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THE ROMANCE OF A FRENCH
PARSONAGE

WORKS BY M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

PUBLISHED IN THE

INTERNATIONAL AND WESTMINSTER SERIES.

NO.	SERIES.		CTS.
115.	Int.	FOR ONE AND THE WORLD, .	50
147.	"	FORESTALLED, . . .	50
86.	"	PARTING OF THE WAYS, THE,	50
11.	West.	ROMANCE OF THE WIRE, A,	25

THE ROMANCE OF A FRENCH PARSONAGE

at the Barber

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

"THE PARTING OF THE WAYS," "FOR ONE AND THE WORLD," ETC.



NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

150 WORTH ST., COR. MISSION PLACE

(1891)

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THE ROMANCE OF A FRENCH PARSONAGE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONSECRATION.

OF the mighty stream of Parisian holiday-makers one Sunday evening, only a tiny rill flowed in the direction of the Rue des Billettes. Few tourists ever find their way to the Lutheran church in this ancient street, few indeed were likely to be tempted thither on such a night. The allurements held out to pleasure-seekers were almost maddening. It was the close of a dazzling show, that unimaginable, indescribable jubilee of liberty, all the nations had flocked to see.

The Eiffel Tower, in itself a revolution, fittest emblem of revolution gone by, with its twinkling lights, near neighbours of the stars, its fairy gardens and rainbow-coloured fountains, its aërial voyages and banquets midway between earth and heaven, formed one of a thousand magnets attracting the stranger.

Who could turn aside in quest of the quiet, incon-

spicuous Rue des Billettes, when Molière could be heard at the Français, Racine at the Odéon? To understand, or rather feel, the French language, we must hear the master-pieces of these great brethren again and again. At a first hearing we are carried away by the passion of the piece; at a second, taken captive by the noble sentiment pervading every line; at a third, our ear becomes alive to the melody of the verse.

What is there in Paris, what indeed is there not, during these intoxicating Eiffel days? The quintessence of intellectual enjoyment for the sober, the acme of pantomime for grown-up children, for Epicureans the Eden Theatre, five hundred beautiful dancers with one smile, one pose, one airy come-and-go!

Would we amuse ourselves by finding out what amuses the work-a-day world, let us turn into the Montagnes Russes or Musée Grévin, to be sledged along artificial avalanches, or, like the prince of Arabian story, wander amid a petrified population.

So perfect the illusion that we end by asking ourselves who is living flesh and blood, who mere make-believe in this uncanny assemblage.

But the show of shows is Paris itself, no longer the metropolis of a nation, the capital of France, but of the universe. On every side is heard a jargon of outlandish speech, the sight of a French face in these motley crowds almost comes as a surprise to us. The curious and the ethnologist need no longer traverse or circumnavigate the globe in order to see what the remotest races of man are like. All are

here, to be admired, wondered at, studied at leisure, their appearance new and strange to ourselves as this brilliant Paris in their own eyes. In this coming together of savage and polished humanity lies the real marvel of the centennial exhibition. And it is emblematic. Just as the Eiffel Tower looks down upon the entire population of the globe, each type being here represented, so did the Revolution it commemorates embrace in its grandest programme, black race and white, civilised and wild, free man and slave!

Far away from these crowded scenes lies the Rue des Billettes where to-night will take place the strangest of all, an epoch-making event in the history of a strange life and in the annals of contemporary thought.

This Lutheran church of old Paris seems peculiarly suited to the coming ceremony. The street to which it gave its name was called after a brotherhood of Augustan friars. Where now descendants of the ancient Huguenot stock sing Protestant hymns, listen to the Scriptures in their own tongue, formerly monks counted their beads, knelt to the confessor and worshipped the image of their founder. And where once many a pious Catholic had prayed for, perhaps anathematised the heretic, would shortly be heard the solemn abjuration of the Romish Church by a former servant, his no less solemn adherence to the ritual of Reform.

A priest, who was not only a brilliant orator, a skilled dialectician, but also a consummate man of the world, one of the brightest ornaments of the

sacerdotal ranks and of Parisian society, had seceded to Protestantism, and to-night awaited consecration as a pastor.

Nothing in the way of pomp or parade attends such ceremonials of the Reformed Church. The doors of the sacred building were thrown open earlier than usual. It was somewhat more liberally lighted—that was all.

The interior itself with its bare, white-washed walls, unadorned windows and plain wooden gallery, would have had a chilling effect but for the large crucifix, glittering as if of pure gold behind the altar. That symbol, hardly less pathetic to the non-believer than the ardent devotee, softened, beautified, irradiated the place, and relieved its drear monotony.

The cross recalled the teaching of the sublime Nazarene in all its primitive simplicity, teaching, alas! from which in these days the church of Luther has perhaps strayed as far as the church of Rome.

Long before eight o'clock, the hour fixed for the service, the sedate-looking congregation dropped in, one or two at a time. A soberer, less inquisitive assemblage it were hard to find. This little community seemed like one numerous family. Friends chatted together in whispers till the organ should be heard, and was it from delicacy of feeling, well reined-in curiosity, or sheer want of zeal that made the inquiry so lukewarm,—

“Is the Abbé really to be consecrated to-night?”

Few failed to put the question, but the answer in the affirmative elicited scant signs of interest or animation. There is a physiognomy in these

Huguenot gatherings, and it was easy to see that the Abbé's former friends and colleagues were wholly, or for the most part, absent.

Was it that they shrank from witnessing his humiliation, or his triumph, in whichever light they regarded this ceremony? Was it that from the apostate now, as of old, alike familiars and kindred had fallen away?

One visitant there came who did not seem at home in that simple place of worship, amid these plainly-dressed, almost homely church-goers. Long before the service began, a lady entered, bringing with her the atmosphere of the splendid, seductive world, on which the Abbé had turned his back for ever. The newcomer, perhaps, now visited a Protestant church for the first time. After some hesitation, she chose a side-seat under the gallery, whence she could see everything without being observed.

Then she studied the little tablets on the wall, announcing the hymns to be sung that evening, and taking up the book lying near, conned the verses. Next she surveyed the congregation as if there, too, she found novel matter for speculation. Lastly, she drew down her veil, and eagerly watched the vestry door. This figure, so elegant yet unpretentious, so distinguished yet unaffected, clearly belonged to a phase of the ex-priest's life he was about to renounce for once and for all.

With beautiful women of the world, their ambitions, their foibles, the village pastor would henceforth have naught to do.

Two bands of school-children were now marshalled

to their places, the girls filing off in one direction, the boys in another.

Instructive it was to compare their demeanour with that of little scholars under conventual rule, so early does liberty of conscience, the right to protest, assert itself. These sturdy young Huguenots showed no automatic demureness, much less slavish submission to their teachers. The individual was apparent in every one.

At last the organist climbed the organ loft, and a soft, plaintive voluntary was heard; then indeed the congregation testified curiosity, and when the vestry doors were flung wide and the little procession marched in, elders of the church, officiating minister, and candidates for ordination, one unanimous thrill electrified all, on every face were plainly written the words,—

“He is there.”

The solitary spectator hiding herself under the gallery gazed for a moment on that tonsured figure by the altar as if unable to believe the evidence of her senses. But for the music, bystanders must have heard the passionate ejaculation, the suppressed sob, that came after; but for the semi-obscurity in which she sat, they must have witnessed the tears streaming down her pale cheeks.

Two pastors were to be consecrated to-night, in appearance as in circumstances strikingly contrasted.

The younger was one of those zealous evangelists who, without having passed the usual theological curriculum, are occasionally received into the ranks

of the Reformed pastorate. In their case, the laying-on of hands comes as a reward for diligent service; whilst the black gown with its wide sleeves is the realisation of their highest earthly ambition.

The worthy man now standing so proudly beside the ex-priest came evidently of unscholastic stock and humble origin. Small wonder that he stood exultant or that a touch of pardonable self-complacency marked every gesture. He seemed to think that all eyes were upon him and to thank the rapt gazers for their sympathy and appreciation. Very different the attitude of his fellow-candidate.

It was indeed a noble figure, that of the convert from absolutism in faith to the right of inquiry; but although pensive, without pathos, evoking rather respect than pity. The recalcitrant who now before Heaven and in the eyes of the world abjured the calling in which he had so signally distinguished himself and renounced the dignities therein, so surely awaiting him, the bishop-designate, even cardinal of the future, thus by universal consent of the Catholic world he had been acclaimed, was no fitting object of compassion.

As he stood beside his jaunty brother, there was not even spiritual upbuoyance in his face, only the calm, unflinching resolve of one who has finally bowed before reason and conscience. He appeared utterly oblivious of the crowd. Whether, indeed, glances of scorn or commendation were directed towards him, evidently mattered not. With the applause or disfavour of the world, he had done.

Meantime, the simple service proceeded. An appropriate hymn was sung, all present joining, prayers and the reading of scripture followed: next came the sermon or rather exhortation of the silver-haired elder to his younger brethren, the two neophytes that evening to be consecrated as shepherds of the Heavenly fold.

There was irony in the situation.

The homely, unlettered evangelist might well listen eagerly to every word falling from the preacher's lips, not a phrase, not a sentiment of the somewhat trite exordium but were priceless. So much hallowed wisdom to be hoarded, meditated upon, lived up to in the future. To his over-confident mind, appeal wore the aspect of prophecy, whilst every admonition, every implied burden only served to enlarge his own personality and magnify his future sphere.

The other hearkened with a rigid face. How could these naïve utterances and time-worn arguments affect him at all, unless with a sense of incongruity? Could he help comparing the past with the present, conjuring up visions of yesterday? He who now listened outwardly meek as a child being instructed in its catechism, was the fiery orator, the impassioned teacher, all Paris had once flocked to hear? The sermon ended, the candidates gave their solemn adhesion to the Reformed Church, then knelt down between their spiritual sponsors to receive the imposition of hands. This solemn act accomplished, there remained the closing and most interesting feature of the ceremonial. It is the

custom upon such occasions for the newly-ordained pastor to stand up and give the reason of the faith that is in him.

Would the ex-priest follow the usual routine?

None aware of the circumstances could feel wholly indifferent on this point. Such an apology must be not only touching in the extreme, but also highly edifying. Some little impatience therefore was testified at the length of the evangelist's apology.

Time is a word wholly without meaning to the self-satisfied, and having once got upon the delightful theme of his own conversion, the good man did not know when to stop. The elders whispered to each other and glanced at their watches, the congregation yawned, tittered, and one or two, their forbearance at an end, stole out on tiptoe. Still the enraptured speaker went on and was only pulled up by a most fortuitous circumstance.

Excessive emotion proved too much for his physical powers. He burst into unctuous tears, whereupon one of his superiors gently touched his arm and motioned him to withdraw. Then way was made for the apologist all present were longing to hear.

No professional type is more strongly marked than that of the Romish priest. The convert might exchange richly-bordered stole, gorgeous cope and alb of finest lawn bordered with lace, for black gown and lappets, he might suffer his beard to grow, and in the public ways don civil garb, the priestly physiognomy would remain, defying effacement.

As he now stood erect, fronting the congregation, the prevailing sentiment was of respectful pity. How

mighty must have been the mental struggle, how irresistible the inner voice that had brought such a man to such a pass! Life's meridian dazzlingly reached, the prizes most tempting to human beings within grasp, the brimming cup of fulfilment held to his lips, then dashed aside, and by no other hand but his own. It was evident that the suffering indelibly written on every feature had passed away. Almost marble-like in its impassibility was the figure now conspicuous within the altar rails, the sculptured Christ behind him hardly more so. And when he began to speak, his narrative was strangely reserved and cold, not a touch of personal feeling, not a single allusion to himself as a man, a member of the great social family, fell on those expectant ears. From beginning to end it was the theologian, the close reasoner, the merciless logician, who held forth. Not for a single moment were his listeners reminded of the powerful oratory all had heard of and which was now enlisted on their own side. The apology, a brief but masterly summing up of the points at issue between the Romish faith and Protestantism, needed no flash of eloquence, no inspired appeal, no moving peroration, to render it impressive.

Only once, and for a moment, did the speaker show any signs of faltering. His rich, sonorous, exquisitely-modulated voice trembled as he alluded to the abuses of the confessional.

"I doubt," he said, speaking very slowly and with apparent effort, "whether human ingenuity could have devised a system more incompatible with mortal weakness and social morality than this, or more

directly opposed to the teachings of Christ. 'Be ye pure,' said the Divine Founder of the Christian religion. And we deliberately set to work in His name to destroy all purity, to bring ardent young souls together in the spring-tide of life, who are doomed to remain before the eyes of men for ever apart. The newly-consecrated priest in the confessional, the maiden destined for closest relationship with another, kneeling outside, what have we here but a contradiction alike shocking to common-sense and natural feeling? Nor can any sophistries reason away the dire consequences of such an anomaly. What, for instance, do we find in our own beloved France? A house divided against itself, the sexes forming two camps, those who should be the stay and stimulative, one of another, wedded to directly opposed systems, aspirations and belief! What else do we find? Too often on the one side of the confessional, perjured vows, spiritual shipwreck, callousness or despair; on the other, wasted affection, a perpetual warfare with impossibilities, unholy cravings, many a broken heart!"

He paused, the silence being only disturbed by the sound of a woman's sobs. The lady, who had hidden herself under the gallery, for a moment was unable to control her tears. None could see her face for the shadows and the closely-drawn veil, nor did the speaker so much as glance that way. He seemed, however, suddenly put on his guard. In clear, metallic tones, without a trace of feeling, he now wound up his discourse. A hymn and short prayer followed. The benediction was accorded and the congregation poured into the quiet streets.

CHAPTER II.

OUTCAST AND OUTCAST.

THE keenest pang felt by the ex-priest is his utter solitude. No matter his rank in life, whether he be peasant-born or sprung from the lettered, luxurious classes, no sooner does he cast aside the cassock than he finds himself alone. Not the great Spinoza, after that horrible rite of excommunication in the synagogue of Amsterdam, the execrations, the curses, the burning of black tapers over a vessel filled with blood, the awful Anathema Maranatha pronounced in total darkness, was more abandoned to himself than is the unfrocked priest of nineteenth-century France. Not only is life to be begun afresh, but the natural and social ties, without which life were intolerable, have to be re-created. The sturdiest character, the most resolute mind, may well shrink from such a sacrifice.

Pastor Evelard, on the day after his consecration, remembered that he had one friend left in Paris, an old acquaintance to whom he could freely speak alike of the past and the present. Sympathisers and kindest helpers had naturally come forward from the Huguenot body, both ministers and their flocks welcoming the noble recusant with open arms. These were as yet strangers to him—at one with

him in the matter of a common faith only. Self-contained, stout-hearted as he was, he yet craved the sight of a familiar face, the sound of a well-known voice.

Taking the railway at the St. Lazare station, he soon reached one of the semi-suburban streets overlooking the fortifications raised by Thiers—those innocent-looking mounds covered with turf, once regarded as formidable, now rendered supererogatory by the line of forts erected since the siege. An unfashionable quarter is this, but airy, spacious, cheerful. If the eye no longer glances over corn-fields and meadows, the horizons are still wide, and on the new boulevards the lounge may breathe freely as in the neighbouring Bois de Boulogne. Climbing in partial darkness to the sixth storey of a barely-finished block, and assuring himself from the visiting-card nailed to the door that he had reached his destination, the pastor pulled the bell.

“Open the door, Suzanne, my girl,” he heard a voice that he knew cry from within.

“Open it yourself,” a woman replied peevishly. “Don’t you see that I have got baby in her bath?”

“Just see who it is, dear little mamma,” the first voice said, in a half-coaxing, half irritated tone.

“Was ever a man so unreasonable? As if I could be perpetually getting out of my chair with a rheumatic leg!” another woman answered in fretful accents.

The intruder, for so he began to feel himself, was about to make good his escape when the door was

impatiently flung wide. A well-favoured, youngish-looking man in dressing-gown and slippers, his clothes fragrant with tobacco, his ink-stained fingers holding a pen, stared at the visitor incredulously, then held out his disengaged hand.

"My dear friend, I am enchanted to see you!" he cried heartily. "Come inside to be introduced to my wife, mother-in-law, and baby, all the blissful components of family life."

Two men could hardly have been found less like; the one blonde, bearded, rosy as a farmer, cheery, confidential, the other raven-haired, olive-complexioned, still close-shaven, reserved.

In a single particular there was resemblance. Both heads showed traces of the tonsure, both had renounced the Romish Church and priestly calling.

"Ah, I had forgotten that you were married!"

"You will not forget it when you are married yourself," was the reply; "but here is madame, madame's mamma, and mademoiselle, my daughter."

He ushered his visitor into one of those tiny flats of modern Paris that make us wonder to what dimensions human dwellings will dwindle in the far future.

The lodging belonged to the genteeler order. The ceilings of the one sitting-room and bed-chamber were decorated with mouldings, rosettes, and cornices, the wall-papers, of crimson embossed velvet, showed gilt dados; the kitchen was fitted up with the latest invention in the way of cooking-stove, an apparatus of quite ornamental exterior. But all were on so diminutive a scale that the whole looked

more like a doll's house than the habitation of full-grown men and women.

Clearly its tenants, like the bride and bridegroom of Tieck's story, were under the necessity of reducing life's necessaries to zero, all but bread, covering, and shelter being discarded as superfluities. There seemed no space for even a newspaper. The doors of the three rooms composing the flat stood open, and, by the disagreeable arrangement common in Paris, communicated with each other; quiet, much less privacy, was therefore out of the question.

The abashed guest paused, irresolute. In the bedroom, if, indeed, that comfortable word can be applied to the make-believe boudoirs so-called here, a sulky, rather handsome young woman was sponging a noisy baby, before the kitchen swing-glass a portly dame stood complacently changing her gown, whilst the central apartment, study, salon, dining-room combined, presented a chaotic appearance—a child's perambulator, a sewing machine, a photographic apparatus, being miraculously, as it seemed, found room for. The unfortunate master of the house, whose writing-table was drawn close to the window for the sake of light, alas! after space, the dearest commodity in over-built Paris, evidently pursued his literary work under extraordinary difficulties. Even the presence of a stranger did not prevent a running fire of conversation, mostly of an unamiable tenor, between the two ladies, the young wife and her mother appearing to see everything from an opposite point of view.

"I intrude," stammered the visitor, bowing bare-

headed to his hostesses, who returned the compliment each by slamming her own door.

“Not in the very least,” was the alert reply. “Here is a seat for you,” added the master. Glancing round, he swept an armful of newly-ironed linen from the single armchair, then, opening the door, flung his burden into the kitchen with as much vehemence as Argan his obnoxious pillows in the play.

“Suzanne, Suzanne,” cried the mother-in-law, “your husband is gone clean stark mad, all the clean shirts and shifts gone into the refuse-pail,” and the peevish retort came from the half-opened door of the opposite room,—

“What is that to me? Can’t I be left in peace for a few minutes?”

“Ladies will have their little differences on these minor points. An argumentative turn, I have observed, is a characteristic of the fair sex,” said the host good-naturedly. “Let us pay no heed, but chat at our ease. You will have a glass of beer?”

“Indeed, no; I want no refreshment, thank you.”

“Nonsense! Suzanne, my angel, where is the Bock?” he said, again opening the door of the bedroom. Baby’s screams, however, quite prevented him from making himself heard.

“I insist upon the child being tubbed every day, after English fashion. I intend to give her a fine physique and an education à la Spencer. She will, I hope, take more kindly to these things in time. Ah! here is the Bock, it was in the sideboard

of course, and two glasses. Your health and prosperity, my dear friend. Well?" There was a temporary lull. For a brief interval baby held her peace, and mamma and grandmamma also. The pair could hear each other speak.

"Nay, I came hither rather to listen than to hold forth," the newly-made pastor answered. "It is now two years since we lost sight of each other. How have you fared meanwhile?"

"Badly, as you probably know by this time; an unfrocked priest is handicapped in the struggle for life. He comes into the world, so to say, a second time, helpless, as from his mother's womb, not master of a single trade which will cover his nakedness and fill his belly. Excuse my homely speech. As a pastor you will be provided for——"

"My motives were not material——"

"Of course not. I understand, you retain your Christianity, whilst disregarding Romanism. My own case is wholly different. I reasoned myself into Agnosticism. I was thrown entirely upon my own resources. How I have managed to live, how I contrive to support myself and my little family now, is a mystery. I ought not to have undertaken these responsibilities so soon. But my character, my temperament, differ essentially from your own. The companionship of women, the domestic affections, the joys of paternity—confound that child, screaming again——" He jumped up from his seat, opened the bedroom door, and exclaimed,—

"Now, Suzanne, must I come and amuse baby?"

"I am sure I wish you would," cried the young

mother snappishly. Then the door was violently shut, and the speaker went on,—

“Family life is an absolute necessity of my existence, but family life, even on the humblest scale, is a luxury one has to pay dearly for in Paris. I have as many trades as an octopus has limbs, some of my own invention. I make a little money, for example, by writing Latin epitaphs. The great stonemasons round about Père-la-Chaise and Montmartre employ me. Then I compile neat little biographies of newly-elected deputies, and obituary notices of local celebrities. Their relations like to see them made much of in the newspapers. Photographer, commission agent, ecclesiastical embroiderer—I will show you some of my art needlework—supernumerary accountant, bookkeeper, nurse in fever hospitals; these are a few of my callings, and what with five francs here and there, we are kept going. But it is hard work.”

“Your health apparently has not suffered. You have not aged. You are cheerful.”

“Yes. I did not come into the world with the name of Jeunet for nothing. I can't look oldish, do what I will; low spirits don't pay, and a downcast mind and a long face are the worst business investments going. I revel in my newly-acquired liberty,—freedom to speak, act, live as a rational being. A wife, too, the fond companion of the fireside, has no longer to be hidden, like the candle spoken of in Scripture, under a bushel. With the place to myself, a cigarette, a glass of Bock, and a quire of paper to scribble on, I envy no man.”

“ You believe in your pen? You propose to devote yourself to literature?”

“ I am writing a novel, which, if I can carry out my idea, and if I mistake not the signs of the times, will create a pretty commotion. But it is now your own turn to hold forth. You will, of course, follow my example, and marry?”

“ Heaven forbid!” ejaculated the other almost solemnly.

His host drew nearer, glanced round to assure himself that both doors were closed, then said,—

“ Do you for a moment suppose that these little altercations indicate an unhappy household? Women have not the absorbing occupations of our sex. They naturally wax warm about trifles, and,” he dropped his voice to a whisper, “ my dear little wife is a daughter of people only just able to read and write. You can look higher——”

Just then the doors of both kitchen and bedroom were opened brusquely. Out of the first came the mother-in-law, her comfortable proportions arrayed in Sunday best, her cheeks red with vexation as the poppy in her bonnet.

“ You will kill that child with those drenchings,” she said, addressing herself to Monsieur Jeunet, utterly ignoring the presence of a stranger. “ And are you gone crazy, Suzanne? Baby in a white frock, and an easterly wind!”

For sole answer the young mother plumped the child into her little carriage, whereupon the elder lady threw off her bonnet and shawl, and declared that Suzanne might walk out by herself. She would

not be a party to such rash proceedings. So she stormed on, Suzanne moving off with the perambulator, finally the discarded bonnet being resumed, and the other following under protest.

“Thank God! they are off at last; now we shall be in Paradise!” ejaculated the host with a sigh of relief. “These little domestic storms but serve to intensify the enjoyment of after calms.”

His hearer smiled. Surely it were hardly worth while to take a wife for the sake of enjoying, not her company, but her absence!

“You will marry, yourself, I feel sure of it,” he went on. “Opportunities will come in your way, will be forced upon you. Already I have had a lady here seeking information.”

“Accord none, I entreat you. Let my movements remain obscure. I ask this as a personal favour. However,” added Pastor Evelard with a sigh, “the gossiping of all Paris can matter little to me now. I shall soon be as completely lost sight of as if I were already sleeping in the tomb.”

“Your plans so far are settled then. You have already a pastorate?”

“By the oddest chance in the world, by what I must regard as a piece of good luck, I am appointed to the very post I should have chosen for myself, a remote parish on the south-west coast. The spot I know, by hearsay—none sweeter in France—and the half rural, half sea-faring population come of an almost unmixed Huguenot stock. What I craved for was entire repose.”

“You will get your heart’s desire, and no mistake,”

replied the other with a grimace. "How call you your sweet spot?"

"St. Gilles-sur-Mer."

"I know, a little fishing village on the mouth of the Gironde. My dear fellow, you will be buried alive during nine months of the year. In the summer, I hear, a handful of bathers frequent the place. If my novel succeeds I will pay St. Gilles a visit next year. I am bent upon baby learning to swim. But what on earth will you do with yourself at the world's end? Mind and take the best talker who ever lived with you."

So saying, he pointed to a well-thumbed Rabelais that lay on his writing-table.

"I have a better talker still here," replied the other, his face for the first time showing animation.

He forthwith produced an equally well-worn copy of the New Testament.

"I won't contradict you; only Rabelais is human, the other impeccable, divine if you will. We peccable mortals can't feel quite at home in such company."

"It is strange," pursued the newly-made Protestant, his eyes kindling as he turned over the leaves, "it is incomprehensible to me now that the wit—you will not accuse me of irreverence, I know; in truth, our language wants the fitting word—the unimaginable, inimitable, superhuman wit of these august utterances has, for the most part, escaped the gross intelligence of humanity."

"Say, rather, they have been set aside, kept out of sight," was the rejoinder. "You see, my dear

friend, like so many lightning flashes, they daze, blind, confound all who have the courage to face them. I admit the human Rabelais suits *me* better."

The pastor glanced from page to page of his tiny volume.

" 'Render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's—Let him who is without sin cast the first stone—Cast not your pearls before swine.' Such sayings, and they are legion, soar as high above any other moral apothegms with which we are familiar as the moon above the earth. Yet whilst we recognise their inspiration, their diamond-like piercingness, their angelic purity, no sooner do we seek to assimilate them with our own modes of thought and action, than they are debased, parodied, past recognition. Note another point. What have these awful and lovely lessons to do with the march of science and mere human knowledge? Nothing. All that is real, vital, living, of the religion of Christ may be preached and practiced by the most advance philosopher or scientist going."

" If you discourse in that strain to the fisher-folk of St. Gilles, you will be casting your pearls before swine with a vengeance. Seriously speaking, you ought to have a pulpit in a large city. You would make converts, obtain a second and more brilliant reputation as an orator, be another Lamennais."

" I have little ambition. Enough for me that my life is no longer a lie, that I lead not others astray."

" You will then, I suppose, occupy yourself with pen and ink. Every liberal or purely literary organ

will welcome you with open arms. France awaits her Döllinger."

"Indeed, literary fame is far from my thoughts, the world of polemics farther still."

"Man alive! you must do something! You can't live like John the Baptist in the wilderness."

His hearer smiled.

"Between John the Baptist and Lamennais and a Döllinger is a wide space. An obscure position does not necessarily imply banishment."

"In heaven's sake don't enrol yourself in the Salvation Army."

The other again smiled as he rose to take leave.

"Never fear. Rowdiness in religion is as distasteful to me as downright scoffing, and, to my thinking, hardly less reprehensible. But how it fares with me you shall know from time to time. I will write."

"I hope so, I am sure. You shall hear from me also. I should like your opinion of my novel as it goes on. And, of course, the embargo of silence just laid upon me is conditional. You would not wish me to withhold a plain answer to a plain question!"

"By no means. I am not hiding myself. I have done nothing to be ashamed of."

They parted in friendliest fashion, the one to betake himself to the nearest railway station, the other to pen the following note:—

"MADAME,—I am now happy to be able to afford you the information you desire. My esteemed friend Pastor Evelard, late vicar of St. Maxime, in this city, is appointed to the commune of St. Gilles-

sur-Mer, Charente Inférieure, and assumes the duties of his new position in a few days. I beg you to receive, Madame, the expression of my most respectful esteem.

“JEAN JACQUES JEUNET.

“P. S.—The wood and wine you kindly ordered will be delivered within the course of a day or two, and will, I trust, give entire satisfaction. I forgot to mention that I am also agent for an English woollen manufacturer, and can supply genuine garments of pure lambswool for both sexes direct from the works. Price-list enclosed.

“J. J. J.”

CHAPTER III.

A WELCOME.

THE new pastor could hardly have reached St. Gilles at a more auspicious moment. An Oriental warmth of colour wrapped the scene: of deep, unclouded amethyst the sky; bright as enamelled picture, the delicious little bay with its gold brown sands smooth as velvet, its bordering forests of many-tinted green, its mingling sea and river, blue as the heavens above. Far away in mid-Atlantic, delicately painted on the pale amber horizon, rises the oldest lighthouse in Europe, the mighty Cordouan, difficult of access to the stoutest-hearted even in smooth weather. A few fishermen's dwellings, and a score or two of new toylike châteaux dot the high ground of the bay, but the village lies inland. So kindly is Nature here that the business of the husbandman and the sailor can be combined. Little farms lie close to the sea, and every fisherman possesses his veteran fig-tree and garden. Tamarisk trees in rosy bloom hedge tiny cornfields planted high above the shore, and ilex groves on the edge of the cliff protect vineyards, all the more precious for their smallness. Below, amid the undulating sands and broken pine forests, large white butterflies sport by myriads, whilst the wild evening primrose and carnation make the air heavy with fragrance.

The newly-appointed pastor, although a man of the world and of somewhat sedentary habits, revelled in this sense of repose and deliciousness. It seemed to him that here, if anywhere in the world, a sick spirit and an overstrained mind might find healing and balance: that now, if ever, he might break off with his old life and begin to live indeed.

He felt as one who had ridden himself of a heritage which had been altogether usurpation and glamour. That once glorified power over men's, and, above all, women's consciences; that once triumphant sway, not only of the weak and the insignificant, but of the capable, and, socially-speaking, the mighty; that spiritual inquisition, handled mercilessly and subtly as the bodily, now repudiated by the feeling of universal humanity—what were all these but an unholy, an unjustifiable usurpation? His future was at any rate a clean page. He could write thereon what he would. To most men the prospect before him would have been far from endearing.

The little life that animated St. Gilles would vanish with the first cloud, the prelude rain-drop. These long, unbroken, brilliant summers always ended on a sudden, and with them the bathing season. During the long, monotonous winter, the pastor here must depend absolutely upon himself, or take occasional trips to Bordeaux and the lesser towns within easy reach, for the sake of distraction and society. None whatever were to be had at home. There was the village priest, certainly, with whom,

he was informed, his predecessor had fraternised; there was the schoolmaster; beside these, only the peasants and sea-faring folk, for the most part artless and unlettered as their ancestors who had worshipped in caves or mid-ocean, always at peril of their lives.

The sense of isolation which would have appalled most men came welcomely to Pastor Evelard. He said to himself that he should at last have time to do the one thing in his life he had longed to do in vain—he could now be idle! He could live a little for himself, which may often be a man's first, highest duty.

Thinking these thoughts, he strolled from end to end of the straggling village, close-shuttered, its fig-trees white with dust, its aspect recalling Jerusalem; next he wandered on the smooth brown sands, where a dozen ladies and children in red flannel bathing-dresses were disporting themselves; finally climbing the sand hills, lost his way in the pine forest.

What a glowing, delicious world was here! Ankle deep in the silvery-white dust he made slow progress, about him the cool shadows of pine and larch; in his ears the murmurous, musical little sea-waves; above, the glorious sky of the Gironde.

And what an adorable solitude! He had there shady coverts to himself, only the buzzing of the bees and the rippling tide broke the stillness.

On a sudden he came upon a carriage-road, cut, as it seemed, for somebody's pleasure, through the very heart of the wood. Following it, he caught sight of

lofty palisades, a bit of garden wall, roof of stable and green-house; at last, of a porter's lodge and handsome iron gate. That vision of adorable solitude was gone in a moment. He had been misinformed then? St. Gilles was not altogether the primitive spot he had been led to believe.

The world of fashion was no mere intruder here for a brief period of the year, but an abiding element, a permanent feature, not to be ignored or reasoned away. This château, with its park-like grounds and dependencies, might indicate much more than met the eye.

Perhaps it was only the seat of some wealthy Protestant merchant of Bordeaux; quite as probably it was the winter resort of some leader of society, attaching to their solitudes the wit, the intrigue, and the feverish excitement of Paris.

As he approached he saw a board, on which were inscribed the words:—

“TO LET OR TO SELL.”

“The place was unoccupied, then,” he mused, and seeing the front gate open glanced within.

Here were lawns, flower-plots, shrubberies, after English fashion; a broad gravelled road leading to the house.

“Come in, sir,” said a cheery stable-man. “Our new pastor, I reckon. I'll be pleased to take you round; this was a kind of show-place when the English milord lived here.”

“You are one of my congregation, I daresay,” the pastor replied, holding out his hand.

“ True enough, sir ; we’re mostly Protestants hereabouts ; you may tell us from the Catholics. I don’t know how it is. ’Tis like the breed of sheep—there’s a something that marks one from another. I’ll just take down this board and then show you the stables and greenhouses.”

“ The château is let or sold ? ”

“ Within the last four-and-twenty hours, sir ; let with the option of purchase. A lady came to look at it two days ago, posted back to Paris, and the news has just come by telegram.”

He produced a crumpled form from his pocket and handed it to the other.

“ Maybe you know the lady, as you come from Paris they tell me. Madame Delinon, that is the name.”

Pastor Evelard glanced at the telegram, then returned it with a brusqueness that somewhat disconcerted his companion.

“ The name of Madame Delinon is not unfamiliar to me,” he said. “ Thank you, my friend, for so obligingly offering to show me over the place. Some other time I will claim your good offices. Adieu.”

He hastened on, the other watching him out of sight with a perplexed face, glancing again and again at the telegram. Before consigning it to his pocket, he mused,—

“ What has the pastor got into his head ? Something, that’s quite certain. He doesn’t like the look of things. Well, I’ll make inquiries, pretty strict ones too, at Bordeaux. I’m not going to hire myself to an adventuress, the kind of female Phyllox-

era we read of in novels, not I. The lady looked honest enough, certainly, but there's no getting to the bottom of a woman's cunning."

Meantime, the pastor walked on, not unmindful of the witchery of the place and the hour.

She here! Madame Delinon, his near neighbour; Georgette, his parishioner! Did she know of his appointment? Could she have followed him to these solitudes? But no! Away with such promptings of self-sufficiency. A freak of fortune, a mere accident, some strange concatenation of events, accounted for her coming, nothing more.

That simile of the white page so lately in his mind; the blank leaf of life, to be written over, filled in at will, was no longer appropriate. Even here he was not alone!

CHAPTER IV.

THE INAUGURATION.

ON the following Sunday all the population turned out to welcome their pastor. Such an event is ever important in these little Huguenot communities. The country folks are anxious to learn what manner of man the newly-appointed minister may be, whether his doctrine is sound—that is to say, precisely like that they are accustomed to, whether he is the right man in the right place; in other words, a proper person to administer the rites of baptism, marriage and burial; by his oratory they set small store. Several pastors from the neighbouring towns had come to assist in the ceremony, but the congregation consisted entirely of the villagers.

When, after the usual prayers, singing, and reading of Scripture, Pastor Evelard ascended the pulpit, a striking sight met his eyes. The plain white-washed building was nearly full. Alike husbandman and sea-farers rest from their labours here on Sunday, and at this season of the year there was nothing extra going on afield or ashore necessitating the absence of some. Old and young, the men as well as the women, the well-to-do and the poorer, had flocked to service to-day, two or three hundred, for the most part in sober black, filling aisles and

gallery. Immediately under the pulpit, seated in a semicircle, sat the veterans of the community, the elders of the little church of St. Gilles. This group of old men,—silver-haired, ruddy-complexioned, keen-eyed—once seen remained pictured on the memory. Not a head here but was worthy of a Rembrandt's pencil. These patriarchs were bent with toil, their hands roughened with labour. The Sunday broadcloth became them less than the week-day blouse, yet each figure had a dignity of its own. In one aged man, with snow-white hair, Roman features, and tawny, beardless face, the staunch Huguenot of old seemed to live again. Here was that calm and resolution betokening the fiery spirit, the indomitable conviction, the unswerving faith, that led his ancestors to brave fire and sword, ruin and desolation, rather than surrender conscience.

Nor was the physiognomy of the women less marked. They in turn recalled the steadfast wives and unflinching mothers, who could endure separation from husband and children, every kind of mental anguish and bodily privation, but not a perjured soul; adhering to the black hood and cloak of their ancestresses, they also sunburnt and toil-worn,—the feminine portion of the assembly, perhaps, had a severer look than the other.

As a relief to the sombre picture were the light frocks and straw hats, trimmed with flowers and ribbons, of the little girls, whilst above the heads of all, through the low square windows of unstained glass, showed the lovely, luminous landscape, vineyard and orchard, pearly sea, gleaming sands set

round with pine woods, far away the lofty lighthouse, a column of alabaster reaching from silvery wave to golden heaven!

For the first time in his career the preacher acknowledged himself at a loss.

The irresistible orator, on whose fervid utterances polished audiences had hung breathlessly, whose searching rhetoric had moved leaders of men, whose elocution had been the school of advocates and politicians, now hesitated before a handful of peasants and fisherfolk.

He had realised at a first glance that his listeners wanted no moving appeals or passionate reawakenings; they had flocked hither to hear what they had already heard scores of times before. This religion clung to so tenaciously, under no condition whatever to be forfeited, had in a certain sense and by sheer force of habit lost vitality.

Huguenots they were as their fathers of old, and Huguenots they would remain; but they did not ask from their minister new lights or spiritual illumination. Their faith was there. No need to call it into question. The weekly sermon had become as much a matter of routine as the wearing of Sunday broadcloth.

Clearly, then, the pastor's duty was that of rigid self-suppression, a narrowing down of his intellectual and spiritual views to the requirements of his audience. He must be unambitious, neutral, comparatively effortless, would he win the confidence of this naïve assemblage.

The idyllic scene before his eyes, the placid, land-

locked bay, the mellow tints of intervening vineyard and garden, the noonday languor bathing all, gave a happy turn to his thoughts. Pictures like this had met his gaze when, an ardent pilgrim in years gone by, he had lingered on the sacred shores of Galilee. The theme was apt, and lent itself to the simplest treatment.

Without figure of speech or seeking after effect, in language so deliciously pure, so telling as to seem a very echo of Scripture itself, he gave his listeners rather a pastoral than a homily, a little prose poem that beguiled the imagination of all. No fault could be found with such a discourse, it was wholly uncontroversial, it raised no vexed questions. The preacher merely brought before them the lovely scene and the lovely life even materialised man is apt to forget.

“Where, if not here, indeed, should the teachings of the divine Nazarene be remembered, abided by?” he asked, as he drew to an end. “Where should faith, constancy, blamelessness of life be looked for, if not amid these sunny vineyards, by this tranquil shore, recalling as they do just such scenes as Jesus gazed on when fulfilling His mission? Small wonder that your forefathers held fast to the faith that was in them! Here, in a remote corner of their beloved country, they were perpetually reminded of that fair land of Galilee, where was founded the religion that made new the world. Here we, too, may turn from Gospel narrative to Nature, saying to ourselves, amid surroundings like these, ‘The Teacher spoke, with such daily reminders before us, shall we turn a deaf ear?’”

Comedy, often of grotesque kind, follows close on the pathos of life.

The preacher had fairly reached the vestry door when he found himself caught in a man's embrace, a pair of arms holding him with vice-like firmness, a bearded face pressed again and again to his own.

If there was one superfluity of affectionateness Pastor Evelard objected to, it was this kind of greeting between man and man. That the softer nature of women could take delight in such demonstrations of attachment he was able to understand. To be kissed and hugged by a bearded admirer in public, as the unfortunate Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is treated by Eraste on the stage, seemed to him little short of an affront.

A second, a third time, he tried to disengage himself in vain.

"My dear brother, my esteemed colleague," exclaimed the offender, returning to the attack. "My beloved fellow-servant of Christ, my honoured co-worker in the Church, how delighted I am to see you again. A thousand, thousand welcomes."

"I must ask your pardon; I frankly confess that I do not know you," was the somewhat distant answer.

"Not know *me*? Impossible. Look again," said the other standing, proudly back, to be looked at, identified, admired. He was a young man, fresh-complexioned, large-featured, brawny, on whose angular limbs the black gown sat gracelessly. His hands, too, were unusually large,—always a drawback in a pulpit orator. If niggardly with regard

to outward appearance, Nature had more than atoned for the deficiency by her all-compensating gift of self-confidence. The young pastor enjoyed the supreme faith in his own endowments and capacities that can render the possessor the happiest being under the sun.

“Now, indeed, I do remember you,” answered the elder man, as he recalled the ecstatic apologist of a few weeks ago. His heart sank within him. Was this irrepressible, self-sufficient coxcomb to be his neighbour?

“Ah! could you forget your fellow-candidate? your, so to say, twin-brother in the ministry? How I have prayed for you! longed to take sweet counsel with you! And the Lord has graciously heard my prayer. I am appointed to a commune but two leagues off.”

The voluble speaker was here interrupted by the elders of the church, who were also functionaries of the village. Alike, mayor and municipal councillor now crowded round their pastor with outstretched hands. These sturdy, hard-headed farmers and fishermen knew something of Evelard's history. They wanted him to feel that, provided he fulfilled his pastoral duties in a satisfactory manner, and lived with the sobriety incumbent on a minister of religion, the tonsure would never be considered matter for reproach. That they should triumph over the fact of such a secession was far from their thoughts. To adhere to the faith of one's fathers was a principle, in their eyes, almost sacred as the Commandments. The hearty greetings, the friendly hand-shakes,

encouraged Evelard. He felt almost elated at the thought that he had touched a chord, found his way to these simple hearts and artless imaginations.

“I’ve no fault to find with your discourse,” said the foremost of the band, the white-haired patriarch with the Roman features. “But we are homely folks, Mr. Pastor. So long as we are baptised, married, and laid in the earth as Protestants, we are content ; we could dispense with sermons altogether. However, as I said just now, I’ve no fault to find with yours.”

The old peasant’s speech disconcerted Evelard not a little. Was his office to be mere matter of routine, hardly higher than that of grave-digger? The fact came painfully home to him that he was a stranger to these practical sea-faring folk. Another conclusion surprised him no less unwelcomely. How lukewarm seemed the faith for which their ancestors had suffered martyrdom !

CHAPTER V.

THE REBUKE.

THE little congregation poured into the hot, noon-day glare. The knot of pastors and village functionaries broke up, only the new minister stayed behind.

He had breakfasted with his colleagues at one homely board, and was now pressed to join them at another, but declined—he needed solitude.

Up to the present time he had lodged in the village, the parsonage-house being under repair. Today, bare, almost uninhabitable although it still was, he took possession. Turning the key, he groped his way through the passage in semi-darkness, every shutter being closed on account of the burning sunshine. Throwing wide the casements as he went, he soon flooded the place with light, making out first one object, then another, amid the prevailing disorder. Here was a bed, there an armchair and table, in another corner his travelling trunk.

The house was commodious, whole and newly whitewashed; when his books and furniture should arrive he promised himself as pleasant a home as a country pastor could desire. An ancient Huguenot woman had been engaged to do the household work. Here, at least, he mused, I shall be my own master. I shall enjoy entire liberty and peace.

Hardly had the thought crossed his mind, when the sound of a man's heavy tread on the bare floor outside caught his ear. He remembered suddenly that he had left the key in the lock, some intruder was already stealing a march upon him.

"It is only I, dear brother," cried a hilarious, self-approving voice, "only your friend and fellow-worker in the Lord. May the Reverend Barthelemy Bourgeois—that is my name—come in?"

"It seems that you have dispensed with my permission," was the dry answer. "I admit, I should prefer to be alone just now, but since you are here, tell me your errand. That need not detain you long."

Too self-occupied to notice the implied rebuke, the other prattled on,

"Bourgeois is my name, and bourgeois the condition of life to which I was born. Did you ever hear of a more curious coincidence?" he laughed. "I must tell you, however—you will not think the worse of me, I am sure—I come originally of peasant stock——"

"So I should gather," dropped inadvertently from the other's lips.

That remark had no sobering effect either. Unsusceptible as the immortal bore of the First Satire, he coolly disrobed himself, hung his black gown on a cloak pin in the hall, then took the vacant chair, stretching out his long legs, and rubbing his hands with a look of ineffable satisfaction.

"To think that you should be here, and I within an easy walk. What are four leagues to me! a

mere nothing, not worth thinking about. My dear friend, I must believe that the Lord's finger is in it all. We are neighbours, because we are necessary to each other's spiritual advancement. I, of course, know your history," he added in a patronising, deeply-pitying tone. "It has made you very, very dear to me."

The listener could no longer conceal his impatience; disgust, perhaps, were the apter word.

"Pardon me," he said, with a ruffled look, "I have much on my hands to-day. May I learn the business that brought you here?"

Even those words, pointedly spoken, failed to impress the exuberant speaker.

"Listen," he said, drawing nearer to his host and clutching his arm, "I see how fruitful may be our intercourse, what sweet truth we may be the means of imparting to one another. You are a learned man, I am no scholar. Beautifully, under the Lord's blessing, we may now supply each other's deficiencies. I am ignorant of many branches of knowledge necessary to the preacher, but in spiritual illumination I have been blessed from my cradle upwards. Come to me, then, dear brother, in all your doubts, difficulties. I, your pupil, in turn, will imbibe classic lore and philosophy."

When the tirade at last came to an end, Pastor Evelard sat with lips unsealed.

More than once he had been on the point of roughly snapping the thread of the insufferable discourse, crushing the offender with well-deserved rebuke. But he hesitated. There was so much evident sin-

cerity, so much harmlessness about this poor creature, so he called him, that stinging satire or scathing epigram seemed quite out of proportion to the offence. The man's tongue must be stopped for all that.

"My poor young friend," he began, his exquisite enunciation strikingly contrasted with the other's spluttering accents. "To what self-deceptions have you allowed yourself to give ear? What vain illusions are these you confess to a stranger, that stranger your senior by many years, how much your elder in matters of knowledge and experience? Reflect for a moment, summon reason to your aid. Should I, above all men, think you, confide the most delicate secrets, the most complex mental problems, to a raw recruit in the ministry—you must admit the justice of the simile—one confessedly an alien to learning, and, I must believe, to the world? No, young sir, confine your ambitions within legitimate bounds. Be content to teach those more ignorant than yourself."

The admonition, although hardly accepted in such a light, set the ex-evangelist thinking. He looked on the ground, not discountenanced, but evidently debating within his own mind.

"You are a very learned man, they told me, and now I believe it," he replied at last.

"I have certainly given more time to books and reflection than most," was the quiet answer.

"I daresay there is hardly a subject in which I desire instruction that you have not at your fingers' ends."

“That may well be.”

“You write Latin and Greek, I’ll wager, as easily as your mother tongue?”

“Such proficiency is required of the—seminarist,” was on the ex-priest’s lips; he added, instead, “the student in theology, before taking holy orders.”

“I hear you are one of the best Hebrew and Arabic scholars in the country?”

“Yes, I studied these languages in the East.”

“And the Aristotelian philosophy, Church history, Patristic lore, scholasticism, metaphysics, logic,—you cannot deny it, you are at home with every one,” continued the other, growing painfully eager. “Oh, my dear, dear brother, do not turn a deaf ear to my prayer. Give me learning—and never fear that you will not be rewarded a hundred, nay, a thousandfold. You see before you a chosen vessel, an instrument especially appointed to do the Lord’s work. But as yet with me spiritual illumination far outstrips intellectual attainment. I would fain unite the subtlety of Paul with the faith of Peter.”

“What do you want to learn?” asked the scholar, unable to resist a smile. Bourgeois’ grotesque vanity irritated, his sincerity disarmed criticism.

“What do I want to learn? Everything!” was the exuberant reply. “Everything we have been talking about. I mean the Hebrew Scriptures, the Greek Testament, Plato and Aristotle, St. Augustin and St. Thomas Aquinas, Descartes’ system of philosophy, Kant’s metaphysics, cosmography, dialectics——”

The voluble speaker seemed no more inclined to stop than Homer when counting his ships.

His listener interrupted him with a gesture.

“Young man,” he said, still quietly ironic. “With learning, as with life, the knotty point is not how to leave off but how to begin. Have a care that the first step be made in the right direction, and the tyro will hardly go astray. These subjects you enumerate—so glibly, are not to be plunged into headlong. Each requires a many-staged preparation. To pursue philosophy, for instance, with any profit, we must be familiar with history, and where should such a study begin but with that of our own country? Could you, from your own memory—without any extraneous help whatever—write the briefest possible outline of French history?”

“Indeed, I could not; could anyone, could you?” asked the listener, aghast at the very proposition.

“Let us next take the Greek Testament,” Evelard went on, not heeding the question. “The study of a foreign language, especially that of a civilisation passed away, is altogether unfruitful unless we have thoroughly mastered our own. I gather—excuse the frank observation—that you have not hitherto been enabled to pay the attention to French grammar so essential to one in your present position.”

“Ah! I have made a slip here and there? But we will soon put these minor points right,” was the cheerful reply.

“Then you alluded just now to such abstruse subjects as metaphysics, dialectics, and so forth. Let us know what we are about. Can you give an

exact definition of these words, the simplest possible, but exact? ”

“With a little thought and just a glance at the dictionary I could,—I am never sure of my accents, and never had a knack at spelling.”

“Ah!” said his host rising. “Now the air is clearer, now we can see more than an inch beyond our noses! Attain, no matter how laboriously, the A B C of knowledge, then talk of Plato and Aristotle! Under the circumstances I cannot refuse to help you. But remember! the master fixes the hour, and limits the duration of the lesson. We will confer thereupon later, I must really beg you to leave me now. Nay, no thanks, no effusions.”

“My beloved brother, my hand, then, since you will not permit a brotherly, an apostolic kiss——”

“Demonstrativeness is silver, but reserve is golden,” was the reply.

Then the visitor was bowed out and the key of the front door withdrawn. Hardly had the pastor re-entered the room when he heard the door-knocker plied vigorously.

Already another intruder?

On opening the door an inch or two he saw the large figure of the irrepressible evangelist.

“A moment, one moment only, my dear friend,” he said, as he contrived to wriggle in. “I had another favour to ask you, our conversation was so absorbing that I clean forgot it. You are to have a great lady from Paris as neighbour and parishioner Madame Delinon, the purchaser of the château. Do you happen to know her?”

The pointblank question evidently annoyed Evelard not a little. He answered distantly,—

“We have met in Paris.”

“Ah! I felt sure of it; a man like yourself always knows everybody—everybody of consequence, I mean. What I want you to do is to introduce me. As a pastor I am entitled to good society—and good society I mean to get; I have taken no end of pains with myself. I think I should not be out of place anywhere. But the grand air, the extra polish, the easy manners of the great—these are not to be learned from books. We must frequent the fashionable world to catch its tone. You will not refuse the friendly service, I am sure?”

“The lady’s wishes must first be consulted. Madame Delinon may desire quiet and privacy.”

“But a friend of yours, a friend of yours?”

“Say rather an acquaintance of a few minutes’ standing,” was the unpromising reply. “However, we will see when the time comes.”

And once more, and more effectually, Monsieur Bourgeois was bowed out.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONVENT BELL.

THE little church and parsonage stood in open country, at some distance from the village and the sea. Both were of the most unpretentious appearance, and both of course dated from the Revolution, that liberty-making epoch associated generally with bloodshed and violence only.

Up till that time the valiant little Protestant remnant settled on these remote shores, wave of the great outflow from the Cevennes, possessed no temple. True, that Turgot the Magnanimous had wrested from his master, the estimable, but, alas! uxorious Louis Seize, certain privileges for his dissident subject, but as yet liberty of public worship and full civil rights were denied them. Not till our great teacher in all things, the Revolution, with a stroke of the pen had proclaimed liberty of conscience and equality of citizenship, could they build churches, celebrate baptism, marriage and burial, and educate their children, now for the first time legitimate in the eyes of the law.

Whilst the church of St. Gilles hardly numbered a hundred years, the parsonage-house close by was linked with the very beginning of Protestantism in the commune and western seaboard of France.

Wisely, indeed, had later builders retained as much as was available of the ancient construction. Instead of demolishing the home of the so-called pastors of the desert, preachers of the Gospel at daily peril of their own lives and of those dearest to them, they had improved and enlarged it, the result being a straggling congeries, with one historic feature of deepest, most painful interest.

At the back of the premises, between kitchen and outhouse, had been left intact a narrow staircase built in the wall, leading to a tiny loft under the roof.

The existence of this hiding-place would never be guessed by the uninitiated, and here, throughout generations, preachers of the Gospel had hidden from the dragoons of His Most Catholic Majesty. When the weather permitted, service was celebrated on the open sea, but on returning ashore the preacher would be hunted down like a wild beast whenever the soldiers were on his track. Sometimes, unable to regain his home, he slept in a cavern of the tufa rocks; at others, a parishioner concealed him among his haystacks or farmhouse lumber; alike, the hider and the hidden being subject to fines, imprisonment, mutilation, torture and cruel death.

That walled-in staircase and loft, reached by a trap-door, possessed a weird fascination for Evelard.

Originally a full-grown man could not stand upright in it, nor could he stretch himself at full length, whilst the only window had been a movable tile overhead.

The last minister, having a numerous young fam-

ily, enlarged the hiding-place, put in a skylight, and made it habitable.

It occurred to the newcomer to turn this eyrie into a study, at least whilst the warm weather lasted.

The skylight done away with, a window thrown out, and he should have an ideal retreat!

The view on all sides was superb. As he gazed around, he said to himself, that with such a prospect perpetually before his eyes he might perhaps feel inspired to do something, in other words, to write. He was not ambitious, but who could resist such inspiration?

His range of vision took in the forest-girt, glittering bay, the broad blue Gironde mingling with the sea, on its bright surface many a noble ship and huge steamer bound for distant ports far away, the majestic Cordouan, emblem of Truth, Faith, Freedom, of all the master forces that have ever done battle with a selfish world.

On the other side the panorama was hardly less heart-stirring. He saw an immense sweep of fair, open country, champagne intermingling with wood, pasture, cornfield and vineyard; here and there a village dotting the sunlit plain. The whole made up a picture of wondrous loveliness, peace and variety. Only one feature broke the spell, and seemed to blot the whole. Below, close under his eyes, lay the parsonage garden, hitherto cultivated more for use than pleasure. On either side rose a wall on which were trained peach, fig-trees, and tomatoes; but at the end this wall was raised to an extraordinary

height, and was evidently the continuation of a neighbour's boundary.

As he followed the line he now discovered that a convent garden adjoined his own. The roof of the main building and the bell-gable of the chapel could be seen as he stood, but on craning his neck he could also distinguish the narrow, close-barred windows of what was evidently a cloistered house.

He had then, under his eyes, one of those living tombs to which unhappy women, often on the threshold of life, still consign themselves, one of those hideous anomalies which had helped to drive him from Rome.

The conviction saddened, dismayed, revolted. There, beneath that joyous heaven, in the heart of that sunny, idyllic landscape, stood the half prison, half mad-house, whose very existence is an outrage to reason and the name of religion.

He felt, nevertheless, attracted to this little chamber in the roof; set the village carpenter to work upon a window and bookshelves; a chair, table and writing materials were brought up. Within a few days of arrival he took possession.

The weather was indescribably beautiful. The wide landscape looked lovelier than ever as he smoothed out a sheet of paper, dipped his pen in ink, and began to write.

Beside his desk lay an open volume of the greatest prose writer of contemporary France. He now copied out a sentence, appropriate text, as it seemed, for an essay on the intellectual development of the world.

“In the great education of the human mind nothing is lost. The primer from which Goethe learned to read was no useless book.”

“And shall I?” mused the ex-priest, “I, who have suffered and struggled in the cause of truth, shall I keep silent? May I not also do my part?”

A momentary exultation thrilled him. He pictured to himself a series of mental labours as stimulating to the writer as they might be fruitful to the reader.

Here, then, should he find his reward. Here should he be recompensed for what had occasionally seemed a useless martyrdom, a shipwrecked career, a piece of self-abnegation of no account. His pulses quickened, his cheeks glowed, the pen moved freely over the page, when a noise arrested his attention. It was the tinkling of the convent bell, the cold, penetrating sound, more like the feeble echo of a death-knell, bidding to tears and gloom, than a cheerful call to thanksgiving and adoration. He dropped his pen, took an agitated turn, then reseated himself, covering his face with his hands.

As he sat thus, the hated sound still audible, there arose before his inner gaze two scenes of a girlish life. Fresh and vivid were they as of yesterday, though both belonged to a buried past.

The first was a radiant, sparkling, wildly joyous picture, one of those nineteenth century pastorals that recall the canvas of Watteau or the pages of Ariosto.

It was an out-of-door *fête* on a sumptuous scale, given in one of those lovely old gardens still to be

found within the precincts of Paris. Here a lady, well-known in the world of fashion and of letters, held her stately court. Under her auspices, aided by poets and artists, a dainty pageant had been arranged, an Arcadian scene in which the shepherds and shepherdesses not only recalled the masques of olden time, but acted their poetic part. And of all the maidens there, one was the universally-acknowledged flower and star. All eyes followed the beautiful, spirited, inspiring girl none of her own sex could find it in their hearts to envy. The dazzling destiny to which she was born—sole heiress to a splendid fortune, last of a noble name, had seemed rather to heighten the sweetness and ingenuousness of her nature than lend haughtiness or caprice. Unspoiled by flattery, she remained naïve, affectionate and guileless as the nymph she so adorably portrayed. Then another scene rose before his eyes.

It was a sunny April morning. He saw a well-dressed crowd, some afoot, others in handsome equipages, hastening towards a convent. The chapel doors were flung wide, the interior blazed with tapers, sacristan and acolyte were preparing the altar for a ceremony. As yet, however, the church itself was empty, one and all of the assembled visitors entered a large hall or vestibule connecting it with the convent.

Here, behind a barred grating, a gloom-visaged, black-robed nun by her side, stood the sparkling, radiant shepherdess of the pastoral. Dressed in white satin, veiled with richest lace, a wreath of myrtle blossoms in her bright hair, delicately-gloved ; but

for these sombre surroundings, the girl seemed ready for her bridal.

Now, one by one, weeping parents, kinsfolk, friends, neighbours, and servants press forward to take a last adieu, the supreme valediction of the living and the dead. Another hour, that twenty-year-old maiden, a cloistered nun will be to all intents and purposes buried in the tomb.

Few outside the grating could withhold their tears, as they approached by turns to clasp for the last time that slender hand, take a long, final look of the lovely, dearly-loved face. But, as it happens on a deathbed, the dying remain calm amid broken-hearted bystanders, so this girl showed no shrinking, no sorrow, as she took final leave of those who had cherished her from the cradle.

A feverish brightness shone in her eyes, an unreal, almost ghastly gaiety animated her voice. She smiled, even laughed away the misgivings expressed openly, for as yet all could speak the thought uppermost in their minds. Even the bent, sobbing figure of her old Alsatian nurse could not shake the victim's self-possession.

And all the while, rigid as stone, repellent as the reality of which she was the incarnation, there stood the dark-visaged, hard-browed superior, henceforth gaoler, keeper, inquisitor of one captive more.

The adieu comes to an end. The two contrasted figures—the one fair as an angel, the other grim and forbidding as Atropos of Greek fable—disappeared from behind the grating. The red-eyed crowd poured into the chapel. The death-knell sounded

and the last scene of the horrible drama was accomplished.

Standing on tip-toe, the more curious spectators could now see the passive figure of the novice stretched on a bier, her hair shorn close, her limbs wrapt in coarse cere-clothes, whilst the death-knell, still sounding, priests and acolytes mumbled over her the lugubrious service for the dead.

Half-an-hour later, all was ended. Parents and friends went home, consoling themselves as best they could. Their darling was consigned to the grave. Alas! not the grave in which memory sleeps and love and sorrow are as if they had never been, the world forgot! "Oh! Bertrande, my Bertrande," murmured the pastor, "forgive! forgive!"

CHAPTER VII.

MOONLIGHT REVELS.

SWEET and engaging as was the landscape of St. Gilles in sunshine, it yet showed more seductiveness under a brilliant moon. The sea gleamed as a silver shield, the pine-woods were clear cut against the deep heavens, every object was sharply defined. The travelled stranger might almost fancy himself in the East, so intense the effulgence, so nearly resembling light every shadow. More splendid even than the sun is this moon of the Gironde, according all things a gem-like lustre and distinctness.

The cool brown sands, firm and smooth as a carpeted floor, made a charming croquet-lawn by day and ball-room at night. After the cloudless, burning glory of the afternoon came a deliciously fresh and balmy hour, the wild evening primroses by the shore breathed fragrance, the softness and mellowness of the air permitted all kinds of indiscretions. Young girls might discard their straw hats in this favoured little land, elderly chaperons watch the dance without dreading a chill. Till the end of summer and the flight of the last straggler the bay would resound with music and dancing.

At the height of the season, when a hundred or more visitors found accommodation in the châteaux, the village band was nightly called into requisition;

young and old gathered to look on, waltz and country dance were the order of the day. As the numbers dwindled down and one little circle broke up after another, waltz and mazurka became popular, and a solitary violin sufficed for all.

September was now advanced, and although the weather remained unbroken, most of the châteaux were closed, and the bathing season was virtually at an end. To-night only one little group of dancers animated the shore, that a right merry one. Far away could be heard their light-hearted talk and careless laughter. The very genius of frolic seemed to preside over the scene. "Come, Monsieur Jeunet, this will never do," cried a vivacious, musical, slightly imperious woman's voice. "If Marthe can make nothing of her pupil, I must really try my hand."

"Do, dear little aunt," answered a young girl in somewhat bored, matter-of fact tone. "Monsieur Jeunet doesn't mind in the least what I say."

"Mademoiselle Marthe is far too amiable—too fearful of giving offence. I need severer discipline," replied the cavalier. "Madame Delinon could, I am sure, make a finished waltzer of me in a single lesson."

Thus appealed to, the elder lady threw off her little velvet tippet, and held out a daintily gloved hand to the speaker. She was no longer what is called young, this charming châtelaine. She had reached the age when the other sex are considered in their prime. But if old enough to be the mother of the eighteen-year-old demoiselle beside her, she

was far more attractive and far more youthful in spirit than most French beauties just out of the schoolroom.

Although not precisely slender, she was without that roundness of proportion all Frenchwomen naturally dread and none take measures to guard against. She could still dance, play croquet, mountaineer, with the zest of her English sisters. Were it otherwise, were she more matronly in appearance, were more than one or two silver hairs mingled with the brown, she possessed such freshness, sweetness and spontaneity in look, voice and gesture, that every one would find her young.

It was wonderful how much assiduity the pupil now put into his lesson. At first it was an uphill concern, every step proving a mistake. The mistress harangued, the learner made excuse, the rustic fiddler had to halt again and again. Things took a decided turn for the better. The waltz now became a waltz indeed. The musician had to play faster and faster, and Marthe clapped her hands, whilst the pair whirled round and round as if nothing on earth could stop them.

“Please pause now. I entreat you to leave off. Monsieur Jeunet, I command you to desist,” cried the lady, panting for breath.

But the enraptured votary paid no heed. Swifter and swifter grew his paces, wilder and wilder his gyrations, till at last, unable to stop himself, he was fortunately stopped by an unexpected intruder. The pair came into sudden contact with a hitherto unobserved bystander.

“Evelard, as I live!” ejaculated Jeunet.

“Monsieur Evelard!” cried the lady, drawing back aghast.

“Monsieur Evelard!” echoed Marthe.

The girl had heard something of his history, and wanted to know what an abbé turned pastor looked like.

Madame Delinon did not blush—French women never do. She dropped her eyelids, smiled like a shame-faced child, and said, with an aggrieved and deeply penitential air,—

“You have a knack at discovering delinquents. If I were bent upon murder, you would be sure to surprise me in the act.”

“It is as well to be afraid of somebody,” replied the pastor drily.

“Monsieur Jeunet really wants to learn dancing. It may be useful to him in so many ways, and you must know everyone dances here. You might do it yourself without creating a scandal.”

“Why these apologies? As if I should not rejoice to see you happy! And were it otherwise,” he added in a low tone, Marthe and Jeunet at that moment teasing each other, “I have never been your second conscience.”

“Not avowedly. A—a—half Protestant—if anything at all, I could not seek a confessor. But it would break my heart to have you think ill of me,” she answered quickly.

“Nay,” was the reply, half-playful, half-reproachful. “Hearts are not so lightly broken, and surely our friends are seldom those we think ill of.”

The words failed to reassure her.

“You look upon me as a worldling, a trifler, little better than a child,” she said, on the verge of petulant tears. “The fates are ever against me. When I try to do a kindness I am sure to make myself despicable or ridiculous. I will explain to you why your friend wishes to learn dancing. Monsieur Jeunet,” she exclaimed, raising her voice, “we will go home now. Please give Marthe your arm. We follow. A thousand thanks, my good Pierre,” and a silver piece was thrust into the musician’s hands.

Then the little party moved off.

“That poor Monsieur Jeunet! To what shifts is he put for a livelihood! Would you believe it—but we will discuss his affairs another time. Let us talk of yourself; you called me your friend just now. Was it friendly thus to hide yourself from me for two long years?”

“Pardon, pardon. It could not be otherwise. You now know the reason.”

“That does not console me. How happy I should have been to sympathise with you, comfort you! We used to see so much of each other in the old days. I little thought the time was near when you would shun me altogether. But it is past and gone,” she added in a wholly changed, almost a jubilant tone. “We are near neighbours, you will let me help you in your parish. You will come to my house for a little relaxation, a little gaiety.”

“Ever kind-heartedness itself,” exclaimed the pastor, his words of approval nevertheless seeming to discommend. “But, remember, that there is a vast

difference between Jeunet's case and my own. I am still a minister of religion. My calling exacts a certain sobriety, a certain reserve. Least of all in a place like this could the Protestant pastor belong to fashion and the world."

It was well for Georgette's womanly pride that her companion could not see the effect of his words. Every sentence wounded, humiliated, made her heart sink.

But they had now quitted the open shore, luminous as by day, and entered the forest road, passing ever and anon into deep shadow. The tears glistening on her veil, the trembling of her sweet mouth, the cloud of pain, were all hidden.

"Come and see me when you like," she said, with an air of affected gaiety; "a cover will always be laid for you, and you shall have due warning of entertainments. Do not make a hermit of yourself. Do not force me into believing that my presence here is unwelcome."

"What words are these! As if I should not rejoice to call you my neighbour!"

"Do you really, really?" she asked, turning suddenly round, trying to read his looks, her own face lighted up with almost a wild glow of triumph.

"Of course," he replied. "I hold myself fortunate that chance directed your footsteps hither. Why you should have selected so out-of-the-way a spot for your *villégiatura* puzzles me not a little I confess."

With that remark, spoken carelessly, perhaps absently, the radiance faded from his listener's face.

She made no attempt at an explanation. They walked on in silence.

“Will you not come in?” she asked coldly, as they reached the lodge gate.

“Thank you, no; the hour is already late.”

“We shall see you perhaps to-morrow, to breakfast or dinner?”

He thanked her warmly, without directly accepting or refusing, bade adieu to the others and hastened away. A little tray of sandwiches, cut English fashion, and the sweet wine of the district awaited the dancers, but Georgette was now in no humour for the merry little supper that to her guests often seemed the best part of the day.

Marthe was hurried to bed, Monsieur Jeunet to the smoking-room, and a few minutes later she was in her own, weeping bitterly.

Here, then, was the end of her wildly joyous hopes and sweet illusions! This man she adored had never loved her! The solemn step so deliberately taken, the renunciation of his priestly vows, had nothing to do with his feeling for herself. She had but been blind all these years, mistaking liking and sympathy for love, admiration and friendship for passion. He wondered why she was there!

He attributed her coming to chance! When the force of her grief was spent, she moved to the window and drew back the curtain.

Yesterday this scene had worn the look of fairy-land. Here she surveyed her own little bay, the gentle curve of shore hemmed round by forest trees, with intervening English lawn and garden. In the

wondrous brilliance of the moon every feature of the landscape stood out bright and clear as the jewels of a mosaic, tiny crescent of silvery sea; serried pines, beds of white and rose-coloured zinnias, marble fountain, broad carriage drive—the picture was perfect of its kind; nothing could be added, nothing taken away; but from the owner's eyes all enchantment had vanished. This delicious domain, with its unique surroundings, its velvety swards meeting a fairy shore, hanging woods, spacious gardens, almost wore the look of a prison. But the despairing mood did not last long. Georgette Delinon owned that, fortunately for herself, she was a woman of the world. If unlearned in books and in the history of thought, she was versed beyond most women in knowledge of life and the human heart. She knew that sentiment does not as a rule guide and direct mortal affairs. More practical, and, in a certain sense, weightier motives, fortunately perhaps for us all, govern the actions of most men and women. So she said to herself that she would take courage. Evelard was now her near neighbour.

They should see each other often. Who could tell? He might wake up one morning with the conviction that he had loved her all his life? But she must be wary, she must be on her guard not to shock or displease him. She must henceforth live up to a new standard—his standard.

CHAPTER VIII.

ASPIRATIONS.

THE Lady Bountiful so familiar to English folks has no place in a French village. Our amiable pauperisers in petticoats, dispensing left-off clothes, beef tea and doses of quinine or port wine, would find their calling a failure at St. Gilles. These homely, hard-working Huguenots had ample store of stout homespun, simples and cordials. They wanted no fine ladies crossing their threshold unannounced, agog for curtsseys and subservient outpourings. Every man sat under his own vine and fig-tree and owned the roof that sheltered him. Laborious and frugal as was the general lot, it was one of content and independence. The new châtelaine felt that she must seek a sphere outside philanthropy. Charity, in other words almsgiving, had here no work to do. She might organise a lending library, make the acquaintance of her neighbours by means of social entertainments, and gradually become one of them. These things were matter of time.

Meanwhile, how could she associate herself with the new pastor and co-operate in his parochial work? She wanted to be useful to him and become his right hand.

Georgette was one of those adorable French women—their name is legion—who do not know what it is to need a religion. Her life had been one long, unbroken series of kindnesses and benefactions. She had lavished her time, her money, her good offices, on the friendless, the unfortunate, and, not seldom, the undeserving. A woman of the world, she ever remained, in the best sense of the term, unworldly. True, she would perhaps spend an entire forenoon in matching a button, would devote hours to books not worth the paper on which they were printed, and to people, in homely phrase, not worth their salt. Her heart and purse were alike at the service of needy saints and sinners.

After taking counsel with Jeunet, she decided upon assisting in the Sunday-school.

Here, surely, was an opening for her energies and aspirations! At St. Gilles, as in other Protestant communities, it was customary for the pastor's wife or daughter to catechise the little girls before service, himself taking the boys in hand. One difficulty, that a paramount one, presented itself. She had never seen a Protestant catechism in her life, and as to a Scripture lesson, she felt that the exposition of Descartes' philosophy could hardly puzzle her more.

Monsieur Jeunet, ever ready at expedients, devised a scheme. Only two leagues off, he said, there lived exactly the teacher she stood in need of; an Evangelist or Scripture Reader, quite lately consecrated as pastor, and now her neighbour.

“A most worthy man, Evelard says, only very conceited. But, good Heavens, why the world rails

at self-conceit I have never been able to understand! A good opinion of oneself is often the only fortune a man comes into. And what a fortune! The Rothschilds' billions are nothing to it."

"We will call on the pastor this very afternoon. I do not wish to lose a single moment. Will it take very long to learn the catechism, think you?"

"Catholics spend years and years upon it, but I fancy Luther simplified matters a good deal. Pastor Bourgeois will enlighten you."

"Can you drive?" asked the hostess.

"I will try."

"Which means that you know nothing about the matter," Georgette cried, laughing gaily. "Well, the carriage is so heavy nothing short of an earthquake could turn it over, and the horse is steadiest of the steady, so we will set out."

Madame Delinon was what is called rich in rural France, but she did not possess one of those colossal fortunes that figure in French novels. She enjoyed an income of just a thousand a year, enabling her to occupy a pretty flat in Paris and travel or hire a country house during the autumn. Handsome equipages and English grooms were altogether beyond her means. When purchasing this fairy-like property at an extraordinarily low price, she had taken, in addition to furniture and fixtures, an old-fashioned hooded carriage, and horse to match, the very turn-out for forest roads and cart-tracks.

If it affords exquisite delight to show off one's skill in accomplishments we have made our own, still more stimulating is the call upon hitherto un-

tried powers. Nothing could equal Monsieur Jeunet's satisfaction as he now handled the reins for the first time. Two circumstances were in his favour. They were pretty sure to have the road to themselves; and so admirably are these vehicles of the *Ancien Régime* adapted to the requirements of the country, that to overturn them would need more ingenuity than to extricate them from a rut no matter how deep.

The little party set off in the highest spirits, Monsieur Jeunet on the driver's box, Georgette, Marthe, and a little maid behind.

Their route lay inland, and although they only here and there caught the glint of the sea, every inch was romantic and beautiful; on the one hand rose stately pines and venerable ilexes; on the other stretched park-like glades, lovely little dells and coppice woods. Now they were lost in a bit of ancient forest, lofty trees shutting out the blue; now they traversed velvety pastures, through which trended crystal streams. Every variety of foliage was here—aspens, ilex, oak, chestnut, beech, acacia, but the two first bore the palm. To realise the beauty of these trees the traveller must visit St. Gilles. We come upon what look like silvery clouds lighting up the dark forest. It is the aspen mingling its pale yet resplendent tints with those of the sombre ilex, that majestic tree, here also seen at its best; and, by force of double contrast, the ilex rigidity itself, the aspen ever murmuring, ever rippling.

If, indeed, the silvery wave of the one is lovely against the deep blue sky, as striking and beautiful

the dark foliage of the ilex by its side, summer and winter, perpetually hand-in-hand.

The enjoyment of the ladies was taken jerkily.

“How pretty! What a sweet spot! Oh, the lovely view!” Madame Delinon would cry again and again, her young companion echoing the apostrophe. No sooner did they rise to gaze and admire at their ease, than, sure enough, Jeunet plumped down into a rut, or made for a stone heap, recklessly and jauntily as if he were taking part in a steeplechase. The hooded carriage presented from behind the appearance of a sailing-boat on a squally sea; first it swayed to the right, next to the left, then it lurched forward, becoming almost invisible. But the more the expedition savoured of adventure, the heartier grew the relish of all. The ladies screamed, laughed and rubbed their aching bones, their driver turning round to receive, with triumphant smile, alike reproach and congratulation.

After a while they rejoined the high road, and bowled smoothly across a fair open country, gay with autumn crops. Then they came once more in sight of the sea, and at the same time of their destination—a straggling village perched above lofty tufa rocks, warm in hue as masses of yellow ochre against the blue Atlantic.

These sea-board villages have each their little Catholic and Protestant churches, often placed in friendliest juxtaposition. Here, however, the two buildings stood wide apart; the one at the head, the other at the extreme end of a hot, dusty, monotonous street.

Pastor Bourgeois' modest dwelling and tiny church

were significantly built on the edge of the cliffs, above the caves in which his predecessors had hidden themselves. The waves had oftentimes imperilled their lives, but the dragoons of a servile king, in the hands of his fanatical pride, threatened doom far more cruel.

“The pastor is not in; you will find him somewhere by the shore. There is a nice little path cut in the rock,” said the black-hooded woman-servant.

“To the right or to the left, my good woman?” asked Jeunet blandly.

“The Lord knows! I have never noticed myself.”

“And you feel sure we shall find Monsieur Bourgeois below, do you?”

“If he isn’t there, he is nowhere, that I can answer for.”

“Good Heavens! My dear madame, do folks disappear so mysteriously in these regions; under our very nose one moment, swallowed up by quicksands the next?”

“Not that I know of; but, as I say, the pastor is thereabouts. You will find him near the caves.”

“Are the caves close by, a few hundred yards, a quarter, or half-a-mile?”

“About that. Not a great way; a bit of a way. I can’t say how far,” was the vague answer.

Then they set out in the direction indicated.

“I was wrong to expect definitions,” he said, laughing. “Our peasants, you must have noticed, never define. A mile to them may mean something over or something under an hour, from forty minutes to twice or three times that number. Westward is not

precisely in the direction of the rising sun, that is all. Well, if we don't find our pastor, we shall have an enchanting walk."

He gave Georgette his hand, Marthe followed with Mariette the maid, and the four zig-zagged down to the shore.

Here, too, the expedition savoured of the hazardous. The good woman's nice little path was a dizzy affair, being merely a footway roughly hewn in the almost vertical sides of the cliff. A dozen incidents happened ere they were safely landed below. Georgette's green gauze veil blew off, and, leaving her perilously placed as Andromeda, Jeunet insisted upon recovering it, risking his neck in the feat.

Then Marthe turned giddy, and there was a vain fumbling for scent-bottles. Jeunet thereupon averred that the best possible 'restorative' was the fumes of a cigarette. Accordingly, the party halted, whilst Marthe, with closed eyes, was smoked as assiduously as a caterpillar on a rose-tree. A stage lower down, Mariette the maid must next declare with a scream that she had sprained an ankle, if not broken a leg, and that she could not move an inch farther. Once more Jeunet proved equal to the occasion. A lovely, bluish-green lizard shot by. He affected fear, crying that they should be poisoned by venomous reptiles if they stayed a moment longer. Whereupon Mariette forgot her sprain, and they gained the shore with all possible dispatch.

Laughing, frolicking as children accorded an extra holiday, they now disported themselves, making the quiet bay resound with mirth. Georgette was not

too much a woman of the world to enjoy natural beauty. The musical splash of the wave, the crocus-coloured cliffs, the flowers, filled her with unaffected rapture. She gathered bunches of sea-lavender, bade her cavalier cut sprays of sea-holly and horned poppy, delighting childlike in her treasure.

Meantime Marthe and Mariette ran hither and thither, filling their baskets with young oysters. Nature, thriftiest matron, combining the useful with the lovely, has made of these romantic shores an oyster bed. Here you may see, sticking to the rocks, the oysterling not larger than a threepenny piece, and the full-grown dainty as served in the famous restaurants of Bordeaux. And, as is the case with game, poaching is winked at by the authorities. At St. Gilles, law and order were represented by the Garde Champêtre, whose chief business was that of town-crier, announcing sales by auction and other local events.

The pair, giggling as French girls are apt to do in the midst of scenery almost sublime, had disappeared for some minutes in one of the grottoes. On a sudden they emerged as if flying for their lives.

“A wild man!” cried Marthe.

“A hermit!” exclaimed Mariette.

“A smuggler, a ghost!” screamed both. “There he comes.”

CHAPTER IX.

EXCHANGE NO ROBBERY ; AND A FRENCH GIRL'S
ROMANCE.

BEFORE their elders could advance a step there issued from the grotto the strangest figure imaginable.

It was only Pastor Bourgeois ; but, like Bottom, wondrously translated. The excellent man was in the habit of writing sermons and gathering oysters amid these solitudes, thus combining devotion and domestic economy. For the more practical operation some disregard to appearance was necessary. He had taken off his stockings, rolling back his trews above the knee ; he had also discarded black frock-coat and white cravat, enveloping himself, for fear of a chill, in an old well-worn plaid, and looking uncouth enough.

If the little company was dumfounded with shyness and dismay, not so Pastor Bourgeois. He seemed rather pleased than otherwise at being surprised in such a deshabelle, stepped forth jauntily, by no means afraid of displaying his shapely legs, drew his plaid more picturesquely about his shoulders, and introduced himself with the ease of a viceroy.

“ I am the Reverend Barthelemy Bourgeois, pastor of the village,” he said proudly, adding with a

rather admiring glance at Marthe; "these young ladies have something to answer for, and no mistake. They disturbed me as I was composing my Sunday sermon. Ah! the ladies, the ladies. Ever, every one of you, bent from morning till night on mischief."

"We are all guilty——" Georgette began with her sweet smile, the smile for everybody, the smile of every day, but none the less ingratiating. "Let me introduce myself, your neighbour, as I may be called, the new occupier of the château of St. Gilles."

"Madame Delinon, the very person I have been dying to know!" cried Monsieur Bourgeois quite overcome. "But allow me two or three minutes in yonder cave, and I re-appear in condition to receive you. We may permit ourselves little sacrifices to comfort and appearance, but the proprieties before all things!"

A few minutes later, and the pastor, now attired in the habiliments befitting his position, sauntered along the shore, Madame Delinon leaning on his arm. It was with a feeling of exquisite delight that he listened to her request. The task of converting the people himself could hardly have afforded livelier satisfaction. Who could tell? Might not those lessons on the Catechism afford openings for a little pastoral advice, even spiritual exhortation later on? Madame Delinon was a Parisian,—in other words, a brand to be plucked from the burning. In the meantime he would keep his eyes open, but prove circumspection itself. He was no scholar. The famous aphorism of Tacitus—not in all men are the same things seemly—had never fallen under his notice. He

nevertheless felt that even in gravest matters, a châtelaine is not to be dealt with as a fishwife. A theologian is, of course, bound to appraise one soul like another, but it makes all the difference in the world whether their possessors be clad in fustian or brocade. The little business was settled after pleasantest fashion.

Pastor Bourgeois was to give his first lesson next day, staying to breakfast, and Georgette was wondering in what guise she could substantially thank him, when the little difficulty was anticipated by himself.

“And now,” he said, “I have a favour to ask of you. ‘Exchange no robbery,’ says the proverb. ‘One good turn deserves another.’ You want to master the Catechism, I want a wife. To find me a suitable partner would, I am sure, be an easy enough task to you.”

Pastor Bourgeois could hardly have put his request after more matter-of-fact fashion, were he casting about for a second-hand pony-carriage, or bargain in the shape of a sewing-machine.

Georgette, being a Frenchwoman, was accustomed to such transactions, and promised to do her best. The pastor set forth in glowing terms his prospects and circumstances, stated his requirements in the matter of dowry, praised himself as far as was permissible, finally wound up with placing his future entirely in her hands.

“Enough. I have seen, I know you,” he said. “Choose me a fireside companion, and, like the Moorish brides of Algeria, I will go to the altar

blindfolded. Your unfettered choice, I am sure, will make me the happiest man alive."

His listener did not so much as smile at this outpouring. Truth to tell, she had heard the same kind of thing too often. Madame Delinon was no more of a matchmaker than any other Frenchwoman occupying the same social position. She had been instrumental in bringing about many a marriage, now being consulted by the friends of would-be bridegroom, now of maiden, impatiently awaiting bridals.

The young pastor's request came as a matter of course. Promising to attend to the business at once, also to apply herself assiduously to the Catechism, she joined her companions, and soon after the little party drove home.

That same evening the topic of matrimony was mooted afresh. Jeunet had gone on a visit to Evelard; his friend, he said, was moping himself to death. Aunt and niece were left alone, Georgette yawning over a new novel, Marthe plying her needle.

For some time the young lady had seemed lost in thought, when she suddenly looked up, and finding her companion gazing out of the window, put the abrupt question,—

"How soon do you intend to marry me, dear aunt?"

Georgette closed the book on her knees, evidently ready for a confabulation.

"My dear child," she said, laughing gaily, "I assure you the question has never entered my head. Why, how old are you?"

"Nineteen next birthday," was the somewhat

pensive reply. Marthe seemed to fear that she had already lost time.

“Really? As old as that? We will think about it, then. Let me see.”

Then as if light had broken upon her all at once, she went on,—

“I suppose you do not mind much where you live?”

“Of what use to mind, aunt? A girl with only a dowry of thirty thousand francs cannot pick and choose. I have often heard you say that.”

“True, quite true. Now, Marthe, I have thought of some one. As yet you know next to nothing of the world, but I have tried to open your eyes a little from time to time. A girl who consults her own happiness will never seek outward attractions in a husband, good looks, charming manners, winning speech and so on; such things are mere snares and pitfalls. Marry a man who is courted by society, universally admired, a drawing-room favourite, and you might as well suffocate yourself with charcoal fumes at once! You could not count upon his fidelity for six months.”

“I should like to marry a cavalry officer, I adore the uniform,” put in Marthe.

“You could, of course, do that; your dowry permits it. But listen to me, Marthe. An officer’s wife has to rough it much more than you are aware of. You would be sure to go to Algeria, all young officers are sent there, and with your dowry you could only aspire to a lieutenant. How would you like to find yourself in some remote spot with Ka-

byles to wait upon you, and robbers and assassins on the lookout to plunder and murder the moment your husband's back was turned? No, my dear child, I have in my mind, ready to hand, a husband who would not separate you from me, and who would, I am sure of it, never give you so much as a single moment's uneasiness."

"Who is he?" asked Marthe almost contemptuously. She had read novels, and her aunt's eulogium failed to awaken enthusiastic feeling.

"Can you ask the question? Recall our delightful adventure of yesterday, that agreeable young pastor, that comfortable little parsonage-house. Where else could you look for such guarantees of peace and happiness?"

Marthe neither welcomed nor deprecated the project. She was evidently weighing, deliberating.

"He would sermonise me," she said at last; "I should not like to be preached at."

"What a child you are! As if doctors ever physicked their own wives! No, Marthe, find me a stronger objection."

"Would he have to stay here always?"

"Oh, dear, no. He may be promoted to the pastorate of a large city any day, to Montpellier, Nîmes, Bordeaux, where the best society is all Protestant; you would be as gay as in Paris."

Again the young lady pondered.

"Well, dear aunt," she said, after a time, "you arrange matters to please yourself. The great point seems to me, not to marry this, that, or the other, but to marry somebody."

“Exactly. There you speak like a sensible girl. So, without acting precipitately, I will encourage the pastor’s visits and give you both opportunities of knowing each other.”

Marthe thanked her aunt and again plied her needle, this time with greater alacrity. The prospect of a trousseau, of matronly rank, of an interior to govern, awakened agreeable speculation. French girls as a rule are the least romantic beings in creation. Marthe’s reverie was very matter of fact. The husband chosen for her was not necessarily a girlish ideal, but the satisfaction of worldly aspirations is surely something to be thankful for.

Thrice happy Marthe! Thrice happy Marthes! for their name is legion in France. The thought of her own possible shortcomings need never trouble her. If fairy godmother had withheld the gift of beauty, wit, and sparkling grace, that was no subject for melancholy recrimination either. She possessed a marriage portion, and thus dowered, as she knew right well, any girl could marry to-morrow if she chose!

CHAPTER X.

THE ORDEAL.

PERHAPS Georgette had never put more heart and soul into any task than that of preparing her Sunday's lesson. She learned every word, both of question and answer, by rote; repeated each, if once, at least twenty times to the ever-ready, ever-handly Jeunet; took counsel with her teacher as to possible emergencies, unlooked-for remarks, puzzling queries on the part of little scholars, probably better versed in Scripture and the Catechism than herself; finally, set out for church in a state of mind bordering on exhilaration. She owned half shyly that her rapture was not wholly of a personal nature. It was not merely the pleasure of being associated with Evelard in his daily avocations, gradually becoming, as she hoped, his fellow-worker and helper, that now made her heart beat and her cheeks glow. Delightful as were these convictions, another thought awakened deeper emotion. Affectionateness itself, generous, single-minded, the petted, beautiful woman of the world had reached middle life without having experienced a thrill of real reverence. Catholic by birth and bringing up, she had long ago drifted into indifference and scepticism. Not even Evelard's eloquence could ever bring her to the confessional, the weekly fast and other obligations of the Church. Whilst vicar

of one of the largest metropolitan churches, the now obscure pastor of St. Gilles, had staggered, electrified, brilliant Parisian congregations. The priest had never reached her soul, although her heart had long been his own.

But the stupendous nature of his sacrifice, the pathos of his present position, touched her now. She felt that there must be something in Truth, the Truth—as he believed—embodied in Protestantism, to have brought about such an act. The spectacle of his daily life and surroundings aroused a feeling widely apart from mere compassion. She almost felt that she could worship him, whilst the thought of raising herself, no matter how laboriously, to his level, became a kind of religion.

The Catechism classes were held after service, the pastor taking the little boys in the vestry, his new teacher retiring with the little girls to the school-room. Georgette smilingly surveyed her pupils, asked the name of each, put them, as she thought, at their ease by a friendly word or two. Then the lesson began.

It was now noon, and the hottest days of closing summer were not yet over. In spite of open doors and partly closed shutters, the heat was oppressive. A bumble-bee and a wasp, as is their wont, would intrude from time to time, creating perhaps to the children no unwelcome diversion. But could midday sultriness, bumble-bees and even wasps account for such woodenness and stupidity?

What could be the matter with the children? thought poor Georgette, as she repeated question

after question, getting from one a monosyllabic reply wholly irrelevant to the matter in hand ; from another a blunt "Don't know !" from most a fixed stare.

The puzzling part of the business was that these little girls had one and all intelligent faces : she could not set down their silence and impassibility to brainlessness, much less idiocy. Neater, nicer-looking peasant children you could hardly find, but now, as it seemed, stricken with sudden incapacity.

"Come," Georgette said, glancing at the little enamel watch having her monogram in brillants, "this will never do. We will leave the Catechism till next time and read our portion of Scripture. Let Barbette begin."

But Barbette, although eleven years old and reputed the best scholar of the class, showed the most astonishing inaptitude and mulishness. She stammered, hesitated, came to a standstill in the middle of a verse.

The mistress, looking up reproachfully, encountered a pair of bright black eyes fixed upon herself. The Scripture lesson threatened to prove as complete a failure as the Catechism.

"Barbette, I am disappointed in you. You are the eldest here, you ought to set an example of diligence and attention. Now, Pauline, see if you cannot do better."

Pauline was Barbette's sister, and had the same bright look and dark eyes. She nevertheless showed herself equally intractable. There she stood gazing at the new Sunday-school teacher as if brought sud-

denly face to face with some startling phenomenon.

Poor Georgette began to lose heart and patience. What account could she render of her stewardship? How could she hope to retain her post if such were the result?

“You are all vexing me very much,” she said; “our time is nearly up and we have really done nothing. The pastor will be grieved, I am sure, and he will not let me go on teaching you. He will appoint some one else——”

Just then a well-known voice called her name. Looking up, she saw Evelard, who had stolen in unobserved a few minutes before, and, standing apart, watched the little scene.

“The children may go now,” he said with an odd smile. “Away with all of you, and very different conduct next Sunday, remember, when I shall take you in hand myself!”

Scuttling away like young rabbits, the little scholars disappeared in a moment, leaving the pair alone.

He went straight up to her, and for a moment his changed position was forgotten. She seemed to hear once more the satiric priest, the masterful man of the world, whose scathing criticisms had even been dear. In the old familiar way he now smiled as upon some petted, irresponsible child, and pointed to the brooch fastening her lace ruffle.

“Adorable blunderer!” he cried, “must you bring all the vanities of Paris in your train? Could you not discard your diamonds for a single day?”

“My bird of paradise? Was it the brooch that made the children stare at me and forget their les-

sons?" she said, overcome with feelings of mixed shame and pleasure. His raillery gratified more than his rebuke wounded.

She unfastened the ornament with a penitential look. It was a charming piece of jewellery, the kind of trinket that ever attracts a little knot of idlers on the Boulevards—diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, topazes, and brilliants, nicely imitating a tiny bird of paradise.

"How could I be so foolish?" she added. "But the brooch shall be consigned to my jewel case. I will never wear it here any more."

"And these—and these?"

As he spoke he pointed to the brilliants glittering on her fingers and little ears. Then he said in a wholly altered tone,—

"No, dear friend, I was jesting. Retain your innocent vanities. They harm neither yourself nor others, but leave Sunday-school teaching to those more fitted for the task. You can boast of wider spheres of usefulness."

"I should like to try again, just once more," Georgette replied, hardly trusting herself to speak. His changed manner made her heart sink. She seemed farther than ever from understanding him. Could a woman then never understand the man she adored?

He shook his head smilingly.

"Why this persistence in an office thankless at best? And the same ground has to be gone over and over again; you would soon grow weary."

"I have made this place my home. I should like to associate myself with your work, that is only natural," she contrived to get out.

Again she was answered by deprecation.

"It is a generous wish. I am heartily grateful. But remember the delicacy of my position. I am bound to be twice as scrupulous as any other pastor, even in the teaching of the Catechism!"

"I understand—I understand," she murmured.

"One word more," he said, as he conducted her to the hooded carriage. "If I am slow to accept your hospitalities, and unmindful of your kindnesses, do not misinterpret my conduct. I thank you from my heart, but even in this remote spot I cannot disregard public opinion. As a priest I was bound to court the world, as a pastor I am under the obligation of renouncing it."

Georgette held out her hand with a smile, one of those smiles some women can command when on the verge of bitterest tears, and the two parted.

She did not venture upon inviting him to dinner that evening, as she had intended to do. She felt in these first moments of cruel disenchantment as if she must never invite him again, her old genial guest, for whom in former days a cover had ever been laid. So the horse's head was turned in the direction of the château.

Evelard re-entered the silent, lonely parsonage. Georgette returned to her novels, her croquet with Jeunet, her confabulations with Marthe on the all-important topic of matrimony.

She thought she had never found any day of her life so wearisome, so monotonous, so apparently interminable. From time to time she escaped to a certain room in the house from which could be seen

the roof of the Protestant church and parsonage.

How could Evelard support such an existence, she wondered, how endure the privations of his new life? In former days he had been luxuriously lodged, delicately served; now, Jeunet told her, his surroundings were of the humblest, his board, frugality itself. But of such discomforts he seemed wholly unconscious, Jeunet added. He who, in homely phrase, might formerly have been styled a fine gentleman, ever nice to fastidiousness with regard to material existence, now accepted the estate of a peasant. From the elegancies and distractions of social life he seemed to shrink more and more.

She owned to herself that he was a mystery to her, better perhaps for both that she should hold aloof—even, when opportunity offered, quit St. Gilles altogether.

Georgette did not shed tears, she was too much mortified with herself to weep. The day that had dawned so brightly, that was to link her with his work, in time make her necessary to him, but separated them more and more, and the separation was of her own bringing about.

On the table of her boudoir-like bedroom lay the little Testament and Catechism, a few hours before harbingers of golden hope and fairest promise, now significant of woefulest failure.

No one, however, should know of her disappointment and humiliation. She would continue her lessons with the young pastor and her attendance at church. Evelard, if met chancewise, should be greeted with an every-day smile.

CHAPTER XI.

A VOICE FROM THE TOMB.

THE day had been one of surpassing brilliance and beauty, and as the sun slanted westward, a wonderful calm and mellowness stole over the place. For once carping mortals could enjoy a perfect world! No less clear than at noonday showed every feature of the immense perspective—pearly waves, sands bright as tortoise-shell, encircling pinewoods and fair open country, the whole now bathed in tender, amber radiance. It was as if a golden veil were drawn over earth and heaven.

Far away, delicately pencilled against the rosy heavens, towered the mighty Cordouan, to-day more like a thing of dreams, itself a roseate cloud destined to melt, than a fortress of mid-Atlantic, proof against devastating wind and wave.

This harmonious, lovely Nature, with its element of subdued grandeur, had inexpressible charms for Evelard. It seemed to him all that he wanted just now, as if nothing else, not even the devotion of a woman like Georgette, could soothe and satisfy him in equal degree.

He loved to explore the country far and wide, and on this Sunday afternoon had strolled westward in

the direction of Royan. For a while his way led amid the sandy undulations of the ancient pine forest, the sombre blue-black foliage of the veteran trees and the waxen-green seedlings in sharp contrast; athwart the red gold stems flitted myriads of large white butterflies, whilst every spot was fragrant with wild carnation and aromatic immortelles. The dim sea-music reached his ears as he went, now in cool shadow, now under the open heavens, deeper-hued than by day, but less dazzling.

Soon he emerged into high ground and looked upon the distant spires and port of Royan immediately under his feet, the smooth brown sands and placid sea between him and St. Gilles, a choice of ways. He could keep to the shore, following the tufa cliffs, or reach the village by a path zig-zagging on their very edge.

He chose the zig-zag path and the downs, having on one side the sea, on the other a vast expanse of waste, gradually growing into a garden. Every shifting scene was full of quiet charm, the sweeps of flowery down, the tiny fields and vineyards bordering the cliffs, the tamarisk groves in rosy bloom and dark ilexes hedging little crops of buckwheat in lovely flower. Here and there tall hedges, a tangle of wild rose, honeysuckle, and luscious blackberry protected these hanging fields. Here and there, deep down under the crags, idlers from Royan peered hither and thither on the lookout for oysters.

The walk ended all too soon, and long before he wished it he had reached the village, coming in sight of parsonage and convent. What would he not have

given to be able to separate the two, shut out the last wholly from his sight?

He seemed suddenly driven from a region of ideal peace and loveliness into the precincts of a sepulchre, a sepulchre haunted by the living, not by the dead.

The sun had now dropped behind the pale gold sea, flooding it with ruby glow as of rich red wine, the transparent azure of the sky changed to misty violet and a star peeped out from time to time. Twilight there had been none. Evening on this coast, as in Southern lands, succeeded day without a break. The white walls of the convent still gleamed amid the swiftly gathering shadows, and as he approached, a familiar, unwelcome sound met his ears. It was the bell summoning the cloistered Carmelites to evening prayer, reminding him of once joyous, joy-giving lives consigned to a living tomb. As one under a spell, he followed the sound, magnetised against his will.

Although the house itself was entirely isolated from the outer world—no prison set apart for the most dangerous class of criminals could be more so—the chapel was always thrown open during service. It stood within the lofty conventual walls at some distance from the road, and was accessible by an iron gate or door adjoining the porter's lodge, unbolted for the occasion.

As a rule the village folk seldom availed themselves of the privilege except on days of high festival. The extra musical services, the display of banners and flowers, would then attract a little crowd.

But visitors and strangers often came in order to catch a glimpse of the nuns.

They could not see much. The chapel was of narrow proportions, but an iron screen shut off that part occupied by the cloistered sisters.

Motionless as statues or performing automatic genuflexions, the white-robed figures were just discernible, that was all. Their voices could be heard, and as the Carmelites are recruited from the upper ranks of society, the musical portion of their services is generally worth listening to.

Such was the case at St. Gilles; but folks did not care for sacred music, they preferred the village band of wind instruments; the majority were Huguenots, the remainder attended mass at the parish church. Only a stray visitor or two reported of a wondrously sweet voice to be heard at the convent, a contralto, worth going many a mile to hear. Evelard walked on mechanically. Before he was aware, he had passed the by-road leading home, and found himself in front of the chapel.

The tall iron gate, bristling with iron spikes, stood wide. Sweet strains of women's voices reached him where he lingered. Actuated as men often are by impulses for which they cannot account, he walked up the gravel path and entered. Standing under the shadow of the organ loft, he gazed and listened. There was nothing to see that may not be seen in any French town—a rococo interior, tawdry ornamentation, ex-votos in plenty, a few lay sisters with their string of pale orphans, and a score or so of outsiders, mostly peasant women and chil-

dren. Behind the sparsely perforated screen at the extreme end and almost concealed by the altar, their features wholly indistinguishable, their figures a mere mass of white, sat the cloistered nuns—living, breathing women, whose only connection with the outside world was this service. The singing soon made Evelard oblivious of the commonplace sight and vulgar display.

It was an Ave Maria chaunted by a cloistered sister behind the screen. No theatrical display, no operatic effects, marked the performance. What held the listener captive was its penetrating, unimaginable sweetness and pathos. This heavenly singing filled the heart with sorrow only. It was as if the songstress, like unhappy bird deprived of eyesight in order to stimulate his voice, sought here relief from a fainting spirit and despairing soul. Life meant a dark prison, the body a fetter that galled, but melody remained in which to pour out all her yearnings for final peace. Love spoke not in those passionate accents, nor regret for vanished joy; faith never once made itself heard, no promptings of heaven-sent consolation soothed the listener's ear. From beginning to end the song was a craving for rest, an invocation to the sable-winged Angel whose name is Death!

Evelard could bear no more. Stealing out softly as, he hoped, unobserved, he made for the door.

He had not noticed the entrance a few minutes before of three persons, who now watched his movements curiously. Just as the pastor was attracted by some unaccountable impulse towards the con-

vent, so Georgette could not help finding herself within the precincts of the parsonage. She had no wish to intrude upon her neighbour's privacy, much less watch his movements; but somehow, inevitably as it seemed, her walks and drives always brought her close to the Protestant church.

To-night, for instance, she had merely said to her companions, "Let us take a stroll;" and although they began by the shore, sauntering on without pre-conceived plan, here they were at the convent doors, and within a stone's throw of Evelard's little gate.

The lighted chapel, the sound of the organ, invited, so they went in, Georgette looking round curiously—churches always amused her, she said; Jeunet, with folded arms, composing the novel that was to create a pretty commotion, Marthe demurely conforming to Catholic usages.

Like most French girls, she was indeed a Catholic by inclination; circumstances, rather unfortunately for herself she thought, had made her a Huguenot.

As Georgette listened to that solo, quintessence of melody, quintessence of human sorrow, her expression changed. She leaned forward, endeavouring to catch a glimpse of the singer, listened more and more intently; at last half rose, as if she must—she would glance behind the iron screen. The singing ended, they passed out, jostling against Evelard on the gravel path.

Georgette forgot the mortifying events of the morning, the collapse of the lesson, the pastor's reproof, her own good resolutions. She had said to

herself that she would henceforth hold aloof, be proud, even distant. These dignified resolutions vanished in a moment. Overcome with emotion, without a commonplace greeting, paying no heed to the presence of her companions, she cried, "You, then, were there, too? Like me, you have been listening to a voice from the tomb!"

But Evelard, murmuring incoherent excuses, brushed by. Before Jeunet could offer a remonstrance, he had passed the porter's lodge and turned down the by-road leading home.

"Our friend was annoyed at being seen within the convent walls," said Jeunet jestingly. "He fears perhaps that we may quote Scripture against him: 'The dog returns'—you know the unsavoury rest. He need be under no apprehension as far as I am concerned. Were he to imitate many a divorced husband taking back to his bosom his discarded darling—in Evelard's case, the Church,—I for one should esteem him none the less. What is the hero of the perpetually changing front? He is the possessor of a thousand lively sympathies where most selfish wretches can boast but one."

His hostess seemed less appreciative of these sallies than usual. On returning home, Bézique, three-handed whist, Jeunet's readings from Rabelais and Molière failed to divert.

The singing of cloistered nuns always made her low-spirited, she said. How could women be so desperately narrow-minded as to believe that sleeping on stone floors, half starving themselves, staring at death's heads and cross-bones till they lost their

wits, could gratify even a heathen deity, much more the God of a highly-polished nation like the French?

In spite of the Exhibition and the Eiffel Tower, she despaired of the future whenever she thought of it.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEPUTATION.

THE village still resounded with the trumpet-note of chanticleer, "The guardian, gallant and gay, of the great world's drowsy conscience," as sings our most musical Owen Meredith.

Soon after dawn, rosy rays like the spokes of a wheel shot up from the eastern horizon. The purple heavens melted into transparent azure, and as the immense prospect became gradually distinct, the westward cliffs were streaked with scarlet and vermilion. Last of all, appeared the sun, flooding sea and shore with gold.

Sunrise, like sunset, is gorgeous in these southern seaboard regions, but the quieter loveliness that follows the first peaceful hour of the work-a-day world, is more delicious still. Already, ere the sheet of silvery dew has melted from the pastures, changing the bluish green to yellow, ere the first sun-ray has warmed the brisk air, both husbandman and fisher are abroad. The blue-bloused farmer is ploughing up his little field for autumn sowing; as if interested in their master's welfare the docile tan-coloured oxen do their part, obeying word and gesture; wife and children are busy, nearer home, gathering the rich

crops of golden fig, ruby-tinted peach and blood-red tomato.

From the level sands come sounds of grating keel and sea-faring voices in cheery chorus; one little bark after another glides off, unfurling a tiny white sail on the sparkling wave; soon ocean, like earth, is animated with light-hearted toilers.

Happy, thrice happy he who wakes up on Monday morning to a more than busy week! Few exhilarations equal that of the good worker entering upon a welcome task. The difficulties stimulate, the drudgery becomes dear. The man, the woman within, proclaims itself; all humanity is honoured in a piece of honest work honestly done.

Evelard had rested ill, and was just falling into a sound slumber when a loud rapping at the front door aroused him. What could such untimely summons mean? He was surely needed to baptize a dying child, or administer spiritual consolation to some adult whose end was near. Hastily dressing himself and opening the shutters on his way, he descended to the front door. As he drew the bolt the village clock struck five and a half.

“Mr. Pastor, I suppose?” said the foremost of a little group outside—three portly figures, wearing the blue blouse of the peasant; rather, we should say, of the small landed-proprietor.

Evelard saw at a glance that the intruders belonged to the well-to-do class. The clean blue linen smock-frock, so becoming to these dark-haired, olive-complexioned Southerners, was to-day worn in order to protect Sunday broadcloth. Their turn-down

collars and wristbands, of fine homespun, white as snow, glossy as satin, betokened something more than comfort in the home; their solid gold wedding rings indicated heads of houses—the genuine Conservative spirit which renders the French peasant, in spite of his ardent Republicanism, the guardian of family honour and social morality.

The senior of the deputation, a white-haired veteran, stalwart still in spite of his three-score years and ten, evidently possessed more knowledge of the world, and, perhaps, more instruction than the others. It was easy to see that he held some position of authority, was accustomed to rule, in fact; the village magistrate was proclaimed by sheer force of presence. His companions, without lacking dignity, showed some shyness and reserve; they were as yet more at home behind the plough than on the civic bench. The elder had that look of quiet, well reined-in enquiry so characteristic of his class. He evidently felt himself in a transitive period, of which others could render far better account. On his forehead seemed written that beautiful text of the modern Gospel: “The golden age is before us, and not behind.” His own existence was very laborious. He had entered the lists of life sadly handicapped in the matter of education; intellectual enjoyments, but dimly realized, could never be his. But his children’s children would fare otherwise. The prospect filled him with cheerfulness.

The third of the little party was a comparatively young man, shrewdness itself, eminently practical, yet alert for change. He, too, was a true son of the

soil, removed by three generations only from the serf—the taxable, rateable animal, nothing more, in the eyes of sovereign and seigneur.

Strange to say, Evelard could unhesitatingly aver that the strangers belonged neither to his congregation nor creed. Let ethnologists and physiognomists explain the matter as they can. The Reformed faith in France has differentiated a physical type.

“Yes, gentlemen, I am the pastor. Do me the honour to enter and be seated,” he replied, accommodating himself to the phraseology and usages of the place. “My housekeeper sleeps in the village, and has not yet arrived, but I know the way to my own sideboard.”

He brought out a bottle of sweet dessert wine, filled a glass for each: good wishes were exchanged, lips smacked, then the visitors seemed fairly at their ease.

“Mr. Pastor,” continued the first speaker, “we know who you are. It is only fair that you should be as well informed. I am Mayor of Roche St. George, the largest commune, as I daresay you know, on this side of La Rochelle. These gentlemen are municipal councillors of the same place, and we have come to you on a matter of business.”

“Mr. Mayor and gentlemen, I am entirely at your service. I shall only be too happy to serve you.”

“You are uncommon learned, folks say,” the Major went on, glancing at the ineffaceable mark at the tonsure—Evelard saw that his history was no secret—“you are just our man.”

He eyed his companions as if anxious to hand over

to them the task of spokesman, but both looked irresponsible. Then he sipped his Frontignac and cleared his throat.

“We are all Catholics, yonder,” he added, pointing over his shoulder. “There never was, that I heard of, a Protestant church or pastor at our place. That is no reason why there never should be.”

“Not that I can see,” put in the youngest of the party, evidently cogitating a longer speech.

“Nor I either,” said the first municipal councillor. “But——” thereupon he stopped short and looked on the ground.

His audience waited. He was compelled to go on. “But, might we put such a question without offence, Mr. Pastor,—are you married?”

“No, I am still a bachelor,” was the somewhat curt reply, an answer which seemed to disappoint his hearers not a little. They exchanged significant glances. The Mayor went on,—

“We—Catholics born and bred, mind you—like the look of a married minister of religion. We should have been better pleased to talk this matter over with a husband and father, as each of us are. However, that is neither here nor there. What we wanted to say was this: folks at St. George would like to know something about Protestantism.”

“Had you not better tell the Pastor why?” asked the first municipal councillor shyly.

“You know as well as we do, Mr. Pastor,” the Mayor continued, “we are pretty sure to find one rotten potato in a sack, and one bad priest in a diocese.”

“Alas, Mr. Mayor, human nature is not changed by the wearing of the soutane; shall the fallen priest receive less mercy than other sinners?”

“Not less, but not more,” exclaimed the younger man fiercely, clenching his fist and striking his stick on the ground. “When a priest betrays a poor innocent orphan girl it is time we have done with such gentry altogether. I, for one, am ready to beat such scoundrels black and blue, to stand up in the very church and bawl out their deeds, to——”

“Hush, hush,” his elder put in. “Let our neighbour speak.”

“A great scandal has just happened in our village, then, Mr. Pastor,” the Mayor went on, “and we are here to ask a favour of you. We want you to come over to St. George once a week and tell all of us, in plain words, exactly the difference between your religion and ours. We like the look of Protestantism. As I say we like the notion of a pastor becoming a husband and father like ourselves. You pastors, too, bear a good character; leastways, I never heard to the contrary. What say you to our request, sir?”

“I cannot, of course, refuse it: I will do my best.”

“You will speak out sharp and short, if you please, Mr. Pastor. Any blockhead knows a Protestant Church from a Catholic when he sees it. We want to become as learned concerning the two doctrines. Just that and no more.”

The first municipal councillor looked as if he had something to say, and his junior edged in,—

“Perhaps, Mr. Pastor, you would let any of us, who chose, put a question or two after your discourse?”

A man, even the sharpest often, doesn't know what he understands and what he doesn't till he opens his mouth."

"Certainly; I am quite willing to accord that demand also."

"Confession, for instance," went on the speaker flushed and eager. "I want to know if in the Old Testament or the New women are bidden to regard the priest as lord and master; if the confessor is to rule the man's house instead of himself, the husband, the father?"

He struck the table heavily, reddened to the brow, and added,—

"Make that point clear, Mr. Pastor. Convince us that Jesus Christ never invented the confessional, and I, for one, will become Huguenot to-morrow!"

His colleague looked a little shocked, at the same time the speech emboldened him to speak also:

"Might I mention another point, Mr. Pastor? We Catholics worship the Virgin and the saints. You Protestants stick to Jesus Christ. I suppose you will tell us the why and the wherefore?"

"The pastor will of course tell us the chief pros and cons. I think we had better leave these things to him," the Mayor put in. "And now, neighbours, we should be going. We have kept this gentleman long enough, and shall not reach Royan too soon. It is cattle fair to-day, sir," he explained, turning to Evelard, "and we thought you would kindly excuse an early visit from us, as we must be there in good time, and shall be returning another way. Thank you for your hospitality."

A few details were gone into, time and place were fixed for the first lecture, then the three took up their felt wideawakes and heavy-knobbed sticks, and made for the door. The elder councillor lingered.

Glancing kindly, almost compassionately, at Evelard, he began, in a hesitating tone,—

“You must be a trifle lonely, sir!”

“Yes, this parsonage would better suit me were it smaller. A man is reminded of his solitude when he has half-a-dozen empty rooms at his disposal.”

His interlocutor looked into the crown of his hat, glanced at his companions, and finally summoned courage to get out the rest:

“No offence, Mr. Pastor, but seeing the sociable kind of man you are, and knowing that a pastor no more than a curé is paid like a bishop, might I mention a matter I have just thought of? Suppose, should it happen, that you are thinking of matrimony—I believe in your Church marriage is looked upon as a duty—I could mention a match no man need snap his fingers at——”

“You are very friendly, but, my good sir——”

“Nay, hear our neighbour out. ’Twill do no harm, anyhow,” the Mayor put in, laying a fraternal hand on Evelard’s shoulder.

The irresistible topic of matrimony could even make French farmers forget the fair.

“Widow Cross, neighbour, ’twas of no other I was thinking,” the speaker continued, winning a nod of approval from his colleagues. “A master woman, as we say, and no mistake. Mr. Pastor, ’twould do you good to see her set her folks a flying

when caught dawdling. Plump as a pouter pigeon, brisk as a lark, with a voice like a railway whistle—no matter what you are about you can't help hearing it, and a heel tapping the ground sharp and short, you might swear it was the woodpecker on an oak tree. And an eye, ah! at the back of her head, as the saying goes. Just the wife cut out for a book-learned man and minister of religion like yourself. A trifle older, certainly; but a giglet of twenty would never do in a parsonage, and Widow Cross's age"—here he glanced at his friends, the three exchanging significant smiles—"Widow Cross's age, sir, no fellow in his senses would think of twice. She is worth a hundred thousand francs if a sou!"

This sentence, uttered triumphantly, and regarded by all three as a climax, fell flat.

Evelard again began to make excuse; on a sudden the speaker brightened up,—

"Ah! I know what the pastor is thinking of, neighbours. The widow's religion! But she is a Protestant like yourself, sir, comes of a Huguenot stock. Then there is another thing. She has minded her husband's business up till now, a compact little wine trade. But, as she told my wife the other day, she wishes to marry again and retire. If Mr. Pastor catches at the notion, and there is no time to lose, such a woman may be snapped up any day—what say you, neighbours? I might take on myself to mention it to her, she being a sort of relation of my wife's, and the two, Lord bless you, getting on like cooing doves together!"

"You have my sincerest thanks, friend," Evelard

replied, pressing the speaker's honest hand. "You wish to render me a substantial service, I am sure. But the thing is impossible, for reasons I do not care to go into now; such a project is wholly out of the question."

There was no more to say; in friendly fashion they took leave, the last speaker looking rather crestfallen. In spite of Evelard's cordiality, he feared lest he might have given offence.

With mixed feelings Evelard watched the stalwart figures as they struck across the meadows, brushing the dew from the blue-green pastures on the way. Their errand pleased him. He felt happy at the prospect of a busy week, of a succession of busy weeks. The task thus forced upon him could but be congenial, and it came opportunely. So far, Monday had begun well.

But that benevolently-meant interference with his domestic life made him uneasy. He felt convinced that the match-making propensities of his neighbours, shared with most country folks, could not easily be held in check. Sooner or later these worthy people would insist on marrying him against his will, the verb to marry in France having the force of a Greek deponent, our own passive, with stronger meaning.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INDISPENSABLE THIRD.

IT may almost positively be affirmed that no French marriage takes place without the mediation of a third person, some sympathetic outsider indispensable to the bringing together of suitable fortunes, social positions and characters, the third element of harmony being usually relegated to the last place.

Certainly, there is much to be said in favour of the arrangement. No suitor exposes himself to the mortification of a direct refusal, whilst a lady, without acting the part of *Celimène*, is thereby enabled to select her future husband.

When the exhilarating morning's work was over, the rapidly-conceived, brilliantly-executed disquisition for the village conclave ready, *Evelard's* thoughts reverted to his own affairs. The portrait of the prosperous widow, sketched so glowingly, haunted him as a nightmare. He seemed to hear the voice like a railway-whistle, and the heel that tapped the ground like a woodpecker on an oak tree. He saw, with the mind's eye, his tranquil retreat invaded by that implacable enemy of scholarly repose, the model housewife, ever busy with broom and duster. And again and again came the penetrating sound of the

convent bell, awakening a buried past, calling up memories too sweet, and at the same time too painful, to be dwelt upon.

“I am growing morbid. I will make an end of these vain regrets and insane yearnings,” he mused. “And the honest farmers are right. A pastor is bound by virtue of his position to take unto himself a wife. I will marry!”

He sat down to pen a word to Jeunet, when he saw his friend hastening up the garden path.

“You will give me some breakfast, I am sure,” said the welcome visitor, fanning himself vigorously with his straw hat. “I am obliged to return to Paris to-morrow, and I wanted particularly to see you before starting.”

Evelard's black-hooded duenna was instructed to break half-a-dozen eggs into her pan instead of two. Meantime the friends sat down to freshly-gathered oysters, alternated with little sausages hot from the gridiron. Between host and guest lay one of those glossy, crisp brown loaves, a yard long at the beginning of the meal, diminished by two-thirds ere it came to an end. Neither had as yet broken his fast. The pair fell to with splendid appetites. The verve and elasticity of the French temperament are explained by their conduct at table. We phlegmatic northerners eat to satisfy hunger, the finer kind of gastronomic discrimination seldom enters into the business. France, the nation of superlative cookery and delicate feeders, is naturally also the land of gaiety and irrepressible hopefulness. When eating is cultivated as one of the fine arts, men have a

material and also a social gratification to fall back upon that oftentimes wards off despondency.

It was now noonday, and the shutters were partially closed to keep out the blazing sunshine. The narrow aperture disclosed a dazzlingly brilliant scene, segment as it seemed of mosaic in precious stones, sky deep in hue as lapis lazuli, sea of lustrous malachite green, sands smooth and brown as polished jasper, conspicuous ever the mighty Cordouan, just now of pure, opaque white, monolith of ivory between the green and the blue. A gentle breeze blowing off the Atlantic just lifted the partially-lowered Venetian blinds from time to time, bearing sea sounds and sea-fragrance.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the parsonage all was very still.

“I wanted to see you, too. We will discuss my own affairs over our cigarettes. I hope nothing of a disagreeable nature recalls you to Paris?”

Jeunet poured into his tumbler about a wineglassful of the sweet light wine of the district, filled to the brim with water, swallowed the whole, then began,—

“Pleasant as it is to be reminded of one’s wife sometimes, it is equally agreeable to forget. I have been too long in Capua, as Suzanne to-day writes word. But I return at Christmas. Madame Delinon wants my help then. She is getting up a little pastoral play, and I am constituted stage-manager. Meantime, I need hardly say that my benefactress insists on paying me beforehand for such services. Look here!”

He brought out his purse, unrolled a little packet of hundred-franc notes, and thumbed them complacently.

“Here is the best receipt for domestic felicity: a thousand francs as I live! The first time in my life that I was such a capitalist. But don't think I accept gratuities! I am that dear, angelic woman's bookkeeper, accountant, and man of business.”

“I am glad Madame Delinon has at least one disinterested person about her,” Evelard said.

“The worst of it is,” the other went on, pocketing his rouleau with a rueful expression, “my poor Suzanne will not see the matter in its proper light. I don't know how it is with others, but a Frenchwoman can never be brought to tolerate her husband's regard for one of her own sex, no matter how innocent. In her letter this morning, my wife positively blackguards me—I borrow the apt expression of our English neighbours; and for what?—for earning bread for all of us! Madame Delinon invites her to return with me at Christmas. We shall see how that proposition is received at head-quarters.”

“Generous, warm-hearted creature,” ejaculated Evelard.

“I am glad that you think as highly of her as she does of you,” the other replied, eyeing his host with a peculiar expression. “We will talk of—of the business I came on after breakfast. By the way, what an excellent table you keep, how comfortable you seem here! I almost wish I had followed your example and become a pastor too.”

“You forget that I did not throw up Christianity in breaking with Romanism.”

“True, true, I am best where I am; and as to Suzanne’s little tantrums and the mother-in-law’s acerbities, these are mere bagatelles, not worth a second thought. Life cannot be all undiluted enjoyment. The undiluted enjoyment is to be able to enjoy. This delightful repast I shall not soon forget. The matchless view from your window, the sea food—these little green oysters and coral-pink prawns—all is of a piece, all makes up a picture.”

The friends chatted on till dessert had been partaken of, then each twisting for himself a tiny cigarette, they puffed away, sipping their coffee between whiles.

“You had something to communicate, I believe?” Jeunet asked, after a pause.

“You also came on a definite errand. Your own turn first, then,” replied his host.

“I yield you right of way,” Jeunet said, looking a little embarrassed.

Evelard changed colour, too. Bending forward he tapped his cigarette on the heel of his boot, took a longer whiff than usual, drained his small coffee cup, and began,—

“You will learn perhaps with some surprise that I have made up my mind to marry.”

“You could hardly, sooner or later, fail to arrive at such a conclusion. Your new position exacts it.”

“I begin to realise that already. My case, you see, is wholly exceptional. By force of circumstances, I am a marked man, my conduct open to

strictest scrutiny, the least deviation from routine rendering me liable to censure. For weighty reasons I have hitherto refused to contemplate such a step; I now see that it is necessary, if not to happiness, at least to my freedom, my honour, my chances of being useful as a pastor."

"Is not that rather an odd way of putting the question?"

The other threw his unfinished cigarette out of the window with a gesture of impatience.

"What would you have me say? How can I think of mere happiness? Affections have cost me too much. I dare not love any more. You have seen my sister many a time; her fireside was as my own, her fatherless children idolised me; had they been mine I could hardly have loved them more. In that little circle I tasted purest joy, and now—but I cannot talk of it. See here!"

He thrust a packet into Jeunet's palm, and turning his back upon him, pretended to adjust the Venetian blinds.

Jeunet, opening the large envelope, saw three letters addressed by the ex-priest to his sister. They had been returned with seals unbroken.

"In heaven's name, my dear friend, what else could you expect?" laughed the Rabelaisian with some bitterness. "You and I are social lepers, and the world considerately saves us the trouble of wearing the bell. We are kept at a safe distance without. As a wholesome corrective, let me read you an extract from my dear old mother's letter to myself, received this very morning. You will, I

dare aver, say that if speech is silver, silence is golden after the reading. In conjunction with my wife's, I felt as if I had had a double tooth wrenched out."

He put down Evelard's envelope, and producing a shabby leathern pocket-book, showed four pages of closely-written manuscript.

"Here is a parable for you; the angelic doctor himself could hardly have improved upon it," he began, spreading open the first sheet upon his knee, and steadying it there with his folded hands.

"'Yesterday was apple gathering here,' writes the dear old lady. 'As I sat by the trough picking out the rotten ones for the pigs, I thought of you, my lost, my perjured son; you also—once sound to the core—to be cast into the pit.' Humph! not a bad simile that, but she had always a turn for metaphor. Well, what comes next? 'I was praying to the Virgin for your poor lost soul, when old Justine hobbled up; she is hard of hearing as you know, and has lost her memory. "Ah! mère Jeunet," says she, "you're a happy mother. My Jacques went to the bad; but yours, bless him, what a stay he has been to you, to be sure!" She said that, and I only laughed: I never cry about you now, I can't cry any more——'"

The hitherto jaunty reader stopped on a sudden, made a feint to clear his throat, went to the table and swallowed half a tumbler of water, then awkwardly refolded the letter. As the two men reseated themselves, a tear still stood on Evelard's pale cheek, and Jeunet's eyes were red.

“The confessional is at the bottom of these dreadful estrangements,” the pastor said, when both had in some degree recovered themselves.

“It is the curse of France, this subjection of our women to the priest. One would think that even Frenchwomen had sufficient enlightenment nowadays to honour all who make sacrifices for conscience’ sake. No such thing! Could you and I be compelled by sheer force to return to Rome to-morrow, our mothers and sisters would be the first to rejoice. Let us forget these things. You have a child, destined, we will hope, to bring her parents closer together. I am utterly alone. Sympathy in little things, a daily interchange of kindnesses, duties mutually shared, may yet give me something worthy to be called a home. Respect, consideration, friendship, I would offer a wife. Let us be clear on one point—deeper feeling is out of the question—I have no love to give!”

“Not even to a Madame Delinon?”

“Madame Delinon!” cried the other, starting. “She is adorable; but not to be made our topic now.”

Jeunet started in turn, eyed his friend incredulously, and would fain have interrupted him. Evelard went on quietly,—

“Just because she is the most lovable, the most generous woman in the world, we must not speak of her. No, my good Jeunet; find me some well-bred, high-principled Protestant. An English governess of my own age would suit me well; one who would marry a country pastor out of sheer benevo-

lence and a sense of Christian duty. There is a sphere for the minister's wife at St. Gilles. I begin to realise that. These good people are a trifle sordid. They live too much for material ends; need social and intellectual as well as spiritual awakening. And there would be the home, the fireside,—wedded interests of impersonal kind. Surely less worthy existences have satisfied single-minded affectionate women before now?"

Jeunet listened sadly. Was this prosaic picture to be the complement of a career opened under such splendid auspices, of gifts so rare, a character so magnanimous? He fidgeted in his chair, opened his lips, stopped short, finally blurted out,—

"What if they should satisfy her you find adorable?"

Evelard confronted his friend with a strange look. Then he said slowly, never once taking his eyes from the other's face,—

"Hear something now, for the first time confided to living soul. Like me, you have been a priest; you know as well as I do that the tonsure does not transform the man. Like many another, I loved when to love was a crime, and my passion was returned."

Just then, whilst the pair looked at each other as if interpreting inmost thoughts, drawn closely, solemnly together by unspoken confidences, understanding, crystal clear outsiders could never share, a tinkling sound broke the sultry noonday stillness; it was the bell of the Carmelite convent. That monotonous, metallic chime but heightened Evelard's

agitation. He walked up and down the room with a desperate face.

“Society, superstition rampant still, made criminals of us, and how monstrous our punishment! For her, as exquisite a spirit as ever made earth its temporary biding-place, fearfulest expiation in a living sepulchre; for me, remorse not to be got rid of till I follow her to the tomb! How can I woo any woman with such memories as these? Marriage, in my case, may mean peace, mutual support, even affection; it can never mean love!”

He closed the casement as if to shut out the obnoxious sound and reseated himself, gradually growing calmer. Seeing his changed mood, Jeunet ventured to put in,—

“Are not the gleanings of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? Unless I am greatly mistaken, a lady I will not name, since you forbid me—a lady we both set on a pinnacle, would accept you, aye! with all your social and spiritual bankruptcies, before any rival living. Man alive! Are you blind? I must speak out, cost what it will—that was my errand—that dear woman followed you here. Her heart, no truer, warmer ever beat in human breast, her fortune, are yours. Will you churlishly reject as bright a future as ever beckoned any man? Have done with these morbid regrets. Make me your emissary in this delicate business. It will console me for my own matrimonial fiasco if I am the means of bringing you two together.”

“Do with me as you will,” Evelard said; “but she must know the truth, the whole truth, remember!”

“Chut, chut,” retorted the other. “Time enough for such outpourings afterwards. They give zest to the *tête-à-tête* dinner-table on winter evenings. And love—well, I will say marriage instead—marriage is a gift horse that fortunately women do not look in the mouth. But I confess, my dear friend, I don’t understand you in the very least, no more than the mole understands the differential calculus. You look positively humiliated by a conviction that would make other men strut like peacocks.”

Evelard shook his head.

“I care too much for that lady not to wish that I could care for her more,” he said.

There, as far as Georgette was concerned, the talk ended.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ROMANCE OF MIDDLE AGE.

NEXT day Evelard and Madame Delinon met under circumstances insular lovers would have found to say the least of it, excessively embarrassing. So traditional, however, is the mediation of a third person in French matrimonial affairs, and so delicately, nay, perfectly, had Jeunet discharged his mission, that both felt absolutely at their ease.

Georgette's heart beat quickly; Evelard, perhaps, acknowledged too pleasurable emotion. Awkwardness, faltering, trepidation, there was none. When the suitor entered his mistress's presence, the woman of the world—the affectionate, light-hearted leader of fashion and society, the coquette—received him as she had done scores of times before. For a moment he could hardly realize their altered positions. Once more he seemed to belong to the fascinating little circle of which she had been the ornament. Once more raillery and persiflage seemed natural and easy. For a brief moment the ordeal he had lately passed through, the crowning mortification and crowning triumph of his life, were forgotten.

It was the delicious hour of late afternoon, and Georgette accorded audience in her favourite room,

that upper boudoir from whence could be just discerned Evelard's church and parsonage. Immediately below stretched her English garden, fragrant with ruby and topaz-coloured Marvel of Peru, and the low growing large-petalled evening primrose; beyond lay her own tiny bay, a fairy scene, sea and shore resplendent with raspberry-tinted clouds and golden sunrays. Against the pure sky of tenderest blue rose masses of sombre ilex and silvery aspen, perpetual repose, perpetual mutability, side by side.

Happy Frenchwomen, who do not think themselves into white hairs before their time! Georgette had reached an age when most of her sisters become grandmothers, that doubtful bliss often attained in France before the fortieth year. But her abundant brown hair made a superb coronet still, and in her light hopeful-looking dress, soft, quick-silver coloured silk, on which seemed thrown a basketful of Neapolitan violets, she looked quite youthful. She held an enormous black fan, lighted up with silver butterflies, and only her persistent fanning betrayed a mood not of every day.

She advanced towards him smilingly. He smiled also, paused for a moment on the threshold, then going nearer studied the engaging picture. Finally, he bent forward and kissed her on the brow. The respectful salute might have been accorded a queen.

"How charming is this boudoir! and how sweet your prospect!" he said, glancing round. "You always contrive to have beautiful surroundings."

"Why not?" she replied gaily. "They make one so happy."

“You are happy, yet you are ready to change your position,” he began, taking a chair beside her. “Is that wise? And Jeunet has explained everything. I have gone through more than one ordeal.”

He looked at her significantly, almost solemnly, but she only smiled. Jeunet had indeed hinted at his friend’s early attachments. Could she expect the devotion of a lifetime? Was she herself on the threshold of existence? Had she not loved or fancied herself in love years ago?

“It is only friendship I can offer you,” he began, with a look of humiliation, “the friendship of a much tried, saddened, lonely man. These dreadful inner conflicts lately experienced, I can hardly expect others to measure them, seem to have deadened my feelings, to have made me almost indifferent to happiness and affection. Can you associate your lot with mine under such chilling conditions, link your loving, joyous, joy-giving existence to one so cold, so self-centred, so aloof from your own interests?”

She looked down, toyed with her fan, and tapped her little mauve-stockinged foot on the ground impatiently,—

“Tell me, in plain words, that I am a child, a trifler, a worldling. Your interests will become mine. Did I not do my best at the Sunday-school?”

“Then,” he added, in a different tone, “there is no necessity for me to pour out my gratitude now; you would only be made to yawn. A homœopathic dose administered at lengthy intervals will perhaps

be just endurable. But, dearest lady, dearest friend, jesting apart, have you well weighed this Quixotic resolution? Think of my worsened fortunes, the kind of existence you would be condemned to lead here, the descent in the social scale, the sacrifice in matters of dress."

He smiled, the old ironic smile of former days, and, taking up a fold of her gown, examined it attentively, then drew back, contemplating the general effect, beautifully-dressed hair, pearly white, blue-veined dimpled wrist and arm, little foot so daintily stockinged in mauve silk, and slipper to match.

"How you understand the art of magnetising poor mortal eyes! But, seriously, dwell on your decision for a moment. Bend your mind to the issues involved. A Frenchwoman, at least, a Frenchwoman like Georgette Delinon, would accompany her husband to Leper Island without a second thought, would share with him the horrors of Siberia, for his sake, mount the scaffold magnanimously as Madame Roland. Would such a heroine give up the milliner, forswear Monsieur Worth and the show rooms of the Louvre? Not if her beloved's very existence and her own depended on the sacrifice."

"Are pastors' wives bound to make scarecrows of themselves, wear poke bonnets and coarse serge like the lady captains of the Salvation Army?" she asked, affecting alarm. "Monsieur Jeunet had not the courage to tell me that."

"Our good Jeunet, I fear, has left out many

points," he said, growing sportive in turn, indeed, almost loverlike. Her gaiety and confidence were irresistible.

"Yes, my sweet friend, there is no denying the truth. If you marry—a poor pastor—not only the château and the pretty flat near the Parc Monceau, but the man milliner, the adorable, must go also. I shall have to take you in hand myself. You saw those worthy matrons on Sunday in their black hoods and coarse bombazine gowns. The best plan will be for me to borrow a complete costume and have an exact copy made for you. The fitting is not of the slightest importance, the less these things fit, the better——"

Georgette gave a little scream.

"A pastor's wife," Evelard went on, playfully, "must not seem to know or care whether she is young or old, handsome or ugly. A pastor's wife, my wife——"

Both had been entirely at their ease till now, his light satire warding off more delicate topics; love-making, in the accepted sense of the word, was impossible to him, even more so that cool, matter-of-fact discussion of practical affairs, so natural to French lovers when planning their future. Those last words made Georgette shy as a girl. Tears started to her eyes, her lips trembled, she quitted his side and went to the window.

"Come here," she said, in low, unsteady tones; "I want to show you something."

He rose, and as they stood thus looking out, caught one little hand in his own.

The casement opened from the bottom, forming two wings, after French fashion, and both stood wide.

Outside was a little iron balcony reaching half-way up; Georgette leaned on the edge, indicating the parsonage roof with her black and silver fan.

“This is my favourite room. I like it because I can catch a glimpse of your home. I am always looking in that direction,” she went on; her voice dropped to a whisper. “I am constantly thinking of you. You did not, perhaps, know it? I was present at your consecration. In my poor ignorant way, I felt proud of you for giving up so much, it seemed to me, for so little! And, without quite realizing what I did, I prayed for heaven’s blessing on your step. I prayed, too, for something else. And the prayer has come true.” She turned to him with a radiant face and exclaimed through her tears,—
“Why should I mind telling you the truth? I prayed that we might be brought nearer together, that you might care for me more. You are noble and generous, I will conceal nothing. I followed you here. Order then, the black hood and bombazine dress for me, if you will. I will wear them proudly for your sake, and my wealth to the last franc shall be yours for the poor!”

Could any man, however bruised in spirit, however enslaved by old memories, resist such an appeal? Evelard put a hand on each shoulder, and as the beautiful head sank for a moment on his breast, spoke out with all a lover’s tenderness,—

“And I,” he murmured, in tones as fond and

tremulous as her own; "I shall find life once more dear and beautiful, because shared with you. The future shall atone a thousandfold for the past!"

Whilst they lingered thus, side by side, the joyous tear still glistening in her eye, the glow of newly-awakened feeling on his face, a metallic tinkle, clear, though far off, broke the stillness.

The bell of the Carmelite convent could be heard even here.

Evelard's expression changed, a look of intense humiliation succeeded loverlike tenderness. He loosened hold of her hand, and re-entered the room.

"You are like me," Georgette said, following his example; "the sound of that bell ever makes me melancholy. I think of my friends buried alive there, of my sweet Bertrande above all. And the Ave Maria last Sunday, how like that voice to hers——"

"Let us talk of the living, not of the dead," he broke in, with a look of pain almost of horror. "Close the window, for heaven's sake, dear friend, or, better still, let us go downstairs, out of doors."

"Shall we join Marthe on the shore? She went an hour ago to bathe with Mariette, and should be out of the water by this time," said Georgette.

"Where you please, dear lady."

They descended to the large, ilex-bordered fruit and vegetable garden at the back of the house, and, passing through a side door, strolled by the undulating sands and scattered sea-pines to the bay. Evelard mechanically plucked fragrant pinks and im-

CHAPTER XV.

AN ADVENTURE.

THE weather was still sultry, although the sun was low and, according to the calendar, autumn had already begun. Gorgeous as had been the day, evening showed hues richer and deeper still. Not a breath stirred the tulip-tinted wave. Motionless, as in a picture, narrow vermilion and orange-coloured clouds barred a pale sapphire sky: Far away, the ilex woods stood rigid as blocks of ivy-clad masonry, only the aspens trembled, smiled ever, making moonlight ripple in broad day!

The bathing season was virtually over, yet when Evelard and his companion reached the shore they found it animated with little groups, strollers in the sea as they are aptly styled.

Here three little lads, in scarlet flannel bathing dresses, disported themselves under the supervision of a priestly tutor, his black robe making him look like a gigantic raven among flamingoes. There a family party—father, mother, son and daughter wearing the costume good-humouredly accepted as both decent and becoming—walked up to their shoulders in the delicious sun-warmed water. In another spot, an elderly portly pair, husband and

wife, regardless of appearance, indulged in the adored, and as is comfortably believed, hygienic exercise. Yet in another, two girls, frolicsome as kittens, making the place ring with their laughter, danced, jumped, dived, attempted to swim, played a dozen foolish pranks, proud to be listened to and looked at. They had walked out so far that at times only their heads were just visible, but on these level sands, amid these almost motionless waves, such a conduct hardly savoured of temerity. Sun-down nevertheless was at hand, and they had already been too long in the sea.

“Marthe, Mariette, it is growing late, come away at once,” cried Georgette, the pair feigning not to hear. The intoxication of being gazed at was irresistible. They played more venturesomely, laughed louder still, and meantime got farther and farther away.

“It is really very wrong of Marthe and Mariette too; she is the elder, she ought to know better,” said Georgette, growing greatly vexed. “They will both take a chill, that is quite certain. Ah, there is Monsieur Bourgeois, just going into the sea! We will send him after the giddy, disobedient things.”

Evelard shouted, Georgette waved her handkerchief, bystanders arrested the young pastor’s attention. Instead of walking into the sea, he made straight for his friends, no little gratified at being seen in so becoming an attire.

Pastor Bourgeois, not without just cause, felt proud of his muscular development. He stood five feet ten inches without his shoes to begin with, his

shoulders were broad, his limbs if wanting symmetrical proportion would not have disgraced a professional athlete. The costume he now wore, of blue and white serge, barred horizontally, and admirably setting off the warm flesh tints, barely reached from collar-bone to knee, the short sleeve displaying a brawny arm. Thus jauntily attired, and unusually exhilarated by so lucky a combination of circumstances, he advanced with hasty strides.

“I wish you good evening, Madame. Ah! good day, Mr. Pastor: you both surprise me in, well, what shall I call it?” and as he spoke he complacently eyed his well-revealed manly proportions, adding,—

“I assure you nothing could be more comfortable this sultry weather; a trifle unbecoming, some may think, perhaps,” here he glanced down at his well-developed legs, and struck out with his formidable arms, “but what is appearance compared to convenience? Thus attired I am as good as two—two of my ordinary self I mean. Just look!”

He made a feint to thrust and parry, and was in the humour for a series of evolutions, when Georgette, not without difficulty, stopped him. Pointing to the two girls she begged his immediate intervention. “They must be fetched at once: would he render her the service?”

No errand could have gratified the young pastor more. He should thereby be enabled to display his prowess as a swimmer, and enjoy an adventure into the bargain—an adventure, moreover, of which his bride elect was heroine. Without another word

he hurried away, having quite a martial air as he strode forward, his fine flesh-tints gleaming coral-pink in the rosy sunset. Soon the warm purple waves reached his waist, and he was within a yard or two of the scatter-brained bathers. Brandishing his arms, shouting stentorian orders, he made for the pair, but the faster he strode, the faster they edged away.

If there was one sea-board in all France where drowning is next door to an impossibility, that spot is certainly St. Gilles-rur-Mur. Never in local annals had amateur swimmers been known to find a sailor's grave off this benignant coast. So long the stretch of level sands, so oily smooth the almost tideless water, that one bathing season after another passed without accident. To-day it really seemed as if the place was destined to be thrown into mourning.

At first the game of hide-and-peek was amusing and mirthful enough. As the stalwart figure in horizontally-barred blue and white, advanced menacingly, his thrice-repeated message being met with laughter and defiance, the little crowd on the shore vociferated, cheered, clapped hands. Now the pretty culprits were egged on to further rebellion, now their paladin was encouraged to sterner threats. The bay rang with explosions of merriment, even Georgette and her companion could not resist a smile.

But, on a sudden, horrified silence succeeded these noisy outbursts. The foolish sport ended after alarming fashion. In their efforts to hold Bourgeois

at bay, the two girls had got beyond their depth, and were now struggling frantically in the water.

Two or three bystanders, Evelard among the number, threw off their coats and hastened to the rescue, but the young pastor's position, for all that, seemed critical. He was at some distance from the shore, the bathers in their struggles were getting farther and farther from him and each other; before help could arrive, one of the pair must be in deadly peril,—so, at least, it appeared, to aghast lookers-on.

Georgette turned away her face, unable any longer to watch the scene.

Pastor Bourgeois showed himself fully equal to the occasion. Never stout-hearted Perseus advanced more gallantly to the rescue of two Andromedas. Striking out in the direction of the nearer, he breasted the delicious water as if in his element. Plunging, diving, in desperate haste and earnest, he succeeded in rescuing Marthe. A jubilant huzza rose from the crowd when they descried two heads where only his own had been visible just before. That tremendous effort over, the sturdy swimmer made for the other struggling figure, bearing up his burden as best he could.

A few seconds of suspense ashore, and a louder and yet more exultant cry echoed from end to end. Rescuer and rescued had momentarily disappeared, then Bourgeois was seen making laborious way through the waves, one girl held up, the sleeve of the other caught between his teeth. Like a heavily-laden water-dog he gained inch upon inch, then feeling the sands under his feet, plunged boldly forward,

a dripping, half-fainting damsel tucked under each arm.

The bystanders cheered louder and louder, and half-a-dozen men made a rush towards the trio; Evelard, shoeless, stockingless, with pantaloons turned up, and in his shirt sleeves, seized Marthe and bore her to the nearest bathing hut; another gallant looker-on performed the same friendly service for her maid; a third was dispatched to the village inn for cordials; a fourth, to the château for carriage and blankets. Before an hour was out, the news of the adventure had reached every ear in the place. The postmistress, who added to her income as newspaper correspondent, telegraphed full particulars to the local organs. Pastor Bourgeois had suddenly become notorious!

If to have saved two fellow-creatures from drowning is an exploit to be proud of, to have been the object of it may well appear to some almost in the light of heroism; so, at least, Marthe and Mariette regarded the matter. From that moment their self-importance increased enormously. They described the event with every little detail over and over again, they posted long narratives to every soul of their acquaintance. They never tired of discussing it when by themselves. One might have supposed that these two giddy Andromedas had each rescued a Perseus; yet their deliverer was a hero in their eyes, as much so as any man can be in the eyes of some women.

To Pastor Bourgeois himself the occurrence brought unmitigated pleasure. That evening he was naturally pressed to dine and sleep at the château,

Georgette overwhelmed him with compliments and kindnesses, Evelard and Jeunet congratulated him on his physical powers and presence of mind in the heartiest terms. The event had raised him several inches in the estimation of others, to say nothing of his own. If, after the praise—and the champagne—he grew self-laudatory and garrulous, was it not excusable? Heroism of the higher order has given the world ideals, but it is the homelier kind of courage and endurance that has built up its history.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROMANCE OF YOUTH AND PLOTS.

“A REPRIEVE! a reprieve!”

Thus shouted Jeunet next day, bursting in as the little party at the château sat down to breakfast.

His portmanteau, ready packed, stood by the front door; wraps, hand-bag and umbrella had been brought downstairs; in another hour the village omnibus was to take him to the railway station, bound for Paris.

“A whole week’s respite, seven days’ grace!” he cried joyfully, waving an open telegram above his head.

Georgette looked up placidly from her carving, she was one of those accomplished Frenchwomen who can coquette, argue, keep general conversation going, and at the same time carve a difficult joint. So skilled indeed, are her countrywomen in this art, that outsiders might fancy Paris possessed carving-schools as did ancient Rome.

“I am very glad,” she said quietly.

“Only very glad!” retorted Jeunet; “but no living soul can conceive what such a leave of absence is to me, quite idle to expect it. Seven days more of freedom of speech, liberty of the press—in our

Liliputian quarters of Paris one cannot write a letter without being overlooked—no ignominious little worries, no squabbles with the wife of one's bosom——”

“Do come to table,” urged his hostess. “The pheasant is getting cold.”

“How can I eat at such a time?” Jeunet made answer, running his fingers distractedly through his hair. “I was famished half-an-hour ago. Overmuch joy has completely destroyed my appetite, and I must send a telegram to my dear wife without losing a moment, she will want to know that I approve of her arrangements.”

“As if I should not!” he added. “Inconsequent darling! Why, a week at Fontainebleau with mamma and baby is exactly the thing for all three; how considerate of her uncle to invite them just now——”

“Pray sit down; the omnibus conductor will take your message,” Georgette said. “And the heat is very great on the high road. It is really imprudent to expose yourself to the meridian sun.”

Bourgeois, who had stayed on, and seemed likely to stay on, now rose and playfully forced Jeunet into a chair, and Marthe, laughing and screaming, held him down. Under such pressure he consented to let the telegram wait, and swallow a mouthful, just a mouthful, he said, for the sake of good manners.

Breakfast now went on merrily, only the mistress of the house was more thoughtful than usual. Does not the French proverb say “Joy maketh afraid”? She was too glad to be merry.

When her visitors had retired to the smoking-room, she beckoned Marthe into her own. The pair sat down in that charming boudoir, since yesterday so full of passionate memories.

Georgette opened the shutters an inch or two, and placed herself where she could get a glimpse of the parsonage. Marthe seized upon a fashion-book just arrived from Paris, and during the interview turned it over eagerly.

“Did you send for this on my account, dear aunt?” she asked. “How kind of you; and here are the latest novelties in the way of brides’ dresses, what I wanted to see above all things!”

“No, indeed; the number came as other circulars do. I had no idea you wished to become a bride so soon,” Georgette replied. “But, tell me how your acquaintance with Monsieur Bourgeois progresses? You have now seen each other several times. I observed, too, that you were talking together this morning in the garden. What did you say to each other?”

“What did we say to each other? Let me try to remember. Oh, dear aunt, do look at this new design for a bodice, is it not pretty? and it would suit me I am sure.”

She rose and hung over Georgette, her forefinger pointing to the design.

Aunt and niece examined it minutely. Georgette would not have been a Frenchwoman unless she regarded dress as the one thing worth living for, no matter how we may appraise the rest.

“Extremely graceful. The sleeves, of course,

should have lace puffing, and the gathers of the bodice itself be a trifle fuller, as you are so slight. But, after all, the character of a husband is more important than the make of one's wedding-gown. Tell me about your conversation with Monsieur Bourgeois?"

She put back the fashion-book, which Marthe, however, continued to scan with unabated interest.

"Well, he asked me first of all if I had slept well, and felt no worse for having been half-drowned yesterday. And when I said yes, he replied that he was very glad, very glad indeed. I then asked, in turn, whether he was quite sure that he had not taken cold in so kindly coming to my rescue, and he said that, on the contrary, he never felt better in his life,—oh, dear little aunt, I must show you this morning gown, to be made of white cambric with open-work and sky-blue ribbons. The love! Might I have one like it in my trousseau?"

Again Georgette gave undivided attention to the pattern-book, then resumed her catechising.

"When he had said that," Marthe went on, "I, in turn, told him I was very glad. Our conversation flagged for a little while; we looked at the melons, and he asked me if I preferred melons with salt and pepper before breakfast, or with sugar at dessert; I replied, with salt and pepper before. He next said that he was anxious to learn my likes and dislikes,—I could guess the reason why,—and that if I fell in with your wishes and his own, I should never have reason, as far as he was concerned, to regret it. I answered that I had no doubt whatever on the sub-

ject; I quite took him at his word. Whereupon he added that such a speech from the lips of a young lady like myself made him feel proud as a peacock. You then called us to breakfast."

"A very satisfactory beginning. Nothing could be better. But you must see each other often. And as to the trousseau and the wedding-day,—they can surely wait a little longer; anyhow till the Spring."

Marthe looked glum.

"We will see. I will hear what your fiancé says," Georgette replied good-naturedly. "But the gentlemen will have finished their cigars by this time. Let us go downstairs."

The sun was now off the croquet-ground, bordered by ilex trees.

Madame Delinon and Jeunet sat down under their shadow, whilst the lovers played a game, Marthe's slender figure, pretty girlish dress, self-conscious laughter, lending an air of romance where none existed; as well look for eglantine and honeysuckle on the walls of the Bourse!

The young pastor looked radiant. To be on easy footing with the world of fashion and elegance was the fulfilment of an ardent aspiration. The matter-of-fact maiden in pink muslin, and broad-brimmed and tasseled Tuscan hat lined with crimson satin, prefigured, to his thinking, quite an ideal wife.

Irreproachable in dress, manners and bringing up, she typified that correctness which is the first virtue of a Frenchwoman. She could be relied upon to say and do the proper—in other words, the ac-

cepted—thing in the proper accepted manner. Could any reasonable man ask more?

“I have other commissions for you in Paris,” Madame Delinon began, as she watched the lovers approvingly. “You will make the necessary preparations for our New Year’s festivities, the little Pastoral Play. But——,” she added, looking shy as a schoolgirl—an English schoolgirl: shyness is not an accomplishment taught in French convent-schools. “I have not yet named the subject to our friend Evelard. He could hardly object?”

“Dear lady! Would existence, would human beings, be endurable if we were not each in turn called upon to object—and in vain? The wife who makes a Pope or Czar of her husband handicaps his moral progress past help. It is the unreflecting affirmation, the perpetual yea, the reiterated Amen, the be it so, that keeps society still in its swaddling clothes.”

“Evelard is always saying that a pastor, especially one in his position, is bound to respect public opinion.”

“But not to bow to it!” Jeunet cried, more vehemently than before. “What is it that renders the Reformed Church in France so unprogressive? Protestantism, in spite of its noble principles, an influence often so deadening?—the narrow-mindedness of its clergy. Let Evelard strike out a new path for himself, show that spiritual freedom logically implies freedom of other kinds,—domestic, social, intellectual,—and he will have done good service to the cause of Truth generally. His sacrifice will not have been made in vain.”

“I shall just hear what he says concerning the play. My notion is to invite the village folk; to make it, in fact, a popular entertainment our friend might even approve. Now for my other errand. I have something strange to tell you.” She paused, to encourage Pastor Bourgeois in his croquet, then went on,—

“You remember the singing at the Carmelite convent last Sunday? how much the Ave Maria impressed me? how Evelard seemed startled by it? I cannot help thinking that he, as well as myself, was reminded of one we both knew in years gone by,—a girl I loved dearly—whom none could help loving!”

Here Marthe, with loud hand-clapping, insisted on being noticed, applauded; she had won her game. The interruption over, Georgette continued,—

“Hers was a strange story. She was a rich orphan, with brilliant prospects. Quite suddenly, and for reasons she would never so much as hint at, she became a nun, and, after the necessary probation, took the veil. Her final retreat no one belonging to her could ever learn. I believe it is here!”

“A supposition truly romantic but highly improbable. In the first place, how long is it since this misguided young lady took final vows?”

“How long? Let me count the years. Four, it must be—yes, four. Bertrande began her novitiate the very year of my *fête*—three years earlier. You remember my account of the Pastoral Play, and what a success was the whole thing! The two dates are fixed in my memory.”

“Four and three make seven. My dear Madame Delinon, is it possible that you can be serious? You think a Carmelite nun, a girl delicately reared too, ever survived seven years of the savage régime? If the body bears up, the mind is pretty sure to give way; but Death, the befriender, whose image is daily invoked within the convent walls, is no laggard there, take my word for it. And why on earth should a cloistered sister live on? The sooner she is despatched to celestial mansions the better for herself and all concerned.”

“My poor Bertrande,” Georgette murmured, for a moment covering her eyes as if to shut out the dismal picture; “once so bright, so beautiful, so loving! Listen, dear Monsieur Jeunet. I am determined to obtain an interview with that singing sister. I am a skilful plotter; there are ways and means, but I cannot act alone.”

“On my word, I believe you are bent upon dis-interring your friend. Madame Delinon, Madame Delinon, beware!”

“I yearn to know the truth,” she replied, taking no notice of his insinuations. “To find out whether my Bertrande—I loved her as a younger sister—is alive or dead, happy or wretched. It is strange how often I find myself thinking of her here. And Evelard too, who knew and admired her with the rest. The voice last Sunday, so like her own, the perpetual tinkle of the convent bell, recall her to his memory also, I feel sure of it.”

Jeunet made a wry face. “Maybe, like the rest of us—of us priests, I mean—our friend finds matter

for self-reproach here. He may, in former days, have advised some fair penitent to betake herself to such a charnel-house. But consider, dear lady, a political exile in a mid-Siberian fortress enjoys liberty by comparison with a cloistered nun. And the gaolers of the first, Cossacks armed to the teeth, are mere make-beliefs, shams, scarecrows, compared to the ogresses who here guard their prey. Excuse strong language. Like Evelard, I loathe the conventual system. Granted that you succeed in obtaining an interview, what then?"

"I must find out whether I am dreaming or no;— if indeed it is Bertrande I listened to last Sunday," Georgette cried with deep feeling. "Do not damp my hopes. Help me if you can."

"You have only to give the word of command. Shall I scale the convent walls this very night?" asked Jeunet.

"Listen to my plan. To make friends with the Superior is the easiest thing in the world. Am I not rich and a Catholic by birth? A pretext for speaking to the singing sister will not be difficult either; but you know the rules of these cloistered houses. Conversation has to be carried on with two thickly curtained gratings between nun and visitor. No adult is permitted to see a recluse face to face. Voices deceive; I could hardly identify my friend. A child, however, who has not yet taken her first communion, may have the curtain lifted. Find me such an ally!"

"My wife shall send you her niece, Jane Mary,

eleven years old; but, like all your born Parisians, a woman in every thing but stature."

"A clever child, put on her guard beforehand, would be able to discover the truth, and Bertrande's face was one easy to particularise. I could, of course, afterwards make myself known to her. What joy to both to meet once more!"

"Scant matter for anticipation it seems to me! To open a poor prisoner's door half an inch, then—clang, bang; back go bolt, chain, and key again. Have it all your own way; Jane Mary is entirely at your service."

Marthe and Bourgeois now came up, and, dropping into low garden chairs, fanned themselves vigorously. Conversation took a general turn, the lovers being tired of croquet and *tête-à-tête*.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STORM AND THE SUMMONS.

IN these gorgeous latitudes, season follows season with scarcely perceptible transition. Just as starry evening supplants sunbright day, no shadowy, neutral-tinted twilight intervening, so boisterous Autumn brusquely overtakes adolescent Summer. The rosy peach harvest is barely gathered, the seagreen melons still ripen as they lie; sunbrowned, sweated, adust, the husbandmen clothe themselves lightly as tropical sugar-planters, and, lo! on a sudden, at the touch of unseen wand, all is changed. Torrential rains blur the landscape, a hurricane lashes into fury the glassy sea, heaven and earth echo the dissonance of wind and wave.

Thus it now happened at St. Gilles. But yesterday, the scene had been one of almost unearthly sweetness and placidity. Ideal summer seemed to have enthroned herself in this little paradise, never more to be dislodged. The morrow brought a storm phenomenal in its force and destructiveness.

Evelard had settled down with the conviction that existence here matched such idyllic scenes and benignant climate. Dire inner conflicts, sharp warfare between man's loftier and baser nature would

surely not mar these delicious pastorals! Good and evil ever exists side by side; where, unless among his unsophisticated neighbours, should the good be expected to prevail?

He was soon undeceived. Ere his first month had run out, he found himself brought face to face with dark phases of life and passion, assailed by problems as dire as any that vex the mind.

On the second day of the storm came a temporary lull. The wind no longer surged with the same violence, rain fell at intervals, a sullen mist obscured earth and heaven. Only from time to time the white fog broke, showing a beacon light that gleamed afar. It was Cordouan, its airy column lifted to the skies, the only steadfast feature in the scene. The swirling waters met and parted, horrible chasms opened and closed again, yeasty whirlpools sucked in the eddying currents. Ever and anon amid the chaos the lighthouse could be discerned, conspicuous, immovable, as the straight pillar of light, stretching across heaven and earth in the vision of Er, the Pole star no surer guide to mariners than its fiery cresset.

Evelard was preparing to confront the weather when a loud knock with a knob-stick—doorknockers and bells are regarded in the light of ornament here—called him to the front door. Throwing it wide, there stood in bold relief, against the background of white fog, a sturdy, sea-faring figure, dripping like a water-dog. Rain was running in little rivers from his slouched oilskin hat, stout leathern jerkin and high boots, his weather-beaten face glowing like a

hot coal, the only bit of colour in the neutral-tinted picture.

“Come inside, friend; the sight of a fire won’t hurt you on such a day as this,” Evelard said cheerily, motioning his visitor towards the kitchen.

A wood fire blazed on the hearth, over it, suspended from a hook, seethed a cauldron giving forth savoury steam; his ancient black-hooded housewife, bending low, banked up her potatoes with the red-hot embers in a second cooking-vessel.

“Thank you, Mr. Pastor,” replied the intruder gingerly, stepping onto the door-mat and shaking the rain from his hat, “another time. There are three that wait for no man—the clock, the tide and the Grand Seigneur, Death.”

“I am entirely at your service,” Evelard said.

“Wait a bit, Mr. Pastor,” the man said, eyeing him steadfastly, and partially closing the door so as to keep out the damp sea-fog. “You’re a landsman; have you a stout heart, a sea-stomach, a devil-me-care or trust-in-God spirit, with the rest of us? If not, you’re no man for this job. I’ll e’en go in quest of another.”

“Duty—like Death—must not be kept waiting. State your errand?”

“Then, Mr. Pastor, it’s just this. Will you venture with me straight away to the lighthouse yonder? There is no time to lose; our comrade is dying out there, and only a minister of religion can make him even with God and man.”

“I said just now that I was at your service. Let us start without delay.”

The burly sailor again perused his host, evidently taking measure of his physical and mental powers. Although every inch a civilian, dress, look and manner betokening the man of thought rather than action, Evelard would be the last to shirk peril or tremendous responsibility. His look of calm, unswerving resolve told so much, whilst his well-made, close-knit frame indicated, if not extraordinary strength, great capacities of endurance. On the whole, the inspection seemed satisfactory.

“There is one question more I should like to put. Excuse me, Mr. Pastor, could you manage—in case of need—an unruly woman?”

The other was hardly able to resist a smile. His guest went on,—

“You see, ’tis a queer business we’re going upon. We have to take a woman with us; not one of your quiet, respectable sort, but a make-believe fine madam, a fly-away, painted thing—you know what I mean.”

He opened the door, once more shook his dripping garments; then closing it, fumbled for something in the farthest corner of a capacious pocket.

“This is the errand that takes us yonder,” he said, producing a little card-paper box, in which were a couple of wedding rings, one large and massive for a man’s finger the other half its size. “You are to marry two folks for the sake of legitimising a child, the little girl of my comrade dying in yon light-house. And we have to take her mother with us, who, as I was telling you, is no better than she should be, and who left her—husband I was going to say,

husband doubtless he would have been ere this had she stayed with him—her lover and child, then, to lead a flaunting life in Paris. And back she'll go to it, I've no doubt, as soon as he has done his best to make an honest woman of her. These creatures, you see, Mr. Pastor, are like the phylloxera, the pest of the country, there's no cure for them——”

“Had we not better start at once?” asked Evelard, seeing that the worthy seaman was growing garrulous.

“What I wanted to say was this. The storm has abated, but the sea is still wild enough to frighten a poor lost thing like that clean out of her senses, and, as you have probably heard, 'tis always a hazardous journey to Cordouan on account of the currents. In fair weather many a boat has been wrecked there before now. My comrade and I shall have enough to do with our oars. Will you undertake to look after the woman? No jumping about, no foolish antics, remember, or she may send us all to the bottom.”

Evelard promised to do his best, and made signs to his deaf housewife; a tin of coffee bubbled on the hearth, whilst he finished his preparations. The old woman filled two cups, added half-a-dozen lumps of sugar and a teaspoonful of brandy to each. Host and guest swallowed the stimulating draught without a word, the latter nodding approval as he returned his empty cup. Then they stepped out into the bleared, vague, misty world. The familiar landscape was unrecognisable in the clinging sea-fog.

Twenty minutes later, looking the only real thing, in a world of phantasmagoria, their boat put off to

sea. In sharp contrast with the unsubstantial aspect of sky and waves, now stood out the burly figures and ruddy complexions of the sailors, cheeks under slouched oilskin, hands above the rowlocks, glowing like robin redbreasts amid wintry snows. Crouched by Evelard sat the woman, her small, neat, hard features almost hidden by the hood of her waterproof, only the diamonds glittering on her ears and the gold bracelets on her wrists, indicating habits at variance with accepted standards. She seemed to defy criticism; with thin lips compressed, eyes bent on the ground, at first apparently indifferent to the hazards of her present position.

For a time indeed all went well. Straight as an arrow the little craft was guided towards the lighthouse. The rowers had hitherto plied their oars gently, almost lazily as it might seem to the uninitiated. They but reserved nerve and sinew for the strain to come. No sooner were they half way, than, bending forward, they put out all their strength and rowed with might and main, as if for dear life, for dear life indeed it became.

Time now stood still for that little crew. Such imminent peril was almost daily fare to the iron-nerved mariners. Evelard clung less tenaciously to life than most people, yet the next half-hour was perhaps as horrible to all three as to the shrinking, awe-stricken creature sharing the same suspense. Difficult and hazardous of approach at all seasons, the lighthouse seemed to have drawn them into a fatal circle, from which there was no escape. Hither and thither, resistless as a child's coracle, the

boat was whirled by the strong currents; now making superhuman efforts, the rowers gained a little ground; now they were violently forced backwards, their work having to be done over and over again.

Almost to touch the dull heavens appeared the angry waves, nothing visible through the mist but the ever-advancing, ever-retreating Cordouan Will-o'-the-Wisp of ocean; one moment it seemed their own, within a stone's throw, the next far off, unreachably as the very clouds. And in seeming mockery of man's impotence, triumphant over Nature's sway, hissed and shrieked the buffeting winds, a thousand angry voices making up the din.

From time to time Evelard glanced at the boatmen, but there was nothing to read on their weather-beaten faces. Accustomed as they were to danger, this was but one hand-to-hand encounter more with the Inevitable. Not a storm-season waned but such men are brought face to face with death. They meet the grim phantom stolidly, for all that congratulating themselves when he passes by.

Thus the fearful seconds dragged on, each a little life-time—the yestreen, to-day and morrow of existence crowded, condensed into one moment's agony. Were they an inch nearer their goal? Would that goal ever be reached, or was the end of all things here,—these seething hungry, merciless waters, these leaden heavens, their last glimpse of Life?

Up to the present time the bowed, shrinking figure by Evelard's side had remained outwardly calm. With dry eyes she gazed upon the waves,

perhaps reassured by the stolidity of her companions, or, it might be, resolute to behave in such a crisis as a lady should. She had evidently made up her mind to betray no emotion. Whatever happened, she would be the object neither of pity nor rebuke. They were now indeed near the lighthouse. The airy column, hitherto vanishing as they approached it, at last took definite shape; the wreath of vapour became solid masonry, when a wave, more formidable than any as yet encountered, bore down upon them. Like a discharge of artillery, crushing rank and file with low, ominous war, it advanced swiftly and surely, the lofty white crests making still more horrible the dark gulf below another moment and the little boat must surely be bent like a straw, sucked into the vortex. The men put out all their remaining strength, Evelard sat as if turned to stone. The woman stirred not an inch. Only from her pale lips went forth a cry, perhaps the sincerest utterance of a tawdry life:—

“Minister of Christ,” she moaned, “pray for me!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

LIFE AND DEATH.

BUT Evelard's strange mission was to be accomplished. Friendly help was now at hand. Voices made themselves heard above the din of wind and waves, a rope flung from the lighthouse reached the boatmen where they sat; a few minutes more and the drenched, benumbed passengers were safely hauled up the outer stair. A fire blazed in the small, dark kitchen, and before it an old sailor, wearing a blue cotton bib-apron, fried buckwheat pancakes; a block of meat frizzled close by; from green and yellow pipkins, placed between the ashes, came savoury steam of tomatoes and mad apples. The long, narrow deal table, clean scrubbed showed covers laid for six; snowy-white napkins of coarse homespun, a small carafe of pink wine and half a foot of bread accompanied each plate. Little saucers of olives, mushrooms soaked in oil, and strong white radish stood ready, after old Roman fashion, to whet the appetite for more substantial dishes.

The narrow chamber barely admitted standing room for the little party. Evelard, in order to restore circulation, lifted one foot, then another,

rubbed his arms and legs; whilst his companion stood over the blazing logs till her sallow cheeks became crimson, no trace of agitation now on that small, hard-featured face. With averted eyes and thin lips compressed, she seemed to shrink from notice and sympathy. Rid of her dripping mackintosh this fashionably-dressed little figure looked strangely out of place amid such surroundings, nor did their unusualness appear to touch her. The turbulence without, the grim realities within, her own share in the day's events—to all these things she was apparently indifferent. A two-inch square looking-glass hung by the mantelpiece; before it she now deliberately adjusted her bonnet, replaced a stray lock, smoothed down a ribbon. With a sense of danger had vanished trembling self-consciousness and glances towards the Unknown.

The kitchen was a scene of hubbub and stir; the clatter of knives and forks, the splutter and bubbling of cooking vessels, the crackling of the logs, and the loud voices of the men, almost stifling the uproar outside. But in the sick man's room all was still, save for the surging wind and waves. As he lay he could see the wide Atlantic, to-day no glassy sheet of pure transparent green, image of infinite peace, and ideal repose, rather emblematic of the perpetual warfare of human passion, the all-embracing limitless sea of the conflict called human life!

No condition offers more startling contrasts than that of the French peasant. Here you may meet a model character moving amid an artless entourage; there mingled with much that is honest and praise-

worthy the grosser element comes into play, and standards of life and conduct are hopelessly degraded. Not even the august approach of death can sometimes banish sordidness and materialism.

Evelard now looked in vain for a sign of softened feeling from the pair brought together under circumstances so solemn. The shock-headed, pallid man just raised himself on his pillows to greet the minister, and to say, as he glanced at the neat little figure following him,—

“Is Céline Meurice there?”

“Yes, Jean Vitu, it is I,” answered an unmoved woman’s voice. That was all. Without a word more Evelard was asked to begin.

Throughout the interview the light-house-keeper remained unmoved as Céline herself. This final bringing together of long-estranged father and mother for their child’s worldly welfare; this strange wedlock, making husband and wife of two beings once dear to each other, forthwith to be separated by the grave itself, seemed to these two a mere legal formality, the signing of an every-day contract hardly more so.

The brief service over, both appeared anxious to be rid of each other’s presence.

“Listen!” Evelard said, after giving his benediction. “The beneficent law of France consents thus to legitimise the offspring of unholy passion at the eleventh hour, and lets the parents go unreprieved. But there is a Power above the law, a Power which, no matter our creed, arraigns the actions of men. To the husband and father in this case, the voice of

the Eternal says—‘Forgive as thou hopest to be forgiven.’ To the wife and mother, Christ being the mouth-piece—‘Daughter, thy sins be forgiven thee. Go and sin no more.’ You trembled before the storm just now,” he said, turning round sharply confronting the woman with incisive gaze. “You implored me to pray for you. Of what avail prayers without amended life. And, think you, God is heard in the storm only, that retribution but dogs our footsteps in the hour of peril? Our most prosperous moments may find us at the bar of Conscience, unpitied of self, despairing, alone. Brother, sister, I now leave you. Harken to the voice of God and of your better selves. Make your peace with each other and with Heaven ere you part for ever.”

“Stay a bit, minister. I’d like to hear a chapter before you go,” said the sick man. “And pray understand, sir, this gewgaw,” here he pointed to the ring on his finger, “has made matters straight between the girl and me. But I couldn’t do more; I’m bound to think of the child. Céline,” he added, in a dry almost chuckling tone, “it is only right to tell you,—I have left you nothing!”

“You owe me nothing,” was the sullen reply.

“The little I have scraped up is for my daughter’s dowry. My own people will marry her respectably when the time comes. ’Tis a strange thing that a woman should prefer diamonds to her own babe, but it is not for me to reproach you——”

“Is that all you have to say?” she asked, edging, towards the door.

“You may go if you like. But remember, Céline, 'tis only fair that the pastor here should hear the truth. You were free to choose between an honest life and one of shame. I promised marriage had you stayed.”

“Was this a bearable existence for any girl?” she asked, glancing at the window, and shrugging her shoulders. “The very thought of it makes me shudder. And your temper was none of the best; you owned so yourself.”

“Temper, temper!” murmured the other impatiently. “What else can girls like yourself expect; unable to cook even so much as an omelette properly, wasteful of everything——”

“You took good care that there was nothing to waste. I remember days when I had barely enough to eat.”

The eyes of the dying man glared; he made an effort to raise himself.

“Barefaced inventions, wicked falsehoods, unblushing lies!” he cried, lifting his hand menacingly. “Silence that tongue of hers, pastor, or by Heaven——”

Evelard, inexpressibly shocked, held up an admonishing hand; the old peasant woman, acting as nurse, came forward.

“I daresay you had both something to put up with; when did man and woman live together like the angels up above? But now, dear,” she said, addressing herself to the patient, “let the pastor read to you, and I will take the lady down to breakfast. They're waiting for her, I'll warrant.”

“Mind and keep something hot for the minister,” murmured the host faintly.

“Tush, tush; as if old Pierre would forget! Hasn't he got a beefsteak on purpose for the gentleman? Here, just a teaspoonful of cordial, darling—that's it; now lie still and listen nicely.”

The dying man made a feint to clench his fist at the retreating figure of his newly made wife, then fell back on the pillow. A shrewd, almost sardonic smile lighted up his massive, once handsome features.

“I had the little hussy there—I had her there,” he murmured, chuckling to himself. “I've left you nothing, I said; and though she pretended not to care, I know how mortified she was; 'tis worth dying to have paid her out.”

Without a word of remonstrance, Evelard began to read. By little and little his hearer grew calm and attentive, the cloud of evil passion vanished from his face. He listened, repeating a word or two now and then.

“Yes,” he said, “let the learned talk as they will, Mr. Pastor; men want a religion, the wise as well as the foolish; and which ever way we look at it, when our buying and selling is over, and all that we see of the world is from a little window, soon to be shut for ever, then Christ is everybody's man. He helps us to die!”

Meantime, whilst peace was gradually taking possession of that little bed-chamber, very different was the scene below.

The Parisian, now freed from Evelard's restrain-

ing presence and retributive thought, acknowledged herself famished with the rest. She prepared the salad, helped old Pierre to dish up, added the finishing touch to the table, then sat down and made a hearty meal.

It was Madame this, Madame that, from beginning to end. What were folks talking of in Paris? How looked the vines and orchards passed on the way? And the weather? Did the Loire threaten inundations in Touraine? Were the crops much knocked about in Vendée?

These rough seafarers found pleasant relief in the society of this agreeable-looking, well-informed, affable little lady. She could enter into their views as easily as she could do justice to the somewhat coarse but abundant fare placed before them. The feast could hardly be called jovial, the company spoke in undertones, yet glasses were chinked; ere coffee appeared, everybody had become everybody's friend.

When, at last, Evelard went downstairs, he found the kitchen silent and deserted. The weather had improved, and his three companions were silently smoking cigarettes on the little gallery outside. Old deaf Pierre now bustled in. Which dish would the pastor have first? A woodcock and prime bit of skate had been put aside for him, he said, hand on ear, as he tried to catch the answer.

Evelard slipped a silver piece into his hand, pointing to the table, on which stood all and more than he needed. Warming himself as he ate, he breakfasted hastily, now anxious to be gone.

CHAPTER XIX.

VISIONS.

It was night-fall when, weary and dispirited after the events of the day, Evelard reached his home. As he unlocked the front door, he remembered that his old housekeeper had asked permission to retire early, promising to leave everything in readiness for dinner. The darkness and silence within did not surprise him, yet as he entered, he stood still, overcome with a conviction as startling as it was sure.

He was not alone. Instinctively he felt conscious of a presence. Just as animals at once detect the proximity of any living, breathing thing, no matter the darkness or security of its hiding-place, so certain sensitive human natures are alive to personal indications, emanations, influences, call them what we will, signs of conscious life imperceptible to others.

Evelard was the reverse of timid or superstitious, nevertheless his first feeling was of uneasiness, even dismay. No one had the shadow of a right to be there at such an hour. The intrusion was wholly unaccountable, suspicious, eerie.

St. Gilles was the last corner of France, certes,

in which housebreakers might be dreaded. Folks boasted here of sleeping with doors unbolted. A humble country parsonage offered no prize to a professional footpad. His old servant, having locked the front door, had hidden the key as usual. Would the most cunning thief divine that it lay under one especial flower-pot of the tiny courtyard? The house communicated with the church, but Protestant churches in France are only left open during service. It was no more accessible from behind his garden adjoining the Carmelite convent. Could any premises be better protected? Were he possessed of millions he might safely leave his back doors unfastened. The walls of a cloistered house would defy Russian Nihilists or London burglars.

He waited on the threshold, matchbox in hand, irresolute. Signs, subtle, yet unmistakable, announced to his quick perceptions that he was not alone. Some one had found means to get into his house, and for what purpose, unless a nefarious one?

The assurance was especially disquieting to one in his position. The parsonage stood completely isolated, save for its neighbour, the silent, unreach-able, fortress-like nunnery.

And he had enemies, evil-wishers; harm done to himself might quite possibly appear a meritorious action in the eyes of many.

But away with thoughts so ungenerous, misgivings so dastardly! He was, of course, the victim of some wayside pilferer or lurching vagrant who had seen the hiding of the door-key and entered perhaps

for no more desperate purpose than a raid on his larder. Italian hucksters and Bohemian pedlers probably tramped through this part of the country as any other, the light-fingered gentry who obligingly mend your chairs and stewpans for a plateful of broken victuals and slip a stray silver spoon into their pockets as part payment.

On a sudden the front door blew to, retreat was no longer practicable. Striking a match, he lighted a hand-lamp and arming himself with a stout, knobbed stick, the only weapon he was possessed of, deliberately set out in search of the miscreant. First the little parlour was inspected, then the dining-room, then the kitchen. As he walked along slowly, he became aware of light, fluttering, bird-like movements, as of a frightened captive seeking to hide itself. Had some poor hunted wretch, outcast of society, sought a refuge under his roof? Or, might some timid, maimed animal have fled hither from its tormentors? This seemed the likeliest clue to the mystery.

He now laid down his stick and called out in a gentle, encouraging voice, "Who is there?"

No answer came, but he fancied he heard a little sigh, a low-drawn breath, half of suspense, half of relief, and again, there was a dragging, rustling sound as of living thing unable to use its limbs freely.

"Have no fear, come forward," Evelard said, more encouragingly than before. Then he heard a woman's voice, and there crawled forth from a dark recess of the kitchen a white, trembling figure, who

threw herself at his feet. The little lamp in Evelard's hand gave feeble light, but he could not be mistaken. The white linen kerchief veiling the face almost after the manner of Moorish women; the long, plain, shroud-like robe of dust-coloured serge; the coarse, hempen girdle and crucifix told their own story. This suppliant kneeling before him was a cloistered Carmelite. "Rise, my sister," he cried, "kneel not to man, but to God. Remember where you are—no longer in the confessional, but before a Protestant pastor."

"Your voice is kind," murmured the girl, half raising and drawing back; she glanced at him, around her, with hands clasped above her forehead. "You are the Protestant minister," she went on. "I felt it must be so. I could just see the church and parsonage roof from the convent windows, and I said to myself, 'There I should find a sanctuary.' Oh!" she cried with a suppressed wail, "you will not give me up, you will help me?"

Evelard was realizing his position little by little. He was asked to shelter a runaway nun; he, in the eyes of the Catholic world, a base levanter, a perjured renegade, was called upon to protect an apostate even more abject than himself! Pity, consternation, an expression bordering on despair, were written on his face, but his resolution was quickly taken. Cost what it might he would do his duty.

"Tell me I am safe; your home is as God's house," she said, again glancing round with the timid, startled look of a strayed bird. "Hark! Is it only the

wind beating against the panes, or footsteps in pursuit ; the least sound makes me tremble.”

“Have no fear,” Evelard replied. “Remember, it is only the criminal who can be torn from a man’s roof against his will.”

“Let me hold your hand. I shall feel then that I am not dreaming, that I have indeed a friend, and your voice is kind. It reminds me of one I loved in days gone by, when life was life indeed——” She crept nearer to him and would have knelt by his chair, so strong the habit of perpetual genuflexion, but he motioned her to a seat near him. For a few minutes her thin trembling fingers clasped his own. Side by side they sat in the dimly-lighted room without exchanging a word, each seeing visions. Her voice, in turn, had recalled the past, bringing back apparitions of girlish sweetness and beauty long since buried in the tomb. The spell of old memories became too strong for both. She wept quietly and he moved away, forcing himself to confront realities. This unhappy girl must not stay here. Quick as lightning he thought of Georgette ; on that generous nature, that warm heart, he could implicitly rely. He began to see an escape from his dilemma.

“Listen, my sister,” he began, moved to deepest, almost tenderest compassion. “There is a lady living near, my best, nearest friend ; she will, I am sure, act a sisterly part towards you. Under her roof you would enjoy greater security than under my own. I have neither wife nor children, my old woman-servant who comes daily from the village,

would babble if you stay here, your hiding-place is sure to be discovered."

"Do with me as you will, I trust in you as in God Himself," was the answer. Then the speaker added in a tone of humblest apology,—“The night is dark, and I daresay you can lend me a mackintosh and hood to cover my white robes. Will you mind if I walk very slowly? I hurt my foot in escaping.”

Evelard had already bethought himself of his housekeeper's black-hooded cloak hanging outside. That day, on account of the rain, he had fortunately lent her a waterproof of his own. But as the stranger rose to put it on he saw that she limped painfully. And the cross-road to the château, the only one that offered security from observation, was rugged. No, the project must be given up. He thought and thought.

It is the custom in out-of-the-way Protestant communities for the pastor to receive deacons, evangelists, or fellow-ministers, whenever any happen to be travelling that way. As only short notices are given of these arrivants, a bedroom is always reserved in readiness, and such hospitality is counted upon. Evelard had lately placed a camp bed in his so-called study, that little chamber under the roof approached by a secret staircase. Should a colleague arrive unexpectedly he would surrender his own room below, himself occupying the hiding-place of hunted-down predecessors.

“My sister,” he now said kindly, “lame and weary as you are, I will not cast you out on such a night.

I will at once go to this lady and arrange with her for your departure to-morrow; the matter requires caution. Meantime do, you in all security, eat, drink, and sleep. There is food ready placed," he said, pointing to the supper table in the dining-room opposite, "and there," he now disclosed the little staircase built in the wall, "you will find a bed to lie on. Take this little lamp, and as soon as you have supped, fasten this door securely behind you. There is absolutely nothing to fear."

"Will you be gone very long?" she asked.

He started; every syllable of that sweet, tremulous voice seemed to unnerve him utterly.

"An hour at most. When you hear the door opened and my tread in the corridor, do not be afraid. No one can get into the house but myself. And," he said as he glanced at the dark narrow stair built in the wall, "your former prison was not safer than the new." A bitter smile now rose to his lips. "Believe me, you will be left in peace. Henceforth you are dead to those you have just left behind, as you died in years gone by to kith and kin."

"You—a Protestant pastor—understand these things?"

Again Evelard fell as in a dream. The look of appeal, the pleading voice, the very attitude of the speaker belonged to the past, to another. Murmuring a vague reply he closed the door behind him, once more confronting the storm.

The night was pitch dark, and the wind raged with redoubled violence; plashes of rain dashed in his face as he plodded on, Georgette's image affording

comfort and hope. Wise she was not, prudent she could hardly be called, but at her doors, as he well knew, sorrow and misfortune had never knocked in vain. The lights of the château, usually illuminating this corner of the forest-girt bay, were not visible to-night, but the thought of the welcome awaiting him, the cheerful, well-lit room, the gracious, benignant figure presiding there, warmed his heart, consoled and uplifted in the midst of anxiety and depression. Yet his thoughts returned to the pale, trembling girl left behind; he felt overcome with shame and contrition. That white-robed, kneeling figure, seemed to rise as a spectre between himself and his betrothed, deprecating this most unequal compact on the one hand, devotion and self-sacrifice that knew no bounds on the other, a shipwrecked existence, an embittered nature, a mere aftermath of affection.

In such a mood of alternating congratulation and humility, he reached the lodge gates. What had happened? Not a light shone in the broad, many-windowed façade; he rang twice, thrice, without attracting notice. At last he heard slow, shuffling footsteps, and the house door was opened an inch, with the abrupt inquiry,—

“Who may you be, pray, at this unearthly hour?”

“Pardon, friend, it is I, Pastor Evelard. I should not have come so late, but I particularly wish to see Madame Delinon.”

“A thousand excuses, Mr. Pastor; come inside, I beg. My wife and I are no longer as young as we once were, and we are always abed betimes when we get a chance. Madame, with Monsieur Jeunet and

the young ladies, started for Paris this afternoon, and will not return for several days. A note was sent to the Parsonage, I feel sure !”

Evelard thanked the good man, and turned away with a sinking of the heart. Who could help him now ?

CHAPTER XX.

TO THE RESCUE.

EVELARD returned to his hushed, dark home in a state of mind bordering on desperation. Nothing could have happened more calculated to discredit him in popular esteem and render his position as pastor here untenable. So fraught with peril the dilemma in which he now found himself, so irremediable the harm already effected, that it seemed as if malevolent scheming and no mere accident, were here at work. But such a thought was not to be harboured for a moment, his mind dwelt rather on the inscrutable mysteriousness of destiny, the retributive work of change and chance, bringing a man suddenly face to face with his one false step, his unforgotten, unforgiven lapse. The fugitive now under his roof was the ghost of a bitter sweet past. He had loved when to love was a crime. In the white, trembling figure lately at his feet, it was as if he saw no mere stranger fleeing to his hearth as a sanctuary, but Bertrande's self, the exquisite vision of her whose love had been so bitterly expiated. For her sake he must shield and befriend this victim of outworn creeds and revolting fanaticism. For her sake he must patiently endure whatever these services might cost

him. Had she not suffered ignominious, long drawn out martyrdom on his account, solitude, fastings, maceration, every imaginable form of mental and bodily privation? Was he to shrink from ordeals of other kind, evil repute, slander, perhaps persecution? Come dark days of opprobrium and the looking askance of new friends and supporters. Come penury, disgrace, exile, he would obey the dictates of conscience and Christian charity!

As he pondered on these eventualities, the future growing gloomier and more portentous with every glance forward, the prayer of another apostate from Rome rose to his lips. In his present mood, Lamennais seemed nearer to him than the divine Nazarene; the wonderful, one is tempted to say, superhuman utterances of the *Paroles d'un Croyant* met his case even better than the Sermon on the Mount. Every word of this little book, perhaps more akin to Scripture than any piece of writing ever penned, was familiar to him. From the depth of his desolation now rose the appeal,—

“Lord, we cry unto Thee. We cry unto Thee as one, who at nightfall encounters a hideous spectre by the graveyard.”

Was not his life just then as a charnel-house from which a wraith had arisen, filling his soul with bitter remorse?

He knew his country people well. The French mind, too forgiving in most respects, is implacable concerning one. Whilst hardened criminals oft-times go unpunished, the innocent cause of a public scandal is regarded as a public enemy. That a

minister of the Reformed religion, one moreover with antecedents such as his, should place himself in direct antagonism to his Catholic brethren, would appear more than a blunder to his own congregation. That he should connive at the escape of a cloistered nun would be regarded as nothing short of a grave offence.

Old folks could hardly recall the days when Catholics and Protestants had lived at open variance, but even in this more enlightened time, great circumspection was necessary on both sides. Jealousies were apt to arise, differences of opinion still brought about disagreeable conflicts. Whichever way Evelard turned he foresaw painful imbroglio and complication.

Next morning on throwing open the shutters, glorious sunshine greeted him. The storm was spent, and in the clear, brilliant atmosphere, the extent of its devastations could be accurately measured. Here veteran trees had been uprooted, there low-lying pastures flooded on every side were evidence of havoc and destruction. Glancing toward the convent, he now saw that the full force of the hurricane had been felt on this higher, more exposed site. The bell gable was unroofed, tiles were blown from the main roof, workmen were already busy repairing damages here and there. What had happened nearer home explained the fugitive's escape. A huge sea pine, almost denuded of branch and foliage, had been hurled against the party wall, crushing in a portion. It would be comparatively easy for any lightfooted, active person, especially in desperate

case, to scramble to the summit of the broken piled-up masses. The height of the wall being thus reduced, a leap might be taken, not without risk of injury, but certainly without hazard of life. The unhappy girl had evidently availed herself of these chances, thus affording a clue to her hiding-place! Most likely the authorities of the convent had already made up their minds as to her whereabouts.

It was not in Evelard's nature to lay deep schemes or work after underhand fashion, even in a good cause. Whatever he did must be done openly and without shame. He at once and without a moment's hesitation decided upon the course to pursue. From that moment, until Georgette's return, his house was a citadel, neither to be taken by force nor stratagem. He should not attempt to spirit away his charge in cunningly devised disguise to some out of the way spot. He should not seek to conceal the truth, he should simply and in an unflinching spirit, vindicate the sacred right of asylum.

There were grave difficulties to contend with. That morning he was compelled to perform burial-service some miles off in place of an absent pastor, in the evening he was to give his second discourse at La Roche St. Georges; who meantime would take his place? Whom could he trust in this emergency?

His heart almost leaped as he caught sight of Bourgeois' ungainly figure at the little front gate, and remembered that the young pastor had come for his lesson. How he congratulated himself now that he had not allowed prejudice to get the better of

neighbourly duty? Bourgeois to-day wore the look of his good genius.

“My housewife will be here in a few minutes. She usually serves coffee at eight o’clock,” he said, “but before we proceed to breakfast or business I have something to communicate.”

He showed his visitor into the little salon, threw wide the shutter, and whilst the over-heated pedestrian loosened his necktie, wiped his brow and fanned himself with a newspaper, perused him narrowly. Yes, vain as he was, self-inflated as he was, Bourgeois could be trusted! This sturdy peasant, anxious not only to become a scholar and a gentleman, but a shining light in the theological world, possessed the invaluable quality of tenacity. In the days of persecution, he would almost jauntily have confronted martyrdom.

“I was ungracious, nay, harsh to you on your first visit,” Evelard began. “You have now the opportunity of taking noble revenge. You can render me signal service.”

Up jumped Bourgeois in a moment. Before the other could resist, two herculean arms were flung around him, moustachod lips were pressed against his cheek; in that boisterous embrace Evelard struggled helplessly as the victim of an aggressive bear.

“My dear brother, my beloved friend, my revered master, only speak the word and I am at your service for the rest of my days.”

“You are too good——”

“Do not dwell on it, do not so much as allude to

it. Am I not already the most beholden of men, owing to none other my power over the conditional mood, my mastery of the past participle, and the noble fields of philosophy and elocution? Have you not been the second Socrates of an ardent young Plato, as the ocean waves to a humble Demosthenes, teaching me how to discriminate between the real and the ideal, how to train the vocal chord? Hear me for one moment, let me show you how I delivered myself of last Sunday's peroration——”

He rose to his feet, cleared his throat, stretched out his arms and began:—

“And now, dear brethren and sisters in the faith——”

Evelard touched his arm gently, unable to resist a smile. “You shall rehearse later. The matter I mentioned just now is grave and pressing. Are you prepared to stand by a colleague in a most painful dilemma?”

“My dear sir, what are you dreaming of? A mere dilemma, forsooth! I would follow you without a second thought, here is my hand upon it, to prison, to Cayenne, to the gibbet or the stake!”

Evelard smiled grimly; perhaps these ordeals, he reflected, were more tolerable than certain moral martyrdoms witnessed in our own days.

“Nay, I am not asking so much of you; although, I confess it, asking no bagatelle.”

He watched his companion's face to read the effect of his words, closed the door, and, glancing towards the convent, added,—

“An unhappy girl contrived to escape from yon-

der priscn last night. She fled hither for protection, is at this moment under my roof."

Bourgeois did not look greatly concerned at this disclosure. He gave a loud whistle, made a grimace, and with hands impocketed, his long legs stretched at ease, listened for more.

"You doubtless know enough of the cloistered system to understand my own feelings on the subject. My mind is, of course, made up. The victim of self-delusion on the one hand, of slavish superstition and unblushing cupidity on the other, is as safe here as if she were on the opposite side of the Atlantic."

Again the young pastor whistled, this time with more animation and significance.

"Ah, ha! you foresee a scrimmage; there will be a tussle? I begin to feel interested. The authorities yonder will try to recover the young lady!"

"By sheer force they cannot do so. The law is explicit on that point. But we may be sure that every other available means will be tried; reproaches, threats, intimidation, and the like. Now I am determined that whilst the fugitive is under my roof her would-be captors shall have no opportunity of communicating with her. As soon as Madame Delinon returns, my charge will be transferred to her care. Till then, may I count on you?"

Bourgeois rose to his feet and pirouetted round the room, chuckling to himself, finally laughing immoderately. For the life of him he could not comprehend Evelard's harassed looks, and serious way of looking at the affair.

“I understand, you want me to guard your door during your absence, as Horatius guarded the bridge—you remember the story came into our first Latin lesson? My dear friend, make your mind easy. You have lighted upon the very man—a Horatius, and no mistake! Absent yourself for a week if you choose. Not a Romanist, were it the Papal Nuncio himself, shall cross your threshold. I assure you no task could be more to my taste.”

“My old woman servant must of course learn what has happened; she will minister to the wants of this poor girl, serve her food in her chamber, and so on. But Marie Louise is discreet, and, moreover, she cannot noise the matter abroad, for I shall insist upon her remaining here till Madame Delinon’s return. Unfortunately, I have two engagements to-day. Your business then will be to see that no one enters the house. So far, I believe we understand each other perfectly?”

“Perfectly.”

“Then suppose we proceed to lessons. Let me see; we were engaged last Saturday, I believe, in dealing with the syntax of the adverb. We will now take the preposition in hand.”

Whilst the pupil, with the exhilaration of a school-boy promised an otter hunt, thought of the encounters possibly awaiting him, his master plunged into grammar, delighted for a while to lose grasp of actualities. This absorption in a subject which must have been familiar to triteness puzzled the somewhat absent-minded disciple. Yet in such habits of concentration might not be found the key to all intellec-

tual achievement? No mere lesson in accidence or prosody was here, but the exercise of the most valuable faculty a thinking being can possess, that of suddenly transporting himself into the mental atmosphere of another, quitting for the time being his own inner self, individuality, cosmos, call it what we will, almost as completely as if he had cast off his corporeal self.

- The gulf, moreover, separating raw educated from ripe scholar is never more apparent than when they take in hand the study of words.

For what are these? To the first, things concrete, prosaic, unsuggestive as the clothes he wears; to the last, each in itself, a parable, a saga, a history informed with life and poetry, integral part of the immense epoch of humanity.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW HORATIUS KEPT THE BRIDGE.

IT was with indescribable exuberance that Bourgeois entered upon his office. Not the Paladin Rinaldo unsheathing Fusberta before Paris, not the Knight of La Mancha charging the windmills, glowed with more martial ardour than the young pastor as he prepared for the fray. Now, indeed, was he to have an opportunity of displaying his mental prowess. Here was a golden opportunity of proving himself more than a match for the wildest Jesuit going. This doughty championship of a poor, broken-spirited girl would be at the same time a daring battle for Martin Luther and the right of free inquiry, and a protestation against the Pope, infallibility, and the worship of graven images. With what immense delight did he inwardly gird his loins and buckle on his armour! Well, he was ready. The sooner the foe appeared the better.

Parsing, chronology, Cornelius Nepos seemed terribly uninteresting that morning. He sat down to his appointed task without zest or spontaneity. As the snail-like minutes dragged on, he left off work, paused, watched, listened; then, for the twentieth time, he rose and inspected bars and bolts back

and front, assuring himself that not even an inquisitive mouse could creep into the house unnoticed, much less a human being.

The place was very silent, only the movements of the old woman in the kitchen broke the stillness. Once or twice an upper door was opened and he heard the sound of a girl's sweet, frightened, pathetic voice —

“Thank you; may Heaven bless you! Oh, how kind, how motherlike you are!” reiterated the fugitive; then the door was closed, the housewife shuffled downstairs, and all became quiet as before.

Bourgeois soon found concentration impossible. For the life of him he *could not* apply himself to study any longer. Evelard would understand, would accept excuse. He must again rehearse his coming part; in such emergencies a man was never too well prepared.

He reseated himself in an easy-chair, threw back his head, thrust his hands in his pockets, stretched out his long limbs, and with closed eyes imagined one passage of arms after another, himself emerging gloriously from each encounter.

First of all, some homely lay-sister would be sure to present herself, florid of complexion, coarse of feature, rustic of speech; outwardly, artlessness itself; in reality, crafty as Macchiavelli; on one arm she carried a basket of ripe figs and apples. “Might she offer these to her beloved sister as a parting gift; bestow on her cheek a farewell kiss? Could a minister of religion, full too, as she felt sure he was, of the milk of human kindness, refuse so small a favour? No

business of hers, forsooth, the whys and wherefores of a nun's running away; her own humble part in this religious house was to cook, scrub, and sew, not to meddle or make with matters that did not concern her. But she loved this dear creature now lost to her friends and companions forever. It would break her heart to be sent away as she had come." With loud sobs and reiterations of the fugitive's name, the young pastor imagined her lingering on the threshold, only to be dismissed at last after a thrice-repeated, thundering "No!"

Next he should have to deal with the Mother Superior; and now the combatant mentally girded his loins and buckled on his armour tighter than ever. Here would be a test of his capacities and no mistake. Most men, he felt sure of it, were the choice placed before them, would a thousand times sooner confront the Tempter himself than a Mother Superior under such circumstances.

But let her come on boldly! He was her man. Chuckling to himself, he now rehearsed the second act in the little drama. He saw himself cautiously opening the door to one of those elderly, aristocratic ascetes, who by force of inflexible will attain the seat of authority in these female autocracies. Such women have a presence stern and forbidding as those of the Fates in heathen mythology. He should very likely quake in his shoes, whilst maintaining a front dauntless as a lion.

By way of better preparing himself for the terrible scene, he mimicked his adversary's words and gestures. With thin lips compressed and basilisk glance

she would assert her claims, appealing to his sense of filial duty, his respect for the closest, most sacred ties, the most solemn obligations any human being can contract. Was she not in the eyes of Heaven mother of this undutiful daughter? Who else had so good a right to learn from her own lips the reason of such shameful defection? And, let the pastor mark the words, were her right disputed now she would find means to enforce it later.

All this time Pastor Bourgeois imagined himself simulating the wisdom of the serpent and the softness of the dove.

He was very sorry, would be his answer; he deeply regretted his inability to oblige so distinguished a lady; into particulars, unfortunately he could not enter, but it was wholly out of his power to grant her request. She must accept a thousand apologies—and an abrupt good-morning!

The lay-sister and Mother Superior being thus satisfactorily disposed of, there remained the final and most redoubtable set-to, which would be at once the palmary proof of his powers and the crowning triumph of the day.

Who should of course come next but the priest attached to the convent, the sentinel of the girl's conscience, in other words, her confessor?

Now Pastor Bourgeois owned that he could more readily encounter a dozen women, were each an abbess, than a single theologian.

He was not well versed in the attitude of the Code Civil towards conventual institutions. He felt quite unable to argue the cause of secular against ecclesias-

tical authority. He had no clear ideas as to the legality of Evelard's action or his own.

These confessors, on the other hand, were deep men, skilled in this kind of fencing, apt at tripping up the wariest adversary, crammed with sophisms to the finger-tips.

Such reflections did not in the least abate his self-confidence or daunt his ardour. One course and one only, lay open before him. He must listen without once opening his own lips. And he must hear as little as possible. The intruder should be cut short, and politely, but firmly showed the gate. If he refused to go, if he attempted to force an entrance,—

“Whew!” whistled the young man, complacently surveying his own muscular limbs, “the attempt will not be made twice anyhow.”

The thought had hardly crossed his mind when he did indeed hear a low, insinuating, Jesuitical knock at the front door. Quick as lightning he flew to the window and peered through the Venetian blinds. His prognostics had come true then? The cart had come before the horse, certainly; that is to say, the confessor had preceded both lay-sister and Mother Superior, the supreme trial of strength was at hand.

He could not be mistaken. The black-garmented figure just glanced at in the noonday glare, was undoubtedly that of a priest. Bourgeois also saw a white clerical handkerchief passed over a tonsured head. The good man has heated himself in his walk, he thought. He will be hotter still when he goes away!

The sturdy henchman, feeling that great circumspection was necessary, now walked deliberately to the door, and squaring himself, held it open, barring entrance with one arm.

What was his astonishment and disgust when the black figure and tonsured head ducked low, the aggressor not deigning to proffer a word as he forced a passage! The cool effrontery of such conduct roused Bourgeois's ire, but did not take away his presence of mind. The intrusion must be checked, swiftly and effectually. Without a second thought, in the twinkling of an eye, the offender was caught in his herculean grip, the door was thrust wide, and as quickly closed. Bourgeois breathed freely once more; he was safe and alone!

"Confound that fellow's impudence!" he said, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow. "But he won't give us any more trouble. That is one comfort."

A tap on the window-pane made him look up—there, could he believe his eyes, stood no stranger but Evelard himself! What piece of folly had he committed?

"You are not the first to mistake an honest man for a thief," said his host smiling. "But now that you are convinced of your mistake, please let me in."

"My dear sir, a thousand apologies."

"None are needed," was the suave reply. "Only an inch of diachylon, for you gave me a nasty scratch or two. Well, what has happened during my absence? Something startling I should suppose from your warm reception."

“Nothing; not a soul has been to the house,” Bourgeois replied, with a crestfallen air.

“Why, so much the better. When I have made myself presentable we will sit down to table.”

Throughout the rest of the day all remained calm alike without and within. The two men could see masons busily repairing the breach made in the convent wall, the woodman’s axe was heard by the fallen tree, on the main roof plumbers were replacing broken tiles. Every trace of the storm was being fast obliterated. From time to time the tinkle of the chapel bell reached their ears; at the usual hour the outer gates, thrown wide, invited passers-by to worship as before. A lay-sister, according to daily routine, tripped to the village for marketings. The father confessor paid his matutinal visit to the superior’s parlour. That was all. No sign was there of excitement or perturbation, nothing to suggest an extraordinary occurrence to the world.

Did this unruffled surface betoken indifference or neutrality; might it rather indicate the unnatural stillness often heralding a storm? Nature, too, was in her peaceullest, most dreamy mood. Windless now the cool grey sea and circling woods, not a tiny tassel of the tamarisk stirred, even the aspen seemed changed into its silvery semblance, so motionless its leaves to-day.

A wondrous transformation had taken place within the last twenty-four hours, the dazzling South, with her gold and purple was gone, not so much as the hem of her gorgeous vesture skirts visible! In her stead, sat enthroned the grey-robed ungemmed

North, for circlet, pale stars, from her zone dropping scentless, pensive-hued flowers.

“Was his future symbolized here?” asked Evelard. After the brilliant summer and tremendous tempest of his own career, were peace and colourless contentment, with vesper charm in store for him?

His frame of mind was not hopeful. These cruel ordeals would be passed through and forgotten, but what should now have afforded gladdest consolation and looking forward, filled him with uneasiness and dismay. Was he worthy, could he ever render himself worthy of Georgette’s generous, self-sacrificing affection?

CHAPTER XXII.

PHANTASMS.

“THE Sister would like to speak to you, Mr. Pastor, if you please,” said the ancient Huguenot woman, as Evelard re-entered the house that evening. He had come home almost in a frame of mind bordering on exhilaration. His little audience had showed so much interest and intelligence, his meaning seemed so thoroughly grasped, that he could but congratulate himself. To proselytise, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, was the last thing thought of when entering upon his charge; to give direct answers to direct questions was wholly another matter. No one could reasonably blame him for telling his neighbours what they wanted to know, namely—wherein consisted the exact difference between Romanism and the Reformed Faith? He began to realize that these village conferences might have weighty results. More than one inquirer after Truth might, like himself, find mental satisfaction and spiritual repose.

His housekeeper’s speech brought back painful realities. He had almost forgotten the incident of the night before, and now it looked more ominous than ever. What if a mere act of charity should

undo all his efforts at pastoral usefulness? What if his action in this matter should prove his ruin?

“Let the Sister come to me, by all means,” he replied, wearily putting off hat and overcoat. On a sofa, in the little salon adjoining, lay Bourgeois sound asleep. The good-natured fellow, not for a single moment deserting his post hitherto, had at last succumbed to drowsiness on the improvised couch prepared for him, return at that hour being out of the question. The day had been so terribly long, so monotonous! and nothing of course was in the least likely to happen now. He breathed heavily, the whole house echoed with the music of the nose. Sleeping accommodation had been provided for the old charwoman in an upper room. Evelard’s quiet parsonage was turned into a camp!

A single lamp under a green shade burned on the table; in that subdued greenish light the pallid, white-robed figure of the Carmelite wore almost a spectral look. Her movements, too, as she glided, fluttered, crept, suggested a phantasmal world rather than that of breathing flesh and blood. To Evelard’s overwrought imagination it was as if he held converse with a spirit disinterred, the ghost of one whose image was graven on his heart.

“Speak without fear, my sister,” he said, anxious to break the spell. “You are, as you well know, among friends. What is it that you now wish to communicate?” The girl had again dropped on her knees beside his chair, the habit of perpetual adoration still clinging to her. With hands clasped over her eyes, she seemed about to make some painful con-

fession. At the sound of his voice, she sprang to her feet, listening and trembling.

“Oh! speak once more. I am soothed, comforted, strengthened as I listen,” she cried, greatly agitated. “I have suffered so much, your voice makes me forget everything, everything but the joy and the love that were once mine——”

“Calm yourself, my poor girl. Pour out your heart to me,” Evelard replied, in his turn much moved. “You are young, life may yet smile on you; you may serve God in a better, to Him more acceptable, way.”

“I had faith once. Prayer was rapture to me, meditation on heavenly things ecstasy, penance and self-sacrifice seemed to bring me nearer to Christ. But a time came suddenly, almost as a revelation it appeared to me, when my eyes were opened; there were the bright blue heavens, the spring flowers, the happy birds. We could not shut these out of our prison, and they spoke to my heart of a better religion. I believed, I realized; I *saw* that privation for mere privation’s sake, abnegation of natural feeling and self-inflicted torture, in reality separate us from God, the good God whose gospel to all the world is Nature, whose best gift to all creatures is the gift of loving each other! How could I stay in the convent when it had become as a charnel-house, a living tomb? Unhappy as I was I could not die.”

She broke off, paused for a moment, then added eagerly,—

“How could I foresee that my self-sacrifice was to end in bitterest disillusion, that fancying I had

done all things for God, I should wake up one day to find that I had done nothing, worse than nothing? And with what confidence and secret triumph I entered upon my novitiate, passed through the necessary probation, took final vows! I never doubted then in my calling! And perhaps had there existed any outlet for human sympathy within the convent walls, had I been allowed to love and cherish any one, any living, breathing creature, I might have borne existence there always. I could have loved God in loving a child, a dog, a bird, even! but in trying to love Him only I found myself alone.”

“What induced you to enter the cloister, my sister?” asked Evelard pityingly.

“Father—forgive me, sir—I fancy myself in the confessional. I forget that I am talking to a Protestant pastor—do not ask me now; some other time I will tell you. I have grievously sinned; I sought to expiate my sin. And have I not done so? Youth, friends, fortune, all these I have offered up by way of atonement. What will become of me now, the apostate, the accursed one? All is dark.”

“Others have trodden a path equally rough and thorny,” the pastor replied, thinking of Jeunet’s case and his own. “You will meet with kindness, never fear. Your life may yet be cheerful, useful, even happy. In a few days, perhaps to-morrow, you will be under the roof of the lady I mentioned; she will, I am sure, act the part of a sister to you.”

The girl pondered, then got out very timidly;—

“The convent is very near, my flight was of

course discovered long ago; am I quite, quite safe here? That is what I wanted to ask you."

"As safe as if you were on the other side of the Atlantic, in Protestant England or free America. Have you not my word?" asked Evelard, with the consolatory reflection that at any rate she would never know what the promise might cost him.

"I cannot thank you yet. I feel as if I were in a dream. Is it true?" she cried passionately, "is it indeed I, my very self, sitting here, and you, you no apparition, but the village pastor? I have strange thoughts in my mind. Not one part of my life only, but all seems unreal. It seems to me as if I must wake up either once more a veiled nun within the cloister walls or right happy listening to you, my teacher, my oracle; oh! pardon," she broke off, and burst into tears. "I thought of a beloved friend, of the idol of my girlhood. Just so he allayed every fear always. For the moment he seemed to be sitting in your place."

Evelard too had become strangely unreal to himself. The present wore the semblance of a dream; only the past seemed reality. He was no longer the pastor of this sea-board village, but a priest: once more at his old post in the confessional, a woman's sweet, passionate, pathetic voice making him forget the minister of religion in the man. The white figure beside him was no stranger, it was Bertrande, his own Bertrande, risen from the tomb. Tears started to his eyes, he could not trust himself to speak.

"You are sorry for me," she went on. "You

perhaps have loved one now lost to you in the convent, a dear sister or friend?"

"Who has not in this France of ours—thrice happy France but for her terrible superstitions?" he interrupted, almost fiercely.

"My story recalls her fate, the fate of the being you loved, now a veiled nun, that is why you are so sad?"

"Speak of yourself, my sister, I entreat you. Go on with your story."

"First tell me—you are a Protestant, these things are different in your eyes—you do not hold me accursed for breaking my vows?"

"What am I that I should judge another in such a case—I, too, of all men; but enough of myself, I will speak another time," he said, greatly agitated. "Enough for you to remember that you are not alone; others have done the same for conscience' sake. I leave you in God's hands."

"My faith gone, what else was left for me to do?" she continued. "I tried to die, I sought death in many ways. Even death unlearns pity and mercifulness within the convent walls! I first thought of the dispensary with its store of drugs. Could I only obtain by stealth some deadly soporific and fall asleep to wake no more! The chance never came. Then I tried to hit upon other means. Oh, the temptations were horrible! There was my hempen girdle: I might strangle myself whilst the sister who shared my cell slept. There was the knife—I secreted one once. I had no courage to draw it across my throat. And the topmost windows were

securely barred; no chance was given of throwing oneself down. Next my thoughts turned to escape: and shall I tell you what first inspired me with hope? It was the sound of your bell, and the glimpse of your church. I could just discern the roof from my window, and I used to hear the bell summoning to service on Sunday morning. Light dawned upon my mind. I said to myself that a safe asylum was close at hand. Could I only reach the Protestant church I was free. No one would dare to force me from a sacred building.

“After hoping against hope, the storm offered a way. How fearful it was, and how I rejoiced in its fearfulness! All day long the fierce hurricane raged, rain falling in torrents. Parts of the convent roof were completely unroofed, the upper storey being flooded, and the basement stood under water. Whilst the storm raged little could be done, but towards nightfall came a lull, and every one was told off to help. Some mopped up the water in the attics, others were busy downstairs. All was bustle and confusion. My task—perhaps because I loved activity and hated inaction—was to keep solitary watch by a dead sister. The mortuary chamber upstairs could not be used, the tiles having been carried away by the wind, so the poor body was placed downstairs in a little room on the ground floor. As I took up my post by the bed, the rain plashing in gusts against the panes and the wind surging among the trees, I saw at last means of escape. During the day a large pine tree had been dashed against the wall dividing the convent garden from your own,

breaking in a portion. The chamber in which I kept watch was on the same side of the house, and as it communicated only with the Mother Superior's private rooms, and was never used by the nuns, it had no barred window like the rest. It opened indeed on to the garden, the bay window being only bolted from within. The Mother Superior would often sit here in summer time watching us as we took exercise. At any other time too there would have been two guarding and praying by the dead, but to-night all the others were busy. And it surely never occurred to any one that I should dream of escaping amid such a storm—abandoning too, a solemn task. My poor sister! Am I forgiven, think you, for leaving her alone? But she had ceased to suffer; neglect or unkindness could touch her no more. I knelt down, murmured a prayer for forgiveness, kissed her cold thin hand, and stole out into the darkness. I knew well where to find the broken wall. Quicker than I can recount it, I had clambered up and reached the other side."

She glanced around almost wildly, as if to assure herself that she was not dreaming, and added,—

"Not a creature stirred, not a dog barked as I drew near; your house was silent as the death-chamber I had just left behind. Into the church I could find no way, but the parsonage door was unfastened—you also trusted to the convent wall for protection—so I crept inside and waited trembling."

Again she paused.

"Should I be kindly received?' I asked myself as I listened for a footstep. 'Should I obtain shelter,

kindness, protection?' I could only hope, and when suspense ended——"

She looked up with a pathetic aloofness in her eyes, as if glancing at a remote, beautiful past, whose light still shone on her, warmed her heart.

"What did I find? No coldly pitying stranger, no unknown voice whose mildly reproofing tones chilled, whilst they intended to encourage; no stranger indeed, but the friend I had adored in days gone by, the teacher for whom reverence had seemed religion. Let me dream for a moment that it is really so; let me hang upon your words as I used to hang upon his——"

"Sister," the pastor said, unable to bear the scene any longer, "others have these cruel illusions, these reminders of vanished joys. Be strong, wrestle bravely, shake them off. Remember," he added solemnly, "or now for the first time hear the words Christ spake—Let the dead bury their dead, do thou take up the cross and follow Me! Could we support existence, much less fulfil our daily duties, were it otherwise, and our beloved lost ones ever with us? Is not every human heart a sepulchre, mine—Heaven help me!—as well as yours, as the rest? Now go, calm yourself; look forward, seek courage and strength in sleep."

He beckoned to the black-headed figure in the kitchen. The two women crept softly up the secret staircase; soon the parsonage was silent save for the stentorian breathing of the sleeper on the sofa.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT BAY.

STILL Madame Delinon lingered in Paris, and still Evelard hesitated to recall her. He felt that she was already sacrificing too much for him, and that he had no right to interfere already with her plans and comfort, spoiling, perhaps, the last brief days of congenial distraction and freedom. Large-hearted, generous-natured as she was, Georgette belonged to the world, loved it—none knew better than himself how well. Let her then revel in its delights whilst she might. Time enough for fireside happiness by-and-by.

The narrowness of French Protestantism at times shook his faith in their future. For himself he had no misgivings. He was ready to make light of trifling humiliations and renunciation in small things. But the case of a spoiled darling of society, a beautiful woman of the world, was wholly different. Was she prepared to give up her former passions and idols, dress, fashion, amusement? Did she at all realize the gulf separating daily life in Paris from daily life in a remote country parsonage?

Such questions recurred constantly, and were

emphasized and magnified by every incident. Yet how sweet and soothing the thought of that large, all-embracing, unsparing devotion! How comparatively easy were existence now with such a wife by his side. To Evelard, as to the majority of Frenchmen, marriage wore a twofold aspect, it implied the closest ties, the most intimate friendship, the purest affection; at the same time, it was a man's surest, social Palladium, the guardian of his honour, the sentinel of his good name. In no other country of the world is wedlock invested with so much dignity and sacredness. The unwedded Frenchman is, no matter his sterling qualities, his intrinsic merit, his stainless character, ever handicapped in the race of life.

Three, four, five days slipped by, still the *château* remained close shuttered, silent as before. At last Evelard determined to write. He would relate what had happened, asking her to come home for the poor fugitive's sake. How could he screen her any longer? How could he safely send her away? To whom but his future wife could the compromising charge be entrusted?

Evelard possessed, in a large degree, the gift of reading men's thoughts. Human nature was to him as an open book, that all who ran might read, none more artless perhaps than that now outspread before him. And he divined clearly enough what was passing in the minds of his congregation and neighbours. Every day occurred some circumstance calculated to enlighten him.

Suspicion had fallen upon the right person, his

secret was guessed. He was marked out as the harbourer of the missing nun, the creator of a grave public scandal. An askance look here, a mistrustful greeting there, the averted face of one, the withheld hand of another, revealed the true state of affairs. An action in itself simple, Christianlike, justifiable, was exposing him to general suspicion and obloquy.

On the sixth morning after the storm and the girl's flight, he was sitting down to write to Georgette, when sounds of tramping feet and men's voices outside caused him to look up. Glancing towards the road he saw a little group of blue-bloused peasants approaching his front door. He immediately recognized the trio who had formed a deputation from La Roche St. George a few weeks back, the sententious white-haired mayor, the friendly, hesitating municipal councillor, his younger, fierier colleague ; with these were as many elders of his own church, the village magistrates of St. Gilles, hitherto his fast friends and supporters.

As the party stood there, awaiting admittance, their errand flashed across Evelard's mind. Here was a second deputation, but on more serious business even than the first. These hard-headed, straightforward, matter-of-fact farmers and seafarers were come, not to ask the reason of the faith that was in him, or to consult on parochial affairs, but to repudiate his teaching and arraign his conduct.

In the bright, transparent light, against the brilliant, clear-cut landscape, stood out the group with picturesque effect.

The stalwart figures in blue smockfrocks, their rich, sunburnt complexions and regular features, might have served a painter in search of national types. Behind and around lay the scenes of their daily toil, and homely, satisfying wealth; sea smooth and shining as a bit of blue enamel, with here and there a dazzling white chalupe breaking the azure; above the shore hanging vineyards making patches of warm crimson and gold; farther inland, the upturned fallow and ever-verdant April-like meads. There was something exhilarating in such a picture and in its suggestiveness, but Evelard drew back with a sinking of the heart.

These excellent citizens and irreproachable heads of families would never fail in national or local emergency; they would stand together as one man, no matter creeds theological and political, should the Patrie call. Fraternal sentiment, discipline, patriotism might uncompromisingly be counted upon, but not sympathy with the traducer of custom, the trampler underfoot of accepted standards, the defier of public opinion.

"Enter, gentlemen," Evelard said, affecting no cordiality that he felt would to-day be unreciprocated, perhaps misunderstood, his pale, resolute face and calm, self-possessed manner strikingly contrasted with the heightening colour and halting speech of his visitors.

It was evident that all felt their errand a painful one and wished it well over.

They filed in, one by one, their heavy tramp and knob-sticks resounding through the hitherto silent

house. Evelard closed the door, handed each a chair and sat down fronting the party.

Then followed an awkward, disagreeable pause. Evelard's position resembled that of a bankrupt called upon for the first time to meet his creditors. Can any deeper, more crushing, more profound humiliation overtake an honourable-minded man? A short time before he was one of a prosperous, self-respecting brotherhood, regarded by each member of the guild as a pillar of society, an integral portion of national solidity and well-being. To-day, the cordial hand is held back, the friendly, confidential glance replaced by frowns of almost fierce suspicion and reproach. He who was recently trusted as a kinsman has betrayed honest, hard-working fellow-citizens and fathers of families, his own friends and neighbours.

The ex-priest met the merciless, inquisitorial glances now riveted on him unflinchingly. Whilst his stern arraigners fidgeted, cleared their throats, and interchanged significant looks, he sat motionless as a statue; only an unwonted pallor and tiny, bead-like drops gathering to his forehead, betokened the intensity of the struggle within.

The two mayors made signs to each other, then the head of Evelard's own parish and congregation, the white-haired, Roman-featured elder, began:—

“You have perhaps an inkling of the business we are come upon, Mr. Pastor?”

“I have,” was the quiet reply.

“Most likely you are not much suprised to receive a visit from these neighbours here and myself?”

“I frankly admit that I am not,” Evelard made answer quietly and firmly as before.

Again the two leaders looked at each other and the rest, meaningly, the speaker assuring himself of their approval, as he went on: “A grave scandal has been brought about in the commune of which I have the honour to be mayor,” he said, the occasion lending added dignity to rustic speech and manner; all looked at the pastor fixedly as he continued, “and grieved, ashamed am I to say it, if reports speak truly, by its minister!”

Evelard met those hostile glances in silence and unmoved.

“Have you nothing to say to that charge, Mr. Pastor?” continued the old man, trembling with suppressed emotion.

For a moment Evelard paused, then unshrinkingly facing his accusers, one and all, he replied,—

“Nothing, Mr. Mayor; nothing, gentlemen.”

“But if you have nothing to say, we have,” the veteran rejoined, striking his stick on the ground. “I, on behalf of my Protestant brethren, the members of your own congregation; my colleague here, on behalf of his townfolk, not Protestants like ourselves, but our good friends and neighbours for all that. Am I not putting the matter in its proper light, comrades?”

“Go on, go on,” cried the others impatiently.

“If then, it is so, if it is indeed the pastor of this parish who is sowing seeds of discord between the Protestants and Catholics of these parts, who now sets at defiance the ordinances of the Romish Church

and the laws of the land, then, I say it to your face, Monsieur Evelard, the sooner he finds a more easy-going congregation, the better we shall be pleased."

"The Mayor has the right on his side," now put in the other white-haired veteran as he eyed his fellow-magistrates, "and if it is so, all I can say is,—no offence to you and you, sir," he added, nodding to the three Protestants sitting opposite, "all I can say is, we will stay where we are—I mean in matters of doctrine—leastways, we will find another exponent of a religion which, regarded practically, might not suit us after all."

"I have now heard you; I in turn, ask to be heard," Evelard said, at last breaking his icy reserve. "Let us then reason out the question in a fair and temperate spirit."

"We do not wish to do anything else," rejoined the Roman-featured veteran. "Say on, brother Evelard."

"Yes, yes, we are just men; let the pastor speak out," echoed the others.

All were silent as statues. Evelard began: "Granted that your assumptions are true, that I am the cause of this public scandal; in other words, that I am sheltering an unfortunate girl, unable any longer to endure the terrible existence of a cloistered nun,—what, I ask, is the precise nature of my offence? Let us define the position accurately. You spoke just now, Mr. Mayor, of the ordinances of the Romish Church, of the laws of the land. Is there not an authority high above these, as the stars are

above the earth—the authority of conscience? Are the ordinances of the Church, the laws of the land, of divine or human authority? The fallibility of both is attested by every-day experience. Not a day passes but some once solemnly accorded oath is broken, some unjust statute is annulled. Is not even the marriage-vow now revocable by law; and how many more once apparently stable institutions have yielded to a wider, more humanitarian view of human society and of legislature? A time will assuredly come, mark my word and it is not so very far off, when the cloistered convent with its horrible régime will no more be permitted in civilized countries, than the burning of widows on the tomb of their husbands in Hindostan. An enthusiastic-spiritual-minded, perhaps sorrow-stricken girl, for instance, pledges herself in a blind moment avowedly to perpetual self-abnegation and prayer; in reality—I speak with authority—to an existence compared with which that of the malefactor in prison is soft and comfortable. No vain emblems or monitions, the death's head and hideous skeleton on the convent walls, the funereal inscriptions that meet the eye everywhere! But the cloistered house is not only a living tomb, it is a place in which the flesh is subjected to perpetual torture, the spirit to daily degradation, in which all that makes us human is eliminated, and all that makes God divine is parodied.”

“The pastor is right there,” said the younger municipal councillor of La Roche, slapping his knee; “I am one with him so far.”

“Let us hear the pastor out,” interposed the others. “Go on, sir.”

“This truth dawns upon the mind of the unhappy victim of self-delusion slowly, but—unless, which is often the case, she dies a year or two after her incarceration—it surely dawns at last. Would you then have me send this poor girl back to her prison, her gaolers? You have manly hearts, you are fathers and brothers, would you condemn a beloved daughter or sister to such a fate? And which is the more conformable to the true spirit of Christianity—a life within the convent, deprived of faith, hope, charity, or a career of activity in the world, cheerful earning of daily bread, of usefulness to oneself, one’s brethren, one’s Creator?” There was a long pause: had he impressed his hearers? He could not tell.

The chief of the Catholic deputation was the first to speak. He began cautiously, as if feeling his way,—

“All that the pastor says is well said; we are agreed so far, neighbors, I am sure. But there are two ways of looking at the business; so, anyhow, it appears to me. I don’t say that I approve of cloistered houses or that I do not; what I say is this, a girl enters upon the vocation with her eyes open, and we are bound to look at the practical side, with a dowry!”

His colleagues nodded approvingly.

“Now, speaking as a father, I can’t feel that I should be inclined to dower my daughter twice, or to receive her, a runaway, into my house, thus bringing shame on me and mine. Nor should I hold it right if others

stood between her and the Church she had offended. Whilst things are as they are, Mr. Pastor,—bettered, no doubt, they might be—I say, and I think my friends here will agree with me, you are getting yourself into trouble about a bad cause.”

Evelard’s reply seemed expected. None came, his pale face was as resolute as before. The white-haired elder of his own church now rose, hat and stick in hand, the others following his example.

“I take it then for granted we have your answer, sir?” asked the leader, as he stood face to the door.

Evelard rose also, confronting the group: “I am sorry,” he said, speaking slowly and without a touch of rancour. “It pains me that I can give no more satisfactory reply. But my mind is made up. Do with me as you will; let this matter be the cause of my degradation and worldly ruin; indict me before the consistory of Toulouse, expel me from the parish, from the ranks of the Church even, ignominiously as some unhappy deserter is drummed from the regiment which he has disgraced, I will bear all. To my heart, my conscience, my sense of Christian obligation, I will never consent to prove traitor. Your grandsires,” he said, addressing himself to the Protestant delegates, “endured fire, sword, exile, death, for the Truth’s sake. Your Church also,” he added, turning to the Catholic deputation, “is cemented with the blood of martyrs. You may blame and pity, you cannot despise a line of conduct you have been taught from childhood to revere. Nor shall I now suffer persecution and obloquy for the first time. Fellow citizens, you know my history.

Am I likely, think you, to be turned from my course by dread of any punishment the world can inflict?" He ceased, and his hearers, moved, impressed, but unconvinced, filed out gravely one by one. With a formal distant salutation, they made their exit; only the last, the impetuous young municipal councillor, stepped back, and, without a word, wrung the pastor's hand.

"That is what I call a man, anyhow," he said to his companions, when the parsonage door had closed upon the group.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ILLUSION.

GEORGETTE was one of those women who appear to others the laziest in the world, whereas none in reality are more indefatigable. She never gave herself those intermittent spells of entire repose more pretentious workers look upon as their due. She never refused to do anything asked of her merely because time, leisure, much less inclination, were wanting. In the somewhat thankless cause of social duty so-called, promiscuous benevolence, and unreflecting philanthropy, she smilingly turned a treadmill from morning till night.

Frenchwomen, exquisite as they often are to look at, to listen to, and to live with, are seldom actuated by the principle of abstract justice. Few, indeed, realize the meaning of the term. With Georgette, as with the majority of her countrywomen, a kind action, as a primrose to Peter Bell, meant a kind action and nothing more. She would unhesitatingly recommend a poor widow to a post of trust without in the least considering her fitness, and when the victimised employer came, with remonstrance, "Oh, Madame Delinon! Where did you find that piece of incapacity, incarnate, unpunctual, slatternly, ever

gossiping with her neighbours?" and so on, and so on, Georgette would smile one of her sweetest smiles with the palinode—"She has six children!"

To be unfortunate was, in her eyes, a positive virtue; if not entirely condoning, at least glossing over every downright fault or shortcoming.

There was Jeunet's novel, for instance, the novel, destined in its author's eyes, to create a pretty commotion. The question of its literary merits or suitability to this publisher or that never for a single second entered her head. Jeunet was her friend; Jeunet had to support a wife, mother-in-law and child, by his wits. Could any editor be so churlish as to drive him to despair by a heart-breaking "No"?

So she carefully stowed away the opening chapters—the story was not nearly finished, nor likely to be—in her crimson velvet hand-bag, with silver clasps, and paid one editorial visit after another astounded and dismayed to find that a half-finished romance by a new hand was not regarded in the light of a diamond field. Nothing could be more cordial than her reception. The feelingly-rendered narrative of its anonymous author's struggles was listened to with the utmost sympathy, the same answer came from each. The novel might prove of deepest, nay, world-wide interest, a veritable gem, a literary pearl of great price; in its present stage publishers could but regard it as the egg rather than the chicken; the seed instead of the flower; the raw material and not the fabric. Let the writer go on boldly, add the colophon, and then proffer his manuscript.

All these rebuffs Georgette bore with imperturbable good humour and the serenest cheerfulness. She never doubted in ultimate success, and this hopeful spirit was caught by those around her. "He who is endowed with cheerfulness," wrote the deep, the wise, the witty Schopenhauer, "shall want no other blessing." The sage should have added, "nor shall his friends and familiars." How many manly, womanly, wholesome lives are rendered purgatorial by the gloom and low spirits of others! If indeed, dejection and pessimism could be prohibited by Act of Parliament, the annals of crime would diminish, and the sum total of happiness be indefinitely increased.

"Let me see," Georgette said one morning, her brain busy with a hundred things, as she leaned back in her low chair apparently idleness itself, "I really think, Marthe, we can return to St. Gilles this week. Your trousseau is put in hand, I have got my concierge's brother a place. I fear he drinks, poor fellow, and his character is far from the best, but his wife has just had twins, and they would have starved, I do believe, but for me. Then I have persuaded my lawyers to employ Monsieur Jeunet. He knows nothing of the business, but that is not his fault, and some one must employ him; we cannot let our fellow-creatures want bread. And I have got a letter of introduction to the Superioress of the Carmelite convent: she will let me speak with the nun, I feel sure—I mean the nun who sang so beautifully, and who, I believe, is my friend. Come here, little Jane Mary, we will rehearse our lesson."

By a whimsical inconsistency, English names are Gallicised in France or transported intact, whilst we, in turn, find French versions more pleasing and elegant. The soft and musical Jeanne becomes homely Jane on the other side of the Channel. Sweet Mary is exchanged for Marie on our own; whilst Bob, Bill, Jack, are found altogether fascinating in French ears. Heaven alone knows why.

Thus addressed, there rose from Marthe's side one of those little twelve-year-old women, as much a growth of Paris as its house-sparrows. There was nothing childlike about Jane Mary but stature and weight. In her precise way of doing things, in speech, look, manner, she showed the circumspection and adroitness of mature years. Where personal interest was concerned she could display the finesse of the consummate worldling.

"I am entirely at your disposal, dear Madame," she said, standing erect before her patroness, her aplomb and self-assurance being wonderful to behold.

"You are a discreet little girl, I can see that," Georgette replied approvingly, "you will neither get me nor yourself into a scrape."

"Never fear, Madame," was the prompt answer.

"It is as well, however, to be prepared for embarrassing questions beforehand. Suppose, for instance, that the Mother Superior should ask who you are, what would be your reply?"

"'Holy mother,' I should say, 'I am the niece of Madame Delinon.'"

“No, you must not say that, it would not be right;” poor Georgette said, her own definitions of verbal truth and falsehood being of the haziest. “You may say that you are my adopted niece. Your guardians allow you to spend some time with me in the country. I am in the position of an aunt, for the time being; you are my niece by adoption.”

“Very good, Madame.”

“Most likely you will have nothing whatever to say at all. Questions concerning yourself will in all probability be put direct to me, and a well-mannered child generally leaves her elders to answer for her. But, as you know, I shall not be permitted to see the face of the nun; the black curtain of the inner grating will only be drawn aside for you because you have not yet been confirmed. That is the rule, you understand?”

“Perfectly, perfectly, Madame—my dear aunt. I had better accustom myself to the words,” said Jane Mary pertly, “or madame might slip out unawares.”

“Quite right. But now, tell me what my friend is like, I mean the friend whom I believe you will find in the Carmelite sister we are going to see at St. Gilles?”

“She has dark, bluish-gray eyes, beautiful arched light-brown eyebrows, a straight nose, a small mouth, lovely little teeth, and a dimple on each cheek——”

“Mind and look for the dimple,” interrupted the monitress. “If you are quite sure of that you may take the rest for granted.”

“And slip your tiny note into her hand?”

“We will see about the note when the time comes,” Georgette said, looking slightly embarrassed. Her own actions concerned herself. She hesitated to impose a task involving direct duplicity upon another, that other a child. Yet, she reasoned, it were but doing evil that good may come! My poor Bertrande! What if I am right! That pathetic, appealing voice betrayed the truth. If my Bertrande still lives, the perhaps unwilling inmate of a living tomb!

Just then a letter was brought addressed in the only handwriting that could have made her quit her chair. With the breathless eagerness of a girl receiving her first love-letter, overcome by an emotion she wished to conceal, she walked to the window and read it, having her back turned upon the rest.

Evelard's missive was short, consisting of a few lines only, but it said all that he wanted to say, all that Georgette wanted to hear. He had need of her; he begged her, if she loved him, to return at once.

Her heart gave a great leap, for a minute or two she stood still; overcome with the most delicious emotion of her life.

The autumnal aspect of the boulevard, the copperish-green leaves drifting one by one from the lime trees, the cold bright sky overhead, the sparrows picking crumbs on her balcony—all these things, she seemed to see for the first time, she would never again see as she saw now. How often in after years did her thoughts revert to the scene, the hour, a scene familiar as daily bread, but to-day rendered

fairy-like; an hour evanescent as any other, but containing a little life of secret hope and joy!

She turned to the others with a radiant face,—

“Dear children,” she said, “I start for St. Gilles to-day, at once, in an hour’s time. You two will follow to-morrow with old Francine and Mariette. Marthe, put me up some breakfast to eat on the way, and you, little Jane Mary, come and help me with my travelling bag. Mariette must order a fly.”

The two girls looked at each other, interchanging significant smiles.

“Dear little aunt,” Marthe said, going up to her protectress and fawning upon her, “how sorry I am that you must leave us.” As she said this she secretly squeezed Jane Mary’s hand.

“And I too; the time will seem, oh! so long, till we see you again,” said the little girl, addressing her newly-adopted aunt, at the same time returning Marthe’s salutation with interest.

When Georgette sat down at her little writing-table, having her back once more turned to them, the pair giggled, chuckled, whispered.

“We will go with Mariette to the Bois and have ices,” said Marthe.

“And, oh, Marthe, what do you say to the Montagues Russes?—we needn’t tell.”

“I shall send a telegram to my aunt to-morrow to say we can’t possibly get off for another day,” added the other.

“Do let us breakfast at the great Duval, near the Palais Royal.”

Unsuspecting enough, Georgette scribbled away; first of all a telegram to Evelard, announcing her arrival the same evening, next to Jeunet with half a score commissions, then a dozen or so of notes and post cards to friends, acquaintances, protégées, and milliners.

An hour later, composure, neatness and promptitude personified—that last, by the way no common feminine virtue in France, wearing the most becoming travelling dress imaginable—she appeared at the railway station.

During that long railway journey she could neither read nor look about her. The most appropriate volume she had been able to lay hands on was in her bag. She now felt it her duty to become acquainted with the great Protestant authors of France, but somehow D'Aubigne's "History of the Reformation" failed to interest. The shifting landscape, so historic, so varied, so rich with autumnal tints, proved equally unattractive. The delicious pastoral scenes of La Vendée, its moated granges, watered meads, and sombre donjons frowning above the wooded banks of the Charente—"fairest river of my kingdom," said the gay Gascon King Henri Quatre—all these delightful pictures were hardly glanced at. She leaned back with half-shut eyes in a state of blissful trance. Evelard loved her; she was necessary to his happiness. Love would condone every fault and shortcoming.

CHAPTER XXV.

WAS LOST AND IS FOUND.

IT did not for a moment disconcert Georgette to find no Evelard awaiting her on the platform. Her nature was too large and generous to indulge in petty jealousies, or seek foolish affronts. If he stayed away, it was simply because he had the best possible reason for doing so.

She drove home through the dark, sweet-scented pinewoods, impatiently putting her head out of the window from time to time. She had no idea that the distance between Royan and St. Gilles was so long! At last, lights were seen twinkling through the trees, the village street, town in miniature, with church, town-hall and police station, was traversed. A quarter of an hour later and her carriage wheels grated on the château drive. At the sound, doors were flung wide; pet dogs yapped with delight; light, warmth and savoury smells from the kitchen greeted the traveller; old servants welcomed her as if the cheer and comfort were of their giving—but still no Evelard. “After all,” reflected Georgette, “to stay away was considerate. I must change my dress and rest a little. He will come later.”

A cheerful wood-fire blazed on the hearth, abundance of wax lights illuminated the sunflower-curtained room, the upholstery being of that rich regal yellow so popular in France. Amid these gorgeous surroundings Georgette soon sat sumptuously attired as a queen.

The weather was chilly and she had not yet worn a dress after her own heart, a gown of garnet-coloured velvet trimmed with Auvergne lace—the point made there, by feminine artists, generations, even centuries ago, a single piece often occupied the lace-maker's lifetime. Such heirlooms, now mostly seen in museums or church treasuries, can be turned to manifold uses, and Georgette's had adorned one gala robe after another, to-day being a flounce, last year a fichu, to-morrow an apron. In her girlish days it was worn over rose-pink, hyacinth-blue or pale primrose, later with deep-hued brocade or velvet.

She had chosen that fabric now, and the glowing wine-red tint, became just such a dress Evelard had noticed and admired years before. Scrutinising the whole he had first rebuked feminine vanity, then corrected himself with a citation from a German author. Georgette thought and thought, and at last the name of the book, even the very words of the citation, came back to her,—

“What says one of the great gods in *Wilhelm Meister*?” he asked. “Should a pigmy like myself gainsay Goethe when he gave his whole mind to this as to weightier subject? How senselessly many poets and so-styled impressionable men set themselves against splendour and ornamentation in

woman's dress, he wrote clamouring for naturalness and simplicity irrespective of rank, blaming ornament without pausing to reflect that it is but ornament itself that displeases when it happens to be an ill-favoured and ordinary person richly or strangely habited!"

Then, as if to make amends for his raillery in the first instance, he had laid an approving hand on her own, adding,—“Nay, never grudge the time or money spent upon self-adornment, dear friend. Beautiful women make the poetry of the work-a-day world,—that was said ten years ago.” Georgette glanced in the mirror, with the comforting thought that time had touched her lightly.

Without retaining in middle life the enviable slenderness of so many English matrons, she had yet escaped the too ample proportions of her own country-women, penalty perhaps paid for taking life too easily.

With Evelard too, time had not stood still. He looked years older than he was in reality; and he was, at all events she felt, oh, how much younger.

Pleasant musings, the prevailing atmosphere of warmth, ease and comfort, soon made her drowsy. Leaning back in her low chair, one little silk-stockinged, daintily-slippered foot peeping from beneath her white lace-bordered under-skirt, a feather screen dropped in her lap, she gradually fell into a light sleep.

The sudden opening of the door aroused her. It was of course, Evelard! She started up, smiling sweetest welcome, but instead of one black-robed

figure in the doorway, she now saw two, and women wearing the heavy hooded cloak of the Huguenot matrons hereabouts. In the foremost, Georgette immediately recognised Evelard's housekeeper, but before she could ask her errand, the old woman had thrust a note in her hand, mumbled a word of apology, and motioning her companion to advance, shuffled out of the room.

Georgette tore open her lover's letter, to find a few hastily-pencilled words only. He would see her early next day, he wrote. Meantime he confided to her care a friendless outcast, whose story she would learn from her own lips.

Whilst Georgette scanned the tiny scrap of paper, running her eyes over each word again and again in search of some lover-like expression, some little term of endearment, the black-draped stranger stood transfixed with sudden surprise or emotion. From under the heavy hood flashed a look of amazed recognition; the thin bare hands were raised in joy and wonder, from the parted lips escaped an exultant cry. She moved a step forward, gazing as if spell-bound at the sumptuous, smiling chatelaine of the reading-lamp.

For Georgette did at last find what she wanted, and the treasure-trove evoked a smile. The tiny note, scribbled in such desperate haste, sealed so carefully, contained all that she was longing for,—“Your gratefully adoring Evelard,” he had written by way of conclusion. Volumes could not have told her more. Pocketing the now precious document, she turned towards the suppliant, encouragingly:

"The pastor's recommendation suffices," she said
"Poor dear woman! In me you find a friend."

For a moment the other stood irresolute. Then, with swift, uncertain, nervous movements, her fingers fumbled for the clasp at her throat; it was unfastened at last, the long hooded mantle enveloping her from head to foot fell to the ground. What was Georgette's astonishment to see before her the white-robed figure of a cloistered Carmelite?

The wearer was a girl still. Easy to tell that, in spite of her wasted cheeks, hollow eyes, and general look of feebleness and emaciation. She had the weak, worn look of one who has wrestled with deadly ailment, gazed upon death face to face, and at the eleventh hour glided back to suffering life. There were traces of beauty, grace, even joyousness, which years of direst bodily and mental privation and torture had not been wholly able to destroy. The slender form, so hideously travestied, was erect still, the sallow wasted features were not without softness of outline, the deep blue eyes retained depth and tenderness. At any other time Georgette would have immediately bent her mind upon the solution of such a problem, and asked herself how it came about that she was here so strikingly, painfully reminded of one long since consigned to the tomb? The dreams and projects of yesterday, the haunting vision of the sweet-voiced nun, the proposed visit to the convent—all these things were forgotten now. Evelard's little note, the prospect of seeing him next day, made her absent and oblivious of all else. Surprised as she

was at this strange apparition, her thoughts were all the time wandering back to her own affairs. The only reality in life just then seemed Evelard's love.

But as the intruder confronted her hostess, smiling because smiled at, there might be seen on either cheek a lovely dimple. That dimple transformed the pale, pain-stricken face, lent a look of youthfulness, naturalness, and looking forward, arrested Georgette's fugitive attention with lightning-like rapidity, made clear as day what before had been mystery only.

In her turn she seemed under a spell. The pair gazed fixedly at each other, tears sprang to their eyes, cheeks glowed, then, with a low, caressing word on the lips of each, they smiled, embraced, wept as fondest sisters, one of whom "was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STORM BREAKS.

NEXT morning Evelard came early, so early that Georgette's flutter of pleasurable expectation changed to dismay. Something else must have happened to bring him to the château before any town-bred lady could be expected to have made her first toilette. She had slept late and brokenly, her rest having been disturbed by overfatigue and excitement. Not that any sense of responsibility concerning the fugitive weighed upon her mind. Georgette knew the world well. She was comfortably aware of the inviolability accorded by certain conditions of fortune to certain offences against routine and society. Exceptional circumstances too were in her favour. She was herself by birth a Catholic, and although an indifferentist, holding aloof from devotional exercises, she had ever avoided offence to the Church. All that generosity and affection prompted she would do for her friend, and she felt assured beforehand that it would be done with impunity.

Tripping downstairs in her pretty morning-gown and dainty little cap to match, she greeted Evelard airily, as if nothing had occurred at all out of the way.

“Do not be uneasy about your protégée,” she said with a little air of mystery. “Her story you shall learn some day, meantime a sister were not more welcome.”

He was standing with his back to the fireplace when she entered, his eyes bent on the floor, his whole attitude that of a man lost in painful thought. The meaning of those cheerful, affectionate words hardly seemed to reach him. He glanced up however at the sound of her voice, and with a look of inexpressible yearning gathered her to his heart, his tears falling on her cheek, as she rested there.

“Why so sad?” she asked softly. Then drawing back and holding him at arm’s length, tried to smile away his depression.

Still he made no reply.

Georgette continued,—

“That poor girl, her flight, perhaps, has caused you annoyance; but when you learn all, when you know her history——”

“Let me forget her, let me banish from my mind the innocent cause of my ruin,” he said, at last. “Who could have foreseen? But of what use such idle retrospection! Read, dearest friend, and you will understand how I need all the comfort you can give me.”

He thrust two letters in her hand, and, whilst she read, walked backwards and forwards, speaking, agitatedly half to her, half to himself. “It is inconceivable, monstrous, that I should be thus misjudged calumniated. Exists there then no Christian charity within the pale of any Church? Is a man to be

treated as a scapegoat of society simply because he has tried to enroll himself under the banner of what he believes to be the purest? Must I renounce my calling, and become a layman in order to have common justice meted out to me? But no; I will not own to a fault which I have never dreamed of committing. They may mentally lay me on the rack. I will be myself, and nothing but myself, come what may."

Meantime Georgette, with a thrill of womanly exultation, was reading the two large, important-looking missives he had put in her hands. Can any moment in a woman's life be more delicious than this, the first participation in her lover's serious business affairs, and first sharing of his moral and social burdens? Full as she was of tenderest concern, Georgette's heart beat with perhaps the most blissful emotion she had ever known. She was, then, no mere spoiled child of society in his eyes; no mere worldling whose highest destiny was to adorn and brighten fireside existence, but a true helpmate and hearthmate, raised to his own level, made one with him by virtue of deep-rooted affection and whole-hearted confidence.

The first letter, written from the Town Hall of La Roche St. George's and bearing the mayor's signature, only became intelligible by a perusal of the second. It stated, in brief and homely language, that after what had transpired, the municipal council released the pastor Evelard from any further obligations. Whilst thanking him for his efforts so far to explain the tenets of the Reformed Faith, they

were not disposed, under the circumstances, to proceed with these theological inquiries any further, at least for the present.

The second document was also official. It bore the seal of the Consistory of Toulouse, and respectfully informed Pastor Evelard that, having in view the unanimously-expressed wishes of his congregation, his duties in the pastorate of St. Gilles would cease at the close of the present quarter. His future destination would be signified later.

Georgette's first summing-up of the matter was, of course, of the woman, womanly. For the moment a vision of freedom, ease, happiness, shut out all sense of Evelard's dire humiliation. She saw him once more at the parting of the ways, at liberty to live for himself, for her, and be happy. Why should he toil in the thankless cause of others any longer? Were there not thousands of inferior men as well able to fulfill these circumscribed duties, aye, and better, than one of his sensitive temperament? She refolded both letters, and going to him where he stood, slipped them in his outer pocket; then, with tenderest, most persuasive insinuation, said,—

“Dear friend, forget these mortifications; your spirit is too high, your character too noble for the calling of a parish priest. The same kind of annoyances are sure to disturb your peace wherever you go. Be guided by me. Give up the Church. Live in the world; occupy yourself with literature; travel. Is not my fortune yours, to do with as you will? Why, then, toil so thanklessly for daily bread? And you are not young,” she added, pleading more and

more pathetically. "Struggle and mental conflict have aged you. Small humiliations are borne less easily as we grow older. Oh, hearken to your friend, then! Enjoy a little happiness whilst you may."

He smiled sadly, but almost tenderly, with the look of one who has heard without listening. She hardly felt sure that the words, much more their meaning, had reached him. When he spoke it was rather to continue his self-explanation than to meet her own arguments.

"Other men would have acted on the defensive," he began. "They would have at once tendered their resignation to the Consistory and excused themselves from further ministrations at St. George's. Such a line of conduct were politic, worldly-wise, I admit. But so long as I retain self-mastery I will never cower before petty persecution. I will never be brow-beaten by unfair accusers."

"You will not then renounce the Church?" Georgette ventured to put in.

"Is it fatality, character, or blind will that ties some men hand and foot to callings they have once made their own?" he cried vehemently. "I know not, I cannot say. This I do know—a minister of religion I am, a minister of religion I remain. For me the sacerdotal career means no longer distinction, the favour of the world, a leading part in the affairs of men. Rather it means obscurity, self-abnegation, disfavour of my fellows. But I cannot change my profession any more than I can change myself. Jeunet's case is wholly different. He does not realize the spiritual necessities of mankind at all. I do,

and as a logical sequence, I respect in myself, first the pastor, then the man."

He paused, looked at her with half-pitying, half-reproachful fondness.

"You spoke just now of toiling thanklessly, of annoyances I am sure to meet with. I heard, although I appeared wrapped in my own thoughts. Are not these compensated for a thousand-fold if one heart is touched by my efforts, one soul made sensible of its loftier part? You advise me to quit the Church. Where more than in this prosperous France of ours is needed religion in its widest, noblest development? I am no optimist concerning my own powers or human nature generally, but I recognize the value of what I do possess, namely, a conviction. And a conviction implies responsibility; have you thought of that?"

Georgette listened pensively. Every syllable crushed an illusion. She could not understand his way of looking at things; his aspirations savoured of chimera, his self-sacrifice of Quixotism. She felt utterly powerless to combat either. Love, inclination, the world, might beckon and cajole. He was deaf and blind except to the voice within, the goal lying straight before him. Those enticing visions of a congenial, pleasant existence vanished one by one. The path to be trodden by his side was uphill, rough, bristling with thorns.

"Do not look so downcast," he said, stooping down and kissing her on the brow as if comforting some vexed child; "these clouds will pass over. Meantime not a word concerning me and my troubles to

that poor girl. She must never know how much my poor services have cost me."

Georgette looked up with a glance of keen, penetrating enquiry. But Evelard went on in the same cold, almost indifferent tone :

"She will of course confide to you her history; you will immediately communicate with her friends. The sooner she is restored to them the better. Bless you for all these benevolences, dearest friend."

He glanced at the time-piece, then took up hat and stick.

"You are surely not leaving me; you will stay to breakfast?" Georgette asked.

"I have to bid you adieu for several days, perhaps a week. I start to-day for Toulouse and Paris. It is a duty to myself—to you—to explain my conduct," he said. "But on my return——"

He moved a step nearer and added in a low voice,—

"On my return—as soon as may be—let our young friend Bourgeois join our hands——"

Georgette felt a sob rising to her throat; she could only answer him with a tearful smile.

"Your fortune I cannot accept," he went on hurriedly, his voice dropping almost to a whisper; "your life, in so far as possible, shall be as now your own, to do with as you will. You must be happy for my sake. Only give me a fireside, a home, that affection for which I have yearned all my life in vain."

Then he made his adieu hastily and went away, leaving Georgette in that humour which is akin to both laughter and tears.

Was she sad or merry, cast down or elated beyond her wildest dreams? She hardly knew. Evelard's respect, gratitude, friendship; all these were hers. What was missing that at times made such gifts questionable, even valueless?

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHRYSLIS AND BUTTERFLY.

GEORGETTE would not have been a Frenchwoman had that April mood of alternating sunshine and shower lasted. Half an hour after Evelard's departure she was herself again, entering with buoyant, girlish spirit into the interesting business of the day. Fortunately she had too much on her hands to brood over his absence just now. Regarded in a practical light, and with reference to her plans, it was fortuitous.

Beamingly and bearing an armful of blue and white draperies, she knocked at her protégées door. The fugitive had been lodged in the pretty little bedchamber prepared for Jane Mary.

"Up and dressed already, and still wearing those hideous garments," Georgette cried, throwing her heavy burden of cashmeres, muslins, and lace on a chair, and embracing the other warmly. "See, Bertrande, I have come to dress you! Niece Marthe, of course you remember her,—she was a child when you took the veil, but is nineteen now and about to be married. Well, part of her trousseau has arrived, and I have been robbing it—each article I shall replace for Marthe, of course; this dark blue dress is of your

favourite colour, and here are shoes and stockings to match, lace collarettes, everything. You will soon look exactly like your old self."

The girl watched the animated prattler with a dreamy, half-dazed expression. Georgette stooped down and gave her an encouraging caress.

"I knew that you would feel strange at first, so I have telegraphed to Marthe not to return for a few days. We are to be quite alone a little while. Oh! how much we have to tell each other, but it must be told by degrees. You are like a person recovering from blindness, who can only bear to face the light gradually. My poor child, how you must have suffered! How happy I am to have recovered you!"

The other bent over the blue draperies as if examining the embroidery, in reality, to conceal her tears. Georgette took refuge in raillery.

"What are we to do with your old dress? The difficulty haunted me all night, I could not sleep quietly a minute for thinking of it."

She held a fold of the coarse white serge between finger and thumb with a gesture of desperation.

"This material is like the Wandering Jew. I suppose the Jesuits invented it, no one else was ever deep enough I feel sure. It has a hundred lives, it is indestructible. Fire won't consume it, water won't drown it, earth won't absorb it."

She laughed merrily whilst putting on an expression of concern.

"That dress of yours, Bertrande, is as difficult to get rid of as a murdered body. If we set fire to it there will be such a smoke that all the fire engines

for miles round will be here in a twinkling. If we bury it in the remotest corner of the pine wood, some dog or other will be sure to unearth it. If we take a boat and drop it miles away in mid-ocean, the waves will as certainly wash it ashore within twenty-four hours. Let us hide the bugbear from sight anyhow. I am dying to transform my ugly chrysalis into a beautiful butterfly.”

She began her task of unrobing with impatient, irreverential, disdainful fingers. No meaning had these graceless habiliments in the eyes of the warm-hearted worldling but debasing, abject illusion. Bertrande, on the contrary, eyed each garment wistfully. What angelic visions of atonement for sin, angelic intercourse and heaven-born peace had visited the novice. What cruel disenchantment and bitter awakening awaited the devotee! How complete the spiritual bankruptcy of the apostate! She had entered, so she fondly believed, a house of sanctification, by virtue of fasting, penance, and prayer, to forestall heavenly mansions. She left behind her a dark prison unillumined by a single ray of Divine Love, because the warm human affections were banished from its precincts.

“There they are!” Georgette cried exultingly. “For that bundle you exchanged the brightest lot ever girl was born to: you presented the Church with a million francs. She handsomely gave you in return a fustian gown! How you came to make the crack-brained bargain I intend to worm out of you later. That is why I repudiate the Romish Church on account of its immense greediness. When I find

any other that is perfectly disinterested, practising the doctrine 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,'—then, Bertrande, I will become as pious as the best of you. And who knows! I am going to—but no! You shall hear all the news by bits. The first business is to dress you."

It was curious to see the change that came over Bertrande under her friend's magic touch. The pallid, pensive, drooping girl gradually regained colour, expression, vivacity. As some fair landscape freed from morning mist at last unfolds itself in all its glory, as some *chef d'œuvre* of the portrait painter's art released from a veil of dust discloses fresh, breathing life, where before all had been indistinct and dull, as from dusky sheath there opens richest blossom, paragon of the floral world, so did the real Bertrande usurp the place of her cold semblance.

Where just before stood in sharpest contrast two women who might have personified feminine witchery and gracelessness, beauty and asceticism, seemed now a pair of lovely sisters, the younger also the lovelier.

Georgette's first master-stroke was with her friend's hair, that bright, chestnut hair, once so glossy and abundant, in the convent shorn close as a convict's.

"Ah," she moralized, brush in hand. "If I ever felt truly vicious, ready to bite, scratch, beat, smash, do anything wicked and desperate, it was on the day of your taking the veil, when I saw a hideous old woman, abbess, was it?—clipping your locks with a pair of garden shears——"

“Nay,” Bertrande put in, unable to resist a faint smile, “you are exaggerating.”

“What matter? Clip, clip, clip, off went your beautiful golden curls as a sheep’s wool at shearing time. I sobbed, I wrung my hands, I could hardly help screaming. And, mark my word, Bertrande, the finger of the Jesuit is there too! We women are all like Samson, our strength, I mean our vanity, lies in our hair. Leave would-be nuns their long tresses and pretty gowns, and every cloistered convent throughout France would have to put up its shutters in less than a year. I hope some such law will really be passed soon. It is high time something should be done. Well, fortunately short hair is the fashion, and your own always curled delightfully. Look at yourself. When you have got on your blue gown, you might have walked straight out of Raphael’s pictures.” She held a hand-mirror before her friend, who gazed and gazed. Was it indeed herself she saw there? Was this bright face, with its clustering curls her very own? What had become of its sallowness, its lines of care, its yearning melancholy?

If to gaze upon beauty is to feel rapture, how doubly rapturous is the conviction of beauty in oneself! especially when the possession has been jeopardized, all but forfeited past recovery.

Bertrande felt as one who wakes up from a long delirium, to find herself not only “clothed and in her right mind,” but youthful, fair to look at as before. When the dress of softest, warmest blue was adjusted, every fold making a graceful line, the beau-

tiful dyes gaining depth by contrast with her gold brown hair, she smiled to the figure in the mirror. Yes, she and life were friends once more. She had shaken off the cerements of the grave, the dark portal of Death was closed for a while; sunshine, cheerfulness, affection, were to be again her daily portion. "For the first time for months, even years," she said, "I feel as if I could pray. But I won't talk of these things to you, dear Georgette, I know you regard devotion in any form as mere waste of time, emptiness, vanity, and self-delusion."

"My religion is to try to make people comfortable all round; a poor one, no doubt, but perhaps better than none at all," Georgette made answer, as she knotted a blue ribbon in the other's hair, then stood back to see the effect.

"I reason in this way, my dear Bertrande. We have a President in France who keeps things going for the general good. Would the poor man's existence be tolerable, would anything like law be possible were every one of us to besiege him about our daily bothers and grievances? So I hold we ought to regard the universe and what we call Divine Rule; we must be satisfied with the existing order of things, never expecting them to be altered just to please us. Yes, I confess it, I am adverse on principle to religions—as men have spoiled them. How much happier you, for instance, would have been without any! And another person, a friend of yours and mine—but we will talk of him presently."

"Have you never then felt the need of an ideal?" Bertrande asked timidly. The blue gown, the golden

curls, the graceful figure in the looking-glass seemed to recede from vision. Was she to find herself once more isolated, misunderstood, as in the cloister?

“Ideals!” Georgette cried, with a pretty gesture of impatience. “My dear Bertrande, as well light a charcoal pan and close every aperture at once, as take up with ideals. Human nature is peccable, society far from immaculate, the only reasonable course is to make the best of both. I said just now that my religion was to try and make everybody comfortable; you may call it an ideal if you please, it is good enough for me. (Why do poor wretches rob, commit perjury, murder, and so forth? Because their lives are so desperately uncomfortable. Better their condition, make them healthy, cheerful and contented, let good clothes, good food, innocent enjoyment be within reach of all, and the race of criminals would become extinct in no time.) I have thought out these problems, I assure you.”

“But life is so short—and afterwards?” put in Bertrande.

Georgette had unfastened her own brooch, a charming specimen of old Auvergnat jewellery, and stooping down put it in the other's lace.

“That will do very nicely,” she said. “I must find you earrings and a pretty ring or two, no woman is properly dressed without a bit of jewellery. What were you saying? ‘Life is so short—and afterwards?’ Really, my dear Bertrande, I should have thought you had mused enough on such lugubrious themes within the convent walls. One might suppose you would gladly forget the death's-head

and cross-bones for awhile! But I must tell you that I have never shirked that side of the question any more than yourself. My philosophy, I'll be bound, serves me here in as good stead as most people's religion. My dear, I do not regard that 'afterwards' with dismay or terror. Do you remember how I visited the cholera wards, and helped to nurse the village folk sick of typhus fever? No, I should not be a true Frenchwoman, a daughter of Gaul, if I quailed before your 'afterwards.'" She took off her own earrings, adjusted them to her friend's ears, turned the pretty head now to the right, now to the left, and went on, "You see, my dear child, the day—I mean life—is very long after all. Like children we grow tired of both work and play by the time evening comes and our kind nurse—Death is feminine in France, you know—summons us to bed. Once fast asleep, will the question disturb the wisest of us whether we wake again or no? If awakening comes, well and good. If not, the sleep will be without nightmare. Now let us take a turn in the garden. What are you doing? The earrings and brooch match your dress admirably. Pray leave them where they are."

"Dear Georgette," Bertrande said, as she removed the ornaments one by one, "you forget my position. What have I to do now with jewels and finery? Henceforth I am a penniless girl obliged to earn my own living as a teacher."

"Chut, chut, chut! You give me no time to make the necessary explanations. Marthe is about to be married. You must, of course, take her place.

The world has turned upside down since you took the veil. The strangest things have happened, to myself, to everybody. I am going to give up my home in Paris and—and live in the country. Your coming is a veritable godsend to me. But now, do let us take a turn in the garden before breakfast.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

REVELATIONS.

THE short resplendent afternoon was drawing to a close. With gem-like clearness and brilliancy showed every feature of the landscape from Georgette's windows, dark ilex woods, sands white as alabaster, unruffled purple sea under a warm orange sky. Far away above the rim of forest stood out the grey roof and tall bell gable of the convent, and separated from these by yellowing foliage of orchard and kitchen garden, the low-roofed Protestant church and parsonage.

As Bertrande gazed on this scene, so solitary, so still, so shadowless, more like a beautiful copy of nature than Nature's self, she was reminded of her own position. Just as she seemed to be gazing, not on real woods, shore and sea, but on an unpeopled lifeless imitation, so a strange sense of unreality oppressed her senses. She was like some unhappy prisoner whose liberty is recovered too late. Perception remained, but the faculty of living, the power to hope, trust and look forward, would these ever be regained? In the old familiar, beautiful, quick-pulsed world she seemed an alien. "Oh!" she thought as she turned from the fair and cold scene

without to the equally irresponsive warmth and elegance within ; “ one there is, who could understand me, one only, but to him I dare not go ! How would the priest receive me, a renegade, an apostate ? ”

Her thoughts went back to the pastor whose voice and looks had so strangely recalled the friend, counsellor, love of her youth.

“ Was I dreaming, nursing a foolish phantasy ? ” she asked herself. “ It seemed to me as if I heard his very self, not the pastor of St. Gilles, warned, admonished, comforted, but the priest. I was once more in the confessional. The voice so gentle, yet full of quiet mastery, the eyes so penetrating, so tender, the smile too, but that was sadder than his ! ”

Just then Georgette burst in, her cheeks aglow with pleasure, a parcel-laden servant following.

“ Help me to take off bonnet and mantle, ” she cried, sinking into a low chair. “ I am tired out. Never such a place for shopping as Royan at this time of the year. Positively nothing to be had. However, I contrived to get what you most want, and we shall be going to Paris soon. Open that box and let me try on your hat—not amiss, is it, for a country town?—and the cloak bordered with fur, quite a love ! ”

“ Dearest Georgette, ” Bertrande said, looking greatly distressed, “ I cannot accept so much from you. I cannot wear these things. Remember, I am no longer a personage, an heiress ; rich clothes will not become me now. ”

“ Nonsense ! Put on both bonnet and mantle, and walk straight to the door, ” Georgette said, in high

glee—the subject of dress ever exhilarated her. “It is now your turn to wear silks and velvet, mine to put on coarse serge and cotton. You will never believe me when I tell you my news, but it is true. I am going to marry a poor country pastor—your bonnet, my dear, is half an inch too forward—that is the first surprise for you; a greater still is in store. Does the mantle feel quite, quite comfortable, no dragging? It really looks as if made for you!”

Bertrande took off both bonnet and cloak, and laid them aside with a pained, puzzled look.

“I will try to thank you for all your kindnesses by-and-by,” she said, sitting beside her. “Tell me more about yourself?”

“And my pastor—that interests you? Ah! I see, you are a woman still. The nunnery has not made you indifferent to the subject of weddings. Listen, then; the Samaritan who took you in, and who confided you to my care, is my future husband. It is strange, but true, men and women, the wise as well as the foolish, forget how to put two and two together when they fall in love and marry! Could any wife be more unsuited to a minister of religion than myself? I adore fashion, society, pleasure. We shall be exiled as completely as if in Siberia. I regard creeds and catechisms as mere survivals of monkish superstitions, not a pin to choose between them. I marry a nineteenth-century Huguenot, a second Luther, who would go to the stake for his religious opinions to-morrow with the greatest possible satisfaction. Idealists, to my thinking, are all Don Quixotes, fighting with windmills, yet I wed as

complete a visionary as the Knight of La Mancha. But leave these things out of the question, think of the man himself, not his vagaries, well, I ought, I suppose, to say, his convictions. Ah! Bertrande, you will not wonder, no one will wonder at my infatuation then—" She looked in the fire, smiled, as she mused, and went on after a little pause, "Tell me, of whom did your benefactor, our pastor here, remind you? You must have noticed the strangest likeness, a startling similarity of voice, features and figure to those of one you knew well in the old days. And a certain unmistakable air of distinction, too. Did it not seem strange to you that the pastor of an out-of-the-way hamlet like this, a mere handful of fishermen's cottages, should possess a commanding presence, such noble bearing, such quiet dignity?"

Bertrande was sitting on a low seat by her friend, her face in shadow; as yet the lamps were not lit, and the half-burnt-out logs gave only subdued light. Georgette, smiling to herself, occupied with her own happy thoughts, failed to notice the change that came over her companion. Bertrande's heart now beat quickly, her cheeks glowed, her lips trembled. The theme fascinated, but at the same time awed; she could not trust herself to speak.

"You would never suspect the truth, of course, how could you dream of such a thing? and for eight long years, no news from the outer world has reached you. That pastor then, Bertrande, the minister of St. Gilles, the man I am about to marry, is Evelard, himself, the Evelard you knew in the old days!"

The girl was by Georgette's side in a moment,

kneeling to her, her pale face lifted in an attitude of pitiful entreaty.

“Dearest Georgette,” she cried, “if you love me, do not play with serious things, do not deceive me even in sport. All seems so unreal so fearfully strange, my poor brain is in a whirl with the unreality and strangeness of everything. Oh, tell me only what is indeed true!”

“I felt sure that you would be greatly shocked at first, you were always such a reverential enthusiastic little creature. The notion that your old confessor had gone over to Protestantism must of course be very distressing—that is to say if you have come out of the nunnery the least little bit of a Catholic. But, my dear child, if you reflect seriously, you ought to respect Evelard all the more for the step he has taken. It is just worldly ruin to him, neither more nor less, this secession from Rome, and it is entirely a question of conscience. I don’t quite understand the difference between the two religions myself. I only know that pastors marry and curés don’t, and that there is no confessional in the Reformed Church. I highly approve of Luther so far, but my case is essentially different from your own. I am a Catholic born and bred, and certainly the position has social advantages. Religion means respectability; but I never, as the phrase goes, practised it. I never observed fast-days, or confessed as was your habit. To me, looked at in a practical, common-sense light, confession is a mere tribute to man’s egregious pretentiousness and vanity, and much more which I need not go into. Then the con-

fessor! I have always felt that I, that any decent woman was much more fit for the office than ninety-nine of the other sex out of a hundred. The very best men—I know more of them than you do, my dear—are far from ethereal beings. What right then have the common herd to interfere with women's, young girls' secret thoughts and feelings? Well, Heaven be praised, Evelard has done with the confessional. He did not belong to the common herd, certainly, but the duties forced on him as a confessor did more than anything else to drive him from Rome. He will tell you so himself."

Bertrande's lips moved nervously. She wanted to speak but the words would not come. At last she asked in a voice hardly audible,—

"Did he recognize me?"

"Fortunately not. I will tell you why I used the word, fortunately. It will be better that Evelard does not know who you are just yet for several reasons. You can easily understand that a man with his antecedents has many enemies. The whole Catholic Church, public opinion, society, are against him. His most trifling actions are liable to misconception. What any one else might do with entire impunity becomes in his case a heinous offence, a criminal act; your escape, for instance. That an ex-priest should conceal in his house an escaped nun, is regarded as a direct onslaught upon the Church he has disowned. The affair has caused him some—some little annoyance. Do not look so distressed. The whole thing will most likely be forgotten ere many weeks are over, and, later on, Evelard will

rejoice at having befriended you, and at having you with us always as a younger sister——”

Bertrande tried to put in a passionate word of remonstrance, but Georgette would be heard out. “We are to be married soon and to leave this place, but the next pastorate is sure to be no improvement upon St. Gilles, most probably a jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire. Evelard will be appointed to some remote hamlet in Dauphiné or the Cévennes, where snow lies on the ground during eight months in the year the nearest railway station is a day’s journey off, and no neighbours within twenty miles. How dull it will be! Your coming, dear, is a god-send. We will get up little entertainments, private theatricals, dances, sing duets as in the old days—that reminds me, I heard you sing in the convent chapel a few weeks ago. I felt sure that voice was yours, and I think Evelard was reminded of you too; he had stolen in to listen to the Ave Maria, and hurried away as if he had seen a ghost. Ah, foolish little Bertrande, I thought, poor captive bird, you are not happy, you beat your wings against the prison bars, you only need the door to be open to fly away. I plotted and plotted——”

“Did you love me so dearly, then?” asked Bertrande.

“My friends never know how I love them, I never know myself till they get into trouble. Well, there was no obtaining any direct information about you. Some of us had been told that you were dead. I believed in the voice. I determined to contrive an interview with the singer. So I went to Paris, set

people to work, got a letter to the Superior, found a little girl who had not yet taken her first communion, who was to go with me to the convent and identify you. As you know, no grown person is permitted to see a cloistered sister face to face. There is wisdom—the devil’s wisdom—in that arrangement. Who could have beheld you, my poor darling, so changed, in a few years, a mere spectre of yourself, without cursing these horrible prisons, without striving might and main to abolish them! To return to my little ally. This child is artful enough for anything, would trick the whole college of Jesuits. She was to have kissed your hand, and in so doing slipped from her teeth a tiny note between your fingers, telling you that I was near, was ready to help you to escape. And now, the thing is done. You are with old friends; you, Evelard and I, shall be as happy as folks in the last chapter of a novel. I have really not a thing left to wish for.”

So saying, she caught Bertrande’s hand in her own and pressed it to her cheek.

“Ice cold, and sitting close to a wood fire! And so haggard! You look as if you too had seen ghosts. I see how it is; you are a poor, feeble, tottering convalescent, who must be strengthened, cheered, fatted up by degrees. If Marthe and I were only not going to be married so soon I would take you to Biarritz for a month. What you need is entire change of air. I must see what can be done, I must hear what Evelard says. Ah! Bertrande,” she added, rising, “I jest about the dreary life of a country parsonage, the snow-bound villages, the lack of

neighbours. I will now tell you what is sober earnest. The only thing I care about is to be with Evelard. I make merry, I play the child, I persuade the world that I am the typical Frenchwoman, the finished worldling. He knows otherwise—and I am too happy!" She stooped down, took her friend's face between her hands, dropped a kiss and a tear on the wan cheeks, then hurried away to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALONE !

Two days after this conversation, Georgette entered Bertrande's room bearing a handful of letters. They had been addressed to her guest under cover to herself.

“Your friends are very prompt in replying,” she said with a peculiar smile. “But I tell you again and again, dear, that you had much better stay with us. Your scruple about Evelard is sheer morbidity. The annoyance your coming has caused him is, I daresay, clean forgotten by this time, and when he learns that it was no stranger, but his little friend Bertrande who fled to him for shelter, he will feel amply compensated. You were ever a favourite of his, and he is magnanimity itself. Before reading these letters then, make up your mind to remain where you are. I should cherish you as a younger sister. In Evelard you can confide as to the friend, the priest, the confessor of former days, he will talk to you about Protestantism. In the wide world there are none to whom you are so dear.”

“It is just because I love you that I must go away. You will both be happier without me. I ought to go, I *must*, at least for a time,” Bertrande answered, as she took the letter with trembling fin-

gers. This pleasant house, these cheerful, affectionate surroundings, had become intolerable as the cloister itself. In a few days Evelard would return. She quailed like a criminal before the thought of his coming.

“I leave you now to the reading of your correspondence,” Georgette said, smiling significantly as before. “You shall tell me what your friends say at breakfast. They have not kept you waiting, anyhow.”

She went away, leaving Bertrande alone with her letters—the first she had received for eight long years. With a little sigh of triumphant expectation she turned them over one by one, each, to her thinking, a herald of affection, a harbinger of peace. Only to find peace! She had strength to endure everything but Evelard’s presence.

In her bright, petted youth, that richly dowered orphanhood, which had been made a perpetual *fête*, letters were always the fulfilment, or even anticipation of her wishes. She could not recall one of cold or ungracious tenor. Youth, beauty, opulence—on these altars are not fires perpetually kept alive? Every missive deposited by the postman had been a homage to the beautiful young heiress. No wonder that she now broke the first seal confidently. From whom should she receive loving welcome if not from her father’s old friend, and her former guardian, the wealthy Parisian banker, who had often and often acknowledged himself his young client’s debtor?

“Mademoiselle,”—the letter began, that formal

apostrophe chilling the breathlessly-impatient reader. Had she not ever been styled his dearest child, fondly cherished ward, adopted daughter?

“Mademoiselle—” wrote the banker. “It was with deep pain and inexpressible humiliation, that Madame Emoney and myself learned of your flight from the cloister, and, as we also gathered from your note, secession from the faith of your fathers. Such a step, Mademoiselle, involves issues which you seem wholly unable to realize. Without wishing to harrow your feelings, I would point out that in thus breaking the most solemn obligation a human being can subscribe to, you place yourself beyond reach of sympathy, and even compassion. None, you remember, endeavoured more strenuously than myself to turn you from your purpose. I had a son, in every respect, you must admit, worthy of you. Nothing would have made us happier than to see you one of ourselves, a beloved daughter; you turned a deaf ear alike to persuasion and entreaty, and, for reasons you would never divulge, even to your father’s most trusted friend and your own guardian, entered the cloister. Instead of becoming a happy wife and mother, you determined to devote yourself to meditation and prayer. I am no devotee, that you know right well. As a man of business, of honour, a Catholic, moreover, by birth, I can but denounce a line of conduct reprehensible in this as in any other walk of life. Contracts are made to be kept, not broken. The Church does not enforce conscription, she gladly accepts volunteers. She has a perfect right thus to protect herself against

the enrollment of the unstable and the frivolous. Nor is the world at variance with the stern sentence passed upon the apostate, as you, alas ! will too soon discern. The doors of society are barred against the cloistered sister, who, unashamed, casts aside her garments of humility, as against the recalcitrant priest who parades the tonsure in civilian's dress. Propriety may be a harsh law-giver, but without it, the fabric of social life in France would tumble to pieces to-morrow. We must abide by the verdicts of propriety till a higher state of civilization gives us a wholly different standard of life and conduct.

“When you ask me, Mademoiselle, to receive you for a time under our roof, you ask what is impossible. Our daughter having just completed her education, is about to be introduced in the world. At such a moment, your presence among us would not only be extremely embarrassing, but in the highest degree injurious to her prospects. On the other hand, Madame Emoney and myself cannot refuse to come to your aid materially, if you will let us know to what address a small sum of money can be safely sent.

EMONEY.”

Throwing aside the missive with a little sob of indignation, Bertrande took up the second letter. It bore a provincial post-mark, and came from a near relation, her first cousin, long since married to a village notary.

“Ah, Marie Louise will write affectionately, I know,” mused the girl. “We did not love each other at school. I was rich, she was penniless. I

was called pretty, she was plain. But the dowry and trousseau I gave her altered everything. 'You are my guardian angel, cousin,' she used to say. 'I envied you in the old days, now I only adore. Your gift of fifty thousand francs has made me the happiest woman in France—I who without it, must have remained a spinster, a nobody.' Poor Marie Louise, how I rejoiced to help her! I wonder if the baby ever came for whom I sent another little dowry before I took the veil!"

She opened the envelope without the shadow of a misgiving. Marie Louise was her mother's sister's child. Such ties were surely indissoluble!

"My dear Cousin," was written in a small, mean, finicking hand, "I write from my bed, your note having brought on a nervous attack, the consequences of which may be serious. I am now in a delicate state of health, expecting, within four months from this time, the birth of my second child.

"Had I received the tidings of your decease, my dear Bertrande, the shock would have been comparatively slight—the grief bearable. I should have rejoiced to think that after a probationary period of holy meditation and prayer, you had joined the heavenly choirs, with them to intercede for your afflicted kindred and erring fellow-creatures. How often throughout the past few years has the thought that you were praying for us, consoled and strengthened! My little girl, too—taught to regard her cousin Bertrande as a saint—whenever anything went wrong, would say, 'Do not fret, mamma, for Bertrande's sake the blessed Virgin will make the

naughty people pay papa,'—my husband has many bad debts—'will drive away the phylloxera,'—our vines are attacked—'will heal your sciatica,'—this place is near a river, and I am a martyr to rheumatic pains. So the sweet child prattled, and to all of us you were an especial angel of intercession, expiating by a life of abstinence and piety, the sins we can hardly help committing so long as we have to do with the world. A religious halo seemed to hover about us. We felt sure of being pardoned hereafter, and of gaining eternal felicity, for your sake. To have a Bertrande in the family was a passport to Heaven! as good as a covenant of grace! Imagine, then, my feelings, when I learned yesterday that we had been cheated, tricked, befooled; that all these comfortable beliefs were mere illusions, and that, instead of bringing honour and blessing on us, you would bring disgrace and curses! I do not pretend to be a devout woman; I have never had time for the proper fulfilment of my religious duties; but, like yourself, I was carefully taught the catechism and the principles of Christianity. It will now be my task, Bertrande, to pray for you, and to implore Divine clemency for the offence you have committed against the one true religion, and the Apostolic Church. Count on my prayers. That is the only mark of affection you can now expect from your brokenhearted and humiliated cousin,

“MARIE LOUISE.”

Bertrande's hopes were not crushed yet. The second letter was thrown aside more coldly and

haughtily than the first; but the third evoked a smile of confidence and looking forward.

“Marie Louise was always selfish and hard,” she thought; “what else could I look for? And she never loved me; her envious spirit would show itself in the least little thing. But here is a heart on which I may certainly count; here is a nature, generous as Georgette’s own. Dearest Madeleine,” and she raised the note to her lips, kissing it fondly, “I felt sure *you* would hasten to welcome your friend, no matter how others might look askance and tread her under foot.” She tore open the envelope with its large, florid crest, stamped in violet and gold.

“I was not so very much astonished, my dear Bertande, to find that you had got out of the Carmelite convent by hook or by crook. Such things are constantly happening now-a-days. Ah, if you had only listened to me! I would have married you to my brother—now a lieutenant-colonel in garrison here—your handsome fortune was just what he wanted. He is the best of men. We should have been sisters.

“You have been as good as dead and buried these past years. Of course you know nothing of the strikes that have taken place in the iron trade, commercial crises and so on. André lost a good deal, and although things are better now, we have to be very economical, and the cost of living at Lyons is very high. We are obliged to keep up a certain appearance, and never to *seem* to retrench, as that would do André’s business harm. It is a comfort to think that you have plenty of rich friends who will be delighted to give you a home. I am thinking of the Emoneys

and that set, all Rothschilds compared to ourselves. If it were any other time of the year, I would say, come to us for a week or two, but we have now left our country-house a few miles off, and settled down in a flat for the winter, without so much as a spare cupboard. It most unluckily happens, moreover, that my own quarter's income was laid out the very day it fell due, on new upholstery for the *salon*, an expense absolutely necessary, as we receive a good deal when in town. I have really not more than a hundred or two francs to go on with, and of course, no wife who respects herself will borrow money of her husband. Had this only happened a few months ago, I could have supplied your wants without the slightest inconvenience, and taken you in for the whole summer, made over to your use the sweetest little room imaginable, looking on to a croquet lawn *à l'Anglaise*. Unfortunately, here we are very badly off in the way of accommodation, and—of course you do not know it—I have two children, a girl and a boy. Children take up so much room!

“I will tell you what I can do. I visit a good deal and feel sure that I must have heaps of new clothes, never so much as tried on, I could spare and never miss. I will fill a box with a dress piece or two, slips, linen, gloves, lace, ribbons, and various items of dress that seem mere nothings and are yet of the first importance. The box shall go off to-morrow carriage paid.

“Your affectionate

“MADELEINE.”

“P. S.—I am dreadfully sorry. I have turned out

drawers, boxes, wardrobes, cupboards, and can find nothing that is but well worn, on the verge of the unwearable, not so much as a pair of new gloves or stockings. The only thing really worth sending is a fashionable bathing costume I ordered from Paris and found a misfit. Sea-bathing is surely the very thing to set you up after all that you have gone through. I will post off the dress to-night. And yet, how foolish of me! we have already begun fires, better to keep it for you till next year.—M. L.”

When a little later Georgette re-entered the room, she knew without a word what had happened. The letters lay scattered on the floor, Bertrande, having her back turned towards them, gazed out of the window, deaf, blind, insensible to everything but the desolation of the hour. To Georgette’s insinuating endearments, sisterly kiss, repeated caress, she only answered at first with a hard, tearless smile. Womanly pride was warring with mortal weakness. What would she not have given in that moment of fierce indignation, to be able to throw herself on her friend’s bosom and tell her all? But between this loving Georgette and herself there rose a wall of separation. She must perforce remain alone.

“Read,” she said at last, placing the letters into her friend’s hand, and bursting into angry tears. “There are hearts of stone then outside the cloister?”

“Women are not metamorphosed into angels by bringing children into the world that I ever heard of, any more than by going without stays, living on raw carrots and mumbling perpetual Paternosters,”

Georgette coolly replied. "But do let me see what these highly respectable folks say for themselves. You will laugh heartily at all this a month hence."

The pair sat down side by side, Georgette slyly drawing away the other's pocket-handkerchief from her eyes, then with little contemptuous shrugs of the shoulders, arching of the eyebrows, pursing of the lips, smiles, nods, and ejaculations she got through her task.

"There speaks the great god Self," she cried, "first the world is its mouthpiece, then cant, then greed, the three uppermost powers that be. On my word, my dear Bertrande, you are a lucky girl, you obtain experiences of life that would set up Balzac himself! And, after all, what else could you expect? Affection, so called, is in nine cases out of ten, self-interest in disguise. I have found it so over and over again. But now, do make up your mind not to fret and worry, but to live happily with me. Surely, if there are two persons in the wide world you can count on, it is Evelard and myself."

"Georgette," Bertrande began, speaking very slow and deliberately, "I have been irrational, I see it now."

"Of course, dearest. Would any woman in her sober senses hand over her liberty and her conscience—all that make life worth living—to say nothing of a million of francs! to the Church in return for a plank bed, a fustian gown, and rations of water gruel? When universal human nature is sane to the core, priests, whether Brahmins, Imans, Rabbis, curés, or pastors, will all have to retire on half-pay. | Evelard

regards himself as nothing better than a stop-gap. Evolution, that is the word he uses—he will explain its precise meaning to you—must gradually, but surely, bring about the supremacy of reason. But go on, dearest, you say you have been irrational. Now, I hope you are going to be common-sense itself.”

“You will understand my conduct better some day,” *Bertrande* continued, “when I can explain everything. My case, remember, was not like your own. I was reared in a convent school. Catholicism was not only my religion, it became my ideal. I lived in the world, devotion saved me from becoming altogether selfish and worldly. I tried to be pure-minded, high-souled, sinless——”

She flung off her friend's arms, rose to her feet and cried with a look of passionate, self-pitying horror, “And failed. What escape, what expiation seemed possible except through the Church? Do not ask me to tell you more now. Only help me to be strong, reasonable, happy! I must leave you, my dear, kind, generous friend. The soft, idle, pleasant existence you offer under your roof, would enervate rather than fortify, would force me back on myself and on useless regrets. I should remain morbid, visionary, no fit companion for sunny natures like your own. Find me some calling, something to occupy my hands and mind.”

“We will hear what *Evelard* says. He must be back soon,” was the encouraging reply.

Bertrande said no more. Making a tremendous effort at self-mastery, she seemed to yield. For the moment her powers of resistance were spent.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TRANSFORMATION.

FESTIVE lights blazed from the château windows, the place resounded with music and song. Amid her guests, the embodiment of French geniality and light-heartedness, moved Georgette Delinon.

She had put on a white dress for this little *fête*, the last, perhaps, she said to herself, that she should ever give. There seemed appropriateness in wearing white. Love in her case, meant sacrifice. She cared more for Evelard than for anything else in the world, but for his sake she was renouncing all else she cared for, of her own free will, abjuring the happy past almost as completely as a nun taking perpetual vows. A week or two later and she should be in the position of an epicure who had pledged himself to Spartan fare for the remainder of his days. Exquisite cookery, in other words, society, is mere vanity and vexation of spirit, fits of indigestion are inevitable, to the gourmet, yet how will he stomach beans and bacon? She was about to bid adieu to fashion which loved and flattered her, to pleasure which she could still enjoy with the zest of a child, above all, to that careless freedom, hitherto unfettered by another's will. The prospect, far from dismaying, made her grow more and more elate.

“I feel young, so young!” she confided to Bertrande. “My niece, Marthe, and that little twelve year old Jane Mary, are grandmothers by comparison! How I pity women who are always wise, who cannot *feel*.”

The proposed New Year's festivities had been given up on Evelard's account. It was only natural that he should now wish his marriage to take place unostentatiously, but until then, whilst still Georgette Delinon, she could without impropriety indulge in a little social distraction. Evelard too remained away, the date of his return was uncertain. So with the utmost possible dispatch she had organized a charming entertainment, the only drawback being the paucity of the audience. To invite the village folks was, under the circumstances, unadvisable, but Georgette was never at a loss. Two or three acquaintances were waylaid on their journey from Paris to Arcachon, a notary and his wife to whom she had been introduced by letter, invited from Niort, Pastor Bourgeois brought his mother and sister; these, with the servants, made up the public, the performance being a little pastoral play in which Bertrande, Marthe, Jane Mary, Jeunet and the young pastor took part.

What medicine so healing to a sick spirit as share in some busy, wholesome, animated life? What tonic so invigorating as spontaneous, pleasant intercourse, the fellowship engendered of hospitalities partaken of in common, the various social duties incumbent upon the guests as well as host?

With every day of cheerful common things, Ber-

trande had regained healthfulness of body and mind. Jeunet too, proved a cheerful counsellor. He was now an educational agent, and promised to find her a situation as governess in England.

“The English are queer beings, so many lunatics I regard them,” he said, “with their tea-pots and travelling baths, and hats glued to their heads. I don’t believe an Englishman ever takes off his hat from his cradle to his grave! But they have money. They live a nomad life like the Bedouins. Get into an English family and you will travel to the moon itself. The best thing you can do is to return to Paris with me. My wife will take you in. No better time of the year for getting a place! Rich Milords with half-a-dozen young Misses apiece, pass through Paris on their way to the south every day. The Boulevards swarm with them.”

The prospect of going to Paris, in other words, of leaving St. Gilles before Evelard’s return, did more than anything else to give Bertrande cheerfulness and self-possession.

Only to get away! To meet Evelard no more! Pass a few busy, taskful years, come and go a few brief seasons of stimulating activity and wholesome intercourse, then she could hold out an untrembling hand to Georgette’s husband and forget the lover in the friend!

Next to Jeunet’s comfort came the ineffable consolation of music. Art, no more than spiritual life, can resist the chilling influence of repression. Like an oak tree planted in a crystal bowl—to use Goethe’s famous simile applied to Hamlet—the soul, if a soul

indeed, that is to say, inceptive of poetry and exaltation, must have room to grow! And just as this faculty of growing is inseparable from the natural, religious and healthful condition of any human character, so artistic tastes, intuitions, perceptions, call them what we will, wither to the root, shrivel to nothing, unless they breathe the air of freedom.

“In the convent music afforded me no real consolation, it was only the expression of despair,” she said to her friend. “The tortured, enfeebled victim was not fagged, that is all. But had I once allowed this to be seen, had I confessed that singing gave me the slightest relief, I should have been straightway silenced, for once and for all. Thus subtle, thus malignant, thus pitiless is the inquisition of the cloister!”

The audience Georgette had gathered, metaphorically speaking, from the highways and byways, was a fairly representative one of French provincial society and in striking contrast with the entertainment provided for them.

Whilst the little pastoral play or operetta was fanciful, naïve, romantic as an episode of D’Urfey’s *Astree* or Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, the spectators belonged to the rank and file of humanity; they had sucked in Corneille and Racine with mother’s milk, knew La Fontaine by heart and held Victor Hugo in profound esteem. Of poetic emotion, æsthetic enjoyment or insight into the half-hidden, half-stifled, yet to some, the most real side of life, they were not so much as dimly conscious. But lovers’ joys and sorrows put into sweet music, pretty

costumes, a suggestion, however faint, of the Opera Comique, afford easy distraction. The occupants of the front row of chairs, listened and looked on without any danger of nodding, a fine compliment in its way, after all.

Foremost sat the notary of Niort and his wife. The French peasant loves litigation, and the French notary, as a natural consequence, is generally rich. The portly prosperous man of law who had accepted Georgette's invitation was ready for any call upon his powers of endurance when he had once dined, and to dine in France is to dine in earnest.

Now that the turning point of the day was over and neither whist nor *écarté* were in prospect, he made up his mind to be bored, but even that may be done amiably. So he sat with arched eyebrows, lips curling upward, on the alert to say something agreeable. Bulwer Lytton wittily observed that no well-dressed woman looks ugly, a saying as consolatory to the sex as those of the Gospel itself. He might have added that no well-dressed woman looks underbred. Why will a half-educated French-woman pass muster anywhere? Because her dress is unexceptionable.

The notary's wife belonged to the old-fashioned school. Reared in a provincial convent, she had been taught to regard knowledge, outside the domestic sphere, as essentially a man's province; women meddling with it, were so many monkeys filching red-hot chestnuts. But with the rest of her country-women she could skilfully conceal alike her ignorance and her prejudices.

She saw a dozen things here that shocked, heard a dozen that she did not understand, no one was the wiser. The volumes of Voltaire and Rénan lying on the table, the sparkling talk of Jeunet, mostly on thorny topics, universal laicization, Darwinism and and so forth, were encountered without the suspicion of a frown or disapproving glance. Rather hard looking, yet invariably affable, untravelled, little used to society, Madame Pichon was never at a loss. Self-possession, indeed, by some subtle, inexplicable process, has filtered through all stages of French society.

The family party intercepted on their way to Arcachon, consisted of a retired colonel, his wife and grown-up son. The former had spent twenty years in Algeria, bringing back lively reminiscences of earthquake, pestilence, pillage and insurrection, and what was more valuable, constitutions well seasoned as ship timber. The son was going through the last stage of that process from which, strange to say, often emerge fine, generous, manly characters. A fetish in babyhood, an idol throughout childish years, petted, spoiled, befooled, the French boy, wonderful to say, still survives the ordeal and becomes a man.

The colonel's son, being engaged to be married, in other words, to a dowry of four hundred thousand francs, was now treated by both father and mother with affectionate severity and jealous watchfulness.

"Our Albert has had his fling with the rest," observed the fond mother complacently, the French mother, alas! too often approving of the so-called "fling." "What else can we expect? But as his

father tells him, there is a season for everything ; the head of a house, the husband and father to be, must respect himself."

If the regenerating prospect metamorphosed the young man in his parents' eyes, still more complete was the change that had taken place in his own. The curled, perfumed dandy, able to play the pianoforte, flirt in French-English, dance to perfection, write comedies, was no longer a mere drawing-room paragon, but a man of business and importance. Instead of discussing the last new play or novel, he now gave his mind wholly to his profession, politics, the money market and municipal affairs. Called to the bar, he was about to purchase a practice in some large town where he intended to play a distinguished part. With him, as with every other Frenchman, the first step to social distinction was a discreet marriage.

Young Lavergne was an agreeable, well-mannered, amiable fellow enough ; he must, however, show off his various accomplishments, chatting in French-English with Jeunet, rattling off a variation in Lohengrin, arguing knotty points with his future father-in-law. It is wonderful what dignity is imparted to a French dandy by this relationship, all other earthly honours sink into insignificance beside it. A mother-in-law may be regarded as a tax, a father-in-law as a premium upon marriage in France. Pastor Bourgeois' mother and sister, the former wearing the high blonde coiffe of La Vendée, showed far more interest in the evening's proceedings than the others. To them, everything was new, the arrangement and etiquette of the dinner-table, the

abundance of furniture, the well-filled bookshelves,—in French farm-houses books are no more seen than Egyptian mummies—the general arrangement—all these things were absolute novelties to the pair, yet beyond a certain naïve interest and curiosity, there was no trace of provincial bringing up. They had quitted their cider-making and dairy-work to take part in what to them was a brilliant festivity. The thought of their possible awkwardness or inferiority never for a moment disturbed their enjoyment.

To invite the village-folk *en masse* had been out of the question, but Georgette was under the necessity of filling her room. So in the background were the gardener and porter, with their wives, children and “any acquaintance they wished to bring,” thus the invitation had been worded, the result being a goodly audience.

Bertrande’s story was of course one of those dead secrets whispered into every ear, women’s secrets for the most part belonging to a figure of speech called by grammarians, oxymoron, in other words, they are and are not. The circumstance piqued general curiosity and perhaps more than anything else, contributed to the animation of the company. It was no stimulating audience but the actors needed no spur. Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm with which they entered into the spirit of the piece. To the two men, Marthe and Jane Mary, the experience was novel, to Bertrande the living over again a passionately joyous episode.

This very part had been played by her years ago in Evelard’s presence, whilst yet her love for him

remained a dimly recognized, half acknowledged joy.

On the threshold of life, the world enticing as a fairy garden, herself a princess called to reign there, wrong, suffering and despair seemed far off, unreal; Evelard's friendship, Evclard's affection, unconsciously filled her heart, her life. She had acted for him, sung to him that day; in unthinking gaiety and innocence, a child's love not being purer than her own.

"Let me to-night forget all else," she now said to herself, "the trembling horror, the crushing self-humiliation with which I owned the truth and contemplated my sin. I loved a priest and was beloved in return! From that moment, ardent Catholic as I was, I could only think of penitence and expiation. The long years of bitter atonement are gone by. Evelard is separated from me as before. For one brief moment, I will live over again a blissful, unclouded past, that was his and mine!"

So she allowed herself to be dressed in the self-same Watteau costume she had worn then, smiling as the transformation went on, feeling at last, as she looked, the *Bertrande* of old.

CHAPTER XXX.

IDYLLIC.

A CHARMING scene awaited Georgette's guests when, after an overture of pianoforte and violin the curtain rose. Stage scenery, representing a forest glade in midsummer, had been hired from Royan. Here, under spreading oaks, Damon and Phyllis, Corydon and Sylvia, Jeunet and Bertrande were surprised in a rustic dance, swains and damsels wearing the fanciful but rejuvenating costume of Louis Quinze. Wonderfully youthful looking Jeunet as he lustily footed the measure, the apple-green of his broad lapped coat, knee-breeches and silk stockings contrasting with Pastor Bourgeois' quieter tints of cream-colour and mulberry. Marthe, as a bride-elect, must of course wear white, her broad-brimmed chip hat showing myrtle blossoms, with long pointed bodice and short distended skirt of white satin; that curtailed petticoat and the opportunity thus afforded of displaying her neat ankles, made Marthe frisky as a young kitten. For the first time in her life she played the coquette, and flirted teasingly with her betrothed.

Bourgeois indeed was divided between two admirations. First he glanced at Marthe's ankles,

then at his own, his stalwart shapely limbs marvelously advantaged by cream-coloured silk stockings with mulberry clocks. Nothing puts us into better humour with the world and ourselves than the consciousness of approval, no matter the unimportance of the deed or quality approved. These three showed an exhilaration Bertrande could not share, yet Georgette gazed in growing wonder. Her friend's former loveliness and sparkle had come back as if by magic.

"Does it not seem incredible?" she whispered to the colonel's wife. "Yesterday a mere shadow, ghost of her former self, to-night the beautiful, joyous girl of eight years ago."

"If only her fortune were not gone! I could then have married her to-morrow," was the reply.

"Officers are no longer compelled to seek a dowry with their wives. The thing is still feasible," put in the colonel.

No daintier impersonation of a Watteau shepherdess could be seen than Bertrande, as she now moved through the rustic dance. Under her broad-brimmed Tuscan hat, garlanded with roses and lined with rose-coloured silk, her cheeks glowed, her blue eyes shone, her lips parted in a smile. The dress of pale pink brocade, not hooped and short like Marthe's, but falling in graceful folds, lent dignity to the slender figure; the kerchief of rich white lace carelessly knotted about the throat, the long, close-fitting sleeves and lace ruffles, partly concealing the hands, were all touches that completed the picture.

June itself, existing in its rose-bud stage, were here personified, but with a nameless charm, an indescribable staidness and reserve we are accustomed to associate with maturer summer. Whilst, too, her companions were mere picturesque figures that might have stepped from the boards of Opéra Comique, Bertrand's appearance was wholly inartificial. The loveliness, the sparkle, the grace, seemed to belong to her, part indeed of herself. As some dainty apparition of romance, denizen of far-off fairy-land alighted on the common world to dazzle for a moment then disappear, she now moved before her enchanted audience, the centre of attraction. The sprightly music, the piquant libretto, the spirited acting of the others, became of secondary interest. All eyes were magnetized towards the delicious nymph in rose-colour, all followed her graceful movements with the silent homage ever accorded the phenomenal.

In the midst of the dance a little girl rushed from behind the trees with a cry of alarm. This was Jane Mary, who high-heeled, hooped, crook and basket in hand, from which dropped the flowers as she ran, looked the most theatrical little figure imaginable. If Marthe and her lover felt proud of their ankles, still more proud felt Jane Mary of herself as a whole. Her satisfaction would have been displeasing but for its excessive comicality. The little woman planted her crook on the ground, posed so as to display to best advantage blue satin shoes and stockings, blue and white frock puffed out like a Japanese lantern, and peaked hat à la

Pompadour, with an aplomb delightful to behold. From a tragedian in the matter of self-possession she had nothing to learn. In a shrill but not unmusical treble she now informed Corydon that Damon's goat had broken through his fences again and were playing havoc with the green clover. Thereupon ensued an angry duet between the two swains.

"The same old story," quoth Corydon, "ever and ever, your cattle trespassing on my pastures!"

"And whose the fault?" retorted Damon fierily.

"Goats require looking after as well as human beings. Your goatherd," here he points derisively to Jane Mary, "you see what she has been about, gathering wild flowers instead of minding her flocks."

An altercation ensues. The two men come to blows, their betrothed endeavouring vainly to appease them. The high voices of the lovers, the alarmed cries of the maidens the little girl's screams, summon to the spot a group of supernumeraries—Georgette's serving-folk, dressed as villagers and rustic guardians of the peace. Amid the wildest confusion Damon is unceremoniously dragged off to prison.

A charming pathetic scene now ensues. Sylvia, of course, takes the part of Corydon, whilst the proud Phyllis deigns to intercede for her lover. The duet concluded, Sylvia remaining hard and almost cynical, Phyllis pours out all her love, sorrow, and anxiety in a last appeal. A word from Sylvia and Corydon will relent, will spare his old playmate and

near neighbour the disgrace of prison, and avert a life-long feud between two who once loved each other as brothers. Sylvia shows no signs of giving way.

“Then,” sang Phyllis, “you convince me that you have never loved; you show that love has no real meaning for you. If you loved indeed, you could not endure the notion of your beloved committing an ungenerous or unworthy act. His reputation would be dearer to you than your own; his nobility of character the very touchstone and measure of your love!”

It was in this song that Bertrande surpassed herself now as she had done on a similar occasion eight years before. Her sweet, rich, carefully-trained voice was never heard to greater advantage than in a song, simple in itself, yet full of gravest, tenderest meaning. As she sang, her features, even gestures, gained elevation from the uplifting, moving words, whilst the most careless of her listeners was moved to tears. And now, as then, Bertrande thought only of Evelard! His image was ever present. She seemed singing to him, as she was singing of him. That little song with its passionate refrain—“Love can only exist with honour. The honour of those we love should be dearer than life itself,”—contained her life-story and his own!

Just then, the audience listening spellbound, the volume of sweet, passion-laden song filling the room, Bertrande’s figure conspicuous on the brilliantly-lighted stage, Evelard appeared in the doorway. No one observed his coming but Georgette—

Georgette, in her capacity as mistress of the ceremonies, compelled to be on the alert; here, there, and everywhere at the same time. The outer door of the double drawing-room—the upper being turned into the stage—had been left open and curtained off, so that any late comer might steal to a back seat without causing interruption. Here, partly concealed by the arras, stood Evelard now, if, indeed, it were Evelard's self!

“He recognizes her at last; it is only natural that he should look astounded?” thought Georgette.

She waited a moment, leaving time for him to get over his surprise, watching his face with keenest interest, soon with painful surmise, in turn to become agonized conviction.

Evelard gazed, but not only as one confronted by ghostly vision, who sees before him some phantom risen from the tomb.

The change that now came over him was still more radical. It was as if he had suddenly become a phantom to himself, being drawn by an influence too strong to resist, far away from his own actuality and surroundings. An individuality unknown to Georgette stood there in Evelard's place. Alike the priest, her friend, and the pastor, her betrothed, had vanished. In the lightning flash of her unerring woman's instinct she now saw the naked soul, the soul that belonged to another!

In the living *Bertrande* he had recognized his buried love. Here, then, was the key to his character and history. The man had conquered the priest; in turn, the priest had trampled the man un-

der foot. Evelard's triumph over himself had been complete; she could now measure the cost. It was the memory of Bertrande that rendered him so indifferent to life, so slow to accept affection, so irresponsible to pleasant things. And she thought, now with feverish eagerness leaping from one conclusion to another, another mystery at the same time became crystal clear. Bertrande had loved in return—loved a priest—that priest her confessor!

Could any pure-minded, religiously-trained girl endure such a position? Would not the cloister offer the only refuge? Where else could she fitly expiate such sorrow and such shame?

But no time was there to pause and think now. The claims of society must be first listened to, her own heart when leisure came. Smiling as if nothing had happened she moved a step nearer and uttered a word of greeting.

Evelard neither saw nor heard, the only sight and sound of which he was conscious now being Bertrande's image, Bertrande's voice. His expression of dazed incredulity and wonder changed to exquisite joy and adoring love. Blind, deaf, insensible to all else, he seemed to drink in every look and tone.

Again Georgette called him gently by name a second time without attracting his notice. Then she laid one little gloved hand on his arm. "I ought to have told you. The refugee is Bertrande," she said in a gentle voice.

He turned round greatly agitated. The spell was broken. Her voice recalled him to realities.

"Strange that I knew her not," he murmured,

his gaze still fascinated to the radiant figure on the stage. "And yet and yet," he added, as if speaking to himself, "there were reminders, her eyes, her voice—" Quite unable to recover self-possession, he drew back hastily. "Excuse me, dear friend, I did not know that you had guests. We shall see each other to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow," replied Georgette, with a little suppressed sob he did not perceive. Had she wept aloud, fainted, screamed, would he have been the wiser? she asked herself bitterly.

She followed him out into the corridor. "You are well, your journey has proved successful?" she asked, his absence of mind and only partial consciousness of her presence, forcing her back upon womanly pride, freezing her into momentary indifference.

"Adieu now, you shall hear my news another time," he replied with a smile.

But what a smile! Georgette returned to her salon smiling also. No one should guess that her light laughter and mirthful sallies hid a wounded spirit, and heart suddenly made desolate.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HEARTS LAID BARE.

BENIGNANT goddess, presiding over household tasks of the daintier sort! how many drooping spirits hast thou uplifted, how many aching hearts soothed, gnawing sorrows laid to rest? On thy modest altar flicker no perpetual flames, thy coronet should be of wayside flowers, for thy votaries are inglorious. Yet no heaven-born guardian of the human race has scattered more lavish blessing, earned heartier thanksgiving. For in thee, goddess of neatness, grace and order, is typified the home; that palladium of man's affection and woman's honour; that sure sanctuary of the weary, the lonely, and the oppressed! A feminine soul sick unto death may be cured by the task of laying down a new carpet or preparing for guests.

Next morning Bertrande was busied in arranging Georgette's boudoir with quite a cheerful face. Warm sunshine flooded the room. To have anything to do was delightful to her; but to be asked to arrange books and music enchantment. Flowers she looked on sadly. Flowers, certainly, were not shut out of the cloister; but is it not the living who need them, rather than the dead; troubled mortals

rather than waxen images? The rest of the party had driven to Royan to see off the Arcachon travellers, visitors from Bordeaux.

“You are tired; better by far for you to stay at home. Do put things straight for me?”

Thus saying, with rather a jaded and meaning look Bertrande thought, Georgette had left her. Joyfully she set about her task; only to be serviceable to this generous, self-sacrificing friend, she mused as she put back one object after another in its place! The moments fled by no longer leaden-footed, each a little hour, each hour a day, each day a dreary lifetime in the convent. The mere handling of pretty, suggestive things thrilled her with pleasure. A book of engravings, a new volume of poetry and romance, artistic little nothings that seem indigenous as daisies in France, all these were sighed over, smiled at, kissed. Life was sweet when life indeed, even if touched with sorrow.

On a sudden, without warning, unannounced, the door opened, and there stood Evelard.

“Madame Delinon—I expected to find her? We had made an appointment,” he stammered.

“She should surely be back by this time. I will go and see!” Bertrande contrived to get out, making for the door as she spoke.

Each wished to spare the other—and Georgette. Loyalty to their leal friend, their all, forbade confidence. But the opportunity of interchanging a few words was irresistible. They were together. No one was by. For the last, perhaps only time, they stood face to face.

As the girlish figure in simple grey dress approached with fluttering, bird-like movements, he barred her passage.

“Nay,” he said smiling—this time a smile indeed! —“stay a little while.”

He held her out at arm’s length and gazed on the sweet picture, with every glance new happiness lighting up his face, irradiating his whole being.

Bertrande had insisted upon discarding all but the plainest attire. A young woman compelled to seek her fortunes in the world, she said, ought to wear sober colours and homely, durable stuffs. Yet no costly gown, *chef-d’œuvre* of Parisian-made milliner could better have become her slender, graceful figure and fair, spiritualized face than this Quakerish costume of dove-coloured homespun. For some women, Georgette among these, the silk worm spins, the loom hums all day long, the artist in clothes invents marvels of skill and shade. Bertrande belonged to another category. Inborn exquisite French neatness and appropriateness were all she needed to look her best.

Amazing was the change effected by a week or two of natural, affectionate, Heaven-ordained life. The look of intense pathos and patience of one who has wrestled with self, grief and privation, emerging from the contest victorious, was there still, also the expression of spirituality, of a craving for something higher, purer, better than the mere comfortable existence of every day.

The sallowness and attenuation of the fugitive had disappeared, a delicate bloom of health, animation

and cheerfulness embellished and rejuvenated; her bright short hair waving about her temples added a look of youth.

“The very same, the *Bertrande* of old!” he murmured, smiling dreamily; “changed, of course, yet her old self, like none other. How could I be so blind at first? Ah! *Bertrande*, they told me long ago you were dead. Was it at your bidding?”

She crimsoned, faltered, and looked on the floor.

“I wanted to be forgotten. I felt that I must be hateful to others as to myself. Heaven forgive me the deception.”

“Poor child, poor child! So innocent, yet persuaded into believing herself so guilty! I was sorely perplexed also. The reminders were strong. Were there then, I asked, two *Bertrandes*; the one consigned to the tomb, the other, her counterpart, still flesh and blood. And myself—am I so altered then as to be wholly unrecognizable? But I forget. I too wore a disguise.”

“The disguise deceived, but not wholly,” she said eagerly. “I felt under a spell, in a dream. I, in turn, asked, are there two *Evelards*?”

“In one sense, yes,” he replied. “I am, as you know, no longer the priest, the confessor. My old self in so far as convictions are concerned is dead for ever, buried in the tomb. But the man, the heart, remain unchanged, *Bertrande*’s own—” with trembling joy and almost incredulous looks as if indeed he could hardly believe the evidence of his senses, he added—“Speak in turn, let me hear your voice. Open your own heart to me?”

“What should I say?” was the low, passionate answer. “You read my inmost thoughts now as always. I am not changed.”

“Nor could I in the respect change ever,” he said—his voice dropped almost to a whisper. “I may tell you, now, you are a child no longer; much suffering has made you wise, and the confidence does no one any wrong: but for you, I should in all probability be a priest still. I, your confessor—Heaven help me!—your lover, examined not only my creed so-called but my calling. I said to myself, can it be rational, can it be *right*, that any man’s faith and profession should force him into such a position—that of confidant, accuser and judge of the woman he loves, and of whose love he is conscious? I reasoned further—can it be right, and, as a natural consequence, religious, that a girl’s innocent affection, a man’s honest passion, become criminal merely by virtue of human ordinances? Reason—another name for the soul—said, no and no and no! you are both guiltless, the offence lies with that Church, that society, which brand you as culprits, distorting natural, wholesome, soul-regenerating affections into frailty and vileness.”

He took one of her thin hands in his own, and raised it reverentially to his lips.

“Wipe away for once and for all those dreadful hallucinations from your mind. Confront reason and the truth. Recognize in yourself a conscience-endowed being, seek humour, sympathies and natural joys and you will not have suffered in vain.”

How sweet his words of comfort and uplifting!

How sweet to him the old task of comforter and lifter! The despair of final separation was as yet far off, each moment of perfect understanding and unfettered intercourse long as a year of pain and absence!

“Like myself, you are a castaway, turned adrift on a cold world,” he went on, with deepening indignation. “Oh, pitiless Church that should be merciful, thus do you parody the words of Scripture—God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. What farther indignity, what additional burden can you lay upon your victims? Then your entire fortune went to the convent, my poor child?”

“Where else should it go?” she said humbly. “I offered it by way of expiation.”

“It is monstrous, inhuman, thus to prey upon the credulity of impulsive, over-sensitive natures. Bertrande—my beloved—for the last time hearken to me as to a spiritual adviser. Oh! cast aside for once and for all these grovelling falsities. Break loose from teachings at variance with the elementary principles of truth and justice. Dare to be yourself a reflecting, reasoning, responsible being. In ministers of religion, henceforth recognize may be a friend, a guide, a helper; but the guardian of your conscience never!”

“I am going to England; I shall become a Protestant like yourself,” was the timid reply.

“Protestant, Romanist! what signify such terms? Study the life of Christ, create for yourself a church, a creed out of *that*. Ah, if I could only——”

His indignation was spent, for a moment he buried

his face in his hands. The desolation confronting both became suddenly very real.

“I was thinking, a foolish thought,” he said, “how happy it would make me to discuss these questions with you. We should learn much from each other. But you are going to England; it is a wise resolve——” His voice trembled, broke down, then mastering himself, he went on, “Home life in England is simple and wholesome; you will make friends I hope, be very happy. Try to gain any knowledge you can, each fresh interest will make daily life brighter. Madame Delinon will write to you——”

He went on speaking very rapidly as if fearful of interruption, of not having time to say now what else must for ever be left unsaid.

“You of course know it; she has certainly told you that we two, you and I, are divided now, irrevocably as formerly, by the grating of the confessional. That noble woman, your best, truest friend and mine, commiserated my fallen fortunes, has accepted the hand of the outlaw, the scapegoat—an ex-priest is all these and more—we shall be married soon——”

Bertrande bowed her head, tears falling on their clasped hands.

“So much you have learned from her own lips. Her disinterestedness, her generosity to myself you will never know. She is aware that long ago my heart was given to another, the name of that other let her not so much as guess. We must raise ourselves to the height of her nobleness and spare her

feelings, as we know in a similar case she would spare our own."

Again Bertrande bowed assent, her lips murmuring inarticulate response.

"To-day, for a brief interval, we have again belonged to each other. Heart has spoken to heart. To-morrow I am only your friend's betrothed. Not a word, not a thought of yours or mine must betray that loyal heart. Our part will lie buried as in a deep grave, no tears bedewing it, no flowers marking the spot."

So sorrowfully, even despairingly were the words uttered, that it was now Bertrande's turn to comfort, uplift.

"Think of me as one who is happy, who asks no other happiness since you loved me," she said smiling at him through her tears.

"And think of me as one whose loyalty to another is loyalty to yourself," he murmured. "Could I by so much as a thought render myself unworthy of her, your love would be turned to contempt. So now let us part."

Bertrande turned away with a half-suppressed sob.

For a moment he stood irresolute. The light shone upon her fair hair as she leaned against the casement, her head bowed on her clasped hands, her slender figure shaken with grief.

But he did not dare to comfort her, his own powers of self-control were spent. Taking up hat and stick, never once glancing back, he hurried downstairs, out of the house. She heard his quick tread

on the gravel walk below, the old man-servant hobbling after him.

“Madame expects you to breakfast, Mr. Pastor,” he said; but Evelard brushed by with hurried excuse. He would see his mistress later, he murmured, walking still faster than before.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OF THE WORLD, UNWORLDLY.

GEORGETTE, apparently in her usual spirits, proposed lawn tennis after breakfast. Croquet, she said, was now out of date; the new game seemed easy. By all means let the box of appliances from Paris be opened.

“What useful folks are those crack-brained folks of ours on the other side of La Manche,” said Jeunet. “Vive Le Sport! say I for one. Let us have lawn-tennis to-day: golf—whatever that may be—tomorrow. Such innocent pastimes drive away *ennui*, foster morality, promote European peace. Why are revolutions unknown in the land of rosbif and plum-pudding? Why is John Bull less addicted to running away with his neighbour’s wife than the son of Gaul? Because muscular energy and the spirit of emulation are expended upon le Sport—the name as well as the thing indigenous to British soil: because, like the Greek of old, he cools his ardour in the Palestra. Lord’s cricket-ground first, love afterwards, is the creed of the true born John Bull. So begin: instruct us, ladies, we also wish to be moralized.”

Georgette and Marthe had already seen the game played, and amid much merriment, an attempt was

made, when the mistress of the house having fairly set things going, excused herself. She had a visit to pay, she said, glancing at Bertrande.

What had happened that morning between the pair, Bertrande and Evelard?

The girl's face was unreadable. Without joining in the game, she seemed cheerful and more than ever anxious to please her friend in little things. Georgette's wishes were studied, anticipated with an alertness that became distressing to the other. It was as if she felt conscious of having injured her friend and now sought every opportunity of making amends.

Georgette turned away sadly. An Englishwoman under the circumstances would assuredly not have thought of her appearance—she would have taken the traverse leading to the parsonage without changing her garden hat. Agitated, in a condition of feverish suspense and changeful mind, the issues at stake of the weightiest, Georgette could nevertheless permit herself no deviation from etiquette. Dressing herself unostentatiously but carefully, every item of her toilet challenging criticism safely as a sentence of Saint Beuve, she set out on her errand. No matter at what cost, she must obtain the truth, and learn how matters stood with these two beings, both so beloved, so cruelly handled by fortune, destiny, chance—call it by what name we will—the force directing human life.

Evelard's greeting was grateful, apologetic, almost painfully self-reproachful.

“Pardon me for so abruptly quitting you last

night, dearest friend," he began, "and for not awaiting your return this morning. But I have much on my hands, as you see." And so saying, he pointed to a litter of correspondence on the table.

"I interrupt," Georgette stammered, hesitating to take the chair held out for her.

"Not at all," he replied. "Whose visit, indeed, should be welcome if not your own? I have much to communicate, many points to discuss with you. My journey has been successful so far. I have vindicated my conduct before the Consistory of Toulouse."

"I am very glad."

"Heaven bless you for your sympathy! I confess, the burden thus got rid of was no light one. Had I felt conscious of offence, I should of course have sent in my formal resignation at once. To do so were tantamount to a confession of guilt. It rests with my congregation whether I remain here or no. I am now summoning the elders of the church to a conference, and shall be guided by their decision."

"You prefer to stay?" asked Georgette, tentatively. She was trying to divine his thought. Alike looks, voice, manner were reassuring. He was calm almost to coldness. His pale face showed no sign of recent conflict.

"On the whole, yes. I feel in sympathy with the place and the people; when this unfortunate misunderstanding is cleared up, I feel sure of regaining their confidence. And the post is far from insignificant. There are little Protestant groups scattered along the coast who have hitherto been wholly de-

prived of a pastor's ministrations. I shall take these alternately, thus trying to keep such isolated congregations together, and to give vitality to what is now mere formalism—little more than a name.”

He looked at her, smiling reproachfully.

“To state my own opinion, as my wife yours will remain no less inviolate than now. But I, you know, feel differently on such matters. I believe in the regenerating power of real religion——”

“If we can find it!” Georgette put in quickly. His self-possession, his reference to the future, his gentle raillery, disarmed suspicion. She felt as near, even nearer to him than before. Those terrible misgivings of the previous night must then be chimera! She had misinterpreted his agitation, taking surprise for dismay, affectionate interest for passionate, despairing love. This Evelard she adored was still her own!

“The mere seeking may answer as well. I am far from averring that attainment is practicable. But time enough for such discussions by and by. You have no objection to spend a few years at St. Gilles?” he asked, perusing her narrowly.

Still in that happy mood of reassured hope and confidence, Georgette made answer—not eighteen-year-old maiden more artless,—

“As if I should object—with you.”

The shy, tender, whole-hearted response had the effect of a blow on the listener. Evelard changed colour, winced; his lips moved nervously.

“Oh,” he said, “if you love me, be less kind. You humiliate, crush, unman me with a sense of my un-

worthiness and of your own single-minded devotion ; vex me with feminine caprice, encroach upon my time, oppose yourself to my judgments, but do not be too kind."

It was now Georgette's turn to change colour, wince and tremble. On her, too, fell a staggering blow. Hastening to undo the effect of his words, he added,—

"Dearest friend, forgive ! forgive ! I am wont, as you know, to speak hastily. When these anxieties are over, and daily life resumes its usual aspect, I shall once more be myself. My heart, as well as my mind, will be freer. The great happiness of your affection will become real and true. At present everything wears the aspect of illusion."

Georgette listened in silence, nerving herself to speak out. The moment had come. If a clear understanding was not arrived at now, to-morrow might be too late.

As she sat thus wrestling with herself, two visions, clear, many-phased, each strikingly contrasted with the other, flitted before her mind's eye. Could she make the supreme sacrifice now demanded of her, forfeit a happiness hungered for so long, clutched at so eagerly, return to the empty, unsatisfying life of every day ? And might she not be exaggerating Evelard's feeling for Bertrande, misjudging his present mood ? Might not the astoundment of the night before indicate a mere passing fancy ? Could an impulsive, inexperienced girl satisfy the aspirations of such a man, offer him adequate sympathy and companionship ?

So she reasoned, trying to persuade herself that her arguments were convincing, determined to speak out, yet hoping, almost believing that further explanation was unnecessary.

And the more thoroughly she searched her own heart, the more impossible seemed separation. Oh, it could not be; Evelard loved her, nothing was changed.

“I spoke of illusion just now,” he said, as if reading her thoughts. “One thing at least is true, unmistakable as yonder sun shining in the blue heavens. If I spoke hastily under the crushing sense of my own unworthiness, forgive! Your kindness, not only to myself but to others, puts many another’s religion to the blush. Here is a scripture all who run may read.”

“Kindness may be disservice too,” she began, speaking slowly and with great effort. “I am not sure—are you quite sure that it is not so now? Let us speak without reserve. Conceal nothing from me.”

He looked up with an expression of pained surprise. “I took you into my confidence long ago,” he said. “You then generously consented to ignore the past. Let it be forgotten.” But he saw that she had still something to say. Toying nervously with her parasol, downcast, tears glistening on her eyelids, she faltered out,

“And if *you* cannot forget?”

“Dearest friend,” he broke in, greatly agitated. “Show yourself now magnanimous as heretofore. Do you not see how humiliating are these reminders?”

how such memories crush me to the very dust? Help me to live in the present. I am weary of conflict, I hunger for repose. Where shall I find peace if not by your side?"

The little gloved hands still played nervously with the parasol, the lace veil still more palpably showed traces of tears. Evelard's agitation but strengthened Georgette's resolve. She was summoning all her powers of self-control: neither false sentiment on her part, nor an exaggerated sense of loyalty on his own should prevent a perfect understanding.

"That is why I came to you now," she began gently, growing calmer as she went on. "I wanted to feel quite sure that we are not deceiving ourselves. Answer me one question, dear friend. On your reply depends our future." Looking on the ground she got out the remainder of her sentence. "When our friend Jeunet came to me from you, he alluded—at your wish—to an early attachment. You in turn spoke to me of one you had loved years ago. Was that Bertrande?"

"Must you of all others lay me on the rack?" he cried desperately. "The sin—for sin it was—has been pitilessly expiated. We have both been punished, heaven knows with what gruesomeness! And we are strangers now as before, this unhappy girl and myself; the convent bars could not separate us more."

"But Bertrande is free, you are both free—and you love her still, I feel it, I know it," Georgette said; then rising from her seat, lifting her tear-wet veil,

and meeting his troubled looks undismayed, she added with tender, even passionate insinuation, "You have yet to understand me, any true woman then! If I love you"—for a moment sobs hindered her from going on—"is it but another name for wishing you to be happy? I must out with the truth. I guessed your secret—last night—when you stole into the drawing-room and recognized *Bertrande*. I spoke to you twice, you did not so much as hear me. You had only ears, eyes, for her. We women see clearly, you know. In some matters we are not to be deceived."

She drew off her gloves, took from the third finger of her left hand the plain gold ring he had placed there before departure. Forcing it gently into his palm, she said, weeping as she spoke, "Never think that I shall reproach you, you have done me no wrong. The fault is neither yours nor hers. It is my own. How foolish of me to think that I should ever really understand you! I who have no religion, the poor, empty-headed worldling. But *Bertrande* is spiritual-minded. I see it all now, clear as daylight. With her you will be quite happy. She will not shock you with frivolities a dozen times a day, as I should do. The life of a country parsonage will suit her exactly. I wished to be your wife. I have always looked up to, admired you. It seemed glorious to give up amusement for your sake. But if I am disenchanted, disappointed, maybe unhappy, do not grieve. There is the world, it is good enough for me!"

He had tried once or twice to interrupt her but

she would be heard to the end. Then she turned to go.

He followed her to the door, raised her hand to his lips, and suddenly breaking away, as if unworthy to pay such homage, cried,

“Do not say that you have no religion, I could kneel to you, true, grand, woman’s heart! No perjury of mine shall outrage it now. You force me into being true to myself. Oh! irony of human fate, our guardian angels and good geniuses are ever those we most cruelly wound. Georgette pardon, forget!”

She paused on the threshold to wring his hand, smile through her tears, then hurried away.

She did not go straight home. Obeying a sudden impulse, she entered the little Carmelite convent. Only one or two lights burned here and there, and daylight was fast ebbing.

Here she could weep unobserved.

“The world, the world!”

As she recalled her words to Evelard, there came upon her a terrible sense of emptiness and desolation. No proud, self-respecting women could have acted otherwise; her heart was lightened of a great burden, yet how welcome this solitude, this obscurity! How welcome these tears!

“What a pity that convents are really a failure, and that disappointed women cannot betake themselves to religion as they used to do,” she mused. “I should make the worst nun imaginable; but the sense of punishing oneself for folly would be so soothing! And the notion of preparing oneself for Heaven—for never-ending happiness—if one could only

grasp it, believe in it, the cloister might answer even for me!"

Well, the illusion was over. Everlard had never loved her. The aspirations of the last few months could never be revived. The dream must remain a dream.

It was the depth and uncommonness of Evelard's character that had captivated her. Amusement and amateur philanthropy wearied at times. She had yearned in secret for a sincerer, more satisfying existence. His confidence, his companionship, seemed to promise these. The very sacrifices in store for her as a pastor's wife, the necessity of living after a homely, monotonous fashion, had enticed. She owned no religion. She did not feel the want of one. What she really needed was a moral stimulus, a standard; and both had been within reach—till yesterday!

The world would bring a careless, makeshift happiness, and oblivion. She should fly to society—what other refuge was open to her? She should, perhaps—who could say?—accept the hand of some apparently congenial suitor.

And, of course, Bertrande must be dowered as a younger sister.

It was pleasant to think of being useful to Evelard's future wife. "After all," she mused, as she dried her tears, "the little good done by poor creatures like myself would very likely never be done by others. There is something in that."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BROTHER AND BROTHER.

“THEN you stay in this Bœotia after all?” Jeunet said, a few days later as the pair sat down to breakfast in the parsonage.

Brilliant sunshine flooded the room, yet the logs crackling on the hearth were very welcome. There was a touch of frost in the air, and the roses drooped. Beyond the garden the landscape was little changed. Here and there a ripple of gold lighted up the sombre masses of pine and ilex, but winter at St. Gilles succeeds summer as day fades into night with hardly perceptible stages of autumn and twilight. The tints of sky, sea, and shore remained bright and clear as before, only colder.

“No; I am glad to say that the difficulties you know of have been satisfactorily explained. I prefer to remain.”

“There is much to be said on behalf of your choice. If a country pastorate is the frying-pan, living by one’s wits is the fire. I am already tempted to wish myself in your shoes. A house over your head, and two or three thousand francs a year, to quote Henri Quatre, are ‘well worth a mass’; we will say, instead, a sermon.”

“I hope you contrive to make ends meet?”

“Lived the man or woman who accomplished that by his wits? But I have other worries. My dear little wife—by the way, what an excellent ham—of local curing?—what was I saying? Ah! I have a sad story to tell you. But, first, a word or two about your own affairs? So—no offence, I hope—your engagement with my charming hostess and benefactress is broken off, at least for a time?”

“Such is Madame Delinon’s wish.”

“I ask no questions. I can only say that I am very sorry. Let us hope matters will right themselves in time. She is incomparable.”

“You were speaking of your wife,” Evelard put in, evidently wishing to change the subject. “I hope you have no serious differences with each other?”

“Are any differences to be regarded as serious between husband and wife? They invariably shake hands and become better friends than before. Divorced couples generally find they can’t live without each other. Unfortunately Suzanne—but I have so much to tell you, I hardly know where to begin. That novel of mine!—for the life of me I cannot finish it. If I could, I feel sure my fortune were made. The story has reached such a climax. Its situations are so desperately entangled that any notion of clearing up everything well nigh turns my brain. I feel half demented when I think of it.”

“Then why not leave it alone?”

“Letting things alone, my dear friend, won’t keep the wolf from the door. How fortunate

I should consider myself if I could afford to let everything alone! But that blissful condition I must not so much as aspire to. Checks too—not of the kind good on a bank—always come in showers. The only regular occupation I had, a post Madame Delinon procured for me, I have now lost. You see we unfortunate ecclesiastics have received no business training, and the prejudices against men in our case are implacable. The tonsure is a second convict's brand."

His listener smiled bitterly. "I am not sure that the latter is regarded with as much disfavour," he put in drily. "We are, however, allowed to live without police supervision."

"That is certainly something," Jeunet replied, helping himself briskly to the crisp brown buck-wheat fritters.

"You, fortunately, have a soul; I—which is next best—an appetite, above such petty mortifications. A good, healthy, unfastidious appetite, my friend—there is the sovereign remedy for human ills. Ah! my poor Suzanne!"

"I hope Madame Jeunet is not ill?"

"On the contrary, in the best of health, quite aggressively robust, in fact; a trifling ailment, tooth-ache, or nervous attack would prove greatly beneficial. Women never observe the golden mean. The dear creatures are either confirmed invalids, or, what is more trying, Hussars in petticoats. To proceed with my plans. Literature then not paying——"

"A half finished novel is hardly to be called literature."

“Finished or unfinished, novels don’t pay, so all the publishers of Paris tell me. Fiction, they aver, has become—owing to competition—a second Panama Canal, a Tonquin. My various agencies bring me in a few hundred francs from time to time. I also earn a little as supernumerary at hotels and offices. But I feel the want of an anchorage, some calling of a definite nature that would necessitate the putting forth of all my powers. Having cogitated the matter I have come to the conclusion that such a calling lies within reach, under my very nose—how fine the flavour of these potatoes cooked in wood ashes—and my little Suzanne, with all her faults was a capital cook, when she pleased. To resume—it has occurred to me then that the proper sphere of an ex-priest like myself, one who rejects revelation and dogma on scientific grounds, who, in other words, cannot help seeing things through the eyes of Herbert Spencer, the proper sphere of such a man is that of intermediary between the Church and others similarly placed. He ought to constitute himself high priest—I should more modestly say—house porter of the debatable land, lying, like our old French Marches between two provinces, fact and fiction, science and theology. How many younger brethren might thus be helped to an upright existence, how many doubting spirits withdrawn from the priesthood? Hundreds, doubtless thousands, remain where they are simply because they would otherwise starve.”

“That may well be true. Yet I hardly see how

you can come to the general aid. Not counsel only is needed, but money."

"Money," quoth Jeunet, almost derisively. "Is not perfidious Albion the goose that lays the golden egg for all? A famine happens in China, an earthquake at Timbuctoo, a pestilence in Patagonia, an inundation in Siberia. Straightway our Quixotic neighbours hand round the hat, gold pours in as when a state loan is raised here. And what are famine, earthquake, pestilence and inundation, compared to the sufferings of men like ourselves?—men who wake up to find that their lives are composed of falsehood, their so-called duties the inculcation of grovelling superstition. My mind is made up; I shall go to England, turn stump orator, plead the cause of the struggling French priesthood—and return, never doubt it!—as did Richelieu after his financial expedition, followed by trucks of gold."

The other shook his head.

"Charity like religion—especially in England—is wedded to tradition. To one who would help a priest unfrocked for conscience' sake you will find a million ready to feed, clothe and set on his legs the first vagabond going."

"My projects are not confined to mere material support. What I have chiefly in view is to rally men of my own way of thinking round a common centre, to form a brotherhood, a sect, a Church even, if you will, in harmony with science and the spirit of the age. Truth and justice form the basis of all moral government, should they not also become the corner-stone of spiritual dominion? But we won't

argue on these questions. Retain your Protestantism, may it make you very happy! Do not deny that others require something more."

"Or less," remarked Evelard quietly. "I read your thoughts, my friend. I should stand half a head higher in your estimation were I like yourself, unencumbered with what you evidently consider superstitions. Frankly, I fail to realize your scheme. I do not see how a Church is to be founded except upon a religion, good, bad, or indifferent."

"Between religion and religiosity there is a broad gulf," put in Jeunet. "Give me as much of the former as you please; defend me from the latter! Bishops, priests, deacons, of my Church, we should find plenty to do, never fear. You will smile at me in turn, but I have often thought, my occasional services as male nurse suggested the notion, what a boon lay friars would be in our great hospitals for the sick! A poor fellow goes there to die. He no more believes in the fables dinned into his ears by the attendant sister of mercy—ofttimes a sad misnomer!—than he believes in hobgoblins. How would his end be cheered by a passage from the *Phædo*, the closing lines of the *Republic*; or, to come down to our own day, a page or two of Jean Reynaud? Ah! you approve of *him*, I see. And again, to be able to interchange thoughts with a really enlightened, sympathetic mind? Who on his death-bed, would not be thereby soothed a thousand times more than by litanies and ceremonials? But we are getting too grave. See, I help myself to a glass of your liqueur in order to revive my spirits. The experiment is

worth making, anyhow, and I shall in all probability kill two birds with one stone. I am going to see some wine merchants at Bordeaux to-morrow, about selling wine on commission in England. And now that I have no ties—ah! I have not yet told you—my wife has quitted me, for once and for all, so she declares.”

“I am very sorry to hear it.”

“I assure you it is not my fault,” poor Jeunet said very humbly. “I did my utmost so make Suzanne happy; in other words, supply her needs. Marriage to her, as to many another, meant only a purse to go to. She did not marry me, but board, lodging, washing and good clothes! It seems that an uncle of hers, who is in Algeria and well to do there, having lost his wife, wants her to keep house for him; wants, in fact, two women whom he can trust, to mind his dairy, kitchen garden and Kabyle servants. He offered me a home as well—on condition of course that I helped on the farm, an offer I respectfully declined. Suzanne, my mother-in-law and baby are already on their way.”

“I am very sorry that you have been compelled to part with your child.”

Jeunet swallowed a tumblerful of water pinkish with wine, coughed, feigned a sneeze and replied,—

“The poor little creature was a perpetual bone of contention. I wanted to rear her according to modern notions, Suzanne clung pertinaciously to day caps, late dinners and other abominations. But I have no doubt that my poor wife will learn wisdom. I quite

expect the little party back before another year is out, and if my affairs were more flourishing, if I could give her all the money she wanted, we should live like the reconciled couples in English novels."

Both men finished their meal in silence. That mention of the child had saddened Jeunet in spite of himself. His little daughter's image called up most uncomfortable visions of disturbed nights and noisy days, of perpetual squabbles with his wife and mother-in-law. She was not winsome, as some babies are. Her propensity to scream was abnormal. Yet, as is often the case with very young children, she had ever showed a marked preference for her father. When no one else could soothe her, Jeunet had but to hold out his strong arms, recite in his incomparably droll way the French version of Humpty-Dumpty, and straightway the sobbing would cease and smiles irradiate the tear-wet, distorted little face. Such memories pained him inexpressibly. He thought, too, of the training à la Spencer so dear to his heart, now sure to be abandoned, and the unwholesome régime substituted in its place, of her gradual forgetfulness of himself, yet he felt that even this was easier to bear than the struggles and dissensions of the last year or two.

And as was only natural, he now lay even his domestic unhappiness at the door of the priesthood. Other men marry the wives of their choice and are happy. In the case of other men, narrow circumstances and uncertain earnings would have been regarded quite differently. Suzanne could not forgive herself for having married an ex-priest. There-

in, he felt sure, lay the real source of discord and motive of her conduct.

Evelard's reflections were only a shade less bitter. To have caused Georgette pain seemed in his eyes little short of a crime. Her proud initiative humiliated him to the dust. He could not tell a lie and say, "I love Bertrande no longer."

The realization of his altered circumstances brought no bright looking forward. He was free. The love of his youth lived, her heart belonged to him as of old, nearer to each other they could hardly be. Yet how wide apart! These gloomy retrospections were suddenly interrupted.

"Who is your visitor?" asked Jeunet, as a lady wearing widow's weeds walked up the garden path.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MOTHERHOOD AND MILLINERY.

THERE is a halo of poetry about French mourning which our own is wholly without. Unrelieved by a touch of white, widow's weeds in France may yet prove becoming, nay, coquettish. The semi-transparent gauze veil flowing from head to foot lends an air of Sibylline mystery to the least ideal face and figure.

English widows wear a cheerful, often jaunty look; their French sisters in misfortune, never. With eyes downcast and features composed to a decent gravity, slowly and pensively they move under their long veils, the personification of cruellest bereavement. Vulgarity, at least for the time being, is eliminated. The English widow often repels sympathy; the French one invariably calls it forth. Is the cause to be sought in millinery, artificial bring-up, the *code civile* which places the French relict at the mercy of her husband's relations, or in a more sentimental, morbid temperament? Or must we suppose that the superlative qualities of French partners, as of so many other earthly blessings, are not discovered till too late? Be this as it may, such are the facts. French widowhood symbolizes the

sable cloud without the silver lining. Beholders are moved to compassion as they gaze.

On entering his salon, Evelard immediately recognized his visitor. The sedate little personage, now able to meet his gaze unabashed, was no other than his fellow passenger to the lighthouse during the storm of a few weeks before. So altered, rather so apparently altered was she to-day, as to look precisely what she affected to be, the neatest, demurest, most circumspect middle-class widow imaginable. Compromising antecedents were kept out of sight. Looks, deportment, attire were in accordance with the most rigid propriety.

"Pastor," she began, bringing out a little black-bordered handkerchief for the tears to come, "I have made this journey in order to supplicate your intercession. You see before you, no longer the adventuress of a few weeks ago, but a respectable, well-conducted woman, the fittest person, surely, to be entrusted with the care of her own child?"

"It is not to me but to your child's guardians you should address yourself," Evelard replied. "I am wholly powerless in the matter. Pray understand me," he added hastily. "If I could help you, not to the indulgence of a sudden caprice, not at the expense of an innocent child's best interests, the service should be rendered gladly; but the difficulties are great."

"The greatest is already removed," she put in eagerly. "I am tired of an uncertain position, and of damaging relationships. I wish to begin life afresh."

“Alas! an excellent resolve does not straightway fit us for grave responsibilities.”

“From whom should I look for encouragement if not from a minister of religion? Is it Christian, is it human, to cast a poor woman adrift, because she has once succumbed to temptation?”

“I was thinking of your child, not of yourself,” Evelard replied. “Here is my hand. I am ready to take you at your word. I blot the past from my mind; but the guardians appointed by your late husband will require more substantial guarantees than mere expressions of amendment. Have you any to give?”

“I will live here under your eye, anywhere they choose, provided I can have the child. I don’t know how it is, Mr. Pastor, but it is this,”—here she pointed to her wedding ring—“that seems to have changed everything. We had a quarrel about it, when I got back to Paris, my—my friend and I. He quizzed, tormented, finally insulted me, and I quitted him in a pet. My mind is made up. I shall start a little business somewhere, and live honestly till the end of my days. What I want is my child. The wedding-ring has made me feel differently about her.”

Evelard eyed the speaker narrowly. There was not a trace of sentiment in her face, not a change of colour, not a tremor in the voice, yet he could hardly doubt her sincerity. And, he reasoned with himself, how little oftentimes, may maternal affection have to do with sentiment? How far removed from tenderness may be even conscientious motherhood! This woman evidently felt the natural interest of a parent

in her own child, but it was interest of a very practical kind. She regarded herself as the fittest person to be entrusted with her care, dress, and bringing up.

“You see, Mr. Pastor,” she went on, “my daughter will have a dowry. If her interests are properly looked after, she may marry well. Who will do this unless it be myself? And I am growing old.”—The speaker was just thirty-five.—“There comes a time when women become vain for their children instead of for themselves. I begin already to imagine what my Jane Mary will look like dressed for her first communion—for she has been reared a Catholic. The thing came about naturally. My husband’s relations, with whom he placed her, were Catholics, and well to do. He use to say that when she grew up she could choose for herself; the important thing was that she should have a good education, be a young lady, in fact; and her god-parents would not have had her on other terms. Besides, they have no children, they will make Jane Mary their heir——”

“I am very sorry,” Evelard said kindly. “I fear the realization of your wishes is impossible. Is it likely that these people will give up their child by adoption?”

“She is twelve years old; in six years more she will become her own mistress,” was the eager reply. “If I can only see her from time to time she will love me I am sure. Can a child help feeling natural towards its own mother? The thing is against flesh and blood.”

“Where is the little girl?” asked Evelard.

“Do you not know it?” she asked with a look of

surprise. "At St. Gilles, within a stone's throw of this very house, at the château! It seems that the lady there made the acquaintance of Jane Mary's god-parents in Paris, and invited the child here. And the chit, I hear, acted in a little play one night so beautifully that a prodigy at the Eden theatre could not have outdone her. When I heard of her little blue satin shoes, silk stockings, white-hooped frock and gipsy hat, à la Marie Antoinette, all new, ordered especially for her, regardless of expense, I cried as if my poor heart would break." And the little black-bordered handkerchief was really called into requisition. Between each sentence came a genuine, unmistakable sob.

"Look you, Mr. Pastor," she murmured, "these are things past a woman's bearing. For a mother to hear of her own child, a minx of twelve, turning everybody's head, and she not there to see! The laws of the land ought not to allow such horrors. They told me—Madame Delinon's maid knows some friends of mine—that when Jane Mary faced the audience, planting her shepherdess's crook on the ground, beginning her little song with the knowingest, pertest air in the world, the company laughed till the tears ran down. And this is nothing to a first communion. Is there such another sight in the wide world as a procession of little girls, innocent as the angels in heaven—looking so, at least—all in white, and everything new down to their very chemises—excuse me, Mr. Pastor, but you Protestant clergy are husbands and fathers, like other men—myrtle wreaths and long veils, making them look like

fairy brides? Yes, I know it, I feel sure of it! If Jane Mary is confirmed without my knowledge, I shall be driven to suicide."

"Hush, hush! you forget yourself. Shall a mortification, trivial at best, drive you into the committal of a crime? For, think a moment, what is the ceremonial you speak of compared to your child's welfare, moral and spiritual? These are surely worthy of a sacrifice on your part. Under the circumstances, the charge was necessarily placed in other hands. The plan you propose, if effected, might add to your own happiness; would it be advantageous to the one whose interests you are bound to consider before your own?"

She sobbed in sulky silence.

"Understand me, I am quite willing, after having duly considered the matter, to confer with your child's guardians. I cannot however believe that your wishes will be readily acceded to. You may comfort yourself with the reflection that when your daughter is grown up there will be no barriers between you."

"You forget the husband! They will marry her as soon as she is old enough. But at least you will not let me have made this journey in vain, I may see the child?"

"Under certain conditions, yes. I feel it right to insist that the interview takes place in Madame Delinon's presence."

The little black-bordered handkerchief was pocketed with temper; the veil adjusted; gloves, reticule, umbrella hastily gathered up.

“Never! never!” was the snappish reply. “You are not a woman, Mr. Pastor, or you would not so much as propose such a thing. I have heard nothing but good of that lady, her hand is ever in her pocket. I know how such women can treat me when they get a chance.”

Evelard hesitated. Ought he to send her away thus? Might not the coveted interview prove a turning-point in this poor life, the sight of the child work real influence for good? The little girl, then, was close at hand, under Georgette’s roof! What easier than to arrange a meeting? Begging his visitor to wait, he went into the next room. A whispered conference took place, then the gate clicked, and fast as his legs could carry him, Jeunet was making for the château. A quarter of an hour later the gate clicked a second time, and mother and child stood face to face. Emotion from Jane Mary was, of course, wholly out of the question. She allowed herself to be caressed with a proper show of demonstration, clung to her mother’s arm, repeating the words, “Mamma, my beloved mamma,” and affected the liveliest interest in every syllable that dropped from her lips.

All this time, whilst the mother was scrutinizing the little stranger from head to foot, trying to find out, not only what she was like, but what she was, Jane Mary’s eyes were magnetized towards one point, in the direction of the elegant reticule lying by the other’s chair. Again and again she glanced elsewhere as if anxious not to betray her curiosity, again and again her gaze was fascinated by the velvet bag.

It could not hold much, but the smaller the gift oftentimes the greater its value. She was evidently burning with impatience to see the bag opened.

“Ah, what am I thinking of!” cried the enraptured mother suddenly—the bird was snared at last—“Jane Mary has not yet received her present, her own mother’s little present for her first communion!” She glanced deprecatingly at Evelard. “Only a little silver cross and chain, Mr. Pastor, that I bought on the boulevard, yesterday—I may surely give her these?”

Before he could reply she had slipped the chain round the child’s neck.

“Oh! mamma, my own, darling little mamma,” said the little girl, throwing her arms round her mother’s neck and kissing her with effusion, “how I love you, my sweet mamma.”

Again Evelard found his visitor’s gaze fixed upon him, this time as much as to say,

“Are you not convinced at last. Can further proof be wanting that my child’s heart is mine?”

“I must leave you now,” she said. “Mind and be a good girl. Never believe that I—that I don’t love you. When you are grown up, we shall be always together.”

“Have you a big house like Madame Delinon’s, and do you give fine entertainments? I should like that,” said Jane Mary, eyeing her mother’s gold watch chain and little enamelled watch,—they seemed of good augury in her eyes.

“But you would prefer to be with me, your own mother, anyhow, would you not?”

Jane Mary's answer was of the wariest.

"Little girls like to be with their mammas, of course, and they like big houses and fine entertainments too. When may I see your house, mamma darling?"

"I will write; we will arrange," was the somewhat disconcerted reply, whilst tears of mortification dimmed the black gauze veil. Evelard followed his visitor to the front door, saying, as he took kindly leave,

"Do not allow yourself to be cast down. Affection, remember, must grow. Were it a purchasable commodity who would care to buy? Meantime, I will serve you as best I can."

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Pastor. You mean well, I am sure," she murmured, as she took leave, never once looking back. Had she done so she would have seen her little daughter holding up the trinket to Jeunet's inspection, whispering eagerly,

"Are they real silver? Are you quite, quite sure?"

Dispiriting as was the interview, it yet strengthened Evelard's desire to remain at St. Gilles. In this outwardly idyllic spot the sordid, selfish world held sway as in capitals. Where, if not here, might a disinterested religious spirit expect its proper sphere? The sum total of good effected by his ministrations might be small. What would become of human society without the almost imperceptible influences of men and women like himself, obscure workers in the cause of truth and single-mindedness?

A few weeks later the château was close-shuttered and silent, Georgette and her charges had returned to Paris, Jeunet was in England, Bertrande in Alsace. The pastor's solitude was complete.

Did Evelard tremblingly glance towards a happy future, cheer himself with the vision of wife and children? He hardly knew. Georgette wrote cheerfully, even gaily. Rumours reached him of her betrothal to a distinguished foreign diplomate. In the forgetfulness of one noble woman, the memory of another, lay his own chances of happiness.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONCLUSION.

ANOTHER autumn has come round. The brilliant day is merging into still more brilliant night as a little vessel quits the port of Bordeaux. It was one of those small steam tugs that ply between city and river-side villages, densely packed from morning till night, performing the journey with amazing rapidity. The departure of this one was effected quietly; but for the presence of a solitary gendarme, strangers might have suspected illegal traffic, dealings of smuggler or contrabandist. Statue-like stood the spectator, his cloak wrapped around him, for the air was fresh, his hat drawn over his brows. Whatever his business there it was of no joyful nature.

The spot was the least frequented of that bustling line of quays. Immediately above towered the bulwarks of a huge merchantman, casting dense shadow, hiding ships, sea front and city church towers. On the other side, flowed the hushed twilit river. All was very peaceful.

By and by a little procession was seen advancing towards the steamer. The solitary gendarme crossed himself and bared his head. Then, without indecorous haste, yet without losing an instant of

time, six bearers deposited their sad burden on deck, the black pall with its white cross and deep white border was carefully adjusted, deferential way was made for the solitary mourner, the little crew dispersed, each man to his post, and the vessel sped rapidly towards the river's mouth.

The evening was one of rare beauty, and the prospect fair as any the world can show; mile after mile of stately quays crowded with shipping, flags of all nations streaming from the mast, proudly dominating city and harbour, the glorious Minster towers and neighbouring campanile of St. Michel. Mere silhouette is every feature of the scene in the twilight, delicate amber pencillings against a soft golden sky.

Wharf after wharf is passed, the tiny vessel gliding close under many a noble prow; now of steamer carrying a thousand passengers between Bordeaux and the Brazils, now a timber-bearing brig from Norway, or merchantman from Liverpool.

The broad bosom of the river has room for all. As the picturesque suburb of Lormont is reached, the current becomes swifter, the steamer seems borne on against the steersman's will.

The after-glow soon faded, yielding to effects equally beautiful. The full moon, matchless moon of the Gironde, no pale, silvery splendour, but a ball of fire, rose gloriously. Mast, keel and figure-head of each craft passed by stood out in dark relief against the clear heavens, the waters shone steelly bright, the riverside villages with their

spires made jet black outlines upon a soft blue background.

Evelard, notwithstanding his heart-breaking errand, could hardly be unmindful of the beauty around him. The intense calm and silence exercised a soothing effect upon his overwrought nerves. A few hours before despondency had taken possession of him. His soul had rebelled against the desolation henceforth his portion. He was bearing his young wife to her last resting-place, himself left with one brief year of happiness to set against decades of sorrow. Yet, he asked himself now, could he reasonably have expected more? Could any delicately-reared girl, especially one endowed with Bertrande's sensitiveness, long survive the horrible ordeal she had gone through—cold and hunger, maceration of the body, tortures of the spirit, what were these but stepping-stones to the grave, or worse still, the madhouse?

That brief, bright spell of returning health and joyousness was delusive, no rainbow lovelier or more evanescent. Thankful indeed must he feel that in her case the physical rather than the mental powers had given way. Unclouded to the last her intellect; free from morbidness her clinging affection—for a little lifetime the joy of years crowded into one: she was his, his very own; no more perfect union could exist between two human beings. And now that all had become as a dream, she seemed his still. Her grave would be made in a little burial-ground adjoining the parsonage. They should still, for a time, be very near together.

Tears rolled down his cheeks as he reviewed the events of the last twelve months, the quiet bridal, the little trip to Biarritz, the return home. Even the sight of the deserted convent could not damp Bertrande's spirits. The Carmelite sisters had abandoned the place. After such a scandal, it was of course out of the question for the members of so rigid an order to remain. The buildings were sold to the Municipal Council of La Rochelle, to be used as an orphanage for the children of disabled seamen. There had been comedy as well as pathos in these beginnings of domestic life. The widower smiled amid his tears as he recalled one incident out of many. Bertrande, having apprenticed herself to the old Huguenot housewife, soon boasted that she in turn could cook the family dinner. The old servant took a day's holiday. Her young mistress in cotton dress and bib apron, busy as a bee, gay as a lark, manipulated saucepans and gridirons. All began under the happiest auspices. But, alas! as the breakfast-hour drew near, an ominous silence supplanted the cheerful bustle of the kitchen: he found her weeping over a series of misfortunes. The fire would not burn: one attempt after another had proved a failure. What was to be done?

A Frenchman cooks by instinct; quick as lightning he had turned up his sleeves, donned an apron, plied the bellows, cooked an omelette to perfection, broiled a steak. The pair sat down to the gayest meal, her own fiasco affording matter for merriment only.

Her very helplessness and utter dependence on

him but rendered her the dearer. In some matters she could be an efficient help. It was delightful to her to teach in the Sunday-school, train the children's voices, read the Scriptures to the sick and aged. In the fundamental doctrines of Protestantism he never attempted to initiate her. Theological disquisition was avoided by mutual consent. Religion should make us just and happy, he used to say; and it was this kind of religion only, that she imbibed from his lips. He had endeavoured to wean her, at least for a time, wholly from habits of devotion, bending her mind to wholesome joys and duties, concentrating her energies on the actual. On the whole, the effort had proved successful. The fits of morbid self-questioning and introspection became rarer and rarer. As her bodily powers diminished, her quick, bright intellect re-asserted itself. Not until the shadow of final separation had darkened their almost too happy life, did he realize the depth, individuality, and sweetness of a character, open to him as a book. Her image was before him now. He seemed to see the fair sensitive face and slight figure in its neat dress, as she moved about the house, who ever and anon coming to him for a word of advice or approbation, ever on the threshold to bid him adieu, or joyfully welcome his return. Ah, what days were those! Yet, as he recalled them, he wondered that his eyes had been opened to the truth so late! It was not *Bertrande's* self, only her apparition that had emerged from the cloister. The sparkling, rosy, adoring girl, veritable impersonation of health, love and joy, was buried long

ago within the convent walls. There had come forth in her place a mere semblance, an imitation of flesh and blood, a cold, grey shadow, for a brief interval to wear the hues of life. He recognized the fact now. Death had set its seal on that pure candid brow before it was impressed with a bridegroom's kiss. Even calm happiness and unbroken peace were too much for her tired spirit and worn out frame.

Bertrande rested now, and neither grief nor joy could touch him now. He would seek solace in work. This pastorate for a time suited him well. Without neglecting a single duty he should have time to think, study, write. He by no means shared his self-confidence or ambition. He never expected any work of his to awaken widespread curiosity. Fame was far from his thoughts. But he did hope to obtain the ear of a few. And who could tell? Was not Columbus led to the discovery of the New World by the suggestion of Averroés? Might not even his pen lead others to the truth? Ought he to keep silent, feeling that he had something to give the world?

Was not this Protestantism a stepping-stone to loftier, more magnanimous creeds, a moral and intellectual enfranchisement, to be followed by another far more radical? He could not give up Christianity. A creedless life seemed impossible to him at present. He began to realize that the creed he had chosen was a restriction.

As a storm-tossed mariner finds safety only in lightening his ship, so must he now throw aside

another and yet another dogma ere he could hope to reach the spiritual haven for which he yearned. At present, superhuman effort was impossible to him. All his energies and powers of self-endurance were for the time exhausted in that final wrench from Rome!

He fled for relief to other thoughts and memories. Herecalled Georgette, Jeunet, Bourgeois. He should not be wholly alone. Friendship, affection, intercourse with kindred souls would be his as in former days. These tried friends knew not only his own story, but Bertrande's also. To these he could freely open himself, lighten the burden of sorrow by closest confidence.

Thus he endeavoured to take hope and comfort whilst the little chalupe glided onwards, the only moving thing in that vast, luminous scene. The brilliance of day was there without its warmth and colour. Only one cresset of fiery reddish gold gleamed above the cold metallic waters.

It was Cordouan, the mighty Cordouan; and as Evelard recognised the lighthouse he felt strengthened and uplifted. He seemed to see no mere beacon, warning sailors off rocks and shoals,—rather an Emblem of Truth itself; pillar of light: eternal, immutable, shining between earth and heaven!

THE END.

THE ROMANCE OF A FRENCH
PARSONAGE

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

“THE PARTING OF THE WAYS,” “FOR ONE AND THE WORLD,” ETC.

NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

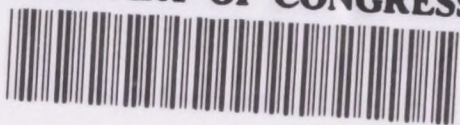
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