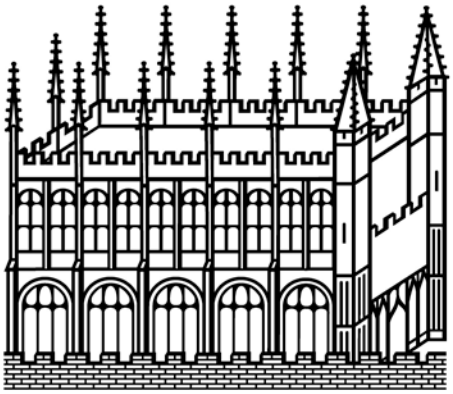

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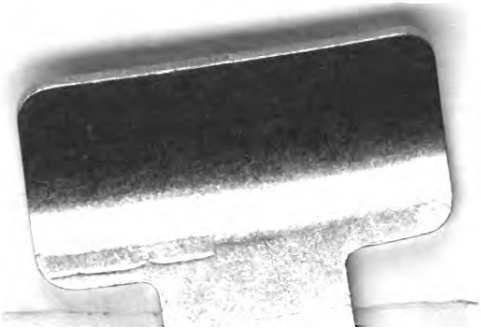

SANGUINES

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By

PIERRE LOUŸS

Translated by

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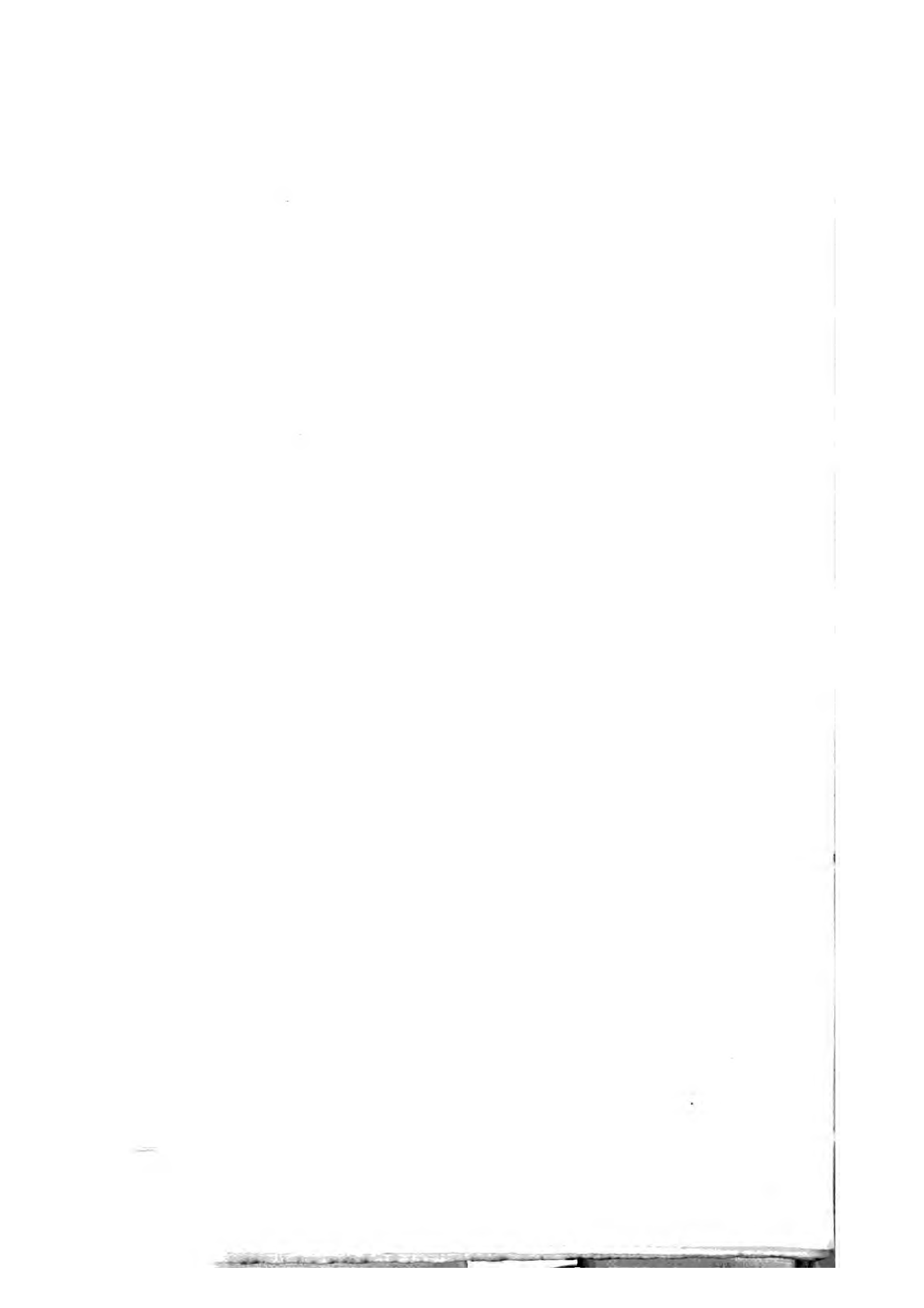

THE WEARER OF PURPLE

THE WEARER OF PURPLE

I

In the green gardens of Ephesus, the white city, we were employed, two youthful apprentices, in the service of the aged Bryaxis.

He had just seated himself in a stone chair, as pale in colour as his own face, and was silent, scratching the ground with the end of his worn staff.

Out of respect for his great age and for his great reputation, still more venerable than his years, we remained standing before him, leaning against two black cypresses and not venturing to open our mouths so long as he said nothing.

We gazed at him without moving, in a sort of awe of which he seemed to be aware. We were glad that he had survived all those we would have wished to know; we loved him to show himself to us, who were simple children born too late to hear the heroic voices of the past; and foreseeing the future, when he would be gone, we silently sought to recognise the invisible connection between his person and the glory of his achievement. That forehead had conceived,

that very thumb had moulded in the clay of the preliminary model, a frieze and twelve statues for the tomb of Mausolus, the five colossal figures erected before the city of Rhodes, the Bull of Pasiphæ, a work over which the eyes of women dream, the tremendous Apollo of bronze and the Seleucus Triumphant of the new capital. The more I contemplated their author, the more it seemed to me that the Gods must have fashioned with their own hands this sculptor of light, before descending to his presence that he might reveal them to mankind.

Suddenly we heard the sound of racing feet, a whistle, a laughing exclamation, and young Ophelion sprang into our midst.

"Bryaxis!" cried he. "Listen to this! The whole town knows it already. If I am the first to tell you, I'll present our Lady Artemis with a broad bean! But first, greeting! I had forgotten."

He gave us a rapid wink, which might pass for a greeting, unless it meant: Get ready for a surprise: and began at once:

"I suppose you knew, aged one, that Clesides was painting a portrait of the Queen?"

"I had heard so."

"But have you heard the end of the story?"

"There is a story, then?"

" I should say so ! Then you don't know ? Clesides arrived eight days ago from Athens for that precise purpose. He was conducted to the palace, but the Queen was not ready : she condescended to be late. At last she appeared, accorded the painter a bare greeting, and began to pose, if pose it could be called. It seems she fidgeted the whole time, on the pretext that too much love-making had given her the cramp. Clesides continued to draw as well as he could in the midst of all this twitching, and was in a very bad temper, as you may imagine. His first sketch was not even made, when suddenly the Queen wheels round and announces that she wants to pose from the back ! "

" Any reason ? "

" Because her back, so she said, was as perfect as the rest, and ought to show in the picture. Clesides protested in vain that he was a painter, not a sculptor, that panels are not looked at from behind, and that it is impossible to draw a woman so as to be seen from every side in one picture. She replied that it was her will to be painted so, that the laws of Art did not apply to her, that she had seen the portrait of her sister as Persephone, and of her mother as Demeter, and that she, Stratonice herself, would pose by herself for all three Graces."

" Not a bad idea," said Bryaxis.

Our friend became heated.

"Suppose Clesides had refused then? He could have done so, I presume. One does not give orders to an artist. That little thing gives them to us in a manner we are not going to put up with. Her father would never have behaved like that. Why, when he was besieging Rhodes and Protogenes was working there on his Iasylus——"

"I know," said Bryaxis. "Go on."

"In short then, Clesides was very angry, although he did not show it. He finished his study of the back; the Queen rose. She asked him to return the next day; he accepted the invitation and left her. Good."

Ophelion folded his arms.

"The next day, whom do you think he found? A serving-woman on a stool! 'Stratonice,' says she, 'is tired this morning. She will not pose any more, master, and I am to be her substitute until the portrait is finished. Thus has she decided!'"

We burst out laughing, and Bryaxis himself joined in our mirth.

Ophelion continued gaily:

"The slave was not bad looking. Clesides was scrupulous enough to give her a stiff dose of cramp in order that she might bear a closer resemblance to her mistress. Then he explained

dryly that he did not require her any longer, and returned to his lodging with his drawings."

"He was right that time!" I exclaimed. "The Queen was really making a fool of him."

"On the way back, as he passed along the quay, he noticed a certain sailor who, so he had been told, was a secret visitor to the Queen, although no one could prove it. It was Glaucon; you know the man I mean. Clesides summoned him to his lodging, paid him, and got him to pose. Four days later he had finished two rude little pictures, which showed the Queen in the arms of this fellow, first from the front and then from the back——"

"Just as she had wished," I interrupted.

"Pretty well. Last night, nobody knows just when, he fixed the two paintings on the wall of the palace of Seleucus: no doubt he managed to get away by sea after the publication of his revenge, for there is no trace of him anywhere."

We all cried out:

"The Queen will die of rage!"

"The Queen? She knows already, and if she is furious in reality, she conceals it wonderfully well. All through the morning an enormous crowd passed in procession before that scandalous advertisement. Stratonice was told of it, and also wanted to look. Attended by eighty

members of the Court, she halted before each painting, stepping forwards and backwards in order to criticise the picture by turns in its detail and in its entirety. I was there, and as I followed her movements with terror, wondering which of us she was going to put to death when her wrath should explode: 'I don't know which is the best,' says she, 'but both are excellent.' "

Bryaxis, in the midst of our delight at this, merely raised his eyebrows, wrinkling his aged countenance into the lines of surprise and approbation:

"She is evidently as witty as she is impudent," said he. "The story is really a curious one. But why are you so proud of it, my children? It seems to me that the artist's rôle is inferior to that of the model, in the anecdote I have just heard."

"If the Queen had dared," said Ophelion, "she would have had Clesides pursued beyond the seas and killed like a dog. But in that case the whole of Greece would have considered her as a savage, and she likes to believe herself an Athenian because she happens to have been born in a Parthenon which has been turned into a brothel. Stratonice holds Asia in her hand like a bluebottle, and she has given ground before a man whose sole weapon is a lump of

wax. Henceforth the Artist is the King of Kings, the only inviolable being under the sun. That is why we are proud ! "

The old man made a slight grimace of disdain.

" You are young," he answered. " In my time, the same formula was current, and perhaps with more reason. When Alexander timidly endeavoured to explain ' why ' he liked such and such a painting, my friend Apelles silenced him by saying that he was making himself ridiculous in front of the boys who were grinding the colours. And Alexander apologised. Well ! I never thought stories of this kind were worth the telling. Whatever may be the respect or the arrogance shown by the King to contemporary painters, the pictures are no better and no worse for it : all that is therefore of no consequence. On the other hand, it may be a good and even a great thing if an artist dares and can place himself, not above any king whose army happens to pass by his house, but above the laws of men and above the laws of Heaven, upon the day that his muses order him to trample under foot all that is not actually themselves."

Bryaxis had drawn himself up.

We murmured :

" Who did so ? "

" No one, perhaps," said the old man, with a

dreaming look in his eyes. " No one, except possibly Parrhasius. And then, was he right ? I thought so, once. To-day, I do not know what to think."

Ophelion cast a glance of astonishment in my direction. But I could tell him nothing.

" We do not understand you," I said to Bryaxis.

He decided to give us a hint.

" The Prometheus," he muttered in a low voice.

" Well ? "

" Don't you know ? Don't you know how Parrhasius came to paint the Prometheus of the Acropolis ? "

" We have never heard how it was."

" You have never heard of that terrible drama ? Of the tragedy of death and of shrieks whence that painting emerged in blood like a newly born infant ? "

" Speak. Tell us the whole drama. We know nothing of it."

For a moment Bryaxis rested his gaze upon our young faces, as if he hesitated to inflict upon our hearts such a recollection.

Then he decided :

" Well, yes ! I will tell you."

II

What I am about to relate, my children, took place in the very last year of the hundred and seventh Olympiad, the very year that Plato died ; quite fifty years ago now.

I was at that time in Halicarnassus, and had just finished my portion of the work on the tomb of Mausolus the Long-haired : a thankless portion, if ever there was one. Scopas, who was in charge of us, had chosen to decorate himself the eastern front of the monument, which meant that at the hour of the morning sacrifices, our Master's marbles had the full benefit of the sun and actually one saw nothing else but them. He had allotted the side facing south, which was a little less interesting and twice as long, to his companion Timotheus. Leochares had undertaken the western face ; and I had got what nobody wanted, the north side, which required a vast amount of work, and was in perpetual shadow. For five years, then, I carved Victories and Amazons that lived, while they were in the sun, like real women, but each time that I had to place one for ever in the gloomy region of the Mausoleum, it seemed that I was witnessing her death, and I wept, my little ones.

At last my task came to an end. I busied

myself with my return to Attica. That year, as now, the Ægean was unsafe. War everywhere. Hate between city and city. Athens, by the way, had been defeated. On the day I wished to set out, I could not find any shipowner who cared to go to the Piræus. The Carians, like good traders, were going over to the conqueror, and since the capture of Olynthus had led to the fall of Chalcis into the hands of the Macedonian, all the merchants of Halicarnassus were setting sail to Eubœa, where they intended to sell robes from Cos and courtesans from Onidus.

I, too, set out for Chalcis, telling myself that the Euripus was not broad, and that I could soon reach Athens from Aulis by Tanagra and the Acharnian road.

The sea voyage was unpleasant. I had rather a bad time in my corner, though I took up little enough room. My name, no doubt, had then a different sound from that which it has to-day, and the Mausoleum was too new to demand an estimation of its worth. The other passengers were content to know that I was an Athenian citizen, and that was quite enough for them to ridicule me, since Athens was out of luck.

One morning when the sun had already risen above the crests of the eastern heights, we landed at Chalcis in the midst of an immense crowd. I plunged into it with delight.

In reply to my inquiries, I learned that outside the gates a slave-market quite out of the ordinary was being held. Philip, after the fall of Olynthus, had razed the town to the ground, and enslaved the entire population of about eighty thousand. The sale had been going on two days, and it was calculated that it would last three months.

The city was crammed, too, with foreigners, purchasers, and sight-seers. My informant, who was a wine merchant, had no objection to these swarms of people; but he told me that his neighbour, who sold, as a rule, only the most expensive slaves, had been ruined in one night, so quickly had prices fallen. I can still hear the innkeeper saying, with much gesticulation: "Then, a Thracian lad of twenty! Every one knows how much they are worth, by the Gods! When you bought twelve of them to work a field, you paid a full twelve bags of gold stamped with the owl![1] Well, now go and look at the prices. The quotation has fallen to fifty drachmæ! You can judge by that of the rest! It is unheard of! There are three thousand virgins in the market: they are being sold off at twenty-five drachmæ apiece: don't think I am guessing, the price is twenty-two, twenty-five, or twenty-eight drachmæ if their

[1] The bird sacred to Athene.

skins are particularly white. Ah, Philip is a great king ! "

I was disgusted with the fellow, and leaving him, I followed the crowd beyond the open gates into the vast sloping meadow in which the Olynthians were penned.

With great trouble, I was shouldering my way through the swaying groups of people, and wondering in which direction to continue so difficult a progress, when I saw passing before me a fanciful and majestic procession, before which the crowd drew apart.

Six Sarmatian slaves advanced two by two, each carrying a load of gold, and with swords stuck in his belt. Behind them a little negro held horizontally, like a libation-cup, a long crook of rose-coloured cedar with a gold riband : the sacred staff of the Master. Finally, gigantic, weighty, crowned with flowers, his beard saturated with perfumes, his shoulders upheld by two pretty girls, wrapped in a mantle of purple of enormous extent, and crushing the grasses with his great feet, Parrhasius himself appeared, like another Indian Bacchus, and his glance fell upon me.

" If you are not Bryaxis," said he, frowning at me, " how comes it that you permit yourself to appropriate his countenance ? "

" And you, if you are not the son of Semele,

who has given you those vast curls, that dionysiac stature, and that purple robe woven by the Graves of Naxos ? "

He smiled. Without even disengaging his arm from the charming support which increased the appearance of its bulk, he held out to me, across one of the courtesans, his mighty hand, like a golden platter, loaded with rings, and clasped my own upon a bare breast.

" Chariclo," said he to the girl on his right, " lend an arm to my friend, and let it embrace him pleasantly. On with our walk ; it will soon be too hot for your complexion."

Arm in arm, then, we all moved on, Parrhasius imparted to our pace a vast and regular rhythm, pompous as a hexameter, in which the short steps of the women might be said to correspond to the beat of the dactyl.

In three words he asked after my work and my life. At each of my answers he said quickly, " Excellent ! " in order to cut short my explanations. Then he began to speak of himself.

" You must understand that I have taken you under my protection," said he, " for not one Athenian citizen except myself is safe in the hands of the Macedonian, and if the slightest quarrel had brought you before a court of law, I wouldn't have given two obols this morning

for your freedom. Henceforth you may rest assured."

"I am not," I answered, "of a timid nature; but I can scarcely doubt that even here if you gave your name——'

"I have done so," he declared. "I announced myself. When Philip heard that I was doing him the honour of visiting his new city, which he is peopling only with rascals, he sent to meet me, at ten stadia from the bridge of the Euripus, an officer of his household, who presented me with the royal bounty, including six colossi of the North and the two handsome girls you see—strength to clear my way, grace to adorn my person."

"Are the ladies from Macedonia?" I inquired.

They burst out laughing.

"If you call Rhodes Macedonia!"

With a generous gesture Parrhasius concluded the subject:

"They will attend you this evening. I have others, left behind with my baggage; but you may be alone, my friend; accept from my hand these roses. The skin of their young bodies should be extraordinarily effective against a carpet of dark purple."

We were now close to the great slave-market. He stopped and looked at me.

"By the way, you don't ask what I am looking for here!"

"I did not presume."

"Can you guess?"

"I certainly cannot; I do not think you require a slave, since Philip presents you with his. Nor a woman, since these——"

"I have come from Athens to Chalcis to find a model, my young friend. Ah, I thought that would surprise you."

"A model? Why, are there none left between the Academy and the Piræus?"

"About four hundred and forty thousand for me," said Parrhasius, with pride; "in other words, the whole population of Attica. Nevertheless, I am looking for a model in the Olynthian slave-market. You will understand why, when I tell you——"

He drew himself up.

"I am painting," said he, "a Prometheus."

As he uttered the great name, his mouth opened wide, and all the horror of his subject appeared for a moment in the knitting of his brows.

"As you know, there are studies of Prometheus in every portico. Timagoras has sold one. Apollodorus has attempted another. Zeuxis thought he could—but why recall so

many miserable daubs? No one has ever painted a Prometheus."

"I can well believe it," I replied.

"We have been shown naked peasants bound to wooden rocks, with their faces twisted into some sort of indescribable grimace which makes one think of the toothache; but Prometheus the Fire-Smith, Prometheus the Creator of Man and his struggle with the Eagle-God between the Caucasus and the Thunderbolt—ah, no! Bryaxis, that has never been done. That mighty Prometheus I see as clearly as I do your face, and I am determined to nail his image upon the wall of the Parthenon."

So saying, he withdrew himself from the support of the two women, took his gold staff from its diminutive bearer, and traced great lines in the air.

"I worked for two months; I had found magnificent rocks on Crates' estate on the promontory of Astypalaia. All my studies were finished. The background of my landscape, ready. The line of the figure, in place. Suddenly I was held up. I could not find a head. Of course, if it had been a matter of a Hermes, of an Apollo, or of a Pan, my citizen of Athens would have been proud to pose for me; but to take as model a man whose genius is like light upon his face, and to bind such a man by the

feet and by the wrists upon the framework of a stage property, you can see well enough how impossible that is. One can only subject the limbs of a slave to dislocation of that kind, and they have all got heads like animals! They might be called Enceladus or Typhon, but not Prometheus. Why? Because we lack slaves who come from the free Hellene class. Well, Philip is providing us with them; I have come for them to the place where he sells them."

I shuddered.

"An Olynthian?" I said. "A conquered ally? Where are you going to paint this picture?"

"At Athens!"

"On the soil of Athens your slave will be free."

"He will be what I wish."

"But then, if you treat him as a prisoner, are you not afraid of the laws?"

"The laws?" said Parrhasius, with a smile. "The laws are in my hand like the folds of this mantle that I cast over my shoulder."

And with a magnificent movement he swathed himself in the sunlit purple of his robe.

III

The Olynthian slave-market stretched before us. As far as the eye could reach, and forming

in one direction six wide parallel rows, platforms of boards had been raised upon low trestles which were about on a level with the middle point of the thighs of the passers-by.

The population of a whole town was collected there, in face of a second multitude : one merchandise, the other purchasers. Eighty thousand men, women, and children, their hands bound behind their backs, their feet tied loosely with cords, awaited, most of them standing, the unknown Master who was to conduct them to some mysterious quarter of the Hellenic world. One soldier was in charge of forty, and took the part of salesman. Behind the tables, servants, picked up in the suburbs, passed round the bread and water necessary for the sustenance of the enslaved host, and a loud and continuous uproar, like the ceaseless voice of a carnival, arose.

Parrhasius entered the principal fairway, where on either hand were exhibited, naked as a people wrought of marble, the young men and women who had been considered worth a high price. To my astonishment, I could see nothing mournful in their looks, which seemed more inquisitive than lugubrious. There is a limit to human suffering, and in youth it is soon reached. Since the ruin of their homes, these splendid creatures had completely exhausted

the quota of days and nights which it was possible for them to devote to apprehension or to despair. No trace of such emotions was now visible in their appearance. The young men, no doubt, had regained confidence in the prospect of future escape. Perhaps the girls were thinking of the lovers to whom they were to be subjected, and were innocent enough to desire them, whoever they might be. In a word, whether it were ignorance or bravado, they seemed to put a good face on the matter.

The crowd surged about them, more anxious to examine than to buy. Few made their decisions quickly in the distraction of so extraordinary a market. The slaves were freely handled. The muscles of a leg, the delicacy of a skin, the firmness of a budding breast, or the breadth of a manly fist were carefully tested. Then the group would pass on to the next platform, hoping to find something still better.

Parrhasius halted for a moment before a young girl of remarkable height, whose tall white figure was an exact harmony.

"That is a beautiful girl," said he.

Instantly the salesman sprang forward.

"She is the most beautiful in the market, lord. See how upright she is, and how white. Sixteen yesterday——"

"Eighteen," corrected the girl herself.

" You lie, by Zeus ! She is but sixteen, lord. Look at her black hair, gathered up with a comb. When she loosens it, it falls to her knees. Look at her hands, at her long fingers which have not even touched a distaff. She is the daughter of a Senator——"

" Do not speak of my father," said the girl gravely.

" Whether I said so or not, you could tell she was," declared the salesman. " She is as beautiful as a Nereid, as supple as a sword, as gentle as a hind in a wood, and lastly, what is worth all the rest, virgin as on the day she was born."

And with a rough and cynical hand, he proved to us the truth of his words.

Parrhasius struck the dry ground with the end of his heavy staff.

" Virgin or no," said he, " that did not trouble me. It was enough for me that she was beautiful. Free her of these degrading shackles, and let her put on her robe at once. I purchase her. What is her name ? "

" Artemidora," said she.

" Well, Artemidora, know that you are henceforth in the train of Parrhasius."

She opened a pair of wide eyes, and murmured with naïve hesitation :

" You are—perhaps—the Parrhasius who ——"

" I am he," replied her master.

And dismissing her to the custody of his servants, he continued his progress.

Then he deigned to explain his purchase.

" Stretched on the Caucasus, that girl would make a delightful picture, but it was not with the idea of finishing by her aid the Prometheus of which I have told you, that I bought her. She will serve me as model for certain small pictures dealing with sexual subjects, with which I relieve the tension of my mind in my hours of leisure, and which are far, as you know, from being the least admirable of my works."

For a long time we continued our walk among the trestles. The multitude had increased. The sun was becoming less and less endurable in this vast shadowless plain filled with a sea of people.

Artemidora had put on first her white tunic and then her virgins' belt drawn high beneath the breasts, and her hair was hidden in the end of a bluish veil which swathed her whole body. She often turned back to look at us, and I noticed then that with her raiment she had suddenly assumed what was practically a new personality. Her face seemed altogether different. She watched us with anxiety, as if she was wondering which of all these men was to insult her modesty, and already forgetting the nudity in which we had seen her, she continually

twitched the folds of her veil with that delightful backward thrust of the left elbow which attempts to dissimulate the curve of the hips.

We were already half-way down the principal fairway when Parrhasius stopped.

" No," said he, " what I want is not here. A youthful frame and a fine head do not go together. Besides, Prometheus is not a boy. Let us turn off to the right and leave it to chance : it is more probable that I shall find my man among the slaves to be sold at a lower figure."

Scarcely had we gone three paces into the second lane to the right when he stretched out his hands and cried : " Behold him ! "

I turned with curiosity.

The man to whom he thus drew my attention was about fifty. Well proportioned and of great height, he had a fine forehead, strongly marked and prominent brows, a nose at once powerful and of geometrically exact design, wide nostrils, and deeply hollowed ears. His hair was grey, his beard still brown and crisply curling, as striking as the rest of his features. The powerful sinews of his neck formed a sort of pedestal which lent, in some curious way, an additional authority to the intelligence of his eyes.

Parrhasius addressed him :

" What is your name ? "

" No man."

" I didn't ask you for a literary allusion, my good fellow, but for the name you received from your father. You will tell me that, I suppose ? "

" For a month my name has been No man. If I am of an ancient stock, it is not my pleasure to reveal it."

" Why not ? "

" Nor does it please me to give the reason, son of a dog."

Parrhasius, beside himself, became more purple than his mantle. The salesman, very much alarmed, extended his arms in a gesture of supplication.

" Do not listen to him, lord. He speaks like a madman, and it is pure malice on his part, for he has more brains than I have. He is a physician. For knowledge and skill he had no equal in Olynthus. I am simply telling you what every one repeats, for he was celebrated even in Macedonia. I have heard that during the last thirty years he has cured more Olynthians than we managed to kill the day we took the town. He will be a valuable slave when you have chained him and made him feel the whip ; he still plays the insolent, but he will change his tone like the rest. Then if you know how to manage him, you will not make the acquaintance of death till your hundredth winter. Give

me thirty drachmæ and Nicostratus will be your property for life."

"Nicostratus?" repeated Parrhasius, turning to me. "I do, in fact, know the name. My indifference is complete in regard to his medical knowledge. All my drugs are in my cellar, and one cures me very well of the indigestions given me by another. When, as sometimes happens, I have a cold, I do not make use of any other plaster than a fair warm-breasted girl to recline upon my bosom, and I am quite confident of living for a hundred years without the aid of this apothecary."

Turning to the salesman, he ordered: "Take off his clothes."

Nicostratus, powerless but disdainful, made no resistance.

Parrhasius continued to issue orders:

"Face front, arms down. Good—sideways—back—now right side; front again; 'tis a bargain."

He clapped me lightly on the shoulder and said in a low tone: "Superb, my boy!"

And I did not answer, for I experienced an uneasy feeling which was almost one of envy.

Fifty years have passed—the space of a human life. I have seen thousands of models, never one comparable to this Nicostratus of Olynthus.

He was the statue of Man in all his greatness, at the age when strength becomes power. Parrhasius called him Prometheus, but any name of those that are eternal would have been no less fitting for his new slave. With that man in my studio for a year, I could have made enough preliminary studies to fill my whole career with statues of Zeus, of Pluto, of Poseidon, or of the fifteen grey-bearded Gods who are called the Lords of the World. He evoked all Olympus. When he stretched forth his arm, it held the Trident, and when he raised it, there was the Thunderbolt. The lines of his pectorals, where they joined the shoulders, were so majestic that all his gestures seemed divine.

Ah, I thought, Parrhasius offers me women, as if I were going to pass my evenings between the pillars of the Ceramicus, and it is clear that he does not understand that I would renounce love itself in return for his Nicostratus. Will the Gods ever inspire him to send me the man, were it but for a day ?

Such were the pangs of jealousy that I secretly suffered ; but I half consoled myself with the reflection that, if not in marble, at least in paint, a medium almost as pure, the deathless splendour that dwelt in him would be preserved.

Nicostratus was, in fact, lost for marble ;

I never had him as a model. The unfortunate man only posed once, and you shall hear how.

IV

I returned alone, on horseback, through Attica. During my five years' absence, my creditors had sold what little property I had, and I put up at one of the inns in the city, in very simple fashion, for the long weeks which would have to elapse before I could find a new home.

Parrhasius had followed me at a few days' interval. When he heard of my modest habitation, he desired that I should accept no other hospitality than his own, and sent word that he expected me. The next day I called upon him, unaccompanied, to decline his offer.

He lived half-way between the Ceramicus and the Academy, in a palace constructed of marble and bronze, near the small house occupied by Plato. His gardens stretched right down to the blue borders of the Cycloborus, and in the opposite direction, rising towards the road, they surrounded the white building with trees, which served merely for ornament.

Owing to a weakness, surprising in a man of his standing, Parrhasius was ostentatious in the

display of wealth. His fortune was enormous, and he saw to it that no one had any doubt about the matter. In addition to this, he extracted its due proportion of delight from every pleasure, and desired to experience continually the freshness of marble, the fine texture of silk, the still more delicate material of virgin flesh, the colour of purple, so appropriate an adornment of the human countenance, and the incorruptible and sunlike quality of gold. For these reasons his house resembled the palace of Artaxerxes.

He welcomed me at the threshold of the great interior court which he used as a studio.

Erect, and draped as usual in his robe of red silk, a fillet like that of some Olympian God upon his forehead, he opened his great arms to receive me. I passed with him into the illustrious apartment, the womb of masterpieces, experiencing a deep emotion at finding myself there once more.

"My Prometheus?" he replied to my question. "No, I do not feel that it is ripe for execution yet. That fellow Nicostratus requires a certain amount of study, and I foresee that my first conception of the subject will break down as soon as I introduce his figure into it. In a few days we shall see."

I asked him if he was taking a holiday, but

the question showed how little I knew him. Painting was his very life. Returning from his journey at midnight, he had begun a picture the following morning.

"Come," said he to me suddenly. "I am glad you have the chance to see it: that little sketch of mine is a marvel. I have never done anything finer."

It was another trait of his character to estimate his own works at their actual supreme worth, and to understand the admiration devoted to his great name by the entire population of Greece.

The panel which he had begun rested in a slanting position on an easel of sycamore wood, whose twin supporting pieces, at the point where they should have met, curved backwards in the form of golden swans' necks.

I bent forward respectfully, and perceived a rather peculiar subject, which, however, did not surprise me in the studio of Parrhasius.

His picture represented a vivid woodland landscape where a sleeping nymph, arrows in hand, reclined upon her side. A satyr, stooping before her, was in the act of raising her tunic to the girdle with an expression of bestial and greedy delight. Behind her, a second satyr, kneeling, was making a direct assault upon the virgin, without producing any impression upon

her youthful slumbers, which must have been very profound. Such was the picture.

As I raised my eyes, I perceived a few yards away, lying upon a bench, the abashed Artemidora between the two Sarmatian barbarians who had been posing with her for the outline of this sketch of life in the raw. Parrhasius explained :

" Yes, I am fond of these pictures dealing with intense feeling, and I do not represent man's desire except at the moment of its paroxysm, and of its fulfilment. Socrates, who had begun by being a bad sculptor before becoming a good philosopher, wished to see me paint the emotion of sexual love in looks and thoughts.[1] It was an absurd criticism. Painting is design and colour; it only speaks the language of gesture, and the most expressive gesture is that from which its triumph proceeds. I have painted Achilles at the moment when he is in act to slay. His anger, unexpressed in movement, I leave to the poet. Still, enough of that, we understand each other."

He seated himself before his easel and commanded : " Recommence the pose."

[1] There is a slight anachronism here. The year in which these events took place is stated in the first paragraph of Chapter II to be that of Plato's death, namely, 347 B.C. Socrates was executed in 399 B.C., and thus could not have known Parrhasius as an adult.—Translator's note.

At this Artemidora raised her black eyes in our direction, and in a voice which rendered me uneasy, murmured : " Before him ? "

But Parrhasius was not listening. He was singing already. With his thin brush, whose handle was of ivory and hollowed like a reed, he added the last touches to the sketch in order to accentuate still more the purity of its impeccable design. Then two of his young apprentices brought him his instruments.

" As you see," said he to me, with a smile, " I no longer paint in distemper. Here are the irons and the wax in accordance with the new procedure. I shall beat these young people of the Sicyonic school on their own ground ! "

And actually one would have said, to watch him, that he had always employed the method of Polygnotus which had recently returned to favour. His little wax-boxes were arranged in a small coffer already stained with use. He dipped carefully therein the thin rod, previously heated in the brazier, brought forth a tiny drop of coloured wax, placed it in position, and mixed it with the rest with a sureness of touch that drew from me from time to time a smile of enthusiasm.

As he painted, he told me how the wax was mixed with the colours, and which colours were the right ones, to the exclusion of all the rest.

His white came from the island of Melos, that of Samos being too thick. He liked Indian cinnabar, which was more solid and also more costly than that of Ephesus. Flame-coloured sandarac and armenium, with its faint blue tint, were suitable for the habiliments of women. He realised the value of the ivory black recently discovered by the young Apelles, but preferred for his own part the black, easier to mix, which was manufactured, when one could get it, from the burned human bones taken from ancient sepulchres.

The day passed in this way without my noting the flight of the hours, except when Parrhasius gave the order: "Rest!" and Artemidora, whose blushes deepened as the time wore on, hid her face in her hands.

Towards the end of the day he rose, calling to the apprentices: "Heat the sheet!"

And turning to me, he said: "It is done."

The red-hot sheet, emitting sparks, was brought to him. He seized it by the eyebolt with long-handled pincers and moved it to and fro very slowly above the panel, which lay in a horizontal position. The wax rose to the surface and imprinted on the dry wood the multi-coloured life of the picture.

And that is how, between the dawn and the dusk of a single day, the "Nymph Surprised"

of Parrhasius, which is now at Syracuse, was completed.

Parrhasius eyed his work with careless satisfaction, and shaking his beautiful and expressive hand, cried out as though to an audience of a hundred persons : " Yes ! It is an exercise before the battle ! "

Inattentively I asked : " What battle ? "

He seemed astonished that I had not understood. With long strides he crossed the room and flung open a door. Nicostratus, in chains, looked up at us. At the sight, Parrhasius drew himself to his full height, and plunging his fingers into his beard, murmured as though to himself alone : " My battle, as of a God, against this human soul."

V

I was busy for a whole month at Athens with personal affairs, which prevented me from returning to visit Parrhasius.

The city was in deep mourning since the fall of Olynthus. The slave-market of Chalcis, the sale of an allied people, the scandal and insult offered at the very gates of Attica, was the subject of every conversation, the thought that filled every silence.

We could do nothing against Philip. Crates

did not want war, and Demosthenes himself no longer demanded it, but Æschines, on the way home from the Peloponnese, had met by the roadside flocks of Olynthians being driven like beasts, and it had been enough for him to relate that passage of a host of slaves for the indignation of the populace to be aroused, at his words, against the guilty cities.

One day, worse befell: it was discovered that, in the town itself, one of the citizens was treating an unfortunate Olynthian woman as if she had been a captive. The man was arrested, tried, and condemned to death immediately.

I was alarmed at this, and saw that a similar fate threatened Parrhasius. I left all my affairs to look after themselves, and went down to his palace in order to warn him if there were still time.

Doors were closed and curtains drawn when I arrived before the walls of his house. The slave did not want me to enter, and I had to insist, to show my anxiety, to declare that my business was a matter of life or death to his master. I got in at last, and running down the great empty gallery, lifted the hanging of the doorway.

I shall never forget the slow, grave look that Parrhasius turned upon me when he perceived my entrance. He was painting in an erect position, gigantic before a panel of black wood

which was almost the same height as himself. The sky, which was ominous of storm, gave a superhuman aspect to his unusual stature. The serenity of his countenance was such that its characteristics were lost: the very wrinkles had disappeared, as may be observed in the corpses of very old men recumbent in the peace of death.

He did not speak to me nor look at me again. Holding the warm rod between his fingers, he carried the drops of wax between the box and the upright panel with a hand as sure and as steady as if he had created the world with blots of colour.

Then, as I followed his eyes, fixed by turns upon his work and upon a certain spot in the vast room, I perceived the naked and struggling form of Nicostratus, his four limbs spread out upon the hummock of an actual rock, all his muscles standing out in the effort to free himself from the four ropes which bound him.

For a long time I stood there motionless, holding my breath, forgetting what I had come to do and say. My whole attention was absorbed by the marvel of what I saw. My other senses abandoned me, and I had fewer thoughts than one has in a dream.

Suddenly Parrhasius uttered two words, at

least I imagined I heard them. The words were: "Cry out!"

His voice was as calm as his gesture and his face. "Cry out!" repeated Parrhasius.

Nicostratus burst into a violent fit of forced laughter, which shook the room. He exclaimed that he would not! That he was master of his features! That they could not be bound with ropes, like his limbs, to the rock! That he would prevent this picture being painted! Then he foamed at the mouth with rage, uttering a volley of abuse.

Not a line in the countenance of Parrhasius moved. He set down the rod he was holding, took up deliberately another, white-hot from the brazier beside him, and measuring the exact spot where the vulture of his picture was gnawing the liver of Prometheus, he said to a Sarmatian slave:

"Take this. To the right. Under the bottom rib. Touch lightly, without penetrating the skin."

Nicostratus watched the fellow advance upon him. He managed to smile, but was very pale. The flesh shrivelled, and he did not utter a word. But, in a moment or two, his eyes darkened. A terrible sweat broke out upon his forehead. He began first to shriek, then to moan in a trembling voice, like a little child sobbing.

Parrhasius, impassive, observed the reaction of his features.

How long did it last ? I do not remember. I think, until evening. Nor do I know when I had the strength to drag myself from the room, for I was faint from head to foot. At the very moment I passed through the doorway there was a sudden silence, then a voice at the end of the apartment :

" The fool ! " cried Parrhasius. " He died a second too soon ! "

When next day it became known in Athens how Parrhasius had achieved the " Prometheus Bound " which he destined for the Parthenon, a cry of horror arose from the whole city. Crowds swarmed out upon the road that ran beside the Cycloborus, and began to assault the house of the painter, whose doors were closed.

" An Olynthian ! A Freeman ! Taken by the Macedonian ! "

" Prison for his murderer ! "

I mingled with the hostile crowd, not in order to save my friend, for I too considered, at that time, that he deserved every punishment that could be devised, and the shrieks of Nicostratus still resounded in my ears. Yet I followed the mob, thrust hither and thither in the tumult, and arrived with it beneath the walls of the besieged mansion.

For a long time the shouts continued. The house seemed dead. Not a slave on the threshold. Not a voice behind the curtains which hung, drawn and motionless, between the columns.

At last two curtains on the first floor were parted, and Parrhasius himself appeared, his arms folded upon his royal robe and his forehead still bound with the sacred fillet.

A storm of shouts arose.

"Assassin! Barbarian! Ally of Philip!" yelled the mob. "Where is the Olynthian? We will bury him like a victorious general. And for you, poison, poison!"

Parrhasius allowed their anger to escape and to subside. Then seizing, at his feet, by both sides of the panel, the "Prometheus" which he had just painted, he raised it slowly and as though participating in a religious rite, at first above the balustrade, then above his own head, so that he was concealed by it, and the Work appeared in place of the Man.

An abrupt shock thrilled through the mob, and they came nearer. They beheld a prodigy; the picture of human suffering and of humanity's eternal defeat by pain and death seemed to throb into life above their heads. Before their countless eyes the height of tragic grandeur was unfolded there for the first time. The crowd

shuddered. A few men wept. A silence as of a temple spread to the farthest of the multitude, and as the cries of menace attempted to break forth again, a thunderous acclamation extinguished them in a roar that is the voice of Fame.

DIALOGUE AT SUNSET

DIALOGUE AT SUNSET

ARCAS

GIRL of the black eyes . . .

MELITTA

Touch me not !

ARCAS

Nay . . . I come not near, seest thou not, sister of Aphrodite, girl of the clustering hair, like massed grapes. I stop by the wayside, and I can go no farther, seest thou not ? Neither to those that await me, nor to them I have left.

MELITTA

Go ! go ! Thou wastest words, goatherd that hast no herd, wanderer in aimless paths ! Canst thou keep the road no longer, then begone by the fields ; but come not into my pasture, thou whom I know not ; or I cry for help !

ARCAS

To whom, then, wouldst thou call in this solitude ?

MELITTA

To the Gods ! They will hear me.

ARCAS

Ah, child ! The Gods are farther from thee than I now ; and were they even at thy side, they would not forbid me to say that thou art beautiful, for thy face is their pride : they know it for their masterwork.

MELITTA

Enough, goatherd, begone. My mother has forbidden me to listen to any man's words. I am here to watch my woolly flock and see that they crop the grass till sunset. I must not hear the voices of the boys who pass along the road with the wind of evening and the winged dust.

ARCAS

Why ?

MELITTA

I know not. My mother knows. 'Tis not yet thirteen years since I was born upon her bed of leaves ; and I should indeed be foolish if I did not do all that she cares to bid me.

ARCAS

Child, thou hast not understood thy mother, who is so good, and so wise, and so fair, and so venerable. She spoke of the outland men who sometimes cross the countryside, their shield on their left arm and their sword in their right hand. They would be cruel to thee, for thou art weak and they are strong. In the cities they have taken in the hateful times of war they have killed many a young virgin almost as beautiful as thou art, and they would not spare thee, if they found thee on their way. But I, what harm could I do thee ? I have only my sheep-skin on my shoulder and my switch in my hand. Behold me. Am I so terrible ?

MELITTA

Nay, goatherd. Thy words are soft, and long would I listen to them. But the softest words are treacherous, I have been told, when the

mouth of a young man murmurs them to one of us.

ARCAS

Wilt thou answer if I ask thee a question ?

MELITTA

Ay.

ARCAS

Of what wert thou dreaming, under the black olive tree, when I passed ?

MELITTA

I will not tell thee.

ARCAS

I know what it was.

MELITTA

Tell me.

ARCAS

If thou wilt let me come near. Otherwise I will not speak. I can speak it only in thine

ear, since it is thy secret and not mine. Thou wilt let me come near ? And take thine hand ?

MELITTA

Of what was I dreaming ?

ARCAS

Of thy marriage girdle.

MELITTA

Oh, who told thee. . . . Did I speak aloud ? Art thou a God, goatherd, to read from so far off in the eyes of girls ? Do not look at me so ! Do not try to read what I am thinking now. . . .

ARCAS

Thou wert dreaming of thy marriage girdle and the unknown man who may loose it, with some of those soft words that thou dreadest to hear about thee. Will they, too, be treacherous ?

MELITTA

I have never heard them.

ARCAS

But thou hearest mine, and thou seest mine eyes.

MELITTA

I do not want to see them any more.

ARCAS

Thou seest them in thy dreams.

MELITTA

O goatherd !

ARCAS

When I take thine hand, why dost thou tremble ? When mine arm closes about thy breast, why dost thou lean towards me ? Why does thy frail head seek my shoulder ?

MELITTA

O goatherd !

ARCAS

How couldst thou be so almost naked in my arms, were I not already almost thy husband ?

MELITTA

Nay, thou art not he ; let me go, let me go, I am afraid ; away, I know thee not ! Let me go ; thy hands hurt me, let me go, I desire thee not !

ARCAS

Why speakest thou to me, child, with the lips of thy mother ?

MELITTA

Nay, 'tis not she, 'tis I that speak. I am good ; leave me, goatherd. I should be ashamed to act like Naïs, or like Philyra or Chloë, who did not wait for their wedding day to learn the secrets of Aphrodite and to give birth in secret, none knew how. Nay, nay, I will not yield ! Thou canst tear my tunic ; I will not yield, goatherd ! Rather would I strangle myself with my own hands.

ARCAS

Again why ? And what have I done to thee ? I have touched this tunic, I have not torn it. I have kissed thy girdle, I have not loosed it. Well, as thou wilt ! I forsake thee, I set thee

free, I let thee go. . . . Begone. . . . Why goest thou not ?

MELITTA

Let me weep.

ARCAS

Thinkst thou then, I love you so little as to force thee against thy will ? Would I have spoken thus to thee, while thou didst listen, did I ask of thee but a moment of pleasure such as every shepherd girl could give me ? Have my eyes not taught thee. . . . But thou regardest them no more, these eyes of mine. Thine own thou hidest, weeping.

MELITTA

. . .

ARCAS

Yet, hadst thou willed it, I could so well have passed, here at thy feet, a lifetime long of love and tender words. I would have laid my two arms about thy body, my head upon thy breast, my mouth on thine ; and thou wouldst have loosed thine hair about our kisses, to give me pleasure. Harken ! Hadst thou willed it I

would have built a green shelter for thee with flowering boughs and cool grasses, still full of singing grasshoppers and gold beetles, rich as gems. There wouldst thou have prisoned me, each night, there on the rich couch of my outspread mantle would our two hearts have beaten for ever, one upon the other.

MELITTA

Oh, let me weep, still weep . . .

ARCAS

So far from me ?

MELITTA

In thine arms—in thine eyes.

ARCAS

My love . . . the evening falls, and the light passes, as on toward the sky. . . . Already the earth is dark. Afar, we can only see the long, milky way of the stream that glitters like a river of stars about our meadow. . . . Yet is it too bright for us. . . .

MELITTA

Ah, yes, too bright . . . take me hence.

ARCAS

Come . . . the wood, through which we glide, under its caressing boughs, is so deep that even by day the divine ones fear to enter it. We never see, along its paths, the cleft hoofs of satyrs follow the light-foot nymphs. Here, through the leaves, we see not the green eyes of hamadryads holding the fearful gaze of men. But we shall not be afraid, for we are together, thou and I . . .

MELITTA

Nay, I fear not. I cannot help but weep, but I love thee and I follow thee. There is a God in my heart ! Speak to me ! Speak on ! There is a God in thy voice.

ARCAS

Let thine hair fall about my neck, thine arm about my waist, and thy cheek against mine. Walk warily, there are stones here. Lower your eyes, here are roots. The moss is slippery under

our bare feet, and the earth is cold. . . . But thy breast is warm beneath my hand.

MELITTA

Seek it not. 'Tis small, 'tis young, 'tis not fair. The autumn of last year, it was yet no more than on the day of my birth. My friends laughed at me. It was in the spring I saw it grow, with the buds on the trees. . . . Caress it not so. . . . I cannot go farther.

ARCAS

Nay, come. . . . We are in shadow here. I can see thy face no more. It is not thou, it is not I. Give me no more thy lips : I would see thine eyes once more. Come to the old tree down yonder, that stands in the light of the moon. Its great shadow reaches to our feet : follow the shade.

MELITTA

See, the tree is as big as a palace.

ARCAS

The palace of thy marriage rites : it opens for us two in the depths of holy night.

MELITTA

I hear sounds . . . the palms . . .

ARCAS

The rustling palms of the marriage train.

MELITTA

These stars . . .

ARCAS

They are the torches.

MELITTA

These voices . . .

ARCAS

They are the Gods.

MELITTA

O goatherd, I cross this threshold virgin as Artemis, who lights us from afar through the blackness of the boughs, and who, perchance,

hears my vow. I know not if I have done well to follow thee whither I have followed thee, but a breath was in me, a spirit which thy voice has brought to birth . . . and thou gavest me happiness, like an immortal, when thou gavest me thine hand.

ARCAS

Girl of the black eyes, nor thy father nor mine has made ready for our union at the altar of their hearths, bartering thy wealth and mine. We are poor, hence we are free. If there is one that marries us this evening, lift up thine eyes : 'tis the Olympians, protectors of shepherds.

MELITTA

My husband, what is thy name ?

ARCAS

Arcas. And thine ?

MELITTA

Melitta.

Biarritz, 1903.

A NEW SENSATION

A NEW SENSATION

I

ABOUT four years ago, perhaps five, I used to occupy for several days a week an inconvenient but out-of-the-way and picturesque ground-floor flat in a street which led at one end into the little park of Monceau : I took no interest in this detail, as the gate was closed every evening before midnight, and I was unable to go there at the precise hour when I enjoy walking in the open air.

One night, when I was there, in silent colloquy with two blue porcelain cats squatting upon a white table, I was trying to make up my mind between two methods of employing my solitude; I was either going to write a strictly regular sonnet while I smoked cigarettes, or I was going to smoke cigarettes while I contemplated the paper on the ceiling.

The important thing is always to have a cigarette in one's hand ; objects must be enveloped in a heavenly and delicate haze which bathes both light and shadow, effaces solid angles, and by its scented spell imposes upon

the restless mind a variable rhythm whence it may fall to dreaming.

That evening I both intended to write and desired to do nothing; in other words, it was an evening like all the rest; and it would assuredly have ended before a virgin sheet of paper and an ash-tray full of corpses, had not my thoughts been suddenly interrupted by an unexpected ring at my front door.

I raised my head. I was convinced that on Friday, the ninth of June, I did not expect any one at this hour of the night; but as a second ring followed close upon the first, I went to the door and unlocked it.

On opening the door I saw a woman standing there. She was wrapped in a voluminous mantle of natural serge, resembling a travelling dress, but figured with interlaced ornaments, like an opera-cloak. It was gathered about her neck by a circular, tufted trimming, above which her head just showed; it was a completely brown face, surmounted by light-coloured hair. Her features were young and sensual, and had a slightly mocking expression; there were two very black eyes, a very red mouth.

"Will you please allow me to come in?" she said, putting her head on one side.

I made way for her with the astonishment

which can only be felt by a man who sees, at an hour when one scarcely receives any but the most intimate feminine friends, a woman enter his abode of whom he has not the slightest recollection, and who addresses him in familiar terms in the first words she utters.

"Dearest," I said to her timidly, when I had followed her into my room; "Dearest, don't be angry with me, I recognise you perfectly well, but unfortunately, somehow or other, I can't for the moment remember your name. Would it be Lucienne now, or Totótte?"

She smiled indulgently and, without answering, took off her mantle. Her dress was of sea-green silk, adorned with enormous irises woven into the fabric itself; their stems rose tapering up her body as far as the square opening at the breast, which displayed both nipples bare. She wore on each arm a small gold bangle in the form of a serpent with eyes of emerald. A collar of large pearls in two rows gleamed upon her bronzed skin, emphasising the base of the supple and rounded neck.

"If you recognise me," said she, "it is because you have seen me in dreams. I am Callisto, daughter of Lamia. My tomb was left undisturbed for eighteen hundred years in the flowery woods of Daphne, near the hills where

once stood the luxurious city of Antioch. But in these days tombs are great travellers. I was brought to Paris, and my shade followed the stone which held my delicate ashes. I slept for a long time, imprisoned in the icy vaults of the Louvre. I should be there still had not a great pagan, a venerable man, Monsieur Louis Ménard, who is the only man who remembers, to-day, the sacred rites and gestures, pronounced before my tomb the traditional words that can give a brief nocturnal existence to poor dead women. For seven hours, each night, I go wandering in your squalid city . . ."

" Oh, my poor girl ! " I interrupted. " How changed you must find the world ! "

" Yes and no. I find the houses black, the costumes ugly, and the sky mournful (what a singular notion that was of yours to come and live in such a climate !). I find that life is more stupid, and that people seem less happy ; but one thing that absolutely astounds me is the reappearance at every step of everything I used to know. Really ! In eighteen hundred years is that all you have done ? Nothing more original ? Nothing better, positively ? Is what I have seen in your streets, in your fields, in your houses everything, absolutely everything ? What a sorry business, my friend ! "

The astonishment of my expression was a

sufficient answer. She smiled, and went on to illustrate her meaning :

" You see how I am dressed ? " she said. " I am wearing the robe that was buried with me. Look at it. In my time dresses were made of wool, yarn, and silk. When I returned to earth I thought I should find that all those ancient fabrics had not only vanished but been forgotten. I supposed (forgive me) that after so many years men would have discovered stuffs marvellous as the sun or the moon, and more voluptuous to the touch than the skin of a virgin or of a fruit. But no ; what are your dresses made of ? Wool, yarn, and silk. . . . Oh, I know you have invented cotton goods, and you wrap up negroes in them, as you don't like the state in which those people walk about. I expect it is extremely moral of you. . . . Are you very fond of cotton ? Are you proud of discovering it ? Personally I cannot even bear to feel the thing under my hands, it is so sticky and hangs so badly. Anyhow, have you any material which drapes better than wool ? You have not. Anything finer than linen ? Brighter than silk ? . . . Tell me yourself."

She continued :

" In my time foot-coverings were made of leather. . . . Slippers, coloured shoes, furred indoor slippers, and high boots were known.

. . . Your cycling shoes too, open, with a strap rather high up, that was a Phrygian fashion. Now look at mine; they are made of olive morocco, gold-tooled like a bookbinding. You had better admire them. You will not find any so fine where your lady friends buy theirs."

She went on again:

"In my time there were two precious metals used for ornaments—gold and silver. Have you people found a third? They were employed in the manufacture of necklaces, rings, bracelets, ear-rings, diadems, and brooches. I found all these articles again in the Rue de la Paix, identical with ours. We were acquainted with pearls, emeralds, diamonds, opals, moonstones, rubies, sapphires, and all the variously tinted silicas which come from Arabia and India to-day as they did then. Now, have you by any chance produced one precious stone in eighteen centuries? Just one, tell me just one, I beg of you! A stone I never knew, a ring I never put on my finger; a new jewel, even one mounted in gold, as mine are, since you have no rarer metal to offer me, but one that clasps a gem invented by yourselves?"

Her voice had gradually become more excited, until it assumed a tone of reproach and scorn. I made a gesture, a much calmer one.

" Callisto," I answered, " you seem to me to attach far too much importance to the ornaments that women load themselves with, and for which there is no excuse but that of employing, in their difficult selection and meticulous arrangement, a stagnant and idle existence. It is quite clear to-day, after ten thousand years of fruitless efforts by all nations, that a girl can never be made more beautiful by the art of the tailor, of the embroiderer, and of the jeweller, than she is at the moment when she displays herself naked as the Gods created her. I have no doubt that the Greeks were acquainted with that simple costume. . . ."

" Better than your people are."

" You did not invent it : you need not flatter yourself. I recognise that nowadays it is disguised even more badly than when you were born ; but does the difference between bad and worse amount to much ? It is impossible to dress a woman. That is an axiom with which we cannot dispense. If æsthetic truths could be demonstrated theoretically, Monsieur Poincaré would have already proved mathematically that it is useless to employ the human imagination in the quest for a solution of this problem, which is as certainly chimerical as the trisection of angles. For my part I do not worry myself over a failure which is persistent because it is

eternal ; and I am content to admire a woman in her primitive purity (which is also immutable), with the antique emotion of those who touched the body of Helen."

She looked at me more steadily, bending her head towards me, and said slowly :

" Are you sure, presumptuous one, that women have not changed ? "

II

I do not know whether I actually saw, in my confusion, what she did immediately after uttering these words.

How she took off her rings, slipped down four bracelets, unfastened her necklace, and let her robes fall at the same time as her heavy hair, I really could not say. It was all so rapid and so dazzling that the recollection of it in my mind is that of a burst of splendour full of shadows.

Up till that moment I had not believed with conviction in the reality of my adventure. Apparitions, which were long supposed to be supernatural, and which are now with less reluctance considered as obeying certain profound and mysterious natural laws, exhibit themselves sometimes with the signs of a material substance which is not denied by any

of our senses and which can mislead the most sceptical mind or even one simply forewarned against its improbability.

I had been wondering for the last hour whether I were not being mystified by one of the wilder of my lady readers ; some foreigner, I thought, who is immodest and bold enough to visit, at night, a bedroom to which she has not been invited, no doubt wants to make me forget the vulgar intention that has brought her here in the contemplation of the care that she has taken to dissemble it under a theatrical costume. I had answered her in the way that she seemed herself to suggest, with the indulgent reserve, in conversation, of one who through deference or curiosity is unwilling to tear away too soon the veil of a laboriously concocted and interesting comedy.

But as soon as she was naked, I understood that she had come to me from the depth of the past. . . .

I remember very well that the moment I was certain of it I began, if I did not finish, all the movements with which an invincible religious instinct inspired me. I held on to my chair to prevent myself going on my knees, and I gazed at her with bent head, with a feeling as though I were committing sacrilege, and that so miraculous a personage ought not to be con-

templated with eyes accustomed to behold living women.

Callisto was tall. The torso was spare and rounded, the waist high, the legs very long. Her limbs were articulated with a fragile nicety which enchanted me; and one could conjecture, even under the muscularity of her thighs, the dainty bones. Every hair had been plucked from her skin, but it was spotless, innocent of rouge, and shone as if just bathed, having a uniform light brown tint, almost black at the nipples, at the elongated borders of the eyelids, and in the short line denoting the organ of sex. I am really unable to explain why her beauty could not have been produced either in this climate or even in this age, for the evidence of it did not arise from the appearance of any particular detail, but simply from a harmony and perhaps from a kind of brightness about her. In order to assert a difference between her and the women of my own epoch, I was compelled to rely, without any other proof, upon my personal discernment, just as a collector distinguishes the genuine from the counterfeit without sometimes being able to show that he depends upon any special feature for the establishment of his conviction.

As if to place herself within my reach she lay down upon a couch.

"You might at least have been able to perfect the female form," she began again, with a smile. "And yet, as you see, the races of mankind have degenerated. Why do your physicians, who are contemptuous of ours, allow your mistresses, to-day, to be less beautiful than my sisters? The earth on which we live has not been swallowed up. The river Orontes still flows from the depths of the cedar-wooded mountains. Smyrna survives. Sparta is dead, but Athens has been brought back to life. O vain-glorious and sickly age, why dost thou substitute for the women of Ionian stock the mongrel Levantine, and why hast thou not created choice breeds of women as thou createst families of roses? Thou canst not. Thine experiment is that of a child. Ours was that of the Gods."

As she talked—for I was scarcely in a state of mind to argue with her—a terror such as one hardly ever knows except in some fit of cold shudders, when one is half asleep, constricted my temples. I trembled lest she should suddenly vanish, like something fluid, some empty flash of light, and I wondered whether it were only my sight that could have the illusion of her bodily presence; whether I could, by placing the end of my finger on the tender skin of one of her lips, touch her.

" Come along ! " said she, laughing. " I am not a ghost. Give me your hand."

And, arching her loins on the couch, she drew my arm round her body, which rested, with a voluptuous weight, upon my fingers.

Then, with unflagging pertinacity, she resumed her lecture.

" A thousand years before my beauty existed, men coupled with women in practically the same way as goats did with their mates. You have read Homer ? Neither Argos nor Troy knew any other pleasure except that of the simple and brutal act which satisfied the animals. Briseis was ignorant even of the kiss upon the mouth. Andromache never proffered her breast to other lips than those of her newborn babe. Never upon the flesh of Helen's sides did an open and nimble palm arouse the thrill which is born of the caress of a human being."

She closed her eyes.

" And then, suddenly, in one day, the ancient East, where I was born, took from the Gods, like a fire that can never grow old, the only gift which distinguished them from the other inhabitants of the earth : they invented voluptuousness.

" O days of flowing sap ! Youth of the world ! For the first time the lips of a man

and a woman abandoned the savours of fruits for those of each other. The great burning soul of Aphrodite inspired the bodies of lovers, and each day a new pleasure—a new pleasure, do you hear ?—came down from blue Olympus into the wide beds filled with their enamoured cries. An unbridled intoxication ruled : from Babylon to Mount Eryx every perfume, every silken fabric, every flower, every art, and every woman joined the triumphal procession which entered upon the discovery of delight. Girls who were at last liberated from a hereditary barbarism became conscious of their senses and their desires, opened their nostrils to the rose, and their entrancing bodies to human mouths. For centuries the treasure of sensualities grew. In my time at Antioch and at Alexandria women were still adding to its riches. I, I myself, Callisto, daughter of Lamia, invented this. . . ."

But I had started away from her.

She laughed.

" Now I've frightened you ! Well, suppose you tell me something ; come ! While I was asleep in the grave for nineteen hundred years, what unknown delight has been your conquest ? I asked you just now to tell me of a new pearl. Now I am asking you to tell me of some way of making love that I have not experienced.

Doubtless, after all this time, some quite new kinds of enjoyment must have been made known. I await your invitation to partake of them."

She was firmly entrenched in the ironical positions she had taken up, and I could well believe that in her long nocturnal wanderings about the city she must have tried in vain to complete her education; and so I made no effort in that impracticable direction. I merely said:

"You must be patient. We began by forgetting everything, you see. Now we are making the old discoveries afresh. The process is called the history of modern civilisation. A few years after your death the world was involved in unprecedented calamities which might have proved irreparable. What happened was, first of all the birth and the singular fate of a religion which, at its origin, was morally admirable; but when it became distorted by Jews, who were sometimes overboorish and sometimes over-clever, it sterilised the effort which had been made by your race and sowed salt on the ruins of Athens. Next came the inroads of the barbarians; when the flood of Judea had rotted the wood of the vessel, the rats entered into it and gnawed it to pieces. That state of affairs lasted until the

dawn of a new day when men saw arising from the East, like a ray of early morning light, the books which had been saved from the wreck and were being brought back from Constantinople. We took a hundred years to read them. Since the study of them began, life has gone on for barely three centuries. But time is on our side, perhaps. Give us time, Callisto."

She smiled mockingly.

"Will you find," she answered, "the tradition of Rhodopis in the byways of your museums? Have your archæologists, who understand so well the politics of Pericles and the strategy of Alexander, re-established the science of Aspasia and of Thais? Are they sure that the tomb where the delicate dust of Phryne lies at rest does not hide for ever the secret of a lost delight? I still possess that tradition. Would you like to know it? I surrender it to you. . . ."

III

Whatever may be the feelings of curiosity which the girls who will read this fragment of recollections may experience, I shall not continue further with the description of what followed; first, because I have already written, on the evidence which I took from Callisto, a

whole book with the title of *Aphrodite*; and, secondly, because a certain modesty would still perhaps prevent me from communicating in the first person the details of a night which was immoderately exciting.

Callisto rose about midday. She drew my attention quietly to the facts that the sun had already risen, and that we had to blame a perfect lighting system for not having observed it.

"You do away with Night, you no longer know Dawn," said she in a melancholy tone. "Once, the gleaming pageant of sunrise was the reward of long and exhausting vigils. But now you pass all your lives in a light without variations, and you no longer know, even, how to look upon the Dark."

I became anxious.

"Midday! . . . But you told me that, for you, life was limited to the hours of the night. How am I able to keep you here still?"

"That is a matter of private arrangement between myself and Persephone," she replied, with a peculiar smile. "Let us talk. I have not yet finished reviling your epoch."

I was a little tired and, at the same time, nervous. "No more of that, I beg of you," I said. "Let us speak of ourselves, shall we not? Let us abandon the world, whether it is better

or worse than it was. . . . You are all that interests me."

"In that case, listen. You are not convinced. I shall continue until you confess. Really, I am returning very vexed from my second voyage on earth. I ought to have stayed in the grave with the dream of a purer age, in which I grew up surrounded by delights. I feel the need of telling some one what deceptions I have undergone in the course of my journey, and how angry I am with your century on account of all the surprises which it has not given me. I tell you, the world is a young man who promised well and who is in a fair way to spoil his life."

"I don't know . . . I think, all the same, that we have thought and created a great deal since your death. The century in which we live is not so very contemptible."

"It is! By reason, to some extent, of its impotence, but still more on account of its complacency. No! You are neither thinkers nor creators! You are Phœnicians, clever at reproducing models invented by my race, but you do not find them anywhere but in our civilisation, and you only exist in our shadow."

She gesticulated.

"Walk through the streets of Paris. On every side our eternal soul breaks forth in the

façades of monuments, in the capitals of columns, and in the aspect of statues. After the construction, during the course of a barbarous and paltry Middle Age, of some wretched buildings which are already in decay (thank goodness !) you, the men of modern times, being incapable of creation, returned to our ruins ; for the last four hundred years you have been making mosaics of stone with the fragments of our temples. One column discovered in Sicily begot two thousand churches and as many railway stations. You cannot even give a new architectural form to new requirements. You make, with the brass of your cannon, yet another copy of Trajan's column, and you erect concert halls in the style of the Corinthians. In succession to ourselves, sculptors of marble and founders of casts of bronze, you discovered nothing, not a single natural stone, not a single chemical alloy, which was better suited to reproduce the human form. And the solitary great sculptor you have had only became what he was because people discovered underground a torso by Apollonius, a headless, armless, and legless wreck ; a piteous ruin, but a created work, that—a creating work. Schoolboys ! "

She took two books from a shelf and threw them on the carpet.

" Your thought, like your art, is a parasite

upon our corpses. It was not Descartes, it was Parmenides, who said that thought was identical with being. It was not Kant, it was Parmenides, again, who said that thought was identical with its object. And in these two phrases the schools of the present day are completely contained; they will never get rid of them. In all the directions in which your science becomes general—that is to say, philosophical—it rests, even to-day, upon the foundations which we laid. Euclid's masters settled once and for all the unalterable relations of line. Archimedes employed the integral calculus long before your Leibnitz, who is also indebted to us for his metaphysics. Instead of meditating on the fall of the apple, your revered Newton might have confined himself to reading a page of our Aristotle, in which his theory of universal gravitation had been set out two thousand years before. On the subject of the constitution of matter, which is the problem of God, Democritus knew as much as Lord Kelvin; his hypothesis is still the only one admitted. Finally, at this moment, when you are on the point of achieving the concept of a universal and central science, whose law would suffice to explain the entire collection of phenomena—what is this science, and what is this law? They are those definitively expressed, two thou-

sand four hundred years ago, by Heraclitus. Fire becomes movement, movement becomes fire, and there you have the world."

My strength was at an end.

"O Callisto," I begged, "hear my winged words; you are much too learned. I had certainly heard that the courtesans of antiquity were women of rare intelligence, but it was not that, I am sure, that made them so beautiful. To-day, if Madame de Pougy, in spite of her excellent literary gift, wished to discuss with Monsieur Boutroux the subjects which engross his attention, she would not succeed in interesting him so much as an Aspasia in converse with Xenophon. And yet I prefer the former, because she would rather expatiate on a dress than on a law of thermodynamics, and that is a topic which goes better with her supple figure. Besides, the charm of a woman is always increased as soon as she stops speaking; that, however, is a very special truth, whose evidence is only apparent to the male sex."

She waited in silence until I had finished; then, with triumphant pertinacity, she resumed:

"However that may be, in two thousand years you have discovered neither——"

"We have discovered America," I interrupted patiently.

"That is not true!"

"Callisto, don't talk nonsense."

"I repeat and I maintain that America was discovered by Aristotle, and that this is not a paradoxical thesis but an historical and obvious fact. Aristotle knew that the earth was round, and (as you can read in his works) he had advised the exploration of the way to the Indies 'in a westerly direction, beyond the pillars of Heracles.' Columbus took up the project again. But it has always been considered that the glory of a discovery redounds to the credit of the brain which conceives it, and not to that of the labourer who gives it practical effect. When Leverrier discovered Neptune——"

"Good," said I, in the last stages of lassitude. "At least you agree to that; we did discover Neptune."

"And suppose you did! Discover Neptune! You are an amazing person! Since yesterday I have been begging you to tell me of a new pleasure, a conquest on the road to happiness, a victory over tears. And you tell me you have discovered Neptune! I return to life after twenty centuries, anxious about everything, jealous of the marvels that I supposed to have been invented, wondering whether I shall not have to weep all through my ghostly eternity

for too early an arrival in the world ; and you tell me you have discovered Neptune ! A pleasure ! A pleasure ! Of the mind, of the senses, what do I care ! Am I to descend to the Elysian plains again without taking with me the thrill of a new sensation ? "

She stretched out her hands . . . then added abruptly : " Besides, it was Pythagoras who discovered Neptune."

I collapsed.

" There is no doubt about it," she explained relentlessly. " Pythagoras had found that the solar system must comprise ten stars. I do not know upon what basis he calculated his figure ; but considering that his disciple Philoaus was to discern later on, without the use of any magnifying instrument, and many centuries before Copernicus, the double movement of the earth about its axis and about the central fire, and considering that, of course, you cannot understand how such a discovery was established by the sole aid of reason, you have not the right to a preconceived opinion that the hypothesis of Pythagoras was advanced rashly and confirmed by accident. I conclude."

I had abandoned the struggle.

" Will you have a cigarette ? " I asked.

" What ? "

" I say, will you have a cigarette ? Of

course, I know, cigarettes too come from Greece, for it was Aristotle who——"

"No. I won't go so far as that. I confess that we were ignorant of that silly habit, which consists in filling one's mouth with the smoke of burning leaves. But I suppose you don't mean to offer me that pastime as a pleasure ?"

"Who knows ? Have you tried it ?"

"Never ! Why, are you one of the practitioners of that ridiculous business ?"

"Sixty times a day. It is actually the only regular occupation with which I have agreed to burden my existence."

"And you like it ?"

"I really believe that I should be content not to touch a woman's hand for positively a whole week, rather than be cut off from my cigarettes for the same period."

"You exaggerate."

"Hardly."

She became thoughtful.

"Well ! Give me a cigarette."

"I was offering you one."

"Light it. What do you do ? Inhale ?"

"Girls puff at them ; but that is not the best way. It is better to inhale, as a matter of fact. Take a whiff. Close your eyes. Now another. . . ."

In a few minutes Callisto had reduced her

little twist of oriental leaf to ashes. She threw away the half-finished stub, where the paint of her lips had left a reddish stain.

A silence ensued.

She even avoided looking at me. She had taken the square packet in her hand, which shook a little, I thought, as though she were agitated by a faint emotion, and after she had examined each of its four sides, she did not, I observed, return it to me.

With slow movements and with the care one uses in handling very precious articles, she placed it near the ash-tray on the edge of a brightly coloured divan, and disposed her tawny person at full length beside it.

A LANDING FROM THE ROADSTEAD OF NEMOURS

A LANDING FROM THE ROADSTEAD OF NEMOURS

MONSIEUR WALTER H——, whose name is too well known to-day to be written in full, was once my friend for twenty-four hours, on a day when both of us nearly died.

We had each embarked, without knowing one another, on an Atlantic coaster, the *Ville de Barcelone*, serving the ports which lie between the white city of Tangiers, Gibraltar, and Oran. There was storm everywhere. The Spanish papers we had bought at Malaga contained accounts of the loss of the finest cruiser of the fleet, the *Reina-Regente*, which had gone down in those latitudes at the base of a waterspout with four hundred and fifty-five officers and men. I can still see the newspapers with their funereal aspect and their immense lists of dead, filling the black-bordered front page, from the admiral in command down to the scourers of the ship's wells.

We sailed the same day, in the midst of a false lull, which did not last half an hour. As soon as the vessel had cleared the dark-green edge of the open sea, it leaped and plunged,

leaped again, still higher, rolled on to its right side, and shuddered from end to end under the bursting of the hurricane like a little frightened bird.

A wave passed over the ship and broke with its whole weight upon the decks. Another washed the vessel from stem to stern. Then came another, then a hundred others. All night we heard the crash of the heavy billows on the bridge, and the groaning of its planks. Sometimes we were tossed up on the crest of a sea like an eggshell in the spray of a fountain, and then the screw emerged and raced in the air with a harsh hissing sound like that of a siren in the midst of the gale. At moments, between two minutes of deafening uproar, we passed through silences so deep that we thought we had already foundered. Incomparable hours they were, of grandeur and of tragic beauty.

The next morning, when I went up on to the bridge at the end of the storm, a tall dark-skinned Moroccan, enveloped in a white burnous whose folds fluttered in the breeze, approached the captain.

" When we come Melilla ? " said he.

" Melilla ? " returned the master. " Not for some time yet, my friend. In a fortnight. Next voyage."

"What you say, a fortnight? I go Melilla to-day."

"Yes. Well, you will have to go from Nemours. We made a straight run past Melilla. I should have sunk my ship if I had put in last night with the weather we had."

The Arab gnashed his teeth in a fury. He growled out a "*Jekrab beitak*," in which all his anger snarled for expression: then he walked off along the bridge, gripping the nettings and gazing darkly at the coast of his native land, which shut in the eastern horizon.

. . . . . .

The dining-saloon, when I opened the door, was empty, or nearly so. Two other passengers, out of the fifty on board, had been able to leave their cabins. The first was a lady and an intrepid traveller, the aged Marquise de S——, the mother of a French deputy whom Monsieur Jaurès was already attacking. The second was Monsieur Walter H——. The latter addressed me with the cheerful good humour which follows bad nights at sea and resembles a smile of convalescence. "I have just spent five years in Morocco," he told me. "And I am going to Persia by way of Marseille, Constantinople, and Batoum. Tell me, do you like the Arabs?"

After this opening we were at once in sympathy.

Walter H—— was at that time twenty-nine years old. His face was tanned by the African sun and closely shaved in the Oxford fashion, but it was French enough in outline and expression. He had been over all the roads in Morocco, and even some way into the Sahara. He spoke Arabic so perfectly that one day in the suburbs of Oran I saw him surrounded by natives, who took him for a Mussulman dressed as a European. "Ah," said he, "you will only know the real Arabs when you get right down to the country between Fez and Marrakech, below the Djebel Aiachin.[1] Everywhere else the Arab, as a Turkish, French, or English subject, has already lost, with his independence, the nobility of his character. The most important sections of the race, merchants of Tripoli, Tunisians grown tame and clothed in their bluish silks, officials or respectable property owners of Algiers, they are all slaves under the yoke of Europe; and around them there swarms the poverty-stricken and cowed populace which would no doubt revolt if an opportunity arose, but meanwhile is content to beg."

"While in Morocco itself——"

"O there! There you have an ancient race which has never been enslaved since the beginning of the world. I believe that is

[1] A mountain.

unique in the history of mankind. Eight millions of free men still survive there, sons of the great conquerors who once galloped in a single raid from the Indian seas to the basis of the Loire and established themselves almost in the very positions where they halted. They are the ancient Saracens ! You must go and see them ; they are superb ! "

Meanwhile the vessel had cast anchor in a roadstead whose lines composed a harmonious pattern : the village of Nemours lay along the Mediterranean seaboard ; Nemours, the only spot in Moroccan territory under the French flag, the only valley which Marshal Bugeaud could get the Sultan to cede, after the victory of Isly.

We stepped down into a boat, which was to put us ashore. The discontented Moroccan whom I had caught sight of on the bridge followed us and seated himself on the central thwart.

I looked him over ; he had let the white cowl of his burnous fall back, and his fine head, supported upon an admirable neck, was erect. His features comprised every detail which is considered necessary for nobility of expression. A conscious majesty radiated from his brows and cast its shadow upon his black eyes. His thin lips and the formation of his nostrils bore witness to the purity of his lineage.

Walter H—— got him to talk. His name was El Hadji Omar ben Abd-el-Nebi, caid of Sidi-Mallouk. On former occasions, returning from Tangiers, he had reached the home of his tribe by way of the port of Melilla, the footpaths of the Riff, and the banks of the river; but being prevented from following his usual route, he was now in some anxiety about the road from Nemours to Lalla-Marnia, for the powerful tribe of Oudjda was unfriendly to his own people.

I pointed to a pair of pistols which stuck out of his yellow sash, and observed: "You are armed."

He made a disdainful grimace and shrugged his shoulders.

"Crackers," he muttered.

At that moment we reached the shore.

Then, when we were all three on solid ground and walking through the flowery valley ascending from the village, El Hadji Omar undid a fold of his white mantle, grasped with caution, almost with respect, the cutlass lying concealed along his thigh, and held it out horizontally.

"There is a weapon for you," said he.

The cutlass was two-thirds of the length of a man's arm. The hilt was short but substantial, and gave a good grip; the guard was simply a strip of copper over the butt. The colour of the

blade appeared a very dark blue, laced with the gold ornaments of its delicate damascening, and quite plain at its cutting edge.

El Hadji Omar tested it with his thumb and first finger. His hand ran down as far as the keen point and rounded it with a swift skimming movement as if passing over a flame.

" With this," he added, " my brother killed a man and a woman with a single blow. With a single blow of the hand. It's a good bit of steel."

A man and a woman ? We wanted to hear the story. The Moroccan hesitated. At last he allowed himself to be persuaded.

We sat down on a green sloping bank in a corner of the valley, where the earth was covered with flowers. Vegetation of prodigious luxuriance invaded it from the sides of the mountain : turpentine-trees and dwarf palms, phillyreas, nettle-trees. Bushes of myrtle, mastic, and tree-briar surrounded jujube-trees covered with spring foliage. Tamarisk and hare's-ear mingled on the bank of a rapid streamlet where oleanders swayed to and fro.

And this was the tale we heard in that valley paradise.

. . . . . .

El Hadji Omar had had a brother, Mahmoud

ben Adb-el-Nebi, who had preceded him as caid of Sidi-Mallouk.

Mahmoud had already married three wives, and he had long dismissed any idea of further nuptial unions when he met a strolling waif of a girl, and all of a sudden fell madly in love with her.

Her name was Djouhera. Djouhera is a word which means "the Pearl." She came from the plains of Tunisia, and wore the costume of her native village: a simple tunic of red, slit open on the right side, and exposing the breast where the drapery falls away. She was a shepherd's daughter, that is if her mother's story were true, for nothing definite was known about either of them, except that they had the appearance of two unbelieving gipsies. But nothing on earth or in dreams was lovelier than Djouhera.

Accordingly Mahmoud was not mad the day he found this girl by the roadside, but rather cursed with ill-luck; for she was walking with uncovered face so that every one could see her mouth, and was that not enough to bring a man ill-luck? It was quite natural that Mahmoud should carry her off in the first place so as to get possession of her, and should then marry her so as to make her love him, if God willed. But God did not will.

Djouhera gave nothing to Mahmoud but her small unconcerned person. In return she procured everything she wanted, even the divorce of his first wives and the consent of the cadi. She became absolute mistress of her husband and his household. And when she had no more conquests to make she enlarged the sphere of her ambitions, desired to have other men as well.

Who were, then, her lovers ? And who could count them ? Never had the wife of a caid led so debauched a life. In the evenings she went up to the terraces, her face uncovered, her robe open, and if a man saw her she smiled instead of taking to flight. The young men of the tribe found one after the other that she always welcomed any one who happened to be on the spot. She used to take the first man she met to a place near a little door at the bottom of her garden under the low spreading branches of a rose-coloured almond-tree, and she was never detected, for she was so prompt to experience the pleasure of her sex that her tenderest assignations only lasted for the period of one embrace.

Now, one evening, in the midst of one of these fits of furtive excitement, Djouhera fell in love.

The shock of it came upon her like a stirring of puberty, all in a moment, to her great

astonishment. It was a certain Abdallah, a lad as poor as she herself had formerly been, one who slept in summer on the ground and in winter in the mosque, who transported her from voluptuous sensation to veritable passion. She eloped with him, on horseback.

For days and days Mahmoud searched for some trace of them, but without success, for the girl had set off dressed as a man, and rode as hard as a lion-hunter. Desperate as he was, Mahmoud had definitely decided to forgive her rather than lose her, however disgraced he might be by so doing, for his love had scattered to the void every particle of pride he possessed.

But he did not know that he was to see what he did see.

When, at the end of his pursuit, he entered, at last, the room at the inn where he had discovered that Djouhera was, the lovers were so intoxicated with each other that they did not hear his footsteps. Mahmoud cried out twice, " Djouhera ! Djouhera ! " then, without knowing what he was doing, stabbed with a single thrust the young man, the woman beneath him, and the floor below.

The man expired instantly. Djouhera uttered a cry which, though faint, was yet long as a cry of ecstasy. She opened her dying eyes wide, turned her head, and murmured :

"O Mahmoud, God sendeth thee. . . . I prayed God to let me die in the midst of my happiness. 'Tis He who hath armed thy hand. . . . O God, how lovely a night is this my last. . . . Thou, Mahmoud, thou shalt die in pain, in old age and sickness. . . . And I, I pass away in a swoon of bliss. . . . Take thou my blessing, Mahmoud; my blessing, Mahmoud; my blessing. . . ."

Again and again she repeated, right up to her last breath:

"Take my blessing, Mahmoud; my blessing, blessing. . . ."

El Hadji Omar, having finished his story, drew the cutlass for the second time from its sheath. I imagined I saw, indistinctly, reflections of crimson light upon the blade. Then we continued our walk through the long flowered valley. At our feet an Arab urchin was teasing in the dry sand a little black scorpion, furious and convulsed.

BIBLIOTHECA·BODLEIANA·

THE IMPERSONATION OF ESTHER

THE IMPERSONATION OF ESTHER

As I glanced through the red book-catalogue, I perceived half-way down the page the following amazing item :

MANUSCRIPT.—Fragment of a private diary (1836–1839), by Mlle. ESTHER VAN GOBSECK, Netherlandish philosopher. . 50 *fr.*

Interesting document. Contains unpublished matter on Fichte.

The principal romantic types of which the public retains any recollection often acquire a celebrity which surpasses that of historical personages of the same class. However little of a Balzacian the reader may be, he will allow me to presume that he is not unacquainted with Esther Gobseck. If he himself had read this advertisement there cannot be the slightest doubt that he would have manifested the greatest astonishment.

An hour later I was in the shop, and the document was my property. I would not let

them wrap it up, and began to examine it in the cab that took me home.

My acquisition was a sort of account-book, covered with paper ornamented with flowers. On the first page Mademoiselle Gobseck, or rather her namesake, had painted in water-colour in a shy and discreet style two bunches of roses tied with an azure ribbon. A swallow and a butterfly, which were exactly the same size, hovered above this composition, and about the middle of the sheet was elaborately penned :

II*nd* Book of my Diary

Begun 5*th March* 1836 (*My birthday !*)
Finished.....

The catalogue had told the truth. Mademoiselle Gobseck did speak of Fichte ; if not because she had known him (the great Johann-Gottlieb had died in 1814), at any rate because she had had the honour of listening to his son Hermann during a visit to Prussia.

Also, the advertisement had properly described this lady from the Netherlands as a philosopher.

Philosophy and Mademoiselle Gobseck were inseparable, but in the progress of this sympathy between an abstraction and a reality the

former supplied scarcely anything, while the latter believed that she received a great deal. The zeal exhibited by Mademoiselle Gobseck in her evolution from pure to applied reason was equalled only by the obstinate resistance opposed to her efforts by her slow cerebration. The theses and antitheses which confronted one another in her mind did not come into contact anywhere else in the field of human intelligence, and she drew from them syntheses which were chiefly remarkable for the surprise which they did not cause her.

But nothing discouraged her. Mademoiselle Gobseck experienced in regard to philosophy that *Liebe ohne Wiederliebe*, that unrequited passion, which is universally regarded as incomparable, both as feeling and as expression. She loved to regulate her life at each juncture according to her principles, or I should say, according to the principles of her masters. She was careful not to believe in the deceptive criterion of her senses, in the disastrous counsels of her tastes, or in the fallacious babble of her personal opinions. Nothing seemed to her true, legitimate, or credible which was not, to begin with, founded upon some philosophical teaching. This was the price of her mental tranquillity.

The years 1836 and 1837 did not bring about

any notable event in her life. The little town, where she passed days untouched by either sorrows or joys and perfectly free from surprises, supplied a calm horizon to her punctual meditations. In 1838 she visited Prussia, undertaking the journey for purposes of study and improvement, and being spared, apparently, any kind of adventure while making it.

Having set forth this preamble for the reader's information, I shall confine myself to transcribing the final pages of the diary which lies before me, without emphasising in any other way their extraordinary content.

I.

28th March 1839.

Mina came to see me at half-past five this morning. As a rule we never meet before daybreak, although we both get to work early. I went to open the door to her, with a candle in my hand and my hair down my back, a state I do not care to be seen in, but I was doing my hair at the time, and did not expect her.

" What's the matter ? " I said to her.

And she answered : " Oh, Esther ! "

I felt very anxious, made her sit down, and asked her whether she were not ill, whether her

grandfather were worse, or whether perhaps her little sister . . . but it was not herself she was worrying about, it was myself, alas !

She was holding two books in her hand, and she held them out to me, saying : " Read it yourself."

I read : H. DE BALZAC, *The Woman of Breeding*, and then said :

" What is it about ? "

" You may well ask," she returned. " Let me tell you that these two volumes contain three stories, and that the third discusses you in the character of a lost woman."

Her words were so blunt and unexpected that I immediately felt faint and lost consciousness. As soon as I was capable of listening to her again, Mina continued :

" Yes, yes, it's terrible, but you must read it, Esther, you must. The woman is Dutch, I tell you ; she is called Esther, like yourself ; Gobseck, like your father : it's your name, it's you, I say, on every page of this horrible book. If the sale of the hellish thing continues you will be disgraced, girl ; do you understand ? You must act at once, go to Paris, speak to the author. . . ."

" Merciful heavens ! What an awful thing to happen to me ! "

Mina showed me a few pages. The third

story was called "The Torpedo."[1] . . . Esther Gobseck . . . Esther Gobseck. . . . It really was myself, my father's name . . . and in what company, good God, in what houses! Oh dear, what an awful thing! Oh dear, oh dear! I shall never survive it! Oh dear! To think that I have lived as I have done, so circumspectly, for twenty-seven years, and sometimes at the cost of such struggles with my natural inclinations! To think that I have sacrificed everything to fortify this house of purity where my soul was to reside, I thought, my mind to cultivate itself! To think that I have even renounced the felicities of marriage only to see myself at last morally contaminated, sullied, by a Frenchman whom I do not even know, dragged under my own name through the mud of the gutters of Paris. . . . Oh dear, what an awful thing to happen!

What am I to do? What am I to do now? How shall I be received by this novelist if I dare to visit him? Do I even know whether I shall be respected in the house of a man licentious enough to write such infamous things? And then, who can say whether it is not all done for revenge, whether it is not some plot hatched

[1] The first part of *Splendours and Miseries* appeared under this title in October 1838, at the same time as the *Woman of Breeding* and the *House of Nucingen*.—P. L.

against me? I have enemies in the town, although I have never done any harm to anyone. Some of them have a spite against my family, others against my money, others against my learning. And besides . . . besides . . . the damage is already done. . . .

II.

Paris, 12*th April.*

I have come. I really do not know what I am doing here, but I have come. . . . Mina wished me to, for the sake of my honour. She told me me that there was still time to take steps to avoid a more serious misfortune. If only she were with me; if I could make this terrifying visit with her. But I am alone here in this town, where for six months my name has been infamous.

III.

13*th April.*

Where does M. de Balzac live? How can I find out? I went to his publishers this morning and asked this question. An employee said: "Who are you?" and as I dared not say my name he replied grossly: "Oh, a creditor, then?

Oh well, when one is asked Balzac's address, one says one does not know it."

I went away. At my hotel they did not even know this gentleman's name. He is not as celebrated as Mina told me he was.

And yet his novels are in all the bookshops. This evening I saw *The Torpedo* in the Palais-Royal, and I fled, hiding my face. I always feel that the passers-by are staring at me, that they recognise me in the streets.

IV.

15*th April.*

At last I know. Monsieur de Balzac : aux Jardies, Sèvres, on the way to Ville-d'Avray, after the railway arches.

I shall go to-morrow morning early, to be sure of finding him at home.

Oh, shall I have enough courage ?

V.

April 16*th, midday.*

I do not think they were deceiving me, but what a curious man this writer is !

At seven o'clock I took the Sèvres omnibus at the Carrousel, and had myself put down at the Ville-d'Avray arches.

I found the house without difficulty. It

stands half-way up a hill, below a park, facing south, with an admirable view stretched before it. Everywhere trees, forests, and valleys. The morning mist was so fresh and sweet round about me that I felt I was full of strength and decision to be firm when I rang at the gate.

A servant lets me in :

" Monsieur de Balzac ? "

" Monsieur has just gone to bed."

" Is he ill ? "

" No, Madame. Monsieur goes to bed every day at about eight in the morning. Monsieur works at night."

Really, I do not believe he was deceiving me. In Paris one sees few who lead a normal existence. The French are all so queer.

" Madame could return at six in the evening," the servant told me, " if Madame really wishes to see Monsieur."

So I shall return, but this day of waiting upsets my nerves and deprives me of all my energy. Now I am afraid, I am exhausted with impatience and apprehension.

VI.

16*th April, evening.*

If to-day is not a dream, I shall either remain mad or shall die from it. I do not myself under-

stand how I have the courage to write an account of it after having lived through it ; but it does not matter, I write mechanically, without seeing, with a buzzing in my head which robs me of my reason.

I went to see this man at six o'clock, I think —I do not know now. Ah, why did Mina make me read those pages of which I might, perhaps, have been ignorant ! Why does fate hang greedily over my head ? Ah, poor me ! poor me !

The servant asked me whom to announce. I gave my name ; I hoped that thus Monsieur de Balzac would know immediately what was the purpose of my action.

For five minutes I remained alone in an antechamber in which there were no seats. The four walls were white, and on the plaster was written in charcoal : *This is a fresco by Delacroix. This is a bas-relief by Rude. This is a Gobelins tapestry.* I do not know what else. It occurred to my mind that I was in the house of a madman ; but no, it is not he that is mad. It is I that am mad, this evening. He is right, he is always right.

A door opened, I took a few steps, I saw no one. And suddenly a terrible voice called out to me from the end of the room :

" Who has given you permission, Mademoiselle, to take the name of Esther Gobseck ? "

Oh, that voice; it still echoes in my poor demented mind.

I raised my eyes. A man stood before me, stout, ugly, and yet magnificent, with long straight hair such as I have seen the Prussian students wear. He was on his feet behind a desk, where there were quite ten thousand sheets of paper, piled up in wilder confusion than the waves of the sea; and from beyond that ocean he examined me with black pupils whose brilliance shone full upon me, even though he had his back to the light.

"Oh, Monsieur," I murmured, ready to faint. The words died upon my lips.

He struck the desk with his fist, and repeated again and again: "Who authorises you? Who authorises you?"

Then, although I do not know how I had the strength to do so, I succeeded in murmuring: "Monsieur, I *am* Esther Gobseck."

He threw out his chest to its full extent, crushed me with a look which I could not bear to meet, and burst into a roar of laughter which shook the walls like the concussion of a bomb.

"You!" said he. "You! Esther Gobseck!"

I bent my head.

"Mademoiselle," he continued in a calmer

tone, " this jest of yours is detestable. If you desire to hide your identity from me you are at liberty to do so. Take a pseudonym or don't mention your name, but don't steal some one else's ! A name is the most sacred property which a human being can possess."

With a trembling hand I opened my pocket-book, and handed him my passport containing my official description.

" Please examine it, Monsieur. The documents are signed by the burgomaster."

He read it through, read it a second time, said over and over again : " Strange . . . curious . . . singular . . ."

Then he stared at me for a long time till, pale as I had been, I blushed furiously.

" The thing is in order," he observed at last. " There is nothing more to be said. You are Esther Gobseck . . . extraordinary as it may seem."

He crumpled up a sheet of paper, and threw it into a basket, then sat down, and turning round suddenly towards me said : " That being the case, you will give me at once some information which I require. What furniture had you in your bedroom at the time you joined the Opéra as a junior ballet-girl ? "

" A junior ballet-girl ! " I exclaimed indignantly. " But, Monsieur, I have never been

a junior ballet-girl! I am a Fichtean philosopher."

He lost his temper, and struck the table for the second time.

"Mademoiselle, I tell you once more, this facetiousness of yours is out of place. One thing or the other: either you are not Esther Gobseck, as I thought at first, or if you are Esther Gobseck you are 'the Torpedo.'"

"The Torpedo; I?" I stammered in bewilderment.

"But of course! And the Torpedo is not a Fichtean philosopher!"

After a pause he got up, pointed in my direction, and made the astounding observations which I shall now try to write down, if I still have the strength. The authority of his tone was such that I did not interrupt him for a single moment.

"You were born in the year 1805; your mother was Sarah van Gobseck, your father unbeknown. The former, who had been ruined by Maxime de Trailles, was murdered by an officer in a house at Palais-Royal, in the month of December 1818. At this date you were thirteen years old, and already for several years, under the direction of your mother Sarah, you had led the unhappy life of a young prostitute under the age of puberty. It was at that time

you joined the Opéra. Several patrons of the place supported you, among whom was Clément des Lupeaulx. It would be very vital to me to know what furniture you had in your bedroom at this period, but as you will not tell me, let that pass. In 1823 there was a scheme to send you to Issoudun to the aged Jean-Jacques Rouget, who was on the point of marrying his cook, and whom it was desired, by your agency, to divert from such an unsuitable union. The project was, however, never realised. I pass over the financial embarrassments which depressed you in your eighteenth year, embarrassments which compelled you to have recourse to a disgraceful expedient. At the end of this year, 1823, you met Lucien de Rubempré by chance at the theatre; you entertained him at your apartment in the rue de Langlade. You adored him, he loved you, and I need not inform you how, through the medium of Vautrin, the baron Nucingen made both your fortunes, yours and Lucien's together. Now, listen carefully."

I listened, overwhelmed with horror.

"Nucingen is odious to you, my girl. He is thirty-eight years older than you are. He is antipathetic and even repulsive to you. You endure him with growing aversion. Listen carefully: on the thirteenth of May, after a

reception given in his honour, you will swallow a black pearl, containing a Javanese poison, and you will die immediately. That is the fate I have reserved for you."

Alas ! I was trembling like a leaf.

" How do you know, Monsieur ? " I gasped.

" How do I know ? " he shouted. " What a ridiculous question ! Why, I created you ! "

VII.

17th April.

I am slowly recovering my reason.

I see it all now. The situation is clear. There is a conflict of two opposed certainties, just that, and nothing more.

I believe (I *believe*) that I am twenty-seven years old, that I was born at Maestricht in 1812, that I bear my father's name, and that I have always lived an honourable life ; but actually what proof have I of all this ? None.

No rational principle, no truth of experience, no sense-datum supports such an interpretation of my existence. There are, then, only two presentations to my consciousness which I can investigate in order to obtain an adequate understanding of my past : my own memory or

the testimony of others. Now in the case under consideration these presentations are mutually incompatible. It therefore remains to determine which of the two must prevail over the other.

Well, I still feel myself too weak, mentally, to accord the supremacy to my personal certainty. The man who spoke to me yesterday dominates me, I cannot doubt it. To suppose his mind inferior to my own would be an obvious piece of folly on my part. His perspicacity has clarified my distracted judgment. I have lived my days in a state of hallucination of which I was not even conscious and which, by a phenomenon which is inexplicable, provided me with fictitious memories at the very moment I lost those which were true.

The duplication of my personality is so complete that I cannot discover the precise date when the metamorphosis of my self took place, for I have no means of doing so but a memory which is vitiated through and through. I feel myself living in the state of mind which is proper to dreams, accepting as probable events which are chimerical, together with a whole long series of memories which Monsieur de Balzac, by his formal testimony, reduces to non-existence.

VIII.

18th April.

So, I am one of those women. . . . Heavens ! How little I suspected it ! I did not see the truth. But it would be madness to deny it, madness ! The evidence of it is corroborated by the intervention of my own sensations. I am not physically pure ; my chastity is only intellectual ; I have the imperious senses of a courtesan ; my body is devoured by an internal fire. How can I deny it, alas ! And how deny all my frailties ! And all the frailties of my will !

IX.

19th April.

This evening I went out to fulfil my destiny ; but what a strange metamorphosis is mine ! I have totally forgotten all my previous habits. The mere thought of returning to them terrifies me, and my timidity stifles me at the very first word.

A stranger whom I ventured to accost took me, no doubt, for a beggar, because he tossed me fifty centimes and did not invite me to follow him. Perhaps I have not the right

clothes . . . perhaps not the right voice either.

. . . . . .

X.

5th May.

The end is coming, the end of my miserable destiny. I know well, though I dare not write it, I know only too well the reason why, this next thirteenth of May, as Monsieur de Balzac foretold, I shall pass from life to death by swallowing a black pearl . . .

A black pearl, containing a Javanese poison. . . . Where can I find it, this black pearl, which has eternity within it ? I go from shop to shop, to chemists, to herbalists. . . . I am offered poisons, but not that one. . . . (Ah, God, the horror of life, and how sweet death will be to me !). . . . I must have a Javanese poison, a Javanese poison in a black pearl. . . . Monsieur de Balzac ordains it so.

. . . . . .

(The manuscript ends here. Forty-one blank pages follow.)

THE CONFESSION OF MADEMOISELLE X.

THE CONFESSION OF MADEMOISELLE X.

The Reverend Father de Couézy disliked being asked certain questions, even in a perfectly serious way, on the subject of his experiences in the confessional. But scarcely a day passed without his being cross-examined on such points by some one.

He might have been called a society man, provided that the epithet did not involve any reflection on his character, for he was seen almost as often at church as in a drawing-room; and if there were, in fact, anything in his conduct to which exception could be taken, one must remember that a mass is a shorter ceremony than a call or a dinner. The Reverend Father de Couézy was a thoroughly religious man.

The paramount trait of his plump and keen physiognomy was, in the first place, intelligence, and, more specifically, perspicacity. When he observed any newcomer, his little eyes slowly traversed the entire figure of the person who was to be made known to him; then his eyelids

closed with a peculiar fluttering movement, resembling that of lips murmuring the phrase : " Right, that's enough, I understand the sort you are."

The whole of Paris went to be confessed by him. Ladies in throngs selected him as adviser to their consciences, which are invariably, with good reason, in a state of alarm. He was known to be enough of a man of the world not to send a penitent to Rome if she had only relapsed peacefully into an adulterous relation which was perfectly free from disturbance ; and at the same time his indulgence was sufficiently limited to make it impossible for any repentance, however trifling, which might be laid at his feet, to have an absolute assurance of being pardoned in advance. When ladies consent to sin, they would not thank you for telling them that their faults are non-existent.

Well ! When the Reverend Father de Couézy, on one of his visits, left the drawing-room sofa for the leathern arm-chair of the foggy smoking-room, when he slipped unostentatiously into the midst of masculine conversation, it so happened that his presence immediately transformed the surface of the talk without altering its basis, except that a certain reticence entered. He was commonly regarded as a purveyor of information, although he indig-

nantly refused to play the part. The tactful, in their attempts to obtain confidential communications from him by leading such observations imperceptibly from the general to the particular, used to begin with the following phrase, or something like it: "Now, Father, you know this age better than any one; what do you think of its morality?"

Then he would exclaim, waving his hands: "What a question! I can tell you nothing, nothing at all! We are not supposed to derive anything from any one confession but the experience necessary for an adequate understanding of those which follow, and thus to acquire a just, or perhaps I should rather say, a judicious outlook on difficult cases. Moreover, if we are forbidden to reveal any particular confession, even an anonymous one, still less ought we to summarise in public all the avowals we hear, extract their quintessence, and pass it on to curious minds on the pretext of philosophising."

On the day on which I heard him utter this sentence one of us caught up its final word.

"But suppose such philosophising were good for the soul?"

"It can only be disastrous to it, Monsieur; as all moral systems are which rely on descriptions of the errors to be avoided. Man is only completely demoralised in countries which

suffer from a superfluity of moralists. To declare the prevalence of a vice with the object of inspiring horror of it is to forget, in the first place, that your listener preserves a recollection of the example you give him, which recollection will serve him as an excuse if he falls into the aberration in question. Accordingly, I shall be very careful not to tell you what I know in regard to the morals of my time, for your own would be the worse for it, and I should be more distressed over that than yourselves."

We shyly agreed that the sentiments expressed by the Reverend Father de Couézy were admirable. However, the same voice as before persisted :

" Not every one is so reserved as you are, Father. I recently met a Jurist who has been vicar of Sainte Clotilde, quite near here, for two years. He is appalled at what he has heard during his two years confessing the inhabitants of that district. Appalled. He makes no secret of it. On all sides he finds adultery, seduction, abortion, infanticide, poisonings of father or husband . . . terrible things happen in family circles, and no one knows anything of them outside the confessional. Every budding scandal is suppressed while it is still in incubation. There are others which are acknowledged, welcomed, and even imposed at will. We can

all see spreading everywhere, like a plague, a vice which was almost unknown in former days among the upper classes. . . . You know which one I mean, Father ? "

" Oh, there are many such," answered the Reverend Father de Couézy quietly. " I don't know exactly which one you refer to."

" Incest. Yes, really ; I mean actually that. Which of us ever heard incest discussed twenty years ago ? When I was young we only knew of its existence from the Bible. If a man had injured his sister or his daughter, he would have been considered a lunatic and confined as such, the penal code not anticipating the case. And to-day, positively, it is the fashionable failing. There is nothing else heard now in the confessional, if my information is correct. A girl's first lover is her brother. We are going back to the age of the Ptolemies. The brother initiates, instructs, perverts, seduces, is accepted as a paramour. If by any chance there are only girls in the children's room, their crime becomes more complicated or more simple, I leave you the choice of the term. . . ."

The Reverend Father remained silent.

" Come, let us have an opinion," repeated the speaker. " Am I rightly informed ? You confess the whole of the rue de Varennes, do you think I have blackened the picture of contem-

porary morals ? In the matter of incest, especially, have I slandered the girls of to-day ? Do they make such avowals, I ask, such confessions ? "

The Reverend Father de Couézy set his elbows back on the arms of his chair, with a very subtle smile faintly indicated about his eyes ; it was addressed, apparently, to himself. . . . Then he observed in a very low voice : " Yes, and they boast about it too."

When he raised his eyelids again the Reverend Father perceived that he had not been understood. Our expressions were those of people who expect a serious reply and are met with a jest. A little hurt, he proceeded to expound his meaning :

" If I were speaking, in this place, to confessors, I would need to say no more. My thought would have been sufficiently well comprehended ; but it is natural that you should have no idea of all the intuition that we have to employ to discriminate between the false and the true, considering on the one hand the reservations people make in regard to the facts which they conceal, and on the other hand their exaggerations in regard to the errors they submit."

" Exaggerations ? "

" They are very frequent. . . . You must,

in the first place, clearly understand that the confessional is only mysterious and formidable to the parishioners who avoid it. The members of the congregation, who come every Saturday and kneel upon its little bench, end by acquiring a familiarity with it of which you have no suspicion. We do try to put them at their ease, of course, we have to do that; if we did not encourage them we should never be able to find out anything; but often enough it happens that our affability defeats our object, and I will tell you how that occurs."

The Reverend Father de Couézy lowered his voice: "At eleven years of age young girls begin to come to us. They confess, at first, their small sins—temper, greed, or laziness; then, all of a sudden, at about thirteen or fourteen, they reach the age when they commit a new sin, the avowal of which causes them the greatest embarrassment. Some can never bring themselves to tell us about it. Next, as on the one side there is no instance of any of them reforming in this respect before marriage, and as on the other side they soon understand that an unmerited absolution places them in a more serious state of impenitence than if they simply remained impenitent, they struggle for a year or two, then desert the confessional: that type is lost for the Church. . . . As against these we

have a number of girls who brace themselves to the ordeal with a facility which amazes us. In its origin this is not immodesty on their part, far from it; it is the result of piety, humility, submissiveness, mortification. But, even so, all these feelings soon become transformed. Imperceptibly the actual avowal itself comes to be a pleasant habit. . . . In cases where there is complicity in the sin, if it can give occasion for the story of an adventure, if a girl friend, a boy cousin, or a male dancer is involved, interminable narratives result, and the more we repeat the admonition, 'My dear child, no details, please!' the more they answer: 'Father, I must explain everything, otherwise you won't understand!'"

We looked at each other without a word.

"Well, now, this is the point I wanted to make. Certain girls of an excessively nervous type are immoderate in their self-accusations. They tell us more than actually happened. Perhaps, subconsciously, they regard as equally real the sins they have on their souls and those they have in their heads. They assign themselves vices that they dare not undertake. They reveal to us as having occurred in detail, on the sofa in some little drawing-room, scenes which did, in fact, commence there, but ended only in their own imaginations. . . . That is

the kind of thing that newly appointed confessors have to be informed of, or we should have them too rigorous in their judgments of the customs of the age. Of the tales that we are told, the worst ones are 'rigged.' Once more, then, the confessional is not an extra-terrestrial place; there, as elsewhere, people boast about everything, even about the evil they have not done."

The Reverend Father threw himself back in his chair with the air of a man who has just settled a dispute.

However, we were not convinced. The speaker's previous adversary took it upon himself to notify the fact:

"I have no doubt, Father, that you are an extremely expert psychologist, and better qualified than any of us to fathom people's secret thoughts. Men whose vision can penetrate in that way to what lies behind the pupil of the eye possess a gift which is as invaluable as it is rare, and yet there are limits to its operation even in cases where it exists in its completest form. What is your fundamental resource when you unmask a falsehood? Merely your own judgment. There are neither proofs nor witnesses to be had in the confessional. Can you be certain that during the course of those solemn confessions, in which

you do not believe, your judgment escapes the influence of a preconceived optimism ? Don't you ever imagine that such and such a scene is apocryphal in consequence of its improbability ? The physicians whose business is psychopathy lay down the axiom that everything is possible. You do not appear to be of their opinion."

The Reverend Father shook his head vaguely, with a gesture which implied : " That is not the point." Then, after a deliberate pause, he said simply : " I have proofs."

We all asked him, with our eyes, what they were. He came to a sudden decision, and crossed his legs.

" After all, I think I may tell the story," said he. " Just now I pleaded the inviolability of the secrets entrusted to me. But I once received a confession from a woman which I can reveal without committing sin ; you will agree with me later on."

He lifted his head, leaning it against the back of his chair, with a smile which made the circuit of our faces in a faintly complacent manner, as though he were taking account of the curiosity he had aroused. Finally he began his narrative:

" At a period which I shall not specify, I was taking duty in a Parisian parish which I shall not name either ; it will be sufficient for you to know that my church lay very far from St.

Thomas's, and that my flock was composed of poor people. One day, as I was awaiting, in front of the confessional, the time at which my penitents were due to make their appearance, I saw advancing towards me a very elegantly dressed personage, whose elegance was, however, of a sober character, and who was certainly not a parishioner of mine; there are certain hats which are hardly ever worn except between the Invalides and Palais-Bourbon. She had the face and figure of a girl of twenty-eight; in any case I need not describe her. At my invitation she knelt down and, after a preamble in which she informed me that her confession would be a most serious one, told me the following story:

"From the age of twelve she had avoided taking the sacrament. At seventeen, while she was travelling alone with her father in the interior of Italy, she arrived one evening at a crowded hotel in Pisa, where they were compelled to take a single room, with two beds, between them: the occurrence was disastrous to their virtue. Thenceforward for the rest of their tour they did not register any longer as 'Monsieur and Mademoiselle' but as 'Monsieur and Madame,' in order to be free, wherever they went, to occupy the same room. Up to this point of the narrative there is nothing out of the way about it, as you will admit."

There were several exclamations.

" On their return," continued the Reverend Father de Couézy imperturbably, " the situation remained the same, in greater secrecy, no doubt, for the girl's mother was still living, but without any kind of interruption. Under the pretext of taking long walks together the guilty couple went to a hired apartment, where the error of their ways could escape observation. I pass over, naturally, the details of these misdeeds, although the penitent did not spare me the description of any of them. But, suddenly, the father died. . . . In the course of the next two years the moral health of the girl became seriously impaired. Her senses, fully awakened as they were, were restrained with difficulty under the supervision of her mother. Several projected marriages came to nothing. Nervous disorder supervened, accompanied and followed by positive suffering. One night, incapable of further resistance to the temptation of sin, she rose, entered the bedroom of her younger brother, aged fourteen, and without employing any kind of stratagem or pretext, in a dumb frenzy, took advantage of him in his bed. She related this terrible scene to me, the violence of it still evident in her voice, told me everything, struggles, refusals, prayers, the child's Christian resistance, his inability, in spite of all, to control

his sensations, his final surrender. For fifteen days she kept him in subjection, less hostile but tormented by a growing remorse, and in the end the boy's first confession rescued him from her for good. The more she begged him to give in, the more obstinate he became, locking himself in his room and threatening to tell everything. Then, gentlemen, she poisoned him. . . . Getting her information from a process described in a popular serial, she obtained a slow poison, leaving no trace, and painless, but destroying the sufferer by inches. She saw her victim go into a decline and pass away under her own unforgiving eyes. Every day she gave him, mentally, the choice between crime and the grave, without revealing whose hand was raising the stone, and at last let it fall upon him."

. . . . . .

The eye of the priest travelled over our faces with a tragic glitter in it, remained for some time bright with horror, then, still looking straight at us, took on an expression of open amusement.

For our own part, as we listened to the story, we had forgotten, right up to the end, that the confession with which it dealt was suspected of being untrue. The tone of the narrator had been so positively affirmative that we had lost

sight of the occasion and the object of the tale.

"Was there any truth in all that?" asked some one.

"Not one word. Nothing, absolutely nothing, not one scene, not one detail, not one person, not one fact, nothing, literally nothing, really what we mean when we say nothing. . . . Six months after receiving this confession, I left the parish for another; the girl's mother became a penitent of mine, and I myself became an intimate friend of the family. Such coincidences do occur, do they not? I learned successively that Mademoiselle X. had never travelled in Italy; that her father died when she was two years old; that she had always been the only daughter; and, lastly, that her reputation was unimpeachable. So, not only was the story false, but it was physically impossible that it should be true in either of its sections, since neither accomplice had ever existed. So the whole piece of fiction that you have just heard, the first incest, the second, the hotel at Pisa, the apartment in Paris, the bereavement, the scene of violence, the child's confession, the struggle, the poison, all, together with the thousand and one details that I have not mentioned, all, I repeat, was born in the brain of a Christian virgin who did not even go to

dances, to such an extent did she shun temptation."

The Reverend Father de Couézy rose, and, terminating his lengthy visit with a piece of Latin and a piece of sly humour, said :

"*Lasciva pagina, vita proba.* With those four words, so perfectly explicit, it is possible to paint the moral portrait of a girl in her teens."

THE STRANGE ADVENTURE OF MADAME ESQUOLLIER

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I

When Madame Esquollier had left the Opera, followed by her young sister, Armande, and was seated in her closed car, she asked her : " Well, what was your impression ? "

" In the first place, physically, he is delightful ! "

" Good. You need not go on. You are caught, my dear. Kiss me. It's settled."

They embraced each other tenderly ; but Armande protested :

" No, no ! You're in too much of a hurry, Madeleine. What does it matter whether I like him or not? He doesn't like me. He spent a whole hour criticising me, while I, like a little fool, did my best to deserve it."

" What do you mean ? "

" It seems my frock is too pretty. It's more suitable for an actress than for a young girl."

" Impudent young rascal ! "

" That's not all, dear. He thought it strange

that I should be taken to the Opera on a ballet-day. His father and mother were introduced to each other (from a distance) one evening when *Zampa* and *Rendez-vous Bourgeois* were being presented. Those, at least, were respectable plays, he considered. Unluckily, I told him that the subject of *Zampa* was rape, and he stared at me as if he were being suffocated. I also told him that *Rendez-vous Bourgeois* was a lesson to young girls in the art of introducing gentlemen into their bedrooms, and he turned quite pale."

"But why——"

"I don't know. I was a mass of nerves. I felt that he was in love with me, and I took a delight in scandalising him so that he might continue to love me with all my faults. But I think I went too far."

"Whatever did you say to him?"

"I showed him, in a corner of the stage, the two little Italian girls you told me of the other day, and I told him, as a secret——"

"That it was a romance?"

"Yes."

"That was very indiscreet of you."

"Wasn't it?" sighed the girl.

"What did he say then?"

"He asked me, between whom."

Madeleine burst out laughing behind her

gloves, and finally announced, without troubling herself about her sister's feelings :

" My child, that boy is a perfect jewel. I shan't let you miss the chance of such a husband. You must marry him. He's a treasure."

She broke off abruptly :

" Good heavens ! We've been travelling for twenty minutes. Which way is he taking us ? "

Armande rubbed the moisture from the window and said : " I can't see anything. It's pitch-dark."

" What ? Pitch-dark in the Champs-Elysées ? "

She leaned forward in her turn, strained her eyes into the darkness, and perceived dimly the greyish surface of a road, but no houses.

" I—I don't know where we are," she stammered. " We've left Paris—Alexandre must be mad—we must stop him."

With a quick movement she touched the button of the electric bell.

But scarcely had the shrill vibration of the sound broken the silence, when a rapid double click was heard from the driver's seat, and the car plunged forward, with a hiss like that of a huge serpent, at top speed.

II

The shock threw the two sisters back into their seats, and at the same moment they both exclaimed : " Good heavens ! "

Madeleine bent her head and looked through the mirror in front at the driver's seat.

" Good heavens ! " she cried again. " It's not Alexandre ! "

" What ? "

" We're kidnapped. It's not Alexandre driving."

" I'm going to jump out."

" Armande, don't be silly. We're doing forty. You'd be killed."

If they had not been together, both would have jumped, all the same, but through a feeling akin to that experienced at the edge of an abyss, when the peril of our companions makes us more giddy than our own danger, Armande and Madeleine both thought at the same time : " I could jump, but she would be killed."

Each sought and clasped the other's hands, and held them tightly enlaced upon the leather cushions.

The speed of the car continued to be excessive. Crossing a small channel-stone, an abrupt shock flattened the springs, two of the wheels raced in

the air, and for a brief minute the whole vehicle wavered, jolted, and staggered, then the car went on at the same rapid and uniform rate, like a river that has broken its dam.

Motionless at the back of the coupé, the two sisters, frozen with terror, had fallen silent. Madeleine, as became a woman who had nothing to learn of life and of mankind, was thinking : " If it's only *that* ! If they don't kill us ! "

Armande had not even the support of the lesser evil hoped for by her sister. She was not so innocent as not to know precisely what was in store for her, and the poor child was going mad with horror. Ah, she had formed so poetic and at the same time, so clear an idea, of the first love that was to come to her ; she had dreamed for so many nights of what she meant it to be, so as to keep it worthy of her proud and sentimental little soul ! For so many nights she had sworn to cherish at least that, even at the price of scorning all the rest ! She had already caught a glimpse of her ideal in the white mist of a delightful dream on the eve of her betrothal, and now all was going to be plunged into the dark depths of this dreadful adventure.

" Ah ! " she cried, all of a sudden. " Madeleine ! I'd rather jump ! It's a better end——"

But at the same moment the car slowed

down, turned, ran under an archway and through into a great empty courtyard, and stopped before a flight of steps.

Madeleine murmured : " Too late, little one."

A man of about forty, bald, perfectly dressed, and obsequiously polite, opened the door, and bowed to them.

Armande screamed : " Kill me, please, kill me ! " and added, with childish inconsequence, " but don't come near me ! "

" Mademoiselle," returned the unknown, " I shall not come near you in any way, but please follow me, we have not much time. It is useless to call out ; the house stands alone in the middle of a forest."

Madeleine emerged first. Armande followed, but was so faint with apprehension that she missed the steps, and had to be assisted. The fitful light of the moon, which had just risen, turned to silver the evening-cloaks, the two pallid profiles, the carefully dressed heads. They went up the steps and entered the house.

The whole building was lit up. Their unknown host, preceding his victims, crossed a flagged hall, two drawing-rooms, and a smaller apartment. He made his way along a corridor which seemed to go all round the mansion, and confused their sense of its conformation. Finally he opened a last door, signed to the two

ladies to precede him, and closed the door upon them without entering himself.

In the room where they found themselves, an ancient dame was standing, dressed completely in black, and she also bowed to them.

" Madame, Mademoiselle."

Then, without further preamble, her dry tones enunciated :

" Kindly allow me to remove your dresses."

" To—to——" stammered Madeleine. She did not finish the phrase. The old lady had already unfastened the clasp of the cloak, drawn the pins from the waistbelt, and let the skirt down over the first petticoat. With the same dexterity, her thin fingers undid the hooks of the bodice, and the shoulder-pieces slipped down the delicate powdered arms.

" You also, Mademoiselle," she continued in the same dry tone.

Armande, who was already pale, became livid. She cast a despairing look at her sister, who had thrown herself upon a settee, shaken from head to foot by a nervous convulsion. Without resistance, strength, or courage, she abandoned herself like a dead woman to the despoiling hands. The old lady, carrying the two dresses over her left arm, went out quickly and locked the door behind her.

The girl had remained standing. She fell on

her knees before a chair, burst into sobs, and began to pray. She prayed almost aloud, weeping into her clasped hands, with a terrified, stammering, and pitiable earnestness. She invoked the three saints who had always protected her, promised candles to one, alms to another, an altar-vessel from a good jeweller's to the third. She took an oath to attend mass for nine days, to fast throughout Lent without asking for dispensation, and made a vow, if she should marry, not to deceive her husband for the whole of the first year, right up to the three hundred and sixty-fifth day, whatever might happen.

Time passed. The clock in the room struck four.

Writhing on her settee, Madeleine flung up her stiffened arms, and struck the seat with her clenched fists.

"I can't stand it! I can't stand it! It's horrible, this waiting! I shall be dead with fright when they come! What do the brutes want us for, then? Why don't they come? Why don't they come?"

Then an access of tenderness threw them into each other's arms.

"My darling! My Armande, my little Armande! My dear little sister! Don't be afraid, sweetheart, I'll protect you, I promise.

I don't care about myself, but I won't have them touch you, and they shan't. I'll cover you with my own body——"

There was the sound of a step in the passage beyond.

"My God, my God, here they are!"

III

The key was inserted in the lock with so harsh a sound that Armande gave a shriek of anguish, as if the assault upon her young virginity had already begun.

However, when the door opened, there was revealed merely the old lady, carrying the two dresses on her arm.

The others recoiled to the farther end of the room.

"Madame, Mademoiselle," said the dry tones, "be so good as to allow me to dress you."

"What?" exclaimed Madeleine. "But I—but then——"

The septuagenarian took no notice of the stupefaction of the ladies, which probably did not surprise her. Wonderfully skilful in the fastening of hooks, as she had already shown herself to be experienced in the undoing of them, she replaced the dresses as she had found

them, arranged the openings at the neck, fluffed out the laces, drew down the folds of the skirts, and left the room with a bow.

In her place, the unknown re-entered. He was in evening dress, bare-headed and gloved ; perhaps a little more like a butler than a man about town, but then the difference is sometimes so small ! Let us say that he had the appearance of a business man who goes into society.

" Ladies," said he, with composure, " I had at first intended to have you driven back home with a word or two of apology, but without any further explanation of your mysterious kidnapping. But feminine curiosity is an element with which one cannot reckon too closely. If I do not tell you my secret, you will try to discover it, and in ruining yourselves, you will also ruin me. My interest is then to tell you so that you may proceed no further in the matter."

He closed his eyes, reopened them, and continued, with a smile :

" You ladies are wearing, to-night, the two prettiest frocks in Paris."

" Ah, heavens ! " exclaimed Madeleine, striking her forehead. " Then, that was it ! "

" One of my customers, a young foreign lady, saw these two frocks on Monday at the Opera. She wanted two exactly the same at any price. I could, of course, have copied their outward

cut and the elegance, which was peculiar to them, without the aid of any stratagem, for the glance of a dressmaker photographs a bodice with the precision of the lens of a camera, but your dresses are covered with two embroidered designs of a fantastic quality, which absolutely eludes even a professional decorator. It was impossible to reproduce them without spreading the skirt and the bodice, *so as to eliminate the folds*, upon a cutting-out table. I had, therefore, ladies, to obtain the dresses in question."

He took a chair by the back, tilted it towards him, and continued :

" The simplest way was to ask your maid for them, bribing her with an appropriate sum. I certainly thought of it, but, unfortunately for me, the girl is stupid. In the event of discovery and legal proceedings (one has to foresee every eventuality) she would never have resisted a five minutes' examination by counsel. Had I used her, I should have been arrested with her, and that would have been a sad end for an artist of my standing. I preferred to take my chance once for all, and to kidnap the robes and their contents at the same time. That, at least, was worthy of such a man as myself."

The two sisters, struck dumb by such audacity, looked at each other without uttering a word.

" Accordingly, I bribed your chauffeur, and put my own in his place. The exchange was effected in the congestion of the Rue Auber during a block which I had foreseen, and which always occurs as people leave the theatres. The same devoted servant (I am speaking of my own now) will drive you home. Two ladies may very easily return from a dance at six in the morning without causing any astonishment. You will not, therefore, be at all compromised. On the other hand, your most obvious interest is to maintain absolute secrecy in the matter, for I need not tell you that your version of the story would be repeated by your friends—with a certain flavour."

Madeleine did not seem to hear the insult. She was overcome with joy at their escape from this awful nightmare, and, besides, felt reduced to a mere figurehead before the assurance of this extraordinary man.

She leaned towards Armande.

" It's a providence that my husband is away. What a piece of luck that shooting expedition was ! "

" Shooting expedition ? " said the dress-maker. " I believe my own information is more reliable. It was indispensable that your respected husband should be absent on the night of the execution of our plan. An ex-

tremely fashionable person fell in love with him——"

"What?"

The other finished with a bow.

"That was the most expensive item of all."

IV

The next morning Madame Esquollier did not, in fact, speak of her adventure, for she slept until two o'clock, worn out with fatigue and the stress of various emotions. But her best friend, Madame de Lalette, having by that time forced an entrance, she felt an irresistible impulse to unbosom herself in the sympathetic presence of the other, and so revealed the dramatic episode of the previous night.

When she had told the whole story to the very last word, she took both her friend's hands and made her swear to tell no one, explaining at length that she could not apply to the law, owing to the fact that the investigation of the matter would involve her certainly in ridicule, and perhaps in scandal; that, as she was not going to prosecute, it was better to hush it up altogether and not to tell a single soul what had happened, for people would understand still less why she did not take proceedings if the story became public. In short, she counted absolutely

on the discretion of her dear Yvonne. Madame de Lalette gave the required promise.

Unfortunately, the story was too good to be kept to herself. Women only respect trifling confidences in the hope that they may be trusted, one day, to hear confessions of real importance, and to spread them abroad. The same evening Madame de Lalette happened to be at a house where twelve of her friends, each as discreet as herself (which was saying a good deal) were assembled. Under the seal of deadly secrecy she narrated the story of the strange kidnapping.

The tale was cunningly told. Not for a moment did she allow her hearers to divine that the adventure was to end in comedy. From the beginning the effect was gripping. Cries of "How horrible!" arose. Each pictured herself carried off in the phantom car by the mysterious chauffeur. The impression made was so deep that it persisted right to the end of the story: a chorus of indignation greeted the last speech, that of the wicked dressmaker.

"Really," said one, "one can no longer be surprised at anything."

"Kidnapped from the Opera!"

"Paris is becoming impossible!"

"We live in the midst of brigands!"

An old maid did not fail to observe that the

fortunate conclusion of the adventure was due to a miracle, for if little Armande had not made her vows, things would have turned out quite differently for her.

Another declared that she would not dare to go out now without an escort, after sunset, and that she would always keep a stiletto in her bodice, a poisoned stiletto, with the word "Muerte" engraved on the blade, since real life was now melodrama.

Madame de Lalette was the only one who said nothing. She added no commentary on the tale, now that it was told.

"Well, Yvonne, what do you think of it?" inquired a shrill voice.

She made a little grimace of indifference.

"I? Oh, well, I think—I think——"

"Well?"

"I think it was a great deal of trouble to take, to explain getting home at seven in the morning."

At that there was a simultaneous explosion of wild hilarity from the twelve friends, and in the midst of the exclamations, the laughter, the shrieks, and the clapping of hands, was heard the piercing note of the shrill voice, chirping delightedly: "Oh, dearest, what a wicked woman you are!"

AN ASCENT OF THE VENUSBERG

AN ASCENT OF THE VENUSBERG

In the month of August 1891, after hearing at Bayreuth *Tannhäuser*, *Tristran*, and, for the ninth time, *Parsifal*, I lived for a fortnight or so in the green valley of Marienthal, near the ancient city of Eisenach.

The room which I occupied had a window opening westwards on to the heights of the Wartburg, and had a view, to the east, of Mount Hoersel, called by priests and poets, in the old days, the Venusberg. The actual Star of Wolfram was visible in the clear sky of that Wagnerian countryside.

I was at that time of such a sinful disposition that after I had once leaned from the western window, looking towards the towers of Luther, I never had any idea of respecting the experience, even in dreams. It was the Venusberg that attracted me.

Amid all the neighbouring mountains which, in their clothing of black fir-trees or damp meadows, spread a pattern like a garment upon the earth, the Venusberg alone was bare, and looked exactly like the swelling breast of a

woman. Sometimes the floating red gleams of twilight gave it the purple tinges of human flesh. It quivered; positively seemed to be alive at certain hours of the evening; and at such times one would have said that Thuringia, like a goddess reclining in a tunic of green and black, was letting the blood rise, in her passion, to the summit of her bare breast.

I spent whole long evenings watching, day after day, this transfiguration of the hill of Venus. I watched it from afar. I did not approach it. It was my fancy not to believe in its existence in nature, for it is an exquisite pleasure to simplify reality to the abstract appearance of its symbol, and to remain at a distance from which the eye is not compelled to see things as they really exist. I was afraid that on the day I set foot on the actual soil of the mountain, the illusion would vanish once for all and never return.

However, one morning I started . . .

At first I followed the Gotha road with its intersections of bridges and green rivulets, later a field path. I had not raised my eyes from the level of the meadows when I arrived, three hours afterwards, at their boundary. Then I looked up.

Seen from near at hand Mount Hoersel was reddish in colour, and appeared stripped of all

vegetation, without trees, grass, or water; it seemed to be consumed by an internal fire, as if the curse of the legend were still arresting at its base all such new green growths as gave life to the other mountains. The path I took was all pebbles and dead lichen, sometimes scarcely visible in a wilderness of rocks, sometimes clearly marked between tall weather-worn crags. It rose to the very summit, where a small grey house had been built, with thick walls to resist the wild violence of the winds.

I went into the building and learned that lunch was to be had there. Lunch on the Venusberg! It was the final blow to my expectations. I received it, to my shame, willingly enough, for, in spite of my disappointment, I was hungry.

The two daughters of the innkeeper, who was absent, served me, at a little table, with a *Wiener Schnitzel*, which was, perhaps, more Saxon than Viennese, and a bottle of rather sour Niersteiner. I was in the midst of the most commonplace reality. The clean, bright room, the white curtains at the windows, the freshly scrubbed tiles of the flooring, a well-lighted bedroom visible through an open door, all ended by convincing me that I was not being entertained by witches, as for a moment, alas, I had hoped. The two girls were practical people who did not

propose to take any part in the damnation of the district.

It is true that at the end of the meal the elder of them discreetly withdrew, whereupon the second girl immediately produced an inviting smile which was a proof of her obliging disposition ; but in German inns the maids hardly set any limits to the favours they consider due to a young tourist on his travels, and as a general rule it does not follow that they have made a compact, in the shadows, with an accursed goddess.

We talked. She was good enough to understand my German, though I spoke it something like a Cameroon negro. I asked her for a certain quantity of topographical information regarding local matters ofwhich Iknew nothing. She answered me with great readiness.

" Do not forget," said she, " to visit the grotto."

" What grotto ? "

" The Venushoehle."

" There is a grotto of Venus, then ? "

" Certainly ! That is what they call it ; I don't know why—the Venushoehle. You must not leave the mountain without visiting the Venushoehle."

Uneasily, and actually with a sort of jealousy in my mind, I desired to learn whether many

foreigners were in the habit of coming to see the grotto, whose name alone had given me so distinct a thrill . . .

The girl answered sadly: "No one at all! You know, the mountain is not high enough to tempt expert climbers, and at the same time it is too high for people who only want a stroll. We never see any foreigners. Just occasionally, a hunter from Eisenach comes here for his lunch or to sleep; but you are the first Frenchman I have seen since I was born. . . ."

"Which is the way to the grotto?"

"Take the left-hand path. You will be there in five minutes. You may find a man seated on a stone at the entrance. Do not pay any attention to what he may say to you; he is out of his mind."

. . . . . .

Actually, then, there was a grotto of Venus in the side of the Hoerselberg! In that case the Tannhäuser country had preserved the whole apparatus of its terrible legend!

. . . The grotto of the Goddess did, in fact, exist. And so did the man.

It was small, in the form of a vertical ellipse crowned with slender brown brambles, and seemed the necessary symbol of the mountain, like a further vindication of the old Germanic tale, still more striking than the fleshlike

appearance of the Venusberg on the horizon. . . . The interior, as I stared into it, was dark, narrow, and low-roofed. Pools of water, bays of gloom, covered the indistinctly seen ground of the place. It would certainly be difficult to go right into it without getting muddy, but some strange incomprehensible spell drew me on into its damp nocturnal air. . . .

"Where are you going?" said the man suddenly.

"To the end of the grotto. . . ."

"To the end of the grotto? But there is no end, Monsieur. It is the Orifice of the Earth."

"Quite so," I answered patiently. "I shall not go far. I shall soon be back."

His long hollow cheeks turned purple. He struck the stick he held in his clenched fist against the earth.

"Ah, you'll soon be back! Ha, ha! You think you can go in there and come out when you like! Perhaps you mistake this grotto for a climber's goal or a geological curiosity? Are you from Cooks or from one of the Natural History museums? Do you want to write your name on the rock or gather stones for your collection? . . . You think you are going to find subterranean lakes here, or blind fishes, or architectural stalactites and vaults of rock all covered with crystals! You're going to study

the spelæology of the Venushoehle! Ha, ha! That's capital! But you're as mad as the rest, then! You don't understand! You don't *know* . . . that Venus dwells there herself in the flesh with her millions of nymphs about her, more alive than you are, because immortal!"

"Monsieur," I answered, "I believe what you tell me; but you little know me if you imagine that the presence of Venus can keep me from entering this place."

"Hell-fire!" he shouted.

"I am quite willing to deserve it as the price of the favours she bestows."

The madman made a brief gesture which evidently meant: You do not understand me at all. Then he seized his head in his hands and went on speaking: "Hoerselberg! Hoellenberg,[1] rather! They shall come to thee without foreboding of thine eternal horror, thou that awaitest the innocent, thou that dost punish the chaste, thou that shalt consume in eternity the wretched niggards of the flesh, thou Furnace! They shall have lived their solitary lives in revolt against the great, the divine law, and they shall know not thy dreadful kindling until the day when, by the might of the Sword, the Bearer of Souls shall plunge them into the abyss. They have eyes and they see not, they have ears

[1] Hell-mount.

and they hear not, they have mouths and they . . . God ! They are mad, mad, mad ! "

Suddenly, turning towards me, he shrieked : " How can you dream that the Venusberg can bring men to damnation, when *the Venusberg is Hell itself !* "

I stirred slightly.

" Alas ! " he groaned. " Alas, O God ! "

He drew his hands from his eyes down on to his beard.

" Alas ! Must I be the only living thing that knows the Truth, the Truth, the Truth. . . . Must it have been in vain that all the Patriarchs set up Venus, in relation to God, as His own fearful antithesis, and must none have ever known that she was Satan ? It shall have been in vain, then, that the antique tradition depicted Satyrs with those horns, that black tail, those goat-legs, those cloven feet : none shall ever have guessed that they were Demons. And as for the eternal flames, no one on earth shall ever have understood that they are thousands of millions of naked women dancing there. . . . "

He struck the ground.

. . . " There ! Under our feet ! "

He shivered to the very nape of his neck.

" Since man was first able to think, since man first wrote and taught, he gave out, he

repeated, he cried aloud, that there is no worse torment than love. How could he not foresee that in the world of eternal torment that torment alone would be his? And what other could he imagine more awful?"

He assumed an attitude, then, of prophecy, and shook his hand before his staring eyes:

"Ay," said he, "'tis there . . . there. . . . From the day on which we shall be nothing more than rotting corpses and souls mad with terror 'tis there we shall go in our myriads, we, all of us, all of us sinners, to burn with the terrible fire of Lust. Each day, each hour, we shall long, to the point of agony, for women more beautiful than women are, and at the moment of possession we shall see them vanish, as on earth, into the empty vapours of a dream. But what is here a spasm, an anxious fear, a cry, a sob, enough, indeed, to bring a curse upon some human life through the birth of the memory to be, shall be, there below, the perpetual shudder, the unbroken anguish, the torture, of years, of centuries of centuries. . . . Ah, God! Such is the fate that I must meet."

He fixed his eyes upon a stone on the ground. Shaking his head, he continued, in a frightfully changed tone:

"I have lived evilly, Monsieur; this was the

way of it. I was born of Protestant parents on Mount Wartburg, the very place where Luther, more than three centuries ago, set up his accursed doctrine. My youth was pious, my life austere and honourable. Nevertheless, from my fourteenth year I could not look at a woman without being assailed by desires of terrible intensity. I mortified them. I had appalling struggles from which I emerged, at daybreak, with my forehead streaming with sweat and my jaws trembling. I believed I could remain pure by living without love, insane fool that I was, blind to my own passions! To remain pure I would have killed myself with my own hand rather than commit sin. Those who have not experienced such nocturnal conflicts between religious duty and the frantic caprice of the body have never experienced suffering! And I struggled thus for a shadow, and I know now I struggled against God! Later on I married, Monsieur, but married only in the eyes of the world. My wife and myself had sworn to unite our souls alone, in order to preserve them, as we thought, in a state of grace. That was how little by little I damned myself by my mistake in telling a lie, each day, to the law of life; and henceforth *it is too late* for me to follow the strait path of my lost youth. I am virgin. Ah! Woe to all virgins! For the

love they have rejected all their short lives will justly torture them in the infinity of the wrath to come!

. . . . . .

He seized my arm.

"Hark ye! . . . the sun is setting. . . . This is the time. . . . Every evening I come here, and the Goddess sings a sweet song. . . . She calls me from afar . . . she draws me to her. . . . I come as on the day of my death, as on the day of my final downfall into the Venushoehle. . . . Ah, do not utter a word. *She is going to speak to us.*"

I do not know whether the calm tone of these last words or the expression of the man's face or the grip of his hand persuaded me that he was telling the truth—but a quick shudder passed over me, and I listened attentively.

It was an unfamiliar feeling. I was waiting, not on chance, but with an absolutely exact anticipation, the event foretold by the lunatic.

I cannot compare my state of mind to anything better than the sensation of a traveller who, having seen the lightning and knowing the distance between himself and the storm, expects to hear the thunder of heaven at a preordained second.

The time which separated me from the

miracle diminished first by a quarter, then by a half, then by three-quarters ; and at the precise instant when I perceived that it was at an end a breath of perfumes bore to our ears the languishing echo of a . . . Voice . . .

THE VENETIAN BLIND

"WELL, here is my secret," she said to me, at last. "As you seem so anxious to know, my dear, I will enlighten you, this evening, as to the reason I have never wished to marry.

"Your question shows more affection than the silence of others, into which I read sometimes so many injurious reservations. It is a fact that every one knows of the wealth of my family in all its branches; and when a rich girl does not marry it is always because she is vain, ambitious, ugly, or immoral: people are at perfect liberty to assume one or other of these suppositions in order to pass judgment on my life, if they do not, in their charity, adopt all four at once.

"Believe me, I did not refuse my suitors on their own account. It was the mere husband, the male, the official or unofficial lover, whom I shunned with a sort of terror which is only just beginning to subside now that my fortieth year has me in its safe keeping. . . . Don't make any guesses yet; my story is not one of an unfortunate love-affair; no, no, I have never

loved ; I grew old too soon, one evening, when I was seventeen. . . .

" Listen. The tale will not be long.

" After all . . . perhaps you will hardly understand why an event so trite, so much a matter of common knowledge, robbed my life of all the pleasures I might have experienced in after days. It was such an incident as is reported in newspaper paragraphs : you can read of such things on the third page of every paper, and it is not even the case that I took part in the scene which I am going to describe to you. If in my solitary existence I have shuddered over it for so long, that is because I saw the thing happen with my own eyes, within a yard of me. You, who will hear it as an anecdote, will feel nothing of what I felt."

. . . . . .

Mademoiselle N. leaned her forehead upon her hand and began as follows, her eyes fixed upon the ground, without once looking up at me :

" Twenty-five years ago my mother and myself were living in an old-fashioned private house in the shadow of Saint-Sulpice. It was quite an ordinary house : no courtyard or outbuildings ; all the windows looked out on to the street, which was, however, as quiet as a path in a forest.

" One midsummer night it was stiflingly hot in my room, and I could not sleep. I did not dare to open my window for fear of waking my mother. After an hour of insomnia, I got up, put on my slippers, and went down the great staircase in my nightgown to the drawing-room on the ground floor.

" Here . . . but you must clearly understand the situation of the drawing-room. The house had once had a garden which also ran parallel with the street. This property had been sold to builders, and the Council had taken over part of it for road-widening purposes. Accordingly, one window of the drawing-room opened upon a dark corner, in a recess, a mysterious and gloomy spot where the rays of the street-lamps did not penetrate.

" On entering the room I observed that this window had not been shut. The venetian blinds only had been closed. Faint with the heat and nearly suffocating I climbed up on the ledge, held on to the slanting laths of the blind with the tips of my fingers, and inhaled the delicious freshness of the night air with the whole of my body, from head to foot.

" That was the last moment of unalloyed pleasure I have ever had.

" I had not been there a minute when a couple appeared on the other side of the street.

"The man drew the girl into the secret shadows of the corner. He was a sham workman, one of those who work three weeks and loaf six months for the reason that their good looks enable them to despise honest labour. Her I recognised at once. She was a girl of fifteen to whom my mother had been very kind, and who was employed at a place to which I had often been. She had on a black skirt which was too short, a jacket of grey material, and wore no corsets (in any case she hardly needed any). The short plait of her hair was caught up on the top of her fair head, and fastened with a pin.

"Her companion, who had his hands on her shoulders, asked her hurriedly:

"'Well, here then? What about it?'

"She answered, her face pallid:

"'Let me go . . . let me go . . .'

"It was clear from the tone of her voice that she had repeated the phrase two hundred times since they had left the restaurant.

"The man resumed:

"'Now look here, kid, you told me yes; and yes it's going to be. Can't change your mind like that. When you've said a thing, you've said it, haven't you? We're all right here; why don't you want to?'

"'No . . . not there . . . not there . . .'

" ' Well, where d'you want, then ? You haven't got a bean, nor have I ; I can't afford a room for you. If you're coming to the *fortifs*,[1] carry on, then, we're in for an hour of it.'

" She made a negative gesture. The man became excited.

" ' Z'line, tell me straight. Are you going to let me, yes or no ? Because, if it's no, you know I can get others. . . .'

" The poor child burst out crying. She wept so violently against the blind on which I was leaning that I could feel every convulsive leap of her poor distracted young heart.

" ' Yes, I do love you,' she said. ' But not in that way, not in that. . . . I don't know how to say it, but love isn't that. . . . I love you . . . because you are kind to me, because you speak differently from the others, because I am so glad when I see you coming. I love you so that I want to put my arms round you, to do that as much as you like, every evening, always ! But when you talk about the other thing, no ; can't you understand I don't want to . . . especially with you . . . it seems to me it would be wicked.'

" The man shrugged his shoulders and started swearing.

[1] Slang abbreviation for " fortifications," the obsolete and deserted military works on the outskirts of Paris.

" ' Ah ! Damn your bloody bitch's eyes . . .'

" And so on : I can't tell you it all.

" Then, drawing from under his coat a knife . . . a knife . . . I mean a butcher's knife . . . a thing like a sword, he drove it into the blind level with my breast, and said in a violent undertone :

" ' Now then, it's between you and me. You do the jumpy business and I'll sting you.'

" The girl braced herself to resist. An atrocious scene followed. . . .

" The street was absolutely deserted, and the silence so unbroken that only the silence of a countryside can be as calm. It was not even possible to hear the distant hum of the city. What time was it, I wonder ? Perhaps two o'clock in the morning. The whole district was asleep except that couple and I myself, the terrified spectator. The girl, so near to me that I could have touched her by simply stretching out my fingers, defended herself with an energy which very nearly gave her actual strength.

" She was bent double, head down, knees pressed together. She panted like an animal out of breath. As soon as her arms were seized she brought her child's legs together, and as soon as her skirts were touched she fought with her hands. . . . The struggle lasted very long, longer than you might think ; but, as in the

Greek ballad, in which, at last, Charon gets the shepherd down—she was, at last, overcome.

" She beat the air, then, with her arms, fastened on something driven into the blind. . . . She did not know what it was, poor child ; did not know any longer that it was a knife and, thus accidentally armed, thrust back once more that man who was wounding her so terribly for ever, in her body and in her soul.

" Alas ! Human flesh is a mere nothing, a delicate soft clay which yields at the first blow. . . . The knife entered the throat and flashed out beyond it.

" There was a spirt of blood. . . .

" (Here, along the neck, two huge arteries lie out of which blood gushes as from a heart. . . .)

" A spirt of warm blood splashed through the slats of the blind and reached my waist, wetting it. The man, suffocated by the blade, his eyes bursting from his head, opened his mouth in a frightful manner, but did not even utter a sigh ; no, when he fell forward on his face, it was she, the murderess, who, recoiling and skipping to and fro like a small blackbird, pierced the silence of the street with three cries . . . three cries of horror. . . .

" Ah ! Those wailings for the dead ! I have never heard anything more appalling.

. . . . . .

" What followed . . . is of no consequence to you, is it ? My mother, awaking with a start, fearing something had happened to me, looking for me, finding my bed empty, calling me all over the house, and discovering me at last standing at the window all greasy and red with blood which she thought at first was mine . . . it was not for the sake of that part of the drama that I have told you such a story as I have.

" The rest of it, lying in the depths of my memory, is enough. I was seventeen. In half an hour, I, who knew nothing of realities, had learned everything from them, all the secrets of life, of love and of death ; what is called in novels desire ! And what it means when a man is in love ! And what it means too, when a man dies.

" If people do not know why I have wished to live alone, you at least, my dear, will know, henceforth, the reason."

THE IN-PLANO

A Tale for Easter

THE IN-PLANO

A Tale for Easter

I

When the great door had been closed with a snap of its powerful lock, little Cile did not know at first whether to laugh or to cry, so utterly ignorant was she of the emotions of solitude.

For twelve years—that is, all her life—she had never been left alone for more than five minutes. In the evenings she went to sleep in her mother's room, as the latter did not like leaving her at night; in the mornings she worked under the eye of her youthful governess; in the afternoons she became the centre and beloved object of the charmed attention of her family. The presence of ten persons around her did not embarrass her; but she had no more idea of solitude than Siegfried had of fear.

Nevertheless she was alone, quite alone now, for two long hours to come; she could have no doubt of that.

The father had left Paris on a hunting party. Her mother had just gone out in her carriage,

taking the coachman and footman with her. The maid and her husband, the valet, were in the country, where they had been called to the funeral of a relative. The chef and the kitchen-maid had gone out separately, as they were allowed to do every Sunday. Mademoiselle Cile had been left to the sole and perhaps rather juvenile supervision of her governess from Madrid, who taught her Spanish.

Unfortunately, Señorita, as her little pupil called her, seemed also to have her reasons for not staying at home. She was, that day, inexplicably absent-minded, nervous, and almost tearful. Cile was fond of her, and asked what was the matter. But Señorita told her abruptly that she was going out, that she could not take her, that she would be back in two hours for certain; moreover, that above all Madame must not be told, and that Cile could prove her great affection for her by behaving even better, all by herself, than she would have behaved if her mistress had been there.

Cile promised, without knowing what she was promising, for she and solitude had never met before. Señorita stuck a big pin through her black hat, kissed the motionless little girl with a swift movement, and both doors closed before Cile had understood anything of what had happened.

Feeling depressed, she sat down quietly on the chair which stood behind her, and sighed deeply.

Every one had gone away from her.

Out of the hundred and one people who loved her so much and were always telling her so, parents, grandparents, servants, governess, uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends, not a soul had stayed to enjoy the honour of paying her attention. Every one, then, had some one to love, somewhere else ; how could you explain that ? Cile had never foreseen the distress of such a situation.

She got up on tiptoe, and went through every room, large and small. The great mansion where she had been born terrified her for the first time. After much reflection she observed that the empty house had taken upon itself, in full day, the silence of night ; and nothing is more mysterious than the confusions which occur in time when sounds are blotted out just as light is. Undoubtedly the sun was shining outside, but in the sudden tranquillity of her surroundings Cile trembled as if there were an eclipse.

She sat down slowly and soberly at the piano, opened the first volume of Schumann at the page where the turned-down leaf indicated her easiest piece, " After the Theatre," and

tried to play. But the crash of the first chord made her jump from her stool to the floor, so violently did it re-echo from the four walls, and she decided it was better not to continue.

She trotted, still slowly, to the window : the wide paved courtyard, the two outbuildings side by side, the tall closed doors of the coach-house and stable made up, as usual, the only too familiar and invariably deserted scene she had contemplated and meditated over so often before. Even the dog-kennel had assumed the aspect of an empty dwelling since the departure for the hunting party. Cile breathed on the smooth pane and wrote idly in the whitish vapour : " I feel bored."

But suddenly an idea—a brilliant idea—flashed into her childish brain.

The house had only three floors, and the whole of the third was occupied by an immense library, which little Cile was forbidden to enter. In fact, there were only two supernal regions which she imagined to be quite inaccessible : first, this library; and secondly, the firmament. Who could stop her exploring, during her hour of independence, the nearest and most tempting of the zones that she was unacquainted with ? Who could stop her ? Her conscience ? No. Cile had a strict conscience, but only in regard to faults or sins whose wickedness she under-

stood. She was quite determined to do nothing reprehensible on the third floor any more than on the first. She would be good when she got there, she would not break anything, she would walk on tiptoe, she would not leave any trace of her secret visit. . . .

Trembling a little, she went upstairs.

Each fresh step, where the flexible soles of her pink slippers had never been before, both frightened and interested her, like a strip of virgin territory in a voyage of discovery. There were twenty-eight stairs altogether, to the top. When she had reached the horizontal rail of the banisters Cile leaned over with a quite excited feeling of standing upon the summit of the world.

On the landing the double door had been left ajar. At a push from the timid child it moved back majestically in the dark—it might have been the door of Mystery itself, and Cile entered, on tiptoe.

II

The library was laid out in the form of a cathedral, very lofty, very cavernous, and very dark, with glass windows above the shelves. Multitudes of brown books (Cile thought: "More than ten million books") covered the

walls right and left, and even farther on, in the far distance. Cile was very fond of books. Now one could enjoy oneself with so many stories ! Really she might just as well let herself read a few of them. In the first place, no one would ever know. And then, it would not hurt anybody, would it ? Why should she be forbidden to ?

Only, it was very embarrassing to have to choose one volume out of ten million. Which should she take ? The one that looked the nicest. And the nicest one was the biggest one. It happened that exactly in front of her, right at the bottom of the tallest bookcase, rose the black-and-gold back of a gigantic *in-plano*.

Oh, did you ever see one like that ? Surely that wasn't a book !

Cile remembered that she had once been given a game as a Christmas present, a big one shut up in a box which looked like the binding of a book.

" Suppose it were a game," she said to herself.

Then she leaned forward to read the title.

In gilded capitals the title read :

HAGIOGRAPH
HISPANOR

The young reader's acquaintance with biblio-

graphy and Latin was still too elementary to enable her to complete the phrase in its precise form : *Hagiographorum hispanorum opera selectissima.*

She put her finger in her mouth, and said to herself after some reflection :

" Hagiographer Hispanor . . . It must be a clockwork game."

When she had come to this conclusion her mind was made up. She seized the enormous *in-plano*, almost as large as herself, with both hands, pulled at it, made an effort which caused her to bend double. . . . The book, dragged from its eternal home, slid forward, toppled, rocked, and came to rest, upright on its edge.

Cile breathed deeply, proud of her strength, and still more of her audacity ; but she did not take the risk of lifting such a heavy burden. Still with both hands, she turned the first cover over on its hinges, as though it were a secret door, and stepped back a few paces.

The darkness was gathering about her. The daylight was failing, and failing rapidly. A long ray descending from a bluish window-pane fell upon the black frontispiece of the book she had just opened.

It represented the figure of a Spanish saint, a woman in the costume of a Carmelite nun, standing before a landscape vaguely African in

appearance. She held a scourge in one hand, and in the other a great heart which dripped blood.

Cile, terrified, stepped farther back.

Soon there was nothing to be seen clearly in the immense room but the stern and pale phantom of the Saint ; and the more the surroundings darkened and became black, the more the figure itself brightened and became white.

It seemed to become larger, to stir, to move its eyes.

A breath of air came from the landscape, ruffling the folds of its garments.

It inclined its head.

At last it spoke.

" Cécile. . . ."

The poor little girl, nearly dead with fright, fell upon her knees.

" Madame . . ." she said.

Then, recollecting herself, like a good child, and remembering, just in time, that all nuns must be addressed as " my sister," she murmured politely :

" My Saint. . . ."

The apparition answered :

" Do not be afraid."

" Oh, I'm not frightened," said Cile, very white. " But I'm so nervous. . . . Pardon me, my Saint."

As she spoke she examined the ample costume of the Immortal One, the brown tunic, the scapular, the bare sandalled feet, and the immense white mantle surrounding the whole figure like a blaze of light.

"Come nearer," said the Saint. "Nearer still. How can I help you? Have you something to say to me, or rather to ask me?"

Cile plucked up courage.

"Something, rather, to ask you, my Saint. There are so many things I want to know! And you must know everything, since you come from heaven."

"Well, I shall allow you to put three questions to me. Three, not a single one more. I am listening. And I shall answer you, my child."

At once the child put her first question:

"Why am I forbidden to come here?"

The Saint answered slowly:

"Because the beams and the planks and the leaves and the pictures in all this library are the trunk and the branches and the leaves and the flowers of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil."

"The Knowledge of Good and Evil," repeated the child. "What is that?"

"It is the understanding of life."

" Life . . ." she repeated again. " Oh, what is my life going to be ? "

The Saint shuddered imperceptibly.

" That would be your last question, little Cile, think it over well ! Would you not prefer to put another one to me ? "

But the little girl, who was gradually regaining confidence, insisted :

" No, no ! That is all I want to know."

" If I answer you, you will regret that you consulted me."

Cile hesitated, turned pale once more, and replied in a very quiet voice :

" My Saint, answer me ; you promised."

Then the apparition raised towards the sky the hand which held a great purple heart, and the drops of blood began to fall, first one by one, like tears, then in streams, like sobs.

" I could," said she, in a hollow tone, " open the book of your life, ascertain how . . . whence . . . in what guise . . . and in what circumstances. . . . What would be the use ? All human lives are crushed to the same level, and whatever may be the nature of your life it will only be Life. . . . Listen carefully, my poor child. You are living on illusion and hopes ; your illusion will vanish ; all your hopes will be mown down ; never, never will you succeed in keeping that which is dear to

you, or in possessing that which you desire, or in realising that of which you dream. You will pursue happiness with a pursuit which will be frantic ; you will see it everywhere within reach of your hand, and always your hand will fall upon the empty air, your knees upon the earth, and your forehead upon your knees, and you shall utter such bitter cries that you will believe that you are dying. . . . You will lie, indeed, a hundred times, with those hundred dreams of yours ; your last day will not be the blackest of those you have to live."

A wave of blood flowed from the uplifted heart.

" Listen carefully. . . . You will love. A new, strange, inexpressibly serene and tender sentiment will invade your credulous soul, which will mistake it for happiness, and the more promise of delight it gives you, the more it will scourge your body and your mind with its triple lash of horror, of despair, and of disgust. Of whatever nature your love may be, it will lie in tears and your sufferings will be such as you cannot imagine. . . ."

The heart swelled up several times with great violence. Red blood continued to flow from it.

" Listen again. . . . You will become a mother. Ah ! This time you will believe, in

vain, that you have found the path of a happy life. Your child ! Your child ! How you will long for it ! What an enchanted future you will dream of for yourself and for the being you will hold in your arms ! But from the day on which God shall have promised you it, your tears will never cease streaming upon your cheeks. There will be terrible sufferings to obtain it, effort and pain every day to keep it alive, terror if it is ill, incurable anguish if God takes it back from you as He gave it. Then you will know that unhappiness rises like a tide to the assault of human life, increasing incessantly, year after year, the surges of its bitter cries."

The heart grew as large as the sun at evening. Its shape could now scarcely be seen, for the blood was breaking out all over it.

" Lastly," resumed the Saint, " take note, to-day, of all those you love and know that not one of them will be at your bedside on the day when, as an old woman and almost a stranger in a new world, you will die, horribly alone. You will see, one after the other, your four grandparents, so kind and so beloved, disappear from the places where you used to caress them. You will see your mother expire, perhaps after an agony, at which you will shudder for the rest of your life. You will place your dead father in an oaken coffin between two layers of sawdust,

in order that the putrefaction of his body may not filter through to the soil from the chinks in the box nailed down upon his face. . . ."

"Ah ! ! !"

Cile, in the last stage of terror, shrieked, wept, held out her hands. . . .

"No . . . no . . . my Saint . . . no . . . don't tell me. . . ."

She threw herself in a beseeching attitude upon the folds of the mantle of light ; but through the unsubstantial vision she touched the huge *in-plano* still upright upon its edges. . . . The volume rocked backwards and fell from its full height with a formidable crash, which re-echoed like thunder from the vaulted roof, while Saint Thérése de Jésus at the centre of a cloud of bluish dust faded out and passed away.

At the same moment the door opened. . . . Fourteen flashes of lightning suddenly illuminated the electric chandelier, and Cile heard her father's voice cry out in a tone of fury such as she had never known in him :

"Cécile ! Naughty girl ! So it's here you were, then ! "

Alas ! The poor child was scarcely in a condition to answer. She listened to the paternal reproaches with a sort of bewilderment, seeing in the outburst of his voice the beginning of the

unhappiness of life, and collapsed, in a violent outbreak of tears, upon the floor.

III

" I want to die this minute, this minute ; I want to die this minute . . ." she kept on repeating.

The father, perturbed, approached her, picked her up, took her on his knee, questioned her. What had happened ? What was the meaning of all this ? Why had she come in there ? And what were these cries of despair about ? But Cile did not want to answer. Cile did not want to do anything now but die.

She sobbed for an hour without being able to give any explanation of her trouble. She wept, her head buried in her father's shoulder, while he rocked her slightly to and fro. Then suddenly she related what the Saint had told her, her voice sounding weak, expressionless, monotonous, and despairing, like those of dying persons uttering their last words.

The father heard her out. He was unwilling to exhibit more than a smiling tenderness ; but in spite of every effort of his self-control, he could not prevent tears coming to his eyes, and was paler than the child herself when she had finished her narrative. . . .

Then he drew her more closely to him. Taking between his two large affectionate hands the little fair head, all wet with tears, he said, with extreme fondness :

" My child . . . my little one . . . never mind . . . you have been punished, as you can see, because you disobeyed me. That is what happens to little girls who go into libraries. They read certain things there about life which there is no need for them to know."

After hesitating a moment, he went on :

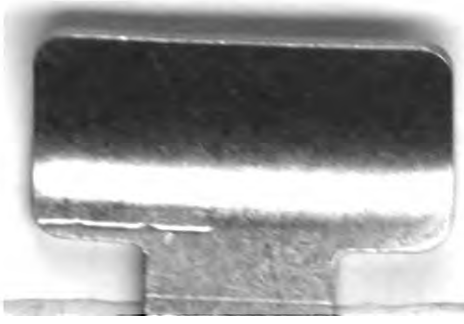
" . . . And which are not true."

Cile raised her eyes with the serious gaze of a child :

" Not true ? How can they be not true ? Did the Saint tell me something that was not true ? "

" The Saint wanted to frighten you, so that you should repent of your sin, my darling ; but life is quite the opposite of the picture that she gave you of it. Life is beautiful . . . life is sweet . . . life is good. . . . It is all happiness."

And, once more, he forced himself to smile.

The child looked at him for a long time . . . then she hugged him to her with all her strength, trembling from head to foot.

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