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THE TWO PRIMA DONNAS

BY G. A. SALA

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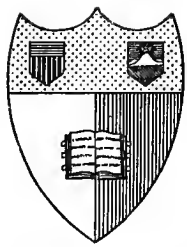

THE

TWO PRIMA DONNAS.

BY

GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA,

AUTHOR OF "DUTCH PICTURES," "THE SEVEN SONS OF MAMMON," "TWICE ROUND THE CLOCK," ETC., ETC.

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PREFACE.

THIS little book scarcely requires two words of preface; but in accordance with the fashion of the age it must be ushered into the world with a few lines explanatory, deprecatory, or self-laudatory, as the case may be. As to explanation. It may possibly occur to some readers that as the scene of the "Two Prima Donnas" is laid in France, as the manners and customs of a little Norman village are somewhat minutely described, and as the local colour is asserted from time to time, and in places where English locutions would not serve by French ones, that the story is a translation from the French, or at best a "colourable adaptation." It is nothing whatever of the kind. For the conception of two little incidents I am certainly indebted to fact rather than invention. The restoration of the church at Cidre-Fontaines by an English nobleman was suggested by the generous gift, on the part of the ducal family of Bedford, of a peal of bells to a French village church—the *curé* thereof having been ingenious enough to discover some monuments of departed "Roussels" (whence "Russell," of course) in the chancel. I believe that a person of my own name is mentioned in scriptural genealogy as one of the Dukes of Edom; and if it can be proved that he was an ancestor of mine, I shall be happy to contribute towards the restoration of any existing Edomite church or chapel.

In respect to the fantastic and apparently unreal character

of the Countess Malinska, and her sobriquet, I am indebted to a paragraph cut from a French provincial newspaper twenty years ago, and in which it was stated that such a *Fée aux belles mains*, a Fairy with the Fair Hands, had been living at some out-of-the-way château, doing good in a haughty, capricious manner, and baffling all inquiries as to her identity. The rest of the story is entirely original.

I know perfectly well that a strict adherence to the rules of Italian orthography would convert "Prima Donnas" into "*Prime Donne.*" However, as we more frequently write "*gendarmes*" than "*gens d' arme,*" and "*Cicerones*" than "*Ciceroni,*" and "*aide camps*" than "*aides de camp,*" I have thought it permissible to give an English and not an Italian plural to "Prima Donna." Some people may be more punctilious; but I aver that, being lately at the Scala at Milan, I heard far more of the audience contenting themselves with a simple "*Bravo!*" or "*Brava!*" when a male or female artist was singing, than pedantically insisting on "*Bravi!*" and "*Brave!*" when a concerted piece was performed.

GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

THE

TWO PRIMA DONNAS.

CHAPTER I.

THE MARQUIS OF MIRABEL'S BOUNTY.

PRAY bear this in mind: that I don't for one moment guarantee the truth of this story. I believe in it myself, word for word, and every word of it; but there are some people so incredulous that they refuse to put faith even in a gentleman floating in the air across a drawing-room window, and who with his ethereal toe may salute them on the cheek. To such I say, Don't believe the story; it isn't meant for *you*. I write for those who have faith in wonderful things.

Not necessarily supernatural ones. I may also remark with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, that I have, in my own person, seen too many ghosts to place any reliance in spiritual apparitions. The wonderful things I mean are those which are done round about us every day, and which we in our common-place imaginations decline to give credence to, because, forsooth, they lack probability. Now and again comes a little police case, or a trial at law, or a coroner's inquest, to confute the sceptics, and prove at once, for the five hundred thousandth time, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. It has been remarked by a sage, whose sayings I am proud to rescue from oblivion, that pigs *might* fly, only they are exceedingly unlikely birds to do so. In a like spirit I confess that the human beings of whom I am about to discourse were, perhaps, the most unlikely persons in the world to act in

the manner I shall ascribe to them; but they *might* have so acted, and their actions were possible without being probable. The success of Garibaldi in Sicily was barely possible, but was it at all probable? The defence set up by the wretch Youngman was just within the bounds of possibility, but, judged by the laws of probability, it was absurd and untenable. So no more of *that* part of the subject. If you require any documentary evidence to bear out the events which will be narrated in seven brief chapters, you are welcome to such as I possess; but I should advise you not to look the gift horse in the mouth, and if this story should happen, as I honestly trust it will, to please you, to join in the spirit of the old Italian saw, and admit *Si non è vero, è ben trovato.*

Turn to your old almanacs. Carry out the *couleur locale* by ordering your hairdresser to dye your grey tresses brown; imagine Queen

Victoria to be in the third year of her reign, and, comely matron as she is now, scarcely then a mother. Throw a dart at Time for once, and make him recede to eighteen hundred and forty.

Somewhere in the province of Normandy—it may be that it was in the department of the Seine et Oise or of the Seine et Marne; at all events, the department was governed by the prefect of the Seine et Something: but for reasons personal, I intend to be exceedingly vague as to all matters topographical, both on this and on the other side of the Alps—somewhere in Normandy—not, certainly, a hundred miles from Rouen, and not fifty from Caen—there existed, twenty-one years since, a village called Cidre-Fontaines. It was not in the least like an English village, albeit it had held for ages some distant connection with perfidious Albion; but it was, nevertheless, one of the prettiest and most sequestered little

hamlets that human eyes ever beheld. Cidre-Fontaines was on the Seine—at least, it was situated on one of the little silver streamlets or back waters of that famous river—and entertained two brawling little water-wheels, for all the world like those you see at the Opera Comique, whereof one moved a silk-throwing and the other a paper mill. The introduction of the factory element, however, brought neither smoke, profligacy, intemperance, discontent, nor strikes for wages to Cidre-Fontaines. The machinery of the mills was very primitive. The hours of work were few. Rouen, and not Paris, was the metropolis of the villagers. No great capitalists, native or foreign, had come down hither to amass gigantic fortunes for themselves by grinding the faces of the poor; and Colin, the silk throwster, and Jacqueline, the rag-sorter, lived happily and cheerfully enough on very small wages. MM. Dubois and Riflard,

proprietors of the respective mills, were glad enough to realize a decent competence; paid the fines of their workpeople when the game-keeper summoned them before the mayor for poaching; and otherwise conducted themselves in a pleasant, hospitable, and neighbourly manner. There was no lord of the manor resident. The whilom seigneur of the village had, for reasons hereafter to be mentioned, long since left the neighbourhood; and the old Château de Luz, the abode for ages of the Counts of that ilk, was occupied by—but I am premature.

I have said that Cidre-Fontaines could boast of some remote connection with this country; not, it must be admitted, in external appearance. It had no stocks, cage, pound, or whipping-post, like an old English village; no post-office, national school, or "agricultural labourer's institute," like a modern English one. In that which follows existed the bond of

union between the humble Normandy hamlets and Britain the superb. It had a church, a delightful Gothic church, rich in sculpture and tracery, and rose windows, and carved mullions, and flying buttresses, which dated from the days of Charles VII., when, according to the ecclesiastical legends of the place, it had been erected on the ruins of an edifice built in the early Norman style, destroyed by the ruthless English in their retreat after being vanquished by Joan of Arc. However this may be, the church of Cidre-Fontaines, although small in size—a very toy cathedral—was an exquisite example of ornamented Gothic; and, curiously enough, the tombs in its chancel were evidently of far earlie date than Charles VII.'s masons could have wotted of. For they were after the manner of our own Norman king's tomb at Fontevrault, and of the grim monument to St. Barbon, bishop of Etampes, A.D. 1150, which

frowns behind the altar of the church there.

The tombs in the chancel of St. Luc-des-Fontaines were those, indeed, of a famous knightly Norman family, whose earliest scions had done battle for that Duke Robert, called in the title to M. Meyerbeer's opera by a very ugly name. These were an older, a much older, family than the De Luz, who had not come to Cidre-Fontaines before the time of Louis XI.; and their cognomen in the old Norman time was Craintrien—Fear Nothing. Hugo de Craintrien, whose father had fought so doughtily for Robert le Diable, came to England with that Duke William whom we Saxons, with a rueful kind of pride, must admit to have been indeed the Conqueror. After the battle of Hastings, Hugo de Craintrien got a comfortable paragraph or two for himself from the pages of the Domesday Book, and became rich in English lands and beeves.

His successors, however, preserved their connection with their native province until late in the reign of Edward III., when they finally settled in England. The last Craintrien, who was buried in the little old church of St. Luc, was slain at the battle of Poictiers; and his recumbent effigy, his visor up, his surcoat on, his shield and sword by his side, his knightly belt round his loins, his knightly spurs on his heels, and his mailed palms reverently joined, with many a brave armorial bearing sculptured on the sarcophagus beneath, was added to the stately line of tombs and monumental brasses to departed Craintriens who had fallen in war with the French kings, or in the crusades against Paynim dogs in the Holy Land. At the final expulsion of the English from France, the church of St. Luc was, as I have stated, almost wholly demolished by the exasperated soldiers of the vanquished party, and rebuilt in a more florid style.

At the Great Revolution it is almost needless to say that the pretty little church at Cidre-Fontaines was, like almost every other ecclesiastical edifice in France, shamefully maltreated. A Jacobin club was held in the church, and the committee smoked pipes in the chancel. The rich church plate went to the mint. The bells were pulled down, and the monumental brasses wrenched up, and sent to the national melting-pot, to be converted into cannon and halfpence. All the stained glass windows were smashed. The confessional became a manger for the republican commissary's horse; but still the tombs of the old knights of Craintrien, although sadly hacked and hewed about, remained. Napoleon, as you know, restored all things clerical to due and proper order. He shut up the Pope, it is true, but he opened the churches and allowed the priests to say mass and hear confession; and so long as they did

not meddle with politics and duly intoned the *Salvum fac Imperatorem Napoleonem* at matins and vespers, his Imperial Majesty did not interfere with the clergy to any appreciable degree. Under the Restoration the pretty little church flourished exceedingly, and the last Countess de Luz, who lived at the château, gave a handsomely chased ciborium and an embroidered alb for the use of the *fabrique.*

In 1830, it occurred to sundry red-hot patriots from Caen to mark their hatred of superstition, and their admiration of the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, by stealing the ciborium, stripping half the lead from the roof of the church, and smashing the few coloured panes that remained of the once magnificently emblazoned rose window, which during the next nine years remained in a woeful condition, the fractures being mended with common glass, oiled paper, and even

rags stuffed into the apertures, and protected with rude wirework. At the commencement of 1840, the good and zealous curé of the parish, l'Abbé Guillemot as he was ordinarily called, although I doubt if he could claim more than a right of courtesy to the abbatial title, felt that this unseemly state of things could no longer with decency endure. In vain he memorialized the minister of public worship. In vain he put all the female devotees in the neighbourhood under contribution. These good ladies were willing enough to hem pocket handkerchiefs for l'Abbé Guillemot, to keep him in snuff and preserved apricots, and even at Easter or the new year to subscribe for the purpose of presenting him with a new cassock and shovel hat; but they were not rich enough to fill the windows of St. Luc-des-Fontaines with stained glass, to replace the torn-up marble pavement, or to keep the roof watertight.

Suddenly l'Abbé Guillemot bethought him of those battered tombs of the Chevaliers de Crantrien, which even time and the Jacobins of '92 had been unable wholly to destroy. He happened one day to be at Caen, where he had just made an unsuccessful appeal to the rich Madame de Montfichet for funds wherewith to restore his beloved little church. Madame de Montfichet received him with great kindness, entertained him with a succulent lunch—it was a flesh day—of *Bayonne ham*, sponge cake, and cider, but expressed her regret that the last ten thousand francs of which she had to dispose that year were promised to the dean and chapter of Caen for the renovation of the great east portal of the cathedral. "And the dean and chapter are as rich as Rothschild," murmured the Abbé Guillemot. They were not very wealthy, it is true; but they had a great deal more money than he, poor man, and that was quite enough.

The disappointed incumbent of St. Luc-des-Fontaines was returning sorrowfully enough to the inn whence the diligence started for his parish, when the sight of a little picture book about Robert, Duke of Normandy—I think he was called by his uglier title—in a toy-shop window, put him in mind of the English belongings of the knights of Craintrien. As an orthodox churchman, l'Abbé Guillemot was bound to repudiate the alleged dealings of the wicked Robert with the Principle of Evil; yet, as a true-born son of La Normandie—the pretty, honest, cheerful province, if its natives would not be quite so fond of litigation!—he had a furtive liking for, and a sneaking belief in, the legend of the Demon Duke and the spectral nuns. He looked long at the picture-book—a glaring little collection of coarse cartoons it was—and began to ponder whether any of the descendants of that Craintrien who bore shield

and sword for Duke Robert remained in England. "I will go ask the Britannic vice-consul," he said.

L'Abbé Guillemot was lucky enough to have a slight acquaintance with the functionary to whom was confided the interests of England's majesty at Caen. The vice-consul, on his side, happened to be a gentleman of education and refinement, who solaced his somewhat dreary leisure in a little French provincial town by reading up matters connected with heraldry, genealogy, and the like. He was delighted to give the kindly curé of Cidre-Fontaines all the information in his power. Craintrien family of Normandy—certainly, he knew all about them. Here they were in Lodge, in Burke, in Debrett, in Sir Harris Nicholas. Hugo de Craintrien made feoffee of the manor of Mirabel, Notts, for his services to the Conqueror at Hastings. Boulger de Cranjan—the name had begun slightly to

alter—was one of the barons who would have signed Magna Charta had he not been laid up with quartan ague in a forester's hut at Slough. Lord Cranyon, of Mirabel, beheaded by Henry VIII., title extinct by attainder. His daughter Margaret—known as "Termagaunte Pegge"—married Sir William Sillikins, of Salop, who was permitted by Queen Elizabeth to assume the name and arms of Crayon, but could not extort the concession of the dormant peerage from the tough old Eliza. Sir Bilberry Crayon killed at Edgehill on the king's side. At the restoration of Charles II. the attainder reversed, and Sir Bilberry's son Huckleberry called to the House of Lords as Viscount Canyon Mirabel. The next lord managed to rat just in time from King James to King William at the Revolution. Present holder of the title and estates, Hugh Huckleberry de Crantrien—ancestral Norman name restored by licence

from his late Majesty, George IV. Marquis of Mirabel, Earl of Cranyon, Baron Cranyon of Mirabel, Lord Lieutenant of Bumpshire, K.C.B., D.C.L., Colonel of the Bumpshire yeomanry cavalry—"and a most amiable, estimable nobleman, of a princely fortune," added the British vice-consul at Caen.

"That will do for me," whispered l'Abbé Guillemot to himself.

He went back to Cidre-Fontaines and indited a tremendously long letter, full of the best French and the longest Latin quotations he could muster—it was many years since he had left the seminary at Rouen, and both French and Latin were growing somewhat rusty—to the most noble Seigneur Anglais, the Lord Marquis de Mirabel. I think he called the British nobleman "Sir" Mirabel in his original rough draft, which was corrected by his vice-consul. The abbé exposed the lamentable condition of the noble Gothic monument at

Cidre-Fontaines — he did not say anything about its size—in terms as pathetic as they were eloquent. He introduced compliments to the noble race of Craintrien and their English descendants with an adroitness of which Rochefoucault would have been proud. He called upon the Lord Marquis of Mirabel, by his illustrious name, by the memory of his heroic ancestors, not to allow the cradle of his race to crumble into desolation and decay. He implored him to come to Cidre-Fontaines, or, if his duties near the person and throne of his young and amiable sovereign prevented him from making the journey in person, to send one of his intendants, in order that an English eye-witness (*temoin oculaire*) might judge of the mournful state of the cenotaphs of the first Chevaliers de Craintrien. And, finally, with assurances of the most distinguished consideration, the abbé subscribed himself the most humble, devoted, and, by anticipation, grateful

servitor of the Lord Marquis of Mirabel, Guillaume Guillemot.

This elaborate epistle the curé of St. Luc submitted to the vice-consul at Caen, who, suggesting a few alterations, added to the fair copy of the letter an official document corroborating the truth of the statement made, and vouching for the respectability of the writer. Many weeks elapsed before any reply was received; but at length, just as the abbé was beginning to give up all hopes of seeing his windows mended and his roof repaired, the vice-consul came post haste to Cidre-Fontaines with an autograph letter from Lord Mirabel, written in very bad French, thanking him for the very great interest he had been pleased to manifest in the early relics of the Craintrien family, and informing him that he had given instruction to his agent at Paris to honour any orders signed conjointly by the Abbé Guillemot and her Britannic

Majesty's consul at Caen for funds wherewith to carry on the entire renovation of the church of St. Luc-des-Fontaines, all the arrangements of which were to be confided to those gentlemen. His lordship concluded by saying that the state of his health alone prevented him from coming to superintend the restoration of the church, but that he would take care to send a competent person, well acquainted with mediæval art, to confer with the French architect who undertook the task; and that he hoped before his death to be able to visit the resting-place of so many valiant Craintriens of bygone times.

It need scarcely be said that the Abbé Guillemot nearly went beside himself with exultation at the contents of this letter. The vice-consul was almost alarmed at taking advantage of his lordship's offer of a pecuniary *carte blanche*, and for fear lest the enthusiastic curé should propose to pave the whole of the

church with porphyry, and cover the outside with gold leaf, after the manner of the gingerbread kings and queens at a fair, he made a private suggestion to Lord Mirabel that the whole work should be covered by an expenditure of fifteen thousand francs, or six hundred pounds.

His lordship replied, after a good deal of delay, but in a most munificent, off-handed manner, that he really didn't care, that he hadn't done much good in his life, and thought he might do a little before he died; but that if the vice-consul thought the thing could be done for six hundred pounds, well and good. If they spent the money before the church was finished, they might draw for as much more as they liked. The fact was that his lordship was very old, very indolent, and very good-natured, and that he pleased himself with the thought that some of these days he might cause himself to be conveyed by easy stages to

Cidre-Fontaines, and see the old tombs of his forefathers.

It turned out, subsequently, that our honest abbé's notion of a *carte blanche* was to spend about two thousand five hundred francs in touching up the church; and when the consul told him that he might go as far as fifteen thousand without overstepping the patience of his patron beyond the sea, he went into fresh paroxysms of delight. A skilful architect and a modeller were sent for from Paris; a famous *gentilhomme verrier* at Rouen, fired with emulation at the generosity of the English lord, promised to supply stained glass enough for the large rose window at cost price, and to glaze the remainder in plain white for nothing. So the church was shut up for a time, and given over to the artists and workmen, and the Abbé Guillemot said mass in a temporary chapel in M. Dubois's factory, consecrated, for the nonce, by the lord archbishop of the dio-

cese, who did not much relish the notion of a humble village church being so sumptuously repaired by a heretic nobleman, thinking that he would have done much better in presenting a set of golden censers to Monseigneur's own cathedral.

"They are all the same, these *milors Anglais*," said the lord archbishop to his chief penitent, Madame de Montfichet—"all the same, *bêtes commes les boucles de mes souliers* —stupid as my shoe buckles." But as the Abbé Guillemot had taken the precaution of obtaining the consent of the Minister of Public Worship and of Public Works, and of the Prefect of the department, to his work, Monseigneur, the archbishop, was fain to bite his lips, smile his archiepiscopal smile—the which he always smiled when he meant mischief—and say in public that "*ce Lor Mirabel*," who imagined himself to be descended from the "*vieille souche des gentilhommes Normands*," had done,

for an Englishman, a remarkably handsome thing.

It was in the spring of 1840 that the repairs of the church of St. Luc-des-Fontaines commenced, superintended almost day and night by the indomitable Abbé Guillemot. One fine afternoon, towards the close of a remarkably fine September, as the *diligence* from Caen passed through Cidre-Fontaines, there alighted from the roof-seat thereof, at the door of the inn of the Three Red Pigeons, a remarkably good-looking young fellow, with a sunburnt face, clear blue eyes, and a long, tawny moustache, and dressed in a loose travelling suit of light colour, who, having, as a preliminary measure, ordered for himself and the conductor a foaming measure of cider; disposed himself, and with much alacrity, of a sufficient portion thereof; given the postilion his gratuity; kindled a very large cigar, which he produced from a neat needleworked

case; and, patting on the head a little girl with cheeks exactly resembling two ripe Normandy pippins, who, with her fingers in her mouth, was staring with all her eyes at the good-looking stranger, asked, in tolerable French, the way to the abode of M. le Curé.

He was soon directed, and even furnished with a guide; for the villagers of Cidre-Fontaines, seldom seeing strangers, and foreigners well-nigh never, are kindly and hospitable towards them. They have not, at least they had not in 1840, learnt to swindle and insult travellers. It was before the days of railways. As the new arrival strode vigorously towards the Abbé Guillemot's parsonage, preceded by a diminutive cicerone in the shape of an urchin in sabots and a blouse, the postilion, who was in raptures at the liberality of the fee bestowed upon him, proceeded at once to devote it to its legitimate purpose by drinking the health of the late occupant of the *impériale*, in which

he was joined, nothing loath, by the conductor.

"A brave boy that," said the postilion; "he gave me forty sous."

"A true son of Albion," echoed the conductor, "free with his money as his native ocean is with its foam. To me also he gave a forty-sous piece, and a cannikin of cider into the bargain."

"Ah! he is English, then," interposed the comely matron who officiated as hostess at the inn of the Three Red Pigeons. "How know you that, *compère* Trochu?"

"Did I not see his passport at Caen?" answered the conductor, thus addressed as Trochu, with a look of official dignity. "He came right through by the *diligence* from Paris. He must have bags of gold. Besides," he continued, "is there any mistaking an Englishman, wheresoever you may find him? I would discover your Rosbif were

I to meet him in the middle of the Great Desert."

The worthy conductor had never been nearer Paris than Rouen in his life, and knew about as much of the Great Desert as he did of the Great Mogul; but the phrase he had used gave him importance, and he knew it.

"If you saw his passport you must know his name," the hostess continued, eagerly. "I wonder whether he will come back after he has seen M. le Curé, and order dinner at the Three Red Pigeons. He might sleep here even. My niece Jacqueline would be too happy to give the best white chamber up to him. What an honour it would be! But his name, his name, my good Trochu."

"Faith," replied the conductor, in some confusion, "I can't remember his name. It was one of those crabbed English titles which dislocate your jaw to pronounce. All I know, Madame Bontemps, is, that he is an English-

man, and that so far from his being likely to take up his abode at your hostelry, he will much more probably be entertained at the residence of M. le Curé."

Now, the truth is that both the conductor and the postilion had seen the stranger's passport at Caen, having carefully looked over the shoulder of the gendarme who inspected it, prior to the departure of the stage for Cidre-Fontaines; but as the conductor could only read print, and the traveller's name for so short a distance was not entered in the way-bill, and as the postilion could not read at all, neither probably would have profited much by the inspection of the passport had not the gendarme himself told them that the traveller came from London *viâ* Paris, was an English subject, and a person of the highest importance.

The fresh relay of horses having been duly entangled in their rope harness, after the ex-

penditure of sundry expletives and abusive epithets of those dumb animals, the lumbering old *diligence* went clattering along the narrow, powdery road, bordered on either side by apple trees, leading from Cidre-Fontaines to Yvetot. For my pretty Normandy village was not far from that more famous hamlet erst the seat of royalty of the immortal King of Yvetot, whose throne was a donkey's back, and whose crown was a cotton nightcap.

The *diligence*, however, had not been gone ten minutes before all the *habitués* of the *estaminet* of the Three Red Pigeons had been aware of the fact that M. le Curé was at that moment conferring with a handsome stranger, an Englishman, and a "person of highest consideration." The little urchin in the blouse and sabots, who had acted as guide, came back with the intelligence that the Abbé Guillemot had embraced the stranger with the greatest cordiality; that he had kissed

him on both cheeks, that he had made him drink a bumper of the *vin d'honneur* heretofore reserved exclusively for the visits of Monseigneur l'Archeveque; that he had given him, the boy in the blouse, five sous for conducting the gentleman to the parsonage, and that he and his guest had gone off arm in arm to visit the church. At this wondrous narration the smokers in the *estaminet* at once arrived at the conviction that the handsome traveller must be, if not the Lord Marquis who was paying for the restoration of the church, at least his eldest son and heir, and thus equally entitled to gratitude, if only by proxy, as the benefactor of Cidre-Fontaines.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAIRY WITH THE FAIR HANDS.

THE stranger in travelling costume who had asked his way to the parsonage of Cidre-Fontaines had time to smoke half his cigar through before he arrived at the modest dwelling of the Abbé Guillemot. The entire annual revenue of the incumbent of St. Luc-des-Fontaines did not exceed fifteen hundred francs. His female admirers, as has been before hinted, kept him in snuff, in canonicals, and in preserves—three things very essential to the comfort of a French ecclesiastic. His wardrobe was kept pretty well supplied with body linen, too, by the same pious means; and many a fair devotee found no more pleasant

employment than in cutting out shirts for the reverend person of the good old abbé, and hemming those famous blue cotton pocket-handkerchiefs which our Norman parson, with a touching humility, persisted in using. The best of cambric or lawn would have been gladly placed at his disposal, but he preferred the orthodox blue. White or coloured silk, he said, might be fit for Monseigneur the Archbishop; but he, a humble *curé de village*, would rest content with cotton. And he did. And it was for the best, perhaps; for the Abbé Guillemot had a nose of Slawkenbergian pattern, and snuffed continually.

The parsonage was a tiny white house, or rather hut, standing alone in a garden, and looked very much like a lump of sugar stuck in the midst of a flower-pot. The abbé was a great horticulturist, and his flowers and fruit were famous all through the canton, and well nigh through the department. He had a

little study which opened on to a lawn, and the window of which was half smothered with jasmine, eglantine, and honeysuckle. He did not write his sermons here, for the very good reason that he never wrote sermons at all. His moral discourses were always oral, and conveyed to his parishioners in the *patois* of the province. As for doctrine, when the coming of Lent necessitated an occasional oration from the pulpit, he went thereunto with a copy of Massillon or Bourdaloue, mostly under his arm, and gave the congregation half-a-dozen pages from those eloquent preachers, without any pretence as to his sources of theological information. They were the more edified; he had the less trouble; and good pens, ink, and paper were saved.

The chief use which the abbé made of his study was to sit and sleep in it in a great easy chair covered with chintz, to read the *Gazette de France*—he thought the *Univers* too vio-

lent—to eat sweetmeats, and to impale butterflies—dead butterflies, mind—with corking-pins on to cardboard. For the Abbé Guillemot was an entomologist as well as a horticulturist, and possessed considerable entomological attainments. Then he had a little dining-room, likewise hung with chintz, and with an oak floor, polished almost to a mirror-like brightness. Many a Norman farmer, scraping his foot in a reverence to M. le Curé, and bringing him a kilderkin of cider, or a bushel of pears, as a present, had slipped and fallen on his nose in that polished dining-room. The only inconvenience, beyond the tumbling down of visitors, was, that the perpetual polishing of the floor gave rise to a perpetual and somewhat too powerful smell of beeswax. The malicious said that the only purpose to which the abbé could turn the three hives in his back garden was to extract the wax to make furniture polish for his flooring; and

any boy in the village school could command a half-holiday if he would only come to the parsonage and spend an hour in skating about the abbé's dining-room with scrubbing-brushes strapped on to his feet.

There were three bed-rooms in the house—the best one reserved for visitors, and which had once been occupied by the sacred person of Monseigneur himself, on the occasion when, for certain reasons, he had declined staying at the Château de Luz; next, the abbé's own apartment, which was quite a hermit's cell, and contained little save a camp-bed, an ewer and jug, a *prie-dieu,* a crucifix, and an image of Notre Dame de la Poire; and last, a spare room, which might have been occupied, had she so chosen, by Madame Grugeon, the immensely old and intensely wrinkled housekeeper of the establishment. For the Abbé Guillemot, being past forty years of age—indeed, he was nearer sixty—was, by disci-

plinary usance, entitled to entertain a female domestic beneath his roof. You have heard, perhaps, of priests' nieces? Our abbé, however, was the very pink and pattern of decorum; and Madame Grugeon, albeit as green as a Gorgon, was not permitted to sleep within those virtuous walls. A pillow in a neighbouring cottage was nightly pressed by her good old head and monstrous nightcap. The spare room, too, might have found a tenant in one Jean de Pierre, surnamed Caraboulade, who was gardener, valet, groom, and general factotum to the establishment; but Jean Pierre had a little hovel of his own at the end of the garden, where he slept among his tools and his flower-pots; so the abbé every night was as isolated as St. Simon Stylites.

A cigar must come to an end, be it ever so large a regalia. So must a walk through a Norman village road. So must the descrip-

tion of a clerical bachelor's hall. Suppose we terminate the three simultaneously, fling away the smouldering stump of the seductive weed, put a full stop to the (to me) equally seductive description of a place in which I have spent many happy hours, and, dismissing the little guide with the blouse and sabots (not, however, before he had received that substantial benison from his pastor of which I spoke), bring the traveller up-standing in the little porch of the parsonage.

The afternoon being remarkably fine and warm, the abbé had given his little study a holiday. He had chosen to repose himself on a carved oak bench in the same porch, quite *perdu* in honeysuckles; and, when the feet of the new arrivals began to grate against the gravel of his garden walk, was sunk in meditation.

It was the abbé's custom of an afternoon to meditate, with his capacious chin reposing

on the *rabat* of his *collet*, or ecclesiastical bands; his plump hands folded across the roomy arc formed by the canonical sash which girt his *soutane*, or cassock; and his feet shod in stout calfskins with antique silver buckles, massive though plain, comfortably turned up in the golden sunlight. His cogitations were on this occasion assisted by a pretty little porcelain jug full of cider, beside which, on the bench, stood a thin blown glass with a slender stem, and one of those peculiarly juicy and luscious pears called "*mouille-bouche*," or "moisten mouth." So profoundly was he cogitating — doubtless upon some eloquent passage in his favourite Massillon or Bourdaloue—that his eyes were closed, and from the Slawkenbergian nose already mentioned there issued a subdued droning noise which, were I a poet, I would compare with the bulbul singing to the rose, but which, in reality, more closely resembled

the quiet practice of a trombone by a considerate musician who did not wish to disturb a humble-bee.

The earliest greetings of the ecclesiastic and his visitor were recorded in the last chapter. It is quite true that the abbé kissed the fair-haired young stranger on both cheeks, inducted him with great state to his principal apartments, caused Madame Grugeon to bring forth the *vin d'honneur* of which Monseigneur the Archbishop had partaken, and appeared generally overjoyed. But his guest did not happen to be either the Marquis of Mirabel or that open-hearted nobleman's son and heir.

His credentials had been presented before the *vin d'honneur*—which was, indeed, a very sound Burgundy—was offered to him; and as soon as the abbé could rub his eyes clear from the somewhat drowsy influence of his theological meditations, and after he had found his spectacles, taken a revivifying pinch of

snuff, and sounded, with the assistance of the blue cotton pocket-handkerchief, an alarum on his resonant nose, he applied himself to reading the letter, with a very large seal impressed with heraldic bearings, which was placed in his hand.

The letter was from Lord Mirabel. It was very brief, written in even a worse French than his previous communication, but was quite as satisfactory. In fact, a very gouty scrawl on a very large and thick sheet of letter paper informed the reverend incumbent of St. Luc-des-Fontaines that the bearer of the missive was Monsieur Leonard Dayrell, *gentilhomme Anglais — quoique artiste.* Whether this was intended as a stroke of satire—whether the marquis really considered the *status* of a gentleman and the vocation of an artist incompatible—is uncertain, but these were his words: "An English gentleman, notwithstanding that he is a painter." Mr.

Leonard Dayrell was further recommended as a gentleman of great taste and capacity, who would examine the restorations made in the church of St. Luc-des-Fontaines, would report on them to the marquis, was empowered to render any assistance, moral or material, which might be required, and was in all respects to be considered as Lord Mirabel's authorized and accredited representative.

To this document—the perusal of which the abbé frequently interrupted by expressions of gratitude towards his lordship, and of regard for his young guest—was appended a brief note from the vice-consul at Caen, begging the abbé to treat Mr. Dayrell with every courtesy and consideration, as he was not only a young gentleman of great ability and estimable character, but was well known to be high in the confidence and favour of the lordly Lorenzo the Magnificent, who had so benefited Cidre-Fontaines. This further in-

troduction was almost a work of supererogation; for the heart of the good old priest was overflowing with grateful and kindly feelings, and he was with great difficulty restrained from embracing Leonard Dayrell a second time. As it was, he put his lips to the precious letter of the English nobleman, and, uttering a silent prayer for his conversion to that which he considered to be the true faith, placed it carefully in the recesses of a rusty old leathern pocket-book, which usually reposed in the vest of his cassock, and contained the list of his little catechists in the village school, a schedule of the most pressing wants of the bedridden and sick of the village, with memoranda of the names of the charitable to whom he judged it most expedient to apply for assistance, and the *billets de confession* to be delivered after penance and absolution to those who proposed to enter into the holy state of matrimony. For in France, if you

wish to keep on good terms with Mother Church, you must confess your sins before you can be wedded. Whether you choose to make a clean breast of your misdeeds after marriage is quite a different affair.

What could the Abbé Guillemot do for his good, his generous, his gallant young friend, his *cher fils?*—for the impulsive clergyman at once endowed the artist-gentleman, or gentleman-artist, with all these complimentary epithets. How could he show his sense of milor the Marquis's kindness in sending so worthy an ambassador? How he regretted his lordship's indisposition! What a *jour de fête* it would be if on Mr. Dayrell's next visit he would bring *la seigneurie* to his humble cure!

The abbé poured out these queries and ejaculations in a very random manner. He ran hither and thither, and to and fro. He bade Jean Pierre draw more cider and cull

more "*mouille-bouche*" pears. He called at the top of his voice to Madame Grugeon to put the lavender sheets on the bed in the best bed-room. He dived himself into his rabbit-hutch of a cellar, and brought up another bottle of the sound and honourable Burgundy —a rare old flask, all wreathed in brown cob-webs; and, at the risk of unduly exhilarating himself and his guest, he forced another glass upon him, and, filling a bumper for himself, he pledged him—pledged him with a trembling hand, a full eye, a quivering but cheery voice; and, audibly this time, prayed God bless his *cher fils* and his noble benefactor, and the country which bore such generous sons.

Dear old Abbé Guillemot. Cheerful, honest, single-hearted old Christian. I admit that he was fat, and that he snuffed and snored. I grant that he was a Roman Catholic priest, and believed in the Pope of Rome. We don't;

we won't; we mustn't. But I knew the Abbé Guillemot—knew him in the flesh, and loved him; and nestling in hundreds of quiet little French villages are hundreds of working pastors as poor, as contented, as good as he—people who abide by their ancient creed and are satisfied with its promises, are not always abducting schoolboys, ill-using nuns, plotting against governments, vilifying heretics, or recruiting for that poor old gentleman at Rome, yonder.

"I only wish," said the abbé, setting down the bumper which he had loyally drained, "that this little cot of mine" (it must be explained that Mr. Leonard Dayrell spoke much better French than his patron the marquis wrote) "were the palace of the archevêque at Rouen, or even monseigneur's at Caen. You should be lodged then in a manner more suitable to your dignity."

"My dignity," answered Dayrell, with a

laugh, "will be perfectly satisfied with th hospitality you are good enough to offer me i one of the prettiest little retreats I have eve seen in my life. My father was a clergyman,' he added, with a sigh, "and I often though his rectory the perfection of prettiness; but I am vanquished by Cidre-Fontaines. Still, M l'Abbé, I must warn you that my stay wil be of some days' duration, and if I am in the least disturbing your domestic arrangements I had better go to that comfortable roadside inn the *diligence* halted at."

Of course his host would not hear of such an arrangement, and Dayrell, nothing loath, withdrew his suggestion.

"But I have another warning to give," he remarked; "not only do I paint, and the smell of turpentine and varnish may affect your head, but I smoke, and cigars are scarcely in place either in your house or in your beautiful garden."

"My son," answered the ecclesiastic, with a good-humoured smile, "let me tell you that I adore art too much to quarrel with the odour of the accessories which its practice necessitates. As for smoking, the fumes of a good cigar are the best in the world for destroying the caterpillars in the garden. Besides, I am *maître chez moi.* The curé has a right to do what he likes in his own house. The villagers will know that it is not their pastor who is smoking; they are too well aware of my partiality for snuff. Besides—but strictly between you and me—I may whisper that when Monseigneur l'Archevêque did me the honour to visit me the summer before last, his grandeur always condescended to smoke one, two, three cigarettes after breakfast—the very best Persian tobacco, *mon cher fils*, and made by the good hands of the most charitable lady in the whole province."

They were sitting cosily by this time in the

little study, the priest beaming on his companion with fresh mantling smiles of kindness and good humour.

"I see that I shall be excellently well off,' Leonard said. "I only hope that you won't give yourself any trouble about me, but will let me take care of myself, like the wild, rough fellow that I am. By the way, M. l'Abbé, if I am not asking an obtrusive question, what was that old, half-ruinous, castellated building among the trees, which one passes at about half a league's distance from the village?"

"You mean a grey mass of antique stone, with lancet windows, and round turrets, with peaked roofs covered with slate: a kind of half castle, half dwelling-house, its lower storeys embowered among the pines and cypresses."

"Exactly; the road passing by it is very steep. The *diligence* went slowly, and I had plenty of time to examine it."

"That building," continued the abbé, very gravely, "is the Château de Luz, a place where, if things were as they should be, you should have taken up your abode, instead of in this cottage."

"The cottage is admirable. But the château—is the proprietor absent?"

"He is dead."

"But his family?"

"They never come near Cidre-Fontaines."

"Still, the place seems to be inhabited. Although it must have been at least thirty yards away, I could hear the brilliant playing of a pianoforte, and one of the most delicious female voices that ever gladdened human ears trilling forth a perfect cascade of roulades."

"You will hear that piano and that voice," the priest responded, and in a still graver tone, "at almost every hour of the day."

"Is the place haunted, then?" asked Leonard, with a start.

"Yes," replied the abbé, with a deep sigh "it is. Bah! why should I not tell you? I will be the talk of the canton for years, and you will not be able to go half a mile to morrow without hearing the whole story. The Château de Luz is haunted by the memory o a great crime. The last Count de Luz died at Rouen. Yes, there in full market-place and on a scaffold. He was guillotined, my son, for the assassination of his own brother down whose throat, at his own dinner table and in that very château, he forced a deadly poison."

"But ghosts do not play on the pianoforte and sing '*Di tanti palpiti,*' M. l'Abbé."

"Hush, hush, my dear young friend," the clergyman broke in, with an alarmed glance, "such subjects are far too important to jest about. I was wrong, however," he continued "to call the Château de Luz haunted. I spoke metaphorically. It is true that the

ignorant and the superstitious declare that they have heard strange noises and seen stranger appearances about the château, both by day and night. We must not believe in such idle tales; and as for the person who plays and sings so constantly, she is no phantom—at least," he checked himself as he spoke, "we are bound to believe her mortal."

"You pique my curiosity, M. l'Abbé. An amateur, whose mortality is questionable! I was not aware that such rarities existed, even in Normandy."

The Abbé Guillemot rose from his seat with a very perturbed air, took sundry vast pinches of snuff, and paced about his little study. He muttered that dinner would soon be ready, and that Madame Grugeon was an excellent hand at making *omelette aux fines herbes*. He suggested that his guest might wish to see his room, or to make some alterations in his attire. The traveller's luggage

had been left at the Three Red Pigeons, and the urchin in the blouse had been instructed to send a servant on with it. But there was no baffling the curiosity of Mr. Leonard Dayrell, and the abbé was compelled to resume his explanation.

"This woman, this lady, this phantom, then, as she has been more than once called by my simple parishioners," he continued, "is certainly a mystery. She has worked nothing but good at Cidre-Fontaines, and yet, I know not why, I cannot help wishing her well out of the place. She has lived for nearly twelve months at the Château de Luz, hired from the notary to the representatives of the family, Maître Roncier de Boisdragon, at Caen. She pays her rent, and, like myself, maintains two servants, an old housekeeper at least a dozen years older than Madame Grugeon, and one of the most hideous negro lacqueys you ever saw. She seems to have a horror of all good-

looking people, and only gives sous to the ugliest beggars she meets."

"Is she handsome?"

"I don't know," returned the abbé, shrugging his shoulders.

"Don't know? Why, haven't you seen her, then?"

"Her face, never. She comes to church, attends mass regularly, but never approaches the altar. She never speaks to me, never seeks the consolations of religion at my hands. The large charities she is good enough to bestow on the poor are sent to me, with a few lines of direction, by the hands of her hideous negro. I had some thought of seeking her aid before the Marquis of Mirabel's bounty made a sunshine in Cidre-Fontaines; but she sent word that she hated handsome churches, and that a dog kennel was good enough for her, and most of the people she had met, to worship in. She

offered, however, to give me a cornet-à-piston for my own use. Imagine the insult!"

"But some one must have seen her. Does she never come out?"

"Yes, frequently, morning and evening; but no one has gazed upon her face. She is clad from head to foot in deep black. She wears a black velvet robe, and a thick hood and veil of black silk. She walks like a sable ghost. She is very tall and stately, and frightens the little children dreadfully. All you can see besides this funereal drapery are her hands, which are always ungloved, and are very white, and splendid and beautiful. For her goodness, and silence, and mystery, the villagers call her the 'Fairy with the Fair Hands.'"

"Has she no other name?"

"*Mais, oui.* There appears to be no rational doubt about her *état civil.* Her passport has been duly *viséd* by the cantonal and

departmental authorities. She is registered as the Countess Malinska, a noble Russian lady, a widow travelling with her two servants, Feödorowna Ivanovna, aged seventy—I am sure she must be ninety—and Serge Ali Hammam, native of Africa, deaf and dumb from his birth. As the Countess Malinska she has taken the château, as such she condescends to sign her brief epistles to me. See, here is a sample of her handwriting."

As he spoke, the Abbé Guillemot produced from his rusty leather pocket-book a little pink billet, daintily perfumed, and, opening it, showed Leonard Dayrell about half-a-dozen lines written in a masculine, but exquisitely formed, character, in which the abbé's correspondent begged that a hundred francs should be given to the widow whose son, in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, had lately—so the news had arrived—lost an eye in a campaign against the Kabyles; that Lestiboudois, the

cultivateur, should have a new cow bought for him, in lieu of the brindled one lately stung to death by hornets; and that M. Martinet the village pedagogue, should be instructed to administer a sound whipping to Nino Pompon and Desiré Allaix, school children, for having scrawled in chalk a libellous caricature, accompanied by the inscription "*Sorcière*," on the right-hand post of the gates of the Château de Luz.

"In this you see the character of our strange Lady Bountiful," the priest resumed folding up the letter. "A mixture of kindness and severity. I am bound to say, however, that the former shows itself in actions and the last mostly in words. I have directed old Martinet, who is only too glad to have an excuse to punish the children, to stay his hand; for I am sure that before noon to-morrow I shall receive an express, by that terrible negro, begging them off the chastise

ment. Madame de Malinska—if that be her name—knows that I am averse from acting promptly on harsh injunctions."

"One can easily see that, my excellent friend," interposed Dayrell.

He was right. The Abbé Guillemot would probably have hesitated long ere he could have made up his mind to execute the last sentence of the law upon a flea.

"The worst of the matter is," the abbé went on, "that not all the whippings in the world would be able to cure the children—nay, nor the grown-up children either—of the wicked habit of calling this veiled lady a sorceress. They call her fairy for a compliment; but the prevalent impression is that she is a witch. We have so many erroneous impressions to root out in this nook of the province, my dear sir. Although this beautifully-handed lady has given a new cow to the cultivator, Lestiboudois, I dare say that there

are at this moment many evil tongues wagging to the effect that her ladyship bewitched the old one, and conjured the hornets about it which stung the poor animal so fearfully."

"I confess," observed Leonard, rising, as from the study window he saw a peasant wheeling his luggage in a little truck along the gravelled path leading to the parsonage, "that the lady you describe seems in every way a strange phenomenon; but I can't exactly understand the connection between her black veil and her witchcraft and those enchanting sounds, due both to nature and to art, which I heard an hour since. *Ma parole d'honneur*, M. l'Abbé, the 'Fairy with the Fair Hands' plays as brilliantly as Thalberg, and sings as exquisitely as Malibran."

"I am no judge of music," the abbé answered, modestly; "but I have heard the Malibran you speak of—aye, and Dorus Gras, and La Grisi, and Sontag—at a high mass at

Notre Dame de Paris, *bien entendu.* I also admit that this Countess Malinska sings as perfectly as any one of the great artists I have named. How she attained such ravishing accomplishments I know not; but from morning till night you may hear her at the open window of the grand *salon* in the château, playing and singing—" "Like an angel," I am afraid the abbé was about to add, but he bridled his tongue in time, and substituted as a simile, " Like a chorister of his Holiness at the Sistine in holy week."

"I have been in Rome," Leonard remarked; "but the *cantatrice* of the Château de Luz throws, to my mind, the whole of the papal choir into the shade. She cannot be always singing or playing, however Does she never go out?"

" Frequently — that is, twice every day; before noon and about sunset. Be the weather fair or foul, she makes no difference

in her attire. I have seen her in a storm of rain, walking calmly along the high road, in that perpetual black veil, and those white hands folded before her. The women say—what will not women say?—that she must paint those hands with some subtle preparation, else they would be discoloured by the atmosphere."

"And does she never speak?"

"Well, she is not exactly deaf and dumb—you can tell that from her vocalization. Although, for that matter, I have heard that persons with dreadful impediments in their speech can sing well enough. But her general rule is silence. She comes into the school, pats the children on the head, sometimes raps them on the knuckles, and says 'It is well,' or 'It is ill,' at the conclusion of the lessons. Once, when M. Martinet was scolding a dull scholar, she called him—the master, not the scholar—donkey: only

imagine! She speaks with a slight Italian accent, which is very piquant. When she meets me, she makes a haughty reverence; and perhaps once in a dozen times she says, '*Bon jour*, M. l'Abbé.'"

"Nothing more?"

"No, not anything. I believe," added the abbé, naïvely, "that I am somewhat of a favourite of hers, because I have such a large nose. She detests handsome people. I have seen her converse with old, and blind, and crippled people, and they have come away crying and touched with her bounty; but of the comely young lads and lasses of the village she takes not the slightest notice. Once Madame Grugeon—to whom she is very good in the way of flannels—told her that Aimé Boacon, *garde-chasse*, was about to be married to Antoinette Perrin, the prettiest girl in Cidre-Fontaines; she stamped her foot, and said that the girl was a fool."

"A strange personage, truly. She must
a misanthrope—a misogynist, rather."

"And once," continued the abbé, who
growing garrulous, "just before the chu
was closed for the restorations, she wrote
say that she would sing the *Adeste fideles*
vespers the next Sunday. She came in
veil, and with her white hands as usual, a
went into the organ-loft and sang. It
very beautiful, exquisite, delicious; but
congregation were frightened. The voice
so piercing, so unearthly, they said. T
women trembled all over; two fainted aw
For a week afterwards the young people u
to make the sign of the cross when they n
her; and, at the risk of offending her ladysh
I had to beg her not to come again."

"Was she offended?"

"Not in the least. She wrote to say t
she hated to see so many people together, a
that she would come to the organ loft

more. But hark, there is Madame Grugeon's bell warning, us that we have just a quarter of an hour to dinner. Your luggage has been taken upstairs. Let me show you to your room, and let us make haste, else the omelette will be spoiled, which, let me assure you, with Madame Grugeon is no light matter."

And so saying, and with the dignity of a gentleman-usher of the old *régime*, the Abbé Guillemot conducted his guest up the narrow flight of polished oak stairs which led to the sleeping apartment which had been prepared for him.

The pair had scarcely left the little study, ere the peasant, returning with the empty truck, was met, just as he had closed the garden gate, by a tall figure, clad from head to foot in black silk and velvet. It answered the description of the Abbé Guillemot to a shade; and there, crossed before the heavy

sable drapery, were the white hands of whic he had spoken.

"Cabochon," said, in a low, silvery voic the wearer of the black dress, "who is th stranger staying with the Abbé Guillemot?"

"*Connais pas*, madame," answered the rusti with a sheepish bow; "*on dit* in the villag that he is a marquis, and that he is ver handsome."

A little foot peeped out from beneath th velvet drapery, and gave an angry stamp o the path.

"Bah!" said the low and silvery voic again. "I hate marquises and handsom people." And without another word th figure swept on.

"How did she know my name was Ca bochon?" the rustic asked himself, as h scratched his shock head.

"See, see," cried the Abbé Guillemot, a most simultaneously with Cabochon's quer

as he pointed from the open lattice of the chamber above to the receding figure of the lady in black. "See, my amiable M. Dayrell. Yonder she goes. There is the Fairy with the Fair Hands."

CHAPTER III.

UP AT THE CHATEAU DE LUZ.

AGALA dinner, including the famous *omelette aux fines herbes*, was in due time discussed by the Abbé Guillemot and his guest. Coffee, and a modest *châsse* of very good cognac, followed. In the evening, M. Limayrac, a young architect, a student from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, and his friend, M. Hugo de Presmes, decorative artist, of the Quartier Latin, who were carrying out the restorations in the church, looked in. They "fraternized," to use the term, which, however, did not come into general use until ten years afterwards, with the young Englishman, making, however, a reservation for their

political opinions, which were decidedly hostile, not to say rabidly inimical, to the native country of Leonard Dayrell. The abbé and M. Limayrac played backgammon until ten, and M. Hugo de Presmes and Leonard smoked cigars in the garden—the former, with much gesticulation and a great deal of fervid eloquence, endeavouring to explain to the Englishman (with sentiments of the most distinguished consideration towards him personally), that Albion was irreclaimably perfidious; that the massacres of the Reign of Terror were brought about by the gold lavished by Pitt and Coburg; and that, but for the treachery of Grouchy, the English and Prussian armies would have been overwhelmed and annihilated at Waterloo by the Emperor Napoleon.

If the fairies had watched over the couch of Leonard Dayrell he could not have enjoyed a sounder and sweeter night's rest. While he is achieving his toilette in the morning—not

without a certain care and nicety, for although he is manly, and rough and ready, Mr. Leonard is not destitute of the knowledge that he is a smart and good-looking young fellow—let us inquire a little into the antecedents of the curé's visitor, and endeavour to discover how he became the *protégé* of the Marquis of Mirabel, and what merits and demerits on his part led to his being despatched as minister plenipotentiary of his lordship, and *chargé d'affaires archæologiques* to Cidre-Fontaines.

The history of the young Englishman is a short and not by any means a romantic one. Leonard Dayrell was an orphan. He was of good family enough to be the only child of the younger son of a rector of a small parish in Devonshire, who being of ancient county descent, and having a very small income, thought himself perfectly justified in quartering as many of his children as he possibly

could upon the public. This was in the good old days of tax-eating sinecurists—days which, I am given to understand, are not yet entirely departed. So Bab, and Sally, and Louey, the rector's daughters, being quietly provided for by gentlemen of good estate in the west country, Jack, the eldest, went into the army, and was comfortably killed at Salamanca. He was mentioned in the duke's despatches for his conspicuous gallantry, so no one could maintain that he did not make a good end of it. Tom, the second son, distinguished himself at college, got a fellowship, and in due time a living; and, if he had not died of an indigestion, might have been a bishop. Will, the third, went to sea, made large sums in prize money, had every chance of obtaining a post-captaincy; but the ten-gun brig in which he was lieutenant being totally wrecked coming home from the West Coast of Africa, was never more heard of.

Harry, the fourth—you see what a large family the Devonshire rector had—saved his family any trouble on his account by consistently remaining, from his birth upwards, an idiot, and succumbed under an attack of water on the brain in his tenth year. Leonard's father was the last of this bright band. He had a turn for poetry, and painting, and natural history, and other unproductive avocations; but the personal wishes of boys and girls were not often consulted in the rector's family, and so Harry was told that his fortune was made when, through the interest of my Lord Mirabel—whose domestic chaplain, for a short time after leaving the university, Leonard Dayrell had been—a cadetship was procured for him in the East India Company's military service. So Harry went to Hindoostan, and, having an excellent constitution, did not lose his liver there. He lost, however, quite as important a part of his organization,

to wit, his heart, which was violently ravished from him at a ball at Government House, Calcutta, by a Miss Aylmer, the prettiest girl in the three Presidencies, and without one rupee to rub against another. Harry, by this time Captain Dayrell, could do nothing better, in the hope of getting his heart back again, than marry the possessor, and he shortly afterwards became the husband of Lucy Aylmer.

The children of the Reverend Leonard Dayrell were, it is certain, remarkable for getting on in the world, but they had also a notable facility for something else—viz., for getting out of it; and three years after his marriage, in the year of grace, 1818, Captain Dayrell, then political agent at Galluspore, was cruelly murdered by a party of Thugs. The young widow, with a child, an infant in her arms, and the fair-haired Leonard, of whom we are now discoursing, came naturally to England. Captain Dayrell's pay and allowances had

been large, but his habits were expensive, and he did not leave five hundred pounds in the world behind him. The Devonshire rector thought he had done quite enough for his youngest son—"that ungrateful child," as he always called him, because he liked painting, and poetry, and similar vanities—in getting him the cadetship which cost him nothing; and, to tell truth, thought it rather an indelicate proceeding on the part of his daughter-in-law to come back to England at all. She ought to have remained in India, and have married a collector of salt duty, or a judge of Sudder Adawlut, or something of that kind, he reasoned. Widows always married in India; and, indeed, he more than half hinted that, in default of a second matrimonial alliance, Mrs. Dayrell would but have accomplished a strict act of duty in carrying out the institution of Suttee, and burning herself on a neat funeral pyre, perfumed with sandal-

wood and gum benzoin, in the compound of her late husband's bungalow. As it was, he promised to try and get the little Leonard "made something" so soon as he had attained an age for ministers and magnates to be importuned on his behalf; but meanwhile he neglected to invite the widow to share the hospitality of his roof. She had her pension, it is true, and a little allowance for the child; on this she lived, in a pinched and meagre manner enough, till the generous Lord of Mirabel happened one day to remember that he had stood godfather to the youngest son of his domestic chaplain, for whom he had got the cadetship, and provided him, moreover, with a handsome outfit, and a nest-egg in the shape of pocket-money, when he set sail for Bengal.

Lord Mirabel, an idle, careless, self-indulgent man, but with an excellent heart, was princely in all the good actions he performed,

when he could muster up sufficient volition to perform them at all. He gave Mrs. Dayrell a charming little cottage he possessed in Mid-Kent to live in, rent free. The produce of the orchard and the kitchen-garden alone added nearly seventy-five per cent. to her pension. He announced that he undertook to provide for Leonard's future career in life, and commenced carrying out his intention, in 1823, by sending the little fellow, then six years of age, to Mrs. Cranberry's celebrated preparatory school, on the Grand Parade, Brighton, whence, after five years' assiduous study of the beach and its marine curiosities, the world as it appeared from a donkey's back, and Mrs. Cranberry's jam-pots—a curriculum occasionally varied by a little book-learning gently instilled by that good lady without any application of birch—he was removed to Eton. Here Leonard suffered and enjoyed himself as much as most Eton boys do. He

was bullied, and bullied others in his turn. He was fagged, and toasted his young master's bacon; and when he was advanced enough he had a fag of his own, who made his buttered toast for him. He was flogged, but not often, ate his share of confectionery, went out boating, paper-chasing, and so forth, and left Eton at fifteen, a very manly, honest, handsome lad, and a very fair scholar.

Lord Mirabel would have sent him to college, would have made him a parson, guardsman, barrister, whatever he liked; but the boy had very early evinced a decided leaning for those unprofitable occupations which had laid his father open to an accusation of ingratitude. Then, Leonard had begun to draw almost as soon as he could hold a pencil. As he grew older, his rough, rude scrawls had developed into tasteful and graphic sketches. He began to paint in oils and water-colour, to etch, to carve wood, to model in clay. He

read with avidity all the works on art, ancient or modern, in which the noble library of his patron abounded; and it must be confessed that these studies were somewhat detrimental to his progress in Latin verse-making and Greek play-constructing, albeit in those accomplishments, so essential for the moral and physical welfare of a young English gentleman, he attained no contemptible proficiency. There was clearly no help for it. His grandfather, now immensely old and silly, to whom he paid a visit during one of his vacations, was very much shocked to learn that the artistic sins of the father had been visited on the child. He informed Leonard that he was bringing his (the rector's) grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. He opined that he would infallibly lose the valuable patronage of the Marquis of Mirabel; and then, with a touch of sarcasm, he advised him to apply for the vacant post of drawing-master

in the Misses Gimp's establishment for young ladies at Tiverton, instead of going to college and being "made something comfortable under Government," through the influence of the powerful nobleman who had adopted him. Fortunately, however, for the lad, Lord Mirabel had a refined and cultivated love for art. He saw at once of what Leonard was capable. He loved painting too much—indeed, he had one of the finest private galleries in Europe—and he wisely determined to allow the boy to follow the bent of his own inclination.

When Leonard was sixteen his mother died, and, apart from the uncles and aunts who did not care one halfpenny about him, and the grandfather who was more than four-fifths imbecile, he was left quite alone and unprotected in the world. But Lord Mirabel, when the boy's first bitter grief was over, bade him be of good cheer, and have no anxiety for the future. He took Leonard to

live with him entirely; and the fortunate youth had the run of all his lordship's sumptuous town and country houses. But his studies were not neglected. The most famous English artists of the day were engaged to give him lessons. All agreed that he had a wonderful capacity for, and appreciation of, art. All regretted that he could not be persuaded to devote his attention to one particular branch, and become either painter, sculptor, or engraver, in history, in *genre*, or in landscape—in any one of which departments he could scarcely fail in obtaining eminence. But Leonard flew from artistic flower to flower like a bee, and, though he gathered honey enough, omitted to collect it in one hive. When he was nineteen, the marquis sent him with a handsome allowance to Paris, and he studied in the Louvre and the Luxembourg, danced, dined, went into society, flirted, and acquired that pernicious habit of smoking the

very best cigars purchasable, of which he had made an early confession to the Abbé Guillemot. He came back to England a well-bred young man of the world, but not very far or very definitively advanced towards the rank of a great painter or a great sculptor. Then he was sent to Italy for a couple of years more, and with an allowance still more generous. He wandered about Florence, Rome, and Naples; had an adventure with brigands, serenaded a contessa or two, with whom he tried to persuade himself that he was in love, and returned in 1838, his head and his sketch-book full of the glories of the *Loggie* and the *Stanze*, the Pitti Gallery, and the Museo Borbonico, but still without having produced anything very wonderful. Lord Mirabel was not in the least angry. He liked Leonard, not only for his talent, but for himself. With his own family, who anxiously expected his demise and the distribution of

his vast wealth, the marquis was almost always at war. He knew that the young man he had adopted was bound to him by the strongest ties of gratitude. He respected his frank, manly, truthful character. Leonard was given to no dissipation: art was his only mistress. He was generous, and sometimes a little extravagant; but he rarely exceeded his allowance, and when he did, a candid confession to the marquis and a fifty-pound note very speedily put matters straight between him and some rapacious cigar merchant or dealer in old curiosities. Perhaps Lord Mirabel was himself somewhat to blame for the desultory habits, so far as art was concerned, of his *protégé*. The marquis was one of the laziest of mankind. He loved to talk about the things he didn't do. He loved to look at works of art, and buy them, and exchange them, and turn them about in a hundred ways. Leonard and he pottered in and

out of auction rooms and curiosity shops together. They hunted up frame makers and picture restorers. They arranged and rearranged Lord Mirabel's picture galleries, cabinets of gems, coins, cameos, and antiques, cupboards full of porcelain, vestibules full of porcelain, portfolios of engravings and water-colour drawings, over and over again. There was always some artistic job that the marquis wanted Leonard to do—a head to copy, an engraving to mount, a tarnished water-colour to touch up, the broken finger of a statuette to replace.

Lord Mirabel could do scarcely anything without Leonard; and when to this you add that he made him a friend, and not a dependant; that the young man was known to be a gentleman of good family, and, by his father and grandfather, of position; that he was received in the best houses; that he rode, and shot, and danced, and dined, and flirted, like

other young gentlemen of high degree, although he had nothing to depend upon save the generosity of his patron—it is not to be wondered at that he was always putting off until the morrow that grand historical picture, that chaste and classical landscape, that marble group of Achilles inconsolable for the loss of Briseis, with which he had been threatening the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, and challenging the ire of the critics, for at least five years.

When Lord Mirabel condescended to provide the funds for the restoration of the church of St. Luc-des-Fontaines, it was but natural that he should wish to send some one to the spot who would faithfully inform him as to the manner his wishes had been put into execution, and his money laid out. There was no one so eminently fitted for the task as was Leonard Dayrell, and the old nobleman being, as has before been hinted, very indolent and

very gouty, he imparted his kindly mandate to Leonard, who, nothing loath, and with a good stock of circular notes in his pocket, departed from Normandy, taking, as all young men should do, Paris in his way.

Do you understand the character of the Abbé Guillemot's guest by this time? I have drawn his portrait *en pied*. Three-and-twenty years of age, fair, blue-eyed, handsome, athletic, sound in wind and limb, clever and vivacious, generous and honourable in heart, but not very much addicted to steady application or hard work. One thing, however, Leonard had firmly intended to do when he entered the *diligence* which was to bear him into the bosom of La Normandie, and that was to enjoy himself, and make himself as agreeable to everybody in Cidre-Fontaines as ever he possibly could. I am bound to say that he carried out this determination with a right good will. He had not been three days in the vil-

lage before he had made himself amazingly popular with the inhabitants, male and female, young and old. He went to the estaminet of the Three Red Pigeons, and played billiards there, to the great delight of the *habitués*—whom he cheerfully allowed to beat him, and win half-a-dozen francs or so—and the enormous gratification of the worthy hostess. He gave Madame Grugeon a gold cross, upon which Madame Grugeon called him "*mon chou*," my cabbage—a term of endearment to which he did not in the least object—and, moreover, wanted to kiss him. Leonard managed to evade that caress by the artful stratagem of bobbing his head down and kissing the wrinkled old housekeeper's hand. MM. Limayrac and de Presmes declared that he was a *brave garçon*, notwithstanding that he was a child of perfidious Albion, and consequently an adherent of Pitt or Coburg. The proprietors of the silk factory invited him

to dinner, and he was positively permitted to talk to the unmarried young ladies of the family—a privilege very rarely extended to strangers in French households. He did not interfere with the works of restoration in the church; he praised everything, approved of everything, from the stained glass windows to the carved confessional box; but now and then he made a little suggestion, which, based, as it generally was, on sound canons of artistic taste, MM. Limayrac and de Presmes were only too glad to carry out. He placed in the hands of the Abbé Guillemot a tight little rouleau of Louis-d'ors, to be bestowed in purposes of charity, modestly adding that the donation was not his own, and that he was but the almoner, and carrying out the instructions of the marquis, their mutual friend and benefactor. Whereupon the abbé wept, and had frequent personal interviews with the blue cotton pocket-handkerchief.

The good ecclesiastic pondered much, and tormented himself as to whether it was not his duty to use every endeavour for the conversion of his young friend to the Romish creed. He consulted several of the old lady *devotées* of his acquaintance, and their voices were unanimously in favour of conversion, recommending a course of Thomas à Kempis as a commencement. But the abbé found that Leonard had read the *Imitation* from beginning to end, admired it enthusiastically, but was none the less a staunch Protestant. The abbé's better sense came to his aid.

"Why," he reasoned, "should I endeavour to lead this good young man from the faith of his ancestors? His grandfather, he tells me, was *ministre Anglican*. His mother was of the Lutheran religion. In his country there are many millions professing the same faith; many of them, let us hope, as good and as generous as he. His patron, he tells me, who

seems a kind of Christian Crœsus, helped many of our French ecclesiastics when they were driven into exile by the Jacobins; and yet this noble, who would succour Catholics, can also give away benefices in the Anglican Church. No; although Monseigneur might not approve of it—we will leave him where he is."

So the Abbé Guillemot carefully avoided theological controversy in his conversations with Leonard, who on his part did not carry his conciliation so far as to forget to what faith he belonged; and when the villagers on Sunday were gathered together at the temporary chapel in the factory to hear mass, quietly stopped at home in the parsonage, and read the morning service according to the liturgy of the Church of England.

Dayrell had been in Cidre-Fontaines about a fortnight, when, returning from the church one morning with the curé, after narrowly

inspecting the works now nearly approaching conclusion, he said, suddenly—

"M. l'Abbé, don't you think me a very idle fellow?"

"You have no need to be otherwise, my son," replied the priest. "Providence has blessed you with means, and you are not compelled to depend for your bread on the labour of your hands. Our good friends yonder, Paul Limayrac and Hugo de Presmes, have nothing but their art, and probably do not earn so much in a year as you spend in a month."

"That is to say, you do think me an idler?"

"I don't say that I think you anything of the kind. You are honourably carrying out the mission confided to you by Milor Marquis. Besides, you study, and sketch, and paint flowers. You fish and ride out on horseback with the brigadier of gendarmerie, and are never entirely unoccupied."

"Yes, and I play a game at billiards, too,

sometimes," added the young man, good-humouredly, "which is capital walking exercise; and I smoke a great many cigars, which at least gives some employment to the respiratory organs. But, notwithstanding that *I* think myself an idle drone, I should like to do something *quelque chose qui vaille* before I leave Cidre-Fontaines. It would be a memento for you of my stay in a village where I have been so happy."

"What do you wish to do?" asked the Abbé Guillemot, looking towards Leonard, with something of a surprised look.

"I will drop badinage," answered Dayrell, "and be serious. You know what fresco-painting is, M. l'Abbé?"

"Surely, *mon fils.*"

"Well, I know something of fresco-painting, and am somewhat of a practitioner in it. There is just an elliptical panel in your lady-chapel that would contain the picture I wish

to paint. At present it is a bare whitewashed wall. Will you permit me to try and cover it?"

Of course the required permission was at once granted. On the scheme being submitted to MM. Limayrac and de Presmes, those gentlemen highly approved of it. They had seen many specimens of Leonard's ability, and moreover his spirited offer relieved them of a little difficulty as to how they should fill up the panel in question. So, the necessary materials for fresco-painting having been procured from Paris, Leonard resolutely set himself to work to paint his picture, allowing himself a couple of months for his task, by which time it was anticipated that the work of restoration would be completed. He did not neglect to apprise the marquis, to whom he wrote twice a week, of his enterprise; and his lordship was good enough to signify his approval by an early post.

Leonard chose for his subject St. Luke painting the portrait of the Virgin. He was neither so ambitious nor so fond of hard work as to crowd his panel with angels and cherubs; so he limited his composition to a couple of figures. He was a graceful and accurate draughtsman, and knew the laws of light and shade thoroughly, and had a good eye for colour; and only needed increased practice, steadiness of hand, and attention to finish, to possess all the attributes of a good and even a great painter. His resolve was that this fresco of St. Luke and the Madonna should be the starting point for a whole series of careful, earnest works. He made a finished and studied chalk drawing or cartoon of his subject before he ventured to transfer it to the panel. For to paint in fresco—in other words, on wet plaster, which has to be renewed for as much space as it is thought will be covered by every day's work—is no trifling

matter; and it is far easier to commit errors, not to say incur total failures, than to repair them.

However, Leonard Dayrell worked away at his fresco for full three weeks, giving an average of six hours a day to his labour of love. The Abbé Guillemot was persuaded that when once this picture was finished the church of St. Luc-des-Fontaines would become the pride and glory of Normandy, and far superior in magnificence to the far-famed cathedral of Rouen itself. Leonard laughed at the compliments addressed to him. MM. Limayrac and de Presmes, who, like the generality of clever French artists, were totally destitute of envy and malice, candidly admitted that their *brave garçon* drew skilfully and coloured brilliantly, and, going to to and fro in their labours about the church, often patted the amateur approvingly on the back. Even the old-lady friends of the in-

cumbent of St. Luc, the *devotées,* expressed their admiration of the "pious generosity" of the young Englishman, all heretic as he was, who was making so handsome a donation to a Catholic place of worship; and there is reason to believe that, so far distant as Caen and Rouen itself, little tapers were burned and little prayers uttered by worthy, simple souls for the speedy reconciliation to the bosom of the church of M. Leonard Dayrell, *gentilhomme Anglais.*

There was another critic, by the way, in Cidre-Fontaines, who appeared to take great interest in the progress of the portrait of St. Luke and the Madonna. This was none other than the veiled lady, in black silk and velvet, who by her passport had every right to call herself the Countess Malinska, but who was so much better known as the "Fairy with the Fair Hands." During the earlier days of Leonard's stay in the village he had often met

this mysterious personage, but the veiled lady had always averted her head at his approach; and once or twice he had observed an angry twitching in her white hands, and something like that impatient stamp of the foot which had betrayed her irritation when the announcement of his arrival was made by the peasant Cabochon. The *incognita*, moreover, chary as she was usually in her words, had condescended more than once to speak disparagingly of the young Englishman. Leonard had occasionally, but without meaning the slightest harm, a smile and a merry word for the pretty girls of the village, who, although they could not give many words in return, repaid the smiles with interest. The charitable autocrat of Cindre-Fontaines would seem to have been exceedingly irate at these innocent familiarities, severely reprimanded such of their recipients as she met, enjoined their parents to keep a strict watch over them,

and once, meeting the Abbé Guillemot at the school-house door, bade him, in harsher accents than had yet fallen from her lips, have a care lest he was harbouring a serpent in his bosom.

"A serpent, madame!" the good abbé exclaimed in astonishment—"why, our good M. Dayrell is as harmless as a sucking dove, and as cheerful as a squirrel."

"You are a fool!" cried, from beneath her veil, the Fairy with the Fair Hands, and with her well-known stamp of the foot.

"Madame la Comtesse Malinska," answered the offended ecclesiastic, drawing himself up with some dignity, "I am the *curé* under Monseigneur the Archbishop, and his excellency the Minister of Public Worship, of this village. I have never yet, until now, been interfered with in my private concerns, or insulted in my sacerdotal position, and I am your obedient, humble servitor." And so say-

ing, with a sweep of the skirt of his *soutane*, the abbé left the black velvet and white-handed presence, vowing, in his wounded *amour propre*, that he would write a letter of complaint to his diocesan that very afternoon.

But an hour had not elapsed since the occurrence of this little passage of arms ere the hideous negro, Serge Ali Hammam, came, panting with the haste he had made, to the parsonage. He bore a letter from the Countess Malinska, full of the prettiest and tenderest apologies that were ever penned by female hand, and of expressions of the warmest esteem and the profoundest veneration for the abbé. He was pacified forthwith—indeed, he had already half forgiven the offence; but the countess's exasperation against Leonard Dayrell did not appear to be one whit abated. Leonard had frequently in his afternoon walks strayed as far as the Château de Luz, and,

passing beneath its ever-opened window, listened to the syren strains of the unknown singer; but one day he found, posted in the road, close to the gate, that terrible Ethiopian, Serge Ali Hammam, who, in guttural accents and exceedingly imperfect French, bade him take notice that the noble lady his mistress was not accustomed to be watched and spied over by English dogs, and that if he (the dog in question) could not find some other locality for parading about, it was as well that he should know that the noble lady, his mistress aforesaid, was very fond of shooting pigeons with a double-barrelled fowling-piece from the open window, and might, at no distant date, miss her aim and shoot something else.

Leonard's first impulse was to kick the negro for his impertinence, and his next to tell him angrily that he had a perfect right to walk on the public highway, and that the laws of France dealt somewhat harshly with persons

who fired double-barrelled fowling-pieces from open windows in quest of pigeons or other game. But his good nature soon got the upper hand, and, with a loud laugh, he flung a five-franc piece to the Countess Malinska's sable attendant, and turned on his heel towards Cidre-Fontaines again. He did not, however, laugh so loud as Serge Ali Hammam, who, having picked up the five-franc piece, which had rolled in the dust, and placed it in his fantastically embroidered vest, gave vent to a hoarse and prolonged peal of laughter, his very ugly mouth being meanwhile distended from ear to ear.

When the affair of the fresco became the talk of the village, the Fairy with the Fair Hands at first contented herself, in one of her curt colloquies with the schoolmaster, with saying that it was all *bêtise*—folly, and that the Englishman had better not interfere with an art which he did not understand, and a

religious communion with which he had nothing to do. At this the villagers, who adored Leonard, murmured among themselves about singing women and open windows in connection with one Jezebel, who, they had been told in one of the abbé's sermons, had been thrown therefrom. A little boy meeting the Countess the next day, and perfectly aware of the one-sided feud between her ladyship and the artist, positively dared to call out *Vive M. Dayrell!* whereupon it must be recorded that the Fairy, with one of her own fair hands, did hit the diminutive rebel a swinging box on the ear, which sent him howling to complain to the milkwoman, his mamma, who, judging from his statement that he must have been, *ab origine*, impertinent to the kindly though imperious benefactress of the entire village, gave him an extra box on the ear for good luck, which made him howl still louder.

The expression of feeling on the part of the juvenile population seemed, however, to have deterred the Fairy with the Fair Hands from further demonstrations of hostility towards Leonard Dayrell, at least of an active nature. She even deigned to gratify her feelings of curiosity so far as to pay frequent visits to the church—Serge Ali Hammam standing guard outside, but not being allowed to enter the sacred edifice—and even to stand a short distance behind the painter while he was at work.

This became, very soon, a daily habit with her; and she would so stand—silent, attentive, and almost motionless—for a couple of hours at a time. Her presence at first somewhat disturbed Leonard; but he soon grew accustomed to the neighbourhood of his mute critic, and when he heard the rustle of her drapery behind him in the morning, would just turn his head, tender her a grave

salute, which was not returned, and go on with his work.

"Poor lady!" he used to say to himself; "she must either be mad or she must have had some great sorrow."

CHAPTER IV.

GREEN TEA AND POLITE CONVERSATION.

THE autumn leaves had fallen thick in Cidre-Fontaines. The leaves had changed from golden yellow to ruddy brown, from brown to dusky purple, from that to yellow again, but to a sere and sickly tawny. They were dry and shrivelled, and the wind began to chase them about the paths, in eddies of vengeful disdain. The harvest of wheat, apples, and what scant Normandy vintage there was, had been gathered in. The cider presses foamed at the mouth, and ran streams of sugared tears. The Toussaint was long gone and past. It was black in the morning and chill at night; albeit at

noon the sun yet shone out kindly, to warm and gladden the simple villagers. Cidre-Fontaines was always a great place for sunshine, and the swallows were loth to leave it.

The church of St. Luc-des-Fontaines had triumphantly achieved the phœnix process, and had risen from its ruins radiant and restored. Messrs. Limayrac and De Presmes surveyed their work with proper pride, and embraced each other *à la Française*, for pure joy. *Il y eut bombance* at the Three Red Pigeons. The artists gave a supper there to the notabilities of the village. The abbé, from reasons of ecclesiastical etiquette, could not be present; but M. Leonard Dayrell was good enough to take the vice-chair. The presidential fauteuil was occupied by M. Dubois, of the silk factory, supported right and left by MM. Limayrac and De Presmes. The jollity was enormous. To the "toast," *porté à la santé* of the munificent Marquis

of Mirabel, Leonard responded with much eloquence, and with very few grammatical mistakes, in a French speech. The two Parisians delivered each a *chaleureux discours*—an ardent oration—full of praises of the marquis's generosity, of the Abbé Guillemot's goodness, of Leonard's talent and kind-heartedness. For a wonder, the name of Albion, as associated with perfidy, was not once mentioned during the festivities. M. Dayrell returned thanks for his own health (by request) in his own language; and although the company did not understand a word he said, the enthusiasm of their applause was tremendous.

Subsequently the Marquis of Mirabel's representative condescended to sing a comic song; and about midnight he incited the entire assemblage to join hands, and, following his initiative, to attempt perhaps the most execrable imitations of "Auld Lang Syne" that were ever heard by human ears. After

that, M. de Presmes took to sing the proscribed air, the Marseillaise. No danger was incurred thereby: first, because the brigadier of gendarmerie, who was present, and thoroughly overcome with punch *à la Romaine*, cried "Sing my child," and declared to his neighbour, the mayoral adjoint, that he had adored the Marseillaise from his youth upwards; and next, for the reason that M. de Presmes, after intoning the first line of the republican chant in question, fell comfortably under the table, and began at once to snore with twenty-trombone power. It was a most convivial evening. The Frenchmen, ordinarily abstemious, had dreadful headaches the next morning, and their faces assumed a variety of ghastly hues; and even Leonard, whose hardy frame could stand a great deal, and who had enjoyed himself somewhat copiously, felt a little flustered, and was compelled to have recourse to Eau de Selz dashed

with Cognac, and a long run in the country, ere he felt equal to conversation with the Abbé Guillemot.

The renovated church was to be solemnly inaugurated by monseigneur himself from Rouen. His vicar-general wrote to say that his Grace might be expected in the early days of November; but although the exterior and interior looked beautiful, and painters, carvers, glass stainers, and decorators, had made an end of their task from-organ loft to Lady Chapel, there yet remained something to be done ere monseigneur's visit could with propriety take place, and his Grace judge for himself how prosperously the end had crowned the work. M. Dayrell's fresco of St. Luke painting the portrait of the Virgin was not quite finished yet. Leonard had not been idle—quite the contrary; but he had bestowed great pains on his work. The process of manipulation was slow and tedious; and

ever and anon had come days when the sky was overshadowed with clouds, or invitations in the neighbourhood were pressing, or he felt a disinclination to do anything, and consequently did nothing. Such a day, for instance, was the one following the supper at the Three Red Pigeons; but on the morrow Leonard hastened to his work early, and was hard at his fresco by ten in the morning. Something like a guilty pang shot through him when he saw that his mysterious critic, the Fairy with the Fair Hands, had already arrived, and, in her usual low-seated, rush-bottomed chair, her white hands folded before her, and her inscrutable veil, was taking stock of his performance. The Fairy never missed the church now. Whether Leonard was there or absent, she took her invariable station in front of his fresco every day, and sat there for hours.

There was another little circumstance to

discompose Leonard, as, arrayed in the orthodox paint-stained blouse and Greek cap of an *artiste peintre*, he slipped his fresh-laid palette on to his thumb, and grasped his sheaf of brushes. He remembered, with a half-amused, half-shamefaced consciousness, that the culminating performance of the symposium at the Pigeons had been to make the Fairy's domestic, Serge Ali Hammam, exceedingly tipsy. The landlady, who was a plain-spoken dame, and did not admire the Countess Malinska, principally because she abused Leonard, declared that the negro—*ce vilain noir*—came as a spy and eavesdropper from the sorceress of the Château de Luz. Whatever was his errand, there was Serge Ali Hammam hovering about the bar, as the guests, more or less unsteady on their legs, came down from the gay supper. When the black saw Leonard, he indulged in another fit of hoarse laughter, similar to the merri-

ment he displayed when the five-franc piece had been presented to him; but whether he laughed in gratitude or in derision is uncertain.

It occurred to Leonard—partly for mischief's sake, partly out of good nature—to invite Serge Ali Hammam to drink; an invitation which, nothing loth, he accepted. The dark retainer partook of a variety of stimulants: notably of cider, rough and bottled, cognac, *absinthe*, *vermouthe*, *cassis*, hot punch, and *bière de Mars*. He ended by becoming exceedingly intoxicated, but, fortunately for madame's bottles and glasses and the lives of the company, not outrageously so. He sang, or rather screeched, a song in some unknown language; he danced a maniacal fandango, indigenous probably to his native land, accompanied by guttural yells and frantic snappings of his fingers. Then he prostrated himself before Leonard, calling out "Bono

Anglais, Anglishman bono," made as though to lick his feet, yelped and whined like a dog, and finally, barking at the spectators around, crawled off on all-fours, like a wild beast as he must have been, and was seen no more. How he ever reached the Château de Luz that night was exceedingly problematical.

Leonard was marking in a broad shadow of the Virgin's drapery, when he heard a voice behind him.

It was the Fairy. She was speaking English, very purely and correctly, but with the slightest and prettiest foreign accent, although to what country that accent belonged Leonard could not, for the life of him, determine.

"You work very hard when you do work," said the Fairy. "How much are you paid for your labour?"

Leonard thought of this as he dipped his brushes in pure spring water, and, but that he knew the terrible Fairy was behind him,

and for some natural reverence inspired by the place he was in, would have burst out laughing. MM. Limayrac and De Presmes, all Catholics as they were, would have been troubled with no such scruples. They smoked and laughed habitually in the church, pending its reconsecration, and saw no harm in it.

"Nothing, madam, save thanks," replied the painter, rising and bowing to his mysterious guest.

The Fairy did not vouchsafe the slightest inclination of the head to this demonstration of courtesy.

"Nothing?" she continued, interrogatively. "What a fool you must be!"

"*Merci du compliment, madame,*" Leonard returned, with a good-humoured shrug of his shoulders.

"I understand your odious language well enough," was the calm reply of the black

lady, but without the slightest acrimony of tone to suit her insulting words. "You need not interlard your discourse with scraps of French. It only makes you more ridiculous. You get nothing for your labour, and yet you are an Englishman."

"I am, madam."

"Go on working, and don't look at me; your bold eyes will not pierce my veil. I thought Englishmen did nothing for nothing. You must be very rich, thus to waste your time in smearing walls with paint, as a child does its picture book."

"On the contrary, I am as poor, to use an English proverb, as a church mouse. If there be any about St. Luc-des-Fontaines, they can't be poorer than I am."

"I understand," rejoined the Fairy, "you are the good-looking pauper who hangs on to my Lord Mirabel, the pampered beggar whom his kinsmen loathe, and who toadies

my lord in hopes of having a place in his testament."

There was such an odd conflict of idioms in the two words, "toadies" and "testament," that Leonard was fairly bewildered. He could not help wincing somewhat at the remarkably uncomplimentary epithets so liberally bestowed upon him; but he was determined not to lose his temper, and replied—

"You are at liberty to think what you like, madam. My own conscience will acquit me of the unworthy motives you ascribe to me.

"Very fine! The usual excuse of parasites and legacy hunters. Why did you make my slave drunk on Monday last?"

The transition was of the abruptest, and the thrust a home one. Leonard parried it as well as he could. He was amused, and began to defy the Fairy.

"I did not know that slavery was permitted

in France—at least, since the glorious charter of 1830."

"He is *my* slave, and that is sufficient," the Fairy haughtily retorted. "Why did you make him drunk?"

"He only swallowed what I gave him."

"I say again, why did you make him drunk, and how dared you make him so?"

"May I ask you, Madame la Comtesse Malinska, on my side, why you bade him threaten me with death by means of a double-barrelled fowling-piece? Why did you call me a dog? Why are you always villifying me? Why do you keep your window open, and resent the vicinity of listeners? I won't ask how you dare do any of these things, because it appears to me you are a lady who would dare do anything."

"I asked you one question, and you are insolent enough to ask me half-a-dozen in return. It does not matter. The wretched

negro will be seen no more at the infamous alehouse where he disgraced himself."

"Surely you have not shot him with the double-barrelled fowling-piece, Madame la Comtesse?"

"I am not at my own home, and have not the power of life and death; but I have bastinadoed the wretch soundly. He had a headache yesterday, and now he has an ache in the soles of his feet. He had need walk on all-fours, the degraded barbarian."

"You are quite Oriental in your notions, madam."

The Fairy with the Fair Hands disdained to reply to this, and, without any word of farewell, gathered up her sombre drapery and swept out of the church.

"At least," said Leonard to himself, "it is something to hear her talk. Her speaking voice is quite as pretty as her singing one. I don't believe she is half so mad as she seems."

That evening there arrived at the vicarage —not, however, by the hands of Serge Ali Hammam, who had not been seen since the momentous night of the supper, and it is to be presumed was anointing his swollen feet somewhere—a delicate little basket containing divers flasks of maraschino, curaçoa, *parfait amour,* and *eau d'or de Dantzic.* On the card nailed to the basket it was intimated, in the Countess Malinska's well-known handwriting, that these cates were for the Englishman who was staying with the Abbé Guillemot; and, as the Countess never conferred a favour without adding an insult thereto, it was quite natural to find appended a paragraph stating that, as the English were well known to be a drunken nation, and the Englishman at the vicarage was probably too poor to purchase the liqueurs of which he was fond, the gift was to be considered as an act of charity on the part of the mistress of the Château de Luz.

The capricious benefactress seemed by no means disposed to relax her attendance at the studio in the church. Day after day she was to be found at her post—now, as the whim seized her, preserving an impenetrable silence; now establishing a conversation with the painter, on the same terms of mingled sarcastic familiarity and rigid *hauteur* which had before distinguished their *entretiens.* One morning — St. Luke's drapery was quite finished now, and the last touches were being given to his sainted sandals—the Fairy said abruptly to Leonard—

"You smoke?"

"Somewhat too frequently for my health, I am afraid," was the reply.

"Smoke now, then," continued the countess, producing a tiny green velvet case, embroidered in seed pearls, and presenting the painter with a symmetrical cigarette of remarkably odoriferous tobacco.

"Pardon me, madam," Leonard objected, with a polite bow, "the locality is scarcely suitable for such a relaxation. I confess to having more than once smoked in a churchyard; but I would rather not smoke in a church."

"Hypocrisy Are you not a Protestant?"

"I admit it; but that is no reason why I should be a heathen."

"I say again, smoke!"

"I must respectfully decline. If you will allow me to take away the cigarette, I will promise to smoke it after lunch."

For all reply, the Fairy crumpled up the little paper cigar in her tiny hands, and scattered the tobacco dust over the marble pavement. Then she produced another cigarette from her case, together with a golden fuzee box, drew from it a piece of *amadou*, kindled it, deliberately lighted her "weed," and, puffing the smoke in little blue spirals through

goodness knows what interstice of her veil, swept towards the door.

"I shall return no more," she said, in a cold and bitter tone. And in a moment the Fairy with the Fair Hands was gone.

She did not come again for a week. At first Leonard laughed at her absence, and thought "she will return to-morrow." But she did not return. Then he strove to persuade himself that she would come the next day. But another and another day elapsed, and there was no Fairy. Dayrell grew uneasy—he knew not why, and in spite of himself. Braving Serge Ali Hammam and the menace of the double-barrelled fowling-piece, he thought, on the fifth day of the Fairy's absence, that there would be no harm in strolling up to the Château de Luz. Its occupant might be ill, might have gone away, he debated within himself. Why should Leonard Dayrell have troubled himself about the proud

and insulting lady of the château and her movements?

The window towards the road was closed.

"The weather is growing cold," murmured Leonard. "Fond as she is of open windows, she will scarcely risk bronchitis."

And he returned very slowly and silently to the vicarage. He was quite out of spirits. The Abbé Guillemot rallied him on his melancholy. Madame Grugeon opined that it was the *migraine*, and prescribed a warm *tisane* of marjoram with a *soupçon* of *rhum de Jamaïque* therein.

"After all," remarked these good people among themselves, "it is not so very surprising. M. Dayrell has nearly finished his fresco —and a charming fresco it is. My lord marquis doubtless requires his presence in Albion, the cold and brumous. He has a kind heart; and he is sorry to leave the village where he has been so happy, and on which he has conferred such happiness."

Thus reasoned the sages of Cidre-Fontaines. Some portion of their surmise was correct. The fresco was nearly completed; and Lord Mirabel was growing exceedingly fidgety for the return of his *protégé*, and had written him more than one kindly yet pressing letter, applauding the fresco enterprise, but telling him that he was wanted very badly in London; and recommending him, if he found the work lag on his hands, to allow "one of those fellows" to finish it. But the anticipation of his approaching departure from Cidre-Fontaines was not by any means the chief cause of Leonard Dayrell's sadness.

Just seven days were past since the Fairy had visited him, and he had never met her abroad since the adventure of the cigarette, and the notable fresco was really finished. Leonard was "scrumbling" the foreground, reviewing his work—with which, although the abbé and the inhabitants generally were in

ecstacies at every touch thereof, he was but half satisfied — and, perhaps from fatigue, perhaps from some occult feeling, had given vent to a long-drawn sigh, when he felt a light touch on the shoulder.

He turned round, and found the Fairy.

"You were right, and I was wrong," she said, in a softer tone than he had ever yet known her assume. "I am sorry, forgive me!"

And she held out one of her little white hands.

The painter seized it, and, by an almost involuntary impulse, was about to carry it to his lips, but he timorously checked himself, and, contenting himself with a pressure in which he endeavoured to combine respect with tenderness, bowed low, and faltered—

"I thank you, madam. I feared not only that you were angry, but that you were ill."

"No," replied the Fairy, gaily; "I have

been as well as"—she hesitated—"as I can hope to be," she resumed. "You have been watching the Château de Luz, and found the windows closed, the piano silent, and my *roucoulement* hushed."

"I can assure you, madam, that if I—"

"You need not explain. I tell you again, I am not angry. You are a very good boy, and I am a wilful, perverse, and ungovernable woman. I will give you a reason why you have not heard or seen anything of me. I have been at work."

"And *my* work is just finished," the painter said, with another sigh, and looking towards St. Luke and the Virgin.

"I am sorry, very sorry."

The Fairy said this, and both remained silent. Then, if I am not mistaken, there was another sigh, and a very tender one. But I think it came through the folds of the Fairy's sable veil.

"You are going away?" she asked in a low tone.

"In two or three days. I must hasten back to England, or I shall be in disgrace with my patron. I am poor, and must not venture to offend him."

"I will give you twenty thousand francs if you will stay and cover the walls of the church with pictures," cried, with a short, sharp, passionate suddenness, the Fairy with the Fair Hands.

"Place yourself in my position, madam," Leonard replied, in sadly expostulating accents. "Would you not sacrifice your inclination to your duty? Would you act with base ingratitude? Would you inflict pain on a good and generous old man who had befriended you since your childhood, and protected you when you were solitary and forlorn?"

"No," answered the Fairy, decisively—"I would not. I am wrong again. See how

humble I am. I who was so proud and disdainful a week since."

She was indeed humble, and, which is much more, quite caressing and affectionate in manner. What *could* have come to her?

"You will grant me one favour, M. Dayrell" (she had never called him by this name before), the Fairy said, almost in a supplicating manner.

"Any favour that it is in my humble power to grant."

"Come to the Château de Luz this evening. You need not be afraid. You will do me no harm, and I shall do you none. You may tell the Abbé Guillemot, if you like; only promise to come."

Leonard promised. How could he avoid doing so? If the Fairy had bade him smoke a large meerschaum in the church, it is not, I am afraid, unlikely, in his then frame of mind, that, all scruples notwithstanding, he would

at once have complied with her request. So he promised, and the Fairy gave him her hand once more, and once more he pressed it; and then he began to count the minutes that lay between him and eight o'clock.

With an eye to the *bienséances*, though sorely against the dictates of a feeling which he was half ashamed of and half delighted in, Leonard, who was the soul of honour and candour, duly informed the Abbé Guillemot of his invite to the château. The good ecclesiastic received the news with a puzzled look, scratched his head, and, according to his custom, had recourse to his blue cotton pocket-handkerchief.

"You have made a conquest, my son," he remarked, after a pause. "The countess's condescension is, to say the least, eccentric. Yet, frankly, I cannot see any harm in your accepting it. She is a *femme posée*. Her passport is perfectly *en régle*, and describes her as Madame la Comtesse Malinska; thus inferring

that she must be either married or a widow. I would go with you, only it is most probable that the imperious lady of the château would at once order me to be shown to the door. I know you to be good and honourable. Go, therefore; and if anybody dares to whisper scandal about your visit, I, Guillaume Guillemot, curé of St. Luc-des-Fontaines, will denounce the slanderers even from my own pulpit."

With this sacerdotal acquiescence in his mission Leonard went with a good heart to the château at the time appointed. He was received at the gate, with many grins, by Serge Ali Hammam, who did not seem any the worse for the pedal punishment he had been said to have endured. Perhaps he had recently recovered from the effects of his chastisement. At all events, he skipped quite nimbly before the expected guest, and led him to a comfortably furnished little *salon*, whose chief object

was a magnificent grand pianoforte, and in which apartment, seated before a little walnut-tree table, Leonard found the Fairy with the Fair Hands busily employed in writing. She was not quite alone; for, at a few paces from her, sate, on a low stool, the wrinkled old Muscovite attendant, sedulously plying needle and thread at a tambour frame.

The countess, not one fold of whose veil was disturbed—"However can she see to write through that thick silk?" Leonard asked himself—rose as her visitor entered.

"I have just finished my work," she said, laying down her pen. "Come and sit by me. I am going to give you some tea. Serge Ali Hammam, slave and toper, tea."

The negro made an abject Oriental reverence, grinned, and disappeared. He soon returned, bearing a huge Russian samovar, a brazen urn for hot water, heated by live charcoal contained in a tube passing down the

centre. Then Serge Ali Hammam brought a lacquer tray, with two glass tumblers, a porcelain saucer full of slices of lemon, and a plate of crisp little biscuits. Leonard had to drink the very strongest green tea, made without sugar or milk, and flavoured only with one of the slices of lemon. The tea itself was exceedingly aromatic; but it was so potent an infusion that it had very nearly as strong an effect on the painter's head as the *ponche à la Romaine* at the Three Red Pigeons. This, the Fairy was good enough to inform him, was *thé à la Russe*. She offered him some caviar to eat with his biscuits; but as Leonard had once before tasted that saline condiment, and found it intolerably nasty, he declined with such earnestness that the Countess laughed, did not insist, and asked him if he would smoke instead. This he was only too glad to accept; whereupon the Fairy clapped her hands, and Serge Ali Hammam brought

her a Sèvres vase full of the finest Bessarabian tobacco, and a sheaf of papiros or cigarette tubes in paper.

With her own fair hands the Countess made the cigarettes. Leonard smoked; she smoked. The evening seemed to pass as in an enchanted castle. The Fairy sang to him, she played, she laughed. She talked in French and English and Italian, on art, on literature, on music, on politics even.

At last midnight struck.

"It is time for you to go," the Countess said. "Go, and God bless you, Leonard: stay, take this with you."

She held out to him a little packet which she had just sealed. "Read it at your leisure," she continued. "It may while away an idle hour."

Leonard took the packet, but he detained the hand that extended it to him. No warning gesture from the Fairy deterred him, and

he kissed the white hand once, twice—nay, thrice. At last the Fairy wrenched her hand from his grasp, and vanished through a curtained doorway. Leonard was conducted to the gate by Serge Ali Hammam, more profuse in grins than ever. The painter crammed all the loose cash in his pocket—there were two or three gold pieces among the handful, but had there been a hundred Napoleons he would not have stayed to count them—into the negro's dingy palm, and rushed, rather than ran, home.

Abbé Guillemot had long since retired to rest. Madame Grugeon admitted him with a smile of peculiar significance; wished him *bonne nuit* and *bonne chasse*, and retired to her isolated domicile. No sooner had Leonard entered his sleeping-chamber than he eagerly examined the packet which the Countess had given him. The outer envelope was blank; he tore it off, and found in the inner cover,

in the handwriting of the Fairy, this superscription:

"For Leonard Dayrell.

The memoirs of the most miserable woman in the world."

CHAPTER V.

THE FAIRY'S MANUSCRIPT.

"LEONARD—dear Leonard"—it was thus the Fairy's manuscript commenced. "In all human probability I shall see you no more. I am vain enough to think—nay, I am certain—that you will read what I have written; but, alas! when you have come to the end, it will be with a shudder that you will lay down these pages; it will be only with horror and aversion that I shall be remembered by you. Dearest—I may call you so now, if for the last time—the woman who has sneered at and insulted you, loves you; has watched over you and prayed for you; has marked your every movement and your every gesture.

Bear with her now; judge with mercy. Forgive and pity her! for she has suffered much. And now read."

These lines were blotted, as though the tears of the writer had fallen fast as she penned them. They were hastily scrawled at the top of a sheet, the rest of which was blank. But when the manuscript proper commenced, Leonard found it not only legible, but firm and deliberate, in its caligraphy.

"It is not without reason," wrote the Fairy with the Fair Hands, "that I call myself the most miserable woman in the world. I have been wretched from my cradle. Leonard, let me rob you of the first of your illusions, if, indeed, you have cherished any regarding me. I am much older than you. I am very nearly thirty years of age. I was born in Rome; and my earliest reminiscences are connected with the return of Pius VII. to his capital, after the

downfall of Napoleon. Who my father was I never knew. My mother used sometimes to tell me that he was an officer who had fallen in the campaign of Russia. At other times she would say that he was a stranger from beyond sea. Then she would chide and even strike me if I dared ask the question. Afterwards she would call me unkind names; while of my father she seldom spoke without a malediction. She said that she was an Englishwoman. She occasionally apostrophized herself as 'poor Fanny;' but of whether that was her real Christian name, or what was her surname, I am ignorant. Our neighbours—for friends we had none—spoke of my mother as La Vezzosa, and by that name she was known until she died.

"La Vezzosa and I lived in the Via Vergognosa—a long, dark, narrow lane, close to the Ghetto, or Jews' quarter. The first eight years of my life seem to have been passed

mostly in semi-darkness, in the odour of rancid oil and old clothes, and amid the perpetual upbraidings of my mother. I don't think that she hated me; but disease and misfortune had made her fractious and capricious, and I suffered for her unhappiness and infirmities. It may have occurred to you that much of this capricious and fractious mood has descended from the mother to the daughter. We were less positively poor than continually embarrassed. My mother had a certain yearly allowance paid to her in quarterly instalments, and with undeviating punctuality, from some foreign source. But she was a bad manager, careless, and improvident; and whenever she had a few scudi in hand, would waste them in fine clothes and good cheer. Then she would beg advances from the banker who was the medium of her remittances; or, when he refused a loan, borrow money from the old-clothes dealers in Ghetto; or, failing that re-

source, pawn her silk dresses and lace mantles. Thus her income was always forestalled, and she would be often penniless a week after quarter-day. It was a miserable life; and but for the tinkling of an old guitar, to which my mother used to sing in a shrill but still very flexible voice, I think that I should have died of grief. I used to be sent, by fits and starts, to a dirty little school over a cow-house, where a horrible old woman, pestiferous with garlic, used to sleep during one-half of the school hours, and tell us absurd stories about the Madonna and the saints during the other half.

"It does not matter now, I shall see you no more; but I was a very beautiful child. I remember that my mother once took me to visit a great English sculptor who had for years made Rome his dwelling-place. I cannot recall his name; but I know that he was gifted, and famous, and that the Roman princes, as well as the great English nobility

staying in the Eternal City during the winter season, used to come to his studio. We went to him one very cold January morning. He opened the door to us himself. He was a simple-looking old gentleman, in a grey dressing gown; and no sooner did he see us than he took my head between his two hands, and turned it either way, and then upwards towards his own, smiling, and muttering, "*Testa angelica! testa angelica!*" He was a curious old gentleman, and had half-forgotten his English. I was not afraid of him, because he looked so simple and kind. He took us into a great lofty barn of a place, full of beautiful white statues. He gave us coffee and fruit, and by-and-by put me into a great carved chair, and bade me be as quiet as ever I possibly could for ten minutes. My mother stood behind me, and whispered that if I stirred ever so little she would beat me to death when we got home. I trembled very much at this

threat, but remained as still as my fear would allow me; and the old gentleman, standing before a pedestal which was opposite, and on which was a great mass of grey clay, began pulling it about with his fingers, looking at me, smiling, and talking to himself all the time. After about half an hour he let us go —but he had allowed me to rest myself for a minute or two more than once; and I think that as we passed out of the door he put some money into my mother's hands. The next time we went—about a week afterwards—he showed me the image of my own face in shining white plaster. I sat in the great carved chair over and over again; and one day he took me up to a little marble statue of a child with bare arms and feet and wings, which he said was me. For my mother had bared my arms and feet for him to work by; nay, more—but I disdain to recount what her cupidity would have led her to had I not re-

sisted, in despite of the stripes and revilings the refusal led to. After one dreadful day we went no more to the studio; the old gentleman patted me on the head, and said almost sorrowfully he had lost his Zephyr; and when we reached home, my mother passionately declared that I had taken the bread out of her mouth.

"I did not in the least understand her meaning; but I was soon enlightened. At the wretched school I went to, the girls used to pinch and teaze me, pull my long, fair hair, and call me 'heretic,' 'alien,' '*figlia di nienie*,' 'daughter of nothing,' and the like. I had one special enemy—a dark, stout girl, with a strong arm and flashing black eyes, called Nina Cortesi. Her father sold cheeses and macaroni in the very street in which we lived, and my mother was often in his debt. Nina was at least three years older than I was. She was tall of her age, and clever, and cruel,

and wicked. She would not let me sit by her in school, or, indeed, sit down at all. 'I am an honest man's child,' she said; 'and what are you, little vermin? You are not fit to be with Christians and decent people. Your mother cannot pay for her polenta; and she picks up money by letting you out on hire as a model for the sculptors. Papa says that you will be a beautiful Venus—*O! una bellissima!* —some day.'

"This was the secret. I had been taken to the sculptor to serve the degraded purpose of a model. I cried with rage, not with grief. I flew at Nina. I tried to bite, to scratch, to tear her hair. She flung me away from her with a scornful laugh—flung me to the ground, bruised and almost bleeding. Then the old woman woke up, and made me stand on the stool in the dark corner for 'penitence.'

"We left Rome soon afterwards, and went, by a long, wearisome *vetturino* journey, from

Rome to the great city of Milan, in Lombardy. Larger remittances than usual had arrived for La Vezzosa, and besides these a letter, which she read over and over to herself dozens of times, sometimes laughing and sometimes crying. We had handsomer lodgings in Milan, in a nice street called the Borgo Imperiale; and were not obliged to pawn, or borrow, or beg for many months. Nor, indeed, was my poor mother destined to pawn, borrow, or beg any more. We were just growing poor again, when a cough with which she had long been troubled assumed the most aggravated form of pulmonary disease. Fatal symptoms showed themselves, and one bright summer's morning, in the year eighteen hundred and twenty-two, the poor Vezzosa died. I can only recollect her as being terribly thin and haggard, and with a hectic spot on either cheek; but, to judge by a little faded miniature I yet possess, she must

once have been eminently beautiful, and fair as I was."

"Fair as I am," had been originally written in the Fairy's manuscript; but the present tense had, by an afterthought, been erased, and the past substituted for it. Leonard sighed, and resumed.

"I was eleven years of age, and utterly alone in the world. My mother had never been very kind to me; and, to tell the truth, had she had her way, I might have grown up a common drudge and *comparse* in the studios of Rome—now sitting for a Bacchante and now for a St. Cecilia, and used and abused according to the common lot of painters' models. I had not even been to school since we arrived at Milan; and the only language I could speak was a slipshod medley of Italian, French, and English, all of which tongues La Vezzosa spoke with equal fluency and incorrectness. Yet I missed and bewailed

my mother. I missed the tinkling of the cracked guitar, her shrill, flexible voice, and the *barcaroles* and *chansonettes* she used to sing. I missed even her scoldings, and the shade and sunshine of her changeful moods. I had the more reason to miss her; for when she was laid in her coffin there seemed not one soul on earth to whom I could look for succour. You spoke, Leonard, of your own forlorn condition. You had at least a mother that loved you, influential relatives, and a powerful and generous patron. What must my state have appeared! Nobody came forward to claim me. The papers found among my mother's effects were either old theatrical contracts of engagements, long since cancelled, or else curt notes from the English tourists at Rome, responding to applications for pecuniary relief—some complying with, but more declining to accede to, the request. From the first it was inferred that La Vezzosa had

been on the stage—there was one contract with the manager of a theatre at New Orleans; from the last that she had been at one period of her career in England, and had some acquaintance with the nobility and gentry of that country. But there was nothing that could afford a clue to any relatives or connections she might have had, or that would put a morsel of bread in my mouth. Some such documents may have had an existence, but they were beyond all human reach; for I remember my mother burning a whole box-ful of papers a few days before her death, weeping passionately as she did so. What was to become of me? Within four-and-twenty hours of La Vezzosa's death, this municipality put her corpse into a deal shell, put that again into a long black cart, like a dray, and flung all that remained of her into the *Fossa communa*, or paupers' grave, in the cemetery. Our landlord, with whom, I need

not say, my mother was in arrear for rent, seized the few chattels and articles of wearing apparel that were left, towards the discharge of his debt; and I was left '*sul pavimento*'—in the street, and alone in the wide wide world. I should have been better off had it been in Rome that I was left an orphan; for the Pope's Government is very tolerant to beggars —does not mind how ragged they are, gives them bread sometimes, and allows them to sit on the steps of the churches and beg to their hearts' content. But in Lombardy, you know, the Austrians have the sway;* they do not allow pauperism—only slavery; and my first appearance as a mendicant might have led to my being dragged off to prison by ruffianly policemen, and subjected to shameful chastisement.

Could I even have managed to play the poor old cracked guitar which had belonged to my

* Written A.D. 1840.

mother, and which even the landlord disdained to seize, I might have scraped together a few coppers every evening by singing to the guitar in the cafés of the Corso de Servi. La Vezzosa had taught me many songs; or rather I had picked them up by ear—perhaps I had a natural aptitude for vocalization—from hearing her sing so often; but she had been too indolent to teach me my notes, and I could make no use of the lute, which was my sole inheritance. I have it now. Altogether, I might have starved, but for the charity of the family who lived beneath the floor we had occupied. It was a very large family. Gaetan Ambrogi, the father, was only a poor musician who played the bassoon in the orchestra of La Scala. His wife sang in the choruses at the same gigantic theatre. He had a son who was a music copyist; another, a lad of twelve, who played the triangle at the other theatre, the Canobbiana. One of his daughters danced

in the ballet at a smaller theatre still; and the two youngest, almost babies, earned a zwanziger or two now and then, by appearing as children in any opera where juveniles were required. They were all very poor and very happy, and very fond of one another. They lived in two rooms, full always of tobacco smoke and the odour of soup. Papa Ambrogi—it was thus he was habitually called—took pity on me. 'Wife,' he said, 'we must not let the little Vezzosa, the Vezzosina, starve. *Non mancura di pene.* She shall not want for bread while these lips can blow a bassoon. *La povera!* we must give her the bite and the sup. You must put a little more water and a great deal more of bread in the soup, and we shall not know that we have an extra mouth to feed. She is fair, she is clever, she looks good; she will soon be able to do something for herself. Is not Mitridato earning eighteen zwanzigers a month?' Mitri-

dato was the little boy who played the triangles at the Canobbiana, and very proud of his talents and his income he was.

"The Ambrogis were all very kind to me. They had but little to give, for theatrical artists of the inferior class are miserably paid in Italy; but what they had they gave freely. I had my soup every day, and learned to forget nearly all my English, and began to dance very nicely under tuition of the grown-up daughter, Anita. I stayed with the hospitable people six months, and I don't think Papa Ambrogi, who had become very fond of me, would have said a word had I stayed six years; but his wife, who although kind to me was also a prudent housekeeper, and had to make the zwanzigers go a long way, began to hint very unmistakably that I must begin to do a little towards earning my living. *Andrà bene sulle gambe*—'she will go well on her legs,' she remarked; and this she meant not

figuratively, but literally. Anita declared that I was born to be a dancer! that if I were only two or three years older, and had a few friends—*la povurina!* they all cried—I might be received into the choregraphic department of the Imperial and Royal Conservatorio of Milan. Meanwhile, she said, she would speak to M. Lazaro.

"M. Lazaro—he would not suffer himself to be called Signor, and always declared that he was a Parisian, although his French was the vilest jargon that ever put human ears out of tune—had taught dancing to the ladies of Eugene Beauharnais' court, when viceroy of Italy. He had been a famous dancer, too, at the opera, and boasted of his brilliant successes in France, England, and even Russia. When I first knew him, his dancing days had long since been over. He was frightfully ugly; his face and his shirt frill were always covered with snuff; his legs were boards, and

he was nearly humpbacked; he never washed his hands, and he wore a wig. He was said to be immensely clever in teaching operatic dancing; and he had always a number of young pupils, ranging from eight to thirteen years of age, whom he was preparing for the stage, or for entrance into the Conservatorio. This unpleasant old man came to see me, made me dance, and pinched my arms, wrenched my shoulders when my posture did not please him, took a vast quantity of snuff, and finally offered to take me as an apprentice for three years, and not only teach me dancing, but board, lodge, and clothe me during that period. I was frightened at this old M. Lazaro's face and voice, and humped back; but the Signor Ambrogi was only too glad to accept the offer, and I did not dare to refuse, remembering how kind these poor people had been to me when I was left an orphan. So a little bundle of necessaries was made up for

me, and I went as an apprentice pupil to M. Lazaro. I kissed the Ambrogis all round, and promised to come and see them on my monthly *giorno di sortita*—holiday.

"The three years I passed with this old wretch were one long round of torture, relieved only by an occasional visit to my kind friends in the Borgo Imperiale; but I was often deprived of my holiday by my master. He was a tyrant, a hypocrite, and a miser. He had a wife as tyrannical, as hypocritical, and as miserly as himself. He had a dozen hapless little apprentices, whom he kept slaving in a dancing school all day long, sometimes till late in the evening, and whom he frequently sent to bed without any supper if their exertions during the day did not please him. This was not the worst: we were mercilessly beaten with a scourge made of leathern thongs—beaten for the most trifling offence, for an error in a step, for a tremulous motion

of the hand when executing a peculiar *pose*. It was no novelty for me to be whipped. I bore my stripes well enough both from husband and wife; but I could not endure continual semi-starvation. I ran away to the Ambrogis, but my master came after me to claim his fugitive apprentice; and although kind-hearted Papa Gaetan would gladly have granted me an asylum, his wife said that children would never become *ballerine* without being whipped; and as my protector had entered into certain formalities before the police which constituted him my legal guardian, there was unfortunately no doubt about the binding nature of my apprenticeship. I was now in the second year of my servitude. I went back to the old wretch, and was dreadfully punished; but I was determined to run away again on the first opportunity. I should have done so, I dare say, but for the entreaties of Papa Ambrogi, who implored me, with tears in his

eyes, to suffer my probation to the end. He interceded with my master to treat me with greater humanity; and Papa Ambrogi had been so kind when I most wanted kindness, that I could not bring myself to disobey him. I was not so hard-hearted then, Leonard, as I am now.

"In the last year of my apprenticeship I was tall and clever enough to go in the *corps de ballet* at the Canobbiana, and even to take part occasionally in a *pas de cinq*. 'In three years,' the avaricious old Lazaro used to mutter, 'she will be a *coryphée*, in ten she will be a *prima ballerina*.' He would be glad enough to renew the term of my apprenticeship for three, six, any number of years more; and the Ambrogis would, nothing loth, have consented to the bargain; for tender-hearted as old Papa Gaetan was, his wife was a model of prudence and economy, and I am very much mistaken if she did not receive a pecu-

niary consideration from M. Lazaro when I was first apprenticed to him. Nor was I so very reluctant to continue my education under his direction. The old brute was certainly very clever, had brought up some of the most famous dancers of the Scala and the Grand Opera in Paris, and I had certainly made great progress under his tuition. The remembrance of his cruelty did not deter me from continuing with him. 'I am too big to be whipped now,' I thought; and I determined that I would secrete a stiletto in my dress, and stab him if he struck me again with those horrid thongs.

"This was not to be, however; and it is no worn-out star of the ballet who writes these lines. My fortuitous guardians were on the eve of concluding a fresh compact with M. Lazaro, when, in executing a difficult *pas*, I violently sprained my ankle. At first the hurt was thought trifling; but it resisted all remedies,

and for many months I was perfectly helpless. My master, thinking I was maimed for life, and would never make a *prima ballerina*, very soon found out an excuse for creeping out of his bargain. My apprenticeship was at an end. I was free from slavery and the scourge; but, on the other hand, I was destitute as ever. There was nothing left for me but to have recourse to the charity of the good bassoon player at the Scala. Unfortunately, the Ambrogis had grown poorer; the son, who played the triangles, had been taken by the Austrians for a drummer; the music copyist had become embroiled in some political intrigue, and had been compelled to fly to Switzerland; the daughter, who danced, had run away with a Russian count, and left him for a quack doctor who went round to the fairs. All these used to contribute to the family revenue; but now only Ambrogi and his wife could be depended upon, for the child-

ren, who used to perform Norma's ill-used infants, were still too young to earn a livelihood. They took me in again, and fed me; but I was quick-witted, and soon saw that I was a burden to them. At last a situation was found for me in a milliner's shop, in the Corso Cavallo, where, under a good-tempered mistress, I remained a whole year, doing odd tasks of needlework, waiting upon the young ladies who made the bonnets and mantles, and going home every evening to the Borgo Imperiale to sleep. I could pay for my own lodging now, and cost my protectors nothing.

"I had always been passionately fond of music. I have told you all about the poor Vezzosa, her shrill voice, and her cracked guitar. As I grew older, I became more and more devoted to the art. We had music enough at M. Lazaro's—music, indeed, all day long; but it was harmony of a kind for which I did not care, being elicited from a

squeaking little dancing-master's fiddle of his, to which we danced. However, I had persuaded Madame Lazaro, who was an old opera chorus-singer, to teach me my notes. She was a cross old hag, but had fits and starts of good temper; and I took advantage of these, and studied music from the few hints she gave me as hard as ever I could. Nature had gifted me with a voice—but I need not say any more on that topic, you have heard me; and I do not sing a quarter so well now as I did ten years ago.

"I was always singing to the young girls who worked in the milliner's shop. They were never tired of hearing me, nor I of singing. My mistress condescended to praise me. 'You have a fortune in your little throat, *carina*,' she used to say. 'But for that poor lame foot, you might aspire to become one day *prima donna assoluta* at the Scala, to take the first parts in the operas of the *maestro*

Rossini.' But the poor lame foot was growing rapidly better. On my fifteenth birthday it was quite well; and it was with a feeling of exultation that, meeting my old persecutor, Lazaro, close to the cathedral, I made him a mock curtsey, and tripped away from him, half across the Piazza del Duomo. I can see the wrinkled old villain now, wagging his toothless jaws, and shaking his walking-stick at me as I ran from him. Ah, he had better have had me as an apprentice again!

"One day there came into the milliner's shop a lady belonging to the great Milanese nobility. Her name was the Contessa Muratori. Our mistress happened to be from home, and I was singing away gaily to the work-girls. I came to ask her pleasure, but she bade me sing on; and although somewhat frightened at displaying my ability before so great a lady, I did sing, and my very best too. She bought a lace cap, ordered half a dozen new

bonnets, and, going away, put two golden ducats into my hand. I gave the money to Madame Ambrogi, and told her who the lady was.

"'The Countess Muratori!" cried the old woman. 'Vezzosina, your fortune is made.'

"Up to this time I had always been called the Vezzosina—the diminutive of the appellation given to my mother. When my indentures to Lazaro had been signed, the police found a name for me, and I was registered as Benvenuta Imperiali—a *nome di circostanza*, taken half from the haphazard character of my position, and the other half from the street in which I lived. At Lazaro's I used to be called Flora. At the milliner's they gave me my police name of Benvenuta, but not often. With much more frequency I was the Vezzosina. I am the Countess Malinska, now. I have had another name, which you shall hear by-and-by; but to this day I do not know

what my real name, or that of my parents, may have been.

"A few days after I had sung to the Countess Muratori, I was sent for to her hotel. I was taken into her grand drawing-room, and bidden to sing there. I sang. The Countess was delighted, but there was a gentleman present who was even more gratified, and who beat time with his hand and his foot, smiling and nodding his head as he listened to me. He was tall and stout, and fair and handsome. He did not look like an Italian, and the Countess called him my lord.

"He was a great English nobleman, and immensely rich. He laughed at my broken English, for I yet preserved some smattering of the language of my childhood—he made me tell him the whole of my simple history. A tear stood in his eye when I described the kindness of the Ambrogis; but his brow darkened when I dwelt on the cruelty of

Lazaro. When I went away he kissed me, and gave me ten ducats.

"When I reached home that evening the English lord had been there. The next morning he came to the Corso Cavallo, spoke to my mistress, asked if I were a good girl, seemed satisfied with the reply, and then, kissing me again, asked which of two courses I preferred —to be sent to school in England, or to enter the Imperial and Royal Conservatorio, there to be trained as an operatic singer. Now, as my ideas of a school were confined to a gloomy place where I danced all day to the squeaking of a fiddle, was half-starved and cruelly beaten, and as I loved singing with all my heart, I did not long hestitate. I chose the Conservatorio, and in less than a fortnight afterwards I was entered as a *pensionnaire* in the singing department of that magnificent foundation. A handsome present was made to the Ambrogi family by the Countess Mura-

tori; and I still went to see the good old couple on my *giorni di sortita*, my holidays, which were frequent and regular now. The entire expenses of my board and education were paid for by the rich English lord, the noble MARQUIS OF MIRABEL, then travelling in Italy."

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed Leonard, breaking off in his perusal of the Fairy's manuscript. "She must be the Bertolacci, the famous singer who ten years since sent half Europe crazy, of whose mysterious disappearance Lord Mirabel has often talked to me. But he never said a word about having paid for her education at Milan."

"It was one of the express directions left by my patron when he quitted Italy that I was to keep up my knowledge of the English language. A professor was found for me, an old Englishman, long resident in Milan, who

gave me regular lessons. As you have heard, I speak English with fluency, but with a foreign accent. How should I do otherwise? How do I know that I am an Englishwoman at all?

"I was well fed, well clothed, well taught, and kindly treated in the Conservatorio. The professors all praised my industry and intelligence, and augured enthusiastically for my future sucess. My mirror told me that I was beautiful—ah! very beautiful. I should have been as happy as the day was long, but that I found an enemy in the Conservatorio. She was an old enemy too—an enemy dating from my childhood, from the days when I lived with the Vezzosa in the dark street close to the Ghetto in Rome. This enemy was the grocer's daughter, Nina Cortesi.

"She was darker, handsomer, wickeder than ever. She was now seventeen, and in a class far above mine, although her voice was a deep contralto and mine a pure soprano.

She owed her position in the Conservatorio solely to her talents, for her parents were poor enough; but she had been elected a pensionary, and was supported entirely by the State. Nina had always hated me. She did not dare to strike or pinch me now, as she used to do when I was a child; but she could stare and sneer, and say cruel things of me, and this she continually did. The story of my having been a sculptor's model in Rome, of my mother being called La Vezzosa, of her pawning and borrowing and drinking rosolio, was very soon current in the Conservatorio. It did not do me much harm. The lady superintendents only looked for good conduct; the professors only looked for musical talent. If a girl was clever and well conducted, it did not matter what her name was, whence she came, or whether she was anybody's or nobody's child.

"Still Nina made me unhappy. I tried to

conciliate her, and to make her little presents, but in vain. She put her dark, handsome face to mine one day, and said—

"'I hate you; I hate you because you are young, and have fair hair and a soprano voice. If it were a mezzo soprano I should not care. It is a pure soprano, and I shall have to play *Pippo* to your *Nouria*. I will poison myself or kill you first—yes, I will kill you, viper!' and she stamped her foot. I have learnt the way of stamping mine, Leonard, since I knew Nina Cortesi.

"'Dear Nina,' I used to urge, 'I cannot help my voice. Heaven gave it to me.'

"'Bah!' she would reply. 'I tell you that I hate, loathe, abominate you, and shall do so until one or another of us is dead. Why did you come here, with your white face and your voice like oil? My voice is hard and rigid as iron. You can do the *trille*. I cannot do the *trille*. I shall be *Arsace* to your

Semiramide. Go away, or I shall do you mischief.'

"It was fortunate that Nina and I slept in different dormitories, else I think it not at all improbable my enemy would have risen some night from her bed and strangled me. The girls used to say that she had the *gettatura*—the evil eye. She was very clever, but very indolent and perverse, and was continually being punished for impertinence and idleness. She tormented me for two years; and it was at last with a sensation of infinite relief that we were relieved from her presence. The paternal Cortesi died at Rome. Cheese, olive, and macaroni selling had enabled him to save many scudi; and Nina was spoken of as an heiress.

"The generous nobleman who provided for my wants did not, however, carry his kindness so far as to wish me to correspond directly with him. He had perhaps many *protégées*

such as I was—such as, in a superior rank of life, you were, Leonard—all over Europe. But the Countess Muratori, to whom I paid a solemn visit once every three months, told me that his lordship sometimes in his letters condescended to ask how the little fair girl at the Conservatorio was getting on, hoped that she was not forgetting her English, and promised to take a box at the opera when she came to London to make a 'sensation.'

"The time when I was to quit the Conservatorio arrived, and I left the institution with very gratifying testimonials as to ability and good conduct. But I had yet another year of probation to undergo ere I should be thought competent to make an appearance on the lyric stage."

CHAPTER VI.

A VEIL IS LIFTED.

WHAT more Leonard Dayrell read in the manuscript confided to him by the Fairy with the Fair Hands it suits not here to tell; but by the time he had accomplished its perusal he was more madly in love with the writer than ever. It needs, however, to be mentioned that the concluding portion of the packet contained an absolute prohibition for him either to strive to see the writer again or even to write to her until after the termination of one year and one day—"then, although I fear for the worst," wrote the Fairy, "we shall see."

The adieux of Cidre-Fontaines were very

bitter indeed. The young man had endeared himself during his stay to almost every inhabitant, high and low, of the pretty place. Among the old and young he was alike popular. There was scarcely a man or woman there but to whom he had done some act of kindness, or spoken some kind word; by the landlady of the Three Red Pigeons his loss was bewailed with a pathos that became more touching when she asked what was to become of her billiard-table now that the very best player at pool in the whole department was gone? Old Madame Grugeon was nearly as fond of Leonard as the Abbé Guillemot himself; and when he stepped into the *diligence* which was to convey him to Caen, *en route* for Paris, she pressed on him a little parcel carefully wrapped in lilac paper, and which, when the young man opened it, he found to contain a pair of lambswool stockings of her own knitting; a black silk skull cap, neatly embroi-

dered, of the self-same pattern with which she was in the habit of providing her beloved curé, and which, by the label appended to it, was designed for "*M. le Marquis;*" and a certain tiny relic, carefully enshrined in the midst of a gilt and embossed card. In this, although the faith of others in it could not be made compulsory, poor old Madame Grugeon may certainly be forgiven for believing.

It was with difficulty that the Abbé Guillemot could persuade himself that his noble young friend was obliged to leave Cidre-Fontaines. Could not his lordship, the Marquis, be persuaded to come over himself? he asked. At least Leonard could wait another post or two, until the reply of *sa Seigneurie* was received. It required all Leonard's tact, and all his firmness, to explain to the excellent ecclesiastic that he must imperatively take his departure, and that he risked his patron's most

serious displeasure by prolonging his stay in Cidre-Fontaines.

"There is a limit to human patience, my dear sir," urged Leonard; "and even marquises are human, as you know."

"I have no doubt of what you say," replied the abbé, with almost reproachful gravity. "Poor parish priest as I am, I have never been in the habit of exalting the mighty ones of the earth above their fellow-men."

"My dear abbé"—and Leonard was hastening to explain.

"You spoke but in kindness, my son," the good man said, affectionately patting the back of his friend's hand. "'T is I who should be, not more, but less, than human, were I not to regard your departure hence with feelings of very poignant sorrow. I had formed so many plans to make each remaining day of your sojourn among us a little *fête*. I wished to present you to Monseigneur, who was coming

over from Caen on purpose. I wished you to wait until the arrival of our senior deputy for the department, who would have posted from Paris to see you. The few votes which the poor village curé Guillemot is enabled, in this canton alone, to procure for M. Varlet des Pamiers, do him, they say, no harm in our electoral colleges."

Leonard could only express his regret, and plead the exigencies of his position.

"I see, I see," the abbé continued, gently nodding his head, and with almost a waggish expression in his countenance. "Monsieur must act according to his good pleasure. You are young, and youth must follow its impulses —ah! to the harvesting of what sorrow and regret, sometimes. 'T is a little love, as well as a great deal of duty, that calls you away from Cidre-Fontaines."

"I don't exactly understand you," Leonard remarked, with a half-smile.

"I am not talking enigmas; I have eyes—all our neighbours have. Although it is no business of ours, you are bewitched—you are delivered over to the spells of the Circe, the enchantress who has done so much good and so much harm in this village."

"Do you mean the lady at the Château de Luz? Do you mean Madame de Malinska?"

"Whom else should I mean? And can't you see that by your taking Paris in your way, instead of going *viâ* Havre or Dieppe, everybody in the place is set on the *qui vive* of curiosity, and declares that you are following the Countess to Paris."

"I declare, upon my solemn word and honour," cried out Leonard Dayrell, "that I had not the slightest notion of Madame de Malinska's having left Cidre-Fontaines; and that, so far from following her, she has forbidden me even to write to her."

"I believe you, my son," replied the abbé, extending his hand, which the other pressed. "*Tapez là.* I knew that no deceit could exist in you. I told everybody so. And I am glad to hear you are rid of this maleficent Fairy."

"Don't say maleficent, M. l'Abbé—remember how charitable she was."

"Well, continued the abbé, "we must say malevolent; for, wicked and uncharitable as it is, I must think that, if her acts were good, her intentions were not so. At all events she is gone."

"Gone!"

"Gone, bag and baggage. She and her black pagan, and her Muscovite sorceress, and her grand piano, and her lap-dogs. She left the Château de Luz in a carriage-and-four last night; and her last words on entering the vehicle were to ask if you were still in Cidre-Fontaines. Artful creature! As if she did not know. I learned early this morning, at

the Mairie, that her passport was made out for Paris."

Leonard reiterated his assurances that he was totally ignorant of the events which had taken place at the Château de Luz since the evening which he had spent there; but there was no necessity for him to do so, as the abbé, who was the soul of candour himself, was quite satisfied with his first disclaimer. Moreover, two days had passed since that memorable *soirée*, during which Leonard had never left the parsonage, but had remained shut up in his own chamber, feeding principally on love and the Fairy's manuscript. Should he ever see her again, he wondered?

The hour of final leave-taking arrived, and Leonard bade adieu to the quiet village and to all his attached friends of Cidre-Fontaines, promising faithfully to return whenever the state of the Marquis's health would permit him to make the journey. He reached Paris

with as much celerity as was compatible with the wearisome arrangements of those lumbering old *diligence* days; but he remained but forty-eight hours in the gay capital of France. The pledge faintly exacted from him by the Countess forbade him to exercise any search as to her whereabouts; and he even refrained from running his eye over the pages of the visitors' book at Galignani's, lest he should discover that Madame de Malinska was staying at Meurice's or the Hotel des Princes.

He had no heart to mingle in the amusements of which Paris was then as prolific as it is now; but on the eve of his departure for Calais—he wished now that he had gone home by way of Dieppe or Havre—for which purpose he had secured a place in the *malle-poste*, he thought he would go to the opera. Indeed, he felt so weary and forlorn that he scarcely knew what to do with himself. Now, there is

no better resource, when you are alone in Paris, for whiling away an hour or so, which you may find hang heavy on your hands, than going to the Grand Opera. If you don't care about the music, there is the ballet; if you don't care about dancing, there are the rich costumes and magnificent scenery; so that you are sure to be pleased one way or another. Leonard walked down to the *bureau de location* behind the Rue Lepelletier, and took a stall. He strolled for an hour or so on the Boulevard and on the Palais Royal; and, for all the prohibition he was under, could not help turning whenever he met a tall, graceful lady in black, and scanning her countenance narrowly.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, impatiently, to himself, "there are thousands upon thousands of female mysteries upon the Boulevards of Paris. How am I to know one from the other? Perhaps the Fairy has taken off her

veil by this time, and yonder Jewish-looking dowager—yonder saucy, snub-nosed, flaxen-haired Amazon, may have the fair hands I love beneath her tight-fitting gloves. She may be in pink, in blue, in all the colours of the rainbow; but she *must* be beautiful—that I will swear to."

Of the ladies at whom Leonard was bold enough to look, some returned his gaze with interest, and murmured to themselves that the Englishman — there was such an indefinable something about him which told you at once that he was an Englishman—was *bel homme*. Some smiled, some frowned, some blushed, some averted their gaze; but from none did Leonard obtain any approach to a responsive look or gesture to tell him he was recognized.

He went to dine at the Café de Paris, and after a slender repast, for his appetite had quite left him since that last cup of tea at the

Château de Luz, hastened to his hotel, dressed, and proceeded to the theatre. The opera was *Robert le Diable.* It was but indifferently performed. *Robert* was a decided muff; the terrible tempter was dead hoarse; and the *Alice* sang "*Quand je quittai ma Normandie*" abominably out of tune. There was something, however, about the *cantatrice* who played *Isabelle* that struck Leonard very forcibly. She was not pretty: he could see through his opera-glass, notwithstanding the paint, that her features were bold and harsh, and her complexion swarthy. She was not young: he could count the lines beneath her eyes and round her mouth. Her voice was jarring and strident—ah! how different from those silvery tones at Cidre-Fontaines!—but her execution was magnificent, elaborate yet facile, scientific yet lucid. An *habitué* of the third row grumbled, however, terribly, at having to listen to the dark lady of mature

years, who looked so forbidding, and sang—or at least executed—so well.

"Is it not a shame, a scandal, an outrage, on the subscribers, to abuse our ears with these *crailleries*, this atrocious *tintamarre?*" he asked, familiarly addressing himself to Leonard, as all playgoing Frenchmen will do. "With what face does the direction continue to draw a huge subvention from the Government, when, month after month, it can give us nothing better on subscription nights than the *hurlements* of this wretched Megæra?"

"I think she sings very well," Leonard good-naturedly interposed. "She is certainly not in her first youth."

"In her first!" disdainfully exclaimed the *habitué*—"she is neither in her first nor in her fifth, nor in her fiftieth. Monsieur, I have heard her dolorous yells in every capital in Europe. To force her down the throat of the *abonnés* of the Academie Royale is a disgrace,

an insult. If she must continue her objectionable howlings, let her go and howl to the English: they are deaf enough."

"Thank you," said Leonard, laughing outright. The third act was over, and the curtain was down.

"I beg pardon," the Frenchman continued, glancing at the honest face of his companion, "*Monsieur est Anglais?* You speak very good French, though. After all, it must be admitted that, once upon a time—oh! a very long time ago—the Cortesi sang very well, and made an enormous sensation."

"Whom did you say?" asked Leonard, eagerly.

"La Cortesi — Nina Cortesi. She is a Roman, I believe, and was once a very fine contralto singer; now she is what you hear. She yet manages to get a very good salary at our Academie Royale, although you may be sure that the administration of the Italians

are too wise to have anything to do with her. She first spoiled a really magnificent voice in trying to sing soprano, and rival the great prima donna La Bertolacci, whom she hated, and who, it is said, was poisoned by the Cortesi. At all events, she disappeared from society many years since."

The curtain rose for the fourth act of *Robert le Diable*, and Leonard listened as though spell-bound to the great scena and duet between *Isabelle* and the wavering *Duke of Normandy*. This, then, was the Fairy's enemy —the relentless foe, the implacable Nina Cortesi, who had pursued the woman whom he loved even from her school-girl days. Leonard would have liked to bound on to the stage, and clutch the tigress by the throat. She looked so wicked, so revengeful. Her very voice had a hateful sound to him. "'*Robert, toi que j'aime*,' indeed!" he said, indignantly. "She love anybody! That she-wolf should

have played *Bertram*, the tempter." But the opera came to an end. The *habitué*, after throwing out a hint that he should be glad to take a cigar and a glass of *eau sucré* with Leonard at the adjacent Café de l'Opera, shut up his *lorgnette*, and bade him good-night. Our hero passed into the vestibule; but, as he was emerging into the Rue Lepelletier, he fancied that he felt a light pressure on his arm. He turned sharply round; but the throng around him was dense, and he could only see a lady enveloped in a black mantle, the hood of which was closely drawn over her head, and who was being assisted into a close carriage. He rushed forward with an exclamation of joy and surprise, but it was too late. He had to elbow his way through the press, and in an instant the carriage was gone.

"A droll costume that, to come to the opera in," grumbled a *sergent de ville* on foot to a municipal guard on horseback.

"What costume may that be?" asked the soldier. "Madame Eve's fig-leaf? They seem to be getting nearer and nearer to it every day. Coco, stand still!" Coco was the steed of the municipal guard, which was caracoling in an inconveniently exuberant manner.

"Not quite so bad as that," answered the *sergent de ville*. "Authority would feel itself bound to interfere in the event of fig-leaves. It is not in vain that the *cancan* and the *Chahue* have been put down. But the costume was, nevertheless, droll. Imagine a lady enveloped from head to foot in black, and with her face covered with a black veil!"

"*Diantre!*" cried the municipal guard. "An eccentric toilette, upon my word. Perhaps the lady had lost an eye, or was marked with the small-pox. One never knows their devices, these women. Now, Coco, my child, we will go to bed." And so saying, the guardian of

the peace, with his child, otherwise his troop horse, trotted to the barracks.

Leonard had listened with intense anxiety to the conversation of the two men, thinking to glean something from it. "It must be she," he muttered; "no one else would answer that description." He turned to the *sergent de ville*, who was yawning desperately, and waiting for the peristyle to be clear in order that he might go to bed, and endeavoured to obtain some further information from him. The man was civil enough, and became more civil on the donation of a five-franc piece; perhaps he discerned love at the bottom of the stranger's inquiries; and in that case his civility is not to be wondered at, for every Frenchman has a latent sympathy with love and lovers.

"I only know what I tell you, monsieur," he answered, in reply to Leonard's hurried queries. "I remarked the strangeness of the lady's dress when she arrived at about nine

o'clock; and mentioned it again to my comrade of the guard when she went away in her own private carriage, seemingly not five minutes ago. However, here is one of the *ouvreuses*, who may know something more about her than I do. They know everything, these *ouvreuses*."

The *ouvreuse*, or box-opener, was a little, leathern-skinned woman, triply tanned, with long skinny hands, twinkling black eyes, and elf locks, and who looked altogether like a reduced copy of one of the witches in *Macbeth*. These box-openers will do anything for money. She would very gladly have sold five hundred lies for the five-franc piece which Leonard bestowed on her; but as he only wanted the truth, and he told her so pretty plainly, she confined herself to informing him that the lady had occupied one of the stage boxes in the rear of the proscenium, which are generally in the gift of the administration of the police, and

that she had received one visitor to her box during the evening—a gentleman, whom she, the *ouvreuse*, knew very well, being no other than the secretary of the Legation to the Russian Embassy in Paris. And then Leonard, with a sinking at his heart, went away, and the box-opener treated the policeman to a glass of *cassis* at the nearest wine-shop, and prattled of the days when she was in the ballet, and had diamonds and cashmeres, an equipage, and a general at her feet. The *sergent*, on his part, repaid the compliment in *cassis*, and discoursed to the box-opener of what a *chienne de vie* he was, and how he would like to be a gendarme, with a yellow crossbelt and jack boots, and a great sabre to clank on the pavement as he walked.

"'Marked with small-pox,' that may perchance be the secret," mumured Leonard, as he sped sadly to his hotel.

The next day, at ten o'clock, he was to start by the *malle-post* from the Messageries Royales, in the Rue Notre Dame des Victoires. He was seeing his baggage secured on the top of the vehicle, when, with a start of astonishment and a thrill of pleasure, he descried among a knot of idlers the well-remembered sable physiognomy of Serge Ali Hammam.

The negro darted towards him, and handed him a letter. He shook his head, and pointed towards the open gateway, as if to tell Leonard that he was not to halt, but to pursue his journey; and then incontinently disappeared.

Leonard tore open the letter—it was in her handwriting—and read as follows:—

"I myself have broken through the compact. I could not resist the temptation of touching you on the arm last night. Leonard,

you have seen my Enemy. It was that wretch who robbed me of my happiness—who robbed me of my beauty—who left me the miserable, forlorn, and degraded wretch I now am. Go, go to England, and be happy. If at the end of the stipulated time you will love me, you shall hear more.—Ever,

"V. M."

Two days afterwards Leonard Dayrell was in London.

He read and re-read the Fairy's manuscript; but although there was much that related to her operatic successes, to her travels in divers countries, and to the unrelenting persecution in the shape of calumny and misrepresentation which the Cortesi was never tired of lavishing upon her, there was no clue to the great and terrible secret of her life, beyond the oft-reiterated assertion that she was miserable and degraded, and that she must be an object of

abhorrence and disgust to Leonard if he ever saw her again.

I need not say that Leonard Dayrell was received with the utmost kindness by the good-natured Lord Mirabel, and that he resumed his former agreeable position in his mansion. But a considerable period elapsed before the young man could bring himself to make his patron fully acquainted with the strange details of his adventures in Cidre-Fontaines. He began first by dropping one hint, and then another; until at last the Marquis was in possession of the whole story.

Lord Mirabel was not in the least offended; nor, to tell the truth—easy-going Sybarite as he was—did he seem much surprised at the nature of the narrative. His lordship had heard of and had done much stranger things in his time.

"There is certainly a disparity of ages be-

tween you, Leonard; but if you are as fond of this mysterious Fairy as you say you are, and at the appointed time she expresses herself to be as much in love with you, I don't see any reason why you should not come together. I never like to baulk young people's affection. I have had my own baulked in my time, and suffer from the disappointment to this very day much more than I do from the gout. Only be careful. That veil must be lifted before you give yourself away. When I knew the Vezzosina she was young, and pretty, and good; but time works wonders, as you know. Prima donnas are dangerous folks, and Russian countesses are more dangerous still. *Gare à la cruche cassée*, my young friend."

Time worked such wonders, that at the end of the year and the day—namely, in the latter part of the year 1841—Leonard Dayrell was, if possible, still fonder than ever of the Fairy

with the Fair Hands. The enchantress was faithful to her promise. On the very day on which the term expired, Leonard, who had come expressly to London from the seat of Lord Mirabel in Scotland, received a billet in her well-known hand. It simply bade him, if he were still in the same mind, to come at eleven o'clock the following morning to a west-end hotel, and ask for the Countess Malinska. He did not sleep that night. He counted the minutes the next morning until it was time to attend the rendezvous, and punctually as the clock struck eleven found himself in the stately portal of Julabert's Hotel, in Brook-street, Hanover-square, hoping for the best, but prepared for the worst—his heart in his mouth, in his eyes, at the tip of his fingers, all over his body in fact.

The dusky countenance of Serge Ali Hammam showed himself in the hall among the throng of trim, white neck-clothed waiters.

The negro bestowed on him his never-failing grin of recognition, hastened upstairs in his usual cat-like manner to announce him, and in another minute or so Leonard Dayrell was in the presence of his unknown adored one. She was attired as usual: she was still impenetrably veiled, and her hands were whiter than ever.

"Listen to me, Leonard," she said, when their first passionate greetings were over; "I shall not detain you long, and it dependeth on what answer you return to me whether we ever meet again, or meet to part no more. Do you love me as you professed that you loved me a year and a day since?"

"I do—I declare it most solemnly."

"It is well; your love is about to be put to the test. If you love me, would you wed me? Fear not; I am a widow. M. de Malinska was killed in a skirmish in the Caucasus three years since."

"I would. To be your husband would make me the happiest man on earth."

"Leonard Dayrell, could you marry a monster?"

"You are jesting."

"I am speaking seriously. You have read the *Veiled Prophet.* Could you unite yourself to one more hideous than Mokhanna? Could you marry a woman with worse than a death's head?"

"I love you. I have given my word, and will not depart from it."

"Again, it is well. Ere five minutes have elapsed this veil shall be lifted, and you shall judge for yourself of the terrible fate you have condemned yourself to. Ere I do that which cannot be undone, listen to me patiently while I add the postscript to the narrative you have perused—while I explain how I came to be the deformed and disfigured creature you will shortly see. Attend.

"The Cortesi," she continued, "was ever my evil genius. It would take too long to recount all the injuries she did me—the frightful pertinacity with which she persecuted me. I was rich, I was beautiful, I was famous; but she held ever the sword of Damocles. Through her diabolical intrigues I was deceived, I was betrayed—I was cozened into becoming the wife of a certain Count Malinska, who was staying at Naples, while I held an engagement at the San Carlo. He was a Russian nobleman, indeed, and of illustrious family; but I think that a wretch more unprincipled, more cruel, and more depraved, never existed. He ill-treated me in every possible shape and way. He was unfaithful to me. He gambled away half my fortune. He even added blows to his other outrages; and, after seven months of wedded misery, he basely abandoned me, after robbing me of my jewels, and seizing on

all the ready money on which he could lay hands."

"The unutterable villain!"

"He is dead," continued the Countess, "and I hope Heaven will forgive him. Bad as he was naturally, I believe that he was made much worse by the evil counsels of Nina Cortesi, who continually excited him to oppress me. She told me so. She came to insult me in my misery and desolation. She told me that she had been my husband's mistress, and had worn my diamonds.

"Her revenge—although how I had ever offended I know not—did not end here. My husband's desertion left me, for a time, almost penniless; but I was still young, still beautiful, still talented, still the greatest prima donna in Europe. A couple of seasons, full of prosperous engagements, made me once more rich. When I heard that my husband, for a political offence, had been sent to the Cauca-

sus, I went to Russia, where singers are paid enormously. I was prima donna for an entire winter season at St. Petersburg.

"One evening, when there was no performance, I was seated in my boudoir reading. I had allowed my servants to go out for a holiday, and, with the exception of the door porter, who must have been bribed, I was entirely alone in the spacious suite of apartments I occupied. Suddenly, the door of my room opened, and the dreaded Cortesi appeared.

"'I have travelled hundreds of leagues to find you,' she said; 'I have found you at last. Ah, la Vezzosina! I will finish with you this time.'

"'You wouldn't kill me,' I murmured, for I was too frightened to scream.

"'I will do worse,' the infuriated woman cried. 'I will not destroy your life, but I will destroy your beauty. You shall go through

the world to be an object of horror and derision to all who meet you.'

"As she spoke, she suddenly produced from her bosom a glass phial full of some colourless liquid.

"'Do you see this?' she repeated. 'It is *vitriol*—take it.'

"She had clutched my hands in her strong grip. With a cry of agony, I tried to avert my face; but it was too late. She uncorked the phial with her teeth, she raised it on high, and she dashed the contents in my face."

* * * * * *

"Do you love me still?" asked the Fairy, after a dead silence.

"I do."

"Do you still desire to marry me?"

"I do."

"Then behold!" cried the Countess Ma-

linska, triumphantly. "As Nina Cortesi left me then, I am now. Look up, Leonard Dayrell, and behold your bride."

She tore away her veil—she displayed her countenance; and Leonard Dayrell saw—no features scarred, riddled, disfigured almost out of human semblance by the deadly corrosion of vitriol, but a face calm, fair, and smiling—a face with mild blue eyes and rosy lips, a face of angelic beauty.

"I have told you the truth, dear Leonard," said the Fairy, gaily, "and yet but half the truth. Let me tell you how I escaped. When Nina had, as she thought, accomplished her dreadful purpose, she rushed from the room and effected her escape. The porter afterwards confessed that she had bribed him to admit her. I was found an hour afterwards in a swoon on the carpet of my boudoir; but, save that my face and bosom seemed to have been drenched with some perfumed

liquid, I had sustained no harm. I might at first have thought that Nina had only intended to terrify me; but the Russian police, who know everything, discovered the chemist from whom she had purchased the so-called vitriol; and he, honest man, informed them that, suspecting some sinister object from the expression of his customer's face, he had sold her, instead of vitriol—what do you think?"

"What?"

"Rose-water."

"The effects of terror," concluded the Fairy, "were, however, sufficient to throw me into a fever. After that I suffered for months from a nervous affection. On my recovery, I fell into a low, brooding state of misanthropy. I made a vow to assume the garb in which you first saw me, and never to leave it off till I found one who would love me for myself, and who would cheer-

fully incur the peril which you, Leonard, have incurred, but from which you have escaped."

Of course they were married, and they were happy. Need more be said. I ought, I suppose, to give a "full, true, and particular account" of the marriage ceremony, with description of the bride's dress; how she looked in the magnificent tiara of diamonds that were presented to her by the Marquis of Mirabel, from whose mansion, of course, the marriage was celebrated; how many bridesmaids she had, &c., &c. But to what purpose? Isn't the story told in every novel, and mustn't every reader be weary of marriages that are the fag-end of novels? I ought, I am aware, to cause some calamity to befall Donna Nina Cortesi, but I am not cognizant that any did, more than her own evil spirit. About six months after their union, when Mr. and Mrs.

Dayrell were on the Continent, they met her, and much was her astonishment to find that the rival whom she thought she had disfigured for life was more beautiful than ever in her happiness. So, again I say, they were married and they were happy.

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