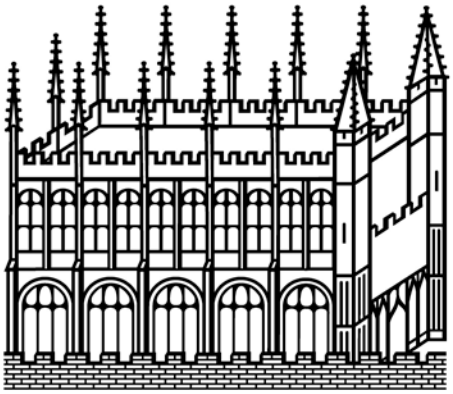

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SYDONIE'S DOWRY.

SYDONIE'S DOWRY:

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "MADEMOISELLE MORI,"

"DENISE," ETC.

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SYDONIE'S DOWRY.

CHAPTER I.

'*EST bien, c'est bien,* mademoiselle! please yourself; but I warn you that a girl will never have an honest lover, not to speak of a husband, who slips out by moonlight to meet a rascally hair-dresser, a fellow that no one knows anything about, who comes and settles himself in the town, down yonder, without doubt, because in his own parts too much is known about him! who bewitches our girls by playing the Parisian before them, the little simpletons!"

Here the speaker's breath failed him, so that he could only complete his oration by a vehement gesture, flinging from him the cup of boxwood, which he had a little while before been carving, and push-

ing his blouse off his broad brown chest, as if to invite the morning wind to visit and cool him. His companion, a tall young girl, who was leaning carelessly against the old well beside which they were speaking, replied with profound disdain,—

"Ta, ta, ta, M. Paul! do not excite yourself about trifles, one would think you king of Pamparigousto!"

"King or peasant, I know how an honest girl should behave!" interrupted Paul; "and once more I tell you, Madeloun, that if you don't promise me this instant to give up your fine parrot of a *coiffeur* you may come back *sans vert*, for me, from the fête to-morrow!"

Madeloun did not seem greatly moved by this menace. On the contrary, she shrugged her shoulders, assumed a disdainful air, and said, "*Bien!* I am going away. The conversation of M. Paul is not so amusing that I should forget we have much to do to-day. It may be that there are other people who can dance in our parish besides himself; I have never wanted for partners that I know of, and he need not be so ready to act *le grand seigneur*. People do say that his uncle has the intention of re-marrying, and then adieu the mulberries, and the flocks, and the farm of Mas Crema!"

"And adieu, also, *la grande Madeloun!* Is it

not so? Never was a weathercock made that showed so well which way the wind blows as a woman! Ah, do you see? She thinks the wig-maker's shop surer than my uncle's money! Well done for far-sightedness! Then I tell you, Madeloun, that now I see this, nothing on earth would make me be your *fiancé* either for a day or for life!—no, nothing! I would rather dance with lame Zèu, or hump-backed Ano, or —"

"Or Sydonie, the grand-daughter of the *Roumèco, n'est ce pas?*" cried Madeloun, bursting out laughing, as a fresh voice was heard in the distance, singing an old carol of the district, the words of which became more and more clear as the singer came nearer.

"Yes, rather with her," retorted Paul, exasperated at Madeloun's indifference towards his warnings, "rather with Sydonie fifty times; she is a good girl, a hard-working lively girl as you will find in all France! Is it her fault if she is the grandchild of a *mal famée?* Is it she who is a witch? One is not answerable, I should hope, for all the sins of one's grandmothers!"

"Ta, ta, here is M. Paul putting himself into a passion again about Mdlle. Sydonie. Listen, Sydonie: you are born *coiffée!*" cried Madeloun, raising her voice to make herself heard by the young

girl who was coming towards them, still singing, while she carried a large bag full of mulberry-leaves for the silkworms! "Here is M. Paul asking you to dance with him at the fête to-morrow! You are sure of a partner this year; your grandmother has cast a spell on him, one sees that!"

The new comer was now opposite the two others, and looked at them earnestly, as if seeking to understand of what they were speaking. The words of Madeloun had called up a frown to a face usually laughing. Sydonie was the prettiest girl in the whole country side, though the peasants, with one voice, gave the preference to *la grande Madeloun;* for the peasant admires a robust and solid beauty: he has a taste for caryatides rather than sylphs. *La grande Madeloun* was of the former class; tall, freshly coloured, strong, and loud-voiced. Paul, also, was a handsome fellow, brown as a date, gay, and easily provoked. But Sydonie belonged to another type, and recalled the beautiful Venetians, whom Titian loved to paint, and whose living image may yet be seen in the Friuli, with rippling hair, like ripe corn, skins fair as asphodel flowers, and dark eyes by turns sad and joyous. Sydonie wore the dress of that part of Languedoc where she lived, but the least experienced eye could see that she was

not Languedocienne. These three persons had met beside an old Saracen well, like a cleft in the live rock, so deep was it, and so far down lay the cool water within its sides, fringed with maiden-hair ferns, and *erba de nostra Dama.* There was a huge wheel, armed with ropes, and earthenware jars, and an array of troughs beside it to receive the water when drawn up. Wells like these may be seen in Spain, in Africa, in short, wherever the Moors have been. *La grande Madeloun* had come out to wash her *éclisses,* (cheese-tubs); Paul, as often happened, chanced to pass that way, and Sydonie, early as the hour was, had been to gather food for her silkworms, or *magnans,* as the patois has the name. She looked at the two disputants for a moment, saw that Madeloun pouted, and that Paul was really angry, and replied, laughing,—

"Many thanks, but I advise you not to be in such a hurry to give away your partners, for I foretell that your handsome Anatôle will not be of the fête to-morrow!"

"How! who has told you that?" cried both the others together.

"Eh! if my grandmother is a witch, is it not very easy for me to know the future? Qualities are inherited, you know!"

"You say that to vex me and please Paul!" cried

Madeloun, almost in tears. "You shall pay me this, wicked snake—*petite venimeuse!*"

"And to reward you I will dance with you to-morrow, on my word!" said Paul. "You shall have a partner, and I know who will dance with a pretty girl!"

"If she will dance with him!" said Sydonie, laughing and curtseying. Then she turned to go, and left the lovers, if lovers they were, to settle their dispute as they pleased. They heard her lark-like voice recommence the carol, but little by little the sounds died away; she turned the corner of a rocky buttress and disappeared.

No chain of mountains offers more variety than that of the Cevennes—a nest of extinct volcanoes; there are parts which seem never to have emerged from a state of chaos, so savage, shapeless, and inaccessible are they. The lava has taken the most fantastic forms; the perpendicular precipices are inaccessible even to the goats, and not a blade of grass grows on the wind-swept rocks. Elsewhere the valleys are choked up with a mass of brushwood, trees whose boughs have interlaced, climbing plants, and gigantic ferns, below which, unseen, but not unheard, glides a stream, called, in the patois of the province, a *gardon*. The chief produce of the dis-

trict is the chestnut, and it is the tree most cultivated, though the mulberry rivals it; but the chestnut grows where the mulberry could not live,—here, sheltered, green, and flourishing; there, twisted, bent, crouching as if to escape the gusts of the mistral, which howls through the narrow gorges and sweeps the bare mountain slopes. From time to time, however, situations are found, altogether exceptional and fortunate, where the turf is enamelled with flowers, and the bees gather a rich store, the mulberries flourish, and the rocks, fallen from the mountain overhead, are almost hidden in heath and clematis. It was in one of these folds of the Cevennes that had sprung up the village of Le Peyrou. Two leagues further off, in the plain, was the little town of Castelnau, where lived the *coiffeur* who had given such umbrage to Paul Bridaine, nephew and heir-presumptive of the richest landowner in Le Peyrou, Maître Bridaine, which title marked him out as a village notable. Up to this time Paul had been in great request, as the best match of this district, for his uncle was rich, not only in mulberry-trees, but he was also a grazier, and was the owner of a fine herd of cattle, which, in summer, was driven up into the mountains, and in winter fed in the plains. Young men were scarce in Le Peyrou, owing to the conscription; but Paul

might have pleased a woman without any of these adventitious circumstances: he knew it, and perhaps believed himself to be more irresistible than he was. At all events he was as much astonished as displeased by the faithlessness of *la grande Madeloun,* to whom he had occasionally paid some attention, and he promised himself that he would be revenged the next day, when the village fête was to take place. The great event of the year! before which the housewives, Cevenoles though they were, gave themselves up to orgies of cleanliness, every maiden did her best to procure a new toilette, and old and young speculated on who would have a partner and who would not. Long before it came, and long after, did the fête of the patron saint afford food for gossip; few events happened in Le Peyrou, and none so important as this. A young girl who was not asked to dance felt herself almost disgraced; he who selected a partner was called for the day her *fiancé,* and had the right to see her home at night. Each youth appeared with a sprig of hawthorn or rosemary in his hat, and offered it to the lass whom he selected, and she to whom no one brought this homage was said to be "*sans vert.*" There was great and open rivalry among the girls; the year before, *la grande Madeloun* had had Paul Bridaine,

and Sydonie had been "*sans vert.*" No one had chosen to dance with this pretty girl; no roguish old woman had snatched a "*vert*" unexpectedly from a hat, and placed it in her hand, thus obliging, by the immemorial laws of the fête, both the owner of the "*vert*" and her into whose hand it had been thrust, to dance together whether they would or not: yet many people, especially those from the town, thought Sydonie very pretty. "*Qu'elle est avenante!*" sighed more than one audibly. Yet she went home "*sans vert,*" to the extreme anger of her grandmother, who nevertheless was the cause of the affront offered to her grandchild.

Everybody knew everybody in Le Peyrou; connections and friends intermarried; you were born, wedded, and buried under the eyes of the whole village. Strangers rarely found their way even to Castelnau; novelty was unknown, or at least scarce and suspicious. This is still the case in these lonely places; far more was it so thirty years ago.

Yet there was a mystery in Le Peyrou; a living, ceaseless mystery; nothing was even surmised as to the history of Jano Mario, the grandmother of Sydonie, who was called in the country by a name which no one used in her hearing—*la Roumèco,* or the Vampire. When people spoke of her they lowered

their voices and signed themselves with the cross. Nothing was known about her; nothing, except that sixteen years before she had appeared in the valley, with a frail little creature of perhaps two years old, since grown up into the pretty Sydonie. The grandmother at once took possession of a deserted dwelling, avoided by all good Christians; she spoke Languedocien perfectly, but French equally well. Everything about her seemed foreign: instead of the universal little cap or black hood worn by the women in that part, she knotted a crimson handkerchief round her head; in short, she was a foreigner. She might come from the great plain of La Beauce; she might be a Bordelaise, or a Savoyarde; it was all one to the inhabitants of Le Peyrou, who classed all who were not Languedocien as beings remote from their knowledge and sympathies. But this was not all. She was at home in the history of every one, from the De Parthenau, a noble family ruined by the Revolution, down to the domestic misfortunes of the poorest peasant. Moreover she was learned in plants; her fame spread abroad; her charms and her cures became celebrated. She had visitors who came by day to the retreat which she had chosen at the bottom of the valley; others came stealthily by night, to ask for help and advice on matters which would not

bear day-light. She was well paid for all her counsels, whether given by day or night, especially for the latter, yet she was always needy. Her granddaughter did not lead a very gentle life beside her; but Sydonie was always gay, alert, and blithe as a dragon-fly, whether she carried her load of mulberry-leaves, bound the sheaves under the burning summer sun, or wound a skein of silk at the cottage-door, whilst she sang the old songs, or the "*noëls*" of the province as softly as if her grandmother had not possessed the voice of a raven in a quinsey. Sydonie knew and cared nothing about the secrets of her grandmother; it was by her work that they lived; she was always busy, always gay, and happy above all when near the friend whose favourite she had been from her childhood, Mademoiselle de Parthenau.

As she passed round the projecting rock which hid her from Paul Bridaine and *la grande Madeloun*, Sydonie found herself in sight of the dwelling of *la Roumèco*. It was composed of two rooms; the further one had been, at some distant time, hollowed out by the water which had filtered through the rock; the front room was built with great stones, heaped one upon another, and menacing ruin whenever a storm swept through the valley. Yet it had stood for many years: it was said to have been constructed by

Protestants, driven from their homes in the troublous times; it now served as a refuge for the sorceress who had chosen it, knowing well that amongst the Roman Catholics this choice of a dwelling, held accursed among them on account of its Camisard occupants, would add much to her reputation as a witch—a reputation not only very lucrative, but giving her a power, real and wide-spread, in which she delighted. Wild roses and clematis had done their best to bind together these old stones, and covered them with a thick mass of verdure; their garlands hung over the rude door, and mingled with the brambles which had sprung up on all sides of this rude dwelling, half cabin, half grotto. The door was usually open, to admit light, which also stole in through an opening in the walls, but never sufficiently to brighten the whole apartment; even at this moment, when the rising sun illuminated the valley, sparkled on the snowy crests of the Vivarais, and shone brilliantly here and there on the mountain slopes, while elsewhere deep shadows still nestled; white clouds wandered along the rocky summits and rose into towers in the blue sky; all things were awake and glad; the bees hummed; the green wavelets of the *gardon* babbled as they went by; the birds began to sing; yet, in spite of it all, this place

was singularly lonely. Behind the cottage the precipice rose straight up, its grey wall appearing here and there through the pines that clothed it. A shoulder of the mountain stretched out on the left, and completely hid the witch's dwelling from the sight of the village. Before it was a carpet of short turf, always green, thanks to the river, which here made a bend, as if expressly to preserve the verdure of the mountain lawn, on which a goat and her kid were feeding. Both raised their heads on seeing Sydonie approach, and ran to meet her, with the bells round their necks tinkling a duet. Their mistress caressed them, and had some difficulty in preventing them from entering the cottage with her. She pushed them back, and stood still for a moment, to accustom her eyes to the dimmer light. She soon perceived *la Roumèco*, staff in hand, for her steps were somewhat tottering, though no one could traverse the country with such speed as she, whether it were that she knew all the bye-ways, or feigned to be lamer than she really was. One person would affirm that he had seen her in her cabin, while another declared that almost at the same time she had been gathering herbs among the rocks, or charming away some malady of man or beast at a considerable distance. These things exalted her ill fame as a witch,

above all since she always chose moonlight nights on which to collect her simples, and every one knows that the full moon is the friend of sorcerers. Undeniably it was strange and weird to see this tall, lean figure stalking by night along almost inaccessible paths, examining, rejecting, or carefully plucking the herbs, which she finally threw into the bag which she carried on her back. When Sydonie came in, the old woman was feeding the vipers which she kept imprisoned in a kind of cage; she had just given them a mouse and several frogs. She turned her head at the sound of footsteps. "Eh! it is thou!" said she in her hoarse voice, "*Dis donc!* what hast thou seen this morning?"

From her babyhood Sydonie had been trained to observe and report all that passed around her to her grandmother, who besides never failed to question adroitly every one who came near her. Thence her familiarity with all that was passing in the neighbourhood, but her intimacy with the past history of every one could not be thus explained.

"*Pas grand' chose,*" answered the girl in French, which language the grandmother also had spoken, although it was an accomplishment very rare among those of her rank.

"*Pas grand' chose! pas grand' chose!* that is what

you have always said of late. You are growing a little fool; one would say you went out with your eyes shut. Have you then seen no one this morning?"

"Well, yes, *mère grande;* I saw Bartholomieu beating his wife. Ah, if I had a husband who beat me!"

"Well, what would you do? Ah! —" with a great Languedocien oath addressed to one of the vipers—"so you bite your comrades, do you? let them eat then, I say! let them eat in their turn, infamous one, ungrateful animal! behave thyself, I say to thee!—What would you do, Sydonie?"

"First of all," replied the girl, laughing, "I would not scream and call, in a way to be heard by all the village."

"Eh, eh! she would do better to pay me a little visit; I shall see her some day soon; we know ways of softening the temper of husbands. And then?"

"That poor Ano was crying because her *magnans* (silkworms) have the malady."

"It was she who mocked me the other day, was it not? It was she who defied me to bewitch her *magnans*, because she had set up a new image of the Virgin among them!"

"It is not well to offend you, *mère grande;*" said Sydonie, looking with a singular mixture of uneasi-

ness and suspicion at the old woman, who was laughing low to herself, while she again occupied herself with her snakes.

"Well said, my girl, you are right; but as for you, you will never be more than a simpleton. You have no courage—*Va!* one needs that for my trade, do you see?"

"One would think it paid you well, grandmother, yet we live by my work."

"That does not concern you; girls must work. Some day you shall have a husband, and he shall work for you."

"You will be a witch, indeed, if you find me a husband, grandmother."

"*Quoi donc!* they are afraid of me, perhaps? *Bonne fille que tu es* (simpleton), the husband is found."

"What!" said Sydonie, starting, and ceasing for a moment to wind the skein of silk which she held already in her hands; "Found!—my husband?"

"Say then, child, whom would you marry?"

"For instance—Paul Bridaine."

"You shall have him. It is he of whom I thought."

"Bah! he is to marry *la grande Madeloun.* I named him in joke."

"He will marry none but you. Was it for nothing that *la grande Madeloun* came to me at nightfall to ask her fortune told? A girl who is going to be married does not care to read the ashes. She knows her fate already."

"They do say that M. Anatôle of the town seeks her, and it was about him that Paul and Madeloun quarreled to-day."

"Where? where? Is she a fool, this girl! To say she had seen nothing! They were quarreling, then? Ah, ah, she thinks only of the *coiffeur;* Paul is angry; he will not dance with her to-morrow; Anatôle has sprained his foot, and will not be at the fête; she will remain *sans vert,* the beauty!"

"How spiteful you are, *mère grande!* What has the girl done to you?"

"I hate handsome girls, I hate them all. Once I was handsome too; I had lovers like them; now—it brings back things—I could strangle them all! And then she hinders one of my plans, this Madeloun. You will go to the fête to-morrow; you will dress yourself in your best, and you shall have the cross and ear-rings that I keep for your dowry; no one has such ornaments as those, eh? This time do not come back *sans vert,* or—"

"Listen, grandmother, M. Paul says he will dance with me!"

The eyes of the old woman sparkled as they might have done in the far-off time when she too was a handsome girl.

"He said so, he said so! good, good!—it is going right!"

"But I did not say that I would dance with him!" murmured Sydonie to herself.

"You will wear your cap that you have just bought, and your new *fichu*, and my cross and my ear-rings; they shall see if my grandchild is well dressed! She will have a good dowry when she marries; that *parure* will be yours, it is your dowry, you know."

"Yes, grandmother, you have often said so. If you knew how they envy me those ornaments! not a girl in the country has the like!"

"I should think so! It is a good dowry, *vrai!*"

"They often ask me where those things came from, and if they were the fashion in your country, and I laugh and tell them some story or other about it—they will believe anything!" said Sydonie, with her clear laugh. "However"— and a cloud came down on the expressive face—"I know that is wrong; I should do better to keep away from the fête to-morrow, but I do so love to dance! It vexed me

so last year to come back *sans vert*, and hear people laughing at me—"

"They paid for it," said the grandmother between her teeth.

"Oh, I never wished that, you know!"

"But the *magnans* of one died, and the cottage of another took fire, and Matthieu fought with Pierre, whence at this moment they are in prison—is it not so?"

Sydonie looked at her with terror.

"You do not mean that you caused all that!" cried she.

"*Bon!* she opens her eyes wide now! that does not concern you, my child; look to your silkworms, and let me alone."

Sydonie was long silent. The goat put her head in at the door without her mistress paying her any attention; the little crisp sound produced by the silkworms feeding was distinctly heard; the old woman began to sort a heap of plants. A ray of sunlight glided in through the opening in the stones which served as a window, gilded the hair of the girl who sat there deep in thought, and fell on her hands and on the skein of silk which she was winding. All at once she lifted her head, saying, "You have never told me where you were born, *mère grande?*"

"What does it matter to you?"

"Why, a great deal, I should think. I know nothing of my family, for instance."

"It is apparently because you have none. The conscription took your father from me; your mother died a year after your birth."

"But only tell me who she was."

"A girl of good family, whom your father protected during—have done with your silly questions."

"During the Revolution?"

"Yes, then! Afterwards, having lost all her friends, she married him. He was mad about her; twenty times he risked his life to protect her."

"Ah, how glad it makes me to hear this!" cried Sydonie, with a joyful look. "Be kind, grandmother; tell me more about it. And you had a daughter, too?"

"Why, you know it, little plague! Have I not told you that an English family took a fancy to her for her voice and her ways; they had an only daughter, spoiled as *pas un!*—she wanted her for a playfellow. She—my girl—was delighted to go; they gave me a good sum of money, for she was useful to me, that child; she might have been more useful had I kept her; but so the affair was arranged. Since, I have never heard of her."

"You did not love her? yet you loved my father?"

"If you talk of him I will throw this soup in your face! What need is there for you to cause me pain now? What does a girl like you know of how mothers love their sons? I had only one, and he loved me; yes, he loved me. His sister never did. I knew that. I was glad to get rid of that little frightened face of hers; when I saw her trembling before me I could hardly keep my hands off her! But he!—he coaxed me, he called me 'good little mother,' he hugged me! You are like her; you do not love me, no! but all the same, you are his child, and I think I love you for that."

Sydonie listened with astonishment to this unusual confidence. Great tears rolled down the withered cheeks of the old woman, who dried them with a sort of anger, and applied herself to arrange her herbs with minute care. It was she, however, who this time first broke silence.

"Listen!—you will go out this evening; I don't want you here."

"You are expecting some one? If only it is not Seube . . . . No? Well, then, I will go to the Manoir Parthenau. Ah, grandmother; if you were really a sorceress, we would look for the red *chèvre d'or*, who shows where hidden treasures are,

and I would make that family rich. What a sad lot, though they never complain! To be almost as poor as we are, so that Mademoiselle must always stay at home, and could not even go to her cousin's marriage! You who know the history of every one, tell me about the De Parthenau."

"I know nothing of them," answered the old woman, in a voice both abrupt and trembling. "Hold your tongue, and leave me at peace, or I will beat you with that distaff, child born on a Friday!"

And she looked round her, as if to seek the implement, in so threatening a manner that Sydonie thought it wise to remain silent.

CHAPTER II.

SYDONIE spent nearly an hour in gathering and arranging the wild flowers that grew around the cottage; nameless flowers, which the people call *fleurs des bergers.* She made them into a bouquet with some rarer ones which she brought out of the hut, saying to herself, "I have nothing better; she knows that if I had I would give it to her."

"She" meant Thérèse de Parthenau, whom Sydonie regarded with the passionate affection that one woman sometimes gives to another. It is a kind of worship, and has the feverish joy and pain of that love which is generally supposed to be felt only by persons of opposite sex. To be with Mdlle. de Parthenau was for Sydonie perfect felicity. To have pleased her in a mere trifle there was no difficulty which she would not have confronted, and her opinion was a law for Sydonie, who, however, still preserved a certain independence of mind which

prevented her from becoming the mere shadow of her friend; and her occasional fits of waywardness, though they made Mdlle. de Parthenau smile and shake her head, perhaps added not a little to the pleasure which the noble *demoiselle* took in the society of the village maiden.

Sydonie spoke truth when she said that the De Parthenau were almost as poor as herself. So many noble families had, during the last sixty years, been reduced in one way or another to poverty, that there was nothing surprising in this. Ask what have become of the *seigneurs* of such and such a place—as, for example, Montferrier? and the answer will be, "They disappeared in the Revolution." All the members of the Parthenau family had thus perished, except a son, the father of Thérèse, who at that fatal time chanced to be absent in America, where a small property had just been left him. When it was possible for him to return to France, he bought back a fragment of his estate, which had been sold as the property of an *émigré*, and lived on this slender means. He had two children, a daughter, and a son, who was trying to make his way at Paris. M. de Parthenau had accepted his position readily. He became a good *bourgeois*, was his own steward, occupied himself with his little estate, frequented

the fairs, paid occasional visits to old friends, and led a tranquil life, whose days were so much alike that it was difficult to tell one from another. His old age was rather a crown than a burden, enlivened by a strong spice of true Gallic gaiety and philosophy; and he would have been surprised had any one suggested that this peaceful life was less to the taste of his children than himself. Like so many excellent fathers, he sincerely believed that because it suited him it must suit them. He had forgotten his own stormy youth, to find himself happy by his fireside, and it never occurred to him to ask, "Is my daughter happy?" So much the better, since he could have done nothing, and Thérèse was the last person to make him suspect that she was not perfectly satisfied. Yet, whoever had seen her would have thought her destined for a wider sphere than that of the narrow world where she strove to be content. It had not always been so. Now, however, she stifled all the aspirations, the radiant visions which once haunted her, under the crowd of occupations which she found for herself. She silenced the cry of her intellect, and yet heard it always; perhaps, because she shunned as snares the natural outlets which presented themselves, refusing each rare opportunity of leaving home lest she should

return discontented; and putting away books and pencils that she might have no interests but those of her father and her poor dependants. It was an honest mistaken effort to do right, and the confessor, who stood to her in the place of a conscience, approved it, nay, urged it on her. It was strange, this mute ceaseless conflict, known only in its full extent to herself, and hidden under so monotonous and peaceful a life!

The Manoir Parthenau was between the village and the town: Sydonie never lost any time in reaching it. Attracted, perhaps, by her large nosegay, the kid sprang up to follow her, and gamboled beside her, trying to snatch her flowers. She threatened it, and ordered it to go back, and the mother-goat uplifted in the distance a peremptory voice, to which the kid returned a little disobedient cry, paying no more attention to the summons than to the blows of Sydonie, none of which reached him, since as soon as she threatened him on one side he fled to the other, made a circle, and returned to await her a few steps in advance. Finally, weary of this sport, he thought fit to return home, shaking his impertinent little head, where the horns were just budding, and Sydonie continued her way alone. Smiles came to her lips; she sang like a bird, so

happy was she. From time to time, however, the smile vanished, the song ceased; she was thinking, and not cheerfully. Then she shook her pretty head, as the kid had done, and smile and song returned to her lips. The mere thought that she was going to see Thérèse de Parthenau was happiness. She crossed a small garden, where blossomed semi-double roses, oleanders, nasturtiums with dark fiery flowers, and a quantity of white lilies, destined for the altar of the Virgin in the neighbouring chapel. In the court, before the house, was a dovecote: Mdlle. de Parthenau was standing below it, throwing handsful of corn to the pigeons, which fluttered round her, or walked at her feet. At the approach of Sydonie they flew up suddenly; Mdlle. de Parthenau looked round to see what had startled them, and saw Sydonie, smiling, as she held out her wild flowers.

"Ah, *ma petite*, is it you?" said Thérèse, with a ray of pleasure lighting up her pensive face. Sydonie hastened to kiss the hand extended to her.

"What beautiful flowers you have brought me this time! You have gone far to find them; here are some which do not grow near Le Peyrou: thanks, my child!" said Thérèse, smiling, for she knew well what joy it was to Sydonie to give her pleasure.

"I have something pleasant to tell you!" said Sydonie, raising her glad trustful eyes to the face of her friend.

"Indeed! So much the better: come and tell me quickly!" said Mdlle. de Parthenau, moving towards a bench, sheltered by a mass of Virginian creeper, where she sat down, while the girl took up her usual position at her feet. "I, too, have had a pleasure yesterday!"

"What was it? Oh, tell me! how glad I am!"

"Yes, my father brought home the last work of M. de Chateaubriand."

"What happiness!" said Sydonie, fully sharing in the satisfaction of her friend, though, assuredly, she did not know M. de Chateaubriand from Titus Livius. "He will read it to you of an evening: what charming *veillées* you will spend!"

"Yes, and we meant to have begun yesterday, but the name of M. de Chateaubriand recalled so many recollections to my father, that he talked till it was bedtime; and, as I could not end the day by reading a secular book, I took the 'Lives of the Saints.' But you do not tell me your news."

"It is because I so love to know what you have been doing, and yet I have thought all day of the pleasure of telling you."

"Many seek me when they are in sorrow, but none but you come to me when they are happy!" said Thérèse, with a suppressed sigh, as she caressed the girl's golden brown hair. Then, as if repenting her words, she added, quickly, "Well, what have you to tell me?"

"It seems so little now, it *is* very little; but I always long so much to know something of my history; it is so singular to be without a history, and they cast it in my teeth in the village, you know. Well, my grandmother has told me to-day that my mother was of a good family, for whom my father risked his life many times during the Revolution."

"That explains why you are not quite a little peasant, my child. Did she tell you her name?"

"No, she shut herself up in silence; but you will see, sooner or later, I shall know. It is surprising how things come to pass, if one only desires them enough."

"Little inquisitive!"

"But, Mademoiselle, what would you have? And see what a good thing it is to be a little curious; thus I learnt that my mother was not a vagabond: ah, it made me glad! But how can I help wishing to learn something more? One would say my grandmother had dropped from the clouds;

a stranger here, she yet knows the affairs of every one; she speaks the *patois* perfectly, yet she also talks French as well as M. le Curé; I do not say as well as you, Mademoiselle."

"How? you think I speak French better than M. le Curé?"

"But of course, if you chose you could teach him everything, I think!"

"And why do you think so?"

"I divine it. *Tenez;* it is wrong, perhaps, but I believe there are many things that M. le Curé does not know."

"Enough, Sydonie; you ought to respect him too much to imagine such things."

"But I do respect him, Mademoiselle. I do all that he bids me."

"For example, you stay away from the fête to-morrow!"

Sydonie cast down her eyes, then raised them quickly. "Ah, Mademoiselle, we have a fête only once in the year—we, who have to work! I think there is indulgence for that little sin, if dancing be a sin, since we have so few pleasures. It is like the fruit that is forgotten or out of reach on the trees,—the branch that the good God has given to the birds,—a little something to make them joyful.

And, think! if I choose, I may have the best dancer in the country to-morrow for my partner!" and she began eagerly to relate her meeting with Paul Bridaine. "But I do not mean to dance with him."

"That is right, since he only asked you out of pique. You would be wise to stay away, *petite.*"

"Oh, do not tell me to do that! every one would say it was because I came home *sans vert* last year; and my grandmother would be so angry!"

"At all events, try not to mortify this girl, and make her an enemy instead of a friend."

"A friend! I have none!" exclaimed Sydonie, with a mixture of sadness and indignation. "Have I ever harmed any one? yet, you know it, Mademoiselle, they bear me an ill-will; they are always calling me '*la demoiselle à la sorcière;*' the kindest of them dare not make friends with me for fear of what the others would say. *Tenez,* I am obliged to work, sing, dance, to drive away these thoughts; above all lately. Formerly, I complained to my grandmother; now I dare no more do so, since misfortunes always happen to those who offend her. Not later than to-day, I perceived this while speaking of those who insulted me last year—I was frightened—"

"But what could she have to do with it, dear child?"

"Do I know? Yet it is true. I am growing afraid of her. Formerly I did not think about these things; I was accustomed to our life; it seemed to me quite natural. Now, I ask myself what people want with her by night? why she always sends me away when she has certain visitors? And then, Mademoiselle, I am horribly afraid of that old man who comes from time to time; Seube, you know!

"The *panieraire?*" said Mdlle. de Parthenau, using the local word for men who go from house to house with their long bundles of osiers, to make or mend baskets and chairs.

"The same, and he is an *orpailleur* too, but I don't think he gets rich by seeking gold in the *gardons*, he has such a mean, miserable look. Each time that he comes to us my grandmother is *d'une humeur massacrante;* ill-tempered as a red ass! He comes for something, I am sure; but what? Could he have formerly known my grandmother? One thing is certain, and that is, that she dreads him!"

"It is possible that they have some mutual secret!" said Mdlle. de Parthenau, thinking. "I advise you to rest content, without trying to find it out."

"I am sure there would be nothing good to hear, yet, still, I should like to know ..... Ah, Made-

moiselle, one soon finds out there is trouble in this world!"

Thérèse de Parthenau sighed as she rested her hand on Sydonie's bent head, and answered, rather to her own thoughts than Sydonie's words, "We shall know, by-and-bye, that it was best."

"Ah, that is well for saints like Mademoiselle, but I—I should be so glad just to be like other people. I do not understand the least in the world the pleasure that my grandmother takes in being feared. 'He who is feared is a king!' says she; 'there never was a reign like the Terror.' Ah, Mademoiselle, I have grieved you!"

"No, no, little one, but I am an *émigré's* daughter; you know it. Although, I remember nothing of those days—indeed, I was not born then—it seems to me that their shadow is upon me. We lost so much in the Revolution."

"If you would but tell me something about it!" said Sydonie, with a pretty coaxing air, for Mdlle. Parthenau very rarely spoke of herself. "I tell you everything, while you—"

"Tell you nothing! What would you have me tell a child like you?"

"Not too much of a child to love you!"

"I did not say that."

"Ah, but I shall believe you think so if you only talk to me of myself. It would make me so happy if you told me something that you would not say to all the world!"

"There is little to tell. My father had left France before the great troubles; his mother wrote earnestly entreating him to remain away, and promising to join him as soon as she had realized her fortune: but this province being very unquiet, she was going to Lyons, where she had a *château*, while awaiting the moment to emigrate. This became daily more difficult. She contrived to let him know that she had taken refuge with an old servant whom she had dowered and established at Lyons. I cannot recall this part of the history exactly, but we have her letters in that cabinet which you admire. Then—Silence! My father afterwards learnt that she and his sister had perished in the 'Reign of Terror,' and with her, no doubt, a poor young girl, a very distant connection, whom my father fancies you a little resemble."

"And M. your father?"

"He joined the army of the Princes in Germany. Ah, how he must have suffered when he found himself opposed to his countrymen! Later, being wounded, he retired to England, which was very kind to the *émigrés*—"

"Ah, Mademoiselle! how can you praise that perfidious country, so cruel to our Emperor?"

"It opened its arms to the *émigrés*, *petite*, and I cannot forget that. There he married my mother, herself an *émigré's* child. He established himself in a small town in the south of England, I think solely in order to be able to see the blue distant lines of the opposite coast. How often he has said to me, 'Look, child! yonder is France, where you ought to have been born!' And then, looking at my little brother, 'You will see it, my son, you will be happy!'"

"However, at length you returned," said Sydonie, with moistened eyes.

"Yes, yes, but what a return! I was very young, but I recollect it well. All our property had been confiscated: my father bought back this little estate; but we were strangers here! He hardly found a single person left of his old friends. The *presbytère* had been sold, the church was but just re-opened, our house pillaged, pulled to pieces,—one hardly knew it again! Yet I believe the people were glad to see us returned. If some said, 'These *ci-devants* return like ill-fortune!' others repeated, 'Madame la Marquise was very kind to us poor people; she gave us more bread than the Revolu-

tion did.' And my poor father! he had tears in his eyes as he looked round, tears of joy. He had so pined in exile—ruined, changed, it was still his own home. Ah, Heaven be praised, he lives in his home, he is happy now—my dear old father!"

Sydonie kissed her hand fondly.

"That is much, is it not, my little Sydonie? to see those we love contented, to be able to do a little good, to possess a brother—"

But there she stopped. This brother, whom she passionately loved, was the source of her deepest anxiety. He could not reconcile himself to poverty; he chafed against the difficulties which want of fortune put in his way. His sister guessed his feelings by her heart; he told her little, but she divined it all.

"Is not the postman coming here now?" said Sydonie.

"Is he? Letters—one from Julien perhaps; it is long since he wrote to me—let us see."

And her hand trembled as she rose to take the letters from the messenger.

"Yes, it is so; he has written," said she, flushing with pleasure. "He knows how glad it makes me to hear from him. Thanks, my friend."

But the *facteur* was not prepared to depart so

quickly. He had concerns of his own to relate. As she had said, those in want of consolation flocked to her; her soft voice, her kind words soothed so much pain. Without betraying the least impatience at the delay, she listened, advised, went to seek for medicine for the sick father of whom the man was telling her, and promised a visit that same evening.

"But your letter!" cried Sydonie, seeing her prepare to go at once.

"I will read it as I go, and you shall accompany me part of the way, for the cottage of this poor old man is not very far from yours."

"You will return alone? so late!"

"Why not? Who would harm me? Every one knows me."

"Oh, they would harm the Holy Virgin sooner than you!"

"Well then, there is nothing to fear. Walk fast, my child."

"But you will read your letter, Mademoiselle?"

"Well, yes, then! Are you content now?"

While she read as they walked on, and Sydonie carried a basket of such things as the sick man might need, the girl studied her friend's face, her own brightening or becoming shadowed according to the expression of that of Mademoiselle de Par-

thenau. Her love for Thérèse seemed to enable her to read each change of feeling. When Thérèse had ended reading and put the letter in her pocket, Sydonie said very low, "Ill news of *M. votre frère?*"

"No, on the contrary. He is certainly a little out of spirits, poor boy, alone in Paris—one is so lonely in a town!"

"Ah! Mademoiselle, you must find him a wife."

Mademoiselle de Parthenau started, for the true source of Julien's depression was the impossibility of a marriage on which he had set his heart.

"What made you think of that, *petite?* Because I said a town was so lonely? But people cannot marry just where they choose. Poor boy! he is sad, and I can do nothing; that makes one sad too, you understand that, *n'est ce pas?*"

"Yes, I understand it, for I feel it now," said Sydonie; adding as her friend looked a smiling inquiry, "Are you not sorrowful at this instant, and I can do nothing?"

"You think I am sorrowful!—Nay, no playing at the sorceress, little one; leave that to your grandmother. It is true indeed that I would give much to have my brother here. If he saw our beautiful views, if he could lead our calm peaceful life, it must do him good, don't you think so? He is not

strong; he complains of his cough—if I could but go and take care of him!"

The regret escaped her in spite of herself, and the tone of pain went to Sydonie's heart.

"And I—and Monsieur your father—and every one, what would become of us without you?"

"You want me to believe myself indispensable," answered Mademoiselle de Parthenau, in her calm, cheerful voice; she had already conquered the emotion which had forced that cry from her heart. "Well, be it so! do not look at me so wistfully; I shall always remain here, you know. Of what were we talking?"

"If I died of the heart-break at your going, what would it matter so long as you were happier?" murmured Sydonie to herself; but with the tact of love she dropped the subject, as Mademoiselle de Parthenau seemed to wish.

CHAPTER III.

DURING nearly four-and-twenty years, while France was still heaving from the Revolutionary tempest, the little village of Le Peyrou had remained without any *curé*. Its church was closed, all worship was forbidden, all religious instruction abolished; the children grew up like heathens, beside parents profoundly ignorant, and thoroughly occupied in gaining daily bread. The sacraments were no longer administered; marriage, become merely a civil contract instead of a religious rite, was performed by means of a municipal officer. The town of Castelnau was but two leagues distant; but the town fared like the village, and, had it been nearer and more fortunate, would have had little influence on Le Peyrou, as the peasants at all times held the "*bourgeois*" of the town in respectful suspicion; the roads were bad, and distances count double in dangerous times.

The peasants knew and cared little about politics in

this remote place, and only desired to be heard and seen as little as possible. More than twenty-four years without religion, without instruction, in a district always ignorant and superstitious! the result is easy to imagine, especially as after the re-opening of the church the *curé* appointed to Le Peyrou was an old man, who had saved his life from the guillotine by taking an oath of fidelity to the Revolutionary Government. It weighed heavily on his mind, and he came by his own anxious desire to this obscure place, where he hoped to forget his weakness. But he never could forget it, and fancied that all his parishioners knew it and pointed him out as "*un prêtre assermenté;*" and with what contempt, nay, horror, the peasants looked on "*un jureur,*" as they called the priests who had taken this oath, may be gathered from the current belief that the image of the Virgin had quitted the place and fled when one had approached it. The poor old man lived a hermit life, showing himself as little as possible, and totally without courage or energy to attempt to improve the moral condition of his flock.

Some ten years he occupied the post of *curé*, then died, and was replaced by a much younger man, selected expressly for his orthodox zeal by the Bishop of the diocese, to whose ears the neglected state of

Le Peyrou had come. The new minister came prepared to exterminate all abuses, especially heresy. But heresy, in the sense of Protestantism, did not exist in Le Peyrou, though in the neighbouring parish of Gaillac it abounded. He would have made war just as sweepingly against superstition, but superstition kept out of his way. Popular beliefs are shy game; strangers may live long in a country where they abound without perceiving them, just as a traveller may pass through an American forest without perceiving a single humming-bird or monkey. They were there, but he did not know where to find them. M. le Curé naïvely flattered himself that superstition was extinct in his parish, little guessing that his own old *ménagère* would turn back from the threshold, though the last bell were ringing for mass, did she see a black dog in the road, and that a sorcerer's *sabbat* was weekly held, according to common report, on a rocky platform which looked down upon the *presbytère!* He had almost quarreled with Mademoiselle de Parthenau because she had ventured to doubt whether superstition had quite deserted Le Peyrou; to believe in its existence was almost to encourage it!

Several years of conscientious, if injudicious, labour had done something even in this ungrateful soil; the

women, if not the men, flocked to mass, and an outward obedience was produced, to which M. le Curé could point triumphantly. But *la Roumèco's* existence was a blot on this fair surface, and from time to time it came to his ears that some one had been to consult her. Horrible! a crime which he had strictly forbidden; against which he had preached! And Mademoiselle de Parthenau, whose influence was so great—greater he sometimes suspected than his own—she openly cherished the granddaughter of this suspicious person! He had felt it his duty to interfere, and caused Thérèse one of the severest struggles she had ever undergone between her common sense and her obedience to her spiritual director. He did not know how great the struggle had been, for she answered with the gentle dignity which ever left him at a loss to show her in the wrong; and his own kind-heartedness, which was great, though too often stifled by intolerant zeal, was touched by the thought that he was depriving the girl of her only chance of being saved from the evil example of her grandmother. Sydonie too was irreproachable in her religious duties, a credit to the parish, and her voice added not a little to the effect of every service in which it was heard.

Little by little, unconscious by what mental process he attained to it, M. le Curé reconciled his theories as

to the satisfactory state of his parish with the existence of *la Roumèco*, by persuading himself that she was only consulted on account of her medical skill, the renown of which was spread far and wide. It was then as a doctress, not a witch, that she was sought; nothing could be simpler.

Had he learnt the heart of the people as familiarly as the lessons of his seminary, he would have known how deeply rooted in France is the belief in sorcerers. Is not the gloomy gorge of Ollioulles their stronghold? and have they not taken the place of the Vaudois who formerly inhabited the Valmasque? In Burgundy they dance under walnut-trees precisely like the wizards of Benevento; in Britany they meet on the wild heaths, and every St. John's eve all the cats join them there! You may take from the peasant his worship and his schools, but no power on earth can wrest from him his superstitions, the moving springs of his daily life, the materials for the legends that charm his *veillées*. So, while every one agreed with the young priest to his face, behind his back they said that townsfolk knew nothing of these things, and besides he was not born in their parts. The argument was unanswerable, and the effect of his exhortations was to add greatly to the fame of *la Roumèco;* it was even whispered that

M. le Curé was afraid of her power! Little did he guess that he had doubled the number of her clients.

Both time and place were propitious to any keen-witted impostor, who was surrounded by the attractive veil of a mystery, and *la Roumèco* was not a mere impostor, but her whole life was a mystery, its antecedents known to none unless to the old *panieraire* of whom Sydonie had spoken, who, after a long absence, had returned to his native province, to combine the trade of basket-maker and gold-seeker with the profession of beggary. Between these two there appeared to be some tie of ancient date; but when the *panieraire* was questioned by the curious, he became obstinately silent, while giving to understand that there was much to be said had he chosen to say it. This again raised the popular estimation of the witch, who knew and triumphed in her power, conciliated protectors by certain services only known to herself and them, and remained unmolested by the police, amid the mingled awe and suspicion of the neighbourhood. She was consulted by many who were not mere peasants, and exulted in knowing that her advice was servilely followed; though had she but once been fairly tried and condemned as a sorceress, not one of those who sought her but would have hastened to contribute a faggot to her funeral pile.

It was well known that ill luck attended all who offended her; she rarely threatened; her hand could never be traced: but misfortune in some shape never failed to come upon those who had thwarted *la Roumèco.* The peasants declared that with a look she could dry up the milk of cows, send the goats headlong down a precipice, and destroy those delicate nurslings the silkworms.

On the other hand, her cures were surprising; and, without adhering to the general belief that she possessed a crystal cup which, placed on the sufferer's brow, drew out the rays of a *coup de soleil,* it was undoubted that she knew potent remedies that acted when all ordinary means had failed. It was also said that she called her herbs by magic names in an unknown tongue. The apothecary of Castelnau, however, whom she sometimes supplied with rare plants, pronounced this tongue to be Latin; but for a woman of her condition to know more Latin than a *paternoster* was well-nigh a miracle. Her age was supposed to be very great, and she encouraged the idea. In fact, she was nearly eighty years old; the peasants believed her to be twenty or thirty years older, and her tall lean figure, usually bent, but, when she pleased, suddenly straightened and vigorous, her white hair escaping from the crimson *foulard* which

bound it, her black and still brilliant eyes, and features wrinkled as a withered olive, formed a whole which rendered any conjecture possible.

When Sydonie with her flowers went singing up the valley, the old woman rose and came out to watch her. Though her words to the girl were always harsh, she took a strong and manifest pride in her, and as long as Sydonie was in sight her grandmother's eye followed her. Some notes of her song came back on the wind, and as the ear of *la Roumèco* caught them her face changed singularly. Its expression told of old, startling thoughts suddenly awakened. She too had once had a fine voice; it was an old air learnt from her that Sydonie was singing:—

"Ils ont couché les hautes tours dans l'herbe."

There was a Revolutionary ring in both words and tune, and the old woman's thoughts instantly took that direction. She muttered to herself, while her eye followed Sydonie till she passed out of sight. The evening shades were beginning to close in; the churr of the grasshoppers became silent, and all the sounds of day were ceasing, overhead the sky was pale, veiled by a slight mist, but the sunset still lingered in the west.

"Just such an evening!" muttered she; "just such an evening, only without the bonfire—men saw

that bonfire a long way! What a crowd! how they rushed along with guns and pitchforks, howling like demons! We women wore the red cap too; it was the first time that ever I wore it. The flames roared so that one could not hear the shouts as they danced, mad with drink and joy, round the burning *château.* And then the gardener and the porter were strung up! And after that we broke open the Carmelite Convent and dragged the nuns to prison. Those accursed aristocrats, they worked for the wages we gave them; ay! they earned those if they earned nothing else, and were paid—were paid!—but the nuns were harmless enough. The sky was blood-red with that fire and all the air smelt of scorching. Who's that coming?"

Her ever-watchful eye had caught sight of some one in the distance, coming slowly as if fear had almost banished from his mind the motive that brought him. She had many such visitors, for whom she was a witch and no more. Before he came up she had seized her staff and was whirling round in a mad dance, her white hair streaming, her eyes glowing like live coals. For several minutes she took no notice of the man standing astounded before her; then she suddenly stood still and looked at him without a word. He was a young fellow, unknown to

her, but it was part of her trade to know every one's business before they told it.

"Good evening, Madame, you seem merry," said he, at last finding courage to break the awful silence.

"It is to please the fairies, *mon garçon*. They like us to be cheerful. They favour no one who comes here with a dull face."

Fairies were fully believed in at that time in France; perhaps it is so still. The unfortunate visitor could have had little chance of good luck if it depended on his cheerful looks, for he appeared more and more cast down and embarrassed as he muttered, "I come to—"

"I know why you come. Speak lower, or *they* will be offended. You want a spell—"

"They say you know a spell which makes a man sure to draw —"

"Ay, ay, to draw a good number in the conscription! And the drawing is near, and you are not the son of a widow, nor have you an older brother in the service."

"She knows it all!" said the peasant, awe-struck, and forgetting that as these cases would have exempted him from serving himself, the *Roumèco* naturally concluded they were not his.

"The conscription is at hand, yes; and you want a good number, not because you are a coward—"

"*Caspi!*—one is not a coward; let me see the *palusin* (bull) that can master me in a *ferrade;* but how can I marry la Catha if I go for a soldier?"

"No, no, one cannot go for a soldier, though one is a brave *camarguais,*" said the *Roumèco,* who had not failed to note the significant words of *palusin* and *ferrade,* and who guessed at once the district whence her visitor came. "Once gone, adieu the *fiancée,* adieu the little house with a balcony!"

A house with a balcony is the ideal of a Languedocien peasant.

"That is it. I can pay you—"

"*Chut!*" said she, slipping the money into a vast pocket which hung outside her gown. "I do not work for money. Many a one has come to me for that spell, and paid me treble; but I will help you. You know the great walnut-tree on the rock above the *presbytère?*"

"Do you mean—they say—yes, the only walnut-tree in the *banlieue,* but—"

"Go there when there is a full moon; gather a leaf, hold it in your hand when you draw, and you are sure of a good number."

"I had rather go to the wars, I think," said the lad, turning pale.

"Then you are a fool," said the *Roumèco*, with awful contempt. "What do you fear?"

"Why, every one knows—but it is better not to talk of such things," said the lad, with a glance of alarm round him, and a vision before his mind's eye of blue flames, demons, witches and wizards, who danced under the full moon below that evil tree.

"They will not harm you," said *la Roumèco*, answering his thought, to his increased alarm, "if you say you come from me."

"Is there no other way?" he asked, by no means encouraged by this assurance.

"There is another way, but it is less sure. If you draw a bad number tell them you cannot serve, because you are a *loup garou*."

"But the townspeople do not believe in these things."

"How! who is there that does not believe in *loups garoux?* Tell them it was after you that all the dogs barked the night before—"

"Pyrame of M. le Maire always flies at me, that every one knows."

"Remind them of Jean Courteaud, whom every one knew to be a *loup garou*, and Madame de Guérice, who was seen only last winter in the woods, and no one could shoot her."

"*Tiens!* that is true!" said he, with conviction that would have seemed impossible to any one who did not know the deep belief in *loups garoux* which has existed in France from time immemorial, originating, perhaps, in the strange monomania that sometimes seizes on the shepherds in their lonely lives, causing them to fancy themselves changed into wolves, and driving them into the forests and caverns of the mountains.

"Many thanks, Madame, I will do as you advise," said the youth, turning to go; but a sudden idea flashing into his mind—"Will la Catha marry me if she hears it?"

"Eh! settle that between you, my lad! But you have only to come to me for a love-charm, if she objects. Stay! Speak to no one, and look at no one till you are out of the valley, or my charm will be broken."

La Roumèco had her reasons for this command, which was so strictly obeyed by Jacques Cadamour, whose reigning desire just then was to get out of this place, that he never raised his eyes when a boy ran past him at speed, nor when a woman, with her black silk hood drawn down so as entirely to hide her face, shrank out of his path. The little lad, who was running to fetch the witch, had, of course, no

such scruples; in all his haste he took a good look, and said to himself, "I wish I may be a stockfish if that is not Fanette Ramoun!" His conjectures, however, did not delay him, and his breathless tale was that his old grandfather had fallen down by the hearth, and being too feeble to move unaided, was seriously burnt before any one came. *La Roumèco* promised a visit, and dismissed him with a warning, that if he spoke of his visit or of any one whom he met, her skill would be in vain. She had received these two visitors outside her door, but, lonely as the place and hour was, she exchanged not a single word with the third till she had led her inside the hut. Then a conversation ensued, so low, and so broken by the sobs of the younger woman, that no ear could have caught it. Not till she had been gone some time did the *Roumèco* set forth to cure the old man who had sent to claim her aid.

It was he of whom the postman had spoken to Thérèse de Parthenau. Many a time already had the witch and Thérèse met beside a sick-bed, the one called in to heal the body, the other to minister to the soul. Thérèse's own convictions, and her instinctive certainty that the witch aided in many dark deeds, even without the exhortations of M. le Curé, would have made her steadfastly oppose the *Rou-*

mèco; but though Mdlle. de Parthenau was strong in her knowledge of the people and their exceeding love and respect for her, she could not banish the witch from sick-beds, where her skill was often wonderfully shown. Thérèse was the only person who openly opposed *la Roumèco* without suffering for it. She knew many ways of spiting the *curé,* but she shrank from the very name of Mdlle. de Parthenau; and when she entered a house where Thérèse was, unaware of her presence, cowered and speedily left it. Had she known that her patient's son had summoned Thérèse, the *Roumèco* would not have visited him. As it was, when Mdlle. de Parthenau entered the cottage, close and dirty, as was every other cottage in the district, she saw the old man lying groaning on his bed, his wife and daughter-in-law standing near, and *la Roumèco,* who had applied her remedies, and was muttering the spell she used on such occasions: — "*Para fara gara: douleur tu sortiras, et ma souffrance guérira, par St. Jean et Nicolas.*" She chanted the words in a monotonous cadence, ending with signing the cross on the burns. As Thérèse stood in the doorway, *la Roumèco* looked up; her face changed as it had done when Sydonie sang of the high towers, and she drew back into a corner. The other woman came forward to thank

Thérèse for coming; but there was manifest confusion, for here they were, all caught in the act of using magic charms! Mdlle. de Parthenau seated herself by the bed, ignoring this offence, and gently said, "Your son told me of this sad trouble, my poor friend! what can I do for you?"

"The pain pulled me to pieces before she came," said the old man, in a quavering voice, "but she's taken it away with her charms."

"Nay, my friend, rather say that the good God has been pleased to bless the remedies she has used."

"Oh, the good God!" said the old shepherd, as if trying to recall thoughts long laid aside. "They used to talk of him when I was young; there even was a priest who preached about him every Sunday, do you recollect, wife?" looking feebly up to his wife—"but then, all that went out of fashion, and they said there was no truth in what the priests taught us. I don't know how it all was—I don't know."

"Ah, my friend, in all your long life have you never needed to know?"

"Not I. I know I made my first communion with the other children, and it was all very pretty; and after that I kept the sheep in the mountains all the

summer, and in winter we brought them down to the plains, and I and the dogs have got old together—got old together. Once a man and twice a child!"

His withered hand feebly sought something beside the bed, and a large white dog, once a splendid guardian of the flock, but now nearly blind, raised its head and licked his fingers.

"The poor cannot be learned like townsfolk," said the old wife, apologetically.

"That is true, but there are things which both rich and poor need to know, my friends. Rich and poor must both die, must they not? Do you think spells will help you then?" Thérèse spoke with a slight accent of severity, and her glance sought the *Roumèco,* but she was gone unperceived.

"If she is displeased," whispered the daughter-in-law to the old woman, "all the virtue of the cure will turn to harm, and who knows what other misfortunes will happen? Did not she throw the *herbe qui trompe* in Jeannier's way, and he never found his way home for a week?"

"You will carry her a measure of chestnuts to-night, and an egg, if we have one," returned the mother-in-law, rapidly.

"But Mademoiselle says beautiful things!" whis-

pered the young woman, and involuntarily she came nearer to the bed where Thérèse was seeking words whose tender simplicity should even yet reach the dull mind of the old shepherd.

CHAPTER IV.

IN spite of his desire to mortify *la grande Madeloun*, Paul Bridaine repented heartily before the morrow of his promise of dancing with Sydonie. In proportion to the eagerness with which every one looked forward to the fête was the keenness with which was noted every one of its little events, and for weeks after they furnished food for conversation in the *veillées*. The fête was awaited as the favourable moment to show the truth as to such and such young people, suspected of being in love, and the favour or disfavour with which their parents regarded the attachment. Although it was against the time-honoured rules of the day that any one should interfere to prevent "*un mariage*," that is to say, the offer of a sprig of rosemary or hawthorn, yet numerous admonitions were addressed in private, beforehand, to the dancers by anxious relatives, who, moreover, sat under the old chestnut-trees to look on and

watch the effect of their counsels, and rash was he who ventured to forget them! From time to time, some malicious bystander, generally an old woman, contrived to make a "marriage" wished by neither partner, or only by one, who had whispered a word confidentially to her, and then saw, with feigned astonishment, his "*vert*" snatched from his hat and thrust into the hand of a girl who had not the right to refuse, unless already engaged. Whole families came to look on, or join in the fête, though only the unmarried danced, and the sunset was impatiently watched for, as the dancing did not begin till the moon shone forth. Long before this, however, every one set out, and the assembly was sure to be complete before the last rosy light had quitted the highest mountain crests, or the landscape assumed that indistinct blue tint which is one of the charms of an evening view.

The name of the Cevennes suggests Protestantism, but there are villages entirely occupied by a Roman Catholic population. Such was Le Peyrou. The neighbouring Protestants did not join in the fête, not only from the difference of religion, but their austere morals kept them aloof from scenes which to them seemed worldly, if not downright pagan. These grave and rigid people still bore the stamp of

years of persecution. Their chief pleasure was the journey each Sunday, sometimes very long and troublesome, to the solitary spot in the hills, where a *pasteur* came from a distance to pray and preach. There was no Temple, as yet, in the district. Although Napoleon had restored the liberty of worship, a fanatical mayor and *curé* could easily prevent a Temple from being opened. As for M. le Curé, of Le Peyrou, the very name of Protestant was an abomination to him. It is true that village dances were nearly as objectionable in his eyes, but his parishioners, who listened docibly enough when he talked of the heretics, were singularly deaf when he counselled them to renounce their favourite pleasure. Not a girl, however devout, would obey him in this thing, and it must be owned that the Protestant women, in their invariable black dresses, looked much more as if they had given up vanities than the flock of M. le Curé. Mothers and daughters came and confessed their offence afterwards with edifying penitence, but when the time came round again they decked themselves out, thinking, indeed, a little of what M. le Curé would say by-and-bye—but going all the same to the fête.

Neither man nor woman was so troubled in mind on this occasion as Paul Bridaine, but the

priest had no share in it. Paul spent the night in asking himself what he was to do.—Break the word that he had passed, and before *la grande Madeloun*, too,—out of the question! She would laugh finely at him, either way! Do as he had promised—but what a scandal for the village—the village, indeed!—why, there would be acquaintances of his present from the town too; for Castelnau sent its quota to the little fête, gay *grisettes*, workers, too, from the *filature*, whose silkworms found employment for a great number of hands throughout most part of the year. Paul was too great a person to act as he pleased unnoticed; he felt like a bishop who had unwarily promised to act in a play! He, Paul, the nephew of the rich Bridaine, (rich is a comparative term), was pledged to dance before all the world with the granddaughter of ——! And his uncle, who the year before had so complacently seen him select *la grande Madeloun*, heiress-presumptive of a *mûrieraie*, how would he regard the choice of this year? It was enough to drive him to the marriage of which *la grande Madeloun* had spoken, a marriage as yet mere gossip; but the uncle was a hale old man, capable of such a folly if it came into his head. And that it was there, Paul much suspected, when, while pursuing these thoughts, as he sat with the

book of farm accounts open and unnoticed before him, Bridaine the elder, sitting tranquilly smoking before a fire of vine-boughs, with a hand on each knee, slowly said,—

"We can't do without them, and we can't do with them, and I don't know whether they are worse young or old, but one is too old, Paul."

Paul looked up, and his own thoughts gave him the clue.

"There's time enough, *mon oncle.*"

"There's time enough for you, but not for her; we want a younger one, Paul!"

"Her" signified the housekeeper, who had lived with them since old Bridaine became a widower. He contemplated himself reflectively in the copper vessels on which the fire danced and sparkled.

"What must be must," added he, as Paul did not respond. "And there's plenty of choice, if you like them pretty, it's all one to me, so long as she's her dowry; you must look to that, *mon garçon*, it is the important part; every *sou* we have we earn, and there is never one too many in the bag. A woman—that keeps things going, if the husband knows how to be her master. We want a woman here, a young one, Paul."

"Then it is clear that either you or I must marry, *mon oncle*, which shall it be?"

The old man chuckled, and answered: "I've done it once, it's your turn now; I'm sorry for you, my lad, but we must have a housekeeper, so that's settled."

"Well, let's think about the girls, then," said Paul. "Who is there?"

"Rich," said old Bridaine, "one; strong, two; handsome, if one can get it; virtuous, or people will talk—how many is that? four? yes, we must have a respectable family, yes—"

"A girl may be honest enough, even if she comes of a bad race," said Paul, thinking of Sydonie. How charming she was! He seemed really to never have properly noticed her till that day. Ah, what a pity that she belonged to the *Roumèco!*

"People will never believe it," said Bridaine; "besides, there's no one rich enough here to make that worth thinking of. Nore Lez, now, there's a girl for you!"

"She is engaged," said Paul.

"Marie Bertrand? there are economics in that family."

"I don't want a girl who last year was to marry a *porcher* from Arles, and in the spring a *saulnier* from Aigues Mortes, and now any one who will have her!"

"Enough, enough, *mon garçon;* and Marie Leclerc

is always after the fiddles; dancing at fêtes makes the money dance too; and Lise has a temper like—well, like my late wife's, your aunt, and yet who was master here, eh? A woman's what a man makes her; the men and maids did not dare to say their skin was their own when she was by, but when I was near her she was a lamb, my boy! But if you have any doubts about yourself, let her alone. Now there's one;—I have kept the best grapes for the last—*la grande Madeloun!*"

"Oh, as for her," began Paul.

"Oh, as for her!" said Bridaine, imitating his tone. "As for her she has one, two, three, and four, and I tell you what, *mon garçon*, while the dog scratched his ear the hare ran away, and if you look at every cloud you'll never go on a journey. Last year you had her for your partner, and I thought the grass was growing, and by-and-bye we would cut it, but now you come and say, 'As for her!'—Enough; do as you like, but you or I must marry; you said so yourself."

Paul returned to his accounts. He had had an education beyond any one else in Le Peyrou, and was renowned, since among the blind a one-eyed man is king, for his powers of calculation and letter writing. Many a *sou* had he spared a neighbour by writing a

letter for him or her, whereas otherwise recourse must have been had to the public letter-writer at Castelnau. But the accounts stood still this night.

The next day found him still in uncertainty, even when the mountain slopes were dappled with shadows, and the bare summits blushed with a rosy light as vivid as it was transient. If he were late in arriving, and already it was growing late, they would all think he was afraid of being laughed at. He set off, without a suspicion that Sydonie's feelings were not unlike his own. Delayed by contradictory wishes, she came but a little before Paul. He saw her at once, through all the crowd; she was not alone, for no one dared openly to shun her, as all had remarked the misfortunes which had befallen those who at the last fête had amused themselves at her expense—and besides her gay temper made her a favourite. Yet still there was something indescribable which showed that there was some barrier between this girl and the others. Her toilette was very simple, but fresh and neat, and her ornaments would have struck any one with surprise, even where the women wear their chief wealth about their persons, which was not the case here. The ear-rings were heavy gold; the cross, suspended to a gold chain, was very massive, and in the centre was a sapphire. Whenever Sydonie wore

them, many eyes turned with wondering envy upon her, as she well knew. She was not thinking about them to-day; as her eyes met those of Paul both faces clouded. Paul said to himself, "There she is waiting for me!" and Sydonie, "Why has he not found a partner by this time?" The dance which had already begun did not pause for such a trifle, but all eyes turned towards them, and a gust of whispers rose and spread and rose again on all sides like the chirping of grasshoppers in the fields in summer. Evidently *la grande Madeloun* had taken everybody into her confidence. Without a moment's pause, affronting all the curious and malicious looks, Paul marched straight towards Sydonie, with a defiant air, and sought to put his bit of hawthorn in her hand. *La grande Madeloun*, close by, had as yet no partner, and was casting anxious glances towards Castelnau. She burst out laughing. "*Vive les nouveaux mariés!*" cried she, and all the rest repeated it in chorus. Sydonie had hastily put her hands behind her, and was saying vehemently, "No, no, nothing in the world shall make me dance with him!" The circle of young people around them increased fast, and every one cried out, while trying to unloose the fingers that she had clasped behind her back, "Oh, oh, this is against rules, no one ever

heard of such a thing, it is not allowed; you are not *fiancée*, you must dance with Paul!"

"*Caspitello!* she may dance with whom she likes!" exclaimed Paul, equally vexed and astonished. "I don't force girls to take me for their partner!"

"Decidedly you are unfortunate; women won't have anything to say to you, M. Paul!" cried the mocking voice of *la grande Madeloun.* The first dance was ending; every one hastened to the spot where the discussion was going on; the circle was so dense that Paul and Sydonie could not possibly escape; every one laughed, shouted, there was a deafening hubbub of voices. Nothing was wanting to enrage Paul. Even the elderly people, sitting under the chesnut-trees, rose and approached, yet Sydonie still resisted, without owning any reason for her refusal. In vain! no one could be allowed to violate the immemorial laws of the fête; a "*vert*" duly offered made a marriage, and finally, as the fiddles began to strike up again, Paul was obliged to lead his reluctant partner to her place, and amid immense delight and laughter the dance recommenced. Many little dramas were always played out at the annual fête, but never yet had so striking an event occurred to rejoice all the by-standers. At every moment the unhappy couple heard some-

thing about themselves, and their gloomy faces encouraged yet more the village jokes, never too refined. Paul had foreseen disagreeables, but this was beyond everything. At last he looked at his partner, and broke the silence which reigned between them.

"You have been very amiable towards me to-day, Mademoiselle!"

"And you towards me!" retorted Sydonie.

"*Dame!* I did not know I was so little to your taste!"

"And as for me I stayed away as long as I dared, hoping to find you *fiancé!*"

"I told you I should dance with you."

"A silly joke, which you had no right ever to make."

"How! I have no right to dance with you?"

"No, ten times no! What! I should be, I suppose, much flattered because, having quarreled with *la grande Madeloun*, you wished to vex her by dancing with the person everybody most disdained, so you chose me! Do you know that I have never, never—do you hear?—had such an insult as that which you have just shown me!"

"What, you think—"

"I think the pure and simple truth; do you not see that every one knows this silly story?"

The eyes of Sydonie flashed lightnings through

her tears. Paul was confounded. He kept silence a moment, and then exclaimed, "But I must be a downright ass; that is another truth, and a pretty plain one too! Believe me or not, I do assure you I only thought of punishing that weathercock Madeloun; I swear I never meant anything else. Now I see your reason for refusing to dance, and quite right too!"

"I should think so; and what then? Be satisfied, M. Paul; if you have not succeeded in vexing Madeloun, you have done more than you wished. Do you hear that?" as certain remarks which concerned them came to their ears in a short pause of the dance.

"Only say the word, and I'll thrash that Laurence on the spot!"

"The fine idea!" said Sydonie, with disdain. "Men think everything can be arranged by blows. And the women's tongues! Can you stop them? Why, they all said you were a kind-hearted fellow, but as for me, I think you are just like the rest; as long as you are flattered and admired, all goes right: but just let a woman think some one else better than you, you must be revenged, to be sure, no matter at what price!"

"You have the right to say so."

And as he said this Paul's handsome face looked so honestly repentant that the indignation of Sydonie cooled all at once.

"Come! we have quarreled enough," said she, with her girlish laugh, "it's over; I forgive you, and you are well punished, my poor Paul, for you are my *fiancé*, you must dance with me all the evening, and see me safe home to-night. Have you courage enough for all that?"

"*Tenez*, it seems to me that I never really looked at you till to-night!" said Paul, astonished by the sudden change, and looking at the face where smiles had replaced frowns so quickly. "Yesterday I felt the same . . . . it is singular!"

"See what it is to have quarreled with another woman!"

"No, I do not think that is it . . . . it is . . . . After all, I am very glad everything turned out so well to-day; it does not matter what they say; no one can deny that I have the prettiest partner."

"You think everything has turned out well!" said Sydonie, laughing. "Well, they say storms bring fine weather."

"And it is the black grapes that make the best wine," added Paul, thinking of her grandmother;

but he had just time to arrest the next words on his lips.

Sydonie pretended not to understand, but she betrayed herself a little by saying, "So you will really be brave enough to see me home?"

"Why not?" said Paul, and no more was spoken concerning that matter. The fête ended very gaily; Paul and Sydonie answered the raillery addressed to them so well that the mirth became general, even *la grande Madeloun*, who had no real harm in her, was well pleased, as she had found a good partner at last, though M. Anatôle did not appear. Sydonie's prediction came true.

The moon had long shone overhead when the dance broke up, and all the little parties went their several ways, four or five accompanied Sydonie and Paul for some distance, but the number gradually lessened. The last couple looked after them and crossed themselves, whispering, "*I* should not like to be going that way at this hour," and stood still to see what would happen to the rash Paul, thus venturing into the domain of the sorceress. Meanwhile Paul and Sydonie walked slowly on together. All was still in the valley; the moths fluttered over the grass; the last grasshopper was mute; a thick dew lay on the ground and the night-wind bent the dark fir-

trees on the mountains, whose bases were lost in profound shadow, while the summits stood pale and cold against the sky, in the moonlight which shone on the little garden.

"Only see the *trèves!*" said Sydonie, pointing to the sparkles on the water.

Paul of course knew that the *trèves* are little sprites who love to run along the streams. "One would think it is the night of St. Médard!" said he.

"Hush, do not speak of that!" said Sydonie, with some fear, as she looked round her, seeming to expect to see the souls that rise from the water on that night.

"What! do you believe in that?" said Paul.

"I do not know . . . . at night one believes things, which by day . . . . . Anyhow it is better not to talk of it."

Paul gave way to a burst of laughter, and Sydonie continued, slightly angry, "But as for you men you believe in nothing!"

"And you women believe everything."

"We believe what wiser people than we believe."

"Oh, I know, you mean M. le Curé now. They say you are very devout."

"If I were not, some day I should throw myself into the *gardon.*"

Paul looked at her with incredulity, but the energy of her gesture confirmed the strange words that had passed her lips.

"Throw yourself into the *gardon!*"

"Yes, I tell you; I don't care who knows it. Do you think my life so pleasant that I should value it much? As for work, I could work like an ox, and like it, that is nothing; I enjoy being busy, but one wants something more; in the end one wearies of nothing but work, and when I think it will go on thus, always, always—would you think it worth while to live yourself if you did not look forward to something else?"

"I never think about such things, I have something better to do; but still, yes, I have my plans. Sometimes I think I should like to see a little more of the world before I marry; I have even thought sometimes of visiting an uncle of mine at Dieppe, my poor mother's brother, who is master of a fishing-boat."

"There, you see! And I, I have but one thing to care about, one thing that can make me very happy; it was once when I thought I should lose that, that those thoughts came."

"*Dame!* I don't know what could make me feel so!"

"I thought that Mdlle. de Parthenau was going away."

"Ah, Mdlle. de Parthenau—it is she who has made you a *demoiselle!*"

"If you dare laugh at me again!"

"Why, I never thought of such a thing. You boil up in a moment like milk soup!"

"You know they will call me the *demoiselle à la sorcière.*"

"Do you mind that so much?"

"I should fancy I did. Perhaps you do not understand that either?" said Sydonie, with a disdain of this poor *naïf* Paul which he felt directly.

"Truly I am not clever enough to talk to you; you are too sharp for us common people," said he, vexed. "Usually, I know well enough what to say to women, but you are not like the rest; it comes from your knowing Mdlle. de Parthenau, and then your grandmother is not like other folks."

"You are very right there," said Sydonie, and this time she was very grave.

"*Dites donc!* is she really a witch?"

"I don't know. One would think so; certainly she knows charms, which she is going to write down, because when she learnt them she swore never to tell them; so she dare not speak them to any one, but she never promised not to write them."

"That is a difference which is good for *les savants*, but as for me I don't see it," said Paul.

Sydonie looked at him. "Oh, look at me as much as you please: I suppose I am a blockhead as usual, but I can't help it!"

"No, you are right," said Sydonie, struck by his honest good sense.

"Ah, you think so!" he answered, surprised to feel quite proud of her approbation. "So much the better. Well, I advise you to keep clear of all these secrets of *la Rou*—of your grandmother, I mean; they are not good for girls, and so Mdlle. de Parthenau would tell you."

"That is true, and so does M. le Curé. But you think so little about M. le Curé!"

"Nor you, either, it seems to me. Does he not forbid the dance to his parishioners?"

Sydonie found the inconvenience of inconsistency. She was longing to attack Paul for his want of due reverence to ecclesiastical authority, and here were the tables turned upon her. She made a gesture of vexation.

"Well, as for me I should say he would do much better to come and see us dance; then he would see there is not so much ill in it as he thinks, or he might preserve order."

"How! a priest look on at a dance!"

"Why not, if it be harmless? Myself, I believe the priests so severe on our amusements only because they long for them themselves. It is either that, or else they talk of what they know nothing about. I cannot sit and hear these men thunder from their pulpits against things they have no experience of. M. le Curé now, what does he know of my life? Did he learn our hearts in his seminary?"

"*Taisez vous!* you frighten me! I think that if Mdlle. de Parthenau listens to him with respect we may, and then his office—"

"I respect his office well enough. Do not believe me a pagan, Sydonie, but the office does not make every word the priest says truth. I own to you that if M. le Curé said anything foolish (such things do happen sometimes) I should not respect it in the least!"

Sydonie was silent, disconcerted. At last she said, "There are so many ways of thinking; how can one know which is right? It is best not to trouble oneself about it."

"I don't waste my time in thinking; that is good for learned men, it does not concern me: but I can't believe a thing because I am ordered to do so."

"Mdlle. de Parthenau says, that since the peasants

have learnt to read they have also learnt to despise religion," said Sydonie. "There is no good in such talk as this. Yet," she added, with a woman's desire to penetrate into the attractive and unknown region of a man's mind, "one thing I seem to see, and that is, that you believe what you do believe, not because it is your duty, but because—in short, because you really do believe it."

"Certainly. What do you mean?"

"*Mais —!* There are so many things that one believes because one is told to do so."

"Not I," said Paul, brusquely.

"You said just now that I was '*dévote*,'" said Sydonie, looking up to him and lowering her voice. "Now I will tell you why; I try to be doubly pious for myself and my grandmother; you know she never goes to mass, she never confesses!"

"She is a Protestant?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Sydonie. "Oh, at any rate she is not so lost as that!"

"Oh, it is better then to be a heathen?" said Paul.

"Why, the Protestants are heretics!"

"They pray sometimes, I have heard; but I know nothing about it."

"You see I try to expiate her sins by praying and doing penance, as far as I can."

"Why, what an easy thing it must be to be devout."

"How?"

"Since one can be devout enough for oneself and another besides!"

"You are mocking; just like a man!"

"No, I am serious; I never considered these things. I only know I can never do a bit of work well enough to please myself; when I overlook our farm labourers, I think only of that; when I prune a tree, I attend with all my might to that, and it is never too well done. That is my idea; but it seems that a little religion goes a long way, since one can have it for oneself and another! That is what I think about it."

"Men are always so proud of their ideas, as if everybody had not ideas!"

"Oh, I have no time to sow that sort of seed! Of an evening I add up our accounts, or I read one or two old books that we have, but as soon as I sit down, somehow my eyes shut and I go to sleep. But for that I should think very often."

"Ah, there is our house," said Sydonie, sighing, as they turned the rocky buttress which hid the hut. She stopped, and took a few steps back, to look down the valley.

"See how beautiful it is!" she said, with enthu-

siasm, as she looked at the sparkling water and the mountains whose crests seemed to touch the blue and starry sky. Her eyes were fixed on the landscape, and Paul's were fixed on her, standing in the moonlight, in her festal dress and glittering ornaments.

"Is it not beautiful?" she repeated, with peremptory impatience.

"Yes, it really is!" said he, at last looking round him, and struck with the scene as if he had never been out on a moonlight night before.

"How still it is! how fresh! and hark! the nightingale. Oh, I think it is the very one which built last year in our bush of clematis! Listen!"

"Do you know I have been out at night a hundred times and never seen that there was anything to admire?"

"So much the worse for you!"

"Oh, you disdain me, I know, and now I wonder why I saw nothing worth looking at; it will never happen again, I think!"

"It seems that you profit by good company. Well, good night; I must go."

"I shall see you safe indoors."

"There's no need. Good night."

But Paul had no intention of losing these three or four last moments, and his masculine will was

stronger than hers. They walked together to the door.

"When shall we have another walk together, Sydonie?" said he.

"As if I knew! This is all very well, as it was the fête, but it must not happen again."

"You are still angry with me."

"No, no, as you said just now, it has all turned out well, and it was the fête, or else we could have had nothing to say to one another."

"I may not come here again then?"

"What for? You know very well it cannot be. Do you want people to say we have cast a spell upon you?"

"Suppose it is true?"

"Ah, what nonsense! Stay, I will give you some good advice as a souvenir of this evening. Make friends again with *la grande Madeloun;* after all she is a good girl—and let us two be friends when we meet. Good night."

Before Paul could protest, she had hastily opened the door, but at the same instant she started and turned pale as she murmured, "Seube is there!"

CHAPTER V.

BUT for her look and exclamation, Paul would not have gone in. He did not fully share the general dread of *la Roumèco*, but he disliked her heartily, and owed her a grudge for being Sydonie's grandmother; but he was so much struck with the startled manner of Sydonie that he followed her in, hardly able to believe that it was only the old basketmaker who was the cause of it. The old woman was crouching over the embers; at this moment she had none of the imposing aspect which she usually assumed: she was only a squalid, toothless old hag, whom Paul looked at with disgust, as she cast unquiet, ceaseless looks around her. On the other side of the hearth was the old basketmaker. To judge by his rags, he did not find his occupation of seeking gold in the rivers with his wooden bowl a profitable one. His osiers lay beside him, and he was weaving,

as he sat, a basket to hold olives. Neither he nor the old woman spoke for a moment, while they looked at the new comers, and Paul saw the eyes of the *panieraire* fixed greedily on the gold cross and earrings of Sydonie.

"*Bon vespre en toute la coumpagne*," said Seube, at last, without taking his eyes from the ornaments. "Here is that good M. Paul whom we all love;" and then, seeing perhaps that the wheedling tone did not please the young man, he added, "Is there no work up at your place for me, M. Paul? work gets so scarce that one does not know how to gain an honest livelihood."

"Did you ever try, you old rascal?" said Paul between his teeth; replying aloud, "You should ask our housekeeper, it is no affair of mine. Well, Mademoiselle Sydonie, I am going; good night, Madame; good night, Sydonie;" and he was gone, as if he wanted air to breathe in the cottage. The old woman had not spoken a word. Often she feigned to hear and see nothing of what was passing before her, making the unfortunate, who came trembling to consult her, await her good pleasure, but in reality she was always of a cat-like vigilance. Sydonie saw that she was intensely anxious Paul should go. When the basketmaker began to speak she looked

at him with a glance at once alarmed and menacing, to which he replied with another full of meaning, but a meaning which was an enigma to Sydonie.

This man always frightened her, though she could give no reason for her fear, and she was glad to obey her grandmother's orders, and go to bed in the next room, where the large sack in which she carried the "*feuillée*" for her silkworms served her as a bed. She lay down after a prayer, which she prolonged unusually, as if to drive away the unorthodox ideas which Paul had presented to her mind; but they came back in spite of it. The scenes of the evening re-acted themselves in her memory; she recalled all Paul had said, remembered her own indignation, and smiled to think what a good fellow he really was. She almost laughed at his simplicity, and then asked herself how it came to pass that she had such complete confidence in his uprightness and kindness. His face, all amazed and troubled when she reproached him, rose up before her; or she saw it full of earnest attention when she set before him those opinions, in which—ah, what a pity!—he did not believe.

At last she fell asleep, without divining that Paul was still lingering on his way home, either to look at the view, which, through the eyes of Sydonie, he now found so beautiful, or to think over the even-

ing. "What pretty flowers grow out of ugly roots!" said he to himself, with a sigh. "There is no good in thinking about it!" and it was doubtless to strengthen himself in this good resolution that he turned and looked at the rock which hid the dwelling of Sydonie.

Something awoke Sydonie with a start. She had the disagreeable feeling that some one was standing by her, bending over her, had lightly touched her; when she opened her eyes there was no one there, but she thought she saw something moving in the darkness. Much alarmed, she kept motionless an instant, recalled her presence of mind, and knew that it could be no one but her grandmother. And then she heard her voice, saying, in lowered tones, "She is asleep."

"What does it matter? Do you think she would tell your secrets?" answered the *panieraire*, with the laugh which Sydonie hated.

"I will not have her know anything about it, neither A nor B! It is already too much that there are two who know."

"Ah, ah, it has cost you a little, my old friend! What would you have? one must not be an aristocrat and keep all for oneself; one must share with *le pauvre monde*."

"I have no more to share with any one. You have taken all I had."

"Come, come, a little yet remains. You will always have enough to live on till *æternam vitam, amen.* It was a pretty sum, and then the jewels; it cost you little enough, you know."

"You think so!" answered the old woman, with a moan.

"You only did your duty by the country in denouncing them, *ma bonne,* eh, eh! Do you recollect how the old Marquise told Danton she was deaf? 'Why do you not answer the accusation, *citoyenne?*' said he. '*Je suis sourde, monsieur.*' Do you not see her now, with her grand air and her grey curls—"

"For the love of heaven say no more about it!" interrupted *la Roumèco,* wringing her hands. "I have them always before me!"

"'*Je suis sourde,*' said she. And he: '*Ecrivez que la citoyenne a tramé sourdement contre la République.*' *La citoyenne*—what was her name, eh? She was seventy-six years old, I think, and the daughter was not young either. *Allez,* they would be dead by this time, even without the *sainte guillotine,* and you would not have been any the better for it, nor I either! That would have been a pity, *ma belle!*"

"*Pecaïre!* have I been any the better for it? Did not my husband disappear with a good half of that

accursed money, and went back, no doubt, to his own country? Have not you taken the rest from me? I am poor as a church rat; you may threaten me as you like; I have nothing left to buy your silence with. Speak, speak, and have it over! I am sick of this life."

"Eh, it is not given to all the world to make a beautiful end like Madame la Marquise. You would not make as fine a figure in mounting the guillotine as the aristocrats did, and afterwards—it is not too agreeable to die; that is a point on which every one seems agreed."

"No, I will not die," said the witch, shuddering. "I should meet the Marquise and her daughter, and they would know now—"

"*Allez*, you would be in a place far enough from them!" said the *panieraire*, with a sneer. "You need not be afraid of that, *ma bonne*. The *ci-devants* will not covet your future dwelling, I think. But come, you are going to find me a little sum of money to-night, an old friend who knows you so well."

"I knew you too long ago, when you wore the *bonnet rouge*, and the *carmagnole;* and what have you done with the little guillotines that you wore in your ears? There are certain *ci-devants* returned who might remember something concerning you if we went over old times."

"What a pleasure it is to think of old times!

Those when you were Présidente of the Jacobin Club, for instance!" replied Seube, tranquilly. "I often do, only there is some danger in it. For instance, one would not wish to answer every question. Does no one ever ask anything about the ornaments that your *demoiselle* wears? It would be safer to get rid of them."

"No!" exclaimed the old woman. "No, I tell you! I dragged myself in the mud to have those things; I lost my soul for them, and for that money which was taken from me, stolen from me by a scoundrel who would never have dared to do what I did to get them, though he profited by it afterwards. I thought my son should be rich, like the aristocrats, but he died, and I have nothing left but these ornaments; they are his child's dowry; I swore to myself they should be hers long ago, and I will not lose everything!"

Her voice had risen to a cry. Sydonie, attracted by the disjointed words which reached her ears at the beginning of the conversation, was leaning, sick with dismay, against the partition between the two rooms.

"*Bien, bien,* as you will," said the *panieraire,* unmoved. "It will do another time. But you comprehend, I must have some money to-night."

La Roumèco rose up groaning, took some money from a box, and gave it to the basketmaker, who

received it with a growl of dissatisfaction, shrugged his shoulders, and said something which Sydonie did not hear. Then he stretched himself out before the fire, with his back against a bench, and his osiers for a pillow, and wished an ironical good night to his hostess.

"You will not eat a morsel?" said she, offering a bowl of bean soup.

"*Grand' merci!* I have a crust in my wallet; you are too good a cook for me. I like to know what I am eating. Good night, *ma bonne!* I shall be gone before you awake."

To judge by the look she cast on him as she went, he would never have woke again had she had the arranging of it. Sydonie darted back to her bed and shut her eyes, but she trembled so that if her grandmother had looked at her she must have perceived her agitation. Buried, however, with gloomy thoughts, she hardly recollected that the girl was there, and long after she had laid herself down on the heap of hay, where she was accustomed to sleep, Sydonie, wide awake, and trembling afresh at every sound, heard her toss and move, and mutter unintelligible words. No one slept that night but the basketmaker: his snoring announced from the outer room that he was enjoying all the benefits of a peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER VI.

UP to this time the course of Sydonie's life had not been unlike that of some mountain rivulet, which goes on its way sparkling and bubbling; now flinging itself down some little declivity, now spreading out into a shallow pool, or leaping in mimic anger round the stones in its bed. But suddenly it had come to an obstacle which had arrested its course. The waters gathered dark and threatening, only awaiting the first opportunity to burst out. Sydonie did not breathe a word of that conversation, half heard and half understood, over which she was constantly brooding, but all her companions noticed a change in her. She avoided them, and her mirthful temper seemed embittered. When Paul Bridaine met her, which was always happening, she attacked him with such pitiless raillery, that all the other girls were scandalized, and with one voice reproached her for her cruelty. Paul grew angry, went away, and

always ended by believing the fault to be his own. Day by day he thought her more charming, and became more convinced that beside her he was a mere blockhead. If formerly, without any acquaintance with classic literature, Paul had flattered himself that Cæsar's device was his, and that he had only to come and see in order to conquer, Sydonie had thoroughly cured him of his delusion. His uncle's angry indignation was wasted on him: everybody laughed at his folly: Paul cared nothing for it, he was honestly in love with the granddaughter of the *Roumèco*, and sought her "*pour le bon motif*," as the peasants say, *i. e.* intending marriage.

It was not to attract him that Sydonie harassed him by her mockery; her words were too merciless to be meant in jest, so merciless, indeed, that they betrayed secret suffering, which sought thus to escape and relieve itself. There was but one person who dared openly to worship her, and it was on that very one that she poured out the bitterness which gathered in her breast. It was marvellous how Paul contrived to meet her so often, for she avoided him with all her might. During the summer she worked as a "*lieuse*," binding up the sheaves with feverish activity, in fields as far from Le Peyrou as possible. When autumn came she hired herself out as an

"*oliveuse,*" and this work over, she would go far and wide seeking fallen chestnuts in the mountains. Sometimes she would not return till very late, paying no attention to the reproaches of her grandmother, who had been in the blackest of humours since Seube's visit. Ceaseless activity was her only means of bearing her anxiety; she awaited and yet dreaded another visit from him, resolved, at any price, to know the truth concerning suspicions which as yet she would not put into words, even to Mdlle. de Parthenau, who wondered to see her so seldom, and vainly sought to learn what anxiety was consuming her. Sydonie lost no opportunity of gaining information concerning this *panieraire,* who seemed to hold a power of life and death over *la Roumèco.* She learnt, however, little; he was generally looked upon as poor and despicable, though no one had any very clear reason to give for this feeling. For many years he had been absent from the neighbourhood, gone no one knew where, unless to make his fortune at Paris. When he came back he began the life which he had led ever since. If both he and the *Roumèco* were from the same part of Languedoc, as was likely, to judge by her familiarity with place and people, in spite of her foreign aspect, she and Seube might have met and renewed their acquaintance; and

Sydonie saw that either he had helped her in some dark scheme, or surprised some secret which she wished kept, cost what it would,—a secret, no doubt, concerning some noble family. All Sydonie's sympathies were passionately enlisted on the side of the nobles; she had imbibed and intensified the feelings of Mdlle. de Parthenau. As Sydonie thought again and again over what she had overheard, she tried to recall her childish recollections, and put together something of her history, but in vain. There were vague, baby recollections of a large town, which she always took for granted was Paris, without asking herself why; and the terrible burst of grief which ensued on the *Roumèco's* learning the death of her son in battle had left a deep impression on her mind. Then, she supposed, they had left the city and come to Le Peyrou. Her mother's death she did not recollect at all. Doubtless, the peculiar love of mountaineers for their country, which is very strong among the Cevenols, had driven the *Roumèco* back to her birthplace. What her life had been since, Sydonie partly knew; what it had been before, in the dark years of the Revolution, Sydonie could not—dared not—think. Her thoughts were busy with this subject while she descended one evening with sure light step from rock to rock, carrying her basket of chestnuts on her

head. A sound interrupted her musings; it seemed to her that some one called her. She stopped to listen, half-way down the mountain, her hand steadying for a moment the overflowing basket. The call came from below, and the voice was Paul's. Its brusque tones always grew tenderer when it spoke her name, but now there was a sound of pain in it. Sydonie sprang down to the valley, and saw Paul lying on the ground wearily, and looking anxiously to see if she were coming. Was it a stratagem to bring her to his side? Oh no, he was too loyal to play her a trick, and besides, what a pale and suffering face! She was beside him in a moment, asking question upon question.

"I saw you up there," he said; "a little misfortune has happened to me, and I wanted help, for I could not get any further. The plain was a furnace to-day!"

He showed her his wrist, swelled and discoloured. All the arm was in the same state, and she uttered a cry of dismay: "*Pecaïre!* you have been bitten by a viper!"

"Exactly," said Paul; and before the word had left his lips she had thrown herself on her knees and applied her mouth to the wound.

"What are you about?" cried Paul, putting her

aside by a sudden movement; "are you mad to risk your life thus?"

"There is no risk, leave me alone! I will do it, I tell you," cried Sydonie, vehemently struggling to free herself. Paul did not trouble himself to reply; he only held her away with one hand, just as if she had been a refractory child.

"And if there be danger, to whom does it matter?" she cried. "It is my own affair, I suppose!"

"Do you dare to say it does not matter to me?" answered Paul.

She looked up at him, smiling, in spite of herself, but her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "And does it not matter to me to see you in danger? The vipers' bites are so dangerous at this season! What shall I do? what shall I do? Paul, I beseech of you—"

"No, I will not have it done," answered Paul, in a tender and decided tone, which admitted of no reply. Sydonie stamped her foot, then suddenly—"Oh, if only that herb grows here—I know what my grandmother uses to cure bites, but—I will go and seek for it."

She was gone like a breeze; her broad hat fell off without her perceiving it. Ten minutes later she was speeding back, her hands full of leaves, some of which she made Paul eat, while she pressed out the

juice of others on the wound, and bound them with a handkerchief upon his arm. Paul let her do it without speaking.

"You are thirsty?" said she, still kneeling by him. "The stream is near."

"I am burnt up with thirst, but I was too tired to drag myself to the *gardon*," he replied. "Here is a bowl that I was carving as I went along this morning, fill it up to the brim."

Sydonie obeyed, and Paul drank a deep draught of the cold water, bathed his forehead, and said with a long breath, "I am another man now; I was in luck to see you, for if you had not come this way—let us see if I can walk on."

"Keep still!" said Sydonie, in a peremptory voice. "An hour's rest will cure you. I am going to bandage your arm again with fresh leaves. I know all about it, for I have often looked for vipers for my grandmother, who sells them to the apothecary of Castelnau; they are used in some medicines, she says. She showed me this herb and told me to use it if ever I were bitten; but just now I was too frightened at first to remember it. See the swelling is going down: what happiness!"

Paul submitted with a good grace. He watched her earnestly, while she was too much absorbed in her

remedies to feel embarrassed at thus being alone with him. "Sydonie!" said he, all at once, "this is the first time since the dance that you have been kind to me. Do you know that your words hurt me more than the viper's bite?"

"Anyhow the effect was not so visible," said Sydonie, trying to laugh. "I will tell you a sure remedy."

"Well?"

"Keep away from creatures that bite. How did you come in this viper's way?"

"I was going to give a look to the cattle down yonder, and I had something to do a little further off. Stay, do you see these roots? They are lily roots, what you wanted for Mdlle. de Parthenau."

"You have a good memory, Paul!"

"Yes, I remember things pretty well," said Paul, simply, without adding, as he might, that every wish of Sydonie's was so graven on his memory that to forget was impossible.

"Put the lilies into your basket—"

"But they are very rare! You must have gone far to find them, and then you had to cross the plain in a heat fit to fry the grasshoppers! *Bonne mère,* I cannot imagine how you ever got back thus far!"

"*Tenez!* it was worth while to be bitten, since I

have you sitting by me; you do not seem laughing at me now, you are smiling as you used to do; but yesterday,—do you know that I was near you yesterday evening? you were leaning on the well, and I saw you crying, is it not so? Your goat came and laid her head on your lap, and you kissed her. But as for me, I did not dare come nearer, for you do not count me half as much a friend as your goat."

"I am very glad that you did not come," murmured Sydonie; but she did not confess that she felt had he done so, the longing to be comforted by this voice, so gentle to her, though rough enough to others, would have made her own all the story of her trouble.

"You will not tell me what grieved you?"

"It is because I cannot, Paul," she said, entreatingly.

A silence followed. She had great difficulty in restraining her sobs; Paul was looking at her with tenderness which made him forget himself to think only of her. She was, indeed, altered. Her face was pale, her voice had lost its old ringing joyousness; her lips seemed to have forgotten how to smile. He thought over all the reasons for grief that she could have. If just then by giving her to a rival he could have made her the gladsome

creature of other times he would have done it, and remained a bachelor for the rest of his life. But there could hardly be a rival in the case unknown to him. He rose at last with some effort, and said he could walk home. She did not object now; they walked on slowly without speaking until the hut of *la Roumèco* was close by. Paul thus lengthened his own way, an imprudence for which Sydonie was going to reproach him, but she refrained. He stopped.

"Sydonie," said he, "listen! I have things to say to you which I would not say down there; but now you are at home; you can go away if you choose, but do not do that, for I shall not have many more chances of seeing you. I am going away."

"Paul!"

"I will tell you all about it to-morrow, if you will be here at the same time."

"Yes . . . but you should rest; remember what has happened to you!"

"Bah! I shall be here. You will come then? That is kind, Sydonie; and you will see I had my reasons for asking it."

CHAPTER VII.

IT might be the solitary life led by Mdlle. de Parthenau which made her shrink from meeting even the friends with whom, in a few moments, she was perfectly at her ease. She had a kind of dread of the first encounter, the effort of beginning a conversation; without some special cause she could hardly make up her mind to accost even a peasant, much less one of her own rank. Thus, when on the morning after Paul's adventure, of which she had not heard, she looked into the village church, intending to seek the confessional, and saw several persons already waiting there, she drew back, and seated herself outside the church, on the steps of a side door, looking on the little stream which flashed in the sunshine as it tumbled over a lasher, while the dusty road beside it wound far away like a white ribbon. A party of women were washing clothes in the stream; a donkey stood near, meek and depressed, waiting

patiently for the burden which he was by-and-bye to carry home. The voices of the women, and the sound of the falling water, came up together to the ears of Thérèse; she fancied they had a melancholy tone, just as a more joyous person would have heard a glad one in them. A little further on was the cemetery, and her eyes dwelt on it sadly, though none of her relatives slept there. Some were buried in distant parts of France; some had perished at Lyons in the Revolution: her mother was laid in English ground. She was not thinking of them; her thoughts were with her treasure, the brother, absent in Paris, whose life was almost as unknown to her as if he had indeed been with those dwelling in another world. He wrote from time to time, when the fancy took him, or some disappointed mood made him turn to the sister whose idol he was. And she lived on these crumbs of affection, and told herself with justice that he, tossing in the tumult of life's sea, could not know of what importance every trifle that concerned him was to her, stranded on her little island, with no future to dream of unless of his.

M. de Parthenau, though very fond of his son, and at times heartily desiring more communication with him, by no means suffered as Thérèse did; he was too happy in the calm life which she made him, too

much occupied with his little property, his labourers, and his crops, to feel the void that was always haunting her heart. "Absence is like death!" she said to herself, as she sat under the shadow of the church, and looked out on the graves, the busy women, and the chestnut-trees, over which already had "wild autumn shaken gold;" and then she thought of her father, also absent that day, and recalled his cheerful adieu, as he was about to drive off in his *char à bancs*, and called to her, advising her to change her mind and come with him. She had declined, smiling; though it was but for one day's absence, she could not resolve to change her usual ways sufficiently to encounter the merry family party whom he was gone to visit; at the mere thought of it her home occupations, her walk to the church, her visits to the sick who were expecting her, became invested with a new charm. M. de Parthenau would have liked to have had her beside him, but what she wished was law to him; he only declared that he should not know how to make her excuses, and drove off, the most cheery, hale old man of his age to be found in the department, younger at upwards of seventy than Thérèse had been for many years. A half-wish that she had accompanied him dawned when the *char à bancs* was out of sight, a

consciousness that it would have added to his pleasure, and a feeling of depression followed which ended in the desire to pray and to confess in the little church whence, she sometimes said, she had never yet returned uncomforted. To drive away unwelcome thoughts she ceased to let her eyes wander over the landscape, and drawing the "Imitation" of Thomas à Kempis from her pocket, began to read its familiar pages. Not for long, however; a peasant woman approaching, laden with flowers, spied her out, and hurried up to her, exclaiming, "Ah, Mademoiselle! You will be glad to hear my news. My husband has returned to me; he found that after all no one loved him as I did, whatever they might pretend; he has been very ill, and can scarcely stir: but I shall work with a good courage, since it is for him as well as myself. I am strong, thank the blessed Queen of Angels! I bring these flowers for her altar to-day—if I had a crown of gold, I would gladly give it too!"

Thérèse knew that the poor creature had suffered a daily martyrdom at the hands of the husband whose return awoke such gratitude; she said a few words of mingled sympathy and inquiry.

"Oh, dear lady, it is true that he misused me at times, but he loved me well in the first days of our

marriage, and he has not strength to beat me now; I wish he had! When first he left me, I used to wake in the winter nights, and go out into the garden, thinking I heard him, and that he was standing in the snow, afraid to come in, but he knew better, he came in and sat down as if nothing had happened; only to-day he said a kind word, just as he used long ago. Ah, how beautiful it is to be so happy!" And with wet eyes she passed on into the church, leaving Thérèse touched and marvelling at a state of things into which she could by no means enter.

If she had chosen her place for the sake of solitude, she had chosen ill. A second woman, quitting the confessional, espied her and came up, seeming to have derived little comfort from the pious act which she had just performed. Mademoiselle de Parthenau knew her, and asked the reason of her distress. It was an old story, a conscript son, obliged to go just when his services became valuable at home, and now he had come back, having lost the habit of labour, missing the military discipline, restless and idle.

"And he and Rose, with her husband," continued the poor mother, with bitter tears, "they all want me to give up my little share of our property. Mademoiselle knows how little it is! and say that one week I can live with Etienne and one with Rose,

and that I shall never want for anything. *Pecaïre!* have I forgotten the poor Roubasse, who did exactly thus, and then neither son nor daughter had a bit of bread for her, and she begged about the Commune till she was starved in the winter. Alas! nothing but ill-luck has been on me since Etienne offended the *Roumèco*, long ago, when he was a boy. She cursed him, Mademoiselle, and cursed we have been ever since."

"My poor friend, your troubles come not from an enemy, but a Friend, who can take them away when He sees fit, only do not try to bear them alone."

"They are very hard to bear, Mademoiselle! One gets so weary of trouble, it is a guest who comes into your house and remains as master. But I will get the *Roumèco* to remove her curse, though it cost me all I have, for it will not let me rest by night nor eat by day. I have saved nearly two Napoleons, my dear lady, sou by sou, and I said to myself that I would give them to you to be spent in masses for my soul after my death, asking you to settle it with M. le Curé, but now I will go to the *Roumèco* and see if she will take away her curse."

"Do not do so, my good Marie; do not spend the money saved for so pious a purpose on this wretched woman, who has no real power. Do you think the

good God would let a bad woman hold the happiness of His people in her hands?"

"*Pecaïre*, Mademoiselle—" but there she broke off, seeing that a little god-child of Mademoiselle de Parthenau's had come close, and was listening with open-eyed curiosity.

"I am detaining Mademoiselle . . . I must go, but if she would come and speak to Rose and to my son . . . . . it might help us all. Every one listens to Mademoiselle."

Thérèse promised, but with some inward shrinking, easily understood by those who know what the French peasant is. An ex-soldier too! But the greater her repugnance the greater the merit of the deed, and if indeed the poor mother believed that her influence would work for good, it would be a sin to refuse. She turned to her little god-daughter, proposing that the child should say the portion of catechism which she had been learning of late. The little one obeyed, but in a *distraite* manner, which brought on her a grave and gentle reprimand. She began again, again paused, and observed, "Mademoiselle is come to confess! Yet she never does wrong, while many who sin never confess at all."

Thérèse was about to repeat her reproof, but the thought that here was an opportunity of impressing

her little Flora with the benefits of the sacred ordinance checked her.

"Men, of whatever rank, disdain it!" she thought sadly to herself. "Julien has ceased to confess, and with it, to believe. They discuss and ridicule it, or at best, they neglect it. At least let me try to teach this child, who may some day influence husband and sons, what an unspeakable blessing it is. *Mon enfant,* we all sin; my faults are different from yours: but I too do amiss, and then I come here because my soul is sick, and I seek a physician for it, who tells me what I must do to be cured, and opens Heaven which is shut against me. Those who neglect this sacrament are like dying people who do not care to seek the medicine which might save them."

"Mademoiselle, you will not tell M. le Curé if I ask you something?"

"No, I only tell my own secrets."

"M. le Curé said from the *chaire* that there were no witches or sorcerers, yet you know what Marie Roumanille said just now, and last night, only last night . . . . "

"What has this to do with confession or thy catechism, little one?"

"Oh, but I must really tell this, Mademoiselle! Last night my father returned very late, because the

best ox of M. Caylou was ill, and he and M. Caylou sat up all night with it, and he saw a dark figure against the sky, just as the lightning broke from a cloud, a figure under the walnut-tree above the Presbytère . . . . . Mademoiselle knows why that tree is cursed?"

"Yes, I have heard the old legend."

"They sing it in the country . . . . . a woman stole the wafer and put it in her hive to make the bees prosper; but news of it got abroad, and the thing was examined into, and it was found that the bees had built a waxen chapel for the holy wafer, and hummed round it day and night: but as for the woman, she was burnt for her sin under the walnut-tree, and that is why all the lower boughs are dead. No honest people would go there by night or day. Even if I had my medal round my neck that Mademoiselle gave me I would not go there at broad noon. And this figure stooped down under the tree as if it were doing something strange and awful; but the lightning went out, and all was dark, my father never knew it so dark before. Mademoiselle, do you think it could have been the *Roumèco?* it looked like a man, but she can take any shape that pleases her."

"Doubtless it was a man, pulling on his *sabots.*"

"But, Mademoiselle . . . Ah, there is Seube, the *panieraire!* Good day, Seube, where have you come from?"

They had not heard the old man approach, yet there he was beside them, and there was a look on his face as if the conversation had its interest for him.

"Good day, my friend," said Thérèse, with the involuntary feeling of dislike for the basketmaker, for which she never could account, strong upon her.

"Are you come to confess like Mademoiselle?" asked the child, with a spice of malice.

"If I began to confess, it might take so long that the *curé* would have no time for any one else to-day. What were you saying when I came?"

"Eh! you heard. How long have you been here?" said little Flora.

"Do you not know that the *Roumèco* has laid a curse on every one who passes in sight of the walnut-tree after sundown?" answered Seube, thereby showing that he had been listening for some time.

"*Bonne mère!* My poor father!"

"She has no power to bless or to curse, Flora," interposed Thérèse, gravely. "You heard what I said to Marie Roumanille. The *Roumèco*, as you call her, is learned in Medicine, but it is only through your

own silly fancies that she has the power which you fear. Do you think that Heaven would give such gifts as she pretends to have, to one who scoffs at holy things, and turns her knowledge to such bad use?" Little Flora looked at the *panieraire* in consternation, and he returned her glances with expressive pantomime.

"Mademoiselle must know best," she said, reluctantly; "but Minino (grandmother) says it is not well to speak of such—such people. They always know, and they never forget. There was Romiguières who said . . . but Mademoiselle does not like me to talk about it, though everyone knows it is true."

"We will speak of this another time. I am going to pray now, before I confess. My friend," she added, addressing Seube with her winning, persuasive manner, "the door stands open to invite all in: your work would prosper the better if you asked a blessing on it now. Shall we not both go in? Will you not give me this joy?"

Seube lifted his eyes to those fixed with such anxious kindness on his face, uttered a sound, half laugh, half sneer, and answered, shrugging his shoulders,—

"I am ready to oblige Mademoiselle. The last time I entered a church it was to enthrone the god-

dess of reason there; but Mademoiselle does not remember those times. It makes no difference to me, so long as she is pleased."

Thérèse looked at him with inexpressible sadness; it seemed to her incredible that so wretched a life as that of the old basketmaker should be dragged out and end without a ray of hope.

"You have had a miserable life!" she said. "If you would believe that it is but the road to another . . . ."

"To which I can find my way without the help of those religious go-betweens, the priests," interrupted Seube, with insolence that startled Thérèse, who had not anticipated the Jacobin spirit being thus evoked.

"Mademoiselle reminds me of old times, when I was a prisoner in St. Lazare," continued Seube, with a fierce smile, that made Thérèse shudder as she thought what it would have been to find herself at the mercy of such as this man. "In good company, I assure you; aristocrats, Brissotins, Maratistes, and some of the most distinguished rogues in Paris, all heaped together, and no time to tire of one another; the Committee of Public Safety took care of that! We had an abbé there; the poor man was crazy to convert some of us . . . . tried his hand on

me amongst others. He annoyed us so, that, to defend ourselves, we set up a rival religion; we had our altar and our ceremonies, and whenever he began to harass us with his exhortations and his *Vierge Marie*, we began to worship Magonia, that was what we called our goddess. Ah! if you could have seen how amusing his despair, and his gestures of horror were! We were very merry, I assure you!"

"My friend," answered Thérèse, "it is needless to tell me all this. You were spared when thousands perished; will you not think why this was? I speak for your own sake. You have lived to see men almost lose their hope of finding liberty, equality and fraternity, which was the cry of those 'old times' that you speak of. As for me, I have not lost it; I know that they exist, only they are too pure and excellent for this world of ours. I look for them in another."

"To make things fair there, the aristocrats should be the servants of us who served them down here."

"I will serve you willingly, whenever you choose," said Thérèse, with her sweet, serene smile. "But you have never yet let me do so."

She passed into the church as she spoke, leading little Flora away with her. Seube remained outside.

"If she knew!" he muttered, half aloud. "If

she knew! Shall I tell her, and see what tone she takes then? And yet .... She always has a kind look for me; why should she wish me well? She is not like the rest of them; too good for an *aristocrate!* Why, there is M. Paul! Good day, my dear monsieur! have you turned *dévot?* What joy for our excellent *curé,* and for Mademoiselle de Parthenau, who concerns herself doubtless with your conversion as with mine. If an old fellow like myself be worth converting . . . . "

"Have done with your impudent nonsense, and tell me if she be here . . . or rather, I will see for myself," said Paul, looking in at the church. He saw Thérèse kneeling absorbed in prayer, and walked away, keeping however at such a distance as enabled him to see when she came out. He had something to tell her about his plans for the future, and a word to say concerning Sydonie.

Seube went, meanwhile, on his way. As he passed the Presbytère he looked up at the walnut-tree with a vexed and thoughtful air. Evidently what Flora had said was in his mind, and he pondered it uneasily for a considerable time.

CHAPTER VIII.

SYDONIE passed the night in troubled dreams, and woke to wonder afresh over the information so abruptly imparted by Paul. She was punctual to their appointment, but found him already waiting, twisting a bit of *aspic* (wild lavender) in his fingers, and thinking more deeply than was usual with him. He looked ill, she saw, and was about to exclaim at his want of common sense in taking a long walk before he was half cured, but he did not give her time.

"Yes, I am going away," he began. "My uncle has no more need of me; he wants a wife to order about. He is going to be married, so he told me yesterday."

Paul did not choose to own, and Sydonie only knew long afterwards, that his love for her had so angered old Maître Bridaine, that he had resolved on marrying and disinheriting his nephew.

"He says that he shall still give me the same '*pension*' as I have always had from him since I managed his affairs; and I may say that I have more than earned it by looking after the land and the cattle. Ah! the poor beasts, they will miss me; La Rousse will turn her head and low when I don't come into the stable of an evening, and whoever has my place won't find the new ox too easy to guide."

"But why must you go? It is a disgrace to go out of one's own parts seeking fortune; and you know it always, always brings ill-luck to change one's trade!"

"Yes, we all say so hereabouts; and I wish I could have seen how the new manure answers which, at last, my uncle consents to try . . . I do regret not seeing that . . . I believe that even M. de Parthenau's crops will not equal ours next year; but I cannot live on what my uncle allows me, and besides, I was already thinking of going, for what's the use of waiting for dead men's shoes? one only finds them on other people's feet. I am going to Dieppe."

"You have another uncle there?"

"Ah! you recollect that? I told you so, that evening after the dance, did I not? And you have an aunt somewhere . . . suppose I find her! I am glad to be going to see the world a little, no doubt

it makes a man of one. Since I was not drawn in the conscription, I must try another way. I have written to my uncle Michaud, and when I come back perhaps you won't think me the *nigaud* whom you laughed at so much; but then I say to myself . . . Now don't be angry, Sydonie;—you must let me say it,—you are so pretty, and the *Roumèco* does not count for much. If you should want a friend and I be away! I don't know how to think of that. For a man is always some good, Sydonie; a man is a protection to a sister or a sweetheart, and you have no father. What would become of you if the old woman died? and she is greatly altered; I don't think she will last long. What should you do?"

"I cannot tell—I don't know," said Sydonie. Her hands hung down by her sides, her head drooped, she was the image of discouragement.

"I would stay here; but one does not get a living by stopping to *conter fleurette.* The bleating sheep gets no grass. Mademoiselle de Parthenau will be at hand, that is one comfort. *Tiens!* you will think it droll, but I could not help saying a word of this to her this morning. I stopped her as she came out of church. I knew I should find her there."

"You spoke to her of me," said Sydonie, with crimsoning cheeks.

"And she understood directly, *cette chère demoiselle.* No wonder you love her so much. I shall always remember the kind words she said to me. She is a true Christian, not a *mangeur de crucifix* (bigot), like some people!"

Sydonie had not the courage just now to scold, or it would have been the worse for Paul. The idea of his going and asking Mademoiselle to watch over her! What would she think! It was exactly like this Paul! But—he was going away!

"I am coming back, you know, Sydonie, when I see what I find to do at Dieppe, and when I have learned their ways there; and if you want me before, you have only to say the word. When I come back, I shall find you here, I suppose—married, perhaps?"

"A nun, more likely."

"Sydonie!" cried Paul, in consternation. "What, you would take '*les ordres!*'"

At another time she would have seized the opportunity of tormenting him, by propounding a dozen plans which she had not the least intention of carrying out, but just now she had not spirit for it.

"You are only trying to vex me, as usual; *te faire sœur!* You are not in earnest? It is unkind of you, Sydonie! Say that you did not mean it. Where did you get such a notion?"

"Paul, I can never marry. Never, never, Paul!"

"Why not?" asked Paul, in a brief, imperative manner.

"Because—because.—I cannot tell you why."

"I must know why, for I love you, Sydonie. Oh, you do not love me! I know that; you have made it clear enough. You think me a clown, a blockhead. That I can understand, but why not marry some one else? You said 'no one.'"

"Paul, it is not my secret."

"Ah! it is the secret of your grandmother, then," said Paul, frowning, though he seemed relieved. "Yet I think she looked on me with a favourable eye .... You think, perhaps—but no, you cannot think so. Others may look down on you because of her, but you could not think that makes any difference to me."

"If you knew more," said Sydonie, with a failing voice.

"Don't cry, or I shall go and wring her neck. Has she some secret that she has told you?"

"No, no; but don't question me, Paul."

"Then it is something that you know, no matter how; you have learned it lately, and it is something ugly too."

"Paul! Who told you?"

"*Dame!* There is no need to be very sharp to guess it."

"And I who thought him dull!" said Sydonie to herself, quite confounded.

"Listen, Sydonie, I ask you nothing now. Later, if you choose, you will tell me everything; if not, why, one must trust people a little. Your grandmother's affairs do not concern me, nor you either, if ever you marry me. It is you, not her, that I shall marry, thank Heaven! I will take you away from Le Peyrou, and you shall forget them."

A ray of joy lighted up Sydonie's face. Paul would have gone crazy on the spot, had he divined her feelings towards him at that moment. He was sitting on a heap of large stones, and she, standing by him, watched the last swallows as they circled through the blue sky.

"They will go away soon, and leave the winter and the *bise* (north wind). They are happy birds! When do you go?" said Sydonie, letting him take her hand.

"In a week. I shall be more sure to come back than the swallows."

"You will come back with them?"

"With them! I mean to come back after *Nôtre*

Dame la blanche (November 21st). I shall be here when they ring *Nadalet!*"

"When they burn the *souc de Nadal* (yule-log)," said Sydonie.

The burning of the yule-log is a great event in the south of France, accompanied by curious pagan ceremonies, a time of general rejoicing; but Sydonie spoke mournfully, and Paul replied,—

"That does not please you. All the same, I shall come to please myself."

"It pleases me. Yes; I have not too many friends; but I cannot be glad of anything to-day. My thoughts have put on mourning."

"You forbade me to come here," said Paul. "Do you remember? But I shall come again to say Good-bye, *n'est ce pas?* and I was wishing to give you this bowl that I was carving. All the cups and bowls at our house I carved one time or another, but this is my prettiest; however, I shall make you another, for I mean to take this with me, to remind me of to-day."

"Lest you should forget me in the town."

Paul was going to be angry, but Sydonie's smile disarmed him.

"*A la bonne heure!* Laugh as much as you like at me, since you look as you used to do."

"Have I been very wicked of late?"

"Like a nettle."

"Perhaps you treated me too gently. You ought to have given me as good as I gave; but, indeed, I have been very unhappy."

"Can one do anything? No? Then one must take patience."

"There is philosophy! Do not forget my bowl; and it must be very pretty. Do you hear?"

"And then I have a little white hen, a pretty creature too, with a tuft on her head, and so tame! The other fowls have a spite against her, I know not why, for she is the prettiest of them all."

"That's reason enough."

"They hurt her, they beat her; the poor thing led a sad life among them; and one day I thought to myself that she was a little like you, only she never pecked any one; she was as gentle as possible with the others, and so I got fond of her, and now, whenever she sees me, she flies up on my shoulder, and eats from my hand, and clucks for joy. Will you have her, Sydonie? Otherwise, I must take her away with me, and they will laugh at me finely down at Dieppe."

"I! What should I do with her? The little fool to let herself be so ill-used!"

"Well then, it does not matter, she shall go with me."

"Oh, Paul! You are quite too simple!" said Sydonie, laughing, although the tears came into her eyes. "Will you never know when I am in jest? *Allez*, I will love it dearly, and you must bring it before you go; but Paul, do not fancy that I was in jest when I said I dared not marry."

"We will see about that by-and-bye."

"Oh, Paul, you will oblige me to tell you what I hardly dare say to myself! Who could marry a girl whose—whose family had committed a crime which might be known any day to all the world?"

"The more reason that those who love her should protect her, I should think. It is not your fault, if you have an old witch of a grandmother; and that I always said. Somehow, I don't think she will trouble any one long, so there's no good in speaking ill of her."

"I see no difference in her," said Sydonie, startled.

"You see her every day, and do not notice it. Others do."

"I have not seen much of her lately," said Sydonie, with something like remorse, as she thought with what shrinking aversion she had regarded the

old woman since the night when suspicion took possession of her.

"There, she is calling you! She is come out on the threshold and looking round for you. *Quelle masque!* Call away, Madame, you have a splendid voice, like an old raven! But she is strangely changed, Sydonie, it is a positive fact!"

"Go away, Paul . . . good night," said Sydonie, who had become suddenly gloomy at the sight of her grandmother. "Good night . . . good night, Paul!"

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Paul thought of going away so soon he had counted without his host—at least, without his passport. During the excitement of his conversation with Sydonie he had forgotten his wounded arm, and her remedies had greatly allayed the pain, but during several days he was ill and obliged to remain at home. When he was able to go and ask for his passport, without which he could not leave Le Peyrou, a hundred difficulties arose. The period was one when the authorities exercised a minute and jealous watchfulness over all honest people; as for those who were not strictly honest, they usually contrived to do without the luxury of a passport, and somehow the police were so taken up in watching innocent persons that they had no time for any one else. Paul was asked the reason of his departure, and what his age was, and whether his uncle approved of the step; and it was clear that the authorities of Castelnau did

not approve of it at all, and thought it altogether suspicious that any young man should leave his birth-place to seek his fortune elsewhere. Poor innocent Paul suddenly found that he had become a suspected character, and the more he tried to make his reasons clear, the less he seemed believed. He could not at all comprehend the merits of the system now applied to his affairs, but then he was a blockhead; he had said so himself! He was told to return in three days, in company with a merchant of Castelnau, whose affairs required his immediate presence at Marseilles. They went away, Paul well pleased on the whole with a delay which enabled him to see Sydonie again; the merchant muttering observations between his teeth, which politeness, without mentioning prudence, forbade him to make aloud. The three days being ended, Paul came again, and learnt that some neglected formality obliged the authorities to request him to wait three days more. As for the merchant, he was free to go, having already been so delayed that the journey would probably be useless.

Furnished with the document which enjoined all civil and military authorities to give him their aid and protection, and described him in so convenient a fashion that it might have served for a dozen other people, Paul prepared to leave Le Peyrou. But

first he wished to see whether his white hen was well cared for by her new mistress, and on the eve of his departure he went to visit Sydonie. He had scarcely seen her since they met in the valley, and the short moments which he had spent with her left him little satisfied, for she was anxious, impatient, almost angry with Paul's firm resolution to return and seek her. But Paul would not be shaken on this point.

Having guessed that the secret which troubled Sydonie related to some crime of the *Roumèco's*, whom he believed capable of anything, he would not be satisfied till he was assured that during his absence she was not likely to suffer for it. While he feared this, he was ready to stay in the neighbourhood, as *gardien, saulnier*, or even basketmaker, like Seube; but when certain that it was not likely to be the case, he again resolved to go to Dieppe, where he would make his fortune and return worthy of Sydonie.

Though he had the humility of true love, he had, too, the conviction that no one could care for her, guard her, as well as he could. He never guessed how much her opinion of him had changed, or that her impatience and bitterness sprang as much from regret at his departure as from her secret trouble. *La grande Madeloun* had never ill-treated him as Sydonie did, yet he gave her up on their first quar-

rel. He had thought of her as a good *menagère,* with a dowry, and had quite convinced himself that she would suit him very well as a wife, since some day he must marry. But he had never reasoned at all about Sydonie. One evening he had found out that he loved her, and since then it had never seemed to him possible that it should be otherwise. Yet he was going to bid her farewell without the sadness that might have been expected. He went along whistling the airs which once had been always on Sydonie's lips; she had rarely sung of late. Paul thought of this, and did not feel in charity with *la Roumèco.*

With the optimism, which was part of his character, he now congratulated himself that he was leaving Le Peyrou, where, if he had married Sydonie, every one would have kept in mind whose grandchild she was. Other feelings mingled with this one, and increased his satisfaction. Entirely taken up with his daily life, he had thought of nothing beyond the Mas Crema, till he fell in love and found that Sydonie laughed at him. He had thought much since; ambition awoke, and while Sydonie only saw a want of spirit in his readiness to give up his plans of absence, in fact it would have been a great sacrifice to him to go back to his old life. It already lay behind him. The

village was full of regrets at his departure; there was no one who could not have been better spared. From boyhood he had been a sort of king there, accepted as a judge in all the childish disputes, always honest and just, and making his authority respected by a hearty thump, when necessary, which brought universal concord, no one attempting to appeal from his decisions, not even lads much older than himself; for Paul was acknowledged by all to be the best climber, the luckiest fisherman for crayfish, and the cleverest birds'-nester in the country side, a reputation which extended as he grew up into that of the best wrestler in the matches, the swiftest runner, and the bravest fellow in a *ferrade* to be known, far or near, while the character for honest good nature, which had distinguished him as a boy, remained unchanged.

He could not leave all the friends who thus regarded him without some pain, and yet he was right glad to go, especially as he hoped that *Nôtre Dame la blanche* (Nov. 21st) would see him back in time, as he had said, to hear the bells ring the peculiar chime which marks that the fortnight before Christmas is come, and is known in Languedoc as *Nadalet.* Still *Nadal* was a long way off—for a lover! Sydonie would surely say a kind word this last time.

If you wish a thing *not* to happen as you expect, make a castle in the air of it. A very different scene

to what he had imagined awaited Paul. As he approached the hut of the *Roumèco*, a voice, broken with sobs and wild with alarm, struck on his ear. He hastily entered and saw Sydonie kneeling over something that had sunk on the ground, a mass of ragged garments, covering—what? Nothing with life in it; nothing that could answer the appeals of the terrified girl who shrieked as Paul rushed in. "Who is there? Help—for Heaven's sake, help me! What is it? She does not answer! Grandmother, what is the matter?"

"Sydonie, it is I; what has happened here?" said Paul, stooping over the body and raising it. "Move; give her air; we will lay her on the bench: perhaps she has only fainted!"

But even as he lifted the heavy helpless form he knew that here was death.

Sydonie watched him raise the body, lay it down on a bench, put his hand on the heart, and draw back, shaking his head. She was stupified, and let him do as he would, seeming to wait for him to make her understand what had happened.

"Has it just happened?" he asked presently, drawing back a little from the dead woman, over whose drooping, motionless face something had come which betrayed the seal of death, though her hands were still warm.

"It is not a quarter of an hour since she spoke," answered Sydonie, lowering her voice as he had done, thus acknowledging the presence of that death which they hardly realized. "She was there, in the corner; she was doing nothing, only she kept muttering something very low, as she has constantly done of late. I was just thinking how pale she looked, when she rose up all at once, and spoke quite loud, looking straight before her. With terror, such terror, Paul! I got up too, quite frightened, and before I could ask what was the matter, she said, 'Yes, Madame la Marquise, it is my turn,' and made two steps forward, and fell down. Holy Virgin, holy Virgin, is she dead?"

"Listen, my poor Sydonie; there is nothing to be done for her, and you ought not to stay here. I will take you away, and tell the doctor and the mayor what has happened."

"But she cannot be dead! I heard her speak so lately; death does not come thus! Do not stay here, go and fetch a doctor; you spoke of a doctor!"

"I am going; but I cannot leave you here, Sydonie. It would send you mad to stay here alone."

"No, no, I will not leave her. She always said I did not love her. Ah, how true it was of late! She would indeed think so if she awoke and found her-

self alone. Oh, if she would but look at me again!" and Sydonie stooped and laid her hand on the chill forehead, but she shrank back and turned white.

"It is death!" she said, as if now the fact really came home to her; but the full shock seemed to calm her, for she continued with less vehemence, "Yes, I understand it now, but go, all the same, Paul; I shall not be afraid of being alone; I will pray. Oh, Paul, she had not an instant for prayer, and if you only knew!"

She shuddered, and knelt down by the corpse. Paul was reluctant to leave her thus alone, and stood hesitating. Sydonie looked up, and ceased for a moment to let the beads of her rosary glide through her trembling fingers.

"Good Paul," she said, "go quickly; you will do whatever should be done?"

And Paul only stayed to kindle the little iron lamp, whose feeble light could scarcely contend with the darkness that seemed to press upon it. Sydonie was left alone with the dead. She prayed with feverish energy; she dared not look up, lest she should see the wrinkled face which assumed strange expressions under the faint and quivering light; she even fancied sometimes that there was a movement, that the head was lifted, or the arm stirred. She

felt as if she should go wild with horror. Her fingers clutched the consecrated medal which she wore round her neck, and pressed it convulsively at every slight accidental sound; she prayed aloud, but her own voice added to her terrors; she dared not raise it again. Twenty times she was on the point of rushing out of the hut; but Sydonie had courage, she mastered herself, and resolutely resumed her prayer. Meanwhile, Paul was hurrying on to seek help, with his thoughts full of Sydonie, left behind for such a vigil. He had to warn the medical man, whose duty it was to examine into the cause of death, and he asked himself again and again where he should find a charitable woman who would fulfil the last offices for the dead; but, in spite of his haste, he went out of his road to seek Mademoiselle de Parthenau. She came to the door herself when he knocked; the servants were all at church, listening to an 'instruction,' given to prepare for an approaching Confirmation; Thérèse and her father were sitting in the kitchen; she had been at work, while he, a fine, cheerful old man, was reading aloud to her, by the fireside. Paul made a hasty bow, and forestalled all questions with,—

"Mademoiselle, I thought it right to tell you—" he was so breathless with his rapid walk that he

could hardly get the words out—"that poor Sydonie wants you greatly; her grandmother is dead."

"Dead!"

"Dead this evening. I found her on the ground, and there was nothing to be done. I am going to the town to give notice to the authorities."

"Dead! the old witch dead!" said M. de Parthenau.

"Dead without confession, without the sacrament!" said Thérèse, with dismay. "And Sydonie?"

"She is alone down yonder, *la pauvrette.* I was forced to leave her, but Mademoiselle sees that this should not be."

"I will go and fetch her," said Thérèse, rising. "I will bring her home. You allow it, my father?"

"Do so, do so; but you are not going alone at this time of night. If Jean were come back from Montpelier, but he is always late. Stay, I will go with you myself."

"Oh, my father, I pray you—"

"Come, come, I rather like a moonlight walk; get ready."

"Thanks, my good father."

Paul was impatient to be gone, but he had still something to say.

"Mademoiselle, I must leave to-morrow, as you know. My place is taken in the diligence, and I shall not know how all this goes on."

"You wish me to write and tell you?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle, how good you are;" said Paul, with a burst of gratitude, at finding his wish so quickly comprehended. "I should never have dared to ask it. You will tell me what she decides to do! She will be with you for a time, is it not so? and soon I mean to be here again. If she wanted me, a word would be enough."

"You will return and see me to-morrow, before the diligence starts."

"It is so early, Mademoiselle, I could not disturb you at such an hour."

"*C'est égal*, come all the same, and you will hear of our poor child. I will not keep her waiting longer now. But stay, you must find an *ensevelisseuse*."

"I was thinking of this, Mademoiselle, but who would come? the *Roumèco!*"

"Go to old Marte Roquier. You will tell her from me that there is a good work to be done. She will go."

"I will do so, Mademoiselle," said Paul, his heart so full that he could not utter a word of his overflowing gratitude.

"Well, *ma fille*, are you ready?" said M. de Parthenau.

"Yes, my father; but you may have to wait a long time in the valley for me. Sydonie will not leave the hut till old Marte comes."

"Well, I shall walk about the valley. It is fine; I shall smoke, and wait for you very contentedly."

Thérèse was reluctant to disturb her old father; but it seemed to her absolutely necessary to fetch away the girl who was keeping watch, alone, beside her dead grandmother, and they set out together. M. de Parthenau was devoted to this daughter, who crowned his old age with love; he was positively well pleased to quit his book and his fireside for this nocturnal expedition, since it forwarded her wishes; but he comprehended nothing of the painful thoughts that flocked into her mind during their walk, and almost hindered her from replying to his remarks.

"I really believed her immortal, that old hag," said he. "Her death is a real deliverance for the neighbourhood, for, unless I am greatly mistaken, she carried on a brisk trade with the evil one. You recollect that affair of Fanette Ramoun, who was convicted of child-murder?"

"I remember it only too clearly, my father!"

said Thérèse, sighing, for she had known the unhappy woman well.

"Well, there was no getting hold of it, but there was good reason to believe that the *Roumèco* was her accomplice, and she might have explained a good many other matters if she had chosen. She must have had strong secret protectors, or she would have been in the hands of the police long ago. An old witch! Your little protégée will be much better without her. She grows marvellously pretty. You will have her at our house; she has the good taste to adore you. Look at the moon rising behind the mountain; one sees the first rays through the pine trees . . *Ma foi*, one would turn poet if one often walked out by night. It is better than our book, *hien!* How you hurry on!"

And Thérèse was thinking of the soul which was—where? Dead, without confession! unabsolved!

The cottage was in sight at the end of the valley, and M. de Parthenau stopped.

"There! Go on, my dear, stay as long as you like, and I shall walk slowly up and down here."

"Marte cannot be long in coming, my father, but she is old, and does not walk so fast as you."

"Nevertheless, I am not young either! but a good daughter and one's native air keep up one's strength.

I should have been dead long ago if I were still an exile. Who is it that says the sun shines everywhere, but it only smiles on your own home?"

Thérèse entered the hut alone. It was time, for Sydonie's strength was exhausted. Only the moonlight now illuminated the room, for a great moth had just beaten out the lamp with its wings. As she saw it flutter round the light, a new access of terror seized on Sydonie, for these moths, "*sant-fèli,*" in patois, are, according to popular belief, wandering souls. Already greatly agitated by the dreadful event of the evening, she watched, cold with dismay, the creature hover round the dead woman, brush her face with its wings, circle round the room, and at last die in extinguishing the lamp. A cloud just then passed over the moon; everything became dark in an instant. Sydonie felt as if the room turned round with her; there was the noise of rushing water in her ears, reason seemed giving way—then the white moonlight flooded the room again, and a dearly loved voice called her with tones of tender sympathy; she rose with a bound and threw herself on the breast of Thérèse. There was life and safety in the close embrace of her friend; for the first time Sydonie could shed the tears which had been choking her.

CHAPTER X.

PAUL did not see Sydonie again before he left Le Peyrou. When, as Mdlle. de Parthenau had bidden him, he returned to her house, Sydonie was asleep, worn out with agitation, and Paul immediately begged that she might not be awakened. Thérèse had not had the slightest intention of disturbing Sydonie; but she was touched by Paul's want of selfishness, and listened to him with the sympathy that made her so beloved, and though she did not think that he would ever win Sydonie, her good wishes were gained by the manner in which he spoke.

"You love her very much then?" she said, struck by his energetic sincerity.

"Well, Mademoiselle, I cannot think how it came about. When I saw her eyes full of tears the evening of the fête, and afterwards when she stood looking at the moonlight, it was as if she took my heart with her two hands, and I could not hinder it."

Thérèse remembered the way in which the laughing girl had often spoken of Paul, and thought that she did for the best in advising him not to return; but her good counsels were wasted on this obstinate lover, who was bent on coming back after "*Nôtre Dame la blanche*," and held to his purpose. "Why harass yourself and grieve her?" Thérèse had said, "for it must grieve her to grieve you."

"She may need me," Paul answered; "I should like to see with my own eyes how she is getting on;" and Thérèse saw that he would take this resolution with him.

The death of the *Roumèco* made a great sensation. People seemed unable to believe that the terrible old witch had died a natural death, and so many reports got abroad, by degrees assuming form and consistency, that her death bade fair to be held more fearful and mysterious than her life had been. Sydonie was, indeed, happy at this time to be sheltered by the De Parthenau roof, but the refuge could not be permanent. She became anxious about her future as soon as she could think of anything but the shock which she had received, and talked long and often of it with Thérèse, who was dismayed to find her anxious to be employed in the "*filature*" of Castelnau. Thérèse would have wished to have placed her in a

family related to the De Parthenau; but they lived in a distant part of France, and Sydonie would not hear of leaving her old neighbourhood. Thérèse had sometimes thought that there was no real safety for Sydonie except within a convent. So young, so pretty, so unprotected, where else could she be safe? And, besides, all Thérèse's own aspirations were directed towards a conventual life, which she would certainly have embraced had she not been indispensable to her father. How often she had said to herself that her restless heart would never really be still until she could fill it with a pure unworldly life, all given to Heaven! But Sydonie suddenly revolted against this scheme. "A convent!" said she; "it is a beautiful idea to devote oneself to God, one comprehends that, but yet a convent . . . . . I have heard Mdlle. Sarrasin speak of the one where her sister is, when I went to teach her to make lace. It made me shiver! One went to see the nuns in the *parloir*, a room so cold, so sad, with three narrow windows that darkened the daylight as it passed. There was a grating covered with a curtain, and the nuns kept their black veils down whenever they spoke to any one not in '*la religion!*'"

"That is a Benedictine convent, a very severe rule. I understand that it should attract you but

little; yet what does it matter if our short life here be sad and painful, so long as we gain an immortal one?"

"No, without doubt, it is a good bargain," said Sydonie, simply, and without noticing that the word she used had struck very unpleasantly on the ear of Thérèse.

"If you have no vocation, it is not to be thought of, my child," answered Mdlle. de Parthenau, "but to me it seems that peace, that happiness is found in this tranquil life, filled with prayer. It is not a slight matter to be able to do like so many great saints, and devote one's youth and strength to Heaven, setting a barrier between oneself and the world. Sooner or later the world is very cruel to its children. It gives them a bitter wine to drink, believe me!"

"But tranquillity is not happiness, Mademoiselle!"

"True, nor is happiness real joy. One is happy—why? Because something has happened, some pleasure or good fortune which will, perhaps, fly away the same day! Joy is a gift of Heaven which the world cannot give."

"Ah, I know that one can be very unhappy, but also one can be very happy; the two go together, and I should like to feel both! I think I would rather be

sometimes unhappy than see ever the same faces, do always the same things at the same hour each day. I should die of it! And then never to do anything more for those I love!"

"My child, you could do much, for you could pray far better for them with a free heart. Have you not owned sometimes that a simple village fête has driven all holy thoughts away? How would it be in the turmoil of the world?"

"Ah, pardon, Mademoiselle, I pray better for what is before my eyes; for instance, when we thought that the child of *là Romiguières* was dying, and I saw the despair of the poor mother, it seemed to me that all at once I understood what she felt; I knelt down in a moment, and I never besought the good God as I did then, unless it were the other night—you know what I mean. Do the nuns comprehend these things behind their gratings? For me, I understand nothing well but what I have felt myself. Yourself, Mademoiselle, could you pray more for M. your brother in a convent than here?"

"Ah, my child, I might there have more faith, more patience. Here, perhaps, I love him too well."

"Too well?"

"If it fills my heart too much, if I could not bear

to know his marriage *manqué*, as probably it may be, —I am tempted immediately to desire riches; it seems to me that our poverty is an injustice, yet I do not even know that this marriage would make him happy! I only know that he desires it passionately, and—"

"How glad he must be that you too feel like him!" interrupted Sydonie.

"Possibly, dear child, but I am wrong to cling thus to any plan of earthly happiness—to let the happiness of each day depend on what he writes me. Well, think of what I have said."

"This convent—is it far from here?"

"In Le Puy."

"Then I should see you no more?"

"I cannot tell, my child, but I should know you were safe."

"That is it! I need you, but you have no need of me; it is like the saints and those who pray to them," said Sydonie, very bitterly. The thought which had long gnawed her heart escaped at last; but, without knowing it, she had struck her friend one of those blows that only those dearly loved can give.

Thérèse suddenly felt that the loss of this girl, wayward, anxious charge as she was, would take all the

sunshine out of her life. But if it were better for her to go, this would but make one more sacrifice, and why make it more difficult by owning how much it cost her?

"You are mistaken," she said, in her rich and gentle voice, "I should miss you much, but above all I long to see you safe and happy."

Sydonie looked at her with eyes that said many things. For the first time Mdlle. de Parthenau really read this page of the heart which she had thought she knew from beginning to end. There were many more leaves yet to be deciphered.

"You wish to remain near me, child?" said she. "Well, I understand this; thank you. You know that I too would not leave my father, or I should have been a sister of charity."

"That you are already, Mademoiselle!"

"But you have other reasons, let us hear! You dread leaving your home, little mountaineer?"

"Ah, besides, I love to go, to come, to run; that makes me feel that I am alive. I love to work hard, then to do nothing: I would go through the deepest river I could find to please two or three people; but I must let myself detest some others, and if by chance I could not like Madame l'Abbesse, I should choke for want of being able to say so to her; have

her daily before my eyes, and not dare to show what I felt!"

"Child, you would offer an acceptable sacrifice in yielding up this undisciplined will to her to whom Heaven has given authority."

"Heaven! but suppose the nuns had made a mistake in choosing their abbess?"

"These elections are made very solemnly, my child, after fervent prayer."

"But, Mademoiselle, if the nuns should not have prayed fervently?"

Thérèse was betrayed into a smile. "Little reasoner! where have you found such ideas?"

"Oh, that one came to me at this moment, but I have thought much since—"

"Since when?"

"Since the evening of the fête."

"To persuade yourself that you did well to attend it?"

"No," answered Sydonie, rather low, as she leant her head on the hand of her friend, at whose feet, as usual, she was sitting.

"My child, you reason too much. You do not know where it leads, and I trust you never may."

"It is true that men reason, and they don't believe much," said Sydonie.

"Yes, they reason because they are too proud to believe what they cannot understand, and yet, Sydonie, if they could grasp these truths, they would be like gods; it is because truth is so high, so great, that it cannot be wholly grasped. Let us be content to follow the old paths; the new only lead astray!" She hesitated, and added tenderly, "Dear child, I know that the thought of your poor grandmother is a weight on your heart, and I thought that by devoting yourself to religion you might expiate her sins."

"If you think that,"—began Sydonie, while the longing to sacrifice herself for another, which sometimes seizes on a woman, woke up strongly within her, but another feeling stifled it. She saw again Paul's face of pain and dismay when she spoke of becoming a nun. "Oh, I do not know, I do not know!" she exclaimed, bursting into sobs. "I should be very unhappy, and surely we were not sent into the world to be miserable! I have been so sad already, and I am only seventeen years old. I should not have asked for much to make me happy; only what others have, —a mother, a family, something of their own,—but I have only what is given me through pity. Only one person ever loved me, and who knows if I shall ever see him again?"

"Do not I love you, my child?"

"Ah, Mademoiselle, you are goodness itself for every one, but you do not need me."

"But, my little Sydonie, would you have me love none but you?"

"You do not understand, Mademoiselle. Do you see, it seems to me that one would have some person to love one above all others, for oneself. And I do not want to live for no one but myself—I would rather suffer, if it were for another. I would make him very happy, *allez!* and if ever I had a little child who loved me with all its heart and called me mother, ah, Mademoiselle, how I would thank the good God. Surely women's hearts must feel very cold if they have never had a child to warm them! And then, a good husband who would work for me, and come home at night, singing for gladness to get back to his *chez lui*, why, I should find all the day as light as a feather when I thought of the evening."

As Mademoiselle de Parthenau listened to this *naïf* exposition of Sydonie's views of happiness, she started like Robinson Crusoe, when he saw the foot-step on the sand, which showed that some one besides himself inhabited his island. She, too, had once had thoughts and feelings so like these, that, as Sydonie uttered them, Thérèse seemed to hear the voice of

her own youth speaking to her. She had thought them silenced long ago, but they awoke all at once, as if the battle had to be fought all over again. The heart has sometimes these pitiless re-awakenings; Thérèse learned it then.

"You seemed to have thought much of the future," she said, with an effort. "You wish to marry; you wish for a life '*en famille;*' be it so; you would be wise if we lived in an ideal world, but suppose you made a marriage like most of your friends; think of all the unhappy wives of your village. What would become of you with a husband who went and gambled at the *cabaret*, and came back drunken to beat you?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle, I should never choose such an one!"

"You think so, as those poor wives thought. Do you fancy you could keep him away from temptation?"

"Perhaps I might."

"Alas, child! what people call love never had that strength. Only religion can do that, and the peasants have so little! Shall we ever see them again humbly believe and worship as formerly, when they let their true guides lead them? What disorder and misery since every one has chosen to think for himself!"

"Ah, Mademoiselle! I cannot bear to see you sad!"

"Who could be otherwise? But come, you have thought of a husband, that is clear. What ideal have you made, for you are fastidious? You disdained the only one who might have suited you; you require cleverness, is it not so? You expect some hero whom fate is to bring to Le Peyrou, for decidedly such an one has never existed there up to this time."

The voice of Thérèse had a certain sweet and gentle raillery in it, which was as charming as a caress from another. Sydonie smiled and kissed her hand.

"Mademoiselle, I will tell you what sort of husband I desire. For example, I do not wish him to be very clever."

"What!" said Thérèse, not a little astonished. "You do not care for cleverness?"

"No, so long as he had common sense; with that he could not be foolish, and that is already much. He must be kind and gentle, though capable of a rough word when necessary, and he must love me dearly, and scold me sometimes."

"You consider that desirable!"

"Certainly; he must also hold to his own opinion,

and then it would be worth while sometimes to try to make him yield. I would never marry a bulrush that bent to every wind. And he must be very kind to animals."

"Now I quite see the sort of husband we must find," said Thérèse, laughing. "It is well I asked for directions, for I confess I expected something very different. I am wondering now why you used to laugh so much at Paul Bridaine, for your portrait is not at all unlike him. I liked him much: he may not be clever, but you have just said that you did not care for wit."

"He is much cleverer than he seems, Mademoiselle! he judges so well when necessary. You know the saying 'stupid as a *savant.*' I should not like that sort of man."

"He is brusque, certainly, but I should think his temper excellent."

"Oh yes! I wish you could see how all the animals of the Mas Crema love him; the goats come bounding to meet him; the cat climbs on his knees; the oxen turn their heads to watch him, and he has a caress and a word for each."

"You thought him too obstinate, too determined, perhaps? He may not be as good to women as to animals?"

"Oh, I like a man to have a good will of his own. I said so just now. Formerly, I thought he bore saucy words too mildly, but one must overlook something."

"Then it seems to me that the husband is found. Why did you make me think you could never love him?"

"Ah! Mademoiselle, during the life of my grandmother—"

"You look pale, your hand trembles. I understand; during her lifetime there were difficulties. You will tell me about it another time. And our good Paul, does he guess that you love him a little?"

"Well, Mademoiselle—you said yourself he was not really dull."

"But he is very modest, I think, and esteems this silly little girl so far above her true worth, that he might think himself unworthy of her. You will try to be a good wife to a good husband, Sydonie? He will come back at Christmas, he told me so, and then—you will find it possible to leave me?"

Her voice did not falter; she smiled, but Sydonie thought she perceived a painful effort.

"If I thought you would be sorry, Mademoiselle—"

"Sorry, yes; but I shall be right glad to know my lark safely kept by this handsome bird-catcher. Till then, you will stay with us."

"Oh, no! I must earn some money," said Sydonie, without adding that she felt herself a burden on this poor and generous family. "And you know, he may forget me in the town. It will be best to work in the *filature;* I know the *magnanière* a little, she will give me work, and already I know how to spin off the cocoons."

"You think of lodging alone in Castelnau?"

"Oh! I shall find a little room cheap, and every Sunday I shall come here, if you permit it; you will keep my money, and in winter I shall find something else to do, if—"

"Yes, I understand. But the air of the factory, so unhealthy as it is! the monotonous work! how will you bear it, my mountain kid?"

"I shall tell myself that sooner or later it will come to an end: one can bear anything when one knows that the end is not too far off. When one thinks that a trouble will last for years, for life, then one despairs; but once that I know when it will be over, bah! it is no more an ennui."

"I do not know where you find these thoughts," said Thérèse, astonished.

"Have they never come to you, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, but it is singular to hear them spoken by another. To come back to your schemes, do you need money to begin with?"

"I have still a little, quite enough. Oh, I will take nothing from you, who have already so many poor to help."

"It is astonishing that your grandmother had not a penny when she died; one would have thought her rich; but you are better without money ill-gained."

"But is it not singular that my cross and ear-rings have never been found, Mademoiselle? I cannot understand that at all. Where could she have hidden them? I do not think she would have given them away."

"To whom would she have given what she always said was your dowry?"

"It is no matter; I could never have worn them again," murmured Sydonie, recalling with a shudder that which she had overheard concerning these ornaments between *la Roumèco* and the basketmaker.

Mademoiselle de Parthenau related this conversation with Sydonie to her father, adding, "I should have thought the child more romantic."

"It certainly is rather common-place," laughed M. de Parthenau, "but what would you have? one

loves romantically but once in one's life, and I think you are Mademoiselle Sydonie's first passion. Don't let her go away. I like to see her about the house, she is so graceful, and her voice pleases my ear."

"I was glad to hear her singing to-day. It is the first time she has had the courage to be gay," said Thérèse.

"What was she singing? Stay, some rhyme of the district. '*Hélas, que les rochers sont durs,*' that was it," and M. de Parthenau began to hum the air. "Those old tunes which my nurse sang do me good. Poor woman, I called her mother as long as she lived; but her voice was very unlike that girl's; hers somehow is not French."

"No, *mon père*, and I often ask myself whence she comes. That un-French type of countenance; her graceful, caressing manners, are a riddle to me; and then she has a natural sense of the beautiful."

"Ah, ah, she is not of our mountains then. Imagine that two days ago I asked La Villarde, who came to ask for you, I forget why, if she saw the *Vieu* from her cottage; you know, the huge rock with the profile of a giantess. '*Mais, monsieur,*' she answered me, 'I don't know.' How, you do not know the peak which is seen ten miles round? 'Perhaps my husband may know it, Monsieur.'"

"Well, my little Sydonie is not like La Villarde. She has quite an Italian appreciation of beauty."

"Italian! *tiens!* I have it; I have seen portraits of Italian women in my travels; Titian's, I think. Till to-day I never could think what she reminded me of."

"What you say is singular, *mon père*, for when M. de Thézac chanced to see a sketch which I made by stealth of Sydonie, he said it was quite Italian."

"Ah, so our friend saw your sketches! He praised them, did he not? Why did you not tell me?"

"Because he praised them too much, *mon père*."

"Bah, bah!" said M. de Parthenau, with vexation. "I do not comprehend these scruples. You draw no longer because a good artist has praised your sketches; you deprive me of the pleasure of knowing your talent appreciated. I will invite him again, that good de Thézac: he talks too much of art, of things that are Hebrew to me, but it pleases you, is it not so?"

"No, dear father, do not invite him. I am best satisfied to be alone with you."

"We shall see, we shall see. Nevertheless, I find our life *à deux* very pleasant; you also do so, it seems," said M. de Parthenau, looking at her with

the mild passive happiness of an old man who is surrounded by love. "So much the better. Still, you would be glad to see your brother again? It is four years since he was here. If we were rich we would visit him in Paris."

And in thinking of his loved son, and still more loved daughter, he forgot, for the moment, both Sydonie and the thought which had occupied his mind, that the life of Thérèse lacked variety.

CHAPTER XI.

SYDONIE found, as she had hoped, employment in the *filature* for a short time; but it was closed at the end of autumn, and she was not ill-pleased to exchange the heated and unwholesome atmosphere, and sedentary occupation for another. On the double recommendation of Mdlle. de Parthenau and the *magnanière*, who had been struck with her diligent and rapid work, she found a situation in a *bourgeoise* family of Castelnau; for it soon appeared that for some time Paul could not marry. He wrote to Thérèse and to Sydonie, saying that his uncle had received him "*en bon parent*," but that he did not earn much, and the uncle, Thomas Michaud, having already a wife and children, could do no more for his nephew than let him work on board of the little fishing-boat, which he had bought with the savings of many years. Michaud loved his boat as if it had been one of his children, and always spoke of it with respectful admi-

ration. Paul ought to feel grateful that in any way he belonged to it. Paul related all this in his letters in a *naïf* and droll manner, which made Thérèse laugh, while astonished to find him capable of expressing himself so readily. Sydonie was equally surprised, but would not own it. She was angry with herself for ever having thought him dull. He still said that he should return soon after "*Nadal,*" to see how all was going on; and Sydonie worked gaily, consoled by this hope for her disappointment in finding her place as a servant far harder than her work in the *filature.* So long as the *fileuses* were punctual in the morning they left at the fixed hour, and the rest of the day was their own; and on Sundays Sydonie had hastened to the Manoir Parthenau, and passed a true "*jour de fête*" with her friend.

This was now all changed. Plenty of work, low wages, and a strict and suspicious economy of which she had before never had an idea. Her mistress watched over and measured wood, coal, and food; her principle was that servants must be managed by scolding, and no one could accuse her practice of being inconsistent with her rules. Sydonie soon understood that this parsimony was almost a duty in a family where there were two daughters to be married, and a son for whom a substitute must be found if he

should draw a bad number in the conscription. She cared little for the sharp voice which ever pursued her; she soon learnt to laugh at it, with other servants in the same case as herself, for Madame Simon was not the only one of her species in Castelnau. She was a buxom little woman withal, smiling and plump,—a description which also fitted her husband. Castelnau, which was as much addicted to nicknames as mediæval Florence, called them M. and Mde. Nougat, and they certainly had a look as if they lived on bon-bons; but if they did, it must have been in other people's houses. Sydonie sometimes thought she had fared less scantily in the *Roumèco's* cabin than here, but it was not this which she found galling. She could not accustom herself to be suspected. Madame Simon was amazed by her indignation; she suspected her servants from habit, and intended no special affront to Sydonie, whom she answered, carelessly,—

"You are a fool! If I were not everywhere at once one knows how it would be. When the mistress is absent the mice dance on the table. I know you *au bout de mes doigts,* all of you; I have already tried six or seven maids, and not one was a bit better than the others. As for you, children take after their parents, and there are

many who say I was a simpleton to take the grandchild of —" But the sentence ended abruptly as she met Sydonie's eyes. A mad wish for revenge filled the girl's heart: she clenched her hands, and pressed together her lips, which had suddenly turned white.

"What is the matter?" said Mde. Simon, quite alarmed. "You have an air—. Come, I did not mean to vex you! you misunderstood me."

"No, I understood very well; you said a cruel thing then, but perhaps you are right," said Sydonie, slowly, as if returning to herself; and she went away, and began to work energetically, murmuring, "I was mad that moment. If that often happened Mademoiselle de Parthenau would be right, and I should be better shut up in a convent."

Here was a southern nature, awaking for a moment; a passionate nature, hidden below the gay and careless surface. Mdlle. de Parthenau had rightly said that the girl was rather Italian than French, and there also existed in her some drops of Arab blood, bequeathed with much besides to Languedoc and Provence by the Saracen invaders.

Mde. Simon was rather disquieted by this scene, and repented that she had had anything to do with Sydonie; but seeing her assiduous at her work, active

and discreet, she perceived that she might have done worse; yet she continued to suspect her, declaring that such irreproachable conduct was unnatural, and that there must be a serpent in the grass. In truth, Sydonie grew exceedingly cautious, for she saw that the least fault in her would be counted double. She piqued herself on baffling all the malicious tongues that longed to find an opportunity of speaking against the favourite of Mdlle. de Parthenau and the granddaughter of the witch.

Christmas brought disappointment; Paul's savings did not justify the long journey from Dieppe, and he was obliged to confess that illness had consumed the greater part of them. He was well again, hard at work, but the journey became impossible. Spring began rather sadly for Sydonie; she kept up her courage, but it was easy to see that she was less gay than of old, and sighed for liberty. She would have returned to the *filature*, but Thérèse dissuaded her, thinking her present life, though hard, far better for her than that of a *fileuse*.

Sydonie was very pretty, and many people did not fail to tell her so. She was safer with Mde. Simon than alone in the town. But Sydonie cared very little for what was whispered to her. One of the honest, loving looks that Paul used to give her, or a

simple word of praise from him, would have made her more happy than all the compliments that Castelnau could pay her. She had one or two offers of marriage, but her heart was elsewhere, though Paul and she had never formally plighted troth; and besides, she was not encouraged by the sight of *la grande Madeloun*, fretting and pining under her dignity, as the wife of M. Anatôle, longing for her village home, where she had been important and useful, while now her country ways furnished continual food for mockery or fault-finding. M. Anatôle did not shine as a husband, and Sydonie found herself obliged to show so clearly that she scorned his admiration, that she was forced to give up visiting her old acquaintance Madeloun. Her own pleasure was the sight of Mdlle. de Parthenau, who, knowing that, to soften the hardships of her position and to see her often, it was necessary to gain the mistress's heart, took especial pains to do so. Mde. Simon felt, in spite of herself, the influence of Thérèse, and, after a vigorous defence, ended by doing whatever she wished. Yet Sydonie, day by day, became rather brave than gay. She was a bird in a cage. More positive misfortune, too, was impending, and fell upon her just when she expected it least. Since the death of the *Roumèco*, the basketmaker had not been seen in the neighbour-

hood. He made long rounds, and only appeared at irregular intervals. Sydonie seldom thought of him, for since the death of her grandmother all connection between herself and the *panieraire* seemed at an end; but this would appear not to have suited Seube.

There were in the town certain places where the poor sought their simple breakfast of what they called "*coco*," though it had no resemblance to civilized *coco*, and a *coque* (a kind of cake). The fashion of the place forbade mistresses to go to market themselves, which sorely grieved all the race of Mesdames Simons, though they did not fail to count every *sou* that was spent,—a precaution which, however, did not hinder them from being occasionally cheated. The two *sous* for the servants' breakfast, for instance, generally came out of the market-money, and Sydonie's proud honesty formed so rare an exception to the general rule, that Mde. Simon might be pardoned for not believing in it.

Sydonie was coming out of one of these places, half kitchen, half tavern, in the early morning, and paused on the threshold to see whether the servant of the De Parthenau, whom she expected, was coming. With her hand above her eyes to keep out the sunbeams, she looked down the almost empty street. The shops began to open, the town was awaking

slowly. There was no one whom she knew in sight —no one. She was mistaken; she espied a stooping, miserable figure coming towards her, and recognized Seube. Her first feeling was of disgust, as if a snake had crept out before her, and she was just retreating into the *café;* but the basketmaker had seen her—his eyes kindled, he hurried on, and Sydonie changed her mind, and, like a brave girl, lifted her head and stood firm. Decidedly her air did not encourage him to address her, for it was easy to see that the instinct of combat was awake in her: yet he stopped before her with the coaxing air which, as she knew, readily turned to menace.

"Ah, the pretty girl! what a long time it is since I have seen her. I thought I should see her, only not quite so soon. Heaven is good to the poor, eh, eh!"

"Good morning," said Sydonie, disdainfully, and she was about to pass on.

"What! she has not a moment for an old friend, who has not seen her since the death of her grandmother! Is that the way to treat an old friend who knows all about her family?"

"One may know all about people without, for that reason, being a friend," said Sydonie. "Let me go; Madame Simon does not like her servants to waste her time."

"She will wait, she will wait, my little one. I have a word to say to you. How would you have me be consoled for the death of that good old woman, unless by you? She, so kind to me; always a little gift ready for me."

"That was why she had not a *sou* when she died."

"*Contes!*"

"You may believe or not as you choose."

"And the cross, the ear-rings? your dowry, my pretty one, I suppose they were not gone!"

"Unless you have them, they are gone no one knows where."

"You will do well not to mock me," said the basketmaker, in a low and threatening voice. "She kept back those things which ought to have been mine long ago, and now I mean to have them."

"Go then, and find them! Since you know her secrets, you know where she has hidden them."

"Take care!" said Seube, seizing her arm.

Sydonie contented herself with shrugging her shoulders; but fear began to creep over her as she felt his long fingers round her arm, and saw his eager, fierce face come close to hers, as if he would drag a confession out of her by force.

"Ask the neighbours if anything was found," said she, freeing herself with difficulty, "and go, for I cannot stay here; people begin to look at us."

"Robbed, robbed!" said Seube, with despair mingled with fury; "if she had lived, I should have had them. I will have them; there must be a way of finding them. Listen! you must come with me into yonder church: I have something to say to you."

"But I have nothing to hear!" cried Sydonie.

"You will come with me; I have something to say to you," repeated the *panieraire*, imperatively. "Else I will have you turned from Madame Simon's door before the sun is over your head."

"Try!"

"You will be turned away, I tell you; for I will tell matters concerning the *Roumèco* which will shut all doors against her grandchild. Ah! you understand now; they say that that good Paul Bridaine thinks of marrying you—M. Paul who used to cast me a scornful word as you might to a dog—we will see how he acts when I have spoken."

"If Paul were here you would not dare to speak to me thus," said Sydonie, with a voice which trembled as much with anger as fear.

"But he is not here, my pretty one, since his uncle packed him off for falling in love with some one not far off."

"You lie!" cried Sydonie, with a vain struggle to disbelieve what all at once flashed upon her as truth.

The basketmaker laughed, without taking the trouble to repeat his assertion, and went towards the church. Sydonie followed him, summoning her courage for the combat.

"Answer me," she said, when they had entered the church, chill and empty as yet.

They had stood still in front of a little chapel, dedicated to "Our Lady of Sorrows;" little tapers were burning near it, and flowers in profusion decked the altar; but at this early hour no worshippers knelt there.

"Answer me," said Sydonie. "You knew my grandmother long ago."

"I see no objection to answering you," replied Seube, with his cool smile. "What I tell will be paid for in good French coin. Yes, I am of these parts; so was she; we met in the Revolution. She was well married, I a poor wretch trying to get a living as I could."

"Married to whom?"

"To an Italian, called— No, that will keep for next time. One must not tell everything at once."

"Her papers were correct, and the name on them was not Italian," said Sydonie, looking full at him.

"When the world is upset many little matters may be managed."

"What was the secret between you?"

"What a pace you go at! A secret which she paid me well to keep, and you will be wise if you do the same."

"I will do nothing unless I know all."

Seube looked at her. She seemed so resolute, and so disposed to brave him that he saw he must crush her or give in.

"Listen!" he said, without taking his eyes from her face: "there were certain persons who had done everything for her; educated her, dowered her, married her, protected her. The rich love to show protection. Times changed, it was they who needed protection; the good times came for the poor. *La Roumèco* had a great longing to be rich, you see she had seen riches closely; it was like letting a starving man watch things at a banquet; it suggests singular ideas to him. Those persons came one day to her and said, 'You owe us everything; reward us for what we have done for you. Say nothing of us to your husband'—a red Jacobin, if ever there was one. She took them in—"

"And betrayed them," said Sydonie.

"Ah, ah! You guess that? It was the best thing she could do; it only made two aristocrats the less, and her husband would never have forgiven her had

she hidden them. It was a case of life and death, *ma petite,* so she acted like a woman of sense and denounced them. She kept their fortune which they had with them, meaning to emigrate. Imagine that they had the simplicity to tell her this! *La Roumèco* kept the money and the jewels, which were now useless to them, for they were lodged in prison, very comfortably, and before they had time to get tired of that they were guillotined."

The *panieraire* laughed as he told this tale of treason. It seemed to give him positive pleasure to recall it.

"What was your own share in this?" asked Sydonie, without comment.

"Oh, that is my concern. It was your grandmother's history that you asked me."

"Do you think you can tell one without the other?"

"It matters little. I know how to take care of myself, but it would truly be a pity that a pretty girl like you should have this story tacked on to her name. On my word, I should be sorry for that. You will do as your grandmother did. You will give me, now and then, a little money, and I shall hold my tongue."

"Tell me the names of those whom she denounced?"

"Ah, ah! that is the most curious part of the story. You shall hear that when you give me the money. It will be to-morrow, perhaps? It depends on yourself."

"Money! You always speak of money; you dream of money, I think! You make merchandise of this atrocious history; you killed these women to have it! Do you never see them by night, if not by day, come to you and accuse you of this murder, you who at seventy years old are rejoicing in this crime! No, I will not stay here another moment, you defile this holy place. Ah! you assassinated those women for the sake of a little money! Truly you do well to tell me the vile story before this altar, and exult in it in the house of God!"

Sydonie turned to go, quivering with emotion. Several persons had come in. The basketmaker seemed slightly moved, but he laid his hand on her shoulder, saying in her ear, "I will wait two days. Be here then, or I come to seek you!"

CHAPTER XII.

MDE PARTHENAU'S jesting assertion that all the romance of Sydonie's nature was concentrated in her love for Thérèse was strictly true. From her childhood, a word, or even a look from Mdlle. de Parthenau had been the most important event of the day. When she awoke in the morning, her first thought was ever, "Shall I see her to-day?" and however unlikely it might be, she always hoped it, and her heart fluttered if afar she saw some one who resembled Thérèse. As for her feelings towards Paul Bridaine, they were quite different. With him she felt contented, protected, and greatly inclined to torment him. She knew her power over him, and enjoyed misusing it, though, after all, his honest love made her happiness. These two feelings had hitherto filled her heart, but now another forced its way in and ruled cruelly,—a terrible fear of the basketmaker.

The history which he had hinted at haunted her. Since the death of the *Roumèco* she had buried it deep, and driven it into the furthest corner of her memory, but now it returned upon her more threateningly than ever. She had never spoken of it, for at first she had wished to know more, and later it had become her chief desire to forget what she believed dead with the *Roumèco.* At last it had become absolutely necessary to ask advice. She felt sure the *panieraire* could not betray her yet, for in doing so he lost his last hope of getting money from her. He might threaten, but he would wait. Oh, to fly to Thérèse and ask her advice! but Mde. Simon entirely disapproved of her servants going out visiting, and if they were ill-judged enough to ask such a thing, she explained pathetically to them that, since she paid them to work, all their time belonged to her, and visits were a downright theft. Her astonished and troubled air at such times was quite touching. Sydonie knew that she must wait several days before her mistress could digest the request, but Mdlle. de Parthenau had so captivated her that it was sure to be granted in the end—grudgingly, but still granted. It was hard to control her longing to go at once; hard to bear this burden and to give no sign.

She saw Seube again in the town, and answered

his reproaches for not bringing him money by telling him that as yet she had had no wages from Mde. Simon, and all that she had earned at the *filature* was in the hands of Mdlle. de Parthenau. A strange expression came over the face of Seube as he heard this name; he asked if Sydonie were going soon to see her friend, and on her affirmative reply, said, "It is well: I shall still be here for a few days;" and left her affrighted by his evil smile. He seemed to have found work here and there, some old chairs and baskets to mend; but towards evening he quitted the town, and went towards Le Peyrou; but he did not stay in the village; and a labourer, returning late with his oxen, declared that he had seen him going towards the hut of the *Roumèco*, which had become so ill-famed since her death that no one would venture within a mile of it after night-fall. They spoke of ghosts and mysterious sounds that were heard round it, and the cottage was avoided as carefully as was a little mortuary chapel between Castelnau and Le Peyrou. It might have been thought that there was nothing in common between the hut of the witch and the consecrated building, where lay the remains of Christian people once well known to all Le Peyrou, but popular superstition classed them together.

What could the *panieraire* be doing at such an hour

in this unholy place? The peasant who saw him in the distance stayed the ox which he rode, and gazed after him, trying to make his slow brains comprehend the case. Not succeeding, he struck the animal with his goad, and went leisurely on, relating what he had seen at the tavern, where every one thought he had dreamed it, especially as the next day Seube appeared safe and well in the village, denying that he had been near the hut of the *Roumèco.* When he returned to Castelnau he contrived to learn that Sydonie was gone to the Manoir Parthenau. He lingered about the door of Mde. Simon, till he learnt at what time she would return, and then stole away to watch for her. She came, but Jean, an old servant on the farm of M. de Parthenau, was with her. The *panieraire* swore when he saw this, but did not fail to fling them a jest in his usual fashion. He had a kind of privilege in the neighbourhood which allowed him to say what he pleased to rich and poor. Jean replied in the same style; Sydonie did not even look at him. He could not guess what resolution she had taken, and went away again down the valley.

In fact Sydonie was ruminating thoughts which made Seube almost unimportant.

When she reached the Manoir, Thérèse came to

meet her with unusual emotion; kissed her, and murmured, "You have done well to come immediately . . . . . dear child, these are, indeed, good news!"

"You have had good news? Ah, I am glad! Of Monsieur, your brother?" said Sydonie, eagerly.

"But you surely know what I mean? Have you had no letter from Dieppe?"

"*Tiens!* the postman did give me a letter from Paul, but I was too hurried to stay and read it then, for I had just set out. I do not know what news he can have to send. He said once that nothing could hinder his loving me, but who knows? That man will hunt me everywhere, everywhere!"

"My dear one, what is it? My poor child, do not cry thus, I cannot bear it," said Thérèse, drawing her to her breast, and the magic of her voice and caressing hand gradually stilled the agitation of Sydonie, who was much too excited to think about the news from Dieppe. She had her own story to tell, but at first she could not speak.

"Now tell me," said Thérèse, "of whom and what you spoke? You are afraid of some one?"

"Oh, not now, not here!" answered Sydonie, pressing closer as she poured out her tale, to which Thérèse listened with increasing interest.

When Sydonie said that her grandfather had been an Italian, Mademoiselle de Parthenau started; a vague suspicion became certainty; she looked at Sydonie with sad and profound compassion, but said nothing; and when the story was told, she sat thinking in silence, while her eyes turned to an old ebony and ivory cabinet, wherein was kept a packet of letters, yellow with age. She had lately read them all through with mournful interest, for they were relics in the De Parthenau family: the only inheritance that the old Marquise had left to her son. The last, dated from Lyons, said that she had been obliged to take refuge with a person in whom she had entire confidence, since the Marquise had done much for her, and her husband too, though he held infamous republican principles (Madame la Marquise spoke like an aristocrat as she was), he would protect her, since he too owed everything to her, for she had found him poor and neglected in a little Italian town.

Thérèse had it all fresh in her mind. She looked up to a picture of her grandmother, hanging on the wall of the little room where she was sitting with Sydonie. It had been found thrown aside in an outhouse, and M. de Parthenau had replaced it with reverent affection, in the room where he remembered that his mother loved to distill the herbs from

her garden, and study the properties of the plants which she had caused to be sought far and wide, for she was a learned herbalist, and botany was a passion with her. The picture was a full-length, representing a fine-looking woman, whose powdered hair was dressed in the peculiar fashion of the early days of the Revolution—that head had fallen under the axe of the guillotine like many another as proudly held. Her hand rested on a basket of flowers and plants; she had chosen to be represented with her favourites near her. Thérèse divined that the Marquise had made a pet and *protégée* of some attendant with quickness enough to enter into her pursuits, had imparted her own knowledge to her, dowered and married her to the Italian apothecary, who doubtless had been a valuable auxiliary in the experiments that she loved to make. M. de Parthenau had sometimes alluded to his mother's eccentric enthusiasm for all relating to botany; had she lived a century earlier she would have been an alchemist, or at least have devoted her fortune to those who followed the occult science. As it was, she was neither the richer nor the poorer by her pursuits, yet they cost her dear in the end. How dear, Thérèse began to see. M. de Parthenau had no suspicion of it, for he had been perpetually away from home, and knew little of the

concerns of his mother's household, else Thérèse would have known all that now dawned upon her long before. It grew clearer and clearer,—

> "Doubts, like the needle urging to the pole,
> Tremble and tremble into certainties."

It was so with her now, and her first thought was to prevent Sydonie from ever knowing what she now knew.

"You love me well, poor child," she said, involuntarily; and Sydonie, while she answered by an embrace, wondered at the remark, which was unlike Thérèse, as was the mournful tone in which she spoke.

"Did your grandmother ever show any penitence for that crime which you suspect?" asked Thérèse.

"I believe that she thought much of it, continually at last, but she showed little of what she felt. Sometimes, seeing her so gloomy, I sought to speak a little of religion, but then she grew enraged and threatened to beat me. She had a terrible fear of looking on death."

"Yes, that is true, I remember that she never would remain by a death-bed. I recollect well that once, when I had come to see a dying girl whose parents had summoned the *Roumèco*, I said, 'Stay,

Madame, and you will see a Christian die,' her answer was, 'I have already seen too many deaths.'"

"She must have seen fearful things, Mademoiselle! I once said to her, 'How is it *mère grande*, that you never pray to the holy Virgin, who comprehends all our pains?' but she only said, 'Bah! what does she understand about the Revolution? The saints themselves would have become *sans culottes* had they lived then!'"

"Dead with such sentiments! And that poor wretch who still lives! he must be saved, Sydonie! Should he annoy you, send him to me, and I will try to bring him to a better mind. What a comfort, my Sydonie, that we can go for directions to our spiritual guide! What should we do without confession?"

"And besides, you consult Monsieur your father."

"Not on such a subject as this," answered Thérèse, hastily. "You know I do not willingly speak of the Revolution to my father."

"Mademoiselle!" exclaimed Sydonie, with sudden and violent emotion; "you are sure—are you not sure, with whom Madame la Marquise and her daughter took refuge? You spoke once of them"—

"Yes, I know the whole history."

"Ah! Thank Heaven! a frightful idea came to me; if it had been true I should have died of grief.

But the letters which you spoke of tell you where they went; you would have known had they been betrayed?"

"Yes, dear child."

"I am a simpleton! Because something was said of a Marquise . . . why, Marquises were as plentiful as daisies at Easter!"

"Nearly. Dear child, do not torment yourself so needlessly; there is sorrow enough already in the world without going to seek it. Rather think of your affairs, there is much to be said about them; but first, why did you not tell me this before?"

"I thought you would scold me for having listened, and then I could not bear to speak of it. Oh, what a night I passed! I neither slept nor woke, it was both and neither, and would not end. I hardly felt as if I were myself."

"*Pauvrette!* The best thing for you would be to go away without seeing this man again. Do not give him money, for that would be endless. You have no one to protect you here; elsewhere it might be difficult to annoy you."

"Alas! Mademoiselle, where should I find a protector, unless I sent for Paul? and I do not see what he could do. One cannot fight an old man; he is strong in his weakness."

"Read your letter, my child."

"Ah, my letter! I must have been very wretched to forget it. One always finds consolation with you, Mademoiselle; already I am hardly at all afraid."

She opened the letter and read aloud what Paul had written. Like many other authors, he found the beginning a great difficulty; he was apt to call "*le guide des écrivans*," or "*le soldat amoureux*," to his aid, but when once started, he went on swimmingly.

"Mademoiselle, it is with the greatest satisfaction that I sit down to communicate to you the unexpected event which has just taken place, and which nearly concerns one who is dearer to me than life. Mademoiselle, I must inform you that my uncle supplies fish to the Pension Laforêt, kept by a most respectable widow, said to be rich, which is the more likely as she formerly lived in an English family of a colossal fortune. I hear that she married the valet of this family, and they two set up the Pension; but now she is a widow, the poor dear woman, which is not her fault, so that it would be unjust to blame her for it, as indeed one ought rather to pity her, though, to tell you the truth, she does not seem in need of pity, as her house is more than full all the year round, and she herself is highly respected in Dieppe."

"What is he coming to?" cried Sydonie. "Is he

going to marry her, this widow ? or does she want a servant ? "

"Read on," said Thérèse, who also held a letter from Dieppe in her hand.

"Mademoiselle, I have to inform you that yesterday I went to the Pension Laforêt to carry fish there, and was told to wait as Madame had orders to give me; but she was adding up the bills of her *pensionaires*, and long ones they were, to judge by the time she took to do it, and there I waited in the court-yard—a pretty place, I can tell you. Oleanders in tubs along the walls, and a stand of flowers under the windows of the *salle à manger.* I kept looking at these flowers, and I looked at the fowls which came I know not whence, clucking and cackling; that made me think of Cocotte, to whom, as I hope, you are still kind, and that brought you to my mind, so I began, without thinking, to sing the carol that you are so fond of. It has always stuck in my head since that morning when you and I and *la grande Madeloun* were together by the old well, which she must finely regret since she has become a hairdresser's wife, for *vrai!* there is nothing like one's own home, and I wish I were there now instead of having before my eyes this grey sea, where our *gardons* would certainly be drowned if they were un-

lucky enough to fall into it, but as for them, they have the happiness to remain in the south."

"I never knew Paul discouraged before," said Sydonie, uneasily. "Is work scarce?"

"And while I hummed these words, you know, '*Marte et Marie et Saturnin,*' behold a woman burst out upon me like a thunderclap, asking where I had learned them, and whence I came. I remained staring at her, so greatly was I astonished; a man, one knows how to deal with a man, but women do take one aback, whether young or old. This was an old one: imagine to yourself a strong, well-dressed person, with eyes as black and soft as velvet, and rows of curls quite white and silken, but with a golden shine; one could see that she had had hair like yours, Sydonie; and while I was thinking of this, she repeats impatiently, '*Dites donc!* where did you learn that *noël* which my mother used to sing?' '*Tiens,*' said I, for I kept thinking about her hair, 'I have an idea.' 'Ah! you have an idea!' said she, as much surprised as if nobody but mistresses of *pensions* ever had ideas. 'I have it!' said I, delighted to see whose her hair was like, for at first, you see, it did not come into my head. 'My poor friend, are you mad?' said she. 'Can't you answer a simple question such as I have just asked?' '*Dame!* give

me time,' I said, wishing to show that I knew what good manners were. 'I'm not a woman, to answer without thinking. That carol? why, I learned it *chez nous.*' She laughed, and I saw she thought me a fool, and that worried my mind yet more, for, you understand, I was trying, without well knowing it, to seize a resemblance which I saw more and more clearly. 'They are wise folks, *chez vous,*' said she, 'one can see that, *mon garçon,* as true as my name is Laforêt.' '*Tiens,* I have it!' cried I, for this time I had got it, this likeness. 'I learned the carol from a pretty person whom Madame is very like, and who also thinks me a fool—there's another resemblance between you.' 'Well, I said they were wise folks in your parts,' said she, still laughing. 'The sagacity of this *demoiselle* proves it. At all events, she is pretty! so much the better for me. What's her name?' 'Sydonie,' said I, and the likeness struck me more and more. '*Comment!* that is my name too,' said she, with a start. 'And her surname?'

"Well, there I was, and I did think myself a donkey this time, for never in my life did I hear your surname.

"*Tenez,* Madame!' said I to her; 'laugh at me as much as you like; I can't tell you. She lived with a grandmother who had a nickname in our parts, and

I never heard any other.' 'It is singular,' said she, without laughing at all; and when they came to say she was wanted in the house, she put it all off in haste, and fell to thinking again. She is a handsome woman, though on the wrong side of fifty. 'I am from the south,' said I, to help her memory a little. 'But Sydonie is come no one knows whence; from Paris, perhaps, for she speaks French as well as her great friend Mademoiselle de Parthenau.' 'De Parthenau!' said she. 'No, I do not know the name, there is nothing clear in my memory. I left my family so young.'"

Sydonie looked at Mademoiselle de Parthenau, who had turned pale as she heard the beginning of the sentence; but Sydonie supposed that her agitation arose from the revelation which began to dawn upon her.

"'Has she no relations, this child?' I explained to her that your grandmother is dead, and your father died in battle, and that you had an aunt somewhere or other—for it came back to me all at once that you had spoken to me once of this relation—whom I had there before me! And the rest she will tell herself, for she wants you to come to live with her."

"Is it true?" said Sydonie.

"Quite true, my child, you shall read this letter,

which Madame Laforêt has written to me, supposing me able to give her information about you. And indeed, who could tell her so much as I, who have known you ever since that day when I saw you playing, almost a baby, before the hut in the valley? Little vain one! you were putting forget-me-nots in this hair of yours." She stroked the hair of Sydonie, which rippled like water under a breeze. "Do you recollect that?"

"I should think so, and you told me that those flowers were called 'the Virgin's eyes;' you kissed me and went into our hut to speak to my grandmother."

"True," said Thérèse, recalling all at once the singular look with which the old woman had received her.

"I do not know what you said to her, but at last she consented to let me go and see you sometimes, and you taught me to read and write, you gave me my picture of St. Thérèse, and ever since—ah, a moment ago I thought this news too good to be true, but if I must go away from you it is very, very bad!"

"My child, let us be thankful that it comes at a moment when it is far better for you to go away. What could we have done but for this? The holy

Virgin, to whom I have so often prayed for you, has protected you. You do not know what good it does me to see this so unmistakeably. I love you well, dear one; never doubt that."

"You will not forget me?" murmured Sydonie.

"Never," said Thérèse, adding, a moment afterwards, "if you could believe that possible, I should begin to think that you yourself would forget me."

Sydonie contented herself with shaking her head. She did not think it worth while to answer, for Thérèse had filled all her life; but what was she in that of Thérèse?"

"You are richer than you thought," continued Mdlle. de Parthenau, wishing to remove the conversation to safer ground, for she was afraid that Sydonie would discover how painful the separation was to her. "A good aunt who will love you! Paul describes a charming person. And Paul, you will find him, too, at Dieppe. You cannot travel there alone, and we must think about that."

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"I know a kind family who are going next week to Paris; suppose you went with them? and then they would find you another escort."

"Thanks, Mademoiselle."

"It will be better to say as little as possible of it beforehand, and I will ask Mde. Simon to let you go, and keep our secret. I shall merely say that you are going to Paris with friends of ours, and will remain there a little while. Thus Seube will not trace you."

"As you please, Mademoiselle."

"Ah, my child, do not be ungrateful! Heaven is very kind to you."

"I know that," said poor Sydonie.

"Well then—child, do not be sad! it is already enough to find courage for myself, without doing it for you too; do you think I have an inexhaustible supply? Read your aunt's letter; it is written by a good and sensible woman, and she already likes Paul, since she owes it to him that she has found you."

"It seems to me that as for him he is not much rejoiced by this affair. Here is news that changes all my life, and he seems almost grieved by it."

"You think so?"

"Certainly. Perhaps he is pleased for me, but not for himself."

Thérèse had not remarked this, but on re-reading Paul's letter she saw with surprise that the girl was

right. They talked so long that Sydonie saw her mistress would have good reason to scold, and set off in haste; but Thérèse would not let her go alone, for she thought, without saying so, that Seube would be in her road, and a storm was coming on. Sydonie, versed in all the weather-signs of the district, saw very well that there would be a tempest before night, and hurried on, so that old Jean could hardly keep up with her. He did not thank his mistress for having sent him on this expedition, especially as Sydonie, usually so ready to talk, kept a gloomy silence. From the moment that she had said to Thérèse, "You will not forget me!" it seemed to her that their separation had begun. By-and-bye she would rejoice in the wonderful news that had reached her, but as yet she hardly realized it, and her most distinct feeling was that she must leave Thérèse.

The armies of fir-trees on the mountains bent and swayed under the wind which howled through the valley; the rain fell in torrents before Sydonie reached the Maison Simon. Old Jean was obliged to spend the night with a friend; had he sought to return to the Manoir Parthenau the wind would have swept him like a straw from the road. He had

the double satisfaction of complaining of his long walk, and gossiping with his friend, while they played at cards together, and the storm swept by, and the rain lashed the window panes, while every one said, "One would not wish to be out of doors on such a night."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE wild south wind had swept the sky clear from clouds, but the angry rush of the *gardon* told that torrents of rain had fallen in the night, and many a fir-tree on the mountain side was uptorn. One, the remains of whose splintered trunk still remained firmly rooted aloft, had fallen right across the hut of the *Roumèco* from a considerable height. The walls still stood, but the roof was crushed in under the heavy branches which lay across it, and concealed the ruin they had made. At the death of the *Roumèco* her goat and kid had been sold; the latter, though a kid no longer, had in maturer age preserved his wilful ways, and often escaped from his guardian, and scampered off to his old haunts.

It happened thus on the morning after the storm; and, in defiance of shouts and stones flung after him, he was away to the green lawn where he had been

accustomed to browse when Sydonie was his mistress. The boy, who was answerable for him, went in pursuit; but the four legs of the animal went faster than the two of the lad, bare brown active limbs though they were, and the fugitive was quietly feeding in front of the hut when his keeper came up, full of wrath at the chase he had had. His purpose of chastising the offender was however forgotten when he saw the fallen tree, and distinctly heard strange sounds within the ruins. In open daylight this spot lost its terrific nightly reputation, yet it was always held as a lonely and suspicious place, and the boy looked round affrighted. The complete solitude was not re-assuring; he hesitated, advanced cautiously, and again heard moans so distinctly, that, without a moment's delay, he turned round, hurled a stick at the goat, and drove it at full speed before him out of the valley, back to Le Peyrou, where his story soon attracted a little crowd of wondering, half-incredulous listeners. Presently, a new comer joined it, no other than the peasant who had watched Seube go towards the hut in the gloaming; and the suggestions which he made caused a few of the more curious, or compassionate, to go and see if, indeed, the *panieraire* lay buried under the fallen roof. They penetrated through branches and stones with some difficulty, and found it

even so. He lay there under a mass of stones which had well-nigh crushed the life out of him; power of motion or of speech, beyond feeble groans, was almost gone when they dragged him out: but even thus he kept his hand clenched on something glittering, and resisted all attempts to take it from his tenacious grasp. It might be that in his repeated, eager search, in every cranny of the ruinous abode, he had loosened the stones and rendered them incapable of supporting the sudden weight that fell on them; the peasants, however, all declared that the crumbling old hut had only resisted wind and storm so long through the spells of the *Roumèco*, and that with her death the charm ended, and the first storm destroyed her abode. However this might be, Seube had succeeded in his object, and discovered the hiding-place where the witch had concealed the cross and ear-rings which she destined for her grandchild's dowry.

The *panieraire* was carried to a cottage in Le Peyrou, and it was found that his injuries, though mortal, would not cause the instant death which had at first been expected. The power of speech returned; he used it to protest that the ornaments were rightly his; that the *Roumèco* had defrauded him of them; and as Sydonie, when told this, replied, shuddering, "Let him keep them," it seemed that no

one had any right to interfere. He must have strangely coveted the costly ornaments, for he kept them beside him all day, as if it were his delight to look at them, and his fingers held them in a grasp which sleep never relaxed by night; but sleep seldom visited him, and increasing suffering told that death could not be far off. It was a death-bed by which none would have willingly lingered. As he had lived, so it seemed he would die,—reckless, exulting in blasphemies which scandalized even the least pious of the neighbours, and drove the affrighted *curé*, in despair, from his side. Never had Mdlle. de Parthenau endured such a scene, as she encountered whenever she came to visit him, and see that he was not in absolute destitution; for in so poor a district the usual means of public relief for the poor were apt to run so short that more than one case of actual starvation had occurred in winter time. He would watch her sorrowfully leave him with a kind of triumph, yet there was a tone of regret when once by some chance she had not visited him at the usual time, and he remarked, "She will not come again." He was mistaken. Thérèse, who never failed to visit the sad and sick, felt as if she had a special call to the side of this man, probably deeply guilty to-

wards her own family. Of this she was not long left in doubt; his allusions to the past, and half-revelations which she could fill up for herself, assured her that he had been a sharer in the *Roumèco's* treachery.

While her very heart sickened at the audacious impenitence of the poor wretch, who triumphed in outraging all that was most sacred to her, she yet would not be driven away; she believed that her earnest prayers for him must in the end gain this soul for which she so wrestled, and she attended, unwearily, on this death-bed with a love and patience that did its work, though no edifying signs of conversion could ever be extracted from the *panieraire.* At least she became sure at last that his dying eyes turned anxiously towards the door by which she was accustomed to enter; and though he gave no sign of entering into the prayers breathed beside him, and feigned sleep or deafness when the good *curé* entered, yet he ceased to blaspheme when Thérèse was present, and would have detained her when she left him. Some belief in the loving-kindness of his fellow-creatures had come back to him; his life had not been such as to make him very ready to credit its existence, but Thérèse was a living proof of it. Neither winter storm nor ungrateful repulse kept her away; to her

he owed all the comforts which his death-bed knew; her tenderness was a perpetual contrast with the philosophical "*Il faut prendre patience! Que voulez vous! Il faut mourir!*" of others. There is no waste of sympathy in France; but, for the most part, it must be owned that a sufferer—unless it be his fortune that is lost—is just as ready to console himself as another with these stoical reflections. Thérèse, however, as it seemed, took different ground, and sometimes a dim light as to the motives of her conduct dawned on the old *panieraire.*

Sydonie had no further cause to fear him; he wanted nothing further from her, but in sheer malice he might have made revelations which would have nearly broken her heart, and it was well that she resisted the solicitations of the neighbours to visit him. A fortnight later she was out of his reach. Her journey to Paris had been easily arranged; the friends, of whom Mdlle. de Parthenau had spoken, took charge of her, and within a short time after she learnt so unexpectedly that she had a relative yet living, she left Castelnau; left it after a parting with Thérèse, almost as bitter as if it had been the last, longest parting of all, for indeed life has in it separations as complete, nay, more complete, than death;

and these two, who had been so closely linked together for so many years, were now drifting apart, perhaps for ever. And no love, no hope of future meetings, uncertain as such hopes must be, could make the actual parting less hard. When their last moment together was gone, and they loosed their embrace, Mdlle. de Parthenau shut herself up in her little room, and kneeling before the crucifix suspended beside the picture of her patron saint, murmured, "Those are blessed who have renounced lands, or brothers, or sisters . . . . . Alas! I have not renounced them, but I have tried to live out my life contentedly without such joys . . . . perhaps it is as hard! All must suffer, but it is only *here* that we learn how to suffer—;" and her streaming eyes were raised to the crucifix. Presently she rose up, with a calm and patient look, and went about her daily work. Those whom she visited and consoled that day little thought how much the gentle visitor herself needed consolation. Meanwhile, Sydonie, whom every instant bore further away from her old home drove back her blinding tears, thinking, "What is the use of crying, since there is no one to comfort me now?" There were, truly, none who could. The friends to whom Mdlle. de Parthenau had confided

her were ready to do their best, but they were not the one person for whom Sydonie's heart longed; and, as yet, the thought of her new life was not vivid enough to comfort her in the loss of her old one, and the separation from Thérèse.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE one who remained behind was, as usual, far more to be pitied than the one who went. No expectation of possible future joys lightened the burden of life for Mademoiselle de Parthenau; there was "no purple in the distance;" while Sydonie's young life lay full of rosy hope before her; and though the longing for Mademoiselle de Parthenau would break out suddenly and vehemently, she had keen enjoyment of her stay in Paris.

Such youthful enjoyment as hers is in itself a pleasure to others; and the family who had charge of her so delighted in her ready wit and sparkling delight that they would fain have kept her with them. Her aunt must have possessed the same charm when she caught the fancy of the English family, who had carried her away to be the childish companion of their daughter. Sydonie, however, was no longer a

waif and a stray, whom any one might patronize: she belonged to Madame Laforêt, who by-and-bye wrote to say that a suitable escort was found to conduct her to Dieppe.

The second stage of her journey was made, first in the *coche d'eau* (passage-boat), down the clear-flowing Seine, and then by diligence, through the green valleys, whose long sweeping lines of poplars told how far behind was her old Cevenol home of the chestnut and mulberry. The sea at last caught her eager eyes, creeping up grey and placid over the sands, where the gulls were feeding among the weed and shallow pools left by the last tide. Paul—was he somewhere in one of the fishing-boats which she could see far out? Nay, as if he were not sure to be watching for her arrival! He would not think this sea dreary now, nor envy the *gardons* in the south! Ah, it would be very pleasant to see him again, but there was no need to show it too plainly. Sydonie felt quite restored to the old pedestal from which at one time she had completely descended. It seemed so natural that Paul should be anxiously waiting for a kind word or look from her, and wait almost in vain. She had thought a great deal of her unknown relative, on whom she was hereafter to depend; but just now there was no place in her mind

for anything but the scene to be enacted with Paul: with prosperity her mischievous, coquettish spirit seemed to have returned in tenfold force.

She might have spared herself the trouble of planning her looks and actions. When she alighted from the diligence there was Madame Laforêt, standing eagerly expectant, and her servant behind her. Madame Laforêt, with the rows of white curls on which a flaxen shine yet lingered; the quick voice and peremptory good-natured manner which Paul had described with comic fidelity; but Paul himself, was he absent, or did Sydonie catch a glimpse of him withdrawing? She could not be sure; Madame Laforêt took possession of her, embraced, welcomed, carried her off, and she found herself an inmate of the Pension Laforêt, and being introduced to the *bourgeois* and *bourgeoises habitués* of her aunt, already established for the evening in her sitting-room.

"*Ma foi!*" commented Madame Laforêt, with surprise and satisfaction, "she is *tout à fait comme il faut!* Has he discernment then, that young fisherman, who disinterred for me this pearl? And he thought we resembled each other! I knew he was no fool, thy friend Paul, my niece, though he may not be capable of turning all ways at once, like a

whirligig. I must thank *Va-tout-droit* at the first opportunity. It is thus his comrades call him."

Evidently she did not expect *Va-tout-droit* to appear that evening, though Sydonie fancied that there was a keen glance at her when Madame Laforêt introdueed his name. It might have been impossible for him to be in waiting for the arrival of the diligence; impossible for him to come unasked to the Pension: but Sydonie was not inclined to recognize impossibilities, and grew angry and perplexed. She had not yet realized the gulf that social position had set between herself and the young fisherman, who, for his part, knew it but too well, and had long ago learnt the character of Madame Laforêt, who, under her agreeable French manner, had true French acuteness where the main chance was concerned, kept an eye on every *sou*, and turned them into silver when other people would have let them slip through their fingers; otherwise, as she said, she and her husband would never have owned the Pension. What Paul did not know was, that his good looks, honest *naïveté*, and the resounding voice which sang the old *noëls* of Languedoc, had found a soft corner in her heart, and that he might have appeared in her *salon* unreproved.

Sydonie had a success not only with her aunt, but with all the intimates of the Pension. Indeed, so

bewitching a creature could not have failed to please, and Sydonie had gained by her late constant contact with the ladies who had made her their pet and companion in Paris. As she now stood in her aunt's *salon*, in the Parisian dress with which her friends had replaced the peasant costume, it seemed as natural to her as if she had been a *demoiselle à chapeau* all her life, and there was almost as wide a difference between the Sydonie who picked up chestnuts in the Cevennes and this Sydonie, the heiress of comely Madame Laforêt, as between *Blanche épine* of the old legend, tending barefoot her lean cow on the heath, and *Blanche épine*, at the end of the story, in silken shoes, rich enough to endow a chapel. So thought Paul when he came to see her, and the sadness which she had detected in his letter became more marked. Otherwise, he was unchanged; Sydonie found him the same honest, bronzed, good-looking fellow that he was at Le Peyrou, only that absence made her see him with new eyes, and she became more fully aware of his personal merits.

There was no doubt of his opinion! He surveyed her with a sort of regretful admiration.

"You always were a *demoiselle*, Sydonie," he said, sighing, and then turned the conversation to old friends, asking earnestly after Mademoiselle de Par-

thenau, and listening with much interest to the history of Seube's accident. He flamed up when Sydonie alluded to the *panieraire's* persecution of her, which was news to Paul; but they both recollected the presence of Madame Laforêt, listening no doubt to every word. Both were embarrassed, remembering suddenly that she was the *Roumèco's* daughter,—a fact which had escaped them for the moment, and no wonder, so unlike were the miserable hag and the prosperous matron who owned the Pension Laforêt. Sydonie afterwards pondered whether good fortune could possibly have altered her grandmother for the better so far as to have made her anything like Madame Laforêt. Who could say? Who shall venture to assert what any one might have been without the pressure of those circumstances which have contributed to make them, for bad or good, what they are?

The interview with Paul left Sydonie wondering and uneasy; her very gladness in seeing him had disguised itself under coquettish airs, savouring of the old time when she had treated him *de haut en bas*, and he had been gravely respectful; there was much more underneath, but resolutely kept back, and why? Not till he was gone did she remember that their positions were now completely reversed; Paul was no longer the future master of the Mas Crema, offer-

ing all he had to the despised grandchild of the *Roumèco;* he was only a Dieppe fisherman, and she heiress presumptive of Madame Laforêt: what then? Much to a proud man; and Paul was proud, prouder than Sydonie.

Her new life quickly grew familiar to her, and with familiarity came a sense of something wanting. At first the novelty of the town, the sea, the changes of *pensionaires* amused her; but, by-and-bye, she grew weary of it. Mde. Laforêt, fully engaged with her Pension, her accounts, her tradespeople, and constant struggles for supremacy with her various domestics, had little time for Sydonie, who found herself thinking regretfully of Le Peyrou; and the longing for Mdlle. de Parthenau grew into pain, combined, as it was, with another feeling, which she hardly acknowledged to herself,—a passionate pining to return to the old terms with Paul. Thérèse's letters were very precious to her. They were rare, but fond, and full of details priceless to Sydonie, who had a most true and loving heart. Once the longed-for letter was accompanied by a little parcel, whose contents made Sydonie start and shudder, for before her astonished eyes lay the cross and ear-rings with which so dark a history was connected. How dark she never fully knew, for Mdlle. de Parthenau had

long ago written a word of warning to Mde. Laforêt, beseeching her never to furnish any information to her niece concerning former days, and Mde. Laforêt readily comprehended that there might be passages in the *Roumèco's* life better not inquired into; and, far from furnishing Sydonie with any missing links, or questioning her very closely, was well-pleased to find her little inclined to speak of that past life which would not have been creditable in the ears of Dieppe. Mde. Laforêt could not be expected to retain any affectionate remembrance of the mother who parted with her in childhood, and it told well for her kind-heartedness that she had sent for this niece whom she might have ignored; she was unexpectedly rewarded by finding what a pretty and engaging creature she had taken home, and awaited with complacency the moment when Sydonie or Paul should make her their *confidante.*

Thérèse wrote that Seube was dead, in what state of mind she hardly knew, but "*il s'était rendu à la fin,*" had received extreme unction, and died between sleeping and waking. She used the expression current on such occasions, but evidently her truthful mind was not satisfied with the half-conscious submission of the *panieraire* in his last moments. He had left a will, she added, whose contents proved

him no beggar-man, in extreme poverty, as all had supposed. Sydonie guessed whence came his hoarded wealth,—for he was very wealthy; and the mystery of his riches remained a fruitful source of legend and marvel in Le Peyrou, but to her it was no mystery; he had, doubtless, extorted it from the *Roumèco*, and with a shiver she thanked Heaven that such unblessed wealth had not come to her: and then, with sudden rejoicing, she read that he had left all to Thérèse; all the gold and jewels which he had concealed in an iron pot, hidden within the hollow walnut-tree above the Presbytère. Seube knew well that no one would approach the trysting place of the witches too closely, and the terrific stories which he himself spread concerning it in the country side doubled this security. The will spoke of the bequest as restitution; Thérèse knew why, but did not tell this to Sydonie. She only mentioned the joy which it had caused her, enabling her to forward the marriage of her brother. Never had she seemed so happy; she was coming to Paris for the wedding, she might even visit Dieppe. Seube had enriched her with more than wealth. As Sydonie read, she felt as if she had had a share in causing this flush of gladness, since the money might have been her own. Better thus, since from her Thérèse could not have accepted the

wealth which Sydonie would so gladly have given her. Among the hoards were included the cross and ear-rings, though they were not in the iron pot, as he had jealously guarded them and kept them in sight ever since he bought them at so dear a price. Sydonie was glad that it had not, as she supposed, occurred to Mdlle. de Parthenau that not they only, but all the treasure had once been the *Roumèco's;* then she would have refused to keep any part of it; but Sydonie did not guess how rightfully they passed into Thérèse's keeping. That pain her friend succeeded in sparing her. Ever since the conversation in which Sydonie had revealed all that she knew of her own history, and that of the *Roumèco,* Mdlle. de Parthenau had felt doubly that the girl belonged to her, and loved her even more tenderly than before.

The young orphan "of good family," whom Sydonie's father had protected and married, was, surely, Thérèse believed, that poor and distant connection of the De Parthenau whose fate had remained unknown, though she was supposed to have died with the old Marquise. Thérèse would hardly have recollected her existence but for a remark casually made by M. de Parthenau, that her pretty *protégée* had a look of a girl whom his mother and sisters patronized, an orphan, sheltered in their hospitable house.

The ornaments brought no pleasure to Sydonie. She looked at them with aversion, saying, "My grandmother used to call them my dowry; perhaps I shall never need one." And she thought of Paul, whose obstinate pride she began to comprehend, though she did not know how it was re-inforced by the doubt which he began to entertain whether she had ever really returned his affection. He, considering that it was for her now to make some advance, held aloof, seeking her but rarely, though often meeting her, apparently by chance, and always maintaining that guarded manner which angered her at the time, and afterwards caused her to shed salt tears, whether she would or not.

Meanwhile, a wealthy *bourgeois*, whose round whiskerless face and black moustache were abhorrent to Paul, began to be often seen in Mde. Laforêt's *salon*, and Sydonie was not quite guiltless of accepting his attentions. Perhaps she hoped that this would reach Paul's ears, and punish him for leaving the field open. Probably Paul did hear all, and more than all there was to be heard; it also reached Sydonie that a certain Jean Moreau, a man of mark among the fishers, had offered Paul a share in his boat, and his daughter in marriage. She was highly indignant against all concerned—Paul, Jean, and

rosy Simonette Moreau — the more so that a doubt whether this would not explain Paul's reticence crept in and would not be dislodged. The very day that she heard this report she and Mde. Laforêt met Paul at the church door, where they were pausing to cross themselves with holy water. Paul looked blither than he had done since Sydonie came—a bad sign, she thought. He had news to tell her, but she was in no mood to stop and hear that he had turned his old trade of carving to such account that he was now engaged to furnish one of the first shops in Dieppe with those pretty ivory trifles which are now all that the place has to show of its old traffic with Africa. Paul's hopes were rising; he was no longer a mere fisherman.

"Good day, Madame; good day, Sydonie!" he began; "I wanted to see you . . . . . "

"Really!" retorted Sydonie, feigning infinite surprise.

"Oh, I know that I have seen but little of you of late, or of Madame . . . . . "

"No doubt you have been better engaged!" said Mde. Laforêt, who had heard the current report concerning Paul and Simonette Moreau, and, though incredulous, put the question to see what he would reply.

"More agreeably," added Sydonie.

"Yes, I have been well engaged," answered Paul, in his old blundering straightforward way. "I could think of nothing else."

"We have heard something of your good fortune," added Madame Laforêt.

"How is that possible? but it is indeed good fortune, a rise in the world. Sydonie, you remember—you have still that bowl I carved for you?"

"That was in the old times that are only good to forget, or rather they are forgotten already, I think," cried Sydonie, whom his words had entirely misled.

Paul stood quite still and looked at her.

"Is that in earnest?" he asked, all the breathless eagerness gone out of him.

"Certainly. There are numbers of things best forgotten, and people, and promises. Aunt, let us go!"

"Sydonie!"

The one word said so much that it should have arrested her, but she had caught her aunt's shawl,—

"My aunt! come. We have stayed too long. We can congratulate M. Paul another time . . . or let him suppose that we have already done so . . . only come!"

"Sydonie!" repeated Paul, with amazed reproach.

She made a quick gesture, as if refusing to hear, and hurried on. Madame Laforêt followed with an odd smile, saying to Paul,—

"Use thy wits, my lad, and see if thou canst read this riddle;" and when she succeeded in rejoining her impetuous niece, she added, "*Mon chou*, it seems to me that if the gates of Paradise opened for thee, thou art so perverse, that thou wouldst certainly shut them with a bang and decline to enter."

Sydonie glanced up at her, and involuntarily turned to look back at Paul. She was enraged with herself for having done so, for he was standing watching her. She turned away in haste; but there was something in his face that haunted her, a look that spoke of a life's hopes stricken down, of a long farewell. She saw one of his comrades approach, clap him on the shoulder, and say,—

"Well, *Va-tout-droit*, are you going with us? Why, *tu es triste*, what's wrong with you?" But the two moved off together, and so she lost sight of Paul.

The fishing-boats had been kept in for days by contrary winds, but the next morning there was not a cloud or a single *queue de vache* in all the

sky; earth and air were still. Old sailors shook their heads at the strange lull; but the fleet of boats all took advantage of it, and stood out to sea. They had not returned when a fierce orange sunset glowed in the west, and masses of huge clouds marched up and covered all the sky. At midnight Sydonie woke in pitch darkness, woke from a maze of dreams, which escaped her waking senses, but left a sense of wretched, ineffectual struggle with some great misery. She sat up, and became suddenly aware that the screams of the wind had awakened her. The storm was abroad again; she heard the thunder of the waves on the beach. Springing from her bed, she pressed her face against the window, and looked out into the thick darkness. Nothing was visible above, below, or around, but the ear was deafened with the tumult of sound, the roar of the water and screech of the wind. Long she watched till a faint dawn broke afar in the east, and she gradually caught sight of a white world of sea. With the dawn the wind sank again. All the fisher population of Dieppe was astir; every family had husband or brother away on those waves—the quays were already alive with women, running from their own quarter of the town towards a point which commanded the widest view of the sea—looked, in fact, full upon the

perilous angle which the boats must turn before they had a chance of safety, even should they have lived out the night. The very hearts and lives of those women were out on the sea.

And Sydonie! "Paul! Paul!" she had kept repeating through those long, dark hours, and repeated still with passionate, vain appeal,—

"Paul! come back to me! I love you, I will never vex you any more, only come back and hear me say so!"

The cries and calls on the quays below seemed to re-echo her own despair; she opened the window and leaned out, raising her voice to gain a hearing. One or two of those hurrying by looked up, and then went on; the rest were too full of their own anxiety even to hear her. She drew back, dressed herself, pulled her shawl over her head, and while the inmates of the Pension were just beginning to sleep now that the storm had abated, Sydonie was out in the grey chill dawn, making one of the crowd running down towards the harbour.

Torn, brown clouds were drifting all over the sky; the daylight was not yet fully come; the sea lay heaving, dark with weed and sand. La Plage, the night before a smooth level reach where boats were building, now was like a ploughed field, furrowed by

the mad waves that had torn at it all night long, and the fragments of broken boats, and the stocks where they had lain were tossing out to sea. On the pier were sailors, old fishermen, and other anxious watchers, gazing out from under gloomy brows, and calculating the chances in favour of the fishing vessels. The women were clustered around the tall crucifix which overlooks the harbour; some wild with suspense, shrieking out their terror, others praying aloud, or with voices lost in sobs. They stood, and knelt, and clung, at the foot of the crucifix,—mothers, wives, betrothed girls, some with many a sin against those absent, to be repented of—repented of fiercely, in that hour of agony.

The light grew clearer; under it the sea looked all the more sullen and turbid, and not a sail appeared far or near . . . Suddenly a shout from one of the men was answered by a wild cry from the women, some of whom broke from among their companions and rushed down to the extreme verge of the pier, pressing through the groups of men; others clung closer round the crucifix and hid their faces, unable to look. A boat! the first! whose? would it round the point?

There was a moment of perfect silence, no one seemed to breathe—then a universal sob or wail of

relief among the women, and cheer from the men, told that the tiny vessel was safe. Another followed, another, and the eager questioners learned that the boats had all weathered the storm—all, except one. A burst of loud lamentation from one little group told that the widow and orphans were those of Thomas Michaud. But Sydonie made no moan, for she seemed to have known it all through that night; she had felt all along that the one boat in whose safety she had a personal concern would never come home. The crowd dispersed; pitying women and kind rough men took home the widow and orphan children with such consolation as they could find; Sydonie remained alone on the steps of the crucifix, stupefied, crouching down, unheeding that the cold air chilled her through and through, and that she alone remained of those watchers who half an hour before had peopled the quays. Some had spoken to her, but obtaining no reply, went away absorbed in their own affairs, and careless of this stranger, who had no right to share in their joys and griefs, for a glance showed that Sydonie did not belong to their class. She was left to herself, and all her life seemed to pass before her in a dull, dreamy way; her childhood, befriended by Mademoiselle Parthenau, her girlhood, when first she had realized her isolation,

and the true, tender love that Paul had lavished on her—on her whom every one else, except Thérèse, who was good to all, had despised as the grandchild of the witch. How he had loved her! asking for nothing, only caring to guard her from every rough wind; bearing all her slights and caprices, though who knew how much pain they had cost him? Too late now! too late! she could never tell him that she knew he had been far too good for her.

"Sydonie!"

The boundless surprise of the voice startled her out of her stupor; she raised her head and looked up, with a face whose white weariness was changing into sudden and startled terror.

"Sydonie! you here?" and this time there was the tenderest anxiety in look and tone, as the speaker knelt down and took her hands. "My darling! what is it? why are you here?"

Yes, the moment that trouble fell upon her, she was his Sydonie again.

"The boat went down!" she murmured, still incredulous, though her hands were clasped in his own warm living ones.

"My uncle's boat! my poor uncle!" and a cloud of grief past over his honest face. "I heard it from the men yonder. But I was not in her; I was in yon-

der yacht—look!" and looking, she perceived that, all unnoticed by her, an English yacht had come into harbour, and had caused a fresh stir on the pier.

"The captain is a milord, with his wife on board; he wanted an extra hand yesterday, and I went; I did not much care what I did or where I went then, Sydonie! I thought I would go to England and then a little further, to America perhaps; but we had to put back, you see, and I may say it was lucky for them that they had some one on board who knew the pilotage hereabouts; we had a tussle for our lives last night,"—Paul spoke with exultation—"the old sea had a mind to swallow us up, but here we are, and milord is as generous as an Englishman, which he is—he says I brought the vessel in; but he is a fine fellow; so cool last night when we were on the point of foundering,—but he rewards me for having saved his wife, that's what it is! And some day, what with this, and a new trade I have, I shall own a vessel of my own. Sydonie! why would you not hear my news at the church door?"

"They said .... Has Moreau offered you a share in his boat?"

"There was some talk about it; but he prefers his son-in-law, Le Piol—"

"His son-in-law! Then you are not to marry Simonette Moreau?"

"Bah! Nor you M. Antolin Rolland?"

"I! Ah, Paul, I did not think you would really believe that!"

"Why, you believed the other it seems! And I was so glad of my news, for your sake."

"For mine!" She stood up. "Then, Paul, let me say this now; I promised to myself that I would say it if you came back; I am not worth such love as yours. I thought I had something to give that you could hardly deserve; but, O! Paul, you could spare my love better than I could yours!"

Sydonie reached the Pension Laforêt escorted by Paul. Her absence was causing a great commotion, and Madame Laforêt met them scolding loudly, but with a laugh in her eyes.

"*Ecoutez!* listen to me!" she concluded her oration, "already I grow grey with the cares of *pensionaires*, and provisions, and domestics, and many matters which a person like myself has on her mind . . . I have a Russian family now, they pay well, but bah! I like not these barbarians . . . they may go! and added to this, *Va-tout-droit* has burdened

me with a madcap niece. Yes, M. Paul, it is your fault, and now let me tell you I will endure this no longer; nothing but marriage steadies certain persons, therefore I shall immediately look out for a husband for her."

"Dear aunt, we should both be sorry to cause you needless trouble," said Sydonie.

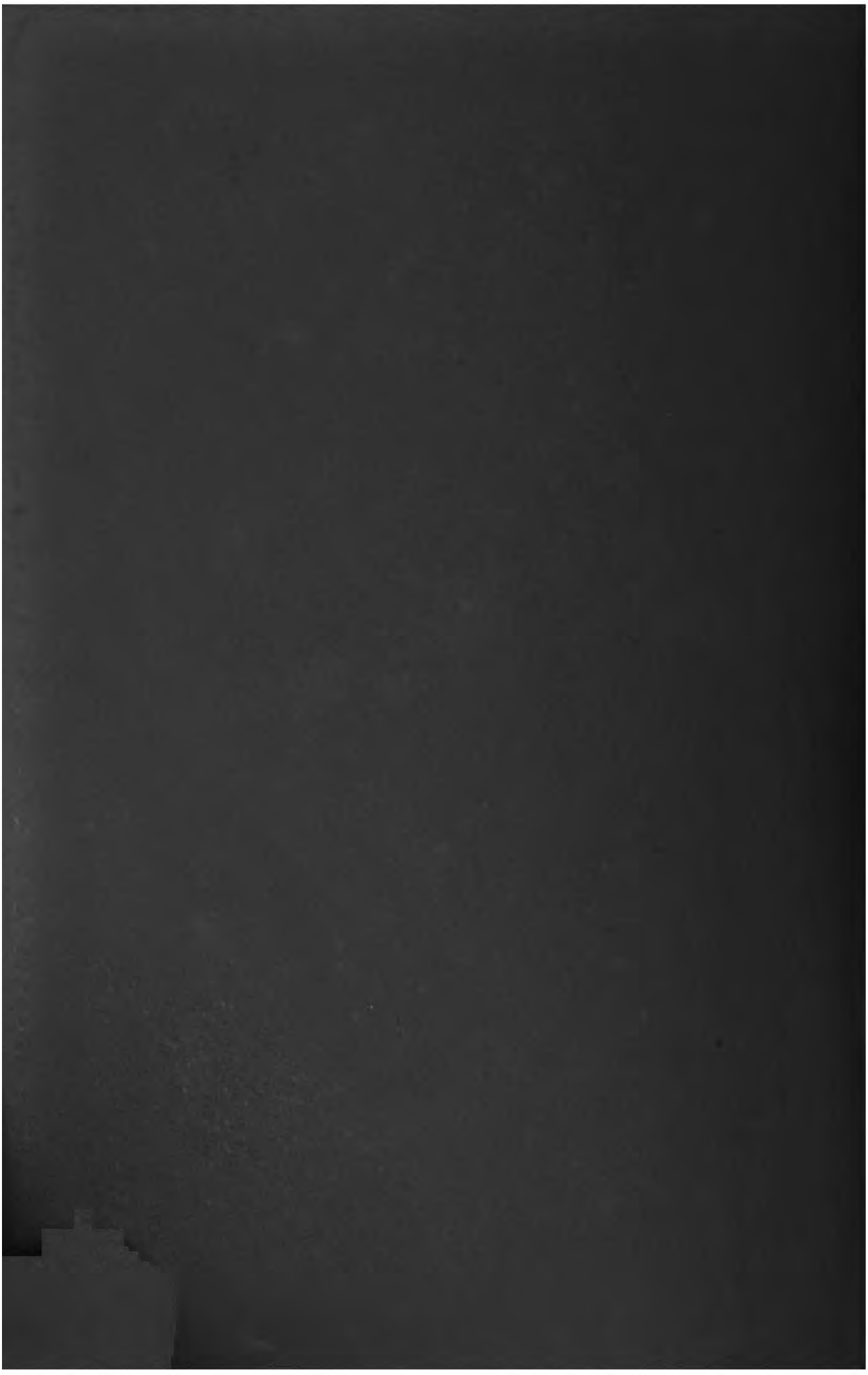
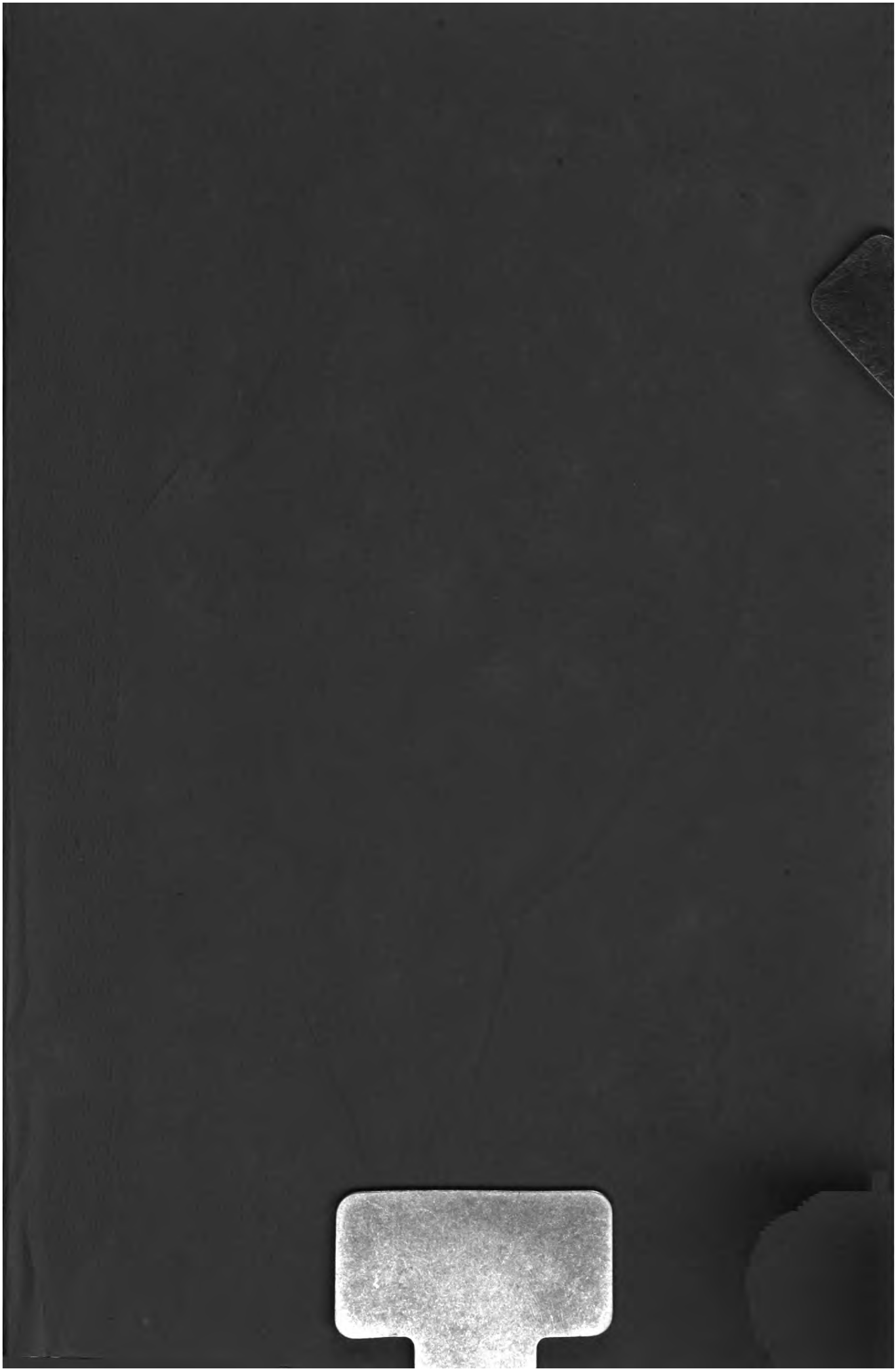
"If Madame would commission me to look out for her?" added Paul.

"Ah! 'tis just, since you brought this affliction upon me; but no unnecessary delay!"

"My wish is always to please you, dear aunt," said Sydonie, presenting Paul.

The next day, gifts of money for the widow and orphans of the drowned fisherman filled the little wooden box at the foot of the crucifix; gifts from those happier women whose dear ones had come home. Found among the offerings made by the poor to those now poorer than themselves was one gift whose value excited much marvel; the giver remained unknown, and none guessed her to be the girl, who, even in that absorbing moment when all shared one common terror, had attracted some attention. None ever learned that she it was who had bestowed the gold cross and ear-rings which had

been the wonder and envy of Le Peyrou in days when they were known to all as "Sydonie's Dowry," and thus the last relic of the unrighteous wealth of *la Roumèco* passed away and was converted into a blessing.

FINIS.

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