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THE ROMANCE

OF A

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

OCTAVE FEUILLET

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY MOUCHOT, ENGRAVED BY MÉAULLE

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Sursum corda !

PARIS, *April 20th*, 185—.

THIS is the second evening that I have spent in this wretched room, looking gloomily at the empty fireplace, listening mechanically to the monotonous buzz and rolling of wheels in the street, and feeling myself, in the midst of this great city, more lonely, more deserted, and nearer to despair than the shipwrecked sailor shivering in mid-ocean on his broken plank. Enough of this weakness! I

will look my destiny in the face, to rob it of its spectral air; I will also open my heart, which is overflowing with grief, to the sole confidant whose pity cannot be an insult—to that pale and last-remaining friend who looks upon me from my mirror. I will therefore write down my thoughts and my life, not with a daily and childish precision, but without any important omission, and, above all, without falsehood. I shall love this journal: it will be as it were a brotherly echo to cheat my loneliness; it will furnish me at the same time with a kind of second conscience, warning me to allow no trait to imprint itself upon my life which my own hand cannot steadily delineate.

I now seek in the past, with a sorrowful eagerness, for all those facts and incidents which should long ago have enlightened me, had not my eyes been closed to an illumination by filial respect, by custom, and the indifference of indolent happiness. The constant deep melancholy of my mother is now explained; I understand, too, her distaste for society; and that simple and unchanging dress of hers, which was the object sometimes of my father's sarcasms, sometimes of his anger: "You look like a servant," he would say.

I could not disguise from myself that our domestic life was at times disturbed by quarrels of a more important nature; but I was never an eye-witness of them. The angry and imperious tones of my father, the murmurs of a voice apparently entreating, stifled sobs, this was all I could hear of them. I attributed these storms to violent and ineffectual attempts to bring back my mother's inclination for the elegant and stirring life which she had loved as much as a good woman can, but into which she no longer followed my father, save with a dislike which every day

made more determined. It was seldom that after these scenes my father did not hasten to buy some costly trinket, which my mother would find under her serviette on sitting down to table, and which she never wore. One day in mid-winter, she received from Paris a large case of exotics; she thanked my father warmly, but as soon as he had left her room, I saw her slightly shrug her shoulders and cast towards heaven a look of hopeless despair.

During my childhood and early youth, I had great respect for my father, but little enough of affection. Through the whole of that time I knew, in fact, only the dark side of his character—the only side which displayed itself in private life, for which my father was not made. Later, when my age allowed me to go with him into society, I was astonished and delighted to find in him a characteristic of which I had no suspicion. It seemed as if within the inclosure of our old family chateau, he felt himself under the weight of some fatal enchantment; scarcely was he beyond the gates, when I saw his brow grow clear, and his chest expand—he grew young again. "Come, Maxime," he would cry, "now for a gallop!" And we flew gaily over the ground. At those times he had shouts of boyish joy, an enthusiastic bearing, a nimble fancy, and a flow of feeling which charmed my young heart, and of which I would but too gladly have brought something back to my poor mother, forgotten in her corner. It was then I began to love my father; and my tenderness for him was increased by real admiration, when I saw him in all the festivities of worldly life, in the hunting-field, at races, balls, and dinners, bringing out the sympathetic qualities of his brilliant nature. An admirable horseman, a dazzling converser, a skilful player,

a fearless heart, an open hand, I regarded him as a finished type of manly grace and chivalrous nobility. He used to call himself, smiling with a kind of bitterness, the last gentleman. Such was my father in society; but he was no sooner returned home, than my mother and I had before our eyes again only the restless, moody, violent old man.

My father's outbursts against so sweet and delicate a creature as my mother would certainly have been revolting to me, had they not been followed by those quick returns of tenderness, and those redoubled attentions of which I have spoken. Justified in my eyes by these tokens of repentance, my father seemed to me only a man of naturally kind feelings, but carried beyond himself at times by stubborn and systematic opposition to all his tastes and likings. I fancied my mother attacked by a sort of nervous disorder, a kind of hypochondria. My father gave me to understand as much, though always maintaining with regard to the subject a reserve which I thought very fitting.

My mother's feelings towards my father seemed to me indefinable. The looks which she fixed on him seemed at times inflamed with a strange expression of harshness; but it was only a flash, and the next moment her beautiful humid eyes, and her countenance, which had an unalterable charm, testified to nothing save tender devotion and most loving deference.

My mother was married at fifteen, and I was close on my twenty-second year when my sister, my poor Helen, came into the world. A short time after her birth, my father, issuing one morning with anxious brow from the room where my mother was languishing, made me a sign to follow him into the garden. After two or three turns

in silence, he said to me: "Maxime, your mother is growing stranger than ever!"

"She suffers so much, father!"

"Yes, no doubt; but she has a very singular fancy: she wishes that you should study law."

"Study law! How can my mother want me, at my age, with my birth and position, to go and dawdle on the benches of a school? It would be ridiculous!"

"So I think," said my father drily; "but your mother is ill, there is nothing more to say."

I was at that time a simpleton, very much inflated by my name, my youthful consequence, and little successes in society, but my heart was sound: I adored my mother,

with whom I had lived for twenty years in the closest intimacy that can bind two human souls. I ran to assure her of my obedience; and she thanked me with an inclination of the head and a sorrowful smile, at the same time bidding me kiss my sister, who was asleep on her knee.

We lived within half a league of Grenoble, so that I could go through a course of law without quitting the paternal roof. My mother informed herself day by day as to the progress of my studies, with an interest so lively and persevering, that I came to ask myself whether there was not behind this unusual attention something more than a sick woman's fancy; whether, perhaps, my father's dislike and contempt for the positive and troublesome side of life had not wrought some secret ravages in our resources, which an acquaintance with law, and a familiarity with business, might, my mother hoped, enable his son to repair. However, I could not dwell on this thought. I remembered, it is true, having heard my father complain bitterly of the disasters which our fortunes had undergone in the revolutionary times; but his complaints had long since ceased; and indeed I had never been able to avoid thinking them quite unjust, as our position with regard to property seemed to me most satisfactory. We lived, in fact, near Grenoble, in our hereditary family chateau, which was spoken of throughout the country for its grand seignorial air.

My father and I would often hunt for a whole day without leaving our own land or our own woods. Our stables were ancient and large, and always filled with valuable horses, which were my father's passion and pride. We had besides at Paris, on the Boulevard des Capucines, a handsome house, where a comfortable abode was secured

to us. Lastly, in the habitual style of our house, there was nothing to betray the shadow of pinching or contrivance. Our table, too, was always served with a particular and refined delicacy, which my father appreciated.

Meanwhile my mother's health was almost insensibly but steadily declining. A time came when that angelic disposition changed. That mouth, which—in my presence at least—had uttered none but gentle words, became bitter and attacking; every step that I took outside the chateau, drew forth sarcastic and painful remarks. My father, who was spared no more than I was, bore these attacks with a patience which seemed to me meritorious on his part; but he began to spend his time more than ever away from home, feeling, as he said, the want of ceaseless diversion and change. He always desired me to accompany him; and my love of pleasure, the impatient eagerness of my age, and, in a word, the weakness of my heart, made him find me only too ready to obey.

One day in the month of September, 185-, some races, for which my father had several horses entered, were to take place on a course at no great distance from the chateau. We started, my father and I, early in the morning, and breakfasted on the course. Towards the middle of the day, as I was galloping on the border of the race-course, so as to follow more closely the progress of the struggle, I was suddenly joined by one of our servants, who had sought me, he said, for more that half an hour; he added that my father had already returned to the chateau, where my mother sent for him, and where he begged me to follow him without delay.

"But, in Heaven's name, what is the matter?"

"I believe Madame is worse," the man replied. And I set off like a madman.

On arriving, I saw my sister at play on the grass-plot in the middle of the great courtyard, which was silent and deserted. She ran to meet me as I got down from my horse, and while embracing me, said with a mysterious air of business, and almost of joy, "The curé is come."

Still I saw no unusual excitement in the house, no sign of disorder or alarm. I hastily ascended the staircase, and was crossing the boudoir which adjoined my mother's room when the door gently opened, and my father appeared. I stopped before him: he was very pale, and his lips were trembling. "Maxime," he said, without looking at me, "your mother wants you."

I would have questioned him; but he made a sign with his hand, and hastened to a window, apparently to look out.

I entered the room. My mother was half-reclining in her easy chair, over the side of which hung one of her arms, as if nerveless. Suddenly I discerned once more on her face, now of a waxen pallor, the exquisite gentleness and delicate grace which suffering had recently banished: the angel of eternal rest was already plainly spreading his wing over that calm forehead. I fell on my knees: she half-opened her eyes, raised with difficulty her drooping head, and covered me with a long look. Then with a voice which was only an interrupted breathing, she slowly said these words: "Poor child!—I am worn out, you see—do not weep! You have neglected me a little latterly: but I was so ill-tempered!—We shall meet again, Maxime: all will be explained, my son.—I can speak no longer!—

Remind your father of what he has promised In the battle of life be strong, and forgive the weak!"

She seemed exhausted, interrupted herself for a moment, then raising her finger with an effort, and looking steadily at me, said: "Your sister!" Her death-coloured eyelids closed, then she opened them again suddenly, and stretched out her arms with a stiff and ominous gesture. I uttered a cry, my father ran in, and pressed for a long time to his breast, with heart-rending sobs, the poor corpse of a martyr.

Some weeks later, at the formal request of my father, who, he said, was only obeying the last wishes of her whose loss we wept, I left France, and began that life of wandering in the world which I have led almost to this day. In a year of absence my heart, which became more and more loving as the wretched impetuosity of my age died out—my heart, I say, urged me, more than once, to go and plunge again in the fountain of my life, between my mother's grave and my little sister's cradle; but my father had himself fixed the exact duration of my travels, and he had not brought me up to treat his wishes lightly. His correspondence, affectionate but brief, announced no impatience about my return. I was all the more terrified, when, on landing two months ago at Marseilles, I found several letters from him, all recalling me with feverish haste.

It was on a gloomy evening in the month of February that I again saw the massive walls of our ancient dwelling, standing in relief from a slight fall of snow which covered the country. A bitter icy blast blew at intervals; flakes of hoar-frost fell like dead leaves from the trees in the

avenue, and settled on the damp earth with a slight but mournful sound. On entering the court-yard I saw a shadow, that seemed to be my father's, on one of the windows of the great saloon on the ground-floor, which in the latter part of my mother's life was never opened. I rushed forward. On seeing me, my father uttered an indistinct exclamation; then opened his arms to me, and I could feel his heart beating violently against mine. "Thou art frozen, my poor child," he said (contrary to his custom, he used the "thou"). "Warm yourself. This room is cold; but I keep to it now by preference, for one can at least breath in it."

"Your health, my father?"

"Passable, you see." And leaving me near the fireplace, he resumed the walk which I seemed to have interrupted, pacing to and fro the immense saloon, which was faintly lighted by two or three tapers.

This strange reception astounded me. I looked at my father in a state of stupefaction.

"Have you seen my horses?" he asked suddenly, without stopping.

"My father!"

"Ah! stay—you are right! You are just come." (After a silence.) "Maxime," he resumed, "I wish to speak with you."

"I am listening, father."

He seemed not to hear me, continued walking for some time, and repeated several times at intervals: "I wish to speak with you, my son!" At last he heaved a deep sigh, passed one hand across his forehead, and suddenly sitting down, pointed me to a chair in front of him. Then

as if he wished to speak, but could not summon up the courage, he fixed his eyes on mine, and I read in them an expression of anguish, meekness, and entreaty, which, in so proud a man as my father, touched me deeply. Whatever might be the wrongs he had so much difficulty in confessing, I felt in the depth of my soul that they were already freely forgiven, when on a sudden this look, which did not quit my face, assumed a wonderful and vaguely terrible fixity; his hand tightened on my arm; he rose in his chair, and sinking back immediately, fell heavily on the floor. He was no more!

The heart neither reasons nor calculates. That is its glory. In an instant I had divined it all: a single minute had sufficed to reveal all at once, without a word of explanation, but by a flash of irresistible light, the fatal truth, of which a thousand facts repeated daily before me for twenty years had aroused in me no suspicion. I understood that ruin was about me, in the house and on my head. Alas! I know not whether if my father had left me overwhelmed with benefits it would have cost me more and bitterer tears. My regret and deep sorrow were united to a pity, which, ascending from a son to a father, caused a strangely bitter feeling. I had ever before me that entreating, humiliated, distracted look: I was in despair that I had been unable to say a word of solace to that unhappy heart before it broke, and I cried madly to him who no longer heard me: "I forgive you! I forgive you!" O God! what moments were those!

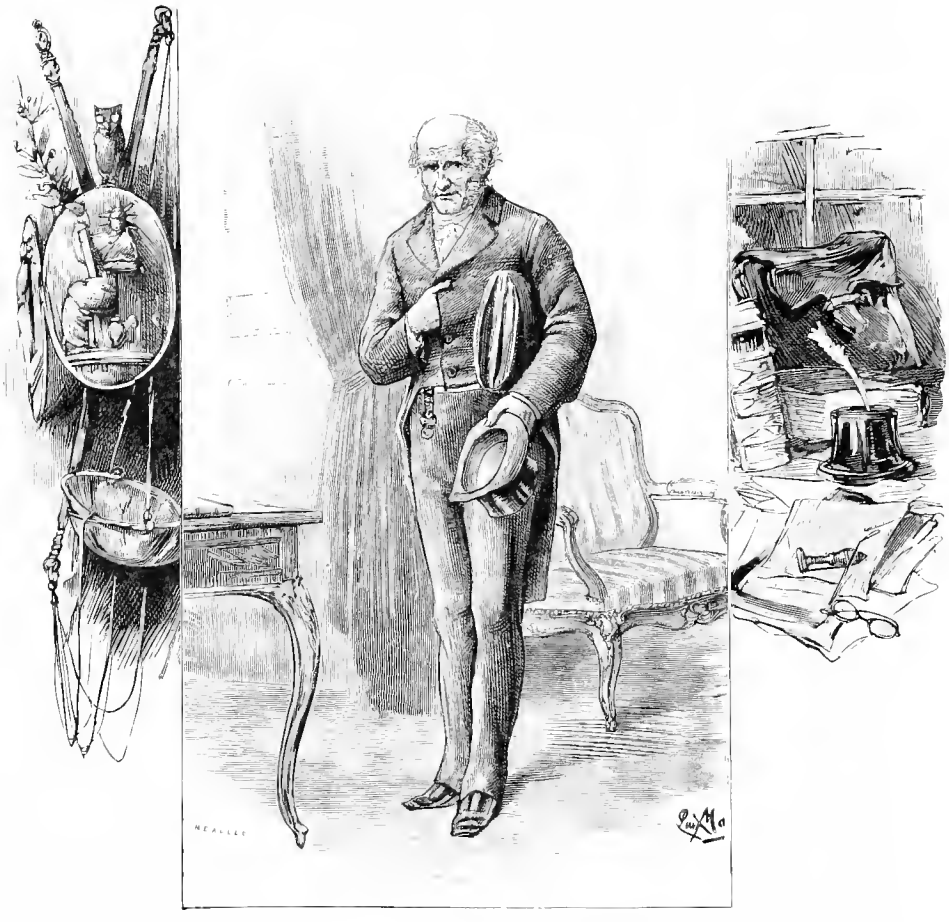
As far as I have been able to conjecture, my mother when dying made my father promise to sell the larger portion of his property, to pay off entirely the enormous debt

which he had contracted by spending every year a third more than his income, and afterwards to reduce his expenditure strictly in proportion to what remained. My father had tried to keep his engagement: he had sold his timber, and part of his land; but finding a considerable sum thus in hand, he had employed only a small part of it for the extinction of his debt, and had essayed to restore his fortune by entrusting the remainder to the detestable chances of the Bourse. This completed his ruin.

I have not yet been able to sound the depths of the abyss in which we are swallowed up. A week after my father's death I fell seriously ill, and it was with difficulty that, after two months of suffering, I was able to leave our hereditary chateau on the day when a stranger took possession. Happily an old friend of my mother, living at Paris, who formerly had charge of our affairs as notary, came to my help in this sad position, and offered to take upon himself the task of liquidation, which to my inexperience seemed one of inextricable difficulty. I left the care of arranging the business of succession to the property entirely in his hands; and I presume that his task is finished to-day, No sooner had I arrived yesterday morning, than I ran to his house: he was in the country, and is not to return until to-morrow. These two days have been cruel: uncertainty is truly the worst of all evils, for it is the only one which suspends the elasticity of the soul and postpones its courage. Ten years ago I should have been greatly surprised, had any one prophesied that the old notary, whose formal language and stiff politeness so highly amused my father and myself, would one day be the oracle from whom I awaited the decree that was to decide my destiny! I do my best to be

on my guard against exaggerated hopes: I have made approximate calculations that there would remain to us, after all debts are paid, a sum of from a hundred and twenty to a hundred and fifty thousand francs. It is strange if a fortune of five millions does not leave at least this wreck. I purpose to take ten thousand francs for my share, and seek my fortune in the new States of the Union; the remainder I shall leave to my sister.

Enough of writing for to-night. It is a sad occupation to evoke such remembrances. Still I feel that it has somewhat restored my calmness. Truly labour is a sacred law, for even the slightest application of it will result in an indescribable satisfaction and serenity. For all that, man does not love work: he cannot slight its indisputable blessings; he tastes them daily, and makes a boast of them: and on the morrow betakes himself to work again with the same distaste. There seems to me a singular mystery and contradiction about work; as if we felt in it at the same time punishment and the divine fatherly nature of our Judge.



THURSDAY.

On awaking this morning I received a letter from old M. Laubépin. It was to invite me to dinner, apologizing at the same time for so great a liberty: it contained no communication relative to my affairs. I drew an ill omen from this reserve.

In the interval before the hour appointed I brought my sister from her convent, and took her for a walk about Paris. The child has no suspicion of our ruin. In the course of the day she indulged in several pretty expensive fancies. She laid in a large stock of gloves, rose-tinted paper, sweetmeats for her friends, perfumes, extraordinary

kinds of soap, and small pencils—all very useful things no doubt, but not so necessary as a dinner. May she never know it!

At six o'clock, I was at M. Laubépin's house, Rue Cassette. I do not know what our old friend's age may be; but as far back as I can recollect, I remember him just such as I saw him to-day—tall, lean, with a slight stoop, white hair in some disorder, a piercing eye under bushy black eye-brows, a face showing both vigour and refinement. I recognised too the old-fashioned black coat, the professional white cravat, and the hereditary diamond in his frill; in short, all the outward marks of a grave methodical mind, that was attached to traditions. The old gentleman awaited me before the open door of his little drawing-room; after a low bow he took my hand lightly with two of his fingers, and led me up to an old lady of a very plain appearance, who was standing before the mantelpiece. "The Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive!" said M. Laubépin in a strong, deep, emphatic voice. Then immediately turning toward me, and in a more humble tone: "Madame Laubépin."

We sat down, and for a moment there was an embarrassed silence. I had looked for immediate instruction as to my exact position; perceiving that it was deferred, I presumed it could not be of an agreeable nature, and this presumption was strengthened by the looks of discreet compassion with which Madame Laubépin furtively honoured me. As for M. Laubépin, he watched me with a curious attentiveness which I fancied not free from malice. I remembered then, that my father had always claimed to discern in the heart of the punctilious scrivener, under all

his pretence of respect, traces of the leaven of the *bourgeois*, the *roturier*, and even of the Jacobin. This leaven I thought was fermenting a little just now; and the old man's secret dislikes seemed gratified at the sight of a gentleman thus on the rack. I began talking at once, in the attempt to show, spite of the prostration I really felt, that my mind was perfectly easy. "Why, M. Laubépin," I said, "you have left the Place des Petits Pères, that dear Place des Petits Pères. I would not have believed you could make up your mind to it."

"The truth is, Marquis," said M. Laubépin, "it is not a fickleness that suits my age; but when I gave up the office, I had to give up the house, since one cannot take down an escutcheon so easily as a sign."

"But you still do some business?"

"Yes, Marquis, in the way of friendly assistance. Some families of distinction and consideration, whose confidence I have been so happy as to gain in the course of a forty-five years' practice, are still pleased, in cases of unusual delicacy, to seek advice from my experience; and I think I may add, that they seldom repent following it."

When M. Laubépin had finished paying himself this tribute, an old servant came in to announce dinner; and I had the advantage of conducting Madame Laubépin into the adjoining room. The conversation throughout the meal turned on the most insignificant trifles; M. Laubépin not ceasing to fix on me a piercing look of doubtful meaning, while Madame Laubépin, when offering me any dish, would use that tone of grief and compassion which we assume by a sick man's bed. At length we rose, and the old notary led me into his study, where coffee was immediately served.

Bidding me to be seated, and turning his back to the fireplace, M. Laubépin then began: "Marquis, you have done me the honour to intrust to my care the settlement of the inheritance of the late Marquis Champcey d'Hauterive, your father. I was preparing to write to you no later than yesterday, when I learned your arrival in Paris, which enables me to give you a *vivâ voce* account of the results of my zeal and labours."

"I have a presentiment, Sir, that the result is not a happy one."

"No, Marquis, it is not; and I will not conceal from you that you will have need of courage to hear it: but I am used to proceeding methodically.

"It was in the year 1820, Sir, that Mademoiselle Louise Hélène Dugald Delatouche d'Erouville was sought in marriage by Charles Christian Odiot, Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive. Invested by a tradition of ages, as it were, with the management of the affairs of the Dugald Delatouche family, and moreover long since on a footing of respectful intimacy with the young heiress of that house, I had to use all the arguments reason could furnish to oppose the inclination of her heart, and turn her aside from this melancholy alliance. I say melancholy alliance, not that M. de Champcey's fortune, spite of certain mortgages with which it was even then burdened, was unequal to that of Mademoiselle Delatouche; but I knew M. de Champcey's disposition and temper, which were partly hereditary. Under the seductive and chivalrous exterior, which marked him and all of his house, I plainly saw an obstinate thoughtlessness, a hopeless imprudence, a mad love of pleasure, and lastly, implacable selfishness____"

"Sir," I broke in roughly, "my father's memory is sacred to me, and I expect it to be so to all who speak of my father in my presence."

"Sir," the old man resumed with a sudden violent emotion, "I respect the feeling; but when I speak of your father, I can with great difficulty forget that I speak of the man who killed your mother, who was a heroine, a saint, an angel!"

I rose in great agitation. M. Laubépin took a few paces up and down the room, and seized my arm. "Pardon, young man," he said, "but I loved your mother. I wept for her. Be kind enough to forgive me." Then standing before the mantlepiece he added in the most impressive tone habitual to him: "I had the honour and vexation of drawing up your mother's marriage-contract. In spite of all I could say, your mother's property was not settled on herself; and it was not without great effort that I contrived to introduce into the deed a protecting clause, declaring inalienable, without your mother's legal consent, about a third of her real property. A vain, and I might say, Marquis, cruel precaution of blundering friendship; for this fatal clause had only the effect of preparing the most unendurable torture for her whose peace it was intended to secure: I mean those struggles, quarrels, and scenes of violence, the echo of which must more than once have reached your ears, and in which was torn piecemeal from your unhappy mother, the last inheritance —the very bread of her children."

"Spare me, Sir, I beg."

"I bow to your wish, Marquis.—I will speak of the present only. As soon as I was honoured with your confidence, my first duty, Sir, was to request you not to accept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M. le Baron
M. le Marquis
M. le Comte
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an inheritance which would bring with it such heavy obligations."

"That measure, Sir, seemed to me an outrage on my father's memory, and I had to refuse it."

M. Laubépin darted at me one of his familiar inquisitive glances, and resumed: "Apparently you are not unaware, Sir, that for want of having adopted this course, legally open to you, you stand responsible for the burdens of the estate, even should they exceed its value. Now, it becomes my painful duty to inform you, Marquis, that this is exactly the case offered by the premises. As you will see in these papers, it is quite clear that, after selling your hotel on unhoped-for terms, you and your sister will remain indebted to your father's creditors in a sum of forty-five thousand francs."

I was truly overwhelmed by this news, which surpassed my most painful apprehensions. For a minute I listened stupidly to the monotonous ticking of the clock, on which I fixed a vacant stare.

"And now," M. Laubépin resumed after a silence, "the time is come to tell you, Marquis, that your mother, in anticipation of possibilities which to-day are unhappily realized, deposited with me certain jewels, the value of which is estimated at about fifty thousand francs. To prevent this slight sum, henceforth your sole resource, from passing into the hands of the creditors of the estate, we can avail ourselves, I believe, of a legal subterfuge which I shall have the honour of pointing out to you."

"It is entirely useless, Sir. I am too happy to be able, by the help of this unexpected reserve, to pay off my father's debts in full, and I will ask you to devote it to that purpose."

M. Laubépin bowed slightly. "Be it so," he said; "but it is impossible for me not to point out to you, Marquis, that when once this deduction is made from the deposit in my keeping, there will remain, as the whole fortune of Mademoiselle Helen and yourself, only a sum of four or five thousand francs, which, at the present rate of money, will give you an income of two hundred and twenty-five francs. After saying this, Marquis, allow me in a confidential, friendly, and respectful manner, to ask you whether you have thought of any means for securing your subsistence and that of your sister and ward, and what are your plans?"

"I confess I have no longer any plans, Sir. Any which I might have formed are irreconcilable with the absolute destitution to which I find myself reduced. If I were alone in the world, I would become a soldier; but I have my sister, and I cannot bear the thought of seeing the poor child reduced to labour and privation. She is happy in her convent, and is young enough to stay there some years longer. I would accept with all my heart any occupation which would enable me, by practising the strictest economy, to earn enough to keep my sister at school, and save up a dowry for her in the future."

M. Laubépin looked at me steadily. "To attain this honourable end, you ought not at your age, Marquis, to think of entering on the slow promotion of the public service or official duties. You would want a situation that should secure you, from the outset, five or six thousand francs a year. I am bound to tell you, that in the present state of society, this desideratum can certainly not be had for stretching out your hand for it. Happily I have to make certain propositions touching yourself, of a nature to influence your

position at once, and with no great trouble." M. Laubépin fixed his eyes upon me with a more penetrating gaze than ever, and continued: "In the first place, Marquis, I am to be the spokesman for a clever, rich, and influential speculator. This individual has conceived the idea of a considerable enterprise, the nature of which shall be presently explained to you, and which can only succeed with the special co-operation of the aristocratic class of this country. He thinks that an ancient and noble name like your own, Marquis, figuring among the founders of the undertaking, would win for him some sympathy among the special public to which the prospectus is to be addressed. In consideration of this advantage, he offers you, to begin with, what is commonly called a bonus, namely, ten shares which will cost you nothing, their value being reckoned at ten thousand francs now, and probably at three times that amount if the speculation succeeds. Besides——"

"Stop, Sir; such degradation is not worth the pains you are taking to explain it."

I saw the old man's eye suddenly gleam under his thick brows, as if a spark had shot from them. A slight smile relaxed the stiff wrinkles on his countenance. "If the proposal does not please you, Marquis," he said, speaking thickly, "it pleases me no more than yourself. In any case, I thought it my duty to submit it to you. Here is another, which may gratify you more, and it is really more attractive. I count, Sir, in the number of my oldest clients, a worthy merchant who has retired from business some little time, and now quietly enjoys, with an only and therefore adored daughter, an *aurea mediocritas* which I estimate at twenty-five thousand francs a year. Chance would have it, that three days ago my client's daughter was informed of your position; I had occasion to

think, and even reason to know, that the young lady, who, by the way, is pleasant to look on, and possessed of an estimable character, would not hesitate for a second to accept from your hand the title of Marchioness of Champcey. The father consents, and I await only a word from you, Marquis, to tell you the name and abode of this—interesting family."

"This decides me altogether, Sir. From to-morrow I will renounce a title which, in my position, is ridiculous, and which seems, moreover, to expose me to the most wretched schemes of intrigue. The original name of my family is Odiot; it is the only one I will henceforth bear. And now, Sir, while I admit to the full, how lively was the interest which induced you to become the bearer of these curious proposals, I will beg you to spare me any others of a similar character."

"In that case, Marquis," M. Laubépin replied, "I can say absolutely nothing further."

Here being taken with a sudden fit of merriment, he rubbed his hands together with a noise like cracking parchment. Then he added, smiling: "You will be hard to dispose of, Monsieur Maxime. Yes, yes, very hard to dispose of. It is strange, Sir, that I did not sooner notice the striking likeness which nature has been pleased to exhibit in your face to your mother's. The eyes and the smile especially—but let us keep to the point, and as you are determined to owe your living to honourable labour alone, allow me to ask what talents and aptitudes you may possess?"

"My education has naturally been, Sir, that of a man brought up to riches and idleness. Still I have studied law, and even have the title of advocate."

"Advocate! The deuce, you are an advocate, are you? But the title is not enough; in the career of the bar more

depends on yourself than in any other—and in it—well—do you feel yourself to be eloquent, Marquis?"

"So far from it, Sir, that I believe myself quite incapable of speaking two sentences extempore in public."

"Hm! That is not exactly what you can call being a born orator. You will therefore need to look elsewhere; but the matter requires fuller consideration. Besides, I see you are tired, Marquis. Here are your papers, which I beg you will examine at your leisure. I have the honour to wish you good night, Sir. Allow me to light you. Pardon, am I to wait for fresh instructions before I apply the proceeds of the sale of the gems and jewels in my keeping to the payment of your creditors?"

"Certainly not. And I expect you further to deduct from this reserve the proper remuneration for your kind offices."

We had reached the landing on the stairs. M. Laubépin, who stoops a little in walking, drew himself up to his full height "In all that concerns your creditors, Marquis," he said, "I will respectfully obey you. As to myself, I was a friend of your mother's, and I humbly but earnestly beg your mother's son to treat me as a friend." I gave the old man my hand; he pressed it warmly, and we parted.

Returned to the little room which I occupy under the roof of this hotel, now no longer mine, I wished to prove to myself that the certainty of my utter misery did not plunge me in a despondency unworthy a man. I set myself to write an account of this decisive day in my history, studying to keep the precise style of the old notary, and his language, compounded of stiffness and courtesy, of mistrust and good feeling, which, even while my soul was overwhelmed, more than once made my spirit smile.

This, then, is poverty; no longer the hidden, proud, poetic poverty which in imagination I bravely bore in mighty forests, deserts, and savannahs; but sheer misery, want, dependence, humiliation, something even worse—the bitter poverty of the sometime rich man; poverty in a black coat, hiding its bare hands from old friends passing by! Courage, my brother, courage!

MONDAY, *April 27th.*

I HAVE waited five days in vain for tidings from M. Laubépin. I confess I did seriously reckon on the interest he seemed to take in me. His experience, business acquaintance, and extensive connection gave him the means of serving me. I was ready to take all necessary steps, under his guidance; but, left to myself, I have absolutely no idea in

which direction to turn. I thought him one of those who promise little and perform much. I am afraid I was mistaken. This morning I decided to go to his house, under pretence of returning the documents which he intrusted to me, and which I have found painfully correct. They told me that the good man had gone to taste the pleasures of the country, in some chateau or other in the heart of Brittany. He will be away two or three days longer. This news completely upset me. I not only experienced the vexation of meeting with apathy and neglect where I had expected to find the warmth of devoted friendship; I had, in addition, the annoyance of returning as I went, with an empty purse. My intention was to have asked M. Laubépin to make me an advance on the three or four thousand francs which we shall have left after paying off our debts in full; for, in spite of living like a hermit since coming to Paris, the trifling sum which I managed to put aside for my journey is completely exhausted, so completely exhausted that after making a genuine pastoral breakfast this morning,

"Castaneæ molles et pressi copia lactis,"

I was obliged, for my dinner this evening, to have recourse to a kind of swindle, the melancholy history of which I will here record.

The slenderer a man's breakfast, the stronger his desire for dinner. I felt the full force of this axiom to-day, even before the sun had finished his course. Among the promenaders who were attracted this afternoon to the Tuileries by the mildness of the weather, and who watched the first smiles of spring playing on the marble faces of the sylvan deities, might have been

noticed a man, still young, and irreproachably dressed, apparently studying the re-awakening of nature with unusual anxiety. Not satisfied with devouring the fresh verdure with his gaze, it was not seldom that this person might be seen to pluck from their stems young appetizing shoots, and half-unfolded leaves, and to lift them to his lips with the curiosity of a botanist. I am in a position to assert that this alimentary resource, which had been pointed out to me by narratives of shipwreck, is of a very middling value. Still, I have enriched my experience with some interesting ideas; thus I know for the future that the leaves of the chestnut are exceedingly bitter to the taste, no less than to the heart; the rose-tree is not bad; the lime is oily and pretty agreeable; while the lilac, seasoned with pepper, is, I think, unwholesome.

Still reflecting on these discoveries, I walked in the direction of Helen's convent. On setting foot in the parlour, which I found as full as a hive, I felt more than usually deafened by the noisy chat of the young bees. Helen came in, her hair in disorder, her cheeks inflamed, and her eyes red and flashing. She held in her hand a piece of bread as long as her arm. As she kissed me with an absent air, I said: "Well, my child, what is the matter now? You have been crying?"

"No, no, Maxime, there's nothing the matter."

"What is it now? Come——"

She lowered her voice. "Oh! I am very unhappy, my poor Maxime, there."

"Indeed! Tell me about it while you eat your bread."

"Oh! I am sure I am not going to eat my bread; I am far too unhappy to eat. You know Lucy, Lucy Campbell, my best friend? Well, we have had a deadly quarrel."

"Bless me! But make yourself easy about it, my darling; you will be friends again, I am sure."

"O Maxime! it's impossible, you see. Things have been too serious. It was nothing at first, but one gets warm, you know, and loses one's head. Fancy, we were playing at shuttlecock, and Lucy counted the points wrong. I had six hundred and eighty, and she had only six hundred and fifteen, and would have it she had six hundred and seventy-five. It was a little too bad, you must confess. Of course I stuck to my number, and she to hers. 'Very well, Mademoiselle,' I said, 'let us consult these young ladies; I appeal to them.' 'No, Mademoiselle,' she said, 'I am certain my number is right, and you don't play fair.' 'Very well, Mademoiselle,' I said, 'and you are a liar!' And then she said: 'For my part, Mademoiselle, I despise you too much to answer you.' It was lucky Sister Sainte Felix came in at that moment, for I believe I should have struck her. After what has passed, you can see if it is possible for us to be friends any more. It's impossible; it would be mean. Still I can't tell you what I suffer; I don't believe there is anybody in the world so unhappy as I am."

"Certainly, my child, it is hard to fancy a heavier misfortune than yours; but, to tell you my mind about it, you brought it on yourself a little, for the most wounding expression in the quarrel came from your mouth. Tell me, is your Lucy in the parlour?"

"Yes, there she is in the corner yonder." And she pointed out to me, with a dignified and discreet nod of the head, a very fair-complexioned little girl, who also had inflamed cheeks and red eyes, and seemed to be giving to a very attentive old lady an account of the drama which Sister Sainte Felix had so luckily interrupted. While speaking with a fire worthy of the

subject, Mlle. Lucy darted from time to time a furtive glance at Helen and me.

"Well, my dear child," I said, "have you confidence in me?"

"Yes, I have great confidence in you, Maxime."

"Well, then, this is what you will do; you will go and place yourself quite gently behind Mlle. Lucy's chair; you will take hold of her head like this, from behind, and kiss her on both cheeks, like that, heartily, and then you'll see what she will do."

Helen seemed to hesitate a few seconds, then set off in haste, and falling like a thunderbolt on Mlle. Campbell, caused her nevertheless the sweetest surprise. The two unhappy children, now united again for ever, mingled their tears in a touching group, while the aged and worthy Mme. Campbell blew her nose with a sound like bagpipes.

Helen came back all radiant to find me. "Well, my love," I said to her, "I hope now you will eat your bread?"

"Oh! indeed no, Maxime; I have been too much excited, you see, and besides, I must tell you a new scholar came to-day, and gave us a feast of puffs and cakes and cream chocolate, so that I'm not at all hungry. Indeed I am very much troubled, because in my distress I forgot just now to put my bread into the basket again, as we ought to do when we are not hungry at lunch, and I am afraid of being punished; but when I go through the courtyard I shall try to throw my bread down the cellar-grating, without any one seeing it."

"What! my little sister," I returned, blushing slightly, "you are going to throw away that great piece of bread?"

"Well, I know it isn't right; for perhaps some poor people would be very glad to have it, wouldn't they, Maxime?"

"Certainly they would, my dear child."

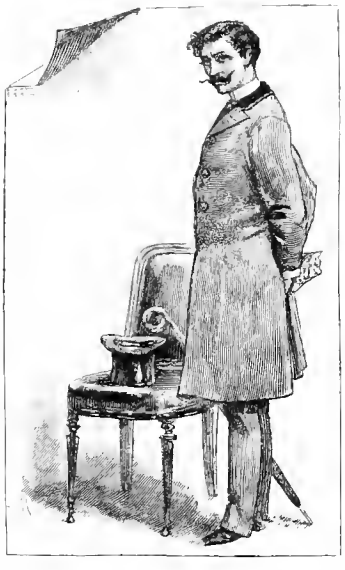
"But what am I to do? Poor people don't come in here?"

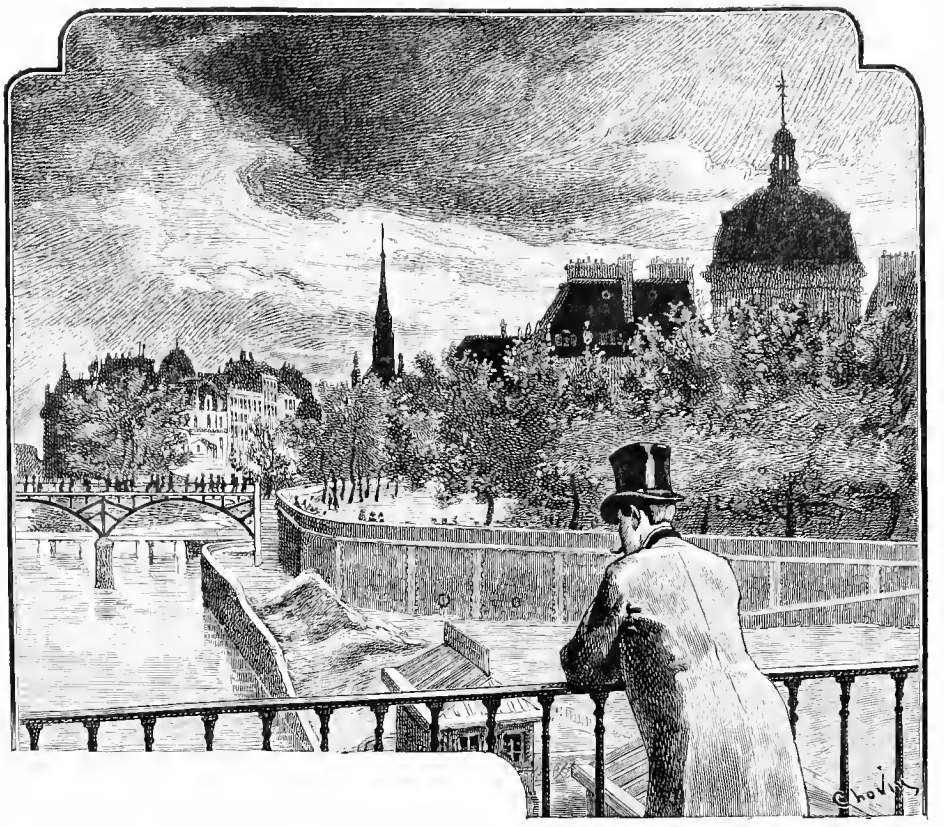
"Let us see, Helen; you give me the bread, and I will give it in your name to the first poor man I meet: shall I?"

"Oh! that will do!" It struck the hour for retiring: I broke the bread in two, and ignominiously slipped the pieces into my overcoat pockets.

"Good-bye, dear Maxime," said the child; "come again, soon, won't you? And you'll tell me if you met a poor man and gave him my bread, and whether he liked it."

Yes, Helen, I did meet a poor man, and gave him your bread; he carried it away like a stolen loaf to his lonely garret, and he did like it; but it was a poor man with no courage, for he wept while devouring the gift bestowed by your beloved little hands. I will tell you all this, Helen, for it is good you should know that there are heavier troubles in the world than your child's troubles; I will tell you everything, except the poor man's name.





FRIDAY, *April 28th.*

THIS morning, at nine o'clock, I rang at M. Laubépin's door in the vague hope that something might have hastened his return; but he is not expected before to-morrow. The thought occurred to me to address myself to Mme. Laubépin, and to tell her of the extreme annoyance to which her husband's absence subjected me. While I was hesitating between shame and want, the old servant, apparently frightened at the hungry look which I fixed on her, cut the discussion short by suddenly shutting the door. I then came to a determination, and resolved to fast until to-morrow. I said to myself, after all a

man does not die of a single day's fasting; if I was to be blamed in this course for an excess of pride, I alone had to suffer for it, and consequently it concerned no one but myself.

Upon this I took my way to the Sorbonne, where I attended several lectures in succession, trying, by dint of intellectual enjoyment, to fill the void which made itself felt in the flesh; but the time came when this resource failed me, and I soon began to find it ineffectual. I felt particularly an intense nervous irritation, which I hoped to soothe by walking. It was a cold and foggy day. As I was crossing the bridge des Saints Pères, I stopped for a moment in spite of myself; I leaned on the parapet, and watched the troubled waters of the river tumbling through the arches. I know not what accursed thoughts at that moment crossed my weary and weakened brain; on a sudden I pictured to myself, in the most dreary colours, the future of ceaseless strife, of dependence and humiliation, on which I was entering through the gate of hunger; I felt a deep and positive loathing and, as it were, an incapability for life. At the same moment a flood of wild and brutal rage rushed to my brain, a dizzy sensation seized me, and, leaning over the empty space, I saw the whole surface of the river studded with stars.

I will not say in common phrase, "It was not God's will." I do not like those unmeaning expressions. I venture to say, it was not my will! God has made us free; and if I could have doubted it previously, that supreme moment when the soul and the body, courage and cowardice, good and evil, were so clearly in mortal combat within me, that moment would have removed my doubts for ever.

Once more master of myself, I no longer felt, in looking on

those dreadful waters, anything save the very harmless and tolerably stupid temptation to quench the thirst which was consuming me. I reflected moreover that in my own room I should find much clearer water, and I quickly made my way towards the hotel, summing up a delightful image of the pleasures which awaited me there. In my wretched childishness I was astonished, nay, could not get over the fact, that I had not sooner thought of this victorious device. On the Boulevard I suddenly came across Gaston de Vaux, whom I had not seen for two years. After a moment's hesitation he stopped, shook me cordially by the hand, said a word or two about my travels, and left me hastily. Then returning, he said, "My friend, you must allow me to share with you a piece of good luck which has befallen me within these few days. I have got hold of a treasure; I have received a lot of cigars which cost me two francs apiece, but they are above price. Here's one, you'll tell me what you think of it. Good morning, my dear fellow."

I mounted painfully the six stories, and, trembling with emotion, seized my lucky carafe, the contents of which I swallowed in little mouthfuls; after which I lighted my friend's cigar, giving myself an encouraging smile in the glass. I left the house again at once, convinced that walking and the sights in the street were good for me. On opening my door, I was surprised and displeased to see in the narrow passage the wife of the porter of the hotel, who seemed disconcerted by my sudden appearance. This woman was formerly in the service of my mother, who became fond of her, and gave her a husband and the lucrative post which she still holds. I had thought I noticed for several days that she was keeping a watch on me, and, surprising her this time almost in the very fact, I

said violently, "What do you want?" "Nothing, Monsieur Maxime, nothing," she replied, much agitated; "I was turning on the gas." I shrugged my shoulders, and walked away.

The day was closing. I could walk in the most frequented places without fear of the annoyance of meeting acquaintances. I was obliged to throw away my cigar, which disagreed with me. My walk lasted two or three hours, hours of torture. There is something peculiarly bitter in feeling yourself attacked, in the midst of all the splendour and opulence of civilized life, by the scourge of savage life, by hunger. It is akin to madness, it is a tiger that springs at your throat on the crowded Boulevard.

I made fresh reflections. It is not, then, an idle word, this hunger! There is really a disease of this name; there really are human beings who suffer usually, almost every day, what I am suffering by chance once in my life. And for how many of those beings is not that suffering increased by complications which are spared me? The only person in the world for whom I care, I know her at least to be sheltered from the evils which I am undergoing; I see her dear face happy, rosy, and smiling. But those who do not suffer alone, those who hear the heart-rending cry of their own bowels repeated by beloved and supplicating lips, those for whom in their cold lodgings wait pale-cheeked wives and little ones that cannot smile! Poor people! O holy charity!

These thoughts robbed me of the courage to complain; and gave me the courage to endure the trial to the end. I had, in fact, the means of shortening it. There are two or three restaurants here where I am known, and it often happened, when I was rich, that I would enter them unhesitatingly though I had forgotten my purse. I could make use of this device. It would not have been more difficult for me to manage to

borrow a hundred sous in Paris; but these plans, which savoured of wretchedness and trickery, decidedly displeased me. It is a slippery descent for the poor, and I will not even set foot on it. I would as soon, I think, lose honesty itself, as lose the delicacy which is the distinguishing mark of that common virtue. Now I have so often observed with what a dreadful facility this exquisite sentiment of honour loses its flower and its rank even in the best endowed souls, not only at the breath of misery, but on simple contact with difficulties; that I must watch over myself with strictness, and reject henceforth, as suspicious, the most harmless seeming compromises of conscience. When evil days come on us, we must not accustom the soul to pliancy; it has only too much inclination of itself to yield.

Weariness and cold brought me to the house again towards nine o'clock. The door of the hotel happened to be open; and I was making for the stairs with the step of a ghost, when I heard from the porter's lodge the sound of an animated conversation, apparently at my expense, for just at that moment the tyrant of the place pronounced my name in a contemptuous tone.

"Do me the favour, Mme. Vanberger," he said, "to leave me in peace about your Maxime. Did I ruin your Maxime for you? Very well, then, why do you keep talking about him? If he kills himself, he'll be buried, I suppose?"

"I tell you, Vanberger," the woman rejoined, "it would have cut you to the heart if you had seen him swallow the carafe of water. And if I thought that you mean what you say, when you say so coolly, like an actor, 'If he kills himself, he'll be buried!' But I don't think so, because you are a

good man at heart, though you don't like to have your habits disturbed. Just think, Vanberger, to be in want of fire and bread! A gentleman who has been fed all his life on blanc-mange, and wrapped in furs like a pet cat! It isn't a shame and a disgrace, oh no! and it isn't a queer government to allow such things, I suppose, either!"

"But that doesn't concern the government at all," Mr. Vanberger replied, reasonably enough. "And then you're mistaken, I tell you—he's not in that position—he doesn't want for bread. It's impossible!"

"Well, Vanberger, I will tell you everything: I have followed him, played the spy on him up there, and set Edward to play the spy, too; well, I'm certain he did not dine yesterday and ate no breakfast this morning, and as I have searched all his pockets and all his drawers, and there is not a red farthing left in them, it is quite certain that he will have had no dinner again to-day; for he is too proud to go and beg a dinner."

"Well, so much the worse for him. When a man is poor, he must not be proud," said the worthy porter, who seemed to me to be expressing the true feelings of a door-keeper.

I had had enough of this dialogue, and closed it abruptly by opening the door of the lodge, and asking M. Vanberger for a light; I think he would not have been more astonished if I had asked him for his head. In spite of all the desire I felt to keep a good countenance before these people, I could not help stumbling once or twice on the staircase; my head was going round. On entering my room, generally icy cold, I was surprised to find a genial temperature, pleasantly kept up by a

bright, cheerful fire. I had not the asceticism to put it out; I blessed the excellent hearts that there are in the world, and stretched myself in an old arm-chair, covered with Utrecht velvet, which, like myself, had been driven by stress of fortune from the ground floor to the garret, and tried to slumber. I had been plunged for about half-an-hour in a kind of stupor, in which one uniform dream offered me the phantom of luxurious feasts, and fat thanksgiving-days, when the noise of the door opening made me spring up wide awake. I thought I was still dreaming, when I saw Mme. Vanberger come in, adorned with a huge tray on which smoked two or three savoury dishes. She had already set the tray down on the floor, and began to spread a cloth on the table, before I was able entirely to shake off my lethargy. At last I rose abruptly. "What is that?" I said. "What are you doing?"

Mme. Vanberger feigned great astonishment.

"Did not Monsieur ask for his dinner?"

"Not at all. Edward has made a mistake; it is some lodger close by; see if it is not."

"But there is no lodger on the same landing with Monsieur .... I don't understand."

"At any rate it was not I. What can it mean? You weary me! Take it away!"

The poor woman hereupon began sorrowfully to fold up her cloth again, looking at me meanwhile as mournfully as a beaten dog. "Monsieur has dined, probably?" she resumed in a timid voice.

"Probably."

"It is a pity, for the dinner was all ready. It will be wasted, and the child will get a scolding from his father. If

Monsieur had happened not to have dined, Monsieur would have done me a favour."

I stamped violently. "Go away, I tell you!" Then, as she was leaving the room, I walked towards her. "My good Louise, I understand you, and thank you; but I am not quite well this evening, I am not hungry."

"Ah, Monsieur Maxime!" she cried, weeping, "if you knew how you mortify me! Well, then, you shall pay me for the dinner, if you like; you shall put money in my hand, when you have some again; but you may be sure that you might give me a hundred thousand francs, and it would not please me so much as seeing you eat my poor dinner! Why, it would be giving me alms! You are a sensible man, Monsieur Maxime, and you must see that it would!"

"Well, my dear Louise, what shall I do? I cannot give you a hundred thousand francs, but I am going to eat your dinner. You will leave me by myself, won't you?"

"Yes, Sir. Oh, thank you, Sir! Thank you sincerely, Sir. You have a good heart!"

"And a good appetite, too, Louise. Give me your hand; it is not to put money in it, don't be afraid. There . . . Good-bye, Louise."

The excellent woman went away sobbing.

I was finishing writing these lines, after doing honour to Louise's dinner, when I heard the sound of a heavy, steady step; at the same time I thought I distinguished the voice of my humble providence, speaking in the tone of a hasty and agitated communication. A few seconds afterwards came a knock, and while Louise disappeared in the darkness, I saw,

appearing in the frame formed by the doorway, the solemn profile of the old notary. M. Laubepin cast a rapid glance on the tray on which I had placed the remnants of my dinner; then advanced towards me, and opening his arms, in token at once of confusion and reproach, "Monsieur le Marquis, in Heaven's name, why did you not let me ——" He interrupted himself, walked with great strides across the room, and stopping suddenly, resumed, "Young man, this is not well: you have wounded a friend, you have made an old man blush." He was much agitated. I looked at him, a little agitated myself, not clearly knowing how to answer; when he abruptly caught me to his breast, and pressing me as if he would stifle me, murmured in my ear, "My poor child!" . . . A moment's silence ensued. He sat down. "Maxime," M. Laubepin then resumed, "are you still in the same mind in which I left you? Should you have the courage to accept the most humble labour, the most modest employment, provided only it is honourable, and, while securing a livelihood for yourself, remove your sister, for the present and for the future, from the pains and dangers of poverty?"

"Most certainly, Sir; it is my duty, and I am ready to do it."

"In that case, my friend, listen to me. I have just come from Brittany. There is in that ancient province a wealthy family, of the name of Laroque, which for many years has honoured me with its entire confidence. This family is represented at present by an old man and two women, whose age or disposition renders them all alike useless for business. The Laroques possess considerable landed estate, the management of which was entrusted, latterly, to a bailiff, whom I took the liberty of considering as a scoundrel. I received the news, the day after

our interview, Maxime, of this individual's death; I set off immediately for the château of the Laroque family, and asked for the vacant office for you. I made the most of your title of advocate, and especially of your moral qualities. In conformity with your wish, I did not speak of your birth: you are and will be known in the house only under the name of Maxime Odiot. You will live in a cottage by itself, and your meals will be served there, whenever you may not like to appear at the family table. Your salary is fixed at six thousand francs a year. Does that suit you?"

"It suits me perfectly, and I am deeply touched by all the delicate precautions your friendship has taken; but, to tell you the truth, I am afraid of being somewhat strange and new as a business man."

"Make yourself easy on that score, my friend. My scruples came into play before yours, and I have concealed nothing from those concerned. 'Madame,' I said to my excellent friend, Mme. Laroque, 'you want a bailiff to manage your affairs; I offer you one. He is far from having the skill of his predecessor; he is utterly unversed in the mysteries of rents and leases; he does not know the first syllable of any business you may deign to entrust to him. He has no professional knowledge, no practice, no experience; nothing of that which any one can learn; but he has something which was wanting in his predecessor, which sixty years' practice could not have given him, and which ten thousand years could not have given him in larger measure; he has integrity, Madame. I have seen him in the crucible, and I answer for him. Take him; you will do a favour both to him and to me.' Mme. Laroque laughed a good deal, young man, at my way of

recommending people, but finally it seems to have been a good way, for it succeeded."

The worthy old man here offered to give me some elementary and general notions on the kind of management with which I am to be invested; and he will add to these, certain particulars touching the interests of the Laroque family, which he has taken the trouble to collect and arrange for me.

"And when shall I have to start, my dear Sir?"

"Why, to speak the truth, my boy" (no mention any longer of Monsieur le Marquis)—"the sooner the better, for those people yonder are not capable, all put together, of drawing up a receipt. My excellent friend, Mme. Laroque, especially, a woman otherwise respectable on many accounts, is, in business matters, careless, incapable, and childish beyond all imagination. She is a Creole."

"Ah! she is a Creole!" I repeated with some eagerness.

"Yes, young man, an old Creole," M. Laubépin replied drily. "Her husband was a Breton, but these details will come in their time. . . . Till to-morrow, Maxime, keep a good heart! . . . Ah! I was forgetting. . . . On Thursday morning, before my departure, I did a thing which will not be unpleasant to you. You had among your creditors some scoundrels whose affairs with your father were plainly tainted with usury; armed with the thunders of the law, I reduced their claims one half, and I have procured a receipt for everything. There now remains to you a clear sum of twenty thousand francs. By adding to this reserve the savings you may be able to lay aside each year out of your salary, we shall

have, in ten years' time, a nice fortune for Helen. . . . Ah, well, come and dine to-morrow with Master Laubépin, and we will finish arranging all this. . . . Good night, Maxime, a good night's rest, my dear child."

"God bless you, Sir."

CHÂTEAU DE LAROQUE (D'ARZ), *May 1st.*

I LEFT Paris yesterday. My last interview with M. Laubépin was a painful one. I tendered to the old man the feelings of a son. It was then needful to say good-bye to Helen. To make her understand the necessity I am in of finding employment, it was indispensable to give her a glimpse of a portion of the truth. I spoke of some temporary embarrassment in our affairs. The poor child understood more, I think, than I told

her; her large wistful eyes filled with tears, and she threw herself on my neck.

At last I set out. The railway brought me to Rennes, where I passed the night. This morning I took my seat in a diligence which was to set me down, some hours later, in a small town in the department of Morbihan, situated not far from Laroque château. I had ridden half a score leagues beyond Rennes without being able to account for the reputation which the ancient Armorica enjoys generally for picturesqueness. A flat, green, and monotonous country, everlasting apple trees in everlasting meadows, ditches and wooded slopes bounding the view on each side of the road; at best but a few nooks of a rustic grace; blouses and oil-skin hats to enliven these vulgar pictures; all this gave me a strong idea since yesterday that this poetical Brittany is but a pretentious and somewhat leaner sister of Lower Normandy. Tired of deceptions and apple trees, I had ceased for an hour to pay any attention whatever to the landscape, and I was sadly slumbering, when I seemed all of a sudden to perceive that our heavy vehicle was leaning forward more than was fit, and sure enough the pace of the horses became perceptibly slower, and a sound of iron, accompanied by a peculiar friction, told me that the last of conductors had just fastened the last of drags to the wheel of the last diligence. An old lady who was sitting near me, seized my arm with that lively sympathy which springs from common danger. I put my head out at the window; we were going, between two high banks, down an extremely steep hill, a conception of some engineer who was certainly too fond of the straight line. Half-sliding, half-rolling, we were not long in finding ourselves in a narrow, gloomy-looking valley, in the bottom of which a puny rivulet flowed with difficulty, and

without sound, through thick reeds; on the crumbling banks were a few crooked, old mossy trunks of trees. The road crossed this rivulet by a bridge of a single arch, and then ascended the opposite hill, drawing its white furrow across a boundless moor, barren and absolutely bare, the heights of which stood out boldly against the sky before us. Near the bridge, and by the roadside, stood a lonely ruin; the air of utter desolation about it made the heart ache. A stout young man was busy chopping wood before the door: a black ribbon fastened his long fair hair at the back of his head. He raised his head, and I was astonished at the foreign character of his features, and the calm gaze of his blue eyes; he saluted me in an unknown tongue, with a short, sweet, and wild accent. At the window of the cottage was a woman spinning: her head-dress and the cut of her garments brought before me, with the exactness of the stage, the image of those slender stone figures of ladies that we see reposing on old tombstones. These people had not the appearance of peasants; they had in the highest degree that look of ease, grace, and dignity, which is called a distinguished air. Their faces wore that sad and dreamy expression which I have often noticed with emotion in nations that have lost their nationality.

I had got down to walk up the hill. The moor, which was not fenced off from the road, stretched all round me, far as the eye could see; everywhere straggling rushes were creeping over a black soil; here and there were ravines, holes, abandoned quarries, and a few rocks just showing above the surface of the ground; but not a tree. Only on reaching the height, I saw the dusky line of the moor meeting on my right, in the far distance, a band on the horizon still more distant, slightly indented, blue as the sea, bathed in sunlight, and apparently

opening out in the midst of this desolate scene the sudden prospect of a radiant fairy land; it was Brittany at last!

I had to charter a post-chaise in the little town of ——, in order to accomplish the two leagues which still lay between me and my journey's end. During the ride, which was none of the quickest, I dimly recollect seeing woods, lawns, lakes, and oases of fresh green hidden in valleys; but on approaching Laroque château, I felt myself attacked by a thousand painful thoughts, which left little room for the observations of the tourists. In a few minutes I was about to enter an unknown family, on the footing of a kind of disguised servitude, with a position that would scarcely secure me the attention and respect of the servants of the house; this was a new thing to me. At the time when M. Laubépin proposed to me this situation as bailiff, all my instincts and habits revolted strongly against the character of peculiar dependence attached to such an office. I thought however that I could not refuse it, without seeming to disparage and discourage my old friend's cordial efforts on my behalf. Besides, I could not hope to obtain, for several years, in a more independent situation, the advantages here afforded me at the outset, which would allow me to work without delay for my sister's prospects. Accordingly, I had overcome my distaste, but it was very strong, and awoke again with greater strength before the impending reality. I had need to read again, in the code which every man carries in his breast, the chapters on duty and sacrifice; and, at the same time, I repeated to myself that there is no situation, however humble, in which personal dignity cannot be maintained, and which it cannot elevate. Then I marked out a plan of conduct towards the members of the Laroque family, promising myself to show a conscientious zeal for their interests, and a

becoming deference for their persons, equally removed from servility and stiffness. But I could not disguise from myself that this last, and indisputably most delicate part of my task, would be wonderfully simplified or complicated by the particular nature of the dispositions and minds with which I was thus brought into contact. Now, M. Laubépin, while fully recognizing the legitimate character of my anxiety on this personal matter, had shown himself studiously sparing of information and detail on this point. Nevertheless, at the moment of my departure, he had given me a confidential note, with a recommendation to throw it in the fire after using it. I drew this note from my portfolio, and began to study its sibylline contents, which I will reproduce exactly:—

"LAROQUE CHÂTEAU (ARZ),

"Description of the inmates of the said château.

"1st. M. Laroque (Louis Auguste), octogenarian, head of the family, principal source of its fortune; old sailor, celebrated under the first Empire as a privateer with letters of marque; appears to have become rich, while following the sea, by legitimate undertakings of various kinds; has lived long in the colonies. Originally from Brittany; he returned there to settle, thirty years ago, with the late Pierre Antoine Laroque, his only son, husband of—

"2nd. Mme. Laroque (Josephine Clara), daughter-in-law of the above; Creole by birth; forty years of age; indolent disposition, romantic mind, some insane ideas; noble soul.

"3rd. Mlle. Laroque (Marguerite Louise), granddaughter, daughter, and presumptive heiress of the above;

twenty years of age; Creole and Breton; some caprices; noble soul.

"4th. Mme. Aubry, widow of the Sieur Aubry, broker, deceased in Belgium; second cousin, received into the family; embittered spirit,

"5th. Mlle. Helouin (Caroline Gabrielle), twenty-six; formerly governess, now companion; cultivated mind; disposition suspicious.

"Burn this."

This document, in spite of the reserve which stamps it, has not been useless to me; I felt a part of my apprehensions vanish with the horror of the unknown. Besides, if there were, as M. Laubépin asserted, two noble souls in Laroque château, it was certainly more than one had a right to expect among five inmates.

After a two hours' ride the driver drew up before a gate flanked by two cottages, serving as a porter's lodge. I left the bulk of my luggage there, and took the way towards the château, in one hand holding my little bag, and with the other switching with my cane the daisies which studded the turf. After walking a few hundred paces between two rows of enormous chestnuts, I found myself in a vast garden of circular form, which seemed to change into a park a little further on. I saw to the right and left deep vistas opening between thick clumps of trees already in leaf, sheets of water retreating under the trees, and white boats housed under rustic sheds. Before me rose the château, a large building, in the elegant and semi-Italian style of the early years of Louis XIII. Before it is a terrace, which forms, at the foot of two rows of steps and under the high windows of the front, a kind of private

garden, reached by several wide and easy flights of steps. The smiling and luxurious look of this abode caused me real disappointment; which did not diminish, when, on approaching the terrace, I heard the sound of young and merry voices rising above the more distant murmurs of a piano. Decidedly I was entering a place of pleasure, far different from the old frowning keep which I had loved to fancy. Still the time for reflection was past; I mounted the steps lightly, and found myself suddenly facing a scene, which, under any other circumstances, I should have thought sufficiently graceful.

On one of the lawns of the garden, half-a-dozen young girls, in laughing couples, were whirling in a gleam of sunlight, while a piano, touched by a skilful hand, sent out to them, through an open window, the measures of an impetuous waltz. I had scarcely time to note the animated faces of the dancers, their loose flowing hair, the large hats floating over their shoulders; my sudden appearance was greeted by a general shout, followed immediately by a deep silence; the dancing ceased, and the whole band, in order of battle, gravely waited for the stranger to pass. Nevertheless the stranger stopped, not

without showing a little embarrassment. Although, for some time, my thoughts scarcely meddled with mundane things, I confess I would have sold my little bag at a bargain just then. It was necessary to decide. As I advanced, hat in hand, towards the double flight of steps which leads to the hall of the château, the piano suddenly became still. I saw first an enormous dog of the Newfoundland breed appear at the open window, resting his lion-like muzzle between two velvety paws on the cross-bar; then a moment afterwards appeared a young girl of a tall figure, whose somewhat brown face and serious countenance were set in a thick mass of lustrous black hair. Her eyes, which seemed to me of an unusual size, interrogated with careless curiosity the scene which was going on outside.

"Well! what is the matter?" she said, in a tranquil tone. I made her a deep bow, and, once more cursing my bag, which clearly amused the young ladies, I hastened to cross the terrace.

A gray-haired servant, dressed in black, whom I found in the hall, took my name. In a few minutes I was ushered into a vast parlour, hung with yellow silk, where I at once recognized the young lady whom I had just seen at the window, and who was really extremely beautiful. Near the fireplace, in which a real furnace was blazing, sat a middle-aged lady, whose features strongly attested the Creole type, buried in a large easy chair, which was arranged with eider-pillows, cushions, and ottomans of all sizes. A tripod of antique shape, surmounted by a lighted brazier, was placed within her reach, and at intervals she extended towards it her thin pale hands. By the side of Mme. Laroque sat a lady knitting; by her morose and displeasing countenance I could not mistake the second cousin, the widow of the broker deceased in Belgium.

The first look which Mme. Laroque cast on me seemed

stamped with a surprise bordering on stupefaction. She made me repeat my name. "Pardon! Monsieur——?"

"Odiot, Madame."

"Maxime Odiot, the agent, the manager whom M. Laubépin——"

"Yes, Madame."

"You are quite sure?"

I could not help smiling. "Yes, Madame, perfectly."

She gave a rapid glance at the broker's widow, then at the young girl with the serious brow, as if to say, "Think of that!"

After which she shuffled a little among the ottomans, and resumed:

"Please to take a seat, Monsieur Odiot. I am much obliged to you, Sir, for being so kind as to devote your talents to us. We have great need of your help, I assure you; for, in fact, we have, it cannot be denied, the unhappiness of being very rich." Perceiving that at these words the second cousin shrugged her shoulders. "Yes, my dear Mme. Aubry," continued Mme. Laroque, "I maintain it. In making me rich, God determined to try me. I was in reality born for poverty, privation, devotedness, and sacrifice; but I have always been crossed. For instance, I should have liked to have an infirm husband. Well, M. Laroque was a man of admirable health. That is the way my destiny has been, and will be, thwarted from beginning to end."

"Stop there," said Mme. Aubry drily, "poverty would suit you finely; you who cannot deny yourself a single luxury, a single refinement!"

"With your permission, my dear lady," replied Mme. Laroque, "I have no taste for useless self-denial. If I should

condemn myself to the greatest hardships and privation, who, or what would get any good by it? If I were to freeze from morning to night, should you be any the happier?"

Mme. Aubry gave it to be understood by an expressive gesture that she should be none the happier, but that she considered Mme. Laroque's language excessively affected and absurd.

"Well," continued the latter, "happiness or unhappiness, it matters little. We are very rich then, M. Odiot; and however little I may care for this wealth myself, it is my duty to preserve it for my daughter, though the poor child troubles herself about it no more than I; do you, Marguerite?"

At this question a slight smile half parted the disdainful lips of Mlle. Marguerite, and the long arch of her eyebrows was slightly raised, after which that serious and superb countenance returned to its repose.

"Monsieur," Mme. Laroque resumed, "you shall be shown the apartment selected for you at the express desire of M. Laubépin; but first, allow them to conduct you to my father-in-law, who will be very glad to see you. Will you ring, my dear cousin? I hope, M. Odiot, you will do us the pleasure to dine with us to-day. Good-bye, Sir, for the present."

I was entrusted to the care of a servant, who begged me to wait, in a room adjoining that I had just left, till he had received M. Laroque's orders. The man had left the door of the parlour half opened, and I could not help hearing these words spoken by Mme. Laroque in the tone of good-natured banter which is habitual with her.

"Who can understand Laubépin, who announces a bachelor of a certain age, very simple and very grave, and then sends me a gentleman like that?"

Mlle. Marguerite murmured a few words which escaped me, to my lively regret, I own, and to which her mother immediately replied. "I say nothing to the contrary, my daughter, but it is none the less absurd of Laubépin. How can you expect a gentleman like that to go trotting about in *sabots* over ploughed ground? I wager the man has never worn *sabots*. He does not even know what *sabots* are. Well, perhaps I am wrong, my daughter, but I cannot fancy a good bailiff without *sabots*. What do you say, Marguerite, to going with him to see your grandfather?"

Mlle. Marguerite entered almost immediately the room where I was. She seemed but little satisfied on seeing me. "Pardon, Mademoiselle; but the servant told me to wait here."

"Please to follow me, Sir."

I followed her. She led me up a staircase, through several passages, and finally showed me into a kind of gallery, where she left me. I began to examine some pictures on the wall. These paintings were mostly very indifferent sea-pieces, devoted to the glory of the old privateer of the Empire. There were several sea-fights, somewhat smoky, in which it was nevertheless apparent that the little brig *Aimable*, Captain Laroque, twenty-six guns, was causing John Bull the most evident dissatisfaction. Then came some full-length portraits of Captain Laroque, which naturally attracted my particular attention. They all represented, with slight variations, a man of a gigantic size, wearing a kind of republican uniform with large facings, his hair like Kleber's, and sending straight before him a look of energy, ardour, and melancholy; on the whole a kind of man with nothing cheerful about him. While I was curiously studying this tall form, which wonderfully realized

the idea we generally fashion to ourselves of a privateer, and even of a pirate, Mlle. Marguerite begged me to enter. I then found myself in the presence of a thin, decrepit old man, whose eyes scarcely preserved the vital spark, and who, in token of welcome touched with a trembling hand a black silk cap, which covered a skull shining like ivory.

"Grandfather," said Mlle. Marguerite, raising her voice, "this is M. Odiot."

The poor old privateer rose a little in his easy-chair, and looked at me with a dim and undecided expression. At a sign from Mlle. Marguerite I took a seat, and she repeated: "M. Odiot, the new bailiff, father!"

"Ah! Good-morning, Sir," the old man murmured. A pause of most painful silence followed. Captain Laroque, his body bent double and his head drooping, continued to fix on me an unmeaning stare. At last, apparently finding a subject for conversation which was of the highest interest, he said to me, in a dull and deep voice, "M. de Beauchene is dead!"

I could find no answer to this unexpected communication. I was absolutely ignorant who this M. de Beauchene might be, and, as Mlle. Marguerite did not take the trouble to inform me, I confined myself to expressing, by a slight exclamation of condolence, the interest which I took in the unhappy event. Apparently this did not quite satisfy the old captain's expectation, for he repeated a moment afterwards, in the same mournful tone:

"M. de Beauchene is dead!"

My embarrassment was doubled at this perseverance. I I saw Mlle. Marguerite's foot tapping impatiently on the floor: despair took possession of me, and seizing the first expression

that came into my mind: "And what did he die of?" I asked.

This question had no sooner escaped me than an angry look from Mlle. Marguerite warned me that I was suspected of some sarcastic disrespect. Although I felt myself guilty of nothing but foolish awkwardness, I hastened to give the conversation a happier turn. I spoke of the pictures in the gallery, of the strong emotions they must recall to the captain, of the respectful interest I felt in seeing the hero of those glorious annals. I even went into detail, and spoke with some warmth of two or three engagements in which the *Aimable* seemed to me really to have performed miracles. While I was practising this refined politeness, Mlle. Marguerite, to my extreme surprise, continued to look at me with evident dissatisfaction and vexation. Still her grandfather gave me an attentive ear; I saw his head gradually rise. A strange smile lighted up his emaciated face, and seemed to efface its wrinkles. Suddenly, seizing with both hands the arms of his chair, he drew himself up to his full height; a warlike flame shot from his deep-set eyes, and he cried in a sonorous voice, which made me tremble: "Keep her up to the wind! Full up to the wind! Fire on the larboard side! Close with her! close with her! Throw out the grappling-irons! Quick! Now we have her. Fire yonder! a good clean sweep, clear her deck! Now follow me! All together! Down with the Englishman, the accursed Saxon! Hurrah!" While uttering this last cry, which rattled in his throat, the old man, ineffectually supported by the pious hands of his granddaughter, fell back, as if crushed, in his chair. Mlle. Laroque made me an imperious sign, and I left the room. I found my way back as well as I could through the maze of passages and staircases, congratulating myself

warmly on the tact which I had displayed in my interview with the old captain of the *Aimable*.

The gray-haired servant who had received me on my arrival—his name is Alain—was waiting for me in the hall, to tell me, from Mme. Laroque, that I had not time now to go to my own apartment before dinner, and that my dress would do as it was. At the moment that I entered the parlour, a company of about twenty persons was leaving it with the usual ceremonies to go to the dining-room. It was the first time, since the change in my circumstances, that I had been at a fashionable party. Accustomed formerly to the little distinctions which the etiquette of society usually makes in favour of birth and fortune, I did not receive without bitterness the first tokens of neglect and disdain to which my new position unavoidably condemns me. Repressing as well as I could the rising of false pride, I offered my arm to a young girl of a short but well-shaped and graceful figure, who was staying alone behind all the guests, and who was, as I supposed, Mlle. Helouin, the governess. My place at table was set near hers. While we were taking our seats, Mlle. Marguerite appeared, leading, like Antigone, the slow and heavy steps of her grandfather. She came and took a seat on my right, with that air of calm majesty which belongs to her, and the powerful Newfoundland who seems to be the accredited protector of this princess, did not fail to take his position as sentinel behind her chair. I thought it my duty to express to my neighbour, without delay, the regret which I felt at having awkwardly awakened memories which seemed to disturb and annoy her grandfather.

"It is for me to excuse myself, Sir," she replied; "I ought to have warned you never to mention the English

before my father. . . . Are you acquainted with Brittany, Sir ? "

I said that I had no acquaintance with it before to-day, but that I was very happy to know it now ; and further, to prove myself worthy of it, I spoke in lyrical style of the picturesque beauties which had struck me on the journey. Just when I was thinking that this adroit flattery was gaining me the young Breton's good will in the highest degree, I was astonished to see symptoms of impatience and weariness depicted on her brow. I was decidedly unlucky with this young girl.

" Come, Sir," said she with a peculiar ironical expression, " I see you love what is beautiful, all that speaks to the imagination and the soul ; nature, greenness, heather, rocks, and the fine arts. You will get along wonderfully with Mlle. Helouin, who also adores all those things ; for my own part, I scarcely love them at all."

" Why, in Heaven's name, what then do you love, Mademoiselle ? "

At this question, which I addressed to her in a tone of amiable pleasantry, Mlle. Marguerite turned abruptly towards me, and answered drily :

" I love my dog. Here, Mervyn ! "

Then she affectionately plunged her hand into the thick fur of the Newfoundland, who was seated on his haunches and already thrusting his formidable head between my plate and that of Mlle. Marguerite.

I could not help observing with a fresh interest the countenance of this strange person, and looking for the outward signs of the deadness of soul which she professed. Mlle. Laroque, who had at first seemed to me very tall, owes that appearance only to the full and perfectly harmonious style

of her beauty. She is really of the ordinary height. Her face, of a slightly rounded oval, and her neck, exquisitely and proudly set, are lightly covered with a tint of dusky gold. Her hair, which forms a thick setting to her forehead, throws wavy bluish reflections with every movement of her head; the nostrils, delicate and thin, seem copied from the divine model of a Roman Madonna, and sculptured in living mother-of-pearl. Below the large, deep, pensive eyes, the golden-brown tint of the cheeks is shaded by a kind of browner glory, which seems a mark, projected by the shadow of the eyelashes, or as it were burnt in by her ardent gaze. I can with difficulty give the supreme sweetness of the smile, which at intervals animates that fine face, and tempers, by a kind of graceful shrinking, the brilliancy of those large eyes. Certainly the very goddess of poesy, the goddess of dreams and enchanted worlds, might boldly offer herself for human worship under the form of that child who loves nothing but her dog. Nature often prepares these cruel mysteries for us in her choicest works.

For the rest, it matters little enough to me. I am convinced that I am destined to play in Mlle. Marguerite's imagination the part which might be played by a negro; an object, as is known, of slight attraction for a Creole. Still, I flatter myself I am as proud as Mlle. Marguerite; the most impossible of all attachments for me would be one that would expose me to suspicions of intrigue and scheming. I do not think moreover that I shall need arming with any great moral force against a danger which does not seem to me a probable one; for Mlle. Laroque's beauty is of the kind which calls for the pure contemplation of the artist, rather than for any more human and tenderer feeling.

Be that as it may, at the name of Mervyn which Mlle.

Marguerite had given to her body-guard, my neighbour on the left, Mlle. Helouin, launched under full sail into the cycle of Arthur, and was so kind as to inform me that Mervyn was the true name of the famous enchanter whom the vulgar style Merlin. From the Knights of the Round Table she ascended to the times of Cæsar, and I saw pass before me in a somewhat tedious procession, the whole hierarchy of druids, bards, and Ovates, after which we fell fatally from "menhir" to "dolmen," and from "galgal" to "cromlech."

While I was losing myself in the Celtic forests under the guidance of Mlle. Helouin, who wants nothing but a little more flesh to be a very passable druidess, the broker's widow, seated near us, was waking the echoes with a continued monotonous complaining, like that of a blind man; they had forgotten to give her a foot-warmer; they gave her cold soup; they gave her bones without any meat; that was the way they treated her. But she was used to it. It is sad to be poor, very sad. She wished she was dead.

"Yes, doctor"—she addressed herself to her neighbour, who seemed to be listening to her grievances with a rather ironical affectation of interest—"yes, doctor, I am not joking: I wish I was dead. Besides, it would be a great relief to everybody. Think, doctor, when one has been in my position, and dined off plate with one's own crest on it, to be reduced to charity, and to find one's self a plaything for servants! It is not known, it never will be known, how much I suffer in this house! Those who are proud can suffer without complaining; and so I hold my peace, doctor, but I think none the less."

"Exactly, my dear lady," said the doctor, whose name, I think, is Desmarets; "let us speak no more of it; drink some cold water, it will calm you."

"Nothing will calm me, doctor; nothing but death."

"Very well, Madame, whenever you please," the doctor replied resolutely.

At a more central part of the table, the attention of the guests was riveted by the careless, caustic, conceited rattle of a person whom I heard called M. de Bevallan, and who seems to enjoy here all the rights of particular intimacy. He is a man of tall figure, past his first youth; his head recalls with tolerable fidelity that of King Francis I. He is listened to like an oracle, and Mlle. Laroque herself bestows on him as much interest and admiration as she seems able to conceive for anything in the world. For my own part, as the majority of the sallies which I heard applauded related to local stories and events of the immediate neighbourhood, I could appreciate thus far but imperfectly the merits of this Armorican lion.

I had occasion however to congratulate myself on his politeness; he offered me a cigar after dinner, and took me to the smoking-room. He did the honours at the same time to three or four young men, scarcely past boyhood, who evidently regarded him as a model of good manners and exquisite wickedness.

"Well! Bevallan," said one of these young rufflers, "you don't give up the priestess of the sun, then?"

"Never!" replied M. de Bevallan. "I will wait ten months, ten years if need be; but I will have her, or no one shall."

"You are not unlucky, old fellow; the governess will help you to keep patient."

"Shall I slit your tongue or your ears, young Arthur?" replied M. de Bevallan in an undertone, advancing towards the speaker, and pointing out my presence to him by a rapid gesture.

Then they brought on the carpet, in charming confusion, all the horses, all the dogs, all the women of the neighbourhood. It might be wished, by the by, that women could be present, once in their lives, in secret, at one of those conversations which take place between men in the first excitement after a generous repast; they would there learn the exact measure of the delicacy of our morals, and of the confidence with which it should inspire them. I do not in any degree pique myself on prudishness; but the conversation at which I was present had, in my opinion, the grave fault of overstepping the bounds of the freest pleasantry: it touched lightly on everything, outraged everything gaily, and finally assumed a very uncalled-for tone of universal desecration. Now, my education, doubtless too imperfect, has left in my heart a fund of respect, which, it seems to me, should be kept intact even in the liveliest outbreaks of gaiety. Still we have nowadays in France our Young America, which is not happy if it does not blaspheme a little after drinking; we have some agreeable little ruffians, the hope of the future, who have had neither father nor mother, who have no country and no God, but seem to be the brute production of some heartless and soulless machine, which has dropped them by chance upon this globe, to become its very indifferent ornament.

In short, M. de Bevallan, who is not afraid to appoint himself professor of cynicism to these beardless rakes, did not please me, any more than I think I pleased him. I alleged a little fatigue, and took my leave.

At my request, old Alain armed himself with a lantern, and led me across the park towards the apartments intended for me. After a walk of a few minutes, we crossed a brook by a wooden bridge, and found ourselves before a massive

arched doorway, surmounted by a kind of belfry, and flanked by two turrets. It is the entrance of the old château. Aged oaks and firs form a mysterious girdle round this feudal ruin, and give it an air of deep retirement. It is in this ruin that I am to live. My apartments, consisting of three rooms very prettily hung with chintz, stretched above the gate from one turret to the other. This melancholy abode did not fail to please me; it suits my fortunes. As soon as I was released from old Alain, who is of a somewhat garrulous disposition, I began to write an account of this important day, stopping now and then to listen to the gentle murmur of the brooklet running beneath my windows, and to the cry of the legendary owl, celebrating his mournful loves in the neighbouring woods.

July 1*st.*

It is time to try and unravel the thread of my personal and private existence, which has been a little lost these two months in the active duties of my office.

The day after my arrival, after several hours spent in my retirement in studying the papers and registers of Father Hivart, as they call my predecessor, I went to breakfast at the château, where I found only a few remaining of the guests of the day before. Mme. Laroque, who lived a good deal in

Paris before the health of her father-in-law condemned her to a perpetual country life, faithfully preserves in her retirement the taste for the elevated, elegant, or frivolous pursuits, which were reflected in the kennel of the Rue du Bac, in the time of Mme. de Staël's turban. She seems moreover to have visited most of the great cities of Europe, and has brought back from them certain literary inclinations which go beyond the usual bounds of Parisian learning and curiosity. She takes in a number of papers and reviews, and endeavours to follow from afar, as much as may be, the movements of that refined civilization, of which the theatres, museums, and new books, are the more or less transient flower and fruit. In the course of breakfast, a new opera was spoken of, and Mme. Laroque addressed a question relative to it to M. de Bevallan; he was not able to answer it, though, if he is to be believed, he has always one foot and one eye on the Boulevard des Italiens. Mme. Laroque then fell back on me, though showing, by her distracted look, the small hopes she had of finding her man of business well acquainted with such things; but, unluckily, they are precisely the only things I do know. I had heard in Italy the opera which had just been played in Paris for the first time. The very reserve of my reply excited Mme. Laroque's curiosity, and she began to press me with questions, and soon condescended to impart to me, of her own accord, her impressions, remembrances, and enthusiastic ideas of travel. In short, we did not stop before reviewing in company the most celebrated theatres and galleries of the Continent; and our conversation was so animated when we left the table, that, not to break it off, she took my arm without noticing it. We went into the drawing-room, and continued our sympathetic outpourings; Mme. Laroque forgetting more and more the

tone of kind protection, which hitherto had a good deal jarred on me in her language to me.

She confessed to me that the demon of the theatre tormented her in a high degree, and that she contemplated having a play represented at the château. She asked my advice as to the management of this diversion. I spoke to her in some detail of the private theatricals which I had had the opportunity of seeing in Paris and St. Petersburg; and then, not wishing to presume upon her favour, I rose abruptly, stating that I intended to inaugurate my office without delay, by exploring a large farm situated two short leagues from the castle. At this announcement, Mme. Laroque seemed suddenly astounded: she looked at me, shuffled among her ottomans, stretched out her hands to the brasier, and finally said in a half-whisper: "Oh! what does that matter? Leave it for the present." And when I persisted: "But, good heaven!" she returned with charming embarrassment, "the roads are frightful! At least wait for fine weather!"

"No, Madame," said I, laughing, "I will not wait a minute; I am bailiff or I am not."

"Madame," said old Alain, who happened to be in the room, "we could harness Father Hivart's wagon for M. Odiot; it has no springs, but it is all the stronger for that."

Mme. Laroque looked thunderbolts at the unlucky Alain for daring to propose Father Hivart's wagon to a bailiff of my stamp, who had been at a play in the palace of the Grand Duchess Helen. "Would not the buggy get through the roads?" she asked.

"The buggy, Madame? No, indeed. No fear of its getting through," said Alain; "or if it does get through, it

won't all of it get through; and besides I don't think it can get through."

I asserted that I could go perfectly well on foot.

"No, no, impossible; I won't have it! Let us see, let us see. We have half-a-dozen saddle-horses doing nothing—but probably you do not ride?"

"I beg your pardon, Madame; "but really it is useless; I will go—"

"Alain, have a horse saddled for Monsieur. Which, Marguerite?"

"Give him Proserpine," murmured M. de Bevallan, laughing in his beard.

"No, no, not Proserpine!" cried Mlle. Marguerite, impetuously.

"Why not Proserpine, Mademoiselle?" I asked.

"Because she would throw you," said the young girl, flatly.

"Ah, would she really? Pardon, will you allow me to ask if you ride the animal in question, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, Sir; but I have some trouble."

"Well, perhaps you will have less after I have ridden her two or three times. That decides me. Have Proserpine saddled, Alain."

Mlle. Marguerite knitted her black brows, and sat down, making a gesture of the hand, as if to disclaim all share in the responsibility of the catastrophe which she foresaw to be impending.

"If you want spurs, I have a pair at your service," said M. de Bévallan, who certainly expected that I should not return.

Without seeming to notice the reproachful look which

Mlle. Marguerite directed at the obliging gentleman, I accepted his spurs. In five minutes, a sound of irregular pawing proclaimed the arrival of Proserpine, who was being led with some difficulty to the foot of the steps leading to the private garden. I may state that she was a fine half-bred mare, as black as jet. I immediately descended the steps. Some young men, with M. de Bévallan at their head, followed me on the terrace, out of humanity, I fancy; and at the same time the three windows of the drawing-room were opened for the benefit of the ladies and the old men. I would willingly have dispensed with all this ceremony, but, of course, I had to submit to it; and, besides, I had no great anxiety as to the upshot of the adventure; for if I am a young bailiff, I am a very old horseman. I could scarcely walk when my father began to set me on horseback, to my mother's great despair; and subsequently he spared no pains to make me his equal in an art in which he excelled. He had even carried this branch of my education to a refinement, occasionally making me put on some old, heavy armour that was in the family, that I might go through my exercises of the *grand manége* more at my ease.

Meanwhile Proserpine allowed me to untie the bridle, and even to touch her shoulder, without giving the least sign of hesitation; but she no sooner felt the weight of my foot in the stirrup than she swerved abruptly aside, giving three or four magnificent flings above the large marble vases which ornamented the steps; then reared, by way of doing the agreeable, beating the air with her fore-feet, after which she stood still, trembling. "Not easy to mount," said the groom, with a wink. "So I see, my boy; but I'll astonish her, you'll see." At the same time I sprang into the saddle without touching the

stirrup, and while Proserpine was thinking over what had occurred to her, I got a firm seat. The next moment we were vanishing at a hand-gallop down the avenue of chestnuts, followed by a sound of clapping of hands, for which M. de Bévallan had had the wit to give the signal.

This incident, trifling as it was, did not fail, as I could perceive even the same evening in the faces of the party, wonderfully to raise my credit. A few other accomplishments, of equal value, completed the work of securing for me all the importance I wish for here, enough to guarantee my personal dignity. For the rest, they can easily see that I make no attempts to abuse the care and consideration which are shown me, with an idea of playing a part in the château out of keeping with the modest post which I fill. I shut myself up in my tower as often as I can, without distinctly failing in politeness; in a word, I keep strictly in my place, that no one may ever be tempted to put me down into it.

A few days after my arrival, when I was present at one of these dinners of ceremony, which are almost of daily occurrence here in this season, my name was pronounced in a tone of inquiry by the burly Sub-Prefect of the neighbouring small town, who was seated at the right of the lady of the château. Mme. Laroque, who is liable to such abstraction, forgot that I was not far from her, and, in spite of myself, I did not lose a word of her reply.

"Good heavens! Don't mention him! There is some impenetrable mystery. We think he is a prince in disguise. There are so many strolling up and down the world! This one has every conceivable accomplishment: he rides, he plays the piano, he draws, and all in perfection. Between ourselves,


Gust. Mouchet

my dear Sub-Prefect, I believe with all my heart he is a very poor bailiff, but he is really a very agreeable man."

The Sub-Prefect, who is also a very agreeable man, or thinks himself so, which comes to the same thing for his own satisfaction, replied gracefully, caressing his magnificent moustache with one of his plump hands, that there were beautiful eyes enough in the château to account for many mysteries; that he strongly suspected the disguised prince of being a lover in disguise, and that, moreover, Love was the legitimate parent of Caprice, and the natural bailiff of the Graces. Then, suddenly changing his tone: "For the rest, Madame, if you have the slightest uneasiness as to this individual, I will have him questioned to-morrow by the Brigadier of Gendarmes."

Mme. Laroque protested against this excess of gallant zeal; and the conversation went no further, as far as concerned me; but it left me much piqued, not at the Sub-Prefect, who, on the contrary, delighted me extremely, but at Mme. Laroque; for, though she did more than justice to my personal qualifications, she did not seem to be duly impressed with my official merits.

It so happened that I had next day to renew the lease of a considerable farm. This business had to be done with a very cunning old peasant, whom I nevertheless contrived to bewilder by a skilful combination of a few legal terms and prudent diplomatical reserve. Our terms agreed upon, the good man quietly laid down three *rouleaus* of gold coins on my desk. Although the meaning of this payment, which was not due, entirely escaped me, I kept from showing any inconsiderate astonishment; but while opening the *rouleaus*, I learned by some indirect questions that this sum was the earnest-money of

the bargain; in other words, the pot of wine, which it seems the farmers are in the habit of paying their landlord at each renewal of a lease. I had no idea of claiming this earnest-money, having found no mention of it in the former leases, drawn up by my able predecessor, which had served as my model. At the time I drew no conclusion from this incident; but when I went to give Mme. Laroque this lucky present, her surprise astonished me. "What is that?" she asked. I explained to her the nature of the payment. She made me repeat it. "That is not the custom, is it?" she resumed.

"Yes, Madame, every time you consent to a fresh lease."

"But there have been more than ten leases renewed, to my knowledge, within these thirty years. How comes it that we have never heard of such a thing?"

"I cannot tell, Madame."

Mme. Laroque fell into an abyss of thought, at the bottom of which she perhaps encountered the venerable shade of Father Hivart, after which she shrugged her shoulders slightly, looked at me, then at the money, then at me again, and seemed to hesitate. Finally, throwing herself back in her chair, and sighing deeply, she said to me, with a simplicity for which I felt grateful: "That will do, Sir; I thank you."

This mark of stupid integrity, about which she had the good taste not to compliment me, nevertheless caused Mme. Laroque to form a high idea of the ability and virtues of her bailiff. I could judge of it a few days afterwards. Her daughter was reading to her an account of a journey to the Pole, in which an extraordinary bird was mentioned, that does not steal. "Stop," she said, "that is like my bailiff."

I firmly hope that since that time, by the strict care which I bring to the task I have accepted, I have acquired some title

to respect of a less negative kind. M. Laubépin, when I went to Paris lately to embrace my sister, thanked me with much feeling for the honour I had done to the engagements he had accepted for me. "Courage, Maxime," he said; "we shall portion Helen. The poor child will, so to speak, have known nothing. And as for yourself, my friend, feel no regret. Believe me, you have in yourself the thing most like happiness in this world, and, thank heaven, I see you will always have it; a peaceful conscience, and the strong serenity of a soul wholly devoted to duty."

The old man is doubtless right. I am calm, but still I scarcely feel happy. There are in my soul, not yet ripe for the austere delight of sacrifice, some outbursts of youth and of despair. My life, unreservedly dedicated and devoted to another life, more feeble and more dear to me than my own, no longer belongs to me: it has no future, it is in a cloister for ever closed. My heart must no longer beat, my brain must no longer think, save for another. Only let Helen be happy! Years are already coming on me; let them come quickly! I beseech them to come; their coldness will strengthen my courage.

For the rest, I cannot complain of a situation, which, in a word, has deceived my most painful fears, and even surpasses my highest hopes. My work, my frequent journeys into the neighbouring departments, and my taste for solitude, keep me much away from the château, the noisy gatherings at which I especially avoid. Perhaps I owe to the infrequency of my visits a good part of the friendly reception I meet with. Mme. Laroque, especially, shows me real affection; she makes me the confidant of her strange and very sincere chimeras about poverty, about devotedness and poetical self-denial, which contrast amusingly with the manifold precautions of the chilly Creole. Sometimes she

envies the gipsy women, carrying their children, dragging a wretched cart along the roads, and cooking their dinner under a hedge; sometimes it is the sisters of charity, and sometimes canteen women, to whose heroic toils she aspires. Lastly, she does not cease to reproach the late M. Laroque the younger with his admirable health, which never allowed his wife to display that genius for nursing with which she felt her heart surcharged. Still, she has had the fancy, within these few days, to add to her easy-chair a kind of nook, shaped like a sentry-box, to protect her from draughts. I found her the other morning triumphantly installed in this kiosk, waiting pleasantly enough for martyrdom.

I have hardly less cause to be satisfied with the other inmates of the château. Mlle. Marguerite, always buried like a Nubian sphinx in some unknown dream, nevertheless condescends with thoughtful kindness to repeat for me my favourite airs. She has a beautiful contralto voice, which she manages with consummate skill, but also with a negligence and coldness of manner that one would think was intentional. She does sometimes accidentally let some impassioned notes escape her lips, but she immediately seems humiliated and ashamed at thus forgetting her character or her part, and hastens to return within the bounds of icy correctness.

A few games at piquet, which I have had the easy politeness to lose with M. Laroque, have won me the good graces of the old man, whose looks rest on me sometimes with a perfectly singular degree of attention. One would say that some dream of the past, some fancied likeness, is half-awaked in the clouds of that wearied memory, on the bosom of which float the confused shadows of a whole century. But they would not return me the money I had lost to him! It seems that Mme. Aubry, who

plays habitually with the old captain, makes no scruple whatever of accepting this restitution as a regular thing, which does not hinder her from frequently winning from the old privateer, with whom she then has noisy disputes.

This lady, whom M. Laubépin treated very gently when he described her merely as an embittered spirit, inspires me with no sympathy. Still, out of respect for the house, I compelled myself to win her good will, which I have accomplished by lending a friendly ear, sometimes to her wretched lamentations over her present lot, sometimes to the emphatic description of her past splendour, of her plate, her furniture, her laces and pairs of gloves.

I must own that I am in a good school for learning to despise the property I have lost. Everybody here, in fact, preaches me, by their behaviour and language, an eloquent sermon on the contempt of riches; first Mme. Aubry, who may be compared to those shameless gluttons whose disgusting greediness takes away your appetite, and gives you a deep loathing for the dishes of which they boast; then the old man, who is decaying over his millions as sorrowfully as Job on his dunghill; then this excellent, but romantic and used-up, woman, who dreams amid her obstinate prosperity of the forbidden fruit of wretchedness; and lastly, the superb Marguerite, who wears the diadem of beauty and wealth, with which heaven has burdened her brow, as if it were a crown of thorns.

Strange girl! Almost every morning, if the weather is fine, I see her pass beneath the windows of my belfry; she salutes me with a grave bow, which sets the black feather in her hat waving, and then disappears slowly down the shaded path which crosses the ruins of the old château. Generally old Alain follows her at a little distance; sometimes she

has no companion but the huge and faithful Mervyn, who steps out at the side of his fair mistress like a thoughtful bear. With this escort she goes the round of the whole neighbouring country, seeking for charitable adventures. She might dispense with any protector; there is not a cottage within six leagues that does not know her, and venerate her as a good fairy. The peasants call her simply "Mademoiselle," when they speak of her, as if they were speaking of one of those king's daughters who adorn their legends, and whose beauty, power, and mystery, she seems to them to possess.

I try, however, to explain to myself the cloud of gloomy thought which continually overshadows her brow, the haughty and defiant severity of her look, and the bitter dryness of her words. I ask myself, are these the natural features of a curiously compounded character, or the symptoms of some secret trouble, whether remorse, fear, or love, gnawing that noble heart. No matter how disinterested one may be in the case, it is impossible to help feeling a certain curiosity in the presence of so remarkable a person. Yesterday evening, while old Alain, with whom I am a favourite, was waiting on me at my lonely dinner, I said to him, "Well, Alain, it has been a fine day; have you had a ride to-day?"

"Yes, Sir, this morning with Mademoiselle."

"Ah, indeed."

"Perhaps Monsieur saw us go by?"

"Possibly, Alain. Yes, I see you go by sometimes. You look well on horseback, Alain."

"Monsieur is too kind. Mademoiselle looks better than I do."

"She is a very pretty young lady."

"Oh, perfect, Sir; and inside as well as outside, like her

mother. I will tell Monsieur something. Monsieur knows that this property belonged formerly to the last Count de Castennec, whom I had the honour to serve. When the Laroques bought the château, I confess my heart swelled a little, and I hesitated about staying in the house. I had been brought up with a respect for the nobility, and it cost me a great deal to serve people of no birth. Monsieur may have noticed that I feel a particular pleasure in discharging my duty towards him; it is because I think Monsieur has the ways of a gentleman. Are you quite sure you are not of a noble family, Sir?"

"I fear I am, my poor Alain."

"However, as I was going to tell Monsieur," Alain resumed with a graceful bow, "I have learned in the service of these ladies that the nobility of the feelings is as good as the other kind, particularly that of M. le Comte de Castennec, who had a weakness for beating his servants. Still, Sir, I say it's a pity Mademoiselle doesn't marry a gentleman of good name. Nothing more would be needed to make her perfect."

"But it seems to me, Alain, that it depends only on herself."

"If Monsieur refers to M. de Bévallan, it really does depend only on herself, for he asked her in marriage six months ago. Madame did not seem much opposed to the marriage, and in fact M. de Bévallan is the richest man in this neighbourhood, next to the Laroques; but Mademoiselle, without giving a positive answer, wished to take time to think over it."

"But if she loves M de Bévallan, and can marry him when she pleases, why is she always so sad and abstracted as we see her?"

"It is a fact, Sir, that Mademoiselle is entirely changed these two or three years. Formerly she was as gay as a bird, and now one would say something is worrying her; but I may say respectfully, that I don't think it is love for that gentleman."

"You don't seem too fond of M. de Bévallan yourself, my good Alain. And yet he is of a good noble family——"

"That doesn't hinder him from being a rascal, and spending his time in seducing the country girls. And if Monsieur has eyes, he may see that he wouldn't mind playing the Sultan in the château, in default of anything better."

There was a pause of silence; after which Alain continued, "Pity Monsieur hasn't a hundred thousand a year."

"Why so, Alain?"

"Because——" said Alain, tossing his head thoughtfully.

July 25th.

In the course of the month which has just passed, I have made one friend, and, I think, two enemies. The enemies are Mlle. Marguerite, and Mlle. Hélouin. The friend is an old maid, eighty-eight years old. I fear she is not a compensation.

Mlle. Hélouin, with whom I will settle accounts first, is an

ungrateful person. My alleged wrongs to her ought rather to recommend me to her esteem; but she seems to be one of those women who are pretty common in the world, who do not count esteem in the number of the feelings which they care either to inspire or to feel. From the very beginning of my life here, a kind of similarity between the fortunes of the governess and the bailiff, the modest position we each hold in the château, had impelled me to form relations of affectionate kindness with Mlle. Hélouin. At all times, I have made it a point to show the interest in these poor girls, which their thankless task, and their precarious situation, at once humiliating and without a future, seem to me to bespeak for them. Mlle. Hélouin is moreover, pretty, intelligent, and accomplished; and, though she spoils it all somewhat by the nervous vivacity of manner, feverish coquettishness, and slight pedantry, which are the usual mistakes of her situation, I had but little merit, I own, in playing the chivalrous part towards her which I had assigned myself. This part assumed the character of a kind of duty in my eyes, when I perceived, as several warnings had previously suggested to me, that a devouring lion, with the features of king Francis the First, was furtively roaming about my young protégée. This duplicity, which does credit to M. de Bévallan's boldness, is carried on under colour of friendly familiarity, with a policy and coolness which easily deceive unobservant or unsuspecting eyes. Mme. Laroque and her daughter, especially, are too much strangers to the perversity of the world, and live too far from any reality to feel the shadow of suspicion. As for myself, who am greatly irritated at this insatiable eater of hearts, I took a pleasure in spoiling his plans; more than once I have attracted the attention which he sought to appropriate; and I have particularly taken pains to lessen in

Mlle. Hélouin's breast that feeling of neglect and isolation, which in general gives so great an advantage to the style of consolation offered her. Have I ever, in the course of this ill-advised contest, gone beyond the delicate bounds of brotherly protection? I do not think so; and the very terms of the short dialogue which has suddenly changed the character of our intercourse, seem to speak in favour of my reserve. One evening last week we were all taking the fresh air on the terrace. Mlle. Hélouin, to whom it happened that I had occasion to show some particular attention during the day, took my arm gently, and, picking to pieces an orange-flower with her delicate white teeth, said to me, with a little emotion in her voice, "You are kind, Monsieur Maxime."

"I try to be, Mademoiselle."

"You are a true friend."

"Yes."

"But what sort of a friend?"

"A true one, as you have said."

"A friend who loves me?"

"Doubtless."

"Much?"

"Certainly."

"Passionately?"

"No."

At this monosyllable, which I pronounced very distinctly, and followed up by a firm look, Mlle. Hélouin impetuously threw away the orange-flower, and left my arm. Since that unlucky hour, I have been treated with a disdain, which I have not come by dishonestly, and I should most assuredly believe that friendship between the sexes, is a delusive feeling, had I not received the very next day a kind of set-off against my mishap.

I had gone to spend the evening at the château; two or three families, who had come for a fortnight's visit, had gone away in the morning. I found there none but habitual guests, the curé, the collector, and Doctor Desmarets; and, lastly, General de Saint Cast and his wife, who, like the doctor, live in the adjoining small town. Mme. de Saint Cast, who appears to have brought her husband a handsome fortune, was engaged in lively conversation with Mme. Aubry when I entered. These two ladies understood each other perfectly; as usual, they were celebrating, each in her turn, like two shepherds in a pastoral poem, the incomparable advantage of riches, in language in which elegance of expression vied with elevation of thought. "You are quite right, Madame," said Mme. Aubry, "there is but one thing in the world, and that is to be rich. When I was rich, I despised with all my heart those who were not, and so I find it quite natural now that I should be despised, and I do not complain of it."

"You are not despised for it, Madame," returned Mme. de Saint Cast, "certainly not, Madame; but it is a fact that it makes a tremendous difference whether one is rich or not. The General there knows something about it; he had positively nothing when I married him, except his sword, and a sword doesn't put butter in one's soup, does it, Madame?"

"No, no, indeed, Madame," cried Mme. Aubry, applauding this bold metaphor. "Honour and glory are all very fine in romances; but I prefer a good carriage, don't you, Madame?"

"Yes, certainly, Madame; that's what I was telling the General this morning as we were on our way here; eh, General?"

"Hm!" grunted the General, who was playing dismally in a corner with the old privateer.

"You had nothing when I married you, General," Mme. de Saint Cast continued; "you don't think of denying it, I hope?"

"You've said so already!" the General muttered.

"That doesn't alter the fact that but for me you would have to go afoot, General, which would not be pleasant with your wounds. You couldn't ride in your carriage with your pension of six or seven thousand francs, my friend. I told him so this morning, Madame, speaking of our new carriage, which is as easy as it is possible for a carriage to be. I paid for it handsomely, though; it makes four thousand good francs less in my purse, Madame!"

"I can easily believe it, Madame! My best carriage cost me full five thousand, reckoning in the tiger-skin for the feet, which was worth five hundred by itself."

"I have been obliged to be a little economical about mine," returned Mme. de Saint Cast, "for I have just been refurnishing my drawing-room, and for carpet and hangings alone it stands me in fifteen thousand francs. That's too good for a hole in the provinces, you'll tell me, and it's quite true. But the whole town is on its knees before it, and one likes to be respected, isn't it so, Madame?"

"No doubt one likes to be respected, Madame," Mme. Aubry replied, "and one is only respected in proportion to one's money. For my part, I console myself for being no longer respected, by thinking that if I were again what I once was, I should see the people who despise me at my feet."

"Except me, damn it!" cried Doctor Desmarets, rising suddenly. "You might have a hundred millions a year, and you wouldn't see me at your feet I give you my word of

honour. And so I shall go out into the fresh air, for devil take me if I can breathe here any longer."

"And the worthy doctor left the room, taking with him my heartfelt gratitude, for he had done me a real service, by comforting my heart, overburdened with indignation and disgust.

Although M. Desmarets is established in the house on the footing of a Saint John Chrysostom, and allowed the greatest freedom of speech, his exclamation was too spirited not to cause the company a feeling of uneasiness, which resulted in an embarrassed silence. Mme. Laroque broke it skilfully, by asking her daughter if it had struck eight.

"No, mother," Mlle. Marguerite replied, "for Mlle. de Porhoët has not come yet."

A moment afterwards, as the clock was on the point of striking, the door opened, and Mlle. Jocelynde de Porhoët-Gaël, leaning on Dr. Desmarets' arm, entered the room with astronomical punctuality.

Mlle. de Porhoët-Gaël, who has this year seen her eighty-eighth spring, and looks like a reed preserved in silk, is the last scion of a very noble race, whose earliest ancestors are thought to be discovered among the fabled kings of ancient Armorica. Still the family does not occupy a serious footing in history until the twelfth century, in the person of Juthaël, son of Conan le Tort, issue of the younger branch of the house of Brittany. Some drops of the blood of the Porhoëts have flowed in the most illustrious veins of France, in the Rohans, the Lusignans, the Penthièvres; and these great lords admitted that it was not the least pure of their blood. I remember, when studying one day, in a fit of youthful vanity, the history of the alliances of my family, that I noticed this

queer name Porhoët, and that my father, who was very learned in such matters, was very proud of it. Mlle. de Porhoët, now the only one left of her name, would never marry, that she might so preserve as long as possible in the firmament of French nobility the constellation of these magic syllables, Porhoët-Gaël. It chanced that one day some one was speaking in her presence of the house of Bourbon. "The Bourbons," said Mlle. Porhoët, plunging her knitting-needle several times into her white wig, "the Bourbons are a good noble family; but" (suddenly assuming an air of modesty) "there are better!"

It is impossible, however, not to do homage to this august old lady, who wears with unexampled dignity the threefold burdensome majesty of birth, age, and misfortune. An unhappy lawsuit, which she has obstinately carried on out of France for fifteen years, has gradually reduced her already very slender fortune; probably she scarcely has an income of a thousand francs left. This distress has taken away nothing from her pride, added nothing of ill-temper; she is cheerful, equable, and courteous; she lives, no one knows how, in her cottage with a small servant, and yet finds means to give a good deal in alms. Mme. Laroque and her daughter have formed an attachment to their noble and poor neighbour, which does them honour; she is in their house the object of an attentive respect, which confounds Mme. Aubry. I have often seen Mlle. Marguerite leave the liveliest dance to make the fourth at Mlle. de Porhoët's game at whist; if Mlle. de Porhoët should miss her whist (five centime points) for a single day, the world would come to an end. I am myself one of the old lady's favourite partners, and, on the evening of which I speak, we were not long, the curé, the doctor,

and I, before we were seated round the whist-table, opposite, and on each side of the descendant of Conan le Tort.

It is needful to state, that at the beginning of the last century a great-uncle of Mlle. de Porhoët, who was attached to the household of the Duke of Anjou, crossed the Pyrenees in the retinue of the young prince, afterwards Philip the Fifth, and formed in Spain a prosperous establishment. His direct descendants appear to have become extinct fifteen years ago, and Mlle. de Porhoët, who had never lost sight of her ultramontane relatives, at once declared herself the heiress of their property, which is said to be considerable. Her rights were contested, too justly, by one of the oldest houses of Castile, allied to the Spanish branch of the Porhoët family. Thence arose the suit which the unlucky octogenarian prosecutes at great expense from court to court with a perseverance bordering on madness, which causes grief to her friends, and amusement to the indifferent. Dr. Desmarets, in spite of the respect which he professes for Mlle. de Porhoët, does not fail to make common cause himself with the laughers, all the more so, that he decidedly disapproves of the use to which the poor woman in fancy devotes her chimerical inheritance, namely, the erection, in the neighbouring town, of a cathedral in the finest flamboyant style, which is to disseminate to the end of ages yet to come, the name of the founder, and of a great and vanished race. This cathedral, a dream engrafted on a dream, is the harmless plaything of this aged child. She has had plans drawn for it; she spends her days and sometimes her nights in contemplating its glories, in changing its arrangement by the addition of some ornaments; and she speaks of it as of a building already erected and fit for use:—

"I was in the nave of my cathedral; I have noticed something very unbecoming in the north aisle of my cathedral; I have changed the dress of the Swiss," et cætera.

"Well, Mademoiselle," said the doctor, while shuffling the cards, "have you been at work on your cathedral since yesterday?"

"Yes, doctor. I have even hit on a very happy idea. I have replaced the dead wall, separating the choir from the vestry, by foliage of carved stone, in imitation of the Clisson chapel in the church at Josselin. It has a much lighter effect."

"Yes, to be sure; but what news from Spain, in the meantime? Ah! is it true, as I think I saw in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* this morning, that the young Duke de Villa Hermosa makes you an offer of marriage, by way of settling the suit amicably?"

Mlle. de Porhoët shook, with a disdainful toss of the head, the faded ribbons which stream over her cap, and said: "I should refuse it flatly."

"Oh, yes! you say so, Mademoiselle; but what is the meaning of that sound of a guitar that has been heard several nights under your windows?"

"Pooh!"

"Pooh? And that Spaniard in a cloak and yellow boots, who is seen roaming about the neighbourhood, and is always sighing?"

"You are humorous," said Mlle. de Porhoët, calmly opening her snuff-box. "But if you wish to know, my lawyer wrote to me two days since, from Madrid, that with a little patience we shall no doubt see the end of our troubles."

"I think so, indeed! Do you know where he comes from, this lawyer of yours? From Gil Blas's cave, direct. He will take your last crown from you, and then laugh at you. Ah, if you would only consent just to bury this mad idea, and live in peace! What good would millions do you, come? Are you not happy and respected, and what more do you want? As for your cathedral, I don't speak of it, because it is nothing but a bad joke."

"My cathedral is a bad joke only in the judgment of bad jokers, Dr. Desmarets; besides, I am defending my right, and fighting for justice; this property belongs to me, I have heard my father say so a hundred times, and it shall never, with my consent, go to people who are really just as much strangers to my family as you, my dear friend, or as Monsieur," she added, nodding at me.

I was childish enough to be piqued at the compliment, and at once rejoined: "As far as concerns me, Mademoiselle, you are mistaken, for my family has had the honour of being allied to yours, and yours to mine."

On hearing these audacious words, Mlle. de Porhoët instinctively carried to her pointed chin the cards which were spread like a fan in her hand, and drawing up her thin figure, first looked into my face as if to assure herself of my sanity, then by a superhuman effort regained her composure, and lifting a pinch of Spanish snuff to her nose, said: "You will prove that to me, young man."

Ashamed of my absurd boast, and much embarrassed by the looks of curiosity which she had drawn down on me, I bowed awkwardly without replying. Our whist was finished in gloomy silence. It was ten o'clock, and I was preparing to escape, when Mlle. de Porhoët touched my arm: "Will

Monsieur the bailiff," she said, "do me the honour to accompany me to the end of the avenue?"

I bowed again once more, and followed her.

July 25th.

We soon found ourselves in the park. The little servant, in the costume of the country, walked in advance, carrying a lantern; then Mlle. de Porhoët, stiff and silent, holding up in a careful and becoming manner the scanty folds of her silken sheath: she had dryly refused the offer of an arm; and I walked on at her side, my head drooping, and much dissatisfied with myself. At the expiration of a few minutes of this funeral march, the old lady said to me, "Well, Sir, speak, I am waiting. You said that my family was allied to yours, and as an alliance of that kind is an entirely new point in history to me, I shall be much obliged to you if you will be kind enough to clear it up for me."

I had in secret decided that I ought at any cost to keep the secret of my *incognito*. "Indeed, Mademoiselle," I said, "I venture to hope you will overlook a joke, which escaped me in the course of conversation."

"A joke!" cried Mlle. de Porhoët. "A fine subject for jokes indeed. And what name do you give nowadays, Sir, to jokes courageously levelled at an unprotected old woman, jokes which you would not venture on to a man?"

"Mademoiselle, you leave me no possibility of retreating; it only remains for me now to trust myself to your discreetness. I do not know, Mademoiselle, if the name Champcey d'Hautèrive is known to you?"

"I am perfectly acquainted, Sir, with the Champcey d'Hautèrives, who are a good, nay, an excellent Dauphiné family. How does that bear on the case?"

"I am at this moment the representative of that family."

"You!" said Mlle. de Porhoët, coming to a sudden halt; "you a Champcey d'Hautèrive?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"This alters the case," said she; give me your arm, cousin, and tell me your history."

I thought it best, in this state of things, just to hide nothing from her. I was ending the painful account of the disasters of my family, when we came before a singularly narrow, low cottage, flanked at one corner by a sort of ruinous tower with pointed roof. "Come in, Marquis," said the daughter of the Kings of Gaël, stopping on the threshold of her sorry palace; "come in, I beg." A moment afterwards I was ushered into a little dismal parlour, with a brick floor; on the pale tapestry which covered the walls were crowded together half a score portraits of her ancestors, robed in ducal ermine; above the mantelpiece sparkled a magnificent timepiece, made of tortoise-shell, inlaid with copper, and surmounted by a group representing the Chariot of the Sun. A few oval-backed arm-chairs, and an old sofa with rickety legs, completed the decoration of the room, in which everything betokened a severe propriety, and you smelt a powerful odour of iris, Spanish snuff, and sundry other perfumes.

"Sit down," said the old lady, taking a seat herself on the sofa; "sit down, cousin; for though in reality we are not related, and cannot be so, as Jeanne de Porhoët and Hugues de Champcey, between ourselves, were foolish enough to have no issue, it will be agreeable for me, with

your leave, to treat you as a cousin when we are alone, that I may for a moment cheat the painful feeling of my present loneliness. So then, cousin, your position is as you have told me? It is a hard pass assuredly. Still I will suggest to you a few thoughts which have become habitual with me, and seem to me of a kind to offer you sterling comfort. In the first place, my dear Marquis, I often say to myself, that in the midst of these ignoramuses and old servants whom we see nowadays riding in their carriages, poverty has an odour of distinction and good taste.

"Besides, I am not far from believing that God has intentionally reduced some of us to straitened circumstances, that this gross, material, gold-seeking age may always have before it, in our persons, a style of worth, dignity, and renown, which owes nothing to gold and material things, which nothing can purchase, which cannot be sold! To all appearance, cousin, that is the providential account of your position and mine."

I testified to Mlle. de Porhoët all the pride I felt at having been chosen along with her to give the world the noble lesson which it needs, and by which it seems so little disposed to profit. Then she resumed: "For my own part, Sir, I am formed for poverty, I suffer little from it; when one has seen, in the course of a life too long protracted, a father worthy of his name, and four brothers, worthy of their father, fall before their time by the bullet or the steel; when one has seen all the objects of one's affection and devotion perish one after the other, one must needs have a very little soul to be anxious about the plenteousness of the table or the newness of one's dress. Certainly, Marquis, if my personal comfort were alone concerned, you may believe

that I should care but little for my Spanish millions; but it seems to me proper, and setting a good example, that a family like mine should not disappear from the earth without leaving behind it some lasting trace, some striking monument, of its greatness and its faith. Therefore, in imitation of some of my ancestors, cousin, I have formed the idea, and will never renounce it while I live, of the pious foundation of which you have certainly heard!"

After assuring herself of my assent, the old and noble lady seemed wrapped in contemplation, and, while she cast a melancholy glance over the half-effaced portraits of her ancestors, the hereditary timepiece alone broke the midnight stillness of the dimly-lighted room. "There will be," Mlle. de Porhoët suddenly resumed, "a chapter of regular canons attached to the service of this church. Every day, in the private chapel of my family, low mass will be said for the repose of my soul, and of the souls of my ancestors. The feet of the officiating priest will tread on a nameless stone, which will form the step before the altar, and will cover my remains."

I bowed with an emotion of visible respect. Mlle. de Porhoët took my hand and pressed it gently; "I am not mad, cousin," she said, "whatever they may say. My father, who never told me a lie, always assured me that, on the direct descent of our Spanish branch becoming extinct, we alone should have a right to the inheritance; his sudden violent death unhappily did not permit him to give us more exact information on the matter; but not being able to doubt his word, I do not doubt my right. Still," she added after a pause, and in a tone of touching sadness, "if I am not mad, I am old, and those people yonder know it well. They have dragged on my case for fifteen years,

with all sorts of delays; they are waiting for my death, which will end it all. And you see they will not have long to wait; one of these days I shall have, I feel, to hear mass for the last time. This poor cathedral, my only love, which had supplied the place in my heart of so many destroyed or crushed affections; it will never have but one stone, and that my tombstone."

The old lady was silent. She wiped away with her emaciated hands two tears which were trickling down her withered cheeks, and then added, with a forced smile: "Forgive me, cousin; you have plenty of troubles of your own. Excuse it. Besides, it is late; go home, you will compromise me."

Before going, I once more recommended to Mlle. de Porhoët's discreetness the secret which I had been forced to confide to her. She answered me somewhat evasively, that I might make myself easy, she would know how to secure my peace and dignity. Still, in a few days I suspected, by the redoubled attention with which Mme. Laroque honoured me, that my worthy friend had repeated my communication to her. Mlle. de Porhoët, in fact, did not hesitate to own it, assuring me that she could do no less for the honour of her family, and that Mme. Laroque was, besides, incapable of betraying, even to her daughter, a secret entrusted to her delicacy.

Still my conversation with the aged lady had left me penetrated with a tender respect, of which I tried to give her proof. The very next evening, I applied all the resources of my pencil to the interior and exterior decoration of her dear cathedral. This attention, to which she showed herself sensible, has gradually assumed the regularity of a habit.

Almost every evening, after our whist, I set to work, and the ideal building is enriched with a statue, a pulpit, or a gallery. Mlle. Marguerite, who seems to pay her neighbour a kind of worship, has been pleased to join in my labour of love by devoting to the temple of the Porhoëts a special sketch-book, which I am to fill.

I further offered my old acquaintance to take my share in the proceedings, researches, and cares of all kinds, which her lawsuit may cause her. The poor woman owned that I did her a service; that, though she still could keep up her correspondence, her weak eyesight refused to decipher the manuscripts in her collection of documents, and that she had never been willing hitherto to get any help in her work, however important it might be to her case, for fear of giving a fresh handle to the uncivil jokes of the neighbours. In short, she accepts my advice and co-operation. Since then, I have conscientiously studied the voluminous papers in her suit, and remain convinced that the affair, which will be tried some day soon on final appeal, is positively lost already. M. Laubépin, whom I have consulted, shares my opinion, which however I shall try to keep from my old friend as long as circumstances will allow. Meantime, I do her a pleasure by ransacking her family archives, in which she is always hoping to find some decisive title in her favour. Unhappily these archives are very rich, and the little tower is filled with them from roof to cellar.

Yesterday I went early to Mlle. de Porhoët's, that I might finish before breakfast the examination of bundle number 115, which I had begun the day before. The mistress of the house not having yet risen, I installed myself quietly in the parlour, with the connivance of the small servant, and set solitarily to

my dusty task. After about an hour, as I was perusing with extreme delight the last folio of bundle 115, I saw Mlle. de Porhoët come in, with difficulty dragging along an enormous packet, very neatly covered with white linen. "Good morning, my good cousin," she said. "Learning that you were giving yourself some trouble this morning on my account, I wished to give myself some on yours. Here I bring you bundle 116."

There is a story somewhere, in which an unhappy princess is locked up in a tower, and a fairy, who is a foe to her family, sets her an endless series of out-of-the-way, impossible tasks: and I own that just then, in spite of all her virtues, Mlle. de Porhoët seemed to me a near relation of that fairy.

"I dreamed last night," she continued, "that this bundle contained the key to my Spanish treasure. You will therefore oblige me greatly by not delaying the examination of it. This labour over, you will do me the honour to partake of a modest repast which I wish to offer you under the shade of my arbour."

Accordingly I resigned myself to my fate.

It is needless to say that the lucky bundle 116 contained like the former ones nothing but the idle dust of ages. Precisely at noon, the old lady came to offer me her arm, and led me ceremoniously into a little garden trimmed with box, which forms, with a piece of adjoining meadow land, all the present domains of the Porhoëts. The table was set under a bower of hornbeams, and the sun of a fine summer's day cast through the leaves a few rainbow-tinted rays on the shining and perfumed table-cloth. I was finishing doing honour to the *poulet doré*, the fresh salad, and the bottle of old Bordeaux

which formed the bill of fare of the banquet, when Mlle. de Porhoët, who seemed delighted with my appetite, turned the conversation to the Laroque family.

"I confess," she said, "that the old privateer does not please me at all. I remember when he came here he had a large pet ape, whom he dressed up as a servant, and with whom he seemed to have a perfect understanding. The animal was a real pest in the village, and none but a man of no education or decency could have been so wrapped up in it. They said it was an ape, and I assented; but I really think it was nothing but a negro, all the more as I always suspected his master of having dealt in that commodity on the coast of Africa. The late M. Laroque the younger however was a good man, and quite a gentleman. As for the ladies, speaking of course of Mme. Laroque and her daughter, and by no means of the widow Aubry, who is a creature of mean condition; as for the ladies, I say, there is no praise they do not deserve."

We were at this point when the stately step of a horse was heard on the path which skirts the outer side of the garden-wall. At the same moment several smart taps were struck on a little door near the arbour.

"Well!" said Mlle. de Porhoët, "who's there?"

I raised my eyes, and saw a black feather waving over the top of the wall.

"Open!" cried gaily a rich, musical voice: "open, it is the fortune of France!"

"What! is it you, my darling?" cried the old lady. "Run quickly, cousin."

In opening the door I was almost knocked down by Mervyn, who rushed between my legs, and I saw Mlle.

Marguerite busy tying the bridle of her horse to the rail of a fence.

"Good morning, Sir," she said, without showing the least surprise at finding me there. Then gathering over her arm the long folds of her riding-habit, she walked into the garden.

"Welcome this beautiful day, my beautiful child," said Mlle. de Porhoët; "embrace me. You have been galloping, you young madcap; your face is all over a bright purple, and your eyes absolutely flash fire. What can I offer you, my love?"

"Let us see," said Mlle. Marguerite, giving a glance at the table; "what have you there? Has Monsieur eaten everything? But I am not hungry, only thirsty."

"I certainly shall forbid you drinking in the state you are in; but stop, there are still a few strawberries in that bed."

"Strawberries! *O goija!*" the young girl cried. "Take one of these large leaves quickly, Sir, and come with me."

While I was selecting the largest leaf from a fig-tree, Mlle. de Porhoët half shut one eye, and with the other followed, with a smile of delight, the proud walk of her favourite down the sun-lit paths.

"Look at her, cousin," she whispered to me; "would she not be worthy to be one of us?"

Meanwhile Mlle. Marguerite, stooping over the strawberry bed, and stumbling at every step on her habit, greeted with a little shout of joy each strawberry as she discovered it. I kept near her, holding the fig-leaf spread out in my hand; and from time to time she would drop into it one strawberry for two which

she munched by way of gaining patience. When the harvest

was sufficient for her taste we returned in triumph to the arbour, and what remained of the strawberries was

powdered with sugar and then eaten by the prettiest of pretty teeth.

"Ah! that does me good!" said Mlle. Marguerite when she had finished, and threw her hat on a bench, and leaned back against the hornbeam hedge. "And now, to make my happiness complete, my dear lady, won't you tell me some stories of the past, of the time when you were a fair warrior?"

Mlle. de Porhoët, smiling with delight, needed no further entreaty, but drew from her memory the most striking episodes in her bold forays under the Lescures and the Larochejaquelins. I had here a fresh proof of my aged friend's loftiness of soul, when I heard her pay a passing homage to all the heroes of those gigantic struggles, without distinction of standard. She spoke of General Hoche, especially, whose prisoner of war she had been, with an almost tender admiration. Mlle. Marguerite lent a passionate attention to these stories that astonished me. Now half-buried in her niche of hornbeam, and her long lashes drooping a little, she showed the immovable repose of a statue; then, as the interest became keener, she leaned her elbows on the little table, and thrusting her fair hand into the waves of her loosened hair, she darted at the old Vendéan the continuous lightning of her looks. I must certainly say that I shall always count among the pleasantest hours in my sorrowful life those which I spent in watching the reflection of a radiant sky mingled in that noble countenance with the feelings of a courageous heart.

The story-teller having finished her narration, Mlle. Marguerite embraced her, and waking Mervyn, who was asleep at her feet, she said she was going back to the château. I made no scruple of leaving at the same time,

being convinced that I could cause her no annoyance. For, apart from the extreme insignificance in the eyes of the rich heiress, both of myself and of my company, a *tête-à-tête* conversation usually is no discomfort to her, her mother having resolutely given her the liberal education which she herself received in one of the British colonies; for the English custom, as is well known, allows women before marriage all the liberty, which we sagely grant them from the day when any abuse of it becomes irreparable.

We left the garden together then; I held the stirrup while she mounted her horse, and we set out for the château. After a few paces she said to me, "Upon my word, Sir, I fancy I disturbed you yonder very unluckily. You were getting on charmingly."

"It is true, Mademoiselle; but as I had been there a long time, I forgive you, and even thank you."

"You are very attentive to our poor neighbour. My mother is very grateful to you for it."

"And your mother's daughter?" said I laughing.

"Oh, I am not so easily moved. If you want me to admire you, you must have the goodness to wait a little longer first. I am not in the habit of judging lightly of human actions, which generally have two faces. I confess your conduct towards Mlle. de Porhoët looks well, but——" Here she paused, tossed her head, and continued in a serious, bitter, thoroughly insulting tone: "But I am not quite sure that you are not paying your court to her in the hope of becoming her heir."

I felt that I turned pale. Still reflecting on the absurdity of answering this young girl in a hectoring style, I restrained

myself, and said to her gravely: "Allow me, Mademoiselle, sincerely to pity you."

She seemed much surprised. "To pity me, Sir?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, allow me to express the respectful pity to which you seem to me to be entitled."

"Pity!" she said, stopping her horse, and turning towards me her eyes half shut in disdain. "You have the advantage of me, for I do not understand you."

"Yet it is very simple, Mademoiselle: if the loss of faith in goodness, if doubt and deadness of soul, are the bitterest fruits of a long life's experience, nothing in the world deserves more compassion than a heart that is withered by mistrust before it has lived."

"Sir," replied Mlle. Laroque, with a vivacity far removed from her ordinary way of speaking, "you do not know what you are talking about! And," she added, more sternly, "you forget to whom you are speaking!"

"True, Mademoiselle," I replied quietly, with a bow; "I am speaking somewhat without knowledge, and I am forgetting somewhat to whom I speak; but you set me the example."

Mlle. Marguerite, with her eyes fixed on the tops of the trees that skirted the road, returned with ironical haughtiness, "Must I ask your pardon?"

"Certainly, Mademoiselle," I replied firmly, "if one of us two had pardon to ask of the other, it would be you; you are rich, and I am poor; you can lower yourself, I cannot!"

There was a silence. Her compressed lips, her distended nostrils, a sudden paleness on her forehead, proved the combat that was raging within her. Suddenly, lowering her

whip as if for a salute—"Very well!" she said. "Pardon!" And immediately she gave her horse a fierce cut with the whip, and set off at a gallop, leaving me in the middle of the road.

I have not seen her since.

July 30th.

The theory of chances is never more idly employed than on the thoughts and feelings of a woman. Not caring to find myself soon in Mlle. Marguerite's company, after the painful scene between us, I had passed two days without showing my face at the château. I scarcely expected that this short interval could have sufficed to soothe the resentment I had stirred up in that haughty heart. Nevertheless, the morning of the day before yesterday, towards seven o'clock,

as I was at work near the open window of my turret, I heard myself suddenly called, in a tone of friendly gaiety, by the very person of whom I thought I had made an enemy.

"Monsieur Odiot, are you there?"

I went to the window, and perceived, in a boat stationed near the bridge, Mlle. Marguerite, pushing aside with one hand the brim of her large brown straw hat, and raising her eyes towards my half-invisible tower.

"Here I am, Mademoiselle," said I promptly.

"Will you come for a walk?"

After the just alarm, by which I had been tormented for two days, so much condescension made me fear that, according to the saying, I was the plaything of a senseless dream.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle; what do you say?"

"Will you take a little walk with Alain, Mervyn, and me?"

"Certainly, Mademoiselle."

"Very well; bring your sketch-book."

I made haste to come down, and ran towards her on the bank of the stream.

"Ah!" said the young girl, laughing, "you are in a good humour this morning, it seems."

I muttered awkwardly some confused words, intended to intimate that I was always in a good humour, which Mlle. Marguerite seemed not to believe very firmly; and then I jumped into the boat, and took a seat by her side.

"Row on, Alain," said she immediately; and old Alain, who piques himself on being a masterly boatman, began to take methodical strokes with the oars, which gave him the look of a heavy bird trying in vain to fly away. Then Mlle. Marguerite continued, "I am actually obliged to come and

fetch you from your tower, as you have been obstinately sulking these two days."

"I assure you, Mademoiselle, nothing but discretion—respect—fear "

"Oh, heavens! 'respect'—'fear.' You were sulking, that's what it was. Positively we are too good for you. My mother, who insists upon it, I don't clearly know why, that we ought to treat you with a very distinguished consideration, begged me to immolate myself on the altar of your pride, and, like an obedient daughter, I immolate myself."

I frankly expressed my lively gratitude.

"Not to do things by halves," she went on, "I resolved to give you a treat that would suit you: so here is a fine summer morning for you, wood and glades with all the desirable effects of light and shade, birds singing under the leaves, a mysterious boat gliding over the water. You who like stories of that kind, you must be pleased?"

"I am enchanted, Mademoiselle."

"Oh, that is not unlucky."

I found myself, in fact, for the moment pretty contented with my lot. The two banks between which we were gliding were strewn with newly-cut hay which perfumed the air. I saw retreating all around us the dark avenues of the park, pierced with lines of brightness by the morning sun; millions of insects were intoxicating themselves with dew in flower cups, humming gaily the while. Before me was old Alain, at every stroke of the oars smiling on me with an air of satisfaction and protection: still nearer sat Mlle. Marguerite, contrary to her custom dressed in white; beautiful, fresh, and pure, she shook away with one hand the dewy pearls which the early hour hung around the lace of her hat, and offered the other as a bait

to the faithful Mervyn, who was swimming after us. Truly, I should not have needed very much entreaty to go to the world's end in that little white boat.

As we were leaving the limits of the park, passing through one of the arches that pierced the boundary wall, the young Creole said to me: "You don't ask me where I am leading you, Sir?"

"No, no, Mademoiselle, it is all the same to me."

"I am leading you into fairyland."

"I suspected it."

"Mlle. Hélouin, who is more competent to speak of poetical matters than I am, ought to have told you that the clumps of wood which cover the country for twenty leagues round are all that remains of the old forest of Brocélyande, where the ancestors of your friend Mlle. de Porhoët, the Kings of Gaël, used to hunt, and where the grandfather of Mervyn here, enchanter as he was, was enchanted by a king's daughter named Viviane. Now we shall soon be in the very heart of the forest. And if that is not enough to excite your imagination, know that these woods still preserve a thousand traces of the mysterious religion of the Celts; they are paved with them. You have the right therefore to fancy under each of these shady places a white-robed Druid, and to see a golden sickle shining in every ray of the sun. The worship of those unendurable old men has even left near here, on a site that is lonely, romantic, picturesque, et cætera, a monument, at the sight of which persons given to ecstasy generally faint away; I thought it would give you pleasure to draw it, and, as the place is not easy to find, I resolved to serve as your guide, asking nothing in return, except that you will spare me any outbursts of an enthusiasm in which I cannot join."

"Very good, Mademoiselle, I will restrain myself."

"I beg you will!"

"That is understood. And what do you call this monument?"

"I call it a heap of big stones; antiquaries call it, some simply a dolmen, others, who are more pretentious, a cromlech; the country people call it, without explaining why, the *migourdit*." [1]

Meanwhile we were gently following the course of the stream, between two lines of dewy meadow-land; small cattle, mostly black, and with long sharp horns, rose here and there at the sound of the oars, and watched our passage with a fierce gaze. The valley, down which the stream meandered, widening in its course, was shut in on both sides by a chain of hills, covered, some with furze and dry broom, some with verdant underwood. From time to time, we crossed a ravine which opened out between two slopes a winding prospect, in the depth of which was to be seen the rounded blue summit of a distant mountain. Mlle. Marguerite, spite of her "incompetence," did not fail to direct my attention to the several charms of this sweet and rugged landscape, not omitting however to accompany every remark with an ironical exception.

By this time a dull, continuous sound had begun to announce to us that we were probably near a water-fall, when suddenly the valley closed up, and assumed the appearance of a wild and sequestered gorge. On the left rose a high wall of moss-covered rock; oaks and firs, intermingled with hanging ivy and briars, stood in the chinks even up to the

[1] In the wood of Cadoudal, department of Morbihan.

top of the cliff, casting a mysterious shade on the deeper water which bathed the rocks below. Before us, at the distance of a few hundred paces, the waters boiled, foamed, and suddenly disappeared; while the broken line of the river stood out through a whitish smoke, against a distant background of obscure verdure. On our right, the bank opposite the cliff now presented only a narrow strip of steep meadow, to which the thickly wooded hills gave a fringe of sombre velvet.

"Pull to the bank!" said the Creole. While Alain made the boat fast to the branches of a willow she continued, springing out lightly on the grass, "Well, Sir, you don't feel uncomfortable? You are not upset, petrified, thunderstruck? And yet they say this place is very pretty. For my part I like it because it is always cool here. But follow me into the wood—if you dare—and I will show you these famous stones."

Mlle. Marguerite, lively, nimble, and gay, as I had never seen her before, crossed the meadow-land at two bounds, and took a path which buried itself among the thick trees as it ascended the slope. Alain and I followed her in Indian file. After a few minutes quick walking our guide stopped, seemed to consult with herself for a moment, and to be finding the right way; then, deliberately parting two entangled boughs, she left the beaten path, and struck directly into the underwood. The journey then became less agreeable. It was very hard to force one's way through the already sturdy young oaks, of which this underwood was composed, their sloping trunks and thick-leaved boughs interlacing like Robinson Crusoe's hedge. At any rate, Alain and I got on with difficulty, bent double, hitting our

heads at every step, and bringing down, at each of our heavy movements, a shower of dew on us; but Mlle. Marguerite, with the greater address and cat-like suppleness of her sex, glided without apparent effort through the openings in the labyrinth, laughing at our sufferings, and carelessly letting fly back behind her the flexible branches which would hit us in the eyes.

We reached at length a very narrow open space, which seems to crown the summit of the hill, and there I perceived, not without emotion, a gloomy and monstrous table of stone, supported by five or six enormous blocks, which are half-buried in the ground, and form there a cavern truly full of religious terror. At first sight there is in this uninjured monument of almost fabulous times and of primitive religions a power of truth, a sort of real presence, which seizes the soul and makes one shiver. A few rays of sunlight, penetrating the foliage, filtered through the disjointed rows of stone, played on the gloomy slab above, and lent an idyllic grace to this barbarous altar. Mlle. Marguerite herself seemed pensive and absorbed. As for me, after penetrating into the cavern, and examining the dolmen on all sides, I set about the task of drawing it.

I had been absorbed in this work for about ten minutes, paying no attention to what might be going on around, when Mlle. Marguerite said to me suddenly: "Would you like a Velleda to give life to the picture?"

I raised my eyes. She had twined round her brow a thick chaplet of oak-leaves, and was standing at the head of the dolmen, leaning slightly against one of a group of young trees; in the half-light under the branches her white dress assumed the brilliancy of marble, and the pupils of her eyes sparkled

with a strange fire in the shadow cast by her projecting crown. She was beautiful, and I think she knew it. I looked at her without finding a word to say, and she continued: "If I inconvenience you, I will move away."

"I beg you will not."

"Very well, make haste; put in Mervyn too; he shall be the Druid, and I the Druidess."

I was so happy as to reproduce with tolerable fidelity, thanks to the vagueness of a sketch, the poetical vision with which I had been favoured. She came to examine my drawing with an appearance of eagerness.

"That's not bad," she said. Then she threw away her crown, laughing, and added, "Confess that it was good of me."

I confess it, and would even have owned too, had she wished it, that she did not want for a grain of coquettishness: but she would not be a woman without that, and perfection is detestable; the goddesses themselves, to be loved, would need something more than their immortal beauty.

We reached once more, through the dense undergrowth, the path traced through the wood, and descended again towards the river. "Before we got back," the young Creole said to me, "I should like to show you the waterfall, all the more as I intend to have a little amusement in my turn. Come, Mervyn! come, my good dog! How beautiful you are!" We were soon on the bank in front of the shelf of rock which dammed up the river's bed. The water dashed from a height of several feet to the bottom of a large deep-set pool of a circular shape, which seemed to be bounded on all sides by an amphitheatre of green turf, studded with dewy rocks. Still some invisible fissures received the overflow of the little lake, and these streamlets united again at a little distance in one common bed.

"It is not exactly Niagara," said Mlle. Marguerite, raising her voice a little so as to be heard above the din of the fall; "but I have heard connoisseurs and artists say that it was pretty enough. Have you admired? Good! Now I hope you will give Mervyn all the enthusiasm you have remaining. Here, Mervyn!"

The Newfoundland came and stood by the side of his mistress, and watched her, trembling with impatience. The young girl weighted her handkerchief with a few stones, and then threw it into the stream a little above the fall. At the same moment Mervyn fell like a lump into the lower pool, and quickly left the bank; the handkerchief meanwhile followed the course of the water, reached the shelf of rock, danced for a second in an eddy, then suddenly passing like an arrow over the rounded rock, came whirling in a flood of foam before the eyes of the dog, who seized it with quick and unerring tooth. After this, Mervyn proudly regained the bank, where Mlle. Marguerite stood clapping her hands.

This charming sport was repeated several times with the same success. It was now the sixth time, when it happened, either from the dog starting too late, or from the handkerchief being thrown too soon, that poor Mervyn missed his aim. The handkerchief was caught in the eddy of the falling water, and carried among some thorn-bushes which showed themselves above the water a little further down. Mervyn went in search of it; but we were much surprised to see him struggle convulsively, loose his prey, and raise his head towards us with piteous cries. "Gracious heaven! what is the matter?" cried Mlle. Marguerite.

"It seems as if he was caught in those bushes. But he will get free, don't doubt it."

However, we soon had to doubt it, and even to despair of it. The network of weeds in which the unhappy Newfoundland was caught, as if in a snare, rose directly beneath an opening in the ledge of rock, which poured an incessant stream of foaming water on Mervyn's head. The poor beast half-suffocated, ceased making the slightest effort to loose his bonds, and his plaintive bark took the strangled sound of the death-rattle. At this moment Mlle. Marguerite seized my arm, and said in a low tone, almost in my ear: "He is lost, come away, Sir. Let us go." I looked at her. Grief, anguish, and necessity were working violently in her pale features, and forming a hollow livid ring beneath her eyes.

"There is no way," I said, "of getting the boat down here; but, if you will allow me, I can swim a little, and I will go and hold out a paw to this gentleman."

"No, no, don't try. It is a great distance. And besides, I have always heard that the stream was deep and dangerous under the fall."

"Make yourself easy, Mademoiselle: I am prudent." At the same time, I threw my jacket on the grass, and stepped into the little lake, taking the precaution to keep at a certain distance from the fall. The water was really very deep, for I found no footing except at the moment when I came near the suffering Mervyn. I do not know if some little island were formerly there, and had been loosened or undermined gradually, or if a rise of the river has swept away and lodged in that channel fragments torn off from the bank: but it is certain that a thick network of briars and roots lies hid under those treacherous waters and thrives there. I placed my feet on one of the stems from which the bushes seem to rise, and managed to free Mervyn, who recovered all his

strength immediately he became master of his motions, and made use of it without delay to swim to the bank, abandoning me with all his heart. This proceeding was in little conformity with the chivalrous reputation ascribed to his species; but good Mervyn has lived much among men, and I suppose he has become a bit of a philosopher. When I would have taken a start to follow him, I discovered with annoyance that I was caught in my turn in the net of the jealous and mischievous water-nymph, who apparently reigns over these channels. One of my legs was entangled in some knots of weeds which I vainly tried to break through. Deep water with a slimy bottom is not the place to exert all one's strength with comfort; I was moreover half blinded by the continual spray of the foaming waterfall. In short, I felt that my position was becoming equivocal. I cast my eyes on the bank: Mlle. Marguerite, hanging on Alain's arm, was leaning over the gulf, and fixing on me a look of deadly anxiety. I said to myself that it now perhaps only rested with me to be wept for by those beautiful eyes, and to put an enviable termination to a wretched existence. Then I shook off the weak thought; a violent effort set me free. I tied round my neck the little handkerchief, which was all in shreds, and peacefully reached the bank.

As I landed Mlle. Marguerite gave me her hand, which trembled a little. That seemed sweet to me. "What madness!" she said, "what madness! you might have lost your life! and for a dog!"

"It was yours," I replied in a half whisper, as she had spoken to me.

The word seemed to vex her; she abruptly withdrew her hand, and turning to Mervyn, who was yawning and drying

himself in the sun, she began to beat him, "Oh, the fool! the great fool!" she said. "How stupid he is!"

Meanwhile I was dripping on the grass like a watering-pot, and did not quite know what to do with myself, when the young girl returned to me, and kindly went on to say: "Monsieur Maxime, take the boat and go home very quickly. You will get a little warmth again as you row. I can return with Alain through the wood: the way is shorter." As this arrangement seemed to me most suitable on all accounts, I made no objection to it. I took my leave, had for the second time the pleasure of touching the hand of Mervyn's mistress, and threw myself into the boat.

Returned home, I was surprised, while dressing, to find round my neck the little torn handkerchief, which I had entirely forgotten to give back to Mlle. Marguerite. She certainly thought it was lost, and I decided without any scruple to appropriate it as the prize of my watery tournament.

In the evening I went to the château. Mlle. Laroque received me with that air of disdainful indolence, gloomy abstractedness, and bitter *ennui,* which habitually marks her, and which now formed a striking contrast to the graceful pleasantry and hearty liveliness of my companion of this morning. At dinner, M. de Bévallan being present, she spoke of our excursion, as if to take away any mystery from it; aimed, as she went along, some brief sarcasms at the cleverness of lovers of nature, and then ended by telling of Mervyn's accident; but she suppressed in this last episode everything about me. If this reserve was intended, as I think, to set the tune for my own discretion, the young lady gave herself very useless trouble. However that may be, M. de Bévallan, on hearing the story, deafened us with his cries of despair.

"What! Mlle. Marguerite had endured that long suspense, the brave Mervyn had run that danger, and he, Bévallan, was not by! Fatality! he should never console himself for it; nothing was left him now, except to hang himself, like Crillon!"

"Well! if there was nobody but me to cut him down," said old Alain to me in the evening when conducting me home, "I'd take my time about it!"

Yesterday did not begin so pleasantly for me as the day before. I received in the morning a letter from Madrid, instructing me to inform Mlle. de Porhoët of the decisive loss of her suit. Her lawyer told me moreover that the family against whom she brought the suit does not seem likely to profit by its victory, for it is now engaged in a struggle with the Crown, which bestirred itself at the sound of these millions, and maintains that the disputed inheritance belongs to it as an escheat. After long reflection it seemed to me that it would be a charity to conceal from my old neighbour the utter ruin of her hopes. I therefore purpose to secure the complicity of her Spanish agent; he will make the excuse of fresh delays; on my side, I will continue to ransack her archives, and, in short, do my best to enable the poor woman to continue to cherish her dear illusions to her latest day. However legitimate may be the character of this deceit, I still felt the need of having it sanctioned by some delicate conscience. I went to the château in the afternoon, and made my confession to Mme. Laroque; she approved of my plan, and even praised me for it more than the occasion seemed to me to demand. It was not without great surprise that I heard our conversation terminated by these words: "It is now time to tell you, Sir, that I am deeply grateful to you for your attentions, and that I feel every day more taste for your company, and more respect for yourself.

I would wish, Sir—I beg your pardon for it, as you can scarcely share my desire—I could wish that we should never part. I humbly beseech Heaven to do all the miracles that may be wanted for that end; for miracles would be needed, I do not disguise it from myself." I could not grasp the exact meaning of this language, any more than I could account for the sudden emotion which shone in the eyes of this excellent woman. I thanked her suitably, and went to carry my sorrowfulness out into the field.

Chance, and by no means a strange chance, to speak frankly, led me, at the end of an hour's walking, into the secluded valley, and to the brink of the pool which had been the theatre of my recent prowess. The circle of foliage and rock, which incloses this little lake, realizes the very ideal of solitude. There you are really at the end of the world, in a virgin country, in China—where you will. I stretched myself on the heather, and went over in imagination the whole of my promenade of the day before, which is one of those which do not occur twice in the course of the longest life. I felt already that a similar piece of good fortune, should it ever be offered me again, would not possess nearly the same charm of unexpectedness, of serenity, and, in a word, of innocence. I had good need to tell myself that this fresh romance of youth, which now perfumed my thoughts, could have but one chapter, but one single page; and I had read it. Yes, this hour, this hour of love, to give it its true name, had been supremely sweet, because it was unforeseen; because I had not thought of giving it a name until I had exhausted it; because I had enjoyed the intoxication of it without blame! Now, my consciousness was awakened; I saw myself on the incline of a love that was impossible, absurd, nay, worse, culpable; it

was time to watch over myself, poor disinherited man that I am!

I was giving myself this advice in this lonely place, and it would not have been specially needful to go there for that purpose, when a hum of voices roused me from my abstraction. I rose, and saw coming towards me a company of five or six persons, who had just stepped out of a boat. First came Mlle. Marguerite, leaning on M. de Bévallan's arm; then Mlle. Hélouin and Mme. Aubry, followed by Alain and Mervyn. The sound of their approach had been covered by the rumbling of the falling water; they were but two paces off, I had no time to beat a retreat, and I had to be resigned to the annoyance of being surprised in the attitude of a *dilettante* hermit. My presence here could however awake no particular attention; only I thought I saw a trace of displeasure flit over Mlle. Marguerite's brow, and she returned my greeting with marked stiffness.

M. de Bévallan, standing on the brink of the pool, for some time wearied the echoes with the commonplace clamour of his admiration: "Delicious! picturesque! what a tasteful spot! The pen of Georges Sand; the pencil of Salvator Rosa!" The whole accompanied with energetic gestures, which seemed to snatch from these two great artists in turn the instruments of their genius. At length he grew calm, and had pointed out to him the dangerous channel in which Mervyn had nearly perished. Mlle. Marguerite told the story again, still observing however the same discretion with regard to the part I had taken in the issue. She even dwelt with a kind of cruelty, relatively to me, on the ability, courage, and presence of mind which, according to her, her dog had displayed in this heroic affair. She apparently fancied that her momentary kindness,

and the service I had been so fortunate as to render her, must have sent up to my brain some fumes of presumption which it was important to drive down again. Still, as Mlle. Hélouin and Mme. Aubry showed an eager desire to see Mervyn's highly boasted exploits repeated before their eyes, the young girl called the Newfoundland and threw her handkerchief into the stream of the river, as on the day before; but at this signal the brave Mervyn, instead of plunging into the lake, ran along the bank, coming and going with a terrified air, barking furiously, wagging his tail, and in short giving a thousand proofs of a powerful interest, but at the same time of an excellent memory. Reason decidedly rules the heart in that animal. In vain Mlle. Marguerite, angry and confounded, employed caresses and threats by turns to overcome the obstinacy of her favourite; nothing could persuade the intelligent beast to entrust his precious person again to those terrible waters. After such pompous announcements, the stubborn prudence of the dauntless Mervyn had really something droll about it. I had a better right than any one to laugh at it, I think, and did not blame myself for doing so. However the mirth soon became general, and Mlle. Marguerite at length joined in it herself, though but slightly.

"And after all that," she said, "there is another handkerchief lost!"

The handkerchief, swept away by the constant motion of the eddy, had naturally been stranded in the branches of the fatal bush, at a very short distance from the opposite bank.

"Trust to me, Mademoiselle," cried M. de Bévallan; "in ten minutes you shall have your handkerchief, or I shall exist no longer!"

I fancied that Mlle. Marguerite, on this magnanimous

declaration, furtively darted at me an expressive look, as if to say: "You see that devotion is not so rare around me!" Then she replied to M. de Bévallan, "For God's sake, don't do anything mad! The water is very deep. There is real danger."

"It is perfectly the same to me," replied M. de Bévallan. "Alain, you ought to have a knife about you."

"A knife?" Mlle. Marguerite repeated, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes. Leave me alone, leave me alone!"

"But what do you propose to do with a knife?"

"I propose to cut a switch," said M. de Bévallan.

The young girl looked at him steadily. "I thought," she muttered, "you were going to swim?"

"To swim!" said M. de Bévallan; "excuse me, Mademoiselle. In the first place, I am not in swimming costume; and then, I will confess that I don't know how to swim."

"If you don't know how to swim," the young girl replied, in a dry tone, "it matters little enough whether you are in swimming costume or not."

"That is perfectly correct," said M. de Bévallan, with amusing calmness; "but you don't particularly insist on my being drowned, do you? You want your handkerchief, that is your object. As soon as I have attained it you will be satisfied, isn't it so?"

"Very well! go," said the young girl resignedly; "go and cut your switch, Sir."

M. de Bévallan, who is not easily put out of countenance, hereupon disappeared in an adjoining thicket, where we heard for a moment the creaking of branches; then he returned

armed with a long nut-stem, which he began to strip of its leaves.

"You don't calculate on reaching the other bank with that stick," said Mlle. Marguerite, whose gaiety was plainly beginning to awake.

"Leave me alone, leave me alone, I beg!" said the imperturbable gentleman in reply.

He was left alone! He finished preparing his switch, and then walked towards the boat. We now understood that his plan was to cross the stream in the boat above the fall, and, once on the other bank, to harpoon the handkerchief, which was at no great distance from it. On this discovery, there was nothing but a cry of indignation from the group; ladies being generally, as is known, very fond of dangerous adventures—for other people.

"A fine invention, indeed! Fie, fie, Monsieur de Bévallan!"

"Gently, gently, ladies! It is like Christopher Columbus and the egg. The thing was to think of it."

And yet, contrary to all expectation, this expedition, apparently so peaceful, was not to end without emotion, nor without danger. M. de Bévallan, in place of reaching the other bank directly opposite the little recess in which the boat was moored, conceived the unlucky idea of going down to some point nearer to the waterfall. He accordingly pushed the boat off into the middle of the current, and then let it drift for a moment; but he was not long in finding out that in the neighbourhood of the fall, the stream, as if attracted by the gulf and seized with dizziness, quickened its speed with an uneasy rapidity. We had a revelation of the danger in seeing him suddenly turn the boat, and begin to ply the oars with

feverish energy. He struggled against the current for some seconds with very doubtful success. Still he was gradually nearing the opposite side, although the drifting of the boat continued to hurry him on with terrific impetuosity towards the falls, the threatening din of which must then have been filling his ears. He was now but a few feet from the brink, when a tremendous effort carried him near enough to the shore for his safety at least to be secured. He then took a vigorous spring, and leapt on the slope of the bank, in spite of himself kicking away the abandoned boat, which was immediately upset over the ledge, and floated about the pool, keel uppermost.

As long as the peril lasted we had no other feeling, in looking on the scene, than one of lively anxiety; but as soon as our minds were set at rest, they were of course vividly penetrated with the contrast offered by the issue of the adventure to the usual coolness and assurance of him who was the hero of it. Moreover, laughter is as easy as it is natural after alarm has been successfully calmed down. Accordingly, there was not one among us who did not give way to unrestrained mirth as soon as we saw M. de Bévallan out of the boat. It must be told how, at this very moment, his misfortune was completed by a truly afflicting circumstance. The bank for which he had made a leap offered a steep, wet, sloping surface; he had no sooner set foot on it than he slipped, and fell back again; some solid branches were luckily within his reach, and he fastened both hands on them with frenzy, while his legs worked about like a pair of oars in the water, not however of any depth, which washed the bank. Every shadow of danger having now vanished, the sight of this struggle was simply laughable, and I suppose this cruel thought infused into M. de Bévallan's efforts

an awkward haste which delayed his success. He succeeded however in raising himself up and getting fresh foothold on the slope: then suddenly we saw him slip again, tearing away

the brambles, and he began once more, with evident despair, his irregular pantomime in the water. It was positively impossible to restrain one's self. Mlle. Marguerite, I fancy, had never seen such fun. She had utterly lost any care about her

dignity, and, like a nymph intoxicated with the grape, she filled the air with the outbursts of her almost convulsive joy. She clapped her hands together while she laughed, shouting with a spasmodic voice: "Bravo! bravo! Monsieur de Bévallan! very pretty! delicious! picturesque! Salvator Rosa!"

M. de Bévallan had however at length lifted himself upon firm ground; when he turned towards the ladies, and addressed them in a speech which the roar of the fall did not allow to be distinctly heard; but by his animated gestures, by the descriptive movements of his arms, and by the awkward smile on his face, we could understand that he was giving us an apologetic explanation of his disaster.

"Yes, Sir, yes," Mlle. Marguerite replied, continuing to laugh with the implacable cruelty of a woman, "it is an excellent success, a very excellent success! Congratulate yourself on it."

When she had become somewhat serious again, she asked me about the means of recovering the boat that had been upset, which, by the way, is the best in our flotilla. I promised to return the next day with some workmen, and preside over its rescue; then we took our way gaily across the meadows in the direction of the château, while M. de Bévallan, not being in swimming costume, had to give up the idea of joining us again, and hid himself with a melancholy air behind the rocks that skirt the other bank.

August 20th.

At length this extraordinary soul has yielded up to me the secret of its tempests! Would she had kept it for ever!

For some days after the last scenes which I have related, Mlle. Marguerite, as if ashamed

of the impulses of youth and freedom to which she had for an instant yielded, had allowed to fall over her brow a thicker veil of sorrowful pride, defiance, and disdain. In the midst of the noisy pleasures, *fêtes*, and dances, which followed one another at the château, she glided like a shadow, indifferent, icy, and sometimes irritated. Her irony attacked with inconceivable bitterness, sometimes the purest enjoyments of the mind, those which spring from contemplation and study; and sometimes even the noblest and most inviolable feelings. If any exhibition of courage or virtue was mentioned before her she would at once turn it over to find its selfish side; if one had the misfortune to light in her presence the smallest grain of incense on the altar of art, she would extinguish it with a back-hand blow. Her short, dry, terrible laugh, which sat on her lips like the mockery of a fallen angel, was furiously withering against enthusiasm and passion the noblest faculties of the human soul wherever she saw a trace of them. This strange spirit of calumniation took, I noticed, a character of especial persecution and downright hostility with regard to me. I did not understand, and do not yet very clearly understand, how I could have deserved these particular attentions; for, if it is true that I bear in my heart a firm religious belief in ideal and eternal things, of one of which only death can deprive me (Great God! what should I have left, if that were gone!), I am in no way inclined to public ecstasy, and my admiration, like my love, will never be an inconvenience to any one. But I in vain observed, with more scrupulousness than ever, the kind of modesty which befits true feeling. I gained nothing by it; I was suspected of poetry. Romantic chimeras were imputed to me, for the pleasure of combating them; a ridiculous harp of some sort was put

in my hands, simply for the diversion of breaking its strings.

Although this war, declared against everything that rises above the material interests and dry realities of life, was no new feature in Mlle. Marguerite's character, it was abruptly exaggerated and envenomed, so far as to wound the hearts which are most attached to the young girl. One day Mlle. de Porhoët, tired out by this incessant sarcasm, said to her, before me, "My darling, for some time there has been a devil in you, which you will do well to exorcise as soon as possible; otherwise you will end by making an unholy trio with Mme. Aubry and Mme. de Saint Cast; I warn you plainly. For my own part, I don't pretend to be or have ever been a very romantic person, but I like to think that there still are in the world some souls capable of generous feeling; I believe in disinterestedness, were it only in my own; I even believe in heroism, for I have known heroes. Moreover, I take a pleasure in hearing the little birds sing under my hornbeam, and in building my cathedral in the clouds as they pass by. All that may be very absurd, my sweet child; but I will venture to remind you that these illusions are the treasures of the poor, that Monsieur and I have no other treasures, and that we are singular enough not to complain about it."

Another day, after enduring with my usual impassibility Mlle. Marguerite's scarcely veiled sarcasms, her mother took me aside: "Monsieur Maxime," she said, "my daughter torments you a little; I beg you to excuse it. You must notice that her character is changed for some time past."

"Your daughter seems more abstracted than usual."

"And not without reason, too; she is on the point of

making a very serious resolution, and it is a moment when a young girl's humour is tossed about by any wind of folly."

I bowed without replying.

"You are now," Mme. Laroque continued, "a friend of the family; in which capacity I shall be obliged if you will tell me what you think of M. de Bévallan."

"M. de Bévallan, Madame, has a very fine fortune, I believe; a little less than yours, but a very fine one still; about one hundred and fifty thousand francs a year."

"Yes, but what is your opinion of the man himself, of his character?"

"Madame, M. de Bévallan is what is called a very polished gentleman. He does not want for sense, and passes for an upright man."

"But do you think he will make my daughter happy?"

"I do not think he will make her unhappy; he has not a malicious spirit."

"What on earth am I to do? He does not please me at all, but he is the only one who does please Marguerite at all; and then there are so few men with a hundred and fifty thousand a year! You can understand that my daughter, in her position, has not wanted for suitors. For two or three years we have been literally besieged. Well, this must come to an end. I am ill, and may go off any day; my daughter will be left without any protection. And since this is a marriage which will satisfy all the requirements of society, and which the world will certainly approve of, I should be to blame if I did not lend myself to it. I am accused already of suggesting romantic ideas to my daughter: the truth is, I suggest nothing to her. She has a head entirely her own. And now what do you advise me to do?"

"Will you allow me to ask what is Mlle. de Porhoët's opinion? She is a person of great judgment and experience, and is, besides, entirely devoted to you."

"Ah, if I took Mlle. de Porhoët's advice, I should send M. de Bévallan far enough. But she speaks about it very much at her ease. When he is gone, it is not Mlle. de Porhoët who will marry my daughter!"

"In point of fortune, Madame, M. de Bévallan is certainly an unusual match, it must not be disguised from you; and if you rigorously demand a hundred thousand a year——"

"But I don't demand a hundred thousand francs a year, any more than a hundred sous, my dear Sir. Only it doesn't concern me, it concerns my daughter. Well, I can't give her to a mason, can I? I should like well enough myself to be a mason's wife; but what would have made me happy, perhaps would not make my daughter so. When I give her in marriage, I have to consult generally received ideas, and not my own."

"Well, Madame, if this marriage suits you, and if it equally suits your daughter—"

"But it does not, it does not suit me, or my daughter either; it is a marriage—why, it is a marriage of convenience, and that is all!"

"Am I to understand that it is quite decided on?"

"No, for I am asking your advice. If it were so, my daughter would be calmer. It is this hesitation that upsets her, and then—"

Mme. Laroque plunged into the shade of the little dome that surmounts her easy-chair, and added: "Have you any idea of what is going on in that unhappy brain?"

"None whatever, Madame."

Her sparkling glance dwelt on me for a moment. She heaved a deep sigh, and said in a gentle and sorrowful tone: "Go, Sir; I will not detain you any longer."

The confidence with which I had just been honoured, had caused me small surprise. For some time it was evident that Mlle. Marguerite was devoting to M. de Bévallan all the sympathy she could still retain for humanity. These tokens, nevertheless, were the appearance of friendly preference rather than of passionate tenderness. It must be said however that this preference is capable of being explained. M. de. Bévallan, whom I have never liked, and of whom I have given in these pages, in spite of myself, a caricature rather than a portrait, combines the greatest number of the qualities and defects which usually enlist the sympathies of women. Modesty is absolutely wanting to him; but that suits him wonderfully, for women do not like it. He has that witty, sarcastic, and calm assurance which nothing can intimidate, which readily intimidates others, and which everywhere secures to a man who is endowed with it, a kind of rule and an appearance of superiority. His tall figure, his large features, his skill in physical exercises, his renown as a steeple-chaser and hunter, lend him a manly authority which imposes on the timid sex. Lastly, he has in his eyes a spirit of boldness, of enterprise and conquest, which is not contradicted by his manners; which troubles women, and stirs up a secret ardour in their souls. It is right to add that advantages of this kind have full value in general only with vulgar hearts; but Mlle. Marguerite's heart, which I had at first been tempted, as is always the case, to rate as highly as her beauty, seemed to be making a display, this some time past, of sentiments of a very inferior order; and I thought her quite capable of yielding,

without resistance and without enthusiasm, with the passive coldness of a sluggish imagination, to the charms of this common-place conqueror, and the subsequent yoke of a marriage of respectability.

In all this it was highly necessary to come to a decision, and I did so more easily than I could have thought possible a month sooner; for I used all my courage to combat the first temptations to a love, of which good sense and honour equally disapproved; and she herself, who, without knowing it, made this combat necessary, had, also without knowing it, powerfully aided me. If she had been unable to hide her beauty from me, she had at least unveiled her soul, and my own at once half returned within itself. A trifling unhappiness, no doubt, to the young millionaire, but a real happiness to me!

Meanwhile I made a journey to Paris, whither I was called by Mme. Laroque's interests, and by my own. I came back two days ago, and on my arrival at the château, I was told that old M. Laroque had been asking for me repeatedly since the morning. I hastened to his apartment. As he perceived me, a pale smile flitted over his withered cheeks; he fixed on me a look in which I thought I read an expression of malignant joy and secret triumph, and then said to me in a dull, hollow voice: "Sir! Monsieur de Saint Cast is dead!"

This news, which the singular old man had insisted on giving me himself, was correct. During the preceding night, poor General de Saint Cast had been attacked with a fit of apoplexy, and in one hour he had been taken away from the wealthy and luxurious existence which he owed to Mme. de Saint Cast. Immediately the event was known in the château, Mme. Aubry had caused herself to be speedily conveyed to her friend's house; and these two companions, Doctor Desmarets

told us, had passed the day in exchanging a whole string of original and striking ideas, on death, the swiftness of its attacks, the impossibility of foreseeing or guarding against them, the uselessness of regret, which will not bring the dead to life again, and on time as a consoler. After which they sat down to dinner, and recruited their strength very sweetly. "Come, eat, Madame; you must sustain yourself, God wishes it," said Mme. Aubry. At dessert, Mme. de Saint Cast had a bottle of some Spanish wine brought up, which the General used to adore, in consideration of which she begged Mme. Aubry to taste it. Mme. Aubry obstinately refusing to taste it alone, Mme. de Saint Cast let herself be persuaded that God also wished she should take a glass of Spanish wine and a crust. They did not drink the general's health.

Yesterday morning, Mme. Laroque and her daughter, dressed in deep mourning, stepped into the carriage. I took a seat by them. We reached the little neighbouring town towards ten o'clock. While I attended the general's funeral, these ladies joined with Mme. Aubry to form the customary circle round the widow. The sad ceremony over, I returned to the house of mourning, and was ushered, with some friends of the family, into the celebrated drawing-room, the furniture of which cost fifteen thousand francs. In the funereal half-light which reigned there, I distinguished, on a sofa worth twelve hundred francs, the inconsolable shadow of Mme. de Saint Cast, enveloped in much crape, of which we soon learned the price. By her side was Mme. Aubry, presenting an image of the greatest physical and moral weakness. Half-a-dozen relations and friends completed the mournful group. While we were arranging ourselves in line at the other end of the room, there was a sound of moving feet and creaking of the

floor; then a gloomy silence once more reigned in the mausoleum. Only from time to time there rose from the sofa a lamentable sigh, which Mme. Aubry immediately repeated like a faithful echo.

At length came in a young man, who had delayed a little in the street, to take time to finish a cigar which he had lighted on leaving the cemetery. As he glided discreetly into our ranks, Mme. de Saint Cast saw him.

"Is that you, Arthur?" she said in a voice like a breath.

"Yes, aunt," said the young man, advancing like a vedette in front of our line.

"Well," returned the widow, in the same plaintive, drawling tone, "is it over?"

"Yes, aunt," was the answer given in a curt and deliberate tone, by the young Arthur, who seemed to be a young fellow that was pretty well satisfied with himself.

A pause followed, after which Mme. de Saint Cast drew from the depths of her soul this new series of questions: "Did it go off well?"

"Very well, aunt, very well."

"Many people present?"

"The whole town, aunt, the whole town."

"The troops?"

"Yes, aunt, the whole garrison and the band."

Mme. de Saint Cast groaned audibly, and then added: "The sappers?"

"The sappers too, aunt, most assuredly."

I do not know what it was in this last circumstance that could so painfully lacerate Mme. de Saint Cast's heart, but she did not resist it; a sudden fainting fit, accompanied by an infantine wailing, called round her all the resources of female

sensibility, and gave us an opportunity to escape. I took good care, for my part, to profit by it. I could not endure to see that ridiculous harpy performing her hypocritical mummery over the grave of the weak, but good and true man, whose life she had embittered, and whose end she had probably hastened.

A few minutes later, Mme. Laroque sent to propose to me to accompany her as far as the farm-house at Langoat, situated five or six leagues farther, in the direction of the coast. She calculated on going to dine there with her daughter. The farmer's wife, who had been Mlle. Marguerite's nurse, is ill at present, and the ladies have for some time proposed giving her this mark of their interest. We set out at two in the afternoon. It was one of the hottest days of this hot season. The open curtains let into the carriage the thick scorching effluvia which a burning sky spread abundantly over the parched moorland.

The conversation suffered from the languor of our minds. Mme. Laroque, who alleged she was in Paradise, and who had at length dispensed with her furs, remained buried in a quiet ecstasy. Mlle. Marguerite played with her fan, with Spanish gravity. While we ascended the endless hills of this country, we saw legions of small, silver-backed lizards swarming on the calcined rocks, and heard the continual cracking of the broom opening its ripe pods in the sun.

In the middle of one of these laborious ascents, a voice cried suddenly from the roadside: "Stop, if you please!" And a tall, bare-legged girl, holding a distaff in her hand, and wearing the antique costume and ducal cap of the peasants of the district, quickly crossed the ditch; she upset some terrified sheep, whose shepherdess she seemed to be, settled herself on the step, and showed us in the frame of the carriage-window

her brown, composed, and smiling face. "Excuse me, ladies," she said, in the short, melodious accent which marks the speech of the people of the country, "would you be so kind as to read to me that?" And she drew from her bosom a letter, folded in the old fashion.

"Read it, Sir," said Mme. Laroque, laughing, "and read it aloud, if it is possible."

I took the letter, which was a love-letter. It was very minutely addressed to Mlle. Christine Oyadec, Borough of ——, Commune of ——, Farm of ——. The writing was that of a very uncultivated hand, but one that seemed sincere. The date proclaimed that Mlle. Christine had received the missive two or three weeks before; apparently the poor girl, not being able to read, and not wishing to reveal her secret to the malice of her neighbours, had waited till some passing stranger, both benevolent and instructed, should come and give her the key to the mystery which had burned her bosom for a fortnight. Her widely opened blue eye was fixed on me with a look of inexpressible eagerness, while I painfully deciphered the slanting lines of the letter, which was conceived in the following terms:

"Mademoiselle, this is to tell you that since the day when we spoke together on the moor after vespers, my mind has not changed, and that I am anxious to learn yours; my heart, Mademoiselle, is all yours, as I desire that yours should be all mine, and if that is the case, you may be very sure and certain that there is not a more loving soul on earth or in heaven than your friend——, who does not sign; but you know very well who, Mademoiselle."

"Why, you don't know who, do you Mademoiselle Christine?" said I, giving her back the letter.

"Very possibly," she said, showing her white teeth, and gravely shaking her young head, radiant with happiness. "Thank you, ladies, and you, Sir." She jumped down from the step, and soon disappeared in the underwood, flinging towards the sky the joyous and sounding notes of a Breton song.

Mme. Laroque had followed with evident delight all the details of this pastoral scene, which sweetly flattered her chimera; she smiled, she dreamed in the presence of that happy bare-footed girl, she was charmed. Still, when Mlle. Oyadec was out of sight, a strange idea suddenly came into Mme. Laroque's thoughts: it was that, after all, she would not have done so much amiss to give the shepherdess a five franc piece, besides her admiration.

"Alain!" she cried, "call her back!"

"What for, mother?" said Mlle. Marguerite eagerly, who had hitherto seemed to pay no attention to the occurrence.

"Why, my child, perhaps the girl does not understand altogether what pleasure I should find, and she herself ought to find, in running about barefoot in the dust: in any case I think it fitting to leave her something to remember me by."

"Money!" returned Mlle. Marguerite; "oh! mother, don't do that! Don't mix up money with the child's happiness!"

This expression of a refined feeling which poor Christine, by the way, would perhaps not have immensely appreciated, did not fail to astonish me, coming from the mouth of Mlle. Marguerite, who does not generally pique herself on this quintessence. I even thought that she was joking,

although her face showed no inclination to merriment. However that may be, her caprice, joke or no joke, was taken very seriously by her mother, and it was enthusiastically decided that the idyl should be left with its innocence and its bare feet.

After the display of this fine trait, Mme. Laroque, evidently well pleased with herself, sank back in smiling ecstasy, and Mlle. Marguerite went on playing with her fan with redoubled gravity. In another hour we reached the end of our journey. Like the majority of the farms in this country, where the heights and the table land are covered with barren moors, the farm of Langoat is situated in the hollow of a valley traversed by a water-course. The farmer's wife, who was recovering her health, began without delay to prepare the dinner, for which we had taken care to bring the chief ingredients. It was served on the natural turf of a meadow, in the shade of an enormous chestnut. Mme. Laroque, though installed in a vastly inconvenient position on the cushions of the carriage, looked none the less radiant. Our party, she said, reminded her of the groups of reapers we see in summer time, gathering under the shade of a hedge, and whose rustic banquets she could never contemplate without envy. For my part, I might perhaps under other circumstances have found a singular sweetness in the close and easy intimacy which a repast on the grass, like all scenes of the kind, did not fail to establish between the guests; but I thrust away with painful feelings of self-restraint, a charm too liable to repentance, and the bread of this transient brotherhood seemed bitter to me.

As we were finishing dinner, Mme. Laroque said to

me: "Have you ever been up yonder?" and pointed to the summit of a very high hill that overlooked the plain.

"No, Madame."

"Oh, that is a pity. There is a very fine view from it. You must see it. While they put to the horses, Marguerite will take you there; won't you, Marguerite?"

"I, mother? I have been there but once, and that a long time ago. But I shall easily find the way. Come, Sir, and prepare for a rough climb."

We began at once, Mlle. Marguerite and I, to ascend a very steep path that wound along the side of the mountain, passing here and there through a clump of trees. The young girl stopped from time to time in her light and rapid ascent, to look if I was following, and smiled at me without speaking, being a little out of breath with running. On reaching the bare moor, which formed the table-land, I perceived at a little distance a village church, the little belfry standing out with its square edges clear against the sky. "That is the place," said my young guide, walking more swiftly. Behind the church was a walled graveyard. She opened the gate, and made her way with difficulty through the tall grass and trailing brambles that encumbered the field of repose, towards the extremity of it, where there is a kind of semicircular arrangement of steps. Two or three steps, loosened by time, and very strangely ornamented with massive spheres, lead to a narrow platform of the same height as the wall; a granite cross rises in the centre of the semicircle.

Mlle. Marguerite had no sooner reached the platform and cast a look over the space thus revealed to her, than I saw her place her hands obliquely above her eyes, as if she felt a sudden dizziness. I hastened to join her. The beautiful day, now

near its close, lighted up with its dying splendours a vast, strange, and sublime scene, which I shall never forget. Before us, and at an immense depth below our elevation, extended, as far as the eye could reach, a kind of marsh studded with shining spots, and offering the appearance of a world not quite abandoned by a subsiding deluge. This wide bay came right under our feet, into the heart of the hollowed mountains. On the ridges of sand and mud that separated the occasional pools, was a mingled growth of reeds and marine grasses, dyed with a thousand shades, all equally sombre and yet distinct, which contrasted with the brilliant surface of the waters. At each of its rapid steps towards the horizon, the sun illuminated or plunged in shade some of the numberless lakes that speckled the half dried-up bay. It seemed to be drawing from its heavenly casket the most precious things, silver, gold, rubies, and diamonds, to make them sparkle in their turns on every point of the magnificent plain. When the sun touched the bounds of its career, a vaporous and watery band, which skirted in the distance the extreme limit of the marshes, suddenly grew purple with the glare of a conflagration, and preserved for a moment the radiant transparence of a cloud furrowed by the thunderbolt. I was wholly absorbed in contemplating this picture, so truly stamped with the divine greatness, and which was traversed by the memory of Cæsar as another ray of light, when a low and apparently stifled voice murmured near me: "O God! how beautiful it is!"

I was far from expecting this sympathetic expression of feeling from my young companion. I turned towards her with the eagerness of surprise, which was not lessened when the change in her features and the slight trembling of her lips attested the deep sincerity of her admiration.

"You confess it is beautiful!" I said to her.

She shook her head; but at the same moment two tears escaped from her large eyes; she felt them trickling down her cheeks, and made a gesture of vexation; then, suddenly casting herself upon the granite cross, the base of which served as her foothold, she embraced it with both hands, pressed her head strongly against the stone, and I heard her sob convulsively.

I thought it my duty not to disturb by a single word the free course of this sudden emotion, and I retreated a few paces with respect. After a moment, seeing her raise her forehead, and arrange with a troubled hand her disordered hair, I drew near again.

"How ashamed I am!" she murmured.

"Be happy rather, and cease, believe me, to seek to dry up the fountain of those tears: for it is sacred. Moreover you will never succeed."

"I must!" the young girl cried, with a kind of violence. "And it is done! This fit was only a surprise. Everything that is beautiful and everything that is lovely I will hate, and I do hate!"

"And why, in God's name?"

She looked me in the face, and added, with a gesture of unspeakable pride and sorrow, "Because I am beautiful, and yet cannot be loved!"

Then, like a long-restrained torrent at length bursting its banks, she went on with extraordinary impetuosity. "Still it is true," and she placed her hand on her breast, "God placed in this heart all the treasures that I mock at, that I blaspheme every hour of the day! But when He inflicted wealth upon me, alas! He took back with one hand what He lavished on me with the other. Of what good is my

beauty, of what good the devotion, the tenderness, the enthusiasm, with which I feel myself consumed? Ah, it is not these charms to which is paid the homage with which so many villains weary me! I divine it, I know it—I know it too well! And if ever some disinterested, generous, heroic soul should love me for what I am, and not for what I am worth, I should not believe it. Mistrust always! That is my penalty, my punishment. And so I am resolved; I will never love! Never will I risk the pouring into a vile, unworthy, venal heart the pure passion that burns my heart. My soul shall die a maid within my breast! Well, I am resigned; but all that is beautiful, all that makes me dream, all that speaks to me of forbidden skies, all that stirs within me a useless flame—I put it away, I hate it, I will none of it!" She stopped, trembling with emotion; then, in a lower tone, she added: "I have not sought this moment, Sir; I have not weighed my words; I had not intended all this confidence for you; but I have at length spoken, and you know all: and if I may ever have wounded your feelings, I think you will forgive me now."

She gave me her hand. As my lip touched that warm hand, still wet with tears, a mortal languor seemed to descend into my veins. As for Marguerite, she turned aside her head, fixed her eyes for a moment on the darkened horizon, then, slowly descending the steps, said, "Let us go."

August 20th.

A LONGER but easier road than the steep slope of the mountain, brought us back to the farmyard without a single

word having been spoken between us. Alas! what could I have said? I was more liable to be suspected than another.

I felt that every word escaped from my too full heart would only have widened still further the distance that separates me from that overshadowed and adorable soul.

The night had now fallen, and took from our eyes any trace of our common emotion. We set out. Mme. Laroque, after again telling us of the pleasure which she carried away with her from this day, began to dream of it. Mlle. Marguerite, invisible and motionless in the thick shade of the carriage, seemed asleep like her mother; but when a turn in the road allowed a ray of pale brightness to fall on her, her open, fixed eyes proved that she was watching in silence, alone with her inconsolable reflection. For my part, I can hardly tell what I thought: a strange sensation, compounded of deep joy and deep bitterness, had taken entire possession of me, and I gave myself up to it, as we sometimes give ourselves up to a dream of which we are conscious, and of which we have not the strength to shake off the charm.

We reached home towards midnight. I got out of the carriage at the beginning of the avenue, in order to reach my apartments by the shorter way across the park. As I was entering a dark path, a slight sound of steps and voices near me struck upon my ear, and I dimly distinguished two shadows in the darkness. The hour was late enough to justify the precaution which I took, of remaining concealed in the thick clump of trees, and observing these two nocturnal marauders. They passed slowly before me: I recognized Mlle. Hélouin, leaning on M. de Bévallan's arm. Just then the roll of the carriage gave them the alarm, and, after a pressure of the hand, they parted hastily, Mlle. Hélouin escaping in the

direction of the château, and the other on the side of the wood.

Returned to my room, and still full of this adventure, I asked myself angrily if I should allow M. de Bévallan freely to pursue his double-dealing in love matters, and to seek a bride and a mistress at the same time in the same house. I am certainly too much a man of my age and times to feel the vigorous hatred of a Puritan for certain weaknesses, and I have not the hypocrisy to affect it; but I think that the freest and laxest morality on this point still admits some degrees of dignity, elevation, and delicacy. People walk more or less straight in these by-paths. After all, the excuse for love is loving; and the senseless profusion of tenderness on M. de Bévallan's part took away all appearance of absorbing passion. Such loves cease to be faults; they have not enough moral value; they are nothing but the calculations and wagers of a stupid jockey.

The various incidents of this evening, standing side by side in my mind, proved satisfactorily to me how utterly unworthy this man was of the hand and heart which he dared to covet. This union would be monstrous. And yet I soon felt that I could not, with the purpose of frustrating his designs, make use of the weapons which chance had just furnished to me. The best of ends cannot justify vile means, and there is nothing honourable in any kind of tale-bearing. This marriage will take place, then! Heaven will allow one of the noblest creatures it has ever formed, to fall into the arms of this cold libertine! It will permit this profanation! Alas, it permits so many others!

I then sought to discover by what process of false reasoning this young girl had chosen this man from among all. I think

I hit upon it. M. de Bévallan is very rich: he will bring a fortune almost equal to that which he will receive; that seems a kind of guarantee: he could dispense with this increase of riches, and he is presumed to be more disinterested than others, because he is less needy. A melancholy argument! What a boundless disdain, to estimate characters by the degree of their venality! Three quarters of the time, greediness swells with wealth; and the poorest people are not the greatest beggars!

But was there no appearance that Mlle. Marguerite might be able to open her eyes of herself to the unworthiness of her choice, and to find, in some secret prompting of her own heart, the advice which it was forbidden me to suggest to her? Might there not suddenly spring up in that heart, some new, unexpected feeling, which should extinguish the vain determinations of reason, and annihilate them? Was not this very feeling already born there? And had I not received irrefragable proof of it? So many strange caprices, hesitations, combats, and tears, of which I had for some time been the occasion or the witness, undoubtedly announced a reason that was wavering and far from master of itself. I was no longer sufficiently fresh to life to be unaware that a scene, like that of which chance made me on that very evening the confidant, and almost the accomplice—however unpremeditated it may be—does not burst forth in an atmosphere of indifference. Such emotions, and such convulsions, presuppose two souls already troubled by a kindred tempest, or about to be so.

But if it were true, if she loved me, as it was already too certain that I loved her, I might say of this love as she said of her beauty, "Of what good is it?" For I could not hope that it would ever have strength enough to triumph over the

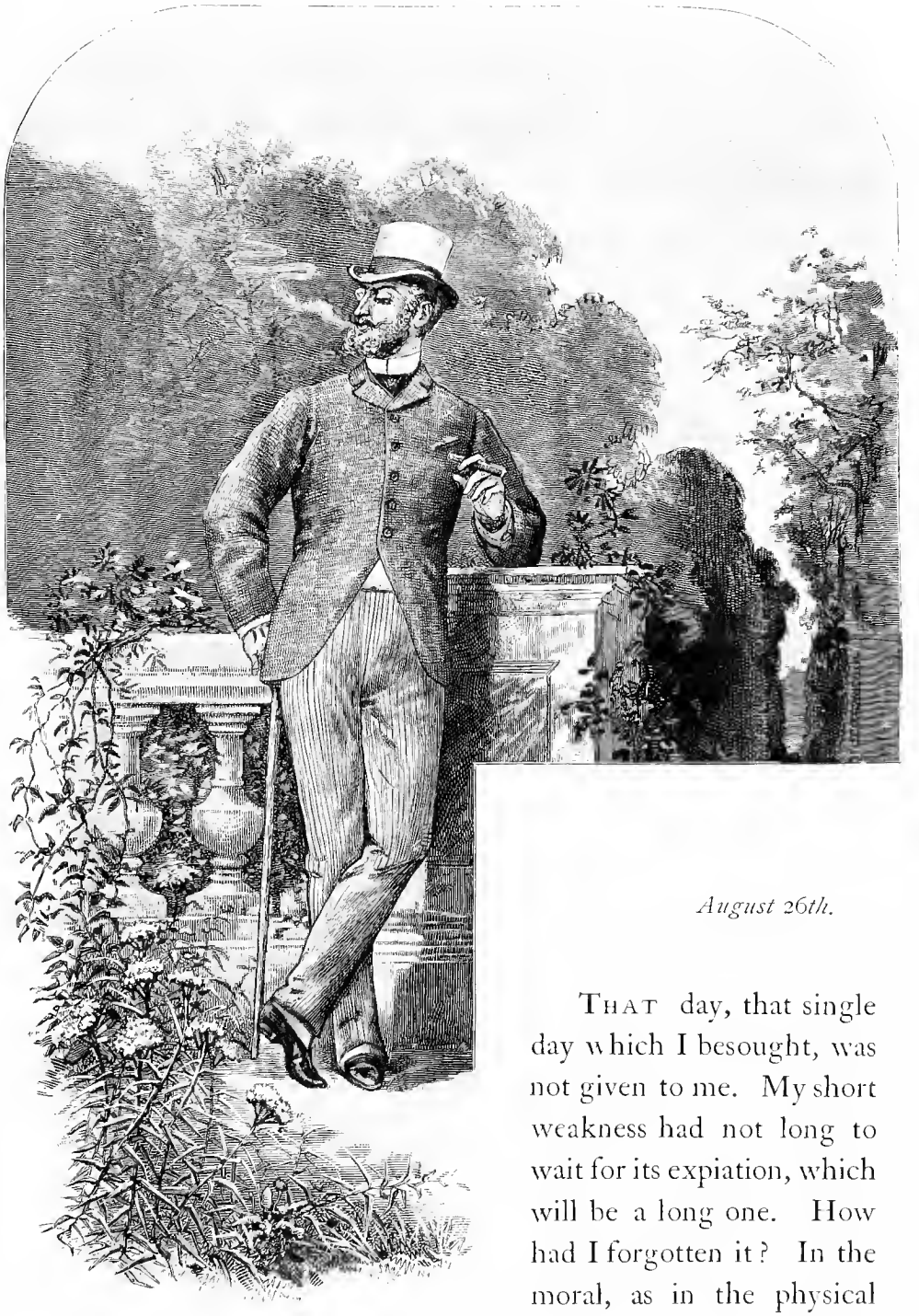
eternal mistrust which is the fault and the virtue of this noble girl; a mistrust, the insult of which my character, I venture to say, repels; but which my situation, more than any other, is calculated to inspire. Between this terrible gloom and the reserve that it imposes on me, what miracle could fill up the abyss? And even should this miracle be interposed, should she

condescend to offer me that hand for which I would give my life, but which I will never ask, would our union be happy? Shall I not have to fear, sooner or later, some dim revival of ill-repressed mistrust in that restless imagination? Could I defend myself from all painful after-thought in the midst of borrowed riches? Could I enjoy without uneasiness a love

that was tainted by a benefit? Our part of protection towards women is so formally imposed on us by every feeling of honour, that it cannot be inverted for a single moment, even in all honesty, without some shade of doubt or suspicion being spread about us. In truth, riches are not so great an advantage that they can have nothing set against them in this world, and I suppose that a man who brings to his wife, in exchange, certain bags of gold, a name which he has made famous, eminent deserts, a high position, or a future, need not be overwhelmed with gratitude; but as for me, my hands are empty, my future is no more than my present; of all the advantages which the world appreciates, I have but one, my title; and I should be very determined not to bear it, so that it might not be said it was the price of the bargain. In short, I should be receiving everything and giving nothing; a king may marry a shepherdess, it is generous and pleasing, and he may safely be congratulated on it; but a shepherd who should allow himself to be married to a queen, that would not look quite so well.

I have passed the whole night in revolving all these matters in my poor brain, and in seeking for a conclusion which is yet to seek. Perhaps I ought without delay to leave this house and this country. Wisdom would have it so. All this can come to no good end. What mortal vexation we should often spare ourselves by a single minute's courage and decision! I ought at any rate to be overwhelmed with sorrow; I never had so fine an opportunity. Well, I cannot do it! In the depth of my confounded and tortured mind lies a thought which prevails over everything, and fills me with superhuman gladness. My soul is as light as a bird of the air. I incessantly see, I always shall see, that little graveyard, that distant

sea, that boundless horizon, and on that radiant summit that angel of beauty, bathed in divine tears! I still feel her hand beneath my lip; I feel her tears in my eyes, in my heart! I love her! Well, to-morrow, if need be, I will make a resolution. Till then, for God's sake, let me be left in quiet. It is long since I have abused happiness. It may be that I shall die of this love; I wish to live peacefully with it one whole day!



August 26th.

THAT day, that single day which I besought, was not given to me. My short weakness had not long to wait for its expiation, which will be a long one. How had I forgotten it? In the moral, as in the physical order, there are laws which we never transgress with impunity,

and whose certain effects form in this world the permanent intervention of what we call Providence. A weak and great man, writing with an almost insensate hand the gospel of a sage, said of those very passions which formed his wretchedness, his opprobrium, and his genius: "All passions are good, when you remain master of them; all are bad, when you let them hold you in subjection." What is forbidden us by nature is, to extend our attachments beyond our strength; what is forbidden us by reason is, to wish for what we cannot obtain; what is forbidden us by conscience is, not to be tempted, but to let ourselves be overcome by temptation. To have passions, or not to have them, does not depend on us; it depends on us to govern them. All feelings of which we have the mastery are lawful; all those which have the mastery of us are criminal.

Set thy heart only on the beauty which does not perish; let thy condition limit thy desires; let thy duties go before thy passions; extend the law of necessity to moral things; learn what may be taken away from thee; learn to leave all when virtue bids it! Yes, such is the law; I knew it; I violated it; I am punished. Nothing more just.

I had scarcely set foot in the clouds of this mad love, when I was violently hurled down, and I have hardly regained, after five days, the necessary courage to relate the almost ridiculous circumstances of my fall. Mme. Laroque and her daughter had gone in the morning to pay a fresh visit to Mme. de Saint Cast, and then to bring back Mme. Aubry. I found Mlle. Hélouin alone at the château. I brought her a quarter's salary; for though my duties leave me in general an entire stranger to the interior management and discipline of the house,

the ladies desired, doubtless out of consideration for Mlle. Caroline and for me, that her moneys and mine should be an exception, and be paid by my hand. The young lady was in the little boudoir adjoining the drawing-room. She received me with a pensive sweetness that touched me. I felt just then that fulness of heart which disposes one to trustfulness and kindness. I resolved, like a true Don Quixote, to extend a helping hand to the poor isolated girl. "Mademoiselle," I said suddenly, "you have withdrawn your friendship from me, but mine has remained entirely true to you; will you let me give you a proof of it?"

She looked at me, and murmured a timid yes.

"Well, my poor child, you are ruining yourself."

She rose abruptly. "You saw me that night in the park?" she cried.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

She took a step towards me, and said: "Monsieur Maxime, I swear to you that I am an honest girl!"

"I believe it, Mademoiselle; but I am bound to tell you that in this little romance, very innocent doubtless on your part, but perhaps less so on the other side, you are very seriously risking your honour and your peace. I beg you to think of it, and I beg you at the same time to be very well assured that no one save yourself shall ever hear a word on the subject from my mouth."

I was going to withdraw; she sank on her knees near a sofa, and burst out sobbing, her forehead resting on my hand, which she had taken. I had but a short while ago seen more beautiful and worthier tears flow; but still I was moved. "Let us see, my dear young lady," I said; "it is not too late, is it?" She shook her head strongly. "Well, my dear child,

take courage. We shall come out of it all right. What can I do for you, tell me? Is there in this man's hands any pledge, any token, that I can demand of him for you? Command my services as if I were your brother."

She gave up my hand angrily. "Ah, how hard you are!" she said. "You speak of saving me; it is you who are ruining me! After pretending to love me, you repelled me; you have driven me to humiliation and despair. You are the sole cause of whatever happens!"

"Mademoiselle, you are not just; I never pretended to love you; I had a very sincere affection for you, which I still feel. I confess that your beauty, your wit, and your talents, give you a perfect right to expect from those who live near you something more than brotherly friendship; but my position in the world, and the family duties that devolve on me, did not allow me to pass that limit with you without failing in uprightness. I tell you plainly I think you are charming, and I assure you that in restraining my feelings towards you within the bounds that my duty prescribed, I was not without merit. I see nothing so humiliating to you in that, Mademoiselle; it might much more justly humiliate you to be very resolutely loved by a man who is very resolute not to marry you."

She gave me a malicious look. "What do you know about it? All men are not fortune-hunters."

"Ah! do you happen to be a malicious little lady, Mlle. Hélouin?" I said very calmly. "That being the case, I have the honour to wish you good-bye."

"Monsieur Maxime!" she cried, suddenly rushing forward to stop me. "Forgive me! Have pity on me! Alas! understand me, I am so unhappy! Picture to yourself what can be the thoughts of a poor creature like me, cruelly endowed with

a heart, a soul, an intellect, and who can use them all only to suffer and to hate! What is my life? what is my future? My life is the feeling of my poverty, continually strengthened by all the refinements of the luxury that surrounds me? My future will be regret and bitter weeping some day for even this life, this slave's life, odious as it is! You speak of my youth, my wit, my talents. Ah, would that I had never any other talent than that of breaking stones on the road! I should be happier. My talents! I shall have passed the best of my life in adorning another woman with them, that she might become beautiful, and yet more adored and more insolent. And when the purest of my blood shall have passed into the veins of this doll, she will go away on the arm of a happy husband, to take her part in the fairest scenes of life; while I alone, old and neglected, shall go and die in some corner, with the pension of a lady's maid. What have I done to heaven, to destiny, tell me? Why is it I, rather than these women? Am I not as good as they are? If I am bad, it is unhappiness, it is injustice that has ulcerated my soul. I was born like them, perhaps more than they, to be good, loving, and charitable. Oh, benefits cost so little when one is rich, and benevolence is easy to those who are happy! If I were in their place, and they in mine, they, they would hate me—as I hate them! You cannot love your masters? Ah, what I tell you is horrible, is it not? I know it well, and that is what undoes me. I feel my abject position, and blush at it; and I keep it! Alas! you will despise me now more than ever, Sir; you whom I should have loved so much, if you had allowed it! you who might have restored to me all that I have lost, hope, peace, goodness, self-respect! Ah, there was a moment when I thought myself saved, when I had for the first time a

thought of happiness, of a future, of pride. Unhappy that I am!" She had seized my two hands; she bowed her head upon them, her long curls floating round it, and wept madly.

"My dear child," I said to her, "I understand better than any one the annoyance and bitterness of your condition: but let me tell you that you add to it greatly by cherishing in your heart the melancholy feelings which you have just expressed to me. All this is very ugly. I will not conceal it from you, and you will end by deserving the full rigour of your destiny; but come, your imagination exaggerates its rigour strangely. At present, whatever you may say about it, you are treated here on the footing of a friend; and I see nothing in the future to hinder you from leaving this house on the arm of a happy husband. As for myself, I shall all my life be grateful to you for your affection; but I wish to tell you once more, for the last time on this subject, that I have duties to which I belong, and I will not and cannot marry."

She looked at me suddenly. "Not even Marguerite?" she said.

"I do not see what Mlle. Marguerite's name has to do here."

She threw back with one hand her hair, which was overspreading her countenance, and stretching the other towards me with a menacing gesture, she said in a dull voice: "You love her! or rather you love her fortune; but you shall not have it!"

"Mademoiselle Hélouin!"

"Ah," she continued, "you are pretty much of a child, if you thought to deceive a woman who had the madness to love you! I can read your manœuvres plainly, I warn you. Besides, know who you are. I was not far off when

Mlle. de Porhoët repeated to Mme. Laroque your wily confidence—— "

"What! you listen at doors, Mademoiselle!"

"I care little for your insults. Moreover, I will avenge myself, and that soon. Ah, you are certainly very clever, Monsieur de Champcey, and I offer you my compliments upon it. You have played beautifully the little part of disinterestedness and reserve, that your friend Laubépin did not fail to recommend to you when he sent you here. He knew with whom you had to do He knew well enough the absurd mania of this beautiful girl! You think you have already secured your prey, don't you? Some good millions, of which the source is more or less pure, they say, but which would still do very well to put fresh plaster on a Marquisate, and fresh gilding on an escutcheon. Well, you may give up the idea from this moment; for I swear that you shall not wear your mask another day, and this is the hand that shall tear it off."

"Mademoiselle Hélouin, it is high time to put an end to this scene, for we are bordering on the melodramatic. You have made it a fair game for me to forestal you in the field of tale-bearing and calumny; but you can descend into it in full security, for I give you my word that I shall not follow you there. And so, your servant."

I left the unhappy creature with a deep feeling of disgust, but also of pity. Although I had always suspected that the best endowed organization might, in the very proportion of its gifts, be irritated and distorted in the equivocal and mortifying position that Mlle. Hélouin holds here, my imagination had not been able to sound the abyss of gall just opened before my eyes. Certainly, when you think of it, you can hardly

conceive a kind of life that subjects a human soul to more venomous temptations, that is more capable of developing and sharpening in one's heart the covetousness of envy, of raising the revolt of pride at every moment, of exasperating all the natural vanities and jealousies of a woman. It cannot be doubted that the greatest number of the unhappy girls whose destitution or talents have set them apart for this employment, so honourable in itself, escape by the moderation of their feelings, or, with God's help, by the firmness of their principles, the lamentable emotions against which Mlle. Hélouin has not been able to secure herself; but the trial is terrible. For my own part, the thought had sometimes occurred to me that my sister might be destined by our misfortunes to enter some rich family as a governess; and I now took an oath, whatever future might be in store for us, rather to share with Helen in the poorest garret the bitterest bread of toil, than ever to allow her to sit down at the poisoned banquet of this wealthy and hateful servitude.

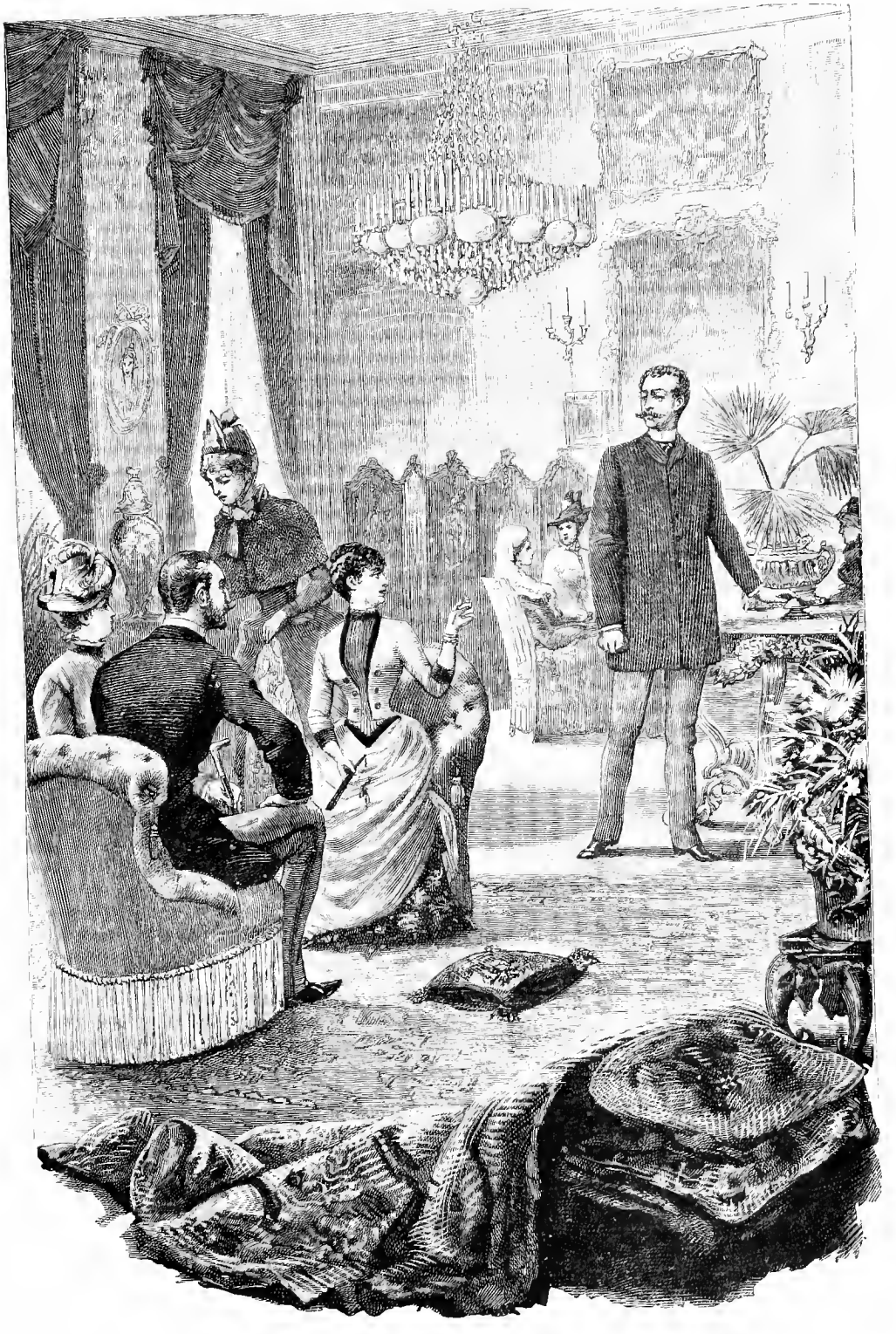
Still, if I was firmly determined to leave a clear field to Mlle. Hélouin, and on no account to enter myself into the recriminations of a degrading contest, I could not look without disquiet at the probable consequences of the war which had been declared against me. I was plainly threatened in everything where I am most sensitive, in my love and in my honour. Possessed of the secret of my life and the secret of my heart, mingling truth and falsehood with the skill of her sex, Mlle. Hélouin could easily present my conduct under a suspicious light, and turn against me the very precautions, the very instincts of my delicacy, so as to lend to my simplest proceedings the colour of premeditated intrigue. It was impossible for me to know exactly what turn her malevolence

would take; but I trusted in her, and was certain she would make no mistake in the choice of her means. She knew better than any one the weak points of the imaginations she wished to impress. She possessed, over the minds of Mlle. Marguerite and her mother, the natural power of dissimulation over frankness, of cunning over candour; she enjoyed with them all the confidence that arises from long habit and daily intimacy, and her masters, as she called them, were far from suspecting, under the exterior of graceful amiability and obsequious attention, in which she wraps herself with consummate art, the existence of the frenzied pride and ingratitude that are preying upon that wretched soul. It was too probable that so sure and skilful a hand would pour its poison with full success into hearts thus prepared for it. It is true Mlle. Helouin might be afraid, in yielding to her resentment, of placing Mlle. Marguerite's hand once more in that of M. de Bévallan, and of hastening forward a marriage that would be the ruin of her own ambition; but I knew that a woman's hatred calculates nothing, and risks everything. I expected then the promptest and blindest of vengeance on her part, and I was right.

I passed in painful anxiety the hours that I had intended for sweeter thoughts. All the poignancy that dependence can cause in a proud heart, all the bitterness that suspicion can cause in an upright conscience, all the pain that contempt can cause in a loving heart,—I felt it all. In my worst days, my cup of adversity had never been more full. Still I tried to work as usual. Towards five o'clock I went to the château. The ladies had returned in the afternoon. I found in the drawing-room Mlle. Marguerite, Mme. Aubry, and M. de Bévallan, with two or three passing guests. Mlle. Marguerite

seemed not to notice my presence; she continued conversing with M. de Bévallan in an animated tone unusual to her. They were speaking of an extempore ball that was to take place that very evening at a neighbouring château. She was to go there with her mother, and she pressed M. de Bévallan to accompany them; he excused himself on the ground that he had left home in the morning before receiving the invitation, and that his dress was not suitable. Mlle. Marguerite persisted with an affectionate, eager coquettishness, at which he himself seemed surprised; and told him that he certainly still had time to go back home, dress, and return to take them. A nice little dinner should be kept for him. M. de Bévallan objected that all his carriage horses were sick, and that he could not come on horseback in ball dress. "Well, then!" Mlle. Marguerite returned, "you shall be driven in the buggy." At the same time she, for the first time, turned her eyes towards me, and covering me with a look in which I saw the thunderbolt breaking out, she said in a short, commanding tone, "Monsieur Odiot, go and tell them to put to the horse!"

This servile order was so different from those usually addressed to me here, and from what I may be thought disposed to obey, that the attention and curiosity of the most indifferent were immediately aroused. There was an embarrassed silence. M. de Bévallan cast an astonished glance on Mlle. Marguerite, then looked at me, assumed a serious look, and rose. If they looked for any mad display of anger, they were deceived. True, the insulting words which had just fallen on my ear, from so beautiful, so beloved, and so barbarous a mouth, had penetrated with the chill of death to the deepest fountains of my life; and I doubt whether a blade of steel, finding its way through



my heart, would have caused me a worse sensation; but I was never so calm. The bell which Mme. Laroque is in the habit of using, to summon her attendants, was on a table within my reach; I pressed my finger on the spring. A servant entered almost immediately. I believe I said to him:

"Mlle. Marguerite has some orders to give you."

At these words, which she heard in a kind of stupor, the young girl violently made a sign in the negative with her head, and dismissed the servant. I made great haste to leave the room, for I was stifling there; but I could not withdraw before the attitude of provocation which M. de Bévallan then assumed.

"Upon my word," he muttered, "this is something very peculiar."

I pretended not to hear him. Mlle. Marguerite said two words abruptly to him in a whisper.

"I bow to your wish, Mademoiselle," he returned in a higher tone; "only allow me to express the regret which I feel at not having the right to interfere."

I immediately rose. "Monsieur de Bévallan," I said, standing within two paces of him, "that regret is quite superfluous, for if I did not think it my duty to obey Mademoiselle's orders, I am entirely at yours, and I shall await them."

"Very well, Sir, very well, nothing better," replied M. de Bévallan, gracefully waving his hand to reassure the women.

We bowed to each other, and I went out.

I dined alone in my tower, waited on as usual by poor Alain, whom the rumours of the servants' hall had doubt-

less informed of what had taken place; for he did not cease to fix upon me piteous looks, heaving deep sighs at intervals, and, contrary to his custom, keeping a gloomy silence. Only, in reply to my question, he informed me that the ladies had decided not to go to the ball that evening.

My brief repast over, I set my papers in a little order, and wrote two words to M. Laubépin. Under any circumstances, I recommended Helen to his care. The idea of the neglect in which I should leave her, in case of accident, wounded my heart, without shaking the least in the world my immovable principles. I may be wrong, but I have always thought that, in our modern society, honour is at the top of the whole hierarchy of duties. It supplies the place nowadays of so many half obliterated virtues in men's consciences, so many half dead beliefs; it plays in the present condition of society, so much the part of a guardian deity, that it will never enter my mind to weaken its rights, to discuss its decrees, or to lower its obligations. Honour, in its indefinite character, is something superior to law and morality: we do not reason it out, we feel it. It is a religion. If we no longer have the foolishness of the cross, let us keep the foolishness of honour!

Moreover, there is no feeling deeply planted in the human soul, that is not sanctioned by reason, if you think of it. Better at all hazards is a daughter or a wife alone in the world, than protected by a brother or a husband dishonoured.

I was every moment expecting a message from M. de Bévallan. I was preparing to call upon the collector of the borough, who is a young officer, wounded in the

Crimea, and to ask his aid, when some one knocked at my door. It was M. de Bévallan himself who came in. His countenance expressed, with a slight shade of embarrassment, a sort of open, joyful good-humour.

"Sir," he said, while I looked at him with a very lively surprise, "this is a somewhat irregular proceeding; but, upon my word, I have seen service which puts my courage above suspicion, thank God! On the other hand, I have occasion to feel this evening a happiness which leaves no room for hostility or rancour. Lastly, I am obeying orders which must now be more sacred to me than ever. In short, I come to give you my hand."

I bowed gravely, and took his hand.

"Now," said he, taking a seat, "here I am very much at my ease to discharge the duties of my embassy. Mlle. Marguerite, Sir, just now, in a moment of abstraction, gave you some instructions which certainly were not proper for your position. Your feelings were very justly hurt, we acknowledge; and the ladies have charged me to make you accept their regret. They would be in despair if this momentary mistake should deprive them of your good offices, of which they appreciate the full value, and should dissolve a relation on which they set an infinite price. For myself, Sir, I have this evening acquired, to my great joy, the right to join my request to that of the ladies: the wishes I long ago formed, have just been gratified, and I shall be personally obliged to you if you will not mingle with the happy recollections of this evening the recollection of a separation which would be at once prejudicial and painful to the family into which I have the honour to enter."

"Sir," said I, "I cannot but be very sensible to the testimony which you are so good as to give me, in the name of those ladies and in your own. You will forgive me if I do not at once reply by a formal determination, which would require more freedom of mind than I can yet feel."

"You will at least allow me," said M de Bévallan, "to carry away a good hope. Come, Sir, as the opportunity now offers, let us break for ever any shadow of coolness that may have existed between us. For my own part, I am strongly disposed that way. In the first place, Mme. Laroque, though without giving up a secret that does not belong to her, has not left me unaware that the most honourable circumstances are concealed under the species of mystery with which you surround yourself. Then I owe you gratitude on my own account: I know that you were recently consulted on the subject of my pretensions to the hand of Mlle. Laroque, and that I can flatter myself on your estimate of me."

"Indeed, Sir, I do not think I have deserved—"

"Oh! I know," he returned, laughing, "that you were not insanely fluent in my favour; but at any rate you did me no harm. I even admit that you gave proof of true sagacity. You said that if Mlle. Marguerite would not be absolutely happy with me, she would not be unhappy either. Now the prophet Daniel could not have spoken better. The fact is, that the dear child would not be absolutely happy with any one, because she could not find in the whole world a husband who would speak to her in verse from morning to night. There are none such! I am not a man of that calibre, any more than another, I admit; but,

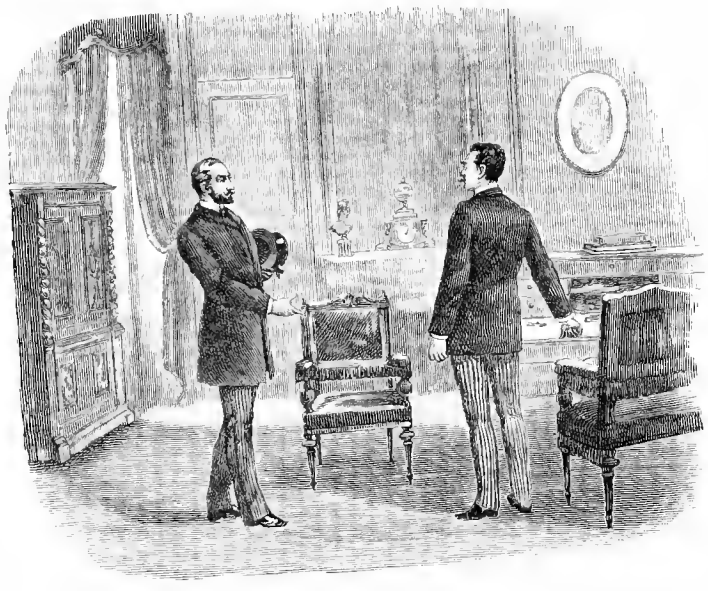
as you in fact did me the honour to say, I am an upright man. When we know each other better, you will certainly have no doubt of it. I am not a wicked devil; I am a good sort of fellow. Good heavens, I have my faults; above all I have had them! I have loved pretty women, —there, I cannot deny it! But what! that is a proof that one has a good heart. Besides I am now in port; and I am even delighted at it; because—between ourselves—I was beginning to grow a little rusty. In short, for the future I will think of nothing but my wife and children. Therefore I conclude with you, that Marguerite will be perfectly happy, that is to say, as much as she can be in this world, with a head like hers: for I am sure I shall be charming, I shall refuse her nothing, and even anticipate her wishes. But if she were to ask me for the moon and stars, I cannot go and hook them down to please her, the thing is impossible! And so, my dear friend, your hand once more!"

I gave it to him. He rose. "There, I hope you will stay with us now. Come, clear that forehead of yours a little. We will make your life as agreeable as can be; but, devil take it, you must help a little! You take pleasure in your sadness. You live, if you will allow me the expression, exactly like an owl. You are a kind of Spaniard that one never sees! Shake off this, come! You are young, and a handsome fellow; you have wit and talents; take advantage of all these things somewhat. Come, why should you not pay some court to little Hélouin? It would amuse you. She is agreeable, and would do very well. But, the deuce! I am somewhat forgetting my promotion to high dignities! Well, good-bye,

Monsieur Maxime; we shall see you to-morrow, shall we not?"

"To-morrow, certainly."

And this upright man—who, on his side, is a kind of Spaniard that one often sees,—left me to my reflections.



October 1st.

A SINGULAR occurrence! Although its consequences have been hitherto none of the happiest, it has done me good. After the rude blow that had struck, I remained as if stunned with grief. This has at least restored to me the feeling of existence, and for the first time in three long weeks, I have the courage to open these sheets, and take up my pen again.

Every satisfaction being given me, I thought I had no

longer any cause to throw up, at least abruptly, a position with advantages that after all are necessary to me, and for which I should have great difficulty in finding an equivalent at a day's notice. The prospect of the merely personal sufferings which remained to be met, and which I had moreover brought on myself by my own weakness, could not authorize me to flee from duties in which my own interests are not the ones concerned. Besides, I did not mean Mlle. Marguerite to be able to interpret my sudden retreat as vexation at losing a rich match, and I made it a point of honour to show an impassible front, even to the steps of the altar; as for the heart, she should not see that. Briefly, I contented myself with writing word to M. Laubépin that certain aspects of my situation might at any moment become unendurable, and that I was eagerly desirous for some less highly paid, and more independent employment.

The next day I presented myself at the château, where M. de Bévallan welcomed me cordially. I saluted the ladies as naturally as I could. Of course there was no explanation. Mme. Laroque seemed to me agitated and pensive; Mlle. Marguerite a little excited still, but polite. As for Mlle. Hélouin, she was very pale, and kept her eyes bent on her embroidery. The poor girl had not cause to congratulate herself excessively on the final result of her diplomacy. True, she tried from time to time to dart at the triumphant M. de Bévallan a look full of disdain, and threatening; but in that stormy atmosphere, which would have tolerably discomposed a novice, M. de Bévallan breathed, moved, and flew about with the most perfect composure. This supreme self-command plainly irritated Mlle. Hélouin, but at the same time it subdued her. Still, but for the

risk of ruining herself along with her accomplice, I do not doubt she would have done him immediately, and with more justice, a service similar to that with which she had obliged me the day before; but it was probable that, by yielding to her jealous rage and confessing her ungrateful duplicity, she would only ruin herself, and she had sense enough to see it. M. de Bévallan, in fact, was not the man to have pushed an affair with her, without reserving for himself a strict defence, which he would use with merciless coolness. Mlle. Hélouin might say to herself with truth that they had yesterday believed, on her bare word, her otherwise lying accusations; but she was not unaware that a lie which flatters or wounds the heart, finds credence more readily than a truth that is a matter of indifference. She resigned herself therefore, not, I suppose, without feeling bitterly that the weapons of treason sometimes turn against the hand that uses them.

Throughout that and the following days I was subjected to a kind of torture which I had foreseen, but of which I had not been able to calculate all the bitter details. The marriage was fixed to take place in a month. All the preparations had to be made in haste and without delay. Mme. Prevost's bouquets came regularly every morning. The laces, stuffs, and jewels then flowed in, and were exhibited every evening in the drawing-room before the eyes of busy and jealous friends. I was obliged to give my opinion and advice on everything. Mlle. Marguerite asked for them with a sort of cruel affectation. I obeyed with a good grace; then returned to my tower, and taking from a secret drawer the little torn handkerchief that I had saved at the peril of my life, I wiped my eyes with it. Still this weakness! But what can I do?

I love her! Treachery, enmity, irreparable misunderstandings, her pride and my own, separate us for ever: be it so! but nothing shall hinder my heart from being full of her in life and death.

Meanwhile, a mocking demon whispered in my ear, that, according to all the foresight of human wisdom, Marguerite would find more peace and real happiness in the moderate friendship of a reasonable husband, than she could have met with in the passionate attachment of the romantic lover. Is it then true? Is it then possible? I do not believe it! She will have peace; good! but after all, peace is not the last word of life, not the highest symbol of happiness. If absence of suffering and petrifaction of the heart sufficed to make one happy, too many people would be happy, who do not deserve it. By dint of prosaic reasoning, we come at last to slander God, and to degrade His work. God gives peace to the dead, passion to the living. Yes, there is in life, by the side of the vulgarity of common and daily interests, from which I am not childish enough to pretend to escape, there is poetry allowed—what do I say?—commanded! It is the part of the soul that is endowed with immortality. This soul must of necessity feel itself and arouse itself at times, were it by transports that go beyond reality, were it by aspirations that go beyond possibility, were it by tempests or by tears. Yes, there is a suffering more valuable than happiness, or rather, which is happiness itself; the suffering of a living creature which knows all the troubles of the heart and all the phantasms of the brain, ands hares in these noble tortures with a steadfast heart and kindred thoughts! There lies the romance which every one has the right, and, to speak

plainly, the duty to work out in his life, if he bears the name of man and wishes to prove his claim to it. To return: this much boasted peace itself, the poor child will not possess. Let the marriage of two sluggish hearts and two frozen imaginations beget the repose of annihilation, I am quite willing; but the union of life and death cannot be maintained without horrible constraint and perpetual laceration.

In the midst of this internal misery, which redoubled in intensity every day, I found a little relief only with my poor and aged friend, Mlle. de Porhoët. She did not know, or pretended not to know, the state of my heart; but, in veiled allusions, perhaps unintended, she passed lightly over my bleeding wounds the delicate and skilful hand of a woman. There is moreover in that soul, living emblem as it is of sacrifice and resignation, and already seeming to hover above the earth, a seclusion, a calmness, and a gentle firmness which communicated themselves to me. It made me understand her harmless mania, and even join in it with a sort of childishness. Leaning over my sketch-book, I shut myself up with her for long hours in her cathedral, and I breathed in it for a moment the vague odours of an ideal serenity.

"Nevertheless, as the fatal time drew near, Mlle. Marguerite lost the feverish vivacity which had seemed to animate her from the day on which the marriage had been definitely arranged. She fell back, at least now and then, into her old familiar attitude of passive indolence and gloomy dreaming. I even caught her looks once or twice fixed on me with a kind of unusual perplexity. Mme. Laroque, on her part, often looked at me with an air of

disquiet and indecision, as if she at the same time wished and feared to enter on some painful subject of conversation with me. The day before yesterday, I happened to be alone with her in the drawing-room, Mlle. Hélouin having suddenly gone out to give some order. The indifferent talk, in which we were engaged, ceased in a moment, as if by a secret agreement; after a short silence Mme. Laroque said to me, in a searching tone: "You place your confidences very badly, Sir!"

"My confidences, Madame! I cannot understand you. Apart from Mlle. de Porhoët, no one here has received from me the shadow of a confidence."

"Alas!" she returned, "I wish to think so, I do think so; but that is not enough!"

At that moment Mlle. Hélouin came back, and all was said.

The following day, yesterday, I had gone out riding in the morning to overlook the cutting of some wood in the neighbourhood. Towards four in the afternoon I was returning in the direction of the château, when, at an abrupt turn in the road, I found myself suddenly face to face with Mlle. Marguerite. She was alone. I was going to pass her with a bow; but she stopped her horse.

"A fine autumnal day, Sir," she said.

"Yes, Mademoiselle. You are taking a ride?"

"As you see. I am using my last days of independence, and even abusing them, for I feel a little embarrassed by my loneliness. But Alain was wanted yonder. My poor Mervyn is lame. You will not take his place perhaps?"

"With pleasure. Where are you going?"

"Why I almost had the idea of going as far as Elven

Tower." She pointed out with the end of her whip a misty hill-top that rose on the right of the road. "I think," she added, "you have never made the pilgrimage?"

"That is true. I have often been tempted, but have always put it off, I don't know why."

"Well, that will do perfectly; but it is already late, and we must make haste a little, if you please."

I turned my bridle, and we set off at a gallop.

While we were riding, I sought to account for this unexpected whim, which did not fail to look rather premeditated. I supposed that time and reflection might have weakened in Mlle. Marguerite's mind the first impression of the slanders by which she had been troubled. Apparently she had at last conceived some doubts as to the veracity of Mlle. Hélouin, and had profited by the opportunity to offer me, under a disguised form, a sort of reparation that might be due to me.

Amid the reflections which then besieged me, I attached little importance to the particular end which we proposed to ourselves in that strange ride. Still, I had often heard this Elven Tower mentioned as one of the most interesting ruins in the country, and I had never travelled over either of the two roads leading to the sea from Rennes and Jocelyn without contemplating with an eager eye the undefined mass that is seen rising up in the midst of those distant moors like a stone set on end; but time and opportunity to go there had been wanting.

The village of Elven, which we passed through at a somewhat gentler pace, gives a truly striking picture of what a borough might have been in the middle ages. The form of the low, gloomy houses had not altered for five or six

centuries. You think you are dreaming when you see, through the arched openings without any frames that serve for windows, those groups of wild-eyed women, in sculpturesque costume, spinning with the distaff in the shade, and talking in low tones in an unknown tongue. It seems as if these grizzly spectres had just left their tombstones, to enact together some scene of another age, of which you are the only living witness. It causes a kind of oppressed feeling. The little life that is to be seen around you in the only street of the town, wears the same stamp of antiquity and foreignness, faithfully preserved from a vanished world.

At a little distance from Elven we took a by-path, which led us to the top of a barren hill. From it we distinctly saw, though still at a considerable distance, the feudal Colossus overtopping a wooded height in front of us. The moor on which we were went down, with a pretty stiff descent, towards marshy meadows, skirted by thick brushwood. We descended its other side, and were soon in the woods.

Here we followed a narrow causeway, the loose and rugged pavement of which must have rung again under the tramp of iron-shod horses. I had long ceased to see Elven Tower, the position of which I could no longer even conjecture, when suddenly it disclosed itself out of the foliage, and rose within two paces of us with the suddenness of an apparition. This tower is not in ruins; it still preserves its original height, more than a hundred feet, and the regular courses of granite which compose its magnificent octagonal form give it the look of a formidable block cut out but yesterday by the purest chisel. There is nothing more imposing, more proud, and more gloomy than this old keep, unaffected by the lapse of ages, and isolated in the depth of these woods. Trees have grown to

their full height in the deep recesses that surround it, and their tops scarcely touch the sills of the lowest windows. This gigantic vegetation, in which the base of the building is bewildered and lost, completes its air of fantastic mystery. In that solitude, in the midst of those forests, in front of that suddenly-rising mass of strange architecture, it is impossible to help thinking of those enchanted towers, in which beautiful princesses sleep a sleep of ages.

"Up to this day," said Mlle. Marguerite, to whom I tried to convey this impression, "this is all I have seen; but if you are anxious to awake the princess, we can go in. So far as I know, there is always a shepherd or shepherdess in the neighbourhood, who is provided, he or she as the case may be, with a key. Let us fasten our horses yonder, and set to work to look, you for the shepherd, and I for the shepherdess."

The horses were stationed in an inclosure near the ruin, and Mlle. Marguerite and I parted for a moment, to beat up the neighbourhood as it were. We had the annoyance of finding neither shepherd nor shepherdess. Our desire to see the inside of the tower naturally increased with all the attraction of forbidden fruit, and we crossed at a venture a bridge thrown over the moat. To our lively satisfaction the massive door of the keep was not fastened: we had only to push it in order to enter a narrow, dark, rubbish-covered hovel, which might have served formerly as a guard-house; thence we passed into a vast hall of almost circular shape, the fireplace still showing on an escutcheon the bezants of the Crusades; a large window opening before us, and traversed by the symbolical cross cleanly cut out in the stone, gave a full light in the lower region of the inclosure, while the eye lost itself in the uncertain shadow of the high open arches. At the sound of

our steps a flock of unseen birds flew away out of the gloom, and shook down on our heads the dust of ages. Ascending the granite flags which are arranged in steps on each side of the wall, we could have glanced outside at the depth of the moat and the ruined portions of the stronghold, but we had observed on coming in, the first steps of a staircase in the thickness of the wall, and we felt a childish eagerness to push our discoveries further. We undertook the ascent. I opened the march, and Mlle. Marguerite followed me courageously, managing her long skirts as well as she could. From the height of the roof the view is vast and delightful. The sweet tints of twilight were just touching the ocean of foliage, half gilded by the autumn, the dark marshes, the green expanses of turf, the slopes that interlocked on the horizon, where they mingled and succeeded each other before our eyes into the extreme distance. In the presence of this graceful, melancholy, and boundless landscape, we felt the peace of solitude, the stillness of evening, the melancholy of time past, all sinking together, like a potent charm, into our spirits and our hearts. What could be added to this charm, for me at least, by the presence of an adored being, all who have loved can understand. That hour of contemplation in common, of emotions shared between us, of pure deep pleasure, was doubtless the last that was to be given me to live near her and with her, and I clung to it with a sensitiveness almost painfully violent. For Marguerite, I know not what went on within her; she was seated on the edge of the parapet, looking into the distance, and silent. I heard only the slightly quickened drawing of her breath.

I could not say how many moments thus glided away. When the vapours became thick upon the low-lying meadows, and the furthest horizons began to fade in the growing shadow,

Marguerite rose. "Let us go," she said in a half whisper, as if the curtain had fallen on a drama that had touched her; "it is over!" Then she began to go down the staircase, and I followed her.

When we would have left the keep, great was our surprise to find the door fast. Apparently, the young guardian, unaware of our presence, had turned the key while we were on the roof. Our first impression was one of merriment. The tower was really an enchanted tower. I made some vigorous efforts to break the spell; but the enormous bolt of the old lock was firmly shot into the granite, and I had to give up the attempt to loosen it. I then directed my attacks against the door itself; but the massive hinges, and oak panel plated with iron, opposed the most unconquerable resistance. Two or three large stones that I found in the rubbish, and dashed against the obstacle, only shook the archway, and loosened some fragments which came tumbling at my feet. Mlle. Marguerite would not let me continue an attempt that was evidently hopeless, and that was not unattended with danger. I then ran to the window, and shouted several times for help; but no one answered. For ten minutes I repeated my shouts every instant, with the same want of success. At the same time we hastily took advantage of the last gleams of daylight to explore minutely the whole interior of the keep; but, apart from this door, which was as a wall against us, and the large window, separated from the moat by an abyss of nearly thirty feet, we could find no outlet.

Meanwhile, night had fallen over the country, and darkness had invaded the old tower. Only a few rays of the moon penetrated into the depth of the window, and cast a slanting white light over the stone steps. Mlle. Marguerite, who

had gradually lost all appearance of mirthfulness, ceased even to reply to the more or less probable conjectures with which I tried to beguile her anxiety. While she remained silent and motionless in the shade, I was seated in a full light on the step nearest the window, and from that position I made signals of distress at intervals: but, to tell the truth, in proportion as the success of my efforts became more uncertain, I felt myself seized by a feeling of irresistible joy. I saw, in fact, suddenly realized for me the most eternal, the most impossible dream of lovers; I was shut up in the depth of a desert and in the closest solitude with the woman I loved! For long hours there would be none but she and I in the world, no life but hers and mine! I thought of all the tokens of gentle protection, of tender respect, which it would be my right and my duty to lavish upon her; I imagined to myself her terrors appeased, her trustfulness, her slumber; I said to myself, with deep delight, that this happy night, if it could not give me the love of this dear creature, would at least secure me for ever her most unshaken esteem.

As I was giving myself up, with all the selfishness of passion, to my secret ecstasy, of which some reflection perhaps was depicted on my countenance, I was suddenly aroused by these words, addressed to me in a dull voice, and with a tone of affected calmness: "Monsieur le Marquis de Champcey, have there been many villains in your family before you?"

I rose up, and immediately fell back again on the stone flag, fixing a stupid gaze on the darkness, through which I saw dimly the outline of the young girl. One single idea occurred to me, a terrible one: it was that fear and vexation were disordering her brain—that she was going mad.

"Marguerite!" I cried, without even knowing that I spoke. The word, no doubt, completed her irritation.

"Good heavens, how odious he is!" she resumed. "What a villain he is! yes, I repeat it, a villain!"

The truth began to dawn on my mind. I went down a step, and said coldly, "Well, what is the matter?"

"It is you!" she said, with abrupt vehemence, "it is you who have paid this man—or boy, I do not know which—to imprison us in this wretched tower. To-morrow I shall be ruined, dishonoured in public opinion, and I shall no longer be able to belong to any but you. That is your calculation, is it not? But I promise you it shall not succeed, any more than the rest. You know me yet very imperfectly if you think that I would not prefer dishonour, the cloister, death, anything, to the degradation of linking my hand, my life, to yours! And even should your infamous tricks succeed, should I have the weakness—as I assuredly shall not—to give you my person, and—what touches you more nearly—my fortune, in exchange for this stroke of cunning, what sort of man can you be, of what slime are you made, to be willing to have a wife and a fortune acquired at that price? Ah! thank me, Sir, thank me for not yielding to your wishes. Your wishes are imprudent, believe me; for, if ever shame and public derision threw me into your arms, I should have such contempt for you that it would crush your heart! Yes, were it as hard and icy as these stones, I would draw blood from it—I would fetch tears from it!"

"Mademoiselle," I said, with all the calmness I could command, "I beseech you to return to yourself. I declare, upon my honour, that you are insulting me. Be pleased to think of it. Your suspicions rest on no probability. I have

had no possible way of preparing this treachery of which you accuse me, and even had I, how have I ever given you the right to think me capable of it?"

"Everything I know of you gives me the right," she said, slashing the air with her whip. "I must tell you, once for all, what I have too long had in my mind. What did you come to do in our house under an assumed name and character? We were happy and in peace, my mother and I. You have brought us trouble, anxiety, and vexations that we did not know before. To attain your end, to repair the breaches of your fortune, you have insinuated yourself into our confidence, you have trampled under foot our repose, you have played with our purest, truest, most sacred feelings, you have bruised and broken our hearts without mercy! That is what you have done—or wished to do; it matters little which! Well, I am profoundly weary and sore under all this, I tell you! And when at this moment you offer me the security of your honour as a gentleman, which has already permitted you so much unworthiness, I have a right not to believe it, and I do not believe it!"

I was beside myself; I grasped her hands in the violent transport that carried me away: "Marguerite! my poor child; listen to me! I love you, it is true, and never entered into man's heart a love more holy, more disinterested, or more ardent! But you too, you love me. You love me, unhappy girl, and you are killing me! You speak of a bruised and broken heart: ah, what are you doing to mine! Yet it belongs to you, I give it up to you. But as for my honour, I keep it: it is intact! and before long I will compel you to acknowledge it. And on that honour I swear to you, that, if I die, you will weep for me; and that if I live, never—all

adored as you are—were you even on your knees before me—never will I marry you, unless you are as poor as I, or I as rich as you! And now, pray, pray; ask God for miracles, for it is time!"

I then pushed her abruptly away from the recess of the window, and rushed to the topmost steps; I had formed a desperate project which I immediately put in execution with the hastiness of downright insanity. As I have said, the tops of the beeches and oaks, which grow in the moat round the tower, rose to the level of the window. With the help of my twisted whip, I drew towards me the extremities of the nearest boughs, caught them at hazard, and let myself go into the air. I heard above my head my name "Maxime!" suddenly uttered with a piercing shriek. The branches to which I clung bent all their length towards the abyss; then there was an ominous crack, they snapped with my weight, and I fell roughly on the ground.

I suppose the rotten character of the soil deadened the violence of the shock, for I felt myself alive, though wounded. One of my arms had struck against the sloping masonry of the face of the wall, and I felt so sharp a pain that my heart sank within me. I was stunned for a moment. I was aroused by the distracted voice of Marguerite, crying, "Maxime! Maxime! for pity, for mercy's sake! In the name of God, speak to me, and forgive me!"

I rose, and saw her in the arch of the window, in the midst of a gleam of pallid light, her head bare, her hair falling loose, her hand clasped on the bar of the cross, her eyes eagerly fixed on the dark precipice.

"Fear nothing," I said, "I am not hurt. Only be patient an hour or two. Give me time to go to the

château, it is the safest plan. Be sure that I will keep your secret, and save your honour, as I have just saved my own."

I got out of the moat with difficulty and went to find my horse. I used my handkerchief to tie up my left arm, which was no longer of any use, and gave me a good deal of pain. Thanks to the brightness of the night, I easily found the way back. In an hour I reached the château. They told me that Doctor Desmarets was in the drawing-room. I hastened to go there, and found him with a dozen people whose faces betokened their condition of anxiety and alarm. "Doctor," said I, gaily, as I entered the room, "my horse has just taken fright at his shadow, and thrown me on the road; I am afraid my left arm is dislocated. Will you look at it?"

"What, dislocated!" said M. Desmarets, after untying the handkerchief; "why it is regularly broken, my poor boy!"

Mme. Laroque gave a slight cry, and came towards me. "Why, it is an evening of accidents," she said.

I feigned surprise. "What else is the matter?" I cried.

"Oh, heavens! I am afraid some accident has happened to my daughter. She went away on horseback at three o'clock; it is now eight, and she is not yet returned."

"Mademoiselle Marguerite! why, I met her——"

"What! where? at what time? Pardon me, Sir; it is a mother's selfishness."

"Why, I met her towards five o'clock, on the road; we passed. She told me she thought of riding as far as Elven Tower."

"Elven Tower! She must be lost in the woods. Some one must go promptly. Let orders be given."

M. de Bévallan immediately ordered horses. I affected at first a wish to join the company in their search; but Mme. Laroque and the doctor forbade it strenuously, and I easily let myself be persuaded to go to bed, which, to tell the truth, was what I greatly needed. M. Desmarets, after applying the first dressing to my wound, went away in a carriage with Mme. Laroque, who was to wait in Elven for the result of the search M. de Bévallan would make in the neighbourhood of the tower.

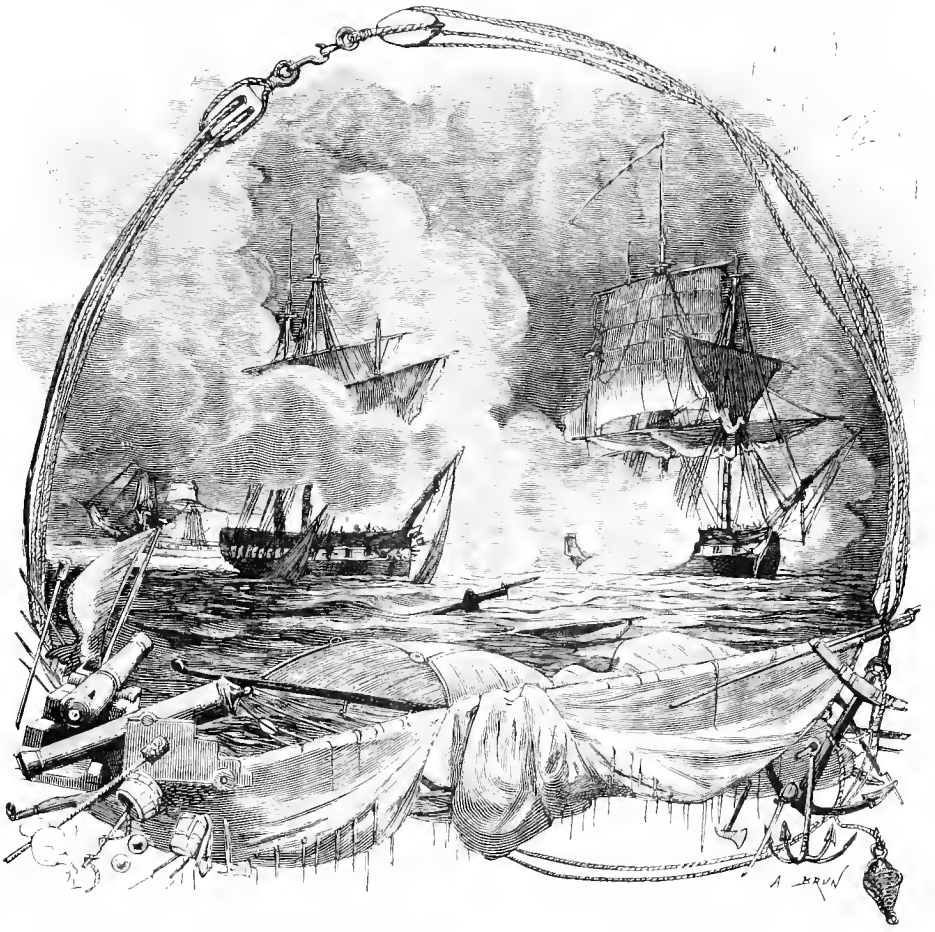
It was about ten o'clock when Alain came to tell me that Mlle. Marguerite was found. He told me the story of her imprisonment, without omitting any circumstances, except of course those which the young girl and I alone were to know. The story was soon confirmed by the doctor, then by Mme. Laroque herself, who came both in succession to pay me a visit; and I had the satisfaction of seeing that no suspicion of the exact truth had entered into any of their minds.

I passed the whole night in repeating, with the most tiresome perseverance, and with the oddest complications of dream and fever, my dangerous leap from the height of the window of the keep. I could not get used to it. At every moment the sensation of the empty space rose in my throat, and I awoke out of breath. At last came day, and calmed me. At eight o'clock I saw Mlle. de Porhoët come in; she installed herself by my pillow, with her knitting in her hand. She did the honours of my room to the visitors who kept coming all day. Mme. Laroque came the first after my aged friend. As she held with a prolonged pressure the hand

I stretched out to her, I saw two tears glistening on her cheeks. Has she received a communication from her daughter?

Mlle. de Porhoët informed me that old M. Laroque had taken to his bed yesterday. He had a slight attack of paralysis. To-day he cannot speak, and his state causes anxiety. It has been decided to hasten the marriage. M. Laubépin has been sent for from Paris; he is expected to-morrow, and the settlements are to be signed the day after, under his management.

I have been able to sit up for some hours this evening; but if I am to believe M. Desmarets, I have done wrong in writing, with my fever, and I am a great ass.



October 3rd.

It seems really as if a malignant power was tasked to invent the strangest and most cruel trials, to propose them in turns to my conscience and my heart.

M. Laubépin not having arrived this morning, Mme. Laroque sent to ask me for some particulars which she wanted for the arrangement of the preliminaries of the marriage settlement, which, as I said, is to be signed to-morrow. As I am

condemned to keep my room for a few days yet, I begged Mme. Laroque to send me the title-deeds and private documents which are in her father-in-law's possession, that I might settle the difficulties that were stated to me. They immediately sent up to me two or three drawers full of papers, which had been secretly carried away from M. Laroque's study; advantage being taken of a time when the old man was asleep, for he has always shown himself very jealous of his private archives. In the first paper which I opened, my family-name, several times repeated, caught my eye suddenly, and excited my curiosity irresistibly. Here is the literal text of the document:

"TO MY CHILDREN.

"The name which I bequeath to you, and to which I have done honour, is not my own. My father's name was Savage. He was an overseer on a plantation of some size in the island of St. Lucia (then a French island), which belonged to a rich and noble Dauphine family called Champcey d'Hauterive. In 1793 my father died, and I inherited, though still young, the confidence which the Champceys had reposed in him. Towards the close of that fatal year, the French Antilles were taken by the English, or were given up to them by the insurgent colonists. The Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive (Jacques Auguste), not yet overtaken by the orders of the Convention, then commanded the frigate *Thétis*, which had cruised in those waters for three years. A pretty large number of French colonists, throughout the Antilles, had contrived to turn their property into money, as it was threatened daily. They had arranged with Commandant de Champcey to organize a flotilla

of light transports, in which they had embarked their possessions, and which was to undertake the voyage back to France, under the protection of the guns of the *Thétis*. I had long ago, in anticipation of impending disasters, received orders myself to sell, at any price, the plantation which I managed after my father's time. On the night of the 14th of December, 1793, I embarked alone in a boat at Point Morne au Sable, and secretly quitted St. Lucia, which was already occupied by the enemy. I carried away in English notes and guineas the price I had contrived to get for the plantation. M. de Champcey, thanks to the minute knowledge he had acquired of those coasts, had succeeded in eluding the English cruiser, and taking refuge in the difficult and unknown channel of Gros Ilet. He had ordered me to meet him there that very night, and only waited for my arrival on board before leaving the channel in company with the flotilla which he was to convoy, and steering for France. In crossing to him I had the misfortune to fall into the hands of the English. These masters in treachery gave me the choice of being shot on the spot, or to sell them, for the million of which I was the bearer, and which they would leave me, the secret of the channel where the flotilla lay sheltered. I was young, the temptation was too strong; and in half an hour the *Thétis* was sunk, the flotilla taken, and M. de Champcey severely wounded. A year went by, a year that brought me no peace. I was going mad. I resolved to make the accursed Englishmen pay for the remorse by which I was torn. I crossed to Guadaloupe, changed my name, and devoted the greater part of the price of my crime to the purchase of an armed brig, and fell upon the English. For fifteen years I washed with their blood and my own the stain I had inflicted, in an hour of weakness, on my

country's flag. Although my present fortune has, more than three-fourths of it, been won in glorious combats, the origin of it was none other than I have said.

"Returned to France in my old age, I inquired into the position of the Champcey d'Hauterive family: it was a happy and wealthy position. I continued to hold my peace. May my children forgive me! I have not been able to find courage, during my life, to blush before them; but my death must deliver my secret to them, and they will use it according to the dictates of their consciences. For myself, I have but one entreaty to address to them: sooner or later there will be a final war between France and her neighbour across the way; we hate each other too much; whatever may be done, we shall have to eat them, or they to eat us! Should this war break out in the lifetime of my children or grandchildren, I desire that they should present to the State a corvette, armed and manned, on the sole condition that she be called the *Savage*, and be commanded by a Breton. At every broadside she discharges against the Carthaginian shore, my bones will tremble with joy in their grave!

"RICHARD SAVAGE, called LAROQUE."

The recollections suddenly awakened in my mind by reading this terrible confession, confirmed its correctness. I had heard my father a score of times tell, with mingled pride and bitterness, the episode in my grandfather's life here alluded to. Only it was believed in my family that Richard Savage, whose name was perfectly present to my mind, was the victim, and not the furtherer, of the treachery or chance which gave up the commander of the *Thétis*.

I could now account for the singularities that had often

struck me in the old sailor's character, and particularly his pensive and timid bearing before me. My father always told me that I was the living portrait of my grandfather, the Marquis Jacques, and doubtless some glimpse of the likeness from time to time pierced through the old man's clouded brain, even to his uneasy conscience.

No sooner possessed of this revelation, I fell into terrible perplexity. I could not, as far as I was concerned, feel more than a feeble malice against this unfortunate man, the defect in whose moral sense had been atoned for by a long life's repentance, and by a passionate despair and hatred, which were not lacking in grandeur. I could not even breathe without a sort of admiration the fierce breath which still animated the lines, traced by that culpable but heroic hand. Still, what was I to do with this terrible secret! The first thing that struck me was, that it destroyed any obstacle between Marguerite and me, that henceforth this fortune which had kept us apart would be almost a bond of obligation between us, since I alone, of all the world, could give her a legal title to it, by sharing it with her. In reality, this secret was not mine, and though the most innocent chance had revealed it to me, strict integrity perhaps required that I should let it await its time in the hands of those for whom it was intended; but what! meanwhile that which was irreparable would be accomplished! An indissoluble knot would be tied! The tomb would close for ever over my love, my hopes, my inconsolable heart! And should I allow this, when I could stay it by a single word? And these poor women themselves, when the fatal truth should one day put them to blush, would they share my regrets and my despair? They would be the first to say to me: "If you knew it, why did you not speak?"

Well! no! not to-day, nor to-morrow, nor ever, as far as I am concerned, shall those two noble foreheads blush with shame, and I will not purchase happiness at the price of their humiliation. This secret which belongs only to me, which the old man himself, now mute for ever, can no longer betray; this secret has ceased to exist; the flames have devoured it.

I thought it over well. I knew what I ventured to do. It was a testament, a deed, and I destroyed it. Besides, it would not have advantaged me only. My sister, entrusted to my care, might have found a fortune in it; and without con-

sulting her, I have with my own hand plunged her back into poverty. I know all that; but two pure, lofty, and proud souls will not be crushed and withered under the burden of a crime that was unknown to them. A principle of equity was involved, which seemed to me superior to the mere letter of justice. If I have committed a crime in my turn, I will answer for it! But this struggle has ground me to powder; I can no more!

October 4th.

M. LAUBÉPIN at length arrived yesterday evening. He came to shake hands with me. He was abstracted, abrupt, dissatisfied. He spoke briefly of the marriage which was afoot. "Very successful operation," he said; "very laudable combination on all accounts; nature and society both receive the securities they have a right to demand on such an occasion. Whereupon, young man, I wish you a good-night, and I shall set about clearing the delicate ground of the preliminaries, so that the car of these interesting hymeneals may reach its journey's end without jolting."

There was a gathering in the drawing-room at one o'clock this afternoon, amid the customary preparations and company, to proceed to signing the settlements. I could not be present at this ceremony, and blessed my wound that spared me that torture. I was writing to my little Helen, to whom I strive more than ever to devote my whole soul, when, towards three o'clock, M. Laubépin and Mlle. de Porhoët walked into my room. M. Laubépin, in his frequent visits to Laroque, could not fail to appreciate the virtues of my venerable friend; and there has long existed between these two old people a platonic and respectful attachment, the character of which Doctor Desmarets in vain strives to misrepresent. After an exchange of ceremonies, endless bowing and curtseying, they took the seats which I brought them, and both began to contemplate me with an air of serious bliss. "Well," said I, "is it over?"

"It is over!" they replied in unison.

"Did it go off well?"

"Very well," said Mlle. de Porhoët.

"Excellently well," M. Laubépin added. Then, after a pause, "The Bévallan is gone to the devil!"

"And the young Hélouin on the same road," continued Mlle. de Porhoët.

I uttered a cry of surprise. "Good heavens! what does that mean?"

"My friend," said M. Laubépin, "the projected union offered all the advantages that could be desired, and would no doubt have secured the joint happiness of the parties to it, were marriage a purely commercial partnership; but it is not so. My duty, when my assistance was called in

for this interesting circumstance, was therefore to regard the inclination of their hearts and the suitability of their characters, no less than the proportion of their fortunes. Now, I thought I observed, from the first, that the nuptials in preparation had the awkwardness of not exactly pleasing anybody; neither my excellent friend, Mme. Laroque, nor the amiable bride, nor the most enlightened friends of those ladies; in short, no one, unless perhaps it may please the bridegroom, about whom I do but little care. It is true (and I am indebted for this remark to Mlle. de Porhoët), it is true, I say, that the bridegroom is a gentleman."

"Ought to be! if you please!" was the severe interruption of Mlle. de Porhoët.

"Ought to be a gentleman," M. Laubépin resumed, "but he is a kind of 'ought to be' gentleman that does not suit me."

"Nor me either," said Mlle. de Porhoët. "It was fellows of that stamp, unmannerly grooms like this man, whom we saw in the last century, under the lead of the Duke of Chartres, coming out of the English stables to pave the way for the Revolution."

"Oh! if they had only paved the way for the Revolution," said M. Laubépin sententiously, "one could forgive them."

"A million excuses, my dear Sir; but pray speak for yourself! However, that is not the question. Be so good as to go on."

"Well, then," continued M. Laubépin, "seeing that every one was going to this wedding as if to a funeral, I sought for some means, at once honourable and legal, if not to return to M. de Bévallan his promise, at least to induce him to take it

back. The step was all the more allowable, as, in my absence, M. de Bévallan had taken advantage of the inexperience of my excellent friend, Mme. Laroque, and of the pliability of my colleague in the adjoining town, to secure himself exorbitant advantages. Without departing from the letter of the stipulations I succeeded in sensibly modifying the spirit of them. Still, honour and the promise given imposed limits upon me, which I could not overstep. The settlements, after all, remained still quite advantageous enough for a man of some loftiness of soul, and animated with true tenderness, to accept them with confidence. Would M. de Bévallan be the man? We had to run the risk of it. I confess it was not without emotion that I began this morning, before our imposing audience, to read the irrevocable deed."

"As for me," Mlle. de Porhoët broke in, "I had not a drop of blood in my veins. The first part of the deed was so advantageous to the enemy, that I thought all was lost."

"No doubt, Mademoiselle; but as we augurs say, the poison is in the tail, '*in caudâ venenum.*' It was amusing, my friend, to see M. de Bévallan's face, and the face of my colleague of Rennes, who was present, when I suddenly unmasked my batteries. At first they looked at each other in silence, then whispered in each other's ears, and at last rose, and coming to the table before which I was seated, asked me in a low tone for explanations.

"'Speak up, if you please, gentlemen,' said I; 'we must have no mystery here. What do you want?'

"The public was beginning to listen. M. de Bévallan, without raising his voice, insinuated to me that the deed was a work of mistrust.

"'A work of mistrust, Sir!' I replied, in the highest tone

of my organ. 'What do you mean by that? Is it at Mme. Laroque, at me, or at my colleague here, that you aim this strange imputation?'

"'Hush! silence! no noise!' said the notary of Rennes, in his discreetest tone; 'let us see; it was agreed on at first that the lady's property should not be settled on herself.'

"'Not settled on herself, Sir? And where do you see any mention of its being settled on herself?'

"'Come, my colleague, you know very well you are bringing it about by a subterfuge.'

"'A subterfuge, my colleague? Allow me, as your senior, to persuade you to erase that word from your vocabulary.'

"'But,' M. de Bévallan muttered, 'my hands are tied on every side; I am treated like a little boy.'

"'What, Sir! What are we at this moment doing, according to you? Is this a marriage-settlement or a will? You forget that Mme. Laroque is living, that her father is living, that you are marrying, Sir, and not inheriting—not yet, Sir; a little patience, what the devil!'

"At these words Mlle. Marguerite rose. 'Enough of this, M. Laubépin,' she said; 'throw that deed into the fire. Mother, have Monsieur's presents returned to him.' And she left the room with the step of an insulted queen. Mme. Laroque followed her. At the same time I hurled the deed into the fireplace.

"'Sir,' said M. de Bévallan, in a threatening tone, 'that is a manœuvre of which I well know the secret!'

"'Sir, I will tell it you,' I replied. 'A young lady, who respects herself with a just pride, had conceived a fear that your

attentions were addressed only to her fortune; she has no longer any doubt of it. I have the honour to wish you good-day.'

"Thereupon, my friend, I went to join the two ladies, who actually threw their arms round my neck! A quarter of an hour later M. de Bévallan left the château with my colleague from Rennes. His departure and disgrace had the inevitable effect of unloosing against him all the servants' tongues, and his shameless intrigue with Mlle. Hélouin soon came to light. That young lady, already for some time an object of suspicion on other accounts, tendered the resignation of her situation, and it was not refused her. It is unnecessary to add that the ladies have secured an honourable livelihood for her. Well, my boy, what have you to say to all that? You are not in great pain, surely? You are as pale as a corpse!"

The truth is, that this unexpected news stirred up so many emotions, both happy and painful, in my breast, that I felt on the point of losing consciousness.

M. Laubépin, who is to go away at daybreak to-morrow, came again this evening to say good-bye to me. After a few embarrassed words on both sides, he said, "Come, now, my dear child, I will not question you as to what is going on here; but if you should happen to need confidential advice, I would ask you to come first to me."

In truth I could not unburden myself to a more friendly or more trusty heart. I gave the worthy old man a detailed account of all the circumstances since my coming to the château that have marked my intercourse with Mlle. Marguerite. I even read him some pages of this journal, to give to him a more exact idea of the character of this intercourse, and also of the state of my mind. Except

only the secret that I had discovered the day before in M. Laroque's archives, I hid nothing from him.

When I had ended, M. Laubépin, whose forehead had for a moment looked very thoughtful, spoke in his turn: "It is useless to disguise from you, my friend," he said, "that, in sending you here, I looked forward to a union between you and Mlle. Laroque. At first everything succeeded as well as I could wish. Your two hearts, which, in my opinion, are worthy of each other, could not meet without understanding each other; but that strange event, on the romantic theatre of Elven Tower, completely disconcerts me, I confess. What the deuce! my friend, to jump down from the window, at the risk of breaking your neck, was quite sufficient proof, allow me to tell you, of your disinterestedness; it was very superfluous to add to that honourable and delicate proceeding a solemn oath never to marry the poor child, unless under conditions that are absolutely impossible to expect. I boast myself to be a man of resources, but I acknowledge myself entirely incapable of giving you two hundred thousand francs a year, or of taking them away from Mlle. Laroque!"

"Well, Sir, advise me. I have more confidence in you than in myself, for I feel that my reduced circumstances, always liable to breed a suspicious temper, may have irritated to an excess the sensitiveness of my honour. Speak. Do you authorize me to forget the indiscreet, but still solemn oath, which is now all, I believe, that separates me from the happiness you dreamed of for your adopted son?"

M. Laubépin rose; his thick eyebrows contracted over his eyes, he paced the room with long strides for several minutes; then, stopping before me and grasping my hand strongly, he said: "Young man, it is true I love you as my own child;

but should your heart break, and mine after it, I will not tamper with my principles. It is better to go too far than to stop short in honour; and of oaths, all that are not exacted at the point of the knife, or at the muzzle of a pistol, ought either not to be taken, or ought to be observed. That is my opinion."

"And mine too. I will go with you to-morrow."

"No, Maxime, stay here some time longer. I do not believe in miracles, but I believe in God, who seldom lets us perish by our virtues. Let us give Providence some delay. I know that I am asking you for a great effort of courage, but I ask it formally of your friendship. If, in a month, you do not hear from me, well, you can then go."

He embraced me, and left me with tranquillity in my conscience and desolation in my soul.

October 12th.

It is two days since I became well enough to leave my retirement, and visit the château. I had not had a chance of seeing Mlle. Marguerite since the moment we parted at Elven Tower. She was alone in the drawing-room when I entered; on recognizing me she made an involuntary movement, as if to rise; then she remained motionless, and her countenance was

suddenly dyed a becoming purple. It was contagious, for I felt that I too blushed up to the eyes.

"How do you do, Sir?" she said, giving me her hand; and she uttered these simple words in a tone so gentle and humble—so tender, alas! that I could have wished to throw myself on my knees before her. But I was obliged to reply to her in a tone of cold politeness. She looked at me sorrowfully, then lowered her large eyes with a resigned air, and resumed her work.

Almost at that moment her mother sent for her to go to her grandfather, whose state was becoming very alarming. For several days he had been unable to speak or to move; paralysis had got almost entire possession of him. The last gleams of mental activity were extinct; sensation and pain alone remained. They could not doubt that the old man's death was at hand, but life was too strongly entrenched in that energetic heart to leave it without obstinate struggling. The doctor had predicted that the conflict would be a long one. Still at the first appearance of danger, Mme. Laroque and her daughter had lavished their attentions and watchings with the passionate self-denial and the unreserved devotedness which are the peculiar virtue and glory of their sex. In the evening of the day before yesterday they had succumbed to weariness and feverishness, and Doctor Desmarets and I offered to take their places beside M. Laroque during the ensuing night. They consented to take a few hours' rest. The Doctor, who was himself very weary, soon told me he was going to lie down on a bed in the room adjoining. "I am no good here," he said; "the thing is over. You see he doesn't even suffer any longer, poor man! it is a condition of stupor that is quite painless. Awakening from it will be death. So we can make ourselves

easy. If you notice any change call me; but I don't think any change will take place before the morning. Meanwhile, I am fainting with sleepiness, absolutely!" He gave a loud yawn, and went out of the room. His language, in presence of the dying man, shocked me. He is an excellent man, nevertheless; but to pay death the respect which is its due, we must not only see the senseless matter which it destroys, but we must believe in the undying principle which it sets free.

Left alone in the chamber of death, I took a seat near the foot of the bed, from which the curtains had been turned back, and tried to read by the light of a lamp which stood on a little table near me. The book fell from my hands. I could think of nothing but the strange combination of events which, after so many years, gave to this guilty old man the grandson of his victim as the witness and guardian of his last sleep. Then, amid the profound stillness of the time and place, in spite of myself, I thought of the scenes of tumult, and violence, and blood, of which this dying existence had been so full. I sought for the distant impression of them on the countenance of this suffering aged man, on the large features which stood forth in pale relief against the shade, like a plaster mask. I saw there nothing save the seriousness and premature repose of the grave. At intervals I approached his pillow, to assure myself that the breath of life still dilated his weakened breast.

At length, towards the middle of the night, an irresistible drowsiness took possession of me, and I fell asleep, my forehead resting on my hand. I was suddenly awakened by a kind of mournful shivering. I raised my eyes, and felt a thrill dart through the marrow of my bones. The old man

had half risen on his bed, and fixed on me an attentive and astonished gaze, in which shone an expression of life and intelligence unknown to me before that moment. When my eye met his, the spectre trembled; he stretched out his arms on each side of him, and said to me in a tone of entreaty, whose strange, unfamiliar sound stopped the beating of my heart: "Marquis, forgive me!"

I tried to rise, to speak, but in vain. I was petrified in my chair.

After a silence, during which the dying man's gaze, still riveted on mine, continued its entreaty, he went on: "Marquis, deign to forgive me!"

At length I summoned up strength to advance towards him. As I drew near, he drew back as if in pain, and trying to avoid a touch of terror. I raised my hand, and gently lowering it before his eyes, which were dilated beyond measure and stupefied with fear, I then said, "Be at peace! I forgive you!"

I had scarcely uttered these words when his withered face brightened with a flash of joy and youth. At the same moment two tears started from the dried-up sockets of his eyes. He stretched out his hand towards me; then the hand suddenly shut with violence, and clenched itself in the empty air with a threatening gesture; his eyes rolled within the open eyelids, as if a bullet had struck him in the heart. "Oh, the Englishmen!" he murmured; and immediately fell back on the pillow a lifeless mass. He was dead.

I called out in haste; some one came running in. He was soon surrounded with pious tears and prayers. As for me, I withdrew, my soul deeply troubled by this extraordinary

scene, which must remain for ever a secret between the dead man and me.

This sad event in the family at once burdened me with the cares and duties of which I stood in need, to justify, in my own sight, my prolonged stay in this house. I am unable to conceive for what motives M. Laubépin advised me to put off my departure. What can he hope from this delay? I fancy he has, in this matter, yielded to a kind of vague superstition and childish weakness that ought never to have influenced a mind of that temper, and to which I have myself done wrong to submit.

How comes it that he did not see that he was assigning me additional useless suffering, and a position of no freedom or dignity? What am I doing here now? Is not now the time when I can justly be reproached with playing with the most sacred feelings? My first interview with Mlle. Marguerite sufficed to prove to me the full rigour of the test to which I had condemned myself, when M. Laroque's death happened, and restored for a short time some degree of naturalness to my intercourse, and a kind of propriety to my stay.

RENNES,

October 26th.

ALL is said! O God! how strong was that tie! how it encompassed my whole heart! how it has torn my heart to break it!

Yesterday evening, about nine o'clock, as I was leaning out at my open window, I was surprised to see a faint light approach my room through the dark paths in the park, and in a direction which people from the château were not in

the habit of taking. A moment after, there was a knock at my door, and Mlle. de Porhoët came in, quite out of breath. "Cousin," she said, "I want to talk to you."

I looked her in the face. "Some bad news?"

"No, not exactly that. However you shall judge for yourself. Sit down. My dear child, you have passed two or three evenings of this week at the château: have you noticed nothing new, nothing strange, about the ladies there?"

"Nothing."

"Have you not at least noticed in the expression of their faces a sort of unusual tranquillity?"

"Perhaps so. Apart from grief at their recent loss, they have seemed to me more calm, and even more happy, than formerly."

"Doubtless. Other peculiarities would have struck you, if you had lived, as I have, in daily intimacy with them the past fortnight. For instance, I have often detected signs of a secret understanding and some mysterious arrangement passing between them. Moreover, their habits have altered noticeably. Mme. Laroque has put away her brazier, her sentry-box, all her harmless Creole inanities; she rises at fabulous hours, and sits down at the work-table with Marguerite before daybreak. They are both smitten with a passionate taste for embroidery, and are learning how much money a woman can earn a day in that kind of employment. In short, there was an enigma, of which I strove to find the key. The key has just been revealed to me, and, though perhaps intruding on your private affairs sooner than suits you, I have thought it right to give it you without delay."

After the protestations of perfect secrecy which I eagerly

made to her, Mlle. de Porhoët went on to say, in her own gentle, firm language: "Mme. Aubry came this evening to see me by stealth; she began by throwing both her ugly arms round my neck, which displeased me very much; then, in the thick of a thousand selfish lamentations which I spare you, she entreated me to stop her relations on the brink of ruin. This is what she has learned by listening at doors, as her graceful custom is; the ladies are at this moment asking for power to make over all their property to a religious society at Rennes, so as to destroy the inequality of fortune which still separates Marguerite and you. Not being able to make you rich, they are making themselves poor. I thought I could not leave you in ignorance, cousin, of this revolution, which is equally worthy of their generous souls and their fantastic brains. You will excuse me for adding that it is your duty to put a stop to their design at any cost. What repentance is laying up for our friends, and with what frightful responsibility it threatens you, it is unnecessary to tell you; you understand it as well as I do, at a glance. If you could now, my friend, accept Marguerite's hand, that would settle everything in the happiest way in the world; but you are tied down in this respect by an engagement, which, blind and rash as it was, is none the less binding on your honour. There remains therefore but one thing for you to do: to leave Brittany without delay, and resolutely to cut the ground from under the hopes which your presence here must inevitably result in fostering. When you are no longer here, it will be easy for me to bring those two children to reason again."

"Well! I am ready; I will go away this very night."

"That is right," she said. "In giving you this advice, my friend, I myself obey a very rigorous law of honour. You

cheered the last moments of my loneliness; you restored to me the illusion of the sweetest attachments of this life, attachments lost to me for many years. In sending you away, I am offering up my last sacrifice: it is an immense one." She rose, and looked at me for a moment without speaking. "At my age we do not embrace young men," she resumed, smiling sadly, "we bless them. Farewell, dear child, and thank you! May the good God help you!" I kissed her trembling hands, and she left me precipitately.

I hastily made preparations for my departure, and then wrote a few lines to Mme. Laroque. I entreated her to renounce a determination, the full scope of which she had not been able to estimate, and to which I was firmly resolved, on my part, not to become an accomplice. I gave her my word—and she knew that it could be relied on—that I would never accept happiness at the cost of her ruin. At the close of the letter, the better to divert her from her mad plan, I spoke vaguely of a near future, in which I pretended to discern chances of fortune.

At midnight, when all were asleep, I said farewell, a cruel farewell, to my retreat, to the old Tower where I had suffered so deeply, where I had loved so deeply! and stole into the château by a secret door, of which a key had been given me. I stealthily crossed, like a criminal, the empty and sounding galleries, finding my way as well as I could in the darkness, and at last reached the drawing-room where I had seen her for the first time. She and her mother had left it scarcely an hour ago; their recent presence was still betrayed by a sweet, warm perfume, with which I was suddenly intoxicated. I sought and touched the basket, in which her hand had, a few moments previously, replaced her newly-begun embroidery. Alas! my

poor heart! I fell on my knees before the place which she usually occupies; and there, my forehead throbbing against the marble, I wept and sobbed like a child. O God! how I loved her!

I took advantage of the last hours of the night to be driven secretly into the small neighbouring town, where I this morning took the coach for Rennes. To-morrow evening I shall be in Paris. Poverty, loneliness, and despair; you whom I left there, I come to find you again! Last dream of youth—dream of heaven, farewell!

PARIS.

NEXT day, in the morning, as I was about to go to the railway, a post-chaise drove into the courtyard of the hotel, and I saw old Alain get down out of it. His countenance brightened when he saw me. "Ah, Sir! what good fortune, you are not gone away yet! Here is a letter for you!" I recognized Laubépin's handwriting. He told me in two lines that Mlle. de Porhoët was seriously ill, and was asking for me. I only took time to change horses,

and then threw myself into the chaise, after persuading Alain, not without difficulty, to take the seat opposite me. I then pressed him with questions. I made him repeat the news he had told me, which seemed to me incredible. Mlle. de Porhoët had received, the previous evening, from Laubépin's hands, a ministerial document, announcing that she was put into full and entire possession of the inheritance of her friends in Spain. "And it seems," Alain added, "that she owes it to you, Sir, who discovered some old papers in the Tower that nobody thought of, but which have proved the old lady's good rights. I don't know what truth there is in it; but if it is so, it's a pity, I said to myself, that such a respectable lady should have got such ideas into her head about a cathedral, and won't let them go; for you must know she holds to them more than ever, Sir. At first when she received the news, she fell flat on the floor, and they thought she was dead; but in an hour she began to talk without end or break about her cathedral, choir and nave, chapter and canons, north aisle and south aisle, so much, that they had to bring her an architect and some masons, and lay all the plans of her cursed building on her bed. At last, after three hours' talking about it, she dozed a little, then woke up and asked to see Monsieur—— Monsieur le Marquis" (here Alain shut his eyes and bowed), "and they sent me quickly after you, Sir. It seems she wishes to consult Monsieur about the aisle."

This strange event threw me into profound astonishment. Still, by the help of my own recollections, and the confused particulars given me by Alain, I contrived to hit on an explanation which more positive information was soon to confirm. As I have said, the case of the succession to the

Spanish branch of the Porhoëts had gone through two phases. First, there was a long lawsuit between Mlle. de Porhoët and a great house of Castile, which my aged friend had finally lost in the highest court; then a new suit had arisen, in which Mlle. de Porhoët was not even concerned, about the same succession, between the Spanish heirs and the Crown, which alleged that the property had devolved to it as an escheat. Meanwhile, still prosecuting my researches among the Porhoët archives, I had, about two months before my departure from the château, laid my hand on a curious document, of which I here give the literal text:

"Don Philip, by the Grace of God, King of Castile, Leon, Aragon, the Two Sicilies, Jerusalem, Navarre, Grenada, Toledo, Valencia, Galicia, Majorca, Seville, Cordova, Cadiz, Murcia, Jaën, the Algarves, Algesiras, Gibraltar, the Canary Islands, the Eastern and Western Indies, and Islands and Continents of the Ocean; Archduke of Austria; Duke of Burgundy, Brabant, and Milan; Count of Hapsburg, Flanders, the Tyrol, and Barcelona; Lord of Biscay and Molina, &c.

"To thee, Hervé Jean Jocelyn, Sieur de Porhoët-Gaël, Count Torres Nuevas, &c., who hast followed me into my realms and served with exemplary faithfulness, I promise by special favour, that, in case of thy direct and lawful descendants becoming extinct, the possessions of thy house shall revert, even to the detriment of the rights of my crown, to the direct and lawful descendants of the French branch of the Porhoët-Gaël family, as long as any shall exist.

"And I make this engagement for myself and my successors, on my kingly faith and word.

"Given at the Escurial, April 16th, 1716.

"Yo, el Rey."

Side by side with this document, which was only a translated copy, I had found the original text, with the Spanish arms on it. The importance of the document had not escaped me; but I had been afraid of exaggerating it. I had great doubts as to whether the validity of a title, over which so many years and events had rolled, would be admitted by the Spanish Government; I even doubted whether it would have the power to do justice to it, in case it should have the will. I therefore decided to leave Mlle. de Porhoët in ignorance of a discovery of such apparently problematical effect, and I confined myself to despatching the deed to Laubépin. Not receiving any answer, I had soon forgotten it in the midst of the personal anxieties which then overwhelmed me. However, contrary to my unjust suspicion, the Spanish Government did not hesitate about redeeming the promise of Philip V., and immediately that a final decree gave to the Crown the immense inheritance of the Porhoëts, the Government nobly restored it to the lawful heir.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when I got out of the chaise, before the threshold of the humble cottage, which that almost royal fortune had so tardily entered. The little servant came to the door. She was weeping. I immediately heard M. Laubépin's deep voice, at the top of the stairs, saying: "It

is he!" I hastily ascended the stairs. The old man pressed my hand warmly, and ushered me, without a word, into Mlle. de Porhoët's room. The physician and the curé from the town sat silently in the shade of a window. Mme. Laroque was kneeling on a chair near the bed; her daughter, standing near the head of the bed, was supporting the pillows on which my poor friend's head rested. When the sick woman saw me, a slight smile passed over her greatly changed features; and she with difficulty disengaged one of her arms. I took her hand, I fell on my knees, and could not restrain my tears.

"My child!" she said, "my dear child!" Then she looked steadily at M. Laubépin. The old notary took up a sheet of paper which was on the bed, and, appearing to finish reading something that had been interrupted, said:

"For these reasons, I appoint by this will (the whole of which is written by my own hand), universal legatee of all my property, as well in Spain as in France, without any reserve or conditions, Maxime-Jacques-Marie Odiot, Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive, of noble heart and noble race. Such is my will.

"JOCELYNDE-JEANNE,
"Comtesse de Porhoët-Gaël."

In my excessive surprise I rose with a sort of abruptness and was about to speak, when Mlle. de Porhoët, gently guiding my hand, placed it in Marguerite's. At the sudden touch the dear girl trembled; she bowed her young forehead over the pillow of death, and murmured, blushing, some words in the dying woman's ear. As for me, I could find no words;

I fell on my knees again, and prayed to God. Some minutes had passed amid solemn silence, when Marguerite withdrew her hand from mine suddenly, and made a sign of alarm. The doctor approached hastily, and I rose. Mlle. de Porhoët's head had sunk back suddenly; her looks were fixed, radiant, and turned towards heaven; her lips parted a little, and as if she had been talking in a dream, she said: "O God! God of mercy! I see it—yonder! Yes; the choir, the golden lamps, the windows—the sun everywhere! Two angels kneeling before the altar — in white robes — they wave their wings. O God! they are alive!" This cry died away on her mouth, and left it smiling; she closed her eyes, as if falling asleep, and suddenly an air of undying youth spread over her countenance, which could no longer have been recognized.

Such a death, crowning such a life, carries with it lessons, with which I wished my soul to be filled to its depths. I begged to be left alone in the room with the priest. That pious vigil, I trust, will not be lost upon me. As I looked on that countenance which wore the impress of glorious peace, and over which some reflection of the supernatural seemed dimly to stray, more than one forgotten or doubted truth came before me with irresistible evidence. My noble, holy friend, I well knew that you had possessed the virtue of sacrifice: I then saw that you had received its reward.

Towards two o'clock in the morning, giving way to weariness, I felt a wish to breathe the fresh air for a moment. I descended the staircase in the dark, and walked into the garden, avoiding going through the parlour on the ground floor, where I had observed a light. The night was profoundly gloomy. As I approached the turret at the end of the little inclosure, a slight noise sounded under the hornbeams, and an

indistinct form at the same moment emerged from among the leaves. I felt a sudden dizziness, my heart palpitated, the sky looked full of stars. "Marguerite!" I said, stretching out my arms. I heard a little cry, then my name murmured in a whisper, then nothing—and I felt her lips on mine. I thought my soul was leaving me!

* * * * * *

I have given Helen half my fortune; Marguerite is my wife. I close these pages for ever. I have nothing to confide to them now. It may be said of men, as it has been said of nations, "The happiest are those that have no history!"

THE END.