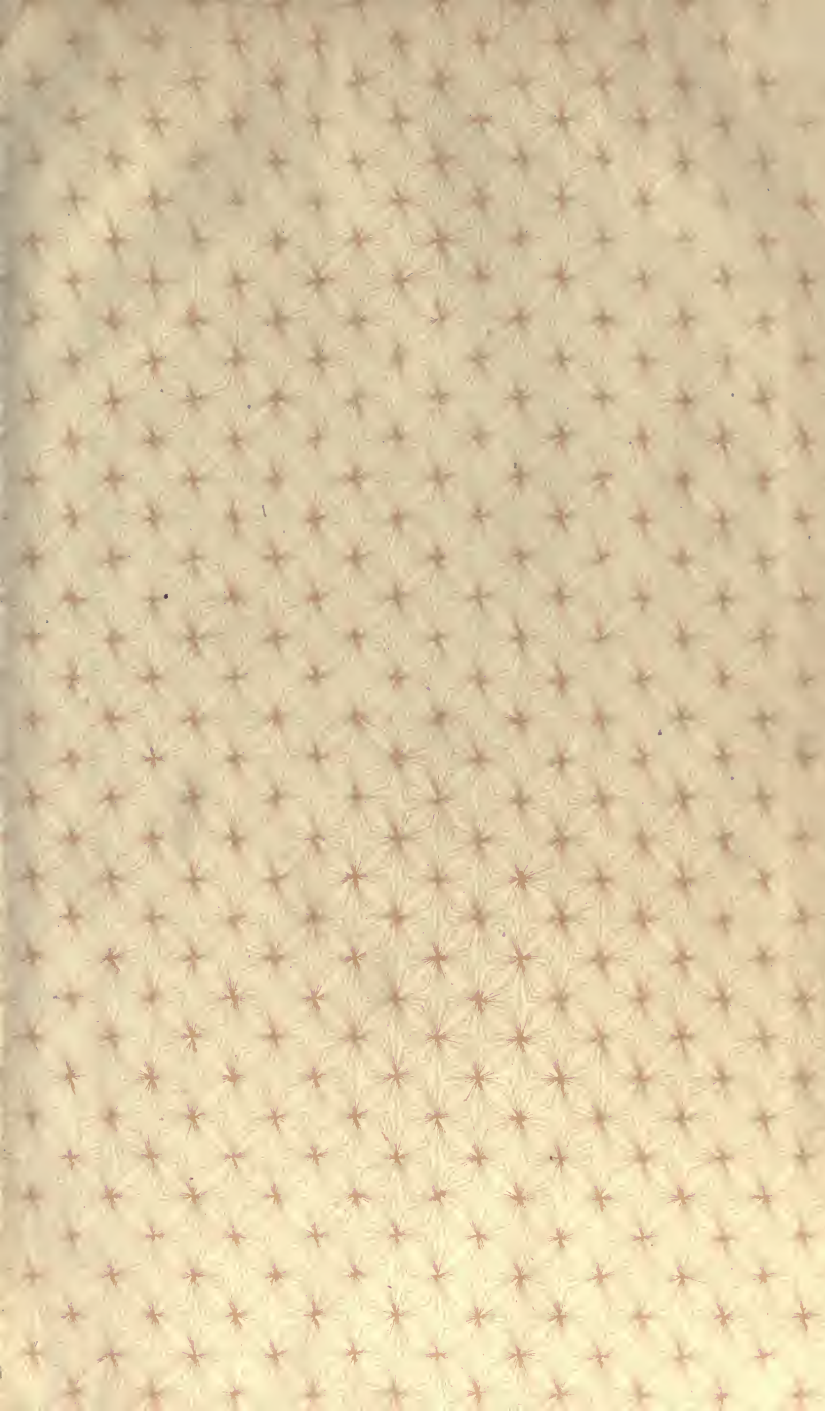
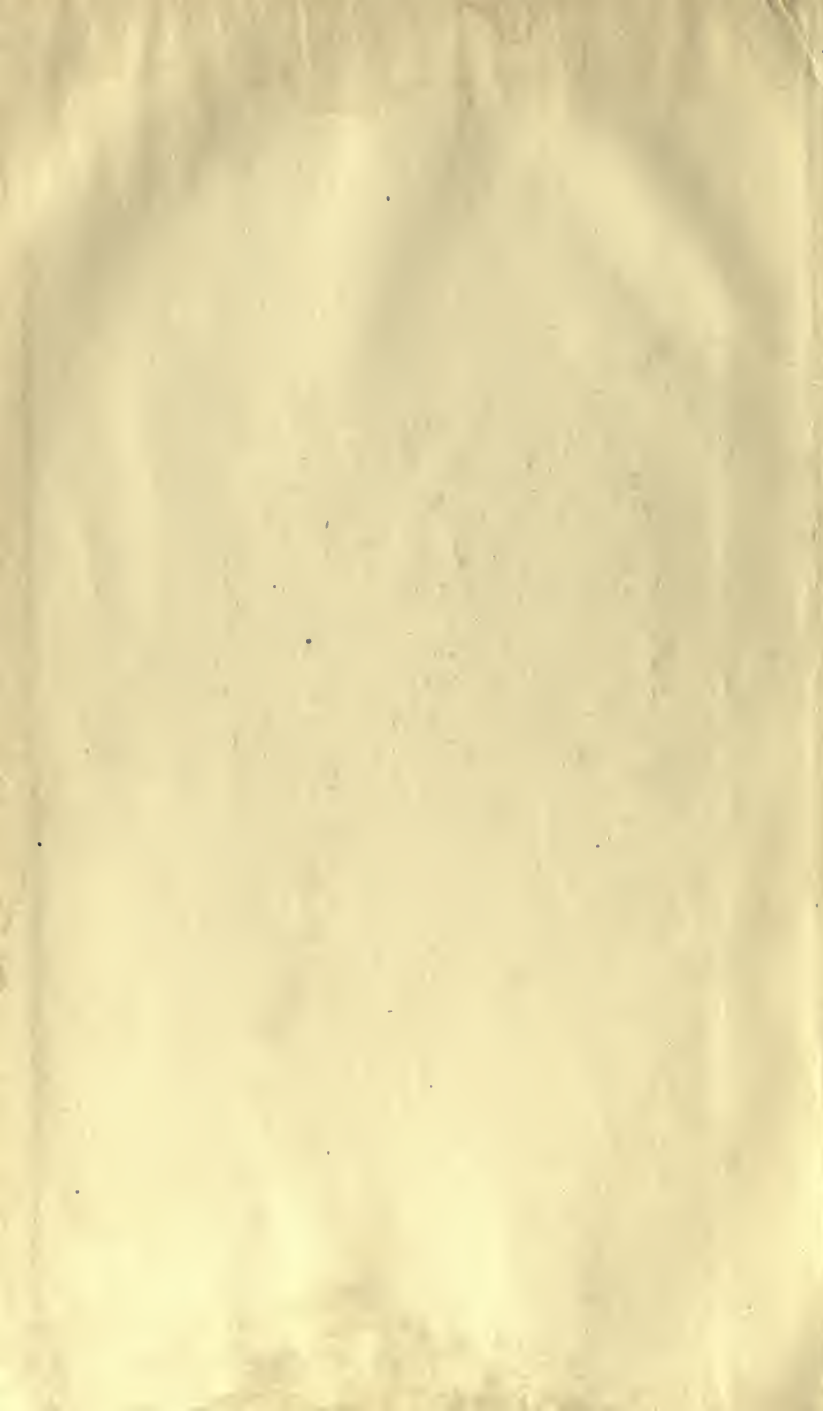


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BALTHASAR
BY ANATOLE FRANCE

A TRANSLATION BY
MRS. JOHN LANE



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BALTHASAR

TO THE VICOMTE EUGÈNE
MELCHIOR DE VOGÜE

BALTHASAR

“Magos reges fere habuit Oriens.”¹

TERTULLIAN.



IN those days Balthasar, whom the Greeks called Saracin, reigned in Ethiopia. He was black, but comely of countenance. He had a simple soul and a generous heart.

The third year of his reign, which was the twenty-second of his age, he left his dominions on a visit to Balkis, Queen of Sheba. The mage Sembobitis and the eunuch Menkera accompanied him. He had in his train seventy-five camels bearing cinnamon, myrrh, gold dust, and elephants' tusks.

As they rode, Sembobitis instructed him in the influences of the planets,¹ as well as in the virtues of precious stones, and Menkera sang to him canticles from the sacred mysteries. He paid but little heed to them, but amused himself instead watching the

¹ The East commonly held kings versed in magic.

jackals with their ears pricked up, sitting erect on the edge of the desert.

At last, after a march of twelve days, Balthasar became conscious of the fragrance of roses, and very soon they saw the gardens that surround the city of Sheba. On their way they passed young girls dancing under pomegranate trees in full bloom.

"The dance," said Sembobitis the mage, "is a prayer."

"One could sell these women for a great price," said Menkera the eunuch.

As they entered the city they were amazed at the extent of the sheds and warehouses and workshops that lay before them, and also at the immense quantities of merchandise with which these were piled.

For a long time they walked through streets thronged with chariots, street porters, donkeys and donkey-drivers, until all at once the marble walls, the purple awnings and the gold cupolas of the palace of Balkis, lay spread out before them.

The Queen of Sheba received them in a courtyard cooled by jets of perfumed water which fell with a tinkling cadence like a shower of pearls.

Smiling, she stood before them in a jewelled robe.

At sight of her Balthasar was greatly troubled.

She seemed to him lovelier than a dream and more beautiful than desire.

“My lord,” and Sembobitis spoke under his breath, “remember to conclude a good commercial treaty with the queen.”

“Have a care, my lord,” Menkera added. “It is said she employs magic with which to gain the love of men.”

Then, having prostrated themselves, the mage and the eunuch retired.

Balthasar, left alone with Balkis, tried to speak ; he opened his mouth but he could not utter a word. He said to himself, “The queen will be angered at my silence.”

But the queen still smiled and looked not at all angry. She was the first to speak with a voice sweeter than the sweetest music.

“Be welcome, and sit down at my side.” And with a slender finger like a ray of white light she pointed to the purple cushions on the ground. Balthasar sat down, gave a great sigh, and grasping a cushion in each hand he cried hastily :

“Madam, I would these two cushions were two giants, your enemies ; I would wring their necks.”

And as he spoke he clutched the cushions with such violence in his hands that the delicate stuff cracked and out flew a cloud of snow-white down. One of the tiny feathers swayed a moment in the air and then alighted on the bosom of the queen.

“My lord Balthasar,” Balkis said, blushing; “why do you wish to kill giants?”

“Because I love you,” said Balthasar.

“Tell me,” Balkis asked, “is the water good in the wells of your capital?”

“Yes,” Balthasar replied in some surprise.

“I am also curious to know,” Balkis continued, “how a dry conserve of fruit is made in Ethiopia?”

The king did not know what to answer.

“Now please tell me, please,” she urged.

Whereupon with a mighty effort of memory he tried to describe how Ethiopian cooks preserve quinces in honey. But she did not listen. And suddenly, she interrupted him.

“My lord, it is said that you love your neighbour, Queen Candace. Is she more beautiful than I am? Do not deceive me.”

“More beautiful than you, madam,” Balthasar cried as he fell at the feet of Balkis, “how could that possibly be!”

“Well, then, her eyes? her mouth, her colour? her throat?” the queen continued.

With his arms outstretched towards her, Balthasar cried:

“Give me but the little feather that has fallen on your neck and in return you shall have half my kingdom as well as the wise Sembobitis and Menkera the eunuch.”

But she rose and fled with a ripple of clear laughter.

When the mage and the eunuch returned they found their master plunged deep in thought which was not his custom.

"My lord!" asked Sembobitis, "have you concluded a good commercial treaty?"

That day Balthasar supped with the Queen of Sheba and drank the wine of the palm-tree.

"It is true, then," said Balkis as they supped together, "that Queen Candace is not so beautiful as I?"

"Queen Candace is black," replied Balthasar.

Balkis looked expressively at Balthasar.

"One may be black and yet not ill-looking," she said.

"Balkis!" cried the king.

He said no more, but seized her in his arms, and the head of the queen sank back under the pressure of his lips. But he saw that she was weeping. Thereupon he spoke to her in the low, caressing tones that nurses use to their nurslings. He called her his little blossom and his little star.

"Why do you weep?" he asked. "And what must one do to dry your tears? If you have a desire tell me and it shall be fulfilled."

She ceased weeping, but she was sunk deep in thought. He implored her a long time to tell him her desire. And at last she spoke.

“ I wish to know fear.”

And as Balthasar did not seem to understand, she explained to him that for a long time past she had greatly longed to face some unknown danger, but she could not, for the men and gods of Sheba watched over her.

“ And yet,” she added with a sigh, “ during the night I long to feel the delicious chill of terror penetrate my flesh. To have my hair stand up on my head with horror. O ! it would be such joy to be afraid !”

She twined her arms about the neck of the dusky king, and said with the voice of a pleading child :

“ Night has come. Let us go through the town in disguise. Are you willing ?”

He agreed. She ran to the window at once and looked through the lattice into the square below.

“ A beggar is lying against the palace wall. Give him your garments and ask him in exchange for his camel-hair turban and the coarse cloth girt about his loins. Be quick and I will dress myself.”

And she ran out of the banqueting-hall joyfully clapping her hands one against the other.

Balthasar took off his linen tunic embroidered with gold and girded himself with the skirt of the beggar. It gave him the look of a real slave. The queen

soon reappeared dressed in the blue seamless garment of the women who work in the fields.

“Come!” she said.

And she dragged Balthasar along the narrow corridors towards a little door which opened on the fields.

II



THE night was dark, and in the darkness of the night Balkis looked very small.

She led Balthasar to one of the taverns where wastrels and street porters foregathered along with prostitutes. The two sat down at a table and saw through the foul air by the light of a fetid lamp, unclean human brutes attack each other with fists and knives for a woman or a cup of fermented liquor, while others with clenched fists snored under the tables. The tavern-keeper, lying on a pile of sacking, watched the drunken brawlers with a prudent eye. Balkis, having seen some salt fish hanging from the rafters of the ceiling, said to her companion :

“I much wish to eat one of these fish with pounded onions.”

Balthasar gave the order. When she had eaten he discovered that he had forgotten to bring money. It gave him no concern, for he thought that he could

slip out with her without paying the reckoning. But the tavern-keeper barred their way, calling them a vile slave and a worthless she-ass. Balthasar struck him to the ground with a blow of his fist. Whereupon some of the drinkers drew their knives and flung themselves on the two strangers. But the black man, seizing an enormous pestle used to pound Egyptian onions, knocked down two of his assailants and forced the others back. And all the while he was conscious of the warmth of Balkis' body as she cowered close against him; it was this which made him invincible.

The tavern-keeper's friends, not daring to approach again, flung at him from the end of the pot-house jars of oil, pewter vessels, burning lamps, and even the huge bronze cauldron in which a whole sheep was stewing. This cauldron fell with a horrible crash on Balthasar's head and split his skull. For a moment he stood as if dazed, and then summoning all his strength he flung the cauldron back with such force that its weight was increased tenfold. The shock of the hurtling metal was mingled with indescribable roars and death rattles. Profiting by the terror of the survivors, and fearing that Balkis might be injured, he seized her in his arms and fled with her through the silence and darkness of the lonely byways. The stillness of night enveloped the earth, and the fugitives heard the clamour of the

women and the carousers, who pursued them at haphazard, die away in the darkness. Soon they heard nothing more than the sound of dripping blood as it fell from the brow of Balthasar on the breast of Balkis.

“I love you,” the queen murmured.

And by the light of the moon as it emerged from behind a cloud the king saw the white and liquid radiance of her half-closed eyes. They descended the dry bed of a stream, and suddenly Balthasar's foot slipped on the moss and they fell together locked in each other's embrace. They seemed to sink forever into a delicious void, and the world of the living ceased to exist for them. They were still plunged in the enchanting forgetfulness of time, space and separate existence, when at daybreak the gazelles came to drink out of the hollows among the stones.

At that moment a passing band of brigands discovered the two lovers lying on the moss.

“They are poor,” they said, “but we shall sell them for a great price, for they are so young and beautiful.”

Upon which they surrounded them, and having bound them they tied them to the tail of an ass and proceeded on their way.

The black man so bound threatened the brigands with death. But Balkis, who shivered in the cool,

fresh air of the morning, only smiled, as if at something unseen.

They tramped through frightful solitudes until the heat of mid-day made itself felt. The sun was already high when the brigands unbound their prisoners, and, letting them sit in the shade of a rock, threw them some mouldy bread which Balthasar disdained to touch but which Balkis ate greedily.

She laughed. And when the brigand chief asked why she laughed, she replied :

“ I laugh at the thought that I shall have you all hanged.”

“ Indeed ! ” cried the chief, “ a curious assertion in the mouth of a scullery wench like you, my love ! Doubtless you will hang us all by aid of that blackamoor gallant of yours ? ”

At this insult Balthasar flew into a fearful rage, and he flung himself on the brigand and clutched his neck with such violence that he nearly strangled him.

But the other drew his knife and plunged it into his body to the very hilt. The poor king rolled to earth, and as he turned on Balkis a dying glance his sight faded.

III



AT this moment was heard an uproar of men, horses and weapons, and Balkis recognised her trusty Abner who had come at the head of her guards to rescue his queen, of whose mysterious disappearance he had heard during the night.

Three times he prostrated himself at the feet of Balkis, and ordered the litter to advance which had been prepared to receive her. In the meantime the guards bound the hands of the brigands. The queen turned towards the chief and said gently: "You cannot accuse me of having made you an idle promise, my friend, when I said you would be hanged."

The mage Sembobitis and Menkera the eunuch, who stood beside Abner, gave utterance to terrible cries when they saw their king lying motionless on the ground with a knife in his stomach. They raised him with great care. Sembobitis, who was highly versed in the science of medicine, saw that he still

breathed. He applied a temporary bandage while Menkera wiped the foam from the king's lips. Then they bound him to a horse and led him gently to the palace of the queen.

For fifteen days Balthasar lay in the agonies of delirium. He raved without ceasing of the steaming cauldron and the moss in the ravine, and he incessantly cried aloud for Balkis. At last, on the sixteenth day, he opened his eyes and saw at his bedside Sembobitis and Menkera, but he did not see the queen.

"Where is she? What is she doing?"

"My lord," replied Menkera, "she is closeted with the King of Comagena."

"They are doubtless agreeing to an exchange of merchandise," added the sage Sembobitis.

"But be not so disturbed, my lord, or you will redouble your fever."

"I must see her," cried Balthasar. And he flew towards the apartments of the queen, and neither the sage nor the eunuch could restrain him. On nearing the bedchamber he beheld the King of Comagena come forth covered with gold and glittering like the sun. Balkis, smiling and with eyes closed, lay on a purple couch.

"My Balkis, my Balkis!" cried Balthasar.

She did not even turn her head but seemed to prolong a dream.

Balthasar approached and took her hand which she rudely snatched away.

“What do you want?” she said.

“Do you ask?” the black king answered, and burst into tears.

She turned on him her hard, calm eyes.

Then he realised that she had forgotten everything, and he reminded her of the night of the stream.

“In truth, my lord,” said she, “I do not know to what you refer. The wine of the palm does not agree with you. You must have dreamed.”

“What,” cried the unhappy king, wringing his hands, “your kisses, and the knife which has left its mark on me, are these dreams?”

She rose; the jewels on her robe made a sound as of hail and flashed forth lightnings.

“My lord,” she said, “it is the hour my council assembles. I have not the leisure to interpret the dreams of your suffering brain. Take some repose. Farewell.”

Balthasar felt himself sinking, but with a supreme effort not to betray his weakness to this wicked woman, he ran to his room where he fell in a swoon and his wound re-opened.

IV



FOR three weeks he remained unconscious and as one dead, but having on the twenty-second day recovered his senses, he seized the hand of Sembobitis, who, with Menkera, watched over him, and cried, weeping :

“O, my friends, how happy you are, one to be old and the other the same as old. But no! there is no happiness on earth, everything is bad, for love is an evil and Balkis is wicked.”

“Wisdom confers happiness,” replied Sembobitis.

“I will try it,” said Balthasar. “But let us depart at once for Ethiopia.” And as he had lost all he loved he resolved to consecrate himself to wisdom and to become a mage. If this decision gave him no especial pleasure it at least restored to him something of tranquillity. Every evening, seated on the terrace of his palace in company with the sage Sembobitis and Menkera the eunuch, he gazed at the palm-trees standing motionless against

the horizon, or watched the crocodiles by the light of the moon float down the Nile like trunks of trees.

“One never wearies of admiring the beauties of Nature,” said Sembobitis.

“Doubtless,” said Balthasar, “but there are other things in Nature more beautiful even than palm-trees and crocodiles.”

This he said thinking of Balkis. But Sembobitis, who was old, said :

“There is of course the phenomenon of the rising of the Nile which I have explained. Man is created to understand.”

“He is created to love,” replied Balthasar sighing. “There are things which cannot be explained.”

“And what may those be?” asked Sembobitis.

“A woman’s treason,” the king replied.

Balthasar, however, having decided to become a mage, had a tower built from the summit of which might be discerned many kingdoms and the infinite spaces of Heaven. The tower was constructed of brick and rose high above all other towers. It took no less than two years to build, and Balthasar expended in its construction the entire treasure of the king, his father. Every night he climbed to the top of this tower and there he studied the heavens under the guidance of the sage Sembobitis.

"The constellations of the heavens disclose our destiny," said Sembobitis.

And he replied :

"It must be admitted nevertheless that these signs are obscure. But while I study them I forget Balkis, and that is a great boon."

And among truths most useful to know, the mage taught that the stars are fixed like nails in the arch of the sky, and that there are five planets, namely: Bel, Merodach, and Nebo, which are male, while Sin and Mylitta are female.

"Silver," he further explained, "corresponds to Sin, which is the moon, iron to Merodach, and tin to Bel."

And the worthy Balthasar answered: "Such is the kind of knowledge I wish to acquire. While I study astronomy I think neither of Balkis nor anything else on earth. The sciences are beneficent; they keep men from thinking. Teach me the knowledge, Sembobitis, which destroys all feeling in men and I will raise you to great honour among my people."

This was the reason that Sembobitis taught the king wisdom.

He taught him the power of incantation, according to the principles of Astrampsychos, Gobryas and Pazatas. And the more Balthasar studied the twelve houses of the sun, the less he thought of

Balkis, and Menkera, observing this, was filled with a great joy.

“Acknowledge, my lord, that Queen Balkis under her golden robes has little cloven feet like a goat’s.”

“Who ever told you such nonsense?” asked the King.

“My lord, it is the common report both in Sheba and Ethiopia,” replied the eunuch. “It is universally said that Queen Balkis has a shaggy leg and a foot made of two black horns.”

Balthasar shrugged his shoulders. He knew that the legs and feet of Balkis were like the legs and feet of all other women and perfect in their beauty. And yet the mere idea spoiled the remembrance of her whom he had so greatly loved. He felt a grievance against Balkis that her beauty was not without blemish in the imagination of those who knew nothing about it. At the thought that he had possessed a woman who, though in reality perfectly formed, passed as a monstrosity, he was seized with such a sense of repugnance that he had no further desire to see Balkis again. Balthasar had a simple soul, but love is a very complex emotion.

From that day on the king made great progress both in magic and astrology. He studied the conjunction of the stars with extreme care, and he drew horoscopes with an accuracy equal to that of Sembobitis himself.

“Sembobitis,” he asked, “are you willing to answer with your head for the truth of my horoscopes?”

And the sage Sembobitis replied :

“My lord, science is infallible, but the learned often err.”

Balthasar was endowed with fine natural sense. He said :

“Only that which is true is divine, and what is divine is hidden from us. In vain we search for truth. And yet I have discovered a new star in the sky. It is a beautiful star, and it seems alive ; and when it sparkles it looks like a celestial eye that blinks gently. I seem to hear it call to me. Happy, happy, happy is he who is born under this star, See, Sembobitis, how this charming and splendid star looks at us.”

But Sembobitis did not see the star because he would not see it. Wise and old, he did not like novelties.

And alone in the silence of night Balthasar repeated :
“Happy, happy, happy he who is born under this star.”

V



HE rumour spread over all Ethiopia and the neighbouring kingdoms that King Balthasar had ceased to love Balkis.

When the tidings reached the country of Sheba, Balkis was as indignant as if she had been betrayed. She ran to the King of Comagena who was employing his time in forgetting his country in the city of Sheba.

“My friend,” she cried, “do you know what I have just heard? Balthasar loves me no longer!”

“What does it matter,” said the King of Comagena, “since we love one another?”

“But do you not feel how this blackamoor has insulted me?”

“No,” said the King of Comagena, “I do not.”

Whereupon she drove him ignominiously out of her presence, and ordered her grand vizier to prepare for a journey into Ethiopia.

“ We shall set out this very night. And I shall cut off your head if all is not ready by sundown.”

But when she was alone she began to sob.

“ I love him ! He loves me no longer, and I love him,” she sighed in the sincerity of her heart.

And one night, when on his tower watching the miraculous star, Balthasar, casting his eyes towards earth, saw a long black line sinuously curving over the distant sands of the desert like an army of ants. Little by little what seemed to be ants grew larger and sufficiently distinct for the king to be able to recognise horses, camels and elephants.

The caravan having approached the city, Balthasar distinguished the glittering scimitars and the black horses of the guards of the Queen of Sheba. He even recognised the queen herself, and he was profoundly disturbed, for he felt that he would again love her. The star shone in the zenith with a marvellous brilliancy. Below, extended on a litter of purple and gold, Balkis looked small and brilliant like the star.

Balthasar was conscious of being drawn towards her by some terrible power. Still he turned his head away with a desperate effort, and lifting his eyes he again saw the star. Thereupon the star spoke and said : “ Glory to God in the Heavens and peace on earth to men of good will !”

“ Take a measure of myrrh, gentle King Balthasar,

and follow me. I will guide thee to the feet of a little child who is about to be born in a stable between an ass and an ox.

“And this little child is the King of Kings. He will comfort all those who need comforting.

“He calls thee to Him, O Balthasar, thou whose soul is as dark as thy face, but whose heart is as guileless as the heart of a child.

“He has chosen thee because thou hast suffered, and He will give thee riches, happiness and love.

“He will say to thee: ‘Be poor joyfully, for that is true riches.’ He will also say to thee: ‘True happiness is in the renunciation of happiness. Love Me and love none other but Me, because I alone am love.’”

At these words a divine peace fell like a flood of light over the dark face of the king.

Balthasar listened with rapture to the star. He felt himself becoming a new man.

Prostrate beside him, Sembobitis and Menkera worshipped, their faces touching the stone.

Queen Balkis watched Balthasar. She realised that never again would there be love for her in that heart filled with a love divine. She turned white with rage and gave orders for the caravan to return at once to the land of Sheba.

As soon as the star had ceased to speak, Balthasar and his companions descended from the tower.

Then, having prepared a measure of myrrh, they formed a caravan and departed in the direction towards which they were guided by the star. They journeyed a long time through unknown countries, the star always journeying in front of them.

One day, finding themselves in a place where three roads met, they saw two kings advance accompanied by a numerous retinue; one was young and fair of face. He greeted Balthasar and said :

“My name is Gaspar. I am a king, and I bear gold as a gift to the child that is about to be born in Bethlehem of Judea.”

The second king advanced in turn. He was an old man, and his white beard covered his breast.

“My name is Melchior,” he said, “and I am a king, and I bring frankincense to the holy child who is to teach Truth to mankind.”

“I am bound whither you are,” said Balthasar. “I have conquered my lust, and for that reason the star has spoken to me.”

“I,” said Melchior, “have conquered my pride, and that is why I have been called.”

“I,” said Gaspar, “have conquered my cruelty, and for that reason I go with you.”

And the three mages proceeded on their journey together. The star which they had seen in the East preceded them until, arriving above the place where the child lay, it stood still. And seeing

the star standing still they rejoiced with a great joy.

And, entering the house they found the child with Mary his mother, and prostrating themselves, they worshipped him. And opening their treasures they offered him gold, frankincense and myrrh, as it is written in the Gospel.

THE CURÉ'S MIGNONETTE

TO JULES LEMAÎTRE

THE CURÉ'S MIGNONETTE



IN a village of the Bocage I once knew a curé, a holy man who denied himself every indulgence and who cheerfully practised the virtue of renunciation, and knew no joy but that of sacrifice. In his garden he cultivated fruit-trees, vegetables and medicinal plants, but fearing beauty even in flowers, he would have neither roses nor jasmine. He only allowed himself the innocent luxury of a few tufts of mignonette whose twisted stems, so modestly flower-crowned, would not distract his attention as he read his breviary among his cabbage-plots under the sky of our dear Father in Heaven.

The holy man had so little distrust of his mignonette that he would often in passing pick a spray and inhale its fragrance for a long time. All the plant asked was to be permitted to grow. If one spray was cut, four grew in its place. So much so, indeed, that, the devil aiding, the priest's mignonette

soon covered a vast extent of his little garden. It overflowed into the paths and pulled at the good priest's cassock as he passed, until, distracted by the foolish plant, he would pause as often as twenty times an hour while he read or said his prayers.

From springtime until autumn the presbytery was redolent of mignonette. Behold what we may come to and how feeble we are! Not without reason do we say that all our natural inclinations lead us towards sin! The man of God had succeeded in guarding his eyes, but he had left his nostrils undefended, and so the devil, as it were, caught him by the nose. This saint now inhaled the fragrance of mignonette with avidity and lust, that is to say, with that sinful instinct which makes us long for the enjoyment of natural pleasures and which leads us into all sorts of temptations.

Henceforth he seemed to take less delight in the odours of Paradise and the perfumes which are our Lady's merits. His holiness dwindled, and he might, perhaps, have sunk into voluptuousness and become little by little like those lukewarm souls which Heaven rejects had not succour come to him in the nick of time.

Once, long ago, in the Thebaid, an angel stole from a hermit a cup of gold which still bound the holy man to the vanities of earth. A similar mercy was vouchsafed to this priest of the Bocage. A

white hen scratched the earth about the mignonette with such good-will that it all died.

We are not informed whence this bird came. As for myself, I am inclined to believe that the angel who in the desert stole the hermit's cup transformed himself into a white hen on purpose to destroy the only obstacle which barred the good priest's path towards perfection.

M. PIGEONNEAU

TO GILBERT AUGUSTIN-THIERRY

M. PIGEONNEAU



HAVE, as everybody knows, devoted my whole life to Egyptian archæology. I should be very ungrateful to my country, to science, and to myself, if I regretted the profession to

which I was called in my early youth and which I have followed with honour these forty years. My labours have not been in vain. I may say, without flattering myself, that my article on *The Handle of an Egyptian mirror in the Museum of the Louvre* may still be consulted with profit, though it dates back to the beginning of my career.

As for the exhaustive studies which I subsequently devoted to one of the bronze weights found in 1851 in the excavations at the Serapeium, it would be ungracious for me not to think well of them, as they opened for me the doors of the Institute.

Encouraged by the flattering reception with which my researches of this nature were received by many of my new colleagues, I was tempted for a

moment to treat in one comprehensive work of the weights and measures in use at Alexandria in the reign of Ptolemy Auletes (80-52). I soon recognised, however, that a subject so general could not be dealt with by the really profound student, and that positive science could not approach it without running a risk of incurring all sorts of mischances. I felt that in investigating several subjects at once I was forsaking the fundamental principles of archæology. If to-day I confess my mistake, if I acknowledge the incredible enthusiasm with which I was inspired by a far too ambitious scheme, I do so for the sake of the young, who will thus learn by my example to conquer their imagination. It is our most cruel foe. The student who has not succeeded in stifling it is lost for ever to erudition. I still tremble to think in what depths I was nearly plunged by my adventurous spirit. I was within an ace of what one calls history. What a downfall! I should have sunk into art. For history is only art, or, at best, a false science. Who to-day does not know that the historians preceded the archæologists, as astrologers preceded the astronomers, as the alchemists preceded the chemists, and as the monkeys preceded men? Thank Heaven! I escaped with a mere fright.

My third work, I hasten to say, was wisely planned. It was a monograph entitled, *On the toilet of an Egyptian lady of the Middle Empire, from an unpublishea*

picture. I treated the subject so as to avoid all side issues, and I did not permit any generalising to intrude itself. I guarded myself against those considerations, comparisons and views with which certain of my colleagues have marred the exposition of their most valuable discoveries. But why should a work planned so sanely have met with so fantastic a fate? By what freak of destiny should it have proved the cause of the monstrous aberration of my mind? But let me not anticipate events nor confuse dates. My dissertation was intended to be read at a public sitting of the five academies, a distinction all the more precious, as it rarely falls to the lot of works of this character. These academic gatherings have for some years past been largely attended by people of fashion.

The day I delivered my lecture the hall was crowded by a distinguished audience. Women were there in great numbers. Lovely faces and brilliant toilettes graced the galleries. My discourse was listened to with respect. It was not interrupted by those thoughtless and noisy demonstrations which naturally follow mere literary productions. No, the public preserved an attitude more in harmony with the nature of the work presented to them. They were serious and grave.

As I paused between the phrases the better to disentangle the different trains of thought, I had

leisure to examine behind my spectacles the entire hall. I can truly say that not the faintest smile could be seen on any lips. On the contrary, even the freshest faces wore an expression of austerity. I seemed to have ripened all their intellects as if by magic. Here and there while I read some young people whispered to their neighbours. They were probably debating some special point treated of in my discourse.

More than that, a beautiful young creature of twenty-two or twenty-four, seated in the left corner of the north balcony, was listening with great attention and taking notes. Her face had a delicacy of features and a mobility of expression truly remarkable. The attention with which she listened to my words gave an added charm to her singular face. She was not alone. A big, robust man, who, like the Assyrian kings, wore a long curled beard and long black hair, stood beside her and occasionally spoke to her in a low voice. My attention, which at first was divided amongst my entire audience, concentrated itself little by little on the young woman. She inspired me, I confess, with an interest which certain of my colleagues might consider unworthy of a scientific mind such as mine, though I feel sure that none of them under similar circumstances would have been more indifferent than I. As I proceeded she scribbled in a little note-book ;

and as she listened to my discourse one could see that she was visibly swayed by the most contradictory emotions ; she seemed to pass from satisfaction and joy to surprise and even anxiety. I examined her with increasing curiosity. Would to God I had set eyes on her and her only that day under the cupola !

I had nearly finished ; there hardly remained more than twenty-five or thirty pages at most to read when suddenly my eyes encountered those of the man with the Assyrian beard. How can I explain to you what happened then, seeing that I cannot explain it to myself ? All I can say is that the glance of this personage put me at once into a state of indescribable agitation. The eye-balls fixed on me were of a greenish colour. I could not turn my own away. I stood there dumb and open-mouthed. As I had stopped speaking the audience began to applaud. Silence being restored, I tried to continue my discourse. But in spite of the most violent efforts, I could not tear my eyes from those two living lights to which they were so mysteriously riveted. That was not all. By a more amazing phenomenon still, and contrary to all the principles of my whole life, I began to improvise. God alone knows if this was the result of my own free will !

Under the influence of a strange, unknown and irresistible force I delivered with grace and burning eloquence certain philosophical reflections on the

toilet of women in the course of the ages; I generalised, I rhapsodised, I grew eloquent—God forgive me—about the eternal feminine, and the passion which glides like a breath about those perfumed veils with which women know how to adorn their beauty.

The man with the Assyrian beard never ceased staring steadily at me. And I still continued to speak. At last he lowered his eyes, and then I stopped. It is humiliating to add that this portion of my address, which was quite as foreign to my own natural impulse as it was contrary to the scientific mind, was rewarded with tumultuous applause. The young woman in the north balcony clapped her hands and smiled.

I was followed at the reading-desk by a member of the Academy who seemed visibly annoyed at having to be heard after me. Perhaps his fears were exaggerated. At any rate he was listened to without too much impatience. I am under the impression that it was verse that he read.

The meeting being over, I left the hall in company with several of my colleagues, who renewed their congratulations with a sincerity in which I try to believe.

Having paused a moment on the quay near the lions of Creuzot to exchange a few greetings, I observed the man with the Assyrian beard and his

beautiful companion enter a *coupé*. I happened accidentally to be standing next to an eloquent philosopher, of whom it is said that he is equally at home in worldly elegance and in cosmic theories. The young lady, putting her delicate head and her little hand out of the carriage door, called him by name and said with a slight English accent :

“ My dear friend, you’ve forgotten me. That’s too bad ! ”

After the carriage had gone I asked my illustrious colleague who this charming person and her companion were.

“ What ! ” he replied, “ you do not know Miss Morgan and her physician Daoud, who cures all diseases by means of magnetism, hypnotism, and suggestion ? Annie Morgan is the daughter of the richest merchant in Chicago. Two years ago she came to Paris with her mother, and she has had a wonderful house built on the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne trice. She is highly educated and remarkably clever.”

“ You do not surprise me,” I replied, “ for I have reason to think that this American lady is of a very serious turn of mind.”

My brilliant colleague smiled as he shook my hand.

I walked home to the Rue Saint Jacques, where I have lived these last thirty years in a modest lodging

from which I can just see the tops of the trees in the garden of the Luxembourg, and I sat down at my writing-table.

For three days I sat there assiduously at work, before me a little statuette representing the goddess Pasht with her cat's head. This little monument bears an inscription imperfectly deciphered by Monsieur Grébault. I was at work on an adequate interpretation with comments. The incident at the institute had left a less vivid impression on my mind than might have been feared. I was not unduly disturbed. To tell the truth, I had even forgotten it a little, and it required new occurrences to revive its remembrance.

I had, therefore, leisure during these three days to bring my version of the inscription and my notes to a satisfactory conclusion. I only interrupted my archæological work to read the newspapers, which were loud in my praise.

Newspapers, absolutely ignorant of all learning, spoke in praise of that "charming passage" which had concluded my discourse. "It was a revelation," they said, "and M. Pigeonneau had prepared a most agreeable surprise for us." I do not know why I refer to such trifles, because, usually I am quite indifferent as to what they say about me in the newspapers.

I had been already closeted in my study for three

days when a ring at the door-bell startled me. There was something imperious, fantastic, and strange in the motion communicated to the bell-rope which disturbed me, and it was with real anxiety that I went myself to open the door. And whom did I find on the landing? The young American recently so absorbed at the reading of my treatise. It was Miss Morgan in person.

“Monsieur Pigeonneau?”

“Yes.”

“I recognised you at once, though you are not wearing your beautiful coat with the embroidery of green palm-leaves. But, please don't put it on for my sake. I like you much better in your dressing-gown.”

I led her into my study. She looked curiously at the papyri, the prints, and odds and ends of all kinds which covered the walls to the ceiling, and then she looked silently for some time at the goddess Pasht who stood on my writing-table. Finally she said :

“She is charming.”

“Do you refer to this little monument, Madam? As a matter of fact, it is distinguished by an exceptional inscription of a sufficiently curious nature. But may I ask what has procured for me the honour of your visit?”

“O,” she cried, “I don't care a fig for its re-

markable inscriptions. There never was a more exquisitely delicate cat-face. Of course you believe that she is a real goddess, don't you, Monsieur Pigeonneau ? ”

I protested against so unworthy a suspicion.

“ To believe that would be fetichism. ”

Her great green eyes looked at me with surprise.

“ Ah, then, you don't believe in fetichism ? I did not think one could be an archæologist and yet not believe in fetichism. How can Pasht interest you if you do not believe that she is a goddess ? But never mind ! I came to see you on a matter of great importance, Monsieur Pigeonneau. ”

“ Great importance ? ”

“ Yes, about a costume. Look at me. ”

“ With pleasure. ”

“ Don't you find traces of the Cushite race in my profile ? ”

I was at loss what to say. An interview of this nature was so foreign to me.

“ Oh, there's nothing surprising about it, ” she continued. “ I remember when I was an Egyptian. And were you also an Egyptian, Monsieur Pigeonneau ? Don't you remember ? How very curious. At least, you don't doubt that we pass through a series of successive incarnations ? ”

“ I do not know. ”

“ You surprise me, Monsieur Pigeonneau. ”

“Will you tell me, Madam, to what I am indebted for this honour?”

“To be sure. I haven’t yet told you that I have come to beg you to help me to design an Egyptian costume for the fancy ball at Countess N——’s. I want a costume that shall be absolutely accurate and bewilderingly beautiful. I have been hard at work at it already, M. Pigeonneau. I have gone over my recollections, for I remember very well when I lived in Thebes six thousand years ago. I have had designs sent me from London, Boulak and New York.”

“Those would, of course, be more reliable.”

“No, nothing is so reliable as one’s intuition. — I have also studied in the Egyptian Museum of the Louvre. It is full of enchanting things. Figures so slender and pure, profiles so delicate and clear cut, women who look like flowers, but, at the same time, with something at once rigid and supple. And a god, Bes, who looks like Sarcey! My goodness, how beautiful it all is!”

“Pardon me, but I do not yet quite understand——”

“I haven’t finished. I went to your lecture on the toilet of a woman of the Middle Empire, and I took notes. It was rather dry, your lecture, but I grubbed away at it. By aid of all these notes I have designed a costume. But it is not quite right yet.

So I have come to beg you to correct it. Do come to me to-morrow! Will you? Do me that honour for the love of Egypt! You will, won't you? Till to-morrow, I must hurry off. Mama is in the carriage waiting for me."

She disappeared as she said these last words, and I followed. When I reached the vestibule she was already at the foot of the stairs and from here I heard her clear voice call up:

"Till to-morrow. Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne, at the corner of the Villa Saïd."

"I shall not go to see this mad creature," I said to myself.

The next afternoon at four o'clock I rang the door-bell. A footman led me into an immense, well-lighted hall crowded with pictures and statues in marble and bronze; sedan chairs in *Vernis Martin* set with porcelain plaques; Peruvian mummies; a dozen dummy figures of men and horses in full armour, over which, by reason of their great height, towered a Polish cavalier with white wings on his shoulders and a French knight equipped for the tournament, his helmet bearing a crest of a woman's head with pointed coif and flowing veil.

An entire grove of palm-trees in tubs reared their foliage in this hall, and in their midst was seated a gigantic Buddha in gold. At the foot of the god sat a shabbily dressed old woman reading the Bible.

I was still dazzled by these many marvels when the purple hangings were raised and Miss Morgan appeared in a white *peignoir* trimmed with swans-down. She was followed by two great, long-muzzled boarhounds.

“I was sure you would come, Monsieur Pigeonneau.”

I stammered a compliment.

“How could one possibly refuse anything to so charming a lady?”

“O, it is not because I am pretty that I am never refused anything. I have secrets by which I make myself obeyed.”

Then, pointing to the old lady who was reading the Bible, she said to me :

“Pay no attention to her, that is mama. I shall not introduce you. Should you speak she could not reply ; she belongs to a religious sect which forbids unnecessary conversation. It is the very latest thing in sects. Its adherents wear sackcloth and eat out of wooden basins. Mama greatly enjoys these little observances. But you can imagine that I did not ask you here to talk to you about mama. I will put on my Egyptian costume. I shan't be long. In the meantime you might look at these little things.”

And she made me sit down before a cabinet containing a mummy-case, several statuettes of the

Middle Empire, a number of scarabs, and some beautiful fragments of a ritual for the burial of the dead.

Left alone, I examined the papyrus with the more interest, inasmuch as it was inscribed with a name I had already discovered on a seal. It was the name of a scribe of King Seti I. I immediately applied myself to noting the various interesting peculiarities the document exhibited.

I was plunged in this occupation for a longer time than I could accurately measure, when I was warned by a kind of instinct that some one was behind me. I turned and saw a marvellous being, her head surmounted by a gold hawk and the pure and adorable lines of her young body revealed by a clinging white sheath. Over this a transparent rose-coloured tunic, bound at the waist by a girdle of precious stones, fell and separated into symmetrical folds. Arms and feet were bare and loaded with rings.

She stood before me, her head turned towards her right shoulder in a hieratic attitude which gave to her delicious beauty something indescribably divine.

“What! Is that you, Miss Morgan?”

“Unless it is Neferu-Ra in person. You remember the Neferu-Ra of Leconte de Lisle, the Beauty of the Sun?”

“Pallid and pining on her virgin bed,
Swathed in fine lawns from dainty foot to head.”*

“But of course you don't know. You know nothing of verse. And yet verses are so pretty. Come! Let's go to work.”

Having mastered my emotion, I made some remarks to this charming young person about her enchanting costume. I ventured to criticise certain details as departing from archæological accuracy. I proposed to replace certain gems in the setting of the rings by others more universally in use in the Middle Empire. Finally I decidedly opposed the wearing of a clasp of *cloisonné* enamel. In fact, this jewel was a most odious anachronism. We at last agreed to replace this by a boss of precious stones deep set in fine gold. She listened with great docility, and seemed so pleased with me that she even asked me to stay to dinner. I excused myself because of my regular habits and the simplicity of my diet and took my leave. I was already in the vestibule when she called after me :

“Well, now, is my costume sufficiently smart? How mad I shall make all the other women at the Countess's ball!”

I was shocked at the remark. But having turned

* “Voici qu'elle languit sur son lit virginal,
Très pâle, enveloppée avec des fines toiles.”

towards her I saw her again, and again I fell under her spell.

She called me back.

“Monsieur Pigeonneau,” she said, “you are such a dear man! Write me a little story and I will love you ever and ever and ever so much!”

“I don’t know how,” I replied.

She shrugged her shoulders and exclaimed:

“What is the use of science if it can’t help you to write a story! You must write me a story, Monsieur Pigeonneau.”

Thinking it useless to repeat my absolute refusal I took my leave without replying.

At the door I passed the man with the Assyrian beard, Dr. Daoud, whose glance had so strangely affected me under the cupola of the Institute.

He struck me as being of the commonest class, and I found it very disagreeable to meet him again.

The Countess N——’s ball took place about fifteen days after my visit. I was not surprised to read in the newspaper that the beautiful Miss Morgan had created a sensation in the costume of Neferu-Ra.

During the rest of the year 1886 I did not hear her mentioned again. But on the first day of the New Year, as I was writing in my study, a manservant brought me a letter and a basket.

“From Miss Morgan,” he explained, and went

away. I heard a mewling in the basket which had been placed on my writing table, and when I opened it out sprang a little grey cat.

It was not an Angora. It was a cat of some Oriental breed, much more slender than ours, and with a striking resemblance, so far as I could judge, to those of his race found in great numbers in the subterranean tombs of Thebes, their mummies swathed in coarse mummy-wrappings. He shook himself, gazed about, arched his back, yawned, and then rubbed himself, purring, against the goddess Pasht, who stood on my table in all her purity of form and her delicate, pointed face. Though his colour was dark and his fur short, he was graceful, and he seemed intelligent and quite tame. I could not imagine the reason for such a curious present, nor did Miss Morgan's letter greatly enlighten me. It was as follows :

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I am sending you a little cat which Dr. Daoud brought back from Egypt, and of which I am very fond. Treat him well for my sake, Baudelaire, the greatest French poet after Stéphane Mallarmé, has said :

‘ The ardent lover and the unbending sage,
Alike companion in their ripe old age,

With the sleek arrogant cat, the household's pride,
Slothful and chilly by the warm fireside.'*

"I need hardly remind you that you must write me a story. Bring it on Twelfth Night. We will dine together.

"ANNIE MORGAN.

"P.S.—Your little cat's name is Porou."

Having read this letter, I looked at Porou who, standing on his hind legs, was licking the black face of Pasht, his divine sister. He looked at me, and I must confess that of the two of us he was the less astonished. I asked myself, "What does this mean?" But I soon gave up trying to understand.

"It is expecting too much of myself to try and discover reason in the follies of this madcap," I thought. "I must get to work again. As for this little animal, Madam Magloire my housekeeper can provide for his needs."

Whereupon I resumed my work on a chronology, all the more interesting as it gave me the opportunity to abuse somewhat my distinguished colleague, Monsieur Maspéro. Porou did not leave my table. Seated on his haunches, his ears pricked, he watched

* "Les amoureux fervents et les savants austères
Aiment également, dans leur mûre saison,
Les chats puissants et doux, orgueil de la maison,
Qui comme eux sont frileux et comme eux sédentaires."

me write, and strange to say I accomplished no good work that day. My ideas were all in confusion; there came to my mind scraps of songs and odds and ends of fairy-tales, and I went to bed very dissatisfied with myself. The next morning I again found Porou, seated on my writing-table, licking his paws. That day again I worked very badly; Porou and I spent the greater part of the day watching each other. The next morning it was the same, and also the morning after; in short, the whole week. I ought to have been distressed, but I must confess that little by little I began to resign myself to my ill-luck, not only with patience, but even with some amusement. The rapidity with which a virtuous man becomes depraved is something terrible. The morning preceding Twelfth Night, which fell on a Sunday, I rose in high spirits and hurried to my writing-table, where, according to his custom, Porou, had already preceded me. I took a handsome copy-book of white paper and dipped my pen into the ink and wrote in big letters, under the watchful observation of my new friend:

“The Misadventures of a one-eyed Porter.”

Thereupon, without ceasing to look at Porou, I wrote all day long in the most prodigious haste a story of such astonishing adventures, so charming and so varied that I was myself vastly entertained. My one-eyed porter mixed up all his parcels and

committed the most absurd mistakes. Lovers in critical situations received from him, and quite without his knowledge, the most unexpected aid. He transported wardrobes in which men were concealed, and he placed them in other houses, frightening old ladies almost to death. But how describe so merry a story! While writing I burst out laughing at least twenty times. If Porou did not laugh, his solemn silence was quite as amusing as the most uproarious hilarity. It was already seven o'clock in the evening when I wrote the final line of this delightful story. During the last hour the room had only been lighted by Porou's phosphorescent eyes. And yet I had written with as much ease in the darkness as by the light of a good lamp. My story finished, I proceeded to dress. I put on my evening clothes and my white tie, and, taking leave of Porou, I hurried downstairs into the street. I had hardly gone twenty steps when I felt some one pull at my sleeve.

"Where are you running to, uncle, just like a somnambulist?"

It was my nephew Marcel who hailed me in this fashion. He is an honest, intelligent young man, and a house-surgeon at the Salpêtrière. People say that he has a successful medical career before him. And indeed he would be clever enough if he would only be more on his guard against his whimsical imagination.

“Why, I am on my way to Miss Morgan, to take her a story I have just written.”

“What, uncle! You write stories, and you know Miss Morgan? She is very pretty. And do you also know Dr. Daoud who follows her about everywhere?”

“A quack, a charlatan!”

“Possibly, uncle, and yet, unquestionably a most extraordinary experimentalist. Neither Bernheim nor Liégeois, not even Charcot himself, has obtained the phenomena he produces at will. He induces the hypnotic condition and control by suggestion without contact, and without any direct agency, through the intervention of an animal. He commonly makes use of little short-haired cats for his experiments.

“This is how he goes to work: he suggests an action of some kind to a cat, then he sends the animal in a basket to the subject he wishes to influence. The animal transmits the suggestion he has received, and the patient under the influence of the beast does exactly what the operator desires.”

“Is this true?”

“Yes, quite true, uncle.”

“And what is Miss Morgan’s share in these interesting experiments?”

“Miss Morgan employs Dr. Daoud to work for

her, and she makes use of hypnotism and suggestion to induce people to make fools of themselves, as if her beauty was not quite enough."

I did not stop to listen any longer. An irresistible force hurried me on towards Miss Morgan.

THE DAUGHTER OF LILITH

E

TO JEAN PSICHARI

THE DAUGHTER OF LILITH



HAD left Paris late in the evening, and I spent a long, silent and snowy night in the corner of the railway carriage. I waited six mortal hours at X——, and the next afternoon I found nothing better than a farm-waggon to take me to Artigues. The plain whose furrows rose and fell by turns on either side of the road, and which I had seen long ago lying radiant in the sunshine, was now covered with a heavy veil of snow over which straggled the twisted black stems of the vines. My driver gently urged on his old horse, and we proceeded through an infinite silence broken only at intervals by the plaintive cry of a bird, sad even unto death. I murmured this prayer in my heart: “My God, God of Mercy, save me from despair and after so many transgressions, let me not commit the one sin Thou dost not forgive.” Then I saw the sun, red and rayless, blood-hued, descending on the horizon, as it were, the sacred Host, and

remembering the divine Sacrifice of Calvary, I felt hope enter into my soul. For some time longer the wheels crunched the snow. At last the driver pointed with the end of his whip to the spire of Artigues as it rose like a shadow against the dull red haze.

"I say," said the man, "are you going to stop at the presbytery? You know the curé?"

"I have known him ever since I was a child. He was my master when I was a student."

"Is he learned in books?"

"My friend, M. Safrac, is as learned as he is good."

"So they say. But they also say other things."

"What do they say, my friend?"

"They say what they please, and I let them talk."

"What more do they say?"

"Well, there are those who say he is a sorcerer, and that he can tell fortunes."

"What nonsense!"

"For my part I keep a still tongue! But if M. Safrac is not a sorcerer and fortune-teller, why does he spend his time reading books?"

The waggon stopped in front of the presbytery.

I left the idiot, and followed the curé's servant, who conducted me to her master in a room where the table was already laid. I found M. Safrac

greatly changed in the three years since I had last seen him. His tall figure was bent. He was excessively emaciated. Two piercing eyes glowed in his thin face. His nose, which seemed to have grown longer, descended over his shrunken lips. I fell into his arms.

“My father, my father,” I cried, sobbing, “I have come to you because I have sinned. My father, my dear old master, whose profound and mysterious knowledge overawed my mind, and who yet reassured it with a revelation of maternal tenderness, save your child from the brink of a precipice. O my only friend, save me; enlighten me, you my only beacon!”

He embraced me, and smiled on me with that exquisite kindness of which he had given so many proofs during my childhood, and then he stepped back, as if to see me better.

“Well, adieu!” he said, greeting me according to the custom of his country, for M. Safrac was born on the banks of the Garonne, in the home of those famous wines which seemed the symbol of his own generous and fragrant soul.

After having taught philosophy with great distinction in Bordeaux, Poitiers and Paris, he asked as his only reward the gift of a poor cure in the country where he had been born and where he wished to die. He had now been priest at Artigues for six years, and

in this obscure village he practised the most humble piety and the most enlightened sciences.

“Well, adieu! my child,” he repeated. “You wrote me a letter to announce your coming which has moved me deeply. It is true, then, that you have not forgotten your old master?”

I tried to throw myself at his feet.

“Save me! save me!” I stammered.

But he stopped me with a gesture at once imperious and gentle.

“You shall tell me to-morrow, Ary, what you have to tell. First, warm yourself. Then we will have supper, for you must be very hungry and very thirsty.”

The servant placed on the table the soup-tureen out of which rose a fragrant column of steam. She was an old woman, her hair hidden under a black kerchief, and in her wrinkled face were strongly mingled the beauty of race and the ugliness of decay. I was in profound distress, and yet the peace of this saintly dwelling, the gaiety of the wood fire, the white table-cloth, the wine and the steaming dishes entered, little by little, into my soul. Whilst I ate I nearly forgot that I had come to the fireside of this priest to exchange the serenity of remorse for the fertilising dew of repentance. Monsieur Safrac reminded me of the hours, already long since past, which we had spent together in the college when he had taught philosophy.

“You, Ary,” he said to me, “were my best pupil. Your quick intelligence was always in advance of the thought of the teacher. For that reason I at once became attached to you. I like a Christian to be daring. Faith should not be timid when unbeliever shows an indomitable audacity. The Church nowadays has lambs only ; and it needs lions. Who will give us back those learned fathers and doctors whose erudition embraced all sciences? Truth is like the sun ; it requires the eye of an eagle to contemplate it.”

“Ah, M. Safrac, you brought to bear on all questions that daring vision which nothing dazzles. I remember that your opinions sometimes even startled those of your colleagues whom the holiness of your life filled with admiration. You did not fear new ideas. Thus, for instance, you were inclined to admit the plurality of inhabited worlds.”

His eyes kindled.

“What will the cowards say when they read my book? I have meditated, and I have worked under this beautiful sky, in this land which God has created with a special love. You know that I have some knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, and certain of the Indian dialects. You also know that I have brought here a library rich in ancient manuscripts. I have plunged profoundly into the knowledge of the tongues and traditions of the primitive East.

This great work, by the help of God, will not have been in vain. I have nearly finished my book on 'Origins,' which re-establishes and upholds that Biblical exegesis of which an impious science already foresaw the imminent overthrow. God in His mercy has at last permitted science and faith to be reconciled. To effect this reconciliation I have started with the following premises :

“The Bible, inspired by the Holy Ghost, tells only the truth, but it does not tell all the truth. And how could it, seeing that its only object is to inform us of what is needful for our eternal salvation? Apart from this great purpose it has no other. Its design is as simple as it is infinite. It includes the fall and the redemption ; it is the sacred history of man ; it is complete and restricted. Nothing has been admitted to satisfy profane curiosity. A godless science must not be permitted to triumph any longer over the silence of God. It is time to say, 'No, the Bible has not lied, because it has not revealed all.' That is the truth which I proclaim. By the help of geology, prehistoric archæology, the Oriental cosmogonies, Hittite and Sumerian monuments, Chaldean and Babylonian traditions preserved in the Talmud, I assert the existence of the pre-Adamites, of whom the inspired writer of Genesis does not speak, for the only reason that their existence did not bear upon the eternal salvation of

the children of Adam. Furthermore, a minute study of the first chapters of Genesis has proved to me the existence of two successive creations separated by untold ages, of which the second is only, so to speak, the adaptation of a corner of the earth to the needs of Adam and his posterity."

He paused, then he continued in a low voice and with a solemnity truly religious :

"I, Martial Safrac, unworthy priest, doctor of theology, submissive as an obedient child to the authority of our Holy Mother the Church, I assert with absolute certainty—yielding all due submission to our holy father the Pope and the Councils—that Adam, who was created in the image of God, had two wives, of whom Eve was the second."

These singular words drew me little by little out of myself and filled me with a curious interest. I therefore felt something of disappointment when M. Safrac, planting his elbows on the table, said to me :

"Enough on that subject. Some day, perhaps, you will read my book, which will enlighten you on this point. I was obliged, in obedience to strict duty, to submit the work to Monseigneur, and to beg his Grace's approval. The manuscript is at present in the archbishop's hands, and any minute I may expect a reply which I have every reason to believe will be favourable. My dear child, try those

mushrooms out of our own woods, and this native wine of ours, and acknowledge that this is the second promised land, of which the first was only the image and the forecast."

From this time on our conversation, grown more familiar, ranged over our common recollections.

"Yes, my child," said M. Safrac, "you were my favourite pupil, and God permits preferences if they are founded on impartial judgment. So I decided at once that there was in you the making of a man and a Christian. Not that great imperfections were not in evidence. You were irresolute, uncertain, and easily disconcerted. Passions, so far latent, smouldered in your soul. I loved you because of your great restlessness, as I did another of my pupils for quite opposite qualities. I loved Paul d'Ervy for his unswerving steadfastness of mind and heart."

At this name I blushed and turned pale and with difficulty suppressed a cry, and when I tried to answer I found it impossible to speak. M. Safrac appeared not to notice my distress.

"If I remember aright, he was your best friend," he added. "You have remained intimate ever since, have you not? I know he has started on a diplomatic career, and a great future is predicted for him. I hope that in happier times than the present he may be entrusted with office at the Holy See. In him you have a faithful and devoted friend."

“My father,” I replied, with a great effort, “to-morrow I will speak to you of Paul d’Ervy and of another person.”

M. Safrac pressed my hand. We separated, and I went to the room which had been prepared for me. In my bed, fragrant with lavender, I ’d dreamed that I was once again a child, and that as I knelt in the college chapel I was admiring the blonde and ecstatic women with which the gallery was filled, when suddenly out of a cloud over my head I seemed to hear a voice say :

“Ary, you believe that you love them in God, but it is God you love in them.”

The next morning when I woke I found M. Safrac standing at the side of my bed.

“Come, Ary, and hear the Mass which I am about to celebrate for your intention. After the Holy Sacrifice I shall be ready to listen to what you have to say.”

The Church of Artigues was a little sanctuary in the Norman style which still flourished in Aquitaine in the twelfth century. Restored some twenty years ago, it had received the addition of a bell-tower which had not been contemplated in the original plan. At any rate, poverty had safeguarded its pure bareness. I tried to join in the prayers of the celebrant as much as my thoughts would permit, and then I returned with him to the presbytery. Here we break-

fasted on a little bread and milk, after which we went to M. Safrac's room.

He drew a chair to the fireplace, over which hung a crucifix, and invited me to be seated, and seating himself beside me he signed to me to speak. Outside the snow fell. I began as follows :

“ My father, it is ten years ago since I left your care and entered the world. I have preserved my faith, but, alas, not my purity. But it is unnecessary to remind you of my life ; you know it, you my spiritual guide, the only keeper of my conscience. Moreover, I am in haste to arrive at the event which has convulsed my being. Last year my family had decided that I must marry, and I myself had willingly consented. The young girl destined for me united all the advantages of which parents are usually in search. More than that, she was pretty ; she pleased me to such a degree that instead of a marriage of convenience I was about to make a marriage of affection. My offer was accepted, and we were betrothed. The happiness and peace of my life seemed assured when I received a letter from Paul d'Ervy who had returned from Constantinople and announced his arrival in Paris. He expressed a great desire to see me. I hurried to him and announced my marriage. He congratulated me heartily.

“ ‘ My dear old boy,’ he said, ‘ I rejoice in your happiness.’

“I told him that I counted on him to be my witness and he willingly consented. The date of my wedding was fixed for May 15, and he was not obliged to return to his post until the beginning of June.

“‘How lucky that is,’ I said to him. ‘And you?’

“‘Oh, I,’ he replied, with a smile which expressed in turn joy and sorrow, ‘I—what a change! I am mad—a woman—Ary. I am either very fortunate or very unfortunate! What name can one give to a happiness gained by an evil action? I have betrayed, I have broken the heart of a good friend . . . I carried off—yonder—in Constantinople——’”

M. Safrac interrupted me :

“My son, leave out of your narrative the faults of others and name no one.”

I promised to obey, and continued as follows :

“Paul had hardly ceased speaking when a woman entered the room. Evidently it was she; dressed in a long blue *peignoir*, she seemed to be at home. I will describe to you in one word the terrible impression she produced on me : she did not seem *natural*. I realise how vague is this expression and how inadequately it explains my meaning. But perhaps it will become more intelligible in the course of my story. But, indeed, in the expression of her golden eyes, that seemed at times to throw out sparks of light, in the curve of her enigmatical mouth, in the

substance of her skin, at once brown and yet luminous, in the play of the angular and yet harmonious lines of her body, in the ethereal lightness of her footsteps, even in her bare arms, to which invisible wings seemed attached, and, finally, in her ardent and magnetic personality, I felt an indescribable something foreign to the nature of humanity; an indescribable something inferior and yet superior to the woman God has created in his formidable goodness, so that she should be our companion in this earthly exile. From the moment I saw her one feeling alone overmastered my soul and pervaded it; I felt a profound aversion towards everything that was not this woman.

“Seeing her enter, Paul frowned slightly, but changing his mind, he made an effort to smile.

“‘Leila, I wish to present to you my best friend.’

“Leila replied :

“‘I know M. Ary.’

“These words could not but seem strange as we had certainly never seen each other before; but the voice with which they were uttered was stranger still.

“If crystal could utter thought, so it would speak.

“‘My friend Ary,’ continued Paul, ‘is to be married in six weeks.’

“At these words Leila looked at me and I saw distinctly that her golden eyes said ‘No!’

“I went away greatly disturbed, nor did my friend

show the slightest desire to detain me. All that day I wandered aimlessly through the streets, my heart empty and desolate; then, towards night, finding myself in front of a florist's shop, I remembered my *fiancée*, and went in to get her a spray of white lilac. I had hardly taken hold of the flowers when a little hand tore them out of my grasp, and I saw Leila, who turned away laughing. She wore a short grey dress and a jacket of the same colour and a small round hat. I must confess that this costume of a Parisian dressed for walking was most unbecoming to her fairy-like beauty and seemed a kind of disguise. And yet, seeing her so, I felt that I loved her with an undying love. I tried to rejoin her, but I lost her among the crowd and the carriages.

“From this time on I seemed to cease to live. I called several times at Paul's without seeing Leila again. He always received me in a friendly manner, but he never spoke of her. We had nothing to say to each other, and I was sad when we parted. At last, one day, the footman said that his master was out. He added ‘Perhaps you would like to see Madame?’ I replied ‘Yes.’ O, my father, what tears of blood can ever atone for this little word! I entered. I found her in the drawing-room, half reclining on a couch, in a dress as yellow as gold, under which she had drawn her little feet. I saw her—but, no, I saw nothing. My throat was

suddenly parched, I could not utter a word. A fragrance of myrrh and aromatic perfumes which emanated from her seemed to intoxicate me with languor and longing, as if at once all the odours of the mystic East had penetrated my quivering nostrils. No, this was certainly not a natural woman, for nothing human seemed to emanate from her. Her face expressed no emotion, either good or bad, beyond a voluptuousness at once sensual and divine. She doubtless noticed my suffering, for she asked with a voice as clear as the ripple of a mountain brook :

“ ‘ What ails you ? ’ ”

“ I threw myself in tears at her feet and cried, ‘ I love you madly ! ’ ”

“ She opened her arms ; then enfolding me with a lingering glance of her candid and voluptuous eyes :

“ ‘ Why have you not told me this before ? ’ ”

“ Indescribable moment ! I held Leila in my arms. It seemed as if we two together had been transported to Heaven and filled all its spaces. I felt myself become the equal of God, and my breast seemed to enfold all the beauty of earth and the harmonies of nature—the stars and the flowers, the forests that sing, the rivers and the deep seas. I had enfolded the infinite in a kiss. . . . ”

At these words Monsieur Safrac, who had listened to me for some moments with growing impatience,

rose, and standing before the fireplace, lifted his cassock to his knees to warm his legs and said with a severity which came near being disdain :

“You are a wretched blasphemer, and instead of despising your crimes, you only confess them because of your pride and delight in them. I will listen no more.”

At these words I burst into tears and begged his forgiveness. Recognising that my humility was sincere, he desired me to continue my confession on condition that I realised my own self-abasement.

I continued my story as follows, determined to make it as brief as possible :

“My father, I was torn by remorse when I left Leila. But, from the following day on, she came to me, and then began a life which tortured me with joy and anguish. I was jealous of Paul, whom I had betrayed, and I suffered cruelly.

“I do not believe that there is a more debasing evil than jealousy, nor one which fills the soul with more degrading thoughts. Even to console me Leila scorned to lie. Besides, her conduct was incomprehensible. I do not forget to whom I am speaking, and I shall be careful not to offend the ears of the most revered of priests. I can only say that Leila seemed ignorant of the love she permitted. But she had enveloped my whole being in the poison of

sensuality. I could not exist without her, and I trembled at the thought of losing her.

“Leila seemed absolutely devoid of what we call moral sense. You must not, however, think that she was either wicked or cruel. On the contrary, she was gentle and compassionate. Nor was she without intelligence, but her intelligence was not of the same nature as ours. She said little, and she refused to reply to any questions that were asked her about her past. She was ignorant of all that we know. On the other hand, she knew many things of which we are ignorant.

“Educated in the East, she was familiar with all sorts of Hindoo and Persian legends, which she would repeat with a certain monotonous cadence and with an infinite grace. Listening to her as she described the charming dawn of the world, one would have said she had lived in the youth of creation. This I once said to her.

“‘It is true, I am old,’” she answered smiling.

M. Safrac, still standing in front of the fireplace, had for some time bent towards me in an attitude of keen attention.

“Continue,” he said.

“Often, my father, I questioned Leila about her religion. She replied that she had none, and that she had no need of one; that her mother and sisters were the daughters of God, but that they were not

bound to Him by any creed. She wore a medallion about her neck filled with a little red earth which she said she had piously gathered because of her love for her mother.

Hardly had I uttered these words when M. Safrac, pale and trembling, sprang forward, and, seizing my arm, *shouted* :

“She told the truth! I know now. I know who this creature was, Ary! Your instinct did not deceive you. It was not a woman. Continue, continue, I implore.”

“My father, I have nearly finished. Alas, for Leila’s love, I had broken my solemn plighted troth, I had betrayed my best friend. I had affronted God. Paul, having heard of Leila’s faithlessness, became mad with grief. He threatened her with death, but she replied gently :

“‘Kill me, my friend; I long to die, but I cannot.’

“For six months she gave herself to me; then one morning she said that she was about to return to Persia, and that she would never see me again. I wept, I moaned, I raved: ‘You have never loved me!’

“‘No, my friend,’ she replied gently. ‘And yet how many women who have loved you no better have denied you what you received from me! You still owe me some gratitude. Farewell.’

“For two days I was plunged in alternate fury and apathy. Then remembering the salvation of my soul, I hurried to you, my father. Here I am. Purify me, uplift me, strengthen my heart, for I love her still.”

I ceased. M. Safrac, his hand raised to his forehead, remained lost in thought. He was the first to break the silence.

“My son, this confirms my great discovery. What you tell me will confound the vainglory of our modern sceptics. Listen to me. We live today in the midst of miracles as did the first-born of men. Listen, listen! Adam, as I have already told you, had a first wife whom the Bible does not make mention of, but of whom the Talmud speaks. Her name was Lilith. Created, not out of one of his ribs, but from this same red earth out of which he himself had been kneaded, she was not flesh of his flesh. She voluntarily separated from him. He was still living in innocence when she left him to go to those regions where long years afterwards the Persians settled, but which at this time were inhabited by the pre-Adamites, more intelligent and more beautiful than the sons of men. She therefore had no part in the transgression of our first father, and was unsullied by that original sin. Because of this she also escaped from the curse pronounced against Eve and her descendants. She is exempt from sorrow and death ;

having no soul to be saved, she is incapable of virtue or vice. Whatever she does, she accomplishes neither good nor evil. The daughters that were born to her of some mysterious wedlock are immortal as she is, and free as she is both in their deeds and thoughts, seeing that they can neither gain nor lose in the sight of God. Now, my son, I recognise by indisputable signs that the creature who caused your downfall, this Leila, was a daughter of Lilith. Compose yourself to prayer. To-morrow I will hear you in confession."

He remained silent for a moment, then drawing a paper out of his pocket, he continued :

"Late last night, after having wished you good night, the postman, who had been delayed by the snow, brought me a very distressing letter. The senior vicaire informs me that my book has been a source of grief to Monseigneur, and has already overshadowed the spiritual joy with which he looked forward to the festival of our Lady of Mount Carmel. The work, he adds, is full of foolhardy doctrines and opinions which have already been condemned by the authorities. His Grace could not approve of such unwholesome lucubrations. This, then, is what they write to me. But I will relate your story to Monseigneur. It will prove to him that Lilith exists and that I do not dream."

I implored Monsieur Safrac to listen to me a moment more.

“When she went away, my father, Leila left me a leaf of cypress on which certain characters which I cannot decipher had been traced with the point of a style. It seems to be a kind of amulet.”

Monsieur Safrac took the light film which I held out to him and examined it carefully.

“This,” he said, “is written in Persian of the best period and can be easily translated thus :

“THE PRAYER OF LEILA, DAUGHTER
OF LILITH

“My God, promise me death, so that I may taste of life. My God, give me remorse, so that I may at last find happiness. My God, make me the equal of the daughters of Eve.”

LAETA ACILIA

TO ARY RENAN

LAETA ACILIA



LAETA ACILIA lived in Marseilles during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius. She had been married for several years to a Roman noble named Helvius, but she had no

children, though she longed passionately to become a mother. One day as she went to the temple to pray to the gods she found the entrance crowded by a band of men, half naked, emaciated and devoured by leprosy and ulcers. She paused in terror on the lowest step of the temple. Laeta Acilia was not without compassion. She pitied the poor creatures, but she was afraid of them. Nor had she ever seen beggars as wild looking as those who at this moment crowded before her, livid, lifeless, their empty wallets flung at their feet. She grew pale and held her hand to her heart; she could neither advance nor escape, and she felt her limbs giving way under her when a woman of striking beauty detached herself from these unfortunates and came towards her.

“Fear nothing, young woman,” and the unknown spoke in a voice both grave and tender, “the men you see here are not cruel. They are the bearers not of falsehood and evil, but of truth and love. We have come from Judaea, where the Son of God has died and risen again. When He ascended to the right hand of His Father those who believed in Him suffered cruel wrongs. Stephen was stoned by the people. As for us, the priests placed us on board a ship without sails or rudder, and we were delivered over to the waters of the sea to the end that we should perish. But the God who loved us in His mortal life mercifully led us to the harbour of this town. Alas! the people of Marseilles are avaricious, idolatrous and cruel. They permit the disciples of Jesus to die of hunger and cold. And had we not taken refuge in this temple, which they deem sacred, they would already have dragged us to their gloomy prisons. And yet it would have been well had they welcomed us, since we bring good tidings.”

Having thus spoken the stranger held out her hand towards her companions and pointed to each in turn.

“That old man, lady,” she said, “who turns on you his serene gaze, that is Cedon, he whom, though blind from birth, the Master healed. Cedon now sees with equal clearness things both visible and invisible. That other old man, whose beard is as

white as the snow on the mountains, is Maximin. This man, still so young, and who yet seems so weary, is my brother. He was possessed of great wealth in Jerusalem. Near him stand Martha my sister and Mantilla, the faithful servant who in happier days gathered olives on the hillsides of Bethany."

"And you," asked Laeta Acilia, "you whose voice is so soft and whose face is so beautiful, what is your name?"

The Jewess replied :

"I am called Mary Magdalen. I divined by the gold embroidery on your raiment, and the unconscious pride of your bearing, that you are the wife of one of the principal citizens of this town. For this reason I have approached you, to the end that you may move the heart of your husband on behalf of the disciples of Jesus Christ. Say to this rich man : 'Lord, they are naked, let us clothe them ; they are anhungered and thirsty let us give them bread and wine, and God will restore to us in His Kingdom what was borrowed from us in His name.'"

Laeta Acilia replied :

"Mary, I will do as you ask. My husband is named Helvius ; he is of noble rank and one of the richest citizens of the town ; never for long does he refuse what I desire, for he loves me. Your companions have now ceased, O Mary, to fill me with fear. I shall even dare to pass close to

them, though their limbs are polluted by ulcers, and I shall go to the temple to pray to the immortal gods to grant my wish. Alas ! hitherto they have refused."

Mary, with arms outstretched, barred her way.

"Beware, lady," she cried, "of worshipping vain idols. Do not demand of images of stone words of hope and life. There is only one God, and with my hair I have wiped His feet."

At these words the flashing of her eyes, dark as the sky in a storm, mingled with tears, and Laeta Acilia said to herself :

"I am pious, and I faithfully perform the ceremonies religion demands, but in this woman there is a strange feeling of a love divine."

Mary Magdalen continued in ecstasy : "He was the God of Heaven and earth, and He uttered His parables seated on the bench by the threshold, under the shade of the old fig-tree. He was young and beautiful. He would have been glad to be loved. When he came to supper in my sister's house I sat at His feet, and the words flowed from His lips like the waters of a torrent. And when my sister complained of my sloth, saying : ' Master, tell her it is but right that she should aid me to prepare the supper,' He smiled and made excuse for me, and permitted me to remain seated at His feet, and said that I had chosen the good part.

“ One would have thought to see Him that He was but a young shepherd from the mountains, and yet His eyes flashed flames like those that issued from the brow of Moses. His gentleness was like the peace of night and His anger was more terrible than a thunderbolt. He loved the humble and the little ones. Along the roadside the children ran towards Him and clung to His garments. He was the God of Abraham and Jacob, and with the same hands that had created the sun and the stars, He caressed the cheeks of the newly born whom their happy mothers held out to Him from the thresholds of their cottages. He was himself as simple as a child, and He raised the dead to life. Here among my companions you see my brother whom He raised from the dead. Behold, lady ! Lazarus bears on his face the pallor of death, and in his eyes is the horror of one who has seen hell.”

But for some moments past Laeta Acilia had ceased to listen.

She raised towards the Jewess her candid eyes and her small, smooth forehead.

“ Mary,” she said, “ I am a pious woman, attached to the faith of my fathers. Unbelief is evil for our sex. And it does not beseem the wife of a Roman noble to accept new fashions in religions. And yet I must confess that there are some charming gods in the East. Your God, Mary, seems one of these.

You have told me that He loves little children, and that He kisses them as they lie in the arms of their young mothers. By that I see that He is a God who is favourable to women, and I regret that He is not held in esteem among the aristocracy and the official classes, or I would gladly bring him offerings of honey-cakes. But, listen, Mary the Jewess, appeal to Him, you whom He loves, and demand of Him for me that which I dare not demand myself, and which my goddesses have refused."

Laeta Acilia uttered these words with hesitation. She paused and blushed.

"What is it," Mary Magdalen asked eagerly, "and what desire, lady, has your unsatisfied soul?"

Gaining courage little by little, Laeta Acilia replied :

"Mary, you are a woman, and though I know you not, I yet may confide to you a woman's secret. During the six years that I have been married I have not had a child, and that is a great sorrow to me; I need a child to love; the love in my heart for the little creature I am awaiting, and who yet may never come, is stifling me. If your God, Mary Magdalen, grants me through your intercession what my goddesses have denied me, I shall say that He is a good God, and I will love Him and I will make my friends love Him. And like us they are

young and rich, and they belong to the first families of the town."

Mary Magdalen replied gravely :

"Daughter of the Romans, when you shall have received that for which you ask, may you remember this promise that you have made to the servant of Jesus."

"I shall remember," she replied. "In the meantime take this purse, Mary, and divide the money it contains among your companions. Farewell, I shall return to my house. As soon as I arrive I will send baskets full of bread and meat for you and your friends. Tell your brother and your sister and your friends that they may without fear leave the sanctuary where they have taken refuge and go to some inn on the outskirts of the town. Helvius, who has great influence in the town, will prevent any one molesting them. May the gods protect you, Mary Magdalen ! When it shall please you to see me again ask of the passers-by for the house of Laeta Acilia ; any of the citizens will be able to show you the way without trouble."

II



It was six months later that Laeta Acilia, lying on a purple couch in the courtyard of her house, crooned a little song that had no sense and which her mother had sung before her. The water sang gaily in the fountain out of whose shallow basin rose young Tritons in marble, and the balmy air gently stirred the murmuring leaves of the old plane-tree. Tired, languid, happy, heavy as a bee leaving the orchard, the young woman crossed her arms over her rounded body, and, having ceased her song, glanced about her and sighed in the fulness of pride.

At her feet her black, white and yellow slaves were busy with needle, shuttle and spindle, vying with each other as they worked at the garments for the expected infant. Laeta stretched out her hand and took a little cap which an old slave laughingly offered her. She placed it on her closed hand and laughed in turn. It was a little cap of purple and

gold, silver and pearls, and splendid as the dreams of a poor African slave.

At that moment a stranger entered this interior court. She was clothed in a seamless garment of one piece, in colour like the dust of the roads. Her long hair was covered with ashes, but her face, worn by tears, still shone with glory and beauty.

The slaves, mistaking her for a beggar, were about to drive her away when Laeta Acilia, recognising her at the first glance, rose and ran towards her.

"Mary, Mary," she cried, "it is true that you were the favourite of a god. He whom you loved on earth has heard you in Heaven, and through your intercession He has granted my prayer. See," she added, and she showed her the little cap which she still held in her hand, "how happy I am and how grateful to you."

"I knew it," replied Mary Magdalen "and I have come, Laeta Acilia, to instruct you in the truth of Jesus Christ."

Thereupon the Marseillaise dismissed her slaves, and offered the Jewess an ivory armchair with cushions embroidered in gold. But Mary Magdalen, pushing it back with disgust, seated herself on the ground with feet crossed in the shade of the great plane-tree stirred by the murmuring breeze.

"Daughter of the Gentiles," she said, "you have not despised the disciples of the Lord. For this reason

I will teach you to know Jesus as I know Him, to the end that you shall love Him as I love Him. I was a sinner when I saw for the first time the most beautiful of the sons of men."

Thereupon she told how she had thrown herself at the feet of Jesus in the house of Simon the Leper, and how she had poured over the Master's adored feet all the ointment of spikenard contained in the alabaster vase. She repeated the words the gentle Master had uttered in reply to the murmurs of His rough disciples.

"Why do you reprove this woman?" He had said. "That which she has done is well done. For the poor ye have always with you, but Me ye have not always. She has with forethought anointed My body for My burial. I tell you in truth that in the whole world, wherever the Gospel is preached, shall be told what she has done, and she shall be praised."

She then described how Jesus had cast out the seven devils that had raged within her.

She added :

"Since then, enraptured and consumed by all the joys of faith and love, I have lived in the shadow of the Master as in a new Eden."

She told her of the lilies of the fields upon which they had gazed together, and of that infinite happiness, the happiness born of faith alone. Then

she described how He had been betrayed and put to death for the salvation of His people. She recalled the ineffable scenes of the passion, the burial and the resurrection.

“It was I,” she cried, “it was I who of all was the first to see Him. I found two angels clad in white seated, one at the head, the other at the feet, where we had laid the body of Jesus. And they said to me: ‘Woman, why weepest thou?’ ‘I weep because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.’”

“O joy! Jesus came towards me, and at first I thought He was the gardener. But he called me ‘Mary’ and I recognised His voice. I cried ‘Master’ and held out my arms, but He replied gently, ‘Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father.’”

As she listened to this narrative Laeta Acilia lost little by little her sense of joy and contentment. Recalling the past and examining her own life, it seemed to her very monotonous in comparison to the life of the woman who had loved a god. Young and pious and a patrician, her own red-letter days were those on which she had eaten cakes with her girl friends. Visits to the circus, the love of Helvius and her needle-work also counted in her life. But what were these all in comparison to the scenes with which Mary Magdalen kindled her senses and her

soul? She felt her heart stifling with bitter jealousy and vague regrets.

She envied this Jewess, whose radiant beauty still glowed under the ashes of penitence, her divine adventures, and even her sorrows.

“Begone, Jewess!” she cried, forcing back her tears with her hands. “Begone! But a moment since I was so contented, I believed myself so happy. I did not know that there were other joys than those which were mine. I knew of no other love than that of my good Helvius, and I knew of no other holy joy than to celebrate the mysteries of the goddesses in the manner of my mother and of my grandmother. O, now I understand! Wicked woman, you wished to make me discontented with the life I have led. But you have not succeeded! Why have you come to tell me of your love for a visible God? Why do you boast before me of having seen the resurrection of the Master since I shall not see Him? You even hoped to spoil the joy that is mine in bearing a child. It was wicked! I refuse to know your God. You have loved Him too much! To please Him one is obliged to fall prostrate and dishevelled at His feet. That is not an attitude which beseems the wife of a noble! Helvius would be annoyed did I worship in such a way. I will have nothing to do with a religion that disarranges one’s hair! No indeed, I will not allow the little child I bear in my bosom to know your

Christ! Should this poor little creature be a daughter she shall learn to love the little goddesses of baked clay that are not larger than my finger, and with these she can play without fear. These are the proper divinities for mothers and children. You are very audacious to boast of your love affairs and to ask me to share them. How could your God be mine? I have not led the life of a sinner, I have not been possessed of seven devils, nor have I frequented the highways. I am a respectable woman. Begone!"

And Mary Magdalen, perceiving that proselytising was not her vocation, retired to a wild cavern since called the Holy Grotto. The sacred historians believe unanimously that Laeta Acilia was not converted to the faith of Christ until many years after this interview which I have faithfully recorded.

A NOTE ON A POINT OF EXEGESIS



HAVE been reproached for having in this story confused Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha, and Mary Magdalen. I must confess at once that the Gospel seems to make of Mary who poured the perfume of spikenard over the feet of Jesus and of Mary to whom the Master said : “*Noli me tangere,*” two women absolutely distinct. Upon this point I am willing to make amends to those who have done me the honour to blame me.

Among the number is a princess who belongs to the Orthodox Greek Church. This does not in the least surprise me. The Greeks have always distinguished between the two Marys. It was not the same in the Western Church. On the contrary, the identity of the sister of Martha and Magdalen the sinner was early acknowledged.

The texts lend themselves but ill to this interpretation, but texts never present difficulties to any one but the pundits ; the poetry of the people is more

subtle than science : it can never be held in check, and it overcomes the obstacles which prove a stumbling-block to criticism. By a happy turn of the imagination popular fancy has welded the two Marys together and thus created the marvellous type of Mary Magdalen. It has been made sacred by legend, and it is the legend which has inspired my little story. In this I consider myself above reproach. Nor is that all ! I am able, even, to invoke the authority of the learned, and I may, without vanity, say that the Sorbonne is on my side. The Sorbonne declared on December 1, 1521, that there is but one Mary.

THE RED EGG

TO SAMUEL POZZI

THE RED EGG



R. N—— placed his coffee-cup on the mantelpiece, threw his cigar into the fire, and said to me :

“ My dear friend, you recently told me of the strange suicide of a woman tortured by terror and remorse. Her nature was fine and she was exquisitely cultivated. Being suspected of complicity in a crime of which she had been the silent witness, in despair at her own irreparable cowardice, she was haunted by a perpetual nightmare in which her husband appeared to her dead and decomposing and pointing her out with his finger to the inquisitive magistrates. She was the victim of her own morbid imagination. In this condition an insignificant and casual circumstance decided her fate.

“ Her nephew, a child, lived with her. One morning he was, as usual, studying his lessons in the dining-room where she happened to be. The child began to translate word by word a verse of Sophocles,

and as he wrote he pronounced aloud both the Greek and the translation : Κάρα θεῖον, the head divine ; Ἰοκάστης, of Jocasta ; τέθνηκε, is dead. . . . σπῶσ' κομην, tearing her hair ; καλεῖ, she calls ; Λαῖον νεκρὸν. Laios dead. . . εἶσεδομεν, we see ; τὴν γυναῖκ' κρεμαστὴν, the woman hung. He added a flourish which tore the paper, stuck out his ink-stained tongue, and repeated in sing-song, ' Hung, hung, hung ! '

" The wretched woman, whose will-power had been destroyed, passively obeyed the suggestion in the word, repeated three times. She rose, and without a word or look went straight to her room. Some hours later the police-inspector, called to verify a violent death, made this reflection : ' I have seen many women who have committed suicide, but this is the first time I have seen one who has hanged herself. '

" We speak of suggestion. Here is an instance which is at once natural and credible. I am a little doubtful, in spite of everything, of those which are arranged in the medical schools.

" But that a being in whom the will-power is dead obeys every external impulse is a truth which reason admits and which experience proves. The example which you cited reminds me of another one somewhat similar. It is that of my unfortunate comrade, Alexandre Le Mansel. A verse of Sophocles killed your heroine. A phrase of

Lampridius destroyed the friend of whom I will tell you.

“Le Mansel, with whom I studied at the high school of Avranches, was unlike all his comrades. He seemed at once younger and older than he really was. Small and fragile, he was at fifteen years of age afraid of everything that alarms little children. Darkness caused him an overpowering terror, and he could never meet one of the servants of the school, who happened to have a big lump on the top of his head, without bursting into tears. And yet at times, when we saw him close at hand, he looked quite old. His parched skin, glued to his temples, nourished his thin hair very inadequately. His forehead was polished like that of a middle-aged man. As for his eyes, they had no expression, and strangers often thought he was blind. His mouth alone gave character to his face. His sensitive lips expressed in turn a child-like joy and strange sufferings. The sound of his voice was clear and charming. When he recited his lessons he gave the verses their full harmony and rhythm, which made us laugh very much. During recreation he willingly joined our games, and he was not awkward, but he played with such feverish enthusiasm, and yet he was so absent-minded, that some of us felt an insurmountable aversion towards him.

“He was not popular, and we would have made him

our butt had he not rather overawed us by something of savage pride and by his reputation as a clever scholar, for though he was unequal in his work he was often at the head of his class. It was said that he would often talk in his sleep and that he would leave his bed in the dormitory while sound asleep. This, however, we had not observed for ourselves as we were at the age of sound sleep.

“For a long time he inspired me with more surprise than sympathy. Then of a sudden we became friends during a walk which the whole class took to the Abbey of Mont St. Michel. We tramped barefooted along the beach, carrying our shoes and our bread at the end of a stick and singing at the top of our voices. We passed the postern, and having thrown our bundles at the foot of the ‘Michelettes,’ we sat down side by side on one of those ancient iron cannons corroded by five centuries of rain and fog.

“Looking dreamily from the ancient stones to the sky, and swinging his bare feet, he said to me : ‘Had I but lived in the time of those wars and been a knight, I would have captured these two old cannons ; I would have captured twenty, I would have captured a hundred ! I would have captured all the cannons of the English. I would have fought single-handed in front of this gate. And the Arch-

angel Michel would have stood guard over my head like a white cloud.'

"These words and the slow chant in which he uttered them thrilled me. I said to him, 'I would have been your squire. I like you, Le Mansel; will you be my friend?' And I held my hand out to him and he took it solemnly.

"At the master's command we put on our shoes, and our little band climbed the steep ascent that leads to the abbey. Midway, near a spreading fig-tree, we saw the cottage where Tiphaine Raguel, widow of Bertrand du Guesclin, lived in peril of the sea.

"This dwelling is so small that it is a wonder that it was ever inhabited. To have lived there the worthy Tiphaine must have been a queer old body, or, rather, a saint living only the spiritual life. Le Mansel opened his arms as if to embrace this sacred hut; then, falling on his knees, he kissed the stones, heedless of the laughter of his comrades who, in their merriment, began to pelt him with pebbles. I will not describe our walk among the dungeons, the cloisters, the halls and the chapel. Le Mansel seemed oblivious to everything. Indeed, I should not have recalled this incident except to show how our friendship began.

"In the dormitory the next morning I was awakened by a voice at my ear which said :

“‘Tiphaine is not dead.’ I rubbed my eyes as I saw Le Mansel in his shirt at my side. I requested him rather rudely to let me sleep, and I thought no more of this singular communication.

“From that day on I understood the character of our fellow pupil much better than before, and I discovered an inordinate pride which I had never before suspected. It will not surprise you if I acknowledge that at the age of fifteen I was but a poor psychologist. But Le Mansel’s pride was too subtle to strike one at once. It had no concrete shape, but seemed to embrace remote phantasms. And yet it influenced all his feelings and gave to his ideas, uncouth and incoherent though they were, something of unity.

“During the holidays that followed our walk to the Mont St. Michel, Le Mansel invited me to spend a day at the home of his parents, who were farmers and landowners at Saint Julien.

“My mother consented with some repugnance. Saint Julien is six kilometres from the town. Having put on a white waistcoat and a smart blue tie I started on my way there early one Sunday morning.

“Alexandre stood at the door waiting for me and smiling like a little child. He took me by the hand and led me into the ‘parlour.’ The house, half country, half town-like, was neither poor nor ill

furnished. And yet my heart was deeply oppressed when I entered, so great was the silence and sadness that reigned.

“Near the window, whose curtains were slightly raised as if to satisfy some timid curiosity, I saw a woman who seemed old, though I cannot be sure that she was as old as she appeared to be. She was thin and yellow, and her eyes, under their red lids glowed in their black sockets. Though it was summer her body and her head were shrouded in some black woollen material. But that which made her look most ghastly was a band of metal which encircled her forehead like a diadem.

“‘This is mama,’ Le Mansel said to me, ‘she has a headache.’

“Madam Le Mansel greeted me in a plaintive voice, and doubtless observing my astonished glance at her forehead, said, smiling :

“‘What I wear on my forehead, young sir, is not a crown ; it is a magnetic band to cure my headache.’ I did my best to reply when Le Mansel dragged me away to the garden, where we found a bald little man who flitted along the paths like a ghost. He was so thin and so light that there seemed some danger of his being blown away by the wind. His timid manner and his long and lean neck, when he bent forward, and his head, no larger than a man’s fist, his shy side-glances and his skipping gait, his

short arms uplifted like a pair of flippers, gave him undeniably a great resemblance to a plucked chicken.

“My friend, Le Mansel, explained that this was his father, but that they were obliged to let him stay in the yard as he really only lived in the company of his chickens, and he had in their society quite forgotten to talk to human beings. As he spoke his father suddenly disappeared, and very soon an ecstatic clucking filled the air. He was with his chickens.

“Le Mansel and I strolled several times around the garden and he told me that at dinner, presently, I should see his grandmother, but that I was to take no notice of what she said, as she was sometimes a little out of her mind. Then he drew me aside into a pretty arbour and whispered, blushing :

“‘I have written some verses about Tiphaine Raguel. I’ll repeat them to you some other time. You’ll see, you’ll see.’

“The dinner-bell rang and we went into the dining-room. M. Le Mansel came in with a basket full of eggs.

“‘Eighteen this morning,’ he said, and his voice sounded like a cluck.

“A most delicious omelette was served. I was seated between Madame Le Mansel, who was moaning under her crown, and her mother, an old Normandy woman with round cheeks, who, having lost all her teeth, smiled with her eyes. She seemed very

attractive to me. While we were eating roast-duck and chicken *à la crème* the good lady told us some very amusing stories, and, in spite of what her grandson had said, I did not observe that her mind was in the slightest degree affected. On the contrary, she seemed to be the life of the house.

“After dinner we adjourned to a little sitting-room whose walnut furniture was covered with yellow Utrecht velvet. An ornamental clock between two candelabra decorated the mantelpiece, and on the top of its black plinth, and protected and covered by a glass globe, was a red egg. I do not know why, once having observed it, I should have examined it so attentively. Children have such unaccountable curiosity. However, I must say that the egg was of a most wonderful and magnificent colour. It had no resemblance whatever to those Easter eggs dyed in the juice of the beetroot, so much admired by the urchins who stare in at the fruit-shops. It was of the colour of royal purple. And with the indiscretion of my age I could not resist saying as much.

“M. Le Mansel’s reply was a kind of crow which expressed his admiration.

“‘That egg, young sir,’ he added, ‘has not been dyed as you seem to think. It was laid by a Cingalese hen in my poultry-yard just as you see it there. It is a phenomenal egg.’

“‘You must not forget to say,’ Madame Le

Mansel added in a plaintive voice, 'that this egg was laid the very day our Alexandre was born.'

" 'That's a fact,' M. Le Mansel assented.

" In the meantime the old grandmother looked at me with sarcastic eyes, and pressed her loose lips together and made a sign that I was not to believe what I heard.

" 'Humph!' she whispered, 'chickens often sit on what they don't lay, and if some malicious neighbour slips into their nest a——'

" Her grandson interrupted her fiercely. He was pale, and his hands shook.

" 'Don't listen to her,' he cried to me. 'You know what I told you. Don't listen!'

" 'It's a fact!' M. Le Mansel repeated, his round eye fixed in a side glance at the red egg.

" My further connection with Alexandre Le Mansel contains nothing worth relating. My friend often spoke of his verses to Tiphaine, but he never showed them to me. Indeed, I very soon lost sight of him. My mother sent me to Paris to finish my studies. I took my degree in two faculties, and then I studied medicine. During the time that I was preparing my doctor's thesis I received a letter from my mother, who told me that poor Alexandre had been very ailing, and that after a serious attack he had become timid and excessively suspicious; that, however, he was quite harmless, and in spite of the disordered

state of his health and reason he showed an extraordinary aptitude for mathematics. There was nothing in these tidings to surprise me. Often, as I studied the diseases of the nervous centres, my mind reverted to my poor friend at Saint Julien, and in spite of myself I foresaw for him the general paralysis which inevitably threatened the offspring of a mother racked by chronic nervous headaches and a rheumatic, addle-brained father.

“The sequel, however, did not, apparently, prove me to be in the right. Alexandre Le Mansel, as I heard from Avranches, regained his normal health, and as he grew towards manhood gave active proof of the brilliancy of his intellect. He worked with ardour at his mathematical studies, and he even sent to the Academy of Sciences solutions of several problems hitherto unsolved, which were found to be as elegant as they were accurate. Absorbed in his work, he rarely found time to write to me. His letters were affectionate, clear, and to the point, and nothing could be found in them to arouse the mistrust of the most suspicious neurologist. However, very soon after this our correspondence ceased, and I heard nothing more of him for the next ten years.

“Last year I was greatly surprised when my servant brought me the card of Alexandre Le Mansel, and said that the gentleman was waiting for me in the ante-room.

“I was in my study consulting with a colleague on a matter of some importance. However, I begged him to excuse me for a moment while I hurried to greet my old friend. I found he had grown very old, bald, haggard, and terribly emaciated. I took him by the arm and led him into the *salon*.

“‘I am glad to see you again,’ he said, ‘and I have much to tell you. I am exposed to the most unheard-of persecutions. But I have courage, and I shall struggle bravely, and I shall triumph over my enemies.’

“These words disquieted me, as they would have disquieted in my place any other nerve specialist. I recognised a symptom of the disease which, by the fatal laws of heredity, menaced my friend, and which had appeared to be checked.

“‘My dear friend,’ I said, ‘we will talk about that presently. Wait here a moment. I just want to finish something. In the meantime take a book and amuse yourself.’

“You know I have a great number of books, and my drawing-room contains about six thousand volumes in three mahogany book-cases. Why, then, should my unfortunate friend choose the very one likely to do him harm, and open it at that fatal page? I conferred some twenty minutes longer with my colleague, and having taken leave of him I returned to the room where I had left Le Mansel. I found

the unfortunate man in the most fearful condition. He struck a book that lay open before him and, which I at once recognised as a translation of the *Historia Augusta*. He recited at the top of his voice this sentence of Lampridius :

“‘On the day of the birth of Alexander Severus, a chicken, belonging to the father of the newly-born, laid a red egg—augury of the imperial purple to which the child was destined.’

“His excitement increased to fury. He foamed at the mouth. He cried : ‘The egg, the egg of the day of my birth. I am an Emperor. I know that you want to kill me. Keep away, you wretch !’ He strode down the room, then, returning, came towards me with open arms. ‘My friend,’ he said, ‘my old comrade, what do you wish me to bestow on you? An Emperor—an Emperor. . . . My father was right the red egg. I must be an Emperor ! Scoundrel, why did you hide this book from me? This is a crime of high treason ; it shall be punished ! I shall be Emperor ! Emperor ! Yes, it is my duty. . . . Forward . . . : forward !’

“He was gone. In vain I tried to detain him. He escaped me. You know the rest. All the newspapers have described how, after leaving me, he bought a revolver and blew out the brains of the sentry who tried to prevent his forcing his way into the Elysée.

“And thus it happens that a sentence written by a Latin historian of the fourth century was the cause, fifteen hundred years after, of the death in our country of a wretched private soldier. Who will ever disentangle the web of cause and effect?”

“Who can venture to say, as he accomplishes some simple act: ‘I know what I am doing.’ My dear friend, this is all I have to tell. The rest is of no interest except in medical statistics. Le Mansel, shut up in an insane asylum, remained for fifteen days a prey to the most violent mania. Whereupon he fell into a state of complete imbecility, during which he became so greedy that he even devoured the wax with which they polished the floor. Three months later he was suffocated while trying to swallow a sponge.”

The doctor ceased and lighted a cigarette. After a moment of silence, I said to him, “You have told me a terrible story, doctor.”

“It is terrible,” he replied, “but it is true. I should be glad of a little brandy.”

HONEY-BEE

TO FLORENTIN LORiot

HONEY-BEE

I

*Which treats of the appearance of the country and
serves as Introduction*



THE sea covers to-day what was once the Duchy of Clarides. No trace of the town or the castle remains. But when it is calm there can be seen, it is said, within the circumference of a mile, huge trunks of trees standing on the bottom of the sea. A spot on the banks, which now serves as a station for the custom-house officers, is still called "The Tailor's Booth," and it is quite probable that this name is in memory of a certain Master Jean who is mentioned in this story. The sea, which encroaches year by year, will soon cover this spot so curiously named.

Such changes are in the nature of things. The mountains sink in the course of ages, and the depths

of the seas on the contrary rise until their shells and corals are carried to the regions of clouds and ice.

Nothing endures. The face of land and sea is for ever changing. Tradition alone preserves the memory of men and places across the ages and renders real to us what has long ceased to exist. In telling you of Clarides I wish to take you back to times that have long since vanished. Thus I begin :

The Countess of Blanchelande having placed on her golden hair a little black hood embroidered with pearls. . . .

But before proceeding I must beg very serious persons not to read this. It is not written for them. It is not written for grave people who despise trifles and who always require to be instructed. I only venture to offer this to those who like to be entertained, and whose minds are both young and gay. Only those who are amused by innocent pleasures will read this to the end. Of these I beg, should they have little children, that they will tell them about my Honey-Bee. I wish this story to please both boys and girls and yet I hardly dare to hope it will. It is too frivolous for them and, really, only suitable for old-fashioned children. I have a pretty little neighbour of nine whose library I examined the other day. I found many books on

the microscope and the zoophytes, as well as several scientific story-books. One of these I opened at the following lines : “ The cuttle-fish *Sepia Officinalis* is a cephalopodic mollusc whose body includes a spongy organ containing a chylaqueous fluid saturated with carbonate of lime.”

My pretty little neighbour finds this story very interesting. I beg of her, unless she wishes me to die of mortification, never to read the story of Honey-Bee.

II

*In which we learn what the white rose meant to the
Countess of Blanchelande*



HAVING placed on her golden hair a little black hood embroidered with pearls and bound about her waist a widow's girdle, the Countess of Blanchelande entered the chapel where it was her daily custom to pray for the soul of her husband who had been killed in single-handed combat with a giant from Ireland.

That day she saw a white rose lying on the cushion of her *prie-Dieu*; at sight of this she turned pale; her eyes grew dim; she bowed her head and wrung her hands. For she knew that when a Countess of Blanchelande is about to die she always finds a white rose on her *prie-Dieu*.

Warned by this that her time had come to leave a world in which in so short a time she had been wife, mother and widow, she entered the chamber where her son George slept in the care of the nurses.

He was three years old. His long eyelashes threw a lovely shadow on his cheeks, and his mouth looked like a flower. At sight of him, so helpless and so beautiful, she began to weep.

"My little child," she cried in anguish, "my dear little child, you will never have known me and my image will fade for ever from your dear eyes. And yet, to be truly your mother, I nourished you with my own milk, and for love of you I refused the hand of the noblest cavaliers."

So speaking she kissed a medallion in which was her own portrait and a lock of her hair, and this she hung about the neck of her son. A mother's tear fell on the little one's cheek as he stirred in his cradle and rubbed his eyes with his little hands. But the Countess turned her head away and fled out of the room. How could eyes about to be extinguished for ever bear the light of two dear eyes in which the soul was only beginning to dawn?

She ordered a steed to be saddled and followed by her squire, Francœur, she rode to the castle of Clarides.

The Duchess of Clarides embraced the Countess of Blanchelande.

"Loveliest! what good fortune brings you here?"

"The fortune that brings me here is not good. Listen, my friend. We were married within a few years of each other, and similar fates have made us

widows. For in these times of chivalry the best perish first, and in order to live long one must be a monk. When you became a mother I had already been one for two years. Your daughter Honey-Bee is lovely as the day, and my little George is good. I love you and you love me. Know then that I have found a white rose on the cushion of my *prie-Dieu*. I am about to die; I leave you my son."

The Duchess knew what the white rose meant to the ladies of Blanchelande. She began to weep and in the midst of her tears she promised to bring up Honey-Bee and George as brother and sister, and to give nothing to one which the other did not share.

Still in each other's arms the two women approached the cradle where little Honey-Bee slept under light curtains, blue as the sky, and without opening her eyes, she moved her little arms. And as she spread her fingers five little rosy rays came out of each sleeve.

"He will defend her," said the mother of George.

"And she will love him," the mother of Honey-Bee replied.

"She will love him," a clear little voice repeated, which the Duchess recognised as that of a spirit which for a long time had lived under the hearthstone.

On her return to her manor the lady of Blanche-

lande divided her jewels among her women and, having had herself anointed with perfumed ointments and robed in her richest raiment in order to honour the body destined to rise again at the day of judgment, she lay down on her bed and fell asleep never again to awaken.

III

*Wherein begins the love of George of Blanchelande
and Honey-Bee of Clarides*



CONTRARY to the common destiny which is to have more goodness than beauty, or more beauty than goodness, the Duchess of Clarides was as good as she was beautiful, and she was so beautiful that many princes, though they had only seen her portrait, demanded her hand in marriage. But to all their pleading she replied :

“ I shall have but one husband as I have but one soul.”

However, after five years of mourning she left off her long veil and her black robes, so as not to spoil the happiness of those about her, and in order that all should smile and be free to enjoy themselves in her presence. Her duchy comprised a great extent of country ; moorlands, overgrown by heather, covered the desolate expanse, lakes in which fishermen sometimes caught magic fish, and mountains

which rose in fearful solitudes over subterraneous regions inhabited by dwarfs.

She governed Clarides with the help of an old monk who, having escaped from Constantinople and seen much violence and treachery, had but little faith in human goodness. He lived in a tower in the company of birds and books, and from this place he filled his position as counsellor by the aid of a number of little maxims. His rules were these: "Never revive a law once fallen into disuse; always accede to the demands of a people for fear of revolt, but accede as slowly as possible, because no sooner is one reform granted than the public demands another, and you can be turned out for acceding too quickly as well as for resisting too long."

The Duchess let him have his own way, for she understood nothing about politics. She was compassionate and, as she was unable to respect all men, she pitied those who were unfortunate enough to be wicked. She helped the suffering in every possible way, visited the sick, comforted the widows, and took the poor orphans under her protection.

She educated her daughter Honey-Bee with a charming wisdom. Having brought the child up only to do good, she never denied her any pleasure.

This good woman kept the promise she had made to the poor Countess of Blanchelande. She

was like a mother to George, and she made no difference between him and Honey-Bee. They grew up together, and George approved of Honey-Bee, though he thought her rather small. Once, when they were very little, he went up to her and asked :

“ Will you play with me ? ”

“ I should like to,” said Honey-Bee.

“ We will make mud pies,” said George, which they proceeded to do. But as Honey-Bee made hers very badly, George struck her fingers with his spade. Whereupon Honey-Bee set up a most awful roar and the squire, Francœur, who was strolling about in the garden, said to his young master :

“ It is not worthy of a Count of Blanchelande to strike young ladies, your lordship.”

Whereupon George was seized with an ardent desire to hit Francœur also with his spade. But as this presented insurmountable difficulties, he resigned himself to do what was easier, and that was to stand with his nose against the trunk of a big tree and weep torrents.

In the meantime Honey-Bee took care to encourage her own tears by digging her fists into her eyes ; and in her despair she rubbed her nose against the trunk of a neighbouring tree. When night came and softly covered the earth, Honey-Bee and

George were still weeping, each in front of a tree. The Duchess of Clarides was obliged to come and take her daughter by one hand and George by the other, and lead them back to the castle. Their eyes were red and their noses were red and their cheeks shone. They sighed and sobbed enough to break one's heart. But they ate a good supper, after which they were both put to bed. But as soon as the candle was blown out they re-appeared like two little ghosts in two little night-gowns, and they hugged each other and laughed at the top of their voices.

And thus began the love of Honey-Bee of Clarides and George of Blanchelande.

IV

*Which treats of Education in general, and George of
Blanchelande's in particular*



O George grew up in the Castle side by side with Honey-Bee, whom he affectionately called his sister though he knew she was not.

He had masters in fencing, riding, swimming, gymnastics, dancing, hunting, falconry, tennis, and, indeed, in all the arts. He even had a writing-master. This was an old cleric, humble of manner but very proud within, who taught him all manner of penmanship, and the more beautiful this was the less decipherable it became. Very little pleasure or profit did George get out of the old cleric's lessons, as little as out of those of an old monk who taught him grammar in barbarous terms. George could not understand the sense of learning a language which one knows as a matter of course and which is called one's mother tongue.

He only enjoyed himself with Francœur the

squire, who, having knocked about the world, understood the ways of men and beasts, could describe all sorts of countries and compose songs which he could not write. Francœur was the only one of his masters who taught George anything, for he was the only one who really loved him, and the only good lessons are those which are given with love. The two old goggle-eyes, the writing-master and the grammar-master, who hated each other with all their hearts, were, however, united in a common hatred of the old squire, whom they accused of being a drunkard.

It is true that Francœur frequented the tavern "The Pewter Pot" somewhat too zealously. It was here that he forgot his sorrows and composed his songs. But of course it was very wrong of him.

Homer made better verses than Francœur, and Homer only drank the water of the springs. As for sorrows the whole world has sorrows, and the thing to make one forget them is not the wine one drinks, but the good one does. But Francœur was an old man grown grey in harness, faithful and trustworthy, and the two masters of writing and grammar should have hidden his failings from the duchess instead of giving her an exaggerated account of them.

"Francœur is a drunkard," said the writing-

master, "and when he comes back from the 'Pewter Pot' he makes a letter S as he walks. Moreover, it is the only letter he has ever made; because if it please your Grace, this drunkard is an ass."

The grammar-master added, "And the songs Francœur sings as he staggers about err against all rules and are constructed on no model at all. He ignores all the rules of rhetoric, please your Grace."

The Duchess had a natural aversion to pedants and tale-bearers. She did what we all would have done in her place; at first she did not listen to them but as they again began to repeat their tittle-tattle, she ended by believing them and decided to send Francœur away. However, to give him an honourable exile, she sent him to Rome to obtain the blessing of the Pope. This journey was all the longer for Francœur the squire because a great many taverns much frequented by musicians separated the duchy of Clarides from the holy apostolic seat. In the course of this story we shall see how soon the Duchess regretted having deprived the two children of their most faithful guardian.

V

Which tells how the Duchess took Honey-Bee and George to the Hermitage, and of their encounter with a hideous old woman



THAT morning, it was the first Sunday after Easter, the Duchess rode out of the castle on her great sorrel horse, while on her left George of Blanchelande was mounted on a dark horse with a white star on his black forehead, and on her right Honey-Bee guided her milk-white steed with rose-coloured reins. They were on their way to the Hermitage to hear mass. Soldiers armed with lances formed their escort and, as they passed, the people crowded forward to admire them, and, indeed, all three were very fair to see. Under a veil of silver flowers and with flowing mantle the Duchess had an air of lovely majesty; while the pearls with which her coif was embroidered shone with a soft radiance that well-suited the face and soul of this beautiful lady. George by her side with flowing

hair and sparkling eyes was very good to see. And on the other side rode Honey-Bee, the tender and pure colour of her face like a caress for the eyes ; but most glorious of all her fair tresses, flowing over her shoulders, held by a circlet of gold surmounted by three gold flowers, seemed the shining mantle of her youth and beauty. The good people said, on seeing her :

“ What a lovely young damsel.”

The master tailor, old Jean, took his grandson Peter in his arms to point out Honey-Bee to him, and Peter asked was she alive or was she an image of wax, for he could not understand how any one could be so white and so lovely, and yet belong to the same race as himself, little Peter with his good big weather-beaten cheeks, and his little home-spun shirt laced behind in country fashion.

While the Duchess accepted the people's homage with gracious kindness, the two children showed how it gratified their pride, George by his blushes, Honey-Bee by her smiles, and for this reason the Duchess said to them :

“ How kindly these good people greet us. For what reason, George ? And what is the reason, Honey-Bee ? ”

“ So they should,” said Honey-Bee.

“ It's their duty,” George added.

“But why should it be their duty?” asked the Duchess.

And as neither replied, she continued :

“I will tell you. For more than three hundred years the dukes of Clarides, from father to son, have lance in hand protected these poor people so that they could gather the harvest of the fields they had sown. For more than three hundred years all the duchesses of Clarides have spun the cloth for the poor, have visited the sick, and have held the newborn at the baptismal font. That is the reason they greet you, my children.”

George was lost in deep thought : “We must protect those who toil on the land,” and Honey-Bee said : “One should spin for the poor.”

And thus chatting and meditating they went on their way through meadows starred with flowers. A fringe of blue mountains lay against the distant horizon. George pointed towards the east.

“Is that a great steel shield I see over there?”

“Oh no,” said Honey-Bee, “it’s a round silver clasp, as big as the moon.”

“It is neither a steel shield nor a silver clasp, my children,” replied the Duchess, “but a lake glittering in the sunshine. The surface of this lake, which seen from here is as smooth as a mirror, is stirred by innumerable ripples. Its borders which appear as distinct as if cut in metal are really covered by reeds

with feathery plumes and irises whose flower is like a human glance between the blades of swords. Every morning a white mist rises over the lake which shines like armour under the midday sun. But none must approach it for in it dwell the nixies who lure passers by into their crystal abodes."

At this moment the bell of the Hermitage was heard.

"Let us dismount," said the Duchess, "and walk to the chapel. It was neither on elephants nor camels that the wise men of the East approached the manger."

They heard the hermit's mass. A hideous old crone covered with rags knelt beside the Duchess, who on leaving the church offered her holy water.

"Accept it, good mother," she said.

George was amazed.

"Do you not know," said the Duchess, "that in the poor you honour the chosen of our Lord Jesus Christ? A beggar such as this as well as the good Duke of Rochesnoires held you at the font when you were baptized; and your little sister, Honey-Bee, also had one of these poor creatures as godmother."

The old crone who seemed to have guessed the boy's thoughts leaned towards him.

"Fair prince," she cried mockingly, "may you conquer as many kingdoms as I have lost. I was the queen of the Island of Pearls and the Mountains

of Gold ; each day my table was served with fourteen different kinds of fish, and a negro page bore my train."

"And by what misfortune have you lost your islands and your mountains, good woman?" asked the Duchess.

"I vexed the dwarfs, and they carried me far away from my dominions."

"Are the dwarfs so powerful?" George asked.

"As they live in the earth," the old woman answered, "they know the virtue of precious stones, they work in metals, and they unseal the hidden sources of the springs."

"And what did you do to vex them?" asked the Duchess.

"On a December night," said the old woman, "one of them came to ask permission to prepare a great midnight banquet in the kitchen of the castle, which, vaster than a chapter-house, was furnished with casseroles, frying-pans, earthen saucepans, kettles, pans, portable-ovens, gridirons, boilers, dripping-pans, dutch-ovens, fish-kettles, copper-pans, pastry-moulds, copper-jugs, goblets of gold and silver, and mottled wood, not to mention iron roasting-jacks, artistically forged, and the huge black cauldron which hung from the pot-hook. He promised neither to disturb nor to damage anything. I refused his request, and he disappeared

muttering vague threats. The third night, it being Christmas, this same dwarf returned to the chamber where I slept. He was accompanied by innumerable others, who pulled me out of bed and carried me to an unknown land in my nightgown. "Such," they said as they left me, "such is the punishment of the rich who refuse even a part of their treasure to the industrious and kindly dwarf folk who work in gold and cause the springs to flow."

Thus said the toothless old woman, and the Duchess having comforted her with words and money, she and the two children retraced their way to the castle.

VI

*Which tells of what can be seen from the Keep
of Clarides*



IT was one day shortly after this that Honey-Bee and George, without being observed, climbed the steps of the watch-tower which stands in the middle of the Castle of Clarides.

Having reached the platform they shouted at the top of their voices and clapped their hands.

Their view extended down the hillside divided into brown and green squares of cultivated fields. Woods and mountains lay dimly blue against the distant horizon.

“Little sister,” cried George, “little sister, look at the whole wide world !”

“The world is very big,” said Honey-Bee.

“My teachers,” said George, “have taught me that it is very big; but, as Gertrude our housekeeper says, one must see to believe.”

They went the round of the platform.

“Here is something wonderful, little brother,” cried Honey-Bee. “The castle stands in the middle of the earth and we are on the watch-tower in the middle of the castle, and so we are standing in the middle of the earth. Ha! ha! ha!”

And, indeed, the horizon formed a circle about the children of which the watch-tower was the centre.

“We are in the very middle of the earth! Ha! ha! ha!” George repeated.

Whereupon they both started a-thinking.

“What a pity that the world is so big!” said Honey-Bee, “one might get lost and be separated from one’s friends.”

George shrugged his shoulders.

“How lucky that the world is so big! One can go in search of adventures. When I am grown up I mean to conquer the mountains that stand at the ends of the earth. That is where the moon rises; I shall seize her as she passes, and I will give her to you, Honey-Bee.”

“Yes,” said Honey-Bee, “give her to me and I will put her in my hair.”

Then they busied themselves searching for the places they knew as on a map.

“I recognise everything,” said Honey-Bee, who recognised nothing, “but what are those little square stones scattered over the hillside?”

“Houses,” George replied. “Those are houses. Don’t you recognise the capital of the Duchy of Clarides, little sister? After all, it is a great city; it has three streets, and one can drive through one of them. Don’t you remember that we passed through it last week when we went to the Hermitage?”

“And what is that winding brook?”

“That is the river. See the old stone bridge down there?”

“The bridge under which we fished for cray-fish?”

“That’s the one; and in one of the niches stands the statue of the ‘Woman without a Head.’ One cannot see her from here because she is too small.”

“I remember. But why hasn’t she got a head?”

“Probably because she has lost it.”

Without saying if this explanation was satisfactory, Honey-Bee gazed at the horizon.

“Little brother, little brother, just see what sparkles by the side of the blue mountains? It is the lake.”

“It is the lake.”

They then remembered what the duchess had told them of these beautiful and dangerous waters where the nixies dwell.

“We will go there,” said Honey-Bee.

George was aghast. He stared at her with his mouth wide open.

“But the Duchess has forbidden us to go out alone, so how can we go to this lake which is at the end of the earth?”

“How can we go? I don’t know. It’s you who ought to know, for you are a man and you have a grammar-master.”

This piqued George who replied that one might be a man, and even a very brave man, and yet not know all the roads on earth. Whereupon Honey-Bee said drily with a little air of scorn which made him blush to his ears:

“*I* never said *I* would conquer the blue mountains or take down the moon. I don’t know the way to the lake, but I mean to find it!”

George pretended to laugh.

“You laugh like a cucumber.”

“Cucumbers neither laugh nor cry.”

“If they did laugh they would laugh like you. I shall go along to the lake. And while I search for the beautiful waters in which the nixies live you shall stay alone at home like a good girl. I will leave you my needle-work and my doll. Take care of them George, take good care of them.”

George was proud, and he was conscious of the humiliation with which Honey-Bee covered him.

Gloomily and with head bowed he cried in a hollow voice:

“Very well, then, we will go to the lake.”

VII

*In which is described how George ana Honey-Bee
went to the lake*



THE next day after the midday meal, the Duchess having gone to her own room George took Honey-Bee by the hand.

“Now come!” he said.

“Where?”

“Hush!”

They crept down stairs and crossed the courtyard. After they had passed the postern, Honey-Bee again asked where they were going.

“To the lake,” George said resolutely.

Honey-Bee opened her mouth wide but remained speechless. To go so far without permission and in satin shoes! For her shoes were of satin. There was no sense in it.

“We must go and there is no need to be sensible.”

Such was George’s proud reply. She had once

humiliated him and now she pretended to be astonished.

This time it was he who disdainfully sent her back to her dolls. Girls always tempt one on to adventures and then run away. So mean! She could remain. He'd go alone.

She clung to his arm; he pushed her away.

She hung about his neck.

"Little brother," she sobbed, "I will follow you."

He allowed himself to be moved by such touching repentance.

"Come then, but not through the town; we may be seen. We will follow the ramparts and then we can reach the highway by a cross road."

And so they went hand in hand while George explained his plans.

"We will follow the road we took to the Hermitage and then we shall be sure to see the lake, just as we did the other day, and then we can cross the fields in a bee line."

"A bee line" is the pretty rustic way of saying a straight line; and they both laughed because of the young girl's name which fitted in so oddly.

Honey-Bee picked flowers along the ditches; she made a posy of marshmallows, white mullein, asters and chrysanthemums; the flowers faded in her little hands and it was pitiful to see them when Honey-Bee crossed the old stone bridge. As she

did not know what to do with them she decided to throw them into the water to refresh them, but finally she preferred to give them to the "Woman without a head."

She begged George to lift her in his arms so as to make her tall enough, and she placed her armful of wild flowers between the folded hands of the old stone figure.

After she was far away she looked back and saw a pigeon resting on the shoulder of the statue.

When they had been walking some time, said Honey-Bee, "I am thirsty."

"So am I," George replied, "but the river is far behind us, and I see neither brook nor fountain."

"The sun is so hot that he has drunk them all up. What shall we do?"

So they talked and lamented when they saw a peasant woman approach who carried a basket of fruit.

"Cherries!" cried George. "How unlucky: I have no money to buy any."

"I have money," said Honey-Bee.

She pulled out of her pocket a little purse in which were five pieces of gold.

"Good woman," she said to the peasant, "will you give me as many cherries as my frock will hold?"

And she raised her little skirt with her two hands.

The woman threw in two or three handfuls of cherries. With one hand Honey Bee held the uplifted skirt and with the other she offered the woman a gold piece.

“Is that enough?”

The woman clutched the gold piece which would amply have paid not only for the cherries in the basket but for the tree on which they grew and the plot of land on which the tree stood.

The artful one replied :

“I’m satisfied, if only to oblige you, little princess.”

“Well then, put some more cherries in my brother’s cap,” said Honey Bee, “and you shall have another gold piece.”

This was done. The peasant woman went on her way meditating in what old stocking or under what mattress she should hide her two gold pieces.

And the two children followed the road eating the cherries and throwing the stones to the right and the left. George chose the cherries that hung two by two on one stem and made earrings for his little sister, and he laughed to see the lovely twin fruit dangle its vermilion beauty against her cheeks.

A pebble stopped their joyous progress. It had got into Honey-Bee’s little shoe and she began to limp. At every step she took, her golden curls

bobbed against her cheek, and so limping she sat down on a bank by the roadside. Her brother knelt down and took off the satin shoe. He shook it and out dropped a little white pebble.

“Little brother,” she said as she looked at her feet, “the next time we go to the lake we’ll put on boots.”

The sun was already sinking against the radiant sky ; a soft breeze caressed their cheeks and necks, and so, cheered and refreshed, the two little travellers proceeded on their way. To make walking easier they went hand in hand, and they laughed to see their moving shadows melt together before them. They sang :

Maid Marian, setting forth to find
The mill, with sacks of corn to grind,
Her donkey, Jan, bestrode.
My dainty maiden, Marian,
She mounted on her donkey, Jan,
And took the mill-ward road.

But Honey-Bee stopped :

“I have lost my shoe, my satin shoe,” she cried. And so it was. The little shoe, whose silken laces

* Marian' s'en allant au moulin,
Pour y faire moudre son grain,
Ell' monta sur son âne,
Ma p'tite mam'sell' Marianne !
Ell' monta sur son âne Martin
Pour aller au moulin,

had become loose in walking, lay in the road covered with dust. Then as she looked back and saw the towers of the castle of Clarides fade into the distant twilight her heart sank and the tears came to her eyes.

“The wolves will eat us,” she cried, “and our mother will never see us again and she will die of grief.”

But George comforted her as he put on her shoe.

“When the castle bell rings for supper we shall have returned to Clarides. Come!”

The miller saw her coming nigh
 And could not well forbear to cry,
 Your donkey you must tether.
 My dainty maiden, Marian,
 Tether you here your donkey, Jan,
 Who brought us twain together.

“The lake, Honey-Bee! See the lake, the lake, the lake!”

“Yes, George, the lake!”

George shouted “hurrah” and flung his hat in

* Le meunier qui la voit venir
 Ne peut s'empêcher de lui dire :
 Attachez là votre âne,
 Ma p'tite Mam'sell' Marianne,
 Attachez là votre âne Martin
 Qui vous mène au moulin.

the air. Honey-Bee was too proper to fling hers up also, so taking off the shoe that wouldn't stay on she threw it joyfully over her head.

There lay the lake in the depths of the valley and its curved and sloping banks made a framework of foliage and flowers about its silver waves. It lay there clear and tranquil, and one could see the swaying of the indistinct green of its banks.

But the children could find no path through the underbrush that would lead to its beautiful waters.

While they were searching for one their legs were nipped by some geese driven by a little girl dressed in a sheepskin and carrying a switch. George asked her name.

"Gilberte."

"Well, then, Gilberte, how can one go to the lake?"

"Folks doesn't go."

"Why?"

"Because"

"But supposing folks did?"

"If folks did there'd be a path, and one would take that path."

George could think of no adequate reply to this guardian of the geese.

"Let's go," he said, "farther on we shall be sure to find a way through the woods."

"And we will pick nuts and eat them," said

Honey-Bee, "for I am hungry. The next time we go to the lake we must bring a satchel full of good things to eat."

"That we will, little sister," said George. "And I quite agree with Francœur, our squire, who when he went to Rome, took a ham with him, in case he should hunger, and a flask lest he should be thirsty. But hurry, for it is growing late, though I don't know the time."

"The shepherdesses know by looking at the sun," said Honey-Bee; "but I am not a shepherdess. Yet it seems to me that when we left the sun was over our head, and now it is down there, far behind the town and castle of Clarides. I wonder if this happens every day and what it means?"

While they looked at the sun a cloud of dust rose up from the high road, and they saw some cavaliers with glittering weapons ride past at full speed. The children hid in the underbrush in great terror. "They are thieves or probably ogres," they thought. They were really guards sent by the Duchess of Clarides in search of the little truants.

The two little adventurers found a footpath in the underbrush, not a lovers' lane, for it was impossible to walk side by side holding hands as is the fashion of lovers. Nor could the print of human footsteps be seen, but only indentations left by innumerable tiny cloven feet.

“Those are the feet of little devils,” said Honey-Bee.

“Or deer,” suggested George.

The matter was never explained. But what is certain is that the footpath descended in a gentle slope towards the edge of the lake which lay before the two children in all its languorous and silent beauty. The willows surrounded its banks with their tender foliage. The slender blades of the reeds with their delicate plumes swayed lightly over the water. They formed tremulous islands about which the water-lilies spread their great heart-shaped leaves and snow-white flowers. Over these blossoming islands dragon-flies, all emerald or azure, with wings of flame, sped their shrill flight in suddenly altered curves.

The children plunged their burning feet with joy in the damp sand overgrown with tufted horse-tails and the reed-mace with its slender lance. The sweet flag wafted towards them its humble fragrance and the water plantain unrolled about them its filaments of lace on the margin of the sleeping waters which the willow-herb starred with its purple flowers.

VIII

*Wherein we shall see what happened to George of
Blanchelande because he approached the lake in
which the nixies dwell*



HONEY-BEE crossed the sand between two clumps of willows, and the little spirit of the place leaped into the water in front of her leaving circles that grew greater and greater and finally vanished. This spirit was a little green frog with a white belly. All was silent; a fresh breeze swept over the clear lake whose every ripple had the gracious curve of a smile.

“This lake is pretty,” said Honey-Bee, “but my feet are bleeding in my little torn shoes, and I am very hungry. I wish I were back in the castle.”

“Little sister,” said George, “sit down on the grass. I will wrap your feet in leaves to cool them; then I will go in search of supper for you. High up along the road I saw some ripe blackberries. I will fetch you the sweetest and best in my hat.

Give me your handkerchief ; I will fill it with strawberries, for there are strawberries near here along the footpath under the shade of the trees. And I will fill my pockets with nuts."

He made a bed of moss for Honey-Bee under a willow on the edge of the lake, and then he left her.

Honey-Bee lay with folded hands on her little mossy bed and watched the light of the first stars tremble in the pale sky ; then her eyes half closed, and yet it seemed to her as if overhead she saw a little dwarf mounted on a raven. It was not fancy. For having reined in the black bird who was gnawing at the bridle, the dwarf stopped just above the young girl and stared down at her with his round eyes. Whereupon he disappeared at full gallop. All this Honey-Bee saw vaguely and then she fell asleep.

She was still asleep when George returned with the fruit he had gathered, which he placed at her side. Then he climbed down to the lake while he waited for her to awaken. The lake slept under its delicate crown of verdure. A light mist swept softly over the waters. Suddenly the moon appeared between the branches, and then the waves were strewn as if with countless stars.

But George could see that the lights which irradiated the waters were not all the broken reflections of the moon, for blue flames advanced in circles, swaying and undulating as if in a dance.

Soon he saw that the blue flames flickered over the white faces of women, beautiful faces rising on the crests of the waves and crowned with sea-weeds and sea-shells, with sea-green tresses floating over their shoulders and veils flowing from under their breasts that shimmered with pearls. The child recognised the nixies and tried to flee. But already their cold white arms had seized him, and in spite of his struggles and cries he was borne across the waters along the galleries of porphyry and crystal.

IX

*Wherein we shall see how Honey-Bee was taken
to the dwarfs*



THE moon had risen over the lake and the water now only showed broken reflections of its disc. Honey-Bee still slept. The dwarf who had watched her came back again on his raven followed this time by a crowd of little men. They were very little men. Their white beards hung down to their knees. They looked like old men with the figures of children. By their leathern aprons and the hammers which hung from their belts one could see that they were workers in metals. They had a curious gait, for they leaped to amazing heights and turned the most extraordinary somersaults, and showed the most inconceivable agility that made them seem more like spirits than human beings.

Yet while cutting their most foolhardy capers they preserved an unalterable gravity of demeanour,

to such a degree that it was quite impossible to make out their real characters.

They placed themselves in a circle about the sleeping child.

“Now then,” said the smallest of the dwarfs from the heights of his plumed charger; “now then, did I deceive you when I said that the loveliest of princesses was lying asleep on the borders of the lake, and do you not thank me for bringing you here?”

“We thank you Bob,” replied one of the dwarfs who looked like an elderly poet, “indeed there is nothing lovelier in the world than this young damsel. She is more rosy than the dawn which rises on the mountains, and the gold we forge is not so bright as the gold of her tresses.”

“Very good, Pic, nothing can be truer,” cried the dwarfs, “but what shall we do with this lovely little lady?”

Pic, who looked like a very elderly poet, did not reply to this question, probably because he knew no better than they what to do with this pretty lady.

“Let us build a large cage and put her in,” a dwarf by the name of Rug suggested.

Against this another dwarf called Dig vehemently protested. It was Dig’s opinion that only wild beasts were ever put into cages, and there was

nothing yet to prove that the pretty lady was one of these.

But Rug clung to his idea for the reason possibly that he had no other. He defended it with much subtlety. Said he :

“ If this person is not savage she will certainly become so as a result of the cage, which will be therefore not only useful but indispensable.”

This reasoning displeased the dwarfs, and one of them named Tad denounced it with much indignation. He was such a good dwarf. He proposed to take the beautiful child back to her kindred who must be great nobles.

But this advice was rejected as being contrary to the custom of the dwarfs.

“ We ought to follow the ways of justice not custom,” said Tad.

But no one paid any further attention to him and the assembly broke into a tumult as a dwarf named Pau, a simple soul but just, gave his advice in these terms :

“ We must begin by awakening this young lady, seeing she declines to wake of herself ; if she spends the night here her eyelids will be swollen to-morrow and her beauty will be much impaired, for it is very unhealthy to sleep in a wood on the borders of a lake.”

This opinion met with general approval as it did not clash with any other.

Pic, who looked like an elderly poet burdened with care, approached the young girl and looked at her very intently, under the impression that a single one of his glances would be quite sufficient to rouse the dreamer out of the deepest sleep. But Pic was quite mistaken as to the power of his glance, for Honey-Bee continued to sleep with folded hands.

Seeing this the good Tad pulled her gently by her sleeve. Thereupon she partly opened her eyes and raised herself on her elbow. When she found herself lying on a bed of moss surrounded by dwarfs she thought what she saw was nothing but a dream, and she rubbed her eyes to open them, so that instead of this fantastic vision she should see the pure light of morning as it entered her little blue room in which she thought she was. For her mind, heavy with sleep, did not recall to her the adventure of the lake. But indeed, it was useless to rub her eyes, the dwarfs did not vanish, and so she was obliged to believe that they were real. Then she looked about with frightened eyes and saw the forest and remembered.

“George! my brother George!” she cried in anguish. The dwarfs crowded about her, and for fear of seeing them she hid her face in her hands.

“George! George! Where is my brother George?” she sobbed.

The dwarfs could not tell her, for the good

reason that they did not know. And she wept hot tears and cried aloud for her mother and brother.

Pau longed to weep with her, and in his efforts to console, he addressed her with rather vague remarks.

“Do not distress yourself so much,” he urged, “it would be a pity for so lovely a young damsel to spoil her eyes with weeping. Rather tell us your story, which cannot fail to be very amusing. We should be so pleased.”

She did not listen. She rose and tried to escape. But her bare and swollen feet caused her such pain that she fell on her knees, sobbing most pitifully. Tad held her in his arms, and Pau tenderly kissed her hand. It was this that gave her the courage to look at them, and she saw that they seemed full of compassion.

Pic looked to her like one inspired, and yet very innocent, and perceiving that all these little men were full of compassion for her, she said:

“Little men, it is a pity you are so ugly; but I will love you all the same if you will only give me something to eat, for I am so hungry.”

“Bob,” all the dwarfs cried at once, “go and fetch some supper.”

And Bob flew off on his raven. All the same, the dwarfs resented this small girl’s injustice in finding them ugly. Rug was very angry. Pic said

to himself, "She is only a child, and she does not see the light of genius which shines in my eyes, and which gives them the power which crushes as well as the grace which charms."

As for Pau, he thought to himself: "Perhaps it would have been better if I had not awakened this young lady who finds us ugly." But Tad said smiling:

"You will find us less ugly, dear young lady, when you love us more."

As he spoke Bob re-appeared on his raven. He held a dish of gold on which were a roast pheasant, an oatmeal cake, and a bottle of claret. He cut innumerable capers as he laid this supper at the feet of Honey-Bee.

"Little men," Honey-Bee said as she ate, "your supper is very good. My name is Honey-Bee; let us go in search of my brother, and then we will all go together to Clarides where mama is waiting for us in great anxiety."

But Dig, who was a kind dwarf, represented to Honey-Bee that she was not able to walk; that her brother was big enough to find his own way; that no misfortune could come to him in a country in which all the wild beasts had been destroyed.

"We will make a litter," he added, "and cover it with leaves and moss, and we will put you on it, and in this way we will carry you to the mountain

and present you to the King of the Dwarfs, according to the custom of our people."

All the dwarfs applauded. Honey-Bee looked at her aching feet and remained silent. She was glad to learn that there were no wild beasts in the country. And on the whole she was willing to trust herself to the kindness of the dwarfs.

They were already busy constructing the litter. Those with hatchets were felling two young fir trees with resounding blows. This brought back to Rug his original suggestion.

"If instead of a litter we made a cage," he urged.

But he aroused a unanimous protest. Tad looked at him scornfully.

"You are more like a human being than a dwarf, Rug," he said. "But at least it is to the honour of our race that the most wicked dwarf is also the most stupid."

In the meantime the task had been accomplished. The dwarfs leaped into the air and in a bound seized and cut the branches, out of which they deftly wove a basket chair. Having covered it with moss and leaves, they placed Honey-Bee upon it, then they seized the two poles, placed them on their shoulders and, then! off they went to the mountain.

X

*In which we are faithfully told how King Loc received
Honey-Bee of Clarides*



HEY climbed a winding path along the wooded slope of the hill. Here and there granite boulders, bare and blasted, broke through the grey verdure of the dwarf oaks, and the sombre purple mountain with its bluish ravines formed an impassable barrier about the desolate landscape.

The procession, preceded by Bob on his feathered steed, passed through a chasm overgrown with brambles. Honey-Bee, with her golden hair flowing over her shoulders, looked like the dawn breaking on the mountains, supposing, of course, that the dawn was ever frightened and called her mother and tried to escape, for all these things she did as she caught a confused glimpse of dwarfs, armed to the teeth, lying in ambush along the windings of the rocks.

With bows bent or lance at rest they stood immovable. Their tunics of wild beast skins and their long knives that hung from their belts gave them a most terrible appearance. Game, furred and feathered, lay beside them. And yet these hunters, to judge only by their faces, did not seem very grim; on the contrary, they appeared gentle and grave like the dwarfs of the forest, whom they greatly resembled.

In their midst stood a dwarf full of majesty. He wore a cock feather over his ear, and on his head a diadem set with enormous gems. His mantle raised at the shoulder disclosed a muscular arm covered with circlets of gold. A horn of ivory and chased silver hung from his belt. His left hand rested on his lance in an attitude of quiet strength, and his right he held over his eyes so as to look towards Honey-Bee and the light.

“King Loc,” said the forest dwarfs, “we have brought you the beautiful child we have found; her name is Honey-Bee.”

“You have done well,” said King Loc. “She shall live amongst us according to the custom of the dwarfs.”

“Honey-Bee,” he said, approaching her, “you are welcome.” He spoke very gently, for he already felt very kindly towards her. He lifted himself on the tips of his toes to kiss her hand that hung at her

side, and he assured her not only that he would do her no harm, but that he would try to gratify all her wishes, even should she long for necklaces, mirrors, stuffs from Cashmere and silks from China.

“I wish I had some shoes,” replied Honey-Bee. Upon which King Loc struck his lance against a bronze disc that hung on the surface of the rock, and instantly something bounded like a ball out of the depths of the cavern. Increasing in size it disclosed the face of a dwarf with features such as painters give to the illustrious Belisarius, but his leather apron proclaimed that he was a shoemaker. He was indeed the chief of the shoemakers.

“Truc,” said the king, “choose the softest leather out of our store-houses, take cloth-of-gold and silver, ask the guardian of my treasures for a thousand pearls of the finest water, and with this leather, these fabrics, and these pearls create a pair of shoes for the lady Honey-Bee.”

At these words Truc threw himself at the feet of Honey-Bee and measured them with great care.

“Little King Loc,” said Honey-Bee, “I want the pretty shoes you promised at once, because as soon as I have them I must return to Clarides to my mother.”

“You shall have the shoes,” King Loc replied; “you shall have them to walk about the mountain, but not to return to Clarides, for never again shall

you leave this kingdom, where we will teach you wonderful secrets still unknown on earth. The dwarfs are superior to men, and it is your good fortune that you are made welcome amongst them."

"It is my misfortune," replied Honey-Bee. "Little King Loc, give me a pair of wooden shoes, such as the peasants wear, and let me return to Clarides."

But King Loc made a sign with his head to signify that this was impossible. Then Honey-Bee clasped her hands and said, coaxingly :

"Little King Loc, let me go and I will love you very much."

"You will forget me in your shining world."

"Little King Loc, I will never forget you, and I will love you as much as I love Flying Wind."

"And who is Flying Wind?"

"It is my milk-white steed, and he has rose-coloured reins and he eats out of my hand. When he was very little Francœur the squire used to bring him to my room every morning and I kissed him. But now Francœur is in Rome, and Flying Wind is too big to mount the stairs."

King Loc smiled.

"Will you love me more than Flying Wind?"

"Indeed I would," said Honey-Bee.

"Well said," cried the King.

"Indeed I would, but I cannot, I hate you, little

King Loc, because you will not let me see my mother and George again.”

“Who is George?”

“George is George and I love him.”

The friendship of King Loc for Honey-Bee had increased prodigiously in a few minutes, and as he had already made up his mind to marry her as soon as she was of age, and hoped through her to reconcile men and dwarfs, he feared that later on George might become his rival and wreck his plans. It was because of this that he turned away frowning, his head bowed as if with care.

Honey-Bee seeing that she had offended him pulled him gently by his mantle.

“Little King Loc,” she said, in a voice both tender and sad, “why should we make each other unhappy, you and I?”

“It is in the nature of things,” replied King Loc. “I cannot take you back to your mother, but I will send her a dream which will tell her your fate, dear Honey-Bee, and that will comfort her.”

“Little King Loc,” and Honey-Bee smiled through her tears, “what a good idea, but I will tell you just what you ought to do. You must send my mother a dream every night in which she will see me, and every night you must send me a dream in which I shall see her.”

And King Loc promised, and so said, so done. Every night Honey-Bee saw her mother, and every night the Duchess saw her daughter, and that satisfied their love just a little.

XI

In which the marvels of the kingdom of the dwarfs are accurately described, as well as the dolls that were given to Honey-Bee



THE kingdom of the dwarfs was very deep and extended under the greater part of the earth. Though one only caught a glimpse of the sky here and there through the clefts in the rocks, the roads, the avenues, the palaces and the galleries of this subterraneous region were not plunged in absolute darkness. Only a few spaces and caverns were lost in obscurity. The rest was illumined not by lamps or torches but by stars or meteors which diffused a strange and fantastic light, and this light revealed the most astonishing marvels. One saw stupendous edifices hewn out of the solid rocks, and in some places, palaces cut out of granite, of such height that their tracery of stone was lost under the arches of this gigantic cavern in a haze across which fell the orange glimmer of little stars less lustrous than the moon.

There were fortresses in this kingdom, of the most crushing and formidable dimensions; an amphitheatre in which the stone seats formed a half-circle whose extent it was impossible to measure at a single glance, and vast wells with sculptured sides, in which one could descend forever and yet never reach the bottom. All these structures, so out of proportion it would seem to the size of the inhabitants, were quite in keeping with their curious and fantastic genius.

Dwarfs in pointed hoods pricked with fern leaves whirled about these edifices in the airiest fashion. It was common to see them leap up to the height of two or three storeys from the lava pavement and rebound like balls, their faces meanwhile preserving that impressive dignity with which sculptors endow the great men of antiquity.

No one was idle and all worked zealously. Entire districts echoed to the sound of hammers. The shrill discord of machinery broke against the arches of the cavern, and it was a curious sight to see the crowds of miners, blacksmiths, gold-beaters, jewellers, diamond polishers, handle pickaxes, hammers, pincers and files with the dexterity of monkeys. However there was a more peaceful region.

Here coarse and powerful figures and shapeless columns loomed in chaotic confusion, hewn out of the virgin rock, and seemed to date back to an

immemorial antiquity. Here a palace with low portals extended its ponderous expanse; it was the palace of King Loc.

Directly opposite was the house of Honey-Bee, a house or rather a cottage of one room all hung with white muslin. The furniture of pine-wood perfumed the room. A glimpse of daylight penetrated through a crevice in the rock, and on fine nights one could see the stars.

Honey-Bee had no special attendants, for all the dwarf people were eager to serve her and to anticipate all her wishes except the single one to return to earth.

The most erudite dwarfs, familiar with the profoundest secrets, were glad to teach her, not from books, for dwarfs do not write, but by showing her all the plants of mountains and plains, all the diverse species of animals, and all the varied gems that are extracted from the bosom of the earth. And it was by means of such sights and marvels that they taught her, with an innocent gaiety, the wonders of nature and the processes of the arts.

They made her playthings such as the richest children on earth never have; for these dwarfs were always industrious and invented wonderful machinery. In this way they produced for her dolls that could move with exquisite grace, and express themselves according to the strictest rules of poetry.

Placed on the stage of a little theatre, the scenery of which represented the shores of the sea, the blue sky, palaces and temples, they would portray the most interesting events. Though no taller than a man's arm some of them represented respectable old men, others men in the prime of life, and others still beautiful young girls dressed in white.

Among them also were mothers pressing their innocent children to their hearts. And these eloquent dolls acted as if they were really moved by hate, love and ambition. They passed with the greatest skill from joy to sorrow and they imitated nature so well that they could move one to laughter or to tears. Honey-Bee clapped her hands at the sight. She had a horror of the dolls who tried to be tyrants. On the other hand she felt a boundless compassion for a doll who had once been a princess, and who, now a captive widow, had no other resource alas, by which to save her child, than to marry the barbarian who had made her a widow.

Honey-Bee never tired of this game which the dolls could vary indefinitely. The dwarfs also gave concerts and taught her to play the lute, the viola, the theorbo, the lyre, and various other instruments.

In short she became an excellent musician, and the dramas acted in the theatre by the dolls taught her a knowledge of men and life. King Loc was always present at the plays and the concerts, but he

neither saw nor heard anything but Honey-Bee ; little by little he had set his whole heart upon her. In the meantime months passed and even years sped by and Honey-Bee was still among the dwarfs, always amused and yet always longing for earth. She grew to be a beautiful girl. Her singular destiny had imparted something strange to her appearance, which gave her, however, only an added charm.

XII

In which the treasures of King Loc are described as well as the writer is able



IX years to a day had passed since Honey-Bee had come to live with the dwarfs. King Loc called her into his palace and commanded his treasurer to displace a huge stone which seemed cemented into the wall, but which in reality was only lightly placed there. All three passed through the opening left by the great stone and found themselves in a fissure of rock too narrow for two persons to stand abreast. King Loc preceded the others along the dim path and Honey-Bee followed him holding to a tip of the royal mantle. They walked on for a long time, and at intervals the sides of the rocks came so close together that the young girl was seized with terror lest she should be unable to advance or recede, and so would die there. Before her, along the dark and narrow road floated the mantle of King Loc. At last King

Loc came to a bronze door which he opened and out of which poured a blaze of light.

“Little King Loc,” said Honey-Bee, “I had no idea that light could be so beautiful !”

And King Loc taking her by the hand led her into the hall out of which the light shone.

“See !” he cried.

Honey-Bee, dazzled, could see nothing, for this immense hall, supported by high marble columns, was a glitter of gold from floor to roof.

At the end on a dais made of glittering gems set in gold and silver, the steps of which were covered by a carpet of marvellous embroidery, stood a throne of ivory and gold under a canopy of translucent enamel, and on each side two palm-trees three thousand years old, stood in gigantic vases carved in some bygone time by the greatest artists among the dwarfs. King Loc mounted his throne and commanded the young girl to stand at his right hand.

“Honey-Bee,” said King Loc, “these are my treasures. Choose all that will give you pleasure.”

Immense gold shields hung from the columns and reflected the sunlight, and sent it back in glittering rays ; swords and lances crossed had each a flame at their point.

Tables along the walls were laden with tankards, flagons, ewers, chalices, pyxes, patens, goblets, gold cups, drinking horns of ivory with silver rings,

enormous bottles of rock crystal, chased gold and silver dishes, coffers, reliquaries in the form of churches, scent-boxes, mirrors, candelabra and torch-holders equally beautiful in material and workmanship, and incense-burners in the shape of monsters. And on one table stood a chessboard with chessmen carved out of moonstones.

“Choose,” King Loc repeated.

But lifting her eyes above these treasures, Honey-Bee saw the blue sky through an opening in the roof, and as if she had comprehended that the light of day could alone give all these things their splendour, she said simply :

“Little King Loc, I want to return to earth.”

Whereupon King Loc made a sign to his treasurer who, raising heavy tapestries, disclosed an enormous iron-bound coffer covered with plates of open iron-work. This coffer being opened out poured thousands of rays of different and lovely tints, and each ray seemed to leap out of a precious stone most artistically cut. King Loc dipped in his hands and there flowed in glittering confusion violet amethysts, and virgins' stones, emeralds of three kinds, one dark green, another called the honey emerald because of its colour, and the third a bluish green, also called beryl, which gives happy dreams ; oriental topazes, rubies beautiful as the blood of heroes, dark blue sapphires, called the male sapphire, and the pale blue

ones, called the female sapphire, the cymophanes, hyacinths, euclases, turquoises, opals whose light is softer than the dawn, the aquamarine and the Syrian garnet. All these gems were of the purest and most luminous water. And in the midst of these coloured fires great diamonds flashed their rays of dazzling white.

“Choose, Honey-Bee,” said King Loc. But Honey-Bee shook her head.

“Little King Loc,” she said, “I would rather have a single beam of sunlight that falls on the roof of Clarides than all these gems.”

Then King Loc ordered another coffer to be opened, in which were only pearls. But these pearls were round and pure; their changing light reflected all the colours of sea and sky, and their radiance was so tender that they seemed to express a thought of love.

“Accept these,” said King Loc.

“Little King Loc,” Honey-Bee replied, “these pearls are like the glance of George of Blanche-lande; I love these pearls, but I love his eyes even more.”

Hearing these words King Loc turned his head away. However he opened a third coffer and showed the young girl a crystal in which a drop of water had been imprisoned since the beginning of time; and when the crystal was moved the drop of water could

be seen to stir. He also showed her pieces of yellow amber in which insects more brilliant than jewels had been imprisoned for thousands of years. One could distinguish their delicate feet and their fine antennæ, and they would have resumed their flight had some power but shattered like glass their perfumed prison.

“These are the great marvels of nature; I give them to you, Honey-Bee.”

“Little King Loc,” Honey-Bee replied, “keep your amber and your crystal, for I should not know how to give their freedom either to the fly or the drop of water.”

King Loc watched her in silence for some time. Then he said, “Honey-Bee, the most beautiful treasures will be safe in your keeping. You will possess them and they will not possess you. The miser is the prey of his gold, only those who despise wealth, can be rich without danger; their souls will always be greater than their riches.”

Having uttered these words he made a sign to his treasurer who presented on a cushion a crown of gold to the young girl.

“Accept this jewel as a sign of our regard for you,” said King Loc. “Henceforth you shall be called the Princess of the Dwarfs.”

And he himself placed the crown on the head of Honey-Bee.

XIII

In which King Loc declares himself



THE dwarfs celebrated the crowning of their first princess by joyous revels. Harmless and innocent games succeeded each other in the huge amphitheatre; and the little men, with cockades of fern or two oak leaves fastened coquetishly to their hoods, bounded gaily across the subterranean streets. The rejoicings lasted thirty days. During the universal excitement Pic looked like a mortal inspired; Tad the kind-hearted was intoxicated by the universal joy; Dig the tender gave expression to his delight in tears; Rug, in his ecstasy, again demanded that Honey-Bee should be put in a cage, but this time so that the dwarfs need not be afraid to lose so charming a princess; Bob, mounted on his raven, filled the air with such cries of rapture that the sable bird, infected by the gaiety, gave vent to innumerable playful little croaks.

Only King Loc was sad.

On the thirtieth day, having given the princess and the dwarf people a festival of unparalleled magnificence, he mounted his throne, and so stood that his kind face just reached her ear.

“My Princess Honey-Bee,” he said, “I am about to make a request which you are at liberty either to accept or to refuse. Honey-Bee of Clarides, Princess of the Dwarfs, will you be my wife?”

As he spoke, King Loc, grave and tender, had something of the gentle beauty of a majestic poodle.

“Little King Loc,” Honey-Bee replied, as she pulled his beard, “I am willing to become your wife for fun, but never your wife for good. The moment you asked me to marry you I was reminded of Francœur, who when I was on earth used to amuse me by telling me the most ridiculous stories.”

At these words King Loc turned his head away, but not so soon but that Honey-Bee saw the tears in his eyes. Then Honey-Bee was grieved because she had pained him.

“Little King Loc,” she said to him, “I love you for the little King Loc you are; and if you make me laugh as Francœur did, there is nothing in that to vex you, for Francœur sang well and he would have been very handsome if it had not been for his grey hair and his red nose.”

“Honey-Bee of Clarides, Princess of the Dwarfs,” the king replied, “I love you in the hope that some

day you will love me. And yet without that hope I should love you just the same. The only return I ask for my friendship is that you will always be honest with me."

"Little King Loc, I promise."

"Well then, tell me truly, Honey-Bee, do you love some one else enough to marry him?"

"Little King Loc, I love no one enough for that."

Whereupon King Loc smiled, and seizing his golden cup he proposed, with a resounding voice, the health of the Princess of the Dwarfs. An immense uproar rose from the depths of the earth, for the banquet table reached from one end to the other of the Empire of the Dwarfs.

XIV

In which we are told how Honey-Bee saw her mother again, but could not embrace her



HONEY-BEE, a crown on her head, was now more often sad and lost in thought than when her hair flowed loose over her shoulders, and when she went laughing to the forge and pulled the beards of her good friends Pic, Tad and Dig, whose faces, red from the reflected flames, gave her a gay welcome. But now these good dwarfs, who had once danced her on their knees and called her Honey-Bee, bowed as she passed and maintained a respectful silence. She grieved because she was no longer a child, and she suffered because she was the Princess of the Dwarfs.

It was no longer a pleasure for her to see King Loc, since she had seen him weep because of her. But she loved him, for he was good and unhappy. One day, if one may say that there are days in the empire of the dwarfs, she took King Loc by the

hand and drew him under the cleft in the rock, through which a sunbeam shone, along whose rays there danced a haze of golden dust.

“Little King Loc,” she said, “I suffer. You are a king and you love me and I suffer.”

Hearing these words from the pretty damsel, King Loc replied :

“I love you, Honey-Bee of Clarides, Princess of the Dwarfs ; and that is why I have held you captive in our world, in order to teach you our secrets, which are greater and more wonderful than all those you could learn on earth amongst men, for men are less skilful and less learned than the dwarfs.”

“Yes,” said Honey-Bee,” but they are more like me than are the dwarfs, and for that reason I love them better. Little King Loc let me see my mother again if you do not wish me to die.”

Without replying King Loc went away. Honey-Bee, desolate and alone, watched the ray of light which bathes the whole face of nature and which enfolds all the living, even to the beggars by the wayside, in its resplendent waves. Slowly this ray paled, and its golden radiance faded to a pale blue light. Night had come upon earth. A star twinkled over the cleft in the rock.

Then some one gently touched her on the shoulder, and she saw King Loc wrapped in a black cloak.

He had another cloak on his arm with which he covered the young girl.

“Come,” said he.

And he led her out of the underworld. When she saw again the trees stirred by the wind, the clouds that floated across the moon, the splendour of the night so fresh and blue, when she breathed again the fragrance of the herbage, and when the air she had breathed in childhood again entered her breast in floods, she gave a great sigh and thought to die of joy.

King Loc had taken her in his arms ; small though he was, he carried her as lightly as a feather, and they glided over the ground like the shadows of two birds.

“You shall see your mother again, Honey-Bee. But listen ! You know that every night I send her your image. Every night she sees your dear phantom ; she smiles upon it, she talks to it and she caresses it. To-night she shall, instead, see you yourself. You will see her, but you must not touch her, you must not speak to her, or the charm will be broken and she will never again see you nor your image, which she does not distinguish from you.”

“Then I will be prudent, alas ! little King Loc ! . . . See ! See !” . . .

Sure enough the watch-tower of Clarides rose

black on the hill. Honey-Bee had hardly time to throw a kiss to the beloved old stone walls when the ramparts of the town of Clarides, overgrown with gillyflowers already flew past ; already she was ascending the terrace, where the glow-worms glimmer in the grass, to the postern, which King Loc easily opened, for the dwarfs are masters of metals, nor can locks, padlocks, bolts, chains or bars ever stop them.

She climbed the winding stairs that led to her mother's room, and she paused to clasp her beating heart with both her hands. Softly the door opened, and by the light of a night lamp that hung from the ceiling she saw her mother in the holy silence that reigned, her mother frailer and paler, with hair grey at the temples, but in the eyes of her daughter more beautiful even than in past days as she remembered her riding fearlessly in magnificent attire. As usual the mother beheld her daughter as in a dream, and she opened her arms as if to caress her. And the child, laughing and sobbing, was about to throw herself into those open arms ; but King Loc tore her away, and like a wisp of straw he bore her through the blue landscape to the Kingdom of the Dwarfs.

XV

In which we shall see how King Loc suffered



EATED on the granite step of the underground palace, Honey-Bee watched the blue sky through the cleft in the rock, and saw the elder-trees turn their spreading white parasols to the light. She began to weep.

“Honey-Bee,” said King Loc as he took her hand in his, “why do you weep, and what is it you desire?”

And as she had been grieving these many days, the dwarfs at her feet tried to cheer her with simple airs on the flute, the flageolet, the rebeck, and the cymbals. And other dwarfs, to amuse her, turned such somersaults one after the other that they pricked the grass with the points of their hoods with their cockades of leaves, and nothing could be more charming than to watch the capers of these tiny men with their venerable beards. Tad so kind and Dig so wise, who had loved her since the day they

had found her asleep on the shore of the lake, and Pic, the elderly poet, gently took her arm and implored her to tell them the cause of her grief. Pau, a simple just soul, offered her a basket of grapes, and all of them gently pulled the edge of her skirt and said with King Loc :

“ Honey-Bee, Princess of the Dwarfs, why do you weep ? ”

“ Little King Loc, ” Honey-Bee replied, “ and you, little men, my grief only increases your love, because you are good ; you weep with me. Know that I weep when I think of George of Blanchelande, who should now be a cavalier, but whom I shall never see again. I love him and I wish to be his wife. ”

King Loc took his hand away from the hand he had pressed.

“ Honey-Bee, ” he said, “ why did you deceive me when you told me at the banquet that you loved no one else ? ”

“ Little King Loc, ” Honey-Bee replied, “ I did not deceive you at the banquet. At that time I had no desire to marry George of Blanchelande, but to-day it is my dearest wish that he should ask to marry me. But he will never ask me, as I do not know where he is, nor does he know where I am. And this is the reason I weep. ”

At these words the musicians ceased playing ; the

acrobats interrupted their tumbling and stood immovable, some on their heads and some on their haunches; Tad and Dig shed silent tears on the sleeve of Honey-Bee; Pau, simple soul, dropped his basket of grapes, and all the little men gave vent to the most fearful groans.

But King Loc, more unhappy than all under his splendid jewelled crown, silently withdrew, his mantle trailing behind him like a purple torrent.

XVI

In which an account is given of the learned Nur who was the cause of such extraordinary joy to King Loc



ING LOC did not permit the young girl to observe his weakness ; but when he was alone he sat on the ground and with his feet in his hands gave way to grief. He was jealous.

“She loves him,” he said to himself, “and she does not love me! And yet I am a king and very wise ; great treasures are mine and I know the most marvellous secrets. I am superior to all other dwarfs, who are in turn superior to all men. She does not love me but she loves a young man who not only has not the learning of the dwarfs, but no other learning either.

“It must be acknowledged that she does not appreciate merit—nor has she much sense. I ought to laugh at her want of judgment ; but I love her and

I care for nothing in the world because she does not love me.”

For many long days King Loc roamed alone through the most desolate mountain passes, turning over in his mind thoughts both sad and, sometimes, wicked. He even thought of trying by imprisonment and starvation to force Honey-Bee to become his wife. But rejecting this plan as soon as formed he decided to go in search of her and throw himself at her feet. But he could come to no decision, and at last he was quite at a loss what to do. The truth being that whether Honey-Bee would love him did not depend on him.

Suddenly his anger turned against George of Blanchelande; and he hoped that the young man had been carried far away by some enchanter, and that at any rate, should he ever hear of Honey-Bee's love, he would disdain it.

“Without being old,” the king meditated, “I have already lived too long not to have suffered sometimes. And yet my sufferings, intense though they were, were less painful than those of which I am conscious to-day. With the tenderness and pity which caused them was mingled something of their own divine sweetness. Now, on the contrary, my grief has the baseness and bitterness of an evil desire. My soul is desolate and the tears in my eyes are like an acid that burns them.”

So thought King Loc. And fearing that jealousy might make him unjust and wicked he avoided meeting the young girl, for fear that in spite of himself, he might use towards her the language of a man either weak or brutal.

One day when he was more than ever tormented by the thought that Honey-Bee loved George, he decided to consult Nur, the most learned of all the dwarfs, who lived at the bottom of a well deep down in the bowels of the earth.

This well had the advantage of an even and soft temperature. It was not dark, for two little stars, a pale sun and a red moon, alternately illumined all parts. King Loc descended into the well and found Nur in his laboratory. Nur looked like a kind little old man, and he wore a sprig of wild thyme in his hood. In spite of his learning he had the innocence and candour characteristic of his race.

“Nur,” said the king as he embraced him, “I have come to consult you because you know many things.”

“King Loc,” replied Nur, “I might know a good deal and yet be an idiot. But I possess the knowledge of how to learn some of the innumerable things I do not know, and that is the reason I am so justly famous for my learning.”

“Well, then,” said King Loc, “can you tell me

the whereabouts at present of a young man by the name of George of Blanchelande?"

"I do not know and I never cared to know," replied Nur. "Knowing as I do the ignorance, stupidity and wickedness of mankind, I don't trouble myself as to what they say or do. Humanity, King Loc, would be entirely deplorable and ridiculous if it were not that something of value is given to this proud and miserable race, inasmuch as the men are endowed with courage, the women with beauty, and the little children with innocence. Obligated by necessity, as are also the dwarfs, to toil, mankind has rebelled against this divine law, and instead of being, like ourselves, willing and cheerful toilers, they prefer war to work, and they would rather kill each other than help each other. But to be just one must admit that their shortness of life is the principal cause of their ignorance and cruelty. Their life is too short for them to learn how to live. The race of the dwarfs who dwell under the earth is happier and better. If we are not immortal we shall at least last as long as the earth which bears us in her bosom, and which permeates us with her intimate and fruitful warmth, while for the races born on her rugged surface she has only the turbulent winds which sometimes scorch and sometimes freeze, and whose breath is at once the bearer of death and of life. And yet men owe to their over-

whelming miseries and wickedness a virtue which makes the souls of some amongst them more beautiful than the souls of dwarfs. And this virtue, O King Loc, which for the mind is what the soft radiance of pearls is for the eyes, is pity. It is taught by suffering, and the dwarfs know it but little, because being wiser than men they escape much anguish. Yet sometimes the dwarfs leave their deep grottoes and seek the pitiless surface of the earth to mingle with men so as to love them, to suffer with them and through them, and thus to feel this pity which refreshes the soul like a heavenly dew. This is the truth concerning men, King Loc. But did you not ask me as to the exact fate of some one amongst them ? ”

King Loc having repeated his question, Nur looked into one of the many telescopes which filled the room. For the dwarfs have no books, those which are found amongst them have come from men, and are only used as playthings. They do not learn as we do by consulting marks on paper, but they look through telescopes and see the subject itself of their inquiry. The only difficulty is to choose the right telescope and get the right focus.

There are telescopes of crystal, of topaz and of opal; but those whose lens is a great polished diamond are more powerful, and permit them to see the most distant objects.

The dwarfs also have lenses of a translucent substance unknown to men. These enable the sight to pass through rocks and walls as if they were glass. Others, more remarkable still, reconstruct as accurately as a mirror all that has vanished with the flight of time. For the dwarfs, in the depths of their caverns, have the power to recall from the infinite surface of the ether, the light of immemorial days and the forms and colours of vanished times. They can create for themselves a phantasm of the past by re-arranging the splinters of light which were once shattered against the forms of men, animals, plants and rocks, so that they again flash across the centuries through the unfathomable ether.

The venerable Nur excelled in discovering figures of antiquity and even such, inconceivable though it may seem, as lived before the earth had assumed the shape with which we are familiar. So it was really no trouble at all for him to find George of Blanchelande.

Having looked for a moment through a very ordinary telescope indeed, he said to King Loc :

“King Loc, he for whom you search is with the nixies in their palace of crystal, from which none ever return, and whose iridescent walls adjoin your kingdom.”

“Is he there?” cried the king. “Let him

stay!" and he rubbed his hands. "I wish him joy."

And having embraced the venerable dwarf, he emerged out of the well roaring with laughter.

The whole length of the road he held his sides so as to laugh at his ease; his head shook, and his beard swung backwards and forwards on his stomach. How he laughed! The little men who met him laughed out of sheer sympathy. Seeing them laugh made others laugh. A contagion of laughter spread from place to place until the whole interior of the earth was shaken as if with a mighty and jovial hiccough. Ha! ha! ha!

XVII

*Which tells of the wonderful adventure of George of
Blanchelande*



ING LOC did not laugh long ; indeed he hid the face of a very unhappy little man under the bed-clothes.

He lay awake all night long thinking of George of Blanchelande, the prisoner of the nixies.

So about the hour when such of the dwarfs as have a dairymaid for sweetheart go in her stead to milk the cows while she sleeps in her white bed with folded hands, little King Loc again sought the astute Nur in the depths of his well.

“ You did not tell me, Nur, what he is doing down there with the nixies ? ”

The venerable Nur was quite convinced that the king was mad, though that did not alarm him because he knew if King Loc should lose his reason he would be a most gracious, charming, amiable and

kindly lunatic. The madness of the dwarfs is gentle like their reason, and full of the most delicious fancies. But King Loc was not mad ; at least not more so than lovers usually are.

“ I wish to speak of George of Blanchelande,” he said to the venerable Nur, who had forgotten all about this young man as soon as possible.

Thereupon Nur the wise placed a series of lenses and mirrors before the king in an order so exact that it looked like disorder, but which enabled him to show the king in a mirror the form of George of Blanchelande as he was when the nixies carried him away. By a lucky choice and a skilful adjustment of instruments the dwarf was able to reproduce for the love-sick king all the adventures of the son of that Countess to whom a white rose announced her end. And the following, expressed in words, is what the little man saw in all the reality of form and colour.

When George was borne away in the icy arms of the daughters of the lake the water pressed upon his eyes and his breast and he felt that he was about to die. And yet he heard songs that sounded like a caress and his whole being was permeated by a sense of delicious freshness. ¹ When he opened his eyes he found himself in a grotto whose crystal columns reflected the delicate tints of the rainbow. At the end of the grotto was a great sea shell of mother-of-

pearl iridescent with the tenderest colours, and this served as a dais to the throne of coral and seaweed of the Queen of the Nixies. But the face of the Sovereign of the waters shone with a light more tender than either the mother-of-pearl or the crystal. She smiled at the child which her women brought her, and her green eyes lingered long upon him.

“Friend,” she said at last, “be welcome into our world, in which you shall be spared all sorrow. For you neither dry lessons nor rough sports; nothing coarse shall remind you of earth and its toil, for you only the songs and the dances and the love of the nixies.”

And indeed the women of the green hair taught the child music and dancing and a thousand graces. They loved to bind his forehead with the cockle shells that decked their own tresses. But he, remembering his country, gnawed his clenched hands with impatience.

Years passed and George longed with a passion unceasing to see the earth again, the rude earth where the sun burns and where the snow hardens, the mother earth where one suffers, where one loves, the earth where he had seen Honey-Bee, and where he longed to see her again. He had in the meantime grown to be a tall lad with a fine golden down on his upper lip. Courage came with the beard, and so one

day he presented himself before the Queen of the Nixies and bowing low, said :

“Madam, I have come, with your gracious permission, to take leave of you ; I am about to return to Clarides.”

“Fair youth,” the queen replied smiling, “I cannot grant you the leave you ask, for I guard you in my crystal palace, to make of you my lover.”

“Madam,” he replied, “I am not worthy of so great an honour.”

“That is but your courtesy. What gallant cavalier ever believes that he has sufficiently deserved his lady’s favour. Besides you are still too young to know your own worth. Let me tell you, fair youth, that we do but desire your welfare ; obey your lady and her alone.”

“Madam, I love Honey-Bee of Clarides. I will have no other lady but her.”

“A mortal maid !” the queen cried, turning pale, but more beautiful still, “a coarse daughter of men, this Honey-Bee ! How can you love such a thing ?”

“I do not know, but I know that I love her.”

“Never mind. It will pass.”

And she still held the young man captive by means of the allurements of her crystal abode.

He did not comprehend the devious thing called a woman ; he was more like Achilles among the

daughters of Lycomedes than Tannhäuser in the enchanted castle. And that is why he wandered sadly along the walls of the mighty palace searching for an outlet through which to escape; but he only saw the splendid and silent empire of the waves sealing his shining prison. Through the transparent walls he watched the blooming sea anemones and the spreading coral, while over the delicate stems of the madrepores and the sparkling shells, purple, blue, and gold fishes made a glitter of stars with a stroke of their tails. These marvels he left unheeded, for, lulled by the delicious songs of the nixies, he felt little by little his will broken and his soul grow weak. He was all indolence and indifference when one day he found by chance in a gallery of the palace, an ancient well-worn book bound in pigskin and studded with great copper nail-heads. The book, saved from some wreck in mid-ocean, treated of chivalry and fair ladies, and related at great length the adventures of heroes who went about the world redressing wrongs, protecting widows and succouring orphans for the love of justice and in honour of beauty. George flushed and paled with wonder, shame, and anger as he read these tales of splendid adventures. He could not contain himself.

“I also,” he cried, “will be a gallant knight. I also will go about the world punishing the wicked and succouring the unfortunate for the good of

mankind and in the name of my lady Honey-Bee."

With sword drawn and his heart big with valour he dashed across the crystal dwellings. The white ladies fled and swooned before him like the silver ripples of a lake. Their queen alone beheld his approach without a tremor ; she turned on him the icy glance of her green eyes.

"Break the enchantment which binds me," he cried, running towards her. "Open to me the road to earth. I wish to fight in the light of the sun like a cavalier. I wish to return to where one loves, to where one suffers, to where one struggles ! Give back to me the life that is real and the light that is real. Give me back my prowess ! If not, I will kill you, you wicked woman !"

With a smile she shook her head as if to refuse. Beautiful she was and serene. With all the strength that was in him George struck her ; but his sword broke against her glittering breast.

"Child !" she said, and she commanded that he be cast into a dungeon which formed a kind of crystal tunnel under her palace, and about which sharks roamed with wide-stretched monstrous jaws armed with triple rows of pointed teeth. At every touch it seemed as if they must crush the frail glass wall, which made it impossible to sleep in this strange prison.

The extremity of this under-sea tunnel rested on a bed of rock which formed the vaulting of the most distant and unexplored cavern in the empire of the dwarfs.

And this is what the two little men saw in a single hour and quite as accurately as if they had followed George all the days of his life. The venerable Nur, having described the dungeon scene in all its tragic gloom, addressed the King in much the same way as the Savoyards speak to the little children when they show their magic lanterns.

“King Loc,” he said, “I have shown you all you wished to see, and now that you know all I can add nothing more. It’s nothing to me whether you liked what you saw ; it is enough to know that what you saw was the truth. Science neither cares to please nor to displease. She is inhuman. It is not science but poetry that charms and consoles. And that is why poetry is more necessary than science. Go, King Loc, and get them to sing you a song.”

And without uttering a word King Loc left the well.

XVIII

In which King Loc undertakes a terrible journey



HAVING left the well of wisdom, King Loc went to his treasure house and out of a casket, of which he alone had the key, he took a ring which he placed on his finger. The stone set in the ring emitted a brilliant light, for it was a magic stone of whose power we shall learn more further on. Thereupon King Loc went to his palace, put on a travelling cloak and thick boots and took a stick ; then he started on a journey across crowded streets, great highways, villages, galleries of porphyry, torrents of rock-oil, and crystal grottoes, all of which communicated with each other through narrow openings.

He seemed lost in deep meditation and he uttered words that had no meaning. But he trudged on doggedly. Mountains obstructed his path and he climbed the mountains. Precipices opened under his feet and he descended into the precipices ; he

forded streams, he crossed horrible regions black with the fumes of sulphur. He trudged across burning lava on which his feet left their imprint ; he had the appearance of a desperately dogged traveller. He penetrated into gloomy caverns into which the water of the ocean oozed drop by drop, and flowed like tears along the sea wrack, forming pools on the uneven ground where countless crustaceans increased and multiplied into hideous shapes. Enormous crabs, crayfish, giant lobsters and sea spiders crackled under the dwarf's feet, then crawled away leaving some of their claws behind, and in their flight rousing horrible molluscs and octopuses centuries old that suddenly writhed their hundred arms and spat fetid poison out of their bird-beaks. And yet King Loc went on undaunted. He made his way to the ends of these caverns, through the midst of a heaped up chaos of shelled monsters armed with spikes, with double saw-edged nippers, with claws that crept stealthily up to his neck and bleared eyes on swaying tentacles. He crept up the sides of the cavern by clinging to the rough surface of the rocks and the mailed monsters crept with him, but he never faltered until he recognised by touch a stone that projected from the centre of the natural arch. He touched the stone with his magic ring and suddenly it rolled away with a horrible crash, and at once a glory of light flooded the cavern with its

beautiful waves and put to flight the swarming monsters bred in its gloom.

As King Loc thrust his head into the opening through which daylight poured, he saw George of Blanchelande in his glass dungeon where he was lamenting grievously as he thought of Honey-Bee and of earth. For King Loc had undertaken this subterranean journey only to deliver the captive of the nixies.

But seeing this huge dishevelled head, frowning and bearded, watching him from under his tunnel, George believed himself to be menaced by a mighty danger and he felt for the sword at his side forgetting that he had broken it against the breast of the woman with the green eyes. In the meantime King Loc examined him curiously.

“Bah,” said he to himself, “it is only a child !”

And indeed he was only an ignorant child and it was because of his great ignorance that he had escaped from the deadly and delicious kisses of the Queen of the Nixies. Aristotle with all his wisdom might not have done so well.

“What do you want, fathead ?” George cried, seeing himself defenceless, “why harm me if I have never harmed you ?”

“Little one,” King Loc replied in a voice at once jovial and testy, “you do not know whether or not you have harmed me, for you are ignorant of effects”

and causes and reflections, and all philosophy in general. But we'll not talk of that. If you don't mind leaving your tunnel, come this way."

George at once crept into the cavern, slipped down the length of the wall, and as soon as he had reached the bottom he said to his deliverer :

"You are a good little man ; I shall love you for ever ; but do you know where Honey-Bee of Clarides is ?"

"I know a great many things," retorted the dwarf, "and especially that I don't like people who ask questions."

Hearing this George paused in great confusion and followed his guide in silence through the dense black air where the octopuses and crustaceans writhed. King Loc said mockingly :

"This is not a carriage road, young prince."

"Sir," George replied, "the road to liberty is always beautiful, and I fear not to be led astray when I follow my benefactor."

Little King Loc bit his lips. On reaching the gallery of porphyry he pointed out to the youth a flight of steps cut in the rock by the dwarfs, by which they ascend to earth.

"This is your way," he said, "farewell."

"Do not bid me farewell," George replied, "say I shall see you again. After what you have done my life is yours."

“What I have done,” King Loc replied, “I have not done for your sake, but for another’s. It will be better for us never to meet again, for we can never be friends.”

“I would not have believed that my deliverance could have caused me such pain,” George said simply and gravely, “and yet it does. Farewell.”

“A pleasant journey,” cried King Loc, in a gruff voice.

Now it happened that these steps of the dwarfs adjoined a deserted stone quarry less than a mile from the castle of Clarides.

“This young lad,” King Loc murmured as he went on his way, “has neither the wisdom nor the wealth of the dwarfs. Truly I cannot imagine why Honey-Bee loves him, unless it is because he is young, handsome, faithful and brave.”

As he went back to the town he laughed to himself as a man does who has done some one a good turn. As he passed Honey-Bee’s cottage he thrust his big head into the open window just as he had thrust it into the crystal tunnel, and he saw the young girl, who was embroidering a veil with silver flowers.

“I wish you joy, Honey-Bee,” he cried.

“And you also, little King Loc, seeing you have nothing to wish for and nothing to regret.”

He had much to wish for, but, indeed, he had nothing to regret. And it was probably this which

gave him such a good appetite for supper. Having eaten a huge number of truffled pheasants he called Bob.

“Bob,” said he, “mount your raven ; go to the Princess of the Dwarfs and tell her that George of Blanchelande, long a captive of the nixies, has this day returned to Clarides.”

Thus he spoke and Bob flew off on his raven.

XIX

Which tells of the extraordinary encounter of Jean the master tailor, and of the blessed song the birds in the grove sang to the duchess



WHEN George again found himself on the earth on which he was born, the very first person he met was Jean, the master tailor, with a red suit of clothes on his arm for the steward of the castle. The good man shrieked at sight of his young master.

“Holy St. James,” he cried, “if you are not his lordship George of Blanchelande who was drowned in the lake seven years ago, you are either his ghost or the devil in person.”

“I am neither ghost nor devil, good Jean, but I am truly that same George of Blanchelande who used to creep to your shop and beg bits of stuff out of which to make dresses for the dolls of my sister Honey-Bee.”

“Then you were not drowned, your lordship,”

the good man exclaimed. "I am so glad! And how well you look. My little Peter who climbed into my arms to see you pass on horseback by the side of the Duchess that Sunday morning has become a good workman and a fine fellow. He is all of that, God be praised, your lordship. He will be glad to hear that you are not at the bottom of the sea, and that the fish have not eaten you as he always declared. He was in the habit of saying many pleasant things about it, your lordship, for he is very amusing. And it is a fact that you are much mourned in Clarides. You were such a promising child. I shall remember to my dying day how you once asked me for a needle to sew with, and as I refused, for you were not of an age to use it without danger, you replied you would go to the woods and pick beautiful green pine needles. That is what you said, and it still makes me laugh. Upon my soul you said that. Our little Peter, also, used to say clever things. Now he is a cooper and at your service, your lordship."

"I shall employ no one else. But give me news of Honey-Bee and the Duchess, Master Jean."

"Alack, where do you come from, your lordship, seeing that you do not know that it is now seven years since the Princess Honey-Bee was stolen by the dwarfs of the mountain? She disappeared the very day you were drowned; and one can truly say

that on that day Clarides lost its sweetest flowers. The Duchess is in deep mourning. And it's that which makes me say that the great of the earth have their sorrows just as well as the humblest artisans, if only to prove that we are all the sons of Adam. And because of this a cat may well look at a king, as the saying is. And by the same token the good Duchess has seen her hair grow white and her gaiety vanish. And when in the springtime she walks in her black robes along the hedgerow where the birds sing, the smallest of these is more to be envied than the sovereign lady of Clarides. And yet her grief is not quite without hope, your lordship; for though she has had no tidings of you, she at least knows by dreams that her daughter Honey-Bee is alive."

This and much else said good man Jean, but George listened no longer after he heard that Honey-Bee was a captive among the dwarfs.

"The dwarfs hold Honey-Bee captive under the earth," he pondered; "a dwarf rescued me from my crystal dungeon; these little men have not all the same customs; my deliverer cannot be of the same race as those who stole my sister."

He knew not what to think except that he must rescue Honey-Bee.

In the meantime they crossed the town, and on their way the gossips standing on the thresholds of their houses asked each other who

was this young stranger, but they all agreed that he was very handsome. The better informed amongst them, having recognised the young lord of Blanchelande, decided that it must be his ghost, wherefore they fled, making great signs of the cross.

“He must be sprinkled with holy water,” said one old crone, “and he will vanish leaving a disgusting smell of sulphur. He will carry away Master Jean, and he will of course plunge him alive into the fire of hell.”

“Softly! old woman,” a citizen replied, “his lordship is alive and much more alive than you or I. He is as fresh as a rose, and he looks as if he had come from some noble court rather than from the other world. One does return from afar, good dame. As witness Francœur the squire who came back from Rome last midsummer day.”

And Margaret the helmet-maker, having greatly admired George, mounted to her maiden chamber and kneeling before the image of the Holy Virgin prayed, “Holy Virgin, grant me a husband who shall look precisely like this young lord.”

So each in his way talked of George's return until the news spread from mouth to mouth and finally reached the ears of the Duchess who was walking in the orchard. Her heart beat violently

and she heard all the birds in the hedge-row sing :

“Cui, cui, cui,
 Oui, oui, oui,
 Georges de Blanchelande,
 Cui, cui, cui.
 Dont vous avez nourri l'enfance
 Cui, cui, cui,
 Est ici, est ici, est ici !
 Oui, oui, oui.”

Francœur approached her respectfully and said :

“Your Grace, George de Blanchelande whom you thought dead has returned. I shall make it into a song.”

In the meantime the birds sang :

“Cucui, cui, i, cui, cui, cui,
 Oui, oui, oui, oui, oui, oui,
 Il est ici, ici, ici, ici, ici, ici.”

And when she saw the child who had been to her as a son, she opened her arms and fell senseless at his feet.

Which treats of a little satin shoe

EVERYBODY in Clarides was quite convinced that Honey-Bee had been stolen by the dwarfs. Even the Duchess believed it, though her dreams did not tell her precisely.

“We will find her again,” said George.

“We will find her again,” replied Francœur.

“And we will bring her back to her mother,” said George.

“And we will bring her back,” replied Francœur.

“And we will marry her,” said George.

“And we will marry her,” replied Francœur.

And they inquired among the inhabitants as to the habits of the dwarfs and the mysterious circumstances of Honey-Bee’s disappearance.

And so it happened that they questioned Nurse Maurille who had once been the nurse of the Duchess of Clarides; but now as she had no more milk for babies Maurille instead nursed the chickens

in the poultry yard. It was there that the master and squire found her. She cried: "Psit! Psit! psit! psit! lil—lil—lil—lil—psit—psit, psit, psit!" as she threw grain to the chicks.

"Psit, psit, psit, psit! Is it you, your lordship? Psit, psit, psit! Is it possible that you have grown so tall—psit! and so handsome? Psit, psit! Shoo! shoo! shoo! Just look at that fat one there eating the little one's portion! Shoo, shoo, shoo! The way of the world, your lordship. Riches go to the rich, lean ones grow leaner, while the fat ones grow fatter. There's no justice on earth! What can I do for you my lord? May I offer you each a glass of beer?"

"We will accept it gladly, Maurille, and I must embrace you because you nursed the mother of her whom I love best on earth."

"That's true, my lord, my foster child cut her first tooth at the age of six months and fourteen days. On which occasion the deceased duchess made me a present. She did indeed."

"Now, Maurille, tell us all you know about the dwarfs who carried away Honey-Bee."

"Alas, my lord, I know nothing of the dwarfs who carried her away. And how can you expect an old woman like me to know anything? It's ages ago since I forgot the little I ever knew, and I haven't even enough memory left to remember

where I put my spectacles. Sometimes I look for them when they're on my nose. Try this drink ; it's fresh."

"Here's to your health, Maurille ; but I was told that your husband knew something about the disappearance of Honey-Bee."

"That's true, your lordship. Though he never was taught anything he learnt a great deal in the pot-houses and the taverns. And he never forgot anything. Why if he were alive now and sitting at this table he could tell you stories until to-morrow. He used to tell me so many that they quite muddled my head and even now I can't tell the tail of one from the head of the other. That's true, your lordship."

Indeed, it was true, for the head of the old nurse could only be compared to a cracked soup-pot. It was with the greatest difficulty that George and Francœur got anything good out of it. Finally, however, by means of much repetition they did extract a tale which began somewhat as follows :

"It's seven years ago, your lordship, the very day you and Honey-Bee went on that frolic from which neither of you ever returned. My deceased husband went up the mountain to sell a horse. That's the truth. He fed the beast with a good peck of oats soaked in cider to give him a firm leg and a brilliant eye ; he took him to market near the mountain.

He had no cause to regret his oats or his cider, for he sold his horse for a much better price. Beasts are like human beings; one judges them by their appearance. My deceased husband was so rejoiced at his good stroke of business that he invited his friends to drink with him, and glass in hand he drank to their health.

“You must know, your lordship, that there wasn’t a man in all Clarides could equal my husband when glass in hand he drank to the health of his friends. So much so that on that day, after a number of such compliments, when he returned alone at twilight he took the wrong road for the reason that he could not recognise the right one. Finding himself near a cavern he saw as distinctly as possible, considering his condition and the hour, a crowd of little men carrying a girl or a boy on a litter. He ran away for fear of ill-luck; for the wine had not robbed him of prudence. But at some distance from the cavern he dropped his pipe, and on stooping to pick it up he picked up instead a little satin shoe. When he was in a good humour he used to amuse himself by saying, ‘It’s the first time a pipe has changed into a shoe.’ And as it was the shoe of a little girl he decided that she who had lost it in the forest was the one who had been carried away by the dwarfs and that it was this he had seen. He was about to put the shoe into his pocket when a crowd of little

men in hoods pounced down on him and gave him such a thrashing that he lay there quite stunned."

"Maurille! Maurille!" cried George, "it's Honey-Bee's shoe. Give it to me and I will kiss it a thousand times. It shall rest for ever on my heart, and when I die it shall be buried with me."

"As you please, your lordship; but where will you find it? The dwarfs took it away from my poor husband and he always thought that they only gave him such a sound thrashing because he wanted to put it in his pocket to show to the magistrates. He used to say when he was in a good humour——"

"Enough—enough! Only tell me the name of the cavern!"

"It is called the cavern of the dwarfs, your lordship, and very well named too. My deceased husband——"

"Not another word, Maurille! But you. Francœur, do you know where this cavern is?"

"Your lordship," replied Francœur as he emptied the pot of beer, "you would certainly know it if you knew my songs better. I have written at least a dozen about this cavern, and I've described it without even forgetting a single sprig of moss. I venture to say, your lordship, that of these dozen songs, six are of great merit. And even the other six

are not to be despised. I will sing you one or two. . . .”

“Francœur,” cried George, “we will take possession of this cavern of the dwarfs and rescue Honey-Bee.”

“Of course we shall !” replied Francœur.

XXI

In which a perilous adventure is described



THAT night when all were asleep George and Francœur crept into the lower hall in search of weapons. Lances, swords, dirks, broadswords, hunting-knives and daggers glittered under the time-stained rafters—everything necessary to kill both man and brute. A complete suit of armour stood upright under each beam in an attitude as resolute and proud as if it were still filled with the soul of the brave man it had once decked for mighty adventures. The gauntlet grasped the lance in its ten iron fingers, while the shield rested against the plates of the greaves as if to prove that prudence is necessary to courage, and that the best fighter is armed as well for defence as for attack.

From among all these suits of armour George chose the one that Honey-Bee's father had worn as far away as the isles of Avalon and Thule. He donned it with the aid of Francœur, nor did he forget the

shield on which was emblazoned the golden sun of Clarides. As for Francœur, he put on a good old steel coat of mail of his grandfather's and on his head a casque of a bygone time, to which he attached a ragged and moth-eaten tuft or plume. This he chose merely as a matter of fancy and to give himself an air of rejoicing, for, as he justly reasoned, gaiety, which is good under every circumstance, is especially so in the face of great dangers.

Having thus armed themselves they passed under the light of the moon into the dark open country. Francœur had fastened the horses on the edge of a little grove near the postern, and there he found them nibbling at the bark of the bushes; they were swift steeds, and it took them less than an hour to reach the mountain of the dwarfs, through a crowd of goblins and phantoms.

“Here is the cave,” said Francœur.

Master and man dismounted and, sword in hand, penetrated into the cavern. It required great courage to attempt such an adventure; but George was in love and Francœur was faithful, and this was a case in which one could say with the most delightful of poets:

“What may not friendship do with Love for guide!”

Master and man had trudged through the gloom for nearly an hour when they were astonished to see

a brilliant light. It was one of the meteors which we know illumines the kingdom of the dwarfs. By the light of this subterranean luminary they discovered that they were standing at the foot of an ancient castle.

“This,” said George, “is the castle we must capture.”

“To be sure,” said Francœur; “but first permit me to drink a few drops of this wine which I brought with me as a precaution, because the better the wine the better the man, and the better the man the better the lance, the better the lance the less dangerous the enemy.”

George, seeing no living soul, struck the hilt of his sword sharply against the door of the castle. He looked up at the sound of a little tremulous voice, and he saw at one of the windows a little old man with a long beard, who asked :

“Who are you ? ”

“George of Blanchelande.”

“And what do you want ? ”

“I have come to deliver Honey-Bee of Clarides whom you unjustly hold captive in your mole-hill, hideous little moles that you are ! ”

The dwarf disappeared and again George was left alone with Francœur who said to him :

“Your lordship, possibly I may exaggerate if I remark that in your answer to the dwarf you have

not quite exhausted all the persuasive powers of eloquence."

Francœur was afraid of nothing, but he was old ; his heart like his head was polished by age, and he disliked to offend people.

As for George he stormed and clamoured at the top of his voice.

"Vile dwellers in the earth, moles, badgers, dormice, ferrets, and water-rats, open the door and I'll cut off all your ears."

But hardly had he uttered these words when the bronze door of the castle slowly opened of itself, for no one could be seen pushing back its enormous wings.

George was seized with terror and yet he sprang through the mysterious door because his courage was even greater than his terror. Entering the courtyard he saw that all the windows, the galleries, the roofs, the gables, the skylights, and even the chimney-pots, were crowded with dwarfs armed with bows and cross-bows.

He heard the bronze door close behind him and suddenly a shower of arrows fell thick and fast on his head and shoulders, and for the second time he was filled with a great fear, and for the second time he conquered his fear.

Sword in hand and his shield on his arm he mounted the steps until suddenly he perceived on

the very highest, a majestic dwarf who stood there in serene dignity, gold sceptre in hand and wearing the royal crown and the purple mantle. And in this dwarf he recognised the little man who had delivered him out of his crystal dungeon.

Thereupon he threw himself at his feet and cried weeping :

“O my benefactor, who are you? Are you one of those who have robbed me of Honey-Bee, whom I love?”

“I am King Loc,” replied the dwarf. “I have kept Honey Bee with me to teach her the wisdom of the dwarfs. Child, you have fallen into my kingdom like a hail-storm in a garden of flowers. But the dwarfs less weak than men are never angered as are they. My intelligence raises me too high above you for me to resent your actions whatever they are. And of all the attributes that render me superior to you that which I guard most jealously is justice. Honey-Bee shall be brought before me and I will ask her if she wishes to follow you. This I do, not because you desire it, but because I must.”

A great silence ensued and Honey-Bee appeared attired all in white and with flowing golden hair. No sooner did she see George than she ran and threw herself in his arms and clasped his iron breast with all her strength.

Then King Loc said to her :

“Honey-Bee, is it true that this is the man you wish to marry?”

“It is true, very true that this is he, little King Loc,” replied Honey-Bee. “See, all you little men, how I laugh and how happy I am.”

And she began to weep. Her tears fell on her lover’s face, but they were tears of joy; and with them were mingled tiny bursts of laughter and a thousand endearing words without sense, like the lisp of a little child. She quite forgot that the sight of her joy might sadden the heart of King Loc.

“My beloved,” said George, “I find you again such as I had longed for: the fairest and dearest of beings. You love me! Thank heaven, you love me! But, Honey-Bee, do you not also love King Loc a little, who delivered me out of the glass dungeon in which the nixies held me captive far away from you?”

Honey-Bee turned to King Loc.

“Little King Loc, and did you do this?” she cried. “You loved me, and yet you rescued the one I love and who loves me——”

Words failed her and she fell on her knees, her head in her hands.

All the little men who witnessed this scene deluged their cross-bows with tears. Only King Loc remained serene. And Honey-Bee, overcome by his

magnanimity and his goodness, felt for him the love of a daughter for a father.

She took her lover's hand.

"George," she said, "I love you. God knows how much I love you. But how can I leave little King Loc?"

"Hallo, there?" King Loc cried in a terrible voice, "now you are my prisoners!"

But this terrible voice he only used for fun and just as a joke, for he really was not at all angry. Here Francœur approached and knelt before him.

"Sire," he cried, "may it please your Majesty to let me share the captivity of the masters I serve?"

Said Honey-Bee, recognising him :

"Is it you, my good Francœur? How glad I am to see you again. What a horrid cap you've got on! Tell me, have you composed any new songs?"

And King Loc took them all three to dinner.

XXII

In which all ends well



THE next morning Honey-Bee, George and Francœur again arrayed themselves in the splendid garments prepared for them by the dwarfs, and proceeded to the banquet hall where, as he had promised, King Loc in the robes of an Emperor soon joined them. He was followed by his officers fully armed, and covered with furs of barbarous magnificence, and in their helmets the wings of swans. Crowds of hurrying dwarfs came in through the windows, the air-holes and the chimneys, and rolled under the benches.

King Loc mounted a stone table one end of which was laden with flagons, candelabra, tankards, and cups of gold of marvellous workmanship. He signed to Honey-Bee and to George to approach.

“Honey-Bee,” he said, “by a law of the nation of the dwarfs it is decreed that a stranger received in our midst shall be free after seven years. You have

been with us seven years, Honey-Bee, and I should be a disloyal citizen and a blameworthy king should I keep you longer. But before permitting you to go I wish, not having been able to wed you myself, to betroth you to the one you have chosen. I do so with joy for I love you more than I love myself, and my pain, if such remains, is like a little cloud which your happiness will dispel. Honey-Bee of Clarides, Princess of the Dwarfs, give me your hand, and you George of Blanchelande, give me yours."

Placing the hand of George in the hand of Honey-Bee he turned to his people and said with a ringing voice :

"Little men, my children, you bear witness that these two pledge themselves to marry one another on earth. They shall go back together and together help courage, modesty, and fidelity, to blossom as roses, pinks, and peonies bloom for good gardeners."

At these words the dwarfs burst into a mighty shout, but not knowing if they ought to grieve or to rejoice, they were torn by conflicting emotions.

King Loc, again turning to the lovers, said as he pointed to the flagons, the tankards, all the beautiful art of the goldsmith :

"Behold the gifts of the dwarfs. Take them, Honey-Bee, they will remind you of your little friends. It is their gift to you, not mine. What

I am about to give you you shall know before long."

A lengthy silence ensued.

With an expression sublime in its tenderness, King Loc gazed at Honey-Bee, whose beautiful and radiant head, crowned by roses, rested on her lover's shoulder.

Then he continued:

"My children, it is not enough to love passionately; you must also love well. A passionate love is good doubtless, but a beautiful love is better. May you have as much strength as gentleness; may it lack nothing, not even forbearance, and let even a little compassion be mingled with it. You are young, fair and good; but you are human, and because of this capable of much suffering. If then something of compassion does not enter into the feelings you have one for the other, these feelings will not always befit all the circumstances of your life together; they will be like festive robes that will not shield you from wind and rain. We love truly only those we love even in their weakness and their poverty. To forbear, to forgive, to console, that alone is the science of love."

Good
Layton

King Loc paused, seized by a gentle but strong emotion.

"My children," he then continued; "may you be happy; guard your happiness well, guard it well."

While he addressed them Pic, Tad, Dig, Bob, Truc, and Pau clung to Honey-Bee's white mantle and covered her hands and arms with kisses and they implored her not to leave them. Thereupon King Loc took from his girdle a ring set with a glittering gem. It was the magic ring which had unclosed the dungeon of the nixies. He placed it on Honey-Bee's finger.

"Honey-Bee," he said, "receive from my hand this ring which will permit you, you and your husband, to enter at any hour the kingdom of the dwarfs. You will be welcomed with joy and succoured at need. In return teach the children that will be yours not to despise the little men, so innocent and industrious, who dwell under the earth."

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