




L. J. ...



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THE DUKE'S MARRIAGE.

“ O Dieu ! qui tenez la France sous vos ailes !
Ne souffrez pas, Seigneur, ces luttes éternelles,
Ces trônes qu'on élève et qu'on brise en courant . . .
Ces tristes libertés qu'on donne et qu'on reprend ;
Ce noir torrent de lois, de passions, d'idées,
Qui jette sur nos mœurs ses vagues débordées ;
Ces tribuns opposant, lorsqu'on les réunit,
Des chartes de plâtre aux abus de granit !
Cette guerre toujours de plus en plus profonde
Aux sinistres éclairs de l'orage sur l'onde,
Des partis au Pouvoir, du Pouvoir aux partis,
L'aversion des grands qui rongent les petits. . . ”

VICTOR HUGO.

THE DUKE'S MARRIAGE.

L. Richard James Bentley

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE DUKE'S MARRIAGE.



CHAPTER I.

THE DUKE'S OFFER.

GERTRUDE CORRINGTON—"Flirtie," as many of her kind friends called her—was engaged to marry the French Duc d'Alma.

Flirtie was a girl with wavy hair and a little mouth, the belle of Lewbury, and twenty-one years old. She had had her dozen of love-affairs already (certainly not one less, affirmed Mrs. Nethersole, who had a retentive memory for the doings of her neighbours), and it was reported that Dr. Claverley, the rising young surgeon, and Mr. Oram, the curate of Westover, who were both smitten with her charms, would never propose to her because she was too fast. But now of a sudden, Flirtie was about to become a

duchess, the wife of a rich and handsome foreigner, who kept a stud of race-horses, one of which had fanned the pride of Gaul into a flame by winning the English Derby.

To be sure, this horse's master was only a French duke, said Mrs. Nethersole and some others, who were anxious to show that they knew the difference between the sterling value of an English coronet and the electro-plated imitations which foreigners presume to wear; but this would not prevent Gertie from being styled "duchess," and soaring into a social sphere far above that where Mrs. Nethersole waddled. The girl was, in fact, going to become Duchesse d'Alma, Marchioness of Palestro, and Countess de Beauregard-Voilay; to be mistress of the historical Castle of Beauregard, in the Valley of the Loire; and to take a foremost place in the brilliant court of Napoleon III., who then ruled on the French throne. Pretty well this, for the daughter of a half-pay major-general with six children.

General Corrington and his wife certainly thought so, and deemed that Gertrude had played her cards wondrous well. Who would have imagined that the sly puss could have made such capital use of a month's stay at Ostend? *Venit,*

vidit, vicit; she had carried the Duke's heart by storm, out-manceuvring ever so many besieging parties of active young widows and demurely scheming virgins. In the fashionable Flemish watering-place, overflowing with visitors from all parts of Europe, she had suddenly achieved a success like that which an obscure actress, leaving the boards of a country theatre, sometimes wins on a first-rate stage in an evening.

She was pronounced *ravissante, divine*; she was stared at, almost mobbed, and there were even some of her own sex who praised her. On the Digue de Mer, the parade where people saunter all day, at the hotel *tables d'hôte*, in the ball and concert rooms of the Kursaal, visitors, a week after Gertie's arrival, were all saying to one another, "Have you seen the beautiful Miss Corrington?" and those who had not seen were told that they could not conceive how lovely she was. So it befell that the Duc d'Alma, an Adonis of thirty, a little tired of female worship, a little sceptical, too, of girlish witchery, heard of the English beauty and saw her.

He was leaning over the railings of the Digue one morning, gazing out lazily over the sunlit sea, when he beheld Gertrude Corrington coming

over the sands, with her brother and two younger sisters. She wore a pretty sailor hat, and under it her splendid hair, damp from the salt water, flowed all down her back like a golden mantle. The sight pleased the Duke, and called to his mind the lines of a Provençal minstrel-poet—

“ In every weather, heat or cold,
 She had no dress but her hair of gold,
 Which, like a mantle rich and strong,
 Draped her limbs as she went along.”*

Having repeated which lines to himself, the noble sportsman strolled off to find some English friend who might introduce him to General Corrington. He soon stumbled upon Lord Oldborn, an elderly peer, who acceded with pleasure to his request. The General was just then basking on the terrace of the Kursaal, with his double eye-glass on, and a copy of the *Times* in his hand, his mind deep in the *Gazette* of army promotions, and innocently unconscious of the stir which his daughter's good looks were making in the place.

French declarations of an amorous nature

* “ Per qualche temps che fessa, per fredda o fredura,
 Antr' habit non abbia che la sion caballura,
 Qualche como un' mantel d'or tant eram bel et blond,
 La cobra della testa fin 'al bas des talons.”

never hang fire long. Whatever courtship has to be gone through is regarded as a formality to be discharged after a proposal of marriage has been made and accepted. An introduction at the Kursaal followed by a valse; a meeting next day, which was not so accidental as it looked, during an excursion to Ghent; a trip by canal to picturesque old Bruges, with a picnic, at which the Duke mixed the salad, uncorked the champagne, and sang some ballads of his country in a bold and gay tenor voice;—these were the only preliminaries to Gertrude's engagement. Perhaps mamma noticed that Gertie and the Duke were sitting rather confidentially in the bows of the boat as it was being towed back to Ostend in the moonlight, by a pair of tattered Flemings; but this did not prepare the good lady for the announcement which her daughter made, with an outburst of blushing joy, as soon as they had returned to their hotel, "Oh, mamma, the Duc d'Alma has asked me to marry him!"

The other children had gone to bed. The General and Mrs. Corrington, a little upset by the tidings, remained alone to hear how the surprising thing had happened; but Gertie could not say much that night.

“He made his proposal so suddenly, mamma, that I thought he was joking; but he is so good that I am sure I shall love him dearly. He is going to speak to you to-morrow.” Upon which Miss Beauty hurriedly kissed her parents and fled to her room, for emotion overcame her.

“This is very unexpected,” said the General, as soon as she was gone. He was a tall, stiff-backed old officer, a martyr to duty and pipeclay, with a queer voice, loudish and cracked, which sounded as if he were giving the word of command in a high wind. He was a little puzzle-headed too. “I hope it’s all right, my dear, eh? I only made the Duke’s acquaintance last Monday. I don’t suppose he can be trifling—eh, what? We must see what happens to-morrow.”

General Corrington harboured a native suspiciousness of Frenchmen, perhaps because he had been born in the year of Waterloo; and he had only heard of the Duc d’Alma as of a dashing nobleman, noted for his successes on the turf, and for his *anglomania*; but he need have been under no apprehension as to the sincerity of this foreigner’s attentions, for on the following day the Duke formally made his proposal by proxy.

All the traditions of French etiquette were

observed on the occasion. The friend whom the Duke sent to bear his offer of marriage was his cousin, the Marquis de Maisonbelle, a general and a dandy of forty-five, who was equerry to Napoleon III., and sported a nose, a waxed moustache, and chin tuft, which made him look absurdly like his imperial master. The Marquis arrived at midday, calm, polite, smiling, arrayed in ceremonious evening dress, and with the red collar of the Legion of Honour commandership round his neck. He could not speak a word of English, and neither the General nor his wife were proficient in French; but they understood enough to seize all the points of the courteous harangue which their visitor delivered, after making them a very low bow.

The substance of the Marquis's communication amounted to this: that his cousin was sprung from one of the best families in France, as all the world knew. His late father, the Maréchal Count de Beauregard-Voilay, was an illustrious soldier, and had been created Duc d'Alma for his achievements during the Siege of Sevastopol. Roland, the present Duke, was an orphan; he had an income of five hundred thousand francs, and was heir to the estate of his grandmother,

the aged Marquise de Châteaufort, conjointly with his only sister, the Countess de Beaujeu. The Countess de Beaujeu was married to a senator of the empire. Roland himself was in the army, and held the rank of lieutenant-colonel on the staff and aide-de-camp to the Empress Eugénie. "As to his character and talents," concluded the Marquis, "I trust you will find, on closer acquaintance with him, that they are all that the most exacting parents can require in a son-in-law."

"Nous sommes très-heureux," muttered General Corrington, not liking to hazard a longer statement.

"I wish I could speak French as Gertie does," remarked Mrs. Corrington; but this exclamation was lost on Monsieur de Maisonbelle, who only understood the wistful smile which accompanied it. As this smile conveyed full acquiescence in his cousin's suit, he rose to make a new bow and depart. Without asking to see Gertrude, he expressed the hope that he should be honoured with an introduction on a future occasion; meanwhile, he would hurry back to his cousin, who, he felt sure, was waiting with the utmost anxiety for the joyful tidings that were in store for him.

As soon as this urbane emissary had retired, Mrs. Corrington hastened to her daughter's room, and hugged Gertie in the fondest embrace. "Oh, my darling, this all comes of your having learned to speak French so well! Wasn't I right to give you girls a French governess when you were small?"

"I suppose you were, mamma," laughed Gertrude, with a blush.

"Yet you used to dislike that poor Mademoiselle Lépine so at first, and tease her shamefully, poor creature! But never mind all that now. How lucky it is that the Duke speaks English! It would have been a dreadful thing to have a son-in-law with whom I couldn't talk!"

"Roland speaks English beautifully, mamma. He so often goes to England for the races."

"Rowland is his Christian name, is it? Well, it's a pretty name. And he is such a charming man, too; though he keeps race-horses, there is nothing horsey about him; and people say he is not in the least extravagant. I heard Mrs. Nethersole speaking about him at the Kursaal the other day, and I am sure, if there is a thing to tell against a human creature, she is the woman to find it out; but she spoke in the

highest terms of the Duke. Gertie dear, you may consider yourself a lucky girl."

"It is all so sudden," said Gertie, "I can hardly realize it."

"Didn't you suspect anything before he asked you?" inquired Mrs. Corrington, archly. "Come, you must have suspected a little wee bit—eh, Gertie?"

"No, mamma, I assure you," and Gertie turned red as a cherry. "Until yesterday I had not made up my mind as to whether I thought him nice or not."

"And have you made up your mind now?"

"I am sure I shall love him," answered Gertie, with downcast eyes.

"Well, my dear child, it seems to your father and me that you have made a very wise choice," said Mrs. Corrington, affectionately patting her daughter's cheek and looking with maternal pride upon her beautiful face. The good lady was stout and florid; her life had been for some years past a peaceable one, and her daughter's engagement was just beginning to work her up into a state of excitement quite novel to her. Her thoughts were already rambling upon wedding dresses, breakfasts, bridesmaids. "We must

write to Aunt Jenny and Aunt Bessie about this," she said, sitting down and thinking of her relations. "How astonished they'll be! And, of course, you will write to Kate yourself; she ought to be told by to-day's post." Kate was Gertie's elder sister, married to Mr. Littlepoint, a solicitor in Lewbury.

The mention of her sister's name seemed to produce an effect on Gertie, for she hung her head, and her lips began to twitch. She was standing beside her mother's chair, with her hand resting on the back of it. Suddenly tears trickled from her eyes, and her hand trembled. Mrs. Corrington, looking up, saw her daughter crying.

Gertie's emotion under the circumstances was too natural to cause her mother any surprise, so Mrs. Corrington drew her on to a chair near hers, and, twining her arm round her neck, fondled her with endearing words; but Gertie only cried the more, till at last, to her mother's alarm, she sobbed outright. "Oh, mamma dear, please give me advice! I don't know how Kate will take this; she wanted me so much to marry Laurence Claverley—and, and—Dr. Claverley proposed to me just before we left England."

“Dr. Claverley proposed to you?” echoed Mrs. Corrington, astonished. “Why, had you given him any encouragement?”

“Kate says I had; but I didn’t mean to,” was the doleful reply.

“And what did you say to the proposal?”

“I said nothing; at least, not much. I said I didn’t know, and that we must wait. Oh, mamma, I don’t like Dr. Claverley at all.”

“Well, then, my precious pet, why trouble your head about him?” exclaimed the fond mother, indignant that such a person as a Lewbury doctor should have pestered her child for an affection which she could not give. A week before she might have thought the doctor no bad match, for she had already given her eldest daughter to Lawyer Littlepoint, who was no magnate. But now times were changed. “I am surprised,” she said, “that Dr. Claverley should not have had more tact than to make offers to you without first being sure of your parents’ approval. I gave him credit for more propriety.”

“Kate said that I ought to marry him,” murmured Gertie, plaintively. “I am sure she will think I have not treated him well.”

“Leave me to deal with Kate,” replied Mrs. Corrington, shrilly. “I won’t have her or anybody else dictating to you in matters where your happiness is involved. Dr. Claverley indeed! I wonder Kate can find anything to admire in such a man! If it had been Mr. Oram now—and, to tell you the truth, Gertie, I did think the curate was a little smitten with you.”

“Oh, mamma, I never cared for Mr. Oram a bit,” answered Gertie, still crying, but more quietly. “People only talked because I helped him, with a lot of other girls, to put up the decorations in church last Christmas, and he said something silly about my making a good clergyman’s wife.”

“People will talk, that’s certain,” remarked Mrs. Corrington, reflectively. “There’s your papa, for instance, felt convinced there was something between you and young Purkiss Nether-sole, and grew quite uneasy about it. All that comes from your being such a pretty girl, my pet. But never mind; you must dry your eyes now, for I expect the Duke will be coming presently. You have found a good husband this time, and people won’t talk any more. As for Dr. Claverley, he had better be on his good

behaviour, or he shall never come into our house again."

After this Gertie dried her eyes as requested, and went into her room to put on her prettiest dress for the Duke's coming. As for Mrs. Corrington, she sat down without any loss of time, and commenced a scolding letter to her eldest daughter Kate.

The Corringtons were not such great people, though, that Mrs. Corrington could take high ground in rebuking her eldest daughter. The General had been an artillery officer. He was the grand nephew of a baronet, and prided himself on coming of good old Yorkshire stock; but his family had never been influential enough to assist him in his career, or to lend him a penny. His father had been a colonel, and his grandfather a captain in the navy. On Mrs. Corrington's side, the lineage was rather more illustrious; for there was a lord somewhere among the good lady's ancestors on the mother's side, which gave her occasion to describe herself sometimes as a connection of two or three noble families, with whom, however, she had diffidently forborne to claim personal acquaintanceship.

In sum Mrs. Corrington was the daughter of

an army surgeon named Perkins, and she had considered that she was making rather a good match when, out in India, she had married Tom Corrington, who was a captain at the time, with nothing but his pay. A good match it had been, for she had never repented of it ; but the life she had led whilst her husband struggled for promotion had been exempt neither from fatigues nor disappointments. All her six children were born in different parts of the world—Kate in Calcutta, Gertrude in Canada, and so on—and there had been whole twelvemonths at different times during which Mrs. Corrington had been separated either from her husband or her children. Now that the General was at length settled down in an English country town, with an income derived from his half-pay and the interest of a small legacy left him by an aunt, his wife had begun to appreciate the blessings of having a permanent home of her own, and she had been minded that her daughters should not marry wanderers.

She esteemed that Kate had done well for herself in marrying Hucks Littlepoint, a promising young lawyer, who was as likely as not to become clerk of the peace or coroner of the county some day ; and a week ago she would

have welcomed Dr. Claverley as a second son-in-law, all the more readily as she had entertained fears about Mr. Oram the curate, who had no immediate prospect of a living, and was objectionable from having divided the parish on the subject of candles and auricular confession. But now this trip to Ostend—undertaken with no other object but that of getting a change of air, after nearly ten years' uninterrupted residence in one place—this trip had changed everything. The offer from a French duke with £20,000 a year—a handsome young duke, too—aroused pride and ambition in the maternal breast, so that the letter to Kate, which began and ended joyfully as a pœan, contained some rather high-flown considerations about detrimental suitors like that presumptuous Lewbury doctor.

CHAPTER II.

A REMONSTRANCE UNHEEDED.

THE Duc d'Alma sat in his room at the Hôtel Fontaine, awaiting with some trepidation the return of his cousin from the errand on which he had sent him.

“Well?” he exclaimed, starting from his chair as the Marquis de Maisonbelle entered the room with his military air, head erect and gait elastic. “Good news or bad?”

“Mon cher, tu as fait une bêtise,” answered the replica of Napoleon III., drawing off his straw-coloured gloves, and throwing them into his hat.

“Why, have they rejected me?” asked the Duke in an altered voice.

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders. “Was it likely? They seemed rather to wonder whether

I was not joking. I left them half-throttled with astonishment and satisfaction."

"Ah, then, Heaven be praised! The rest concerns me!"

"It concerns your family as well as yourself," answered the Marquis, putting his beaky nose close to his cousin's, and laying a hand on his shoulder. The Marquis de Maisonbelle, with that scarlet riband round his throat, looked much like a grey parrot with a red breast. He was a veteran courtier, and it was reported that his morals were easy; but he feared ridicule as a cat does water, and a breach of social proprieties as much as a stain on his honour or his shirt-front.

He had consented to act as Roland's emissary because Roland was his cousin, and it is correct that cousins should act for one another at such junctures; but he had disliked his embassy from the first, and, since he had seen what people the Corringtons were, he marvelled whether the Duke had not "got a spider in his ceiling," which is the French for a bee in the bonnet. But for the fact that Gertrude's father was a general, and that military rank was a thing he perforce respected, he would have pronounced the word

mésalliance; as it was, he endeavoured to convey this idea by serious expostulations.

“Have you considered,” he said, “what your grandmother, the Marquise de Châteaufort, would say to your marrying a Protestant—she is such a rigid Catholic?”

“Pooh, my poor grandmother is almost in her dotage. You would not have me regulate my actions according to her crotchets?”

“But you must ask her consent to your marriage, and I doubt whether she will give it you. I question also whether the Emperor and Empress would approve such a match. There are proprieties which ought not to be violated. Let me remind you, cousin, that you belong to a family who have been Catholics since—since, in fact, it was the right thing to be a Catholic.”

“Say, rather, that my ancestors worshipped Venus, Bacchus, and Mars,” retorted the Duke, with good-humoured flippancy; “and as for you, De Maisonbelle, I will bet you ten napoleons to a cigarette that you cannot recite the *credo* straight off.”

“*Parbleu*, I should lose my cigarette,” acknowledged the equerry; “but be good enough to recollect that I obey many a statute that I can’t

quote. Seriously, Roland, I told you my opinion about this matrimonial freak of yours this morning, and now that I have seen these Corringtons, I warn you that they are *horriblement bourgeois*. They are people who go to the temple three times on Sundays, nourish themselves on tea and the "Vicar of Wakefield," and would redden to the roots of their hair if you dropped the word 'pantaloons' in their hearing."

The Duke laughed. "You have all a Frenchman's prejudices against the English, my dear cousin; but I know the people well, and like them. They are not such oafs or such prudes as you may imagine."

"*Sacrebleu!* no, their girls are certainly not prudes," admitted the Marquis, drily. "They get up flirtations with Tom and John, ramble on the sands by moonlight, far from the eyes of their mammas, who care not, and the first man who pleases may kiss them on condition of doing it in a dark corner, and being prepared to face an action for breach of promise of marriage afterwards. I know the——"

"You don't know them at all," replied Roland, amused; for he was in high spirits. "English girls enjoy more liberty than ours, but

they are all the better for it, and they make excellent wives."

De Maisonbelle grinned. "So I have heard," was his rejoinder. "But, once again, are you sure that you are fitted for the enjoyment of matrimonial bliss as an English wife defines it? If you carry your homage to the feet of any other woman—just for a change occasionally, and to make the time pass—you must rely on no French indulgence from her. The young matron, who was so placid at the conjugal tea-table, cutting bread and butter for her progeny, will become a raging lioness, and go roaring to her London Divorce Court for redress. Have you thought upon that?"

"It is a pretty picture," laughed the Duke; "but you forget one thing—that I marry for the sake of changing my life. I have had enough of light loves. They weary me. In taking an English wife, I will adopt the manners and morals of a husband *à l'anglaise*."

"*Mes compliments*," replied the incredulous Marquis. "However, having had my say, nothing remains for me but to hold out my hand and wish you the realization of the happiness you seem to anticipate," saying which he

suited the action to the word, like one who means to wash his hands afterwards.

This was all that the Duke wanted. The old grey parrot, worldly-wise as he was, could not turn him from a marriage on which he had set his heart; besides, the die was cast now, and there was no retreating from an offer of marriage duly made. Gertrude herself might still break off the match, for she had not yet formally accepted her lover; but nobody else could do so.

The Emperor's equerry had plenty of things to do at Ostend. He was going to carry a dozen pairs of gloves to an actress with whom he had lost a bet overnight; afterwards he purposed paying his respects to a Russian ambassadress, whose husband was absent. So, having interfered with his cousin's concerns to the extent which the duty of kinship commanded, but not so far as to ruffle Roland's temper and create a quarrel (which would have been *de mauvais ton*; for you must never get angry with a man for jumping into a ditch, if such be his fancy), he went off to his apartment to take off his ceremonial garments. As for Roland, he retired to his dressing-room to put on a frock-coat and otherwise beautify himself for his visit to Gertrude.

He was as much excited as a boy who is in love for the first time ; and there was, indeed, in his passion for Gertrude something different from the fleeting affections he had from time to time bestowed on other women. What were stage *ingénues*, and the frisky matrons of the imperial court, as compared with this coquettes English child, so lovely and so pure ? Roland spoke truly in telling his cousin that he knew the English and liked them ; nor was his notion of taking an English wife any sudden fancy born of his admiration for Gertrude. He had thought of doing such a thing long before he had set eyes on her.

For some seasons past his relations—nay, even that august lady, the Empress Eugénie, whose A.D.C. he was—had been telling him that he ought to take a wife, and he had always parried this suggestion with the time-honoured pleasantry, which used to make her Majesty laugh, saying, “ Whose wife ? ” But he had pondered over the subject, notwithstanding. His aged grandmother wished to arrange a marriage for him with a young lady of high birth and large fortune, who was being educated in a Breton convent at Auray ; his young married sister desired to get

him wedded to a damsel equally gifted, who lived in the seclusion of a convent in Paris. Had he accepted either match, the Duke would have been presented to a girl brought out of a nunnery on purpose to see him; and the mere fact of her being so trotted out for his inspection would have implied a betrothal, whether he felt drawn towards the girl or not. Then there would have been a short but formal courtship, a series of interviews between family notaries, ending in the execution of a tremendous marriage contract, and the Duc d'Alma would have found himself united to a raw schoolgirl, knowing absolutely nothing of the world, and very impatient to drink deep of its pleasures. This was not exactly what Roland wanted. He had had his experience of worldly adventures as a soldier, courtier, and *viveur*, and looked to marriage as a haven where he might ride for the future in still waters.

He was an easy-going man, too, and felt more disposed to be led by a wife having an original mind and a will of her own, than to shape the character of an utterly inexperienced girl. For it is always a delicate task for a husband, this moulding of a young nun-bred wife's character. He must be very cautious to

set no bad example, instil no loose principles, or they may bring up a crop which he will garner sorrowfully enough in his old age. A man does not indulge in such reflections between twenty and twenty-five, and he is apt to scout them between fifty and eighty, if he sets his heart upon marrying a young girl at such a period; but they are very apt to trouble him when he has reached the critical age of thirty, which is near the half-way house in man's journey up the hill of life and down.

They had assailed Roland with the more force because of his acquaintance with English manners, so different from those of his own country.

In his frequent visits to England, where he always stayed at the houses of the richest and noblest of the land, he had been charmed at seeing the freedom allowed to English girls. Their society was delightful to him. He could talk to them as to rational beings, instead of having to mince his words as if they were children; and the circumstance of his never being in any one English house long at a time, prevented him from detecting abuses which might attend this liberty.

So he had often said to himself that he should like to wed some bright, good English girl, who would take him of her own free choice, and cling to him the more closely through life from remembering that she had chosen him instead of having been thrust into his arms by match-making relatives. Unfortunately for Roland, his luck had never thrown him in the way of any high-born English girl who spoke French to perfection, whilst his own knowledge of English, such as it was, laid him rather under a disadvantage than otherwise in prosecuting so serious a thing as a courtship.

Roland spoke English well, but he thought in French, and the result was an occasional quaintness of speech which made his hearers smile. Now, a Frenchman who knows but little or no English can go a long way in making love to an English girl, because his utter helplessness renders him interesting; but the case is not the same when a man is sufficiently conversant with the language to be afraid of committing mistakes in it, and carefully measures his expressions lest he should say more or less than he means. Such restraints clip the wings of eloquence. They had often caused the Duke, who chatted so glibly at

ordinary times, to appear shy and reserved in those moments when he was burning to put a great many pretty things into words.

But in truth, if marriages be made in heaven, one must suppose that Roland was not destined to meet his appointed bride until he encountered Gertrude Corrington. She spoke French with a fluency that was rare. In that boat excursion to Bruges, she had prattled to him in his own tongue with far more assurance than any French girl of her age could have shown in speaking to a man, and with a faint foreign accent which only lent piquancy to her pronunciation. The Duc d'Alma had never heard talk so sprightly, and yet so innocent, in his own language from any woman; for, to his thinking, the ladies of France were a trifle too bold, and the girls never bold enough.

When he complimented Gertrude on her proficiency, she told him of her French governess, poor little Mademoiselle Lépine, the daughter of a political refugee who had written a grammar, which was to his daughter the book of books. After an amnesty had allowed her father to return to France, Mademoiselle Lépine had set up a school at Boulogne, and Gertrude had several

times gone to spend six weeks with her during the summer holidays, "to re-set her participles and tune her accent." She was also in the habit of writing to Mademoiselle Lépine once a week, by way of exercise, and the schoolmistress answered in English, so that each might correct the other's faults—an arrangement which worked exceedingly well, and which Roland, when it was explained to him, thought the happiest idea that had ever been conceived since the invention of gunpowder.

When Roland had put on his frock-coat after the Marquis's departure, and placed a rosette in his button-hole—for he was an officer of the Legion of Honour—he took a survey of himself in the glass, and was tolerably pleased with the image it reflected.

The Duc d'Alma was a soldierly man, tall, with dark hair slightly curling, kindly hazel eyes, and a fine black moustache. Having lived fast, however, in barracks and at court, he was afflicted with incipient baldness, and was growing a little stout, which gave vexation to his spirit. His lost hair could never be got back, though he had tried the lotions of twenty mendacious hair-dressers for the purpose; but he endeavoured to combat his plumpness of girth by hard riding,

scientific diet, and by wearing clothes cut by the prince of London tailors. The coat he had just donned was a master-work of correctness, and he buttoned it high, so as to show underneath only an edge of white waistcoat and a black satin scarf, in which was stuck a pear-shaped pearl of great beauty. Having thus accoutred himself, the Duke bethought him of ordering a bouquet for his bride-elect, and rang the bell for his English valet Barney.

The Duke's coachman and grooms all were English, and this Barney had once been a groom. He was a dapper man of about forty, with a clean shaven face and knowing grey eyes. A smart, active servant he was, by no means bashful in giving his opinion when asked, and of a very cheerful disposition altogether. He had not the manifold talents of those foreign valets who can do twenty things and jabber five tongues; but he had not his equal for keeping clothes and boots in order, and seeing that his master was properly attended to by the servants, whether at home or when he travelled. He addressed his master in the English style as "Your Grace."

"Barney," said the Duke, "I must announce

to you a piece of news. I am going to marry myself."

"Indeed, your Grace!" This with respectful surprise.

"I have proposed to the daughter of General Corringtonne, and from this day I make my court."

"I congratulate your Grace," muttered Barney, who began to wonder whether his own position would be affected by this change. He had never seen Miss Corrington, or heard of her. "I am glad your Grace is going to marry an English lady," he added.

"Ah! that pleases you," smiled Roland. "Well, you may show it by your zeal in executing this command. You must go to the florist and order him to send every day a bouquet to the Hôtel Royal for Miss Gertrude. You will explain it is for my *fiancée*. He will understand; and the flowers, they must be of the finest."

"Very well, your Grace. Begging pardon, sir, but is the wedding day to be soon?"

"I hope so. In a month, no doubt. In any case, I shall have to return to France first to make arrangements. It is in England that we marry ourselves."

“In London, your Grace?”

“No; I believe it will be in Lewbury, a little town of the provinces. But I know not yet. You will be particular about those bouquets, Barney. The florist must excel himself.”

CHAPTER III.

ROLAND'S WOOING.

ON the strength of Gertrude's promotion, the Corringtons had hastily removed from a small and inconvenient set of rooms they had occupied on the fourth floor of the hotel to a large and magnificent suite on the first. Mrs. Corrington, in the fulness of her heart, had told her maid what was going to take place; this damsel had spoken of it in the servants' hall; the matter had reached the landlord's ears, and he made diligence to accommodate the fortunate family with a set of rooms which were generally reserved for visitors of large fortune and distinction. They fronted the sea, and cost only a hundred francs a day; but Mrs. Corrington compounded for this outlay by reflecting that they must all be leaving Ostend very soon now to prepare for the wedding.

The Duke was ushered into a drawing-room gaudily furnished with carmine satin. Through the three open windows, shaded by pink and white awnings, there was a splendid view of the sea, whose calm blue waters were dotted with a fleet of little white sails gleaming in the midday sunlight. It was a lovely day. Hundreds of children were pattering about the sands, while their elders sat reading or working under canvas covers. Brass bands were playing everywhere, and the Digue was crowded with people who had bathed, or were going to bathe, or had come out to see others bathe.

The Duke's interview with the General and his wife was short, but very cordial. He said just the right thing. He was fully alive to the responsibility he was incurring in proposing to take Gertrude from a happy home, but promised so to act that neither she nor her parents should ever feel that he had been false to his trust. Then he turned to the General, and said, "A soldier myself, sir, I am proud to ally myself with the family of so distinguished an officer."

"I am very glad, I'm sure," replied the General, briefly; for he was not a ceremonious mortal, and hardly considered himself a dis-

tinguished man. "I saw something of your father in the Crimea. I dined once at his table, when I was a major in the 105th."

"Ah, yes, my poor father! He was a general then. He commanded a division at Inkermann."

"I recollect his voice now; yours is just like it. Did you see any regimental service before joining the staff?"

"I was in the Cuirassiers of the Guard, and served in my father's division at Magenta and Solferino," answered the Duke, modestly. He did not say that he had been wounded and decorated on the battle-field.

"Your duties are not heavy now, I suppose?"

"I lead the cotillons at the balls of the Tuileries," laughed Roland. "I try to amuse the ladies in waiting and maids of honour when the Court is at Fontainebleau or Compiègne; and sometimes, when a foreign prince comes to Paris, I am told off to pilot him among the museums and theatres."

Mrs. Corrington found all this delightful to hear. She was sure her future son-in-law must be a great pet at the French Court. "You have no brothers, I believe?" she inquired kindly.

“No; I have only a sister, and we are orphans; our dear mother died whilst I was a boy.” The Duke lowered his voice here, and spoke with much feeling of his dead parents. The memory of his mother lingered with him ever fresh and hallowed, so that he never breathed her name without coupling it with an expression of tenderness; his father he had dearly loved and honoured, and, proud of his fame, he was grateful to all who praised it, or who furnished to his own filial piety the opportunity of doing homage to it.

There was a pause presently, and Roland approached with tact the subject of settlements. He wished to intimate that, of course, he expected no dower with Gertrude. “If you will permit me, General, I will put my notary, Monsieur Ragotin, of Paris, in communication with your solicitor, that a contract may be drafted.”

“Thankee,” said the General, who had not the slightest intention of portioning his daughter. “My lawyer is Mr. Littlepoint, of Lewbury, my son-in-law.”

“Mr. Lectlepoint?”

“Yes; he married my eldest daughter Kate—a steady young fellow. But I am afraid he doesn’t know much French.”

At this the Duke smiled, and Mrs. Corrington invited him to luncheon. Then she and the General withdrew, in order that he might see Gertrude alone.

Gertrude presently came in, looking a little timid, but absolutely bewitching in a light silk dress, with pale blue and white stripes, and with her golden hair all clustering in little curls.

Roland ran forward to greet her with both hands extended, and, drawing her to him, kissed her tenderly. "My sweet Gertrude," he said to her in French, "your parents have given their consent. Say that you will be my wife?"

"Oh, Duke, I am sure I am not good enough for you!" she answered, her cheeks tinted with very becoming blushes.

"My dear little one, it is I who am not good enough for you. I have been repeating this to myself a hundred times; but I will become better. I will cure myself of my faults to make you happy, because nothing will be so precious to me henceforth as your happiness. You must call me by my name, Roland—will you? And say you will trust me, my darling?"

"You are so good," she replied softly.

They were seated now very close together,

near the window, where they could see the people pass without being seen, for they were behind a muslin curtain. One of Gertrude's hands was clasped within Roland's, and he stroked it fondly whilst he poured the most ardent vows of attachment into her ear. It was very pretty music, for Roland made love with the fervid volubility of a Frenchman, never pausing for a word, but saying all that came into his imaginative mind, and speaking with a manly earnestness. Gertrude had been made love to before, more than once, but never so eloquently as this.

Some time elapsed before the torrent of Roland's words decreased, allowing the conversation to flow in a quieter stream of question and answer. Roland drew from his waistcoat pocket a little ring of turquoises and pearls, which had belonged to his mother, and he placed it on the third finger of Gertrude's left hand to seal their engagement.

“What a pretty ring!” she said, turning it to the light to admire it; and she looked thankfully into his face, lowering her eyes instantly, however, when they met his, so burning with love. After a minute, during which he got possession of her hand, she asked him a question about his

relatives. "What will they say to your marrying me, Roland? Do you think they will like it?"

"My little one, I have only my grandmamma and my sister Aimée. My grandmamma is very old—eighty-five—and she adores me. What I like, she likes; and she will love you with all her heart. My sister, the Countess de Beaujeu, adores me also. She is twenty-eight, and has been married ten years; she has two little children—two angels, with rosy cheeks and blue eyes. She is a little giddy, my sister, but so good, and she has a heart of gold. You will become her best friend at once, and will remain so; for everybody becomes her best friend, and she never seeks quarrels."

"But your grandmamma and sister are both Catholics, I suppose? Won't they object to my being a Protestant?"

"Oh, religious differences do not signify," answered the Duke, lightly. "I myself look upon good Catholics, Protestants, Jews, or Mussulmans as belonging to so many different regiments in God's army. It is their business to fight wicked people, not to fight one another."

Gertrude was rather shocked at this, for she was persuaded that a hot place was being reserved

in the next world for Jews and other such reprobates. But she saw that Roland intended to speak comfortingly. "Do you know," she answered, "I do not think I have ever been inside a Catholic church while service was going on."

"Nor I," was the unexpected rejoinder; "at least, not since I was quite small. I go to church when my friends are being married or buried. I attend the official *Te Deum* on the 15th of August, the Emperor's *fête*; and ah, sometimes when I am on duty near the Empress, I attend mass in the private chapel at the Tuileries, and, squeezed up in a corner among the maids of honour, I hear Monsignor Bauer preach to the Court. But I never go to church for my own pleasure."

"Not even to mass on Sundays?"

"No, my darling; why should I trouble God? I have nothing to ask of Him. He has given me money, health, a good digestion, and now He has given me *you* for my wife. To beg Him for more would be unreasonable. Rather is it good policy on my part to avoid attracting His close attention lest He should say, 'Ah, you are never satisfied; the time is come for teaching you a little lesson,' and by way of a reminder, He might send me rheumatisms, which are the things I

most dread, as they would prevent me riding on horseback."

Gertrude did not know what to make of these sentiments. "But surely, Duke—Roland, you do say your prayers, sometimes?" she asked gently.

He at first glanced at her with amusement; but suddenly, to her surprise, his eyes filled with tears, and, seizing both her hands, he bent his head over them and burst out crying. "Oh, my little one, you remind me of my dear mother when you speak and look like that! Let me cry; these tears do me good. When I was small, I used to kneel with my mother, and she taught me to pray. We used to pray for my father when he was in battle; and every day we went to church, and burned a taper for him at the Lady Altar. My dear mother made me promise that I would always pray, but she was taken from me, and then my father went; and I had nobody to pray for, for my sister has no need of my prayers. She is happy. As for my grandmother, it would be like offering alms to a Rothschild to pray for her; she is so religious herself, and is protected, I believe, by a great many saints whose names I do not even know. But now, my sweet darling,

as I am going to marry you, I shall have somebody to pray for. Be sure, my little one, that if you want anything of Heaven, I will go down on my knees and ask for it. I will not be too proud to do that. You shall see."

Gertrude, however strange she might think her lover's language, was moved by this little scene, which gave her a reassuring insight into the nature of the man she was going to marry. Laurence Claverley would not have cried on her lap in this way, nor would Mr. Oram, the curate. They were matter-of-fact men, who kept their emotions under control; yet how could a girl help feeling drawn towards a man who made such an unaffected display of feeling?

So with mute sympathy she laid a hand on her French lover's head as she would have done on a child's. His tears lasted no longer than an April shower. Wiping them away, he soon looked into her eyes with a smile.

"My little one, I have wept before you; you see, my heart is yours. We are man and wife; and now we must get married soon. What shall you say to this day month?"

"Oh, in a month! That is very soon," answered Gertrude, a little startled.

“No ; we are in June. If we marry in July, we can go on a tour of Europe for three months ; then we will return to Paris for the winter season, and I will present you at Court. If it pleases you, I will go to France in two or three days and see my grandmother ; then I must ask leave of the War Minister to be married, as I am in the army, and get the Empress's permission, as I am her aide-de-camp. But those are only formalities. After that, I will go to Lewbury, and we shall see each other every day till the wedding.”

“You won't remain away long when you go to France ?” asked Gertrude, already reluctant to part with him.

“No, my darling, only a week at most, and we will write to each other every day—won't we ? You will write to me, Gertrude ?”

“Yes.”

“And it is agreed, then, is it not—we marry in a month ?”

“Whenever you like,” whispered Gertrude, her head nestling on his shoulder ; for he had drawn her to him again, and was kissing her on the lips.

At this juncture Gertrude's youngest sister, Mab, ran into the room to announce that luncheon

was ready. Mab was a high-spirited, pretty child, twelve years old, and with hair like Gertrude's, flowing in a cascade over her shoulders.

"Come here, little young lady," said the Duke, stooping to shake hands and make friends with her. "You know I am going to become your brother."

"You are going to marry sister Gertie," answered Mab, a little shyly; for his moustache, seen so close, rather intimidated her.

"And you will promise to be always very good, and to make a great pet of me, and say to everybody that I am the best brother alive; for that is how I like my little sister to be."

Mab laughed. She had no answer prepared, and so ran away, colouring, into the dining-room, where the General, his wife, and two of their other children were waiting.

General Corrington had six children. The eldest, Kate, married to Mr. Littlepoint, lived at Lewbury; Clive, the second, a lieutenant in the Buffs, was stationed at Gibraltar; next came Gertrude; then Dick, a cadet at Woolwich, who was now at Ostend for his holidays; after them, Bertha, who was sixteen; and Mab, who was often called Baby.

Bertha was a dark and serious young lady, who read good books, and belonged to a mutual improvement association of Lewbury maidens, who met on Saturday afternoons to point out their defects to one another. Those who denied a defect, which was said by the others to be glaring, were fined twopence. The proceedings of this association were conducted with a sisterly frankness which kept its members in a chronic state of irritable self-consciousness. At Ostend, Bertha was occupied in drawing up a memoir, which she intended to read before the association when she got home, and which contained thoughtful notes on the sinfulness of visitors, their exceeding frivolity, and so forth. But Bertha had a skeleton in her cupboard. She was alarmingly fond of cake and sweetmeats, and had long trembled lest her visits to the pastry cook's should be detected, and form the subject for debate at one of the Saturday meetings. She was constantly communing with herself as to whether she ought not to lay her failing candidly before the association, but hitherto she had not done so, and felt wicked.

Mab was a little romp altogether, who tripped along when she should have walked staidly, and

fidgeted when she ought to have sat quiet. She was very fond of Gertie, who was her governess ; but she rebelled against the authority of her brother Dick, who was a tease, and thought that sisters were made to act as fags. Having been educated at a public school, where he won renown as a cricketer, he had been made rather too much of at home, and his elder sisters had fallen into the way of humouring him and regarding him as a clever boy. Now that he was at Woolwich, he gave himself greater airs than ever, setting up as a humourist and a determined propagator of slang ; but he was not a bad-hearted youngster.

Just before Mab had gone to summon Roland and Gertie to luncheon, Dick, lounging with his hands in his pockets, had been entertaining his mother and sisters with his view on the pros and cons of the forthcoming match.

“Old Mother Nethersole has heard of it already,” he said. “I passed by the Kursaal half an hour ago, and she screamed to ask me if it was true. I said I believed it was a fact that we were going to admit a frog into our family.”

“Dick, I won't have you talking slang in that vulgar way !” remonstrated Mrs. Corrington, angrily. “I have told you this before.”

“All right, mother; but how am I to address this fellow? Shall I call him ‘Mossoo’? I’m not a dab at parleyvooring.”

“You must address him as ‘Duke’ until he tells you to do otherwise; and I trust you may be induced to take pattern from his manners, which are perfect.”

“He may certainly have his advantages as a connection,” confessed Dick. “A man who owns Derby winners ought to be able to put one up to some straight tips. All the same, it will be rum to see Gertie married to a ‘Johnny Crapand.’ Suppose there should be war between the two countries, I may be obliged in the course of duty to have chilled shot bowled at his legs. He’s a colonel, isn’t he?”

“Yes, and that’s more than you will ever be at his age, unless you take care,” remarked Bertha.

“Take care of what?” responded Dick. “Don’t you be cheeky, Bertie. I’ll teach you a song, which you may sing to the Duke if he asks you to show off your talents. I don’t remember it all, but there’s a chorus which runs—

“‘And we will teach those bragging foes
That beef and beer hit harder blows
Than soup and toasted frogs.’”

“ I shall order you out of the room, Dick, if you go on in this way,” said Mrs. Corrington, indignantly.

During the above conversation General Corrington had been pacing to and fro, with his hands behind his back, watching the cloth being laid for luncheon. He had not overheard Dick's remarks, for the latter was standing with one foot on the balcony and the other in the room, and he had spoken not too loud, so that his words might not reach the waiters. Had the General joined in the conversation, Dick would have said less, for his father was somewhat of a disciplinarian, and had but a dull appreciation of humour.

An elaborate *déjeûner* had been prepared, after consultation with the *maitre d'hôtel*, who had come up in person to superintend the arrangements. There were three waiters in the room; *menus* near all the plates; gold-capped champagne bottles in ice-pails on the side-board; and the air was fragrant with flowers, melons, and strawberries. Just as the Duke entered with Gertrude, the bouquet which Barney had ordered arrived from the florist's. It was a splendid creation of a master mind, almost a yard in circumference, and surrounded with a border of real lace. It was

placed as a centre-piece on the table, dethroning a more modest yet tasteful nosegay which the landlord had caused to be set there. The whole Corrington family, excepting Gertrude, were abashed by its magnificence.

The Duke took his place at Mrs. Corrington's right hand, having Gertrude on the other side of him, and throughout the meal he charmed everybody by his agreeable flow of talk and his genial manners. He was such a thorough man of the world that conversation could never languish when he was present. He knew how to pass with the easiest transition from gay topics to grave, drawing out others on to the ground most familiar to them, and making them dance there, as it were, whilst he piped softly to their measures. He set the General talking about military grievances; Mrs. Corrington, about the difficulty of finding good servants in these our times; Dick, about the unfairness of army examiners; and Bertha, about introspection. All the while his attentions to Gertrude were so watchful, so full of unspoken caresses, that they made Mrs. Corrington's motherly heart warm towards him, and she kept repeating to herself that her Gertie was indeed a lucky girl.

Dick noticed that the French Duke drank nothing but a little red wine and water; and, after luncheon, it transpired that he did not smoke. Dick had counted upon enjoying a cigar on the balcony, and was disappointed.

“So you will soon be an officer, my young friend,” said Roland, laying a hand amiably on his shoulder; “and I suppose you are a learned mathematician, since you are going into a scientific corps?”

“Oh, Duke, I wish you would question that boy about his studies,” interposed Mrs. Corrington. “I am sure he is idling away his time at Woolwich.”

Dick pulled a wry face, but Roland glanced humourously at him, and said, “My dear Dick, when I was at your age and studying at St. Cyr, I was the idlest boy in the school. The professors did me the honour to affirm that with an unanimity not observable in their opinions on other subjects. But I consoled myself. Did not the masters at the school of Brienne predict that young Bonaparte would never make his way in the army? He won Austerlitz, notwithstanding.”

“Which must have been a sell for his mater,” remarked Dick, *sotto voce*; and by-and-by he

said privately to Bertha, "I declare, Froggie isn't half a bad fellow."

After luncheon Mrs. Corrington and her daughters left the room to put on their bonnets or hats for a walk with the Duke. They were to go to the Kursaal to hear the afternoon concert, and this promenade was to be a solemn showing forth of Gertrude to Ostend society as the Duc d'Alma's betrothed.

But all these glories moved Dick Corrington to philosophize. "I say, Ber," he whispered, displaying new dog-skin gloves before his sister's eyes, "if we're going in for a course of ruination like this, putting on our best go-to-meetings every day, I hope the gov'ner will increase my allowance."

"You tiresome boy, you think of nothing but money. Do be quiet!"

"I'll be quiet. But I say, if Froggie thinks we always live up to the style of to-day's lunch, he must fancy we're awful swells. As plain-speaking is in your line, you'd better hint to him that cold mutton and swipes are not unknown at our table."

"I shall do no such thing," replied Bertha, indignantly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PERPLEXITIES OF HUCKS LITTLEPOINT.

MRS. NETHERSOLE and her son Purkiss were staying at Ostend. They witnessed the honours paid to Gertrude wherever she went with her betrothed, and they both knew that this young lady had been nearly, if not quite, engaged to Dr. Claverley.

Mrs. Nethersole was a small, lean widow of fifty, whose nose changed its tints with the weather. She was a truly good person, who had issued to herself a permanent commission to hold moral assizes on the doings of her neighbours. None knew better than she how to convict her friends of sin, and to lay down the law, religious or social, by which people ought to be guided in their actions. She could quote from the Bible or the manual of etiquette with an equal felicity of

selection, and she humbly disclaimed any purpose but that of doing good to those whom her tongue hurt or annoyed. Mrs. Nethersole's smallest foible was the fondness for spreading news, and she hastened to inform her familiars in Lewbury, by letter, of Gertrude's surprising betrothal. The tidings caused a sensation in the town, where General Corrington and his family were known to everybody and respected.

Lewbury is a clean, old, and dull parliamentary borough, which has seen better days long ago. It is very ancient, but does not look so, for its monuments are few. It once boasted a renowned priory, the ruins of which may be admired in the parish of Westover, which lies at the foot of a hill; and on the highest mound of the upper part moulder the donjon and keep of a venerable castle, wedged in among the purlieus of the High Street. It has an hotel, the Star, which has kept its name and position for centuries, as is proved by a picture in the bar parlour, which represents a group of heretics being consumed with fire outside this self-same hostelry in the reign of Mary.

The place keeps up a sleepy existence of its own. It is an assize town; the county gaol

stands there ; it has also barracks for militia, and a race-course. Five or six times a year the town wakes up, overflows with visitors during a few days, and then relapses into somnolency. It has no fine shops, for Brightport being but ten minutes' distant by rail, ladies prefer to go there when they have anything to buy. Everybody in Lewbury would rather reside at Brightport, if it were not for the expense ; but everybody, with practical philosophy, pretends to be well-satisfied with the place, and accuses Brightport of being too noisy.

It was entirely from motives of economy, and not from any constitutional aversion to gay sea-ports, that General Corrington had come to Lewbury. After retiring from the army on half-pay, he had intended to settle at Brightport—he had, indeed, been looking forward to doing so for years ; but rents are dear in this queen of watering places, and the General heard of a large and commodious house which was to be had cheap at Lewbury.

The Corringtons had been ten years in Lewbury at the date when this story commences, and they had led comfortable lives there. They took the lead of the local society, such as it was,

having no equals, except Mr. Jentleigh, the rector of Westover, and Mr. Butterby the banker. The General was a magistrate, and one of the visiting justices of the gaol, a post which provided him with some of that responsible work without thanks or pay, in which English gentlemen—alone of the human race—take pleasure.

The King's House (or Kingshouse), where he resided—so called from Charles II. being said to have lurked in it for three days, whilst he was avoiding his affectionate subjects after the battle of Worcester—was the most interesting mansion in Westover. It must once have been connected with the priory, for there were abbots' mitres on the stone shields above the doorway. Probably it was the Guest House, reserved for noble visitors who came with large suites, and were able to pay royally for the hospitality which they were supposed to receive gratis. On the scroll-work interlacing the shields was carved the eclectic motto, "Hospes, quisquis es, eras, eris ; salve, vale ;" but some have conjectured that the poorer guests who knocked too confidently at this door were more often regaled with the word *vale* than *salve*.

It was on a wet day in June, 1870, when the rain had been dripping in a dispiriting way since

morning, that the General's son-in-law, Mr. Hucks Littlepoint, sat at the desk in his office in the High Street, and rubbed his ear with a perplexed air. His wife, seated in the chair where clients generally ensconced themselves, and holding her last-born baby on her lap, eyed him with an equal perplexity. The midday post had brought them the news of Gertrude's engagement to the French duke, and nothing within the range of possible events could well have astonished them more. Mrs. Littlepoint, to whom the tidings had been addressed in a letter sent by Gertrude herself, and in another from her mother, had been unable to bring them at once to her husband, because there had been clients in his office; but now it was close upon two o'clock, the lawyer's dinner hour, the last visitor had gone, and there she sat, watching her husband's face with an inquiring gaze as he re-read the letters and rubbed his right ear.

Mr. Littlepoint was a pale young lawyer, with a wild head of hair and gold-rimmed spectacles, and he was easily made to look perplexed. Anything out of the common knocked him out of his methodical range of thoughts, like a spider out of his web, though he always dangled on to a

thread, as it were, by which he slowly climbed up again.

“I am afraid it will be a disappointment to Claverley,” he remarked at length.

“A disappointment!” echoed Kate Littlepoint, who was a handsome, dark-eyed young woman, with a warm heart and impulsive habits both of speech and action. “I should think Dr. Claverley will be maddened, dear. He considered himself engaged to Gertrude, and so did I. He has just had a quantity of new furniture put into his house, and I helped him to choose it. He asked me only yesterday to select a pretty dessert service for him next time I went to Brightport.”

“Are you sure, Kate, that Gertrude formally accepted Claverley?” inquired the lawyer very seriously. He was an honourable man, who had a horror of breaches of contract, though he lived by such things.

“Well, yes, dear; at least, I thought so. And I can't imagine why mamma writes to me so sharply, just as if I had been trying to drag Gertie into a match against her consent. I am sure I did nothing beyond doing my best to encourage them both.”

“You were very anxious about the match, dear.”

“But so were you, Hu.” Hu was diminutive for Hucks. Kate had tried at first to call her husband Hucks, but it wouldn’t do, and Hucky sounded no better.

“Laurence Claverley is young, handsome, clever—a bit conceited, perhaps; but all young doctors are that—he has money of his own, and is making a good practice. I thought he was just the man for Gertie, and we agreed how nice it would be to have Gertie settled in Lewbury close to us. You never saw any objection to Dr. Claverley, Hu.”

“No. But the question is, did Gertie accept him?”

“This is exactly how things happened,” said Mrs. Littlepoint, composing herself by dandling her baby. “It was the last time they came to tea here, three days before Gertie went to Ostend. Dr. Claverley and she were in a corner of the drawing-room, looking at the stereoscopic views of Paris, and Gertie suddenly exclaimed, ‘How I should like to go to Paris!’ Then Dr. Claverley took her hand, and said, ‘Will you go there with me for a honeymoon?’”

“What did she answer?”

“She didn't say ‘yes’ or ‘no’; but then, girls don't always give plain replies to proposals. I didn't say ‘yes’ to you, Hu, when you asked me. I think Gertie merely said, ‘Oh, it's very sudden. I don't know,’ and things of that kind. But in the course of the evening, Dr. Claverley managed to give her a kiss in the passage, as he was helping her to put on her cloak; for I saw him do it by the reflection in the looking-glass, because the drawing-room door was open, and he certainly went away with the impression that Gertie had accepted him.”

“I know he entertained that impression, but I should like to ascertain whether it was justified by what Gertie said or did?”

“I think it decidedly was, beyond any question, dear.”

“Well, ladies are the best judges on such a point,” said Hucks Littlepoint, with a sigh. He was beginning to feel dismayed by his sister-in-law's conduct.

“I wouldn't speak too positively, though,” rejoined Mrs. Littlepoint, alarmed at the responsibility thrust upon her. “I can't say that Gertie was actually in love with Dr. Claverley,

and I know she was very anxious that I should say nothing about the proposal to mamma. After all, Hu, I may be mistaken. Girls are so difficult to understand in these affairs ; and Gertie appears to have become very fond of this French duke, and mamma says he is so nice. Let me see again what her letter says."

She took up the letter and read aloud Mrs. Corrington's enthusiastic account of the Duc d'Alma, and the introductions to all sorts of distinguished people, friends of the Duke, who had come to leave congratulatory cards at the hotel.

All this was so novel to the Littlepoints, that they heard of it with bewilderment. There was not a tittle of jealousy in Kate's mind about her sister's marrying in a rank so much above her own, but she was sorry to think that she and Gertrude would now be parted for life, for it was complete separation that must result from Gertrude's becoming the wife of a foreigner ; and she was concerned also for Laurence Claverley's sake. Nevertheless, she made up her mind that she must stand by her sister in this affair, whatever befell ; for she was a staunch ally to her own kin, and, right or wrong, would cudgel for them before the whole world.

“Dr. Claverley will have to bear his disappointment as he can, dear,” she said to her husband. “It is unfortunate that he should have been mistaken about Gertie’s feelings; but he can’t do anything.”

“No, he can’t do anything,” said the lawyer. “I think, though, he should hear the tidings from me. It will be more considerate than allowing them to reach him through other channels. I will call on him presently.”

“Oh, as Mrs. Nethersole is at Ostend, I dare say the news will be all over the town soon!” observed Kate. “That odious old woman will be raising quite a screech over this, for I told her of Gertie’s engagement with the doctor.”

“It was a pity you did that, Kate,” said the lawyer, looking up; “and I—I don’t think it wise to call anybody an odious old woman.”

“It is a pity, because things have turned out as they have,” answered Kate, rebelliously; “but I told her in order to keep that abominable son of hers, Purkiss, from worrying Gertie with his attentions. He used to follow her about everywhere, squeeze her hand in corners, wink at her when people were looking on, and behave in such a way that she was sometimes ready to scream.

I was afraid the doctor might notice his goings on, and fancy Gertie had encouraged him to take liberties."

"I dare say the doctor will be at home now," said Hucks, consulting his watch. "I think I will just step round."

"No; you must have your dinner first, dear," said Kate. "It is ready now. Come along."

Hucks obeyed, though he had lost appetite for his dinner. He was a queerly grave and respectable young man of thirty, who had already adopted the costume and habits of elderliness, and was not likely to alter in appearance for the next forty years. He dressed in black, loved his home, and lived in small things subject to his wife.

But throughout dinner on this day, Hucks was very thoughtful about his sister-in-law. He was both shocked and amazed that Gertie should have jilted Dr. Claverley for the sake of a rich foreigner, and the idea of the public scandal that might result from this made him wince. Kate's vivacious prattle, which generally cheered him at table, failed to do so, and almost irritated him.

When the meal was over, Hucks put on his

hat, and took his umbrella from the stand in the hall.

“I shall go down to Kingshouse presently to give orders about everything being got ready for the day after to-morrow, as mamma says they are all coming then,” said Kate. “I suppose you will find Dr. Claverley at the Reading-rooms, dear. He is more likely to be there than at home at this hour. Do your best with him.”

“Yes, I’ll go to the Reading-rooms,” answered Hucks, sallying out into the rain. “I can’t help thinking Claverley is an awkward man to offend. He is a clever fellow, energetic, and generally respected, as you know.”

“Don’t let him bully you, dear,” said Kate wistfully, from the doorstep.

CHAPTER V.

DR. CLAVERLEY'S THREATS.

THE Reading-rooms at Lewbury were used as a kind of club. There was a round public room, with wooden forms and long tables covered with novels and newspapers, where lady-subscribers were to be seen at all hours, and a smaller room sacred to persons who paid a guinea a year. Herein ladies never entered, but the sanctum was resorted to by the gentlemen of the town, who came to read the news and to chat.

When Hucks Littlepoint walked in, after depositing his dripping umbrella in the hall, he found only two persons in the room. A short, pudgy, good-humoured gentleman with a bald head, who answered to the name of Quang, sat nursing his leg in an armchair, and laughing over a comic paper; whilst a spare, lantern-jawed

curate, with a very long coat which reached to the calves of his legs, stood with his back to the empty fireplace blinking at the rain, which was still pouring outside as if it were never going to be fine again. This clergyman was the Rev. Chrysostom Oram, curate to old Mr. Jentleigh, the rector of Westover. He was the best fellow in the world, but in Church matters had much tribulation through disputes with his rector's daughter, Miss Rose Jentleigh, about ritual. He had fought with beasts at Ephesus, as he put it; that is, with his bishop and other raging Low Churchmen, and he had generally prevailed in these encounters, but he had no hopes of ever prevailing on Miss Rose to mind her own business. The rector was an easy man, and his daughter had instituted herself priestess in his stead, vexing the gentle soul of the curate by her interpretations of the rubric.

Mr. Quang was a jolly little gentleman, who, having no business of his own, found plenty of leisure to bestow on other people's. He had once been sleeping partner in a bank, and enjoyed an income which allowed him to live in not too straitened circumstances, seeking amusements for himself and family. He had five

unmarried daughters, who were not pretty nor plain, clever or stupid, and who were always dunning him for pocket-money. Mr. Quang was a great promoter of social festivities and expedients for killing other people's time. He belonged to a Mutton-chop Club at Brightport; he went up to London with deputations who had claims to urge upon Cabinet ministers; he was a member of divers annual-dinner-giving associations for setting up or putting down things; he had been half-way up Mont Blanc; he could brew punch, play whist, and tell anecdotes which everybody knew, but which could be laughed at without effort.

Mr. Quang was a great crony of Mrs. Nethersole, and just before Hucks Littlepoint came in, he had been reading to the unhappy curate a long letter from that lady, in which she announced Gertrude's betrothal, and spoke of the great stir it was making at Ostend. Mr. Oram was in love with Gertrude, but had been too bashful to propose to her. When he was told of her engagement to Dr. Claverley, he suffered a sharp spasm; but now that he heard of her being affianced to the Duc d'Alma, he felt utterly miserable from reflecting that the first rumour

was untrue, and that if he had proposed to Gertrude just before her departure for the continent he might have had her. That is why he looked out so sorrowfully at the rain, moaning in spirit like a man who has missed a happy destiny for want of a little courage at the right time. As a matter of fact, Mr. Oram could not have had Gertrude for the asking, so that there was a flaw in his reasoning; but a curate is not bound to be a logician.

“Ah, Littlepoint, you are just the man we wanted to see,” exclaimed Mr. Quang, holding out his hand to the lawyer. “Well, so it seems we have to congratulate you on your sister-in-law’s engagement to a French duke?”

“You have heard of it, then?” replied Hucks, nervously, as he gave his hand to Mr. Quang, who did not at once release it, but worked it up and down like a pump-handle, grinning.

“Oh yes, I’ve a long letter from my good friend Mrs. Nethersole,” said Mr. Quang, who called this lady his “good friend” on the same principle as the Greeks styled the Furies “Eumenides.” “She writes me there have been grand goings-on, and sends an extract from an

Ostend paper, in which they speak of Gertrude as a 'damoselle d'oon rare boty.' But I say, I thought that Gertrude was engaged to Claverley?"

"Did you?" said Hucks; but he despised himself for this dissimulation, and at once added, "To tell you the truth, I did too; but it seems we were mistaken. How d'ye do, Oram? What wretched weather this is!"

"It is miserable weather," rejoined the curate, gloomily. He would have liked to ask whether Miss Corrington's engagement was irrevocable, but the words stuck in his throat. He could only glance in despair at his muddy boots, which were of no small size.

"We wanted something of this kind to wake us all up, for I'll be bound it will be a grand wedding," continued the cheerful Mr. Quang, who thought he might already fish for an invitation to the breakfast. "The dining-room at Kingshouse will be just the place for a bridal feast; and, I say, if the General likes, I'll put him up to a hint or two for giving something quite novel in the way of an entertainment."

"Claverley hasn't been here, has he?" inquired the lawyer.

"No; I saw him drive out in his dogcart this

morning, but he hasn't come by again. I suppose the doctor will be pulling a face over this affair, eh? Odd thing, his having spread the rumour of his engagement when it wasn't true. What, are you going already?"

"I only looked in to see Claverley."

"None of the babies ill, I hope?"

"No, no."

"I shall be writing to Ostend by this night's mail," said Mr. Quang, following Hucks to the door, "and all the girls will send a line, too, to offer their congratulations. Some of them will be expecting to be bridesmaids. I've been telling them they will have to draw lots for it, aha!"

Hucks fled from Mr. Quang out into the rain again. He called at the doctor's house, but Claverley was not at home; so he left a card, and returned to his office, where a farmer was waiting to see him about a case of trespass. Kate had been gone from the house about five minutes.

Shod in her thickest boots, covered with a grey cloak, and holding an umbrella against which the rain-drops rattled like peas, Kate walked down to Kingshouse to give orders to her mother's servants.

The house had been left in charge of a cook

and a housemaid on board wages, and Kate thought she would set them briskly to work by telling them of Miss Corrington's forthcoming marriage. The communication had the desired effect; for the prospect of a wedding is always enlivening to the female-servant mind. The cook cried "Lor!" the housemaid simpered, and was then ordered off to fetch a pail and a mop and commence a general clean-up. Fires would have to be lighted in all the rooms to drive the damp out, clean sheets must be laid in the beds, the silver must be polished, the carpets beaten, muslin curtains just home from the wash must be put up, and all that within two days; so that there was no time to lose. In a few minutes the maid, bare-armed, and with her gown pinned up, was carrying coals, faggots, mop, pail, and broom from the kitchen; and Kate Littlepoint, having taken off her cloak and hat, repaired to the linen room to give out the sheets.

As she went about her work, she pondered in a sisterly way over the brilliant offer which Gertrude had received. Gertie a duchess! Gertie shining as one of the beauties of Napoleon's Court! It sounded like one of the romances they used to weave together when they were little

girls, and used to play at having husbands with fine titles. Gertie and Kate had always been very fond of each other, and, notwithstanding her alarm about Dr. Claverley, there was a thrill of pleasure and pride in the elder sister's heart at the flattering recognition which Gertrude's beauty had met with abroad.

“I wish I could have seen her when the Duke proposed. I hope she wore her blue dress; she looks best in it,” thought Kate; and she resolved that, whatever her husband might say or think, she would be very good to Gertie during the last month they would spend near each other. She would not say a word about Dr. Claverley to make her feel uncomfortable. The conversation on this subject should be with their mother, who had written so unkindly in accusing her (Kate) of seeking to foist the doctor upon Gertie—“just as if I could foresee that this French duke was coming,” murmured the aggrieved lady.

Thus musing, Kate had walked into Gertrude's bedroom, which overlooked the road leading into the country past the militia barracks. There she saw through the window a dogcart drawn by a high-stepping horse, and being driven at a rapid rate towards Kingshouse.

“Why, that is Dr. Claverley, and Hu can't have seen him,” muttered Kate; and immediately she ran downstairs and opened the street-door, so as to stop the doctor as he passed.

It was a bold move, and as soon as she had taken it she repented, thinking she would have done better to leave the interview with the doctor to her husband; but having once put her head through the doorway, she did not like to retreat, lest Claverley should have seen her.

“After all, it is better to get the explanation done with,” she said to herself, and waited.

Dr. Claverley had been driving out to see a country patient, who had met with an accident. He was wrapped in a mackintosh, and drove hard through the rain without saying a word to the servant, who sat by his side with arms folded. Claverley, too, had received a letter from Mrs. Nethersole, just before he had been summoned to set his patient's leg at noon, and he was as mortified and furious as it is possible for a man to be. He loved Gertrude; he believed that she loved him, and, esteeming that she had accepted him, he would have thought Mrs. Nethersole's news incredible had not her letter been so circumstantial. Even now, as his mind whirled in

a very eddy, he was persuaded that Gertrude could not have broken her troth of her own accord, but must have been forced to do so by her parents. And he vowed that if this were the case, he would marry her, in spite of father and mother.

Laurence Claverley was a self-made man, and everybody was aware of the fact, for at the outset of his medical career he had often boasted rather too loudly about it.

He was the son of a footman and a housemaid ; but he had been sent early to a school where there was a good master, and had been lucky enough to obtain, in his twelfth year, a situation as page to a warm-hearted, eccentric physician, who practised at Brightport. This doctor, finding that Laurence was a sharp and cheerful boy, had taken a fancy to him, and continued his education, till by degrees the page ceased to be a servant, and became his master's pupil and surgery assistant.

Meanwhile, Laurence's parents having left domestic service and established themselves in a house at Brightport, where they let lodgings, the boy got help at the turning-point of his life. By his master's advice he was sent to study for three

years at Bonn, and he made such good use of his opportunities that soon after his return to England he passed for a B.A. degree at the university of London, and subsequently got his diploma from the College of Physicians. His master, who had employed him as assistant after he came back from Germany, then took him into partnership, and two years later Claverley's parents, both dying in the same year, left him a few hundred pounds, with which he was enabled to buy a house at Lewbury, and to start a practice on his own account.

It must be noticed that Hucks Littlepoint and his wife, in their conversation about Claverley, did not allude to the lowliness of his origin, the fact being that the young doctor had, by his talents and his good manners, acquired an excellent position in Lewbury and considerable popularity. He was then thirty years old—a tall, handsome man (his father, the footman, had been a splendid creature); he was a good doctor, and it mattered not a pill to his patients whose son he was. The battle about his ancestry had been fought out when he first came to Lewbury, and when his professional rivals, thinking to damage him by proclaiming that his father was a footman,

had done him good by their vulgar sneering. There is no country where the advantages of birth and connections are so justly appreciated as in England, and no country where a clever man can get on so well without these adjuncts, provided he is not ashamed of being without them. Claverley, however, nearly put himself in the wrong at first by talking with bravado, as if it were a merit to be a footman's son, and as if persons who had no plush in their family were to be pitied. The people of Lewbury were not prepared to admit that much, and the young doctor, out of his ambition, soon found the sense to see that he had better take the world as the world took him, without seeking to give offence.

Of course, in his heart he would rather that his father had been dignified by gunpowder than hair-powder, and in paying his addresses to Gertrude, he had not been insensible to the consideration that she was the daughter of a general officer. He loved her for herself—he loved her beauty, her grace, her character; but he had felt it was a social honour to be accepted by her, and it gave a fearful bitterness to his reflections to imagine that she had possibly been impelled by her family to break off her engagement because

of the pedigree which caused his enemies to nickname him "Jeames" behind his back.

Perceiving Kate standing in the doorway as he neared Kingshouse, Dr. Claverley drew up his horse with a jerk, and threw the reins to his servant. "Put up," he said; "I shall walk home."

"Dr. Claverley, I want to speak to you; that's why I came here," said Kate, trying to smile and look pleasant.

"I want to speak to you, too," he answered significantly, as he descended from the trap.

In the hall he showed that he was preparing for a serious interview by divesting himself of his waterproof coat and hanging up his hat. Kate led him into her father's old-fashioned study on the ground floor, and shut the door. He was flushed, and his mouth was firm set; stealing a look at him, Kate did not like his expression at all.

Laurence Claverley was nearly six feet high, well-shaped, and upright. His complexion was pale but clear; he had large dark eyes, with a glance that was steady and a little hard; small black whiskers and hair of the same colour, cut short and neatly brushed. He dressed well; his

voice and manners were those of a gentleman ; and there was an air of professional dignity in his bearing which reassured patients who might have objected to his youthful appearance. But Kate had always seen him in pleasant moods, for he could be very pleasant, and his present aspect struck a chill in her.

“Have you heard ?” she asked ruefully, as she sat down and motioned to him to take a seat.

“Yes, I have heard,” he answered, without sitting down ; “and I want to ask you what on earth it means. Gertrude cannot intend to throw me over in this unceremonious way ?”

“She does not consider herself bound to you, Dr. Claverley ; it seems we mistook her sentiments.”

“Can you look me in the face and repeat that ?” he asked sternly. “Is it not a fact that you regarded us as engaged ? Were you not talking with me about our marriage only yesterday ?”

Kate could not look him in the face and tell him a fib. “Well, *I* did think you as good as engaged,” she confessed, reddening ; “and I am very sorry for you, Dr. Claverley, indeed I am. But what can we do ? You proposed to Gertrude

in this small country town, where she had seen little society ; she goes somewhere else, and sees a man whom she loves better than you. Those things happen constantly. She cannot have cared for you, or she would not have accepted the man who will be her husband."

"He shall never be her husband if I can help it!"

"But you can't help it," retorted Kate. "Be sensible, Dr. Claverley. When Gertrude comes back, shake hands with her as if nothing had happened. It looks so well for a man to be magnanimous."

"Mrs. Littlepoint, an infamous slight has been put upon me," said Claverley, "and I do not believe Gertrude has thus dealt with me of her own accord. She must have been instigated by friends who, perhaps, worked upon my social status as inferior to hers ; but let me tell you that——"

"Oh no, you are quite wrong there!" interrupted Kate, eagerly. "Gertrude has written to me herself, and says she loves the Duc d'Alma. She is overjoyed at the match—one can see it in every line she writes ; and there is not a word about you in the letter."

This shot struck harder than Kate had meant it to do. Claverley grasped the back of a heavy oak chair, whilst his features grew livid.

“If that be the case,” he answered, hoarse with restrained passion, “there are no words in which I can express my reprobation of Gertrude’s conduct. She has deliberately trifled with me. She has shown herself heartless and mercenary. She is unworthy to become the wife of an honest man, and her father, if he has sanctioned her conduct, is unworthy to be called an officer and a gentleman.”

“You have no business to speak of my sister in that way,” protested Kate, losing her temper.

“I shall teach her that I am not the man to submit tamely to such an insult,” continued Claverley, without heeding her. “After she left for Ostend, I wrote at length as her accepted lover, and she answered in such a way as to encourage me in my belief. That was but a fortnight ago, and now——”

“You don’t mean to say Gertrude has written to you since she has been abroad?” inquired Kate, disconcerted.

“Yes, and here is her letter.” The doctor

drew a note on pink paper from his pocket-book and displayed it. Kate was strongly tempted to tear it from him, but he may have divined her impulse, and held it with both hands. "You can read it, Mrs. Littlepoint."

Kate did read it with a thumping heart. The note was very short, but it was undeniably couched in such terms as to encourage Claverley's hope.

"If you are a gentleman, Dr. Claverley," said Kate, "you will give me that letter that I may destroy it."

"I shall hand it to a lawyer," responded the doctor, vehemently. "There is but one way of punishing an offence like your sister's, Mrs. Littlepoint. To vindicate my own conduct, I shall bring an action for breach of promise of marriage."

"You would not do such a silly thing as that, Dr. Claverley?" exclaimed Kate, eyeing him as if he were mad.

"I have been made to look silly enough as it is," replied Claverley, bitterly. "Have I not told all my friends of my engagement? Have I not been refurnishing my house? It will be said that I was not jilted for nothing. Aspersions

will be cast upon my character, and those shall be publicly removed."

"You expect a jury will give you damages?" cried Kate, mockingly, and looking as if she could beat him.

"I do not want damages, Mrs. Littlepoint, but reparation. I shall read Gertrude a lesson which may not be lost upon other girls tempted to misbehave as she has done. Perhaps this fine marriage with a guileless foreigner will not take place after all."

This was too much for Kate, who stood up and confronted him with brave scorn in her glance. "If you act in that ungentlemanlike way, Dr. Claverley, you will become the laughing-stock of all England. There is not a girl of any spirit who will marry you. You will have conducted yourself with such contemptible vindictiveness that everybody will think Gertrude was very lucky not to have married you. I rejoice, for my part, that she never cared for you. She evidently had a clearer insight into your character than I had."

"I will take my chance of what people shall say, Mrs. Littlepoint," answered Claverley, trying to remain calm, but stuttering in the attempt;

and upon this he left the room without salutation of any sort. It was clear from the redness of his face and the thickness of his speech that he was utterly beside himself with anger. He walked out of the house, letting the door slam behind him, and forgetting his waterproof in the hall.

Kate was very much frightened. She put on her hat and cloak, and tore home. Her husband was in his office, busy over some dot-and-carry-one process, with all his tin boxes around him. "Hu, Hu!" she exclaimed, sinking into a chair, "I have just seen Dr. Claverley. He is in such a state!" and Kate unfolded her terrible story.

"An action for breach of promise!" incredulously echoed Hucks, when he had heard her to the end. "I do not think Claverley will commit himself in that way."

"But he declares he will, Hu. He is quite ferocious."

"If men kept all the threats they make in angry moments, this world would be no place to live in," said the lawyer; "but it's a lamentable business, Kate."

"At any rate, I shall write to Gertrude and mamma by this day's post," answered Kate, who was all flurried by the interview. "In his present

temper the doctor might do something outrageous when they return. They ought to be warned."

Hucks agreed that his wife must write to convey a warning, so she hastened to her drawing-room, and dashed off a letter to Gertrude. But she had no time to write to her mother by that post, and the one letter went off alone. It reached Gertrude on the following day, just as she was in the heyday of joy over her growing love. She coloured as she read it, but did not waver long about what was to be done. She went coolly to her mother, and said—

"Mamma dear, please ask papa to protect me against this man. See what Kate writes about him. He has no business to tease me in this way."

"Protect you, my darling! of course he will," exclaimed Mrs. Corrington, stupefied when she had perused her eldest daughter's letter through her glasses. "Why, the man must have taken leave of his senses; and as for Kate, all this is her fault. She has behaved like a perfect goose."

CHAPTER VI.

CLAVERLEY'S REVOLUTIONARY FRIEND.

THERE was living at that time in Lewbury a French refugee named Grachard—Christian name, Timon—who gave lessons at several schools, and eked out his resources by contributing queer, anonymous articles on English politics to a Red Republican newspaper in Paris.

He was a thin, dark man of forty, with a black beard and restless eyes, who dressed decorously as an undertaker, but smelt strongly of tobacco, and had several of his fingers smudged with brown stains, which came from smoking cigarettes which he rolled for himself. Grachard had been sentenced to death, *per contumaciam*, for joining in a plot to overthrow the imperial dynasty, and he had been living fifteen years in England, where he felt as completely a stranger

as on the day of his arrival, though he had learned to speak the language after a fashion, always using the verbs *shall* and *will* in the wrong places.

Nobody in Lewbury had cared to cultivate M. Grachard's private acquaintance except a few sempstresses, who admired his black beard, and Laurence Claverley, who liked his independence of character, and was interested in his advanced opinions, which he thought good for France, that *corpus vile* of political experiments.

Grachard was a violent Republican and an atheist, one of those men who shake their fists at God Almighty out of garret windows, and marvel that the "impostures" of religion should not yet have been swept away by the reasonings of Parisian newspapers. Such views not being popular at British tea-tables, M. Grachard (who advocated political assassination also) had been kept at arm's length, and he looked upon England as a canting, inhospitable country; but he was very fond of Claverley, who had been kind to him, and whom he esteemed as a superior Briton. The doctor had attended him through an illness, and had refused to accept any fees; but not to wound the poor Frenchman's susceptibilities, he

had taken out his payment in French lessons. Grachard used to come to his house for an hour in the evening two or three times a week, and thus a pretty strong friendship had gradually sprung up between them ; for it was impossible to become intimate with Grachard without hating or liking him thoroughly, so self-asserting was he.

Timon Grachard knew of Claverley's love for Miss Corrington, and was disgusted at hearing in the town how that faithless young person had thrown his friend over for one of the Emperor Napoleon's dukes. At the young ladies' schools, where he taught French out of "Télémaque" and Bossuet's "Orations" (works which, having been composed by "clericals," he considered degrading to the human intellect), he was much questioned about the Duc d'Alma, and was at some pains to keep his temper in replying that he knew nothing of this nobleman. The governesses and pupils did not expect him to know much about dukes, but they wanted him to say whether his distinguished countryman was rich and handsome, how it was that he had never fallen in love with a girl of the French aristocracy, etc., and these questions maddened the Republican. He thought that friendship's voice called him to the doctor's

house to offer consolations, and he accordingly went there on the day after Claverley had received his great blow.

It was in the evening, and Claverley was taking a solitary cup of tea, more composed in spirit, but by no means disposed to find comfort in talking about his sorrow. Englishmen show a reserve in their love affairs which Frenchmen like Grachard cannot understand.

Claverley lived in the High Street, in a house of substantial appearance. There was a brass plate on the door with his name, and a separate entrance to the surgery round the corner, with a lamp over it. The place had just been refurnished, and the sight of some workmen laying down a new carpet in his dining-room had made the doctor turn almost sick with suppressed rage, as he passed through the hall on the day before, after his scene with Mrs. Littlepoint. But it was worse when, in his study, his eye fell upon two photographs of Gertrude on the chimney-piece. He had placed them there in frames, where any of his patients might see them—rather an imprudent thing to do, but natural in a young man who exults in his love. Convinced of Gertrude's treachery, he removed them and locked them up

in a drawer, but the doing so forced a moan from him like a sob. Seeking a relief to his feelings, he, of course, sat down and wrote to Gertrude. But even as his hand flew over the paper he felt that it is all up with a man who is obliged to write such a letter as he was composing; for he could find no tender expressions; his words were all angry and bitterly reproachful.

There is no torture like that of being jilted. It cuts deep down into a man's heart, making his pride bleed in torrents, and leaving a wound, where a sore place will remain for a lifetime. But the sore is much worse in a man of low birth who has been jilted by a girl who is his superior in station. The world had been kind to the Lewbury doctor, making him feel no mortification for being a footman's son; but his rejection by Gertrude punctured the poison-bag of class hatred which lurks within all men of low degree, and suffused his whole being of a sudden with a moral jaundice. In a sleepless night he had brooded over every plan of revenge that could occur to an inflamed mind, and, losing all self-respect in his abasement to the jealous devil within him, he felt cruel, mean, and powerless, as he had never done before. But outwardly his handsome face

looked calm and hard to the Frenchman who brought him sympathy.

So Grachard was rather put out, for he had expected to find his friend in a paroxysm of rage and grief. Claverley shook hands with him in a collected way, and asked him to take some tea. Nevertheless, while the Frenchman sipped this beverage, he examined the doctor attentively, till at length he saw the gloom settle on his brow, and then he spoke out.

“Tell me all that is on your heart, Claverley ; it shall relieve you.”

“I had rather not talk about it,” answered the doctor, in a tone which, had he been speaking to a countryman, would have precluded all further allusion to the topic ; but Grachard was entirely frank about his own affairs, and had lately solicited advice and compassion from the doctor touching an entanglement into which he had got with Miss Hopkins, the daughter of his landlady, so that he felt he had placed himself under an obligation which now was the time to discharge.

“My poor friend, I am so sorry,” he said, laying a hand kindly on Claverley’s knee. “If Miss Corrington knew you as I do, she would not

reject you thus for a miserable debauchee, who thinks of nothing but women and horses."

"Tell me all that you know about this Duc d'Alma," said the doctor, moodily. "Has he a bad character?"

"His father was a villain, and the son must be like him," declared Grachard, energetically. "No courtier of Bonaparte's can be a man of honour. The late Duke, General de Beauregard, as we then called him, was one of Badinguet's* myrmidons at the *coup d'état*, and will you that I tell what he then did? Well, this is what he did. There was a crowd of peaceable citizens, some women, some children, on the Boulevard. They did nothing. They regarded the soldiers who came. They laughed. They did not think their blood would soon dye the pavements. My friend Lerouge was in that crowd with his young wife. Of a sudden General de Beauregard, riding at the head of his staff, gives the order, 'Sweep away that *canaille!*' and in a moment *pif, paf, crack*—the bullets whistled like hail. The crowd

* Opprobrious nickname given to Napoleon III. Badinguet was the name of the workman whose clothes Louis Napoleon borrowed when he escaped from the prison of Ham in 1846.

fled, stupefied and shrieking. The men, the women fell; the children were trampled under foot. It was a carnage. My friend Lerouge is struck down by a bullet; he raises himself; he sees his young wife tottering, with the bayonet of a soldier through her breast. When Lerouge comes to himself, he is mad, and he dies a year after in an asylum. Ask me now what General de Beauregard was, and I shall tell you. He was a bandit!"

Claverley was aware that any reminiscence of the *coup d'état*, which had placed the Emperor on the throne, excited Grachard to frenzy. The Frenchman could not keep his seat, but stood up, pale and glaring, whilst his whole frame shook. Claverley, who had often seen him in this state, merely asked, "You know nothing against the Beauregards except their politics?"

"Politics? You call that politics, you?" screamed Grachard. "A man steepes his hands in the blood of innocents, and I must ask whether he has not done anything else before I have the right to call him brigand! Those innocents, they died that a rascal might wear a crown, and give titles, riches, posts to his friends. General de Beauregard becomes a marshal and Duc d'Alma,

and his son who grows up learns to think his father a great and good man. What can you expect from such a disorder in men's ideas of right and wrong? This Duke, who divides his time between boudoirs and stables, takes your betrothed from you, and proposes to marry her. Will he marry her? We will see. If so, you have luck. It would be more like one of his race to ruin her, then cast her back in your arms, saying, 'Take her now, if you will.' Thunder! you talk of divine justice; but where is your Deity if he permits such things? Is he asleep? Talk to me not of divine justice. These emperors and dukes, with their swords and their gold, are our masters; you, I, all of us, are their victims; and if one of them fall by the hand of some avenger, your priests declare that he is in heaven, and consign us, his enemies, to malediction! Ah, I thank God I am an atheist!"

After this sally Grachard cooled and discussed the situation from another light.

"Marriage is an institution profoundly immoral," said he, gesticulating with his tea-cup. "In a society well organized on a basis of equality, you choose the woman who has affinities with you, and she becomes the mother of your children.

You need no priests or mayors to assist that arrangement, and public morality will oblige you not to repudiate obligations which you have contracted. That is what I say to Miss Hopkins ; but she is incredulous, for I too, my friend, have my troubles with women. In a society well constituted, I should not have to enter into relations with Miss Hopkins ; but I am a poor refugee driven from his own land, away from women to my liking, and your English girls of education would not accept me, because I have no money. So I took refuge with Miss Hopkins in a moment of forgetfulness, and now I must wed with her because I am an honest man, and cannot refuse to let her live unhappily with me if she thinks it is her interest. Thus is your society made !”

Infuriated by his own picture of society, M. Grachard clapped his hat on and marched out, promising to call again when his blood was no longer boiling. After he had gone, Laurence Claverley was doubtful what to think about the Duc d'Alma. He did not want to think well of him, and though he could not trust Grachard's account of the man, it gave him a grim feeling of satisfaction to reflect that he might be a libertine

who would make Gertrude cruelly expiate her infatuation for his title. Jealousy despises no weapon of vengeance ; it poisons every thought ; it is a fever whose only medicine is tears forced from the eyes of him or her who caused the fever.

Claverley had torn up half a dozen drafts of letters which he had written to Gertrude. He was asking himself now how he should act after her return—whether he should attempt to see her and overwhelm her with upbraidings, or treat her with distant scorn. His resolutions varied according as hot or cold fits of jealous fever possessed him, and he had not made up his mind when the Corringtons came back to Lewbury.

The worst of it was that during this interval he had to go about and see his patients as usual, and it was surprising how many people in Lewbury became unwell at this time and required his services. He knew that he was being watched with mocking eyes, and he had to bear himself as if nothing was the matter. But all this gave him a loathing for his profession. It was one in which he could never hope to win that kind of distinction by which he might dazzle the girl who had played him false. If he had been a soldier, a barrister, an author, he might have

looked to professional success for his consolation and vengeance ; but what is the success of a country doctor worth ? Laurence Claverley asked himself more than once during those wretched days, whether he should not throw up his practice and leave Lewbury ?

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. NETHERSOLE'S INVITATION.

THE Corringtons on their return were warmly received by their friends; for "so long as thou doest well unto thyself, men shall speak well of thee." A gallant little paragraph about Gertrude's betrothal appeared in the *Lewbury Chronicle*, and the news was copied into the principal London papers under the heading of "Marriages in High Life." Wherever Gertrude went, she had to return the obsequious pressure of outstretched hands; and this public homage would have been very grateful to her if she had not been so uneasy about what Dr. Claverley might do, and so sore about Hucks Littlepoint's coldness towards her.

Hucks was the only person who abstained from offering her any congratulations. His wife

had in vain attempted to persuade him that her sister had done no wrong ; he answered guardedly—for he weighed his words in scruples as chemists do their drugs—that he trusted it was so, and he shook hands with his sister-in-law as usual, but he showed by making no allusion to her engagement that he thought she ought to give some explanation of her conduct. Hucks also had a long private interview with the General and Mrs. Corrington, the result of which was to make Gertrude's father exceeding wroth with Dr. Claverley.

General Corrington, on being apprised at Ostend of the doctor's alleged grievance and threats, had merely said, in that loud, cracked voice of his, "Pooh ! we must take no notice of the fellow ;" and he had not even questioned Gertrude as to her past relations with Claverley. He chose to treat the matter as a piece of childish folly beneath his notice, and continued to do this after his interview with Hucks. Mrs. Corrington told Gertrude that her father would know how to deal with "that man" if he dared to make himself objectionable.

Laurence Claverley, meanwhile, had already perceived that by his foolish threat of bringing

an action for breach of promise he had forfeited the dignity which might have belonged to him as a man in love who had been grossly treated. This was a false step from which there must be a retreat at once. During several days he expected that General Corrington would call upon him; but the General did no such thing. He had an idea that Hucks Littlepoint would come, or that Gertrude would send him a message; but neither of these incidents occurred. Accordingly he made the first advance by returning to Kate Littlepoint the letter which Gertrude had sent him from Ostend, along with this note:—

“DEAR MRS. LITTLEPOINT,

“I return you Miss Corrington's letter as you desired, and I wish to express my regret for some hasty expressions which escaped me the other day under the influence of strong excitement. I shall not cease to feel that I have been very badly treated; but the remembrance of the past is so painful that I must try to dismiss it.

“Yours truly,

“LAURENCE CLAVERLEY.”

There was no overture to a reconciliation in

these lines. Claverley did not intend to forgive Gertrude, and Kate knew this when she read his letter. It was a comfort to her and her husband to be relieved of the fear they had entertained lest the doctor should cause a scandal; but Kate remained angry with him for having given her such a fright. By his bluster, Claverley had destroyed the sympathy which, with her natural generosity, she would otherwise have felt for him; and Kate, running to the opposite extreme, set him down as a cantankerous and ill-bred man, who could never have made a nice husband.

Gertrude was also relieved of her terrors; for she had been horribly alarmed at the idea that Laurence Claverley might write to the Duke. Hucks Littlepoint now congratulated her, and she condescended to express to herself a little pity for the doctor. No girl can feel quite indifferent to a man who has proposed to her out of love; and the future duchess would have liked to meet Claverley just for once, and prove to him by quiet argument—all the arguing being on her side—that she had never wronged him.

Did she at heart feel contrite for her behaviour? Well, just a little, no more. She was neither saint nor sinner, but an ordinary English

girl, with many sound homespun qualities and a few human failings. She was merry, fond of pleasure, and had too often been told she was pretty not to believe it. Since she had been to her first ball at seventeen, she had indulged in more than one flirtation with young officers of the Brightport garrison and undergraduates home for vacations. She knew how to draw a man to her side by a glance, enchant him with a smile, flurry him with a pout, try his temper by alternations of confidential tenderness and raillery, or repel him altogether by icy reserve. These were little arts which she had practised on the youth of Britain by manner of pastime and in full security. To squeezes of the hand, exchanges of photographs, and stolen kisses, she attached little importance; they are the wild flowers which English girls scatter before marriage, and how much more innocuous are they than the wild oats which young men sow at the same season!

But Gertrude knew the value of a matrimonial offer made by a responsible householder, having a profession and a good name in the world; so she had never treated Laurence Claverley like other young men. He was one of those whose attentions mean business, and it had been her

object to win his best opinion while studying him with a cool and careful eye, as one whose board she might have to share for the remainder of her days.

Claverley had never received a coquettish glance from her, nor a lock of hair, nor a kiss ; he had snatched one kiss from her after making his offer, but she had not been a consenting party, and the impress of his lips had caused her to blush deeper than she had ever reddened for all bygone kisses. She had made up her mind, however, to accept the doctor soon or late, and here was the gist of her serious offence against him. If she had returned from Ostend disengaged, she would certainly have become his wife. She could not well have helped herself, for her father and mother, who now spoke so contemptuously of Claverley, would have urged upon her the advantages of the match ; her sister Kate would have warmly advocated it ; and Gertrude herself had seen nothing in the doctor's character that could prevent her from becoming very fond of him after marriage. As to his being the son of a footman, she had never troubled herself about that version of his pedigree, and indeed, had closed her ears to it.

But now, since her brilliant Ostend campaign, it seemed to Gertrude as if the time when it had been possible that she could love Laurence Claverley was ever so remote. She had entered a new world bounded by an enlarged and more glorious horizon, and she gratefully loved the man who had led her in view of this happy country. She felt it was rather gracious on her part that she should forgive Dr. Claverley for having so nearly entrapped her into becoming a country surgeon's wife. What a fate that would have been ! Supposing she had gone away to Ostend irretrievably engaged to Laurence Claverley, and had been obliged to renounce the Duke's offer to keep faith with a man, the branches of whose genealogical tree, perhaps, swarmed with ostlers and housemaids ? There was enough in the idea to make her shudder.

One might suppose from this that Gertrude had little heart ; but she was only a girl of twenty-one. We do not expect boys at that spring age to be weaned from all vanities. We are not astonished if they fall short of ideal goodness, or despair of them if some selfishness and wrongheadedness regulate their conduct. Why, then, should there be a stricter exaction

from girls? Gertrude Corrington had a very good heart, but Laurence Claverley had failed to touch it; that is all.

The opportunity of meeting the doctor, which Gertrude half desired, was soon furnished her; for our friend Mrs. Nethersole issued invitations to a grand evening party, and invited the Corringtons as well as the doctor. The old lady wanted to see what would come of the rencounter between "Flirtie" and her jilted lover.

The Corringtons doubted at first whether they could go to the party; for Gertrude, with her mother and Bertha, went every day into Brightport to see milliners, make purchases, and try on dresses. Those were the days of handboxes and parcels arriving constantly; silks and velvets had to be matched; there were anxious consultations as to whether the wedding dress should be white, or cream-coloured; and a dressmaker had been hired by the day and located in the schoolroom, where the *tic-tac* of her sewing machine made a music dear to female ears. However, it was decided at length that Mrs. Nethersole's invitation should be accepted. "She's such a spiteful old cat," said Kate, "that she would declare we were afraid to meet the doctor if we did not go."

Gertrude's dressmaker was none other than Polly Hopkins, M. Grachard's intended. Polly's mother let lodgings, and was the Frenchman's landlady. The relations between M. Grachard and Miss Hopkins having reached a point which no prudent mother could approve, Mrs. Hopkins had insisted upon marriage, and "Tim," as Miss Hopkins called him, had, as we know, surrendered to a sense of his duties. But he would not hear of being married in a church, for he looked upon such edifices as monuments of human folly; while Mrs. Hopkins argued that since he was not a Catholic—for which she thanked her Maker—nor a Jew, as was shown by his eating sausages, he must be a Churchman, a Baptist, or, at least, a Quaker, though it pleased that silly French head of his to think otherwise. Miss Hopkins cared not where or how she was married, so long as the ceremony took place soon, and was graced with a proper amount of pomp.

She was a sly maiden, with a pert nose, grey eyes, and a quick tongue. Grachard had given her his emphatic opinion about Miss Corrington's bad behaviour; but in this, as in many other things, Miss Hopkins did not agree with her

future husband, and she had an idea lying deep and quiet in her own mind that Gertrude might be useful to her, by obtaining her Tim's pardon from the Emperor Napoleon.

Grachard had told her that if he were back in his own country, he should fill a high position there as a journalist and politician, but he always added that he would perish rather than sue for grace. With such scruples the high-minded Miss Hopkins had nothing to do, and she had resolved that if Tim would not crave the Duc d'Alma's intercession, she would do so privately in his stead.

She had informed Gertrude of her engagement, and Gertrude was, of course, much interested in her, owing to the coincidence of their both being about to become Frenchwomen. Polly Hopkins, on her side, was interested in the goings-on at Kingshouse. She kept her eyes and ears on the watch, and picked up odds and ends of conversation which she retailed to Tim, through whom they reached Laurence Claverley. Thus the doctor overheard scraps of the discussion as to whether Mrs. Nethersole's invitation should be accepted by the Corringtons. He himself meant to go to the party. He thought it best to meet

the Corringtons and have done with it, though how he should behave in their presence—whether he should accost or ignore them, speak to them coldly, coolly, or not at all—were points on which his resolutions varied from hour to hour.

Grachard's warm sympathy poured out whenever the friends met, ended by thawing Claverley's reserve, and the doctor sometimes let his mortification be seen by the Frenchman at their evening lessons.

"They are a mean lot, the whole family of them," he once said bitterly. "There is that cur, Hucks Littlepoint, who purposely avoids me. I saw him duck down a side street to-day when he sighted my dogcart. And the General, too, as an officer and gentleman, he knows that he owes me an apology."

"Why don't you pull their ears?" shrieked Grachard. "I would spit at their faces in public. They should fight me and have six inches of my foil in their bodies. Ah, *sacrebleu*, what a country is this, wherein there is no remedy for outraged honour! Why, what cure is there for a worry like yours?"

"To grin and bear it, I suppose," muttered Claverley; "so let us turn to our Voltaire. A

chapter of the Philosophical Dictionary is what I most want, and I'll light a pipe."

But sometimes the advice which Grachard gave was of the thoughtful kind which beseeemed true friendship.

"You fret, my poor friend," he said one evening; "but that is worth nothing. You should show contempt. Will you that I tell you what I should do in your place? Well, I would prove to that proud Gertrude that it is she who has made the bad bargain, not I. I would laugh and pay my court to another girl. There are plenty. I would marry, be a good husband, a triumphant father. I would work at my profession, and make the world speak well of me, so that your faithless one should bite her lips and say, 'I deceived myself about that man.' To every one comes the opportunity of reprisals, and, as the Italians say, "Revenge is a dish that should be eaten cold."

"I thought you did not believe in Providence," remarked Claverley.

"No! but I believe in the logic of facts!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "You do a wrong; you stir up against you the hatred, the contempt, the vindictiveness of others, and you are like one

who unchains so many ferocious dogs to roam about in the woods where he takes his daily walks. Soon or late they shall bite him. Miss Gertrude has betrayed you to marry a duke, but think not she will forget you. She shall be uneasy; her conscience shall condemn her. You shall be ever present in her memory, and your character will be the standard by which she will judge that of her husband. If he is brutal, neglectful, stupid, she shall think of you; if her life is unhappy and that of your wife is all the contrary, you shall have planted a dagger in her heart. A duchess does not wear her coronet in her bedroom; in the moments when she is a mere woman, she holds titles cheap; she ranks men according to her feelings, and the love of an honest heart seems to her, after all, the only thing worth having. Look well, therefore, that by your conduct now you leave on this cruel girl an impression that will never be effaced."

This was good advice, but not more easy to follow on that account. To begin with, Claverley was not disposed to go and form some random loveless attachment simply to spite Gertrude; and as to fortitude, some little event contributed every day to upset the philosophy with which

he tried to balance his mind before starting on his morning's rounds. Here it was some injudicious offer of sympathy from a lady patient, or a clumsy question from a friend in the streets, or an inquiry from one of his own servants wanting to know "whether it was true, sir, that there wasn't going to be a wedding?" On the very day of Mrs. Nethersole's party Claverley received by post—anonymously, of course—a parody of "The Frog he would a-woeing go." It ran—

"Jeames he would a woeing go,"

and was illustrated with a pen and ink daub of a footman being kicked out of a house by a man with big moustaches and a coronet.

Against such potions even Voltaire provides no antidote in his *Philosophy*.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. NETHERSOLE'S PARTY.

MRS. NETHERSOLE lived with her son Purkiss in Priory Crescent. Her reputation as a spiteful old cat did not prevent people from keeping on good terms with her, as she had a talent for avoiding quarrels. Her damaging rumours could never be positively traced to her, for she had always heard them from other persons, and she retailed them in an interrogative form, wanting to know whether they were true, and sincerely hoping they were not.

Since her return to Lewbury, she had asked a dozen sets of visitors whether it was a fact that Dr. Claverley and Gertrude had been engaged, and wondered indignantly what people could mean by spreading such idle rumours. Her son Purkiss likewise went about button-holing Mr.

Quang and others, saying with a giggle, "I say, rum start that, isn't it, between 'Flirtie' and the Sawbones?" But Purkiss had to drop that chaff on espying that public opinion took so respectful a view of Gertrude's engagement. Mr. Quang, who did not often rebuke anybody, once ventured to say, "I wouldn't call Miss Corrington 'Flirtie' if I were you. It doesn't sound proper."

He might have added that Purkiss Nethersole should have been the last man to throw stones about flirting, being himself a sad offender in this respect. Purkiss Nethersole was one of the most objectionable and dangerous of young men. The only child of his widowed mother, he had been spoilt, and had never made use of his time at school, so that he had grown up unfit for any profession. He had talked at one time of going into the army, then he was to eat his terms for the bar; but in the upshot he remained at Lewbury, leading a loafer's life, and screwing as much as he could out of his mother for cheap amusements. The creature did not drink nor gamble, so that he was reputed to have no vices, and mothers trusted him more than was prudent.

He knew all the girls of Lewbury, addressed them by their Christian names, and was called

by them "Purkiss." He could dance well and strum a little on the piano, so that he was always useful at parties; and if girls were going to Brightport to shop, his escort was accepted as that of a brother. Nobody liked him or hated him, for there was nothing salient in his nature; but mothers talked of him with good-humoured tolerance, as being very harmless, which he was not. Their daughters knew better. There was scarcely a marriageable young lady in the town whom he had not kissed and "spooned." They used to flush up sometimes, and cry, "Purkiss, how dare you?" but what more could they say? One or two had slapped his ears, which did not keep him in check. Gertrude was one of those who had slapped his ears, and he had taken less liberties with her than with others, because she had her brother Dick to protect her. When there were no brothers at hand, Purkiss had things his own way; and, after all, he used to make girls titter by talking to them of love, marriage, and such things, and by regaling them with tattle not always suited to maiden ears. He had a long upper lip, tusky front teeth, and a face rather like a sheep's. "I say, here's a lark," was his favourite exordium; and he called

everything a lark which tended to the exposure of people's little foibles, or to their public discomfiture. It was a great lark, in his opinion, that Gertrude and Dr. Claverley should be brought together, "like a pair of Kilkenny cats," in his mother's drawing-room; and he had promised the five Quang girls—Dora, Hilda, Caroline, Bessie, and Priscilla—that he would hit upon something to make the pair "smoke," *i.e.* blush. Such was this young man.

Mrs. Nethersole's party—a stuffing of forty guests into two small drawing-rooms—commenced at nine, and it was ten o'clock when Claverley arrived, looking his best in his dress-clothes. As the greengrocer, hired for the evening to play waiter, announced his name, many a girl in the crowded little rooms eyed him kindly. He might have had any of the five Quang girls for the asking. He might have had Miss Claribel Jupe, a long-necked young person (daughter of Dr. Jupe, a professional rival), who sat at the piano, howling "*He thinks I do not love him.*" Miss Susan Jentleigh, the rector's daughter, a brave and warm-hearted girl, the mainstay of orthodoxy in her father's parish against the ritualistic encroachments of Mr.

Oram, was not insensible to his merits. What a pity that so handsome and popular a man should have taken a fancy to a girl who had trifled with him !

Miss Jupe, in the midst of her song, screeched a false note or two ; for the doctor's entrance produced a sudden silence, which caused her to glance over her shoulder. Purkiss was turning the leaves of her music, and winked to her. Gertrude, who was seated among the five Misses Quang, flushed pink, though she tried to appear indifferent. Claverley made his bow to Mrs. Nethersole, and then accosted Mrs. Corrington, who sat beside her. His manner was stiff and embarrassed.

"Is General Corrington quite well?" he asked, with an effort.

"Yes, thanks ; he is playing whist in the next room." This was said very drily, and sounded almost aggressive, because, in the silence of the room, the words rang so loud.

There were plenty of other ladies to be shaken hands with. Kate Littlepoint was there, in a very elegant black net dress, and with a white rose in her hair ; and her turn came in time.

“How do you do, Dr. Claverley?” she said, with a greater appearance of cordiality than she had intended to display, for she felt anxious as to how the doctor would salute her sister.

Everybody in the room had begun to talk again, so as not to seem preoccupied about the little scene that was going to be enacted; but everybody was listening with strained ears, and looking towards Claverley or Gertrude. It was like a minor *concerto* of fiddles playing the prelude to a duet.

Gertrude was tastefully dressed in white silk, with a few moss roses on the skirt. It was a plain dress, but beautifully made in the latest fashion; and Gertrude's hair was also arranged in a new style. She seemed lovelier to Claverley than when he had last seen her—though she had seemed peerless then—and there was a something about her altogether which revealed her social promotion. She looked out of place in this provincial drawing-room—no longer the sort of a girl whom a struggling surgeon would ask to be his wife.

After saying a few words to Kate, the doctor walked straight up to Gertrude, and bowed, without holding out his hand.

“Good evening, Miss Corrington,” he said in a voice which trembled slightly.

“Good evening, Dr. Claverley,” she murmured, blushing deeply and without raising her glance to his. She did not feel much disposed to argue with him at that moment.

“I have to wish you joy of your engagement,” he continued, forcing himself to speak calmly.

“Thank you.” And that was all, for the doctor bowed again and passed on into the back drawing-room, where there was a whist table.

Kate Littlepoint began to breathe more freely. The meeting was going off much better than she had expected, and Dr. Claverley was behaving like a gentleman. But at this moment Purkiss Nethersole proceeded to execute the little plot he had formed for making Gertrude and the doctor look foolish.

Miss Jupe had finished her song amid polite applause. While the greengrocer and a maid were going round with refreshments, Purkiss approached the group of Quang girls, and asked if any of them would sing.

“Dora, please give us one of your Scotch songs.”

“Oh, Purkiss, I have sung already. I think *you* should treat us to a performance now.”

“You know I can't sing,” said Purkiss. “I only wobble.”

“Well, then, warble us one of your comic songs. You always give them with great expression.”

“Since you compel me, I'll try something better than that,” bleated Purkiss. “I'll indulge in a ballad ; but you must promise not to *encore*, because I'm bashful.”

There was something in the look of the Quang girls which struck Kate Littlepoint. They simpered and gazed at the carpet, while Purkiss's readiness to sing was suspicious, for he disliked singing. All this gave indications of a conspiracy, and made Kate wonder.

Purkiss sat down to the piano, splashed out the notes of his prelude with remarkable action, cleared his throat, and sang this :—

“'Twas rank and fame that tempted thee,
 'Twas empire charmed thy heart ;
 But love was wealth, the world to me ;
 Then, false one, let us part.

“The prize I fondly deemed my own
 Another's now may be ;

For ah! with love life's gladness flown,
Leaves grief to wed with me."

and Purkiss repeated *con fuoco*—

"Leaves grie-ie-ief to we-ed with me-e-e-e!"

The song was concluded amidst a general feeling of awkwardness, the guests munching biscuits and burying their noses in their teacups to avoid making remarks. The allusion was too transparent, and Purkiss had decidedly "put his foot into it." He was not prepared for the swift retribution which Kate Littlepoint dealt out to him, though he ought to have known that this impulsive lady never allowed a friend, much less a relative, to be attacked without flying to the rescue.

"Purkiss," she said promptly, as she rattled her fan, "I suppose that ballad describes the feelings which possessed you when Patty Brown, the pastrycook's daughter, jilted you to marry Mr. Dove, the hosier?"

"What's that, Mrs. Littlepoint?" asked Purkiss, turning very red, but looking blue.

His mother, perceiving his uneasiness, smiled in a wry way as she echoed his inquiry, "What are you saying, my dear Kate?"

“Oh, Purkiss knows,” laughed Kate, speaking distinctly, so that all might hear. “He was very tender about Miss Patty Brown. He used to make love to her over the counter, and spend his money on sweets for the good of the house. One day he took her to Brightport, and she allowed him to treat her to a pair of gloves. After so much liberality, it must have been a great blow to him, poor fellow, when she married Mr. Dove.”

“Come, Mrs. Littlepoint, you—you ought not to say such things,” stammered Purkiss in consternation; for all this was true.

“Why not, since you sing about them in that ballad of yours, and talk about being ‘wedded to grief’?” retorted Kate. “But I must say, Purkiss, you are not very constant to that Miss Grief, whoever she may be, for you have taken of late to setting your sprouting whiskers at our housemaid, Betsy. You know, Mrs. Nethersole, Betsy is a pretty girl. Well, would you believe it, Purkiss contrives to pass our house in the morning while she is washing the doorstep, and he casts soft glances at her? I told Betty the other day this must not go too far, unless Purkiss intended to propose to her.

In that case, I said, as I should consider it a very suitable match——”

A general burst of laughter drowned the rest of Kate's sentence. The five plain Quang girls laughed louder than anybody, for they had noticed some fiery sparks in Kate's fine eyes, and were horribly afraid lest, having made an example of Purkiss, she should give each of them a cut with her tongue. Poor Purkiss was so mortified and dumbfounded by this turning of tables that he slunk away and busied himself with some music-books, that he might not meet the glance of his scandalized parent. Altogether Kate's brilliant charge completely routed the Nethersoles.

But now Gertrude was sitting alone, for Dr. Claverley, after his retreat into the next room, had joined the whist-party. He was playing in a listless way, having Mr. Quang for his partner. Nor did he speak to Gertrude again that evening, beyond wishing her coldly “Good night” when she went away.

Gertrude felt piqued, and half afraid, with a presentiment that all was not yet over between herself and the doctor. But, returning home, she found a long letter from Roland, and this consoled

her. The Duke wrote in French, a language which lends itself so well to the strains of tender love and the turning of pretty compliments. How could the poet Lamartine have called it a cold language—*une langue d'arithméticien*? You may boldly say in it things which, put into English, read like craziness or grotesque affectations. A Frenchman may be grandiloquent, chalorous, sentimental, or witty, without ceasing to be natural. Read an English love-letter in a law court, and it excites roars of laughter; read one before an average of audience of Frenchmen, and if it provoke a smile at all it will be a very kindly one.

Is this because the French look upon love-making as the grand business of life, whereas the English affect to treat it only as a weakness of the flesh, to be half-ashamed of, and to be kept very sly and private? Your Gaul, duke or soldier, does not mind declaring before all the world that he is ready to die for his lady love; and he expects to be believed, and he is believed. And from the Empress to the flower-girl in the street, every woman who hears him thinks this mode of expressing himself perfectly natural and proper, “*Mes amis, je suis amoureux?* Elle

m'aime. . . . Félicitez-moi ; j'en pleure de joie." Do we Englishmen dare to say such things to our friends, in a room where there are strangers present ? The Frenchman does so every day, and cares not who listens.

So in Roland's letter there came to Gertrude as it were a wafting of warm air from that fair land of France, which is a land of love—a land where women have always been queens in spite of Salic law ; whose history is made up of the doings of women ; whose kings have been popular, according as they loved most. A Frenchman's love, however, is not always bestowed on his wife, or on the girl he is going to marry ; and in this Gertrude was lucky to get a husband who was going to be her lover too. Her pulses throbbed as she caught the glow of those fervent lines, as one catches the rhythm of good poetry which carries you along with a voluptuous sensation as of floating off earth.

Roland not only made passionate declarations of his love, but he wrote in good spirits about the prospect of soon being with Gertrude again. He had started for Brittany to see his grandmother, and hoped to get his business there soon concluded. Gertrude read this letter twice in

her room ; then stood by her window for awhile, gazing at the moonlight, which threw its soft blueish glare on the night.

She thought of the home she was going to leave—it had been a happy one—but she did not regret to leave it ; for the trying scene to which she had been subjected that night had put her out of conceit with Lewbury and its wretched provincial society, where creatures like that Purkiss Nethersole made a pleasure of annoying her. Then, as the languor of hopeful love stole over her, her fancy flapped its wings onwards towards the great world which she was about to enter, and she felt so comforted and happy that she pressed Roland's letter to her lips. And when she went to bed, she hid that letter under her pillow, that she might read it again in the morning.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OMEN OF THE FALLEN BRANCH.

THE Duc d'Alma had gone to France to ask the consent of his maternal grandmother to his marriage. He would have been bound to do this even if he had been seventy years of age, and had had parents or grandparents still living. The aged Marquise de Châteaufort could not, by withholding her consent, forbid his marriage ; but she could, according to French law, compel him to go through formalities which are always disagreeable. He would be obliged to send to the Marquise, through a public notary, a respectful intimation (*acte respectueux*) of his intention to disregard her wishes, and all the world would then know that he had quarrelled with his grandmother.

Would the old lady be willing that he should marry an English Protestant ? As Roland

travelled towards Brittany, he had his misgivings on the point. He had proposed to Gertrude without any thought of his family, and he intended to marry her, whether his relatives were pleased or not. But he would like things to be made pleasant all round. The Marquise was eighty-five, and a rigid Catholic. She was very fond of him, however, and she was almost in her dotage ; that is to say, there were days when her memory got confused, so that he hoped she might give her consent without exactly understanding that he was going to marry a "heretic." She would only have to put her signature before witnesses to a document drawn up by Roland's notary, Monsieur Ragotin.

Châteaufort was situated at a few miles from Auray, on the wildest part of the coast of Morbihan. It was close to the Heath of Carnac, with its countless Celtic remains, dolmans, menhirs, and cromlechs ; and the waves of the Gulf of Morbihan, a sea of innumerable rugged islands and treacherous tides, tumbled roaring amidst a mass of huge black rocks that could be seen from its windows. It was a gloomy and romantic place, the seat of many Breton legends and superstitions ; and the peasantry, who still

wore the picturesque Breton costume and talked Gaelic, were a rude uncultured race, believing in all that their priests and their old women told them.

Roland d'Alma had no love for this spot, where his mother had been brought up. It made him dismal to go there. He was a nineteenth-century Parisian, who thought Catholic and Royalist Brittany a good place to read of in books, or to boast of as the locality where some of his ancestors had hunted and fought, but not a place to inhabit one's self. Yet, out of the filial respect which is always strong in the French, he used to pay visits to Châteaufort several times a year, to spend a few days with the Marquise. He called this taking his fated dose of *ennui*, and hoped it would be counted to him in purgatory. The air of Carnac seemed to him saturated with melancholy; and at night, when the noise of the sea mingled with the plaintive sighing of the wind through the pine woods, when the doors of the old castle creaked and the window panes rattled, he wondered how any human creature possessing money could care to live in such a hole.

There was nothing in the conversation of the natives, either, to enliven the Duke. From the

toothless old crones who hobbled among the Druidical stones gathering simples, to the white-capped village wenches who sold their hair at the fairs of Auray to make chignons for Parisian ladies ; from the stiff-jointed fathers of the village, with their baggy canvas breeches, and their broad-brimmed, low-crowned hats, to the clattering hobbledehoy in wooden shoes, who blubbered when the conscription took them ;—there was not a man or woman in this bleak place but saw in the commonest disturbances of the elements portents of death or disaster. If they perceived a crow, or heard a dog howl, they muttered an *ave*. Their very pigs seemed loaded to the snout with prophecy ; for if one of these animals grunted too loud on a Friday morning, it was taken to mean that there would be rain all through the ensuing week.

Roland had telegraphed from Paris to announce his arrival, so that on reaching Auray he found his grandmother's landau waiting for him at the station. He was also met by a lanky young priest, with enormous hands and feet and a very greasy cassock. This was the Marquise's chaplain, the Abbé Jérôme Juva de Penmarek.

Jérôme Juva had bright blue eyes and fair

hair that fell to his shoulders ; but his shoulders stooped, and his eyes, though so handsome, seemed, out of timidity, to retreat from anybody's straight gaze, like moles backing into their holes away from lantern light. He had a juvenile, gawkish gait and expression, smiled readily, and listened with an eager, respectful curiosity to all that was said to him. When in the presence of strangers, he held his long bony arms downwards almost level with his knees, and rubbed his hands nervously, as if he hoped to extract sparks of conversation from them. He appeared to be a very good young man, painfully anxious to do the right thing, and ever tormented by the idea that he was not doing enough.

Roland, who had known him since he was a boy, greeted him with a friendly pat on the shoulder. "It's kind of you to have come, Jérôme. How is my grandmamma?"

"She is fairly well. Allow me to take your bag, sir;" and, seizing the bag with all his strength in his desire to oblige, he snatched it out of the Duke's hands and tottered three paces backwards with it.

The family coachman, old Bernard Kergarec—an outlandish figure in a mouldy blue coat

with half a dozen capes, and a glazed cap with a blackened gold band round it—now croaked his welcome in a husky voice—

“*Por diou, monsiou*, we are glad to see you ; but I'd rather you had brought two boxes instead of one, even though I should have had to carry them to the château on my own shoulders. This doesn't look like a long stay, monsiou,” added Bernard, trying to lift the large portmanteau ; and though he had expressed his willingness to carry two boxes to the château, he found this single one as much as he could manage, and had to be assisted by the Duke's English valet, Barney, and a porter. In fact, he did little of the work, but made a great show of performing it all.

“Energetic as ever, my good Bernard,” said the Duke. “And I see your horses are always patterns of fine grooming.”

“Yes, monsiou, I'll wager they've no horses in Paris to beat them.”

“And not a coachman in the world to rival you, eh ?” added the Duke.

This was an eternal joke which old Bernard pocketed unsuspectingly as a compliment, and which always made Barney laugh consumedly in

his sleeve. For the antiquity of the Marquise's landau, its heavy wheels and hard springs, the shaggy look of its pair of Norman horses, and the odd turn-out of Bernard himself, were most entertaining things to the English valet. Roland would have preferred a modern vehicle. The hood of the carriage was pulled down, and he seated himself, half reclining on cushions broad as an ottoman; but the unyielding springs gave him a cruel jolting, and the deafening noise which the old wheels made in going over the paved high-roads precluded all conversation between him and Jérôme.

It was a beautiful evening, cooled by a soft breeze that smelt of seaweed. On that wild coast, where it so often rains, and where grey mists may be called the every-day garb of the moorlands, the few fine days of summer may be compared to Sundays, when the country puts on a holiday attire of lovely colours. The Celtic boulders on the plain of Carnac were crested with little tufts of green, or coated with patches of fresh velvet moss. In the chinks of old stones, brown with the polish of centuries, sprouted little plants with yellow flowers; and the ground was carpeted with pink and white heather, which

blended into a uniform tint of purple when seen from afar, as it stretched away undulating for miles. The sea coming in view glowed like a calm lake ; and the western sky, where the sun was setting, looked like a large sheet of green glass blazing and streaked with long lines of blood red.

Leaving the high-road on the border of the heath, the landau ascended a narrower road, which sloped upwards for half a mile till it came to a forest of pines, which formed the girdle of the estate. There was a low paling all round it, and the entrance to the wood was guarded by a thatched porter's lodge, and by a pair of tall rusty gates with coroneted escutcheons of wrought iron, which a couple of bareheaded urchins in *sabots* swung back by jumping on them as if they were swings.

Just as the landau had passed through the gates it was pulled up short, and the coachman uttered a shout of alarm as he reined in by jerking up his elbows to the level of his ears. There had been a crash aloft, and the dead branch of a tree came crackling down, and fell right across the road, scattering a shower of dust and twigs.

“*Malédiction!*” howled old Bernard, who had been almost thrown off by the oscillation of the ponderous carriage in his sudden stop.

“What is the matter?” asked the Duke, standing up.

“May the devil take thee, Odette, slut, wench, wicked little *vaurienne!*” continued Bernard, shaking his whip at somebody in the tree.

And Roland saw a wild-looking girl, with a patched kirtle, standing bare-legged on one of the lower branches. She stared rather mockingly at him for a moment, then scrambled lightly down from the tree, slipped her feet into a pair of wooden shoes, and ran to pull the branch out of the way.

“There, it’s gone! You needn’t growl and grunt any more, uncle,” she cried, smothering a laugh.

“But the presage isn’t gone!” shouted old Bernard, lashing at her furiously with his whip. “Holy St. Anne of Auray, defend us from your wiles, you little sorceress. I believe you did it on purpose.”

“Why is he so excited?” asked the Duke, of Jérôme; for he could not understand why the fall of a rotten branch of a tree should throw the old

man into such a rage; but now he noticed that the priest was moved too. He had made the sign of the cross, and was muttering a prayer.

“Sir, God is good,” he stammered; “but the branch of a tree across the path of one returning home is supposed by our people to bode mischance.”

“No doubt it does to a rider coming home on a foggy night,” answered the Duke, who felt a little uneasy nevertheless, for, like most Frenchmen, he had his grain of superstition. He was annoyed that the priest had told him of the presage. “Is it good to frighten a young girl like that with such ideas, Jérôme? It’s Odette, the cow-girl, isn’t it?—Hie, Odette!”

But Odette, after skipping out of reach of her uncle’s whip, had hidden behind a tree, and put out her tongue at her relative. When the Duke called, she took to her heels, and vanished in the wood.

There had been an amused spectator of this scene. A man who looked like a pedlar was leaning against one of the gate pillars, with a pack on his back and a bundle lying at his feet. He was a fellow with a merry eye and a swarthy Italian face. His costume was the blue French

blouse, with leather leggings; but he wore a Tyrolese hat, and smoked a cigarette with the lazy daintiness of a Spaniard.

“Pardon me, Monsieur le Duc,” he said, throwing away a cigarette half-consumed, and lifting his hat with easy politeness as he advanced, “I am afraid I was the cause of this little mishap by asking the young lady who has just fled to catch a squirrel for me. She told me she could catch squirrels. I am sorry that she has so upset Monsieur l’Abbé.”

“You appear to know me, sir,” replied Roland, struck by the man’s expressive face, good manners, and foreign accent; “and it seems to me I have seen you before.”

“No doubt you have, sir. I travel a good deal. My name is Quirolo, but people have punned on my patronymic, and call me Pierre Quiroule.”*

“I have not seen you in Brittany, though, Monsieur Quiroule, nor under this costume, I think. It seems to me that—at a court ball——”

“I am a man of many trades, Monsieur le Duc,” interrupted the pedlar, with a composed smile. “I am engaged at present in fostering

* *Pierre qui roule*—Rolling Stone.

the piety of this very religious province by selling relics, images, and little medals blessed by the Pope. Will you allow me to offer you one of St. Denis and St. George ?”

“Why, it bears the heads of General Garibaldi and Henri Rochefort !” observed the Duke, amused.

“So it does. I beg your pardon ; I went to the wrong pocket,” said Pierre Quiroule, with a laugh, quite unabashed. “You know, sir, each locality has its saints, and one must humour every form of belief. These two are worshipped in manufacturing towns. Here are St. Denis and St. George, emblematical of the *entente cordiale* between France and England, and, may I add, of your coming marriage, to which I wish every happiness.”

The pedlar's unexpected speech was cut short by old Bernard's urging his team on.

“I wonder who that fellow is ?” murmured the Duke, astonished. “I could swear I had seen him at a court ball in some foreign uniform. And where has he heard that I am going to be married ?”

“He is a very dangerous man,” observed Jérôme Juva, somewhat excitedly, and with a

solemn shake of the head. "He comes here about twice a year, sir, and he turns the heads of all the girls, selling them cheap jewellery and books of idle stories. He has been here since yesterday, and I dare say he is going away with his pockets full of money."

Roland, marvelling how the pedlar could have heard of his coming marriage, was tempted to ask whether the news of it had reached Châteaufort; but he refrained. The landau was toiling up a private road full of deep ruts, and jolted so violently that of a sudden Jerome bit his tongue, and uttered a squall of pain.

Onwards and still upwards went the private road, a mere carriage way through the wood, till, at about half a mile from the lodge, the ascent terminated abruptly in a plateau of about half an acre in extent, in the centre of which rose the château.

There had been a time when, standing on one of the gate towers of their castle, the Seigneurs of Châteaufort could count the steeples of twenty villages all their own. Their lands reached from Carnac to Auray on the one side, and from Carnac to Quiberon on the other. But now, thanks to revolutionary confiscations, the Marquise

owned little property outside the forest. The greater part of her income was derived from money in the funds ; but she made a fair profit yearly out of the sale of her timber, her cattle, sheep, and the produce of her dairy. There was a fine dairy on the plateau, and, when younger, she had superintended it herself ; but now it was managed by her steward, Alain Kergarec. All the servants in the household were Kergarecs, relatives of Alain, whose family had served the lords of Châteaufort for centuries.

CHAPTER X.

AN OFFER OF TWO WIVES.

THE castle had scarcely altered in outward appearance since it was built in the reign of Charles VI. It was a massive place of grey stone, two stories high, partially cloaked with ivy, and having a diadem of battlements. At each angle of the front stood a round tower, and there were a pair of turrets, with pointed roofs flanking the large doorway, which had a portcullis, and was still approached over a moat and a drawbridge, which Jehan Kergaree, the porter, pulled up every night.

The landau, rumbling over the drawbridge and under a deep archway, entered a quadrangle of good size, with a grass plat in the centre. To the right of it was a chapel in the flamboyant style, very black, and with niches full of broken-nosed saints; to the left were stables, a kitchen,

and a refectory. The fourth side of the château, which from its crenelated roof to the basement was draped entirely with ivy, was occupied by the private apartments. A paved, but weed-grown carriage-sweep, encircling the lawn of ill-kept turf, on which household linen was hanging out to dry, led up to the door, which was surmounted by an elaborately carved stone shield, bearing the arms of the Kerouailles.

On the steps stood a pretty girl in a grey frock and broad-brimmed straw hat with red trimming—a girl of small stature and neat figure, with large grave blue eyes. The brim of her hat, keeping her face in the shade, darkened her ruddy, rustic complexion, and made her eyes seem all the larger and more serious, so that a stranger would have taken her to be twenty-five years old, instead of being, as she actually was, scarcely twenty. This was Pauline Juva, Jérôme's sister. She had formerly been the Marquise de Châteaufort's companion and reader, but was now the housekeeper of the château. Her position of trust was denoted by a purse-bag suspended to her black and silver girdle, and containing a big bunch of keys; it was also evinced by a somewhat prim demeanour. A countrified little thing

she was, evidently intimidated by the Duke's arrival, for she coloured as the carriage drove up ; yet she stood her ground, as if it were part of her duty to be there and greet him.

“ Good evening, my dear Pauline ; I need not ask how you are,” said Roland, in a brotherly tone, after he had alighted gingerly from the landau, which had four steps, one of which was broken. Jérôme put his inexperienced foot through this step, and descended from the carriage with more speed than ecclesiastical decorum. “ Is grandmamma awake ? ” continued the Duke, as he returned the salutation of the major-domo, the coachman's brother and another Kergarec, who muttered a querulous blessing at him in Gaelic. All these old servants, though devotedly attached, looked chronically out of sorts.

“ Madame is taking a nap ; but I will awake her, for she is very impatient to see you,” said Pauline, in a voice that was soft and musical, but louder in its pitch than that of town-bred girls.

“ I understood from Jérôme that she was quite well ? ”

“ Pardon me, she has received news which greatly agitated her.”

“ What news ? ”

“That you were going to be married, cousin,” answered Pauline, reddening.

She called the Duke “cousin,” because she came of a very ancient family, which in old times had intermarried with the Kerouailles.

“May I ask who brought you this news?” inquired Roland.

“We read it in the newspapers.”

“Ah, I thought you received only the *Gazette de France* here? I did not know that pious journal was so well-informed about mundane affairs.”

“We only receive the *Gazette de France*,” admitted Pauline; “but somebody in Paris—we do not know who—sent the Marquise two newspapers, in which it was stated that you were to marry a—a Protestant.”

“My future wife is a good Christian, my dear Pauline.”

“The newspaper said she was a Protestant,” replied Pauline, glancing up at him timidly.

“But so am I a Protestant,” answered Roland, with a light laugh to conceal his vexation; for he was annoyed to find that a prejudice had been created against Gertrude before he could plead her cause himself. “I protest against all sorts of

things; so do you; so does everybody. I will prove to Jérôme presently that he is an arch heretic, who doesn't know half the canons of our Mother Church."

Jérôme giggled. Pauline said nothing, but led the way into an entrance hall, with a low-panelled oak ceiling, black with the grime of centuries. The floor was paved with flags, many of them cracked, and the walls were covered with faded tapestry, with antlers and with trophies of arms, helmets, and breastplates, bearing the dents of battles, the causes of which have long ceased to worry the world. An itinerant dealer in bric-a-brac had once found his way into this place, and his eyes fairly watered as he mentally marked out its contents into lots and priced them. The whole château was a very museum of antiquities. The chairs in all the rooms were adorned with tapestries, wrought by the fingers of Kerouailles ladies long departed. The newest piece of heavy furniture in them dated from Louis XV.'s reign, and the smallest ornaments in them, whether of china, wood, or metal, had their value as curiosities. But all this was comfortless, and made the Duke feel as in a store-house rather than in a home.

Pauline, having ascertained that it was Roland's pleasure to see his grandmother at once before dining, clapped her hands, and at the summons a tall Breton man-servant, who had been hovering about the hall, emerged from a passage, bobbing his head humbly to the Duke. This was Clovis Kergarec, son of Bernard, the coachman. His flaxen hair was combed over his forehead, and cut straight just above the eyebrows, while behind and at the sides of the head it fell lank to the shoulders. If this long hair had shown a little more of the forehead, and had been brushed back behind the ears, it would have given Clovis's smooth-shaven face a comely appearance; but, concealing his ears and part of his cheeks, it made him look atrociously shaggy and almost ruffianly. Clovis wore the national Breton costume; that is, a white jacket with four rows of small brass buttons, a blue waistcoat with a roll collar buttoned up to the chin, a broad red sash, wide canvas breeches, and grey worsted stockings.

Pauline gave this uncouth Cornouailler an order in Gaelic, and he fetched a massive silver candlestick, with a tallow candle in it, to escort the Duke to his room; while Pauline herself went

to prepare the Marquise for her grandson's visit. It was not yet dusk, but the passages in the castle were so dark that the flickering dip which Clovis carried, as he strode five steps ahead of his master, gave no more light than was enough to guide Roland as he went upstairs to the large state bedroom, which was always made ready for him when he came to the château. The bed in this chamber was hidden in a deep alcove, and the fireplace was so wide that the wind roared in the chimney day and night with frightful noises. The brown planks of the flooring were polished like glass, but there was many a crevice in them, out of which mice crawled in the dark, and the draughts were so numerous that they kept the curtains, hangings, and even the pictures in the room continuously swaying or trembling.

Roland did not remain long in this chamber of delights. He washed his hands, changed his attire with his valet's assistance, and then went downstairs again. Pauline was waiting for him in the hall. She had been standing near the window in a pensive attitude, gazing out at the sea, which glimmered under the sunset light in the distance. So wrapt was she in her meditation that she did not hear Roland till he was close

upon her ; then she turned with a slight start, but, recovering her self-possession, she murmured—

“Madame is awake and ready to see you, cousin.” Then, without another word, she led him down a corridor to a door which she noiselessly opened, and left him.

Roland entered on tiptoe, and glanced anxiously at the bed, expecting to find his aged grandmother in a state of prostration ; but, on the contrary, the Marquise was wide awake and refreshed after her recent nap. It has been said that there were days when her memory was clouded, but there were others when she had full possession of her senses, and this was one of them.

Propped by large square pillows with broad frills, the old lady sat up in a big oaken bed with carved columns and tester which filled up half the space in her small room. This chamber was on the ground floor ; it had once been a boudoir, but had become the Marquise's bed-chamber since a paralytic seizure had disabled her from ascending staircases. A door facing the bed led into a small oratory, where there was an altar and a couple of fald-stools. Here Jérôme Juva said his

mass every morning, the door being left open so that the Marquise could join in the service without leaving her bed. On a little table at the foot of the bed stood a statuette three feet high in painted wood, which represented her patroness, St. Anne of Auray. It was gorgeously clothed in gold brocade, lace, and real jewels; and when the Marquise said her prayers, she always made an invocation to it.

A regard for appearances never forsakes French ladies, so Madame de Châteaufort's venerable head and shoulders were swathed in rich folds of lace, and jewelled rings glittered on her small wasted hands. Very decrepit she would have looked if she had not been "made up" by her old maid Agathe to receive her grandson. She had a set of false teeth, a front of fine silvery hair fluffed in little bunches on either side of her forehead, and there was a suspicion of pink pearl powder on her cheeks. The Marquise had outlived wrinkles, the skin on her face was tightly drawn, and so the artificial colour imparted to her the appearance of a quaint little wax figure. But hers was a kindly, dignified face, which lit up with a very tender expression when her grandson took her in his arms and kissed her. He had

always been her pet, and after their greetings were over, she said to him in a tone of motherly remonstrance—

“My dear child, what is this strange fancy of yours for marrying a girl of naught? You must leave Mademoiselle Corrington to her English fogs.”

“You would love her so much if you saw her, grandmamma,” answered Roland, joining issue at once. “She is beautiful and good. I have not found a fault in her.”

“That may be,” replied the Marquise, calmly, in a low quavering voice. “I am always glad to see a pretty girl, but to admit her into my family is another matter. There has never been a *mésalliance* in our house. This young person is not even noble.”

“She would be if the English nobility were like the French, grandmamma. The grandson of a French duke's younger son may be a count during his grandfather's lifetime, but the son of an English duke's second son bears no title at all. General Corrington's father was the younger son of a baronet.”

“Baronets are very small nobility, Roland.”

“Surely they are the equals of most French

counts," demurred the Duke, coaxingly. "We have a hundred and fifty thousand people in this country who bear nobiliary titles, and four hundred other thousands who tack the particle '*De*' to their names; whereas there are scarcely five thousand people in the British Isles who sport an hereditary prefix."

But the Marquise shook her head. She had lived seven years in England as an *émigrée* during the Great Revolution, and for want of better employment there had studied British peerage and baronetage. She could recite the names of all the leading families in the three kingdoms, and was disposed to give due honour to many members of the ancient squirearchy who were untitled, and especially to the *Tres*, *Polcs*, and *Pens* of Cornwall, with whom the Breton nobility had in the days of yore intermarried; but she knew not the Corringtons.

"If you married this young person," she said, "you could not pin a notice to her shawl to explain to people what the English laws of succession are. It would be said that you, a Beauregard on your father's side and a Kerouailles de Châteaufort on your mother's, had married a girl of no blood (*une roturière*), and this would

be a disgrace. Besides, Mademoiselle Corrington is a Protestant, and you could not commit the impiety of marrying a girl who was hostile to your Church."

"Would you have considered the religious question a drawback if I had contemplated marrying the daughter of an English duke?" inquired Roland, seeing he must face the religious difficulty without subterfuge.

"What a question, my dear child! The daughter of an English duke would have felt what was due to her husband, and would have recanted her heresies before her marriage. Do you wish a test of Miss Corrington's feelings towards you? Has she promised to enter a convent for a year and be baptized? If not, she can have no true love for you."

"Is not the test rather a hard one?" rejoined Roland, with perfect patience. "Gertrude is not like one of those German princesses who are brought up as unattached Christians, ready to adopt the tenets of any husband whom it may be convenient for them to wed. If she is staunch to her faith, this offers a guarantee that she will be true to me."

"Tut, tut, ce sont des phrases tout ça. A

husband and wife must kneel in the same church. If she thinks you wrong in your religion, she may think you wrong in other matters ; and a pretty state of things that would be.”

“I don’t want her to think me infallible, grandmamma.”

“As to that, my dear child, you would be like other husbands, I suppose. We women never think our husbands infallible, but every husband expects us to make some pretence that way ; and it is madness to add to the many causes of dispute that may spring up between man and wife such a miserable element of discord as religious differences. It would be as if your bride came to you with a firebrand in her trousseau.”

“I don’t look upon it in that light, grandmamma,” said the Duke. “I fancy in these times few of us reason on religion so—so staunchly as you do.”

“And why do you not reason as I do ?” inquired the Marquise, looking hard at him. “Why are you not a good Catholic, like the best of your ancestors, Roland ? What has God done to you that you should desert him ? Has he not loaded you with favours, and ought you not in

the midst of a godless generation to be one of those who set the example of keeping your faith pure and whole? Is it now the time to desert your Church, when the rabble in all our large cities are turning it into mockery; when false *savants*, false wits, and all who are depraved in this unhappy nation want to shake off moral restraints that would check them from wallowing in sin, and would break the altars of their God, as they have overturned the throne of their king? As for me"—and the old lady trembled all over with emotion as she said this—"I pray Heaven I may die sooner than see you disgrace your name by bringing a Protestant wife to this castle. Don't tell me that these Protestants are Christians like ourselves; they are rebellious, disobedient children who have broken away from the discipline of our Church. God may forgive them—we must in charity hope He will; but *we* cannot, unless we see them come back humbly and sue for pardon. This projected marriage of yours, my dear child, has grieved me more than I can tell you; but I am sure you will not persevere in it against my wishes. If I thought you would do so, I would write to Miss Corrington, I would write to her father and mother, and ask them

whether they intended to bring an old woman heartbroken to her grave ; for that would be the result of your marriage, and it would carry no blessing to you or your children.”

Roland moaned in spirit at this vehement outburst. He took his grandmother's paralyzed hand between his, patting it gently, and returned no answer. He saw that it would be useless to argue.

What could he say ? The Marquise had spoken with an energy which had altogether surprised him, for at his last visit to Châteaufort her talk had been incoherent, and he had concluded that she was sinking into dotage.

He was so good-natured, however, that he showed no sign of irritation. A bad-hearted man would have grown sulky, and have tried to reduce the Marquise by making her wretched ; but it never occurred to Roland to do this.

He continued to stroke her hand, while she went on talking ; and as he mechanically nodded his head to what she said, the poor old lady flattered herself that he was beginning to coincide with her views.

“ You must not be angry with me for feeling so strongly about anything that concerns your

welfare, my dear child," she said, glancing at him fondly. "I want to see you married; and now that your thoughts are turned on marriage, you would gladden my last hours if you adopted the scheme I had planned for you, and took as your wife my old friend De Rocarmé's only daughter Laure. She has some of the best blood of France in her veins, and will have a million francs on her wedding-day, with twice as much besides when her father dies; and all this, added to your money and mine, would make you a princely fortune. If you had three sons, the eldest would inherit your title of Beauregard" (the Marquise never acknowledged the dukedom of Alma, conferred on Roland's father by an usurper; her grandson was always to her Count de Beauregard-Voilay); "the second might be Marquis de Châteaufort, though really the Kerouailles de Châteaufort are of older nobility than you Beauregards, so that you ought to assume the Châteaufort title when I die; and your third son could take his mother's fortune and his maternal grandfather's title of Duc de Rocarmé. You can apply to Henri V., when he gets his own again, to have the transmission of our titles made to your younger sons; or if that

Bonaparte of yours is still on the throne, his keeper of the seals must be told to do what you wish. Oh, Roland, my beloved boy ! I should die happy if I could see you married to Laure de Rocarmé, even though I may not live to fondle your children. I have told Pauline that she is to be their governess. You will find her a good girl, and she will improve as she gets older, poor little soul."

There was a contrast that might have amused a humourist between the lofty ground the Marquise had taken up to combat her grandson's marriage with Gertrude, and the very low ground of worldly interest on which she urged his alliance with Mademoiselle Laure de Rocarmé, whom he had never seen ; but Roland was not in a mood to notice the humour of the thing. The mention of Pauline's name set him thinking that this young lady might, perhaps, have more power than anybody else to help him out of his difficulty. She was the Marquise's *confidante* ; her brother was the confessor. Between them the pair must exercise an absolute ascendancy over the aged lady's mind at the periods when it was weak. Roland felt sure that Pauline could easily be tutored into acting under his instruction. Mean-

time he thought he would pave the way to an understanding with her by doing her a good turn. He took it for granted that a girl in her dependent position would be glad to get a dower in order to have some chance of finding a husband—French girls of good family having very little chance when they are portionless, and yet too proud to marry beneath them.

“Pauline is a pretty girl, grandmamma,” he said. “You ought to think of getting *her* married.”

“Pauline has no desire for marriage,” replied the old lady testily. “She is a De Penmarck. Her ancestors had tower, dovecot, and gibbet like our own; her father, as you know, was a naval officer. Pauline can only marry a man of her rank, and with money enough for two, if at all. When it pleases God to bring a great family to the dust, Roland, be sure He intends the survivors to devote themselves to His service. Jérôme has become a priest; Pauline will educate your children, which will be more agreeable for her than going into a convent.”

“I should think she would find it more agreeable to have a husband and children of her own. Why not give her a dower? She has been like a

daughter to you for several years. If you let it be known that she would have a hundred thousand francs at her wedding, she would soon find a husband."

"I could not spare Pauline," said the Marquise, with senile selfishness. "She must remain with me till my death, unless"—and the old lady suddenly turned towards her grandson—"unless you would marry her yourself, Roland. Is that what you were thinking of?"

"I, grandmamma? Oh no; such a thought was far from me."

"But you said you thought her a pretty girl?"

"Yes; but that is no reason——"

"Why shouldn't you marry her?" interrupted the old lady absently, as if she were conning over all the pros and cons of this new scheme. "She is of more ancient blood than any of us; that is a point beyond dispute. Those Penmareks go back into the night of history. If you married her, she would still remain with me, and you would be obliged to stay here too, so it would be all gain to me. Why did I never think of all this before? Roland, if you like to ask for Pauline's hand, you shall have my consent."

The Duke thought that his grandmother's mind was wandering. The new ideas that had got into it had suddenly burned up the other, and was blazing there like a straw fire. Mademoiselle de Rocarmé, her fortune and dukedom, were no longer thought of. The Marquise talked of Pauline Juva, her qualities and desirable points as a wife, with as much volubility as if a hundred revealed truths about the girl had started to her reflection—which, indeed, was the case, for she had always till then regarded Pauline as a child.

“Grandmamma, dear, we will talk about all this another time,” said Roland, as he saw the Marquise grow so agitated. “You must try to sleep now.”

“Very well, dear child,” she muttered; “but before you go, give me your hand, and kneel down while I say my prayer to our good Sainte Anne, who guards us all.”

Roland did as he was bidden reverently enough, and the Marquise, closing her eyes, moved her lips for a minute or two in silent prayer. She prayed that St. Anne and the Blessed Virgin might use all their power to prevent him from thinking any more about the heretic English girl, and Roland, not knowing

what she said, responded "Amen" when she had finished.

After he had retired, Agathe, the maid—an old woman with a face like a baked apple—came into the room; and the Marquise, who could not compose herself to sleep, ordered her to fetch Mademoiselle Juva. Pauline quickly arrived.

"Come here, child," said the old lady, beckoning to her. "Let me take a good look at you. Do you know, monsieur says you are a very pretty girl."

"Madame!"

"I may speak to you as if you were my daughter, my dear, as your mother is dead. Tell me, would it please you to become my grandson's wife? Ah, you redden; he is not distasteful to you, then? Can it be that you have ever thought of this? How could I have been so blind as not to suspect it? Well, my little one, I should approve of this marriage; and, if you like, I think it can be arranged. Roland has recognized the absurdity of that English *mésalliance*."

Pauline's only answer was to bend her blushing face over her benefactress's hand, and to kiss it. In her ecstacy of joy and amazement, she could not speak. It was as if heaven had suddenly opened to her.

CHAPTER XI.

PAULINE JUVA.

PAULINE had long loved Roland. How could she have helped falling in love with him ?

He was so different from all the other men she had ever seen. When he came to Châteaufort, he brought with him a living reflection of the great world. In his looks, his bearing, his pleasant courtly chatter, his dress—and how well he dressed !—he was all that a girl thinks a nobleman ought to be.

He was brave, too ; and was not reduced, like those Legitimist squires of the neighbourhood, who declined to serve in Napoleon III.'s armies, to brag of the feats of his ancestors. He had led a charge at Solferino, and had been wounded. His grandmother, who would not let his foreign ducal title supersede the more ancient one of De

Beauregard, talked often enough of the battles where his father had won it, and she had kept the newspaper in which Roland was gazetted Knight of the Legion of Honour for his gallantry by his father's side.

The gentlemen whom Pauline had met at Châteaufort since leaving the convent at Morlaix, where she had spent her girlhood, were mostly squires of small estates and small brains, who wore ill-cut clothes, and drove from the plain in tumble-down traps. Their manners were awkward, and their conversation dreary. None of them made love to her, because she was believed to be a portionless dependent. Indeed, they all spoke with punctilio, as if afraid of raising presumptuous expectations in her bosom. Only one, a young Count René de Polhuan—aged thirty, and noted as a sad dog—had once so far forgotten himself as to pay her a compliment. He had said to her, in the hearing of his parents, that the birds would be pecking at her lips some day, mistaking them for cherries ; but his mamma must have read him a severe lecture upon this flight of fancy (which had set Pauline laughing), for next time he called he was as formal and sulky as the others. It was generally taken for

granted that when the Marquise died, Pauline would enter a convent.

She had that sort of vocation for the cloister which may be acquired by looking forward to it as an inevitable fate. She was the daughter of a naval officer, who had left his children unprovided for, while bequeathing to them a name too noble to be trailed about in any menial occupation. Her brother had become a priest, and it was natural she should become a nun, since she was too proud to misally herself to any rich *bourgeois* who might like to buy her escutcheon to cover up his trade mark.

So Pauline's love for Roland de Beauregard had been a mere piece of romance, the recreation of her thoughts in lonely hours when she sat watching purple sunsets, or embroidered church vestments for her brother with tiny needles and silk threads, while the rain dripped outside for long, long hours. Girls will dream, and compose novels of which they are the heroines; and they will conjure up heroes. Roland had been Pauline's hero.

But since she had heard of Roland's project of marrying an English Protestant, Pauline had been almost beside herself with astonishment and

mortification. If he had married a Catholic, his equal in birth and fortune, she could have borne it. The dream in her heart would have been extinguished, as the lights in a chapel are put out after the adoration is over; she would have locked the door of the chapel, and there would have been an end of it. But that he should be going to marry a foreigner who was not of noble blood, and whose religion was a heresy—that was intolerable. Even as the Rev. Chrysostom Oram was thinking at Lewbury, that he had lost Gertrude from not having dared put his fate to the touch while it was yet time, so Pauline, during several days, could not banish the thought that she had valued Roland far more than he valued himself. The man whom she had loved in a far-off way, with a sense of her own unworthiness, had been treated as mere human flesh and blood by her rival, and this crafty girl was now going to drag him down to her own level.

There was a feeling of personal humiliation and bitterness in this which had aroused all the combative instincts that had till then laid dormant in the Breton girl's nature. Her pride of caste, her religious fanaticism, her loyalty to the Marquise her benefactress, and even that

secret antipathy towards the English which she had inherited from her father the sailor, were all up in arms against the shameless alien heretic who had robbed her of her hero.

But now all this was over. From the depth of her despair Pauline had been raised to unexpected triumph. Her hero was faithful after all—a true Catholic and Frenchman, who had listened to the pleadings of his mother's mother and turned penitently from his brief error.

Overcome by her emotion, Pauline, having left the Marquise to Agathe's care, fled to her own room. It was a little place at the top of the house, hardly better than a servant's room. The walls were whitewashed, a crucifix in black wood and ivory, and a few cheap crudely coloured prints of saints, hung upon them. The small iron bedstead with white curtains, the sheepskin mat beside it, a rush-bottomed *prie-dieu*, and a small rusty stove, in which there had not been a fire for years, formed the principal items of furniture.

Here Pauline shut herself in by drawing the heavy wooden bolt of the door, and she waited with a thumping heart. She knew that she ought to be downstairs to see that monsieur's dinner was properly served; but she did not dare go.

Every noise she heard brought a flow of colour to her face, and made her check her breath. She expected that Roland would send for her to declare his suit in person, and she would have pleaded for time, as she wanted to compose herself—to reopen her dazzled eyes, as it were, and consider the glorious sunshine that had suddenly fallen upon her path.

Nobody came, and by degrees she grew more calm. After kneeling for a time on her *prie-dieu* and panting incoherent prayers, she arose and went to the window, pressing her forehead against the diamond panes for coolness. Then she bathed her face, and as it was growing dark, and she had brought no candle to the room, she employed the last moments of twilight in smoothing her hair before a tiny mirror. She could make no change in her dress, for her grey stuff frock, sparingly trimmed with black velvet, was the best she had; but she did not trouble herself about that, for she thought it a fine frock, and had never desired a better.

One question spun round and round in the eddy of her thoughts—What would Roland say to her? Would he be formal, polite, playful, or tender? Would he kiss her, and would she have

to kiss him? Her position was peculiar; for though she considered herself already as affianced, she had no surety of her future husband's love. Nevertheless, the astounding revelation of Roland's abrupt change of purpose could not long disconcert her French notions. The Marquise had asked her grandson to give up his project of marrying Miss Corrington, and it was quite natural that Roland, out of filial obedience, should instantly transfer his affections from the English girl to Pauline herself. Marriages were constantly made in this fashion, and Pauline could have no objection to accept a husband whom she loved merely because he had not come to her quite of his own accord. It would be the business of her life to make him love her; and she was rather afraid of her own awkwardness in the preliminaries of courtship than doubtful at all as to her ultimate success in the mission of married life. She felt, in fact, as all girls must do under such circumstances, the need of a mother to advise her.

But reflection came to the aid of her inexperience, and whispered to her to have faith in the man she loved. He would be sure to do all things for the best in the best way. Probably he would

make no formal proposal for several days, but remain at the château, and live much in her companionship, so that he would be quite in love by the time he proposed—say, in about a week, or next Sunday afternoon after vespers, which was the time when village lads generally did their courting. Many tens of minutes had crept away while Pauline thought of all this, still standing by the window of her room. It was quite dark now, for the moon had not yet risen; and the girl had to grope her way to the door, when she felt, at length, that she must go downstairs to give the servants their orders for next day's work.

She stole downstairs on tiptoe, pausing now and then to listen. If she had heard an ascending step, she would have run back; but there was not a sound in the house. Descending to the front hall, where a dull oil lamp rather speckled the darkness than gave light, she walked to the end of a passage which led to the kitchen, and opening a door hearkened. Roland's servant Barney was talking in broken French to all the servants gathered round the kitchen fire, and was trying to make them laugh. Some did laugh, but in a rather forced way, as it seemed

to Pauline. The kitchen company was dull that evening.

Then Pauline retraced her steps and went into the dining-room, a large apartment all wainscoted with oak, and never used except when monsieur was at the château. The dinner-cloth had long been removed, but Jérôme Juva sat at one end of the table in the circle of light formed by a moderator lamp, and pored intently over a well-thumbed folio of the "Lives of the Saints." His fore-arms were laid squarely on the table, and his chin rested on his knuckles. The "Lives of the Saints" was the only book he ever read, excepting his breviary, and it was a treasure of book which yielded whatever sensations its reader might happen to desire—excitement if he was wakeful, and sweet sleep when he was in somnolent mood.

"*The blessed St. Labre lived for thirty-five years without using soap or water,*" said Jérôme, reading aloud, when his sister appeared—just as a schoolboy might do who, caught napping, wants to show that he is awake. "*This he did to mortify the flesh, for he had been a voluptuary in his youth.*"

"Monsieur has dined?" asked Pauline.

“Yes, more than an hour since,” replied the young priest, sitting up and stretching his long arms. “We dined together.”

“He invited you?”

“Yes; I had gone to my room, and he sent for me. He wanted very much to see you also; and I wish you had been with us, for it was a good dinner.”

“Did he ask for me?” faltered Pauline, half turning her face away.

“He did, and I think he wants to speak to you about something. He talked about seeing you to-morrow; but, in fact, he spoke a good deal about you while we were eating, and he praised the cream-tart you had made. I told him you had made it.”

Jerôme yawned over his book, and would have said no more. So Pauline had to revive the conversation.

“What had our cousin to say about me, Jerôme?”

“Everything that was amiable. He gave me his thanks for your devotion to the Marquise, and said she looked upon you as her daughter. But I say, Paulette, it cannot be true that our cousin is going to marry a Protestant, for he

wanted to know whether he could do anything for our chapel. He sat after dinner in that arm-chair near the fire, and made me relate to him some of our Breton legends; and when I told him that some rats had been gnawing a hole in my best chasuble, he said that he would buy me a whole new set of vestments. He would not have promised that if he had been going to bring a heretic wife here—would he?"

"No," answered Pauline.

Her brother's glance was raised towards her, and for the first time in his life, perhaps, he noticed that she was a pretty girl. There was a bloom of gladness on her face, a liquid brightness in her eyes, and her lips, half parted, breathed that word "No" as a soft murmur.

Jerôme returned musing to his St. Labre; and Pauline, gliding towards the fire, seated herself on a chair opposite to that where Roland had sat. A pile of pear-wood logs had been burned on the hearth, and had left a mass of glowing embers. Into these the French girl gazed and saw faces in the fire—Roland's and her own always close together.

CHAPTER XII.

PAULINE'S DECEPTION.

ROLAND attached so little importance to his grandmother's scheme of marrying him to Pauline, that he hardly gave it a thought after retiring to his room. He only thought of Pauline in connection with the assistance she could give him in overcoming the Marquise's scruples to his marriage with Gertrude.

He was rather vexed than dismayed by the obstacles thrown in his way. He was annoyed that his projected marriage should be called a *mésalliance*, for he did not want his friends to think he had misallied himself; his position was too high to allow of such a thing. Certainly he had not instituted searching inquiries as to who the Corringtons were; but from the General's military rank, from the kind of people he knew,

and from the style in which the Corringtons lived at Ostend, he concluded that their position was among the upper classes.

In this he had judged somewhat hastily, for he fancied that the General owned an estate at Lewbury, and not a mere house hired on lease. But if the Corringtons had lived in a village, it would have made no difference in his sentiments towards Gertrude ; for he was in love.

He loved so well that he was sure his grandmother would approve his choice if once Gertrude could be brought to Châteaufort ; and for his future wife's own sake, therefore, there must be no disagreeables about the marriage. To marry without his grandmother's consent was repugnant to Roland, and he dismissed, as out of the question, the idea of serving the Marquise with a legal process.

After all, Gertrude's religion seemed to him the principal bar, and this must be circumvented. As a man of the world, confident in the ascendancy he should exercise over his wife, and relying also on the social influences which would operate upon Gertrude when she became a Frenchwoman, he doubted little in his private mind that the Duchesse d'Alma would some day

turn Catholic; and this was the prospect which, on reflection, he saw it would be politic to present to the Marquise and to Pauline. Ignorant of Pauline's feelings towards himself, he imagined that her piety as a Catholic might easily be touched by the idea of winning over a Protestant, and perhaps a whole family of Protestants to the true faith.

In this frame of mind Roland went to bed, after writing Gertrude a letter which contained more assurances of love than information as to what he was doing at Châteaufort.

He did not rest long undisturbed, for shortly after midnight he was roused by sounds of tramping and excited voices in the courtyard under his window. He raised himself and sat up in bed. His room was dark, but flickers were thrown into it by lanterns in the yard. The château was usually so quiet at that time of night that he fancied a fire must have broken out. But after a few minutes the voices subsided and the lights vanished, whereupon he lay down again and was soon asleep.

In the morning, when Barney brought him some chocolate and toast, an explanation was offered of the night's noises. There was an air

of mysterious amusement on the valet's face as he set down the tray.

"The servants say there was a ghost walking about the place last night, your Grace."

"A ghost!" echoed Roland, without betraying incredulity or wonder, for apparitions in Brittany are no rarer than foreigners on the Boulevard des Italiens.

"I can't make out exactly who saw it, sir, but they're all talking about it as if it had given 'em a fright, and Odette, the cow-girl, especially. When there's any talking downstairs, that young party does more than her share. She says the ghost was the *White Lady!*" Barney's smug face was quite demure as he said this, though a smile hovered on the corner of his lips, ready to break out if his master should smile.

But Roland never jested upon religious things in the presence of a servant. "These people have their superstitions, which we must not affront," he said. "Show yourself very considerate in all their remarks upon their faith."

"Oh yes, sir, I should be sure to do that. When telling 'em yesterday of your Grace's engagement, I made so bold as to say that the young lady was very religious, though it might

not be after their fashion ; but I told 'em all fashions was good, so far as I could see."

" How did they receive your communication ?"

" Well, your Grace, begging your pardon, they didn't seem quite to take it as they ought to 'a' done. It was Miss Corrington's being a Protestant that made 'em grumble. They was rather surly about it over their suppers, and two or three of the old women sat rocking themselves in chairs with their aprons over their heads, without appearing to listen much when I said that Miss Corrington was a Christian of the same sort as me, who was brought up religious by my mother, and allus went to Church twice o' Sundays."

" You must say that the duchess will never interfere with *their* religion," replied Roland.

" So I did, sir, knowing as how your Grace's English servants 'ave allus been allowed to do as they pleased about going to this church or that, or to no church at all, which, as I explained to 'em, was true Christianly of the proper sort, which keeps people from disputin' with each other about matters that ain't worth it. But they was rayther obstinate, your Grace, and wouldn't understand."

This was quite true. Barney's communica-

tion had made an untoward impression in the kitchen. This Englishman was always received there with friendly deference, being monsieur's servant; but as to his religion, these Bretons had not been able to see that he had any at all. He never made the sign of the cross; he did not go to mass or confession; he had no such thing as a rosary or amulet about him; he owned no patron saint; and he never fasted.

What was this but paganism? How could a man possess a religion if he had no symbols to show, and eschewed all observances? As well might a person wearing only a shirt boast that he was clothed in the uniform of the French army. The thing which Barney called a religion was nothing but the light linen which a man is obliged to put on for decency's sake, and if the new Madame's soul were draped in no better costume, then the saints help Monsieur! Such was the common opinion downstairs.

The Duke's beliefs concerning apparitions may be guessed. He supposed that the servants had seen a night mist and were reporting it as a White Lady for his special behoof; and though not disposed to baulk them of any spiritual satisfaction they might derive from such a proceeding

so long as they kept their satisfaction to themselves, he thought it desirable to forbid their making any use of the apparition to weigh upon his grandmother's mind. In consequence, he sent Pauline a message by Barney, requesting that nothing should be spoken to the Marquise about the White Lady. Barney returned, saying that mademoiselle sent her compliments and much regretted that old Agathe had already spoken of the matter to madame, who was anxious to see monsieur at his earliest convenience.

This was tiresome; but presently, when Roland had finished his toilet—an operation over which he never hurried—he went downstairs to see the Marquise. The conversation between them was short, for the venerable lady was so much fatigued by the excitements of the previous day, which had robbed her of sleep, that her words were incoherent. She was murmuring broken sentences about the White Lady (to which her grandson lent a respectful ear, being unwilling to contradict her in anything) when a Dr. De Tregalloan, her physician, arrived to pay his daily visit, and upon this Roland retired.

But in so doing he beckoned to the doctor to join him in the next room, and there he asked

him for a candid opinion about the Marquise's state of health. Dr. De Tregalloan was a gaunt man with a face like a death's-head, and a hard hand which gave you a grip when you shook it. He had a professional grin which he constantly displayed to reassure his patients, and which was the most terrifying thing imaginable; for it was a contortion of the mouth only, his eyes remaining grim as a watch-dog's.

“Madame can scarcely be said to live now; she is merely being kept from dying,” he remarked in a wooden voice. “The least shock of joy or sorrow might kill her.”

This grieved Roland, who would have been inconsolable had he caused his grandmother's death; so he felt more than ever dependent on Pauline. He had, indeed, his sister, the Countess de Beaujeu, who ought to have been his natural ally at this juncture; but she was a lady of fashion, a pretty creature with the brilliant plumage and spirits of a mocking bird, and just as much sense; her advice could not be asked in any business of moment. Accordingly the Duke strolled out of the quadrangle, over the drawbridge, and went in quest of Pauline, who he learned was at the dairy.

Everybody on the plateau had been up and stirring for hours, and there were men-servants and maid-servants on all sides pretending to be busy. They did little, for the good-natured Marquise allowed too many dependents to swarm about her, and as there was not enough work for them all, what work there was either got spoilt or was neglected as nobody's business. Roland, whose own estate of Beauregard was kept like an English gentleman's, was always displeased when he came to Châteaufort by the signs of dirt, untidiness, and sloth discernible everywhere. All this was not Pauline Juva's fault ; she had never seen a well-kept estate, and allowed the Kergarecs to do things in the old Breton way, imagining it was the right way. Inside the house cleanliness prevailed in the rooms that were inhabited, because nature had taught Pauline that dust and cobwebs were not seemly ; but nature had given her only vague hints as to the impropriety of allowing enormous dung-heaps to accumulate outside the stable in the state quadrangle. Every Breton manse had its dung-heap, and they were considered emblems of wealth. A primitive Cornouailler who had been to Paris and seen the Tuilleries had returned home with the notion

that the Emperor could not be a rich man ; “ for,” said he, “ je n’ai pas vu le moindre tas de fumier dans sa cour.”

Half a dozen strong men gave up their time to the garden and orchard, but the gravel paths were green with weeds ; the stables were filthy, and the horses poorly groomed, but at whatever time you passed you were sure to see a Kergarec mending a rusty bit with a piece of twine, or patching an old saddle, and imagining that he was rendering his mistress a great service by this economy. Roland wished that his grandmother would put the men-servants of the household into proper liveries, make them cut their hair, and wear leather instead of wooden shoes ; but the old lady, while generous to a fault in some things, was very parsimonious in others, and all who lived round her took pattern by her notions. If a milk-pail had served twenty years, it must needs serve ten years more ; better tinker it, cobble it, fix its handle with bits of wire, and spill a quart of milk daily out of it, than buy a new one. If there was a hole in a roof, Breton wisdom counselled that it should be allowed to get larger, and let in hogsheads of water before it was repaired ; and on the same principle a Breton

who fell ill deemed it good policy to wait until his malady had taken a serious turn before sending for the doctor, as in this way fees were kept down. All these were Breton ways, rendered venerable by custom, and not to be argued against.

Roland wandered for nearly an hour all over the mismanaged property, to which he was heir, till he perceived Pauline coming across the field with a small basket on her arm. She had been to the dairy, and was returning with some eggs. No doubt she saw him before he caught sight of her, and it was well that the distance gave her time to compose herself. He could not observe from afar how she changed colour, and how suddenly her elastic step became timid when she knew they were going to meet.

They met without awkwardness, for just as they were shaking hands Odette the cow-girl and another came out of a fir plantation, trundling between them a wheelbarrow full of firewood. Like most things on the estate, the barrow was out of repair; and as the girls brought it to a standstill, in order to let the Duke and Pauline pass, one of its legs gave way under the weight of wood, and the concern toppled over. Odette was a pretty girl, albeit her face was

smudged and her kirtle full of holes and patches, and it amused the Duke to hear her laugh aloud at the accident.

“Can't they give you a better barrow than that, my girl?” he asked, with a kind look, and without remembering at the moment that this was the Odette whom Barney had often described to him as an imp of mischief, a chatterbox, and story-teller. At this question, Odette's companion, a squat-faced hoyden, grinned and snuffled.

“I dare say the Korrigans* will mend the

* These Korrigans are the familiar sprites who haunt old castles. They are little people, a foot high, and of two sorts—the good and bad. The good ones make themselves pleasant by doing the work of servants for them in the night—they milk the cows, ply the darning needle, scour the floors; the bad Korrigans, on the contrary, behave very ill. They throw pins into the butter, rend clothes, cut off the tails of horses, and sometimes are so wicked as to tweak the noses of poor servant-girls slumbering by the hearth in the evening. The Korrigans dance on the heath of Carnac at midnight; and there also are to be seen the “Washerwomen of the Night” (*lavandières de nuit*), who come from the Bay of the Dead (*Bai des Trépassés*) off the rock of Penmarek, and wash their shrouds. Woe to any man who crosses the heath while they are thus employed! He will be called upon to help them, and if he succeeds in wringing their shrouds exactly as they do, he may be allowed to depart in peace; but if he twists them in any other fashion, the dismal

barrow for me," replied Odette, with such a bold, hard stare at Roland that he felt almost abashed.

"The Korrigans? Are they abroad, then?"

"Oh yes, sir. They churned a lot of cream in the dairy last night, and they did no mischief, so they must have been the good elfs; not the bad ones, like those who set fire to the rick last Martinmas. You have heard, too, that the White Lady has shown herself?"

"Yes, I heard that," answered Roland, lifting his head, and scrutinizing Odette narrowly, an ordeal which she bore with much composure. "Did *you* see the White Lady?"

"Of course I did—large as life, down there among the trees."

"Your tongue is too pert, Odette," interposed Pauline, reprovingly. "You should speak more respectfully to monsieur."

Odette looked comically into the Duke's

laundresses fall upon him and beat him with their wet shrouds till he becomes senseless. Then they carry him to his bed, and he awakes in the morning all black and blue. It has been observed that many irreclaimable drunkards and henpecked husbands have awaked to find themselves black and blue, an indisputable proof of the reality of these Korrigans.

eyes, and shrugged her shoulders with a half titter. "You asked me what I saw, sir."

"Yes; tell me what you saw, my girl. Don't be afraid."

"Well, then, she had a golden crown on and a blue mantle. I was coming away from the cowshed, just as the clock struck eleven, when I first saw her, because one of the cows is ill, you know; that's why I was out so late. Then I ran back to the dairy, and called up old Alain, the boys, and all the women, who came and saw her too, though she had got further away among the trees by that time. I tell you she was large as life, and where she passed there was a long bright trail like thousands of glow-worms."

Such animation, such gesticulation as Odette threw into her recital, no pen can describe. The squab-faced cousin, profoundly impressed, kept on snuffling, and often passed the back of her hand across her nose.

Roland drew a napoleon from his pocket and slipped it into Odette's hand. "Buy yourself and your friends some sugar-plums at the next fair of Auray," he said, amused but mystified. "You are a sharp girl, as I dare say you know."

"Oh yes, sir," replied Odette, who had spoken

in French all the time, for the Duke did not understand Breton. She had lost some of her assurance, though, at the sight of the gold piece in her palm, and added nothing more as he walked away with Pauline.

“That is a strange girl,” remarked Roland. “I suppose you, Pauline, don’t believe in those Korrigans, who ramble about to churn cream at night? One of the dairymaids must be a somnambulist.”

“Perhaps,” said Pauline, doubtingly; “but that apparition of the White Lady was very mysterious. Alain, the bailiff, saw her. She had an aureola.”

“Did she carry an umbrella in case of rain?”

Pauline thought this very profane. “The White Lady may have been the blessed St. Anne,” she said, signing herself.

“Such a visit would do us great honour,” rejoined Roland, smiling. “But why should a saint disturb herself to come walking about in the damp of a Breton wood at night?”

“Oh, cousin, your family has always lived under the protection of Heaven!” exclaimed Pauline, raising her small face towards him with an expression of pain and excitement. After

what the Marquise had said to her on the preceding night, she could not understand his manner, and thought he was teasing her.

“I rather want the help of an earthly saint at this moment,” said Roland, with a gallant little bow. “You know of my intended marriage, Pauline, and I am reduced to solicit your help in this affair. My poor grandmother, whose mind is weak, has offered unexpected opposition to my plans; but, as you have considerable influence over her, I hope——”

“I, sir?” ejaculated Pauline, starting back, quite pale. What could he mean by this? She spoke her next words almost inarticulately, and with no clear notion of what she was saying. “Why, can it be that you still think of marrying Miss Corrington?”

“Unquestionably. I am fully bent upon it.”

“In spite of madame’s wishes?”

“My grandmother is hardly in a condition of mind to have any wishes of her own; that is why I expected you would assist me in obtaining the merely legal consent which I require for my marriage.”

“Never, sir!” panted Pauline, as if an insulting proposal had been made to her. “How

can you suppose——? O mon Dieu!” And, unable to utter another word, she turned and walked away from him fast. He tried to recall her, but she paid no heed, and almost ran till she was out of his sight.

Roland was very angry, and for a minute or two stood twirling his moustache and looking as he must have looked on the field where he won that little bit of red riband which graced his button-hole. But at last he shrugged his shoulders, and simply muttered—

“*Diable!* Check to my queen. What’s my next move?”

CHAPTER XIII.

A PHOTOGRAPH OF GERTRUDE.

PAULINE'S position was pitiable. She ran indoors and took refuge in a small parlour, which was her day workroom. Here she sank into a chair, and tried to understand the sudden destruction that had fallen upon her hopes—those hopes which, like red lilies, had lived in blossom less than one whole day.

In the unutterable humiliation that made her cheeks flame, she felt as if she had been mocked and outraged; and yet she knew that Roland had not mocked her. She had deluded herself by believing without reflection in the Marquise's hallucinations. She had been so eager to believe that she had almost been betrayed into a disclosure of her love before Roland himself, and her maiden modesty quivered under this most cruel

thought. Let him marry whom he pleased ; his marriage, his concerns, could be of no further interest to her. She could never bear to meet him again. Even to live at Châteaufort would be a torment. The uppermost thought in her mind was that she would take leave of the Marquise that day, and fly into a convent. So she thought till she heard footsteps approach, and then for a last breathless moment she clutched at her hope again.

She half expected to see Roland walk in, chastened in spirit, like the Prodigal Son, and declaring that his brief madness was over. But the footsteps were not the Duke's. It was Clovis Kergarec, who stood before Pauline with a frown between his shaggy eyebrows. This long-haired boy had something to say, but the words were a long time coming, and there was a tone of sullen alarm in his speaking.

“Mademoiselle, Monsieur Barney has been saying downstairs that monsieur is going to marry a heretic, who will take your place here. It isn't true, is it ?”

He had got his answer before Pauline opened her lips, for her glance was enough, and a dull look of consternation overspread his sunburnt

features. Clovis, the brother of Odette, was in an especial way Pauline's servant. He did all her errands, she being hardly aware herself of how frequently she had recourse to his services, for he was somehow always at hand when wanted, and never let it be seen that the orders which he executed took up any of his time. He had been a boy when Pauline first came to Châteaufort, and she had treated him like a boy ever since. He was attached to her with a dumb fidelity; but perhaps there was something more in his sentiments towards her than he suspected.

For some time past undefinable sensations had been creeping over him when he stood alone in her presence. If her dress touched him as she passed, he thrilled; if her eyes met his, he reddened; if he contemplated her fixedly for a few moments when she was not noticing it, his eyes filled with tears. Her praise was sweet to him; but to be scolded by her was pleasurable also, if she were not angry. He sometimes did little things amiss that she might tell him he was a careless boy and show him how they could be done better. To be noticed by her in some way had become the delight of his existence.

“It’s true, then, mademoiselle ?” he repeated hoarsely before Pauline had replied.

“Barney knows more about his master’s affairs than I, Clovis,” said Pauline, evasively, and turning her face away that her emotion might not be seen.

“Monsieur Barney has been saying what I have told you, and he has been showing the picture of young madame that is to be.”

“That’s nothing to me,” murmured Pauline, but with a sudden overwhelming desire to see her rival’s portrait.

“Nothing to you ! But *I* want to know if it’s true that you are going away ? They’re all in a pretty state about the news downstairs, old ones and young ones. It would be a bad day for all if you went, mademoiselle, and you had better go and tell them if it is to be. And as for that Englishwoman without faith who has tried her sorceries on monsieur, may God and Saint Anne——”

“Hush, boy ! How dare you speak in that way ?”

“What right has he to drive you from here ?” exclaimed Clovis, with fury, his face looking murderous. “We don’t want him here ; he’s no

true Breton. If he had a mind to marry somebody, why didn't he take you? You're good enough for him, I should fancy. Hark to this! I'm going off to be a soldier. I'll not stop here to see that Englishwoman come, and you turned out of the château to be locked up in a convent, where I should never see you again. I'd rather get my head broken with a bullet. So good-bye now, if you're going. I'll not wait on monsieur again."

"Put another log on the fire," said Pauline, quietly, as she moved to the door. She had turned scarlet, but knew enough of Breton temper not to check Clovis's outburst. He had never had the audacity to speak to her in such a style before, but in her own excited frame of mind his agitation did not appear excessive. He stood alone before her a minute, with his fists clenched, and the veins in his neck swelling; there was a slight foam at the corners of his mouth, and angry reproach in his eyes, as if he would upbraid her for being so indifferent to his sufferings.

She brushed by him, throwing him just one glance, which calmed him as a pat on the head quiets a dog; then she left the room. But crossing the hall she met Odette coming stealthily

down the grand staircase, holding something in paper to her bosom. The cow-girl's hair was all rumpled as usual, and she was in stockings; her pair of wooden shoes had been shuffled off on to the hall mat.

A strange girl was this Odette, utterly incomprehensible as to character—untruthful, wayward, overflowing with gossip, and yet sometimes so cajoling as to be lovable. For days she would be mad with animal spirits, and at other times so morose that nothing could draw a word or a smile from her. She would relate in the coolest way, and with the minutest circumstantiality, adventures which she alleged to have happened to herself, and not a syllable of which was true; but the lies were so bold and curious, and the motives which could have dictated them were so inexplicable, that it was as difficult to doubt them wholly as to believe them. No secret was safe from her. She had an intuition for guessing things, and a marvellous ingenuity for drawing far-fetched conclusions from them, which she published among her fellow-servants as facts. She was pretty, and several young men had fallen to loggerheads about her, but she had such a way of treating her suitors that none could tell whether

there was a single creature on earth whom she really cared for besides her cows. She was at once the wonder and the plague of Pauline's little realm.

“What were you doing upstairs, Odette?” asked Pauline. “You know that you have no business to be in this part of the house.”

Odette laid her head on one side, evidently dubious as to whether she ought not to tell a fib; but the superior advantages of truth in this particular instance having presented themselves to her mind, she thrust two photographs under Pauline's eyes by way of answer, saying, “Hush, mademoiselle, these are pictures of the new madame.”

“Where did you get them?”

“Monsieur Barney was showing one downstairs, and he said there were two others in monsieur's room; so I ran upstairs to fetch them, and let you see them.”

“Take them back instantly; it was exceedingly wrong of you to do this.” But as she said this Pauline had glanced at the photographs, and her heart was crushed by the great beauty of Gertrude. She could hope no more when she had seen that face.

“Don’t you be afraid, mademoiselle,” whispered Odette, who had been watching her with round hazel eyes, penetrating as a cat’s. “He won’t marry her. I had a dream about it, and *it was you whom I saw wedded to monsieur in the chapel of the château.* You will be our new madame.”

A tremor shot through Pauline’s limbs ; but, in the shame of seeing her secret read by this saucy cow-girl, she answered her with blunt reproof. “Do as I order you at once, and, Odette, never speak to me again like this. You have a mischievous, wicked tongue, and I am very angry with you.”

“Ah, I could tell you something, though,” replied Odette, not in the least put out, but with lambent malice in her glance. “I know something that would prove that *he* will never marry *her.* Shall I tell you ?”

“No,” was Pauline’s only answer, as she turned away. She knew how little reliance was to be placed on Odette’s dreams and statements, yet she was bound to believe that Odette had dreamed about her, or else to conclude that the girl had discovered the secret by some disquieting process of witchcraft. Odette was a very witch,

with her untamed eyes, bare arms, brown face, and dishevelled hair; and at this moment she frightened Pauline. But one word more she said as she ascended the stairs to restore the photographs to the Duke's room.

“He's gone, you know.”

“Who is gone?”

“Why, monsieur. He received some letters; then went to the stables, saddled the best horse, and rode off to Auray as fast as he could. You should have seen him gallop.”

Pauline said nothing, but walked away to the Marquise's room, and there the intelligence of the Duke's departure was confirmed by old Agathe, the maid. Monsieur, she said, had come in hurriedly to his grandmamma's room, and had kissed her while she slept. He had told Agathe that he must return to Paris. Monsieur Barney was packing his master's things, and had orders to follow him to Paris by an evening train.

It was a great relief to Pauline to hear this. In her disturbed condition of mind it did not occur to her to wonder what could be the reason of the Duke's sudden flight. She supposed he would return, but for the present it was a comfort that he had gone. During the remainder of the day

Pauline went about her business as if in physical pain. Whenever the recollection of the morning's scene came back to her, she shook her head, as if to banish it. But Gertrude's face she could not banish; that haunted her large as life, and all day long.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MIRACULOUS APPARITION.

TOWARDS the close of this day, Clovis Kergarec, on one of the slopes of the plateau, was chopping the trunk of a felled cedar tree into logs. He had thrown off his jacket and waistcoat; his shirt was open at the throat; and his hair, wet with perspiration, streamed all over his face and shoulders.

He was hewing with frenzy, doing in quarters of an hour as much work as two or three of his kinsmen together generally wrought in a morning. The trunk had been sawn into lengths. With massive blows on his iron wedge he clove these into halves; then, with his axe, split the halves into quarters, and the quarters into logs. The axe whirled round his head as if it were no heavier than a whip, and the splinters flew about in showers. Clovis was exerting his strength to

quiet the rageful spirit in him, and he uttered short savage exclamations as he worked.

In the twilight his sister Odette stole out of the house, and came to lean against a neighbouring tree, and to watch him. But he received her with a growl. "Get thee to thy cows; it's no time for thee to be here."

She paid no heed to this. "Why hast thou been working like a madman?" she asked. "Dost think she'll like thee any better with a red face?"

"Of whom art thou speaking?" Clovis grounded his axe, and his glance fell upon a ring—a trumpery but brilliant thing—that glittered on his sister's finger. "Who gave thee that?" he asked, glad of a pretext for being angry with somebody, and seizing Odette by the wrist. "It's that pedlar Quiroule who has been fooling with thee again. Let me catch him at that game, and I'll cut his head open."

"Let go," cried Odette, wresting her hand away. And with provoking composure she hummed to herself and admired her ring; while Clovis vented some of his temper by swearing energetically at Pierre Quiroule for a decoyer of girls, a honey-tongued, false-hearted Parisian,

etc. Odette only laughed. "Pierre Quiroule is nothing to me. It is Monsieur Barney who gave me this ring, and he wants me to go away from here with him. He promised to marry me."

"He didn't."

"I tell thee he did; and he has money in plenty—a pretty man too."

"Let me look at that ring to see if it's gold," grumbled Clovis, stricken with involuntary respect at the name of the Duke's valet.

Odette, however, declined to remove the trinket from her finger, and Clovis did not insist. He resumed his chopping with a shrug which indicated but little belief in his sister's story. Odette retreated to a tree further off, where in the gathering dusk she began to look like a mere shadow; and from this safe distance she bantered her brother. Her voice had the mirthful shrillness of a magpie's.

"What is the use of fretting about *her*? She has been crying this afternoon, but not for thee. She has given her heart to monsieur, who loves that English girl."

Three fierce blows with his axe, making twice as many logs jump here and there, were the only replies which Clovis vouchsafed.

“If monsieur marries the English girl, mademoiselle will return to her convent at Morlaix,” continued Odette. “Ah, that stirs thee! Why try to conceal that thou art in love with mademoiselle? But thou art no man, Clovis. Aha! if I were thee, I would speak out my fancy; all girls are alike, and not to be coaxed by moping. What is mademoiselle more than thee? She is a servant, like us. Ask the White Lady to help on thy suit if she comes here to-night.”

Clovis was roused now. He dared not speak against the Duke, but he burst into imprecations against Barney, vociferating against the latter all that he would have liked to say in his paroxysm of unconscious jealousy against his master. “Give back his ring to that accursed heretic! They are all accursed together! As for thee, thou art a witch; the devil take thee! Let me catch thee calling mademoiselle a servant again, and I’ll trounce thee. Mind thine own business, too, and don’t meddle with mine.”

He threw away his axe with great violence, and catching up his back hair in a handful, twisted it into a knot. This is what Breton lads do when they are going to fight. Odette grew

frightened and ran away. Clovis, however, simply picked up his jacket and waistcoat, flung them over his arm, and strode back to the château, not caring to look where his sister went.

She tripped down the rugged declivity, running zigzag among the trees as lightly as a fawn. She knew every inch of the ground, for there were stumps, holes, and brambles which must have been as traps to her feet if she had not known it. Half-way down a whistle stopped her.

“Monsieur Pierre!” she answered, halting behind a pine, and peering cautiously before she advanced another step.

“Yes, it's I, my beauty. This way;” and Pierre Quiroule struck a vesuvian which, blazing for an instant, revealed his whereabouts. It showed, too, that on the spot where he stood the earth had been freshly stirred, and he was stamping with one foot, as if to fill up a hole.

“What a smell of incense, and what a strange light that was!” murmured Odette. Vesuvians are not much used in France to this day, and the Breton girl had never seen one. The musky perfume was like incense to her.

“It’s magic light,” replied Pierre. “You know I’m a magician.”

“Why came you here to-night?” responded Odette, with an incredulous titter.

“I came to see you,” said the pedlar, and slipped an arm round her waist.

“Oh, that’s easily said,” laughed the girl; but there was a pleased tone in her voice, nevertheless, and she did not rebuff the pedlar’s caresses. He was a good-looking fellow, and there was a nice odour of jessamine pomade in his hair. He called her a beauty, too, and kissed her.

“Why hast thou been digging a hole?” she asked, abruptly using *tutoiement* towards him.

“To grub up roots for my incantations. Dost doubt that I am a wizard? See, what is that on thy forehead?”

He struck another vesuvian, and Odette, feeling something cold on her brow, put up her hand and drew away a big brooch with a sparkling cairngorm that was entangled in her hair.

“Now, look at this,” he continued, and forked tongues of flame leaped of a sudden from his mouth. Then he cried, “A rat!” and to Odette’s

horror drew out from his mouth by the tail a huge live rat, which he dangled for a moment before her startled eyes, and which then seemed to vanish.

The rapid execution of these common conjuring tricks, which would have made any Parisian girl scream with mingled terror and amusement, caused Odette to tremble all over. But she was more fascinated than frightened. She drew near to the man whom she regarded as a superior being; and while her hand closed tightly over the brooch from fear lest it should vanish like the rat, she listened intently to something which he told her in whispers.

“Wilt thou obey me faithfully?” he demanded, after a time.

“I'll do everything thou sayest,” she answered submissively. “But tell me, this brooch won't melt by daylight, will it?”

“No fear.”

“I believe it will.”

“No, it won't. See, I've touched it with a relic—a mesh of the net which my patron St. Peter used when he was a fisherman. If it melts, never trust me again. But I say, now thou hast sworn to hold thy tongue, and speak not a word

of what thou hast seen and heard, if thou betrayest me I'll plague thee with rats and fire."

"I'll serve thee with my tongue as well as my hands," answered Odette, with a slight shudder; "and thou'lt give me some more things, eh? Thou'lt take me to Paris and dress me in silk like a madame? Thou'lt always be good to me, eh?"

"I'll be good to thee," said Pierre Quiroule, taking her gallantly by the waist again, and kissing her. "But now to work, my girl; we must choose a spot and get everything ready before I go off to sup."

"Ah, that reminds me I've something more to ask of thee!" exclaimed Odette. "They've been saying to-day in the village that thou hast bought a field at the foot of the plateau, and that when thou camest here last thou didst lend a big sum of money to Mathias Pulker, who keeps the wine-shop with the sign of the Five Gulls. Is it true?"

"A plague on their chattering tongues," answered the pedlar impatiently. "Yes, it's true."

"Then why didst thou not tell me?"

"Well, I'll tell thee now," replied Pierre Quiroule, after a moment of hesitation. "If

what we are going to do to-night succeeds, the value of land will rise down there. As for Mathias, I have bought his house ; he is only my servant. I want to be rich ; does that satisfy thee ? Wilt thou be glad to see pilgrims come and bring money to the Five Gulls, which will serve to buy fine things for thee ? Enough said now ; let's get to work."

* * * * *

That night there was another apparition of the White Lady on the slopes ; it was plainly seen by some twenty people, and no wonder, for Pierre Quiroule, who had come down to Brittany to speculate on the credulity of the natives, had brought with him a fine magic lantern, which, with Odette's connivance, he worked with bewitching effect. A sheet hung between two trees revealed to the stupefied gaze of the peasantry a luminous lady, whose garments were dazzling white, and whose hair was golden. It remained motionless for a quarter of an hour—enough to bring out every man and woman from the château and farm, once Odette had raised the cry of its appearance. Then, when every one had seen it, it abruptly vanished. No one was daring enough to walk down the slope and in-

investigate the mystery. Trembling like sheep, the whole flock of Kergarecs huddled together, some on their knees, some bareheaded and uttering the *avé*. Jérôme Juva set the example of adoration by throwing himself prostrate with his face to the earth.

Pauline alone did not see the apparition. Odette had no doubt arranged that it should come at an hour when mademoiselle was always in the Marquise's room, reading the old lady to sleep; and the White Lady was gone by the time some servants came rushing to the Marquise's room, calling out mademoiselle to come and see the sight.

But for the very reason that neither Pauline nor the Marquise had beheld the wondrous vision it produced a more profound impression on them both. There had been miraculous apparitions in recent times at Lourdes, La Salette, and Paray-le-Monial. Why should not one occur at Auray? There was no doubting the testimony of Jérôme Juva, whose eyes were enlarged to twice their size when he related what he had seen. To Pauline, as to the Marquise, it seemed manifest that the saints were interposing to prevent the marriage of the heir of Châteaufort to a heretic; and then

Pauline remembered Odette's prophecy, and her heart, bruised as it was, and embittered against Roland, throbbled with some yearnings, in which many feelings, pious and worldly, were mingled. For one thing her love was exalted and dignified by the signal interposition in favour of the man on whom she had bestowed it; it might be a religious duty to love such a man, and to join in rescuing him from his infidel enslaver.

It so happened that every hour of this eventful day was to remain ever memorable to Pauline. It was the 26th of June, the festival of the Seven Sleepers, and there is an old Breton superstition to the effect that those who stand near a church on the last minute of that day will see walk into the porch all the inhabitants of the parish who are marked to die within the coming twelve-month. This superstition was known to all the Marquise's servants, and when, about an hour after the apparition had vanished, Jérôme Juva, in a holy excitement, proposed to go into the chapel and hold a service of praise, many of the servants hung back. It was close upon midnight, and they feared the omen of walking through the porch. But Jérôme disdained these terrors; in his ecstasy he possibly thought of the martyrs of

whom he was always reading in his History of the Saints, and reflected that if he were to die soon, it might be in the same cause as these brave and blessed ones. Therefore he took the keys of the chapel and a lantern, and stood near the porch, deliberately waiting till the clock of the château should begin to strike midnight.

Pauline, seeing him go, threw a shawl over her head and wished to follow, to set an example ; but a number of women held her back, and all the women together in a panic began to scream to the men to come indoors. The clock struck, and for a moment all the men stood irresolute amidst these clamours of their mothers, wives, and sisters ; but Jérôme Juva walked into the porch, unlocked the chapel door, and, holding his lantern aloft, turned to see if any were going to follow him. Then six of the sturdiest peasants, with Clovis Kergarec at their head, went to join him, signing themselves as they passed in.

Pauline was never to forget the sight, and there was many another Breton woman who was never to forget how those seven young men walked into the chapel on that night of June, 1870, only a few days before the rumbling of war-clouds began to be heard over France.

CHAPTER XV.

ODDITIES OF MARRIAGE LAW.

ROLAND D'ALMA had not been summoned to Paris by letters, as was believed at Châteaufort, for he had made up his mind to leave Brittany before receiving his mail. One of his letters, however, was of a very startling character, and troubled his mind much during his journey to the capital.

It was from his sister, the Countess de Beaujeu, and ran as follows:—

“Hôtel de Beaujeu, Champs Elysées,

“June, 1870.

“MY DEAR BROTHER,

“I have just heard some horrible things. The news of your coming marriage reached me at Dieppe the other day, and since then intelligence about the Corringtons has been pouring upon me from all quarters. It is a very deluge, and, unhappily, a deluge of unclean water

—‘quite *shokingue*,’ as they say in England. It seems your Miss Corrington is a young lady whose reputation is far from spotless. She does not marry you for your fine eyes, but for the *dot* she expects of you. She has had scandalous *liaisons* with all sorts of people, and amongst others with a young doctor, *très-joli garçon*, whom she had promised to wed, and who it appears, according to English law, can oblige her to fulfil her promise, even after she has become your wife. These are the dreadful tidings which have been communicated confidentially to my good confessor, the Abbé Doucerot, who has friends in England; but they also come to me through the newspapers. At this moment, while I am writing, my husband brings me a copy of the *Gazette des Cafés*, a journal of the Republican *canaille*, in which your *fiancée* is spoken of in mocking terms by a journalist who lives in England, and writes as if the young lady were a public character. *Mon Dieu!* how funny those English mothers bring up their daughters. Imagine a French general about whose daughter a journalist would dare to write such things as those in the extract which I enclose! I add no more, but hope to hear from you that you have

retired adroitly from a *mauvais pas*. You are not of those who can marry young ladies having handsome doctors in their cupboards.

“Your sister, who loves and kisses you,

“ AIMÉE DE BEAUJEU.

“*Postscriptum*.—Do you think we shall have war with Germany this summer? It will annoy me if we do, for I want to spend July at Baden.”

There was enough in this missive to make an engaged man jump, but the newspaper extract was far more cutting to the Duke's pride. The *Gazette des Cafés* was one of those many opposition papers which sprang up in France during the last two years of the Empire, when Napoleon III. had relaxed his curb on the press. It was Republican, profane, and lively; it dealt in revolutionary principles, irreligious scoffing, and society scandals. Its conductors ceased not to deplore the corruptions of Court and society under the Imperial *régime*, but they found it pay to make their descriptions of these depravities as minute as possible. M. Timon Grachard was the English correspondent of this paper. He had lately been contributing to the *Gazette* a series of

wonderful letters, entitled "Les Anglais dans leurs 'Homes'"—the information contained in which articles was both funny and peculiar. A man looking at things through turbid water in a glass full of prisms would not have conveyed a more fanciful idea of their shape and colour than did M. Grachard of British institutions, as viewed through his French ideas. But the style in which he wrote his nonsense was fresh, fluent, and sparkling as champagne; and it had the pungency of that same wine when very dry.

It was in the fifth of his essays which bore the signature of "T. G." that Dr. Claverley's friend, descanting on the social evils that abound in a country "groaning under the weight of Queen, lords, and clergymen," made a passing reference to the Duke's marriage in these terms:—

"I write this from a provincial town, which is in a state of commotion because a young lady of great beauty is going to marry one of the courtiers of Napoleon III. You would laugh if you could witness the enthusiasm which is excited by this titled breeder of lean horses. *Mademoiselle* has allowed herself to be blinded by the glitter of his coronet, and, with that cool cynicism which is to be found in the most sentimental-looking misses of

this commercial country, has not scrupled to break off an engagement which bound her to a man of talent and honour, in order that she may become a duchess. I mention this because everybody is talking about it; not with any censure of the girl, but, on the contrary, with some admiration for her sharp good sense."

"The scoundrel! I will cut his ears off!" muttered Roland to himself when he first read these lines. , But by the time he had galloped to Auray and got into the Paris train, he was sufficiently composed to see that he could not cut off the ears of a writer who had not designated him by name. It was even out of the question that he should go to the office of the *Gazette* to demand an apology, or to require that the writer's name should be given up to him. This would only make noise, the kind of noise in which papers like the *Gazette* rejoice.

But the letter from the Countess was a different matter, and Roland was bound to ask his sister what she meant by "scandalous liaisons." If nothing more was alleged against Gertrude than that she had had some girlish love affairs, and had broken off her engagement to a young doctor, Roland could make light of such

things. He would have expected that a French *fiancée* should come to him without the least rumour of a flirtation being associated with her name, for this is French custom; but he prided himself upon his intimate knowledge of English ways, and was on that account disposed to be more tolerant than an Englishman would have been. In sum, he did not believe a word of what was said against Gertrude. He had formed his ideal of her with the usual ardour of lovers, and he had only to call to mind her innocent, fond, trustful glance to feel reassured and happy. But he was furious against those who had been slandering his future wife, and for this reason amongst others, that such slanders seemed likely to throw the most serious obstacles in the way of his speedy marriage.

We left the Duke, after his interview with Pauline, saying to himself, "Cheek to my queen. What shall be my next move?"

The next move of a headstrong man would have been to call in two doctors and ask them to declare that the Marquise de Châteaufort was unfit to manage her own affairs, as a consequence of which Roland would have been relieved from the necessity of asking her consent to his

marriage ; and the next move after that would have been to dismiss Pauline Juva from the château. Roland did think for a moment of performing this domestic *coup d'état*, but he rejected the idea as soon as conceived ; in fact, his dutiful affection towards his mother's mother was so strong that his eyes filled with tears at the mere thought of doing any violence to her. On the other hand, however, it was quite clear that he could not get married in the orthodox French fashion unless he got her consent. As an officer, he must apply to the War Office* for leave to marry, and it was of no use to do this until the family formalities, as they are called, had been fulfilled. It was worse than useless to beg leave to marry a foreigner who had been written about in the newspapers.

Under all circumstances, therefore, it seemed best to Roland that he should try and get married in England, according to English rites only ; and, before receiving his sister's letter, he had determined that he would hasten to Paris

* French officers cannot marry without the permission of the War Office, and an applicant must provide evidence that his intended wife has property of her own, or would be suitably provided for by settlements.

and consult his notary, M. Ragotin, as to whether a marriage of this description would be valid in France. If he could get privately married in England, without his grandmother hearing anything of the matter, then he would bring his bride to Châteaufort for her honeymoon, confident that with her beauty and sweetness she would soon ingratiate herself with the aged lady. In this way all would go well.

Roland's purpose remained unaltered, in spite of the Countess's letter. He reached Paris towards eight o'clock in the evening, and as it was then too late to find M. Ragotin at his office, he drove straight to the Cercle Impérial, where that worthy, who was one of the busiest lawyers in Paris, generally spent his evenings.

The Cercle Impérial, on the Place de la Concorde, was like a first-rate London club in its comforts—unlike it in its enjoyment of State patronage. It was the resort of all the highest officials and wealthiest unofficial supporters of the Empire, and the Government allowed its walls to be adorned with pictures which had been bought with public moneys for public museums. Some of the choicest masterworks from the Louvre occasionally found their way there for a few

weeks. In the matter of *baccarat*, the Impérial had not such a notoriety as other clubs in Paris, which, with scarcely one exception, were all gambling houses. The Impérial aimed at respectability; but its *chef* and its cellar were more than respectable.

M. Ragotin was at the club, but before meeting him Roland had to shake hands with a score of friends, who all asked him the same question: "Well, shall we have war, do you think?"

"Why should we have war?" asked the Duke. He had not read the papers for several days, and was unaware that the announcement of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern's candidature to the throne of Spain had suddenly fired the heads of all Frenchmen. His friends did not enlighten him, for they could not suppose him to be so ignorant about the great question of the day; they concluded that, being a courtier, he wanted to be diplomatically reticent of things which he might have heard at St. Cloud. Roland asked no questions, but, having shaken hands with his friends, passed on to the dining-room. There he found M. Ragotin, who had just finished a long, copious, and solitary dinner, and was sipping the last glass of a crusty bottle of Chambertin.

M. Ragotin was a swarthy little man, sturdy as an ox and hairy as Esau. He had jet whiskers, bushy as those of a Spanish matador; eyebrows which formed two bristling tufts on either side of his large flat nose; and when he opened his mouth, he disclosed two rows of frightfully strong discoloured teeth, which looked as if they were all grinders. His dress was a suit of baggy black clothes, with a low waistcoat which showed a broad expanse of shirt-front stained with slops of gravy; he had a white cravat, limp and untidy, and starchless wristbands, which came down as far as the knuckles of his fat brown hands, covered with fur like those of a gorilla. M. Ragotin was one of those hot, panting men who can never bear anything stiff about them, and are always gasping for more air; but though he was not a prepossessing person, nor a pleasant one to hear, as he spoke in a rasping voice with the horrible brogue of Marseilles, he was a good-natured man and a very prudent lawyer, who had a large *clientèle* of aristocratic families.

“Monsieur le Duc,” he said, rising with marked respect to greet Roland.

The Duke sat down beside him, ordered some dinner, and apologized for intruding upon the

lawyer at such an hour and place to ask for professional advice. "But it's rather friendly advice I want," he said, "and I am anxious to start for England by the express to-morrow morning."

"I have been expecting to see you every day, Monsieur le Duc," replied the notary. "Do you think we shall have war?"

Thereupon Roland had to inquire what all this war-talk meant, and M. Ragotin told him the whole story. It was a great piece of news. To officers of the French army a war with Germany had been, since Sadowa, the one thing to be desired; but they had been baulked of this fancy year after year, and Roland, when his eyes had flashed for a moment with pugnacious ardour, reflected that with M. Ollivier's new-fangled Liberal Ministry in office there was little chance of war. "It's too good to be true," he said. "I shan't sup in Berlin yet awhile."

"For one reason you must be glad," suggested the lawyer. "A war would delay your marriage."

"I came to talk about that," said Roland. "I have had some worries at Châteaufort." And in the frankest way he explained what these

worries were. M. Ragotin listened, breathing hard, as if he were in the hottest room of a Turkish bath, but with all his mind intent on what his client was saying. "Now, I want to know," concluded Roland, "whether, if I got married according to English forms simply, my marriage would hold good in France."

"The French marriage law," observed the notary, as if he were quoting an article from the code, "obliges you, even if you get married in a foreign land, to go through all our national forms. When you have obtained parental consent, and, in your case, license from the War Office, your banns must be published for a fortnight in the French *commune* where you were born, in that where you reside, and again at the French embassy or consulate in the country where your bride lives. Then you must be married in the presence of a diplomatic or consular agent, and after that your marriage must be registered in France from a certificate delivered by the said agent. That is the law." M. Ragotin finished his glass of wine, smacked his lips, and snorted with an air of tranquil satisfaction, as if no such good laws had ever been framed as those which made it very difficult

for young French people to get joined together. "But," added he, in a more matter-of-fact way, "if you like to be married simply in a church according to English manner, your marriage need not necessarily be invalid. It could be declared of non-effect if your grandmother moved the courts to have it set aside, but she must do this within a twelvemonth after the solemnization. If she let a year elapse without taking action against your marriage, it would become valid *de jure*, and you could have it registered in France as if it had been celebrated in due French form."

This communication took a great load from Roland's mind. "My grandmother would not attack my marriage," he said. "When she sees my wife, she will love her; besides, as I shall be a good deal at Châteaufort after my marriage, she could take no action without my cognizance, and she would only take it, if at all, through you, her legal adviser. Now, if matters come to this extremity through my poor grandmother yielding to bad counsels, I should have to point out to you that she is not in a fit state to manage her own affairs. Any doctor would uphold me in that opinion."

“Family differences are painful things, and ought not to be published,” remarked the lawyer, quietly. “If you are quite resolved upon your marriage, you had better get married in the English way, as you have suggested.”

“I am quite resolved on my marriage,” answered Roland. “And now we come to the question of settlements. I will ask you to prepare a deed settling five hundred thousand francs absolutely and entirely on my wife.”

“The lady has no fortune, then?”

“Her beauty, her goodness, and many other gifts which endow her richly, and make me feel it a high honour to have been accepted by her.”

M. Ragotin bowed. He could not venture to oppose his client's whim; but experience had taught him that *mésalliances* produce nothing but wretchedness, and he was convinced that the Duc d'Alma was going to make a goose of himself. As family notary to the Kerouailles and the Beauregards he was sorry for this, and in recommending the Duke to get married in the English fashion, he had given what he thought was excellent advice; for if Roland grew tired of his English bride—as was most likely, considering the incompatibilities of humour that

might arise between a Frenchman and an English girl—then it would be easy to have the marriage annulled.

The Duke's dinner was brought, and whilst he ate he talked again of what had happened at Châteaufort. In his soldierly candour he could never fence with the questions of people whom he trusted, and a few inquiries from M. Ragotin elicited from him all that the Marquise had said—her proposal that he should marry Mademoiselle de Rocarmé, whom he had never seen; next, her wish that he should marry Pauline Juva; and, after that, Pauline's own little scene of hysterics with him.

“Mademoiselle de Penmarek is a very good girl,” he added, “but she has too much influence over my grandmother. You notaries are all matchmakers, Monsieur Ragotin, and if you hear of anybody who wants to marry a young lady of good family, I dare say we shall be able to make up a suitable dower for Pauline.”

Now, M. Ragotin was very friendly to Pauline Juva. He and she managed the Marquise's affairs between them, and he had had many opportunities of perceiving how high-minded and disinterested she was, never seeking any ad-

vantages for herself out of the position of great trust in which circumstances had placed her. Moreover, he pitied the girl for being, high-born as she was, in a situation of dependence; for M. Ragotin had a veneration for rank. At the outset of his career, a great Legitimist nobleman had befriended him, and, though he was of low extraction himself, he had, partly out of gratitude towards his early patron and partly from long professional connection with aristocratical families, come to espouse all the opinions, prejudices, and crotchets of the old nobility. He would have been very glad to see the Duke marry Pauline, and, after what Roland had just said, it occurred to him that the pair would very probably be united in the end. Roland's infatuation for a penniless foreigner with a pretty face was, no doubt, a passing fancy that would cool.

“I will prepare a deed of settlement, Monsieur le Duc,” said M. Ragotin, when Roland had finished dining and rose to go; “but I think we should insert a clause giving you a lien on this dower, in case——”

“In case of what?”

“Well, we lawyers are bound, in the interests of our clients, to see all sorts of contingencies.

I think the five hundred thousand francs ought only to become Miss Corrington's conditionally."

"There we differ. I want the money to be hers unconditionally on the day she is married to me, in no matter what form. Please give effect to my wishes as I have stated them. Put General Corrington's name in the deed as sole trustee for his daughter, and forward the instrument ready for my signature to Monsieur Littlepoint of Lewbury.

This seemed to M. Ragotin like flinging five hundred thousand francs out of the window. However, all follies must be paid for; and perhaps when the English girl became possessed of £20,000, she might not much object to having her marriage quashed, so that she might be free to wed again with an Englishman.

Such was the Parisian notary's reflection as he accompanied his client into the vestibule and, blowing like a whale on dry land, wished him obsequiously "Good-night."

Roland had some palatial chambers on the Boulevard Malesherbes, close to the Club, and thither he drove after leaving M. Ragotin; but he merely left directions with the door-porter that when Barney arrived from Brittany he was

to proceed to the Count de Beaujeu's mansion, in the Champs Elysées, where his master was going to sleep.

Roland hardly expected to find his sister or his brother-in-law at home at half-past ten in the evening. The Senator was accustomed to spend his evenings at the Cercle Impérial; the Countess was never in her own house after dinner, except when she held a reception. June is not the season for parties in Paris, but ladies who happen to be in town during that month for a few days between two visits to different watering-places form parties for dining at restaurants and going to the theatres afterwards. The Countess de Beaujeu on this particular evening had gone to see a farce at the Palais Royal; so Roland, on being told this by her major-domo, made his way to her boudoir and there waited for her, reading the newspapers and coaching himself on the Hohenzollern question.

What a boudoir it was, and what a mansion altogether! Rich Frenchmen do not spend much on their country estates, but they make their town-houses magnificent. The Hôtel de Beaujeu stood in its own grounds at the broadest part of the Champs Elysées. A bijou palace in the

Italian Renaissance style, it was approached through a pair of fine wrought-iron gates with richly gilt escutcheons. These opened on to a lawn with marble statues by Barye, Carpeaux, Pradier, and Clesinger at the four corners, and a wide carriage sweep covered with stoneless tawny gravel. Inside the house the art of the painter, sculptor, and decorator had been employed to make every room and nook beautiful. There was nothing common in any part of it; nothing had been left to the upholsterer's fancy. In the Countess's boudoir four panelled portraits of the lady of the house represented her with the attributes of Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, and these had been painted by Cabanel, Gerome, Winterhalter, and Carolus Duran. Another portrait of the Countess by Ingres showed her as Aphrodite receiving the golden apple from Paris, and a very ravishing face it was which the great artist had limed in grey and pink tints on canvas.

Perhaps there was too much luxury in the house. Certainly the coronets and other reminders of the Count's rank were too many to please an Englishman's taste; but then, it had never occurred to the Count de Beaujeu that

English people are the arbiters of taste. Since revolutions have stripped the nobility of their privileges, it is the least they can do under a system of universal suffrage and pretended equality to show that they do not consider themselves the equals of other men. And this is what the Count had done. His servants were electors whose votes had the same value as his own; but their menial condition was conspicuously denoted not only by dazzling liveries and hair-powder, but by the perfect military precision of their deportment, and of the obeisances which they had been taught to perform. Even the major-domo was not arrayed in the plain dress-suit of an English butler; he had a collarless black coat of the Court fashion, with ruffles, knee-breeches, and silk stockings, and round his neck a silver chain. To hear this servant murmur "Monsieur le Comte," or "Monsieur le Duc," was like receiving a priest's *benedicite*.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRENCH LADY OF FASHION.

THE little Sèvres clock on the mantelpiece of the boudoir tinkled midnight, and soon afterwards the Countess returned from the theatre. Silk rustled on the staircase, a Maltese lapdog yelped a welcome to his mistress, the door of the room was impetuously thrown open, and the most charming of pretty Frenchwomen flung herself into her brother's arms.

“My dear Roland, what a pleasure to see you! You are going to stay the night? *Mon Dieu*, if I had known you were coming, I should not have gone to the theatre. Did you get my letter? Down, Coco. What a dog it is!”

The Countess, in talking like this, fairly danced round her brother, hugged him, and laughed gleefully in his face.

A little after his wife, the Count de Beaujeu, who had toiled slowly up the stairs, entered the room, and held out a trembling hand to his brother-in-law. He was an elderly beau, with blear eyes, drooping under-lip, and a long chin tuft. He looked like a profligate old goat. His evening dress, diamond star on his coat, and the red riband of the Legion of Honour that crossed his vest, showed that he had not been to the theatre with his wife; in fact, he never took his pleasures in her company, but he considered it his duty to fetch her home from her evening's amusements, and this with sundry other small marital obligations he punctually discharged, to absolve himself for neglecting the greater ones.

He was a bad husband, this polished, immoral old gentleman, and the Countess would have been an unhappy woman if she had ever loved him. Satire could not have conceived a more ill-matched pair. Aimée de Beaujeu was the most delicious of *Parisiennes*—lovely, full of grace, ever beautiful in her dress, fascinating in her manners, amusing in her prattle. The Count, nearly thirty years older than his wife, had seen his best days before she was born, and by the

time he married her his constitution was shattered and his purse almost empty. He had taken Aimée to wife in the most approved manner, straight from the convent, before she had seen anything of the world, and without any option being given her between this man and another. Her father, the Marshal Duc d'Alma, who was alive at the time, had consented to the match because he was a widower, and did not understand how girls should be disposed of. He had left the whole matter to be managed by one of his friends, an old countess, who looked only to the fact that the Count de Beaujeu was a man of splendid family, high connections, and brilliant prospects. A Legitimist by education and antecedents, he had promised to make his submission to the Empire, and as Napoleon III. always rewarded Royalist deserters with high posts, his rise in the world was certain. The Count also promised privately that he would pay his patroness a commission out of Aimée's dower, and less privately to Aimée's father, her brother, and all her other relations, that on being married he would turn over a new leaf.

M. de Beaujeu kept two of these promises. He condescended to accept from the Emperor the

title of Senator, an ambassadorship, and a decoration; he further paid the stipulated fee to the old countess who had procured him a wife. But he did not turn over a new leaf. In one thing only did he alter, and this was that instead of losing money he quintupled his wife's fortune by seemingly audacious but always safe speculation on the Bourse. He spent as much money as ever on dissipation and cards, but could always recoup himself by using secret official information to guide him in buying securities when they were about to rise. Sometimes he helped to depress securities with a view to buying them cheap; for he belonged to a ring of influential statesmen and placemen who, having a number of semi-official newspapers at their back at a time when few independent journals were tolerated, held the power to create panics on the Bourse by false rumours. The difference between this kind of thing and gambling with loaded dice may not be apparent to men of ordinary understanding, but there is no reason why men of ordinary understanding should be asked to sit in judgment on the cause. Nobody ever accused the Count de Beaujeu of doing an underhand thing in the card-room. The smiling good grace with which

he paid his losings at baccarat was only equalled by his serenity in pocketing the monthly differences remitted him by his stockbroker.

For the rest, the Count de Beaujeu was the most dissolute of men. After two children had been born of his marriage, his infidelities estranged him completely from his wife. They led separate lives; her respect for him—love she had never felt—was gone, and if they continued to live together, it was because rich people in large houses need not clash like poor people in small ones. Add to this that the Count knew the uses of studied politeness and airy *persiflage*. Peevish with his servants, short and haughty with persons of low degree, of whom he had nothing to expect or to fear, he turned only the varnished side of his character towards men of consequence, and especially towards ladies. He had early in life earned a reputation of *bel esprit*, and this once gained can never be lost. He was the reputed author of a thousand witticisms which he had never uttered, and gossip-fed newspapers like the *Figaro* continued to put new smart sayings to his account every day. Enfeebled in mind, his utterances were either frivolous and flippant or cynical; but he still had the stuff of a party

politician or second-rate diplomatist in him. Not much brain is wanted for such stuff.

That evening the Count de Beaujeu had been dining with a cabal of statesmen out of office, and he was full of the projects they had been brewing against the Prime Minister of the day, M. Emile Ollivier, and his Liberal Cabinet. That cabinet, disliked by the Emperor, was loathed by the Conservative Imperialists, and these were going to make political capital out of the Hohenzollern incident in order to overthrow it. If the ministers recoiled from war, the Imperialists would denounce them for holding the honour of France cheap; but if a war took place, and Prussia were beaten—as it certainly would be, thought the caballers—the Emperor would recover power enough to retract the Liberal concessions made during the second decade of his reign, and to revive the autocratic system as it was established in 1852. In any ministry formed after the overthrow of the Ollivier Cabinet, the Count de Beaujeu was to have a portfolio.

“I am sorry I—I—cannot bring you the news that would be welcome to a soldier, Roland,” he said in his usual tone of ironical courtesy, and with the slight stutter of incipient

paralysis. "M. Ollivier doesn't mean to give you any s-sport on the Rhine."

"We can't expect an Ollivier (olive-tree) to be warlike," answered Roland, carelessly. "I only heard about this Hohenzollern question this evening. But is the matter settled already?"

"N-no, not settled; they are going to tell Prussia that Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern shall not sit on the Spanish throne. They have spirit enough for that much; but Prussia and Spain ought both to be ch-chastised together for having had the impertinent idea of seating a German on the throne of the Bourbons."

"If there were war," said Roland, "I would give up my staff appointment and ask to be placed in command of a regiment; but it is of no use to send in my application at this stage of matters."

"Not much use, I think. I will let you know when the p-proper time comes," said the Count, blinking in the armchair, where he had ensconced himself, and looking very sleepy. "By-the-bye, you are going to be married; and I hear Miss Corrington is charming. My compliments. What does our good Marquise say to your choice?"

“I found the Marquise in weak health,” answered Roland, evasively.

“That doesn’t astonish me ; she is very aged, poor lady.” The Count de Beaujeu was too languid and selfish to care whom his brother-in-law married ; but he was rather pleased than otherwise that Roland contemplated a *mésalliance*, for between him and the Duke there was no love. Roland deeply resented the Count’s conduct towards Aimée, and though he was too sensible to interfere unmasked between husband and wife, he had testified his feelings by treating his brother-in-law with coldness. It was, therefore, pleasant to the Senator to think that if Roland contracted an injudicious marriage, he, the Senator, might be able to say often to his wife, “That precious brother of yours, who has made a noodle of himself,” etc.

Whilst her husband and her brother chatted, Aimée, taking no part in the conversation, acted as if she were by herself. She removed her cloak and bonnet, rang the bell for her maid, ordered some chocolate, and, waiting for this refreshment, she made her lapdog beg for boubons. When the maid returned with a tray, the Count rose, shook hands with Roland, and, giving his

wife a ceremonious little bow, wished her good night.

“He looks very unwell,” remarked Roland, when the door had closed.

“Does he? Much the same as usual, I think,” replied Aimée, with indifference. “But now, come and sit down beside me at this small table, and let us make ourselves cosy. It’s such a time since we’ve been alone together, Roland, and I’ve got enough to talk about till day-break.”

The Countess was dressed in close-fitting black satin, with a *cuirasse* of beads and a little lace at the collar and short sleeves. She had one bracelet—a superb serpent of six coils, made of sapphires—and in each of her little ears was a big diamond *dormeuse*, like a raindrop. She looked so lovely that her brother could not help telling her how pretty she was, and he told it her with eyes as well as lips.

“You pay me compliments because you know you are going to be scolded,” laughed the Countess, shaking a forefinger. “What do you mean by thinking to afflict me with an English sister-in-law? You gave me a fine fright. But you are cured of that folly, eh? Grandmamma

must have been startled out of her bed, poor dear thing, when she heard you meant to marry a Protestant! What did she say? Tell me all about it."

Roland had no time to reply, for his vivacious sister poured him out a cup of chocolate, and went babbling on—

"Oh, you needn't tell me what she said; I can guess it. I know she wanted you to marry Mademoiselle de Rocarmé, for that was the burden of her song all the time of my last visit to Châteaufort. But Mademoiselle de Rocarmé would make an extremely disagreeable sister-in-law. The wife I had in view for you, Roland, would be much nicer—Clotilde de Luciennes, the sister of my best friend, the Countess de Joyeuse-Enville. Clotilde is eighteen; she will have a dowry of a million francs, and another million when her aunt, the Duchess d'Hautencourt, dies. I grant, though, that Laure de Rocarmé is of older family than Clotilde, and I dare say she will have several millions, for her father has speculated very successfully in house property."

"What arguments to come from you, my dear Aimée!" exclaimed Roland, disgusted.

"Are they not the proper arguments in treat-

ing of a marriage?" asked the Countess, dipping a sponge biscuit in her cup.

"You know they are not. Marriage is something more than a union between two escutcheons and two money-bags."

"Ah, that's new to me! I was not told that when you made me the wife of yonder gentleman." And Aimée nodded towards the empty chair which the Count de Beaujeu had just occupied.

There was a mocking sparkle in her hazel eyes, which were very like her brother's, and a cruel smile played for a moment over her pretty lips.

"I have not ceased to deplore your marriage, Aimée," said Roland, contritely. "We were all of us mistaken in that man."

"You were a grown man when my marriage was arranged," continued Aimée. "You knew what sort of a creature the Count was. I, in my convent, knew nothing. You let me be taken, with all my youth, illusion, and hopes—a good girl as I then was, wanting to do my duty, and ready to be the slave of a man who should love me—and you flung me into the arms of a man who neither loved nor respected me, who sullied

my mind, and who has brought me to perdition."

"Don't say you have been brought to perdition, Aimée. What shocking words!"

"They are truer than you think. Perhaps I am not so bad as people say; perhaps I am worse. My confessor and I alone know the truth on that point; but if you imagine that a woman can be the wife of such a man and not become the worse for it, you know our sex very ill."

"But you have children, dear. You can be good for their sakes, and happy in bringing them up."

"Yes, I have my children, poor darlings! and I ought—— But what is the use of talking about it? Can a woman ever do for her children what a good husband and father does? In a few years Louis and Annette will begin to understand what the Count and I think of each other; and perhaps a time will come when the Count will try to make Louis vicious as he is himself, just to break my heart. I hope I may die then."

"My poor little sister!" exclaimed Roland, tenderly, and caressing Aimée's hand, "I will look after your son for you. I swear he shall have none but good examples from me. We will make a man of him."

“Will you promise me that, Roland?” asked the Countess, her tears beginning to flow. “He is such a good little boy; and when I think he may grow to be like his father, it makes me wild. I can manage Annette, and I will take care that she is never forced into such a loveless, horrid marriage as I was.”

“Forgive me for my share in that marriage of yours!” pleaded Roland, earnestly. “I am more grieved about it than I can express.”

But Aimée hid her face in her hands, and sobbed outright. The wretchedness of an unnatural marriage was never more painfully illustrated than in the inconsolable grief of this young woman, having all that other women might envy—beauty, rank, wealth—and yet mourning over the joyless days passed and the dreary future to come, in the society of a husband whose heart had never mated with hers. To Roland his sister's sorrow brought both anxiety and remorse.

“Yes, I'll forgive you. What's done can't be helped,” said Aimée, presently, as she dried her eyes; and she quickly recovered her spirits, for hers was an April nature. “Stoop your forehead that I may kiss you. *Je t'aime bien va.* You have a good heart, and we are brother and sister.

But you must not yourself make a marriage that would store up unhappiness for you. All that tattle about Miss Corrington ought to be cleared up."

"Tell me about it, and let me talk to you about Gertrude," said Roland. "You will soon be convinced that she has been maligned." And when he had ascertained how little Aimée had really heard against Gertrude, he knew that his cause was won. He had never much doubted that his sister could be brought over to his side; and now he thought that he ought to prevail upon her to write a sisterly note of congratulation to Gertrude, and also to attend his wedding. If she did that, it would be seen that he was not being married in opposition to the wishes of his family; and it would be gratifying to Gertrude, as well as useful to himself, that he should be attended at the altar by his sister. Little Annette might be one of the bridesmaids, and perhaps the Count de Beaujeu could be induced to come too; for he was not likely to refuse a request made to him point-blank by his brother-in-law, and his presence at the wedding would enhance the dignity of the proceedings.

Roland unfolded these plans, and Aimée

hearkened to them with a desire to serve her brother; besides, the bait of any new pleasure or business always tantalized her. It might be amusing to take a short trip to England, and judge of Gertrude for herself. If they were to be sisters, the sooner they grew friendly the better.

“Let me see her photograph,” said Aimée. “I am sure you must carry one about with you.”

And Roland had, in fact, two photographs in his pocket-book. He produced a vignette and a carte.

The Countess wagged her head with a dubious air as she scrutinized them. “H’m! she is very pretty; but we must teach her how to dress. That frock of hers is too—too English. And she is certainly *très bourgeoise*. None but a bourgeoisie would assume a sentimental expression in sitting for her photograph. She has nice hands—that’s something; but she has taken care to hide her feet in this full-length carte. I suppose she is horribly ill-shod, like most of her countrywomen. Does she walk like a dragoon, and say, ‘*Aoh, yes, bioutifoul,*’ and eat her cutlets raw? There was my poor old governess, Meess Cropper, who used

to dig in the garden at Beauregard for toadstools to make an abominable sauce called *katchoup*, which she poured over her food——”

“Do be serious, Aimee,” remonstrated Roland, half amused, half vexed; “you know I love Gertrude with all my heart.”

“Ah! and you see no defects in her. *C'est naturel*; but we women are never so much in love with each other. Listen! now you must make me a promise. When you are married, I will take Guer—Ger—how do you pronounce her name?”

“Guertrude, in English; but you may soften the G in French.”

“I shall soften it, then. How can those English have such a taste for rough sounds?”

“I don't call it a rough sound.”

“Tu es donc épris jusqu' aux oreilles? Ah, I am glad I could never learn English; as it would have spoilt my ear for music. But I was going to say, Roland, when you are married, you must let me take Gertrude to Father Cocorique's sermons. He will convert her, and we will bring her to the Foreign Missions' Church to be baptized. She shall wear a white dress, and I will be her godmother, and give her a new name,

something sweet and Catholic. You must positively promise me that, else I shall never be able to square my accounts with my confessor, Father Doucerot, for consenting to the marriage."

"I dare say Gertrude will become a Catholic in the end," answered Roland; "but Father Doucerot will have the tact to understand that her conversion must be a question of time."

"Let me see; what shall I wear at your wedding?" mused Aimée, who went from subject to subject as a bird hops from twig to twig. When she began to talk about dressing, there was no checking her; so Roland had to wait some minutes before re-urging his request that his sister should write a letter to Gertrude at once before going to bed, and, as soon as convenient, send her a present. Thereupon Aimée declared that she never wrote letters; she only wrote notes, inviting people to dinner. If a letter was wanted, her brother must dictate it. Roland agreed to dictate. "As to the present, I suppose you would like me to send something very fine?" said Aimée, reflectively. "In that case, you must give me some money, for I am quite destitute."

"Have you been losing at Hombourg, then?"

"No; I won two hundred napoleons when I

was last there ; and I hope to win some more at Baden. I don't know how it is that money goes. I have only had eighteen new dresses from Worth's this year ; but I have not paid his bill for two years. I hate asking the Count for money. He has his fortune and I have mine. We pay the household expenses between us ; but I would never accept a sou of him for myself. If you had not been about to get married, I should have asked you to pay my debts for me. You must have won enormously with your racehorses this year, Roland ? ”

“ My stables cost me two hundred thousand francs a year, even when I am in luck,” replied the Duke ; “ and I think of putting them down now. However, you shall have some money. How much do you want ? ”

“ No, it wouldn't be fair to take money from you now. You shall give me twenty thousand francs to buy Gertrude a suite in diamonds and sapphires, and I'll add the seven nuptial rings out of my own jewel-case. As for my bills, I'll tie them all up in a parcel, and lay them on the Count's table some day when he is in a particularly bad humour. They will help to cool him. By-the-bye ”—and she stopped short—“ is your horse

Oriflamme going to win the English St. Leger? If so, I'll have a bet about him with that Russian Prince Krusoff, who is so rich and depraved; but I must make sure of winning, for the Prince would ask me to do something dreadful if I lost. I lost a *discretion* to him at the last Chantilly races, and I shan't forget it in a hurry. He wanted to claim an *indiscretion*." *

"You ought not to bet, little sister," remarked Roland, with a shake of the head; but not very severely, for it was impossible that he could scold Aimée when she was behaving so nicely to him.

Late as it was, she went to her desk and wrote Gertrude an exquisite little letter on a sheet of primrose paper, with an enormous gilt cipher and coronet in one of the corners. She did not require her brother's dictation for this missive. When Roland, after deep cogitation, had delivered himself of a first sentence, she laughed, mimicking his tone, and said, "There, leave it to me."

When her rapidly written note had been sealed, she took her brother's arm. "And now come upstairs to the nursery, and see the children

* *Parier une discretion* is to make a bet by which the winner may demand of the loser what he likes. *Une indiscretion* is often the result.

while they are asleep," she whispered. "It's so beautiful to see them, and they are such darlings."

Roland had purposed starting for England by the Calais express in the morning, but he found this impracticable. To begin with, Barney had got by mistake into a slow train, and did not reach Paris till nearly seven; and in the next place, Aimée would not hear of her brother leaving before the evening. She wanted to have him to herself for a whole and enjoyable day. She would go and arrange with him about taking a house near the Parc Monceau, which he much fancied, and about getting it furnished for Gertrude's reception; and he should accompany her, and help her select the costume which she was to wear at his wedding. Then they would take a drive in the Bois de Boulogne with the two darlings, and be as happy as possible.

To all this Roland agreed, thinking he would utilize the day by calling on M. Ragotin, and stimulating him to activity about the settlements. This he did, and a draft of the settlement was prepared, signed, and posted to England, all within a few hours. Roland also gave orders to his coachman to start for Lewbury that evening,

with a groom, four horses, a brougham, and a wagonette.

It so chanced that on this day Paris was noisy with popular clamours for war. The political party to which the Count de Beaujeu belonged had hired a couple of hundred street-loafers, who stamped about the Boulevards in white blouses (that is, disguised as workmen of the better sort), and bawling, "*À Berlin!*" To these all the tagrag and bobtail of the city, with idle boys and worthless girls, were soon added, and the uproar of this mob stirred the fires that are always smouldering in Parisian breasts. There was plenty of cheering from *cafés* where quidnuncs sit, and from the knifeboards of omnibuses. Roland himself caught the war fever, and, returning from the Bois de Boulogne in his sister's barouche, waved his hat, to the great glee of his little nephew and niece, on meeting a herd who were braying, "*À Berlin, à Berlin!*"

But on arriving at his sister's house after this drive, Roland got a piece of news that disconcerted his plans. The evening journals published a decree of the War Minister suspending the furloughs of all officers and men, and calling upon them to rejoin their regiments. This decree

might not personally affect Roland, who, as A.D.C. to the Empress, held a Court appointment like that of equerry, and was only required for duty at regular periods in his turn. Still, it became necessary that he should report himself to the War Office, to ask for permission to absent himself from France for a few days; and this he could only do on the following day. So he had to spend another night in Paris. Feeling sure, however, that he would obtain leave, unless war was actually on the point of being declared, he allowed his coachman and horses to start for England, and sent Barney with them to take rooms and stabling "in the best hotel of Lewbury."

Roland got his leave without trouble. Dressed in his staff uniform—a blue tail coat with gold epaulets and aiglets, crimson trousers, and a cocked hat with scarlet, white, and blue feathers—he presented himself in the morning at the War Office, and was admitted, after not more than an hour's waiting, to see Marshal Lebœuf, the Minister. That ill-starred officer, who was afterwards to be made the scapegoat of so many errors, but who at that time was in the plentitude of his fame as an administrator and strategist,

received the Duc d'Alma in a friendly manner ; but he was very busy, and detained him hardly five minutes.

Marshal Lebœuf owed his rapid advancement as much to his refined urbanity as to his talents. Popular in court and camp, a man never hurried, vexed, or disregarding of those little courtesies which smooth the creases out of men's features, his gracious bearing was dignified by a face of masculine beauty, with large sparkling eyes, always alight like crystals in the sun. Seated in undress uniform at a table loaded with papers, smoking, giving signatures, having a score of people to see, and a hundred things to do, he yet found means to receive everybody as if he were welcoming the friend whom of all others he had most longed to see. This was his way, and a very pleasant way it was.

“ We will not consider you absent on leave,” he said to Roland. “ As you have no particular duty to do at present, you may go where you please, provided you can be summoned to Paris at twenty-four hours' notice.”

“ If there were a war, I should beg to be sent on active service, your Excellency,” said Roland, respectfully.

“That is a matter of course, D’Alma, and we will take care of you,” was the answer; “but”—and the Marshal lowered his voice, glancing at a secretary who was writing letters at a side table—“there will be no war. Our demonstration of being ready to fight will be enough.”

This was the opinion of most well-informed men at the moment. When Roland started for England in the evening, he took with him, for perusal in the train, half a dozen newspapers, which declared that Prussia “dared not fight.” The crowing Gallic Cock was persuaded that he had frightened the Black Two-headed Eagle.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DUKE AT LEWBURY.

THE Corringtons had no idea that any difficulties had arisen as to the Duke's marriage. They knew little of the French marriage laws beyond this—that a man was obliged to have the consent of his parents before he married; but Roland was an orphan, and it was not supposed that an aged and infirm grandmother had any right to veto his choice of a wife.

The Corringtons were more alarmed at the prospects of a war between France and Germany as being likely to delay Gertrude's wedding; but almost as soon as the fear of this had entered their minds, it was dispelled by a reassuring letter, in which Roland announced his return to Paris from Brittany, and his immediate departure for England. He alluded to the war rumours,

but said, on the faith of what his brother-in-law had told him, that there would be no soldiering for him that year.

Roland was detained in Paris, as we have seen, two days longer than he had anticipated; but on the day before that which he fixed for his return in his letter to Gertrude, Barney arrived at Lewbury with the Duke's horses and men, and they all installed themselves at the Star Hotel. On that day also the Countess de Beaujeu's pretty, sisterly letter reached Gertrude, and Hucks Littlepoint received from M. Ragotin a large registered envelope, containing the draft of the marriage settlement.

Hucks Littlepoint was not learned in French, and had to take the notary's communication to his wife. Kate knew French pretty well, but there were words of legal jargon which she could not make out, and so the papers were referred to Gertrude herself. Even Gertrude, however, found the pointed calligraphy (those French lawyers' clerks write with the hardest and sharpest of steel nibs) and the legal phraseology too much for her. All she could clearly understand was that five hundred thousand francs were to be settled absolutely on herself.

“That makes £20,000. It is a very handsome provision,” remarked Hucks Littlepoint, thinking surely there must be some restrictive clauses.

General Corrington was also rather taken aback by his future son-in-law's munificence. “Do you say, Gertie, that I am appointed sole trustee, and that the securities are to be lodged at my banker's?”

“That's what I understand, papa; but the same thing is repeated over and over again till it becomes puzzling.”

“We must be very particular about every word, as I shall have to make out an English copy,” said Hucks Littlepoint, who was quite nervous, and bit the nails of his lean fingers. It was impossible that he could enter with Gertrude into questions of pre-decease, remainders, and reversionary interest; so he fell to wondering whether there was not a soul in this town of Lewbury conversant with the technicalities of the language spoken by a people living so near to the English coasts. It rather shamed him to conclude there was none. At last he thought of M. Grachard, and sent for that foreigner to come and help him in his difficulty.

The poor *refugée* felt mortally offended at being invited to mix himself up with the affairs of a myrmidon of Napoleon III.'s court ; but he only evinced his resentment by a freezing coldness as he did the work required of him. Hucks, who had not the remotest idea that he had inflicted pain, thanked M. Grachard cordially. The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders, and later in the day apprised Miss Polly Hopkins that next to a priest he knew no creature so despicable as an "imbecile" lawyer.

M. Grachard, however, had been a gainer in pocket by the Duke's engagement. Since we last saw him he had been invited to come daily to Kingshouse and give lessons to Bertha, Mab, and Dick Corrington. The General thought that as his children were going to have a French brother-in-law, they should perfect themselves in the language of Gaul ; whereupon other young ladies and gentlemen in Lewbury decided to brush up their French too. The five Misses Quang, possibly with an eye to matrimonial entanglements with the French nobility, arranged to take lessons twice a week, and Purkiss Nethersole did the same, in order to be in the fashion.

M. Grachard had sorely objected to give lessons at Kingshouse, but was coerced by Miss Hopkins and her mother, and told not to be a "silly." The wretched man, being under the thralldom of these two women, had confessed his dilemma to Laurence Claverley, and vowed his readiness to throw himself into the nearest river ; but Claverley did not want the Frenchman to make open cause with him, and told him so ; and that is how it came to pass that, a day or two before his services were solicited by Hucks Littlepoint, M. Grachard had presented himself at Kingshouse, wearing somewhat the expression of a wolf in a menagerie, who jumps through hoops under protest.

To do him justice, he proceeded to give his first lesson in the surliest manner possible. When he saw Gertrude in her own home, he fairly snarled at her. Her beauty had often excited his admiration when he had beheld her in the streets, but now he saw in her only a traitress. Gertrude, loftily unconscious of these sentiments, asked him innocently whether it was not "his Empress" who set the fashions in Paris ? a question which made him explode. "Non, mademoiselle," he said, grinning with

rage. "To begin with, *I* have no Empress, and I don't know who sets the fashions. Allow me to add that Paris is not merely a city of fashions and frivolities, but the cradle of great ideas and—and—often the scene of grand revolutions."

Gertrude merely arched her eyebrows, but Dick Corrington laughed outright; and he had another laugh on hearing how Grachard had been asked to translate the marriage settlement.

"That Frog is a rum 'un," he observed to his sister Bertha. "It seems he told the Quang girls the other day that there will soon be a revolution in France, and that the Emperor and all his friends will be kicked out of the country. That'll be rather a sell for Gertie, eh? if the Duke has to fly over here and change places with Grachard."

"You are the most disagreeable boy in the world," answered Bertha. "I believe you lie awake in the night thinking of what ill-natured things you shall say to people."

"I read in some book or other that at the time of the great Revolution the noblemen of France came over to England and mixed salads," continued Dick. "Some turned an honest penny as dancing masters, and others as hair-

cutters. I wonder what line the Duc d'Alma would take up with? I begin to understand now why he has settled such a pot of tin on Gertrude."

"You can do nothing but attribute ignoble motives to people."

"It's not ignoble to provide for to-morrow if you live in a country where you are liable to cut and run at any moment. I say, though, it would be rather a lark if Gertie quarrelled with the Duke and refused to give him any of his own tin. Then he'd have to take a guitar, and go singing *tra-la-la* about the streets of Brightport for halfpence."

"That's more than you could do if you were ruined."

"The English are not obliged to cultivate those *talents de société*," observed Dick. "Depend upon it, when you see a frog able to do a dozen things, the beggar has his reasons for being so clever. The very poodles of France have their wits sharpened by the instability of their country's institutions, and are a precious sight 'ceter at earning a living than other dogs."

Bertha could not appreciate such low pleasantries. Gertrude's engagement had con-

siderably raised the position of the Corringtons in the world. Every post brought letters from friends of the General, who offered their congratulations, and many who had not been friends till then were claiming the prerogatives of friendship at this juncture. Lord Oldborn, the greatest man in the county, with his daughters, the Ladies Lucy and Clara Bright, had called at Kingshouse, and several other of the county families had followed suit; for most of them, if they did not know the Corringtons, were acquainted with the Duc d'Alma, owing to his connection with the turf.

Latterly, too, wedding presents had begun to arrive. The back drawing-room was becoming something like a show-room, with its display of albums, inkstands, and tea-services. All this could not but agitate a young lady of Bertha's thoughtful temperament. Her habits of introspection made her examine whether her pride was not inflated by the exaltation of her family, and she confessed to herself that it was sweet to her when the many glories that had burst upon Kingshouse were one day crowned by the General hiring a carriage and pair by the month; for Gertrude and her mother were obliged to go so

often into Brightport now, that the General thought that it would be, on the whole, cheaper and more convenient to have a carriage than to be dependent on trains. But this fine equipage, the first time it drew up at the door, naturally produced a sensation in the parish of Westover; and Bertha felt compelled to write down in her private diary that she had been vainglorious.

Vaingloriousness was the word which Mrs. Nethersole also used in stigmatizing both General Corrington's hired trap and the Duke's showy carriages and horses when they arrived from Paris. Purkiss was moving about the streets when these vehicles and animals wended their way from the railway station, and he promptly went to tell his mother what he had seen.

"Six horses and carriages, did you say, Purkiss?"

"Not six carriages, mamma, but six horses, and regulars stunners! There was quite a crowd round the Star to see them led into the stables by grooms in 'Mossoo's' livery."

"What kind of liveries, Purkiss?"

"Oh, I don't know—tip-top things, either blue or green, I forget which; with cockades on the hats, and coronets on the buttons."

“How supremely ridiculous!” exclaimed Mrs. Nethersole, who, nevertheless, looked all alive with admiring curiosity.

“Claverley’s face was a thing to see,” grinned Purkiss. “He was passing the Star when the whole lot were standing at the door, and I asked him if he didn’t think them A1.”

“Dr. Claverley may be thankful that he is well rid of his entanglement with Gertrude,” replied Mrs. Nethersole. “The airs all those Corringtons give themselves now are sinfully preposterous, and show up their true characters devoid of that humility which is the mark, not only of Christianity, but of good breeding.”

“Gertie looks precious sweet, though,” said Purkiss. “I shouldn’t mind marrying her myself, mother, if you found the coin.”

Mrs. Nethersole’s visage was hardened against her son. “Purkiss, have I not told you again and again not to say such highly improper things in my presence? After the shameful exposure of your misconduct which was made at our party, I should think you ought to be careful in your expressions about girls.”

Purkiss smothered a yawn. “I’ll pay out Kate for that whenever I get a chance. But I

say, mother, I don't suppose they'll invite you to the wedding."

"I have not the slightest wish to go to the wedding," answered Mrs. Nethersole, in a tone which belied her words.

"You'd go, though, if they asked you? I'd like to be invited to the breakfast, and I wish you'd give me a couple of sovereigns to buy Gertrude a present."

"A couple of sovereigns! what next? A copy of the 'Siege of Mansoul' shall be my present to the girl, and you need give nothing at all. Two pounds to that chit, indeed!"

"Well, mother, if I do the right thing, perhaps Flirtie'll invite me to go and stay at the Duke's house in Paris, sometimes—or give me board and lodging, if I run over on spec'. It wouldn't be bad economy to stand well with that Mossoo. If you'd seen his traps and horses, you'd guess what a regular swell he is; and I say, Dick Corrington brags that the Duke has settled £20,000 on Gertie!"

"I don't judge a gentleman by his horses or his money, Purkiss," was the severely sententious axiom which Mrs. Nethersole emitted to avoid meeting her son's worldly-wise proposal with a direct negative or affirmative for the moment.

The Duke was to arrive at Lewbury the next day. The half-dozen best rooms on the first floor of the hotel were retained for his reception, and that of his suite, as the *Lewbury Chronicle* expressed it, though in the way of suite Roland had only his valet Barney. The coachman and groom, however, who had come with the Duke's brougham, wagonette, four carriage-horses, and two for saddle, spread in the course of a few hours such magnificent ideas about their master, that Miss Corrington's lover was regarded by many as in no way inferior to a prince of the blood.

They were both English servants, and looked uncommonly well in their speckless breeches and new coats. Perhaps, having a gaping circle of ostlers and servant-girls to listen to them, they indulged in a little romancing, touching the splendour of the Duke's foreign estate and general style of living. Every Marquis of Carrabas has his cat.

We have heard Mrs. Nethersole declare that all this was "supremely ridiculous." Certainly there was some appearance of ostentation in the Duke's sending down so many horses and liveried servants to Lewbury; but, in the first place,

French noblemen, as it has been already remarked, are not much given to hiding their coronets under their hats in the English way ; and, in the second place, the Duke was, as we know, under some misapprehension as to the whereabouts of Kings-house and the quality of that demesne. He thought it was a large estate, situated at some miles from Lewbury, and which, when he went to pay his daily court to Gertrude, he should have to reach driving or riding. Mrs. Nethersole was quite justified in saying that she hated people who made a fuss, but, in truth, the estimable lady's spleen arose from this—that she now saw Gertrude's marriage and social exaltation were positively about to take place. She had trusted that all sorts of things might turn up to prevent it—that the supposed Duke, for instance, should prove to be a circus-rider. Dear soul ! she did not like to see underbred girls raised above their station. She was sadly afraid that this marriage would be the ruin of dear Gertrude.

It had been a very trying time to Gertrude, waiting for her lover's arrival. Roland had left her at Ostend, saying that he hoped to be away less than a week ; but from one cause and another his return had been delayed for more than a

fortnight. During that time her love had grown apace, fed by his letters. He had been with her at Ostend just long enough to leave a glamour on her vision when they parted. She longed now to behold him again, to hear him talk, to cling to his arm, and to see those kindly eyes of his gazing with confiding fondness into hers. No one could ever be to her again what he had already become to her. Hopes, anxieties, passing thoughts, which formerly she would have communicated to her parents or sisters, she now found herself treasuring up for his ear alone. She dreaded mischances which might keep him away longer. On the night when he was to cross the Channel a summer storm broke, and she stood at her window listening to thunder and rain, which were making an atrocious noise. There was less than a "capful" of wind, as sailors say, but Gertrude's alarms magnified this breeze into a hurricane.

All traces of bad weather had disappeared next morning, and there was a glorious sun blazing over sea and land, when the Duke, feeling none the worse for a rough passage, came to Lewbury from Dover. His wagonette was at the station to meet him, but owing to some doubt as to the hour when he would arrive, none of the

Corringtons were at the station. It was eight o'clock, the hour at which, in all English towns, housemaids are scouring the doorsteps.

“How far is it from Kingshouse?” was the Duke's first question to his coachman, as he issued from the station.

“It is quite close, your Grace. Not five minutes' drive.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the Duke, surprised. “Well, to right or left?” and, springing on to the box, he caught up the reins. “Barney, you can go to the hotel with the luggage, but hand me in those two packages.”

The Duke had changed clothes at Dover, so that there was no disorder of travel in his attire. He looked fresh, happy, and impatient—far too impatient to notice whether Kingshouse was a villa or a palace, as he pulled up his team sharp, with a clatter at the door.

The housemaid of Kingshouse was doing like the other housemaids at Lewbury, and swabbing the doorstep down on all fours, with a dirty cap and a dirtier face. Not a soul in the house was down yet, and the baker, who arrived just behind the Duke, delivered his tale of loaves and rolls into the maid's apron as soon as she had risen

from her knees. In the background of the hall the Duke descried another maid going upstairs with an armful of boots and a can of water.

But instinct told Gertrude who it was that had come. She had been up more than an hour, and, on hearing the horses at the door, ran out of her room without a moment's hesitation.

The Duke, as he entered the house, half concerned, half amused to see that he was taking everybody by surprise, beheld her hastening downstairs, and looking so radiant in her happy blushes.

"My darling!" he cried; and he had caught her in his arms before she could speak.

The housemaid, in her amazement, let fall a loaf into her pail, and all the rolls upon the doorstep; the other maid, equally astonished, mixed the boots and the contents of the water-can together on the first landing. In another minute, you might have heard bells ringing all over the house. The entire Corrington family, having been apprised of the Duke's arrival, were trying to dress in a hurry.

"Let's come into the garden," said Gertrude, laughing a little, when she and Roland had put their heads into three rooms and found them but

half swept and garnished. There was not even a sign of breakfast in the dining-room.

“My dear little one, this is like taking a city by storm!” exclaimed the Duke, in great good-humour. He was pleased as a schoolboy at the sudden commotion he had caused. He liked the look of Kingshouse and everything about it.

“What a picturesque place!” he said, “and what an enchanting garden!”

“Roland, you must let me give you some breakfast,” was Gertrude’s first anxious idea. “I am sure you must be hungry.”

“Yes, my darling, I was famished for a sight of you, and now let me feast my eyes on you a little—under those trees there, where we shall be alone.”

“How long you’ve been away!” she remarked presently, with tender reproach.

“Ah, yes, it was long. Did you find it long, my little one? To me the days seemed all to have lost their wheels, and to be dragging uphill.”

“But you won’t have to go away again, now, shall you?”

“No, no; it is all over now. *Tout est fini*,

arrangé. When next I go, you go with me. And when shall that be, dearest, tell me?"

Gertrude made no direct answer; but, scruti- nizing his face timidly as he twined an arm round her waist, said, "Let me look at you, Roland. You've not been unhappy, have you? Some of your letters read to me as if you were having trouble."

"Yes, darling, I was unhappy at being away from you; everything that delayed my return was a sore trouble."

"But there was nothing—except that?"

"No-o." At that moment, as Gertrude's head nestled on his shoulders, and as her soft eyes looked into his, full of love and wistful inquiry, Roland was minded to tell her every- thing that had happened. She had a right to know; but as he pressed a kiss on her lips, and was still hesitating, Dick Corrington manifested his presence at the end of the alley by a loud use of his pocket-handkerchief. The diplomatic youth had witnessed the kiss, and had retired temporarily under cover, so as not to spoil sport. When he had trumpeted loud enough to startle the pair of lovers, and set them walking demurely side by side, he appeared in the alley, and wished the Duke good morning.

“I have beaten all the others by a neck, Duke, but mother’s a good second; I left her half-way down the staircase, and here she comes. And, Gertrude, I’ve a message for you.” (Here a solemn whisper to his sister.) “*Give me the key of the tea-caddy!*”

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAYS OF COURTING.

THE next few days were the happiest Gertrude had ever known. Roland, eager and assiduous as the youngest of lovers, spent almost all his time with her. He used to come to Kingshouse every morning soon after breakfast, and she enjoyed his society till nearly midnight, with the exception of an hour in the evening, when he returned to his hotel to dress for dinner.

Every day he drove several of the family into Brightport in that beautiful wagonette of his, whose high-stepping horses trotted with a rhythm that was like music. Shopping was the object of these expeditions. Once the Duke took Mrs. Corrington, Gertrude, Bertha, and Dick to London for the same purpose, and the party made merry by lunching at a restaurant.

On this occasion the wedding ring was bought, and the wedding day fixed. There had been a sudden lull in the war rumours. Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern's candidature to the Spanish throne had been withdrawn, and Aimée de Beaujeu's letters to her brother assured him that the peace party was in the ascendant at the Tuileries. People at Lewbury were astonished to see the Duke so cool about the war; but as it was obvious that he must have better information than they as to what was going on, they formed their own prognostications of peace from his demeanour. The Corringtons naturally did so, and the General avoided raising the question as to whether the marriage ought to be put off if war were declared. He only broached the matter to his son-in-law, Hueks.

"Well, that's the Duke's affair, I think," submitted Mr. Littlepoint. "As Gertrude is so well provided for by settlement, her husband's death, if it occurred——"

"Yes, yes, of course; that's what my wife says," answered the General.

"But even if there is a war, it does not follow that he would be killed," continued Hueks.

"I have been in half a dozen wars," said the

General. "War is our business; and soldiers could never marry at all if the chance of being killed were enough to stop them."

The truth is, that when a father sees his daughter on the point of making a splendid match, he does not care to raise obstacles; and in a soldier's eyes war is not an impediment to marriage. Did not Tom Rushforth, of the Carabincers, the General's best friend, get married on the very morning of the day when he had to sail for India during the Mutiny?

So the wedding was appointed to take place in three weeks. Roland was for having it earlier, but he was informed that this was utterly impossible, in view of the preparations necessary according to feminine notions, for so great an event. Then he had to consider whether, and when, he should explain why he was going to be married in an English Church only.

His perplexities on this point were most harassing. At one moment he resolved that he would tell Gertrude of his grandmother's opposition; at another, he shrank from giving her needless pain. As an English ceremony would be valid, why afflict Gertrude by apprising her that she was obnoxious to his family? and why put

himself in the humiliating position of confessing that the laws of his country made him subject to a grandmother in her dotage ?

There was this further point to be faced, that if he told the whole truth, General Corrington would certainly insist that his, Roland's, first duty was to Gertrude, and not to the Marquise. An Englishman was not likely to understand the scruples that withheld a Frenchman from urging his legal rights against an unreasonable old lady. The General would be sure to say that a *sommation respectueuse* ought to be served on the Marquise ; he would postpone the wedding, and all the scandal which Roland was so anxious to avoid would become unavoidable. He deemed it best, then (not without misgivings), to let the Corringtons imagine that by getting his marriage registered in France he would do all that the law required. However, he had almost promised his sister that he would be married in a Catholic as well as in a Protestant Church, and so he talked of having a private ceremony before some Roman Catholic priest at Brightport on the day previous to the public solemnization in the parish church of Westover.

What with trying on dresses, marking the

articles of a trousseau, inviting friends to the wedding, and conferring with bridesmaids, the days which precede a marriage are always well employed. Gertrude was to have six bridesmaids—her two sisters; Roland's little niece (who was expected with her mother at Kingshouse two days before the wedding; that is, in ample time to recover from the horrible *mal de mer*); Miss Jentleigh, the rector's daughter; and two cousins. The five Misses Quang were disappointed that not one of them should have been chosen as a bridesmaid. Having never in their lives said a pleasant thing of Gertrude, they felt they were being treated ungratefully. Their father, however, exhorted them to philosophy, because he had succeeded in worming out an invitation for himself to the wedding breakfast.

Presents continued to pour in, and every evening Gertrude had to write letters of thanks to the friends who sent them. She used to take her desk into a corner of the drawing-room, and Roland would sit beside her to watch her write, and sometimes to help her. At least, he called it helping; but there was so much whispering and quiet laughter between them that the correspondence did not always get on very fast, and

the matter often ended in Gertrude having to finish her letters alone, when Roland had gone.

These were the nice evenings when no strangers were present, and when everything was cosy and familiar. When they had had enough of letter-writing, Roland and Gertrude could stroll into the garden, and wander about the alleys together; while the sounds of Kate Littlepoint's piano-playing reached them through the open windows of the drawing-room.

Kate Littlepoint came in every evening, for she and the Duke had struck up a fast friendship at first sight. Her frank nature delighted him, whilst his gentleness and polished manners made her think him the most charming of men. "You are a very lucky girl, Gertrude," she said, so soon as she had become fully acquainted with her future brother-in-law. "Your husband is one among a thousand."

"I know he is," answered Gertrude, whom love was making quite languorous and sentimental. She was now a very different maiden from the young lady who had earned the sobriquet of "Flirtie."

"Well, but you needn't say it so seriously as that," laughed Kate. "He is a lucky fellow

too ; don't let him forget that. You were never made to be a doctor's wife, my pretty duchess."

"Katie, don't talk to me of that man!" entreated Gertrude, with a piteous look. "I have been so afraid that Roland would find out something about him, and—and it would kill me if he thought I had behaved badly."

"Tut, tut!" said Kate. "He would not think you had behaved badly in preferring him to another man."

"But he might not look at it in that light."

"He would look upon it in the light most favourable to you, dear, you may be sure."

"I don't know. He is so chivalrous in all his sentiments ; he would be shocked at anything like a broken promise."

"But he would not be chivalrous if he believed anybody's word against that of the girl he loved. Why don't you try him, and tell him the truth straight out?"

"Katie dear, I am afraid. I wanted to tell him, but felt as if I had nothing to say for myself."

"Say the worst you please for yourself, and rely upon him to think the best. You have nothing to fear if you are truthful."

Gertrude pondered over that, and the next evening told Roland everything that had passed between herself and Dr. Claverley. She little thought that he knew the story, for nothing in his manner betrayed that he did. He was touched and pleased by her confidence. He answered her half in jest, half seriously, but finally kissed her hands in a transport, exclaiming, "My sweet angel, can I wonder that you have been loved? It is enough for me that you are going to be mine, and that I have your heart, which others could not win. What more could I ask?"

That was really what Roland felt on the subject. All curiosity to investigate the truth as to what he had heard about Gertrude had died out of his mind since he had come back to her and had the living testimony of her love in her constant gladness when she was by his side. He had even put out of memory the scurrilous paragraph in the *Gazette des Cafés*. He had so completely forgotten the signature to this libel, "T. G.," that when Gertrude spoke to him about M. Timon Grachard, it never struck him that this must be the man whose ears he had vowed to cut off.

Gertrude spoke about M. Grachard in conse-

quence of the promise she had made to Polly Hopkins that she would endeavour, through the Duke, to obtain that rabid little man's pardon, though, certainly, M. Grachard did not behave as if he wanted anybody's pardon. When he came to give his lesson to Bertha, Mab, and Dick, he marched through the hall to the schoolroom, never looking to right or left, lest he should meet the Duke and be obliged to bow to him. He was saying now that the Emperor Napoleon wanted to get up a war in order to enslave the French nation once more with his victorious armies, and he swore that he would never enter Kingshouse again if he were asked to exchange a single syllable with the Bonapartist Duke. As M. Grachard was the only French master in Lewbury, his exigencies had to be endured. But Gertrude could not feel very kindly towards him, and she marvelled that any English girl could be ambitious of marrying such a creature.

"The Emperor is very good, is he not, Roland?" she asked, introducing Miss Hopkins' troubles in a roundabout way.

"Yes, very good, my darling—too good, I think; for he is growing weak, and allows his enemies overmuch licence."

“But there is no chance of his being overthrown by Revolutionists, is there?”

“That is a question which we are all asking. But what put the idea into *your* little head?”

“There is a French master here,” said Gertrude, “a Monsieur Timon Grachard, such an odd little man, Roland; he seems to be always in a passion, and his fingers are all brown with cigarette juice. He talks sometimes about revolutions, and I feel a great deal of pity for him, because he is going to marry an English girl, and she would like to go to France with him; but I believe he has been banished from France on account of his opinions.”

“Yes, I have heard M. Grachard's name. He joined in a plot to assassinate the Emperor.”

“Assassinate? Oh, Roland, he surely never did that!” exclaimed Gertrude, horror-stricken.

“Reassure yourself, it is a venial offence. In my country a man who plots to murder the Emperor has more sympathizers than one who conspires to kill his neighbour's rabbit.”

“If papa knew that M. Grachard had done such an atrocious thing as that, he would never allow him to enter the house again,” protested Gertrude, thinking it was very wicked of Miss

Hopkins not to have told her what manner of man her betrothed was.

“*Mon Dieu!* then I have said too much,” laughed the Duke. “You must know that there are two kinds of murderers, my darling. There is the man who instigates to murder by his pen, his speeches, his money. He shows how the crime may be done; he chooses a hireling to perpetrate it; and, if the thing succeeds, he derives all the profit from it. If, on the contrary, it fails, he retires to a land of refuge, and describes himself as a persecuted person. The other kind of murderer is the one who strikes the blow, generally a poor man, ignorant, fanatical, sometimes honest, always brave. This man, whether his crime succeeds or fails, is invariably doomed to public execration, and perishes on the scaffold; but the other man, call him Mazzini, Ledru-Rollin, Grachard, or by what name you please, drapes himself in some fancy title, ‘Patriot,’ ‘Liberator,’ ‘Avenger,’ and claims the applause of the philanthropical. Your M. Grachard has possibly a glorious future before him. If France should ever become a Republic, he will be a senator or minister, and drive others into exile, not merely for plotting, but for think-

ing against himself. Possibly my want of enthusiasm for Republican ideas will cause me to be one of his victims."

"How can you laugh at such things, Roland?" said Gertrude, gently chiding her lover's outburst of careless merriment. "It all seems so dreadful to me! And to think that I was going to ask you to intercede for M. Grachard's pardon!"

"Well, and why not, my little one? My brother-in-law, the Senator, will see what can be done, if you like."

"But supposing this miserable man, after his return to France, were to try again to murder the Emperor?"

"No; as he is a plotter, not a striker, he could conspire more safely in England than in France, if he had a mind to it. But I dare say he considers that he has advertised his name enough by his first escapade; and as a second plot could not make him more eminent than he already is in that red-revolutionary firmament where he plays the part of *shooting star*, it is probable that he will keep quiet. Besides, if he sues for pardon——"

"Ah! but that is just it; he refuses to make

any application at all," said Gertrude. "He declares it would be beneath his dignity."

"I suppose he thinks the Emperor should apologize first. Well, the man is a character, and he interests me. With whom is he going to marry himself?"

"You should say, 'Whom is he going to marry?'" said Gertrude, who had promised to correct her lover's mistakes in English.

"*With* whom is he going to marry?" repeated the Duke, with docility.

"No, not '*with* whom;' say simply, 'Whom is he going——'"

The Duke ended by uttering the sentence correctly; and Gertrude informed him that Miss Mary Hopkins was a needlewoman who worked in the house.

"Then let us help the poor girl," said Roland. "M. Grachard will get no pardon unless he asks for it in writing; but perhaps I might draw up a form of letter which Miss Hopkins could copy, and which he would then sign. This might torture his Republican bosom less than composing the letter himself."

"Oh, Roland, you are too good! And I don't feel that Mary deserves this kindness."

The future duchess was minded to read the future wife of the revolutionist a lecture, and she did so by-and-by. But Polly hearkened only to the promise of intercession which closed the homily. With heightened colour and glittering eyes, she poured out her unaffected thanks.

“Oh, miss, it's so kind of you! You can't tell how glad I am! You see, Tim—that's M. Gratchard—says that if we were in France he could earn twice or three times as much money as he does now, and become a member of Parliament or something of the kind that would make a gentleman of him.”

“But, Mary, M. Grachard has done some very wrong things. I hope, for your sake, he will not mix himself up any more in sedition.”

“He would be quite silly enough to do it, miss, if I let him,” replied Polly Hopkins, with a wag of the head. “He's the obstinatest, most aggravating sort of man you ever saw. He'll talk about shooting people down and cutting their heads off till you feel fit to scream and send for a policeman; but there isn't any more meaning in what he says than in a parrot's talk; and as for hurting anybody, why, lor, miss, he's always giving sixpences to beggars—just as if halfpence

wouldn't do—and coaxing home dirty stray dogs that he picks up in the streets, which mother and I have quite a job to kick them out of the house as fast as he brings them in, telling him it ain't respectable. But it isn't a bit of use, and only shows that he ain't bad-hearted, which is a comfort in a kind of way."

"Don't you think you could prevail upon M Grachard to write a letter to the Emperor, and say he is sorry for what he has done?" asked Gertrude.

"Sorry? Lor, no, miss, he ain't sorry for anything," answered Polly Hopkins. "You wouldn't believe how he sticks to a thing when he's said or done it. I don't even know how it is I manage to get the last word with him sometimes; but I can tell you I feel then as if I'd been fighting for something with an awful squalling tom-cat, barring that Tim doesn't scratch, which he'd better not, knowing that two might play at that game."

"M. Grachard will have at least to sign the letter which the Duke drafts," explained Gertrude; and before evening a copy of this letter was handed to Miss Hopkins. It was characteristic of Roland that he had couched the letter in such

terms that no humiliation whatever would be involved in the signing of it. It was a much more dignified letter than M. Grachard himself could have composed. The Republican was not made to say that he repented of his misdeeds, but simply that he promised to become a peaceable subject if he received a pardon.

This letter Miss Hopkins folded like a bank-note and put into her purse. She was silent and preoccupied all the rest of that day, taking out the note now and then from its receptacle, and spelling through its French words with a knitted brow, whilst her thimbled finger slowly traced the lines. Her knowledge of French was something like a shepherd's knowledge of astronomy, derived from the close observation of certain signs, and completed by guess-work. Like the shepherd, too, she fancied that she knew a great deal more than she did.

CHAPTER XIX.

M. GRACHARD SUES FOR A PARDON.

THE end of all this was that early next morning, Miss Hopkins went to the Star Hotel to see the Duke in private.

The Star Hotel was not accustomed to receive visitors of rank, except at the time of assizes and elections. Most of the people who crossed its threshold all the year round made either for the bar on the left of the hall, or for the billiard-room, which was down a passage to the right. It was a cheerful hall, large and light, which served as a forum to farmers on market days, and on other days was used as a favourite lounge by the gentry of the town. Here Mr. Quang was often to be seen wiping the moisture of sherry and bitters from his lips; while Mr. Purkiss Nethersole, whose habits were frugal, and

who never indulged in wine except at somebody else's expense, contented himself with the less extravagant refreshment of sucking the knob of his umbrella. The walls of the hall were decorated with some hunting pictures, some stuffed foxes in cases, and the customary collection of highly coloured advertisements, framed and glazed. Harmonizing finely with these ornaments was a marble sideboard, protected by a bow sash, behind which were always displayed the delicacies of the season—in summer, joints of lamb, crested with little sprigs of parsley, large bowls of fresh-shelled green peas, or bundles of fat asparagus; and in winter, big barons of beef, flanked by plump hares and appetizing pheasants. But the hall had also a noble staircase of black-stained oak, which had found its way there from some palace which had once existed in the neighbourhood. Antiquaries often came to see this relic, and the landlord was justly proud of it.

Now, since the Duc d'Alma's arrival, the landlord had covered the staircase with a scarlet carpet, which, extending across the hall, formed a broad walk from the street door. With the same reckless magnificence he had placed pots of flowers and evergreens on different coigns of

vantage, and kept a waiter permanently on duty at the entrance, with a clean shirt-front and a well-starched cravat, to make a fuss whenever the Duke came in or went out. It was quite inspiring to behold this waiter, whenever he descried the Duke from afar, whisking his napkin to make imaginary intruders stand aside, rushing headlong into the hall, then out again for no object whatever, and finally shouting to any person of low degree who might be entering the hotel on business, "Now, *will* you stand aside there?"

The natural effect of this was that Roland never entered the hotel without having to pass through a lane of people, who all endeavoured to look as if they had come there by the merest accident. Some, staring at the advertisements on the walls, with their hands very deep in their trousers' pockets, tried to get a sight of him over their shoulders without shifting the position of their bodies; others peered at him over the edges of "Bradshaw," which they pretended to be studying, or through flame and smoke as they lit their pipes. Those who were not too shy to take a good look at the Duke would get on to the roadway of red carpet, so as to exhibit their good

manners by ostentatiously stepping off it to make way for him. All, without exception, would talk about the Duke for half an hour after he had gone by, for the public curiosity about him was not to be sated.

The starched waiter was at his usual post when Polly entered the hotel, but as she told him that she came from Kingshouse, he made no difficulty about sending up her request for an interview to the Duke, who was at breakfast. In a few moments Miss Hopkins was invited to step upstairs.

“I beg pardon for the liberty, sir,” she said rather shyly, as she curtsied to Roland, “but I was afraid I might not see you at Kingshouse this morning, and I wanted you to have this letter as soon as possible.”

“Quite right, my girl,” answered Roland. “Sit down whilst I read it.”

Then Polly Hopkins plumped into a seat, and wondered whether all dukes wore grey cashmere jackets lined with red-quilted satin to breakfast in. She noticed that the Duke dipped sippets of buttered toast into his tea—a habit which she had imagined was peculiar to her Tim, and for which she had oft reproved him as being “pig-

gish." "I suppose they all do it," thought she. "I suppose, too, it's a way with 'em to tuck their napkins under their chins like bibs, just as if they were babies."

"That will do very well," said Roland, glancing up from the letter. "You have copied it nicely, and I see M. Grachard has signed it."

"Yes, sir, Mossoo Gratchard signed it."

"He did not too much make the difficult, I hope?"

"I beg pardon, sir?"

"He did not—well, he signed it readily?"

"Comm' ça M'sso," answered Polly, airing one of her little bits of French, with a blush and a slight laugh. "It's signed, anyhow. Please, your Grace, when shall I have the answer back?"

"Ah, when? You have no experience of Government offices, Miss Mary, that you ask that? However, M. Grachard is an important person, and they will be glad to see him ask pardon, so that I dare say they will not make you wait long."

Miss Hopkins rose from her seat as if to say good-bye; but, advancing towards the table, she stood for a moment irresolute, then hoped the Duke would not take it unkindly if she asked

him whether it was prudent in her to believe all that M'soo Gratchard said about himself? She was a poor girl who did not want to be deceived. Nor did her mother. She was fond of M'soo Gratchard, and all that; but she'd be sold like a cheap joint, you see, if, going to France with a foreigner, she found he hadn't any respectable livelihood. Was it true that in France people made fortunes by writing lots of things in the papers against clergymen and policemen?

"Yes, truly, very rapid fortunes can be made in that way," laughed Roland. "Does M. Grachard write much now in that style?"

"Yes, sir, a great deal, and he lays by all the money he gets, saying he'll start a newspaper of his own; which, as mother says, ain't to her thinking such safe kind of speculation as buying a good house and letting out the upper storeys to lodgers. But then, being an editor, and having free orders for the play and all that, is, of course, more genteel."

"Yes," replied Roland, absently, for all at once he remembered the *Gazette des Cafés*, and the initials 'T. G.' "Do you know for what papers M. Grachard writes, Miss Hopkins? Have you ever heard of the *Gazette des Cafés*?"

“That’s one for which he does write, sir. A bit of a paper not half so big as the *Daily Telegraph*, but costs three-halfpence, he says, and comes over to him with a yellow band round it regular every morning.”

“So, so,” muttered Roland, and for a moment he frowned; but then an expression of ineffable disgust passed over his face. He was thinking that this Timon Grachard who had slandered Gertrude, and was not ashamed afterwards to seek her good offices for obtaining his pardon, must be the most abject of crawling insects. He glanced again at the man’s signature, then pushed the letter from him with loathing; and he would have dismissed Polly without another word, but a reflection suddenly arrested him. M. Grachard was, like himself, a Frenchman about to marry an English girl. How had he surmounted all the legal difficulties which beset Frenchmen in such cases?

“How are you going to be married?” he asked Polly, speaking much more dryly than before.

“Ah, that’s just it, sir. You see, my Tim (that’s Mossoo Gratchard) can’t abide the sight of a church or parson. You’d think that man was

a heathen to hear the way he goes on. Mother, who always brought me up as a church-goer, though she isn't one of the psalm-singing sort, but regular at evening service, summer and winter, at seven o'clock, no matter who the curate is, she spoke to Miss Jentleigh about our wedding, and miss said it wouldn't be respectable if we weren't married at church. That's why mother and I have been pressing Tim so to have the banns put up; but he won't, and I know I shall have an awful to-do to make him give in at the end."

"Miss Jentleigh was wrong to give you such advice," remarked Roland, with a lively recollection of his own troubles.

"But Miss Corrington says the same thing, sir."

"Ah! that is another matter. Two ladies are against me, so I must be mute. All I wanted to know was whether you were going to have any other wedding besides that in the church?"

"No, sir, Mossos Gratchard wants us to be married before the registrar."

"Well, if he's to get pardoned you had better make haste about your wedding, Miss Hopkins. M. Grachard might run over to France and find

some other young lady who would not tease him about his religion."

The Duke spoke in jest, but Polly started and reddened. The possibility of her Tim suddenly decamping, with the free pardon which she had obtained for him, had never occurred to her. She comforted herself by remembering that Tim would not be likely to levant without his beloved books, and that he could not remove these from his lodgings unseen by herself or her mother. However, she thanked the Duke seriously for his hint. "I'll pack off M'soo to get a licence, and there shan't be any more delay," she said with decision.

It must be added that before day closed, M. Timon Grachard was made relatively happy by Miss Hopkins' abandonment of her religious "crotchets." Mrs. Hopkins likewise surrendered, grumbling. Mother and daughter had had a conference, from which it ensued that the little Frenchman was requested to purchase a licence without further delay.

"C'est bien," he answered ; not, indeed, in the thrilling accents which a bridegroom is expected to use at such a crisis in his life affairs, but with a grim sort of satisfaction that the ceremony of

uniting him to Miss Hopkins was not going to be rendered additionally grievous through being performed by a priest.

The clerk of Westover church—a credible witness—has always declared that one night when it rained and thundered he saw a small man pause opposite the church tower, brandish his umbrella, and yell several times, “Aha! Aha!” and it is supposed that this demonstrative personage was M. Grachard rejoicing in the triumph he had obtained over clericalism by persuading Miss Hopkins to get married before a registrar.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CORRINGTONS' BALL.

THE war-clouds were gathering very darkly now. Aimée de Beaujeu wrote to her brother that the Count and his political friends hoped by the Empress's support to carry their point against their vacillating Emperor, who was inclined towards peace. Marshal Lebœuf had plainly told their Majesties that the army was not ready for a long campaign, to which the Empress had answered, that a Marshal of France ought to be ashamed of using such pusillanimous language.

“The Marshal wanted to resign,” wrote Aimée; “but the Emperor, in that winning way he has, laid a hand on his shoulder and begged him as a personal favour *not to mind what a lady said*. So it seems we shall have war unless those Prussians go down on their knees to beg our

pardons ; but I hear it will be a very short campaign, something like that against Austria—just two or three rapid victories, then we shall offer peace ; and the Emperor coming back victorious will chain up and muzzle all those noisy mongrels—as my husband calls them—the Gambettas, Rocheforts, Ferrys and others. The end of this will be, I suppose, that I shall have to give up my visit to Baden.”

Roland had no doubt whatever that France could beat Prussia in very quick time ; and the prospect of the campaign being a short one enabled him to speak comfortingly to Gertrude, whenever this dismal subject forced itself upon their conversations. It naturally did so every morning when the newspapers had been read and discussed, and Gertrude was made sad and angry to see that public opinion in England was against the French. There were newspapers which she asked her father not to read any more, because they were “so unreasonable and wicked in siding with Bismarck.”

What pangs and terrors the sweethearts of soldiers feel cannot be understood by ordinary girls ; but Gertrude, as the daughter of a soldier and the sister of two brothers who wore uniform,

had to show spirit. Dick was very good to her in repeating that the Prussians were going to be "licked into smithereens." All the fellows at Woolwich were saying so. The French had got a jolly new *mitrailleuse*, which could be worked with no more trouble than a coffee-mill, and so on.

This was very pleasing to hear after what Roland himself said, and Gertrude tried with all her might to believe that there would only be a short campaign, at the end of which her husband would be a general. Meanwhile it was arranged that the wedding day might be advanced if occasion required it. Aimée de Beaujeu undertook to get her brother's transfer from the staff to a cavalry regiment managed for him, and to warn him by telegraph at least three clear days before the order to join his corps was going to be sent him. But it might be that this summons would come at any moment, and it was quite a settled matter between Gertrude and Roland that the marriage should not be put off because of the war. During the short campaign, Gertrude should go and stay with the Countess de Beaujeu, who would take her to Châteaufort. Perhaps Roland might just have the time to run down to

Châteaufort himself with his bride ; but in any case, Aimée, during his absence, would take charge of her grandmother and the Château, and see that neither Pauline Juva nor anybody else kindled the Marquise's mind against Gertrude. And one of Gertrude's sisters should accompany her to France, so that she might not feel too lonely among strangers while her husband was away.

All this was concerted by Roland with minute forethought, and Bertha was, of course, the sister chosen to go with Gertrude. That highly conscientious young lady, who had once propounded, at her Mutual Improvement Society, the question as to whether people had any moral right to kill beetles and mice, now found herself musing that it would be very nice if the armies of two nations began to slaughter each other, because otherwise she would not go on the pleasurable visit to the French Château.

Nevertheless, the last chance of peace was not absolutely gone ; there remained just one chance. One fine morning the newspapers all opined that the King of Prussia was going to give satisfaction to the demands of France, exaggerated as these were ; and it was on this day

—a most glad one to Gertrude—that a grand ball was given at Kingshouse.

The invitations to this feast had been sent out a day or two after the Duke's arrival in Lewbury, for Mrs. Corrington had felt that she really must give a party. Old friends could be invited to meet the Duke at dinner; but the Blacks, the Browns, the Whites, the Greens, who had been sending cards and presents to Gertrude, could not all be asked to dinner, and it was obviously politic to acknowledge their civilities by setting them to dance with one another. Gertrude had been very eager about this ball. How nice it would be to valse with Roland, and see him organize a *cotillon*! His fame as a dancer was great, and everybody had heard that for two or three seasons past he had been leading the *cotillons* at the Tuileries balls. He promised now to invent some new figures for the dance at Kingshouse. Bertha and Mab circulated these joyful tidings, and Lewbury was on the tiptoe of expectation.

The General gave *carte blanche* as to expense. The house would not have been large enough to hold all that were bidden, and a tent was set in the garden for supper—weather favouring. Five

greengrocers, in swallowtails, arrived early to officiate as waiters. Part of the supper was made in the house, part was ordered from the local confectioner, and another part had to be sent in from Brightport; so that up to the last moment there was a stimulating uncertainty as to whether the three parts would be brought together at the right minute. Pastrycooks who lent plates and glasses, nurserymen who hired out flower-pots for the evening, musicians, carpenters, and upholsterers—all gave trouble, caused alarms by doing the wrong thing or not doing the right one, and had to be scolded after their respective kinds.

All the flys in Lewbury had been requisitioned to fetch each at least half a dozen families residing in different places, punctually at the same hour of half-past ten; whence it arose that five out of every six families drove to the ball in a state of shrill irritation with the flymen for being unpunctual.

The officers of the Brightport garrison had been invited, and drove over on their drag, all in uniform. Being a crack regiment, the splendour of their habiliments and their self-complacent looks caused a flutter among the young ladies, and quite eclipsed the local gallants. Mr.

Purkiss Nethersole only counted as a poodle among these lions. However, as there were partners for everybody, and as everybody had to dance and dance again owing to the activity with which the Duke bestirred himself to keep the fun in perpetual flow, it was pronounced a wonderfully successful ball.

Roland appeared in the magnificent uniform of the Imperial Guides—his old regiment—green jacket profusely laced with gold, and a flying dolman lined with scarlet. Thus accoutred, he cut a figure to make any bride proud and enviable in the sight of her maiden friends. But though the Duke captivated general admiration by his appearance, he consolidated his popularity by the irresistible dash and geniality of his behaviour. A Frenchman has no notion of a slow ball. Roland would tolerate no wall-flowers; he contrived that the plainest and dullest girls in the room should find partners, and to set a good example he began by dancing with them himself. He gave each of the five Misses Quang a turn; he asked Mrs. Nethersole if she would foot a measure, and actually dragged her unresisting through one of the figures of the *cotillon*. All through that long dance he kept

scattering pleasant words about him like *bon-bons*; he made everybody laugh; even the youngest subs of the crack regiment forgot to be stilted and to "haw-haw."

"Really, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Nethersole, panting, to a crony, "you'd take the man for a comic actor. I shouldn't wonder if it turned out that he was a changeling, the son of one of those acrobats who go about fairs with dancing dogs. Poor dear Gertrude! what a life she'll lead with him. Such a man never cares for home, my dear. He'll be gallivanting about with other women till he breaks his wife's heart. Oh! if I had a daughter she should never marry a Frenchman, though he might call himself by what titles he pleased; and in France, you know, people may sport what titles they like, for there is no peerage to regulate such things."

"I thought he was very nice," rejoined the crony, meekly. She often went to Mrs. Nethersole's for afternoon tea, without ever returning the hospitality, and so did not like to be disputatious.

"Oh nice, my dear: they're all nice. Lord Byron writes in one of his books that the most polite man he ever met picked his pocket. O

certimong, Duke——” This was said abruptly, in response to an affable wave of the hand which the Duke made as he was passing by.

Choosing to misinterpret this salute as an offer to escort her to supper, Mrs. Nethersole promptly darted from her seat and took the Duke's arm. Supper had just been announced, and Roland was going to take down Gertrude; but Gertrude had to smother her disappointment under a pleasant smile, while Mrs. Nethersole flowed by her, nodding in a patronizing maternal way, and saying, “Dear girl, you are looking a little pale to-night; all this dancing must have tired you. You should rest a while, and have a cup of tea.”

Mrs. Nethersole naturally divined that when the Duke had catered for her wants, he would try and get back to the ball-room to fetch Gertrude; but she frustrated this move as long as she could by compelling him to dance attendance on herself. When he had filled her plate with lobster salad, and her glass with champagne, she prayed for a little iced water in a tumbler; then for a piece of bread, if there was such a thing in the house, for she mistrusted the rolls supplied by confectioners for evening parties, having

heard that they were generally made of flour ground from old mutton-bones. By the time the bread was forthcoming the salad had gone, and Mrs. Nethersole thought she should like just the merest cut from the breast of a chicken, with a slice of ham off the upper end. She would take just a half-glass more champagne, too, if you please.

“Dear me! it’s very kind of you to be so attentive to an old woman like me, Duke,” she simpered at last, with her eye on some jelly. “But I guessed at first sight that we should like each other. You must come and dine quietly with my son and me one of these evenings; you really must.”

“I should have been most happy, but——”

“Oh! I can take no refusal; I positively cannot. Thank you, a little of that iced pudding, please. We live at Priory Crescent, and I know you will tell me that your time is fully occupied, but you will contrive to spare one evening.”

“I have been obliged to refuse so many kind invitations already,” said the Duke, and at that moment he was opportunely relieved of Mrs. Nethersole by Dick Corrington’s intervention;

but he fell from Scylla into Charybdis, for as he turned away he was pounced upon by Mr. Quang.

That rosy little gentleman, agreeably to his passion for getting up entertainments, had been going about among the male guests to propose that a public banquet should be given to the Duc d'Alma in the Corn Exchange of Lewbury, not only as a compliment to the Duke himself, but to express the sympathies of the British nation for the Emperor of the French. What title Mr. Quang had to speak for the British nation was not manifest, but he belonged to that political race who are always taking the echoes of their own tongues for the voice of the multitudes. And as a goose going through a gap leads other geese, he had found plenty of gentlemen to concur in his proposal; some because they liked to dine in public, others because they did not like to refuse subscribing for a guinea ticket, and others because the sherry and champagne they had imbibed had temporarily convinced them of the propriety of giving a proof of goodwill to the French sovereign and people. So Mr. Quang's pocket-book was getting to be full of names, and the little man already saw him-

self taking the chair at the banquet, sending a telegram to the Emperor to say that his Majesty's health had been drunk, and receiving a message in return which he would keep framed in his study for evermore. But first the Duke must be sounded as to his willingness to accept a public banquet at the Corn Exchange, and it was a grievous disappointment to Mr. Quang when Roland gaily declined the proffered honour.

“ You would end by killing me with your hospitalities, you are all so kind, Mr. Quang ; I have received at least half a dozen invitations this evening.”

“ But this, your Grace, is a public banquet ; half political, I may say.”

“ Ah ! but I never mix myself in politics !”

“ I mean international exchange of courtesies. We should be both happy and proud to give a proof of our friendship to your country.” And Mr. Quang, drawing himself up, looked almost ambassadorial : but at this the Duke only made a grave bow ; and as he had more experience than Mr. Quang in the official ways of putting off bores, he got out of the invitation by declaring he should like to accept it at some

future time, when his engagements were less pressing.

Men in love are never disposed to be critical about the relatives or friends of their intended wives; but the Duke had begun to perceive that Gertrude's family did not exactly occupy the rank he had imagined. Most of his own English friends were men of high station and wealth, and it certainly would have pleased him to discover that some of them were General Corrington's friends too.

The odd gentility of the Quangs and Nethersoles, the airs of the Blacks, Browns, and Whites—whose daughters, during the breathless pauses of a dance, all trumped up titled relatives like court cards at beggar-my-neighbour—grated upon him a little because he was anxious that the family at Kingshouse, and their acquaintances, should produce a good impression on his sister when she came to Lewbury for the wedding.

The Countess de Beaujeu was truly a *grande dame*, and anything that smacked of *bourgeoisie* excited her unmerciful raillery. Like that Duchess, who, during the Terror, was told that she must disguise herself as a tradesman's wife

or as a peasant girl, she would pertly have said, "*Paysanne tant qu'on voudra, bourgeoise jamais.*"

Roland could only hope that the Countess and Gertrude would like each other by instinct at first sight, and that as the Countess would remain in Lewbury for no more than a couple of days, she would not have time to notice anything ludicrous in the Corringtons or their surroundings.

Gertrude at the ball had been seeking an opportunity of presenting the Rector's daughter, Susan Jentleigh, who was a great friend of hers, to Roland. While the Duke was in the toils of Mrs. Nethersole, the two girls had withdrawn to a conservatory to rest and chat a little. Presently the Duke, having emancipated himself from Mrs. Nethersole and Mr. Quang, appeared, looking for Gertrude.

"Here is Roland, Susie: let us come out from the shelter of these orange trees, or he won't see us."

"How well he wears that splendid uniform, dear!" said the Rector's daughter, playfully. "Doesn't it make you feel strange to own absolute proprietorship in such a hero, and to call him Roland?"

“Yes, it does,” laughed Gertrude; “but what am I to call him?”

“I was only joking, dear: call him Roland by all means, till you make it Roley—which will be soon, I dare say.”

“Mab already calls him Roley,” said Gertrude. “I am thankful she hasn’t come to *Poley* yet, but she will in time.”

Somebody drew the Duke away just as he was entering the conservatory, so the girls were left alone for a little while longer. Then Susan thought that she ought to speak a word in season to her friend. People had been saying in the town that Gertrude, after her marriage, would certainly become a Roman Catholic, and this was most afflicting to the Rector’s daughter. Susan was too earnest in church matters to consider proprieties of time and place; or if she did consider them it was only to reject scruples which her innate refinement might have prompted by upbraiding herself as a moral coward. Therefore she told Gertrude outright what people were saying.

“This is an odious town,” protested Gertrude, turning scarlet. “I believe every one in it, except yourself, Susan, is jealous of my happiness.

Roland would never think of asking me to become a Catholic."

"I thought not," replied Susan Jentleigh, evidently relieved. "But don't be offended, Gertie; marriages between persons of different religions inevitably give rise to conjectures like this, and it is natural that people who know you should hope that you will not be converted."

"I don't see what business it is of people's whether I am converted or not, Susan."

"Oh, it would grieve me terribly, dear, if such a thing happened. I should be so glad to think of your carrying our religion to a foreign land. One in your high station could do so much by example." Thereupon Miss Jentleigh developed her views as to what a Protestant Duchess might do, and the sinful way in which the French spent their Sundays was pointed out as the first thing calling for immediate reform.

Now, on this question of Sunday observance, Gertrude resolved to take a stand at once: she was not going to make herself miserable by setting up any principles of her own against those of her husband. She foresaw that Roland would never expect her to give up any particle of her religion; but if, in his good-natured way,

he allowed her to spend Sunday according to her own tastes whilst he himself went to horse-races, theatres, and parties, that would not do at all.

“ Catholics do not think about Sunday as we do,” she said. “ I shall have no peace, Susan, if I take to preaching.”

“ But would you go to theatres and balls on Sundays ? ”

“ Yes, if *he* went.”

“ If he really loves you, Gertrude, he would not think of asking you to go, and he would not go himself. Would it not be straightforward of you to tell him what the rules of our church are before you marry, so that he may never tempt you into evil through ignorance ? ”

“ But it would not be evil if *he* saw no sin in it.”

“ Gertie, Gertie, it would. Don't, dear, trifle with your faith at such a period of your life as this. If you act courageously now, there need never be any dissensions between you and your husband on a matter settled once and for all.”

“ What a girl you are ! ” ejaculated Gertrude. But the dispute was cut short here by the Duke's reappearing. Gertrude would have been so

happy to link her arm in his and get away out of sight and sound of everybody; but she had to introduce her friend.

“Roland, this is Miss Jentleigh, who is going to be one of my bridesmaids.”

“Must I ask her to dance?” was the query which Roland conveyed by a glance, and a doleful little nod was Gertrude’s reply.

Accordingly the Duke led out Susan for a quadrille.

Miss Jentleigh only danced square dances, and she deemed it decorous in a Rector’s daughter, keeping house for her father, always to wear black dresses. However, she did not object to crimson roses or carnations, and some bunches of these flowers set in her skirt and in her hair became her very well.

“So it is your father who will officiate at my wedding, Miss Jentleigh?” said Roland, after the first figure. “Your name will remain dear to me because of that.”

“There will be another ceremony beside that at our church, I suppose?” answered Susan.

“Yes, probably; though, to my mind, the blessing pronounced by your excellent father would be enough.”

"I, of course, think so, but . . ." And here, surely, was an opening for another word in season. At the next rest Susan asked her partner if he had ever attended a service of the Church of England.

"No, I think not; but it is never too late to begin. I will go next Sunday."

"Will you? Gertrude will be so pleased."

"Indeed? Then I thank you for having informed me of the way to give her pleasure."

Nevertheless Roland made no allusion to this matter of going to church when, a few minutes later, he at last got a valse with Gertrude. He did not think a ball-room was the place for religious topics. To the dreamy strains of Oliver Métra's *Valse des Roses*, which was a novelty in that year, he went round and round the room with Gertrude, exciting general admiration by his graceful step and easy skill in "reversing;" for, consummate dancer as he was, he never stopped till the music ceased, and yet he never tired his partners. After this valse he danced no more with anybody, except Gertrude, and so the ball ended happily to her.

Altogether it had been a most enjoyable entertainment — everybody said so, everybody

thought it ; and by the time the company had separated in the full sunshine of morning, the French Duke had established himself as a universal favourite, and it was the general opinion that Gertrude was a fortunate girl.

CHAPTER XXI.

“ THE DOG’S BITE.”

BUT this was to be *un beau jour sans lendemain*—one of those that set in rosy sunlight and herald in a morning of grey mist and rain. Towards noon Roland was breakfasting at his hotel. His sitting-room was a large place, with greenish paper, and furniture of faded red damask. The carpet was growing string-bare, though it must have been a fine one in its day, for this was the room where county ladies lunched at election-time, while county gentlemen addressed the populace out of the bow-window, ducking their aristocratical heads good-humouredly at the tokens of popular affection thrown at them from the street. On the walls hung print portraits of several of these county gentlemen, all with whiskers, double-breasted hunting coats, hats on their hips, and whips under their arms.

Roland, as he sat at a broad table spread with some of the old-fashioned silver of the hotel, and sipped his tea out of a big cup, dark blue inside and out, glanced at missives which the morning's post had brought. A kind soul, anonymous, had sent him a parcel of tracts directed against Papists, and the Secretary of some Association for Removing Motes out of Neighbours' Eyes had written to ask if he would receive a deputation anxious for the suppression of divers evils in his country—in particular the sale of spirituous liquors in cafés. Turning from these displays of a philanthropy peculiarly British—for what English traveller has ever been asked to receive a deputation of Frenchmen anxious to purify Seven Dials, or to amend our licensing laws?—Roland took up the *Times*, which contained important news. War was going to be declared, and the news was in good earnest this time. He was so interested that he left his breakfast unfinished, and walked to the bow-window, where he read, standing.

It was a market day—a slushy, sloppy market day. The High Street was full of cattle, sheep with soaken fleeces, and squealing pigs; but the farmers, as they trudged in the mud and

put their coat-collars up to ward off the drizzle of rain, were not so intent as usual upon buying and selling. They kept pulling crumpled newspapers out of their pockets and pointing out passages thereof to one another, nor was it difficult to see that they were discussing the outbreak of the fire which was perhaps about to set all Europe in a flame. The French soldier noted all this, and whilst he looked out of the window, beginning to wonder why he himself had received no tidings from his sister, the telegram which he expected was brought to him by Barney. The Countess de Beaujeu wired :—

“War going to be declared. You are appointed to command 12th Cuirassiers, with promotion to coloneley. You must be in Paris within four days at the latest. Telegraph immediately to acknowledge receipt of this. Your marriage will be postponed, I suppose, so I shall not go to England.”

“Barney, it is war!” exclaimed the Duke, turning with a glow on his face, and waving the paper in his excitement.

“Indeed, sir? . . . The Prussians are going to catch it, then?”

“They are; and . . . I marry myself to-

morrow. To-day I buy a licence—our wedding will be quite private. It will be a short notice ; but needs must when Monsieur de Bismarck drives.”

“The Duchess won't go with your Grace to France?” asked Barney, who was a little more moved than he cared to show at the prospect of being separated from his master, for, as a civilian, he could not attend the latter during a campaign.

“Yes,” said Roland. “The Duchess will go to Châteaufort. Her sister, Miss Bertha, will accompany her, and you shall escort them. I wish I could take you with me, my good Barney, but I shall be obliged to have a regimental servant.”

“I was in 'opes, sir, they'd let me go with you,” said Barney. “For the matter of that, I wouldn't mind taking service in your Grace's regiment during the war.”

“And the drills, and the riding-school? You forget you would have to be sent to a dépôt for six months and longer ; before six months the war will be over.”

Barney had it on the tip of his tongue to say that he could ride against any French trooper

who ever bestrode a pigskin; but this would hardly have been complimentary. His master asked him for a sheet of paper, and drafted a telegram to Paris, which Barney presently carried downstairs to the hotel porter.

As Barney elbowed his way through the hall, receiving nods from several farmers with whom he had scraped an acquaintance, the barmaid of the “Star,” espying him through an open door, beckoned him to her counter. Barney was always very sweet with barmaids when they were stylish and cheerful like this one, who had dimples and saucy eyes, and a cherry ribbon in her glossy black hair.

“Well, the Duke is going, I suppose?” whispered the damsel. “But what about the wedding? I’m dying to know.”

“There’ll be a wedding, Miss Carry, but quiet-like.”

“What, no bells or bridesmaids?”

“Little of that—but keep it dark.”

“Trust me.”

“Trust you for telling.”

“Well, there isn’t any use knowing a thing if you can’t tell it,” said the barmaid; “but what’s come over *you* this morning, that you

look so down? Men generally make-believe to be glad when they're going to war."

"I ain't going; that's why I'm down."

"Ah! would you like a glass of that curaçoa?" Whether there was implied scepticism in this proposal, or whether the barmaid was simply "cornered" by the display of valet's valour, there is no saying. Barney certainly did not regard the offer of curaçoa as an allusion to Dutch courage.

"I was going to ask it, Miss Carry. It isn't very pleasant to part with a good master, and to think that one of those German roughs may send a bullet through him."

"I wish you'd tell me what the war's about," said the pretty barmaid, as she poured out the beverage.

"Oh, it comes of some quarrel between Boney and Biss—that's the Emperor and Bismarck."

"Why don't they fight it out between 'em, then, I say, like the old song?—

"Let those who make the quarrels
Be the only ones to fight."

"Here's my respects and I'm off," replied Barney with a wry smile, and he swallowed the

liqueur. “I was forgetting this telegram; and I’ve got a busy day before me, too, if the wedding’s for to-morrow.”

He was off; despatched the telegram, and returned to his master, who had been dressing, and was ready to start for Kingshouse.

“Barney,” said the Duke, “there is an official who delivers licences of marriage—you will have to find out his address—the Protonotaire or Surrogät, I think they call him.”

“‘*Brought-a-note-here,*’ ‘*Sorry-cat,*’” echoed Barney. “Those must be nicknames, your Grace.”

“No; ask downstairs, and they will tell you.”

“I’ll ask, sir; but I’ve always heard it’s a Dr. Commons that sells marriage licences, and I’m sure he lives in London. I’ve seen his servants standing at a gate near St. Paul’s with white aprons on.”

“You are taking the Piræus for a man,” laughed the Duke.

“I beg pardon, sir?”

“Never mind; do as I tell you, and learn at what hours licences may be bought.”

Roland had been residing just a fortnight in

England, so that he was qualified to apply for a marriage licence; and he knew that Gertrude was fully prepared for a marriage at short notice if the emergency required it. Of course he had no idea of delaying his marriage, as his sister proposed.

He was an object of more than usual curiosity to bystanders as he walked out of the hotel, for the news imparted to the barmaid had quickly circulated; and a man who is going to be married in a hurry is almost as interesting as one who is going to be hanged. He reached Kingshouse, and had hardly rung when the door opened, and Mrs. Nethersole flounced out, literally turning up her nose at him as she went by:—"Bong djoor, Mossoo, oh wee, tray bo tong, bong djoor." In these words the good lady seemed to give him the cut direct.

"Curious old dame! what flea can have bitten her?" thought Roland, and, walking in, he asked to see Gertrude.

But he was shown into the study, and there he found the General, Mrs. Corrington, and Hucks Littlepoint, all looking as if they had just received a piece of news which had upset them. Attributing their emotion to the war

intelligence in the morning’s papers, Roland communicated his sister’s telegram, and without delay urged that his immediate marriage was necessary.

Then the General checked him in a nervous manner, by putting a written paper before his eyes and saying—

“Are you sure, Duke, that you have not made some mistake about the marriage laws of your country? I am told that Gertrude would not become lawfully your wife unless you went through all the formalities specified on that paper.”

“Who wrote this?” asked Roland in an altered voice; and glancing at the paper he perceived that it contained a minute statement as to the French marriage laws. All the French terms used were correctly spelt, and the writer had evidently been consulting the Code Civil; but he said nothing about marriages conditionally valid, such as that which the Duke wished to contract.

“I think we ought to say who gave us that,” remarked Mrs. Corrington, who, seeing the Duke’s emotion, was full of sympathy for him, and put little faith in the paper. But the

General hesitated, muttering something about a promise, and Hucks Littlepoint coughed as if he thought the revelation ought not to be made.

“We can't have any mysteries about such a thing as this,” continued Mrs. Corrington, disregarding these hints. “Roland (she had never called him by his Christian name before), it was Mrs. Nethersole who brought us this paper. She came early this morning before any of us were up, left the paper, and returned about an hour ago to have a talk about it. I suspected that she must have got her information from a doctor in this town who is a great friend of M. Grachard, the French master. So we have been questioning M. Grachard, and he made no secret of having dictated this paper to——”

“Grachard? Ah! a dog's bite is below the knee!” exclaimed the Duke. “Is M. Grachard still in the house?”

“No, he went away before Mrs. Nethersole came; but he admitted having dictated the paper to Dr. Claverley.”

“Dr. Claverley!” Roland looked up and Mrs. Corrington reddened, for the name had slipped from her unawares. Upon this Hucks Littlepoint became very fidgety, having noticed

the Duke’s tone in pronouncing Claverley’s name.

“Well, of course, Alma, we have every confidence in you,” cried the General in his loud voice; “but as we are both soldiers and don’t know much about law, we must take care that no mistakes are made. That’s Hucks’ opinion.”

“Mossiou Grachard was very explicit,” observed Mr. Littlepoint.

“He said the most shocking things,” broke out Mrs. Corrington indignantly; for, in her fear that Roland should be offended, she lost all patience with Mrs. Nethersole, Dr. Claverley, and M. Grachard.

“Well, my dear, let’s hear what Alma has to say,” interrupted the General.

Roland, exasperated as he was, could only tell the truth; but the interference of Claverley and Grachard in his affairs caused him such deep annoyance that he spoke in a rather proud and peremptory tone, and not at all like a man on his defence.

This did him good with Mrs. Corrington. Before he had finished his mortifying account of family worries, the good lady saw that he had acted for the best, and was persuaded that a

purely English marriage would be perfectly valid. But this was not the view taken by the Lewbury lawyer.

“Supposing you—you were to be killed in war, Duke?” said this gentleman, blinking through his spectacles at Roland. “I understand that if all goes well you would have power to prevent your grandmother from getting your marriage cancelled; but you would not have that power if you got killed within the coming twelvemonth.”

As one blow striking the pedestal of a column may lay the whole in ruins, so the structure of Roland's plans and hopes fell under this argument of Hucks'. It was an unanswerable argument.

The Duke stared and bit his lips. In providing for his marriage he had calculated every possibility except that of his own death. Quite a minute elapsed—and this was a long time—before it occurred to him that his sister would stand by Gertrude if he were killed in battle. Inwardly he was persuaded that his whole country would stand by his widow, and that neither the Emperor nor any French judge would suffer a marriage to be broken which had been solemnized *in articulo mortis*, as it were, by

an officer bearing the name of Alma. And in so thinking he was right; but his romantic faith in sister, Sovereign, and country sounded only as unbusinesslike equivocation to the English solicitor.

“If we could be quite sure of the Countess de Beaujeu’s intentions,” remarked Hucks Littlepoint with a shake of the head.

It was unfortunate that Hucks said *we* instead of *you*, for now the Duke felt affronted. “Will you please put the dots on the i’s?” he said with dignity.

“Do what?” asked Hucks.

“Make your meaning clearer, sir.”

“Oh, well, we ought to have some written guarantee from the Count and Countess de Beaujeu,” said the impervious lawyer; “and I think you should telegraph for the certificate of two medical men to the effect that your grandmother is of unsound mind. Even then, considering that great settlements are at stake, I hardly feel that we should be safe.”

“*Who* will not be safe, Mr. Littlepoint?” inquired the Duke with suppressed anger that flashed out of his eyes. “Is there anybody here who has a more vital interest in the validity

of my marriage than I have myself? What guarantee would you have in written promises or certificates that you do not possess already in my word of honour? If you do not believe that, you are the first man who will have had the audacity to say so to my face."

The General was too deaf to seize more than half of this; but if the Duke had boxed Hucks' ears the effect could not have been more alarming to Mrs. Corrington. The Duke had turned towards the door; another step and he might be gone—gone back to his own country and to war, with the bitter recollection of this parting scene to prevent him from ever returning. And then Gertrude's brilliant match—nay, her love-match—would have crumbled away, and the poor child be left heart-broken. And how the Blacks and Browns, the Greys and Greens would tattle!

"Roland, dear Roland," cried the good lady, springing from her seat and laying a hand on the Duke's arm, "don't pay any attention to what they say. It's all that wretched Dr. Claverley. Gertrude has told you about him, and *Mossiou* Grachard, who shall never set foot in this house again. The horrible little man; he said the most atrocious things, and I can't think how the

General can have had the patience to listen to him. But don’t you be angry about it.”

“I am not angry, my dear Madame Corrington,” said Roland, raising the hand of Gertrude’s mother to his lips and kissing it with filial respect; “but as to M. Grachard, I do not see how he can impugn English marriages, since he is going to be married himself as if he were an Englishman.”

“His case is different,” interposed Hucks Littlepoint; “it seems he is an exile under sentence of death—that is, the law accounts him as dead—and he cannot go through any legal formalities in his own country.”

“Do, please, be quiet, Hucks!” exclaimed Mrs. Corrington, quite beside herself at seeing the Duke move again towards the door. But Roland took his leave with words that were as balm to her.

“I will not see Gertrude now, but I will return presently; I pray you to tell her all that has passed. She is of age, and can judge for herself. When I come back I shall ask her if she will trust me and become my wife before I go away to war.”

His anger seemed to have left him; he

spoke with a tranquil solemnity, and gave a kindly nod to the General and Mrs. Corrington as he retired. He did not say that he was going straight off to find Dr. Claverly and M. Timon Grachard, and have a few words with them.

END OF VOL. I.

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