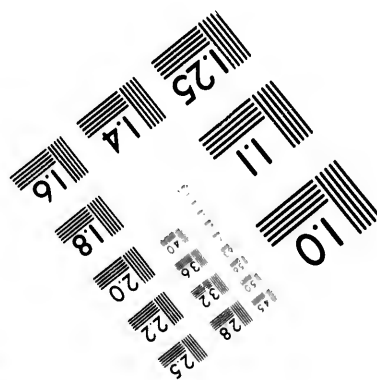
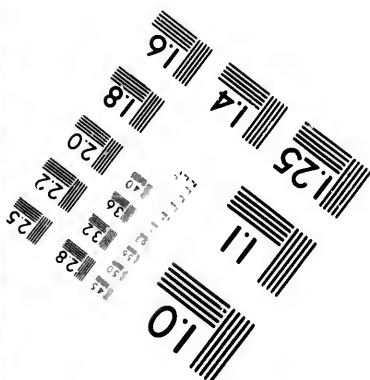
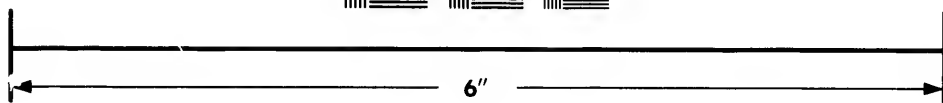
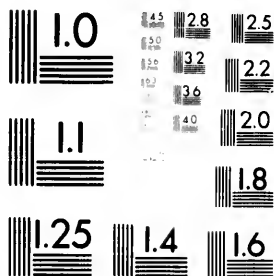


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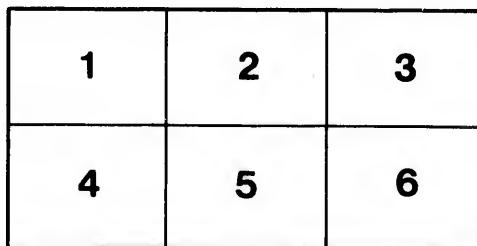
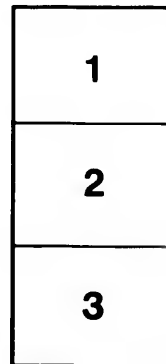
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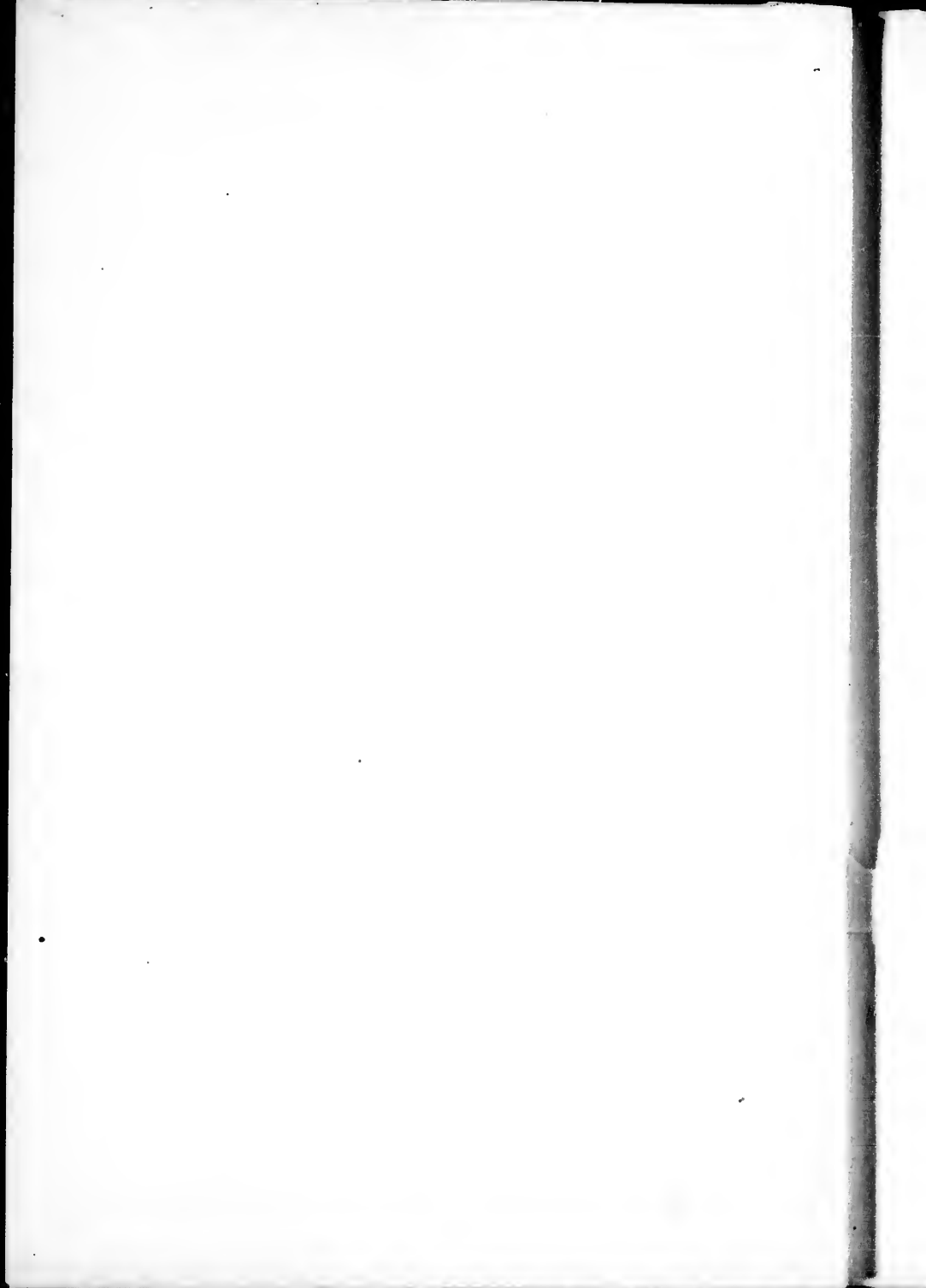
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THE  
SCHOOL FOR SAINTS

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PART OF THE HISTORY OF  
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
ROBERT ORANGE, M.P.

BY  
JOHN OLIVER HOBBS.

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*'Buona è la signoria d'Amore, però che trae l'ontendimento del suo fedele da tutte le vili cose. . . . Non buona è la signoria d'Amore, perchè quanto lo suo fedele più fede gli porta, tanto più gravi e dolorosi punti gli conviene passare.'*—DANTE, VITA NUOVA XIII.

*'The lordship of Love is good, in that it withdraweth the inclination of his liegeman from all vile things. . . . The lordship of Love is not good, because the more fidelity his liegeman beareth to him, so much the heavier and more grievous trials he must needs endure.'*—VITA NUOVA.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

**THE** story of Orange's married life, of his literary and political life in 1870-1880, of his friendship with Disraeli, and of his career in the Church will be told in a subsequent volume.

# The School for Saints

## CHAPTER I

ROBERT ORANGE spent his childhood in an ancient fortress built high on a great rock on the northern coast of France. When he grew to be a lad, he used to climb up on the ramparts and look toward the land he had never seen, yet which he knew well was his own country. The stern, immutable building in which he lived had been, in glorious days, the feudal stronghold of a grand Seigneur. Its gabled roof and lofty chimneys, where pigeons built their nests, towered above the town-walls, and frowned at the rosy rising of the sun. Now it belonged to Robert's god-mother—a banker's widow and a good soul—who, it was said, had a large fortune and no heir-at-law. She kept geraniums and marigolds on her balcony in the spring-time, and her little *salon*, with its white panelling and water-colour sketches, its gilt chairs and volumes of unread Lamartine, was called by priests and warriors a paradise. But to the boy who loved Homer, and *Amadis of Gaul*, and *Le Morte*

*d'Arthur*, it seemed insipid. He would steal away to a desolate lower chamber where the dim drama on the fading tapestries passed into his own experience and seemed his real life : that, lived in company, was, in comparison, a grotesque dream. On his eighteenth birthday, his god-mother prepared a large oppressive supper of food out of season, to which all the rich, all the amiable and all the pious of her acquaintance were invited. The guests, who were mostly of ripe years, enjoyed the evening to excess, ate and drank with easy stomachs, and played cards till daybreak. They toasted the youth, and many brought him gifts ; but he felt that he was feasting with gaolers in a prison, and he had no thought in common with his blessing friends. This sense of alienation from those he wished to love produced a melancholy as profound as it was inevitable. On the morning after the festival, he went—although he was a Protestant—to the Altar of Our Lady in the Cathedral, and at her feet laid some hawthorn boughs which he had gathered from the hedges, far outside the town, in silent lanes. He said a prayer and wept because he carried such a burden of ingratitude on his soul. An abbé surprised him in tears, and asked him the cause.

‘I feel a stranger,’ said Robert, ‘and a fool!’

‘You must remember,’ said the abbé, kindly, ‘that you are a poet.’ He had read some of his verses. Then he passed on, for there was an old rich rascal waiting close at hand to make his confession.

Robert left the church and walked out toward the ramparts. The massive gateway and encircling walls struck a chill to his passionate soul. Once more he climbed the stony fortress and saw the sights, heard the sounds which had formed so far his sentimental education. Deeper than any dogma, stronger than his artistic craving for beauty, was the Puritan instinct for health and neatness which belonged to his English blood. The stifling streets, where poverty and uncleanliness festered into disease; the parched malodorous gardens; the tawdry rooms disclosed here and there by a swaying shutter; the garbage heaps; the tinkling of untuned pianos; the scolding of shrews and the crying of children, all mingled together to give one hideous impression of humanity. The town seemed a dungeon where his spirit suffered, starved, and neither the azure sky nor the gilded sun-path on the sea, nor the unmeasured yellow sands, nor the remote grandeur of the great horizon, could distract his mind from memories of the unilluminated past. All things presented themselves to his imagination in some forbidding aspect. The Virtues were gaunt mothers, lean and unloving. The Graces were harlots. The Muses were spectral witches who taught madness. Then he remembered the tales he had been told of the vast forests under the sea reaching even to Spain—the forests which had once been a kingdom. Wonderful story, and perhaps all true! For, not more than two centuries ago, at low tide an old man had seen the



very tree-tops. That mysterious kingdom was the dearest possession of the boy's heart. It was unknown, and, better than all, never to be known. But that day, as he stood wondering what he should do with the gift of existence, he seemed to hear a singing which mingled with the sound of the waves. Was there a quire of birds in that forest under the sea? They sang songs of the land, and the stars and earthly love. And the singing mixed with the air till he seemed to breathe it.

'What folly,' he exclaimed at the notion; 'what folly!' and laughed aloud.

Flushed and confused, he turned on his heel toward the town, and there, standing in the path, he saw a little strange old woman, with a pale luminous face and grey hair. She dropped him a curtsy, and smiled.

'It is a beautiful country,' she said, pointing with her bony hand toward the open sea.

The youth followed her gesture with his gaze, and stood looking with her at the great sheet of water before them, which rose and fell as though it lay on the sleeping heart of the universe.

Presently she pointed to the west.

'Do you see Miraflores over there?' she asked.

'No,' said Robert, who was thinking of that castle of Miraflores *'about two leagues from London, a little place, but the pleasantest abode in all that land, in a wood by the side of a mountain, surrounded with orchards and gardens that abounded with fruits and flowers. Foun-*

*tains were there in the courts canopied with trees, that all the year round bore flower and fruit.' (Amadis of Gaul.)*

'No,' said he, drawing a long sigh. 'I don't see Miraflores.'

'Yes, you do,' she said; 'it is where the trees are so dense and the smoke is rising. Look again!'

He looked again.

'I see smoke rising,' he answered, 'and I see trees.'

'A lady lives there all alone,' said the old woman, 'a young, beautiful lady—the greatest singer, they say, in Europe. But someone made her sad, and so she sings no more. She should have had more courage. For my husband was drowned, and my three sons were drowned, and I still make lace as I did when I was a girl, and I had neither husband nor sons. So long as I have myself I have not lost everything. One should not ask for too much.'

'Are you a lace-maker?' said Robert.

She nodded her head.

'I have sold a flounce to the lady at Miraflores,' said she. 'I was twenty years making it, and it is as fine as a mist. But now I have sold it I am lonely, for all the thoughts I have thought, and all the love I felt, and all the happiness I used to dream of, are there. And I wish I could buy it back again. It will cure her sorrow, but I shall die, monsieur. I am too old to sell life. For my lace is my life—all spun out of my soul. There is no time now for me

to begin another flounce like that. Oh, it was so beautiful!

She closed her eyes, but unrestrainable, irrevocable tears escaped and drenched her face. Without a further word she passed on and crept down the stone stairs of the ramparts into the close, dark market-place below, where they were selling pigs. Robert found himself looking with curiosity toward Miraflores. Who was this singer who sang no more? What was her name? On the sand beneath him a young fisherman whom he knew sat cleaning a boat.

‘I will row to Miraflores,’ thought Robert.

‘The white entrance to the park of Miraflores stood’—so we read in Orange’s Journal—‘at the end of a long avenue of young oaks, on either side of which little cows of a delicate breed fed on wild flowers and verdure. The villa stood on a pine-wooded hill rising out of a river, facing the rocky sea-coast and a fair harbour. Its grounds were rich with timber and pathless stretches of green, where marguerites, feathery colza, red clover and a hundred waving grasses grew in miraculous plenty. There was no garden, but there were winding alleys through the park leading to peeps of sea, land and sky, which, seen through the framework of trees, seemed fairy visions. Surely the birds at Miraflores for ever sang, the sun for ever shone, the breeze was the perpetual honied breath of an eternal summer. To imagine

Miraflores in a storm or in the winter was impossible : it were easier to believe that it might fade away and disappear like some enchanter's tower, or melt like the radiant clouds which sometimes lend a brief tenderness to the bleak crags of an everlasting mountain. A small chapel surrounded by palm trees stood in the wood not far from a cluster of magnificent firs, in the centre of which one could suppose an altar had once burned to some Pagan deity. And near this was a levelled terrace in the Roman style, with stone benches, and a railing heavy with vines. What flattering hours could be spent there with the scent of pines and roses in the air, and at one's feet, flowing out to the sea, the cool blue river, where, like giant butterflies, boats with white sails floated idly or waited for the breeze. Here there were no memories of wild deeds done in the past to terrify the soul or make the evening shadows horridly vivid. No grave was sacred to the woe of unhappy loves ; no tree marked the spot where a hero met death, or a faithless mistress kept her tryst ; no ancient gateway told the tale of a siege ; no broken urn nor fallen tower nor moss-grown god brought dismal meditations to the mind. Miraflores had no history—it was all new—all fresh ; each day the sun seemed to rise for the first time on a just-created earth. There were no yesterdays and no to-morrows. The snow of former years, the lilies of years to come, could neither bury laughter nor sweeten tears. Time seemed a never-

ending present, too bright-ethereal to need the radiance of hope, or to be darkened by the forebodings of experience.'

It was in the month of May when Robert came to Miraflores. He rowed from the sea to the river, and, mooring his boat to a post, climbed up the hill seeking he knew not what. And after wandering through a wood, he beheld, on the terrace far above him, a woman reading. She was dressed all in white, with a lace fichu crossed over her breast, and her flaxen hair half hidden under a large straw hat. Robert stood trembling—wholly unable to advance or to retreat: his tongue speechless, yet melodies ineffable in his heart. He looked at the vision and said to himself,—

'It is an apparition! It will pass!'

The woman spoke first.

'Why did you come?' she asked; 'are you a stranger?'

'Yes.'

'You may rest here,' she said, 'but it is well known in the neighbourhood that this place is a retreat. It belongs to a recluse.'

'I meant no intrusion,' he replied. 'It was an impulse. I will go away.'

The woman smiled.

'You are a handsome boy,' said she; 'you may stay a little while and talk to me. Who are you? What is your name?'

'My name is Robert.'

'Robert—what?'

'Orange.'

'Are we compatriots?'

'In the City of God—yes.'

'Where is that?'

'The City of God is the world as God sees it!'

said Robert.

She looked at him with deep amazement.

'What are you?' she asked.

'Nothing,' said Robert.

'What are you hoping to be?'

'A poet.'

'The world wants a statesman,' said the woman.

'I have thought of that, too.'

'Then be a statesman,' she said quietly.

'I have too small a fortune. I must make money first.'

'Why not marry it? That's much quicker.'

He curled his lips. 'I have certain ideals,' said he.

'Lord!' said she, 'so far as that goes I had 'em myself at your age. You are a dear silly boy, and I am quite fond of you—because you are just like me. I couldn't marry money even now. I am one of those fools of women who go about falling in love first with this poor devil and then with that! But don't listen to me—or any one of us. We give such bad advice. You must travel.'

'Where?'

‘Everywhere. This Old World is now mere literature—nothing else. It is the best of all possible libraries. But if you want drama—if you want to see the stuff that life and history are made of—you must cross the Atlantic. I have been eight times to the United States.’

‘I was once in Paris,’ said Robert.

‘How did you spend your time there?’

‘I used to walk out to Versailles.’

‘Hear the little Cherub!’ she exclaimed. ‘But I love Versailles. When it has been forgotten for fifty years it will be perfect. I hope you went to the hotel, and had luncheon on the terrace. I have been there often.’

‘I took my luncheon with me,’ said Robert. ‘I cannot afford hotels. But I went all over the palace. It is splendid, glittering, regal. It is the architectural emblem of state-craft. It was built by a king for kings; it is now a holiday-house where any poor-poet, or any good bourgeois and his family, may enjoy their Sunday afternoons.’

‘Clearly,’ said the woman, ‘you were born for politics.’

‘But tell me about yourself,’ said Robert.

‘I am older than you are,’ she said. ‘I am four-and-twenty.’

‘Does that matter?’ said the boy. ‘I want to know your name?’

‘My name is—’

She paused, and wrote something on a page which she tore from her book. She threw it over the railing and it fell at his feet. Picking it up, he read the following,—

‘Henriette Marie-Joseph Duboc—known professionally as Madame Duboc.’

‘But—why *Madame?*’ asked Robert, turning pale.

‘That’s nothing,’ she replied briefly; ‘but it is more convenient—when one is travelling. I am not married. . . . Are you supposed to look like your mother, Innocence?’

‘I do not know. She is dead.’

‘Do you live with your father?’

‘No—with my god-mother.’

‘And you are poor?’

‘I must work for my living.’

‘You must come again,’ she said, ‘and tell me more about your ambition. I am always here.’

‘May I come to-morrow?’

‘Perhaps.’

‘And are you always alone?’

‘Alone—always.’

‘Angel!’ he exclaimed.

‘Don’t be foolish. I love sincerity. Flattery wounds me.’

‘You are the most beautiful woman in the world!’

‘Hear him!’ She appealed to heaven and the trees.

‘May I worship you—from afar?’

She smiled coldly and said, ‘Ah, yes!’



'May I kiss your hand—both your hands?'

'No.' She held them down.

'I shall come to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow!'

'No,' she said, 'no. You must not. I am not free.'

'Not free?'

His look terrified her. She swayed and trembled: finally summoned all her power of truth in order to give him perfectly the lie he begged for.

'I mean—I am my own prisoner.'

He threw his hat into the air and caught it.

'Never tell me again that you are not free. *Not free*—what ill-omened words! We were predestined for each other before the beginning of the world. I have no doubt of it.'

The calm scene, the quiet air, the murmuring of doves in the distance, worked like a spell. It was not heaven opening, but a vision of earth. He would have enjoyed it irresponsibly—accepting it as a due. But to the woman it was a promise—a blessing dependent on certain conditions.

'You must work,' she said; 'for your age you have done well. But you must do better.'

'I hope so,' said the youth.

'If you come to-morrow, when may I expect you?'

'At this hour.'

'The view,' she replied, 'is even clearer in the morning.'

'Then I shall come in the morning. But not to see the view.'

'Now you may go home and forget me.'

'My destiny!' he cried, and held out his arms.

'If you follow that path,' she said, 'it leads up here!'

'There—where you are standing?'

'I think so.'

'It is quicker to climb.'

'There is plenty of time,' said Henriette.

'True. Why should an immortal soul be impatient? There is all eternity before us!'

He had now one foot on the railing. Another second, and he was standing by her side. But with this nearness he felt a fear.

'I am afraid of you,' he said, at once.

'Why,' asked Henriette.

'I don't know why.'

She wore on a chain round her neck a little trinket. It was a single ruby set in pearls.

'Take this,' she said, 'and I belong to it. It means love and tears.' But before he could speak or thank her for that dear yet terrible gift, she glided away and he dared not follow.

In his boy's nature, passion still lay profoundly dormant, but in its place he felt that infinite vague longing of the soul for an answering voice. What to him had been the nightingale's note or the coming of May or the blue pinions of a night in June?

What to him were reveries at evening or the murmuring serenades of the summer sea! Had he not been alone and solitary—companionless, misunderstanding and misunderstood? But now it was all changed. It seemed as though his spirit had mixed and mingled with the sanguine springs and sacred flames of life. The emanations of ideal beauty which float upon the surface of the earth now seemed one with his own being. It was all his—all part of himself—the sunshine, the ecstasy, the illimitable illusions of land and ether. His soul was swayed by the music of the spheres; and, swinging with the planets in their course, he saw the stars dance, he followed the eagle's flight. He was no longer a stranger in the world—no longer a wandering outcast. Had he not heard the secret language of the gods, and tasted the unforgettable sweetness of love's first rapture? His happiness lay too deep for song; even the splash of his oars on the water disturbed the peace of that entralling hour.

It was late when he reached home. His god-mother, as he entered the house, peeped, in her little frilled night-cap, over the staircase.

'I have put your supper by your bedside,' said she; 'but if you want cider you must fetch it from the cellar.'

He kissed his hand to her, and waited till he heard the last echo of her footsteps in the corridor. Then

he crept noiselessly to bed, where, with a wild sob of supreme relief, of a gladness so great that it weighed upon his heart like grief, he fell asleep. He dreamt that he went to Miraflores on the morrow. It seemed a still sunnier day. The sea and the river were dazzling; the birds sang; the path was pink with fallen hawthorn blossoms; Henriette wore a rosy gown. She was beautiful, smiling and tranquil. He noticed that her eyes were not, as he had at first supposed, dark blue. They were hazel.

For some moments neither of them spoke. They were too happy.

‘Of course,’ said Henriette, touching his face with her fingers suddenly, ‘this cannot last.’

‘Why remind me of that?’ he asked; ‘you may as well say it will rain some day. One knows these things. They do not matter. The rain, on the other hand, does not rain for ever. Be philosophical.’

‘This is not philosophy—this is drifting.’

‘Then why not drift?’

‘Very well,’ said she.

‘Would you be willing to live in England?’ he observed.

‘With you—yes.’

He took her hand, and again they plunged together into silence. Presently he explained the simple scheme of their perfect future. He wound up by saying,—

‘What do you think?’

'I agree with all you say.'

'Darling!'

Her eyes filled with tears. 'Oh, that it were possible! But this is all mockery, dear love. We see each other as we are not; we talk of life as it can never be.'

'This is not mockery, and it must be,' he declared; 'life is not what we find it, but what we make it.'

She wept, shook her head and repeated,—

'Oh, that it were possible!'

'Speak plainer, my heart. Why is it impossible?'

'I am very sorry,' she added quickly, 'that I wore my best clothes and sat on the terrace yesterday. None of this need have happened. It is such a pity!'

'We should not have met,' said Robert, quietly, 'if it was all to end in bitterness or nothing. I can never love anyone else.'

'I believe you,' she said simply.

In the joy of her presence he could not measure his desolation—his despair.

'I shall thank God every night and morning of my life hereafter for giving me the love of you,' said he. 'I shall love you for ever and ever, Henriette.'

'Why make rash vows? You do not ask me to promise anything?'

'Be yourself—always.'

He set his face toward the sea which called him hence—not with unkindness but with a solemn warning.

'No, no!' said Henriette, 'I cannot send you away! I cannot spare you! I cannot say good-bye!'

She looked, as she spoke, not at him, but at the boat on the beach below.

'I cannot say good-bye,' she repeated, and sank down weeping bitterly. 'I can't! I can't! I have had so much trouble. Don't ask me to bear more. I know this is a fairy tale, but I want it to last! Oh, stay a little while longer!'

'Come,' sang the sea. '*Come! There is a summer every year, and there is love in every life! But it is not always summer, and it is not always the time to love!*'

'Oh, stay a little while longer!' sobbed Henriette, and she walked weeping by his side to the boat.

'Oh, stay!' she said, and, stooping down, kissed each oar. He pushed away from the shore. She waved her handkerchief again and again and again. The salt breeze kissed his face, and he woke with a cry. That dream was over.

He looked around. He lay in his own little room overlooking the quay. It was early morning, but the sun did not shine. A gale was blowing hard, and the sea laughed. Robert pressed Henriette's trinket closer to his heart, and gained courage. What were dreams? She was a real woman. He was to see her in a few hours' time. He dressed, and hurried out on the ramparts to look towards Miraflores. No smoke rose above the trees; the leaves were pale.

‘Good day, monsieur,’ said some one.

He turned and saw the lace-maker.

‘She has gone,’ said she, with a wise smile; ‘she went to Paris this morning by the five o’clock train. Her lover returned, and he has gone away with her. And she wore my lace flounce on her under-petticoat. I saw her step out of the carriage, and she tore the lace, too—my beautiful lace. But that did not matter to her. She pinned it up and smiled. I felt the pin all over me—in my heart and in my eyes. Did I not prophesy that her luck would change.? Her life is just beginning—that is all. She went away laughing and singing. And she pointed over there and waved her handkerchief at the air again and again and again! She’s a great *cocotte*.’

‘What is that?’ asked Robert.

‘*Mon Dieu!* said the old woman, ‘have you never met one?’

‘Never,’ said the boy.

‘They are very pretty, and they want money, and they tell lies. Why do you close your eyes, monsieur?’

‘The glare is too strong,’ said Robert. ‘I must go home.’

## CHAPTER II

**BLINDLY** the boy looked homeward, and the prison-house now seemed the one corner in this great world where he could take his grief. His mind was suffering its first real disillusion, and all the tender exalted emotions which love had called forth now returned to him all the stronger for their flight; but alas! now bitter and disdainful from the fruitlessness of the journey. He longed to weep, but the pride of his soul forbade that sensual relief. His eyes might burn, and his heart might ache, and his limbs might fail, but the spirit within him retained its resolution. Yet what could he do? Should he follow Henriette to Paris, challenge her lover, then kill him or perish in the attempt? He would die gladly because he was jealous for her honour, and because he could neither see himself betrayed, nor, having been betrayed, forgive her. Why had she been so false? He would cast himself dying on her threshold, and tell her what a thing it was to play with the souls of men. Perhaps in death he would find great eloquence, and utter words that would sing in her ears—(Oh, those little ears



made to be kissed!)—for ever! Then he thought that was perhaps too weak a part to play. He would seek her out, accuse her of her perfidy, and slay her swiftly before she could woo him into cowardice. The poor boy suffered as all young, ardent, candid creatures must suffer when they make mistakes and are deceived, not by life, but by their own inexperience. Robert's intelligence was too pure in quality to confound even this first overwhelming and apparently inexplicable disappointment with any foolish theory adverse to the wisdom of Divine Providence. A sigh certainly escaped his lips that the discipline of life should be so severe, but he never doubted that the trial was a discipline, and a necessary one. He felt, too, that he had deliberately sought an adventure by rowing to the strange villa of Miraflores. Was God to blame because the adventure had ended unhappily? Nay; the example of the knights of old had taught him a deeper philosophy than the art of whining. He lifted up his head and bit the sob which, in spite of his endeavours, reminded him of man's native frailty. He would seek out Henriette; he would give her back the bauble she had so freely, so graciously bestowed; he would show her the scorn of an upright and honest soul. At least she should respect him.

When he reached home, his god-mother was not yet in the little *salon*. He was able to climb the stairs to his room unobserved and unquestioned. He opened

his money-box, and found that he had just one hundred francs. That would be enough for his needs, if he were careful. He could walk to Paris. Pierre-Joseph, the net-mender, had walked all the way to Marseilles in order to speak his mind to an evil daughter; and he was far stronger than old Pierre-Joseph. But what should he tell his god-mother? What excuse could he give for leaving home so suddenly? It was plainly his duty to consult Madame Bertin in the matter.

He went to her boudoir, tapped at the door, and, in reply to a soft, husky voice, entered the room.

Madame Bertin lay upon her sofa, with a light falling in through the half-closed blinds upon her long white hands—the one beauty still left to her. All the rest was in shadow. The boy imagined her leaden face, with its dim eyes and falsely patient smile.

‘Well, Robert,’ she said, ‘what do you want?’

‘I want to go away for a fortnight or three weeks.’

‘Where?’

‘To Paris.’

‘What for?’

‘To see someone.’

‘Who?’

‘A friend.’

‘Can you afford the journey?’

‘Yes, if I walk both ways.’

‘What a mad idea!’

‘I must go.’

‘Who is the friend?’

‘It is a friend who has deceived me. I cannot tell you more than that.’

Madame Bertin shrugged her shoulders.

‘I will have no nonsense with girls,’ she said.

‘This is no question of nonsense; it is very serious.’

Again she shrugged her shoulders.

‘They always say that. I do not care who the woman is—she isn’t worth it.’

‘Have I said it was a woman?’

‘Don’t prove her bad influence, my dear Robert, by trying to deceive me. Of course it is a woman. What does she look like? How old is she?’

‘She told me she was four-and-twenty.’

‘In that case you may go and see her. She is old enough to take care of herself. Where does she live?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘That’s a comfort. Good-bye, my child. If you have time, you might buy me some gloves at Alexandre’s. You will find some money in that drawer.’

He went to the little cabinet to which she pointed, and, opening a drawer, found it full of twenty-franc gold pieces.

‘Take one,’ said Madame Bertin. ‘Pay for the gloves, and bring me back the change. When do you start on your walk?’

‘At once.’

‘Good-bye again.’

‘Good-bye.’

He paused for a moment as though he would have said more, but his god-mother waved him away. He wondered whether she were vexed, and, as he reached the door, he turned round to throw her a conciliatory glance.

‘It is all right,’ said Madame Bertin ; ‘I understand. It is not your fault that you are young and ridiculous. Another kiss ! Adieu, *cher enfant !*’

So that was all ! The dreaded interview was over. What a sensible woman she was ! How well she understood men ! In less than an hour he found himself following the railway line to Paris, flourishing a stick in his hand, and barely conscious of the light knapsack which he bore strapped across his shoulders.

He spent eight days on the road—walking some thirty odd miles between each sunrise and sunset, and sleeping at night under hayricks or in carts. He bought his food from the peasants who worked in the fields, or from those who were driving cattle to market. They thought him an artist, and therefore treated him as though he were a lost child roaming through the world at leisure. It was infinitely touching to see the kindness and rough pity of these toiling, tired souls for that lad whose troubles so far had been but a gentle tuning-up of the heart strings. Of pain, of poverty, of adversity, of disease and death he knew nothing. He was eighteen ; he had seen a pretty face,

heard a thrilling voice ; he had loved both, he had been deceived. Yet how much older and wiser he felt than Jacques, whose back was curved like the sickle he had used too long ; or Lise, who washed clothes in a muddy stream while her husband lay dreaming in drunkenness by her side. We may imagine the egoism of this vigorous, round-limbed boy as he tramped along, forgetting often the very object of his journey in the mere bodily pleasure of exercise in the fresh air, and the eye's delight in new scenes. Sometimes he sang, sometimes he murmured a childish prayer—made in rhymes so that it might be readily remembered ; sometimes he whistled tunes ; sometimes he tried to imitate the birds he heard ; he barked at dogs ; he mewed at cats ; he climbed trees ; he carved little ornaments out of fruit stones ; he whittled sticks ; he had a fight or two with some louts who interfered with him ; he punched a few heads and received a blow on his own nose. It must be owned that he enjoyed himself thoroughly, and it was not until he saw the lights of the metropolis in the distance that a cloud came over his spirit.

She was there—the traitress, the enchantress, the deceiver — Henriette Marie Joseph Duboc. How madly he had loved her ! how madly he loved her still ! He reached Paris at an hour when the streets are comparatively quiet. The rioting and gaiety associated with every great capital were within doors ; the theatres and music-halls had not yet released their

patrons; the cafés were deserted and the boulevards forlorn. Robert knew Paris well. He had spent a year there when he was fifteen, and he experienced none of the emotions which are supposed to overwhelm the countryman when he enters, for the first time, the most brilliant, the most beautiful, the most compelling in its influence of all cities in the world. Robert at that moment was blind to every sight, and heedless of every consideration save one. He looked into every passing carriage—his heart beating wildly with the fear, the hope, the certainty that Henriette would be seated within one or another. This was she! No. Then that was she! Again and again he hastened after some womanly form which seemed in the distance to resemble Henriette's. Several times he thought he heard her footstep behind him. He halted once or twice at the fancied sound of her voice. He felt the delicious pressure of her hand on his arm.

'When I see her,' he thought, 'perhaps everything will come right. I have judged her too hastily.'

He grew sick at the unconvincing suspicion that he had been unjust. What did he know, after all? Had the lace-maker told him a lie? What if Henriette were ill? What if she were dead? At the mere thought he felt a cold sweat on his brow. He had not seen her for nine days. The whole world could change in less time. He passed a kiosk, and bought eight or nine newspapers, which he studied

feverishly. He could find nothing. The pangs of boyish hunger added ferocity to his disappointment. He entered a quiet restaurant and ordered some dinner. But, to his own surprise, when it was put before him he found himself unable to eat a morsel. The soul—in spite of all scientific demonstrations to the contrary—is even stronger than either youth or health. So, while the roast chicken grew cold, and the salad became sodden and the bottle of wine remained untasted, Robert sat there, crumbling the bread with his fingers, and drinking his own tears.

Suddenly, however, his eye was attracted by a flaming theatre bill which, pasted on a kiosk outside the window, announced, in black and red lettering, that Madame Henriette Duboc was appearing for one week only at *Les Papillons*. His head swam: he read the name a dozen times. He had never before seen it in print. It seemed as terrible as the mysterious writing on the wall of King Belshazzar's palace—*Madame Henriette Duboc*. Then, indeed, he was able to swallow a little wine, if only to assure himself that he was not dreaming. He paid his bill, and, rushing out into the street, hailed a fiacre. How lucky it was that he had kept the greater part of his money for Paris.

'Drive to *Les Papillons*,' he told the driver. A flick of the whip, and they started. The boy's pulse throbbed; he looked at the stars, and they, too, seemed to be trembling. What painful sensations surged in his breast! what piercing thoughts! When one is

young, high feelings about small things do not seem ridiculous. And, after all, what are small things but matters which appear great to those whom they immediately concern? Poor Robert was living through an experience which is not the less bitter because it may be common in psychology. And indeed it is a question whether that mental suffering known as a disillusion is so ordinary as it is frequently held to be. Vulgar selfish minds are still the rule rather than the exception in the human race, and neither vulgar souls nor selfish souls can ever know what it is to be disappointed in a sublime belief. For to imagine excellence and to love it—whether it may be real, as it often is, or merely supposed, as it can be sometimes—is not given to low understandings. So, without dwelling on each particular pang or each wild sad idea which tortured our sensitive young friend, let us be patient for him, and say that physic is as needful for the spirit as the flesh.

The famous music-hall for which he was bound stands at a kind of cross-road. At night one can see from three points of approach its name in large letters of shivering gas—*Les Papillons*. As the fiacre halted at the entrance, Robert saw a large photograph of a woman in a gorgeous costume. It was Henriette! He thought his heart would burst for sorrow and longing. How beautiful she was! how false! He bought his ticket and hurried through the *foyer*, where a crowd of more or less respectable orderly persons were eagerly



scanning each other in the hope of discovering some sign of unusual—or even usual—wickedness. *Les Papillons* is the resort of every husband who wishes to show his wife or her lady friends the temptations to which bachelors are exposed. The amusement provided there is of the most tedious description. When Robert gained his place in the hall, a fat man clad in pink hose, and described in the programme as ‘Apollo,’ was performing feats of strength. At the end, he kissed his hands elegantly, and, screwing his heavy lips into a smirk, knocked down some twelve cannon balls which impeded his exit. The audience applauded, yet not without discretion. The next item on the bill was a ‘legend’ in two tableaux, with appropriate music. Madame Henriette Duboc played the part of the heroine. The name of the legend was *Amadis and Oriana*. It was arranged by a poet whose name was associated with that bloodless effeminacy known to moderns as *medievalism*, yet wholly alien to the genius of the Middle Ages.

‘Surely,’ thought Robert, as he read the heroic names of *Amadis* and *Oriana*, ‘surely this is Fate! Will they give the scene at Miraflores? But oh, what irony that anyone so faithless should play the part of the most faithful, most devoted and most womanly of women!’

The first tableau represents the rocky entrance to a hermit’s cave. The orchestra, by means of wind instruments, endeavour to suggest the nightingale’s note

and the sea-gull's shriek ; the drum rolls, the cellos croak ; a large sunset illuminates the back of the stage. An aged man enters. He has a long white beard, and he walks to and fro with a laborious totter. At last he lifts a hand to his ear, then he shades his eyes and looks forth into the side-wings. The orchestra plays louder, there is a thunder-clap, the old man wrings his ever-useful hands ; lightning flashes into the sunset ; the violins utter a terrific note : who is this ? A warrior in steel armour is seen bounding over the rocks. And what a warrior ! He wears a wig of long red hair, a helmet surmounted by nodding plumes ; his girlish features are whitened ; his elongated legs are padded into an unnatural symmetry. When the hermit invites him to draw near, he trips toward him like a ballet master. He touches his sword, glances upward in an attitude of devotion, and swears an inarticulate oath which every spectator can readily believe means vengeance. The orchestra again intervenes. The note this time shudders and pipes. The hermit points to the left as a monster bird, with black wings and eyes as big as lamp-globes, approaches the warrior. This bird leads the warrior to infer that he will conduct him to his destination. And the warrior, with a magnificent gesture of dauntless courage, follows him. The hermit sinks down in prayer.

The curtain falls.

When it rises again, the scene is a grotto. A dozen men or more lie fast asleep on the ground. By their

carefully gracious attitudes, the green light and the slow music, it is clear that they are the victims of some fell enchantment. The warrior enters. He endeavours to arouse the prisoners. He clasps his hands and shakes his head with horror at their condition. A dreadful tinkling of tambourines is heard. He looks. The back of the grotto seems to melt into a golden cobweb; the cobweb expands; the warrior draws his sword; a woman is seen. It is she! It is Henriette! Robert almost sprang from his seat. She wears a robe of gold tinsel; she shines with a hundred false gems; she smiles; the warrior dashes forward to thrust his sword into her white, too gleaming breast. Yet he cannot strike. Three times he makes the essay, and three times he sinks, overcome by her beauty, on his knee. She smiles again, holds out her arms; he flings aside his sword, and falls captive at her feet.

The curtain drops.

That was the end.

The 'legend' bore no kind of resemblance to the *Amadis of Gaul*, and its falseness to the great original marred, for Robert, even such merits as it may have possessed in the way of mere scenic effect. For the moment it seemed to him that he had misread, not a book only, but the whole universe. He doubted his own judgment, his own feeling, his own sight; even his ideals were deceptions: no one saw things as he saw them, or felt things as he felt them.

He wrote his name on a slip of paper, and, handing it to an attendant, asked him to give it to Madame Duboc. Would she see him? She sent back word that he might come at once.

He followed his guide through a long, narrow passage and up a steep staircase, at the top of which a door stood partly open.

‘Come in,’ said a soft voice.

He entered.

Henriette sat before him, in all the radiance of tinsel and sham jewels. He did not bow, nor did he seem to notice her outstretched hand.

‘It is the little angel from Brittany,’ said she; ‘but where are his manners?’

‘I cannot bow, madame,’ said he, ‘to a falsehood. I have brought you back your locket.’

Henriette dropped her eyelids, and affected a reverie.

‘Which locket?’ said she.

‘The one that means love and tears, madame,’ he answered.

He held it out.

‘I don’t want the thing,’ she said; ‘and don’t be so cross. I hate cross children—even when they are handsome, and have splendid brown eyes full of—a man’s love. Oh, Robert, I could never resist brown eyes. Sit down, kiss my hand and be kind.’

‘I know I am only a boy,’ said the lad, ‘but I know what honour means and what loyalty means. And you have neither.’

'Hold your tongue!' cried Henriette, stamping her foot, 'how dare you? You ought to be whipped! I believe you are much older than you pretend to be. To stand there lecturing! And I, like a fool, permit it! *Mon Dieu!* is it conceivable? A little stupid peasant takes an excursion ticket to Paris, and—'

'Pardon me,' said Robert, 'I walked here.'

'Walked here!' screamed Madame Duboc. 'Walked here—on foot from Brittany—to see me?'

'Yes,' said Robert, 'to see you and tell you what I think of you.'

'But it is miles and miles.'

'I was in no hurry, madame. It is no happiness to me to say harsh things to you.'

The accent in which he uttered these words was in itself a caress. It was so tender, so courageous, so frank, and accompanied by a glance as stern as it was pitiful. It touched the woman, and reminded her of her own innocent first passion, which, when a girl of sixteen, she had felt for a man of the world whose soul she had hoped to save by offering prayers to the Virgin, and working him slippers for his birthday.

'Oh, my poor little Robert!' she exclaimed, with a great thrill of sympathy, 'that is what I, too, would have said to someone I loved.'

Her eyes grew dewy. She caught his cold hand, and half-timidly stroked it.

'Poor boy,' she said, 'how you will have to suffer!' Then she sat down before the table of cosmetics,

daubed on more rouge, re-pencilled her eyebrows and pinned a false curl under her crown of false diamonds.

‘How do I look?’ she asked.

‘You are always beautiful!’ answered Robert, choking.

‘If I were so bad as you say I am,’ she sighed, ‘could I look so nice? Of course not. Wicked people are always frightful. Just notice my mouth—these curves tell something after all. They mean generosity. Oh, Robert, I am very much in love, but not with you, dear. He is middle-aged and selfish: his heart is a mere salad of stale emotions. And I am, for the moment, its *sauce mayonnaise*. Pity me, little, kind, dear Robert. Once I thought I should be someone’s princess, someone’s ideal, someone’s angel. I thought we should live together—perhaps in a great palace with golden gates, perhaps in a little, little cottage all covered with roses and myrtle, and birds’ nests and things; perhaps in a splendid hotel, where the band would play all day, and one could ring bells for anything one wanted. What dreams!’

The strains of the orchestra, which was now playing, floated in through the door, and that giddy sound of perverted sensuality seemed to Henriette the emotion in her own soul.

‘What dreams!’ she repeated, and stood entranced, with her lips parted. ‘What dreams!’

The music troubled and swept Robert’s senses as though they were young leaves stirred for the first

time by the thrilling breezes of the spring. He remembered the starry silence and the moonlit night which had followed his one day of love. His heart trembled, and the air seemed sweet with the perfume of the woods at Miraflores. Henriette's face—stained though it was by paint—still retained something of that innocence, virginal and innate, which is the one permanent charm of any countenance. Robert longed to throw himself at her feet and entreat her—to do what? He did not know.

‘It is not yet too late,’ he said; ‘you are so young, and all this is so vulgar!’

‘Vulgar?’ she said, opening her eyes. ‘Vulgar?’

‘Yes. That tawdry dress, the false jewels, the false sentiment, the caterwauling in the orchestra. It is abominable!’

‘I like it,’ she said; ‘it is gay. It amuses me, and I amuse all the tired, overworked people in the audience. Don't be so lamentably serious.’

‘But you don't understand. I do not love you for what you appeared to be, but for what you really are. You are too good for this.’

‘What would you have me do, dear little Saint Robert? I may go again to Miraflores some day, and then—and then—you must come and see me, and we will talk less and perhaps learn more. Oh, I can be very kind—kinder than anyone you ever met. Take a long look into my eyes.’

'No,' said Robert. 'I know all I wish to know of them already. I don't love you that way. It is not a question of looking into your eyes or not looking into your eyes. It is altogether different. If you were blind—if you lost all your beauty—if you were pale and bent and withered, I should love you just the same. It is you that I see—you!'

'Of course,' said Henriette; 'of course. *Mon Dieu!* If they pay me three thousand francs every time I appear, I suppose I must be worth looking at.'

The boy's eyes filled with cutting tears. For a moment he had tried to persuade himself that he was perplexed, yet not wholly despairing. But despair touches the soul as though it were some idle hand mingling its fingers with the sea.

'Oh, Henriette!' said Robert, 'you will never understand me!'

She yawned.

'Everybody understands calf-love,' said she.

His throat grew dry.

'I don't wish to be unkind,' continued Madame Duboc, 'but I am too tired now to consider anyone's feelings except my own. You mustn't be stupid. You look as white as a sheet and as cold as a grave-stone. Love should affect one pleasantly. You think too much. Clever men think only when there is absolutely nothing else to do.'

She glanced at him slyly. Where had he learnt this self-possession? His handsome countenance had



grown calm, not from indifference, but pride, and Henriette grew jealous of its absent ardour. Had it strayed away to some fair, intangible idea remote from womanly flesh and blood, remote from the human, withering influences of time and change and passion? All women wish to see affection perpetually burning—a straight and brilliant flame; when it flickers, they suffer what must surely be the sharpest pang in purgatory.

‘Oh, Robert,’ she murmured, devouring his face with her gaze, ‘wasn’t it sweet at Miraflores. I can see you now coming toward me—up that little path through the trees. Do you remember? I thought you were a wandering angel sent down from Paradise to call me to repentance. And I was so unhappy that day. I had been crying for hours and hours. I blessed you for coming. I said prayers all that evening in my little chapel. And about ten o’clock. . . .’

‘Your lover came,’ said Robert, gravely. His whole nature was now in revolt against false sentiment.

A dark flush surged under the artificial pink and white on Henriette’s cheeks.

‘And why not?’ said she; ‘and why not? Surely the angels need never be jealous of men!’

He was silent, but for the first time he glanced about the room, which was lined with mirrors, and reflected Henriette, from every side. He seemed surrounded by a train of painted women, each with the

same face, the same smile, the same form, and all moving with a terrible, inhuman precision, at the same moment, with the same features, the same blandishments. And he saw himself also—ten distinct selves, yet all the same. He could have cried out at the horror of this illusion. It was phantasmal, gloomy: a mockery of life—a mockery of the faith so precious in the days of one's vanity that the little sum of sensations which we call our own experience is intimately and especially our own—wholly dissimilar from that of any other creature. But it is the privilege, and perhaps the supreme agony of the gods alone to feel unshared emotions. Robert—now in one of those moments when the mind has a preternatural quickness of comprehension—grasped at this knowledge, and that divinity within him which is—could we but realise it—in all mortals, drew back disdainful from the commonness of the merely human drama—the eternal duet of man the lover, and woman the beloved.

'At Miraflores,' said he, 'we were like spirits in the sunlight. God was there. But here it is hellish—suffocating! Your whole look has changed. When I try to see you, there is a cloud between us.'

Henriette shrugged her shoulders.

'You Protestants,' said she, 'are always thinking of hell. You are never happy unless you can feel that all your friends are damned. It is very *triste* and very rude.'

Robert bowed.

‘I am going now,’ said he.

‘And what will you do?’

‘Pray for you!’

‘What?’ cried Henriette; ‘what?’

‘Pray for you.’

She lifted up her arms with a fine theatrical gesture of amazement.

‘But why?’ she asked.

‘Because I once caught a glimpse of your true self, and I loved you.’

She looked at the reflection of her own face in the mirror, and addressed it.

‘Did you ever see such a funny boy as this?’ Then she sprang up, and, placing a hand on each of Robert’s shoulders, kissed him on both cheeks with a frank, almost sisterly affection.

‘Pray if you like,’ she exclaimed; ‘I am quite sure that no one has ever prayed for me before. When I want a prayer, I pay five francs for a mass. And that happens often—far oftener than you would believe, my little Saint Robert with the grave, grave eyes, and the firm, firm mouth, and the square, square chin and the moustache—a real moustache—just coming. I think I even want you to pray for me. There! I ask it. I even beg it as a favour. Pray for me morning and evening. I believe in prayer. It is the one irresistible force. All the clever men who come to my little suppers admit that. So pray as much as you

can. The devil will try to hinder you. He will tell you cruel, bitter things about me. He will make you lose heart, and think it all useless. He will say, "She is hopelessly wicked." Or he will say, "Don't waste your time and energy." For if you pray well, there is nothing more exhausting. I had a cousin who was a priest. They say he used to faint after he had prayed very earnestly for any poor soul. I can well believe it—because he never lived to be an abbé, although he worked real miracles. Be a brave fool, and don't listen to anyone. Just continue your prayers, and—who knows?—you may yet meet me in heaven.'

During this speech she stood with her hands still resting on his shoulders, and her gaze fixed intently on his face.

'We make a handsome couple,' said she, 'and if we had wings—'

They heard a heavy step on the staircase without.

'You must go now,' said Henriette.

The door opened, and a panting woman flounced into the room.

'M. le Comte is coming,' said she.

Madame Duboc's lips parted into a forced smile.

'Adieu, *cher* Robert,' she murmured, 'and repeat all the pretty prayers you know. I want to be always beautiful, always happy, and always loved. Adieu.'

'Adieu,' said Robert, white with sorrow,

He turned and left her.

Henriette re-powdered her neck and arms.

'*Le pauvre bête garçon,*' said she, '*il a du cœur et . . . il est beau comme un petit amour!*'

'*Mon Dieu!*' said her *femme de chambre*, handing her the carmine, 'is madame going to cry about a child?'

Henriette's eyes were brimming over with tears.

'Platonic love,' said she, 'gets on my nerves. My head aches.'

### CHAPTER III

ROBERT groped his way down to the staircase, through the narrow passage and into the theatre, where two young women clad in brief skirts and enormous wigs were dancing a breakdown. He went back mechanically to his former seat, and sat there so absorbed in thought that the music-hall, with its lamps and gilding, might have been a field of graves, and the dancers mere summer flies wantoning on epitaphs. He heard nothing and saw no one, but remained there—praying wild entreaties for the soul of Henriette. He did not ask himself whether he cherished any hope of ever seeing her again. It was impossible, as matters were, to find any happiness in her company. He had no intention of fighting with the vulgar throng of her admirers for a stray smile.

No, if it were to mean anything in his life, this new-found intensity of emotion, this sudden revelation of the greatest force in earth and heaven, he would have to guard it well and keep it sacred from the associations which destroy and the con-

siderations which corrupt. But the last words of his prayer startled him; they came unpremeditated from his lips, as though a need stronger than his will—more powerful than wisdom—had found a voice. ‘O God, do not let us be for ever separated. Let her be mine some day!’

The blood rushed into his cheeks, and, trembling between a vague longing and a deep dread, he rose from his place and hastened from the auditorium, wholly unable to restrain the tumult of sensations which now possessed him. What if he should never see Henriette again? What if, humanly speaking, she were never to be more than a woman whose shadow had fallen but momentarily on his life? Had she not melted into his existence and become an indissoluble part of his career? Could he foresee a future in which she had no share?

‘Surely,’ he thought, ‘most of us have at certain moments a prophetic divination of our fate. We feel a sudden assurance that some things will inevitably come to pass—that this or that person will affect our destinies.’

He was conscious of such a presentiment with regard to Madame Duboc, and, while he felt unhappy, he lost that fever of unrest and indecision which is so much harder to bear than a definite sorrow.

He was already in sight of the entrance hall when the swinging felt doors leading thereto were thrown

open, and a small foppish man about two-and-forty, who walked as though he were stepping on to the scene in response to an enthusiastic recall, advanced toward him with every sign of astonishment.

'Parflete!' said Robert, in a tone of dismay.

'*C'est bien lui! Robert, enfin!*' said Parflete, with a disagreeable smile, which was half conciliatory and half a menace, '*depuis quand es-tu ici? Je suis bien heureux de te voir!*'

'I wonder that you have not forgotten me!' answered the boy. Parflete was one of his god-mother's friends who had once visited her for a month in Brittany when she had fled thither with her jewels and some priceless reminiscences of the Court of Napoleon I. He was a person who went everywhere and was acquainted with everyone, because he never stayed in any place too long, nor attempted to know anyone too well. He had been the tutor of a royal duke till he inherited, from an unexpected source, a handsome property, when he became instead the duke's best patron. He lived in Paris—if a being so restless could be said to live in any quarter of the globe—and he had shown himself kindly disposed toward Robert during his schooldays in that capital.

The boy, however, had never responded to his interest, and he felt now that there was something ill-omened in this sudden encounter with a man



whom, for some reason, he had always tried to avoid. He found it impossible to affect any pleasure at the meeting, and shrank back from the other's feigned cordiality. But he replied to his eager questions when he was allowed the necessary time for a reply.

'Let us sit down,' said Parflete, dropping the theatrical French which he usually adopted when he had no time to be civil in his own tongue. He chose a red velvet sofa at some distance from the string-band which was playing in the *foyer*. (There are two orchestras at *Les Papillons*, one in front of the stage, and one by the promenade.) 'Are you in Paris for any length of time?' he asked. 'Paris is preposterous this year. It is full of young men who come here from some northern home and imbibe from their new environment everything that is extravagant and therefore striking, ephemeral and therefore talked of. They catch the taint of third-rate French literature. They begin to look like the "Arthurs" on a novel cover, and they talk like a bad translation of the Goncourts! They become the solemn incarnation of *Le Petit Journal pour rire*. They think Flaubert—that sweet singer of artificial emotions—the greatest of the prophets. They are always wondering why they were not born either in the fifteenth century or the eighteenth century. They cannot be certain whether Dante was or was not a great poet.

Shakespeare gives them the headache. They like those authors best who had euphonious names and who have left but few works! In other words, *mon enfant*, they are—fools. But they will amuse you—you who know France and the French so well!

All this time he was studying Robert's face.

'Good God!' he thought to himself, 'this boy will become famous. I must not lose sight of him, and I must give him some advice.'

'When are you going to Oxford?' he asked aloud.

'At the end of this year.'

'It won't suit you. What you need is not Plato, but Bacon. Plato would play the devil with you. You are a visionary as it is. You must go to Cambridge and read the *Novum Organum*. Bacon is a man's philosopher. Plato is for demi-gods and criminals. Heavens! how you resemble your father in profile! It was my good fortune to be present when he preached his last sermon in London. It was a month before he startled the whole Order of St Dominic by—by marrying your entrancing mother. His brilliant eyes and clear, white face! He looked like a Holbein—Holbein did manage to see one or two handsome fellow-creatures. I stared at your father and thought, "That man is meditating some terrific step!" I was but twenty at the time, and it shows me that I was a judge of character even then.

I shall never forget his extraordinary neatness—such a dazzling white surplice! such beautiful, nervous hands! . . . Surely these things do not pain you? Why should they?’

‘They do, nevertheless,’ said Robert.

‘*Cher enfant*, faithful are the wounds of a friend. I spoke for your good. It was a test. Do not pamper a thin skin. I could swear that you were destined for an uncommon career. You will make a hit—but—for God’s sake and your own, conquer this feminine sensitiveness. When you were last here, I often thought you were mad. But you were never silly. Now, many boys are silly, though few indeed attain the grandeur of madness. To be seriously mad is a fine thing; it shows that the gods have had somewhat to say to you. This morbid reluctance to hear the truth and to face life is, however, both silly and weak. You are a strong, vigorous lad. Don’t shoot tame canaries and think you are a sportsman. That was the fault in charming, absurd, consumptive Keats. Now come and see me to-morrow. I am spending a few days at the Embassy, and I can present you to some valuable acquaintances. I also wish to give you something for your god-mother. *Au revoir*. I have to take supper with Henriette Duboc.’

‘Do you know Madame Duboc?’ asked Robert, with burning cheeks.

‘Yes,’ answered Parflete, with a grin, ‘I am her philosopher-in-waiting! We sup to-night *en petit*

*comité*—the Archduke Charles, the Comte de Brie, Lord Reckage, Henriette and myself. It is the birthday of Brigit—*la petite Brigitte!*’

‘Who is she?’ asked Robert.

‘The daughter of Duboc and the Archduke Charles. She is six years old, and she begins to recite her catechism. They christened her Brigit because Duboc’s mother was that lovely Irishwoman, Bridget O’Malley, who eloped with—but I shall never stop if I once begin *that* tale of woe. *Au revoir* again. Come to-morrow. *Au revoir!*’

And, waving his hand, he hurried away.

For a moment Robert could but hang his head and think how dull, clumsy and ineffective he was in comparison with that brilliant, if unpleasant, personage. Henriette, no doubt, found him an agreeable companion. Perhaps he was her most intimate friend. Perhaps she would amuse her guests at supper by telling them of the little stupid peasant who walked from Brittany to Paris in the hope of saving her soul—a soul which all the world knew and jeered at. And Parflete would grin and twist the story into a good anecdote for his journal. In the mortification of this thought, the lad’s face grew scarlet. He longed to escape into some desolate place where there were neither men nor women, where there was no one—no one save God, Who understood everything and never laughed. His feeling for Henriette turned to hatred, and back again to love. Why should a last

painful impression blot out his remembrance of that one perfect day at Miraflores ?

‘Alas !’ he told himself, ‘she knows too well how deeply I love her. Yet is that a reason why she should deceive me and despise me ?’

He dashed away the tears which sprang up to his eyes, but as he wandered out into the street, he saw nothing before him except Henriette’s face and her farewell glance—ironical, wondering and compassionate. He had not been unprepared for that news of the Archduke Charles. He knew that there was a man ; his name and rank mattered but little. The real blow came from little Brigit, aged six, who was learning her catechism ! A child always brings a hallowing influence. The repulsive picture of Madame Duboc and her train of lovers gave place to the softer view of a very young mother and a little girl—a little girl like herself, with flaxen hair and violet eyes. This did not cure him of his infatuation, but it took another hue. It became chastened. It gained in philosophy what it lost in romance. Humour took up the place of sentiment. He was able to smile at himself, and, before he reached the little hotel in the Avenue Carnot, where Madame Bertin would, did she write at all, address his letters, he lost the rather oppressive feeling that Henriette was his fate, his destiny by the unalterable fiat of the gods ! He had made a mistake. Clearly she was the fate of Wrexham Parflete’s friend, that Archduke Charles. The discovery was at first

humiliating — although he remembered that young Romeo, too, had loved a Rosaline before he died for Juliet. The ideal he had set before himself for accomplishment was that of fidelity to one Lord, one purpose and one woman. Some natures attain the condition of religious faith only after many and harassing years of moral experiments ; others, on the other hand, are born with so clear a sense of the divine Omnipresence that they doubt more readily the evidences of sight, than their instinctive knowledge of the invisible God. It does not invariably follow that beings endowed with this spiritual perception are outwardly holier, or inwardly more pure than those less favoured. The men who have seen, in rare moments of inspiration, the vision of the Eternal, have not had fewer temptations, nor have they sinned less deeply—less wilfully—than their blinder brothers.

Robert, in his early boyhood, had been as inquisitive after evil, as undisciplined in mind as any other lad, but his heart had been quick to respond to great ideas. He liked to think of himself as the player of a noble part. He thought the thoughts of his favourite heroes, acted as he supposed they would have acted had they been born in his circumstances, and, by degrees, the habit, due in the first place to vanity, passed into that higher realm, the imagination, and from thence into his soul. He became, in reality, that youth he had by artifice once merely seemed to

be. Amadis in the romance was not more brave, more faithful, or more determined than the provincial Robert, who had walked two hundred miles to tell the woman he loved that she was unworthy.

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## CHAPTER IV

THE hotel in the Avenue Carnot was a house in a square block of large white buildings. Robert was given a small room on the fifth floor which overlooked the courtyard, where, in the centre of some laurel bushes, a fountain played.

He undressed by the light of the stars, and, overcome by the fatigue and excitement of the day, soon fell asleep, and had no further dreams till he awoke next morning.

He rose early, and commenced a long letter to his god-mother. The sentiment which existed between Madame Bertin and himself was of too formal a nature to have been particularly warm. She had always seemed to him a woman who exacted—not merely from himself, but from the whole world—every outward mark of consideration, and, by exaggerating the visible courtesies he sought to delude himself into the belief that he really loved her. Perhaps he succeeded. Certainly he never permitted



himself to examine the bond which seemed to unite their two lives. If it was slight, he preferred to remain in ignorance of its actual fragility. She was clever, and when he was in correspondence with her, he found it easy to express his thoughts in an intimate strain. There was something man-like in her nature, which, though it forbade any display of tenderness, kept her sympathies free from the taint of curiosity, and her advice, from the feminine sting of reproach. And she was never jealous. When Robert wrote to his god-mother (and he sent her a letter every day), he seemed to be sending a message from one solitude to another. Each led an independent and isolated existence. The woman lived in the past, the boy in his dreams; but her sphere was peopled with the dead, whereas Robert's held those brilliant, airy creatures of the fancy who cannot die because they never come to life.

In the news he now wrote, he made no reference to Henriette Duboc, but he dwelt at some length on the meeting with Parflete, for whom Madame Bertin had always felt an inexplicable regard. She had an old silver box containing a small packet of that gentleman's letters—letters which she declared to be so brilliant that they might have been written by Swift. In these circumstances, Robert felt that, since Parflete had been careful to say that he had something for Madame Bertin, it was impossible to avoid a call at the Embassy.

Her Britannic Majesty's ambassador was, at that time, Lord Locrine—a peer who was pre-eminent in his generation for an enchanting manner and remarkable literary gifts. While he was never known to fail in his diplomatic duties, his house was a rendezvous, not for distinguished foreigners only, but for such of his own compatriots who had either brains or charm to recommend them. He delighted the capricious French republic, while he represented the best traditions of the English monarchy. To snobs he was a prince, and a haughty one; but to men he was a man and a scholar. Not every visitor who crossed his threshold was either a genius or a noble. Not every woman whom he took into dinner was either a beauty, a wit, or the incarnation of a pedigree; but the people who were welcome at the British Embassy during his term of office were, for the most part, intelligent or amusing, and often both. His Excellency had once been heard to remark that, in the whole course of his varied career, he had met one *grande dame*, two geniuses, four fools, several thousand very clever persons, and hundreds who were, at least, absurd.

At the moment of Robert's visit, the house-party was smaller than usual. In addition to Parfete, there were two male visitors only, Lady Locrine's nephews—sons of the Earl of Almouth;—Lord Reckage and his twin-brother, Hercy Berenville, who was a cripple. Lady Locrine's own son was an undergraduate at

Oxford. Her daughter Amy, however, was just nineteen, and enjoying her first season at Paris.\*

‘Parflete took me into the drawing-room,’ we read in Robert’s letter to his god-mother, ‘and I lost my dread of a formal interview with the Loctrines when I saw a very handsome woman seated at a piano, an inoffensive youth looking over her shoulder, and another youth, with a crutch, standing in the middle of the floor delivering a harangue on Greek music.

“‘The Greeks,” he was saying, “regarded music as a natural expression of sentiment; they wrote airs and simple themes. They did not show their skill in counterpoint and ornamentation.” When he caught sight of Parflete and myself, he blushed, and made me feel quite happy by saying that he was “boring everyone with his usual rot!”

‘Lady Lochrine wore a grey silk (I noticed this at once on your account), and a few fine jewels. Her hair is white, her eyes are black and piercing—not unkind, but certainly in search of truth. She was most civil, and she has one of those agreeable fatigued voices. Poor Hercy Berenville has five times his brother’s brains, but unhappily only half his leg! I hear that he was born so. Parflete tells me that he tried two terms at Eton, but his health broke down. He has now four tutors at home, and they are looking for a companion of his own age to work with him. Reckage—his twin-brother—is an odd boy, whose face shows a pretty even mixture of cunning and sincerity. His manner, however, is perfect, and I like him, in spite of myself, rather better than Hercy, who, by a strange paradox, seems a strong man playing the part of an invalid, while the other seems an invalid playing the part of a blood! His talk was all about horses and dogs and pretty women. I don’t think that he cares much about either, for his eyes were always wandering to Lady Lochrine’s

\* The story of Amy Lochrine has been written by Robert Orange, but the work may not yet be published as many of the personages involved in it are still living.

book table. Hercy, on the other hand, fingered a curious reprint of the *Fioretti*, prattled about the thirteenth century, and sat by the window craning his neck to see every petticoat that passed. When he offered any remark to his brother on the subject of horseflesh, it was always an original, unexpected observation which showed knowledge as opposed to Reckage's jargon—taken second-hand from trainers, who, of course, have all the caution of the vulgar mind where trade secrets are in question. I never heard a trainer or a coachman tell the truth about a horse.

'Lord Lochrine was not visible, but when I said good-bye, Lady Lochrine asked me to breakfast with them to-morrow. Parflete came out with me into the hall and called me into an ante-room, where he told me all I know, at present, about Reckage and Hercy Berenville.

"You have made a good impression," said he. "Your fate is now in your own hands. If fortune should fail you, it would be a calamity, but never let it be said that *you* have failed fortune, for that would be an irretrievable dishonour."

'He spoke solemnly, and I could not have believed that he was capable of so much feeling. I had always regarded him as a cross between a learned pig and a performing poodle. For the moment I liked him—perhaps because I felt sorry for him. He has just enough soul to be damned, and just enough heart to suffer under damnation. . . .

'I have just returned from my breakfast at the Embassy. Lord Lochrine is handsome in a curling way—his hair and his beard, his eyelashes, his nostrils and his moustache all curl. Once I nearly addressed him as Hyperion. His talk was equally elegant and decorative. Each phrase he used was either *frisé*, or *ondulé*, and all were *parfumé*. He has the knack of uttering literature as though it were conversation. The gift, too, is clearly natural; he thinks, I should say, in roundels. It is a real bird; it trills because it must. Lady Lochrine is the best of listeners, and she has, for her sex, an extraordinary sense of humour. Her laugh is hearty and unrestrained, but then she looks

well laughing. Laughter ruins many women. Hercy Berenville was my neighbour at table. He is swarthy, and he might be an Italian. The face is pointed; the eyes are almond-shaped, very large, and like those of some fine sagacious animal. He puzzles me a little, and yet attracts me. . . . I seem to have lived a hundred years since I left you. I enclose a letter which I have just received from Parflete. They have given me four days in which to form my decision upon it.'

The letter in question contained the proposal that Robert should accept the position of companion to Hercy Berenville, at a salary of two hundred pounds a year. He was to work with Hercy, travel with Hercy, read with Hercy, and, in a word, be a brother to Hercy. Hercy lived, for the greater part of the time, at his mother's dower-house in Hampshire.

'This,' wrote Parflete at the conclusion of his letter, 'is the great opportunity of your life.'

Madame Bertin, on receiving Robert's news, telegraphed her advice from Brittany:—

'Madness to refuse.'

The boy himself needed no persuasion in the matter. He accepted the situation, and, with Hercy, left Paris for England early in the following week.

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## CHAPTER V

ROBERT'S life during the next ten years seems to have been marked by passions of the mind rather than passions of the heart. He had, it is true, a few love adventures, but they were sources to him of unhappiness rather than inspiration. We hear that both Hercy and himself became accomplished scholars; that they travelled in the East, in America and all through Europe; that they became citizens of the world.

The one person to whom Robert would have sent confidential letters in all that time was Madame Bertin, and she, to his sorrow, died before he had spent a month in his altered circumstances.

He composed two novels, but if the events and persons with which they deal bear any relation to his own immediate experience, they are so described and disguised that it is impossible to regard them in any other light than that of pure romance. They show, however, a knowledge of the world and human thought as unexpected, yet sound, as Hercy Berenville's remarks on horseflesh. There is one passage, however, in his last novel—written when he had reached the

highest place in political life—which he is said to have admitted to a friend was pure autobiography. The internal evidence is in such strong favour of this supposition, that it may be taken, without doubt, as an accurate analysis of his mind during his first years in England. It should be stated that the individual of whom he wrote is not the hero of the romance, but a subordinate character—a certain Michael Crabbe.

‘Michael Crabbe,’ so runs the extract, ‘had spent his youth on the coast of Brittany, where dreams take their substance from the great rocks, their colour from the sky, and their unfathomable mystery from the sea. Paris—where he had been for a certain number of terms at school—was to him a city of books, by the Cathedral of Notre Dame; the brilliant streets, the public buildings, the life, sparkle and gaiety of France’s capital were to him but seemings, appearances and nothings—while he could read of Ancient Greece and Rome in the masters of literature. In winter and summer, he rose at five in the morning and read for two hours before the household or his schoolfellows stirred. He was permitted a room to himself, and, in dark weather, he studied by candle-light. He spent the greater part of his pocket-money in candles and second-hand books. When, through interruptions or fatigue, he failed to work twelve hours a day, he would feel, for some reason, unfaithful, and he always made good, by additional exertions, the lost time. What a change, then, was his life in England! At the Earl of Illingdale’s mansion on Piccadilly—the best, the greatest, and also the most foolish society in London, streamed in and out all day and half the night. When his lordship retired to his country seat, the same society followed him, but it stayed longer. He was rich, hospitable, inordinately fond of hearing gossip, yet an adept at minding his own

business. He lived the life of a king without responsibilities, and his house was a court where there were neither ceremonies, penalties, favourites, nor spies. In this rippling, ever-widening circle of acquaintances, Crabbe found it difficult to maintain his moral equilibrium. He has found, in a measure, the realization of his early romantic fancies; he was, indeed, a dependent, but he shared in every pleasure and privilege of his young charge, the heir. The hours spent with tutors, masters of modern languages, and professors of art and music, were snatched from the serious time devoted to the table, the drawing-room, the stable and the field. In his love for animals and out-door life, he was less an English sportsman than a gipsy. He was a bold rider and a good shot, but he was happier aiming at bulls' eyes than birds. On the other hand, he was a champion of duelling. He seemed to have no scruple about killing a man for a just cause in a fair fight, and he took pride in his reputation as a fencer. He hated fishing. While others fished, he wrote poems, or put the gloves on with Captain Debright—one of the Earl's private secretaries—a great boxer in his day.

'From all this it will be seen that the earnest student had become transformed into the courtier. He engaged in several love-affairs, and he was a dandy in his dress. His tailor's bill was long, and his salary was barely sufficient for his bootmaker, his hatter, and his shirts. He thought of entering the army. He read all he could find about Sir Philip Sydney and Lord Essex. Then he studied Beethoven, and wished to be a great composer. He was supposed to play the violin with skill and feeling. He read deeply in German metaphysic, Russian politics, English art, Gothic architecture and the Fathers of the Church. There was no limit to his interests and aspirations. He wanted to be rich, powerful and distinguished. He sighed for some princess who would love him for his devotion and exploits. If he thought himself a fine, handsome, devil of a fellow—the women were a little to blame. They told him so, and he swallowed it all—for a time, at all events. He soon learnt to put more trust



in his mirror. There were periods when he became bitter at the comparison of his own poverty and few advantages with the wealth and favours lavished upon his associates. The thought that, even with the highest intellectual gifts, he could but hope to end his life at the social point from which they—even as fools and incompetent—started, filled him with something—remote, indeed, from jealousy, but very near despair. “Poor men,” thought he, “who succeed in public life, are called, at best, adventurers! It was not so in the age of chivalry. The kingdom of Art is now the one realm where might makes the king.” But his health was too sound to support, for any length of time, such enervating moods. His ambition soon centred itself on a more permanent object than fashionable popularity. The phase of uncertainty and worldliness lasted about eighteen months. After that he passed—in the natural course—through the three common stages of mental growth:—

‘*First*:—The fanatic love of poetry and a contempt for human beings.

‘*Second*:—The love of Nature: a desire for solitude: theoretic sympathy with mankind in the past,—the heroes and heroines of history.

‘*Third*:—The love of humanity: a pleasure in Nature: a right understanding of poetry: a firm faith in God’s wisdom and a fierce desire to take a manly part in the drama of life.

‘In time he earned enough money by his pen to pay his debts, but it was a slow and chastening business. It cost him the good looks for which he had once taken, perhaps, too much thought.’

It should be remembered, in reading the foregoing extract, that Orange, at middle-age, was looking back upon himself as a young man between eighteen and eight-and-twenty. He was not one to spare his own weaknesses, and the general tone of the composi-

tion will be found to be, at all points, ironical. In the Memoirs of Hercy Berenville, we find Orange described as being, at the age of thirty, 'extraordinarily handsome, with a fine, erect figure, and easy, though undemonstrative, manners. When he chose to exert himself, few people could resist his influence. His words were often severe, but his personal magnetism was such that it seemed to attract every order of mind, and what he said, though never so sharply, mattered little. For general accomplishments, for quickness of intellect and depth of knowledge he stood out among the crowd of remarkable men who, in those days, were constant visitors at my father's house. It was felt that Robert Orange was cut out for a distinguished literary career,—that he would be a second Gibbon.'

In all such estimates some allowance must, of course, be made for the prejudices of affection, yet, while Robert did not become 'a second Gibbon,' his life could not have been a disappointment to the friends who first believed in his ability.

After the publication of his second book, *Basil Lemaitre*, which dealt in brilliant style with the adventures of a young politician, Robert was offered the post of secretary to Reckage, who was attempting to draw public attention toward himself by making witty speeches in the House of Commons.

That Robert's own ambition should have soared into more dramatic scenes than the lonely path of

literature seems not to have occurred to his friends. In the correspondence of Lord Reckage we find the greatest astonishment expressed when 'Orange, a most able, learned, but ascetic fellow,' offered himself a candidate to the electors of Norbet Royal.

Hercy, on the other hand, writes to Lady Lochrine:—

'I have been expecting this for some time. It is the misfortune of Robert's life that he is not an ecclesiastic. In the Roman Church he would find full scope, both for his political talents and his deeply religious mind. He will succeed in Parliament because he has a clear head and the gift of seeming—when necessary—an untravell'd Saxon. You would often suppose that he shared our foolish national belief that the average Briton's point of view is the observatory of the entire human race—that London is the Greenwich of the Universe; and, that the average Londoner is the average man—whether Hottentot or Brahmin. This power of contraction would of itself command an overwhelming majority of votes. In any other man of equal genius and experience, I should call that power by a harder name—insincerity. With Robert, however, it is the Apostolic gift of sympathy—"He is all things to all men that he may, by any means, save some." I have never met so patient and tranquil a soul. When the time comes for him to enter the arena of public life, it will be a case of

fighting with the wild beasts at Ephesus. His real happiness and his tastes are for meditation, for retirement, for a cloistered activity.'

It is now known that there was a deeper cause for Robert's sudden resolution than was imagined even by the two men who were, in all but parentage, his brothers. He had fallen in love.

In the May prior to his campaign at Norbet Royal (which took place in the summer), he had accompanied Hercy and a small party of friends on an expedition to Touraine. They made Chambord their headquarters, and stayed at the inn in the magnificent park surrounding the château. The journal, to which we are indebted for his minute description of the Villa Miraflores and his first meeting with Henriette Duboc, contains no word of the finest palace in France, and but a few lines of reference to a moment—perhaps the vital moment of his career.

It contains these three entries:—

*Chambord, May 18.*—I hope to remain here for many months.

*May 19.*—To-day I was ascending the famous double staircase in the castle, when, hearing voices which reminded me most painfully of my boyhood, I looked up, and saw Wrexham Parflete with a lady. I thought it was Henriette Duboc. She is Parflete's wife; they are on their honeymoon; she is only

sixteen, and she is poor Henriette's daughter. She is more beautiful than her mother.

*May 20.*—The Parfletes lunched with us. I have told Hercy that I must go on to Paris the day after to-morrow. I feel restless.

After this there is a break of several weeks, and the Parfletes are not mentioned again in his diary of that year. He wrote, however, a letter to Lord Reckage on his arrival on 25th May at Paris, and this contained the following passage:—

‘I find it impossible to like Parflete, and this marriage with a child (who left her convent school on her wedding-day) but increases my antipathy. I know that I owe him much. I know, too, that you and Hercy have real affection for him. To me he is frankly intolerable, even as an acquaintance. He asked after you with the deepest interest, and added that, “as for himself—he had but one grief, his futile resemblance to all the portraits of Horace Walpole!” This, as a matter of fact, is true. It is extraordinary. He then went on to say that, “Macaulay never understood Walpole. Poor Walpole’s good spirits were as forced as Gray’s melancholy. Gray was by nature cheerful; that was why he composed an elegy. Walpole was sad, so he wrote the wittiest letters in our language. Walpole was to his (Parflete’s) mind the greater man of the two. But the Saxons always distrusted wit. It offended their moral pomposity, etc., etc.” All this time his bride was waiting for him, and he had not so much as presented us to her. Hercy and I both remained, by a common instinct, with our heads uncovered; there was something in the child’s whole bearing which seemed to demand unusual signs of respect and deference. It was a shock to both of us when he said, with a revolting smirk,

"This is my wife." He told Hercy later on, while I was showing Mrs Parflete the room in which Molière gave *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, that she was the daughter of Henriette Duboc and the Archduke Charles. You must have seen her, *la petite Brigitte*. After the Archduke's marriage and Henriette's death, Brigit was sent to a convent at Tours. Parflete, by her mother's will, was appointed sole guardian. The Archduke, to use Parflete's villainous phrase, "behaved well," and a handsome *dot* was settled on the child. I absolve Parflete from mercenary motives in the matter. His own fortune (though much impaired by gambling) is still considerable. But the child's astonishing beauty on the one hand, and his servile devotion to the Archduke on the other, explain the whole intrigue. It can but end in disaster. The child, for the moment, is amused by her deliverance from school, and seems to regard Parflete in a purely fraternal light. The relationship is extraordinary. I cannot call him an attentive husband. He is, however, good-natured in those rare moments when he can forget himself. . . . His position at the Court is now established. He has been appointed Equerry to the Archduke. My plans are unsettled. Hercy joins me to-morrow. I am spleeny, savage and useless. I am not on friendly terms with myself. I have twenty *unread* books in my room, all of which I have bought because I could not live another day without them! There they are, with dancing letters, and I wish them all back at the bookseller's. I went to the Louvre, and I nearly composed a poem. Such stuff! I gazed long and blindly at the Samothracian Victory. Once it would have thrilled me with emotions of joy and hope; but now it mocks me. I am thinking much of your speech at Nottingham. Your head is all right, so don't be afraid of showing your heart. Davenport's resignation has left you a splendid opening. Speak out, and don't worry about oratory. Demosthenes nowadays would be called an actor. The Lords would complain of his vulgarity, the Commons of his superiority, and the journalists of his perseverance. Your style is unaffected, and if you can just manage to

conceal your knowledge of French literature, they will find you a true patriot! Politicians are now of three kinds—the sugary, the soapy and the feathery. The first cover their vile opinions with sweetness; the second affect to keep other people's opinions clean; the third make their opinions so light of wing that they can fly away at a moment's warning. I would have you like none of these, dear Beau.\*

'More of this to-morrow.

Yours, R. O.'

When Berenville arrived in Paris, two days after the despatch of the foregoing, he was accompanied by the Parfletes.

'Why have they come?' asked Robert, in great irritation. 'Has that man no delicacy of feeling? He is on his honeymoon and if he does not find us *de trop*, he ought! If Parflete will not leave us, we must leave Parflete. The situation is impossible.'

'He is all right,' said Hercy, 'and as for me, I am thankful to see that he is not uxorious. I couldn't stand it. You must remember that he is a married bachelor. Besides, you needn't talk to him. Talk to Mrs. She's refreshing.'

Hercy was taking his usual rest on the sofa while Orange was pacing the floor. The invalid fixed his eyes on his former tutor's broad shoulders and fine figure, then he hurled his own crutch across the room.

'I tell you,' continued Robert, 'the whole thing is unseemly. When we are present, Parflete talks incessantly about himself and pays no attention to his wife.'

\* Lord Reckage's nickname was an abbreviation of Beauclerk.

'He was never a carpet-knight.'

'Aristotle,' observed Robert, 'has remarked in his politics, that the warlike nations are those who pay the highest regard to women. And this, he suggests, may have given rise to the fable of the love of Mars and Venus!'

'Mars was not a highly-educated person. His blood was red, and he did not know that the liver was the seat of our heart-felt emotions! I will bet you anything that Mars was a god of no ideas. Education gives a man ideas.'

'But love alone can give true vitality,' said Robert. 'With ideas and vitality there is little that men cannot achieve. Parflete, however, is something not more but less than a man!'

'We must make the best of him now. I have asked them to dinner, and afterwards we are going to *Les Papillons*.'

'You will take *her* to *Les Papillons*?'

'Why not? Her mother made the fame of the place. She must know all about her mother. I know what this means. You have been reading one of those footling old Fathers! As Parflete said the other day—he is most generous where you are concerned—as Parflete said, "Orange has real learning and great abilities, but he is a Platonist."'

'What is that?' said Robert, grimly.

'A devilish hard fellow to live with!'

Robert threw back his head and laughed.



‘And how would Parflete describe himself?’ he asked.

‘I have often heard him admit that he has been his own enemy.’

‘If a man is evil to himself to whom is he good?’ said Robert at once.

‘He is a very decent, amusing fellow. He gave up a great deal to marry the relation of a great man. But he can’t talk all day about samplers, and the *bon Dieu* and the Blessed Lady; and, at present, that is Mrs P.’s great line. You are a scholar yourself. How should you amuse a wife of sixteen who cannot understand the least of your thoughts? I don’t know what you would have done in Parflete’s circumstances, but I can guess!’

‘Parflete ought never to have married; but marriage, when a crime, is a crime which it is criminal to repent of.’

‘He doesn’t repent—he merely drinks a little more cognac than usual.’

‘You grant that? And what makes this man peculiarly detestable is the fact that he knows better. His early training left nothing to be desired. He who has once put his hand to the plough, to him it is not permitted to look back!’

‘We live in the kingdom of men,’ muttered Hercy, whose mother had been a pious woman of Evangelical principles. What would she have thought of Parflete, and his little suppers and his philosophy? ‘We live

in the kingdom of men,' he murmured again. 'Parflete is a good-natured ass, and, after all, if it had not been for him, I should never have known *you*.'

'I do not forget that; yet, when he was kind enough to present me to your aunt, I went to the Embassy not for myself, but to call, at his request, for a present which he had for Madame Bertin. The present turned out to be a letter asking for a large loan. She lent it and it was never repaid. I found the letter among her papers after her death. That account therefore stands square. I have never mentioned this before. But you force the truth from me. Parflete had the money which would have gone for my expenses at the University and for my income now. The money, it seems, was my own, and settled upon me by my father. Madame Bertin was the trustee only. No doubt she was under the impression that she was acting in every way to my advantage.'

Hercy's face had undergone many changes during the speech. It was not in his nature to own himself either astonished or in the wrong. But he was conscious of a deep disgust for Parflete and his methods. He made up his mind to cut that gentleman for ever—though, in performing that act he would take time and study his own convenience. He would have a little more fun with Mrs Parflete, a few more games of cards, another dinner or two. He would hear all Parflete's news and capital stories

—then, wish him farewell. That would be the way.

‘It is not in my power,’ said Robert, after a long pause, ‘to protect the child he has married.

‘But,’ suggested Hercy, ‘you can do the civil thing. I had rather hear her little story of the pigeon, who was an orphan and a widow, than any conversation between the allied wits of Europe.’

‘Yet you were pitying Parflete!’

‘I understand him. He is wretched just because he cannot be happy with that divinely pretty creature. His position must be hellish. Every man congratulates him, envies him and prods him—morally, at all events—in the ribs! Wherever he goes he is pointed out as the old coxcomb with the enchanting young wife. It is enough to give him *la colique de Miserere!* When he quotes poetry to her, I could howl!’

‘Madame Bertin had a pet toad which she kept in a glass cage and fed on butterflies,’ said Robert. ‘Parflete reminds me of that delicate reptile. I tell you I hate him, and I don’t see why I should like him. I think he must be a diseased doll. Do I want him to run after his wife with Provençal roses on his shoe and a guitar slung over his shoulders? Do I ask him to ape the boyish devotion of Daphnis to Chloe? But his attitudes, and his epigrams, and his curling little fingers—the wretched homunculus! As for the lady—she cannot like him—although

virtuous women are incomprehensible in their tastes. They will cling to men whom the good Samaritan would scarcely touch with the tongs. But, all other considerations apart, if you have the heart to dine and laugh with a doomed creature—knowing her to be doomed—I have not. To me it is sacrilege. I may not help her. And to look on, an idle, curious witness,—I cannot do it!

‘I haven’t got your uncomfortable gift of prophecy!’ said Hercy.

‘You have just exactly that which I have,’ rejoined Robert, ‘a knowledge of life and human nature. But Parflete amuses you, and so you deliberately blind your eyes to a character which, in your soul, you must despise.’

‘Oh, do come off!’ said Hercy, feeling himself correctly explained and becoming, in consequence, both angry and depressed. ‘I never went in for minute self-analysis and all these scruples of conscience. Fellows don’t. For priests and rum chaps it may be normal enough. My health wouldn’t stand it. But if I began it—this hand-to-the-plough business—I should be an awful hypocrite, and if I dropped it, after I began it, I should feel a coward, so I jolly well leave it alone!’

‘*I would thou wert cold or hot,*’ said Robert, ‘*so, because thou art lukewarm, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*’

‘This is too much,’ exclaimed Hercy; ‘you are furious about some imaginary falling-off or declension or some such drivel which you think you have discovered in yourself and so you are pitching into me! It’s a great shame! That is the whole trouble. You badger and scourge yourself into a delirium and then you fly out like a lion at Reckage or myself. Reckage and I both know it. We have noticed it again and again.’

Hercy’s countenance showed a very cunning expression, and Orange had to endure the mortifying reflection that he had been studied and summed up by these two contemporaries who had always seemed to him mere lads, and, as it were, his pupils. He felt by so many years the senior of both. He soon forgot that momentary prick to his pride, however, in the thought that Hercy had probably hit upon the truth. Certainly he had been much cast down by his self-communings while alone in Paris and after he had torn himself away from Chambord. He started now at the phrase *torn himself* which now rose spontaneously in his mind as he thought of the sudden departure from his friends and the fixed plans of many a week. He had abandoned Hercy, he had abandoned his work, an historical treatise; he had fled like a thief in the night from a scene that was fair and a day that was glorious. And the reasons which he gave to himself for his conduct were these—a dislike of Wrexham Parflete and a quarrel with Hercy. Some things must not be

admitted even in the hidden sanctuary of the heart. To own them is to grant them a kind of existence. They may indeed be killed, but then a ghost will remain. So Robert could still say that these reasons held good; they were strong enough to stand alone. It was not necessary to probe deeper into his feelings.

'I say,' said Hercy, not caring for the stern silence which had followed his last remark, 'the Beau and I always know that you are a brick, and as good as a saint and all that.'

'Don't talk like some managing woman!'

Hercy began to sulk.

'Then you won't dine with us to-night?' said he, pretending to feel a twinge in his weak limb.

'Certainly not. I wonder that you can repeat the question.'

'What is to become of me? I can't fight my way through crowds! and Parflete must look after his wife.'

'This is most ungenerous,' said Robert, with a dark flush; 'you know that I have never left you alone to struggle through a crowd, or anywhere else. Aumerle was with you at Chambord. He promised me never to leave you. No one could be more thoughtful than Charles Aumerle.'

'I hate being shunted off on to good-natured other people's people! It makes me feel a perfect nuisance. I often suspect that I am a bore as it is; but, to be so placed that I must *know* it for a dead certainty, is the thing *plus fort que moi*.'

The corners of Hercy's sensitive mouth began to droop, and his voice had the plaintive accent which never failed to wring the heart of women and strong men.

Robert owned a long experience of this manœuvre, but, nevertheless, he had to swallow something before he could be sure of his own firmness. He recognised now, one over-looked motive in the rather tangled string of circumstances which had led to his leaving Chambord. He had striven to sever all connection between Hercy and the Parfletes. Poor Berenville, as all invalids, took violent and capricious fancies for new acquaintances, or even for old acquaintances under new conditions; yet, as all invalids, also, he wanted to be quite sure that one particular friend was always in the background to soothe him when the new-comers proved unsympathetic, or to help him away when their society palled. Robert knew that he could effect his purpose only by his own withdrawal from the field. Hercy would follow him to the ends of the earth, but so long as Robert remained in sight, no matter how vexed in spirit and severe of mein, his charge would amuse himself by over-drinking, over-smoking and gambling with Parflete or any other person whom he found for the moment to be entertaining.

Most of us know what an intense feeling of relief it brings to find that our motives, for a certain course of action, were not wholly egoistic. Selfishness, in a

case of physical danger, is, without doubt, an ignominious weakness; but when there be spiritual danger, it takes another complexion and becomes a duty. Robert had fled from a situation which he found destructive to his own ideas of honour. It had been a question of instinct—not close reasoning. He had not permitted himself the enervating and sinful luxury of examining the transient emotions which passed like clouds over his soul. They were but the signs of a storm. He received them as such, and, without further wondering, sought to escape from the threatened calamity. That, in itself, was a sufficient reason for his conduct; but he had found another reason, too—consideration for Hercy. He had acted on the principle of the two boys at play, one of whom, finding that his comrade was rushing toward a precipice and deaf to all entreaties to return, immediately took to his heels and darted off as though in pursuit of some enticing object, whereupon, the lad by the precipice turned too and ran after him, determined to see what thing it was that had proved more interesting than his own audacity.

‘Where you are concerned, Hercy,’ said Robert, quietly, ‘I have no self-reproaches. I left you with Aumerle. I would leave you with him at any time, or I would even leave you alone if I found, as I found at Chambord, that you neither valued my advice nor listened to my just objections to late hours, gambling and brandy swilling. I was your friend then and I



am your friend still, unless you go on in this way and make it impossible for me to remain one. You knew I did not like your manner at Chambord, therefore, why do you keep it up, unless you wish me to be your friend no longer? I am neither your servant nor your dependent. We are equals, I have nothing to gain from you; you have nothing to gain from me. No, you must either treat me with confidence or break with me altogether. There must be some common ground on which we can stand. We must agree that certain things are right, and certain things are wrong, otherwise, all is over between us. The vicious, self-indulgent life which commends itself to Parfete, is, to my mind, scandalous. If you, on the other hand, think it a fine thing for a man to lose his own soul and corrupt others by his example, all that is left to be said is this—it is a parting of the ways. I must go my way—you, yours. Now you know my mind on the matter. It is a parting of the ways.'

He had spoken simply and with great earnestness. To Hercy he had never before seemed so resolute a character; he had never seemed so determined to himself. There is perhaps no strength so great and abiding as that which follows from a resisted temptation. Every dangerous allurements is like an enchanted monster, which, being conquered, loses all his venom and changes at once into a king of great treasure, eager to make requital. Robert felt a self-

trust, an exaltation of mind which seemed able to defy all the powers of darkness.

‘What with men not daring to venture upon marriage and what with men wearied out of it,’ muttered Hercy, ‘I begin to think that St Paul did wrong to spare us his full information on the point!’

‘This is a parting of the ways,’ repeated Robert for the third time.

He heard a tap at the door.

‘Come in!’ said Berenville.

It was Parflete’s young wife.

## CHAPTER VI

SHE entered the sitting-room with a reluctant air, and blushing deeply, rather from vexation than shyness, held out toward Hercy a three-cornered note as though that gesture would justify, far quicker than words, an intrusion evidently made against her own judgment.

‘Mr Parfete told me to bring you this,’ she said in French, as she walked up to the invalid’s sofa. ‘I believe there is an answer.’

She bowed to Orange, who looked pale. He offered her a chair which she declined, and as they both stood silent while Hercy read the note—which was rather long and seemed to require much consideration—Robert stole a glance at her face and figure. Her resemblance to Madame Duboc was such as one might suppose the purified spirit bears to its earthly body. She was the same creature yet all changed. Brigit was tall and slight. She was a real blonde, with that soft, flaxen hair, which never grows to a great length or in heavy masses, and which is too fine to bear the weight of pins. Mrs

Parfete confined hers very simply, and regardless of the fashion, in a jewelled net. She kept to that mode all her life. Her eyes were blue, unfathomably deep, and her features had an irregularity which, while it destroyed her claim to any classic beauty, gave her a most uncommon and distinguished appearance. Although Robert had in his mind compared her to a spirit she was neither ethereal nor ascetic. She was obviously human enough and with a heart as passionate as her mother's. Henriette Duboc, when all the worst was said and thought and known, had died of grief in the Villa Miraflores, while the Archduke Charles and his bride were sailing in the Imperial yacht straight past her windows. Robert wondered whether the child knew aught of that story. For she was a child—a child in face which was younger than any poetic conception of youthfulness and a child in figure—clad as it was in a pensionnaire's frock of white lawn made and embroidered by the nuns in the Convent at Tours.

She remained there motionless, with one beautiful, ungloved hand resting on the chair she had refused, looking down to the noisy Rue de Rivoli beneath the hotel window. Robert seized the opportunity to give Berenville, who was extraordinarily sensitive over such attentions, his crutch. But the cripple was in a mood not unusual with him, which was just redeemed from vindictiveness by a certain elvish love of mischief for its own sake.

‘Where is Parflete?’ he said, turning to Brigit.

‘He is in the court-yard smoking,’ she replied.

Hercy threw Robert a defiant glance, sprang from the sofa—as he could when he was sure of his prop—and in two jumps was out of the room. Brigit and Robert were thus left alone.

‘He frightens me,’ said Brigit. ‘Where has he gone? What am I to tell Mr Parflete? He told me to wait for an answer. He has not given one.’

‘Pray sit down,’ said Robert. ‘He is very tired after his long journey, and he is not himself to-day.’

‘Do you think,’ she said, ‘I should have time to fetch my book? Mr Parflete has given me *Kenilworth*.’

‘Hercy might return at any moment,’ replied Robert, smiling; ‘but, in the meantime—have you seen this?’

He gave her a small volume which was one of the neglected twenty that he had bought in the fever of mental unrest from which he had suffered on his arrival in Paris. It was a French version of Browning’s *Men and Women*, a curious work, which, however, had not wholly missed the spirit of the original.

‘Ah!’ cried Brigit, ‘that is *M. Robert Browning*.’ She gave the name a French pronunciation. ‘One of our nuns who knew English gave a lecture about him, but the Mother Superior said he was too difficult. I wrote a composition on his works.’

‘Had you read them?’ he asked in astonishment.

‘*Mais non!* But I had the notes from Sister Winifred’s lecture. She called him a great genius but with no sense of form. Wasn’t that right? I said the same and so they gave me the first prize. I was very pleased.’

‘Your life at the Convent must have been happy?’

‘Ah yes! because I knew I should not be there always.’

‘Then you would not care to be a nun yourself?’

‘Oh, no!’ said Brigit, with dancing eyes. ‘I wanted to be married as mamma was. Did you ever see mamma? I remember her quite well. She had such beautiful dresses and so many friends. They all brought me presents and bonbons until she grew ill. Then, of course they stayed away because she could not see them. But she used to lie on a sofa all day telling me fairy stories. And they always ended this way. “*She married the brave prince and lived happy ever after.*” When that part came I knew it was time to clap my hands. She used to say, “Louder, louder, clap louder! *Il faut avoir de l’esprit.*” Oh! I can hear her now!’

So could Robert. She had inherited every note of her mother’s bewitching voice and he looked away.

‘What else?’ he asked, clearing his throat.

‘Mr Parflete was very kind to mamma,’ said Brigit.

‘He was with her when she died. She had her couch wheeled to the window because she wanted to see the

Imperial yacht sail past. The Archduke Charles and his Duchess were on board, and mamma said to me, "Can you see him? Does he look happy?" I knew him well, because when we were all in Paris, and mamma was strong, he used to call often and bring me dolls, but I could not see him that day because the boat was too far away. And when the boat sailed out of sight mamma said she believed that she would go to Spain for the winter because she wanted more sun. That is all I remember. Mr Parflete sent me to bed, and when I saw mamma again she was in her coffin, and there were two nuns watching over her and they told me to kiss her good-bye. I cried very much, but the next day they took me away to the Convent, and they soon taught me not to cry for anyone so happy as poor mamma. But although she was happy, they always said her name in the prayers for the faithful departed. I want to live longer than she lived. She must have forgotten the world by this time. I should like to be here long enough to think of it all when I am in Paradise. I love the world. It is so gay and so beautiful and everyone is so kind, and there are so many things to see.'

Brigit found it most easy and pleasant to pour out her little confidences to this handsome grim young man, who had a dark beard and looked like someone between a king and a monk—Charles I., for instance, and St Bernard. She wondered whether he loved any

woman or had ever loved one. He seemed so sad, grave and meditative.

‘Were you married at the Convent?’ asked Robert, abruptly.

He thought it a necessary discipline to remind himself often, and without paraphrase, that this young girl was Parflete’s wife.

‘I was married in our chapel,’ answered Brigit. ‘The nuns made my gown; the Mother Superior herself pinned on my veil and gathered the flowers for my wreath. She laughed and told me that she had never dressed an earthly bride before. But she cried at the wedding, and, when I went away she said, “Be very silent, trust greatly in the Sacred Heart and not much in anything below It; least of all in friends, when the sun goes in they change colour, but the Sacred Heart is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. May every blessing be with you!” I wrote it all down afterwards on a piece of paper and I wear it as a charm. Here it is.’

She unfastened a small gold chain which she wore round her neck, and placed it with its pendant, heart-shaped locket in Robert’s hands.

‘Open it,’ she said, ‘and read it for yourself.’

The lines were written in an unformed but delicate hand on a little slip of pink paper. Brigit looked over his shoulder as he examined it. The words suddenly seemed blurred, and, growing pale, Robert returned it in silence. He was thinking of that day at Mira-



flores, when Henriette Duboc gave him the little pearl and ruby trinket which meant love and tears. How it all came back! The cooing of the doves; the little green lizard that crawled out upon the stone bench where Henriette had been sitting; the scent of the pines; the cool blue river winding out toward the sea, and the deep inexpressible joy which had first roused his soul to the sure and certain knowledge of its own immortality. It is a mental passion only which can kindle such enthusiasm or bear such imperishable memories. After the lapse of ten years those moments spent at Miraflores returned to Orange with more than their first sweetness and none of that last misery which had made them, for a long time, a torturing recollection.

‘Do you like the lines so much,’ asked Brigit, whose feminine instinct told her that he was profoundly moved.

‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘I like them very much.’

‘Then I will copy them for you,’ she exclaimed, and ran to the writing-table.

That copying proved a great affair. A new pen had to be found, and then a fresh bottle of violet ink was opened.

Robert’s leather portfolio contained no letter paper worthy of the transcription. At last he decided that it should be written in a rare, old copy of Casaubon’s *Marcus Aurelius* (1634), which he had discovered by a miracle the day before.

Brigit shook her head. Oh, no, she could not dream of writing in such a precious book. Alas! she made a blot on its cover as she spoke. But Robert did not seem vexed—a fact which to the bibliophile will tell its own story.

So the words were eventually copied in accordance with his wishes.

*'Be very silent. Trust greatly in the Sacred Heart and not much in anything below It; least of all in friends, when the sun goes in they change colour, but the Sacred Heart is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. May every blessing be with you!'*

'You have not signed it,' said he.

Perhaps she had been agitated by her carelessness in the matter of the blot—perhaps she was fearful lest her signature should look larger than Robert's own name at the top of the page, and in watching to compare the two, became confused in her ideas; but, for one of these reasons, or for some unknowable cause, she wrote herself down *Brigit Orange*, and never discovered the error.

Robert saw it. His heart was beating wildly. He said nothing; he hid the volume at once. It seemed as though it held a leaf from the secret books of Fate.

'Mr Berenville does not come back,' said Brigit, moving from the writing-table and walking over to the window.

Her thoughts were flying rapidly in girlish fashion

from one subject to another. 'The room was too small for her roving mind, and she longed to be out in the busy street where she could see all the shops and the people and the gaiety. It seemed such a waste of time to stand inactively behind dull, maroon curtains talking of convents and wedding-days, when the Spring sun was in a kissing mood and everyone was driving toward the Bois. She wanted to walk out, and she wanted to look at new hats. Mr Parflete had generously promised her a hat from Virots. Why did he wait so long ?

'I do hope,' said Brigit, with a mournful glance, 'that nothing will interfere with our plans for this evening. We are going to *Les Papillons*. I suppose you are coming with us ?'

'No ; oh, no !' he answered with such haste that she felt it was scarcely gracious.

'You wonder why we care for anything so foolish ?'

'Don't misunderstand me,' he said. 'It is perfectly natural that you should like places of amusement.'

'But, nevertheless, you could wish that I showed wiser taste ! I must be truthful. I long for this evening. You may frown at me, but I cannot be a hypocrite. I love the theatre, and I delight in everything *bourgeois*.'

Her eyes sparkled and her cheeks flushed from the pleasure of teasing this severe man of whom her

husband and Charles Aumerle and Hercy Berenville certainly stood in awe. *She* was not afraid! She should say what she pleased! She was a married woman and had a perfect right to—Mr Parflete's opinions! The truly delightful thing would be to hold this *jeune homme très extraordinaire* with a direct look, and utter such defiant sentiments as she could—under the inspiration of Puck—invent.

'I see,' said Robert, 'that you are the pink of perversity.'

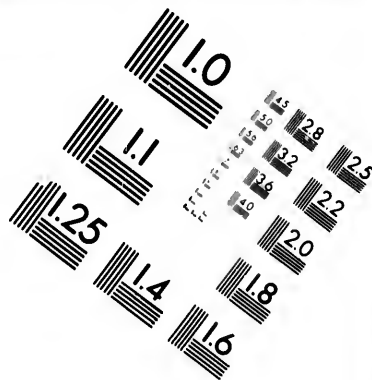
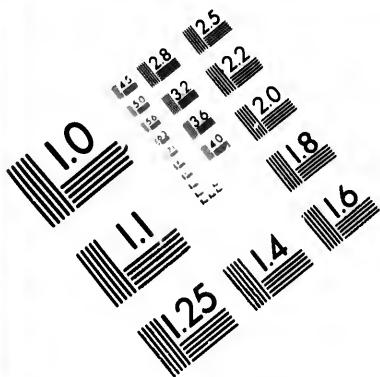
'Not at all! My first desire is to be honest, yet it would grieve me to quarrel with you.'

'That could never happen,' he said. 'I agree with all you say. I, too, delight in the stage. I have wished that theatre-going were a moral obligation, for then we should have a highly critical audience, and, as a consequence, good plays.'

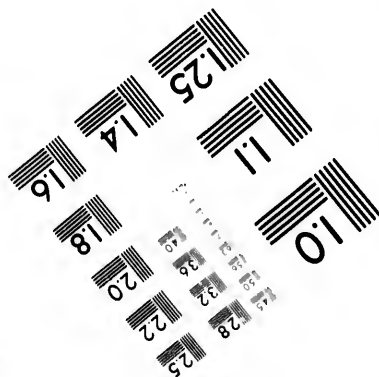
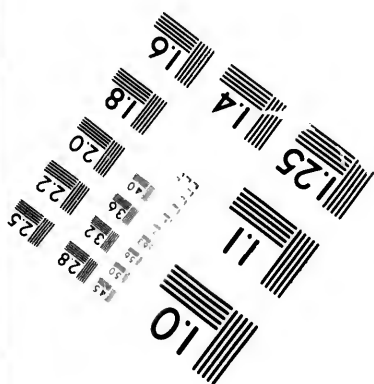
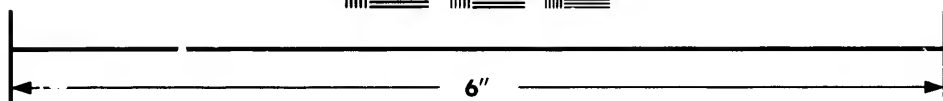
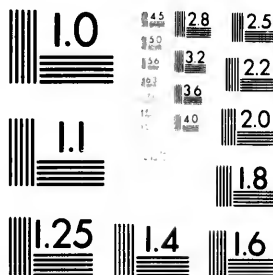
'Then why won't you come with us this evening?'

'Have you never heard of self-denial?'

This was more than he had intended to say. Brigit's manner, however, seemed to him maddening, because she was flirting, not on principle, but by instinct. He was filled with a blinding jealousy of the possible, average man, who might have been standing in his shoes, and on whom she would have smiled, and to whom she would have spoken, and at whom she would have laughed, just as she was smiling and speaking and softly laughing now. It was no tribute to himself, nor did it show any reprehensible



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weakness in Brigit. She was no angel—that was all. A dangerous conclusion for even the most cautious of mortals to arrive at when an argument has to be demonstrated from premises.

‘I have some work to finish,’ he added hastily. ‘Nothing otherwise would give me greater pleasure than to join the party. I hope you believe that.’

Brigit looked long and thoughtfully at his face.

‘I don’t know,’ she said at length. ‘I should like to believe you, but—’

‘My word is not to be doubted!’

‘You might wish to be polite.’

‘Politeness is no man’s word; it is everybody’s lie! That is why I have a habitual contempt for courtesy. You may have observed this.’

‘I think it is a pity,’ said Brigit, with some dryness.

‘Then, in your opinion, I am brutal!’

‘Very difficult.’

‘I am sorry if I have offended you.’

‘Then, shake hands.’

His hand was cold—ice-cold. She exclaimed in maternal accents, on touching it,—

‘Are we friends again?’ she asked.

‘Have we ever been enemies?’

‘No, but you puzzle me. I think you want to be kind, but you don’t understand a woman’s idea of kindness. To speak of self-denial is a reproach; it carries an accusation. You have placed my conscience in an unflattering light!’

‘How have you discovered these things?’ said Robert, at once, eager, delighted and astonished; ‘you, at your age!’

This sudden seriousness in a character which had been, till that moment, remarkable chiefly for its unstudied candour, seemed to add to Brigit’s already sufficient attractions, the enigmatic fascination of the Sphinx.

‘Vanity will make even the silliest creature occasionally thoughtful,’ said Brigit, with a saucy air.

Robert had never been so situated that he could observe the working of a child’s mind, nor had he ever heard the profound truths which children utter between the shouts, lamentations and laughs of play. He had studied the adolescent and men and women, but this experience was wholly new to him. For the first time the charm of childhood—its trust, its transparent guile, its careless wisdom, its pure humanity, uncultivated, unrestrained and unsuspecting—touched his heart, which was just then a little dry and weary from too much love of books. He had never been young himself. He had met responsibility at the very threshold of life. He imagined himself—and rightly—as unlike men of his own age as he had been, at an earlier period, unlike other children.

He could not remember a time when—even while surrounded by congenial and loved companions—his mind had been otherwise than lonely. The effect



of Brigit was overwhelming. His meeting with Henriette Duboc had opened his eyes to the beauty of the visible world and had turned his unharmonised senses into unison with the great chords of Nature. But to be in tune is not, of necessity, to be played upon. He had never felt what he was feeling now. Brigit seemed to touch every note in his being; there was not a longing nor a fear, not a nerve nor a sentiment, not a hope nor a despair, not a virtue nor a failing, but responded to that subduing influence. It was as though some rare musician had strayed into a forgotten church and told a message from God upon the organ keys. All that was deep in emotion, all that was sublime in thought seemed to meet and blend in one inspiring strain. Mortal desire and the insatiable more subtle needs of the spirit seemed, not two opposing voices, but one irresistible voice and its softer aërial echo. His pulses trembled and the warning spirit within him cried out in weeping, as it had cried before to a poet-lover—*Heu miser! quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps.* (Woe is me! for that often I shall be disturbed from this time forth!)

The room in which Orange stood was bare and dingy. Here there were no adventitious snares for the idealist's soul or the dreamer's imagination. The sensuous delights of blue sky and green land, of singing birds and scented flowers were not here as they had been at Miraflores. All the magic was in that slight, young figure clad in white, in that

animated girlish face set in a natural glory of bright hair. He wondered—and hated himself for wondering—whether she was even remotely conscious of her power. The most honourable mind will often encourage itself in a conscientious insincerity. Robert still showed a stubborn resistance to admit that the mysterious exaltation which he felt, under the obscure medium of philosophic thought, was, in reality, but the common process known as falling in love. He would have recoiled as violently from the notion as the phrase. It could not be. It was impossible. He could have knelt at Brigit's feet, not because she was a beautiful young woman, but because both her beauty and her womanliness had so little in them of common sexuality. She was a divinity; and if he was a monster—a wolf—was that her fault? Did that prove anything one way or the other? In the ordinary course of life, he was sane and even Homeric in his straightforward views of the laws of attraction, but in the present instance his accustomed simplicity was lost in an irritating poetic vapour which hung about his soul just as a fog will enwrap the morning.

The lovely minute had passed; he came down from the earthly heaven into which he had been caught for a brief moment, and he found himself thinking in dull words of plain things. He had a longing to quarrel with someone—with everyone, preferably with the fair, young creature into whose company he had

been driven by a relentless fate and a friend's malice. Once he had been able to think, on the whole, rather highly of convent schools. He now considered them barbarous forcing-grounds where perfect wives were trained for the Wrexham Parfletes. He had observed that selfish, coarse-minded people usually married well. Men of the Parflete type found angels, and shrewd, vixenish women entrapped the very sons of God. The thought was sickening. He grew more and more peevish at the general mismanagement of human affairs, and even became enraged against Biddy herself for seeming to acquiesce so cheerfully in a lot so unedifying. And yet it was just this sunny health of mind which won him most. He abhorred *la femme mécomprise*—that she-dragon of family life.

'Why don't you speak?' asked Brigit, suddenly.

'Because,' he answered, 'there is nothing to say!'

Brigit went up to him, laid her hand on his arm and looked up into his face with the kindest eyes he had ever seen in any human countenance.

'Are you in trouble?' said she, gently.

And what was his answer? He shrank back from that light touch and turned away.

'You are very good,' he said roughly, 'but it is my nature to be brutish. When I sink into meditation I am merely seeking whom I may devour! Yes, that is me—the real Me!'

'Oh, no,' said Brigit, 'that is not you at all. But I know that you are, perhaps, a little discontented. You are not satisfied with your life. When I first saw you, I asked myself, "*Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?*" You don't mind? . . . May I go on? I know that I have no right to speak; I have had so little experience. And yet, while you have been out in the world, thinking of many things, I have been in one small crowded corner with more than forty other girls, and I have been in daily intercourse with each member of that crowd. How could I then—even if I would—be entirely ignorant of human feelings? Besides, before mamma died I travelled with her; we crossed the Atlantic twice. We went to London and Berlin quite often; all my memories are very clear of the people we met and the places we saw. My husband was surprised to find how well I remembered those far-away times and journeys and conversations. So when I saw you, I thought of a man who, mamma used to say, was a disciple without a master. Now, if you are not too angry, may I say that I think that is your trouble? You have zeal and you have courage, and you have loyalty and you have devotion, but you have not yet been called by a voice you can believe in!'

Robert held his breath. How clearly she had divined a state of mind which he himself had been unable to explain except as a dull and gnawing ache.

‘In what sense do you mean that?’ he said at last. ‘Do you speak of a divine or a human call? The Divine Voice I have never doubted, but I have often wished that I could hear it more plainly. When it pleads from the Roman Church I am deeply moved; I am not, however, fully persuaded that I hear aright. When it threatens from the Protestant pulpit, I am more nearly persuaded, but I am not moved in the least. The Protestants insist on the virtues—you must assume them if you have them not—the Catholics lay more stress on the sacraments. Now the virtues are, after all, the product of philosophy. Jewish ethics, under the old dispensation, were barbarous when we compare them with the precepts taught by the Pagan moralists, who had, nevertheless, no hope and were without God in the world! The philosophic mind is not told by the Hebrew prophets. Passionate invective; cries for vengeance; lamentations and mourning and woe; threats of appalling punishment; promises of earthly recompense and the urging forward to worldly aims, crowns and dignities—humanity, in fact, as opposed to spirituality, is the great strain running all through the godliness taught before the birth of Christ. One might be perfectly virtuous in every human relation and yet possess an irreligious soul. On the other hand, one might be absolutely convinced of God’s revelation of Himself and yet sin against every canon of right conduct. The devil, for instance, must have

a sure knowledge of God ; his fault was treachery not disbelief. This thought has always made me feel that the deepest of crimes is to sin against light ; it has also helped me to understand why your Church is so much more severe toward pride of intellect than against the natural weaknesses of the heart. I think it conceivable that God would forgive even Satan, if he would but repent and love Him. Humanly speaking, so long as we feel that we are really loved we can forgive much. The faults of those who love us are more acceptable than the virtues of those who treat us with neglect. I fully comprehend, therefore, why it should be a more vital necessity in the Christian life to attend mass than to keep a stoic's temper. Faith in God does not in itself alter the fundamental characteristics of a man's disposition. It seems to me unjust, therefore, to call any person a hypocrite because, while in creed a Christian, he is in the struggle for life, greedy, untruthful, malicious or worse. Strive for the calm temper, by all means, if you have not received it—as many have received it just as some are blessed with good health, or fine possessions, or a serene mind—but never suppose that natural graces of character, or acquired stoicism or Platonism, or any other ism without acts of devotion to God will avail you at the judgment ! These are the things I say to myself constantly ; I try hard not to forget them.'

'Then, why are you not one of us ?' asked Brigit.

‘Because my sympathies are all with Rome,’ he answered slowly; ‘and on that ground I mistrust my reason in the matter. Sentiment with me is so powerful a motive that I have to regard it as I would a besetting sin. I dare not yield to any thought when I find myself attacked through the sentiments. The very poetry of the sacraments—if I may so speak—their sway over the intellect and the emotions are, to me, the strongest argument against them. I cannot allow myself to think that ceremonies which bring such a glow of unspeakable, inhuman happiness can be intrinsically right or pleasing to God. It is an intoxication of the soul. . . . The capacity for such intense feeling—whether in the mental or the sensuous life—seems to me a thing one should stifle—stifle and forget. . . . I am saying too much about myself; forgive me!’

People who have a taste for accurate scholarship, often start on their researches, as it were, in quest of a forgotten idiom, and they return enriched with a new language—if not a new world. Robert had seemed, quite suddenly, to see the rest points towards which his reflection and reading, for many months now, had been directed. He blushed, however, in the fear that he had been speaking with that dogmatic assurance which all men dislike in each other, which, nevertheless, no man, who is in earnest, may lack. Strong convictions alone can lead to strong deeds, and a man who is timorous in uttering an

opinion will be even weaker in his attempt to act upon it. Orange was too young and over-austere then to have practised persuasiveness as an art. The winning quality was his by nature, and he classed it with his sentiments, among wrong things, leading to vain-glory and flattery.

The struggles of an ardent nature against a hard and oppressive habit of thought, tell outwardly in a certain irony of speech and a manner which, to the inconsiderate, appears cold, even unfeeling. It requires the pure eyes and unstained heart of a young unsophisticated mind to penetrate through the depths of an outward appearance—to reflect the hidden kindness under an icy look. Brigit was not deceived by the expression which Robert had drawn, as a veil of stone, over his face.

‘Catholicism,’ he said, abruptly, ‘has beauty that we should desire it, and I have not so learnt Christ.’

‘You forget,’ said Brigit, ‘that Christ once showed Himself as He was. Have you never read how, one starry, August night, He went up on to the holy mount, with the apostles He loved best, and was transfigured before them. His sorrowful face was changed, it shone as the sun; His garments became white as snow, and He was glorious with the splendour of God. Does that not mean that He wanted them to know, that, in worshipping the spirit of truth they were also worshipping



the spirit of perfect loveliness — perfect and ineffable beauty?’

She spoke as only those can speak with whom sacred thoughts are familiar things, to be declared in fearlessness and simplicity.

Robert was startled by what seemed, to him, a new light adroitly cast on his obscure difficulties; but he looked straight at the dingy walls, tightened his lips and persuaded himself that he had to wrestle with another most cruel temptation, namely, the force of a personal influence in what should be a purely religious question. It meant, in reality, placing faith in an individual, and, when that individual fell short of the expectations he raised, and who, being human, can be otherwise than disappointing?—one lost faith in his doctrines—faith in his God. He prayed to be delivered from any momentary yielding to a folly so passing sweet in its first enthusiasm—so afflicting in its last reproach.

‘You are very good,’ he said; ‘but no one can help me!’

‘I will pray for your intention,’ said Brigit, smiling; ‘I will say the rosary for you every day. That is much better than any argument. St Monica prayed for her son, St Augustine; she never lectured him, and that is a lesson for all of us. But you remind me of something a Jesuit Father once told me. I asked him why men risked their lives to find the North Pole. It seemed to me that

the land there would be useless even when gained. "By no means," said he, "for, on the other side of the North Pole, when you have once passed through the regions of ice and snow, there is a beautiful country, warm and fair, another Italy!"

'It must be like my kingdom under the sea,' said Robert, smiling, 'I will tell you about it some day.'

Brigit sat down on the sofa, and, folding her hands, looked up at him with an expression of meek wistfulness which was quite unusual on her brilliant, mobile face.

'Tell me now,' said she. 'Tell me everything.'

The appeal was irresistible. He began to talk about his boyhood in Brittany, about Madame Bertin, about his walks on the ramparts of St Malo and the old lace-maker whom he had met on the day after his eighteenth birthday. He had never before spoken of that past to any ears.

The first exchange of confidences between two minds in sympathy makes a delightful moment, and it is, moreover, a moment which, in various degrees of delightfulness, may be repeated so often as one finds a congenial companion. But things can be told for the first time once only. That experience must ever be unique. The second telling renders the news less sacred; at each repetition it loses its value for us. Piece by piece it ceases to be ours, and finally it is carried away into the great dead sea of gossip.

Robert, in talking to Brigit, did not hear the sound of his own voice. He felt himself thinking, not speaking. His memory and hers seemed to flow together, and their common thoughts were an enchanted fleet borne upon that tide. . . .

‘And yet,’ said Brigit, when he had finished speaking, ‘and yet . . . you won’t come to *Les Papillons* with me to-night.’

‘Why do you put it in that ungenerous way?’

‘Because I want you to go with us.’

‘I thought I explained that I had work . . . unfortunately . . .’

‘If you stay at home you will not work. I know that. The true cause is this—you don’t like my husband! But if I like him—and I am his wife—surely you can like him? His heart is all generosity, and I love to look at his beautiful coats! Please like him because he is so kind to me!’

‘How could anyone be otherwise than kind to you?’

‘Oh! oh! And you can dare to ask me that? I have never till now been made unhappy—never! No one has ever refused me anything. And why? because I am perfectly reasonable. But you—you won’t look at me and you keep saying “no” to the poor wall! The wall has not begged you to go to the theatre. I was the one!’

‘Then, yes,’ said Robert. ‘Yes! There! why should I give up everything? I have been dying to

say "yes." I could not believe that you could want such a dull, prosing . . .'

'How silly of you,' said Brigit, smoothing back a lock of her hair. 'But now we can go downstairs to the others. I am wondering where they are.'

## CHAPTER VII

ORANGE opened the door and Brigit, leading the way, went out into the corridor with that light and swinging step which was one of her peculiar characteristics. Neither of them spoke, and, when they reached the top of the staircase, both were relieved by the sight of Parfete and Hercy seated at a small table in the hall below.

Parfete, on observing his wife, stood up and went forward to meet her. He looked the pattern of Court equerries, and, as he handed her to a seat, he quoted the well-loved lines from Dante :—

\* ‘ *Negli occhi porta la mia donna Amore ;  
Per che si fa gentil ciò ch’ella mira ;  
Ov’ella passa, ogni uom vèr lei si gira,  
E cui saluta fa tremar lo core.*’

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\* ‘ My lady carries love within her eyes ;  
All that she looks on is made pleasanter ;  
Upon her path men turn to gaze at her,  
He whom she greeteth feels his heart to rise.’

Robert had started with a resolve to fight what he inwardly called his own uncharitable spirit, but this greeting seemed to him to show so false a rapture that his heart was set burning anew with all the fires of disgust and jealousy. The religious calm which had settled upon his mind was now disturbed by the frequent reiteration of an active thought to the effect that Wrexham Parfete needed kicking.

Brigit, however, who was not suffering persecution from the furies, acknowledged the pompous compliment by a blush that came, partly from a gentle pleasure in her husband's praise, partly from a feeling that the others ridiculed—or worse, misjudged him. She, too, might have found it necessary to suppress a smile at the dollish figure and the mincing utterance of the Archduke's chief adviser, and this thought, in itself, was disturbing to her sense of what was loyal. She understood that coxcomb's morbid character, the chief faults of which arose from an over-anxiety to make himself agreeable, and an under-estimate of his natural power to please. His talk was an elaborate paraphrase of his ideas, and his outward existence was a travesty of the life within him. The unacted Parfete was a man of many hardly-won accomplishments, and some genuine virtues, but the edition of himself which he presented to the world was, if more amusing, far less respectable than the original creature. He glittered and twinkled at the Court where he was a great favourite with errant heirs-apparent who liked

to sip instruction through anecdotes. Ambassadors and statesmen remarked him with less pleasure, for the former thought his influence unaccountable, and the latter feared his wit. Bismarck had once described him as '*a velvet buffoon.*' Disraeli summed him up more leniently as '*a goldfish with a soul.*'

'Of course you will have some more coffee,' exclaimed Berenville, who was now eager for a reconciliation. '*Garçon*, two cups of coffee! Parflete's note, it seems, was a rigmarole about an opera box, but it was written in such diplomatic, such courtly language, that I thought it meant Miss Lucifer was in at four stone for the Chester Cup. In my anxiety to learn more, I nearly broke my neck!'

'*The words of Mercury sound harsh after the songs of Apollo!*' said Parflete, in his most ironical manner, 'but it was decreed that we should all meet at this table. Listen! Berenville and I were sitting here wondering why we had been born—'

'Or,' said Hercy, 'whether we should toddle round to the Cercle de l'Union for a little game of cards.'

'When we looked up and whom should we see within five feet of us, of all men in the world, his face a ruin and his mind, to all appearance, a howling wilderness—but . . .'

'Old Dizzy!' exclaimed Berenville.

'Mr Disraeli!' said Parflete. 'My astonishment was great. He remembered me at once, and showed surprise when I told him of my marriage. He knew

your mother, dearest ! But I made the *grand coup* when, by the merest accident, I mentioned the author of *Basil Lemaitre*. I said that you were a member of our party.'

He looked at Robert, whose discomfort had now reached a culminating point. Parflete continued in a slow strain, as though he were tasting his own words and finding them pleasant to his palate,—

'Mr Disraeli at once observed that he had read *Basil Lemaitre* with concern and pleasure—concern for the author's career, and pleasure in his gifts of poetical expression.'

'Don't put it on too thick !' said the graceful Hercy.

'He laid such emphasis on the word poetical,' said Parflete, undismayed, 'I believe that he has found out that you are a Platonist ! He asked me to present you to him, and I promised to do so. This is, without a doubt, the second opportunity of your life. Disraeli is not in office, and therefore he has great power behind the scenes. If you could excite his interest for Reckage, it would be a good day's work.'

This last touch was skilful. Parflete was well aware that Orange could never be induced to make an acquaintance with a view to the possible advantage which might accrue to himself from the encounter. As a mere matter of good manners, he would have shrunk from an introduction to Disraeli by any chance out of the common order of things in social life. The



truest modesty is three parts pride. Robert had too independent a spirit to seek success by favour, or to strive to keep it, when gained, by the assiduous cultivation of useful friends. He felt, too, that his own achievements in literature were as yet so slight and imperfect that it would have required nothing short of insolence to think they could possess any pressing claim upon the weary ex-minister's attention. But these personal considerations were now overruled by the thought, that, in speaking with the eminent politician he might be able to utter a word in Lord Reckage's behalf.

'I wish he would do something for Reckage,' said Hercy, who, with the rest of their little clique in England, thought that Orange's two romances were as dust in comparison with Reckage's one speech on the *Secularization of Ecclesiastical Property*.

'Robert, you must wake him up about Beau. You might remind him that papa always supports him in the House of Lords. He went up to town with his whole back in plaster of Paris just to vote for—'

'Good God!' exclaimed Parflete, under his breath, 'here he comes! What a proof of the man's kindness. He has returned on purpose. Hereafter I shall always defend him. This is an historic moment!'

The statesman was walking slowly, but with rather long strides, through the public drawing-room that faced them. His worn and livid countenance had lost the romantic beauty to which he owed much of

his early fortune, but neither illness nor anxiety had dimmed the piercing brilliancy of his expression. It was impossible to see him without observing the conspicuous details of a costume which was certainly not the least uncommon part of his picturesque and amazing personality. He wore a light overcoat, grey trousers, a white hat and lavender gloves. When he saw Parflete advancing toward him, he smiled as if he had fully intended to be met, and now expected to be amused.

If, in gaining his point with Orange, the equerry had given evidence of his tact, it had not been exhibited in a less striking degree during his conversation with Disraeli. That diplomatist had been rather vexed than otherwise to find himself suddenly accosted by a man whom he associated with all the fussy trivialities of Court etiquette, and Parflete's own account of the first moments of their interview was probably a flattering sketch of what actually took place. But the mention of Robert's name in connection with the novel *Basil Lemaitre* had stirred Disraeli's interest, more particularly when he heard him described as 'the son of a Dominican apostate by a descendant in the female line of Cromwell's friend, Lord Wharborough. She was,' to continue the Parfletean strain, 'a beautiful creature, as wilful as the devil and as great a Puritan as Michal, the wife of David.'

'And who was this lady?' asked Disraeli,

'She was disowned by her family,' had been the reply. 'Her father broke his heart. I may not mention the name, but he held a high position.'

'I should think,' said Disraeli, drily, 'that your young friend was in some danger of becoming a charlatan from the sheer force of a sensational pedigree.'

'But his education has been too severe,' said Parflete.

He had then told how the young man had received his literary training while acting as companion and secretary to the sons of the Earl of Almouth.

'He had remarkable tutors, sir,—coming men themselves, in fact; Ledward taught them the classics, Grantham put them on to general ideas.'\*

'Then I admit,' said Disraeli, with his peculiar smile, 'that he ought to be, on the whole, a thoroughly decent scoundrel.'

But nevertheless his curiosity, which was not, as a rule, easily excited, had received a stimulus. He expressed a genuine wish to meet Mr Parflete's 'accomplished friend,' and this, considering his own rather irritable state of mind, and his hardly concealed dislike of the gossipy Wrexham, was a tribute to the latter's persuasiveness.

As he now came up to the table, he scanned the

\* In justice to Parflete's power of estimating worldly success, Ledward became, many years after, Bishop of Barchester, and Grantham was made Professor of Moral Philosophy at Camford.

group, and was immediately pleased at Robert's unpretentious, yet manly, bearing. When his eyes fell with a glance of almost tragic wonder upon Brigit, she rose from her seat and dropped him a little curtsey as she had been taught to do to dignitaries of the Church, royalties and elderly persons. But she listened to Disraeli's congratulations on her marriage—to the *Gamaliel of Imperial Councils*—with the self-possession of a nature born rather to accept, than to pay, homage. She might have been a young princess in exile, and, during the short conversation which followed, she showed a dignity as simple as it was touching. Of the four men surrounding her Parflete himself was probably the most astonished at her ease of manner. She was only then on her honeymoon, and had not yet mixed in society. She had not yet been presented at the Court, nor was she aware of the close relationship that she bore toward the Archduke.

Robert thought her so delightful in this stately aspect that he caught none of the remarks which passed—they were doubtless unimportant—till he heard himself directly addressed by Disraeli.

‘I am going to the Bibliothèque Impériale,’ he said ‘would you care to accompany me?’

‘Nothing would give me greater pleasure,’ replied Robert, with perfect honesty.

‘But am I taking you from your friends?’

There followed an exchange of smiles and bows,

compliments and vague expressions of unmet hopes with regard to further meetings.

In a few moments Disraeli and the young secretary were walking toward the Rue Vivienne.

‘Let us go first,’ said Disraeli, ‘to the left and quieter bank of the Seine. The ancient hotel of Cardinal Mazarin is, perhaps, too noisy at this hour in spite of its thick walls. My delight, after all, is in the air and the sunshine. I like the river. Have you ever thought of the colours of rivers? There is the verdant Loire, the yellow Tiber, the silvery Thames, the ruddy Hudson, the purple Rhine, the blue Danube, but the Seine—how should one describe the Seine?’

‘It seems to me dusty,’ said Robert, with his usual bluntness.

‘Ah! the dusty Seine! I see you are alive rather to the paradox than the beauty in things. Your book led me to expect another order of perception. It shows the influence of Plato. There is a heartlessness, however, in the writings of Plato which makes his mysticism forbidding to my mind. But the mysticism in your hero was religious—like Newman’s. It was not coldly philosophical. At your age I was myself a dreamer of dreams. I soon learnt that I was too imaginative to be useful anywhere except in a life of action.’

‘Surely,’ said Robert, ‘that, too, is a paradox.’

‘Possibly. But the greatest leaders have been men

of the highest imagination. Shakespeare and Milton expressed what Elizabeth and Cromwell imagined. I have been an idealist always. Yet, while I am infinitely yours in respect of your beliefs, my experience keeps me separate from your impatient hopefulness. Hope is the heroic form of despair. Such must have been the feeling of the great Law-giver, who, if you remember, sang as he started for the Promised Land, and died in silence when it was at last shown to him.'

The sadness of his tone was so profound that Robert felt it would have been an impertinence to offer any remark. They walked on in silence till Disraeli spoke again.

'What I feel now is this. We have reached the stage when sentimentality and philosophism have taken up the room of poets and philosophers. The new generation in our educated classes seem to feel that nothing, save money, is worth their while. On the other hand, in the labour classes, there is an aggressive desire on the part of each unit to assert his or her individuality. Now it has always seemed to me that the gospel of Individuality is a doctrine of failure, whether in politics or art or in any other sphere. That Mazzini said this when he was urging a revolution, with himself as its presiding spirit, does not detract from its profound truth as a dictum! A strong personality, following on the beaten track, may, perhaps, go a step or two farther than his

guides, whereas, if he seeks to cut out a path of his own, he will find himself wandering in a painful circle outside the common starting-point.'

'Still,' said Robert, 'no great work was ever done by a system, whereas systems arise out of individual exertions.'

'It is only the Church of Rome,' said Disraeli, quietly, 'which, as a governing body, has been able to encourage the great ideas of any one person without loss to its own power, or without disaster to the person encouraged. I speak of it, observe, purely as a governing body.'

'I think that may be explained,' said Robert, 'on this ground. Where the welfare of a State is concerned, the heart is probably apprenticed to false gods, and the greatest of false gods is expediency. A measure might be advantageous for the moment only, yet, for the sake of the momentary gain, a politician might refuse to contemplate a future which would not come in his own time. In the policy of Rome, however—and I, too, speak of it as a governing body, the first consideration is for the eternal welfare of the Church; the whole point of view is fixed on what is *to come*, and the great ideas, whether in the individual, or in the council as a body, all arise from a common religious belief.'

'I see,' said Disraeli, smiling, 'that you are not one of those who hold that the Church of Rome apostatized at Trent.'

‘No,’ replied Robert, shortly, ‘but I am not a Papist.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Disraeli, ‘some day you may arrive at a compromise between Rome and Canterbury.’

‘No,’ said Robert.

‘At eight-and-twenty,’ said Disraeli, ‘I, too, thought that compromises were nearly always immoral, as well as dangerous, but, unless I am mistaken, you will find that the best-ordered life is that which shows the largest record of compromises. One need not be a monger of principles—that is a vulgar trade, and always leads to moral bankruptcy—but one can be, as it were, a worker in principles and set one’s mind as a piece of mosaic. You have insight, but you should acquire flexibility. Flexibility is the great thing. In your book it appeared in the guise of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is a beautiful word, if it be understood to mean liberty for all men; when, however, it means, as it seems to mean in the case of a great Republic I could name, an indiscriminate hospitality, you will find that the host will wake one morning to find himself shivering in nakedness on his own doorstep! But tell me, have you yourself never thought of going into Parliament?’

‘I have thought of it,’ said Robert, ‘but as something remote and barely probable. But my secretarial work brings me into close touch with the political problems.’



‘To be sure,’ said Disraeli ; ‘I had forgotten that.’

‘I should feel most grateful if you would give me your opinion of Lord Reckage.’

‘Reckage ! Do you mean Lord Almouth’s eldest son ? I confess he has never occurred to me.’

‘I think,’ said Robert, with some warmth, ‘he will have to be remembered one of these days.’

‘As I remember him now,’ said Disraeli, ‘his head seems made without back windows ; it is all façade and nothing else ! His private merits may be astonishing, but I do not feel that the destinies are actively engaged in fighting for his future. Why should you bury your talent under a friend’s hat ?’ he added, with a piercing look. ‘You have sense, your book shows that. You have ideals, and you have knowledge. My advice would be that you should first essay your strength in the reduction of some Liberal majority. I mistake if a chance of the kind does not occur shortly at Norbet Royal. Vandeleur’s conduct has put scandal to the blush, and the angels of peace themselves must have wept over his duplicity. But while the English always have the knack to oppose good men, they evince a touching loyalty for traitors. Vandeleur will be returned to a certainty at the next election. He will keep his seat till Government is beaten ; that will be your opportunity. Your real troubles will not begin till you are actually in the House.’

‘You speak, sir, as though I were already there !’

‘Why not?’ said Disraeli. ‘Is the average intelligence at the Talking Mill so high that you find my supposition over-flattering? The difficulty does not lie in getting there, nor in keeping there, but in gaining respect for being there! As for parties—as Manning once said to me, or as I may have said to Manning—it is now merely a question between aristocratic selfishness and well-to-do selfishness. All things hinge now on one passion—the least useful passion in public life—jealousy!’

‘I shall have little to fear at that rate,’ said Orange, who had a very modest opinion of his own ability.

‘When I started,’ said Disraeli, putting his arm in Robert’s, ‘I was all for sedition! Now you are all for tradition! Don’t protest; you will become a Roman Catholic because you will find nowhere out of Rome, poetry and the spirit of democracy and a reverence for authority all linked together in one irrefragable chain. But I must warn you that such a step would prejudice your whole political career. It would be throwing down the gauntlet to Fortune herself.’

‘That,’ said Robert, flushing, ‘is the strongest argument you could bring forward in Rome’s favour. It seemed to me that I had everything to gain by acknowledging her claims. Now you tell me—and I could ask for no better judge—that it would mean a severe blow to my worldly prospects my way seems clearer.’

‘The thing you mistook for a temptation begins to

look like a duty ! Certainly, the best test of any belief is the sacrifice one is prepared to make for it. Have you never thought of entering the priesthood ?'

'Never !'

'The unmarried nature is, to my mind, incomplete. It has great, even mystical, power, so far as it goes ; but its range and knowledge is necessarily limited. To quote the example of Christ is to forget His divinity. I do not see how we can, without descending into gross anthropomorphism, make Him a pattern in all human relations. He had an unique mission to fulfil. Few, indeed, of us can feel that we have even so much as a *raison d'être* apart from the divine incomprehensible desire to multiply souls. Men who take upon themselves priestly vows must—or ought—to be sure that they are marked out for some express service. What might be an act of splendid obedience, sublime self-renunciation in a Newman, would be presumption and folly in a lesser spirit. I hope you agree.'

'Most thoroughly ; I have never doubted that my own work, such as it is, is in the secular life.'

'I believe,' said Disraeli, with a certain slyness, 'that you think the secular life the harder of the two. You regard marriage as a state of discipline ruled by a code of somewhat stern responsibilities.'

'Perhaps,' said Robert, laughing.

'Your friend, Mr Parflete, is an interesting fellow,' observed Disraeli ; 'his young wife might be called the Madonna's married sister ! There is all the sweetness,

with just the warmth of human peccability, possibly jealousy, possibly temper. I have traced the short upper lip to its imperial archetype! Her mother was a prettier woman, but less spirited. It was an unhappy hour when the Archduke's roving eye fell on Duboc's enchanting face. But for a weak soul—she did much. He married her.'

'I never knew that,' exclaimed Robert.

'Fortunately for history there is always one indiscreet member of the College of Cardinals. He told me the story. Duboc was married to the Archduke according to the rites of Holy Church. Of course it was illegal—or, if you prefer it, morganatic—but her death saved a lot of trouble—a lot of trouble. This girl is perfectly legitimate so far as the Recording Angel is concerned. Now, shall we turn?'

Robert felt too profoundly interested in the news he had just learned, to trust himself far in making a reply.

'If this were generally known,' he asked after a momentary hesitation, 'would it be of any advantage to Mrs Parflete?'

'For the present,' said Disraeli, 'it should be kept a secret. I gather from Parflete's remarks to me that his wife knows nothing of her actual parentage. She has been given to understand that her father was a young officer, *le Capitaine Duboc*. It is better so. The consciousness of royal blood works, in most cases of the kind, as a curse. Take for instance

the Countess Orzelska, who was the daughter of August of Poland by a French milliner. Who would dare to write her history? Is there any language obscure enough to clothe it?’

‘But Mrs Parflete’s mother was no ordinary woman,’ said Robert. ‘She is not to be compared with the typical French milliner. She had great accomplishments. She was beautiful; she was honourably born; she was virtuous.’

‘She belonged, however, to the race of wits and mockers, an order of beings ever more popular in France than elsewhere. You may remember what the Bishop of Paris wrote to the French Court before the coming of Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn to Calais, “*Surtout je vous prie que vous ostez de la court ceux qui ont la reputation d’estre mocqueurs et gaudisseurs, car c’est bien la chose en ce monde autant haïe de ceste nation.*” (Keep the wits and mockers out of the Court, for the English detest all such above all things.)

He was clearly thinking a little of his own reputation for epigrams and satire, and, also, he may have intended his words to convey some warning to his young companion.

He talked on in the same strain, drifting apparently in an illogical sequence from one subject to another, yet always introducing some remark which had its right place in the general scheme of advice. The conversation established a firm understanding between

the two men, and, when they reached the hotel, Disraeli invited his new acquaintance to join him at breakfast on the morrow. For the result of these two interviews and several other matters, which may, perhaps, not be without interest for the reader, it would be better to take Robert's own account given in the following letter to Lord Reckage :—

‘What better illustration could be found of the extraordinary laws of human economy than in my meetings with Parflete? For the second time in my life this man, whom I have sedulously avoided and ever disliked, has been instrumental in changing the whole course of my plans. When I came to Paris in 185—, he presented me to you and Hercy at the Locrines. Yesterday he introduced me to Disraeli, with whom I have had two long and, to me, memorable interviews. He has encouraged me to think of entering Parliament; he has mentioned the constituency of Norbet Royal. I believe, from all he said, that I could be of greater service to you if I were actually in the House than if I were a mere outsider. Disraeli's kindness passes all belief. I am to cross over to England with him to-morrow. At the moment he, too, is writing a novel, some chapters of which he has shown me. They are the most brilliant things of their kind in any language. The book is to be called *Lothair*. Roman Catholicism plays a great part in the plot, and it is delightful to hear him utter his views on the subject. They have changed a little since he wrote *Sybil*, whereas he was, in his sympathies, *Roman Catholic* then, he is *Pagan Catholic* now. He knows a lot; in fact, he possesses real learning. It is more than a great mind; he is a great spirit. If I agreed with him at all points I should distrust my enthusiasm; it might come less from an admiration of his genius than from the fact that he seemed the witty exponent of my own theories and beliefs. No, my allegiance to him is based on a stronger feeling than flattered

egoism, wrongly called sympathy. He has courage and intellect, and if I found these qualities, even in an enemy, my heart, in spite of me, would go out to him. I prefer a brave foe before a weak ally. However much, then, I might be tempted to quarrel with the author of *Lothais*, I could never forget his magnificent attainments or his audacity. Last evening I went with Hercy and the Parfletes to *Les Papillons*. Parflete reminded me that you supped behind the scenes there in 185— with Madame Duboc, the Archduke Charles and the child. Have you forgotten it? I was there the same night, but I was not invited to the supper. The whole thing returned to me: every emotion, every thought, every word, every sight; and when I realised all that had happened since poor Henriette's tragic death, my own selfish life, this marriage of the little girl—who sat there, by-the-bye, as happy and oblivious of evil as her mother had been sad and full of dread—it was almost more than I could bear. The braying band and the painted dancers, the repulsive buffoons and the pomatumed athletes seemed to have undergone no change. It was the performance of 185—all over again, and these ten eventful years might have been, as it were, an *entr'acte*. The one who was missing—never more to return, and never more to be replaced—was the loving, beautiful, heart-broken woman—Henriette Duboc. She had played the part of an enchantress. It is madness, it is wrong to revisit old scenes. One might as well unearth the dead—just as the insufferable hero of Dumas's romance dug up the corpse of his mistress—Margarite Gautier—in order to cure himself of grief. But a love that could be so cured was more corrupt at its best moment than any honest mass of dust and worms could ever be. You will see my mood. . . . I have bought for a song a fine clean copy of Jansen's *Augustinus*; a Robert Estienne *New Testament* (a gem) and a Montaigne (1595)—which fairly beats anything in your father's collection. Hercy, of course, returns with me to-morrow. Aumerle will remain for the *Grand Prix*, and after that he will visit De Brie at Vieuville. The Parfletes, I hear, are going also. She is a very

young woman to be hurled into that dissolute society. The knock-knee'd Marquis de Chaumont has given her some novels by Paul de Kock. To-night they are taking her to the Jardin Mabille. And she has just left a convent! Yesterday, at dinner, De Brie entertained her with the story of la Pomarè—whose epitaph you may remember—“*Pomarè, queen of Mabille, princess of Ranelagh, grand-duchess de la Chaumière, by the grace of the polka, the can-can, and other cacuchas!*” Inasmuch as the same kind of thing was written about Henriette Duboc, I did not think his anecdote was in the best taste. . . . I am glad to get Hercy away from the *Cercle de l'Union* and the Jockey Club. Parflete is welcome in neither place. He seems to be regarded as an upstart, and it will soon take more than the Archduke's influence to make them stomach him. But the Archduke himself is a diminishing power in France—and perhaps elsewhere. Before five years are gone, this country will be a Republic. The present Government is too romantic: the Empress is too beautiful; there is a Salon des Fleurs in the Tuileries; and this scent of violets will soon be overpowered by the smell of gunpowder. Victor Hugo has already said adieu to France, because she is too great to be a nation. The Roman Empire, he declares, became Christendom; France will become—the world! “*Rome est devenue la chrétienté; toi, France, deviens le monde!*” But your true prophet usually predicts a downfall. Glory is like Cupid in the fable: it must not be discovered. A war with Germany seems inevitable, and, if one may believe Disraeli, there shall be other wars also. They do not think of these things in England. Dizzy made a remark, which might have been a hit at his opponents, or at certain colleagues, “Surely,” said he, “there is no fool so great as an untravelled Prime Minister who has never tried the temper of his neighbours, or set foot on the land of his allies.” Our foreign secretaries are, as a rule, but parish beadles with a Garter!—Your ever affectionate,

‘R. O.’



## CHAPTER VIII

AFTER the Grand Prix, Parflete and Brigit went to the Château de Vieuville (near Fontainebleau), on a visit to the Count de Brie. When they had been there a fortnight, word was received from the Alberian Court that the Archduke Charles was on his way to Paris, and wished Parflete to form part of his *suite* during his stay in France. The equerry, who had been winning large sums of money at cards, and wished to reserve the fund thus raised for the Archduke's summer pleasures at Madama, was somewhat cast down at the royal command. His Imperial Highness was a costly, if impressive, fellow-traveller, and Parflete, who had no family claim to his post at Court, was well aware that he could hope to retain it by the right only of a full and ready purse. Already he had spent more than half of his property in the inglorious struggle to keep a seat in that enchanted merry-go-round, from which, should one fall, he is not missed, and a hundred are ready to leap into the vacant place. Parflete himself was, with all

his vanity, too well versed in human nature to blame the Archduke for the faults of his retinue. Is the flame guilty because moths rush into it? The equerry was, in certain respects, an adventurer. He had elbowed his way through the little crowd of poor noblemen who owned every right to stand in that palace which their ancestors had defended at the cost, in many cases, of life and fortune. He was regarded justly enough as an intruder. He was neither of their blood nor their class. His mother was an Alberian, but his father was English. His position was in the highest degree, precarious; and, when his money failed, he knew well that his day would go out in laughter and contempt. What, then, was his chagrin when he learnt, by a second despatch, that His Imperial Highness, on reaching Paris, would proceed immediately to the Château de Vieuville, where (as the order ran), M. Parflete was to receive him on his arrival.

For some days, this gentleman had been conscious of a certain estrangement between himself and his host. In his confidential moments with Brigit, he expressed the fear that he had outstayed his welcome, and the prospect of remaining in a merely official capacity, where he was no longer regarded as an acquisition to the company, seemed to prey upon his mind. Brigit, however, had been received with exceptional attentions, and was regarded—ostensibly because she was a bride—as the guest of honour.

Charles Aumerle, who was the one Englishman, besides Parflete, in the party, attributed the favour shown her to another consideration, namely, her imperial father.

Some of the haughtiest members of the French aristocracy were under that roof, and the gay Duchesse de P——, who was as eminent for good nature as she was exalted in birth, was especially kind to the *ravissante et malheureuse enfant*. It was, therefore, difficult for Brigit to appreciate the slights of which Parflete so bitterly complained. She tried, in vain, to understand the distinction which certainly existed between the deference which was shown toward herself and the manner adopted toward her husband.

The night before the arrival of the Archduke, Parflete came into her bedroom at three o'clock in the morning (he played cards till the small hours every day), and waking her, burst into a terrible fit of crying. The poor child threw her arms round his neck, and begged him to tell her his trouble. Many moments passed before he could speak. Brigit had never supposed that a man could either sob or shed tears, and the sight was to her so appalling that her own heart became frozen between fright and apprehension. She could but lay her cheek against his haggard, distorted face and, breathing soft moans of sympathy, wait for his words.

‘They have accused me,’ he said at last, looking

miserably into the eyes which had never doubted him. 'They have accused me! It was a cowardly attack; they set a trap for me. I could have put it all right with the very next card. I had it ready, but the brutes would not give me time. I challenged them; not one of them had the courage to accept my challenge. They dared not fight. If you could have seen their faces: they were like bloodhounds! It was a plot against me. They are jealous of me; they think I am an intruder. They have been waiting for years to come between myself and the Archduke. If he believes this I shall be a ruined man. I offered them all my winnings. I threw them at their feet. They questioned me as though I were a criminal. I don't know what I said, but I shall kill myself. Can I live under such an accusation? Would you wish me to live? They will not even accept my challenge. I have devoted my whole life to these people. I have amused them and helped them through their scrapes, and lied about them in order to keep them respected, and this is the end of it all! Insult, disgrace, humiliation piled upon humiliation!'

'But the Archduke,' said Brigit; 'he will know better. He will defend you and despise them.'

'He will be the first to kick me lower,' said Parflete, 'the first! They have no right to keep me here as a prisoner,' he exclaimed, changing his tone and looking wildly round the room. 'They may poison me. This is not England. I must get away before he comes.'

'Oh, no!' said Brigit. 'You are too tired to think now, but that would place you in the wrong, whereas you are right. No, we must show them that we have nothing to fear.'

'You don't understand,' said the wretched man. 'They have four spies to swear against me. The traitors! the dastards! Aumerle was the only one who would have nothing to say one way or the other. You must not think, because I break down here before you, that I showed any fear to them.\* I withstood them to the death, but—I am too ill to face them again. You must not ask me to face them again. By God! I have lost my nerve. It was six to one!'

'Sleep first,' said Brigit. 'Try to sleep.'

'Oh! how can I sleep? You will have to meet the Archduke. I cannot receive him with this charge hanging over my head. He would never pardon such an affront. No; you see him, speak for me, insist on seeing him. You may remind him of your mother. He never spared her, but still you have more spirit than she had. He likes to see spirit. Tell him that I have been kind to you. Tell him that you are fond of me. Tell him that I don't ask to be taken back to the Court. I will go quietly away anywhere, where no one will know me. Tell him that you will not

\* This seems to have been true, and Aumerle, in a private account of the scandal, declares that everyone was amazed at Parflete's barefaced lying. He never surrendered.

mind the banishment. Go on your knees to him and swear that you believe in me.'

Brigit dared not question her own misgivings. She could have held her hands over her ears, or put out her own eyes, in the agony of suspicion she now experienced.

'Then,' she whispered, 'it was—not a mistake.'

'I swear to God,' said he, 'I never did such a thing before! It was the first time. It meant one movement and ten thousand francs in my pocket, and I did not want them for myself! This all comes of thinking too much about other people!'

He clasped her hands.

'You won't desert me, will you?' he said, 'because I am telling you everything?'

'No,' said Brigit, 'I shall not desert you.'

Her voice failed, and presently, though not so soon that he could feel himself despised, she stole softly away into a little ante-room where she could pray for fortitude and counsel. Then, knowing that if she did not sleep she would be unequal to the day before her, she asked for that gift, too, and it was granted.

Parflete went in to speak again to her and found her in a deep slumber, yet with wet eyelashes. This time he did not rouse her; but he stooped down and kissed her golden hair which shone out on the dark pillow of the couch. The sunlight streamed in through the half-closed shutter. He could hear the birds singing outside. Who would describe the

thoughts, sharper than death, which pierced his soul as he stood there? Perhaps Brigit owed her very existence to his treachery towards her mother. He had assisted the Archduke in that cruel intrigue. He had laid snares at every point for poor Henriette's undoing. He had persuaded her into the marriage which, none knew better than he, was but a vain form in the eyes of the law. Yet her child—this child of fatal love and extreme despair—was the one being on earth who seemed to care for him and would now have to suffer with him.

Yet these ideas, sharp as they must have been, must also have soon passed, for remorse itself cannot be so strong as the injured vanity of a profoundly selfish heart. The remembrance of his own disgrace and of the hideous scene with his accusers, the knowledge of his certain banishment from the Court, which he loved and feared with the frantic servility of the born favourite-in-waiting, overwhelmed him as a flood from the burning lake. He cowered, groaned and fled away to his room, driven before the dreadful scourge of his own shame and the mockery of a just doom.

Before the Archduke's arrival, Brigit dressed herself in the plainest gown she possessed, which was but one degree removed from a nun's habit. Her youthful face showed traces of horror and weeping, but otherwise she was calm, the mistress of all her faculties. She informed the Count de Brie that her husband was unable to leave his room, and that she

herself would render the excuses for his absence to the Archduke.

The Count was astonished at the firmness she used in declining to discuss the events of the preceding night. When he ventured to remind her that her youth and inexperience were such that she would be well advised not to meddle in a matter which was best disposed of by men, she told him that where her husband's honour was in question, she could remember nothing of greater moment than the fact that she was his wife.

Finding her deaf to all argument, he left the Château with two other gentlemen, of whom Parflete was to have been one, in order to meet the Archduke at the railway station. The guests assembled in the great hall to welcome him on his arrival; Brigit alone remained apart in an ante-chamber till she was summoned.

An hour passed. She could hear, as she murmured her prayers, the joy bells ringing and the horses prancing in the court-yard. The sound of footsteps passing and repassing in the corridor, the rustle of women's silken skirts, voices, laughter, hurried words of command, came constantly to her ears, but no one entered to relieve her suspense. A fear of missing the message when it came, made it impossible for her to return even for a moment to Parflete, who, she knew, was suffering unspeakable anguish of mind.



Two hours—three hours—passed. At the close of the fourth hour she was informed by her host that His Imperial Highness would see her in the private apartments which had been reserved for his use during the visit. The Count de Brie then conducted her to the royal rooms, and she was received on the threshold by a young officer of supercilious air, who was in attendance, in Parflete's stead, on the Archduke.

'His Imperial Highness,' said he, casting his full eyes over Brigit's distressed and beautiful face, and plain serge gown—'His Imperial Highness will see you in a few moments.'

He then thrust his hands into his pockets, and, with an air which was intended to convey equal degrees of contempt, patronage and admiration, lolled back against some article of furniture. Brigit threw him a glance which called some colour into his face, and although he did not change his attitude, his expression lost its spirit: he clearly felt that he had been guilty of an indiscretion.

When Brigit was finally admitted into her father's presence, she saw, standing at the end of a tapestried room, a tall imposing individual, with large strongly-marked features, blonde hair, a blonde beard, and a countenance of corpse-like pallor. His bearing was soldierly, and the impression he gave was that of a cold, tyrannical, but not malignant, man.

She dropped him a curtsy and waited for him to

speak. In her concern for her husband she had forgotten that the Archduke had known her mother, or that, as a child, she herself had played at the princely knees. As he came forward to receive her, he seemed to be labouring under some inexplicable emotion; whether it was anger or pity she could not decide.

‘Do you remember me?’ he said.

The question at once brought the past to her mind.

‘Sir,’ she said, ‘it would not be for me to speak to your Imperial Highness of those laughing days.’

‘Where is your husband?’

‘I have come, sir, to explain his absence, but may I beg to see your Imperial Highness alone.’

The Archduke made a motion to the young equerry, who, with a very ill grace and a look of astonishment, retired from the room.

‘That fellow is new to his office,’ said Brigit, colouring. ‘He should be taught how to receive women, and he may yet be a credit to his Court.’

If there was a strong trait in her character, it was imperiousness, and now, under the immediate and exciting influence of the being from whom she had inherited the quality, it gained a peculiar force. It had been her intention to plead, and, although she had prepared no speech, and had trusted to the occasion and the help of God for her eloquence, she had entered the Archduke’s presence with the firm wish to exhibit at least the humble spirit which it

was her duty, rather than her pleasure, to feel. But the prince found himself addressed by a spirit as intrepid and as little disposed to beg for quarter as his own. Had she known that she was his daughter, her religious sense of the reverence due to parents might have kept her meek, but as she was wholly unaware of the relationship, she treated him with that ironical etiquette which exists, on formal occasions, between equals.

‘My husband, sir,’ said she, ‘did not venture into his master’s presence, because he is held to be in disgrace, and has been accused of cheating at cards. I am his wife, and Your Imperial Highness will forgive me if I am too proud to attempt the vindication of his innocence. It would ill become me to sit in judgment upon one whose honour or dishonour must be as my own. But this, perhaps, I may be permitted to say : he came here as a guest. He had every reason to believe himself among friends. They played a trick upon him, and, from the results of that trick, they claim to have found him guilty of dishonesty. But to have played that trick shows that they suspected him ; and if they suspected him, why did they invite him here to join in all their games ? Does a man become a thief in one night ? He has known the Count de Brie for years, yet this friend appointed a man to accuse him openly before a room full of acquaintances. He found himself attacked by each of them save one, and, when they were all calling

out to him, the host himself joined in the outcry. I think it an indignity offered, sir, to a member of the imperial household, a member, too, who has never once faltered in his devotion to the Archduke, who is the most loyal and affectionate of all his servants. It would be an act—not of mercy—but of justice, if your Imperial Highness would show resentment at the cruel and degrading treatment shown to a gentleman who, toward his master at least, has never been otherwise than faithful.’

Her voice faltered, and it was with great difficulty that she restrained a sob.

‘You are not afraid,’ said the Archduke, drily, ‘of speaking your mind.’

‘My father, sir,’ she replied, ‘was an officer who died fighting. I hope I do him no discredit.’

A ghastly smile drifted across the Archduke’s rigid countenance. He turned his back upon her and paced the room before he made a further remark.

‘What do you wish done?’ he said at last.

‘I wish you, sir, to defend my husband against his persecutors.’

‘What is he to you?’ said he, brutally. ‘He is years older than you are, and you cannot care for him. You cannot believe in him unless you are a fool; and if you are indeed your father’s daughter, you cannot be a simpleton. The man is guilty. It is impossible to doubt the evidence against him. I will have no proved blacklegs in my service; no, not even to

please the child of my charming and beautiful friend—Henriette Duboc. De Brie has no wish to persecute your husband. It would be a revolting scandal, and the affair must be hushed up. Parfete had better get out of the country as soon as possible, but tell him that I do not wish you to accompany him. He will be hounded from place to place like a rat, and I do not choose that any woman should share in his existence.'

'My duty, sir,' said Brigit, 'is in the hands of a higher authority than a prince's. I shall follow my husband.'

'You shall do what you are told to do,' said the Archduke. 'I never wish to see Parfete again. You may tell him that if he attempts to address me, or hold any communication with me, I shall take my own method of dealing with the offence. As for you, you have forced me to seem more severe than my intention. I will find some appointment for you at the Court. At your age, and with your appearance, and with your audacity, you will need more than any common surveillance! I shall see that you are protected and provided for.'

'Sir,' said Brigit, 'I thank you—but I am no beggar, and if my husband's debts are greater than his own fortune, I have my own dot left me by my father.'

'He seems,' said the Archduke, with a strange smile, 'to have been a remarkable person. Do you remember him?'

'No, sir,' said Brigit; 'but my mother told me of him often. He was brave: he was always kind to women, and he feared no man in the world.'

'And did your mother love him?' said the Archduke.

'They say, sir,' replied Brigit, 'that she died because life was too desolate without him.'

'Would you die so easily?' said the Archduke, 'if you found yourself separated from Parflete?'

Brigit's face flushed at a question, which cut her sensitive nature to the quick.

'My father, sir,' said she, 'was perhaps too proud a man to have suffered insolence even from an Archduke. If my husband has ever suffered it, my lot could not be so hard as my mother's when she lost not her protector only but mine!'

'Well turned!' said the Archduke. 'Well turned! I shall not forget you. It would be unpleasant for you to remain here when your husband has left. I will see that you travel under a proper escort to Alberia. For the present, you may go, but *au revoir*. If you think me harsh, a day may come, when you are older, when you will see my judgment in another light. You had best make your preparations to leave the Château to-night. I will send passports and further instructions to you by Captain Kaste.'

'Sir,' said Brigit, 'I cannot promise to obey them. My duty is toward my husband.'

‘Your husband,’ said the Archduke, grimly, ‘will not venture to express a wish in this matter contrary to my own. Now you may go.’

Brigit made a profound bow and went out of the room. The Archduke looked after her and sat for a long time in silence, biting his nails, then he rang for his equerry.

‘Where is Parflete by this time?’ he asked.

‘He should be beyond Paris, sir,’ replied the young man, with a grin which he made but a feigned effort to conceal.

‘Where is De Brie?’ asked the Archduke.

‘He is waiting in the next room.’

‘Show him in.’

Captain Kaste withdrew and presently returned with the Count.

## CHAPTER IX

THE Count de Brie, it may be remembered, had been one of the three guests who took supper with Madame Duboc and the Archduke at *Les Papillons* on Brigit's sixth birthday. He was a person who had moved in the four quarters of the moon and practised vanity in each. A member of the old nobility, he had received his early political training under the leadership of the Duc de Broglie, but, as he possessed all the arrogance without the ability of his pattern, he had not the honour of being reckoned among the beaten when that Minister and his party fell from power in 1835. As a youth, De Brie had contributed several articles to *L'Avenir*, but, in 1833, we find him on the side of Montalembert in the rupture with Lamennais.\* He was among those who listened to Lacordaire's famous *Conferences de Notre-Dame*, and he figured for a time as a mystic. But this formal religion, which deceived himself rather than on-lookers, was balanced by an equally frigid system of worldliness. His intrigues were as studied as his piety, and, the same spirit which

\* For a brief, yet vivid, account of the fall of De Lamennais, the reader may be referred to the article on the subject in Cardinal Newman's *Essays: Critical and Historical*. Vol. i. page 138.



urged him to seem more devout than he felt, induced him to affect habits of dissipation wholly at variance with his natural instincts. Of a cold, calculating and rather morbid temperament, he chose companions of a precisely opposite character, and by figuring on the scene of their adventures he sought to share a little in their reputation for gallantry.

He was, however, one who kept strictly faithful to those maxims of prudence, which, in many characters, are a substitute for principle. Convictions he had none, but rules of conduct he had in plenty, and to break one of these seemed to him a demonstration either of forgetfulness or ignorance. He would have recoiled from using a harder term. Among these rules the following were especially important :—

*‘Lying is bad policy.’*

*‘To desert a woman enlists unpopularity.’*

*‘Be true to some woman and you will gain credit from all men.’*

*‘To cheat at cards is the last possible mistake.’*

It may be granted, then, that he had, on the whole a taste for what is commonly known as honour, and also a nice perception that this earth—if it is to be conquered—can be conquered by fair means only. His annoyance at Parflete’s disgrace was so deep that it almost reached sorrow. He disliked the man and he had long expected to hear of his downfall.

*‘Lion-tamers, snake-charmers, and royal favourites all come to sudden disaster,’* was another of his axioms.

Still, he would have preferred that the last scene in Parflete's social career had been acted elsewhere than at the Château de Vieuville. As he now approached the Archduke, the melancholy droop of his eyelids and mouth seemed more marked than usual. Apart from his personal feeling in the matter, he had too much breeding to appear otherwise than distressed at the calamity which had befallen his royal visitor's equerry.

'What has been done?' asked the Archduke. 'Who will break the news to—Brigit?'

'It will be a delicate mission,' said De Brie. 'Her courage is extraordinary, and I fear she may give trouble. We might tell her that she is to join him—and gradually prepare her mind for the—disappointment.'

The Archduke remained silent for a few moments, and then ordered Kaste to leave the room.

'It might be best, after all, to let her know the whole truth,' said Charles. 'I am not ashamed of her. I wish that my son had even half her spirit! She might be more obedient if she were told everything.'

'Sir, I could offer no advice on that point. *Mon Dieu!* is it conceivable that a man so bound as Parflete was to consider his reputation and guard his character—' He could not finish the sentence, but lifted up his hands in token of an amazement beyond speech.

'Did he give much trouble?'

‘Happily he was reasonable. I found him waiting in his bedroom for his wife’s return. I explained that she had not yet seen you : that you intended to receive her, but that it would be impossible for you to grant the requests which she might make. I then informed him of Your Imperial Highness’s irrevocable decision. First’—and he checked each remark on his fingers—‘that he was to consider himself banished from Alberia and from your circle,—*partout* : that he was to make no appeals to your friends : that he was to separate himself from Madame—your natural daughter.’

‘What did he say to that ?’

‘I regret to say that he permitted himself a remark about the morganatic marriage.’

‘Was it a threat ?’

De Brie mouthed a little over his reply,—

‘*A peu près*. He was, perhaps, over-excited. His devotion to Your Imperial Highness is, I think, sincere. I pointed out that Madame Parflete was dear to the Archduke and that he could not bear to see her participate in a ruined life. I said much to the same effect, and, ultimately, he accepted the terms. He had, after all, no choice. I thought it but kind to indulge him in the little farce of consideration. He has left a letter for Madame Parflete.’

‘Where is it ?’

‘Here, sir.’

‘You may show it to her. He would not dare to disobey me. Did you give him the money ?’

‘Yes, sir. He desired his humble thanks—’

‘I know, I know,’ said the Archduke, impatiently. ‘I don’t want to hear any more. He took it and he was satisfied. He has a price for everything—but his wife seems the least precious of his treasures! We princes surely see the meanest vices of mankind! It is difficult, indeed, for a king to find a creature he can either trust or respect. As a boy, I heard that often from my father.’

At that moment, they were both startled by the sound of voices in the adjoining room. The Archduke rang his bell, and Captain Kaste entered.

‘Madame Parflete has come back, sir,’ said he. ‘She *desires* to see Your Imperial Highness.’

He put a sarcastic stress on the word *desires*, as though he wished the Archduke to understand that he was delivering the message in all its original informality.

‘That is impossible,’ said Charles. ‘Tell her that I am resting after my journey. If she can receive the Count de Brie, he will wait upon her in her own apartments.’

But, as he spoke, the door at the end of the room was opened, and Brigit herself, unannounced, confronted the three men.

She pressed one hand to her throat as though to hold back the sob of despair which rose, stronger than words, to her trembling lips.

‘Sir,’ she said, with a deep curtesy, ‘if I have no

manners, you must pardon me. I am treated as though I were a slave without rights and without a soul, whereas I am not even your subject. I am a Frenchwoman, and I ask by what authority you step between myself and my husband? Where have they taken him, and who is the Count de Brie that he may imprison and insult gentlemen at his caprice?’

‘Madame,’ said De Brie, coming forward, ‘if you will allow me to explain—’

‘A crime cannot be explained,’ said Brigit; ‘nor will I trespass upon your time, nor will I take you from your guest. I ask to see my husband only.’

‘Give her his letter,’ said the Archduke, who was watching her from under his deeply-lined and heavy eyelids. ‘Give her his note and leave her with me.’

De Brie handed the half-fainting girl her husband’s farewell letter, which was sealed very neatly with the Parflete crest, and addressed ‘For my Wife’ in his familiar, graceful handwriting. She walked away to the window, where they could no longer watch her face, and then tore the envelope open. The page trembled in her hands. She could scarcely grasp the meaning of the few lines which met her eyes.

‘MY DEAREST,—Never forget me. It was a conspiracy. But I will not make you more wretched than you must be. The Archduke is right in his decision. Remember his position. He could not act otherwise. He could not encourage any system of cross-questioning. I do not complain. I may never see you again. It would not be fair. I may not ask you to share such misery as mine must be.

They will treat me as though I were a leper. I know them. Pray for me and think of me always, and, should we ever meet, never let me read reproach in your eyes. Your devoted and heart-broken husband.'

'Oh, he wrote this!' exclaimed Brigit. 'He wrote it!'

The man's nature cried out in every phrase. She would have fallen if the Archduke, in his experience, had not risen from his chair and stationed himself so near to her that he could, at the critical moment, offer her his support.

Her grief was unconquerable. She broke down utterly, and, sinking to the ground, buried her face in her two hands, weeping tears of bitter humiliation. The Archduke could only hear the words,—

'I cannot—cannot—I cannot!'

He walked away, surveyed her from a distance, and came back again to put his hand on her bowed head.

'*Calme-toi, mon enfant,*' he said at last, '*releve-toi et écoute! Ce n'est pas convenable.* It is ungrateful. We have done the best for your husband. These things are hard, but we must submit to them. I am always sorry for wives. The whole world pities them. There was never such a black scoundrel but some woman would break her heart and wring ours by begging mercy for him. We think that your husband's chief crime is his offence against you. We allowed him to marry you because of our high regard for him. He has deceived and betrayed us all. He is

a vile fellow. Shed no more tears. You are too young to cry.'

'Young!' said Brigit. 'I was young six weeks ago, but not now. I am old—old—old—and I thought I should be so happy. I had so many friends. Friends everywhere—everywhere friends! Now, not a soul. And what have I done to deserve this? I only wanted to do right. You are all nothing to me—nothing. My husband is suffering. Sorrow will not make him a better man, but a desperate one. O God! to whom shall I turn but to Thee? I have neither father, nor brother, nor husband—and my mother is dead. O God! take me away. I am afraid!'

Charles again walked away from her to the end of the room, where his chair and writing-table stood.

'I thought you were brave,' said he.

'I was once,' said Brigit, holding her palms to her aching eyes. 'But you are all men, you are strong and cruel; and I am alone, and I see what is coming—disaster and ruin.'

'You need not lose your courage,' said the Archduke. 'Your father has, perhaps, more power than you dream of.'

'But he is dead,' sobbed Brigit, 'and the dead cannot help me.'

'Wait,' said the Archduke, 'wait! Your father is living. But would you know him if you saw him?'

Brigit looked up, with something of suspicion, at his face. She was still crouching on the ground; bowed

down to the earth with the weight of grief, too heavy for youth to bear.

‘Would I know him?’ she replied slowly. ‘He was noble, my mother said, and as handsome as the sun-god, and always kind to women, and he feared no man in the world. And she said that his eyes were like agate—’

There she stopped short. The moment of recognition was near—a recognition in violent contradiction with the sentimental evidence which had grown up and flowered in the girl’s mind from the hour of her first remembrance. The Archduke himself was moved. Their glance met. Trembling, Brigit rose to her feet and walked slowly, as though she were drawn toward him by some irresistible, but torturing, influence. Her lips were parted as if in terror, her gaze was fixed and panic-stricken, yet she approached nearer and nearer till they stood with the table only between them.

‘Brigit,’ he said, holding out his two hands. ‘I am not the sun-god, nor have I died fighting, nor have I been always kind to women, if I may believe all they have said to me—but—I am your father.’

Brigit coloured as though she had received a whip stroke on each cheek.

‘But my mother,’ she answered, ‘was good,’ and she shrank away.

‘*Elle était belle et douce.*’



'She was more,' cried Brigit, passionately, 'she was good. They told me so at the Convent, and I know it.'

'*Tu as raison,*' rejoined the Archduke. 'She was virtuous to a fault; but, nevertheless, I am your father.'

'I cannot understand,' said the poor girl, bursting into tears. 'But I pray that God may bless you and help me to honour you. At present He seems to have forsaken me, for everyone now tells me lies, and everything I once believed in is now proved false. I pray God that this is all a dream and I may soon wake up.'

The Archduke went round to her, bent down and kissed her forehead.

'Your mother was good,' he said, 'and a priest married us. But princes may not love whom they will, and the Church's law is not always the law or the State. *Tu es ma fille. Je t'aime bien, mais tu n'as pas de droits. Il faut que tu saches ces choses là. Il faut que tu restes comme tu es aux yeux du monde—la fille du Capitaine Duboc.* It is a secret which you must keep for my sake. You must not boast of me.'

A white smile passed over Brigit's face.

'I was proud,' she said, sadly, 'of my father, the poor officer who died fighting; but I shall never boast again. You may trust me well.'

'You will see now,' he said, not feeling her irony,

‘why I cannot allow you to follow Parfete. I permitted the marriage because he was your guardian, and he never told me that you had so much beauty. He knew your mother, and I felt that I could trust him. But now trust is out of the question. If you are patient, we may be able to arrange a divorce, and I will find you another husband—a young one—a handsome one—perhaps a nobleman. Shed no more tears.’

Brigit received this speech with profound resentment.

‘As I am not a princess,’ she said, ‘and as I have no rights, I may remain true to my marriage vows. The word divorce has no meaning for me. I am a Catholic. I implore you to let me go. I have heard too much to-day, and my heart can bear no more.’

He followed her to the door and, at parting, stooped down and kissed her forehead again. She curtsied, kissed his hand, then, turning away, was seized with another fit of crying, and rushed, like a frightened child, to the one refuge left her—the little altar with the lamp hanging before it, which she had arranged in an alcove of her bedroom.

But neither prayers nor tears were left in Brigit. Her head swam and her knees bent beneath her. She had tasted no food since her first light meal in the morning, and her bodily frame—in spite of her perfect health—was still too immature to bear—

without some special grace—so prolonged a strain as she had suffered. It was not, however, the moment for rest or hesitation. Her one desire was to escape from that perilous household before the Archduke could take steps to hinder her going, or to direct her future destiny. A dreadful fear paralyzed her heart and benumbed every other emotion. She distrusted her own shadow, and, the stirring of the leaves on the trees outside her window seemed the iron whispers of armed men. The place of retreat to which her mind turned by the united force of affection and instinct, was the Convent at Tours. There, undoubtedly, Parflete would write, either to give some account of his own movements, or to ask for tidings of Brigit herself. It was even probable that, on leaving Fontainebleau, he would at once place himself in communication with the Reverend Mother, who, he knew, was kindly disposed toward him, and a woman of great good sense. Thus the girl reasoned. She would walk to Paris—for she felt it would be imprudent to venture into the railway station, where she could not hope to pass unrecognised. The Archduke was too worldly-minded a man to suspect her of flying to the Nuns, and, once in Paris and on her way to Tours, she felt certain that she could defy his vigilance. She examined the situation of her room. The Château de Vieuville, which faced a superb avenue, one mile and a half in length, stood in a park, set out in the English taste, and crossed

by a large artificial lake of serpentine form. Brigit's apartments were in a pavilion which formed the right wing of the Castle, and the saloons on the first floor were shaded by a modern glass roof supported on marble pillars. These lower rooms, she remembered, were used in the morning only. They were never occupied after mid-day. It would have been just possible to climb along the ledge until she reached the dome above the servant's stair-case. The descent from thence to the ground looked like a matter of mere daring and a sure foot. But, after a moment's consideration, she decided that the better, if more audacious course, was to brave the dangers of the hall and corridors, and walk out as though she intended to stroll in the Park. She was a free woman, having wronged no one, and she was her own mistress. She sought for her jewels, and found that her mother's pearl rosary, diamond necklace, bracelets and brooches were gone. Parfete alone knew where they were kept. Had he taken them? She hoped so. He would need money for his flight. She had but two hundred francs in her purse, and the few rings—fortunately valuable ones—which she happened to be wearing on her fingers. These she tied up in her pocket-handkerchief and thrust it, with her money, into the bosom of her gown. She put on her garden hat, a light wrap, and, with trembling limbs, opened her door. There was no one in sight save the Duchess of Parma's *femme de chambre*, who was dozing on a

chair, by a sleeping poodle, at the extreme end of the long corridor. The poodle moved at the sound of Brigit's light step. He barked inarticulately, and did not so much as wake himself. She reached the top of the grand staircase and looked down. There were four lacqueys in the hall. She opened the Breviary which she carried in her hand, and, with her eyes fixed upon it, descended the stairs very slowly, passed the servants without appearing to notice them, and found herself in the courtyard. Two of the guests were there—Charles Aumerle and the young Marquis of Chaumont. She kept her gaze intently on her book, and, although they uncovered their heads, they did not attempt to address her. Presently, her feet seemed to touch a gravel path—she was on the great avenue. How her heart throbbed! She still continued reading. Aumerle looked after her till her slight, childish figure was lost among the trees.

'These convent habits stick,' he observed at last. 'She is saying her prayers!'

Brigit walked on and on, not daring to lift her eyes. 'Our Father in Heaven, help me! Help me, Our Father in Heaven!' she cried in her soul. But how long it was before she reached the common highway! She dared not look back at the great iron gates of the Château, and the smile which she gave to the concierge's pale daughter was the last that reddened her lips for many a long day. She trudged on till

the evening, when she bought some food, for she was on the road to Paris and needed all her strength. All that night, taking strength from God and her own despair, she kept on the road, always looking for the lights of the city, and meeting neither insults nor adventures. But she was afraid of the blackness; and Psyche, journeying through the way of death, past the Castle of Orcus and the river of the dead, toward the house of Proserpine, did not suffer more piteously than Brigit during that lonely march. The sky was sombre, and, when the wind in a sudden gust drove the clouds from the face of the moon, it shone out with an opalescent light that gave the very atmosphere the colour of tears. The remembrance of all that Robert Orange had told her of his walk from Brittany cheered her a little when sharp flints pierced her thin shoes, or a frog, hopping across the path, made her fear the presence of some evil spirit. She never once glanced behind her, for the steps and voices of pursuers—either men or devils—seemed ever in her ears. She felt the clutch of invisible hands on her shawl, and, from time to time, a fiery touch on her shoulder. The Prince of the Power of Darkness was surely near. Yet she sped on and on, now sobbing from sheer exhaustion, now exhorting her weary heart with the good words she had been taught:—

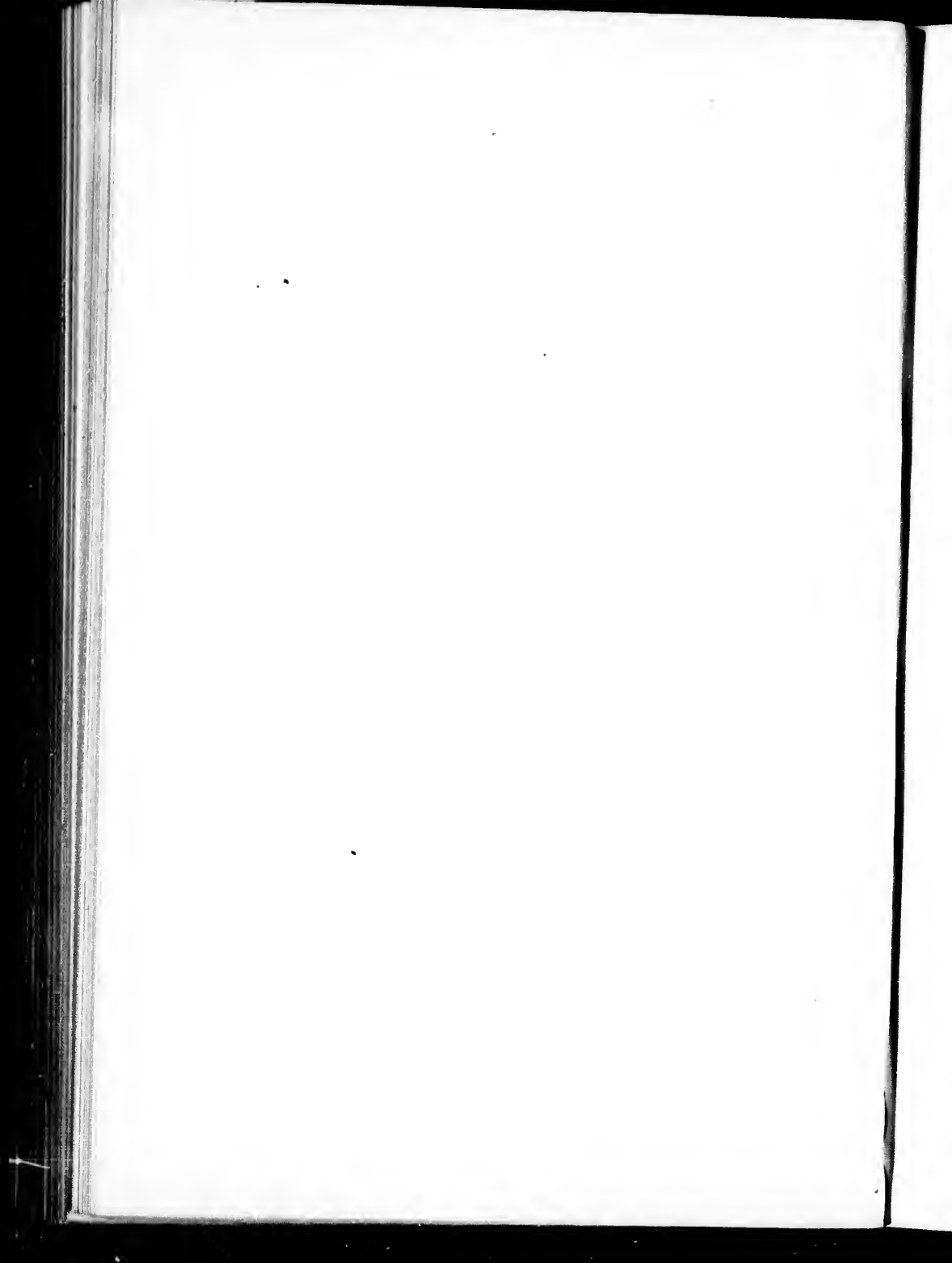
‘If Thou wilt have me to be in darkness, be Thou Blessed; and if Thou wilt have me to be in light, Blessed be Thou again. If Thou vouchsafest to comfort me, be

Thou Blessed; and if it be Thy will that I should be afflicted, be Thou always equally Blessed. Keep me from all sin, and I will fear neither death nor hell. So only Thou cast me not off for ever, nor blot me out of the book of life, no tribulation that befalls me will hurt me.'

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BOOK II





## CHAPTER I

SOME ten days after Brigit's flight from the Château de Vieuville, Orange was at work among his books, wondering which volumes he could sell with the least sorrow—the necessary sum for his election expenses still lacked two hundred pounds—when he found the old copy of *Le Morte d'Arthur* which had belonged to his mother, and which, as a boy, he had learnt by heart. The passages which told of the life and death of *Launcelot* had been lined and under-lined in red and purple and black inks, till the original print was wholly obscured, and Robert found himself repeating the text from memory, although he had not seen it nor thought of it for a long time. He reached the last words of *Launcelot* to the *Queen* :—

'And therefore, lady, sithen ye have taken to perfection, I must needs take me to perfection of right. For I take record of God, in you I have had mine earthly joy. And if I had found you now so disposed, I had cast me to have had you into mine own realm. But sithen I find you so disposed, I ensure you faithfully, I will ever take me to penance. . . . Wherefore, madam, I pray you kiss me and never no more.'

He felt that he himself was uttering some solemn promise, that his existence could not again be what it had been during the last ten years. He made no attempt to disguise the cause of this change. Where women were concerned he had always been deeply impressionable. Madame Bertin and the old lace-maker, and Henriette Duboc were but the forerunners—each in her own way:—the first as a Guardian, the second as a Witch, the third as a Mistress—of a long series of feminine influences similar in kind which permeated, while they never ruled, his life. It was hard, indeed, for Robert to find a woman, no matter what her age or history or temper, in whom he could not discover some point of attraction—some hallowing goodness. But he had never truly loved in the perfect sense any one of his numerous idols, and he was, in this respect, as a man convinced in matters of doctrine, yet lacking spiritual fervour. Robert would have faced death willingly for several ladies; such was his intellectual admiration for their graces of character, and his passionate appreciation of their excellent beauty, but he had never met one who made him eager to *live*. His boyish ideal of eternal fidelity to one love had, under the stress of material facts and civil laws, become an acknowledged illusion—fair, but impossible. A society which has admitted ‘that there be no causes to die for,’ is not a society which produces women whom men can passionately worship for ever. This, at least, was his arid belief when he met Brigit,

for the first time, at Chambord. Then he learnt that there was still an influence on this earth which neither doctrines of vanity, nor the pride of life, could mar. And, whereas other influences, made for restlessness, dissatisfaction, a sort of shame, and certainly much folly, this, on the contrary, brought strength and a sense of heirship to the peace of God. He obtained, too, his first clear and untroubled vision of Time. He saw that, of a truth, a thousand years were as one day, and one day was as a thousand years—not in God's sight only, but in that School for Saints which has been often called the way of the world.

We read in his Journal that he was thinking thus of eternity and immortality, and dreaming of love and sadness (*je songeais d'amour et de tristesse*), when he was given a letter, written in a hand which he feared to recognise—so painful was the happiness he felt in seeing it once more. It was addressed from a Convent in London, and it contained these words :—

‘I am in great trouble, and I think you can help me—for you are kind and you understand. Do you remember me? My name is Brigit Parlete. We met first at Chambord, where we read together those two verses which François I. wrote on the window-pane of his room,—

“Souvent femme varie  
Mal habil qui s'y fie.”

Then we saw each other again in Paris, and you told me of your kingdom under the sea, and I told you how my mother died. In the evening we all went to *Les Papillons*. Oh! I know that you have not forgotten us. I have

written all these other things in order to fill up the page, because three lines look hurried, whereas, for six days, I have been wondering what I should say to you. I do not know how to address you, and now I do not know how to explain myself. But I am in great trouble.'

She wrote in French, and of all modern languages it is the one for which English, with all its richness and strength, has no equivalent expression. The translation of Brigit's letter can give no notion of its grace, but the sense, at least, is faithful; and, with that sense before us, we may discern also her character, which was a blending of shyness and independence, of inexperience and womanly instinct, of candour and discretion.

The news of Parflete's disgrace had not yet reached his few acquaintances in England. Friends he had none. His family connections had always seemed to him too obscure and inconvenient to be recognised, and, if, now that he was in difficulties, he had seen fit to send them any communication, their station in life was not such that either their annoyance or their astonishment could reach the ear of London gossip. Charles Aumerle was still in Paris, and he seldom wrote letters. Lord Reckage was absent in the country, paying court to an heiress and making notes for an address on 'Erastianism.' Hercy Berenville was in town with Orange (they were both staying at Lord Almouth's), but on this particular day he was spending the afternoon with some cousins in Curzon Street.

Robert, having read Brigit's appeal, set out at once

for the address given on the first page of her note. It was not until he reached the Convent gates that he fully realised the delicacy of his position and also its poignant, though indefinable, unhappiness. Until that moment all thought on the subject had been lost in the emotion caused by the mere sight of her letter and the stirring remembrances it brought of her visible presence.

He describes the interview at the Convent in a letter sent that evening to Lord Reckage:—

‘A nun opened the grille and looked out at me. I asked whether I might be allowed to see Mrs Parflete. She retired, and after ten minutes came back again with a second nun. They drew back the heavy bolt and turned the great key. I was admitted into a covered court which ran along a stone-paved yard, where a fountain played and plants grew in red earthenware pots. There were even one or two small orange trees. It was very quaint and so un-English that I felt as though I had inadvertently stepped into some Italian scene. I waited there a few moments alone and examined, at my leisure, the thick grey walls and the pavement, worn by the passing of many feet through many centuries. At last the two nuns, both of whom were old and more silent than spirits, conducted me up a flight of stairs into a small sitting-room furnished with a crucifix, oak-and-horsehair furniture and a small bookcase. Here they left me. From the window, which was much overgrown with ivy, I could see a triangular garden, cut up into gravel paths and shaded by tall plane trees. On the grass plot facing me I saw three or four little graves: one was quite recent, and marked by a small wooden cross and a wreath just fading. All this was fenced about by a high stone wall. Above them was a pearly sky—a sky which made me think of spring days by the Loire. It was a relief to my spirits to hear the sound of young

girls laughing. I inferred that they were pupils in the Convent school. They seemed full of merriment. When the Arch-duchess came in (for to call her less is to insult her mother), I could not speak. She had greatly changed. Her face was as a rose garden seen through the blinding rain; yet, so far from having lost her beauty, I found it was more complete. Her mouth had always seemed a shade disdainful; it was now merely proud. As I tell you, I was speechless. I know I looked a fool. My feelings were indescribable. I wished myself a thousand miles away, while I was, I believe, overjoyed to meet her once more at least. Her face has looked out at me from every page ever since that first day on the staircase at Chambord. On walls and pavements, even on the sky itself, I have seen it constantly. She has been a figure in my heart and a seal upon my eyes. Why should I deny it? It was not a thing of my own will. If I think about her it is but to remember that she and I are utterly dissociated. To ask more is to ask what I have not in my power to bestow. Other men may not be haunted by impressions. But if a star shines on a weed, the weed may not, even if it would, reject the brightness. I shall have wretchedness and despair enough for all this. I do not deceive myself. Wretchedness, however, is not always an evil. In this case, I do not even think it a misfortune. I accept it, calling it by its own name only and teasing my poor wits no further. I know this—that, if I were exempt from every outward ill under the sun, I should still hammer out of my own heart, as out of a flint, the sparks and flashings of misery. You will say this is the *Apologia pro amore suo*—then let it be that, that—or nothing less at all events. But it is not love in the common sense. What is the common sense, pray? Who knows? We all commonly lie on this point. I dialogue thus with my conscience all day and whole nights. . . .

‘When she saw me, she held out both her hands and said, with tears in her voice, “I thought of you because I need help, and I am your countrywoman: *Nos cui mundus est patria.*” Ah! that is it. She has said it. The world is our country, yet in every land we are exiles.’

The letter goes on to tell what we already know of the facts in connection with Parflete's dismissal from the Archduke's household.

'The task now,' continues Robert, 'is to find him. He is a man whose nature may be said to make his destiny. It will be till the end a contemptible fiasco. He has neither the self-confidence of a true rascal nor the guilelessness of a true fool. I can well believe that he never cheated at cards, save on that first, last, fatal occasion when he was discovered. He is doomed to be ludicrous. The real villain must be free from vanity, for vanity will keep human beings straight when every heavenly or other consideration would fail. Parflete had to deceive himself before he could attempt to deceive other people. He laboured to feel that he was at once, the greatest dandy, the greatest wit and the most dangerous libertine on the Continent. He was a bad actor and he knew it. Imagine, therefore, how exhausted he must have been when he found it necessary to indulge in soliloquy! His wife implores me to find him. Acting on advice given her at Tours, she has come to London in the hope of meeting her husband here. She is staying at the Convent because she is alone, and because, so she assures me, she is happier there than she would be at a hotel or in lodgings. I see the wisdom of the decision, for, with her youth, appearance and inexperience, I could not recommend a safer refuge. A woman who is neither with her husband, nor yet a widow, is better in the cloister. She seems to have all the liberty she could reasonably demand, and she could leave the Convent to-morrow did she so wish. . . . That she can love Parflete is impossible. Respect is out of the question. I trace much of her feeling to an alarm for his soul. She is a Roman Catholic of the fine human sort—not in the least sanctimonious, but ever mindful of the four last things—Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven. I have promised to help her. But I had rather see her shut up in a Convent till the end of her mortal days than living again with that husband.'



So the letter ends, and, as we can see, in no hopeful strain. Orange had given his word to seek for someone whom, in his heart, he could not wish to find. We may imagine this impetuous, often intolerant, yet always chivalrous man caught in the meshes of a false position. We see, even in the abrupt conclusion of his letter, a state of mind too raw to bear the light of reason. Something must grow out of the grey of thought and time, and form obscurely over it, before he can bear to examine the weakness.

Some days passed before he wrote again to Reckage. This time he had other news :—

‘My books sold far better than I expected. I hate parting with them. It seems too hard a sacrifice to make in a mere attempt to reduce the Liberal majority! Disraeli remarked that I was the first political candidate without fortune who had not spoken luminously with him on the subject of the Secret Service money. “Every tongue-wagger thinks,” said he, “that the State should provide him with a handsome income and his expenses!” He hinted, with great delicacy, that, in my case, “something might be done.” I thanked him. But I cannot sell my independence. I have certain ideas of my own. They may be wrong. Then they are not worth buying. If they should be right, I cannot do better than invest in them myself. I am selling my library; my coat and my boots may follow. All I ask is to keep my own soul and the monk’s habit which belonged to my father. Alas! the paradox.’

This, in the whole of Orange’s correspondence, is the solitary reference to his father’s marriage. It was ever a sensitive point, and his whole life was spent in

the self-dedicated task of doing penance for the blot on the family word. It is quite certain that he accepted the many trials of his career in a spirit wholly contrary to his proud and combative nature. He resented persecution when it came — as we shall shortly see it did come — but he fought with the uncomplaining energy of those who view the world as a field of battle, and not as a garden where one may dream according to one's stomach.

What follows in the letter from which we have quoted, is still more remarkable:—

'Yesterday' (he says), 'I was received into the Roman Communion. I went to a little chapel I know of and made my profession to a simple parish priest—a Secular. He knows my name, but nothing more of me. We have had a short correspondence, however, and the step is not sudden. I have been meditating it for several years, and my mind on that point is at last clear. I know the case against Rome by heart, and, from its accusers, I have learnt its defence. Disraeli, who is not unsympathetic, admits, that, until a man is settled in his religious belief one may never know what to expect from him! But he condemns my proceeding on the eve of a political contest as *suicidal*. I replied that I could not flatter myself that I should be permitted the distinction of suffering for my Creed.'

In this respect he was too modest. Lord Reckage's reply to his communication was a severe surprise. It was long and elaborately worded. It contained many fine sentiments, and the tone was, perhaps, not so insincere as it was artificial. Treasure may be

wrapped alike in tinsel or in cloth of gold, and it would be as unjust to judge of a parcel by its covering as to appraise a man's candour by the merits or shortcomings of his literary style. We say this because it seems inconceivable that a person of Orange's discernment could have felt the deep affection which he always held for Lord Reckage, if that nobleman had been, in reality, the sham Crusader whom his own letters seem to indicate, and whom his later critics do not scruple to describe.

After ten pages of compliments to his Secretary's worth, and much frank depreciation of himself, he winds up thus:—

'You will see that, in becoming an Ultramontane, you have made it very difficult for me to be associated with you in any political sense. My trust in your conscience would be mistaken for sympathy with your Creed. I shall always count you among my friends and depend upon the matchless wisdom of your private counsel, but our public connection must, I fear, be severed. I have a fellow in my mind, who might, for the moment, take your place as my secretary. He is already in Parliament, and his father is a man of great commercial influence and blunt worth. I should like your opinion of the son. He seems capable, willing and unpretentious. That I can ever find your equal is a hope too preposterous to be entertained. Yet, after all, our rupture will be a superficial one only. What is it but that concession to appearances and the popular judgment which every man, who seeks the popular confidence, must be ready, at the sacrifice of his personal wishes, to make? Your own sense of fairness, your own common sense, will admit the necessity of this painful course. My exculpation will find its clearest voice in your own generosity.'

It was a plea from the timid to the strong. The entreated generosity did not fail, but, unfortunately, Orange's reply to his lordship is either lost or destroyed—probably the latter. We may presume that its tenor was ironical, that his cautious friend did not find it comfortable reading. Yet it must have been kind also, because we find the correspondence between the two continuing, for many years afterwards, in the same intimate strain and with the same regularity. The blow to Orange, however, was of the steely kind which affects a man's whole nature till his blood itself grows permanently pale and his marrow partakes of metal. He found himself, at a critical moment, deprived, at one stroke, of his chief ally and of the main source of his income. With the prospect of Parliamentary service before him, he could not hope to gain much by his literary pen. No young man, in public or artistic life, is able to save any considerable sum out of his first earnings. He is exceptional, indeed, if he can escape the chafing harness of debt. He finds himself thrown into the society of those whose fortunes are derived from ancient land grants or confiscated church property, from commerical ancestors, or from flourishing industries, trades and city interests. Many, doubtless, of these licensed idlers could earn, under the pressure of necessity, a decent livelihood. Many of them, from time to time, have occupied, and occupy, positions of public trust with respect and occasionally genius. It is perseverance rather than ability that

is uncommon. But one thing is certain. Ambition and great talent, and even exhortations to poverty, can neither be demonstrated nor preached without the aid of money, and a great deal of money. Orange's position was, therefore, calamitous. In any case, he had no hope of winning, at the first contest, the Norbet Royal election. The unlooked-for withdrawal of Reckage's support seemed ominous. Robert felt that he must either obtain another Secretaryship or retire from the scene until he could establish a reserve fund which would enable him to exist through a year or two, at least, of unpaid labour.

He went to Disraeli and explained the newly-soured aspect of affairs. Disraeli was in a silent mood. He offered neither comment nor advice. He promised to write in a day or two. Orange received a note that same night.

'There is a man' (it runs), 'who would do. A Peer : stupid : a thorough gentleman : certainly courageous : comes rarely to the House of Lords : is partial to Mary of Scots : loves water-colour drawings and refuses to take modern politics seriously. Nevertheless, he is on the other side. You might win him over to us. His interest in Mary looks a promising sign. Lead him "by easy roads to Leicester." Speak of Zucchero and mean Peel.\* If you think it worth trying, I can promise you the berth. A lady controls it. She is omnipotent : has the Stuart complexion, and you interest her.'

Orange had no leaning toward little Queen Besses

\* Disraeli's full appreciation of Sir Robert Peel seems to date from that great minister's exit from this world.

and his spirit rebelled from the 'interest' of any 'omnipotent lady.' He saw himself in fresh difficulties. Disraeli's kindness in the matter deserved no common response. To refuse the introduction which he had offered would look like ingratitude or silliness. Yet, on the other hand, it was always a dangerous and unpleasant thing to be laid under any obligation to a woman's good graces. Disraeli's reference to the feminine influence in question contained a whole policy in brief. It was impossible to doubt his meaning. Orange had even a very shrewd suspicion of the 'omnipotent lady's' identity. She was rich, amiable, sufficiently young, and a widow. She was 'ethereal,' as Robert himself had once said of her, 'from the chin upwards.' She did not flirt, except in the presence of her two young children, but she sang passionate songs in a minor key, and talked the natural philosophy of love with great refinement. Portraits of her at this period show a pleasing oval face, and hair arranged in a chignon, terminating in two long fair curls to the waist. She signed herself *Pensée Fitz Rewes*. Her motto was—*Je me nourris de flammes* (I feed on flame). She had the rank and title of a Viscountess and her uncle was the Earl of Wight and Man.\* We hear, on the unimpeachable authority of all Robert's opponents, that women considered him 'extremely handsome.' When men

\* The recent sale of this nobleman's collection of old lace and Italian water-colours may be fresh in the minds of many readers.

called him an adventurer, the fair ones showed 'annoyance and, in some cases, genuine unhappiness.' He was a brilliant figure at a time when, if we may believe contemporary records and the memoirs of the great, the social arena in London was crowded with remarkable personalities. If, therefore, he had excited interest in the love-lit mind of Lady Fitz Rewes, it was not astonishing, and we need not be so surprised, as he himself unquestionably was, at the pregnant item at the close of Disraeli's letter.

The force of a temptation may be said to lie in its correspondence with some unconscious or some admitted desire. Robert was an ambitious man. This passion, like a sleeping dragon, lay side by side with the unselfish romance of his nature—a romance which had received the kiss of Gallic gaiety as well as the thorn of mediæval asceticism. He who has even once subdued the flesh in favour of the spirit can never again return in joy to carnal things. Robert had resisted mundanity—not always, indeed, but often. It now turned upon him, even as he seemed half-willing to embrace it, and, with its very promise, it breathed a curse. That way there might perhaps be power, there might perhaps be a little brief exaltation of the lower vanities, but there would be a burning darkness in his soul which remorse could not quench nor endurance lighten. It might seem that a man, to whom Folly presented herself with a crown of horrors, was in small danger of committing

a foolish act. But Folly—no less than Wisdom—has her martyrs, and, while she deceives the weak by flattery, she warns the strong, with a candour even more dangerous than blandishments, that her discipline is cruel and her reward, an ordeal.

Robert was standing in the Library of Almouth House, considering all these points and studying Disraeli's letter, when Lord Reckage himself, unannounced and unexpected, entered the room. For a moment both men lost their countenance, and neither of them could speak. Then they greeted each other as though nothing had happened to disturb their friendliness.

Lord Reckage, of whom it might now be well to give some description, was a slim, handsome man with an auburn beard and darker hair prematurely tinged with grey. His complexion was healthy and his blue eyes had not the languor which is so often found in individuals of such colouring. There was something Quixotic in the shape of his face and the droop of his eyebrows. He had the interesting air—without the misery—of a melancholy mind. Though he presented an appearance of much gentleness, he possessed a fierce and even cruel temper. His manner had a grace which was all but feminine, yet he lacked every quality which makes for effeminacy. Tactful rather than timid, superstitious rather than pious, calculating rather than affectionate, artistic rather than refined, he was never, it must be owned, deliberately insincere.



To Robert, who loved frankness above all other things, this was perhaps the commanding charm of Reckage's society. Hercy, who was in every intellectual respect his brother's superior, had a certain slyness which gave even his conspicuous merits—such as patience and good-humour—the alloy of unreality. Reckage was a man who acted on opinions which, however contradictory in themselves, he was never afraid to declare. There was a total absence of self-consciousness in his mental methods which made him at once confident and unreliable.

‘I am sorry,’ said he, ‘that I have had to go against you over this Catholic question. Do I care what you are? All the same, I don't believe in the Roman claim, and if it is a true one, I don't want to know it! I have no great talent, so I must make the best use of my faults! I am set on getting a place in the next Government. We shall soon turn these fellows out. They are ready to tear each other in pieces. Among other things, they say that Hartington\* is too young for his appointment. It ought to have been given to some one of a dozen doddering old Peers, all of whom are now raging up and down the Clubs, plotting mischief against their own Party. The very fact that John Stuart Mill lost his seat will show you what the present Liberal crew is made of. And now they go about complaining that Gladstone has no tact.’

\* The present Duke of Devonshire.

'It is a case,' said Robert, 'where *God might be ashamed to be their God.*'

Reckage flushed a little. 'What do you hear from Dizzy?' he asked.

Robert handed him Disraeli's letter.

'Does he mean Lady Fitz Rewes?' said Reckage, when he had read it. 'She has always been busy about you!'

'I know her very slightly,' said Robert.

'But why should you know her slightly? She's a nice woman and high-minded, and quite good-looking enough. A gadding wife would be the devil, and a pretty one is down-right wear-and-tear! I wish you could love this one, although no man yet, I suppose, ever loved under advice. But I believe she is fond of you, and she doesn't seem to care who knows it.'

'Which is a bore,' said Robert, 'for, in that case, every one knows more than I do!'

'She isn't the first who has lost her time over you, and more's the pity. What is the use of that other affair? It can't do you any good either in this world or the next! Parflete will live for ever. Will you waste your best years on an incalculable hope?'

'You know what the Buddhists teach with regard to the chances of a soul's escape from one of the hells?' said Robert. 'A man throws a yoke into the sea. The winds blow it in different directions. In the same sea there is a blind tortoise. After the lapse of a hundred, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand years,

the tortoise rises to the surface of the water. Will the time ever come when that tortoise shall so rise up that its neck shall enter that yoke and float to land? *It may.*'

'It may,' said Reckage, 'but in the meantime—'

'In the meantime,' said Robert, 'one boils in one's iron pot, or one feeds on burning metal, or, one is beaten with heavy rods!'

'Then I am glad that I am neither a Buddhist—nor a lover,' said Reckage. 'Love in some natures seems to turn the blood of life to tears and fire. I want none of it.'

Robert made no reply.

'Take Pensée Fitz Rewes again,' continued Reckage: 'she is a great opportunity—if you wish to succeed. Are nice women common? Do I ask you to sell your soul to the devil?'

'That is the worst bargain that any man can make! *Thine, O Lord, are all things that are in Heaven and that are in earth.* The devil can give us nothing. It is we who are always making presents to the devil! Success depends—not on the devil at all—but on our natural talents. Look at the dancing elephant—has he made any sacrifice to the spirits of evil? Not a bit of it. He was born with a light foot—for his kind. And as for work! See how worldly people toil and scheme in order to gain their treasure. When disappointments happen—they become the jest of serving maids and lookers-on—food for the crowd!

They perish from humiliation. If one wants independence—one must keep on the side of the angels! That is mere prudence—quite apart from every other thought.'

'O yes—there is always one's immortal soul—and one's eternal destiny. I believe in all that. I go a long way with you on that line. I believe in Hell.'

'When most people speak of the soul—they mean the five senses! The real doctrine of immortality is quite forgotten nowadays.'

Reckage took out his note-book.

'I will work that idea into my speech,' said he, 'it would interest a number of people—and perhaps do a lot of good.'

'Would any Christian gentleman venture to quote Scripture in the House of Commons?' asked Orange, drily.

'As a rule,' said Reckage, 'it would be considered a mark of bad taste. But all would depend on the occasion. You don't want to shock people—do you? I wonder whether Disraeli's influence will make you reckless. I can't believe in him. He is laughing in his sleeve at all of us. Every one says so. What is he—a brilliant adventurer—a Jewish upstart—yet he wants to lead the aristocratic party in England. The idea tickles his sense of humour.'

'You mistake him wholly. His pride of race is enormous. If he is trying to lead the aristocratic party, it is because he is himself an aristocrat and has

the right to lead. Does a king chuckle when his men muster round him? No—he accepts allegiance as his due. It is so with Disraeli. Your real impostor always comes to grief, because he is essentially servile. When Disraeli stands among his peers—you recognise the Premier at a glance. He won't find many faithful supporters—but in that respect, he is eminently philosophic. His strength lies in his freedom of soul. He depends on no man either for sympathy or courage.'

'You may be right. But what do you say to his hint about Lady Fitz Rewes?'

'I think it a prudent and delicate test—that is all.'

'What will you say to him?'

'I intend to call on the lady first. And then—the rest will be easy.'

Lord Reckage began to hum a little air.

'If my mind had been free,' said Orange, 'all this might have been well enough.'

'I don't quite see how you reconcile this—devotion to Mrs Parflete with your other views,' said Reckage, bluntly. 'I know you are ascetic—but a man is a man. If you love a person—that means that you cannot live naturally without them. You may put it in any way: you may fast five days out of the seven, and you may feel as though you had been dragged through seven cities: you may wear a hair-shirt next your skin: you may clothe yourself in iron chains—but—but—*Amor è una passione in disianza.*'

And, indeed, there was that in Robert's attitude of mind in this regard which could but be incomprehensible to one who was ignorant of certain traits in the Breton character. Orange was, by his father's blood and his own early associations, a Breton. Renan, who was himself a native of Brittany, has said that all the Celtic races have in their hearts an eternal source of folly and that this very malady is their charm. Love is with them a sentiment rather than a passion. It is a spiritual rapture—a mental thrill which wears away and kills the bodily life. It bears no resemblance to the fire and fury of the South. The Southern lover slays his rival, slays the object of his passion. This Breton's sentiment slays only him who feels it. No other race can show so many deaths from love; suicide, indeed, is rare—they perish from a lingering decline. One sees this constantly among the Breton conscripts. Unable to find either pleasure or forgetfulness in vulgar and bought amours—they sink under some indefinable grief. The home-sickness is but an appearance: the truth is that love with them is inseparably associated with their native village, its steeple, the evening *Angelus*, the familiar fields and lanes. Their imagination is filled with a desire alike beyond all common needs and ordinary satisfactions. Idealism in all its degrees—the pursuit of some moral or intellectual end—often wrong, always disinterested—is the first characteristic of the Celt. Never was a race so unfit for the industrial arts or commerce. A

noble occupation is in their eyes that by which one gains nothing—for instance, that of a priest, a soldier, or a sailor, that of a true aristocrat who cultivates his land according to the tradition of his ancestors, that of a magistrate, that of a scholar who devotes himself to the acquisition of learning for its own sake.

All this then was strongly developed in Robert's character and formed its essence. Lord Reckage was, in every fibre and emotion, Saxon. He could indeed form some conception of that love of the '*homme du Midi*' which must be driven out by the whip and scourge: but his sympathies were allied with those affections and instincts which should ever render obedience to the voice of reason or the warnings of propriety.

But such love as Robert's—at once so illusive and yet so powerful in its sway—such love as that was wholly beyond his knowledge.

## CHAPTER II

THE Viscountess Fitz Rewes, who lived in Curzon Street, occupied what is sometimes called a *maisonette*. It was a small house with a canary bird in a gilt cage at each window of the dining-room, and a number of vines and plants on the drawing-room balcony. The widow received her friends every afternoon between three and four.

As Orange walked on his way to her innocent dwelling, he placed before himself the considerations which made the visit necessary. Lady Fitz Rewes was a woman for whom he had a real liking. She was gentle and affectionate. If one wanted a being ideally strong in love and weak in argument—Pensée looked the incarnation of these feminine virtues. When absent from sight, she remained in one's memory—a gracious figure that floated—always elegant and appropriate—into any fair scene which might seem to require some infusion of humanity to make it—in an earthly sense—perfect. She had written him, in the course of their acquaintance, such little notes as may be sent from a great lady of the



best of all possible worlds to an obscure young man without fortune, in whom backwardness was but respect, and silence, a sign of hopeless passion.

The situation was difficult in the extreme. When will great—and other—ladies learn that audacity in love is determined not by a man's deserts but by his desires? Diffidence springs less from humility than indecision.

'I could almost wish,' thought Robert, 'that women were not so kind!' Then again, 'Why cannot we adore them all equally?' And again, 'What does her imagination see in me? I wish she had less imagination.'

Was the vision of a fair face—the soft remembrance of a few spring days, to leave so permanent an impress on his life, that ambition, success, the counsel of friends were but the dust of travel in comparison? In Robert the love of power was perhaps the ruling passion. His was a dominant spirit, intolerant of restraint, eager, impulsive, self-reliant. As a boy, wandering alone on the rocks and sands of St Malo, he had seemed to be ruling his kingdom under the sea—that mythical city of Is—so dear to the Bretons. There was his splendid army, there,—his palace, there,—his Queen. The humiliations, absurdities, and vulgarity of the daily struggle were there unknown. All the sorrows were grand and all the pleasures, noble. His fancy, nourished on the stories of Saul and David, of the Greeks, of Roland, of King Arthur, existed in

scenes before which the nervous modern of our days is as the blind and deaf.

Robert's life had been, on the whole, both sad and solitary. He lived in an isolation of soul which is hard to be borne and indescribable. But the ardour of study and the affairs of life had kept his mind from melancholy, and, until the meeting with Brigit, he had kissed loneliness gladly each morning on both her icy cheeks. Suddenly, however, he had found presented to him, a mind and a nature in such complete harmony with his own that it had seemed as though he were the words and she the music, of one song. It was the coming of Esther—it was the fairest among women, and, at the sight of her, he knew that—if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

How often had he seen her as she had appeared that first day on the stair-case at Chambord! She had seemed to him attired by all the angels and the graces! Yet what had she worn? A brown silk dress and a straw bonnet covered with pink ribbons. But it was she—the promise of his youth—the mistress of his kingdom under the sea. Most men had veiled portraits in their hearts. Most men could close their eyes and see the sacred days their lips might never tell of. Many a man had loved a woman well, yet married a name well, also. He would not be the first dreamer of dreams who could share a pillow with common sense. If Lady Fitz

Rewes were his wife—he would no longer be held as an alien and an adventurer. Such a marriage would clear at one short step full twenty years of waiting and working. Twenty years to the good! No more jostling with mean rivals. No more insolence from inferiors. No more dependence on some employer's whims and frailties. No more poverty, no more debts. No more vile cares for the morrow. No more degrading anxieties for the present. Henceforth, the fight would be on the grand plan—a heroic combat to conquest or to the death.

‘What,’ he thought, ‘shall I forget that Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters? Shall I walk on the dry land and become a portion for foxes? Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness—but among the gods there is none like unto Thee!’

After that he could meditate no longer on rich bountiful ladies with blonde curls.

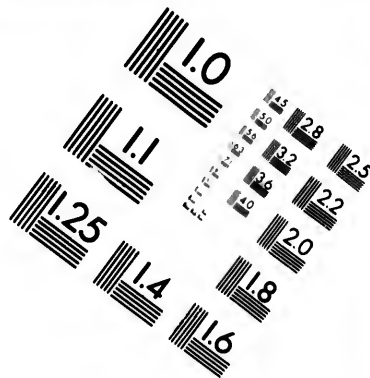
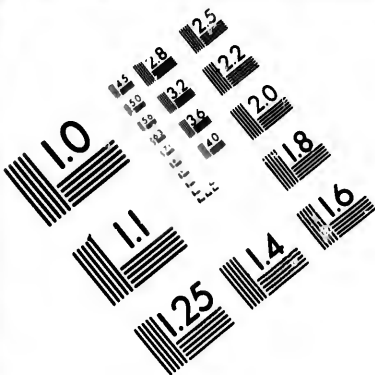
On arriving at the *maisonette*, he was ushered into the drawing-room. The Viscountess was not there. His eyes, before she made her appearance, had leisure to examine the heavy gilding, the damask hangings, the glass candelabra with their sparkling lustres, and the gay carpet which represented large bouquets of pink roses on a grass-green background. The Broadwood piano stood open. Her ladyship had evidently been playing an ‘arrangement of airs

from Rossini.' A miniature of the late Viscount in a heart-shaped frame had a small table—adorned with a copy of *The Christian Year* and cut flowers in Church vases—sacred to itself. A tiny wreath of yellow immortelles trembled on the wall above. The corner seemed consecrated to a gentle and resigned spirit of hopeful mourning.

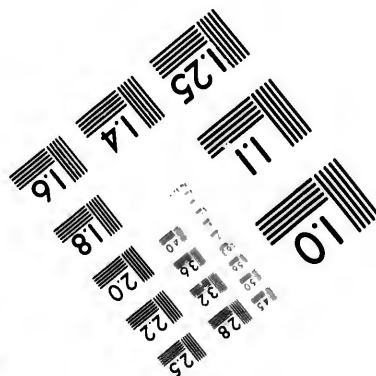
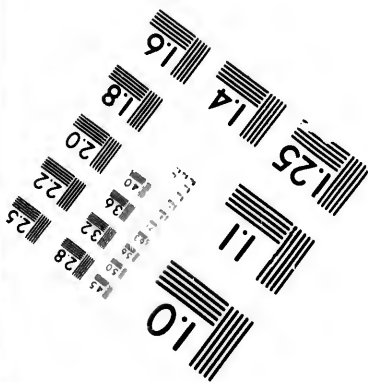
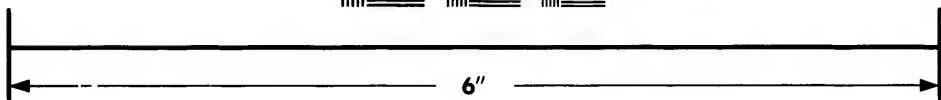
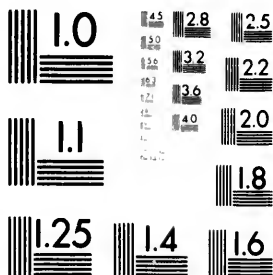
Robert heard a light step. The pretty lady entered.

She had just returned, it seems, from a wedding. She wore, to use the words of the *Post*, which, the following morning, contained a description of her costume—straight from Paris—'*an under-robe, comprising high corsage, tight-fitting sleeves, and jupe of rose-coloured taffeta. Upper robe with low corsage, open sleeves and paniers in white foulard covered with a small rose-bud pattern, and bordered with a leaf-shaped ruche in apple-green taffeta. Chapeau of green crêpe with a diadem of moss, a single rose posed on the left side, with a row of trailing flowers falling loosely half-way over the chignon.*'

The two blonde curls trickled down to her tiny waist. When she held out her gracious hand and smiled at Robert with her heavenly blue eyes, he thought himself of all men the most unworthy of this sweet angel's preference. She pressed his palm and floated with him to a couple of 'occasional' chairs—not inconveniently near each other yet within touching distance.



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'Have your ears been burning?' she asked. But she pitied his confusion and went on,—

'They look pale now. In fact, you are altogether pale. Don't work so hard. We need you. Think of *us*. I was speaking of you yesterday. Ah! I see you know all about it. Men know everything. Mr Disraeli said—May I tell you? You won't mind? He calls you—*Launcelot before the Fall!* You are not angry. But he is too wicked. I asked him *what* he meant. He said, "Doesn't it express him?" I said, "How *can* you!" He said, "No change is so great as to be improbable." He is always enigmatic. That was the only naughty thing he said. The rest was wise. But I won't repeat the wise things. You would exclaim "Flattery!" I know you—don't I? I never flatter men. Women *will* flatter. I wonder why. *Aren't* they tiresome? I tell them how wrong it is. I say—No, let men flatter us: we are weak: we need encouragement. But men are so *gweat*: they see through it.'

As she spoke, she sent a piercing shaft of flattery from her eyes. This, coupled with the slight difficulty she experienced in pronouncing her *r's*, would have melted a Xenocrates. The unhappy young man endeavoured to concentrate his thoughts on the ivory handle of her lace parasol. It had a whip at the top. She drove a pair of ponies every afternoon in the Park. The two children always accompanied her—the boy in a sailor suit, the little

girl in white. She, too, had long fair curls. The three made a ravishing group. The picture, inspired by the parasol, rose before Robert.

‘One’s best friends,’ said he, ‘tell one of one’s mistakes and shortcomings.’

‘I like,’ said she, softly, as though she had not caught the remark, ‘the Launcelot idea. It is most expressive.’

‘In what sense?’

‘He was so stern with—women and yet so true to—them.’

This use of the plural seemed to her a decorous allusion to the story of Guinevere and her jealousies. She watched Robert from under her long lashes and thought, ‘He is either faithful to me or to someone else. No man could be such a saint unless his heart were well satisfied. It isn’t natural.’

‘Revive the spirit of chivalry,’ she entreated. ‘You can do it. I am praying about your election. Do you value a heretic’s prayers? Will you be a Papist always? You may come back to us some day. *Do!*’

‘Now I know,’ he thought, ‘why I cannot love her.’

‘If you think that possible,’ said he, aloud, ‘you will agree with my strongest opinion.’

‘What is that?’

‘This. That anyone who has left one Church for another ought not to marry!’



‘Why?’

‘Because such a step may be prompted by one of four qualities—restlessness, a desire for perfection, a spirit of inquiry, or a passion for truth. You will admit that any one of these four things would make marriage a hard matter.’

‘Ah, you have never loved in earnest!’

‘You think then, that, in the practice of life, nature and philosophy alike must yield to fate?’

‘Ah, you have never loved in earnest!’

‘I believe that love is immortal.’

‘Ah, you have never loved in earnest!’ she repeated, for the third time.

‘Do you mean that I should have known, in that case, that it was not immortal?’

She bestowed on him a glance of exquisite patience.

‘Does it please you,’ said she, ‘to tease me?’

‘I know I am selfish.’

‘You will change at last, I hope.’

‘I fear not yet. I want your opinion on a difficulty. Is there time to tell it?’

She gave him, from her belt, an enamelled watch, a lovely jewel in the form of a pansy and studded with gems.

‘It is yours,’ said she, ‘while you need it.’

‘Oh,’ he thought, ‘if I could love her, I would worship her! If I had not seen a woman even more adorable, how happy I might have been at this moment! Do I wish that I had never met that

other woman? No—on the contrary—I thank God without ceasing for having shown me so much beauty and virtue.’

Lady Fitz Rewes by a gentle sigh reminded him of her presence.

‘You are too kind,’ said he, and he permitted himself to kiss her hand.

Tears sprang into her eyes. The kiss was so cold and the season was Summer.

‘The story is this,’ said he. ‘A man met a lady who was beyond his reach. He seldom saw her. He rarely spoke to her. She cared nothing for him.’

‘How did he know that?’ asked Pensée, quickly.

‘She was as good as a Nun.’

‘Oh!—then was she elderly—’

‘A mere girl. Would you have ugly old women only dedicated to God?’

‘Then she *is* a Nun?’

‘Did I say so? The great point is this—she cared nothing for the man. But he knew that he would never love anyone else and so he took a solemn vow of fidelity to this affection. Perhaps the vow was rash—but you will think—you—with your high and delicate standard of Honour—you—who ask me to revive the spirit of chivalry—you will think that he could not break that vow by so little as a regret!’

‘The temptations of life—’ sighed Pensée.

‘Oh, even under the strongest temptation—even if

the most beautiful of all women should seem near him to inspire him—'

'Poor man! What a terrible position!—You say that he seldom meets the first woman?'

'He may never see her again.'

'Ah! But why did he take that fatal vow? If he saw that he was in some danger of—being inspired, would not that amount to a—certain yielding? It would be so human! Could one judge harshly in such a case?'

'One may recognise an allurements and so avoid it.'

She grew pale to the lips.

'We can speak openly,' said she. 'I understand. You mean yourself. But why did you take that vow?'

'I obeyed an early creed.'

'But—is no release possible? In your Church are there not ways and Dispensations? Would a Protestant vow count?'

'A vow is a vow in every Church.'

'Oh, it was rash!'

For a few moments neither of them spoke.

'I am sorry,' she said, at last, 'for the other poor lady. But I suppose you must follow your conscience. Will that mean that you can never marry?'

'It comes to that.'

'And now,' she said, after another miserable silence, 'about my uncle. He is a celibate himself. He too, once loved unwisely. He is a lonely sad old

man full of regrets and gout and pretending to like pictures! You will be great friends. Promise me that you will accept the berth. I will write the rest and he shall write.'

She went to the window and looked down at the pony-carriage which was waiting for her in the street below.

'The darlings!' said she, 'they want their sugar!'

Robert and she descended the stairs together. She kissed the ponies' cheeks with fervour.

'How I love animals!' she exclaimed: 'they are all soul and no conscience! The pets!'

With consummate skill, she managed to evade shaking hands with Robert when he wished her good-bye. The tide of her heart, which had been ebbing away the whole afternoon, now began to flow in. The waves were dark and tumultuous and they cried with a loud voice. As Robert walked away, she noticed that a young seamstress who happened to be passing turned to look after his handsome face.

'What a brazen minx!' thought her ladyship. 'And he gave her no encouragement. How can men keep steady with such creatures about!'

And the ponies, which had been kissed so tenderly, felt the whip more than once during their exercise that day.

### CHAPTER III

THAT same evening — before the dinner hour — Robert received an urgent summons from Disraeli. He obeyed it at once. When he was shown into his great friend's study, he found him reading. At the sight of the young politician, he put away his book and closed his eye-glasses.

'Are you,' said he, with one of his piercing smiles, 'a Manichean?'

This salutation was certainly unexpected.

'Why do you ask that?' said Robert.

'Are you forbidding marriage and commanding to abstain from meats?'

'By no means.'

'But you will die a bachelor?'

'I hope not.'

'That is better—although I say nothing in disparagement of a single life. Of the two men I know who were most eloquent against the celibacy of your priests—one was living with a lady not his wife, and the other had been divorced! But beware of the tyranny of a false ideal—an ideal based on an unreal knowledge of human nature. It will sear

your will with hot iron and melt your soul like wax over a flame. You are not a monk—you are a layman. Don't make the monk's renunciation—when you have got neither the rules nor the compensations of his life. May I say one thing? Is the situation hopeless?'

'It is improbable,' said Robert, flushing.

'Then,' said Disraeli, kindly, 'avoid all books on love and when you hear sweet music say to yourself, "Twiddle, twaddle, twiddle, twaddle!" Wrap your soul in the linsey-woolsey of morality and then you may order your hair-shirts lined with silk! You must get rid of all this Mediævalism. The world judges of the present by the present and not by the past. Great Pan is dead; the gods have gone and the Round Table too has vanished. You may as well seek to found an order of Vestal Virgins as to mould your life on the principles of Amadis and Oriana. How charming they are too! How touching! The modern passion for truth may perhaps be compared to the quest of the Holy Grail—but what a difference!'

'I don't see,' said Robert, 'why, at any epoch of civilisation, a man should marry one woman when his mind is fixed on another?'

'*And, in the morning, behold! it was Leah!*' said Disraeli drily. 'However, have your own way. We have grave though possibly latent agreements in principle! It would never do for us to quarrel

about non-essentials. In the meanwhile, make friends of the women. The sex is dangerous but it stands well in the Divine Favour! Read this letter from Lady Fitz Rewes and then pray for a good death.'

It ran as follows :—

'MY DEAR MR DISRAELI,—YOUR INTERESTING friend has called upon me. Fortunately I was at home. I feel sure that he is the very person for poor uncle. I have known Mr Orange, IN A WAY, for months. This afternoon he told me the sad story of his rash vow of celibacy or something. He seems to REGRET it most bitterly. I have always suspected that he had some SEVERE AND SECRET trouble preying upon his mind. His manner is sometimes UTTERLY UNNATURAL. I do wish that he knew the good Bishop. He must come back to OUR Church and then he may perhaps YET find happiness. He is too young and brilliant to have his life spoilt in this SHOCKING manner. These things make one quite HATE the Papists. They set one aloof from all human affection. Can this be RIGHT? But Mr Orange seems to be tied to some early rather fantastic attachment. I am so sorry for him, and so glad that you mentioned him to me. Uncle WILL be so grateful, although he has NEARLY engaged Lord Savernake's third son—the SANDY one.

'What a mob and RABBLE at the F. O. last night! Where do the Liberals find their women? O, how uncharitable! I wish I had time to tear this up, but they ARE frumps, aren't they? Please forgive this stupid letter—MUCH too long. I never can write nicely to great men. They frighten me out of my wits. Please don't say clever, sarcastic, TRUE, unkind things about poor little me!—I am,  
yours sincerely,  
PENSÉE FITZ REWES.'

Neither of the two men could repress a smile at this artful communication.

‘Is she not a dear darling?’ said Disraeli. ‘Could the average natural man—unaided by grace—resist her?’

‘No,’ answered Robert, with the utmost good humour.

‘Nevertheless,’ said Disraeli, ‘you know what was said of Ulysses—*Vetulam suam prætulit Immortalitati*—he preferred his old woman to immortality. Some men are by constitution constant.’

‘True,’ said Robert, ‘you may therefore attribute my folly, rather to my native constitution than to the ideals of romance!’

‘By-the-bye,’ said Disraeli, ‘I have received a letter from Wrexham Parflete. He has gone on a journey to the Canary Isles with an inebriate Viscount! He says nothing about his unfortunate wife. Have you heard anything of her?’

‘She is living, for the present, at a Convent,’ said Robert.

He was greatly astonished at the news he had just heard. He wondered whether Brigit had received any message from her husband. In that case—would she leave London? It had been so much to know that she was, at least, seeing each day as he saw it. Reserved in the ordinary transactions of life, no one knew better than Robert the right use of that easily abused quality known as open-heartedness. He said nothing more but he made no effort to disguise the gloomy thoughts which were now afflicting his soul.



‘I fear there is much unhappiness in store for that poor lady,’ said Disraeli. ‘She, too, must make friends of women—and her own virtues. No man can help her.’

‘I think that is clear,’ replied Orange.

‘In trivial matters,’ said Disraeli, ‘friends are always ready to consult each other. They make what they are doing—or are going to do—a subject of frequent conversation. They consider and discuss together every unimportant detail of their lives. But when a serious problem presents itself, men at once grow cautious, and, at the very moment when advice or support is most needed, everyone resolves to think for himself. If I know a little about anything,’ he added, ‘it is the *simplicity* of the hidden life. Motives, excuses, argument and philosophy belong to the things that are temporal. They pass with the fashion or die in their utterance. They display the education of a man—never the man’s heart. Now you are a student and a scholar. Your intellect has been trained to a high pitch of technical excellence. Surely in the present instance, if you trust me at all, you can give me your confidence.’

It was impossible to resist an appeal so delicate and yet so grave.

‘I will be frank,’ said Orange, at once. ‘I hate talking about myself, yet I suppose there are occasions on which one must express one’s opinions or sink into contempt. You are right. Mrs Parflete is the lady.’

I may admit it because I know that her thoughts are far indeed from me !’

‘But all this is fantastic,’ said the older man, ‘this is an obsession. This is not the love that can be cured by hunger, time, or the halter ! It is a *possession*—a form of *obsession*—a habit of thought which the French so well describe as *l'idée fixe*. The familiar examples of Dante and Beatrice, of St Francis of Assisi and St Clare rise up before me. Flaubert has just given us a whole treatise on the subject in his *Éducation Sentimentale*. You remember his hero’s peculiar devotion to Madame Arnoux ?’

The novel in question—which had then recently been published, lay on the table near his elbow.

‘If we may believe this,’ he continued, touching the yellow cover, ‘such friendships, in our century at least, cannot be said to elevate the mind !’

‘I cannot help thinking that Flaubert will as little influence your views as he would mine. He has the morals of a sick devil and the philosophy of a retired dancing master !’

‘You young critics are very severe ! I won’t say, however, that you are always wrong. Now let me show you how well I understand Platonics ! The ordinary marriage is sometimes regarded as a pre-figuration of the mystical union of souls. There are some beings, however, who seem to reach, at the very outset, the ultimate condition of ideal happiness. To them, the thought of any commoner relationship

would be—not a fall only—but an impossibility! Such beings are rare—though not so rare as many would believe. They are seldom understood. It is always unwise to quote them to the mass of men and women. The counsels of perfection, as you know, are fit only for those who are able to hear such sayings. But I will own this: although it is the penalty of saints and poets to suffer much more than vulgar mortals, it is also given to them to experience joys of which the ordinary creature is as ignorant as he is incapable. If I have admitted these things to your satisfaction, tell me your story. If, on the other hand—

‘I will tell it at once,’ said Robert, ‘and you will soon see that I make no claim to any mystical sentiments. It is a common case. I met Mrs Parflete first at Chambord. We spent two whole days together. It fell usually to me to walk by her side—for Parflete and the others were bent on card-playing and the races. As I remember it all—and I remember it as seldom as possible now—she and I talked very little, but I soon discovered that I was restless except when I found myself with her. Although I was not always thinking of her—although I was often absorbed in my work—although my attention was frequently claimed by the other members of the party, I was conscious that she exerted an almost magical power of attraction over me. To be near her was enough. That, whether

silent or in conversation, we should be together—was the strong need. It seemed that we were not two persons but one person. If she had walked out alone, I am certain that, without so meaning, I must have followed her and found her. There is nothing new in all this. The everlasting hills are but a few days older! I did not find anything either dishonourable or wrong in my state of mind. I realised, nevertheless, that it was profoundly dangerous. I left Chambord and I saw no hope then of ever meeting her on earth again. But the event was against me. She came with Parfete to Paris where I was. Again we met each other constantly for several days. Again I learnt that she had every quality which most appealed to me—which most appeals to every man.'

'True,' said Disraeli: 'her modesty, her beauty and good sense could not fail to make a very deep impression.'

'And then her tragic history,' said Robert—'the helplessness of her position and that husband! She would have roused the spirit of a swineherd! Her voice was charming and when she sang, all other earthly creatures except herself seemed pests to me!'

'How easy it is,' observed Disraeli, 'to be faithful to a woman one loves!'

'I left Paris. I came to London. I tried to banish her from my thoughts. Then she wrote to me—as you know, about her trouble. It fell to me to see her once more. She seemed no longer young.

Care and fatigue had left such marks on her face, that, for a moment, I felt she had lost all her beauty. It made no difference. She was to me the more perfect for the loss. We had a conversation—wholly about her husband. Once she referred to an excursion we had made to St Cloud. She spoke of the sunshine there and of our walk through the trees, and how we had all sat on the Terrace thinking that the Summer was still to come! With that remembrance of a happy day, her prettiness, like a swallow when the Winter is past, flew back—and stayed. I remained one hour with her, then the bell rang for Benediction and I said good-bye. I have not seen her since.'

'Nor have you passed her Convent gates?' asked Disraeli.

'I have often passed them,' said the young man, blushing—'but she will never know that.'

'You remind me,' observed Disraeli, 'of a French priest I once knew who told me that he had not risen at four o'clock in the morning for fifty years in order to think like other people! Your life has been so coloured by your early meditations, that, as I hear you talk, I seem to be living in the Middle Ages!'

'Why?' asked Robert: 'my one point is commonplace enough—since I may not marry the woman I want, I will remain single!'

'I am really sorry for Lady Fitz Rewes!'

'That reminds me that you have asked me to pray for a good death. Will you come with me to a service given for that very purpose? We call it the Devotion of the *Bona Mors*, and it is held on the first Sunday of each month. It will mean an hour of your time.'

'I will come with pleasure,' said Disraeli, and they parted on the best terms.

## CHAPTER IV

IN the meantime, Reckage was waiting at Almouthe House for Robert's return. They had arranged to devote that evening to a prolonged consideration of the speech on *Erastianism*. His lordship's manuscript was spread out on the library table. His blue books had been unpacked. Some were strewn on the floor, others, scattered on the chairs and sofas, were laid open at marked places. He was pacing the room with an old volume of Hansard in his hand when a footman, bearing a card on a salver, disturbed him.

A lady had called to see Mr Orange. He (the servant) had never seen the lady before. She was very young, not too proud but rather haughty. She was, to his idea, *some one particular*. She had given no name. She had written Mr Orange's name on the card—which was otherwise blank. She had said that she could wait till he came in. She was waiting, therefore, in the Red Saloon.

'The Red Saloon is depressing,' said Lord Reckage, who, where strange, young, proud and beautiful

ladies were concerned, was not without feeling. 'Show her in here!'

He gathered his papers together, and then made as though he were about to leave the library, when the visitor entered. He raised his eyes respectfully. It was Parflete's wife. There could be no doubt on that point. The height, the graceful carriage, the imperious air, the pretty face were unmistakable. Orange had described her well.

'Pray do not allow me to disturb you,' said the lady. Lord Reckage bowed, and halted. Brigit, however, offered no further remark but sat down, clasped her hands and sank into a reverie.

'Perhaps,' said his lordship, 'it would amuse you to see some of the pictures. The gallery is here.'

He opened a small door, which had been made to represent a part of the book-case. Brigit, who had at once guessed his identity, thanked him and obeyed the invitation.

'Here are some original drawings by Watteau,' explained Reckage. 'The Poussin and the two Claudes are over there. Would you like to see them first? That is a Veronese—a fairly good example. I never cared for the Titian, but I am very friendly indeed with this Carpaccio. The Tintoretto is a favourite. We lend it often.'

'My thoughts are far from these,' thought Brigit. 'I wish he would leave me!'

But she followed him.



‘Do you know the farm where Poussin lived on the Flaminian Way—near Rome?’ asked Lord Reckage.

‘I have never been to Rome.’

‘Pray go soon—before the Italians destroy it. They are the least Roman now of all civilized peoples! This is not a good day for the larger Claude. I hope you admire him. All ladies admire Claude. He is a Romantic. I prefer him to the gloomy fellows.’

‘Oh!’ thought Brigit, ‘if he would not talk so much!’

‘There is a new school coming in. Every line means a lot but there are not many lines. Some critics call it humbug. I don’t go so far. I should not mind having a Whistler. I believe he has a future. He interests me. That’s a great thing. Then there is the Pre-Raphaelite School. That is rather alarming. I think one should strike the medium. Raphael himself, for instance, has what I call a happy manner. After all, the chief aim of art is to please.’

‘Who is that?’ exclaimed Brigit, suddenly, with much animation. ‘What a fine head! May I go closer?’

She pointed to a canvas which stood on an easel at the end of the Gallery.

‘That is a portrait of—Orange.’

‘Oh!’

‘He is sitting for some new Frenchman. It promises to be a success.’

'I am no judge of pictures,' said Brigit, drawing back. 'From this distance I merely saw the outline. It seemed striking—for the moment.'

'Come nearer. If you stand here—it is Orange himself. The artist has caught his expression marvellously. Observe the eyes. You would swear that he was defying the devil and all his works. Orange should have been a priest—he's a born ecclesiastic! The head is most characteristic—and the chin!'

'Yes.'

'I always look at Orange when I want a change of century! My aunt used to say that he ought to be painted as St Augustine. She says that he is better looking than five Byrons. Poor Byron got fat. Robert must never get fat. I am glad you like the picture. The one above you is probably a Romney—but we cannot prove its authenticity. That is why we hang it rather high. Ah! you are still taken by Orange's portrait.'

'Am I?' said Brigit.

'He's a dear fellow.'

'Is the mouth quite right?'

'You see it is still unfinished.'

'I see.'

'The pose is so good.'

'Very good. But his shoulders are broader.'

'So they are—now you call my attention to it.'

'And—don't you think his whole expression is more commanding?'

‘Perhaps it does not convey his will. He has a will of iron—but women, as a rule, do not know that. He has a way with them.’

Brigit sighed.

‘There is always to me something sad about the portrait of a friend,’ said she.

They heard a step on the gallery floor.

‘Here is the original,’ said Lord Reckage, and he watched the meeting between them with a frankly inquisitive air. His curiosity did not go unrewarded. Orange was paler than death. Brigit grew as white as her gown. Reckage, with much reluctance, left them, but they did not notice him as he went out.

## CHAPTER V

‘Is it you?’ said Robert, touching her hand.

‘Yes, it is I. Have you forgotten me?’

‘Then it is you.’

‘Do I look strange? Have I altered? It is I.’

‘Is it possible? You!’

‘But why do you think I came?’

‘Why? Because you were sent here.’

‘How did you guess that? My husband told me to call upon you with this letter. I do not know what he has written, but, in my instructions, he says that you will arrange everything. He tells me I must go to Spain. Is it a long journey?’

‘Not a very long journey. Are you tired?’

‘Very tired.’

‘Poor child!’

‘Is the letter long?’

‘I will see,’ he replied, breaking the seal.

‘I will be quiet while you read it,’ said Brigit, and her eyes wandered to the portrait on the easel.

This was the letter:—

‘OFF GIBRALTAR.

‘MY DEAR ROBERT,—You are the one man in the world on whom I can rely. I am worn away with grief and am

become a coffin of cares. Get my poor wife away from the Nuns. They are kind blissful souls, but she can be of no use to me mewed up in a Convent. The Archduke is prepared to behave in the most handsome manner. He is proud of her. He is disappointed in the Imperial children and my wife is certainly a Princess in ten thousand. She is far cleverer, too, than any one would suppose and POLITICALLY she could have a great career. She is the very woman that is wanted, but, unless we take prompt measures, this religious atmosphere will ruin her mind and she will be fit for nothing! I know the Countess Des Escas with whom she can live at Madrid, for the present, with the greatest advantage to herself AND me. Befriend her, Robert. She needs friends. Would God that she could join me. In time all may yet be justified. I am with the poor Viscount Soham. He drinks. What a pity! His parents (old acquaintances) have entreated me to take him under my charge. We may be *en voyage* for eighteen months. I am writing very fully to my wife. If I have been able to help you to your present good fortune and position, do not fail me now.—Yours ever affec., dear Robert,

‘WREXHAM PARFLETE.’

‘May I see it?’ asked Brigit, when he had finished.

‘Do you wish to see it?’

‘Yes.’

She took the letter, read it swiftly, and reddened to her eyes.

‘I will not go to Spain,’ said she, ‘nor could you advise me to go.’

‘I fear I must.’

‘What!’

‘I fear I must. You cannot remain with the Nuns against his will.’

'He is not here to protect me. He leaves me. I am alone: I have no home. There is no place for me but a Convent. Yet you, you—O, you! would have me turn adventuress.'

'I say that you should obey your husband so long as he does not ask you to do evil.'

'I can read as much in any little book! To do evil! Do you think that man could tell me to do anything good? I begin to mistrust him. *Begin*, did I say? How long can one lie to oneself? I have tried to respect him. I cannot. I have tried to think kindly of him. I cannot. I have tried noon, night and morning to pray for him and I cannot. He is a traitor. He tells falsehoods. I have my own conscience. It is not his conscience, nor your conscience. It is mine. A Spanish Countess, indeed! I want none of them. I shall remain with the Nuns.'

'You told me in Paris that you did not wish to spend your life in a Convent.'

'True. But my life was different then. The world was pleasant in those days. It would be pleasant still, if I had a father I could own and a husband I could mention. But it is not so, and I must hide myself.'

'You are too proud.'

'You suffer, too,' she said. 'We have done nothing, you and I. We have asked for no more than to serve God and save our souls. And what

has happened? I have a birth-right I may not claim. I must be looked on to the end of my days with doubt and suspicion. Men will make foolish faces at me. Women will ask to know my story.'

'I have much to bear also,' said Robert.

'In the other world,' said Brigit, abruptly, 'shall we know one another?'

'For certain.'

'Then I will so live that I shall meet you there. Do not look at me to-day. You might not recognise me when you see me happy.'

'I would have you happy now.'

'That cannot be. No one is happy except God. . . . When should I go?'

'Where?' said Robert.

'To Spain.'

'To-morrow or the next day.'

'I will take a servant with me, and, when I get there I shall say, "I am come because a true friend bade me go and not because of any obedience to my husband!" You look vexed. But I mean every word. I am wretched—beyond all telling, wretched—and through no fault of my own. Others are glad—and for no virtue. I do not remember Job. I will lament and mourn, and, no one—least of all you—shall comfort me. Sorrow does not pass away because you call "Farewell" to it.'

'Why do you speak like this when you know how little I can do to help you?'

‘Because I want you to know that I am neither good nor patient—because I had rather be thought worse than I am than better than I am. Do not think well of me. My light is all darkness. That I know God above everything and everyone is true, but shall I lie to Him and say that my lot is not bitter?’

‘Are these the words you leave with me now when we see each other, it may be, for the last time?’

‘I have no better things to offer. I cannot be brave to-day. Forget my weak sayings and ask God to forgive them. But—if there should be no other world and if this one is so desolate! Oh, Robert, I have faith and, although I am a coward, I would die for it! Once I dreamt I was in Heaven. It was not like this—and yet, I woke up crying. Even in our sleep we must shed tears.’

She held out her hands.

‘Help me to go,’ she said; ‘my heart for some days now has been disloyal to me—for I am not of those who draw back into servitude. Help me to go—’ and she could add no more.

They both stood in silence for a little—looking out of the window on to the Green Park opposite.

‘I have loved London,’ sighed Brigit: ‘I have loved it better than all other cities. And next to it I love your kingdom under the sea which, please God, shall some time be dry land.’

They wished each other good-bye. He led the



way to the Hall where her maid was waiting—half-asleep—for her coming. Robert said no more and the two women left the house together. He followed them all the way till they reached their destination, but Brigit did not see him. The time was Summer : the hour, nine in the evening. Day, in the sky, was blushing her farewell, and Robert remembered that the blue sea off Brittany would be looking up with still impatience for the advent of the stars. He paced the pavement outside the Convent all that night until the dawn. There are thoughts which are companions having a language, and there are other thoughts which rest in a painful sleep upon our souls till the dumb weight of them brings us to dust. Grief, despair, the desire of beauty, the sorrow of partings, the thirst of ambition, the attachment to friends are not small contemptible weaknesses. *Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas* is the cry when we hear it in the market-place—not of wisdom—but of weariness. It is uttered in the qualms of satiety and disappointment : it does not come from the great spirit of renunciation. A strong man has living blood in his veins and he shows his character not by despising—still less in denying his emotions—but in exalting them. And that is no light achievement. The labour of it is not until the evening only, but for the watches of the night and the early morning and the noon-day and for all the Seasons and for all the year and for all the fasts and for all the Feasts.

## CHAPTER VI

ROBERT's Journal, at this period, presents a blank. His days at Almouth House were ended. That mansion, pending Lord Reckage's courtship of the heiress, was closed. The lady was capricious, and the upholsterers waited, not idly, for the pronouncement of their call. In the meanwhile, patterns of silk brocade, in tender shades, were being ordered from Paris. Reckage himself retired to a Villa on the Thames. It may have been painful to him to witness the straits of suspense and humiliation to which his friend, a proud man, was reduced. Berenville, too, left London. Robert engaged some lodgings on a top floor in Vigo Street. The question of the Secretaryship remained, for some time, undecided. The date was fast drawing near for the Norbet Royal election. Some light is thrown on the difficulties of the situation by a curious document—since found among the Orange MSS.—which appears to have been addressed but never posted to Reckage. We may infer that Robert sat down in loneliness one evening and wrote in the old intimate strain to his friend. Then,

perhaps, he remembered, when it was nearly finished, that the confidence between Lord Reckage and himself was no longer all that it had once been. So the letter was not sent. It runs as follows :—

‘ 16B VIGO STREET,

‘ I have not yet told you that I followed the Lady to Spain in order to assure myself that all was well. She did not know it. I think she will never know it. From careful inquiries at Madrid, I have learnt that the Spanish Countess is a person of some piety and many adventures. She has social influence, and, so far, has not abused it. Existence in her household could be neither dull nor constrained. But the Lady’s mind is still fixed on the Convent at Tours. I wish that she were there. The cloistered life—in its perpetual protest against all that is mean and feverish, might indeed be called monotonous, but it is the monotony of the cry before the Throne— itself unchanging—SANCTUS, SANCTUS, SANCTUS, DOMINUS DEUS OMNIPOTENS, QUI ERAT, ET QUI EST ET QUI VENTURUS EST. —After leaving Madrid, I journeyed on to Barcelona. From thence, I made a pilgrimage to Manresa and the Benedictine Abbey at Mont Serrat where St Ignatius long ago hung up his sword. I had no sword to offer, so I plucked out the wings of my soul and left them on the altar steps and said—“ Hereafter I will crawl. Let this be a penance ! ”

But—

θεοῖς μὲν κἀν ὁ μηδὲν ὦν ἰμοῦ  
κράτος κατακτησαι’.\*

Am I a slave to ambition or to pride ? I know not. If one were to preach at me till his tongue grew worn to the stump, I could not tell. But if you might see me now, you would own that I was humbled. Of all my books—six only remain. How many pounds of chops would you think one could buy for the price of an Horæ

\* With the help of the gods, even a man who was no man, might prove a conqueror.—Sophocles, *Ajax*, 767-8.

MS. on vellum, with miniatures, Sæc. XV. ?\* Must I bring myself to take its equivalent in butcher's meat? The election will cost at least a thousand pounds. I have the sum in the bank—a sacred treasure. People seem to think that I am a silly fellow who has forgotten himself. If I were not vain, I would not mind this. Now and again, I think of the days when I mimicked the Stoics and called my body—A VILE CARCASE, my spirit—A DREAM, A SMOKE; when I howled at the cities of the earth—You are dust-heaps! and to the Heavens—You are ether! I never meant it. No one ever does mean these things. The pride of life and the desire of the eyes is mighty in all men, and, while one is strong, the time is the time of love.

My room is not gay. Below, there is a lodger who sings. His voice grows weaker every hour. A great Countess has promised him an opportunity to amuse her guests—some night—next month . . . probably. I hope he may live till then. We have discovered that—before chicken and turtle, we both prefer water biscuits and Marsala. "A tenor," says he, "should have a slim waist." "An author," says I, "should not clog his brain with rich food!"

I met Lord Wight for the first time this afternoon. Imagine a fat man with an externally happy profile and a full face—beyond all description, sad. He told me that—if I would not urge him to give up eating pastry and if I could assist him with his new translation (with notes) of SOLOMON'S SONG—we should agree. He has hired a house near the Border, for he connects the Love of the CANTICUM CANTICORUM with Mary Stuart. "Was she not," said he, "as fair as the moon and as terrible as an army with banners?" He would require my undivided devotion for three full hours every morning. On waking, it is his habit to hear six Psalms or so read aloud in Hebrew. After that, he "potters among his books." I have accepted his terms and I feel, on the whole, fortunate. Lady Fitz Rewes was present during the interview. She never spoke,

\* It was purchased recently for £124.

but she looked all the Beatitudes—more particularly the fifth—

“BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL : FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN  
MERCY.”

She is a pretty soul. I never saw longer eye-lashes than hers. When she looks up, they fairly sweep the skies. When she looks down, the whole world lies in shadow—

Here, the letter breaks off. It was never finished, and, as we have already seen, it was never despatched. That it contains a faithful transcript of Robert's mind cannot be doubted. Although he had resolved to enter political life, his will rather than his heart was pledged to that vocation. The true bent and the real struggle are shown in that solitary pilgrimage to Mont Serrat, in his reflection on the monastic life, his significant attachment to the *Horae*—the sale of which might have saved a few at least of his other books—and, finally, those words—half-defiant and half a confession—‘*The pride of life and the desire of the eyes are mighty in all men, and, while one is strong, the time is the time of love.*’ He could not bring himself to utter the priestly vows. He could not sacrifice the hope—though pale and mute—of marriage and honours, nor could he renounce the vain expectation of that happiness, which the young, and ardent, and impassioned do ever think to be the sum of earthly prizes. It is true that this last is never mentioned either in Robert's Journal or in his correspondence. But we may be sure that it was there—and with it a pride of birth almost amounting to arrogance. His father came of

the best blood in France. His mother—of a haughty and rebellious stock—had been disowned by her family. Robert felt that he must fight for his birth-right. His place was among the noblemen of any realm. A man should strive to come unto his own. Afterwards—he might—of his free will live as he pleased, and become, for penance' sake, as a hired servant. But to be dispossessed, by force, of his position and to bear such injustice without protest was neither godly nor manly. It is not within the power of any family to disown one of its members. A name is a name and neither curses nor disgrace can make the blood of one race the blood of another. Robert was born of the House of Hausée and the House of Wharborough. He was no adventurer, no upstart. And he would vindicate his mother's honour. Such was his argument.

## CHAPTER VII

THE days were the days of the Irish Church Bill. Disraeli, as Leader of the Opposition, had indeed delivered speeches against it, but they were given without unction. He spoke rather of manners than of measures. On the Lords sending back their Amendments, he entreated the Commons to remember the courtesy due to the Upper House and to meet their Lordships 'in a spirit of conciliation.' When he defined Propaganda as the most powerfully disciplined Foreign office in the world—when he called the Catholic priesthood a perfect organization against which the Protestant Church in Ireland could not hope to stand—when he described the Roman See as possessing the advantages without the disadvantages of an Establishment, it did not require profound intelligence to see, that, wherever his allegiance may have been, his admiration did not rush forth spontaneously to the government of the Church of England. He bore the final passing of the Bill with honied resignation. '*Not for many years,*' says *The Times* of that date, '*has there been such a sweet inter-*

*change of good feeling. The House of Commons yesterday afternoon might have been the Temple of Harmony. The conversation somewhat assumed the tone of the supper-parties of our youth, or the later hours of a provincial banquet when every one feels called upon to propose his neighbour's health, or to testify to his excellent social and moral qualities.'*

Robert had avoided Disraeli and the political Clubs during those memorable debates in July 1869. Lord Reckage, however, whose interest in ecclesiastical questions was making itself more manifest each day, had been addressing the serious-minded all through the country. He gathered round his standard a small but dashing band of Graduates and young clergy who clamoured, in the language of Prize Essays, for the Reformation principles of Church and State. 'The fear of God made England,' was their text, 'and no great nation was ever made by any other fear.' The Roman Catholics could not deny this: the Nonconformists found the doctrine sound. Reckage began to be regarded, in a certain exclusive circle, as the second Wellington of a new Waterloo fought between the powers of darkness and the sons of light. The young man was in earnest. His sympathies were frankly Ritualistic when Ritualism was by no means popular. To be irreligious was, in his opinion, to be ungentlemanly. To deny God and blaspheme was the cad's part. True piety will give even the humblest person the grace of self-possession and dignity.



Reckage knew that. How much more then, he argued, did it illumine those who had rank and talents and influence? 'It is so vulgar,' said he, 'to doubt.' The motive of belief may not have been a high one—but it touched many minds not readily accessible to more exalted arguments. His party grew. He saw himself regarded as a man of some consequence and he honestly wished to give God the glory. No deliberate hypocrite has ever yet succeeded even in the wayside booths of public life. There must be a spark of sincerity somewhere. And Reckage had more than a spark of it. His Villa on the Thames was as the abode of a Mæcenas turned theologian.

On the last day of July, Orange was writing to Disraeli to remind him of his promise to attend a service of that Archconfraternity known as that of the *Bona Mors*, when Reckage presented himself at Vigo Street. His lordship had long wanted an introduction to the despised, feared, yet indispensable genius of the Conservative party, and it had struck him, that, of all ways of meeting so mysterious a person, this, of sitting next him in a Church of the Jesuit Fathers, was by far the most picturesque and extraordinary.

'Besides,' said he to Orange, as they walked together toward Farm Street, 'the service itself is no doubt interesting. Very touching, too, I daresay. Who can deny that Rome understands a ceremony better than we do—at present? But we shall have all these things in time. A great many people have

already given in about the candles! And that's a tremendous concession. The difference between the priest and the parson need not be so great. Tell me more about Dizzy's manner. He bores Salisbury. I wish he didn't bore Salisbury.'

At that time, the West End of London and the Parks did not present, on Sunday afternoons, the lively appearance which is now their characteristic. The Zoological Gardens were then the favourite promenade of such members of society who were at once eminently distinguished for decorum yet not extravagantly Puritanical in the matter of Sunday recreations. But the streets were deserted. The houses might have been vast silent catacombs. There was not a face to be seen at any window. Not a laugh or a word rose from any area. No caller stood before any one of the many hundred doors. The creaking wheels of a loitering cab or the heavier roll of an half-empty public conveyance disturbed, at rare intervals, the strange tranquillity of the scene. The very air seemed to have paused and the earth stood still.

As the two young men crossed the threshold of the Church, the sight which opened before them was like a dream imprisoned in a rock. The dark stone cavernous building, where shadowy forms were kneeling in prayer and praise, seemed a hollow not made with hands, and the light on the high altar shone through the mist of incense as something wholly

supernatural yet living and sacred. It seemed to breathe and vibrate, and was, now a still blessing, and, now a note of music too delicate to be told on instruments or uttered by the human voice. It fell not upon the senses but the heart, and the faint sound that reached the ear was no more than the infinite soft murmur of many small candle flames. The choir were singing the last strains of the *O Salutaris* :—

*Uni trinoque Domino  
Sit sempiterna gloria  
Qui vitam sine termino  
Nobis donet in patria.*

The service that followed was a devotion—the great end of which is ‘to honour the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Dolours of the Blessed Virgin Mary, trusting thereby to obtain the grace of a happy death.’ It begins with an appeal for mercy from the Lord Christ and then a salutation to Holy Mary, the angels, archangels, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, evangelists, martyrs, and to all the holy ones and Saints of God—to which, at the intoning of each name, the choir cries out, ‘Pray for us.’

Then there is the incomparable prayer and adjuration :—

*From Thine anger  
From an evil death  
From the pains of Hell  
From all evil  
From the power of the devil  
By Thy Nativity*

*By Thy Cross and Passion*  
*By Thy Death and Burial*  
*By Thy glorious Resurrection*  
*By the grace of the Holy Ghost the Comforter*  
*In the Day of Judgment,*

O LORD, DELIVER US.

Then, after some shorter prayers, there follows that sublime commemoration of the Passion :—

O Jesus, Who, during Thy prayer to the Father in the garden wast so filled with sorrow and anguish, that there came forth from Thee a bloody sweat—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who wast betrayed by the kiss of a traitor into the hands of the wicked, seized and bound like a thief, and forsaken by Thy disciples—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who, by the unjust council of the Jews, wast sentenced to death, led like a malefactor before Pilate, scorned and derided by impious Herod—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who wast stripped of Thy garments, and most cruelly scourged at the pillar—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who wast crowned with thorns, buffeted, struck with a reed, blindfolded, clothed with a purple garment, in many ways derided, and overwhelmed with reproaches—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who wast less esteemed than the murderer

Barabbas, rejected by the Jews, and unjustly condemned to the death of the Cross—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who wast loaded with a Cross, and led to the place of execution as a lamb to the slaughter—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who wast numbered among thieves, blasphemed and derided, made to drink of gall and vinegar, and crucified in dreadful torment from the sixth to the ninth hour—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who didst expire on the Cross, Who wast pierced with a lance in presence of Thy holy Mother, and from Whose side poured forth blood and water—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who wast taken down from the Cross, and bathed in the tears of Thy most sorrowing Virgin Mother—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

O Jesus, Who wast covered with bruises, marked with the Five Wounds, embalmed with spices, and laid in the sepulchre—

*Have mercy on us, O Lord: have mercy on us.*

For He hath truly borne our sorrows—

*And He hath carried our griefs.*

After this there was a pause. A sacred banner was placed—as a veil—before the monstrance, and a form of address, known as a Meditation, was given from the pulpit by one of the Fathers. He had chosen for his

subject, on this occasion, the crowning of our Lord with THORNS. It was not a sermon—but an appeal to the imagination of his listeners. They took part in the trial before Pilate, they heard the words of the Accused and His accusers, the shouts of the mob, the brutal jests of the soldiery. The whole tragedy was enacted before their eyes: many wept: the hardest were moved by the recital of woes so poignant and so faithful to the human heart. The rest of the service, as its commencement, is similar to the Litany, which, translated and adopted from the Roman Breviary, is one of the chief beauties in the English Book of Common Prayer. At its conclusion, the priest, mantled with the veil, makes the sign of the cross with the monstrance over the worshippers. This Benediction is given in silence—to show that it is not the earthly but the Eternal Priest Who, in the rite, blesses and sanctifies His people.

One by one the lights upon the Altar were extinguished and the Church grew so dark that it was impossible to discern the faces of the congregation. A terrific clap of thunder shook the whole building. It was followed by another and yet another. Some of the women and children huddled themselves, like frightened sheep, in the side-chapels. The men looked out only to find the streets deluged with rain and the skies frightful with lightning. Such a storm had not been seen in London for years. It broke with disastrous violence all over the City. The peaceful

Sunday had become a Witch's Sabbath. The violent gusts of wind and the drenching shower made the thoroughfares impassable. Yet, as suddenly as the storm had broken, it ceased. In less than an hour the Church was deserted—save for three. Orange and Lord Reckage were watching for Disraeli. He had been sitting, unknown and unperceived, apparently lost in thought, in a remote corner of the side-aisle. He came forward at last but he hastened by the two young men without a word.

‘He could not have seen me!’ exclaimed Reckage a little hurt.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE nomination of the candidates for the Norbet Royal election took place eleven days later when Parliament was prorogued and the Session of 1869 came to a close. Robert had no hope of winning the contest. He was told to make for a decent show at the third place. The mission was not glorious and scarcely inspiring. Disraeli gave him but few instructions. He had not even suggested a heading or two for his first speech. Robert had chosen to be a free agent, and, in the hour of trial, he found himself alone. The diplomatist evidently wished to try the mettle of his man by the most severe tests possible. The fact that Orange had been brought forward by the leaders of the Opposition without consultation with the general body, coupled with the reappearance of Mr Vandeleur as a candidate, also in the Tory interest, aroused great excitement and dissension. Vandeleur had strong connections in the County. These connections detested him, yet, they all wished, for the family's sake, to see him once more in Parliament. He was a plump sort of scoundrel with a certain gift for writing political pamphlets in agreeable English. To the obscure learned, who worked for



their living, he was known as a 'brain-picker.' Sir Charles Bellingham, the Gladstonian, had for his chief's sake, the support of the district. He was an excellent man but perhaps a shade over-confident. The seat was a Liberal stronghold. He felt like a king coming unto his own and he bore the honours of victory in advance.

Ten thousand persons assembled in the Market-place, and, amidst groans, cheers, yells, cat-calls, and the pitching of carrots and stale eggs, the three candidates were conveyed to the hustings. The High Sheriff arrived at least half-an-hour after time, but the interval of suspense was relieved from monotony by the oaths of the wounded and the jests of the brave. 'Blue doves' and 'yellow doves' pelted each other with mud and garbage. Mr Vandeleur had hired four hundred and seventy 'doves' to protect his possible voters. It afterwards transpired that they received £192 for their refreshments and loyalty. Another body of one hundred and four 'respectable' men, under the police, were endeavouring to preserve—without favour—order and peace. Songs—not too decent—were sung: pleasantries—of no milky flavour—were freely exchanged. Sir Charles Bellingham's Wellington nose received more than its full measure of attention. Mr Vandeleur's head was denounced as 'fat.' A young factory girl threw her bow of long ribbons, known as 'Follow-me-lads,' at Orange's feet. He saluted her and tied the favour on his arm.

The writ having been read and the usual formalities

disposed of, Lord Ravensworth proposed Sir Charles Bellingham as a person of distinction, virtue, and property.

A gentleman in the crowd then saluted him, in kind terms, as 'Pretty Poll!' When Major Egerton Dane rose to second the nomination, he was not heard.

Mr De Havers then proposed Mr Vandeleur, whose name was received with hoots.

The Hon. Gerald Galloway seconded the motion.

Orange was then proposed by a friend of Lord Derby.

One of Disraeli's friends seconded the nomination. Their speeches were short and were little more than a mere introduction. Wisely, no reference was made to the candidate's literary career. Authors are not considered practical in worldly affairs. Robert had three points in his favour. He had a fine presence: he was a bachelor: he was unknown in the constituency, and, if he had no friends, he had no enemies in the crowd. When it came to his turn to speak, the calm of curiosity settled upon the hearers. What would he say? How would he say it? He had been described in the local prints of his opponents as a foreigner. But he had been born in England and he had inherited his mother's English features. His fine athletic figure, his plain dress, his whole appearance was that of an English gentleman of the true school. They waited anxiously for the sound of his voice. Vegetables and eggs were held in readiness for the first imperfection in accent. He came forward. His countenance was

eminently pleasing and his manner unaffected. He spoke with some nervousness, but in language as clear and simple as though, to quote a contemporary, he had been addressing the very flower of Europe, or a Vatican Council! He was allowed to continue for some minutes without interruption, till one of the 'yellow doves,' at a glance from Mr Vandeleur, raised the cry of 'Jesuit!' This was enough. The groans, hisses and hoots—for the temporary lull—recommenced with double vigour. Heads were smashed. Robert himself was pelted with garbage. Gross things were said of the Papacy and the priesthood. The note of blasphemy was not wanting. That fatal cry of 'Jesuit!' had worked, so it seemed, irretrievable harm. 'Blue' attacked 'blue,' and 'yellow' turned against 'yellow.' Bruised ears, battered noses and blackened eyes, swollen cheeks and cracked teeth were perhaps the worst outward signs of the struggle. A constable had his arm broken, and a priest—who had rashly ventured into the crowd—suffered afterwards from a dislocated shoulder. A child was killed, a woman carrying an infant was knocked down, but the rest escaped lightly. The scene, however, became so wild that the Riot Act was read, and the mounted police were permitted some rough riding. The poll was eventually fixed for the Saturday. The intervening days were for speeches and demonstrations.

Early the next morning, Robert strolled into the Market-place, and there he met a whole company of

carters—in their picturesque dress of smocks and shorts—who were exhibiting feats of skill with the whip. He had often seen, as a lad, performances of the kind in Brittany. One especially difficult game is to pursue a running man and catch him by casting the whip in such a way that it curls about his legs and trips him up—but without stinging. If the whip stings—it is badly thrown. The prowess is shown by the lightness of touch. Now it will be seen at once that much depends on the honour of the adversary. Should he swear that the whip came too hard—no umpire could decide to the contrary. In Brittany, however, the strictest integrity seemed to prevail in the matter. Robert found a spirit no less chivalrous among the Norbet Royal carters. They were extremely rough, and they were not of the kind that smarted easily. When one was stung—he rounded on the pursuer and punched his head. This was considered a just return. On the other hand, when one was fairly caught—he would pick himself up with meekness and chuck his halfpenny into the ‘pool.’ As Robert stood watching—one of the fellows, who seemed the bully of the party, dared him to take his chance. The suggestion was received with roars of laughter.

‘Two to one on Bobby Lemon!’ said the chief wit. ‘Rum-and-Bobby-Lemon! He’ll have his fine shanks like a zebra at the circus!’

But they had not been drinking, and they were disposed to show good-nature.

‘What will thee put in the pool, Holy Peter, mylad?’

‘I’ll put in when I’m caught,’ said Robert, ‘but not a minute before.’

‘That’s fair,’ said the keeper of the stakes, and he winked at their champion whipster: ‘that’s the rule true enough. But hast thee got twenty shillun?’ It will cost thee every penny o’ that, lad, and more too!’

This sally was received with cheers.

‘Wold Jacob’s got his answer for the best of ’em,’ observed the first speaker.

‘I can pay for all my cuts,’ said Robert, ‘but I will not run till I myself cut a man.’

‘Canst thee throw a whip?’ said the champion—a big lout with the lightest wrist in the county.

‘Once I could,’ said Robert, ‘and there’s no harm in trying again!’

He was offered a choice of whips.

‘Thee’st taken a ugly customer,’ growled the champion: ‘and thee won’t catch no me wi’ *him*.’

The Market-place was a large square. The traditional ‘start’ was three lengths of the whip. It often happened that the carters—who were rather clumsy at running—went at least six times round the course before they tripped their prey.

The places were taken, the ground was cleared, the distance was carefully marked off.

‘Now then—when I says voür. Are ye ready? One—two—three—voür!’

The chase began. The champion—Sam Pratt—

had acquired the trick of so running that, while he was not swift, he threw up his heels in a way which made lassoing extremely difficult. Thrice they went round the course—Robert contenting himself by cracking the whip—which was also a feature of the game.

‘He can crack as foine as I ever heerd!’ said the pool-keeper. ‘But what’s cracking?’

The fourth lap was made. At the fifth, Orange decided to cast. He aimed. A shout went up. Sammie fell down.

‘Hast thee been stung, Sammie?’

Sammie got up, scratched his head, and, striding over to the pool, paid in—without a word—his halfpenny. But when the applause was ended, they missed him.

‘He’s taken it to heart,’ said Jacob. ‘He’ve got the tenderest skin of the lot. He’ve punched vive heads this morning. And who will go next?’

They had, however, seen enough of Robert’s skill, and, after shaking hands with him, they departed each to his cart. But they watched old Jacob who still held the pool in his cap. It amounted to four-pence halfpenny.

‘How many men are there?’ asked Robert.

‘There be ten men, two lads, and a galoot, and the galoot is my own flesh-and-blood. I can’t think who he takes after.’

‘And which was he?’

‘Sammie.’

‘The champion?’

‘He was the champion. But I believe he’s gone off now and hanged himself.’

‘Shall I go after him?’ said Robert.

‘Thee’st best leave a sick cat lie,’ answered Jacob, counting out the nine half-pence upon the stone step beside him.

Orange added three gold pieces to the little sum, at which the eyes of the old man grew hard and thoughtful.

‘Sammie’s made more by being beat,’ said he, ‘than he’s ever done by winning! And I say—send more beaters—please God—pride or no pride. Let him put ’s pride in ’s pocket!’

Robert wished him good-day and left the Market-place where the carters—with Sammy among them—were soon quarrelling over the pool.

It was now about half-past six. The shops in the High Street were not yet open, but every window, door, wall and available space bore the name either of Bellingham, Vandeleur, or Orange.

‘VOTE FOR BELLINGHAM, THE PEOPLE’S FRIEND.  
VOTE FOR BELLINGHAM, LIBERTY, and PROBITY.  
*Vote for conscience, St George, and the British Lion*’

‘VOTE FOR VANDELEUR AND THE UNITED KINGDOM. *Property for all and the rights of property. Vandeleur and the realm. Vandeleur and England’s greatness. Vandeleur and the gentlemen of Great Britain.*’

*'Vote for ORANGE, the protection of the poor, and the faith of our fathers. Vote for Orange, and Merrie England will be herself once more. Vote for Orange, peace and plenty.'*

These bills—composed by the respective agent of each candidate, had been written 'to meet the local wants.' Mr Vandeleur had suggested a point or two on his own account, but Robert had trusted wholly in the discretion of the great Mr Mawrenny, and Sir Charles had placed no less reliance in his 'valued friend,' Mr Paradil.

When Orange reached his quarters—the White Hart Hotel—Sir Charles Bellingham was in the hall. The rival candidates saluted each other pleasantly. One, with a historic majority at his back, could well afford to be magnanimous; the other, perhaps, found it impossible to do anything else but smile. Conscience, St George and the British Lion in one person were to be encountered only, one might think, in the week of three Saturdays.

The day's fight began about ten o'clock. Bellingham and Orange both attempted to address their supporters from the hotel, but the noise and uproar was so great that they could not, and several fights ensued.

Mr Vandeleur, who, as his agent declared, was nearly enough related to the Redford family to go into mourning on the death of the Duke, had taken up his quarters with Lord Ravensworth. There he



talked of greatness in all the pleasure and safety of family life. Possibly out of respect to his deceased and noble relative, he refrained from addressing the mob from a commoner platform than the Town Hall. Once and but once he ventured into the street, where he heard so many coarse remarks and rubbed shoulders with so many vulgar people that he could only rid himself of these disagreeable associations by entering the post-office and despatching confidential telegrams to half the peerage. In fact, so much time passed in this dignified and soothing occupation that he forgot many of his public engagements, and, it may even be assumed, that the public in turn forgot him.

Orange, however, succeeded in pleasing the Mayor—a man of few prejudices and a large family of unmarried daughters. He lent the bachelor candidate a fine blood mare, as bright as a star, and, riding through the town on this beautiful animal, Robert made several speeches in the teeth of the rioters. He spoke at the Corn Exchange, in the market, in the band stand of the public Park, at the Town Hall, at the Freemasons' Tavern, at the Travellers' Inn, and, indeed, wherever he could find even two hearers.

'Numa can no longer consult his Egeria in secret caves,' wrote an enthusiastic Tory editor in the local Organ. 'He has to go into the crowd to hear what people say of men and what will satisfy the greatest number. Mr Orange has shown himself a man of open mind who is ready not only to answer questions but to ask them.'

On the other hand, we find in the *Liberal Journal* this solemn warning :—

‘Let us be on our guard against the well known oiliness of Jesuitical casuistry, and let us thoroughly realize, that, when the Tory shows himself sympathetic, or concerned in the wrongs and rights of the people, it is because he will soon make the rights penalties, and the wrongs but fruitless party cries—a case of “Cherry Ripe” and empty baskets.’

There is no reason to think that Robert’s many addresses were either brilliant or original. It was said by Mr Vandeleur in a letter to his cherished friend the Earl of Wencombe that ‘the person *named after some vegetable* has no idea of rhetoric. He has a certain persuasiveness due, no doubt, to his Roman Catholic training, and his voice is good, but, if *κῦδος*, oratory, distinction, and that reserve inseparable from high breeding are still the characteristics of a Tory gentleman, the aforesaid vegetable *or fruit* has no claim to the title.’

The scene on the polling day was but a repetition of the skirmish at the time of the nomination. There was much that Mr Vandeleur would have described as ‘low.’ The assistance of the military was applied for. Early in the day the Liberals made a great display of strength. Sir Charles Bellingham had his telegrams half written out, quite ready for the congratulations which would inevitably arrive in the course of the evening. But, as the hours wore on, that superb majority rapidly declined. It was considered wiser at

the three Committee Rooms to refrain from posting up the returns. At nightfall there was much horse-play, many smashed heads, and several broken limbs. More violent recriminations were reserved for the morrow, a Sunday, when men, under the influence of drink and leisure, confessed, or pretended to confess, changes of opinion, and qualms of conscience.

On Monday, in a drizzling rain, a jaded crowd assembled at the hustings, where the Mayor, as returning officer, announced the numbers to be as follows :—

Orange, 3,602 ;

Bellingham, 3,207 ;

Vandeleur, 93 ;

and further declared Mr Robert Orange to be duly elected to represent the city in Parliament.

As we have said, the Session had been brought to a close on the preceding Wednesday. Robert could not take his seat that year. He had arranged to spend the summer with Lord Wight in Scotland. His lordship had spoken largely of Hebrew and house-parties. Lady Fitz Rewes and her delightful children had been ordered Northern air. She had agreed to accept her uncle's hospitality for 'some weeks.' Robert was just beginning to wonder whether his prejudice against blonde ringlets was not a little unjust when all his plans received a sudden check.

## CHAPTER IX

ABOUT this time, young Legitimists in France and dashing souls in England were roused to an interest in the claim of Don Carlos—‘Charles VII., Duke of Madrid’—to the throne of Spain. But a year before, the Carlist cause had been pronounced by those in power—‘as forlorn as a cow made into shoe-leather.’ Nevertheless, it suddenly revived. ‘Carlo Quinto,’ worn out by war, embittered by treacheries and disappointments, had died in 1855. Dead, too, was his son, Montemolin. His second heir, Don Juan of Bourbon, had signed away his birth-right. The new Don Carlos was the son of this last by the Austrian, Maria-Beatrice, Archduchess of Este. He had been born in exile at Leybach in Illyria (now Carmiola). He was, in 1869, a prince of one-and-twenty, a bride-groom—described by his devoted partizans as tall, slight, and eminently distinguished in bearing. His large black eyes had the fire that kindles love and the firmness that breeds fear. Ardent, courageous, impulsive to a fault, head-strong and inexhaustible—he seemed the very figure to

disturb the monotony of civic prudence and to inspire the hearts of a passionate people. His marriage with the young Princess Margaret of Parma, the daughter of a murdered king, added yet another touch of pathos to a life already wrapt in romance and linked with all the tragedy, the fortunes, gifts, reverses and follies of the House of Bourbon. This same bride—Donna Margarita—who was called Queen ‘par la naissance et par le cœur’— had a fair countenance which soft blue eyes, a charming smile and perfect manners made trebly lovable. One hears of her—dressed all in black—going from bed to bed among the wounded in the Hospital—saying, ‘They are all mine—for they are Spaniards—whether for us or against us!’

Spain itself was divided between two great forces—the army and the people. Its fortunes were in the grasp of the army and the army was under the guidance of one mind—that of General Prim. The people, on the other hand, had as many heads as it had combatants. Each enthusiast went to destruction in his own way. It was a case of ‘Vae Soli!’ *The Carlists have a King: the Isabellinos a Queen: the Alfonsists a Prince: the Unionists a Duke (Mompensier), but the Progressionists have neither Duke, Prince, Queen nor King*—so runs a contemporary despatch. The Bourbons had been tried, it may be, too long, and to the Republicans no man in his senses would give even the chance of a trial.

The Carlists, however, stood for the traditions of chivalry, for the Rolands and Olivers of the heroic age. Prim's harshness was found, even by his supporters, both ill-advised and barbarous. Don Carlos—in contrast to this—had issued orders that the men who followed his standard were to be as distinguished for humanity as valour.

'Choose,' said he, 'such a twenty thousand that there will not be found one coward among them all. But in battle strike great blows, and let there be none to sing ill-songs about us. For the King's right, one should suffer all things, endure consuming heat and unkind cold, lose life and limb. Let there be woe in the heart of that man who is a coward in his stomach.'

He echoed the war-epic of France. It was the cause of blood and romance against the encroachments of flesh and reason. He was—when the worst was said—the true heir. His wrongs appealed to the old, dying and neglected nobility all over Europe. They went to the soul of every man—whether peasant or aristocrat—who preferred tradition to policy, courage to comfort, and the magnificent thought of the Lord's Anointed before the tangible if treacherous advantages of democratic government. Robert's new ally—Lord Wight, resolved, in common with several other English gentlemen, to go to Madrid. He seemed to be fighting the fights, and thinking the thoughts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He carried the miniature of *Mary Stuart* on his breast and an

unfinished essay on the iniquities of *Elizabeth*, in his portmanteau. He spoke warmly of the gallant Don John of Austria and of the brilliant, reckless Egmont till one would have supposed that these heroes had been the playmates of his youth. He was suffering from the dropsy, and every step was torture. Sea-sickness and the August sun, the hardships of travel and an insatiable greed of good cooking could not diminish his determination to be of service.

‘By God, Orange,’ said he, when the two left England together, ‘after this, your spoonies at the House of Commons will sound like old maids at a kettle-drum! All this commerce will be the death of Great Britain. Commerce—is the mother of liberty and eventually its destroyer. God Almighty! If I were but twenty years younger!’ On that point he refused to be comforted till his man reminded him that he was a good shot.

The night of their arrival in Madrid was marked by a tragic adventure. A patrol of volunteers in the service of the government had their suspicion aroused by two men, who, muffled in cloaks and carrying muskets, were lurking in the neighbourhood of a fort near Loadilla. On being challenged they ran off and were eventually traced to a house in a low quarter of Madrid. The pursuers dared not enter it. But, concealing themselves, they watched for the morning. At daybreak, the supposed conspirators ventured out. The patrol fired. One of the men

fell dead: the other was dangerously wounded. The wounded man was the Marquis of Pezos: the young fellow lying dead was his servant. Despatches were found upon both. There was a Carlist plot in Madrid. Don Carlos himself was supposed to be in hiding there. Vainly, the French Minister protested that the 'Duke' was at Fontainebleau. He was with General Elio in Navarre. He was on the frontier. He was at La Mancha. He was at a port of Guipuzcoa. He was in Austria. There was a fluttering at every Legation. Party animosity corrupted all information at its very source. The Government represented the matter as slight, but the air was sharp with rumours. Nothing could be known for certain: anything might be guessed, except, perhaps the actual truth. But arrests, it was said, were to be made, and this time they would mean more than banishment to the Canary Isles! Among the names of those involved was that of Brigit's friend, Marie-Joseph-Joanna, the Countess Des Escas.

The Countess had two residences—a house in Madrid and a Villa at Loadilla—about fourteen miles from the capital. Her town house formed part of a large Convent and Hospital—both of which were wholly under her own control. From her bed-room she could step into a tribune which overlooked the Chapel. A balcony ran the entire length of the building—from her state saloon to the



first floor ward of the Hospital. She had the right to appoint her own priests, confessors and doctors. There were twenty-seven choir nuns and twenty-five lay sisters. At Loadilla—she had feudal power over all the adjacent lands and villages. Her privileges were extraordinary and her influence among the working classes was too great and incalculable—too deeply involved in popular sentiment and superstition to be lightly tampered with. Her husband had fallen in the cause of Don Carlos the Fifth, but, after his death, she had devoted her interests exclusively—so far as one could judge from appearances—to the care of the sick, poor and aged. General Prim was not the man to hesitate over any measure, but in the question of arresting the Countess Des Escas he realized that violent or even sudden methods would excite a dangerous sympathy. She was not a poor woman—although her numerous charities kept her purse slender. But, faring abstemiously and dressing plainly—she maintained the dignity of her rank by keeping a large retinue of men-servants. Her house had the atmosphere of an official residence and the massive oak doors—heavily carved and studded with iron—were guarded by a sentry wearing the once famous uniform of the Des Escas guards. The marble hall within was hung with old armour and trophies of war, torn flags and battered shields. The empty knights in mail formed a mournful

contrast to the powdered lacqueys with their plush and cordings. Every afternoon the Countess drove on the Prado in a carriage drawn by four mules. Gentlemen and officers of her acquaintance would often ride by her side, making an informal but impressive escort.

On the day after the arrest of the Marquis of Pezos, the Countess drove out as usual accompanied by Brigit. The two women presented a striking picture. The elder had the ivory complexion of her race—with full black eyes and a mass of snow-white hair dressed high above her forehead. Other Spanish ladies of her degree followed the fashion of the Imperial Court at Paris, which, at that date, dictated chignons and ringlets, gaudy bonnets and large crinolines. Marie-Joseph Des Escas, however, kept faithfully to the old style, and many said that she was clothed in heirlooms, dating mostly from the sixteenth century. Brigit belonged to a more frivolous generation and had inherited a livelier taste. Lilac was then considered the most elegant and distinguished of all colours. She wore therefore a lilac silk, a black lace mantilla over her shoulders, and a lilac plumed hat. She had a crinoline also, but from the sketch of her by Millais (some of us may have seen it), no one would be disposed to doubt that even a crinoline can be worn with grace. Her expression was of that brilliant, elusive kind which is the distinctive quality of French women. She had also the

Austrian fairness of skin and clearness of feature. Though little known outside the Des Escas circle she was, beyond question, among the few extraordinarily beautiful creatures in the European society of that day.

The Countess, on this particular occasion, bowed as usual to her acquaintances and exchanged commonplace civilities with the various officers, who, from time to time, rode up to her carriage, saluted her and looked long looks at her young companion. It was not her custom to talk to Brigit whilst driving and they both sat in perfect composure, smiling at their friends and the bright day. The Prado was lined with vehicles. It had been announced a day or so before that General Prim was about to leave Madrid for Vichy, and every one of consideration in the city had driven out for the last rally of the season. Two large detachments of cavalry were exercising. The gaiety, the crowd, the voices, the richness of the ladies' dresses, the splendour of the uniforms, the strains of the band, the clatter of the horses' feet, the dust, the heat and the emotion became confused into one overpowering sensation of life, and it seemed like the beginning of a second Spring. On some faces one read defiance, on others hope, on others chagrin, on others contentment, on some cruelty, on more mockery, on all—expectancy.

The Countess remained out as long as usual, but, as she was on the point of driving homewards, one

of the many gentlemen who rode up to address her, slipped a small note into her hand. The action was too skilfully done to be perceived by any, and, after a few trivial remarks, he turned his horse away and was soon trotting at a rapid pace toward the Casa del Ayuntamiento. The Countess was able to conceal her agitation, yet the moment was one of grave danger and anxiety. It was impossible under the vigilance of a hundred jealous eyes to read the communication which she had just received. To wait until she reached home might mean, perhaps, a loss of time so disastrous that many lives would have to pay the forfeit. In this extremity her presence of mind did not fail. Fortunately, it was not unusual for ladies, particularly those of the old school, to visit the Chapel of Our Lady of Atocha which stood at the extreme end of the Prado. She gave her coachman a hurried order to drive there. She alighted from her carriage with Brigit, and the two entered the church, where several well known leaders of Madrid society were already praying before the famous image of the Blessed Virgin. The Chapel was dark. A dim light was blazing, however, over one of the confessionals, but it was not sufficient to read by unless one entered the box itself. The Countess waited for some moments in despair, when, to her relief, the priest left his seat evidently to fetch something from the sacristy or to consult his Superior. As though to assure

any intending penitent that his absence would be short, he turned the jet a little higher. As the sound of his footsteps died away, Joanna slipped into the confessional and opened the note with trembling fingers. It was written in cypher. She understood its meaning and burst into tears. The police would be sent that night to take possession of her villa at Loadilla. Pezos was not expected to live. He was delirious and talking dangerous matter. She rose from her knees, pressed her palms to her eyes, and, with an unmoved countenance, rejoined her companion. They both said a prayer before leaving the church, and then, with terror in their hearts, they drove homeward through the splendid crowd, smiling with it and upon it.

The Convent bell was ringing for some extra service as they reached the house. The event was not unusual, for the Sisters were often asked to offer a special prayer for the sick and dying, the tempted and distressed. Yet the Countess turned pale. It seemed to her an ominous sign, and, instead of driving to her own private entrance, she went at once to the side door of the nunnery.

‘For whom are you ringing, Sister?’ she asked from the nun who answered her summons. She was told that a patient had been brought there who was too ill to be taken to the hospital. He had been given a room to himself. His groans

were so loud and he uttered his prayers with such fierceness that they sounded like blasphemy.

‘Let me see him,’ said the Countess.

The poor fellow was lying on a pallet bed in a small room with whitewashed walls which was usually occupied by the sacristan. He pretended not to recognise his visitors, but, on their approach, moaned heavily and begged for a little wine and water.

‘We will stay with him,’ said the Countess to the nun who was with her. ‘Fetch him the wine.’

‘Ah, Luciano,’ said she, when the Sister had passed out of hearing, ‘what has happened to you?’ Then she leant over him while he told his story:—

‘The Marquis told me to take a man and two of the best horses to Loadilla. When I got to the bridge I was stopped by Captain Avion. I had time to give warning to my man and he rode off with my master’s horses, but I was taken prisoner, and brought before the General. I told him that I was neither a priest nor a Carlist, but only a poor horse thief, so I begged him to spare my life and let me join his army. I believe he would have taken me too, if some beast there with him had not said—“Vah! he is one of Pezos’s curs and the horses belong to Pezos. He is a spy.” So they took me out into the yard, tied my hands and stood me to the wall to shoot me. Then, by the mercy of God, the Mayor, and some of his friends came up and he

told the General that he knew me to be no conspirator but a thorough blackguard with three wives. So they gave me a lot of drink, robbed me of every penny I had, broke many of my bones and kicked me out into the road, where I was picked up for a dead man. That was an escape, but there will be worse things coming.'

'We must go to Loadilla to-night,' said Brigit, speaking for the first time. She breathed the rest into Marie-Joseph's ear.

At the Villa, at Loadilla, there were not incriminating papers only, but a large secret store of bayonets, swords, and ammunition for the next Carlist rising. If these were found, the Countess could not hope for mercy: it would mean death or banishment. She grew pale at Brigit's whispered counsel, but she seemed to give her assent, and, leaving Luciano to the sisters, the two women stole away by an under-ground passage to the private cells—which they used during Holy Week and at times of retreat, and where each kept a nun's habit, coif and wimple in case of hard necessity. They put on this disguise and crept out, unobserved, through the Convent yard. It was not yet dusk and they were obliged to walk by circuitous and dirty streets to the railway station—where, jostled by the crowd, they waited in an agony of apprehension for the slow and over-due market-train bound for Loadilla. On reaching their destination—they trudged to the

Villa. The hour was about ten. Above them the sky was blue and starry : they could see the shadow and smell the sweet fragrance of the pine woods. Lay sisters were frequently sent on errands between Loadilla and the Convent at Madrid. The sentry—who stood before the high iron gates of the Villa—permitted his mistress and Brigit to pass unrecognised without a word. All was still in the house : no servant was there. The sentry and his family slept in a lodge by the entrance.

The Countess and Brigit each took matches and went swiftly from room to room setting light to the hangings.

‘It burns ! It burns !’ said Brigit. But the older woman could not speak. They crept out by one of the windows at the back and escaped through the garden into the road, where, a mile or so distant, there was an old wind-mill, long out of use. They reached this at last. The ladder which led up to the loft was brittle and very steep, but the two climbed up—always silent—and, from the top loft of all, they watched the villa burning in the distance.

‘Dogs ! dogs ! dogs !’ cried the Countess ; ‘we shall beat them ! Wait till the flames reach the gun-powder !’

At first they saw pale garlands of blue smoke winding up toward the stars. Then the house seemed a black cauldron of bright serpents :



flames filled the sky and soon a tremendous explosion shook the earth. The roof of the Villa fell in, and, stick by stick, the whole fabric was levelled with the ground. For two hours they watched without speaking.

‘We must not forget,’ said Marie-Joseph at last, ‘that they will come after us. Can you hear the soldiers tramping? We must not be taken alive, Brigit.’

‘No,’ said the girl.

The wall of the mill-loft in which they stood, was low, and suddenly they feared to look out through the narrow windows for fear of receiving gunshot in their eyes. And all the time, the mill was slowly revolving in the wind, round and round, although there was no grain to be ground. The one sound they could hear was the creaking of the worn machinery. There may have been a hundred men below—or none.

‘It will begin soon,’ said the Countess. ‘They will come without a word of warning. We shall be like rats in a trap. But not live rats—never that.’

Each one made a little pile of hemp and sat down before it with a match—ready at the first signal of attack—to speed the work of destruction. Yet — even with death so imminent — they had dragged a heavy board between themselves and the wall, as some protection against the enemy and the night air.

'Do you hear them?' asked Brigit.

'I think so,' said the Countess.

Yet nothing came.

'Hark!' exclaimed the Countess. 'They have come. Be quick.'

Each one struck a match—and yet waited. They were obeying the set plans of many a week. There was nothing to say — nothing to re-consider. The worst had happened—that was all.

'Do you really hear them?' asked Brigit.

'A gypsy once told me that I should die by burning,' replied the Countess. She lit her flax. Brigit did the same.

The Countess put her lips to the flame and breathed upon it with all her strength.

'Coax it,' she said to Brigit. 'Coax it.'

The fire crept like thin snakes across the floor and mounted higher and higher.

'But the flax will soon be gone,' said the Countess. 'What can we burn next? Oh, think of something.' She tore off her coif—it burnt but slowly. 'We want a blaze—a quick blaze—our clothes would only smoulder.' In her perplexity she put up her hand to her head and, in doing so, touched her hair. There were some shears hanging on the wall. She pointed to them and Brigit understood the gesture. She took them from the hook and waited while the Countess shook out her magnificent white hair. It fell below her knees and covered her like a veil of silver gauze.

‘Quick—quick!’ said she. It was all cut off and thrown to the flames. How quickly it burnt! But it did its work. In a second the flames reached the roof and the thatching.

‘Put your arms round me, Brigit,’ said the Countess. ‘When we are dead we shall not be forgotten. They will know that there is still some royal blood in Spain.’

The tears that sprang to Brigit’s eyes were scorched before they could fall.

‘This is war. This is martyrdom,’ said the Countess.

Their faces were transfigured, and that extraordinary exaltation which seems to fill the human soul in moments of great peril, great joy, or great despair had made them insensible alike to horror and pain. The boards beneath their feet were cracking, and, from time to time, a tongue of fire darted out from the wall and singed the heavy serge of their skirts. So intense was the heat that Brigit—following a tender impulse, began to fan her companion’s cheeks with a soft handkerchief. But what was that? The shouts of men in the road below. The Countess stepped nearer the blaze.

‘Look!’ said she. ‘Look!’

The smoke was now blinding, but both women could see the dark outline of a man’s head appearing above the stair-way. They uttered the pass-word

of the Carlist party. It was answered in a voice that Brigit knew well. Then her strength and the strong desire to live came back to her.

She carried Marie-Joseph—who was no longer conscious—to the trap-door, where strong arms lifted her—with her pitiful burden—to the small room below. One danger was past. There were still others. She saw a wild blaze above her head. She heard the crash of falling wood-work. Would the long worm-eaten ladder which led to the ground bear the unaccustomed strain of that night?

‘You go first,’ said Robert—for it was he—‘there are several waiting for you below. Have no fear.’

She obeyed, and when she had reached the ground he followed her—carrying the Countess. For the rest she remembered only being held upon a horse—which galloped she knew not where. There seemed a large number of riders—all silent and desperate.

Robert had placed the two women in front under the care of those who knew the country better than himself. Prim’s soldiers were in pursuit—as Brigit heard afterwards—and if four men in the rear of her escort had not put the hunters off the scent by the stratagem of hanging back and taking a side-road, the whole band must have fallen into the hands of the enemy. The gallant four were caught: three were shot dead in their saddles: Orange—who was

the fourth—was dangerously wounded and left in a ditch for dead. But the lives and the suffering were not given and offered in vain. The rest escaped with whole skins and reached a place of safety ere the morning.

## CHAPTER X

WHEN Robert came to his senses, he found himself lying on moist ground — half-suffocated under a weight so cold and unyielding, that, with his scarce awakened reason still dreaming between unconsciousness and death—he fancied that it was a grave-stone. He stirred, and knew then from the sharp agony in all his limbs that, whether buried or abandoned, he was yet alive. Again, he struggled to rise. This time he succeeded. The weight was the dead body of one of his three companions. The other two—stripped of all save their shirts—were lying a little farther on, face-downwards, in a pool which even the moonlight could not make pale. He found himself standing in a field of stubble divided from the road by a low hedge. The scene was deserted : the grim outline of the fortress some miles beyond made a blot on the deep-blue horizon : there was not a sound of bird or insect and yet there seemed a sort of breathing in the air as though live creatures were sleeping somewhere near. Robert peered over the hedge. The

four horses had been secured by their reins to a tree some yards higher up, and there, huddled together, they were dozing as they stood. Any attempt to ride back to Loadilla and from there to Madrid would have been madness. Men were no doubt even then on their way from the fort to fetch the animals, which were valuable. The roads, too, would be carefully guarded. Orange's arm hung numb and lifeless at his side. His shoulder was fractured. He had a wound in his leg. To stand upright in that clear atmosphere was to make himself a target for every watchman hiding near or on guard in the distance. He resolved to crawl as best he might over the stubble till he came to some hut or habitation. The field possibly belonged to some peasant-farmer or to the owner of the burnt mill. And the working classes were notoriously opposed to Prim. At any rate—there was a little hope one way: the other way meant inevitable destruction. With the maimed arm slung between the fastening of his flannel shirt he crept along—in pain so great that, but for his pride and the love of freedom, capture in itself—even a shooting-down—would have come as a relief. He had advanced about fifty yards with his one free hand, his face and his knees streaming with blood, when a bullet whistled past his ears. This was followed by two others in rapid succession: he lay still—as yet untouched. A fourth bullet grazed his

ear. And then he saw, moving toward him, the figure of a man. He felt for his own pistol. It was gone. The figure halted and called out in a boyish treble,—

‘Do you surrender? I have ten others with me.’

‘Who are you?’ said Robert

‘I am a Lieutenant!’ said the youth.

‘I am an Englishman and I am wounded.’

‘Did I wound you?’

‘Not you. Others.’

‘I have ten great hulking fellows with me,’ repeated the Lieutenant, drawing nearer. ‘But—for the love of God—don’t faint. Are you for the Government or for Don Carlos?’

‘For Don Carlos,’ he said at once.

The Lieutenant burst into tears of joy.

‘So am I,’ said he, ‘but I have no one with me and I’m not a Lieutenant. I am a girl!’

Robert looked at her small brown face and her boy’s clothes.

‘And do you wander about alone—like this?’ he asked.

‘I have a dagger and my pistols. And I am a Navarraise.’

‘But what are you doing here?’

‘I am watching for a signal. Till it comes—I hide in a hole in the ground. My brother is killed and I have taken his place. Can you crawl a little farther?’



‘Not much farther.’

‘Do your best. I can make the ground easier.’

She pulled off her jacket and cast it over the stubble till, in fearful torment, he had made his way over so much land as it covered. Then he raised himself a little on his right arm, she drew the jacket from under him and spread it anew. This was repeated eight times or more till he reached her place of ambush—which proved to be a dry well, scarcely a man’s height in depth, cut into the earth and concealed by little squares of turf and stubble carefully placed on its cover. This she removed. Orange, at her entreaty, descended first and then he lost consciousness. The well was small—two could sit up-right on the bench which had been placed there, but when he fell forward there was only standing room left for his companion. She poured a little wine down his throat and then climbed up to the field to gather some leaves from the hedges for his wound. She found what she wanted and was returning when, to her terror, she heard the sound of horsemen in the road. She threw herself on a level with the earth, but it was too late. She had been seen. An officer followed by six riders leapt over the hedge. Without a question or further warning they fired. Two bullets pierced her back. One of the men dismounted, rolled her over and sent a third shot through her heart. And so another life was sacrificed in the King’s Cause. The trampling of horses overhead was

the first sound that greeted Robert's reviving sense. Then he heard a woman's cry of horror and the report of pistols. He sprang to his feet and came out—he knew not how—from his shelter. The moon was still so bright that it might have been the day. His features could be plainly seen and the officer in charge of the band must have decided at once that Orange was neither a peasant nor a Spaniard.

'I am not armed,' said Orange, 'and I am wounded.'

'Are you for the Government?'

Orange looked down at the lifeless body of his poor little friend.

'For Don Carlos!' said he.

The order of arrest was given. He was seized by his fractured shoulder, and, as they could not tie his arms behind him, they strapped them to his sides. He was in great suffering, but the dead girl on the ground made all other things seem light. They put him on a horse and led him from the field to the high-road.

'And what will you do—with her?' asked Orange.

Those who were following, turned back, called her a vile name and kicked her into the well.

'To the Fort!' said their Captain, impatiently.  
'To the Fort!'

Robert leant forward over the horse's neck, and so they marched for three miles when they halted and gave him some strong wine. For he was not to die—yet. The General must see the prize and learn

his story. This was no common prey. At day-break, they reached the fort. Orange was placed on a litter and carried into a cell where a surgeon was soon in attendance. He had a certain skill and he did his work well, if roughly. When he had finished, he laughed.

‘There are two things,’ said he, ‘an Englishman will never learn—How to love, and how to groan! You have no feeling!’

## CHAPTER XI

IN the meantime, the Countess Des Escas, Brigit and their protectors had found asylum in the palace of a Brazilian banker of Jewish extraction—the Baron Zeuill, who was held to be one of General Prim's supporters. Officially, this may have been the case. Secretly, he remained a loyal friend to certain members of the Carlist conspiracy—to certain members, in fact, of all the conspiracies. General Prim himself had not yet fully resolved on his own course of action. There was, perhaps, no especially safe play open to a political gamester who boasted openly that he held seven kings up his sleeve. He was ready, however, to rally to the strongest party willing to accept him as their chief; and, until that question was decided, it seemed unwise to persecute imprudently the eminent among any faction. The Baron Zeuill's wealth was great, and, while Generals could be banished and the impoverished nobility placed under arrest, it was apparent alike to the Isabellist, the Unionist, the Carlist, and the Progressionist that gentlemen who had money to lend were best left with a free hand.

For this reason, the land within his gates enjoyed a privilege which no altar, in those wild days, could promise. It was the one patch of peaceful territory in the whole of Spain. But the gates were always barred, and those that passed the sacred boundary came as guests—not as fugitives.

On that memorable night in August, the Baron had betrayed more agitation of mind than was usual with him. From the cupola above his private study, he had watched alone the reddened sky above Loadilla. His palace stood on an elevation, and, at last he could discern moving specks upon the high-road—sometimes lost to sight in the winding of the way, and again re-appearing. Nearer and nearer they came although they appeared to crawl—black, undistinguishable atoms with a whole Heaven and its multitude of worlds above them and a great country—to be conquered—stretched out beneath their feet. Still they crept on—mere ants or little toys in seeming—on and on—each with a life at stake and a soul burdened with eternity and ten thousand hopes and fears.

When they reached a certain point, the Baron could watch their progress no longer. A heavy wood intervened between them and his sight. But the wood was within the charmed circle of his estate. He was able to breathe more easily and the hard lines vanished from his usually pliant mouth.

The sun was just rising when the fugitives—with

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faces paler than the dust—galloped into the court-yard. The Countess Des Escas had been strapped into a saddle-seat behind Antonio de Bodava—a young officer who became well-known two years later as an aide-de-camp to Marshal Elio. Brigit rode similarly behind the Marquis of Castrillon. These gentlemen—and the remaining four were members of the ‘Royal Guard’ of Don Carlos. One of the horses on halting panted heavily and then dropped dead. At this both women who, till that moment, had seemed petrified with terror, burst into tears.

‘That is all right,’ said the Baron, ‘the poor beast has saved their reason.’

Brigit wept for the horse, but there was another cause for the sharp grief which hurt more fiercely than all the flames of the burning mill. She looked from one to the other of those around her.

‘Are we all here?’ she asked.

‘All,’ said Bodava, ‘except four!’

She covered her face with her hands, and the women, who were waiting in attendance, lifted her as though she were a child and bore her from the scene.

‘We have had a hard journey,’ said the Countess, smiling. She had regained, during the ride, a deceptive strength. She refused all aid—save the Baron’s arm—and walked with a firm tread to the apartments which had been prepared for her. On the threshold she paused, looked in, and pressed Zeuill’s hand,

‘I did not think,’ she said, ‘that I should ever see this room again.’ That was her sole reference to the perils she had escaped. It would have seemed to her discourteous to speak of political matters to a friend who had to maintain at least an appearance of absolute neutrality. The discretion was characteristic of the woman and the times—when a man’s foes were of his own household and father was divided against son. The Baron surrendered her to the female servants, and returned to the officers who—full of youth, excitement, information and content—were talking in the dining-hall below.

‘In five minutes those ladies would have been a little heap of ashes,’ said Captain Rastro, a little man whose astonishing vivacity and bass voice made him the orator of the group—‘the rescue was a miracle. As for the Villa there was nothing left but this—’ he drew from his pocket a small black and red banner, bordered with silk and gold, bearing the portrait of Carlos VII.

‘I always look for an omen,’ said he.

‘And where are the four missing men?’ said Zeuill.

‘I don’t know. They are young Hausée and three volunteers—fine fellows—I forget their names—and well mounted.’

‘Who is Hausée?’ asked the Baron.

‘Hausée,’ said Castrillon, ‘is a mystery. He travels with Lord Wight and looks like an Englishman.’

'The Hausées,' observed Zeuill, 'have always stood by the Bourbons. I thought I knew them all.'

'This one is the son of Henri - Dominique de Hausée.'

'The religious?' said Zeuill, with a cynical smile.

'Yes. He apostatized and married a Protestant.'

'Where is he now?'

'Doing penance at La Trappe.'

'I hope Père Hyacinthe will soon join him!' said Bodava.

'And the lady?' said Zeuill.

'Dead—long ago. She was disowned.'

'Adventures run in the family,' said Zeuill. 'I wonder what has become of him?'

Rastro shrugged his shoulders.

'He may be shot,' said he, 'or he may be a prisoner. But he rides like four devils and he could not have been taken easily.'

They were now eating and drinking. During their flight—each man had been for himself—and egoism once strained to passionate excess does not soon relax into its normal form. They were all willing enough to rush out and brave danger again. At a word of command—they would have ridden back to Robert's rescue, but the word had not been given and so they drank, loosened their clothes and rested.

'The affair has ended well,' said Zeuill, 'but it was badly organized. Women—no matter how



clever—are always for desperate measures. Suppose now that you had reached them five minutes later.’

‘Horrible! But while there are such women to be saved—men do not arrive too late!’ said the gallant Bodava.

‘One thing troubles me,’ said Zeuill, with some abruptness, ‘the name of Hausée does not appear in any of my papers. It could not have escaped my attention.’

‘I can explain that,’ said Rastro. ‘When he offered to join us he called himself Robert Orange and Dorrégaray would not accept him. English volunteers are a mere embarrassment. They are either mercenaries or writers of memoirs or lunatics. Who wants them? But this fellow was determined. He tried every argument. “We have yet to learn,” said Dorrégaray—you know his style—“that England is the friend of Spain or of Legitimists anywhere. She is always on the side of usurpers and rebels. She hates the Bourbons; she hates all the great dynasties. She would like to see every country in Europe weakened by civil war. I know your cursed policy.” Dorrégaray is not a man to sugar the truth.’

‘Go on,’ said Zeuill.

‘At this, the Englishman, who is a giant, brought his fist down on the table. “Leave England out of the question,” said he, “or we must kill each other. But I am the son of Henri-Dominique de Hausée, and

if a Hausée may not fight for Don Carlos—who may ?” Dorrégaray drew back. “If that is the case,” he answered, “I am enchanted but, pardon me, why do you bear the name of Orange ? In Spain it does not spell loyalty.” I thought Hauséc would die of rage. “That is my business,” said he, “but I am Robert de Hausée and I can prove it.” Dorrégaray’s moustache went straight up. “When you have proved it,” he said, “you may come and see me again.” I am certain that Hausée would have fought him on the spot if he had not resolved, plainly, to carry his point at every cost. He answered very quietly. “We can return to this matter on another occasion,” said he, “but in the meantime, I am travelling with a friend who can identify me—the Earl of Wight.” Dorrégaray stood up. “Who is the Earl of Wight ?” said he, “we know nothing about him.” Here I was able to interfere. I called Dorrégaray aside and reminded him that Wight had given a thousand pounds to the Cause. Dorrégaray was deeply touched. He went over to Hausée and embraced him. “In these times,” said he, “one cannot be too careful. Volunteers come to us—more Catholic than the Pope and more royalist than the King. It is an old story. They demand more attention than Don Carlos himself and they expect to be thanked all day. When the least thing goes wrong, they set up a howl and call us traitors. They send their whines to every newspaper, and if I had my way—I would shoot them as the most

dangerous kind of spy. But I felt certain that you were a true patriot and a true Hausée. You have the family eye!" After that they became as gay as Easter! We found, too, that he knew the young Madame and all about the Countess Des Escas. Poor young man! I hope he was not killed. He would have made a superb officer."

'If they took him alive,' said Zeuill, 'he will be safe enough, for a few days at all events. You say that he knows Madame Parflete.'

'Yes—he saved her life. He did very well.' Zeuill, at this piece of information, looked thoughtful.

'She might be able to tell me about him,' said he, at length; 'I must save him if I can. After all, he is a Hausée. There are not many of such men left.'

He called up one of the servants as he spoke and sent him with a message to Brigit. The answer soon came back.

'If you will excuse me, gentlemen,' said the Baron, 'I will leave you for a little.'

Two of them had fallen asleep. The rest—including Rastro—were but half-awake over their wine. These tried to rise as the Baron went out. They succeeded in smiling.

## CHAPTER XII

BRIGIT received the Baron in a small saloon which adjoined her bed-room. Neither grief nor agitation nor fatigue had told upon her youth and splendid health. Her cheeks were burning: her eyes shone. Hers was a nature which faltered only under disgrace—such disgrace, for instance, as her husband's dishonour and the humiliations which she had experienced at the Château de Vieuville. But danger and sorrow seemed to call out her finest traits, and, among them that capacity for devotion to impersonal interests which is commonly held to be less rare in men than in women.

'I have just left the Countess,' she said, at once; 'she is sleeping.'

'I am rejoiced to hear it,' said the Baron, 'and since all goes so well here, it is a plainer duty to wonder how matters may be going elsewhere. You know that four members of the party are missing. One of them is Robert de Hausée—to whom, I understand, we owe the success of this night's ex-

pedition. If he has been taken alive, I may be able to save him.'

'If they have taken him at all, he must be dead or nearly dead,' answered Brigit.

'Do you know him well?'

'My husband has known him always.'

'Then I suppose the story is perfectly true. He is a legitimate Hausée.'

Brigit repeated Robert's history as she had heard it from Parflete. She added, too, all she knew of his career in England.

'Then why,' said Zeuill, 'should he mix himself in the uncertain fortunes of Don Carlos? Family tradition, I know, stands for much, but when it makes for ruin—a man brings more distinction to his name by establishing a new precedent.'

He watched Brigit's face as he spoke, but her expression remained inscrutable.

'If we could say,' he went on, 'that he joined this ride to-night rather out of friendship for yourself than for any political motive, the excuse might be accepted. Otherwise, we may have difficulties. Wait before you reply. I cannot believe that in your own case, it is wholly a matter of Carlist rights and wrongs. The Countess Des Escas lost her husband in this cause. It is her creed and the price of her blood. If she had ten deaths to die she would give them for the King. But you are not Spanish. You do not carry in your soul a terrible inheritance

of wrongs to avenge. The Seven Years' War is not within your remembrance. I daresay that you never heard it spoken of till you came to Madrid—a few short weeks ago.'

'How long does it take to know a just cause?' asked Brigit.

'A life-time is often too short a while,' said the Baron. 'I am an old man. I have spent my days among kings, ex-kings, and pretenders. I have seen the flower of France die magnificently, and I have seen nameless blackguards die magnificently. All I have learnt from them is this—Might may win many battles; Might and Right together can win most battles; Right by itself—without money and without friends—counts for nothing.'

'What do you wish me to say?' asked Brigit.

'I would like you to trust me.'

'I do that most heartily, dear Baron. Are we not here—under your roof. You are our protector—our friend.'

'Then answer one question. Did you know that Robert de Hausée was a Carlist?'

She hesitated for a moment, but so serenely that it was impossible to infer anything from the pause.

'When I recognised his voice,' she said, at last, 'my surprise was great.'

'Did you think his presence—at such a moment—inexplicable?'

'I thought of nothing. It might have been a

miracle—I did not know. When he spoke to us, the Countess and I were waiting for death.'

Zeull could not restrain his curiosity.

'But what an atrocious plan!' he exclaimed. 'Were you afraid?'

'No.'

'Surely you were glad to be rescued?'

Her eyes filled with tears.

'I marvelled,' she replied, 'at the Mercy of God and His Power. We had not hoped for life. It is just that one or two should die for many. Our secrets were burnt with the Villa. They can prove nothing against our friends.'

The Baron knit his brows and drew some documents from his pocket.

'There is another matter,' he said, 'which must be settled also. It concerns yourself and your own safety. I do not wish to frighten you. But your position is dangerous.'

Brigit looked up and it almost seemed as though a kind of joy transfigured her face. Could it be that, in her heart, she had no wish to live? Zeull owned himself perplexed and baffled.

'I am in communication with your father,' he said; 'His Imperial Highness desires me to put a proposal before you. At this moment, it is one of the utmost importance.'

A dark flush spread over her cheeks and throat, but she made no response.

‘Briefly,’ continued Zeuill, ‘it is this. You will assume the title and rank of Countess Veuberg; you will consent to a divorce between yourself and the gentleman who so abused the Archduke’s confidence. Your life—your girlhood, I should say, will begin afresh and more appropriately. You are but seventeen. Let me entreat you to listen to advice. In order to save you any unnecessary pain, Mr Parflete has owned his perfect readiness to submit to your decision in the matter. He will be liberally provided for. His interests—so long as he avoids Alberia—are to suffer in no way.’

The proud, sensitive and courageous girl who could meet the peril of a cruel death with undaunted resolution, cowered under this further revelation of Parflete’s ignominy. Zeuill, who had scanned her face in vain for any sign of love for Robert de Hausée, now, at all events, read plainly enough her feeling toward the exiled Favourite. Her reply, therefore, was the more amazing.

‘My father means kindly,’ she said. ‘I owe him my gratitude and affection. But I have a rank already—for I am his lawful daughter born of a true marriage. I promised him that I would never claim him publicly. I will therefore take such a name and such a title only as my husband can give me. No one, I suppose, would dispute my claim to that.’

‘But it is the Archduke’s wish—indeed, his command, that you should abandon that name. It is an offence—a degradation to him.’



'He gave his consent to the marriage.'

'In the first place, yes. But he was unaware then—'

Brigit put up her hand:—

'Forgive me. We can say no more on that subject. He may have been deceived in certain respects; he knew, however, that I was his daughter.'

'Then you refuse both these proposals.'

'Absolutely. If he wishes to think of me as the Countess of Veuberg—let him first admit to the whole of Alberia his marriage with my mother.'

'You know, Madame, that you are making an impossible request. As it is, His Imperial Highness must advance with great caution. It will be understood that you have certain claims on his favour—you cannot, in reason, ask him to publish the details of a painful and abiding . . . grief—associated with his early days in Paris. His affection for you is real. It is an open secret that his domestic affairs are far from happy. His one child is a disappointment—the Archduchesses, his sisters, are disobedient and plain. He turns to you for solace. He remembers—in the bitterness and vexation of State affairs—the sweet nature, the accomplishments, the love of your incomparable mother. Would that generous and noble creature wish you to repulse his kindness? It may be tardy, but it comes from a broken heart. I cannot believe that your harshness will last. If it is wounded pride, Madame, can you not remind yourself that he, too, has suffered?'

‘God knows well that I bear my father no malice. My mother loved him so dearly that she died when he left her. She died, too, with the laughter of Paris in her ears: she was called a light woman who had danced into the Archduke’s favour and sobbed herself out of it! I have heard all the epigrams—or most of them—that were made at the time. They were amusing: they were lies that were almost true! And because they were almost true, they killed her. Now you ask me to admit their justice by calling myself the Countess of Veuberg. I cannot do it. His Imperial Highness is kind, but I cannot do it.’

Zeull poured out his arguments afresh. He used every force at his command—the skill, the knowledge, the training, the diplomatic arts acquired in a life-time of intrigue. But to no purpose.

‘Then,’ said he, at the end of a fruitless discussion which had lasted two hours, ‘you refuse to accept the title of Countess Veuberg because you regard yourself as an Archduchess of Alberia? You have a very clever and a very charming head, but, in the eighteenth century, it would have come surely enough to the block! Your claim, Madame, is romantic and untenable. It is only right to tell you so.’

‘I make no claim. I obey my father most willingly while he asks me to remain unknown and in seclusion. It is now when he asks me to come

forward and accept a mean dignity that I must seem ungracious. I begged him to let me retire to a Convent. He would not allow that. What then does he wish? To give me an honour which insults my mother's name. I will not take it.'

'Then you quarrel with the Archduke?'

'I hope not. I would have him think of me as his dutiful daughter. I have been faithful to the Countess Des Escas and her cause. I have followed his instructions at every point. He may trust me to the death, and he will not have reason to trust me less, I hope, because I find no reward for my constancy in a silly title.'

'Your words are meek enough, Madame, but your spirit would not be understood. It puzzles the Archduke himself. Could he hear you now—he would doubt your sincerity. *I* believe you. Few men, I think, would do so. I yield to no one in my admiration for Madame Duboc who was certainly the canonical wife of His Imperial Highness. But she is dead and Europe is in no mood to hear of such tales about Princes. The air is full of revolution. The talk is not of rights but of impostures. Where the King of France has fallen, the Emperor of the French will also fall. Mind my warning and keep out of all conspiracies. And now one further word—Can you give me no message for M. de Hausée?'

'He may be dead.'

But if he should be living?’

‘Tell him that we cannot be grateful till we know that he himself is out of danger.’

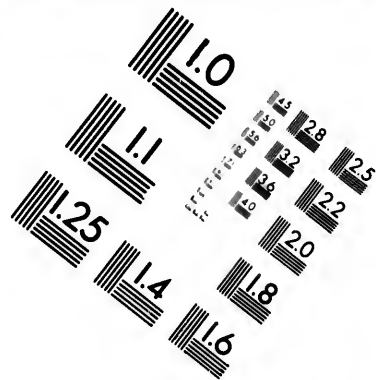
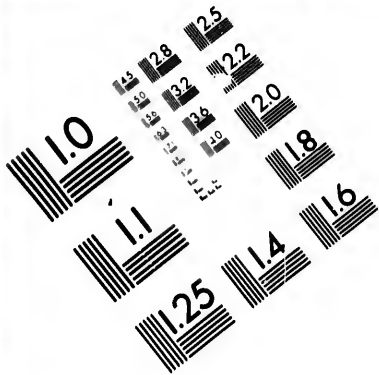
‘I hope he will trust me more fully than you do—or it will be hard to help him.’

At this reproach she burst into tears.

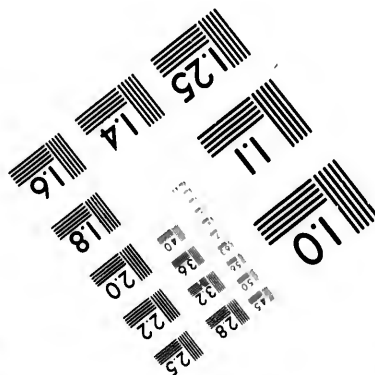
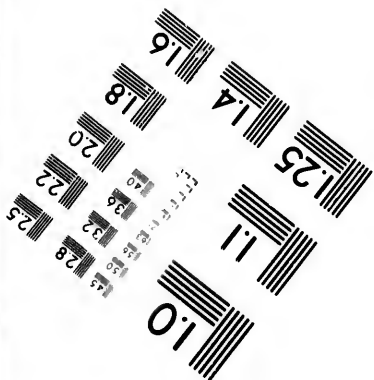
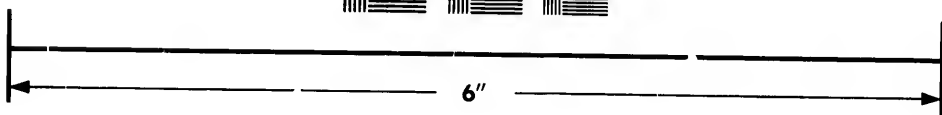
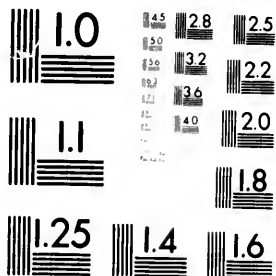
‘Good friend,’ she said, with a sob, ‘I know him but distantly. I cannot say to you what I do not say to myself . . . but . . . if cutting my heart from my body would save him—it would be too little. Yet—and this is the truth—that would not be because I want to see him again. There is no happiness that way.’

The Baron checked himself in a remark he felt tempted to make on the subject of her divorce. He wished her a good rest and then withdrew. Half an hour later he was on the road to Loadilla—wondering vainly, no doubt, which of three deadly things was the least dangerous—a woman’s tears, a woman’s protestations, or her incalculable cunning in affairs of love.

The very frankness of Brigit’s last speech was, to the Baron’s mind, the one mistake in diplomatic play of a high order. He decided that here, possibly from fatigue, she had over-acted. In her anxiety to conceal her real designs and anxieties, she had suddenly affected a violent devotion for Robert de Hausée. De Hausée was, no doubt, in the train of her cavaliers. But, clearly, she was too ambitious to feel more than a



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passing kindness toward a poor unacknowledged nobleman with little to gain and that still to be sought. The necessity for her divorce and re-marriage was pressing. Public affairs in Alberia were taking a sick complexion. The Archduke had alienated himself from the traditional supporters of the Imperial House. Rich adventurers were favoured at the Court to the exclusion of the old families, and the better class of his own subjects. The faithful rallied round his young son—an unfortunate lad whose follies and extravagance made loyalty a Quixotic virtue. The discontented retired to their own estates to wait for the downfall of a Prince of whom no man of honour could think well and for whom even the creatures he encouraged felt a secret contempt. The young Archduchesses were rebellious and unbeautiful. The position of Charles in Europe was not so secure that suitors of distinction should come begging for his sisters in marriage, and they were too haughty to admit the advances of their inferiors in rank. The Archduke's project of bestowing one on his Great Chamberlain and the other on the Keeper of the Privy Purse was met with fury. Both of these gentlemen were rich, and they were both impatient to share the flickering glories of Imperialism. Disappointment worked in them so strangely that a touch would have driven their instincts back where they belonged—to the people. In his despair, the Archduke remembered Brigit. Why should she not

come to Alberia? His Great Chamberlain was human and beauty still went for something. Charles could make her a Countess. People would not think the worse of him for that. He was considered inhuman and cold-blooded. Recklessness in love—love under any aspect—had never been associated with his name. The one romantic episode in his life had been concealed by his enemies—for fear lest it should make him even a shade less obnoxious, and by his friends—because they were not proud of their part in the affair. Democracy—with all its faults—was on the side of injured women. Pathetic stories—with a marriage ceremony in the argument—were best left untold. The Archduke himself, however, seemed bent on a course of action which, had Brigit been a vain or a weak woman, must have ruined them both. Zeuill saw in her refusal but the policy of a bold nature making for the highest prize or none. For himself, the issue of it all was a matter of indifference. His passions and hopes were all fixed on the aggrandizement of his own race and the ultimate triumph of the chosen people. To him all Kings and Emperors, Powers and Dominions were as pawns in the great struggle between Jew and Gentile.



### CHAPTER XIII

It was already past mid-day when the Baron reached the fort near Loadilla.

He was permitted to drive into the barrack-yard—a large piece of ground, in form a parallelogram, surrounded by high walls. These walls were pierced by three rows of small windows at many of which, soldiers, some in their shirt-sleeves and some without shirts, were smoking, chattering, or staring idly at a party of recruits who were exercising in the court below. The vaulted arch through which the Baron had driven ran the depth of the whole building—from the façade to the yard. It was separated from the high-road by ponderous oak doors, and divided from the court by an iron gate. The ordinary guard had no doubt been doubled; the number of sentries on duty looked ominous, and, as Zeuill heard the door barred and the gate locked behind him, he had reason to remind himself that his impartiality in Spanish politics had, as yet, been too sincere to merit the distrust of any one party. He was received with every mark of politeness by two officers and con-

ducted to the private apartments of the Colonel then in command—a man who stood high in Prim's regard and who had, with him, escaped an attempted assassination. He was young for his military rank, arrogant, and burdened by an intolerably heavy sense of his own importance. He was just finishing a meal. Four private servants in livery stood behind his chair. A dozen guards were stationed round the room. Several wines and a number of elaborate yet untouched dishes on the table before him gave testimony rather to his love of display than his appetite. A band was discoursing gay tunes loudly in an ante-chamber. The noise of these brass instruments, the odour of the food, the extreme heat, the numerous flies, the ostentation yet discomfort of the whole environment produced an impression on Zeuill's mind of a state of things not destined to endure.

'This cannot last,' was his thought as he took a seat at the table. In person, the Colonel was thin and sinewy : in manner, nervous yet overbearing. He received Zeuill with an air of immense preoccupation, and, as he listened coldly to his opening remarks, he interrupted him from time to time by reprimanding the servants, and giving unintelligible orders to the men on guard.

'We certainly have a prisoner here,' he said, at last, in a harsh voice, 'a Pékin ! He has disturbed the peace and he must abide by the consequences.'

'Where is General Prim ?' asked Zeuill.

‘General Prim will no doubt see you when he arrives. At present, he is probably on his way here. He wishes to examine the fellow himself.’

‘The whole thing is a love affair,’ said Zeuill; ‘a bit of gallantry.’

‘Marie-Joseph Des Escas is getting a little old for Cupids of that kind,’ replied the officer, drily.

‘There was another lady in the matter.’

‘You mean the French *blonde*? I have never seen her. But Englishmen don’t risk their lives for women. You must find a better story than that for Prim. He would like to oblige you—he obliges every body just now—but don’t make the favour impossible. If this young fool has given all his money to the Carlists, that—with the wounds he has got—may be punishment enough. His *blonde* will find his beauty spoilt a little!’

‘Then he is badly wounded?’

‘What did you expect? Our men do not go out to capture singing birds for boudoirs!’

‘I am aware of that, yet I am surprised, nevertheless, at the severity of your measures.’

‘Why?’ shouted the Colonel. ‘Severity is what we need—we are as a rule too lenient. It is grotesque to shoot the insurgents in one district and make treaties with them in another. I am in earnest at any rate. You know the fable of the two wolves who, meeting one dark night, devoured each other and left nothing but the two tails? If one party

does not make a stronger move than the rest—there will be nothing left of Spain but two tails! The Spanish people choose to throw down the dynasty which once ruled them and constitute themselves into a sovereign people. They exercise a right which no one can dispute. They will not have the Bourbons!’

‘Prim knows my indifference in political matters,’ said Zeuill. . . . ‘He never talks in this strain to me. Besides—would he take so extreme a view?’

‘If he is wise, he will take it,’ replied the Colonel, with a harsh laugh. ‘The people are sick of Monarchs and court menageries—sick!’

The servants and the guards had not been ordered out of the room during this interview. They stood there, with ready ears and stoic faces, silent but by no means heedless spectators of the scene.

‘Prim will never succeed in pleasing every one,’ continued the Colonel, ‘and I don’t mind telling you that if I were in his place, I should direct things differently. He is too amiable. He shoots a man, then invites the mother of the corpse to dinner and tries to make a friend of her. “Have you another son, Madame?” says he; “if so I will give him a good appointment.” That is his policy in a nutshell. He has no ambition. This is a moment when such a man must say to himself—“There is just room enough on the Throne for a person of my build.” Prim has the opportunity of a second Napoleon. What will he make of it?’

‘He may be a leader of revolutions, but he is not a Republican,’ replied Zeuill: ‘he is at heart a Royalist. Nothing will persuade me to the contrary. He knows that men do not kneel gracefully before a Monarch hatched in a Committee-room! He will give you a King of the blood yet. This is a country of good Catholics, and the Catholics, as may be seen anywhere, are obedient to their lawful Princes.’

‘I am glad you say *lawful*,’ exclaimed the Colonel, ‘because many hogsheads of devout blood must be spilt before that particular question is decided! And in the meantime our Commander in Chief is going to take the waters at Vichy!’

The door was thrown open. The young officers who had previously conducted Zeuill to the apartment re-entered and announced a name. The Colonel rose to his feet and bowed with a certain mock deference to a gentleman, below the middle height, of small and slender frame, followed by two aides-de-camp, who now advanced into the room. This new arrival was General Prim.

The Catalan hero was then in the fifty-fifth year of his age. His features were regular. The brow was particularly frank: the high cheek-bones and jaundiced complexion gave his large dark eyes a haunting — even terrible — distinctness. But the countenance — though fine as a whole — was not, at a first glance, remarkable, and its expression of brilliant melancholy, which was accentuated by an

habitual frown, seemed to veil a nature prone rather to self-questioning than self-encouragement. He was one of those men of winning personality and intricate motives, who, from time to time, leap into the furious drama of historical crises to play the part of God's agent or the devil's fool—it is rarely given to contemporaries to decide which. In bearing Prim was at once soldierly and courteous. Those who sought to find in him the insolence of the newest idol, and the glamour, were disappointed. His stern uncommunicative lips promised a friendship which might indeed be loyal, but which would be too discriminating to attach itself to many. He seemed to belong by right of mind—if not of birth—to the old implacable type of Spanish Grandees. It would have been difficult to imagine a leader of the people less likely to be swayed by tawdry ideals of greatness, or so little in sympathy with vulgar notions of democratic freedom. To look at him was to remember the words he uttered on receiving a challenge—after the successful revolt against Isabella II.—to tear off the crown which he still wore on his kepi—'The Queen alone has fallen: the Throne is imperishable.'

As he came in, his glance fell pleasantly on both men, but rather less so on the over-savoury remains of the young Colonel's repast. He went at once to the window and looked up at the sky. Then he turned to Zeuill.

‘What can you tell me,’ said he, abruptly, ‘about this English prisoner?’

‘He is known as Robert Orange; he is travelling with the Earl of Wight; he has excellent prospects in England and is connected with the Hausées.’

‘That explains his imbecility,’ exclaimed the Colonel.

‘He has chosen to fall in love and perform heroic capers,’ continued Zeuill.

‘The Countess Des Escas is a dangerous wild cat,’ said Prim, ‘and her little mice are mostly rats!’

‘Do Englishmen as a rule know much of foreign affairs?’ said Zeuill. ‘I doubt extremely whether this good creature knows the difference between Don Carlos and the Duke of Genoa. I wonder you take him seriously. In the case of the Countess Des Escas—it is, I grant you, a question of war. But as to that—’

All three men shrugged their shoulders.

‘It is amateur politics!’ said Prim, pouring out for himself a small glass of Manzanilla: ‘in these days it costs money to effect a revolution! This matter was arranged by priests, women and children. They had about two hundred old flint muskets, and perhaps ten thousand francs. Des Escas sold all her jewels long ago. My wife bought them. As for our prisoner, the English Frenchman, I have his passport. They found it in his pocket—with nothing else. And that, in my opinion, is the way he arrived in Spain! But

to save time, let us see him at once. It was kind on his part to endanger his life in order to convince us of a public fact !'

'What fact?' asked the Colonel, with some tartness.

Prim took a last sip of the Manzanilla.

'The fact of Don Carlos's pedigree,' said he.

'Unfortunately,' said the Colonel, 'it is not a question of pedigrees. We want privileges not pedigrees.'

Prim tapped him on the shoulder :—

'That sort of talk,' said he, 'crawls far—but it never mounts high. Now show us your captive.'



## CHAPTER XIV

ROBERT was lying in a dark hot room guarded by a couple of soldiers whose whispered talk hissed through his brief moments of uneasy sleep. The greater part of the time he kept awake wondering about the fate of his companions and seeking for some means of communication with Lord Wight. His own share in the adventure had been wholly unpremeditated. The notion of joining the Carlist insurrection had been as far from his thoughts as a Jacobite conspiracy. In a letter written to Reckage just before his departure from England, he says :—

‘I am going abroad to restrain Wight’s enthusiasm and revive my own. Did you ever get up in the morning and say to yourself—“Man are you a prig ?” It’s a wholesome discipline. You become desperate. You say—“If I can kill some one I may escape this reproach. If I can kill a number of persons—my character will be saved.” As it is I have never fought a duel : I have never compromised a woman : I have never in my life been either picturesque or dangerous. What is to become of me ? I don’t steal because buccaneering has always seemed to me a shabby sport. I don’t abduct proud beauties because beauties nowadays are not proud. I am not a Tenor

because the whole idea of grand opera and squawking one's emotions is, to me, preposterous. I am not in the Army because I spent my boyhood in a garrison town. I am not a priest because I love the world. I am too poor to be a Blood with any sort of distinction. My health is so good that artistic genius—any genius—is beyond my prayers. In my early youth I wrote poetry: in my old age I shall compose pamphlets. Perhaps my friends will say when I am dead:—

*“ Here lies the body  
of  
Robert de Hausée Orange  
who would have been a great sinner had he dared  
and  
who succeeded, in spite of his cowardice, in being a dull one.” ’*

A chain of accidents—or the deliberate play of destiny — brought Robert to Madrid at a critical hour. Event had followed event with an inconsequence which exposed men's little laws of life to ridicule. It showed once more the eternal contrast between the thing that actually happens and the spectral thing that ought to have happened—a contrast hung up between heaven and earth from everlasting to everlasting for all impious prophets of the inevitable to mark and profit by. The very word inevitable belongs to heresy, long sermons, and suicide. It is silly and provoking. These and similar thoughts—trite enough no doubt—passed through Robert's mind whenever the pain in his shoulder and his wounds slackened its fury. He had never before felt acute physical anguish. He had never before

taken part in a struggle for life and principle. He had never seen deeds of blood. He had moved in the best society and met the most accomplished people and talked of war in six languages with highly distinguished diplomatists. He had travelled in many lands, and read a vast number of books, and was, in every respect, a young fellow of uncommon knowledge. Men liked him because he was strong, and women liked him because—with the true instinct of a priestly mind—he found the devout sex dangerous. But with all this he lacked that experience of sensations—as opposed to sentiments—which makes all the difference in one's living of life. The *King Arthur*, the *Launcelot*, the *Roland*, the *Amadis*, the *Ignatius*—all the adored figures of his boyish fancy grew, some paler and some more splendid—for his present suffering. He began to distinguish clearly between the facts of life and the affectations of literature. He found himself muttering in time to the throbs of pain—'It's all bosh—bosh—bosh. It's all bosh—but I should like to have had another jab—another jab—another jab—at that filthy sergeant.'

The bit of sky which he could see through the window did not conjure up immortal longings nor send him dreaming about the peaceful bowers it sheltered in other climes. He did not tease his brain for rhymes to *passion* and *despair*. His melancholy found its vent in a rage—compounded of jealousy, anger and irritation—against Brigit. She was

head-strong : she was imprudent : her conduct was indefensible. Why should she risk her life for Don Carlos? What a crazy plan to get up into that mill. And who was Castrillon Castrillon was an ass—a turkey-chick. Castrillon had a very good time riding off with her—a dashing person in all his best clothes and without a burn. Where was the sense of such conduct? had Brigit lost her religion and grown frivolous? It was deplorable. What a fall! what a shame! what a tragedy! As for himself, he had no wish to live—none. But he would live long enough, at any rate, to have a word or two with Castrillon. . . . And then, the poor little girl in the field? . . . *What were those two brutes talking about? . . . Would no one be good enough to punch their heads? Where was the surgeon? He was not a bad fellow—that surgeon. He could jerk a shoulder anywhere. . . . Hullo! Here are three swells, and one is the little beast I saw just now . . . little beast. . . .*

The young Colonel had been with Robert for more than an hour that morning. As the three men entered the room, Orange felt at once that Zeuill, whom he had never seen before, came as an intermediary, that Brigit and the Countess Des Escas were safe. As this news flashed upon him, his natural defiance and good humour revived. He sprang out of bed, stood up, and bowed to foes and friend alike with a high spirit which even

the Colonel found admirable. Robert said in reply to Prim's first inquiries, that his injuries were slight; that he was fully able and prepared to answer any questions relating to himself; that he was neither a spy nor a conspirator but a prisoner of war.

'There is no war,' said Prim, with some grimness: 'and there are no prisoners. But the Government is suppressing a few traitors and criminals.'

The General had no doubt made up his mind—from antecedent investigations at Madrid—that Orange was not a man of political importance to the Carlists. His name did not occur in any of the fatal despatches found on the Marquis of Pezos: he was merely the travelling companion of a 'fat fanatic, el Conde de Wight'—and fat fanatics were rarely dangerous. Prim who, when he pleased, could show a rigour which did not escape the charge of cruelty, decided that, in the case before him, a sermon would enforce a sounder lesson than a bullet.

'You seem to me,' said he, 'a young man whose heart has got into his head. This Government has done everything to save Don Carlos and he has done everything to ruin himself. He is not wanted in Spain. If Spain wanted him, she would have him. No man—no human policy could stop her. Those who seem most devoted to Don Carlos do not like him, and doubt his return. His army is the débris of the old regiments. His loyal subjects

belong chiefly to that idle and numerous class of vagabonds who are ever ready to create disturbances by which they hope to profit. They live rather to rob their fellow-citizens than to defend them. If Don Carlos puts any trust in these he is deceived. I am sorry for that young man. He thinks that he has but to appear in the field for all Spain to welcome him. It is a happy imagination to believe that the whole nation longs for his rule. If the whole nation expressed such a wish—I should be the instrument to effect its desire. But that wish will never be expressed by any majority of the Spaniards—either in my day or in yours, or in his. Why then do you—an alien—take it upon yourself to join in a ridiculous attempt to force an unpopular cause upon an angry and outraged people? These bad jokes must come to an end. Men who persist in playing them will be shot without trial. I regard the Countess Des Escas as a fond, silly old woman who has burnt her villa in order that she may end her days in a mad-house.'

He then glanced at the Colonel who, in a sharp tone, began a string of questions on the subject of the plot.

'I can tell you nothing,' said Robert, 'because I know nothing.'

'Then how did you join the party?'

'There are many well-known adherents to the Carlist Cause living at present in Spain. One

meets them daily in society. If their names do not occur to you—it is not for me to remind you of them. On that point, I decline to give the least information. You have caught me. But I shall not help you to catch more.'

'Then you are not a Carlist,' said the Colonel, 'for their chief industry is to betray each other! That is why we know so much about you.'

'The more you know of me the better I shall be pleased,' answered Robert.

'How long have you enjoyed the acquaintance of the Countess Des Escas?'

'I think,' said Prim, before Robert could reply, 'that M. de Hausée's interest does not lie in that direction! But for the present this is enough.'

He looked at the Colonel and he looked at Zeuill. He went out and they followed him. Orange could not decide whether their faces meant mischief or mercy. He sat down on the edge of his bed while the two soldiers who guarded him started singing a song about a conscript who lay dying while his false love danced gay dances with a boy that played guitars. And the refrain went:—

Ho ! ho ! ha ! ha ! Do you need the sun to see a woman's deceit ?  
Ho ! ho ! ha ! ha !

## CHAPTER XV

To return to Brigit.

Zeuill had not passed the gates of his own Park before the Countess des Escas summoned all the members of her party to a council. They found her seated at a writing-table in her bed-room with her head bound up in a silk scarf and her burnt hands swathed in bandages. The nun's dress had been discarded for an old silk gown which had been lent her by one of the women. It was too ample for her spare figure and its bright hue made her face—which had grown twenty years older for the night's enterprise—a haggard, scarcely human apparition. Her features had taken a sharpness, her lips a pallor, her eyes an unanswerable despair that told without reserve for the first time the deathly panics of a whole life spent in loving a sick hope. She seemed to repulse affection, forbid pity and exact fear. The men took their places round the table in silence. The young Marquis of Castrillon worked his arched brows and his white hands—but he said nothing. Bodava was moody and



ill at ease. The others were stolid—even indifferent. Brigit, whose expression showed mingled sorrow and audacity, felt her own courage rise as the men's so perceptibly sank. But she trembled at the stillness for she knew it was a bad sign for any cause when a woman must speak the first word.

Joanna's glance passed swiftly from one to the other.

'To whose crime,' she asked, at last, 'do we owe all these disasters? Why does Pezos wander about the city with papers enough in his pocket to destroy us all? If God has forsaken us and will suffer our ruin, I will end nevertheless as I have begun. But this looks to me less like the hand of God than human folly.'

Castrillon, whose voice was soft and melodious, then spoke up. The absent Pezos was his own 'good cousin.'

'Who could expect,' said he, 'such a brutal attack? If people will write letters, some one must deliver them.'

The four members of the Royal Guard nodded their heads in support of this remark.

Joanna burst into angry tears.

'We have lost two years,' she said, 'and all the powder, fire-arms, bayonets, swords and cartridges. We can never get so many together again. We have neither the money nor the means. And I had planned it all so well.'

'As you have said,' observed Bodava, 'it will take

two years or more before we can attempt another rising.'

'Does Dorrégaray say that?' asked Joanna.

'What else could he say?' replied Bodava; 'some of our strongest friends are in prison, some are murdered, some are in exile. There is no more money.'

'Men will do nothing now save for bribes and wages,' exclaimed the Countess; 'surely for soldiers and statesmen who desire to leave a name in history there can never be a part more noble than to sacrifice every thing to the national good—to God, the country and the King! I do not reproach any one present,' she added, quickly, 'you have all done well and bravely. But we stand alone against a generation of hugglers and heretics. And a Jew gives us shelter—a Jew. I honour his good heart and I blush for the false hearts of our Catholics. As for Prim, he is like Saul. He spares Agag but he hurls the javelin at David. And, like Saul, his death shall be cruel and bitter. Aye! who lives shall see it. Gentlemen, I do not thank you for saving my life—you have but given me a day more in which to eat my heart and pray vain prayers. God is angry with us or these things could not be. The Cause is lost—it is doomed.'

The speech had poured from her lips in a torrent. Her voice had become a wail and she seemed to be looking at forms that were invisible to her hearers.

She stood up and lifted her maimed and bandaged hands above her head.

'What man is there that liveth and shall not see death?' she cried; 'I am not afraid. Who says I am afraid tells lies. I am not afraid. But teach me, O God, to say, Behold! I have fought and I have failed.'

Castrillon sprang forward to catch her swaying figure.

'She is very old,' whispered Bodava to a young man with a scared face who sat next him: 'And she has done too much!'

They all went to her assistance. They lifted her on to her bed—and when they looked upon her as she lay there weak, helpless and in a mortal stupor their minds softened and they knew that a woman's soul was passing from the earth. She had always seemed an old, gaunt, terrible shrew—a constant scourge to lovers of ease and pleasure. Her fierce intellect, her impetuous genius and bitter tongue were odious to her friends. The men she directed and browbeat owned her power but hated her restless and reproachful energy. They crept out of the room—leaving her with Brigit and the waiting women who had been called from an ante-chamber. Each man went away to his own apartment to sleep at last without fear of disturbance. That imperious summons would never be heard again. Don Carlos had lost his most vigilant subject.

Castrillon was the last to leave. He lingered on the threshold for a long glance at Brigit. But she was kneeling by the friend who had never been to her, or to any creature in sorrow, other than gentle and most indulgent.

The women attendants—after their kind—began to weep loudly. Two remained by the bed suggesting remedies and ejaculating prayers. The others drifted about the room bound on purposeless errands.

‘Have you the shoe of Madame the Countess?’ said one.

‘Which shoe?’ said the other, with a sob.

‘Madame the Countess would not touch her supper,’ said a third; ‘this is exhaustion.’

‘My brother’s wife Christina died this way,’ said the first.

Another sob broke from a fourth who had been crawling under the table.

‘I have found one shoe,’ said she; ‘but Madame the Countess will not need it now.’

Madame the Countess continued to breathe for another half hour. Her cheek seemed warm to Brigit whose own was pressed against it. But suddenly it grew very cold and the girl—with a new strange sensation of fear—drew back. The women broke into a loud wail and the oldest of them pulled Brigit from the corpse.

‘Come away!’ said she; ‘it is dead!’

## CHAPTER XVI

THE death of the Countess Des Escas though piteous enough in its circumstances came at the best moment for herself and the party involved in her flight from Loadilla. Had she lingered on to suffer banishment or to languish in prison, her wrongs would have supplied an unwelcome motive for action to the many half-hearted patriots who were already longing to make some compromise. Ruined, disappointed, and broken in health, her estates confiscated and her authority gone, she would have remained an angry voice, but no longer a power in the Carlist movement. When the news of her death was told to the Marquis of Castrillon, he dropped his eyes and said,—

‘God is Wise.’

Brigit, who had grown to love her unhappy friend with a deep affection, winced at the cynical tone underlying the Marquis’s piety, but she felt the truth of his words.

The day passed as all such days must pass—in feverish melancholy. No fresh projects could be

formed till Zeuill returned from Madrid. Suspense held each member of the little company aloof from the other. A discretion which might have been called distrust set every man busy with his own meditations and forebodings. When they all met at luncheon, it was with a sullen air. In conversation scarcely a sentence was finished. One would begin to speak—then he would check himself. What if Zeuill should betray them all? This was the unutterable fear in every mind. Had they tried him too far? Strange things had been said and done lately. The Countess had dropped down like a poisoned bird. Groundless as these suspicions were and foolish as they seemed even to those that held them, they lent, nevertheless, a peculiar horror to hours, already and of necessity, most wretched. Castrillon, whose light heart could resist all things save *ennui*, found a guitar and played a while till he remembered that there was death in the palace. 'How tiresome,' he thought, and he next sought to amuse himself by tormenting some of the Baron's pet dogs. Brigit remained for a long time in her own room. But the strain of refusing to recognise the drift of her emotions drove her—toward evening—to seek company. She stole down the stairs into the great hall where the men, taciturn and gloomy, were sitting, some at chess, others at cards. At her approach, they stood up and Castrillon offered her his own seat—the most luxurious there. She accepted it and drew from her

pocket some worsted and knitting needles which she had borrowed from one of the maids.

'Why do you knit wool when you could knit souls?' asked the young noble. 'I would do more for one glance from your eyes than for all the gods, kings, and countries ever preached! A beautiful woman may look politics but she should never speak of them.'

'She should not meddle with them at all,' answered Brigit, 'for political intrigues are worked neither by words nor hearts, but by gold alone! Sentiment counts for nothing.'

'And you can say this after our ride last night? Do you think I risked my life for the sake of Don Carlos?'

'No, I feel sure that you did not think of him once.'

'I was thinking solely of you.'

'I know it. That is why I am sad. I hoped you were a patriot and I find you are merely a gallant!'

'Strange woman! And you are as cold as you are strange. Have you never loved? Has the moon had nothing to say to you?'

'Too much,' said Brigit, 'only too much!'

'Is there no one? Who is this Robert de Hausée?'

'My husband's friend.'

'Ojo! Is it so serious as that?' exclaimed Castrillon, half to himself.

'I fear he has been killed,' said Brigit, pausing from her work and meeting Castrillon's inquisitive gaze with a long, proud glance. The young Marquis was extremely handsome, and, in spite of his violence, his foppery in dress and his undisguised vanity, his type was not effeminate. Brigit defied but she could not despise him. He may have been a laggard in war. In affairs of the heart, however, and in the pursuit of pleasure, he knew neither fear nor fatigue. To look at him at all was to fall under the spell of an audacious, passionate and crafty nature.

'Would you smile like that if *I* had been missing?' he asked.

'O no!' said Brigit, not without irony.

'Did he come, too, for love of you?'

'I hope not.'

'Perhaps, after all, he is happier than I am. If he is dead, he has forgotten you.'

The ball of worsted fell down from her lap and rolled away toward young Antonia de Bodava who, from a short distance, had been watching them both as they talked. Bodava touched the ball first, but Castrillon sprang up and snatched it from his hand. The two men had long been seeking some cause for a quarrel and the occasion now presented itself. A few pointed words passed between them and the incident was full of meaning to every one of the spectators present except Brigit, who, on receiving the ball from Castrillon, tossed it back again in play



to Bodava. Of all her friends in Spain, she liked him best. He had paid her respectful if sullen homage ever since her first arrival in Madrid. He bore a certain likeness to Robert, and, true to the perversity of her sex, she showed more kindness to the possessor of that accidental and slight resemblance, than she had ever permitted herself to display toward the original. Castrillon now thought that he detected in her air a secret passion for Bodava, who, while his inferior in social rank, was his superior officer.

‘Colonel de Bodava,’ said Brigit, ‘has not opened his mouth all day. He will not speak to me. I fear he is tired.’

‘Not tired—but patient,’ replied the Colonel

The gravity of his air and tone reminded her for some reason of Joanna’s death, and perhaps many other things which she was labouring, with the full strength of her soul, to forget. A sob sprang into her throat. She tried to speak but her voice failed, and, in an agony of grief, agitation, and hopelessness, she rose hurriedly from her seat, forbade them by a gesture to follow her, and walked away to the farthest end of the hall. Bodava, however, once stirred was not soon daunted. He hastened after her, and, with a stern face, watched the tears stream down her cheeks.

‘I must speak,’ he said. ‘I have been silent because I have had so much to occupy my thoughts. Do you realize the danger of your position in this

house? The Countess is dead. You are here alone among six men—all of them devoted to you. That is as it should be. Most of them, however, boast that they are devoted to you. That is as it should not be. Your protector is dead. Her presence might have silenced calumny. But the world is neither romantic nor reasonable. It will see you—young, attractive, responsible to God and yourself only. The world will soon over-look God in the argument and reckon wholly on the devil. I am a soldier and I don't use the language of ballads. But you must leave this place. A woman might be as pure as you are and yet she could not afford to be seen with libertines. Snow once soiled makes the blackest mud. There is not a man here whose character would marry happily with any lady's reputation.'

Brigit knew the truth of this last remark. The General in authority over the Carlist party in Madrid had chosen such men for the adventure at Loadilla as were remarkable rather for daring than loyalty. Had they perished—their loss would not have affected the moral strength of the Cause. They were neither rich nor powerful and the confiscation of their estates would not have meant a serious hindrance to the proposed war. It was commonly, and perhaps rightly said that Castrillon's debts were the chief motive of his anxiety to see a revolution. Rastro was a fire-brand snatched from the Isabellists. The others were

cadets of good family for whom it was at once a duty and a difficulty to find suitable commissions. Bodava himself, however, had with trouble, obtained permission to lead the enterprise. He was a young man of proved energy and ability. His rapid promotion from the position of a simple volunteer in the Carlist force to the rank of Colonel had been, even in a service where honours were scattered with a prodigal hand, an extraordinary thing. At head-quarters it was not thought well that such a soldier should risk his life in a wild escapade. The Countess Des Escas—who was a rich self-willed woman—had played her all and lost. To desert her, they agreed, would be a crime. But her day of usefulness was past. She was to be saved—if possible. It was not necessary, however, to waste heroes where adventurers would answer the purpose equally well. Yet Bodava carried his point. He it was to whom, with Robert, Brigit owed her present safety. His words, though kindly meant, wounded her pride. It seemed to her that he had presumed to question her prudence. She felt, too, the cruel humiliation to which women must ever be exposed when they venture into the harsh and perilous region of political intrigue.

Bodava, with the instinct of a sincere affection, divined her thoughts although he could not understand her feelings.

‘To meet men on a common ground,’ said he, the more roughly because he dared not be tender, ‘to

meet us in this way—or in commerce—is a bad matter. Beauty is nothing to us then. Youth is nothing. Sorrow is nothing. Virtue is nothing. It is merely a struggle for power. We do not want women at these moments. We tolerate them so long only as they may be used for tools, dupes or spies. I am a man and I know men. For the love of God, Madame, believe me. Your enthusiasm, your devotion is out of place amongst us. Too often we trade on your generosity and make calculations on your love. I would have saved you from these hard lessons—'

'Nevertheless,' said Brigit, who was weeping bitterly, 'you teach them well! I did not come here to help any man. I did not risk my life for any man. I have neither plotted nor conspired for any man. That the cause of Don Carlos is the cause of the Church is all I know and believe. My poor friend was a martyr and God must have found that I was not worthy to die with her. So I am here.'

'It is as I thought,' exclaimed Bodava, 'it is all sentimentality. *Qui veut la fin veut les moyens* is a proverb for men. Women think neither of means nor the end. They are ruled by these two pretty ideas—to die with some one or to live for some one! *How* they live or *how* they die does not matter so much till the time comes and then—*Bo hoo!*—for whether they live or whether they die, it is always a crying affair!'

His peasant blood and homely humour had rendered him detestable to the aristocratic ladies of the Carlist party. The Countess Des Escas had always viewed him with repugnance as an upstart. Brigit, who admired independence of character, had formed a wiser estimate of his worth. But her temper was quick. She had been educated in a school where insolence under any form and in all circumstances was held as an abomination. She mistook Bodava's burly kindness for familiarity.

'You go too far,' she said, 'you forget yourself. I wish that all my own words to you might be recalled. You could never understand me or any of my friends. Our motives and our conduct must always remain a mystery to you. And the more they bewilder you the more reason shall we have to take pride in them!'

Then, wiping the traces of tears from her face, she looked back over her shoulder at Castrillon and called him with her eyes. He was at least a courtier. He never offered women a gift so uncouth as the plain truth. He came up most readily and smiling. They began to talk together as though Bodava were a lacquey in waiting or a fly on the window pane. The conversation was mere nonsense. It was a silly banter about knitting and names for pet poodles. At the end of five minutes, Brigit wished the company good-evening and withdrew to her own rooms, having worked, as she soon feared when her softer

nature asserted itself, much trouble in a party already ripe for strife and distracted by small jealousies.

She had indeed but passed out of earshot when Castrillon called upon Bodava for an explanation of his conduct. Bodava's reply was a threat to report him for insubordination. The Marquis drew himself up.

'Neither my family, nor my rank nor the honoured uniform I wear,' said he, 'permit me to see a lady rudely treated. I do not deny the laws, civil and military. I do not forget the duties imposed by our holy religion. But I can accept only one reparation for this affront.'

Both men were strong in hate and hot in blood. Both were eager to satisfy, in some fair encounter, a mutual spite. It would have been hard to decide which struck the other's cheek first. The rest of the foolish drama followed all too swiftly. The whole party, at Bodava's command, went down into the superb gymnasium which was one of the underground wonders of Zeuill's palace. Bodava permitted Castrillon to appoint his second. He himself chose Rastro. The consultation between them was brief. It was decided that there should be a duel *à primera sangre*, at ten paces and with pistols. The preliminaries and preparations settled, the adversaries were placed opposite each other at a distance of ten yards. Bodava fired and Castrillon answered. No harm was done. They were then stationed nine yards

apart. The firing was repeated. Still there was no hit. They were then placed eight yards apart. This time, at Castrillon's third shot, he saw Bodava stagger backwards. The bullet had just missed his right eye and lodged in the cheek bone. With blood streaming down his face, he presented a terrible spectacle. Castrillon grew so affected at the sight that his heart became like water and his remorse claimed as much attention as the Colonel's wound, which was no light injury. Not one member of the horrified group was capable of giving medical aid. It was unsafe, in the circumstances, to use the private telegraph wires between Zeuill's palace and Madrid. What then could be done? At last Rastro suggested that, with so many valuable horses in the stable, there was no doubt a veterinary surgeon at any rate attached to the household. Castrillon offered to find him. He rushed out half in delirium and shedding tears. But he returned shortly with the man whom he had sought, and, praying hard, he himself supported Bodava while the bullet was extracted. The farce—as ridiculous as it was ghastly—thus came to an end, so far as the two male actors were concerned. At Bodava's own request, the whole affair was to be represented to the Baron, for the lady's sake, as an accident. The young lady was alone, unprotected and in a peculiarly hard situation. Each gentleman swore to observe absolute secrecy on a matter so delicate. They forgot, however, the surgeon to whom Castrillon, in his agitation

of mind, had clearly stated that the shot had been fired in a duel. This surgeon was an Englishman—a man of the valet and spying class. Castrillon made him a handsome present. It was the one thing of value, in fact, which that spendthrift still possessed—a massive gold chain that he wore, with a locket containing an *Agnus Dei*, under his shirt.

‘What is your name?’ said the Marquis.

‘My name,’ said the surgeon, ‘is William Caffle.’

Castrillon then presented him with the chain, but he retained its pendant, for that had been the gift of a fair kinswoman who had taken the vows in order to pray the better for his turbulent soul.

‘I don’t believe in charms and superstitions,’ observed Caffle, who, at one glance, had decided that the little trinket was of small worth: ‘my profession is against all that.’

Then he bowed low and withdrew.



## CHAPTER XVII

BARON ZEULL, meanwhile, was anxiously occupied at Madrid. As a result of his mission, General Prim had invited him to supper. But the question of Robert's release remained unsettled. The supper hour was fixed for nine o'clock. Zeull had thus some little time before him for the transaction of other business. He called at the Hôtel where Lord Wight was known to have rooms, and he obtained an interview with the Earl by describing himself as the bearer of news from Robert Orange. Wight received him politely but with great caution. He had been led to believe, by information received from a Carlist agent, that Robert had escaped with the rest of the party. He felt therefore that this was an occasion for the exercise of those diplomatic arts, which, in solitude, he had so long and carefully studied.

'I have heard rumours,' said he, 'of some distressing *fracas* at Loadilla, and it would seem that Orange is involved in it. He is certainly missing. I have communicated with the British Minister, but at present he has no official knowledge of the affair. I am an

invalid as you see.' (He was propped up on several chairs.) 'I can take no active part in the search for my friend. My anxiety, therefore, is the more trying.'

'I can relieve your anxiety,' said Zeuill: 'Mr Orange has declared himself a Carlist and he has been placed under arrest.'

Wight did not believe this statement and his smile, which was natural enough in the circumstances, seemed to Zeuill, who mistook it for mere acting, a highly creditable performance.

'The arrest is no laughing matter,' said he. 'General Prim has revived the old martial law of 1821.'

'What is that?' asked Wight.

'This: all conspirators against the Government taken with arms in hand shall be tried by council of war on the spot, and executed within twenty-four hours. There is an accident in Orange's favour. No arms were found upon him at the time of his arrest. He was caught half-stripped and seriously wounded. He is not well enough yet to give a clear account of himself.'

'There is some mistake,' said Wight, growing livid, 'some monstrous blunder. If it is a question of a fine or a ransom, I will gladly pay it. Mr Orange is my Secretary—a young man of the highest promise and character—the son of a French nobleman of very ancient name whose wife died at the birth of this one child. He was adopted by friends and it was a condition of his adoption that his own

name should be dropped, and he has accordingly always borne that of Madame Bestin's family.\* The facts of the case were unfortunate but not illegal.'

'I am acquainted with them,' replied Zeuill, much to the annoyance of his hearer, who liked all aristocratic origins veiled in brilliant mystery from the vulgar eye. 'I understand, too, that Orange has been elected to represent Norbet Royal in your House of Commons. It is a great pity that he has meddled with Spanish politics. Neither a fine nor a ransom will meet the present emergency—it is a case that will require all my influence. Amateur enthusiasm is dangerous and it must be suppressed with a high hand. Not that I wish to alarm you.'

'Sir,' said his lordship, 'I am not to be alarmed. An Englishman may know indignation, but never, I trust, fear.'

Zeuill then spoke in a more conciliatory tone.

'My view of the situation,' said he, 'is probably your own. I don't wish to be indiscreet, but I feel sure that Mr Orange—or to be accurate, M. de Hausée—is more interested in a certain young Senora than in the Throne of Spain.'

'I know nothing of his private affairs,' said Wight; 'your surmise, however, seems to me unlikely.'

'Have you never heard him speak of Mrs Parflete?'

\* Madame Bestin, the widow of Admiral Pertin of the French Navy, was closely related to the Duc of Orange and Vaucluse.

‘I think your question improper. But I may reply that the lady’s name is wholly unknown to me. I have never heard of such a person. If you were to say that Orange had shown a chivalrous spirit out of devotion to his Church, you might perhaps be nearer the mark.’

Zeuill made no attempt to conceal his impatience.

‘Let that report get bruited about and no influence in Spain can save him,’ said he.

The Baron, apart from his friendship for the Countess of Escas, gave no support to the Carlist cause. It was closely allied with the See of Rome, and the whole matter stood before his mind not as a question of rightful succession but as a question of policy. The return of the Bourbons meant, to him, the restoration of the banished religious orders, fresh strength to the Ultramontane diplomatists, and renewed power to the Catholic clergy. He respected the sentiments of pious, high-born ladies, but he dreaded, only a degree less than anarchy, the Papal hand in political affairs.

‘Sir,’ said Lord Wight, ‘is your business with me to the advantage or the disadvantage of my Secretary? Your tone leaves me in considerable doubt on that score.’

‘I desire to save a young man—with whose family I have long been acquainted — from foolishness. Armies are worked, not by sermons, but by pay. The Carlist Cause is poor—it can never succeed.’

‘The Bourbons, sir, will reign again in Spain. I will stake my life upon it, sir. And Mr Disraeli—a gentleman of pretty considerable ability—is of my opinion. Nor will I reconsider an opinion—which Christian faith and Oriental prescience alike support. Sir, make my compliments to General Prim and tell him that persecution for an honest sympathy is unknown in England. It could not happen.’

‘In England,’ replied Zeuill, ‘you have civilians at the head of the Government. They prefer to wear out their political opponents by interminable speeches. A great military commander would employ briefer—perhaps more heroic—measures! But I have no desire to raise invidious comparisons.’

‘Sir, you have already raised them.’

‘My lord, this is not the way to help your Secretary out of his present difficulties.’

‘Sir, I could help no Englishman by joining in unworthy criticism of the British Government.’

‘M. de Hausée is not an Englishman.’

‘Pardon me, sir, you labour under a misapprehension. Mr Orange became a British subject some years ago. My health will not suffer me to prolong this discussion further.’

The interview thus came to an abrupt close, and Zeuill, having offered an adieu with unruffled good nature, went on to Prim’s residence.

He found the General in an ill humour. His un-

bounded confidence in himself had led him to make light of the Conspiracy and Don Carlos 'the Simple,' but other conspiracies had come to light at Valladolid, at Pontevedra, in Catalonia, Valencia, and Alicante. Nor were the Carlists so poor as they were commonly thought to be.

'I hear from a good source,' said Prim, sullenly, 'that Carlos has, at least, fifteen millions of reals in Spain, and property too in France and in England. A conquered party will never be obedient for kindness. They must be ruled by fear. And they shall have it,' he added, with a grim laugh.

The two sat alone at supper, and the servants did not remain in the room. Prim ate little, and his mien was not promising.

'This man Orange,' he said, suddenly, 'seems a mere pawn. He knows nothing. You may have him. I will give him a safe-conduct and he must leave the country within twenty-four hours. But I shall want an exchange. That little hell-kitten must have her neck wrung.'

'Who is the hell-kitten?' asked Zeuill, in his mildest manner.

'Madame Parfete. She would destroy whole regiments. Her husband, on the other hand, is a valuable man. His last letter was a week late and has only just reached me. A most unfortunate delay in every respect. He knew much about all this last nonsense. But the wife is deep. She tells him as little as possible.'

‘You will find that she, too, is a mere pawn. The Countess Des Escas rules everything.’

‘Thank God she is dead,’ said Prim.

This startling news made the Baron as livid as his host.

‘You didn’t know that?’ continued Prim; ‘I found the blessed tidings waiting for me when I returned from the barracks.’

Zeuil was too discreet to ask the name of the General’s informant. There were spies everywhere, and, if Prim’s agents were in Zeuill’s household, Zeuill’s agents were also about Prim.

‘This,’ said Zeuill, whose voice showed genuine emotion, ‘is a real grief to me. I liked that woman. There was greatness in her character. The Carlist cause will sink with her death.’

‘It will rise again with mine,’ answered Prim. These ominous words came from his own lips, yet, as he heard them, he half-started from his seat, and, glancing about him, displayed a nervousness wholly alien to his soldier habits. He felt that dread, not of human foes, but of the supernatural under which the stoutest heart turns sick.

‘There is no one here,’ said Zeuill.

‘What was I saying?’ asked the General, whose hands had grown wet with a sudden sweat.

Zeuill replied that he could not remember. This was the truth, but the incident and the forgotten sentence returned to his mind with a horrid distinct-

ness just one year and four months later at that same hour of the evening, half past nine—when Prim, murdered by six assassins, paid the price of King-making and consummated his devotion to what he took to be the winning party in Spain.

For a few seconds neither of the men spoke. The room, for all its closed doors, did not seem secret. There was a body to the air, which, now hot and now icy, swept through the sombre apartment. Each filled the other's glass, and both, with haunted souls, drank a deep draught of wine.

'What would you do with Mrs Parflete?' said Zeuill, at last.

'If we are not careful,' replied Prim, 'Cástrillon or some one of her lovers will persuade her that she is the Archduke's Heir Presumptive in Alberia. She could never succeed, but she could inspire endless risings and insurrections among his Catholic subjects. Europe is swarming with Pretenders who have claims far inferior to those she could put forward. They are very clear—so clear, in fact, that Charles after Duboc's death, re-married his Archduchess privately. I have just heard that. Parflete never throws all his cards on the table at once! *Among Protestants, he says, in his letter, the first affair with Duboc would of course be laughed at, but the moment you call in the priests, marriage becomes the devil and all hell.* Parflete himself seems to brood more than a little over his wife's legitimacy!'



‘He is a man of whom I have no hesitation in saying that I hold the very worst opinion possible. That young woman’s case has been in my mind all day. Her obstinacy and pride pass all belief. I saw her at close quarters. Her beauty is astonishing. She looks like the picture of an Empress. If she were to stick her head out of a window, every soldier’s heart would be in his mouth. England is the only safe place for a creature like that.’

‘Will she agree to the divorce from Parflete?’ asked the General; ‘he mentions the matter to me in this same dispatch.’

‘There are easier things than a divorce,’ said Zeuill. ‘If one made it worth Parflete’s while, he would step aside. The marriage was a mere form. It would be sheer theology to call them husband and wife. And whatever it may be, the state of matrimony is not an abstract relationship. I feel sure that Parflete would show good sense. The Church can be counted out on this occasion.’

He drummed with his finger on his knee as he spoke. Prim presently answered him.

‘I will consider what may be done,’ said he, ‘but we must not give scandal.’

‘Even at the risk of giving scandal,’ replied Zeuill, ‘you should act quickly. We can marry her to some respectable Englishman who would plant her in a park, make her the mother of twelve children, and add her face to the family portraits! I have a person

in my eye and within reach who might well be employed in this business!

'The divorce must be disposed of before any fresh marriage can be discussed,' said Prim, tightening his lips, 'and in the meantime, I will undertake to keep her out of mischief.'

'As to that,' said Zeuill, showing equal firmness but a milder air, 'I am under certain obligations to the Archduke Charles. She must remain, for the present at all events, my guest.'

'Then, my dear Baron, I regret to say that your young friend—M. de Hausée—must remain my prisoner. A bargain is a bargain.'

Zeuill, with perfect good humour, made a gesture of acquiescence.

'So long as M. de Hausée is not shot and is decently treated,' said he, 'I will not complain. He is now, however, a shorn Samson and no longer dangerous. You might give him back to Lord Wight—who is a silly old gentleman suffering from dropsy and ideas. Otherwise—here we are at a dead-lock. I am less than ever in a situation to come forward. I can do little without your co-operation. But if this Government is bent on working its own destruction, all I have to do is to avoid being buried under its ruins.'

This speech, at once a concession and a menace, was uttered in a silken tone. He understood Prim's high spirit. Pressed too hard, the General was not without resources. No threat could ever bring him

to eat his own words. As a way out of the difficulty, therefore, Zeuill offered the suggestion that Orange should be delivered up to the Earl of Wight. He saw that Prim was listening with a favourable ear and he pursued his advantage.

‘Possibly the Government no longer depends on one or two hundred thousand pounds more or less,’ he continued, ‘but it has many things claiming its time and its money. Ought either to be wasted at this particular moment? There is no credit to be lost—there is a great deal to be gained—by giving this young man his freedom.’

‘What is he to you?’ said Prim, abruptly.

‘He has obliged me,’ answered Zeuill, ‘by appearing on the scene at the right moment. And years ago, when a Zeuill needed help, the Hausées were not backward. Perhaps you would like to hear the story? It happened to my grandfather at the time of the Revolution in France. He was flying from the mob and the Baronne de Hausée gave him shelter at the risk—many say the cost—of her own life, for she was arrested not long afterwards and guillotined. On being reproached by her friends for harbouring my grandfather, she replied: “I can never forget that our Blessed Lord was a Jew.” She had, you see, her prejudices, and her act, therefore, was the more touching. It is a tradition of our house to support all those who have ever helped us. We never desert old allies and we pay our just debts.’

He was trying to work on all Prim's passions at once. He reached now, with a single stroke, the General's Spanish instinct for romance, his no less Spanish worldly prudence, and the piety which, even when inactive, is seldom wholly extinct in a true Spaniard's heart.

'Are your obligations still greater to the Archduke?' said Prim.

'That matter rests on quite another basis,' replied Zeuill. 'It is a question of policy.'

'Can you explain it?'

'Upon my word, I do not see why not. To begin with, the Archduke is becoming devout. That is a bad sign for all of us. He is fierce against his sisters. He would do anything, in the name of religion, to spite and humiliate them. He is refurbishing his young sentimentality for the Bourbons. Suppose, for argument's sake, that he should take it into his mind to own this young woman as his legitimate daughter? There is nothing to prevent it. And what a bid for the old Ecclesiastics who detested his second marriage with that Lutheran! The church at one time disturbs—at another time, strengthens a government. So far Charles has cajoled the Liberals only, and he is a little sick of their greed. Dying men are desperate, and, if we are not careful, he will throw such a hot brick into both baths, that the two parties will be set kicking and splashing at one another for the next sixty years! Mrs Parflete need not be injured, but she must be

placed beyond his reach. I think this can be done. The Archduke is now labouring to get rid of Parflete. In that quarter, he would be a more promising agent than either of us. So there we may let him alone for a little. After that—'

'But you say she is obstinate.'

'So is young de Hausée.'

'What chance has de Hausée? Castrillon and Colonel Bodava have fought a duel about her this very day. You have taken a bosom snake into your care.'

Again, Zeuill was placed at a considerable disadvantage. This was the second piece of news that Prim had levelled at his elaborate calculations. But this time, the Baron did not own his surprise. He maintained a smooth countenance.

'Bodava,' said he, lightly, 'is a peasant. He would jar on her pride. And Castrillon has been honoured by the love of too many jealous ladies. He would never dare to marry. De Hausée has nothing to fear from rivals of that stamp.'

'Shall we send for him?' said Prim, drily. 'I had him brought here for convenience' sake.'

He touched a bell as he spoke, and smiled with a look of almost boyish amusement at the success of a ruse which he had planned in order to discover to what a degree the Baron Zeuill and Robert were acquainted. Such was the treachery, the uncertainty of opinions on all sides that men could not trust their own—far less their friends' loyalty.

## CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Robert received his summons to the General's presence, he was waiting, under guard, in a fine apartment furnished with every decoration that a taste for splendour could suggest and a large fortune supply. The contrast between these new quarters and the squalid cell of the Barracks seemed to justify his fullest hope of regaining a speedy freedom. But his heart had grown heavy and morose. Thoughts of Brigit and what he took to be her imprudence were working as a fever in his brain. *How is the gold become dim, how is the most fine gold changed!* he thought. The devotion, which, while absent from her personal influence, he had been able to regard as a delicate supernatural friendship, now, under the stress of danger, jealousy, compassion and hot wrath, showed itself as a desperate attachment not to be gainsaid or conquered. His arms had been around her. He had seen—for one instant—a thrilling happiness in the glance of recognition that she gave across the flames of the burning mill. Such a look—bestowed when death was a nearer thing than any human love—could never be forgotten.

He knew at that moment and from henceforth that they were bound by an ardent and reciprocal affection. Yet his gnawing doubts would not be stilled. Those who have loved, whether happily or the reverse, will know well—without the telling—all that he suffered, and those who have never loved could not believe the extent and folly of his misgivings even if they were set down in a catalogue. If he longed for liberty, it was in the fierce desire to see Brigit at least once again and deliver his mind from the spell of a reticence no longer to be borne. From long restraint, his mood was the more violent, and he seemed possessed rather by a fury than any spirit of kindness.

When he entered the General's supper-room, both men were struck by his altered appearance. The asceticism of his countenance, which, more than all the evidence of the secret police, had persuaded Prim that his captive was no rogue—still remained. But it was an asceticism gained by strong efforts and at a heavy cost. Robert's real nature—turbulent, rebellious, full of troubles and passions—was working plainly enough beneath the surface. His boyish air had gone. The anguish of mistrusting the woman whom he loved had driven youth forever from his face and from his character. A bitter smile played about his lips. His eyes were hard with the ice of unshed tears. Haggard, scarred, unshaven and defiant, his shoulder bandaged in splints, and his left arm in a sling, he did not appear a likely suitor to please the

caprice and tame the spirit of a haughty, ambitious, self-willed and beautiful girl. But his step was resolute, and even at such cruel disadvantages, Prim could find no fault with his bearing.

‘He is a man,’ muttered Zeuill, ‘and a real seigneur—for he does not attitudinize.’

‘M. de Hausée,’ said the General, ‘I think you will find that red chair very easy. I shall not detain you long. It is my hope to set you at liberty, under certain conditions—’

‘But when?’ said Robert.

Prim met his eyes with a curious smile, and, after a certain deliberation, answered,—

‘I feel that I cannot yet count you among my friends. You are, however, a British subject and my sentiments toward your country are invariable and sincere. I will not forget them unless you force me so to do. But you are reserved and suspicious. You withhold your confidence at the very point where we might become close allies. I am treating you as I have never before treated any political prisoner. I believe you are innocent of any actual complicity in this puerile effeminate affair. You had, I think, different and more manly motives for action.’

His tone had grown into one of affectionate admonition. He spoke as a father addressing a well-loved son.

‘I offer you,’ he continued, ‘this opportunity of declaring these motives. I wish you well, but I can go no further. It is for you to advance now.’



‘What would you have me say?’ asked Robert. ‘If I am innocent of this so-called conspiracy—on what ground am I detained here?’

‘You interfered with my officer in the discharge of his duty. You attempted to rescue two notoriously dangerous women who were proved *intrigantes* against the Spanish Government. It is a serious charge. Say no more about that or we may not end so well as we started,’ he added, with a sudden flash of temper. ‘This is not a moment for false delicacy. It is with reluctance that I bring a lady’s name into our conversation. But it must be. I do not ask you whether you are a saint or a *chevalier*. The great point is whether you are a wise man or a fool. Trust me and I will give you my word that Mrs Parflete shall not be compromised, but, on the contrary, protected from the worst consequences of her folly. I have two or three reports before me. One says that she is a pretty woman with an indifferent reputation. Another says that she is a prude in virtue but a martyr to ambition. Can you tell me anything clearer?’

‘What have you to do with me in the matter?’ said Robert. ‘I am here to answer for myself.’

‘We are satisfied of your honour,’ said the General, ‘we wish now to be satisfied of Madame Parflete’s. If you are neither her dupe nor her accomplice you may be her friend. At present she needs an advocate.’

‘What has she done?’ asked Robert.

‘A great deal. She is a young person for whom

epithets are not spared. She fancies that there is a piece of royalty stitched up in her blood and she seems bent on giving trouble. She is now shut up alone with six young men in a palace in the country. Two officers—the Marquis of Castrillon and Colonel de Bodava—have already fought a duel about her. There is such a thing as army discipline even among the Carlists and that scandal will not drop.'

Some seconds passed before Robert could reply and then his voice—in spite of every effort—trembled.

'I cannot accept,' said he, 'such a story—or at least, such a version of it. It is a monstrous calumny invented by her political enemies. Other enemies she could not have. But why should we talk of her—here?'

'I regret the necessity. When a lady sets at nought the limits which are drawn round women for their own protection, when she breaks down the barrier between the sexes and unites with men in a conspiracy—she must not whimper for that reverence which belongs only to the innocent and harmless.'

'Mrs Parflete is a girl of seventeen,' said Robert, 'she thinks still as a child. These scoundrels take advantage of her position.'

'Inexperienced as she is,' said Prim, dryly, 'she must be aware that a beautiful young woman can have but one male friend.'

'Nevertheless,' said Robert, 'her ignorance of the

actual world is so great that, while her modesty could never be at fault, she does not know the usual rules of life. Her manner is as frank as a boy's. She is quite unconscious of her appearance. Immediately after her marriage, she was thrown by her husband into a society composed almost exclusively of young, rich, idle men. She lacks that knowledge of human wickedness which would enable her to estimate them at their proper value. It would not require any vulpine cunning to deceive her. As it is, she trusts each one of them as a good comrade, and they in turn seek only the gratification of their vanity. She is cleverer—more carefully educated than most of her sex—and to a nature so pure and courageous, the ordinary manœuvres of the drawing-room would but seem insincere—if not worse. And so she is misjudged.'

'It seems to me,' put in Zeuill, speaking for the first time, 'that she is endowed with an understanding which, in every scene of life, is calculated to distinguish her. But I am also convinced that she was formed to defy all control. In this instance she may have been edged on by the late Countess Des Escas—'

'The *late* Countess?' repeated Robert, stupefied at the expression.

'She died from the shock and fatigues of her adventure,' said Prim. 'I need not tell you the whole story over again. We both know it!'

'Then Mrs Parflete is indeed alone,' said Robert, with an agitation he could not hide. 'And—where?'

'Is it possible that you do not know?' asked Prim.  
'Have you never heard of the Baron Zeuill?'

'I know him by name and repute,' replied Robert.  
'I have never met him.'

'Do you think she would be safe under his charge?'

'I have no reason to believe that he is other than a man of high character. He may know her husband or some of her relatives. The justice of God would not leave her wholly unprotected, and if she has no visible defenders, she will have those that are far stronger.'

'I see,' said Prim, ironically, 'that you are on good terms with Heaven!'

'My joy of this world has not been so great as to reverse my reason,' answered Robert. 'I know that there is a God above us and all our follies.'

A new suspicion rushed into the General's mind.

'Are you a priest?' said he, with some sharpness.

'Not yet,' answered the young man.

'God take me presently if you are not more than half one already! You speak properly enough and like a good Christian. You have given yourself too much trouble on a poor account. But gentlemen, I think you should become acquainted with each other. Baron Zeuill, allow me to present M. de Hausée.'

The Brazilian seemed as delighted as his host at Robert's astonishment. He exhibited the pleasantest smile and shook the young man warmly by the hand.

‘We must be good friends,’ said he.

Englishmen, as a rule, do not appreciate tricks of the kind, and had Robert been less Celtic than Saxon, had he been quick to resent any departure from British manners and custom, the experiment might have proved unfortunate. But he met Zeuill’s advance with unfeigned courtesy.

‘Am I to understand,’ he asked at once, ‘that Mrs Parflete is at your house?’

The banker bowed.

‘I am in communication with her father,’ said he.

‘In that case,’ replied Orange, ‘she should need no better adviser.

‘What are her relations with Alberia?’ said Prim, suddenly.

‘You must be aware that Parflete was Equerry to the Archduke Charles,’ was Robert’s answer.

‘But has she no ambition to cut a figure at the Court on her own account?’

‘When I knew her,’ said Robert, ‘she wished to spend the rest of her days in a Convent.’

Both his hearers smiled at this remark.

‘Would a nun,’ asked Prim, ‘care for the friendship of Castrillon? She has deceived you.’

There was a pause and the General rose from his seat.

‘You may go,’ said he, ‘and to-morrow you will be your own prisoner again—no longer mine!’

He rang the silver bell at his side. The two guards

re-entered and Robert, under their escort, took his dismissal.

'Well,' exclaimed Prim, when the door had been closed, 'it is a happy thing to meet with good men. And I know them when I see them. I would never waste one on a trashy woman. It is a bad economy of force. Can you find no commoner fellow for this business?'

Zeuill, in the best of humours, replied that 'with the help of soaring Bæcchus he might think of a *cheaper* plan.'

'But,' he added, 'you must not forget that we want a *succès fou*. De Hausée has one supreme advantage over all his rivals—he saved her life.'

'And in return she will help him to lose his soul!' exclaimed the General.

'How long, pray, have you taken an interest in souls?' asked Zeuill.

Prim forced a laugh, but his guest did not venture to pursue the inquiry further. He shifted instead to the subject of Robert's destination on the morrow.

'Will you permit him to rejoin Lord Wight—or, in view of these other circumstances, may I invite him to spend a few days first with me?'

'I must consider that proposal. Come to me to-morrow morning at ten o'clock.'

The interview then came to an end.

## CHAPTER XIX

AT a late hour the following evening, Robert received his release. He was escorted to Wight's lodgings at the Hotel where he was told he might enjoy full liberty—under *surveillance*. He could not yet be permitted to leave the country. Of his reception by Lord Wight, we find the following account in a letter to Reckage :—

'As I entered the room, I observed three figures sitting on the balcony. The moonlight was unusually clear and brilliant. I had no difficulty in recognising the Earl. The other two were women. One had her back turned toward me. But I knew the small waist and the flaxen curls. It was Lady Fitz Rewes. She stood up at the sound of my step and faced me. Her eyes were full of tears. She looked thoroughly tired. I never knew before how much she owed to her vivacity of expression. The second woman retired into the shadow. At first, I thought I had made a mistake and imagined that I saw her. I could not speak. I was absurdly weak and I cannot believe that I was in full possession of

my senses. Wight's exclamation on seeing me was characteristic,—

“Thank God, you are safe! I take all the blame. I led you into it. I shall never forgive myself. Pensée, where's the port?”

‘She poured out some wine which I was glad enough to swallow. Several minutes passed before another word was uttered. It was painful to all of us to be ourselves and see each other. There was so great a strain, so severe a restraint, so much that would ever be inexplicable, so much that would ever rest untold, that, to be natural was out of the question, and to be artificial, a sheer impossibility. I told them, however, as well as I could of Prim's kindness, which, in the circumstances, was a miracle. The ladies showed needless alarm over my bandaged shoulder, and it was a relief when they bade us good-night. I was longing for some explanation of Mrs Parflete's presence. She never gave it. I had never seen her so haughty, so impassive. Moral courage is a hidden thing that grows in silence and in silence, too, is broken. The soul may be withered, wounded, slain, and still keep an outward skin—strong enough to deceive at least the cruel and curious. I sought vainly for any trace of Mrs Parflete's real thoughts. I almost persuaded myself that she was incapable of emotion. And so the brave are always ill-used and worse-judged; while weak women—weak men for that matter—seem to get all the compassion, all the



help, all the love. I was ashamed of my own unfairness in condemning a reserve which I should have been the first to praise and understand. When the ladies had gone, each to her own room, Wight wiped his eyes—they were streaming—and half wrenched my one sound arm out of its socket.

“I have been like a blind beggar without his dog,” said he. “I telegraphed for Pensée the moment I missed you. She started at once and arrived but a few hours ago. I shall never forget the handsomeness of her conduct toward me. I can trust her tact. I wished, as the French say, to know *sur quel pied danser*. I hate all these foreigners. This is a ruined and undone country. Everything denotes the impropriety of remaining here a day longer. My poor boy, when I think of all you must have suffered from these liars and knaves!”

‘Here he dropped his voice and peered cautiously about the room—for we had left the balcony.

“I was too happy to make Mrs Parflete’s acquaintance,” said he, “but, if I may ask the question, who is she? She is here with that Jew—Baron Zeuill. The fellow called on me. His saucy pretensions knew no limit. I should take it deeply to heart if you were offended at any remark of mine. I am walking in the dark, and may, when I mean to do good, be doing the greatest harm. The lady appears a very distinguished and highly-bred person. No doubt she is. God forbid that she should be otherwise. God

bless you. But it was just a little awkward for my niece."

'He then went on to say, that, about a quarter of an hour before my arrival, Mrs Parflete appeared on the balcony adjoining his own.

"“I was talking with Pensée,” he went on, “and we were both much startled when this elegant-looking woman—of whom we knew nothing—addressed us. She mentioned your name at once and asked at what hour we expected you. She then gave me her card. I did not know how to reply. I was never more uncomfortable. Presently Zeuill came out—as if to show himself. I was barely civil to him and I am glad to say that he went in. But Mrs Parflete sat on her side of the balcony while we kept on ours. You will own that it was an extraordinary proceeding. My niece exchanged a word or two with her. We did not, however, engage in conversation. I don't see how we could have done so.”

““When you hear Mrs Parflete's explanation,” I replied, “you will find that it was the best course she could have adopted in the circumstances.”

““But is she really a friend of yours?” he asked.

““She is a lady,” I replied, “for whom I have the most profound respect. She would probably regard me as an Equerry-in-waiting.”

'He seemed struck by the expression, which I used purposely, knowing my man. I then undertook to explain everything fully to Lady Fitz Rewes on the

morrow. As I said this, we were disturbed by a tap on the window-pane. I looked out and saw Mrs Parflete. She was on the balcony and beckoning with her hand. She wore the same glacial air that she had shown on my arrival, but this time I thought I detected something like desperation in her eyes. It was no moment to stand on strict etiquette. The straits to which she was driven were, I own, compromising to the last degree. I would have given ten lives sooner than have let her appear at that particular moment in that particular way. I hastened to her. She asked me if she might come into our sitting-room. I helped her over the little barrier. Wight offered her his own chair, and then, with a delicacy which did infinite credit to his instinct, he withdrew to a corner out of earshot, but did not leave us alone.

‘Our interview was so painful that I can scarcely describe it.

“Some day before I die,” said she, “I shall hope to write down a little of my gratitude, but I have not the courage now to say a word. I must beg you to excuse this intrusion on your friends. It could not be avoided.”

‘Her beautiful voice, which was usually both soft and clear, began to tremble. Her eyelashes were wet with recent tears. She was dressed in black, and the astonishing whiteness of her hands, the pallor of her cheeks, the brightness of her hair made up a picture that I could not—even if I would—forget. She seemed too slight a

thing to stand against the powers of this world. I could but think of a little image of some saint set in the sands of Brittany to beat back the sea. As a child, I had built altars around many such, and they are all under the waves now. She read my fear and said, with a pathos that would have touched the hardest,—

“Have no grief for me. God does not abandon those who trust in Him and do their own part in helping His good Providence.”

“Did Zeuill bring you here?” I asked.

“Yes,” she answered, “at my own entreaty. I wish to join my husband. Do you know where he is? He tells me lies now. They all tell me lies. I can trust no one but you. Take me to my husband. I must at least seem to have a protector. I have had to suffer much humiliation.”

“Those of us who would most wish to resent your wrongs would do you most harm by coming forward,” I said, “O, try to understand!”

She flushed scarlet but, seeing that my embarrassment was even greater than her own, she leant forward, and, with a gesture of exquisite kindness, touched my arm.

“I do understand,” she answered. “And I wish that I had some women-friends. But they are all still at school. I was the first to marry. Some of them, I remember, thought me fortunate to get my holidays before the time! Léonie d’Arglade, and Camille de

Graville and Caroline d'Etampes are still learning their lessons. I am learning lessons, too. But of another kind. When I next meet those children, I shall not know what to say to them."

"Surely they are of your own age."

"Oh yes—in years. But we could never again be girls together and laugh at nothing."

"I saw that the sudden remembrance of happy and untroubled days distressed her almost beyond endurance. I returned to our main subject—which was at least a familiar grief and one for which she ever held herself prepared.

"I cannot tell you where Parflete is," said I, "and, in the meanwhile, could you not go to the Convent at Tours?"

"Her whole face altered. She seemed like a creature reprieved from some atrocious death.

"I was praying that you would say that!" she exclaimed. "You would never believe how I have longed and longed just for the sight of the Convent. When I was there I wanted to see the world and God showed it to me. O take me away from these people. They are stronger than I am and they frighten me. I feel my weakness. While I am with them, I try to look bold and clever. But my heart always trembles and I know that, in the end, no matter how well I fight, I must lose the day. They are not wicked from frailty, but by design, by principle, by maxims. I am like a small bird on a battle-field. I am like a

mouse among vultures. There is no chance—no hope. I must not only die—but I must be beaten first. And it will not be the death of a martyr. It will be the death of one who was not strong enough to live alone.”

‘The idea flashed into my mind that Lady Fitz Rewes might be induced to help this unhappy, friendless, and inexperienced girl. It is a common belief with men that women but add, when they can, to each other’s sufferings, and I have been forced, by observation, to endorse this cynical estimate of female charity—in the rough. There is, however, another sort of charity which is part of the chivalrous spirit—and that, I have always thought, was stronger in Lady Fitz Rewes than the little natural cruelties which belong not to any one sex more than another, but to human nature as a whole. I decided to make my first essay in the matter with Mrs Parflete herself.

“Did you happen to notice Lord Wight’s niece?” I asked.

“A pretty creature but rather cold.”

“Ah, that is her English manner.”

“No doubt. If you like her, I am sure she must be delightful.”

“She is older than you are, and I believe you would find her a kind, true friend.”

“One cannot force friendships. . . . And do not remind her that she is older than I am.”

‘This did not sound promising.

“Why!” said I, “do two women about to meet always assume that they will repulse each other?”

“It is an old grudge against Eve. Every woman—until we know her—represents Eve.”

“There was a second Eve.”

“Ah, our Blessed Lady! But she had no daughters.”

‘It was pleasant to see even a momentary return of her true courage and gaiety. Despondency sat sick and awkwardly upon her. She had been born for laughter and fair gardens, summer days, bright nights, and scenes of joy. She was a Princess for my Kingdom under the sea. This world, I know, is the place of our exile and not our country—not a continuing city. But how hard it is to remember this. . . . Sometimes I fear that I do wrong to think of her at all. There is no harm, however, in dreaming. One may always dream. . . . As I watched her beautiful face, I must have lost myself in wondering—for she accused me of inattention.

“You do not hear what I am saying,” she said, “or else you will not hear. Lady Fitz Rewes does not care for me. She thinks I am a foreigner. When I spoke to Lord Wight and mentioned my name, she stared very hard at my wedding ring, as though I had stolen a husband from some nice English woman!”

‘I could well imagine the glance. All aliens married to Englishmen must submit to it. But it means no malice.

“I feel certain,” I insisted, “that you will under-

stand each other. There are many nations and many ways of being foolish with strangers, but when it comes to a question of heart, a lady is a lady in every language."

"She has beautiful eyes," said Mrs Parflete.

"And surely something more."

"She was gentle with her uncle. . . . I thought her smile very pretty. . . . I liked her voice. . . . Her step was light. . . . Do you like her?"

"She has been the kindest of friends," I replied.

"Then, of course, she is charming. She must be charming."

"Her husband died when she was little more than a girl. She married at your age."

"Poor child! Had she, too, lost her mother?"

"The unconscious pathos of this question—spoken without bitterness and in perfect simplicity—was as much as I could bear.

"She has had many sorrows," I said, "few people know how many."

"Did she love her husband?"

"I believe so—and very dearly."

"If marriage is not for Heaven," she exclaimed, "I wonder why all its laws are made there! On earth, when two people are happy, one is soon taken and the mourner is told not to weep—for they shall surely meet again hereafter. But when two people are wretched and their union is a bondage, they are taught to endure each other



patiently in this world—which is brief—because they shall be separated in the next—which is eternal!”

‘In every woman, raillery is either a cutting business directed towards the secret thoughts of other people, or else—that act of supreme treachery—the betrayal of her own. The least trustworthy may be believed when she indulges in this dangerous exercise of the wits—for, while men are known by their friends, women are known by their jests. For the first time, therefore, I realised the great change that had taken place in Mrs Parflete’s character during her stay in Madrid. She had gained in fascination, in knowledge, perhaps—if that were possible—in beauty, but she had lost the peculiar reserve which I admired even more than her appearance—that, after all, is on the surface and for all eyes. She used to talk with a certain difficulty, but now, probably from the example of the Countess Des Escas and constant mixing with society, she has an assurance and ease most winning, I admit, and yet— You know that I have never liked women of fashion. To say that Mrs Parflete is anything so hard would be unjust. She is my ideal of all that is gentle. But when a girl is naturally tall and imperious, when her features are of a proud cast and her expression rather mocking than otherwise, she is better for a little weakness in will and speech.

“You think,” she said, suddenly, “that it would be well for me to lose no time on my way to the Convent? I feel here, in my heart, all the reproaches you will not speak aloud. You wish me to show a blind submission to whatever others may call the Most Holy Will of God. Surely there is much done in the world that is against God’s Will. He permits the devil’s mischief, but we know that it is odious in His sight. I cannot therefore sing songs of thanksgiving for the plagues of Hell. I pray for the strength to endure them. I cannot call suffering a joy, and corruption Heaven’s good blessing. That would be the language of hypocrisy—not resignation. O, what a kind of life is this! If Our Blessed Lord had not gone before us and taught us the way of it, who would have cared to follow?”

‘Then, with a strong effort, she changed her tone.

“Zeull is in there,” she said, pointing toward the next room, which was also a private *salon* such as the one we were then occupying. “He knows that I am talking to you. But he does not know that I wish to go to Tours.”

“The one person who can help us,” I replied, “is Lady Fitz Rewes.”

“Till to-morrow then,” said she. “At nine o’clock—here.”

‘She touched my hand and bowed to Lord Wight who was still in his corner. Before he could come forward, she had passed through the window and dis-

appeared, leaving me in the deepest vexation and perplexity. The Earl seemed to understand that he could best prove his trust in me by wishing me, without more words, good-night. He told me the number of my room. We took up our candles in silence, lit them, and went each our own way. I write all this down while it is fresh in my memory. It contains everything that passed during the interview between myself and Mrs Parflete. I send it to you because I have confidence in your discretion, and, should anything ever happen to me, you would know how to defend—in the event of misrepresentations—an innocent woman. I am very tired. I hope to sleep. Your ever affectionate,

‘ROBERT DE H. ORANGE.’

While Robert was writing to his friend, the Baron Zeuill was in close conversation with the Archduke's agent in Madrid, a person who exercised ostensibly the trade of a dealer in silks. He was thought to be of Polish origin. His name was Mudara. His character was honest: he lived humbly, troubling no man and exciting no woman's curiosity. He kept to his own circle and was held in esteem by all his customers—among whom was included, during her lifetime, the Countess Des Escas. Zeuill and this respected individual sat in the room from which Brigit had stepped on to Wight's balcony. The windows were now closed, the shutters fastened, the

curtains drawn. From a curious statement, written some years ago by Mudara himself, we are enabled to form some idea of the conversation that took place. The Baron lost no time in coming to the point. He said that he saw no reason why Parflete should not be regarded as dead—to society. He could change his name and disappear. He might charge any fair price for the inconvenience. Mudara, in reply, saw difficulties in the path. Parflete, he declared, soon grew tired of any game. He might agree to some scheme, accept wages for carrying it into execution, and, when the money was spent, work for higher pay—or merely for variety's sake—in a wholly opposite direction. One could place no reliance in him. He was not even consistently mercenary. Bribes did not always tempt him. He had more moods and caprices than a woman.

‘What does that matter?’ said Zeuill: ‘let me once hear that he is dead—and I will ask no more. He may have a dozen resurrections afterwards.’

But, so Mudara insisted, the Archduke Charles was equally uncertain. He was now sending his thoughts toward the next world. He had lately shown great civilities to the Cardinal. It would be a dangerous business to suggest—

‘Suggest?’ interrupted Zeuill, ‘who would *suggest* in such a matter? The thing is to act. If you and I cannot manage this alone, the Archduke had better entrust his affairs elsewhere. One need not run to

him with every trifling detail. In the distance, one cannot judge correctly of reasons for or against a plan.'

The conference went on until the dawn—Mudara always showing himself cautious, Zeuill always showing himself sanguine. Letters were drafted and destroyed. Calculations were made, amended, abandoned and again considered. At last, however, the two men came to an agreement. Parflete was to be 'approached.' Mrs Parflete in the meanwhile was to be sent to England. The Archduke was to be informed that, in all respects, his own interests and his daughter's happiness were about to take a more promising aspect.

## CHAPTER XX

EARLY next morning, before the horizon had whitened with the day-light, Lady Fitz Rewes was watching at her window, wondering why the birds were so still (they were twittering from every roof), and why there was no breeze (it was blowing freshly) to cool the fever in her cheeks. Neither imagination nor sentimental philosophy had a part in her unhappiness which, as a child's grief, had a clear cause and one which she had no wish or will to disguise from herself. She loved and she was jealous. She had a rival whose charm was far greater than her own and who was also, by more than a few years, her junior. Pensée could not reflect deeply on the subject nor distract her heart by studying, after the manner of moralizing ladies, the actual quality of her own anguish. She could but suffer, tremble, weep and endure—forgetting her looks, unmindful of revenge, uncomplaining against God, very miserable, yet, in her soul, as gentle toward the world as some wounded pigeon fallen into a thicket. She said her prayers and read—with her eyes at least—the Lessons. She looked at the photographs of her

children and the miniature of the late Viscount. Shedding tears over the latter, she recalled his excellent virtues and many acts of kindness. He was such a good man and he felt so much for everybody and he was always nice to women. He suffered when he saw others do wrong ; his view of Christianity was one of the finest, warmest and most beautiful she had ever, ever known. His was a singularly delicate-minded, pure, true, unselfish nature, so full of consideration for his family and friends, so generous. O, to be worthier of such a husband ! When he lay dying, she had knelt by his side and prayed the Lord's Prayer for him. And afterwards he asked for a Hymn and she and the two children tried to sing one verse of 'Abide with me.' It was so touching—so agonizing. His whole life had been consecrated to duty—cheerfully and quietly carried out. But now he was at rest, free from pain and from every evil to come, and she could feel, for his sake, resigned. There were days, however, which were harder than others, when solitude was almost too much to bear. His loss was quite, quite irreparable. God was very merciful in letting time temper the sharpness of one's grief, but to her grave and perhaps beyond the tomb she would carry this one sorrow. Her tears gushed forth afresh and she sobbed aloud, for, her children were not old enough to be the companions of her loneliness and the friend she would have chosen to guide and protect her was interested, disastrously, elsewhere. She hoped the

woman was a nice woman—she was, in any event, un-English.

She was suddenly roused from this piteous state by hearing a loud tap and seeing a note slipped under her door. Was it for her? It was some mistake. What could it mean? How extraordinary! Should she pay the smallest attention? But how impertinent! It was such an odd thing to do—at an Hotel, too, abroad where one had to be so particularly careful. And yet— She stooped down. The envelope bore her own name in Robert's hand-writing, and the letter within contained these words:—

*'May I see you soon? I have a great favour to entreat. I will wait in Lord Wight's sitting-room down-stairs.*

*'R. O.'*

She read it once and tossed her head. She read it a second time and rang for her maid. An hour and a half later—followed by this servant—she descended the stairs. It was barely six o'clock. Not a creature was stirring and she could not hear her own steps for the blood beating in her temples. When she reached the threshold of her uncle's *salon*, she felt unable to proceed, or to assume the habitual self-command which, in public, never deserted her. She turned away, and on the pretext of looking for a dropped brooch, retraced her steps. As she re-entered her bed-room, she looked toward the ward-robe.



‘This brown dress is a little heavy,’ said she. ‘I will wear my blue Indian silk with the fringe.’

The gown was changed, more touches were bestowed on her hair, and this time she did not falter on the way but walked into Robert’s presence with all her usual grace, and even more than her accustomed calm.

He was alone in the room, and, although he had been trying, for some time, to read, he was now pacing the floor. He had been waiting there two hours. Each was startled at the other’s appearance. Robert paused to look at Pensée before he could utter a word. Her dull pallor and hollow eyes told of many a sleepless night, and many hours of weeping. Her charming figure had wasted into something less than slenderness. She found him—by the morning sun—ill, plain and haggard—the spectre of himself. The man was dismayed, chilled, to see so serious an alteration in a face and form he had once thought all but irresistibly pretty. The woman loved her poor friend only the better for his disfigurements, and grew tearful at the thought of the suffering, bodily and mental, which could have produced such a shocking change.

‘This is so generous,’ he said at last. ‘I don’t know how to thank you? I want your help in a great emergency. You are my one hope.’

‘I often feel the want of going about and doing the little good that is in my power. If I can render any real service to you—I ought to thank you for giving me an opportunity of being useful.’

She knew now that she loved him : loved him with all the strength of her heart. And in meeting him again was she not preparing for herself much wretchedness? Was it not too clear that, let the matter go how it would, her love could never be returned. As a friend, no doubt, he had it in him to be all that was kind, all that was affectionate. Did he not shew kindness and affection to her tiresome old uncle? She bit her lips to keep herself from sobbing. He was so much more interesting than any other man of her acquaintance. Her favourite poem was 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' and, in comparing Robert to *Bertram*, the poet, in that story, she felt that praise could soar no higher. It was not the fault of her nature—but the vulgarity of her times, which made her think certain lines in the *Courtship* peculiarly applicable to herself, such lines, for instance, as :—

*'There's a lady—an earl's daughter ; she is proud and she is noble,  
And she treads the crimson carpet, and she breathes the perfumed air ;  
And a kingly blood sends glances up her princely eye to trouble,  
And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair.'*

The idea of putting aside her 'ermined pride' and listening to words of wooing from a genius—self-educated, but very rich in virtues—one for whom she could sacrifice her 'Norman' prejudices without flushing—fell pleasantly on her really modest soul.

Orange, it was true, came of no mean blood and the joy of 'stooping' could not enter into the question. But very few people knew anything about his antecedents, and, so far as London and county opinion went, he was certainly an obscure person *quite* of the Bertram school. So Pensée had argued: she had brought her arguments to a decision and she was prepared to face every consequence of that resolve. One thing only was wanting. The man was indifferent to her. Unhappily, he had met another woman first. That was the cruel accident. His coldness sprang from loyalty. How splendid! how noble! how very fine!

'I am going to beg your sympathy for someone who is in great trouble,' began Robert, 'it is a woman.'

'Yes,' replied Pensée, looking grave.

'You saw her last night,' he continued. 'She may not have appeared to advantage—for she was in a false position and she is proud.'

'Things often seem odd when one does not know exactly how everything stands!'

'That is what I hope to explain. You shall know as much of the story as I do and judge for yourself.'

'But don't you know *all* the story?' she asked.

He flushed—for the question cut more deeply than she could have imagined. She had meant it as a mere scratch—without blood-shed. But it made a wound, a bad one.

'I believe I know it all,' he said, looking well into

her soft blue eyes—eyes far more tender in expression than Brigit's. Then he told, as simply as possible, the tale of Mrs Parflete's birth and misfortunes. Pensée listened with a breathless interest. A passion for adventure slumbers in the breast of every true English woman. The escape from Loadilla and the mid-night flight on horse-back across country appealed to her where the woes of an unhappy marriage left her unmoved. She could form no conception of a bad husband—or even of a thoroughly bad man. Her own life had been spent with Christian gentlemen—gentlemen who often did those things which they ought not to have done and who left undone the things which they ought to have done—but who were, on the whole, honest, chivalrous fellows, whom women with an ounce of sense could love, honour and obey quite easily.

'Of course,' said Pensée, 'it is a great pity that she can't get on with her husband. Couldn't they be brought together in some way? You see, he is really the proper person to look after her and protect her and all that. I think I can understand what you must feel, but, in such a case, the comfort of trust in God, Who does all well and for the best, is the only support. A divorce would be too fearful a thing to contemplate, and, as you say, she wouldn't think of such a step. But surely her people must have known a little about Mr Parflete. Surely, they made proper enquiries.'

‘Her people!’ exclaimed Robert, in a tone of reproach; ‘have I not told you that her mother died ten years ago—that her father, the Archduke Charles, showed no interest in her existence beyond giving her a large *dot* and paying her Convent bill? This is not a common case, nor are we speaking of an English family.’

‘It is very sad and most interesting. Mrs Parflete talks English without the least accent and seemed a sort of person to like. It is hard to realize that she is a foreigner and an Archduchess and all that. I am sorry for her. I wish I could see my way to helping her. One does not like to be mixed up in a scandal. I have to think of my children. I am sure that she must be quite, *quite* delightful, but, if you don’t mind—and please don’t think me stiff, I am afraid I would so much rather not meet her again.’

She sat with her white hands tightly clasped and her head bowed in an attitude of supplication.

‘I don’t see how I can,’ she replied in answer to Robert’s silence. ‘Lionel would not have liked it.’ (Lionel was the late Fitz Rewes.) ‘He was very English in all his ideas. He did not care for foreigners—not even for foreign Royalties.’

‘Nevertheless,’ said Robert, ‘I suppose he would not have refused aid to an innocent woman in great sorrow—no matter what her nationality. I have asked you to befriend a girl—your equal certainly in social rank—though less fortunate—by many degrees—than the poorest creature on your estates.’

‘But you said that her real birth was kept a secret. If one could call her quite openly an Archduchess, it would be a different thing—though still difficult enough in all conscience. Do me the justice to assume that I am anxious to do my best in this—as in every other case. But I am a widow, and, for a widow, young. Could I be regarded as a chaperon?’

‘You could at least be regarded as a lady of the whitest reputation willing to comfort and shield another lady—also of high character—but most ill circumstanced.’

‘It is so very awkward. What does Uncle think? Why not refer the matter to Uncle? I don’t seem equal to the responsibility of acting without advice. One cannot be too careful. I know that if one always lives in the exclusive circle of English society, one’s good impulses dry up—one gets rather unfeeling. And I am *sure* that your poor friend is all—and even more—than you say. I am so sorry for the poor thing. It is really enough to make anyone cry just to hear of all that she has gone through. I want to be nice and civil and obliging—I really do. Why does not God in His mercy take that dreadful man away? That would make it all so much easier. And people—people whom you and I know, for instance—hate mysteries and muddles. They take such a time to explain. You know what I mean. Bourbons in exile are all right. Everyone

feels for the Bourbons. But Mrs Parflete's mother was not of Royal blood. She cannot be a real Archduchess—can she? It is one of those unpleasant morganatic complications that come so hard on everybody. And I can't at all see what it is that you want me to do!

'Mrs Parflete wishes to go to the Convent at Tours, She cannot travel alone and she must not travel with Baron Zeuill.'

'I would gladly lend her my maid. I can manage to do my own hair. I sha'n't mind in the least.'

'That is kind,' said Robert, 'but not kind enough. I want you to accompany her yourself.'

'Me! I shall do nothing of the sort. What would people think?'

'People would admire your goodness and bravery.'

'I don't think that women are called upon to be brave—except in a very quiet way—in bearing pain or unkindness.'

'But I implore you not to refuse your help. It may be a matter of life or death to that poor child. Can't you forget *people* and think a little about humanity?'

'It is against my better judgment—but to oblige you, I will invite her to visit me in England:' and two shining tears escaped from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks—till she brushed them away with the back of her hand.

You are an angel,' exclaimed Robert: 'the brightest of them!'

'She won't care for English country life—it will seem very dull after all this excitement. There's the Bishop's Garden-Party and the County Ball and the Flower Show and one or two other things, but the weeks between are endless. If she consents to come with me—I tell you frankly, I will make it my duty to try and bring about a reconciliation with her husband. This informal separation won't do. She must have some respect—*some* affection left for that horrid man!'

'She probably has that pity for him which every high-spirited woman feels for an inferior male being. I could not promise more.'

'Still,' continued Lady Fitz Rewes, 'that is a basis to work on. Girls are wilful and French girls are badly brought up. Forgive me—but I don't think you are a good judge of character. Hercy Berenville once told me, that, when you and he were travelling together you used to walk about listening to the birds, studying the colours of the flowers, gazing at the clouds, the stars, the moon, the mountains! "*Orange,*" said he, "*would stare up at the Cathedral spires—I watched the women passing in through the Cathedral doors.*" So leave Mrs Parflete to me—'

'Most gladly,' said Robert, astonished at her sudden animation.

He remained silent for a moment, during which



he kissed her hand. He tried to read her face—which now wore a lovely flush—the fleeting hue of a last hope. She looked away, far beyond him, straight out of the window and up at the sky; striving to appear as though she was the mistress of the occasion. But her heart was trembling. What if all were not yet wholly lost! The pining grief of a disappointed woman gave place to the spirit of rivalry, the love of a game—requiring skill—but perfectly fair. She could not believe that she would like Mrs Parflete; she would receive her, however, *en tout bien, tout honneur*, advise her well, treat her with all conceivable generosity. But women could love twice—had not she herself loved Lionel? Did she not now love some one else? And men could love twice, too. Orange, no doubt, was much interested in this surprising young person. She had come in his way and he, being human, had grown fond of her. What could be more natural? Was he made of bronze? A smile came across her lips—which were red again with joy—as she sat looking at the heavens, thinking of this. Then her thoughts ran back to months gone by and settled themselves on certain Midsummer days, in which she had dreamed that Robert's heart was her very own—not another's: that he loved her, Pensée, and no one else.

'Tell me,' she said, abruptly, 'was Mrs Parflete the cause of that strange vow you made? I think

I have a right to ask the question. When I have your answer, I may be a better friend to both of you.'

'I am nothing to Mrs Parflete,' he replied, 'nothing. But she is all this world—and all the next—to me.'

'Then you must be very unhappy—very unhappy indeed. You ought not to see her.'

'Do you suppose that I enjoy seeing her? Is there any pleasure to be found in such a friendship? I would prefer the rack.'

'Then why are you here—in Spain? Why have you risked your life and forgotten every other friend—every other duty—every consideration in order to be near her?'

'She was in peril. I could not have done less for a stranger in such a terrible extremity. When Lord Wight came here, he presented me at once to his Carlist acquaintances. On the very day following our arrival, we heard that the Countess Des Escas and Mrs Parflete were under suspicion. I flew to the head of affairs. With the utmost difficulty, I prevailed upon him to accept my services. He had refused many English volunteers. I made the best use I could of my second name. This helped matters. The Hausées have always been identified with the Legitimist Cause. I was then told that the Countess had been warned of her danger—that she would set fire to her Villa and, if necessary, take her own life. The

plot had been arranged with a cold-blooded desperation which one would think unimaginable in these days. Each one in the terrible game had his or her part to play and at all costs. Such enthusiasm for an impersonal cause does not belong to the egoism of our century. I confess, that, as I listened—I felt no surprise—the whole thing seemed to my inexperience, a wild but unreal horror. Yet I insisted that some effort, at least, should be made to save the two women from their fate. I spoke as one does in a night-mare. I could not hear my own voice. I don't know what I said or how I said it. My soul was paralysed. But a rescue party was summoned. Courage was not lacking among any one of them. We got horses and God favoured us. We managed to reach Loadilla in safety. The Villa was already level with the ground. Then, in the distance, we saw something like a beacon-light. I took it for a sign and rode toward it, followed by the others. Five minutes more and we must have arrived too late. But I found her . . . Never ask me to tell you this again. "*There are two woes : to speak, and to behold ;—thou spare me one.*"

Lady Fitz Rewes said, 'How painful ! Of course, we won't speak of it. Poor Mrs Parflete shall come with me to Catesby Hall . . . It is quiet there, and, among the trees and the flowers and the dear children, I will talk to her. If she has a strict sense of duty and of what is right and wrong, she will soon make up her mind to act as a high-minded woman should.'

She tightened her lips and spoke with an irritation which she could not conquer.

'Some things ought not to be said : a few cannot be said at all,' replied Robert ; 'in this case, the impossible word is the one which would seem to imply the smallest doubt of Mrs Parfete's loyalty to her husband. She never left him : he abandoned her and received a large sum of money for his act. She has offered again and again to follow him into exile. But he puts her off with lies. He is a spy and a villain and a traitor—the very scum of the earth.'

'How you hate him !'

'I do—from the depths of my soul and with all my strength and all my heart. Don't speak of him. He is unspeakable.'

'He must be bad, or you would not feel so strongly. But if his wife felt so, it would be shocking. I am glad to hear that she doesn't. Could he not be won and reclaimed by love ?'

'Would you yourself love such a scoundrel ?'

'I am not called upon to love him. He is not my husband.'

'Love has no place in the question. Loyalty and forbearance and forgiveness she gives, and gives nobly.'

'I shall know all this better after I have seen her,' said Lady Fitz Rewes : 'but I admit that it is a sad case—a very sad case.'

'I am glad to hear you say so. You are good and gentle and you know what it means when

love has gone out of one's existence. People who have lived self-indulgent lives and loved many times in many ways, think it no sacrifice to renounce all human affection. To them it is a mawkish, disappointing thing. They leave it gladly—perhaps, because love, long ago, left them. But to strong pure hearts—hearts neither jaded, nor embittered, nor made cheap by constant exchanges—love always seems the most precious of life's gifts—the one gift, too, which we may have on earth and in Heaven, also. Those who be-little it, have first be-fouled it. You can always be sure of that.'

'I know what you mean,' said Pensée.

'Think then of the loneliness—the isolation of mind to which she is condemned.'

'I have thought of that and I want to be kind to her.'

'May I ask her then to meet you here at nine?'

'Yes, but leave us alone together. We shall get on far more happily if you are not present.'

She rose, and moved toward the door, which he opened.

'Remember,' said she, 'that I do this for no other reason than to oblige you:' then, with a graceful inclination of her head, she passed out into the corridor and so on up the staircase to the floor above. He watched her all the way, but he was conscious of feigning this interest and he reproached himself for his ingratitude.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE story may now be better told in the following letters from Brigit to the Reverend Mother of the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Tours.

MADRID, *August 1869.*

Again my plans are changed. Early this morning, I was formally presented to Lady Fitz Rewes. She and I were together for a short time last night, while we were waiting for Mr Orange's return, and she did not then appear well disposed toward me. She seemed lackadaisical and frigid—she might have been a toy nightingale with a musical box in her breast, and, whenever she opened her lips to say 'Yes' or 'No,' I expected to hear the plaintive tinkle of *Au clair de la lune*. But to-day she was another creature—all smiles, and curls and kindness. She may be ten years older than myself; she is very blue round the eyes, a little hollow in the cheeks. Her figure is graceful: she has quantities of flaxen hair, a pink and white complexion, a foolish rather pretty mouth, and a chin like Martin Luther's. She dresses beautifully and her waist cannot measure eighteen inches. I had no opportunity to observe her closely, so I give you this impression—taken at a glance—for what it is worth. It will at least present some idea to your mind of the person to whom I am already indebted to an extent beyond all ordinary gratitude. Her manner of receiving me was, as I have said, a surprise in the happiest way. Mr Orange left us alone. She took

both my hands, looked a long time into my face, and then drew me beside her on the sofa.

She said, 'You have my deepest sympathy! How cruelly you have suffered! But you have shown *great pluck*.' (Such were her words.) 'May I help you?'

'I wish to rejoin my husband,' said I.

This seemed to cause her some amazement.

'Do you know where he is?' she asked.

'He is yachting in the Mediterranean with Lord Soham,' I replied. 'I must wait for him at some port. But until I have more definite instructions, I want to go to the Convent—where I was educated—in Tours.'

'Ah,' said she, 'I have another suggestion to offer. It would give me so much pleasure, if you would spend some weeks with me at my home in the country, in England. If you care for books and flowers, I have an old-fashioned garden and a good library. The society at Catesby would, I daresay, be good if there were any. But there is none. It is very quiet and restful. Do come.'

I was so touched by this generosity that I could not speak. She took her answer from my tears.

'There are plain and simple duties,' said she, 'for which we need not go far, but which are made nigh to us, which meet us in our every-day path. Suffer we all must, whether things in this world go what the world thinks well or what it deems ill. But though God undo, one by one, the links which bind us to this life, we shall, if we are wise, see them patiently unclasped: the objects of our affections, our strength, our health, we shall resign them peacefully at His call: counting it the happy lot, not to have but to lose; to "sow in tears," if, by His mercy, we may at the last, "reap in joy." Our lot, as Christians, is to be in the world, yet we are not to be of it.'

These words of true piety astonished and embarrassed me. I had not looked for such sentiments from so much pale blue silk. She spoke in a tone of solemnity as though she were reading a sermon. I feel sure that she was sincere—and, if the speech lacked the accent of really profound emotion, it was because the brook has not the same voice—nor the same storms—as the sea. I told her

that I did not ask to live free of all sorrows. Could I look among crowds for that peace which is not to be found even in solitude? Should men and women give us what God has already denied us?

'But,' said I, 'it may be that the too-eager abandonment of all natural hopes and affections comes from pride—the ambition to be, while we are yet dust, like the angels of God. And while I might be tempted to feel exalted at my resignation, God, Who cannot be deceived, would know that it came—not from virtue, but from a cultured inhumanity! Does Our Blessed Lady in Heaven forget the song of rapture she sang at Karem, or the bitter anguish, voiceless and never to be told—of Calvary? I cannot say then, "Take my happiness. I do not need it. I am better off without it. Before the year is past, I shall have reason to be glad that it is no longer with me." Oh, no! But I can say, "Take it if it be Thy Will to take it. It is my life. When it has gone, I may indeed be calm, because my capacity for grief—or for any other feeling—will have gone also!" Self-absorbed and self-sufficient, I, a clay thing, would contain the ashes of my soul—ashes and ashes only!'

I could see that she did not understand me. She quoted the verse from St Paul's epistle to the Hebrews:—

*'Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of Our Faith, Who, for the joy which was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.'*

These sublime words—uttered by that serene prosperous creature who, from the day of her birth, through no fault but also through no virtue of her own, has been watched over and tenderly guarded, adored and indulged—seemed less a consolation than a sacrilege. I could have laughed aloud—and cried, too, at the contrast between the lives of the saints and the lives of those who can lightly murmur—over a disappointing bonnet or a love-letter too cold—their exhortations to martyrdom. Lady Fitz Rewes is a widow, I know, and she bears her lot with dove-like meekness. But place her grief beside the fate of my poor friend the Countess Des Escas, who lost husband, sons, possessions,



and finally her own life in a struggle for another person's rights. That was a sacrifice—that, a true act of renunciation, that was a heart offered up freely and voluntarily neither for credit here nor crowns hereafter, but purely and singly out of devotion to God, her king, and her country. Yet she always read St Paul, kneeling. Ah, dear Reverend Mother, her example is a constant reproach to me, and whenever I find myself weeping (that happens sometimes) over my own little miseries, I am filled with self-contempt at the thought of her grandeur—and my poverty, of spirit. My troubles—such as they are—have been sent to me. They came against my will. But she asked for hers—took them—and bore them because she loved her Church and her true King. No such surrender was ever made in vain, and although she died at a cruel hour when defeat seemed the sole result of all her efforts, I still believe that Don Carlos will come to reign over his own people, that Spain and France will give back their old allegiance to the Bourbons.

I attempted no reply to Lady Fitz Rewes's text, for, to our common relief, Mr Orange re-entered the room. As a result of the dreadful night at Loadilla, he is maimed, disfigured and aged beyond recognition. His face, however, is one which does not depend on his features—although they are, as a matter of fact, good. A written description of his characteristics would satisfy neither you nor myself—I can but say that he is considered handsome. I have read your last letter frequently. I understand your fears and your warning. Believe me, you have no cause for alarm. My esteem for M. de Hausée (as he is sometimes called) is so far from a danger that it is my chief safe-guard. I find, in spite of every effort, that I keep the courage to live—not so much for the love of God and the hope of Heaven, as for the desire to remain without dishonour in a world where my friends are—separated though we may be by cruel distances and circumstances. If I had not this thought to sustain me, I do not know how I could bear the loneliness of my journey on the frightful road to death. Death itself, when at last we reach it, is probably not lonely—for

solitude is only oppressive during our waking hours. In sleep we do not feel our solitariness. I speak my true thoughts, dearest Mother, and while one can speak truth, one is not in the worst of difficulties. . . . I sit here with the heat, the dust, and the noise rising up to my window from the street below, and I think of the cool green Loire and its banks where we used to walk and watch the roses—crimson, white, and yellow, and pink, growing over every wall and in every garden that we passed. . . . *Ah, si la jeunesse savait* . . . those were the days of my joy : these so longed-for, are the days of my trial.

Let me tell you now what happened on M. de Hausée's entrance. Lady Fitz Rewes blushed a deep red. The bells were chiming from every church in Madrid. I stepped on to the balcony in order to distinguish more clearly the peals from the Des Escas Convent. While I stood there, the two had a short conversation. I do not know what passed, but when Madame called me back, Monsieur was no longer there.

'He approves,' said she. 'He is so happy to think that you can come to me. He is devoted to you. Do you know that?'

'He would give his life for any one of his friends,' I answered : 'we can all be sure of his devotion. He never fails.'

'I agree with you. He is very noble. I often wonder what will become of him. He ought to marry.'

'Why?' said I.

'Bachelors in public life are at a disadvantage.'

'Then that is the fault of the women,' said I; 'for men do not care whether another man is married or not married.'

'But a wife is such a help,' said Lady Fitz Rewes. 'Surely you would like to see such a splendid fellow happily settled?'

'To be frank,' said I, 'I have not given the matter a thought. He seems contented as he is. It never occurred to me that anything more was needed.'

'My dear, he is poor and he is ambitious.'

'He is strong and he has abilities. Let him work.'

‘Of course, but he over-works. You should have seen him at the time of the election. It was heart-breaking.’

‘His own heart did not break,’ said I.

‘Yet what a fight it must have been,’ she insisted, ‘and now he is merely at the starting post. Isn’t it sorrowful?’

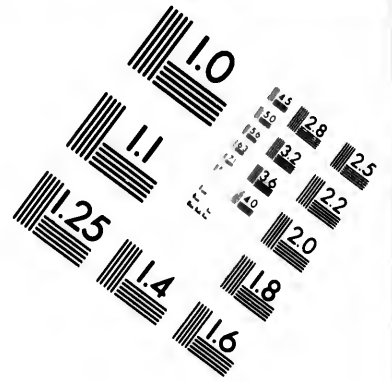
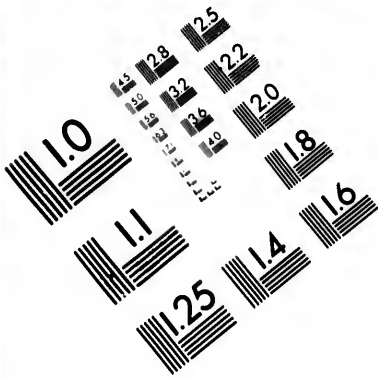
‘That’s not sorrow,’ said I. But I would add no more on the subject, and, thanking her again for her goodness, I returned to my own rooms. Baron Zeuill, for some reason, is anxious that I should go to England, and I told him, without loss of time, of Lady Fitz Rewes’s invitation. He was—or he affected to be—delighted. He has promised to get my passport and, if it be God’s Most Holy Will, I shall leave Madrid to-night. My joy at this unlooked-for relief is indescribable. I feel that you have been offering many prayers for me. Such a miraculous turn of fortune does not come as my reward but as answer to your entreaties.

Lord Wight and M. de Hausée have not yet received their safe-conduct from General Prim. But Zeuill assures me that the delay is a matter of days—that it is a little concession to some of the officials . . . I do not know when I shall see my friend again. When he leaves Spain, he will go at once to the north—to Scotland. And Catesby is in the South of England.—I am, dear Reverend Mother, your devoted daughter in Christ,

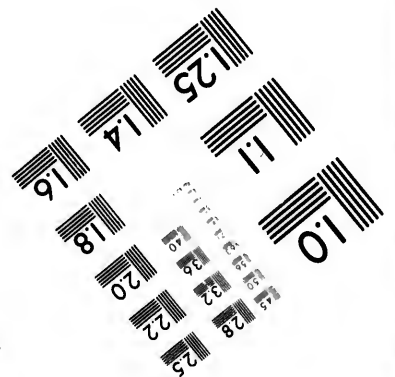
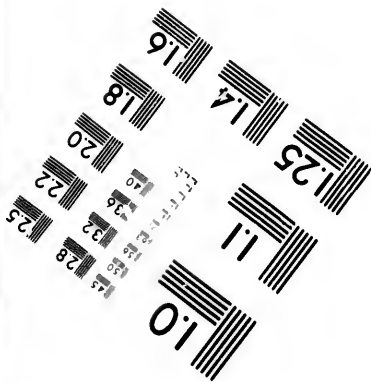
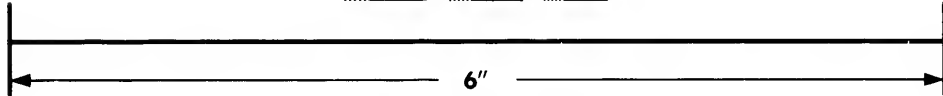
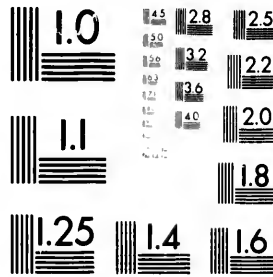
BRIGIT.

In reading this, no one among us with any knowledge of human character could feel that there was much contentment, as the world understands it, in store for the writer. The precocious intelligence, the occasional note of sarcasm, the passionate desire for happiness are symptoms all too plain of that wasting fever of the heart which, in some cases is the result of meeting sorrow, and in others, of meeting love, too early in life. To every pure and innocent young girl, love is a condition of mind, and not a strain on the

senses. The senses, once roused, may be controlled, killed or indulged according to the conscience or the strength of the individual. But when the senses still sleep, and the spirit only is active, it is indeed difficult to impose a limit on tender interest, or to define wherein excess of charity consists. Many women—till the end of their lives, and no short lives either—keep their affections so sacred from the taint of selfish emotions, and so closely allied with the love of God that it would seem an act of sacrilege to analyse a devotion on which even angels might look with humility and learn a lesson. To pretend, however, that no jealous thought—no angry reproach would, under any provocation, enter into a sentiment of this kind, would deprive it of attributes certainly as much divine as human. Jealousy may be noble—although it is often mean. Anger may be just—although it is frequently cruel. But that is the case with every power of the soul, and, because in some of us those forces which make up spiritual greatness have become degraded into sins, nothing could be falser idealism than to assume that true perfection is composed of negatives—that the best saint is the one with the fewest feelings. Jesus Christ draws all humanity to Him, not because while on earth He felt less, but because He felt more than all the rest of mankind. And the purer the heart, the greater its capacity for sorrow and joy—the sweeter seems earthly blessings, the more humiliating seems earthly pain. It was not easy for the Divine Redeemer



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of the World to give a complete and irrevocable acquiescence in God's mysterious decrees. Can one read of the Agony at Gethsemane, and doubt that even the smallest act of self-mortification in the least of us has been sanctified by that ineffable victory over the desire to escape death—whether of the will or in the flesh?

Brigit's will was her best gift. But, as in nature, the sun that quickens the harvest must, if unrelieved by other influences, also destroy it, so does a fine quality become, in the human being, the source of disasters as well as triumphs. Brigit wanted, to use the familiar phrase, her own way. It was not an evil way—not a way that could be found, by any judgment, other than pleasing to God as He is known to us. How hard then it must have been for that young impulsive heart to realize that the path of her choice—though a good one—was not the one which her Master wished her to tread. What bewilderment and dismay, what self-doubt and doubt of all things assail even the wisest of mortals when they find that the lawful is not always expedient, that a measure, blameless in itself, is not invariably the measure set down by command. Among the countless problems presented to the mind, there is none more difficult than to distinguish clearly between the will of Providence and the accidents, to be surmounted, of daily life,—to know when one should submit to circumstances and when one should

rise in rebellion against them. This was Brigit's hard position. The course before her was winding, full of obstructions, dense overhead, and, under her feet, stony. Shall we wonder then if her letters should contain much that is contradictory, much that is puzzling?

CATESBY HALL, 1869.

MY DEAR REVEREND MOTHER,—I am once more in England, and so strange is the effect of this climate, my new surroundings, and the calm, that, while I have not forgotten the past, the past seems to have forgotten me. It never calls me. So I wait upon the present. This Hall was once a Monastery. It is surrounded by flat meadows and plantations. The meadows are often covered by an azure mist which, they say, comes from the hills. There is a grey mist also. That comes from the sea. And then there is a white mist. That rises from the ground. I love the lawn and the flower-beds, but, more than all, the splendid trees. They cast strange shadows on the grass. I walk alone among them and wonder what they mean. . . . My hostess does not give parties, but she receives a number of visitors, to whom I am always presented as *Madame de Parfète*. How is it that one meets charming people every day with whom it is, for some reason, impossible to exchange a thought? We know nothing about them: we realize that they have no desire to hear anything about us: our feelings are not wounded by their indifference, and they, on their part, are no less philosophic. We say good-day and mean good-bye. We touch hands and pass on—each on our way to eternity. . . . Lady Fitz Rewes assures me that to be happy, a woman should have as many acquaintances and as few friends as possible. Acquaintances are often useful, whereas friends are a constant anxiety. I was surprised at this selfish remark from so sweet a creature. It might have been made by my husband. And yet, what is it but a crude expression of that rule of detachment which is the first principle of



a life consecrated to the service of God? I try to practise it, and I am training myself to think of things—not persons. The greater part of the time my endeavours are successful. The little son and daughter of this house are pretty delightful beings with perfect manners. English children have the best breeding imaginable. I cannot describe their many charming graces—shyness, affection, candour, obedience, respect for their elders, kindness toward the poor—these are but a few surface virtues in hearts moulded, one would swear, after the old chivalrous pattern. And yet—these very children—models to every mother in the world, grow up into a race renowned for their barbarous discourtesy—both to strangers and each other.\* Toward their social superiors they display a sad uneasiness which is shown sometimes by a nervous familiarity, more often by a grotesque awe. Their adoration of native titles is so great that, if they could have their way, they would give a city knight precedence over all or any of the monarchs of Europe. A country baronet means much to them, but they can form no idea of a Spanish grandee. The gloomiest English person will smile at the mention of a French count or an Italian prince. Lady Fitz Rewes herself laughs at these absurdities, and even repeated to me a remark made by her uncle, to the effect that things were different in the old days, when England had an aristocracy—but *‘manners left her when she lost Calais,’* and *‘Elizabeth flouted the great nobles in order to hold a Court for criminals, liars and thieves.’* This is very severe. But I am now reading the works of Thackeray, and certainly he paints a sickening picture of his countrymen. Lord Byron, Shelley, and Carlyle are no less bitter, and although Sir Walter Scott has a more flattering pen, he writes of other ages than the present, and shows a desire to escape from facts immediately within his observation. Speaking from my own experience, I can say that the kindness of Pensée (she has asked me to call her by

\* It should be remembered that Brigit was visiting in 1869, when English manners, particularly in provincial society, were very much more pompous than they are at the present day—1897.

her Christian name) more than outweighs the vulgarity of her neighbours—for whom she cannot be held responsible. Let me give you an example of the latter. For my own amusement, I teach the children French and music. Their governess is absent for her holiday, and so, as they associate me with lessons, they call me *Mademoiselle*. The other day, some fresh callers hearing this, treated me with immense condescension, and, to my joy, left me to myself. The men, however, only ventured to address me when the women were not looking—and this I found rather an insult than an attention. The Bishop's wife—who had met me before—must have noticed my resentment, for she observed in a loud whisper to a Lady Harivale (she was waiting for her turn at croquet) that '*I was very highly connected and had a large fortune.*' This remedy was worse than the offence. Yet I suppose my well-meaning ally knew her generation, for the talk was no longer carried on over my head. I was lifted, as it were, into the circle. I was shown the most flattering civilities. In fact, the same person who, a moment before, had received cruel slights for her supposed poverty now received whole garlands of smiles for her supposed wealth. Such a thing could not have happened in France. My singing which had seemed but a monkey-trick for the entertainment of the guests, became 'an enviable gift,' 'a glorious talent.' My awkward failures at croquet—which had filled my fellow-players with undisguised annoyance—were now 'quite wonderful for a beginner.' I had some difficulty in hiding my contempt, and I left the group, as you may well believe, as soon as possible. At dinner last night, Pensée was unusually sad. 'Do you wonder,' said she, 'why my poor Lionel died? He thought it was his duty to be civil to these horrid middle-class people, because of his position in the county and all that. But no one could like them. They are so pushing and such snobs. Once one could turn them all loose into an annual garden-party and have done with them. That doesn't satisfy them now. They expect me to go to a *their* parties—and I would rather have them here every week than do that.' She then told me that she

had heard from Mr Orange. He has at last left Spain, and is on his way to Scotland with Lord Wight. Thank God!

I have had a further conversation with Pensée on the subject of friends. She declares now that, for the future, she will not entertain people for whom she has neither respect nor liking. In this way she hopes to form a pleasant circle. We amused ourselves by making a little list of our favourites. It contained seven names: 'I want to know what a man *is*,' said she. 'I don't care what his father *was*. And I have the same idea about women. Rank and temporal distinctions count for little in these matters. Nature alone can produce the true aristocrat!' She is becoming quite bold in her notions. 'How can God,' said she, 'love all His creatures? Most of us are detestable.' 'He loves us because He created us,' I answered. 'That thought is a great help,' said she. 'But all the same I don't see why I should try to like that odious Augusta Harivale!' Pensée, you will see, has a child-like charm which is bewitching. Each day I become more fond of her. If I were her own sister, she could not treat me with greater kindness. We never speak now of Mr Orange. She writes to him occasionally, and I know that she loves him. A marriage between them would be, in many respects, desirable. I do not yet pray for it. . . . My indifference toward the future gives me a certain happiness in the present. You say in your letter that affection either grows or dies—that unchangeable sentiments are for feeble natures only. This is, no doubt, true. I will now speak more openly than I have yet been able to speak. My reserve so far has not been due to cowardice but ignorance. I could not understand my own feelings. There is in all of us a desire of the eyes which seems to detach us from God—Who is Invisible—and draw us toward sensible objects—the beings we see and meet. The saints were not all spirit: the chiefest of sinners is not all flesh: men and women are always and everywhere composed of both elements. My soul loves its guardian angel; my heart could love a companion. But at present it seems well satisfied to

be alone. I find an unspeakable quiet happiness in the society of Pensée and her children. Yet I believe that I could part from them without a pang—so closely do I watch my affections. I make this constant prayer, 'Let me love no one too well—let me not give that devotion to mortals which is due to Thee only.' I cannot thank you sufficiently, dear Reverend Mother, for teaching me early in life the folly of all intimate and violent friendships. To what regrets and misplaced confidences do they inevitably lead? To what fierce hatreds and irrevocable words? To what sorrows and calamities? Pensée once endcavoured to question me about my husband. I told her that I could not discuss him. She has never returned to the subject. . . . I am at last resolved on one point. If I am not to rejoin him, I shall take up my residence permanently in some Convent.

CATESBY HALL, *September 1869.*

Have you heard of Mr Parflete's death? It is either a lie or he has met with foul play. My brain is on fire. Have they murdered him? He always lived in fear of treachery. God in Heaven! what am I to think? They tell me that I am ill. O, come to me.

This note—the last in the little packet—bears the following addition written in Lady Fitz Rewes's hand :—

I am thankful to say that there seems no ground for dear Brigit's terrible suspicions. Lord Soham, with whom Mr Parflete was travelling, has sent a full account of his last illness, which was the normal result of an intemperate life. He had complained of insomnia for some weeks, and, in a mood of insane depression, jumped over-board during a calm night off Genoa. It is all too shocking. Brigit has been at death's door—we feared for her reason. I did not write to you because I did not

know whether she would wish me to write. She is so extraordinarily reserved. The poor darling is better, but so weak and desolate. I try to console myself with that beautiful text, '*Therefore, behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart.*' I cannot bear to think that her spirit—that proud, brave spirit—is broken. But she is very still, and she has not shed one tear.

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## CHAPTER XXII

ROBERT happened to be in London at Wight House when he received the news of Parflete's suicide. Lady Fitz Rewes wrote the letter and it seemed to him to contain something like an under-current of reproach—as though she would have said, had she dared, 'Now you have got your will. Much good may it do you!' This, he felt, was not merely vindictive but unjust. He could have sworn, with a clear conscience, that his hopes had never sought for nourishment in any open grave. Hope—in the matter of love and marriage—had been so far from him that he had even partially resolved to abandon his political career and with it all those things which are called the enjoyments of society. His mind went back to its first education and the early prejudices he had formed in favour of the military life. Forgetting the squalid disillusionments of a garrison town, the bugle once more sounded sweeter in his ears than the lark's song, and, to his eyes, the raggedest uniform appeared more glorious than any great Civilian's court livery. At Madrid his soul had been tinged, for the first time, with the red passion of war and a brief indulgence of

his fighting instincts—an indulgence the more intoxicating because all his softer feelings were dissatisfied—had roused in him that desire of the sword which is not the less powerful because it is the least censured of all lusts. He saw France and Spain united under one King and forming one great Catholic power. He dreamed dreams of a new Renaissance which were not too wild to be prophetic visions, and, lost in the golden atmosphere of these musings, he would often forget the narrow question of his own future and the grey desolation of his own heart. But the strongest will must seem vacillating, weak and ineffective under that disease which comes from an unavowed and unpermitted misery. And so there were other times when Robert thought the Cloister and austerities more alluring than the battle-field, when he wished to live in an indissoluble alliance with solitude — possessing nothing on this earth and desiring nothing, waiting for nothing, hoping for nothing—dead to love and dead to sorrow, yet rising in the watches of the night to pray — to make supplications, intercessions and thanksgivings for all men—that they might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He felt that his taste for the world had gone. He was no longer able to persuade himself that ambition was a duty. It had been the chief pleasure of his existence. The old restless craving for power had vanished, like a quenched flame, into the air. Public life had suddenly lost its charm, and the striving for a nation's

honours seemed but one degree more foolish than the vanity of sorrowing under a nation's neglect. He worked half the day on his *History of the Duke of Guise*, and, during the intervals of necessary rest, made long meditations on his disregard of fame. Is it possible to be eight-and-twenty, hot-blooded, a lover and consistent? We read the following passage in his Journal of that date :—

‘The immortal spirit can find no permanent content in pleasures that must pass, no permanent despair in griefs that are also transient although their flight be slower. Joy is a swallow; woe, an eagle, but both have wings. The soul that is hid with God may watch these birds and wanderers whirling, drifting, darting around the ever-fixed Rock of Christ’s Church—away from which there is indeed no salvation either in time or in eternity.’

These thoughts may have called to Robert as an answer to his tortured mood. If they could not cure the ill, they gave him at least the fortitude to endure it. He turned his face toward the imperishable city, and swore to throw no longing glances back into the Valley of Shadows where most of us, in spite of all our wisdom, love to linger. The news of Parflete’s suicide, therefore, proved less a relief than an appalling check. What was he to think? Was his sacrifice—now that he had shown himself able to make it—rejected?

‘It is all for the best,’ said Lord Wight, who was with him when Pensée’s letter arrived.

‘I pray God it may be for the best,’ said Robert.



A worse thing than unhappiness had befallen him—and that was uncertainty.

Men will own willingly the dangers, escapes, reverses and fatigues that they have met or suffered in the body. Such tales inspire the heart with courage and a hero is found great in proportion to the desperation of his earthly circumstances. But when we come to the adventures of the spiritual world, the case is changed. Either from pride or cowardice, it has become the fashion to make light of those mental combats and perils by which, after all, human action is determined and must ultimately be judged. Men, who after many secret disasters have attained to the apparent serenity of middle-age, will often leave it to be inferred that they have never been otherwise than sure of their own opinions, confident in their own good sense, and unswerving in their duty toward God, their neighbours and themselves. They ask what is the meaning of temptation (beyond the common indiscretions of the table), and they feel certain that the soul must be already in a bad way when Satan has the hardihood to address it. As for them, they know nothing about demons, and, while they have had, with the rest of mankind, their *ups and downs*—these necessary shifts, by a special Providence, were never permitted to disturb their reason's equilibrium. Now if these accounts were true, it might well be said that the Gospel has been preached in vain. But they are not true, and, in the same way

that we doubt the sportsman's tale of game too big for the compass of an ordinary vision, we doubt these cheerful pretenders to a moral infallibility beyond our hidden—but no less real—experience of life. To err, we admit, is human, but to confess the error belongs to the saint alone. But whether we confess it or whether we deny it—we all know that unless man has an infinite capacity for being foolish, self-renunciation is not a victory and faith is no virtue. The fact, then, of Brigit's freedom seemed yet another difficulty in Orange's steep path. He feared—just as she herself had feared—that some crime had been committed. Zeuill's message proved nothing. The evidence of Lord Soham—a tipsy imbecile—was valueless.

'Mr Parflete left a farewell letter for his wife,' wrote Lady Fitz Rewes; 'she has allowed me to see parts of it. I cannot feel that he was in full possession of his faculties. Such sentiments! such impiety! It is too dreadful. In view of the altered and peculiar circumstances, there is no reason why Mrs Parflete, on her recovery from the shock, should not come to town for the opening of Parliament in February.'

Robert thought the whole communication harsh and tactless. He did not know that Pensée had shed tears over the first three copies of that poor letter, and spoilt two signatures by breaking down completely. Is it an easy task for any woman to tell the man she loves that a more delightful bride may be his for the wooing? This question did not occur to Orange. With all his faults, he was no

coxcomb and he could never believe that he was in reality an object of lasting interest to the Lady Fitz Rewes. She had so many admirers—rich men, handsome men, men who deserved her—at her feet. How should she care deeply for a dull fellow whom she rarely saw and who was never, at any time, much to look at? Her liking was a mere caprice—nothing more.

And so his reply was a severe surprise to the love-sick mistress of Catesby Hall.

WIGHT HOUSE, ST JAMES'S, September, 1869.

‘MY DEAR LADY FITZ REWES,—Your news is terrible and, in spite of all the documents, I am not yet convinced that we have the true story. Parflete was not a man to commit suicide. He loved himself—in one sense—too well and felt dishonour so little that it could not have affected his quite admirable brains. I suspect some crime or else a trick. Mrs Parflete must be on her guard. When you tell me that she is well enough to read letters, I shall write to her. I fear, however, that her illness will be a long one. I understand her nature, and this last calmity must seem to a mind so sensitive for others—the worst of all.

‘I leave London to-night with Lord Wight. Our destination—Blatrach Castle.\* He is tired of the Border.—Believe me, my dear Lady Fitz Rewes, yours sincerely,

‘ROBERT DE H. ORANGE.’

He was offended and he wished Fensée to know it. He kept this answer in his pocket till the evening; in order to convince himself that he meant it as a well-considered, perfectly kind rebuke. He

\* Lord Wight's shooting lodge in the Western Highlands.

posted it on his way to the Capitol Club where he had an appointment to meet a new acquaintance, Hartley Penborough, a Government clerk of literary gifts, who founded, some years later, that excellent weekly journal called *The Sentinel*, and who became, eventually, a Permanent Under-Secretary of State. He wrote, at this time (1869), an occasional leader for the best Tory newspapers. But his father was an Admiral, and his mother, a Dean's daughter; and he was at heart a Whig under the influence of St Peter. At the first sight of Robert, he accused him of looking better.

'I am all right,' said Robert.

'I hope you have given up the idea of leaving your present line.'

'I shall keep to it for a while at all events.'

'I should think so. When we have commenced a career, what stop is there but the grave? If ambition has once entered into a man there is no more rest for him upon this earth.'

'I can't agree with that. I can imagine the sacrifice of ambition no less than the sacrifice of other passions and appetites.'

'Then there is more youthfulness in your imagination than there is in all my being! At my greenest period, when I would have renounced home, country, women, wine, wealth (perhaps because I was a ugly beggar), I hugged my little hope of gaining glory. It was my solitary possession. It is the one thing

that a poor devil can keep in spite of his enemies—or his virtues, his banking account or his wife. By-the-bye, I see that Reckage is engaged to an heiress with ten thousand a year.'

'You mean Agnes Carillon?'

'That's the girl—the daughter of the Bishop of Hadley. I have danced with her, but she wouldn't remember me. . . . I suppose it's a good match on both sides.'

'It couldn't be better. You know I believe in Reckage.'

'Do you?' said Penborough, drily.

'What do you think of his Church Party?'

'The Bond of Association? I have never thought about it in my life. While there is such a thing as religion, there will be rows and opportunities for action. But is Reckage the man to lead? Has he the three essentials of a superior intelligence—genius, fortune and perseverance? At present, we can only be certain of his income.'

'Ah, he's a clever fellow. Look how he has pulled his Society together—it is a force already. He tells me that fresh men are joining every day. You must admire his enthusiasm.'

'He stuck at no lie to get followers and he will stick at no truth to keep them! But he is certain to get a hideous pommelling before long. In a year or two, the *Bond of Association* will have but one feature in common with earthly greatness—it will have fallen!'

'That is nature's course. It plainly means that there never can be a Church and State party in England.'

'So long as the State is administered by Christian men, its acts will be Christian,' said Hartley in a cheerful tone.

'But are they Christian men?'

'Well, how can you test them?'

'Do they follow the truth so far as they know it? do they admit and accept truths higher than those which they may have received in the first instance? finally, do they die loving God more than all things and creatures?'

'I couldn't answer for any of 'em. There ain't two Bishops of the same mind, and if you ain't in with the Bishops, you ain't in with the State—for the State appoints them. And the Government is sometimes High and Tory, sometimes Low and Whig. I wouldn't trust a Tory Broad Churchman or a Tory Rationalist, and I wouldn't put my money on a Whig High Churchman. That's confusion worse confounded. And so, on simple lines, it is *Here we go up-up-up, Here we go down-down-down*;' which is all very well as a game, but it's a fool of a position if you happen to be anxious about your immortal soul and want a gun to stand by at the Judgment!'

'Then you think that the Anglicans haven't got a gun?'

'No, they have only got livings. And yet I don't

know a pleasanter thing than to read in your paper of a morning that some nice, good-hearted curate—who wants to marry your sister—has been handsomely preferred! That's human weakness and family pride. It's scandalous and you pray for yourself. But you go to the wedding and hope that the bridegroom, like the blessed heathen, is a law unto himself! When you come to the great questions, however, the choice has to be made between Nonconformity—the genuine Protestant—and Rome. The Dissenters and the Romans are the really religious-minded among us—they have to suffer for their opinions. One is thought low-class and the other, cunning.\* I don't suppose that Reckage will turn Dissenter. But if he has a spark of genius in him he will go over to the Catholics. I leave honesty out of the question. As if any man who respected his neighbour's intelligence could pretend to stomach a *congé d'élire* as it is at present conducted in the Church of England. Blasphemous humbug! Yes, Reckage must turn Papist.'

He glanced at Robert as he spoke, for it was thought that the Convert still exerted a certain influence over his former pupil.

'Nothing would make me happier,' answered Orange, 'although I never despair at the obstinacy of the Protestant and the comparative fewness of our numbers. It is God's pleasure that heresy should

\* It must be remembered that this conversation took place in 1869.

seem to prevail for a season. And the enemies of the Church are astonished. Unable to understand her life, they prophesy her death. But we can afford to be patient. There is eternity before us and what are a few hundred years in comparison with the infinite and everlasting?’

‘It is useful to hear eternity mentioned—for there is nothing one so easily forgets. And I envy anybody who can speak of God as though he were as really alive as the Prince of Wales! In these days men put on a false tone and look canting hypocrites whenever they refer to the Almighty. I do myself. I can’t help it. How do you manage it so naturally? But your chances in the House will be clean lost if it once gets rumoured about that your opinions have a touch of *other-worldliness*. They want serious politicians!’

‘And what are they?’

‘Bumbles and Shallows—pompous asses full of self-conceit—fellows that never look higher than the level of mundane necessities! They subscribe a pew-rent to God and consecrate their lives to furnaces and drains, and contracts and manure! They succeed, however, and people call ’em useful Public servants—which they are. But you have never been identified with any great idea on ventilation! I hear, instead, gorgeous anecdotes about your goings-on in Spain. That won’t do at all. I swore they were all lies. Your books are too romantic as it is—it will



take a lot of bad speeches to atone for 'em. Consider Dizzy. He won't be fully appreciated till every man-jack of this generation is dead. He's too brilliant—he makes us all feel very dull dogs and very lame ducks. And he isn't an Anglo-Saxon—another crime. To be sure, we call him clever—*infinitely clever*, and we listen to his wit—as we watch a comedian—with amusement, which, however, we should be sorry to derive from anyone who had better claims to our society! We are so jealous of his statesmanship that we wouldn't even govern Europe by his influence. Lord! how he must despise us! That is why I like him.'

'Which do you think will be the urgent subjects next Session?' asked Robert, anxious to soothe the thoughts of his excitable companion.

'The State of Ireland and the Education Bill,' said Penborough, 'then, if there is time, they will hammer a bit on the depression of trade. Some of them may begin to consider the Working Man. But there won't be many opportunities for the private Member. Have you any special trump to play?'

'I am thinking of Ireland and our Foreign Policy and India—'

'That will do to begin with,' said Hartley. 'I see you have a little ambition left, after all!'

Robert blushed.

'And now,' said Penborough, 'you can do me a kindness. Will you give me a few points about the

Archduke Charles of Alberia? You must have met him. You have met everybody. I am writing an article on his career.'

'But why?'

'Because he is dead and people want to know who he was.'

'Dead!' exclaimed Robert, who was fortunately in the shadow where Penborough could not see his sudden change of countenance.

'Dead of heart-disease. Haven't you seen this morning's papers?'

Orange, who had been too troubled to read the papers that day, sat stunned at Hartley's piece of news.

'I say,' said Hartley, aggrieved, 'you ought to keep pace with the Press. The Commons are strong for the moment, but in fifty years' time the country will be in the hands of the Lords and the Journalists. They will settle everything between them. Bear that in mind. The House will be as obsolete as the Tower!'

Robert's thoughts were far away with Henriette Duboc at Miraflores when she sat there, rosy with love, in the sun-light, and when she watched, with dying eyes, for a last glimpse of all that made her live. And he remembered Brigit—Brigit with her mother's face and voice and her father's sombre spirit—the heiress to woe and passions, gaiety and despair, pride and humiliation. . . .

‘It is too strange to be true,’ he said, ‘I cannot believe it.’

Penborough began to button up his coat.

‘I am no fool,’ said he, ‘and I repeat—the House of Commons will be, before the end of the next century, as obsolete as the Tower.’

‘I wasn’t thinking of that. I was wondering about the Archduke.’

‘To be sure. Well—it’s a slack time and I shall give him three-quarters of a column. But it must be racy.

*“ Dies irae, dies illa,  
Solvat saeculum in favilla,  
Teste David cum Sibylla.*

*Judex ergo cum sedebit,  
Quidquid latet, apparebit ;  
Nil inultum remanebit.*

*Quid sum miser tunc dicturus ?  
Quem patronum rogaturus  
Cum vix justus sit securus ?” \* \**

‘What are you muttering ?’ said Penborough.

‘My part of the Archduke’s obituary,’ said Robert.

*\* Nigher still and still more nigh  
Draws the day of prophecy  
Doom’d to melt the earth and sky.*

*Now before the Judge severe  
Hidden things must all appear ;  
Nought can pass unpunished here.*

*What shall guilty I then plead ?  
Who for me will intercede  
When the saints shall comfort need ?*

## CHAPTER XXIII

LORD WIGHT owned, in the Highlands, a small Isle which had formed part of his mother's dowry. Here, near the ruin of an old fortress, he had built a shooting lodge where it was his custom to spend the Autumn with such friends as he could persuade to join him in so exposed and desolate a region.\* He could offer a warm welcome, good grouse, plenty of hares, excellent whisky and spring water, but the coast was stormy, wrecks were not infrequent, and the guest, once landed, could not fix his day of departure nor hope to get his letters—or despatch them—with any regularity. More than all, his lordship in spite—or perhaps because—of his wealth, kept, in that district where town delicacies were rare and always bad, a frugal board. He himself cared only for pastry—the heavier the better—and his cook was a simple old woman who owned, with Christian

\*The Island now is but too famous for its views. Steamers pass it all day long. It has a Post Office, a Villa or so, several small farms and a population of one hundred souls. One may attend the fortnightly sermon at the school-house, and pic-nic on the spot where the shooting lodge stood in 1869. It was pulled down after the Earl's death in obedience to a clause in his will.

cheerfulness, that she had long lost her sense of taste. For these reasons, the Earl's parties were usually composed of a few fierce sportsmen without domestic ties, who, leaving luxuries to the effeminate and large retinues for the vulgar, could sleep well anywhere, eat thankfully whatever might be set before them, shave their own chins, clean their own guns, and prepare, if necessary, their own birds for roasting. But this year his lordship did not invite any one of his old companions, and his steward, a man of many anxieties, was astonished to hear that foreign visitors of high rank were expected—Prince Leitneritz of Bohemia, Prince Czestochowa of Poland, Don Pedro de la Cerda, Duke of Mastrana, the Marquis de la Suenta, the Count de Lesmaissons and Colonel de Bodava.

‘My lord,’ said the steward, ‘where shall we put their valets and suites?’

‘They will leave their servants at home,’ said the Earl, ‘for they travel *incognito* for a little rest and pleasure. The Duke of Mastrana, however, will bring his Chaplain who, being a priest and a minister of God, must be shown every attention possible. The rest can shift for themselves.’

‘Very good, my lord.’

‘They are all noblemen of such birth and quality that their power makes their titles—and not their titles their power. If their lands and honours were confiscated to-morrow, they would still have a hand in the fortunes of Europe—for, while man forgets,

history and the fates remember Keep that in your mind, Glencorbie.'

'Yes, my lord,' said the steward, who was wondering what the foreigners would think when they found, that, although Slatrach Castle had a brass cannon washed ashore from the Armada, it did not possess a single feather bed nor an eider-down quilt.

'It will be a privilege to see such gentlemen in the flesh. They belong to a race fast diminishing.'

'Yes, your lordship. And what will they eat and drink?'

'Bless me! what an absurd question. They will drink the wine of the country, and then there are the birds, and hares, and rabbit pie and one thing and another. But you may order some hams.'

'Yes, my lord. And what will they do?'

'Do? They will hope to get some shooting. Do you suppose they want to spend their time knocking ivory balls around a table or driving long hours through vile roads to look at tattered tapestry?'

'You know best, my lord. So long as I give satisfaction and do my duty, it's all one to me what happens.'

Orange, on returning from the Capitol Club, joined Lord Wight in time to catch the last words of the above conversation and see Glencorbie, with a pre-occupied air, bow himself out in order to resume his preparations for the journey that evening to the North.

The Earl, on his Secretary's entrance, opened

a note-book and begged to be told how to spell 'Glencorbie is a blockhead' in Spanish. 'For he reads all my letters and memoranda,' said the kind-hearted gentleman, 'and I would not have him come across a line that might wound his feelings. But really he is a fool. When one is fatigued with shooting or missing grouse, one finds whisky very palatable, and I have tasted rabbits at Slatrach which, in taste, were beyond a partridge for delicacy. The *canaille* do not know what good eating means. But what is the matter? You seem very *distract*.'

'I have heard some disquieting news. The Archduke Charles is dead.'

'Is it possible! That's most unfortunate—for he had one thumb on a new leaf, and, blessed be God, I believe he would have turned it—although he was a bad Prince and no one could pretend the contrary. I think "speak only good of the dead" is a silly maxim. I had rather speak ill of the dead than of the living. But how will this loss affect Don Carlos? Badly, I fear.'

'No doubt. It even affects my own plans to a certain extent. I cannot start for Slatrach to-night. I must go to Catesby first.'

'The lady is ill. You won't be able to see her.'

I can see Lady Fitz Rewes. The Archduke's death will touch Mrs Parflete's prospects materially.'

He had never told Lord Wight the history of Brigit's parentage. The Earl was not a man to be

trusted with a secret of that kind. He did know, however, that Parflete had held some confidential position at the Alberian Court, and so, after a certain amount of grumbling, he resolved to postpone his own departure for two days rather than be obliged of his Secretary's company on the tedious way to Scotland.

Orange left London for Catesby by the earliest train the next morning, and, at this point, the story is best told by his own narrative.\*

*September 1869.*

It was my first visit to Catesby. I sent a telegram to Lady Fitz Rewes warning her of my intended call. Her carriage was waiting for me at the station. There were few passengers, and I was particularly struck by the appearance of a man not much above the middle height, with high cheek-bones, an olive complexion, and tranquil black eyes. The strange feature was his white, abundant hair which was as fine as a woman's, and formed a most distinguished setting for a countenance which had otherwise nothing really remarkable except its sadness. He looked a foreigner and his presence in that neighbourhood at that time roused my suspicions. I had been searching my conscience in the train to find whether my sudden journey to Catesby was due to a prudent or a merely selfish motive. The sight of this stranger cleared my doubts, and I felt that I had acted wisely in coming. To my astonishment he asked the guard—in fluent English, yet with a strong foreign accent—whether it was a great distance to Lady Fitz Rewes's residence. The groom, on hearing his mistress's name, stepped forward and touched his cap. A moment later, I found the gentleman seated opposite me in the waggonette, driving toward the Hall. His expression was neither sinister nor ingratiating, but

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\* This was written, it is believed, for Mr Disraeli.



wholly impenetrable. His clothes, though plain, were of good material: his hands and feet showed no common breed. His manner was perfectly collected but his temperament seemed suited rather to the transaction of affairs than the observance of ceremonies. I decided that he was one of those men who are constantly employed on diplomatic and difficult missions because they are of so little importance to the great world that their successes need not be openly rewarded nor their failures publicly made known. This surmise afterwards proved correct. I learnt later that he was Lucas Mudara, the Archduke's agent at Madrid.

As we drove along, we exchanged a few words about the weather and the place.

Catesby harbour stands in a fine bay which, that day, was bright with yachts—their flags flying, their crews—mostly in white or blue jerseys and red caps, loitering about the quay. Catesby town is three miles or so beyond the pier, and, sheltered by high Downs, it is a little too well protected from the wind. The Hall stands at the foot of a green rounded hill, sloping up from the sea where the beach, bleak and rocky, makes, at low tide, a ragged boundary of the estate. The house, which was once a Monastery, has no architectural beauty. It is approached by a long drive that follows the coast line, and, while there is at intervals a piece of pasture-land or a hay-field between the water and the road, the trees are on one side only and the house is never hid from sight. It is a long low building with a stout oak door in the middle, and, for its size, few windows. But it is covered with vines and it has a curious garden of blue hortensias on its flat roof. A number of parrots and cockatoos also are kept there—tied to their silvered perches by light chains. The effect is startling and too fantastic, but it redeems the house from an austerity over severe for any dwelling not used as a place of repentance and mortification. When our carriage was some three hundred yards from the entrance, the groom jumped down and asked us if we would kindly walk the rest of the way as there was a visitor ill in the house, and it was feared that the sound

of wheels on the ground would disturb her. I glanced at my companion to see whether this news came as a surprise. He murmured some polite words of regret, but his expression was like the waters of Lora at high tide. One could not believe, that, under so calm a sheet, there were whirlpools, swift falls, sharp rocks and a current fiercer than the Furies. But presently I caught him watching me from the corners of his eyes. I determined to take a straight course.

‘Pardon the question,’ said I, ‘but have I the pleasure of addressing a Castilian?’ Where I felt in such doubt of his nationality, I thought it well to let my guess err on the side of flattery.

He seemed rather pleased than annoyed by the remark, but, to my astonishment, he said, speaking with an extraordinary rapidity in perfect Spanish,—‘I am glad to find that my birthright is so distinct. I hate your Cosmopolitan who is usually proud of every country except his own, and that he avoids—lest he should be called on to defend it.’

‘Spaniards, at any rate, have opportunities now to show their patriotism.’

‘Alas, yes! Misery must come to many “that the nations may know themselves to be but men.”’

‘Do you take a gloomy view of the situation?’

‘The gloomiest. We have sold our souls for swords. And the swords are filthy. They poison the wound and the hand that inflicts it. We are a ruined people, and Spain must perish.’

‘You must have the courage of the past. When Anaxarchus was being beaten to death, he said, “Pound on. You can pound the sheath of Anaxarchus, himself you cannot pound.” Nothing can destroy the spirit of Spain. Do you not feel what an injury you are doing to the Church, our Mother, by your predictions?’

I said this purposely in order to discover to which party he belonged.

‘The Church,’ said he, ‘is at once perfect light and utter darkness. She is like that miraculous cloud which guided the children of Israel, and, at the same time, blinded their enemies.’

This was a fine saying and true, but I saw that he meant it half in irony and I knew then what to expect.

'The revolutionary party must inevitably come to destruction,' said I; 'elections by the sword are dangerous. They never endure. The military elections of the Roman Emperors and in other nations proved fatal to the public peace and liberty. Every bad end may be referred to a bad beginning. Men who fight—*pro aris et focis*—for religion, freedom, wives and lands are full of courage. But godless, homeless, mercenary vagabonds—whose trade is blood—have no just cause and therefore no mettle. "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host." There must be some soul of goodness among his legions.'

'That is our unhappy position,' said he. 'The Revolution in Spain is between the army and the people armed. It is now a year ago since the two combined to drag Isabella's bust in the mud. The Bourbons were declared to have for ever forfeited the throne, but there was not an evil done under the Bourbons which has not increased a hundred-fold since the rebels have come to misrule. Where there may have been a passing sickness there is now mortal disease, disease in the Church, in civil society, in the army, in the whole nation. Thousands of good citizens and poor priests are immigrating to Biarritz and Bayonne, to St Jean de Luz and to the frontier. God knows how they will all live! But their native land is no longer a home for honourable creatures, and yet I cannot forget how short a time has passed since my country was the greatest Power in Europe.'

The speech was uttered with a feeling certainly not feigned. I felt the truth of every word. Nevertheless, I could not decide to my satisfaction whether he was, in his sympathies, a Carlist.

'Nothing is done without the Law of Providence,' said I, 'and when things seem to fall out contrary to justice, they finish, notwithstanding, for the greater glory of God. That is why it is right to say always—*Fiat voluntas tua in cælo, et in terra*. It is mockery to pray thus and nourish a secret revolt.'

'You are a young man,' said he, 'and perhaps you are

happy to-day. But I agree with you, although I have waited longer for the millennium! I think, too, that one should maintain unity of religion—being of Plutarch's opinion, that *varietas religionis, dissolutio religionis*. Religion, however, should keep on her rock, and not wander forth into the council-chamber and the market-place.'

'In fact,' said I, 'you want liberty not of worship but of conscience. Let Church provide the Ritual and any devil the sentiment that you take to it! In other words, every man may permit her ceremonies on his own terms. But a power that depends on its subjects is not a power at all, it is a servitude. Saint Louis of France showed his army that he could fight his own battles, and thus he won respect from foe and follower alike. Shall the Church be less than her own saints?'

A sort of pallor showed under his olive skin, as though a mist had crept over his blood. But his reply betrayed no resentment.

'You are zealous,' said he, 'and, for an Anglo-Saxon, you show a great interest in foreign affairs.'

'There is French blood in our family.'

'Ah! I have observed that the English take great pride in a Norman descent. Yet England played a filial part in the Netherlands while Marie Antoinette was in hourly expectation of the guillotine? Your Government pretended, indeed, to assist the Allies in restoring the Monarchy. She meant to pay herself handsomely for the trouble, however, by taking the lion's share of the French conquests, and dividing the noble kingdom into parcels! But that meanness was paid for at Austerlitz. Austerlitz is written on Pitt's heart in letters of eternal fire.'

He paused and spat upon the ground.

'You will not find that there were many old Norman families on the side of Mr Pitt! But my father was French,' said I, 'not choosing to make any fuller comment on the chapter of history to which he had referred.'

'A Bonapartist?'

'Never.'

'And what, pray, would he have thought of my poor country—her empire in tatters, her credit a jest!'

‘He would remember the Prophet, and say, “The multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her stronghold, and that distress her, shall be as a dream, a vision of the night.”’

His eyes filled with tears. I saw him strike his breast and heard him murmur, ‘*Hei mihi, Domine, quia peccavi nimis in vita mea. Quid faciam miser, ubi fugiam, nisi ad te Deus meus?*’

Unconsciously he gave these words that peculiar clerical intonation which no layman, in reciting prayers or psalms, can acquire or affect. I controlled my astonishment and looked away from him. When he next spoke, it was in his ordinary voice—guttural, but well-modulated.

‘So you are not an Anglo-Saxon? Thank God! It was said of Richelieu that the priest concealed the cavalier. In your case, the cavalier conceals the priest!’

He bowed gravely. He gave me to understand that he meant to convey an innocent, if high-flown compliment. But I felt tolerably certain that, in some way, he knew the story of my birth and my whole history. On the other hand, his remark might have been purely accidental. While the doubt was possible, I could take no stand. I kept silent.

‘The Emperor of France has been ill,’ he said, suddenly, as though he wished to change the subject; ‘and he is a long time getting well. The Empress Eugenie, with her son, is visiting the room in Ajaccio where Letitia Ramolino gave birth to the first Napoleon! Signs of the times, indeed. But a year ago, Genera! Prim was a proscribed Spanish patriot, driven from France and Belgium. Now he is going to Vichy for his health—attended as a king in state is attended. Sick Prim and the sicker Emperor will have a little conference about Cuba. Cuba is all but lost to us already. And what will become of our Spanish emigrants under a Foreign Government? Shall we abandon them to suffer as the Irish and the Hindoo? Never—while there is one thread of honour still running through our flag. “Death has come up into our windows,” but not yet shame. The people—’ he checked himself, then turned upon me with a face distorted by passion—‘What do

young men of family care about the people? You talk about God, King and country—you fight well and spare neither your bones nor your blood. But your devotion is for the shepherds and the pasture-land—the poor sheep may perish.'

'The poor sheep have grown into wolves since the Reformation,' said I. 'They have been trained to look upon the assertion of a divine right as the last insult which a monarch may offer his subjects. That a king should presume to govern is insolence not to be tolerated. He is a State-Doll to be brought out and laid away at the pleasure of his humble Ministers! And with all this what have the people done for themselves? Have they ever enjoyed more comforts, straighter opportunities of advancement, or safer protection than they did under the old Feudal System? But in those days this last false worship of Humanity was unknown. Men now have neither gods nor kings nor idols. They have sunk lower than the heathen—for the heathen has never yet bowed down in adoration before his own *individuality*. He chose something which at least seemed to him more powerful than himself. Prayer has been recently defined as a *reference to one's higher self!* But one's "higher self" is the soul, and the soul belongs to God—and a man must save his soul because God will call him to account for it. *Individuality* is the new soft name for our secret sins.'

I spoke warmly and perhaps it was as well that we had reached, by this time, the old Monastery door which, made in the twelfth century, showed the marks of many a wild assault. Before we could ring the bell, the bolt was drawn and a footman, whose face was familiar to me from my many calls and dinners at Curzon Street, let me in. The elderly butler who stood near him waiting to announce us smiled a benediction as he always did on his mistress's friends. But he cast a dubious glance at the Spaniard and asked him with grim respect whether he came with me and what was his name. To the first question, Mudara made no reply. As an answer to the second, he gave him a card. Old Clayton, whose presence of mind deserved great credit, asked us to rest a moment.

He went into the great hall—(we were standing in the vestibule without)—and presently returned. He conducted Señor Mudara to the drawing-room. As the two turned the corner, Lady Fitz Rewes herself—dressed in flowered muslin—came out from the hall on tiptoe, put her finger to her lips, and gave me her right hand which I kissed as usual. It was a very pretty hand. I read displeasure in her eyes, however, and I remembered that she must have received that morning my letter of the day before. I was ashamed of it the moment I saw her face, which was flushed, and younger than it had ever yet seemed to me. She did not speak till we had crossed the long, imposing *salle*, hung with magnificent Gobelins, but rather gloomy—and entered a small, sunny room, finished in the modern taste, with quantities of china and chintz and family miniatures.

‘Who is that man?’ said she at once, ‘his name is unknown to me. Here is his card—*Lucas Mudara*. There are no coronets or things on it. He must be Brigit’s man of business.’

As she mentioned the word *Brigit*, she threw me a swift rather icy glance.

‘That unhappy child’s condition is deplorable,’ she continued. ‘When she received the news of her husband’s death, she went straight out into the old chapel, but neither then nor since has she been seen to shed one tear. She seems in a stupor. All day long she is there among the graves, with her head resting on her hand and her lips closed, as white and silent as a stone monument.’

She paused in order to give me the opportunity to ask some question. But I could say nothing. The picture and the suffering she described had robbed me of the power of speech. There was never a time in my life when I less saw my way before me than at that moment—when I felt with such confusion the inadequacy, and also the danger, of words. Lady Fitz Rewes proceeded,—

‘I believe very great caution is necessary. This is no common illness and our hope must be in earnest prayer. Brigit has been obedient always, conquering her natural

wishes at every step. Surely none of us will ever lose any Grace with God from having submitted our own wills to that of our superiors in authority. I cannot believe it. She will be given some measure of earthly happiness yet. It is not in the next world only that goodness is rewarded.'

I dared not ask her to explain herself more clearly. Her look and her trembling tone left no room for any doubt of her unutterable fear.

'It is hard to say sometimes for what we mourn,' she continued, 'but a heart broken by grief cannot be calm. So I do not think that her melancholy is wholly due to sorrow. I think it is some other feeling — a horror of life, a weariness of its folly, a desire to see an end of disappointments and all.'

She could say no more, but broke down and wept as I had never seen any woman weep before. I would not have believed, from mere hearsay, that so fragile a creature was capable of so much passion. Her very soul seemed to be dissolved in tears. I knew the kindness of her nature, yet I was astonished to see her so utterly overwhelmed by the thought of another's misfortunes. She was not without her faults, but, from that hour, I forgot them all.\*

'Dearest Pensée,' said I—(for she seemed to me, as "the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold,")—"there is no one like you. You are the best and truest of friends. Do not cry. My task is already hard enough. I have more news to tell, but it must be our secret till Madame is stronger. The Archduke Charles is dead.'

The sentence had barely passed my lips when I saw a shadow on the lawn outside the open window. I hurried forward and looked out. It belonged to Mudara who was standing there, well within earshot, in perfect tranquillity, apparently watching an immense flock of sea-gulls which had gathered in hundreds on the wide beach below. I myself was fascinated by the unusual sight. Some were pluming themselves in the pools left by the out-going tide: others were warming their breasts in the sand, and seemed

\* Orange does not seem to have suspected that there may have been more causes than one for Lady Fitz Rewes's deep emotion.



to be asleep—secure in the thought that six patrols, each flying in a radius from the centre of repose, were keeping watch in the air above them, ready to give the signals of distress at the first approach of an enemy. I know not why, but the scene struck me almost as a miraculous vision. My heart grew lighter, and my thirsty faith received a fresh draught of hope. I rubbed my eyes—the gulls did not vanish. Then I looked again at Mudara. He must have heard every word of my conversation with Lady Fitz Rewes, but he showed no embarrassment on being discovered an eavesdropper. On the contrary, he smiled, came nearer, and, with the easiest air in the world, looked over my shoulder at Pensée.

‘I walked round from the *salon*,’ said he, ‘the open window and the garden were irresistible. I had no intention of intruding. *Madame la vicomtesse* will pardon me?’

Lady Fitz Rewes, at the first sound of his step, regained her composure, but, with that simplicity which belongs to a really proud nature, she made no attempt to conceal her former agitation. She dried her eyes and wet cheeks at her leisure, then stood up, and, disregarding Mudara’s apology, asked him his business.

‘Your name conveys no idea to me,’ she added.

‘There is no reason why it should, Madame,’ said he; ‘my business is with Mrs Parflete.’

She made me a slight sign and I allowed him to pass into the room.

‘Mrs Parflete is too ill to receive visitors,’ said Pensée.

‘No doubt. She has had to suffer a great loss in the death of her husband, but broken hearts often find much consolation in the pity which they inspire.’

He bowed with profound respect, and was careful not to lift his eyes again to her disfigured face. His remark, in the circumstances, showed considerable tact. It induced her to treat him less severely—for by justifying her tears he had relieved her at once from the strain of an inexplicable and painful situation. She blushed a little, and, motioning him for the first time to a seat, said that if he preferred to talk in Spanish—although his English was perfect—I

could act as an interpreter. (She referred to me as M. de Hausée.) To my surprise, he fell in with the suggestion, which she had made simply as a means of including me in the conversation. He turned to me at once and had the audacity to observe in his good, but very rapid Castilian,—

‘M. de Hausée, I have had the honour of meeting, in times past, many members of your distinguished family. This is a good and charming lady. But her habits of thought are childish. If you have any friendship for Madame the *half-sister* of His Imperial Highness, the *present* Archduke Albert of Alberia, you will do all that you can to help me in my mission. I was the private agent of the late Archduke Charles. His daughter knows me well. I am her trustee. It is imperative that I should see her. My cause is that of God and the *Archduchess*. If the *Archduchess* fail—I trust in God, and on Him I must wholly depend unless you aid me.’

Now it had seemed to me, that, as a politician, he belonged to that vast impotent crowd of educated beings who, while they sympathise with the Cause of God as opposed to other causes, do, on their own part, nothing to help it. But, in spite of his alternate shifts of mood, I could not suspect him of absolute treachery. He was no doubt an instrument in some intrigue, but to err in over-much suspecting is the easiest made and hardest mended of all mistakes. I had no knowledge of Mrs Parflete’s affairs. I feared that Parflete had spent the greater part of her fortune, and it seemed but too probable that her father’s sudden death would leave her in an unstable—if not precarious—situation. Parflete, on his honeymoon, had boasted of his wife’s jewels, which she had inherited from her mother, and which, from his account, were of great value—some, unquestionably, being heirlooms in the Imperial family. He mentioned, among other things, a famous emerald which had belonged to the great Empress, Maria-Teresa. I had never seen Mrs Parflete in full-dress and I could not say, therefore, whether she still possessed these ornaments. In any case, she did not seem to care greatly for things of the kind. But, so far as her worldly comfort went, they were of the highest importance. I felt that

Mudara had matters of real moment to communicate, and, acting out my part of interpreter, I repeated the substance of his appeal, together with further entreaties on my own part. I knew that the demands of business are, so far from a penalty, a godsend in times when the mind is over-charged with emotion and wholly at the mercy of every sentimental caprice or morbid impulse. I urged the point with such persistence that Pensée, after an hour of wavering in her usual manner, finally agreed to cooperate in a plan which Mudara himself proposed. It was this. Lady Fitz Rewes should first invite Madame to walk a little in her favourite haunt—the chapel. Then she might be induced to rest for a short time in the boudoir where we were then sitting. That would be a favourable moment to show her Mudara's card and ask her to receive him.

'She would never do it,' said Pensée, at first: 'she has refused to see every one and she is too ill to talk.'

'I know Madame,' answered the Spaniard, in English, 'she would not hesitate—she would grant me an audience at once. It is one of the noblest intellects in Europe. Weak natures are always firm when it is to their palpable advantage to show a little pliancy. But the strong soul knows when to yield. Madame is never unalterable at the wrong moment.'

'I will do my best,' said Lady Fitz Rewes, who then rose and left us, promising to send us word if her attempts at persuasion proved successful.

'It will be my painful duty,' said Mudara, when she had gone, 'to inform the Archduchess of her father's death.'

'I had hoped,' said I, 'that this news might have been withheld for the present.'

For a moment he said nothing. Then he made an effort—not to reply, but to interrogate,—

'Do you think that the loss will cause her much grief?'

'I am sure of it. Can you suppose that she lacks natural feelings?'

'Certainly not,' said Mudara. 'Indeed, I always assume that she has every human attribute—in its virtuous extreme,

be it understood. Therefore she is honourably ambitious. She is the grand-daughter of an Emperor.'

'That would be the last consideration to enter her mind.'

'The problems which time has ripened and which the future evokes demand a bold solution,' he replied. 'Her Imperial Highness must realize the duties of her station.\*'

I concealed my amazement, and, seeming to disregard these strange observations, I asked him whether he could give me any further details—than those already received through Baron Zeuill and Lord Soham—of Parflete's suicide. He replied that he could not. I expressed, without paraphrase, my conviction that the man still lived. He said that nothing was impossible in the case of such a scoundrel—that he himself (Mudara) had found the suicide story hard of digestion. 'But,' he added, with ingenuousness, 'we cannot get away from the proofs. They are conclusive. They would satisfy any Court of Justice in the world. He has made his death so clear, that, if he should wish to come to life again, he would experience much difficulty in establishing his identity! We have nothing to fear one way or the other.'

'I was not thinking of fear but of fraud.'

'Then that,' said he, firmly, 'is all imagination. Dispel such an idea from your mind. He had everything to lose and nothing to gain by giving out his death. He forfeits his pension, and his wife may re-marry. These things do not matter when one is in another world, but while one is here, they matter greatly. I could believe that he might have a morbid wish to read his own obituaries—he was so inordinately vain. Fraud, however, is another affair. He was awkward when it came to vulgar misdeeds. He had every vice, but he could always persuade himself that they were refinements—evidences of culture and superiority of spirit. He drank to excess, yet no one ever saw him drunk. The first time he cheated at cards, however, he was found out. Parflete's whole history might be conveyed in those two facts. Madame Duboc used to call

\* It should be remembered that Orange was not then aware of the various intrigues at the Alberian Court, nor of the late Archduke's determination to recognise his daughter publicly.

him the *baptized satyr*. Did you ever meet that charming and accomplished lady? I believe she had not one true friend in the world.'

I told him that I had seen her on two occasions, and I spoke of her extraordinary beauty.

'It was miraculous,' said he, 'and the Archduke's infatuation could not be blamed. She was the sole love of his life, and although he was a hard man, he remembered her till the end of his days. And, after all, she was his canonical wife. No doubt, her ancestors too, could be found, if necessary, sufficiently noble! The time has come for her daughter to stand on her rights. The marriage was and has ever been acknowledged by Rome, and although His Holiness would no doubt prefer to maintain silence on so disturbing a question, he could not, for all the threats of Europe, deny her legitimacy.'

All in a moment, through the gloom, I saw the colour of his dangerous schemes.

'A nobleman,' said I—'or a country gentleman—who owns even a small estate may exercise certain, if limited, powers, and call himself master of his fate, but a prince reduced to a private station is in a wretched state of dependence. He is useless in politics, a burden to his country, and his title, separated from royal or official duties, is an empty term. He is, in fact, a spectacle of ruin or of scorn. Mrs Parflete—whose one desire is to live in retirement—would never care to excite public attention by asserting a dignity which would create a thousand slanders—a thousand enemies, and give not a single privilege.'

Here, with a candid yet piercing glance, he interrupted me,—

'You forget one thing. The little Archduke, her half-brother, is a sickly, half-witted boy.'

'Sickly princes often live the longest.'

'When they are virtuous—not otherwise. But this one is a poor, effeminate lad, who dances, who has a room full of dolls and plays on the fiddle two hours every day, more because he is ordered to do so than from any taste for music!'

His tone, I noticed, was more sorrowful than contemptuous, and the accent of regret—inappropriate for words so bitter, made an impression upon me.

‘It comes to this, then,’ said I, ‘you wish Madame to declare her claim to the Throne?’

‘It comes to that,’ said he, after a short pause.

My estimate of his sagacity did not allow me to think him other than a liar in this last assertion. He must have known that the course of action which he proposed could only recommend itself to the enemy of all human happiness. Had he seemed a vain person, I would have accused him frankly of speaking in contradiction to his own obvious good *statesmanship*—with more compliments to the same effect. To which, in his anxiety to salve his credit, he might have replied in such a way as to betray his real sympathies. But he had too intelligent a mind to be caught by bait so common, and indeed, everything about him betokened fanaticism rather than rascality. He was, perhaps, bound by an unscrupulous devotion to some person, some cause, or some idea of duty. A peculiar hardness and self-sufficiency about his whole being restrained, however, the notion that he was actuated by any especial affection for an individual. He had, I decided, that form of egoism which renders a man rebellious under authority, but a slave to his own private and fantastic rules of conduct. He reminded me of those lawyers who, well knowing a client to be a rogue, do their utmost, as a point of professional honour, to prove the innocent party in the wrong. An instinct warned me that he was acting in some double interest—partly for the Archduchess and partly for the young Archduke—that he had come to preach false doctrine in order to be taught the true. I knew that a woman of Madame’s high spirit and majestic character had nothing to fear in a verbal duel with a man of his class. I answered him, therefore, in such a way that he could not be certain whether I was in jest or in earnest.

‘Saul,’ said I, ‘went out to seek asses and found a kingdom, but I have never yet heard of any man or woman who went out for a kingdom and did not meet with contempt!’

He lifted his eyebrows in surprise and seemed at a loss for the right reply.

'I grant,' said he, at last, 'that the question of the Throne is remote and difficult. But she can form, in the meantime, some alliance worthy of her blood. When the period of mourning has elapsed, she will need a protector. Is she not alone in the world?'

'There is much in what you say,' said I.

'But surely you agree with me?' he insisted.

'In such a matter, I could agree only with the lady herself. If she saw fit to remain as she is, I should feel bound to honour the decision. But if she resolved on marriage, I should think it a wise step.'

'Even supposing that her choice fell on the Marquis de Castrillon? He is poor, he is disreputable, but he is young, he is handsome, and he is a grandee of Spain.'

'But, admitting all these high qualifications,' said I, 'would he still be thought sufficiently distinguished to form a party in any *alliance*?''

'You are a little satirical, Monsieur,' said he, smiling. 'There are, however, but three families in Europe of so many descents as the Hausées, and the house of Castrillon is not, I own, one of those three.'

This foolish remark was delivered with such an air of encouragement that it was impossible to ignore its meaning. I laughed outright at his impudence, and said that Madame was not the woman to base her opinion of a man on the empty fact that he had a few descents more or less than another. But the situation was becoming, I thought, far too intimate. I knew no more of Mudara than his card, his account of himself, and my own instinct told me. I determined to change the subject and I did so most abruptly—wishing to show him that I would discuss the Archduchess and her affairs no further. I had made up my mind—in the face of his assertions and his consummate mastery of the Spanish tongue—that the Agent was no real Spaniard. That haughty, reserved and chivalrous race does not produce men of his calibre, and, when persons claiming that country show dispositions opposed to the national character, it will be found that

they have sprung from alien stock and have neither the tissue nor the traditions of the superb people whom they pretend to represent. Mudara, it is true, had the presence and self-possession of one who had been born in no ignoble state; he was a subordinate yet never an inferior; he could flatter without becoming servile; his eye was fearless, his features were clear; every gesture, every expression, showed, unmistakably, pure blood. But of what kind? Chivalry was as far from him as vulgarity: he was not a gentleman in our sense of the word: nor was he base.

‘I suppose you have been often in Alberia?’ said I, ‘indeed, a great traveller in all parts of the globe?’

On his replying in the affirmative, I was able to drive the conversation toward international politics on which he expressed himself promiscuously in French, Italian, and German, according to the subjects under discussion. He spoke all three languages with perfect fluency, but he *actea* them, also, borrowing in each case the mannerisms which are associated respectively with the French, Italian and German nations. He could have passed, in ordinary circumstances, for a native of any one of these countries. Half in fun, I addressed him, first in the meagre Russian, and then in the less Turkish, at my command. His Russian was too good for me. I begged him to stop. After a certain hesitation, he answered my Turkish remark, and, for the first time during our long interview, he became natural. He was at last himself.\* I was careful not to betray my discovery, and, to his evident relief, I resumed the conversation in Spanish.

‘Do you not think,’ said I, ‘that the great religious war of the future will rest between the Christian, the Jew and the Mussulman?’

\* Lucas Mudara was a Turk who, either from conviction or interest, had professed in his early youth the Christian faith. He received the greater part of his education in Russia—where he was ordained priest in the Greek Church. Five years afterwards, he quarrelled with his Bishop and fled to Alberia. There, in consequence of his talents, his gift of languages, and his supposed sincerity, he was well received in every quarter. Later on, he established himself as a silk merchant at Madrid, where, as he was never seen to observe any religious duties, his neighbours regarded him as a heretic.



'Between the *Church of Rome*, the Jew and the Mussulman,' said he; 'Christians outside the Church would merely come like birds and beasts of prey—after the battle! They talk about Jesus Christ, but they take their gospel from Voltaire. The Mussulman will fight for God and his prophet; Protestants will fight only for their purse. Prick that—and you will find them as meek as the saints and as hardy as the martyrs.'

I warned him that patriotism was not yet an extinct virtue in any European country—whether Greek, Lutheran, Calvinistic, or English in creed.

'True,' said he, 'but patriotism and religion have become utterly dissociated in the policy of every Christian Government. Patriotism itself is now a profitable name for commercial interests, and State theology has degenerated into a mere science of outward appearances. What Anglo-Saxon in his senses could shed one drop of blood for the Church of England as it stands at present? He would as soon go to the stake for the General Post Office, or for the Lord Mayor and his Aldermen.'

'There,' said I, unable to refrain from laughter, 'you are in error. English people love honesty and hate iniquity. They may not be profoundly religious, and certainly they are not well instructed in matters of faith and doctrine, but so long as they can believe in a person or an idea, they will fight for ooth with the courage of lions and a fidelity more than heroic. Their clergy—as a body—are remarkable for uprightness of character and every social virtue. Many of them have a fervent piety. You could not read their writings nor hear their sermons nor watch their lives and doubt it. I rarely meet one but I feel that Church would be the stronger for such a son. Once convinced and once given the courage of their convictions—and that, when a man is bound and fettered by family ties is no light thing—they would carry the world before them. They are fine fellows—a bold stroke more and they would be fine priests.'

'Nevertheless,' said he, drily, 'your great Martyr, St Thomas Becket has not had many successors at Canter-

bury! But his mother was a Saracen: he had the Oriental fervour in his veins.'

'That is a legend,' I replied.

'It has never been disproved,' answered Mudara.

'I have never doubted it,' said I.

We were interrupted at this moment by the entrance of Lady Fitz Rewes. She was pale, but whether from anger or from grief I could not decide, and she spoke under her breath.

'Mrs Parflete has gone to the chapel,' she said, 'if you follow me you may be able to see her and judge for yourselves how little fit she is to be disturbed by strangers.'

The idea of spying upon a lady in such distress seemed to me detestable. I declined to go.

'But I insist,' said Pensée; 'I can act no longer on my own responsibility. It is right that Mr Mudara should satisfy himself of his ward's condition, and as for you—'

She looked at me and bit her lip—

'Will you not come,' she asked, 'as *my* friend?'

She stepped out on to the lawn and we followed her.

It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon. The sea was as tremulous as the trees on an Autumn day when they wait for the windy scythe of Winter. As I beheld it, I seemed to be looking at the reflection of my own heart. The conversation with Mudara—slight as it was—had roused the old doubt, which always slept lightly, that I was obedient to my true vocation. And this, together with the joy and dread combined of seeing Brigit once more, my terror at the possible effects of her illness, the despair caused by my poverty—what had I to offer her? the piercing fear—certainty—uncertainty—that she cared for me as a friend only—made me so dazed with wretchedness that reason itself seemed a torment and a disease. There is something, however, in the very presence of the ocean with its extent, its depth, its changeableness which lifts the soul to the remembrance of that Divine Grace which changes not and is so vast that Heaven above the sky cannot contain it. I sent my hopes beyond this land of the rustling of wings where, to

our short sight, all powers and emotions rest a moment only to flee the faster away. But, I know, that, in the kingdom of God from Whom there is no hiding place in heaven or in hell, in the uttermost parts of the sea or in the darkness, those, whose love has been found steadfast during the flying days of adversity, shall love for ever in a fixed and perfect happiness. Remembering this, I was able to collect myself and throw aside despair.

We went through a grassy lane and then down into an under-ground passage from which we finally emerged into a kind of wood. Here, under the shade of some large beech-trees and much over-grown by ivy, stood the ruins of an ancient Gothic church. But four windows—or rather clefts in the masonry—and two crumbling walls preserved even a little of the original design. The rest was broken into wide gaps and irregular arches through which we saw masses of foliage and glimpses of the sea. The floor was made up of moss-covered fragments—some of them grave-stones, their names and inscriptions wholly obscured by time. One corner, however, had apparently been restored, for it was separated from the rest by a rusty gate wrought in iron to represent a death's head, cross-bones, and a sand-glass. The treasure it protected was a dismal monument erected to the memory of Hugo de Baskerville, eleventh Viscount Fitz Rewes—a nobleman who had been well distinguished and thoroughly forgotten during the reign of Queen Anne. On the wall just behind this granite tribute, some figures of women in flowing drapery and with hands clasped in the attitude of prayer were rudely carved. Even in the sunlight and under a sky as blue as Italy's, it was a damp and melancholy spot. The strong salt air rose from the marsh-lands beyond: jackdaws, sea-gulls, and curlews had made it their haunt: its sacredness had departed and it did not seem to me like hallowed ground. I was able to observe all these details for Lady Fitz Rewes told us to remain there and watch till Mrs Parflete went into the Lady Chapel. The passage between the Lady Chapel and the part in which we stood, had, for some reason, been closed

up. Ivy now concealed what may have been visible of the brick-work, and it was not until Pensée drew our attention to a small window—quite hidden under the leaves—that I fully realized the part we were expected to play.

There could have been no question of Mudara's legal right to assure himself of his ward's state of health and mind. Had he refused to let that particular occasion pass, it would have shown ordinary good feeling, no doubt, but at the cost of duty. Much as this harsh consideration grated, I could not, in common justice, cast it aside. Of Lady Fitz Rewes's friendship for the Archduchess, of my portion in her welfare he had—he could have had—not the smallest safe knowledge. That we were her wilful enemies was hardly, in the circumstances, conceivable, but how far our devotion was selfish or to what a degree it may have been tinged by motives contrary to her real interests, he could not, by any human means, decide until he himself had seen and conversed with Brigit herself. I sought in vain for any easier solution of the difficulty than the one before me. I had, for a moment, so stood that Mudara could not approach the window. I stepped aside and walked away—leaving him to spy alone and, so far as I was concerned, unobserved.

Lady Fitz Rewes followed me.

'Surely you wish to see her?' said she.

I dared not trust myself to give an answer.

'O Robert!' she exclaimed, 'you are very cruel to me. But you are more cruel to yourself. How you are suffering! Your eyes are full of blood.'

Mudara called her and she glided back to him. Presently they both joined me. I had formed such a violent hatred of the Agent that I kept my glance from his face, so I do not know how he looked. His tone, when he spoke, was confident.

'The Archduchess,' said he, 'seems ill and in grief, but I am certain that she is mistress of all her faculties. The Archduke, her father, was subject to these attacks of *reticence*. They are a blessed gift. I must beg her to see me and without delay. My business will not keep.'

I cannot deny that these words gave me a great relief. When he suggested that Lady Fitz Rewes should go at once to the Chapel and inform Madame that he was waiting without, I supported his wish. Pensée went away and, after a short time which seemed to me interminable, came back.

'Mrs Parflete will see you in there,' she said: 'that is the path.'

He received the message with an air of cold self-satisfaction, bowed to both of us and stole out in the direction Pensée had indicated. I commended my poor Lady to God, to our Lord Jesus, to the Blessed Virgin, to her Guardian Angel and to all the saints. But my friend unable, perhaps, to account for my silence, struck me on the shoulder with all the little force of her small, delicate arm.

'You are so stubborn,' she cried, 'and you are so unkind. You do not understand me and you never will. I knew that nothing would induce you to look through the window at Brigit, but I could not do less than give you the opportunity. You are longing to see her. I am sure of it. I have never known such a case of infatuation. Yet you treat me like a stranger. You deny me your confidence.'

Full, to the utmost measure, of her imagined ill-usage, she indulged in a long scolding complaint made up of rhetorical questions addressed to herself, Heaven, and me. God knew this and God knew that. Had she not loaded my friend—solely on my account—with kindnesses? Had she not shown her the most tender devotion and the love of a sister? Had she ever denied her rare beauty, her virtue, her sweetness of disposition? Had she sought to make mischief between us? Had she (Pensée) been as many other women in the *same strange situation*, she would most certainly have done. I could not get a word in edgeways. She went on with great vehemence and at last—as I had expected—burst into tears.

'You go about,' said she, 'making every one's life a burden because no one knows how to take you! You have reduced Brigit to such wretchedness, that, although

she has good sense much beyond her years, she thinks she wants to be a Nun—a life to which she is utterly unsuited. I would take the Veil to-morrow gladly. But her sorrow is not like mine. I have been plunged in deep affliction. The only consolation I can have is afforded me by the reflection that I tended *Lionel* in his last hours, and that his latest breath was drawn when I was with him! No, her sorrow is not like unto my sorrow!

It was, no doubt, most natural that comparisons should arise in her mind between the infamous Parflete and that perfect knight Fitz Rewes, who, as Lord Wight frequently told me, was the 'most graceful and accomplished gentleman of the generation he adorned.' Had his widow allowed me to speak, I would have said all I could to show my profound sympathy. But, without a pause, she continued reciting her string of grievances, and even went so far as to reproach me with the early death of her parents which took place before I was born. One moment she seemed to be making, to my infinite embarrassment, a general confession: the next, she was accusing *all her friends* of malign coldness and the blackest ingratitude. At last, however, God in mercy restored her temper. She declared it was my fault, and began to smile as prettily as her considerable gifts in that direction permitted.

'Now let us be kind to each other,' said she, 'and talk affectionately as brother and sister should!'

As I had not opened my mouth once during the preceding interview, I begged her pardon humbly for any remark and all the remarks I had made. This she readily and most graciously granted, but not without warning me that I ought to be more careful of wounding people's feelings. She understood me and was willing to make every allowance for my humours—for I had shown a fine resignation in truly hard circumstances. Yet, all the same, it had been the Will of God to make a way out of my perplexity, and I was not at all thankful or nice. And I made it 'most disagreeable and trying and a fearful strain' for every one concerned.

'What, after all, have I said?' I exclaimed, by this time fairly exasperated.

'You have hurt me very much indeed,' she answered, 'but I forgive and forget it now that you admit you were in the wrong and behaved badly! But I should always forgive you in any case, because I am fond of you and I am sure that you mean well and wouldn't grieve me for worlds.'

'There,' said I, 'you are right.'

'As if I had ever wronged you!' she exclaimed, 'as if I could, dear Robert!'

She spoke with angelic amiability and I was too grateful for the change to quarrel with her reasons for reconciliation.

She leant upon me, and we paced the narrow area circumscribed by the fallen walls. I was trying to imagine the interview between Brigit and Mudara. My heart and my thoughts were far away from the kind, capricious creature by my side. But she talked with vehemence about my future, and assured me that I ought to marry.

'Ordinary rules,' said she, 'do not apply in extraordinary cases. For once, dear Robert, listen to common sense. Be guided by me. You both love each other very much. It is a good and honourable love. I want you to be happy. And she is all I could wish for you—she is, indeed.'

She paused and glanced up into my face.

'I suppose you think I am unnatural,' said she.

'Why unnatural?' I asked.

'Not to be jealous.'

'Angels cannot be jealous.'

She drew away and said, with great petulance,—

'I hate always being called an angel! You never give me credit for any *nice* feeling! You seem to think that it requires no effort to be a good friend. But it is an effort all the same.'

'In some cases, certainly. In yours—never.'

'Oh, very well. Have your own way. I am a frog then! I am quite different from all other human beings! I am particularly anxious to give up every one I care for! It gives me perfect joy to step into the background, and send some other woman forward! Of course! I am like the poor doll who *loved* to have pins hammered into her

head! Oh, how stupid men are, and how foolish they can be.'

She went on and on and on in the same strain till she seemed to be a humming bird with a lamenting, feminine, yet prettily musical note. And although she herself was very near me, her voice sounded far away. I would not have been alone—for her presence was a help and a pleasure. Now and then I looked down at her little foot, or remarked her soft, transparent complexion which flushed and paled with every passing whim. Her flaxen curls fluttered in the wind. Once she stopped short in the midst of an oration on 'the Tomb,' and exclaimed,—

'Aren't they ridiculous?'

'What?' said I.

'My curls!' said she. 'I wish they would go out of fashion. But they look so well on the Empress Eugénie! . . . Yes, I hope to be buried, please God, beside *Lionel*.'

Lionel's name was never long absent from her lips. Whenever I heard it, I would say, 'Poor darling! What trouble you have had!'

'Haven't I,' she would answer. 'I have had a lot of sorrow, haven't I, Robert?'

Had it been possible, I believe she would have spent her life gladly repeating over with me that same little dialogue—again and again—without a single variation.



## CHAPTER XXIV

BEFORE proceeding further, it will be necessary to put before the reader a few facts from Mudara's Confession—a document to which reference has once already been made. In this manuscript, it is clearly shown that the Agent's visit to Catesby was of an odious sort. There is a treachery that is knit up—partly from warped principles, partly from motives, which, if never excusable, are always comprehensible. But there is another kind, more rare and certainly more dangerous, that is less a studied policy than a disposition of mind—a habit of conduct to be exercised impartially in all relationships and in every situation of life, even at a heavy loss, even at the risk sometimes of certain self-destruction. The need to deceive becomes, in fact, a passion. Its slave must lie, must dissimulate, must betray, because his soul, by submitting to the bondage, has gradually lost the power to bring forth an honest thought. That Mudara meant no deliberate malice toward his ward is as evident as his own double-dealing. It is probable that he hoped—from sheer amiability—that she would come unharmed out of the snares he

had himself prepared for her ruin. But he wished to ascertain, let the event be what it might, first, whether she was already involved, or could be tempted to engage, in any conspiracy against the Alberian Government; secondly, how far she was concerned in the Carlist movement. His third object was to urge on, by all the means in his power, her marriage with Robert de Hausée—commonly known as Robert Orange. Parflete had been paid a large sum for his feigned suicide, but he was a man of uncertain immorality. His remorseful return to the scene was, at any hour, possible, and, although such inconvenient penitence was to be held at bay by bribes and menaces so long as either could move him, and by precautions so long as they could be invented, both Zeuill and Mudara felt that there was not a moment to be wasted in bringing about what they were pleased to call *the De Hausée complication*. All their plots and efforts were directed towards preserving every Lutheran—indeed, every Protestant power—from the Catholic influence and the Legitimate Causes. No claim, no party was so slight or so purely sentimental as to seem unworthy of suppression. To crush the Papacy was, no doubt, impossible. The heathen Emperors, the Greeks of Constantinople, the barbarian hordes, the Lombards, the Normans, the nobles of Rome, the Emperors of Germany and France, the Kings of England and Spain who had striven with the Pontiffs, had passed away, all out of power and many out of remembrance. It had been proved

that 'God made the nations for health: there is no kingdom of hell upon the earth.' But if one could not root out the Church, it was always easy to set up forces against it, and, if one could not destroy the great Catholic families, one might always observe that old tradition in European diplomacy—'an alliance against the House of Bourbon is the most desirable connection in the world.' For this last reason, even had there been none other, Brigit, as a conspicuous adherent to the Carlist Cause, would have been a marked figure for 'management.' Modern refinement shrinks from crude methods of persecution. It is eminently civil, well-meaning, a little wiser, that is all, than its victim. We shall see the method by which 'superior wisdom,' in the present case, laboured for expediency as opposed to 'superstition.'

Mudara, on leaving Pensée and Robert, pursued the path which led to the other side of the old ruin. The walls of the Lady Chapel were so leafy with their own dense vines, and the small structure, as a whole, stood so sheltered by the beech and fir trees, that a stranger would have passed it by without suspecting its existence. It had often escaped, therefore, the cruel attention of Catesby's many besiegers, and it had suffered chiefly from the invisible hands of time and neglect. Mudara found that the path abruptly ceased. It had grown imperceptibly narrower till, at last, it terminated in the long weeds and waving grass. The footsteps of the two women who had

preceded him had left, however, slight traces here and there. These he followed for a little distance, when they stopped before a large impenetrable briar-bush. He tried to peer between the branches, and, in so doing, felt it yield. Pushing harder, he saw that it grew out of a box attached to—and concealing—a low oaken door. This stood ajar and led into a small stone vestibule at the end of which hung a heavy velvet curtain—very faded yet evidently placed there but recently. He drew this aside and found himself in the Chapel.

The crumbling walls were still whole: the small and glassless windows were dark with foliage; and such light as entered came in through the wide gaps in the roof. The altar and every trace of it had been swept away, and a collection of rakes, hods, wheelbarrows, spades, bottles and watering pots now stood where, for five centuries or more, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass had been offered, and the faithful had knelt to receive the Sacred Host. Brigit, as the Agent entered, was sitting in the farthest corner, dressed in a plain grey gown, her hair concealed under a black lace veil, her hands tightly clasped over an open Breviary which lay upon her lap. The little that was visible of her face was ashen and every feature seemed to have received the twist of woe. Grief has a harsher touch than death. Mudara, who was by nature little disposed to pity, shuddered to see so severe a change in a countenance once the symbol of all those radiant essences which go to make the magic of youth and

gaiety. But at the sight of the Agent, the hue of life and blood swept into her cheeks. The sudden emotion, the necessity for speech, the vivid remembrance this man brought up of her days in Madrid, roused her spirit to a more poignant sorrow—a keener realization of the demand upon her courage. She rose to her feet: the spell of an impotent yet blighting melancholy fell away. She lifted the heavy veil: her bright hair shone out above her brighter eyes, and what had seemed a vanishing spectre of womanhood was once again the defiant, mysterious and beautiful girl whose character and fate alike had inspired intrigue and baffled speculation. Mudara knelt and kissed her hand, then rose, retired two paces, and stood with a bent head in an attitude of extreme deference.

‘Madame,’ said he, ‘there are many pressing matters to be considered. Your Imperial Highness must know—’

‘This is a new thing. I don’t care for it. My mother was never so addressed.’

‘The circumstances are new, Madame. There can never be too many good Catholic Princesses.’

‘I agree with you. But my life is not among Princes and I am anxious to talk, without waste of time, about my own affairs.’

Mudara’s self-control for a moment deserted him. A suspicion that she, too, possessed more than ordinary skill in dissimulation fanned his indifference

into violent antagonism. Enraged at his own inability to understand a character which had so little in common with the vulgar estimate of feminine weakness, and regarding her judgment with that awe which soon develops into hatred, he resolved to strike his worst blow at once and in the roughest manner

‘These are your affairs, Madame,’ he said, his olive face glowing with resentment. ‘There is a kingdom waiting to be claimed. Will you demand your just rights—a Divine Right—if it comes to that, or submit to any and all indignities? The Archduke, your father, is dead.’

The wanton cruelty of this speech carried its own antidote. Brigit’s mental fortitude rallied and drew fresh strength from the very insolence of the Agent’s attack. Her hands and lips tightened: the colour deepened in her eyes: she paced the Chapel floor for a few minutes without speaking, but, when she finally turned to address Mudara, he saw no expression except grief on her countenance, and he listened in vain for any sign of inward agitation in her voice.

‘Then, if my father is dead,’ she said, ‘in whose interests are you acting?’

‘In yours, Madame, if you will permit it.’

‘You should first learn, in that case, what my interests are. If I have the smallest claim on my father’s estate, I renounce it gladly in favour of the Archduke Albert, my brother, whom I do not know and who will never, in this world, know me.’

‘Madame, it is my duty to point out certain facts of which, apparently, you are quite ignorant. The Archduke Charles, before his sudden and lamentable death, was especially anxious that you should adopt a title more in keeping with your position, as the legitimate daughter of His Imperial Highness.’

She interrupted him,—

‘I disposed of this matter weeks ago. Baron Zeuill had my answer then, and you must regard that as final’

‘He offered, at that time, an insufficient distinction,’ said Mudara. ‘And the case now is changed. The Cardinal has led me to infer that he is wholly on your side. The Marquis of Castrillon and a very strong party are only waiting your commands. I think, Madame, that you take the situation too lightly. I can believe that, at your age and with your taste for a private life, you shrink from the glory and dangers of a Crown. But a strong man fears neither God, nor his fellow-men, nor himself. He accepts all the consequences of his qualities, good and bad. A strong woman should be the same. And there is such a thing as duty. Imagine Alberia under a Lutheran Regent, a crew of Lutheran officials, and a child-Archduke who can barely comprehend the difference between conscience and inclination. He is sickly too in health. You are the next heir. Will you toss away your birth-right?’

‘I know,’ she answered, ‘that I am the lawful child

of the lawful marriage between my father the Archduke Charles of Alberia and my mother, Madame Duboc. But you misunderstand the Cardinal if you think that he wishes me to stir up strife in my brother's kingdom. As for the Marquis of Castrillon—he can lead his supporters where they are wanted. I have no need of him or them. Take no thought for me. I am in safety, and my welfare is not in the power of fortune. God alone has power over me. I put my trust in Him—not in men nor in their advice.'

'Almighty God, no doubt, is a good Friend, Madame. But why does He with His Omnipotence permit such injustice and so many horrors in the world?'

'He could make them cease. But at what a cost? No less than our Free Will, which, while it makes the misery—makes also the greatness of human nature.'

'Madame is philosophic beyond her years! Alberia would be happy under the rule of so wise a Princess. But I should be the last to advocate hasty measures even to bring about that blessed consummation. The Archduke Albert may live, marry, and have heirs—'

'Unless he, too, should die as suddenly as my husband.'

'Madame?'

'I say, unless he, too, should die as suddenly as my husband.'

Mudara dropped his eyes.



‘Such calamities,’ said he, ‘are always in the hands of Providence. Who can tell how often or when they will fall?’

‘Answer this, then,’ said Brigit. ‘Why do you come here to call me by absurd titles and talk about my birth-right, when I do not yet know whether my husband’s body has been recovered and received burial?’

‘I feared to revive a painful subject. His body has not been found, but every rite that is customary in such cases will be observed!’

‘I believe that he was murdered.’

‘You have his own letter, Madame.’

‘It might be a forgery.’

‘These are romantic fears. Villainy is only common in story-books. Who, pray—except himself—would wish to murder Mr Parflete—a gentleman always described as his own enemy? Suicide was but the final step in a long career devoted to self-injury.’

‘I know him and I deny it. There has been foul play somewhere.’

‘To a pious mind—such a suspicion is, in reality, a hope. Do you ask me to argue down the first instincts of a true affection? I will not attempt it. For your sake, I could wish that he had been killed by other hands than his own. Let me confess that I have even tried to think so. You might then take some consolation in revenge. But what then? He is still dead, and you are his widow—a girl in years, alone in the world, yet, by the mercy of

God, not unprovided for. The Archduke has left you a fortune—half a million of marks, the Villa Miraflores in Northern France, and a large sum for the purchase of an estate—preferably in England. Madame should have some fixed *home*. Plants and trees may be trained for transplantation from place to place, but they do not acquire a perfect form. They take no root and they remain—until they fade—mere *appearances*. Madame will not be happy nor truly mistress of herself till she is settled in her own establishment.'

To weigh other minds by our own is the false scale by which the greater number of us miscalculate all human actions and most human characters. Mudara had regained his normal smoothness, and he was anxious to try less direct appeals to Brigit's vanity than those he had so unsuccessfully essayed at the beginning of their interview. Strangely enough, it was his own cherished—and singular—ambition to be the owner of vast private lands. For modern Kings and Princes he had a genuine contempt—they seemed to him as so many hired officials. But he envied his rich colleague the Baron Zeuill, who owned great districts and was, in fact, an absolute ruler over his own domains.

It occurred to him, therefore, that Brigit, at the sudden revelation of her wealth, would be led inevitably into the betrayal—either by exclamation, look, tone, or manner, of some ruling sentiment.

‘My poor father!’ she said, able to command her tears but not her sorrow. ‘I need so little. Was my mother’s miniature buried with him?’

Mudara, thrown from his hope, still kept his purpose.

‘Ah,’ he exclaimed, ‘if your mother were living, would she not rejoice to see you come at last into your just honours? *Specie tua et pulchritudine tua intende, prospere procede, et regna. Propter veritatem, et mansuetudinem et justitiam . . . et deducet te mirabiliter dextera tua. Audi filia, et vide, et inclina aurem tuam.*’\*

This profanity but strengthened her distrust.

‘Your mind runs so much on my royal honours,’ she said, ‘that I could almost think that you believe in them! I have none. A Prince must reign either by Divine Right, or by the right of conquest, or by the unanimous will of his subjects. The Divine Right is now laughed at. The right of conquest, in my case, is too absurd to be discussed. And as I am unknown in Alberia and my very existence unimagined, the unanimous wish of my subjects could not come into the question.’

‘You seem, Madame, to have given some thought to the matter.’

\* ‘In thy comeliness and thy beauty, go forward, fare prosperously and reign. Because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness . . . and thy right hand shall lead thee wonderfully. Hearken, O daughter, and consider and incline thine ear.’—Psalm xlv.—The Roman Breviary. Translated from the Latin by John, Marquess of Bute.

'Naturally,' she replied, 'for, why not? I have not less ambition than other women. You mistake me altogether if you think I have no love of a great position. As for responsibilities—they are inspiring. I have youth and strength and health. I would like well to be acknowledged my father's lawful daughter. Perhaps too well. Who can say? But it is more pleasing to God that I should remain in a private station. And His Will is my happiness. What ought He to have done for me, that He has not done?'

'This is fatalism. It comes strangely from one who would have given her life for the claims of Don Carlos.'

'My conduct in each case had but one motive.'

'And that?'

'Obedience,' she answered, quietly.

'To whom?'

'To my superiors. Don Carlos is the true King of Spain. You are, I fear, among the scoffers who see in the disasters of the vanquished the condemnation of their cause. But those who know by what struggles and sacrifices, by what tears and blood, all victories of justice are purchased—those who know this—keep their faith above the bitterest reverses and discouragements. The Carlists have right on their side, and some day, they must conquer.'

'Optimist!'

'As for me,' she continued, 'I have no cause at all.'

My father's first marriage was unwise and unequal. There are higher duties than love. My mother was an actress—what had she to do with Archdukes? Surely true pride consists in knowing one's own order and abiding by it. She did know it. She neither thought herself nor desired to be thought a great lady. She craved no title. Her Baptismal name—*Henriette-Marie-Joseph*—that, and no more, is written on her grave-stone. In the Court of the King of Kings, there is rank, but not as the world sees it. If I am found worthy to stand even within reach of her—I shall know then that I have, indeed, kept my birth-right. That is my answer to Baron Zeuill—to you.'

'Very well. This is your promise for the moment. But would you pledge yourself to that past all retreat? Don John of Austria was the natural son of Charles V. and a washerwoman. Yet he became a great Prince. He had no foolish scruples.'

'Do you think my scruples foolish?'

'I will own, without any gasconade, that I had rather see you less reasonable. It is in ordinary moments and during peace that one should show prudence and forethought. But this is a time for impulse, impetuosity, reckless courage—fire! To be candid, I detect in all you say, the influence of M. de Hausée.'

She coloured deeply and made no response.

'M. de Hausée,' he continued, pressing what he

supposed was his first considerable advantage. 'M. de Hausée is an aristocrat of aristocrats. He has the fanatical faith and all the prejudices of the ancient Catholic nobility. His father—Henri Dominique, Count de Hausée, as you may be aware, renounced his rank, and exchanged the military for the ecclesiastical profession! We know the rest. A wild love, broken vows, remorse, and penances—the most severe. M. Robert de Hausée has inherited the priestly nature. His life is spent in moral combats. He is not like these other youths who go into Parliament without any political training and without any decided resolution—unless to make a speech and to become distinguished! In order to win others, he has resolved to conquer, first, himself! He will have to triumph over many public adversaries. Meanwhile, his face is pale with fasts and secret struggles. As I looked upon him, I dropped my eyes in pity and respect. I said to myself—"It is a good Catholic—firm in faith and righteous in action. He will have no hope—except the hope of Heaven. He will love no woman except with the love of charity." But there is another passion in life—as strong and more enduring than the others. I mean the love of domination. This he keeps. He will win souls for God. He rules yours.'

She listened calmly. When he had finished, she made the following reply,—

'I have never discussed the question of my birth with M. de Hausée. He would not attempt to in-

fluence me in the conduct of my private affairs. We know each other, in one sense, but distantly. I admire his fine character. I should value his advice on any subject. It is a sincere pleasure to me to hear him praised. My husband held him in the highest esteem. Have you anything further to say to me ?'

Her self-possession commended Mudara's allegiance. Innocence, integrity or unselfishness were beyond his imagination, but this delicate girl of seventeen struck him, at last, as a marvel of coldness and cunning. He owned that the further details of his business would be communicated by letter. He begged, however, to be told whether she intended to remain in England. Her answer astonished him. She was going, she said, as soon as she could travel, to the Convent at Tours. This was the last thing he desired. Her large fortune would be found equally dangerous whether consecrated to the service of God, or squandered on Royalist politics.

'As M. de Hausée is an old friend,' he said, 'you will, no doubt, allow him, when you fix your date of departure, to arrange the details of your journey. Perhaps he is here to-day for that purpose.'

'I will not trouble him. He is in Scotland with Lord Wight.'

'Pardon me. I have this moment left him. He is with Lady Fitz Rewes.'

Brigit lifted her hand to her veil in such a way that Mudara was unable to enjoy the first success of this

news. He could obtain no sight of the change which his words had produced on her countenance. But he saw, or fancied that he saw, her whole figure tremble.

'This is a great act of kindness on the part of M de Hausée,' she said, after a short silence. 'I hope they told him that I was better.'

'Will you not see him?' asked Mudara.

'That,' she answered, at once, 'would be unnecessary at present. He would not expect it.'

She stood up. Mudara felt bound to take his leave. In going, however, he stole a glance backwards. She had resumed her seat and had re-opened the Breviary. Above the stillness, he heard her whispering words he had himself recited often,—

*'Levavi oculos meos in montes, unde veniet auxilium mihi. Auxilium meum a Domino, qui fecit cœlum et terram. Non det in commotionem pedem tuum : neque dormitet qui custodit te.'* ('I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains from whence help shall come to me. My help is from the Lord, who made Heaven and earth. May He not suffer thy foot to be moved : neither let Him slumber that keepeth thee.')

Mudara, however, had by no means exhausted all his resources. The reader, knowing that Mrs Parflete had no guilty passion to conceal and no dark purpose to cover, will find nothing indicative of a

\* Douay Version. See also the Roman Breviary translated out of Latin into English by John, Marquess of Bute.



devilish deceit in the simple words she had used during the scene we have described. But truth will often produce, on insincere hearers, all the effects of a lie. The mirror must itself be clear before it can reflect correctly a fair object. Mudara, incapable of honesty, had never yet found his match among scoundrels. He could lead them from falsehood to falsehood till they perished in ridicule. But before the accent of candour he stood bewildered, irritable, impotent. He taxed his cleverness in explaining the phenomenon. He could even find the generosity to own himself fairly out-witted. And by what? The mere force of innocence? No: by superior treachery.\* He saw, even in the wavering

\* As an illustration of this, the following fragment from his letter to Baron Zeuill, may be quoted:—"At the news of De Hausée's presence in Catesby, Madame's sullen indifference gave place to an ungovernable agitation. She was so altered that I would not have known her for the same woman. But all this was outward. What did our Judith say? You will scarcely believe me when I tell you. "This is a great act of kindness on the part of M. de Hausée. Pray thank him. It will not be necessary to see him." Such audacity deserves to succeed. Of course, they are in secret communication. I find much to detest in her, but, on my honour, more to admire. Her self-recollection never fails. She has an answer cut-and-dried for every question. She would as soon die as live, or live as die. She knows no fear but the fear of God. "Her sandals ravish the eyes, her beauty makes the soul a captive, with a sword she will cut off your head." De Hausée is the ascetic to master her. You are wrong, every one, about Castrillon. He is too pretty and sensual for such a termagant. Our one hope is De Hausée. All his interests are in England. He has been elected a Member of Parliament. Disraeli is disposed to favour him. And Disraeli knows how to control an enthusiast. She must marry De Hausée. But he, too, is a furtive character. Prim believes that he is, at the very least, a deacon. I hope to God, not.

colour of Brigit's cheeks, the elaborate art of a consummate actress. Such coolness, he thought, could be the effect only of a long training for some especial mission. The Church of Rome had ever shown an extraordinary genius in choosing, educating, and controlling her servants. This girl had the blood of the Carolingians and the beauty of a child of love. She had been instructed in that exercise of self-mastery which the Catholic faith alone seems able to teach. She was endowed by nature with the power of winning hearts, and, by her father's will, she had inherited a princely fortune to support her inclinations. Such a being, surely, was no mean prize for the net of any faction in society. Mudara had called her a Judith. But the spell of Judith, he reflected, had rested not less in her reputation for virtue than in her bodily fairness. He saw at last, that, unless discredit and substantial scandal could be cast on his ward's character, she would remain, till the end of her days, a living power among the very forces he was most eager to see damaged. As he considered his plan of action, he decided that, in the simple nature of Lady Fitz Rewes, he would find perhaps the most useful instrument for his scheme. She exerted an influence—the more cogent because it was unintended—over Brigit and also over De Hausée.

Pensée and Robert were still waiting where Mudara had left them. At the first sound of his returning steps, they both went forward to meet him. His

implacable countenance could neither betray the sentiments he felt, nor assume those which he did not feel. But with an admirable manner, he assured Lady Fitz Rewes that her friend was, if sorrowful, most prudent, and if ill, on a sure way to recovery. Orange did not speak. The three returned to the Hall in silence. It was not until they reached the open windows of the morning-room that Mudara found an opportunity to beg his hostess for the favour of a private interview. A look passed between them. He managed to throw a significant glance at Robert. She understood. She bowed her head. A few minutes later, as she stooped to admire a rose-bush, she said,—

‘You must both remain to dinner.’

Orange, she knew, was obliged to return that evening to London. The carriage which was to take him to the station stood, even at that moment, before the door. She showed, therefore, no astonishment when he declined, with deep regret, her invitation. But Mudara, to her affected surprise, expressed the pleasure he would have in availing himself of her kindness. He had, he said, some important letters to write. Her farewell to Robert was cold. She felt a sudden terror lest Mudara should divine her secret—that poor, sad secret, her love for her uncle’s Secretary. The Agent’s eyes were piercing and pitiless. They devoured, with cynical hunger, the very tissue of her soul. He would never understand friendship or . . . devotion . . . or . . . about Lionel.

‘Good-bye, Mr Orange,’ she said ‘I suppose we shall see you sometimes, in the Spring—when I come to town.’

There was thus nothing left for him save to make his adieus, and depart with the best grace he could exhibit. He concealed his reluctance, his consternation, his distrust. For a cruel instant, he had been pierced by the suspicion that Lady Fitz Rewes was playing him false. But a generous mind will always resent, as a base temptation, any doubt of a tried friend’s fidelity. Robert would not look again at her face. He remembered her as she always seemed when they were alone. He bowed, he touched her shrinking hand, and he was gone.

Lady Fitz Rewes beckoned to Mudara and led the way into the large saloon from the windows of which he had made his first intrusion on to the lawn. It was a stately room furnished in the style associated with the reign of Queen Anne.

‘And now,’ said Pensée, summoning up her haughtiest air, ‘what is your business?’

Mudara put the matter briefly. Mrs Parflete, he said, had been left with ample means but in a dangerous position. She had no relatives. Her heroic nature exposed her to the machinations of every religious or political fanatic. Spain was in a state of revolution. France, under the surface, was a witches’ cauldron. Italy was no better. For a lady so young, beautiful and wealthy as Madame his ward,

England was the safest—the one—refuge. But she needed a lawful protector. To be plain, she ought to marry. She was, of course, too high-minded to display a marked preference for any particular gentleman in the large circle of her respectful admirers. M. de Hausée, however—'

'The very man of all others who would deserve her,' exclaimed Lady Fitz Rewes, seizing the excuse to seem disinterested.

'Then why not bring them to their senses? They might be married privately. The fact need not yet be made public. But I must feel that she has a defender. The marriage with Parflete was an atrocious—a calamitous—mistake. It broke the Archduke's heart. We must make her happy this time.'

'We must make two people happy,' said Pensée. 'But you will see that the subject is very delicate. How can one interfere?'

'Bring them together.'

'He has gone to Scotland.'

'Follow him to Scotland. Insist that she needs the air.'

'That might be managed, certainly.'

'Manage it.'

'I will do my best. I really feel sure that you are right. There is no time to be lost.'

'None. But one word—don't let her suspect that she will meet M. de Hausée in Scotland. She is naturally elusive. Use all your discretion.'

'I will.

'Thank you. Then I need not trespass further on your time. I will not stay to dinner.'

He kissed her hand. She rang the bell, and he bowed himself out, by no means dissatisfied with his day's work.

## CHAPTER XXV

ROBERT, as we have seen, had told himself that he had perfect faith in Pensée's loyalty. Yet he could, without injustice, feel small confidence in her wisdom. Hesitation, where he was once resolved, had no part in his character. He dismissed the phaeton before he had driven half-a-mile. He told the coachman he preferred to walk. He did walk, but not in the direction of the town. Plunging into the plantations, he ran back unobserved, swiftly, lightly, to the thick wood by the ruins of Catesby Church. From this he made his way down to the Lady Chapel. The door stood open. He entered, fearing horribly that he would find it empty. But she was there.

'Brigit!'

'Robert!'

'Have I frightened you?'

'No. I knew you were coming.'

'Why?'

'Because you always come when I ask our Blessed Lady to send you.'

'Then this is a miracle.'

'What else? Where shall we go?'

‘Will you come with me?’

‘Of course.’

‘But away from this place—to London?’

‘I trust you in all things.’

‘Can you run?’

‘Like the wind.’

‘Then give me your hand’

‘Put my Breviary in your pocket. Yes, you may kiss it first. It’s a blessed book. It belonged to a Saint. She wasn’t canonised. Now wait till I take a long breath. Oh, Robert! I love to see you. But—are we to run to London?’

‘No, angel, we must take a train.’

‘I am ready. Where shall we go when we get to London?’

‘I will take you to your Convent.’

She clapped her hands:

‘But, dear Pensée? What will she think?’

‘All is fair in war and—’

‘Yes,’ she said, hastily, with a blush. ‘Mudara means war. I will write Pensée a letter. That will do. Which hand will you have?’

‘The left. Follow me.’

They hastened out and ran—for their lives—not towards Catesby, but, at Brigit’s suggestion, towards Cottingden, a village farther inland where they might hire a carriage and drive to the county town.

‘There,’ she panted, ‘we can catch the London express.’



Darkness was fast approaching. They could see, in the distance, the yachts at anchor off Catesby Harbour — their lights burning brightly like large stars fallen from the firmament above. The hills around, soft with a purple bloom, seemed like the spread pinions of a winged host. A rich, Autumnal breeze — as strong as wine, as pure as sheaves of wheat, swept through the silvery poplars and sent the white-owl, screeching, to his mate. But the owl's scream had no terror for the blissful fugitives.

Once they paused to rest.

'I feared for your safety,' said Robert. 'Hereafter, I will take care of you myself.'

She blushed and said nothing.

'And then,' he added, half-laughing, 'I think I must kill a few people.'

She showed pleasure but observed, gravely, —

'You must not affront God. I am afraid duels are wicked.'

'No, no. Don't say so.'

'You might be wounded.'

'That decides me. Do you think I am a worse swordsman than Castrillon?'

'Dear Robert! . . . Did you ever see a lovelier cloud? The earth is very beautiful.'

'Perfect. . . But Castrillon's fencing is nothing remarkable. Besides, it is not a question of skill. It is a question of honour. You must see that.'

'I see you.'

He looked at her, wistfully.

‘I wish you didn’t,’ said he.

‘But you are quite handsome again. You are, truly. I should say—even handsomer.’

‘Dearest, I think we ought to go on.’

‘This is a happy time, Robert. Let us remember this place always.’

They resumed their journey and reached Cottingden at half-past eight. There Robert hired a carriage, and, as Brigit stepped into it, she said,—

‘Dear Pensée! She has been so kind to me. I wish I could write to her now. But I suppose I must wait till I get to London.’

The village was a little cluster of white houses scattered round a ditch and a green.

‘What a charming place!’ exclaimed Brigit, as they drove rapidly away. ‘I could stay there for ever.’

‘So could I,’ said he, not troubling to look back.

‘With you—of course—’ she added.

‘Of course, with you,’ he said.

‘Don’t you miss,’ she said, suddenly, ‘the little shrines and crosses by the road-side? I have not seen one in England. Let us come here some day, and buy a piece of land, and build an altar to our Blessed Lady.’

This, unhappily, reminded him that he was poor. But he had courage.

‘I shall hope, please God,’ said he, ‘to build many—that is, in time.’

‘If I fall asleep, will you wake me up? I have not slept well for a long time I used to feel frightened. But now you are with me, and everything is different. Shall we say the Rosary? You begin—’

When it came to her turn to reply, she could just murmur—‘*Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostræ. Amen.*’

‘*Ave Maria,*’ said he, ‘*gratia plena : Dominus tecum : benedicta tu. . .*’ He whispered the rest. For the weary girl had sunk into a deep slumber. Her head rested against the side of the carriage. Her hands still clasped her Rosary. Her little feet, touching each other, were almost concealed by her long skirt. It is during sleep that the human countenance will show its likeness to the soul. Lines become luminous, and the tranquil features yield the secret of their training. Watch a man, or a woman, sleeping, and it will be your fault, not Nature’s, if you are deceived. Brigit’s face in repose had the innocence one sees rarely—even in young children. Her mouth showed sadness and a certain self-repression. The delicate cheeks were perhaps too hollow for perfect health. Their flush had a brilliancy too rare. As Robert watched her, his heart suffered that strange agony which attends all intense affection. To love is to know the sacrifices which eternity exacts from life.

‘Brigit!’ he said, in sudden terror. ‘Brigit!’

He had forgotten the sound of her voice. Her

words came back to him, but their tone—the lovely, rippling tone full of melody and pathos—was not to be recalled. What if he should never hear it again?

‘Brigit!’

She opened her eyes, smiled and said,—

‘Is this the station?’

‘No,’ said he, ‘but—I wanted to hear you speak.’

‘Dear Robert! Men are like children.’

Her hand stole into his.

‘Try and sleep, too,’ she said: ‘I will tell you my little story about the pigeon. Once upon a time there was a holy woman who— Or shall I sing?’

But she was too drowsy. The song slept on her lips.

Her head sank back against the carriage and a silent sadness weighed once more upon her eyelids. Presently he heard her sob, and saw tears stealing down her cheeks.

‘Mon pauvre père est mort,’ she murmured, ‘priez pour lui. Il est mort à la pointe du jour. Il me parlait, puis il parlait aux anges. Priez pour lui.’

Again, Robert called her. This time she woke fully.

‘Oh, Robert!’ she said, ‘what was I saying in my sleep?’

‘You said,’ he answered, ‘mon pauvre père est mort. Priez pour lui. Il est mort à la pointe du jour. Il me parlait, puis il parlait aux anges. Priez pour lui.’

‘Was that all?’

‘All.’

‘My mother, long ago, taught me that,’ she said. ‘It always makes me cry. But you are sure I said nothing else?’

‘Quite sure.’

She drew her veil closer, hesitated for a moment, and then said,—

‘Promise me never to ask any questions about my father. Because I may not answer them.’

‘Dearest, I know the story. Your husband told me, long ago, when we first met.’

‘Then *he* knew? I never guessed that.’

Those who have substituted emotions of the blood for emotions of the soul could never understand the anguish of disappointed trust. Brigit was finding, one by one, the many links of Parflete’s treachery. It seemed as though that harassing chain would hang for ever on her life.

‘I thought it was a secret,’ said the poor child: ‘I promised my father that I would never tell. Perhaps my husband made no promise. . . . At any rate, I must not have hard and miserable feelings about him. The issue of things is known to our Blessed Lord. I am going through what must be gone through. But I think no one ever had such kind friends as I have. I am even thankful, in one way, that Wrexham told you the story. I have never wished there should be any reserve between us—it is most repugnant to my nature to conceal things.’

'That is why I thought it better to let you know that you could speak openly with me.'

'Thank you. It has always been a great burden on my mind. Now it is gone.'

She leaned forward, touched him softly, and looked up into his face.

'But there is something else,' she said.

'And that?'

'I want to write a letter to Pensée.'

The carriage stopped. They had at last reached the railway-station. Gaiety had held her court in the little town all day. The streets were lively with a laughing crowd of lads and girls returning homeward, to different parts of the country, from a gala. They pushed, and joked, and jostled each other, or enjoyed, with strained cheeks, the lingering inarticulate delight of sugar *bulls' eyes*. Others, more demure, sang in strong harsh voices 'Sweet Belle Mahone,' and 'The Gipsy's Warning,' and 'The Death of Nelson.' The crowd streamed into the building, and over the bridge to the 'Down' platform. No one noticed the two travellers bound for London.

## CHAPTER XXVI

ROBERT'S resolution, winged with thoughts of Brigit's possible danger, had never wavered. Yet he realized, that, while acts of chivalry were daily done, they were seldom indeed explained by a chivalrous method. In addition to the careful narrative we have already seen, he wrote a letter to Lord Reckage, in which he describes, with much clearness, the whole flight to town. He mentions that there were three other passengers in their compartment:—

A man, his wife, and another man, perhaps her brother. Mrs Parflete was exhausted, and slept till we reached our journey's end. The Convent, as you may remember, is some distance from Victoria. At nine, all the nuns retire to rest. Nevertheless, we drove there. It was approaching mid-night. There was not a sound, nor a light in the whole building. We rang several times. We could get no answer. Madame declared that she would sit on the door-step till the morning. But presently, I caught a pair of eyes looking out at us through the grille. Madame spoke. A woman answered.

'Sœur Marie-Agnès!' cried Madame, in an ecstasy of joy, 'ma sœur, c'est moi.'

'Tiens, tiens! C'est Madame Parflete. Tiens, tiens!'

I heard the bars drawn back. The door was opened, and I saw a fresh-faced nun half-asleep but smiling on

Madame with that ineffable *bonté de cœur* for which we have, unfortunately, no word. .

There was, I thought, a certain angelic humour in her eyes when she expressed her regret that the Convent could afford no accommodation for Monsieur. Apparently, she inferred that I was Parflete. Madame wished me good-night, and, in a moment, happy nun and weary lady had both disappeared. But Madame spoke to me through the *grille*.

'Thank you,' said she. 'I am so happy now. I shall write to Pensée to-morrow. Dear Pensée, I know she will be anxious. But I need not tell her about you.'

'Madame!' said Sœur Marie-Agnès: 'il est tard.'

'I come, ma sœur. I come.'

And that was all. . . .

What is to happen now? I leave you to imagine my anxieties. She is free. But I have never yet been able to picture her free. I have always seen her—there, and myself, miles distant and oceans below, here. Her beauty promises to be extraordinary. Think of her age? Seventeen. Does the child know her own heart? Yet the indecency of suggesting marriage at this moment! It is out of the question. I must be patient. . . . I walked home.

Foor Wight, in his dressing-gown and slippers, was waiting up for me, with a whole company of his cronies. There were old Fauconberg, and Mrs St Kentigern,\* Dean Ethbin, Valentine Vivian, and Penborough. They were discussing Disraeli. Let me give you the talk.

'What I ask myself is this—' said the Dean, looking with reverence at his own gaiters—'is the man *sincere*?'

'I know one thing,' said Mrs St Kentigern. 'The Duke of Mercia can't stand him. The Duke is going to send in his resignation to the Committee of the Capitol Club. He is simply furious. He is going abroad.'

'Where did you hear that?' asked Valentine Vivian.

'The Duchess was at my milliner's this morning. "I

\* Mrs St Kentigern was Lord Wight's half-sister—by his mother's second marriage.



want," says she, "as soon as possible, a bright-looking bonnet: such a bonnet as I could wear in Rome next month." There is proof conclusive. She has never left the Duke in her life: she is going to Italy as soon as possible: she wants a *bright-looking* bonnet. If that does not spell resignation, I don't know English.'

'Then the Duke's a bigger fool than I thought,' said Vright.

'Not at all,' said Mrs St Kentigern. 'Where is the Tory party? It is nowhere. Toryism,' she added, with a sigh of profound desolation, 'is now but the mere negation of Whiggism.'

'The landed interest will rise,' said the Dean, lifting up his voice as a ghostly comforter, 'and the monied interest—the great support of Whiggism—must decline.'

'But first,' said Penborough, 'the Reformation must take its full revenge! The Abbeys which were given as bribes to the nobility will be sold to the Railway Companies for Hotels. Every great nobleman's country-seat will become an Hotel. Since the people may not have their own with God, they will take it without Him. Where there was once an Abbot, you will soon find an obliging manager, and where there were holy monks, there shall be Swiss waiters!'

'How shocking!' said Mrs St Kentigern.

'I dread flippancy,' said the Dean. 'It is the enemy of the future. But I do not share in the new and hypochondriacal sentimentality over ruined Abbeys and the like. A Monastery was the Mediæval type of our modern Club. The obligations and duties, however, were subscribed, nominally, to God. There were rules of discipline and certain vows incumbent on each member. They lived in a comfortable house of supremely beautiful architecture. They looked out upon picturesque landscapes, and enjoyed well-filled Libraries. They could spend their time in prayer, in manual labour, in works of charity, in tending the sick, in educating, after a fashion, the young. It is notorious that many of the monks were unrivalled sportsmen. I daresay there were often good, even *sincere*, men among them. But I really

cannot see why the ruins of some old Convent should appear more sacred in our eyes than the nice clean Athenæum! I really cannot. I have small sympathy with these dismal young gentlemen who contrast romantic pictures of ancient virtue with the supposed degeneracy of our own days.'

Lord Wight, whenever I am present with him, in Protestant society, always makes it a rule to speak of politics, dogs, horses, or yachting—in order to keep the conversation free from any attacks on the Catholic faith. He became most uneasy during the Dean's harangue.

'I can't get over this news about the Duke,' he exclaimed. 'He is sometimes noisy, but generally civil.'

'I should have thought,' said Fauconberg, 'that he belonged to the world of men who are content with a social in default of a higher unity. It is always a pity to make a fuss. You don't get anywhere. You only get out of everything.'

'If one could only establish an opposition on another principle of combination than that of Whig or Tory!' sighed Mrs St Kentigern.

'I heard a fellow describe Disraeli as the vilest rag that ever fluttered on a garbage heap,' said Valentine Vivian.

The Dean clasped his hands. 'What came from the mouth of a vulgar might pass in the mind of a better man!' said he.

'I don't pretend to judge of Disraeli's politics,' said Vivian, 'but I cannot stand his novels. Does one ever hear such talk anywhere? He has been in very good society, too. He has met people. He knows the men and women we all know—in a dim, dinner-party sort of way, it is true—but still he knows them. That's the extraordinary part of the whole thing. So very odd.'

'He's an idealist,' explained Penborough, solemnly.

'I like my idealism in poetry—not when I want an hour's light reading!' said Vivian. 'It's a nuisance in a novel.'

'But Disraeli is a foreigner,' said Mrs St Kentigern;

'he is not one of ourselves, is he? Now, if I were to write a novel about English society, it would not be in the least like *Coningsby*, would it?'

We all shook our heads.

'I believe, all the same,' said Fauconberg, 'that Dizzy will be the next Prime Minister.'

This was too much for the Dean. He rose at once. It was, in fact, the signal for a general retreat. Each member of the party expressed the wish that Lord Wight would enjoy himself in Scotland. Penborough, in leaving, managed to whisper in my ear,—

'Does Dizzy know that he was born solely to provide light literature for Valentine Vivian's odd moments? . . .'

I hope some of this may amuse you. But it seemed strange to me after my long day of fierce temptations and anxiety. Yet, such is the perversity of human nature, that the scene in that close room, with Lord Wight swollen up with dropsy and Mrs St Kentigern nodding in her wig, seemed real . . . and the quiet Convent, and Madame's sweet beautiful face, and my love and my unhappiness—and all my struggles—a dream. . . . It is one thing to cherish your ideals in solitude; it is quite another thing to keep even one of them in the turmoil and twaddle of society. . . . Wight once told me that a big London dinner-party—where one met everyone and heard everything—was quite enough to upset his theology for a month. I reminded him that theology was not, perhaps, his strongest point.

'True,' said he, 'but I even forget Mary Stuart . . . and begin to think that Elizabeth and that villain Cecil were a sensible, good-natured pair, without any nonsense about 'em! So then I have to swim through Isaiah for a month or two—*afin de savoir à quoi m'en tenir*.'

I do not know whether this letter is sensible or legible. To-day (it is already morning), Lord Wight and I leave London for Slatrach Castle.

I have read this over. Miserable indeed is the fate of the double-minded. Why do I pretend that the question of marriage is, at this moment, impossible? It may be incon-

venient. But my heart is set upon it. Men attach an undue importance to this or that point in received notions of *etiquette*. We happen to be placed in an age of the world which is conspicuous for the decency of its manners. That is to say, so long as one behaves what is called 'decently,' or 'with common prudence,' one need not trouble much about higher considerations. But we are by nature what we are. We like, too, to be what we are. I don't wish to reach that stage of self-suppression when one becomes *self-less*. Till we have done something, we have done nothing, and, so long as an act is not in itself sinful, I cannot stay supinely wondering how much I may lose or gain by attempting it. The great, the sole point, is this—have I a decided wish in the matter? have I any wish at all in the matter? Almighty God has given us two whole worlds but only one Faith—millions of fellow-mortals and only Ten Commandments. Our opportunities and liberties are thus enormous. They were meant to be used. Now what is my present case? The Parflete marriage was, in reality, a solemn betrothal—nothing more. Parflete is now dead. This fact has now been established beyond dispute. Madame—a girl of seventeen—is, in *etiquette*, his widow. Custom would say, 'Wait, at all events, for a year or two.' As if patience were the one thing on earth to be remembered! At that rate I shall find obstacles for every step in life. But again. A hasty marriage reflects rather on the bride than on the bridegroom. That, I admit, is a real difficulty. Yet even this becomes slight on examination. Madame has no parents and not a relative. She is her own mistress. She is in peculiar circumstances of some danger. She needs a protector. Of course I do not deserve her. No man could deserve her. But with women, thank God, it is never a question of deserts. They are won, I think, rather by determination. I have made up my mind. I can exist, but I cannot *live*, without her. This is not a struggle for air. This is a struggle for soul and body. And I mean to stand my ground. She is impetuous, enthusiastic, superb. As for 'courting' her—one might as well try to court the North Wind. She is

'a vapour of the power of God.' And I love her. And, right or wrong, there's an end of it.

When he had finished this letter, he extinguished the lamp, and found that the room was still light, but with the morning. It was already time to dress for the journey to Scotland.

## CHAPTER XXVII

LORD WIGHT was already seated at the breakfast table when Orange joined him.

‘Poor Marion and old Ethbin and the rest are dear people,’ said his lordship, ‘but they are getting on in years, and I find them very tiresome. I am glad I didn’t ask them up to Slatrach. *Ils ont bien des misères*. Their ailments seem inexhaustible. I have as much as I can stand with my own dropsy. I won’t be bored by Valentine Vivian’s perfectly unnecessary stomach. He says he can eat nothing now but *spoon-meat*. As if that matters to me. As if it could matter to anybody—except his cook. How is Pensée?’

‘She seemed well,’ said Orange: ‘she sent you her love.’

‘And the children?’

‘I didn’t see them.’

‘What a pity! The two—with their mother—make such a pretty picture. Millais has promised to do them. But I hope,’ he added, flushing a little lest he should seem indiscreet, ‘I hope you found *Madame de Farfiète* better?’

‘Much better. I fear, however, that her illness has been a great anxiety to Lady Fitz Rewes.’

‘No! no! I feel sure she was only too happy to be of the least service to the poor young widow. But that fellow’s suicide was a very good thing. He was wholly unworthy of his wife. Pensée writes me that she is the most charming creature—indeed, distinguished in every way. Pensée is grateful for a friend—she has had so much trouble, poor darling. Fitz Rewes was such a loss. As a bachelor he won every heart, but no man’s manhood is thoroughly completed until he becomes *chef de tribu*, the head of a home.’ He threw Robert a sly, exceedingly cautious glance, to which the young man replied by blushing to the eyes.

‘Would you mind,’ he asked, ‘if I were to go by a later train to-day?’

‘Mind? It would upset everything. I must have someone to talk to the Princes.’

‘But they are both very good talkers themselves. Besides, you will have a set topic for discussion.’

‘Yes, but not all day. I cannot converse for any extravagant length of time about Don Carlos. The subject is too agitating. . . . Don’t throw me over.’

‘I will join you to-morrow.’

Lord Wight looked incredulous.

‘No you won’t,’ said he. ‘I have a presentiment that you won’t.’

Orange coloured again.

'I can't explain all the circumstances,' he answered, 'but—the chances are that—things will go on just as usual. I mean my plans for the future and so on. You might perhaps guess—'

'I hate guessing. I won't do it. It always offends people—particularly if you make a lucky hit!'

'I have no reason—no particular reason that is to say—to hope for any especial change in my life,' said Robert, now pale. 'But I shall have to speak . . . because I simply can't go on . . . wondering. That's too awful. I have always tried to feel that I was—interested—as a friend only. I didn't altogether succeed. Still, the effort was made, and I pulled myself together, and I did manage to get the upper hand. I don't know how I did it, either. Then I heard that she was free. And you would have thought that I had never struggled at all. I once had a friend who built a fine wall on his estate in order to keep back the sea. It answered for a while. But the sea was not to be conquered. It rushed in—when its time came—and the great stones went for nothing. It was soon as though they had never been. And that was my feeling when I heard of Parflete's death.'

'Very natural, too, I am sure,' said his lordship, 'and most extraordinarily *comme il faut*. If the story were known—it would do you great credit. But it was to be—I am quite certain of that. I wish you both every happiness. There could not be a marriage more



harmoniously assorted. I suppose, however, you won't be announcing the engagement for some time.'

'I have not yet spoken to her. There is no engagement.'

'That,' said the old man, smiling, 'is but a matter of the post—or do you intend to go down to Catesby again?'

Robert dropped his glance for a moment, and then looked up with his customary frankness.

'You shall know all about it,' said he, 'to-morrow.'

'I don't want you to feel that I *expect* you to tell me anything about your private affairs,' said Lord Wight. 'What has already happened in our past experience surely is enough to assure you of this.'

But his expression was dissatisfied. He arched his eye-brows, and drew up his mouth in the peculiar smile which he always assumed as an outward manifestation of Christian forbearance.

'I relied on your help, you know,' he went on, 'and that is one reason why I have asked this big party of foreigners to Slatrach. You may say that you will follow me to-morrow. But *I* say that, in the circumstances, you won't be able to do so. I was once engaged myself, and my plans have been unsettled ever since. That was forty years ago. An engagement—whether it comes to marriage or not—will change your whole life. *Il ne faut jamais penser au bonheur, cela attire le diable.* So don't make any

appointments or promises, till you have seen the lady.'

Orange sighed without replying. He was not thinking of happiness, nor was he happy. The tumult in his soul seemed a physical pain, and confused him. He felt like a wolf with a sudden gift of wings, and the struggle between the old paws on the ground, and the new pinions in the air, was like the slow rending asunder of flesh and spirit.

'I don't know what to say, I'm sure,' he said, presently.

'Of course not,' answered his lordship. 'No one ever does know what to say at such a crisis. One merely thinks. And one's friends feel for one. And everyone is very much relieved when it is all over.'

He rose from his chair and shuffled clumsily out of the room. Orange dared not offer to assist him. Lord Wight was too profound a sentimentalist not to resent any spectator of his tears. He retired alone to his study, where, with trembling fingers, he opened many books and waited to hear Robert pass through the Hall—on his way to the front-door. He did not listen long. The strong, swift foot-steps seemed to follow but too closely on his own painful tread. He heard the door opened; and a sound of the streets, of wheels, traffic, the relentless energy of a great city, came loudly for a moment. Then the door was closed with a noise that went through the whole mansion,

shaking the windows, and echoing through the desolate apartments. Youth, and blood, the pride of life and the desire of the eyes were once more outside the house, and within there was only wisdom and a great deal of disturbed dust.

Lord Wight rang the bell for his valet. Glencorbie had already departed the day before in order to prepare the Castle for its visitors.

‘Eshelby,’ said his lordship, ‘have you packed my Spanish Grammar, *Rabelais*, and *Candide*?’

‘Yes, my lord.’

‘Then take them out again. Put in *Horace*, the *Vita Nuova*, and the latest volume of Mr Froude’s disgraceful History! I will take the Spanish Grammar in my pocket, and see what I can make of it in the train. Mr Orange does not accompany us. He hopes to join us to-morrow.’

‘Yes, my lord.’

‘But I don’t think that it looks much like it at present.’

The man, who was an old and confidential servant, glanced up with a respectful reproduction of his master’s expression of countenance.

‘I am sorry for that, my lord,’ said he: ‘but no doubt Mr Orange will feel more settled before long! He hasn’t been in his bed all night. It’s my belief he keeps Vigils, my lord.’

‘Poor young man! Such a dear fellow! Of course, he finds it very lonely,’ observed Lord Wight. ‘A man

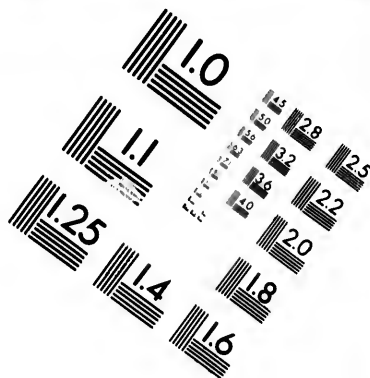
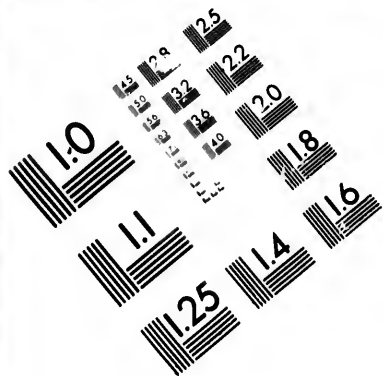
soon learns that independence is not the highest good in life. Young people like each other's society—especially of an opposite sex! It is very natural—very natural, indeed. And old people ought to like old people, but they never do. That is why every man—not a priest—should marry and have a family. Sons and daughters are so interesting. *O jeunesse! jeunesse! que je te regrette! Mais t'ai-je jamais connue?* That is French and it means, don't be morbid. . . . And . . . Eshelby.'

'Yes, my lord.'

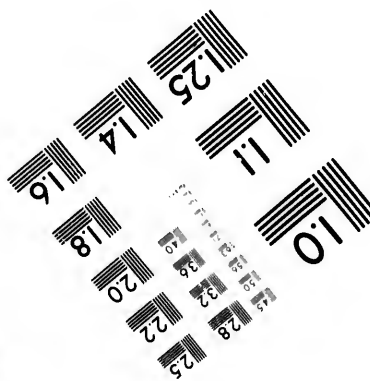
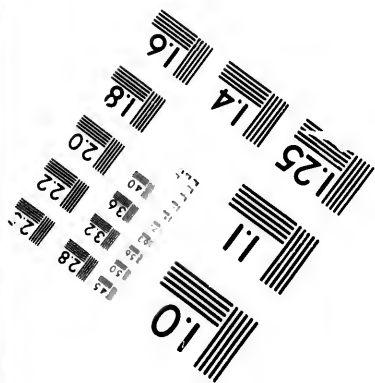
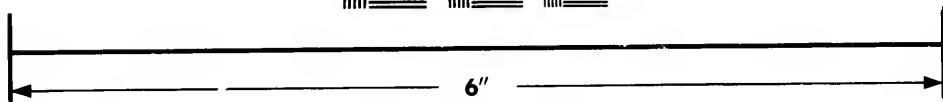
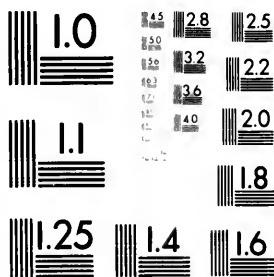
'How all this reminds me of '29 and Lady Sybil. I suppose I was quite as—agitated and—extraordinary on the night of that dinner at Madame de Lieven's?'

'Every bit, my lord. Gentlemen are all the same, my lord. So are men. Will your lordship take both hot-water bottles?'

'Both.'



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## CHAPTER XXVIII

BRIGHT, who had received a message from Robert early that morning, was waiting in the Convent parlour when he arrived.

The little room (*he wrote to Reckage*) was very quiet, but, for all its greyness, it seemed one of the stars—our own. There was an image of the Mother of God on the mantel-piece, and a large map of the Ancient World hanging on the wall. The window was cut rather high—as if for a studio. One could see the sky only, and the clouds were like white spirits set free, moving upwards through the æther. But I noticed these things later, when, on leaving, I looked back, not once, but many times. You have seen Brigit? Her loveliness now fairly catches your breath. I gaze at her and am terrified at my privilege. I fear she will vanish. She seems to vanish. Yet she comes again—the lovelier. She is still there—but only as an emblem surely :—

Werd'ich zum Augenblicke sagen :  
Verweile doch ! du bist so schön !  
Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen :  
Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn.

Now let me talk with you, if I can, quietly. If there were not another world, I would tear myself into shreds for the very first disappointment I met with, in this. I could not bear it—the humiliation, I mean. Nor the thought of death either. I would leap, of my own free will, into the depths of misery. I would say, 'Not at your time, O Nemesis, but at my time. You shall not

call me at your pleasure : you shall not hunt about for me, entice me into traps baited with happiness, find me, put me to slow torture, pour me out at your will. No : I come myself. Tear ! curse ! burn ! wound ! but I first shall have bruised my own flesh, cursed my own life, seared my own heart, spread out my own soul, like a torn rag, on your pitch-fork.' This is the proud side of the philosophy of self-mortification—the human, Pagan side. Pride says, 'I will not eat the wafers made with honey, and be sick afterwards, and perhaps be beaten into the bargain.' Pride says, 'I will teach my mouth to loathe honey, and I will myself be a beater, beating myself. What better brute ?' The mere strength of a man will declare that much—if he can love anything well enough to feel the loss of it. Some, of course, care nothing for things and persons, but are concerned only with *conditions*. They will crawl from roof to roof, and from root to root—forgetting the peach if they can find a turnip, or foregoing the turnip if they may lap up the rinsings of a sour-beer cask. But these are worms, and not men. For us—who love once as we live but once—there is, under our feet, the *soliditas Cathedræ Petri*. From this we see the other world—indeed, the greater part of the time we may be said to move in it. We may spend whole hours in the Very Presence of the Living God. He is there in perpetuity : He is to be found. He will come Himself, in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, to the heart of the least of His worshippers. It is there and then that pride, a weak force at best, becomes devotion—the mightiest of all forces. The Lord Incarnate, Who laid the foundations of the earth and shut up the sea with doors, Who commands the morning and has caused the day-spring to know his place, Who alone spreadeth out the Heavens, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death—He, the Creator of the World and its Redeemer, is Himself a Sacrifice. To know this is to know all that we need to know. But if the rest is not easy, we always feel that we are not shadows with the gift of suffering, nor chained Titans, nor petty deities, but nothing less than the sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Oh, the



splendour, the liberty of that magnificent certitude! Why do we ever forget it? Why do we sit in the ashes, counting the temporal things we have lost or may lose, when we have inherited as our birth-right all the eternal fastnesses of Heaven? You will not quarrel with these thoughts, but you may ask, why do I have them now, at this moment? You are waiting to hear a tale in another strain. I could perhaps send what you expect—yet it would not be a letter from *Me*. It would be a manufactured thing from that sham entity—the three Unities. I know the rules of effective composition—they are easily learnt. I could send you ‘a work of art’—the real thing. First, the lady—described in a sharp, cold-blooded, memorable way. Take one feature. Make much of it. Homer did the same—after his old, lucid fashion. Then the scene, lightly done. Nature then—rather heavy. Suggest orchestration—if possible. Let the lady speak—but, above all things, a short sentence. It cannot be too *banal*. *A banalité* is always *le juste mot*. Then (with a fresh ink-bottle) set the whole globe whirling for a couple of pages, and use long words—for the balance. Return to the human interest. Let yourself speak—or, preferably, merely sigh. At this tremendous point, use your sun-set for all it is worth, and, plucking it from the consuming Heavens, drag it down to the hem of the lady’s petticoat! Who does not know the obscene plan? So the dog bays the moon, and returns to his own vomit. Shall I repeat carefully what we each said, how we said it, how we looked, how we each thought we looked? Is there nothing to be kept sacred on this earth? Even Memory has its reserves. To be honest, I do not even remember what we said. Did I go forth this morning to find an experience, to tickle my soul into some utterance—some squeal, bray, or crow which I could mimic later, in words, for my bosom friend, or the public? I have to earn my bread by writing. I am a poor man—and as things look now—I shall be poorer yet. Parflete, I feel sure, has squandered every franc of Brigit’s fortune. This I don’t mind. That *dot* must have had a curse upon it. But if I were starving—I think if *she* were starving—I would never

put to paper, or repeat to any creature, for all the prizes of the earth, any account—fuller than this you know—of my own love, or of some imaginary love. I go into these things now, because they have a relevance greater than you would, at first, suppose. They are brought to my mind by the thought that I must set my wits to work at once, and produce something more profitable than a little volume of French History. I must provide a home for my future wife. Greywood will give me £200 for the *Duc de Guise*, and £1000 for a 'pretty love tale.' Well, 'many bear the thyrus, but few are inspired by the god.' I can at least do my best—keeping these two rules before me:—1. No 'portraits' of my friends. 2. No love scenes in the 'impersonal manner.'

We shall marry with as little delay as possible. She tells me that Baron Zeuill, her other trustee, should arrive in London to-day. For some reason, he is well disposed toward me. He would approve, she says, of our marriage. This being the case, he will, I hope, give his countenance to the matter, and so remove every difficulty in the way of a Special Licence. I have been to both Embassies. We must have all things in perfect order. I have every reason to trust the Baron. She took shelter in his Palace after the escape from Loadilla. To his influence with Prim, I owe my present liberty—perhaps, my life. I have not a doubt of his kindness. It is a relief unutterable to find that I can act quite openly in the matter. I detest long engagements. I could write whole volumes in folio against them. They are immoral and destroying. I hate—and I have always hated—the notion of a clandestine marriage. What does it mean? A constant ground for scandal, misunderstandings, curiosity and lies. I shall not see Brigit again till our wedding day. I have already written to Zeuill. He is expected at Claridge's this evening. I seem to feel that everything will go smoothly now, and I am not at all anxious. Have I not her promise?

This was a letter from his heart, and, in all his correspondence and writings, there is not a passage

which brings out more clearly the two ruling motives of his life. Which came first? Had he been asked, he would not have known how to answer. It was the hidden, and therefore the more powerful; it was the one of which he was the least conscious—the one he spoke of with the greatest difficulty. It was not his affection for Brigit. His volume of sonnets—*To Kalliste in Exile*—tells all the devotion of a young man deeply, most humanly, in love. But can we forget that, before he sent these sweet addresses to the adored ‘Kalliste,’ he had composed songs as impassioned, if a little less tender, ‘To Henriette,’ ‘To A——,’ ‘To Tryphena,’ ‘To Cynthia,’ and a few more? In each instance, the poet’s state appears to be carried to the extremest limit of possible versification. He is utterly in earnest. His whole being—and nothing short of it—heaven-high and hell-deep, is always irresistibly attracted toward the subject of his entreating, reproachful, bitter, or rapturous lines. Orange could never bring himself to laugh, at any time, at these early outpourings of an ardent mind quickly susceptible to the spells of beauty, grace, or purity. ‘Kalliste,’ no doubt, was the last of the goddesses—the perfect sun before which all other lights were but day-shadows of the moon. No other woman after her, could ever drive him even so far as the rhyming dictionary. Nor, it should be said, was the lady one who would have played, without a word

or two, the silent tragedy of Griselda dethroned. Yet the strongest attachment of his soul was, unquestionably, to God—to the Everlasting, to the All-Powerful. His own strength sought the Source of all Strength, his desire of truth went forth to the One Unalterable Truth. No one, and nothing, could separate him—he could not separate himself—from his innate love of God. And next to God, he loved literature, he loved books. He loved to read them, he loved to see them, to handle them. He was the born man of letters and libraries. Brigit stood apart from both of these over-mastering, yet distinct devotions. She permeated, she did not control, his existence. Her soul did not stand in his own soul's stead. They were together, but identified. When a woman is the first and chief consideration in a man's life, or when a man becomes the first and chief consideration in a woman's life—the end, in each case, will be always cruel and foolish—always an insupportable disappointment to one, or to the other, or to both.

It is true that when Robert had finished his letter, and while he was writing it, he moved in that trance of enchantment when the soul seems to be floating, like a melody, into the air. To close his eyes was to see illimitable rosy æther: to open them was to behold, in seas of bliss, worlds melting into worlds, and heavens dissolving into heavens. Mystery and vastness were around him: it was as though he

stood on the edge of the universe, and could leap—not down—but upwards into the empyrean. He recognised the ecstatic mood, and wondered, for a moment, whether it was a blessing, or a thorn, to possess a clear knowledge of one's spiritual organization. Early in life, he had shaken his mind through the Hegelian sieve, and, as a result, it was no longer a whole mass, but a collection of particles—each with a name. No one can study Hegel and remain unaltered by that discipline, or see his fellow-creatures quite as he saw them before. Orange loved madly, passionately, but he knew it. He was happy, but he knew it. He was living in a day-dream, but he knew it. And, the intoxication, the folly of all such love, such happiness, and such dreaming lies in the *not-knowing*, in the mistaking them, in the spontaneous rushing-forth to them as to the ultimate goal, and the extreme climax of all things. 'This,' you must say with the moth, 'is the final, the undying, the star of stars.' 'This,' you must say with Orpheus, 'is the last note, this is the supreme gift.' Robert could not say these things. The mellow radiance of the Autumnal sun came through his window, and fell upon the small bronze crucifix which was nailed on the wall that faced him. He knelt before it. He laid his flushed brow against the Pierced Feet. There, at all times, he could find a reprieve from all torturing self-doubts, all restless questionings. That was the Way and the Life: that was the

Abiding and Unchangeable. There was not a splinter of the Holy Cross but had proved adamant—yes—even through the ordeal of the Hegelian sieve! The young man's heart was over-whelmed. He felt a longing—a need to remain there, as he was, on his knees—not because, out of Pagan superstition, he feared to be too happy, but because his happiness would not have been happiness at all, without that Adored and Hallowing Influence.

He heard, however, quick steps outside his door, and he rose up with a sigh, as the door was thrown cautiously open, and Lord Reckage, with an air of vindictive fatigue, walked unannounced into the room. His hair and auburn beard had turned greyer. He was thinner, darker round the eyes, and paler than Orange had ever known him.

'I am thankful to find you,' said he, waving his hand to Robert and throwing himself on to the first seat—a sofa—in his way. 'I wanted to see you. There are a thousand things on my mind. In the first place, I am engaged and it is all settled. I suppose you saw the announcement in *The Post*. But that was premature.'

'I thought so. That is why I didn't write.'

'Well, it is Agnes at last! She is charming and clever. I worship her. I could say this to no one except yourself. Most men would think it a *pose*, but you understand me.'

'I congratulate you,' said Robert, stifling a doubt

of his friend's future contentment; 'I am sure you must be very happy.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Reckage, 'that is precisely what I am not! I am far from happy. But I am interested. Life for the moment interests me enormously. You know what the French poet has said: "*Rassure-toi, l'amour viendra; désolé-toi, il n'est pas l'idéal de bonheur que tu penses.*" When we ask for our daily bread, we mean our daily deceptions. The terrible irony of life is the incontestable fact that we cannot exist without a number of intoxicating illusions. They are the wine by which we defy the horrors of the slaughter-house!'

'But surely there is a certainty—or two!' said Robert, unable to resist a quiet thrust at this newest pillar of the Establishment.

'I want a practical talk—not *that*,' said Reckage. 'What's the good of going into all that now? Sometimes one must look at things from the outside. Nature is stronger than systems. And I am worried in every sort of way. Of course, Agnes and I are close friends—such friends that it would kill me if she were to marry anyone else. My people are very pleased; *her* people, I fancy, are not so delighted. They are all serious-minded, and jaw—jaw, jaw—from morning till night about one's duty. Agnes has inherited just a shade of the pulpit manner. She approaches politics from the religious point of view. Of course that's my line, and I like her to feel an intelligent interest

in my work. But you don't want your line following you everywhere—from your wife's boudoir to your heir's nursery! We shall be as happy, no doubt, as most married couples—perhaps happier than most, because I enter matrimony with clear eyes. It is a state of bondage—a deliberate chaining up of one's independence.'

Orange knew that there was an essential brutality in Reckage's composition which neither refined habits nor a polished manner could totally disguise. Perhaps he read Robert's thoughts. His sensitiveness to opinion was extreme, and he was quick to perceive meanings, or glances, when they seemed to have reference to himself.

'You think I am cold-blooded,' he said, flushing. 'I can but say this—that whenever I look at the sky, or whenever I see flowers, or whenever I enter a Church, or whenever I hear music, I remember Agnes! It would be idle to pretend that I suffer from thrills and sleeplessness. I have done with all that sort of thing—for I have made up my mind to settle down. I was very fond of'—his voice grew husky—'I was very fond of my cousin Amy. She wasn't half so pretty as this one, but she had such tact. If Amy had lived—oh, well, you know what Heine said: "*From my great sorrows, I made little songs.*" This shall be the motto for my married life. The "little songs" may, now and again, have a jarring note, but nothing worse!'



‘When will the marriage take place?’

‘Early next year—most probably.’

‘How lovely she is! You are a lucky fellow, Beau.

Reckage drew a little miniature from his pocket and surveyed it with a languid, half-grudging admiration which had something in it of vague annoyance—even animosity.

‘She *is* lovely,’ he said, ‘and of course she is much prettier than Amy was—even at her best. Poor little Amy! It is strange how differently trouble affects different people. It makes some fellows melancholy. It has made me hard.’ His eyes welled over with tears. ‘I’m a fool,’ he went on. ‘I am unstrung and tired out and everything else. But I was simply awfully fond of that one.’

He plunged his head into the sofa-cushion, and the miniature fell to the ground.

Orange picked it up. It showed the face of a young girl about one-and-twenty. Her hair was brown, brushed straight back over a cushion from the low brow, and worn (it was the fashion of that day) in a *chignon*. Her countenance, with its flower-like freshness of colour and deep grey eyes, had the health and purity which belong to an intense yet unselfish nature. A curious charm, a something irresistible, compelling yet wholly innocent, seemed to emanate even from her presentment on cold ivory.

‘She is a beautiful creature,’ said Robert.

‘She is perfect,’ groaned the bridegroom-elect. ‘I

am devoted to her. But can't you understand? I don't wish to *dénigrer* my affection for Agnes, but she isn't Amy—is she? And nothing will ever make her Amy. I know that I'm a lucky fellow. Valentine Vivian says that no one, since the Gunnings and the Sheridans, has created such a sensation as Agnes. She has had any amount of brilliant offers. I can't think why she accepted me. I dislike being a woman's ideal. It makes you feel such an unmitigated impostor. I was never Amy's ideal. She would just come in and put her arms round my neck, and say, 'I hate you!' That was so nice of her. It was the most fetching thing you ever heard. But I am not going to sit here reminding myself of Amy. It isn't fair to Agnes. Let us drop the whole subject. . . . Have you heard from Hercy lately?'

'His last letter—which I received many weeks ago—was dated from Paris.'

'Well, he is now in London, and he is worrying me to death. Half of *this*—is Hercy's fault. My nerves are all quivering. He has suddenly, without a word of warning, gone in for Art. He paints portraits. You never saw such things—blots, and smears, and a regular mess. They would make you sick. He calls them artistic. An artist's strength is to be a *fier bourgeois*—a Philistine like Velasquez or Millais. But Hercy does nothing but blether about *tones*, and *values*, and the *colours of sounds*. He says that Agnes has a pink voice, and he has

painted her voice. He has called it "*The Pink Voice.*" Everything about it is pink—except her face, and that is violet. He says that he *sees* her that way. But if people see such repellent monsters—ought they to paint them? That is not the worst, however. He has taken up with such a queer set of friends. He goes everywhere now with an unsavoury looking dog called Mandeville. Mandeville is by way of being a fiddler. And he has a wife—Flamma Mandeville—a dreadful sort of woman, a foreigner. Hercy has painted her as "*The Purple Smile.*" It looks like a Tartan plaid—with all the dyes running into each other. He is going to send it to the Academy. Papa is frantic with annoyance.'

'I have never heard of the Mandevilles. But if they are really objectionable, Hercy will soon get tired of them. So many men are degraded by their sympathies. They have any amount of aspirations and would like to fly, but they have not the courage to fly alone. So they prefer to crawl—in company. It is natural enough.'

'But you should see the three together—Swinburne and sherry at eleven o'clock in the morning, and no proper breakfast. Brahms and onions and beer and Bach at night. You know the kind of thing. I don't say that there is the least harm in their nonsense. But it is so bad for Hercy. Won't you come round with me to his Studio?'

'Has he got a Studio?'

'Rather. And he has broken Papa's heart.'

'But he may have genuine talent.'

Reckage shook his head.

'Wait,' said he, 'till you have seen *The Pink Voice*. I believe he is going mad. And if there is insanity—even latent—in our family, I must know it. Agnes's people are beginning to look a little glum already. The Bishop is not a man to take any risk, I can tell you. Of course, I don't really believe that Hercy is mad.'

'I should think not. He is brilliant. These rapid changes of mood, the disordered views, and the irregular life are characteristic of every artist whose work is a self-conscious form of autobiography. A vision so constituted that it is perpetually directed inward, egoistically, and never outward, sympathetically, tempts its possessor to produce—at every sacrifice—a certain amount of variety in his own soul. Everything depends then on the quality of the soul. But have you no mercy on youth? Hercy's heart is all right.'

'Well, be that as it may, I think he should defer his antics till I am married, and so on. Everyone hates artists in his family. Do come, and see him, and talk to him. He may listen to you.'

He paused a moment to look at his watch.

'I have to attend a Committee Meeting at six,' said he. 'We are going to jump on the Vatican

Council. . . . You know it's a real trouble to me that you cannot see the Papacy as I do. I hear on all sides what a crisis this is. All the same I always dread an Appeal to our Church. It is like a sickly person recovering. One cannot be morally sure that it can stand—yet. As a matter of fact, I don't think that religion ever has reached, or ever will get hold of, the English mind and imagination. No Englishman at any period has been able to paint either a Christ, or a Holy Family. He can work up a sacred picture for the Galleries, and he can copy the early Italians, but there is nothing spontaneous about his conceptions of Divinity. We are not a religious nation. It isn't in us. It never was in us—we were never good Catholics at our best. But'—he glanced at Robert with an air of apology—'I haven't asked you about your own affairs?'

'I was just writing to you,' said Robert, 'when you came in. I thought you were still with the Carillons.'

'No, I couldn't stand the Palace any longer. It was too much of a strain. Agnes alone is charming, and her people alone are charming. I love the old Bishop. But the whole lot of them in a bunch makes one feel rather lonely. Give me that letter. I always like your letters. That's all right. You are looking much better. Come along!'

They descended the stair-case together, arm in

arm, Reckage leaning with genuine, unconscious affection on the young man whom he liked to regard as his *protégé*.

'By-the-bye,' said he, 'I never told you how pleased I was about that Norbet Royal election. Wasn't it a lucky fluke? No one could understand it. But Disraeli has any amount of influence, one way and another.'

They took a cab, and drove toward an address in Chelsea. Reckage had regained his spirits, and he was now wondering where he would go for his honeymoon, and whether Framlingham would have a place in the next Cabinet.

It was one of those clear days in the early Autumn when the leaf, not yet fallen, still trembles, glorious in dying, on the bough: when there are rosy clouds on the russet sky, and when the songs and softness of the Summer still linger in the air.

'It is so much better out here,' exclaimed Reckage, 'everything looks different now. The Church is certainly in a wretched state, and people who think that it must rest on the multitude—not the brains—of England, are, of course, desponding. But I am going to make a straight bid for the brains! Pusey and these other fellows talked too much about sin and the soul. That bores people. Brains are the thing. A man is proud of his brains. Very few are proud of their souls. Fellows who talk about their souls are a flabby lot—as a rule. And they behave like brutes

in reality. I know there are exceptions. But what's the good of making for the Minority? That is your ambition—not mine. I met Dizzy the other morning, at Framlingham's, and managed to appear at my worst. I am sure he must have thought me a fool. I sometimes have stupid fits. But he knew who I was, and seemed curious about me.'

'I am thinking about Hercy,' said Robert, rousing himself with a start. 'I remember now that he always had a *wish* to paint. It is absurd to say that we ought to attempt nothing, but what we can do. We know not what we can do, and what we cannot, till we have tried. He may hope to find work easy. If it should prove a great deal too much for him, he will have learnt, at least, how to respect failure.'

'What an extraordinary way of looking at it! I hate failures myself. All the same I wrote Hercy as nice a letter as ever I could. But I cannot describe the kind of sickness I felt when he showed me his pictures. He is my twin-brother, and yet he could produce those awful things! I blushed for them. Why should he not try to revive the old *ἦθος* in Art? One could stand a fad of that kind. There would be some dignity about that. I am very fond of him. I would make any sacrifice for him, but this new craze will embitter every occurrence of my life.'

'Hercy seldom expects one to make a sacrifice. He wants your confidence.'

'Yes, but that's the hardest thing on earth a fellow can give him. I will try to keep myself cool; but suppose we find him with that vulgar woman! She orders him about as though he were a lady's maid—*my* brother! I can't bear to think of it. Let us get out and walk.'

They dismissed the hansom and went together along the Embankment.

'The thing beats me,' said the young man, 'it fairly beats me,' and, going the rest of the way in silence, they looked at the river where a dark barge was slowly moving westward.

The house was soon found. There was a strip of garden in front, newly planted with those full-grown trees which one may see being borne along in carts, root exposed and branches tied round with hay, for some temporary exhibition. A fountain played in the centre, the water spurting forth from a gourd held high above the head of a stone Mænad. The house door—made of oak, and glass, and ivory, and bearing Hercy's name—

*The Hon. Hercy Berenville,*

in tortured characters—stood half-open.

'His servant has probably gone out for a moment,' said Reckage, entering the narrow hall. A strong odour of pastilles and tobacco, roses and coffee, patchouli and garlic sent both men staggering backward.



'My God!' murmured his lordship.

Robert heard the sound of a melodious unknown voice, and then a shrill feminine laugh.

'The Mandevilles!' said Reckage.

A dog barked.

'Fiammetta! Fiammetta!' cried the lady, in a strong foreign accent, 'Fiammetta! do be quiet.'

The other voice grew louder, and said,—

*'Wilt Thou yet take all, Galilean? but these Thou shalt not take,  
The laurel, the palms and the pæan, the breasts of the nymphs in the brake; . . .  
And all the wings of the Loves, and all the joy before death; . . .  
Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from Thy breath.'*

'Oh, dat is ve-ree fine!' exclaimed the lady, although the yapping of Fiammetta had made much of it inaudible; 'and ve-ree true!'

Reckage, followed by Orange, advanced into the studio where Hercy was standing, on his crutch, in front of a large canvas, with his back to the door. A young man, who was evidently posing for his portrait, was reading aloud. On the divan sat a woman, with red hair, smoking a cigarette. She held a small Skye terrier in her lap, and was the first to perceive the visitors.

'O la-la!' she exclaimed, without stirring, 'Her-cee, eet ees your brother-r, and a man.'

The artist, who had been absorbed in his occupation, turned round. Blushing scarlet, he showed, certainly, more pleasure than annoyance at the surprise. But the annoyance—or was it shame?—was not the less evident.

‘Robert!’ he cried, ‘you don’t mean to say that it is old Robert? How are you? And Reckage! Sit down, old stick. How’s Agnes? I am as well as possible and I am working—most awfully hard. None of them can paint so well as I hope to paint! You may look at it—but it is all wrong.’

‘It is rather alarming, I own,’ said Reckage, in a tone of cruel contempt.

‘Beau,’ said the artist, quivering, ‘is one of those critics who think it the knowing thing to point out all the faults. Any ass can see the faults. I can see them myself! But it isn’t so bad as all that. I swear it isn’t.’

‘I like the colour so much,’ said Robert.

‘Of course. But you are a worker—you *understand*. The colour *is* all right — it’s the beastly drawing now. But that will come. The light here is very bad, especially as this picture is rather deep in tone. And the nuisance is, that whenever I have a good mood on, that infernal chimney begins to smoke. And Flamma—er—er—Mrs Mandeville, cannot be expected to sit in a cold room.’

‘The chimnee is re-alley awful,’ observed the lady.

‘Let me introduce everybody,’ said Hercy, who

now seemed on the verge of hysterical tears ; ‘ Philip, this is Orange. You know my brother. Robert, this is Mr Mandeville—er—er— What a fool I am ! I ought to have introduced you first to Mrs Mandeville. Flamma, forgive me—er—er—Flamma, this is Mr Orange.’

Flamma extended her small, unpleasant hand to both visitors. The sitter, who was a strikingly handsome young man, with a delicate sullen face and an elaborate resemblance to Alfred de Musset, stood up, came down from the dais, and immediately seated himself by his wife. He never spoke then, nor at any time during the visit.

‘ Flamma,’ said Hercy to the lady, who was pouting, ‘ Flamma, you have often heard me talk about Robert. We read his book together. You liked it so much.’

‘ Oh, yes.’

She laughed, and in so doing displayed a row of irregular, discoloured teeth. Her lips were thin, purple, and curiously withered. A dreadful *ennui* brooded in her rolling blue eyes. Her nose had the wide, disproportioned nostrils which belong to a coarse nature. She was vicious, discontented and untidy. She wore a soiled lavender silk, and an Italian sash of many brilliant hues. Her face was heavily powdered. Youth she still possessed, but it was a youth without charm and with very little innocence. Hercy looked at her with an imploring glance—the glance of a

canary to a rat. He seemed to be praying, 'Do be nice to them.' Then he picked up his brush, and made fierce strokes on the sultry background of his canvas.

'We don't want to interfere with your work, Hercy !' said his brother.

Mandeville glided back to his seat on the raised platform, and resuming his pose, a fine one, began to read that morning's newspaper.

'Shall I show them your pictures, Hercy ?' said Mrs Mandeville.

'Thank you, Flamma. That would be very kind.'

She made a little grimace at Robert and shrugged her shoulders.

'Lord Reckage always upsets him,' she whispered. 'He gets on hees nerves.'

His lordship had strolled away to the far end of the apartment and was looking at the volumes in the book-case. He had no desire to see any further examples of his brother's aberrating vision. Flamma darted a look of hatred at his back. She stared at Orange with the hunger of some starving beast. No human power could have made her a pleasant woman, or an attractive one ; she was brutal and probably treacherous. Yet she presented a picture of squalid woe past all description pitiful. As she tottered on her high heels round the room, Robert found himself following her with interest and even a curious sense

of commiseration. She had the irresistible magnetism of the wretched.

‘Her-cee,’ she said, ‘has got ree-al talent—ree-al gen-i-us. But he needs friends who have *la joie de vivre*. English people are so Northern, so Olympian, so uninspiring to his tem-per-a-ment. I know dem, and I understand gen-i-us. Have you ever heard my husband play? Eet ees mar-vellous. Wagner says that eet ees won-derful. Eet ees not a man—eet ees a spir-it. You are carried away. You cry. You laugh. You sob. You go mad. Eet ees not music. Eet ees death. Eet ees an-gu-ish! *Hé?*’

She broke into a dreadful laugh, and diving into a cupboard, produced a little canvas.

‘Dis is de best,’ said she, ‘quite—de best. Eet ees veree good. Look at eet. Eet is me.’

But Hercy sprang forward and snatched it from her hand.

‘You know that’s the worst,’ he said, his face distorted with passion. ‘I won’t have it shown. It’s a beast of a thing.’

Flamma laughed again, and yawned, and laughed.

Hercy threw down his palette with a sudden gesture of despair.

‘Who ever heard,’ he said, ‘of any man doing good work at this hour of the day? It is preposterous. And the whole idea of ‘sittings’ is absurd. You should study a face, and then paint it—all by yourself—without a soul—from memory.’

'And how lone-lee you would be, Her-cee! Eet would be awful. Poor Her-cee! You would die—quite heart brok-en. Come! let us have a ieelele game of cards.'

'Cards!' said Hercy. 'What an inspiration!' He looked like a man under sentence of death.

'But first,' said Flamma, 'won't you say good-bye to your brother? He is an-xi-ous to go.'

Reckage could not trust himself to speak. He bowed to Mandeville, he bowed to the lady, and strode out. Hercy hastened after him, and Orange, fearing a scene between the brothers, thanked Mrs Mandeville for her attention, and followed also.

'Come out into the air,' said Reckage. 'I can't stand this. Come out into the air!'

The two young men were livid with disgust and anger. Each saw in the other the embodiment of the qualities he most detested in himself. Each was at war, as it were, with his own weakness. Each beheld, in the flesh, his supposed worse nature. There was not too little—there was too much—sympathy.

'What is the matter?' said Hercy, in a tone of frigid politeness. They had reached the garden. 'I must beg you to be civil to my friends when you come to my Studio. Your manner is impossible. You have offended Mrs Mandeville.'

'I beg your pardon. She practically ordered me out of the house. She is an outrageous person. I

have never before met anything of the kind—anywhere !’

‘You have insulted a—lady for whom I have the highest respect,’ repeated Hercy, doggedly. ‘And don’t imagine any Clytemnestra business, either. It’s absolutely Platonic.’

‘You young fool! I wasn’t doubting that. I was only wondering whether it was not ridiculous. It is so vulgar. It is so revolting. It is so unspeakably fifth-rate !’

‘That will do. I don’t want to hear any more.’

‘But as a duty, I tell you that you are ruining your life.’

‘My life is my own.’

‘But you owe something to your family.’

‘I can change my name. I don’t want it. . . . And yet, I sha’n’t drop it just to please you. Everyone says that you are a prig. I wish I could get myself to believe that this was a lie. But, on the contrary, I feel it strongly.’

‘I have felt in you exactly what you feel in me.’

‘Then why don’t you leave me alone? I shall always hit back. You can depend on that, at any rate. I wish you were dead. I never wish to see your face again. I wish you were dead.’

Reckage gave him one white look, and left him.

‘He was to blame,’ said Hercy, turning to Orange. ‘I swear he was to blame. He doesn’t understand, and he won’t understand. He is most unfair to that

poor little woman. She is a spoilt child—that's all. One cannot take her seriously. I know that her manners are bad. But her mother died when she was born, and she has knocked about a good deal in rather shady society. Mandeville is very fond of her, but he is engrossed in his Music. 'That is why I go out of my way to be kind to her. Can't I try to make someone's life a little bit brighter and happier without being . . . hounded off the earth?'

He nearly wept, but with an effort he controlled himself.

'Besides,' said he, 'these people have got *perceptions*. They see what I mean even when it isn't all put exactly on the canvas. They know what I *want* to do. They treat me as though I were an artist. And I am an artist. My soul is an artist's soul.'

'I am sure of that, Hercy.'

'Then why don't Beauclerk see it? I am unable to exist without sympathy. And I love Art. I live for Art. I get tired of our uninteresting, arid, departmental set. They are only human when they want something material which they cannot have—a vacant Garter, good husbands for the poor girls, or some such damnation nonsense. Then they can show vitality enough for all Billingsgate. I despise them. I reject them. Let them call me the *Philippe Égalité* of the family. I don't care. They never understood me. I am sick of sitting on Gallery



stools copying "old masters." I want to think of beautiful things. I want to get a little of *la joie de vivre*.'

'Her-cee!' called Flamma from the window. 'Her-cee, when you come back fetch me my cloak from the hall. I am ver-ee cold. And Philip ees as-leep. He ees tired of waiting.'

'I must go,' he said, hurriedly. 'I must not forget my other guests. Good-bye, Robert.'

He shook Robert's hand, and limped back painfully toward the narrow hall where the pastilles were still burning. Once he glanced over his shoulder at his old friend.

'Art,' said he, with trembling lips, 'Art is everything . . . really.'

And he went in. And the door closed. And Flamma's dreadful laugh—like a jackal's—came out through the Studio window.

Orange, on gaining the road, found Reckage waiting for him.

'Before God, Bob,' said he, passionately, 'I can't feel that I am in the wrong. It is too bitter. Here am I, half-killing myself if the truth were known, in order to do my duty, and all that. As for youth, ain't I young? ain't I Hercy's own age? couldn't I talk this nauseating slip-slop about *la joie de vivre*, and souls? couldn't I go about amusing myself with low standard ruffians, who put no strain upon you in the way of keeping you up to the right pitch? don't I get

tired sometimes of being with thoroughly nice people? It's so easy and comfortable to let yourself drop, and be *déclassé*. It's merely rolling down a soft hill into a dung-heap. And shall I see Hercy go, and never put a finger out to stop him? Perhaps I haven't got a tactful way of setting to work, but tact or no tact, I will do my duty, please God. I shall go home—after this Committee Meeting, and write Hercy a letter that will make him sit up. Even Mandeville and his wife have a contempt for him. I saw it. *My* brother! He is an awful young fool, but he is an angel in comparison with those sodden impostors. It is too bitter!

Robert, still under the horror of Hercy's final disappearance, could think of nothing except a butterfly which he had once seen flying, like a heart's-ease on the wing, into a cage of two famishing toads. But Hercy, after all, was not a butterfly. He was a man with a soul, and an eternal destiny.

'And then those pictures,' said Reckage, 'those perfectly dreadful pictures! I can say one thing for 'em—they may be bad, but, I swear, they ain't vulgar. He paints like a gentleman.'

'He's a genius.'

'Do you think so? But we don't want any Byrons in our family. They are no good. I have a feeling now that Hercy will go out of my life for ever. This is one of those rows that never come right. And I am very fond of him. I love Hercy. He is *my*

own brother. I can't talk about it. He is done for.'

'Oh, well—as to that,' said Orange, 'surely God is still stronger than a little woman with painted eyes.'

'Oh, yes,' said Reckage. 'God . . . but . . . I am his brother. He ought to have listened to *me*.' Then, with every muscle of his face in anguish, he said that he must pull himself together for the Committee Meeting.

'And where are you going?' he asked Robert.

Robert blushed.

'I know,' said Reckage, calling a cab, 'I always forget! You are going to walk miles just to take one more look at that Convent.'

Forcing a smile, he sprang into the hansom and drove away. He meditated on the selfishness of all men in love, and recollected the headings of his Speech to the Committee:—1. The necessity for concerted action. 2. Suggestions for the founding of some Theological Society (on the lines of the Royal Society) for the discussion of matters of Faith, Doctrine, and Discipline in the Established Church. Laymen—with peculiar and admitted qualifications—to be permitted, in certain circumstances, to take part in the same. 3. A resolution to destroy, if possible, the objectionable term High Church. 4. A resolution to speak on all occasions of *The Holy English Church Catholic*—as opposed to all other heresies in England, or out of it.

And when tears started to his eyes at the remem-

branch of Hercy, he took out his note-book and drew a ground-plan for a proposed Theological Seminary to be built—at Oxford, or at Cambridge, or at York, or at Canterbury, or in London, or—up the river.

Robert, led by habit to his favourite walk, went, at a swinging pace, toward the Convent. But the undisguised despair of Hercy, and the subtler discontent of Lord Reckage, had driven every thought, except anxiety for these friends, from his mind. At every turning he seemed to see the Mandevilles. Their faces—one, with its withered youth, the other, with its silly imitation of De Musset—pursued him in the air. And, fainter than these, he saw the sweet countenance of Agnes Carillon, and the mocking eyes (not especially fine, either) of that dead, that unforgettable ‘cousin Amy.’ It is always easy to say of another’s misfortune, ‘What does it matter to me?’ or, ‘There must be these sentimental—these emotional—crises. They form the character. It is all for the best—God is Good!’ All these things are true in substance; all these things occur invariably to the wise spectator of human fates. But more than wisdom—more than the formal utterances of piety is sometimes required of us, and, while a sleepless night for your neighbour’s woe may not assist him materially in his trouble, we know that the Divine Economy permits nothing to be wasted. Every unselfish thought sends a lasting fragrance into the whole moral atmosphere

of the world. Orange was not the man to express his sympathies by those marked outward signs and injudicious words which add so often but a fresh irritation to the unhappy. It was a sympathy that worked within on his own spirit till he became—no longer the witness, but the partaker of his friend's sorrow. And so, when he reached the Convent, he almost forgot his reasons for going there. He was still with Hercy, struggling in pastilles and squalor for the realisation of the beautiful in theory. He was still with poor Reckage, who was heroically willing to offer everything to God, except his own family's *idea of God*. To this he clung insanely, with the fatal persistence of a man who has one genuine belief, and a number of opinions. He believed in the noble family of Almouth: he found it hard—even vulgar—to doubt the existence of a Divine Providence. His very desire to escape vulgarity, had, however, something vulgar in its essence. He was religious, in the way that he wished Hercy to paint, 'like a gentleman.' Robert—while he winced a little—understood and appreciated this particular taste. It made, at any-rate, for chivalry. Conscious refinement may not be wholly pleasing, but it is an incomparably better thing than grossness, whether conscious or unconscious. And then his lordship was young—not yet thirty.

'We must all get through a lot of whippings yet!' thought Robert.

There stood the Convent, solemn and invincible, with the glory of the evening sky colouring its windows, and its austere walls glistening, as if with amethysts and copper, in the sunset. It was the hour for the Rosary and Benediction, and, as Orange passed, the organ notes came sobbing through the air. He could hear the nuns' pure, almost unearthly voices singing the beautiful Litany of Loreto :—

*Rosa Mystica,  
Turris Davidica,  
Turris Eburnea,*

*Ora pro nobis.*

And again,—

*Salus infirmorum,  
Refugium peccatorum,  
Consolatrix afflictorum.*

*Ora pro nobis.*

He waited, listening till the end, pressing his Crucifix a little closer, yet almost refusing the sudden happiness of his mood, the unexpected miraculous lifting-up of his heart. He feared to be selfish, and hastened on to Wight House, hoping a little that Hercy might come in the evening, if only to weigh arguments against his brother's conduct.

He found Lady Fitz Rewes sipping tea and eating bread-and-butter in the Library. She had her little feet

on the fender : her gloves and umbrella were on the ground by the side of her chair. Her veil, or Fall, was lifted severely just to her eyebrows—showing her face, which was pale, rather sharpened, yet as charming as ever. The curls, however, were twisted up out of sight in her chignon, and she was dressed in a dark stuff gown, a dark shawl, and her gloomiest velvet bonnet.

‘I find,’ said she, as Robert entered, ‘that I have missed Uncle. But I was determined to see you. Let me give you some tea. I came all the way from Catesby. I brought my maid and my box. I was going on to Slatrach. I was, indeed. I feel that I have been treated very shabbily. I have always been told *qu’il n’y a rien de si volage* as a Frenchwoman. I can believe it. I am really angry. Last night I was frantic.’

‘I saw Brigit this morning and—’

‘No doubt. I suppose she telegraphed to both of us. But how madly she has acted ! Mudara seemed a remarkably bad sort of person, yet surely she could feel safe with me ? I cannot forgive it. She always seemed so true, so feeling, so practical.’

‘She was desperate. When I tell you all the circumstances—’

‘No circumstances can give me back my hours of agony last night. What was I to think ? I was filled with a kind of shuddering horror. I must know where I am with people. Brigit is delightful and

*dans le meilleur genre*: I liked her earnest desire of doing right. She has, too, that *don du ciel* of never being *de trop*. I didn't regard her in the least as a foreigner. She was always so thoroughly well-bred—quite English, in fact, in all her ways. And now, this!

'I think you ought to wait till you hear all the facts of the story. I am responsible for the whole thing. I—'

'And I have been so fond of her, and so kind to her.'

'An angel! But if you will only listen, and be kind a little longer. You remember your advice to me?'

'I have given you so much advice on so many subjects, Robert.'

'But your advice yesterday—about marriage.'

'Oh!'

'I have spoken to her.'

'Not already?'

'Didn't you say that all the circumstances were unusual?'

Although there was no fire, she stretched out her hands over the fire-place.

'I am so glad,' she said, at last. 'I am toothachy and tired to-day. I can't appear so pleased as I feel. Dear Robert, I am quite, quite delighted. It is the best thing. But I wish, somehow, that I could imagine you married. You always look *le moins mari que possible*. You have got an ecclesiastical, anti-



domestic air. I suppose you love her very much. Beauty is such a power, isn't it ?'

'I am afraid it is.'

'Love, I feel sure, has but one cause, and that cause is beauty. The proudest, the coldest, the sternest, the saintliest men have to submit to its influence.'

'And why not ? Are you still heretic enough to think that only the manifestations of the devil are alluring ? Has God then made nothing fair ? Can He show nothing attractive ? Is all the loveliness, and joy, and ecstasy in Babylon, and all the ugliness, and desolation, and pain in the kingdom of God ?'

'Oh, no ; I never meant that. Don't we know that Job, after his trial, was blessed by the Lord, and was given, besides seven sons and an enormous amount of cattle, three daughters ? "And in all the land," we are told, "were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job." In some creatures, therefore, beauty is clearly meant to be a blessing. Brigit is a fortunate girl. Because I believe, too, you are the sort of man who would perhaps love a woman, in the first place, for her appearance, and afterwards, when it had gone, on principle ! Lionel was the same. I hope my boy will grow up like him. He is such a darling at present, and writes the cleverest essays, full of Latin quotations. Isn't it nice for me ? And so wonderful of his governess.'

'Astonishing.'

‘You look as though you wished to ask me something.’

‘I want you to go and see Brigit.’

‘At the Convent? How interesting! But I sha’n’t go. I don’t see why I should. I am very cross with her. I am much too fond of her to forgive her so easily.’

‘In that case, I won’t urge you.’

‘It would be dear to see her, too! What is she going to be married in?’

‘Give her your advice.’

‘She wouldn’t take it. Wait till you know her! An angel, but a mule. Yet I shall miss her horribly. Who can fill up her place?’

‘Do go and see her.’

She stood up, pulled down her veil, and waited for Robert to kneel down for her gloves.

‘I know how it will be,’ she said, taking them. ‘You will both be very happy, and speak of me to each other as “that dear tiresome creature.” And I shall be expected to adore your children. And I am such a fool that I shall do it. And each time I meet you, I shall have to say, “Brigit grows lovelier every year.” And I am such a silly, that I shall say it, and think it, too. Of course, she is quite too lovely. What hair! what eyes! what a figure! Never mind. Lionel admired me. God bless you, dear Robert. You are always the same. One pours out one’s soul to you, and one tells you everything, and,

afterwards, one remembers that you have told, on your part, nothing! Lord Reckage and Berenville have mentioned that peculiarity again and again. Before I go, I have a little news for you.'

'I long to hear it.'

'Framlingham has asked me to marry him.'

'What impudence!'

'Poor old Fram! Brigit says that he simpers like a cupid on a wedding-cake. I think he would be kind.'

'You can't marry him unless you love him.'

'There you are—a Turk, like the rest. Oh, so selfish!'

'But, I ask you, could you, calling him "poor old Fram," marry him?'

'How do I know? I get very lonely. Everyone quotes the Queen. They say, "Look at the dear Queen. What a pattern!" But she is older than I am. Her children are grown up.'

'You mustn't marry Framlingham. It would be a crime.'

'A crime, Mr Jealous?'

'You are much happier as you are.'

'Yes, admiring you and Brigit. What greater joy could I ask in life? Don't get red. It is not my fault that I understand men. Even Fitz Rewes, who was the very image of King Arthur and the Prince Consort, loved three other women—besides me, pretty well. He was furious when they married

—which they very sensibly did. And he was godfather all round—which he hated. But he managed to look like an archangel when he stood at the Font. He had such control of his expression. Dear Robert, I sha'n't marry poor Fram. Don't worry about it. I hate his old barrack of a place in Shropshire. And I do so dislike the back of his head. It is maddening. And now put me in a four-wheeler. And choose the cabman carefully—some nice, steady old thing, with a happy-looking horse. You are looking very handsome, dear, but not so free from cares as I could wish. I shall be rather stiff with Brigit at first, because I am really cross. Good-bye. God bless you !'

These were her last words as she stepped into the cab. Her eyes, under the Fall, were extraordinarily bright. In driving away, she waved her hand from the window with the childish grace which characterised all her movements. Robert watched her out of sight, knowing well, that when the vehicle reached the corner, she would look forth again.

'Dear little soul !' he was thinking.

Perhaps it was a little soul, but the smallest birds may rise — though imperceptibly—to heights past human vision, to the stars.

## CHAPTER XXIX

THE year 1369, which had proved an eventful one for Orange, was fast drawing to its close. He was at that crisis in his life when young men, who are in earnest, seem a little unsociable in comparison with those genial, easy-going persons who manage, nevertheless, to disappoint their friends when life at last has to be lived rather than agreeably criticised. Few things are more pathetic than the middle-age of one who, in his youth, has enjoyed, by universal consent, a brilliant future. The actual Future comes. It gives the lie to post-prandial prophets, and 'universal consent,' always accommodating, tells reminiscences of its poor dupe's brilliant *Past*, and wonders why so charming a fellow made so little of his opportunities. Orange, for his salvation, was never what is called a popular man. His few very intimate friends loved him devotedly, yet always listened, with peculiar secret pleasure, to his detractors. He was, they would admit, rather annoying at times, a trifle over-bearing perhaps, and lamentably dogmatic. He was generous to a fault, a man without malice, forgiving injuries to

the point of insensibility, but, on matters of religious faith, or literature, as great a despot as Sir Thomas More — a man that would burn you and be beheaded himself sooner than yield an inch. Robert — ‘dear old Robert’ — was never ‘one of themselves.’ He stood with them, yet apart — a perplexing personality. Disraeli understood him, but the great difference in their respective ages and importance in the world, rendered any close companionship between the two impossible. Orange was therefore a solitary figure, and, but for Brigit, and Lady Fitz Rewes, he would have been, during his early manhood, certainly, a most unhappy one.

The night, after Pensée’s visit to Wight House, we find him writing thus to Brigit :—

I am going to compose a little book about you, dearest. I have called it, ‘*To Kalliste in Exile.*’ This is its motto :—

*Giù per lo mondo senza fine amaro,  
e per lo monte, del cui bel cacume  
gli occhi della mia Donna mi levaro ;  
e poscia per lo ciel, di lume in lume.  
ho io appreso quel che, s’io ridico,  
a molti fia savor di forte agrume ;  
e s’io al vero son timido amico,  
temo di perder vita tra coloro  
che questo tempo chiameranno antico.\**

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\* Down through the world of infinite bitterness,  
And o’er the mountain, from whose beauteous summit  
The eyes of my own Lady lifted me ;  
And afterwards through heaven, from light to light.  
I have learned that which, if I tell again,  
Will be a savour of strong herbs to many ;  
And if I be a timid friend to truth,  
I fear lest I may lose my life with those  
Who will hereafter call this time the olden.

Dante, Par. xvii. 112. Longfellow’s translation.

The book will not please me, but you will understand it, and that will be everything. You will have seen Pensée when you receive this. Your letter—describing her, the meeting, the conversation! Can I wait for the post? Yet what a pure life it is—it is like the finest string on some celestial harp. It can utter just one—very delicate, very sweet—all but inaudible note. Yet without it, all the music of one's life would suffer. What she says never matters. I hold out my hand and expect her, bird-like, to perch there. Make what you can, dear heart, of these mixed metaphors. I would take out the last, but, as it is true, I must leave it. I am interrupted. A caller. . . .

The caller was Baron Zeuill. He came himself in reply to my letter. Zeuill, though of good abilities, is of so tortuous a nature, that it is no easy matter to deal with him. He professed the greatest pleasure at our news: he repudiated, without a word from me, Mudara's insolence: he advised, in the strongest terms, our early marriage. So far as I am concerned, I have acted for what I thought the best and after the consideration of more than three days. But I confess that I am not wholly satisfied with Zeuill's manner. He is well-meaning, and, at the same time, insincere—also, disturbed in mind. He would open his mouth, seem about to speak, and then check himself. This was the rule during our interview. When he did say anything, it was always the third or fourth thought, never the first. He dwelt at some length on political matters, and expressed a hope that you would never mix in them.

'I don't care how clever a woman may be,' said he, 'so long as she keeps her knowledge to herself. The emotional sex can excite enthusiasm, but they cannot control it. The good ones are satisfied with nothing short of martyrdom, and the bad ones will give you no rest till you become an assassin.'

This was, in its way, true enough. He called Castrillon 'a vacant aristocrat,' and returning again to the subject of Mudara, he observed,—

'The personal character of that man is not such as I should willingly choose for an associate in any delicate matter. He is an apostate priest. I make no secret of my disapproval of the Roman and Greek Churches, yet I never like any one the better for leaving them—unless the Greek becomes a Roman.'

At this point, he asked me, with a strange glance, whether I had ever wished to take Holy Orders.

'The thought has often been in my mind,' I answered, 'but it has never yet seemed a distinct vocation. That is why I am a layman.'

'Surely,' said he, 'you are too philosophic to leave the solid pleasures of this abused world, and exchange manly cares for visionary burdens, responsibilities for the scourge, healthy sorrows for hysterical woes, and genuine happiness for the enervating imaginations of a starving stomach packed in a hair-shirt!'

'If the Church taught philosophy only, the Catholic Faith would not be a religion,' said I; 'but have you ever *tried* asceticism?'

'As one man to another,' said he, 'no, I have not. What makes you think so?'

'I did not think so,' I replied; 'your description of the life forbade the supposition. But devote—say a week—to the rule of the Jesuits or the Carmelites or the Dominicans, one week only, I ask for no more, and then you may be better fitted to form an opinion of the men who give—not seven days—but all their years to such discipline. Try it!'

'I have the highest regard, M. de Hausée,' said he, 'for the courage and endurance of these ascetics, yet, I repeat, I have no patience with their theories of life. Why should I make myself wretched when I am blessed with health? Why should I fast when I have an excellent digestion? Shall I correct the wisdom of Providence, and put what is orderly into complete disorder? I speak neither as a Jew nor as a Pagan, but as a critic.'

'Wait!' said I, 'you go too quickly. Ascetics, in the first place, do not make themselves wretched, nor are they



wretched in the sense you mean. A man may choose to abstain from many lawful things as a satisfaction for sins—not necessarily all his own. They may include yours, and mine, also! Again: what is needed in the service of God? weak knees, weak backs, and sickly minds? No, the ascetic must learn endurance, fortitude and self-command. He has to bring his body not to destruction, but into subjection. He must not lose his health, but perfect it. Finally, he must be as unknown, yet well-known, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as needy, yet making many rich, as having nothing, and possessing all things. This is not precisely the state of mind you just described, and, you will admit that St Paul knew more about such matters than either of us!’

‘Well, perhaps I spoke a little widely! For all that, however, what earthly lovers have suffered such misery as the saints? God, in all the prayers and colloquies of his elect, seems more capricious than any human being—now kind, now unkind, now with His disciples, now hiding the light of His countenance from them, now showering graces, and now drenching them in the waters of affliction. The *Sorrows of Werther* are nothing in comparison with the woes of Thomas à Kempis!’

‘When it has been proved,’ said I, ‘that we have the right to expect incessant happiness in any state on this earth, men may justly wonder why the virtuous have ever uttered a single lament. But, since a certain amount of suffering and impatience is, with other things, our inevitable portion, I would rather complain of the occasional silence of Almighty God than bemoan the capers of some little minx!’ (Ah, *ma bien aimée!* But you are not a little minx.)

‘The *occasional* silence of God,’ said Zeuill, smiling. ‘Have you ever heard Him, even out of the whirlwind?’

‘Often, and out of everything.’

‘To *see* God in everything—but principally in one’s self—is what your English writers call the *Higher Pantheism!* That view is a harmless vanity. But to *hear* Him in everything is but the first step to blind obedience. Humility of that kind is not harmless. It is a great danger.’

'A great force, no doubt, whereas vanity is a sort of ocean without water—a huge emptiness.'

'Make my compliments to Madame,' said he, 'and tell her that she had better marry you at once, or Holy Church will call you, and then—*Adieu, ma mie!* How jealous is religion, and how cruel!'

'Once more,' said I, 'I must disagree with you. Religion is the one thing which can keep men and women constant to their ideals, and therefore constant in their human affections. All our finest ideas of romantic chivalry are Roman Catholic. The Church which you have called both "cruel and jealous" has taught us that Marriage is a sacrament. She has ever laboured to inspire men with a reverence for women. Do we not call Holy Church herself, our Mother? Is not the Blessed Virgin our gracious advocate, *vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra?* No true Catholic husband or wife could ever fear the "influence" of Catholicism. The fears would be for the influences of all the putrid philosophy outside it.'

One would have thought that he had never heard of these things before. But he over-acted his ignorance. I am sure that there was some hidden motive in every word he uttered. This is why I repeat the conversation to you. I did not try to change the topic. I made my remarks with perfect freedom, without taking much trouble to choose the terms most pleasing to heretic ears. It was not a case of 'milk for babes,' but a time to meet intelligent impudence with the elementary truths of the penny Catechism. In regard to discussing such matters with 'critics' of Zeuill's calibre, I have invariably set my face against it, and have never consented to it, or done it, even for half-an-hour, in any instance. All that these people care about, as a rule, is the display of their own wit, and how to carry on the war against the Faith and the Holy See. They never attend to an answer with an intention to weigh it, or sufficiently to understand it, be it never so reasonable. But there is indeed, no need to convince them, for, like evil spirits, they know too well that they are at enmity with truth. I could not forget,

however, that I was under heavy obligations to the Baron. I have a real regard for him, and, in the total absence of any proofs against his sincerity, I must show the gratitude I honestly feel for the kindness he has certainly shown to both of us.

'I am acquainted with a number of Catholics,' he said, abruptly, 'but I confess you seem to have a touch of the real ecclesiastic. It is, no doubt, to some degree inherited.' (I had of course told him all I knew about my father's marriage.) 'Yet heredity does not explain all of this.'

'Do we not all live always in a triple atmosphere—the atmosphere of God, the atmosphere of Nature, and the atmosphere of humanity? Some natures may feel any one of these three influences in a predominant degree, and so we get what are called differences in temperament. One man breathes in humanity first, and God last. A second will put Nature last. A third will put Nature first. A fourth will aspire to God before all things, and all creatures. But the three atmospheres are ever with us, and make, in reality, one atmosphere. You may toil through many volumes of Metaphysic, and you will learn no higher truth than that.'

'True. It is the Ego, Cosmos, and the Absolute,' said he. 'These Germans are merely dishing up the Fathers of the Church! No sublime thing comes from the North, or from the Teutons. You get your God, your Scriptures, your inspiration, your poetry, your vital ideas from the East.'

His whole face became transfigured. It was, for the moment, really superb with an heroic contempt for the barbarians of Europe. But the mood soon passed, and, without a further word on the subject of religion, he began to talk about the final arrangements for our marriage. Wednesday next? He referred to your fortune. I am selfish enough to feel sorry—decply sorry—that you have one. I could not discuss the point at all. It was a great surprise. Let me forget it. . . . Yet why didn't you tell me, dearest? I remember now your asking me whether I disliked rich

women on principle, or from tyranny? How could I have guessed what you meant? I said, 'I dislike all rich people, because I am poor and I want to build Cathedrals!' I won't reproach you till I see you. And when I see you, I sha'n't be able to reproach you. . . . Would you believe it? I am wondering at present *how much Cathedrals cost?* And it is *your* fortune! If one could get some land in Westminster. . . . Pray for it. . . .

As you wish me to go to Slatrach, I shall do so, but for one day only, and after I have made everything right for Wednesday next. Prince Leitneritz may have some highly important news.

In due course, the Special Licence was applied for, and obtained. If Zeuill felt the least misgiving over the matter, he did not betray it. We read, in Mudara's confession, that the Baron took great pleasure in the thought that he was making 'two charming Christians innocently happy.' One thing, however, must, in common justice, be remembered. We have to rely on Mudara only for our knowledge of the miserable intrigue. It is Mudara who insists on Zeuill's original responsibility for the overtures to Parflete. It is Mudara who paints himself as over-persuaded, in the first instance, to such 'extreme measures.' There is a possibility that Zeuill was, after all, technically innocent. That is to say, he may have believed that Parflete had probably committed suicide. He may have expected some fraud, without precisely entertaining the unwelcome idea. We do know, beyond any doubt, that Zeuill was held in general respect as a man of his word: we

also know, beyond any doubt, that Mudara was a liar. The whole facts of the case will probably never come to light, but most of us may prefer to feel that the fewer scoundrels in the story, the better. The wedding day was fixed for October the 17th.

We find Robert writing to Brigit from Slatrach Castle on October 12th :—

This ruin stands on a peak above one of the many small bays of the Island of Gylen. It is protected by a natural battlement formed by the steep irregular cliffs, which, crowned with verdure on the level, present a bleak and adamant resistance to the water, or, at low tide, a perilous ascent to anyone who might attempt to scale them. The surrounding land is broken up into deep ravines and gorges, green valleys and steep hills a little higher than the Castle. Larch, fir, and spruce are to be found toward the centre of the Isle, but all along the coast it is either marsh land where the rushes grow, or wide fields of clover where the scream of the gull and the cry of the corn-crake mingle with the incessant moaning of the sea breaking itself upon the granite crags. On the night of my arrival here, the old ruin was decked in all the splendour of the sunset: lights were burning in every window of the shooting-lodge: Glencorbie and the 'household,' consisting of the cook's three sons, great giants with copper cheek-bones, were waiting to receive me.

All the foreign visitors are here, and Wight is in the midst of them talking Latin in four languages! Of all the party, I like best Don Pedro's Chaplain (a learned Dominican), and Prince Czestochowa of Poland. This young man's grandfather was taken as a hostage by the Empress Catherine of Russia. He was treated with great distinction at the Russian Court, and became the intimate companion of the young Grand-Duke Alexander, after-

wards the Emperor Alexander I. He was given, in time, an important post in the Government, but no consideration could induce him to forget the wrongs of Poland, his own country. The present Prince is an intense patriot, consumed with sympathy for Don Carlos, and well able to fight for him. Prince Leitneritz is prepared to beggar himself for the same cause. In fact, they are all enthusiasts, and they are all determined to stand for God, and the rights of the most Catholic nation in Europe. Such fine fellows are not easily crushed—even by Prims and Bismarcks. But they see great troubles ahead. Prim, they say, is plotting with Bismarck in one direction, and with the Emperor of the French in another. Prim sees that Spain can never be a Republic. He fears the Bourbons, but he would be willing to offer the Crown to Montpensier. The Emperor, however, will not have an Orleans on the Spanish throne. 'Spain,' says Prim, with his tongue in his cheek, 'cannot permit her election of a Monarch to become an international question.' He ignores England. It was the unnecessary fear of England that interfered with the marriage of Queen Isabella and Montpensier. So Prim consults with Bismarck. A Prussian shall occupy the throne of Charles V. The crown shall be offered to Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern.\* I leave you to imagine the indignation, the resentment of the Legitimists. I am thinking of the many thousand lives that must be sacrificed before this outrage can be wiped out. Wight has aged about twenty years since the news. Political troubles press upon him more heavily than personal griefs weigh on the majority of men. He has that prophetic soul rarely found in Saxons, who too often mistake a brutal callousness for vigour of spirit. . . . Dearest, it does not

\* The reader will remember that, as a matter of fact, it was the eventual nomination of this Prince which led to the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, and, indirectly, to the loss of the Temporal power of the Pope. During the war, the French troops were withdrawn from Rome, and, in the absence of this protection, Victor Emmanuel annexed the Pontifical States and its dependencies to the Constitutional Monarchy of Italy. This meant no less than 'the unlawful dispossession of an ancient and legitimate Government held for one thousand years.'

seem the moment to speak of our own happiness. The Prince of the powers of darkness is surely gathering his forces together, and the cruellest struggle this world has yet seen is still to come. Still, "who overcomes by force, hath overcome but half his foe." I never doubt the ultimate triumph of justice. Spain is indeed distressed, and yet I see in England a prosperity more dangerous. Trouble makes friends: insolence makes enemies. And what a noisy, barbaric sham insolence it is! The men who struggle for the public good die—either in battle or from over-work, while the sharks, adventurers, and drones share in the results of victory without having to pay for it, either in blood or by labour. Don Pedro asked poor Wight whether he saw all the English newspapers. 'No,' said he, 'Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* gives the safer information! The daily papers are written to keep the public misinformed on every point. I merely read them now and again in order to learn the current Lie!' . . . It is vain to hope that the British Government will take an active interest in all these troubles. England associates Spain with the wrecked Armada, and France with the downfall of Napoleon—who was not French! We have not had a statesman since Bolingbroke who understood either of these great nations. And Bolingbroke? What was he at his best? A mind attached to a flunky. I long to see you. It is four o'clock in the morning, very cold, and the sea seems to be crawling over the land in search of prey. At five I leave for London. . . . Oh, dear and beautiful, heart of my life, are you mine? . . .

Robert was married to Mrs Parflete on October 17th, 1869. The marriage, as the reader knows, was not legal, for, while it was believed that the lady was a widow, Parflete was still living. Infinite sorrow came, in after years, from that hasty step. But in 1869, Brigit was seventeen and Robert just eight-and-twenty. Haste, in those days, seemed slowness.

Lady Fitz Rewes and Lord Reckage were present at the fatal ceremony.

'*Everyone,*' wrote Pensée to her uncle, 'was joyous. The bride was a vision of loveliness. She is so tall and white and angelic. Robert was dreadfully pale, but entranced. I cried bitterly. It was so touching, and different from all other things of the kind one has ever seen. It would have made a picture. But no paint could express Brigit's whiteness and golden-ness. You think of a lily in the sun, and then—that isn't it. God bless them both.'

Lord Wight read this as he sat on the cliff at Slatrach looking out at the sea. Don Pedro's Chaplain, the old learned Dominican, stood by him.

'And where has De Hausée taken his bride?' asked the old priest.

'To the Villa Miraflores,' answered the old bachelor.

'Where is that?'

'It is near an ancient fortress, on a great rock on the Northern coast of France.'

'Well,' said the Dominican, 'we have rocks and the sea here.'

'Oh, yes,' answered Lord Wight, 'we have rocks and the sea—'

'And the sky,' added the priest, 'and Almighty God.'

He looked up as he spoke to the heavens, where the sun was not silent.



'True. But,' said Lord Wight, looking with a sigh at the grim ruins of Slatrach, 'we have not the Villa Miraflores.' . . .

'Well,' said the old priest, serenely: 'they are as happy as we are, *mon fils!* For there, too, at Miraflores, is Almighty God!'

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