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BY

OCTAVE FEUILLET.



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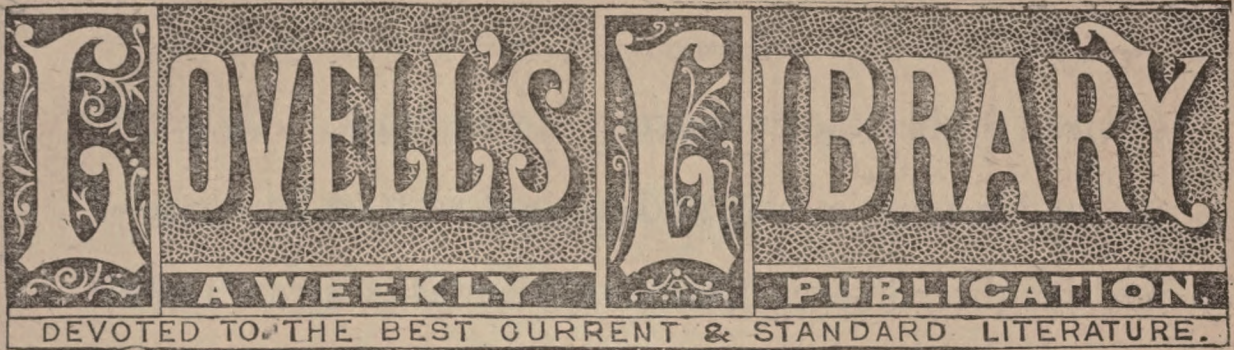
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A

MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

MADAME DE LA VEYLE, widow of the Rear-Admiral de Lorris, had espoused in her second nuptials the General Marquis de la Veyle. Happy in her choice, in these two successive unions, the marquise made it a duty, pious and diverting at the same time, to propagate in others a taste for an institution which she had only cause to praise. She was possessed with a passion for marrying people. The personal consideration which she enjoyed, the aristocratic relations with whom she was connected, and her remarkable success in several difficult operations, had

secured for her the confidence of the public. Above all she had, as she herself said, a good sign at her door—her daughter-in-law, Louise de Lorris. M. de Lorris was an officer of marines, and his frequent and prolonged absences imposed upon his young wife a delicate *role*, in which she acquitted herself in a manner so meritorious as to reflect great honor upon the discernment of her mother-in-law.

Madame de la Veyle received on Thursday evenings. Her Thursdays were chilling, although there was music. Those who attended them breathed there an air of mystery. One met there unknown persons, wearers of white cravats, who often failed to make a second appearance. Young girls suddenly burst into sobs, without anybody knowing why. All this threw a chill over the drawing-room parties.

On that evening the marquise accomplished a work of pure charity, that of promoting marriages among an inferior class, from which she expected no other reward than the satisfaction of her conscience.

A poor cousin of the general—whom they simply called “Edward” about the house—was about to be offered to the daughter of a professor of Sainte-Barbe. Edward was a timid, awkward young man, with mediocre face and figure, so that it was not easy to introduce him with any eclat; but he had one measurably redeeming qualification, in that he was a musician and played passably well upon the flute. Madame de la Veyle had decided that he should be presented in this character.

“I know very well,” she said, “that the flute is an instrument which does not appeal very forcibly to the imagination; still, it is the most brilliant side of that poor Edward.”

So, it was understood that Edward should, during the course of the evening, execute a *morceau* upon the flute, in which he would be assisted by the General and Madame de Lorris. When the moment came, Madame de Lorris gave the key by striking a chord upon the piano and the general sounded it upon the violoncello,

Edward having essayed to strike the key, suddenly crossed the parlor, stepping very quietly and cautiously, knelt before the fire, unscrewed his flute and began carefully warming its sections.

“What is he doing there?” said Madame de la Veyle, while the professor’s daughter exchanged smiles with her family. “What a singular proceeding! Why do you warm your flute?”

“In order to raise its pitch,” answered Edward.

“Indeed! It has that effect! That is strange. I can hardly believe it, my friend. However, everything is possible.”

Edward, intimidated by the silence and constraint of those about him, arose a little hastily and made another endeavor to fall into accord with the General and Mad. de Lorris, who once more, with unwearied kindness, gave him the key. But his ear was not yet satisfied, and retaking his humble posture on the hearth, he a second time exposed the sections of his flute to the warmth of the fire. This unhappy second

offence called forth a dull murmur of mingled disapprobation and hilarity all around the room. The professor's daughter, redder than a tomato, directed an eloquently supplicatory glance at her mother.

“My dear Edward,” then said the marquise, “that is enough. We cannot spend the entire evening in watching you warm your flute. You should understand that. You had better give it up altogether,—let it be for another time—for another time.”

After this painful incident, conversation languished. The professor's family soon took their departure. Poor Edward, in a melancholy manner, replaced his flute in its morocco case, wiped his dejected brow and disappeared.

“What a beautiful evening!” said the general, shortly afterward, retiring to his bed-room.

One single person remained in the drawing-room in company with Madame de la Veyle and her daughter-in-law. It was a young man, about thirty years of age, well-made, elegant and with fine, aristocratic features.

The events of the evening appeared to have completely escaped his observation. The little domestic drama which we have just sketched had not awakened any signs of interest or even of attention on his proud and cold visage. He did not notice the retiring of Edward or the professor's family, merely arose a little from his chair when the general went out, and then languidly resumed his drawing of Turks'-heads in an album.

"M. de Rias," suddenly said Madame de Lorris to him, "how about my verses? When?"

"This instant madame, if you desire."

"Ah! an impromptu! Bravo!"

She put before him the album reserved for poetical effusions, and the young man, after two minutes of reflection, wrote rapidly some lines, which he then presented to Madame de Lorris, with a slight bow.

"What has this gentleman said to you?" asked Madame de la Veyle, arousing herself from her sombre meditations.

“Read, mamma,” said the young woman.

She read gravely :

“ Ah ! little delighted,
Was the lady to-night
By the marquise invited,
At the laughable sight,
Of the glowing fireside haunted,
By Edward and his flute enchanted.”

“ Ah ! poor boy !” said the marquise ; “ instead of using his flute against me like a dagger, you would do better to explain your conduct, which is decidedly unnatural.”

“ How ? dear madam.”

“ My dear Lionel, I do not deceive myself about my Thursdays. I know that they cannot have any very great attraction for you—for you have been two years without even remembering that they took place. Well, all that I can understand ; but for sometime past you have not missed a single one, and that, I confess,

puzzles me. Come, frankly now, my friend, what is your object? For whom, or why, do you show such assiduity? Do you come to captivate my daughter-in-law? or do you wish that I shall marry you off?"

"Tell me first, have I a choice?" replied Lionel.

"Must I leave the room, mamma?" cried Madame de Lorris gayly, arching her swan-like neck and showing her pretty head above her embroidery.

"Madame! dear god-mother!" appealed M. de Rias, "keep Madame de Lorris, I pray you! Since you appear to be going to preach up marriage, do not deprive yourself of such a strong argument."

"Indeed, you think that, my friend," said the marquise with sparkling eyes. "Well, you charm me; positively you charm me. Here is at length a delicious compensation for the annoyances of this evening. I have no need to tell you, my dear Lionel, with what zeal I shall put myself at your commands, out of friendship for you and also for the affectionate memory I have of your poor mother. But, since we are going

to talk, if the presence of my daughter-in-law embarrasses you——”

Madame de Lorris half arose and spread out her arms like two wings, in an attitude of smiling interrogation and ready submission.

“No, no, I conjure you,” said Lionel; “the presence of Madame de Lorris is not only agreeable but useful to me; she sustains me in this hour of trial; she shows me marriage in a light——”

“Ah! permit me, my friend,” said the old marquise; “you must not pay court to Madame de Lorris on the pretext of a fictitious marriage. You shall not deceive me with that play; but, remain; keep your seat, daughter; we will see.”

“Very well,” replied the young wife, again taking up her embroidery.

“Come now, my friend,” continued Madame de la Veyle. “Is it serious? Are you decided to settle down and make an end of it?”

“I have not any great end to make,” modestly

replied M. de Rias, "but I have always had an intention of marrying some day. It is the custom of my family to do so; besides I am now thirty years old, and it seems to me right and decent at least that I should present myself at the altar while I am still presentable. I may add, in order to calm Madame de Lorris—who is throwing terrifying looks at me—that I am inclined toward marriage by other considerations of a less positive nature; that I am not a stranger to certain honest and tender sentiments, although I do not like to make a parade of them; that I can be haunted, like other men, by imaginings of sweet intimacy and domestic happiness; that the idea has come to me of seeing in my home, when I enter it, a graceful young head bent beneath the gas light over her embroidery which may not be indifferent to me; and that, in short, I shall be happy to see filled, in a manner so worthy and charming, the empty place that my mother has left in my house."

"That is admirable," said the old lady, "I may

even say that it touches me. Your hand, dear friend."

M. de Rias respectfully kissed the hand she held out to him and replied laughingly, "And now for the chapter of objections."

"What objections! my friend But I know them; you need not tell them to me. There are marriages which turn out badly. Is that what you mean? There are unhappy households in the world; well——

"There are indeed, a great many," assented Lionel.

"Well, but what can you do? Certainly there are wicked men, and there are fools and awkward people, and so much the worse for them."

"You do not pretend to try and make me believe that it always depends upon the man himself to be happy or unhappy in marriage!"

"I beg your pardon, I do pretend to try and make you believe it, because it is the truth. Look at the wives of sailors! why are they all models

of good conduct? (Bow, my daughter.) It is because their husbands are not with them to spoil the situation."

"But, my dear god-mother, you will admit that there are monsters who are unaffected by either the presence or the absence of their husbands."

"No, my friend, there are no monsters; or, if there are any they are rare, exceedingly rare. It is a mania that men have now-a-days of insisting that all women are monsters at birth. That is very convenient; one is no longer responsible. But you may be very sure that I will not give you a monster; I will answer for that. Louise," continued she, addressing her daughter-in-law, "do you know of whom I am thinking for him?"

The young woman raised her clear eyes to the ceiling for a moment, then letting them fall upon her mother-in-law, she said, "Marie."

"Exactly. I see them together already. That is the same idea you have had, is it not? For the

matter of that, this marriage has been in my head for a long time."

"Marie," said M. de Rias, "is a pretty name when it is well worn; but permit me a question: is Mademoiselle Marie a Parisienne?"

"As Parisian as it is possible to be," replied Madame de Lorris.

"That is enough; I formally refuse the candidate."

"Why?" asked the marquise.

"Because I know how young girls are brought up in Paris, and without cherishing any grand illusions concerning rural innocence, I believe that I would have a better chance in taking my wife from the provinces."

"Oh! do not do that!" cried the marquise. "What an idea! taking a wife from the provinces—as one takes a domestic. Do you know what happens to the domestics that you bring from the provinces? Paris intoxicates them, turns their heads, and they are the worst of all. You would have a clumsy woman, who

would not know how to conduct herself, who would have red hands, of whom you would be ashamed, and who would still be no less likely to deceive you than any other. You see, my friend, in reality there are dangers everywhere, and therefore we should choose those which are least ridiculous."

"But, I must say," cried Lionel, pleasantly, "I do not comprehend you. I thought you were going to excite and encourage me; but all you say to me is terrifying."

"I assure you, mamma," said Madame de Lorris, laughing heartily, "that you are by no means reassuring."

"How shall I answer him, my dear? He would like to have a marriage without inconvenience, without danger, without bad luck, offered him on a silver salver, like all the rest of the men. Well, I have none of that kind to offer, for the simple reason that there are none. As a general rule, my dear, I marry only those people who unite in themselves sufficient elements of

agreement and happiness. I know, for example, a well-born and well-dowered young girl who can make an admirable wife; I know, on the other hand, a genteel young man, the soul of honor, almost charming—I mean you, godson, by the way—I marry them; the affair, so far as I am concerned, is finished; the rest concerns them alone. I marry you, and after that, God help you! Besides, dear Lionel, at the point where you are, your reflections, your objections, your reasoning, all go for nothing. You have told us your symptoms; they are decisive. You are ripe; permit yourself to be plucked, and do not struggle.”

“But truly,” said Lionel, in a serious tone, “I am not so decided as you think, and I desire to reflect farther.”

“Do so, my friend, only while you are thinking about it my rarest bird may fly away.”

“Ah! well, let her fly,” answered the young man, taking his hat as if to withdraw. He did not retire, however, but, leaning his back against the mantel-

piece, sighed a long sigh and said, in a sort of melancholy murmur, "Marry,—well, so be it. I don't ask anything better than to marry to-morrow morning."

The old marquise turned toward Madame de Lorris and said to her, with an air of comic gravity: "You are present, daughter, at a touching scene—the last struggles of a bachelor."

Lionel laughed.

"Tell me," he replied, "how she has been brought up—your young lady?"

"My friend," said the old marquise, "she has been brought up in a tower, by the fairies. Does that suit you?"

"Is she one of your friends?" the young man asked of Madame de Lorris.

"Yes, sir, and I like her very much."

"That is something."

"Oh! goodness," cried the marquise, "we have had enough of mystery. She is not only her friend,

she is her cousin and her name is Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald."

"Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald?"

"Yes, what have you to say to that?"

"That it would be an alliance as honorable as advantageous; but are you sure that there is a young lady named Fitz-Gerald? I think I saw once a child at the Fitz-Gerald's, but I thought it was a boy."

"No, it was a girl."

"Where can one see her?"

"One can see her wherever one sees oneself. She is to be seen wherever you go; but this has only been during two years past, since you have been in mourning; so that accounts for your not knowing her."

"Do you remember," said Madame de Lorris, "my poor little sister-in-law, Madame de Kevern?"

"Madame de Kevern! Certainly--poor young woman, she was charming."

"Well, Marie Fitz-Gerald is just such a person. I

think she greatly resembles her in appearance, do not you, mamma?"

"Yes," answered the marquise, "she is very handsome. But you shall judge of her with your own eyes, for I am going to do for you a heroic thing. Marie and her mother are now at their country-house near Melun. Poor Kevern, the brother of my daughter-in-law, has a little castle in their neighborhood, which he has put at our disposal during his absence. It is a place that I do not like, but I will go there with Louise for a few days. You shall come and see us, and an introduction will take place naturally. Is it a bargain?"

"I am overwhelmed by your kindness," said Lionel, "but I wish it to be understood that this step shall not commit me in an absolute manner."

"What a man! Nobody shall marry you in spite of yourself, my dear friend; therefore be tranquil. Besides, you yourself may not please. That astonishes you; but it is very possible, nevertheless, that you

may not please—so nobody is committed. Ring now, my friend—come back to-morrow, and then we will complete our projects.”

M. de Rias renewed his thanks, made his adieus and retired, leaving Madame de la Veyle and her charming daughter-in-law in the enjoyment of that pleasurable excitement which all women, young or old, experience when they are concerned, even indirectly, in those adventures wherein love is called upon to take a part.



CHAPTER II.

MADAME FITZ-GERALD, widow of a counsellor of state, had been a great beauty, and might still be called so, although she had reached her forty-fifth year. When, under the first sunbeams of March or April, she emerged from her furs and deigned to descend the boulevard, from the Rue de la Paix to the Madeleine, in company with her daughter, the promenaders, who shrank away from her path with involuntary deference, got a perfect idea of Parisian elegance in its supreme purity. Mother and daughter, although little accustomed to long walks, advanced with firm and sure steps, cleaving the crowd with sovereign indifference, and exchanging a few words in haughty and crisp voices, as if they

were enjoying a *tête-à-tête* in their own park. Their toilettes, although marvellously adapted to their ages, had a charming similarity ; their gait was harmonious ; they left behind them an odor of hot-house flowers, and seemed to purify the asphalt upon which they trod. Strangers studied with jealous eyes the dress, the movements, the attractions of these two Parisians strolling abroad in their empire, and, with reason, despaired of imitating them.

Although she had been left a widow early and in all the splendor of her beauty, Madame Fitz-Gerald had doubled the cape of maturity with a reputation perfectly pure. She was not armed with any very solid or elevated principles, but she had, in the highest degree, the religion at once of ermines and of thorough women of the world—a horror of stains. She applied to morality the tastes and repugnance which characterized her physical care of her person. Her instincts and habits revolted at disorder and blemishes. Evil, to her, was not simply evil—it was more,

it was bad breeding. If it is not desirable to exaggerate the moral value of this sort of feeling, it is at least well not to deny its delicacy and practical value. It is the unique safeguard of many women. It is a charm which resembles virtue.

An uncle of her husband, Count Patrice Fitz-Gerald, with chivalric courtesy devoted himself to the service of the young widow, and made himself her guide and protector in the world until the day when her daughter was old enough to be presented in society. From that moment Count Patrice retired, with pleasure, to his chateau de Fresnes, and it became a habit with his niece to spend there with him several months of each summer.

It was there that Madame Fitz-Gerald received, one fine morning in July, an interesting communication from Madame de la Veyle, of which that lady had already forewarned her by a mysterious missive. The matrimonial overture was received with an enthusiasm hardly hidden by the appearance of reserve which the

circumstances demanded. Madame Fitz-Gerald endeavored to murmur that her daughter was still very young; that she was hardly nineteen years of age; that she was, furthermore, very much sought and in a position to make her choice at leisure—then, finally, forgetting all conventionalities in her maternal impulse, she threw her arms about the neck of her old friend and burst into tears. Lionel de Rias was in fact, by his name, his fortune, his merit and his personal appearance, one of those sons-in-law whom mothers delight in evoking in their dreams.

Count Patrice was naturally called to the council and showed himself quite in sympathy with the project of alliance. They took several days to talk of it at their ease, and to discuss all the questions of conventionality and interest involved. The marquise was installed in a pleasant country-house, which they called the Pavilion, belonging to the brother of her daughter-in-law, situated only about half a mile from Fresnes; and, thanks to this convenience of neighbor-

hood, they could multiply their conferences on this delicate subject without awakening the curiosity of Mademoiselle Marie Fitz-Gerald or interesting her feelings. She might not please Lionel, and Lionel might not please her. It was therefore of the utmost importance to spare her from those premature excitements so undesirable for young maidenhood. During the parleying of the elders, Madame de Lorriss was detailed to amuse Mademoiselle Marie, and, being too wise and discreet to "tell tales out of school," discharged this duty conscientiously.

At length the day arrived which had been fixed upon for the first interview between the two young people, and all felt a happy confidence that Marie would pass through the ordeal with the most entire liberty of heart and mind. But they did not neglect any precaution which might take away from that interview even a trace of intention or formality and give it an appearance of accident or chance. Notwithstanding the perfect naturalness of M. de Rias'

arrival, among many other comers and goers, at his godmother's house, the following notes—agreed upon before hand—were exchanged between the Pavilion and the Chateau de Fresnes on the morning of this important day :

Madame de la Veyle to Madame Fitz-Gerald.

“MY DEAR CLARISSE,

“Do not count upon us to-day for dinner. Some visitors have come by the train. They are very amiable people, no doubt, but might have made a better choice of their day, and, above all, notified me. I detest even the most agreeable surprises.

“Tender regards, my dear.”

Madame Fitz-Gerald to Madame de la Veyle.

“Bring me your very amiable people, my dear. Only tell me the number, in order that I may lay plates for them.

“I embrace you, my friend.”

Madame de la Veyle to Madame Fitz-Gerald.

“ My dear friend, my amiable people are only one. It is my godson, Lionel de Rias, but I cannot let him dine alone and I cannot bring him to you. He comes to me only for a day and has not brought his evening coat.

“ Affectionate despair.”

Madame Fitz-Gerald to Madame de la Veyle.

“ DEAR FRIEND :

“ Bring M. de Rias as he is. My uncle will keep on his jacket in order to put him at his ease. Come early, and we will take a walk this evening.

“ Yours for ever.”

Madame de la Veyle to Madame Fitz-Gerald.

“ It is understood then that we will come at three o'clock,—that is, the general, Louise and myself. As to M. de Rias, he has some visits to make in the neighborhood. He will join us toward six o'clock, on one of the general's horses.”

Madame Fitz-Gerald took care to communicate to her daughter each successive part of this astute correspondence, and could not but felicitate herself on the perfect indifference with which Mademoiselle Marie followed the progress of events.

Nevertheless, toward half-past five o'clock in the afternoon, the young girl was promenading solitarily on the terrace of the park which overlooked the road leading from Melun to Fontainebleau. From time to time she stopped in her light and rapid walk, and seemed to listen for some far-off noise, looking the while toward the road through the openings in the thick hedge which bordered the terrace. Then she would start again upon her walk, moving with a gliding step, as if she were about to waltz.

When she again hazarded a furtive glance through the verdant arches, she drew quickly back her yielding bust and murmured a few words between her lips, half-parted by a vague smile. There was to be clearly heard, on the dry, hard road, the resonant tread of a

horse, the proud step of a high-bred charger it seemed, one which should carry only some distinguished rider. The young girl still smiled. She hid herself, and, with a palpitating bosom, managed to make, among the foliage in the thickest part of the hedge, a little observatory. The horseman passed. She regarded him with an interest so intense that she seemed to cease to breathe. M. de Rias had appeared, with his quiet elegance, his manly grace, his handsome and proud features slightly paled with emotion.

When he had passed out of sight she sighed deeply. Placing her hand on her agitated heart, she fixed her brilliant blue eyes for an instant on the space which a moment ago he had filled, then lowering her gaze slowly to the ground, she said in a broken voice :

“ My husband !”

At the sound of this word her face became purple ; she hid it in her hands, and remained thus for some minutes like a statue of startled modesty, after which

Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald, with lively step, returned to the chateau.

They were waiting for her there, with extreme impatience, for M. de Rias had already entered the court-yard, to the great despair of the old marquise.

“Where is Marie?” she asked of Madame Fitz-Gerald, who was posted at her side in the embrasure of one of the windows of the drawing-room. “Lionel looks very well on horseback; I had arranged this so that she should first see him in all his glory—for first impression is the great thing; and now, behold him arrive and that little girl is not here. It is a real misfortune!”

“My dear marquise,” replied Madame Fitz-Gerald, “you know that, above everything else, we desired that Marie should not have the slightest suspicion; besides, your godson appears to me to look as well on foot as upon horseback, therefore he has lost nothing.”

When Mademoiselle Marie condescended to appear

in the drawing-room with the family, a few minutes before dinner, she found M. de Rias already there, acclimated, as it were, and in possession, manifestly, of the good graces of Madame Fitz-Gerald and the Count Patrice. He was immediately introduced to her, and she responded to the profound salutation of the young gentleman with an inclination of the head so slight and indifferent as almost to amount to rudeness. Lionel—a little astonished, because he was generally better treated by the ladies at first sight on account of his good looks—began to wonder and endeavor to divine the reason for this cold reception. After a little cogitation he thought he had hit upon it. Madame de la Veyle had shown him her diplomatic correspondence of the morning, with Madame Fitz-Gerald, and, while he approved of the general spirit of it, he deemed ill advised the detail about his coat. He thought that Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald, a thorough expert in social decorum, had been shocked, and that a man who would visit about in castles

without a dress-coat seemed to her to justify and even to invite ridicule.

This chimera was, as we know, the utter puerility of a lover. Was Lionel then that already? In reality he had been so even before seeing Mademoiselle Fitzgerald; for, if the unknown possibilities of marriage awaken in men of the age of M. de Rias some secret fears, it is not the less true that in that horizon there is for them a luminous point, a perspective of novelty and certainty that attracts and charms them powerfully. It is the emotion of a sort of love, and, if one may so speak of it, a voluptuousness, that, however rich their past lives may have been in kindred sensations, has hitherto been unknown to them. It is the mirage of a fount of purity whose dew is to refresh and rejuvenate their weary hearts and senses. It is the ideal image of that young creature, immaculate as Pygmalion's marble, whose virgin breast reserves for them its first blushes.

Much occupied for some time past with this beauti-

ful vision, M. de Rias had hardly yet become enamored of Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald, who seemed to him its incarnation. Truly she was very pretty and very graceful, supple and willowy, with the air of a wild nymph, magnificently blue-eyed and lofty-browed. Lionel found, however, that this marble did not become animated at his contact, as he had dreamed. The countenance of Mademoiselle Marie, during dinner, completed his mortification. If he had been the parish priest she could not have seemed more indifferent to his presence. She appeared quiet and preoccupied, made pleasant little remarks from time to time to her cousin de Lorris, in a tone of passable enjoyment, and replied to the questions of Lionel with polite indifference.

This behavior finished by alarming the old marquise herself, versed as she was in all the arts of her sex. When they left the table she took her daughter-in-law aside.

“My darling,” she said to her, “it is all on one side.

Lionel is evidently under the charm, but the child disquiets me. Try to find out what she thinks of him—without appearing to do so; you understand!"

A moment after, the young cousins were running about like two boarding-school girls, across the parterres which ornamented the court-yard before the façade of the chateau.

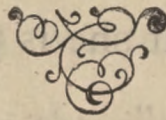
Suddenly, Madame de Lorris, out of breath, approaching one of the open windows of the drawing-room, made a sign to her mother-in-law.

"Mamma," she said to her, "re-assure yourself; she has said nothing to me, but I am sure that she has divined all, and that she is pleased with it, for she kisses me every instant."

The train to Paris passed at nine o'clock, and Lionel, in order to bear out his part of the programme, had to go back to the Pavilion, which was only a few steps from the depot. His horse was led into the court-yard. It was a thorough-bred Arab, displaying its grace by coquettish prancings

and curvetings, while its long silky tail swept the sand.

Mademoiselle Marie seemed to know the horse, for she called him by his name, "Sahib," petted him and fed him with tufts of grass. She finished by giving him a large rose, which she laughingly plucked from the waist of Madame de Lorris. These attentions, very much to the taste of the horse, were still more so to that of his rider.



CHAPTER III.

A FEW weeks later a strange personage arrived at the Chateau de Fresnes. It was the Countess Jules de Bruce, sister of the Count Patrice. She lived in the environs of Cherbourg, near the sea, in an old mansion—a sort of savage place—where she occupied herself with agriculture and good works. She never left there, except under the most extraordinary family circumstances. Her arrival, she said, was equivalent to a sacrament, for she was a sure sign of marriage, baptism or death.

The Countess Jules, in spite of that juvenile appellation, which she had preserved through all her ages, was a septuagenarian. This venerable lady had an easy and dignified bearing, a blending of monastic

simplicity with extreme good breeding. She had been a widow for quite fifty years. It was impossible even to imagine what sort of a man, in his time, the Count Jules de Bruce had been. She never spoke of him. When any one expressed astonishment that she had persisted in such a long widowhood:

“I was married five months,” she would reply, “and that was sufficiently long to show me the nothingness of that kind of amusement.”

And that was all anybody knew about the count.

She arrived early in the morning of the day before that fixed for the marriage of her grand-niece with Lionel de Rias. Lionel—who for some time had been domiciled at the Pavilion, with his godmother, in order to pay his court with more assiduity—on that day also came to the chateau at a very early hour. He was then immediately presented to the Countess Jules, who, having looked him over with a formidable fixity of stare, said to him in a brusque voice:

“Sir, I am your servant;—you are very good—

looking. You please me very much!—so I find it very good—tra-la-le! I find it very good—tra-la-la!”

After which she turned her back upon him, buried herself in a great arm-chair, unrolled an immense piece of knitting, and went resolutely to work.

Nevertheless, Madame Fitz-Gerald was a prey to the most cruel perplexities, which she confidentially put before the Countess Jules.

“My dear aunt,” she said, “you are very good to come so early. Your presence extricates me from a great embarrassment. We expect at least twenty relatives and friends this afternoon. I have a number of preparations to make and orders to give, and, above all, I have my two amorous young people to watch. It is enough to drive me wild. Thank Heaven! you are here to relieve guard. I have the most absolute confidence in the delicacy of M. de Rias, but there are certain appearances which one must keep up. After the wedding they may take care of themselves, but until then it appears to me highly improper

that my daughter and my future son-in-law should remain alone one instant. I have managed them until now, but for to-day I confide them to you. Do not lose sight of them for a single moment when I am forced to be absent. You will promise me this, will you not, good aunt?"

During this invocation a caustic smile flitted over the faded features of the Countess Jules, yet she signified by a very emphatic nod her acceptance of the mission with which she was thus invested. The opportunity to do honor to her engagement was not slow to offer itself. After breakfast, Madame Fitzgerald followed her uncle, in order to share with him the hospitable cares necessitated by the occasion, but she did not leave the drawing-room without addressing an eloquent look, expressive and supplicatory, to her old aunt.

The Countess Jules installed herself in the embrasure of a window. She had taken up her knitting work again, but, while working incessantly, kept a sharp

lookout upon Mademoiselle Marie—who was picking out upon the piano the notes of a new piece of music—and upon M. de Rias, who with a very melancholy air, was turning the pages for her. A rapid dialogue in an undertone took place between the two young people.

“Monsieur,” said Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald, without interrupting her playing, throwing her words over her shoulder at him.

“Mademoiselle?”

“What is the matter with you? You look like a martyr.”

“That is because I am one.”

“How so?”

“You see how it is.”

“How what is?”

“That we are now under the surveillance of a dragon. Your mother is truly incomprehensible.”

“You know how much she thinks of appearances.

Do you not yourself have a regard for appearances, sir?"

"Yes, certainly—particularly when they suit me; but frankly, your mother——"

"Come, come, don't say anything against my mother."

"I adore her—but, frankly, I say again, she might have contented herself with keeping us in sight for two long months, and let us breathe a little on the last day; but no—she delivers us over to that Cerberus."

"Why! Do you not find my aunt agreeable?"

"Not at all—she is very far from being agreeable."

"Take care. She is not deaf."

"I regret it."

"Why?"

"Because—naturally—I have a thousand things to say to you."

"Say them! I will put down the pedal."

M. de Rias bent towards the ear of his betrothed, in

order to pour into it one of those thousand things that he had to say to her, but in that instant a fixed stare from the Countess Jules, stony and austere, suddenly paralyzed him. At the same time the old lady ceased knitting, stuck her needle in her cap and thus spoke.

“ My children, approach! I have heard it said by knowing people, and my short personal experience has confirmed me in believing it true, that in the happiest marriage the day which was the best of it all was the day before the wedding. I think it perfectly absurd that they will not leave you to enjoy it fully and freely. That is why I abuse the plenipotentiary powers which your mother has delegated to me, by giving you the key of the garden. It is lovely weather. Go, my children, and take a walk !”

Mademoiselle Marie turned very red.

“ But, aunt——” she murmured feebly.

The old lady, without replying, took her by the hand and pushed her gently forth from the window

of the drawing-room at which she was seated, which window opened upon the park. Lionel followed her as soon as he had, in passing, kissed the hand of this blunt but good fairy.

Once in the open air, the two young people, like two long-imprisoned birds suddenly set free, seemed not a little astonished at their new-found liberty.

They looked at each other and laughed, quite embarrassed with their good fortune. Then, at last, Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald took Lionel's arm, which he offered her.

As they directed their slow steps toward the nearest foot-path leading to the park, a window was opened above them, in the upper story of the chateau.

"Your mother!" cried Lionel, gayly. "We are lost!"

Overcoming the feeble resistance of the young girl, he forced her to run with him beneath the leafy shelter of a by-path at the edge of the park.

They soon reached the first cross-roads in the forest, where they stopped for a moment to take breath

Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald, lending herself with good grace to an adventure which promised such frolicsome freedom, leaned upon the arm of Lionel, and interrogated him, in a panting voice and with a pretty little startled look :

“Do you really think, monsieur, that they saw us?”

“Without doubt, they saw us!”

“My mother?”

“It seemed to me that I recognised her.”

“And what do you think she is going to do?”

“She will send the police after us.”

They began laughing, like two young lovers as they were, when suddenly :

“Listen!” said the young girl, “I hear some one coming.”

M. de Rias listened.

“Yes, some one is coming;—we are followed. Well, mademoiselle, what shall we do? Shall we give ourselves up?”

“Already?” said she.

At that moment, a noise of footsteps, nearer and nearer, made them start like two kids, and they rushed in haste down a by-path, which wound through the neighboring shrubbery and underwood. They walked rapidly for some time, the young man going in front to push away the branches which almost filled the little path, and turning at intervals to smile at his laughing betrothed. Suddenly he stopped and very carefully advanced his head among the foliage. They were at the verge of one of the great avenues of the park, where the path ended.

"What is it, monsieur?" timidly asked Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald. "What do you see?"

"Hush! I see your uncle. They have probably sent him to keep us company. He will pass us soon—he is looking right and left. Quick! hide yourself!"

They were near a group of two or three old oaks, covered with lichens and moss, whose trunks were almost united. Lionel hid behind the trees, while the young girl knelt on the moss which carpeted the roots.

They remained thus a few minutes in silence; he standing up, with his finger on his lips, looking at her; she at his feet, like a child, upturning to him her sweet face radiant with pleasure, tenderness and innocence.

The Count Patrice, nevertheless, despatched by Madame Fitz-Gerald, with an injunction to put an end to this improper *tête-à-tête*, looked vaguely around—like a man who realized the importance of the duty which he had undertaken. He stopped a last time, and listened; then, accepting the situation, made a movement of the head and a gesture of the hand expressive of his formal announcement of an abandonment of the pursuit. A moment later he disappeared.

Lionel, as soon as he was assured of this happy circumstance, hastened to inform Mademoiselle Marie, upon which she rejoined him in the avenue.

“And now, monsieur,” said she to him, “what are we going to do?”

“We are going to continue our walk, alone, under the blue sky. Is not that charming?”

“Ah! yes! It is charming,” she replied. “I would like to show you the places that I love. Follow me, monsieur, and have confidence.”

“I do not know that I ought to have confidence,” said Lionel. “I feel sure that you will get me lost.”

“No, no! do not be afraid!”

He followed again the beautiful young girl, who once more led the way, graceful as a fawn and supple as an adder. She wore little slippers, with high heels and silver buckles, which seemed ill adapted for an excursion in the forest, but in which she nevertheless glided along with a marvellous charm of motion. Lionel viewed with extraordinary interest the rise and fall of those little slippers, showing at each step a tread full of elastic firmness, displacing obstacles, springing over roots, disentangling themselves from loose brushwood, and occasionally becoming lost in the dry leaves, only to reappear again triumphant.

They came to the margin of a brook which they had to cross upon a dyke of large stones, which a humid moss made very slippery. Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald passed over like a bird. Lionel was not so fortunate. His foot slipped when he was but half-way over and he could not avoid a slight immersion. His disaster would have been complete, had not Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald quickly held out her hand to him from the bank, while she made the woods echo with her bursts of laughter.

Then she led him gayly from bower to bower, over hills and dales, halting from time to time at her favorite sites, stopping before the bright and sombre scenes which alike stirred her young imagination and which she had christened with symbolic names. There was *The Ball-room*—a little clearing, oddly hung around with a fringe of trailing creepers, like chandeliers; then *The Hermit's Chapel*, not far from *The Fairies' Ring*. Of the sombre class she called upon him to admire *The Felon's Pool*, a little piece of

muddy, slimy water, which seemed to hide some sinister mystery beneath its stagnant surface; and *The Secret Pond*, so called because it was suspected of dark complicity with *The Felon's Pool*.

These little episodes served as texts for pleasant reflections and foolish polemics; in brief, of all those childish nothings, little worthy to be recorded by history, but in which the betrothed two took an extreme pleasure—for when love sits at the piano, it matters little what air is sung to the delicious melody of that accompanist.

Nevertheless, Mademoiselle Marie, having consulted her watch, uttered an exclamation of affright when she saw that nearly two hours had rolled by since they set out.

“Monsieur, we must go back!” she said.

“What a pity!” replied Lionel.

“Yes.”

But, in spite of the sigh which accompanied her response, she chose the most direct route to the

chateau. As they approached it they became more silent. Their conversation, when attempted at all, no longer had the same character of lightness and joyousness. They were going along a terrace bordered by witch-hazels, above the highway.

“Ah! how anxious and troubled I was, the first time I passed this terrace!” said Lionel.

“Yes! Why?”

“Because I was afraid I would not please you!—and I was right, for indeed I did not.”

“How so? It seems to me that——” she finished her sentence by a look and a smile.

“Oh, yes; you have become resigned since. But admit now that the first time we met I displeased you greatly?”

“Why? What made you think so?”

“Your reception. It was something horrible. You affected not even to see me.”

“Oh! that was because I had already seen you.”

“Where? How?”

“There,” she said, showing him the hedge.

“What!” he exclaimed, “so young and yet so artful!” pressing affectionately the arm which leaned upon his own.

After a pause :

“Do you believe,” she said, “that what my aunt said was true—that the day before the wedding is the happiest in marriage?”

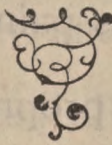
“I am tempted to believe it at this moment,” answered Lionel; “for I cannot imagine an hour sweeter than this.”

“Nor can I; but may we not always be as happy as we are now?”

He stopped, took her two hands in his, and with his eyes gazing into hers, said in a very tender voice :

“If it will render you happy to be loved, Marie, we shall be very happy, for I will love you very dearly. Yes, I do love you very much!” he added, still more tenderly, drawing her toward him as he spoke.

She lowered her eyes ; her face assumed a strangely serious expression, and in silence she bent toward him her forehead, pure and pale, upon which the young man reverently, yet lovingly, pressed his lips.



CHAPTER IV.

IF you imagine that Madame Fitz-Gerald received the two fugitives with anger and reproaches, it shows conclusively that you were not acquainted with her. Doubtless she was pained by an escapade which shocked her ideas of propriety and good behavior, but it would have been in the extreme of bad taste for her to exaggerate the gravity of the offence. She contented herself with smiling a little and shrugging her shoulders at sight of the guilty ones.

“My children, you are ridiculous!” she said to them; “you behave like a pair of rustic lovers.”

“Mamma,” said Mademoiselle Marie, throwing her arms about her mother’s neck, “we only obeyed my aunt.”

“But your aunt, my dear, is a savage, and you ought to know it. She has never lived in the world. She is a wild woman—from the forest. That is all.”

In the afternoon and evening the chateau was the theatre of great animation. The different trains from Paris successively brought crowds of relations, friends, guests and bridemaids, with their baggage. The continual rolling of carriages in the court-yard; the welcoming of new-comers; the laughter of young girls; the voices of servants; the noisy moving of trunks up the staircases; all commingled in a confused and indescribable tumult. Madame Fitz-Gerald and her daughter, aided by Count Patrice, exerted themselves to receive their guests, guide them through the labyrinths of the corridors, and house them in their respective apartments. Lionel, on his part, lent with a graceful courtesy what assistance he could, although in the bottom of his soul this portion of the fête seemed to him very uninteresting. Only one person held aloof from all the excitement. It was the

Countess Jules, who all the time remained seated near a window, knitting with impassible serenity.

To this violent hurly-burly succeeded softer sounds of trailing robes in the lobbies and avalanches of silks on the staircases. A royal dinner united all the guests in a vast gallery, in the midst of an odorous framework of foliage and flowers ; after which they passed from the gallery into the drawing-room, in that fine expansive humor and mutual sympathy which are, in all social conditions and in all latitudes, the ordinary consequences of a comfortable repast.

While they took coffee, Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald thought it her duty to introduce particularly to her betrothed two young women—the Duchess d'Estrény and Madame de Chelles, who were, like Madame de Lorris, her cousins and friends from infancy.

Madame de Chelles, laughing, petulant, with manners somewhat boisterous, had still at certain moments, in her dark eyes, an odd expression of reverie and pensiveness.

“My dear,” she said, abruptly, to Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald, “the first time that you go to the Bouffes-Parisiens or the Palais-Royal, you must take me with you. I wish to enjoy your first impressions. It is very amusing—as you will see. I married principally to go to the minor theatres; but I have commenced to tire of it—because my husband gives me too much of them.”

“You complain, my darling,” broke in M. de Chelles upon the conversation, caressing his light moustache while he spoke, “but I, let me tell you, have a system.” He spoke in a sententious manner, for he was one of those to whom wine lends gravity. “I share all my pleasures with my wife. I am not selfish. I have my tastes—but I associate my wife with them. For instance, I like the minor theatres, where they get off good things; well, I take my wife with me. I like to drive—I take my wife with me. I go to an opera-ball—I take my wife with me. I go to sup with my friends after the ball—my wife sups with us. A wo-

man should be the comrade of her husband. That is my system."

"Oh! you are a dunce with your system!" exclaimed Madame de Chelles; "go on, my friend, and you will lose me—I'm weary of you already!" And, bursting into a laugh, she turned on her heel.

The Duchess d'Estrény was a blonde, slight, elegant, with eyes full of languor and even sadness. She was thus sad because the duke, her husband, liked her well enough, but did not passionately love her. When M. de Rias was introduced to her by her cousin, she studied him with an air of doleful interest; then tenderly embracing Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald:

"You love her very much, sir, do you not?" she said, with an impressive accent.

"Yes," cried at that moment a sonorous and jovial voice behind them, "but love her passionately. That's it. See, my dear Lionel," continued the Duke d'Estrény, who was a fine-looking man, of powerful build, "love women with all your heart, or do not meddle

with them. Now I have thrown this poor duchess into despair, because I do not love her sufficiently to write verses to her. It is a misfortune, I know; but I do not know how to make verses—so what can I do about it? I was made that way. *I--do--not--write--verses!*”

He pronounced his words with an emphasis, as if he meant it to be understood, that while repudiating verses he was a prose-writer of the highest order.

During this tirade, the dutchess took off her gloves and adjusted her rings, with a look of cold inattention. When the duke finished his good-natured declaration, she simply turned to Mademoiselle Fitzgerald and said:

“Are you coming?”

They went together to the piano. The duchess first, in a fusillade of chromatic fireworks, solaced her indignant soul. Then a waltz, by four hands, burst noisily through the drawing-room and set palpitating the corsages of the bridesmaids.

A little later in the evening, Lionel came and seated himself besides Madame de la Veyle, who looked with pleasure on this family fête.

“My dear godmother,” he asked her, seriously, “is there still time to break off?”

“What! To break off!” she exclaimed, bounding up from her seat. “Are you crazy?”

“I am, certainly, about Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald.”

“And then what?”

At that same moment, Mademoiselle Marie, who was waltzing, stopped before them, and bending over said quickly, with a smile on her lips:

“What is he saying to you, madame?”

“Oh! He is telling me that he is crazy about you.”

“Ah! what a pleasant madness!” exclaimed the young girl, gayly, springing again into the midst of the whirlpool of dancers.

“Never,” confided Lionel, “have I appreciated her

as to-day ; she is simple, true, tender, honest—she is a charming creature, an exquisite being !”

Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald understood that they were still speaking of her, and stopped a second time in the same place.

“What is he saying to you now, madame ?” she asked in an undertone.

“He is saying that you are an exquisite being.”

“Then he has indeed gone mad,” said she, and, radiant with happiness, she again consigned herself to the arms of her partner, who did not seem much amused by this by-play.

“But, this evening,” continued M. de Rias, “I am tormented by the most sinister ideas.”

“What ideas, my poor friend ?”

“I have remarked one frightful thing. We have among our guests seven or eight married couples, who have not been chosen, but are taken at hazard from the world. Well, there is not a single pair which is not in a flagrant condition of misunderstanding or

disunion. Cast your eyes about you, and I defy you to deny it."

The old lady glanced about the drawing-room, and, pursing up her lips, replied :

"It is certainly true that we have not here the best specimens of exemplary households."

"Well," continued Lionel, "I say to myself, bitterly, that all these people, or at least the greatest number of them, have loved as we love—Mademoiselle Fitzgerald and myself; that they have all had a day before marriage, full of charm and hope—like ours; and I conclude from all this that there must be in our state of civilization—particularly, perhaps, in our wordly manners—some general causes which alter marriage in its source, and there deposit a fatal germ, which strikes with sterility the most generous and sincere dispositions, and almost invariably makes of an institution of love and peace one of hate and war. You must admit that these are terrible thoughts for a man who is going to be married to-morrow."

“Good gracious! do not start upon such a wild-goose chase!” answered the marquise. “There are no general causes; there is no fatal germ; there is nothing of the kind. As I have already had the honor to say to you, there are bad husbands, and that is all.”

“But I do not at all admit your theory,” cried Lionel. “It is in all respects a great deal too absolute.”

“Pardon me, my friend. If you will permit me, let us examine a little these husbands here, I beg of you. There is, in the first place, the Duke d’Estrény. He is a very good man, no doubt, and not a bad husband possibly, but he is a ridiculous blunderer. His wife is a little, delicate, sentimental woman—while he is a blacksmith! yes, positively a blacksmith! In addition to which, he is continually joking her about her innocent mania for romance. Well, he wounds her—he exasperates her. In time she will find some one who will comprehend her—that is cer-

tain; and whose fault will it be? Next, we have little de Chelles——

“Oh! de Chelles!” said Lionel. “I do not defend him. He wants to make his wife lead a bachelor’s life. He is a fool!”

“Good!” assented the marquise. “There, we have already two. As for the others, it is still worse. You are not ignorant that Monsieur d’Eblis commenced by causing his wife to be patronized in public by his mistress. That was a pretty beginning. And there is one whose sordid avarice has pushed his wife to all sorts of expedients—borrowing, and all that follows it. If you do not know about that already, I tell you of it now. Charny, on the contrary, is not a miser; he has just given to Mademoiselle I-don’t-know-who, of the Varieties, an equipage worth fifty-five thousand francs, and his wife, modestly drawn by a pair of horses costing three thousand francs, meets her every day in that equipage; and knows from whom she received it—be sure of that. M. de Lastere is a serious

man—too serious—aspires to be a minister of state. He occupies himself constantly with political economy. His wife understands nothing of that; so he despises her and neglects her; but he pities her. He sends her all the young men that he meets on the boulevard, saying to them: ‘Go and see my wife!’ ‘Go and keep my wife company!’ ‘Go and have some music with my wife!’ That poor Laumel there has quiet tastes—he is modest—he is timid—he distrusts even himself. He is afraid of actresses, afraid of women of the world, and, above all, afraid of his wife; but he is not afraid of chambermaids, and they are his consolation. Now, my friend, it seems to me that is all—and is not all that reassuring for you?”

“I beg your pardon. Not in the least in the world so,” said Lionel, laughing, in spite of himself, at this pitiless enumeration. “In the first place, I find it very difficult to believe that the wives of all these gentlemen are entirely victims, perfectly innocent of wrong toward their husbands. Furthermore, even in com-

placently lending my assent to your system, I ask myself what man can flatter himself with a certainty of not being in some one of your categories; for, in short, if one is not perverse and a fool, one may be a blunderer, and how many ways are there in which a man may be a blunderer?"

"There are about one hundred thousand, my friend," said the marquise; "and there is one in particular, which consists in talking philosophy, and searching for the quintessence of things with his old godmother, instead of waltzing with his young wife, while she is dying of envy."

Upon this sage observation, M. de Rias hastened to his duty—which had not yet ceased to be a pleasure—and soon forgot, when looking into the blue eyes of his betrothed, the dismal reflections which a moment before had possessed him.

The next day, which was that of the wedding, appeared quite insupportable to Lionel. He had, some time before, timidly suggested to Madame Fitz-Gerald

the idea of having the civil and religious ceremonies performed at six o'clock in the morning, or at midnight, in the strict seclusion of the family circle. Madame Fitz-Gerald, however, repulsed this proposition as a savage eccentricity, which would have lent to the marriage of her daughter a clandestine character. The marriage took place at mid-day, to the sound of the village bells, and in the midst of the public festivity, he had to submit to the curiosity of the crowd, the multi-colored cockades of the horses, the new liveries of the coachmen, the coarse joy of the servants—in brief, all the inevitable associations, demonstrative and vulgar, of a wedding.

During the religious ceremony, which was the only thing that pleased and touched him, M. de Rias was not slow to remark one fact which gave some appearance of reason to his godmother's theory. Among the wedding-guests the men were, for the most part, in careless attitudes, indifferent or slightly ironical; while the women were, on the contrary, very serious,

showing a sort of passionate fervor, or, as they bent over their chairs, an absorption in mysterious meditations. Some wept, all seemed to remember with agony that there has been in their lives such an hour, filled with purity, confidence, hope and sweet vows that they would have liked to have kept.

It had been at first intended to terminate the wedding-feast by the immediate departure of the young couple for Scotland or Italy; but Madame Fitz-Gerald had supplicated her son-in-law to leave her her daughter for a little while yet, and M. de Rias, too essentially a Parisian to like travel, willingly gave consent to her solicitations.

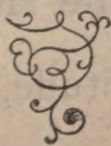
It must be owned that he repented of so doing, however, when, the day after marriage, he had to descend to the drawing-room at the breakfast hour and display himself before a dozen relatives and friends who had remained at the chateau. In this unwonted conjuncture even the most self-possessed men are in reality very much embarrassed by their countenances;

in such a situation the smile is awkward; the laugh out of place; freedom and expansiveness, the manner of a ninny; languor and prostration, ridiculous; the air of triumph, gross. A natural air would be best, but that is impossible.

Madame de Rias, on her side, appeared with that self-possession which distinguishes young wives of a day. She served tea as usual, smiling placidly, with a pure forehead and a limpid eye.

During this morning the Countess Jules quitted the chateau. After getting into her carriage, she called her grandniece to her, embraced her for the last time, and left her, as a farewell, this fine maxim:

“Remember always, poor child, that woman is made to suffer—and man to be suffered.”



CHAPTER V.

AFTER two or three weeks passed at Fresnes, in the enchantment of their mutual love, M. and Madame de Rias settled in Paris towards the commencement of October, in a small house in the rue Vauneaw that belonged to Lionel.

Madame Fitz-Gerald came back at the same time to occupy her apartments in the rue Chaussée-de-Antin.

It was a little far from her daughter, but she was accustomed to that quarter—and it was a quiet quarter, she fearlessly declared.

The truth was, that the faubourg Saint-Germain, by its comparative solitude, reminded her of the country, which she held in horror.

It was on one of the first days of February, the

following winter, and the honeymoon had not yet ceased to shine with its sweet light in the sky of the young couple, that Madame de Rias summoned her mother to her by a furtive note.

Madame Fitz-Gerald went with all speed to the rue Vauneaw; after a mysterious conference with her daughter, she sought M. de Rias, who was writing in the library; her eyes were moist, but her face was radiant.

“My friend,” she said to him, in a tone full of feeling, “Marie is not very well this morning—but it is nothing serious—nothing serious, I assure you. With a modesty very natural in a young woman, she did not like to tell you herself. And now go and embrace her!”

“What! Truly, dear madame?” asked Lionel.

“Yes, indeed; go and kiss her! That will make her feel better.”

“But—— Is she worrying about anything?”

“Not at all. What should she worry about? She

has the finest health in the world ; nevertheless, it is a circumstance which always astonishes young wives a little ; so go and embrace her."

Lionel hurried away to perform this agreeable duty, while Madame Fitz-Gerald slowly paced the library, softly fanning herself with her handkerchief and perfuming the air with exquisite odors.

A few minutes later, three perfectly happy people were seated at the breakfast-table. Madame Fitz-Gerald, proud of her daughter, contemplated her with an air of tender triumph. Madame de Rias, secretly proud of herself, displayed a blending of gayety and confusion quite charming. Lionel admired his wife, who appeared to him extremely touching under this new aspect of a young mother in flower.

The interesting event which had just been officially communicated to M. de Rias, caused him more than one sort of satisfaction.

Not only did it flatter his legitimate pride of family, but at the same time it awakened in his heart gener-

ous feelings ; it also seemed as if it would put an end to that first period of marriage which Lionel had accepted with good grace, but of which he ardently desired the close. This period had naturally been consecrated to the amusement of his young wife, and in particular to those mundane pleasures which had for her the attraction of forbidden fruit.

He had taken her to the minor theatres with her cousin de Chelles ; he had allowed her to taste till dawn the intoxication of the dance. He had permitted her to hunt. In short, he had feasted and spoiled her like a lover and a courteous gentleman. He had even accompanied her in her wedding visits, although her circle of friends appeared to him unnaturally extended.

There were many of these pleasures and duties for which M. de Rias had for a long time, like the generality of men of his age, lost the taste and the habit. For his own part, he visited very rarely, making calls only when necessary, or choosing the most agreeable.

He had formerly been a most passionate leader of the German, but now he could hardly explain to himself how he could ever have indulged in such a childish pastime ; and all sorts of fashionable gatherings, especially where they danced, had become to him absolutely insupportable.

He passed his evenings at his club, when he did not devote them to study. He still went to theatres, but as a critical amateur, or rather as one who has been much behind the scenes.

Sustained by his love for his young wife, he had taken up again, and for a time with amiability, some of the tastes of his own youth.

This bitter-sweet phase of wedlock had, however, been contemplated in his programme, but he did not intend it should pass to the chronic stage, and he had commenced to dream of quietly settling down, when the fortunate indisposition of Madame de Rias came to solve the problem like an interposition of Providence.

A few fears still tormented him; he apprehended that his wife, thus baulked of her enjoyment in the full tide of fashionable life, in the height of the season, would rebel against her destiny, and not even try to reason with herself; but in this he was mistaken. If he had his programme, his wife had hers, and that which had happened made part of it; it was the anticipated, and even desired, complement of her adornment and dignity as a wife.

Far from pretending to dissimulate to herself or others her maternal hopes, she took an innocent pride in dwelling upon them.

Without any hesitation she gave up going out of evenings, and received calls in a loose, flowing robe, lying on an extension-chair.

All this appeared very reassuring to M. de Rias; such a complete and cheerful resignation to such a severe trial left him no doubt that he had found in Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald the ideal of which he had

dreamed, and which is the general dream of his sex—a domestic wife.

Well satisfied with the present, Lionel cast his eyes confidently towards the future. What could in the time to come alter a union of which each day of intimacy drew closer the ties, and established more perfect harmony? On his wife's side there was no danger to apprehend; within a few months he had learned to know her well. She was perfectly upright and true; she had only honest instincts, strengthened by the education and example she had received from an honest mother. She loved her husband, she possessed all that was required to please him, and to attach him to her. Charming to behold, she was not less so to hear, for she was intelligent and witty. Her only defect was in the evident incompleteness of her education—in her instruction; in several circumstances Lionel would have been able to state that his wife's knowledge of matters historical and literary was strangely vague, but there was even in her very ignor-

ance something *piquant* and most amusing, in her fantastic way of stating things.

As for M. de Rias, however severely he questioned himself, he could not find himself guilty, nor capable of the wrongs generally attributed by unhappy husbands to their own faults.

Without exaggerating his personal advantages, he was aware of them, and considered he was justified in having confidence in them.

He was worthy the affection of a wife ; he could not doubt that he had conquered the heart of his own ; by what fault or clumsy blunder might he ever alienate it ? He surely was in no danger of breaking up on the usual ordinary rocks ahead ; he could not even take credit for avoiding them, since nothing in his tastes drew him towards them. He was not miserly, and gave Madame de Rias a very liberal allowance for pin-money and for household expenses.

He was not a man to demoralize his wife himself by taking her out to sup in private rooms.

He was not blind, and he knew how to keep away from his house perilous intimacies, instead of inviting them, as so many do.

He had greatly modified his opinion in many things; besides, he loved his wife, and felt no temptation to inflict upon her the outrage of a rival.

In short, on his side, as well as on that of Madame de Rias, he saw, after mature examination, nothing but what guaranteed a peaceful union and enduring happiness.

A gentleman of elegant manners, M. de Rias was also a student, and a man of letters. Formerly he had made a very creditable *debut* in diplomacy; but he had suddenly relinquished that career in order to live with his mother when she became a widow.

At last, to occupy his idle hours, which weighed upon and mortified him, he had commenced, with a good deal of mystery, an important literary work, which elevated him in his own eyes and inspired him

with hope of public honor ; it was a History of French Diplomacy in the Eighteenth Century.

This serious labor was accomplished very slowly, and often interrupted by the distractions of an outdoor life. Lionel had always intended to apply himself to it steadily, when marriage should have made his life more regular, in rendering his home more attractive. That day being come, he kept his word, and thenceforth passed a good deal of his time in culling from the archives of foreign affairs material which he afterward classified, and used in his library.

In order to diversify this employment, M. de Rias fell back into some of his former habits, which had become almost indispensable to him, and which appeared to him honorably reconcilable to the marriage state.

A connoisseur in art, and something of a sportsman, he loved to follow Parisian life in its incessant and varying manifestations. He liked to watch from day to day events as they arose, sometimes from the

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purlors of his club, sometimes from the grand stands at the races, and sometimes from the green-rooms of theatres.

In the meantime, his young wife waited for him with a tender impatience; he always found her in a state of profound contentment, and his life now realized his most ambitious hopes; a smiling face welcomed him the moment he entered—that of a wife eager to spare him the anxious details of material life; a chimney-corner always bright, flowers always fresh, an asylum ready at all times to shelter him from fatigue and annoyance—in short, the charm of a peaceful and luxurious home, added to the interest of his individual pursuits and recreations, was what M. de Rias had taken delight in fancying would be his in marriage—and he is not the only man who thus dreams.

Apart from some natural fears, the time that Madame de Rias was obliged to pass on the extension-chair was for her, as for her husband, a delicious period.

She was very much visited and surrounded by friends; her brilliant cousins, Mesdames de Lorris, de Chelles, d'Estrény, brought her almost every day the news of the city. Her mother only left her to ransack shops, and select materials for an infant's outfit, which were afterwards submitted to Madame de Rias for her approbation.

Her easy chair, and even the floor, was continually inundated with fine linen, flannel stuffs, lace, ribbons, and strange little articles.

Mesdames de Lorris, de Chelles and d'Estrény chattered over them, and offered advice from their experience. Towards the close of the day, M. de Rias fell into the circle of agreeable matrons, and redoubled the animation.

He generally arrived with his pockets and his hands full of little boxes, large sacs or mysterious packages, which the ladies undid.

They admired the jewelry, shared the flowers, and ate the sweetmeats—it was a regular high holiday.

The arrival of the Countess Jules towards the month of August lent to the above circumstances a graver character. A few days later, she was seen holding at the baptismal font the new-born LOUIS HENRY PATRICE DE RIAS.

The next day she left with her knitting for her manor-house in the environs of Cherbourg.



CHAPTER VI.

MADAME DE RIAS recovered with a promptitude which did honor to her constitution, and she soon showed herself on the boulevard in all her maternal glory, escorted by a provincial nurse whose odd head-dress and black eyes awoke the profane attention of pedestrians.

Lionel ardently desired that his wife should nurse their son herself, but Madame Fitz-Gerald, in the name of the health and beauty of her daughter, had opposed to this desire some of those specious feminine arguments to which men have nothing to reply, because they know no better themselves.

He congratulated himself, however, that the young mother busied herself with her child with solicitude;

but he saw at the same time that even this occupation left Madame de Rias considerable leisure. He did not indeed expect to fill all the void; during the day he led his accustomed life, for it is not the custom for husbands to accompany their wives in their visits and in their daily walks, and in this matter he thought he was pleasing his wife in leaving her her independence, even as it pleased him to retain his own. He was not so fortunate as regards the evenings; both propriety and prudence forbade him to allow Madame de Rias to attend balls and theatres without her husband, and a heightened taste for these recreations manifested itself in the young wife, after the long months of seclusion and abstinence which she had undergone. The Parisian season was particularly brilliant that winter, and Lionel considered himself lucky when he was not obliged to go to three or four parties the same evening; but his wife had certainly a right to some indemnification in the way of enjoyment, and, although his work and habits were greatly disturbed

by this feverish gayety, M. de Rias, in the cause of justice and of affection, resigned himself to it with a good grace, at least apparently; it was, he hoped, only a passing crisis—perhaps he also flattered himself in the bottom of his heart that Providence, which had so bountifully interposed in his behalf the preceding winter, would again come to his aid in this new trial.

One morning, as they were finishing breakfast, his wife, who had been remarkably quiet and dreamy during the repast, suddenly covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

“My dear child, what’s the matter now?” inquired M. de Rias, going to her.

“Nothing,” she said, in the midst of her weeping; “nothing—I wish to see my mother.”

“But what has happened? What is the matter?”

“Nothing. Send for my mother, I beg of you!”

As she spoke, Madame Fitz-Gerald, attracted, no doubt, to the rue Vauneaw by some vague presentiment, entered the dining-room. Her daughter, with-

out giving her time even to be astonished, seized and immediately dragged her into the adjoining room, and Lionel a moment afterwards heard a confused duet of plaintive murmurs and stifling sobs.

The situation was painful for M. de Rias. he shrugged his shoulders, lit a cigar, and ran his eye over a newspaper while awaiting the end of the conference.

In about a half an hour, which seemed very long to him, the door opened, and Madame Fitz-Gerald appeared alone, with red eyes and inflamed face; she promised her daughter to come to see her in the course of the day; then she shut the door, and, going to her son-in-law, wrapping her furs around her, she said to him:

“You might dispense with killing my daughter!”

After which she walked out majestically.

M. de Rias, in another difficult position, proved once again that he had the heart and mind of a gallant and honorable gentleman. After subduing, not without

effort, the promptings of his pride, he went to his wife, who was still bathed in tears. He talked to her in a way that was reasonable, tender and cheerful; scolded her a little, kissed her a great deal, and finished by persuading her that she was a little woman worthy of pity, but at the same time much loved and passably happy.

When Madame Fitz-Gerald came back, towards the middle of the day, she found them on the sofa, hand-in-hand, smiling at young Louis-Patrice going through his primary gymnastics on the floor.

“You can hardly imagine, my dear,” Lionel said, gayly, to his wife, “how hard your mother was on me this morning!”

“Oh, my friend,” replied Madame Fitz-Gerald, slightly appeased by the family scene before her, “I ask a thousand pardons! I was wrong. I confess there are things for which there is no name; but it seems that such treatment suits her; therefore I have nothing more to say.”

“It does not suit me, mamma,” said Madame de Rias, “but I have reasoned with myself about it.”

“Oh! well, then it is all right.”

Lionel did not believe that he had paid too dearly, at the price of this slight storm, for the new period of repose, of calm and domesticity, which that morning seemed to inaugurate in his home.

He already saw unfolding before him a series of peaceful and comfortable months in a charming picture, in which his wife's extension-chair would occupy the centre.

It was a deceitful mirage. He was not slow to perceive that the best expedients wear out, and that the same causes do not always produce the same effects.

The general health of Madame de Rias was so much better than the year before that she was able to go to parties and other places of amusement during the rest of the winter; she passed the summer at Trouville, in accordance with the advice of an obliging physician, and only resorted to the extension-chair at

the last extremity ; that is to say, during a period of fifteen days. In short, without ill-nature, or pouting, but even with spirit, she appeared to apply herself to the task of demonstrating to certain people that they did not gain much by their Machiavellian calculations.

M. de Rias fell into a state of moral discouragement.

A charming little girl was born to him, it is true; but would the increase of his young family and the attention demanded by the two children, have the effect of calming their mother's rage for worldly pleasures, and keep her by her own fireside? He hardly thought so, and he was right.

Madame de Rias gave to her maternal duties the time required by them, but she pursued with undiminished zeal the only kind of life of which she had any notion, and which seemed to her perfectly correct and irreproachable.

Lionel tried palliatives. He imposed certain restrictions, and, in order to induce her to accept them

without murmuring, he managed to secure the aid of his mother-in-law.

There arose a question of one of those charity fairs which fashionable ladies delight to get up for the benefit of the poor, where, attracted by their fine eyes, society people clustered around their elegant little shops. Madame de Rias, invited to figure among the beautiful saleswomen, solicited her husband's consent.

"My dear," he said to her, "you shall certainly do as you please, or rather your mother shall decide for you. Madame," he added, addressing himself to Madame Fitz-Gerald, "your knowledge of the proprieties is so great, your tact is so good and delicate—if you will permit me to say so, so exquisite—what do you think of it?"

Madame Fitz-Gerald, thus attacked on her weak point, replied:

"To speak frankly, I am not crazy about such exhibitions. In my time, there were no such things.

It is true that the young women of to-day are not so particular."

"You hear what your mother says, my dear child," added M. de Rias. "I own that I am quite of her opinion, and that I should be horrified to see the name of my wife in the papers, with pleasant criticisms upon her dress and appearance. I do not desire, in a word, that you should make part of that which is vulgarly called '*all Paris.*' And while I am in a mood for playing the tyrant, I would like to strike out from the list of your present or future recreations all those which expose a woman to that sort of unhealthy publicity. I see by her looks that your mother approves of what I say, and that encourages me. I would suppress noisy appearances at the races, clandestine visits to not-over respectable theatres, to fancy-dress balls, and parlor theatricals; in fine, always deferring to the good taste of your mother, I would have you avoid all that which your cousin Madame de Chelles seeks and permits herself to do. I would

even like, if your mother does not gainsay it, to suppress Madame de Chelles herself, who is decidedly a lady one should not receive—is it not so, dear madame?”

Madame Fitz-Gerald replied,

“She is certainly a young woman who is becoming very fast. For that matter, my daughter is not very fortunate in her cousins, except Madame de Lorris, who is perfection itself; but that poor duchess would give me a great deal of disquietude if I had the prerogative of being her husband.”

“Oh, mamma!” exclaimed Madame de Rias, who wished to make an end of her sacrifices, “leave me the duchess. It is true, she is something of a coquette—but there is no harm in her, and she pleases me so much!”

“If she pleases her so much,” said M. de Rias, “let us leave her the duchess.”

He did not add, that the duchess also pleased him very much; it was the truth, however.

After having inserted into the pleasures of his wife this species of clipping, Lionel did not feel himself in reality any happier than before.

At some points, his dignity as a husband, and his susceptibility, had better safeguards, but his personal independence continued very much restricted. Within the limits he had drawn, Madame de Rias had still a wide circle of active fashionable life, and, obliged to follow her into it, he bore, under his habitually grave and courteous appearance, a sense of profound weariness and annoyance.



CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT this period, Madame de Rias experienced great regret on account of being separated from one of her cousins, who held the largest and best merited place in her affections.

Madame de Lorris went to join her husband, who had just returned from Cochin China, and who intended to pass one or two years at Cherbourg before going to sea again. At the same time, in order to please Lionel, Madame de Rias allowed her relations with Madame de Chelles to become colder and colder, in consequence of which that lady became her enemy.

Her friendship increased for the Duchess d'Estrény, whose languishing graces, tender melancholy and distinguished bearing possessed great attraction

for her. They had a ball together that year at the Opera and the Français.

The duchess returned the sympathy of her cousin. She took an affectionate interest in the happiness of her young household. She asked, fixing upon her her beautiful eyes, bathed in their eternal sadness :

“Your husband loves you very much, does he not, darling?”

“I believe so,” Madame de Rias replied.

“With all his heart?”

“Yes, it seems so.”

“And you wish for nothing more?”

“No.”

“Poor angel! how happy you are!”

And she kissed her forehead maternally.

It was a custom of the duchess to cast curious, and sometimes not very discreet glances on the conjugal relations of the young wives of her acquaintance. All husbands, except her own, had especial interest for her.

Their manner of living, language and proceedings, when in the domestic circle, interested her, and she made mental comparisons, in which, it is to be doubted if the duke obtained the advantage. It is true that the duke continued to joke and tease her about her romantic manias and ideal reveries, forgetting that one exasperates a sick person by doubting the gravity of his disease, and tempts him to die of it.

The duchess, apparently for the purpose of protesting against the materialism of her husband, and especially against his excellent appetite, affected to eat very little. She willingly persuaded herself that she could live on fruits and flowers.

All day long she nibbled at rose and lilac leaves. As to fruits she only liked the most rare. In all seasons she had pineapples in her hot-house; she cut them herself in thin slices, and kept them beside her on a small table. The duke, with his gross joviality, insisted that she got up in the night, like the ghoul in

Arabian stories; that he had followed her, found her seated at a table, devouring a hare and ham-pie.

“And the quantity she ate,” he added, “frightened me!”

The duchess had dancing at her house every Tuesday, and Madame de Rias was constant in her attendance. One night, or rather one morning, when she had entirely forgotten herself in the delights of a cotillion, indefinitely prolonged, her cousin de Chelles, who was about leaving, said to her over her shoulder as she passed her,

“When you want your husband, my dear, you will find him in the hot-house, with Sabine, you know.”

Madame de Chelles accompanied this benevolent information with a significant smile, very slight, but it did not escape Madame de Rias.

She thanked her with a look and continued to dance until she saw her disappear. Then, under the

pretext of fatigue, she made a curtesy to her partner and left him with a careless air.

She passed through two or three parlors which were almost deserted, and stopped at last before a glass door through which she could see the interior of the hot-house. The young wife looked through the large exotic foliage with which the hot-house was magnificently shaded, and a chill ran through her veins.

Nevertheless what she saw was nothing very extraordinary. Her husband was peacefully seated on a sofa by the side of the duchess, and they were talking in a low voice and smiling. Their dialogue did not seem even very animated; there were pauses and silences; at intervals, the duchess plucked the leaves off some violets which had faded on her bosom, and ate them, and from time to time, she threw a few to M. de Rias, who also appeared to find them very savory. Passing then to something more substantial, the duchess took from a plate of Japanica ware, a

slice of her dear pineapple, and put her white teeth upon it, but she only ate the half of it, and, after a moment's hesitation, during which M. de Rias murmured something probably very eloquent, she gave him the other half.

Madame de Rias, seeing the disquieting progress which followed the poetic repast, judged it unnecessary to wait for a third course.

She entered the hot-house noisily.

"Ah! you are there, are you?" she said. "Well, are you coming?"

"What, already?" said Lionel, laughing, and rising hastily; "it's hardly three o'clock, my dear. You astonish me!"

She received, or rather submitted to, the parting kiss of the duchess, and they left.

They were hardly in the carriage when Madame de Rias fell into a profound sleep, and Lionel felt the apprehensions which his troubled conscience suggested to him die away.

Arrived at home, Madame de Rias immediately seized him by both hands, almost with violence, and, looking him in the eyes, said, in a broken voice :

“ I am so unhappy ! ”

Then she threw herself into an arm-chair, and began sobbing bitterly, biting the lace of her pocket-handkerchief.

This explosion of grief had been so sudden that M. de Rias was struck speechless ; but soon regaining his wits, he approached his wife, and seating himself at her feet on a stool :

“ Come, Marie,” he said, affectionately ; “ what’s the matter, darling ? ”

And as she only responded by new transports of despair :

“ Oh ! I know ! ” he continued, “ I know what it is ! You saw me eating the duchess’s violets. It’s that, isn’t it ? ”

She tried to speak in the midst of her sobs,

“And the pineapple,” she said.

The pathetic way in which she uttered this word made M. de Rias smile.

“And the pineapple, too. The list is complete.”

“My misery is complete,” said the young wife, sadly.

“As to that, you cannot think so, my darling girl,” replied Lionel. “You are too sensible to take such childishness seriously. You well know it never leads to anything; above all, with a person like your cousin, who is such a pure spirit, and only speaks in the language of flowers.”

“And fruits,” said Madame de Rias, becoming more herself again.

“And fruits, if you will. I don't pretend to excuse her, mark that. Such coquettishness is highly improper. She was wrong to permit it, and I to lend myself to it. But frankly, child, what is the moral of this story?”

“Frankly, I see none,” said his wife.

“Well, then, permit me to point it out to you,” said Lionel, rising, the better to display his eloquence. “You like society: your life and mine, in consequence, is one perpetual ball. You dance in Paris in the winter, at watering-places in summer, and in the country in the autumn. You see no harm in it, which does you honor; but will you believe my experience? If people only went into society for the purpose of dancing, nobody would go after he had passed his twenty-second year—there would only be balls for students and boarding-school misses; the fashionable world would close its doors; but, unfortunately, it has another kind of attraction—society is only a commerce of gallantry, and that is the true reason for its existence. Dancing is most frequently only a pretext and an opportunity. That which men always seek, and women willingly, is what they call an interest of the heart, though the heart generally plays a slight part in such matters. It cannot fail to be found—that interest—without even looking for it, because it is in

the air, because it is fatal, because it is impossible to imagine that a man who does not dance, who does not play, and who is not a fool, can pass each night three or four hours by the clock without experiencing the unhealthy temptations of *ennui*. Thus it might happen that, without ceasing to love you truly and entirely, I might some day find myself in some sort unfaithful to you.

“As to you, my dear, you are as yet given over to the innocent delights of dress, of liveliness and Terpsichore; but there will come a time when these pure pleasures will appear stale to you, if they are not relieved by recreations of a higher class.

“In brief, do you wish to know what future is in store for us, if we continue to whirl around in the fashionable vortex with so much fury? I can tell you in two words. I shall deceive you—you will weep, and you will forgive me. You will deceive me—I shall not weep, and I will not forgive you!”

“I will give up society!” murmured the young

wife, drying a couple of tears wrung from her, less by the thought of her sacrifice, than by the dryness of her husband's language.

"I do not require that. I only ask you to go into it with a little more moderation; and to permit that, in my own defence, I leave you more frequently to the protection of your mother."

"I will go out no more!" repeated Madame de Rias, perfectly overwhelmed.

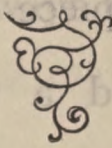
"You think so, darling. Whatever you do will be right. Good-night! Pardon me, or rather, pity me, for you know how I hate pineapples!"

He kissed, and left her.

He left her, it must be owned, well pleased with himself. By a skilful manœuvre, he had made of his fault a grievance, and not only extricated himself from a difficult situation without trouble, but advantageously. In the first place, he had regained, by the most honorable pretext, the entire freedom of his evenings, but flattered himself that, in the second

place, he had narrowed, more and more, Madame de Rias's sphere of action, in reducing her to a fixed point in the house—that finished and sublime type of the pure, domestic wife.

CHAPTER VIII.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE next day, Madame de Rias dressed herself in a toilette of severe simplicity, and remained at home all day. She practiced her gamuts on the piano, and began a piece of embroidery. In the afternoon she received a visit from the Duchess d'Estrény, who arrived in even a more languishing condition than usual, which was not surprising, as she had eaten nothing since the day before. The two cousins kissed each other, according to custom, after which Madame de Rias took up her work again, and applied herself to it with extraordinary industry. The duchess regarded her with inquietude. For some time the conversation dragged along in common-places, then entirely broke down, and the silence was

broken only by the crackling of the fire and the sighs of the duchess.

“Are you sick?” asked Madame de Rias, dryly, without raising her eyes from her embroidery.

“Why do you ask me that?”

“Because you sigh continually.”

“Yes—I am suffering a little, and I have a constant desire to weep.”

“Why do you desire to weep?”

“Ah! you know—always the same thing.”

“What thing?”

“I am so unhappy with my husband.”

“And you hoped to be more happy with mine,” said Madame de Rias, brusquely, turning her head suddenly, and looking the duchess full in the face.

Madame d'Estrény, after a few seconds of mute confusion, glided down to the feet of her cousin, and, half fainting in the amplitude of her skirts, burst into tears.

“What must you think of me?” she murmured.

“I think that you are not a good friend. That is what I think!”

“I assure you that I am—I assure you. It was a moment of folly. I have been jealous of you—of your happiness—it is true. But I have been so punished, so humiliated—I have seen so well that your husband did not love me!”

“You do not expect me to offer you my condolences for that, I suppose?”

“He only loves you—so be content.”

“That is not your fault, Sabine. Come, get up. I have told you what I have in my heart. Let us not talk of it any more.”

“I have caused you a great deal of unhappiness, Marie,” said the duchess, whose tears redoubled.

“A great deal,” answered Marie, who began to soften, and whose tears likewise began to flow.

“My poor darling!”

“I had so much confidence in you,” replied Madame de Rias, in a choking voice.

“ Ah! Heavens!” sobbed the duchess.

The end of this scene was lost in a confusion of tears and kisses.

When M. de Rias came home, toward evening, he found his wife stitching away at her embroidery, with an air of zealous pre-occupation.

“ Heavens! my dear child,” he cried. “ Can I believe my eyes? What are you doing there?”

“ Oh! I am embroidering a collar for my mother.”

“ Ah! it is a collar, is it? for your mother? Well, it is very pretty—you make this thing quite nicely. I had no idea you possessed that talent. Why it is very far along toward completion. You must have worked at it all day.”

“ All day.”

“ What! not gone out at all?”

“ No.”

“ Not to the Petit Saint Thomas?”

“ No.”

“ Nor yet to the Guerre?”

“No.”

“The end of the world must be near then,” said M. de Rias, paying his young wife with a kiss, which appeared to him delicious. “You must not make a nun of yourself, my little darling; you must take a little air during the day. And so you have been all alone since this morning?”

“The duchess came,” said Madame de Rias, in a careless tone.

“Ah! Indeed. ‘The duchess came,’—indeed! and—how did you separate?”

“Oh! very well. The same as usual.”

“Good little woman,” said Lionel, embracing her.

“We cried a little together. That is all.”

“Ah! that, of course.”

Dating from that day, Madame de Rias, without restricting herself daily to such rigorous seclusion, showed a laudable resolution to modify her habits of life. She no longer went out at night, and would scarcely appear even in a high-necked dress in the

few quiet parties of the family. To those who were astonished at no longer seeing her in society,

“Well, what would you have?” Madame Fitzgerald would say, elevating her eyes skyward. “My daughter is quite happy at home; my son-in-law is so amiable, so educated and full of resources.”

Fruitful in resources as was M. de Rias, it was difficult for him to fill the immense leisure which he had imposed upon his wife. His occupations and his own especial amusements did not allow him to appear at home save at rare intervals during the day; in the evening he remained in her company after dinner for a few moments, listening to one or two waltzes, and then went to his library, or to promenade in the town. He escorted her sometimes to the theatre. But he often abandoned her to her own resources, evidently imagining that she had as many as he. The truth is that their intimacy, not being sustained by any intellectual interests in common, was painfully difficult. Conversation between them languished into an em-

barrassing sterility. With an intelligence which was naturally very vivacious and frank, Madame de Rias was trammelled with that remarkable ignorance of everything peculiar to young French women. Of matters of art, of literature, of history, of politics, she possessed only the superficial and confused notions with which a Parisienne becomes imbued from day to day. It sometimes happens at last that these crude notions get classified and consolidated in the head of an intelligent woman, and compose for her, willy-nilly, a reasonable basis of instruction and conversation; but in the case of Madame de Rias they were still only in the state of vapor, and her startling ignorance, which had immensely diverted her husband at the outset of their love and marriage, no longer amused him. One day he came in, full of vexation:

“My dear child,” he said to her, rudely, “do you intend to render me ridiculous?”

“How so? my dear.”

“Why, you are telling everybody that I am writing

A History of French Diplomacy in the Eighth Century.”

“Well, I thought so. You told me so.”

“I never told you such an absurd thing! What French diplomacy do you suppose there could have been in the Eighth century—before Charlemagne?—it is silly! When one confounds the Eighth century with the Eighteenth, they may speak of figures, but not of history!”

“I ask your pardon, my dear,” said the frightened young wife; “but at all events, the ridicule, if there is any, falls upon me.”

“It falls on us both, my dear.”

The little parlor of Madame de Rias was more than once the theatre of such scenes as this. The symptoms of *ennui* which she could not always repress—the yawnings, languors and furtive tears—irritated her husband.

“It is incredible,” said he, “that women cannot please themselves in their own homes. They must

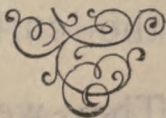
absolutely be in the streets! *Eh! mon Dieu!* How do you suppose the honest women of other days got along, when what we call high life did not exist? At Rome, for instance, an honest wife did not spend her days in shopping and her nights in dancing. She reared her children and spun tranquilly, and she was happy. I don't ask you to do exactly that. But you have a thousand means of occupation. You have your children, your household, your flowers, your embroidery, your piano, as many books as you please. You have your religious duties—and yet you are half dead with *ennui*. It's very annoying."

When he came home in the evening, he often found her asleep over her embroidery or a number of a magazine. Sometimes he surprised her in a confidential *tête-à-tête* with her mother, and saw that they had been crying. His pride was wounded—perhaps his goodness also.

"I do not like," he said to her one day, "the airs of a victim that you affect and that your mother

seems to encourage you in. I am not a jailer. If you remain at home every evening, grieving and lamenting, it is because you choose to do so. You know perfectly well that I have authorized you to go into society with your mother whenever it suits you. Go then ; and I will call for you, from time to time, as I return from my club."

The young wife, who felt that her heroism had come to an end, and upon whom his arguments, borrowed from Roman history, had made but a feeble impression, willingly profited by his permission, and was not slow to throw aside her high-necked dresses—as a butterfly does its chrysalis. She triumphantly re-entered society, as her natural element, and plunged into it more and more, with the innocent and thoughtless ardor of her age.



CHAPTER IX.

IN order to do justice to all concerned, it is necessary to say that M. de Rias was a great deal more unhappy than his wife. While she was giddily enjoying her youth, her beauty, and her successes, her husband sadly meditated on the ruins of his last illusions, and saw with profound bitterness the misery and vulgarity of appearance which his home began to assume.

One evening in January, after having promenaded on the boulevard for some time, with only his sombre thoughts for company, he mechanically entered a theatre, into which the curious public were at the moment crowding. They were attracted by the brilliant performances of a young actress named Jeanne

Sylva, who had recently arrived from Russia, with a well-merited reputation for beauty and talent. Mademoiselle Jeanne Sylva, when she left Paris for St. Petersburg, several years before, was but a third-rate soubrette. From that simply nebulous state she now returned with the rank of a star of the first magnitude, and the Parisian public confirmed by its applause the legitimacy of this rapid promotion.

Lionel, who had not yet seen Mademoiselle Sylva, but had heard a great deal of talk about her at his club, was greatly astonished at recognising in her an obscure figurante whom he had formerly met in some theatre, but whom he had not otherwise remarked. He admired, as everybody did, her brilliant metamorphosis, and thought it his duty to go behind the scenes and pay her a compliment between the acts.

We have sometimes heard it said, in society, that the prestige of actresses ended behind the scenes, where could be viewed, near at hand, all the horrible artifices of which they avail themselves—the Jezebel-

like painting and ornamentation of their faces. But we must deem this an error; for if their prestige ends anywhere—which is possible—it is assuredly not behind the scenes. On the contrary, it is there that they show themselves in all the strength of their singular fascination. The white, the red, the black and the blue, of which they make use to put their beauty in theatrical perspective, lend them, when off the stage, a strange brilliancy, slightly supernatural, which makes of them a very seducing sort of phantoms. Then, too, the alchemy with which they paint themselves, has another advantage, that of pleasing the olfactories, and the atmosphere of perfume which they spread about them has a subtle intoxication in itself. We cannot, therefore, counsel mothers of families to send their sons behind the scenes in order to disenchant them with theatrical loves. The result of the experiment would, we believe, be the reverse of their hopes.

Lionel found Mademoiselle Sylva in the midst of

that apotheosis of illumination which the dazzling blaze of many gas-lights throws over all behind the scenes. She was standing, and, with the grace and smiles of a queen, receiving the laudations of a circle of fanatics in white cravats. M. de Rias waited for the crowd to leave him space to approach in his turn, when he saw the gaze of the young actress suddenly fixed upon him, and her features assume an extraordinarily serious expression. For a moment she remained silent and motionless; then, clearing the group which surrounded her, came to him, and laid the tips of her gloved hand upon his arm.

“And you here?” she said to him.

“You do me the honor to recognise me, mademoiselle?” exclaimed Lionel, overcoming his surprise.

“Naturally,” she said, laughing, as if she had replied to her own thought.

Then, with her large eyes and painted eyelids regarding him seriously and fixedly:

“You are here!” she continued, with a deep sigh;

“well, one must confess that there are good moments in life.”

After a pause, she added:

“You comprehend nothing of this, do you, monsieur?”

“Your pardon, mademoiselle, but are you not laboring under some mistake?”

“Oh! no, M. de Rias; no, I assure you!” replied Mademoiselle Sylva, with an inflection of infinite sadness in her voice; “but tell me, frankly, how do you find me?”

“Very beautiful.”

She made a gesture of impatience.

“Yes; but tell me, have I talent?”

“Very much. You moved me greatly a little while ago. You are a great artist.”

“Well,” said she, gayly, “I repeat it—there are good moments in life. Farewell, sir.”

“But, mademoiselle,” said Lionel. “You cannot leave me in this way. Between us there seems to be

a mystery, an enigma—I do not know what. May I not know the word which will explain it?"

"Is it necessary?" said Mademoiselle Sylva, leaning her pretty head on one side.

"It would be very agreeable to me."

"I do not know. You are married, it appears?"

M. de Rias replied by a light bow of grave acquiescence.

"Yes," she said. "You are married—I am an old woman—[she was twenty-eight years of age]—we can treat then this story of youth as pure childishness, and, in reality, it is nothing else. So, sit down there."

She made him sit near her, in a retired corner, upon a garden bench.

"Do you remember having sometimes met behind the scenes, some five years ago, an humble little girl who then simply called herself Jeanne?"

"I remember perfectly."

"Imperfectly, would be nearer the truth, I think; but, no matter—I had then neither beauty nor talent,

but I had a very tender heart, very ardent and very ambitious. You often came to flirt with my grand companions, and you appeared to me a man—how shall I express it?—not very handsome, but very good-looking, and with superior manners. Thank Heaven! I have a foot thick of white on my cheeks—I did not permit myself to love you, but I did permit myself to admire you. I was nobody—nevertheless, it seemed to me that if you would address to me a word of kindness and of sympathy, it would give me the courage of a lioness, and I would become something. I tried one evening to attract your attention, as you were passing near me to pay homage to my greatest comrade—whom I detested cordially; but, poor good woman, I pardon her now. I let fall at your feet a flower from my bouquet—it was a white lilac, if I remember rightly—with the purpose of opening a conversation—you understand. You quietly put your boot on my lilac, but, remarking my pitiful little face, thought you had wounded me, and said to

me, 'I beg your pardon, little girl!'—and passed on, going to your loves. I—I hid myself in this very same corner where we are now, and wept."

When Mademoiselle Sylva was at this point of her recital, the call-boy came to respectfully warn her that she was wanted on the stage.

"Oh! gracious!" she exclaimed, rising hurriedly; "I forgot."

She picked up her skirts hastily, kicked back her trail with her heel, composed her face, and, respiring the air like a thoroughbred racer starting upon the course, ran upon the stage. It was at the end of the act, and she had only a short scene, but a very dramatic one. Lionel vaguely heard her musical voice resound in the midst of a silence so profound that one, not seeing, might have imagined the theatre empty. Then came a piercing cry—to which the audience responded by prolonged applause and a frantic recall. After having gone before the curtain two or three times, the young artiste, tottering and

then abandon all the rest to drift away? Should he let the passions of his youth slowly re-establish their empire over him, to transform him, little by little, in the disorders of the libertine-husband and the vices of an old man?

His wife had gone out that evening, as she almost always did. She had gone to a ball with her mother. He could not then seek from her his inspiration, but he thought of his children, whom he loved, and for whose sake his honor was doubly dear to him, and at their cradle he resolved to take counsel.

It was his custom, when Madame de Rias was not at home, to pass through her room in order to go to that of his children. He crossed her apartment, and to his great surprise found that she had come in, and had been, probably for a long time, in bed and asleep.

She slept with one arm under her head. The pale and ardent image of the actress, which had followed Lionel up to that moment, suddenly disappeared before that charming face, pure and calm as a flower,

He stopped and looked at her ; his heart melted, and he felt enter into it a flood of love and confidence. No, all was not lost! On her chaste forehead, and in that bosom which rose and fell as lightly as that of an infant with the gentle respirations of sleep, were the innocence and virtue of a child. Why then despair? What was there between them? Nothing. A few shadows, some misunderstandings, that one word, one minute of affection, one impulse of the heart, would dissipate for ever. If he should try? If he should say to her, "Listen to me! I love you, and you love me—we are both honest people—we have our happiness in our own hands; nevertheless, it escapes us. Why? Let us inquire together, why? Will you?"

As he approached her, she suddenly awoke; her look, vaguely astonished at first, at meeting the eyes of her husband, immediately took on an expression of anxiety and even of alarm; her eyelids were lightly pressed together, and she threw herself back in an attitude of timid defiance.

M. de Rias became suddenly very pale; a rigid coldness iced his features, and, smiling bitterly :

“ Oh ! fear nothing,” he said. “ I was going to the children. I did not know you had come in ; it is a miracle to see you at this hour ; and permit me to tell you, since the opportunity presents itself, that you dissipate a great deal too much ; you are at home neither night nor day. It is a little too much.”

“ If you were here oftener yourself,” said the young wife, “ you would know that my children occupy me every day until three o'clock, and that I never go out at night without putting them to bed. My duties accomplished, I divert myself as I can : I go into the world, as all women of my condition do. It is you who make the trouble. I do not. You do not wish to accompany me, and you do not desire either, as it appears to me, that I should go with my mother. What do you wish, then ? That I should be simply a piece of furniture in your house ; a piece of furniture that feels nothing, that thinks nothing, does no good,

which must be always in its place, inert and immobile, waiting for your rare presence and good pleasure? If that is what you wish, say so!"

"I wish nothing," said Lionel, in a tone of cold disdain. "Adieu, Marie!"

And he left the room.

There had been in his adieu an accent so serious and profound that the young wife suddenly comprehended its grave signification. They were separated. She made a gesture of despair, half arose and almost sprang out of bed to call back, by a cry, him who was leaving her, him whom she had so much loved, and whom she still loved above all. Then, seized with a sort of convulsion of grief, she plunged her face into her pillows and in them stifled her sobs.



CHAPTER X.

TWO years passed.

From the commencement of July, Madame de Rias had been settled at Deauville for the season, with her mother and children. She lived in Rosebush Villa, the garden of which opened on the terrace between the Casino and the downs. She was surrounded by a goodly number of friends from Paris, and, in particular, Mesdames de Chelles and d'Estrény. Madame de Chelles, with whom she had unfortunately resumed her former relations, was at Villers, the duchess at Houlgate. The three cousins were very neighborly, and formed the nucleus of a circle that did not plume itself on its melancholy. Some few of their winter waltzers were spread along the

shore, by chance, and contributed, as they thought, to the animation of the landscape. They imposed upon themselves the task of composing and putting on the scene of action, by land and sea, daily some new recreation : sailing parties, fishing parties. horseback parties, picnicing under the trees, and returning by moonlight.

Sometimes, in the evening, this brilliant band would triumphantly invade some one of the casinos on the beach ; but more frequently they danced among themselves, or had parlor theatricals in the drawing-room of one of the ladies, or sometimes in tamarisk groves, decorated with Venetian lanterns. A good deal of gallantry was blended with all this amusement ; it was a very gay life for everybody, except for Madame Fitz-Gerald, who followed it with some weariness, and for M. de Rias, who did not follow it at all.

As for him, he made Paris his watering-place, according to his custom, and paid rare and short

visits to Rosebush Villa, for the edification of the public and of his domestics.

There had never been between his wife and him the shadow of a scene, or of an explanation; what their intimacy could have been may be divined. It was that miserable state of latent and permanent hostility which prevails in so many households, where one can never utter a word without being contradicted by the other; where each word is an allusion, a rancorous and bitter reproach.

Madame de Rias saw with pleasure disappear from her horizon the sombre and ironical face of her husband. On the other hand, Madame Fitz-Gerald brought all her graces to bear—vainly, it is true—to keep near her a son-in-law who had not realized all her hopes, but for whom she still retained a certain weakness, and whose light gallantries she did not take too seriously to heart.

“That which astonishes me in my son-in-law,” she said, confidentially, to the Marquise de la Veyle, who

was sojourning at Trouville, "that which astonishes me in my son-in-law, is not that he should deceive my daughter, but his attitude towards her. Well, let him deceive my daughter—(it appears that he has broken off with that Sylva—the *corps de ballet* has great attractions for him, it seems.) Very well, then, let him deceive my daughter—one sees that done every day to married women; but what one does not see every day is his malicious, wicked, disagreeable manner with my daughter. He is still charming for me—quite charming; he is an exceedingly agreeable man when he pleases."

"I know it—the beast!" muttered the old marquise.

"When with my daughter he does nothing but sulk. Not content with playing her false, day and night, he sulks. You must admit that such conduct in a man as intellectual as my son-in-law is something incomprehensible. What does he want? To drive her to extremes? Let him deceive her as much as he pleases, but let him at least be amiable with her—that's the

first thing; otherwise, my daughter will finish by losing her head—for she is surrounded by admirers. I have, it is true, the most entire confidence in her principles; but, after all, she is not a stone. I like my son-in-law very much, in spite of his undoubted faults. I should be wretched if anything happened—but he is too light—he is too light!”

“He is a fool!” said the marquise; “I tell you he is a fool! Don’t talk to me any more about him!”

The fears which the instinct of the woman and the mother awoke in Madame Fitz-Gerald were unfortunately but too well founded. Madame de Rias had arrived at that fatal hour, which, from his own experience, her husband had predicted. Little by little she wearied of the noisy enjoyments of her first youth. Worldly excitement, dress, the dance, the perpetual holiday of her life, no longer sufficed for her. Her imagination and her heart alike craved to add to these commonplace pleasures a livelier interest, something new and more serious.

It can readily be understood that there were not wanting plenty of people around her ready to second such desires.

It is not rare that the excitements and struggles of vanity join with the workings of passion to determine the preferences of a woman. In the social groups which meet for the purpose of convenience or pleasure, there is always some individual to be found who seems to usurp, in particular, feminine smiles and coquetries, and whose conquests are not only a satisfaction of the heart, but a triumph of pride.

In Madame de Rias's surroundings, this agreeable part was played by the Viscount Roger de Pontis, a relative of the Duchess d'Estrény. He was one of those good-for-nothing fellows whom everybody likes. After having squandered his wealth on the turf, at twenty-five years of age he entered a regiment of hussars. He displayed great bravery and rose rapidly to the rank of lieutenant. Then, having unexpectedly inherited a fortune, he retired into civil life.

His follies, his courage, his adventures in war and love, strongly recommended him to the interest of the ladies ; they loved him for these qualities even more perhaps than for his vices. Besides, he had the merit of disposing of himself for them in every way. He would ride a dozen leagues on horseback at night to buy a skein of silk, which he afterwards held, sitting at their feet, while they unwound it. He sang sentimental songs to them, gave them lessons in horseback-riding, led the German, organized charades, got up picnics, lunches, fireworks, and gratified all and every fancy of which they advised him. He was the same to all, ready to please all, nimble and gay as a page, supple and burning as a tiger.

Under this appearance of an amiable fool, Roger Viscount de Pontis was a man, and above all an amorous man, very skilful, very experienced, and very dangerous.

Much struck with Madame de Rias, he had immediately, with one glance, judged what sort of woman

she was, and had perfectly well understood that so new and strong a place could not be carried by one blow from a hussar. He proceeded by adroit manœuvring.

He first surprised her by taking very little notice of her, while directing a spirited attack against her two cousins. Madame de Rias, who was, and knew she was, the flower of the flock, conceived a spite against him, and affected to return contempt for contempt.

It was the first success for which M. de Pontis could score himself a good point. He thus explained himself to her; his coldness was respect; no one paid court to a woman like her. Why? Because men felt her to be above vulgar attentions; and besides—might he say it?—she frightened him. It was strange, but it was so. A woman like her could only inspire a serious and durable attachment, a lasting love, and M. de Pontis had always feared a passion of that kind gaining upon him, precisely because he

knew the terrible empire it would take upon his life. He was wrong, perhaps, for such a sentiment would be, without any doubt, the end of that foolish career for which he already blushed ; it would be his restoration and his safety—but he was afraid of it.

On this text there are a great many pretty things to say, and he said them.

The idea of losing herself to save the hussar at first appeared singular to Madame de Rias. She was nevertheless flattered at having been chosen before all others to effect such a miracle, and, while very properly resisting his advances in a capable manner, she insensibly permitted her young heart to dwell upon this seductive chimera.

In brief, this intrigue, skilfully followed up, seemed approaching a serious point, when the appearance of a new personage on the scene threw momentary trouble into the viscount's play.

CHAPTER XI.

TOWARDS the end of July, Madame de Lorris, whose husband had gone to sea some months previously, joined the Marquise de la Veyle at Trouville.

She was accompanied by her brother, Henry de Kevern, whose name has already been mentioned in these pages, but whom we now present for the first time to the reader.

M. de Kevern was a man of cold and severe bearing, but possessing a heart capable of loving profoundly. He still, in the depths of that heart, wore mourning for his young wife, a charming woman—whom he had lost a dozen years before. His despair at this sorrow was so great that his sister feared he

would do something terrible; but he began to travel, taking long voyages, the interest and perils of which somewhat assuaged his sorrow, but never consoled him. Through all, he had preserved the melancholy which caused him to withdraw from the world. When he returned to France he lived principally in the country, and saw few besides his sister, who, prompted by her affection, was constantly devising ingenious means of winning him from his retiracy. Such extraordinary conjugal fidelity had passed into a proverb in high Parisian society, in which M. de Kevern was considered a hero by the women, and by the men as one who strains after effect.

The day after her arrival, Madame de Lorris ran to Madame de Rias, with whom she had always been united in a firm friendship, even though in her youthful wisdom she blamed a manner of life which Madame de Rias excused by pleading her husband's neglect and her domestic misery. After the first

warm greetings, and as they mutually related their news:

“By-the-by, dear,” said Madame de Rias, “there is a gentleman in love with me.”

“Only one?” inquired Madame de Lorris.

Madame de Rias blushed slightly.

“Oh, as to that,” she replied, “lovers are rank weeds which flourish at the seaside; but this is a new one. He puzzles me, because his face is not unknown to me; but I cannot remember where I have seen him—perhaps in a dream. He is very ridiculous, this gentleman; for three days he has followed me everywhere, on foot and on horseback; he passes and repasses the house. Yesterday I was at Trouville, where I saw his nose flattened against every window of every shop I entered. This morning he waited for me to come out of church. I assure you he bores me.”

“What sort of a looking man is he?”

“A man very well dressed—a well-bred air—but a

little pre-occupied—I don't know how exactly. What would you advise me to do, if he continues?"

"I advise you to pay no attention to him. But are you sure that it is you whom he is following?"

"Child!" exclaimed Madame de Rias, shrugging her shoulders. "Ah!" she added immediately, "look! there he is!"

They were seated at the end of the parlor, in a sort of semi-circle, which commanded a view of the terrace, and some of the panes were open.

Madame de Lorris glanced at the mysterious unknown, whom Madame de Rias pointed out by an inclination of the head, and began to laugh.

"Is that your admirer?" she asked. "Well, dear, I hope you may never have a more formidable one."

"Do you know him?" Madame de Rias inquired eagerly.

Without replying, Madame de Lorris leaned a little out of the window, and waving her handkerchief called,

“Henry!”

“M. de Kevern!” cried Madame de Rias.

“Himself, my dear. He came a little before I did. I always counted on introducing him to you some day; now the opportunity presents itself. As to his ardor in following and looking at you, he is entirely innocent, poor man! I can explain it in one word. You resemble his wife.”

M. de Kevern responded to his sister's call with more submission than enthusiasm; he quietly opened the little gate of the garden surrounding the house, and slowly mounted the outside stairs leading to the parlor.

The two young ladies met him on the stoop.

“My brother!” said Madame de Lorris, “my cousin de Rias!”

Madame de Rias, who had seen M. de Kevern before, hardly remembered him, but knew his history by heart, did not find him the sentimental and dolorous tenor that she had pictured to herself. Small, quick

and robust, with sunburnt skin and black hair getting gray on the temples, he looked like an officer of the *chasseurs à pied* in civilian's dress.

The look which he fastened upon her with evident curiosity was firm and almost hard. He seated himself for a few minutes. He questioned in a brusque voice about her children, tastes, pleasures; received her answers with a cold and absent air, and went as he had come, leaving her only moderately pleased with his visit and his person.

“And you say that I resemble his poor wife?” she asked Madame de Lorris, when he had gone.

“A great deal. I have been often struck with the likeness, and I am sure that he noticed it.”

“You really think that he noticed it?”

“He told me so.”

“One would think that he feels unpleasantly towards me on account of it; it is not, however, my fault.

“What makes you think that? He don't please you, then?”

“Why do you think that he does not please me? He is a shade too dark for my style of beauty; but he is your brother, and, of course, I like him. Do you wish me to love him?”

“No, not that; but be agreeable to him, I beg of you. I so much want to save him from himself. He is so unhappy, so good, and I owe him so much. You know he brought me up.”

“And made you the little treasure that you are!” interrupted Madame de Rias, kissing her cousin. “Well, never fear, darling; we will cheer him up, we will cheer him up—it will not be an easy task, but we will buckle to it.”

Madame de Lorris, who was always thinking how to lure her brother from his solitude, had employed her most tender eloquence to induce him to accompany her to Trouville.

She relied on the familiarity of habits and the facility of relations which characterize seaside resorts, to gradually lead him into the world again. The

strange resemblance with which nature had endowed her cousin de Rias, and the especial attraction this likeness would offer to her brother, certainly had not entered into her calculations; but she saw in it a chance of success, of which she availed herself without any scruple; for this wise young woman was, however, but a woman, and her love for her brother, which was almost the only passion of her heart, blinded her to the fact that it was a little equivocal to make use of, even to forward the most honest scheme, so delicate a circumstance.

Madame de Rias, on her side, only half understood the part assigned to her by the diplomacy of Madame de Lorris, and accepted it with good grace, mingling with it a strong dose of curiosity, and perhaps a little malice.

This innocent plot did not meet with all the resistance from M. de Kevern which had been feared. His sister, during the long absences of her husband, was condemned to an existence, very retired and almost

austere for her age; he was her only protector; he alone could give her a little liberty and enjoyment by accompanying her into society from time to time.

He often reproached himself with not having the courage to go. Perhaps, unknown to himself, he took a melancholy interest in Madame de Rias. However that may be, he consented to dine with her the next day. She invited him and his sister in the evening to a picnic the day after, and he consented again, so that she was not slow to believe that M. de Kevern was an overrated man, and that he fell below his reputation.

“His innocence began to weigh upon him at last!” she laughingly said to her cousin, Madame de Chelles, in a classical line, caught up at the Theatre-Français.

After the picnic, at which M. de Kevern had displayed encouragingly good temper, they had a little dance at Madame de Rias's.

She thought it would be pleasant to make this in-

consolable widower dance, and, skipping up to him suddenly, she tried to carry him off for a waltz.

M. de Kevern refused her with a very dry "No," strengthened by an icy look. Little accustomed to such sort of checks, the young woman spitefully made him a profound courtesy, and hid her confusion in the arms of Viscount Roger, who desired nothing better. The waltz over, she lighted a cigarette, as if for bravado. M. de Kevern approached her, and bowing with a smile which gave to his grave face a sweet charm,

"I ask your pardon," he said; "you found me very sulky a little while ago, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Come, madame," he said kindly, "let us understand each other. Out of good-will for my sister, and for the pleasure of meeting you, I decided to reappear in society. I try not to be a death's-head in it. I do not wish to display my sorrows—but you know them; why do you not respect them? Do you wish

to render me ridiculous? It is not well—it is not the part of a friend—and I hoped that you would be a friend to me!”

There was in these simple words a tone of frankness and of confidence which touched Madame de Rias, who had a foolish, but in nowise bad heart.

She held out her hand to M. de Kevern, and said to him with affectionate gayety:

“Let me be a second sister, then.”

“I pray you to be so!” said Kevern.

After a pause and a puff of her cigarette, she replied with a serious air:

“It is certain that I have need enough of a brother.”

M. de Kevern bowed, without reply.

“You think so. Is it not true?”

“You say so,” he answered.

“When you are not content with me, you will scold me, will you not?”

“Certainly—immediately, if you wish.”

“Well.”

“Well,” said he, smiling, “do not smoke!”

A roseate tint flushed over the charming features of the young woman; she let her cigarette drop.

“It is agreed,” she said, seating herself at the piano.

For a few days following the above conversation, Madame de Rias went through the farce of submitting her acts and gestures to the control and appreciation of M. de Kevern. She interrogated him upon her dress: Was it too “loud?” On her manner of waltzing: Was it right? On certain expressions that she used: Were they not too “fast,” or too familiar? Did he approve of her yellow boots? Should she carry a cane? M. de Kevern lent himself to this childishness with a sort of calm and slightly disdainful irony; but she saw that he blamed all that she said and did in general and in particular.

“Decidedly, my dear,” she said, to Madame de Lorris, one day, “your brother is a bore.”

Nevertheless, the “bore” interested and impressed

her. The strong individuality of M. de Kevern, his superior intellect, the romantic tinge in his life, the authority of his character, at once energetic and gentle, inspired her with respect and admiration.

Perhaps it only depended on himself to take the place in the young woman's heart which had been usurped by the Viscount de Pontis; but as to that, M. de Kevern did not even think of it. He limited himself scrupulously to the fraternal part which Madame de Rias had attributed to him, and when his young friend, carried away by her coquettish habits, tried to enliven a little their calm relations, he resorted to severities of look and language, which pitilessly repressed these irregular manœuvres.

Women, unfortunately, do not greatly love those who only love them by halves, and Madame de Rias, in the crisis through which she was then passing, eager for some interest and feeling in her life, was less disposed than any other woman to taste the simple sweets of mutual sympathy.

The burning viscount, excited by the struggle, at the same time redoubled his skill, his rapture and his audacity. He risked writing to her, and she received his letters.

The lookers-on saw that the frequent asides, the flashings of their eyes, supplicating glances from one party, and softening ones on the other, announced the near and fatal climax of the adventure.

These precursory symptoms might have escaped M. de Kevern, if Madame de Rias had not evinced a strange desire to make him a witness of them. In the heart of woman there are mysteries so unfathomable that we cannot undertake to divine why Madame de Rias, so eager in general to please M. de Kevern, forced him to submit to tests which could not but be disagreeable to him. She did better still. One fine evening in August, as they were returning on horseback from a farm that M. de Chelles owned in the environs of Caen, where they had dined gayly, she suddenly left the company of the Viscount Roger, in

order to join Kevern, who was riding a little apart, and, profiting by the shades of night, she indulged in this singular language :

“ I have something to say to you, sir.”

“ Well, madame.”

“ Your friendship is very precious to me—nothing can be more so.”

“ I am very happy to hear it.”

“ But do you believe that a friendship, howsoever precious it may be, can fill the heart of a woman ?”

“ I have not the pretension to think so.”

“ Well, if some day a stranger sentiment should take possession of me, if I should sacrifice duty to it, as they have tried to make me do—as you know—might I always count on your friendship ?”

“ No !” Kevern coldly replied.

“ What ! no ? Would it not be in my misfortune—in my fault, if you will, more useful, more helpful than ever ?”

“It is possible, but the part of confidant in a love affair does not suit me.”

“At least, if it should happen—you would not feel hard against me?”

“I would feel very hard.”

“Because you would be jealous?”

“I should not be jealous, for I have no love for you, and never can have. The memory of my wife, whom you resemble, protects me against you; but I should feel very hard towards you, if you should put a blemish on that memory. Do you understand?”

“No,” she answered. “It is too deep for me.”

She whipped up her horse, and went to take her place in the principal group, where he heard shouting, with laughter.

Supper was awaiting them on their return, in the cottage that Madame de Chelles occupied on the beach at Villers. Of course they danced afterwards until daylight.

M. de Kevern desired that his sister should be

amused, but not at that point, and so he refused to stop at Villers, and with her continued on the road to Trouville. They had brought Madame de Rias, whose mother had gone to pass a few days in Paris. It was natural that she should return in their company, and they would leave her at her house; but she would not go so early, and it was agreed that she should be taken back later by her cousin de Chelles, who never went to bed until the last extremity.

After some minutes of a silent ride in the charm of a midsummer night,

“ Louise,” said M. de Kevern, brusquely, “ that poor child is lost!”

“ Oh, my friend!” cried Madame de Lorris, dolefully.

“ Perfectly lost! It is very provoking! Her husband is neither a fool nor a knave. What is he thinking of?”

CHAPTER XII.

IT was about eleven o'clock in the evening, when Madame de Lorris entered the embowered cottage in which she dwelt with her brother on the quais de Trouville. Almost immediately after, to her great surprise, M. de Rias was announced as being at the door and desirous of speaking with her. She consulted her brother by a glance.

“Certainly,” said he, “receive him;” and he left the room.

M. de Rias presented himself with a very cheerful air, or at least he endeavored to wear that appearance.

“I am committing a great breach of etiquette,” he said, “and I beg of you to excuse it; but I know that

my wife left home with you this morning, and I have taken the liberty of coming to learn if I shall have the pleasure of seeing her again."

"Very probably," said Madame de Lorris; "but, sit down."

"No, I cannot sit; have the kindness to tell me simply where my wife is, and I will go."

"She is at Villers, with the de Chelles, who will bring her back to you themselves in a short time."

"But why did she not come back with you?"

"I was a little tired, and did not wish to take her away from her friends so soon. But when did you arrive?"

"At five o'clock. I came by the husbands' train, of course. They told me on my arrival that my mother-in-law was in Paris, with my children, and they did not know where my wife was; upon which I made—a very agreeable dinner, and here I am. I hope that I look ridiculous enough. Good-night, dear madame."

“ Good-night! If she should be a little late in returning do not be uneasy.”

“ No! no! Good-night!”

He was going, when the young woman called him back, softly touching his arm with the end of her riding-whip:

“ M. de Rias?”

“ Madame?”

“ You do not look well! Are you suffering?”

“ Not at all, thank you.”

“ You will not scold Marie too much, when she comes back.”

He looked at her, as if astonished, without replying. She continued,

“ You must remember that she is a little neglected.”

He still looked at her fixedly, and, after a moment's pause, said:

“ Then you condemn me—you also!”

“ I love Marie a great deal.”

“And I have also greatly loved her,” said Lionel, in a solemn voice.

“And now?” asked Madame de Lorris.

“Now, madame—it is very different.”

Then, with a sudden burst of feeling,

“She is neglected, you say. It is true; but what man of sense and honor could associate himself with a life like hers?”

“Excuse me,” said she, with the same sweetness as before, “but is yours any better?”

“Mine! Great Heavens! was it not she herself who drove me into it?”

“Can she not say the same on her side?”

“Oh! without doubt,” replied Lionel, with bitterness, “she has given you her reasons. If, however, there is a person in the world who should be just to me, it is yourself, for I am very unhappy—yes, unhappy in the highest degree—and in truth you yourself are the cause.”

“I!”

“ You, yourself! I entreat you not to see in my words an intention of gallantry which would be out of place at this moment, but deign to recall that evening which decided my fate, that evening when my poor god-mother combatted my too-well-founded objections to matrimony. It was not her eloquence which triumphed, I assure you. It was you alone. It was your presence, your example; I looked at you and I said to myself: ‘ Well, yes, there are wives like that after all. Happiness is possible!’ ”

“ M. de Rias,” said Madame de Lorris, “ spare me, I beg of you, and permit me to tell you that I have been acquainted with your wife for a long time; that she is greatly superior to me in every particular, and that she was, also, at least as worthy as myself to make the happiness of an honest man.”

“ Be it so,” coldly replied Lionel. “ It is I, then, who have ruined her. Adieu, madame!”

M. de Rias crossed the bridge which unites the rival territories of Trouville and Deauville, and walked

along the seashore road to Rosebush Villa. He reached it a few minutes after midnight. Madame de Rias had not yet returned. He went in and tried to read; soon he gave that up, and commenced to pace his room in an excited promenade, unhappily destined to be a long one.

As the time rolled by in this vain watch, all his griefs, all his resentment against his wife—exasperated by the painful events of this evening—mounted to his brain in waves of choler; for, let it be said in his praise, Lionel de Rias had not, as many others would have done, taken a part in the disorder of his household. He was one of those for whom marriage, when it has ceased to be a charm, becomes an agony. The woman upon whom he had reposed his hopes of happiness, and who bore his name, could become odious to him, but never indifferent. He did not pardon her for having destroyed the ideal, a little vague, perhaps, but, after all, honest and sincere, that he had formed to himself of marriage. He said to himself, not with-

out some appearance of reason, that he had been for her such a husband as one sees very seldom—tender, generous, delicate, and even faithful, up to the time when she herself had broken, with her own hand, the conjugal tie. From that time she was happy. Her giddinesses, her frivolity, her vanity, obtained full sway over her, and sufficed for her. As for him, his life was a failure. He no longer found in the distractions and giddiness of youth aught but vacuity, *ennui* and disgust. He was the most unhappy of beings, discouraged and disenchanted with everything—his fire-side and his work; without aim, without ambition, without dignity, and perhaps soon to be—thanks to her—without honor. And it was her whom they pitied, him whom they accused. The thought that the honest and kind Madame de Lorris was one of his accusers, did not contribute to calm his irritation.

The first rays of dawn surprised him in these bitter reflections. It was toward the end of the month of August. Almost five o'clock in the morning, and

still Madame de Rias had not returned! To pass an entire night out of the house, without her mother and without her husband, in company with fast young men, and under the sole shield of Madame de Chelles, was assuredly a very serious escapade. Lionel felt that his patience was exhausted; he descended to the stables, saddled a horse, and mounting, took the road to Villers.

The road from Deauville to Villers, as most of our readers know, after having followed for some time the straight line between the plains and the drives, winds up the side of a rocky cliff which overlooks the ocean. The acclivity is long and steep. M. de Rias was mounting this inclined plane, with his horse at a walk, when a noise of voices and laughter came floating to him from the distance, and struck his ears clearly in the silence of the early morning. After an instant this noise ceased, and other sounds succeeded to it. The earth resounded under a heavy and rapid tread, as if a band of runaway horses were mounting at a

gallop the other side of the cliff. Suddenly the summit on that side was reached by the cavalcade, and Lionel saw, outlined upon the azure of the still pale sky, the silhouettes of cavaliers and ladies on horseback. He immediately comprehended that his lost wife must be one of the ornaments of that society.

The cavalcade, having reached the plateau, moved slowly and descended toward him. The joyous voices, cries and laughter were heard with redoubled force—then suddenly sank to a vague murmur, and this in turn died away in a dull silence. It would seem that they had perceived, in the light of the dawn and in the centre of the white road, the figure of the solitary horseman, vidette-like, in their path. They had even probably recognised him.

M. de Rias continued to advance with a tranquil mien until within a few paces of the brilliant squadron. Then he stopped, and, without permitting any sign of emotion to appear, other than extreme pallor, saluted them.

“I ask your pardon,” he said, addressing his wife, in a voice calm and low, “but I was a little uneasy, and have come to seek you.”

“You see,” said Madame de Chelles, “that she is in good company.”

“Excellent,” replied Lionel; “and I am very grateful to you. Are you coming, my dear?”

He bowed again, turned bridle, and at the side of his wife took the direction of Deauville; while Madame de Chelles and her cortege returned to Villers.

After a moment of painful silence between the pair,

“When did you arrive?” asked Madame de Rias.

“Yesterday evening.”

“Ah!”

There was a long pause; then she spoke:

“Did you see my mother in Paris?”

“No, she will be back in two days.”

“You know that she has taken the children with her?” she inquired.

“I know.”

They were then at the foot of the hill, and a gallop put an end to the languishing conversation. A few minutes later they entered the court-yard of the villa. Without exchanging a word, they mounted the staircase which led to their respective apartments.

At that moment, when Madame de Rias opened the door of her chamber and was about to close it behind her,

“Excuse me,” said Lionel, and followed her in.

Hardly was the door shut and the young wife, hesitating and uneasy, stood before him, her long riding habit thrown over her arm—

“Well,” said he, fixing upon her a look full of anger, “you lead the life of a common woman decidedly.”

Madame de Rias became as white as bleached wax. She appeared to totter, let fall her train to the floor, and leaned heavily upon the first piece of furniture which her hand reached—then, immediately recovering her self-possession, and braving the look of her husband:

“I thought,” she said, “that the way to please you was to resemble those women.”

“You see that it is not so,” replied Lionel, in a hard tone. “Ah!” continued he, with growing excitement, “you complain that you are neglected, that you are, for your husband, only the mistress of a day. Very well; it is the truth; you are nothing else. And do you know why? It is because you resemble those women; because we seek in our wives the opposite of those women; because that which pleases us in them we view with horror in you; because we demand of you that you differ from and not resemble them; that you make us forget, not remind us of them. And you do not even resemble them—you are only pale and badly-painted copies of them. You imitate their dresses, adopt their manners, ape their tone and language; you have all their weaknesses, their wild dissipation, their ignorance; you have, like them, a contempt for duty and a dread and fear of children; but, believe me, that is not enough; you are always

vanquished in this miserable struggle; you lose your own charm and you never attain theirs; you are no longer honest women; and you are not even courtesans; you are wives without virtue and mistresses without vice. You are nothing!"

To this merciless tirade, Madame de Rias, whether in her own heart she owned its cruel truth, or disdained its cruel injustice, did not reply. She pushed back her dress with her foot and advanced toward the bell-rope.

"Permit me," said she, "to call my maid. I am a little tired."

Lionel immediately went out, bearing against his wife a new grievance, that of having provoked in him a violence of language contrary alike to dignity and good taste.

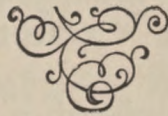
Two or three hours later, a carriage waited in the court-yard to take him to the depot. In the vestibule he met the maid of Madame de Rias.

"Madame is still sleeping, doubtless," he said to her,

“Yes, sir. Madame is asleep,” replied the girl, dryly.

“I will not awake her. I have already informed her that I am forced to leave for Paris to-day.”

And he took his departure.



CHAPTER XIII.

IN the afternoon of that same day, Madame de Lorris came to her cousin to obtain some information of the events which had transpired. Struck with the alteration in the features of Madame de Rias, and with her feverish excitement, she pressed her with questions, and received a detailed recital of the conjugal scene to which she had been subjected in the morning. She was in such a violent condition of excitement that Madame de Lorris deferred the reproaches that the giddiness of her conduct seemed to merit, and restricted herself to overwhelming her with affectionate caresses. She was astonished at receiving a sort of resistance.

“Do not kiss me so much, Louise,” said Ma-

dame de Rias to her, smiling bitterly, "you will perhaps repent it, by and by."

"Why so?"

"I will tell you."

She arose, with an abrupt movement, took a letter from her blotting-case, and throwing it open, upon her cousin's knees, said :

"There, read that!"

Madame de Lorris ran her eyes over it in haste. It was from the Viscount de Pontis, and contained, with expressions of burning and pressing passion, a solicitation for an interview that night, for which the absence of Madame Fitz-Gerald afforded an opportunity which might never occur again. M. de Pontis supplicated Madame de Rias not to drive him to despair by refusing to grant him a few moments of private conversation in the garden of her villa. He would be at the garden gate between eleven o'clock and midnight, and would there await life or death.

"How can you expose yourself to the receipt of

a letter like that?" said Madame de Lorris, severely. "I hope, at least, that you have replied to it as you should."

"You are right," replied Madame de Rias, with a strange smile; "yesterday I replied to that letter as I should, because yesterday I was an honest wife; but to-day I am a 'common woman,' and I am going to reply to it in that character!"

She seized a pencil and rapidly traced, under the signature of the viscount, a single word—"Yes"—placed the letter beneath the eyes of Madame de Lorris, sealed, and addressed it and rang.

Madame de Lorris regarded her with an air of stupor.

"Marie!" she cried, "I pray you——"

A servant entered.

"Jean," said Madame de Rias, "you must go immediately, on horseback, and carry this letter to Houlgate, to its address."

Then going quickly to Madame de Lorris, the moment that the servant had retired:

“Do not waste your words,” she said. “Say nothing to me—not a word. Leave me. Go back to your home. Leave me to weep!”

“You drive me away, Marie?”

“Yes, I drive you away. Go!”

“My poor child!” said Madame de Lorris, fixing upon her a look of sweetness and profound pity, “I shall love you always—you know that. Calm yourself—you are too much excited in this moment to listen to me—so be it; I will come back again.”

She kissed her hands and quitted her.

Toward six o'clock, after having made several visits, she returned. They told her that Madame de Rias was gone out—that she would not dine at home. By the embarrassed manner of the servant, she understood that her cousin had given orders that she would not receive her.

As she was re-entering her carriage, with an almost

broken heart, a little note was given to her, from Madame de Rias. She opened it anxiously, and there read simply this half line :

“Say nothing to your brother.”

The thought that this note immediately suggested to Madame de Lorris was precisely to tell all to her brother. She had need of counsel. Her mother-in-law, Madame de la Veyle, had returned to Paris several days before, and the situation was too urgent to permit the delay of an appeal to her. On the other hand, the singular pre-occupation which had dictated the note from Madame de Rias attested that M. de Kevern had obtained over her a certain influence, through which it might not, perhaps, be impossible to draw her from the verge of this abyss. Madame de Lorris ran to her brother's room, threw herself on her knees before him with the grace of a child, and recounted to him, in a low and animated voice, the sad incidents of her visit to her cousin de Rias. She terminated her recital by showing to him the note

which she had just received; then, with all the eloquence of her large tearful eyes, implored him to save from shame the dearest friend of her youth.

M. de Kevern had listened to her without permitting the least expression to appear upon his serious face. When she had finished,

“My dear little one,” he said to her, with kindness, “I understand your grief, and I too am unhappy about it, but what do you wish me to do? I am almost a stranger to the young woman. How can you wish me to enlist in a struggle against a husband and a lover who are in such perfect accord to push her into the abyss? It would not be possible! Because, my intervention would not be proper—and, finally, I cannot force her door.”

“If you would write to her,” timidly suggested Madame de Lorris.

“What the deuce do you wish me to write to her?”

“Whatever you think!”

M. de Kevern thought a moment, with a wearied

air, then drawing his work-table to him, he wrote the following laconic note :

“ You will be very unhappy to-morrow.

KEVERN.”

“ Send that to her, if you will, my dear,” he said ; “ but I warn you that it is absolutely useless. If you would only reflect that it is going to a woman possessed at the same time by the passion of vengeance, and that of love, you would comprehend that it is but a drop of water thrown on a great fire.”

“ I will ask for a reply.”

“ You can do so,” said M. de Kevern, with calm irony.

An hour afterward, as they were finishing dinner, the servant who had taken the note was introduced into the dining-room ;—Madame de Rias had said that it was all right—that there was no answer.

M. de Kevern took Madame de Lorris out upon the beach. He felt that she trembled and shuddered on his arm.

“ You are very much distressed, my poor Louise,” he said to her.

“ Yes, a great deal ; and then the evening seems cold. One would think the autumn was already here.

“ Very well, then, do you know what we must do ? We must go back, light the fire and give ourselves the pleasant illusion of a sweet winter-evening at the corner of a peaceful fireside. It is something, when one is suffering, to at least have smiling surroundings.”

They went in and were soon seated in the little parlor of the cottage, to which the flame and crackling of the fire lent an air of gayety and homelike comfort. Madame de Lorris had taken up her faithful embroidery and her brother, sitting before her, read to her an article from the *Revue*. At first she appeared to listen with attention, but as the evening advanced she became absent-minded ; her eyes wandered every instant from her needle to the clock, and

her features betrayed the agony that was in her heart. Eleven o'clock had just sounded, when M. de Kevern saw tears escape from the eyes of the young woman, and fall, drop by drop, upon her embroidery. He interrupted his reading and took her hands.

“Come! my darling, what is the matter? Come!”

“I cannot help it,” she murmured; “she told me to weep for her—and I weep!”

And she sobbed aloud.

Suddenly she raised her head and quickly dried her eyes. A carriage was heard stopping before the entrance to the cottage. A few seconds later, some one mounted the stairs. She arose precipitately and ran to the door of the parlor, which she opened. She heard the rustling of silk, and an instant after saw the face of Madame de Rias, beautiful and pale, emerging from the darkness. Uttering a cry, “Marie! Ah! *mon Dieu*,” she seized her, embraced her and stifled her with kisses.

Much moved and trembling, Madame de Rias drew

herself from the arms of her cousin and said to her, with a sort of joyous pride :

“ My dear, can you lodge me ? ”

“ Lodge you ? ”

“ Yes ; would you believe it ? I am afraid at night in the absence of my mother and my children. I remembered that your mother-in-law had returned to Paris, and I thought perhaps you would let me have her room for a couple of nights. ”

“ I will, indeed ! ” cried Madame de Lorris.

She rang for her maid, and, while she was giving her some orders in a low voice, Madame de Rias advanced to M. de Kevern—who had discreetly held himself aloof since her arrival until now,—and tendered him her hand.

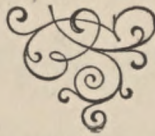
“ Thanks ! ” she said.

M. de Kevern bowed profoundly, without reply.

She seated herself between the brother and sister, methodically unrolled her embroidery work, which, judging by its appearance, had not seen the light for

several years, and put herself at her ease in a large arm-chair.

“You have a fire,” she said; “what a good idea! How comfortable you are here!”



CHAPTER XIV.

DATING from that moment, a long and spirited correspondence took place between the principal personages in this story.

We merely publish the letters necessary to the thread of the narrative.

Madame de Lorris to Monsieur de Rias, at Paris.

“Trouville, 23d August.

“DEAR SIR :

“Yesterday, after your departure, your wife had the happy thought of coming to ask my hospitality. Do you approve of this?”

Monsieur de Rias to Madame de Lorris.

“DEAR MADAME :

“I think it excellent.”

Madame de Lorris to Monsieur de Rias.

“You encourage me. Do you authorize me to show you that I am very indiscreet?”

Monsieur de Rias to Madame de Lorris.

“The more indiscreet you are, the better I shall be pleased.”

Madame de Lorris to Monsieur de Rias.

“I don't know that I ought—However, I shall commence.

“MY DEAR COUSIN.—I was not so insensible as I may have appeared to the reproachful flattery which you paid me last Saturday evening. I was, according to you, the determining cause of your marriage; that it was my dazzling merit which had given you such a good idea of my sex that all your objections to matrimony were suddenly dissipated, like a fog before the morning sun. Very well. I accept the compliment, provided you will allow me to fulfil the duties which it imposes upon me. I regard it as a point of honor

to realize the hopes I made you conceive. I wish that your home may be happy. You will tell me that it is too late; I do not believe it, and I consecrate myself to proving the contrary. But it is necessary that you should second me by your confidence and good-will. I must exact of you some sacrifices. For example (I am taking soundings now), are you the man, in spite of your being essentially Parisian, to undertake a little voyage out of France, when I shall have shown you the opportunity?"

Monsieur de Rias to Madame de Lorris.

"Yes, if you will accompany me."

Madame de Lorris to Monsieur de Rias.

"Apparently you have not forgiven me for having taken, the other evening, the part of your wife against you, and you revenge yourself by an impertinence. I wish to tell you that our interview impressed me with sympathy for you. Your tone of sincerity and of grief touched me. I began to per-

suade myself that I was wrong in accusing you, or at least accusing you alone for the troubles in your home.

“In short, it was not only in consequence of my affection for Marie, it was also esteem for you which induced me to offer you my humble services. It only remains for me to tender my excuses.”

Monsieur de Rias to Madame de Lorris.

“DEAR MADAME :

“I am perfectly ashamed of my folly. I was, in truth, borne down by the thought that you had gone over to the enemy, and only cared for her interests. You will deign to concede that your brusque proposition to send me out of France, was not of a nature to modify this bitter impression.

“Your very kind letter delivers me over to you entirely. I will joke no more, reason no more ; I will listen and obey. I am ready to believe that in inviting me to expatriate myself, you give me a signal

proof of your good intentions. You must own that one could not give a greater proof of confidence and respect. While awaiting your orders, I will pack my trunks."

Madame de Lorris to M. de Rias.

"Still a little bitterness—but submission! that is sufficient. I drop, sir, the light tone, which little suits the seriousness of my thoughts and of yours. You understand that I have received the confidence of your wife. You have said grave words to her, very offensive and, permit me to tell you, very imprudent.

"After such a scene, and in the state of mind of both, do you not think that your intimacy with her will be very difficult? that life in common, continued immediately after this, would only envenom your mutual wounds, and render them irremediable?

"Do you not think that it would be better to give time for each to grow calm, to forget your

grievances, and perhaps to remember your own faults? I entreat you to consider all this with me. Your wife returns to Paris in eight days. I have heard you say that a sojourn in England was indispensable for your historical researches, but that you had never had the courage to go. Take courage now, I beg of you. I have a profound belief that on this step hinges the happiness of your life. During your absence I will take care of your wife; she shall live at home, or with her mother, as you please; but our lives shall be in common.

“She is worthy of you, I am sure; and I affirm it; but this is not enough, since you do not love her as she is. Well, I will do my best to remodel her so that you shall still find in her the woman of your dreams—that is to say, a sailor’s wife, I believe.

“Only, sir, if you wish to keep her such as I shall render her back to you, you must, if you please, make some slight reforms on your side. I have upon this subject a few ideas which I shall mature with my

great wisdom, and I shall have the honor of laying them before you at the proper time and place."

Monsieur de Rias to Madame de Lorris.

"DEAR MADAME:

"I will undergo the ordeal.

"I expect nothing from it for my happiness, but everything for my justification. You cannot fail to recognise that there are incurable follies, which discourage and render hopeless the most patient affection. You will be more just to me, and I shall not regret the sacrifice I make, if by it I shall have gained the affection of a heart so delicate and generous as your own.

"I leave in two days for London.

"I desire that Madame de Rias should live at home. I entreat that Madame Fitz-Gerald will be kind enough to give me, occasionally, news of my children."

*Madame Fitz-Gerald to Monsieur de Rias, Clarendon
Hotel, London.*

“Paris, October.

“MY DEAR LIONEL:

“I send you the new photographs of your children, who are both very well. They sat remarkably well for children of their age. The photographer was surprised at it. He was a Pole, whose name I won't even attempt to write. He was recommended to us by the duchess. Poor woman! I am quite disconsolate about the way in which she behaves with her cousin Pontis. The duke is very blind. So much the better for that matter. But to come back to your dear children. They are two prodigies of intelligence and beauty. They console me for many things. You do not understand me, my friend.

“I hope your great work makes headway. We shall be very happy, my daughter and I, to hear it read. It will be delightful. We are going out very

little this winter. My daughter hardly ever leaves her cousin de Lorris. They are like Paul and Virginia. They read Madame de Sevigné together. We don't write like that woman now-a-days.

“Adieu, my friend! When are you coming back to us?”

Monsieur de Rias to Madame Fitz-Gerald, Paris.

“London.

“I beg pardon, dear madam; we do still write like Madame de Sevigné, and your charming letter is the proof of it.

“Women write with a natural genius that art cannot approach—not even that of the Polish photographer. I am not the less delighted with the pictures, and very grateful for your attention.

“You wish to know the date of my return. Madame de Lorris can give you a great deal better information on that subject than I can. Am I here

for two months, or ten years? Must I become a British subject? She only knows.

“I kiss with tender respect everybody’s beautiful hands. There are none equal to them in England.”

Madame de Lorris to Monsieur de Rias.

“They tell me, sir, that you desire to know the duration of your sojourn in the United Kingdom. Nothing is more natural; but I cannot, you understand, tell you in advance. All must depend on the success which I obtain in the work I have undertaken.

“Your amiable wife, thank Heaven! lends herself to the work with so much good-will that I can, from to-day, limit your exile to a few months, three or four. Let us say six—for time is necessary to consolidate matters.”

The Same to the Same.

“You would be wrong to suppose, sir, that we pass our lives, your wife and I, in the austerity of a

cloister. To tell you the truth, we are two very lively widows.

“ We run through Paris like two countrywomen, and we make strange discoveries ; for instance, the Musée du Honore, the Musée de Cluny, the Musée Carnavalet. We even get as far as the Musée of Saint-Germain, in passing by the pavilion Henri IV., where we breakfast divinely. We have often a very obliging and very well-informed guide (and not at all compromising, you may believe), who points out and explains to us everything of interest. We brush up our history, somewhat neglected, I must admit, geography, rhetoric, and even our philosophy, as from a grand illustrated book. We travel over time and space as if we had wings. We go from the stone age to Louis the XIV.’s century, from the lacustrine habitations to the Hotel de Rambouillet, and we see the difference.

“ But we have too much to do to pass all our time out of doors. Had we not better commence the edu-

cation of our children? A little of the alphabet, of the piano, of sacred history, is enough to begin with; but later on, when they are more capable of learning, and we of teaching, we shall do better. Then we have our flowers; it was your wife's idea to empty the hot-houses at Fresnes to fill the house here with flowers and leaves from top to bottom. We have to bring them and send them back twice a week, so that the plants will not wither. We place them here, and move them there, and water them, and sponge them, and it smells good; but what smells better still, is our linen closet. A nice place is a linen closet. You will be wild over yours. You will fall on your knees before the large wardrobes with glass doors, where piles of linen, white as snow, are displayed; these white piles are tied with blue ribbon, strewed with rose-leaves, and perfumed with the healthy odor of orris-root, which makes us think of our powdered grandmothers. In brief, order and extreme cleanliness reign in our house. I spare you the details; but

have written you enough to prove to you that we take pride in our house.

“If I should give you a complete idea of our daily employments, I should have to speak of our works of charity ; but where would be the merit if we spoke of them ?

“The evenings we give to art, theatres, music and reading combined. We read Saint-Simon, when we return from Versailles ; Madame de Sevigné or Madame de Lafayette, when we leave the hotel Carnavalet ; a romance of George Sand, when we want to dream ; and a leading article, when we want to go to sleep. What ! you will say, no dresses, balls, reunions nor fashionable fêtes ?

“Excuse me, sir, a little of all that, too. We are, after all, women in high life, and will not cease to be so, even to please you ; for you like housewives and matrons, but they must have white hands, rosy nails and well-fitting dresses. We go into society at certain times ; we know that that is a pleasure permitted

to us, but we also know that permissible pleasures only turn into vices when they are abused, not simply used. Therefore, we do not abuse them.

“We give to worldly recreations that part which appertains to the existence of a well-bred Christian, and nothing more.

“You will find it difficult to believe me, sir. Such a complete metamorphosis in the habits and tastes of your wife will seem improbable.

“It would be so, indeed, if it were not explained by a secret reason which you do not suspect, that you would never imagine, which I ought to be silent about, and which is—— there is somebody whom your wife desires to please, to charm, to edify, to attach to her, and that some one, I fancy, my dear cousin, is your unworthy self.”

Madame de Lorris to Monsieur de Rias.

“March.

“The task is done, sir. In a few weeks, you may

return to Paris. You have gone through the probation to the end, with a resignation and a loyalty which touches me. I appreciate your confidence. I have proved worthy of it by doing my best. Aided by the counsels of my beloved brother, to whom I owe all that I am, all that you esteem in me, I have tried to open for you a happier life. Your wife, in all that concerns her, has seconded my efforts with all her heart and all her mind. It only remains for me to ask you to do as she has done. This is not the least delicate part of my task, and in order to accomplish it, I must resort to a daring frankness, for which I crave your indulgence.

“A long time, sir, before you honored me with your confidence, your marriage was for me the object of much deep and sober reflection. The sad turn which it had taken, astonished and troubled me to the last degree. It confounded my good sense, disconcerted my logic and alarmed my piety. I knew your wife as I knew myself. I thought that I understood

you well also, and it was rather difficult to fancy that the union of two beings so happily dowered and so perfectly disposed for each other's happiness and welfare, should fatally turn toward misunderstanding, discord, and a disordered household. If marriage, even contracted in these rare conditions of harmony, brought only disaster, it was time to renounce it; the institution was condemned. This was what caused me great pain to admit. Happily, by racking my poor head for ideas, I finished by discovering that instead of attributing the evils to marriage, it was perhaps more just to ascribe them to the married people, and specially, I confess, to the husband.

“I know that women are too frivolously brought up in France; that their education is superficial and exclusively worldly; that it but ill-prepares them for the serious duties of wifedom: all this I grant you; but despite all this, I dare to affirm, as a general principle, that there is not one of them who is not morally superior to the man she marries, and far more capable

than he of all the domestic virtues; and I will tell you why: it is because women all have, in a higher degree than you think, the main virtue of marriage, which is the spirit of sacrifice; but it is difficult for them to renounce all when their husbands renounce nothing; and that is nevertheless what they are asked to do.

“ You have, perhaps, fancied yourself, sir, a model husband, and in many respects you have been one; I give you that praise; but you have, notwithstanding, a point of resemblance to the mass of husbands, which is, that you make for yourself a very clear idea of the duties which marriage imposes upon the woman, and a very vague one of those which it demands of the man. Marriage is not a monologue; it is a piece for two persons. Now, you have studied only one character, and it was not your own. You are too sincere, sir, not to admit that your personal conception of marriage was simply this: to add to the habitual comforts of your life, an agreeable accessory in the

person of a good and pleasing woman, who should ornament your house, who should perpetuate your name, and who, in short, should bring you, without troubling you too much, a supplement of comfort and respectability. You have busied yourself greatly, like all of your sex, in endeavoring to find in Paris, in the country or in China, that marvellous woman who would make every sacrifice and exact none. You have not found her, and no one will find her, because that rare bird of which you all dream—the domestic woman—necessitates the existence of a bird still rarer—the domestic man.

“What, sir, is a ‘domestic man?’

“A domestic man is not one who sits at the feet of his wife, and embroiders, who makes out the bills of fare, who writes the invitations, who trims the lamps and regulates the clocks. We call a domestic man the man with whom we read the same book, with whom we see the same play, with whom we admire the same picture, or the same landscape, the man who gives us

an intellectual and moral life by the side of his own, or rather in his own, who associates us with him, if not in all his occupations, at least in all his leisure, and who has in consequence no taste, no pleasure, no interest of heart or mind, that he will not, or that he cannot permit us to spare ; the man who in marrying freely pours all his worldly goods into the bosom of his family and home, without any selfish reservation. Be such a man, sir, and you will keep your wife at home by being there yourself. Your hearth will not only be a home, it will be a domestic altar. It will follow you everywhere, be with you in all places. It will be in her heart and in yours, whenever you intermingle your affectionate thoughts, impressions, faith and charity.

“ Marriage is an enterprize which promises inestimable benefits ; but there is a list of indispensable instructions for it. Have you read it ?

“ I fear not, because you would have seen there that a great part of a woman’s education must be

given her by her husband ; that it is for him to model her to his will, to form her according to his desires, to elevate to the dignity of his sentiments the young heart and mind which asks only to please him ; you would then have learned that it is at once wise and charming, to add to the bonds which unite a wife to her husband, those which bind pupil to master, instructor, guide and friend.

“ I foresee the objection ; the young heart and mind fled from your care. They opposed to you their futile education, their taste for dissipation, for vanity, for coquetting ; in short, the incurable frivolity of woman. I do not believe, sir, in the incurable frivolity of woman ; nor do you, because you see, as I do, every day, that frivolity transforms itself under the empire of passion, pity, faith, misfortune, into austere devotion and rigid abnegation.

“ No, own it. You have not tried. You hoped that the child you had married would suddenly become, by the mere virtue of the sacrament, a per-

fect wife. No, sir. That was a miracle which you would certainly have had to perform yourself.

“I have finished my sermon.

“Excuse me. Meditate upon the thoughts expressed in the text, during the last days of your exile, and you cannot fail to give a finishing touch to the work which my feeble hands have only begun.”

Madame de Rias to M. de Rias.

“April.

“You deemed it necessary, my dear Lionel, to give to our existence an interval of separation and of silence. My resignation lasted until the last moment; but I cannot allow you to return without sending you a kind word from my heart. I hope that, hereafter, you will be better satisfied with your affectionate and faithful wife.

MARIE.

“P. S.—Unless you countermand it, I intend to

take up my abode at Fresnes about the 1st of May. I will await you there. I shall still have the company of my dear Louise, who is going to reside at the Pavilion with her brother."



CHAPTER XV.

M. DE RIAS was too honest a man, and he had too truly suffered from the trouble in his home and the cruel error of his life, not to view with tender satisfaction the hope of better days which the general tone of this correspondence seemed to offer to him. He was very far indeed from assenting to the theories of Madame de Lorris, which seemed to him strongly tinged with partiality for her sex; but, after all, whatever had been the original cause of the demoralization of his wife, it was sufficient for him that she recognised it and seemed disposed to repair it. With the generosity of his nature he put aside all considerations of his self-love, and, without troubling himself with the adjustment of a balance of blame and respon-

sibilities, resolved to accept, unreservedly and with a glad heart, this newly-offered happiness. He saw in the installation of his wife at the Chateau de Fresnes, in anticipation of his return, a delicate intention. It was there that they had seen each other the first time; there that they had loved; there that they had been wedded; it was there that they should recommence their life in common; there that they should recommence their union from the beginning, as it were. In this thought there was something very tender and touching, and M. de Rias, on his side, prided himself in responding to it with the ardor and spontaneity of a newly-married man.

He wished to give himself the pleasure of surprising his wife, and advanced by two or three days the date which he had already announced for his return. He passed half an hour at his home in Paris, admiring its good order; then, about seven o'clock in the evening, set out for Fresnes, and two hours later descended from the train at the station nearest to the

chateau. Not finding there a carriage to convey him, he gayly set out on foot, leaving his baggage at the depot.

It was a beautiful evening in spring-time, softly lighted by the young moon and millions of stars. Lionel traversed, with emotion, that route so often gone over by him with his young betrothed, in the days of his love. He recalled at each step some dear remembrance which again awoke new hopes in his heart.

With secrecy he entered the park by one of the forest avenues, and soon perceived, through the foliage, the lights of the chateau. His heart beat violently as he approached the windows of the family sitting-room. His curiosity prompted him to look in before entering. His dream was to find his wife alone for this first interview; but Madame de Rias was not alone, in which there was nothing extraordinary or shocking, since she was not expecting him.

She was in very good and honest company. She

had around her, her mother, her two children, her cousin Madame de Lorris, M. de Kevern, and that was all. At one end of the large parlor, Madame Fitzgerald and Madame de Lorris were playing upon the piano a sonata arranged for four hands. Near the fire-place, before a table, Madame de Rias was gracefully kneeling on a low chair, her hand resting on the blonde head of her son, whilst her daughter was seated, two steps from her, upon the knees of M. de Kevern. They were examining a large book of engravings, spread out beneath the lamp, upon which M. de Kevern appeared to be giving some very interesting explanations, if one might judge by the profoundly attentive mien of the two children and their mother. From time to time the pretty bending heads were raised to address to the explainer a question or a smile.

This scene presented nothing of the character of worldly dissipation; nevertheless, M. de Rias, upon witnessing it, experienced a lively sense of displeasure.

There was in this little family circle, and particularly in the group of which Madame de Rias was a member, an air of happy and placid intimacy which it would seem really awkward to interrupt by a surprise, however agreeable it might be.

M. de Rias retired from the window with a gesture of ill-humor, walked away a few steps, and then returned. The more he contemplated the family scene before him, the more there grew upon him a feeling deeper and more serious than mere contrariety, and his features clouded, and his brow contracted almost dolorously, when he saw his two children—for whom the hour of retiring had arrived—leap to the neck of M. de Kevern and cover him with kisses.

Tea was brought in at that moment. Lionel presumed that Madame de Lorris and her brother would soon take their leave, and resolved to await their departure before presenting himself to his wife. He ensconced himself in a leafy alley at the edge of the park, and there walked to and fro, lost in thought.

After a few minutes, he heard the opening of the glass door fronting upon the park, and saw coming forth, first Madame de Lorris, then his wife, leaning on the arm of M. de Kevern. From the direction of their walk, he comprehended that Madame de Lorris and her brother, attracted by the beauty of the night, were returning on foot to the Pavilion, and that Madame de Rias, according to appearances, was accompanying them to the park gate. He let them depart, and followed slowly in the direction they had taken, in order that he might meet his wife on her return to the chateau. Chance obtained for him at length for this first interview the *tête-à-tête* he had so ardently desired, but which he felt, although without knowing why, promised to be for him a very troubled pleasure.

He saw Madame de Rias coming at some distance, before she saw him. He was half hidden by the fringe of shade at the edge of the forest overhanging the avenue, while his wife walked in the light, in the

middle of the road. She seemed deeply absorbed in meditation, and advanced with slow steps, her arms crossed and her head sunk upon her breast. At a little distance from where Lionel had stopped, there was a rustic bench ; she seated herself upon it, as if thoroughly overcome, bowed her head in her hands, and he heard her weeping bitterly.

At sight of this strange scene, the first impression of M. de Rias was an acute and icy grief, which seemed to penetrate to his bones. He was not loved, and the apprehension of his return was the cause of these mysterious tears. Such was the poignant thought which entered his mind ; but it was only as a flash, which was quickly obscured. The supply of confidence which he had brought with him could not be dissipated thus in a single minute. For six months they had sustained him with the thought that his wife had entirely returned to him ; that she only thought to please him ; that she consecrated to this object all her sacrifices, all her abnegations, all the

reforms of her life. She had herself confirmed this tender disposition in her note, at the last hour. He persuaded himself, then, that the doubt which had suddenly invaded his mind, was an injustice to her and a guilty ingratitude. Madame de Rias, like all women, shed tears easily; this ebullition was no doubt caused by melancholy nervousness; perhaps a last tribute of regret for the pleasures she was sacrificing to him—a regret which attested all the more the merit of her devotion.

To rid himself of these new chimeras, he stepped quickly out of the shade into the middle of the road and advanced toward the rustic bench, walking in the light, that his approach might not alarm her. At the noise of his footsteps, Madame de Rias suddenly arose; he made an amicable sign toward her with his hands, and she heard him address her, in a pleasant tone :

“ You must think me quite a child, but I wanted to surprise you.”

She quickly dried her eyes and came to meet him. He seized her hands, and felt that she shivered.

“Heavens! my dear,” he said; “how thoughtless and awkward I am! I have frightened you.”

“A little,” she murmured; “I was so far from expecting you—see, I am all trembling!”

“You do not embrace me, Marie?”

“Pardon me!”

And she presented her forehead to him.

After this cold ceremony, a little different from the effusion which M. de Rias had premeditated, they took their way toward the chateau, walking side by side. A pause of constrained silence ensued, and then she suddenly began to interrogate him, with a sort of feverish animation, upon the incidents of his voyage: crossing the channel; the hours of trains and packet-boats; then she passed, in the same tone, to her children, telling him of their progress, and relating to him incidents marking their intelligence.

They had been put to bed only a moment ago, and were not yet asleep, she hoped.

As soon as they entered the chateau, she took him to the children's room. They were sound asleep and Lionel did not wish to awaken them. He contented himself with casting upon their sweet faces a look of mingled sadness and agitation.

On descending to the parlor, they were met by Madame Fitz-Gerald, who had been hastily apprised of her son-in-law's arrival, and came, in a mob-cap, to welcome him. She uttered several ejaculations of surprise, embraced him, excused the impropriety of her dress and discreetly retired.

Left alone with his wife, M. de Rias was not slow to perceive that while she responded to his questions and affectionate compliments with an appearance of enjoyment, she was singularly absent-minded and preoccupied. Her gayety, visibly forced, was momentarily extinguished in an icy silence. In proportion as the evening advanced, he surprised in her eyes an in-

creasing expression of uneasiness, anxiety, and even of anguish. Himself more and more oppressed and chilled, he interrupted the interview.

“My room is prepared—is it not, my dear?” said he, rising abruptly.

“Yes, oh! yes——certainly.”

Then she sighed, as if in spite of herself.

She stood up before him, smiling and embarrassed. He looked in her eyes, and she blushed. “Good-night,” he murmured, and, feebly pressing her hand, left the room.

Notwithstanding the fatigue of a day of travel and emotion, M. de Rias, did not even attempt to take repose. During long hours he paced his chamber to and fro, in a state of mind worthy of pity. Disenchantment the most complete and bitter, had succeeded to the illusions which his heart and his imagination had so long cradled. The lightning-like impression which had struck him in the instant when he saw his wife weeping in the park, was now decided,

and he doubted no longer that impression was just and correct. His return was for her a sadness, a terror, a despair. From that moment the truth unrolled itself before his eyes with a pitiless array of evidence, and inundated him with its cruel light. He went over, in his feverish thought, all the incidents, all the details, of this painful evening; he recalled various features in his correspondence with Madame de Lorris; he linked together all the points of evidence and interpreted them with a frightful lucidity. He did not believe that Madame de Lorris had intentionally abused and misled him, and that the conversation of his wife and the transformation in her tastes and habits were untruthful inventions. No; Madame de Lorris did not deceive him, but, unwittingly, had told him only a part of the truth. It was true, in effect, that Madame de Rias had corrected herself of her worldly follies; that she had given to her life a tone more serious, more intelligent and more worthy; that she had ardently applied herself to the elevation

of her heart and of her mind. It was still farther true, that she had done all that to obey and please the man whom she loved, but the man whom she loved was not him, it was M. de Kevern. That was what Madame de Lorris had not told him, and that of which she was probably ignorant. He knew her honesty, her candor, her idolatrous confidence in her brother. She had associated him in her work, without suspecting the equivocal part that he might be tempted to take in it.

Perhaps, in the agitations of this grievous night, M. de Rias did not spare himself some secret reproaches and tardy lessons, for, in point of fact, all that which this man had undertaken and accomplished he himself should have done ; like him, he had been loved, had been all powerful over that heart which had shown itself so capable of devotion and of sacrifice ; but he had neglected to use his power, and now another usurped it.

It was not the first time that M. de Rias, in the

course of his life, had encountered one of those wise sermonizers who constitute themselves the mentors of this erring world, and who most habitually apply themselves to saving, where they would most effectually ruin. He knew that most of those austere counsellors are dangerous hypocrites, and those who are not hypocrites are often the most dangerous.

To which of those two categories did M. de Kevern belong? That was of little importance to Lionel. That which appeared very certain to him was that M. de Kevern had taken his place, at his fireside, in the heart of his wife and almost in the love of his children. That was enough for him to swear a mortal hate, and promise himself that he would make this man expiate all that he had been caused to suffer. In this thought, he saw a glimpse of hope, a solution of the difficulty entangling him, and at length, when day was breaking, he sought some hours of sleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

UPON awaking, M. de Rias arranged his course of conduct. Before giving vent to the sentiments which animated him, it would be necessary for him to have proofs, stronger and more unexceptionable than mere suspicions, and these he could assuredly not obtain by putting upon their guard those whom he suspected. He resolved then to impart to them a sense of security by himself affecting perfect freedom and confidence. His manners, a little cold and reserved, accorded well with this role, and would spare him those efforts at dissimulation which would be too painful.

During the first day he saw with bitterness more than one circumstance to confirm his apprehensions.

That most painful to him was the unconscious testimony of his children. In his interviews with them, when he questioned them respecting their occupations and pleasures during the time of his absence, the name of M. de Kevern was every instant on their lips—innocent accusations! He was mingled in all their thoughts—in all their recitals, in their studies and their plays, in each detail of their daily life; Madame de Rias, on the contrary, pronounced his name very rarely and always with an embarrassed reserve. To hear her, one might have been led to believe that M. de Kevern was a stranger to her, admitted but at rare intervals to her home; while in the mouths of her children he was clearly the guest and intimate companion of the family

Lionel went that day to pay his respects to Madame de Lorris and to express his obligations to M. de Kevern. The latter received him with every appearance of calm cordiality. But in the countenance and the manner of Madame de Lorris, on the contrary,

were novel and accusing symptoms. From the character of her reports to M. de Rias, in the amicable correspondence exchanged between them, after the success of the experiment which she had suggested to him, it would have seemed but natural that this amiable woman should have welcomed him with frankness and warmth. Nevertheless, he found her singularly timid and constrained. There was trouble in her eyes and a shade of sadness on her brow. He thought he understood that she also had suppressed the truth, and that she was seriously disquieted in her heart and conscience.

During the three or four days which followed, the families of the chateau and of the Pavilion continued, at the instance of Lionel himself, to live in close intimacy, breakfasting and dining together at the home of either; but, in spite of the ease and good grace that M. de Rias brought into their daily relations, there reigned a manifest air of trouble, uneasiness and secret anxiety. M. de Kevern, under his

habitual calm, was evidently full of care. Madame de Rias, sometimes agitated, sometimes dejected, always pale and weary, appeared to succumb under the weight of dissimulation, too heavy for her strength and perhaps her loyalty. She manifested before her husband a compromising appearance of being ill at ease ; she scrupulously avoided all *tête-à-têtes* with M. de Kevern, but her eyes sought him incessantly and betrayed her.

As to Madame de Lorris, more sad from day to day she watched Lionel with furtive attention, as if she doubted what he might clearly see. She had with her cousin frequent private interviews, out of which they both came with eyes reddened by tears. Was she then a confidant ? Was she an accomplice ? Did she push her blind affection for her brother to the point of protecting his amours ? Did she, on the contrary, force herself to recall Madame de Rias to reason and duty ?

However it might be, it was evident that for every-

body, except doubtless the excellent Madame Fitzgerald, M. de Rias did wrong in leaving England, and that he had come back to play in his own house and in the bosom of his family, the part of an intruder and a skeleton at the board.

Lionel waited with sombre impatience the moment to violently end this insupportable situation, when chance offered him the opportunity. Troubled, since his return, with too easily accounted for insomnia, he was accustomed to hold vigil in his room, even after extinguishing his light. In the fifth night which followed his arrival at the chateau, toward one o'clock in the morning, he heard the noise of a door being opened with precaution, on the side of the house looking in the direction of the park. An instant after he saw a form, white and elegant, pass under his window, glide with the step of a phantom across the lawn, and disappear in the deep shade of a forest avenue. A sort of bitter satisfaction suddenly contracted the lips of M. de Rias. He seized and precipitately opened a

mahogany box containing a pair of pistols, but, after a second's reflection violently threw the arms upon the sofa, left his chamber and descended into the park.

The direction which Madame de Rias had taken, was for him an almost certain indication. The oblique avenue on which she had entered led to one of the extremities of the park adjoining the woods of M. de Kevern. A bridle-path, but little frequented even during the daytime, formed on this side the limit between the two properties ; it was doubtless towards this that Madame de Rias wended her way, if her nocturnal excursion had for its object that which Lionel supposed. Instead of following her footsteps, he took a little hunting-path, which crossed the thickets and shortened the distance. He relied upon his instincts and experience as a hunter to enable him to follow its windings through the darkness, but in so doing he found much greater difficulty than he had anticipated. His agitation of mind and the haste of

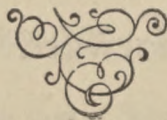
his pursuit had the effect, more than once, of leading him astray.

Whilst slowly and painfully pushing his way through the brushwood, he could not help having some strange memories. He recalled a loving walk which he had taken one day—the day before his marriage—in these same woods and these same paths with Mademoiselle Fitz-Gerald. The contrast between the feelings which had charmed his heart on that day and those which tortured him at this moment, inflicted upon him a heart-breaking grief.

Suddenly he stopped. The noise of voices, and as it seemed to him of sighs, struck his ear, in the midst of the silence of the woods and the night. He bent forward, parted the leaves, and, like an Indian stealing upon his enemy, glided forward with noiseless tread. He was on the border of the bridle-path, of which the relative clearness enabled him to perceive two shadows, walking closely side by side. He recognised, without any possibility of doubt, Madame de Rias

and M. de Kevern. He held his breath; he would have wished to suspend the beatings of his heart that he might listen better, but their interview was without doubt drawing to a close; they exchanged words but rarely and then in a stifled voice. Madame de Rias frequently put her handkerchief to her face. Suddenly M. de Kevern stopped, looked at her in silence, and, drawing her to him, pressed her passionately to his heart.

A cloud of blood passed over the eyes of Lionel, and for some seconds seemed to blind him. When he could shake off his vertigo and see before him, M. de Kevern and Madame de Rias had disappeared.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE next day, in the morning, M. de Rias's valet placed in M. de Kevern's own hands this note :

“ I was, last night, in the park. I shall be obliged to you if you will, to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, be ready to receive two of my friends.

LIONEL DE RIAS.”

Immediately after having sent this message, Lionel set out for Paris. As soon as he arrived, he sought out one of his relatives who had an especial liking for affairs of honor. He told him that since his return from England he had several discussions with his country neighbor, M. de Kevern, in relation to their boundary rights and their reciprocal hunting privi-

leges; that these discussions had ended in a serious quarrel, which could only be settled by an appeal to arms, and begged him to be one of his seconds. M. d'Eblis hoped that so trifling a disagreement could be amicably adjusted. He promised, however, to take the first train the next day for Fresnes, so that he should be there at eight o'clock in the morning.

M. de Rias then proceeded to the house of the Duke d'Estrény; but the duke was at the club. He went there and found him. As he entered one of the parlors, where a group of young men surrounded a whist-table, one of the players chanced to pronounce the name of M. de Kevern. The sudden and marked silence which followed upon their perceiving M. de Rias, was a bitter proof to him that his conjugal misfortune was public talk. The Duke d'Estrény received Lionel's communication with a grave air; listened without comment to the scarcely probable explanation which he gave of the origin of the quarrel, and placed himself, like M. d'Eblis, at his disposition,

On returning to Fresnes about ten o'clock that evening, M. de Rias found Madame Fitz-Gerald in the drawing-room, alone and very sad; she told him that her daughter had suffered much all the day, and that she had felt so unwell after dinner that she had gone to bed, begging them to let her take a little repose. Lionel, after several questions of affected solicitude, retired under the pretext of fatigue.

Toward midnight, whilst seated before his writing-table, writing some letters, the door of his room was softly opened. He turned—Madame de Rias was before him, pale as a corpse. He fixed on her a look of glacial severity.

“What do you want?” said he.

“I wish to speak to you,” murmured she, in a voice stifled and scarcely distinct.

“Speak!”

“Lionel, I am already half mad,” replied she, with a heart-breaking expression of grief; “I pray you spare me! Oh! spare me!”

“What is it you wish to say to me, my dear?”

“Louise has just come——she has had suspicions since morning——she seized a moment when her brother was absent——she saw your letter——we know all!”

“And what do you know?”

“I know that to-morrow you are going to fight with M. de Kevern!”

M. de Rias rose and stood before her.

“Listen, Marie,” said he, coldly; “I much regret that this affair has come to your knowledge; but you may believe me it was not my fault. Now, why did you come here? You only waste your time. You ought to understand that your denials and your supplications would be at such a moment completely useless. Your reception and countenance, since my return, leave me in little doubt as to the character of your relations with M. de Kevern. Last night I followed you; I saw what passed between you. I am then edified, and nothing in the world, you may be

certain, will hinder me from saving my honor, as much as still remains to be saved. Go! leave me."

She fell upon a chair, and, wringing her hands, with eyes fixed on vacancy,

"My God!" she cried; "Oh! my God!"

"I pray you, leave me," said M. de Rias, harshly.

She arose and took a few steps toward the door; then, returning to him suddenly and throwing herself on her knees upon the floor:

"Ah! well!" she cried; "kill me!—that would be just!—but me alone!—me alone!"

And her voice was lost in a burst of sobs.

"How is it that you do not feel," Lionel replied, "that each one of your words is a new offence?"

"No,——Oh! no, I swear to you!——It is because you do not understand all.——Let me tell you all, I implore you——Ah! you will see that I tell you the truth!——Yes, I am guilty——yes, I love M. de Kevern——yes——and if he had wished——I believe——it is possible——my love, my feebleness,

would have refused him nothing!—You see that I do not spare myself;—but he did not wish it—Oh! God, he did not wish it! It is he who preserved me—and you would kill him!—but it is impossible!—such an action would be odious,—abominable!—I pray you,—I pray you,—do not commit it!”

“I see that you indeed love him,” said M. de Rias.

“Yes, I love him,” continued she, still kneeling and crouching down before him. “I love him because he has saved me, not only from himself, but from others!—Let me tell you!—several months ago, at Trouville, after that scene—deserved perhaps—but so hard and wounding—neglected, desperate and corrupted at heart—I wished to rush upon my ruin;—there was there a man who pursued me with his love—whom I believed I loved—who, you may suspect. Well, shall I tell you? I waited for that man, on the night following your departure;—it was a word, one single word from M. de Kevern,

which brought me back to reason, to duty, to honor
——and you would kill him!——But——since then——I
have loved him——and, perhaps, my love has been
shared——it may be so!——but that love has re-
mained in our hearts——it has never been criminal
——never!——You saw us last night——alas!——
you have seen me in his arms——and I feel it—
well——that you must believe——and will still be-
lieve, O! my God!——that you have a mortal offence
to avenge!——nevertheless, it is not so——it is not
so! That moment of abandonment, of weakness——
was the first——it was the last between us——it was
the farewell of a friend——of a brother, whom I should
see no more. Nothing more, in truth! Since your re-
turn, we have been—he, his sister and I—in a cruel
combat. She wished that he should leave;——he hesi-
tated, fearing that his sudden departure might awaken
your suspicions——I—I did not wish it——and then
——for I have still a little honesty——the existence daily
between you and him——the duplicity——the continual

deceit—rent my heart asunder. I made my sacrifice suddenly last night. I wished to see him immediately, to make an end of it at once—and then I went where you followed me. He was going to leave to-day—and I——was going to tell you a part of that which I now tell you! Then, perhaps, you might have believed me——whilst now you do not believe me!”

“No!” said M. de Rias, curtly.

A silence ensued, broken only by the convulsive sobbings of the young wife.

“Besides,” suddenly replied Lionel, “if you are truly strangers—so far as concerns criminality—is there not in that which you have avowed enough to justify a resentment and implacable hate of a man?”

“Yes, doubtless——yes,——and yet, if you were certain, Lionel, very certain, that there is nothing more than that which I have avowed to you,——if you were very sure that your pride only is wounded, not your honor,——that there is nothing irreparable

between us,——truly nothing——would you not have pity—if not for me——at least for his poor sister——so innocent, so devoted and so unhappy!——Would you kill her, or drive her mad?——my poor Louise,——who loved me so much, and this is her recompense! Oh! if you would have that goodness, Lionel, if you would be generous enough to conquer this outburst of your offended pride——very justly offended, alas!——Ah! Lionel,——I feel it——I swear it to you——that there is still happiness in store for us!——Oh! I should be so grateful——that you may command anything of my heart!——It has once been all yours——it would return to you. It is not the moment,——I know that well——to speak of your faults——for, after all, you have had some, perhaps;——but I will obliterate them from my memory——I will be so happy——so happy to forget them——and to make you forget mine!——so happy!——Ah! I beg you——I pray you——Oh! I would love you as much as God!”——

She was silent ; stifled by her tears, which flowed as profusely as her prayers.

M. de Rias was visibly moved and actuated by a vivid emotion. For a few moments he paced to and fro. His features were frightfully distorted, and the convulsive trembling of his lips testified to the terrible struggle which he underwent. Suddenly he approached his writing-desk, took a sheet of paper and wrote a few words thereon. Then approaching his wife—exhausted, panting and trembling at his feet—he gave her the note which he had just written.

“ You can read it,” he said to her ; “ it is for Madame de Lorris.”

She pushed back with one hand her dishevelled hair, which covered her face, and read the note—containing these lines only :

“ Be so good as to say to your brother, madame, that he need expect nobody from me to-morrow.”

The young wife uttered a cry, suddenly sprang up and seized the hands of her husband as if to draw

him to her, in the exaltation of her gratitude and joy ;
then, lowering her eyes, bathed with tears,

“ I dare not,” she murmured.

“ No,——nothing now——nothing——I beg of
you,” said M. de Rias, in a voice profoundly moved.

“ Go, Marie, go !——rest in peace !”

She bowed her head, covered his hands with feverish
kisses and left the room.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE loftiness of sentiment to which M. de Rias had arisen in the emotion of this scene, unfortunately possessed no durability. Reflection, cold reasoning and bitter experience, were not slow in making him hear their voices and regaining their domination over him. Each day, in decreasing measure, as the time passed by, the impression produced upon him by the passionate words of Madame de Rias, her truthful accents and touching supplications, became enfeebled, and doubt and dark distrust recurred to his mind, gaining ground and meeting constantly with readier welcome. He soon reached that point where he asked himself if his easy confidence had not been rather the candor and generosity of a dupe,

if he had not been the laughing-stock of a perfidious farce—one of those lies bathed in tears, of which even good women are not ignorant.

The apparent relations between himself and wife were then exteriorly those of pleasant accord, of affection and of unity. On the part of Madame de Rias, there was a constant effort to avoid whatever might be displeasing to her husband, and to do that which might be pleasing to him, manifesting always a timid and reserved affection, blended with devoted attention. Lionel, at the same time, manifested a characteristic goodness and graceful courtesy worthy of him. Never, in his language, or in his eyes, was there the shade of a resentment or a reproach; his feelings were too exalted for him to forfeit his word or the forgiveness he had extended.

But in the very midst of that sweet home-happiness, which seemed to almost realize the best dreams of his life, he was perhaps, in the depths of his soul, more unhappy than he had ever before been. An

incurable suspicion devoured him—he had been a dupe! He was secretly an object of the ironical disdain of M. de Kevern, and of his wife herself. This incessantly tormenting thought caused him the more profound sadness, for the reason that he felt it to be irremediable. It would always henceforth be between him and his wife, forever congealing in his heart and upon his lips the tendernesses and self-abandonments of love. He now bitterly regretted the impulse of his heart, which had condemned him to this agony of doubt and eternal dissimulation.

One morning, toward the end of the month of July, as he was smoking a cigar in the yard outside the stables, he saw in the distance, Madame de Rias, walking rapidly, through one of the paths of the park. That path, at a little distance, crosses a road leading to the village where Madame de Rias was accustomed to dispense her charity. At first, he thought that this was the object of her present walk, although it seemed strangely matutinal for such a purpose. A moment

after, however, an apparently insignificant incident awoke another supposition in his mind. It was the hour at which the post-boy daily visited Fresnes, and, after delivering his letters at the chateau, took from the servants—or sometimes from a table in the vestibule—those intended for the mail, continuing on his way to the neighboring village through the path in which Madame de Rias was now walking. Lionel was suddenly struck with the idea that his wife wished to give some letter to the post-boy secretly, with her own hand, and that she had gone out with this design to encounter him in the forest, away from the scrutiny of curious eyes. He was confirmed in this suspicion by seeing her speedily reappear and hurriedly return to the chateau as soon as the post-boy had crossed her path.

M. de Rias entered the meadows through which there was also a path leading to the village, shorter than that through the park, but interdicted to the public. A few minutes later he met the post-boy, at

the moment when the latter was emerging from the woods.

“I ran after you,” he said to him. “You took from the chateau, a little while ago, a letter addressed to M. de Kevern,—did you not?”

“Yes, sir. Madame has just given it to me herself.”

“Exactly. Will you be kind enough to give it to me? There is a mistake in the address. You can take it to-morrow.”

The post-boy obeyed and went on his way.

The letter bore this superscription :

“M. Henry de Kevern, Hotel des Bergues, Geneva.”

M. de Rias looked at the note, turned it and returned it in his hands, with inexpressible anguish. To open it and violate its secret would be an action concerning the character of which he could not deceive himself. To respect it was to lose the opportunity, probably the only one, of dissipating the horrible uncertainty which poisoned his life.

He seated himself before one of the thickets of the park, upon the trunk of a fallen tree, and was profoundly absorbed in his perplexities when the noise of carriage-wheels caused him to raise his eyes. He recognised the carriage of Madame de Lorris. He remembered that she was going to breakfast at the chateau that day. When she perceived Lionel, Madame de Lorris apparently thought that he had come to meet her. She ordered her coachman to stop, immediately got out and sent away the carriage.

“This is very kind of you, sir,” she said. “Is Marie well?”

“Very well,—what a beautiful morning, is it not?”

He opened the gate and conducted her into the avenue leading to the chateau.

Struck with his careworn and absent air, she said to him, after they had gone a few paces:

“Well,—what is new now, my dear friend?”

“Nothing.”

“ I ask your pardon,——your brow is stormy—
and then you were dreaming there, a little bit ago,
like a man meditating a crime.”

“ I have sometimes very sad thoughts,” said Lionel.

“ Why?——You will never be happy thus, my
poor friend.”

“ I fear so.”

She replied in a serious voice :

“ It gives me a great deal of pain to hear you say
that.” Then, stopping in the middle of the avenue,
she continued :

“ Come! What is it that is lacking? Confidence—
is it not so?”

Lionel did not reply.

“ *Mon Dieu!*” she continued; “ what then can be
said or done to give it to you?”

“ What must be done,” said M. de Rias abruptly,
giving way to a movement of impulse, “ is to tell me
what is in this letter.”

“ This letter! What is this letter?”

He held it before her eyes ; she read the address, and turned slightly pale.

“ This,” replied Lionel, “ is the history of this letter. This morning I saw Marie give it secretly to the post-boy. At the first moment the idea of letting the letter go, bearing away eternally its secret, appeared to me impossible, and I possessed myself of it.— That is already too much—I will not open it. Take it—it is not a trap that I spread for you—that would be detestable.—Do not open it, I beg of you : I do not wish it. However sure you may be of your friend and your brother, you are not sure enough to risk such a proof. Burn it, without reading it yourself and without speaking of it to anybody. Promise me——”

Madame de Lorris took the letter, with a slightly trembling hand—she looked fixedly at M. de Rias, and broke the envelope.

The heroic young woman had then, however, a moment of faintness ; a haze passed over her eyes, and

she tottered. Then she bravely nerved herself to read the letter aloud :

“ SIR AND FRIEND :

“ Am I wrong in writing you these lines ? I cannot believe it, though I am hiding it from my husband. I wish to save him even the shadow of a painful remembrance ; but towards you I feel that there is a duty owing, that of telling you that I am happy.

“ I know you well enough to be certain that the thought of my happiness will be to you the best of recompenses, and—if need be—consolation. I remember your words during that last interview, which nearly had such fatal consequences—‘ the best news that I ever could hear, sent by you to me, would be that your heart had sided with your duty.’

“ Alas ! that then seemed to me impossible, yet a few hours later that miracle was performed. My husband saved me from the agonies of death ; his generous confidence, his goodness, truly divine, inspired in me not only gratitude, but esteem, respect and tender-

ness worthy of them. From that moment he regained me entirely, and I have loved him ever since.

“Each day still, when I recall that terrible night—when I remember the follies, the imprudences of my language—(because, for the better showing of my sincerity, I allowed myself to appear even more guilty than I was)—when I think of his agonized heart, his wounded pride, of all that he must have suffered, all that he must have vanquished to tender me his hand,—I long to fall at his feet and worship him.

“I dare not. He is tender and excellent, but unquiet, a little distrustful, yet, perhaps, in his secret soul. I feel it. I suffer from it sometimes, but without being discouraged, for I also feel that the future is mine, and that all the truth that is in my heart, will, in time, pass into his and open it entirely to me.

“This, sir, is what I wished to say to you, and in telling it to you, do I not give you the greatest proof of the esteem of your pupil and friend?

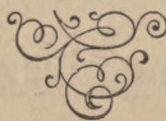
MARIE DE RIAS.”

When she had finished reading this letter, in a voice shaken by emotion, Madame de Lorris saw that M. de Rias had his hand over his eyes and that tears rolled down his face.

* * * * *

We cannot finish this recital without reminding the reader that the Keverbs are very rare in the world; that it is a very delicate thing to count too much on their disinterested aid, and that a husband solicitous for the perfecting of the education of his wife, would be wisely employed in conducting it himself and never delegating his powers.

THE END.



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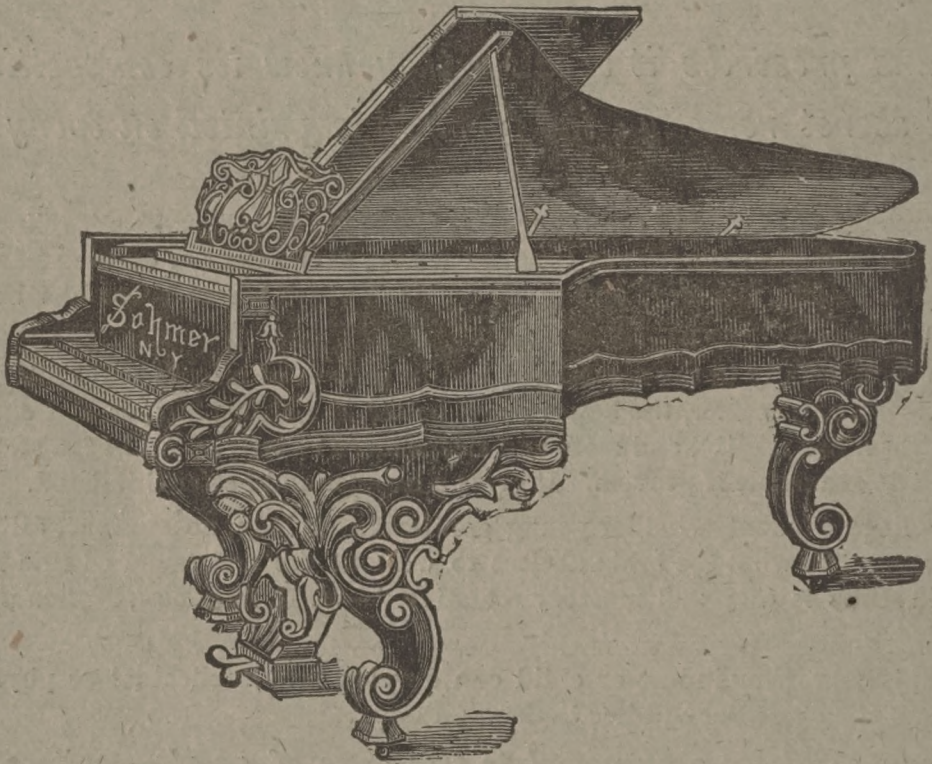
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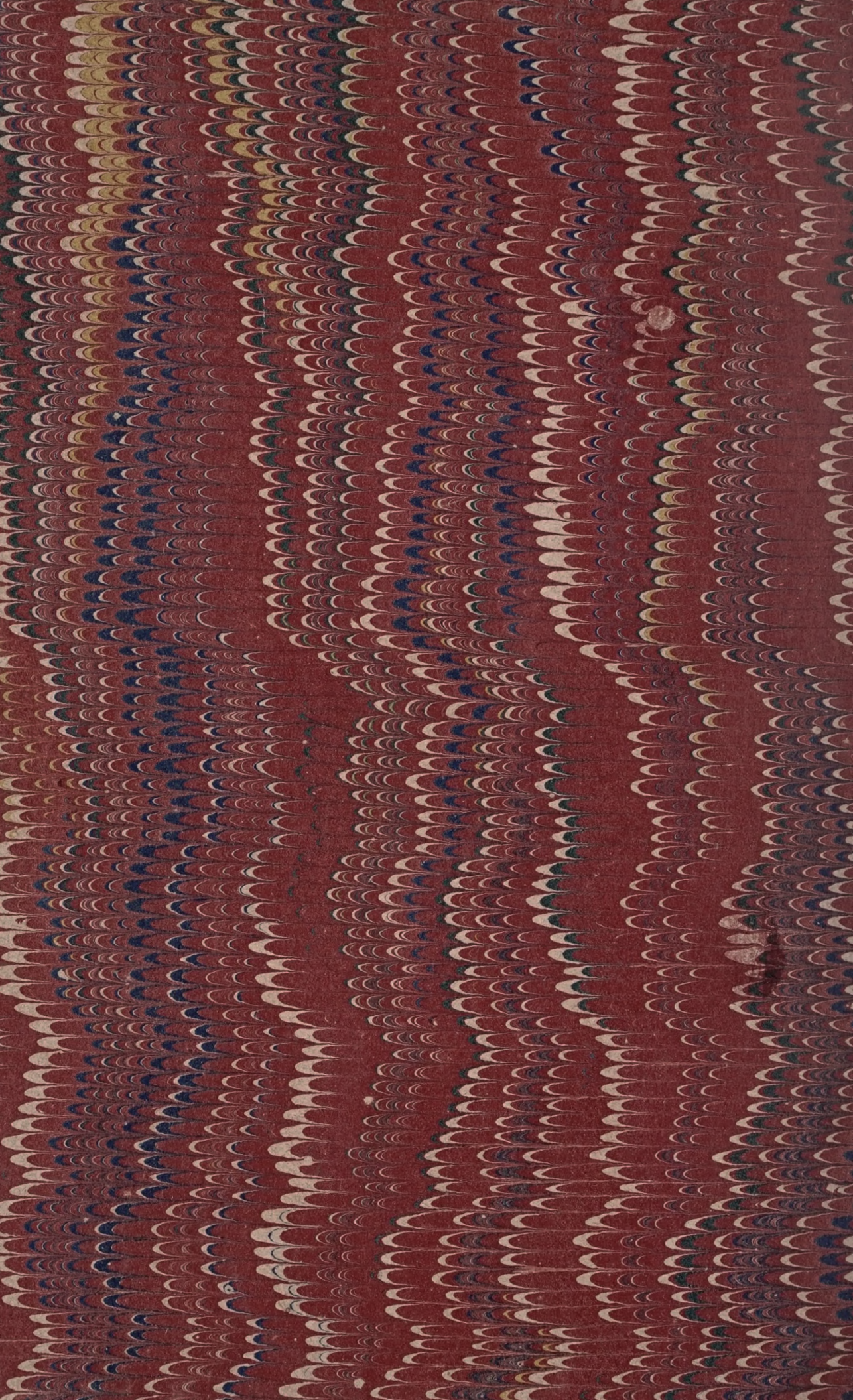
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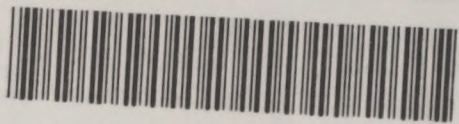








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