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G E R M A I N E .

BY

EDMOND ABOUT,

AUTHOR OF "THE ROMAN QUESTION," ETC.

TRANSLATED

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GERMAINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUCHESS' NEW YEAR'S GIFT.

NEAR THE middle of the Rue de l'Université, between the numbers 51 and 57, are four mansions, which may well be classed among the finest in Paris. The first belongs to M. Pozzo di Borgo, the second to the Count du Mailly, the third to the Duke de Choiseul, and the fourth to the Baron de Sanglié. The latter forms the angle of the Rue Bellechasse.

The hotel de Sanglié is a princely dwelling. The gate opens upon a court-yard, carefully gravelled, and tapestried with vines a century old. The porter's lodge is at the left, concealed beneath a thick ivy, where the sparrows and the porter chatter in unison. On the right, at the bottom of the court-yard, a broad flight of steps,

shaded by an awning, leads to the vestibule and the principal escalier. The ground floor and the first story are occupied by the baron, who enjoys the sole possession of an immense garden, bounded by several others, and peopled by larks, sparrows, and squirrels, who come and go in full liberty, as if they were the denizens of a forest, and not citizens of Paris.

The Sanglié arms, painted in medallion, are blazoned on the walls of the vestibule. The design is a *Sanglier d'or* on a field gules. The escutcheon is borne by two greyhounds and surmounted by a baron's crest, with the device SANGLIE AU ROY. Half a dozen actual greyhounds, grouped to suit their fancy, gambol at the foot of the escalier, gnaw the veronicas blooming in the Japan vases, or lie at full length on the carpet, stretching their slender serpentine necks to the sun. The footmen sit on the Beauvais benches with their arms folded decorously, as befits the servants of a noble house.

On the first of January, 1853, at nine in the morning, all the servants of the hotel Sanglié held a tumultuous congress within the vestibule. The baron's intendant, M. Anatole, had just distributed their New Year's gifts among them. The steward had received five hundred francs, the valet de chambre two hundred

and fifty, and the scullion, the least favored of all, was gazing with inexpressible tenderness on two beautiful new louis d'ors. There were some jealous faces among the assembly, but not a single discontented one, and each was saying in his own way, that it was a pleasure to serve such a rich and generous master.

The gentlemen in question were grouped somewhat picturesquely around one of the heaters. The earliest risers were already in full livery; the rest were still wearing the sleeved-jacket which forms the undress of all domestics in Paris. The valet de chambre was dressed in black with list shoes, the gardener resembled a villager in his Sunday clothes, the coachman appeared in a knit jacket and laced hat, and the porter wore a gilt belt and sabots. Here and there along the walls might have been seen a whip, a curry-comb, a blacking-brush, and an indefinite number of feather brooms. The master slept till noon like a man who had passed the night at the club, and the servants had plenty of time to attend to their duties. Each one was spending his money in advance, and castles in the air rose rapidly. All men, whether great or small, are in some way related to the milkmaid who counted her chickens with her milk-pail on her head.

“With this and what I have beside,” said the steward, “I shall increase my annuity. Thank God! I have some bread already laid upon the shelf—one ought not to want for any thing in his old age.”

“Parbleu!” returned the valet; “you are a bachelor; you have only yourself to care for. But I have a family; I shall give my money to the young man at the Bourse. He will speculate for me in stocks.”

“That is a good idea, Monsieur Ferdinand,” exclaimed the scullion. “Carry him my forty francs too, when you go.”

“What a child!” replied the valet, with a patronizing air. “What could they do on the Bourse with forty francs?”

“Well then,” said the youth, stifling a sigh, “I will put them in the savings’ bank.”

The coachman burst into a loud fit of laughter. “Here is my savings’ bank!” cried he, stroking his stomach. “Here is where I have always invested my capital, and it has paid me a good interest, has it not, Father Altroff?”

Father Altroff, a porter by profession, and an Alsatian by birth, who was tall, strong, muscular, big-bellied, broad-shouldered, large-headed, and as rubicund as a

young hippopotamus, winked knowingly in reply, and made a little sound with his tongue which was worth a long poem.

The gardener, a fine flower of Normandy, clinked his money in his hand, and answered the last speaker,—
“Come! come! one cannot drink a thing, and have it too. There is no such investment as a good hiding-place in an old wall or a hollow tree. Money that is well hidden, the notaries cannot spend!”

The assembly all cried out against the simplicity of the good man who thus buried his crowns alive instead of setting them at work. Fifteen or sixteen exclamations arose at once. Every one had his say, betrayed his secrets, mounted his hobby, and shook his cap and bells. Every one smote his pockets, and noisily caressed the certain hopes, the clear and liquid happiness, that had been disbursed to him that morning. The gold mingled its sharp and ringing voice in this concert of vulgar passions; and the clink of the twenty-franc pieces, more heady than the fumes of wine or the smell of powder, intoxicated these weak brains and quickened the throbbings of these churlish hearts.

At the height of the tumult, a little door was opened on the escalier, between the ground floor and the first

story, and a woman, clothed in black, shabby garments hastily descended the stairs, crossed the vestibule, opened the glass door, and disappeared in the court-yard.

It was the work of a moment; yet, notwithstanding, this sombre apparition extinguished the mirth of all the good-humored valets. They rose on her passage with marks of profound respect. The noisy exclamations lodged in their throats, and the clinking of the gold ceased in their pockets. The poor woman had left behind her a wake of silence and of gloom.

The valet de chambre, a blustering fellow, was the first to recover himself.

“Sapristi!” cried he, “I fancy I have seen Poverty pass in person. Here is my New Year’s day spoiled already! You will see that nothing succeeds with me now till Saint Sylvester’s. Brrr! I am chilled through.”

“Poor woman!” said the steward. “She has had hundreds and thousands, and see her now! Who would believe that she is a duchess?”

“Her rascally husband has squandered every thing.”

“A gambler!”

“A glutton!”

“A libertine, who trots on his old legs from morning till night in the train of all the petticoats!”

“He does not interest me,—he has nothing but what he deserves.”

“Does any one know how Mademoiselle Germaine is?”

“Their negress says that she is at the point of death. She spits blood by mouthfuls.”

“And no carpet in her room! She might be cured in a warm climate,—at Florence or in Italy.”

“She will be an angel before long.”

“It is those who are left who are to be pitied.”

“I don't know what the duchess will do then; their accounts are elosed with all the tradesmen. Even the baker talks of refusing them credit.”

“What rent do they pay?”

“Eight hundred. But I don't believe that monsieur has ever seen the color of their money.”

“If I were he, I should rather let the little lodging be vacant than to let people in it who are a disgrace to the house.”

“Are you a brute? Would you have the Duke de La Tour d'Embleuse and his family picked up from the public sidewalk? These paupers are the plague-spots of the faubourg,—we all have an interest in hiding

“ ”

—what do I care for

that? Why don't they work? Dukes are men, like the rest of us."

"Boy," replied the steward gravely, "you are talking at random. They are not men like the rest of us,—one proof of it is that I, with my superior talents, can never be a simple baron for a single hour in my life. Besides, the duchess is a sublime woman, and does things of which neither you nor I would be capable. Could you eat bouilli at every meal for a whole year?"

"Bah! that would not be pleasant."

"Well, the duchess cooks a dinner every two days, because the duke, her husband, does not like sops. Monsieur dines on a good tapioca *au gras*, with a beefsteak or a couple of chops, while his poor wife swallows the last morsels of the boiled fragments. What do you think of that?"

The scullion was touched to the heart. "My good M. Tournoy," said he to the steward, "these people are very interesting. Can't we make them some presents by means of their negress?"

"No, indeed; she is as proud as they; she will take nothing from us. Yet I am of the opinion that she does not get a breakfast every day."

This conversation might have lasted some time longer, if it had not been interrupted by the entrance of M.

Anatole. He came just in time to cut short the words of the chasseur, who was opening his mouth for the first time. The assembly dispersed hastily, each orator carrying away with him his implements of labor, and nothing was left in the hall of deliberation but one of those gigantic brooms commonly called a wolf's head.

Meanwhile, Marguerite de Bisson, Duchess de La Tour d'Embleuse, was walking with rapid steps in the direction of the Rue Jacob. The passers who jostled her elbow in hastening to give or receive their New Year's gifts, thought her one of the tribe of destitute Irish who shuffle along the macadamized streets of London in pursuit of a penny. The daughter of the Duke of Brittany, and wife of an ex-governor of Senegal, the duchess wore on her head a straw bonnet, dyed black, the strings of which were twisted like twine. An imitation veil, torn in five or six places, partly concealed her features, and gave her a strange appearance, — her beautiful face, thus marked by white spots of unequal size, seemed disfigured by the smallpox. An old crape shawl, blackened by the cares of the dyer and reddened by the inclemency of the weather, hung heavily about her, the fringe sweeping the snow of the side-walk. The gown which was hidden beneath was so much

worn that the stuff was hardly discernible. It would have been necessary to examine it very closely to recognize a former mohair, uncalendered, cut in the folds, frayed on the bottom, and eaten by the corrosive mud of the pavements of Paris. The shoes which supported this lamentable edifice no longer possessed either form or color. No linen was visible, either at the neck or the wrists. Sometimes, in crossing a street, the dress was raised a little on the right, disclosing a gray woollen stocking and a single skirt of black fustian. The hands of the duchess, which were reddened by the piercing cold, were hid beneath her shawl; and if she dragged her feet in walking, it was not from carelessness, but simply from the fear of losing her shoes.

By a strange contrast, which you may sometimes have remarked in others, the duchess was neither thin nor pale, nor in any way disfigured by poverty. She had received from her ancestors the gift of that rebel beauty which resists every thing, even hunger. One sometimes sees prisoners fatten in their dungeons till the hour of their death. At the age of forty-seven, Madame de La Tour d'Emblouse was still in possession of much of the beauty of youth. Her hair was jet black, and she had thirty-two teeth, all of which

were capable of bruising the hardest bread. Her health was less blooming than her figure; but that was a secret between herself and her physician. The duchess was approaching that critical and sometimes fatal season, when the wife disappears that she may give place to the grandmother. More than once had she been seized with strange suffocations, and she often dreamed that the blood was rising in her throat and strangling her. Inexplicable flushes of heat mounted to her brain, and she awakened in a bath of perspiration, in which she wondered that she did not die.

Doctor Le Bris, a young physician but an old friend, had prescribed for her a mild regimen, without fatigue, and especially without anxiety; but what stoical soul could have passed through trials as harsh as hers without having been moved by them?

Duke Cesar de La Tour d'Embleuse, son of one of the *émigrés* who had shown himself most faithful to his king and most rabid against his country, had been magnificently recompensed for the services of his father. In 1827, when scarcely forty years of age, he had been appointed by Charles X. governor-general of the French possessions in Western Africa. He held the Moors and the yellow fever at bay during twenty-eight months' stay in

the colony, and then asked leave of absence to go to Paris and marry. He was rich, thanks to the indemnity of a thousand million of francs; he doubled his fortune by espousing the beautiful Marguerite de Bisson, who possessed an income at Saint Brienne of sixty thousand francs. The king signed his marriage contract and the Ordinances on the same day, and the duke found himself married and beggared at one blow. The new government would gladly have welcomed him among the throng of deserters, and it was even said that the ministry of Casimir Périer made him some advances; but he scorned every proffered office, at first through pride, and afterwards through an unconquerable indolence. Whether it was that he had expended all his energies in three years, or whether the easy Parisian life retained him by an irresistible attraction, his sole occupation during ten years was to drive his horses in the Bois du Boulogne, and to air his yellow gloves in the green-room of the opera. Paris, to him, was a new world; for he had lived in the country under the inflexible rule of his father, until the day of his departure for Senegal, — he tasted pleasures so late in life that he had not time to be palled with them.

Every thing seemed good to him, — the enjoyments of the table, the gratifications of vanity, the excitement of

play, and even the austere joys of the family. At home, he showed the assiduity of a young husband, and abroad the impetuosity of a youth just freed from control. His wife was the happiest woman in France, but she was not the only one whose felicity he fashioned. He wept with joy at the birth of his daughter in 1835; and in the excess of his happiness, he purchased a country-house for a dancer of whom he was enamoured. The dinners which he gave at home had no rivals, unless it were his suppers at the house of his mistress. The world, which is always indulgent to men, pardoned him this waste of his life and of his fortune. It was thought that he managed matters handsomely, since his pleasures outside never awakened a mournful echo in his household. How could one reproach him for scattering everywhere about him a little of the superfluity of his purse and his heart? No woman pitied the duchess, and in fact she was not to be pitied. He carefully avoided compromising himself; he never appeared in public except with his wife; and he would rather have lost a rubber than have sent her alone to a ball.

This double mode of living, and the circumspection with which a gay man knows how to conceal his pleasures, soon encroached upon his capital. Nothing costs

dearer in Paris than secrecy and discretion. The duke was too fine a lord to haggle. He neither knew how to refuse any thing to his own wife nor to the wife of another. Do not think that he was ignorant of the enormous breaches that he was making in his fortune; but he counted on play to repair them. Men to whom Fortune has come while sleeping, accustom themselves to a boundless confidence in destiny. M. de La Tour d'Embleuse was as lucky as those who touch the cards for the first time. It was estimated that his gains in the year 1841 more than doubled his income. But nothing is lasting in this world, not even success in play; and the truth of this, the duke soon experienced. The liquidation of 1848, which brought to light so much poverty, proved to him that he was ruined without remedy, and he saw a bottomless abyss opening beneath his feet. Another man would have lost his reason; he did not even lose his hope. He went straight to his wife, and said to her gayly,—"My dear Marguerite, this villanous revolution has ruined us. We have not a thousand francs that we can call our own."

The duchess was not expecting such a revelation; she thought of her daughter and burst into tears.

"Never mind," said he, "the storm will blow over.

Count on me ; I count on luck. They say that I am a light man—so much the better ! I shall come to the surface.”

The poor woman dried her tears, saying,—“ Right, my friend. You will work ? ”

“ Me ! For shame ! I shall wait for Fortune,—she is a capricious sprite, but she loves me too well to quit me point-blank without hope of return.”

The duke waited eight years in a little apartment of the hôtel Sanglié, over the stables. As soon as they had time to find him out, his old friends aided him with their purse and their credit. He borrowed without scruple, as he had always lent without security. Several employments were offered him, all of which were honorable. A manufacturing company wished to add him to their board of directors with an allocation equivalent to a salary, but he refused for fear of derogating from his dignity. “ I am willing to sell my time,” said he, “ but I do not intend to lend my name.” Thus he descended, one by one, all the rounds of the ladder of poverty, discouraging his friends, wearying his creditors, closing every door against him, and forfeiting the name which he would not compromise ; yet without ever taking in earnest the threadbare coat that he wore

in the street, or the hearth that was fireless for the lack of a bit of fuel.

On the first of January, 1853, the duchess carried her wedding-ring to the pawnbroker's.

One must be wholly destitute of all human aid to pledge an article of so slight value as a wedding-ring. But the duchess had not a centime in the house; and one cannot live without money, although credit may be the main-spring of the trade of Paris. Many things may be procured without paying for them, when you can throw on the counter of the merchant a noble name and an imposing address. You can furnish your house, fill your cellar, and replenish your wardrobe, without letting the tradesman see the color of your money; but there are a thousand daily expenses which can only be met, purse in hand. A coat may be bought on credit, but the mending must be paid for in ready money. It is sometimes easier to buy a watch than to buy a cabbage. The duchess had a remnant of credit with a few tradesmen, which she husbanded with religious care; but as to money, she knew not where to find it. The Duke de La Tour d'Embleuse possessed no more friends; he had spent them all like the rest of his fortune. Many a college chum loves us to the amount of a thousand

francs, — this boon-companion is the man to lend us a hundred louis, and that charitable neighbor represents the value of a thousand crowns to us. Beyond a certain figure, the lender is released from all the obligations of friendship, — he has nothing to reproach himself with, he has done a great deal for you, he owes you nothing more, and he has the right to look away when he meets you, and to deny himself to you when you call at his house. The friends of the duchess had detached themselves from her, one after another. The friendship of women is assuredly more chivalrous than that of men; but, in both sexes, affection is lasting only among equals. One feels a delicate pleasure in climbing a steep staircase two or three times, and seating one's self in full dress by the side of a humble pallet; but there are few minds heroic enough to live familiarly with the misery of another. The dearest friends of the poor woman, those who called her Marguerite, had felt their hearts grow cold in the carpetless and fireless apartment; and they came there no longer. When any one spoke to them of the duchess, they praised her and pitied her sincerely, saying, "We love each other still, but we hardly ever meet, — it is her husband's fault."

In this lamentable abandonment, the duchess had had

recourse to the last friend of the unfortunate,—the creditor who lends at a high interest, but without objection and without reproach. The pawnbroker had in safe keeping her jewels, her furs, her laces, the best of her linen and her wardrobe, and the last mattress but one of her bed. She had pledged them all under the eyes of the old duke, who had calmly seen his articles of furniture departing one by one, and had gayly wished them a pleasant journey. This incomprehensible old man lived in his house like Louis XV. in his kingdom, without care for the future, saying, “After me, the deluge!” He rose late, breakfasted with a good appetite, passed an hour at his toilette, dyed his hair, plastered his wrinkles, rouged his cheeks, polished his nails, and displayed his graces in Paris until the hour of dinner. He was not at all surprised to see a good meal on the table, and he was too discreet ever to ask his wife where she had found it. If the pittance was meagre, he made the best of it, and smiled on adversity as formerly on good fortune. When Germaine commenced to cough, he jested pleasantly with her on this bad habit. It was long ere he perceived that she was wasting away; the day wherein he *did* perceive it, he felt an intense vexation.

When the physician informed him that the poor child could only be saved by a miracle, he called him Doctor Croaker, and said, rubbing his hands,—“Come, come, all this will be nothing!” He did not really know himself whether he assumed these flippant airs to reassure his family, or whether his natural levity rendered him incapable of feeling sorrow. His wife and his daughter adored him as he was. He treated the duchess with the same gallantry as on their wedding morning, and danced Germaine on his knees like a child. The duchess never suspected him of being the cause of his own ruin; she had seen a perfect man in him for twenty-three years, and she took his indifference for courage and firmness, continued to hope in him in spite of every thing, and believed him capable of one day raising his house again by a stroke of good fortune.

Germaine had four months to live, in the opinion of Dr. Le Bris,—she would sink in the early spring days, and the white lilacs would blossom on her tomb. She had a foreboding of her destiny, and read her condition with an acuteness which is very rare among consumptives,—nay, more, she even suspected the disease that was undermining the health of her mother.

She lay by the side of the duchess, and, in her long nights of sleeplessness, she often shuddered at the difficult breathing that broke the slumbers of her dear nurse.—“When I am dead,” thought she, “mamma will soon follow me. We shall not be separated long,—but what will become of my poor father?”

Every care, every privation, every physical and mental suffering was to be found in this little corner of the hôtel Sanglié. And in Paris, where wretchedness abounds, it is questionable whether there was a single family more completely miserable than that of La Tour d’Embleuse, whose last resource was a wedding ring.

The duchess hastened at first to the branch office of the Mont de Piété in the Rue Bonaparte, near the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. She found the house closed: was it not a holiday? The idea occurred to her that the agent in the Rue Condé might have opened his shop, and she retraced her steps to his door,—this also was made fast. She knew not where to apply next, for establishments of this kind are not common in the faubourg Saint-Germain; but, nevertheless, the duke must not commence the year by fasting; so she entered a little jeweller’s shop in the Odeon Square, and she sold her ring for eleven francs. The mer-

chant promised to keep it at her disposal for three months, in case she wished to redeem it.

She tied the money in a corner of her pocket-handkerchief, and walked without stopping to the Rue des Lombards. Here she entered a druggist's, bought a bottle of cod liver oil for Germaine, crossed the market, selected a lobster and a partridge, and returned, dragged to the knees, to the hôtel Sanglié. She had forty centimes remaining.

The apartments which she occupied there were slightly built, and had been added about thirty years before for the servants of the hotel. The four rooms of which they consisted were separated by wooden partitions. The antechamber opened on one side into the drawing-room, and on the other into a long passage, that led to the duke's sleeping-room. From the drawing-room you passed into the chamber of the duchess, and thence into the dining-room, which terminated the suite, and connected the apartment of the duchess with that of her husband.

Madame de La Tour d'Embleuse found her only servant, old Semiramis, in the antechamber, weeping silently over a piece of paper.

“What have you there?” asked she.

“Madame, it is all that the baker has brought us. We can have no more bread if we do not pay him his money.”

The duchess took the bill,—it amounted to more than six hundred francs. “Do not weep,” said she; “here is a little money; go to the baker in the Rue du Bac; you will buy a Viennese roll for monsieur, and some brown bread for ourselves. Carry this into the kitchen; it is monsieur’s breakfast. Is Germaine awake?”

“Yes, madame, the doctor saw her at ten o’clock. He is still in the chamber of M. the duke.”

Semiramis departed on her errand, and Madame de La Tour d’Embleuse directed her steps towards her husband’s room. As she opened the door, she heard the duke’s voice, clear, joyous, and ringing as a bell—

“Fifty thousand francs’ income! I knew well that the lucky vein would return!”

CHAPTER II.

ASKING IN MARRIAGE.

DOCTOR CHARLES Le Bris is one of the best loved men in Paris. The great city has her spoiled children in every art; but I do not know of one whom she pets with greater tenderness. He was born in an obscure little city of Champagne, but pursued his studies in the College Henri IV. A relative, who practised medicine in the country, destined him at an early age for the medical profession. The young man attended the lectures, frequented the hospitals, competed for the *internat*, practised under the eye of the professors, carried off all the diplomas, and gained certain medals which serve to ornament his cabinet. His sole ambition was to succeed his uncle, and to finish the patients whom the good man had commenced. But when they saw him appear armed to the teeth with his successes and his title of doctor, the sanitary officers of the place, his uncle included, demanded why he had not settled in Paris. His new paletot fitted him so well, and he joined to his talents such fascinating manners, that

they divined at the first glance that all the patients would fall into his hands. The venerable relative found himself much too young to think of retiring, and the rivalry of his nephew restored to him the vigor that he had lost before; in short, the poor fellow was so badly received, and they put so many spokes in his wheels, that through desperation he returned to Paris. His former masters appreciated him,—they procured him a practice. Great men can afford to dispense with jealousy. Thanks to their generosity, Doctor Le Bris made himself a reputation in five or six years. He is beloved here as a scholar, there as a dancer, and everywhere as a charming and excellent man. He is ignorant of the first elements of quackery, says very little about his success, and leaves to his patients the care of telling that he has cured them. His abode is not a temple,—he lodges on the fourth floor in an obscure quarter, whether from modesty or coquetry, no one knows; but the poor people about him do not complain of such a neighbor: he attends them so sedulously that he sometimes forgets his purse at the head of their bed.

M. Le Bris had been the physician of Mademoiselle de La Tour de Embleuse during three years, and had watched the progress of the malady without being able to do any thing to check it. It was not that Germaine

was one of those children, condemned from their birth, who carry within them the seeds of an hereditary disease, — her constitution was robust, her chest was broad, and her mother had never been known to cough. A neglected cold, a damp room, and deprivation of the necessaries of life, had done the mischief. Despite the cares of the doctor, the poor girl had gradually grown pale as a waxen statue; her strength had gone; and appetite, gayety, breath, the joy of breathing the free air, all had failed her. Six months before the opening of our story, M. Le Bris had consulted with two celebrated physicians regarding the patient. She could yet be saved; — one lung was left, and less than this was sufficient for nature, but it was necessary to carry her without delay to Egypt or to Italy.

“Yes,” said the young doctor, “the only prescription which we can order is a country-house on the banks of the Arno, a quiet life, and the comforts which wealth alone can buy. But see!” He pointed with his finger to the tattered curtains, the rush-bottomed chairs, and the red tile-floor of the drawing-room. “Behold her death-warrant?”

In the month of January, the last lung was attacked, — the sacrifice was accomplished. The doctor had transferred his cares to the duchess; his last hope was to lull

the daughter gently to sleep, and to save the life of the mother.

He made his visit to Germaine, felt her pulse for form's sake, offered her a box of bonbons, kissed her forehead fraternally, and passed into the chamber of M. de La Tour de Embleuse.

The duke was still in bed. His toilet was not made, and his face bore the traces of his sixty-three years.

"Well, handsome doctor!" cried he, with a burst of laughter; "what kind of a year do you bring us to-day? Is Fortune at last in need of me?—Ah, gypsy, if ever I catch thee!—You are a witness, doctor, that I am awaiting her in my bed."

"Monsieur the duke," returned the doctor, "since we are alone, we can talk of serious matters. I have not concealed from you the state of your daughter."

The duke made a little sentimental grimace, and said,— "Really, doctor, is there no hope? Do not disclaim it,—you are capable of a miracle!"

The doctor sorrowfully shook his head. "All that I can do," returned he, "is to soothe her dying days."

"Poor little girl! Do you know, my dear doctor, that she awakens me every night by coughing? She must suffer terribly, though she denies it. If there is really

no longer any hope, her last hour will be one of deliverance.’

“This is not all that I have to say to you, and you must pardon me if I begin the new year with mournful tidings.”

The duke started up abruptly. “What do you mean?” cried he; “you terrify me!”

“Madame the duchess has disquieted me for several months past.”

“Ah! for once, doctor, you are too free with your ill omens. The duchess, thanks to God, is in excellent health. I wish that I were as well as she.”

The doctor entered into details which overthrew the carelessness and levity of the old man. He saw himself alone in the world, and a shudder ran through his frame. His voice fell, and he clung to the hand of the doctor like a drowning man to the last straw.

“My friend,” cried he, “save me!—I mean, save the duchess. She is all that is left to me,—what will become of me without her! She is an angel,—my guardian angel! Tell me what must be done to cure her; I will obey you like a slave.”

“Monsieur the duke, the duchess must have a calm and easy life, without emotion, and above all, without privation;

a suitable diet of choice and varied food, a comfortable house, a good carriage ——”

“And the moon, must she not?” cried the duke impatiently. “I thought that you had more sense, doctor, and better eyes. A carriage! a house! choice food! Go, find them for me, if you want me to give them to her!”

“I bring them to you, and you have only to take them,” answered the doctor quietly.

The eyes of the old man sparkled like those of a cat in the dark. “What mean you? speak!” cried he. “Do not keep me in suspense!”

“Before telling you any thing further, Monsieur the duke, I need to remind you, that, for the last three years, I have been the best friend of your family.”

“You may say the only one,—no one will contradict you.”

“The honor of your name is as dear to me as to you, and if——”

“Very well! very well!”

“Do not forget that the life of the duchess is in danger, and that I pledge myself to save her, provided that you furnish me with the means.”

“The devil! it is for you to furnish them to me! You have been talking to me for the last hour like the

walking philosopher in *The Forced Marriage*. To the point! doctor, to the point!”

“I have come to it. Have you ever met the Count de Villanera in Paris?”

“The one with black horses?”

“Precisely.”

“The finest team in Paris!”

“Don Diego Gomez de Villanera is the last scion of a noble Neapolitan family, transplanted to Spain in the reign of Charles V. His fortune is the largest in the whole Peninsula; if he cultivated his estates and worked his mines, he would have a revenue of four or five millions; as it is, he has an income of fourteen hundred thousand francs, which is but little less than that of Prince Ysoupoff. He is thirty-two years old, and has a handsome face, a finished education, an honorable character——”

“Add:—And Madame Chermidy.”

“Since you know that, you shorten the way for me. For reasons which would be too long to relate, the count wishes to quit Madame Chermidy, and to marry according to his rank into one of the most illustrious families of the faubourg. He cares so little for fortune, that he will secure to his father-in-law an income of fifty thousand francs. The father-in-law whom he wishes is yourself; he has charged

me to sound your inclinations. If you say yes, he will come to-day to ask the hand of your daughter, and the marriage will take place in fifteen days."

This time, the duke sprang from the bed, and stared the doctor full in the face.

"You are not insane?" he cried. "You are not mocking me? You cannot forget that I am the Duke de La Tour d'Embleuse, and double your age? Is this really true that you have told me?"

"The precise truth."

"But he does not know, then, that Germaine is ill?"

"He knows it."

"Dying?"

"He knows it."

"Given over?"

"He knows it."

A cloud passed across the features of the old duke. He seated himself in the corner of the cold chimney-place, without perceiving that he was almost naked, leaned his elbows upon his knees, and buried his face in his hands.

"This is unnatural," resumed he. "You have not told me all. M. de Villanera must have some secret motive for asking the hand of a corpse."

"It is true," returned the doctor. "But pray return to your bed; it is a long story to relate."

The duke again rolled himself up in the coverlet. His teeth were chattering with cold and impatience, and he fixed his little eyes upon the doctor with the restless curiosity of a child who watches the opening of a box of bonbons. M. Le Bris did not keep him waiting.

“You know what is the position of Madame Chermidy?” asked he.

“The consolable widow of a husband whom no one has ever seen.”

“I met M. Chermidy three years ago, and can assure you that his wife is not a widow.”

“So much the better for him! Peste! to be the husband of Madame Chermidy! That is a sinecure which must bring in a good salary!”

“See how rashly people judge! Monsieur Chermidy is an honorable man, and even an officer of some merit. I do not know how well-born he may be; at thirty-five, he was a captain in the merchant service, sailing long voyages. He obtained an appointment on one of the government ships as subsidiary lieutenant, and after two years' service, the minister gave him an officer's commission. It was in 1838 he laid his heart and his epaulette at the feet of Honorine Lavnaze. She had for her sole patrimony her eighteen years, the large eyes that you know of, an Arle-

sian cap that coifed her ravishingly, and an ambition that knew no bounds. She was not nearly as beautiful as she is now; I know from her own mouth that she was as thin as a rail, and as black as a young raven. But she was in sight, and therefore was sought after. She presided at the counter of a tobacconist's, and all the nautical aristocracy of Toulon, from the maritime prefect to the youngest midshipman, came to smoke and to sigh around her. But neither the vapor of incense nor the smoke of cigars could turn this strong head; she had sworn to be prudent till she had found a husband, and no temptation made her swerve from her virtue. The officers surnamed her *Croquet* for her harshness; the citizens called her *Ulloa* because she was besieged by the French marine.

“She did not lack honorable proposals; they are abundant in seaport towns. On his return from a long cruise, a naval officer has more illusions, more simplicity, and more credulity, than he had on the day of his departure; the first woman who presents herself to his eyes appears to him as beautiful and as holy as the France which he has just found again,—it is his country in a silk gown! The goodman Chermidy, simple as a sea-wolf, was preferred for his candor; he carried off this refractory sheep in the face of his rivals.

“This fine fortune, which might have made him enemies, did not injure his prospects in the least. Although he lived in retirement, alone with his wife, in an isolated country-house, he obtained a very pretty captaincy without having asked for it. Since that time, he has seen France but at rare intervals; always at sea, he has economized for his wife, who in turn has economized for him. Honorable, embellished by dress, ease, and that wealth of the body, *embonpoint*, reigned for ten years over the department of the Var; the only events which signalized her reign being the bankruptcy of a coal merchant and the removal of two paymasters. At the close of a scandalous suit in which her name was not mentioned, she judged it proper to show herself on a broader scene, and took the apartments in the Rue du Cirque, which she still occupies. Her husband steered towards the banks of Newfoundland as she rolled towards Paris. You witnessed her debut, Monsieur the duke?”

“Yes, morbleu! and I can say that few women could have made their way better. It is nothing to be beautiful and witty; the great art consists in feigning the millionaire, and that secures the offer of millions.”

“She arrived here with two or three hundred thousand francs, gleaned discreetly from the public offices. She

raised such a dust on the Bois du Boulogne, that you would have said that the queen of Sheba had just landed at Paris. In less than a year, she had made people talk of her horses, her dresses, and her furniture, while no one could pronounce positively concerning her conduct. I, who am speaking to you, attended her for eighteen months before perceiving a shadow of the truth, and I should have kept my illusions much longer, if chance had not thrown me in the presence of her husband. He dropped in on her, with his trunks, one day when I was there on a professional visit. This was in the commencement of the year 1850, three years ago or thereabouts. The poor devil arrived from Newfoundland, with his face sunburned a foot deep. He was to set out again at the end of a month for a five years' station in the China seas, and thought it very natural to embrace his wife between the two voyages. The livery of *his* servants made his eyes twinkle, and he was dazzled by the splendor of *his* furniture. But when he saw his beloved Honorine appear in a morning toilette, which represented two or three years of his pay, he forgot to fall into her arms, put about without saying a word, and ordered his baggage to be carried to the dépôt of the Lyons railroad. It was thus that M. Chermidy ushered me into the confidence of madame;

I have since learned much more of her through the Count de Villanera.”

“Have we come to the point now?” demanded the duke.

“A moment’s patience. Madame de Chermidy had singled out Don Diego some time before the arrival of her husband. She occupied the next box to him in the balcony of the *Italiens*, and she glanced at him with such eyes that he soon procured an introduction to her house. Every man will tell you that her drawing-room is one of the most agreeable in Paris, although no woman is ever seen there except the mistress of the mansion. But she multiplies herself to infinitude. The count fell passionately in love with her, through the same spirit of emulation that had destroyed the unfortunate Chermidy. He adored her the more blindly that she left him all the honors of war, and seemed to yield to an irresistible penchant which threw her into his arms. The most intelligent man suffers himself to be taken by such a bait, and there is no scepticism that can hold out against the semblance of real love. Don Diego is not a hairbrained and inexperienced youth. If he had divined an interested motive, or surprised a calculated movement, he would have put himself upon his guard, and all would have been lost.

But the cunning actress pushed artifice even to heroism. She exhausted her treasury and expended her last sou in making the count believe that she loved him for himself alone. She even exposed her reputation, of which she had taken so much care, and she would have been foolishly compromised, if good care had not been taken. The countess-dowager of Villanera, a devout woman, fine in her old age and dignity, and resembling a Velasquez portrait escaped from its frame, was acquainted with the amours of her son and found no fault with them. She liked better to see him attached to a woman of the world, than lost in those dangerous pleasures in which one ruins and degrades himself.

“The delicacy of Madame Chermidy was so sensitive that Don Diego could never succeed in giving her a trifle. The first thing that she accepted after a year’s intimacy, was a stock-receipt for an income of forty thousand francs. She was then pregnant with a son, who was born in November, 1850. Now, Monsieur the duke, we are at the heart of the question.

“The accouchement of Madame Chermidy took place in the village of Bretèche-Saint-Nom, behind Saint-Germain. I was present. Don Diego, ignorant of our laws, and believing that every thing was permitted to persons of his

condition, wished at once to acknowledge the child. The eldest son of the family of Villanera takes the title of Marquis de los Montes de Hierro. I explained to him the legal axiom, *Is pater est*, and proved to him that his son must either be named Chermidy, or not be named at all. The captain had passed through Paris in the month of January, just in time to save appearances. We were deliberating by the bedside of the mother. She explained that her husband would certainly kill her, if she attempted to impose on him this legal paternity. The count added, that the Marquis de los Montes de Hierro should never sign himself Chermidy. In short, I registered the infant at the mayoralty under the name of Gomez, born of unknown parents.

“The young father, both happy and unhappy at the same time, shared the knowledge of this event with the venerable countess. She wished to see the child, ordered it to be brought to her, and has brought it up herself in her hotel in the faubourg Saint-Honoré. He is now two years old; he grows finely, and already resembles twenty-four generations of the Villanera. Don Diego worships his son; he cannot endure to see in him a nameless child, and, what is worse, an adulterine. Madame Chermidy would be a woman to remove moun-

tains to secure to her heir the name and the fortune of the Villanera. But the one most to be pitied is the poor dowager. She foresees that Don Diego will not marry for fear of disinheriting his beloved son, that he will turn his fortune into money to put it in his possession, that he will sell the family estates, and that of this noble name and these vast domains nothing will be left at the end of half a century.

“In this extremity, Madame Chermidy was inspired with a flash of genius. ‘Marry,’ said she to Don Diego. ‘Seek a wife from among the first nobility of France, and prevail on her in the marriage contract to recognize your child as her own. By this means the little Gomez will be your legitimate son, noble on the father’s and mother’s side, and heir to all your Spanish possessions. Do not think of me; I sacrifice myself.’

“The count has submitted this project to his mother, who will sign it with both hands. The noble lady has lost her illusions concerning Madame Chermidy, who had cost Don Diego four millions, and who talked of retiring to a cottage to bewail her lost happiness while thinking of her son. M. de Villanera was duped by this false resignation; he thought that he should commit a crime in abandoning such a heroine of ma-

ternal love. At last, to silence his scruples, Madame Chermidy whispered four words in his ear,— ‘Marry for a little while. The doctor will find you a wife among his patients.’ I thought of Mademoiselle de La Tour d’Embleuse, and therefore have broached the subject to you, Monsieur the duke. This marriage, strange as it may seem to you at first sight, and giving you as it does a little grandson who is not of your blood, assures to Mademoiselle Germaine a prolonged existence and a peaceful end, it saves the life of madame the duchess, and lastly” —

“It gives me an income of fifty thousand francs, does it not? Well, my dear doctor, I thank you. Tell M. de Villanera that I beg to be excused. My daughter may be to bury, but she is not to sell.”

“Monsieur the duke, it is true that it is a bargain that I propose to you, but if I believed it unworthy an honorable man, I should not meddle with it, believe me.”

“Parbleu! doctor, each one understands honor in his own way. We have the honor of the soldier, the honor of the shopkeeper, and the honor of the nobleman, which will not permit me to be grandfather to the little Chermidy. Ah! M. de Villanera intends to

legitimate his bastards! It is Louis XIV. throughout, —but we are allied to the family of Saint Simon. Fifty thousand francs' income! I have had a hundred thousand, Monsieur, without ever having done any thing for them, either good or bad. I shall not derange the traditions of my ancestors to gain fifty!"

"Observe, Monsieur the duke, that the family de Villanera is worthy to be allied to yours. The world will have nothing to say."

"Nothing more is wanting than to offer me a plebeian son-in-law! I confess, that, under any other circumstances, Don Diego Gomez de Villanera would suit me exactly. He is well born, and I have heard his family and himself praised. But the devil! I do not want it to be said, 'Mademoiselle de La Tour d'Embleuse had a son two years old on her wedding day!'"

"No one will say any thing,—no one will know any thing. The acknowledgment will be secret,—and why should it be spoken of? Neither the law nor society makes any difference between a legitimate child and a child legitimated."

"Fancy Germaine at Saint Thomas d'Aquinas, under the canopy before the high altar, with M. de Villanera on her right, Madame Chermidy on her left, a two

years' old bantling in her arms, and the undertaker behind her! It is simply abominable, my poor doctor. Let us say no more about it. Are they very complicated, these ceremonies of acknowledgment?"

"There is no ceremony at all. A sentence in the marriage contract, and the child is legalized."

"That is one sentence too much. Let us say no more about it. Not a word to the duchess,—promise me."

"I promise."

"But is the poor duchess really so ill? Why, she steps like a girl of fifteen!"

"The duchess is in a serious condition."

"And do you believe, in good faith, that she could be cured by money?"

"I will answer for it, if I can persuade you to ——"

"You can persuade me to nothing at all. Ah! I am one of the old school! And see if there is not some merit in my refusing you; we have not perhaps at this moment ten louis in the house. On the honor of a nobleman, if any one should die here, I don't know where we should find any thing to bury him with. The more's the pity! *noblesse oblige!* 'The Duke de La Tour d'Embleuse cannot take little boys to wean; and espec-

ially the little boy of Madame Chermidy! I had rather end my days on the straw. Doctor, I am glad that you have put me to the proof; I bear you no malice for it. One never truly knows himself, and I was not too sure of the figure I should make in the presence of an income of fifty thousand francs. You have felt the pulse of my honor, and it is in perfect health, thank God!— Does M. de Villanera offer the capital, or only the income?”

“At your choice, Monsieur the duke.”

“And I have chosen poverty. *O gué!* Did I not just tell you that Fortune was a capricious sprite? We have been sometimes friends and sometimes foes. Now she is making me advances again—but no, no! Adieu, my dear doctor!”

M. Le Bris rose from his chair. The duke retained him by the hand. “Observe,” said he, “that I am doing a heroic deed. Are you a player? do you understand cards?”

“I play whist.”

“Then you are not a player. But know, my friend, that when one once lets a vein of good luck escape him, it never returns. In refusing your propositions, I renounce all hope in the future, I condemn myself in perpetuity.”

“Accept, then, Monsieur the duke, and do not challenge adverse fortune. What! I bring you health for the duchess, ease for yourself, a tranquil and peaceful end for the poor child who is dying amid privations of every kind; I raise up your house, which is crumbling to dust; I give you a grandson ready made, a magnificent child, who can join your name to that of his father, and all this at what price? In consideration of a sentence of two lines inserted in a marriage contract,—yet you repulse me for a dealer in shame and a giver of evil counsels. You had rather condemn yourself, your wife, and your daughter, to death, than to lend your name to a little stranger. You fancy that you would be guilty of high treason against the nobility; but do you not know at what price the nobility has been preserved both in France and elsewhere since the crusades? We must admit reasons of state. How many names have been preserved by a miracle or by address! How many genealogical trees have been revived by a plebeian graft!”

“Almost all of them, my dear doctor; I could cite you twenty without going out of the street. Besides, the Villaneras are more than good;—one can ally himself to such people without scruple. One condition, however,

—the business must be done in broad daylight, without hypocrisy. My daughter may acknowledge a strange child in the interest of two illustrious houses of France and Spain; and if any one asks why, we will answer, for reasons of state. But you will save the duchess?"

"I answer for it."

"And my daughter also?"

The doctor shook his head slowly. The old man resumed, in a voice of resignation, —

"Well! one cannot have every thing at once. Poor child. We would gladly have shared our prosperity with her. Fifty thousand francs' income! I knew well that lucky vein would return!"

At this moment the duchess entered, and her husband recounted the offers of M. Le Bris to her with a childish delight. The doctor rose and offered his chair to the poor woman, who had walked since morning without resting. She leaned her elbow on the bed, face to face with the duke, and listened with closed eyes to all that he had to say to her. The old man, as fickle as one whose reason is tottering, had forgotten his own objections; he saw but one thing now in the world, namely, fifty thousand francs' income. He pushed his giddiness so far as to speak to the duchess of her own danger, and of the

importance of saving her own life; but this revelation glided over her heart without wounding it.

She unclosed her eyes, and turned them mournfully towards the doctor. "Alas!" said she, "Germaine, then, is condemned irrevocably, since this woman is willing to marry her to her lover?"

The doctor attempted to persuade her that all hope was not lost. She stopped him by a gesture, saying: "Do not lie, my poor friend. These people have put confidence in you. They have asked of you a girl so sick and so hopeless that they would not have to fear her recovery. If she should live by any accident, — if she should, some day, place herself between them to claim her rights and to discard the mistress, M. de Villanera would reproach you with having deceived him. You have not exposed yourself to this?"

M. Le Bris could not help blushing, for the duchess spoke the truth; but he extricated himself from this embarrassing position by praising Don Diego. He depicted him as a noble spirit, a chevalier of the olden time who had strayed into our century. "Believe me, Madame," said he to the duchess, "if our dear patient can be saved at all, she will be by her husband. He does not know her; he has never seen her; he loves another; and it is with a very

sad expectancy that he has determined to place a lawful wife between his mistress and himself. But the more interest he has in awaiting the hour of his widowhood, the more will he make it a duty to retard it as long as possible. Not only will he surround his wife with all the cares which her condition demands, but he is the man to establish himself as nurse beside her, and to watch her night and day. I guarantee that he will take the marriage in earnest, like all the duties of life. He is a Spaniard, and incapable of trifling with the sacraments; he has a reverential adoration for his mother, and a passionate tenderness for his child. Be sure that from the day on which you bestow on him your daughter's hand, he will have nothing more in common with Madame Chernidy. He will carry his wife to Italy; I shall be of the party, and you also, and if it pleases God to work a miracle, we three will be there to aid him."

"Parblen!" added the duke. "Every thing is possible; every thing may happen,—who would have said this morning that I should fall heir to an income of fifty thousand francs?"

At these words, the duchess repressed a flood of tears that gushed to her eyes. "My friend," returned she, "it is a sorrowful thing when parents inherit from their children.

If it pleases God to call my poor Germaine to himself, I shall bless his rigorous hand with tears, and shall await by your side the hour that will reunite us ; but I wish that the memory of my dear angel should be as pure as her life. For more than twenty years I have preserved an old bouquet of orange blossoms, withered like my youth and my happiness, — I wish to be able to place it on her coffin.”

“Pshaw !” cried the duke, “that is just like a woman ! You are ill, Madame, and orange blossoms will not cure you.”

“As to me” said she. Her glance finished the sentence, and even the duke understood it.

“This is the way !” said he ; “all die together at your ease ! And what will become of me ?”

“You will be rich, my good father,” said Germaine, opening the door of the dining-room.

The duchess sprang up like lightning, and ran to her daughter. But Germaine did not need to be supported. She embraced her mother, and advanced to the bed with a firm and resolute step, — the step of martyrs.

She was clothed in white, like Pauline in the fifth act of *Polyeucte*. A pale ray of the January sun fell on her forehead, and illumined it with an aureola. Her colorless face was like an effaced page, and the lustre of two great black

eyes was alone visible there. A mass of golden hair, thick and fine, clustered about her head. Beautiful hair is the last adornment of consumptives; they keep it to the end, and it is buried with them. Her transparent hands fell by her side among the folds of drapery, and such was the emaciation of her whole person, that she resembled one of those celestial beings who have neither the beauties nor the defects of the mortal woman.

She seated herself familiarly on the side of the bed, put her right arm round her father's neck, and extended her left hand to the duchess, drawing her gently towards her; then pointing to the chair, she said to M. Le Bris, — "Sit down there, doctor, that the family may be complete. I am not sorry for having listened at the door, — I was so afraid that I was not good for much any longer! Your discussion has shown me that I can still do something here below. You are witnesses that I do not regret life, and that I gave it up for lost more than six months ago. Besides, the earth is a gloomy abode for those who cannot breathe without suffering. My only regret was to leave to my parents a future of sorrow and wretchedness; now I am tranquil. I shall marry Count de Villanera, and adopt the child of this lady. Thanks, dear doctor, it is you who have saved us. Thanks to you, the misconduct of these

people will restore comfort to my excellent father, and life to this noble woman. As for me, I shall not die useless. There remains as my only wealth the memory of a pure life, and a poor little name, spotless as a communicant's veil,—these I give to my parents. Mamma, I beg you not to shake your head. Sick people must have their own way, must they not, doctor?"

"You are a saint, Mademoiselle," answered he, extending her his hand.

"Yes; they are waiting for me on high; my niche is all ready for me. I shall pray to God for you, my worthy friend, who scarcely ever pray yourself."

While thus speaking, her voice had an ærial ringing and unearthly tone,—a tone which reminded one of the serenity of the skies. The duchess started on hearing it; it seemed to her that the soul of her daughter was about to take flight like a bird through the open door of its cage. She clasped Germaine in her arms, exclaiming:—

"No, thou shall not quit us! We will all go to Italy, and the sunshine will cure thee. M. de Villanera is a man of feeling."

The sick girl slightly shrugged her shoulders, and replied, "The man of whom you speak will do much better to remain in Paris, where he finds his pleasure, and leave

me peacefully to pay my debt. I know to what I pledge myself in taking his name. Great God! what would they say if I should play them the trick of recovering! Madame Chermidy would have me expelled from the world by authority of law. Doctor, shall I be forced to see M. de Villanera?"

The doctor made a slight affirmative sign.

"Well," said she, "I will be civil to him. As to the child, I will embrace him willingly,—I have always loved children."

The duchess looked towards the sky, like a shipwrecked man towards the shore. "If God is just, he will not separate us," said she; "he will take us all together."

"No, my dear mamma, you must live for my father. You, papa, will live for yourself!"

"I promise it!" returned the old man naïvely. Neither the duchess nor her daughter suspected the monstrous egotism that was hidden beneath this answer. They were moved by it to tears, and the physician was the only one who smiled.

Semiramis announced that the duke's breakfast was on the table. "Adieu, ladies," said the doctor; "I am going to carry the tidings to Count de Villanera. It is likely that you will receive a visit from him to-day."

“So soon?” demanded the duchess.

“There is no time to lose,” returned Germaine.

“Meanwhile,” said the duke, “let us attend to the most urgent business,—let us breakfast.”

CHAPTER III.

THE WEDDING.

MLE BRIS had a chariot at the door. He drove to a celebrated confectioner's on the Boulevard, bought a violet-wood box, filled it with bonbons, entered his carriage again, and soon alighted at the door of Madame Chermidy. The beautiful Arlesian was the proprietor of the house, though she only occupied the first floor. The porter was one of her servants, and two strokes of the bell announced the entrance of each visitor.

The doors opened of their own accord to admit the young doctor. A footman removed his paletot from his shoulders with so much address that he hardly knew it, and another ushered him without announcement into the dining-room. The count and Madame Chermidy were just sitting down to table. The mistress of the house gave him both cheeks to kiss, and the count cordially shook him by the hand.

The covers were laid without a cloth upon an oval table

of carved oak. The hall was lined with ancient wainscot and modern painting,—a celebrated banker of the Chaussée d'Antin, who handled the brush in his leisure moments, had presented Madame Chermidy with four large panels of still life. The ceiling was a copy of *The Banquet of the Gods*, executed in the Farnese style. The carpet was from Smyrna, and the flower stands from Macao. A large Flemish chandelier, with a round paunch and lank arms, was hooked pitilessly into the centre of the ceiling, without respect for the assembled gods. Two sideboards, carved by Knecht, displayed a profusion of porcelain, crystal, and silver. On the table, the chafing-dishes were of silver, the tea-urn of silver-gilt, the plates of antique China, the flasks of Bohemian and the goblets of Venice glass. The knife-handles came from a Saxon service, made to order for Louis XV.

If M. Le Bris had been fond of antitheses, he might have drawn a sufficiently interesting comparison between the furniture of the woman Chermidy and that of Madam de La Tour d'Embleuse. But the physicians of Paris are imperturbable philosophers, who travel between luxury and poverty without marvelling at either, as they pass from cold to heat without ever taking cold.

Madame Chermidy was enveloped in a wadded wrapper

of white satin; and in this costume she resembled a jewel in its casket, or a cat on an eider coverlet. You have seen nothing more brilliant than her person, and nothing more downy than her robe. She was thirty-three years old,—a fine age for women who have known how to preserve themselves. Beauty, that most perishable of all earthly property, is the one whose management is found the most difficult. Nature gives it,— Art may add a little to it, but one must know how to protect it. Prodigals who waste it and misers who hoard it arrive in a few years at the same result,—the woman of genius is she who uses it with a sage economy. Madame Chermidy, born without passions and without virtues, temperate in all pleasures, and always calm at heart with the appearance of a Southern impetuosity, had taken as much care of her beauty as of her fortune. She husbanded her bloom as a tenor husbands his voice. She was one of those women who say witty nothings at every turn, but always knowingly; quite capable of throwing a million out of the window to make two come in at the door; but too prudent to crack a nut with her teeth. Her old admirers of Toulon would scarcely have recognized her, so much had she changed for the better. Without being as fair as a Fleming, her complexion had acquired a pearl-like brilliancy. The rosy

glow of health flushed her cheeks ; her little, round, and pouting mouth resembled a ripe cherry which a sparrow had parted with his beak ; and her eyes sparkled in their brown irids like the flame of vine-shoots on the hearth of a fire-place. Carelessness and good-nature formed the delicious mask of her charming countenance. Her hair, of a bluish black and growing very near her eyebrows, parted evenly over a white forehead, like the wings of a raven over a December snow. Every thing about her was youthful, fresh, and smiling ; and it was necessary to have good eyes to perceive at the corners of her beautiful mouth two almost imperceptible wrinkles, fine as the blonde hair of a new-born child, but which concealed an insatiable ambition, an iron will, a Chinese perseverance, and an energy capable of every crime.

Her hands were, perhaps, rather short, but white as ivory, with plump and tapering fingers, and well-shaped nails at the ends. Her foot was the short foot of the Andalusians, rounded like a flat-iron. She showed it as it was, and did not commit the folly of wearing long buskins. All her little body was short and plump, like her feet and hands ; the waist rather thick, the arms rather fleshy, the dimples rather deep — too much *embonpoint*, if you please, but the dainty *embonpoint* of a quail, or the savory roundness of a ripe fruit.

Don Diego followed her with his eyes and infantine admiration. Are not lovers children at every age? According to the ancient theogonies, Love is a baby five years and a half old, yet Hesiod assures us that he is older than Time.

The Count de Villanera is descended in a direct line from those Spaniards, chivalric to absurdity, whom the divine Cervantes has ridiculed, not without admiring them a little. Nothing in him betrays his Neapolitan origin. It was said that his ancestors had emigrated with their arms and baggage no further into the country than into the traditionary virtue of heroic Spain. He is a young man, — serious, rigid, and cold, a little stiff in his manners, but with a heart of fire and a soul of passion. He speaks little, and never without reflection, and he never has been guilty of a falsehood in his life. He does not like to argue; therefore he converses ill. He very rarely laughs, but his smile is full of a certain grace which does not lack dignity. Gayety, I admit, would ill become his figure. Fancy Don Quixote young and in a black coat. At the first glance, one remarks nothing but his long, black, glossy, and pointed mustaches. His long nose is sharply curved, like the beak of an eagle; his eyes, eyebrows, and hair are black; and his complexion the color of a

Portugal orange. His teeth would be fine if they were not so long, and if he did not smoke; they are cased in an enamel which is rather yellow, but so solid that it would serve for mill-stones. The white of his eyes draws slightly also on the same tint;—yet no one can deny that he has beautiful eyes. As to his mouth, it is excellent; two lips as rosy as an infant's are just visible beneath his thick mustache. His arms, legs, feet, and hands are of an aristocratic length,—he has the figure of a grenadier and the bearing of a prince.

If you ask me how such a man could have fallen into the hands of Madame Chermidy, I answer that the lady was more attractive and more skilful than Dulcinea del Toboso. Men of the temperament of Don Diego are not the most difficult to capture,—the lion throws himself into the snare more heedlessly than the fox. Artlessness, rectitude, and all the generous qualities, are only so many defects in our armor. Each one makes the world in his own image; and an honorable heart does not easily suspect the calculation and intrigue of which it is itself incapable. If any one had told M. de Villanera that Madame Chermidy loved him through interest, he would have shrugged his shoulders. She had asked him for nothing, and he had offered her every thing.

In accepting four millions, she had done him a favor; he was her debtor to the amount of four millions.

However, on seeing the glances which he cast on her from time to time, it was easy to divine that the fortune of the Villaneras might change hands in the space of eight days. A dog crouched at the feet of his master is not more respectful nor more attentive than was he. In his large, black eyes might be read the impassioned gratitude which every chivalrous man vows to the woman who has chosen him, and the religious admiration of a young father for her who has given him his child. There might be seen also an unsatisfied desire, a humble submission of strength to caprice, a fear of refusal, and a restless entreaty, which proved that Madame Chermidy was a woman of sense.

The little doctor, who was seated opposite the count, formed a singular contrast to him. M. Le Bris is what is called in France a *gentil garçon*. He may lack an inch or two of the medium height, but he is compact and well shaped. His face is not without character, yet no one would ever notice what kind of a nose he has. His expression says a great deal, his description tells you nothing. He dresses with a neatness akin to elegance; his chestnut whiskers are well trimmed, and his

hair is parted behind. He is not plebeian in appearance,—far from it,—yet it is difficult to define why he is not so. No marriageable girl would refuse him on account of his personal appearance, yet I should be greatly surprised if any one ever throws herself into the river for him. At the age of forty he will incline to corpulency.

I know of no physician better fitted for practice. He travels from morning till night through all grades of society, and is at home everywhere. He is a plebeian Alcibiades, who adapts himself without difficulty to the customs of every country. He is beloved in the faubourg Saint-Germain for his reserve, in the Chaussée d'Antin for his wit, and in the Rue Vivienne for his frankness. The women of all classes labor actively for his renown,—and do you know why? It is because at the bedside of every patient, whether young or old, handsome or ugly, he shows an amiable assiduity,—a sort of medium gallantry, at once partaking of respect and love. He has never defined the nature of this feeling to others, perhaps he never has defined it clearly to himself. But it inspires all the women with a kindly feeling for him, which promises to be of great service in his profession.

His old comrades in the hospital have named him, for this reason, *The Key of Hearts*. I know a house where he was called, and not without reason, *The Tomb of Secrets*. His young patients in the faubourg Saint-Germain reproach him with going behind the scenes every evening in the Imperial Academy of Music, and term him *la Mort aux Rats*; but his discretion in the greenroom has caused him to be surnamed *le Nouveau continent*.

“Well, Tomb of Secrets,” said Madame Chermidy to him with her slight provincial accent, “have you found some one to suit me?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Is it the consumptive girl that you spoke of?”

“Mademoiselle de La Tour d’Embleuse.”

“Good! we will not degrade ourselves. I have always taken an interest in consumptive people,—in coughing women,—and you see that Heaven is rewarding me now.”

“Doctor,” demanded the count, “have you spoken of the conditions?”

“Yes, my dear Count; they accept them all.”

Madame Chermidy uttered a cry of joy. “The affair is settled! Long live Paris, where duchesses are to be bought for cash!”

The count bent his brows. The doctor rejoined quickly :

“ Ah! madame, I know your heart,— if you had been with me, you would have wept.”

“ Is it very touching, then, for a duchess to sell her daughter? An episode in the slave market?”

“ Say, rather, an episode from the life of martyrs.”

“ You are complaisant towards Don Diego!”

The doctor related the scene in which he had played a part. The count was moved. Madame Chermidy took out her handkerchief and wiped two fine eyes, which had no manner of need of it.

“ I am very glad,” remarked the count, “ that this is her own resolution. If her parents had accepted it of themselves, I might have judged them harshly.”

“ Before judging them, it is necessary to know whether they had any bread in the house this morning.”

“ Bread!”

“ Bread, literally.”

“ Adieu,” said the count, “ I am going to wish my mother a happy new year; she was asleep when I left the house this morning. I shall inform her of the result of your proceedings, and ask her what must be done. What, doctor, are there really people who want for bread?”

“I have met some few of them in my lifetime. Unfortunately, I had not, as to-day, a million to offer them.”

The count kissed the hand of Madame Chermidy, and hastened to the house of his mother. The pretty woman remained in tête-à-tête with the doctor.

“Since there are some people who want bread, doctor,” said she, “let us take a cup of coffee. . . . How can I see this martyr of consumption? for I must know to whom I entrust my child.”

“At the church, perhaps, on the day of the marriage.”

“At the church! She is able to go out, then?”

“Doubtless—in a carriage.”

“I thought her further advanced than this.”

“Would you wish, then, a marriage *in extremis*?”

“No, but I wish to be sure. Divine goodness, doctor, what if she should take it into her head to get well!”

“The medical faculty would be completely astonished.”

“And Don Diego would be completely married! and I would kill you, you Key of Hearts!”

“Alas, madame, I do not feel myself in any danger then.”

“How, *alas!*”

“Pardon me, it was the physician that spoke, and not the friend.”

“And after she is married, will you still attend her?”

“Must we let her die without assistance?”

“*Dame!* why does one marry her? it is not that she may live forever?”

The doctor repressed a movement of disgust, and answered in the most natural tone, like a man whose virtue was not officious:

“*Mon Dieu!* madame, it is a fixed habit, and I am too old to correct it. We physicians care for our patients as the Newfoundland dogs draw drowning men from the water. It is a matter of instinct. The dog blindly saves the enemy of his master, and I shall attend the poor creature as if we all had an interest in saving her.”

After the doctor's departure, Madame Chermidy sought her dressing-room, and put herself into the hands of her waiting-maid. For the first time for many years, she suffered herself to be dressed without heeding it,—she had many other cares to occupy her mind. This marriage which she had arranged, this skilful contrivance which she had applauded as a stroke of genius, might yet turn to her confusion and her ruin. Nothing was needed but a caprice of nature or the stupid honesty of a physician, to foil her best-laid plans and to frustrate her dearest hopes. She began to doubt every thing,—her doctor, her star, and her lover.

Towards three o'clock, the defile of callers commenced in her drawing-room. She was forced to smile on every pair of whiskers that approached her, and go into ecstasies over forty boxes of bonbons, all of which came from the same shop. She heartily cursed the friendly importunities of New-year's day, but she suffered none of the cares which were consuming her to escape, and all who quitted the room together, sung her praises on the staircase.

She had one very precious talent in a mistress of a house,—she knew how to make everybody talk. She spoke to each one of what interested him most, and drew men unconsciously into their own element. This uneducated woman, who was too indolent and too restless to hold a book in her hand, made herself a capital of useful knowledge by turning over the acquirements of all her acquaintances; and they all took it with the best will in the world. We are so made that we inwardly thank any one who forces us to utter our favorite tirade, or to relate the story that we tell well. He who draws out our wit is never a fool; and when one is contented with himself, he is discontented with no one else. The most intelligent men labored for the reputation of Madame Chermidy, sometimes by furnishing her with ideas, and sometimes by saying with a secret

complaisance, — “She is a superior woman; she understands me.”

In the course of the afternoon, she laid hands on a renowned homœopathist, who had charge of the health of the most illustrious families of Paris, and found means to question him in the presence of seven or eight persons on the point which preoccupied her.

“Doctor,” said she, “you who know every thing, tell me whether consumptive people are ever cured?”

The homœopathist replied gallantly, that she would never have any quarrel with such a malady.

“I am not in question,” returned she. “But I am interested with all my heart in a poor child whose lungs are in a sad state.”

“Send me to her, madame. There is no cure impossible to homœopathy.”

“You are very kind. But her physician, a simple allopathist, assures me that she has but one lung; even that is attacked.”

“We can cure it.”

“The lung, may-be. But the patient?”

“The patient can live with a single lung; that has been seen. I do not promise you that she will ever be able to climb Mont Blanc on a run, but she may live very comfortably for several years by means of care and globules.”

“This is a promise for the future! I never could have believed that any one might live with but one lung.”

“We have numerous examples of it. Autopsy has demonstrated ——”

“Autopsy! but one only makes an autopsy upon dead bodies?”

“You are right, madame; I know that I seem to have uttered an absurdity, but hear me, notwithstanding. In Algeria, the cattle of the Arabs are generally phthisical. The flocks are badly tended; they pass the night in the fields, and often take diseases of the chest. Our Mussulman subjects have no veterinary surgeon, they leave to Mahomet the care of curing their cows and oxen. They lose a great many by this negligence, but they do not lose all. The animals sometimes recover without the aid of art, and despite all the ravages which the disease has made in their bodies. One of our brother physicians in the African army has seen cows killed in the slaughter-houses of Bildah, cows that had recovered from the pulmonary consumption, and had lived for several years with but a single lung, and that in a very bad state. This is the autopsy of which I wished to speak.”

“I understand,” replied Madame Chermidy. “Then if all our acquaintances were killed, some would be found among them whose lungs are not whole?”

“And who are not much the worse for it. Precisely, madame.”

An hour later, a new circle was gathered about the drawing-room fire. Madame Chermidy saw an obdurate old allopathist enter, who did not believe in miracles, who willingly made the worst of every thing, and who wondered that so fragile an animal as man could ever attain his sixtieth year.

“Doctor,” said she, “you ought to have come a moment sooner; you have lost a fine panegyric on homœopathy. M. P——, who has just gone out, boasts of being able to make us all live with but one lung. Would you have contradicted him?”

The old physician raised his eyebrows with an imperceptible shrug of the shoulder. “Madame,” returned he, “the lung is at once the most delicate and the most indispensable of all our organs; it renews life at each second by a prodigy of combustion which Spallanzani and the greatest physiologists have been able neither to explain nor describe. Its contexture is of a fearful fragility, and its function exposes it to unceasing dangers. It is in the lung that our blood comes in immediate contact with the external air. If we reflected that this air is almost always either too warm or too cold, or mixed with deleterious gases, we would not

breathe once without making our will. The celebrated Kant, a German philosopher who prolonged his life by dint of prudence, took care, when taking his daily hygienic walk, to close his mouth and to breathe exclusively through his nostrils, so much did he fear the direct action of the ambient atmosphere upon his lungs."

"But, my dear doctor, are we all then condemned to die of consumption?"

"Very many do die of it, madame; and the homœopaths do not prevent them."

"But some are cured, however? Let us see,—I will suppose that a young and healthy man marries a beautiful consumptive girl. He takes her to Italy, devotes himself to her cure, and surrounds her with the cares of a man of your school. Is it not possible in two or three years ——"

"To save the husband? It is possible: still I would not answer for it."

"The husband! the husband! but what is his danger?"

"The danger of contagion, madame. Who knows whether the tubercles which form in the lungs of a consumptive patient do not scatter seeds of death in the surrounding air. But pardon me; this is neither the time nor the place for developing a new theory, of which I am the author, and which I intend one day to submit to the Acad-

emy of Medicine. I will relate to you only one fact which has fallen under my observation."

"Speak on, my dear doctor; it is both pleasure and profit to listen to a savant like you."

"Five years ago, madame, I attended the wife of a tailor in the Rue Richelieu, a poor little creature who was horribly consumptive. Her husband was a tall German, solid, well built, and as ruddy as an apple. These people adored each other. In 1849 they had a child that did not live. The wife died in 1850; I had done all I could to save her. I was asked for my bill, and I did not pass the house again for two years. At last the tailor sent for me. I found him in his bed, so changed that I would not have known him. He was in the third stage of phthisis. I spied a little woman weeping at his pillow; it was his new wife;—he had been foolish enough to marry again. The sick man died according to the programme, and the widow has inherited his disease. I visited her yesterday, and though it has been taken in time, I can answer for nothing."

Madame Chermidy closed her doors at five o'clock, and lost herself in very melancholy reflections.

She had never despaired of becoming Countess de Villanera. Every woman who betrays her husband aspires necessarily to widowhood; much more, when she

has a lover rich and single. She had every reason to believe that Chermidy would not be immortal. A man who lives between sky and sea is an invalid in danger of death.

Her hopes had taken strength since the birth of the little Gomez. She held the count by a bond which is all-powerful over honorable souls,—that of paternal love. In marrying M. de Villanera to a dying woman, she secured her son's future and her own. But now, on the eve of accomplishing this triumphant project, she discovered two dangers which she had not foreseen. Germaine might recover. If she perished, she might involve the count in her fate by bequeathing to him the germ of death. In the first case, Madame Chermidy would lose every thing, even to her child; for by what right could she reclaim the legitimate son of Don Diego and Mademoiselle de La Tour d'Embleuse? On the other hand, if the count must die after his wife, she did not care to marry him. She felt herself too young and too beautiful to play the rôle of the second wife of the tailor.

“Happily,” thought she, “nothing is concluded yet. The count is in love, and he is a father,—I will make him do as I please. If it is absolutely neces-

sary that he should marry in order to adopt his son, we will find another patient whose death is surer, and whose ailment is not contagious." She said, to reassure herself, that the old allopathist was an original, who was capable of inventing the most absurd theories. She had heard it maintained that the consumption was sometimes transmitted from father to son; but she thought it probable that Germaine would keep for herself disease and death, as her wedding paraphernalia. But what disquieted her the most was the possibility of one of those marvellous cures which foil all the calculations of human prudence. She began to hate Doctor Le Bris as much for his scruples as for his talent; and she at last resolved to stay the proceedings of Don Diego until she had taken all necessary precautions.

But events had taken a rapid stride in the course of the day, and at ten o'clock in the evening the count came to inform her that her plans had been followed to the letter.

Don Diego, on quitting the table, had hastened at once to his mother's house. The old countess was a woman of the same stamp as her son, tall, thin, bony, outlined about as gracefully as a board, encamped majestically upon two large feet, black enough to frighten

little children, and grimacing an aristocratic smile between bandeaux of gray hair. She listened to the recital of Don Diego with the rigid and disdainful condescension of the lofty virtues of olden times for the petty vices of to-day. On his side, the count did not attempt to extenuate any thing that was reprehensible in his marriage calculations. These two persons, honorable by nature, but drawn by the force of circumstances into one of those slippery bargains which are sometimes concluded at Paris, thought only of the means of doing a thing worthily, which their ancestors would not have done at all. The dowager did not spice the conversation with even a mute reproach,—the time for remonstrances was past, the only point in question now was to secure the future of the family by preserving the name of Villanera.

When every thing was arranged, the countess entered her carriage, and ordered her coachman to drive to the hotel Sanglié. The baron's footman conducted her to the duchess' apartments. Semiramis opened the door, and ushered her into the drawing-room, where M. and Madame de La Tour d'Embleuse received her beside a little blazing fire, made of strange materials,—two of the kitchen shelves, a straw chair, and a few rows

of cloak pegs. The duchess had made as much of a toilette as she was able; but her black velvet robe was blue in all the folds. The duke wore the ribbon of his orders over a coat which was shabbier than a writing-master's.

The interview was solemn and cold. Madame de La Tour d'Embleuse could not bear any good-will to those people who were speculating on the approaching death of her daughter. The duke was more at his ease;— he essayed to be charming. But the rigidity of the dowager paralyzed all his graces, and he felt himself chilled through his whole frame. Madame de Villanera, by an error which is often committed in first meetings, included the duke and the duchess in the same judgment. She suspected them both of avidity, and fancied that she read in their countenances a sordid joy at the bargain. However, she did not forget the pressing interests which brought her there, but coldly made known the motives of her step. She discussed the conditions of the marriage as a notary would have done; and when every point had been agreed upon, she rose from her fauteuil, and said, in a metallic voice:

“Monsieur the duke, and Madame the duchess, I have the honor to ask the hand of Mademoiselle Germaine de

La Tour d'Embleuse, your daughter, for Count Diego Gomez de Villanera, my son."

The duke replied, that his daughter was honored by the choice of M. de Villanera.

The marriage day was fixed by common consent, and the duchess went in search of Germaine to present her to the dowager. The poor child was ready to die of fright on being brought before this tall spectre of a woman. The countess was pleased with her, spoke to her in a motherly way, and kissed her forehead, saying to herself: "What a pity that she must die! she might have been the very daughter-in-law to suit me!"

On her return, Madame de Villanera found Don Diego playing with the child in a room strewn with toys. The father and son formed an amusing tableau,—a stranger would have smiled at it. The count handled the fragile creature with timid tenderness,—he trembled lest a movement of his powerful arms should break his child in pieces. The little boy was large of his age, but awkward, ugly, and shy to excess. In the year that he had been separated from his nurse, he had seen but two human beings, his father and his grandmother, and he had lived between these two colossi like Gulliver in the Isle of Giants. The dowager had sequestered herself for

his sake,—she made and received but very few visits, for fear of betraying the secret of the house. The only accomplices in this clandestine education were five or six old servants who had grown gray in the livery,—men of another age and another clime. You would have called them the wrecks of the army of Gonsalvo, or the shipwrecked of the Invincible Armada. In the shadow of this strange family circle, the boy grew up joylessly. He had no companions of his own age, and it was a useless trouble to teach him how to play. Some children at two years of age know how to say every thing; he could hardly articulate five or six words of two syllables. A father is always a father:—such as he was, Don Diego adored him; but he was afraid of Don Diego. He called the old duchess *mamma*, but could seldom be persuaded to kiss her without crying. As to his mother, he knew her by sight; he met her sometimes in an obscure cross-road of the Bois du Boulogne, far from the avenues frequented by the crowd. She left her chariot at a distance, and came on foot to the carriage of the count, where she kissed the child stealthily and gave him bonbons, exclaiming, with sincere affection, “Ah! my poor boy, can I never call thee mine?” It would not have been prudent to take him to her house, even if the

duchess had permitted it. Madame Chermidy was careful to save appearances. All Paris suspected her position, but the world makes a great difference between a woman suspected and a woman convicted. There were even to be found here and there a few people innocent enough to answer for her virtue.

Madame de Villanera informed her son that the proposal was made and accepted. She praised Germaine without speaking of her family, and portrayed the destitution in which the La Tour d'Embleuse were living. Don Diego sought an expedient by which to render them prompt assistance without humiliation. The countess wished simply to open her purse to the old duke, quite sure that he would not refuse to empty it, but the count thought it more delicate to buy the corbeille immediately, and to slip a thousand louis for the bride in one of the drawers. This alms, thus concealed beneath flowers, would serve to pay the most urgent debts, and to support the family for the next fifteen days. No sooner said than done,—the mother and son hastened to make the purchases. Before going out, Madame de Villanera kissed the orange cheeks of her grandson, saying, "So, my poor bastard, you shall have a name for your New Year's gift!"

Nothing is impossible in Paris,—the corbeille was improvised in the course of a few hours. The stuffs, the laccs, the cashmeres, and the jewelry were sent home the same evening. The countess took pains to arrange every thing herself, and to place the rouleau of gold in the pin-drawer. At ten o'clock the corbeille set out for the hôtel Sanglié, and the count for the hôtel Chermidy.

Germaine and her mother turned over the treasures which had been sent them with a cold curiosity. Madame de La Tour d'Embleuse admired the ornaments of her daughter very much as Clytemnestra admired the sacrificial fillets designed for the brow of Iphigenia. Germaine reminded her parents of the chapter of Bernardin de Saint Pierre in which Virginia expends her aunt's money in small presents for her family and friends. "What shall we do with all these," said she; "we who have no longer either friends or family? Here are a great many fine things wasted!" The duke opened the drawers with a lofty disdain, like a man who had been familiar with the greatest splendor; but his indifference did not hold out in sight of the gold. His eyes sparkled. Those aristocratic hands, which had so often been opened for giving, clutched together as eagerly as the claws of a miser. He hastily disembowelled the rouleaux and

flashed the tawny gold in the glare of the smoky lamp, and bent his ear with delight to the sound of the tinkling dishes which were ringing out so joyously the funeral knell of Germaine.

Passion is a brutal leveller, which equalizes all men. Had it been nine o'clock in the morning, M. the duke de La Tour d'Embleuse might have played his part in the concert of the domestics under the vestibule of the hotel. However, education resumed the ascendancy. He shut up the money in the drawer, and said, with well feigned indifference, — "This belongs to Germaine, — lay it by carefully, my daughter. You must lend us a little to make the pot boil. We have dined but poorly to-day; if I were as rich as I shall be a month hence, I would take you all to sup at the restaurant." The dying girl divined the secret envy of the old man. You cannot imagine with what tender eagerness, with what respectful pity, Germaine forced him to empty the coffer, while the duchess arranged his toilette that he might go to sup in the city. He returned towards two o'clock in the morning. His wife and daughter heard an unequal step in the corridor which ran along their chamber, but neither opened their lips, and each one held her breath to make the other believe that she was sleeping.

Don Diego and Madame Chermidy passed a stormy evening. The beautiful Arlesian commenced by stating to her lover all her objections against the marriage. The count, who never argued, answered by two reasons which admitted of no reply, — “The affair is concluded, and it was you who wished it.” — She changed her tactics, and tried the effect of menaces. She threatened to break with him, to quit him, to take back her child, to make an exposure, to die. The little lady was beautiful in her anger. The count entreated her pardon, but without abating any thing of his resolution. He yielded like one of those good steel springs which are bent with infinite difficulty, and which rebound with the rapidity of lightning. Then she opened the floodgate of her tears, and exhausted the arsenal of her caresses. For three quarters of an hour she was the most unhappy and the most loving of women. You would have thought, to see her, that she was the victim and Germaine the executioner. Don Diego wept with her, — the tears rolled over his face like rain over a bronze statue. He committed every faint-hearted offence that love dictated. He spoke of the future countess with a coldness approaching contempt; he swore on his honor that she could not live long. He offered to show Germaine to Madame Cher-

midy before the nuptials. But his word was given, and the Villaneras never retracted what they had once promised. All that she could obtain was that he would come to see her until the day of the ceremony, clandestinely, without the knowledge of any one, and, above all; of his mother.

The next morning, Madame de Villauera accompanied him to the hôtel de Sanglié, and presented him to his new relatives. This was a visit of ceremony, which lasted a quarter of an hour, at the most. Germaine nearly fainted in his presence. She said afterwards that his harsh countenance frightened her, and that she fancied that she saw the man who would put her in the ground. As for him, he felt ill at ease. Nevertheless, he found a few words of courtesy and acknowledgment, with which the duchess was touched.

He came every day without his mother while the banns were being published. He brought a bouquet, according to the established custom. Germaine entreated him to choose flowers without scent, — she could not support odors. These daily interviews embarrassed him and fatigued Germaine; but it was necessary to conform to usage. M. Le Bris feared for a moment that the patient would succumb before the appointed day. The fears of

the doctor gained over Madame Chermidy. When she saw that Germaine was really doomed, she was alarmed lest she should die too soon, and interested herself in her life. Sometimes she even accompanied the count to the Rue de Poitiers, and awaited him in her carriage.

The duchess understood that she could not marry her daughter from the entresol of the hôtel Sanglié, and she hired handsomely furnished apartments, at a thousand francs a month, in a neighboring house. Germaine was carried there without accident on a sunny day. It was there that Don Diego came to pay his court,—the old countess came too, as often as he, and remained much longer. She was not long in comprehending Madame de la Tour d'Embleuse, and the ice was soon broken. She admired the virtues of this noble woman, who had walked for eight years under lowly portals without once bending her head. On her side, the duchess recognized in Madame de Villanera one of those choice spirits which the world does not appreciate, because it never looks beneath its outer covering. The bed of Germaine served as the connecting link between these two mothers. The old countess more than once disputed with Madame de la Tour d'Embleuse the fatigues and disgusts of the duty of nurse. It was which should take upon herself the most

painful tasks and drudgeries in which the devotion of the sublime sex displays itself.

The old duke gave his wife a supplement of cares, which she could well have dispensed with. The money had restored to him a third youth,—a youth without excuse, whose dull and repugnant follies interested no one any longer. He lived away from home, and the discreet solicitude of the duchess dared not inquire concerning his actions. He was seeking, he said, to divert himself from his domestic sorrows. The gold of his daughter glided through his fingers, and God alone knows whose were the hands that picked it up! In his eight years of wretchedness, he had lost that need of elegance which ennobles even the vices of a well-born man. No pleasure came amiss to him, and he sank so low as to bring to the pillow of Germaine the nauseating odors of an *estaminet*. The duchess trembled at the idea of abandoning this aged infant in Paris, with more money than was needed to kill ten men. To carry him to Italy was not to be thought of. Paris was the only spot in which he had known what it was to live, and his heart was chained to the pavements of the Boulevards. The poor woman felt herself distracted by two opposing duties. She would gladly have rent herself in twain, that she might both soothe the last

moments of her daughter, and lead back the wandering old age of her incorrigible husband. Germaine witnessed from her couch the internal struggles which were convulsing the duchess. By suffering together, the mother and daughter had learned to have but one soul in common, and to understand each other without saying a word. One day, the patient declared positively that she would not quit France.

“Am I not comfortable here?” said she. “What is the use of tossing an expiring torch about on the highways?”

At this moment, Madame de Villanera entered with the count and M. Le Bris.

“My dear Countess,” exclaimed Germaine, “do you absolutely insist on sending me to Italy? I can do what I have to do much better here, and I do not want my mother to leave Paris.”

“Well! let her remain!” rejoined the countess, with her Spanish impetuosity. “We do not need her,—I can take care of you better than any one else. You are my daughter, do you understand,—and we will prove it to you.”

The count insisted on the necessity of the journey, and the doctor chimed in the chorus with him. “Besides,” added M. Le Bris, “the duchess will really do more harm

than good. Two invalids in one carriage will not help matters much. The journey is good for you,— it would fatigue the duchess.”

The truth was, the kind-hearted gentleman was anxious to spare the duchess the sight of the death-struggles of her daughter. It was agreed that Madame de La Tour d’Embleuse should remain in Paris. Germaine was to set out accompanied by her husband, her mother-in-law, her son, and the doctor.

M. Le Bris had pledged himself rather hastily to leave his practice. The journey might cost him dear, if it lasted long. The difficulty was not in finding another physician to take charge of the duchess and his other patients,— but Paris is a city in which the absent are in fault, and he who does not show himself every day is quickly forgotten. The young doctor had a solid friendship for Germaine; but friendship never extends so far as to self-forgetfulness;— that is one of the privileges of love.

On his side, Don Diego had set his heart on doing his duty thoroughly, and he wished to take with his wife her own physician. He asked M. Le Bris what he made a year.

“Twenty thousand francs,” said the doctor. “Of these, I receive five or six thousand.”

“And the rest?”

“Are bad debts. We physicians do not have recourse to the sheriff.”

“Would you go to Italy for twenty thousand francs a year?”

“My poor count, don't let us speak of years. The rest of her days may be numbered by months,—perhaps even by weeks.”

“Say two thousand francs a month then, and come with us.”

M. Le Bris struck hands with the count. Interest is mingled with all human affections. It plays its rôle in comedy as well as tragedy. Love and hatred, crime and virtue, life and death, never come in contact without jostling a brilliant and high-sounding personage, who calls himself Money.

The doctor was charged with remitting to M. the Duke de La Tour d'Embleuse the price of his daughter. Don Diego would never have known how to have given a million to a nobleman. M. Le Bris, who knew the duke, easily acquitted himself of the commission. He carried him an *inscription de rente* for fifty thousand francs, and said:

“M. the duke, here is the health of the duchess.”

“And mine also,” added the old man. “You have rendered us service, doctor, and I wish to attach you to my household.”

“It is already done,” replied the young man adroitly.

He had attended them all for nothing for the last three years.

On the morning of the marriage, Germaine’s wedding dress was brought her to try on. She gently lent herself to the mournful mockery. The dressmaker perceived that a point of the corsage was ripped.

“I will repair this,” said she.

“What is the use?” returned the dying girl, “I shall not use it.”

They brought her her veil and coiffure. She remarked the absence of the orange-blossoms. “That is right,” said she, “I feared that they would have insisted on them.”

These preparations wore an air of funereal sadness. “Mamma,” said Germaine, “do you remember those lines of Jasmin, the translation of which you read me in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*?

‘The roads should blossom, the roads should bloom,
So fair a bride shall leave her home!

Should blossom and bloom with garlands gay,
So fair a bride shall pass to-day!

“How does the poem end? I cannot remember. Ah!
now I have it!

‘The roads should mourn and be veiled in gloom,
So fair a corpse shall leave its home,
Should mourn and should weep, ah, well-away!
So fair a corpse shall pass to-day!’*’*

The duchess burst into tears. Germaine entreated pardon for her thoughtlessness. “Wait,” said she, “you shall see me before the enemy! I shall bear your name worthily. Am I not the last of the La Tour d’Embleuse?”

The witnesses of Don Diego were the Spanish Ambassador and the Secretary of Legation of the Two Sicilies; those of Germaine were Baron de Sanglié and Doctor Le Bris. The whole faubourg had been invited to the marriage mass. M. De Villanera’s acquaintances were the *elite* of Paris, and the old duke was not sorry to be publicly resuscitated as a millionaire. Three quarters of the guests were punctual at the ren-

* The translator is indebted for this rendering to Longfellow’s exquisite version of “The Blind Girl of Castèl Cuillè.”

devious;—despite the discretion of all the parties concerned, everybody suspected something;—in any case, it was a rare and curious spectacle, the marriage of a dying girl. As the clock struck midnight, two or three hundred carriages, just from the ball or theatre, opened their doors before the entrance of Saint Thomas d'Aquin.

The bride descended the steps in the arms of Dr. Le Bris. The crowd found her less pale than they had hoped for,—she had begged her mother to put a little rouge on her cheeks, in which to play the comedy.

She advanced with a firm step to the prie-Dieu designed for her. Her father gave her his hand, and walked triumphantly on her left, ogling the assembly. The singular old man could not suppress an exclamation on perceiving in the crowd a charming countenance, half unveiled. “What a handsome woman!” he exclaimed, as if on the Boulevard.

It was Madame Chermidy, who had come to judge with her own eyes how much longer the bride had to live.

After the ceremony, a post-chaise with four horses carried the travellers in the direction of the barrière Fontainebleu; it wheeled about, however, at the exterior

boulevard, and returned to the hôtel de Villanera. It was necessary to take the little Gomez, and to give Germaine a few hours' repose. It was Doctor Le Bris who bore the bride to her nuptial chamber.

CHAPTER IV.

TOUR IN ITALY.

GERMAINE SLEPT but little on the first night of her nuptials. She was laid in a large, canopied bed, in the middle of a strange chamber. An alabaster night-lamp, suspended from the ceiling, dimly lighted the tapestries. A thousand grimacing figures detached themselves from the walls and seemed to dance around her bed. For the first time in twenty years, the duchess, who had never been absent from her daughter, was missing,—she was replaced by Madame de Villancra, a tall, attentive shadow, but frightfully grim and forbidding. In such gloomy surroundings, the poor girl could neither wake nor sleep. She closed her eyes that she might not see the tapestries; but she quickly opened them again, for other and more fearful images glided beneath her eyelids. She fancied that she saw Death standing before her, as he is represented in the missals by the illuminators of the Middle Ages. “If I sleep,” thought she, “no one will wake me,—they have put me here

to die." A large clock on the mantel-piece marked the time. The sharp tick of the pendulum and the unvarying regularity of the movement grated on her nerves. She entreated the countess to stop it. But ere long the silence appeared to her more terrible than the noise: she caused life to be restored to the innocent machine.

Towards morning, fatigue became stronger than care, and Germaine let fall her heavy eyelids. But she awoke almost immediately, and saw with terror that her hands were crossed upon her breast. She knew that it was in this position the dead are buried, and she threw her little fleshless arms from beneath the covering, and clung to the bedstead as if to life. The countess disengaged her right hand, kissed it gently, and held it in her own as she knelt by her side. Then only did the sick girl fall into a slumber, in which she continued until daybreak. She dreamed that the countess was standing at her right with white wings and an angelic countenance. At her left, she saw another woman, but whose face she could not recognize; all that she could see was a black guipure veil, two great cashmere wings, and diamond claws. The count was walking with a restless step from one woman to the other, and

each was whispering in his ear. At last the heavens opened, and a beautiful, rosy infant descended from the clouds and flew, smiling like the cherubs, towards the sleeper. She stretched out her arms to receive him, and the movement awakened her.

As she opened her eyes, a curtain was noiselessly drawn aside, and she saw the old countess enter in traveling costume, with the little Gomez running by her side. The child smiled instinctively at this beautiful little white woman with golden hair, and made a show of climbing on the bed. Germaine attempted to take him, but she was not strong enough. Madame de Villanera lifted him like a feather, and laid him gently among the pillows of his new mother.

“My daughter,” said she, with ill-restrained emotion, “I present to you the Marquis de los Montes de Hierro.”

Germaine clasped the child in her arms, and kissed him two or three times. The little Gomez submitted with a good grace, and even gave her a kiss in return. She gazed at him long and steadily, and felt her heart warm towards him. I know not what struggle was going on in her thoughts, but after an imperceptible effort, she said, in a half audible voice, “My son!”

The dowager embraced her for these words. “Marquis,” said she, “this is thy little mother.”

“Mother!” repeated the child, smiling.

“Wilt thou let me be thy mother?” asked Germaine.

“Yes,” said he.

“Poor little fellow, it will not be for long; no!”

“No,” echoed the child, without knowing what he was saying.

From this moment, the mother and child were friends. The little Gomez would not leave the room, but insisted on being present at the toilette of Germaine. She was holding him on her knees when the count entered to wish her good morning and to kiss her hand. She felt a little shame at being thus surprised, and let the child slip down on the carpet.

Germaine had as yet loved no one but her mother and her father. She had never been to boarding-school, she had had no female friends, and she had never met the tall brothers of her schoolmates in the parlor. The waste of love and friendship which is made in boarding-schools, and which prematurely wastes the hearts of young girls, had never encroached upon the wealth of her affections. She therefore loved her mother-in-law and her son with a prodigality which was in no danger of exhaustion; she confessed for Doctor Le Bris a fraternal tenderness; but she imagined it impossible to love her husband, — this

alone was beyond her power ; it were better to renounce all thoughts of it. Not that the count was a disagreeable man, — any other than Germaine would have found him perfect. Of all her travelling companions, he was assuredly the most patient, the most attentive, and the most delicate, — a knight charged with escorting a young queen would not have performed his duty better. It was he who arranged every thing for the advance and the repose, regulated the pace of the horses, chose the inns, and prepared the lodgings. They travelled by slow journeys ; halting twice in the distance of ten leagues.

This style of travelling might have exhausted the patience of a young and healthy man ; — Don Diego only feared lest they might go too fast and fatigue Germaine. He was a smoker, as I told you before. From the first day of the journey he limited himself to two cigars a day, one in the morning before setting out, and the other at night, before retiring. But one morning, the invalid said to him :

“Have you not been smoking? The scent lingers about your clothes.”

He left his cigars at the first inn, and smoked no more.

The sick girl accepted every thing from her husband without thanking him for any thing. Had she not given

him more than he could ever repay to her? She repeated to herself constantly that Don Diego only watched over her through duty, or rather to acquit his conscience; that friendship had no share in his attentions; that he was coldly playing the rôle of a good husband; that he loved another woman; that he did not belong to himself; that he had left his heart in France. She finally reflected that this man, who seemed so eager to prolong her life, had married her in the hope that she would soon die, and she grew indignant at seeing him attempt to delay by his efforts the event which he hastened by his wishes.

She was as harsh towards him as she was gentle towards every one else. She occupied the back of the carriage with the old countess. Don Diego, the doctor, and the child sat facing them, with their backs to the horses. When sometimes the little Gomez climbed upon her knees, or the dowager, put to sleep by the monotonous motion, let her head fall upon this wasted shoulder, she lulled the countess and played with the child; but she could not endure that her husband should even ask her how she felt.

She answered him one day with cutting irony, "I am getting on finely,—my sufferings are on the increase."

Don Diego feigned to look at the landscape through the carriage window, and she saw large tears fall upon the wheels.

The journey lasted three months without effecting any change either in the health or the humor of Germaine. She grew neither better nor worse,—she lingered. She saw all Italy pass by her carriage windows without interesting herself in any thing, neither would she fix upon any place of abode. It is true that in winter, Italy strongly resembles France. It freezes a little less there, but it rains much more.

The climate of Nice would have done her much good. Don Diego had hired in advance a beautiful villa on the English promenade, with a garden of orange trees in full bearing. But she grew weary of seeing a whole people of consumptives defiling past the house from morning till night. The doomed ones who are exiled to Nice are afraid of each other, and each one reads his own face in the paleness of his neighbor. “Let us go to Florence!” said she. Don Diego ordered horses for Florence.

She found that this city had a festal air, which seemed to mock her wretchedness. The first time that she took an airing, on hearing the music of the Austrian regiments, and seeing the rosy-cheeked flower-girls throwing

bouquets into her carriage, she bitterly reproached her husband for exposing her to so cruel a contrast. Pisa remained,—they carried her to Pisa. She wished to see the *Campo Santo* and the terrible masterpiece of Orcagna. These funereal paintings,—these pictures of Death as the mistress of Life so worked on her imagination, that she left the place more dead than alive.

She expressed a desire to go to Rome. The air of this city was not likely to do her much good, but she had reached that point at which the doctor refuses nothing to his patient. She saw Rome, and fancied she was entering an immense Necropolis. Its deserted streets, its empty palaces, and its spacious churches, with here and there a solitary devotee kneeling in the vast space, wore, in her eyes, a sepulchral air, and she could not endure their mournful suggestions.

She set out again for Naples, which she did not like much better. She was lodged at Santa Lucia. The blue waters of the most beautiful gulf in the world ebbed and flowed before her eyes, and the smoke of Vesuvius curled beneath her windows,—it was the very place to live or to die in. But she grew impatient of the street noises, the shrill cry of the hackmen, the heavy step of the Swiss patrols, and the rude songs of the fishermen, and exe-

erated this clamorous and bustling city, in which one was not even permitted to suffer in peace. They offered to find her a quieter retreat in the neighborhood,—she chose to go in search of it herself, and made such a frenzy of exertion that she was exhausted for several days. The doctor marvelled that she had resisted so many fatigues,—it must either have been that Nature had constructed her frame of very solid materials, or that a strong will retarded the fall of the crumbling edifice.

They showed her Sorrento and Castellamare, and drove from village to village for eight days without finding a place to suit her. One evening she took a fancy to visit Pompeii by moonlight. “It is a city after my own heart,” said she, with a bitter smile. “It is right that ruins should condole together.” She insisted on loitering for two hours over the uneven pavement of the dead city. It is a delightful promenade for a healthy mind. The day had been beautiful, the night was almost warm. The moon lighted up the surrounding objects like a winter’s sun, and the silence added a sweet and solemn charm to the scene. The ruins of Pompeii have not the overwhelming grandeur of those Roman monuments which inspired Madame de Staël with such grandiloquent phrases; they are the remains of a city of ten thousand

inhabitants, and both the public and private edifices have a slightly provincial air. On entering these narrow streets and opening these little houses, one penetrates to the fireside of antiquity, and is received at the home circle of a people that is no more.

You find, within, a singular mixture of the artistic feeling which distinguished the ancients, and the bad taste which belongs to the plebeian citizens of all ages. Nothing can be pleasanter than to discover beneath the dust of twenty centuries, a miniature garden, with its microscopic jet of water, its tiny marble waterfowl, and its statue of Apollo in the midst. Behold the residence of a Roman citizen who lived on his income in the year 79 of the Christian era! The champagne gayety of the doctor sparkled pleasantly amidst these curious ruins. Don Diego translated to his wife the interminable stories of the guide. But the feverish impatience of the invalid destroyed all the pleasure of the excursion. The poor girl was no longer herself,—she was the victim of disease and approaching death. She walked only that she might feel that she was living, and only spoke that she might hear the sound of her own voice. She went forward, retraced her steps, asked to see a second time what she had seen before, stopped on the way, and taxed

her ingenuity to find out caprices which no one could satisfy. Towards nine o'clock, a chill seized her, and she proposed to return to the inn. "I should like to die here," said she; "I could rest here in peace." But she reflected, on second thoughts, that Vesuvius might not yet have spoken his last word, and that he might possibly pour a sheet of fire over her tomb. She spoke of returning to Paris, and threw herself on her bed with a shiver of ill omen.

The dowager supped by the bedside. The child had long since gone to sleep. The landlord of *The Iron Crown* invited the gentlemen to descend to the dining-room, as they would be much more comfortable there than in a sick-room, and would have company besides. The doctor accepted the proposition, and Don Diego followed him.

The company consisted of two persons,—a fat French painter, who was a merry fellow, and a young Englishman red as a prawn. They had seen Germaine enter, and had easily guessed of what disease she was dying. The painter professed a careless philosophy, like all men who have a good digestion. "For my part, Monsieur," said he to his neighbor, "if ever my lungs are attacked, which is not at all likely, I shall not stir out of my way

a hair's breadth for it. One may be cured anywhere,—he may die anywhere. The air of Paris is perhaps the one which suits consumptives the best. Let them talk of the Nile! that report has been spread by the innkeepers of Cairo. Without doubt, the vapor of the river is good for something,—but the sand of the desert! No one reckoned on that! It penetrates your lungs, lodges there, accumulates,—and good-night to you! . . . But you answer, that if one must die he has a right to choose a place to die in. I have heard that idea before. Have you ever travelled in Tunis?"

"Yes."

"You never saw any one's throat cut there?"

"No."

"Then you have lost something. When a Tunisian is condemned to death, they give him till sunset to find a place where he would like to have his throat cut. Early in the morning, two executioners take him arm in arm, and carry him out into the country. Whenever they come to a pretty landscape, a fountain, two palm-trees, the surgeons say to their patient: 'How do you like this place? We shall not find a better one.' 'Let us go further,' says the poor wretch; 'there are flies here.' So they walk about until they find a place that suits

him. Generally, he does not decide on one before sundown. He then kneels down, and his neighbors draw their knives and familiarly cut off his head. But he has the consolation of dying where he chooses.

“I once knew a dancer at Paris who was possessed with the same idea. She selected a plot of ground in *Père la Chaise*, which she visited frequently, and always with a new delight. Her six feet were situated in one of the pleasantest quarters of the cemetery, surrounded by citizens’ monuments, and fronting on the principal avenue. But you Englishmen are especially given to this fancy. I met one once who wanted to be buried at Etretat because it had a pure air, because it was in sight of the sea, and because the cholera had never been there! I have heard of another who bought a burial-place in every country that he passed through, so as not to be taken unawares. Unfortunately, he died on the voyage from Liverpool to New York, and the captain threw him overboard.”

Don Diego and the doctor could willingly have dispensed with this discourse; and were about to entreat their neighbors to change the subject of their conversation, when the young Englishman spoke.

“Well, sir,” said he, “as for me, I was as ill two

years ago as the young lady that passed us. The physicians of London and Paris had signed my passport to the other world, and I too sought a place to die in. I chose the Ionian isles; the southern part of Corfu; and installed myself there to bide my time; but I grew so well that it was indefinitely postponed."

The doctor joined in the conversation with that unceremoniousness which prevails at the Italian tables d'hôte.—“Were you consumptive?” asked he.

“In the last stage, if the Faculty didn't lie to me.” He cited the names of the physicians by whom he had been treated and given over. He told how he had ended by taking care of himself, without new remedies, in the country, away from noise, in the expectation of death, and under the sky of Corfu.

Doctor Le Bris asked permission to auscultate him. He refused with a comical terror. He had heard the story of the physician who killed his patient to know how he had cured him.

An hour afterwards, the count was seated by the bedside of Germaine. Her face was flushed, and her breath panting. “Come here,” said she to her husband, “I want to talk with you seriously. Do you remark that I am better this evening? I am, perhaps, on the road to

recovery. Here are your prospects compromised! What if I should live! I have already made you lose three months—no one expected it. We have tenacious lives in our family—it will be necessary to kill me. You have the right to do so—I know it; you have paid for it. But leave me a few days more—the light is so beautiful! It seems to me that the air is easier to breathe.”

Don Diego took her hand—it was burning. “Germaine,” said he, “I have just dined with a young Englishman, whom I will show you to-morrow. He was worse than you—so he assures me—the climate of Corfu has cured him. Shall we go to Corfu?”

She sprang up hastily and looked him in the eyes, and exclaimed with an emotion which partook of delirium:

“Do you tell the truth?—Can I live?—Shall I see my mother again? Ah! if you save me, my whole life will be too short for my gratitude. I will serve you like a slave—I will educate your son—I will make a great man of him! . . . Oh! wretched that I am! it is not for this that you have chosen me. You love that woman, you regret her, you write to her, you long for the time to see her again, and all the hours of my life are thefts from your happiness!

She was at the worst during the next two days, in this inn-chamber, and they thought she would die on the ruins of Pompeii. She was well enough to rise, however, in the first week of April. They took her to Naples, and embarked in a packet for Malta, whence an Austrian steamer transported them to the port of Corfu.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUKE.

M AND MADAME de La Tour d'Embleuse had bid adieu to their daughter in the sacristy of Saint Thomas d'Aquinas. The duchess wept bitterly, the duke took the separation more lightly, to console his wife and daughter, perhaps also because he found no tears in his eyes. In his heart, he did not think that Germaine would die. He alone, with the old Countess de Villanera, believed in the miracle of a cure. This Chevalier of Luck declared that one good fortune never came alone. Every thing seemed possible to him now that his star was in the ascendant and the vein had returned. He commenced by predicting the recovery of his wife, a prophecy that was soon verified.

The duchess, like all her family, was of a robust constitution. Fatigue, watching, and privation had had much to do with the disease which a critical period of life had brought upon her, and to this had been added the constant anguish of a mother in momentary expecta-

tion of her child's last sigh. Madame de La Tour d'Embleuse suffered more from Germaine's pain than from her own. As soon as she was separated from her dear anxiety, she grew gradually tranquil, and shared less acutely in the sufferings that were no longer before her eyes. We endure as much from imagination as we do from feeling, but a grief at a distance loses something of its poignancy. When we see a man run over in the street, we feel a physical pain as though we ourselves had been crushed by the wheels,—the reading of the accident in the *City Items* of a newspaper scarcely moves us. The duchess could neither be calm nor happy, but she at least escaped the direct action of the danger upon her nervous system. She never felt secure; she never opened a letter from Italy without trembling; but she had a few moments' respite between the arrival of each mail. A settled grief, which habit rendered familiar to her, succeeded the excruciating anguish by which she had been tortured, and she experienced the doubtful relief of an invalid who passes from the acute to the chronic stage of his disorder.

A friend of the young doctor visited her two or three times a week, but M. Le Bris was still her true physician. He wrote to her regularly as well as to Madame

Chermidy, and though he studied never to deceive, the two correspondences resembled each other but slightly. He repeated to the poor mother that Germaine was still living, that the progress of the disease had been stayed, and that this suspension of its fatal course really gave them reason to hope for the miracle. He did not boast of having cured her, and he said to Madame Chermidy that God alone could postpone the widowhood of Don Diego, that science was impotent to save the young Countess de Villanera. She was still living, and the progress of the disease seemed checked, but only like a traveller who reposes at night the better to pursue his journey on the morrow. Germaine was debilitated during the day, and feverish and restless at the approach of night. Sleep refused her its relief, appetite came by caprice, and she rejected the dishes with disgust as soon as she had tasted them. Her emaciation was frightful, and Madame Chermidy herself would rejoice at seeing her. Her lucid and transparent skin revealed every joint and muscle, and her cheekbones seemed starting from her face. In fact, Madame Chermidy must really be very impatient to ask for any thing more.

The duke did not know all this, and he was already celebrating his daughter's recovery by very equivocal rejoicings.

At the age sacred to wisdom, this old man, whose gray hairs one would have respected if he had not taken the trouble to dye them, resisted the fatigues of pleasure better than a youth, and it was easy to see that he would sooner be at the end of his crowns than at the end of his desires and his strength. Men who have not entered into life young find an extraordinary reserved force in their latter years.

He had but little ready money, millionaire though he was. The first half-yearly payment of his income would fall due on the 22d of July; in the mean time it was necessary to live on the twenty thousand francs of the *corbeille*. This was sufficient for the household expenses and the little debts, which were more pressing than the large ones. If the duchess had had the disposal of this modest sum, she would have placed the establishment on an honorable footing; but the duke always held the money under his key whenever there happened to be any in the house. He paid very few of the creditors, politely declined to buy any more furniture, and, despite the remonstrances of the duchess and common sense, persisted in retaining apartments at twelve thousand francs, in which he was scarcely ever at home. He gave Semiramis a louis from time to time for the kitchen expenses, but never thought of asking her how

much was due her for wages. He bought two or three costly garments for the duchess, who was destitute of the most necessary linen ; but what he spent each day for his personal expenses was a secret between his coffer and himself.

Do not think, however, that he was guilty of the pitiful meanness of those husbands who throw away money by handfuls, yet wish to know to a centime the expenditures of their wives. He accorded to the duchess as much liberty for trifling expenses as he reserved to himself for great ones. He was always so polite, so assiduous, and so tender, that the poor woman adored him with all his faults. He inquired after her health with almost filial solicitude, he repeated to her at least once a day, "You are my guardian angel!" and he bestowed such flattering names on her that, without the testimony of her mirror, she might have believed herself still at twenty. This certainly did him credit, — the worst husband is but half contemptible when he leaves a sweet illusion to his victim. A great artist, who, has seen society with the eyes of Balzac, and has painted it better, M. Gavarni, has put this strange saying into the mouth of a woman of the people, — "My lover is a complete rascal, — but the king of men!" Translate the sentence into the language of nobil-

ity, and you will comprehend the obstinate love of the duchess for her husband.

Yet the old man was rapidly descending all the scales of vice that a well-born man could descend. When the news of his good fortune came to be known in Paris, he found a number of old acquaintances again who had been in the habit of turning their heads on meeting him. He was invited into some of those saloons of the faubourg Montmartre, where the most honorable and elegant men go to carry good and to seek bad company. He found furniture here and there which he had bought with his own money, and learned the time from clocks which he himself had paid for. The passion for play, which had been slumbering in him for several years, was awakened more ardently than ever; but he played like a dupe at those suspicious tables where the police come from time to time to sweep away the spoils. This dangerous society, which excels in flattering the vices by which it lives, gave a triumphal reëntry to the Duke de La Tour d'Embleuse. They applauded this posthumous youth, which came forth from wretchedness like Lazarus from the tomb, and proved to him that he was but twenty,—he endeavored to prove it for himself. He took his seat at late suppers, to the great detriment of his stomach; he drank champagne, smoked cigars, and broke

bottles. In these reunions, dignity was left at the door, yet new comers from the country, deluded strangers in Paris, or sons just escaped from tutelage, admired the lofty manners and aristocratic bearing of the fallen old man. The men respected him more than he respected himself; the women saw in him a ruin which they themselves had made, but which still held firm, despite every thing. In a certain class of society, they make more of a veteran who has squandered an income of a hundred and twenty thousand livres, than of a soldier who has lost both arms on the field of battle.

He followed this society, wherever it led him. He was assiduous at the first representations of the minor theatres, and was seen behind the scenes of the *Folies Dramatiques*. That respect for his name which had accompanied him in the early part of his career, seemed to have wholly abandoned him. He became in two months the most notorious old man in Paris. Perhaps he would have placed more restraint on his conduct, if the rumor of his actions could have reached the ears of his family. But Germaine was in Italy, and the duchess was immured in the faubourg; he had, therefore, no reason for circumspection.

The contrast between his name and his conduct soon gave him a second-rate popularity which almost intox-

icated him. He might have been seen, after the play, in a coffee-house of the Temple boulevard, in the midst of a circle of the lowest comedians and supernumeraries, who drank punch in his honor, gazed at him admiringly with their bloodshot eyes, and disputed for the honor of shaking hands with a duke who was not at all proud. He fell still lower, if possible; he even broke the barriers with his company, and seated himself before a salad-bowl of red wine at the table of an *estaminet*. It is very difficult, in the nineteenth century, to keep low company in an elegant manner. The Court of Louis XV. tried the experiment with some success; and two or three noble lords have tried since to revive the traditions of these merry days, but all in vain. The most lofty soul degenerates with incredible rapidity in the unhealthy amusements and nauseating fêtes of the faubourgs; the only debauches which they can long resist are those which cost them dear. That contentment with a little, which is a virtue among working men, is the lowest degree of abasement among men of pleasure.

The poor duke was in the lowest depth of degradation, when two hands were stretched out to him through very different motives. The saviors were the Baron de Sanglié and Madame Chermidy.

M. de Sanglié had been in the habit of calling, from time to time, at the house of the La Tour d'Embleuse; — he had a right to this privilege as their former landlord, the groomsmen of Germaine, and the friend of the family. He always found the duchess at home; the duke, never. But all Paris gave him news of his deplorable friend, and he resolved to save him, as he had formerly lodged him — for the honor of the faubourg.

The baron was one of those men whom we still call a perfect gentleman. He was not handsome, and his physiognomy was somewhat in keeping with his name. His large, ruddy face was almost hidden in the forest of red beard; he was robust as a huntsman, and inclined to corpulency; you would not have taken him for more than forty, though he was in reality fifty years of age. The Barons de Sanglié date from an epoch when they built with solidity. Rich enough to conduct his menage like a prince, and without an occupation, he treated himself like a friend, took care of his own person, and lived in order to live well. His dress and his mien were equally aristocratic. His morning costume was loose, substantial, and comfortable, with an air of coquettish negligence; his evening toilette was irreproachable, yet free from studied elegance. He was

one of those few men whose dress never strikes the eye, and whose clothing seems to have grown on them, and to be the natural foliage of their persons. His coats were from London, and the rest of his apparel from Paris. He was choice of his body, that other vesture of the man; he rode on horseback every day, and frequented the tennis-court; for the evening, he was a subscriber to two operas, and a member of a club. A skilful player, good table companion, and royal drinker; fine connoisseur of cigars, great lover of pictures, the rider to win in a steeple-chase, — yet too wise to throw away his fortune on a costly stud, indifferent to new books, careless about politics, a willing lender to all who would pay him again, impulsively generous to those who had nothing, plain with men, and chivalric with women, he was amiable and agreeable, like all intelligent egotists. To do good without incommoding one's self, is the essence of the most finished egotism.

To save the poor duke was by no means an easy operation. The baron would never have succeeded in it without the aid of that powerful auxiliary, vanity. This was still just visible above the surface, in this mournful wreck of the aristoeratic virtues, — the baron seized him by it as one clutches a drowning man by the hair of his head.

He sought him out in the dens where he was defiling his name and his caste. He struck him roughly on the shoulder, and said to him with the bluntness which so adroitly conceals flattery,—“What are you doing here, my dear duke? this is not the place for you. Everybody is wishing for you in the faubourg, both men and women,—do you understand me? The La Tour d’Embleuse have always maintained their rank since the days of Charlemagne,—you have no right to bankrupt your ancestors. Besides, we all need you. *Eh, morbleu!* if you bury yourself here in the prime of life, who is there to teach us the secrets of elegance,—the arts of running through a fortune with grace, and of pleasing the women,—things in which we are degenerating every day?”

The duke replied grumblingly, like a drunken man inopportunately awakened. He was sleeping off the effects of his new fortune in peace, and he did not care to resume the annoying restraints which society imposes on its votaries; an unconquerable indolence chained him to those easy pleasures which exacted nothing from dress, decency, or intellect. He protested that he was perfectly satisfied, that he asked nothing better, and that every one was at liberty to take his pleasure where he could find it.

“Come with me,” rejoined the baron, “and I swear to give you amusements more worthy of you. Don’t fear to lose by the change,—we live well in our circle,—you know that better than any one. Don’t imagine that I come here to carry you back to your family,—I should have sent you a missionary for that. What the devil! I too belong to your school; I despise neither wine, nor love, nor play; but I will maintain against all the world, yourself included, that a Duke de La Tour d’Embleuse should drink, ruin, and damn himself only in the company of his peers.”

It was by arguments of this sort that the old man became converted. He returned, not to virtue, for that road was too long for his old limbs, but to elegant vice. M. de Sanglié took him to a fashionable tailor of the Boulevards like a rebellious recruit to the regimental captain, and made him don the livery of the fashionable world. This singular subject had always idolized his old person, but economized in his worship. He had continued to dye and to paint, and did not neglect any practice, which could restore to him a semblance of youth; but he did not scorn to appear newer than his coat. They proved to him by a few yards of fine cloth that a new dress rejuvenated the whole mien, and he confessed of his own

accord, that tailors were not to be despised. This was a great step in advance; a man well-dressed is half saved. Fathers understand this well; when they come to Paris to rescue a prodigal son from vicious company, their first care is to take him to a tailor.

The baron charged himself with bringing out his pupil. He introduced him to his club. They dined well there, and M. de La Tour d'Embleuse did not lose by his change of cooks. Before his conversion, the highly spiced food and adulterated drinks of the *estaminets* had irritated his stomach, burned his tongue, and excited a quenchless thirst; to allay this, he had drunk the more, and the poor man seemed thus involved in a vicious circle, from which he could escape only through death. The duchess shuddered sometimes at his burning breath. She dared not confess her terrors, but she discreetly placed cool and perfumed diet-drinks by his bedside, which he left to spoil. The table d'hôte insensibly reëstablished him, although he denied himself nothing there. The bait of gaming retained him under the rod of his preserver. The members of the club played whist and *ecarté* with boldness, but without intemperance. The most daring games of whist rarely cost more than a louis each, and such an amusement has no dangers for a millionaire. When he ven-

tured a high stake at a table of ecarté, no one had the right to call him to reason; but at least they could agree among themselves to spare his purse. Every one knew him, and was interested in him as a convalescent. A player behaves like a sage or a madman, according as he is urged on or restrained by those about him. They held him back, but so delicately that he never felt the curb.

The most aristocratic drawing-rooms opened their folding-doors to him. All aristocracy has a natural freemasonry, and a duke, whatever he may have done, has an indefeasible right to the indulgence of his peers. The faubourg Saint-Germain, like the respectful sons of Noah, covered the errors of the old man with a mantle of purple. Men treated him with consideration; women with kindness, — in what clime have they ever been wanting in indulgence towards profligates? They regarded him as a traveller returned from unknown countries, though no woman dared ask of him an account of his journey. He adapted himself without embarrassment to the tone of good society, for to all the faults of youth he united that flexibility of spirit which is its finest ornament. He was found to be worthy of his name and his fortune, and

every one justified the choice of M. de Villanera in accepting him as a father-in-law.

The baron had promised him more exciting pleasures: he kept his word. He did not imprison him in the faubourg as in a fortress, but carried him into a less starched circle, on the threshold of the fashionable world; into those *salons* which are aspersed without proof, yet not without reason. He was introduced there to widows whose husbands never were in Paris, to wives legally married but embroiled with their families, to marchionesses exiled from the faubourg in consequence of a scandalous process, and to noblewomen living in princely style without any known income. This intermediate society is bounded on one side by high life, and on the other by the *demi-monde*. I should not advise a mother to take her daughter there; but many sons go there with their fathers and depart as they came. One does not find there the austerity of manners, the patriarchal life, the perfect breeding, and the pure and elevated language which prevails in the old drawing-rooms of the faubourg, but he can dance at his ease, play without being cheated, and no one steals his overcoat from the anteroom. It was in one of these drawing-rooms that the duke fell into the company of Madame Chermidy.

She recognized him at the first glance, having seen him on the day of the wedding. She knew that he was the grandfather of her son, the father of Germaine, and a millionaire at the expense of Don Diego. A woman of the temper of Madame Chermidy never forgets the face of a man to whom she has given a million. She would not have been sorry to know him more intimately, but she was too cunning to risk a step in advance. The duke spared her three fourths of the way. As soon as he knew who she was, he introduced himself with an impertinence which would have gladdened the eyes of every honest woman in Paris. Nothing flatters virtuous women more sensibly than to see those who are not so handled without gloves.

The duke did not intend to insult a pretty woman, and thus to abjure the religion of his whole life; but he was accustomed to speaking to people in their own language, and he thought he knew the nationality of Madame Chermidy. He seated himself familiarly by her side, saying:

“Madame, permit me to introduce one of your old admirers, the Duke de La Tour d’Embleuse. I have already had the pleasure of seeing you at Saint Thomas d’Aquin’s. You know that we are distantly related—

allied through our children—permit me, then, like a good cousin, to offer you my left hand.”

Madame Chermidy, who reasoned with the quickness of lightning, comprehended the position in which this speech placed her, at the first word. Whatever answer she might invent, the duke had the advantage of her. Instead of accepting the hand which he offered, she rose with a gesture of grief and dignity which set off all her voluptuous beauty of form, and moved towards the door without turning her head, like a queen outraged by the vilest of her subjects.

The old man was taken in the snare. He hastened after her, and stammered some words of apology. The beautiful Arlesian cast a burning glance on him, in which he fancied he caught the sparkle of a tear, and answered under her breath, with well-restrained or well-feigned emotion, “*Monsieur le duc*, you do not know—you cannot understand——. Come to-morrow at two; I shall be alone, we will talk together.”

With this she vanished like a woman who will listen no longer, and five minutes after her carriage wheels rumbled over the gravel of the court-yard.

The poor duke had been warned; he knew the lady by heart, for M. Le Bris had painted her to him in

her true colors. But he reproached himself for what he had done, and lived till the morrow in a surprise which was not exempt from remorse. They say, nevertheless, that a man warned is twice armed.

He was punctual at the rendezvous, and found himself face to face with a woman who had been weeping.

“Monsieur the duke,” said she, “I have done my best to forget the cruel words which you addressed to me last evening,—I have not yet succeeded, but that will come in time; let us say no more about it.”

The duke persisted in reiterating his excuses; he was struck with deep admiration. Madame Chermidy had spent the whole morning in making an irresistible toilette. She certainly appeared more beautiful than last night at the ball. A woman in her boudoir is like a picture in its frame. She profited by the disorder into which her charms had thrown M. de La Tour d’Embleuse, to envelope him in the web of a captivating eloquence. She at first employed the timid respect which suited a woman in her position. She expressed an exaggerated veneration for the illustrious family into which she had introduced her son, and claimed the honor of having chosen the La Tour d’Embleuse from among twenty noble houses, and of thus having raised up by

her wealth one of the most glorious names of Europe. The voluptuous movements and melancholy languor which accompanied this exordium persuaded the old man much more than the words, and he doubted no longer that he had insulted his benefactress.

“I understand,” resumed she, “that you have no great esteem for me. But yours is a noble soul, and you would pity me, notwithstanding, if you knew the story of my life.”

She had that expressive pantomime of the people of the South, which gives so much probability to the grossest falsehoods. Her eyes, her hands, and her little restless foot, all spoke together with her lips, and seemed to attest of her veracity. Once having listened to her, you were as firmly convinced as if you had held an inquest and examined witnesses.

She mentioned her birth, in middle life, on a rich estate of Provence. Her parents, large manufacturers, had destined their daughter and their fortune, she said, to a wealthy merchant. But love, that stern master of human life, threw her into the arms of a simple officer. Her family had disowned her until the moment when the brutality of M. Chermidy—who soon showed the cloven foot—had forced her to flee from the conjugal

roof. Poor Chermidy! a woman has always the best of the play against a husband who is in China!

Once widowed, or nearly so, she had come to Paris, and lived there modestly till the death of her father. A larger inheritance than she had hoped for, had enabled her to maintain a good position. Some fortunate speculations increased her capital, and she became rich. She was seized with ennui;—at thirty, it was hard to live in solitude. She had fallen in love with the Count de Villanera at first sight, without knowing him, in the balcony of the Italian opera.

The duke could not help saying to himself that the Count de Villanera was a lucky fellow.

She then proved by glances, which were glowing with a candor admitting of no doubt, that M. de Villanera had never given her any thing except his love. Not that he lacked generosity; but she was not the woman to confound affairs of the heart with affairs of interest. She had pushed disinterestedness even to sacrifice; she had yielded her child to the old Countess de Villanera, and had finally abandoned it to another mother. She had even restored his liberty to her lover. The count was married; he was travelling to reëstablish the health of his bride, and he did not even write to the poor forsaken one to give her news of her little Gomez.

She finished her discourse by dropping both her arms with an *abandon* full of grace. "And now," she sighed, "behold me more lonely than ever, in this void of the heart which has once already destroyed me. Consolations, I have none: distractions, I can find in plenty. But I have no heart for pleasure. I know a few men of the world. They come here every Tuesday evening and chat round my fire. I dare not invite M. le Duc de La Tour d'Embleuse to these melancholy reunions; I should be too much humiliated and too deeply pained at his refusal."

The clock of Madame Chermidy certainly struck less truly than did that of Doctor Le Bris, but the bell was so melodious that the duke suffered himself to be deluded like a child. He pitied the pretty woman, and promised to come from time to time to bring her news of her son.

The drawing-room of Madame Chermidy was, in truth, the rendezvous of several distinguished men. She knew how to attract them and to retain them about her by a less heroic means than that of Madame de Warens,—she made them love her at a less expense. Some knew her position, others believed in her virtue; but all were persuaded that her heart was free, and that the last pos-

essor, whether he styled himself Villanera or Chermidy, had left the succession open. She availed herself of this to use all her admirers to the profit of her fortune. Artists, authors, men of business, and men of leisure, all served her simultaneously, in proportion to their means; they were so many *employés* whom she paid in hopes. A stockbroker carried over for her twenty thousand francs a month; a painter purchased her pictures, and a skilful speculator bought her real estate. These were all gratuitous services; but no one wearied of being useful to her, because no one despaired of interesting her. To those busybodies who worried her, she showed her house—a house of glass. She placed her most trifling actions in broad daylight, to reassure the susceptibility of Don Diego, perhaps also to oppose a barrier to those who made light of her virtue.

The duke profited by the *entree* which had been offered him, and his presence in the drawing-room of the Rue du Cirque was not useless to the reputation of Madame Chermidy. It checked sundry rumors about the count's marriage which were in circulation, and proved to a few credulous minds that nothing had ever passed between the little woman and M. de Villanera. How could it be supposed that Madame Chermidy would invite the father-in-law of her lover, or that he would come if she did?

She wielded this new acquaintance as skilfully as the old ones. It was important that she should know the true condition of Germaine, and the precise number of days she had to live. One fine morning, M. de La Tour d'Embleuse intrusted her with all the letters of Doctor Le Bris.

Their persnal produced such a revulsion of feeling that she would have fallen ill, had she not been stronger than all diseases. She saw herself betrayed by the doctor, by the count, and by nature. She pictured to herself the most odious future that the imagination of a woman could conceive. A rival of her own choice was depriving her of her lover and her son, and without crime, without intrigue, without calculation, and with the support of every civil and religious law.

Notwithstanding, she took courage on reflecting that M. Le Bris might have wished to deceive the duchess. She determined to see the letters of Germaine, and counted on the duke to satisfy her sinister curiosity.

M. de La Tour d'Embleuse was a prey to one of those final passions which finish the body and soul of an old man. All the vices which had been drawing him in different directions for the lapse of half a century, had abdicated in favor of this new and single love. When engineers collect all the rivulets dispersed over the plain

into one canal, they create a stream deep enough to float ships.

The Baron de Sanglié, the duchess, and all who were interested in him, were struck with astonishment at the change in his manners. He lived as soberly as a young aspirant who is hoping to rise through the favor of women. He was seldom at the club, and he never played there. The care of his toilette occupied his mornings. He had resumed the habit of riding on horseback, and he rode in the Bois du Boulogne every day from four to six. He dined with his wife whenever he was not invited to Madame Chermidy's. In the evening he went into society to meet her, and as soon as she left the ball, he went to bid his wife good-night, and to betake himself to his bed. The fear of compromising her whom he loved, restored to him those habits of discretion which had veiled his early excesses, and the duchess believed him out of danger at the moment when he was lost without remedy.

Madame Chermidy, who was an artist in seduction, affected to treat him with filial tenderness. She received him at all hours, even when at her toilette; she refused him neither her hand nor her forehead to kiss; she fondled him airily, listened to him with complaisance, accepted

his caresses as marks of generosity, expressed no timidity, and never seemed to suspect the brutal passion which she inflamed every day. To keep him at a distance, she employed but a single weapon, namely, humility. She suffered him to give her all the names with which love can inspire a man, but she never once forgot to call him *Monsieur le duc*. The old simpleton would have sacrificed all his fortune that Madame Chermidy might have been once wanting in respect to him.

He sacrificed at first what, to an honest man, is dearer than all the world,—the sanctity of the paternal name. He borrowed the letters of Germaine from the duchess, under the pretext of rereading them, and the noble woman wept for joy on confiding so precious a treasure to her husband. He hastened without delay to the Rue du Cirque, where he was received with open arms. These letters, which the sick girl had scrawled with her little trembling hand,—these letters, in which she had never failed to put some kisses for her mother in a badly-drawn frame beneath the signature,—these letters, which the duchess had moistened with her tears,—were spread out like a game of cards on the drawing-room table between a ruined old man and an unprincipled woman.

Madame Chermidy, concealing her hatred beneath a

mask of compassion, eagerly sought some symptoms of death in the midst of these protestations of tenderness, but she was but indifferently satisfied. The odor which exhaled from this correspondence was not that which draws vultures in the rear of an army; it was the perfume of a poor little flower, which languishes in the blasts of winter, but which would blossom in the sunshine if the south wind scattered the clouds. The cruel Arlesian found that the hand was still very firm, that the mind was not yet weakened, and that the heart was beating with dangerous strength. This was not all,—a strange suspicion stung her. The invalid spoke with too much complaisance of the attentions of her husband. She accused herself of ingratitude; she reproached herself with her miserable requital. Madame Chermidy foamed with rage at the idea that the husband and wife might end, perhaps, by becoming attached to each other; that pity, recognition, and habit might unite their young hearts, and that she would one day see seated between Don Diego and Germaine a guest whom she had not invited to their nuptials—Love.

This profanation of the letters of Germaine took place a few days after her arrival at Corfu. If Madame Chermidy could have seen her innocent foe with her own

eyes, we cannot but believe that she would have felt less fear than pity. The fatigues of the voyage had thrown the poor child into a deplorable condition. But the mistress of Don Diego was incessantly conjuring phantasmal cures, and dreaming every night that she was supplanted without remedy. The day that changed her suspicions to certainty, would, she felt, make her capable of every crime. In the mean time, through the spirit of prudence and vengeance, through the ennui of a pretty woman without occupation, and through speculation on a capital of interest and perversity, she amused herself by despoiling M. La Tour d'Embleuse. She thought it a good jest to take from him the million which had been given him, promising herself to restore it after the death of his daughter,—it was a bit of consolation which she adjudged to herself in case of misfortune.

The difficulty was not to make him give her the *inscription de rente*. The duke placed himself with all he possessed at her feet every day. He was of the race and character to ruin himself without proclaiming it, and to conquer without sounding the trumpet of victory. A well-bred man never compromises a woman, though she may have despoiled him of his whole fortune. But Madame Chermidy thought that it would be more worthy

of her to take a million without giving any thing in exchange, and still to preserve her ascendancy over the giver.

One day, when the old man was raving on his knees, and repeating for the hundredth time the offer of his fortune, she took him at his word, and said quietly, "I accept, *Monsieur le duc.*"

M. de La Tour d'Embleuse grew dizzy as a young aeronaut at the cutting of the balloon cord. He fancied himself in the seventh heaven. But the lady gently checked his transports, saying, "When you shall have given me a million, do you think that I am paid?"

He protested to the contrary, but his eyes said with some reason that for virtue at sale, a million is not a bad price.

She answered the thoughts of her adversary. "*Monsieur le duc*, the women among whom you do me the injustice to class me are valued according to their wealth. I have inherited four millions, and have gained three more in business; and my fortune is so free that I can realize it without loss in a month's time. You see, therefore, that there are few women in France who have the right to put themselves at a higher price; it also proves to you that I am able to give myself for nothing. If I

love you sufficiently, and that may come in time, money must not come between us. The man to whom I give my heart will have the rest into the bargain."

The duke fell rudely to the ground from the height of his felicity. He was as unhappy in keeping his million as he had been delighted in receiving it. Madame Chermidy appeared to pity him. "Do not weep, you great child," said she; "I commenced by telling you that I accepted. But take care; I shall make my own conditions."

M. de La Tour d'Embleuse smiled like a dying man who sees the heavens open to him.

"It was I who enriched you," continued she. "I knew you of old; at least, I knew your reputation. You have squandered your fortune with a grandeur worthy of the heroic ages; you are the last representative of the true noblesse in these degenerate days; you are also, without knowing it, the only man in Paris who is capable of deeply interesting the heart of a woman. I have always regretted that you had not as incalculable a fortune as Don Diego's,—you would have been grander than Sardanapalus. For the want of better, I made him give you a million. One does what they can. But I went the wrong way to work, and the event has not answered my

expectations. You have a scrap of paper in your drawer which brings in nothing just yet. You get twenty-five thousand francs on the twenty-second of June, and, till then, you vegetate. You will contract debts, and your revenue will only enrich your creditors. Give me, then, your *inscription de rente*, and I will sell it through my broker. Be tranquil,—I will take the capital for myself, you will never see it again; but in return, it is absolutely necessary that you should accept the income. It will not be fifty thousand francs that you will have, but eighty or a hundred thousand, perhaps more. I know the Bourse thoroughly, though women don't frequent it; I know that one can make as much as he likes there with a few millions of ready money. Investments in state stocks are admirable inventions for citizens who wish to live modestly and without care; for those of our stamp, who fear neither risk nor labor, huzza for speculation! It is gaming on a large scale, and you are a gamester, are you not?"

"I was once."

"You are still! We will play together; our interests, our pleasures, our hopes, and our fears shall be in common."

"We will be one!"

“On the Bourse, at least.”

“Honorine!”

Honorine appeared to fall into a profound reverie. She buried her face in her hands; but the duke seized her wrists, and put an end to this eclipse of beauty. Madame Chermidy gazed at him intently, as if to read the depths of his heart, and said, with a melancholy smile:

“Pardon me, *Monsieur le duc*, and forget these castles in the air. We were lost in the future, like the Babes in the Wood. It was a happy dream,—but let us think no more of it. It does not belong to me to despoil you, even to enrich you. What would folks say,—what would you think of me yourself? If Madame the duchess knew what we had done!”

Madame Chermidy knew well that to render a wife odious to her husband, it is sufficient to utter her name in moments like these. The duke rejoined haughtily that his wife knew nothing of his business, and that he never permitted her to meddle with it.

“But you have a daughter?” resumed the temptress; “all that you possess should revert to her. I am wronging her.”

“But my daughter has a son, who is yours, also,”

replied the duke. "Your fortune and mine will go together to the little marquis,—are we not one family?"

"You have said the same thing to me once before, *Monsieur le duc*; but then it gave me less pleasure than to-day."

Madame Chermidy locked up the *inscription de rente*, and took good care not to sell it. The lady had an instinct for substantials, and wisely mistrusted the instability of human affairs. From this day, the duke became the partner of his fair friend. He had the right of drawing from her treasury, and, till further orders, he found with her as much money as he wanted. It was all that he could obtain from this generous and smiling virtue. Honorine provided for the old man's comfort with minute tenderness; she made him quit the apartments which he was occupying; she removed him, with the duchess, to the Champs Elyseés, where she furnished a house for them; she took care that they lacked for nothing in the family; and she even provided for the expenses of the kitchen. This done, she rubbed her little hands, and said to herself, laughingly: "I have blockaded the enemy; and if ever war is declared, I will starve them without pity."

CHAPTER VI.

LETTERS FROM CORFU.

DOCTOR LE BRIS TO MADAME CHERMIDY.

CORFU, April 20, 1853.

“DEAR MADAME,—I did not foresee on the day I left you, that our correspondence would be so long. Don Diego expected it no more than I; could I have warned him of it, I know not whether he would have taken the heroic resolution of depriving himself both of your letters and your society. But all men are liable to err, physicians most of all. Do not show this sentence to my *confrères*.

“We had a stupid voyage from Malta to Corfu, in a dirty little steamer, whose chimney smoked abominably. The wind was against us, the rain prevented us nearly all the time from going on deck, and the waves dashed into our cabin windows. Sea-sickness spared no one but the invalid and the child,—Providence always favors those who are coming into life, and those who are going out of it. We had for our society an Eng-

lish family returning from the Indies,—a colonel in the Company's service, with his two daughters, yellow as Russia leather. Nothing but claret is improved by these long journeys. The ladies did not honor us with a single word; what excuses them a little is that they could not speak French. At the least sign of clear weather, they went on deck with their albums to sketch landscapes, which looked like plum puddings. After an eternal journey of five days, the boat brought us into harbor without even the variety of a shipwreck. The way of life is paved with delusions.

“While waiting till we can find a nest in the country, we are lodged at the Hotel Victoria in the capital of the island. We count on being able to leave at the end of the week, but I dare not affirm that we shall all go on our legs. My poor patient is at the last extremity; the voyage has fatigued her more than sea-sickness would have done. Madame de Villanera does not quit her for a second, Don Diegò behaves admirably, and I do my best—that is to say, very little of any thing. It is useless to attempt a treatment which will add to the sufferings without availing any thing towards a cure. How happy you are, Madame, in having a beauty which is joined to such perfect health!

.

“If this crisis be not the last one, I shall try ammonia or iodine. Iodine succeeds in some cases; Messieurs Pierry and Chartroule use it with success. Be kind enough to send us Doctor Chartroule’s inhaling apparatus, with a supply of iodated cigarettes, — you will find them at Dublanc’s pharmacy, in the Rue du Temple, near the Boulevard. The ammonia may be of some use too; but a miracle is the only remedy which we can count on seriously. Thus then, live in peace, love us a little, and help us to do our duty to the end. Old Gil, whom the countess brought to wait on her, took the fever in Italy, although it was not the season for fevers, and we have one patient the more and one servant the less.

“Happiness and health have one splendid representative in the household in the person of little Gomez. You will be delighted when you see him again. He grows while we look at him, and I believe — God forgive me — handsomer. He will be less of a Villanera than we thought at first. Indeed, the deuce will be in it if he is not a little like his mother. He is no longer shy; he embraces everybody, and lets himself be embraced in turn, and presses his lips to their faces with an ardor that will be dangerous among the little girls some day.

“Don Diego is negotiating with a descendant of the

doges for a house which suits him tolerably. The country is divided into a multitude of pleasant estates, adorned by crumbling chateaus. I have visited several of the gardens; they are generally more habitable than the adjoining houses. There are farms, castles, and cottages in this aristocratic disorder, which preserve an air of grandeur in the midst of their dilapidation. If we rent the Villa Dandolo, we shall not be uncomfortable there; it will only be necessary to put a few panes in the windows. The sea-view on the south is magnificent, and the garden is rank with fine plants. Our neighbors are noble; some of them speak French, it is said. But who knows if we shall have time to make their acquaintance?

“I shall not regret city life, although one lives there well enough. It is beautiful, and reminds me of Naples in some places. The esplanade, with the palace of the Lord Commissioner and the suburbs, forms an English town. The English have constructed gigantic fortifications at the expense of the Greeks, which make of the place a miniature Gibraltar. Every morning, I witness the manœuvres of a Scotch regiment, whose bagpipes are my delight. The Greek city is ancient, and curiously built; with high houses, small arcades, and a pretty face

at every window. The Jews' quarter is hideous, but there are pearls in the filth for the pencil of Gavarni. The population is Greek, Italian, Jewish, and Maltese, and is laboring hard to become English. We have a theatre, where they are giving Verdi's Joan d'Arc. I went one evening when my patient's pulse was a little less than a hundred and twenty a minute. At the end of the first act the whole assembly rose respectfully while the orchestra played God save the Queen,—it is an established usage in all the English possessions. Don't be surprised that the death of Joan d'Arc is represented before an English public,—the author of the libretto has taken care to modify the story to suit their tastes. Joan defends France against some kind of enemies—Turks, Abyssinians, or Champenois, I know not which—wearing, herself, a cuirass of silvered paper, and sporting a flag the size of a fan till a herald rushes on the stage, exclaiming to the king:

'Rotto è 'l nemico, è Giovanni è spinta.'

“The heroine is carried out on cushions, a scarf stained red indicates that she is mortally wounded. She raises herself with difficulty, sings a song at the top of her voice, and expires in the midst of applause. All the people of Corfu are persuaded that Joan died with a wound and a roulade.

“The count suffered me to go alone to the theatre, although, as you know, he dotes on Verdi. Was it not at a representation of *Ernani* that his eyes met yours for the first time? But the poor fellow is literally immolating himself to his duty. What a husband will he be for his definitive wife!

“The journals bring us news from China which you must have read with as much interest as we. It seems that the flat-nosed celestials have abused two French missionaries, and that the *Naiade* has been sent to punish the guilty. If the *Naiade* has not changed her commandant, we shall wait with impatience for news of the expedition. Each for himself, and God for us all. I wish my friends every imaginable prosperity, without praying for any one’s death. The Chinese, they say, are bad marksmen, although they boast of having invented powder; yet it needs nothing but a lucky bullet to make several people happy.

“Adieu, Madame. If I wrote to you as I loved you, my letter would never end; but after the pleasure of chatting with you, duty calls me into the next room. Pleasure and duty!—two steeds very difficult to yoke together. But I do my best, and if that does not reconcile every thing, think that it is not easy to steer between

Scylla and Charybdis. Love me if you can, pity me if you will; do not curse me, come what may; and if I send you by the next mail a letter sealed with black, do me the justice to believe firmly, that I have not the least claim to your gratitude.

“Kissing the prettiest hand in Paris, I am

“Your devoted servant,

“CHARLES LE BRIS,

“D. M. P.”

THE COUNTESS DOWAGER DE VILLANERA TO MADAME
DE LA TOUR D'EMBLEUSE.

VILLA DANDOLO, May 2, 1853.

“DEAR DUCHESS,—I am worn out, but Germaine is better. We all moved this morning,—or rather, I moved them. I had the accounts to settle, the invalid to wrap in pillows, the child to watch, the carriage to find, and almost the horses to harness. The count is good for nothing,—that is a family talent. It is a proverb in Spain,—‘As unhandy as a Villanera.’ The little doctor buzzed about me like a fly on a coach-wheel, until I had to seat him in a corner. I cannot endure to have people bustling about me when I am in a hurry,—they hin-

der more than they help. And that ass of a Gil, too, took it in his head to have a chill, although it was not the day for it! I am going to send him to Paris to be cured, and I beg you to find me some one in his place. I planned every thing, arranged every thing, and did every thing for the best, and found means of being in-doors and out-doors, at home and in town at one and the same time. At last, at ten o'clock, *fouette cocher!* Fortunately, the roads are magnificent, — macadamized like the Boulevards. We rolled on velvet to our cockle-shell, and here we are! I have unpacked my people, opened my parcels, made my beds, and prepared dinner with the help of a native cook, who wanted to pepper every thing even to the milk-porridge. They have eaten, talked, and walked; they sleep at last, and I am writing by the pillow of Germaine, like a soldier on a drum the night after battle.

“The victory is ours, on the honor of an old captain. Our daughter shall get well, or she shall tell why. But she has made me pass fifteen wretched nights in that city of Corfu! She decided not to sleep, and it was all in vain that I rocked her like a child. She ate only to please me; nothing invited her; and when one does not eat, good-by to strength! She had but a breath of life,

that seemed at each moment ready to take flight; but I kept good watch of it! Take courage; she has dined this evening, she has drank an inch of Cyprus wine, and she sleeps.

“I have often heard say, that the more anxiety a child gives its mother, the more she loves it. I know nothing of it by experience, for all the Villaneras from father to son are rugged as oaks. But since you have confided to me the fragile casket of this beautiful soul, since I have kept watch over our child to keep Death from approaching her, since I have learned to endure, to respire, and to suffocate with her, I feel my heart. I was but half a mother till I reflected the agonies of another. I am worth more for it, I am better, I ascend in rank. It is through suffering that we draw near the mother of God, that model of every mother. *Ave Maria, mater dolorosa!*”

“Fear nothing, my poor duchess; she will live. God would not have given me this deep love for her if he had resolved to snatch her from this world. He who rules hearts, measures the strength of our feelings by the duration of their object, and I love our daughter as if she were to be ours forever. Providence mocks at avarice, ambition, and all human passions; but it respects

legitimate affections; it thinks twice before separating those who love each other in the bosom of their family. Why would it have bound me so closely to our Germaine, if it had designed to slay her in my arms? It would be a cruel sport, unworthy the goodness of God. Besides, the interests of our race are bound up with the life of this child. If we should have the misfortune to lose her, Don Diego will certainly make a misalliance some day or other. Saint James, to whom we have built two churches, will never suffer a name like ours to be trailed in the dust by Madame Chermidy.

“I hope nothing from Doctor Le Bris; savants do not know how to cure sick people; the only true physicians are God in heaven and Love on earth. Consultations and remedies which are bought with money will never increase the sum of our days. Mark, now, what we have invented to obtain her life. Every morning, my son, my grandson, and I, pray God on our knees to take from our lives to add to that of Germaine. The child joins his hands with ours, while I repeat the prayer; Heaven must be deaf indeed if it does not hear us.

“Don Diego loves his wife; I say it advisedly. He loves her with a pure love, freed from all taint of earthliness. If he loved her otherwise in the state in which

she now is, he would horrify me. He has that religious adoration for her which a good Christian vows to the saint of his church, to the Virgin of his chapel, to the chaste veiled image which shines from the innermost recess of the sanctuary. It is the nature of us Spaniards; we know how to love purely, heroically, without any mundane hope or any other recompense than the pleasure of falling on our knees before a worshipped image. Germaine is nothing else here below: the perfect image of the saints in Paradise. When Saint Ignatius and his glorious companions enrolled themselves under the banner of the Mother of God, they gave to all men a chivalric example of the purest love.

“When she is cured—ah! we shall see. Just wait till the poor little pale virgin shall have recovered the flush of youth! At present, she is but a cage of transparent crystal, enclosing a soul. But when the healthful blood shall course through her veins, when the air of heaven shall gladden her lungs, when the fragrant perfumes of the country shall speak to her heart and make her temples throb with pleasure, when bread and wine, those gifts from God’s own hand, shall have restored her strength, when an impatient vitality shall make her run till out of breath beneath the great

orange-trees of the garden, then she will acquire a new beauty, — and Don Diego has eyes; he will know how to compare his former infatuation with his present happiness. I shall not need to show him how much superior is a noble and chaste loveliness, heightened by the lustre of birth and the splendor of virtue, to the shameless charms of a wanton. He is on the right road. During the four months that we have been away from Paris, he has neither written nor received a letter; and forgetfulness is springing up in his heart now that he is far from the unworthy being who was destroying him. Absence, which strengthens honorable passions, quickly kills those which had their existence only in pleasure.

“Perhaps, also, our Germaine may suffer herself to be infected with the contagion of love. Hitherto she has loved none but me of the whole family. I do not speak of the little marquis—you know that she adopted him from the first—but she testifies an indifference to my poor son which almost amounts to hatred. She no longer treats him harshly, as before, but she suffers his attentions with a sort of resignation; she endures his presence, she is not surprised at seeing him near her, she is becoming accustomed to him. Yet good eyes are not needed to read in her countenance a secret impa-

tience, a subdued hatred which rebels at instants, perhaps even the contempt of a virtuous child for a man who has been guilty of errors. Alas, my poor friend! indulgence is a virtue of *our* age; the young do not practise it. Yet I ought to acknowledge that Germaine carefully conceals her little dislikes. Her politeness towards Don Diego is irreproachable; she talks with him whole hours without complaining of fatigue, she listens to him and replies at times, she receives his attentions with cold but resigned gentleness. A less sensitive man would not perceive that he was hated, — my son knows and forgives it. He said to me yesterday, — ‘It is impossible to detest one’s friends with more grace and sweetness. She is the angel of ingratitude.’

“How will all this end? Well; believe me. I have confidence in God, I have faith in my son, and I have hope for Germaine. We will cure her, even of her ingratitude, especially if you will come to our aid. I learn that the duke is walking like a good boy in the path of virtue, and that fathers point him out as a model to their sons. If you can venture to leave him for a month or two, you will be received with open arms. In case that the charming convert also wishes to take the country air, there is something to let in our immediate neighborhood.

“Farewell, then, for a little while, my excellent friend, dear sister of my joys and sorrows. I love you more and more as our daughter becomes dearer to me. The distance which separates us cannot chill so true a friendship; we see each other no more, and we write but seldom, but our prayers meet every day before the throne of God. COUNTESS DE VILLANERA.

“P. S. Do not forget my servant; and, above all, let him be young. Our Methusalehs of the hôtel Villanera will never become acclimated here.”

GERMAINE TO HER MOTHER.

VILLA DANDOLO, May 7, 1853.

“MY DEAR MAMMA,—Old Gil, who will give you this letter, will tell you how healthy it is here. It was not at Corfu that he took the fever, but in the Roman Campagna, so have no fears.

“I have been quite ill since my last letter, but my second mother must have told you that I am much better. Perhaps M. de Villanera may have written to you also,—I do not ask an account of his actions. I have been well enough for some time past to scribble three or four pages of paper,—but will you believe

me when I tell you that I have not had time? I spend my life in breathing, — it is a very pleasant occupation, which takes me ten or twelve hours every day.

“I suffered greatly in the crisis which I passed. I never remember having been so bad in Paris. Many, in my place, would have wished for death, yet I clutched life with incredible obstinacy. How one changes! And whence is it that I see things no longer with the same eyes?

“It is doubtless because it would have been too sad to have died far from you, without your dear hands to close my eyes. Yet do not think that I lacked attention. If I had succumbed, as the doctor thought, for a little time, you would have had one consolation. The saddest thought when we hear that those we love have died at a distance, is that they have suffered for want of care. As to me, nothing fails me, and everybody is good to me, even M. de Villanera. You must think of this, dear mamma, if any thing should happen to me.

“Perhaps the friendship and compassion of those about me may have also contributed a little to attach me again to life. When I took leave of you and of my father, I bade adieu to every thing. But I did not know then that I should carry with me a true family. The doctor

is perfect; he acts as though he hoped to cure me. Madame de Villanera (the real one) is another mother. The marquis is an excellent little fellow, and old Gil has been full of attention. I did not want to sadden all these people by the sight of my death struggles, and this is why I came through the crisis. So much the worse for those who counted on my death,—they have some time to wait.

“You asked me to describe our house, so that your thoughts might know where to find me when they wished to pay me a visit. M. de Villanera, who draws very well for a nobleman, will send you the plan of the chateau and garden; I took the liberty of asking this favor of him, as it was for you. In the mean time, content yourself with knowing that we inhabit one of the most picturesque of ruins. At a distance, the house resembles an old church demolished in the Revolution,—I would not believe at first that any one could live in it. Five or six inclined planes of masonry, practicable for carriages, with an uneven pavement and balusters, ever so little broken, lead to the grand flight. All this holds together by the force of habit, for it is a long time since there was any cement there. The gilly-flowers and climbing plants have crept into every crevice,

and the road smells like a garden. The house is in the midst of a wood, at a quarter of an hour's walk from the nearest village. I do not exactly know yet of how many floors it consists; the rooms are not all one above another,—you would say that the second story had slid to the ground in an earthquake. On one side the entrance is on a level with the ground, and on the other there is a breakneck descent. It is in such a hurly-burly that you must look for your daughter, my dear mamma. I seek her there sometimes myself, but I never find her.

“We have at least twenty empty chambers, with a magnificent billiard-room where the swallows have built their nests. I have begged them to be left in peace. What am I myself here, but a poor little martin, fleeing from the cold? My room is the best closed of any in the house. It is as large as the Chamber of Deputies, and is painted in oil from top to bottom. I like that better than paper; it is neater and decidedly cooler. M. de Villanera bought me at Corfu a new set of furniture of English manufacture. My bed, my chairs, and my fauteuils, roll at ease in this immensity of space. The good countess sleeps in the next room with the little marquis. When I say that she sleeps, it is only

not to offend her; I see her at my side when I close my eyes, and I find her in the same place when I open them; but it would not be best to tell her that she has not been in bed all night. The doctor is a little further off, on the same floor. He has installed himself as comfortably as he could; those who take care of others are capable of taking care of themselves. M. de Villanera perches somewhere under the roof, if it be really true that there is a roof. Our Greek and Italian servants sleep in the open air,—it is the custom of the country.

“I have four windows opening on the east and south, through which the light and air have free entrance after nine o'clock in the morning. They help me up and dress me, and open the windows one by one, so that the sea air may not reach me too abruptly. About ten o'clock, I go down into my gardens. I have two; one on the north of the house, bounded by a wall more complicated than the great wall of China; and another on the south, washed by the sea. The north garden is planted with olive-trees, jujubes, and Japanese medlars; the other is a forest of orange-trees, fig-trees, citrons, aloes, nopals, and gigantic vines, which thrust themselves everywhere, climbing over every tree and scaling every wall. M. de Villanera said yesterday that the vine was

the goat of the vegetable kingdom. Ah, what a beautiful thing it must be, my poor mamma, to roam where one chooses, like this vine, in perfect liberty! I have never known that happiness in all my life. But if I live ——!

“I am beginning to crawl along the alleys quite merrily. Eight days ago they were impenetrable; for Count Dandolo’s gardener was one of the purely romantic school, with a passion for wild luxuriance and untutored grace. They have cut out the trees indiscriminately, as in a virgin forest. I demanded favor for the orange-trees, for you must know that I am reconciled to the odor of the flowers. But they must not be in my chamber; I can only endure them in the open air. The perfume which cut flowers exhale in a room, mounts to my brain like an odor of death,—and that saddens me. But when the plants are dancing in the sun, under the sea-breeze, I rejoice with them; I mingle in their gayety, and blossom in their company. How beautiful the earth is! how happy every thing that lives! and how sad it would be to quit this delicious world, which God has created for the pleasure of men! Yet, notwithstanding, there are some who commit suicide. The fools!

“It was said in Paris that I would not see the leaves

bud. I could not have consoled myself for dying so soon without having felt the spring. They have budded, these dear little April leaves, and I am still here to see them. I touch them, smell them, nibble them, and say to them, 'See! I am among you yet. Perhaps the summer may be granted me beneath your shade. And if we must fall together, oh! linger long on these beautiful trees, cling closely to the branches, and live that I may live!'

"Can there be any thing gayer, more alive or more varied than these young shoots? They are white on the poplars and willows, red on the pomegranates, blonde as my hair on the tops of the evergreens, and violet at the ends of the citron boughs. What will their color be six months from now? We will not think of that. The birds are building their nests in the trees, the blue sea is gently laving the sands of the shore, the generous sun is shedding his full golden rays on my poor thin and colorless hands, and I feel an air filling my lungs which is soft and penetrating as your voice, my mother. I fancy to myself at times that this warm sun, these blossoming trees, these singing birds, are so many friends, who are pleading for my life and who will not let me die. I would make friends with the whole earth, I would interest

all nature in my fate, I would move the rocks themselves, so that at the last moment there should arise from the four corners of the earth such a wail and such a prayer that God himself would be touched by it. He is good, he is just; I never have disobeycd him, I never have harmed any one. It would not cost him much to let me live with the rest, confounded in the throng of breathing beings. I take up so little room! And it does not cost much to feed me.

“Unhappily there are some who would wear mourning for my recovery, and who could not console themselves for seeing me alive. What must be done about that? They are in the right. I have contracted a debt; I ought to pay it, if I am an honest girl.

“My dear mamma, what do you think of M. de Villanera? What do they think of him at Paris? Is it possible that any one so frank, so patient, and so gentle as he, can be a wicked man? I met his eyes a few days ago for the first time,—they are beautiful eyes, and one might easily be deceived by them.

“Adieu, my good mother; pray for me, and try to persuade my father to go to church with you some day. If he would do this for the sake of his little Germaine, his conversion would be complete, and I, perhaps, might

be saved! There must be a reward on high for those who bring back a soul to God. But who should have favor in Heaven, if you have not, dear saint?

“With unbounded love,

“I am your dutiful daughter,

“GERMAINE.

“P. S. The kisses for my father are on the right of the signature; yours, on the left.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW SERVANT.

THE DUKE did not show the countess' letter to Madame Chermidy, but he let her read that of Germaine. "You see," said he, "that she is half saved."

"You are a lucky man; every thing succeeds with you," answered she, with a forced smile.

"Except love."

"Patience!"

"One cannot be expected to have much of that at my age."

"And why not?"

"Because he has no time to lose."

"Who is this old Gil who brings your letters?—a courier?"

"No, he is a valet for whom a substitute is needed. Madame de Villanera begs the duchess to send her a good one in his place."

"That is not easy in Paris."

"I shall speak to the steward of my friend Sanglié."

“Don’t you want my assistance? *Le Tas* always has half a dozen valets in her train,—she is a veritable intelligence office.”

“If *Le Tas* has any protégé to provide for, I shall be glad to take him. But remember that we must have a trustworthy man—a nurse.”

“*Le Tas* must have nurses; she has every thing.”

Le Tas was the waiting-maid of Madame Chermidy. She was never seen in the drawing-room, even by surprise, yet the most intimate friends of the family were flattered by making her acquaintance. This woman was an abigail of some two hundred and seventy pounds’ weight, and was a countrywoman and distant relative of Madame Chermidy. Her name, like that of her mistress, was Honorine Lavenaze; and to meet this difficulty, they had availed themselves of her deformity to nickname her *Le Tas*. This living phenomenon,—this heap of quaking flesh, this pachyderm, had followed Madame Chermidy and her fortunes for fifteen years. She had been the accomplice of her success, the confidant of her frailties, and the receiver of her millions. Seated in the chimney corner like a familiar demon, she read her mistress’s future in the cards, and promised her the sovereignty of Paris, like one of Shakespeare’s witches; she raised her courage,

consoled her sorrows, plucked out her white hairs, and served her with canine devotion. She had gained neither bank-stock nor annuity in the service, nor did she wish it. Older by ten years than Madame Chermidy, and obese to infirmity, she was sure of dying before her mistress and of dying in her house:—one does not dismiss a servant who can carry away his secrets. Besides, *Le Tas* had neither ambition, cupidity, nor personal vanity; she lived in her beautiful cousin, and was wealthy, brilliant, and triumphant in the person of Madame Chermidy. These two women, so firmly knit together by a friendship of fifteen years, formed but a single individual,—it was a two-faced head, like the masks of the ancient comedians. On the one side, it smiled at love, and on the other, grimaced at crime; one showed itself because it was beautiful, the other hid itself because it was frightful.

Madame Chermidy promised the duke to think of the matter, and the same day she consulted with *Le Tas* as to how they could best send the proper servant to Corfu.

Madame Chermidy was fully decided to put a period to Germaine's convalescence, but she had too much prudence to take upon herself any risks or perils. She knew that to be criminal is always to be unskilful, and her position was too good to be hazarded on an unlucky throw.

“You are right,” said *Le Tas*, decidedly; “there must be no crime; that we must begin with. A crime never profits the author; others reap the benefit. A robber kills a rich man on the highway, and finds a hundred sous in his pockets,—the rest goes to the heirs.”

“But here I am the heir?”

“Of nothing at all if we are taken in the act. Listen to me. In the first place, she may die a natural death. Next, if any one should lend her a helping hand, we must not know of it.”

“How can that be?”

“By interesting some one in her death. Suppose a sick man should say to his servants, ‘My children, take good care of me, the day when I die you shall each have a thousand francs income.’ Do you believe that he would have long to live? I rather think some intelligent knave would be found among the number to follow the doctor’s directions in his own way. He would soon have his thousand francs income, and the heirs——”

“Would inherit. I understand. But we have only one servant to find,—what if we should light on an honest man?”

“Are there any, then?”

“*Le Tas*, you calumniate humanity. There are a great

many men who would not stake their head for an income of a thousand francs."

"For my part, I am sure that if we send a little fellow there — such as I know a plenty of — a genuine Paris blackguard, pale as a green apple, spoiled by his fellows, jealous of his masters, envious of the luxury he sees, and vile as the sewers, — he would comprehend his future prospects within fifteen days."

"Perhaps. But what if he should fail in his blow?"

"Then take a man of experience, — find a practitioner who is skilled in the business, and makes it his trade."

"You are thinking of the country, my child."

"Dame! there were some very fine subjects at Toulouse."

"Do you wish me to look for a servant in the galleys?"

"There are some who have served their time out."

"But how can we find them?"

"By looking for them. We can afford to take trouble for the right man."

A few hours after this conversation, Madame Chermidy, beautiful as incarnate virtue, did the honors of her drawing-room to the most honorable men of Paris.

She numbered among her constant visitors a good-

humored old bachelor, who was an instructive and amusing talker, a great reader of new books, an amateur of first representations, a capital narrator of unpublished stories, as irreproachable in his narrations as correct in his toilette, and faithful to the traditions of old French gallantry. He was chief of the prefecture of police.

Madame Chermidy carried him a cup of tea with her own hands, and sweetened it with an ineffable smile. She gossiped a long time with him, exhausted his repertory, and took the liveliest interest in all that he chose to relate. For the first time in many months she neglected her other guests, and departed from her habits of strict impartiality.

The excellent man was in a transport, and he shook the snuff from his frill with visible satisfaction.

However, as one is never such good company that he must not leave at some time, M. Domet discreetly made his way towards the door a few minutes before midnight. There was still a score of lingerers in the drawing-room. Madame Chermidy called him back, with the gracious effrontery of the mistress of the house towards deserters.

“Dear M. Domet,” said she, “you have been too charming for me to give you your liberty so soon. Come here — by my side — and tell me one more of those stories that you tell so well.”

The excellent man obeyed with a good grace, although it was his rule to go to bed early and to rise early; but he protested that he had emptied his budget, and that unless he invented, had nothing more to tell. A few frequenters of the house formed a circle around him to tease him a little by cross-questioning. They made a thousand demands, each more indiscreet than the other; they wanted the truth concerning the Iron Mask, the real author of the Junius letters, the mysteries of the ring of Gyges, the Gunpowder Plot, and the Council of Ten, and that he should show the assembly one of the springs of government. He answered all their rallying, gayly and adroitly, with that good-humor which, in old men, is the fruit of a tranquil life; yet he was not at ease, but fidgeted about in his easy-chair like a fish in the frying-pan. At last, Madame Chermidy, with her usual goodness, came to his aid, saying, "It was I who delivered you to the Philistines; it is but just that I should free you from them. But on one condition, mark!"

"I accept it with my eyes shut."

"It is said that almost all the crimes that are committed are done by persons who have already once undergone judicial punishment — returned convicts — *forçats* . . . *libérés* — is that the word?"

“Yes, madame.”

“Ah, well; explain to us what is a *forçat libéré*.”

The courteous official took off his spectacles, wiped them with a corner of his handkerchief, and replaced them on his nose. All who were remaining in the drawing-room gathered round him and prepared to listen. The Duke de La Tour d’Embleuse leaned against the mantel, little suspecting that he was assisting at his daughter’s murder. Men of the world have an epicurean curiosity, and the mysteries of crime are a rich *régale* for their palled appetites.

“Mon Dieu! madame,” exclaimed the chief of the police, “if it is but a simple definition that you ask of me, I shall retire in good season. Returned convicts are men who have finished their term in the galleys. Permit me to kiss your hand, and take leave.”

“What! is that all?”

“Absolutely. And note that there is not a man in France who knows the men of whom you speak better than I. I have not seen a single one of them; but I have their memoranda in my portfolio; I know their past and present history, their occupation, and their residence, and I could mention them all to you by their names, their surnames, their aliases, and their soubriquets.”

“It was thus that Cæsar (be it said without comparison) knew all the soldiers of his army.”

“Cæsar, madame, was more than a great captain; he was the first official of his age.”

“Were there any *forçats libérés* in the Roman republic?”

“No, madame; and soon there will be none in France. We are beginning to follow the example of the English, who have substituted transportation for the galleys. Public security will gain by this, and the prosperity of our colonies will not lose by it. The galleys were the school of all the vices; the transported convicts will grow moral through labor.”

“So much the worse! I regret the returned convicts; they made such an interesting figure in the novels of the circulating library! But tell me, M. Domet, who are these people? What do they do? What do they say? Where do they live? How are they dressed? Where can one find them? How can one know them? Do they still have letters on their back?”

“A few have—the veterans of the order. The branding was suppressed in 1791, established again in 1806, and definitively abolished by the law of the twenty-eighth of April, 1832. A returned convict resembles an honest

man in every respect, — he dresses as he likes, and practises the profession he has learned. Unfortunately, they have almost all learned to steal.”

“But are there no honest men among the number?”

“Not many. Think of the education of the galleys! And besides, it is very difficult for them to gain an honest livelihood.”

“And why so?”

“Their antecedents are known, and employers do not like to take them into their shops. Then their comrades in the work-room despise them, and if they have money, and set up in business on their own account, they cannot find journeymen.”

“They are known then? But by what sign? If one of them should come here to enter my service, how could I know what he was?”

“There is no danger. They are forbidden to stay in Paris, because their surveillance would be too difficult. A residence is assigned them in little provincial towns, and the local police never takes its eyes off them.”

“And what if they come to Paris without your permission?”

“Their ban would be broken, and we should transport them by virtue of a decree of the eighth of December, 1851.”

“But then there is nobody in the *tapis-francs*!”

“The municipal council of the department of the Seine have ordered the houses of which you speak to be demolished. There are no longer either game for the dens or dens for the game.”

“Divine goodness! we are approaching the golden age. M. Domet, you are scattering my illusions one by one. You are depriving life of its poesy.”

“Beautiful lady, life can never want for poesy to those who have the happiness of seeing you.”

This compliment was expressed with such a flourish of rustic gallantry that all the audience applauded. M. Domet blushed to his eyes, and looked down at the toes of his shoes; but Madame Chermidy soon recalled him to the question. “Where are the returned convicts?” asked she. “Are there any of them at Vaugirard?”

“No, madame, there are none in the department of the Seine.”

“Perhaps, then, there are some at Saint-Germain?”

“No.”

“At Compiègne?”

“No.”

“At Corbeil?”

“Yes.”

“How many?”

“You hope, perhaps, to find me at fault?”

“That I do!”

“Well. There are four of them.”

“Their names? Come, Cæsar!”

“Rabichon, Lebrasseur, Chassepie, and Mantoux.”

“Why, that is a verse.”

“You have divined at once the secret of my mnemonics.”

“Let us repeat them: Rabichon”

“Lebrasseur, Chassepie, and Mantoux.”

“This is something very curious. Now we are all as learned as you. Rabichon, Lebrasseur, Chassepie, and Mantoux. And what are these honest men doing there?”

“The first two are in a paper-mill on trial, the third is a gardener, and the fourth has a locksmith’s shop.”

“Monsieur Domet, you are a great man; pardon me for having doubted your erudition.”

“Provided that you do not doubt my obedience.”

It was one in the morning. M. Domet departed, and all the disciples of Madame Chermidy rose, one after the other, and devotedly kissed the little white hand which was caressing the hope of a crime. But while

receiving their adieux, the pretty woman was murmuring between her teeth the mnemotechnic verse of poor M. Domet: Rabiehon, Lebrasseur, Chassepie, and Mantoux.

The duke was the last to depart. "What are you thinking of?" said he; "you are preoccupied."

"I am thinking of Corfu."

"Think of your friends in Paris."

"Good-night, *Monsieur le duc*. I believe that *Le Tas* has found you a domestic. She has yet to make the necessary inquiries; we will speak of it again one of these days."

The next morning *Le Tas* took the cars to Corbeil. She took lodgings in the hôtel de France, and walked the city until Sunday, visiting all the paper stores, buying flowers of all the gardeners, and scrutinizing the passers in all the public streets. On Sunday morning she lost the key of her travelling-bag. She went out in search of a locksmith, and found a little shop on the Essonne road, the master of which was blowing his forge, despite the law of dominical rest. The sign bore the words: MANTOUX PEU-DE-CHANCE, *Locksmithing of all kinds done here*. The locksmith was a small man, of from thirty to thirty-five, dark, well made, alive and

awake. One did not need to look twice at him to divine to what sect he belonged; he was one of those who make Saturday their Sabbath. The love of gain sparkled in his little black eyes, and his nose resembled the beak of a bird of prey. *Le Tas* asked him to return with her to the hotel to force a lock. He acquitted himself like one who understood his business, and when it was finished *Le Tas* detained him still longer through the charms of her conversation. She began by asking him if he was satisfied with his business. He replied in the tone of a man disgusted with life. Nothing in his whole life had ever succeeded with him. He had served as a groom, and been discharged by his master. He had then entered into an apprenticeship to a mechanic, but the malice of some of the customers had injured him greatly. At twenty, he had launched with some companions into a magnificent scheme,—a branch of locksmithry, which promised to afford them all a fortune,—but despite his zeal and skill he had failed shamefully, and had worked hard for ten years without recovering from his fall. From this time the name of *Little-luck* had clung to him. He had established himself at Corbeil, after a long stay in the South. The city authorities knew him well,

and were interested in his welfare, and he received a visit from the commissary of the police from time to time; yet work was very scarce, and but few houses were open to him.

Le Tas compassionated his misfortunes, and asked him why he did not go and seek his fortune elsewhere.

He replied sadly, that he had neither the taste nor the means for travelling; he had been for a long time in Corbeil. Where the goat is tied, there he must browse.

“Even when there is nothing to browse upon?” said *Le Tas*.

He nodded for the only reply.

“If I understand physiognomy aright,” continued *Le Tas*, “you are as honest a man as I am a woman. Why do you not find a place in a family, since you have served before? I am at service in Paris, with a lady who treats me kindly,—I think I know a place that would suit you.”

“Thank you with all my heart, but I am forbidden to stay in Paris.”

“By the physician?”

“Yes, my lungs are delicate.”

“Luckily the place is not in Paris. It is out of

France down in the neighborhood of Turkey, in the country where they cure consumptives by putting them to warm in the sun."

"I should like that well, if the place were a good one. But many things are needed to cross the frontier, — money, passports; I have none of these."

"Every thing will be provided you if you suit madame. But you must come to Paris for an hour or two to see her."

"Ah, that I can do. Nothing would happen to me, even if I pass a whole day with you."

"Surely not."

"If the matter is settled, I should like to take another name on my passport. Mine has brought me quite misfortune enough already, and I shall leave it in France with my old clothes."

"Bah! you are right. It is what is called changing one's skin. I will speak of you to madame, and if the affair can be arranged, I will drop you a line."

Le Tas returned the same evening to Paris. Mantoux, surnamed *Little-luck*, fancied that he had met a beneficent fairy in the disguise of an ape. Golden visions hovered round his pillow; he dreamed that he became rich and honest at the same stroke, and that the *Académie*

Française decreed him an income of fifty thousand francs as a reward of merit. He received a letter on Monday evening, on the receipt of which he broke his ban, and arrived on Tuesday morning at the house of Madame Chermidy. He had cut his hair and shaved his beard, but *Le Tus* took good care not to ask him why.

The splendor of the establishment dazzled him, and he was completely abashed by the severe dignity of Madame Chermidy. The beautiful miscreant had assumed the manners of an imperial censor. She summoned him before her, and questioned him on his past history with the air of a woman not to be deceived. He lied like a prospectus, and she took care to believe him. When he had furnished all the necessary information, she said:

“My lad, the place which I am about to give you is one of trust. A friend of mine, the Duke de La Tour d’Embleuse, is in search of a servant for his daughter, who is dying in a foreign land. Good wages will be given for a year or two, and an annuity of twelve hundred francs after the death of the young lady. She is given over by all the Paris physicians. The wages will be paid by the family; as to the annuity, I am responsible for it. Conduct yourself like a faithful servant, and await the end with patience: you will lose nothing by waiting.

Mantoux swore by the God of his fathers that he would nurse the young lady like a brother, and would force her to live a hundred years.

“That is right,” rejoined Madame Chermidy. “You shall attend this evening, and I will present you to the Duke de La Tour d’Embleuse. Show yourself to him as you really are, and I answer for it that he will take you.”

“Whatever may happen,” murmured she to herself, “the knave will see in me his dupe instead of his accomplice.”

Mantoux waited at table, not without having received a good lesson from his protectress, *Le Tas*. The guests were four in number; there were as many servants in attendance to change the plates, and Mantoux had nothing to do but to look on. Madame Chermidy had determined at all events to give him a lesson in toxicology. She thought it might not be useless to teach him something of the nature of poisons, and had chosen her guests accordingly. They consisted of a court counsellor, a professor of medical jurisprudence, and M. de La Tour d’Embleuse.

She insensibly led the doctor to take up the chapter of poisons. The men who are learned in this delicate

science are usually chary of their knowledge, but they sometimes forget themselves at the table; and indeed, one may well be excused for telling in private the secrets which he takes care to hide from the public, when he has for his auditory a magistrate, a grand seignior, and a pretty woman, five or six times a millionaire. The servants count for nothing,—they are not supposed to have any ears.

Unfortunately for Madame Chermidy, the poisons came before the champagne. The doctor was cautious, and jested a great deal without committing any indiscretion. He entrenched himself in curious archæological facts, declared that the science of poisons was checked in its progress, that we had mislaid the recipes of Locusta, Lucrezia Borgia, Catherine de Medicis, and the Marchioness de Brinvilliers; he laughingly regretted these precious lost secrets, and bewailed the subtle poison of young Britannicus, the poisoned gloves of Jeanne d'Albret, the Emperors' dust, and the household liquid which transformed Cyprus wine into Syracuse; not forgetting, on the way, the fatal bouquet of Adrienne Lecouvreur. Madame Chermidy observed that the young locksmith was listening with all his ears. "Tell us of the modern poisons," said she to the doctor; "those which are used in our day, poisons in active service."

“Alas! madame, we have fallen very low,” was his rejoinder. “The difficulty is not to kill people, — a pistol shot will do that, — but to kill them so as to leave no traces. This is all that poison is good for, — its only advantage over the pistol. Unfortunately, as soon as a new poison is discovered, a new method is also found for verifying its presence. The Demon of Good has wings as long as the Genius of Evil. Arsenic is a good workman; but Marsh’s apparatus is at hand to test the work. Nicotine is not a stupid discovery, and strychnine is a very respectable production, but the counsellor knows as well as I that both strychnine and nicotine have found their masters, or, in other words, their antidotes.

“Phosphorus has been adopted with a show of reason. It was said that the human body contained quantities of phosphorus, — if chemical analysis discovered it in the body of the victim, it might be answered that nature herself had placed it there. But we have confounded these reasonings with our science. Certainly, it is not difficult to kill people, but it is almost impossible to do it with impunity. I could point out to you the means of poisoning twenty-five people in a closed room without giving them any beverage. The experiment would not cost ten sous; but the

assassin's head would go into the bargain. A chemist of great skill has just invented a subtle composition which also has its charms; on breaking the tube which contains it, the people about it fall dead like flies. But nobody will be persuaded that they died a natural death."

"Doctor," asked Madame Chermidy, "what is prussic acid?"

"Prussic or cyanohydric acid, madame, is a poison which is not to be bought, very difficult to manufacture, and impossible to preserve pure, even in sealed glasses."

"And it leaves traces?"

"Magnificent ones! It dyes people blue,—it was thus that Prussian blue was discovered."

"You are laughing at us, doctor. You have no respect for the most sacred thing in the world—a woman's curiosity! I have heard of some kind of African or American poison which kills men by the prick of a pin; is it only an invention of the novelists?"

"No, it is an invention of the savages; they use it on the points of their arrows. A pretty poison, madame, which does not keep its victim suffering,—a thunderbolt in miniature. The most curious part of the matter

is that they eat it with impunity. The savages use it in their sauces and their battles, in war and in the kitchen."

"You just told us its name, but I have forgotten it."

"I have not told you, madame, but I am ready to do so. It is the *curare*. It is sold in Africa, in the Mountains of the Moon; its venders are the anthropophagi."

This was all Madame Chermidy got for her dinner. The doctor carefully guarded the terrible depository which every physician carries about him. But the duke was touched by Mantoux's sobriety and attention. He took him into the service of his daughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

FINE WEATHER.

IN READING the history of the French Revolution, we are often surprised at finding whole months of profound peace and cloudless happiness, in which the passions are hushed, fears lulled, and hatreds at rest, while parties walk hand in hand like brothers, and enemies embrace each other on the public square. These peaceful days are but resting-places prepared from stage to stage along the bloody journey.

Such silences are also to be found in the most restless or the most unhappy life. Passions and diseases, the revolutions of the body and the soul, do not continue their route without some moments of repose. Man is so feeble a being that he can neither act nor suffer without cessation; if he did not pause from time to time, he would too soon exhaust his vital forces.

The summer of 1853 was one of those moments of respite for Germaine which come so seasonably to the aid of human weakness. She profited by it; steeped her-

self in happiness, and took a little strength for the trials she had yet to pass through.

The climate of the Ionian isles has a mildness and equability without parallel. The winter is nothing else than a transition from autumn to spring, while the summer is of a fatiguing serenity. From time to time a fleeting cloud hurries over the Seven Isles, but it never pauses on its way. One may live there for three months in the vain expectation of a drop of rain. In this arid Paradise, the natives do not say as in other countries, "Tiresome as rain;" but: "Tiresome as fair weather."

But the fair weather did not weary Germaine; on the contrary, it was slowly healing her. M. Le Bris witnessed this miracle of the blue sky with admiration; he gazed on the work of Nature, and watched the action of a power superior to his own with passionate interest. He was too modest to attribute to himself the honor of the cure, but honestly confessed that the only infallible medicine was that which came from above.

Yet to merit the aid of Providence, he thought best to do a little himself. He had received Chartroule's oïdometer from Paris, together with a supply of iodated cigarettes. These cigarettes, which are composed of aro-

matic herbs and sedative plants, introduce the medicaments into the lungs, accustom these most delicate organs to the presence of a foreign substance, and prepare the patient to inhale the pure iodine through the tubes of the apparatus. Unluckily the apparatus arrived in pieces, though it had been packed by the duke himself, and brought with infinite care by the new domestic. They were obliged to send for another, which took some time.

At the end of a month of the anodyne treatment, Germaine experienced a sensible improvement. She was less feeble during the day, she could better endure the fatigues of an airing, and she did not lie down so often to rest. Her appetite was better, and moreover, regular, and she no longer rejected the dishes after tasting them. She ate, digested, and slept tolerably well. The fever at evening was considerably abated, and the night-sweats which inundate all consumptive patients gradually diminished.

The heart of the sick girl was not slow in entering also into convalescence. Her despair, her petulance, and her hatred of all who loved her, gave place to a gentle and touching melancholy. She was so happy at feeling her life renewed, that she would gladly have thanked all heaven and earth for it.

Convalescents are great children, who cling for fear of falling, to every thing about them. Germaine would not suffer her friends to leave her side; she feared solitude; she wished to be reassured every moment, and constantly repeated to the countess, "Is it not true that I am better?" adding, in a low voice, "that I shall not die?" The countess would answer, laughing, "If Death comes to take you, I will show him my face, and he will keep at a distance." The countess was as vain of her ugliness as other women of their beauty,—coquetry thrusts itself everywhere.

Don Diego patiently waited till Germaine should return to him. He was too proud and too delicate to importune her with his attentions, but he stood within call, ready to take the first step as soon as she summoned him by a glance. She soon grew accustomed to this discreet and silent friendship. The count had something grand and heroic in his ugliness, which women appreciate more than mere beauty. He was not one of those who make conquests, but who inspire passions. His long and swarthy countenance and bronzed hands were contrasted with a certain effect by his white linen costume. His large, black eyes flashed lightnings of warmth and tenderness, and his deep, ringing voice was capable

of the gentlest and most musical inflections. Germaine ended by finding a resemblance between the Spanish grandee and a tamed lion.

When she walked under the old orange-trees of the garden, or among the tamarisks by the sea-shore, leaning on the arm of the old countess, or with little Gomez clinging to her skirt, the count quietly followed them at a distance without affectation, a book in hand. He never assumed the anxious air of a lover, or confided his sighs to the breeze. You would have called him an indulgent father, who wished to watch over his children without restraining their sports. His affection for his wife consisted of Christian charity, a compassion for weakness, and that bitter joy which a noble heart always feels in the accomplishment of a difficult duty. Perhaps there was also mingled with it a little excusable pride. There is no more glorious victory than to snatch from death its certain prey, and to create a being anew whom disease had almost destroyed. Physicians know this pleasure; they attach themselves sincerely to those whom they have brought back from the other world, and have for them all the affection of a creator for his work.

Habit, which always draws people together, had accustomed Germaine to converse with her husband. There is

no hatred that can hold out against daily intercourse; one is forced to speak and answer, and though this pledges nothing, yet life is only endurable at the price of friendship. She called him Don Diego; he simply called her Germaine.

One day (it was in the middle of June) she was lying in the garden on a Smyrna carpet. Madame de Villanera was seated near her, mechanically telling a large coral rosary, while the little Gomez was stuffing his pockets with the unripe oranges that had fallen from the trees. Just at this moment, Don Diego passed at a little distance, a book in his hand. Germaine raised herself, and invited him to take a seat. He did not wait to be urged, and put the book in his pocket.

“What were you reading there?” asked she.

“You will laugh at me,” answered he, blushing like a school-boy at fault. “It was Greek.”

“Greek! do you know how to read Greek! how could a man like you have the patience to learn it?”

“By the merest chance. My tutor might have been a fool like so many others,—he happened to be a scholar.”

“And you read Greek for amusement?”

“Homer, yes. I am in the middle of the *Odyssey*.”

Germaine feigned a little yawn. "I read Homer in Bitaubé," said she. "There was a sword and a casque on the cover."

"Then you would be very much surprised if I should read you Homer in Homer,—you would not recognize it at all."

"Much obliged! but I do not like stories about battles."

"There are none such in the *Odyssey*. It is a novel of society,—the first that was ever written, and perhaps the best. Our fashionable authors have imagined nothing more interesting than the story of this country squire, who left his home to gain a fortune, and who, returning after an absence of twenty years, found an army of knaves installed in his house to court his wife and devour his estate, and slew them all with his trusty arrows. It is an interesting drama, even for the public of the market-place. Nothing is wanting; neither the trusty servant Eumœus, nor the goat-herd who betrays his master, nor the wise virgins, nor the foolish ones whom Telemachus is charged to hang at the *dénoûement*. The only fault in the story is that it is always translated with exaggeration. The young rustics who besieged Penelope have been transformed into so many kings, the farm-house has been

changed into a palace, and gold has been scattered everywhere. If I dared translate to you a single page, you would be struck with the simple and familiar truth of the story, you would see with what innocent delight the poet speaks of the ruby wine and the juicy meat, and how enthusiastically he admires the well-joined doors and polished floors. You would see, too, with what fidelity nature is portrayed, and you would find in my book the sea, the sky, and the garden which is spread before us."

"Let us try," said Germaine. "You will see how soon I will fall asleep."

The count obeyed with a good grace, and began to translate the first book at sight, unrolling before the eyes of Germaine the glorious Homeric style, richer, more varied, and more sparkling than the brilliant tissues of Beyroot or Damascus. His translation was the freer that he did not understand all the words; but he did what was better, he understood the poet. He cut short some tedious passages, interpreted certain obscure sentences in his own fashion, and added to the text a spicy commentary. In short, he interested all of his beloved auditory with the exception of the Marquis de los Hierro, who screamed with all his might to interrupt the reading. Children are like birds; they always sing when others are talking.

I do not know whether the young couple reached the end of the *Odyssey*; but it is certain that Don Diego had found means to awaken his wife's interest, and that was a great deal. She fell into the habit of hearing him read and of taking pleasure in his company, and she was not long in seeing in him a man of superior mind. He was too timid to speak in his own name, but the presence of a great poet inspired him with boldness, and his own ideas found daylight under cover of the words of another. Dante, Ariosto, Cervantes, and Shakespeare were the sublime mediators who were charged with the task of drawing these two souls together and rendering them dear to each other. Germaine felt herself in nowise humiliated by her own ignorance and the superiority of her husband,—a woman rejoices in being nothing in comparison with him she loves.

They grew into the habit of living together and of meeting in the garden for reading and conversation. It was not gayety that made the charm of these interviews, but a certain calm and friendly serenity. Don Diego did not know how to laugh, and the laughter of his mother resembled a nervous grimace, and the doctor, with his Champenois frankness and mirth, seemed to strike a false note when he threw his grain of salt into the con-

versation. Germaine coughed sometimes, and she still wore on her countenance that unquiet expression which the neighborhood of death gives. And meanwhile these cloudless summer days were the first happy days of her youth.

How many times during this quiet of family life was the count's mind troubled by the memory of Madame Chermidy? No one knew, and I shall not venture to answer the question. It is possible that solitude, idleness, the privation of those exciting pleasures so alluring to men, and lastly, the sap of spring-time which mounts to the brow of man as to the branches of trees, made him more than once regret his noble resolution. The Trappists, who turn their back on the world after having enjoyed it, find arms ready in their cell wherewith to resist the temptations of the past,—these weapons are fasting and prayer, and a discipline mortifying enough to slay the old man within them. There is still more merit in fighting, like Don Diego, as an unarmed soldier. M. Le Bris covertly watched him as a patient whom it was necessary to preserve from a relapse. He rarely spoke to him of Paris, and never of the Rue du Cirque; and on reading one day in a journal that the *Naiade* had been despatched to Ky-Tcheou in the Japan sea to demand reparation for

the insult offered to the missionaries, he quietly tore the paper into atoms that the name of M. Chermidy might not be called in question.

There are hours in the East when the southern breezes intoxicate the senses of man more completely than Malmsey wine,—the heart melts like wax, the will unbends, and the mind grows enervated. He strives to think, and the thoughts escape him like a wave gliding through his fingers. He takes a book—some old and pleasant friend—and sits down to read; his eyes wander at the first line, his gaze swims, and his eyelids open and shut without his knowing why. It is in such hours of half slumber and gentle quietude that our hearts open of their own accord. The sterner virtues win an easy triumph when the piercing cold reddens our noses and bites our ears, and when the December wind contracts the fibres of the flesh and the will. But when the jasmines shed their pungent perfumes everywhere about us, when the fragrant oleanders rain their blossoms on our heads, when the musical pines, swaying in the wind, ring out their silvery murmur, and when the white sails range themselves afar on the sea like mystic Nereids, then must one be both deaf and blind to see or understand any thing else than love.

Don Diego noticed one day that Germaine was improving remarkably. Her cheeks were fuller and rounder, and the furrows in her beautiful countenance were gradually filling up, while the sinister wrinkles became effaced. A more healthful color tinged her vividly beautiful face, and her golden hair no longer wreathed a death's head.

She had been listening for some time to the reading, and, overcome at the same moment by weariness and sleep, had let her head fall backward, and was reclining at full length in the pillows of the fauteuil. The count was alone with her. He laid his book on the ground, softly approached her, and, throwing himself on his knees before the young girl, was about to press his lips to her forehead, when he was suddenly restrained by an instinct of delicacy. For the first time, he thought with horror of the manner in which he had become the husband of Germaine. He was ashamed of the bargain; he felt that a kiss obtained by stealth would be something like a crime, and he forbade himself to love his wife until he was sure of being loved by her.

The tenants of the Villa Dandolo did not live in so profound a solitude as might have been imagined. Isolation is only to be found in large cities, where each

one lives for himself without troubling himself about his neighbors. In the country, the most indifferent draw together; no one fears an hour's journey, man realizes that he was born for society, and seeks the conversation of his fellows.

But few days passed on which Germaine did not receive a visit. The neighbors came to see her at first through curiosity, afterwards through kindness, and finally through friendship. The corner of the island in which they were staying was inhabited through the whole season by five or six families in moderate circumstances, who would have been poor in the city, but who wanted for nothing on their estates because they knew how to content themselves with little. Their castles were falling to ruin, and they had no money wherewith to repair them; but they carefully maintained the escutcheon in the doorway, which dated as far back as the crusades. The Ionian isles are the faubourg Saint-Germain of the East,—you find there the lofty virtues and the petty caprices of nobility, pride, dignity, decent and laborious poverty, and a certain elegance in the most destitute phase of life.

The owner of the villa, Count Dandolo, would not have been disowned by his ancestors, the doges. He was

an active and intelligent man, awake to political affairs, and hesitating between the Greeian party and English influence, though inclined to the Opposition, and always ready to pass a harsh judgment on the acts of the Lord Commissioner. He closely followed the old and new intrigues which were dividing Europe, watched the progress of the British lion, discussed the Eastern question, disquieted himself about the influence of the Jesuits, and presided over the lodges of the freemasons of Córфу. He was, on the whole, an excellent little man, who displayed more activity in sailing round a glass of water than a sea-captain would in circumnavigating the globe. His son Spiro, a handsome young man of thirty, had suffered himself to be won by English ideas, like all the rising generation, mingled with the officers, and was seen in their boxes at the theatre. The Dandolos might have lived elegantly on the proceeds of their estates; but at Corfu the people are as poor as the soil is rich. Every one is ready to sell, but nobody ever thinks of buying. The count and Spiro spoke the three languages of the country—English, Greek, and Italian—with fluency; they knew French besides, and their friendship was valuable to Germaine. Spiro interested himself in the fair invalid with all the warmth of an unoccupied heart.

He sometimes brought with him one of his friends, Doctor Delviniotis, professor of chemistry in the faculty of Corfu. M. Delviniotis vowed to the invalid a friendship the more earnest inasmuch as he had a daughter of the same age. He consulted with M. Le Bris, talked in Italian with the count and Madame de Villanera, and grieved over not knowing French well enough to make a fuller acquaintance with Germaine. He might often have been seen seated before her for hours, seeking a sentence, or gazing at her in silence with that mute and respectful politeness which prevails throughout all the East.

The most noisy of the company was Captain Bré-tiguières, an old Frenchman, who had settled in Corfu in 1814. He had quitted the service at the age of twenty-four, with a pension and a wooden leg. This tall, meagre, and bony body limped merrily, drank dry, and laughed high in the face of old age. He travelled a league on foot to dine at the Villa Dandolo, where he told tales of a soldier's life, stroked his gray mustaches, and maintained that the Ionian isles belonged of right to France. He was always a welcome guest, for his gayety enlivened the whole household. Sometimes, on pouring out a bumper, he would say, in a

sententious tone,—“Ah, well! when one is loved and esteemed, he can drink as much as he likes without fear of harm.” Germaine dined with a good appetite whenever the captain was there. The sight of this merry cripple, who clung so eagerly to life, inspired her with a gentle hope, and forced her to have faith in the future. M. Brétiguières petted the little marquis, called him general, and danced him on his knee, while he gallantly kissed the hands of the invalid, and served her with the devotion of an old page, or a troubadour in retirement.

She had an admirer of a different school in the person of Mr. Stevens, magistrate of the royal court of Corfu. This honorable official applied to his body a treatment of a thousand pounds sterling a year. A neater, sleeker, rosier, or more portly man has never been seen,—he was the picture of tranquil and well-fed health. Egotistical as all old bachelors, serious as all magistrates, and phlegmatic as all Englishmen, he nevertheless concealed beneath his blissful rotundity a large share of sensibility. Health appeared to him so precious a gift that he would gladly have shared it with all the universe. He had known the young Englishman of Pompeii, and had followed with interest the

different phases of his cure. He told naively how he had felt but an indifferent sympathy with the youth while pale and dying, but had loved him better from day to day, in proportion as he saw him returning to life, and had become his intimate friend on the day on which he could shake hands with him without making him wince. This was also the secret of his regard for Germaine. He avoided attaching himself to her so long as he believed her condemned to death, but from the moment when she appeared again to take hold of life, he opened his heart and bade her enter.

The nearest neighbors of the household were Madame de Vitré and her son, and they became in a short time the most intimate friends. The baroness was a Norman woman, who had taken refuge in Corfu with the wreck of her fortune. As she shunned all mention of her history, no one knew what had driven her from her country; but what was evident to all eyes was, that she lived like a good woman, and brought up her son admirably. She was forty years of age, and possessed a not unusual comeliness; she would have been taken in France for a farmer's wife of the *pays de Caux*. But she occupied herself in her household, her olive-trees, and her dear Gaston, with a systematic ac-

tivity and an indefatigable zeal which betrayed her race. Greatness is a gift that reveals itself in the most varied scenes and positions in life; it is as visible in labor as in repose, and shines no more brilliantly in a drawing-room, than in a laundry or a farm-yard. Madame de Vitré, between her two servants, and clothed like them in the national costume so like the habit of the Carmelites, was as imposing as Penelope embroidering the tunic of young Telemachus. Gaston de Vitré, who was fair as a young girl of twenty, led the rude and active life of a country squire. He worked with his own hands, pruned the trees, gathered the oranges, and trimmed the pomegranate hedge, whose red fruits were just bursting in the sun. In the morning he wandered through the dew, with his gun on his shoulder, in pursuit of the fig-peckers and thrushes; and in the evening he read with his mother, who was his preceptor and the nurse of his intellect. Without care for the future, ignorant of the world, and confining his thoughts to the horizon which bounded his gaze, he suspected the existence of no other pleasures than a fine day of hunting, a volume of Lamartine, or a sail on the sea in his pleasure-boat; his was a virgin heart, as white and as pure as those spotless sheets of

paper which look longingly at the pen, inviting it to write. When his mother took him to the Villa Dandolo, he perceived for the first time that he was a little ignoramus; he blushed at the idleness in which he had lived, and—he regretted that he had never learned medicine.

Visits are always long in the country. People are forced to travel so far to see each other that they feel reluctant to separate again. The Dandolos, the Vitrés, the judge, the captain, and Doctor Delviniotis sometimes passed whole days about the fair convalescent. She retained them with joy, without probing the secret motive that prompted her to do so. Already had she commenced to shun occasions of being alone with her husband. As declared love flees from intruders, and seeks the privacy of a tête-à-tête, so does growing love seek the distraction of numbers and excitement. As soon as we begin to feel ourselves in the possession of another, it seems to us that strangers and indifferent persons protect us against our weakness, and that we should be defenceless if they were not there.

Madame de Villanera served unconsciously the secret wish of Germaine. She retained Madame de Vitré near her, and became more attached to her from day to day.

Don Diego had not yet come to that point where a lover impatiently endures the company of strangers; his affection for Germaine was still disinterested, because she was cool and tranquil. He sought before all else to divert his young wife and gradually to attach her again to life. It may be, too, that this man, as timid as all men who are really strong, shrunk from explaining to himself this new feeling which attracted him towards her. He feared to stand between two opposing duties, and he could not conceal from himself that he was pledged for life to Madame Chermidy. He believed her worthy of his love, and he esteemed her despite her frailty, as one esteems the woman, whether innocent or guilty, of whose love he is certain. If any one had come with proofs in hand to tell him that Madame Chermidy was not worthy of him, he would have experienced a feeling of anguish instead of relief. One does not break easily with three years of happiness, or say, rubbing his hands: "God be praised! my son is the child of an *intrigante!*"

The count felt, therefore, a sort of mental uneasiness, a secret disquietude, which opposed his growing passion. He feared to read his own thoughts, and stood before his heart as before a letter, of which he dared not break the seal.

In the mean time they sought each other, met, and were happy together, thanking from the bottom of their hearts those who hindered them from being alone. The circle of friends which gathered around them sheltered their love as the great elms which surround the Norman orchards protect the frail efflorescence of the apple-trees.

The reception-room was the garden, where there was a continuous shower of little oranges. Germaine reclined in her fauteuil and smoked her iodated cigarettes, the count watched the growth of her life, Madame de Villanera played with the child like a great black Faun of antiquity with its swarthy offspring, and the friends swayed to and fro in the large rocking-chairs which had been imported from America. From time to time, Mantoux or another house-servant served coffee, ices, or sweetmeats, according to the usages of Eastern hospitality. The guests wondered a little that the mistress of the house was the only one of the whole company that smoked. They smoke everywhere in the East. You throw away your cigar at the door, but the mistress of the house offers another while wishing you good morning. Germaine, whether it was that she had grown more indulgent to the single fault of her husband, or whether she took

pity on these poor Greeks who did not know how to live without their tobacco, decreed one fine morning that the cigarette should henceforth be permitted throughout the extent of her empire. Don Diego smilingly reminded her of her former repugnance. She blushed a little as she hastily replied: "Oh, I have read in Monte Christo that the Turkish tobacco is a perfume, and I know that they can smoke no other here in sight of the shores of Turkey. It was quite different with your odious cigars, the very sight of which made me ill."

Erelong the large chibouk with its red bowl and amber mouthpiece, and the crystal narghila, bubbling so melodiously and coiling its long, pliant stem on the grass like a serpent, made their *début* both in the house and in the garden. At the end of July, the odious cigars timidly escaped from some invisible receptacle, and they found grace in the eyes of Germaine. These tokens proved that she was decidedly better.

It was at this time that the elect of Madame Chermidy, Mantoux surnamed *Little-luck*, took the part of poisoning his mistress.

There is always some good in the most vicious man, and I must admit that for two months Mantoux had been an excellent domestic. When the duke, who was igno-

rant of his history, had procured him a passport under the name of Mathieu, he strode over the frontier with joy and gratitude. Perhaps he dreamed in good sooth, like the valet of Turcaret, of founding a family of honest men. The sweetness of Germaine, the spell which she cast upon all about her, the good wages which she paid her people, and the little hope which she had of living, inspired this contraband valet with kindly feelings. He knew much better how to pick a lock than to prepare a glass of sugared water, but he strove not to appear like a novice, and he succeeded. He belonged to an intelligent race, who are at home everywhere, skilful in every craft, and even in every art, and he applied himself so assiduously, made such progress, and learned his business in so short a time, that his masters were satisfied with him.

Madame Chermidy had advised him to conceal his religion, and to deny it at need, if any one questioned him; she knew well how intolerant the Spaniards of the old school are towards Israelites. Unfortunately this new-made honest man could not hide his features. Madame de Villanera suspected him of being at least a converted Jew, but, like a good Spaniard, she made little difference between converts and heretics. She was the best woman

in the world, yet she would have sent them all pell-mell to the stake, quite sure that the twelve apostles would have done the same.

Mantoux, who had already more than once compounded with his conscience, did not scruple to deny the religion of his fathers; he even consented to attend mass with the other servants; but by one of those contradictions so common to man, he could never prevail upon himself to eat the same food as his comrades. Without placarding his refusal, he threw himself upon vegetables, fruits, and herbs, and played the part of a Pythagorean or a vegetarian. But he consoled himself for this regimen when he was sent on an errand to town. He went straight to the Jews' quarter, fraternized with his people, talked in the semi-Hebraic jargon which serves as a bond to the widely scattered nation, and feasted on the *kaucher* meat, or that which had been killed by the sacrificer according to the commands of the law. It was a consolation which failed him when he was in the galleys.

In conversing with his co-religionists, he learned many things, one of which was that Corfu was a magnificent country, a veritable land of promise, in which one could live cheaply and count himself rich with *twelve hundred francs' income*. He learned, too, that English justice was

rigorous, but that with a good boat and two oars, one could easily escape its pursuit. It sufficed to put the prow towards Turkey; and the continent was but a few miles off,—one could see it, almost touch it. And lastly, he learned where arsenic could be bought at the lowest price.

Towards the end of July, he heard it affirmed by several persons that the young countess was on the road to recovery. He was sure of it from the evidence of his own eyes, and he daily expected to see her perfectly restored. Every evening, on bringing her a glass of *eau sucrée*, he remarked with M. Le Bris the mitigation of the cough and the decrease of fever. One morning he witnessed the opening of a case, which had been much better packed than the one he had brought from Paris. He saw taken from it an elegant apparatus of copper and crystal,—a little machine so simple and so appetizing that one regretted on seeing it that he was not consumptive. The doctor eagerly mounted it on its pedestal, and said, regarding it affectionately, “Behold, God willing, the safety of the countess!”

These words were the more painful to Mantoux as he had just cast his eyes on a charming little estate, with a cottage embowered in trees,—a nest just after the heart

of an honest family. The idea occurred to him of breaking this engine of destruction, which menaced his coming fortune. But he reflected, on second thoughts, that they would show him the door, and that he would lose his wages together with his annuity; so he sorrowfully resigned himself to being merely a good servant.

Unfortunately his comrades prated loudly of the vegetable diet to which he had condemned himself. Madame de Villanera, taking alarm at this, informed herself of every thing, and decided that he was an incorrigible Jew, who had relapsed into heresy with all its consequences. She asked him whether it suited him better to find a place at Corfu or to return to France. It was in vain for him to lament and ask pardon, and to entreat the charitable intervention of Germaine,—Madame de Villanera would not listen to reason on this point. All that he could obtain was permission to remain till the arrival of his substitute.

He had a month before him: this is how he profited by it. He bought several grains of arsenious acid, and hid it in his chamber. From this he took a pinch sufficient for the ration of two men, and dissolved it in a large glass of water. This glass he placed in the pantry upon a high shelf only to be reached by mounting a

chair; and without loss of time he poured a few drops of this poisoned liquid into the *eau sucrée* of the invalid. He promised himself to repeat it daily, to kill his mistress slowly, and to merit, despite the little apparatus, the benefactions of Madame Chermidy.

CHAPTER IX.

LETTERS FROM CHINA AND PARIS.

“TO M. MATHIEU MANTOUX, CARE OF COUNT DE VILLANERA, VILLA DANDOLO, CORFU.

Without date.

“**Y**OU do not know me, but I know you as well as if I had made you. You were once a government boarder in the naval school of Toulon,—it was there I saw you for the first time. I met you afterwards at Corbeil; you did not do a brilliant business there, and the police had its eye on you. You have had the good hap to light on a silly fool of a Parisienne, who has procured you a fine place, with the hope of a pension. The lady of the Rue du Cirque and her waiting-maid take you for an honest simpleton; and it is said that your masters honor you with their confidence. If the invalid whom you are nursing had taken her passage to the other world, you would be rich and respected, and could live in competence in any country you chose. Unfortu-

nately she has not decided, and you have not wit enough to put her on the right road. So much the worse for you! You will keep your nickname, *Little-luck!* The commissary of police is in search of you. He is on your track. If you do not take your measures, be sure that he will find you yonder. You see that I have found you, since I write to you! Have you any curiosity to go and gather pepper at Cayenne? Work, then, sluggard! your fortune is in your own hands as sure as I am called But you do not need to know my name. I am neither Rabichon, nor Lebrasseur, nor Chaspie. I am, in the hope that you will comprehend your own interests,

“Your friend, X. Y. Z.”

MADAME CHERMIDY TO DOCTOR LE BRIS.

PARIS, August 13, 1853.

“Key of Hearts, my charming friend, I have some astonishing and delightful news for you. Madame Sévigné would have made you wait two pages for it; I go more quickly to work, and give it to you in the first line. I am a widow, my friend! a widow in good earnest! a widow without remedy! as much a widow as though the notary had declared me so! I have received

the official news, the mortuary certificate, the complimentary condolences of the Minister of the Navy, the sword and epaulettes of the defunct, and a pension of seven hundred and fifty francs to keep me from want in my old age. Widow! widow! widow! There's no prettier word in the French language. I dress myself in black; I walk the streets, and I long to stop the passers and tell them that I am a widow.

“I have proved on this occasion that I am no ordinary woman. I know of more than one who would have wept, either through human weakness or to quiet her nerves. I? I laughed like a fool, and threw myself on *Le Tas'* neck, who had n't the strength to hinder. Chermidy is no more! we shall have no more of Chermidy! no more Chermidy, upon my word! we have a right to say the late Chermidy!

“You know, Tomb of Secrets, that I never loved this man. He was nothing to me. I bore his name and his ill-humor; two or three boxes on the ear, which he gave me, were the only ties which love ever formed between us. The only man whom I have ever loved, my true husband, my husband in the sight of God, never was called Chermidy. My fortune did not come from this sailor, I owe him nothing, and I should be very hypocriti-

cal to weep over him. You witnessed our last interview; do you remember the conjugal grimace which embellished his features? If you had not been present, he would not have contented himself with that,—these sailor husbands are capable of every thing. The cards have often predicted that I should die a violent death,—it was because the cards knew M. Chermidy. He would have wrung my neck sooner or later, and have danced at my funeral. It is I who laugh, and dance, and talk nonsense;—it is a case of legitimate self-defence.

“But come, his death is an interesting story. You never saw such a piece of Chinese workmanship,—I wish I could put it on my what-not. All my friends came here yesterday to offer me their condolence. Their faces were heavy with mourning, but I told them the story, cheered them up, and lightened the load in the twinkling of an eye. We laughed without stopping till half an hour after midnight.

“You must know, my dear doctor, that the *Naiade* was stationed before Ky-Tcheou. I have never succeeded in finding the place on the map, and I am in despair. The geographies of the present day are strangely incomplete. Ky-Tcheou ought to be at the south of the peninsula of Corea, on the Sea of Japan. I have found Kin-Tcheou,

it is true, but that is in the province of Ching-King, on the gulf of Leou-Toung, in the Yellow Sea. Put yourself in the place of a poor widow who does not know in what latitude she was deprived of her husband!

“Be that as it may, the magistrates of Ky-Tcheou, or Kin-Tcheou at the mouth of the river Li-Kiang, had maltreated two French missionaries. The governing mandarin, the powerful Gou-Ly, father of the city, devoted all his leisure to playing tricks on strangers. There are three European factories in this agreeable place, and a French mercer officiates as consular agent. A flag was suspended before the door of his house, and the two missionaries lodged with him. Gou-Ly arrested the two priests, and accused them of having preached a strange religion. It ill became them to defend themselves, since they had come there precisely for that purpose. They were condemned to death; and the rumor was spread that they had been executed. It was at this juncture that the admiral despatched the *Naiade* to see something of what was going on. The commandant ordered Gou-Ly on board. Can't you fancy my husband tête-à-tête with this Chinaman? Gou-Ly protested that the missionaries were in perfect health, but that they had infringed the laws of the country, and

must remain in prison for six months. My husband demanded to see them; the mandarin offered to show them to him through the grating. He went the same evening to the gates of the prison. He saw two missionaries in ecclesiastical costume gesticulating at the window. The French consul recognized them, and everybody was satisfied.

“But the next morning, the consul was informed that the two missionaries had positively been slaughtered eight days before the arrival of the *Naiade*. More than twenty witnesses testified to the fact. M. Chermidy again put on his uniform, landed his men, returned to the prison, and forced the doors, despite the gestures of the missionaries, who stretched out their arms to send him back to the ship. He found in the cell two wax figures, modelled with Chinese perfection, — they were the missionaries which had been shown to him the night before.

“My husband fell into a towering passion. He could not endure that any one should deceive him, — it is a trait that I have long known in him. He returned on board his ship, and swore a great oath that he would bombard the city if the murderers were not punished. The mandarin submitted, trembling like a leaf, and ordered the judges to be sawed asunder between two

planks. For once, my husband had nothing more to say.

“But the laws of the country permit every one that is condemned to death to furnish a substitute. There are special agencies which, by means of five or six thousand francs and some fine promises, persuade a poor devil to let himself be cut in twain. The Chinese of the lowest class, who grovel pellmell among the animals, do not cling prodigiously to life. You comprehend how this is! They willingly decide to lead a short life and a merry one, when they are offered a thousand piastres to spend in three days. My husband accepted the substitutes, witnessed the punishment, and made his peace with the ingenious Gou-Ly. He carried his clemency so far as to invite him to dinner the next day, together with the magistrates who had been punished by proxy. This was acting like a good diplomate; for what is diplomacy but the art of pardoning injuries as soon as one has avenged them?

“Gou-Ly and his accomplices came to dine in great state on board the *Naiade*. The dessert was illuminated by a magnificent conflagration, — the ship had taken fire and blazed like a match. The pumps were played in good time, the accident was laid on the shoulders of

a cook, and apologies were made to the venerable Gou-Ly.

“Do you find the story tedious? Patience! We have only one day longer to live. The mandarin wished to reciprocate his politeness; he invited him for the next day to one of those banquets which are the triumph of Chinese prodigality. We are but poor spendthrifts compared with these originals. The nobleman who spent five hundred francs for his own dinner at the Café de Paris was an object of admiration; that was nothing at all to the Chinese. They announced to the commandant ragouts spiced with costly pearls, swallows’ nests lined with the tongues of golden pheasants, and the celebrated peacock-egg omelette, which is made at the table, killing each female to obtain her single egg. My Chermidy, as simple as his own oars, never once suspected that he was to pay the bill. He licked his lips at these official reports, and promised himself to listen with all his ears to the diversions which enliven a Chinese festival.

“He landed with the consul and an escort of four soldiers in the midst of a delightful, drenching rain. You may believe that he had not forgotten to put on his full uniform. A deputation of magistrates received him with all the prescribed compliments. I suppose he was not

displeased with the harangue. If Chinese adore compliments, sailors do not detest them. He was hoisted on one of the little horses of the country, — I fancy I see him from here, trotting on his pony, like a long pair of tongs! The animal (be it said without equivocation), plunged into the mud up to his knees, — the Chinese streets are macadamized with two ends in view, driving and navigation. Twelve boys, dressed in rose-colored silk, with peacock feathers in their hands, walked on each side of him, singing the praises of the great, the mighty, and the invincible Chermidy, and urging on his steed with their plumes. The little ones tickled his nostrils, while the tall ones irritated the inside of his ears so well and so long that the animal reared furiously. The rider fell from his seat with the clumsiness of a sailor. The children ran to him, all asking at the same time if he were hurt, if he needed any thing, if he wanted water to wash himself, or if they should bring him something to smell of; and while talking, they took their little knives from their pockets and cut his throat, without noise, without scandal, until the head was completely severed from his body. The consul escaped to tell the tale, but I fear that he would have told nobody, had it not been for the aid of the four sailors who saved his life and brought

him back to the ship. I stop here — the piece loses its interest as soon as the hero is buried. You can learn the rest from the journals and from the inclosed letter which the officers of the *Naiade* have taken the trouble to address me. I sincerely regret the death of the mandarin Gou-Ly. If he were now living, I would give him a pension of swallows' nests for the rest of his life. Since my happiness depends on a double widowhood, I have always vowed to divide a million between the charitable souls who should deliver me from my enemies. There were five hundred thousand francs in my secretary for this mandarin who is dead.

“Tomb of Secrets, you will burn my letter, won't you? Burn also the journals that speak of this affair. Don Diego need not know that I am free while he himself is in chains. Let us spare our friends too bitter regrets. Above all, do not tell him that black becomes me.

“Take good care of the person to whom you have devoted yourself. Whatever may happen, you will have the credit of making her live beyond all hope. If any one had told you that you were leaving Paris for seven or eight months, would you have gone so willingly? When she recovers — or something else — you must return to Paris, and we will find you a new practice; for

I am sure that all your patients except myself have completely forgotten you.

“M. de La Tour d’Embleuse, who does me the honor to dine at my house occasionally, asks me to find you a new servant. I selected the first one that I sent to you hastily,—he has been represented to me within the last few days as a dangerous man. Discharge him, therefore, at once, or keep him on your own responsibility until the arrival of his substitute.

“Adieu, Key of Hearts. My heart has long been open to you, and if you are not the best of all my friends, it is not my fault. Preserve my husband and my son to me, and I shall be for life,

“Yours devotedly,

“HONORINE.”

THE OFFICERS OF THE *NAÏADE* TO MADAME CHERMIDY.

HONG-KONG, April 2, 1853.

“MADAME,—The officers and midshipmen of the *Naiade* fulfil a painful duty in joining their regrets to the natural grief which the loss of Captain Chermidy will cause you.

“A base treachery has deprived France of one of her

most honorable and experienced officers; you, madame, of a husband whose gentleness and goodness all can appreciate; and us of a chief, or rather a comrade, who did us the honor to lighten our weight of the service by reserving its heaviest duties to himself.

“In sending you the insignia of the rank which he had earned so laboriously, our sole regret, madame, is in being unable to add that star of the brave which he long since merited, as well by the duration as by the importance of his services, and which would doubtless have awaited him at port at the end of a cruise which we must finish without him.

“In a grief like yours, madame, the pleasure of vengeance is but a feeble consolation. Notwithstanding we are proud in being able to say to you that we have given our brave commandant a glorious funeral. As soon as the consul and the four sailors who had witnessed the crime brought the news to us on board the ship, the oldest lieutenant, succeeding the excellent officer we had lost, ordered the people of the European factories to evacuate with their merchandise; and opened a steady fire upon the town, which reduced it to ashes in less than two days. Gon-Ly and his accomplices believed themselves in safety in the fortress. A

company of marines landed under the command of one of our number, and besieged them for a week with two pieces of ordnance, which had been transported to the shore. Our men behaved admirably — they avenged their commandant. The *Naiade* did not set sail to rejoin the fleet until it had punished the mandarin and his colleagues without mercy. At the moment we write, there is no longer a city called Ky-Tcheou; nothing remains of it but a heap of smouldering ashes, which may well be styled the tomb of Captain Chermidy.

“Accept, madame, our assurances of the profound sympathy with which we have the honor to be

“Your most humble and faithful servants.”

[Followed by the signatures.]

CHAPTER X.

THE CRISIS.

THE HAPPIEST epoch in the life of a girl is the year preceding her marriage. Every woman who looks back through the past will dwell with a feeling of regret upon that winter, blest above all others, when her choice was made but was still unknown to the world. Then a crowd of timid and wavering suitors were flocking eagerly around her, disputing for her bouquet or her fan, and enveloping her in an atmosphere of love which intoxicated her. She had distinguished in the crowd the man to whom she would give herself, but she had promised him nothing; and she felt a kind of pleasure in treating him like the rest, and concealing her preference. She took pleasure in making him mistrust the reality of his happiness, in moving him from fear to hope and from hope to fear, and in trying his love for her at every meeting. But in her heart, she sacrificed all his rivals to him, and laid at his feet all the homage which she feigned to welcome. She resolved to reward

him richly for so much patience and resignation. And in chief, she relished the peculiarly feminine pleasure of commanding all and obeying but one.

This triumphal period had been wanting in the life of Germaine. The year which preceded her marriage had been the saddest and the most miserable of all her unhappy youth. But the year which followed it brought her some compensation. She lived at Corfu in a circle of passionate admirers. All who approached her, both old and young, felt for her a sentiment akin to love. She wore on her beautiful forehead that shadow of melancholy which tells all the world that a woman is unhappy. This is an attraction which men with difficulty resist. The most courageous fear to offer themselves to one who lacks for nothing; but sorrow emboldens the most timid, and every one seeks to console it. Physicians were not wanting to this sad soul. Young Dandolo, one of the most brilliant men in the Seven Isles, surrounded her with his cares, dazzled her with his wit, and proudly imposed his friendship upon her with the authority of a man who has always been successful. Gaston de Vitré hovered about her with restless solicitude. The handsome youth felt a new life springing up in him. He had not changed his habits

in the least; his work and his pleasures went on as before; but when he read by the side of his mother, he saw suns glitter among the pages of the book; he stopped as though dazzled in the midst of his reading; and would fall into a revery over the dullest lines. The good-night kiss that he gave his mother burned her forehead; and when he knelt to pray, with his brow resting against his bed, he saw strange images gliding beneath his eyelids.

He no longer slept soundly the whole night through as he formerly had done; his slumbers were strangely broken. He rose long before daybreak, and strolled through the fields with feverish impatience. His gun seemed lighter on his shoulder, and his feet sped more hastily over the parched grass. He ventured further out on the sea, and his robust arms delighted in wielding the oars with new vigor; but whatever was the aim of his sail or his walk, an invisible charm drew him every day into the neighborhood of Germaine. He came there both by land and by sea, and constantly turned towards her, like the needle towards the pole, without being conscious of the power that attracted him. She welcomed him as a friend; she was always glad to see him, and she did not hide it. Notwithstand-

ing, he was always in haste to depart; he had only called in passing, his mother was expecting him, he could hardly stay to sit down. But the setting sun found him still by the side of the dear convalescent; he was astonished to see that the days were so short in the month of August.

Mr. Stevens, who was a heavy man with an important air, marched round the fauteuil of Germaine with the step of a regiment of infantry, and bestowed on her those deliberate and measured attentions which make the power of a man of fifty. He brought her bouillons and told her stories, and lavished on her those minute cares to which a woman is never insensible. Germaine did not despise this good, substantial friendship, so paternal in its manner, yet less paternal than that of Doctor Delviniotis. She also bestowed a kind glance on Captain Brétiguières,—that excellent man, who was satisfied with a feather. She felt a tender friendship for M. Le Bris; and the little doctor, accustomed to pay an innocent court to all his patients, did not know exactly what he felt for the young Countess de Villanera. She visibly improved, and this growing beauty might in a single instant break away the fragile barrier which separated friendship from love.

All these ill-defined sentiments, which it is more difficult to name than to describe, made the joy of the household and the happiness of Germaine. She found a great difference between her last winter in Paris and her first summer in Corfu. The villa and the garden breathed nothing but gayety, hope, and love; merry voices and shouts of laughter resounded everywhere. The guests rivalled each other in wit and good-humor, and Germaine felt herself born again in the gentle warmth of these devoted hearts that were beating for her. If she took care to feed the flame by a little innocent coquetry, it was only the better to secure the conquest of her husband.

The painful memories of her marriage were gradually becoming effaced from her mind. She had forgotten the lugubrious ceremony of Saint Thomas d'Aquin, and looked on herself as a betrothed, awaiting the time when she should be led to the altar. She thought no more of Madame Chermidy, nor ever felt the internal shudder inspired by the fear of a rival. Her husband appeared to her like a new man; and she thought of herself as a new woman, born but yesterday. Is it not to be born a second time to escape from certain death? She dated back her birth to the spring-time, and would say,

smiling: "I am a child four months old." The old countess confirmed her in the illusion by carrying her in her arms like a little girl.

The presence of the young marquis was the only thing that could have recalled her to reality. It was difficult to forget that this child had a mother, and that this mother might come some day to reclaim the happiness that had been taken from her. But Germaine had accustomed herself to regard the little Gomez as her own son. Maternal love is so innate in the heart of women, that it becomes developed long before marriage. We see little girls of two years, offering the breast to their dolls. The Marquis de los Montes de Hierro was Germaine's doll. She neglected herself to attend to her son. She had finished by finding him handsome,—a thing which proved that she had a true motherly heart. Don Diego looked at her with pleasure when she clasped the little swarthy gnome in her arms; he rejoiced to see that his wife was no longer frightened at the hereditary grimace of the Villaneras.

Every evening at nine o'clock, masters and servants assembled in the drawing-room for prayers. The old countess was strongly attached to this religious and aris-

toëcratic usage. She read the orisons herself in Latin. The Greek servants joined with devotion in the common prayers, despite the schism which separates them from the Christians of the West. Mathieu Mantoux knelt in an obscure corner, from which he could see every thing without being seen, and strove to read the ravages of arsenic in the countenance of Germaine.

He had not once failed to poison the glass of water which he had brought to her every night. He hoped that the arsenic thus taken in small doses would accelerate the progress of the malady without leaving any visible trace. It is a prevailing prejudice among the ignorant classes; they all believe in the action of slow poisons. Master Mantoux, rightly surnamed *Little-luck*, had no means of knowing that poison kills its victims at a single blow, or not at all. He believed that the milligrammes of arsenic introduced into the body would collect together to form grammes, without counting on the indefatigable work of nature, which is incessantly repairing all internal disorders. If he had taken a better lesson in toxicology, or had recalled the example of Mithridates, he would have understood that microscopic doses produce quite a different effect from that which he wished. But Mathieu Mantoux had never read the story.

What would have astonished him still more, is that arsenic, taken in small doses, is a remedy for phthisis. It does not always cure, it is true, but it gives a sensible relief to the patient. The molecules of arsenic burn in the lungs on coming in contact with the external air, and produce a factitious respiration. It is something to be able to breathe at one's ease, and Germaine realized it. Arsenic checks the fever, sharpens the appetite, facilitates sleep, and restores flesh; it does not destroy the effect of other remedies; it sometimes assists it.

M. Le Bris had often thought of treating Germaine by this method, but had always been restrained by a very natural scruple. He was not sure of saving the patient, and this diabolical arsenic always reminded him of Madame Chermidy. The less timorous physician, Mathieu Mantoux, accelerated the effects of the iodine and the recovery of Germaine.

Germaine inhaled the pure iodine from the first of August to the first of September. The doctor was present at every inhalation, and M. Delviniotis often kept him company. This mode of treatment is not infallible, but it is mild and gentle. A current of hot air slowly dissolves a centigramme of iodine, and carries it without pain or effort into the lungs. Pure iodine does not in-

toxicate the patient like the tincture, nor parch the mouth like the iodohydric ether, neither does it provoke the cough; its only fault is that of leaving in the mouth a slight taste of rust, but to this one soon becomes habituated. M. Le Bris and M. Delviniotis gently accustomed Germaine to the new medicament. In her impatience she would gladly have dealt abruptly with her malady, and have swept it away by main force; but they only permitted her one inhalation every morning, and that of very short duration, lasting three minutes, or four at the most. In time they increased the dose, and as the recovery progressed, they gave her as much as two centigrammes a day.

The cure went on with incredible rapidity, thanks to the discreet collaboration of Mathieu Mantoux. A stranger, on being introduced at the Villa Dandolo, would never have suspected that there was an invalid there. At the end of a month, Germaine was as fresh as a flower and as round as a fruit. In this beautiful garden, where nature had accumulated all its wonders, the sun looked on nothing more brilliant than this young girl, just newly created, who rose from her malady like a gem from its casket. Not only was her countenance again tinged with the glow of youth, but the fulness of health

had completely metamorphosed her emaciated body. The soft waves of a generous blood slowly inflated her rosy and transparent skin; the springs of life, relaxed by three years of suffering, were joyfully regaining their natural tension.

The witnesses of this miraculous transformation blessed science as we bless God. But Doctor Le Bris was, perhaps, the happiest of all. The recovery of Germaine appeared to others but a hope, to him alone a certainty. By auscultation he daily verified the decrease of the disease; he saw the cure in its causes and its effects, and measured as with a compass the ground which he had gained over death. Auscultation, that admirable method which science owes to the genius of Hippocrates, permits the physician to read the body of his patient like an open book. The invisible springs that are in motion in us produce, in their movements, a sound which is as regular as the ticking of a clock. The ear of the physician, when accustomed to listen to this harmony of health, detects the smallest internal disorder by unmistakable signs. The malady tells its own story to the intelligent observer, who witnesses the progress of life or death as a spectator concealed behind a door divines the slightest incidents of a duel or a quarrel. A dull sound points

out to the physician the parts of the lung into which the air no longer penetrates; and a peculiar rattle indicates to him those constantly increasing cavities which characterize the last stage of phthisis. M. Le Bris soon discovered that the parts impermeable to the air were daily becoming more circumscribed, that the rattle was gradually disappearing, and that the air was merrily whistling again through the vivified cells which enveloped the cicatrized cavities. He had drawn an exact chart of the ravages which the disease had made in the chest of his patient, at the request of the old countess, and every morning, he traced with the pencil a new outline, attesting the progress of the recovery. Balzac has imagined a singular invalid, who saw his life daily shrinking, through the symbol of a piece of shagreen. Doctor Le Bris's sketch shrunk every morning in token of the safety of Germaine.

On the 31st of August, M. Le Bris set out for a walk to the city, as happy as a conqueror. The country was quite to his taste, but he did not disdain a turn on the esplanade to the tune of the fifes and bagpipes. By looking at the smoke of the steamboats, he fancied that he brought himself nearer to Paris. He dined willingly at the table of the English officers, and walked with pleasure

through the public streets. He admired the soldiers dressed in white, with straw hats, yellow gloves, and varnished shoes, as they went, followed by their little family, to buy their slice of ham and bread for sandwiches. He feasted his eyes on the tempting display of ripe fruits which the venders had arranged on their stalls with English cleanliness. One was rubbing his prunes on his sleeve to make them shine, and another was brushing the velvety down of his peaches with a hat-brush. There was a tempting confusion of melons as large as pumpkins, citrons as large as melons, prunes as large as citrons, and grapes as large as prunes. Perhaps the young doctor also looked with some complaisance at the pretty Greek girls leaning on their window-sills in a frame of flowering cactus. In this easy-going country, the little *Bourgeoises* do not scruple to fling kisses to the stranger who passes by, as the flower-girls of Florence throw bouquets into the carriages. If their father happens to see them, he boxes their ears roughly in the name of morality, and this gives a little variety to the scene.

While the doctor was innocently attending to his pleasures, Count Dandolo, Captain Brétiguières, and the Vitrés were dining together at M. de Villanera's. Ger-

maine ate with a good appetite,—it was Gaston who had forgotten how bread tasted. He dined with his eyes, poor little fellow, and was neither for the repast, nor for the conversation, but simply for Germaine.

Nevertheless, the conversation grew very interesting over the dessert. M. Dandolo described the English policy in the extreme East with a few bold strokes, and showed *la grande nation* established at Hong-Kong, Macao, Canton, and everywhere. “You, or at least your children, will see the English masters of China and Japan,” he concluded.

“Stop there!” interrupted Captain Brétiqières. “What are you going to give to France, then?”

“All that she asks; that is to say, nothing. France is a disinterested country. She passes her life in conquering the world, but always scruples at keeping any thing for herself.”

“We know that very well, Count; France has always been wanting in egotism. She has done more for civilization than any other country in Europe, yet she has never asked her reward. The universe is our debtor; we have furnished it with ideas for three or four hundred years, and it has given us nothing in exchange. When I think that we have not even the Ionian isles!”

"You had them, captain, and you did not think it worth while to keep them."

"Ah! if I had but my two legs!"

"What would you do, captain?" asked Madame de Villanera.

"What would I do, madame? My country has no ambition for herself; I would have it for her. I would give her the Ionian isles, Malta, the Indies, China, Japan, and I would no longer tolerate this universal monarchy."

"M. de Brétignières," said Germaine, "is like that teacher whose scholar had stolen a fig. He preached him a sermon on the evils of gluttony, and ate the fig by way of peroration."

The captain stopped short, and blushed to the ears. "I believe," said he, "that I have gone further than I meant. Where were we?"

"We were everywhere," returned Count Dandolo.

"That is true, since we were speaking of England. Do you believe that if the affair of Ky-Teheou had happened to an English vessel, it would have contented itself with bombarding the city? Not so stupid! The English would have gained thereby a favorable commercial treaty, a hundred millions cash, and fifty leagues of territory."

“Do you believe that?” demanded Count Dandolo.

“I am sure of it.”

“Well, what are we disputing about, then? we are both of the same opinion.”

“What was this affair of Ky-Tcheou?” asked Germaine.

“Is it possible that you have not read of it, madame?”

“We have no journal, my dear Count, except you.”

“Ah, well; Ky-Tcheou is a great affair. The Chinese have killed two missionaries, and a commander, and the French have razed the city so completely that even its name remains no longer on the map. If you ask me what will come of all this, I answer, nothing at all will come of it.”

M. de Villanera joined for the first time in the conversation. “Is the story of which you speak of recent date?” asked he.

“Quite fresh; the news came by the last packet. Have you never heard of the *Naiade*?—have you not read the death of Captain Chermidy?”

Count de Villanera turned pale. Germaine looked at him fixedly to detect a symptom of joy, the old countess rose from the table, and M. Dandolo passed into the drawing-room, without having related the story of Ky-Tcheou.

Germaine availed herself of the moment when coffee was being served to the guests to draw M. Villanera out to the foot of the garden. The sun had set two hours before, and the night was as warm as a summer's day. The husband and wife sat down together on a rustic bench by the sea-shore. The moon had not yet appeared on the horizon, but the falling stars were threading the sky in every direction, and the waves were illuminating the shore with their phosphorescent light.

Don Diego was still completely blinded by the news he had just heard. He had received a violent shock; but the impression had been so sudden that he had not yet had time to analyze his feelings, or to know if it gave him pain or pleasure. He was like a man who had fallen from a roof, and was feeling himself to know if he were dead or alive. A thousand rapid thoughts confusedly crossed his mind, like torches which flash in the night without dissipating the darkness. Germaine was neither calmer nor more collected. She felt that this hour must decide her life, and that her physician was no longer M. Le Bris, but Count de Villanera. Meanwhile, these two young beings, though shaken to the depth of the soul by violent emotion,

remained side by side for a few moments in profound silence. A fisherman who skimmed the shore assuredly took them for two lovers, absorbed in the contemplation of their happiness.

Germaine was the first to speak. She turned towards her husband, grasped both his hands, and said to him, in a stifled voice:

“Don Diego, did you know it?”

“No, Germaine,” was his reply. “If I had known it, I should have told you; I have no secrets from you.”

“And what do you say to the news? Has it troubled or relieved you?”

“I do not know what to answer,—you plunge me in a cruel embarrassment. Leave me time to collect and reckon with myself. It cannot give me any pleasure,—that you know well. But if I tell you that it troubles me, you will thence conclude that I had made engagements depending on this fatal chance. Is not that what you are thinking of?”

“I am not quite sure what I am thinking of, Don Diego; my heart beats so loudly that it would be very difficult for me to hear any thing else. The only thing which I see clearly is, that this woman is free. If she

promised you to become a widow, she has kept her word sooner than you. She arrives first at the appointed rendezvous, and I fear ——”

“What do you fear?”

“I fear that I am in the wrong, since my life separates you from your happiness, and my health is taking away from you even the hope of it.”

“Your life and your health are gifts from God, Germaine. It is a miracle of heaven that has preserved you; and now that I know what a woman you are, from the bottom of my heart I bless the decrees of Providence.”

“I thank you, Don Diego, and I recognize your heart in these kind and pious words. You are too good a Christian to rebel against a miracle. But do you regret nothing?—speak to me without disguise. I am well enough now to listen to any thing.”

“I regret but one thing,—that of not having given you my first love.”

“How noble you are! This woman never was worthy of you. I have never seen her; but I instinctively detest and despise her.”

“You must not despise her, Germaine. I love her no longer, for my heart is full of you, and there is no room

left in it for the image of another; but you do wrong to despise her, I swear it to you."

"Why do you wish me to be more indulgent to her than the world is? She has failed in her duties,—deceived the honest man who had given her his name. How can a woman betray her husband!"

"She is culpable in the eyes of the world; but I should not blame her:—she loved me."

"Ah! who would not love you, my friend? You who are so good, so great, so noble, so handsome! Do not deny it and shake your head. My taste is no worse than that of others, and I know very well what I am saying. It is true that you do not resemble M. Le Bris, nor Gaston de Vitré, nor Spiro Dandolo, nor any others who are favorites with women; yet it was on seeing you for the first time that I comprehended that man is the noblest work of God."

"You love me then a little, Germaine?"

"Oh! for a long time!—Ever since the day you first came to the hôtel de Sanglié. Yet it was a very wicked purpose that brought you to our house. When the doctor proposed the bargain to my parents, I thought that I was to marry a villain, and I resolved to endure you with patience, and to quit you without regret. But when I

met you in the drawing-room, I blushed with shame for you, and I regretted that so base a calculation was born in such a noble brain. Then I began to maltreat you,—do you know the reason why? I should have died of chagrin if you had suspected that I loved you. That was not in our compact. During all the journey in Italy, I studied to give you pain. Could I have behaved with so much ingratitude if you had been indifferent to me? But I was furious at seeing that you treated me so well only for the acquittal of your conscience. And then, in spite of myself, I thought of the other who was awaiting you in Paris. And then, I feared to fall into a delightful habit of loving and being happy, which would soon be broken by death. And then, I was very ill, and I suffered cruelly!

“The day that you wept at the carriage window, I saw you, and I longed to throw myself on your neck and ask your pardon; but pride restrained me. I am of a noble race, my poor friend, and I am the first of our blood who was sold for silver. Notwithstanding, I very nearly betrayed myself that evening at Pompeii. Do you remember it? For my part, I have forgotten nothing, neither your gentle words, nor my harshness, nor your cares, so tender and so patient, nor the wrong which I have done

you. I have held a bitter chalice to your lips, and you have drained it to the dregs; but do not think that I have been too happy myself. I was not sure of you, and I feared to be deceived as to the meaning of your kindness, and to mistake tokens of pity for expressions of love. What reassured me a little was the pleasure which you had in being with me. When you were walking in the garden around my divan, I watched you askance, and often feigned to be asleep to draw you closer to me. I had no need to open my eyes to see if you were there; I saw you through the lids. In whatever place you may be, I divine your presence, and I could find you with my eyes shut. When you are near me, my heart swells and beats so loudly that it fills my bosom. When you speak, your voice sings in my ears, and I grow intoxicated as I listen to you. Whenever my hand touches yours, it thrills me with a strange, delightful shudder. When you quit me for an instant, — when I can neither see nor hear you, there seems a great void around me, and I feel a loneliness which overwhelms me. Now, Don Diego, tell me if I love you. For you have more experience than I, and you cannot be mistaken about it. I am nothing but a little ignoramus, but you must remember it it were thus that you were loved at Paris.”

This naïve confession fell like dew on the heart of Don Diego. He was so deliciously refreshed by it, that he forgot not only his present cares, but also his past pleasures. A new light illumined his soul; at a single glance he compared his former passion, as restless and turbid as a stormy torrent, with the limpid, calm tranquillity of legitimate happiness. It is the story of all young husbands. When one lays his head on the conjugal pillow for the first time, he perceives with a sweet surprise that he has never slept well before.

The count tenderly kissed both Germaine's hands, exclaiming :

“Yes, you love me, and no one else has ever loved me like you. You transport me into a new world full of honorable delights and remorseless pleasures. I know not but I may have saved your life, but you have repaid the debt liberally in opening my blinded eyes to the holy light of love. Let us love each other, Germaine, and fling the rein to our hearts. God, who has united us in marriage, will rejoice to gather two more happy ones into his generous bosom. Let us forget the whole earth to belong to each other,—let us close our ears to all the rumors of the world, whether from China or from Paris. Here is the terrestrial paradise; let us live

in it for ourselves alone, blessing the hand which has placed us here."

"Let us live for ourselves and for those who love us," replied she. "I should not be happy if our mother and our child were not with us. As for them, I have loved them openly from the beginning. How they resemble you, my friend! When the little Gomez comes into the garden, it seems to me that I see your own smile playing in the grass. I am very happy in having adopted him. That woman will never take him away from me, will she? The law has given him to me forever; he is my heir, my only son!"

"No, Germaine," returned the count, "he is your eldest son."

Germaine opened her arms to her husband, knit her hands about his neck, drew him towards her, and gently touched her lips to his. But the emotion of this first kiss was stronger than the poor convalescent. Her eyes closed, and her limbs bent beneath her. As soon as she had recovered, she regained the house on her husband's arm, leaning with her whole weight, and walking half suspended, like a child taking his first steps.

"You see that I am still very weak, in spite of appearances," said she, "I thought myself robust, and

see, a mere gleam of happiness throws me down again. Do not speak too kindly to me, — do not make me too happy, — treat me carefully until I am saved. It would be too sad to die when life is opening so brightly! Now I am going to hasten my recovery, and to nurse myself with all my might. Return to the drawing-room, — as to me, I run to hide myself in my chamber. Adieu till to-morrow, my friend. I love you!”

She went up to her room, and threw herself on her bed, confused and agitated. A luminous point sparkling in the corner attracted her attention, — it was the flame of the night-lamp, reflected in one of the little globes of the iodometer. She sent a benediction to this beneficent apparatus, which had already restored her life, and which must restore her strength in a few more days. The idea occurred to her to hasten her recovery by taking a good quantity of the iodine, unknown to the doctor. She arranged the apparatus, drew it near her bed, and drank the violet vapor with avidity. She inhaled it with joyful haste; she experienced neither disgust nor fatigue; she swallowed long draughts of health and vigor. She was proud of proving that the doctor had been too prudent, and she took pleasure besides in committing an act of heroic folly, and in risking her life through love for Don Diego.

It was never known how much iodine she inhaled, nor how long she prolonged this fatal imprudence. When the old countess stole from the drawing-room to learn how Germaine was, she found the apparatus broken on the floor, and the patient a prey to a violent fever. They did what they could until the arrival of Doctor Le Bris, who returned from the city on horseback at midnight. All the guests slept at the Villa Dandolo to await news of her. The doctor was terrified at her agitation; he knew not whether to attribute it to an immoderate use of the iodine, or to some violent emotion. Madame de Villanera secretly accused Count Dandolo; Don Diego accused himself.

The next morning M. Le Bris discovered an inflammation in the lungs which might terminate in death, and he called in Doctor Delviniotis and two other physicians for a consultation. The doctors differed as to the cause of the illness, but none of them dared answer for her cure. M. Le Bris had lost his wits like a captain who finds a reef of rocks at the entrance of the harbor. M. Delviniotis, who was a little calmer, although he could not refrain from weeping, timidly pointed out a faint ray of hope. "It may be," said he, "that we have to do with an adhesive inflammation, which will

reunite the cavities and repair all the internal injuries." The poor little doctor sorrowfully shook his head at this theory. It was as if one should say to an architect,— "Your house is not plumb, but it may be that an earthquake will restore its balance." All were agreed that the disorder was at a crisis, but M. Delviniotis himself dared not affirm that it would not terminate in death.

Germaine was delirious. She no longer recognized any one. In every man that approached her, she fancied that she saw Don Diego, and in every woman, Madame Chermidy. Her confused words were a strange mixture of tenderness and imprecations. She asked constantly to see her son. The little marquis was brought to her; she repulsed him angrily, saying, "That is not he. Bring me my eldest son; the son of that woman. I am sure that she has taken him away again!" The child vaguely comprehended the danger of his little mamma, although he had not yet any notion of death. He saw everybody weeping around him, and he joined in the chorus with loud cries.

It was then seen how much the young wife was beloved by all about her. For eight days, the friends of the family encamped around her, sleeping where they could, eating what they found, thinking only of the

invalid, and not at all of themselves. The two physicians were chained to the pillow of Germaine. Captain Brétignières could not remain quiet; he paced the house and the garden, and the jerking step of his wooden leg was to be heard everywhere. Mr. Stevens abandoned his business, his bench, and his habits. Madame de Vitré constituted herself nurse under the orders of the countess. The two Dandolos ran to and from the city from morning till night, seeking physicians who knew not what to say, and medicines which were good for nothing; the people of the neighborhood shared in the anxiety; bulletins from Germaine were despatched every morning to all the neighboring chateaux, and family remedies and secret panaceas that had been transmitted from father to son flowed in from every side.

Don Diego and Gaston de Vitré bore a strange resemblance to each other in their sorrow. One would have taken them for the two brothers of the dying girl. Both remained aside, seated under a tree or upon the sands of the shore, plunged in a dull and tearless stupor. If the count had had leisure to be jealous, he would have been desperately so of this youth; but each of the witnesses was too much occu-

ped with the danger of Germaine to observe the countenance of his neighbor. Madame de Vitré alone cast an anxious glance from time to time on her son, and then hastened to the bedside of Germaine, as if warned by a secret instinct that this was to labor for the safety of Gaston.

The dowager de Villanera was terrible to behold. This great, dingy woman, unclean and uncombed, let her hair hang in disorder from beneath a cap in rags. Like her son, she shed no tears, but a poem of grief might have been read in her large, haggard eyes. She spoke to no one, she saw no one, she suffered the guests to do the honors of the house themselves; her whole being was absorbed in the safety of Germaine, and her whole soul was struggling with an iron will against the impending danger. Never did the Genius of Good assume a wilder or more savage shape. An infuriate devotion, a rabid friendship, and an exasperated tenderness, were read in the lines of her furrowed countenance. It was neither a woman nor a nurse, but a female demon, who had grasped Death by the throat.

But the countenance of Mathieu Mantoux expanded sweetly in the sunshine. As all the masters were dis-

puting the tasks of servants, this faithful servant adjudged to himself the leisure of a master. He inquired every morning after Germaine's health, only to know whether he should not soon come into his twelve hundred francs' income. He attributed the death of his mistress to the glass of sugared water that he had so patiently prepared for her every evening, and thought, rubbing his hands, that all comes in good time to him who knows how to wait for it. At noon, he took his second breakfast. To digest it at his ease and after the manner of a proprietor, he walked for an hour or two about the little estate on which he had fixed his choice. He observed that the hedges were badly trimmed, and resolved to support them by a trellis, in the fear of thieves.

The sixth of September, M. Delviniotis himself lost all hope. Mathieu Mantoux knew it, and he sent a little note addressed to "Mademoiselle *Le Tas*, care of Madame Chermidy, Rue du Cirque, Paris."

The same day, M. Le Bris wrote to M. de La Tour d'Embleuse :

"MONSIEUR THE DUKE, — I dare not ask you to come to her. When you receive this letter she will be no more. Break the news carefully to the duchess."

CHAPTER XI.

THE WIDOW CHERMIDY.

THE LETTER of Mantoux and the formal promise of the death of Germaine reached Madame Chermidy on the twelfth of September.

The beautiful Arlesian had lost all hope and all patience. No one wrote to her from Corfu; she was without news of her lover and her son; and the doctor, occupied with more important cares, had not even congratulated her on her widowhood. She began to doubt M. de Villanera, and to compare herself to Calypso, Medea, the yellow-haired Ariadne, and all the other abandoned heroines of mythology. She was astonished sometimes to find that her pique was turning to love. She caught herself sighing when no one was present, in the most genuine manner in the world. The memory of the three years which she had passed with the count strangely troubled her heart. She reproached herself, among other follies, for having held the curb too short

and the bit too high, — for not having satiated him with happiness, and slain him with affection. “It is my own fault,” thought she; “I have accustomed him to do without me. If I had known how to manage him, I should have become the necessity of his life, — I should only have to make a sign, and he would quit his wife, his mother and all for me.”

She often asked herself whether absence were not injuring her in the mind of Don Diego, and reflected on the vulgar saying, “Out of sight, out of mind.” She thought of embarking for the Ionian isles, and of falling like a bomb-shell into the household of her lover, and carrying him off by main force. A quarter of an hour would suffice to relight those fires which were but half extinguished, and to renew a habit which had only been interrupted. She saw herself hand to hand with the old countess and Germaine; she withered them by her eloquence, her beauty, and her will; she took her son in her arms, she fled with him, and the irresistible smile of the child drew along the father. “Who knows but that a well-acted scene might kill the invalid?” thought she. “We see very healthy women faint at the play; a good drama after my fashion might make her faint for ever.”

A more human and therefore more probable feeling made her regret the absence of her son. She had brought him into the world; she was his mother after all, and she regretted having parted with him for the benefit of another. Maternal love finds a resting-place everywhere;—it is a tolerant guest, and endures the neighborhood of the worst passions. Madame Chermidy wept a few genuine tears on reflecting that she had alienated the ownership of her son, and abdicated the name of mother.

She was sincerely unhappy. It is only in the theatre that true unhappiness is a privilege of virtue. Distractions were not wanting—she had only to choose among them—but she knew from experience that pleasure gives no consolation. For more than ten years her life had been as restless and exciting as a holiday, but she had paid the costs with her peace of mind. There is nothing more vacant, unquiet, and miserable than the existence of a woman who lives on pleasures. The ambition which had sustained her since her marriage was, henceforth, of little value; it was like the bruised reed which breaks in the hand of the traveller. She was rich enough to disdain to increase her fortune; there is but little difference between a

revenue of a million or of five hundred thousand, — a few horses more in the stable, or a few lackeys more in the court, add almost nothing to the happiness of the master. The only thing that could have amused her for a little while was a noble name to wear in society. She thought more than once of procuring herself one in a legitimate way, and she found fifty to choose from, — there are always some such names for sale at Paris. But she had a right to be fastidious in her choice, — she who had so nearly called herself Madame de Villanera! She could not decide.

In the mean time, she took the whim of publicly giving Don Diego a successor; perhaps he would reclaim his property when he saw it in the hands of another. But she feared to furnish weapons to her enemies. Germaine was not yet saved; it was playing a heavy stake; it would not fail to close the door of marriage. Besides, it was in vain that she looked around her; she saw no man who was worth a caprice, or the succession to M. de Villanera for a single day. The supernumeraries who shifted the scenes in her drawing-room never knew how near they had been to happiness.

She found nothing to occupy her leisure with better than to finish the moral ruin of the old duke. She ac-

complished the task which she had marked out for herself with the minute attention, the patient care, and the indefatigable perseverance of that indolent sultana who amused herself in her master's absence with plucking one by one the feathers of an old paroquet.

It is true that she would have preferred avenging herself directly on Germaine; but Germaine was at a distance. If the duchess had been within her reach, she would have given her precedence. But the duchess never quitted her chamber except to go to church,—Madame Chermidy could not meet her there. She might indeed have starved the ducal household, but this operation would have taken time. In regaining their fortune, the La Tour d'Embleuse had regained their credit. The fair enemy of the family had none but the duke in her power,—she swore to make him lose his reason, and she succeeded in it.

In the Russian baths, when the patient quits a heated stove-room, his body accustomed to a high temperature, the pores of his skin dilated by heat, his blood rushing rapidly through his veins, and his face the color of a full-blown peony, he is taken under a fascet of cold water, and an icy douche is thrown upon his head, which chills him to the bones. Madame Chermidy treated the

duke in the same manner. This kind of treatment agrees very well with the Russians, it is said; but it was death to the poor old victim. He was the victim of the most odious coquetry that ever tortured the heart of man. Madame Chermidy persuaded him that she loved him, *Le Tas* swore it to him; and if he had been contented with words, he would have been the happiest sexagenarian in Paris. He passed his life in the Rue du Cirque, and he suffered martyrdom there. Every evening he expended there as much eloquence and passion, reasoning and prayer, true and false logic, as Jean Jacques Rousseau has collected in the *New Heloise*; every evening he was shown the door with good words. He swore never to return; he passed a long and sleepless night in cursing the author of his woes; and he hastened the next morning to his executioner with a senile impatience. All his intellect, all his will, and all his vices, were absorbed and confounded in this single passion. He was no longer either husband, or father, or man, or nobleman: he was the *patito* of Madame Chermidy.

The experiment succeeded so well that, happy or unhappy, the poor man stood on the brink of the tomb. A prolonged torture was killing him slowly,—the grace he entreated would have killed him at once.

After a summer of these daily sufferings, his intellectual faculties had declined sensibly. He had scarcely any memory; at least he forgot every thing that was not relating to his love. He interested himself in nothing; private and public affairs, his household, his wife, his daughter, all were equally indifferent to him. The duchess tended him like a child whenever he chanced to be with her; unfortunately he was not yet childish enough to be shut up at home.

When he received the letter of Doctor Le Bris, he read it over two or three times without comprehending it. If the duchess had been there, he would have begged her to read and explain it to him. But he broke the seal on the threshold of his door as he was on his way to the Rue du Cirque, and he was in too much haste to turn back. By force of re-reading it, he at length divined that his daughter was in question. He shrugged his shoulders, and exclaimed while hastening, "This Le Bris is always the same. I do not know what he has against my daughter. The proof that she will not die is that she continues so well." However, he reflected that the doctor might really have spoken the truth. The idea terrified him. "It is a great misfortune for us," said he, running the faster. "I am an inconsolable father. There is no

time to lose. I must tell Honorine. She will sympathize with me,—she has a good heart. She will have pity on me; she will wipe away my tears, and who knows?——” He smiled with an idiotic air as he entered the drawing-room.

Never had Madame Chermidy been so radiant or so beautiful. Her face was a sun, triumph shone in her eyes, her fauteuil seemed a throne, and her voice rang like a trumpet. She rose to meet the duke,—her feet scarcely touched the carpet, and her head, in a superb joy, appeared to reach the lustre. The old man stopped, stupid and aghast, at seeing her thus transfigured; and, stammering a few unintelligible words, fell heavily into an arm-chair.

Madame Chermidy seated herself by his side. “Good morning, *Monsieur le duc*,” cried she. “Good morning, and good-by.”

He turned pale, and repeated vacantly, “Good-by?”

“Yes, adieu. Don’t you ask where I am going?”

“*Si.*”

“Well! you shall know; I am going to Corfu.”

“By the way, I really believe that my daughter is dead. The doctor wrote me so this morning. I am very unhappy; Honorine, you must pity me.”

“Ah! you are unhappy! and the duchess also is unhappy! and the old Villanera should shed black tears down her swarthy cheeks! But I! I laugh, I triumph, I bury, I marry, I reign! She is dead! she has paid her debt at last! she has restored to me all she took from me! I regain possession of my lover and my son! Why do you look at me with such astonished eyes? Do you think I am going to restrain myself? It is quite enough to have swallowed my rage during eight long months. So much the worse for those who are darkened at my happiness; they have only to shut their eyes; for my part, I blaze!”

This audacious joy restored to the old man a glimmer of reason. He rose proudly to his feet, and said to the widow: “Do you know what you are doing? You are rejoicing before my face over the death of my child!”

“And you,” returned she, insultingly, “you rejoiced before my face over her life! Who was it that took care to bring me news of her recovery? who was it that came to tell me:—she is better? Who was it that forced me to read her letters and those of Doctor Le Bris? Here for eight months you have been stabbing me with her health,—it is the least that you can do to give me a quarter of an hour to regale myself with her death!”

“But, Honorine, you are a terrible woman.”

“I know what I am. If your daughter had lived, as was threatened, she would not have been hid from me. She would have driven every day in the Bois with Don Diego, with my son, and I should have seen it from my carriage! She would have had a hotel in Paris, and I should have waited in vain before the door! She would have written on her cards the name of Villanera, which is mine:—I have it now, parbleu! it is well earned. And you are not willing I should take my turn!”

“Then you still love M. de Villanera?”

“Poor duke! do you believe that one forgets a man like Don Diego in a day? Do you think that one brings into the world a child like my son, — a born marquis, — only to make a gift of him to a consumptive? Do you fancy that I have demanded from God, during three years, the death of my husband, — I! who never pray! to do nothing with my liberty? Do you suppose that Chermidy went to Ky-Tcheou to be killed by the little Chinese boys, in order that I might remain a widow in perpetuity?”

“Are you going to marry Count de Villanera?”

“So I flatter myself!”

“And I?”

“You, my good man! Go, console your wife; you should have done that in the first place.”

“What shall I tell her, Honorine?”

“Tell her any thing you like,— adieu; I have my trunks to pack. Do you need any money?”

The duke betrayed his disgust by a shrug of the shoulders. Madame Chermidy perceived it. “So our money is repugnant to you?” said she. “Very well! you shall have no more of it.”

The old man went out without knowing where, like a drunken man. He wandered till evening through the streets of Paris. At ten o'clock he was seized with hunger; he entered a carriage, and ordered himself to be driven to the club. He was so much changed that M. de Sanglié was the only one who recognized him.

“What the devil have you been doing?” asked the baron; “your face is all awry, and you seem to be staggering. Sit down here, and let us talk together.”

“I shall be very glad to,” said the duke.

“How is the duchess? I am just from the country, and have not had time to pay her a visit.”

“Did you ask after the duchess?”

“Yes, how is she?”

“She is weeping.”

“He is mad,” thought the baron.

“I really believe,” continued he, without changing his tone, “that Germaine is dead, and that Honorine is glad of it. This is horrible,—and I told her so.”

“Germaine! Come, my poor friend, think what you are saying! Germaine — Madame de Villanera is dead?”

“Madame de Villanera? — that is Honorine. She is going to marry the count. Stop, I have the letter in my pocket. But what do you think of Honorine’s conduct?”

The baron read the doctor’s letter at a single glance. “Is it long since you learned this?” asked he.

“This morning as I was going to visit Honorine.”

“And does the duchess know any thing of it?”

“No; I know not how to tell her. I wanted to ask Honorine —”

“The devil take Honorine!”

“So say I too.”

They called to the baron from the whist table to finish his game, but he replied without troubling himself that he was busy, and begged some one to take his place. This done, he turned to the duke and wished to finish

the confession, but the old man interrupted it, exclaiming in a hollow voice, "I am hungry; I have eaten nothing to-day."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; order me a dinner. You must lend me some money too. I have none now."

"How is that?"

"I know very well—I had a million. But I have given it to Honorine."

The duke ate with the voracious appetite of a madman. After dinner his ideas grew clearer—his mind was fatigued rather than diseased. He recounted to the baron the insane passion which had possessed him for the last six months, and explained to him how he had been despoiled of every thing by Madame Chermidy.

The baron was an excellent man. He was moved on learning that the family which he had seen raised up within a few months had fallen again, lower than ever. Most of all, he pitied the duchess, who must surely succumb to so many blows. He took it upon himself to inform her by degrees of the illness and death of Germaine, and he gave his attention to the old duke, while endeavoring to strengthen his weakened understanding. He reassured him as to the consequences of his foolish

generosity, since it was evident that M. de Villanera would not leave his father-in-law in want; and, through the confessions and concealments of the old man, he studied the strange character of Madame Chermidy.

The authority of a healthy mind is all powerful over a disordered brain. After two hours' conversation, M. de La Tour d'Embleuse threaded the chaos of his thoughts, mourned his daughter's death, trembled for the health of his wife, bewailed his own follies, and esteemed the widow Chermidy at her just value. M. de Sanglié led him back to his house much better, if not fully cured.

Early next morning the baron paid a visit to the duchess. He met the old duke on the threshold of the door, and forced him to return with him. For three days he kept his eyes on him; he walked with him, amused him, and sought to distract him from his one absorbing thought. On the sixteenth of September he took him himself to the house of the pitiless Honorine, and proved to him, by her porter, that she had set out with *Le Tas* for the Ionian isles.

The duke was less troubled by this news than might have been expected. He lived quietly shut up at home, occupying himself with his wife, and demonstrating to

her, with extreme delicacy, that Germaine had never been really cured, and that they ought to be prepared for the worst. He interested himself in the most trifling details of the household, recognized the necessity of making some purchases, borrowed two thousand francs from his friend Sanglié, put the money in his pocket, and left for Corfu on the morning of the twentieth of September, without taking leave of a single person.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WAR.

ON THE eighth of September, Germaine, who had been given over without remedy, deceived the fears of her friends and her physicians; she began to recover. The fever that had been devouring her abated in a few hours, like those wild tropical storms which uproot the trees, overthrow the houses, shake the mountains, and are stayed by a sunbeam in the midst of their career.

This happy revulsion was so suddenly accomplished that neither Don Diego nor the countess could believe in it. Man always accustoms himself more quickly to joy than to sorrow; yet despite this, they remained some days in suspense. They feared to be duped by a false hope, they dared not congratulate each other on so unexpected a miracle, and they asked themselves if this seeming recovery were not the final effort of a being clinging obstinately to life, the last flicker of the lamp that was expiring.

But Dr. Le Bris and M. Delviniotis knew by sure signs that the sufferings of this poor little body were really ended. In eight days the inflammation had repaired the ravages of a long illness. The crisis had saved Germaine,—the earthquake had replaced the house on its foundation.

The young girl found it perfectly natural to live and to be healed. Thanks to the delirium of the fever, she had passed the gates of death without perceiving them, and the violence of the malady had deprived her of the consciousness of danger. She awoke like a child on the brink of a well, unconscious of the depth of the abyss beneath her. When they told her that she had been near dying, and that her friends had despaired of her life, she was greatly surprised; she had not suspected that she was returning from such a distance. When they promised her that she should live a long life, and should suffer no more, she raised her eyes lovingly to the ivory crucifix suspended over her bed, and said, with a sweet and trustful gayety,—“The good God really owes me this,—I am sure that I have passed through purgatory.”

She regained her strength in a little while, and health was soon blooming in her cheeks again. You would have

said that Nature was in haste to adorn her for happiness. She entered into possession of this new life with the impetuous joy of a young Pretender, who leaps with one bound into the throne of his fathers. She would have liked to be everywhere at once,—to enjoy at a breath all the pleasures that were restored to her, both motion and repose, solitude and society, the dazzling brightness of day and the mellow glimmer of twilight. Her little hands clung joyously to every thing about her; she overwhelmed her husband, her mother-in-law, and her child with caresses, and sought to pour out her happiness by a thousand demonstrations. Sometimes she wept without cause, but her tears were tears of joy; little Gomez kissed them from her eyes, as a bird drinks the dew from the calyx of a flower.

Every thing is pleasure to a convalescent. The commonest functions of life are sources of ineffable joy to him who has been on the verge of death. All his senses vibrate deliciously at the slightest contact with the external world; the heat of the sun seems softer to him than a mantle of ermine, the light of day rejoices his eyes, the perfume of the flowers intoxicates him, the sounds of nature fall upon his ears like the sweetest melody, and even bread seems good to him.

Those who had shared the sufferings of Germaine felt themselves born again with her. Her convalescence quickly reëstablished all the companions of her sorrows. Cloudless foreheads again beamed around her, and a common joy made every heart to beat in unison. All the fatigues and anguish that had been endured were forgotten, gayety again was queen of the house, and the first fine day effaced the traces of watching and tears from every countenance. The guests of the Villa Dandolo thought no more of returning to their own houses; they fancied themselves already at home. United by happiness as they had been by anxiety, they lingered around Germaine like a happy family around an adored child. When the doctor wrote to Madame de La Tour d'Embleuse to inform her of her daughter's safety, each one wished to say a word to the happy mother, and the pen passed from hand to hand. This letter reached Paris on the twenty-second of September, two days after the eclipse of the old duke.

Madame Chermidy and her inseparable *Le Tas* landed on the evening of the twenty-fourth at the city of Corfu. The captain's widow had made her preparations in haste; she had hardly taken time to collect a hundred thousand francs for the salary of Mantoux and any unfore-

seen expenses. *Le Tas* had counselled her to wait in Paris for more positive tidings, but one so easily believes what they desire, that Madame Chermidy took Germaine for dead and buried. From Trieste to Corfu she lived on deck, lorgnette in hand, wishing to be the first to discover land. She was tempted to stop all the ships in the offing to ask if they bore no letters to her address. She inquired anxiously if they would not reach port in the morning, for she did not feel able to pass a night in waiting, and she intended to go straight to the Villa Dandolo. Her impatience was so evident that it was whispered among the passengers that she was going to Corfu to receive a large inheritance, and they designated her as the heiress.

The sea was quite rough for two days, and everybody was sick except the heiress of Germaine. She had not time to feel the rolling; perhaps even her feet did not touch the deck of the ship; she was so light that she hovered instead of walking. When she slept by chance, she dreamed that she was floating in air.

The vessel anchored in the harbor at twilight, and it was after nine when the passengers and baggage were landed on shore. The sight of the dim lights that were glimmering sparsely enough here and there through the

city produced a disagreeable effect upon Madame Chermidy. When we reach the end of a journey, that hope which has hitherto borne us on its wings suddenly abandons us, and we fall rudely upon reality. That which seemed the surest to us veils itself in doubt, and we no longer count on any thing, but begin, instead, to prepare ourselves for the worst. A chill seizes us, whatever may be the ardor of the passions by which we are animated; we are tempted to look at every thing on the darkest side, we regret that we have come, and we wish that we might only retrace our steps. This impression is the more painful when we are landing alone in an unknown country. When no one is awaiting us at the port, and we fall a prey to the polyglot knaves who buzz so persistently about travellers, our first feeling is that of mingled anger, disgust, and discouragement. Madame Chermidy reached the Trafalgar House in a most execrable humor.

She hoped to learn there the death of Germaine. The first thing that she learned, however, was that the French language was not very well known in the hotels of Corfu. Madame Chermidy and *Le Tas* possessed but one foreign language between them; the Provençal, which did them but little good in this country. They must wait for an

interpreter, and sup in the mean time. The interpreter arrived after the landlord had gone to bed; he rose out of humor, grumbling because he had been awakened on business that did not concern him. He knew neither M. nor Madame de Villanera; they certainly could never have come to the island, for all travellers of distinction stopped at the Trafalgar House. It could not be supposed that M. and Madame de Villanera, if they were wealthy people, had been misled elsewhere. The English Hotel, the Albion, and the Victoria House, were all establishments of a lower class, unworthy of lodging M. and Madame de Villanera.

With this tirade the landlord went to bed again, and the interpreter offered to go out in search of information. He remained absent part of the night. *Le Tas* slept in the mean time; while Madame Chermidy fretted impatiently at her curb, and wondered more than once that a person who had a hundred thousand francs in her pocket could not purchase a simple piece of information. She awakened poor *Le Tas*, who could do nothing but advise her to sleep, instead of putting her blood in a whirl "You must understand that if the child had taken her departure for the other world, the city would not have been hung in black for it," said she. "We shall hear

in the country; everybody there must know the Villa Dandolo. Go to bed quietly; it will be light to-morrow. What do you risk by it? Be sure that if she is dead and buried, she will not rise again in the night time."

Madame Chermidy was about to follow her cousin's advice, when the servant came with an important air to inform them that M. and Madame de Villanera had landed on the island in April, with their physician and all their household; that they were then all very ill; that they had gone to the Villa Dandolo; and that if they had not got better, they must have all died long ago. The impatient widow showed the servant the door, and threw herself on the bed, where she tossed restlessly till morning.

The next morning she hired a carriage, and ordered herself to be driven to the Villa Dandolo. The coachman could not tell her what she wished to know, and the peasants whom she met on the way listened to her questions without understanding them. She mistook every house on the road for the Villa Dandolo, — all the houses on the island look pretty much alike. When her coachman pointed out to her a slate roof, half hidden by the trees, she pressed both hands to her heart. She gazed attentively on the face of the country to read there the

great news that she was burning to hear. Unhappily the gardens, roads, and forests are impassive spectators of our pains and pleasures. If they interest themselves at all in our fate, they know how to conceal it, for the trees of the park never put on mourning at the death of their master.

Madame Chermidy chafed at the slowness of the horses. She would gladly have ascended the planes which led to the villa at full gallop. She could hardly remain in the carriage, but threw herself from one window to the other, scrutinizing the house and the fields, and seeking in vain for a human figure. At last, she sprang to the ground, ran to the villa, found all the doors open, but met nobody. She turned back, and hastily crossed the north garden,—it was empty. A little gate and a steep flight of steps led to the garden on the south. She sprang to the bottom, and ventured in the walks.

Under the shade of an old orange tree, by the side of the sea-shore, she saw a lady in white, walking with a book in her hand. She was too far off to recognize the face, but the color of the dress gave her food for thought,—one does not dress in white in a house of mourning. All the observations which she had made in

the last five minutes combated each other in her mind. The almost total desertion of the villa might make her believe in the death of Germaine. The doors were open, the servants absent, the masters gone,—and where? Perhaps to Paris. But how was it, then, that nothing was known of it in the city? Could Germaine have recovered? Impossible in so short a time. Could she still be ill? But then they would be nursing her; they would not leave the doors open. She was hesitating whether to advance to the white walker, when a child leaped across the alley, and plunged among the trees like a frightened hare crossing a forest footpath. She recognized her son, and recovered her courage. “What do I fear?” thought she; “no one has the right to drive me hence. Be she living or dead, I am a mother, and I come to see my son.”

She walked straight to the child. The little Gomez was frightened at seeing a lady in black, and ran crying to his mamma. Madame Chermidy advanced a few steps in pursuit of him, and stopped short face to face with Germaine.

Germaine was alone in the garden with the Marquis de los Montes de Hierro. Her guests had just taken leave of her. The countess and her son had ac-

accompanied Madame de Vitré home, the doctor had gone to the city with the Dandolo and M. Delviniotis, the house was abandoned to the servants, and they took their usual siesta wherever sleep had surprised them.

At the first glance, Madame Chermidy recognized the woman whom she had seen but once, and whom she had never expected to see again. Despite the cool deliberation and well-balanced mind with which Nature had endowed her, she recoiled a step, like the soldier who sees the bridge he was about to cross suddenly blown into atoms before his eyes. She was not the woman to lull herself by chimeras,— she comprehended her position with its remotest consequences in an instant. She saw her rival fully cured, her lover gone, her child in the hands of another, and her future lost forever. The fall was the rougher that the fair aspirant fell from so high. The Titans of mythology felt not more keenly the thunderbolts that cast them down after they had piled mountain upon mountain to the very gates of heaven.

The hatred towards the young countess, which she had nourished ever since the day when she had first begun to fear her, suddenly rose to colossal proportions,

like those trees at the theatre which spring from the soil and mount to the ceiling at the touch of the machinist. The first idea which struck a spark from her cruel spirit was that of a crime. A strength, centupled by rage, trembled in her muscles. She asked herself why she did not break in pieces with her own hands the fragile barrier which separated her from happiness. For an instant, she was the sister of those Thyades who tore live tigers and lions to shreds in the excess of divine fury. She repented having left at the hotel a Corsican poniard, — a terrible trinket with a blade as blue as a watch-spring, and as long and pliant as a whalebone, a hilt of ebony inlaid with silver, and a sheath of enamelled platina. She had always displayed it on her mantel, — and she hastened in thought to the familiar weapon, seized it in spirit, and stroked its point in imagination. She thought directly afterward of the sea, which was gently beating against the edge of the garden. Nothing was easier or more tempting than to bear Germaine there as an eagle bears off a lamb to his eyrie, to stretch her in three feet of water, to stifle her cries under the waves, and to repress her struggles until a last convulsion should create another Countess de Villanera.

Happily the distance is longer from the thought to the act than from the arm to the head. Besides, the little Gomez was there, and it may be that his presence saved the life of Germaine. The clear gaze of a child has more than once sufficed to paralyze a criminal hand. The most perverted beings experience an involuntary respect for this sacred age, more august even than old age itself. Old age is a smooth lake, which has suffered all the impurities of life to sink to the bottom; childhood is a spring gushing forth from the mountain which, though restless, is clear because pure to its source. Old men have the knowledge of good and evil; the ignorance of children is like the spotless snow of the Jungfrau, which no foot-print has sullied, not even a bird's.

Madame Chermidy conceived, caressed, debated, and rejected the idea of acrimie while closing her parasol and saluting Germaine, who did not know her.

Germaine welcomed her with that frank grace and cordiality which belong only to the happy. There was nothing in the visit of an unknown lady to surprise her; almost every day she received some friendly neighbor who had been interested in her illness and came to congratulate her on her recovery. The widow entered into conversation with a confused faltering, which betrayed her agitation.

“Madame,” said she, “you could not have expected—indeed I did not expect myself—if I had known—Madame, I have just come from Paris. Your father, the Duke de La Tour d’Emblense, who honors me with his friendship——”

“You know my father then, madame?” interrupted Germaine, eagerly; “you have seen him very lately?”

“Within eight days.”

“Let me embrace you! My poor father! how is he? he writes to us so seldom. Give me news of my mother!”

Madame Chermidy bit her lips.

“But you, madame,” resumed she without replying, “I did not hope to find you so well. The last letter which the duke received from Corfu——”

“Yes, madame, I was very low, but they were not ready for me yet in Paradise. Sit down here by my side. By this time my father and mother are free from all anxiety. Oh! I am really saved. Do you not see it in my countenance? Look at me closely.”

“Yes, madame. After what we were told in Paris, this is indeed a miracle.”

“A miracle of friendship and love. The countess, my mother, is so good to me! my husband loves me so!”

“Ah! . . . What a beautiful child it is playing down there! He is yours, madame?”

Germaine suddenly rose from her seat, looked the widow in the face, and sprang back in terror, as though she had trodden on a serpent. “Madame,” she said to the unknown, “you are Madame Chermidy!”

Madame Chermidy rose in turn and marched straight to Germaine, as if to run her through the body. Anger, surprise, and all the emotions with which she was stifling, burst forth in a deep sob, and two large tears rolled down her cheeks. Germaine knew not that one could weep for rage. She pitied her enemy, and said naïvely in sympathy, “Poor woman!”

The tears dried instantly, like drops of rain in the crater of a volcano.

“Poor woman! and to me!” replied Madame Chermidy harshly. “Well, yes, I am to be pitied since I have been deceived! since my confidence has been abused! since heaven and earth have conspired together to betray me! since they have stolen from me my name, my fortune, the man whom I love, and the son whom I bore with pains and shrieks!”

Germaine was dismayed by this burst of wrath. She turned her eyes towards the house, as if to call for aid.

“Madame,” said she, trembling, “if it is for this that you have come to my house——”

“To your house! and you are going to call your servants to drive me away! Really, this is admirable! It is I who am in your house! But you have nothing that is not mine! Your husband, your child, your fortune, the very air you breathe, all comes from me, all belongs to me; all is a trust which I have confided to you,—you owe me every thing, and you will never repay me. You were vegetating at Paris on a wretched truckle-bed, the physicians had condemned you to death, you had but three months to live—you promised it! Your father and mother were dying of hunger. Without me, the family of La Tour d’Embleuse would be now but a heap of dust in a pauper’s grave. I have given you every thing—father, mother, husband, child, and life—and you dare tell me to my face that I am in your house! Ingrate!”

It was difficult to reply to this burst of savage eloquence. Germaine crossed her hands on her breast, exclaiming, “Mon Dieu! madame, I have sounded my conscience in vain; I am guilty of nothing, except of not dying. I never made any pledges to you,—I meet you now for the first time. It is true that had it not been

for you I should have died long ago; but if you have saved my life, it has been against your will, the proof of it is that you come to taunt me with the very air I breathe. Was it you who gave me for a wife to Count de Villanera? Perhaps. But you chose me because you thought me hopeless. I owe you no gratitude for that. Now, what can I do to serve you? I am ready to do any thing but to die."

"I ask nothing of you, I wish nothing, I expect nothing."

"Then why do you come here? Good God! You believed me ill, and you thought to find me dead."

"I had the right. But I ought to have known your family better; the La Tour d'Embleuse have never paid their debts."

At this coarse insult, Germaine lost patience. "Madame," said she, "you see that I am well. Since you only came here to bury me, your business is ended; there is nothing more to detain you."

Madame Chermidy resolutely seated herself on the stone bench, saying, "I shall not go without seeing Don Diego."

"Don Diego!" exclaimed the convalescent. "You shall not see him! I will not suffer him to see you!

Listen, madame. I am still very weak, but I shall find the strength of a lioness to defend my happiness. It is not that I doubt him,—he is good; he loves me as a sister; he will love me soon as a wife. But I will not have his heart rent by a struggle between the past and the future;—it would be horrible to condemn him to choose between us. Besides, you see very well that his choice is made, since he writes to you no longer.”

“Child! you have not learned love in the midst of your diet drinks. You do not know the empire that we gain over a man by making him happy! You do not know what threads of gold, closer and finer than those of the spider, we weave around his heart! I have not come unarmed to declare war; I bring with me the memory of three years of satisfied but never satiated passion; you are free to oppose to it your sisterly kisses and school-girl caresses. Perhaps you think to have extinguished the flame which I have lighted! Wait only till I breathe upon it, and you shall see a magnificent blaze!”

“You will speak with him? If he be weak enough to consent to that fatal interview, his mother and I will know how to prevent it.”

“What do I care for his mother I, too, have claims on him, and I will enforce them.”

“I do not know what claims a woman can have who has behaved like you, but I know that the church and the law gave the Count de Villanera to me on the day when they gave me to him.”

“Hear me. I leave you the free disposal of all the property you possess. Live, be rich and happy, make your family prosperous, watch over the old age of your parents, but leave me Don Diego. He is nothing to you as yet,—you yourself have confessed it. He is not your husband, he is only your physician, your nurse, the assistant of Doctor Le Bris.”

“He is every thing to me, madame, since I love him.”

“Ah! is it so? Well, let us change our tune. Give me back my son! he, at least, is mine; I hope that you will allow that. When I ceded him to you, I made my conditions; you have not kept your word, I am free from mine.”

“But if you love little Gomez, madame,” replied Germaine, “you will not think of despoiling him of his name and fortune.”

“What is that to me? I love him for my own sake, like all mothers. I had rather have a bastard to embrace every morning, than a marquis to call you mamma.”

“I know that the child was yours, but you have given him away, and you have no more right to claim him again than I have to restore him to you.”

“I shall demand him of the courts; I shall unveil the mystery of his birth. I risk nothing now, — my husband is dead, he will not kill me!”

“You will lose your suit.”

“But I will gain a fine scandal. Ah! Madame de Villanera clings to the honor of her illustrious name, the right to which Italy disputes with Spain! They have done infamous things to glorify it! But I will take this haughty de Villanera by the ears, I will trail it in the dust from court to court, I will print it in all the journals, I will amuse the *estaminets* of Paris with it, I will insert it in the police gazettes, and the old countess will burst with rage. The lawyers may plead in vain, and the judges may do their best; I shall lose my suit, but all the future Villaneras will be stained with Chermidy!”

She spoke with so much warmth that she attracted the young marquis' attention. He was ten paces off, gravely occupied in planting boughs in the sand to make a little garden. He quitted his work, and ran defiantly with his fist clenched towards Madame Chermidy. On seeing him

thus approach, Germaine said to the widow, "Madame, your passion must have abstracted you strangely. You have been reclaiming your child for more than an hour; but have you not yet thought of embracing him?"

The marquis offered his cheek with a very bad grace, saying to his terrible mother in the broken language of children of his age, — "Madame, what dost thou say to mamma?"

"Marquis," replied Germaine, "madame wants to carry you away to Paris; will you go with her?"

He threw himself into Germaine's arms by way of answering, casting furtive glances at Madame Chermidy.

"We all love him," said Germaine.

"You too? that is artful."

"It is natural, — he resembles his father."

"Look at me," said the widow to her son; "don't you remember me?"

"No."

"I am your mother."

"No!"

"You are my son. My son!"

"No, not thine; I am mamma Germaine's."

"Have n't you another mother?"

“Yes; mamma Nera. She has gone home with mamma Vitré.”

“It seems that everybody is his mamma but me. You don’t remember seeing me in Paris?”

“Paris, where is that?”

“Where I used to give you bonbons.”

“Where are the bonbons?”

“Come, children are little men,—ingratitude cuts with their teeth. Marquis de Los Montes de Hierro, listen to me. All these mammas are those who have brought you up. But I am your real mother, your only mother, the one who made you!”

The child understood nothing, except that madame was scolding. He wept bitterly, and Germaine had great trouble to quiet him.

“You see, madame,” said she to the widow, “that no one detains you here, not even the marquis.”

“This is my ultimatum,” answered she proudly. But a well-known voice cut short her words. It was Doctor Le Bris, who had returned from Corfu at full speed. He had seen *Le Tas* at the window of the Trafalgar House, and had come on a gallop to bring back the news. Madame Chermidy’s coachman, whom he found at the gate of the Villa, gave him a terrible fright by

telling him that he had brought a lady there. He ran over the house, awakening every sleeper that fell in his way by a vigorous kick, and descended the steps of the garden, four at a time.

The doctor did not think Madame Chermidy capable of a crime, yet he breathed a sigh of relief on finding Germaine as he had left her. He felt her pulse before speaking a word, then said :

“Countess, you are a little agitated; I think it would do you good to be alone. Rest here, if you please, while I conduct this lady back to her carriage.”

He gave this order smilingly, yet with such an air of authority that Madame Chermidy accepted his arm without reply.

“Come, my fair patient,” said he, after they had taken four steps together, “I hope you do not intend to undo my work? What the devil brings you to this country?”

“What sort of a letter did you write to the old duke?” said she, naïvely.

“Ah! that is it! Well, we did have a hard week; but the fair weather has come again.”

“Is there no help for it, Key of Hearts?”

“None, as sure as I am a living man.”

“And what do you gain by it?”

“The satisfaction of having done my duty. Then it is a remarkable cure, — such are not made by dozens.”

“My poor friend, some prophesy that you will make your way in the world; for my part, I am afraid that you will vegetate all your life. Men of talent are sometimes very stupid.”

“What would you have? One cannot please everybody. La Fontaine has said the same thing in rhyme somewhere.”

“What will become of me? I have lost all!”

“Do you really think so?”

“Without a doubt.”

“You count your millions for nothing, then? You are a prudent woman; you have provided against solitude.”

“Is what you say really your opinion?”

“Mine, as well as others.”

“Don Diego’s among the number?”

“Perhaps.”

“Well, they are very unjust. I will freely restore all he has given me.”

“You know very well that he will not take it. Adieu, madame.”

“Have you still that Mathieu whom the duke sent you from Paris?”

“Yes; why?”

“Because I wrote to you to distrust him.”

“It was for that very reason that I hindered them from dismissing him.”

Madame Chermidy returned precipitately to the city. Her retreat very much resembled a defeat, and *Le Tas*, who was awaiting the news at the window, divined at the first glance that the field of battle remained in possession of the enemy. The widow mounted the staircase out of breath, threw herself in a fauteuil, and said to her accomplice: “Accursed journey!”

“Has she escaped?”

“She is cured.”

“What effrontery! Have you seen the count?”

“Not I! They hid him so well that I could not unearth him. *Le Bris* almost turned me out of doors.”

“If he finds his practice again, I will lose my name. Go on, go on, my good man; the reckoning will come! And my little Jew? is he a fool then?”

“Or else a rascal. He has deceived us, like all the rest.”

“Great gods! Whom to trust, if we cannot count on a convict! After all, they may have showed him the door.”

“No, he is still with them.”

"Then there is one resource left. You surely are not going to throw the helve after the hatchet?"

"Nonsense! I must see Don Diego."

"You shall see him."

"What if we rent a cottage somewhere in his neighborhood?"

"That is a good idea. If ever you have him alone, you can make him do what you like. You are superb now!"

"It is anger. I have reclaimed the child, and have spoken of a suit. He will be alarmed; he will come to me."

"If he does come, you will carry him off?"

"Like a feather!"

"Perhaps you were wrong in speaking of a suit. He is too proud to yield to any thing of that sort. Attacking a Spaniard by threats is like caressing a wolf by stroking him the wrong way."

"If threats avail nothing, I have still another idea. I make my will in favor of the marquis, I give him back his millions to the last sou, and I kill myself."

"An admirable expedient! that will further your wishes greatly!"

"How dull you are. I shall kill myself without doing

any harm. The will will prove that I do not care for money, and the knife will prove that I do not care for life; but I shall stab myself only when some one turns the knob of the door."

Le Tas thought the idea excellent, although it was not wholly new. "Good," cried she; "he is a simpleton, a chevalier,—he will never suffer a woman he has once loved to commit suicide for the sake of his fine eyes. These men! what fools they are! If I had been handsome as you, I would have made them march."

"Meanwhile, my child, it is we who must march, and that to-morrow."

"So soon! well, forward then!"

The next morning, the two women, escorted by a servant, drove to the south of the island. They found a pretty little cottage in the neighborhood of the Villa Dandolo, for sale or to let with the adjoining enclosure. It was the little château which Madame de Villanera had selected for M. de La Tour d'Emblense, in case he should come to pass the summer at Corfu. It was also the *château en Espagne* of poor Mantoux, surnamed *Little-luck*. The cottage was hired on the 24th of September, furnished the 25th, and occupied the 26th, early in the morning. The fact was then made known to Don Diego.

For the last three days the count had been in tortures. Germaine had told him of the visit which she had received. The poor child knew not how he would take the news, yet she wished to be the first to carry it to him. In announcing to Don Diego the arrival of his former mistress, she could assure herself in an instant whether he were really cured. A man taken by surprise has not time to compose his countenance, and the first expression that betrays itself on his features is always the true one. Germaine played a bold game in submitting her husband to such an ordeal,—a gleam of joy in the eyes of the count would have killed her as surely as a pistol shot. But women are thus constituted; and their heroic love prefers a certain danger to an uncertain happiness.

M. de Villanera was really cured, for he received the news of her landing as one receives disagreeable tidings. His brow became clouded with a sadness which was not at all exaggerated, because it was sincere. He seemed neither indignant nor scandalized; this proceeding of Madame Chermidy's, though impertinent to all the others, was excusable to him. He did not frown like a governor on learning that an enemy had effected a descent on his territory, but grew sad, like a man

when some unforeseen accident has broken in on the midst of his happiness.

Germaine could not repress a little anger in repeating to him the woman's insolent proposals and audacious pretensions. The doctor chimed in with her, and the old countess loudly regretted not having been there to have thrown the hussy out of the gate, or into the sea,—the sea being one of the gates of the garden. But Don Diego, instead of espousing the quarrel of the family, applied himself to healing their wounds and soothing their anger. He defended, or rather pitied his former mistress, like a gallant man who loved her no longer, but was yet flattered by her love for him. He performed this duty with so much delicacy that Germaine gave him thanks for it, for it gave her one more occasion of appreciating the integrity and nobleness of his soul. She willingly permitted him to give his pity to Madame Chermidy, quite sure herself of possessing all his love.

The dowager was much less tolerant. The demand for the child and the threat of a scandalous suit had exasperated her. She would hear of nothing less than delivering up the widow to the magistrates of the Seven Isles, and having her shamefully expelled as an adven-

turess. "Mr. Stevens is our friend," said she, "and he surely will not refuse to do us this little favor." She discovered that her visit to Germaine might be construed into an attempt at murder, since the presence of so venomous a creature might easily have proved fatal to the convalescent; the doctor did not say no to it.

The count essayed to calm his mother. "Don't be afraid," said he; "she will institute no suit. She is not so unnatural as to compromise her own son at the same time with ourselves; her anger has made her forget herself. It is very easy for us to talk calmly,—we who are happy. She has a right to be indignant, and to regard me as a criminal,—I have abandoned her without cause. I have not written to her once in the space of eight months, and I have ended by giving my whole soul to another. She would curse me still more, if I should tell her that the happiest days of my life have been those passed far from her, by the side of my Germaine, and that my heart is so full of love that a drop more would make it overflow. Let me dismiss her with friendly words. Why should I not open my heart to her, and show her that there is no room left for her? A single hour would suffice to change this wounded and bitter love into a pure and

lasting friendship. She will think no more of making a scandal, but will remain worthy of meeting us in society without embarrassment, and of coming sometimes to ask after her son. There are very few women who are not exposed to jostling an old mistress of their husband in some drawing-room, yet they do not tear out her eyes; the past and present live in harmony as soon as the line which separates them is clearly defined. Consider, besides, that our position is not that of all the world. Whatever we may do, — whatever this unhappy woman may do herself, — she will always be, in the eyes of God, the mother of our child. Had she been his nurse only, we should have made it our duty to secure her against misery; shall we refuse an innocent and prudent measure then, that may save her from crime and from despair?"

Don Diego spoke so earnestly that Germaine gave him her hand, saying, "My friend, I declared to this woman that she never should see you again; but if I had heard you speak with so much reason and judgment, I should have sought you myself to have led you to her. Take the carriage, lose no time, hasten to take leave of her, and forgive her the wrong she has done me as I forgive her."

“Not so fast!” returned Madame de Villanera. “If he takes the carriage, I will unharness the horses with my own hands. Don Diego, you did not consult me when you took a mistress, neither would you listen to me when I told you that you had fallen into the hands of a wanton, but now since you have consulted me, you shall hear me to the end. It was I who married you. For the interests of our family, I suffered you to make a treaty which would have been base among citizens, but which was excusable by the importance of the interests at stake. God has permitted an affair so unworthily begun, to turn out well,—Heaven be praised for it! But it shall never be said that during my life you quitted the house of your pure and lawful wife to go to that of your former mistress. I know very well that you do not love her, but you do not despise her enough to show me that you are cured. This Chermidy has had you for three years in her clutches; I shall not expose you to fall into them again. You may shake your head in vain; the flesh is weak, my son; I know it by your experience, in default of my own. I know men, though they have never paid court to me,—when one has witnessed the same play for fifty years, he knows something of the secret of the

plot. Believe me,—the best of men is not to be trusted. You may be the best, if you like, I grant it to you. You are cured of your love; but these parasitic loves are of the family of the acacia. Pull up the tree, burn the roots, and then the sprouts spring up by thousands! What is there to assure me that the sight of this woman will not make you lose your reason? He who has drank will drink; and you have drank so deeply that we all thought you drowned. Ah! if you had been married three or four years,—if you were living as you will be living ere long, by God's help,—if the marquis had a brother or a sister, perhaps I might loosen the curb. But suppose that your madness should return again,—I should have done a fine thing in marrying you to this angel! This is why you will not go to see Madame Chermidy, even to take leave of her, my dear Count; or, if it please you to go in spite of me, you will find neither your wife nor your mother here on your return."

Don Diego did as he was told, but he was ill at ease during the three days following. M. Le Bris changed his patient,—he had to take care of the brain of his friend. He attempted to root up the obstinate illusions which the count had kept in respect to his former mis-

tress, he pitilessly broke the brilliant bubbles with which the poor man had suffered himself to be dazzled; he related all that he knew of her past history in its minutest details, and showed her to him as ambitious, mercenary, and profligate, in short, in her true colors. "They call me the Tomb of Secrets," thought the doctor while unwinding his skein of slander, "but justice has the right to open tombs." He saw that Don Diego still doubted,—he made him read the last letter that he had received from Madame Chermidy. The count was seized with horror on finding in it an incitement to assassination, flanked by a reward of five hundred thousand francs.

At this juncture, M. de La Tour d'Embleuse arrived, and they saw a living proof of the villany of Madame Chermidy. The old man had travelled without accident, thanks to that instinct of self-preservation which we share in common with beasts; but his mind had scattered all its ideas by the way, like a necklace of pearls whose string is broken. He knew enough to find his way to the Villa Dandolo, and fell upon the astonished family with no more emotion than if he had just come from his bedchamber. Germaine threw herself upon his neck

and loaded him with caresses; he suffered himself to be embraced like a dog by a child.

“How good you are!” said she. “You knew I was in danger, and hastened to me!”

“What! is it true?” was his reply. “You are not dead, then? Why did you say so? I am very glad of it,—that is, not too much so. Honorine is furious against you. Isn’t she here? She came to^{me} marry de Villanera. What if she should pardon me!”

No one could draw from him a single word about the health of the duchess, but he talked of Honorine as long as they wished. He recounted the happiness and the misery she had given him; all his conversation turned upon her, and all his questions tended towards her; he wished to see her at any price, and he employed the astuteness of a whole tribe of Indians to discover the address of his adored Honorine.

The unexpected arrival of this remnant of the old man was a deep grief to Germaine and a cruel enlightenment to Don Diego. Madame de Villanera, who had never had any sympathy for the duke, took but little interest in the ruin of his intellect; but she triumphed in having at hand a victim of Madame Chermidy. She

carefully seated herself by the side of M. de La Tour d'Embleuse, and drew from him all the secrets of his downfall and ruin, playing with a skilful touch on this cracked instrument, the harsh notes of which were heavenly music to her maternal ear.

The duke had been raving senselessly for some hours, when Madame Chermidy made it known to Don Diego that she was in the neighborhood and expecting him. The count showed M. Le Bris the letter, and said, shrugging his shoulders, "What would you answer in my place?"

"I should offer her money. She came here to take possession of your name, your person, and your fortune. When she found that the countess was not dead, she gave the name up for lost and fell back upon the rest. When she sees that she must also dispense with your person, she will content herself with the money."

"But this suit, this scandal with which she threatens us?"

"Offer her money."

"But her son?"

"Money, I tell you. It may be that you will need a great deal. You give two sous to the beggars that beg in a blouse, ten to those who beg in a vest, and a

hundred to those who beg in a black coat; calculate from that how much you must offer to those who beg in a coach and four."

"Will you go and see how much she asks?"

"Parbleu! you have hired me by the month; we do not count the visits."

The doctor ordered the carriage, and drove to Madame Chermidy's. When he entered, the actress was already on the stage. Seated languidly in a great fauteuil with her hair unbound and her arms hanging listlessly by her side, her melancholy eyes strayed absently about her, and,

"Dreaming, vaguely gazed on every side."

"Good morning, madame," said the doctor. "You can put yourself at your ease, it is only I."

She rose with a start, and ran towards him, exclaiming:

"Is it you, my friend! You wounded me the other day,—is it thus that you should greet me after so long an absence?"

"We will not speak of that, if you please. I do not come now as a friend, but as an ambassador."

"Shall I not see him, then?"

“No; but if you insist on seeing somebody, I will show you the Duke de La Tour d’Embleuse.”

“Is he here?”

“He came this morning. A fine work you have made!—there was no need of signing it!”

“I am not responsible for all the old fools that go mad for me.”

“Nor for the millions that they lose in your house? Agreed.”

“Really, Key of Hearts, do you take me for a moneyed woman?”

“Immensely so! How much do you want to return to Paris and remain quiet?”

“Nothing.”

“Your passage shall be paid, though it cost a million.”

“There are two of us,—I have brought *Le Tas* with me.”

“Perhaps we will double the sum.”

“What would you gain by it? If I am what you suppose, I can take the money to-day and make an exposure to-morrow. But I am worth more than all of you.”

“Much obliged!”

“Stop, my fine ambassador, take this to the king your

master, and tell him that if he has any commissions for the other world, he may send them to me this evening."

"What! all for tragedy? grown desperate already!"

"Yes, my friend. This is my last will and testament. The paper is not sealed, you can read it if you choose."

"*Au fait!* here or there!"

He reads: "'This is my last will and testament.

"'On the eve of voluntarily quitting a life which the desertion of Count de Villanera has rendered odious to me ——'

"What a farce!" exclaimed he, abruptly breaking off the reading

"It is the simple truth."

"Strike out this sentence. In the first place, it is badly written ——"

"Women write nothing well but letters,—testaments are not their specialty."

"I continue:

"'I, Honorine Lavenaze, widow Chermidy, being of sound mind and body, do give and bequeathe all my real estate and personal property to Gomez, Marquis de los Montes de Hierro, only son of Count de Villanera, my former lover. Signed.'"

"And to-morrow morning it will be terribly attested."

“I wager not!”

“Do you challenge me to die then?”

“Yes, I do. Certes.”

“And why should I not kill myself, if you please?”

“Because that would give too much pleasure to three or four good people of my acquaintance. Adieu, Madame.”

The door had hardly closed upon the doctor, when *Le Tas* quitted an adjoining chamber, in company with *Mantoux*.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KNIFE.

MATHIEU MANTOUX could not console himself for the recovery of Germaine. He bitterly accused the druggist of having sold him adulterated arsenic. In his grief he neglected his duty, and wandered dreamily about the villa. The end of his promenades was always this pretty little estate, of which he had been the owner in anticipation; by force of contemplating it, he had grown to know it in its least details as though he had been brought up there from his earliest childhood. He knew how many windows there were in the house, and there was not a tree in the garden that did not recall to him some souvenir. He had broken the enclosure more than once, — the feat was not difficult. This terrestrial paradise was shut in by a hedge of aloes and cactus, a formidable defence if any one had taken care to keep it in order; but three or four of the aloes had blossomed in August, and the flowers had killed the

plants. The impregnable barrier was thus broken in several places, and the meagre form of Mantoux wound its way without hinderance into the forbidden enclosure.

About four in the afternoon of the twenty-sixth of September, this melancholy varlet strolled along by the side of the hedge, musing on his bad luck, and thinking, with a bitter pleasure, of his first interviews with *Le Tas*, and of the kind welcome of Madame Chermidy. On comparing his present situation with that which he had dreamed of, he fancied himself the most miserable of men, — one always imagines he has lost what he has failed to gain. The apparition of an enormous mass moving heavily in the garden broke his train of thought; he rubbed his eyes, and asked himself for a moment if it were *Le Tas* or her shadow, — but shadows are not so substantial. *Le Tas* perceived him, and beckoned to him to hasten; she was just thinking on the means of meeting him.

“So, here you are then, you fine nurse!” cried she, on approaching him. “You have taken good care of your mistress, — she is well again!”

He replied with a great sigh: “*Little luck!*”

“We are alone,” resumed *Le Tas*, “no one can hear us, and there is no time to lose. Are you glad to see your mistress well?”

“Certainly, mademoiselle. Yet your mistress promised me something very different.”

“What did she promise you?”

“That madame would soon die, and that I should have an income of twelve hundred francs.”

“You would have liked that better, would you?”

“*Dame!* then I should have been my own master; and now I must serve others for the rest of my days.”

“And it never occurred to you to give a finishing stroke to the complaint?”

Mantoux gazed at her with visible perturbation; he knew not whether he had to do with a judge or an accomplice. She freed him from his embarrassment by adding, “I know you, I saw you at Toulon. When I unearthed you at Corbeil, I knew your whole history.”

“Then you, too, are concerned in it! You had a purpose in sending me here?”

“To be sure! If there had been no work to do, I should have sought for an honest man. There are enough of them, thank God! there are even too many!”

“This is the reason, then, of the income of twelve hundred francs?”

“Of course.”

“I wager that it was you who wrote me the anonymous letter.”

“Who else could it have been?”

“But what interest have you in it?”

“What interest? Your mistress has stolen her husband from mine, — do you understand now?”

“I am beginning to.”

“You should have begun before, you fool.”

“I did not understand, it is true; nevertheless, I have been at work.”

“With what?”

“I bought arsenic, and gave her a little every day.”

“Upon your word?”

“Upon my honor.”

“You did not give her enough.”

“I was afraid of being detected, — arsenic is so easily found again in dead bodies.”

“Coward!”

“Hold! one cannot afford to have his throat cut for twelve hundred francs.”

“Madame would have given you all that you asked.”

“She should have told me so. Now it is too late.”

“It is never too late. Come and speak to her.”

Mantoux awaited the departure of M. Le Bris in an apartment adjoining the drawing-room. A few words of the conversation passed through the key-hole and came

to his ears, yet, despite this, he but half comprehended the bargain that they wished to make with him. He saluted Madame Chermidy with respectful distrust. The widow did not judge proper to enter into any explanation with him so long as she had received no answer from Don Diego. She was greatly agitated, and paced up and down the drawing-room, listening to *Le Tas* without understanding her, and looking at the convict without seeming to see him. The courtesy of Count de Villanera was so well known to her that she saw the most alarming symptoms in his absence and silence.

“He loves me, then, no longer!” said she to herself. “Were it but indifference, I could easily rekindle him! But they must have blackened me in his eyes; they must have told him all. He despises me, or he never would have treated me in this manner! To offer me money through that odious Le Bris! And in such terms; great gods! If he views me with the same eyes as his ambassador, if he esteems me no longer, I may work in vain, he will never return to me — widowed or not, he is lost to me for ever. Then what is the use unless for pure vengeance —? Well, be it so — I will avenge myself! But wait. If he does not hasten hither on reading my message, then all indeed is lost!”

“Madame,” interrupted Mantoux, “I must go to wait at dinner, and if madame has any commands for me ——”

“Go to wait at dinner,” said she. “But you are mine. Remember that. Hear all that they say, and repeat it to me.”

“Yes, madame.”

“A moment! Perhaps M. de Villanera will come here this evening; in that case, I shall not need you. Notwithstanding, you may walk about here to-morrow morning. If he should not come —but that is impossible —hasten here as soon as he has gone to bed. The time makes no difference; *Le Tas* will be asleep perhaps; but ring, and I will open the door myself.”

“You need not, madame. I have been a locksmith, and I have my tools still.”

“Well, I shall expect you. But I am sure the count will come.”

Mantoux waited at table; but it was in vain that he bent both ears to the conversation; the name of Madame Chermidy was not even spoken. They dined in private with a single guest, Mr. Stevens. The old countess asked him whether the English law permitted magistrates to eject vagabonds without trial. Mr. Stevens answered

that the legislation of his country protected personal liberty even in its abuse.

“That is right,” rejoined the doctor, with a smile; “and what as to adventuresses?”

“It treats them a little more severely.”

“But when they have a fortune of five or six millions?”

“My dear doctor, if you know any of that sort, pray send them all to England. They will open their doors to them; they will crown them with roses, and marry them to lords.”

Madame de Villanera made a grimace, and they spoke of something else.

During the whole meal, the old duke kept his eyes fixed on the face of Mantoux. This imbecile graybeard who had lost his memory was still capable of recognizing a man whom he had seen but a single time at the table of Madame Chermidy. He took him aside after dessert, and led him mysteriously to his chamber. “Where is she?” said he. “You know; show me where she is hid, for they will not tell me.”

“*Monsieur le duc*, I do not know who —— ”

“I mean Honorine! You know her; Honorine, the lady of the Rue du Cirque.”

“Madame Chermidy?”

“Ah! you see you know her! I was sure of it! I was sure that you had seen her! My daughter also has seen her, the doctor too, everybody, in short, but me! Take me to her, I will make your fortune.”

“I swear to you, monsieur, that I do not know where Madame Chermidy is.”

“Tell me, you simpleton. I will never breathe of it; the secret shall remain between us. Show her to me to-night or I will cut your throat,” he added, in a menacing tone.

The convict started as though the old man had read his conscience. But the duke had changed his tune—he was weeping.

“My child,” said he, “I have no secrets from you; I will tell you of the misfortune that is hanging over our heads. Honorine will certainly kill herself to-night; she said so to the doctor, and she has sent her will to my son-in-law. They laugh. They pretend that she will not, that she only wishes to frighten us; but I know her better than they. She will surely kill herself, why should she not? She has killed me. Did you notice that great knife that lay on her mantel at Paris? She plunged it into my heart one day,—I remember it well. It is with

that knife she will stab herself to-night if I do not arrive in time. Will you guide me to her house?"

Mantoux protested that he did not know the lady's address, but he could not succeed in persuading the old madman. Until ten o'clock at night, M. de La Tour d'Embleuse followed him everywhere, through the garden, the pantry, and the kitchen, with the patience of a savage. "Do what you will," he muttered to himself, "you must go to her at last, and I will follow you!"

They go to rest early in the Ionian isles. At midnight all the house slept except the duke and Mantoux. The convict descended like a cat the rickety staircase which led to his chamber, without making the slightest noise. In crossing the north garden he fancied that he saw a shadow gliding among the olive-trees. He struck out into the open country, and crept along the hedges by circuitous paths towards the estate that he knew so well. The pursuing shadow followed him at a distance as far as the hedge of the enclosure. He asked himself whether fear had not troubled his sight, and rendered him the victim of an hallucination; and, summoning his courage, he retraced his steps and sought the enemy. The road was deserted, and the apparition was lost in the night.

A deep darkness enveloped the little cottage. The

only lighted window was that of Madame Chermidy's on the ground-floor, — Mantoux understood that he was expected. He unrolled a bunch of false keys, which he had wrapped in a cloth to smother their clanking, but before he had time to pick the lock of the door, Madame Chermidy opened it for him. "Speak low," said she, "*Le Tas* has just gone to sleep."

The two accomplices entered the room, and the first object that struck the eyes of Mantoux was the poniard of which the duke had spoken.

"Well," asked the widow, "has M. de Villanera retired?"

"Yes, madame."

"The wretch! What did they say of me at dinner?"

"They did not speak of madame."

"Not a word?"

"No; but after dinner, the duke asked me for madame's address. He was very much cast down."

"Did he say nothing else?"

"He talked a great deal of nonsense. He said that madame was going to kill herself, and that she had made her will."

"I said so — I wrote so — to force the count to come to see me. But has he really gone to bed?"

“Oh, I am sure of it, madame. Monsieur’s room is very near ours,—he put out his light at eleven o’clock.”

“Listen; if they spoke ill of me at the table, tell me without fear; I shall not be angry, I shall even be pleased with it.”

“They did not open their lips about madame.”

“Ah! I tell them that I am going to kill myself at night, and they do not even take the trouble to say that it serves me right!”

“They concerned themselves no more about madame than if she were not living.”

“Very well; I will remind them that I am still alive. *Le Tas* tells me that you have given arsenic to the countess?”

“Yes, madame, but it had no effect.”

“If you should stab her, that might have some effect, perhaps.”

“Oh, madame! to stab her! that is a bad job!”

“What is the difference, pray?”

“In the first place, madame, the countess was sick, and the disease would have taken the blame. To kill a well person is much more work!”

“You will be paid according to the work.”

“And what if I am taken?”

“There is no danger of that; find a boat and flee to Turkey; justice will not pursue you there.”

“I wished to remain here,—I thought of buying an estate.”

“Land may be had for nothing among the Turks.”

“That makes no difference. What madame asks of me is worth fifty thousand francs.”

“Fifty thousand!”

“Ah! I hope that madame will not haggle about the price.”

“Well, be it so; the bargain is settled.”

“And ready money?”

“Ready.”

“Have you the money by you?—for you know that if you do not pay me, I cannot go to Paris to recover the debt.”

“I have a hundred thousand francs in my *escritoire*.”

“Give me five minutes for reflection.”

“Take them.”

Mantoux turned towards the mantel, mechanically took up the Corsican dagger, tried the point on his finger, and bent the blade against the shelf. Madame Chermidy did not even look at him,—she was awaiting the result of his deliberations.

“I have it,” said he at length, but not aloud. “I had rather stay here than to go to Turkey, in the first place, because our nation are treated better here than there; secondly, because I know a little Italian, while I shall never learn Turkish! and lastly, because this house and garden which you have hired suit me exactly.”

“How the devil can you?” he silently asked himself.

“I have found a way. Instead of giving the sword-thrust to madame, I give it—to you, to you! In the first place, I get a hundred thousand francs instead of fifty thousand. Then nobody will think of accusing or pursuing me, since you have made your will, that you might kill yourself to-night. They will find you in your bed, pierced with your own dagger, and will see that you kept your word. And lastly, without meaning to offend you, I had rather kill a wretch like you, than an honest woman like my mistress, who has always treated me kindly. I thus make my first step in the path of virtue; and I trust that the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, will take it kindly that I have done his work.”

CHAPTER XIV.

JUSTICE.

THE SHADOW which had followed Mantoux from the Villa Dandolo to the house of Madame Chermidy was the Duke de La Tour d'Embleuse.

An instinct, as unerring as reason, had told the maniac that Mathieu was expected that night at the house of the fair Arlesian. He awaited the hour of his departure at the bottom of a dark corridor, and when he heard the convict open the door of his room, he knew enough to stifle his voice, and to repress the nervous laughter which shook his old body from head to foot. Before descending the staircase, at the heels of his guide, he had the precaution to take off his shoes, and he travelled with bare feet the whole way over sharp flints, thorns, and briars, which marked every step with blood. He heeded neither the pain, the fatigue, the interminable windings, nor the length of the road; the dominion of a fixed idea rendered him insensible to

every thing,—he feared nothing but to lose his guide, or to be seen by him. When Mantoux quickened his steps, the duke flew after him as if he had wings; when the convict turned his head, he threw himself on his face, and crept into the ditches, or glided under a thorny hedge of cactus or pomegranate.

He paused at last at the edge of the enclosure. A secret voice told him that the single window that gleamed on the ground-floor was Madame Chermidy's. He saw his guide stop at the door. A woman opened it, and his old heart bounded with an extravagant joy on recognizing the syren that had drawn him hither.

She was not dead then! He could see her, could speak to her, and perhaps could attach her again to life! His first impulse was to spring towards her, but he restrained himself, and cowered down out of sight. He was sure that she would not kill herself in the presence of the domestic. He resolved to wait till she should be alone, then to force his way into the house to surprise her, and to wrest the dagger from her hand.

He kept his covert for a long hour, without perceiving the lapse of time. He loved Madame Chermidy as he had loved neither his wife nor his daughter. Thoughts of devotion, of abnegation, of disinterested at-

tentions, and of humble slavery, were springing up in his brain. This absolute, unreasoning, unmeasured, and unrestricted love was no new sentiment to him,—it was thus that for the last sixty years he had loved himself. His egotism had changed its object without changing its character. He would have immolated the whole world to the caprices of Madame Chermidy, as he would formerly have done to his own interest or pleasure.

Since the day on which the ingrate had quitted him, he had not lived. His heart could not beat except at her side, and his lungs could only breathe the air which she breathed. He wandered through the world like an inert body launched in empty space.

At times, during this vigil, a glimmer of reason lit his brain, and he would say to himself, “I am an old fool! Why did I take it into my head to speak to her of love. Love ill becomes a graybeard of my years! Let her but grant me her friendship, and I shall have all I deserve! Let her but suffer me in her house like a father, and I shall find paternal feelings in some corner of my heart. She is unhappy, she weeps over the desertion of Villanera,—I will console her by words of sympathy.” The hope of seeing her so soon gave

him a fever. His eyes, fatigued with sleeplessness, stung him grievously, but he hoped to relieve them by tears on falling at the feet of Honorine. In the deep sorrows of life, our eyes slake their thirst in tears. M. de La Tour d'Embleuse, seated in a corner of the garden facing the house, resembled an animal who has hastened three days in the desert in pursuit of water, and who pauses with burning eye and lolling tongue within the last hound of the coveted spring.

The last light was extinguished in the chamber, and the window over which his gaze had brooded became confounded with the rest in the darkness. But the house, though invisible to an indifferent spectator, was not so to M. de La Tour d'Embleuse, and the window, towards which his last desire was strained, shone like a sun to his dazzled eyes. He saw Mantoux quit the house and fly through the fields at a maddened speed without turning his head. Then he ventured from his hiding-place, and crept like a cat to the window, from which his fixed and haggard eyes had not yet swerved. He did not even think of going to see whether the door was closed, so much had this window possessed him! He leaned his elbows on the sill; he felt the sash and the panes; he pressed his face against the

glass, glued his nose and mouth to it, and refreshed his parched lips by the cooling touch.

Profound midnight reigned within as without, — but his diseased senses fancied Madame Chermidy on her knees at the foot of the bed, with her head buried in her hands and her beautiful rosy lips just opening in prayer. He tapped gently on the window to attract her attention, — no one replied. Then he fancied he saw her sleeping; for the most contradictory hallucinations rose successively in his mind. He reflected a long time on the means of gaining access to her without awakening her suddenly and frightening her. To attain this end he felt capable of any thing, even of demolishing a wall with no other tools than his ten fingers. By feeling the window, he discovered that the panes were set in a leaden sash, and he undertook to take one out with his nails. He set about the task at once, and applied himself so heartily that he soon accomplished it. His nails were bent on the lead or broken against the glass, and his fingers, hacked in twenty little gashes, were all bleeding at the same time; but he did not give them a thought, and if he stopped from time to time, it was but to lick off the blood, to bend his ear

to watch for the sounds within, and to assure himself that Honorine was still sleeping.

When the pane had been loosened on three sides, he took it gently by the bottom and shook it slightly, pausing every time that the glass creaked a little or that too violent a shock rattled the whole window. At last his patience was rewarded; the transparent sheet was left in his hands. He stooped and laid it down noiselessly upon the gravel of the walk, leaped up triumphantly, laying his finger on his lips, and returned to inhale the air of the chamber through the opening he had made. He inflated his lungs with greedy voluptuousness; it was the first time that he had breathed for ten days.

He reached his hand into the chamber, groped along the inside of the window, found the fastening and seized it. The panes were small, the opening narrow, the sash cut his arm and crippled his movements; but the window yielded, creaking on its hinges. The duke started at the noise, and thought that all was lost. He fled to the bottom of the garden and climbed into a tree, his eyes riveted on the house and his ear open to every sound. He listened a long time, hearing nothing but the melancholy plaint of the toads that were singing

by the road-side. He then descended from his post of observation, and crept on his hands and knees to the window, now crouching down that he might not be seen, and now rising that he might see and hear. He returned to the spot from which fear had chased him, and he assured himself that Honorine was still sleeping.

The casement had ceased creaking and stood wide open. The night air was filling the house without awakening the beautiful sleeper. The duke climbed the window and glided stealthily into the room. He trembled with joy and fear, like a tree shaken by the wind. He reeled on his feet, without daring to steady himself by the furniture about him. The room was lumbered with articles of all kinds, trunks open and shut, and even overthrown furniture. The duke made his way through this disorder with infinite caution. He walked on tiptoe, brushing past every thing without touching it, and groping his way with his mangled fingers. At each step he murmured, in a low voice, "Honorine! are you there? do you hear me? It is I,—your old friend,—the most unhappy, the most devoted of all friends. Do not be afraid; fear nothing, not even that I shall reproach you. I was mad at Paris, but the voyage has cured me. It is a father come to console you. Do not kill yourself; I should die!"

He stopped, held his breath, and listened attentively. He heard nothing but the beatings of his own heart. Terror seized him; he seated himself for an instant on the floor to calm his emotion and to cool the blood that was boiling in his veins.

“Honorine!” cried he, springing to his feet again, “are you dead?” Death itself made answer. He stumbled against a table, and his hands dabbled in a pool of blood.

He fell on his knees, leaned his arms upon the bed, and remained till daylight in the same position. He did not ask himself how this had happened; he felt neither surprise nor regret;—the blood rushed to his brain, and all was over. His head was now but an empty cage, from which reason had taken its flight forever. He passed the remaining hours of the night with his elbows leaning upon a corpse which grew gradually colder and colder until morning.

When *Le Tas* came in the morning to see if her beautiful cousin was awake, she heard through the door a shrill and discordant cry, which resembled the scream of a jay. She opened it, and saw an old man covered with blood, who shook his head from side to side, as if to cast it from his body. The Duke de La Tour

d'Embleuse was crying, "Aca! Aca! Aea!" It was all that remained to him of the gift of speech, the noblest of man's privileges. His face was grimacing horribly, his eyes opening and shutting as if by springs; his limbs were paralyzed, his body nailed to the fauteuil, his hands lifeless.

Le Tas had never known but one human feeling — she adored her mistress. It is the lot of poor relations to attach themselves furiously to their family either for love or hatred. The mammoth woman threw herself upon her mistress with a cry that has its only parallel in deserts. She wept as tigresses should weep over their young. She tore the knife from the wide, deep wound which had ceased its bleeding; she folded this beautiful lifeless body in her arms; covered it with wild caresses. If souls could be divided in twain, she would have resuscitated her beloved Honorine at her own cost. Erelong grief was succeeded by rage. *Le Tas* did not doubt for a moment that the duke was the assassin. She threw the corpse on the bed, and fell with her whole weight upon M. de La Tour d'Embleuse. She beat him unmercifully, bit his hands, and sought his eyes that she might tear them from the sockets; but the duke was insensible to physical pain;

he replied to her violence by that uniform cry, which was henceforth to be his sole language. Animals have different tones whereby to express-pain and pleasure; the man who falls into paralytic idiocy sinks to the lowest place in the scale of creation. *Le Tas* grew weary of beating him before he suspected that he had been beaten.

Meanwhile Germaine, as fresh and smiling as the dawn, had awakened her mother and husband, presided at the toilette of her son, and descended to the garden to breathe the balmy autumnal air. M. Le Bris and Mr. Stevens were not long in joining them. The sea breeze was gently lifting the leaves glistening with dew; the fragrant oranges and enormous cedrats swung fully ripe at the end of the green twigs; the wrinkled jujubes and the sonorous pistachios were falling pell-mell at the bottom of the trees; the olives had spotted with black the pale foliage of the olive-trees; the heavy clusters of the yellow grape hung on the sides of the trellises in the midst of vine-branches reddened by the first frosts; the figs of the second harvest were distilling honey in large drops; and a few forgotten pomegranates laughed amidst their leaves, like those rosy-cheeked nymphs of Virgil who hid them-

selves that they might be seen the better. The season of flowers was past; but the beautiful red and yellow fruits are the savory flowers of autumn, and the eyes delight in feasting upon them.

All the family were gathered around little Gomez, who was teasing a tame tortoise. M. de La Tour d'Embleuse alone was wanting at the early rendezvous; his windows were still closed, and they respected his slumbers. Mathieu Mantoux, who had redoubled his zeal since the doctor had kept him in his situation, was busily washing his linen at the side of a little brook which ran into the sea.

The servant of Mr. Stevens came in great haste to call his master. A crime had been committed in the neighborhood, the whole district was in commotion, and they ran to the judge as to the fire. Mr. Stevens, before taking leave of his friends, asked the messenger for some particulars of the affair.

"I know nothing about it," replied the man. "They say that it is a French woman who has been found dead in her bed."

"Near here?" interrupted the doctor.

"Within a quarter of a league."

"Is she a new-comer?"

“I think so, though her maid speaks nothing but French, and no one could understand——”

“You saw her maid? A large woman?”

“Enormous.”

“Then it is all right,” said M. Le Bris. “Dear Mr. Stevens, the breakfast-bell has rung, and if you will believe me, the best thing that you can do is to come to the table. The corpse is getting along finely, I warrant you.”

Mr. Stevens, who was a serious man, did not understand the joke. “Does the English law punish people who promise to kill themselves and do not keep their word?” added the doctor.

“No; but it punishes the suicide when it is proved.”

“I should quarrel with the English law.”

“Seriously, doctor,” rejoined Mr. Stevens, “have you any reasons for believing this a false alarm?”

“I will give you my word that the lady in question has not received a single scratch. I know her of old,—she loves her white skin too well to make holes in it.”

“But what if she has been murdered?”

“Do not fear it, my excellent friend. Do you know any thing about birds in aviaries?”

“Not much.

“Then you do not know the difference between the blue and the black tomtits?”

“No.”

“Well; the blue tomtits are pretty little creatures that suffer themselves to be killed without resistance, while the black tomtits are the ones that kill them. The lady in question is of the latter kind. Let us go to breakfast.”

“But I do not understand it,” said Mr. Stevens. “Why have they summoned me?”

“Most subtle judge, if they have sought you here, it is not to have the pleasure of chatting with you; it is to attract somebody else who will not stir for it. What do you say, my dear count?”

“He is right,” said the dowager.

The count did not answer. He was more moved than he cared to show. Germaine gave him her hand, saying, “Go with Mr. Stevens, my friend, and let us hope that the doctor speaks the truth.”

“Parbleu!” said M. Le Bris, “I will go too, though I have not been invited. But if the lady be not dead without remission, I swear on my doctor’s cap that the count shall not speak a word to her.”

Mr. Stevens, the count, and the doctor entered the carriage. Ten minutes after, they stopped at the door of Madame Chermidy. As soon as they came within sight of the house the doctor changed his mind, and thought that an accident had really happened. A dense crowd was besieging the enclosure, and the police, who had hastened hither at the news of the crime, were not strong enough to restrain the public curiosity.

“The devil!” said M. Le Bris, “can it be that the little lady has killed herself to play us a trick! I did not think her strong enough for that!”

M. de Villanera bit his mustache without speaking. He had loved Madame Chermidy during three years, and had believed himself sincerely loved by her. His heart was rent with anguish at the thought that she might indeed have killed herself for him. The memories of the past rebelled against all the doctor’s affirmations, and were victoriously pleading the cause of Honorine.

The crowd opened a passage to Mr. Stevens and his companions. Under conduct of the police, they reached the mortuary room. Madame Chermidy was lying on the bed in the dress which she had worn the evening before. Her beautiful face was horribly contorted; her half-opened lips disclosed both rows of small teeth,

clenched by the last convulsion of agony; her eyes, which no pious hand had closed in time, stared Death in the face with a horrid fright. The dagger was in the middle of the room in the place where *Le Tas* had thrown it. The blood had spurted upon the carpets, the hangings, the furniture, everywhere. A large pool, congealed before the chimney-piece, denoted that it was there the unfortunate had received her death-blow, while a dark-red train showed that she had had strength enough to walk to her bed.

The waiting-maid, who had called the justice and raised the neighborhood, was silent. One would have said that she had spent her fury in exhausting her strength. Crouched in a corner of the chamber, her eyes riveted on the corpse of her mistress, she watched the coming and going of the lawyers; even the arrival of the count and M. Le Bris failed to rouse her from her torpor.

Mr. Stevens, followed by his clerk, who had preceded him on the scene of the crime, observed the condition of the place and dictated the description of the corpse, with the impassibility of justice. The doctor was entreated to assist at the inquest. He commenced by declaring all that he knew, summarily exposed the causes which might have impelled Madame Chermidy to suicide,

recounted the conversation which he had had with her the night before, and repeated the contents of the will which he himself had carried to M. de Villanera. The declarations of the dead woman, the place in which her body had been found, the weapon with which she had been stabbed and which belonged to her, the closed doors of the house, the proximity of her waiting-maid who had heard no noise,—all the known circumstances confirmed the idea of a suicide.

This word, pronounced half aloud, produced the effect of an electric shock on *Le Tas*. She rose with a start, ran to the doctor and looked him in the face, exclaiming, “Suicide! it is you who speak of suicide? You know well that she was not the woman for that! Poor angel! she was so blooming! she was so healthy,—she might have lived a hundred years if you had not murdered her! Besides, the old man is not here,—where have they carried him? Find him! let them bring him here! —you will see that he is covered with her blood.” Then, spying Count de Villanera, who had thrown himself into an arm-chair and was weeping silently, she cried, “You are here then! you should have come sooner. Ah, Monsieur the count, you pay your debts of love in a droll way!”

While the judge and the doctor were on their way to the next room, where a painful surprise awaited them, *Le Tas* dragged the count by the arm to the bedside, and forced him to gaze on his former mistress, and to hear a funeral oration which made his hair stand on end. "Look! look!" cried she, in the midst of sobs; "see those beautiful eyes which used to smile on you so tenderly, those rosy lips which gave you such kisses, these long black locks you so often untied yourself,— for you would do my work! Do you remember the first time that you came to the Rue du Cirque? How, when they had all gone, you went down on your knees to kiss this hand! Brr! how cold it is! And the day when the boy was born, do you remember that? Who cried? who laughed? who swore fidelity till death? Embrace her then a little, faithful chevalier, kiss her now!"

The count, motionless, rigid, and colder than the corpse he gazed upon, expiated in a single moment three years of unlawful happiness.

They brought in the Duke de la Tour d'Embleuse, who was paying very dearly too, for a life of egotism and ingratitude.

The blood with which he was covered, his presence in the room of Madame Chermidy, the missing pane in the

window, the wounds on his hands, and, above all, the loss of his reason, made them believe for an instant that he was the assassin. The doctor examined the wound of Madame Chermidy, and discovered that the dagger had pierced the heart quite through. Death must have been instantaneous; it was therefore impossible that she could have dragged herself to her bed. Mr. Stevens, when dining the day before with the duke, had remarked the derangement of his mental faculties. M. Le Bris explained to him in a few words how the homicidal mania might have sprung up in a disordered brain in a single night. If it were true that he had committed the crime, justice had nothing to do with a maniac. Nature had condemned him to a near dissolution after a few months of an existence worse than death.

But on examining the corpse of Madame Chermidy more closely, they found in her clenched hand a few hairs shorter and coarser than those of a woman, and of a color more natural than those of the old duke. The clerk, on raising an overturned table, picked up a livery-button bearing the arms of Villanera. And lastly, the drawer in which Madame Chermidy had placed bank-notes to the value of a hundred thousand francs was found empty. It was necessary, therefore, to seek some

other assassin than M. de La Tour d'Embleuse. They questioned *Le Tas*, but could gain no light from her. She only struck her forehead and exclaimed wildly, "Fool that I was! it is he. The wretch! That I could roast him alive!—but to what end? he would tell every thing. Bury my mistress and throw me to the dogs; as for him, let him go to the devil!"

Justice transported itself the same day to the Villa Dandolo. On their return, they found Mathieu Mantoux just sewing a button on his red plush waistcoat. They noticed that the button was a new one, and that his hair was precisely the color of the specimen found in the fingers of Madame Chermidy. On seeing himself arrested, he cried out by force of habit, "Always Little-luck!" Mr. Stevens ordered him to be taken to the Chateau Guilfort, west of the city, near the sea-shore. He was fortunate enough to escape during the night, but only to fall into one of the large nets which the fishermen set at night and take up in the morning.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

IF YOU have ever seen the sea in the equinoctial season, when the yellow waves mount foaming to the top of the pier, when the pebble-stones noisily clash against the beach, when the wind howls from black clouds and the surges toss tumultuously through tangled sea-weed, shapeless waifs, and the *debris* of wrecks, come again some day in the summer, and you will recognize it no longer. The glittering pebbles are ranged side by side on the edge of the shore, the sea is spread like a shining sheet beneath the laughing azure of the sky, the oxen lie on the cliffs and lazily stretch their nostrils to scent the salt breeze, white sails are seen unfurling in the distant horizon, and the Paris belles are opening their pink parasols on the promenade of the quay.

The Count and Countess de Villanera, after a long journey, the details of which have never been known in

Paris, returned three months since to their hotel in the faubourg Saint-Honore. The countess-dowager, who had accompanied them, and the Duchess de La Tour d'Embleuse, who had joined them at the death of the old duke, share without jealousy the management of the large household and the education of a lovely child,—a little girl two years old. She resembles her mother, and is therefore much more beautiful than was her elder brother, the late Marquis de los Montes de Hierro.

Doctor Le Bris is still the physician and most intimate friend of the family. M. de la Tour d'Embleuse and little Gomez both died in his arms; the one at Corfu; the other at Rome, where he had taken the typhoid fever.

The little marquis had, it is said, a private fortune of six or seven millions,—the bequest of a distant relative. On the death of the child, his parents sold all his property, and dispensed the proceeds in deeds of charity.

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