphée, the queen's chaplain, rubbed against the starred semi-uniform of the old general. Nothing less imposing could be seen. One thing alone had grandeur, — the chaplain's prayer, asking for the Divine blessing on this first meal in exile. "*Quæ sumus sumpturi prima die in exilio*" . . . said the monk, with outspread hands; and those words slowly recited seemed to prolong very far into the future the royal holiday of King Christian. "Amen!" responded in a grave voice the deposed sovereign, as if in the Church's Latin he had felt for the first time the thousand broken links, still living, still quivering, which the banished of all ages drag after them, as trees uprooted drag their living roots.

But the strongest impressions never held long upon the polished, caressing nature of the Slav. He was no sooner seated than he recovered his gayety, his disengaged manner, and talked a great deal; taking pains, out of regard to the French lady present, to speak French, very purely, and yet with a slight Italian *zezaiement*, which went extremely well with his laugh. In a tone of heroical comedy he related certain episodes of the siege, — the installation of the Court into the casemates, and the wonderful figure there made by the Marquise Éléonore de Silvis in her turban with its green feather and her plaid. Fortunately, that innocent dame was dining in her pupil's apartment and could not hear the laughter produced by the king's jokes. Boscovich and his herbarium served him next as a target. One would really have thought that he wanted by sheer boyish nonsense to avenge himself for the gravity of circumstances. The aulic councillor Boscovich, a little man of no age, timid and gentle, with rabbit-eyes that always looked sideways, was a learned legal authority, passionately devoted to botany. At Ragusa, the courts of law being all closed, he spent his time in herbalizing under the bomb-shells in the moats of the fortifications, — wholly unconscious heroism of a mind given up to its mania, pre-occupied solely, in the midst of this total upheaval of his country, in saving a magnificent herbal which had fallen into the hands of the liberals.

"Think, my poor Boscovich," said Christian to worry him, "what a splendid bonfire they must have made of all those dried leaves . . . unless the Republic, being so poor, took it into its head to cut up your big gray dock-leaves into capes for its militia."

The councillor laughed like the rest, but with scared eyes, and many "*Ma che . . . ma che*," which betrayed his innocent terrors.

"How charming the king is! . . what wit! . . and what eyes! . ." thought the little princess, to whom Christian bent continually, endeavouring to diminish the distance that ceremonial placed between them.

It was a pleasure to see her blossoming out under the evidently admiring gaze of those august eyes, playing with her fan, uttering little cries, throwing back her supple figure, in which laughter was palpitating in visible waves. The queen, by her attitude and the private conversation she was holding with the old duke, who sat next to her, seemed to isolate herself from the overflowing gayety. Two or three times, when the siege was talked of, she said a few words, and each time to set forth the king's bravery and his strategic knowledge, after which she resumed her aside. In a low voice the general inquired about the Court people, his old companions who, more fortunate than himself, had followed their princes to Ragusa. Many remained there, and to each name mentioned by Rosen, the queen was heard to answer in her grave voice: "Dead! . . dead! . ." a funeral note, sounding the knell of her recent losses. Nevertheless, after dinner, when they returned to the salon, Frederica seemed gayer; she made Colette de Rosen sit beside her on a sofa, and talked to her with that affectionate familiarity which she used to attract sympathy, and which resembled the pressure of her beautiful outstretched hand, delicate in the fingers but strong in the palm, communicating to others its beneficent energy. Suddenly she said: —

"Let us go and see Zara put to bed, princess."

At the end of a long corridor, encumbered, like the rest of the apartment, with piled-up cases, open trunks from which linen and clothing were protruding in the hurry and confusion of arrival, was the room of the little prince, lighted by a lamp with its shade covered so that the light fell below the level of the bluish curtains of the bed.

A servant-woman was sitting asleep on a trunk, her head enveloped in her white coif and the large handkerchief edged with pink which completes the head-dress of the Dalmatian women.

Near the table sat the governess, leaning lightly on her elbow, an open book on her knees; she, too, had succumbed to a soporific influence, retaining in her sleep the same romantic and sentimental air the king had been ridiculing. The queen's entrance did not wake her; but the little prince, at the first motion of the mosquito net that veiled his cot, stretched out his little fists and made an effort to rise, his eyes wide open, his glance wandering. For months he was so accustomed to be waked at night, hurriedly dressed for flight or departure, and to see about him in the morning new persons and new places, that his sleep had lost its even tenour; it was no longer that good ten hours' journey in the land of dreams which children make to the regular, continuous, almost imperceptible breathing of their little half-opened mouths.

"Is that you, mamma?" he said in a whisper. "Must we run away again?"

In that resigned and touching exclamation one felt how the child had suffered, suffered from an evil too great for him.

"No, no, my darling; we are safe this time... Go to sleep, you must sleep."

"Oh! then it is all right, and I can go back to giant Robistor on the glass mountain . . . I liked it so."

"Those are Mme. Éléonore's fairy tales; they disturb his ideas," said the queen softly. "Poor little fellow! life is so dark for him... He has nothing to amuse him but stories... However, we must soon determine to put something better into his head."

As she spoke, she was re-arranging the child's pillow, settling him to sleep with caressing motions like a simple bourgeoise, which completely upset the grandiose notions of Colette de Rosen as to royalty. Then, as she leaned over her child to kiss him, he asked in her ear if it was the cannon or the sea he heard growling in the distance. She listened a second to the confused, continuous roll which, at moments, seemed almost to crack the panes and make the partitions tremble, shaking the house from top to bottom, lessening only to grow louder, increasing suddenly and fleeing again into soundless space.

"That is nothing. . . That is Paris, my son. Go to sleep."

And the child fallen from a throne, who had been told of Paris as a refuge, fell asleep in confidence, rocked by the noises of the city of revolutions.

When the queen and the princess returned to the salon, they found there a young woman of grand air and dignity who was standing up and talking with the king. The familiar tone of the conversation, the respectful distance at which all present held themselves, showed plainly that this was a personage of importance. The queen gave an agitated cry.

"Maria!"

"Frederica!"

And the same rush of tenderness in both threw them into each other's arms. On a questioning look from his wife, Herbert de Rosen named the visitor. It was the Queen of Palermo. Rather taller and thinner than her cousin of Illyria, she seemed to be several years older. Her black eyes and her black hair raised smoothly from her forehead, together with her pure white skin, gave her the look of an Italian, although she was born at the Court of Bavaria. There was nothing German about her except the stiffness of her long, flat waist, the haughty expression of her smile, and a certain dowdiness, a something of discord in her apparel which distinguishes the women of the other side of the Rhine. Frederica, left an orphan very young, was brought up in Munich with this cousin; though separated by life, they had always retained a most lively affection for each other.

"You see, I could not wait," said the Queen of Palermo, holding Frederica's hand. "Cecco was not in . . . I have come without him . . . I longed so! . . I have thought of you so often, of both of you. . . Oh! that cannon of Ragusa, I fancied I heard it . . . at night . . . from Vincennes . . ."

"It was only the echo of that of Cajeta," interrupted Christian, making allusion to the heroic attitude maintained a few years earlier by that queen, dethroned and exiled like themselves.

She sighed.

"Ah! yes, Cajeta. . . We, too, were left alone, deserted. . . What a pity! As if all crowns ought not to maintain each other. . . But now it is finished. The world is mad."

Then, turning to Christian: —

"All the same, cousin, I congratulate you . . . you fell as a king."

"Oh!" he said, motioning to Frederica, "there is the true king of us two."

A gesture from his wife closed his lips. . . He bowed, smiling, and turned on his heel.

"Come and smoke, Herbert," he said to his aide-de-camp. And together they went out upon the balcony.

The night was warm and splendid. Day, scarcely extinquished by the dazzle of the gas, was dying in blue gleams. The dark mass of the horse-chestnuts of the Tuileries fanned a gentle breeze, and the heavens above were brightening with the light of the stars. By means of this background of coolness, this space beyond the noises of the crowd, the Rue de Rivoli escaped the stifled aspect of the other streets of Paris in mid-summer; one felt, moreover, the vast current of the town toward the Champs Élysées and its open-air concerts beneath their flaming glass globes. The gayety that winter incloses behind warm curtains now sang freely, laughed, ran riot in flowery hats, floating mantillas, and cotton gowns, the outline of which round white young necks tied with black ribbon could be seen as they passed the street lamps. The cafés and the ice-cream places overflowed upon the sidewalk, with rattle of money, calls to the waiters, and the ringing of glasses.

"This Paris is unspeakable," said Christian of Illyria, blowing his smoke before him into the darkness. "The air is not the same as it is elsewhere . . . there is something in it that goes to the head . . . When I think that at Leybach at this hour all is locked up, gone to bed, extinguished! . ." Then he added in a gayer tone:

"Ah, ça! my aide-de-camp, I hope to be initiated into Parisian pleasures... You seem to me to be up to them . . . well launched, in fact."

"As to that, yes, Monseigneur," said Herbert, neighing with gratified pride... "At the club, the opera, everywhere, they call me *le roi de la Gomme.*"[1]

While Christian was having the meaning of that new word explained to him, the two queens, who, in order to speak more freely, had withdrawn to Frederica's bedroom, were opening their hearts in long tales and sad confidences, of which the low murmur only could be heard beyond the blinds. In the salon, Père Alphée and the old duke were talking together in low tones.

"He was right," said the chaplain, "it is she who is king, the true king... If you had seen her on horseback, riding night after night to the outposts! .. At Fort Saint-Angelo, where it rained fire, she walked twice round the talus, whip in hand, her habit over her arm as if in her own park, to give heart to the soldiers... You ought to have seen our sailors when she came down... He, all this time, running about God knows where! Brave, *parbleu!* yes, as brave as she... but no star, no faith... And to save your crown as well as to win heaven, Monsieur le duc, you must have faith."

The monk grew excited, standing up in his long robe and Rosen was obliged to calm him.

"Gently, Père Alphée... Come, come, Père

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[1] Slang expression for ultra fashion. *Gommeux:* effeminate young dandy.— Tr.

Alphée . . ." He was afraid that Colette would overhear him.

The latter was abandoned to Councillor Boscovich, who discoursed to her of his plants, mingling scientific terms with the most minute details of his botanizing excursions. His conversation fairly smelt of dried herbs and the dust of an old library. However, there is in grandeur so powerful an attraction, the atmosphere it sheds does so strongly and deliciously intoxicate certain little natures eager to imbibe it, that the young princess, that Princesse Colette of the balls of high-life, of races and first representations, always in the advance-guard of the Paris of amusement, kept her prettiest smile while listening to the dreary nomenclatures of the innocent botanist. It sufficed her to know that a king was talking at that window, and that two queens were exchanging confidences in the adjoining chamber. That knowledge was enough to fill the commonplace salon, where her own elegance was quite out of place, with the grandeur, the sad majesty which make the vast rooms of Versailles, with their waxed floors shining like their mirrors, so melancholy. She would willingly have stayed there in ecstasy till midnight, without stirring and without being bored, only wondering a little at the long conversation that the king kept up with her husband. What grave questions could they be discussing? What vast projects of monarchical restoration? Her curiosity redoubled when they both reappeared with animated faces and decided, eager eyes.

"I am going out with the king," Herbert said to her in a low voice. "My father will take you home."

The king came up to her.

"You must not be vexed with me, princess. . . His service begins from this moment."

"All the moments of our life belong to your Majesties," replied the young wife, convinced that some important and mysterious step was about to be taken . . . perhaps a first meeting of conspirators. Oh! why could she not be present herself?

Christian had gone to his wife's room, but at the door he paused.

"They are weeping," he said to Herbert; then, turning back: "Good-night, I will not come in."

In the street he gave way to an explosion of joy, of comfort, as he passed his arm through that of his aide-de-camp, after lighting a fresh cigar in the hotel vestibule.

"It is so good, don't you see, to get off alone, into a crowd, to walk in the ranks like the rest, to be master of one's speech, one's gestures, and when a pretty girl goes by to be able to turn and look at her without all Europe being shaken. . . That's the blessing of exile. . . When I was here eight years ago, I saw Paris only through the windows of the Tuileries, or from the tops of those gala coaches. . . This time I mean to know everything, go everywhere. . . *Sapristi!* now I think of it, I'm making you walk, walk, and you limp, my poor Herbert. . . Stop, we will take a cab."

The prince began to protest; his leg did not hurt him; he felt quite strong enough to walk *there.* But Christian was firm.

"No, no, my guide shall not be foundered on the first day."

So saying, he hailed a roaming cab, which was making for the Place de la Concorde with a clatter of worn-out springs and snappings of the whip on the bony back of its horse, jumped lightly into it, and settled himself, rubbing his hands with childish joy, on the old blue cloth of the cushions.

"Where to, my prince?" asked the coachman little suspecting that he spoke true.

And the king answered, with the triumphant joy of an emancipated school-boy: —

"To Mabille!"

II.

A ROYALIST.

WITH bare, shaven heads beneath a prickly fine December rain which frosted like lace their brown woollen gowns, two monks, wearing the girdle and the cowl of the order of Saint-Francis, were striding down the incline of the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince. Amid all the transformations of the Latin quarter, and those great gaps through which are lost in the dust of "demolition" the originality and the very memories of old Paris, the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince still keeps its ancient physiognomy as a student's street. The book-stalls, the creameries, the cook-shops, the old-clothes dealers, "purchase and sale in gold and silver," alternate with one another as far along as the hill of Sainte-Geneviève, and students tramp it at all hours of the day; no longer Gavarni's students, with long hair flying from their woollen caps, but future lawyers, buttoned from head to foot in their ulsters, brushed and gloved, with enormous morocco cases under their arms, and the cold, cunning air of the business agent already upon them; or else these students are future doctors, a little freer in gait and behaviour, still keeping a material human side in their studies, an expansiveness of physical life, as if to counterbalance their close intercourse with death.

At this early hour girls in dressing-gowns and slippers, their eyes bloated with vigils and hair hanging loose in swaying nets, were running through the streets to the creameries for their breakfast milk, — some laughing and skipping, others, on the contrary, very dignified, swinging their tin-boxes and trailing their faded finery and their slippers with the majestic indifference of queens of love; and as, in spite of ulsters and morocco bags, hearts of twenty are all of one age, the students smiled at these beauties, and greeted them with a "Tiens, Léa" — "Good-morning Clémence." They called to one another across the street; appointments were being made for the evening: "At the Medical" — "At Louis XIII.," when suddenly, on too lively a remark, or a madrigal taken amiss, one of the startling indignations of such girls burst forth in the invariable formula, "Go your way, insolence!" We can fancy how the two monks must have bristled in contact with all this youth, laughing and turning to look at them as they passed. But laughing low, for one of these Franciscans, thin, brown, and dry as a carob-bean, had a terrible, piratical countenance under his bushy eyebrows, and his gown, which the girdle held together in heavy plaits, defined the muscles and the loins of an athlete. Neither he nor his companion seemed to pay the least attention to the street, the atmosphere of which they were shaking off in great strides, with fixed, absorbed eyes, solely bent upon the end they had in view. Before they reached the broad flight of steps which leads to the École de Médecine the elder of the two signed to the other: —

"This is it."

"It" was a furnished lodging-house of shabby appearance, the alley to which, closed by a green gate with a bell, opened between a newspaper booth crowded with pamphlets, songs for a sou, and coloured prints in which the grotesque hat of Basile appeared in a hundred attitudes, and a cellar brewery, bearing on its sign the words "Brewery of the Rialto," doubtless because it was served by young ladies in Venetian head-dresses.

"Has M. Élysée gone out?" asked one of the Fathers as they passed the porter's lodge of the house on the ground-floor.

A stout woman, who must have rolled through many a lodging-house before keeping one of her own, answered lazily from her chair and without even looking at the line of keys hanging sadly on their hooks: —

"Out! at this hour! . . You had better ask if he has come in."

Then a glance at the brown gowns made her change her tone, and she told in some anxiety where to find the room of Élysée Méraut.

"No. 36, fifth floor, at the end of the passage."

The Franciscans went up, making their way through narrow corridors encumbered with muddy boots, and other boots with high heels, gray, bronzed, fantastic, luxurious, or wretched, which told long tales on the manners and morals of the "inhabitants"; but they paid no attention, sweeping the boots along the passage with their coarse skirts and the cross of their great chaplets; they were scarcely moved when a handsome girl dressed in a red petticoat, throat and arms bare under a man's overcoat, leaned over the railing on the third floor to shout something down to a waiter, with the rasping voice and laugh of a singularly degraded mouth. They did, however, exchange a significant glance.

"If he is the man you say he is," murmured the corsair, in a foreign accent, "he has chosen to put himself in singular surroundings."

The other, the elder, with a shrewd, intelligent face, gave an unctuous smile of shrewdness and sacerdotal indulgence. "Saint Paul among the Gentiles," he said.

When they reached the fifth floor the monks were somewhat puzzled; the vault of the staircase, now very low and very dark, scarcely allowed them to read the numbers or the cards on some of the doors, inscribed, for instance, "Mlle. Alice," without indication of her calling, indication very useless for that matter, for there were many other competitors of the same trade in the house, and one of those worthy Fathers was knocking incontinently at the door of one of them.

"We must call out to him, *parbleu!*" said the monk with the black eyebrows, who now made the whole house resound with a "MonsieurMéraut!" in military tones.

Not less vigorous, nor less ringing came back the answer from a chamber at the end of the passage. And when they opened the door the same voice called out joyously: —

"So it is you, Père Melchior. .. That's my luck! .. I thought they were bringing me a letter full of . . . Come in, come in, my Reverends, you are welcome . . . sit down where you can."

On every article of furniture were masses of books, papers, reviews, clothing, concealing the sordid fittings of a furnished lodging of the eighteenth class, its unpolished tiled floor, its collapsed sofa, the eternal Empire secretary and the three chairs covered in defunct velvet. On the bed, papers from a printing office were jumbled with clothing, a thin brown coverlet, and bundles of proofs which the master of the place, still in bed, was sabring with great dashes of a coloured pencil. This miserable den of work, with its fireplace without fire, its walls in their dusty nudity, was lighted by gleams from the neighbouring roofs, the reflections of a rainy sky on the wet slates; and in the same uncertain light, the great brow of Méraut, his passionate, powerful face shone with the intelligent, sad lustre which distinguishes certain faces that we meet in Paris and nowhere else.

"Still in my lair, you see, Père Melchior! .. But what of it? I came here on my arrival in Paris eighteen years ago. Since then, I have never stirred out of it. .. So many dreams, hopes buried in all its corners . . . ideas that I find beneath the cobwebs. . . I am sure that if I quitted this poor chamber I should leave the best part of myself in it. . . That is so true that I kept it when I started for over there."

" Just so, that journey of yours," said Père Melchior, with a little wink of his eye to his companion. . . " I thought you had gone for a long time. . . What happened? Did n't the employment suit you? "

" Oh! if you talk of the employment," said Méraut, shaking his mane, " nothing could be finer. . . Salary of a minister plenipotentiary, lodged in the palace, horses, carriages, servants. . . Everybody charming to me, emperor, empress, archdukes. . . But in spite of all that, I was bored. I missed Paris; specially the Quarter, the air one breathes here, light, vibrant, young; the galleries of the Odéon, the new book turned over standing with two fingers, the quest of the bookstalls, those stalls that line the quays like a rampart sheltering studious Paris from the futility and egoism of the other part. . . And then, for that 's not all — " here his voice became more serious — " You know my ideas, Père Melchior. You know what I was ambitious of doing by accepting that subaltern place. . . I wanted to make a king of that little young man, a king really a king, which is not seen nowadays; to bring him up, knead him, mould him for the grand rôle which surpasses and crushes all others — like that armour of the middle ages which remains in the museums to shame our shrunken chests and shoulders. . . Ah! bah! . .

liberals, my dear man, reformers, men of progress and new ideas — that 's what I found at the Court of X. . . Dreadful bourgeois, who could not comprehend that if monarchy is condemned it had better die fighting, wrapped in its flag, than finish in a perambulator pushed by a Parliament. . . After my first lesson the palace was in a clamour. 'Where does he come from? What does he want of us, that barbarian?' And they asked me with all sorts of pretty speeches to confine myself to simple matters of pedagogy. . . A pawn, I! When I saw that, I took my hat, and good-night Majesties!"

He spoke in a strong, full voice, the Southern accent of which struck all the metallic chords; and as he did so his countenance was transfigured. The head, in repose enormous and ugly, with a prominent projecting brow, above which was twisted in disorder invincible a tangle of black hair with an aigret of one white lock, a thick and broken nose, a violent mouth without a bristle of beard to hide it, for his skin had the heat, the fissures, the sterility of volcanic soil, — that head nevertheless became marvellously animated by passion. Imagine the tearing away of a veil, the black curtain of a hearth raised to show a joyous and warmth-giving flame; the visible display of an eloquence attached to the very corners of the eyes, the nose, the lips, and spreading, with blood from the heart, over the whole of that worn face, haggard with vigils and all excesses. The landscapes of Languedoc, Méraut's native land, bare, sterile, gray with dusty olive-trees, have, under the irised settings of their implacable sun, just such splendid upflamings, slashed with weird shadows that seem, as it were, the decomposition of a ray, the slow and graduated death of a rainbow.

"So, then, you were disgusted with grandeur?" said the old monk, whose insinuating voice, without resonance, formed a great contrast to that burst of eloquence.

"Of course! . ." replied the other, energetically.

"Nevertheless, all kings are not alike. . . I know some to whom your ideas . . ."

"No, no, Père Melchior . . . that's over. I will not make that attempt a second time. . . If I see sovereigns too near I am afraid I shall lose my loyalty."

After a silence the sly priest made a circuit and brought in his thought by another door.

"This six months' absence must have injured your interests, Méraut."

"Why no, not much. . . In the first place, uncle Sauvadon remained faithful to me . . . you know Sauvadon, my rich man from Bercy. . . He meets a great deal of company at the house of his niece, Princesse de Rosen, and as he wants to join in all the conversations, he comes to me to give him three times a week what he calls 'ideas of things.' He is charmingly naïve and confiding, the worthy man. 'Monsieur Méraut, what must I think about that book?' 'Execrable.' 'But it seems to me . . . I heard the other day, at the princess's . . .' 'If you have an opinion of your own, my presence here is useless.' 'Why, no, no, my dear friend, you know I have n't any, no opinion at all' . . . The fact is he has absolutely none and takes with his eyes shut all I give him . . . I am his thinking matter. . . During my absence he never spoke, for want of ideas. . . When I returned, he flung himself upon me — you ought to have seen it! Besides him, I have two Wallachians, to whom I am giving lessons on the law of nations . . . and always some stroke or other on hand; for instance, I am just finishing a 'Memorial of the Siege of Ragusa' from authentic documents. . . There is not much of my own in it . . . except the last chapter, which I am rather pleased with. . . I have the proofs here. Shall I read them to you? I have headed it: 'Europe without Kings.'"

While he read his royalist brief, exciting himself to tears, the lodging-house woke up, scattering all about it the laughter of youth, the gayety of secret meetings with a rattle of plates and glasses, and the cracked notes sounding on wood of an old piano playing a dancing-hall tune. Astonishing contrast, of which the Franciscans took little note, completely absorbed as they were in the joy of listening to that powerful and violent defence of royalty; the taller of the two, especially, quivering, stamping, restraining his exclamations of enthusiasm with a vehement gesture that strained his arms upon his breast till he seemed to crack it. The reading over, he sprang up, and strode about the room, with a flux of words and gestures.

"Yes! that's it . . . that is truth . . . right divine, legitimate, absolute. . . No more Parliaments, no more lawyers. . . Burn the whole gang!"

And his eyes sparkled and flamed like the faggots of the Sainte-Hermandad. Père Melchior, more calm, congratulated Méraut on his book.

"I hope you will put your name to it, this one."

"No more than to the others. . . You know very well, Père Melchior, that I have no ambition, except for my ideas. . . The book will pay me; it was Uncle Sauvadon who procured me that windfall — but I would have written it for nothing, for the love of it. It is so fine to note the annals of that royalty in the death-throes, to listen to the failing breath of the old world fighting and dying in these exhausted monarchies. . . Here, at least, is a fallen king who has given a grand lesson to the rest of them. . . A hero, that Christian. . . It says in these notes that day after day he rode under fire to Fort Saint-Angelo. . . Ha! 't was bold, that was! . ."

One of the Fathers lowered his head. Better than any one he knew what to believe of that heroic manifestation, and of that lie, more heroic still. . . But a will above his own compelled his silence. He contented himself with making a sign to his companion, who rose, and said abruptly to Méraut: —

"Well, it is for the son of that hero that I have come to see you . . . with Père Alphée, almoner to the Court of Illyria. . . Will you undertake the education of the royal child?"

"With us you will have neither palace nor carriages," said Père Alphée, sadly, "nor the imperial generosities of the Court of X. . . You will serve dethroned princes, around whom exile, already lasting over a year and threatening to continue, casts mourning and solitude. . . Your ideas are ours. . . The king has had a few liberal fancies, but he recognized their nothingness after his fall. The queen . . . the queen is sublime . . . you will see it."

"When?" asked the fanatic, again seized by his chimera to make a king through his own genius, as a writer makes a work.

A meeting was at once agreed upon.

When Élysée Méraut thought of his childhood — and he often thought of it, for all the strong impressions of his life lay there — this is what he saw: a large room with three windows, inundated with light, and each window occupied by a Jacquart loom for weaving silk, lifting its tall uprights and interlacing meshes like a blind against the light and the prospect without, namely, a cluster of roofs of houses running downhill, all the windows furnished with the same looms, at each of which worked two men, seated, in their shirt-sleeves, mingling their motions on the frame like pianists in playing a duet. Between these houses little gardens like alleys climbed the hillside, — Southern gardens, burnt-up, arid, pallid, and deprived of air, filled with fleshy plants, rampant bottle-gourds, and great sunflowers expanding toward the west with the drooping attitude of corollas seeking their god, and filling the air with the sickly odour of their ripening seeds, an odour which, after twenty years' absence, Élysée smelt whenever he thought of his early home.

Above this workmen's quarter, humming and crowded like a hive, was a stony height on which stood a few old windmills now abandoned, former feeders of the town and still preserved for their long services, lifting high their skeleton sails like gigantic antennæ, letting their stones detach themselves and whirl away in the wind with the acrid dust of those southern regions. Under the protection of these ancestral mills the manners and traditions of another age were preserved. The whole town (this corner of its suburb was called the Enclos de Rey) was, and still is, ardently royalist; in each workroom will be found hanging to the wall — pink, puffy, blond, with long hair curled and pomatumed with high-lights on its curls — the portrait (clothed in the fashions of 1840) of him whom the weavers called familiarly among themselves *lou Goï* — the lamester. In the workroom of Élysée's father, below this frame was another, much smaller, surrounding a sheet of blue letter-paper on which was a great red seal with the two words, *Fides*, *Spes*, around a cross of Saint Andrew. From his seat, as he kept his shuttle going, Maître Méraut could see the picture and read the motto: "Faith, Hope." . . And his broad face, with its sculptural lines like the coins of Antoninus, which itself had the aquiline nose and the full outlines of the Bourbons he loved so well, swelled up and crimsoned with his strong emotion.

He was a terrible man, Maître Méraut, violent, despotic, to whom the habit of over-topping the noise of battens and headles had given a voice like the blast and rolling of a storm. His wife, on the contrary, timid and retiring, imbued with those submissive traditions which made the Southern women of the *vieille roche* (the old régime) mere slaves, Eastern slaves, had taken a resolution to never utter a word. It was in such a home as this that Élysée grew up, — treated less harshly than his two brothers, because he was the last comer and always puny. Instead of being put to the shuttle when eight years old, he was left in a little of that good liberty so necessary to childhood; liberty which he employed in roaming the suburb and battling on the hill-top under the windmills, whites against reds, Catholics against Huguenots. They are still in the thick of those hatreds in that part of Languedoc! The children were divided into two camps; each had its mill, the falling stones of which served them as projectiles. Then were invectives launched, then did the missiles fly hissing from the slings. For hours together Homeric battles were fought, ending tragically with some bloody gash upon a ten-year-old forehead, or among the tangle of a mass of curls, — wounds that scar for a lifetime the tender epidermis, and which Élysée the man still showed on one temple and at the corner of his mouth.

Oh! those windmills; the mother cursed them when her last-born was brought back one evening, all blood and tatters. The father scolded as a matter of form and habit, and in order not to let his thunder rust; but at table he made the boy relate all the vicissitudes of the battle and the names of the combatants.

"Tholozan! .. Tholozan! .. So there are still some left of that race! .. Ha! the blackguard. I had the father at the end of my gun in 1815, and I 'd better have laid him low then."

Here followed a long history, related in the Languedocian patois, picturesque and brutal, which spared neither phrase nor syllable, telling of the days when he enrolled himself among the young recruits of the Duc d'Angoulême, a great general, a saint. . . . .

These tales, heard a hundred times, but varied by the ardour of paternal fancy, remained as deeply in Élysée's soul as the scars of the windmill stones upon his face. He lived in a royalist legend, of which the Saint-Henri and January 21 were the commemorative dates, in fervent veneration of the prince-martyrs blessing the people by the fingers of their bishops, and of brave princesses wandering on horseback for the good cause, persecuted, betrayed, and trapped at last behind the chimney of a Breton hostelry. To enliven the gloom which this series of griefs and exile would otherwise have produced on the brain of a child, the story of the "Fowl in the pot" and the song of the "Vert-Galant" came in with glori·

ous memories and all the dash of the old, old France. That song of the "Vert-Galant" was the Marseillaise of the Enclos de Rey. When on Sunday, after vespers, the table being wedged up with much trouble on the slope of the little garden, the Mérauts dined "in the good of the air," as they say in those parts, — that is, in the stifling atmosphere that follows a summer's day, when the heat, amassed in the soil and in the plaster of the walls, comes out fiercer and more unhealthy than under the full sunlight, — the old weaver would peal forth in a voice that was famous among his neighbours: "Vive Henri IV! Long live the King valiant!" All was silent around him throughout the neighbourhood. Nothing was heard but the dry rending of the reeds splitting with the heat, the crackling of the wings of some belated cicala, and that ancient royalist song rolling out majestically, with its stiff and stately march in trunk-hose and farthingale, the refrain of which was always sung in chorus: *A la santé de notre roi, — c'est un Henri de bon aloi, — qui fera le bien de toi, de moi.* That *de toi, de moi* ("of thee, of me"), rhymed and fugued, was very amusing to Élysée and his brothers, who sang it jostling and shoving each other, — which always brought them a blast from their father; but the song did not stop for matters like that, and on it went amid shouts and laughter and sobs, like the canticle of the convulsionaries round the tomb of the deacon Pâris.

Mingled thus with all the family festivities, this name of *king* had for Élysée, quite outside of its prestige in fairy-tales and "history adapted to childhood," a certain something of home, of his own life. What added to this sentiment were mysterious letters on foreign paper which arrived from Frohsdorf two or three times a year for all the inhabitants of the Enclos, — autographs in a delicate handwriting with long tails, in which the king spoke to his people, urging them to have patience. . . On those days Maître Méraut threw his shuttle with more gravity than usual, and in the evening, the door being carefully closed, he began to read the circular letter, always the same mild and gentle proclamation in words as vague as hope itself: "Frenchmen, they are deceived, and they deceive you. . ." Always the same invariable seal, — *Fides*, *Spes*. Ah! poor souls, it was neither faith nor hope they lacked.

"When the king returns," Maître Méraut would say, "I shall buy me a good arm-chair. . . When the king returns we will change the paper in the bedroom." Later, after his journey to Frohsdorf, the formula changed. "When I had the honour to see the king" he said on all occasions.

The good man had indeed accomplished that pilgrimage, a true sacrifice of time and money for a workman like himself; and never Hadji returning from Mecca came back more dazzled. The interview was, however, very short. To the faithful introduced into his presence, the king, so-called, had said, "Ah! here you are;" and no one found anything to say in reply to that affable greeting, Méraut least of all, being suffocated with emotion, and his eyes so blurred with tears that he did not even see the features of his idol. On departing, however, the Duc d'Athis, military secretary, had questioned him long on the state of feeling in France; and we can imagine what the enthusiastic weaver, who had never before left the Enclos de Rey, made answer to that inquiry.

"But let him, *coquin de bon sort!* let him come, and come quickly, our Henri . . . they are languishing to see him."

Whereupon the Duc d'Athis, delighted with the information, thanked him much and asked abruptly: —

"Have you children, Maître Méraut?"

"I have three, Monsieur le duc."

"Boys?"

"Yes . . . three children . . ." repeated the old weaver, for among the people of those parts girls are not counted as children.

"Very good. I shall make note of that. . . Monseigneur will remember them when the day comes."

On which M. le duc pulled out his note-book and *cra . . . cra . . .* The *cra . . . cra* with which the worthy man expressed the sound and motion of the protector in writing down the fact of his three sons invariably formed part of this tale included in the family annals, annals so touching, if only for the immutability of their smallest details. Ever after, in times when work was at a stand-still, when the mother was terrified to see the husband growing old and the savings of the household diminishing, that *cra* . . . *cra* . . . replied to her anxieties, timidly expressed, for the future of her children: "Be easy, *va!* . . the Duc d'Athis made note of them."

Becoming suddenly ambitious for his sons, the old weaver, having seen his two elder boys leave the home and enter the same narrow path as their father, concentrated all his hopes and desires for grandeur upon Élysée. He sent him to the Institution Papel, kept by one of those Spanish refugees who crowded the cities of the South after the capitulation of Marotto. It was in the quarter of the Butchers' shops, an old dilapidated house, rotting in the shadow of the cathedral, as the nitrified cracks in its walls and its verdigrised little window-panes showed plainly. To get there, it was necessary to follow a line of shops bristling with lance-head railings, from which hung enormous quarters of meat surrounded by an unhealthy buzzing, and pass through a network of narrow streets, the pavements of which were always sticky and red with bloody detritus. When he thought of it all in after years it seemed to Élysée as if he had spent his childhood in the middle ages, beneath the ferule and the knotted rope of a terrible fanatic, whose Latin in *ous* alternated, in the sordid black classrooms, with the blessings or wrath of the neighbouring bells as it descended on the apse of the old church, on its buttresses, stone foliage, and the fantastic heads of its gargoyles. This little Papel—face enormous and oily, shaded by a greasy white beretta, pulled down to the eyes to hide a thick and swollen blue vein which separated the eyebrows — was like a dwarf in the pictures of Velasquez, minus the brilliant tunics of the painting and the stern bronzing of time. Brutal withal and cruel, but holding in his large skull a stupendous magazine of ideas; a living, luminous encyclopedia, closed, one might say, by an obstinate royalism as a bar put up across it, and well typified by the abnormal swelling of that strange vein.

It was rumoured in town that the name of Papel hid another that was much more famous, that of a *cabecilla* of Don Carlos, celebrated for his ferocious manner of making war and varying death. Living so near to the Spanish frontier, his dreadful reputation hampered him and forced him to live anonymously. How much truth was there in that tale? During the many years that he passed with that master, Élysée, although he was M. Papel's favourite pupil, never heard the terrible dwarf say one word, or knew him to receive a single visit or letter, that could confirm this suspicion. But when the boy became a man, and, his studies being finished, the Enclos de Rey was found to be too narrow for his laurels, his diplomas, and his father's ambition, and it became a question of sending him to Paris, M. Papel gave him several letters of introduction to the chiefs of the legitimist party, heavy letters sealed with mysterious armorial bearings, which seemed to give some colour to the *cabecilla* legend.

Maître Méraut had exacted this journey; for he had begun to think that the return of his king was too long delayed. He bled himself, as they say, by all four veins; he sold his gold watch, the mother's silver key-chain, the vineyard which every villager possessed, — and this quite simply, heroically, *for the Cause.*

"Go and see what they are doing," he said to his youngest. "What are they waiting for? The Enclos is wearying for the end of ends."

At twenty years of age Élysée Méraut arrived in Paris, boiling over with passionate convictions, in which the blind devotion of his father was fortified by the well-equipped fanaticism of his Spanish teacher. He was received by the royalist party as a traveller is who enters a first-class railway carriage during the night, when the other passengers have settled themselves down to sleep. The intruder coming from the outside, his blood stirred by the keen air and movement, with a communicative desire to talk, question, and postpone sleep, brings up against the somnolent and scowling ill-humour of persons buried in their furs, rocked by the motions of the train, and screened by the little blue curtain drawn across the lamp, in a heavy, damp heat, fearing nothing so much as draughts of air and the entrance of disturbing passengers. That was the aspect of the Legitimist clan under the empire, in its abandoned, side-tracked railway-carriage.

This fanatic, with his black eyes and his lean lion's-head, enunciating every syllable as if to carry his audience, enforcing every sentence with vehement gestures, possessing in himself, ready for anything, the fire of a Suleau and the audacity of a Cadoudal, caused an astonishment mingled with alarm among the party. They thought him dangerous, disquieting. Under their excessive politeness and the marks of fictitious interest given by well-bred people, Élysée, with that lucidity which the South of France always retains in the midst of its enthusiasms, soon felt what there was of selfishness and dull acceptance of defeat among these persons. In their opinion there was nothing to be done at present; they ought to wait; above all, be calm, and guard against enthusiasm and juvenile rashness. "See Monseigneur," they said; "what an example he sets us!"

And these counsels of wisdom, of moderation, suited well with the old mansions of the Faubourg, swathed in ivy, deaf to the noise of the streets, happed in comfort and idleness behind their massive gates heavy with the weight of centuries and traditions. Out of politeness he was invited to two or three political meetings, held in great mystery, with all sorts of fears and precautions, in the recesses of these nests of rancour. There he saw the great names of the Vendean wars and the fusillades of Quiberon, glorious names inscribed on the Field of Martyrs, borne by worthy old gentlemen with shaved faces, clothed smugly in broadcloth like prelates, gentle of speech, and always sticky with gum-drops. They arrived with the air of conspirators, each declaring that he was followed by the police — who, in truth, amused themselves much with these platonic rendezvous.

Whist-tables having been started under the discreet light of tall candles well-shaded, the skulls leaned together, shining like billiard-balls; some one gave news from Frohsdorf, and they all admired the inalterable patience of the exiles, exhorting each other to imitate it. In very low voices, — hush! hush! — they repeated de Barentin's last pun about the empress, and hummed beneath their breath a scandalous song on the emperor. Then, frightened at their own audacity, the conspirators slipped away, one by one, hugging the walls of the Rue de Varennes, broad and deserted, which returned them a disquieting echo of the sound of their own feet.

Élysée saw plainly that he was too young, too active for these ghosts of Old France. Besides, the full tide of the imperial epopee was on; the return from the wars of Italy brought a flight of victorious eagles along the boulevards and beneath the bannered windows. The son of the village weaver was not long in comprehending that the opinion of the Enclos de Rey was far from universally shared, and that the return of the legitimate king would be more tardy than they supposed down there. His royalism was not damaged; but he raised and enlarged the idea of it within himself, inasmuch as outward action was now not possible. He dreamed of writing a book, of casting forth his convictions, his beliefs — all that he craved to say and spread — to that great Paris he would fain convince. His plan was made at once: he would earn his livelihood by giving lessons, and these were quickly found; he would write his book in his leisure intervals, and this took more time than he thought.

Like others of his region, Élysée Méraut was, above all, a man of speech and gesture. Ideas only came to him on his feet, to the sound of his own voice, like the lightning which the vibration of bells attracts to the steeple. Fed by reading, by facts, by constant meditation, his thought, which escaped all-foaming from his lips, words hurrying words in a sonorous eloquence, fell slowly, drop by drop, from his pen, coming from a reservoir too vast for such limited filtration and all the delicacies of written language. To speak his convictions soothed him, now that he could find no other outlet for their flow. He spoke therefore at the *popottes* (eating-house *table-d'hôtes*) at the conferences, but especially in cafés, those cafés of the Latin quarter which, in the crouching Paris of the second empire, when book and newspaper were both muzzled, formed the only Opposition. Every one of them had its orator, its great man. Their frequenters said to each other: "Pesquidoux of the 'Voltaire' is very powerful, but Larminat of the 'Procope' is more so." In fact, to those cafés came a whole educated youth, eloquent, their minds busy with lofty things, transplanting (but with more warmth of fancy and spirit) the fine political and philosophical discussions of the Breweries of Bonn and Heidelberg.

In these forges of ideas, smoking, noisy, whose frequenters shouted hard and drank harder, the singular vehemence of this Gascon, always impassioned, who never smoked, was drunk without drinking, his blunt imaginative speech developing convictions as out of date as hoops and powder, as discordant with the place in which they were uttered as the taste of an antiquary with the knick-knacks of Paris — all this soon won fame and an audience for the speaker. When the gas flamed in the packed and roaring cafés, when he was seen to appear on the threshold, with his lank and slouching figure, his near-sighted, rather haggard eyes, whose efforts at vision seemed to blow his hair out to the wind, his hat on the back of his head, and always under his arm some pamphlet or review, from which stuck out a monstrous paper-knife, everybody jumped up and the cry went round: "Here's Méraut!" Then they would all squeeze together and leave him a space in which to play his elbows and gesticulate at his ease. The moment he entered, this greeting of youth, these cries excited him, also the warmth, the lights — those gas-lights, intoxicating, congestionizing! Then on some subject or another, — the newspaper of the day, the book open on the stall under the Odéon as he passed, — he was off at a tangent, sitting, standing, holding the café with his voice, gathering and grouping his auditors with a gesture. The games at dominoes stopped rattling; the billiard players on the floor above leaned over the baluster, cues in hand, and their long pipes held between their teeth. The window-panes, the beer-glasses, the tin trays shook as when a mail-coach passed, and the *dame du comptoir* said with pride to those who entered: "Come in, quick! . . we have M. Méraut." Ah! Pesquidoux, Larminat — they were strong in their way, but *he* could beat them all.

He thus became the orator of the quarter. That glory, to which he had not aspired, sufficed him, so that it fatally delayed and hindered him. Such was the fate of more than one Larminat of that period, — noble forces lost, motor powers or levers allowing their steam to escape with a great noise uselessly, through the carelessness, want of method, or bad management of the engineer. In Élysée's case there was something besides. Without intrigue, without ambition, this Southerner, who had nothing of his own land about him but its fiery spirit, considered himself a missionary of his faith; and this missionary character showed itself in his unwearying proselytism, his vigorous and independent nature, the disinterestedness that took small account of fees and pay, — a life, in short, at the mercy of the hardest chances of his vocation.

Certain it is that during the eighteen years when he was sowing the seed of his ideas amid the youth of Paris, more than one of his hearers attaining later to great reputation, who had been known to say, "Ah! yes, Méraut . . . an old student," did actually win the greater part of his fame from the rich scraps carelessly flung to all corners of the table by the singular fellow who sat there. Élysée knew this, and when he found, under the green binding of some lord of letters, certain of his chimeras reduced to reason in fine academic phrase, he was happy, with the disinterested happiness of a father who sees the daughters of his heart married and rich, although he has no share in their prosperity. It was the same chivalrous abnegation as that of the old weaver of the Enclos de Rey, but with something broader, higher, because the confidence in success was lacking, — that unshaken confidence which the brave old Méraut kept to his dying day. The very evening before his death — for he died of a sunstroke after one of his dinners in "the good of the air" — the old fellow said at the top of his voice: "Vive Henri Quatre! Long live the King valiant!" Nigh upon death, his eyes blurred, his tongue heavy, he said to his wife: "Easy about the children. . . Duc d'Athis . . . took note . . ." and with his dying hand he tried to make a *cra-cra* upon the coverlet.

When Élysée, informed too late of this crushing news, arrived from Paris, his father lay stretched upon his bed, his hands crossed, motionless and wan, the pillow to the wall, which still awaited its new paper. Through the door of the work-room, left open, he could see the looms at rest, that of his father abandoned like a ship with its masts gone which the winds can impel no more, and the portrait of the king with the red seal beneath it, which had presided ever over this life of toil and of fidelity; and above, away above the Enclos de Rey, perched and humming on the hillside, those old mills, still erect, raising their arms in the clear blue sky with despairing gesture. Never did Élysée forget that spectacle of serene death taking the toiler from his work and closing his eyes to the accustomed horizon. He was struck with envy, — he who felt his own life in the grasp of visions and adventure, and who incarnated in himself all the chimerical illusions of the fine old man who lay there sleeping.

It was on his return from this sad journey that the office of preceptor at the Court of X. . . was offered to him. His disillusionment was so keen, the pettinesses, the rivalries, the envious calumnies in which he found himself involved, the splendid stage of Monarchy seen too near, from the side scenes as it were, all this had so deeply saddened him that in spite of his admiration for the King of Illyria, the monks had no sooner left him than the fever of enthusiasm died away and he regretted a decision made so hastily. His vexations at the Court of X. . . came back to him, the sacrifice he must make of his life, his liberty; and then his book, that famous book always stirring in his head. . . In short, after long debates with himself, he resolved to say no, and the day before Christmas, the proposed interview being very near, he wrote to Père Melchior to tell him of his decision. The monk did not protest. He merely replied:

"To-night, Rue des Fourneaux, at midnight mass. . . I still hope to convince you."

The convent of the Franciscans in the Rue des Fourneaux, where Père Melchior had the functions of bursar, is one of the most curious and most unknown corners of Catholic Paris. This mother-house of a celebrated Order, hidden mysteriously in the sordid suburb that swarms behind the station of the Montparnasse, is also called "The Commissariat of Saint-Sepulchre." It is there that monks of exotic appearance, mingling their brown serge of travel with the black poverty of the quarter, bring — for the commerce in relics — pieces of the true Cross, chaplets in olive-wood from the Mount of Olives, roses of Jericho, dry and stringy, awaiting their drop of holy water; in short, a whole pack of miraculous things, changed erelong in the large invisible pockets of the monks' robes into good sound money, which makes its way to Jerusalem for the maintenance of the sacred tomb. Élysée had already been taken to the Rue des Fourneaux by a sculptor, a friend of his, a poor artist in camera, named Dreux, who had just made a statue for the convent of Saint Margaret of Ossuna, and therefore took all the people he could muster to see it. The place was so curious, so picturesque, it gratified the Southerner's convictions so much by connecting them — saving them thus from modern lucidity — with the far-off centuries and lands of tradition, that he often returned there, to the great joy of his friend Dreux, quite proud of this success of his Marguerite.

On the evening of the rendezvous, it was close upon midnight when Élysée Méraut left the growling streets of the Latin quarter, where the hot-meat shops, the ribbon-looking food of the pork-butchers, the stalls for other eatables, the women's breweries, the student's lodging-houses, all the traffic of the Rue Racine and the "Boul Mich," kept up until early morning the odour and flare of a universal junketing. Without transition he fell suddenly into the sadness of deserted streets, where the passers, diminished in height by the reflection of the gas, seemed to creep instead of walk. The shrill bells of the Communities were ringing behind their walls, above which rose the skeletons of trees; the noises and heat of straw turned over in the sleeping stables came from the great closed courtyards of the dairy-men; the broad street still held the snow that had fallen through the day, a vague and trampled whiteness; while above, among the stars that were brightened with the cold, the son of the weaver, walking in a dream of ardent belief, imagined that he saw the one which had guided the kings to Bethlehem. Gazing at that star, he recalled the Christmas Eves of other days, the white Christmases of his youth celebrated in the Cathedral; again he returned, through the fantastic streets of the Boucheries, slashed with shadows of roofs and moonlight, to the family table of the Enclos de Rey, around which they awaited the *réveillon,* namely: the three traditional wax-candles in the greenery of the holly with its scarlet berries, and the *estevenons* (small Christmas rolls) smelling so good of their warm dough, and the fried bacon. He enveloped himself so thoroughly in these family recollections that the lantern of a rag-picker coming along the sidewalk seemed to him the one Père Méraut swung as he marched at the head of his troop, returning from the midnight mass.

Ah! poor father, whom he should never see again!

While he thus talked of the past in whispers with those dear shades, Élysée reached the Rue des Fourneaux, a suburb lighted by one street lamp and occupied chiefly by long manufactories topped with tall chimneys, standing behind board fences, their walls built of the materials of torn-down houses. The wind was blowing violently across the open plain of the outskirts. From a neighbouring slaughter-house came lamentable howls, the dull sound of blows, and a fetid smell of blood and grease; for that is where they cut the throats of pigs sacrificed at Christmas, as at the feasts of the Teutates.

The convent, which stands about the middle of the street, had its great portal open, and in the courtyard were two or three equipages the sumptuous appointments of which astonished Méraut. The service had begun, gusts from the organ and chants were issuing from the church, which was, however, dark and deserted, the only light being that of the small lamps upon the altar and the pale reflections of a snowy night on the phantasmagoria of the painted windows. The nave was nearly round, draped with the red-cross standards of Jerusalem hanging from the walls, and adorned with coloured statues, rather barbaric, while among them stood the Marguerite of Ossuna in pure white marble, flagellating pitilessly her snowy shoulders, because — as the monks will tell you with a certain coquetry — "Marguerite was the great sinner of our Order." The ceiling of painted wood crossed by little beams; the high altar under a sort of dais supported by columns; the choir, also rounded, with carved wooden stalls now empty; a ray of moonlight falling athwart the open page of a chant book, — nothing of all this was distinct, all was divined; but, by a broad stairway concealed beneath the choir, a descent was made into a subterranean church, where they were now celebrating, perhaps in memory of the catacombs, the midnight mass.

At the farther end of this cavern, in the white masonry supported by enormous columns, was reproduced the tomb of Christ at Jerusalem; its low door, its narrow crypt lighted by a number of sepulchral little lamps, glimmering from their stone sockets on a Christ in tinted wax of natural size, his wounds bleeding a rosy pink through gaps in the shroud. At the other end of the cavern, like a singular antithesis inclosing the entire Christian epic, was one of those artless reproductions of the Nativity, the manger, the animals, the babe, which are yearly taken from the store of legends such as they came of old — worse carved, no doubt, but very much larger — from the brain of some visionary. Now, as then, a troop of children and old women hungry for tenderness and marvels, and the poor who love Jesus were clustering about the manger, and among them, to Élysée's surprise, in the front rank of those humble believers, were two men of social rank and two elegant women, kneeling low upon the flags, one of the latter holding a little boy wrapped by her two arms, that were crossed in a gesture of protection and prayer.

"Those are queens," an old woman whispered to him, breathless with admiration.

Élysée quivered; then, going nearer, he recognized the delicate profile, the aristocratic bearing of Christian II. of Illyria, and near him the brown, bony head and the bald though still young forehead of the King of Palermo. Of the two women he could only see the black hair, the auburn hair, and that attitude of passionate motherhood. Ah! how well he knew Méraut, that shrewd old priest, who had thus brought together, as it were in a scenic effect, the boy-prince and his future tutor. These deposed sovereigns, coming to render homage to God, who, to receive it, seemed to hide himself, He too, in that sombre crypt, — this assemblage of fallen royalty and of worship in distress, the sad star of exile leading to a suburb of Bethlehem these poor dethroned Magi, without a cortège and with empty hands, — all this swelled his heart. The child, the child above all, so pathetic, with his little head bending to the animals in the manger, the curiosity of his age checked by a suffering quietude... And in presence of that six-year-old brow, where the future was even now inclosed, like the butterfly in its white chrysalis, Élysée thought how much of knowledge and of tender care was needed to bring it to a splendid outcome.

III.

THE COURT OF SAINT-MANDÉ.

THE provisional arrangement at the Hôtel des Pyramides had lasted three months, six months, with trunks that were scarcely unpacked, bags still buckled, the disorder and the uncertainty of encampment. Every day came favourable news from Illyria. Devoid of roots, on a new soil where the Republic had neither past nor hero, it took no hold. The people, weary of it, regretted their princes, and counsels of infallible certainty said to the exiles: " Hold yourselves ready . . . the day may come to-morrow." Not a nail was knocked in the apartments, not a single piece of furniture moved without the exclamation of hope: " It is not worth while." Nevertheless, the exile continued, and the queen was not slow to understand that this life in a hotel, amid a rush of foreigners, of birds of passage of all plumage, was contrary to the dignity of their rank. Accordingly, the tents were struck, a house was bought, and they installed themselves in it. From being nomadic, the exile became stationary.

The house was at Saint-Mandé, on the Avenue Daumesnil, at the top of the Rue Herbillon, in that part of it which skirts the forest and is lined with elegant houses and coquettish railings that allow a view of gravelled paths, rounded porticos, and English lawns which give illusion to a corner of the Avenue of the Bois-de-Boulogne. The King and Queen of Palermo, without much fortune and wishing to avoid the seductions and the costly quarters of high-life, had already taken refuge in one of these houses. The Duchess of Mechlinbourg, sister of the Queen of Palermo, had joined her at Saint-Mandé, and together they had little difficulty in attracting their cousin to that quarter. But besides this question of friendship, Frederica was very desirous of living apart from the joyous excitements of Paris, of protesting against modern society and the prosperities of a republic, and also of avoiding the curiosity which follows well-known persons, and seemed to her an insult to her fall. The king at first objected to the remoteness of the situation, but he soon found it a convenient pretext for long daily absence and late returns at night. Moreover, and this was a chief consideration, living was cheaper there than elsewhere, and luxury could still be maintained at lower cost.

The establishment was comfortable. A white house of three storeys, flanked by two towers, looked toward the forest through the trees of its own little park; while toward the Rue Herbillon, between the offices and the greenhouses, a large gravelled courtyard swept in a circle to the portico, which was covered by an awning in the form of a tent, supported by two long, sloping lances. Ten horses in the stable, — carriage and riding-horses (for the queen rode daily), — liveries of Illyria, with bag-wigs, powdered, and a Swiss, whose halberd and green and gold baldrick were as legendary at Saint-Mandé and Vincennes as the wooden leg of old Daumesnil, — all this made a suitable state, and was nearly new. In fact it was scarcely a year since Tom Levis had improvised, with all its decorations and accessories, the princely scene on which was played the historic drama we are about to relate.

Eh! good heavens! yes, Tom Levis. . . In spite of distrust and repugnance they were forced to have recourse to him. That fat little man had a tenacity, an elasticity that were truly surprising. And such tricks in his bag! so many keys, nippers to open or force resisting locks, — not to speak of certain ways of his own that won the heart of tradesmen, valets, and chambermaids. "Above all, we shall not employ Tom Levis;" everybody said that to begin with. But nothing advanced. Tradesmen did not deliver their goods, servants rebelled, until the day when the man of the cab, having appeared with his gold spectacles and the dangles on his watch chain, draperies hung themselves on the walls, festooned and knotted themselves into portières and curtains, and stretched themselves out upon the floor in decorative and padded carpets. The *calorifères* burned, the camellias in the greenhouses bloomed, the owners, quickly installed, had only to enjoy themselves, and await on the comfortable seats in the salon the bundle of bills which soon arrived from all corners of Paris. In the Rue Herbillon it was old Rosen, chief of the civil and military household who received the bills, paid the costs, and managed the little fortune of the king so adroitly that within this gilded frame given to their misfortunes Christian and Frederica still lived handsomely. Both kings, children of kings, they were accustomed to see themselves in effigy on their gold and silver coins, and to coin money themselves at their own good pleasure. Far, therefore, from being surprised at this luxury, they felt, on the contrary, how much was lacking in their new existence, not to speak of the chilling void left about the heads from which a crown has fallen. In vain did the house at Saint-Mandé, so simple without, adorn itself within as a little palace; the queen's bedroom exactly reproducing, with its blue silk hangings covered with old Brussels, her chamber in the castle of Leybach; the king's cabinet identical with the one he had left; on the staircases replicas of the statues of the royal residence; and in the conservatory a warm little monkey-house with climbing Chinese plants for the favourite ouistitis — what were all these little details of delicate flattery to the possessors of four historical castles and summer residences between sky and water, their lawns dipping to the waves, in those isles of verdure that are called "the gardens of the Adriatic"?

At Saint-Mandé the Adriatic was a little lake in the wood which the queen could see from her windows, and which she looked at sadly as the exiled Andromache gazed at the false Simoïs.

But, however restricted their life might be, it did occur to Christian, more experienced than Frederica, to wonder at this relative profusion.

"Rosen is incredible . . . I don't really know how he manages to provide all this with the little we have." Then he added, laughing: "We may be quite sure he does not put anything of his own into it."

The fact is that in Illyria the name of Rosen was synonymous with Harpagon. Even in Paris, the fame of his avarice had followed the duke, and was confirmed by the marriage of his son, — a marriage arranged in the special agencies, and which all the pretty ways of the little Sauvadon could not keep from being a sordid misalliance. Yet Rosen was rich. The old pandour, who carried his rapacious and plundering instincts written on his profile of bird of prey, had not made war upon the Turks and the Montenegrins for glory only. After each campaign his carriages returned loaded, and the magnificent mansion in which he lived at the point of the Île-Saint-Louis, close to the hotel Lambert, was crowded with precious things: Eastern hangings, furniture of the middle ages and of chivalry, solid gold triptyches, carvings, reliquaries, gold and silver stuffs, embroideries, booty from convents or harems, massed in a suite of immense reception-rooms, opened but once, for the marriage of Herbert and its fairy fête (paid for by Uncle Sauvadon), and since then locked and bolted, guarding these treasures behind drawn curtains and closed blinds, not risking so much as the indiscretion of a ray of sun. The good man led in that house the existence of a veritable monomaniac; confined to a single floor of the vast mansion, contenting himself with two servants for all his wants and the fare of a provincial miser, while the great kitchens with their motionless turnspits and cold ovens were locked up as tightly as the state apartments.

The arrival of his sovereigns, the appointment of the three Rosens to the offices of the little Court, had slightly changed the old duke's habits. In the first place the young pair came to live with him, their own residence in the Parc Monceau — a true modern cage with gilt railings — being found too far from Vincennes. Every day at nine o'clock, no matter what the weather might be, the Princesse Colette was ready for the queen's *lever*, and got into the carriage beside the general, in that river fog which every morning, winter and summer, hangs about until mid-day on that point of the Île, like a veil upon the magic scenery of the Seine. At that hour Prince Herbert was endeavouring to snatch a little of the sleep he had lost in the hard duties of the night, king Christian having ten years of provincial life and the conjugal curfew to make up for. In fact the king was so little able to do without nocturnal Paris, that on leaving the club — theatres and cafés being closed — he found a charm in roaming the deserted boulevards, dry and sonorous or shiny with rain, the line of their brilliant lamps standing sentinel like fireguards along the far perspective.

As soon as Colette reached Saint-Mandé she went up to the queen. The duke installed himself in a cottage-pavilion adjoining the offices and convenient to the tradespeople and servants. The household called it the administration-house; and it was touching to see that grand old man sitting in his moleskin arm-chair among papers, classifications, green boxes, receiving and settling little bills, he who had had under his orders in a palace a whole regiment of clerks and ushers. But his parsimony was so great that, even though he was not paying on his own account, every time that he had to give out money each feature of his face contracted, his wrinkles puckered nervously as if tied with a string, like a bag, his rigid, erect body, and even the automatic gesture with which he opened the safe built into the wall protested. Nevertheless, he so arranged matters as to be always ready and able to provide, from the modest resources of the princes of Illyria, for the inevitable squandering of a great house, the charities of the queen, the bounty of the king, and even his pleasures — which counted in the budget, for Christian II. had kept his promise to himself and was spending his time of exile joyously. Assiduous at all fêtes, welcomed at the great clubs, sought in the salons, his delicate, sarcastic profile, always seen in the animated confusion of the first boxes or the tumultuous rush of a return from the races, took its place henceforth on the "medallions" known to "all Paris" between the bold locks of an actress then in vogue and the distorted features of a disgraced prince-royal then roaming the cafés of the boulevard till the hour of his reign should strike. Christian was leading the idle, yet fully occupied life of a young Gomme. Tennis or skating in the afternoons, then the Bois, a visit at twilight in a certain chic boudoir, the luxurious comfort of which and its excessive liberty of speech he liked; then, in the evening, the minor theatres, the *foyer* of the dancers, the club, and gambling, especially, where, in his handling of the cards could be seen his Bohemian origin, the passion for luck, and all his presentiments. He scarcely ever went out with the queen, except on Sunday to the church of Saint-Mandé, and seldom saw her at home unless at meals. He feared that sensible, upright nature, always intent on duty, whose contemptuous coldness goaded him like a visible conscience. It recalled him to his office of king, to the ambitions he desired to forget; and, too feeble to rebel openly against that mute control, he preferred to flee it, to lie, to keep away.

On her side, Frederica understood so well his temperament, that Slav nature, ardent and effeminate, emotional and feeble, she had so often forgiven the ill-conduct of that child-man, who kept all his childhood about him, its grace, its laughter, and its cruelty of caprice; she had so often seen him on his knees before her after one of those misdeeds in which he risked his happiness and his dignity, that she was now completely discouraged as to the husband and the man, though some respect for him as a king remained. The struggle had lasted nearly ten years, although in appearance the pair were united. At those heights of existence, with vast apartments, innumerable servants, a daily ceremonial which widens distance and compresses feelings, falsehoods like these are possible. But exile was now to reveal them.

Frederica at first hoped that this hard trial would ripen the mind of the king and awaken in him one of those fine uprisings which make heroes and conquerors. On the contrary, she saw in his eyes an ever increasing intoxication of pleasures, of vertigo produced by the life of Paris and its diabolical phosphorus, its temptations and facilities of pleasure, and its incognito. Ah! if she had been willing to follow him, to share in that wild course of the Parisian whirlwind, to have her beauty, her horses, her toilets cited, to lend herself with all a woman's coquetry to the frivolous vanity of her husband, they might still have come nearer together. Impossible; she was more a queen than ever, abdicating none of her ambitions, her hopes, and, eager from afar for the struggle, sending letter after letter to friends "over there;" protesting, conspiring, and communicating with all the Courts of Europe on the iniquity of their misfortune. Councillor Boscovich wrote at her dictation; and at mid-day, when the king came down to breakfast, she herself gave him the letters for the mail to sign. Sign! *parbleu!* he signed all she wanted, but always with a curl of satire on his lips. The scepticism of his cold and scoffing surroundings had seized him. To his first illusions as to the shortness of their exile had succeeded, by a sudden change common to these extreme natures, a settled conviction that it would now be prolonged indefinitely. Hence the air of ennui, of weariness he showed in the conversations by which Frederica attempted to rouse within him her own fire, seeking in the depths of his eyes an attention she was unable to fix. Indifferent, the chorus of some foolish song pursuing him, his head was always full of a vision of the night before, of that intoxicating, stupefying whirl of pleasure. And what an "Ouf!" of relief he gave when he finally got away; what a renewal of youth and life came to him each time that he left the queen sadder and more lonely!

After this work of writing letters in the morning and the despatch of other short and eloquent notes of her own, in which she revived the courage, the devotion, near to failing, of her friends, Frederica's sole amusements were the books of her library, that of a sovereign (composed chiefly of memoirs, correspondences, chronicles of times past, or high religious philosophy), games with her child in the garden, and a few rides on horseback through the forest of Vincennes, — rides that were seldom extended beyond the edge of the wood where the last echoes of Parisian noise died away and the miseries of the great faubourg ended; for Paris caused her an antipathy, an insurmountable horror, which she could not overcome. Scarcely once a month did she bring herself to make, her liveries in great state, a tour of visits to the exiled princes. Starting without pleasure, she returned discouraged. Beneath these royal misfortunes, decently and nobly borne, she felt abandonment of a cause, complete renunciation, exile accepted, taken patiently, habitually, cheated by hobbies, childish absurdities, or even worse.

The proudest, the most dignified of these fallen majesties was the King of Westphalia, a poor blind man, a touching sight, with his daughter, his blonde Antigone; keeping up the pomp and the external grandeur of his life, but occupied solely in collecting snuff-boxes, and setting up glass cases of curiosities in his salon — singular satire on the infirmity which kept him from enjoying his treasures. In the King of Palermo, the same apathetic renouncement, complicated with mourning, sadness, want of money, a disunited household, ambitions killed by the death of the only child. The king, nearly always absent, left his wife alone on her widowed and exiled hearth; while the Queen of Galicia, gorgeous, loving pleasure passionately, made no change in her turbulent morals as an exotic sovereign; and the Duke of Palma unhooked from time to time his carbine from the wall and tried to cross the frontier, whence he was each time roughly cast back into the miserable idleness of his life. At heart, however, more of a contrabandist than a pretender, making war to have money and women, he gave his poor duchess all the cruel emotions of a wretched woman married to a bandit of the Pyrenees, whom she expects every night to see brought back to her on a bier at the dawn of day.

All these deposed beings had but one word upon their lips, a motto displacing the sonorous devices of their royal houses: "Why do anything? . . What good is it?" To the active fervour of Frederica, to her outbursts, the most polite of them answered by a smile, the women replied with theatre, religion, gallantry, or fashion; and, little by little, this tacit lowering of a principle, this disintegration of forces, affected in the end the proud Dalmatian herself. Between the king who did not wish to be a king, and the poor little Zara so slow to develop, she was struck with a sense of extinction. Old Rosen, shut up by day in his office, seldom spoke. Princesse Colette was only a bird, incessantly employed in preening her feathers; Boscovich a child; the marquise a simpleton. There was always Père Alphée; but that fierce and rugged monk could never have understood from a half-word the inward shudders of the queen, the doubts, the fears that were beginning to invade her. The season also had something to do with it. That wood of Saint-Mandé, in summer all verdure and flowers, deserted and still as a park throughout the week, but on Sundays swarming with populace joy, was now taking, at the coming of winter, in the gloom of a damp horizon and the floating mist of its own lake, the desolate aspect, without grandeur, of a region of pleasure abandoned. Flocks of crows flew low among the blackened bushes and high above the tall, gnarled trees, in whose discrowned summits the nests of the magpies swung, and the long, fibrous threads of the misletoe. This was the second winter Frederica had passed in Paris. Why did it seem much longer and far more dismal than the first? Did she miss the lively racket of a hotel, the stir and life of the tumultuous and rich city? No. But just in proportion as the queen decreased, did the woman begin to feel her weakness, the sorrows of a neglected wife, the home-sickness of a stranger torn from her native soil.

In the glassed gallery adjoining the grand salon where she had made for herself a winter garden, a quiet spot far from the household noises, hung with light draperies and in every corner the greenery of plants, she now sat for days together inactive before the ravaged garden and its tangle of leafless branches defined like an etching on the gray horizon, with a mixture of dark and resisting verdure which box and holly still preserve beneath the snow, through the whiteness of which their stiff arms penetrate. In the three basins of the fountain, rising one above another, the sheets of falling water had a cold, metallic sound, and beyond the tall railing which skirted the Avenue Daumesnil, breaking the silence and solitude of the wood, the steam-cars on the tramway passed, hissing, from time to time, their long smoke streaming backward and dispersing so slowly in the yellow atmosphere that Frederica could follow it long and watch it disappearing little by little, heavily and without an object, like her life.

It was on a rainy winter morning that Élysée

Méraut gave his first lesson to the royal child, in this little haven of the sadness and reflections of the queen, which from that day took the aspect of a study: books and maps spread out upon the table, the full light admitted as into a studio or schoolroom, the mother, very simple in a gown of black cloth fitting her tall figure closely, with a little lacquered work-table before her, and the master and pupil, both hesitating, and equally disturbed the one as the other at this their first interview. The little prince had vaguely recognized the enormous and fulgurating head they had shown to him on Christmas eve in the religious twilight of the chapel, and which his imagination, encumbered with the fairy tales of Mme. de Silvis, connected with an apparition of the giant Robistor or the wizard Merlin. And Élysée's own impression was quite as chimerical, fancying as he did that he beheld in this frail little boy, wizened and sickly, with a forehead as lined as though it actually bore the six hundred years of his race, a predestined chief, a leader of men and peoples; to whom he said gravely, with a trembling voice: —

"Monseigneur, you will be a king some day . . . you must learn what it is to be a king. . . Listen to me, look at me well, and what my mouth may not express with sufficient clearness, the respect in my eyes will make you understand."

Then, bending down to the level of that little intellect and the child's little throat, he explained, with words and images that were suited to it, the dogma of divine right, the mission of the kings on earth, between the peoples and God, charged with duties and responsibilities that other men have not, but which are laid upon kings from their earliest childhood. . . That the little prince could understand perfectly all he said to him is not to be supposed, but it may be that he felt himself enveloped by that vivifying warmth with which florists, protecting some precious plant, surround the delicate fibre, the fragile bud.

As for the queen, bending over her tapestry, she listened in delightful surprise to words she had despairingly awaited for years, words which answered to her most secret thoughts, called to them, stirred them. . . So long had she dreamed alone! Of so many things that she knew not how to say, did this Méraut now give her the formula! Even on this first day she felt herself an unknown musician, an artist unexpressed, before this magic executor of her own work. Her vaguest feelings on that great idea of royalty took shape and were here summed up majestically, and yet very simply, since a child, quite a little child, could almost comprehend them. While she looked at that man, his large features animated with belief and eloquence, she saw, in contrast, the pretty, indolent face, the unmeaning smile of Christian; she heard the eternal "What good is it?" of all those discrowned kings, and the chatter of the princely boudoirs. Ah! if Christian had been like that they would still be on the throne, or both would now have disappeared, buried beneath its ruins. . . Strange to say, in the close attention she could not keep herself from paying, the voice, the face of Élysée gave her the impression of a recollection. From what dark corner of her memory rose up that brow of genius, those accents which resounded to the depths of her being, in the most secret cavities of her heart? . .

But now the master had begun to question his pupil, not on what he knew, — that was nothing, or, alas! so little, — but seeking merely to discover what to teach him. "Yes, monsieur . . . No, monsieur. . ." The little prince had only those two words upon his lips, but he put all his strength into saying them, with the gentle sweetness of a boy brought up by women in a perpetuation of his babyhood. He tried, nevertheless, poor darling, to disentangle from the varied knowledge put into him by Mme. de Silvis, a few notions of general history as distinguished from the adventures of dwarfs and fairies which spangled his little imagination, artificial as the scenes of a pantomime. From her seat the queen helped him, encouraged him, lifted him, as it were, on her own soul. When the swallows fly, if the tiniest in the nest cannot launch itself forth, the mother will give it the spring on her own wings. When the child hesitated to answer, Frederica's look, golden in those aquamarine eyes, darkened like the wave as the squall passes; but when he answered rightly, what a smile of triumph she turned to the master! For many a month she had not known such plenitude of comfort, of joy. The waxen skin of the little Zara, his downcast countenance of weakly childhood, seemed to her eyes infused with fresh blood; even the dreary landscape widened at the magic of those words, and let her see what there was of imposing and grandiose in that vast stripping and baring of Nature.

While the queen sat listening, leaning on her elbow, her bosom forward, bending her whole self toward that future in which the child-king stood before her fancy in the triumph of their return to Leybach, Élysée quivered, marvelling at a transfiguration he knew not he himself had caused, and beholding upon that noble brow of polished surface a royal diadem, twined and rolled among the crossed reflections of her heavy braids.

Mid-day was striking from all the clocks before the lesson ended. In the principal salon, where the little Court assembled every morning at the breakfast hour, the party began to whisper and wonder at the non-appearance of king or queen. Hunger, and the vacuum of that moment when a meal is delayed, mingled a certain ill-humour with these low-toned remarks. Boscovich, pale with cold and hunger, who had just been hunting for two hours in the underbrush of the wood for a certain late-blooming plant, was thawing his fingers before the tall mantel of white marble in the form of an altar, where Père Alphée sometimes, on Sunday, said a private mass. The marquise, majestic and stiff on the edge of a sofa, in a gown of green velvet, was shaking her head on her long, thin neck wound round with a boa, in a tragic manner, while making her confidences to Princesse Colette. The poor woman was in despair at having her pupil taken from her to be confided to a common person . . . positively, a common person ! . . she had seen him that morning crossing the courtyard.

"My dear, he would have frightened you . . . hair long like that; the look of a madman. . . It takes Père Alphée to find such people."

"They say he is very learned," said the princess, her mind wandering to other matters.

The marquise bounded. . . Very learned ! . . very learned ! . . Did the son of a king need to be crammed with Latin and Greek like a dictionary? . . "No, no, my dear, such education requires special knowledge . . . and I had it. I was prepared. I have studied the treatise of the Abbé Diguet on the 'Institution of a Prince.' I know by heart the different means he indicates to discern men, and to repel flatterers. The first are six in number, the second seven. This is order of them. . ."

And she began to recite them to the princess, who did not listen, being seated, sulky and unstrung, on a mound of cushions over which flowed the train of her pale-blue gown made in the last fashion, and looking towards the door that led to the apartments of the king with magnets at the tips of her lashes, and the vexed expression of a pretty woman who has made her toilet for one who does not come. Stiff in his starred coat, the old Duc de Rosen was walking up and down with automatic step, regular as a pendulum, stopping at one or other of the windows looking on the courtyard or the garden, and there, his eyes raised beneath his anxious brow, he seemed like the officer of the watch, charged with the sailing of the ship and the responsibility of all on board. And truly, the appearance of the vessel did him honour. The red brick of the offices and the administration building shone, washed by the rain that was falling on the spotless stones of the porticos and the fine pebbly gravel. On that gloomy day a light positively shone from the neatness of everything and was reflected in the salon, — already cheerful with the warmth of carpets and *calorifères*, and Louis XVI. furniture in white and gold, with its classic ornamentation on the panels and mirrors; the latter very large, a little gilded label hanging to one of them by ribbon fastenings. In one corner of this large room, a console of the same period served as pedestal to the crown saved from wreck, and covered with a glass case. Frederica insisted on its being there, "to remind us," she said. And in spite of Christian's sarcasms — he called it rococo, a relic of kings gone to the devil — the splendid jewel of the middle ages, its precious stones sparkling in their goffered and open-worked old gold setting, did cast a note of ancient chivalry amid the coquetry of the eighteenth century and the mixed taste of our own.

The rolling of wheels on the gravel announced the arrival of the aide-de-camp. At any rate, he was some one.

"You come late on duty, Herbert," said the duke, gravely.

The prince, though rather a big boy, always trembled before his father; he now coloured and stammered a few excuses. . . "Very sorry . . . not my fault . . . on service all night."

"That is why the king is not yet down, I suppose," said the princess, putting her delicate little nose into the dialogue between the two men.

A stern look from the duke shut her lips. The conduct of the king was nobody's business.

"Go up at once, monsieur; the king must be waiting for you."

Herbert obeyed, after vainly endeavouring to obtain a smile from his beloved Colette, whose ill-humour, far from being soothed by his coming, took her off to sulk alone on a divan, her pretty curls in disorder and the blue gown rumpled by the nervous fidgeting of her childlike hands. And yet Prince Herbert had of late made himself a handsome and distinguished-looking man. His wife had exacted that in his capacity as aide-de-camp he should let his moustache grow, which gave an expression that was formidably martial to his kind, good face, now paled and thinned by the sleepless nights and positive fatigue of his service to the king. . . Moreover he still limped a little, and walked with a cane, as became a hero of the siege of Ragusa, a memorial of which he had just written, a memorial made famous before its publication, having been read by the author one evening in the salon of the Queen of Palermo, which won him, in addition to a most brilliant social ovation, the formal promise of a prize at the Academy. Think what position, what authority all that gave to Colette's husband! But none the less did he keep his good-natured, shy, and simpleton air, especially before the princess, who continued to treat him with gracious contempt. Which goes to prove that there is no such thing as a great man to his wife.

"Well, what is it now?" she exclaimed in a saucy little tone on seeing him reappear, his face quite aghast and stupefied.

"The king has not come in!"

These few words produced the effect of an electrical discharge in the salon. Colette, very pale, the tears in her eyes, was the first to recover speech.

"Is it possible!"

Then the duke, in a curt voice: —

"Not in! . . Why was I not informed?"

The boa of Mme. de Silvis erected itself and twisted convulsively.

"If only nothing has happened to him! . ." cried the princess, in a state of extraordinary excitement.

Herbert tranquillized her. Lebeau, the king's valet, had started an hour ago with his valise; therefore he must have had news of him.

In the silence that followed this explanation one disquieting thought filled the minds of all; the Duc de Rosen gave utterance to it: —

"What will the queen say?"

Boscovich, trembling all over, remarked: —

"His Majesty may have told her."

"I am certain he did not," affirmed Colette; "for the queen said only just now that she meant to present the new tutor to the king this morning at breakfast. . ." Then, trembling all over, she added between her teeth: "If I were in her place, I know what I would do."

The duke, his eyes flaming, turned round indignantly toward the little bourgeoise whom he could not succeed in polishing, and was probably about to read her a severe lesson, when the queen appeared, followed by Élysée, who led his royal pupil by the hand. Every one rose. Frederica, with the beautiful smile of a happy woman, which none had seen her wear for many a long day, presented M. Méraut. . . Oh! that bow of the marquise! sarcastic and top-lofty; for the last eight days she had practised it. As for the princess, she was unable to make so much as a gesture. . . From pale she became crimson as she recognized in this new tutor the strange young man with whom she had breakfasted at her uncle Sauvadon's, and who had written Herbert's book. Was he there by chance, or could this be some devilish plot? What shame for her husband, what fresh ridicule upon him if his literary fraud were discovered! She was rather reassured by Méraut's cold bow, though he must have recognized her. "He is a man of sense," she thought to herself. Unfortunately, all was compromised by Herbert's artlessness, his amazement at the entrance of the tutor, and the familiar grasp of the hand with which he said: "Good-morning. How are you?"

"Then you know Monsieur Méraut?" said the queen, who had heard from her chaplain the true story of the "Memorial" and was smiling, not without mischief. But she was much too kind to amuse herself long by a cruel game, and said immediately: —

"Certainly the king has forgotten us. Go up and tell him, Monsieur de Rosen."

It was necessary now to tell her the truth, namely, that the king was not in the house, that he had spent the night out, and to mention the fact of the valise. This was the first time that such a thing had happened; and those present expected some explosion from that proud and ardent nature, all the more because the presence of a stranger aggravated the fact. No. She remained calm; and merely said a few words to the aide-de-camp, inquiring at what hour he had last seen the king.

"About three in the morning. . . His Majesty was walking down the boulevard on foot with Mgr. the Prince d'Axel."

"Ah! true . . . I had forgotten. . . They had something to say to each other."

In these tranquil intonations she completely regained her serenity. But no one present was duped by them. They all knew Prince d'Axel; they knew for what sort of conversation that degraded Royal Highness, that dangerous *viveur*, was sought.

"Come, let us go to breakfast," said Frederica, rallying her little Court with the gesture of a sovereign, to the calmness she had forced herself to show.

Needing an arm to take her to the dining-room, she hesitated for an instant, the king not being there. Then, suddenly turning to the little Comte de Zara, who was listening with eyes wide open and the comprehending air of a sick and precocious child, she said to him with infinite tenderness that was almost respectful, and a serious smile he had never seen before: —

"Come, Sire."

IV.

THE KING MAKES FÊTE.

THREE o'clock at night by the clock of Saint-Louis-en-l'Île.

Wrapped in darkness and silence, the hôtel de Rosen slept, with all the weight of its heavy old stones piled up by time, of its massive arched gates with their ancient knockers; while behind its closed shutters the muffled mirrors reflected naught but the sleep of centuries, a sleep of which the airy paintings on the ceilings seemed the dreams, and the murmur of the neighbouring river the fleeting and irregular breath. But that which sleeps soundest throughout the mansion is Prince Herbert, scarcely half an hour back from the club, worn-out, exhausted, cursing his harassing existence as a *viveur* in spite of himself, which deprived him of all he liked best in the world — horses and his wife: of his horses, because the king took no pleasure in the active outdoor life of a sportsman; of his wife, because the king and queen living so far apart and seeing each other only at the hours of meals, the aide-de-camp and the lady of honour, following, one the king, the other the queen, were as much separated in this parting of the household as the confidants in a tragedy. The princess started for

Saint-Mandé long before her husband was awake in the morning; at night, when he came in, she was already asleep behind double-locked doors. If he complained, Colette would reply majestically, with a little smile at the corner of her dimples: "We surely owe this sacrifice to our princes." A hard put-off to the amorous Herbert, alone in his great chamber on the first floor, with its ceiling sixteen feet above his head, the tops of the doors painted by Boucher, and tall mirrors let in to the walls which returned him his own image in endless perspective.

Sometimes, however, when utterly worn-out, as he was this evening, Colette's husband did feel a certain selfish comfort in stretching himself at full length on his bed without conjugal explanations, in taking back his easy habits as a bachelor, and wrapping his head in a vast foulard handkerchief in which he would never have dared to bundle himself under the satirical eyes of his Parisian wife. No sooner was he in bed on the embroidered and blazoned pillow-case, a veritable sleep-trap of rest and forgetfulness, than the nocturnal and foundered aide-de-camp fell into it; but as suddenly he was dragged out of it by the painful sensation of a light passing and re-passing before his eyes, as a shrill little voice said in his ear: —

"Herbert! . . Herbert! . ."

"Hein? What is it? . . Who 's there?"

"Do hold your tongue. . . It is I . . . Colette."

It was indeed Colette, standing beside the bed, her lace dressing-gown with hanging sleeves open at the throat, her hair twisted up to the top of her head, the nape of her neck a little nest of golden curls; all this seen by the glimmer of a tiny lantern, which brought out the glance of her eye, full, at first, of a solemn expression, but suddenly hilarious at the sight of Herbert, scared, stupid, the ends of his rumpled foulard sticking out in threatening points, his head with its bristling moustache issuing from his nocturnal garment as if from the robe of an archangel, though its expression was not unlike that of a bourgeois braggart surprised in a bad dream. But the laughter of the princess did not last long. She placed her night-lamp gravely on the table, with the decided air of a woman who intends to make a scene; and, without taking notice that the prince was still vague in his waking, she began, her arms crossed, her two little hands hugging her elbows: —

"And you call this a life, do you? . . Coming home every day at four o'clock in the morning! . . Is it proper? . . you, a married man! . ."

"But, my dearest," — he interrupted himself hastily to pull off his foulard, which he flung out of sight, — "it is not my fault. . . I don't wish anything better than to come home early to my little Colette, to my darling wife, whom I . . . "

He tried, as he spoke, to draw towards him the snowy wrapper, the whiteness of which enticed him, but he was harshly repulsed.

"You! as if it concerned you! . . Why, every one knows you . . . knows you are a great innocent, incapable of the slightest . . . I'd like to see you venture to be otherwise. . . It is the king; in his position! . . Think what a scandal such behaviour is! . . If he were free, a bachelor . . . for bachelors must, I suppose, amuse themselves; though as for that, his rank! the dignity of exile!" (Oh! that little Colette, perched on the tall heels of her slippers, to talk of the dignity of exile!) "But he is married. And I don't see how the queen . . . Has n't she anything in her veins, that woman?"

"Colette! . ."

"Yes, yes, I know . . . you are just like your father. . . Everything the queen does! . . Well, to my mind, she is just as guilty as he. . . It is she who has driven him to this by her coldness, her indifference. . ."

"The queen is not cold. She is proud."

"Nonsense! are women proud when they love? If she loved him, the first night he passed away from home would have been the last. Such women talk, threaten, make themselves felt. They have not this cowardice of silence under wrongs that stab them . . . and the result is the king spends his nights on the boulevard, at the club, with Prince d'Axel, and in God knows what sort of company!"

"Colette! . . Colette! . ."

But try to stop Colette when she was once off! —launched in that fluent speech of the true bourgeoise brought up in our exciting Paris, where the very dolls know how to talk.

"That woman loves nothing, I tell you, not even her son. . . If she did, would she ever have confided him to that savage? . . They are wearing him out with study, poor little boy! . . At night, when asleep, he recites Latin and all kinds of things . . . the marquise told me so. . . The queen never misses a lesson . . . they are both of a pair about that child. . . All to make him reign! . . but they 'll kill him first. . . Oh! your Méraut! I detest him."

"He is a good fellow, for all that. He might have made it very disagreeable for me with the history of that book, but he never said a word about it."

"Oh, really! . . Well, I can assure you that when you are praised for that book before the queen she has a very singular smile as she looks at you. But you are such a simpleton, my poor Herbert."

Observing the vexed look on her husband's face, which had turned quite red, his mouth puffing out like that of a pouting child, the princess feared she had gone too far to obtain the thing she had come for. But he, how could he keep up any anger against that pretty creature sitting on the edge of the bed, her head half-turned with a movement full of coquetry, and making play with that lissome youthful figure beneath its laces, the polished whiteness of her throat, the enticing, mischievous eye between those lashes? Herbert's honest countenance became once more amiable, it even grew animated in a quite extraordinary manner at the soft warm touch of the little hand that was now in his, and the feminine fragrance of the woman he adored. . . Ah ! ça, what did she want to know, that little Colette ? . . Very little, apparently; simply a bit of information. . . The king, had he, yes or no, any mistresses ? Was it a passion for gambling that was leading him on, or the love of pleasure and violent emotions. . . The aide-de-camp hesitated before replying. Comrade on all battle-fields, he feared, by relating what he knew, to be treacherous to professional secrecy. But that little hand was so caressing, so pressing, so inquisitive, that Christian II.'s aide-de-camp resisted no longer.

"Well, yes, the king has a mistress just now."

Within his hand, Colette's little palm turned damp and cold.

"Who is she, that mistress ?" she inquired in a curt, half-breathless voice.

"An actress at the Bouffes . . . Amy Férat."

Colette knew that Amy Férat very well, and thought her atrociously ugly.

"Oh !" said Herbert, by way of excuse, "his Majesty won't keep her long."

"Truly ?" asked Colette, with an air of satisfaction.

Whereupon Herbert, delighted with his success, ventured so far as to catch a knot of satin ribbon which fluttered on the bosom of the dressing-gown, and to continue in an airy little tone : —

"Yes, I am afraid that before long poor Amy Férat will receive her ouistiti."

"A ouistiti ? . . What do you mean ?"

"Why, yes; I have remarked, and so have all who see the king, as I do, closely, that when an intrigue begins to tire him he sends one of his ouistitis, P. P. C. . . A way he has of getting rid of a mistress he no longer loves. . ."

"Oh! upon my word!" exclaimed the princess, indignantly.

"Positive truth! . . At the club we no longer say 'get rid of' a mistress, but 'send her a ouistiti. . .'"

He stopped, nonplussed at seeing the princess rise hastily, snatch her lantern, and depart in a straight line from the alcove.

"Eh! but . . . Colette! . . Colette! . ."

She looking back, contemptuous, choking. . .

"I have had enough of your vile stories. . . I am sick of them at last."

And raising the portière she left the unfortunate *roi de la Gomme* stupefied, his arms extended, his heart in flames, ignorant of the why and wherefore of the untimely visit and this whirlwind departure. With the rapid step of an actress leaving the stage, the floating train of her dressing-gown taken up and twisted round her arm, Colette hurriedly regained her own bedroom at the other end of the house. There on a couch, in a cushioned hollow of Oriental embroideries, slept the prettiest little animal in the world, gray, silky fur like feathers, a long tail almost enveloping it, and a little silver bell fastened round its neck by a rose-coloured ribbon, — a delicious ouistiti which the king had sent her a few days ago in a basket of Neapolitan straw, an attention she had received with the utmost gratitude. Ah! if she had only known the real meaning of the gift! Furious, she snatched up the poor little beast, that bundle of living and clawing silk, from which, thus suddenly awakened, two human eyes shone out, and opening the window toward the quay, she said, with a ferocious gesture: —

"Go! . . vile thing!"

The poor little monkey rolled down over the quay; and it was not he alone that disappeared and died that night, but also a dream fragile and capricious as himself, the dream of a poor little creature who now flung herself on her bed and hid her face upon the pillow to sob.

Their loves had lasted very nearly a year, an eternity to that child, who was but a butterfly. He had only to make a single sign, and Colette de Rosen, dazzled, fascinated, fell into his arms, — she who, until then, had kept herself an honest woman, not for love of her husband or of virtue, but because in that little bird's-brain of hers there was a liking for clean plumage which had preserved her from soiling falls; and because, moreover, she was essentially French, of that race of women whom Molière, long before our modern physiologists, had declared to be without temperament, simply imaginative and vain.

It was not to Christian, but to the king of Illyria that the little Sauvadon gave her love. She sacrificed herself to that ideal diadem which, through legends and romantic, frivolous reading, she saw, like a halo, above the selfish and passion-ridden type of her lover. She pleased him so long as he found in her only a new plaything prettily coloured, a Parisian plaything which would serve to initiate him to keener amusements. But she had the bad taste to take seriously her position as "mistress of the king." All those female figures, half historic, all that pinchbeck of the crown, more brilliant than real jewels, glittered in her ambitious dreams. She desired to be, not the du Barry, but the Châteauroux of this Louis XV. of the coast. Illyria to reconquer, conspirators to be led at the tip of her fan, dashing attacks, heroic disembarcations became the subject of all her conversations with the king. She saw herself rousing the natives, hiding in the tall wheat, in barns, like those famous heroines of La Vendée whose adventures she had been made to read in the convent of the Sacré-Cœur. She had even planned a page's costume, — costume always playing a leading part in her inventions, — for a pretty little renaissance page, which would give her access to the king at all hours and enable her to accompany him perpetually. Christian did not particularly like these elated dreams; his own sense showed him the false and silly side of them. Besides he did not take a mistress to talk politics; and when he held his pretty Colette on his knee with her soft little paws and her rosy muzzle, in all the abandonment of love, reports about the recent resolutions of the Diet of Leybach or the effect of the last royalist manifesto gave his heart a shiver like that caused by a sudden fall of temperature or the frosts of April on the orchard buds.

From that moment scruples came to him, then remorse,—the complicated, naïve remorse of a Slav and a Catholic. His caprice satisfied, he began to feel the odious character of this intercourse so near the queen, under her very eyes in fact; the danger of these furtive, hasty meetings in hotels, where their incognito might be betrayed at any moment; also the cruelty of deceiving such a good, kind creature as that poor devil of a Herbert, who spoke of his wife with unabated tenderness and never once suspected, when the king rejoined him at the club, his eyes bright, his face flushed, that he came from the arms of Colette. But more embarrassing still was the Duc de Rosen, extremely distrustful of the morals of the daughter-in-law who was not of his caste, very uneasy about his son, whom he suspected of being deceived, and feeling himself responsible for the whole of it because his avarice had made the marriage. He watched Colette, took her himself, night and morning, to and from Saint-Mandé; he would have followed her all day if the supple creature had not known how to slip through his clumsy fingers. Between them it came to be a silent struggle. From the window of his office the duke seated at his desk saw, with great vexation, his pretty daughter-in-law, arrayed in the delightful costumes she concocted with her dressmaker, curl herself up in the carriage, all glowing behind the mist on the glasses if it was cold, or sheltered behind a fringed sunshade on pleasant days.

"Are you going out?" he would say.

"On the queen's service," the little Sauvadon replied triumphantly from behind her veil. And it was true. Frederica seldom entered the whirl of Paris, and gladly gave all her errands to the lady of honour, never having felt the vanity of proclaiming her name and regal title to some fashionable tradesman before the inquisitive curiosity of the shop people and the customers present. Consequently all social popularity was lost to her. No one discussed in a salon the colour of her hair and eyes, the rather stiff majesty of her figure, and her free and independent manner of wearing the Parisian fashions.

One morning the duke observed that Colette on leaving Saint-Mandé seemed so cheerfully serious, and showed so marked an increase of her grisette type, that from pure instinct, knowing nothing (all true hunters have these sudden inspirations), he started to follow her, and did follow her a long time, to a famous restaurant on the Quai d'Orsay. With much cleverness and imagination the princess had contrived to be excused from the ceremony of the queen's table, and was on her way to breakfast with her lover in a private room. They took their repast before a window, quite low, which incased a splendid scene: the Seine gilded by the sun, the Tuileries beyond — a mass of trees and stone; near-by, the yards of the frigate schoolship amid the shady verdure above the bulwarks of the quay, where the sellers of blue glasses spread out their wares. The weather, true weather for a rendezvous, had the warmth of a sunny day tempered by piquant breezes. Never had Colette laughed so heartily; her laugh was the pearly climax of her grace; and Christian, who adored her when she chose to be simply the creature of joy he loved, enjoyed the choice breakfast in her company. Suddenly she spied upon the opposite sidewalk the figure of her father-in-law, walking up and down at a regular pace, as if determined on a long watch, — a sentry, in short, before the door, which the old man knew to be the only issue from the restaurant; from which post he watched the entrance of the fine, erect, and well-girthed officers who came from the neighbouring cavalry barracks; for in his capacity as former general of pandours he thought that arm irresistible, and he doubted no longer that his daughter-in-law had some intrigue with spurs and sabretache.

The anxiety of the king and Colette was great, and was not unlike the dilemma of the learned man perched on a palm-tree beneath which yawned a crocodile. Certain of the discretion and the incorruptibility of the staff of the establishment, the pair felt sure that the crocodile could not get up to them. But how could they get out? The king, no matter! he had plenty of time before him in which to wear out the patience of the animal. But Colette! . . the queen would be expecting her, uniting, possibly, her suspicions to those of old Rosen. The master of the establishment, whom Christian sent for and informed as to the facts of the situation, could at first think of nothing but making a hole through the wall into the next house, as in times of revolution; then the idea of a very much simpler expedient occurred to him. Madame must wear the clothes of a baker's boy, and put her gown and petticoats into the basket she would carry on her head, and reclothe herself in the house of the *dame du comptoir*, who lived in the next street. At first, Colette objected. Appear as a scullion before the king! However, it had to be, under peril of greater catastrophes; and the ironed-out habiliments of a boy of fourteen turned Colette de Rosen, *née* Sauvadon, into the prettiest and most jaunty of the little restaurant boys who run about the streets of Paris at the hungry hours. But how far away was that white cap, those shoes in which her feet slipped about, that jacket in the pockets of which the sous of the *pourboires* rattled, from the costume of the heroic page, with pearl-handled dagger and high boots, in which she had dreamed of following her Lara! . . The duke beheld without suspicion the two little cook-boys pass him with baskets on their heads diffusing an appetizing smell of warm pastry, which gave him a cruel sense of hunger — he was fasting, poor man! Upstairs, the king, a prisoner, but relieved of a weighty anxiety, sipped his Rœderer as he read the papers and looked, from time to time, through a corner of the curtain to see if the crocodile were still there.

When the old duke returned to Saint-Mandé in the evening the princess received him with a most ingenuous smile. He saw he was successfully tricked, and he said not a word of the adventure. It was noised about, however. Who knows by what cracks in the walls of a salon or antechamber, by what lowered glass of a coupé window, by what echo returned from blank walls to mute doors, are scandalous rumours spread about Paris until they appear in the light of day, that is to say, on the front page of some society journal, thence to the crowd through a thousand ears, becoming a public shame after being first the amusing anecdote of a coterie? For a week all Paris diverted itself with the tale of the little cook-boy. The names, whispered as low as was possible for such great titles, did not penetrate the epidermis of Prince Herbert. But the queen had some inkling of the adventure, for she, who never, since a terrible explanation they had had at Leybach, reproached the king for his conduct, took him aside a few days later as they were leaving the table, and said gravely, without looking at him: —

"A great deal is being said of a scandalous tale in which your name is mixed up. . . Oh! don't defend yourself; I wish to hear nothing more on that subject. . . Only, remember *this*, which is in your keeping" (she pointed to the crown, its rays veiled by the crystal shade). "Endeavour to keep shame and ridicule from touching it. . . Your son must one day wear it."

Did she know the whole truth of the adventure? Could she put the right name on the woman who was half unveiled by scandal? Frederica was so strong, so thoroughly in possession of herself, that no one about her was able to say. At any rate, Christian was aware that he was warned, and his fear of scenes, the need of that weak nature to see around him pleasant faces responding to the perpetual smiles of his own careless indifference, determined him to take from its cage the prettiest and most coaxing of the ouistitis as an offering to Princesse Colette. She wrote to him; he did not answer, nor would he comprehend either her sighs or her dolorous attitudes, but continued to speak to her with the gay politeness that women liked in him so much; then, freed from the remorse which had begun to weigh upon him as his fancy diminished, and having no longer at his heels an affection that was otherwise tyrannical than that of his wife, he rushed full speed into pleasure, caring for nothing — to use the odious and effeminate language of the dandies of the day — caring for nothing but "making fête." That was the fashionable expression at the clubs in that year. No doubt they have another at the present moment, for change is constant. But that which remains, immutable and monotonous, are the famous restaurants where the thing takes place: the gilded and flowery salons where high-priced prostitutes invite themselves or are invited; the enervating flatness of pleasure degrading itself to orgy without the power of revival. That which does not change is the classic stupidity of the mass of rakes and harlots, their stereotyped slang and laugh, without a single imaginative fancy ever slipping into their world, as bourgeois, as conventional, as the other world, under all its apparent folly. It is regulated disorder, a programme played out by yawning ennui and aching joints.

But the king, he, at least, " made fête " with the ardour of a lad of twenty. He carried into it that hunger for escapade which took him to Mabille on the night of his arrival, to satisfy desires sharpened for a long time at a distance by the reading of certain Parisian newspapers, which give each day the appetizing *menu* of debauchery in tales and articles which relate and idealize it for the provinces and foreign countries. His intrigue with Mme. de Rosen stopped him for a certain time on this descent to easy pleasure — which resembles the little staircases of the night restaurants, inundated with light, carpeted from top to bottom, descended step by step in the first stage of drunkenness, which deepens and comes on faster at the bottom in the fresh air of the open door, and leads straight to the gutter, in the dim hour of the scavengers and dustmen. Christian now abandoned himself to that descent; and what encouraged and intoxicated him more than wine was the little Court, the clique with which he surrounded himself,— noblemen, ruined gamblers, on the lookout for royal dupes; journalists, gay-livers, whose paid reports entertained him, and who, proud of this intimacy with so illustrious an exile, took him to the coulisse of the theatres, where women with no eyes but for him, emotional and provocative, painted him in blushing confusion, with their enamelled cheeks. Quick to seize the language of the boulevards, with its fads, its exaggeration, its vapidity, he soon said, like an accomplished *gomme:* "Chic, very chic. . ." "'T is *infect* [ugly, or silly]." "*On se tord* [fleeced at cards, from pigeon's neck twisted]." But he said these things less vulgarly than others, thanks to his foreign accent, which relieved the slang and gave it a Bohemian point. One word he especially affected, — *rigolo*.[1] He used it apropos of everything, to appreciate what he liked. Plays, novels, events, public or private, they were or they were not *rigolo*. This dispensed Monseigneur from all argument. At the end of a supper Amy Férat, who was drunk and irritated by the word, called out to him: —

"Hey! see here, Rigolo!"

This familiarity pleased him. She, at least, did not treat him as a king. He made her his mistress, and long after his connection with the fashionable actress ended, the name stayed by him, like that of "Queue-de-Poule" given to Prince d'Axel, no one ever knew exactly why.

Rigolo and Queue-de-Poule made a pair of friends who were never separated; they hunted their game in couples, and united even in the boudoirs their fates, which were much alike. The disgrace of the hereditary prince constituting in point of fact an exile, he bore it as best he could, and for ten years past had " made fête " in all the wineshops of the boulevard with the liveliness of an undertaker. The King of Illyria had an apartment in the hôtel d'Axel on the Champs Élysées. At first he slept there occasionally, but very soon as often as at Saint-Mandé. These explained absences, with apparent reason, left the queen quite calm, but threw the princess into black despair. No doubt her wounded pride still cherished the hope of regaining that volatile heart. She employed all sorts of coquettish wiles, new adornments and coiffures, and combinations of cut and colour in her gowns that harmonized well with the allurements of her beauty. But what disappointment when, at seven o'clock, the king not having appeared, Frederica, imperturbably serene, would say, "The king does not dine here to-day," and order the little Zara's high chair to be put in the place of honour! The nervous Colette, obliged to be silent and to swallow her vexation, longed for an outburst from the queen which might have avenged them both; but Frederica, scarcely paler, kept her sovereign calmness, even when the princess, with cruel feminine cleverness, slipping hints between skin and flesh, tried to make to her revelations about the clubs in Paris, the coarseness of the conversations between men, the still coarser amusements to which these irregular hours, these habits of the coulisse led, the foolish wagers, the fortunes crumbling like card-houses on the gambling-table, the eccentric bets entered in a special book, curious to look over, a gilded book of human aberrations. But in vain, the queen was not affected by the galling of these pin-pricks; either she did not or she would not comprehend them.

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[1] *Rigolo*, amusing, comical. *Rigoler*, to laugh, to divert one's self; an old word, used by Rabelais. — Tr.

Once, and once only, she betrayed herself, — one morning, as they were both on horseback in the forest of Saint-Mandé. A sharp little breeze of the month of March was ruffling the waters of the lake and driving them towards the shore, still barren and flowerless. A few buds were bursting in the coppices which still kept the russet leaves of winter, and the horses treading side by side a wood-road strewn with fallen branches made them crackle in unison with the opulent sound of creaking saddles and jangling curb-chains. The two women, each as good a rider as the other, rode slowly, absorbed by the calm of an intermediate season, which prepares, with rainy skies and soil blackened by the departing snows, for the renewal of all things. Colette, however, soon began upon her favourite topic, as she always did when alone with the queen. She dared not attack the king directly, but she made up for it on his surroundings, on the gentlemen of the Grand-Club, whom she knew through Herbert and Parisian slander, and whom she now dressed out with the hand of a connoisseur, Prince d'Axel first of all. Really and truly she could not comprehend how any one could make a friend and companion of that man, who spent his life in gambling and revelling, liking none but the worst company, sitting openly on the boulevard beside a slut, drinking, like a coachman, with the first comer, and hail-fellow-well-met with the lowest comedians. And to think that *that* was an hereditary prince! . . Did he take pleasure in degrading and fouling royalty in his own person?"

On and on she went with fire and fury, while the queen, intentionally abstracted, her eyes vague, stroked the neck of her horse and presently urged him on as if to escape the tales of her lady of honour. But Colette kept up with her.

"However," she went on, "we know where Prince d'Axel gets it. The conduct of his uncle is as bad as his own. A king who proclaims his mistresses with such impudence before his Court and his wife. . . One can't help asking what sort of slavish nature a queen can have who would bear such outrages. . ."

This time the blow struck home. Frederica, quivering, her eyes clouded, showed upon her features, which seemed suddenly hollowed, an expression so sorrowful, so worn, that Colette felt herself shaken as she saw that proud sovereign, whose soul she had never yet been able to reach, come down to the level of womanly suffering. But the queen almost immediately recovered her pride.

"The woman you speak of is a queen," she said quickly; "and it would be a great injustice to judge her as you do other women. Other women can be happy or unhappy openly; they can weep their tears and complain if the sorrow is too great to bear. But queens! . . Sorrows as wives, sorrows as mothers, they must hide all, and bear all. . . Can a queen escape when she is outraged? Can she seek a separation and give that joy to the enemies of a throne? No; at the risk of seeming cruel, indifferent, blind, she must keep her head erect to support the crown. And this is not pride; it is the sentiment of our grandeur that sustains us. It is this which makes us show ourselves in open carriages between husband and child when threats of a conspirator's pistol are in the air; this that makes exile and its mire less heavy; this that gives us strength to endure certain cruel affronts of which you, Princesse de Rosen, should be the last to speak to me."

She grew excited as she spoke, hurrying her words at the last; then she struck her horse a vigorous blow, which sent him through the wood in the whirl of a rapid pace that made her blue veil flutter and the folds of her cloth habit clap.

Henceforth, Colette left the queen in peace; but as her nerves needed soothing and distraction, she turned her anger and her teasing tilts against Élysée Méraut, putting herself prominently on the side of the marquise, for the royal house was now divided into two camps. Élysée had scarcely any one on his side but Père Alphée, whose rough speech and ever ready thrust were a fine support on some occasions; but he was frequently making journeys to Illyria charged with missions between the mother-house in the Rue des Tourneaux and the Franciscan monasteries at Zara and Ragusa. At any rate, that was the pretext of his many absences, made with the utmost mystery, from which he returned always more ardent, mounting the staircase with furious leaps, his rosary twirling in his fingers, and a prayer between his teeth which he chewed like a ball. After such returns he was shut up for long hours with the queen, and then he was off again, leaving the coterie of the marquise quite at liberty to league against the professor. From the old duke, who was shocked in all his military and social notions by the negligent dress and touzled hair of poor Méraut, to Lebeau the King's valet, enemy by instinct of all independence, and even down to the humblest groom or kitchen-boy, courtiers of Lebeau, nay, even to the inoffensive Boscovich, who went with the rest from cowardice and respect for the majority, there was nothing less than a veritable coalition against the new master. It showed itself less in acts than in words, looks, attitudes, in the nervous little skirmishes which life in common brings about between persons who detest each other. Oh! those attitudes which were Mme. de Silvis' specialty, — disdainful, haughty, ironical, bitter; she played off all the expressions of her head before Élysée, taking especial pains to assume an air of respectful pity, with smothered sighs and blank looks cast to the ceiling, whenever she was in presence of the little prince. "Don't you suffer, Monseigneur?" and she felt him over with her long, thin fingers, making him languid with her trembling caress. Then the queen would say in lively tones: —

"Come, come, marquise, you will make Zara think he is ill."

"I find his hands, his forehead, rather hot."

"He has just come in. . . It is the brisk air. . ."

Then the mother would carry off the boy, rather troubled at heart by remarks repeated to her,—the household theory being that Monseigneur was made to study too hard; a theory that the Parisian part of the household repeated without believing, but which was taken seriously by the Illyrian servants, the tall Petscha and old Greb, who darted their worst black looks at Méraut, and galled him with that spiteful service of antipathy which is so easy to exercise against dependents and absent-minded persons. . . Again he encountered the pettiness, the persecutions, the jealousies of the palace . . . the same grovelling of souls, crawling round a throne, of which exile and dethronement do not, it appears, rid royalty. His nature, too generous, too affectionate not to suffer from these aggressive antipathies, felt the restraint to his simple, familiar ways and bohemian artist habits, now compressed into the narrow ceremonial of the house at those meals, lighted by tall candelabra, where the men in full dress and the women *décolletées* (seated far apart around the table for lack of guests) did not speak or eat until the king and queen had eaten and spoken, ruling themselves by an implacable etiquette, the observance of which was watched over by the chief of the civil and military household with only the more rigour as the exile was protracted. But it sometimes happened, nevertheless, that the old student of the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince came to the royal table in a coloured cravat, spoke without permission, launched himself headlong into one of those eloquent improvisations with which the walls of the Café Voltaire still rang. Then it was that the thundering looks he drew upon himself, the ridiculous importance given to the slightest infraction of Court rules, gave him a longing to leave all and get back to his Quarter, as he had done on a former occasion.

But — there was the queen!

Living always in Frederica's private existence, the child between them, he became possessed by a fanatical devotion to her, made up of respect, admiration, and superstitious faith. She summed up in herself and symbolized to his mind all his monarchical beliefs and ideals, just as the Madonna is the whole of religion to a peasant of the Transtevere. For the queen he remained; for her he found courage to carry on his hard task to its end. Oh! yes, it was hard, very hard. What patience was needed to put the slightest thing into the little head of this child of a king! He was charming, poor little Zara, gentle and good. Will was not lacking to him. The serious and upright soul of his mother could be divined in the boy, with something, I know not what, that was trivial, volatile, and younger than his years. Mind was visibly belated in that stunted, almost aged little body, which play did not tempt, and on which revery weighed until it turned at times to torpor. Rocked from his earliest years — which to him had been a long convalescence — with the fantastic tales of his governess, life, of which he was just beginning to have some conception, struck him only through its analogies with those stories where fairies and good genii, hovering over kings and queens, helped them out of towers and dungeons, delivered them from persecutions and plots with a single tap of their golden wand, and laid low ramparts of thorns, walls of ice, dragons spitting fire, and old women who could change you into beasts. In the midst of some careful explanation given to him in his lesson, "That is how it is in the story of the little tailor," he would say; or, if he read the account of a great battle, "Giant Robistor killed more than that." It was this sense of the supernatural so strongly developed within him which gave him his abstracted expression and inclined him to sit motionless for hours among the sofa cushions, keeping in the depths of his eyes the changing, floating phantasmagoria, the dazzling false lights in the brain of a child issuing from Rothomago, with the fable of the play developing to his memory in marvellous prismatic tableaus. All this made the serious study and reasoning now required of him very difficult.

The queen was present at the lessons, — in her fingers an embroidery which never advanced, and in her beautiful eyes that attention so precious to the master, who felt her vibrating to all his ideas, even to those he did not express. Indeed, it was by these latter that they chiefly held to each other, — by dreams, chimeras; all that floated above their convictions and diffused them. She took him for counsellor, for confidant, but affecting never to speak to him except in the king's name.

"M. Méraut, his Majesty would like to know your opinion as to this."

And Élysée's astonishment was great at never receiving questions from the king himself on topics in which he was so interested. Christian II. treated him with a certain consideration, spoke to him in a tone of familiar companionship, excellent in its way, but very futile. Sometimes, in crossing the study, he would stop for a moment to listen to the lesson, and say, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, in a tone that echoed the subaltern outcry of the household: —

"Do not press him too hard. You don't want to make a learned man of him. . ."

"I want to make a king of him," replied Frederica, proudly.

Then, as her husband made a discouraged gesture, she added: "Will he not reign some day?"

"Why yes . . . yes. . ."

And as the door closed quickly upon him (to cut short all discussion), he was heard to hum an air from an opera then much in vogue: "He will reign . . . he will reign . . . because he is Spanish." In short, Élysée did not know what to think of this cordial, superficial, perfumed, dainty prince, full of caprices, lounging on sofas with enervated limbs, whom he still believed to be the hero of Ragusa, that king of energetic will and bravery whose deeds he had told in the "Memorial." However, in spite of Frederica's cleverness in concealing the vacuum of that crowned brow, and though she constantly effaced herself behind him, some unforeseen circumstance was always presenting itself in which their true natures appeared.

One morning, after breakfast, when they reentered the salon, Frederica opened the newspapers arriving by courier from Illyria, which she was always the first to read, and presently made so loud and painful an exclamation that the king, who was preparing to go out, stopped short, and all present gathered round her. The queen passed the paper to Boscovich.

"Read that," she said.

It was the authorized report of a session of the Diet at Leybach, at which a resolution was passed to return to the exiled sovereigns all the crown property, more than two hundred millions, on the express condition . . .

"Bravo!" cried Christian's nasal voice. "That suits me famously."

"Go on," said the queen, sternly.

"'On the express condition that Christian II. renounces for himself and his descendants all rights to the throne of Illyria.'"

The salon resounded with an indignant explosion. Old Rosen choked, Père Alphée's cheeks became as white as linen, rendering his beard and his eyes still blacker.

"We must answer . . . we cannot remain silent under this blow," said the queen, and, in her indignation, she turned to Méraut who was making notes with a feverish pencil at one corner of the table.

"This is what I should write," he said advancing;

and he read, in the form of a letter to a royalist deputy, a noble proclamation to the Illyrian people, in which, after rejecting the outrageous proposition made to him, the king reassured and encouraged his supporters with the emotion of the head of a family parted from his children.

The queen enthusiastically clapped her hands, seized the paper, and gave it to Boscovich.

"Quick, quick, translate it and send it. . . Is not that your wish?" she added, recollecting that Christian was there and that eyes were upon them.

"No doubt . . . no doubt . . . " said the king, much perplexed, and biting his nails furiously. "That 's all very fine . . . only, you see . . . we ought to know if we can keep to it."

She turned round, very pale, as if struck by a blow between the shoulders.

"Keep to it! . . If we can keep to it? . . Is it the king who speaks?"

He, very calm: —

"When Ragusa had no food, with the best will in the world we had to surrender."

"Well, this time, if food is wanting, we will take a basket and beg at doors . . . but royalty shall not surrender."

What a scene, in that narrow salon of the suburbs of Paris; what a debate between those two fallen princes, one who was felt to be weary of the struggle, his legs faltering under his own want of faith, the other palpitating with faith and ardour. And how the mere sight of them revealed their two natures! — the king supple, slender, his throat bare, his clothes loose, his feeble nature visible in the effeminacy of his slack, pale hands, and the light curls, slightly dampened, on his white forehead; she, erect, superb in her riding-dress, with its wide lapels and small upright collar and simple cuffs edging the dark cloth of her habit, from which the glowing blood, the lightning of her eyes, the golden coils of her hair came forth dazzling. Élysée, for the first time, had a clear and rapid vision of what was passing in that royal home.

Suddenly Christian II. turned towards the duke, who was standing with bowed head, leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Rosen! . ."

"Sire? . ."

"You alone can tell us this. . . How do we stand? . . Have we the means to go on any longer?"

The chief of the household made a haughty gesture.

"Certainly!"

"How long? . . Do you know? . . about how long? . ."

"Five years; I have reckoned it."

"Without privation to any one? None whom we love being injured or made to suffer? . ."

"Undoubtedly, Sire."

"You are sure?"

"Sure," affirmed the old man, erecting his vast height.

"Very good. . . Méraut, give me your letter;

I will sign it now, before I go out." Then in a low tone, taking the pen from his hand, he added: "Just look at Mme. de Silvis. . . Would n't you think she was preparing to sing 'Sombre Forest'?"

The marquise, entering at that moment from the garden, leading the little prince by the hand, was affected by the dramatic atmosphere of the salon, and, arrayed in her green velvet spencer with a green feather in her hat, had exactly the arrested pose, struck and romantic, of an opera-singer.

Read in the Illyrian Parliament and published in all newspapers, the protest was also, by Élysée's advice, printed in autograph and sent throughout the country-places in thousands of copies, which Père Alphée carried thither in bales, passing them through the custom-houses as "objects of piety" with chaplets of olive wood and roses from Jericho. Royalist opinions were spurred; especially in Dalmatia, where republican ideas had made but little way, so that the people were now moved by the eloquent words of their king, read from the pulpit in many villages and distributed by the begging friars of St. François, who opened their wallets at the doors of the farmhouses and paid for the eggs and the butter given to them with a little printed packet. Soon addresses to the king were covered with signatures, and those crosses in place of signatures which are so touching in their ignorant good-will; pilgrimages, too, were organized.

In the little house at Saint-Mandé there were now perpetual arrivals of fishermen, of porters from

Ragusa, with black cloaks over their rich Mussulman costumes, Morlachian peasants, three-fourths barbarous, all shod with the *opanké* of sheepskin, tied around the foot with thongs of twisted straw. They issued in bands from the tramway, where their scarlet dalmatians, their fringed scarfs, and jackets with metal buttons made violent contrast with the gray monotony of Parisian clothing. They crossed the courtyard with firm step, but stopped at the vestibule and talked together in low voices, perturbed and intimidated. Élysée, who was present at all these presentations, felt moved to the depths of his being; the legend of his infancy lived again in these enthusiasms coming from afar — the journey to Frohsdorf of the weavers of the Enclos de Rey, the privations, the preparations for that journey, the unacknowledged disappointment on the return — all these things came back to his memory; and he suffered from Christian's indifferent, oppressed attitude, and his sighs of relief when each interview was over.

At heart the king was furious at these visits, which interfered with his pleasures and condemned him to a long afternoon at Saint-Mandé. On account of the queen, however, he greeted with a few commonplace phrases the protestations choked with tears of these poor people, avenging his annoyance with some droll comment, or a caricature scratched down at the end of a table in that spirit of ill-natured satire that lurked at the corners of his lips. On one occasion he caricatured the syndic of the fishermen of Branizza, a broad Italian face with hanging cheeks and round eyes, stupefied by the agitation and joy of a royal interview, the tears rolling down to his chin. This masterpiece circulated round the table at the next meal, amid the laughter and exclamations of the guests. The duke himself, despising the popular, wrinkled his old beak in sign of extraordinary hilarity. The drawing finally reached Élysée with a noisy encomium from Boscovich. He looked at it for some time; then he gave it to his neighbour without a word, and when the king, from the other end of the table, called to him in his insufferable nasal tone, —

"You don't laugh, Méraut . . . and he is good, my syndic," —

"No, Monseigneur," he answered sadly, "I cannot laugh . . . It is a portrait of my father."

Some time after that, Élysée was witness of a scene which completed his enlightenment as to Christian's character and his relations with the queen. It was on a Sunday after mass. The little mansion, wearing an unusually festive appearance, opened wide the iron gates of its courtyard on the Rue Herbillon; all the attendants were afoot and ranged in line in the antechamber of the portico, as verdant as a greenhouse. The reception on this occasion was of the highest importance. A royalist deputation from the Diet itself was expected, the élite and flower of the party, who were coming to offer to the king the homage of their fidelity and devotion, and to consult with him as to the proper measures for a speedy restoration.

It was a real event, long hoped for, and now announced; the solemnity of which was brightened by a splendid winter sun, which gilded and warmed the great salon of reception where the king's chair was placed as a throne, and woke from the shadows the sparkling rubies, sapphires, and topazes of the crown.

While the whole house was alive with a continual going and coming, and the trailing rustle of silk gowns everywhere; while the little prince, as they put on his long red stockings, his velvet suit, and its Venetian lace collar, repeated the speech he had been learning for a week; while old Rosen, in full dress, covered with orders, drew himself up more erect than ever to introduce the deputies, Élysée, voluntarily aloof from all this bustle, was sitting alone in the schoolroom, thinking of the probable results of the approaching interview. In a mirage, not infrequent, of his meridional brain, he was beholding the triumphant re-entrance of his princes into Leybach, amid salvos and chimes and joyful streets heaped up with flowers — a king and queen holding before them, like a promise to the people, like a future which still further ennobled them, and placed them in the rank of youthful ancestors, his beloved pupil, the little Zara, grave and intelligent, with that child-gravity crossed by an emotion too great for a child's comprehension. And the glory of this fine Sunday, the gayety of the bells ringing out upon the air in the full sun of mid-day only doubled his hope of a national festival, in which the maternal pride of Frederica might send to him, above the head of her child, the blessing of a satisfied smile.

On the gravel of the court of honour the arrivals were now echoing with the heavy roll of the state coaches which had been sent to bring the deputies from Paris. The doors of the carriages clapped, the sound of steps died away on the carpets of the vestibule and the salon, whence a murmur of respectful voices rose. Then followed a long silence, which surprised Élysée, who was expecting to hear the speech of the king in his high nasal tones. What was happening? What interruption had occurred to the pre-arranged order of the ceremonies?

At this moment he saw, sidling along by the wall and the blackened espaliers of the wintry garden, the man whom he supposed to be in the salon presiding over the official reception, the king, who was walking towards the house with a stiff and awkward step. He must have entered by a secret door hidden under ivy in the Avenue Daumesnil, and was now advancing slowly and painfully. Élysée thought at first of a duel, an accident; and shortly after the sound of a fall in the upper story, a fall that shook the furniture and hangings of the room, so long and heavy was it, accompanied by the breakage of articles on the floor, confirmed him in this idea. He ran up rapidly to the king. Christian's room, in a half circle of the principal wing of the mansion, was warm and cosy as a nest, hung with crimson, adorned on the walls with ancient armour, and furnished with divans, low chairs, lion and bear skins; and amid this downy luxury that was almost oriental, stood the originality of a small camp bed on which the king always slept, from family tradition and that pose of Spartan simplicity which millionnaires and sovereigns are fond of assuming.

The door was open.

Opposite to it stood Christian, leaning against the wall, his hat on the back of his head, his face discomposed and pale, his long fur wrap half open and showing a rumpled coat, a white cravat untied, the broad white shirt-front creased and stained with that foulness of linen which marks a night spent in the disorder of drunkenness. The queen was standing near him, erect, stern, speaking in a low, threatening voice, and trembling with the violent effort that she made to restrain herself.

"You must . . . you must. . . Come!"

But he, very low and with a shamed air: —

"I cannot. . . You see I cannot. . . Later . . . I promise you."

Then he stammered excuses, with a silly laugh and childish voice. . . It was not that he drank too much. Oh, no . . . but the air, the cold, coming out after supper. . .

"Yes, yes. . . I know. . . It is no matter. . . You must come down. . . Let them see you; only let them see you. . . I will speak to them, I will; I know what to say. Come!"

Then as he stood there motionless, mute with a sort of torpor which began upon his face, that grew horribly relaxed, Frederica's anger rose.

"Understand, I say, that our fate hangs upon it. . . Christian, it is your crown, the crown of your son, that you are risking at this moment. . . Come! . . I beg of you. . . You *shall* come. . ."

She was superb at that moment with a strong will whose currents from her aquamarine eyes magnetized the king visibly. She held him by that look, tried to steady him, erect him, helped him to take off his hat and his furred coat, filled with the vile fumes of drunkenness and tobacco. He stiffened himself for a moment on his flaccid legs, made a few steps staggering, with his hot hands resting on the marble of the queen's arm. But suddenly she felt that he was collapsing and she recoiled herself from that fevered contact. Brusquely repulsing him with violence, with disgust, she let him fall at full length upon a divan; then without a look at that disordered, inert mass, already snoring, she left the room, passed before Méraut without seeing him, walking straight before her, her eyes half shut, murmuring in the distraught and dolorous voice of a somnambulist: —

"Alla fine sono stanca di fare gesti de questo monarcaccio."

[At last, I am weary of making gestures for that puppet-king.]

V.

J. TOM LEVIS, FOREIGNERS' AGENT.

Of all Parisian lairs, of all the caves of Ali-Baba with which the great city is mined and countermined, there is none more peculiar, of an organization more interesting, than the Levis Agency. You know it, all the world knows it, at any rate the outside of it. It is in the Rue Royale at the corner of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, directly on the line of carriages going or returning from the Bois, so that none can escape the beguiling announcement of that sumptuous establishment, up eight steps, with its tall windows of a single pane, each bearing the emblazoned arms, gules, azure, and gold, of the principal powers of Europe, — eagles, unicorns, leopards, the whole heraldic menagerie. For thirty metres, the entire width of that street, which equals a boulevard, the Levis agency attracts the eyes of the most indifferent passer. They all ask themselves: "What is sold there?" "What is not sold there?" we had better say. On each pane can be read in beautiful golden letters: "Wines, liqueurs, comestibles, pale-ale, kümmel, raki, caviare, cod's-roes;" or else: "Furniture ancient and modern, carpets, foliage-tapestries, Smyrna and Ispahan rugs;" farther on: "Paintings of great masters, marbles, terra-cottas, armour, medallions, panoplies;" elsewhere: "Exchange, discount, foreign money;" or: "Books and newspapers of all countries, all languages;" and, in addition: "Sales or rentals, hunting, seashore, villegiatura;" with: "Information, celerity, discretion."

This swarm of inscriptions and brilliant heraldic bearings on its glass obscured to a great degree the show window, allowing very little to be seen of the articles there displayed. Vaguely one could distinguish bottles of foreign shape and colour, chairs in carved wood, pictures, furs, and, in wooden bowls, a few opened rolls of coin and bundles of paper-money. But the vast cellars of the agency, lighted from the street at the level of the sidewalk through a species of grated port-holes, gave an impression that the opulent warehouses of the city of London were sustaining the "chic" and the "fla-fla" of the gorgeous show window of the Boulevard de la Madeleine. Those cellars overflowed below with riches of all kinds: hogsheads in rows, bales of stuffs, piled-up cases, coffers, boxes of preserved provisions, depth upon depth, enough to make one giddy, as when we look down into the yawning hold of a steamboat in process of being stowed.

Thus prepared and firmly spread in the full Parisian tide-way, the net floated agrip for the great and the little fishes, even the young fry of the Seine, the most wary of all; and if you pass that way about three in the afternoon you will almost always find it full.

At the glass door on the Rue Royale, lofty, light, and surmounted by a carved wooden pediment, — this is the entrance to the part devoted to dress and fashions, — stands the *chasseur* of the establishment, militarily gold-laced, who turns the handle of the door as soon as he sees you, and holds an umbrella (when there is need of it) over clients who come in carriages. Before you, on entering, is a vast hall, divided by counters, and wire-gratings with little wickets, forming two lines of compartments, regular "boxes," right and left to the very end. The dazzling daylight shines upon the polished packages, the carvings, the correct frock-coats and the hair, curled with tongs, of the clerks, all elegant, handsome, but of foreign air and accent. Some have the olive skin, pointed skulls, and narrow shoulders of Asiatics; others, the American collar-beards beneath porcelain blue eyes, and the ruddy flesh of Germans. In whatever tongue the buyer gives his order he is certain of being understood, for every language is spoken at the Agency, except the Russian, that being useless, inasmuch as Russians speak all tongues except their own.

The crowd comes and goes about the wickets, sits waiting on the light chairs, gentlemen and ladies in travelling costume, a mingling of Astrakhan and Scotch caps, long veils floating over waterproofs, dust-cloaks, tweeds in checks indiscriminately clothing both sexes, packages in straps, leathern bags worn in satire, — in short, the true public of a waiting-room, gesticulating, talking, staring, with the unrestraint and assurance of persons away from their own homes, and making in many languages the same confused, variegated hurly-burly which we hear in the bird-shops on the Quai de Gèvres. At the same time the pale-ale and the Romanée-Conti corks are popping and piles of gold are rolling about on the counters. Also an interminable ringing is going on, whistles descend through the speaking tubes, plans of houses are being unrolled, scales and chords are tried on a piano, while around an enormous carbon photograph a whole tribe of Samoyeds are making exclamations.

From one box to another the clerks are tossing information, a row of figures, the name of a person or street, all smiling, eagerly polite; till suddenly they become majestic, icy, indifferent, with countenances completely detached from the affairs of this globe, when some unfortunate, distracted one, rejected already from wicket to wicket, leans down to speak to them, in a low voice, of a certain mysterious thing, which seems to fill them with astonishment. Sometimes, weary of being looked at like a waterspout or a meteorite, the man becomes impatient and asks to see J. Tom Levis himself, who will, undoubtedly, understand the matter. On which he is told, with a superior smile that J. Tom Levis is busy . . . J. Tom Levis has company . . . not paltry little affairs like yours, and nobodies like you, my good man! . . . Here, look down there, at the end of the hall. . . A door opens. J. Tom Levis appears for a second, more majestic in himself alone than the whole of his staff; majestic in his rounded paunch, majestic by his polished cranium shining like the floor of his agency, by the tipping back of his small head, his fifteen-foot glance, the despotic gesture of his short arm, and the solemnity with which he demands, in a very loud voice and his insular accent, whether "the purchase of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has been sent to him," while with one hand he holds the door of his cabinet hermetically closed behind him, to give the idea that the august personage who is with him is one of those who must not be disturbed on any consideration. Needless to say that the Prince of Wales never came to the agency, and there was not the very smallest parcel to send to him; but you can imagine the effect of that name on the crowd in the counting-room and the solitary client in the cabinet, to whom Tom had just said: "Excuse me . . . one moment. . . A little inquiry to make."

All trickery! trickery! There was no more a Prince of Wales behind the door of the cabinet than there was raki or kümmel in the queer bottles in the window, or beer, English or Viennese, in the rows of hogsheads in the cellar; no more than there was merchandise in those emblazoned, gilded, and varnished carts, marked J. T. L., which passed at a gallop (all the more rapidly because empty) through the finest quarters of Paris — a perambulating advertisement, noisily rattling the pavement with the frantic activity that characterized both man and beast at Tom Levis's agency. If a poor devil, intoxicated by the sight of all that gold, had thrust his fist through the window and greedily plunged a bleeding hand into those wooden bowls, he would have pulled it back full of counters; if he had snatched that enormous bundle of banknotes he would have carried off a bill of twenty-five francs at the top of a pile of bubble-paper. Nothing in the show-cases, nothing in the cellars, nothing, nothing, not so much as *that!* . . But how about the port-wine those Englishmen tasted; and the money that boyard obtained for his roubles; and that little bronze undoubtedly packed up for a Greek of the isles? Oh! good heavens! nothing simpler. The English beer came from the nearest tavern; the gold from a money-changer on the boulevard; the bronze from that shop of "So and So" in the Rue du Quatre-Septembre. 'T was merely the affair of an errand quickly done by two or three employés always waiting in the cellar for orders transmitted down the tubes.

Going out by the courtyard of the next house they were back in a few minutes, emerging by the winding stairway with its carved baluster and crystal post-knob; and then, behold the required article, guaranteed and ticketed J. T. L. And don't feel obliged to take it, prince; if it does not suit you, you can change it. The cellars of the Agency are well supplied. Things are a little dearer than elsewhere, perhaps even double and treble, but is n't that much better than going from shop to shop where they don't understand a word you say, in spite of the promise in the window of "English spoken" or *mann spricht Deutsch*, of those boulevard shops, where a foreigner, surrounded and circumvented, really gets nothing but the dregs of the boxes, the shelved and worthless articles, that refuse of Paris, that deficit on the ledger of "things out of fashion" — the show of last year, more faded and tarnished by its date than by the sun and dust of its exhibition? Oh! that Parisian shopkeeper! obsequious and pertinacious, disdainful and adhesive; that's enough, the foreigner wants no more of him, weary at last of being so ferociously speculated upon; and not only by the shopkeeper but by the hotel in which he sleeps, the restaurant where he eats, the cab which he hails in the street, the seller of tickets who sends him to yawn in empty theatres. At the Levis place, that ingenious agency where foreigners find all they can desire, you are at least sure of never being cheated, for J. Tom Levis is an Englishman, and the commercial honesty of Englishmen is known to both hemispheres.

English, Tom Levis is, beyond the possibility of being more so, from the square toes of his Quaker shoes to his long frock-coat descending on his green checked trousers, and his tall hat with its infinitesimal brim, that sets off his chubby, ruddy, good-natured visage. Albion's honesty can be read on that skin fed on beefsteaks, that mouth stretching from ear to ear, the silky blondness of those uneven whiskers — uneven from a trick their owner has of chewing one (always the same) in moments of perplexity; that insular honesty may also be divined in the pudgy hand with its fingers showing a reddish down and laden with rings. Honest also seems the glance from behind a large pair of spectacles in slender gold frames; so honest that when it happens that Tom Levis lies — even the best of us are liable to it — the pupils, by a curious nervous spasm look inward to each other like the little twirls in the perspective of a gyroscope.

What completes the Anglican physiognomy of J. Tom Levis is his cab, his hansom, the first vehicle of the kind ever seen in Paris, the natural shell of this original being. Has he some rather complicated affair on hand, or one of those moments that come in all traffic, when a man feels himself nipped, cornered, — "I 'll take the cab," says Tom; and he is sure to find within it some idea. He combines, he weighs, he comments to himself, while the Parisians see, rolling along in that transparent case on wheels, the silhouette of an absorbed man, chewing his right whisker energetically. It is in the cab that he invented his finest strokes of business, his close-of-the-empire strokes! Ah! those were the good times! Paris abounded in foreigners, not only travelling foreigners, but a settlement of exotic fortunes, eager for feasts and merry-makings. We had Hussein-Bey the Turk, and Mehemet-Pacha the Egyptian, two celebrated fezes, on the lake; and the Princesse de Verkatcheffs, who was throwing all the gold of the Ural mountains through the fourteen windows of her first-floor apartment on the Avenue Malesherbes; and the American Bergson, who squandered the enormous revenues of his petroleum mines in Paris (Bergson has since then recovered his wealth); together with nabobs, swarms of nabobs of all colours, yellows, browns, reds, variegating the boulevards and theatres, hurrying to spend, to enjoy, as if they foresaw that they would have to vacate that great merry junketing-place before the terrible explosion which was soon to burst the roofs and break the mirrors and the windows.

Consider that J. Tom Levis was the indispensable intermediary of all these pleasures; that not a louis was changed without his having previously pared it, and also that to his foreign customers were added certain Parisian *bon vivants* of the period, lovers of rare game, poachers on private preserves, who came to friend Tom as to the shrewdest and ablest of agents; and also because their secrets seemed to them safer behind his barbarous French and his difficulty of elocution. The monogram of J. T. L. sealed all the scandalous tales of the close of the empire. It was in the name of J. Tom Levis that the lower stage-box No. 9 at the Opéra-Comique was always taken when the Baronne Mils came for an hour to hear her tenorino, carrying away with her after the cavatina, in the lace of her bosom, his handkerchief steeped in perspiration and whitening. In the name of J. Tom Levis was leased the little hotel of the Avenue de Clichy, half and half (without their being aware of it) and for the same woman, to the brothers Sismondo, two bankers, partners, unable to leave their counting-room at the same hour. Ah! the books of the Agency at that period! — what fine romances in a few lines!

"House with two entrances: on the road to Saint-Cloud. Rent, furniture, indemnity to lessee . . . so much," and below it: "Commission to general . . . so much."

"Country-house at Petit-Valtin, near Plombières. Garden, coachhouse, two entrances, indemnity to lessee . . . so much."

And invariably: "Commission to general . . . so much." That general had a good place on the books of the Agency.

If Tom enriched himself in those days he spent as largely, — not in play, nor in horses, nor women; simply to satisfy the caprices of an untutored child or savage, of the silliest, most ridiculous imagination ever seen, which allowed no interval between the dream and its realization. Once it was an avenue of acacias which he wanted at the end of his property at Courbevoie; and as trees are long in growing, for one whole week were seen along the shores of the Seine (very bare at that spot) the slow defiling of huge carts bearing each its acacia, the feathery green branches of which, nodding to the movement of the wheels, threw their quivering shadows on the water. The suburban property, on which J. Tom Levis lived all the year round, after the manner of the great London merchants, beginning as a mere box with only a ground-floor and garret, became to him in the end a source of monstrous expense. His business prospered and grew; proportionally he enlarged his property; and from building to building, purchase after purchase, he came at last to possess a park made up of annexed lands, fields under culture, and scraps of forest; a singular property on which his tastes revealed themselves, his ambitions, his English eccentricity, deformed and dwarfed by bourgeois ideas and attempts at art that were failures. Along this very ordinary house, above which upper storeys had been visibly added, lay an Italian terrace with marble balusters, flanked by two gothic towers, and communicating by a covered bridge with another building, pretending to be a chalet, with open-work balconies swathed in ivy. All this in painted stucco and brick, looking like a Black Forest toy, with a wealth of towers, battlements, weather-vanes, balconies, parapets; and, in the park, a bristling of kiosks and belvederes, a shimmering of greenhouses and fountains, the black bastion of an immense reservoir in which to raise water, topped by a real windmill, the wings of which, sensitive to every breeze, clacked and turned with an endless grinding of their axle.

Certainly along the narrow space traversed by the tramways of the Parisian suburbs many a burlesque villa defiles before the windows of the cars, like fantastic nightmares, the effort of the escaping and gambolling shopkeeping brain. But none is comparable to the Folly of Tom Levis; unless it be the villa of his neighbour Spricht, the great Spricht, the ladies' dressmaker. That gorgeous personage is in Paris only during his business hours, namely, the three hours in which he gives his consultations on coquetry in his grand office on the boulevard; after which, he instantly returns to his house at Courbevoie. The secret of this forced retreat is that dear Spricht, "dear" to all ladies, while he possesses in his drawers, among marvellous patterns of his Lyonnese fabrics, specimens of flowing handwriting, dainty script from the best gloved hands in Paris, is forced to confine himself to an intimacy of correspondence, not being received in any of the houses he gowns, while his close relations with them have spoilt, for him, his relations with the commercial world to which he belongs. Consequently he lives much retired, surrounded, like all parvenus, by a posse of poor relations, and devoting his wealth to entertaining them royally. His only amusement, the necessary fillip to this life of a retired outcast, is the neighbourhood and rivalry of Tom Levis, the hatred and contempt they reciprocally vow to each other, without knowing why, which latter fact of course renders all reconciliation impossible.

When Spricht puts up a tower — Spricht is German, he likes the romantic, castles, valleys, ruins, he has the passion of the middle ages — instantly J. Tom Levis builds a veranda. When Tom pulls down a wall, Spricht cuts down his hedges. There is a tale of a pavilion built by Tom which interfered with Spricht's view towards Saint-Cloud. The dressmaker on that put a gallery to his pigeon-house. The other retorted by a second story. Spricht was not beaten yet, and the two edifices, with a great accumulation of stones and workmen, continued their ascension until one fine night they were toppled over by the wind, without the least trouble, because of the flimsiness of their construction. Spricht, on his return from a trip to Italy, brought back a Venetian gondola, a real gondola, which he installed in the little port at the foot of his property; a week later, pft! pft! a pretty little steam-yacht, with sails also, was moored at Tom's quay, churning in the water the reflected towers, roofs, and battlements of his villa.

To keep up such a style of living, it was necessary that the empire should continue forever, and its last hour had come. The war, the siege, the departure of foreigners, were an utter disaster to the two traders; especially to Tom Levis, whose property was completely devastated by the invasion, while that of Spricht was spared. But peace restored, the struggle between the two rivals began again more furiously than ever, — this time with inequalities of wealth; the man of fashions having recovered all his customers, while poor Tom Levis was still expecting vainly the return of his. The sign "Information, celerity, discretion" produced nothing, or next to nothing; the mysterious general no longer received his clandestine fee from the strong-box of the Agency. Any other man in Tom's place would have retrenched, but that devil of a fellow had invincible habits of extravagance, something in his hands that prevented them from closing. And then, Spricht was there, lugubrious since the "events," declaring that the end of the world was at hand, and building at the end of his park a miniature of the ruins of the Hôtel de Ville, with its crumbling walls blackened by flames. On Sunday evenings these ruins were illuminated by Bengal lights and all the Sprichts lamented around them. It was sinister. J. Tom Levis, on the contrary, becoming republican out of hatred to his rival, fêted regenerated France, organized jousts, regattas, crowned "La Rosière," and at one of these coronations, in a gush of expansive joy, carried off, one summer's evening, the band from the Champs Élysées (at the concert hour), and brought it on the yacht, all sails spread, to Courbevoie, where it played upon the river.

Debts accumulated at this rate; but the Englishman did not disturb himself for that. No one knew better than he how to disconcert creditors by mere force of coolness and impudent majesty. No one — not even the clerks of the Agency, well-trained as they were — had his manner of scrutinizing bills curiously, as if they were palimpsests, and tossing them into a drawer with a superior air; no one had his methods to avoid payment, and to gain time. Time! It was on that that Tom Levis counted to bring him some fruitful enterprise, what he called, in the figurative slang of his bohemia of money, "a grand stroke." But in vain did he take to his cab, in vain did he course through Paris feverishly, eyes on the watch, teeth long, scenting, expecting prey — years went by and still the " grand stroke " did not present itself.

One afternoon when the Agency swarmed with people, a tall young man with a languid, haughty manner, a mocking eye, a delicate moustache on the rather full whiteness of a pretty face, appeared before the principal wicket and asked for Tom Levis. The clerk, misled by the cavalier meaning that underlay the inquiry, thought him a creditor, and was about to take his most disdainful air when the young man, in a high voice, the nasal tone of which doubled its insolence, informed " that species of upstart " that he was to tell his master at once that the King of Illyria wished to speak to him. . . " Ah ! Monseigneur. . . Monseigneur. . ." Among the cosmopolitan crowd which happened to be there at that moment a movement of curiosity towards the hero of Ragusa took place. From all the open compartments rushed a swarm of clerks to escort his Majesty to Tom Levis, who had not yet arrived, but could not fail to be there from one moment to another.

This was the first time that Christian had appeared at the Agency, the old Duc de Rosen having until now paid all the bills of the little Court. But the present matter concerned an affair so private, so delicate, that the king did not dare to confide it even to the clumsy hands of his aide-de-camp. . . A little house to rent for a circus-rider who had just displaced Amy Férat; a furnished house with servants, stable, and certain facilities of access, — one of those affairs, in short, which the Levis agency alone knew how to accomplish.

The salon where he waited contained exactly two large arm-chairs in varnished leather, one of those narrow and silent gas stoves which seem to send you their fire from another room, and a small round table covered with a blue cloth on which lay an almanach Bottin. Half the room was taken up by a tall wire grating, draped with blue curtains, surrounding a desk carefully placed, on which was a large book with steel corners, open, a weight on the page; and around it powder-boxes, erasers, rulers, pen-wipers, a long case filled with books of the same shape — the books of the Agency! — their green backs in line, like Prussians on parade. The order prevailing in this quiet little corner, the neatness of the things within it, did honour to the old bookkeeper, absent for the moment, whose methodical existence must surely be passed there.

While the king waited, lolling in his chair, his nose in the air above his furs, suddenly, without any movement of the glass door opening to the counting-room and covered by an Algerine hanging with a clown's hole, like a stage curtain, a sound of the light, quick scratching of a pen made itself heard. Some one was sitting at the desk, and it was not the old clerk with a white wolf's-head for whom the niche seemed to have been made, but the most delicious little person who ever fingered a commercial ledger. At an exclamation of surprise from Christian, she looked round, enveloped him with a soft glance, slowly turning and drowning a sparkle at the corner of each eye. The whole room was illuminated by that glance; and musically charmed by an emotional, almost trembling voice which murmured: "My husband keeps you waiting a long time, Monseigneur."

Tom Levis her husband! . . the husband of that sweet being with the pale, refined profile, the lithe full form of a Tanagra figurine. . . How came she there, alone in that cage, fingering those big books, the whiteness of which was reflected on her ivory skin while her little hands found difficulty in turning their pages? And this on one of those beautiful days of February when the toilets, the lively grace, the smiles of women were shimmering along the boulevard in the sunlight. The king made her, as he approached, a gallant little speech, in which various impressions were mingled, but his heart interfered with his tongue, so quickly did it beat in his breast, excited by a sudden, ungovernable desire such as this spoilt and blasé child could not remember having ever felt before. This type of woman between twenty-five and thirty was a novelty to him; as far from the mutinous curls of Colette de Rosen and the immodest painted eyes and bold self-possession of the Férat as it was from the embarrassing and nobly sad majesty of the queen. Neither coquetry, nor impudence, nor proud reserve, nothing of what he had hitherto encountered in good society or in his relations with upper harlotry. This pretty person, calm and home-keeping in manner, her beautiful dark hair smooth as that of a woman who has dressed it for the whole day, simply attired in a woollen gown with violet reflections so that two enormous brilliants at the rosy tips of her ears alone prevented her from being classed among the humblest of employées, this charming creature appeared to him, in her office captivity and toil, like a Carmelite nun behind the cloister grating, or some Eastern slave imploring those without through the gilded trellis of her terraced roof. Of the slave she had indeed the submissive timidity, the bending profile, while the amber tones where the hair began, the two straight lines of the eyebrows, the lips that her breathing parted, gave an Asiatic origin to this Parisian. Standing before her, Christian pictured to himself the bald head, the simian aspect of the husband. How came she in the power of such an object? Was it not robbery, a flagrant injustice?

But the sweet voice continued, slowly, with excuses: "It is too vexatious. . . Tom does not come. . . If your Majesty would tell me what brings you . . . I might perhaps . . ."

He coloured, slightly embarrassed. Never could he have dared to confide to that candid kindness the equivocal establishment he was meditating. Whereupon she urged him, gently smiling: "Oh! Your Majesty may feel quite secure. . . It is I who keep all the books of the Agency."

In fact her authority in the house was readily seen; for at every instant the little window which communicated between her retreat and the counting-room was opened by some clerk coming to ask in low tones for the queerest information: "The Pleyel of Mme. Karitidès is wanted." . . "The person from the Hotel Bristol is here." She seemed to be concerned in it all, answered with a word, spoken or written, and the king, much disturbed, asked himself if that angel in commerce, that aërial being could really know the secret dealings and filibusterings of the Englishman.

"No, madame, the matter that brought me here is not urgent . . . or, at least, it is no longer so. . . My ideas have changed within an hour."

He bent to the wire screen as he stammered the words with emotion, and then stopped, blaming himself for his audacity in presence of the placid activity of that woman, her long lashes sweeping toward the ledger and her pen running swiftly in regular lines. Oh! how he longed to snatch her from that prison, carry her away in his arms far, very far, with the murmuring, cradling tenderness with which we soothe young children. The temptation became so strong that he was forced to escape and take leave suddenly, without having seen J. Tom Levis.

It was now dark; the night was misty and bleak. The king, usually so chilly, did not observe it, but sent away his carriage and went on foot from the Madeleine to the Place Vendôme, so enthusiastic, so transported that he talked to himself aloud, his thin lashes dropped over his eyes before which flames were dancing. We sometimes rub shoulders in the street with these exuberant happinesses, their step light, their heads high; they seem to leave a phosphorescence on your clothes as they pass. Christian reached the club in the same happy humour, in spite of the dulness of the suite of salons at this uncertain, unoccupied twilight hour, always especially melancholy in clubs, those semi-public places which lack the privacy and habits of a home. Lamps were brought in. A game of billiards was going on without interest to the rattle of ivory and low voices, the rustling of newspapers, and the snoring of a sleeper stretched on a divan of the grand salon, whom the king's entrance roused and caused to turn with a toothless yawn and a long stretching of lean arms as he asked in a mournful voice: —

"Do we make fête to-night?"

Christian gave a cry of joy.

"Ah! prince, I was looking for you."

This was Prince d'Axel, more familiarly known as "Queue-de-Poule,"[1] who, during the ten years that he had lounged the streets of Paris *en amateur*, knew that city from top to bottom, in length and breadth, from the portico of Tortoni to the brook, and could therefore furnish the king with all the information he wanted. Consequently, knowing the right way to make his Highness talk and to loosen that torpid, heavy mind which the wines of France (although he abused them) were no more able to set a-going than the fermentation of a vintage could raise into a balloon a hogshead hooped with iron, Christian called quickly for cards. As the heroines of Molière have no wit unless with fan in hand, so d'Axel recovered a little life only when "juggling the pasteboard." The fallen Majesty and the royal disgraced heir, the two celebrities of the club, began before dinner a Chinese *bézique*, the most *gommeux* game of all, because it does not burden the mind, and allows an unskilful player to lose a fortune without the slightest effort.

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[1] Argot with several meanings; "fashionable sharper" might express it here. — Tr.

"So Tom Levis is a married man," said Christian II., with a careless air, as he cut the cards. The other looked at him with his dead eyes edged with red.

"Did n't you know it? . . "

"No. . . Who is the woman?"

"Séphora Leemans . . . celebrity. . . "

The king shuddered at the name Séphora.

"Then she is a Jewess?" he said.

"Probably."

There was a moment's silence. The impression made by Séphora must indeed have been very strong — that oval, clear white face of the half-hidden woman, her brilliant pupils, her hair smoothed so seductively — to triumph over the prejudices of the king, and continue to exist in a Slav and Catholic memory haunted from infancy by the pillagings and other infernal misdeeds of the Bohemian Jews of his own country. Unfortunately, the prince was losing the game, and quite absorbed in it; he began to grumble in his long yellow beard: —

"Ah! I am getting stupid... I am stupid..."

Impossible to get another word out of him.

"Good! here 's Wattelet... Come here, Wattelet..." said the king to a tall young man who now came in, frisky and noisy as a young puppy.

Wattelet, painter of the Grand-Club and of high life, rather handsome at a distance, but bearing on his features the marks and the weariness of too fast a life, was a good representative of the modern artist, who so little resembles the flaunting traditions of 1830. Correctly dressed, hair the same, frequenter of coulisse and salon, there was nothing of the studio *rapin* about him, but a supple and rather loose-jointed carriage under his fashionable coat, and in his mind as in his language a certain elegant misarticulation, a turn of the lip that was careless and chaffing. Coming one day to the club to decorate the dining-room, he made himself so agreeable, so indispensable to all the gentlemen, that he remained there, the organizer of the fêtes and the rather monotonous amusements of the place; infusing into these pleasures the *unexpected* of a picturesque imagination and of a training acquired in all parts of the world. "My dear Wattelet... That good Wattelet."... They could not do without him. He was the intimate friend of all the members of the club, of their wives, of their mistresses; on one side of a card he designed the costume of the Duchesse de V... for a ball at the embassy, on the other side an airy petticoat for the flesh-coloured tights of Mlle. Alzire, the perfumed little ballet-girl of M. le duc. On Thursdays his studio was open to all his noble clients, delighted with the freedom, the fantastic, chattering ease of the establishment, the fluttering of soft colours on the tapestries, the collections, the lacquered furniture, and the artist's own pictures, of a style that resembled himself, elegant, with a touch of the *canaille;* his portraits of women being, for the most part, executed with a full understanding of Parisian trickery — complexions disguised, hair distraught, an art of costly frippery in cascades, puffs, and trains, which made old Spricht declare, with the disdainful condescension of a successful merchant to a dawning artist: "There is no one but that young fellow who knows how to paint the women I dress."

At the king's first words, the artist laughed.

"Why, Monseigneur, that is the little Séphora."

"Do you know her?"

"Through and through."

"Tell me."

And while the game went on between the two royal personages, the painter, brought into an intimacy of which he felt very proud, straddled a chair, posed, coughed, and, assuming the voice of a tout at a booth describing the picture of what is within, he began: —

"Séphora Leemans, born in Paris in the year one thousand eight hundred and forty-five, six, or seven . . . among the second-hand dealers of the Rue Eginhard, in the Marais . . . a dirty little damp alley, between the Passage Charlemagne and the Church of Saint-Paul, regular Jewry. . . Some day, as you come in from Saint-Mandé, your Majesty ought to make your coachman drive through that tangle of streets down there. . . You would see an amazing Paris . . . such houses, such heads, a veritable gabble of Alsatian and Hebrew; shops, lairs of old-clothes-dealers, piled that high with rags before every door, old women sorting them with their hooked noses, or stripping off the covers of the old umbrellas; and the dogs! the vermin! the smells! a regular ghetto of the middle ages, swarming in houses of that very period, iron balconies, tall windows cut into lofts. . . But Père Leemans is not a Jew; he is a Belgian from Ghent, and a Catholic; the little one is called Séphora [Zipporah], but she is only a half-breed Jewess; complexion and eyes of that race, but not its nose like the beak of a bird of prey; on the contrary, the prettiest little straight nose in the world. I don't know where she got it. . . Père Leemans has one of your big, bulbous faces! My first medal at the Salon was for that phiz. . . Heavens! yes, and the old fellow still shows in a corner of his dingy lair in the Rue Eginhard, in what he calls his *brocante* (second-hand trade), his full-length portrait signed Wattelet — and not one of my worst, either. It was a way I took of insinuating myself into the lair and making love to Séphora, for whom I had one of those *béquins* [passing passions]. . ."

"*Béquins?*" said the king, to whom the Parisian vocabulary was constantly causing some new surprise. "Ah! yes . . . I see. . . Go on."

"I was not the only one on fire, that's certain. All day long 't was a procession to the shop in the Rue de la Paix; for I ought to have told you, Monseigneur, that in those days Père Leemans had two establishments. Very shrewd and sly, that old fellow understood the change that has taken place about bric-à-brac in the last twenty years. The romantic antiquity dealer of the dark quarters, in the style of Hoffmann, and even of Balzac, has given way to the seller of curiosities, installed in the centre of Parisian luxury with show windows and lighted shops. Leemans retained for himself and for connoisseurs his musty old place in the Rue Eginhard; but, for the public, the street-idler, the Parisian gaper and lounger, he opened a splendid antiquarian shop in the Rue de la Paix, where the tawny gold and the darkened silver of old jewels and the laces yellowed to the tone of a mummy outdid the sumptuous modern shops of the jewellers and silversmiths overflowing with magnificence beside it. Séphora was about fifteen years old at that time, and that calm and juvenile beauty of hers was well set off by those old treasures. And so intelligent, so clever in exhibiting them! and her eye so sure and as well trained as her father's on the true value of a *bibelot*. Ah! there were plenty of amateurs in that shop, if only for the pleasure of touching her fingers and that silky hair of hers in leaning over the same glass case. The mother was not troublesome, — an old woman, with such black rings round her eyes that she looked as if she wore spectacles, always mending, her nose buried in a guipure or an old bit of tapestry, and paying no attention to her daughter. . . She had good reason for that! Séphora was a serious person, who was not to be diverted from her path."

"Really?" said the king, who seemed to be enchanted.

"Your Majesty can judge. Mother Leemans slept at the shop; the girl always went back to the Rue Eginhard at ten o'clock so that the old man might not be alone. Well, that admirable creature, whose beauty was celebrated and chanted in all the papers and who might by a mere 'yes' of the head have had Cinderella's coach start from the ground before her, went, every evening, to wait for the omnibus at the Madeleine, and thence straight back to the parental owl's-nest. In the morning, as the omnibuses were not running so early, she came on foot in all weathers, her black gown under a waterproof; and I swear to you that in that crowd of girls who came down the Rue de Rivoli-Saint-Antoine at that hour in caps and hats or their own hair, pretty, pale, or smiling faces and rosy little mouths coughing at the fog, and always a gallant at their heels, not one could hold a candle to her."

"What hour do they come down?" growled the royal prince, becoming excited.

But Christian was provoked.

"Let him finish" . . . he cried. "What then?"

" Well, then, Monseigneur, I had succeeded in making my way into the house of my angel and was pushing my point very gently. . . On Sundays we played little family lotos with the other second-hand dealers of the Passage Charlemagne. Sweet society! I always came home with fleas. However, I sat beside Séphora and touched knees with her under the table, while she looked at me in a certain angelic and limpid way that made me believe in innocence and the candour of a real virtue. But one day when I went to the Rue Eginhard, I found everything upside down, the mother in tears, the father furious, rubbing up the rusty old lock of an arquebuse with which he intended to blow to bits the infamous seducer. . . Séphora had gone off with Baron Sala, one of Père Leemans' richest clients, to whom, as I found out later, he had himself sold her for some treasure of old iron-work. For two or three years she hid her joys and her loves with that old septuagenarian in Switzerland, in Scotland, on the shores of blue lakes. But one fine morning I heard that she had come back and was keeping a 'family hotel' at the end of the Avenue d'Antin. I rushed there, and found my old passion as adorable and peaceful as ever, at the head of a very queer *table d'hôte* garnished with Brazilians, Englishmen, *cocottes*. One half the guests were still eating salad while the other half had turned back the cloth to play baccarat. That was where she first knew J. Tom Levis, not handsome, no longer young, and without a penny. What did he do to her? Mystery.

It is certain, however, that she sold her business, and married him, helped him to start his Agency, at first prosperous and well set-up, but now on the down track; so that Séphora, who was never seen, and lived a recluse in that droll castellated cage Tom Levis sunk his money in, has lately, that is, a few months ago, made her reappearance in the world as the most enchanting of bookkeepers. . . *Dame!* how the clients flock! the flower of the clubs give themselves rendezvous in the Rue Royale; they flirt at the wicket of that counting-room just as they used to do in the antiquity shop, or in the numbered chambers of the 'family hotel.' As for me, I 'm out of it. That woman frightened me in the end. Always the same for the last ten years; not a line, not a wrinkle, her long lashes lowered, the points of them turning up as *heart-hooks*, the cheeks beneath the eyes as young and fresh as ever, — and all this for a grotesque husband whom she adores! . . . There is something in it all to trouble and daunt the most ardent lover."

The king threw the cards about angrily.

"Nonsense! How is it possible? . . A villanous monkey, a fat carcass like Tom Levis! . . bald . . . fifteen years older than she . . . a jabbering pickpocket. . ."

"Some women like that, Monseigneur."

The prince-royal here remarked, in his drawling, vulgar accent: —

"Nothing to be done with that woman. . . I 've whistled for the signal time and again. . . It is not hung out. . . The road is blocked."

"*Pardieu!* d'Axel, we all know your way of whistling," said Christian, as soon as he understood an expression which had passed from the slang of a railway engineer to that of the *haute Gomme*. . . "You have no patience. . . You want every place to fly open . . . Divan of the Grand-Signor . . . see, and conquer. . . But as for me, I consider that the man who would give himself the trouble to be in love with Séphora, and would not balk at silence or disdain — why, it is an affair of a month. Not more."

"I bet not," said d'Axel.

"How much?"

"Two thousand louis."

"Done. Wattelet, send for the book."

The book on which the bets of the Grand-Club were inscribed was as curious and instructive in its way as the Levis trap. The grandest names of historic France were there, sanctioning the silliest and most preposterous wagers; that, for instance, of the Duc de Courson-Launay, who, having bet and lost all the hairs on his body, was forced to depilate himself like a Moor, and could neither walk nor sit down for a fortnight. Other inventions still more extravagant were there, with signatures of heroes, already inscribed on a hundred glorious parchments, but now misallying themselves in this album of folly.

Several members of the club came up and grouped themselves around the betters with respectful curiosity. And this cynical and ridiculous wager, excusable perhaps amid the laughter or the drunkenness of exuberant youth, took an air, before the gravity of those bald heads, the social dignities they represented, and the heraldic importance of the signatures affixed, of an international treaty regulating the destinies of Europe.

It was thus formulated: —

"February 3rd, one thousand eight hundred and seventy-five, his Majesty Christian II. has bet two thousand louis that he will sleep with Séphora L. . . before the end of the present month.

"His Royal Highness Prince d'Axel accepts the bet."

"It might be the right occasion to sign themselves Rigolo and Queue-de-Poule," thought Wattelet to himself as he carried off the book, and across his fashionable clown's face there passed the shiver of an evil laugh.

VI.

THE BOHEMIA OF EXILE.

"WELL, well! we know all that! . . 'Aoh! . . Yes . . . Goddam. . . Shocking. . .' It is when you don't choose to pay or answer that you use that sort of change. . . But with Bibi, here, that won't do. . . We'll settle our accounts now, old thief."

"Really, Master Lebeau, you speak to me with such vehemence. . ."

And to say the word vehemence in French (seemingly very proud to reckon it in his vocabulary, for he repeated it two or three times) J. Tom Levis threw himself back, his shirt front prominent, and almost disappeared in the enormous white clergyman's-cravat which bound his neck. At the same time the pupils of his eyes began to veer about and to muddle in those wide-open orbs his undiscoverable thought; while the glance of his adversary, crouching and undulating beneath his lowered lids, replied to the rascally eloquence of the Englishman's look with the visible cunning of the sharp and hairless muzzle of a weasel face. With his fair hair, curled and rolled, his clothes austerely black and buttoned to the chin, and the correctness of his circumspect manner, Maître Lebeau, the king's valet, had something of a solicitor of the old Châtelet about him; but as there is nothing like a quarrel or discussion of selfish interests to bring out the truth of natures, this man, so well-trained, as polished as his fingernails, this dainty Lebeau, the reigning favourite of royal antechambers, former valet at the Tuileries, was now exhibiting the hideous rascal that he really was, sharp after gain and quarry.

To shelter themselves from the spring rain that was sweeping the courtyard at Saint-Mandé, the pair had taken refuge in the vast coach-house with white walls lately plastered and covered to half their height with thick mats to protect from dampness the numerous and magnificent carriages lined up against them, wheel to wheel, from state-coaches all glass and gilding, to the comfortable four-in-hand for hunting breakfasts, the light, useful phaeton, and even the sleigh used by the queen upon the lakes in freezing weather; all of them keeping, as they reposed in the twilight of the coachhouse, their showy or massive look of beasts of luxury, sparkling and costly, like the fantastic horses of Assyrian legends. The close neighbourhood of the stables, the sonorous snorting and kicking against the woodwork, the half-open harness-room, showing its polished floor, its billiard-room panels, with all the whips in rack, the saddles on wooden horses, the harnesses like trophies around the walls, with glitter of steel and garlands of reins, completed the impression of comfort and upper-class existence.

Tom and Lebeau were quarrelling in a corner, their voices rising above the rattle of the rain on the asphalt courtyard. The valet especially, feeling himself at home, shouted loudly: "Who could understand such a filibuster? Would any one have suspected such a trick? When their Majesties left the hôtel des Pyramides for Saint-Mandé who had managed the affair? Was it Lebeau, yes or no? And did, too, in spite of everybody, in spite of the most open opposition. . . What had been agreed upon in return? Were not they to divide, half and half, all commissions, all fees from the trades-people? Was n't that it, precisely?"

"Aoh! . . yes . . . that was it. . ."

"Then why do you cheat?"

"No, no . . . never cheat," said J. Tom Levis, his hand on his shirt-front.

"Nonsense, old humbug. . . All the tradesmen give you forty per cent. . . I have proof of it. . . And you told me it was only ten. . . So that on the million it cost to get Saint-Mandé, I have my five per cent — that is fifty thousand francs — and you your thirty-five; in other words seven times more than I, — three hundred and fifty thousand francs! . . three hundred and fifty thousand francs! ! . three hundred and fifty —"

He choked with rage, the figures sticking across his throat like a fishbone. Tom tried to calm him. In the first place, it was all much exaggerated . . . then the agent had enormous expenses . . . his rent in the Rue Royale, just increased. . . So much to put out, returns so slow. . . Not to mention the fact that this was a chance thing for him, whereas Lebeau was always there, and in a household where more than two hundred thousand francs a year were spent, there was no lack of opportunity.

But the valet declined to see it in this way; his affairs concerned no one, and very certainly he should not let himself be duped by a dirty Englishman.

"Monsieur Lebeau, you are an impertinent fellow . . . and I shall have nothing more to say to you. . ."

And Tom Levis turned as if to reach the door. But the other barred his way. "Escape without paying me? . . No, no. . ." His lips were white. His angry weasel snout stuck out, quivering, towards the Englishman, who was still very calm, with such exasperating coolness that the valet at last, losing all self-control, thrust his fist under his nose with a coarse epithet. By a turn of the hand, quick as the parry of a sword, though it had more of a street boxer than of fencing about it, the Englishman struck down the valet's fist and said, in the purest Faubourg Saint-Antoine accent: —

"None of that, Lisette . . . or I'll down you."

The effect of those four words was stupendous. Lebeau, bewildered, looked mechanically round him at first, to see if it was really the Englishman who spoke; then his eyes, returning to Tom Levis (now very red and his pupils veering every way), flashed into wild gayety, through which his late anger still vibrated, — a gayety which after a moment took possession of the agent himself.

"Oh! you damned humbug! you damned humbug! . . I ought to have suspected it . . . No one could be as English as all that! . ."

They were still laughing, unable to recover breath, when the door of the harness-room suddenly opened wider, and the queen appeared. For the last few moments she had stopped in that room, after visiting her favorite mare, and had not lost a word of the conversation. Coming from so low a region, the treachery touched her but little. She had long known what to expect of Lebeau, that Tartuffe valet, the witness of all her humiliations, all her sorrows; as for the other, the man of the cab, she scarcely knew him, a mere tradesman. But those two men had now revealed to her serious matters. So the removal to Saint-Mandé had cost a million! their expenses, which she thought so modest, so restrained, were two hundred and fifty thousand francs a year, when, as she knew, they had but forty thousand. How could she have been so long blind to their way of living, to the insufficiency of their real resources? . . Who was meeting these expenses? Who had paid for this luxury, house, horses, carriages, even her own clothes and her personal charities? . . Shame burned her cheeks at the thought as she went straight through the courtyard in the rain and up the steps of the little portico of the Administration building.

Rosen, busy at the moment in classifying bills on which lay piles of louis, had a shock of surprise on seeing her, which put him on his feet.

"No! . . Stay where you are! . ." she exclaimed, in a brusque voice; then leaning over the duke's desk and stretching out her hand, still gauntleted for the horse, she said, resolutely, urgently, authoritatively: —

"Rosen, on what have we lived for the last two years? . . Oh! no evasions. . . I know that all I thought hired was bought in our name and paid for. . . I know that Saint-Mandé alone cost us more than a million, the million we brought from Illyria. . . You will tell me now who it is that has assisted us since then, and from what hands we receive charity?"

The convulsed face of the old man, the piteous trembling of his shrunken, withered hands told Frederica the truth.

"You! . . It is you! . ."

She had never dreamed of it. And while he excused himself, stammering the words "duty . . . gratitude . . . restitution. . ."

"Duke," she said, violently, "the king does not take back what he gives, and the queen is not kept like a danseuse."

Tears gushed into her eyes like sparks, tears of pride that did not fall.

"Oh! pardon . . . pardon. . ."

He was so humble, he kissed the tips of her fingers with an expression of such sad regret that she continued more gently: —

"You will draw up a statement of all your advances, my dear Rosen. A receipt will be given you, and the king will pay the debt as soon as possible. . . As for our future expenses I shall take charge of them myself henceforth; I will see that they do not exceed our revenue. We shall sell horses and carriages and diminish the household. Princes in exile should content themselves with little."

The old duke gave a start.

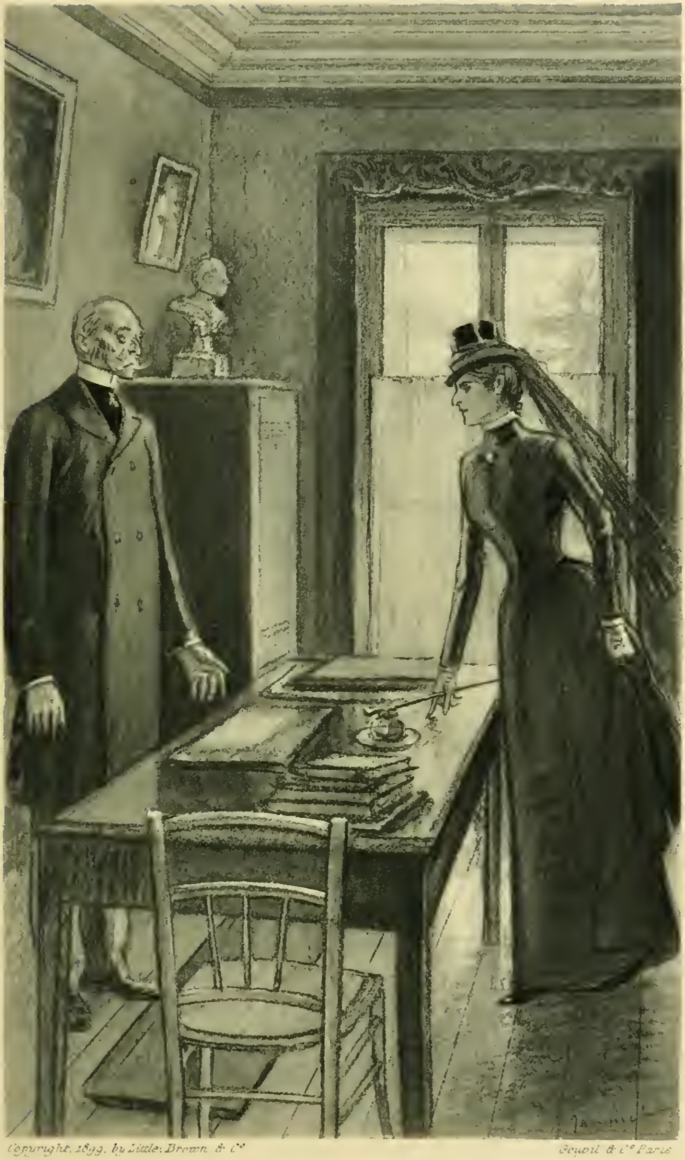
"Undeceive yourself, madame... It is in exile above all that royalty needs all its prestige. Ah! if I had only been listened to . . . it is not here, in this suburb, with an establishment suitable at most for a bathing-season, that your Majesties should have lived. I wanted you in a palace, in full sight of Parisian society, convinced as I am that what dethroned kings have most to fear is the *laisser aller* that comes over them when they drop their rank, the familiarities, the street acquaintance... Oh! I know . . . I know... they often think me very ridiculous with my questions of etiquette, my childish and superannuated punctilio. And yet such forms were never more important; they help to maintain a pride of demeanour, too easily lost in misfortune. It is the unyielding armour that keeps the soldier on his feet, even though he may be mortally wounded."

She stood a moment without replying, her pure brow crossed by a reflection that came to her. Then, raising her head, —

"It is impossible," she said. "There is a higher pride than that. I will that from this day things shall be arranged as I have said."

Then he, growing more urgent, almost supplicating: —

"The king will not play again, M. le Duc."



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Goupil & Cie Paris

"But your Majesty does not realize... A sale of horses and carriages ... a sort of royal failure... What an exposure! What scandal!"

"That which is going on is more scandalous still."

"But who knows it!.. Who suspects it?.. How can any one suppose that that old miser Rosen... You yourself doubted it just now... Oh! madame, madame, I conjure you, accept what you are pleased to call my devotion... Indeed you are attempting the impossible... If you knew... Why, your whole yearly revenue would not suffice for the king's purse at cards."

"The king will not play again, M. le Duc."

This was said in a tone! with such eyes!.. Rosen insisted no longer, but he allowed himself to add: —

"I will do what your Majesty desires. But I entreat you to remember that all I possess is yours, and that, in case of distress, I deserve that you should first come to me."

He was very certain that the occasion would occur before long.

The next day the reforms began. Half the household were dismissed; the unnecessary carriages were sent to Tattersall's, where they were sold under fairly good conditions, except the state-coaches, too striking to the eye for private individuals. These were got rid of, however, thanks to an American circus which came to Paris at that time with a great display of posters; and the splendid coaches, which Rosen had caused to be built to preserve to his princes a little of their vanished pomp in a distant hope of their return to Leybach, now served to exhibit Chinese dwarfs and learned monkeys and to form grand historical cavalcades and apotheoses *à la* Franconi. Toward the end of such performances these princely equipages, with their blazons scarcely effaced, made the tour of the benches three times on the dirty sand of the arena, to the gay strains of the orchestra; while through their opened windows grotesque faces grinned, or, with degraded head close-curled, a famous female gymnast, her bust projecting in its pink silk tights, bowed to the crowd a forehead shining greasily with pomatum and sweat. All these lost remains of consecrated kings reduced to be the glitter of a circus! housed among the horses and trick elephants! what an omen for royalty!

This sale at Tattersall's was announced at the same time as that of the diamonds of the Queen of Galicia at the Hôtel Drouot, and the two posters covering the walls together made a certain noise; but Paris never stops long on any subject; its ideas fly with the flying sheets of the newspapers. People talked of the two sales for twenty-four hours. The next day they thought no more about them. Christian II. accepted without resistance the reforms set on foot by the queen. Ever since his melancholy exhibition of himself he had an almost ashamed, humiliated attitude before her, a wilful childishness, as if to excuse his follies in that way. Besides, what did these reforms in the household matter to him? His life, all pleasure and dissipation, was spent elsewhere. But, surprising fact, in six months he had never once had recourse to Rosen's purse. That raised him a little in the eyes of the queen, who was also gratified by no longer seeing the fantastic cab of the Englishman in a corner of the courtyard, or meeting on the stairway the obsequious smile of that courtier creditor.

Nevertheless, the king was spending much and "making fête" more gayly than ever. Where did he get the money? Élysée Méraut discovered where in a singular manner, through Uncle Sauvadon, the worthy man to whom he had formerly given "ideas of things," the only one of his early connections whom he had kept since his entrance to Saint-Mandé. From time to time he went to breakfast with him at Bercy, and took him news of Colette, whom the old man complained of never seeing. She was the child of his adoption, his little Colette, the daughter of a poor brother tenderly loved and supported till he died. His mind was always on her; he paid for her nurses and her christening cap, and later for her schooling in the most emblazoned convent in Paris. She was his vice, his living vanity, the pretty puppet whom he decked with all the grovelling ambitions in his vulgar head of a millionnaire parvenu; and when in the parlour of the Sacré-Cœur the little Sauvadon would tell him in a whisper: "That girl's mother is a baroness, or a marquise, or a duchess," the uncle would shake his stout shoulders and answer: "We 'll do better for you than that." He made her a princess at eighteen. Highnesses in quest of *dots* were not lacking in Paris; the Levis Agency kept quite an assortment; the only question was price. Sauvadon considered two millions not too dear for being able to figure in a corner of the salon when the young Princesse de Rosen received her guests, and to have the privilege of beaming in the embrasure of a window with his broad smile curled like the edge of a basin between short, tufted whiskers, trimmed in the fashion of Louis-Philippe. His little gray eyes, lively and sly — the eyes of Colette — rather lessened the effect of the stammering, ingenuous, incorrect remarks that came from those thick, shapeless lips, cut as if from a horse's hoof, and the revelations of his coarse square hands, which recalled the fact, even in their straw-coloured gloves, that they had formerly rolled casks on the quay.

In the beginning he distrusted himself, said little, surprised and even frightened others by his silence. *Dame!* it is not in the cellars of Bercy, nor in trading Southern wines adulterated with aniline dyes and logwood, that you learn to speak fine language. After a while, thanks to Méraut, he obtained a few ready-made opinions and bold aphorisms on the events of the day or the book in vogue. Then Uncle Sauvadon spoke, and did not do it badly, except for certain fearful pronunciations fit to bring down the lustres, and the alarm this water-carrier in a white waistcoat excited by the emission of certain theories *à la* Joseph de Maistre picturesquely expressed. But suddenly the sovereigns of Illyria carried off his provider of ideas, and how could he then parade? Colette, moreover, detained by her duties as lady of honour, never left Saint-Mandé, and Sauvadon knew the chief of the civil and military household far too well to expect to be received there. He never even spoke of it. Imagine the duke introducing *that*, presenting *that* to the lofty Frederica! . . a wine-merchant! Not even a retired merchant; on the contrary, a dealer in full activity; for, in spite of his millions, in spite of his niece's entreaties, Sauvadon still worked, spent his life in his storehouses or on the quays, a pen behind his ear, his white hair touzled, among stevedores and sailors, unlading and carting away the hogsheads; or else beneath the gigantic trees of an old park, neglected and cut up, in which his wealth was stored under sheds, in casks innumerable. "I should die if I stopped working," he said, and he really lived on the din of barrel-rolling and the good smell of wine-lees that came up from the damp cellars of the great storehouses where he had started in life, forty-five years earlier, as a journeyman cooper.

It was there that Élysée sometimes went to see his old pupil and enjoy a breakfast such as Bercy alone knows how to serve, under the trees of the park or the gateway of a cellar, with fresh wine drawn from the cask, and fish that were frisking a moment earlier in the fish-pond, cooked by a local receipt for *matelotes* as in Languedoc or the Vosges. It was now no longer a question of "ideas of things," inasmuch as there were no evenings to be spent at Colette's; but the good man liked to hear Méraut talk, and to see him eat and drink liberally, for he always remembered the den in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, and treated Élysée as one saved from the shipwreck of existence. Affecting care of a man who has gone hungry himself for another whom he knows to be poor! Méraut gave him news of his niece and of her life at Saint-Mandé, bringing him a reflection of her grandeurs which had cost the old man so dear and of which he was no longer a witness. No doubt he was proud to think of the lady of honour, dining with kings and queens, revolving in court ceremonial. Still, the grief of never seeing her increased his rancour and ill-humour against old Rosen.

"Why should *he* be so stuck up? His name? his title? . . Why, I paid for them, with my own money. . . His crosses, his cordons, his orders! . . ha! I can have them when I choose. . . By the bye, Méraut, you don't know. . . Since I saw you last, I have had a piece of luck."

"What kind, uncle?"

Élysée called him "uncle" with an affectionate familiarity that was quite Southern, — the desire to give a name to the peculiar sympathy (without any bond of mind) which he felt for the stout old merchant.

"My dear fellow, I have the Lion of Illyria . . .

the cross of commander. . . That duke need n't be so proud of his grand cordon! . . On New Year's day, when I go and pay him a visit, I shall stick on my star . . . that will teach him to — "

Élysée could not believe it. The Order of the Lion! one of the oldest and most coveted in Europe . . . given to uncle Sauvadon! "my uncle! . ." Why? . . for having sold adulterated wine of Bercy?

"Oh! it is very simple," said the other, wrinkling up his little gray eyes. "I bought the rank of commander just as I bought the title of prince. For a little more I could have bought the grand cordon itself; that's for sale, too."

"Where?" cried Méraut, turning pale.

"Why, at the Levis Agency, Rue Royale. . . You can get anything at that devil of an Englishman's. . . My cross cost me ten thousand francs . . . the cordon was fifteen thousand. . . And I know the man who has given it to himself. Guess who. . . Biscarat, the great hair-dresser, Biscarat, Boulevard des Capucines. . . But, my good fellow, what I am telling you is known to all Paris. . . Go and ask Biscarat himself; you 'll see in the big room where he officiates with his thirty assistants an immense photograph representing him as Figaro, razor in hand, and the collar of the Order across his breast. . . The picture is reproduced in miniature on the labels of all the bottles in the shop. . . If the duke were to see that! . . his moustache would turn up into his nose. . . You know, how he does. . ."

And he tried to mimic the duke's grimace, but as he had no moustache it was not at all the true thing.

"Have you your patent, uncle? Will you show it to me?"

Élysée still had the hope that there was some trickery under it all, some forgery on which the Levis Agency would trade without scruple. No. All was apparently regular, — drawn in due form, stamped with the arms of Illyria, signed by Boscovich and the scrawl of King Christian II. Doubt was no longer possible. A traffic in crosses and cordons was going on, with the king's permission. But to convince himself finally, Méraut, as soon as he returned to Saint-Mandé, went up to the councillor.

In the corner of an immense hall, which covered the whole upper floor of the house and served as a business office for Christian, — in which he did no business, — a fencing-room, a gymnasium, and a library, he found Boscovich among his pigeon-holes and layers of thick brown paper on which were leaves affixed, or the last plants gathered laid to dry. Since his exile the learned naturalist had made in the Parisian woods of Vincennes and Boulogne, which contain the richest flora of France, the beginning of a new collection. Moreover, he had purchased the herbarium of another famous naturalist, lately deceased, and now, absorbed in the examination of his new treasures, his head bloodless, of no age, bending over the lens of a magnifying glass, he was lifting cautiously the heavy sheets between which the plants lay flattened from corollas to extended roots, their colours lost at the edges. When a specimen was well-preserved, intact, he uttered cries of joy and admiration, considered it long, with moistened lips, reading aloud its Latin name and its description, written below on a little label. At other times an exclamation of anger escaped him on seeing the flower attacked and perforated by that almost imperceptible worm well known to herbalists, an atom born of the dust of plants and subsisting on it, which is the danger and often the destruction of collections. The stalk still holds, but move the page and the whole, flowers, roots, drop into powder and disappear in a thin vapour.

"'T is the worm . . . the worm. . ." Boscovich would say, the glass at his eye, and showing with a sad, but self-satisfied air a perforation like that the wood-mite makes, indicating the passage of the monster. Méraut could have no suspicion of such a being. The monomaniac was incapable of an infamous action, but he was also incapable of the slightest resistance. At the first word concerning the decorations he began to tremble, looked sideways over his lens, timid and fearful. . . What was all this? Yes, certainly, the king had lately made him prepare a quantity of patents of all grades, leaving the name in blank; that was all he knew about it, and never did he presume to ask more.

"Well, Monsieur le conseiller," said Élysée, gravely, "I warn you now that his Majesty is trading his crosses at the Levis Agency."

Thereupon he related the story of the Gascon barber, with which all Paris had amused itself. Boscovich gave one of his little feminine screeches, but at heart he was very little scandalized; all that was not his mania had no real interest for him. His collection left behind at Leybach was to him the country; that which he was now preparing, the exile in France.

"But don't you see it is unworthy . . . a man like you . . . to lend a hand to such hideous jobbing?"

Then the other, in despair at his eyes being forcibly opened on that he desired not to see:

"*Ma che . . . ma che* . . . what can I do, my good Monsieur Méraut? . . The king is the king. . . When he says, 'Boscovich, write that,' my hand obeys without thinking. . . Especially as his Majesty is so good to me, so generous. Why, it was he who, seeing me in such despair over the loss of my herbarium, made me a present of this one. . . Fifteen hundred francs! a magnificent bargain . . . and over and above it I got the 'Hortus Cliffortianus' of Linnæus, earliest edition, thrown in."

Naïvely, cynically, the poor devil bared his conscience; it was dry and dead, like his own herbarium. His hobby, cruel as the imperceptible worm of naturalists, had perforated all, gnawing in all directions. He was not really moved till Élysée threatened to warn the queen. Then, at last, the monomaniac dropped his lens, and in a low voice, with the heavy sighs of a penitent at confession, he made an avowal. Many things were happening under his eyes, which he could not help, though they made him wretched. . . The king was badly surrounded. . . *E poi che volete?* he had no vocation for reigning . . . no liking for the throne . . . he never had it. . . "Why, I remember . . . it is a long time ago . . . in King Leopold's lifetime, when he had his first attack on leaving the dinner-table, and they came and told Christian he would soon succeed his uncle, the child — he was only twelve then, and was playing croquet in the *patio* — the child began to cry, and cry . . . a regular nervous attack . . . and he sobbed out: 'I don't want to be king. . . I won't be king. . . Put my cousin Stanislas in my place.' I often remember, when I see it now in Christian II.'s eyes, the scared and frightened look he had that morning, clutching his mallet with all his might as if he feared they would carry him by force to the throne-room, and crying out: 'I don't want to be king! . .' "

Christian's whole character was revealed in that anecdote. No, undoubtedly, he was not a wicked man, but a childish man, married too young, with exuberant passions and hereditary vices. The life he led, the nights at the club, the women, the suppers — in a certain society, that is the normal condition of husbands — all this was made worse by the rôle of king which he did not know how to maintain, by its responsibilities above his measure and his strength, and especially by this exile which slowly demoralized him. A firmer nature than his could have resisted the tumult of broken habits, constant uncertainty, senseless hopes, the anguish and enervation of inactive waiting. Like the ocean, exile has its torpor; it dulls, it benumbs. 'T is a phase of transition. No one escapes the ennui of a long voyage unless by periods of fixed occupation or regular hours for study. But what can a king find to do when he has no people, no ministers, no council; nothing to decide or sign, and is possessed of too much intelligence or sarcasm to amuse himself with a pretence at such things, but also of too much ignorance to attempt a diversion to some other assiduous labour? Exile is the sea, but it is also shipwreck; casting its first cabin passengers, its privileged classes pell-mell with the passengers of the steerage and the deck. A man must have a sense of proud prestige, the temperament of a king, not to let himself be caught by familiarities, by degrading promiscuities for which he will later have to blush and suffer, and to keep himself regal in the midst of privations, distresses, and impurities which mingle and confound ranks in one general humanity.

Alas! this Bohemia of exile was beginning to swallow up the house of Illyria, which the Duc de Rosen had so long preserved at the cost of such great personal sacrifices. The king was put to expedients in order to pay the costs of "making fête." He began, like a son of the family, by giving notes, finding that means quite as simple and even more convenient, J. Tom Levis assisting, than drafts "on our privy purse," which he had hitherto addressed to the civil and military chief of the household. These notes reached maturity and were renewed by a crowd of others, until the day when Tom Levis, finding himself sucked dry, invented the capital traffic in patents, — the trade of king without people or civil list presenting no other source of profit. The poor Lion of Illyria, chopped up like butcher's meat in quarters and slices, was sold at the stalls for so much the mane and the rump, the ribs and the paws.

But that was only the beginning. Once in Tom Levis's cab, the king would not stop on so fine a road. Méraut said this to himself as he left Boscovich. He saw that no reliance could be placed on that man, easily led, like all others with a hobby. . . He himself was too new, too entirely a stranger in the house to have any influence upon Christian. Should he speak to old Rosen? At the first words he uttered the duke would throw him a terrible glance, all his religions being insulted. The king, low as he had fallen, was still "the king" to that man. No resource in the monk either, whose wild face now appeared only at long intervals between two journeys, and always more lean and sunburned.

The queen? . . but he saw her so sad, so fevered of late, her beautiful, discreet brow clouded by care when she came to her boy's lessons, to which she now listened with an absent mind, her fingers suspended idly over her tapestry. Grave concerns were troubling her, strange and new to her, and coming from below; anxieties about money, the humiliation of so many hands stretched to receive it which she could not fill — tradesmen, the poor, the companions of their exile and their misfortunes; all that sad business of a sovereign who has duties and burdens though he has no rights. Creditors who had learned their way to the once prosperous house now waited for hours in the antechambers, and often, weary of waiting, left words behind them when they went away which the queen guessed without hearing, from the discontented manner and lagging step of men who had been thrice dismissed. She strove in vain to bring order into the new scale of living; misfortunes happened; bad investments; paralyzed stocks. It was necessary to wait, or all would be sacrificed in selling.

Poor queen, poor Frederica, who thought she knew all there was to know in the matter of suffering; she did not know the distresses that wilt the spirit, the hard and wounding contact with daily and commonplace existence. There were monthly bills of which she thought at night, shuddering in her bed, like the head of a business house. Sometimes when the wages were not paid, she dreaded to see in the delay of an order, in a look less humble, the discontent of a servant. In short, she knew Debt, little by little the galling debt which forces with its dunning perseverance the loftiest and most gilded doors. The old duke, grave and silent, watched his queen's anguish and wandered round her, as if to be always saying to her, "I am here." But she was firmly resolved to exhaust all possible means before she took back her word and turned to him whom she had crushed with so haughty a lesson.

One evening the little Court was collected in the grand salon, a monotonous assemblage, always the same, and without the king as usual. Beneath the silver candelabra the queen's game, as it was called, was going on at the whist table, the duke facing her Majesty, with Mme. Éléonore and Boscovich against them. The princess was playing softly on the piano some of those "echoes of Illyria" to which Frederica never tired of listening, and at her first sign of satisfaction the player would deepen them into pæans of war and valour. Those evocations of their country, bringing to the faces of the whist-players a tearful smile, alone broke the atmosphere of resigned exile and its settled habits in the rich bourgeois salon which now sheltered majesty.

Ten o'clock struck.

The queen, instead of going up as usual to her apartments, giving by her departure the signal to retreat, cast an absent look around her and said:

"You may retire. I have work to do with M. Méraut."

Élysée, who was reading near the fireplace, bowed as he closed the pamphlet he had in his hand and went into the schoolroom to fetch pens, ink, and paper.

When he returned the queen was alone, listening to the carriages as they rolled from the courtyard, the great gates closing behind them, while along the corridors and stairways the various goings and comings of a numerous household at the hour for retirement sounded through the house.

Silence came at last; silence increased by two leagues of forest which deadened among its foliage the distant murmurs sent from Paris. The deserted salon, still brilliantly lighted in its solitude seemed all prepared for some tragic scene. Frederica, resting her elbow on the table, pushed back the blotter prepared by Méraut.

"No . . . no. . . We shall not work to-night," she said. "That was a pretext. . . Sit down and let us talk. . . "

Then, in a lower voice: —

"I have something to ask of you."

But what she had to say must have cost her much, for she collected herself a moment, her mouth and eyes half-closed with that profoundly sorrowful and aged expression already seen by Élysée at moments, which made her noble countenance seem still more noble, marked with all devotions, all sacrifices; hollowed in its pure lines by the purest sentiments of queen and woman. Seen thus, it was religious respect that she inspired. . . At last, summoning all her courage, but speaking very low, timidly, and putting her words one after another like frightened steps, she asked him whether he knew in Paris one of those . . . places where . . . they lent on pawn. . .

Ask that of Élysée! a bohemian who knew every pawnshop in Paris, who for twenty years had used them as storerooms, where in winter he put his summer clothes, and in summer his winter ones! He! if he knew the *clou!* if he knew *ma tante!* Remembering his youth, that *argot* of poverty coming back to his mind made him smile. But the queen, endeavouring to steady her voice, continued: —

"I should like to confide to you something to carry there . . . jewels. . . One has moments of . . . difficulty, sometimes . . ."

And her beautiful eyes, now raised, revealed an abyss of calm, superhuman grief . . . that anguish of kings, humiliated grandeur!

"Could it be done?"

Méraut made a sign with his head that he was ready to do what was asked of him. Had he spoken, he would have sobbed outright; had he made a movement, it would have been to fling himself at the feet of that august distress. And yet his admiration began to be affected by pity. The queen did seem to him a trifle less exalted, a little less above the vulgarities of life; as if, in the sad acknowledgment she had now made to him, he had heard a faint accent of bohemia, a something that was surely the beginning of the fall, something that brought her nearer to himself.

Suddenly she rose and went to the globe of crystal, from which she took the ancient discarded relic and placed it on the table, like a handful of jewels of all colours and rays.

Élysée quivered. "The crown!"

"Yes, the crown. . . For six hundred years it has belonged to the house of Illyria. . . Kings have died, floods of noble blood have flowed to defend it. . . And now it must help us to exist. Nothing else remains to us. . ."

It was indeed a magnificent closed diadem of the finest old gold, the arches of which, each highly ornamented, met above the cap of maintenance made of scarlet velvet. On these arches and around the circlet of twisted filagree, at the heart of each floret made in the shape of a clover-leaf, at the point of the arcade supporting each floret, was every known variety of precious stone — the transparent blue of sapphires, the velvet blue of the turquoise, the aurora of the topaz, the flame of oriental rubies, emeralds like drops of water upon leaves, with the cabalistic opal and the milky-irised pearl; but surpassing all, the diamonds—strewn everywhere— reflected in their facets these myriad hues, and, like a luminous dispersed dust, a mist scattered by the sun, melted and softened the dazzle of the diadem, already mellowed by long ages to the gentle rays of a golden lamp in the depths of a sanctuary.

The queen laid her trembling finger here and there.

"These stones must be pried out . . . the largest . . ."

"With what?"

They spoke in whispers like two criminals. Seeing nothing in the salon that would do that work, Frederica said: "Light me."

They passed into the glazed veranda, where the tall lamp carried by Élysée threw fantastic shadows and a long stream of light, which was lost outside upon the lawn in the darkness of the garden.

"No . . . no . . . not scissors," she murmured, seeing that he looked into her work-basket; "they are not strong enough . . . I have tried."

They discovered at last, on the box of a pomegranate tree, the delicate branches of which were seeking the moonlight at the window panes, the gardener's shears. Returning to the salon Élysée tried to extract with the point of the instrument an enormous sapphire which the queen pointed out to him; but the stone, solidly set, resisted and slipped under the iron, immovable in its place. Moreover, the hand of the operator, fearing to injure the sapphire or break the setting which bore traces of previous attempts, was neither strong nor sure. The royalist suffered; he was shocked by the outrage he was made to commit upon the crown. He felt it shudder, resist, writhe.

"I cannot . . . I cannot . . ." he said, wiping the perspiration from his wet forehead.

The queen answered: —

"It must be done."

"But it will be seen."

A proud smile of irony crossed her face.

"Seen! . . Does any one so much as look at it? . . Who thinks of it, who cares for it here, but me? . ."

And while he returned to the task, his pallid face bent over it, his hair in his eyes, holding between his knees the royal diadem which the tool was mangling, Frederica, holding high the lamp watched the operation, cold as the stones which glittered, with scraps of gold attached, upon the table-cloth, intact and splendid in spite of their violation.

The next day, Élysee, who had been absent all the morning, returned after the last bell had rung for breakfast, and seated himself at the table, troubled, agitated, and scarcely mingling in the conversation — he who was usually the instigator and life of it. His agitation conveyed itself to the queen, though it did not in any way change her smile or the serenity of her contralto tones. The meal over, to was some time before they could approach each other so as to speak freely, watched as they were by etiquette and the rules of court-life under the jealous eye of Mme. de Silvis and the attendance of the lady of honour.

At last the hour of lessons came, and while the little prince was placing himself and arranging his books, the queen asked hurriedly: —

"What is the matter? What next will happen to me?"

"Ah! madame . . . all those stones are false. . ."

"False!"

"Very carefully imitated in paste. . . How could it have been done? . . when? . . by whom? There must be some criminal in the house! . ."

She paled frightfully at the word "criminal." Suddenly, with clenched teeth and a flash of anger and despair in her eyes, she said: —

"It is true. There is a criminal in this house . . . and you and I well know it."

Then, with a nervous gesture, violently grasping

Méraut's wrist as if for a compact known to themselves only, —

" But we will never denounce him, will we ? "

" Never ! . . " he said, turning away his eyes; for, with a word, they had understood each other.

VII.

POPULAR JOYS.

It was the afternoon of a Sunday early in May, a splendid, luminous day, in advance of the season, and so warm that the landau in which the queen, the little prince, and his tutor were taking their drive in the forest of Saint-Mandé, was open. This first caress of spring, coming to her through the fresh green branches, warmed the queen's heart as it brightened her face beneath the silk of her sunshade. She felt herself happy, without any cause, and forgetting for some hours amid that universal clemency and sweetness the hardness of her life, nestling in a corner of the heavy carriage, her child beside her, she abandoned herself in security and privacy to a familiar talk with Élysée Méraut, who sat facing her.

"It is singular," she said to him, "how it seems to me that we had seen each other before we met. Your voice, your face at once awoke in my mind an impression of recollection. Where could we have met for the first time?"

Little Zara remembered very well where it was. It was over there, in the convent, in that church under ground, where M. Élysée had so frightened him. And in the timid, gentle look the boy turned on his master there still remained something of his superstitious fear. . . But no! before that Christmas Eve the queen was sure that they had met each other.

"Unless it was in some former life," she added, almost seriously.

Élysée laughed.

"Your Majesty is not mistaken. You saw me, not in another life, but in Paris, the day of your arrival. I was opposite to the hôtel des Pyramides, on the stone base of the Tuileries railing."

"And you cried out: *Vive le roi!* . . Now I remember. . . So that was you? Oh! how glad I am. . . It was you who gave us our first welcome . . . If you knew what good your cry did me! . ."

"And to myself too," said Méraut. "It was so long since I had had a chance to utter it, that triumphant cry of *Vive le roi!* . . So long that it sang to me on my lips! . . It was our family cry; associated with all my joys of childhood and of youth, — the cry in which at home we summed up all beliefs and all emotions. That cry brings back to me the Southern accent, the gesture, the very voice of my father; it forces to my eyes the moisture I have seen in his so often. . . Poor man! in him it was instinctive; a profession of faith. . . One day, crossing Paris on his return from a visit to Frohsdorf, he entered the Carrousel as Louis Philippe was about to go out. People were loitering about, glued to the iron railings, indifferent, even hostile, — the populace of the close of his reign. My father, hearing that the king would pass, pushed and jostled his way through the crowd to the front rank, that he might eye, and insult with his contempt that brigand, that beggar of a Louis Philippe who had stolen the place of legitimacy. . . Suddenly the king appeared, crossed the empty courtyard amid a death-like silence, an oppressive silence, crushing the very palace, in which one seemed to hear distinctly the cocking of rebel muskets and the cracking of the planks of the throne. . . Louis Philippe was old, very bourgeois, and he walked toward the gateway umbrella in hand, with short little shambling steps. Nothing of the sovereign, nothing of the master. But my father did not see him as he was; and at the thought that in the great palace of the kings of France, paved with glorious memories, the representative of monarchy should pass through that frightful silence and solitude forced on kings by the hatred of their people, something arose and revolted within him; he forgot his rancour and, baring his head instinctively, he cried, or rather he sobbed out a *Vive le roi!* so ringing, so profoundly felt, that the old man quivered and thanked him with a long look full of emotion."

"That is how I, too, should have thanked you," said Frederica, and her eyes fixed themselves on Méraut with such tender gratitude that the poor fellow felt himself turn pale. But she added immediately, full of the tale to which she had just listened:—

"And yet your father was not a man of the nobility?"

"Oh! no, madame . . . all that is most humble, most common . . . a journeyman weaver."

"That is singular," she said reflectively.

And he answering her, an endless subject of discussion between them began again. The queen did not like, and did not understand the people; she had, in fact, a sort of physical horror of them. She thought them brutal; alarming in their joys as they were in their vengeance. Even during the fêtes of the coronation, that honey-moon of her reign, she feared them, feared those myriads of hands stretched out to acclaim her, in which, nevertheless, she felt herself a prisoner. Never had the two understood each other; favours, gifts, charities had fallen from her to her people like one of those blighted harvests when the wheat will not ripen, although no positive blame can be laid to the seed or the soil.

Among the fairy-tales with which Mme. de Silvis etherealized the mind of the little prince, was the story of a Syrian young lady married to a lion, who felt a horrible dread of her savage husband, his roars, and his violent fashion of shaking his mane. Nevertheless, he was full of attentions and loving delicacy, that poor lion. He brought to his child-wife the rarest game, and honey-comb, he watched while she slept, and made the sea and the forests and the animals keep silence. In spite of all that she kept her repugnance, her insulting dread, until one day the lion got angry and roared to her a terrible "Begone!" his jaws open, his mane erect, as if he were more inclined to devour her than to let her go. This was somewhat the story of Frederica and her people; and ever since Élysée had lived beside her he had endeavoured, but in vain, to make her admit the hidden goodness, the chivalric devotion, the savage susceptibilities of that great lion that roared so many times in play before he roared in anger. Ah! if kings only would. . . If they showed themselves less distrustful. . . And then, as Frederica shook her sunshade with an incredulous air he added:

"Yes, I know it well . . . the people frighten you. . . You do not love them, or rather you do not know them. But if your Majesty would look about you . . . in these alleys, under these trees. . . And yet this is the most dangerous suburb in Paris which is walking about and amusing itself here, the suburb from which revolutions issue and barricade themselves in the torn-up streets. See what a simple, kind, and natural, and naïve expression these people have! how they enjoy the comfort of a day of rest, and the sunny weather. . ."

From the wide avenue through which the landau was slowly passing they could see beneath the trees and shrubbery, on the ground all violet with the first wild hyacinths, breakfasts laid out, white plates spotting the grass, baskets with gaping covers, and the thick glasses of the wine-merchants sunk among the greenery of early buds like peonies; shawls and blouses were hanging to the branches, women were in their home gowns, men in their shirt-sleeves; some reading, some taking their siesta, the more industrious were sewing, their backs to the trunks of the trees, and through the joyous glades fluttered the ends of humble stuffs, some in a game of shuttle-cock, or blind-man's buff, others in an improvised quadrille to the sounds of an invisible orchestra which came in gusts. And the children! quantities of children! making common cause with sugar-plums and games; running together from one family to another, jumping, shouting, filling the whole wood with one vast warble of swallows; their endless coming and going having the same bird-like rapidity, caprice, and shadowy fluttering in the light among the branches. This wood of Vincennes — contrasting with that of Boulogne, — which is always neat, brushed-up and protected by rustic fences — seemed expressly prepared for the pastime of the people making holiday, with its paths all free, its turf, though trodden, green, and its trees, bending but resistant, as if nature were here more perennial, more clement.

Suddenly, at a turn of the avenue, a burst of air and of light from the lake which parted the wood with its grassy banks, drew a cry of enthusiasm from the little prince. The scene was indeed superb; like that of the ocean suddenly appearing through the stony labyrinth of a Breton village and bringing its tide to the very foot of its farthest street. Boats with banners, filled with rowers making lively spots of blue or red, ploughed the lake in all directions with the silvery furrows of their oars, the white foam flashing into shoals of little waves. Flocks of ducks swam quacking; swans, with nobler mien, followed the long circuit of the shore, their light plumes ruffled by the breeze; while, in the distance, masked by the green curtain of an isle, an orchestra sent through the whole wood a joyous harmony, to which the surface of the lake served as a sounding-board.

And with it all, a gay disorder, the sparkle of breeze and wave, the flapping of banners, the calls of boatmen, the circling banks with seated groups and scampering children, and two little noisy cafés built almost into the water, their wooden floors sonorous as a deck, and their open walls presenting the idea of a bath-house or a ferry-boat. . . Carriages were few around the lake. Every now and then came a hackney-coach loaded, the day after a wedding, with a faubourg bridal party, easily recognized by the new cloth of the frock-coats and the showy arabesques of the shawls; or else the char-à-bancs of business houses bearing their signs in gilded letters, and filled with stout women in flowery bonnets, who gazed with an air of pity at the humbler pedestrians tramping the sand. But what was chiefly noticeable were the little baby-carriages, that first luxury of the workman with a home; those walking cradles, where little heads in ruffled caps wabbled so blessedly, preparing to sleep, their eyes uplifted to the tracery of branches on the sky.

Amid this promenading of the people, the equipage with the arms of Illyria, its horses and its liveries, did not pass without exciting a certain wonder, Frederica having never driven there before except on a week-day. People nudged one another. Families of workmen in bands, silent in the embarrassment of Sunday-clothes, drew aside at the sound of wheels, and then, turning round, did not check their enthusiasm at the noble beauty of the queen beside the aristocratic childhood of Zara; and sometimes a bold little face peeped out from the bushes to say: "Bonjour, madame. . ." Was it Élysée's words, or the splendid weather, and the gayety of the whole scene stretching to the horizon now left rural by the silent manufactories, or was it the cordiality of these little encounters? Frederica was conscious of a sort of sympathy with this Sunday of workmen, nearly all of them made spruce with a touching cleanliness, considering the nature of their hard toil and the shortness of their leisure. As for Zara, he would not be quiet, quivering and stamping in the carriage; he wanted to get out, to roll with the others on the lawns, and to row in the boats.

Meantime the landau had reached less noisy avenues, where people were reading, or sleeping on the benches, or passing beneath the copses in close-pressed couples. Here the shadows held a little mystery, — the cooling freshness of springs, the true exhalations of a forest. Birds were chirping in the branches. But the farther they advanced from the lake, where noise had so far concentrated, the echoes of another fête were heard distinctly; the sound of firearms, the roll of drums, the blare of trumpets, and the ringing of bells, — all detaching themselves from a great clamour which suddenly passed athwart the sun like a smoke. One might really have thought it the sack of a city.

"What is that? What is it I hear?" cried the little prince.

"The gingerbread fair, Monseigneur," said the old coachman, turning round upon the box; and as the queen consented to go nearer to the merry-making, the carriage left the park and threaded its way through a crowd of narrow streets and roads only half built-up, where new houses of six storeys stood side by side with miserable huts, between market-gardens and stable gutters. . . Everywhere were drinking-shops and arbours, with their little tables and their springboards, painted invariably of the same vile green. All were overflowing with people, the shakos of artillery-men, and the white-gloved military in crowds. No noise. They listened to the wandering harpist or violinist who, having permission to play among the tables, was scraping out an air of the Favorita or the Trovatore; for this scoffer of a people, this populace of Paris adores the sentimental and pays liberally to its music if amused.

Suddenly the landau stopped. Carriages can go no farther than the entrance to the great public promenade of Vincennes, along which the fair is held, having at its end towards Paris the two columns of the Barrière du Trône, which rise above the dusty atmosphere of the suburb. What was seen from that point, namely, the swarming of a great crowd in the midst of a veritable street of enormous booths, lighted up the eyes of little Zara with such an eager craving of childish curiosity that the queen proposed to leave the carriage. This desire of the proud Frederica to go on foot in the dust of a Sunday was so extraordinary, and Élysée was so amazed, that he hesitated.

"Is there any danger?"

"Oh! not the slightest, madame... Only, if we go upon the fair ground it would be better that no one accompanied us. The livery would make you too noticeable."

At the queen's order, the tall footman, who was preparing to follow them, resumed his place upon the box, and it was arranged that the carriage should wait where it was. Assuredly they did not expect to make the round of the fair; a few steps in front of the first booths would be all.

Near the entrance were movable little benches and a table covered with a white cloth, on which were games, mechanical inventions. People passed them disdainfully, without stopping. Next came frying-stoves in full blast, surrounded by an acrid smell of burning grease, with great flames rising pink in the sunlight, around which scullions in white aprons were busy behind mounds of sugared fritters. Then came the makers of marsh-mallow paste, twisting into gigantic rings the snow-white compound that smells of almonds... The little prince gazed at all this in stupor; it was so new to him, the little caged birdling, bred in the lofty chambers of a castle, behind the gilded railings of a park, in the midst of alarms and terrors; never going out unless accompanied, and never seeing the populace unless from a balcony or from a carriage surrounded by guards. Intimidated at first, he pressed against his mother and held her tightly by the hand; but, little by little, he grew intoxicated by the noise and the odour of the fête. The tunes upon the barrel-organs excited him. A wild desire to run, that made him drag Frederica along, was checked only by the desire to stop everywhere, and yet to go farther still "over there," where the noise was loudest, and the crowd more dense.

Thus, without perceiving it, they were soon quite far from their point of departure, with a swimmer's lack of sensation that the tide is carrying him out, and all the more easily because no one noticed them. Amid those gaudy costumes, the simple toilet of the queen in shades of fawn, gown, mantle, and hat in harmony, passed unperceived, as did the quiet elegance of Zara, whose great starched collar and short jacket and bare legs only made a few good women turn and say: "That's an English boy." He walked between his mother and Élysée, who smiled to each other above his joy. "Oh! mother, see that! . . Monsieur Élysée, what are they doing over there? Do let us go and see!" And from one side of the road to the other in curious zigzags they plunged farther and still farther into the crowd, following its tidal way.

"Suppose we go back," proposed Élysée; but no, the child was beside himself. He entreated, he pulled his mother's hand; and she, so happy in seeing her little torpid one alive, and herself excited by this popular fermentation, went on and on still farther. . .

The day became warmer, as if the sun in going down were gathering all its rays into a threat of storm. As the skies changed, the fête with its myriad colours took on a fairy aspect. 'T was the hour for parading. All the employés of the circuses and the booths came out beneath the awnings of their entrances, in front of those canvas signs swelling in the breeze till the gigantic beasts and gymnasts and hercules painted thereon appeared to be alive. This was the parade of a grand military show, displaying the costumes of Charles IX. and Louis XV., arquebuses, rifles, wigs, and plumes mingling together, the Marseillaise sounding from a brass band, while the young horses of the circus, held by white reins as in a bridal procession, executed clever steps, calculated with their hoofs, and bowed to the company. On the opposite side, a booth of regular mountebanks were exhibiting a clown in his checked garments, with shrivelled little Aztecs in tights, and a tall, swarthy girl, dressed as a danseuse, who juggled with gold and silver balls, bottles, and knives with shining pewter blades, all jingling and crossing one another above the tall erection of her hair, held up by glass-bead pins.

The little prince was lost in endless contemplation before this beautiful being, when a queen, a real queen, such as she appears in fairy-tales, with a brilliant crown, a short tunic of silvered gauze, her legs crossed one upon the other, suddenly appeared leaning on the balustrade. Zara would never have tired of looking at her if the orchestra had not slightly distracted his attention, — an extraordinary orchestra, composed, not of French guards, nor of gymnasts in flesh-coloured tights, but of gentlemen, real gentlemen, with short whiskers, shining skulls, and dress boots, who deigned to play on horns and trumpets while a lady, yes, a veritable lady, with a little of Mme. de Silvis' solemnity, in a silk mantle and a bonnet with nodding flowers, looked with an indifferent air to right and left, her arms being tossed about till the fringes of her mantle caught the roses of her hat. Who knows? Some other royal family fallen into grief. . . But the fair-ground presented many other things equally astonishing.

In a vast and perpetually varied panorama, bears were dancing at the end of their chains, negroes were running about in linen drawers, devils and devilesses in crimson bandannas; the wrestlers gesticulated; famous tumblers, one hand on their hip, waved above the heads of the crowd the breeches destined for the amateur; a fencing-mistress in coat-of-mail, red stockings with gold clocks, her face covered by a mask, her hands in leathern gauntlets, was there; and a man dressed in black velvet who resembled Columbus, or Copernicus, describing magic circles with a diamond-handled whip; while from behind the line of booths came a sickly odour of hides and the roaring of wild beasts in the Garel menagerie. All these living curiosities were blended with the pictured ones, — gigantic women in ball costume, their shoulders exposed, their arms in short eider-down sleeves and gloves tightly buttoned; silhouettes of seated somnambulists, looking with bandaged eyes into the future; a doctor near-by with a black beard; abnormal beings, accidents of nature, eccentricities, oddities of all kinds, sometimes sheltered by only two great sheets held up by a rope, with the money-box for the receipts on a chair at the entrance.

Everywhere, at every step, was the king of the revels, Gingerbread, under every aspect, every form, in scarlet boots with golden fringes, wrapped in glossy painted papers, tied with favours, decorated with sweetmeats and burnt almonds, — Gingerbread in flat, grotesque figures representing the Parisian celebrities of the day, the lover of Amanda, Prince Queue-de-Poule with his inseparable Rigolo, — Gingerbread hawked in baskets and on portable benches, diffusing also a good smell of honey and cooked fruits through the crowds who were slowly and tightly moving onward, circulation being now very difficult.

Impossible to return upon their steps. They were forced to follow that despotic current, to advance, to retreat; unconsciously impelled toward this booth and then to that, because the living flood which presses together in the middle of a space is always seeking to flow away at the sides without the possibility of issue. Laughter broke forth and jokes in this continual and enforced elbowing. The queen had never seen the People so near. Encountering thus its very breath and the rough contact of its shoulders, she was amazed to find that she felt neither terror nor disgust. She advanced like the others, with that hesitating step of a crowd which seems like the murmur of a march, and keeps, if carriages are absent, a sort of rhythmic solemnity. The good-humour of all these people reassured her, and also the exuberant gayety of her son and the quantity of baby-carriages which continued their way in the thick of it all. "Don't push! . . see, there's a child!" Not one child, but ten, twenty, hundreds, carried by mothers in their arms, or by fathers on their backs; and Frederica turned a kindly smile when one of these little populace heads of her own boy's age went past her.

Élysée, however, began to be uneasy. He knew what a crowd really is, however calm it may be apparently, and the real danger of its eddies and tides. If one of those big black clouds overhead were to burst in rain, what a rush! what a panic! His imagination, always at boiling point, represented to his mind the scene, the horrible suffocation of body to body, the crushing on the Place Louis XV., that dangerous massing of a whole people in the midst of a broad city, not two steps from immense deserted avenues it is unable to reach. . .

Between his mother and his tutor who protected him, the little prince became very hot. He complained that he could see nothing. Then, like the workmen around them, Méraut lifted Zara to his shoulder, which produced an explosion of joy, for from that height, of course, the view of the fête was splendid. On the western sky, rayed with jets of light and great floating shadows, in the far perspective, between the two columns of the Barrière, were lines of palpitating flags and oriflammes and the flapping canvas of the booth fronts. The airy wheels of gigantic merry-go-rounds lifted their little cars, each filled with people; an immense "chevaux-de-bois" in three stages, varnished and coloured like a toy, turned mechanically, with its lions, leopards, and fantastic *tarasques*, on which the children sat as stiff as puppets. Close by were struggling clusters of little red balloons; innumerable whirling mills of yellow paper, looking like artificial suns; and above the crowd, gazing down upon it, quantities of little heads like Zara's, erect, in a cloud of golden vapour. The rays of the setting sun, now paling, left upon the clouds brilliant layers of reflections, which lighted all objects and shaded them in turn, giving an added movement to the scene. Here, they struck a Pierrot and a Columbine, two white spots fluttering before each other — pantomime in chalk on the black ground of a mountebank's platform — there, a lank, stooping harlequin, wearing the pointed hat of a Greek shepherd and making believe to push into his booth, like loaves into an oven, the crowd that are flowing past the steps of it. He has a big, wide-opened mouth, that harlequin, and he must be shouting, roaring; but he is not heard any more than the furious ringing of that bell at the corner of a platform, or the discharge of muskets of which the smoke and the muzzles can be seen. All is lost in the stupendous clamour of the fair, clamour of an element composed of the "tutti," discordant and general, rattles, jew's-harps, gongs, drums, speaking-trumpets, roars of wild-beasts, Barbary barrel-organs, and the shrieking of steam-whistles. The prize was to him who employed — to attract the crowd, as bees are caught by noise — the loudest and most persistent instrument; while from swings and merry-go-rounds fell other shrieks, and over all this frantic racket rose, every fifteen minutes, the whistle of the trams on the circuit railway as they passed the fair.

Suddenly the fatigue, the stifling odour of this human mass, the dazzle of that five o'clock sun, oblique and hot, in which so many vibrating, glittering things were twirling, turned the queen giddy and made her stop, half-fainting. She had only time to catch the arm of Élysée and save herself from falling; and as she leaned there, clinging to it, erect and pale, she murmured very low: "Nothing, nothing; this is nothing! . ." But her head, or her nerves, beat painfully, and her body, losing the sensation of existence, gave way for an instant . . . Oh! he will never forget it, that one instant! . .

It was over. Frederica again was strong. A breath of cool air upon her forehead quickly revived her, but she did not relax her hold on his protecting arm; and that queenly step conforming to his own, that glove resting warmly upon him, caused an inexpressible trouble in Élysée's breast. The danger, the crowd, Paris, the fête, he thought no more of them. He was in the land impossible; where dreams are realized with all their magic, all their visionary extravagance. Buried in that mass of the populace, he walked without seeing it, without hearing it, borne by a vapour that enveloped him to the eyes, impelled him, sustained him and led him unconsciously from the fair to the avenue. . . There at last he returned to earth and knew himself. . . The queen's carriage was too far off to be regained. They were forced to go on foot to the château, following in the fading light the wider paths and the streets lined with little cafés full of a merry people making holiday. It was a veritable escapade; but neither of them thought much about the strangeness of their return. Little Zara talked, and talked, as children do after a fête, in haste to express with their little lips all they have amassed by their eyes of images, ideas, events. Élysée and the queen were silent, — he quivering still, seeking to recall and yet to escape that delicious, penetrating moment which revealed to him the secret, the sad secret of his life. Frederica was thinking of all she had seen, so novel and hitherto unknown to her. For the first time in her life she had felt the beating of the heart of the people; she had laid her head on the lion's shoulder. An impression remained to her, both strong and sweet, a clasp, as it were, of tenderness and of protection.

VIII.

THE GRAND STROKE.

THE door shut brusquely, autocratically, sending from one end to the other of the Agency a puff of air which swelled the blue veils and the mackintoshes, and waved the bills in the fingers of the clerks, and the little feathers in the hats of the tourist ladies. Hands were extended, heads inclined; J. Tom Levis had entered the establishment. A circular smile, two or three very brief orders to the accountant, the time to ask, in a loud, exulting tone, whether "the package had been sent to Monseigneur the Prince of Wales," and he was already in his cabinet, while the clerks signalled to one another with many winks the extraordinary good-humour of their master. Undoubtedly something new was going on. The peaceful Séphora herself became aware of it behind her railings, and asked gently, as Tom entered: —

"What is it?"

"Things!" he replied with a great silent laugh, and his roll of the eye on important occasions.

He made a sign to his wife: —

"Come! . ."

Together they descended the fifteen steep and narrow stairs brass-bound which led to a little boudoir underground, very coquettishly carpeted and hung, with a divan, a duchesse-dressing-table, lighted constantly with gas, the little port-hole on the Rue Royale being glazed with ground glass as thick as a piece of horn. From there they could communicate with the cellars and the courtyard, an arrangement which enabled Tom to enter and leave the Agency without being seen, and so avoid bores and creditors, who are called in Paris "pavés," that is to say, persons or things that obstruct circulation. With affairs as complicated as those of the Agency, such Comanche craft was indispensable. Without it, life would be spent in quarrels and lawsuits.

Tom's oldest employés, men who had served him for five or six months, had never descended into this mysterious sub-salon, where Séphora alone had the right to enter. It was the private nook of the agent, his interior, his conscience, the cocoon from which he issued transformed, — something like the dressing-room of an actor, to which, indeed, the boudoir at this moment bore a strong resemblance, with its gas jets lighting the marble, the furbelowed hangings, and the singular transformation which J. Tom Levis was now accomplishing. With a twirl of his hand he opened his long English frock-coat and flung it away, then one waistcoat, then another, the many-coloured waistcoats of a circus-man; he unwound the dozen yards of white muslin that formed his cravat, the flannel bandages that wrapped his waist and formed that majestic and apoplectic rotundity which drove about Paris in the first and only hansom known there at that period, and issued, all of a sudden, with an "ouf" of satisfaction, a lean and wiry little man, looking like a spool unwound, a frightful blackguard of quinquagenary Paris, who might have been saved from a fire or dragged from a lime-kiln, with the scars, seams, and baldness of his baking; and yet, in spite of all, with an air of juvenility, of rollicking boyhood, of the old mobile guard of '48, in short, the true Tom Levis; in other words, Narcisse Poitou, son of an upholsterer in the Rue de l'Orillon.

Growing up among the shavings of the paternal establishment until he was ten years old, from ten to fifteen taught by the "Mutuelle" and the street, that incomparable school under the open sky, Narcisse very early felt within himself a horror of the people and of manual employments, and at the same time, a passionate imagination, which the Parisian gutter with the anomalous masses it sweeps along had fed better than no matter what progression through the schools. While still a child, he invented projects and planned business. Later this faculty for dreaming hindered him in fixing his powers and making them productive. He travelled, and undertook all sorts of employments. Miner in Australia, squatter in America, actor in Batavia, bailiff at Brussels, — making debts in both hemispheres, and leaving the stones that pave hell in all four quarters of the universe. He finally settled as broker in London, where he lived for some time, and might have succeeded were it not for his terrible, insatiable imagination, always in quest of something; the imagination of a voluptuary perpetually in advance of the coming pleasure, which flung him at last into the blackest of Britannic poverty. That time he rolled very low, and was caught at night in Hyde Park, poaching among the swans in the Serpentine. A few months in prison completed his disgust for "free England," and he returned to the condition of waif and stray on the Paris pavements whence he had departed.

It was only another fantastic caprice, joined to his instincts of clown and comedian, that made him naturalize himself as an Englishman in Paris; which to him was easy, with his knowledge of the habits and customs, the language and comicality of Anglo-Saxons. The idea came to him suddenly, as if by instinct, in his first affair, his first "grand stroke," as go-between.

"Whom shall I announce?" asked a tall fellow in livery, insolently.

Poitou felt himself so shabby, so down in his luck, in that vast antechamber, fearing to be turned away before he was heard, that he saw the need of buoying things up by something abnormal and singular.

"A—oh! . . announce Sir Tom Levis."

And suddenly he felt a self-assurance come to him under that name, improvised on the spur of the moment, and from that borrowed nationality. Henceforth he amused himself by perfecting its peculiarities, its hobbies, while the attentive watchfulness required for his accent and behaviour corrected his exuberant fancy, and enabled him to invent all sorts of dodges while seeming to be in search of the French words.

Singular thing! Of all the innumerable contrivances of that brain full of fanciful schemes, this, the least sought of all, served him the best. To it, he owed his intimacy with Séphora, who was then keeping on the Champs Élysées a sort of family hotel, a jaunty little place of three storeys, pink curtains, and a portico on the Avenue d' Antin, between wide asphalts made gay with greenery and flowers. The mistress of the house, always in proper dress, showed her calm, divine profile at a window on the ground-floor, bending over her work or else an account-book. Within, a society queerly exotic — clowns, book-makers, grooms, horse-dealers, the Anglo-American bohemia (worst of all), the scum of placers and of gambling resorts. The female contingent was recruited from the quadrilles at Mabille, the violins of which could be heard of a summer's evening, mingling with the noise of the "family" disputes and the rolling of counters and louis; for after dinner play ran high. If at times a respectable foreign family, misled by the lie on the sign, came to install themselves in Séphora's house, the singularity of the guests, the tone of the conversations drove them quickly away on the first day, before their trunks were unpacked.

In the midst of these adventurers and speculators, Maître Poitou, or rather Tom Levis, a little fellow lodging under the roof, won a position very quickly by his gayety, his suppleness, his practical knowledge of business, and of all business. He invested the money of the servants, and gained through them the confidence of their mistress. How should he not gain it with that smiling open face of his, and those unfailing good spirits which made him a precious guest at the *table d'hôte*, enticing clients, baiting the cloth, the instigator of bets and of extra "consumptions." Cold and reserved to others, the beautiful mistress of the "family hotel" was free with none but Monsieur Tom. Often in the afternoon, when going out or coming in, he would stop in the neat little office of the hotel, all glass and mats. Séphora would tell him her affairs, show him her jewels and her books, consult him about the bill of fare, and the proper care to be given to the white arum with flowers like a cornucopia which lived beside her in a Minton pot. They laughed together at the love-letters and the protestations of all sorts that she received, for hers was a beauty that sentiment never defaced. Without passion, she kept her coolness everywhere and at all times, and treated love as a matter of business. It is said that a woman's first lover is the only one who counts. Séphora's first, the sexagenary lover chosen by old Leemans, had frozen her blood forever and perverted her love. She now saw nothing but money in it, also intrigue, schemes, and traffic, this adorable creature being born among second-hand things and for second-hand purposes only. Little by little a tie was formed between herself and Tom, the friendship of an uncle and ward. He advised her, guided her, always cleverly and with a fertility of imagination that delighted her sedate and methodical nature, in which Jewish fatalism was joined to a heavy Dutch temperament. Never had she invented or imagined anything, — living wholly in the present moment; and Tom's brain, that firework that was always going off, simply dazzled her. The crowning point of all was when she heard her lodger one evening, after he had gabbled in his most comic fashion during dinner, whisper in her ear as he took his key from the "family" office: —

"But, you know, not an Englishman at all."

From that day she fell in love, or rather — for sentiments are only what you ticket them — she became infatuated with him, just as a woman in society is infatuated by an actor whom she alone knows away from the foot-lights, the paint, and the costume, such as he is and not such as he seems to others; love is always desirous of privileges. Besides, the pair both came from the same Parisian gutter. In it Séphora had soiled her skirts, and Narcisse had rolled there; but they kept the stain and a liking for the mire. The stamp of the streets, the crapulous line which serves as a clue to the leering physiognomy of a blackguard, and which raised at times a corner of Tom's mask, showed itself in Séphora by flashes along the biblical lines of her face, and in the irony and *canaille* laugh of her Salome-like mouth.

This singular love of beauty and the beast only grew the stronger as the woman entered more and more into the life of the mountebank, into a knowledge of his tricks and his contrivances, from the invention of the hansom to that of the multiplied waistcoats, by means of which J. Tom Levis, unable to make himself taller, endeavoured to at least appear majestic; and the more she herself was associated with this unforeseeable, twirling existence of projects, visions, great and little "strokes," the more infatuated she became with him. And this caricature of a man was really so strong that after ten years of legitimate bourgeois marriage he still amused her, still charmed her as in the early days of their acquaintance. To be convinced of that, it would suffice to have seen her on this particular day, lying back on the divan of the little salon in convulsions of laughter, saying with an enraptured and delighted air: "Is n't he silly! .. Oh! is n't he silly!" . . . while Tom in a tight, coloured jersey, reduced to his leanest, baldest, most angular and bony expression, was performing before her a frenzied jig, with jerking gestures and frantic stamps. When both were weary, she of laughing and he of jigging, he threw himself beside her on the divan and put his monkey face beside that angelic head, puffing his joy into her face.

"Done for! those Sprichts! Ousted! Spricht and Sprichters! I 've found my stroke, the GRAND STROKE."

"What, really? .. Who is it?"

The name which he said brought a pretty grimace of disdain to Séphora's lips.

"That great gaby! . . Why, he has n't a sou. . . We have shorn him, skinned him, him and his Lion of Illyria. . . He has n't one atom of down left upon his back."

"Don't scoff at the Lion of Illyria, my girl. . . His skin alone is worth two hundred millions," said Tom, recovering his composure.

The woman's eyes flamed. He repeated the words, pausing on each syllable: —

"Two — hundred — millions! . ."

Then coolly, clearly, he explained the "stroke." Christian II. must be induced to accept the propositions of the Diet, and cede his rights to the crown for the fine price offered to him. After all, what was it? — a signature to give, that was all. Christian himself would have done it long ago. It was those around him, the queen especially, who stopped him and prevented the signing of the renunciation. He must come to it sooner or later. Not a sou in the house. Debts all over Saint-Mandé; to the butcher, to the grain-dealer — for in spite of the master's penury there were horses still in the stable. The house was always kept up and the table served with all the appearances of luxury while disastrous privations lay beneath. The royal linen, bearing the crown, was in holes in the closet, with none to replace it. The stables were empty, the largest pieces of plate in pawn; the servants, scarcely sufficient in number, were often for months unpaid. All these details Tom had obtained from Lebeau, the valet, who had also told him the tale of the two hundred millions offered by the Diet of Leybach and the scene which had ensued thereon.

Ever since the king had been made aware that two hundred millions were close beside him, against a penful of ink, he was no longer the same man; never laughed, never talked, kept to this fixed idea as a neuralgic pain always keeps to one side of the forehead. He had the temper of a bull-dog, sighed heavily and silently. And yet nothing was changed in his personal attendance — secretary, valet, coachman, footmen, they were all there. The same costly luxury in furniture and dress. That haughty Frederica, crazy with pride, believing she masked their poverty to the eye of all by her loftiness, had never allowed the king to be deprived of anything. When by chance he dined at Saint-Mandé, the table must always be luxuriously served. What he lacked, however, and what she could not supply, was money in his pocket, for the club, gambling, and women. Evidently, the king would succumb in the end on that line. Some fine morning, after a long night at baccarat, not being able to pay and not daring to owe — fancy Christian II. posted at the Grand-Club! — he would take his pen and sign his resignation of monarchy in a flash. The thing would have happened already, if it were not for that old Rosen, who secretly, in spite of the queen's order, had begun again to pay for Monseigneur. So the plan was made to entice him to pass the level of small current debts and drag him into real expenses, into multiplied obligations beyond the resources of the old duke. All this required a considerable advance of money.

"But," said Tom, "the affair is such a fine one that funds will not be lacking. The best way will be to speak to your father and do the business in the family. The only thing that troubles me is the mainspring — the woman."

"What woman?" asked Séphora, widening her ingenuous eyes.

"She who is to pass the rope round the king's neck. . . We must find a regular squanderer for that; a serious girl with a strong stomach, who'll attack the big dishes at once."

"Amy Férat, perhaps?"

"Ho! whisht! . . used-up, done-with . . . besides, not serious enough, sups, sings, makes love in real youth . . . not the woman to worm out her little million a month peacefully, without seeming to touch it, holding her sugarplum high, balking at details, haggling over every square inch, and dearer than a bit of ground in the Rue de la Paix."

"Oh! I know exactly how the thing should be managed," said Séphora, thoughtfully. . . "But who?"

"Ah! that's it. . . Who?"

And the silent laugh each sent the other was as good as a bond of partnership.

"Go on! inasmuch as you have already begun. . ."

"What! you know? . . "

"Don't I see his game when he looks at you, and his attendance at the rail as soon as he thinks I have departed? . . Besides, he makes no mystery of his love, and tells it to anybody who listens . . . why, he has even written and countersigned it on the Club-Book."

When told the whole story of the bet, the tranquil Séphora was roused: —

"Ha! really. . . Two thousand louis that he will sleep. . . Upon my word! that's too much!"

She rose and walked about the room to shake off her anger, then, returning to her husband, —

"You know, Tom," she said, "that for more than three months I have had that great fool hanging behind my chair. . . Well, see! . . not so much as *that!*"

And the snap of a little nail was heard against a tooth which only sought to bite.

She told no lie. Ever since the king had been in pursuit he had got no farther than touching the tips of her fingers, nibbling her pens beside her, and getting himself intoxicated with the rustle of her gown. Never had such a thing happened before to this Prince Charming, spoilt by women, assailed by soliciting smiles and perfumed letters. His handsome curly head, where the print of a crown still lingered, the heroic legend of a kingly conduct, carefully kept up by the queen, and beyond all else that perfume of seduction which hangs about a much-loved being, had won him in society certain real successes. More than one young woman could have shown, curled up on the divan of an aristocratic boudoir, a little ouistiti from the royal cage; and in the world of green-rooms, usually monarchical and "right-thinking," it placed a young woman at once if she could show in her album of souvenirs the portrait of Christian II.

That man, accustomed to feel all eyes and lips and hearts press towards him, and never to cast his own glance without a quiver from the spot where it fell, had now for months been dancing a vain attendance on the coldest and most peaceful of natures. She played the part of model cashier; she counted, ciphered, turned heavy pages, showing her admirer nothing more than the velvety roundness of her profile, with the glimmer of a smile that ended at the eye among the lashes. At first, the caprice of the Slav was amused by this struggle, but vanity soon had a part in it, the eyes of the Grand-Club were fixed upon him, and the matter ended in a real passion, fed by the void of that unoccupied existence, in which the flame now mounted straight without an obstacle. Every afternoon he came at five o'clock, the gayest moment of the Parisian day, the hour of visits when the pleasures of the evening are selected. Little by little, all the young men of the Club who lunched at the Agency and circled round Séphora ceded their places respectfully. This desertion, diminishing the current little gains of the Agency, increased the lady's coldness; and as the Lion of Illyria no longer brought in anything, she was beginning to make Christian feel that he bored her, and monopolized too royally the wicket of her railing, when, all of a sudden, a change occurred — on the morrow of her talk with Tom.

"They say your Majesty was seen, last night at the Fantaisies? . . "

At this inquiry, accompanied by a sad and anxious look, Christian II. felt delightfully troubled.

"Yes, certainly. . . I was there. . . "

"Not alone? . . "

"But. . . "

"Ah! . . Some women are born to be happy."

Immediately, as if to lessen the instigation of her speech, she added that she had long had a wild desire to go to that little theatre "to see the Swedish danseuse, you know. . . " But her husband would never take her anywhere.

Christian at once proposed to take her.

"You? Oh! you are too well known."

"But we will sit quite hidden in a stage-box."

In short, the rendezvous was made for the next evening; because it so happened that Tom was to spend the evening out. What a delightful escapade! She, at the front of the box, in a discreet and knowing toilet, beamed with childish joy at the dancing of that foreigner who had her hour of celebrity in Paris, — a Swede with thin face and angular gestures, showing beneath her blonde bandeaux a pair of brilliant eyes, the black pupils of which covered the whole iris, the eyes of a rodent, and in her darts and silent springs with her black garments the blind bewilderment of a monstrous bat.

"Oh! how it amuses me! how amused I am!" cried Séphora.

And the dissipated king, motionless behind her, a box of sweetmeats on his knee, could not remember a more voluptuous pleasure than the touch of that bare arm beneath its laces and that fresh breath as it turned upon him. He insisted on taking her to the Saint-Lazare station when she returned that night to Courbevoie; and on the way, in the carriage, a transport seized him and he drew her with both arms to his heart.

"Oh!" she said, in a grieved voice, "you will spoil all my pleasure."

The immense waiting-room at the station was deserted and ill-lighted. They seated themselves side by side on a bench, Séphora shivering, and the king protecting her with his ample furs. Here she was no longer timid, but let herself go and talked to the king with whispers in his ear. From time to time some official passed them, swinging his lantern, or a group of actors living in the suburbs and returning home from the theatre. Among them, came a couple with arms interlaced, walking somewhat apart.

"How happy they are," she murmured. . . "No ties, no duties. . . Following the impulse of the heart! All else is cheatery. . ."

She knew something of that, alas! and suddenly, as if impelled, she related her sad existence with a sincerity that touched him; the snares, the temptations of the streets of Paris for a girl made poor by her father's avarice; and sold at sixteen, her life ended; the four years passed with that old man, to whom she had been only a nurse; then, not willing to return to the traffic of her father, needing a guide, a supporter, she had married this Tom Levis, a man of money. She had given herself, devoted herself, deprived herself of all pleasures to be buried alive in the country, and now put to toil as a clerk; and this without thanks, without so much as a kindness from that ambitious man, who cared for nothing but his business and who, at the slightest sign of a revolt, at the faintest desire to see life, held up to her invariably that wretched past for which she was not responsible. . .

"A past," she said, rising, "which brought me that vile outrage signed by your name on the book of the Grand-Club."

The bell ringing for departure cut short at the right moment this admirable theatrical effect. She walked away with her gliding step, which the folds of her black gown followed; sending Christian a salute with eye and hand and leaving him motionless, stupefied, bewildered by what he had heard. . . So she knew it! . . How could she know it? . . Oh! how he blamed himself for his baseness, his bragging. . . He spent the whole night in writing to her, imploring pardon in variegated French, bestrewn with the flowers of his national poesy, which compared his beloved to a cooing dove, and the glowing fruit of the pomegranate.

Marvellous invention of Séphora, that reproach about the wager! It gave her a barrier against the king, and for some time to come. Also it explained her long coldness, her almost inimical greetings, and the clever bargaining she intended to make of her person. A man ought to bear all from a woman to whom he had offered such an insult! Christian became the timid, docile servant of her caprices, the acknowledged sigisbeo in the sight and hearing of all Paris.

If the beauty of the lady was able to excuse him in the eyes of the world, certainly the friendship, the familiarity of the husband had nothing creditable. "My friend, Christian II." said J. Tom Levis, drawing up his stocky figure. Once he took a fancy to receive the king at Courbevoie, for the sake of causing Spricht one of those jealous furies which shortened the days of the illustrious dress-maker. The king went over the house and park, boarded the yacht, and consented to let himself be photographed on the portico of the mansion with its master and mistress, who desired to eternalize the memory of this never-to-be-forgotten day. And that evening, while fireworks were going up in honor of his Majesty, their rockets doubled by reflections in the Seine, Séphora, leaning on Christian's arm, said beside the hornbeams, all white with the glare of the Bengal lights: —

"Oh! how I would love you if you were not a king. . ."

It was the first avowal, and very cleverly made. All the mistresses Christian had had up to this time adored him as the sovereign, the glorious possessor of that title, and a line of ancestors. This one loved him for himself. "If you were not a king," she said. He was so little of a king that he would willingly have cast away at her wish the rag of dynastic crimson which now scarcely held upon his shoulders!

Soon after, she explained herself more clearly still. He was uneasy at finding her, one afternoon, pale and weeping.

"I am afraid we shall see each other no more before long," she said.

"Why so?" he asked.

"He declared to me just now that business affairs in France were doing so badly that he should have to close up and go elsewhere. . ."

"And take you?"

"Oh! I am but a clog on his ambition. . He said to me: 'Come, if you like. . .' I must follow him. . . What would become of me, left here all alone."

"Naughty child, am I not here?"

She looked him fixedly in the eye.

"Yes, it is true, you love me . . . and I love you. . . I could be yours without shame. . . But no, it is impossible. . ."

"Why impossible?" he asked, breathless at the thought of that paradise.

"You are too high for Séphora Levis, Monseigneur. . ."

And he, with adorable fatuity: —

"But I will raise you to myself. . . I will make you countess, duchess. That is a right that still remains to me. We will find somewhere in Paris a lover's nest, where I will install you in a manner worthy of your rank; where we can live alone,— no one but ourselves. . ."

"Oh! that would be too beautiful. . ."

She thought a little, lifting her candid, moistened, childlike eyes. Then she said hastily:

"No, no . . . you are a king. . . Some day, in the midst of our happiness you will leave me. . ."

"Never."

"But if you are recalled?"

"Where? . . To Illyria? . . That is all over, forever done with. . . I missed last year one of those occasions that never return."

"Truly?" she said, with a joy that was not feigned. "Oh! if I could only be sure of it. . ."

He had a word upon his lips that convinced her, though he did not say it; but she understood it well. That evening, Tom Levis, whom Séphora kept informed of everything, declared solemnly that "the thing was sure; and that father Leemans had better be informed."

Seduced, like his daughter, by the imagination, the contagious ardour and inventive volubility of his son-in-law, Leemans had several times put money into the Agency. After gaining, he had lost; following in that respect the luck of cards; but when he found himself "rolled," as he expressed it, two or three times the old fellow took a stand. He did not recriminate, nor get angry, for he knew business too well and detested useless words; but when his son-in-law came to talk about his being a sleeping-partner in one of those marvellous castles in the air which Tom's eloquence raised to the skies, the old man smiled a significant "n, o, no . . . that 's over," in his beard, and lowered his eyelids in a way that brought down to reason and to the level of things feasible Tom 's wild imaginations. The latter knew that; and as he wisely desired that this Illyrian affair should not go out of the family, he despatched Séphora to the old man, who, as he aged, had been seized by a sort of affection for his only child, in whom, moreover, he felt that he lived again.

Since the death of his wife, Leemans had given up his antiquity shop in the Rue de la Paix, contenting himself with the old place in the Rue Eginhard. It was there that Séphora went one morning, very early, to be sure of finding him; for he was seldom at home, the old fellow. Immensely rich and retired from trade, at least in appearance, he continued to ferret about Paris from morning till night, attending sales, seeking the odour, the friction of business, and above all watching with marvellous perspicacity the crowd of little dealers, traders, sellers of bric-à-brac, to whom he was sleeping partner, but without owning that fact, for fear his wealth should be suspected.

Séphora, from a fancy, a memory of her youth, went on foot from the Rue Royale to the Rue Eginhard; following almost the same way she used to take in former days when returning from the shop. It was not yet eight o'clock. The air was keen, carriages were few, and towards the Bastille there remained of the dawn an orange glow, in which the gilded genius on the column seemed to bathe his wings. From this direction, through all the adjacent streets came a charming population of the girls of the faubourg on their way to work. If Prince d'Axel had risen early enough to watch for that flood, his eyes would have been well content that morning. By twos, by threes, chattering, alert, and walking very fast, they reached the swarming work-rooms of the Rues Saint-Martin, Saint-Denis, Vieille-du-Temple; and some — these were the few stylish ones — the shops on the boulevards, farther away, but later to open.

The animation of the scene was not that of evening, when, tasks finished and their heads full of the day's events, they returned to their lodgings with racket and laughter, and sometimes with envy of the luxury encountered which made the garret seem higher up and the stairway more gloomy than before. But now, if sleep still clung to these young heads, rest had adorned them with a sort of freshness, completed by the careful dressing of their hair, the knot of ribbon fastened to the braid or beneath the chin, and the brushing given before daylight to the black gowns. Here and there a trumpery jewel at the tip of an ear rosy with cold, a shining comb, the glitter of a buckle at the waist, the white edge of a newspaper folded into the pocket of a waterproof. And what haste! what courage! — light mantles, thin skirts, unsteady steps on heels too high and worn-down sideways by much tramping. Among them all, the desire, the vocation for coquetry, a way of walking with their foreheads up, their eyes forward, with an eager curiosity for what the day may bring, — natures all ready for whatever turns up, just as their Parisian type, which is not one, is ready for all transformations.

Séphora was by no means sentimental, she saw nothing beyond the present hour and its events; nevertheless this confused pattering, this hurried bustle amused her. Her youth came back to her on all these pretty faces, in that early morning sky, in that curious old quarter, where each street bears at its corner on a poster the names of its noted merchants, names that had not changed in fifteen years. In passing through the black archway which serves as an entrance to the Rue Eginhard from the Rue Saint-Paul, she encountered the long robe of a rabbi on his way to the neighbouring synagogue; two steps farther on was a rat-catcher with his pole and his plank, to which hung the hairy corpses, a type of old Paris no longer to be seen except in this tangle of mouldy buildings, where all the rats in the city have their headquarters; farther on was the driver of a rented carriage, whom she had seen every morning of her work-girl life walking just there, with his big boots quite unfit for going afoot, and holding preciously in his hand, as straight as the taper of a communicant, that whip which is the sword of a Jehu, the insignia of his order, and never leaves him. At the door of two or three shops, comprising the whole street, and where the shutters were just being taken down, she saw the same old garments hanging in a mass, and heard the same Hebraic and Teutonic gabble, so that when, having crossed the low porch of the paternal domicile, the little courtyard, and the four steps leading up to the shop, she pulled the string of the cracked bell, it seemed to her that she had fifteen years less upon her shoulders — fifteen years, however which did not weigh upon her.

As at that earlier period, the Darnet opened the door to her, — a robust Auvergnat creature, whose shiny, high-coloured face with dark undertones, tightly knotted shawl, and black cap edged with white, seemed to wear the mourning of a coal-dealer's shed. Her rôle in the house was made visible by the manner in which she opened the door to Séphora, and by the stiff smile that the two women exchanged as they looked at each other.

" My father is in ? "

" Yes, madame. . . In the workshop. . . I will call him."

" Useless. . . I know the way."

She crossed the antechamber, the salon, and the garden, a black pit between great walls above which trees were growing, its narrow paths encumbered with innumerable old articles, — iron-work, lead-work, wrought-iron railings, stout chains, their oxidized, blackened metal harmonizing well with the melancholy box and the greenish tones of an old fountain. On one side was a shed overflowing with rubbish, carcasses of furniture broken for years, piles of carpeting rolled into corners; on the other a workshop almost wholly of ground-glass, to escape the curiosity of the neighbouring windows. There, piled to the ceiling in apparent disorder, was an assemblage of treasures, their true value known only to the old man himself, — lanterns, lustres, torches, panoplies, incense-burners, bronzes, antique or foreign. At the lower end were two blacksmiths' forges, with carpenters' and locksmiths' benches. Here it was that the old antiquarian dealer vamped up, copied, rejuvenated his old models with amazing cleverness and the patience of a Benedictine. Formerly the racket was great from morning till night when five or six workmen surrounded the master; but now nothing more was heard than the click of a hammer on fine metal and the nibbling of files, while at night the gleam of a single lamp showed that the trade within was not yet dead.

As his daughter entered, old Leemans, in a big leather apron, his shirt-sleeves pushed up on his hairy, light-skinned arms as if he had been carrying copper to the benches, was in the act of hammering out the stem of a Louis XIII. chandelier, the model of which stood before him. At the sound of the opening door, he raised his rubicund face lost in a mass of hair and beard of a reddish white, and knitted his thick, shaggy eyebrows, from which his glance issued as if from the long hairy fur of a griphon.

"Morning, pa. . ." said Séphora, pretending not to see the annoyed gesture of the old man as he tried to conceal the hammer he was wielding; for he did not like to be disturbed or seen at his work.

"It is you, is it, little girl?"

He rubbed his old muzzle to her delicate cheek.

"What has happened to you? . ." he asked, pushing her into the garden. "Why did you get up so early?"

"I have something very important to tell you."

"Come!"

And he pulled her towards the house.

"Oh! but you know, I don't want to have the Darnet there . . ."

"Well, well . . ." said the old man, laughing in his bristles; and going in, he called to the woman who was polishing a Venetian mirror:

"Darnet, you will go in the garden and see if I am there."

And the tone in which this was said proved that the old pacha had not yet abdicated into the hands of his favourite slave. They remained, father and daughter, alone in the neat bourgeois little salon, the furniture of which, covered with white cloths, and the little bits of woollen carpet before each chair, contrasted with the chaos of dusty treasures in the shed and shop. Like those fine cooks who will eat none but the simplest dishes, Père Leemans, so expert and knowing in things of art, did not possess in his own house a single specimen of them. In that he showed the sort of merchant that he was; appraising, trading, exchanging, without feeling or regret; unlike those artists in bric-à-brac who before they part with a rare article inquire anxiously how the amateur intends to surround it and show its merits. There was nothing on Père Leemans' walls but his own full length portrait by Wattelet, representing him at the forge in the midst of his iron-work. It was he himself, not so white-haired, but quite unchanged; lean, bent, always the same dog-man head, with its straight, reddish-white beard and long hair forming a kind of helmet, and showing little more of the face than a nose reddened by chronic inflammation, which gave to this sober tea-drinker the look of a drunkard. This picture was the sole characteristic thing in the room, together with a church prayer-book, lying open and leaves down, on the mantel-shelf. Leemans owed several good sales to that book. It distinguished him from his rivals; from that old miscreant Schwalbach, from Mother Esau and others with their Ghetto origin, whereas he was, he, a Christian, married for love to a Jewess who became a Christian and even a Catholic. This served him well with his upper-class customers; he went to mass in the oratory of those ladies, in that of the Comtesse Malet, for instance, and the elder of the two Sismondos. On Sundays he appeared at Saint-Thomas d'Aquin and at Sainte-Clotilde, where his best clients went; while through his wife he kept on the right side of the great Jewish houses. As he grew older this religious sham became a fixed habit, and often in the morning, on starting out for his day's business, he would enter

St. Paul's "to get," as he said quite seriously, "a little scrap of mass," having remarked that he always succeeded better in business on those days.

"Well? . ." he said, looking slyly at his daughter.

"A great affair, pa. . ."

She took from her bag a bundle of drafts and notes bearing Christian's signature.

"These have got to be cashed. . . Will you do it?"

At the mere sight of that signature the old fellow made a grimace which puckered his whole face and made it disappear into his beard with the motion of a hedgehog at bay.

"Illyrian paper! . . Thank you, I know it. . . Your husband must be a fool to send you here on such an errand. . . Come now, really, have you got to that?"

Without being discomfited by this reception, which, indeed, she expected,—

"Listen . . ." she said, and in her composed way she related the affair, the Grand Stroke, in detail, giving proofs to support it,—a copy of the "Quernaro" in which the session of the Diet was reported, and letters from Lebeau keeping them informed of the situation . . . the king, madly in love, bent on establishing his happiness. . . A superb mansion, Avenue de Messine, servants, equipages, he wanted them all for the lady, and was ready to sign as many bills as they chose, at any interest. . . Leemans now began to prick up his two ears, made objections, ferreting into all the corners of the affair so knowingly contrived.

"How long, the notes?"

"Three months."

"Then in three months? . ."

She made the gesture of tightening a slip noose, and her mouth, drawing in, thinned her calm lips.

"And the interest?"

"Whatever you like. . . The heavier the notes, the better for us. . . He must have no other resource than to sign the renunciation."

"And once signed? . ."

"That concerns the woman. . . She has before her a man with two hundred millions to nibble at."

"And suppose she keeps it all for herself? . . We ought to be devilishly sure of that woman. . ."

"We are sure. . ."

"Who is it?"

"You don't know her," said Séphora, without blinking, putting the papers back in her little bag.

"Let those be," said the old man, hastily. . . "It takes a lot of money, you know. . . A large investment. . . I'll talk it over with Pichery."

"Take care, papa. . . We must n't let too many on to it. . . There's already ourselves, Lebeau, and now you. . . If you go and let in others . . ."

"Only Pichery. . . You must see that I alone could n't do it. . . It is a great deal of money . . . great deal of money."

She answered coldly: —

"Oh! we shall want more than this."

Silence. The old man reflected, sheltering his thought behind his bristles.

"Well, come . . ." he said at last. "I'll do the thing; but on one condition. That house on the Avenue de Messine. . . It must be furnished of course stylishly. . . Well, I am to furnish the bric-à-brac. . ."

Into even his usurious traffic the second-hand dealer must put his paw. Séphora's thirty-two teeth burst into a laugh.

"Oh! the old greedy! the old greedy!" she cried, using a word that came to her suddenly in that second-hand den, contrasting absurdly with her air of distinction and her elegant attire. "Come, that's agreed to, pa. . . You shall furnish the bric-à-brac . . . only, nothing from mamma's collection, mind."

Under that humbugging title, "Mme. Leemans' Collection," the old dealer had grouped a mass of damaged, unsalable articles, which, thanks to this sentimental title, he got rid of magnificently; detaching from the precious lot, from the relics of his dear deceased, only such things as were paid for by their weight in gold.

"You understand me, old man . . . no shams, no rubbish. . . The lady knows what's what."

"You think so. . . Does she know? . ." said the old dog in his beard.

"As well as you or I, I tell you."

"But just tell me. . ."

He put his muzzle to her dainty face; and on both of them the spirit of low traffic was written, on the old parchment and the downy rose-leaf.

"Just tell me who she is, that woman. . . You ought to tell me, now I am in it."

"She is . . ."

Séphora stopped a moment to tie the broad strings of her bonnet beneath the soft oval of her face, casting into a mirror, as she did so, the satisfied look of a pretty woman, in which a certain new pride appeared to mingle.

"She is the Comtesse de Spalato," she said gravely.

IX.

AT THE ACADEMY.

THE classic palace which sleeps under the lead of its cupola, at the end of the Pont des Arts and the beginning of studious Paris, had, on this particular morning, an unusual air of life, and seemed to be advancing to the line of the quay. In spite of the rain, a pattering June rain, that came in showers, a crowd was collecting at the steps of the great entrance, and extending, like the queue at a theatre, along the railings, the walls, and even to the arches of the Rue du Seine; a gloved crowd, well-dressed, well-behaved, waiting patiently, knowing that it was certain of admittance in virtue of little cards of different colours, brightened by the shower, with which all were supplied. Carriages were standing single file along the deserted Quai de la Monnaie, the most luxurious carriages that Paris contained, with coquettish or splendid liveries, democratically sheltered by umbrellas and water-proofs, showing, nevertheless, clubbed wigs and gold lace, and on their panels the armorial bearings and greatest blazons of France and Europe, even royal arms, like enlarged plates of a Pierre d'Hozier, moving in line along the Seine. When a ray escaped, a ray of that Parisian sunlight which has the grace of a smile on a grave face, everything sparkled with wet reflections, the harnesses, the helmets of the guards, the arch of the dome, the cast-iron lions at the entrance, usually dusty and shabby, but now of a rain-washed, beautiful black.

At long intervals, on days of solemn reception, the old Institute has these sudden and interesting wakings-up of an afternoon. But this morning the affair was not a reception. The season was far too much advanced; the new members, coquettish as comedians, would never have consented to make their first appearance after the "Prix de Paris" had been competed for, the Salon closed, and trunks packed ready for departure. It was simply a distribution of Academic prizes, — a ceremony without much interest, which usually attracts none but the families of the prize-winners. The circumstance which now brought this exceptional influx, this aristocratic crowd, to the doors of the Institute was the fact that among the crowned works was the "Memorial of the Siege of Ragusa" by Prince Herbert de Rosen; and the monarchical coterie had profited by that event to organize, under the protection of the police, a demonstration against the government.

By an extraordinary chance, or by the act of one of those intrigues which mysteriously work like moles in official or academic soil, the Secretary being ill, the report upon the crowned works was to be read by the noble Duc de Fitz-Roy, and it was known that he, legitimist of the whitest and most anæmic blood, would bring out with emphasis the ardent passages in Herbert's book, that noble historical manifesto around which the devotion and the fervour of the party had gathered. In short, it was one of those malicious protestations which the Academy occasionally ventured upon even under the second Empire, and which the good-natured indulgence of the Republic permitted.

Mid-day. The twelve strokes ringing from the old clock cause a stir and a murmur among the crowd. The doors are opened. Those on foot advance slowly, methodically, toward the entrances on the square and on the Rue Mazarine; while the emblazoned carriages, turning into the courtyard, deposit their masters, the bearers of privileged tickets, beneath the portico, where, among the ushers with their gold chains, bustled the affable head of the secretariat, in silver lace, smiling and polite as the majordomo of the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty when, after a nap of a hundred years, the princess awakes on her state bed. Doors fly open, the sleepy footmen, in long surtouts, spring from their seats; bows, long-trained curtseys, smiles, whispers among the *habitués*, are exchanged as the arrivals pass with a sound of rustling silks along the carpeted passage leading to the reserved boxes, or through the narrow corridor sloping downward as if sunken by the steps of centuries, which leads to the interior of the palace.

The hall, an amphitheatre, soon filled up on the sides reserved for the general public. The benches were occupied one after another, and behind the last row were persons standing, their silhouettes defined against the glass of the windows. Not a place empty. A swelling sea of heads as in the half-light of a church, or a cold museum, made colder by the polished yellow stucco of the walls and the marble of the great meditative statues, — Descartes, Bossuet, Massillon, all the glory of the great century congealed in one motionless attitude.

Facing the crowded semicircle were a few unoccupied benches, and a small green table with the traditional glass of water, awaiting the Academy and its committee, who would enter presently through those tall doors surmounted by a gilded and tomblike inscription: LETTERS, SCIENCES, ARTS. All is ancient, cold, meagre; contrasting with the springlike toilets with which the hall is actually blooming, — light, delicate materials, fluffy grays, auroral pinks, made in the new and rather tight fashion of the day, and sparkling with jet and steel; airy hats and bonnets, a medley of mimosa and lace with flashes of tropic birds amid knots of velvet and sun-coloured straw; and around and above it all the regular, continuous beat of those large fans, the scent of which made the big eye of the great Meaux eagle wink. For you know very well it is no reason, because you belong to old France, that you should smell mildewed and dress like a fright.

All that Paris could show of chic, well-born, and "right-thinking" had rendezvoused here;

smiling and recognizing one another with little masonic signs, — the flower of the clubs, the cream of the Faubourg, a society that never exhibits itself, takes no part in anything, is never seen at first representations, and only on certain days at the Opera or the Conservatoire, — a discreet and muffled society; closing its salons with many curtains from the noise and light of the street; giving no occasion to be talked about, except now and then by a death, a suit for separation, or an eccentric adventure of one of its members, a hero of the "Persil" or the *Gomme.* Among this choice society were a few Illyrian nobles, who had followed their princes into exile, splendid types of men and women, a little too accentuated, too exotic for this delicately refined company. And also, grouped at certain very apparent points, were the academic circles which prepare, beforehand, the elections and direct the votes, the social cultivation of whom is worth more to a candidate than his weight in genius. Illustrious losers in the Empire lottery were also here, worming themselves in among the "old party," whose sarcasms on their parvenu condition they have long since exhausted; and even, select as the assembly may be, a few questionables, celebrated for monarchical ties, have managed to slip in, in simple toilets, with two or three actresses then in vogue, faces known to all Paris, visions the more commonplace and wearily besetting because other women in all societies persist in copying them. Besides these, journalists, reporters of foreign newspapers, armed with blotters, perfected pencil-cases, tools of their trade, as if for a journey to Central Africa.

Lower down, in a little circle reserved at the foot of the benches, was seen the Princesse Colette de Rosen, wife of the laureate, delicious in a costume of greenish blue, Indian cashmere, and *moire antique*, wearing a triumphant, beaming look beneath the silky fluff of her flaxen hair. Near her was a stout man with a common face, old Sauvadon, very proud of accompanying his niece; but having, in his ignorant zeal and his desire to do honour to the ceremony, put himself into an evening suit, he became extremely unhappy. Stiff in his white cravat as if in the stocks, he watched the men who entered, hoping to find a mate to his dress-coat. Of course, not one.

From this flutter of colour and animated figures came a murmur of voices, rhythmed, but distinct and loud, which seemed to establish a magnetic current from one end of the hall to the other. The slightest laugh spread itself, was communicated; the slightest sign, the mute gesture of two parted hands preparing to applaud was perceivable from top to bottom of the benches. It was emotion and good-will, all prepared and ready for a first representation of which the success was certain; and when, from time to time, the celebrities entered and took their seats, the quivering excitement of the crowded assembly turned towards them, merely restraining as they passed its curious or admiring murmurs.

Do you see, high up, above the Sully, the two women who have just entered, accompanied by a little boy, who fill the whole front of their box? They are the Queens of Illyria and Palermo; two cousins, their figures erect and proud, dressed in the same *mauve faille*, with the same rare embroideries, and on the golden hair of one and the dark braids of the other the same caress of sweeping feathers around their hats, women of noble types completely different. Frederica is paler, the gentleness of her smile is saddened by an ageing look; and the face of her darker cousin is also stamped with the distresses, the anxieties of exile. Between them the little Comte de Zara shakes the blond curls of his hair, pushed back upon a pretty head that is growing daily more erect, more vigorous, while the glance of the eyes and the mouth are gaining assurance. True seedling of kingship beginning to bloom.

The old Duc de Rosen stands at the back of the box with another personage, not Christian II., — who avoids an ovation, — but a tall fellow with a bushy mane, an unknown man, whose name will not be pronounced throughout this ceremony although it ought to be on every lip. It is in his honour that this fête takes place; it is he who has given cause for this glorious requiem of monarchy in presence of the last gentlemen of France and of the royal families exiled in Paris; for they are all there, those exiles, those dethroned ones, come to do honour to their cousin Christian; and it has not been a small matter to place those crowns in their due rank. Nowhere are questions of precedence more difficult to solve than in exile, where vanities are embittered, and susceptibilities may be envenomed into actual wounds.

In the box Descartes — all the boxes bear the names of the statues beneath them — the king of Westphalia maintains a haughty attitude, which renders the more observable the fixity of his eyes, eyes which look, but do not see. His constant effort is to hide his irremediable blindness; and his daughter aids him in this with her devotion, — that tall, slender creature, whose head seems ever bending beneath the weight of its golden hair, the colour of which she so carefully conceals from her father. The blind king likes brunettes only. "If you had been a blonde," he says sometimes, stroking his daughter's hair, "I think I should have loved you less." A remarkable couple, walking their road of exile with the dignity, the lofty calmness of a promenade in a royal park. When Queen Frederica in her hours of depression thought of that helpless infirmity guided by that sweet innocence, she was comforted and strengthened by the spell, so pure, that issued from them.

Farther on, behold, in a turban of dazzling satin, the solid Queen of Galicia, who resembles, with her massive cheeks and high colour, a blood-orange in its coarse skin. She enters with a great stir about her, puffs, fans herself, laughs and talks with a woman, still young, who wears a white mantilla on her head, and has a sad, kind countenance, furrowed by the track of tears from the rather reddened eyes to the pallid mouth. This is the

Duchess of Palma, an excellent creature, little fitted to bear the shocks and terrors to which the adventurous highwayman of a sovereign to whom her life is bound condemns her. He is there, he too, the tall duke, sticking familiarly between the two women his shiny black beard and his insolent face, bronzed by his last expedition, as costly and disastrous as those that preceded it. He has played at being king, had a Court, fêtes, women, Te Deums, and paths strewn with flowers. He has caracoled, decreed, danced, made ink and powder speak, shed blood, sown hatreds. And the battle lost, the *sauve-qui-peut* cried out by himself, he returns to Paris to seek for new recruits to risk, more millions to melt, wearing always a garb of travel and adventure, a frock-coat tight to the figure, buttoned and frogged in a way that makes him look like a vagabond. A noisy youth clusters in this box, talking loud with the freedom of the Court of Queen Pomaré; and the national language, rough and hoarse, bounds in Biscayan missiles from one to another, accompanied with familiarities of speech, the privacies of which are heard throughout the hall.

Singular thing! on a day when all the good places are so hard to obtain that princes of the blood are lost in the amphitheatre, a small box, Bossuet's box, stands empty. Every one is asking who can be coming there, what great dignitary, what sovereign passing through Paris is so late in arriving that the session is now to begin without him. The old clock strikes the hour: One. A curt voice calls without: "Present, arms!" and during the automatic rattle of the handled muskets, through the tall doors, both wide open, LETTERS, SCIENCES, and ARTS make their appearance.

What is most remarkable among these illustrious beings, all alert and lively, preserved, as one might say, by the principle, the will of tradition, is that the older ones affect a juvenile bearing, a frisky dash, whereas the younger ones endeavour to appear more grave and solemn according as they have fewer gray hairs upon their head. Their general aspect lacks grandeur, owing perhaps to our modern curtailment of locks and the black cloth of the frock-coat. The wigs of Boileau and of Racan (whose greyhound bitch ate up his speech) must have had more authority, rising as they did more worthily in keeping with the cupola. In the matter of picturesqueness, however, two or three frock-coats tinged with green installed themselves in the centre behind the table and the glass of *eau sucrée;* and it was one of these who pronounced the hallowed words: "The session is opened." But in vain does he say so; nobody believes it; he does not believe it himself. He knows very well that the true session is not for the reception of this report on the Montyon prize, which one of the most fluent of the Academy proceeds to detail and modulate in fine rhythmic accents.

Truly, a model of academic speech, written in academic style, with "so-to-speaks" and "perhapses" that seem to make thought return upon its steps like a pious woman forgetting her sins at confession; a style adorned with arabesques, paraphrases, fine flourishes of a masterly pen at writing running among the sentences to mask and fill out the void, — a style, in short, that ought to be learned, for every one has to put it on with the frock-coat webbed with green. Under all other circumstances, the usual audience of this hall would have been ecstatic over this homily; you would have seen it pawing and neighing with delight at the tortuous little phrases of which it could guess the outcome. But to-day there is haste to get through with such speeches; the people now assembled are not here for a literary fête. It was worth seeing with what an air of contemptuous ennui the aristocratic company listened to the recital of humble devotions, fidelity under all tests, obscure, jogging, bent-in-two existences, as they passed before them in that finical superannuated phraseology which resembled the narrow, fireless, brick-paved passages of the provinces where those lives evolved themselves. Plebeian names, ragged cassocks, old blue smocks faded by sun and water, scenes in distant villages, where for an instant the pointed clock-tower and the walls of hovels plastered with cow-dung are visible — all of which seems abashed and ill at ease when evoked in the midst of this fine company, beneath the cold light of an inconsiderate Academy as in the show window of a photographer. The noble society is surprised that there are so many worthy persons among the populace. . . What, more! . . Still more? . . Will they never have done suffering, devoting their lives, being heroic? . . So say the clubs impatiently. Colette de Rosen smells her salts; all these old people, these humble people they are talking about, have, she thinks, "the poor smell." Ennui is on all foreheads, it oozes from the stuccoes of the wall. The speaker begins to understand that he is boring his audience, and he hurries to an end.

Ah! poor Marie Chalaye of Ambérieux-les-Combes, you whom the people of your region call the Saint, who for fifty years have taken care of your old paralytic aunt, and washed, put to bed, and blown the noses of eighteen little cousins; and you, most worthy Abbé Bourrillon, minister of Saint-Maximin-le-Haut, you who go in fiendish weather to carry succour and consolation to the cheese-makers on the mountain, you little think that the Institute of France, after crowning your deeds with public recompense, will be ashamed of you, and that your names will be hurried over and stuttered and scarcely distinct in the inattentive buzz of impatient or satirical conversations! The end of the speech was a complete rout. As if to run faster, the fugitive cast away haversack and weapons; deeds of heroism, angelic abnegations are abandoned in a ditch without the least remorse, for the speaker knows that the newspapers of the next day will report his speech in full, and not one of those pretty sentences, as twisted as curlpapers, will be lost.

At last, the end. A few "bravos" and comforted "Ahs!" The unfortunate speaker sits down, mops himself, receives the congratulations of two or three of his associates — last vestals of the academic style. Then follows five minutes' intermission, and a general rustling through the hall, which stretches and readjusts itself.

Suddenly deep silence. Another green coat rises.

It is the noble Fitz-Roy. Every one has permission to admire, while he arranges his papers on the cloth of the little table. Thin, bent, debilitated, narrow-shouldered, gesture cramped by arms too long and all elbows, he is fifty years old, but he looks seventy. On this worn-out, ill-built body is a very small head with distorted features of a boiled pallor, between scanty whiskers and a few tufts of hair. Do you remember in "Lucrezia Borgia" that Montefeltro who drank the poison of Pope Alexander, and whom we see passing across the stage, plucked, broken, shivering, ashamed of living? Well, the noble Fitz-Roy might figure as that personage. Not that he ever drank anything, poor man, Borgia poison or anything else; but he is the heir of a horribly ancient family, which never crosses itself in its descendants; the scion of a plant that has so lost its sap that there is no longer any use in misallying it. Uncle Sauvadon thinks him divine. "Such a fine name, monsieur! . ." Women think him distinguished: a Fitz-Roy! . .

It is this privilege of name, this long genealogy (in which fools and knaves have never been lacking), that has won him his entrance to the Academy far more than his "Historical Studies," a mere compilation, the first volume of which alone showed its value. It is true that another man wrote it for him; and if the noble Fitz-Roy had perceived up there, in Queen Frederica's box, the luminous and solid head from which his best work issued, perhaps he would not have gathered up in his hand the sheets of his speech with that air of supreme and disdainful surliness, or begun his lecture with a haughty circular glance that surveyed all and saw nothing. To begin with, he adroitly and airily clears away the petty works the Academy had just crowned; and to mark how completely such affairs are beneath him, he says little, and mutilates intentionally the names and titles of the books. This amuses the audience. . . He comes at last to the "Roblot prize," given to the finest historical work published during the five preceding years. "This prize, gentlemen, as you know, has been awarded to Prince Herbert de Rosen for his magnificent 'Memorial of the Siege of Ragusa. . .'" A formidable roar of applause saluted these simple words, uttered in a resounding voice with the gesture of a sower. The noble Fitz-Roy allowed this burst of enthusiasm to pass off; then, using an effect of contrast, artless but sure, he resumed, gently, composedly: "Gentlemen . . ." Then he stopped, looked around upon that crowd which waited, breathless, so wholly his that he held it as it were, in his hand. He seemed to be saying, "Hein! if I said no more, how tricked you would be!" And it is he, he, who is tricked, for when he makes ready to continue, not a person listens to him.

A door has slammed above, in the box left empty until now. A woman has entered; she takes her seat without embarrassment, but in so doing forces herself instantly on the attention of every one. The dark costume, cut by the great maker, trimmed with embroidered peacock's-eyes, the hat with a fall of gold-edged lace, set off deliciously that supple figure and the oval face, white and rosy, of an Esther sure of her Ahasuerus. The name is muttered. All Paris knows her; for the last three months nothing has been talked of but her loves and her luxury. Her house in the Avenue de Messine recalls the splendours of the fine days of the second Empire. The newspapers have given the details of this fashionable scandal, the height of the stables, the cost of the pictures in the dining-room, the number of equipages, the disappearance of the husband, who, more virtuous than another celebrated Menelaus, would not live on his dishonour, but had gone to sulk in foreign parts, a victim to the great century. Nothing was lacking to these chronicles but the name of the purchaser, which was left in blank. At the theatres the lady was always alone in the front of her box, escorted by a pair of pointed moustaches, barely visible in the shadow. At the races, in the Bois, still alone, the empty place beside her occupied by an enormous bouquet; while on the panels of her carriage around a mysterious blazon, was the silly device, *mon droit, mon roy*, with which her lover had endowed her together with the title of countess. . .

On this occasion, the favourite was proclaimed. To place her there, on such a day, in these seats of honour reserved for Majesties, giving her for escort Wattelet, Christian's henchman, and the Prince d'Axel, always ready when a compromising folly was to be committed, meant acknowledging her before the eyes of all and stamping her with the arms of Illyria. And yet her presence excited no outraged feeling. All sorts of immunities are granted to kings; their pleasures are as sacred as their persons; especially in the aristocratic world of Old France, where the tradition of Louis XIV.'s and Louis XV.'s mistresses, driving in the Queen's carriage and supplanting her in the great hunts, is still preserved. A few little sham prudes like Colette de Rosen took virtuous airs and wondered that the Institute should admit such creatures; but you may be sure that each of these ladies had a pretty little ouistiti at home that was dying of consumption. In point of fact, the impression made was excellent. The clubs said: "Very chic." The journalists: "That 's pluck! . ." They all smiled benevolently; and the immortals themselves turned their opera-glasses complacently on the fascinating young woman, who sat unaffectedly at the edge of her box, merely showing in her velvet eyes that resolute fixity assumed by women when besieged by the attention of opera-glasses.

People turned with curiosity toward the Queen of Illyria to see how she took the thing. Oh!

extremely well. Not a feature of her face, not a feather in her bonnet quivered. Never mingling in current amusements, Frederica did not, of course, know this woman; she had never seen her, and merely looked at her, at first, as one toilet looks at another. "Who is she?" she asked of the Queen of Palermo, who hastened to answer: "I don't know. . ." But in the next box a name loudly uttered and repeated struck her to the heart: "Spalato . . . Comtesse de Spalato."

For some months, that name of Spalato had haunted her like an evil dream. She knew it was borne by the new mistress of her husband, who remembered he was king only to decorate with one of the noblest titles of his absent country the creature of his pleasure. That thought had rendered this infidelity more bitter to her than others. But this present act overflowed the cup. There, in her presence and that of the royal heir, that woman installed in the rank of a queen — what outrage! Almost without being conscious of it, the grave and intelligent beauty of the woman made Frederica feel the gross insult more keenly. Defiance was clear in those fine eyes, the brow was insolent in its composure, the brilliancy of those lips braved her. . . A thousand thoughts jostled in her brain . . . their great poverty . . . her daily humiliations . . . yesterday that carriage-builder who shouted beneath her windows, and whom Rosen had paid — for she had had to come to that. . . Where did Christian get the money that he gave to this woman? . . Ever since the affair of the false jewels she knew of what he was capable; and something told her that this Spalato would lead to the dishonour of the king, and of his race. For an instant, a second, through that intense nature there passed the temptation to rise, to leave the hall, leading her child by the hand, to escape openly from a neighbourhood so infamous, a rivalry so degrading. But she remembered she was queen, wife and daughter of kings, that Zara would be a king also; and she would not give their enemies the joy of such a scandal. A dignity, higher than her dignity of womanhood, a dignity which she had made the proud, despairing rule of her life, maintained her in her rank here in public as in the secrecy of her desolated home. O cruel fate of queens who are so envied! The effort that she made was so violent that the tears started to her eyes as the still water of a pond leaps under the blow of an oar. Quickly, that no one may see them, she seizes her opera-glass and looks obstinately, fixedly, beyond the misty mirrors to that gilded and reposeful inscription: LETTERS, SCIENCES, ARTS, iridescent through her tears above the head of the orator.

The noble Fitz-Roy is continuing his speech. It is in a style as gray as a prison coat that pompous eulogy of the "Memorial," of the eloquent and forceful historical volume written by Prince Herbert de Rosen "who wields a pen as he does a sword." It is a eulogy above all of the hero who inspired that Memorial, "that chivalrous Christian II. in whom were centred all the grace, nobility, strength, seduction, and fine temper which we are ever certain to find on the steps of a throne." [Applause, and little cries of ecstasy.] Evidently a good audience, sensible, alert, seizing all illusions on the fly, even the most feeling, and comprehending them. . . Sometimes, in the midst of those mealy sentences, a note would ring true and convincing, a passage quoted from the "Memorial," for which the queen had furnished all the documents, substituting everywhere the king's name for hers, annihilating herself to the profit of Christian II. . . O God of justice! this was his return! . . The crowd cheered loudly at those quoted words of haughty, careless courage, of acts heroic, simply performed, — told by the writer in graphic prose, in which they stood revealed like epic tales of ancient times; and, i' faith! before the enthusiastic greeting given to these quotations, the noble Fitz-Roy, who is no fool, renounced his own literature, and contented himself with reading aloud the finest pages of the book.

In that narrow classic building 't was like a lifting, vivifying wing; the very walls seemed to widen, and through the rising cupola a fresh breeze entered from an outer world. People drew breath; fans no longer beat a rhythmic time to indifferent attention. No, the whole audience are standing, all heads turned to Frederica's box; they acclaim, they salute the vanquished but glorious monarchy in the wife and son of Christian II., the last king, the last knight. And little Zara, whom the noise, the bravos intoxicated, as they do all children, applauded naïvely with his little gloved hands, tossing his golden curls, while the queen, retreating slightly backward, affected herself by this contagious enthusiasm, tasted, for a minute, the joy, the illusion that it gave her. Thus it was that she could still surround with a halo that puppet of a king behind whom she effaced herself, and enrich with a fresh glory the Illyrian crown that her son would one day wear, a glory that no one could ever traffic with. When that day came, what of exile, treachery, poverty? and even now these dazzling moments drown all present shadow. . . Suddenly she turned, thinking to pay the homage of her joy to him who, there, behind her, his head against the wall, his eyes lost in the cupola, listened to those magic phrases in pure forgetfulness that they came from him; assisting at this triumph without regret, without bitterness, without for one instant saying to himself that all this fame was stolen from him. Like the monks of the middle ages growing old anonymously in the building of cathedrals, the weaver's son was content to have done the work, to see it rise, solid, in the sunshine. And for that abnegation, that aloofness of his seer's smile, for that which she felt in him was like unto herself, the queen stretched out her hand to him with a soft "Thank you . . . thank you. . ." Rosen, who stood nearest to her, thought she was congratulating him on the success of his son. He caught the grateful gesture as it passed him and rubbed his rough moustache on her glove; and the two victims, happy in the triumph, were reduced to exchange at a distance in a look the unuttered thoughts that unite two souls in bonds mysterious and durable.

'T is over. The session ends. The noble Fitz-Roy, applauded, complimented, disappears, as if through a trap-door; the LETTERS, SCIENCES, and ARTS follow him, leaving the platform empty. By all the issues the crowd makes haste to spread about, as at the close of an assembly or the opera, those rumours which, on the following day are to form the opinion of all Paris. Among the worthy people thus departing, some, pursuing their retrograde dreaming, might well expect to find their sedan chairs waiting before the doors of the Institute. It was rain that awaited them, streaming down on the hurly-burly of omnibuses and the carnival-like butting of street cars. The privileged alone, in their well-appointed carriages were able to still nurse their fond royalistic illusions.

Under the great colonnaded portico, while a crier called up the royal equipages through the wet and shining courtyard, 't was a pleasure to hear the animated cackle of that aristocratic world while awaiting the issue of the Majesties: What a session! . . What a success! . . Could the Republic ever recover from it? . . The Princesse de Rosen is surrounded: "You must be very happy!" — "Oh, yes! very happy." And the pretty creature ambled and bowed to right and left like a trained filly in a circus. Uncle Sauvadon did his best beside her though still embarrassed by his white cravat and his butler's shirt-front, which he strove to conceal behind his hat, but very proud all the same of his nephew's success. Certainly no one knew better than he what was the true texture of that success, and that Prince Herbert had not written a single line of the crowned work; but at that moment he never so much as thought of this. Nor Colette either, I do assure you. True Sauvadon in vanity, appearances sufficed her; and when she saw, pricking forward through the group of *gommeux* who were congratulating her, the waxed points of her Herbert's enormous moustache coming to meet her, it was all she could do not to throw herself upon his breast before the assembled company, so convinced was she that he had managed the siege of Ragusa, and written the Memorial, and that his splendid moustache did not conceal the jaws of a gaby. If the kind, good fellow was delighted and overcome by the ovation made to him and the glances flung in his direction (the noble Fitz-Roy had said to him, solemnly: "Whenever you wish it, prince, you can be one of us"), nothing was to him more precious than this unexpected greeting of his Colette, the almost loverlike manner in which she hung upon his arm, — a thing that had not happened to him since the day of their marriage, when they walked down the nave to the grand roll of the organ in the choir of Saint-Thomas d'Aquin.

But see, the crowd makes way; respectfully, the hats come off. The guests in the boxes are coming down; all those fallen Majesties, who are now to return into darkness after this brief resurrection. A regular defile of royal shadows, the old blind man leaning on his daughter, the Galician queen with her handsome nephew, a rustling of stiff stuffs as at the passage of a Peruvian Madonna. Lastly, the Queen of Illyria, her cousin, and her son. The royal landau is driven to the portico; she enters it, amid an admiring but restrained murmur, beautiful, her brow lofty, radiant. The queen of the left hand and secret stairways has already departed with d'Axel and Wattelet, so that nothing mars the full glory of this exit. . .

Nothing further was now to be seen, or said. The tall footmen rushed forward with their umbrellas. For an hour it was nothing but pawing, stamping, the rolling of wheels, the slamming of carriage doors, mingled with dripping water, and names shouted and repeated by the stony echoes which haunt old buildings and are seldom disturbed in the ancient Institute of France.

That evening, the coquettish allegories of Boucher painted on the panels of Herbert de Rosen's bed-chamber were roused from their languid attitudes and rather faded colours by the warbling of a little voice: "It is I . . . it is Colette." It was indeed Colette, wrapped in a mantle of floating mechlin, who had come to say good-night to her hero, her knight, her man of genius.

At almost the same moment Élysée was walking alone in the garden at Saint-Mandé beneath the rain-washed verdure, lighted now by a clear heaven, one of those June heavens in which the ecliptic light of a long day lingers, defining very sharply the leafy shadows on the wan circle of the roadway, and making the house, with all its blinds fast-closed, look white and dead. On the upper story alone the king's light was still burning. No sound but the trickling of water in the fountains and the faint trill of a nightingale, to which its mate responded. Floating in the atmosphere were the penetrating effluences of magnolias, roses, and southern-wood set free by the rain. The fever that for two months, ever since the fair at Vincennes, had never left Élysée's bosom, which burned his hands and brow, instead of growing calmer in this harmony of scents and sounds, was beating, vibrating the more, and sending its waves to his heart.

"Ah! old fool! . . old madman! . ." said a voice quite close to him under the trees. He stopped, confounded. It was so true, so just, so exactly what he had been saying to himself for the last hour.

"Madman, miserable maniac. . . You ought to be burned — you and your herbal."

"Is that you, monsieur le conseiller?"

"Don't call me councillor. . . I am no longer one. . . Nothing, nothing . . . neither honour, nor intelligence. . . Ah! *porco*. . ."

And Boscovich, sobbing with a passion that was truly Italian, shook his ridiculous head which shone fantastically in the light that fell between the branches of the lindens. The poor man had been for some time past a little off the track. Sometimes very gay and gabbling, he bored them with his herbal, the famous Leybach herbarium, possession of which he expected very soon to recover; then suddenly, in the midst of a delirium of words, he would interrupt himself, give a sort of sidelong, underhand look, and not a word more could be got out of him. This time Élysée thought he had gone absolutely crazy, especially when, after this childish explosion, he bounded forward and seized him by the arm, shouting as one who cries for help: —

"Impossible, Méraut! . . We must prevent it."

"Prevent what?" said the other, endeavouring to loosen his arm from that nervous grip.

Boscovich, in a low voice, breathless, answered:

"The act of renunciation is ready . . . drawn by me. . . His Majesty is now signing it. . . I never ought to have. . . *Ma che! . . ma che!* . . He is the king. . . And then my herbal, my Leybach herbal he promised to recover for me. . . Such magnificent specimens! . ."

The maniac was off upon his topic, but Élysée did not listen to him; he was stunned by the terrible blow. His first, his only thought was for the queen. This, then, was the reward of her devotion, her abnegation, the end of this day of sacrifice! . . What nothingness was that glory wreathed about a head that did not like a crown of any kind! . . In the suddenly darkened garden he saw nothing but that one light up there, lighting the commission of a crime. What must be done? How prevent it? . . The queen, she alone. . . But how could he reach her? . . . .

The maid on duty, Mme. de Silvis dreaming of fairies, the queen herself, every one believed that the sleeping house was on fire when Élysée demanded to see her Majesty at once. A cackle of fluttered women was heard through the rooms like a dovecote awakened too early. At last Frederica appeared in the little salon where the tutor awaited her, wrapped in a long blue peignoir which moulded finely her arms and shoulders. Never had Élysée felt so near to the woman herself.

"What is it?" she asked very low, very quickly, with that flicker of the eyelids which expects and sees the coming blow. At the first word she bounded.

"It cannot be. . . It shall not be, I living! . ."

The violence of her movement loosened the phosphorescent masses of her hair, and she caught them up by a turn of her arm with a free and tragic gesture that threw her sleeve back to the elbow.

"Waken his Highness," she said in a low voice into the curtained darkness of her son's room; then, without adding a word, she went up to the king.

X.

FAMILY SCENE.

ALL the magic of that June night was entering through the wide-opened window portal of the large upper hall, where a single lighted candelabrum left enough of mystery for the moonlight to lie upon the walls in a milky way, and glitter on the polished bar of a trapèze, on the bow, shaped like an arch, of a guzla hanging to the wall, and on the glass doors of a rather scantily furnished book-case, which the brown-paper *cahiers* of the herbalist had filled with the sickly and fetid odour of a cemetery of dried plants. On the table, lying upon a pile of dusty papers, was a crucifix of tarnished silver; for though Christian II. did not write much in this sanctum, he remembered his Catholic education and surrounded himself with pious objects; and sometimes, when "making fête" with courtesans, the trumpets of pleasure blowing breathlessly around him, he would finger in his pocket, with a moist, half-drunken hand the coral rosary he was never without. Beside the Christ lay a large and heavy sheet of parchment, closely written over in a rather trembling hand. This was the act of renunciation of the kingdom, properly drawn up. Nothing was lacking to it but the signature, a stroke of a pen, a violent effort of will; and that was why the feeble Christian still delayed, his elbows on the table, motionless beneath the light of the wax candles waiting to melt the wax for the royal seal.

Near him, uneasy, ferreting, softly silent as a hawk-moth or the swifts in a ruin, Lebeau, his confidential valet, watched him, spurred him mutely, having brought him at last to the decisive moment which the band had been awaiting for months, with ups and downs and beating hearts and all the uncertainties of a game that had to depend on that rag of a king. Notwithstanding the magnetism of this oppressing desire, Christian, with the pen in his fingers, did not sign. Plunged, almost sunken in his arm-chair, he gazed at the parchment and dreamed. It was not that he clung to the crown he had never desired or loved, which, even as a child, he found too heavy, feeling later its irritating bonds, its crushing responsibilities. To be rid of it, to put it in the corner of a salon he would never enter, to forget it as much as he could — that much was done already; but this determination, this extreme decision to make, was what frightened him. In no other way, however, could he procure the money that was indispensable to his new existence; three millions in notes signed by him were in circulation and about to fall due, which the usurer, a certain Pichery, refused to renew. Could he allow everything to be seized at Saint-Mandé? The queen, the royal child, what would become of them? Scene for scene — for he foresaw the fearful echoes of his baseness — was it not better to have it over at once, to face at one stroke both anger and recriminations? And then — and then, all that, even, was not the determining reason.

He had promised the countess to sign the renunciation; and in view of that promise, Séphora had consented to let her husband go alone to London, and to accept the mansion in the Avenue de Messine and the name and title which proclaimed her as belonging to Christian, reserving other compliances until the day when the king should bring her the act itself, signed by his hand. For this she gave the reasons of a loving woman: perhaps he would, later, return to Illyria, abandon her for throne and power; she would not be the first whom those terrible reasons of State had driven to despair and weeping. D'Axel and Wattelet and all the young *gommeux* of the Grand-Club little knew that when the king, leaving the Avenue de Messine, joined them at the club, his eyes worn-out and feverish, that he had spent his evening on a sofa alternately repulsed and attracted, strung and vibrating like a bow, rolling at the feet of an implacable will, a supple resistance, which left in his passionate clasp the ice of two little Parisian hands, clever at freeing and defending themselves, and on his lips the burn of a delirious promise: "Oh! when you are no longer a king, all — all!" She made him pass through the intermittences, dangerous indeed, from passion to coldness. Sometimes, at the theatre, after a frigid greeting, a stately smile, she had a certain slow way of taking off her glove as she looked at him and giving her bare hand an offering to his kisses. . . . .

" So you say, Lebeau, that Pichery will do nothing?"

" Nothing, sire. . . If the notes are not paid he will put them at once into the sheriff's hands."

It was needful to have heard the despairing whine which emphasized that word "sheriff" in order to understand the dangerous formalities that Christian was dragging after him: stamped paper; execution; the royal mansion invaded; the home turned out of doors. But Christian saw nothing of all that. He saw himself arriving in the Avenue de Messine, anxious, trembling, going up that mysteriously draped staircase stealthily, entering that room where the lamp shone dim beneath its laces: "'T is done, 't is done! I am a king no longer. . . To me, all . . . all!"

" Come!" he said with a start, as the vision fled before him. And he signed the deed.

The door opened. The queen entered. Her presence in Christian's apartment at this hour was so novel, so unexpected, they had so long lived apart from each other, that neither the king who was signing his infamy, nor Lebeau who was watching him, turned at the sound. They thought it was Boscovich coming back from the garden. Gliding and light as a shadow she was almost beside the table and the two accomplices before Lebeau saw her. By a finger on her lips she ordered him to be silent as she still advanced, meaning to seize the king in the act of treachery, and so avoid subterfuges and useless deceptions. But the valet defied her order and gave the alarm: "Sire, the queen! . ." Furious, the Dalmatian struck out before her, with her firm, horsewoman's hand, directly on the mouth of the evil-minded wretch; then, standing erect, she waited till the valet had disappeared before she addressed the king.

"What has happened to you, my dear Frederica? Why have you come to me?"

He was standing now, half leaning on the table, which he tried to conceal, in a supple attitude that showed to advantage his foulard jacket embroidered in rose, and speaking with pale lips but a calm voice and that grace of politeness which he never omitted towards his wife, putting between them a certain something like the flowery and complicated arabesques on the hard, polished lacquer of a casket. With a word, a gesture, she brushed away that barrier, behind which he was trying to shelter himself.

"Oh! no speeches . . . no pretences . . . I know what you are writing there! . . do not try to deceive me. . ."

Then coming nearer, and dominating with her proud form that cringing figure, —

"Listen, Christian . . ." she said, and in her tone there was something grave and solemn. "Listen . . . you have made me suffer much since I have been your wife. . . I have said nothing but once, that first time, you remember? . . After that, when I saw that you loved me no longer, I allowed you to do as you pleased; but I was ignorant of nothing, nothing . . . not one of your infidelities, your mad follies. For surely you are mad . . . mad as your father, who exhausted himself with his love for Lola; mad as your grandfather John, who died in a shameful delirium, foaming, and with his very death-rattle uttering words that turned the nursing Sisters white. Yes! it is the same mad blood, the same hellish lava that consumes you. At Ragusa, the nights of the sorties, they had to fetch you from Fedora's. . . I knew that; I knew she had left her theatre to follow you. . . I have never reproached you. The honour of the name was safe with me. . . And when the king was missing on the ramparts, I took good care that his place was not empty. . . But in Paris . . . in Paris . . . "

Up to this point she had spoken slowly, coldly, keeping to the end of each sentence an intonation of pity, of maternal reproach which accorded well with the dropped eyes of the king and his sulky look, as of a naughty child who was being lectured. But the name of Paris put her beside herself. City without faith, accursèd and scoffing city, bloody pavements, torn up perpetually for riots and barricades! What madness possessed them all, those poor exiled kings, to take refuge in that Gomorrah? It is Paris, Paris, with its foul air reeking with vice and gunpowder, which has finished the ruin of the great races; Paris which has torn from Christian what the maddest of his ancestors had kept in safety, respect, and pride for the blazon. Oh! from that first day of arrival, from that first night of exile, seeing him so gay, so excited while those about him wept in secret, Frederica had foreseen the humiliations, the shame, that she would have to endure... And now, in one breath, without a pause, with stinging words that marbled with red the pallid face of that royal libertine, lashing it as with a whip, she recalled to him all his deeds, his rapid gliding from pleasure to vice, and from vice to crime.

"You betrayed me before my eyes, in my household . . . adultery at my table, touching my very gown... And when you had had enough of that curled doll, who did not even hide her tears before me, you went to the gutter, to the mud of the streets, shamelessly wallowing there in idleness, bringing back to us your morrows of orgy, your sated remorse, the filth of that mire... Remember how I saw you, stumbling, stammering, that morning when for the second time you lost your throne... What have you not done? oh! Holy Mother of angels! . . what have you not done? . . you have trafficked with the royal Seal, you have sold your crosses, your titles . . ."

Then, in a lowered voice as if she dreaded lest the silence and the darkness should overhear her:

"And you stole . . . you stole! . . Those diamonds, those stones . . . it was you... And I let my old Greb be suspected and sent away... I was forced to it . . . the theft was known, a false criminal was found lest the true one be suspected. . . For that has been my sole and constant thought — to maintain the king erect, intact, to accept all, all, for that one purpose, even the shame which to the eyes of the world soils me myself. I gave to my own soul a word of command which spurred me, which upheld me in hours of trial: *For the Crown!* . . And now you wish to sell it, that crown which has cost me such tears, such agony; you mean to barter it for gold to lavish on that foul Jewish image, whom you had the indecency to put before me to-day, face to face. . ."

He had listened without a word, cowed, his head drawn in. The insult to the woman he loved roused him. Looking fixedly at the queen, with her stinging blows still cutting his face, he said, politely as ever, but very firmly: —

"You are mistaken. . . The woman of whom you speak has nothing to do with the resolution I have taken. . . What I do is done for you, for me, for the peace of all. . . Come, are you not yourself weary of this life of expedients, of privations? . . Do you think I am ignorant of what is going on here, that I do not suffer at seeing that pack of tradesmen and creditors at your heels? . . The other day when that man was shouting in the courtyard, I drove in, and heard him . . . if it had not been for Rosen, I 'd have crushed him under the wheels of my phaeton. And you, you were watching for his departure behind the curtain of your chamber. A pretty business for a queen! . . We owe everybody. There is but one cry against us. Half your servants are unpaid. . . That tutor, it is ten months since he has had a penny. . . Mme. de Silvis pays herself by wearing majestically your old gowns; and there are days when M. le conseiller, Keeper of the Seals of the Crown, borrows from my valet the money to buy his snuff. . . You see I know what is going on. . . But you do not know my debts. I am riddled with them. . . Everything will blow up soon. That will be a pretty sight! You will see it sold, that crown of yours, with the old silver forks and spoons and knives, under a doorway. . ."

Little by little, carried away by his satirical nature and the scoffing habits of his set, he abandoned the reserved tone of his first words, and in his insolent, nasal little voice he rattled off sarcasms, some of which must have come from Séphora, who never lost a chance to demolish with mockery her lover's last scruples.

"You accuse me of talking for effect, my dear, but it is you who bewilder yourself with words. What, after all, is that crown of Illyria that you are always talking to me about? It is worth nothing unless it is on the head of a king; otherwise it is a cumbersome, useless article, which is hidden in a bandbox when one has to run away, and kept under a glass globe like the laurels of an actor or the orange-flowers of a porter's bride. . . You ought to be convinced of this, Frederica. A king is not a king unless he is on the throne, power in hand; fallen, he is less than nothing — a rag. . . It is nonsense to keep to etiquette, and titles, and put Majesty everywhere, on the panels of the carriages, on our sleeve-buttons; hampering ourselves with a worn-out ceremonial. It is all hypocrisy on our part, and politeness and pity in those who surround us, both friends and servants. Here, in this house, I am Christian II. to you and Rosen and two or three faithful. The moment I am out of it I become a man like the rest. Mr. Christian Second. . . Not even a surname . . . just a given name, Christian, like any strolling player at the Gaieté. . ."

He stopped, out of breath; it is doubtful if he had ever spoken so long standing up. . . Sharp notes of the fern-owl, hasty trills of the nightingale pricked through the silence of the night. A great moth, which had shortened its wings in the candles, was knocking itself everywhere. Nothing was heard within the room but that fluttering distress and the smothered sobs of the queen, who knew well how to hold her own against anger and violence, but whom sarcasm, taking her sincere nature falsely, deprived of weapons; just as a valiant soldier expecting honest blows is helpless under pin-pricks. Seeing her so feeble, Christian thought she was vanquished, and to complete the work he put a last touch to his burlesque picture of monarchs in exile. What a pitiful figure they cut, those poor princes *in partibus*, figurantes of royalty, draped in its frippery, and continuing to declaim before empty benches, and not a penny of receipts! Was n't it far better to be silent and come down to common life and obscurity? Those who had money might keep it up; 't was a luxury like any other, this passion for grandeurs... But as for others, their poor cousins of Palermo, for instance, piled into a house too small for them with their cursèd Italian cooking! always smelling of onions whenever you went there... Worthy, oh yes! but what an existence! And they were not the most wretched either... The other day a Bourbon, a real Bourbon, ran after an omnibus... "Full, monsieur." But still he ran. "Don't I tell you it is full, old fellow?" And he was very angry, because they did not call him Monseigneur! As if it was visible on his cravat!.. "Operetta kings, I tell you, my dear. And it is to get out of this ridiculous situation, and to put ourselves in safety under the shelter of an assured and dignified position that I have decided to sign this act... And remark," he added, suddenly revealing the tortuous Slav brought up by Jesuits, "that it is only an expedient, this signature... They simply return us our property, and I do not consider myself in any way bound... Who knows? These millions may enable us to recover the throne."

The queen raised her head impetuously, held him by the eye for a minute till his own blinked, and said, shrugging her shoulders: —

"Do not make yourself more vile than you are. . . You know well that once signed. . . But no! The truth is that strength is lacking to you. You desert your post of king at the perilous moment, when the new social order, which wants neither God nor master, pursues with hatred the representatives of divine right, making heaven tremble above their heads and the soil beneath their feet. Knife, bombs, balls, all are good . . . for treachery, for murder. . . In the great processions or at fêtes not one of us but trembles when a man advances from the crowd. . . Every petition hides a dagger. . . Leaving our palaces, which of us can be sure of returning to them? . . And this is the moment that you choose, you, to leave the battle! . ."

"Ah! if it were fighting!" cried Christian II., hastily. . . "But to struggle as we do against ridicule, poverty, all the ordures of life, and to feel we get deeper and deeper into them daily. . ."

A flame of hope flashed in her eyes.

"Truly? Would you fight? . . Then, listen. . ."

Breathless, she unfolded to him in a few brief words an expedition which Élysée and herself had been preparing for three months; sending letters upon letters, speeches, despatches, Père Alphée forever on the road among the villages and mountains; for this time it was not to the nobility they addressed themselves, but to the people, the muleteers, the porters of Ragusa, the market-gardeners of the Breno and the Brazza, the men of the Isles, who came to the markets in their feluccas, the primitive and traditional nation, ready to rise, to die for their king, but on condition that they should see him at their head. . . The companies were formed, the word of command already circulating, the signal alone was awaited. And the queen, rushing her words in a vigorous charge on the feeble Christian, felt a cruel shock as she beheld him shake his head with more indifference than discouragement. Perhaps in his heart he felt provoked that all this had been planned without him. But he did not believe the project feasible. They could never advance inland; they must hold the Isles and devastate a noble country with little or no chance of succeeding; 't would be the Duke of Palma over again; an effusion of useless blood.

"No, don't you see, my dear, that the fanaticism of your chaplain and the enthusiasm of that Gascon are misleading you? . . I have my reports just as you have yours. . . The truth is that in Dalmatia, as elsewhere, monarchy has had its day. . . They have had enough of it down there. . . They don't want any more. . ."

"Ah! I know, I know the coward who wants no more . . ." said the queen.

Then she left the room hastily, leaving Christian much astonished that the scene had ended so rapidly. He crumpled up the deed, put it hastily into his pocket, and was preparing to go out, when Frederica returned, accompanied this time by the little prince.

Caught up from his sleep, and dressed in haste, Zara — who had passed from the hands of the maid to those of his mother without a word being uttered — opened his great eyes beneath his auburn locks, but asked no questions, remembering confusedly in his little head, still humming with sleep, certain other wakings for hasty flight amid pallid faces and panting exclamations. It was then that he had taken a habit of giving himself up, of letting himself be led, provided his mother called him in her grave and resolute voice and he could feel the tender folding of her arm about him, and her shoulder all ready for his infant weariness. She had said to him: "Come!" and he came with confidence, surprised by the calmness of this night's waking compared with the tumult of others, when flames and the noises of musketry and cannon surrounded him.

He saw the king standing up; not the kind and careless father who sometimes surprised him in bed or crossed his schoolroom with a smile of encouragement, but a man annoyed and angry, whose face grew harder at their entrance.

Frederica, without a word, led the child to Christian's feet and kneeling down herself with an abrupt motion she placed him standing before her and joined his little fingers within her own clasped hands.

"The king will not listen to me," she said;

"perhaps he may listen to you, my Zara... Say with me: 'My father ...'"

The timid voice repeated: "My father..."

"My father, my king, I conjure you ... do not despoil your child; do not take from him the crown he ought to wear some day... Remember that it is not yours only; it comes from afar; it comes from God, who gave it, six hundred years ago, to the House of Illyria... God wills that I be king, my father... It is my heritage, mine own; you have no right to take it from me."

The little prince followed his mother's words, with the fervent murmur, the imploring eyes of prayer; but Christian turned away his head; shrugging his shoulders and furious, though always polite, he muttered a few words between his teeth... "Excitement ... improper scene ... turn the child's head." Then he freed himself and moved to the door. With a bound the queen was on her feet; she looked at the table now empty of the parchment, and, comprehending that the infamous act was signed and that he held it, she uttered what was truly a roar!

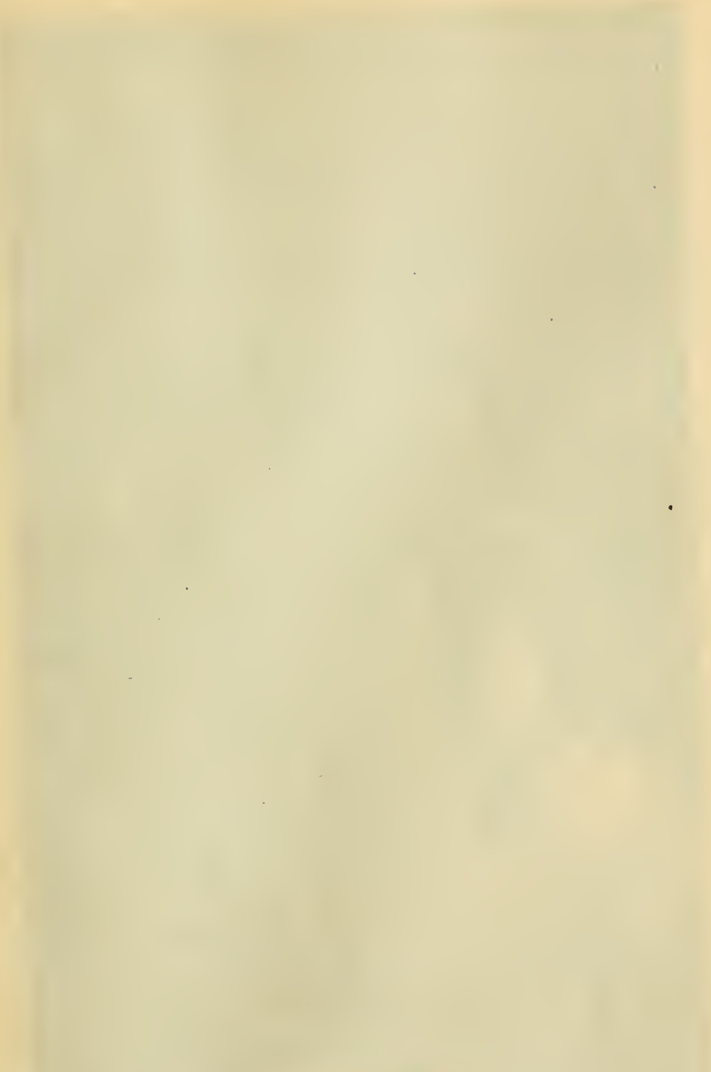
"Christian!.."

He continued his way.

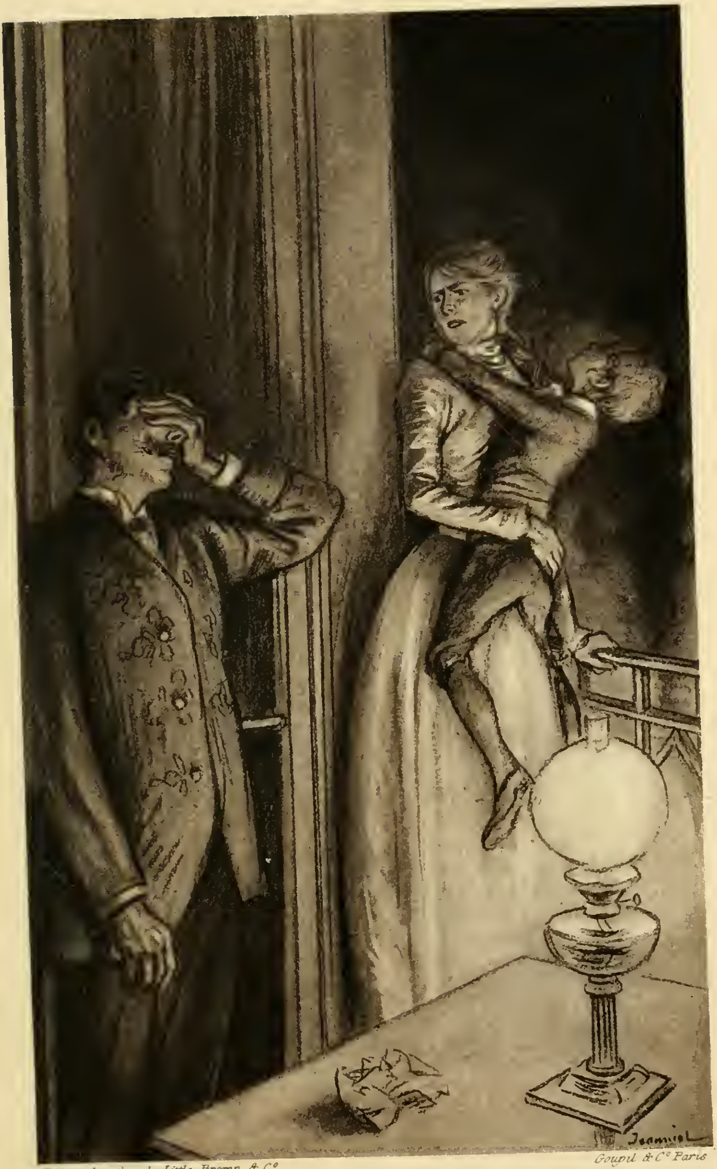
She made one step and the gesture of gathering her gown to pursue him; then she said, suddenly:

"So be it!"

He stopped, and saw her, erect before the open window, her foot upon the narrow stone cop-



King and Queen.



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ing, with one arm bearing her son to death, with the other threatening the escaping coward. The glimmer of the sky lighted this strange group from without.

"To the operetta king, a tragic queen!" she said, grave and terrible. "If you do not instantly burn that which you have just signed, with an oath upon that cross that you will not sign again . . . your race is ended, crushed . . . wife . . . child . . . there, upon those stones. . ."

And in her words, in her beautiful body leaning to the void, there was such impulse to the spring that the king, terrified, rushed forward to grasp her.

"Frederica! . ."

At his father's cry, at the quivering of the arm that bore him, the child — now entirely outside the window — believed that all was over and that death had come. He said not a word, not a plaint, for was he not going with his mother? But his little hands clung to the queen's neck tightly, and throwing back his head from which those victim locks streamed down, he closed his sweet eyes to the horror of the fall.

Christian resisted no longer . . . that courage, that resignation of the child-king, who already knew this much of his royal business — how to die well! . . The king's heart burst in his bosom. He flung upon the table the crumpled deed he had been twisting in his fingers for the last few minutes, and fell, sobbing, into a chair. Frederica, still distrustful, read through the paper from the first line to the signature; then, putting it to a candle, she burned it to her fingers' ends and scattered the black fragments on the table. That done, she carried away her child, who was beginning to drop asleep in his heroic attitude of suicide.

XI.

THE WATCHERS.

It was the end of an amicable meal in the parlour of the second-hand establishment in the Rue Éginhard. Old Leemans when he is alone munches his crust at the kitchen table, opposite to the Darnet, without cloth or napkin; but when he has company the careful housekeeper takes off, grumbling, the white covers to the furniture, hides away the little mats before the chairs, and sets the table before the portrait of "monsieur," in the neat and peaceful salon, worthy of a priest, which is for several hours delivered over to smells of fry and garlic, and to discussions, highly seasoned also, in the argot of low money-dealing.

Ever since the "Grand Stroke" had been preparing, these dinners were frequent. It is well for all such affairs with mixed accounts to meet often and concert together; and nowhere could this be done so safely as in the depths of the little Rue Eginhard, lost in the past of ancient Paris. There, at any rate, they could talk aloud, discuss, and plot. . . And now the end was near. In a few days, what am I saying? in a few hours the renunciation would be signed and the "affair" which had already swallowed up so much money would begin to be profitable. The certainty of success illumined the eyes and voices of the guests with a sort of gilded gayety, made the table linen whiter, the wine better. It was a true wedding-feast, presided over by old Leemans and Pichery, his inseparable, — a wooden head, stiff and pomatumed Hungarian fashion, above a stiff stock; something military but not frank, the aspect of a cashiered officer. Present profession: usurer in pictures, a new and complicated trade well versed in our present art manias and adapted to them. When the son of a family is high and dry, shorn and raked, he goes to Pichery, picture-dealer, sumptuously installed in the Rue Lafitte.

"Have you a Corot, a treasure of a Corot? . . I am so in love with that painter."

"Ah! Corot! . ." says Pichery, closing his dead fish-eyes with beatific admiration; then, changing his tone: "Yes, I have just what you want . . ." and then, on a great easel, rolled in front of them, he shows a pretty Corot, a morning scene all quivering with silvery mists and nymphs dancing beneath the willows. The spendthrift dandy puts up his monocle and pretends to admire it.

"Chic! . . very chic! . . How much?"

"Fifty thousand francs," says Pichery without blinking. The other does not blink either.

"Three months? . ."

"Three months, with security."

The dandy gives his note and carries away the picture to his own house or his mistress's, and for a whole day he allows himself the joy of saying at the club and on the boulevard: "I have just bought a stunning Corot." The next day he sends his Corot to the auction rooms where Pichery despatches old Leemans to buy it back for ten or twelve thousand francs, its proper price. This is usury at exorbitant interest, but legal, without risk. Pichery himself is not expected to know whether or not the amateur buys in good faith. He sells his Corot very dear, *cuir et poils*, as they say in that pretty business, but he is strictly within his rights, for the value of an art object is conventional. Moreover he is very careful not to sell any but authentic merchandise, passed upon by old Leemans, who, by the way, has taught him his artistic vocabulary, very surprising in the mouth of that shady veteran, who is intimate however with the young Gomme and the cocottes of the Opera quarter, both of whom are very necessary to his traffic.

On the other side of Patriarch Leemans, sat Séphora and her husband, playing lovers; their chairs and their glasses touching one another. They had met so seldom since the beginning of this affair! J. Tom Levis, who, for the world at large, was in London, was really living shut up in his castellated abode at Courbevoie, fishing with a line all day for want of dupes to bait, and much occupied in worrying the Sprichts with his tomfoolery. Séphora, more restrained than a Spanish queen, awaiting the king at any hour, and always ceremonious and under arms, was forced to lead the life of an upper-class demi-mondaine; a life so empty and so little amusing that such ladies nearly always live in couples in order to endure their long, weary drives and heart-breaking leisure. But the Comtesse de Spalato had no double in all the town. She could not visit courtesans, nor the other *déclassées* of the questionable world; honest women would not receive her; and Christian II. would not have tolerated around her that whirl of idlers who fill the salons frequented by men only. Consequently, she was absolutely alone in her boudoirs with their painted ceilings, and their mirrors garlanded with cupids and roses, but reflecting nought except her indolent image, bored by the king's insipid incense, burned at her feet like those headache perfumes that smoke in a golden cup. Ah! she would give quickly enough that melancholy princely life for the little cellar salon in the Rue Royale, with her mountebank before her executing his jig of the Grand Stroke! Scarcely could she even write to him to keep him informed of what was going on.

Consequently, how happy she is to-night; how she snuggles to Tom, excites him, stirs him up. "Come, make me laugh." And Tom bestirs himself, but his liveliness is not quite frank, and it drops after each outburst into a troublesome thought which he does not utter, and about which I will give you a thousand guesses. . .

Tom Levis is jealous. He knows that there can be nothing as yet between Christian and Séphora;

that she is much too clever to give herself without proper security; but the psychologic moment is approaching; that paper once signed, the agreement must be kept; and i' faith, my friend Tom felt troubles, uneasinesses, that were very strange in a man devoid of all superstitions and childish notions. Little feverish, terrified, cold chills ran over him as he looked at his wife, who had never seemed to him so pretty as she did now in her toilet elegance and the title of countess, which seemed to polish her features, brighten her eyes, and raise her hair beneath a coronet with pearls upon its spikes. Evidently J. Tom Levis is not up to the level of his part; he has not the solid shoulders of his trade. A mere nothing would decide him to take back his wife and let everything go. But a sort of shame restrains him, the fear of ridicule; and then, such sums of money spent on the affair. The unfortunate fellow argued the matter with himself and was torn by these various scruples, which the countess would never have supposed him capable of feeling. He affected great gayety, gesticulating with the dagger in his heart, enlivening the company with a choice relation of his Agency tricks, and ended by so exhilarating old Leemans and the glacial Pichery himself that they pulled their choicest tricks from their bags and told their best hoaxes on amateurs.

They get to that point, don't they, — these partners, these cronies, their elbows on the table? Yes, they told all; the underside of auctions; their trap-doors and pitfalls; the coalition of big dealers, rivals apparently; their dodges; their traffic with porters, that mysterious free-masonry which puts a real barrier of greasy collars and ragged coats between a rare object and the caprice of a purchaser, and forces the latter at last to a folly at some great price. It was a tournament of cynical tales, a joust to the cleverest, the most rascally sharper.

"Did I ever tell you *that* about my Egyptian lantern and Mora?" asked Père Leemans, sipping his coffee. Then he told for the hundredth time—as an old soldier tells of his favourite campaign—the tale of the lantern which a distressed Levantine had let him have for two thousand francs, and which he resold the same day to the president of the council for forty thousand, with a double commission, five hundred from the Levantine and five thousand from the duke. But what made the charm of the tale was the account given of the sly twists and turns, the shrewd art of exciting and leading on a rich and conceited customer. "Yes, no doubt, a fine thing, but dear, too dear. . . I advise you, Monsieur le duc, to let some one else commit that folly. . . I am pretty sure the Sismondos. . . Ah! yes, yes, a pretty bit of work . . . this framework of little bars . . . that embossed chain . . ." And the old fellow, stimulated by the laughter that shook the table, fingered a shabby little note-book worn at the edges that lay on the table-cloth, and from which his memory refreshed itself now and then as to a date, a figure, an address. All the famous amateurs were classed and noted in that book, like the marriageable girls with large *dots* on the *grand livre* of M. de. Foy, with their peculiarities, their hobbies, their complexions brown or fair; those who must be bullied; those who only value an object if it costs very dear; the sceptical amateur; the artless amateur, to whom you can say when you sell him a fraud: " *You* know . . . don't let any one get *that* away from you." To old Leemans personally the note-book was worth a fortune.

" Look here, Tom," said Séphora, who wanted to make her husband shine, " suppose you tell them *that* about your arrival in Paris . . . you know, your first affair, Rue Soufflot."

Tom did not need to be urged; he poured himself out a little brandy to strengthen his voice, and related how, about a dozen years before, returning from London, cleaned out and shabby, with his last five francs in his pocket, he heard from an old comrade, whom he met in an English tavern near the station, that the Agencies were just then engaged in a big affair, the marriage of Mlle. Beaugars, daughter of a contractor, who had twelve millions of dot and had taken it into her head to marry a great seigneur, a real one. A magnificent commission was offered, and the hounds were numerous. Tom was not hindered by that. He went to a reading-room and turned over all the genealogical books of France, the Gotha and Bottin, and finally discovered an ancient, a very ancient family ramifying into all that were most celebrated, and living at that time in the Rue

Soufflot. The incongruity between the title and the name of the street informed him plainly of either a downfall or a vice. "On what floor does M. le Marquis de X live?" He sacrificed his last bit of silver and obtained from the concierge a few scraps of information. . . Great nobility indeed . . . widower, son just leaving Saint-Cyr and a daughter of eighteen, very well brought-up. . . "Rent two thousand francs, including gas, water, and carpet," added the concierge, for whom that last detail increased the dignity of his lodger. . . "Exactly what I want," thought Tom; and he went up, rather dashed, it must be said, by the respectable air of the staircase, statue at the bottom, arm-chairs at each landing, the luxury of a modern house, not much in keeping with his threadbare coat, his boots that let in water, and his very delicate errand.

"Part way up," related the agent, "I had half a mind to go down again. Then, i' faith, I thought it plucky to risk the stroke. I said to myself: 'You have wits, and cheek, and your living to make . . . honour to intellect! . .' And up I went, four steps at a time. They ushered me into a great salon, of which I soon made the inventory. Two or three fine antiquities, pompous relics, a portrait by Largillière, much poverty underneath, sofa rickety, chairs without horsehair, chimney as cold as its marble mantelpiece. Enter the master of the house; majestic old man, very chic, Samson in 'Mademoiselle de la Seiglière.' 'You have a son, Monsieur le marquis?' At the first words Samson rose, indignant; I uttered the sum . . . twelve millions . . . that made him sit down again, and we talked. . . He began by owning that he had not a fortune equal to his name, twenty thousand francs a year at the most, and that he would not be sorry to regild his blazon. The son would have one hundred thousand francs for a portion. 'Oh! Monsieur le marquis, the name suffices. . .' Then we settled the amount of my commission, and I got away, in a great hurry, being wanted at my place of business. . . Place of business, indeed! when I did n't know where to sleep. . . But at the door the old gentleman stopped me, and said, in a kindly way: 'Look here, you seem to me a lively fellow. . . I have a mind to propose to you. . . You might marry my daughter also. . . She has n't a *dot*. For to tell you the truth, I exaggerated just now about the twenty thousand francs a year. There 's not the half. . . But I can dispose of the title of a Roman count for my son-in-law . . . and what is more, if he is in the army, my relationship to the minister of war will secure him advancement.' I took notes: 'Rely upon me, M. le marquis,' and I was going out . . . A hand was laid flat upon my shoulder. . . I turned round. Samson looked at me, and laughed, with such a droll air. . . 'And then, there 's myself,' he said. . . 'What, M. le marquis?' 'Yes, I 'm not too far gone, and if I found an opportunity . . .' He ended by admitting that he was rotten with debts, and not a penny to pay them. '*Pardieu*, my dear Monsieur Tom,' he said, 'if you could ferret out for me some good business-woman with serious savings, old maid or widow, send her this way with her purse . . . I 'll make her a marquise.' When I left that house my education was complete. I understood the whole of what there was to do in Parisian society; the Levis Agency was morally founded. . . "

This tale was marvellous as narrated, or rather as acted by Tom Levis. He rose, sat down, imitated the majesty of the old noble quickly degenerating into the cynicism of bohemia, and his way of spreading his handkerchief between his knees when he wanted to cross his legs, and the three corrections as to the nothingness of his actual resources. One might have thought it a scene from the "Neveu de Rameau," but Rameau's nephew in the nineteenth century, without powder, without grace, without violin, and with something hard, ferocious, the fierceness of an English bulldog in the satirical intonation of the former suburban blackguard. The others laughed and were mightily amused, deducing from Tom's narrative reflections philosophical and cynical.

"Don't you see, my children," said old Leemans, "that if we second-hand brokers combined together we should be masters of the world? . . People traffic with everything in these days, and everything passes through our hands, leaving a bit of its skin behind it. . . When I think of all the business that has been done for the last forty years in this hole of the Rue Éginhard, all that I have sold, vamped-up, exchanged! I lacked nothing but a crown to sell; and here it is . . . in the bag."

He rose, glass in hand, his eyes brilliant and ferocious.

"À la Brocante, mes enfants!"[1]

At the lower end of the room la Darnet, on the watch behind her black peasant's-cap, heard all and learned much about the business, in which she hoped to establish herself at "monsieur's" death, and sell on her own account.

Suddenly the little bell at the entrance door rang violently in a strangled way, like an old catarrh. They all quivered. Who could be coming at such an hour?

"It must be Lebeau," said old Leemans. "None but he would . . ."

Loud shouts welcomed the valet, whom they had not seen for some time, and who now made his entrance, pale, haggard, his teeth clenched, utterly prostrate in manner and out of temper.

"Sit down, my old rascal," said Leemans, making room between himself and his daughter.

"The devil!" said the other, looking round upon their jovial faces, the table and the remains of the feast. "You seem to be amusing yourselves here. . ."

At that observation and the funereal tone in which it was made, they looked at one another, rather uneasy. . . *Parbleu!* yes, they were amusing themselves, they were gay. Why should they be sad?

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[1] No English word for *brocante*, nor any term that gives an idea of it: brokerage in old things, from clothes to rare pictures, furniture, and bric-à-brac.

M. Lebeau seemed stupefied.

"What! . . You don't know? . . When did you see the king, countess?"

"Why, this morning . . . yesterday . . . every day."

"And he told you nothing of the terrible quarrel? . ."

In two words he related the scene with the queen, the burned deed, their whole affair burned up with it, apparently.

"Ah! the sneak!" cried Séphora. "I'm sold!"

Tom, very uneasy, looked his wife in the eye. Could she, by chance, have had a moment of imprudent weakness? . . But milady was in no humour to explain herself, being full of her rage and indignation against Christian, who, for more than a week had been floundering in a series of lies to explain to her how it was that the deed of renunciation was not yet signed. . . Oh! the coward, the base coward and liar! . . But why had not Lebeau warned them earlier?

"Ah! yes, why indeed?" said the valet, with his hideous smile. . . "I should have had fine trouble to do that. . . For the last ten days I've roamed the highways. . . Five hundred leagues without taking breath, without halting. . . Not even the chance to write a letter, watched as I was by a cursèd monk, a Franciscan Father who smells like a wild beast and twirls his knife like a bandit. . . He watched my every movement; never let me out of his sight one second, under pretence that he did not know enough French to make himself understood. . . The truth is, they distrust me at Saint-Mandé, and they have taken advantage of my absence to get a great affair under way.

"What affair?" asked all their eyes.

"Something, I think, about an expedition to Dalmatia. . . It is that devil of a Gascon who has turned their heads. . . Oh! I said from the first we ought to get rid of that fellow. . ."

But in vain did they try to hide things from him; he, the valet, had scented preparations in the air for some time past; letters departing at all hours; mysterious consultations. One day, opening a water-colour album which that little fool of a Rosen had left about, he had seen designs for uniforms, costumes drawn by her: "Illyrian volunteers, dragoons of the Faith, blue shirts, cuirassiers of the true Right." Another day he had overheard the princess and Mme. de Silvis in a grave discussion concerning the shape and size of the cockades. From all of which, and from scraps of remarks gathered here and there, he suspected a great expedition; and the journey he had just made was probably concerning it. The little dark man, a sort of hunchback, whom they had gone to find among the mountains of Navarre, must be some great general charged with leading the army under the orders of the king.

"What! the king going too! . ." cried old Leemans, casting a contemptuous look at his daughter.

A tumult of words followed the old man's exclamation.

"And our money?"

"And the notes?"

"'T is an infamy!"

"A theft!"

And as, in these days, politics, like Æsop's dish is served up everywhere, Pichery, who is an imperialist, apostrophized the Republic stiff in his horse-hair stock: —

"Never under the Empire would such a thing have been allowed! — to endanger the tranquillity of a neighbouring State! . ."

"It is very certain," said Tom, gravely, "that if it were known to our authorities they would never permit it. . . They ought to be warned, stirred up. . ."

"Yes, I have thought of that," replied Lebeau. "Unluckily, I don't know anything positive, precise. They would not listen to me. Besides, our people are very distrustful . . . all their precautions are taken to mislead suspicions. . . This very evening, the queen's birthday, there is a great fête at the hôtel de Rosen. . . What good would it do to tell the authorities that those dancers are conspiring and preparing for battles? . . And yet there certainly is something out of the common going on at that ball. . ."

Then for the first time it was noticed that the valet was in evening dress, thin shoes, white cravat; yes, he is in charge of the buffets, and he must get back as fast as he can to the Île Saint-Louis. Suddenly Séphora, who had been reflecting for a few moments, said: —

"Listen, Lebeau . . . if the king starts, you will know it, will you not? . . They will tell you, if only to pack his trunks. . . Well, if I am warned only one hour in advance I swear to you the expedition shall not take place."

She said this in her tranquil voice with slow but firm decision. And while Tom Levis was asking himself by what means his wife could prevent the king from starting, and the other conspirators, much dejected, were calculating what the non-success of the grand stroke would cost them, Maître Lebeau, returning to the ball, hurries along on the tips of his pumps through a labyrinth of dark little streets, old roofs, old balconies, scutcheoned portals, through all that aristocratic quarter of the last century now turned into workshops and manufactories, which, shaken by day with the rolling of heavy carts and the swarming of a poor population, resumes at night its character of a strange dead city.

The fête was seen and heard afar, — a summer fête, a midnight fête, sending along the two banks of the river its scattered echoes and its lights in a ruddy mist of flame from the extremity of the Island, which looks, as it projects into the flowing water, like the high and rounded poop of some gigantic vessel riding at anchor. Come nearer; tall and brilliantly lighted windows can be distinguished; a thousand coloured fires in glass globes are fastened among the copses, to the single trees of the garden; and along the Quay d'Anjou, usually asleep at that hour, the lanterns of the waiting carriages are making holes in the darkness with their motionless little lights. Since Herbert's marriage the hôtel Rosen had seen no fête like this; in fact, the present one was finer, more vast, more crowded, with all its doors and windows open to the splendour of a starlit night.

The ground-floor apartments formed one long gallery of salons, lofty as a cathedral, decorated with paintings, ancient gilding, Dutch or Venetian lustres lighting a strange decoration, hangings shimmering with gold reflections upon green or red, heavy shrines of massive silver, ivories, framed in a medley, old mirrors with blackened quicksilver, reliquaries, banners, treasures of Montenegro and Herzegovina, which Parisian taste had known how to group and to display, with nothing discordant, nothing too exotic about them. The orchestra, stationed in the gallery of an ancient oratory recalling that of Chenonceaux, was surrounded with oriflammes, which sheltered also the chairs of the king and queen. In contrast to all this past, to these rich reflections from antiquity which would put old Leemans beside himself, came the waltzes of the day, languorous or whirling; the waltzers with long embroidered trains, with fixed and brilliant eyes in a mist of fluffy hair, passing like a defiance of abounding youth; fair young visions, slender, floating, and brunette apparitions of a moist white pallor. From time to time, from this tangle of dancers moving in a circle, from this medley of silken stuffs which added to the music a sound of coquettish and mysterious rippling, couples would detach themselves and waltz through the tall glass door, receiving on their heads, inclined in opposite directions, the white reflections of the illuminated frontal where the queen's monogram was glittering, and continue through the garden paths the rhythm of their dance, with some hesitation and little pauses caused by the distance of the music, making the waltz at last a cadenced march, a tuneful promenade, skirting the balmy groups of roses and magnolias. In short, apart from the rarity and the curiosity of the decorations and the presence of a few types of foreign women with the tawny hair and the languid suppleness of their Slav nature, there was nothing here, at first sight, but one of those fashionable kermesses such as the Faubourg Saint-Germain (represented at the hôtel Rosen by its most ancient and imposing names) was in the habit of giving in its old gardens of the Rue de l'Université, where the dancers often passed from the waxed floors to the lawns, the black coats being suffered to redeem themselves with light-coloured trousers,—summer fêtes in the open air, freer and more exuberant than others.

From his bedroom on the second floor the old duke, crippled for the last week by an acute attack of sciatica, listened to the echoes of his ball, smothering beneath the bedclothes his moans of pain, and his barrack-room maledictions on the ironical cruelty of the disease which nailed him to his bed on such a day, making it impossible that he should himself join that band of noble youth which was destined to start on the morrow.

The decree had gone forth, the posts for the struggle chosen, and this ball was a farewell, a sort of defiance to war's mischances, and, at the same time, a protection against the suspicions of the French police. Though the duke could not accompany the volunteers, he consoled himself with the thought that his son Herbert would take part in the affair, and his money too, for their Majesties had kindly permitted him to assume all the costs of the expedition. On his bed, mingled with maps for the staff and strategic plans, lay bills for the outfit: such as cases of muskets, shoes, blankets, victuals; all of which he carefully verified, with a terrible bristling of his moustache — heroic grimace of the royalist striving to get the better of his parsimonious instincts. Now and then, he lacked a figure or a fact, and then he sent for Herbert, — a pretext to keep for a few moments near him, there under his curtains, the tall son who was to leave him on the morrow for the first time, whom he might never see again perhaps, and for whom he felt an infinite tenderness, ill-concealed by his stiff manner and majestic silences. But the prince when he came would not stay long, being in haste to do the honours of the house, and, above all, unwilling to lose a moment of the short hours he had still to spend with his dear Colette.

Standing with him in the first salon, she helped him to receive his father's guests; looking prettier and more dainty than ever in her narrow tunic of old lace, made of the alb of a Greek bishop, the dull white reflections of which set off her fragile beauty, that wore an impress of almost solemn mystery on this last evening. It gave repose to her features, it darkened the blue of her eyes, the same blue as that pretty little cockade fluttering among her curls beneath a diamond aigrette. . . Hush! the cockade of an Illyrian volunteer, the model designed by herself and adopted by the expedition. . . Ah! for three months she had not been idle, the pretty little thing! Copying proclamations, carrying them secretly to the convent of the Franciscans, designing costumes, banners, foiling the police whom she always believed were at her heels; it was thus she played her part as a royalist great lady, inspired by her former studies at the Sacré-Cœur. One only detail was lacking to her programme of Vendean guerilla warfare; she could not go, she could not follow her Herbert. For now it was Herbert, Herbert only; by some blessing of nature, the other was no more thought of than the poor ouistiti so cruelly crushed and mangled on the pavement of the quay. This delight of sporting a man's costume and of putting her feet into stout little boots was denied to Colette for two reasons: one, her service near the queen; the other, very private, whispered only the night before into Herbert's ear. Yes, if she were not mistaken, after a lapse of time easy to calculate by taking the day of the session of the Academy as the point of departure, the race of Rosen would be blessed with one representative the more; and it was quite impossible to expose a hope so dear, so precious, to the fatigues of an expedition which could not terminate without some rough and bloody thrusts; quite as impossible as it was to accept an invitation for a waltz in those splendid salons. What secrets the little woman was now obliged to keep; and in spite of her mysterious lips, her eyes, adorably telltale, and the languid way in which she hung on Herbert's arm had a fancy to tell all.

Suddenly the music was hushed, the dancers stopped; every one stood up to await the entrance of Christian and Frederica. They crossed the three salons resplendent in national treasures, where the queen could see her monogram embroidered everywhere in flowers, lights, and jewels; where all things spoke to them of their country, of its glories; and now they stood upon the threshold of the garden. . . Never was monarchy represented in a loftier and more brilliant fashion; a perfect couple to engrave upon the coins of a people, on the frontal of a dynasty. The queen, especially, was admirable; younger by ten years in a splendid white attire, and on her neck, for all jewels, a heavy amber collar from which hung a cross. Given and blessed by the Pope, this collar has its legend, which the faithful relate to one another in whispers. Frederica wore it during the whole period of the siege of Ragusa, where it was twice lost in the sorties, and twice miraculously recovered under fire of the battle. She attaches a sort of superstition to it, fastens a queen's vow upon it, without one thought of the charming effect of its gold pearls close beside the golden hair of which they seem, as it were, to scatter the reflections.

While the sovereigns stood there, radiant, admiring the fête and the garden and its fairy illumination, suddenly three strokes of a bow, fantastic, rasping, energetic, were given from the middle of a clump of rhododendrons. Every Slav in the assembly quivered, recognizing the notes of *guzlas*, whose long-stemmed mandolins could be seen amid the dark-green foliage. The notes began with a humming prelude, an overflowing of distant and sonorous waves, advancing, rising, increasing, shedding themselves around. 'Twas like a heavy cloud, charged with electricity, from which, now and again, a sharper bow struck lightnings, whence there presently gushed forth, stormy and voluptuous, the heroic rhythm of the national air, hymn and dance in one, that air of Rodoïtza which "down there" takes part in all the fêtes and all the battles, presenting finely the double character of its antique legend: — The soldier Rodoïtza, fallen into the hands of the Turks, pretends death to escape them. They light a fire on his breast; the soldier does not flinch. They slip a snake, roused by the sun, into his bosom; they drive a score of nails beneath his nails: he maintains his stony stillness. Then, they bring to him Haïkouna, the tallest and loveliest of the daughters of Zara, who dances as she sings to him the air of Illyria. At the first notes, as Rodoïtza heard the tinkle of the sequins of her necklet, the quiver of the fringes of her belt, he smiled, his eyes opened and he would have been lost, if the dancer in a whirling step had not flung upon his face the silken scarf with which she timed and crowned her dance. Thus was the soldier saved, and this is why for two hundred years the national air of Illyria is called the "air of Rodoïtza."

Hearing it ring now beneath the sky of exile, all the Illyrians, men and women, turned pale. This call of the *guzlas*, which the orchestra at the farther end of the salon accompanies in undertones, like a murmur of waves above which rises the cry of the stormy petrel, *this* is the cry of the nation itself, swollen with memories, with tears, regrets, and hopes inexpressible. The huge bows, heavy, shaped like the bows of archers, did not vibrate upon common strings, but on nerves strained to the breaking point, on fibres delicately resonant. These young men, bold and proud, of martial cut, felt within them, all, the indomitable courage of Rodoïtza, so well repaid by woman's love; and these beautiful Dalmatians, tall as Haïkouna, have in their hearts her tenderness for heroes. And the old men, thinking of their distant country, the mothers looking at their sons, crave all to sob, all, all — were it not for the presence of the king and queen — uniting their voices to the strident cry which the *guzla* players, their playing ended, fling to the stars in a last rushing firework of chords.

Immediately after, the dances were resumed, with a spring, a dash, surprising in a society where we may amuse ourselves only in conventional ways. Certainly there was, as Lebeau had said, something in this fête that was out of the common, something ardent, feverish, passionate, which was felt in the clasp of the arms around the waists, in the spring of the dancers, in certain glittering looks that crossed each other, even in the cadence of the waltzes, the mazurkas, which rang at times with the clanking of swords and spurs. Toward the end of balls, when morning pales the windows, the last hour of pleasure has a hurried ardour, a tired intoxication. But on this occasion the ball had hardly begun before the hands of all were burning in their gloves, hearts were beating beneath the corsage bouquets or the diamond orders, and as each couple passed, lost in a cadenced love, eyes rested long and tenderly upon them, smiling. All present knew that those handsome youths, the nobles of Illyria exiled with their princes, and the nobles of France ever ready to give their blood to the good cause, were to start at dawn of day on a bold and perilous expedition. Even in case of victory, how many would return of those high-spirited young men who now enrolled themselves without a count of cost? How many, within a week, would bite the earth, lying on mountain slopes, the sound of that mazurka still humming in their ears to the beat of their ebbing life-blood? 'T was the nearness of danger, mingling with the joy of a ball the anxiety of a night-watch, that made those young eyes glitter with tears and flashes, audacity and surrender, — for what could be denied to him who goes, who goes to death, it may be? That death which hovered in the air, whose wing swept round them in the cadence of the violins, how it tightened the embrace, and hastened the avowal! Fugitive loves! meeting of ephemera in a single ray of sunshine! They had hardly seen each other, they might never meet again, but here were two hearts chained. Some, the more haughty of the women, tried to smile in spite of their emotion; but what gentleness beneath that pride! And all this as they danced with heads thrown back and locks floating, each couple fancying themselves alone, hid, lost in the twining magic whirl of a waltz of Brahms or a mazurka of Chopin.

One was there, vibrating too, and deeply moved. It was Méraut, in whom the notes of the *guzlas*, soft and savagely energetic in turn, had awakened the adventurous, bohemian spirit which lies at the bottom of all the sun-temperaments, with a mad desire to rush afar through unknown paths to the Light, to adventure, to battle, to do some bold and valiant action for which women would admire him. Méraut, who did not dance, who had never fought, the intoxication of this ball of heroism attained him; and to think that all this youth was departing, to give its blood, to do great deeds and dangerous emprises, while he remained behind with old men, children! To think that, having organized the enterprise, he must leave it to be carried on without him! All this was sadness, hardship inexpressible. The idea, the ideal, was put to shame before action! It may be that this wringing of the heart, this desire to die, poured into him by the songs and the Slavic dances, was not disconnected with the radiant pride of Frederica on the arm of Christian II. How happy he felt her to be in beholding, at last, the king, the warrior in her husband! . . Haïkouna, Haïkouna, in the clash of arms thou canst all forget and all forgive, — betrayal, lies: what thou lovest above all things is personal valour; on that thy handkerchief, warm with thy tears, with the faint fragrance of thy face, is cast. . . And while he thus bemoaned himself, Haïkouna, who saw, in the corner of the salon, that broad poetic brow where the thick rebellious locks, so little in the fashion, massed themselves, Haïkouna smiled, and made him a sign to come to her. It seemed as though she had divined the reason of his sadness.

"What a beautiful fête, Monsieur Méraut!"

Then, lowering her voice: —

"I owe this, too, to you. . . But we owe you so much . . . we know not how to thank you."

It was he, indeed, whose robust faith had breathed upon the dying flames, given hope to despair, and prepared the rising which on the morrow was to turn to action. The queen did not forget him, she; there was not a person in that illustrious assembly to whom she would have spoken with that deferent kindness, that glance of gratitude and sweetness, there, before them all, in the midst of the respectful circle ranged around the sovereigns. But Christian II. turned towards him, again taking Frederica's arm.

"The Marquis de Hezeta is here," he said to Élysée. "Have you seen him?"

"I do not know him, Sire. . ."

"But he says that you and he are old friends. . . See, there he is."

The Marquis de Hezeta was the leader who, in the absence of old General Rosen, was to command the expedition. In the last attempt of the Duke of Palma he had shown astonishing qualities as a corps commander, and never, had he been listened to, would the affair have ended as it did. When he saw his efforts wasted, and the Pretender himself giving the signal and the example of flight, the *cabecilla*, seized with lassitude and misanthropy, flung himself into the Basque mountains, and lived there, safe from childish conspiracies, false hopes, sword-thrusts into water, which exhausted his moral forces. He wished to die obscurely in his own country, but was now once more tempted forth to adventure by the seductive royalism of Père Alphée and the renown for bravery of Christian II. The ancient nobility of the partisan, his romantic life of exile, persecution, grand and dashing strokes, and fanatical cruelty, all this surrounded the Marquis Don José Maria de Hezeta with an almost legendary interest, and made him now the personage of the ball.

"Good-evening, Ély . . ." he said, coming up to Élysée with extended hand, and calling him by his child's name in the old days of the Enclos de Rey. . . "Yes, yes, it is I . . . your old master . . . Monsieur Papel."

The black coat, laden with crosses and orders, the white cravat had not changed him, nor yet the additional score of years that lay upon that huge dwarf's-head, so swarthy with powder and the tan of the mountain air that his frontal vein, terrible and characteristic, was scarcely seen. With its disappearance his royalist infatuation seemed attenuated, as if the *cabecilla* had left in his Basque beretta, which he flung into a torrent at the end of his last campaign, a part of his old beliefs, his early illusions.

Élysée was strangely surprised to hear the talk of his old master, of the man who had made him what he was.

"You see, my little Ély . . ."

The little Ély was two feet taller than himself, and not lacking in gray hairs.

". . . it is all over, there are no kings now. . . The principle is alive, but the men are wanting. Not one of these unhorsed ones is capable of getting back into the saddle . . . and not one of them really wishes to. . . Ha! what I've seen, what I've seen, during this last war! . ."

A bloody mist seemed to cross his brow and inject his eyes, fixed and as if enlarged by a vision of shame, cowardice, treachery. . .

"But all kings are not alike," protested Méraut, "and I am sure that Christian . . ."

"Yours is worth no more than ours. . . A child, a mere enjoyer. . . Not an idea, no will in those eyes of pleasure. . . Look at him now!"

He pointed to the king, who was waltzing past them, his eyes vague, his forehead moist, his small head bending to the bared shoulder of his partner, inhaling it with his open mouth as if he would fain have rolled there. In the rising intoxication of the ball, the pair passed on, touching them with their panting breaths but without seeing them; and as the company crowded into the gallery to see Christian II., the finest waltzer in his kingdom, dance, Hezeta and Méraut took refuge in the deep embrasure of an open window looking on the Quai d'Anjou. They stayed there a long time, half within the whirl and tumult of the ball and half in the cool fresh shadow, the stilling silence of the night.

"Kings believe no longer . . . they *will* no longer. Why should we strive for them?" said the Spaniard, with a sullen air.

"You believe in them no longer. . . And yet you go to-morrow?"

"Yes, I go."

"Without hope?"

"One only. . . That of getting my head broke; my poor head, which I know not where to lay."

"And the king?"

"Oh! as for him, I am easy enough. . ."

Did he mean to say that Christian II. was not yet gone, or that, like his cousin the Duke of Palma, he would always know how to get safely back from a battle? Hezeta did not explain himself further.

Around them the ball continued its giddy whirl, but Élysée saw it now through the discouraged eyes of his old master and his own disillusions. He felt an immense pity for that valiant youth which so gayly was preparing to fight beneath leaders whose faith was gone; already the fête, its scene confused, its lights veiled, disappeared to his eyes in the smoke of a battlefield, in a great *mêlée* of disaster, from which the unknown dead were gathered up. For an instant, in order to shake off that threatening vision, he leaned upon the window-sill above the deserted quay, on which the palace shed great squares of light that reached beyond it to the Seine. And the water to which he listened, always tossing and tumultuous at this angle of the Isle, mingled the noises of its current and its furious dash against the arches of the bridge with the sighs of the violins and the rasping plaints of the *guzlas*, leaping in short gasps like the sobs of a heart oppressed or spreading itself in weltering waves like the blood of an open wound.

XII.

THE NIGHT-TRAIN.

"WE leave to-night, eleven o'clock, Lyons Station. Destination unknown. Probably Cette, Nice, or Marseilles. Take warning."

When this note, hastily scratched off by Lebeau, reached the Avenue de Messine, the Comtesse de Spalato had just left her bath, all fresh, fragrant, and supple, and was moving about her boudoir, watering and taking care of her flowers and her green plants, gloved to the elbows in Swedish kid for this excursion through the artificial garden. She showed no emotion, but stopped a moment to reflect in the calm half-light of the closed blinds; then she made a little resolute gesture and shrugged her shoulders as if to say: "Bah! who wants the end must take the means. . ." After which she rang for her maid, to be put under arms to receive the king.

"What will madame put on?"

"Nothing. . . I shall stay as I am. . ."

And certainly nothing could be more becoming to her than that long garment of pale blue flannel, in soft, clinging folds, a great fichu tied, childlike, behind her waist, and her black hair, twisted, curled and raised very high, showing the nape of the neck, and the starting line of the shoulders, which could easily be imagined of a brighter tone than the face, the brightness of warm and polished amber.

She thought, with reason, that no formal toilet could equal this dishabille, which enhanced the simple, girlish air the king so delighted in; but this decision obliged her to breakfast in her chamber, for she could not, of course, go downstairs in such attire. She had organized her household on a grave and serious footing; there was nothing here of the fantastic and bohemian allurements of Courbevoie. After breakfast she installed herself in her boudoir, from which a wide veranda projected over the avenue, and there, peacefully seated and rosy in the reflection of the window shades, she watched for the king. Christian never came before two o'clock; but from that hour an altogether novel emotion began in her placid nature, namely: expectant waiting — at first quivering slightly like a ripple in the water, then agitated, feverish, humming. Carriages were rare at that hour on the tranquil avenue, now bathed in sunshine between its double rows of plane-trees and new hotels, ending in the gilded railings and lamp-posts of the Parc Monceaux. At the faintest roll of wheels Séphora drew aside the blind to see who was coming, and her expectation, each time balked, was irritated by that exterior quietude, that rural calmness.

What had happened? Would he really go without seeing her?

She sought for reasons, pretexts; but when we are waiting, all else waits; the whole being remains in suspense, and ideas, floating, disconnected, are no more completed than words that are stammered by the lips. Séphora felt this torture, this swooning, in the tips of her fingers where all nerves reach and quiver. Again she raised the rose-coloured linen of the shade. A warm breeze stirred the branches like green feathers, a cool breath rose from the roadway, which the water-carts were bathing in spasmodic jets, stopped for the passing of carriages, now more numerous, on their way at five in the afternoon to the Bois. By this time she was seriously afraid that the king had abandoned her, and she hastily despatched two letters to him, one addressed to the house of Prince d'Axel, the other to the club. Then she dressed, not being able with propriety to remain till evening as a young girl fresh from her bath; after which she wandered, first from her chamber to her boudoir and her dressing-room, and finally over all the house, striving to allay her expectation by restless motion.

It was not a little cocotte's cage that la Spalato had purchased, nor one of those stupendous houses with which a thousand contractors have encumbered the new quarters of western Paris, but an artistic mansion, worthy of the names of its surrounding streets: Murillo, Velasquez, Van Dyck; a house distinguished from all its neighbours, from the pediment of its frontal to the knocker on its door. Built by Count Ponicki for his mistress, an ugly woman, whom he paid every morning with a thousand-franc note folded in four and laid upon the marble of her toilet-table, this marvellous dwelling had been sold hap-hazard, with all its art-furniture, for two millions on the death of the rich Polish nobleman, who left no will, and Séphora had obtained at one stroke these treasures.

By the solid carved wooden staircase, capable of bearing the weight of a carriage and four, which gave to the serious beauty of its present mistress the sombre background of a Dutch picture, the Comtesse de Spalato descended to her three salons on the ground-floor: the Dresden salon, a small room all Louis XV., containing a ravishing collection of vases, statuettes, enamels, in that fragile art of the eighteenth century which seems to have been moulded by the rosy fingers of favourites and animated by the roguery of their smile. Next was the salon of the ivories, where, in glass cases lined with flame-colour were Chinese ivories in a medley of little personages, trees with fruits of precious stones, fishes with jade eyes, and certain other ivories of the middle ages, dolorous and impassioned in expression, on which the blood in red wax of the crucifixes made stains as on the pallor of human flesh. The third room, lighted from above, and hung in Cordova leather, was awaiting the time when Père Leemans should complete its furnishing. Usually the soul of the daughter of the "brocante" exulted amid these lovely things embellished by the bargain she had made of them; but to-day she comes and goes without looking, without seeing, her thought afar, lost in irritating arguments. . . What! would he really go in this way? . . Then he did not love her! . . And she had felt so sure that he was captured, netted! . .

The servant whom she had despatched with her letters returned. No news of the king. He had not been seen anywhere. . . Ah! that was Christian indeed! . . Knowing himself weak, he was fleeing, hiding, escaping her. . . A rush of furious anger swept for an instant from her natural calmness the woman who possessed herself so well. She would have torn, broken, everything about her were it not for her long habit of *sale*, which put a ticket of the price, as one might say, visibly on every object. Flinging herself at last into an arm-chair as the twilight deepened on her treasures, she saw them fleeing, disappearing in the dusk together with her dream of a colossal fortune. The door opened violently.

" Madame la Comtesse is served."

She was forced to sit down to table alone, in the majestic dining-room, adorned on its eight panels with grand portraits by Franz Hals, valued at eight hundred thousand francs, — stern, strong faces, stiff and solemn in their ruffs, but less solemn than the white-cravatted butler who is carving on a side-table the dishes which a pair of impassible flunkeys dressed in nankeen are to serve to their mistress. The irony of this pompous attendance, contrasting with the desertion that threatened her, made her heart wince with vexation; one might almost have thought that the kitchen department suspected her trouble, so stiffly did the footmen enforce their ceremonious disdain as she ate, and waited till she had finished, motionless and grave as a photographer's assistant who has fixed a client before the lens.

Little by little, however, the abandoned one returned to her true self, and recovered her nerve. . . No! she would not allow herself to be cast off in this way. . . It was not that she cared for the king, but the affair, the grand stroke, all her self-loves at stake before the eyes of her associates. . . Come! her plan is made. . . Going up to her room she wrote a line to Tom; then, while the servants were dining and gossiping in the lower regions about the solitary and restless day of their mistress, Madame la comtesse, with her little hands, that were far from awkward, packed a valise which had often made its trip from Courbevoie to the Agency, threw around her shoulders a gray woollen cloak for the chilly night, and furtively left her palace on foot, going straight to a stand of street carriages, valise in hand, like a lady-companion who has just received her pay.

Christian II., on his side, had passed his day not less uneasily. Remaining late at the ball with the queen, he woke in the morning with head and heart both full of those heroic strains of the *guzlas*. Preparations for his journey, arms to examine, also that uniform of lieutenant-general, not worn since the days of Ragusa, — all this kept him busy till eleven o'clock, surrounded and watched by Lebeau, much perplexed, and not daring to push too far his insinuating questions. At eleven o'clock the little Court assembled around a low mass said by Père Alphée in the salon, transformed into an oratory, the mantelpiece serving as altar, its velvet lambrequin covered by an embroidered cloth. The Rosens were not present, the old man being in his bed, and the princess having gone to the station with Herbert, who had already started with a party of young men. Hezeta was to leave by the following train, — the little band scattering itself thus along the day to cause no suspicion. This secret mass, which recalled the times of trouble, the exultant head of the monk, the military energy of his gesture and his voice, made the very air itself seem full of incense and of gunpowder, and the religious ceremony the more solemn through the sense of a coming battle.

The breakfast was oppressed by these mingled emotions, though the king put a certain coquetry into leaving behind him none but agreeable memories; affecting towards the queen a tenderly respectful attitude, the affectionateness of which was dashed by the rather distrustful coldness of Frederica. The eyes of the child watched them timidly, for the horrible scene of the other night haunted his young memory, leaving nervous intuitions within it beyond his years. The Marquise de Silvis was exhaling in advance heavy sighs of farewell. As for Élysée, to whose breast confidence had returned, he could scarcely contain his joy, as he thought of this counter-revolution of the People of which he had dreamed so long, this popular uprising to force the doors of a palace and restore a king. To his mind, success was not doubtful. Christian had by no means the same certainty; but beyond this trifling discomfort of departure — when it seems as though solitude were suddenly made by the receding of objects or beings who have hitherto surrounded us — beyond this feeling he had no unpleasant apprehension, but rather a relief in escaping from a false position, threatened as he was by notes falling due and debts of honour. In case of victory, the civil-list would settle all. Defeat would bring with it, on the contrary, a general and total ruin . . . death, a ball in the forehead, straight between the eyes. . . He thought of that as a final solution to all his troubles of money and of heart. So thinking, his indifference made no bad figure between the queen's absorbed reflections and Élysée's enthusiasm. But as the three were talking together in the garden a groom went by.

"Tell Samy to put the horses in," ordered Christian. Frederica shuddered.

"Are you going out?" she said.

"Yes, for prudence' sake. . . The ball last night will make all Paris talk. . . I ought to show myself . . . let people see me, on the boulevard, at the club. . . Oh! I 'll return to dine with you."

He sprang up the portico at a bound, joyous and free as a boy out of school.

"I shall fear to the very end!" said the queen; and Méraut, doubtful like herself, could say no word to encourage her.

The king, however, had really made strong resolutions. During the mass he had sworn not to see Séphora, knowing well that if she tried to retain him, if she wound her arms about his neck, he would not have strength to leave her. In all sincerity, therefore, he went to his club, where he found a few bald-heads absorbed in silent whist, or in majestic slumber around the tables in the reading-room. The place was all the more lifeless and deserted because they had played very high the night before. In the early morning, as the party of players left the club, Prince d'Axel at their head, it appeared that they met a troop of she-asses ambling past the door, their bells jingling . . . and Monseigneur and the rest called to the donkey-boy. . . They drank warm milk in champagne-glasses, and then these gentlemen, all rather high, jumped astride of the poor little beasts, in spite of their kicks and the cries of the boy, and they ran the most amusing steeple-chase ever seen, the whole length of the Rue de la Paix! . . It was worth hearing, this majestically excited account of M. Bonœil, steward of the Grand-Club: "Ah! it was so droll! . . Monseigneur on that little donkey, obliged to curl up his long legs — for Monseigneur is admirably made in the legs. . . And that imperturbable phlegm of his! . . Ah! if his Majesty had only been there! . ."

His Majesty sincerely regretted having missed that fine show of fools. . . Lucky Prince d'Axel! At open quarrel with the king, his uncle, turned out of his own country for all sorts of Court intrigues, he may never come to the throne, because the old monarch now talks of remarrying with a young woman and begetting a crowd of little presumptives. But all that does not disturb him the least in the world. To "make fête" in Paris seems to him far more interesting than to make politics "down there". . . Little by little, the spirit of *blague*, of sceptical satire, returned to Christian as he lay extended on the divan, where the prince-royal had left the effluence of his contagious laxity. In the aimless atmosphere of the club, everything — the heroic ardour of the night before, the great attempt of the morrow — seemed to the young king worthless, without glory, without magic, without grandeur. Positively, as one might say, he decomposed as he lay there; and to escape the torpor which was overcoming him like a stupefying poison in all his veins, he rose, and went out into the open air of living, active, circulating humanity.

Three o'clock. The hour at which he usually turned in the direction of the Avenue de Messine, after breakfasting at the club, or at Mignon's. Mechanically his steps took their habitual way through this summer Paris, always a little larger and a little less heady than the winter Paris, but offering charming aspects, prolonged vistas with its verdure massed against stonework, and the shadows of its foliage on the whiteness of the asphalt.

What pretty women were gliding there half-screened by sunshades, with a grace, a seductive charm, a sweet good-humour! What other women could walk as these did, or drape themselves with motion, or talk, or dress, or do the opposite, like them? Ah! Paris, Paris, city of facile pleasures and brief hours! To think that in quitting all that he was going, perhaps, to get his head broke. But at any rate, what good moments he had had there! — what intelligent and complete enjoyment!

In the fervour of his gratitude the Slav had a sparkle in his eye for all the passing dames who attracted him by a glance or the twirl of a lace skirt spreading fan-like. The knightly king of the morning between wife and son, kneeling in the oratory before departing to recover his kingdom, was far indeed from this pretty flusher of women, his nose on the alert, his conquering hat on his curled little head, with a rosy glow of the fever of pleasure on his cheeks. Frederica was not wrong in cursing the ferment of Paris, and dreading it for this fickle brain, frothy as a wine that will not keep.

At the forking of the Boulevard Hausmann with the Avenue de Messine Christian stopped and let several carriages pass him. This recalled him to reason. How had he come there, — and so quickly? . . The hôtel Potnicki rose in the vaporous light of the western sun with its two little turrets, a Parisian castle, and its alcoved balcony. . . What temptation! Why should he not go there? Why not see for the last time that woman who would remain forever in his life with the dry and thirsty memory of an unsatisfied desire?

At last, after a terrible momentary debate, his uncertainty plainly visible in the reed-like swaying of that faltering body, he took an heroic decision, jumped into an open cab that was then passing, and was driven to the club. Never would he have had the courage to do this without his oath made to God in the morning during mass. To that pusillanimous soul, the soul of a Catholic woman, that oath carried all before it.

At the club he found a letter from Séphora which, merely by the perfume of its paper, communicated to him the fever in which it was written. Prince d'Axel brought him the second letter, a few hasty, imploring phrases in a writing that the books of J. Tom Levis had never witnessed. But here Christian II., surrounded, sustained, watched, felt himself stronger, being of those to whom the gallery imparts an attitude. He crumpled the letters into his pocket. The gay youth of the club was now arriving, still under the excitement of the tale of the donkey race, related at full length in a morning paper. The sheet was passed from hand to hand, and all as they read it gave that exhausted laugh, that stomach laugh of men worn-out.

"Do we make fête to-night?" asked these young noblemen, absorbing sodas and other hygienic waters, of which the club had an unlimited supply.

Enticed by them, the king went off to dinner at the Café de Londres; not in one of those salons where the well-known hangings had danced a dozen times before their drunkenness, and the mirrors bore their names written and scratched like a wintry frost upon the panes, but in the cellars, those wonderful catacombs of barrels and bottles drawn up in regular lines, bearing white porcelain tickets and extending as far as beneath the theatre of the Opéra-Comique. Every vintage of France lay sleeping there. The table was laid at the farther end, among the Château-Yquems, which softly beamed, their prostrate, glaucous bottles spangled with reflections from the gas and the coloured-glass chandeliers. This dinner was an idea of Wattelet, who wished to mark the king's departure (known only to himself and Prince d'Axel) by a wholly original repast. But the effect was spoiled by the dampness of the walls and ceilings, which penetrated those present, already worn-out with the fatigues of the night before. Queue-de-Poule went to sleep and only woke by shivering starts. Rigolo said little; he laughed, or pretended to do so, and looked at his watch every five minutes. Was he thinking of the queen, whom this delay in his return would terrify?

At the dessert a few women arrived, — diners at the Café de Londres, who, knowing that the princes were below, left their tables, and, guided by the waiters with candelabra, slipped down into the cellars, their trains over their arms, with little cries and pretences of fright. Nearly all were in low gowns. At the end of five minutes they began to cough and grow pale, shivering on the knees of "these gentlemen," who themselves were protected by the upturned collars of their coats. "A pretty joke," said one of them, more chilly or less madcap than the rest, "to make us all split our lungs." It was soon decided to take coffee in the salons, and during the removal thither the king disappeared. It was just nine o'clock. His coupé was at the door.

"Avenue de Messine . . ." he said in a low voice, his teeth clenched.

The thought had seized him like a madness. Throughout the dinner he had seen but her, her, breathing of her alone from the bare skins that surrounded him. Oh! to seize her in his arms and be no longer the dupe of her tears, of her prayers! . .

"Madame is out."

It was a dash of cold water in a furnace. Madame was out. He could not doubt it, on beholding the license of the household, delivered over to a crowd of servants, whose coloured ribbons and striped waistcoats Christian saw fleeing in all directions at his entrance. He asked no questions; suddenly sobered, he measured the bottomless abyss into which he had been about to fall. Perjured to God, a traitor to the crown! . . The chaplet was in his burning fingers; he told its beads in *aves*, in thanksgivings, as the carriage rolled to Saint-Mandé through the fantastic aspects and the nocturnal terrors of the night.

"The king!" said Élysée, on the watch at the window, as soon as he saw the lamps of the coupé turning brightly into the courtyard. The king! It was the first word any one had spoken since dinner. As if by magic, faces were illuminated, tongues were loosened at once. The queen herself, in spite of her apparent calmness, her force of will, could not restrain a cry of joy. She had thought all lost, Christian kept by that woman, abandoning his friends, and forever dishonoured. Not a person about her, during those three mortal hours of expectant waiting, but thought the same, with the same uneasiness; even poor little Zara, whom the queen had kept up, and who, understanding the anguish, the drama of that silence, and without asking one of those questions often so cruel, so oracular in a child's shrill voice, had sheltered himself behind the covers of a large portfolio, whence his pretty face reappeared of a sudden when the king was announced, bathed in tears, which had flowed silently for more than an hour. When asked, later, why he had felt such grief, he owned he was unhappy because he feared the king had gone without kissing him. Loving little soul, to whom this young and lively, smiling father was like an elder brother full of pranks and frolics, a most attractive elder brother, though he made their mother wretched.

Christian's quick, curt voice was heard giving orders. Then he went to his chamber, and five minutes later appeared all equipped for his journey in a little hat with a coquettish buckle and blue band, and dainty gaiters, like a tourist on a beach in one of Wattelet's pictures. The monarch however, was visible beneath the dandy; authority, the grand air, the ease of appearing nobly, no matter under what circumstances. He approached the queen and murmured a few excuses for being late. Still pale with emotion she said to him, very low: "If you had not come, I should have gone with Zara to take your place." And he knew very well she spoke the truth; he saw her for an instant, her child in her arms amid the balls, as on the balcony of his window that terrible night, and the child closing his beautiful, resigned eyes in face of death. Without replying, he raised Frederica's hand to his lips with fervour; then, with an impetuous, youthful movement he drew her to him and whispered: "Forgive! . . forgive! . ."

Forgiveness! she was still capable of it; but at that instant she saw at the door of the salon, ready to accompany his master, Lebeau, that shuffling valet, the confidant of pleasures and treachery, and the dreadful thought came to her, as she gently disengaged herself: "What if he is lying? . . what if he does not go?" Christian divined it: Turning to Méraut he said: "You will accompany me to the station. . . Samy will bring you back." Then, as time was short, he hurried his farewells, said an amiable word to each, to Boscovich, to the marquise, took Zara on his knee and spoke to him of the expedition he was about to undertake to recover his kingdom; told him never to cause grief to the queen; and if he did not see his father again to remember that he died for the country, doing his duty as a king. A little speech *à la* Louis XIV., really not ill-timed and to which the little prince listened gravely, somewhat disconcerted by the gravity of the words from lips he had always seen smiling. But Christian was ever the man of the moment, all mobility, and excessive volatility, now wholly occupied with his departure, the chances of the expedition, and more touched than he was willing to show; a feeling which made him shorten the tenderness of the last minute. "Adieu! . . Adieu! . ." he said, as, with a wave of the hand to them all, and a profound bow to the queen, he departed.

Truly, if Élysée Méraut had not for three whole years seen the interior of the royal household troubled by the weaknesses, the shameful frailties of Christian II., he could never have recognized the Rigolo of the Grand Club in the lofty, heroic prince who explained to him his plans, his projects, his political views, so broad, so wise, as they drove at a rapid pace to the Lyon station.

The royalist faith of the tutor, always a little superstitious, beheld in this a divine intervention, a privilege of caste, the king recovering himself, as he should, at a vital moment, by grace of consecration and heredity; and, without explaining to himself exactly why, this moral rebirth of Christian, foreshadowing, foretelling his restoration, caused him an inexpressible distress, a singular jealousy of which he would not analyze the cause. While Lebeau was engaged in buying tickets and registering the luggage, they walked together up and down the long waiting-room, and in the solitude of this night departure the king could not keep himself from thinking of Séphora and his tender escortings of her to the Saint-Lazare station. While under the influence of this memory a woman who passed them attracted his eye; the same height, a certain something of that virtuous yet coquettish step. . .

Poor Christian! poor unwilling king!

At last, however, he was in a carriage, the door of which Lebeau opened to him, one of the usual carriages for all travellers, so as not to attract attention. He flung himself into a corner, in haste to be done with departure, to be off. . . This slow tearing himself away was painful to him. A whistle, the train moves, draws out, leaps noisily over the bridges that crossed the sleeping suburbs with their rows of lamps, and reached the open country. Christian II. breathed freely; he felt himself strong, saved, out of danger; he would almost have sung were he alone in the carriage. But at the farther end, by the other window, a little figure, sunk in the dark corner seemed to shrink with the desire to escape attention. 'T was a woman. Young, old, ugly, pretty? The king — mere habit — cast a look that way. Nothing stirred but the two feathers of a little hat, which seemed to droop and fold as if to rest. "She sleeps," he thought, "and so will I. . ." He stretched himself out, wrapped a rug about him, and looked vaguely for a time at the silhouettes of the trees and bushes confused and softened by the darkness and seeming to fall one upon another as the train went by, at the mile-posts, at the clouds errant on the midnight sky. His eyelids, growing heavy, were about to close when he felt upon his cheek the caress of a soft curl and lowered eyelids, a violet breath, and two lips murmuring upon his lips: "Cruel! . . without bidding me farewell!" . . .

Ten hours later, Christian II. awoke to a sound of cannon, to the blinding light of a country sun checkered with murmuring foliage. He had dreamed that he was mounting at the head of his troops beneath a hail of fire the steep ascent from the port of Ragusa to the citadel. But instead of that he awoke to find himself motionless in a vast bed, his eyes and brain blurred, his limbs resting in a delightful lassitude. What had happened? Little by little he saw more clearly; he gathered himself together. He was at Fontainebleau, in the hôtel du Faisan, opposite to the forest, where the green and close-pressed tree-tops rose in the blue of ether, while the cannon of the neighbouring camp was being exercised. And the living reality, the visible link of his ideas, Séphora, was seated before that eternal secretary (seen nowhere now but in hotels) writing actively with a pen that spluttered.

She saw in a mirror before her the admiring, grateful glance of the king, and replied, without turning round, by a tender kiss from her eyes and the tip of her pen, after which she continued to write placidly, showing the glimmer of a smile at the corner of those seraphic lips. "A telegram that I am sending just to reassure my people," she said, as she rose to ring the bell. The despatch given, and the waiter gone, she opened the window, relieved of a great anxiety, to let in the golden sunshine, which entered in floods, like the waters of a sluice. "Heavens! how lovely it is! . ." she said. Then she went to the bed and sat down upon the edge of it near her lover. She laughed, she was wild with delight at being in the country, at the prospect of wandering in the woods on this exquisite day. They had plenty of time before the midnight train that brought them should carry Christian on his way; for Lebeau, who had continued his journey, was to notify Hezeta and his gentlemen that the embarcation of the king, and consequently their own, was delayed for a day. The amorous Slav himself would have preferred to draw the curtains on his happiness till the very last hour. But women are more ideal; and directly after breakfast a hired landau took them through the splendid avenues, bordered with lawns and groups of trees, which open into the forest, like the park at Versailles, before the great rocks break it up into superb and natural sites. It was the first time Séphora and the king had ever driven out together, and Christian enjoyed the brief pleasure on the terrible eve of battle and disaster.

They rolled along under the vast arcades of greenery where the foliage of the beeches drooped in slender branches, motionless, threaded by a distant sunshine which seemed to find it hard to pierce this verdure of primeval development. Beneath that shade, with no other horizon than the profile of a beloved woman, without other hope, other memory, other desire than her caresses, the poetic nature of the Slav poured itself out. Oh! to live there, both of them, they alone, in the little house of a keeper, moss and thatch without, a soft, luxurious nest within! . . He wanted to know when she had begun to love him; what impression had he made on her at first? He translated for her the love-songs of his native land, with kisses on her throat and on her eyes; and she listened, feigning to comprehend, to reply, her eyelids closing, heavy from want of sleep.

Eternal discord in the duets of love! Christian wished that they should bury themselves in solitary, unexplored places; Séphora sought the celebrated points, the curiosities of the forest, the places shown where boulders trembled, and rocks wept, and trees were blasted, and the people sheltered in huts and caves, from which they ran at the slightest sound of wheels. She hoped to escape in this way the wearisome and monotonous canticle of love, while Christian was admiring her touching patience in listening to the interminable talk of the worthy country-people, who have time and to spare for all they do.

At Franchart she insisted on drawing water from the famous well of the old monks, so deep that it takes the bucket twenty minutes to come up. Fancy how amusing to Christian! . . Next was a woman medalled like an old gendarme, who showed them the beauties of the site, the ancient pond on the banks of which the stag was always taken, — an old story told in the same language for so many years that she fancied she had belonged to the convent, and, three centuries later, had been present in person at the sumptuous country pleasure-parties of the first Empire. "It was here, monsieur, madame, that the great emperor sat down with all his Court;" and she showed among the bushes a granite bench long enough for three or four persons at most. Then in a lofty tone: "Opposite, the empress, with her ladies of honour. . ." It was sinister, this evocation of imperial pomp amid the fallen rocks and gnarled and twisted trees, and arid gorse. "Come, Séphora! . ." said Christian. But Séphora was looking at an esplanade where, according to the guide, they were taking the little King of Rome when he saw in the distance his august parents and stretched his arms to them. This vision of the child-prince reminded the King of Illyria of his little Zara. The child rose up before him, held by Frederica, and looked at him with his great sad eyes as if asking him what he was doing there. But it was only a vague reminiscence quickly smothered, and they continued their way beneath those oaks of all sizes, the meeting-places of famous hunts, through the slopes of green valleys and along the crest of hills overlooking the amphitheatres of crumbling granite or gravel-pits where fir-trees ploughed the red and sandy soil with their strong projecting roots.

Presently they were following a dark path impenetrably shady, with deep, damp ruts. On either side a line of great tree-trunks, like the columns of a cathedral formed silent naves, where the patter of a squirrel or the fall of a detached leaf like a bit of gold was heard. An immense sadness seemed to fall from those tree-tops, those branches without birds, sonorous and empty as deserted houses. Christian, full of his love, deepened its passion as the day advanced with a note of melancholy and mourning. He told how before departing he had made his will, and dwelt on the emotion those words from beyond the grave, written when full of life, had caused him.

"Yes, very annoying . . ." said Séphora, like one who is thinking of something else. But he believed himself so loved, he was so accustomed to be loved, that he paid no heed to her absent-mindedness. He even consoled her in advance in case of misfortune; he traced her a plan of existence; she must sell the house in the Avenue de Messine, retire to the country, and live with her memories. It was all adorably conceited, naïve, and sincere; he felt in his heart a sadness of farewell which he mistook for presentiments. And then in a lowered voice, their hands clasped, he spoke of the other world. Round his neck was a medal of the Virgin, which never left him; he now took it off — for her. You can imagine Séphora's happiness! . .

After a while an artillery encampment, the gray tents of which became visible through the branches, the light smoke, the unbridled horses, tethered for the night, turned the king's thoughts to another channel. The coming and going of uniforms, of convoys, all that camp activity in the open air and the setting sun, that fortifying sight of soldiers in the field, roused his nomad and warrior-race instincts. The carriage, rolling along the mossy green carpet of the wide avenue, caused all the soldiers, busy in pitching tents or in making soup, to lift their heads, and watch the smiling civilian and his pretty companion pass. Christian would fain have spoken to them, harangued them, plunging his eyes beneath the copses to the very extremity of the camp. In front of a commanding officer's tent standing a little apart on a level piece of ground, a beautiful Arab horse was rearing, nostril expanded, mane to the breeze, and neighing for the warrior summons. The Slav's eyes sparkled. Ah! the fine life a few days hence! the good solid blows he was soon to give! But what a pity that Lebeau in going on to Marseilles had taken the luggage with him! How he wished that she might see him in his lieutenant-general's uniform! Thus exciting himself, he fancied the gates of the towns all forced, the republicans put to flight, and he pictured his triumphal entry into Leybach, the streets gay with banners. She would be there, thank God! He would send for her and install her in a splendid palace at the gates of the town. There they would continue to see each other as freely as in Paris. To these fine projects Séphora did not answer very much. No doubt she would have preferred to keep him for herself, wholly her own; and Christian admired that silent abnegation which placed her so truly in her station as mistress of the king.

Ah! how he loved her, and how quickly that evening at the hotel des Faisans went by in their red room; the great light curtains dropped before the summer evening of a little town with its few lights, humming with the talk of promenaders or of persons before their doors, — soon dispersed, however, by the "taps" of drum and bugle. What kisses, what follies, what passionate promises, going to rejoin the kisses and oaths of the night before! Delightfully weary, pressing against each other, they listened to their hearts beating with great throbs, while the warm wind shook their curtains, after murmuring in the trees and scattering the drops of a fountain in the little garden of the hotel, that resembled an Arab patio, into which gleamed the red and flickering lamp of the office.

One o'clock. It was time to go. Christian dreaded this wrench at the last moment, believing that he should have to struggle against prayers and appeals that would summon all his courage to withstand. On the contrary, Séphora was ready first, determined to accompany him to the station, less anxious for her love than for the honour of her royal lover... Ah! if he could only have heard the "ouf!" of relief she gave, cruel creature, when, standing alone upon the platform she saw the two green eyes of the train wind away in the distance! If he could but have known how glad she was to return to the hotel alone for a night's rest, saying to herself as the empty omnibus jolted over the old paved streets of Fontainebleau, in a composed tone, utterly without any loverlike emotion: "Now, if Tom has only done what is necessary! . ."

Most assuredly Tom had done what was necessary; for on the arrival of the train at Marseilles, Christian II., getting out of his carriage, valise in hand, was much astonished to see a flat cap with silver lace approach him and request, very politely, that he would enter the office for a moment.

"Why? . . Who are you?" asked the king, very haughtily.

"Commissary of inspection," the flat cap replied, bowing.

In the office, Christian found the prefect of Marseilles, a former journalist, with a red beard and a shrewd and lively face.

"I regret to inform your Majesty that your journey ends here," he said with exquisite politeness. "My government cannot allow a prince to whom France has given hospitality to profit by that privilege to conspire and arm against a friendly nation."

The king attempted to protest. But every detail of the expedition was known to the prefect.

"You intended to embark at Marseilles; your companions at Cette, on a steamer from Jersey . . . the landing to be made on the beach at Gravosa; the signal two rockets, one on board, the other on shore. . . You see we are thoroughly informed. . . So they are at Ragusa; and I am saving you from a veritable ambuscade."

Christian II., thunderstruck, asked himself who could possibly have revealed information known only to himself, the queen, de Hezeta, and one other, whom he was far indeed from suspecting. The prefect smiled in his blond beard.

"Come, monsieur," he said, "you must make up your mind to it. The affair is a failure. You may be more lucky another time — and more prudent also. . . At present I entreat your Majesty to accept the shelter which I offer at the prefecture. Elsewhere you will be at the mercy of annoying curiosity. The affair is known in the town. . ."

Christian made no immediate reply. He looked round at the little office with its green arm-chair, green boxes, porcelain stove, and the huge cards marked with train departures, the miserably bourgeois corner where his heroic dream had come to nought and the last echoes of Rodoïtza died away. He was like a traveller in a balloon, starting for heights above all summits and coming down almost at the same place in a peasant's hovel with his poor collapsed aerostat, a bundle of gummed cloth, under the roof of a stable.

He ended however, by accepting the invitation, and found in the prefect's apartments a really Parisian interior, — a charming wife, very good musician, who after dinner and a general conversation, in which were reviewed all the topics of the day, sat down to the piano and turned over the score of a recent opera. The lady had a very pretty voice and sang agreeably; little by little, Christian approached her and talked music and opera. The "Echos of Illyria" was lying on the piano between the "Reine de Saba" and the "Jolie Parfumeuse." Madame requested the king to show her the time and tone of his native songs. Christian II. sang several of the popular airs: "Sweet eyes, blue as summer skies," and "Young girls, listen as you braid your hair. . ."

And while he thus leaned, pale and seductive, on the piano, taking the intonations and the melancholy attitude of an exile, afar on the Illyrian seas, where the "Echos" sang of waves snow-tipped and shores of bristling cactus, a fine enthusiastic band of youth and hope, whom Lebeau had neglected to delay, was sailing joyously to death, with wind abaft and cries of "Long live Christian II.!"

XIII.

IN THE CHAPEL.

"MY dear love, we have just been brought back to the citadel of Ragusa, M. de Hezeta and I, after a session of ten hours in the Corso theatre, where the council of war appointed to try us was sitting. We are unanimously condemned to death.

"I must tell you that I like it better so. At least one now knows what to expect, and we shall be no longer in solitary confinement. I may read your dear letters, and I can write to you. Silence was choking me. To know nothing of you, my Colette, of my father, of the king, whom I thought killed, the victim of an ambush! Happily his Majesty escapes with a sad disappointment and the loss of a few loyal servants. Things might have been worse.

"The newspapers must have told you — have they not? — how matters turned out. The counter-order of the king by some incredible fatality never reached us. At seven in the evening, as agreed upon we were to leeward of the islands, which was the rendezvous: Hezeta and I on deck, the others below, all armed, equipped, with your pretty cockade in their hats. We cruised about for two hours, three hours. Nothing in sight but fishermen's boats or those great feluccas of the coast-guard service. Night came on and with it a sea-fog very hindering to our meeting with the king. After long waiting, we ended by thinking that his Majesty's steamer must have passed ours without seeing us, and that he himself might have landed. And sure enough, from the shore where we were told to expect our signal, a rocket went up. That signified: 'Disembark!' No longer any doubt, the king was there; we started to join him.

"In virtue of my knowledge of the country — many a time I have shot wild-duck along this coast — I commanded the first boat, Hezeta the second, M. de Miremont the third with the Parisians. We were all Illyrians in my boat and our hearts beat high. The country was before us! — that black shore rising in the fog and ending in a small red speck, the revolving light of Gravosa; still, the silence on the shore surprised me. Nothing but the sound of receding waves, like the clapping of wet cloths; not that murmur which the most silent of crowds must make, the clicking of arms, the panting of restrained breaths.

"'I see our men! . .' said San Giorgio, in a low voice close beside me.

"We discovered, the moment we sprang ashore, that what we had taken for the king's volunteers were clumps of cactus and Barbary figs behind the beech. I advanced. No one. But the sands were trampled and cut up. I said to the marquis: 'It is suspicious. . . Let us re-embark.' Unfortunately the Parisians arrived just then. There was no restraining them. Away they went, scattering along the shore, examining the bushes, the copses. All of a sudden, a line of fire, the crackle of a volley. They shouted: 'Treachery! . . treachery! . . get back!' and rushed for the boats. A regular helter-skelter like sheep, maddened, jostling, into the sea. A moment of wild panic, lighted by the moon, just risen, which showed us our English sailors escaping with all oars to the ship. . . But it did not last long. Hezeta was the first to spring forward, revolver in hand. 'Avanti! . . avanti! . .' What a voice! The whole shore resounded with it. We flung ourselves behind him. . . Fifty against an army! . . There was nothing to do but die. That is what they all did, with a grand courage: Pozzo, de Melida, the little de Soris, your lover of last year, Henri de Trébigne — calling out to me in the mêlée: 'Look here, Herbert, we miss the guzlas. . .' and Jean de Véliko, who sang 'La Rodoïtza' as he sabred his way, all — all — fell; I saw them on the shore, lying on the sand, looking up to the sky. The rising tide came up and buried them, the dancers at our ball! . . Less fortunate than our comrades, the marquis and I, sole survivors of that hail-storm, were taken prisoners, bound, and ridden into Ragusa on muleback, your Herbert roaring with impotent rage, while Hezeta, very calm, said merely: 'It is fate. . . I expected it! . .' Strange man! How could he know that we should be betrayed, sacrificed, received on landing with pointed guns and volleys of bullets? And if he knew it, why did he lead us? However, the stroke has missed; the game is still to play again with more precautions.

" I now understand from your dear letters, which I never tire of reading and rereading, why the settlement of our case has hung on so long, why these sessions of black robes in the citadel, these negotiations about our two lives, these ups and downs and long delays. So it seems that the wretches are treating us as hostages, hoping that the king, who would not renounce his rights for hundreds of millions, would yield at last, rather than sacrifice two of his faithful servants. And you are angry, dear, that he does not; you are amazed, blinded by your tenderness, that my father does not urge him in favour of his son. But a Rosen — could a Rosen do so base a thing? . . He does not love me less, the poor old man, and my death will be to him an awful blow. As for our sovereigns, whom you accuse of cruelty, *we* do not have, in judging them, the lofty point of view from which they govern men. They have duties, rights, outside of common rules. Ah! what things could Méraut tell you about that. I feel them, but I cannot express them. Thoughts stay within, they will not come out; my jaws are too heavy. How many a time has this hampered me with you, whom I love so much, but to whom I could never tell it! Even here, separated by so many leagues and those thick iron bars, the thought of your sweet gray eyes, so Parisian, those mischievous lips beneath the pretty little nose that wrinkles to deride me, still intimidates, still paralyzes me.

"And yet, before I leave you forever, I must indeed strive to make you understand for once, that I have loved but you in this world, and that my life began the day when I first saw you. Do you remember it, Colette? It was in those shops in the Rue Royale, that agency of Levis. We were there, my father and I, by chance, so-called. You were trying a piano; you played, you sang something so gay, so gay, and it made me long, I knew not why, to weep. Ah! I had fallen in love. . . Who would have thought it! A marriage *à la Parisienne*, a marriage through an agency, to turn into a marriage of love! And since then, in society, in any society, I have seen no woman so delightful as my Colette. You may rest easy, you were always with me, even absent; the thought of your pretty little visage kept me forever in good-humour; I laughed to myself all alone when I thought of it. It is true that you have always inspired me to that — to laughing tenderly. . . Why, even now, when our fate is terrible, especially the way in which they present it to us — Hezeta and I are moved into the chapel, that is to say, into a little cell with plastered walls, where they have raised an altar for our last mass and placed a coffin before each bed and on the walls placards on which is written 'Death . . . Death. . .' — Well, in spite of all that, the room seems gay. I escape these funereal threats by thinking of my Colette; and when I climb to the barred loop-hole, the lovely landscape, the road which descends from Ragusa to Gravosa, the aloes, the cactus against the sky or the blue sea, remind me of our wedding journey, the Corniche from Monaco to Monte Carlo, and the bells of our mules, carrying a joy as gay and ringing as their own. Oh! my little wife, how sweet you were, dear traveller, with whom I would fain have journeyed longer. . .

"You see now that your image lives and triumphs ever, even on the threshold of death, nay, in death, for I will carry it as a scapulary on my breast, down there, by the Sea-gate, where they will take us in a few hours; it will enable me to fall smiling. And so, dear love, do not grieve too much. Think of the little one, the child that is to be. Keep well for him, and when he is able to understand it, tell him I died like a soldier, standing, with two names upon my lips — my wife's name and my king's.

"I would have liked to leave you a souvenir at my last moment; but they have stripped me of everything, watch, wedding-ring, cravat-pin. I have nothing left but a pair of white gloves, which I meant to wear on our entrance to Ragusa. I will wear them now to do honour to my death, and the prison chaplain has promised me to send them to you.

"And now — adieu, my Colette, darling. Do not weep. I say that to you — and I, my tears are blinding me. Console my father. Poor man!

He, who always scolded me for coming late on duty. I shall come no more. . . Adieu. . . adieu. . . And yet I had so many things to say to you. . . But no! I have to die. . . Ah! what a fate! . . Adieu, Colette.

" HERBERT DE ROSEN."

XIV.

A SOLUTION.

"ONE way is left to you, sire."

"Speak out, my dear Méraut; I am prepared for everything."

Méraut hesitated to answer. What he was about to say seemed to him too serious, too completely out of place in that billiard-room where the king had dragged him to play a game after breakfast. But the strange irony which presides over the fate of dethroned sovereigns willed that it should be before that green table, where the balls were rattling with a hollow, sinister sound in the silence and mourning of the house at Saint-Mandé, that the fate of the royal race of Illyria should be decided.

"Well? . ." asked Christian II., stretching forward to touch his ball.

"Well, monseigneur. . . ."

He waited till the king had made his shot and Councillor Boscovich had devoutly marked it, before he continued, with a shade of embarrassment:

"The people of Illyria are like all the other peoples, sire. They like success, strength; and I fear that the fatal issue of our enterprise. . ."

The king turned round, the colour in his cheeks.

"I asked you for the truth, my dear fellow. Useless to wrap it up in all these curl-papers."

"Sire, you must abdicate," said the Gascon, harshly.

Christian looked at him in amazement.

"Abdicate what?" he asked. "I have nothing . . . a fine present to make my son! . . I think he would rather have a new velocipede than that vague promise of a crown at his majority."

Méraut quoted the case of the Queen of Galicia. She had abdicated for her son during exile; and if Don Leo was now upon the throne it was to that abdication that he owed it.

"Eighteen to twelve! . ." said Christian, abruptly . . . "Monsieur le conseiller, you are not marking."

Boscovich started like a frightened hare and sprang to the board, while the king, his body and his mind on the stretch, was completely absorbed in making a wonderful "four-cushioned" stroke. Élysée gazed at him, and his royalist faith was once more put to a rough test before that type of spineless dandy, vanquished without honour, his thin throat wholly exposed by a loose flannel jacket, his eyes, mouth, and the sides of his nostrils still yellow with a jaundice from which he was scarcely recovered after keeping to his bed for a month. The disaster at Gravosa, the cruel end of those fine young men, the terrible scenes to which the trial of Herbert and Hezeta had given rise in the little Court at Saint-Mandé, Colette flinging herself on her knees before her former lover to obtain her husband's pardon, the slow agony, the waiting with strained ears for that horrible shot which he seemed himself to have commanded, and, above all, his money troubles, the notes to Pichery, falling due — all this savage rancour of an evil fate, though it had not conquered the careless indifference of the Slav, had physically broken him down.

After making his cannon he stood still and, chalking his cue with the utmost care, he asked Méraut, without looking at him: —

"What does the queen think of this project of abdication? Have you spoken to her about it?"

"The queen thinks as I do, Sire."

"Ah!" he exclaimed dryly, with a slight quaver.

Contradiction of human nature! This woman whom he did not love, whose distrustful coldness and clear-sightedness he feared, this woman whom he blamed for having treated him too much as a king and harassed him by a perpetual recall to his duties and prerogatives, — he was now angry with her for no longer believing in him and being ready to abandon him for the profit of their child. He felt it, not as a wound to love, — one of those blows upon the heart that make us cry aloud, — but as the treachery of a friend, a confidence forever lost.

"And you, Boscovich, what do you think?" he said, suddenly turning to his councillor, whose smooth anxious face was convulsively mimicking the expressions on that of his master.

The botanist made a slight gesture of Italian pantomime, arms wide open, head in his shoulders, a mute "chi lo sa?" so timid, so little compromising that the king could not keep himself from laughing.

"By advice of our council be it understood," he said through his nose, sarcastically, "we will abdicate whenever they like."

Thereupon his Majesty began once more to push about the balls with interest, to the despair of Élysée, who was burning to go and tell the queen of the result of a negotiation she did not wish to take upon herself; for that phantom of a king still awed her, and it was only in trembling that she laid her hand upon the crown which he wanted to be rid of.

The abdication took place soon after. Stoically, the head of the civil and military household proposed his splendid galleries in the hôtel Rosen for the ceremony, to which it is customary to give as much solemnity and authenticity as possible. But the disaster of Gravosa was too recent to use those salons still echoing with memories of the fête; it would indeed have been too sad, too full of evil omen for the reign that was beginning. They contented themselves therefore by inviting to Saint-Mandé certain noble Illyrian and French personages whose signatures were necessary at the bottom of a deed of such importance.

At two o'clock the carriages began to arrive, and the guests, ascending slowly on the carpets laid from the threshold to the bottom of the steps of the portico, were received at the door of the salon by the Duc de Rosen, tightly buttoned into his general's uniform, and wearing around his neck and above his crosses the grand cordon of Illyria, which he had laid aside without a word when he learned the scandal of the barber Biscarat sporting the same insignia on his Figaro jacket. On his arm and on his sword-hilt the general bore a long black crape; but more significant than even that sign of mourning, was the senile shaking of his head, an unconscious way of ever saying: "No . . . no . . ." which continued with him after the terrible debate in his presence about Herbert's pardon, — a debate in which he positively refused to take part, in spite of Colette's prayers and the revolt of his paternal tenderness. It seemed as though that small hawk's-head of his, forever shaking, bore the penalty of his anti-human refusal, and that henceforth he was sentenced to say "No" to all impressions, all feelings, to life itself — all things becoming nought to him, and nothing being able to interest his mind since the tragic end of his son.

Princesse Colette was present, wearing with much taste a mourning garb that went well with her fair complexion, — a widowhood relieved by a hope already visible in her heavier figure and slower step. Even in the midst of a grief that was really sincere, that little soul of a milliner, choked with futilities, to which the severities of fate brought no improvement, found something to satisfy it, thanks to the coming infant, in a crowd of coquettish and trumpery vanities. Ribbons, laces, the superb baby's-outfit which she was having embroidered with an initial beneath a prince's coronet, served to divert her grief. The baby should be named Wenceslas or Witold — Wilhelmina if a girl; but very certainly the name should begin with W, because that was a very aristocratic letter, and charming to embroider upon linen.

She was explaining her projects to Mme. de Silvis when the doors were thrown wide open to announce, preceded by a rattle of halberds, the Prince and Princesse de Trébigne, de Soris, the Duc de San-Giorgio, the Duchesse de Melida, Comtes Pozzo, de Miremont, de Véliko. . . Those names, proclaimed aloud, seemed a sonorous echo from the bloody shore where the young victims fell who bore them. And, terrible to see! a circumstance which was to give to the coming ceremony, in spite of all precautions, a fatal and funereal aspect, those who came were in the deepest mourning, clothed in black, gloved in black, swathed in those black woollen stuffs so gloomy to the eye, which imprison, as it were, the free motion and the gestures of women: the mourning of old people, of fathers, mothers, more mournful, more heartbreaking, more cruel to bear than that of others. Many of these unhappy persons left their homes that day for the first time since the catastrophe; torn from their solitude, their seclusion, by devotion to the dynasty. They drew themselves erect to enter, summoning all their courage; but, as they looked on one another — each a dreadful mirror of a common sorrow — standing, with lowered heads and shuddering shoulders, they felt the tears they saw rise in their eyes, the sighs that could not be restrained beside them on their lips; and soon this nervous contagion seized them all and filled the salon with one long sob of choking moans. Old Rosen alone did not weep: stiffening his tall, inflexible figure he continued to make that pitiless sign: "No! . . no! . . he must die! . ."

That evening, at the Café de Londres, H. R. H. Prince d'Axel, invited with the rest to witness the abdication, related how he had been to a funeral of the first class, with all the family assembled to see the corpse removed. It is true that his Highness himself cut a sorry figure as he entered. He felt frozen, hampered by such silence, such despair; and he was looking about with terror at these old Parcæ when he spied the Princesse Colette. He hastened to seat himself beside her, curious to study the heroine of the famous breakfast on the Quai d'Orsay; and while Colette, at heart much flattered by this attention, greeted his Highness with a doleful and sentimental smile, she little thought that the veiled and glaucous glance he cast upon her was taking mental measure of how the cook-boy's costume had fitted her appetizing person.

"The king, messieurs!"

Christian II., very pale, with a visibly perturbed air, entered the room, leading his son by the hand. The little prince showed a gravity enjoined upon him, which became him well, increased as it was by the black jacket and the trousers that he wore for the first time with a certain pride and the serious grace of adolescence.

The queen came next, very beautiful, in a sumptuous mauve gown covered with lace; too sincere to conceal her joy, which shone amid the environing sadness like the glow of her robe beside the mourning garments. She was so happy, so egotistically happy, that she did not bend, even for a moment, to the terrible sorrows that surrounded her, any more than she saw the shivering garden, the fog at the windows, the blackness of an All-Saints' season wandering in a low, dull sky full of mists and torpor.

This day was to stay in her memory, luminous and comforting. So true is it that all is within us; and that the external world is transformed and coloured by the thousand tints of our own passions.

Christian II. placed himself in front of the fireplace at the centre of the salon, having the Comte de Zara on his right, the queen on his left, while a little farther off sat Boscovich, in his ermine as Aulic councillor, at a small clerk's-table. When all were placed, the king, speaking very low, said that he was now prepared to sign his abdication and to make known the reasons for it to his subjects. Then Boscovich rose, and in his sharp, stuttering little voice proceeded to read Christian's manifesto to the nation, a rapid historical review of the early hopes of the reign, the deceptions, the misunderstandings that soon followed, and finally the resolution of the king to retire from public affairs and confide his son to the generosity of the Illyrian people.

This short epistle, in which the hand of Élysée Méraut had left its mark, was so ill-read, like a wearisome botanical nomenclature, that it gave reflection time to see all there was of futile and derisory in this abdication of an exiled prince, this transmission of powers that did not exist, of rights denied and ignored. The act of abdication, read by the king himself, was as follows: —

"I, Christian II., King of Illyria and Dalmatia, Grand-duke of Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc. . . etc. . . declare that of my own will, and without yielding to any foreign influence, I leave and convey to my son, Charles-Alexis-Leopold, Comte de Goetz and de Zara, all my political rights, meaning thereby to retain none but my civil rights as father and guardian over him."

Immediately, at a sign from the Duc de Rosen, all present approached the table to affix their signatures. For a few moments there was movement, the rustling of stuffs, pauses caused by the ceremonial, and the scratching of pens, firm or trembling. Then the homage, the kissing of the new king's hand began.

Christian II. led the way, and acquitted himself of that difficult thing, the homage of a father to his child, by kissing the tips of the fragile fingers with more of airy grace than of respect. The queen, on the contrary, showed a passionate effusion almost religious; the protectress, the brooding mother, became the humble subject. After her came the turn of Prince d'Axel, and then, all the great seigneurs defiled in hierarchical order, which the little king was beginning to think very long, in spite of the charming dignity of his innocent eyes and of his outstretched hand, that little hand, so white and veined, with the square nails of a child who still plays about, and with wrists that were rather strong and disproportioned to his growth. All these nobles, solemn as this moment seemed to them, and in spite of the sad preoccupations of their personal sorrow, were not men to allow their precedence, according to title and the number of leaves on their coronet, to be taken from them; and Méraut, who was rushing towards his pupil, was suddenly stopped by a "Monsieur, by your leave . . ." which made him step back and brought him face to face with the indignant countenance of the Prince de Trébigne, a terribly asthmatic old gentleman, puffing with difficulty, his dilated eyes protruding as if he was unable to breathe except through them. Élysée, the devotee of tradition, drew respectfully back to allow this relic from the tombs to pass, and went himself the last man to do homage. As he retired, Frederica, standing beside her son, like the mothers of young brides in the sacristies, to receive the after smiles and homage, said to him in a low voice, but exultant and vigorous, as he passed: —

"It is done!"

There was in her intonation a plenitude of joy that was almost ferocious, a relief and comfort unspeakable.

It is done! . . That is, the crown is safe at last from traffic and degradation; she could sleep, and breathe, and live, delivered from continual terrors which warned her of catastrophes and might have made her say, like Hezeta, at each fatal result: "I expected it. . ." Her son would not be dethroned; her son would be king. . . Why, he was so already in his majestic little attitude, his courteous yet lofty greeting. . .

However, no sooner was the ceremony over than the nature of a child came uppermost, and Leopold V. darted joyfully to old Comte Jean de Véliko to announce to him a great piece of news: "Do you know, godpapa, I have a pony . . . a pretty little pony, all for myself. . . The general is to teach me to ride, and mamma, too." Around him the Court pressed and bowed with looks of adoration, while Christian, left rather alone and abandoned, felt a singular, indefinable sensation like the taking of something from his skull, the chill of an absent crown. Positively his head was swimming, and yet he had certainly desired this hour, and cursed, above all, the responsibilities of his position. Then why this uncomfortable feeling, this sadness, now that he saw the shore he hated disappear, and the way at last open to other prospects?

"Well, my poor Christian, I think they have given you your ouistiti. . ."

This from Prince d'Axel, who, in a whisper, consoled him after his fashion.

"You have the luck of it," he went on. . . "I wish it were I. . . How happy I should be if some one released me from leaving this charming Paris and going to reign over those walruses of mine, with their white stomachs! . ."

He continued in the same tone for a few moments and then the pair, profiting by the tumult and the inattention of the company, disappeared. The queen saw them go; she heard in the courtyard the roll of the king's phaeton, the light wheels of which had never before departed without passing over her heart. . . What mattered it now? It was no longer the King of Illyria that those women of Paris were taking from her. . .

On the morrow of Gravosa, in the first moments of his shame, Christian had sworn to himself that he would never see Séphora again. As long as he was in bed, frightened by illness like every Southerner, he thought of his mistress only to curse her, to charge her morally with his own misdeeds; but convalescence, the quickening of his blood, the complete idleness in which memories mingled with dreams have so much power, changed before long these dispositions. At first he excused the woman timidly; he began to look on what had happened as fatality, one of the myriad designs of Providence on whom Catholics are prone to lay all oppressive responsibility.

At last, one day he ventured to ask Lebeau if there was any news of the countess. For all answer the valet brought him a quantity of little notes, which had arrived during his illness, tender, passionate, timid notes, a flock of white turtledoves warbling love.

Christian's senses were at once inflamed; he answered from his bed immediately, impatient to resume, the instant he was cured, the romance begun at Fontainebleau.

Meanwhile J. Tom Levis and his wife were spending a delightful holiday in their mansion on the Avenue de Messine. Tom had been unable to bear any longer the weary dulness of his retreat to Courbevoie. He missed his business life, but, above all, he missed Séphora's admiration. Moreover he was jealous, with a stupid, obstinate, lancinating jealousy, like a fish-bone in one's throat, which we think gone and lo, we suddenly feel its prick. And no means of complaining to any one and saying: "Just see what I have got in my throat." Unfortunate Tom Levis, caught in his own trap, inventor and victim of the Grand-Stroke. . . Séphora's journey to Fontainebleau made him specially uneasy. Several times he tried to recur to the subject, but she always stopped him with such a natural peal of laughter. "What 's the matter with you, my poor Tom? . . Where 's your head-piece? . ." On which he was obliged to laugh, he too; understanding perfectly well that there was nothing between them but drollery and *blague*, and that Séphora's fancy for her merry-andrew would quickly cease if she thought him jealous, sentimental, — "a nuisance," like others.

But at heart he suffered, and wearied of living away from her; he even wrote verses to her. Yes, the man of the cab, the imaginative Narcisse, had found that vent for his uneasiness, a poem to Séphora! one of those whimsical lucubrations composed by pretentious ignorance, such as are confiscated at Mazas in the cells of the prisoners. Truly, if Christian II. had not fallen ill, J. Tom Levis would certainly have become so.

I leave you to think of the joy with which the buffoon and his wife met again and lived together for several weeks. Tom danced crazy jigs and cut pigeon-wings on the carpet, like a monkey in good humour or an Auriol let loose to caper through the house. Séphora was contorted with laughter, and yet a little troubled by the kitchen department, where the "husband of madame" enjoyed the most thorough discredit. The butler declared that if the "husband of madame" dined at table he would never consent to wait upon him; and as the man was an exceptional butler, chosen by the king, she did not insist, but had the meals taken up to her boudoir by a maid. In like manner, when a visitor arrived, Wattelet or Prince d'Axel, J. Tom disappeared into the dressing-room. Never was husband seen in such a case; but Tom adored his wife; he had her for himself alone, and in a frame which made her seem to him infinitely handsomer. He was in fact the happiest of that band of rascals, among whom delays and postponements were beginning to cast a certain anxiety.

A knot was felt, a stoppage in an affair well launched. The king did not pay a penny on the notes already due, but was making more incessantly, to the great terror of Pichery and Père Leemans. Lebeau endeavoured to encourage them. "Patience, patience . . . it will all come right. . . It is on the cards. . ." But he was paying nothing, while the other two were piling up in their desks reams of Illyrian paper. The poor "père," no longer possessed of his sturdy composure, came every morning to the Avenue de Messine to obtain reassurance from his daughter and son-in-law. "Then you really think we shall succeed? . ." And he resigned himself to discount again, to discount continually, inasmuch as the only way to run after his money was to send more in pursuit.

One afternoon the countess, making ready to go to the Bois, was flitting from her chamber to her dressing-room beneath the paternal eye of J. Tom, who was sprawling on a *chaise-longue*, a cigar between his teeth, his fingers in the armholes of his waistcoat, enjoying the pretty sight of a woman dressing herself, slipping on her gloves before the psyche, and practising her attitudes. She was ravishing. Her hat was put on, the veil just reaching the eyes, her costume, that of the late autumn, warm and a trifle wadded; while the tinkling of her bracelets and the shimmering jet of her mantle responded to the luxurious sounds of the carriage waiting beneath the windows, to the rattle of its harness, the pawing of its horses, — the whole together forming an equipment under the arms of Illyria.

Séphora was going out with Tom; she was taking him for a drive on this first day of the Parisian season, round the lake, under a low sky which gives full value to the new fashions and the pretty faces, rested by country sojourns. Tom, very elegant, of a true British chic, was enchanted with this prospect of a drive in a coupé, effaced behind his charming countess, on secret pleasure bent.

Madame was ready; they were just about to start. A last look in the glass. . . Come! . . Suddenly the entrance gate opened below, and the bell rang hurriedly. . . "The king! . ." And while the husband rushed into the dressing-room, with a terrible squinting of his eyes, Séphora ran to the window just in time to see Christian II. mounting the portico with a conquering air. He flew, wings expanded. "How happy she will be!" he thought as he mounted.

Séphora comprehended that something new had happened, and prepared herself. To begin with, she gave a little cry of surprise, of joyful emotion on seeing him, fell into his arms, and made him carry her to a sofa, before which he knelt.

"Yes, I. . . Really I . . . and forever!"

She looked at him with wide-opened eyes, wild with love and hope. And he, plunged in that look, replied to it: —

"Yes, 't is done. . . I am no longer King of Illyria. . . Only a man who will spend his life in loving you."

"It is too good. . . I dare not believe it."

"Here, read. . ."

She took a parchment from his hand, and slowly unfolded it.

"And so, is it really true, my Christian, that you have renounced — "

"Better than that. . ."

And while she read through the words of the act, he, standing before her, twirled his moustache and gazed at her triumphantly. Then, thinking she did not understand, or at least not quickly enough, he explained the difference between renunciation and abdication; he would be just as free, he told her, as much relieved of duties and responsibilities, without doing injury to the interests of his son. Only the money. . . But they did not need so many millions to make them happy.

She read no more; she listened, her mouth half-opened, her pretty teeth exposed in a fixed smile as if she wanted them to seize what he was saying. She had fully understood, however; oh! yes, she saw plainly enough the crumbling away of their ambitions and of the piles of gold already spent on the affair; she saw the fury of Leemans, of Pichery, of all that band robbed by the false manœuvre of this ninny. She thought of the useless sacrifices, of her six months' wearisome life, sickened with insipidity and perpetual dissimulation, of her poor Tom, now engaged in holding his breath in the next room, while the other before her was expecting an explosion of tenderness, sure of being loved, a conqueror, irresistible, all-powerful. . . It was so droll, the irony was so complete, so fierce! She rose, seized with a frantic laugh, an insolent, scoffing laugh, which brought into her face a sudden redness, the stirred-up lees of her coarse nature, and passing in front of the stupefied Christian, "Idiot, begone!" she cried to him before she bolted herself into her chamber.

Without a sou, without crown, without wife, without mistress, he cut a sorry figure as he went down that staircase.

XV.

THE LITTLE KING.

OH, magic of words! As if in those four letters of the word "king" lay a force cabalistic, he no sooner ceased to be called the Comte de Zara and bore the name of King Leopold V. than Méraut's pupil was transformed. The patient little boy, pleased in doing well, easy to handle as a bit of soft wax, but without any striking intelligence, came suddenly out of his limbo, awakened by a strange and excessive excitement, and his body was strengthened by the inward flame. His indolence of nature, that desire to lie down or to loll in an arm-chair while they read to him or told him stories, that need to listen, to live by the thoughts of others, changed suddenly into an activity that was not satisfied with the ordinary amusements of his years. Old General de Rosen, now becoming bent and infirm, was forced to recover strength enough to give him his first fencing and shooting and riding lessons. Nothing could be more touching than to see, every morning at nine o'clock, in a clearing of the park enlarged to an arena, the old pandour, in a blue coat, whip in hand, performing his functions of equerry with the air of an old Franconi; always respectful to his king while correcting the blunders of the pupil. The little monarch trotted and galloped, grave and proud, attentive to the slightest order, while the queen looked on and made observations or gave her advice: "Sit straight, Sire . . . easy on the bit." Sometimes, to make him understand her better, she would spring into the circle and add gesture to words. Ah! how happy she was on the day when, regulating the step of her mare to that of the king's pony, the pair rode together through the wood, the child's silhouette against the dark habit of the horsewoman, who, far from feeling a mother's fears, started the two animals in a vigorous gallop, and showing the way to her son, went as far as Joinville without drawing rein.

And in her also a great change had taken place since the abdication. For a woman superstitious of divine right the title of king henceforth protected the child, defended him. Her tenderness, always strong and deep, no longer had outward manifestations, explosions of caresses; and when at night she went, as she always did, to his room, it was not "to see Zara put to bed." A valet had charge of such matters now, as if Frederica feared to enervate her son, to retard the coming of a manly will by keeping him longer in her too gentle hands. She came solely to hear him say that beautiful prayer from the "Book of Kings" which Père Alphée had taught him: —

"O Lord, who art my God, thou hast placed thy servant on a throne; but I am a child who knows not how to act, and yet I am intrusted with the people thou hast chosen. Give me therefore wisdom and intelligence. . ."

The little voice rose firm and clear, toned with authority, with a conviction most affecting if one thinks of the exile in this poor suburb, and the distance, far over sea and land, of this hypothetic throne. But for Frederica her Leopold now reigned, and she put into her good-night kiss a proud subjection, an adoration, an indefinable respect, which recalled to Élysée, when he saw this mixture of maternal sentiments, the Christmas carols of his native country in which the Virgin sings as she rocks her infant in the stable: "I am thy servant, and thou art my God."

Some months went by in this way, — a whole winter season, during which the queen was conscious of one shadow only on her joy, on her heaven, now so clear. And it was Méraut who, most unconsciously, was the cause of it. In dreaming both of them the same dream, in mingling their glances and their souls, in walking together closely bound to the same single end, a familiarity was established between them, a community of thought and life which suddenly became embarrassing to Frederica without her being able to say why. When alone with him she ceased to give expression to herself as before; she grew to be afraid of the place this stranger was taking in her most private decisions. Did she divine the feelings in his breast, that brooding ardour so near to her, closer and more dangerous from day to day? A woman never mistakes such feelings.

She wanted to protect herself, to change her course; but how? In her trouble she had recourse to the guide, the adviser of the Catholic wife, to her confessor.

When he was not roaming the country on his royalist propaganda it was Père Alphée who directed the queen. Merely to look at the man was to know him. In this Illyrian priest with the face of a pirate could be seen the blood, the gait, the facial lines of one of those Uscoques, birds of rapine and of storms, the former rovers of the Latin seas. Son of a fisherman in the port of Zara, brought up on the Marina amid trawls and tar, he was picked up on a certain day by the Franciscans on account of his pretty voice; from house-boy he became a choir-boy, grew up in the convent, and was finally one of the heads of the brotherhood; but there always remained to him the passions of a sailor, and on his epidermis the tan of the sea, which the coolness of cloistral stones could never whiten. For the rest, not the least bigoted or scrupulous; able on occasion to play his knife (*cotellata*) for the good motive; a monk who, when State affairs pressed, would despatch in a bunch in early morning all the prayers of the day, and even those of the morrow, "in order to get on," as he said seriously. Thorough in his affections as in his hatreds, he had vowed an unbounded admiration to the tutor introduced by him into the household of the king. Therefore at the first avowal that the queen made of her trouble, her scruples, he pretended not to understand her;

then, as she insisted, he grew angry, spoke harshly to her as to an ordinary penitent, or some rich milliner of Ragusa.

Was she not ashamed to bring such nonsense into a noble cause? What was she complaining of? Had he ever failed in respect to her? Just see how for such ticklish piety, or for the coquetry of a woman who thinks herself irresistible, they were to deprive themselves of a man whom God had certainly put in their path for the triumph of monarchy! . . And in his sailor language, his Italian vehemence, tempered by the sly smile of a priest, he added that people should n't cavil with the good wind sent by heaven, but "spread all sail and take advantage of it." The most upright of women are ever feeble before specious reasoning. Conquered by the monk's casuistry, Frederica told herself that indeed she ought not to deprive her son's cause of such an auxiliary. It was for her to protect herself, to be strong. After all, what did she risk? She even ended by persuading herself that she had been mistaken as to Élysée's devotion and his enthusiastic friendship. . .

The truth was that he loved her passionately. A strange, deep love; driven out again and yet again, but returning slowly along by-ways, until finally it became installed with the invading despotism of conquest. Until then Élysée Méraut had believed himself incapable of a tender sentiment. Sometimes, during his royalist propaganda through "the Quarter," some daughter of bohemia, without understanding a word that he said, had fallen in love with him for the music of his voice and that which shone in his glowing eyes and his ideal brow, — the magnetic attraction of Magdalens towards apostles. He, bending with a smile, gathered what was offered, enveloping in gentleness and surface affability that incorrigible contempt for womanhood which lies at the bottom of every Meridional. In order for love to enter his heart it had to pass through his powerful brain; and it was in this way that his admiration for the lofty type of Frederica, for that patrician adversity so proudly borne, became at last — through the narrowed life of exile, communion at all hours, at all instants, so many sorrows shared — a true passion, but a humble, discreet passion, without hope, content to burn at a distance, like the tapers of the poor on the lowest step of the altar.

Existence went on, however, always the same in appearance, indifferent to these mute dramas, until the beginning of the month of September. One day the queen, bathed in a beautiful sunshine, that was brightly in keeping with her happy disposition of mind, was taking her walk after breakfast, followed by the duke, Élysée, and Mme. de Silvis, to whom a leave of absence granted to Princesse Colette had given the duties of lady of honour. Frederica led her little Court through the shady paths, draped with ivy, of the English park, turning constantly as she walked along to say some word or some remark with that decided manner which did not lessen in any way her feminine charm. On this occasion she was particularly gay and animated. News had come that morning from Illyria relating the excellent effect produced by the abdication, the name of Leopold V. being already popular in the country-places. Élysée Méraut was triumphant.

"Did not I tell you, Monsieur le duc, that they would actually dote on their little king? . . Childhood, don't you see, regenerates tenderness. It is something like a new religion that we have infused down there, with its naïvetés, its fervours. . ."

And lifting his mass of hair with a violent gesture of both hands that was all his own, he launched into one of those eloquent improvisations which transfigured him, just as the sluggish Arab squatting in rags upon the ground becomes unrecognizable on horseback.

"We are in for it . . ." said the marquise in a low voice with a weary air, while the queen, in order to hear better, sat down on a bench beside the path under the shadow of a drooping ash. The others stood respectfully around her; but little by little the audience evaporated. Mme. de Silvis was the first to retire, to protest visibly, as she never failed to do when occasion offered; and the duke was sent for, to attend to some duty. The queen and Élysée were left alone, but the latter did not perceive it. He continued his discourse, standing in the sunshine which glided across his noble, inspired face, as if on the surface of a smooth stone. At that moment he was beautiful, — with the beauty of intellect, grasping, irresistible; it struck Frederica too suddenly to allow her to hide her admiration.

Did he see it in her green-gray eyes? Received he in return that inward concussion which too keen a sentiment and very near us makes us feel? He stammered, stopped short, panting, and laid upon the queen, on her hair, all spangled with the trembling light, a slow look, burning as a confession. . . Frederica felt the flame of it run through her like a sun, more blinding than that in the heavens, but she had no strength to turn away. And when Élysée, terrified at the words that were rising to his lips, tore himself from her brusquely, it seemed to her, all penetrated as she was with that man, with his magnetic power, as if life itself had left her. A sort of moral swoon overcame her, and she sat there, on that bench, half-fainting, prostrate. . . Lilac shadows flitted on the gravel of the path. Water was rippling in the fountains like a refreshment to the summer afternoon. Nothing was heard in the garden, all blossoms, but a murmur of insects' wings above the fragrant beds, and the sharp sound of a rifle, that of the little king, whose shooting-ground was not far off, at the end of the park, near the wood.

Amid this calmness the queen recovered herself, at first with an impulse of anger, of revolt. She felt insulted, outraged by that look. . . Was it possible? Had she not dreamed it? . . She, the proud Frederica, who, in the dazzle of court-fêtes disdained all homage at her feet, that of the noblest, that of the most illustrious, she who held so high her lofty heart, had she abandoned it to a man who was nothing, to a son of the people?

Tears of pride burned in her eyes. And in the tumult of her ideas a prophetic word of old Rosen sounded again, quite low, in her ears: "The bohemia of exile. . ." Yes, exile alone with its dishonouring promiscuousness could have enabled this subaltern . . . But, as she loaded him with her contempt, her disdain, the memory of his services assailed her. What would have become of them without him? She recalled the emotion of their first meeting, and how she had felt herself live again as she listened to his cry. Since then, while the king pursued his pleasures, who had taken thought for their fate, repaired wrong-doing, defeated crime? And this unwearying devotion of day by day, so much talent, such fire and spirit, all that noble genius applied to a task of abnegation, without profit, without glory! The result? was it not the king, the little king, truly a king, of whom she was so proud, the future master of Illyria? . . Then, seized with an unconquerable rush of tenderness, of gratitude, recalling from the past that minute at the fair at Vincennes when she had leaned upon Élysée's strength, the queen again, as on that day, closed her eyes and gave herself delightfully in thought to that grand devoted heart that seemed to beat beside her.

Suddenly a shot rang out which startled the birds in the foliage; and a great cry, one of those piercing child-cries that mothers hear in dreams on troubled, anxious nights, a terrible appeal of anguish, darkened the sky, enlarged, transformed the garden to the measure of some vast sorrow. Hurried steps were heard in the paths; the voice of the tutor, hoarse, changed, called from the target. Frederica was there at a bound.

It stood in a green dusk of hornbeam at a corner of the park carpeted with hops and gourds and rather rank grass. Boards were hanging on a trellis pierced with little holes in regular lines. She saw her child on the ground, on his back, motionless, his face white, but red around the right eye, wounded and closed, from which a few drops of blood were falling, like tears. Élysée, on his knees beside him, was wringing his arms and crying: "I did it. . . I did it! . ." He was passing; Monseigneur asked him to try his gun, and, by some awful fatality, the bullet, ricochetting on the iron of the trellis . . . . But the queen was not listening to him. Without a cry, without a groan, wholly absorbed in the mother's instinct, the saving instinct, she caught up the child and carried him in her gown to the nearest fountain; then, repelling with a gesture the servants of the household, who were hurrying to help her, she rested on the stone coping the knee on which the little body lay, and dipped that pale, adored face beneath the rippling water, letting it flow across the livid eyelid and that sinister red stain, which the water washed away, while there filtered still a thin line, redder and redder, between the lids. She did not speak, she did not even think. In her muslin dress, stained and soaked, clinging to her body like the drapery of a marble naiad, she bent above her little one and watched.

What a moment! what suspense! Little by little revived by the immersion, the wounded child first quivered, and stretched his limbs as if awaking; then suddenly he moaned.

"He lives!" she said with a delirious cry.

Lifting her head, she saw Méraut before her, his pallor, his despair seeming to ask pardon. The memory of what had passed through her mind on that bench came back to her, mingled with the terrible shock of the catastrophe, and her weakness so rapidly chastised upon her child. A fury seized her against that man, against herself. . .

"Begone! . . begone! . . Let me never see you more . . ." she cried to him, with a dreadful look. It was her love that, to punish herself, to cure herself, she thus flung as an insult into his face.

XVI.

THE DARK ROOM.

"THERE was, once upon a time, in the country of Oldenburg, a lady Countess of Ponikau, to whom the dwarfs had given, on the day of her wedding, three little loaves of gold. . ."

It is Mme. de Silvis who is relating this tale, in the obscurity of a dark room, the windows hermetically closed, the curtains hanging to the floor. The little king is lying on his bed; the queen beside him, like a phantom, is applying ice upon his forehead covered with a bandage, ice which she has renewed every two minutes, night and day, for a whole long week. How did she live without sleep, almost without food, seated by that narrow pillow, her hands holding those of her son in the intervals of applying the ice, passing from its coolness to the fever she watched and dreaded in the pulse of that feeble life?

The little king wanted his mother there, there, always there. This darkness of the great room was peopled to him with dangerous shadows, terrifying apparitions. And the impossibility of reading, of touching a single plaything, held him in a torpor which alarmed Frederica.

"Do you feel pain?" she asked him constantly.

"No . . I feel so dull . . ." the child would answer in a weary voice; and it was to drive away this dulness, to people the sad precincts of the chamber with brilliant visions, that Mme. de Silvis reopened her budget of fantastic fable, full of old German castles, imps and gnomes dancing on the floor of a dungeon, where the princess is expecting a blue bird and spinning her glass threads.

Listening to these interminable tales, the queen felt despair in her heart. It seemed to her that the work she had accomplished with so much pains was being undone, and that she was witnessing the destruction, stone by stone, of a lofty triumphal column. It was that which she saw in the darkness before her, during those long hours of seclusion, far more preoccupied by the thought that her child had fallen back into the hands of women, into the feebleness of the little Zara, than by the wound itself, the true gravity of which she did not yet know. When the doctor, lamp in hand, put aside for a moment the accumulated shades and raised the bandage, trying to revive the sensitiveness of the injured eye by a drop of atropine, the mother was comforted because the little patient did not cry or try to defend himself with his arms. No one dared to tell her that such insensibility, such stillness of the nerves showed, on the contrary, the death of the organ. The ball, in ricochetting, although it had spent its force, had struck and loosened the retina. The right eye was irrevocably gone. All the precautions taken were solely to save the other, threatened by that organic affinity which makes our sight a single tool with a double handle. Ah! when the queen should know the extent of her misfortune! — she who so firmly believed that, thanks to her care, to her vigilant tenderness, the accident would leave no trace, — she who was already talking to the child of going out!

"Leopold, shall you not be glad to have a beautiful drive in the forest?"

Yes, Leopold would be very glad. He wished they would take him where they did before, to that fête, where he went with his mother and tutor. Then suddenly interrupting himself, —

"Where is he, M. Élysée? Why does he never come here?"

They told him that his master was on a journey. That explanation satisfied him. To think fatigued him; so did speaking. He dropped back into his dull indifference; returning to the hazy regions evoked by invalids, whose dreams are mingled with the scene around them and the fixed appearances of things, the movement and sound of which their nurses fear. People came in and went out; whispers crossed each other and discreet steps; but the queen heard nothing, solely occupied in applying that ice. Sometimes Christian would push open the door, always ajar on account of the heat of the closed room, and come in to say, in a voice that he strove to render joyous and careless, some pleasant drollery to make the boy laugh or talk. But his voice sounded false in presence of the catastrophe, and the father intimidated the child. That little sunken memory, which the shot had filled with the cloud of its smoke, retained a few impressions of past scenes, the anxious waitings of his mother, her revolt that night when she almost dragged him to a fall of three storeys. He answered his father in a low voice, his teeth closed. Then Christian would address his wife: "You ought to rest, Frederica, you will kill yourself. . . For the child's sake, even. . ." Urgent, imploring, the hand of the little prince would clasp that of his mother, which reassured him in the same mute, eloquent manner: "No, no, do not be afraid . . . I will not leave you. . ." She exchanged a few words coldly with her husband and left him to his gloomy thoughts.

The accident to his son completed for Christian a true series of black disasters. He felt himself alone in the world, stunned, despairing. Ah! if his wife would only take him back. . . He felt the need of all weak natures to draw near to some one, to lay his head upon a friendly bosom, and comfort himself with tears, confessions; after which he could return with a lighter heart to new enjoyments and fresh betrayals. But Frederica's heart is forever lost to him; and now the child also turns away from his caresses. He told himself all this, standing at the foot of the bed in the dimness of that dark room, while the queen, attentive to the minutes, took the ice from the bowl, applied it to the moistened bandage, lifting and kissing the little forehead to feel the heat of it, and while Mme. de Silvis related gravely the story of the three little loaves of gold to the legitimate sovereign of the kingdoms of Illyria and Dalmatia.

Christian left the room, his exit as little noticed as his entrance, and wandered sadly through the silent, well-ordered house which old Rosen kept up in all its customary ceremonial, he himself coming and going from the mansion to the offices, his figure stiff, but his head shaking. The hot-houses, the garden continued to bloom; the ouistitis, reviving in the balmier weather, filled their cages with cries and skips. The prince's pony, led out daily by the groom, made his rounds of the courtyard, littered now in straw, and stopping before the portico turned his nut-brown eyes to the steps down which the little king was wont to come to him. The aspect of the house is always elegant and comfortable; but every one expects, awaits; suspense is in the ambient air, and a silence like that which follows a great thunder-clap. The most marked circumstance is the sight of those three blinds hermetically closed while all the rest are open to the light and air, shrouding that mystery of sorrow and of pain.

Méraut, who, though driven from the royal house, is lodging near it and roams incessantly around it, Méraut gazes despairingly at those closed windows. He returns each day in terror lest he find them open, the smoke of an extinguished taper exhaling from them. The inhabitants of that section of Saint-Mandé are beginning to recognize him. The seller of cakes stops the rattle of her castanets when the tall fellow with the mournful air goes by; the players at bowls and the guard at the railway station imprisoned in his little wooden box, think him crazy; and indeed his despair is turning into mania. The queen did right to drive him away; he deserved it; and his passion disappeared before the great destruction of his hopes. To have dreamed of making a king, to have given himself that splendid task, and then to have destroyed, annihilated all with his own hands! The father and mother, more cruelly struck in their affections, were not more despairing than he. He had not even the consolation of giving assistance, watchfulness at all hours; scarcely could he get any news of what was happening; the servants treating him with a black rancour as the cause of the disaster. Sometimes, however, a forest watchman, who had access to the house, brought him the news of the servant's hall, exaggerated by that craving for the worst which characterizes the populace. Now the little king was blind; then his brain was attacked and weakened; the queen was declared to be letting herself die of hunger; and the unhappy Élysée lived a whole day on these dreadful rumours, wandering in the forest as long as his legs could carry him, then returning to watch at the edge of the wood in the tall, flowery grass, trampled of a Sunday by the holiday-makers, but deserted of a week-day, a truly rural bit of ground.

Once, towards evening, he was lying at full length in the cool grass, his eyes fixed upon the house, from which the light through the interlacing branches was fading. The players at bowls were departing, the forest watchmen were beginning their nightly rounds, the swallows were navigating in great circles above the tallest shrubs in pursuit of gnats, which were dropping down with the setting sun. The time of day was melancholy. Élysée sank into its sadness, weary in mind as in body, letting his memories, his anxieties, speak within him, as often happens amid these silences of nature in which our inward struggles seem to make themselves heard. Suddenly, his glance, which was seeking nothing, fell upon the ambling, unsteady gait, the quaker hat, the white waistcoat, and the gaiters of Boscovich. M. le conseiller was walking rapidly, holding cautiously in his hand some object that was wrapped in his handkerchief. He did not seem surprised to see Élysée, and came up to him as if nothing had happened, saying in the easiest and most natural tone in the world: —

"My dear Méraut, you see before you a most happy man."

"Ah! my God! What? . . Is Monseigneur's condition . . ."

The botanist assumed at once the proper air of grief with which to answer that Monseigneur continued just the same, — always kept quiet, the room darkened; painful uncertainty, oh! yes, very painful. . . Then abruptly: "Guess what I have here. . . Take care, it is very fragile. . . You are loosening some of the earth. . . A root of clematis . . . but not the common clematis of your gardens . . . *Clematis Dalmatica* . . . a dwarf species, quite peculiar, only found among us, down there. . . I doubted at first, I hesitated; I have been watching it since last spring. . . And now see, stalk, corollas . . . and that fragrance of peeled almonds. . ."

Unfolding his handkerchief with infinite precautions, he revealed a frail, contorted plant, with a milk-white flower and pale-green leaves that seemed blending together. Méraut tried to question him, but the monomaniac was wholly absorbed in his passion, his discovery. It certainly was a very strange fact that this little plant should, alone of its race, have grown there, six hundred leagues from its native home. Flowers have their history, and also their romances; and here was a probable romance which the good man repeated to himself, believing that he told it to Méraut.

"By what caprice of the soil, by what geological mystery can this little travelling seed have been brought to germinate at the foot of an oak in Saint-Mandé? Such cases do sometimes appear. A botanist of my acquaintance found a Lapland flower in the Pyrenees. It must happen through currents of atmosphere, and threads of the soil wandering from place to place. . . But the miracle here is, that this scrap of a plant has germinated precisely in the neighbourhood of its regal compatriots, exiles themselves. . . See how vigorous it is . . . a trifle paler perhaps through exile, but all its tendrils out, prepared to climb. . ."

He stood there, in the setting sunlight, clematis in hand, motionless in happy contemplation. Then suddenly he cried out: —

"The devil! it is getting late . . . I must go in . . . Adieu."

"I am coming with you," said Élysée.

Boscovich stopped, stupefied. He had been present at the scene, and knew the manner in which the tutor had been dismissed, attributing his dismissal solely to the accident. . . What would be thought of his return? What would the queen say?

"No one will see me, Monsieur le conseiller. . . You must take me in by the avenue, and I will slip furtively to the door of the room. . ."

"What! you wish . . ."

"To go near to Monseigneur, to hear him speak for a moment, without his knowing I am there. . ."

The feeble Boscovich exclaimed, objected, but he walked on all the same, driven by the will of the stronger man, who followed him without paying the least heed to his protestations.

Oh! what emotion when the little gate on the avenue turned amid its ivy and Méraut found himself once more at the very spot in the garden where his life was blasted.

"Wait for me," said Boscovich, trembling all over; "I will come and tell you when the servants are at dinner. . . In that way you will meet no one on the staircase. . ."

No one had come to the shooting-ground since that fatal day. In the crushed flower-borders, in the gravel torn up by frantic steps, the scene was still visible. The same boards with shot-holes hung to the trellises, the water flowing from the fountain as from a spring of tears, all things were gray in the gloom of the twilight; it seemed to Élysée as though again he heard the queen's voice saying: "Begone! . . begone! . ." in tones which gave him now, as he listened to them in memory, the sensation of a wound and a caress.

Boscovich returned, and together they glided past the trees to the house. In the glass gallery opening on the garden which served as the schoolroom, the books were on the table, the two chairs stood ready for master and pupil, awaiting the next lesson with the cruel inertia of Things. It was agonizing; and so was the silence of these places, where the child, singing, running, making his little orbit a dozen times a day with songs and laughter, was missing.

From the brilliantly lighted staircase, Boscovich, who walked in front, took him into the room that preceded that of the king, also kept dark to prevent the slightest ray of light from entering the room beyond. A night-lamp alone burned in an alcove, where, too, were phials and potions.

"The queen and Mme. de Silvis are with him. . . Be sure you do not speak. . . And come away quickly. . ."

Élysée heard no more; his foot was on the threshold, his heart beating and striving to command itself. The heavy shadows at first prevented his unaccustomed eyes from distinguishing anything; but he heard, coming as it were from a depth, a childish voice reciting in a sort of singsong, its evening prayers, — a voice scarcely to be recognized as that of the little king, so weary, gloomy, dull, it was. Stopping short, after one of the numerous "amens," the child said: —

"Mother, must I say the king's prayer?"

"Why, yes, my darling," replied the beautiful grave voice, the cadence of which had also changed, wavering a little in its fall, like a metal worn by a corrosive water falling drop by drop.

The king hesitated.

"I thought . . . It seemed to me that now it was not worth while. . ."

"Why not?" the queen asked quickly.

"Oh!" said the child-king, in an elderly, reflective tone, "I think I have many other things to ask of God than those in that prayer. . ." Then correcting himself, from the impulse of his good little nature, he added: "In a minute, mamma, in a minute; as you wish it. . ."

And slowly he began in a tremulous, resigned voice: —

"O Lord! who art my God; thou hast placed upon the throne thy servant; but I am a child, who knows not how to act, though I am trusted with the people thou hast chosen. . ."

A smothered sob was heard at the farther end of the room. The queen quivered.

"Who is there? . . Is that you, Christian?" she added, as the door closed hastily.

At the end of a week the doctor declared that he would not condemn the little patient to the torture of a dark room any longer, and that it was now time to let him have a little light.

"Already!" said Frederica; "they assured me it would last at least a month."

The physician was unable to tell her that, the eye being dead, completely dead, without hope of recovery, the imprisonment was useless. He evaded the truth by vague phrases, of which the pity of such men have the secret. The queen did not understand him, and no one about her had the strength to enlighten her. They waited for Père Alphée; religion having the right of way to all wounds even to those she cannot cure. With his natural brutality, his roughness of tone, the monk, who used the word of God as a club, delivered the frightful blow which brought down every pride in the breast of Frederica. The mother had suffered on the day of the accident, struck on all her tenderest fibres by the cries, the swoon, the blood of her little one. This second shock fell more directly on the queen. Her son maimed, disfigured! She, who wanted him so beautiful for the triumph! Must she take to the Illyrians this poor infirm child? Frederica never forgave the physician for having deceived her. Thus, even in exile, kings are always victims to their grandeur and to human cowardice.

At first, in order to avoid too sudden a transition from darkness to light, green serge curtains were drawn across the panes; but when, finally, all the windows were frankly opened and the actors in this sad drama were able to look at one another by daylight, it was only to perceive the changes that had taken place during that seclusion. Frederica had grown old; she had changed the fashion of her hair to hide the whitening locks about the temples. The little prince, quite wan, wore a bandage over his eye, and all his little face, puckered with grimaces and precocious wrinkles, seemed to feel the burden of that bandage. What a new life for him, this maimed existence! At table he had to learn to eat; his spoon and fork, misguided, struck his forehead or his ear with that curious awkwardness of one lost sense upsetting all the others. He laughed his little laugh of a sickly child, and the mother turned aside as she heard it to hide her tears. As soon as he could go into the garden other distresses came. He tottered, stumbled at every step, took sideways for straight before him; or else, fearful of everything, he shrank at the slightest obstacle, clinging to the hands and the skirts of his mother, and turning each well-known corner of the park as if an ambush lay behind it. The queen endeavoured to arouse at least his mind; but the shock had no doubt been too great; it seemed as if with the visual ray, a ray of intellect had also been extinguished. He fully understood, poor little boy, the grief his condition caused his mother; in speaking to her he made an effort to raise his head and give her a timid, one-sided glance as if to ask pardon for his weakness. But he could not conquer certain physical and unreasonable terrors. The sound of a shot at the edge of the wood, the first he had heard since the accident, caused him almost a fit of epilepsy. The first time also that they spoke to him of mounting his pony, his whole body trembled.

"No . . . no . . . I beg of you," he said, pressing close to Frederica. . . "Take me in the landau . . . I am afraid. . ."

"Afraid of what?"

"I am afraid . . . I am so afraid. . ."

Neither arguments nor entreaties availed.

"Well, then," commanded the queen, in a tone of inward anger, "bring the landau."

This was on a fine Sunday at the close of autumn, recalling that Sunday in May when they had gone to the fair at Vincennes. Unlike her feelings on that day, Frederica was now annoyed by the common crowd that filled the walks and lawns. This gayety in the open air, this smell of their provisions on the grass sickened her. Now she saw poverty and sadness in all those groups, despite their laughter and their Sunday clothes. The child, trying to smooth that beautiful face, whose expression of disenchantment he attributed to himself, clung to his mother with passionate and timid caresses.

"Are you angry with me, mamma, because I would not take the pony?"

No; she was not angry. But how would it be on the day of his coronation, when his subjects recalled him? A king must know how to ride on horseback.

The wrinkled little head turned to gaze at the queen with its solitary eye.

"Do you really think, really, that they will want me still, as I am now?"

He looked indeed so frail, so old. But Frederica, indignant at the doubt, told him of the king of Westphalia who was quite blind, of both eyes.

"Oh! a sham king, he! They turned him out."

Then she told him the tale of John of Bohemia at the battle of Crécy, requesting his knights to lead him forward far enough to deal blows with his sword, and so far did they lead him that they were all found dead the next day, their bodies stretched out, they and their horses in a mass together.

"That was terrible . . . terrible!" replied Leopold.

And he sat there, shuddering, lost in that heroic history as in the fairy tales of Mme. de Silvis; so small, so puny, so little a king! At that moment the carriage left the borders of the lake to enter a narrow roadway where there was room for scarcely more than the wheels. Some one stepped hastily aside, a man whom the child, impeded by his bandage, could not see, but whom the queen knew instantly. Gravely, with a hard look, she showed him by a motion of her head the poor maimed boy, cowering in the folds of her gown, their masterpiece destroyed, the wreck, the relic of a once great race. It was their last meeting; and Méraut left Saint-Mandé forever.

XVII.

FIDES, SPES.

THE Duc de Rosen entered first.

"It is rather damp," he said gravely. "The rooms have not been opened since the death of my son."

And in truth a great chill, like that of a sepulchral cave, filled the splendid suite of apartments, where the guzlas had so proudly sounded, and where all remained as it was on the night of the ball. The two carved chairs of the king and queen, close to the gallery of the musicians, still presided. Arm-chairs in a circle marked an aristocratic "aside" of the greater personages. Ribbons, fragments of flowers, atoms of gauze, a sort of dust of the dance, lay scattered on the floor. Evidently, the decorators had rapidly pulled down the hangings, the garlands of foliage, in haste to close doors and windows on those salons which told of festal joy in that house of mourning. The same abandonment was visible in the garden, heaped with dead leaves, over which a whole winter had passed and then a spring without cultivation, so that a wealth of wild vegetation had now invaded it. By one of those strange whims of sorrow which desires that all about it shall suffer and be barren, the duke had not allowed a single touch to be given to the grounds, nor had he entered even once his magnificent apartments.

After the affair of Gravosa, as Colette, very delicate since the birth of her child, had gone to Nice with the little W to recruit her health, the duke renounced his nightly returns to the Île Saint-Louis, and ordered a bed put up for him in the administration building at Saint-Mandé. Evidently, he would sooner or later sell the great mansion; and he now began to part with the sumptuous antiquities that filled it. This was why the Venetian mirrors that went to sleep reflecting the amorous couples of Hungarian mazurkas, the sparkling of eyes and lustres, were now, in the gray, cold light of a Parisian day, giving back the uncouth silhouettes, the greedy lips of Père Leemans and the Sieur Pichery, his acolyte, — livid he, with his hooked moustache, stiff with cosmetics.

It needed all Père Leemans' life-long habits, his experience in bargaining and in those comedies which bring into play every facial grimace of humanity, to prevent the old man from uttering a cry of joy and admiration when the duke's servant, as old and erect as himself, opened and threw back noisily the outer blinds against the wall of the house, and he could see, shimmering discreetly and blending their splendid tones of wood and bronze and ivory, the precious treasures of a collection, not ticketed and cared for like those of Mme. de Spalato but of a more superb luxury, more barbarous, more novel. And without a dent, without a defacement! . . Old Rosen had not pillaged ignorantly, as the generals who rush through a summer palace like a waterspout, carrying off with equal ardour rubbish and treasures. Nothing here but choice marvels. It was curious to watch the pauses of the old dealer, his snout projecting through his beard, fixing his magnifier, scratching the enamels gently, ringing the bronzes, all with an air of indifference, even contempt; while from head to foot, from the tips of his nails to the hair of his beard his whole being quivered and sparkled as if he had been put into contact with an electric current. Pichery was likewise not less amusing to observe. Having no notion whatever of art, no personal taste, he formed his impressions on those of his partner, assuming the same contemptuous air, quickly changed, however, into stupefaction when Leemans said to him in a low voice about some treasure, as he bent over a little book in which he never stopped taking notes: "Worth a hundred thousand francs, if a sou. . ." Here was a rare, unique opportunity to recoup themselves for their losses on the "Grand Stroke," by which they had allowed themselves to be so supremely fooled. But they had to be cautious how they behaved; for the old general of pandours, as distrustful and impenetrable as the whole "brocante" trade put together, followed them step by step, planted himself behind them, and was not in the least the dupe of their grimaces.

Proceeding thus they came at last, at the end of the reception salons, to a little room raised two steps above the others, delightfully decorated in Moorish style with low divans, rugs, and authentic cabinets.

" Is this included?" asked Leemans.

The general hesitated imperceptibly for a moment before replying. It was Colette's haven in that vast mansion, her favourite boudoir, in which she took refuge at her rare leisure moments and wrote her correspondence. . . The thought came to him to reserve this Moorish furniture which she liked . . . but no, he would stop at nothing; all must be sold.

" Yes, this is included," he said coldly.

Leemans, attracted at once by the rarity of a piece of Arabian furniture, carved and gilded, with arcades and miniature galleries, began to examine the multifarious drawers, some secret, opening one into the other by hidden springs, slender, delicate little drawers exhaling the orange and sandal-wood of their satiny linings. Putting his hand into one of them he felt something rustle.

" Here are papers," he said.

The inventory taken and the two dealers ushered out, the duke bethought him of the papers forgotten and left behind in the drawer. Sure enough, a whole packet of letters, tied with a crumpled ribbon and redolent of the subdued fragrance of the drawer. He looked at it mechanically, and recognized the handwriting, Christian's large, straggling, fantastic writing, which for many months had reached him on notes and drafts requiring money. No doubt these were letters from the king to Herbert. But no: "Colette, my dear love. . ." With a brusque gesture he pulled off the ribbon and scattered the bundle on a divan, some thirty notes, giving rendezvous, thanks, bestowing gifts, — in short the whole adulterous correspondence in all its melancholy commonplace; ending with excuses for missing assignations, missives growing colder and colder, like the last floaters at the tail of a kite. In nearly all there was some reference to an annoying and persecuting personage whom Christian scoffingly called: the "Demon of Ill-luck," or simply: "D. of Ill-luck," on whom the duke was trying to put a name, when at the end of one of those satirical pages — far more licentious than sentimental — he suddenly saw his own image, his own little pointed head on his long stilted legs. It was he himself, his wrinkles, his eagle beak, his blinking eyes; and beneath, to leave no manner of doubt, was written: "Demon of Ill-luck mounting guard on the Quai d'Orsay."

The first surprise over, the outrage fully comprehended in all its baseness, the old man uttered: "Oh!" and stopped, confounded and ashamed.

That his son had been betrayed did not surprise him; he had known it all along. But by Christian! to whom they had sacrificed all, for whom Herbert died at twenty-eight, and for whom he himself was now in the act of ruining his property and selling everything, even to his trophies of victory, that the king's signature might not be protested. . . Ah! if he could only avenge himself! if he could only unhook from those panoplies two weapons, no matter which. . . But — it was the king! satisfaction cannot be asked of kings. And suddenly the magic of that consecrated word appeased his anger; and he ended by telling himself that, after all, Monseigneur trifling with that young woman was not so guilty as he, Duc de Rosen, in marrying his son for money to that little Sauvadon. He bore the penalty of his own cupidity. . . These reflections scarcely lasted a minute. The letters safely under lock and key, he left the house, returning to his post at Saint-Mandé, to the desk in his office where piles of bills and documents awaited him, among which he noticed more than once the big and straggling writing of those love-letters; and Christian, as he passed through the courtyard and saw behind the window, erect, devoted, vigilant, the long outline of the Demon of Ill-luck, never once supposed that he was well-informed of everything.

None but kings with all the national and superstitious traditions attaching to their persons, can inspire such devotions as these, but they inspire them even though they themselves be completely unworthy. This king, now that the boy was out of danger, " made fête " with greater vehemence than ever. At first, he endeavoured to return to Séphora. Yes, even after he had been so brutally and cynically dismissed; after he had had the proof, and every proof of her treachery, he still loved her enough to rush to her feet at the slightest sign. She was now in all the joy of a renewed honeymoon. Cured of her ambitions, restored to her tranquil nature, from which the bait of millions had drawn her, Séphora would have preferred to sell the house in the Avenue de Messine, realize its value, live at Courbevoie with J. Tom, like a pair of rich retired merchants, and crush the Sprichts with their comfort. J. Tom Levis, on the contrary, dreamed of new strokes; and the grandiose surroundings in which his wife was installed gave him, little by little, the idea of another Agency, in a more luxurious, more fashionable form; a gloved traffic, doing business amid the flowers and music of fêtes, around the lake, on the long scent, replacing the played-out cab (now numbered and relegated to a street-cab company) with a gorgeous *calèche* and liveries, bearing the arms of Madame la comtesse. He had not much difficulty in convincing Séphora, with whom he now definitively lived; and the salons of the Avenue de Messine were lighted up for a series of dinners and balls, the invitations for which were sent out in the name of the Comte and Comtesse de Spalato. At first the company was rather sparse. Then the feminine element, rebellious in the beginning, took to treating J. Tom Levis and wife as rich foreign personages coming from a great distance, whose luxury made their exoticism correct. All the young Gomme crowded around Séphora, now much the fashion through her adventures, and M. le Comte, as soon as the winter season had fairly begun, had several very good affairs on hand.

They could not, of course, refuse to Christian an entrance into salons that had cost him so dear.

Besides, the title of king made the house noted and guaranteed it. So he went there, basely, with the vague hope of a return to the heart of his mistress, not indeed by the grand portico, but by some back-stairs entrance. But after trying for a time this rôle of dupe or victim, and showing himself weekly, as white in face as in linen, in those gilded salons, where the glaring eyes of Tom Levis watched and pinned him, he grew discouraged, came no more, and went among prostitutes, to divert his mind. Like all men in search of a type once lost, he wandered everywhere and fell low, very low, guided by Lebeau, well used to all forms of Parisian vice, who often brought his master's valise of a morning to strange lairs. A low downfall, becoming easier day by day to the flaccid soul of that voluptuary, whose sad, calm home was not of a kind to keep him from it. There was little amusement at Saint-Mandé now that Méraut and the princess were no longer there. Leopold V. was slowly recovering, confided, for the period of convalescence to Mme. Éléonore de Silvis, who at last was able to apply the precepts of the Abbé Diguet on the six methods of knowing men, and the seven means of avoiding flattery; lessons hindered by the bandage round the head of the little patient, and presided over, as before, by the queen, with many an agonized glance at her *Clematis Dalmatica*, the little flower of exile now in process of etiolation before her eyes. For some time past the Franciscans had been in search of a tutor; but an Élysée Méraut is not easy to find among the youth of these times. Père Alphée had his own ideas on the subject, which he kept himself from uttering, because the queen would not allow even the name of the former tutor to be spoken before her. Once only, under special circumstances, did the monk dare to speak of his friend.

" Madame, Élysée Méraut is about to die," he said to abruptly her as they left the table one day after grace.

During all the time of his stay at Saint-Mandé Méraut had kept his chamber in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince from a sort of superstition, like that which induces us to keep on the shelf of a closet some old-fashioned garment of our youth which we shall never again put on. He never went there, letting forgetfulness and dust heap itself on the papers, the books, the mystery of that silent retreat amid the noisy life of the lodging-house. But one day he returned to it, aged, weary, his hair almost white. The stout landlady, roused from her torpor by hearing some one fumbling among the keys hanging to their nails, had difficulty in recognizing her lodger.

" Why, what tricks have you been playing with yourself, my poor Monsieur Méraut? " she cried. " It is n't right to ruin your health in that way."

" True, I am rather battered. . ." replied Élysée, smiling; and he mounted the five stories, round-shouldered, stooping, crushed. The room was just the same, with the melancholy outlook from its dusty windows — over square monastic roofs, the

École de Médicine, the Amphitheatre; cold, irresponsive buildings exhaling the sadness of their purpose; and on the right, toward the Rue Racine, the two great tanks of the city water, shining in their reservoirs and reflecting the wan sky and the smoking chimneys. Nothing was changed; but in him there was no longer that glorious ardour of youth which colours and warms all about it, rising enthusiastic amid difficulties and gloom. He tried to settle himself to read, to shake the dust from work he had left unfinished. Between his thoughts and the page before him glided that reproachful glance of the queen, and at the other end of the table he fancied he saw his pupil, awaiting his lesson and listening to him. He felt himself too heart-broken, too desolate, and hurriedly he went down again and put back his key on its nail.

Thenceforth, he was seen as before, a tall, loose-jointed figure with his hat on the back of his head, a package of books or reviews under his arm, wandering through the Quarter, under the arcades of the Odéon, or along the Quai Voltaire; bending over the odour of new editions, or the coarse piles of refuse literature; reading in the street, in the alleys of the Luxembourg, or gesticulating as he leaned of a cold winter's day against some statue in the garden and stared at a frozen fountain. In this atmosphere of study and of intelligent youth, which no march of improvement has been able to demolish or to drive altogether away, he recovered something of his inspiration and his fire. But no longer did he have the same auditors, for the flood of students is ever changing and renewing itself in this Quarter of birds of passage. The places of meeting were also changed; the political cafés were deserted now for those breweries where the waiting is done by girls in costumes, Swiss, Italian, Swedish, draped by some artist in vogue, and decked in jaunty tinsel. Of Élysée's former rivals, the fine orators of his day, Pesquidoux of the "Voltaire" and Larminat of the "Procope," nothing remained except a vague recollection in the memory of the waiters, like that of actors gone from the footlights. Some had mounted high, very high, to power, to public life; and occasionally when Élysée was wandering along the shop-fronts, reading, his hair flying in the wind, from a passing carriage some noted personage of the Chamber or the Senate would call to him: "Méraut! Méraut!" They talked together. . . "What have you been doing? . . are you working at anything? . ." And Méraut, his forehead wrinkling, would speak vaguely of a great enterprise "which had not succeeded." Never a word more. They tried to drag him forth, to utilize those lost powers. But no, he was faithful to his monarchical ideas and his hatred to the Revolution. He asked nothing; he needed no one; nearly all the money he had earned in his post remained to him, so that he did not even seek for pupils. He shut himself up in a disdainful sorrow, too great, too deep to be understood by others, and wholly without distraction — beyond a few visits to the convent of the Franciscans, not merely to obtain news of Saint-Mandé, but because he loved the fantastic chapel with its cave of Jerusalem and the coloured, bleeding Jesus. That artless mythology, those almost pagan representations, were the joy of Christians in the earlier centuries. "Philosophers have placed God too high," he said sometimes. "We cannot see him any longer." But he, he saw Him in the twilight of that crypt, where amid the images of barbarous punishment, beside the Marguerite d'Ossuna flagellating the marble of her shoulders, he beheld again that vision of a Christmas night, a queen, her arms extended, imploring yet protecting, folded with clasped hands around her son, before the manger. . .

One night Élysée was awakened with a start, by a singular sensation of heat rising in his breast slowly as if by a surge; and without pain, without shock, but with a sense of final annihilation, his mouth was filled with a sickening mass of blood. It was mysterious and sinister, — disease coming suddenly like an assassin who opens the doors without noise in the darkness. He was not alarmed, and merely consulted some medical students at the place where he dined. They told him he was very ill. "What is it?" "Everything," they answered. He had reached the climacteric forty years of bohemia, where infirmity lies in wait, watching for man and making him pay dear for the excesses or the privations of his youth; terrible age; above all, when the moral spring is broken, when the will to live is gone.

Élysée continued to lead the same existence;

always out of doors, in the rain, in the wind; passing from overheated rooms, stifling with gas, to the cold of the streets in winter, continuing to ramble along the sidewalks when the cafés were closed for the greater part of the night. The hæmoptyses became more frequent, frightful lassitude succeeding them. In order not to stay in bed, for the desolate melancholy of his chamber weighed upon him, he installed himself in the "Rialto," a brewery close to the lodging-house, where he read the newspapers and dreamed in a corner. The place was quiet until evening, gay with its light oak furniture, and its walls daubed with frescos, representing Venice, its bridges, its cupolas in vistas on a rainbow sky. Venetian girls themselves, lively enough when evening came and they flitted about with their leather pouches between the tables, their coral necklaces reflected in the beer-glasses, slept by day with their heads on their arms, crumpling their lace caps and the puffs of their muslin sleeves; or else were employed beside the stove in needle-work, which at times they laid aside to drink at a table with a stray student. One of them, a tall strong girl, with fine, thick, tawny hair rolled high, and grave, slow movements, would pause now and then at her embroidery to listen. . . At this one Méraut gazed for hours, until she spoke to him; and then the rough and vulgar voice put his dream to flight.

Soon, however, his strength failed him for even these quiet sittings behind the curtain of the brewery. He could no longer come down the stairs, and was forced to stay in bed, surrounded by books and newspapers; leaving his door ajar that the life and rumble of the house might reach him. He was not allowed to talk. It was then that he resigned himself to write; he resumed his book, his famous book on monarchy, and continued it feverishly with a trembling hand, shaken by a cough that scattered the pages on his bed. He now feared but one thing: to die before he finished it; to go as he had lived, hidden, unknown, unuttered.

Sauvadon, the Bercy uncle, whose enormous, turbulent vanity suffered in seeing his master in this miserable lodging, came often to visit him. Directly after the catastrophe he had rushed, purse open, to obtain, as before, "ideas about things." "Uncle, I have no more," replied Méraut, despondently. And then, to draw him from his apathy, old Sauvadon talked of sending him to the South, to Nice, to share in the sumptuous establishment of Colette and her little W.

"It won't cost me any more," he said naïvely, "and you 'll get cured."

But Élysée did not care to be cured; he wanted to finish his book in the place of its birth, among those deep Parisian rumblings, where each man hears the dominating sound that suits him. Even while he wrote, Sauvadon, sitting at the foot of the bed, would gossip about his pretty niece and work himself into a rage against that old idiot of a general who was selling his house on the Île Saint-Louis.

"I ask you now what he can do with all that money. He must heap it in holes, in hiding-places. . . But after all, that 's his affair. . . Colette is rich enough to do without him. . ."

And the wine-merchant tapped his stomach, tight as a drum, on the side of his fob.

Another time, flinging on the bed a bundle of newspapers which he had brought to Élysée, he burst out with: "They say there 's something going on in Illyria. . . They have just sent a royalist majority to the Diet. . . Ah! if there was only a man there! . . But that little Leopold is still too young, and Christian is degrading himself lower and lower every day. . . He is frequenting all the lairs and the dance-halls with that valet of his. . ."

Élysée listened, shuddering from head to foot. Poor queen! . . The other continued, without perceiving the harm he was doing: —

"Fine goings-on among those exiles! . . There 's Prince d'Axel compromised in a filthy affair in the Avenue d'Antin. . . You know, that family hotel with its patriarchal name which serves as a refuge for emancipated girls. . . What a scandal! — an heir-apparent! . . One thing, however, puzzles me. . . At the very time the thing happened, Colette wrote me that Prince d'Axel was in Nice, and she had been to a regatta in a yacht hired for her by his Highness. . . Certainly there must be some mistake. And I hope there is . . . because, between ourselves, my dear Méraut . . ."

And here the old fellow confided very mysteriously to his friend that the prince-royal appeared to be extremely assiduous to Colette; and as she was not a woman to . . . you understand . . . it might be that before long . . .

The big workman's face of the parvenu lighted up with a smile: —

"Think of that! Colette Queen of Finland! . . and Sauvadon of Bercy the uncle of a king! . . But I am tiring you."

"Yes, I want to go to sleep . . ." said Élysée, who had closed his eyes as a civil means of getting rid of the kindly, conceited old fellow.

Sauvadon gone, he gathered up his papers and tried to write, but not a word would come to him; he was seized with disgust and utter lassitude. The hideous tales had sickened him. . . Before those pages scattered on his bed, — that plea for royalty on which he was spending the little that remained to him of blood, — seeing himself, there, in that sordid chamber, with the gray hairs of an old student, so much passion spent and strength squandered, he doubted for the first time, he asked himself if indeed he had been a dupe all his life. . . A defender, an apostle? . . of kings who degraded themselves in pleasures, and deserted their own cause! . . And while his eyes roved sadly along those naked walls, where the sun only came by reflection from the roofs, he saw, in its dusty frame, the old relic, the red seal, *Fides, Spes*, which he had taken from the pillow of his dead father. All at once the noble Bourbonian face of old Méraut rose up before him, such as he had seen it, rigid on the death bed, asleep in his confidence and his sublime fidelity, the looms stopped, the windmills on the horizon between the arid rocks of the coast and the pitiless blue of the Southern sky. It was a moment of hallucination, the Enclos de Rey, all his youth floating in a memory which was now failing. . .

Suddenly the door opened softly with a murmur of drapery and voices. He thought it was a neighbour, some kind girl of the Rialto who had brought him a drink for his fever. Quickly he closed his eyes; for sleep dismissed the unwelcome. But no; a hesitating little step came towards him on the cold brick floor of the chamber. "Bonjour, Monsieur Élysée". . . His pupil is before him, timid, a little grown, and looking with the shyness of his infirmity at the master so changed, so pale, in that poor bed. Beyond, by the door, a woman waited, erect and proud beneath her veil. She has come herself, she has climbed the five storeys of that staircase filled with the noises of debauchery, brushing with her immaculate robe the doors that bear the tickets "Alice . . . Clémence. . ." She would not let him die without seeing — once more — his little Zara; not entering herself, she sent him her forgiveness by the hand of her child. That hand, Élysée Méraut took it, and pressed it to his lips; then, turning to the apparition that he divined to be there on the threshold of his door, with his last breath, with his last effort of life and speech, he said in a low voice, and forever: "Vive le roi!"

XVIII.

THE END OF A RACE.

A ROUGH game was being played at the Tennis club. Around the immense field of beaten ground, trampled like an arena, a great netting protected with its close meshes the evolutions of six players in white jackets and fencing shoes, who were bounding, shouting, and waving their heavy rackets. The light in the amphitheatre coming from high windows, the hoarse cries, the springs, the darts of those white beings, the impassible correctness of the attendants of the hall (all Englishmen) walking with measured step around the outer gallery, might have made an onlooker believe he was at some circus during a rehearsal of gymnasts and clowns. Among the clowns, Monseigneur the Prince d'Axel, to whom the noble game of tennis had been ordered as hygienic for his coma, could be reckoned as one of the noisiest. Arriving the night before from Nice, where he had spent a month at Colette's feet, this game was his re-entrance into Parisian life, and he was sending his ball with the "haw!" of a butcher's boy and a swing of the arm that was worthy of admiration at the shambles, when they came to inform him at the height of the game that some one wanted him.

"Zut!" responded the heir presumptive, without turning his head.

The servant insisted, and whispered a name in Monseigneur's ear which calmed him and appeared to surprise him.

"Very good: beg him to wait. . . I'll come . . . as soon as I have made this stroke."

Entering one of the bathrooms opening from the gallery round the tennis-court and coquettishly hung with Japanese mattings and furnished in bamboo, he found his friend Rigolo, crouching on a divan, his head down.

"Oh! prince, such an adventure!" exclaimed the ex-king of Illyria, raising a troubled face.

He stopped short on seeing an attendant with napkins and woollen and horsehair gloves to sponge and rub down Monseigneur, who was sweating and smoking like a Mecklenburger climbing a hill. The operation over, Christian continued, his lips quite white and shuddering.

"Something has happened to me. . . You must have heard down in Nice of the affair in the family hotel?" . .

His Highness turned his dull glance upon his friend.

"Caught?" he said.

The king nodded, turning away his pretty, irresolute eyes. Then, after a silence: —

"You can imagine the scene. . . The police in the middle of the night . . . the little girl crying, struggling with the agents . . . clinging to my knees, 'Monseigneur . . . Monseigneur . . . save me!' I tried to hush her... Too late... When I gave a name, I don't know what, the commissary laughed. 'Useless,' he said, 'my men know you... You are Prince d'Axel...'"

"Very good of him!" growled the prince, his head in a basin of water... "And then?"

"Well, then, my dear fellow, I was taken so short, I was so dashed ... and other reasons that I'll tell you later... In short, I let the man think I was you, being quite convinced at the time that the affair would have no consequences... I was mistaken. They have brought it up again, and as you are likely to be summoned before the examining judge, I have come to entreat you ..."

"To go to prison in your place?.."

"Oh! things won't come to that. Only the newspapers will get hold of it, names will be given... And just at this moment ... when matters are going right in Illyria, a royalist movement started, our restoration almost certain, the scandal would have the very worst effect..."

What a pitiable air he had, that unfortunate Rigolo, awaiting the decision of his cousin d'Axel, who was silently combing his three yellow hairs before the glass. At last the prince-royal decided to answer.

"So you think that the newspapers ..." Then suddenly, in his weak, sleepy, ventriloqual voice, he cried: "Chic!.. very chic! It will put my uncle into a fury."

Being now dressed, he took his stick, planted his hat on one ear, and said: "Come, let's go to breakfast." Arm-in-arm along the terrace of the Feuillants they proceeded to Christian's phaeton, which was waiting at the gate of the Tuileries, and both got into it, wrapped in their furs, the day being fine with a cold, rosy light, and the slender equipage started like the wind for the Café de Londres bearing the two inseparables: Rigolo, much comforted, and Queue-de-Poule less somnolent than usual, being spurred by his tennis game and the thought of the villany of which all Paris would believe him the hero.

As they drove through the Place Vendôme, always very nearly deserted at this hour, a woman of elegant appearance and young, leading a child by the hand, was standing on the sidewalk, looking up at the numbers on the houses. His Highness, who from his lofty seat was looking at all the pretty faces with the avidity of a *boulevardier* who has been fasting for a month, saw her, and quivered. "Look, look, Christian. . . One might almost think . . ." But Christian did not listen; he was busy looking after his horse, which happened to be lively that morning; and when he did turn round in the narrow carriage to look at the handsome woman, she and the child had just entered the archway of the house that stands next to the Ministry of Justice.

She walked quickly, her veil down, rather hesitating and anxious, as if uncertain of the locality; and though her mysterious manner and dark, over-rich attire might make her for an instant seem doubtful, the name she asked of the porter, the tone of deep sadness with which she uttered that name (one of the most famous in the annals of science) removed far away from her all idea of gallantry.

"Doctor Bouchereau? .. First floor, door in front of you... But if you have no ticket it is useless to go up."

She made no answer, but sprang up the staircase, dragging the child after her, as if afraid of being recalled. At the first floor she was told the same thing.

"If Madame has not put down her name . . ."

"I will wait," she said.

The servant, without insisting, led them across a first antechamber where persons were seated on wooden benches, and then through a second equally full; after which he opened with solemnity the door of the grand salon and shut it again the instant the mother and child had passed through, as if to say: "You wanted to wait . . . now wait."

It was a vast room, very lofty like all the first floors of the Place Vendôme, sumptuously decorated with painted ceilings and pannelled wainscots. Scattered around, and quite out of keeping with the room and with each other, were articles of furniture in garnet velvet, provincial in shape, curtains and portières of the same material, with chairs and cushions in worsted-work. The Louis XVI. lustre above an Empire round table, the clock, with mythological figures between its two candelabra, the absence of all signs of art, revealed the modest, hard-working physician to whom his vogue has come unexpectedly and without his taking any pains to await or receive it. And what a vogue! Such as Paris alone can give when it chooses, extending to all classes, the upper and lower of social life, overflowing to the provinces, to foreign parts, to all Europe in fact; and this for the last ten years without relaxing or diminishing, and with the unanimous approbation of the medical brotherhood, who owned that for once at least success had gone to a true man of science and not to a disguised charlatan. That which had won such fame for Bouchereau, such extraordinary following, was less his marvellous skill as an operator, his admirable lessons on anatomy, his knowledge of the human being, than the light, the divination which guided him, clearer, firmer than the steel of his instruments, that genial eye of the great thinkers and poets, which does magic with science, and sees to the depths, and beyond them. He was consulted like a Pythoness, with blind, unreasoning faith. When he said: "This is nothing at all . . ." the lame walked, and the dying were cured; hence his popularity, urgent, suffocating, tyrannical, denying to the man himself the time to live, to breathe. Head of the staff of a great hospital, he made his rounds every morning, slowly, with minute care, followed by attentive students who regarded the master as a god, escorted him, and handed him their instruments — for Bouchereau never had a case with him, and borrowed from the nearest person the tool he needed, which he regularly forgot to return. When he left the hospital he paid a few visits, but was soon back in his own study, and, often without taking time to eat, he began his consultations, which were frequently prolonged very late into the evening.

On this occasion, though it was scarcely more than midday, the salon was already full of gloomy, anxious faces, ranged in a line around the walls, or grouped near the round table; some bending over the books and the illustrated papers, scarcely turning to look at the new arrivals, each preoccupied by himself, shut up in his own ailment, absorbed in anxiety as to what doom the oracle might pronounce. It was sinister, the silence of these patients with their hollow features furrowed by pain, their languid glance burning occasionally with cruel fire. The women still retained a certain coquetry, some of them the mask of a haughty superiority to suffering; whereas the men, snatched from their work, from the physical activity of life, seemed to be more affected, more completely beaten down. Among these self-absorbed distresses the mother and her little companion formed a touching group; he so frail, so pallid, with a tiny face dull in feature and in colour, in which there was but one eye left — she motionless, as if congealed into some great and dreadful anxiety. Once, tired of waiting, the child went awkwardly, timidly, to fetch a picture from the table. Moving in his maimed way his arm struck a patient, and he received in return so surly and frowning a glance that he returned to his seat with empty hands and sat there, motionless, his head on one side in that attitude of a roosting bird which is common to blind children.

A true suspension of life, this waiting at the door of a great physician; a hypnotism, broken only by a sigh, a cough, a skirt gathered in, a smothered moan, or the tinkle of the bell, announcing the arrival of another patient. Sometimes the newcomer, seeing the room so full, would close the door quickly; then, after a colloquy, a short dispute, would enter again, resigned to wait. With Bouchereau there was no favouritism, each had his turn; he made no exception, beyond the members of his own profession in Paris or the provinces if they brought him one of their clients. They alone had the right to send in their cards and were allowed to enter out of turn. These men could be distinguished by their familiar, authoritative air, and the vigorous step with which they trod the salon, looking at their watches and wondering, as it was past mid-day, that nothing seemed stirring in the consulting-room. People, more people, and of all kinds, from the heavy, obese banker, who had had a servant in the salon since morning keeping two chairs for him, down to the little clerk who had said to himself: "Cost what it may, I'll consult Bouchereau." All sorts of toilets, all kinds of deportment, bonnets of ceremony and muslin caps, black, threadbare gowns beside brilliant satins; but equality was there in the eyes red with tears, the anxious brows, the terrors and the sorrows that haunted that salon of the great physician of Paris.

Among the last comers was a peasant, fair-haired, tanned, broad of face and of build, accompanied by a small rickety being who leaned on one side upon him, on the other upon a crutch. The father is taking the most touching precautions; he bends beneath his new blouse a back already bent by labour, he unlimbers his coarse fingers to seat the child carefully. "Comfortable, so? sit easy? . . Wait till I put this cushion under you. . ." He speaks in a loud voice, not embarrassed himself, but disturbing everybody to get chairs and a stool. The child, intimidated and refined by suffering, was silent, his body drooping, his crutches between his legs. As soon as they were fairly settled the peasant began to laugh, with tears in his eyes: "Hey! here we are! . . He 's a famous one, he is! . . He 'll cure you." Then he smiled all round him on the assemblage, a smile that came into collision with the hard coldness of the faces present. The lady in black, she, too, accompanied by a child, alone looked kindly at him; and although she seemed rather proud, he talked to her, told her his history: his name was Raizou, market-gardener at Valenton; his wife was almost always ill; unfortunately, their children took after her instead of him, so vigorous and strong. The three eldest were dead of some disease they had in the bones. . . The last one seemed as if they could bring him up. . . but for some months now it had caught him in the hip, like the others. . . So he had just thrown a mattress on the bottom of the carryall, and brought him to see Bouchereau.

All this was said sedately, in the slow, drawling way of the country-folk; and while his neighbour listened to him with sympathy, the two little maimed ones examined each other curiously, drawn together by a common infirmity which gave them both, the child in a blouse and woollen muffler, and the child wrapped in velvet and costly furs, a melancholy resemblance. . .

But a quiver ran through the room, colour flew up into pallid faces, and all heads turned to the lofty door behind which steps were heard and seats were moved. He is there; he has come. In the frame of the door, now opened brusquely, a man appears, of medium height, stocky, square-shouldered, his forehead bald, his features hard. With a glance that crosses many an anxious look, his eyes go round the salon and scrutinize those sufferings, old or recent. . . Then one of them passes into the room and the door closes. "He is n't good-natured," said Raizou, half aloud; and to give himself courage he began to watch the people who went before him to the consultation. A crowd they were, and hours of waiting followed, marked only by the dragging, echoing strokes of the old provincial clock surmounted by a Polyhymnia, and the rare apparitions of the doctor. Each time, however, one place was gained, and a little stir, a little life appeared in the salon; falling back almost immediately into gloom and immobility.

Since her entrance, the mother has not said a word nor raised her veil; and from her silence, perhaps from her mental prayer, something issues, something so imposing that the peasant dares no longer talk to her, and is mute himself, heaving great sighs. Once he draws from his pocket, from one of his many pockets, a little bottle, a goblet, and a biscuit in paper which he unfolds slowly, carefully, that he may give his boy "a sop." The child just moistens his lips, then he pushes away the glass and the biscuit. "No . . . no . . . I am not hungry. . ." And before that poor contorted figure, so weary, the father thinks of his three elder ones who never were hungry either. His eyes swell, his cheeks tremble at the thought, and suddenly: "Don't stir, my boy. . . I 'll just go see if the carryall is all right." Several times already has be been down to see if that carryall is still by the sidewalk, at the same place; and each time he comes back smiling, his face beaming; and he fancies that no one will see his reddened eyes, or his cheeks purple from being rubbed by those great fists to stanch his tears.

The slow, sad hours pass. In the salon, now darkening, the faces seem more pale, more nervous; they turn in supplication to the unmoved Bouchereau as he makes his appearance periodically. The man from Valenton is grieving now that their long drive home must be at night; the wife will be so anxious, the little one will surely take cold. His grief is keen, expressed aloud with a naïveté so touching that when, after five mortal hours of waiting, the mother and child see their turn at last come round they yield it to Raizou. "Oh! thank you, madame. . ." His effusion of gratitude is not oppressive, for the door is open for him. Quick he lifts his child, gives him his crutch, so troubled, so agitated, that he does not see what the lady puts into the hand of the poor little cripple. "For you . . . for you. . ."

Oh! how long to the mother and child is that last waiting, increased by the night now falling, and the deepening apprehension that chills their hearts! At length their turn has come; they enter a vast cabinet, vast in length, lighted by one broad, high window, which opens on the Place Vendôme, and through which the daylight enters although the hour is late. Bouchereau's table is there before them, very simple, the table of a country doctor or a receiver of registrations. He sits down at it, his back to the light, which strikes full upon the new-comers, — on that woman, whose raised veil shows a young, energetic face, with a dazzling complexion and eyes that are weary with sorrowful vigils, and on the child, lowering his head as if the strong light hurt him.

"What is the matter with him?" said Bouchereau in a kindly tone, drawing the boy to him with a fatherly gesture; for beneath the hardness of his face lay an exquisite sensibility which the forty years of his profession had never blunted. Before the mother answered she made a sign to the child that sent him to the end of the room. Then in a beautiful grave voice, with a foreign accent, she told how her son had lost his right eye by an accident a year ago. Now some trouble had appeared in the left eye, cloudiness, dazzlings, a decided alteration in the sight. To avoid complete blindness, she was advised to have the right eye removed entirely. Could that be done? Was the child in a fit state to bear it?

Bouchereau listened with attention, leaning over the arm of his chair, his small Touranian eyes fixed on that proud mouth, with the red lips, never touched by paint, which told of the pure blood in them. Then, when the mother had finished speaking, he said: —

"The operation suggested to you, madame, is done daily and without danger, unless under certain very exceptional circumstances. . . Once only in twenty years have I had in my practice — at Lariboisière — a poor devil who could not stand it. . . It is true he was an old man, a rag-picker, alcoholized and ill-fed. . . Here the case, of course, is not the same. . . Your son does not look strong, but he comes of a beautiful and healthy mamma, who has put into his veins. . . But we will see about it, at any rate."

He called the child, put him between his legs, and in order to distract his mind while he examined him he asked him with a kindly smile: —

"What is your name?"

"Leopold, monsieur."

"Leopold what?"

The boy looked at his mother without answering.

"Well, Leopold, you must take off your jacket and your waistcoat. . . So that I may feel everywhere, and listen."

The child slowly and awkwardly unfastened his clothes, aided by his mother, whose hands trembled, and by the fatherly Bouchereau, more skilful than either. Oh! that poor little puny, rickety body, the shoulders sinking into narrow chest, like the wings of a bird folded before it flies, and the skin so livid that the scapulary and the medals scarcely showed upon it, or the plaster of an *ex-voto.* The mother lowered her head, almost ashamed of her work, while the doctor kneaded and auscultated the poor body, stopping now and then to ask questions.

"The father is an old man, is he not?"

"No, monsieur. . . Barely thirty-five."

"Often ill?"

"No, hardly ever."

"That will do . . . you can dress yourself, my little man."

He threw himself back in his great arm-chair, silent, pensive, while the child, after putting on his blue velvet jacket and his furs, went back to the end of the room though no one had told him to do so. He was now so accustomed to these mysteries, these whisperings about his infirmity, that he took no notice of them, did not try to understand them, and cared no longer. But the mother, what agony was in the look she gave the doctor!

"Well?"

"Madame," said Bouchereau, in a low voice, measuring every word, "it is true that your child is threatened with loss of sight. And yet . . . if he were my son I should not operate. . . Without entirely explaining to myself that little nature, I perceive strange disorders in it, a disturbance of the whole system, and, above all, a most vitiated, exhausted blood — "

"The blood of kings!" groaned Frederica, rising abruptly in a fierce revolt. Before her, suddenly, she saw, in its little coffin filled with roses, the pallid face of her first-born. Bouchereau, rising also, enlightened by those words, recognized the Queen of Illyria, whom he had never seen, for she went nowhere, but whose portraits were in everybody's album.

"Oh! madame . . . If I had known . . ."

"Do not excuse yourself," said Frederica, already more calm. "I came here to know the truth, that truth which is never told us, even in exile. . . Ah! Monsieur Bouchereau, queens are indeed unfortunate! To think that every one is urging me, persecuting me to let my child be operated on! And yet they know well that it would kill him. . . But reasons of State! . . In a month, in two weeks, less perhaps, the Diet of Illyria will send to us. . . They want to have a king to show them. . . Such as he is now, it might be done; but blind! Who would have him? . . So, at the risk of killing him, I must allow the operation! . . Reign or die. . . And I was about to make myself the accomplice of that crime. . . Poor little Zara! . . What matter if he reign, O my God! . . let him live! let him live! . ."

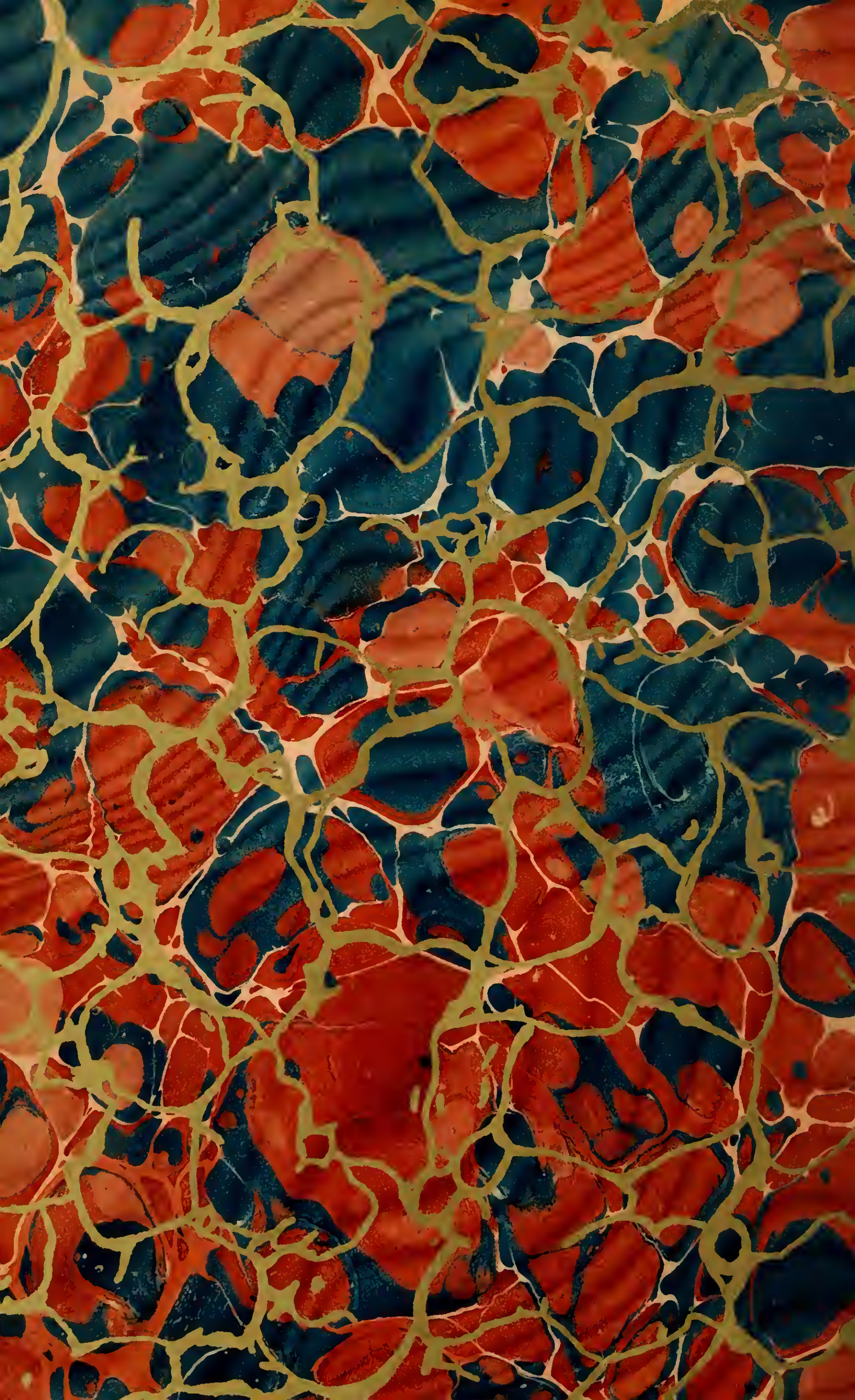
Five o'clock. Daylight is fading. In the Rue de Rivoli, crowded with equipages returning from the Bois, the carriages are driven at a foot-pace, following the railings of the Tuileries gardens, which seem, as they are struck by the setting sun, to lie in long bars upon the occupants. The sky, in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe is still suffused with a ruddy boreal glow; on the other side, already a mournful violet is deepening into night the shadows. To that side rolls the heavy landau that bears the Illyrian arms. At the turning to the Rue Castiglione the queen can see once more that balcony of the hôtel des Pyramides, she remembers the illusions of her first day in Paris, singing to her as she stood there, like the music of the band as it played among the trees. What deceptions since! What struggles! Now, all is ended, ended. The race is extinct. . . A chill, as of death, falls upon her shoulders while the landau moves onward to the shadows, always to the shadows, and she does not see the tender, timid, imploring glance that the child at her side turns towards her.

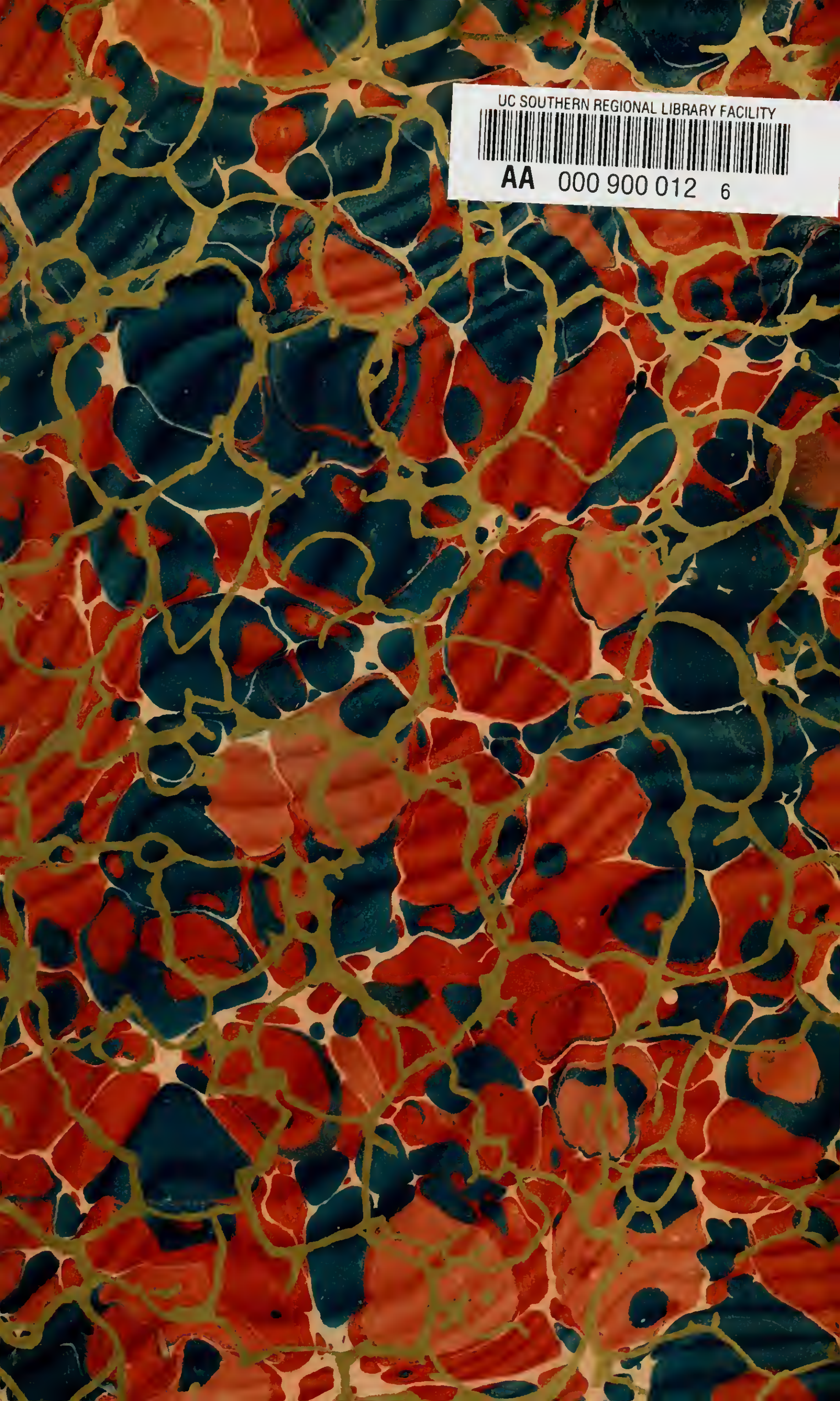
"Mamma, if I am no longer a king, will you love me all the same?"

"Oh, my treasure! . ."

Passionately she presses the little hand put out to meet hers. . . Yes, the sacrifice is made. Warmed, comforted by that clasp, Frederica is a mother only; and when the Tuileries, their ashes gilded by a departing ray, rise up before her to recall the past, she gazes at them without emotion, without memory, as though she looked upon some ancient ruin of Assyria or of Egypt, the witness of manners and of morals and of peoples vanished; a grand old dead past — gone.

THE END.





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