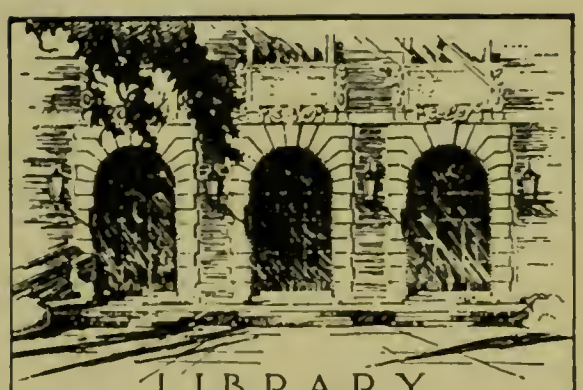
Alexander Elder.



ONCE AND AGAIN.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"COUSIN STELLA," "WHO BREAKS—PAYS,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1865.

CONTENTS

OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

ONCE AND AGAIN.

CHAPTER I.

PETITE MAMAN'S ADVICE.

Mdlle. St. Georges herself opened the door to Madame de Villemont, and opened also her piercing eyes very wide at the unexpected sight of M. de Pressy. Almost before the door was closed on her, Louisa exclaimed, without uttering the usual greeting,—

"I met him as I was coming here, and I could not bid him go away—I was ashamed."

"Ah! that was vexatious," answered Petite Maman, as she led the way to the salon, which

had all the uncomfortable closeness of an unused room.

"Your letter has made me come at once," said Louisa, impetuously, "to know what people *are* saying about me. I ought to know, and I must know."

"What you ask is difficult to answer," replied Mdlle. St. Georges; "no one ever speaks out plainly as to such matters—half words and laughs, and winks, are made to express a great deal."

"At all events you can explain what made you think it necessary to warn me? You need not be afraid to speak out; thank goodness, I can bear the truth."

"Without question you can, poor dear lady."

"Well, what was the grand accusation?" continued Louisa, raising her head, and giving a proud glance at the dear fat old lady, looking like a feather-bed in a brown check mohair dress.

Mdlle. St. Georges turned *her* head aside as she answered,—

"It is said that you are too partial to Severin de Pressy—that's the naked truth. I don't believe

it; if I did I should not have written to you. It would have been of worse than no use—I should only have hurried your misery!"

Louisa's features were rigid with emotion as she said,—

"Do you mean that the people I see daily, who come to my house, who kiss me on both cheeks, who send me invitations, and invite M. de Pressy at the same time as they do me; do you mean that they are the persons who talk of me in this scandalous audacious way?"

Mdlle. St. Georges replied,—

"My dear, neither you nor I can change the world; it's just what it was in the time of Job, whenever that was. You Protestants read your Bible; well, you remember what David said of familiar friends?"

"I have a great mind," said Louisa, "to dare them all, and go on as I have been doing; it will be as much as to confess I was wrong, if I make any change. What an idea, that a woman cannot have a man for a friend without danger!"

Mdlle. St. Georges drew her chair close to

Louisa's, and took one of her delicately-gloved hands in her own muscular ones.

"I am past sixty, and I have seen so much. I know many a sad, sad story—my dear, *you* cannot have men friends, they will all be lovers."

"You are mistaken, mademoiselle; I am told I am good-looking, but do believe me, I am not attractive. I can give you an instance—M. de Villemont never was a bit in love with me."

"Allons donc!" said Mdlle. St. Georges; "you want to make me take a lantern for the moon. I hope you never made that false accusation of your husband to Severin de Pressy."

"It does not trouble me enough to make me talk about it. It was your assertion made me offer you proof in contradiction."

"Ah! my dear, it's a great pity your religion denies you the advantage of a confessor. My beautiful cousin, you have need of a head with more brains than lie within my nob to counsel you. Your mother, she must have experience: talk to her."

"Mamma did read me a lecture two days ago

about M. de Pressy. She has forbidden him to teach me philosophy, and means to be present at all his visits. Will that hush the tongues of my intimate enemies, do you think?"

Louisa's manner had a recklessness in it which alarmed Mdlle. St. Georges; she began to have fears that Louisa had seen Severin de Pressy too often already. She said decidedly,—

"You ask my advice—here it is: forbid that young man the house."

"And how? Am I to make him a curtsey and say, 'Please, sir, give up my acquaintance—all the ladies and gentlemen we know accuse us of being in love with one another?'"

"You are too clever not to be able to make him understand your real wishes as to his too frequent visits," said Mdlle. St. Georges.

"But I have *no* wish to give up receiving M. de Pressy—he is very pleasant, and, indeed, instructive. He is teaching me to employ my time rationally, and I should imagine from the grave warnings he gives me as to my frivolity and that of my associates, he must be almost as good as

a confessor. No, if I give him up, it will be to please you."

"Did Severin ever talk to you of his family?"

"No, never; he has always kept to literary and scientific subjects—he has made me comprehend the difference between a fulcrum and a lever."

"Severin is the last surviving representative of one of our noblest and oldest Lorraine families. Of all the possessions of his house, he has scarcely anything but the name. His father espoused the cause of the Duchesse de Berri, and was killed in La Vendée. His mother lives in the hopes of his marrying a rich cousin, with whom he has been brought up, and thus redeeming his lost fortunes."

"And you are afraid of my spoiling this wise plan," said Louisa, laughing. "Set your heart at rest, ma cousine, I will not ruin M. de Pressy's prospects—many thanks for your good advice. I must, however, leave you; I am sure all your neighbours are accusing me of taking a sentimental walk with this descendant of the Crusaders—adieu, ma cousine."

Mdlle. St. Georges said to herself, as she closed the door on Madame de Villemont,—

"This is what one gets for meddling—poor young thing—ah! she's in a bad way——"

A hasty ring of the door bell interrupted her monologue; it was Louisa again.

"I have come back to tell you that I have repented of my rudeness to you—I am grateful for the interest you have shown in me—I don't believe you had any other motive than my good—forgive me for being so thankless and ill-tempered—will you? I shall not allow M. de Pressy or any other monsieur to come paying me regular visits till I am past fifty. Now, will you always be my friend, and, when I am dull, may I come to you? I declare, I think I'll take to learning cookery—will you teach me how to make beautiful preserves, such as those you sent us—I never saw any so beautiful."

"Flatterer!" said Mdlle. St. Georges, tapping the pretty cheek upheld to her; "if you want work, sometimes give our Marguerite a music lesson—that will be a work of charity."

"To be sure I will," replied Louisa, in a cheerful, kind voice; "shall she come to me, or shall I come here?"

"My dear, we have no piano."

"That settles the matter," said Louisa; "will you send her every day at twelve?"

Louisa went home with a lighter heart than she had had when she set out. She had talked herself out of the fears of what the Mrs. Grundys of the town had said or were saying of her—she had the pleasant consciousness of having made a friend—she was pleased, too, with the idea of being useful to any one.

Youth sees a hope in every new event—old age foresees a chance of trouble in every change. When Louisa told her mother that she was going to teach Marguerite St. Georges music, Mrs. Templar said, sharply,—

"You have done a very imprudent thing; you will see that you have brought an old house on your shoulders."

"Dear mamma, what harm can come of my teaching this poor child? Whom can it injure?"

"You'll see," continued Mrs. Templar; "it won't stop with the piano. After that is settled, it will be something else, until at last you will find yourself saddled with the girl for good and all. However, it's no business of mine."

"What's the use of continually dreading the future, mamma, and so spoiling the present?"

"I needn't say take your own way, for you always did and always will; but just consider what you have made of it."

"Surely in this instance, doing a kindness to those who deserve it, and who, as connections of M. de Villemont, have a right to kindness from me, cannot be wrong. My life is useless enough."

"That's your own fault; you have a husband and a mother to attend to."

"I shall not be less anxious about you, mamma. I shall take nothing from M. de Villemont that he will miss. Do, mamma, approve of my teaching Marguerite," and Louisa turned a pleading face to her mother.

"I have no authority over you now; so what necessity is there for my approval? I believe you

will live to regret what you are going to undertake; if ever you do, remember I warned you."

Louisa could not be convinced that there must be a germ of trouble hidden in the music lessons to Marguerite St. Georges; so the next day she welcomed her pupil affectionately, and thus began the entanglement of the thread of their two lives. Had Mrs. Templar really possessed the power of seeing into the future, even she must have shed tears at seeing Louisa so unconsciously preparing the way for the crowning grief of her life.

Marguerite was at that time a half-grown girl of fourteen; her features were irregular; nevertheless, there was something Raphaelesque in her face—in the peculiar arch of her eyebrows—in the roundness of her smooth forehead—above all, in the expression of her hazel eyes. Her whole air was demure, nun-like; so much so that the workmen and workwomen of her parish had given her the name of la Sainte Vierge. She had been sent as a child to the Convent of the Dames Dominicaines, but after her first communion Mdlle. St. Georges had insisted on taking her home. The girl was so

pious, so absorbed in religious ceremonies, that the aunt, who had little turn that way, had taken fright lest Marguerite's religious feelings should be wrought up to the point of taking the veil.

Mdlle. St. Georges had shown great spirit and determination in thus acting. She had been given to understand that, if her niece were left at the convent, the priests would find her a husband, which Petite Maman was unlikely herself to accomplish, considering the tenuity of Marguerite's dowry. The old lady had persisted against advice and even reproach; she had pinched herself a little more to afford Marguerite a daily lesson of an hour from a governess, but music had been a good utterly beyond even Petite Maman's energy to obtain, until she had made her appeal to Madame de Villemont.

Louisa was charmed with her pupil. The first thing she thought of on awakening was of the quaint little maiden, in whose innocent eyes beamed such admiration and love for her music mistress. This was Louisa's first initiation into one of the greatest of human comforts—that of

being of use to a fellow-being who loved her—she took Marguerite to her heart with all the enthusiasm of a nature which craved for affection.

Louisa thought little more of Severin de Pressy. He, on the contrary, when debarred of Madame de Villemont's society, first perceived how dear it was to him. He wrote to a friend describing his feelings. One paragraph ran thus:—

"Our affections do not always follow our judgment; *she* has few of the qualities with which I have hitherto endowed my ideal. There is no repose about her—no reflection—she acts solely from impulse; and thus I account for her marriage with such an empty-headed, empty-hearted man as her husband. She has talents—they are uncultivated—her mind is a wilderness, but full of the sweetest wild-flowers—her heart is large—you never surprise her expressing an ungenerous sentiment. She is all purity and brightness, but with a yieldingness of character contrary to my ideas of the perfection of womanhood. After all, though, the thought of her pre-occupies me, I believe I have rather a strong, calm affection for

her, than what is vulgarly called a passion. Our pleasant intimacy has been interrupted by tittle-tattle as to my frequent visits; this has made my days more lonely than ever, and solitude has a bad effect on my nervous system."

The friend answered,—

"Your only remedy lies in flight; apply for a change, or for leave of absence; go and spend some weeks at home; cultivate your young cousin's talents, and don't break your mother's heart, and ruin yourself—in short, don't be an idiot. The strongest love does not endure so long as a good estate."

Severin wrote back in Anselm's words,—

"Can a man forget one who is placed like a seal upon his heart?

"I have taken your advice so far; I have seen my mother, but only to tell her that she must look out for another husband for Solanges. I shall never marry her, or any woman I do not love!"

Severin continued to live in Bar le Duc; it was something to breathe the same air as she did, something to see the walls of the house which

she inhabited; a great deal occasionally to catch a glimpse of her. They rarely met in society, for Severin never mixed in any gaiety that he could plausibly avoid. When he did find himself in the same salon with Louisa, a formal salutation was all that passed between them; it was Severin who so resolutely withdrew from Louisa, not she from him; she could not understand why he should so rigorously avoid her. All gossip about them was at an end; why then refuse to be on the same terms with her as were the other gentlemen of her acquaintance?

CHAPTER II.

A SHADOW OF THE PAST.

At the end of the second year after Madame de Villemont's marriage, M. Remy, the old pastor of Bar le Duc, petitioned the Council General to appoint a younger and abler man to take his place. He was offered an assistant, but he declined on the plea of his age and infirmities, which rendered him incompetent for the duties of a Protestant minister in a populous town. The truth was that the newly-displayed hostility of the priesthood of the department towards Protestants had annoyed M. Remy for more than a twelvemonth. Difficulties were constantly arising in adjoining villages, whenever a member of the Reformed Church was to be buried; the old clergyman's tranquillity was disturbed—the finish-

ing blow was given by the following letter, here copied with all its numerous blunders :—

"Cher Pasteur,—

"J'ai une nouvelle à vous apprendre. Aujourd'hui on a honoré notre place de cimetière, en y enterrant une pendue, une femme qui, par plusieurs vols, cependant a été attrappée au fait, ayant elle même auparavant accusée une autre personne. Elle en avait pour cinq ans peutêtre, pour en terminer plus vite, elle s'est donné la mort. Me doutant bien que le curé ce gros Antichrist de G—— pourrait bien commander sa fosse à cette place, j'avais commandé à mon mari de voir M. le Maire, et de le prévenir promptement de ce qui allait arriver, et que pour eviter quelques raisons, il ferait bien de prévenir le curé de chercher une autre place; ayant fait un nouveau cimetière il a grandement de quoi loger ces gens-là.

"Mon mari a été tres mal reçu, surtout qu'il y avait beaucoup d'ouvriers à souper. Le Daniel (the writer's husband) s'est trouvé bien honteux,

car voici les paroles de M. le Maire; qu'est ce que vous me chantez. Ces gens là, on les laisse libre, on leur accorde tout, ils sont néanmoins de plus en plus exigeants—peu m'importe à moi, qu'on la met où on voudra.

"Ainsi voyez, M. le Pasteur, ce qu'il en resulte. Aujourd'hui tout le monde dit, on a mis cette coquine avec les Protestants, avec les chiens. Quand on a mesuré cette place, le commissaire et le maire etaient là, pour convenir de nous la donner, j'aurai cru qu'après cela, le curé ne viendrait plus à l'avenir nous amener, ses noyés et ses pendus, ou peut-être que M. le Préfet n'ayant pas souscrit aux conventions que l'on avait fait, pour cette place, comme il a souscrit pour une chambre, alors il n'est pas etonnant que l' Antichrist ne vient nous braver jusqu'à ce point.

"M. Remy, si vous avez des droits, faites les valoir, *ou je ne sais ce que j'en penserai.* D'abord on vous a caché qu'il y avait déjà un pendu à cette place, cependant ce pendu est de mon temps. Aujourd'hui etant plus avancé, je croyais que l'on n'aurait plus cette effronterie. Le curé met au

defit quel ministre Protestant que ce soit, de lui faire attirer un seul reproche—car dit-il ils n'ont aucun droit.

"Nous en sommes bien humiliés, bien mortifiés, nous prions le Seigneur qu'il veuille toujours nous regarder d'un œil de miséricorde sur cette terre, s'ils en est tant d'autres qui nous méprise.

"Mes cordiales salutations,

(*Sic*) "MICHELLE CORNOUIL."

On receiving this missive, with its menace, "*ou je ne sais ce que j'en pènserai,*" M. Remy hired a vehicle and betook himself to Vitry, of which Marc de Lantry was pastor. Marc gave both advice and help, and redress was easily obtained from the préfet, a man of a liberal mind, but the worry and uneasiness had fairly broken M. Remy's spirit; his application for removal was attended to, and Marc de Lantry was invited to become the pastor of Bar le Duc.

"What a lucky chance for me," exclaimed Louisa.

Ay, to be sure, there are many good chances

as well as bad in life—good influences as well as evil; only we are all apt to have a more retentive memory for what has been bitter than for what has been sweet.

Nevertheless, after the first pleasure of renewed intimacy was over, Louisa's spirits drooped. Admitted within the sanctuary of happy married life, she saw what love in marriage was; once more she keenly felt how she had thrown away her life—she relapsed into restlessness, novel-reading, dissipation—caring less and less for Marguerite's improvement. Petite Maman, struggling to content an extravagant old fop—patching, darning, marketing, cheapening; Petite Maman, resigned to all that had reference to herself, had been an encouraging example to Louisa. Ismay's victories over a naturally indolent nature, her patience and sympathy with every one—and they were many—who came to her with some sad story or some suffering, were never so much as perceived by Madame de Villemont. All was merged in the nimbus with which Marc's devoted love surrounded his wife.

Louisa often sought the De Lantrys; she watched them with the intense interest of one bent on a discovery.

"Poor Louisa!" said Ismay, one day after one of these visits. "Marc, don't be so kind to me when she is here; it makes her angry."

"If the sight of the happiness of others has that effect upon her, then she needs a sermon, and she shall have one," replied Marc.

The opportunity soon occurred, but not the sermon. Louisa came to M. de Lantry with a second novel of Gustave Gastineau's, sent to her as the first had been, wet from the printing-office. It had the same dedication as the previous one; it contained yet more sneers against women, and it was stained by many a coarse description. Still there were noble pages in it; there were also painful pictures of the depression of spirit engendered by his poverty; here is one paragraph,—

"I learned to despise myself for the very thing of which I ought to have been proud—my labour. I did not feel myself a man; I could not be at my ease with rich men, who, I was well aware, must

have gone to the poor-house, had they lost their money, for *they* were unable, like *me*, to gain their daily bread. What a debt of gratitude I owe to her who first taught me the overwhelming advantages of a long purse and a title, over brains and a heart," and so on.

Louisa rose from the perusal of the book with a shudder; she said to Marc, "Gustave Gastineau is my determined enemy, he is bent on revenge; he thinks me happy—ah! if he could know the truth!"

The words were uttered quietly, but there was such a reality of pain in them, that Marc's intended sermon went out of his head. The pastor gave place to the indignant man.

"Whether he believes you happy or not, what he has done is a bad action."

"Oh! M. de Lantry, to think that a girl's one foolish act should mar her whole life. If I live to be a hundred it must always be the same. You can never have an idea of what I suffer when I see you and Ismay together, when I see the comfort of mutual confidence, when I see that, let

what would happen to Ismay, you would always cherish her. I feel when I am with you both, as the rich man in hell did when he saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom."

"My dear Madame de Villemont, don't use such language."

"I don't mean to be profane—you remember me in the Rue de Varennes, how every one petted me; all that seems so long ago, as if it belonged to another existence. I can scarcely believe I was ever that happy little Louisa!"

"Are you sure that you do not exaggerate your discomforts? that, because you have been disappointed in some things, you do not see every thing en noir? M. de Villemont is never unkind to you, I am sure."

Louisa said, "Do you suppose I did not struggle for happiness when I first married; that I did not try to make my husband love me? Ay, that I did, and I have found out for my pains, that the only way to live tolerably well with him is to make him feel my indifference; he despises heart. Dear M. Marc, be my good

counsellor, look after me, keep me from doing wrong. I am afraid of my own thoughts—years and years of this weary life to bear!"

"Courage," said Marc; "you have failed in obtaining one sort of happiness — overcome the evil fate you helped to bring on yourself, and in so doing you will discover another kind of happiness. You have had a sort of triumphant pleasure, haven't you, in battling with a stormy wind—that's the sort of joy reserved for those who battle against trials. You talk of long life—the longest, what is it, but a few years, and then if we have done our work faithfully—an eternity of bliss."

Another spring and summer went by: it was now autumn. M. de Villemont's manner had changed to Louisa; he was often now rude to her before strangers, a savage look came into his eyes when they rested on her. Louisa terrified herself by thinking that he had either himself read or been told of those cruel books of Gustave Gastineau. She never guessed that he resented her being childless, as if it had been a wilful crime.

Mrs. Templar had grown quieter; she still

passed her days among half-packed trunks, but she had given up all talk of going away; she read her prayer-book a good deal, and more than once Louisa fancied that her mother looked as if she had been shedding tears. The mere thought that such might be the case, went like a stab to the daughter's heart.

"I am putting all my papers in order," said Mrs. Templar one day at dinner, without particularly addressing either M. or Madame de Villemont. "I wish M. de Blacourt to look them over before any other person sees them."

"Mamma, you are quite well?" exclaimed Louisa, anxiously.

"Yes, but nobody can say what a day may bring forth. 'Put your house in order,' is a good precept. You need not alarm yourself, Louisa; making a will never killed any one."

Louisa watched her mother narrowly; she could discover no signs of illness in her; she walked as stoutly as ever, and even seemed more erect in figure; still she could not shake off a certain uneasiness.

After this conversation, whenever her mother was later than usual in returning from her walk, Louisa used to set out either with Marguerite St. Georges, or with a servant, towards the wood Mrs. Templar generally frequented.

On one of these occasions she met Marc de Lantry at the top of the hill and he joined her.

"How quiet the birds are," said Louisa, "and only a month ago there was a concert of song from every tree."

A yellow moss bee was creeping over the turf; a blackbird rose heavily with a "cluck, cluck," from beneath a tree, and hid itself among the branches. All at once there was a sound of loud laughter—that kind of laughter which gives the impression of disorder and impropriety. The next instant a woman, accompanied by two soldiers, came in sight. Marc walked forward; as he did so the female drew away, trying to hide herself behind the trunks of the beeches.

"My daughter," said the pastor, "I regret to see you again straying from the fold of the Good Shepherd."

The person he spoke to slunk quite away into a by-path.

"Who is that woman?" asked Louisa, in a startled voice.

"A castaway—I am afraid one utterly lost. The first time I ever saw her was, strangely enough, in our little church at Vitry. She sauntered in out of mere curiosity. I guessed what she was, and I chose for the chapter of the day, the one with the parable of the prodigal son, and I made a few remarks that I thought might encourage her to forsake her evil ways. She left the church before the sermon was over. Ismay and I thought it our duty to seek her out; and my wife found needlework for her, and did all she could to induce her to live a respectable life; we had hopes of saving her—she was clever with her needle. Ismay supposed she must once have been a femme de chambre. However, after a couple of weeks she came to our house, gave the bundle of linen entrusted to her to our cook, and left word that she was tired of work. I have never seen her since until this moment."

"Is she young?" asked Louisa.

"No, she cannot be much less than forty—thirty-seven or thirty-eight she told Ismay. She has purely cut features, but her face is rather repulsive than attractive."

"I suppose it is nonsense," said Louisa, "but she made my heart beat. Do you know, just the one glimpse I got of her made me suddenly remember that odious Laure, whom M. Granson forced mamma to take as lady's-maid when we went to Versailles? Mamma has never spoken to me on the subject; but from what I recollect, I am sure my poor mother was ill-treated. It is twelve years since then, and Laure must have altered very much."

"Not as much as you have done changing from a child into a woman," said Marc. "I do not imagine, however, you would be able after such a lapse of time to recognize Laure—why, you were not nine years old then."

"I have never forgotten her peculiar look; whenever I have bad dreams even now, it's always about Laure and M. Granson. I am sure I should recognize either of them any-

where." She added, in a voice of alarm, "I hope and trust mamma has not met that woman —let us go on faster."

One person's real terror will communicate itself to another. Marc was almost as relieved as Louisa when, at the next turn of the woodland path they were following, they perceived Mrs. Templar. She was walking quietly, Stop, the Newfoundland, gravely marching at her side. Mrs. Templar saw M. de Lantry and her daughter perfectly well, but she gave no sign of recognition—she went on speaking to the dog:

"There's a wise dog, and a good dog, good dog —he is not ungrateful. Stop, my pet."

"Should you have supposed that mamma could speak in such a caressing tone?" said Louisa to Marc; "it's only to a dog, though."

"I never saw any one but your mother who gave me the idea of a living tragedy," observed Marc, as the tall, gaunt figure in black came forwards, with a slow, almost majestic step. "Poor soul, she looks like one whose mind is jangled and out of tune."

"It is quite unnecessary, Louisa, your coming to meet me," were Mrs. Templar's first words; "why should you do now what you never did before M. de Lantry came?"

Mrs. Templar never would receive any attention from Louisa without repaying it by a poisoned hint.

"I do not wonder that Madame de Villemont is alarmed about you," said Marc. "The woods are full of sportsman; we have heard a dozen shots, I am sure, since we came up the hill."

"I have not met a soul," replied the lady, "and the shots were in an opposite direction to where Stop and I were,—weren't they, Stop, my fine fellow?" she said, as she stooped to caress the dog. "Dear Stop, he is faithful and honest, he is —doesn't fawn on me one moment and desert me the next. Do you like dogs, M. de Lantry?"

"Very much," he replied; "but I prefer the society of human beings."

"So I should suppose from your very sociable disposition. I observe that you make friends of your carpenter and shoemaker."

"And capital fellows they are," returned Marc. "You don't figure to yourself all the help those men afford to their poorer neighbours: yes, madame, I allow it—I feel that every man and woman is my equal; they are fashioned as I am, have heads and hands and feet as I have."

"You would make a friend, then, of that man?" and Mrs. Templar pointed to a dirty fellow, half tipsy, rolling from side to side of the road.

"I should not like to sit down to table with him, because he is unpleasant to come near, but I know that he is born with the same faculties that I have, and that the germ of all that is in me is in him. I have no right to despise him because he is unwashed and untaught."

"I would not believe that any other man who said what you say, lived up to his words, M. de Lantry. You were always a good creature. I remember how good you were to those wretched Gastineaux. I was kind to them also, and in return for my kindness they ruined me and that poor girl," looking at Louisa; "father and son were alike fatal to mother and daughter."

Meeting Marc's questioning eyes, she added, "I owed Professor Gastineau a debt which his son's conduct has doubled."

"I am sincerely grateful to you for your good opinion of me," said Marc; "you have never resented my being frank with you, nor will you now, I hope, when in return for your expression of good-will towards me, I tell you that, you are wrong, wrong to yourself as much as to others, in cherishing unforgiving feelings towards any one. I don't know what might be the offence Professor Gastineau gave you; but, let it have been what it would, the command is express, 'Forgive your neighbour, though he offend seventy times.'"

"*I cannot*," said Mrs. Templar; "I allow you to tell me that it is wicked. I agree with you; nevertheless, as long as I have my reason, there are offences I shall never forgive—no—never."

Louisa lingered a little behind the speakers. Mrs. Templar turned round, and, looking at her daughter, saw tears trembling like dewdrops on those long lashes she had gloried over with a mother's pride, when Louisa was a child. Louisa's

eyes met those of her mother; moved by a sudden impulse, Mrs. Templar said,—

"I am not alluding to anything you ever did, you silly child; do you hear?"

"That's right," said Marc, as Louisa hung fondly on her mother's arm; "comfort one another."

"As if I could mean ill by my own child," said Mrs. Templar, as they entered the courtyard of Clairefonds.

CHAPTER III.

THE CROIX ROUGE.

The next morning, while they were still at breakfast, her maid brought Louisa a scrap of paper, on which was written in pencil :—

"The colporteur by whom I send this, is a Protestant; he has an old Calvin Bible for sale; none of my flock, except you or Mrs. Templar, are rich enough to buy it. From the style of printing, it is of the date of 1572; I think it worth having. The man says he bought it from an Anabaptist family in the Vosges.

"Marc de Lantry."

"What's it all about," asked M. de Villemont,

eyeing the paper Louisa was reading, suspiciously.

Louisa read aloud what Marc had written; when she had finished, she said,—

"I suppose I may see the man here?"

"I am sure you have Bibles enough already," said M. de Villemont, in a surly voice.

"I'll buy it, my dear," Mrs. Templar said. "You don't receive many presents, nor spend much on yourself. Let us go and speak to the man in the hall," and Mrs. Templar left the room, followed by Louisa.

But they found, instead of the colporteur, only a girl of perhaps twelve years old. She held a large quarto Bible in her arms. Monsieur Jacques had bid her bring it to Clairefonds.

"Why didn't M. Jacques, as you call him, come himself?" asked Louisa.

"I don't know; he sent me with the book. I am to have ten francs for it."

"Are you his daughter?"

"No, madame, he is lodging with my father."

"And who is your father?"

"Pierre Roussel, the carpenter."

"Are you sure you are telling the truth—that he told you the price was ten francs?" asked Mrs. Templar.

"He said ten francs, and that you were rich and could afford to pay."

"Let me buy it, mamma?" said Louisa.

"No, I meant what I said; there's the money; I daresay the hawker is a cheat. Now, take the Bible, Louisa; I give it to you."

About an hour afterwards, the pastor came to call. Louisa was singing some of Claude Marot's hymns, the words and music of which were at the end of the old Bible. Mrs. Templar, for a wonder, was in the room, and Marc's large, kind heart dilated as he thought,—

"Here's the beginning, I hope, of a new era for these two women. The Lord be thanked." He added aloud: "Pray go on, Madame de Villemont; it is a treat to hear you."

She sang another hymn; when it was ended, Mrs. Templar said,—

"I have an idea your protégé is pious, for he

knows how to make a good bargain. I paid ten francs for the Bible, double its value, probably."

"I should not say so; if there had been the date, it would have been worth more, but what did you think of the man himself?"

"He did not come," said Louisa; "he sent Roussel's little daughter."

"I am sorry you have not seen him; I should have liked to hear what impression he made on you; women have a supernatural instinct in judging of characters. I am divided between his being a knave, a good Christian, or out of his mind. I heard of his being at Pierre Roussel's, and I was surprised at his not coming to my house, as our book-hawkers generally do, so I thought I would go down to the ville-basse to make some inquiries about him, in fact, to verify whether he had a licence. He was already in bed when I got to Roussel's, but I went to his room and asked to look over his books, and to see his licence. He made no difficulty as to showing me both; the books were in a box in a corner of the room, and his papers there also. He informed me

that he had intended to come to me as this morning, that he had walked far, and was footsore, and had, therefore, gone early to bed.

"I entered into conversation with him; at first he was reserved, but he gradually relaxed. His voice and choice of words denoted a person of some education; I guessed he came from Alsace; his accent had a strong German twang. When I was wishing him good-night, he inquired if he were likely to find a purchaser for an old Bible, and then I mentioned Madame de Villemont as the only Protestant in the town likely to give the price he wanted; he asked me for your address and a word of recommendation. As I was for the second time taking my leave, he again stopped me and said abruptly,—'Are you ever kept awake at night by thoughts about the Scriptures?' I answered, 'No; that I had always enough to do during the day to make me sleep well at night.' 'I have a question to propound to you,' he went on; 'have you ever considered what was the nature of Adam's sin?' 'For what do you take me, my good friend?' I asked; 'a believer

or an unbeliever in the Scriptures?' 'That's not the question, M. le Pasteur. In reading and studying the story of Adam, did it never strike you that Adam had already sinned before he ate the half of the apple?' I said, 'Certainly I had not thought that. He went on quickly, 'What's the meaning, then, that we are told that God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him an helpmate?" What made God see that necessity but the knowledge that Adam had already sinful desires—eh, M. le Pasteur?' 'You go too deep for me,' I replied. Without, as it were, hearing me, he exclaimed, 'And can you explain why the devil only appeared in person to Jesus Christ? I'll give you my idea, sir: Jesus Christ was innocent, and Satan could not enter into his thoughts, therefore he must tempt him externally; he can enter into the minds and hearts of all mankind.' 'Yes, yes, we are all possessed, and our sins should not be imputed to us.'"

"I say the man is a knave," exclaimed Mrs. Templar.

"He is crazed," said Louisa.

The two opinions were expressed simultaneously.

"Which of you has guessed right?" said Marc. "I confess the impression made on me was disagreeable. I came here intending to form my opinion by yours; but as you have not seen M. Jacques, I shall go and have a look at my new acquaintance by daylight."

"And what of that unfortunate creature we met the other evening?" said Louisa. "I can't get her out of my thoughts; if I could help to save her. . . ."

"Ah! that's a lost case, I fear. I met her as I left Roussel's last evening—she turned on me like a viper. 'You needn't seek me,' she said; 'I don't want you—let me alone, I tell you—why don't you go to those other houses? You might do the folks there some good, you can't me—I am on the road to hell, and I mean to go there—do you hear—I was happy once—I had religion—I am condemned, for I had light, and I chose darkness. I tell you, there's no hope for me; there's Martine drinks and lies; Suzette and Celestine—they thieve, and lie, and do worse—they may be

saved, but there's no hope for me; I have sinned the sin that's never to be pardoned. Go along and don't waste your time on me.' She struck me on the arm and ran away."

"What strange things you see and hear," exclaimed Louisa, aghast.

"Yes; very different from what you see and hear in your world of show and sham. Lift the curtain, however, and you'll find the same passions at work, the same vices, even the same crimes."

"Do you really think ladies and gentlemen are as wicked as the lower classes?"

"Do I think it? I know it; why else the terrific warnings to the rich which abound in the gospel?"

As M. de Lantry went out of the courtyard gates, Marguerite St. Georges came in. As soon as the music lesson began, Mrs. Templar retired to her own room. Presently M. de Villemont came into the salon; he was in his shooting dress. He said,—

"Louisa, tell your mother that I have taken

Stop with me to-day. I am going to try him as a retriever. Bredy will dine here; we have got permission to shoot in the royal forest," and he left the room with an "au revoir" to both ladies.

"How do you say 'au revoir' in English?" asked Marguerite, who was picking up some English words from hearing Mrs. Templar and Louisa speak to each other in that language.

"I don't remember any exact equivalent for it; we have no leave-taking so cheerful as au revoir; no, our good-by and farewell are blessings —they have in them no hint of meeting again."

"Dear Madame de Villemont, I should so like to learn English," said Marguerite.

"Don't ask me to teach you, dear; I could never teach any one English," replied Louisa, with quickness.

Marguerite was so accustomed to Louisa's always readily acceding to any request she made, that she could not help showing her surprise at this downright refusal. Nevertheless, Louisa said nothing explanatory, but proposed they should go on with the duet, "Giorno d'orrore," which they

had been singing when interrupted by M. de Villemont.

As Mrs. Templar never went out before two o'clock, the hour at which she and Louisa were in the habit of taking a cup of soup or chocolate together, Madame de Villemont had not thought it necessary to go and give her husband's message about Stop until after Marguerite's lesson was finished. Mrs. Templar was then neither in her own room nor in the garden.

"Where's mamma?" inquired Louisa of one servant after the other.

No one had seen Mrs. Templar go out.

"It's so unlike my mother not to ask for Stop; I cannot believe that she has gone to walk," observed Louisa.

"Perhaps some one in the street could tell us if she has passed by," said Marguerite.

They had to displace a group of tiny girls playing on the step outside the great gates; the eldest of them answered that she had seen the tall lady in black go up the street, right up to the top: she was walking towards the wood.

What a lovely day that was! not like an October day—warm as summer, and not a cloud in the blue sky. From where they stood, Louisa and Marguerite could see the first group of trees, the vanguard of the wood, which was Mrs. Templar's favourite walk, and the general rendezvous of the townsfolk. In the autumn, the country round Bar le Duc assumes a strange appearance, which we never see in England; the vine-covered slopes are then no longer green, but of a deep mottled red; and as for the woods, so full of limes and sumachs, they look all aflame when the sun shines; never more fiery than on this bright October day.

"I wish I had given M. de Villemont's message to mamma," said Louisa, more to herself than to Marguerite. As she spoke, a *billon*, loaded with grapes, went past; the driver was tipsy, a young man and a girl were behind, the girl carrying a large nosegay, with long particoloured streamers, the *bouquet de vendange;* they were all three noisily merry.

"I must find some one to go with me to the

wood," exclaimed Louisa, in a panic; "if I can get no one else, I must take Jacquot. Perhaps your uncle is at home," she said to Marguerite; "let us go and see."

"Bring me my garden-hat, Manette," she called to the old woman watching them from a window.

When Louisa and Marguerite reached the St. Georges' house, Petite Maman had just finished dressing the colonel for the day. The old gentleman was charmed to be the beautiful Madame de Villemont's escort; he was ready to go all over the world with her, at the same time he was confident that no harm would or could happen to Mrs. Templar—had not the lady perlustrated the wood in every sense for months?—she had never met with incivility. Every one respected grey hairs (the colonel's were dyed).

"All you say is reasonable," answered Louisa; "but it seems so odd she should have gone out without inquiring for Stop, and not at her usual hour either; a dog like Stop is a great protection, and then there are so many people

about shooting: it may be very foolish, but I am uneasy."

The colonel could not walk very fast over the stony road in his tight boots; once among the trees, on the paths strewn with fallen leaves, the old officer could better keep up with the impatient steps of his companion.

"My heart beats so," exclaimed Louisa, and stood still.

"No wonder, dear lady, when you walk so fast."

"It is not that," she said.

"You mean you are alarmed—a good sign," returned the colonel; "whenever I expected to be hit in battle, I always escaped; it's just when one believes oneself safest and happiest, that misfortune occurs."

Louisa tried to smile and look convinced. The wood was traversed in every direction by alleys. Louisa, followed by M. St. Georges, struck into one which ran north, for the reason that it led direct to the Croix Rouge; close to which was a bench, where her mother often rested. This large

red cross stood on the edge of the royal forest, just where the path Louisa and the colonel were pursuing, debouched on a high road, dividing the two woods.

When M. de Villemont sallied forth that morning, Mrs. Templar had seen from her bed-room window that he was followed by Stop coupled with Sultan.

"That's to pay me off, I suppose, for taking Louisa's part about the Bible," thought Mrs. Templar. "Mean fellow!"

She had gone as far as the salon door to complain to her daughter, but the sound of the two sweet fresh voices united in a duet, changed her mood.

"Poor Louisa!" she said to herself, "how she used to hate practising, and now it is her great consolation."

The old lady went back to her room, and made restless by a certain irritation produced by the incidents of the morning, trifling as they both were, and lured too by the glorious sunshine, she put on her bonnet and went into the garden, in-

tending to return to the house as soon as Marguerite should be gone.

Jacquot was busy cutting down faded annuals, and the walks were almost impassable for stalks and leaves. Mrs. Templar left the garden, and strolled on, almost without intending it, into the wood, and so on till she was in sight of the Croix Rouge. The only living things that had crossed her path were a weasel stealing from one covert to another, and a pair of blue jays, which she knew had a nest in the beech overhanging the cross. As she was emerging from the wood, she perceived a man seated on the bench by the side of the cross; his back was to her, but his dress, the shabby black coat of an itinerant preacher, with the box of books at his feet, at once led her to conclude this must be the very colporteur of whom M. de Lantry had been speaking. At the sound of footsteps the traveller half turned round; that nameless something which makes us recognize at any distance those with whom we are familiar, now caused Mrs. Templar to hurry forward. She stared at M. Jacques—for it *was*

he—for a brief moment, then, ere he could collect his thoughts, she had seized him by the collar of his coat, and shaking him with all the strength that passion lent her, she said, in the broken husky voice of rage,—

"Villain, cheat, swindler, thief! I have caught you at last—at last!"

These words were spoken in English, in tones scarcely human; they sounded like the snarl of a tigress. The man did not utter a syllable, he tried by main strength to make his assailant loose her hold; he did not, to the credit of manhood be it said, strike her—he strove to wrench his coat from her grasp, but Mrs. Templar was a strong woman, and her strength was doubled by her fury. He untwisted her fingers from his collar, she had him again by the breast of his coat, by his shirt, by his hair, uttering at the same time short sharp screams for help.

Her cries reached the ears of two sportsmen in the forest, and they hurried towards the spot from whence they seemed to issue.

"Bon Dieu! mais c'est ma belle-mère qu'on tue,"

exclaimed M. de Villemont, with a bound forwards.

At the sight of this new danger, the colporteur managed to throw Mrs. Templar down, and made off into the wood.

"Stop him—stop the thief!" cried Mrs. Templar; "don't mind me, I am not hurt. Stop him—stop him!"

"We'll send the gendarmes after him," said M. de Villemont; "no fear of his escaping, we have got this to identify him by," kicking the box of books.

Even as he spoke there was the sharp report of a pistol; M. de Villemont turned on himself, and fell to the ground.

"My God! he is shot," exclaimed Arthur Bredy, stooping over his friend.

It was at this instant that Madame de Villemont and Colonel St. Georges issued on to the road; Louisa had instantly caught sight of her mother's crouching figure.

"Mamma! mamma! what is the matter?"

"Go away, Louisa, go away; take her away,

you fools!" cried Mrs. Templar, half in French, half in English.

Colonel St. Georges, though he had no conception of what had happened, tried to keep Louisa back.

"Your mother is uninjured, dear lady."

"Somebody is hurt," said Louisa, with a shiver; "I see some one lying there; some one is hurt, pray, tell me?"

There was a dead silence; she pushed Colonel St. Georges on one side, and walked to her mother's side. Bredy had just wit enough left to cover the dead man's face with a handkerchief.

Louisa strained her eyes on the motionless figure, then said,—

"Why do you cover him? let him have air. Where's the doctor? Why don't you go for a doctor?"

"Run yourself for one, Louisa," said Mrs. Templar, with sudden presence of mind. "I and one of these gentlemen will remain here."

"I don't want any one with me," said Louisa, and rushed into the wood.

On her way she met three soldiers; she stopped and told them that an accident had happened, her husband was wounded, and lying by the Croix Rouge. Would they go and help? "I am running for a doctor," she added.

The youngest man of the three said,—

"If madame would tell him where the doctor lived, he should get there faster than she could."

She told him, and he set off at a quick run, but though the sturdy young soldier ran as swiftly as he could, Louisa was always even with him in the race.

CHAPTER IV.

DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY.

Dr. H—— was luckily at home, when Madame de Villemont arrived at his door. Louisa's tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, she could not utter a word, so it was well that the young soldier had remained by her side to explain that a gentleman had been shot, close to the Croix Rouge, and that the lady had come to fetch a doctor.

Dr. H—— pressed Madame de Villemont to go into his house, but Louisa shook her head; she stood at the door till she had seen him set off, then walked rapidly away to Clairefonds, luckily only a few hundred yards distant from the physician's house.

How she busied herself with preparations! She had the bed warmed, a fire made, the porte-cochère and the hall doors thrown wide open, that there might be no delay in entering. How long they were in coming! Presently there arose sounds in the street, such as of numbers running to gaze at some unusual sight. Louisa who had been watching from a window, no sooner heard that significant noise than she hastened into the vestibule from whence she could see all who entered the great gates. Her mother appeared first, leaning on Dr. H——'s arm.

"I have got everything ready, mamma," cried Louisa.

Four men followed the body.

"This way," said Louisa, "this way."

"No, no," interposed Mrs. Templar, "better here," and she opened the door of a spare room on one side of the hall.

Mrs. Templar took hold of Louisa, saying,—

"You must come and hear what the doctor has to say."

"How quiet he is!" whispered Louisa, strain-

ing her eyes on her husband; what does the doctor say? is there danger?"

"Yes, great danger; come with me, Louisa."

Louisa made no resistance, she allowed her mother to lead her to her own room. She knew what had happened.

There was, if you will, no overpowering anguish mixed with the thrilling horror with which Louisa met the knowledge of her husband's death. Nevertheless, she did grieve, she did suffer. Lives in common for four years are not suddenly sundered without pain. As she stood two days later by the side of the couch on which Raoul lay so passive, with that strange look of serenity that the face of the dead so often wears just before humanity begins to fade into corruption, she said,—

"I should not feel his death so much, had he been happier; it seems hard to die and not to have known what happiness is," she was speaking to M. de Blacourt.

Marc de Lantry had sent an express to the marquis, to make sure that the woeful news would be tenderly broken to Raoul's poor mother, and

M. de Blacourt had accompanied the dowager Madame de Villemont to Clairefonds.

The lady's grief was terrible to witness: she tore out handfuls of her grey hair; she raved; the house echoed with her shrieks; she called on God and man for vengeance. She would not see Louisa.

"She is nothing to me now," she said. "Had she been the mother of a child of my poor boy's, there would have been a tie between us; as it is, I wish never either to hear of, or to see her again. Ah! had he not married that Protestant, he might have been alive at this moment."

It was like a reprieve to Louisa, when the marquis told her, that her mother-in-law declined to see her. Those cries of agony which broke the silence of the night, made Louisa feel that her sorrow and regret would appear revolting indifference to the bereaved mother.

There was, of course, what we should call in England an inquest, at which the depositions of Mrs. Templar, Louisa, and M. Bredy were taken down in writing. Mrs. Templar was, indeed, the

principal witness. The questions put to her naturally elicited her former acquaintance with the person calling himself M. Jacques, known in the department of the Meuse as a Protestant colporteur. Mrs. Templar gave a candid account, without waiting to have her knowledge forced from her. She told how, and by whom the murderer had been introduced to her; how Professor Gastineau had presented him to her by the name and title of Vicomte Granson, how he had shown her documents and letters, which seemed to prove that he was the person he gave himself out to be; and how he had informed her that he was prosecuting his claims for the recovery of his paternal estate, which, he said, had been appropriated by a kinsman during the emigration of his—Vicomte Granson's—father. She explained that any doubts she might have had as to his being the son of that Vicomte Granson who had, she knew, accompanied the Comte d'Artois to Holyrood had vanished, when day after day he related circumstances respecting Scotch families of rank and station, her own among the number,

which only one mixing intimately in their society could have known. That, trusting to what seemed excellent credentials, she had given him her confidence to so great an extent, that she had actually by his advice sold out of the English funds, five thousand pounds, and had confided to him the whole of that sum to invest for her in the Docks Maritimes, and in the Forges of A——, which he assured her would pay 8 per cent.

The juge d'instruction asked,—

"And you ventured on this step without consulting other friends, or any notary?"

"I consulted no one but M. Granson," replied Mrs. Templar; "I had full faith in the man." She continued—"He paid me the first half year's dividends, and gave me what I supposed were the coupons of the shares."

Then Mrs. Templar related how the supposed vicomte had also induced her to take a young woman into her service, whom afterwards she had had every reason to believe an improper character, and that it was the overhearing, one evening, a conversation between him and this Laure which

led to a quarrel and the breaking off of all acquaintance between her and M. Granson. That the idea, however, of fraud had never presented itself to her mind, until the juge de paix of Versailles had warned her that the police had their eyes on that person calling himself Vicomte Granson; that immediately after her return to Paris she had discovered, on showing the papers he had given her, that they were only promises of shares, and not the actual coupons; that the receipt for the money he said he had invested in the Forges de A—— was a forgery. The company knew nothing of any M. Granson, and had never heard of the name of Templar." Mrs. Templar concluded by saying—"That she had never had any news of, or seen the false Vicomte Granson until she had met him at the Croix Rouge, and that she was firmly persuaded that the shot which killed her son-in-law had been intended for her. He had no motive for killing M. de Villemont, but every reason for desiring to silence the tongue which could disclose so much of M. Jacques' past life."

Mrs. Templar, when requested to do so, produced the papers by which she had been deceived.

M. de Blacourt and Pastor de Lantry both corroborated Mrs. Templar's evidence in many of the main particulars. When Marc was asked how he had failed to recognize Vicomte Granson in M. Jacques, he replied,—

"That, in the first place, there was scarcely any light in the room where he had seen him, that the colporteur had kept the bedclothes as high as his mouth, and had, besides, drawn his cotton nightcap almost over his eyes; besides which, the lapse of upwards of twelve years, had quite obliterated his recollection of the soi-distant vicomte, and he was not sure that even now, with his suspicions excited, that he should be able to swear to M. Jacques being Granson."

"I can swear it," said Mrs. Templar.

Hereupon the juge d'instruction remarked,—

"That it was strange how much more tenacious a woman's memory was than that of a man."

Mrs. Templar said to Marc afterwards,—

"You understand now how much Louisa and I

owe to the Gastineaux. I wonder how much more of evil to us is to come from that hated stock."

The funeral of M. de Villemont took place on the fourth day from his murder. More than five hundred persons followed the body, some from respect and sympathy, others from that idle curiosity which leads so many to go where others go. As the long procession, swelling in numbers as it moved on, had nearly reached the cemetery, it was met by two mounted gendarmes coming from the opposite direction, one of them having a man handcuffed, fastened by a leather strap to the holster of his saddle. The gendarmes drew on one side, saluting the hearse as it passed; it was an open hearse; the prisoner could see the coffin. The chanting of the priests and choristers ceased as they came on the group; in place of the holy song, there was a murmur of horror, for in an instant it was known that the prisoner was the murderer of M. de Villemont. Unpitying eyes turned to scan with curiosity the

features of M. Jacques or Granson. Poor wretch, you could see by the uneasy way he moved his head from side to side, his staring first at the sky, then at the earth beneath his feet, how he shrunk from the hard gaze of the multitude.

He had been captured at a village within a league of Bar le Duc, and in this wise. In the town there was an old Protestant nurseryman of the name of Chevreau; that dangerous individual in an argument—the reader of one book—André Chevreau loved an argument on any subject, best of all on religion—in his own opinion he always had the best of it with Catholics. There was one man who had beaten him with his own weapons, and that man was Jacques the colporteur, and Chevreau did not feel more friendly to Jacques on that account. When it was known that the hawker had shot M. de Villemont, Chevreau was among the most eager for his apprehension.

On the morning of the funeral, Chevreau was returning in haste from a commercial expedition, in order to hear Chanoine Maillard's oration at the grave, which was expected to contain violent

accusations against Protestantism, when he espied some paces in front of him, a soldier. The opportunity for talking was too good to be lost.

"Hi—hi, mon camarade," halloed Chevreau, in his cracked treble.

The soldier turned round, and laughed at the shrivelled little old figure hailing him as comrade.

"You are going to Bar le Duc? let us travel the rest of the way together my friend," went on the gardener. "Good company shortens the road."

"With all my heart," said the other.

Chevreau began the conversation by a cross-examination. "Of what part of France was the young man a native? how old was he? how long had he served? and pray, where?" At the answer of "Algiers," to the last query, Chevreau suddenly placed himself face to face with his companion, and looked him well over. "You have been so far, and come back without a decoration?"

"I had no good luck; it will come another day," replied the other cheerfully.

"And so you have been to the east, and you did not find out the cavern they say this beastly east wind comes from?"

"Where's that, I should like to know?" said the soldier.

"I'll tell you what," continued Chevreau; "if I weren't so old, I'd set off, and never stop till I had gone east enough, and then I would settle the matter by blocking up that sharp fellow's dwelling and get a cross of honour as big as two for my pains. Go to the east indeed, and do nothing!"

"I'll remember to look out for that same cavern next time I go, old gentleman," replied the soldier, adding, as Chevreau turned into a by-lane, "If that's your road, we must part company."

"Not a bit; I'll take you a short cut through the vines."

They had gone perhaps fifty yards down one of the precipitous stony paths that furrow the sides of all the hills round the Bar le Duc, when Chevreau said in a low voice:

"Do you see that man skulking along there to the left?"

"Yes, I do."

"That's the rascally colporteur who murdered M. de Villemont, and has made his beautiful lady a widow: a vile hypocrite; we must seize him."

The soldier shrugged his shoulders, saying: "We soldiers leave that kind of work to the gendarmes—it's their duty, ours is to fight. Good-day; I won't forget the east wind." And the young fellow turned sharp round, retracing his steps, until he again reached the high-road.

Chevreau, who knew every short cut, was at the Caserne de Gendarmerie, which stands at the entrance of the Ville Basse, in half an hour from the time he had seen Jacques creeping through the vines. The colporteur was quickly apprehended; he had been trying to satisfy his hunger with the grapes that had been left or dropped by the vendangeurs.

Chevreau was in time for the Chanoine's oration, the gist of which was, that Protestantism was the root of all evil: for instance, could any

one deny that the marriage of M. de Villemont with a Protestant lady had indubitably led to his being foully murdered by a disseminator of the false principles of Luther and Calvin?

"I could soon floor that fellow if I had him to talk to, for an hour;" said Chevreau to his neighbours.

The juge d'instruction lost no time in proceeding at once to the first examinations, or procès verbal, of the De Villemont murder. Jacques, alias Vicomte Granson, refused point blank to give any account of himself. He asserted that M. de Villemont's death was an accident, that he had never seen that gentleman in his life. He did not deny that he had fired (probably because the gendarmes had found a large horse pistol on him), and he was besides aware that M. Bredy, if not also Mrs. Templar, had seen him in the act of firing. He protested that he had aimed at a blue jay; after that he lapsed into obstinate silence. In the local papers it was announced after the simple relation of his capture, that "la justice informe."

The third day after his capture, the prisoner made a demand to be allowed to see the Protestant minister, M. de Lantry. The request was granted. His first words induced Marc to suppose, either that Jacques was insane, or intended to feign insanity, in the hope of saving his life.

"You remember what I said to you, sir?" was how he began the conversation. "I have been pursued by the devil for years—he has got me now. I never meant to commit murder, not even to kill that old witch who has brought me to this pass. Satan whispered to me to do so, to stop her tongue; I heard the words as plainly as I hear myself speak now."

"What you describe is by no means an uncommon case," replied Marc, quietly. "The spirit of evil dwells in all our hearts. Every one of us has to keep watch and ward against its suggestions. You will find such a plea go for nothing with your judges as an excuse for a cruel murder."

"Homicide, not murder," retorted the prisoner. "The old Jewish law, an eye for an eye, a tooth

for a tooth, a life for a life, exists no longer in any Christian country; I cannot be condemned for that which I did not intend to commit, which I had no motive for committing."

"True, as regards M. de Villemont; but you admitted but now, that the devil whispered to you to kill Mrs. Templar—the bullet hit the wrong person, but the intention to murder was there, M. Granson, for now I do perfectly remember you."

A sort of half smile crossed the adventurer's face. With a sudden air of braggadocia, he answered,—

"I snap my fingers at your juge d' instruction; a solemn young ass, placed where he is from interest, not merit—I laugh at your little snuffy procureur royal; they can't touch me. *Civis Romanus sum.* I am a British subject. I sent for you not for spiritual aid, but to beg you, as an old acquaintance, to forward my demand for the interference of the English ambassador."

"A very Proteus," said Marc. "However, believe me, whatever may be your native country—

I should not be surprised to hear you call yourself a Turk in five minutes hence—it does not free you from being amenable to the laws of the country in which you have committed a crime. Supposing it to be true that you are an Englishman, all that can arise from that fact will be some communication from the British Government, praying that you may have a speedy and a fair trial."

The prisoner mused for a while, and then said,—

"You will never persuade me that I can be condemned for anything but homicide."

"I am not your judge," said Marc. "I had hoped to find you sorrowing for the misery you have inflicted, sorrowing for the bereaved mother, the young widow—more than all, for the young man you so suddenly sent out of the world. I came here in the belief that you were repentant, for in my opinion you *are* a murderer."

"You have not much consideration for my feelings in using that term. Pray, M. le Pasteur, how do you know what you would have been, had

you been in my place? if you had had my temperament instead of your own? The force of circumstances makes us what we are—it's a mere chance whether a man turns out a hero or a rogue—the same qualities go to the making of both; it's circumstances, and circumstances alone, which decide. I have been a victim all my life to untoward destiny; we are doomed from our birth to be what we are. I see you are in haste to leave me, sir; I will not detain you longer. Be so good as to remember that I persist in my declaration, that I had no intention of killing M. de Villemont."

Marc, however, disgusted with the criminal's conversation and manner, sought an interview with the procureur royal, to inform him of what Granson, alias Jacques, had declared. "I own I believe his assertion," said Marc. The accused, himself, rendered this effort in his behalf of no avail. When the turnkey went the next morning to look after his prisoner, he found that he had hanged himself; he had evidently done the deed deliberately. The iron

grating of the window to which he had fastened the end of his cravat, was scarcely high enough to keep the feet of so tall a man off the ground, without his own determination. He had written in pencil on a fly-leaf of the Bible, left in his possession, "I save my judges the trouble of condemning me: my real name is James Mc——" the last syllable was illegible. "I was once an officer in the British army. *Requiescam in pace.*"

It would be worse than useless to waste many lines on this miscreant. The revelation of his real country and station accounted for his knowledge of Mrs. Templar's relations. Not long after the story of his crime and death had gone the rounds of the public journals, M. de Blacourt showed Louisa a paragraph in the *Débats*, elucidating how the pretended Granson had managed to obtain so many of the papers and letters of the real Vicomte Granson. This latter gentleman, an émigré, as his father had been before him, had served with the British army in Spain, and was killed at Vittoria. After his death, his papers

and valuables were found to be missing, and it was supposed that they had been abstracted by a man who had been cashiered just at that period, and was known to have been in M. Granson's confidence.

CHAPTER V.

YOUTH AND CRABBED AGE.

Two years have gone by since Madame de Villemont became a widow. Towards the close of that period, Fioretta von Ehrtmann came on a visit to her sister, Madame de Lantry. Fioretta scarcely looked a day older than she had done at Louisa's wedding. She was just the person to retain her youthful looks and spirits. She had no heart, and excellent health; no doubt she will be one of the fortunate ones of this world.

The sisters were in the garden, seated in a rustic bower of Marc's own contriving. In summer, Ismay passed nearly the whole day there, busy with her needle, yet not so busy, but that she could keep a watchful eye on the three children rolling and tumbling on the grassplot.

The little thatched pavilion was also Ismay's *salle d'audience* during the hot months.

"This is the sixth time we have been interrupted this morning," exclaimed Fioretta. "Have you never a quiet hour, Ismay? Must you always be at the beck and bidding of all your husband's congregation?"

"Of course," returned Ismay; "Marc cannot do everything." As she spoke, she threw down her work, for Edmée, her eldest girl, had fallen on a stone and cut her knee, and had to be comforted on mamma's lap.

"Tiresome child," said Fioretta, in an aside; then aloud, "Give her a sugar-plum. I have something particular to say. Edmée, there's a pet, don't cry, and aunt Fior will buy you a doll."

When the small Edmée was soothed into a subdued whimper, Fioretta said,—

"Do you know that Louisa and Gustave Gastineau will both be at the Prefecture soirée this evening. I would not miss the scene of their meeting for anything in the world."

"What do you expect to see?" asked Ismay. "The Proviseur is no longer the raw boy who did not know how to behave properly in society; he is a thorough man of the world, and depend on it, supposing he should feel any emotion, he is perfectly capable of hiding it."

"Of course, they will both do their best to appear indifferent, and they may manage to cheat strangers, but not me. I have an idea he got himself appointed proviseur here on purpose to be near his old flame."

"I hope not," said Ismay; "I don't believe he would have any better chance of pleasing Madame de Villemont, than he had of pleasing Louisa Templar."

"He is very much improved in appearance," observed Fioretta.

"He is grown uglier in my opinion," returned Ismay; "the expression of his face is very disagreeable."

"I don't dislike it; he has a thunder-cloud look which always creates a sensation."

"Thunder-clouds are not pleasant companions,"

said Ismay; after a little pause, she added, "M. Gastineau's life has not been of a kind to make him an eligible acquaintance for women; he is only fitted to be the hero of a melodrama."

"How severe you ultra-pious people can be," exclaimed Fioretta; "you can't exact the same rigidity of conduct from a man of letters, as from a pastor, my dear Ismay. You have no idea how his books made him run after in Paris, and what grandes passions he has inspired."

"I don't wish to know anything about him, and if his novels are celebrated, so much the worse for France; they deserve to be burned."

"Ah! but he says, it was that unfortunate first deception that ruined him, and made him take to naughty ways."

"I will not talk of him, Fioretta; I am sorry you ever read a line of his."

"Why do you allow him to visit here?" asked Fioretta.

"He comes to see Marc. I have nothing to do with him, and I hope you will adopt the same reserve."

Perhaps, Fioretta had guessed truly, when she conjectured that choice, not chance, had brought Gustave Gastineau to Bar le Duc. Gustave had achieved all that he had been ambitious of: he was one of the celebrities of the day, and he was now in a post, that of proviseur or rector of the Lycée of Bar le Duc, which placed him on a footing of equality with the préfet and other notables of the department. He might now, certainly, address Madame de Villemont, without being accused of much presumption. If to do so, had been his motive in obtaining this appointment in the town she inhabited, if his love had really survived six years of dissipated life; he had shown great self-mastery, for he had never yet sought to meet her. Once he had inquired of M. de Lantry, whether the story he had heard of M. de Villemont's death were true, and Marc had restricted himself to giving the precise details, including the discovery made as to the soi-disant Vicomte Granson, but Louisa's name had been mentioned by neither.

Marc, being a man, and judging as a man, had

pooh-poohed the conjectures of the two women, for though Ismay had not said so to her sister, she shared in Fioretta's belief of the motive which had brought Gustave Gastineau to Bar le Duc. Marc said, it was one of those common coincidences in real life, which are somehow supposed only to occur in fiction.

Louisa had not heard of Gustave being in the town, without agitation. She had a terror of meeting him herself, and she was further afraid of the effect his presence might have on her mother and M. de Blacourt. She felt as one who just emerged from a period of anxiety and trouble, and longing for nothing so much as repose, feels at the prospect of new complications and vexations. M. de Blacourt was at this moment staying at Clairefonds; he had been compelled to be much there after M. de Villemont's death.

Raoul had left a will, dated a couple of years back, by which, supposing he left no child, he constituted his mother, should she survive him, his heir, with remainder to half a dozen cousins

whom he scarcely knew by sight. Among other bequests was one of twenty thousand francs to Marguerite St. Georges. M. de Blacourt, astonished at the terms of the will, which could be regarded in no other sense than a proof of resentment towards Louisa, inquired of Marc whether there had been much dissension between husband and wife.

"No open disagreement," was Marc's reply; "but at the same time no one could have supposed they had any cordial affection for one another. Madame de Villemont had, however, always treated her husband with respect, and he could answer for it that she had wished to do her duty.

"Ah!" said the marquis, "none are so vindictive as those whose passions have not been worn or rubbed down by the wear and tear of the world. This will is a revenge for some secret wound inflicted on Raoul's vanity."

Very quickly after she became a widow had Louisa received letters from men of business as to the succession of her husband's property—letters

that were Greek to her. She had taken them to M. de Blacourt for explanation.

"But Clairefonds—they cannot turn me out of Clairefonds, can they?"

"I am not sure; they mean to try, you see."

"Have I nothing then?" asked Louisa.

"You have the dowry secured to you at your marriage."

"It will be dreadful to be turned adrift into the world," said Louisa; "I had so hoped this was always to be my home. And poor mamma! she is not able for a rough life now. Would my money be sufficient to buy Clairefonds?"

"No, certainly not," said M. de Blacourt.

Louisa looked very sad as she heard this decided negative: she answered,—

"It it is right that I should go, I must be resigned. Will you tell me what to do with these letters?"

The marquis could not leave this helpless young creature, so thoroughly incapable of defending her own interests, unaided. Up to that day there had been no resumption of their

former habits of intercourse, broken at the time of Louisa's confession of her luckless promise to Gustave Gastineau. Though her heart impelled her towards M. de Blacourt, though she longed to break through the reserve subsisting between them, Louisa was withheld by a doubt whether the marquis had not really lost all affection for her; hitherto she had had only a feeling of mortification at his having secured her a dowry; she would have been glad to thank him now, to tell him that she principally desired to retain Clairefonds because it had been his gift. She would have willingly put the question to him why, not liking his cousin, he had done so much to facilitate her marriage with Raoul? She wanted to pour out her inmost feelings, to beg him to forgive her petulance that day when she had decided her fate; to say, you were too good, too generous to me, I was ungrateful, but it was in ignorance—forgive me, and let me be to you the Louisa of other days! There was, nevertheless, some barrier to her saying this—a barrier she could not overleap. Was it in her, or was it in him? She

thought it was in him; one word said as of yore, and she would have spoken out; he seemed to rein her back from all effusion. As she sat before him with such scared eyes, such an anxious, helpless look on her lovely young face, she reminded him powerfully of the little Louisa of the Rue de Varennes, who had always run to him for help, in her child's troubles. In a voice of repressed emotion, he said,—

"Will you let me manage all these affairs for you? being in some sort your relation, no one can miscontrue my interference."

Louisa, still the same Louisa of old, seized his hand, and kissed it in spite of his resistance.

"Oh! will you? Whatever you think right I will do."

"You may trust me," he said.

"Trust you!" she said, in such a grand tone of reproof that he should imagine she *could* doubt *him;* then almost in a whisper, "You forgive me?"

"Hush! it's all forgotten, as if it had never been."

M. de Blacourt found in the dowager Madame de Villemont a spirit of hostility difficult to deal with. She took her stand on the circumstance that the sum recognized in the contract of marriage as Louisa's dowry had never been paid. M. de Blacourt declared that his gift of Clairefonds depended on the condition of a hundred thousand francs being assured to Louisa.

The dowager shifted her ground; she would pay that sum, but her daughter-in-law must quit Clairefonds. It was only by the sacrifice of a considerable sum of money that M. de Blacourt could reinstate Louisa as mistress of Clairefonds. When the suit was stopped, all he told her was, that she was now in safe possession of Clairefonds.

The day that M. de Blacourt announced his intention of returning to Paris—he had been, with only short intervals of absence, an inmate of Clairefonds for months—Louisa asked,—

"And when are you coming back?"

"I shall wait for an invitation."

"How I wish you were not going away at all; I shall feel so lonely when you are gone."

"You have the De Lantrys and the St. Georges, all your staunch friends," he replied.

"That is true, but none like you."

"Well, I am certainly an older friend than any of them. You sat on my knee nearly a score of years ago; still, I am not sure that it would do for me always to be here; however paternal I look, I am not your father."

"I am sure I love you as dearly as if you were," exclaimed Louisa.

He did not reply directly; at last he rose briskly from his chair, and said,—

"Well, well, my dear, I will see you again soon; in any difficulty write to me."

As he was passing one of the great mirrors in the salon, he stopped and took a look of himself.

"What a greybeard I am! Ah! one grows old!"

"Not you, indeed," said Louisa; "it's the light.

I look ten years older than I am in that glass." And she went and stood by him.

"We make a nice contrast," he said, and smothered a sigh.

"We look very well together," she said, affectionately.

"You grow every day more like what you were as the child Louisa."

"It's the calm of my life," she replied; "promise not to think the worse of me for what I am going to say," she added, almost in a whisper. "Sometimes I feel so happy; I can't help it."

"God grant you may have many years of happiness, my dear!" and he laid his hand as in benediction on her head.

She thought she saw tears in his eyes.

Many a victory won over self, for which there is no victor's crown. "Les plus vaillans sont parfois les plus infortunés," says Montaigne. All honour to those brave ones who dispute bravely, and inch by inch, the invasion of any meanness or egotism into their souls!

M. de Blacourt stayed away all one winter and

spring from Clairefonds, but keeping up an animated correspondence with Louisa; he had at last again yielded to her entreaties to come and spend the summer with her. The only change that struck him on arriving was in Mrs. Templar; he wondered whether Louisa was as blind to it as she appeared; all the old lady's bitterness and sternness were gone, she showed a childish obedience to her daughter, manifesting for her a sort of ecstatic admiration. If Louisa were long silent, Mrs. Templar would say, time after time,—

"My dear child, keep up your spirits; who knows what may happen yet?"

Once M. de Blacourt tried to sound Louisa on the subject, saying,—

"You are not uneasy about your mother, are you?"

"O dear, no. Mamma is very well in mind and body; she has nothing to vex her now, and that makes the difference you observe in her spirits. I assure you, mamma, is very well and happy."

M. de Blacourt believed that Louisa was doing

what so many do—she was endeavouring to ignore that which she was frightened to believe.

The reader has now a knowledge of Louisa's situation up to that evening in which she knows she is going to meet Gustave Gastineau—the successful man.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD FRIENDS MEET AS NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

Madame de Villemont entered the great salon of the Prefecture leaning on M. de Blacourt's arm. A slight flutter of spirits had brought back to her cheeks the delicate rose tint which had belonged to her girlhood. She was probably more touchingly beautiful at four-and-twenty than she had been at eighteen; there was more of softness and feeling in her face now, than then; but the heightened colour made her on this evening look like the girl Gustave had known and loved.

"She has more the appearance of a bride than a widow," observed one of a group of men gathered near the door through which she had passed.

Louisa was dressed in one of those shining pale grey silks that have high white lights.

"What splendid eyes! Where did an Englishwoman find those black eyes?" said another. "How those long lashes sweep her cheek!"

"Gare! Severin de Pressy hears you."

"I'll lay you any wager you please that she marries that male duenna of hers before the year's out," observed some one else.

A little circle of her intimates formed round Louisa. Colonel St. Georges placed himself (in spirit) at her feet; Marguerite was seated by her side; it was Marguerite's first soirée. Fioretta was there, trying to entice Severin into a flirtation; Madame Bredy with good stupid Arthur joined the party; M. de Blacourt stood behind Madame de Villemont's chair. Louisa strove to take her part in the conversation, to appear unembarrassed, but she had a sensation as if some power were forcing her to look in a certain direction. She resisted, conscious that she was resisting, for the space of, perhaps, ten minutes; at last, she was so overpowered by this unknown influence, that

she could not understand what was being said to her; she smiled and felt as if the smile had become fixed on her face. She yielded and looked.

Gustave was standing by himself in the corner of the room nearly facing her, his eyes were fastened on her. She moved uneasily in her chair, opened and shut her fan, turned to speak to M. de Blacourt, all the time wincing under the dominion of that fixed gaze. Again her eyes turned involuntarily to the proviseur. How altered he was: he had gained, as Ismay had remarked, the air of a man of fashion; he was no longer thin, he was broad of shoulder, of an upright carriage, holding his head high. The thick rough hair which she used to laugh at and to scold him about, had acquired a gloss like that of the raven's wing and waved softly about his temples. He had had no beard six years ago, now he had one both black and curly. In spite of all these advantages the proviseur was not a handsome man, and certainly not pleasant-looking as he stood gazing at Louisa

and forcing her to return his gaze. Presently Fioretta and Marguerite went away to dance. M. de Blacourt had acceded to the préfet's request that he would make one at a whist-table provided for the President of the General Council, then on his rounds. Madame Bredy, too fat to figure in a quadrille, and Colonel St. Georges too old, alone remained with Louisa.

The proviseur came straight to her, making her a most unexceptional bow and begging to recall himself to her memory. Louisa, though she felt as if she were dreaming, and though she had a sensation as if she were falling down a precipice, played her part nearly as well as he did. In right of being a woman, she ought to have showed herself the superior in self-possession. But she now understood the pain she had once given him; she was repentant and a little alarmed also, whereas he was nerved by an undying resentment. He took a chair by her side and began by inquiring, "If she liked Bar le Duc?"

"Very much," she answered.

He arched his heavy eyebrows and said,

"You astonish me. What attraction can this pretty gossiping country town have for you?"

"It gives me a pleasant home and good friends," she replied.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, with a sort of musing, absent air as if he scarcely understood what she had said.

Louisa, seeing him close, was struck by the deep lines of his face. Had she not known his age, she would have guessed him to be at least ten years older than he was. At one moment she thought he was falling asleep; she would have wished to change her seat, but she actually had not the courage.

Presently he roused himself, turned his eyes full on her, and asked,—

"So you believe in friends, believe in disinterested affection?"

"Indeed I do," she answered.

"Then I must suppose you are capable of what you have faith in? We only believe in qualities which we ourselves possess."

There was something inexpressibly painful to

Louisa in the way the proviseur looked her over. She drew her lace shawl close about her.

"Are you cold?" Was it only her fancy that there was mockery in his tone. Twenty times had she been on the point of inquiring after his mother and Antoinette, and twenty times had she repressed the inquiry. She confessed to herself that it was safer to keep to generalities; he might, and probably would, make her feel that she had no right to resume any intimacy. She herself was so busied with the past, that she made sure he must be equally so. Curiously enough, as he sat by her, speaking to her, she was fast losing the feeling of his identity with the Gustave Gastineau she had known. A tray with refreshments was brought to Madame Villemont. "Permit me," said the proviseur, and he presented her an ice with a nonchalant yet well-bred air. One of his hands was ungloved, and she remarked how smooth and white it was; the caterpillar had become a fine butterfly.

Louisa was thankful when Fioretta and Marguerite returned to her. Gustave relinquished

his chair to Fioretta. She welcomed him gaily and plunged at once into reminiscences, winding up with this giddy speech,—

"You and I, M. Gastineau, are the only unmarried ones of our old set."

"Yours the fault," he answered with a laugh.

Fioretta evidently took this answer as a compliment. "My romance is to come," she observed; "the others have finished theirs."

"Remember, however," he said, "that a rose has but a day."

The band was playing a waltz; Gustave exclaimed,—

"That music is irresistible, is it not?" His eyes where directed to Madame de Villemont as he said this. "Nothing more charming in life than Strauss, and a sylph for a partner. Do you dance?" Louisa was about to decline, when he bent forward and in a half whisper added,

"Will you introduce me to your protégée with the seraphic expression?"

Madame de Villemont said,—

"Marguerite, Monsieur Gastineau begs the honour of dancing this waltz with you."

Louisa calling him Monsieur Gastineau struck the proviseur as being as unnatural as his leading off a young girl to waltz, did Louisa. When he had Marguerite's arm within his, he turned his head to Madame de Villemont, and there was a wicked smile on his face.

"He has not forgiven me, he never will," thought Louisa, and something like regret fell on her.

"So you and the proviseur have made it up?" said Fioretta. "I am so vexed to have missed seeing your first meeting. How was it? did you shake hands, did you ask his pardon?"

"M. Gastineau is too well bred to refer to anything that could make me uncomfortable," said Louisa. "My dear Fioretta, if you have any kind feeling for me, do not rake up subjects better forgotten. M. Gastineau and I meet as new acquaintances—do believe it, otherwise you will always be making some allusion that will wound one or the other."

"How tragically you take the matter," said Fioretta. "You had much better have been frank at the first, allowed that you had been two silly children and made it up. Now, *you* will always be in an alarm."

"I dare say you are right, but I could not do what seems so easy to you; promise me, to be on your guard, Fioretta."

"I'll do my very best, and if ever you feel awkward with your old love when I am by, I promise to flirt furiously with him for your advantage."

Madame de Villemont was not aware that two persons had been watching her with almost an equal interest during her conversation with the proviseur. M. de Blacourt had early freed himself from the whist-table and had been a spectator of the meeting. Acquainted as he was with the previous history of Louisa and Gustave, he understood pretty well every change of her countenance.

Severin de Pressy was the other watcher. He had no other interpreter of what was going on,

but that singular power of divination bestowed by love. It was enough; he comprehended that the proviseur had some influence over Madame de Villemont, which he was using unmanfully.

He saw the malignant smile thrown back on Louisa. It seemed to Severin like the fatal glance from an evil eye. As soon as Fioretta had joined the waltzers, he went to Madame de Villemont. He did not ask her to dance; he was certain she was in no mood to do so, but he exerted himself to amuse her, returning to the subjects which in those happy days when he was a constant visitor at Clairefonds, had had so much interest for her. Louisa listened and answered coldly. The very gentleness and kindness with which Severin spoke to her, worried her; she wished he would leave her: he was in her way: she did not want the chair by her side to be occupied by him.

Marguerite returned to her chaperone greatly excited by the knowledge that she had danced with an author. "And he spoke to me," said the novice, "as if he had been any other man."

The proviseur was at that moment, as Louisa perceived, surrounded by a bevy of ladies—the préfette among them—and all eager for his attention. M. de Blacourt thought she had had enough of it, and came forward to tell Louisa the carriage was waiting. He offered his arm, and Severin walked on her other side; Colonel St. Georges took care of Marguerite. As they were leaving the room, the proviseur followed them. He it was who found Madame de Villemont's cloak and wrapped her in it; he it was who led her to the carriage.

"Is Clairefonds forbidden ground?" he asked, in a very low voice.

Louisa rallied her composure, and replied,—

"I shall be very glad to see you there."

He put her into the carriage with a care for which M. de Blacourt could have knocked him down, and Severin as willingly have shot him; instead of which, the three gentlemen exchanged bows.

For five minutes after leaving the prefecture, Louisa did not speak. When she recovered her

presence of mind, M. de Blacourt was questioning Marguerite as to her sensations at this, her first dance. He was always successful in winning the confidence of young girls; there was united in his manner, when he chose, a gentleness and a sportiveness which made them forget his age.

Marguerite avowed "that it had been just what she fancied fairyland must be; she had never imagined there were so many beautiful ladies in Bar le Duc, or that dancing could be so delightful."

When Marguerite had been left at her uncle's house, Louisa took the opportunity afforded by their being alone, to say to the marquis,—

"The proviseur asked permission to call at Clairefonds, and I gave it. Was I wrong or right?"

"You had no alternative, my dear," replied M. de Blacourt: every day his manner grew more paternal.

"I hope mamma will not be displeased," went on Louisa; "I should be very vexed if she were to

be rude to him ; it is so different now from when we were both young."

"The proviseur must have been aware that your mother was living with you, when he made his request; he cannot have forgotten Mrs. Templar's peculiarities of temper and opinions ; therefore, he means to put up with them."

"He has got on very fast, has he not?" said Louisa; "he is very young to be proviseur."

"He is a clever, energetic man, and ambitious ; besides, he has influential friends."

"You know something about him, then," said Louisa.

"Yes, his books have brought him before the public. I have never read a line of his novels myself, but I have been told that in spite of a deplorable laxity of tone, they show great talent. He is the spoiled child of a certain world of which you know nothing."

The carriage stopped. What the marquis had said was meant to warn Louisa, without exciting her suspicions that he was opposed to her renewing her acquaintance with Gastineau.

The warning was unperceived; what had fallen from him only served to whet her curiosity. Louisa thought a good deal about the proviseur before she went to sleep;—thought of him not in any consecutive manner, but very chaotically. The result had justified his assertion, that he had something more than common in his brains; he had been right in having faith in himself; he must have had great gifts to have enabled him in such few years to conquer a name and position for himself; and so then the lover she had disdained had been eagerly sought after by many. She blushed as she recalled one of M. de Blacourt's observations as to Gustave's popularity. She wondered that he had asked leave to visit her—that did not seem as if he were unforgiving. How would it be? Louisa had not answered that question when she slipped off into sleep.

M. de Blacourt did not breakfast with Madame de Villemont and her mother; he had a small suite of rooms to himself on the second floor. Of all domestic arrangements abhorrent to the marquis, that of three or four people always together

in one room was the most so. He said that "neither reading, nor writing, nor even good humour, could be hoped for under such circumstances. To make social intercourse agreeable, we must earn it by a certain abstinence."

Louisa therefore being alone with Mrs. Templar at breakfast, could tell her in English, without danger of being understood by the servant waiting, that she had met Gustave Gastineau the evening before at the prefecture.

"How did he come there?—is he the butler?"

Louisa was startled by hearing again the old sarcastic tone which her mother had appeared to have entirely lost after the tragical deaths of M. de Villemont and the colporteur.

"He is proviseur of the Lycée, mamma."

"And what's that?"

"The same as principal of a college in England, I believe."

"A schoolmaster, you mean."

"No, dear mamma; it gives the person who holds it an excellent position, I assure you. M. Gastineau is also celebrated as an author."

"An author!" repeated Mrs. Templar, with supreme contempt. "He had better have stuck to his cousin's shop."

Louisa began to despair of inducing her mother to be civil to the proviseur.

"Now-a-days, mamma, authors rank very high; they are the honoured guests of princes."

"Ah! well, my dear, I know that customs have changed since I was young: an author would never have been invited to my father's table. There's a story about Samuel Johnson and a screen—but my memory fails me sadly, Louisa."

The effect produced by the familiar and hated name was already evaporating.

"M. Gastineau asked leave to call here, mamma, and I said that he might come. I hope his doing so will not vex you."

"Nothing vexes me now, my dear." Mrs. Templar began to whimper like a child. "I don't wish to interfere with any one's pleasure, or to be a burden on any one."

"My dear mother, what makes you say such

unkind things, so without any foundation," said Louisa, kneeling down before Mrs. Templar, and caressing her.

"I feel in the way, my dear. Old people should keep out of sight — they've had their day: make the most of your youth, my dear. I am sure if it is any pleasure to you to see this proviseur, I'll do my best not to offend him."

"My visitors must do their best to please you, mamma; if they do not, they must not come here. Now, then, will you come into the garden and gather the flowers? no one can make a bouquet like you."

It was some time before Madame de Villemont succeeded in restoring Mrs. Templar's serenity. When at last she had been coaxed into the garden, she turned to Louisa with a jaunty air, and said: "This sunny morn, dear Roger, gars my bluid run cheery."

Tears welled up to Louisa's eyes, as she heard the tremulous voice, and looked at the bent figure and the haggard face. The image of Mrs.

Templar as she was in the Rue de Varennes and at Versailles, rose before Louisa so vividly that she seemed to see her mother of that time, standing by the side of the ruin of to-day.

"Come, no sad faces," suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Templar; "you have had real trouble enough, child; don't begin to be fanciful, you are at your very best now; who knows what may be in store for you?—it doesn't become you to look grave, Louisa—smile, my dear. What a merry child you were, never still an instant, and so sharp, there was nothing you did not understand. Lady Theodosia called you Smiler. Really I don't see any reason why you should look as grave as a judge, or go about hanging your head like a broken lily; walk, and dance, and talk, and you will soon get your beautiful colour back again. I am sure I've no idea why the young women of the present day should be so different from those of my time, now not one of them has the strength of a fly; I believe it's that constant stooping over books. My father said when a woman knew how to make a shirt and a pudding, and play 'Scots

wha hae wi' Wallace bled," she knew as much as was good for her. I have no opinion of this new-fangled way of educating girls, as if they were to go on the stage. I let myself be persuaded by that German busybody to take you to Paris, and what has it done for you?—you're a widow, and as for her girls, one is a married slave, and the other an old maid. If I were to have fifty daughters, they should be brought up on milk and porridge, and only taught to do white seam. Remember what I am saying to you, Louisa, when you have girls of your own; your old mother is as wise as her neighbours." And so maundered on Mrs. Templar, quite forgetful of Louisa having spoken to her of Gustave Gastineau.

Many an hour did Louisa spend hearkening to unmeaning chatter like this; she never tried to stop her mother by any overt interruption, no, not even by a moment's inattention. Mrs. Templar rarely spoke when there were visitors; if she did, her daughter knew how to obtain an appearance, at least, of respect for her mother's disjointed talk. No one, not even M. de Blacourt, was sure that

Louisa was aware that her mother's mind was weakened. She showed now the same passionate affection for her mother which had been so remarkable in her as a child.

CHAPTER VII.

SIGNS.

The proviseur did not come, as Madame de Villemont had expected, the day after the soirée at the prefecture. He allowed three days to elapse ere he made his appearance at Clairefonds. During those three days, Louisa went over in her mind every event of her life connected with Gustave Gastineau, and the more she thought on the subject the more surprised she was that he should seek to renew any intimacy with her. His having sent her his books, those cruel denunciations of herself, was a circumstance of itself sufficient to bar any intercourse between them. She decided that it would be wiser that they should remain as strangers to each other, and when the

third day came and went without a visit from him, she supposed that he, on further consideration, had come to the same conclusion.

During those three days, she read over the two novels he had sent her. This time of reading she dwelt longer on the description of his early love for the heroine. The episode was charming—redolent of the spring season of a human heart—it gave you the feeling you may have experienced when lying day-dreaming in some bosky glen, on the grassy bank of some clear, prattling stream,—so clear that you can see every pebble in its depth.

Tears dropped from Louisa's eyes over this picture of Gustave's first love. She did not say it aloud, but she said it in her heart, "I did not recognize the precious jewel I possessed; it looked so like a common rough stone."

The history of the hero's sufferings, the subsequent degradation of his character attributed to the treachery of the woman he had so adored, pierced Louisa's heart, but still there was a fascination for her in every bitter word—in every denuncia-

tion. "How he must have loved me," whispered the inner voice; and it added, "Can such a love die?" The question engaged all her thoughts.

The proviseur came one afternoon when Madame de Villemont had ceased to expect him—she fancied he was agitated, perhaps he was—and she exerted herself to make him feel that he was welcome. She was indignant with M. de Blacourt for being so little cordial, though, in fact, the marquis, penetrating her anxiety, entered more into conversation than his inclination would have led him to do. M. de Blacourt was sorry to see Gustave at Clairefonds; he knew Louisa thoroughly; he foresaw, from her present solicitous manner, what was to be dreaded from her desire to make up for the past, and he had a repugnance to the proviseur he had never had to Gustave Gastineau. Within the last two days the marquis had bought and read Gastineau's novels; he found in them talent enough and to spare, eloquence and passion also, but also an utter want of purity and principle. Gustave's mode of analyzing and of tracking the motives

of action betrayed a complete disbelief in disinterestedness. Now, M. de Blacourt reasoned thus:—Every writer consciously or unconsciously puts himself in his works, and he who is unable to describe generosity and self-sacrifice, who, when he tries to paint a virtuous woman, gives us a stupid doll, cannot have much feeling for or appreciation of goodness.

M. de Blacourt had sought to turn to some account those three days between the soirée at the prefecture, and the proviseur's visit. He had spoken to some of the leading men of Bar le Duc. They had all given Gastineau high eulogiums for his admirable performance of the duties attached to his post; the members of the administration thought well of him. The most fashionable ladies of the town, who saw all things, heard of all things, talked of all things, had nothing to say against him. The proviseur was well spoken of everywhere. To say that the marquis was reassured would be to state what was not the case. He was as much dissatisfied as ever, for he was of the opinion of the man who asserted that the

human being for whom every one had a good word must be but of little worth; the universally popular individual could have no fixed principles of his own, for fixed opinions indubitably bring the holder of them into collision with those of opposite views.

However, he had no ground for any warning to Louisa, and the marquis could not resist the mute pleading of her eyes, to be friendly to Gustave; but what he did was far from satisfying Louisa. What with the marquis's coolness and Mrs. Templar's awkward inquiries about his mother and sister, Louisa felt sure that the proviseur would never repeat his call. She was dull and dispirited all the evening. She answered an observation of M. de Blacourt's captiously, saying, "I can't understand why people should always be unkind to the friends of their friends. It is such a petty jealousy." She spoke with extraordinary petulance.

"Do you accuse me of being jealous of Gustave Gastineau," asked M. de Blacourt, with a pitying smile.

"I am sure you have no cause," retorted Louisa, "and that's why I wonder you should not have been more cordial to M. Gastineau; you know how ill I behaved to him."

"My dear," said M. de Blacourt, kindly, "beware of extremes."

He always spoke to her now, let her mood be what it might, like an indulgent father.

"Ah! poor Louisa," interposed Mrs. Templar, "she always was either crying or laughing; never could take things easily." Then she added, "Come here, child," and when Louisa was close to her, she said in a whisper, "Don't behave ill to M. de Blacourt—he is your best friend—he loves you—your mother tells you so—and, Louisa, better be an old man's darling than a young man's snarling."

Louisa put a sharp curb on herself, and received the unpalatable advice with a show of patience.

We have all read of those enchanted roads, out of which unwary wanderers could never find their way until the genius of the place dissolved the charm. Louisa had already stepped into one of

these magical paths, and her truest friend could not help her. All he could do was not to fret her spirit, and to wait until his aid could avail. He foresaw that the time would come when she would need a true heart and a strong arm.

Not an evening now save Sunday that Madame de Villemont was not from home. She accepted every invitation to dinner, soirées, or picnics. When she had no party to attend, she would go to Madame de Neuville's or the prefecture. The presence of one person had become necessary to her. As soon as the proviseur was in the same room with her, she subsided into tranquillity. The restless turning of her head, the inattention of her ear, the anxiety of her eye, all ceased. The tension of her figure changed into the languor of repose—her eyelids drooped, the long lashes making a shade on her clear cheek—her lips wore a happy smile, and when she laughed it sounded like a child's sweet laugh. She was often silent without knowing it.

Gustave watched her, divining her every motion with the penetration of a man who had for

years applied himself to the dissection of the female heart. She often quivered from head to foot under his fixed gaze, and only when every involuntary gesture betrayed her feelings, would he place himself by her side. She would then take a furtive look at him, and a glow of pride, the pride of a woman in the man she worships, sent a flush to her cheek. "How superior were those strongly-marked features, that pallor of the large brow, to the mere everyday handsomeness of Severin de Pressy. How she gloried in the sunken eyes, with their circle of bistre, as proofs of thought and mental labour.

She had no idea how transparent to every one was her preference. She did not know how her colour fluctuated when Gustave came near her or left her. Women rarely imagine they show the symptoms they so quickly detect in others. Louisa never perceived how men had begun to vacate their seat at her side whenever the proviseur approached. Some of the more mischievous of her acquaintance would speak slightingly of Gustave's talents, declare they considered him

over-rated, for the amusement of seeing her fall into the trap, and fire up in defence of him.

Severin de Pressy was the only one who persisted in offering to Madame de Villemont those attentions which she desired only to receive from another. He put a climax to his misdeeds when, on one occasion, he favoured her with his opinion of the proviseur's writings. He forced the subject on her, evidently that he might satirize them. He had no idea, poor fellow, on what doubly tender ground he was treading; he was a thousand leagues from supposing he was addressing the original of Gustave's heroines.

"M. Gastineau's style is smart, and dazzles at first," said M. de Pressy; "but as for ideality or poetry, strength or solidity, you seek in vain—a selfish, gross materialism pervades them."

Louisa wondered for an instant whether M. de Pressy had lost his reason; then she said, with biting coldness,—

"As our opinions totally disagree, we need not continue the conversation," and she turned her back on him.

Another person, and one who had hitherto been dear to Louisa, became, about this same time, an object of fear, and certainly of jealousy.

One morning, Marguerite St. Georges said abruptly to Madame de Villemont,—

"Madame, how shall I dress my hair when I am married?"

She had been having a singing lesson, and she was alone with Louisa. At this unexpected question, Louisa, who was still seated before the piano, turned round to look at the speaker, and saw Marguerite standing before one of the mirrors, smoothing with her hands the thick braids of black hair framing her face.

"Are you going to be married?" asked Louisa, astonished.

"Not yet," said Marguerite; "but when I do, this way of wearing my hair would not suit a married woman — it is only nice for a girl."

"It would do very well, if you marry while you are young. You would look a pretty figure in a cap with ribbons."

Louisa left the piano, and took her usual seat in the window, before her own little table, on which lay her favourite books, her desk, and work-box. The desk and work-box were elegant toys; they were not those of a person who habitually worked or wrote. Not an end of thread or silk hanging loose; the painted china stopper of the ink-bottle without a stain; the pens, the pencil-case, the velvet lining, all bright and fresh. The books alone had the appearance of being in constant requisition: a paper-cutter was in one, another was full of withered flowers (the flowers that Severin had taught her to know), serving as markers for favourite passages.

Marguerite left her station before the glass, and came and sat down at her friend's feet.

"Madame, how old is Mdlle. Fioretta?"

"Three-and-twenty," said Louisa.

"Of age, and two years more, and not yet married!" exclaimed Marguerite, her eyes as widely opened as their formation allowed. "Oh! that is terrible!"

"There are many others whom you know who

are not married, and yet they are older than Fioretta."

"True; but there is a reason in their case—they have no money, and they could not expect to be married; that is never done, to be married without a *dot.* I *have* a little money."

"My dear girl, would it not be better to live and die unmarried, than to marry some one who marries you only for your dowry?"

"Live like my aunt! Oh! dear madame, I would rather throw myself in the river. Oh! no, never!"

Louisa bent down, and looked fondly into Marguerite's face; the girl's eyes flinched from meeting those of Madame de Villemont.

"What has put this idea of marrying into your head?" asked Louisa.

Marguerite played with the trimmings of Louisa's dress; then, with very red cheeks, and an attempt at a laugh, she said,—

"It can't be wrong to wish to be married; so many good people are married. You think me very naughty, I see," went on Marguerite, tapping

Louisa's hands, to rouse her from a reverie into which she had fallen.

"Not at all," replied Madame de Villemont, drily; "French girls are so used to hear marriage discussed as a commercial affair, that they talk of marrying as they would do of taking a house or going into business."

"And in your country, madame, is it different?"

"The persons who marry usually choose for themselves; they are allowed to know something of one another; and generally they have a little affection the one for the other before they are tied together for life."

"That does seem a better way," said Marguerite. "Madame, did you ever see Mdlle. Marsan Dupont?"

"Yes, I have seen her once or twice."

"Is she fair or dark?"

"Fair, if I remember right, with a high colour."

"Did you think her pretty?"

"Not very; but she has a nice figure."

"They say she is very pious," said Marguerite; "spends almost all the day in church; and she has eight millions, they say, and that she could marry any one she pleases."

"As for the eight millions, I doubt the fact; but even with the quarter, she will not need a lantern to find a husband," answered Madame de Villemont.

Louisa never thought of asking herself what connection there could be between Marguerite's projects of marrying and Mdlle. Dupont's personal appearance, or she might perhaps have recollected that it was rumoured that Mdlle. Dupont was to be married to Severin de Pressy. Louisa never so much as remembered M. de Pressy's existence; she was quite absorbed by a ridiculous pre-conception.

It is a way women have, that the moment they seriously care for a man, he becomes the only man worthy of affection in the world. If they suspect any girl or woman of being in love, they are stone-blind to the probability, or even the possibility, of its being with any other than the

one they themselves prefer. On the smallest pretext they become jealous, and therefore unjust. While Marguerite had been so suspiciously questioning her as to Mdlle. Dupont, Louisa had been weaving a romance of her own—the foundation for which was Marguerite's praises of the proviseur. Poor little Marguerite had still much of the terrible penetration of children (a gift which seems to diminish in proportion as experience augments), and, to give pleasure to Madame de Villemont, she would often talk of M. Gastineau, ask manifold questions as to his writings, and speak admiringly of his being so good-natured to such a poor ignoramus as she was.

Louisa now remembered all this, and at once jumped to the conclusion, that Margaret's sudden and anxious thoughts about marrying, were connected with this admiration of the proviseur.

To her own distress, Louisa began to feel that the presence of Marguerite was disagreeable to her. She would say to herself, why should I feel so resentful to her? she only expresses the current habits of thought of those about her.

Louisa tried to blind herself to the state of her own feelings; she yet held back from self-examination. She did more, she began to occupy her leisure hours with speculations as to the likelihood of Marguerite attracting the proviseur, and fancied herself sincere when she decided that it was no affair of hers. She was cured of this self-deception by the help of Fioretta. This young lady had hitherto found flirting a very amusing pastime. She practised her powers on every man she met, and, of course, her former acquaintance, the proviseur, seemed to her worthy game to be brought down by the shafts of her vivacity. But he declined her every challenge, which piqued the thoughtless little German into using the more subtle weapons of sentiment. She began, at first, by feigning a preference; a dangerous play, which often turns into sad earnest. Suspicious symptoms of a real malady were soon manifest in Fioretta—she took pleasure in saying disagreeable things of and to Louisa. It happened that Fioretta had been present at a conversation, when some one had remarked on the extreme youthfulness of

Madame de Villemont's appearance; adding, that with such rare beauty, it was surprising to see her so unspoiled by admiration, and as simple and natural as a child.

Gustave Gastineau had smiled ironically, and had said, "I by no means suppose that Madame de Villemont acts a part—simplicity of manners belongs to her class; but it would be absurd to suppose that a married woman of four-and-twenty can really be unsophisticated. No, no, the height of art is to appear like nature—that is why I admire the perfection of her manners."

Fioretta repeated this observation to Louisa, in whose bosom it rankled. The next time she and the proviseur met, she treated him with reserve, not unmixed with hauteur. He had shown no little astonishment at this unexpected change, and had been all the evening moody and depressed. How innocently Louisa rejoiced over what she accepted as a proof that she had the power to make him gay and gentle, or gloomy and savage. It was on that occasion that M. de Pressy had the pleasure of seeing Madame de Villemont manœuvre

skilfully to avoid himself, that she might be handed into her carriage by the proviseur. Severin was so close to them, that he heard Gastineau whisper, "What crime have I committed?" and Louisa reply, "I could not help it—I have been vexed by hearing how ill you think of me."

"I think ill of you!" exclaimed Gustave, and the intonation was that of an adoring lover. "You *must* explain to me what you mean."

"Not now," returned Louisa.

She went home that evening, her heart the abode of faith, hope, and charity.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MERRY, MERRY DAYS WHEN WE WERE YOUNG.

Louisa knew now what it was to be happy. Every faculty was in full play. Every feeling, every sensation, every enjoyment was doubled, nay quadrupled. The tables of the salon were loaded with books—reviews, magazines; heavy-looking volumes in German, French, and English—her music had been resumed with enthusiasm.

"Gone to school again!" exclaimed M. de Blacourt, as he watched her poring over Schiller with a dictionary by her side.

"I am so ignorant, so lamentably ignorant!" sighed Madame de Villemont.

"You are spoiling your eyes and complexion," said Mrs. Templar; "stooping after dinner will give you a red nose—don't, my dear."

"Will it, mamma?" and Louisa rose and looked at herself in a glass. She saw how beautiful she was, and some loving thought awoke a smile. It was not that she cared to possess her beauty, but that she had it to give away. Every fibre of her being was vibrating with happiness. She was in that phase of feeling when a woman entirely forgets herself to think solely of the one she loves; when her personality is lost in his; in short, when the love she feels, gives her greater happiness than that she inspires. Understand, Louisa had never confessed to herself that she loved. She only acknowledged that the world was beautiful, and that life was a beautiful thing. She was breathing that magic atmosphere which makes those who inhale it, see everything *couleur de rose*. She could perceive only goodness in every one she met; she had a ready sympathy for every call on her attention; her voice was softer, more caressing, her eyes

found pleasure in all they rested on. She was never tired, never ruffled. It is better for us all to have felt once in our lives as Louisa then did; it humanizes us, makes us more indulgent, and indulgence for the errors, sympathy for the sufferings of others, bring blessings to the giver as well as to the receiver.

At four o'clock of every afternoon, Louisa might, with certainty, be sought for in the covered walk, overlooking the Polval Road. The view was well worthy her seeking. The vines on the hill-side nearest to her were at that season of a rich green with the sheen and shade one sees on velvet; beyond, there were fields of golden corn; the distance blue, deep blue, save where the sun shone, bringing out chalky headlands, or fallow ground with deep reddish tints; the sky was of the faint azure of midsummer with undefined downy white clouds in masses—vines and woods and hills were all mottled with light and shade.

The Charmille was no doubt a most inviting walk, and you might easily have supposed that Louisa went thither daily to enjoy the prospect, or

she might go there to meditate and speculate on the difference of human lots, as displayed in herself and those vine-dressers opposite, working for hours and hours with bent backs, which at last never straighten. But if you caught the bright eager expression of her eyes, you would comprehend that she was not day-dreaming, under the soothing influence of the hour and scene; you would guess that the view was unseen by her; you would perceive that all her attention was fixed on that bit of road, some hundred feet below, which was visible from where she walked. She came to the Charmille every day with the rosy flush of expectation on her face; three times out of seven she returned to the house wearing the livery of joy. To-day she is under the shelter of a wide-spreading clematis, its purple flowers streaming over her head and shoulders; she presses one hand to her left side, to try and control the tumultuous beating of her heart. When Louisa had first adopted the habit of going daily to the Charmille at four o'clock, the clematis was only in bud.

Screened herself from sight by the wavy streamers with their purple flowers, she sees at length a man's figure appear on the bit of road, visible from her leafy covert; she drew still further back into the shady nook as the gentleman in black, lifting his hat in salutation, showed that he perceived her.

Gustave Gastineau ran up the steps leading through the vine to the garden of Clairefonds, and in a minute or two he was with her hand in his. The expression of happiness in her face was more than he could bear; his eyes drooped before hers.

"How late you are!" she exclaimed, involuntarily; then hastily adding, "I mean that it is later than your usual hour for calling."

"I was detained," he said; "the préfette waylaid me, she wants me to write her a play; she and Madame de Neuville have taken a new whim in their heads: they are going to have private theatricals."

"And shall you write something for them?"

"Probably not; these ladies imagine an author

to be of the nature of Robert Houdin's wonderful bottle; you have only to ask and to have, comedy, tragedy, farce, or melodrama; to free myself from these dames, I had to promise to ponder over the matter."

"You look tired," said Louisa; "will you come into the house, or sit down here?" and she pointed to a bench under the clematis.

"Let us stay here," said Gustave. And they sat down side by side on the same bench, with the purple flowers waving over their heads. A long heavy spray lay like a wreath among Louisa's clustering hair, for she had thrown off her garden hat when they entered the shady recess; the delicate pink fluttered on her cheeks as she felt Gustave's eyes dwelling on her face; she was still as a statue, save for the gentle signs of breathing.

"You should be painted just so," said Gustave, in a low voice, thick with emotion; "just so," he repeated.

Louisa, listening to tones so full of repressed passion, turned pale; she was seized by that mys-

terious dread which clutches at a woman's heart, when she expects to hear from the lips of the man she loves the words that will seal her fate. Very pale she had been, but she became of a deadly white when, instead of uttering words of tenderness, Gustave suddenly burst into a laugh—she gave him a startled glance—Gustave's eyes were turned from her.

"I was thinking," he said, in a quite matter-of-fact voice, "of my conversation with those two great ladies. How they bespattered me with flattery, and in such a flowery style; I was their dear friend, their poet; they avowed with charming insincerity that they were aware they could not be good company for such as me, but still they knew how to value genius; why did I never go to see them but by formal invitation—a man without domestic ties, what solitary hours I must pass? Not solitary, I assured them; I generally spent my evenings with a very pretty and pleasant woman."

Louisa's lips formed the word "Who?" but she refrained from uttering it; she had the con-

sciousness that Gustave was meaning to pain her. She excused him: "He cannot forgive me yet, he does not know how I repent of my cruel folly." She said aloud,—

"I do not perceive much flattery in what you repeat; I am sure those ladies meant what they said."

"You, Madame de Villemont, seriously believe that Madame la Préfette and Madame de Neuville consider *me* as their equal, *me*, Gustave Gastineau, one of the people. You believe that Madame de Neuville would give me her daughter, if I asked the young lady in marriage?" Gustave's stern black eyes were searching Louisa's face.

"Ah!" thought the silly one, "he wants to know if I think of the difference of his rank and mine, and so believing, she answered,—

"Yes, your position puts you on a par with Madame de Neuville."

"My position," he repeated, scornfully; "but I have the unwarrantable pretension to wish that Gustave Gastineau, *the man*, should be married for himself, and not for his position."

"I was speaking of a mother, who would of course take position and fortune into consideration; the daughter——"

"Ah! daughters—they are always so ingenuous, so disinterested, they only care for a man's heart," interrupted Gustave.

The conversation had taken an unlucky turn : a little more in the same strain, and it must become personal. Louisa said, with an effort to smile,—

"Do not let us quarrel about Madame de Neuville's sincerity."

"I was not thinking of Madame de Neuville," he said.

Louisa resolutely changed the subject by saying she had been delighted with the book he had lent her.

"What was it?" he asked, carelessly.

"Maurice de Guérin."

"And so you liked it? He writes much about the clouds, doesn't he, and about the inner eye and the tabernacle of humanity." Gustave spoke mockingly. "Guérin was too much given to introspection and to analyzing the minds of others

—a sure way to grow dissatisfied; he died just in time for his reputation."

"You make me half ashamed of my liking for the book, but once I am interested I cannot judge or criticize."

"That is to say, you are a thorough woman?"

Louisa was silent for a little, then she said,—

"I wonder why it sounds like a reproach to say, you are a thorough woman?"

Gustave laughed.

"Perhaps because Shakspeare has said, 'Frailty, thy name is woman!'"

Louisa was nettled, and retorted,—

"I once heard some one say, that if lions and tigers could speak, we should find that they thought of mankind pretty much as mankind thinks of them."

"Your argument does not apply to women; they can speak, and pretty loudly too, in their own defence."

Louisa, turning suddenly to her companion, said,—

"I have a favour to ask of you." As she said

this, she looked full at him; he met her eyes, and she saw him change colour so violently that she stopped.

"A spasm," he explained, passing his hand across his brow.

"Are you suffering?" she said, in a voice that betrayed her.

"Yes, very much," he answered, abruptly.

"What can I do?" She half rose from her seat.

"Nothing; a moment's quiet, if you please."

He could see the effort it cost her to say nothing, do nothing.

"Have you any objection to walk?"

"None," she replied; and they walked slowly up and down the Charmille. Louisa never knew how nearly, when Gustave met her pleading eyes, he had renounced his revenge and fallen at her feet.

After two or three turns, he asked, in a ceremonious manner,—

"What commission was it that you were about to honour me with?"

"Not a commission," said Louisa, "but a prayer. If you do write anything for the private theatricals you spoke of, pray don't say bitter things against women—don't—for the sake of the merry, merry days when we were young."

She said the last words in English. She had never before alluded to the past. She did not perceive the effect her speech had produced; did not see the savage expression of his face, for she had looked down in proffering her petition; but the concentrated fury of his voice made her shiver.

"Do not invoke the past to me, Madame de Villemont; to do so, you must either be without sense or feeling, or believe me to be a very forgiving Christian."

"I meant anything but to offend you," she said, with great humility.

"Merry days, merry days—a cruel mockery!" he muttered.

"No, indeed—a thousand times no! I was stupid, awkward—but, oh! indeed not unfeeling, not mocking!"

It was impossible to disbelieve the truth of Louisa's defence; useless to speculate as to what might have been the result of their having at last broken the icy silence in which they had shrouded the passages of their young life; for, to Louisa's dismay, she at that instant heard Fioretta's high metallic voice calling,—

"Where have you hidden yourself?"

Gastineau went forward at once to meet Mdlle. von Ehrtmann; Louisa lingered behind a moment to master her agitation. Five minutes more, and she and Gustave must have come to an understanding; he would have forgiven her, and—— Louisa could scarcely restrain her tears. Why had Fioretta come now at this hour, when she had never done so before? She stilled the quivering of her lip, though she could not stop the aching of her heart. She heard Gustave saying, in a cheerful voice,—

"You will find Madame de Villemont in a bower of flowers."

"Quite like old times, eh! M. le Proviseur?" was Fioretta's answer.

Cruel Fioretta! and Louisa remained where she was, waiting for his answer.

"Curiously enough, mademoiselle, we were just laughing over those same old times."

Louisa did now again, what she had so often done before with regard to the proviseur—she interpreted his words kindly, and believed that he was trying to shelter her from Fioretta's indiscretion. A generous nature is apt to give to the conduct of others elevating motives. Strengthened by her belief in his protecting sympathy, Louisa joined her visitors. She was astonished to see Marguerite St. Georges with Fioretta, for Marguerite had been at Clairefonds all the morning.

"Confess you are puzzled as to what could have made us intrude on you at this sacred hour," said Fioretta, with a malicious, defiant smile.

Louisa had learned by this time that the safest course to pursue with Fioretta was to take no notice of any of her allusions. Louisa had come to acknowledge the truth of those words of her mother's—"Fioretta is dangerous." The German

girl had a sly way of her own of misrepresenting; she could have blackened the purity of an angel, and yet claim not to have violated friendship or benevolence. It only needs a good share of audacity to do this, together with a ready, ringing laugh, to show, in case of detection, that all is meant in play. Aware that she was no match for Fioretta at her own weapons, Louisa frankly asked,—

"Why *did* you come?"

"Because we expected to meet M. le Proviseur," said Fioretta, coarsely. "Marguerite and I have a request to make to him."

Gustave turned to Mdlle. Marguerite, who was blushing furiously.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "you can have no request to make to me—lay your commands on me."

"That is very gallant, only it is not true," said Fioretta, sharply. "If Marguerite were to bid you jump down that precipice, would you do it?"

"I expect no such absurd commands from

Mdlle. Marguerite," said Gustave, with a reverential air quite unusual to him; usually, he was either reserved or careless with women.

"Pray, my dear," said Fioretta to Marguerite, "make use of your power; give your orders to your slave."

"But I have none to give," said Marguerite, going close to Madame de Villemont. Louisa did not offer any encouragement to her little friend.

Fioretta went on,—

"M. le Proviseur, as Marguerite St. Georges is resolved to play her part of *ingénue*, she cannot venture further than a yes or no, so you must be so good as to listen to me. We have heard that Madame de Neuville is going to have private theatricals, that you are to be author, manager, *amoroso*, &c. &c., and we have come humbly to petition you to obtain invitations for us."

"I will, be assured, mesdemoiselles, make the petition," said Gustave. "A request from Madame de Villemont, perhaps, would have more success."

"Not at all," said Fioretta. "You are the Jupiter of the Bar le Duc Olympus. We recluses of the ville haute hear what passes in the councils of the goddesses."

"How is it you have already heard of what has only been thought of during the last day or two?"

"Monsieur, it is the penalty attached to celebrity, to enjoy no secresy. "You were au fait, I suppose?" addressing Louisa.

"M. Gastineau told me of the project only within the last half hour."

They had been hitherto standing still. Fioretta said,—

"Now, then, having had our petition graciously accepted, we will take our leave." She added, in a half-whisper, to Gustave, "You are very good to be so civil, when you could beat us for the interruption."

"You are bent on quarrelling with me," he replied; "but you will find me obstinately peaceable."

The Charmille was too narrow to allow of

more than two persons walking abreast. Madame de Villemont walked on before with Marguerite; when they turned into the broad alley leading to the terrace which ran along in front of the great salon, the proviseur came forward and walked by Marguerite.

"Are you fond of the theatre, mademoiselle?"

"I have never seen a play, monsieur."

"The provinces are very rigid to young ladies," said Fioretta. "Church is the only theatre they allow to maidens."

With a sudden explosion of frankness, Marguerite said to the proviseur,—

"I wish very much to see a real play, and I should like to read your books."

The colour mounted to his temples; he said, hastily,—

"Mademoiselle, I beg—I entreat——" Marguerite looked in surprise at him.

Louisa came to his aid.

"My dear Marguerite, your aunt has laid an interdict on all novels. I once begged her to let you read *Cinq Mars*, and she refused.

"Yes, but I thought I might read M. le Proviseur's."

"Mademoiselle, you have too good an opinion of me: one day I hope to write something worthy of your attention."

Fioretta, tapping the proviseur's arm with her parasol, said,—

"You have read *Faust?*"

"I have," he replied.

"I am sure I can't exactly say why, but really you and Marguerite remind me of the Doctor and Gretchen; she displaying such simplicity and ignorance, and he so cunningly reverential and flattering; it did not end well for your namesake, Marguerite."

"I must refresh my memory," said Gustave, "for I confess I have no recollection of any scene in *Faust* that can apply to Mdlle. St. Georges and me."

"I do not profess to be ignorant," said Marguerite; "I am ignorant, and I should be more so but for dear Madame de Villemont." The girl slipped her hand within Louisa's arm. "My aunt

and uncle always tell me to bless God for giving me such a good friend."

Madame de Villemont had put on her large garden hat before she had come forward to meet Fioretta. As she turned round to answer Marguerite's caress, Fioretta exclaimed,—

"Good heavens! how pale and tired you look, Louisa."

"I am a little tired. I should be glad to sit down." They were all going up the flight of steps as Louisa said this. "You will come in—will you not?" she asked, opening the glass doors of the salon.

"I have already intruded too long," said the proviseur. "Madame, I have the honour to wish you a good-day."

"Go and lie down, Louisa; you are ready to faint," said Fioretta, with just a touch of feeling in her voice;—she was almost sorry for having tried to worry and vex Madame de Villemont.

"May I stay with you, dear madame?" pleaded Marguerite.

"Not now, dear; there's nothing the matter

with me, except that I have been standing too long. Good-by." And she kissed Marguerite on the forehead.

As the proviseur walked away with the two young ladies, Marguerite said,—

"I fear that Madame de Villemont is ill; her lips were like ice."

"She's such a nervous creature," said Fioretta. "If she were really as delicate as M. de Blacourt would make every one believe, she must have been dead long ago."

Neither the proviseur nor Mdlle. Marguerite made any reply to this observation. Gastineau left the ladies at the St. Georges' door.

"I think M. Gastineau admires Madame de Villemont very much—don't you?" said Marguerite, as she and Fioretta stood together before entering the house.

"Perhaps," said Fioretta; "he was madly in love with her when he was a boy; but I have an idea that——"

She stopped.

"That?" repeated Marguerite, interrogatively.

"I have no foundation for what I am going to say, but I fancy he doesn't admire her as Severin de Pressy does. Which would you prefer, Marguérite, the proviseur or M. de Pressy?"

"Marguerite will prefer him whom God sends her, Mdlle. Fioretta!" exclaimed Petite Maman, putting her head, covered with a night-cap, out of a window on the ground floor.

"I am off," said Fioretta. "Adieu!" And she ran away, light as a gossamer which sows a weed wherever it lights.

CHAPTER IX.

NEW PROJECTS.

As soon as her visitors had left her, Louisa went up by a back staircase to her own room—she must be alone, quite alone. She sat down and closed her eyes to all outward things—she felt annihilated; no strength in her body, no courage, nothing, nothing but a faint wish that it were all over. This state of prostration was followed by one of fiery indignation. He was revengeful, unmanly, he enjoyed torturing her—there was something of the tiger in him—the tiger played with its victims. Ismay had been right in warning her against any renewed intimacy with him. Well, well; she had thought he did still love her in spite of all,—thought so till to-day. He had left

her no possibility of believing *that* any more: who could ever have imagined that Gustave Gastineau could be harsh to her, almost insulting. There was only one way left for her now: if she wished to keep her self-respect, or to be respected by others, she must go away; she would leave the field to those ladies who made so much of him. If he married Marguerite, she hoped he would be happy; she would propose that very day that they should go to the Pyrenees, or to Baden-Baden: her mother's health might be the pretext, or what need of a pretext? people went to those places for pleasure, and why shouldn't she?

For a few minutes Louisa felt invigorated by this decision. As the dinner-hour approached, a reaction took place. Once she had made the proposal to go away, she must abide by it: she had been over hasty so often; she must pause, lest she should be imprudent again; she ought not to expect to be so easily forgiven; she had inflicted a wound, she ought to have patience till it was healed—ah! if they were ever friends again, how

she would make him repent having given her all these painful hours—she could *not* believe him indifferent. Why should he seek her almost daily if he hated her, and then had she not had other signs of interest? Her paleness vanished as she recalled how one evening when they had been looking over an album together, he had laid his hand on hers—and held it long so. The mere recollection gave her almost the same emotion as the reality had done. Surely no man would have behaved in this way out of mere love of trifling? And then that day at the picnic, when he had snatched her up in his arms, at the sight of a viper on the path: she had felt the wild beating of his heart seen the expression of his face; there was no feigning there—oh! she must wait, must wait!

She appeared at dinner in more than usual spirits, and told of the intended theatricals, of Fioretta's coming with Marguerite St. Georges to ask M. Gastineau to procure invitations for them.

"It sounds so affected, Louisa, your calling that man M. Gastineau," said Mrs. Templar.

"As for me, I shall always say Gustave Gastineau; he will never be a fine gentleman for me, I can tell him. Why doesn't he bring his mother, the washerwoman, and his humpbacked sister, to keep his house: it would be more respectable. But he's afraid the grandees wouldn't notice him then." The sight of Gustave, or the mere mention of his name, always irritated Mrs. Templar.

M. de Blacourt defended Gustave. "In his position he is perhaps right not to bring his relations here. The proviseur has raised himself intellectually, as well as practically, and those excellent women could not be companions for him, nor associate on terms of equality with the persons who are anxious for his society; it would be useless discomfort for all parties—M. Gastineau has always been a good son, I know."

"Ah! well, many things have changed since my time, M. de Blacourt, but in my young days a good child was one who obeyed the fifth commandment: Honour thy father and thy mother."

Neither the marquis nor Louisa ever argued

with Mrs. Templar — they now changed the subject.

That same evening Mdlle. St. Georges addressed her niece seriously, in these terms :—

"Marguerite, don't let English notions about marriage get into your head; you have only five and twenty thousand francs' dowry. Your uncle and I may live till you are forty, and there will be little to come to you then; you have no right to be difficult like Mdlle. Dupont with her millions. It is not so easy now-a-days to marry girls in the provinces, young men go off to Paris, and get married there. Look at the demoiselles Ruvigny, they are going on for thirty; Mdlle. Solanges Mery, twenty-six if she is a day; the two Fauchers, all with more money than you, and yet they have found no husbands. Ernestine de Marsy had to put up with a lieutenant of forty-five. You must not look for an eagle, child; you must put up with a sparrow; for instance, a nice little Directeur des Postes, with a place of eighteen hundred francs a year, and a thousand from something else, I forget what, with the

interest of your twenty-five thousand, will make up an income of nearly four thousand francs,* more than we three have to live on, and by and by there will be promotion. I have some one in my eye."

Marguerite ventured not a word in remonstrance. All her fine colour had left her cheeks.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Petite Maman."

"I have nothing to say, my aunt."

"You don't like the proposal. Listen to me, Marguerite; the man I mean will make a good husband—all the family are good folks."

"What is his situation, aunt? does he sit behind a grating and give out letters and take them in?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, and he ranks as one of the authorities of the town, and his wife may go into the best society."

"Is it—is it M. Bertin, aunt?" asked Marguerite, with a shudder.

"Yes; pray have you anything to say against him?"

* Less than 200*l.* a year by 40*l.*

"Nothing; but oh! aunt, I can't, I can't—he is not a gentleman."

"Not a gentleman! he has been in Paris! taken his degree! won't use any soap that doesn't cost thirty centimes! spends an hour dressing! and not a gentleman? You have seen him with the first young men of the town. Child, you have lost your senses with being with Madame de Villemont. Do you expect the Marquis de Blacourt, or M. Severin de Pressy to propose for you? My girl, you are mad."

"Give me a little time to think, aunt—a little time," gasped Marguerite.

"Time—he has not proposed for you yet; perhaps never may."

"No, no, no," said Marguerite to herself as soon as she was in her bed-chamber, the little closet within her aunt's room. Early next morning she was up and went with the lady next door to the six o'clock mass, and then to confession. What she there said remained a secret between her and the curé. She returned home pale, but with a cheerful face. Petite Maman called to her from

the top of the stairs that she must make haste and iron a shirt and cravat for her uncle. Marguerite went at once into the kitchen. The ironing-table was close to the open window, and the rays of the early sun entering, played on Marguerite's beautiful black hair, making lustrous her forehead, and shining down on her round bare arms; for on returning from church, she had taken off her muslin sleeves.

It was one of those mornings which influence the spirits to gaiety, and Marguerite was in a moment of reaction from the depression of the previous night. She was comforted by having confided her trouble to the Holy Virgin and the curé; she felt sure that two such protections must suffice to win her cause.

As she smoothed out and sprinkled the colonel's fine shirt, she sung in a low, humming voice, Cinderella's song, which Madame de Villemont had been teaching her, *C'era un rè*. The choice was not quite a chance one—Marguerite's fancy was as busy as her hands. Her aunt had spoken as if there were a gulf between her and a certain

person; after all the distance was not so great between her and him, as between Cinderella and a prince—though she was poor, she was well-born.

She was a very pretty sight to see as she stood there fresh as the dawn, apparently intent on her household work, and Gustave Gastineau, out for his morning's walk, stopped to contemplate her. The picture and the associations it awoke, pleased his artistic tastes. It suggested a subject to him—there was matter for some beautiful pages. He crossed the street and lifted his hat.

"Bon jour, mademoiselle." Marguerite gave a little start; he had awoke her out of a dream. She smiled charmingly as she returned his salutation without any embarrassment. He leaned on the window-sill and said, "Mademoiselle, if you were not Mdlle. Marguerite St. Georges, that is, a young lady without a spice of coquetry, I should accuse you of being a deep schemer."

"In what way?" asked Marguerite, her eyes meeting his, untroubled.

"As you are now, you would touch the most

obdurate heart in the world. You are far more dangerous thus than in a ball-room."

"I do not wish to be dangerous," replied Marguerite, smiling. "You will get me a scolding, M. le Proviseur, if you prevent my finishing my ironing."

"That is to say, you desire that I should go away."

"Don't think me rude; but I believe you *had* better go."

The proviseur allowed his eyes to rest a minute on Marguerite's pretty arms and then, with a low bow, walked off. Marguerite did not resume her song; she thought to herself, "How strange it is that it is always some one that you do not care for, who says pleasant things."

The curé called during the day and had an interview with Petite Maman. He did not, of course, mention any matter that Marguerite might have confided to him in confession; but he made an occasion to say, that he should, with Mdlle. St. Georges' sanction, begin to busy himself in finding a suitable husband for Marguerite.

Mdlle. St. Georges launched out at once in favour of M. Bertin.

The curé put up his under lip and remained silent.

"You don't approve, I can see," said the old lady. "I say again, he will make a good husband —he is a young fellow of whom every one speaks well."

"No doubt, no doubt," said the curé; "but he won't suit your niece. She is intelligent, he is not; that's a danger, dear lady. Half the women who go wrong do so, because they find no companion in their husbands. A man, perhaps, not so—not so"—the priest hesitated for a word, then turned his phrase. "After all, the great requisite in a husband is to have the qualities that can master a woman's heart."

"And what may those be, if you please?" asked Mdlle. St. Georges, surprised at what seemed to her quite a new theory.

"Strength of character; a woman is happier when controlled. She must respect, look up to, rely on her husband; she must never blush for

him as her inferior in intellect—love will come in time, if she can be proud of her husband."

"And how and where is a poor soul like me to find one of these nonpareils for Marguerite?" said Mdlle. St. Georges. "To tell you the truth, M. le Curé, I never knew the man yet, whom a woman did not look down upon after any intimacy, —selfish, overbearing; always expecting to be considered gods when they are mere demons."

"Oh! my dear lady——" then the curé remembered that the speaker had never been blessed with a hushand; so he murmured gently to himself, "The fox and the grapes—the fox and the grapes."

CHAPTER X.

THE PATRICIAN'S DAUGHTER.

Madame de Neuville's large salon allowed of a hundred seats ranged in rows like the pit of a theatre: these were for the lady part of the audience; the men were to find standing room where they could. The folding doors leading into a second salon had been taken down, and a row of flowering plants, among which were hidden the footlights, marked the line of separation between the spectators and the actors. The scenery had been lent by the manager of the Bar le Duc Theatre.

The play-bills announced, "La Fille d'un Noble," to be followed by "Le Moineau de Lesbie."

The proviseur had found it possible to persuade Madame de Neuville to accept of an adaptation of the English play, "The Patrician's Daughter," but it had been beyond his powers of eloquence and tact to satisfy the *amour propre* of the two leading ladies in any other way than by having two pieces, so that each might have a first part.

In the "Fille d'un Noble" Madame de Neuville was the heroine; she was a woman of eight-and-thirty, and not handsome; but she had plastic features, which easily expressed every emotion, and, moreover, she was graceful. It was a pleasure to see her move or even sit. Every one said of her that she would have made a fine actress had fate not made her a fine lady. It was to be seen on this night what her talents for the stage might be.

The invited were punctual; Louisa had her seat in the front row—the last chair but one on the left side. M. de Blacourt could therefore remain near her. She had urged him not to leave her—the title of the piece had alarmed her, though she had not said so to the marquis.

Gustave was to play the hero (the secretary to

the old nobleman.) As the moment of the rising of the curtain drew near, Louisa began to wonder how Gustave would act; she had had no idea that he would agree to do so; in all her recollections of him there was nothing that could make her suppose he possessed any talent for acting. She grew so nervous with a dread of his failure that she forgot to think of her own presentiments.

The first scene represents a drawing-room in the patrician's castle—Alicia seated at work—Maurice at some yards distant reading aloud to her. As he reads, Alicia forgets to work, fixes her eyes on him, and listens with suspended breath. This whole scene was admirably played—Maurice's adoration penetrating through his every effort at reserve, as the sun through a veil of summer clouds—she with innocent zeal combating some of the aspersions thrown on woman's candour and disinterestedness by the author from whose pages Maurice had been reading. The by-play was consummate, preparing every one for the coming struggle between the prejudices of rank and the force of love. It was not alone that the

patrician's daughter would have to condescend, but that Maurice would have to do battle with *his* pride, which revolted against the humiliation that must attend the acknowledged love of the poor humble-born man who seeks a noble bride. There is an aunt residing in the castle who has fathomed the feelings of her niece better than Maurice. This dear lady warns Alicia to be more careful in her behaviour to the secretary, a fellow who aped the character of a Brutus, to practise on her ignorance and good heart; he had already given it to be understood by several of their acquaintances that the patrician's daughter was ready to throw herself into his arms whenever he chose to open them. Not feeling at all certain that the indignation she has excited in Alicia will be sufficient to insure a rupture between the lovers, the aunt has recourse to quite a Machiavellian plan. She encourages Maurice to make known his love to Alicia, whom she represents as pining for the avowal. Maurice seeks Alicia on the instant, reveals his long-concealed love, and, to his amazement, is sharply and haughtily refused. He in-

stantly resigns his situation as secretary — the scene in which he takes leave of his noble employer and of Alicia is a very effective one. Alicia, strong in wounded pride, bears herself with dignified composure as long as Maurice is present — the moment the door closes on him, she throws herself on her father's neck with heartrending sobs.

As yet, there was not much in common with what had happened between Louisa and Gustave. She looked towards M. de Blacourt, and met his anxious face with a smile; he leaned over her chair, saying,—

"I once saw an English lady in this part, Miss Helen Faucit—the only Englishwoman I ever saw on the stage who thoroughly pleased me. To an elegant appearance she joined an unaffected pathos that went to the heart; I shall marvel much if in the next two acts Madame de Neuville can come anything near to Miss Faucit's perfection of acting. You know the story, of course?" Louisa shook her head. "Then I will tell it you. Years are supposed to have passed between the

first and second acts; this Maurice, as all heroes of romance do, has made his way to fame, riches, and station; he is a perfect Tom Thumb, annihilating all the giants that oppose him, he has become a cabinet minister, has met the Lady Alicia again, and, in short, is about to be married to her."

Just as the marquis had reached this crisis, the curtain rose: there was an universal "chut," and M. de Blacourt was obliged to be silent—the salon was not a theatre where one may disregard an expression of public opinion.

The second act opens with the marriage party all assembled: it is to be a marriage by special licence. Maurice is the centre of a circle of fashionable men and women, all desirous of a word or sign of friendship from him; his old patron is a mere cipher in comparison to his quondam secretary; at a given signal my lord goes to fetch the bride. There is in Alicia's manner an agitation far exceeding any to be attributed merely to the embarrassment natural to the moment; the glance she gives Maurice has in it

fear rather than timidity; he approaches her, takes her hand, stands a minute in mute contemplation of her—she has lost the gaiety of youth, she is pale—he sighs. Every eye is upon the pair, every tongue is hushed, every one receives an impression of something unusual, something painful about to happen. Maurice speaks, in tones subdued indeed, but with vibrations of passion, which find a response in every listener's soul; he tells his early history, the struggles of his boyhood, those of his early manhood, tries to tell of his love—here the voice of the actor broke down completely (it was not so put down in the play); the audience, all but Louisa and the marquis, thought it first-rate acting, and applauded vehemently. Alas! we often see similar fine acting in our soirées and balls, so fine that we do not recognize it as acting; we neither applaud it, nor weep in sympathy! Louisa felt herself growing blind, she involuntarily stretched out her hand gropingly in search of a support. The marquis took it in his and whispered,—

"Courage!"

The next moment she heard Maurice saying, in a low husky voice,—

"She refused me, not generously, not with the charity of a woman grieved to give pain, but—" here his voice rose shrill and loud, "but with biting contempt, trampling out the faith, the courage, the life of a man, and all, gentlemen and ladies, because—can you credit it—because I was poor. I had then the same eyes, the same form, the same heart, the same mind—but I was poor! It is my turn now—I could not honour her, nor worship her. I will not have her as my wife!"

A shriek from Alicia as she fainted, covered another shriek. Every woman present was in tears, many on the verge of hysterics. M. de Blacourt took advantage of the moment when handkerchiefs were covering every face to carry Louisa away.

In the last act, Gustave's eyes in vain sought to discover Louisa in the salon.

Overpowered by compliments and congratulations, the proviseur only paid attention to these

words: "You have taken us all by surprise, Gastineau; do you know that Madame de Villemont fell into convulsions or fainted?"

"What a pity she did not remain to see Madame de Neuville die," said a girl's voice. "Oh! how charming she was; how did she manage to look so thin and white, and have such holes in her cheeks?"

"For my part, I detest these sort of domestic tragedies," said the marquis, as he and Madame de Villemont were in the carriage driving home. "If I am to be cheated into terror and grief, let it be for something grandiose in crime—Medea—Lady Macbeth, not by seeing a poor little girl breaking her heart for a selfish brute, who, strip him of his borrowed eloquence, is a mean, vindictive egotist; full of self-love, but ignorant of any other kind of love."

Louisa made no other answer to this tirade than,—"What will people say of my coming away?"

"Who cares?" said the marquis. "Besides, no one was thinking about us; there was such a

weeping; no one was capable of seeing or hearing, and by this time everybody will be too busy complimenting or being complimented to take notice of our absence. Now, here we are at home; I hope you and all the young women who have seen "La Fille d'un Noble," will come to the conclusion that Alicia ought to have thought herself fortunate for being spared the being the luckless wife of that mean fellow."

When Madame de Villemont opened her room door, she saw her mother sitting at the table in the centre of the room. Mrs. Templar was even more spectral grey than ever, seen by the dim light of the shaded lamp. Louisa's heart contracted as her eyes met those of her mother. The same dread that she had experienced years before, seized her now; the actual room they were in vanished, and they were again in the salon of the Hôtel de Hollande.

"Mamma! why have you sat up?" exclaimed Louisa.

"I wanted to hear all about the play," returned Mrs. Templar, in the jaunty manner she occa-

sionally adopted, and which inspired Louisa with fear and repugnance.

Mrs. Templar's gaiety had always had something weird in it; it resembled those sunlights which sometimes shoot from below a black thunder-cloud, a lugubrious contrast which gives a fuller sense of a coming combat.

"Send your maid away; I am going to undress you as I used to do, when you went to your first balls at Geneva: I never thought then of such a life as we lead. You can go," she said to Mdlle. Hortense; "my eyes are good enough to unfasten the dress of Madame la Vicomtesse."

As soon as she was alone with her daughter, Mrs. Templar got up from her seat and began unlacing Louisa's dress. "How did it go off, my dear?"

"Admirably," said Louisa, her whole attention engrossed by the appearance of there having been a search made in her room during her absence.

As Mrs. Templar drew her nearer the light, she discovered that the book her mother had been reading was the last one that Gustave had sent her; luckily, the first had been burned.

Mrs. Templar must have hunted out her keys —and opened her private cabinet.

"And that conceited fellow, Gustave Gastineau, did he make a great fool of himself?"

"No, he acted very well."—The lace had been drawn through the last eyelet-hole. "Thank you, mamma, now I can do all the rest for myself; sit down and warm yourself, mamma; your hands are cold."

In the large, lofty rooms of Clairefonds, it was necessary to light fires in the evening as early as the end of August. Mrs. Templar sat down, rubbing one hand slowly over the other; Louisa was at her dressing-table, taking the flowers out of her hair.

"Many people there?" asked Mrs. Templar.

"The room was crowded, and every one very smart, of course. Madame Bredy had a plume of red feathers, and some one else, sea-weed, à la mermaid. I have not seen such a gay scene for many a day; the lights were extremely well managed, so, in spite of red feathers and sea-weed, every one looked handsome."

Louisa spoke with vivacity, it was acting, and quite as good acting as that she had just witnessed; she knew there was something disagreeable coming, and she was nerving herself to bear it. She could just see in the mirror, that her mother was leaning over the fire, holding her bony hands to catch the heat of the flame. The thin, ash-coloured fingers, with knotty joints, the attenuated bent figure, the head almost in a line with the shoulders, belonged rather to fourscore than threescore. It was a pain to look at her.

"Mamma, you must begin goat's milk again."

"Why? I am very well."

"You are thinner than you were."

"Yes, I grow more and more like the lady, all skin and bones; how you used to shriek when I came to the worms they crept in and the worms they crept out. Look there," and the old lady suddenly stretched out one of her legs. It was like a stick in a stocking.

"You must eat more, mamma. You were growing quite plump in the spring."

"It won't do, Louisa, I know you of old—every

turn and twist of you—you want to put me off from speaking to you about that book. You thought I shouldn't find you out, but I watch and watch till I guess everything—ah, ha! my lady, you can't deceive your old mother. Do get a dressing-gown, your bare shoulders give me shivers. I wonder folks wish for children: mothers have all the trouble and none of the pleasures of them. It's unwarrantable, Madame de Villemont, for a widow to go out in a low dress, all for that nasty fellow too!"

"You forget, mamma, that I wore a high muslin gown—you unlaced it yourself."

"I have no power over you now, you are your own mistress; you fancy I am an idiot, yes, you do, but I am not blind, nor deaf; you sit talking, so fine and so learned, subjects your mother of course can't understand—knows nothing about; but she knows very well where Timbuctoo is, and that two and two make four and not five, and while young madame is as proud as a peacock with her palaver about books, the old crone in the corner is reading *men*—do you hear? and I tell

you, that fellow you make such a fuss about, M. le Proviseur, this M. le Proviseur (she spoke the titles in a mincing, affected voice,) is a heartless coxcomb! I am surprised at you, Louisa—you who have refused princes, letting yourself down to court a nobody, a plebeian: he is laughing in his sleeve at you; he does not care for you, *he won't have you, girl!*"

Louisa burst into tears; unnerved already, she could not stand any more attacks.

"Oh! if that's the way you take your poor mother's advice, I have done. It was my duty to warn you, but you can't bear the truth. Don't come to me for pity, whatever happens: at all events, no one will say that you have pleased your eye, for an uglier dog I never saw."

And with this parting dart, Mrs. Templar left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

Fioretta von Ehrtmann and Marguerite St. Georges came to call on Madame de Villemont the next morning.

"What made you leave so soon?" asked Fioretta. "Some one said you were taken ill."

"Yes, and M. de Blacourt brought me home."

"The last act was dreadful," said Marguerite. "Maurice would not believe anything as to Alicia having been deceived, till the poor girl came and died in his arms. How sorry he must have been afterwards."

"Oh! child," said Fioretta, "men are easily consoled for the loss of a woman; they tell you

that, the better they have loved their first wives, the readier they are to take a second."

"It is odd, is it not, Madame de Villemont," said Marguerite, pointedly addressing her friend, "that men and women should be always speaking against one another? My aunt abuses men, and my uncle women."

"The consequence of being endowed with reason," said Fioretta, drily. "It was a pity, Louisa, you did not stay for the second piece—it would have put the tragedy of the first out of your head. The absurdity of Madame Delille was high comedy, she has exactly as much turn for acting as a parrot; she can repeat a set of speeches with few blunders, but she does not understand a syllable of what she repeats; she exclaims 'I love,' with the voice and face she would have, if she had pinched her finger; Madame de Neuville acts well—admirably."

"And the proviseur, I positively forgot he was acting," Fioretta whispered to Louisa. "I fancy there *was* more of reality than sham; his thoughts, I am sure, were full of what happened in Paris—

there's a drop of gall in his heart, he will never get rid of."

"Probably never," said Louisa gravely, so gravely that Fioretta was rebuked into letting the subject drop. "Warnings rain on me," thought Louisa; "I must listen to them."

The marquis came downstairs towards midday. He inquired how Louisa had passed the night—"had she slept?"

"Perfectly well," she replied.

"It is such a charming day," he said, "that I want you to let me drive you to La Fontaine des Fées. You have spent years within five miles of one of the most picturesque spots in the department, and you have never seen it."

Louisa had a violent longing to stay at home; she expected the proviseur to call. She felt certain he would come; he must have guessed that the play had troubled her, and if he did come and was told she was out, he would inevitably take it as an excuse, and understand that she wished to avoid him. Her first impulse, therefore, was to refuse the marquis's request; her second, to agree

to it. She would resign herself blindly to fate —she would be passive, bid farewell to all struggles.

During the first part of the drive, Louisa showed a liveliness which did not impose on the experienced friend by her side. Her sprightliness, her constantly recurring forced laugh, made his heart ache.

"There's only one thing I should prefer to this," she said; "I should like to be on a spirited horse, and to go at full gallop through these green glades. Give the horses just a little touch; I do so enjoy speed—forcing my way through the air—wings—wings are what I long for."

"And the day will come when you will say as I do now, that the *summum bonum* is repose."

"A long while ere that day," and Louisa shook her head gaily.

"It will come. Nature is kind in that, Louisa; it gradually prepares us to appreciate, as a boon, that tranquillity which age makes a necessity. I once also invoked wings, now I prefer a good arm-chair."

"I cannot understand why there should be sorrow and death in the world," said Louisa, without attending to what he had said; "it would have been as easy to make happiness a rule—and why not a painless way of passing from one world to another?"

"I see you do require wings, and strong wings, my dear, to bear you up into those regions of speculation whither your words tend."

"Did you ever know any one who was happy?" asked Louisa.

"Yes, and among your own friends—Marc and his wife."

"I am not sure they are. Ismay is always anxious or uneasy about something or other."

"I never supposed you imagined happiness to consist in absence of emotion—the drowsiness of the lotus-eaters. Ismay is naturally full of solicitude for her husband and children; that solicitude keeps her heart free from selfishness, the verdigris that tarnishes so many domestic firesides. Yesterday I found Marc and his wife walking up and down their strip of a garden; they were not

clad in silk or velvet, nor had they a fashionable air. I thought I saw something like agitation in their faces. I said, 'Nothing wrong, I hope?' 'No, indeed,' replied Marc. 'Ismay and I were just talking over all our blessings, and our hearts are full.'"

"See that now," exclaimed Louisa; "out of all our acquaintances, you can name only two whom *you* believe to be happy."

"My dear, you are too exclusive—you require too much."

"Halt there," said Louisa; "you are not arguing, you are asserting. If happiness instead of unhappiness were the order of the day, I should be happy, however I was constituted. No—no; the more I know, and the more I see, the better I understand that Job was right when he wrote, 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;' but why so? that's what puzzles me."

"Can you explain why the sparks are made to fly upward, and not downward?" asked M. de Blacourt. "My dear, there's only one certain road to contentment or serenity, or happiness—

however you may choose to name the sensation—duty well performed."

"Those poor horses are performing their duty well. Do you think they are happier with those curbs between their teeth, and the rein, and the whip, or roaming free?"

"Louisa——"

"Oh! don't scold me, dear, dear friend—no, you never scold me now. You are all goodness to me; but don't trouble to answer my nonsense. I *am* unreasonable, silly, but I am still young, and I do so long to know what happiness means—to grasp it, if only for a space between sunrise and sunset. Every one has a right to their share of joy. It is easy for those who have drunk of the spring, to preach patience to thirsty pilgrims."

"I am not going to preach patience to you; when the necessity comes, the virtue will follow. Let us enjoy the present."

But Louisa's vivacity waned. She strove to carry on the conversation; she admired the scenery, spoke enthusiastically of the picturesque fountain, got out of the carriage to gather a

bouquet of wild-flowers, quite unconscious how often she used words, which proved how absent her thoughts were. The marquis had compassion on her; he proposed that they should return, and Louisa grew excited again as they neared home. She should like to travel all over Europe, just so, with a good pair of horses in an open carriage, stopping wherever fancy or convenience suggested.

"Not an impossible desire to gratify," said M. de Blacourt.

She was alarmed at once lest she should be taken at her word, and hastily said,—

"Yes; but poor mamma."

"Suppose we winter in Rome, Louisa; it would do us all good—your mother more than any of us."

She changed colour visibly.

M. de Blacourt went on—

"We could go easy stages on account of Mrs. Templar; take the route through Switzerland, and cross either the Mont Cenis, or go by the Simplon?"

"It would be pleasant," she said, reluctantly. "I must find out how mamma would like it."

Before she was well out of the carriage, Louisa inquired of the servant if any one had called.

"Madame Bredy and M. de Pressy."

She stood at the glass door of the salon, which led into the garden—the hands of the clock on the chimney-piece pointed to a quarter to four. At last she took a resolution, went into her own room, and laid aside her bonnet and mantle, returned to the salon, sat down at her little table, and opened a book. She valiantly tried to read, but every one of her senses had merged into the one of hearing. She was listening for the sound of the door bell, or for a step on the terrace below the window. The clicking of the clock and the beating of her heart disturbed her; they were both so loud.

"One, two, three, four—ah! he will not come to-day." Then she remembers that the clock is fast, and the way round to the porte-cochère longer than up through the vines to the Charmille—she will give him till a quarter-past four; after that she will agree to go to Rome, anywhere; if he does not come, she shall be sure that his choice of

last night's play was intended to prove to her that all was at an end between them. It was impossible he could believe her indifferent to him—she had perhaps done too much—but, right or wrong, he could not imagine she did not care for him; and, if he had sought her day after day only to amuse himself at her expense, well, he would not be worth regretting. Five minutes after four—he was not coming; of all days, if he had any heart, he ought to have come this one, and come early—ten minutes went by—common courtesy had brought others. This sharp pain—this fluttering cannot last long—others have gone through it, and been able to bear it, and why shouldn't she?

The door bell rung, and Louisa started as if she had heard the trumpet of doom. She could force herself to speak calmly, but the little hand the proviseur held was cold and clammy. His voice sounded to Louisa as though he were shouting to her from a distance.

He had regretted to hear of her having been taken ill the night before—was she better?

"Oh, yes, quite well; she had been that morn-

ing to the Fontaine des Fées—she had greatly enjoyed the drive and the quick movement through the air—it had been so pleasant that it had suggested to M. de Blacourt the idea of their all making an autumn tour in an open carriage."

"Ah!" was all Gustave's answer.

"I should like, of all things, to be able to talk Italian," said Louisa, as if she really thought what she said.

"I fancied you were busy with German."

"German could wait for another year."

Louisa was endeavouring to steer clear of the subject of the *Fille d'un Noble*.

"I am rather mortified at your not vouchsafing a remark on our last night's efforts," said Gustave, abruptly.

"You and Madame de Neuville acted to perfection," replied Louisa, in a quick, nervous manner.

"And the play itself—how did it please you? The plot is simple—taken from every-day life—but perhaps you are one of those who think that tragedy ought to turn on some grander suffering than the breaking of a poor young man's heart.

But I fancy that the pain is much the same whether it is the heart of a prince or a peasant which bleeds."

"The rank of the sufferer makes no more difference in my eyes than yours," said Louisa. "No; what shocked me in the play was Maurice's unforgiveness—it was very unheroic —I would have found a better way of revenging myself."

"You are too amiable to understand the gratification he derived from his vengeance. I sympathize completely with the feeling and the mode of showing it.

"Don't say so; can you not forgive? some day you yourself may need forgiveness and not find it; it is dreadful to think that you come to see me, that you seek me, talk with me—— Gustave, I can't pretend not to know that you are thinking of the past—are you still angry—still offended with me?"

"Offended, angry with you, Madame la Vicomtesse—"

Louisa interrupted him—

"It is not Madame de Villemont who is speaking

to you, it is Louisa—once your playfellow. Gustave, do you require me to ask you to forgive me?"

He had covered his face with his hands—he sat motionless as she made this appeal. Her feelings had burst their inner bonds—she was carried away by the flood.

"You mistook my motives—you did—you did—so help me, God—it was not love of fortune or title—it was the ignorance and stupidity of an inexperienced girl. Don't hide your face—look at me, and judge if I am speaking the truth." He did look at her—her eyes were strained on him, dilated with fear and anxiety. "You believe me—do you not?—that I had no such vile motives as you said in those books—forgive me," and she held out her hand.

He took it in his, then fell to examining it, laying it on his palm, measuring, as it were, its delicate proportions—tracing the blue veins with his fingers. She remained mute and still. At last he raised it to his burning lips, pushed back the cuff of her sleeve, and kissed her wrist—

kissed it once and again—roughly, violently—then he let her hand drop. Louisa's heart grew heavy. He went on—

"Do you know I found the other day, in an old English grammar, a withered lily of the valley—you must have picked it under the trees at the swing, otherwise I should not have put it into the book. You can never have an idea of the effect the sight of that little dry yellow flower had on me. I have read and written, too, of the pang given by the reopening of old wounds; but I have neither read nor written anything adequate to the real anguish. Love and hate rent my heart in twain; had you been near, I should have done you a mischief."

She said, with all a loving woman's sincerity,—

"I should not have been afraid."

"Then you would have been very foolish; every man occasionally loses his spark of the divine nature, and when he does so, it is wise to be on your guard."

"You are trying to frighten me," said Louisa,

now of a mortal paleness, "but I will not, I cannot be afraid of you," and all the while she was trembling, as the words dropped from her lips involuntarily—she was indeed striving to extort from him one of those reassuring words which can calm a heart racked by doubt.

"And why can you not fear me?" he asked, irritated by her persistency in expressing confidence in him. "And why not? Do you imagine that to have mortally offended a man is a reason for counting on his tenderness?"

"But I am so sorry——"

He interrupted her.

"Sorry! that's capital; she is sorry, as if she had mislaid her book, or lost her newest parasol!"

"What *can* I say? I don't know any better word—I *am* sorry—oh! so sorry!"

He was like a wild animal that has fleshed its fangs in some quivering prey.

"Why don't you fall at my feet, then, and wash them with your tears? *Sorry, she's sorry!*"

Louisa was scarcely able to keep her teeth from chattering, or to still the trembling of her body.

"You say you have read my books, and you fancy they describe all you have inflicted on me!"

"Speak more gently to me," she said.

"Poor weak woman!" he exclaimed, almost with contempt.

"I don't deserve it, I don't," said Louisa, in a broken voice. "I was an ignorant, ill brought-up girl; I did care for you before you made me give that promise; you should have had patience, not hurried me, Gustave. Forgive me, Gustave," and she seized one of his hands, kissed it, while there fell fast on it scalding tears of humbled pride and wounded affection.

"Do not, do not, I pray," he exclaimed, extricating himself from her grasp.

At this moment they were startled by a click of the lock of the door of Louisa's boudoir; they both turned, and both at the same instant saw a human eye watching them—a little bit of the silk blind of the glass-door was turned back. Gustave's emotion vanished; Louisa shrank back into her chair, and closed her eyes. Gustave's face

wore the same menacing expression as it had done on that day when in the little salon of the Hôtel de Hollande he had received his dismission. He said,—

"You have already condescended too far, Madame de Villemont, in apologizing for the rebuke you gave to the presumption of a raw boy. The son of a washerwoman, and the brother of a shopkeeper, had no right to address a declaration of love to Miss Templar! You have done a great deal for me to-day, you have shown me that aspirations senseless seven years ago, are reasonable enough to-day." He drew a long breath, and then continued, "You wish to atone to me for the suffering you inflicted; it shall be so; I will owe my future happiness to you!" He waited for an answer.

"What can I do for you?" asked Louisa, so faintly that it was more like an echo than a human voice.

"You must have a pretty clear understanding of what my private life has been, if you have read my novels; they were autobiographies. I

have sworn many a false oath, shed rivulets of false tears, done what wild young men do when deceived by a woman. I had lost faith and happiness; I accepted pleasure. Lately, perhaps from satiety, perhaps from other causes, I have begun to dream again, to hope again;" he stopped, then said, "Did you speak?"

"Go on," she answered, in that same faint echo-like voice.

"I have pictured to myself a home, children about my knees; I am dead sick of what is called society, of nerveless, heartless, bedizened women grimacing at me. I believe that I could make a wife happy; I have had plenty of experience to help me." Again he paused and examined Louisa's countenance—not one word had he uttered but had a hostile intention.

There are instants when we see the sword about to fall on us, and yet remain helplessly to receive the stroke. Louisa knew what was awaiting her, knew that Gustave was preparing to give her the fatal stab; he was withholding his blow only to have the full perception of his own inge-

nuity, and her lingering torture, and yet she could not move a finger to frustrate his design. But if her lips were silent, and her form motionless, the expression of her features was terrible to see. Gastineau looked away, he was unable to bear the sight of that marble face; not the less did he persist in his resolve; wounded self-love can make a man not only very ridiculous, but very wicked.

"To carry out my idea," continued Gustave, "I must choose a young heart, one so ignorant as to have confidence in others: as for a companion, I must wait till I have taught my young inexperienced wife to be one. I have found my ideal here—here, by your side, Louisa. By way of sealing our reconciliation you shall help to bestow on me the happiness you once robbed me of—you shall help to restore me to the paths of virtue; use your influence to obtain for me Marguerite St. Georges as my wife!"

Louisa's white stony lips muttered,—

"Are you a man?"

"Such as you have made me," he replied.

"You're a liar—a liar," shrieked Mrs. Tem-

plar, who had slipped into the room unnoticed. "Get out of this house, you vulgar—vagabond!"

She rushed at him with extended hands—followed him with hisses.

In his haste to escape from the execrations of the infuriated old woman, he ran against M. de Pressy, who was just entering the hall.

Severin found Mrs. Templar leaning breathless against the side of the vestibule door. "A vulgar vagabond," she was repeating to herself.

"You are ill, madame; allow me to assist you."

"No, I am not ill—my daughter is ill; you must not see her—she has been insulted by that——"

Mrs. Templar's words were arrested by the sight of Louisa herself, deadly pale, but calm and erect. She offered her hand to Severin; perhaps in that moment she was grateful for his love; he touched her hand as reverently as if it had been that of a queen in misfortune.

"Mamma," said Madame de Villemont, "go and lie down for a little—*do*, to please me."

"Very cunning, she's very cunning, sir; she

wants to screen that low fellow, but I'll not let her; no, I'll be even with him yet."

Louisa's eyes sought those of M. de Pressy; he understood that she wished him to take his leave.

"If I can be of any use or service to you?" he said, anxiously.

"I will apply to you," interrupted Louisa.

His eyes filled as she spoke. The gentle dignity with which she mastered some inward anguish, touched him more than any outburst of grief would have done.

That evening, Severin did not go to the club. He paced up and down, till far into the night, the public walk which runs along the sullen river. There was no one there to disturb his thoughts. He was speculating on the triumph of evil here below, so strangely manifest in the history of mankind from the very beginning. The cruel lesson is forced upon us all one day or other, if we live long enough to have to bear the struggles and disappointments of life. He wondered of what was formed that chord which so

strongly drew Louisa's heart to Gastineau. Why should her eyes brighten—her placid lips quiver and smile only for that bad man? Wherein the charm? or was it only in fulfilment of that mysterious doom, which seems ever to track the steps of all that is loveliest or noblest in this world? With heart aching and soul perplexed, Severin returned to his solitary lodging, as the first pale yellow streak above the hill announced the coming of another day.

CHAPTER XII.

CONDITIONS.

Mrs. Templar had cruelly humiliated the proviseur in the very moment of his pitiful triumph over Louisa. The burning shame and exasperation of having been driven like a chastised hound from the presence of the woman he had hoped to see at his feet, strengthened his resolve to prove to her his utter indifference to her love. The whole world might unite to defend *her*, to humble *him*, but none could take from him the power to make her suffer.

Uncertain whether she would choose to understand that he had been in earnest, in requesting her to be the channel for his proposal of marriage to Marguerite St. Georges, he went to Madame

de Neuville, and begged she would undertake the negotiation. In the meanwhile, however, Louisa dreading that delay might bring her some fresh mortification, had written to Petite Maman to communicate the proviseur's offer.

Poor Mdlle. St. Georges was in a sore strait how to trim the balance between her niece's interests in this world and in the next. To marry the Protestant proviseur was to the advantage of the first and to the danger of the second. The old lady never dreamed of the possibility that there might be yet another difficulty in the question. How should she? She had never known of a well brought-up girl excusing herself from accepting an eligible husband, on the plea of liking some one else better.

In the dilemma, Mdlle. St. Georges sought the advice of the curé of her parish; a priest, by the way, tolerant of Protestants, and on good and friendly terms with M. de Lantry, the same who had helped Marguerite in the matter of M. Bertin. Mdlle. St. Georges placed the case before the curé, candidly avowed that she wished to accept

the proviseur's offer for Marguerite—it was all she could hope or desire for her niece—if it could only be arranged, without spiritual danger to the wife—M. de Villemont had married a Protestant—and the Duke of Orleans. What did M. le Curé advise?

M. le Curé promised to see M. Gastineau; there were circumstances which might even make such a marriage agreeable in the eyes of Holy Church: if the husband, for instance, showed an inclination to enter the true fold. The curé should know better what counsel to give, after he had conversed with M. Gastineau.

M. le Curé was an urbane, courteous man, indulgent from temperament, but he belonged to his order. He did not hesitate to tell the proviseur that Holy Church condemned all mixed marriages as detestable and abominable."

"Allons donc! we are in the nineteenth century," Gustave had replied with a smile.

"True," insisted the curé, "but in matters of faith there can be no compromise."

"I am to understand that you bring me a

refusal?" And the priest perceived that Gustave was really troubled; yes, Gustave was troubled; he believed that his revenge was about to escape him.

"That depends on yourself," replied the keen-eyed curé; he guessed that Marguerite's suitor was in the mood to make concessions. "Holy mother Church draws a wide distinction between sins of ignorance and sins of knowledge. Mdlle. St. Georges and her brother would sin with knowledge, did they consent to their niece, a daughter of the true faith, becoming the mother of heretics."

Gustave smiled again and muttered,—

"Il y a toujours des accommodements avec la conscience."

The curé cleared his throat so loudly, that, perhaps, he did not hear this quotation; Gustave continued,—

"What are the conditions which would induce you and the young lady's friends to entertain my proposal favourably?"

"Entire freedom in all that regards your wife's religious observances, non-interference with her

choice of a confessor and with her obedience to his counsels; further, that all her children should be brought up as members of the Church of Rome."

"And why not of the Gallican Church?"

"The larger contains the smaller. Rome clasps within her mighty arms all her true daughters."

"Well, M. le Curé, so be it, I am no bigot."—The curé here gave him a sharp glance of observation. "If the knowledge that Mdlle. Marguerite St. Georges was a Catholic did not deter me from proposing to be her husband, certainly the request to guarantee her the free exercise of her form of worship, will not make me draw back. We both believe in the same fundamental principles."

"The lesser does not contain the greater," interposed the curé. "Why not pray to God, monsieur, to enlighten your understanding? pray sincerely, ardently, and He will illuminate the darkness of your soul. Knock, and it will be opened."

"Always provided you do not, by your precautions, close the door when half-opened," said Gustave, promptly.

"Sir, I will pray for your conversion; God grant my prayers may be heard!"

"May I hope, then, that the obstacles to my suit are removed?"

"If you engage to ratify the stipulations I have made, Colonel St. Georges and his sister withdraw any opposition to your proposal. We cannot answer for the scruples that Mdlle. Marguerite may have; nor will I promise to do aught to overcome them."

When the curé had given this summary of his interview to Mdlle. St. Georges, her conscience permitted her to determine that Marguerite should not throw aside the good fortune so unexpectedly offered her, for the want of a little gentle coercion.

At the mid-day meal on the following morning, Mdlle. St. Georges was grave and silent, manifesting an indifference as to the appetite of her brother, to which he was unaccustomed.

"What has happened this morning?" asked the colonel; "are we grown rich? or are any of us going to be married?"

"My friend, you never know when to be silent, or when to speak," returned Petite Maman; "you have a want of tact, that has told on your fortunes. Considering all the grandees to whom you have been aide-de-camp, if you had had a crumb of tact, you would have secured some good berth for yourself—other men get the good things of this earth, and why? because they don't speak when they should be silent, nor laugh when they should be serious."

"I shouldn't wonder if there's something in what you say, old lady." And the colonel subsided into his usual attention to his plate.

Marguerite proved that she had some of the tact in which her uncle was deficient by asking no question; besides, she was certain to be told the secret in the course of the day, which the colonel was not; one of Mdlle. St. Georges' prejudices being that men always let out whatever is confided to them. It was, therefore, with no little

surprise that Marguerite listened to her aunt's next speech to the colonel.

"You are not to go out this morning, my brother, until I have spoken to you in private.

"Come with me, Marguerite," continued Petite Maman.

Marguerite's heart gave a leap into her throat—something dreadful was going to happen, for never before, within her memory, had Petite Mamam left the breakfast-table to be cleared by the *femme de ménage*.

"All the good luck, my niece, which I never had, comes to you." It was thus Mdlle. St. Georges opened her battery. "I understand now, that when you declined M. Bertin's proposal, you had your own reasons. My dear, I could not guess that such a fine gentleman, the pet of all our great ladies, would ever cast his eyes on such a little goose as you."

Marguerite's lips opened; but she had not the courage to put the question she was dying to have answered. Fear and hope agitated her.

"Men talk as if they admired sense and talents,"

said Mdlle. St. Georges; "but they act as if a pretty face was the only thing they cared for in a woman; not that you are pretty, Marguerite. I am your aunt, and can be honest with you. You are fresh, you have a nice red and white, and good eyes and hair; but you'll be plain enough at thirty, or before. Your mouth and chin are not good, my dear. Madame de Villemont, now, she'll be a pretty woman at fifty. Talking of her, this proposal first came through her."

"Through Madame de Villemont!" ejaculated Marguerite.

"Yes. Now remember this, Marguerite. Your choice lies between marriage and the convent. If your friends approve of a man, you ought at once to say, yes."

"If one has no repugnance, aunt," said Marguerite, in a low voice.

"Repugnance!" exclaimed Petite Maman; "repugnance to what, I should like to know? What does the child mean? it's some Protestant notion you have picked up from Madame de Villemont—it's a vulgar, highly improper word

in a young lady's mouth; never let me hear you pronounce it again. Yes, it was through Madame de Villemont herself this proposal has been made; and Madame de Neuville has sent me a letter of four pages. All this ought to make you understand that you can have no reason for refusing the gentleman who seeks you in marriage.

"You have not yet told me his name, aunt," said Marguerite, anxiously.

"He is rich—is going to Paris."

"Paris?" interrupted Marguerite, and there was hope in her voice.

"Paris, mademoiselle; you know very well who it is—don't pretend ignorance."

Marguerite had nearly pronounced a name, but she stopped.

"Who is it, aunt?"

"Somebody you have seen pretty often, I suspect—M. Gastineau."

Marguerite sat very still.

"Well!" exclaimed Petite Maman, impatiently.

"Madame de Villemont wrote about M. Gasti-

neau for me?" and Marguerite looked inquiringly at her aunt.

"Wrote it to me with her own hand, and Madame de Neuville, I tell you, has written also —it is quite true, child. M. le Curé saw M. Gastineau yesterday on the subject: he is going to resign his appointment as proviseur—he is going to Paris as editor of the —— *Gazette:* he is on the high road to fortune. M. le Curé expects him to be Minister of State some of these days. Come, come, Marguerite, you guessed who it was from the first?"

"No, no, I did not!" said the girl, vehemently.

"But you have no objection—*can* have no objection to M. Gastineau; he is rich, young, clever,—you will be as well off as Madame de Villemont; a carriage, perhaps. Marguerite, it will make your uncle and me so happy."

"Dear aunt, I do wish to make you happy, but how can I marry M. Gastineau? he is a Protestant."

"Ah! that is the only drawback; but one can-

not have anything quite perfect. My dear, I would not speak to you, till I had done my duty in that matter. M. Gastineau behaved beautifully —he leaves you quite free; and if there should be a family, he will guarantee their being brought up as Catholics—he gave every assurance we could desire to the curé."

"And M. le Curé, too, approves?" said Marguerite, in a quivering voice.

"I tell you, yes, child," returned Mdlle. St. Georges, angrily. "After all, Marguerite, it is better to be married than single—a woman is nothing, a nobody without a husband; who cares for an old maid? What's her social position? what can she do? and with your small portion, if you don't marry, you must come to letting lodgings to officers, while here is a clever, rich young man—" and Petite Maman entered on a second recapitulation of Gustave's attractions, and of the advantages to be derived from a marriage with him. She ended with, "Upon my word, Marguerite, the more I think of it, the less I understand why he wants you."

"That is just what I feel also," said Marguerite, drearily.

"But that's no reason for refusing him."

"Aunt, I must see Madame de Villemont and M. le Curé."

And Marguerite put on her bonnet, and went to Clairefonds. She was told that madame could not receive any one. She had scarcely again reached home, when she received a note in pencil from Louisa.

"DEAREST MARGUERITE,—

"PARDON my refusing to see you. You must first make your decision.

"Your sincere friend,

"L. de V."

Marguerite then sought the curé.

"I hope our little heart is not an impregnable fortress," began the priest, jocosely. Marguerite saw that all those interested in her, favoured M. Gastineau—she listened in silence while the priest told her of Gustave's willingness to give

her entire liberty as to her religion; he spoke with enthusiasm unfeigned, of the noble victory she might achieve by bringing her husband into the true fold—quoted, in Latin, the text of the believing wife converting the unbelieving husband —impressed on her the reward promised to those who save a soul.

Marguerite said with a humility quite pathetic:

"I do not feel worthy of M. Gastineau!"

"And the reason, my daughter?"

"When I have thought of marrying, my father, it was not of him I thought."

"Ha—and the other," said the curé, "has he given you reason to believe he thinks of you?".

"No—oh, never!"

"He has attracted you by the display of great virtues—great talents?"

"I do not know."

"The eye is very deceitful, Mdlle. Marguerite." And then the curé spoke to her in a soothing paternal way, of her duties to her protectors—

"See, my daughter, what joy you can spread around you—the load of anxiety of which you

relieve your good aunt, and better than all, think of the noble mission you will have fulfilled, when by the ascendancy gained by your wifely affection, you have opened your husband's eyes to the true light. And, my daughter, supposing you have had a childish preference for some partner at a ball, carry that fancy to the altar, and lay it there as a sacrifice," and so on *ad infinitum*.

Marguerite went home consoled, but not convinced—she would entreat M. Gastineau to give her time—she did not wish to be ungrateful to any one, she wished to please all her friends, and they all evidently considered that she ought to marry M. Gastineau.

The next day Mdlle. St. Georges desired Marguerite to put on her blue silk (this was Marguerite's gala dress), and one of the neighbours came in and dressed her hair. Marguerite's courage was at a very low ebb; she never ventured a word of remonstrance; it seemed to her that somehow everything had been settled for her, between last evening and this morning. The shutters of the great salon were opened, an event

in the St. Georges' life, which did not occur three times in the year, *i.e.*, for the purpose of receiving visitors.

M. Gustave Gastineau was a man of too many and too varied experiences, not to be aware that Marguerite had no preference for him. He therefore went to pay this visit, resolved not to run the risk of further negotiations.

Marguerite was standing by her aunt, flushed and breathless, when he came into the salon. He hurried up to her, and before she had the slightest conception of his design, he had bent down and kissed her on the brow, murmuring impassioned thanks.

This was altogether a compromising and unprecedented proceeding. Mademoiselle St Georges was very angry, yet did not know what to say or do—her nephew elect inspired her with awe.

Poor little Marguerite from that moment understood there was no escape for her, and she resigned herself to her fate.

Pastor de Lantry's house was nearly as possible

opposite to that of the St. Georges', and Fioretta, whose bedroom looked into the street, had seen Gustave arrive.

He had never visited at the St. Georges', and Fioretta, who never could see a man and woman together without suspecting a love-affair, at once set it down as certain, that the proviseur had some matrimonial project in his head regarding Marguerite. She ran downstairs to Ismay to impart her conjecture.

"If he marries that child, he is a wretch," said the excited Fioretta.

"I shall pity Marguerite," said Ismay.

"And after the way he has pursued Louisa, after all the public attentions he has paid her, getting her talked of, and keeping other people off," went on Fioretta, raging.

"To hear you talk," said Ismay, "any one would imagine that Madame de Villemont was eager to marry somebody or anybody."

"I shall tell M. Gastineau my mind," said Fioretta.

"You had better not interfere, it is no business

of yours—I am sure you would vex Marc if you meddled with M. Gastineau's private affairs."

"Marc is not my husband, so whether he is pleased or angry, it cannot hurt me."

CHAPTER XIII.

LE CERCLE.

All the town was talking of Gustave Gastineau, of his good fortune, of his marriage, of his approaching departure. The hopes that were entertained of his conversion were as yet only mentioned among Mdlle. St. Georges' intimates. As many visits were paid and received in every house as if it had been New Year's time; Bar le Duc was thoroughly roused. Fioretta von Ehrtmann's voice was heard loud in many a salon; she told everything she knew of Gustave's early life, of his first love and disappointment, and wherever she went she left the impression that Gastineau was behaving extremely ill to Madame de Villemont; she sacrificed Louisa to do a bad turn to Gustave.

Severin de Pressy was Fioretta's most attentive auditor; hitherto he had neglected his opportunities for flirtation with that young lady, now a sort of intimacy grew up between them. She, finding what subject interested and kept him by her side, never let it flag for want of matter. One day she betrayed to M. de Pressy that Gastineau had meant to represent Louisa in the heroines of his novels; the burst of indignation with which Severin received this piece of information surprised Fioretta, and made her say,—

"For Heaven's sake never let any one know I told you; I fancied you must have guessed it long ago."

"Impossible! You could never have supposed that any one honoured by Madame de Villemont's acquaintance would identify her with one of those unhealthy creations!"

Fioretta said in an offhand manner,—

"Of course I don't mean to say that Louisa really resembles his L——s or his Lucretias; promise not to say I was the one to let you into the secret."

"You may be easy on that point."

Once assured that she herself ran no risk of annoyance, Fioretta was perfectly easy in mind; the excess of her shallowness made her unable to apprehend the possible results of the activity of her love of intrigue.

It was in the afternoon of that same day that Marc de Lantry went to call on Gustave; he did so in consequence of a report which had reached him that M. Gastineau was about to be received into the Roman Catholic Church. The pastor found Gustave alone, and with anything but a look of triumphant happiness on his face. The light of the late autumn day was already waning.

"I am not interrupting you, I hope," began Mark, observing the table before which the successful man was seated, to be strewed with letters, pamphlets, and circulars.

"Not in the least: I am very glad to see you."

And this was really the case, for Marc had aroused Gustave from a bitter meditation; he was in the state of collapse which follows the end of a struggle. He was a successful man; he had

achieved renown, social position; he had achieved his vengeance—and what then? Why, life at that instant seemed to him stale and unprofitable; his thoughts had strayed back to the Rue de Varennes, the squalid garret, the brutal father, the over-worked drudge of a mother, the cowed and beaten children: he recalled it all, and also the one thing that had brightened and softened that miserable atmosphere for him—the lovely little girl that sat on his knee, with her arm round his neck, her rosy cheek pressed to his, doing what she could to comfort him. Gustave had shut up rancour and hatred in his heart, and his heart was now in revolt against these cruel guests; he was suffering from his own hatred. Little by little all the tender recollections he had so sedulously striven to banish came stealing back: they gained on him.

It was at this point that Marc de Lantry appeared.

"Your visits are so few, they are the more to be prized," said Gustave, with emphasis.

"My time is given to those who most require

it," replied Marc; "I have little leisure, I assure you, for making calls of ceremony or pleasure."

"Yet your duties are not very onerous?"

"Pardon me, I have much actively to do; besides, I must study."

"Study—what for?"

"For my sermons."

"They are pretty much the same always, are they not?"

"Why have you not taken the trouble to find out for yourself?"

"I am not a hypocrite," said Gustave. "To tell you a bit of my mind, I look upon all churches, whatever their denomination, as nests of superstition; all the talk of freedom of conscience among Protestant preachers—humbug; they ride rough-shod over their flocks just as much as Catholic priests do. For my part, if I am to belong to a church, let it be the Church of Rome; it is logical at any rate."

"A logic which forbids the use of your own reason and free-will; a logic to which *you*, Gustave Gastineau, can never and will never submit;

the speech you have just made almost makes unnecessary the question I have come to ask you. In your present state of mind you are incapable of feeling the force of arguments which can only tell on a free heart and open conscience; I fear that to whatever church you openly adhere, it will be a mere homage paid to public opinion. Many, Gustave, respect and admire this generation of ours, I do neither; it is an age in which questions are raised, but not answered, in which uncertainty is thrown on every doctrine, and even the holy ramparts of sacred history are attacked, as though they were a burden on the souls of men; at the same time there is a most cowardly outward conformity to the ruling religion. A Roman Catholic in a Roman Catholic country, convinced that Protestants are right, would not openly avow his conversion; it would, maybe, distress his family, or hamper his advancement, so he secretly enters the fraternity of "libres penseurs," and—goes publicly to mass. Well, that is bad enough, but I can, though grieving that it should be so, allow for the influence of family affection, even

for ambition, but I can make no allowance for a man who professes a conversion, to further a stupid petty revenge for a wound to his self-love!"

Gustave did not answer immediately; presently he looked at Marc with hard, dry eyes, and said,—

"The wound was not so wide as a church door, but it was big enough to let out a life; *she* turned my heart of flesh to stone; from that day I have never felt its pulses stir for any woman, my eyes have never seen a glory round any woman's head. I am young, not yet thirty, and I cannot love; whose the fault—she has stolen my share of the fire from heaven, the only spark of divinity we possess!"

"Then you do not love Mdlle. Marguerite?"

Gustave shrugged his shoulders, saying,—

"I am not indifferent to her. The spotless purity of a young girl has an indescribable charm for a man like me—a rose unsunned, a violet of the woods. Your suggestive sister-in-law once likened Mdlle. Marguerite and me to Gretchen and Faustus; her

comparison reminded me that the philosopher and the devil both agreed that the attachment of a simple girl was man's greatest boon. I mean to make her happy, and I daresay I shall succeed. She will always feel that she is not sure of me—a great element in a woman's happiness. I want a quiet home; I wish for children; I have a notion that parental love would do me good; it is unknown to me; perhaps I shall live to deplore that also. I see by your face that every word I utter adds to your bad opinion of me; but believe me, Marc, no man's actions are wholly bad, nor wholly good. Man's feet are attached to the earth, but his head rises towards heaven. Vindictive and selfish as you think me, I have been merciful enough not to sacrifice Madame de Villemont to the purgatory of a marriage with me. I did mean so to punish her; I have not done it. I had loved her beyond words, then hated her intensely. Love, once dead, has no resurrection; but I shrank from watching the light fade from eyes that had been so dear; I have done the best I could for her and myself."

"I pity you," said Marc; "but having, as you say, spared Madame de Villemont, why sacrifice an innocent little girl to a heartless marriage? You talk of having been robbed of your share of the divine gift; why rob another? Are you not afraid that Mdlle. Marguerite may wake some day to bring the same accusation against you?"

"I shall take very good care she never does that," said Gustave. "It is men's weakness which causes the faults of women. I shall make myself master of my wife's heart as well as of her person. I know of what stuff women are made."

"I don't doubt the excellence of your tactics with a coquette, but you have had little experience of single-minded women; they carry a sort of Ithuriel spear with them. The interest which the remembrance of your boyhood still keeps alive, must be my apology for having come to expostulate with you." Marc took up his hat.

Gustave said, "Then I suppose I may expect

a refusal, were I to request you to officiate at my marriage? It would go against your feelings to give me the nuptial benediction?"

"It would be my official duty to perform the ceremony, if you required it," said Marc. "As for the blessing, if Christ says, bless your enemies, how could I refuse to bless you, over whom I sorrow, but not in bitterness? Adieu."

"Wait a moment," said Gustave; "our conversation has not been of a nature to make a man good company for himself. I will walk so far with you."

The two men left the house together.

"Have you seen Madame de Villemont?" asked Gustave, abruptly.

"No."

There was a momentary silence, and the pastor fancied that Gustave was about to give him some painful commission, so he added to his bare negative,—

"Here our roads part."

Gustave did not seem to hear.

"Tell her," he said, "that the recollection of

M. de Villemont separated us more than my desire for retaliation."

"I will be the bearer of no such message," said Marc. "Adieu."

"Au revoir," returned Gustave, and took his way to the Cercle.

Severin de Pressy was only some yards in the rear when Gustave and De Lantry separated. De Pressy had been striving to walk off the irritation produced by Fioretta's revelations. He had been for the last hour pacing up and down by the side of the canal. So uncomplaining, so considerate of others, generous, full of intellect, yet modest as the most unlettered could be, brave as the bravest Frenchman, he was surely worthy of Louisa's love. That he felt something of this, he showed, by the constantly-recurring thought, "I could have borne it, had she given her affections to one of a noble nature."

At this moment, as he caught the sound of Gustave's "Au revoir," he imagined it to be a note of triumph. Severin recalled the feeble old woman's rage, Louisa's sorrow-stamped face, and

the hatred of Cain suddenly awoke in his breast. His agitation was so violent that he had to turn back on his steps to regain his self-command. Five minutes later he bounded up the stairs leading to the billiard-room. From the ante-room, he could hear Gastineau's trenchant, domineering voice, high above all the others. When he entered the billiard-room, the ex-proviseur was on a chair close by a window leading into the balcony, the light of a lamp falling on his strongly-marked features.

There was a chorus of welcome when De Pressy walked in.

Gustave put out his hand, as did several others. Severin turned away abruptly, as if he had not remarked Gastineau's gesture of welcome, and shook hands cordially with the other men. Gustave was visibly embarrassed. He left his seat and pretended to be engrossed by a search among the newspapers scattered about, for one worthy of his attention; he ended by selecting one a week old. In the meanwhile, Severin had placed the balls on the billiard-table, and taken

up a cue. Had he formed any plan of insulting Gastineau? No one ever knew.

"Which of you will have a game with me?" he asked.

Two persons replied at the same instant—Gustave Gastineau and a young man named Louis Lemonnier, who had been looking over the whist-players. Severin's eyes glanced disdainfully at Gustave, and fixed on Lemonnier, to whom he offered the cue he was holding.

"We will play twenty, if you like, old fellow," he said, with unusual familiarity; for Severin's manner was reserved, except to intimate friends.

The game began. Gustave, strongly and disagreeably excited, kept moving restlessly near the players, a prey to the discomfort a man feels who is aware that offence is intended, and yet knows not how to bring it home to the offender.

They had been playing some minutes, when Louis said,—

"Apropos to nothing, have you heard that

Madame Dulau has at last thrown off her weeds, and that she is going to resume her receptions? Are you one of her set?"

"No," said Severin; "you meet too many in her salons, whom you meet nowhere else; people who seem to go only for the supper and the lansquenet that follows."

Severin was perfectly cognizant of the fact that Gastineau was one of Madame Dulau's intimates, or *habitués*.

"As for me," retorted Gustave, in his most dictatorial manner, "I go wherever I find amusement."

"Have you ever observed, Louis," continued Severin, "how many people there are in the world who say they go wherever they are amused, and who are only received, because their folly affords amusement?"

This time there could be no mistake as to Severin's intention. Gustave's pale face became scarlet.

"M. de Pressy," he called in a loud voice.

Severin had his back to Gastineau; he was in

the act of pushing his ball, and was holding his cue horizontally. At this haughty pronunciation of his name, he turned sharply round, and the end of his cue hit Gustave's hand sharply. This time the powder exploded.

Gastineau snatched the cue from Severin, broke it in two, and would have sent the pieces at Severin's head, but that his arm was caught by Lemonnier.

"You are an insolent fool," shouted Gastineau, with eyes that glowed like hot coals; "you shall answer for your insolence."

Severin still retained his semblance of composure. Pale and haughty he approached Gustave, and said, in a low, but distinct voice, contrasting with the stormy tones of his adversary,—

"I am at your orders; I shall wait at home to-morrow till mid-day, to receive any friend of yours, only if you do not wish the police to interfere and save you further trouble with me, you will do well to moderate your voice."

He immediately left the room with Louis, and one or two other young men.

"What, in the name of heaven, made you provoke Gastineau?" asked Louis. "He seemed inclined enough to be civil to you."

"I could not resist the pleasure of insulting him," said Severin. "Dear friends, the world is not large enough to hold us both. One or all of you must arrange preliminaries between us."

"But explain what is his particular offence?" cried Jules Gerard. "You are not going to fight simply because you don't like the cut of his features, or his coat. It is clear as day that you gave all the provocation."

"My dear fellow, right or wrong, I am going to fight him; all I have to beg of you is to settle matters for me with M. Gastineau's friend. Accept whatever weapons he proposes, and allow of no delay beyond the morning after next. I should have preferred settling the matter instanter, but I have set my heart on going to Madame de Neuville's ball to-morrow night. I would not die without seeing two or three of my partners again."

"Die!" exclaimed Louis. "What an idea! the

man of Greek and Latin will have small chance against such a marksman and fencer as you!"

Severin's answer was,—

"He is a successful man, and have you never remarked the triumph of evil here below?"

CHAPTER XIV.

DERNIÈRE INVITATION À LA VALSE.

It had been from Mrs. Templar, that M. de Blacourt first heard the news that Gustave Gastineau was about to be married to Marguerite St. Georges. He had found the old lady alone in the salon, walking up and down the room, twisting and untwisting the strings of her apron. She had said abruptly to the marquis,—

"Good riddance of bad rubbish; I have given him a lesson he won't easily forget; he won't show his face here again, a low-born rascal.'

M. de Blacourt made a shrewd guess as to the person to whom she alluded; he asked,—

"Has the proviseur been here?"

"Hasn't he? He fancied he had only Louisa to deal with!" Here Mrs. Templar laughed; it was that cackle which belongs to bitter angry old age. "I was up to his tricks. I watched him through the keyhole. I am neither blind nor deaf, thank God! Can you believe it, he dared to ask my daughter, the Vicomtesse de Villemont, to mix herself up in his paltry affairs, to ask her to be his messenger?"

"Taking a great liberty indeed," replied the marquis, humouring her. "And what was his request?"

"To offer his hand—*his* hand, forsooth, as if he had been a prince of the blood. You know Louisa refused a crown prince; she might have worn a crown, had she been little less than an idiot. I have had very hard trials, M. de Blacourt, and many a disappointment has that girl given me." Mrs. Templar was whimpering. "A child's ingratitude is sharper than a serpent's tooth, and the sooner I am under the sod the better. I am of no use; she despises my advice."

"No, no," said M. de Blacourt. "Louisa can't

do without you yet; only this morning, she was saying she should like to go to Rome, but that she could not go without you."

"I am too old to travel; if she wants to do that, she must manage by herself."

"You are not a bit too old to do anything you like; you'll live to dance at your grandson's wedding."

"Dance! I was once a fine dancer. I wonder if I could?" and she actually attempted a step.

"But you have not told me yet what it was the proviseur asked Madame de Villemont to do? You and I must see that Louisa is not imprudent."

"She is so wilful," said Mrs. Templar. "I give it up trying to manage her—I begged her not to make or meddle in his affairs. If he wants to marry that doll-faced Marguerite St. Georges, let him go and ask for himself. What business has Louisa with it, I should like to know?"

"You are right, madame; and I will tell Louisa so; where is she?"

"In her own room; she has got a headache—

always has one when she can't have her own way Louisa is violent, M. de Blacourt—you remember how she screamed like a fury when I came back from England. Time flies—and here she is a widow."

The marquis unconsciously sighed. Mrs Templar caught the sound—she chuckled.

"It will be all the same a hundred years hence, monsieur; the heart that beats fastest and loudest will be still enough then; what's the use of making such a fuss about this and that; let us eat and drink, and be merry."

M. de Blacourt said,—

"I will not disturb Madame de Villemont," and hurried away from the sinister old woman.

Louisa was a sight to give the heartache; but if she paled and flushed at every moment, her voice was firm, and her attention ready. Nevertheless, you could see by the distended eye, the sudden drawing up of the figure, accompanied by a quivering of the breath, the pain that had to be controlled. The marquis longed to be alone with her, that he might lead her to give way

to her feelings. Mrs. Templar, however, remained a fixture in the room.

After dinner the old lady fell asleep, and then M. de Blacourt said,—

"Shall we go to Rome?"

"By and by—give me a little time—by and by," repeated Louisa, adding—"I am a poor, weak creature," and she looked at him with sad, wide-opened eyes. "I shall soon get over it; just at first when masks are raised, and you see deformity where you expected beauty, it gives one a shock."

"I am not asleep," exclaimed her mother. "I hear all you are saying—I found out what was below his mask long ago. For heaven's sake, show some proper spirit, Louisa—marry, my girl—marry a rich man with a grand title, and dash past that vulgar fellow in your carriage on your way to court. Wouldn't I crush him." And Mrs. Templar lifted her foot and stamped passionately on the floor.

"Poor mamma!" and Louisa kissed her mother fondly. "I have given you so much vexation—we

are going to be happy now, and live for one another."

"Do you think that seeing you mope away your existence is the way to please me; I wouldn't wear the willow for any man breathing."

M. de Blacourt drew Louisa back to her seat. Mrs. Templar peered into her daughter's face—

"I am glad you are not crying. If you could shed a tear for old Gastineau's son I would disown you."

"Mother, mother," cried Louisa, "it is because he is not worthy of a tear that I am so wretched."

Mrs. Templar rose from her seat, and said, sternly—

"Don't talk stuff; in my day no woman would have owned she suffered for a man." And she left the room."

Fioretta von Ehrtmann was the good-natured friend who told Madame de Villemont that it was said she was breaking her heart for Gustave Gastineau, and that no one expected to see her at Madame de Neuville's ball.

"I always intended to be there," said Louisa; "I will take you, if you please."

"That's right," returned Fioretta, encouragingly.

"My dear Fioretta, I wish you would not speak to me as if I were a sick child."

"You cannot make *me* believe that you don't care; I shall always take your part, and say that Gustave has behaved atrociously ill to you."

Louisa shrugged her shoulders—she knew how useless it was to argue with Fioretta, or to try to make her hold her tongue. She had proposed to chaperon Mdlle. von Ehrtmann to have an excuse for declining M. de Blacourt as an escort; Louisa had a terror of any meeting between the marquis and M. Gastineau.

In the course of the day she received other visits. Madame Bredy and another lady called, and found Severin de Pressy at Clairefonds.

He had wanted to make sure that Louisa would be that evening at Madame de Neuville's. He had entreated her to promise to dance the last waltz with him, and when she hesitated he en-

forced his petition by telling her that he was going away.

"Are you? That's sudden, is it not? I hope it is on account of promotion," said Louisa.

He evaded a direct answer, and, observing this, she did not push the subject further. He went on to say that he had lately received some books which he thought would interest her—might he send them to her, and would she kindly take charge of them till his return? He intended they should remain with her as a souvenir, whatever the length of the journey he went. We all struggle against being forgotten. He had thought it possible to bring Louisa to say that she was sorry they were not to meet again soon—even the most conventional words of regret from her lips would have been a consolation to him. Madame Bredy interrupted them—she was full of gossip. She had just come from Mdlle. Chabot's messe de mariage; it had been highly amusing to see how the bridegroom fidgeted; he kept talking to the bride all through the ceremony. "It is a love-match, Madame de Villemont; that will please

you. M. Gastineau was there—somebody asked him if he was taking a lesson—he stayed till the very last words."

"As for the sermon," said Madame Bredy's companion, "I could repeat it by heart—it's the same M. le Curé has preached at every marriage for these last five years. I shall beg him to give us something new when Marguerite St. Georges is married; indeed he must, for M. Gastineau is a Protestant." And then the speaker suddenly stopped short, as if she had made a blunder.

Both ladies inquired if Madame de Villemont was to be at the ball that evening, and the inquiry was made in a tone of interest which proved to Louisa that Fioretta had told her the truth as to there being much tittle-tattle on float about her and Gustave Gastineau.

When Louisa entered Madame de Neuville's salon, it was with a dread of seeing the proviseur. A quick glance showed her he was not among the group of men near the door. Gustave had abstained from going; he was not

sure he could command himself enough to meet either Louisa or De Pressy with a display of indifference.

By a mere accident, Louisa was dressed in black lace with white flowers in her hair. This startled Severin, for he was seeking omens in everything. Between the dances, he went into the card-room, and did what he had never done before—betted high. He gained every bet; he had said in his heart, we shall see if fortune be on my side.

He avoided Louisa during the first part of the evening; the draught of joy he should quaff in the last waltz should not be weakened by any previous sip.

When the moment came, he would have fain put it off; half an hour, at most, and nothing would remain of his happiness. His lips twitched nervously as he led Louisa to a place in the circle; he turned giddy as he put his arm round her, and then they whirled away among the other couples. There was a laugh; some one had fallen; a fat gentleman was on the floor, and his short-sighted

partner put up her eye-glass to find out what had become of her cavalier.

"Never mind," cried Severin; and he clasps Louisa again, and her fair curls come waving against his cheek.

"That will do," said Louisa, stopping; "I am a poor waltzer."

She had perceived something strange in Severin's look, and she wanted to get away from him.

"We will go slower," he answered. "It is the last time—my last waltz—perhaps I shall never see you again — be good to me this evening."

No: certainly what she had feared was not the cause of his excitement. They went on again.

"Press your hand more heavily—lean on me," he said, in that tone which inexpressible tenderness imparts to the voice.

They danced to the last note of the music.

"You will walk about a little," he said, to put off the evil moment. "Come and have a peep at the card-players."

"Do you go soon?" asked Louisa.

"That reminds me," he said, without answering her question, "that I have left the books I mentioned to you this morning, directed to you. You will receive them to-morrow; keep them till I come back."

She looked at him — she could not help it. Most of us have heard the strings of a silent instrument, forced to respond to the sounds drawn from another. We have been told, if we do not know it from our own experience, that sometimes a note sung by a powerful voice will crack the glass shades of candles in the same room. The passionate feelings of one human heart will coerce that of another to render an answer. Severin saw Louisa change colour as he spoke to her; he felt her for an instant lean heavily on him, then seek to withdraw her arm from his.

"Not yet," he said, and drew her hand back to its former resting-place. She was on his left, and she could feel the hard, quick throbs of his heart. A sort of desperation of grief seized her; she knew what ailed him; it brought back her

own pain in its full intensity, and she had a mad inclination to cry aloud and ask him how he dared to make her suffer thus. What *could* she do? she was not to blame that he was unhappy.

A number of couples hurried by to form a quadrille.

"Come and be our vis-à-vis," said a voice.

"Will you dance?" asked Severin.

"Oh, no!"

Louisa had taken her arm from his; she was no longer acted upon by the vibration of his anguish.

"Then I will bid you farewell."

She offered him her hand, stammering,—

"I am sorry—I hope——"

"Thank you," he said, after waiting in vain for the end of her phrase. He took one long, yearning look at her and turned away.

What a weight of agony we civilized, well-bred men and women can bear without a cry?

Louisa sat where he had left her, thinking—"Were other women's lives as full of incongruities, of heartaches as hers? Madame de

Neuville, who was so mad after pleasure, did she ever weep? Why not? Had she herself not been whirling giddily a quarter of an hour ago; her step as light as if her heart had not been heavy as lead?"

"What has happened to you?" asked Fioretta. "You have a Niobe look."

"Have I?"

"Dear me, yes. What have you lost?"

"Lost?—nothing."

"Yes, you have; you have lost your partner."

"I am not inclined to dance any more. Are you ready to go home?"

"Indeed, no; I wouldn't miss the cotillon for the world. Don't stop for me; the Bredys or some one will take me away with them."

Louisa was led to her carriage by one of the young men of twenty, who seem to go to balls for the purpose of looking after missing cloaks and carriages.

CHAPTER XV.

MARGARET'S VOTIVE OFFERING.

M. DE BLACOURT seldom or ever saw Louisa until after mid-day. Early on the morning after the ball, he sent a message begging to see her. He waited for her in her boudoir. At the first glimpse of his face, she knew that something dreadful had occurred.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"Severin de Pressy is dead—killed in a duel by M. Gastineau."

"And the cause?" exclaimed Louisa, breathlessly.

"A woman, of course," he said, with that sudden elevation and throwing back of the head

familiar to him when indignant. "Is there ever any other reason for a man's misfortunes?"

Louisa burst into a passion of tears; the first she had shed since Gustave had taken his cowardly revenge of her.

M. de Blacourt did not appear touched by her emotion.

"Ay, ay, women have an odd leaning towards what is evil. Show them goodness and they turn from it—it is prosy and stupid; wickedness excites their imagination, there is nothing in goodness to whet their insatiable curiosity; they will trample on and forsake the good man, and cling to the reprobate—struggle for him, defend him, suffer for him, die for him. If you weep, Louisa, weep for yourself, not for the quiet dead. Your loss is greater than his; he loved you with the chivalrous love of an honourable gentleman—you were far dearer to him than himself or his self-love."

"I do weep for myself," said Louisa; "I bring misfortune on every one who comes in contact with me—ah, dear, best of friends, your Louisa's heart is broken; if I could go back only a few months

—hopeless—hopeless. I can undo nothing; but believe me, do believe me, I have tried to do right." She hid her head on the arm of the sofa, and sobbed piteously.

The poor marquis was ready to do as much. He sat down by her, praying her to forgive his bitterness; she must not lay a stress on words spoken in a moment of angry agitation—she must not be hard on him. "Come, come, they must make friends again."

Louisa turned her tear-stained face up to him, and put up her trembling mouth to be kissed, just as she had done at eight years old.

Mrs. Templar coming in, asked, "What was wrong now?" When she was told of the duel, and that Severin had been killed, she exclaimed in her broadest Scotch accent, "The deil's aye kind to his ain."

No one had thought it necessary to take any precaution in telling Marguerite St. Georges of the tragical event, and her uncle and aunt were utterly amazed when they saw her go down all of a heap on the floor. The first words they said to

the poor girl when consciousness returned, were, "M. Gastineau is quite safe, there's no cause for anxiety."

"M. de Pressy is dead?" said Marguerite, in a dreamy voice.

"My dear, I am sorry to say he is," replied Petite Maman, wiping her eyes. "I am thankful for one thing, that his mother died last year—how proud she was of her handsome boy."

"He really is dead?" persisted Marguerite.

"He was killed on the spot. M. Gastineau's sword pierced his heart. They were fighting, my dear, and M. Gastineau had to do his best."

Marguerite drew her breath sharp between her teeth.

"Blessed be God," went on Petite Maman, "he did not suffer long."

"I will go upstairs, aunt," said Marguerite, and ran out of the room.

Mdlle. St. Georges looked after her with a puzzled expression, then turned her eyes inquiringly on the colonel.

"It will put off the marriage," he said. "Gasti-

neau gave himself up at once; he is in prison—a matter of form; he will be sure to be acquitted, for it is positive that poor De Pressy provoked the challenge."

"Such a gentle-mannered young fellow as he was; it's a riddle to me his provoking a lamb. What do people say they fought about?"

"Well, it is whispered that it was about Madame de Villemont; that's what the women think. Young Lemonnier told me that Severin came to the Cercle, evidently with the intention of provoking Gastineau."

"Then what makes them mix up Madame de Villemont's name in the matter? I'd lay my life she has as much to do with it as our Marguerite."

"You had better look after Marguerite herself; she looked dreadfully ill when she left the room."

"I know what to do and when to do it," returned his sister; "let me alone, colonel, in the management of the house, or take it on yourself—there's the keys, and there's the purse; make the best of them both."

"I did not interfere as to the house; I reminded you of the girl upstairs." And the colonel took his hat, and in a twinkling had escaped from the domestic storm within.

To be out of temper is the way some very good people have of showing their grief, and Mdlle. St. Georges had an angry pain at her heart. She recollected Severin as a child and as a school-boy; she had seen him grow into a fine young man, and she felt an irritation against Gastineau, which she was conscious was dangerous; her attack on her brother was like the opening of a safety-valve.

When Mdlle. St. Georges at last went up to her niece's room, she found Marguerite on her knees before a small ivory crucifix, which hung over a small ebony vase for holy water—Marguerite's treasures and inheritance from her mother; Petite Maman waited in silence till Marguerite rose from her knees.

"You have done right to pray——"

Petite Maman stopped at sight of Marguerite's face; she laid her hand on the girl's wrist.

"You are feverish, my dear, lie down and keep quiet."

"Thank you, aunt, but I don't at all want rest; give me something to do—something that will make me move, tire me; I don't want quiet." And then she burst into a little quick sobbing. "*Do*, aunt, something to do, something to do!"

"Come downstairs with me; will you go out for a walk? Will you go and see Madame de Villemont?"

"No—no—no!" She put her hand to her throat. "It's so hard!"

"What's so hard, my poor child?"

"I did as I was bid; I will tell you some day. Give me something to do, aunt, pray!"

A real strong emotion always exercises dominion for the time being; Mdlle. St. Georges meekly offered Marguerite the basketful of stockings to mend.

"I can't sit, aunt; something to do in the kitchen." And thither Marguerite betook herself.

Mdlle. St. Georges remained behind with the stockings, pondering over Marguerite's agitation,

always arriving at the same conclusion, that she could not understand it.

Madame de Villemont and Marguerite were both in the church during the funeral service performed for M. de Pressy. People wondered to see Marguerite there; she was in deep mourning, and so far from not seeking observation, she walked steadily down the nave to the chairs surrounding the bier on which the coffin rested; she never rose from her knees during the whole ceremony; she resisted her aunt's entreaties to return home, and followed the procession to the cemetery. There again she managed to get near the grave, and M. de Blacourt, who was one of the gentlemen who held one of the lowering ropes, observed her throw something into the grave; when every one was moving away, she remained as if rooted to the spot; the marquis offered her his arm, and led her away to Colonel St. Georges.

Marguerite's conduct was much commented on, and very generally blamed; every one was of opinion that out of consideration for her betrothed she ought to have stayed at home, at all events

avoided doing anything that challenged public attention. The colonel and Mdlle. St. Georges were scandalized and grieved, but, as they confessed to their friends, Marguerite had never been herself since the duel.

"And no wonder," said those who received this confidence; "never was a more awkward situation for a girl; still it would be better if she could be induced to imitate Madame de Villemont's avoidance of all occasions for drawing on herself any remarks.

Louisa had made many attempts to see Marguerite—had written to beg her to come to Clairefonds, but Marguerite charged her aunt to excuse her to Madame de Villemont. Mdlle. St. Georges was to say that Marguerite was trying to recover her spirits, to regain composure; that she could not see Madame de Villemont without a recurrence to distressing and painful topics; as soon as she had thoroughly mastered her grief, she would go to Clairefonds.

It is according to circumstances and characters that passions reveal themselves; they may have

smouldered for years, and then burst forth with the force and rapidity of lightning. This was too evidently Marguerite's predicament; but for Severin's cruel death she might never have known the breadth and depth of her feelings for him.

M. de Blacourt again urged Louisa to leave Bar le Duc; he could not at first fathom the cause of her unwillingness to go away from a place so fraught with painful recollections for her, and indeed for them all; at last she explained to him that she would not move until after Gustave's trial was over.

"Public opinion," she said, "is hard upon him; I wish to remain in his neighbourhood in case that I could be of use to him."

"And afterwards?"

"Anywhere you like," she said, and voice and gesture expressed the indifference she felt.

One day early in October, M. de Blacourt announced to Louisa that he was going to St. Mihel to attend Gastineau's trial.

She looked at him wistfully.

"Remember," she said, "that I am not guiltless in the matter; it was my folly which laid the foundation of all his sorrow and wrong-doing."

"False reasoning, my dear. You might as well say that it laid the foundation of his celebrity. It is the bad seed in the man's own heart which has brought forth the evil fruit."

"I know I am about to ask a great deal of you," she said; "but for the ease of my conscience, if you see a need for it, give him *your* support—if you merely own him as an acquaintance—it must do good."

"He will not require my assistance, but if I see a reason for putting myself forward, I will do what I can for your sake."

"Thank you; I am very grateful."

The same evening M. de Blacourt brought Louisa the news of Gustave's having escaped with merely a fine of three thousand francs. It had been clearly proved that De Pressy had used provocation, which allowed of the plea of extenuating circumstances. The procureur royale prosecuted, and confined himself to a bare statement of facts

—there had been no pleading against the accused —St. Georges was present, but there had been no call upon either of them for any protestations of good opinion. In common justice, the marquis must admit that poor Severin did not leave M. Gastineau any alternative but to fight."

Louisa put no further questions. After a little she said,—

"I will begin my preparations for leaving this; I have had plenty to make me dislike it; yet, strange to say, it gives me real pain only to think of going away. I wonder if I shall ever come back again."

"No doubt," said the marquis, who wished to encourage her to seek change of scene.

"I am going because I see you are anxious that I should," she said; "have you fixed where?"

"I thought it was settled we should winter in Rome—we must first go to Paris, and take our final departure from thence."

"You must undertake to persuade mamma," she said, and then the subject dropped.

About a week afterwards Marguerite St.

Georges came to see Madame de Villemont—Louisa was in her own room, busied sorting books and music—what she meant to take, and what to leave behind. Marguerite was very much agitated when she first came in—breathless and unable to speak. Madame de Villemont, taken by surprise, was embarrassed also.

Marguerite was the first to begin the conversation,—

"So it *is* true that you are going away."

"And it is also true that I am sorry to go, Marguerite."

"When do you leave, madame?"

"Not till the middle of November; there is a good deal of preparation necessary—a good many things to settle."

"I am glad you are not going sooner; I have come with a petition—one that I do not think you will refuse."

"I would not deny you anything in my power to grant you, dear."

"First, will you tell me about M. Gastineau?"

"What is it you wish to know?" asked Louisa.

"You were very old friends, were you not?" and Marguerite looked Louisa full in the face.

Louisa sat thoughtful for a few minutes, then she said,—

"Yes, it is right you should understand it all: I was a very little child when we first saw one another; his father and mother lived in the same house as we did; his father taught me French, and that brought Gustave and me together as playfellows. At that time we loved one another very dearly: his father was killed by the explosion of Fieschi's machine, and his mother fell into great distress. They all left Paris, and so did we, and we never met or heard of one another till five years later—when I was fourteen. It was in Switzerland; my mother, by chance, took the house next to that of Gustave's uncle. I was very glad to see Gustave again, and I was very sorry for him; he was in a bookseller's shop, working hard to save money out of his salary to enable him to return to Paris. I saw him very often, and he asked me to teach him English, that he might get better paid, and I did, and that made us more companions than ever."

Here Louisa stopped—her colour rose, and her breath came short; Marguerite remained perfectly still, with her eyes riveted on Louisa.

"I believe I loved Gustave with the same love I had had for him as a child; I never thought of any other kind of caring; but he was older, and he loved me differently; his cousin Claire used to joke me and tease me about him, but I tried not to believe her. He used to tell me of his plans, and how he was already writing; he said one day that it was all for me, and that he could die for me. I was very sorry; I had an affection for him, though he will never believe that now." Louisa's voice broke. "Oh! Marguerite, I was a foolish, untaught girl, allowed to run about wild; I couldn't bear to see Gustave unhappy, so I promised him in secret to wait three years before I married. I said this to comfort him—only to satisfy him, and prevent his looking as if he were going to kill himself; and then we came to Paris, and so did he; and now here is the mean part of my conduct: though I knew he was of more real worth than half the people

I saw, I was ashamed of him—ashamed of his dress, ashamed of his ugliness. I ought to have gloried in his courage, in his perseverance, in his self-denial. I was glad, yes, glad, to do as my mother bid me, and break my promise to him. I did it unkindly, and he has never forgiven me."

Marguerite exclaimed,—

"Why should he have begged you to ask me to marry him?"

"Marguerite, dear," said Louisa, "all that he has of good is his own; if he has shown unforgiveness to me, I deserved it. Make allowances, dear, for his harsh manner: he has suffered much, been soured and embittered by me. You will be patient and kind, dear, for my sake: you love me, Marguerite, don't you?"

Marguerite covered her face—she wept, but she did not say yes.

"I love you, Marguerite; for the sake of the love I bear you, be patient with him; he would have been happy and good but for me. I taught him to despise women; teach him, my darling,

what a good woman is?" There was an angelic smile on Louisa's face as she said these last words.

Marguerite leaned forward and kissed Madame de Villemont on the mouth; when she had first come in, she had barely allowed her friend's lips to touch her cheek.

Louisa clasped Marguerite in her arms, and then they both began to cry and call each other by tender names.

"You are very thin, Marguerite," said Louisa, laying her hand on Marguerite's shoulders.

"I am quite well," returned Marguerite, hastily. "Madame de Villemont, I have come to ask you to go with me to the Mairie the day I am married?"

Louisa hesitated.

"M. Gastineau might not like it."

"I beg it as the greatest favour; if he loves me, why should he mind your being present?" Marguerite spoke with the sudden heat of one whose nervous system is too irritable to allow of her bearing contradiction.

Louisa's face lighted up with the same sweet smile which had touched Marguerite's heart a few minutes back.

"I promise," she said. "Are you to be married in church the same morning you go to the Mairie?"

"No," was the curt reply.

"And when is it to be?" asked Louisa.

"I will let you know a day or two before—good-by."

"I hope I shall often see you now, Marguerite."

Marguerite shook her head.

"I would rather not; I do love you, and you must not imagine I have any unkind feeling to you, Madame de Villemont, but indeed, it is better for me that we do not meet till that day!" Marguerite was trembling with excitement. "Don't be angry with me!"

"No, indeed, I am not in the least angry; I have a keepsake for you, Marguerite."

"Not to-day, not to-day." Marguerite stooped and kissed Louisa's hand.

As she went away, Madame de Villemont

thought, "Poor child! she is jealous of *me*, of *me*—women's hearts are strange things, ill to satisfy, craving for more, even in the full bloom of love!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CIVIL MARRIAGE.

It was on the evening of the 28th of November that Louisa received a line from Marguerite,—

"The hour is ten to-morrow at the Mairie."

To say that Louisa was not agitated would be to exaggerate; she had been schooling herself for the occasion ever since she had yielded to Marguerite's entreaty; nevertheless, she had now a momentary reaction—she was indignant that this trial should be forced on her; recollections of her own repentance and love and expiation made her heart full. It was with difficulty that she brought herself to write in answer,—

"I will be punctual," and then she had a sort

of pleasure in the anticipation of draining to the dregs the bitter cup.

She spoke of Marguerite's request to Mrs. Templar and M. de Blacourt with perfect self-possession.

"What impudence!" exclaimed the former.

M. de Blacourt waited to hear how Louisa had decided.

"Of course I have agreed to go," continued she; "I don't ask you to accompany me," turning to the marquis. "I should even decline your escort," she went on; "there is no cogent reason why you *should* give your countenance to M. Gastineau on the day of his marriage, and it might even seem a slight to poor M. de Pressy's memory!"

"I can see no more cause for your than for my going," returned M. de Blacourt.

"Marguerite made me promise. I should not like it to be said that I was afraid to go."

"Very unlikely that Mdlle. Marguerite or her aunt should say anything unkind of you."

"Fioretta would certainly not spare me."

"I warned you, long ago, against that girl," said Mrs. Templar. "I always told you to keep clear of her."

"I have been too fond of having my own way," replied Louisa, gently.

"It's very well to say so, but I doubt whether you think as you speak. Don't go near those people to-morrow."

"I promised Marguerite."

"I thought so; catch you without a reason for doing as you please. And you mean to go alone? How do you know but that you may be insulted?"

"M. de Lantry will be there, he will look after me.

"He's going too, is he? a pretty proof of his friendship for you!"

"He goes, mamma, in his professional capacity."

"You really do not wish me to accompany you?" asked the marquis.

"Decidedly no."

"And what are you going to wear?" inquired

Mrs. Templar. "Don't be silly, putting on something simple, by way of not outshining the others. You are full of that sort of sentimental nonsense, and much good it has done you. A handsome dress always produces its effect."

"You shall choose what I wear yourself, mamma."

"Oh, yes: now we have got our own way, we can be all that is yielding. You must go in your own carriage, I insist on that; ring the bell, and give orders that it shall be properly cleaned, and desire Jacquot to make himself as smart as he can. The idea of your not allowing him to wear livery, not even a cockade!—another of your ridiculous freaks, as if you or any one else can make folks equal; there are ranks and degrees in heaven, and nothing can prevent servants from being servants."

Louisa was only too thankful that her mother's thoughts should run on the carriage and on her dress.

The following morning was as beautiful a morning as one could wish for a wedding-day.

The weather was more like that of opening spring than of dying autumn. The variegated leaves still on the trees glittering in the sun had a false air of youth; a soft south wind was blowing, and an early shower had moistened the earth, from which arose a grateful aromatic perfume.

Louisa was dressed according to her mother's taste in a rich dark blue silk, which enhanced the beauty of her clear fair complexion—her inward flutter sent a delicate flush to her cheeks, which brightened her eyes—her bonnet was a structure of gauze from Paris, that did not hide her pretty rebellious curls. It was a study to watch Mrs. Templar as she presided over the adorning of her daughter. If Louisa had been the bride herself, her mother could not have been more anxious. When Louisa turned to her and said, "Shall I do, mamma?" pride, admiration, triumph, all appeared on the old lady's strongly marked face.

"Yes, you'll do," she said, slowly. "There's rather a difference between you and that moon-faced Marguerite; but 'comparisons are odorous,' as Mrs. Malaprop says. Oh! what a fool you

have been, Louisa, but it's no use lamenting,—what can't be cured must be endured—go and show yourself to M. de Blacourt, but don't go away till I have seen you again; there's plenty of time."

To Louisa's dismay and astonishment, Mrs. Templar joined her in less than ten minutes, with her cloak and bonnet on.

"Yes, my dear, I am going to see the play played out. I have no idea of trusting you in such company without me: you look at my dress—I am well enough for Gustave Gastineau; he does not expect the honour I am about to do him. Come, come along," and Mrs. Templar tripped lightly down the stairs.

"It can't be helped," said M. de Blacourt, half laughing; "perhaps it is better that she should accompany you."

The hired carriage conveying the bride and her uncle and aunt was just passing as Madame de Villemont's coupé reached the top of the street. Mrs. Templar put her head out of the window and nodded, and waved her hand gaily. Further

on they came up with the pastor and Fioretta on foot; Mrs. Templar again went through the same dumb show of pleasure. When she drew her head in, she laughed that painful hysterical giggle which always made Louisa shiver.

"What a surprise it will be to the bonny bridegroom to see me, eh, Louisa? I am one of his oldest friends—his friend, when he had not a shoe to his foot—I suppose he has fine varnished boots now, like a gentleman?"

"I suppose so," replied Louisa, scarcely knowing what she said.

"There's a proverb in my country," went on Mrs. Templar, "that you can't make a race-horse out of a cart-horse, stable him and groom him and train him ever so well."

"Mamma, you will not say anything unkind at the Mairie, for Marguerite's sake; it would seem a sort of treachery in me."

"My dear, I am unburdening my mind to you. As for Gustave Gastineau, my presence will be worth volumes of speeches to him."

The carriage stopped, and Mrs. Templar could

see Marguerite entering the Mairie in a plain straw bonnet and her little checked blue silk dress.

"It's only to be the civil marriage to-day," said Mrs. Templar. "There was no occasion for Marc de Lantry to come bustling here, and with that busybody Fioretta."

Marc at this instant came up and handed out the ladies from Clairefonds.

"How wonderfully got up we are," whispered Fioretta to Louisa. "You are determined to outshine the bride. What could have brought your mother?"

"Her own wish." A quick glance informed Louisa that Gustave was present, between two gentlemen, evidently strangers and with the stamp of Paris on them. He seemed startled at seeing her. She had taken it for granted that he would have known of Marguerite's invitation to her to be present; then Louisa saw, as women see, without looking, that his two friends spoke to Gustave manifestly about her, for the eyes of all three were fixed on her.

Gustave was pale and thin; an air of suffering

pervaded his whole appearance. Louisa was sorry for him.

The friendliness of the maire to the company assembled, froze into the stiffest politeness, when he had to address the bridegroom.

Louisa was sorry for him again.

At last the official ceremony commenced.

Gustave and Marguerite advanced to the table before which the maire had taken his seat. M. le Maire then commenced reading aloud that portion of the Code Napoléon, relating to the duties which the law imposes on husbands towards wives and on wives towards husbands. That concluded, he said,—

"M. Gustave Gastineau, native of the canton of Geneva, furnished with the consent of his mother, his sole surviving parent, having had his banns of marriage duly published at the parish church of Notre Dame in this town, and also a notice in writing of his intentions of marriage, duly affixed to the walls of this Mairie, is now about to contract a marriage with Mdlle. Marguerite Celestine St. Georges."

The maire then turning to Gustave Gastineau, said,—

"Will you take this woman, Marguerite Celestine St. Georges, for your wife?"

Gustave answered in a strong voice, "I will."

Addressing Marguerite, the maire put the question to her,—

"Will you, Marguerite Celestine St. Georges, take this man, Gustave Gastineau, for your husband?"

Marguerite's breath came loud and hard, she rubbed her hands on one another, shifted her feet, looked down, then suddenly raising her eyes to the magistrate's face, she distinctly said, "No," and stood like one transfixed.

For an instant there was a profound silence; you might, as the saying is, have heard a pin drop. Immediately after followed a buzz of agitated voices: Mdlle. St. Georges and the colonel were vehemently questioning and expostulating with Marguerite.

"The biter bit," came from Mrs. Templar

in English, luckily only understood by Louisa, perhaps by Gustave, but he showed no sign of having heard the comment.

He began, "Monsieur le Maire"—every tongue was hushed—"Monsieur le Maire, and ladies and gentlemen, there is no occasion to detain you here longer. I respect Mdlle. Marguerite St. Georges' decision."

He bowed to all the party. He stood alone like one deserted. His eye caught that of Louisa; she went up to him and held out her hand to him. He grasped it tightly, saying,—

"*You* did not know her intention."

"On my word, I did not."

"I deserve it," he said, gently.

She was very sorry for him; her eyes filled with tears.

"God bless you, Madame de Villemont." And he went out by himself. His departure was the signal for the rest of the party to disperse.

Mrs. Templar described the whole scene with infinite relish to M. de Blacourt; she looked and

spoke more like herself than she had done for many a day. She wound up thus,—

"I am heartily glad of it; it's poetical justice, whatever that may be. The recollection will soothe the rest of my life. It turned my blood to see that villain prospering in everything."

"Poetical justice, like all justice, my dear madame, does not, in striking the unjust, spare the just."

"He is punished, that's sufficient for me," said Mrs. Templar. "It is curious, M. de Blacourt, but it is a fact I can verify, whoever injures *me* comes to evil."

M. de Blacourt avoided any direct reply to this assertion; Mrs. Templar, he saw, was relapsing into her usual moody flightiness.

"What was Marguerite's reason for making her refusal so public?" asked the marquis of Louisa.

"That does not concern us," interrupted Mrs. Templar; "the result was all that could be wished."

M. de Blacourt's question was one very generally put:—Why had Marguerite chosen to make her refusal so insultingly public?

On the afternoon of the very day that had been intended for her marriage, Marguerite retired to the Convent of the Dames Dominicaines, and from thence sent a message to Madame de Villemont, begging to see her. Marguerite was in a high state of excitement, her whole appearance had undergone a sudden change; the red and white, once so cunningly mingled in her young face, was gone—where the hot feverish flush was not, the skin had a yellow tint. There was an almost defiant expression in Marguerite's eyes, which were so sunken as to make her forehead look more prominent than ever.

"I am in disgrace with everybody," she began. "But I don't regret, I glory in what I have done. They will get tired in time of railing at me. His own play put it in my head how to turn the tables on him, I caught him in his own trap. My aunt says I have broken her heart; I wish mine would break as easily; but it won't. I shall have to live and sorrow and sorrow, and all the sorrow in the world will not bring him back to life."

"Marguerite, my poor child, what are you saying?"

"You don't know, then, why I hate M. Gastineau? why I would rather have killed myself than marry him?" Marguerite spread her hands over her face, and tears trickled through her fingers. "He's dead! he's dead! why need I be ashamed now—he can never know—never know."

"Poor Marguerite! I never guessed," said Madame de Villemont, on whom a new light dawned.

"How should you or any one have guessed?" then speaking in a sort of ecstasy, "He was so high above me—high as the angels above common men, and yet so gentle, as if he felt every one to be his equal; so kind to all humble, weak things, and he loved *you*, Madame de Villemont, and you—you could slight him for—— Ah! and he died for you—you know he did—and you only felt for his murderer. I pity you—I do," and Marguerite gave a look of contempt at Louisa.

"You saw him so seldom," said Louisa, bewildered by the girl's passion and anger.

"Seen him seldom—how do you know? Once we lived next door to him, when his mother lived

here; we have played together, and he protected me because I was the smallest of all; he was the champion of the little ones, and he would sit telling us stories always of some one brave and good—— and now he's dead."

"Marguerite, you should never have accepted M. Gastineau."

"Shouldn't I? Well, I never meant to marry him after he had committed murder. I threw his betrothal ring into the grave, but he didn't know—ah! you wonder I should have accepted M. Gastineau, you forget what you said about French marriages—matters of business, like taking a new house—I obeyed my aunt, and I am so glad that I did. I was half mad when they told me M. Gastineau was acquitted; it seemed there was no punishment for him; but I, the poor girl he meant to use as a rod for you—the poor simpleton, he thought he might do as he liked with—she managed to punish him."

"Marguerite, Marguerite, revenge leaves a bitter taste in the mouth."

"Death is something worse. Wish me good-by,

Madame de Villemont. I don't know why I asked to see you; you make my heart burn. I ought to love you for all your goodness to me, but I can love nothing. Alas! alas! I care for nothing, believe in nothing, but that there is a blind chance—say good-by to me," and she threw herself on Louisa's neck, holding her in a close embrace.

CHAPTER XVII.

Soon the sweet spring comes dancing forth,
And nature smiles again.

It was the day before they were to leave Clairefonds, and Louisa and M. de Blacourt were walking up and down the Charmille. The purple flowers of the clematis had long since vanished, the leaves of the hornbeam hedge strewed the path, the few still fluttering on the branches were withered and lifeless. Their conversation had been about Marguerite.

"Her friends ought to be reconciled to her," said Louisa; "otherwise, they may drive her into some other rash step."

"Luckily," said M. de Blacourt, "young ladies cannot make themselves nuns now-a-days, in the first pain of a love disappointment."

"I used to think convents worse than prisons," observed Louisa. "I have altered my opinion; it is not a bad idea to provide hospitals for invalid souls and hearts, as well as for sick bodies."

"My dear, *you* would fret yourself to death in six months, behind a grating and a black veil."

"I don't know. I have an immense longing for repose, for quiet monotony. I feel just like a collapsed india-rubber ball."

In spite of her smile, Louisa looked pale and sad.

"At this moment, perhaps," said M. de Blacourt. "These dead-looking branches, Louisa, will put forth buds and blossoms next spring; all that is so dreary now will be gay and full of animation then; birds will sing, and flowers will perfume the air, this biting wind will be a soft zephyr. Sorrow and regret are like winter, only for a time."

"Why, why has everything gone against me all my life?" exclaimed Louisa, passionately.

"What radical fault is there in me, which has made all my good gifts null and void?"

"What the ancients called fate, the moderns name law, my dear. Your bringing up made you what you are. The consequences of mistakes fall not only on the person who makes them, but also on those who have suffered from the blunders. You have plenty of vigour of mind, use it to control circumstances; that's the difference between strength and weakness. Struggle, action, work, is the true meaning of life."

"I cannot understand it—I cannot make it out —why, if it is a necessity that man should live in a struggle, why is he here at all."

"If this earth were the universe the question would be more puzzling, but, my dear, are you growing sceptical?"

"I don't know what I am growing—I do see that theory and practice disagree. All the striving I have come in contact with, has been to have a box on four wheels to drive in, and to be better lodged than your neighbour. To me," went on

Louisa, impatiently, "the world seems growing more silly every day. Where are there men like the prophets of old, or the women like the heroines of the Bible?"

"They were in the minority then, as great minds always will be," answered M. de Blacourt. "They wrote and preached against the follies of the day, as our great men do now; but, my dear, I believe we cannot go further in this line of argument for want of the wings you were longing for the other day. You were wiser at eight years old. All our wisdom comes to what I heard you say then. You had been to church in the morning, and I heard you talking to yourself. 'God's eye here in this room on me, and in the next room watching Marie and Denis, watching the ships on the sea and watching everybody all over the world—I can't understand it—bah! I shall know all about it by-and-by, when I go to God.' Now, my dear, we had better return to the house; it is getting damp.'"

"You are very, very kind and patient with

me," said Louisa, and looking up at M. de Blacourt, she was struck by his worn appearance. There came over her that dread which seizes on us, when we catch on some beloved face the fatal shadow of the angel Azrael. It appears mercifully at intervals, to warn us to show love and duty while it is yet in our power.

"There is one most precious thing in the world, and that is a true friend," said Louisa, putting her arm within M. de Blacourt's. "Promise, promise that we shall never be separated. Where you go, there I must go also."

"Not cured of rash promises, Louisa?"

"This one I will keep joyfully and truthfully."

After this date Louisa passed out of the realms of fiction into those of reality.

She is now a happy woman; and here I

will make an end in the words of an old writer,—

"And if I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired: but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto."

THE END.

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