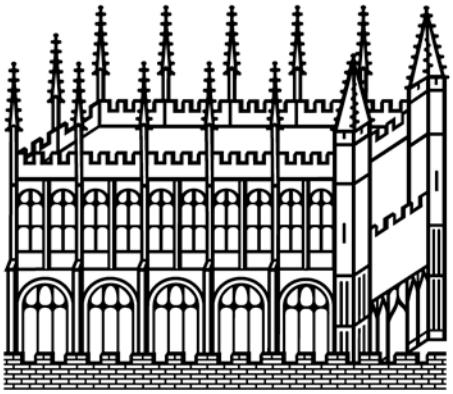

The Works of
GUY DE MAUPASSANT

THE HOUSE OF MADAME TELLIER

Translated by
MARJORIE LAURIE

THE HOUSE OF MADAME TELLIER

AND OTHER STORIES

I
BEL-AMI
II
A LIFE
III
BOULE de SUIF
IV
THE HOUSE OF MADAME TELLIER
V
THE MASTER PASSION
(*In Preparation*)

The works of Guy de Maupassant

The House of MADAME TELLIER

And Other Stories

Newly translated into English
by
MARJORIE LAURIE

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MAUPASSANT, Henri Rene Albert Guy de.—Born at the Chateau de Miromesnil, Seine-Inferieure, August 5th, 1850; died at Passy, Paris, July 6th, 1893. A French novelist. He went to school at Yvetot, and graduated from the college of Rouen, while Gustave Flaubert, his godfather, looked after his literary training. He spent about ten years in Civil Service in Navy Department. In February, 1879, his one-act play " Histoire de viex temps " was performed in Paris, without, however, attracting any special attention. The next year, however, the success of his short story " Boule de Suif " stamped him at once as a writer of marked ability. Then he published in rapid succession " Le Maison Telier " (1881), " Mademoiselle Fifi " (1882), " Contes de la Becasse " (1883), " Une Vie " (1883), " Miss Harriet " (1884), " Les Sœurs Rondoli " (1884), " Au Soleil " (1884), " Clair de Lune " (1884), " Yvette " (1884), " Bel-Ami " (1885), " Contes de jour et de la nuit " (1885), " Contes et nouvelles " (1885), " M. Parent " (1886), " La petite Roque " (1886), " Toine " (1886), " Contes Choisis " (1887), " Mont-Oriel " (1887), " Le Horla " (1887), " Pierre et Jean " (1888), " Sur l'eau " (1888), " Le rosier de Madame Husson " (1888), " Fort comme la mort " (1889), " La Main Gauche " (1889), " Histoire d'une fille de ferme " (1890), " La Vie errante " (1890), " L'Inutile Beaute " (1890), " Notre Cœur " (1890). Among his other works are " Trois contes," " Emmer," " L'homme de lettres " (1892), and two plays, " Musette " (1891) and " La paix du menage " (*Comedie Francaise*, March 6th, 1893). The insanity and death of a brother unbalanced him, and he attempted suicide during a fit of depression in December 1891, general paresis set in, and he had to be confined in a private asylum.—From the " Century Cyclopædia of Names."

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CONTENTS

THE HOUSE OF MADAME TELLIER

I

It was the custom to drop in at Madame Tellier's house every evening about eleven o'clock, just as if it were a café. Its seven or eight regular customers never varied. They were none of them of dissipated habits; they were simply respectable tradesmen and young men from the town. They would sip their Chartreuse and tease the girls a little or have a quiet chat with the proprietress, whom they always treated with respect. And they all went home before midnight, except the younger men, who sometimes stayed on. The house had a certain homeliness. It was quite a small building, painted yellow, and it stood at the corner of a street behind the church of St. Etienne. The windows looked out upon the dock, which was full of ships unloading, and on the great salt marsh with the hill of La Vierge and its old grey chapel in the background. The proprietress came of a respectable family of peasants in the department of Eure, and she had adopted her particular profession, just as she would have adopted that of milliner or draper. In towns prostitution is regarded with violent and deep-rooted prejudice, but there is no such feeling against it in the country parts of Normandy.

"It's a paying trade," says the peasant, and he sends his daughter to run a harem, just as if he were sending her to conduct a boarding school for young ladies.

This house of Madame Tellier's came to her as a legacy from an old uncle. Formerly innkeepers near Yvetot, Monsieur and Madame Tellier had sold out at once, expecting higher profits from the business at Fécamp, and one fine morning they had arrived there and had taken over the management of the concern, which had been languishing in the absence of its owners. They were a worthy couple and had speedily won the affections both of their employees and their neighbours. Two years later the husband died of apoplexy. His new profession had maintained him in such comfort and inactivity that he had grown extremely stout, and had fallen a victim to the exuberance of his health.

Since she had been a widow, Madame Tellier had been sighed for in vain by all her customers. She had, however, a reputation for unassailable virtue, and even her young women had never succeeded in catching her out. She was tall and plump and prepossessing. In her dimly lighted, ill-ventilated house, her complexion had lost its freshness and glistened as if her face had a coating of grease. She wore a scanty false front of fluffy curls, which gave her a juvenile look contrasting oddly with the maturity of her figure. She was invariably cheerful; the expression on her face was frank and open, and she enjoyed a joke, but always with the shade of reserve which she yet retained in spite of her new profession. Coarse language still had the effect of shocking her slightly, and once, when an ill-bred youth called her establishment by its proper name, she was both hurt and indignant. In short, she

possessed natural delicacy, and although she treated her young women as friends, she was fond of remarking that they were not out of the same basket as herself. Sometimes on a week-day she would hire a carriage and take some of her flock for an airing, and they would frisk about on the grassy bank of the little river which flows through the Valmont grounds. They behaved like truant schoolgirls, rushing about and playing childish games with all the rapture of nuns released from the cloister, intoxicated with fresh air. Seated on the grass they ate delicacies from the pork butcher's and drank cider, and at nightfall they would return home deliciously weary and in a mood of tender sentimentality. In the carriage they threw their arms round Madame Tellier and hugged her, as if she were an indulgent mother, overflowing with kindness and goodwill.

The house possessed two entrances. At the corner there was a gloomy kind of tavern, which was opened in the evening for the benefit of sailors and working men. Two of the young women engaged in the traffic peculiar to the establishment, were told off to minister to the needs of this section of Madame Tellier's customers. Aided by Frederick the waiter, a short, fair, beardless youth, as strong as an ox, they brought round half-pints of wine and pots of beer to all the rickety, marble tables, and perching themselves on their customers' knees with their arms round their necks, they encouraged them to drink.

The three other ladies (there were only five in all) formed a sort of aristocracy and were reserved for the quality on the first floor, except on occasions when the first floor happened to be deserted and there was a rush of work downstairs. The drawing-room, reserved for the respectable townsmen, was known as the hall of

Jupiter. On its blue wallpaper hung a large picture representing Leda and the Swan. From these precincts led a winding staircase with a narrow, inconspicuous door at the foot, opening on to the street. All night long, behind a trellis above the lintel, burned a small lantern, such as one still sees, here and there, burning at the feet of an image of the Virgin, in a niche in the wall.

The house was old and damp and a slight smell of mould hung about it. Now and then a whiff of eau de Cologne was wafted along the passages, and at times, when a door had been left ajar downstairs, the coarse shouts of the revellers on the ground floor would echo through the house like a clap of thunder, and at this the faces of the gentlemen on the first floor would exhibit a strained expression of uneasy disgust.

Madame Tellier, who was on friendly terms with all her customers, always presided in the drawing-room and took a lively interest in all the gossip of the town which they retailed to her. Her sensible conversation was a pleasant change from the desultory chatter of the three young women, and a relief, too, from the suggestive witticisms of these portly citizens whose nightly dissipation took the mild and decorous form of having a liqueur in doubtful society.

The names of the three houris attending on the first floor were Fernande, Raphaele and Rackety Rosa. As the staff was limited in numbers, each member had been carefully selected as a particular sample, a characteristic type of feminine beauty, so that, in a general way at least, every client might find here the realization of his ideal.

Fernande's type was that of the handsome, strapping, pink and white country lass. She was buxom, ran somewhat to fat, and had permanent

freckles; her head was scantily covered with short, bleached hair, that looked like combed-out tow.

Raphaele was a native of Marseilles, and had walked the streets of various seaport towns. Thin, with high cheek-bones plastered with rouge, and black oily hair arranged in ringlets on her forehead, she filled the indispensable rôle of the handsome Jewess. Her eyes would have been fine, had it not been for a film which disfigured the right one. Her hooked nose drooped above a heavy jaw, and two new upper teeth contrasted strangely with those in the lower row, to which age had lent the dark hues of old wood.

Rackety Rosa was a small, round dumpling of a creature, all stomach, and with diminutive legs. From morning till evening, in a rasping voice, she sang songs that were alternately sentimental and indelicate; she was always embarking upon interminable and pointless stories and she never stopped talking except to eat, and never stopped eating except to talk. She was never still, and in spite of her bulk and her stumpy legs, she was as active as a squirrel. Her laughter, a cataract of piercing shrieks, rang through the house, issuing incessantly from bedroom, attic or café, with meaningless reiteration.

The two young women on duty downstairs were Louise nicknamed Cocotte, and Flora, known as the See-saw, because of a slight limp. One of them was arrayed as Liberty with a tricolour sash; the other was supposed to be a Spanish girl, with copper sequins, dancing in her carroty hair at each uneven step. They looked like kitchen-maids rigged out for a masquerade. Typical barmaids, they were just like any other women of the working class, neither handsomer nor homelier. In the harbour they were known as the two Pumps.

Thanks to Madame Tellier's tact and good humour, the peace was seldom broken between these five young women, in spite of their mutual jealousy. Her establishment, being the only one of its kind in the little town, did a steady trade. Its mistress had succeeded in investing it with such an air of propriety, she herself was so agreeable and obliging and her kindness of heart so well known, that she enjoyed a certain esteem. Her regular customers went out of their way to please her and plumed themselves on any special mark of her favour. If two of them happened to meet in the course of the day's work, they would say:

"See you this evening in the usual place," as others might have said:

"I suppose you'll be at the café after dinner."

In short, Madame Tellier's house had become quite an institution and there was seldom a member missing from the evening gathering.

One day, however, towards the end of May, the first arrival, Monsieur Poulin the wood-merchant, ex-mayor of Fécamp, found the door locked and the little lantern behind the trellis extinguished. No sound issued from the house, which was silent as the grave. He knocked at the door, tentatively at first, then more vigorously, but there was no reply. Slowly he retraced his steps, and as he reached the market square he met Monsieur Duvert, the shipowner, who was bound for the same place. They made their way thither together, but with the same result. Suddenly they were alarmed by a violent outburst of noise close at hand, and looking round the corner of the house they saw a crowd of English and French sailors battering with their fists on the closed shutters of the café. Afraid of being compromised, the two burgesses were beating a retreat, when they were stopped by a whispered "Hist." It

was Monsieur Tournevau, the fish-curer, who had recognized them. They explained the situation, which was all the more distressing for Monsieur Tournevau, because, being a married man with a family and under strict supervision, he could only venture there on Saturday nights. And as this happened to be his one evening, he found himself doomed to another week of deprivation.

The three men turned in the direction of the quay. On the way they fell in with young Monsieur Phillippe, the banker's son, and Monsieur Pimpesse, the tax-collector, both of them members of the fraternity. They strolled back together along the Rue aux Juifs, with the idea of making one last attempt. But the infuriated sailors were now laying siege to the house, shouting and flinging stones. The five first-floor customers took to their heels and then began roaming about the streets. Presently they met Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, and later on Monsieur Vasse, the arbitrator, and they all set off for a long walk. First they went down to the jetty. They sat down in a row on the granite parapet and watched the waves breaking. In the darkness the foam on the crests of the waves flashed white for a moment then disappeared from sight. The monotonous roar of the sea dashing against the rocks reverberated through the night, echoing along the whole length of the cliff. The disappointed revellers remained there some little time. At last Monsieur Tournevau remarked:

"I don't call this very cheerful."

"Nor do I," replied Monsieur Pimpesse, and they slowly resumed their walk.

They went along the Rue Sous-le-bois, which skirts the hill; returning by the plank bridge over the salt marsh, they passed near the railway line and came out

again on the market square. At this point a sudden difference of opinion arose between Monsieur Pimpesse, the tax-collector, and Monsieur Tournevau, the fish-curer, about a certain edible fungus, which one or other of them claimed to have found in the neighbourhood. Their disappointment had ruffled their tempers so completely that they might have come to blows, had not the others intervened. Monsieur Pimpesse went off in a rage, and immediately a fresh dispute arose between Monsieur Poulin, the ex-mayor, and Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, about the tax-collector's emoluments and his possible perquisites. Insults were flying on either side, when suddenly with a prodigious uproar, the mob of sailors, who were tired of waiting outside closed doors, burst into the square. Two and two, and arm in arm, in a long procession, they swept onwards, yelling and shouting. The little group of townsmen shrank into a doorway, while the howling rabble disappeared in the direction of the Abbey. The noise continued long after they were out of sight, gradually dying away like a receding thunderstorm till peace was restored.

Still nursing their wrath, Monsieur Poulin and Monsieur Dupuis went off in different directions without bidding each other good night. The other four continued their walk, their steps turning instinctively in the direction of Madame Tellier's house. But it remained closed, silent and impenetrable. A single drunk man, with calm persistency, kept knocking gently on the front door of the café. Every now and then he desisted and called cautiously for Frederick the waiter. Seeing that he received no reply, he sat down on the doorstep to await events. The four friends were about to withdraw when the rowdy gang of seamen reappeared at the end of the street, the Frenchmen bawling the

Marseillaise, the Englishmen Rule Britannia. The peaceful citizens flattened themselves against the walls and the ruffianly crew swept on towards the quay where a fray ensued between the sailors of the two nations, in which an Englishman had his arm broken and a Frenchman his nose split.

By this time the drunkard on the doorstep was weeping tipsily like a peevish child. At last the little group of townsmen dispersed and gradually peace descended again upon the distracted town. Now and then the sound of voices would break out anew, only to die away in the distance.

But one man still forlornly roamed the streets; it was Monsieur Tournevau the fish-curer, in despair at the prospect of having to wait another week. The situation baffled him, but he still continued to cherish vague hopes. He felt exasperated with the police for closing an establishment of public utility, which was under its own protection and supervision. He retraced his steps and as he scanned the walls of Madame Tellier's house, seeking some solution to the problem, his eyes fell on a placard posted up on the shutter. Hurriedly striking a wax vesta he read the following words, scrawled in a large irregular hand:

"Closed on account of a First Communion."

Realizing that this was indeed final, he turned away.

The drunk man had fallen asleep and was lying at full length across the inhospitable threshold.

The next day all the members of the côterie found some pretext or other for passing down that particular street, each carrying documents under his arm as an excuse. With furtive glances they read the mysterious announcement:

"Closed on account of a First Communion."

II

The explanation was as follows. Madame Tellier had a brother who was a carpenter in their native village, Virville-en-Eure. In the days when she still kept the inn at Yvetot, she had stood sponsor to her brother's daughter and had bestowed upon her godchild the name of Constance—Constance Rivet, she herself being a Rivet on the father's side. The carpenter, who was aware that his sister was doing well, never lost touch with her, although they seldom met, both being tied to their respective businesses and also living at some distance from each other. But the little girl was nearly twelve now, and was to make her First Communion that year, so he seized this opportunity for renewing relations and wrote to his sister that he was counting on her to be present at the celebration. The grand-parents being dead, she felt that she could not fail her god-daughter. So she accepted the invitation. Madame Tellier was childless, and Joseph, her brother, hoped to induce her, by assiduous attentions, to make a will in his daughter's favour.

He had no delicate scruples with regard to his sister's profession. Besides, no one in the village knew anything about it. When she was mentioned, she was described as residing at Fécamp, and from this remark it was assumed that she possessed a sufficient income. The distance between Fécamp and Virville is at least fifty miles, and to a peasant a land journey of fifty miles is a far more serious proposition than an ocean voyage to a civilized person. The inhabitants of Virville had never been farther than Rouen, and there was nothing

to attract the inhabitants of Fécamp in a little village of five hundred houses, buried in the depths of the country and belonging to a different department. In short, the secret was well kept.

But as the day of the ceremony drew near, Madame Tellier was confronted with a serious difficulty. She had no one to act as deputy and she did not care to leave her establishment to its own devices even for a single day. The smouldering jealousies that existed between the ladies of the first floor and those of the café would undoubtedly burst into open flame. Frederick would certainly get drunk, and when he was drunk he would lay a man out for a look or a word. In the end she decided to take her entire household with her, with the exception of the waiter, to whom she gave two days' leave.

She made this proposal to her brother, who, far from objecting, offered to put up the whole party for one night. Accordingly Saturday morning saw Madame Tellier and her young women embark on their journey in a second-class carriage on the eight o'clock express.

As far as Beuzeville they had the carriage to themselves, and chattered like magpies. At Beuzeville, however, a peasant and his wife joined them. The old husband wore a blue blouse with pleated collar and wide sleeves drawn in at the wrists and trimmed with narrow white embroidery. His antiquated tall hat had a brownish nap, which looked as if it had been brushed the wrong way. One hand clutched a huge green umbrella, the other an enormous basket, from which three frightened ducks poked out their heads. The wife, who sat bolt upright in her rustic dress, had a face like a hen and a nose resembling a beak. Petrified with embarrassment at finding herself in such fine

company, she sat opposite her good man and did not venture to stir.

The carriage certainly boasted a dazzling array of brilliant colours. Madame Tellier, all in blue from head to foot, had draped over her shoulders a French shawl of imitation cashmere of the most blinding and violent red. Fernande was panting in a tartan bodice into which she had been laced by the united efforts of her companions. Forced upwards into two round bosses, her lax bosom kept surging and rippling as if it were fluid beneath the gown that covered it. Raphaele in a befeathered hat like a nest full of birds, wore a mauve creation spangled with gold. It had a suggestion of the East, which suited her Jewish cast of countenance. Rackety Rosa, in a pink skirt with deep flounces, reminded one of an unwholesomely fat child or a corpulent dwarf. The two Pumps looked as if their weird garments had been made out of old window curtains of Restoration days, with floral patterns all over them. When the strangers got in, the ladies composed their faces and began to make polite conversation in order to produce a favourable impression.

But at Bolbec, a gentleman with fair whiskers, rings and a gold watch-chain, entered the carriage and placed in the rack overhead various parcels wrapped in American cloth. He had a facetious and jovial air. Bowing and smiling, he said airily:

"These ladies are changing their garrison, I presume?"

This question covered the whole party with confusion. Madame Tellier, however, recovered herself, and stood up for the honour of her flock.

"You might at least be civil," she replied sharply.

He hastened to apologize.

"I beg your pardon; I meant to say their convent."

Unable to think of a suitable retort, or mollified by this amendment, Madame Tellier pursed up her lips and made him a dignified bow. After this, the gentleman, who had seated himself between Rosa and the old peasant, began winking at the three ducks who were thrusting their heads out of the big basket. When he thought he had captured the attention of his audience, he began to tickle the ducks under the beak, and to address to them facetious remarks, which were intended to poke fun at his companions.

" And so we've left our little pond, quack, quack, quack, for our little spit."

The unhappy creatures twisted and turned in their efforts to avoid his teasing hands and struggled frantically to escape from their wicker prison. Suddenly all three of them uttered a heart-rending shriek of distress:

" Quack, quack, quack! "

At this all the women burst out laughing, and they suddenly began to take a passionate interest in the ducks, elbowing one another in their efforts to bend down and look at them, while the gentleman surpassed himself in fascinations, witticisms and suggestive jokes.

Rosa was in her element. Leaning across her neighbour's legs, she kissed the three ducks on the beak. Then all the other women had to kiss them, too, and the gentleman took the ladies on his knees, dandled them and pinched them and all at once began to address them with the utmost familiarity.

The peasant and his wife were even more horrified than their birds. They sat rolling their eyes wildly, not venturing to stir and without so much as a smile or a quiver on their wrinkled old faces.

The gentleman proved to be a commercial traveller. Jestingly he offered to sell the ladies braces, and seizing

one of his parcels, he undid it. This, however, was merely a trick, for the parcel contained garters. There were garters in all shades of silk, blue, pink, red, mauve, violet and flame-coloured, with metal buckles formed by two gilt Cupids interlaced. The ladies shrieked with joy. Then with the gravity natural to every woman, when considering an article of dress, they began to examine the samples. Exchanging glances and whispers, they took counsel with one another, while Madame Tellier longingly handled a pair of orange garters, broader and more impressive than the others, and worthy of her responsible position.

The gentleman waited; an idea had occurred to him.

"Now, my pretty dears," he said. "You must try them on."

This suggestion provoked a storm of protests. The ladies tucked their skirts round their legs, as if in fear of some impropriety. But he quietly bided his time.

"I see you don't want them," he remarked. "I may as well pack them up again." Then he added slyly:

"Any lady who tries them on shall have whichever pair she likes."

But they would not accept his offer, and sat bolt upright, very much on their dignity. The two Pumps, however, appeared so deeply distressed that he repeated his proposal. Flora especially, who was in torments of desire, was evidently wavering.

"Come, my dear," he urged her. "Pluck up your courage. Doesn't this mauve pair go well with your dress?"

She could resist no longer. Raising her skirt, she revealed a leg, as stout as a milkmaid's, in a coarse, ill-fitting stocking. The commercial gentleman stooped down and clasped the garter below and above the knee.

Then he tickled the young woman gently, making her jump and utter little shrieks. Finally he presented her with the lilac garters.

"Whose turn next?" he inquired.

"Mine! Mine!" they exclaimed with one accord.

He began with Rackety Rosa, who displayed a round, shapeless limb without even a hint of an ankle—"a leg like a sausage," as Raphaele remarked. Fernande, on the other hand, was complimented by the commercial traveller on her stalwart pillars, which impressed him greatly. The fair Jewess's scraggy calves were less admired. Louise Cocotte sportively threw her petticoats over the gentleman's head, and Madame Tellier had to intervene to put a stop to this unseemly buffoonery. Last of all Madame Tellier exhibited her own shapely Norman legs, firm and solid. With true French chivalry, he showed his surprise and admiration by taking off his hat to these superlative calves. Petrified with horror the peasant and his wife watched the proceedings out of the corner of one eye. They looked so exactly like two hens that the whiskered gentleman jumped up from his seat and shouted Cock-a-doodle-doo in their faces, a sally which provoked a fresh outburst of hilarity.

At Motteville, the old couple got out with their basket, ducks and umbrella. As they moved away, the woman was heard remarking to her husband:

"Another lot of hussies going off to that accursed Paris."

At Rouen the facetious gentleman left them, after behaving so outrageously that Madame Tellier had had to put him severely in his place. She pointed the moral:

"This will be a lesson to us not to talk to strangers."

They had to change at Oissel, and a station farther on they found Monsieur Joseph Rivet awaiting them with a large cart which was furnished with chairs and drawn by a white pony.

The carpenter politely kissed all the ladies and handed them into the vehicle. Three of the party sat on chairs at the back; Raphaele, Madame Tellier and her brother occupied three chairs in front, while Rosa, for whom there was no seat, accommodated herself as best she could on the knees of the buxom Fernande. The cart set off. But it jolted so violently with the rough paces of the pony that the chairs began to dance about. With terror-stricken faces, their occupants were hurled into the air like Jack-in-the-boxes and flung from side to side, while their cries of alarm were cut short every now and then by some unusually severe shock. The ladies clung to the sides of the cart, their hats dangling down their backs, or over their eyes, or on to their shoulders. The white pony trotted along, with his head poked forwards and his little hairless rat's tail straight out, except when he twitched it over his quarters. With one foot on the shaft and the other tucked under him and his elbows well up in the air, Joseph Rivet held the reins, and kept making guttural sounds to the pony, who pricked up his ears and stepped out faster. On either side of the road the green landscape stretched away into the distance. Flowering rape, in sheets of undulating yellow, diffused far and wide its strong, wholesome odour, penetrating and sweet. In among the rye, which was already fairly tall, cornflowers raised their small deep blue heads, tempting the women to pick them. Monsieur Rivet, however, refused to halt. Here and there were fields so thick with poppies that they looked as if soaked in blood. And through these plains, aglow with Nature's

flowers, drove the cart with its bouquet of other flowers of still more garish hues. Drawn at a trot by the white pony, it vanished behind the tall trees sheltering some farm, to reappear beyond the screen of foliage, speeding through the sunshine and flaunting its dazzling bevy of women between the green and yellow crops, flecked with patches of red and blue.

One o'clock struck as they drew up at the door of the carpenter's house. The women, who had had nothing to eat since their departure, were faint with hunger and weariness. Madame Rivet hastened to help them out of the cart and kissed each of her guests as they alighted. As for her sister-in-law, whom she was anxious to monopolize, it seemed as if she would never stop embracing her.

Luncheon was served in the workshop, which had been cleared of its benches for the next day's banquet. An excellent omelette was followed by fried sausage, washed down with strong sparkling cider, and the meal restored everyone's spirits. Rivet toasted his guests, while his wife dished up and waited on them, confidentially asking each of them if she had what she liked. The planks, which were stacked against the wall, and the heaps of shavings and chips in the corners of the room emitted that characteristic odour of planed wood, that resinous essence, which clings about a carpenter's shop and penetrates to the lungs.

The guests inquired for the little girl, but were told that she was at church and not expected home till the evening. The whole party then went for a walk in the village. Virville was a small hamlet, straddling the high road. On either side of its one street stood a row of a dozen houses, occupied by the local shopkeepers, the butcher, the grocer, the innkeeper, the carpenter, the cobbler, the baker. At one end of the street, in the

middle of a small cemetery, stood the church, completely overshadowed by four great lime trees that grew outside the porch. Built of dressed flint, it had no architectural merit, and was surmounted by a belfry built of slates. Beyond the church lay the open country, which was broken up by occasional clumps of trees, in which farms nestled.

Though still in his working clothes, Rivet had ceremoniously offered his sister his arm, and escorted her majestically. Quite overcome by Raphaele's gold-spangled gown, Madame Rivet was walking between her and Fernande. Dumpy little Rosa brought up the rear with Louise Cocotte and Flora, who was limping wearily.

All the villagers came to their doors, and the children stopped playing. Here and there a head in a muslin cap peeped out from behind a lifted curtain. One old woman on crutches and almost blind, crossed herself, as at a religious procession, and everyone cast long and lingering glances after all these fine ladies from the town, who had come such a distance for the First Communion of Joseph Rivet's little girl. A prodigious amount of glory was reflected upon the carpenter himself.

As they passed the church they heard the children singing, their shrill young voices raised in a canticle to heaven. Madame Tellier, however, dissuaded her companions from entering for fear of disturbing the little cherubs. After a stroll in the neighbourhood during which Joseph Rivet discoursed about the principal estates and their yield in crops and cattle, he escorted his flock home again and showed them their rooms.

The accommodation being strictly limited, the guests had been distributed in pairs in all the available rooms.

Rivet himself was to sleep on the shavings in the workshop, while his wife shared her bed with her sister-in-law. Fernande and Raphaele occupied the room next door, and Louise and Flora were quartered in the kitchen, where a mattress had been laid on the floor. Rosa was lodged by herself in a small dark cupboard over the stairs at the entrance to a narrow loft, where Constance was to sleep on the eve of her First Communion.

When the child came home, kisses were showered upon her. All the women were eager to fondle her, seeking an outlet for those affectionate demonstrations, that habit of caressing induced by their profession, which had impelled them to kiss the ducks in the railway carriage. Each in turn took her on her lap, played with her fair, silky hair, and hugged her in passionate transports of spontaneous affection. Steeped in pious emotion, absorbed in her own thoughts, with the seal of absolution upon her, the well-behaved child submitted patiently to their endearments.

It had been a trying day for the whole household and they all went to bed directly after dinner. The infinite peace of the country, the pervasive and boundless silence reaching to the stars, enfolded the village in a hush that was almost religious. This calm that brooded over the landscape affected the nerves of these young women who were accustomed to noisy evenings in Madame Tellier's public rooms. They shuddered, not with cold, but with a sense of loneliness, which stole into their restless, troubled hearts. As soon as they had retired to bed, each clung to her companion, as if to protect herself from the influence of that profound repose that enveloped the earth. Rackety Rosa, all alone in her dark cupboard, and unaccustomed to sleeping with empty arms, was possessed by a vague

and uncomfortable feeling of restlessness. As she tossed about, unable to get to sleep, she heard on the other side of the partition behind her head a low sound as of a child sobbing. She was frightened and called out softly, and a small tearful voice replied. It came from little Constance, who was used to sleeping in her mother's room and felt afraid all by herself in her narrow loft. Overjoyed, Rosa got up quietly to avoid disturbing anyone, and took the child into her own warm bed. She hugged her in her arms, kissed her and fondled her, lavishing passionate endearments upon her, until her own agitation had subsided and she fell asleep. And the little communicant slept till morning, her head pillowed on the bare bosom of the prostitute.

As early as five o'clock, the ladies, who were accustomed to spend the whole morning in well-earned repose, were roused by the little church bell, vigorously ringing the Angelus. The villagers were already astir. Women were bustling from house to house, chattering volubly, some carrying, with the utmost care, short muslin frocks, starched as stiff as cardboard; others gigantic candles with gold-fringed, silk bows round the middle and hollowed out places for the hands to grip. The sun was already high in a pure blue sky, with a tinge of pink still lingering on the horizon, the faint after-glow of dawn. Hens with their broods were already running about in front of the hen-houses, and here and there a black cock with a glossy neck raised his red comb, flapped his wings and flung to the wind his clarion call, which was echoed by all the other cocks.

From the neighbouring villages carts were coming in, setting down at the different doors tall Norman peasant women in dark-coloured dresses with fichus crossed over the bosom and kept in place with old

silver brooches. The men wore blue smocks over their new frockcoats or over their old coats of green cloth with the two long tails hanging below.

After the horses had been put up in the stables, drawn up along the whole length of the street was a double line of rustic vehicles of every description and every age: carts, chaises, gigs, wagonettes. Some were tilted forward; others had their tailboards resting on the ground and their shafts in the air.

The carpenter's house was humming like a beehive. The ladies in dressing-gowns and petticoats, their hair hanging down their backs in short, scanty locks that looked as if they had seen much service, were busy dressing little Constance. The child was standing perfectly still on a table, while Madame Tellier directed the operations of her flying squadron. They washed her, combed and dressed her hair, put on her frock, and with the help of countless pins, arranged the pleats in the skirt, took in the bodice where it was too loose, and gave a dainty finish to the whole. When the last touches had been bestowed, they placed their victim in a chair, exhorting her not to move. Then, in great excitement, all the women ran off to attend to their own adornment.

The church bell began to ring again. Its plaintive tinkle rose in the air only to die away in the vaulted sky, like a feeble voice soon drowned in the infinite depths of ether.

The communicants emerged from their houses and made their way to the public building, containing the two schools and the municipal office, and standing at one end of the village, while the House of God occupied the other. Behind the children followed the parents in their Sunday best; they had the uncouth appearance and the clumsy movements of labourers bent with a

lifetime of toil. The small girls were lost in clouds of tulle, as snowy as whipped cream, while the little boys looked like miniature waiters with their hair plastered down with pomade. They walked with their legs wide apart to avoid splashing their black trousers.

It was a great distinction to have one's child surrounded by a large gathering of relations who had come from a distance, and the carpenter's triumph was supreme. In the wake of Constance went the entire Tellier contingent, with its mistress at its head. Her father gave his arm to his sister; her mother paired off with Raphael, Fernande with Rosa and the two Pumps with each other. The party deployed majestically like a general staff in full uniform. The impression produced on the village was overwhelming. At the school, all the girls clustered round the good Sister's white coif, while the boys rallied round the schoolmaster's hat. He was a handsome man of imposing presence. Striking up a canticle, the procession began to move. First came the boys, moving in double file between the two rows of horseless carriages; then the girls in the same formation, while the ladies from the town, to whom the villagers had courteously given precedence, followed immediately after the little girls, like them in double file, three on the right, three on the left, looking like a display of fireworks in their dazzling raiment.

Their arrival in church caused intense excitement. The congregation turned round, jostling and elbowing one another in their eagerness to look. Some of the worshippers actually began to talk out loud, completely demoralized by these gorgeous ladies, who outdid even the choristers in their vestments. The mayor himself offered them his pew, the first one on the right next to the choir. This was occupied by Madame Tellier, her

sister-in-law, Fernande and Raphaele, while Rackety Rosa with the two Pumps and the carpenter seated themselves in the pew just behind. The chancel was crowded with kneeling children, the boys on one side, the girls on the other, all carrying in their hands long tapers, which looked like lances, pointing in all directions. At the lectern stood three members of the choir singing lustily. They prolonged the sonorous Latin syllables, endlessly dragging out the A's of the Amens, their voices supported by the monotonous and interminable bray that issued from the serpent. A child's shrill treble sang the responses, and from time to time a priest in a square biretta rose from his stall, muttered a few words and resumed his seat, whereupon the three precentors broke forth anew, their eyes intent on the huge book of plain song that lay open before them on the outspread wings of a wooden eagle resting on a pivot. Then a silence ensued. With a unanimous movement the congregation fell on their knees, and the officiating priest, an old man, white-haired and venerable, entered the chancel, bending over the chalice which he bore in his left hand. Before him went two acolytes in red, and behind him, in heavy boots, followed the choristers, who ranged themselves on either side of the choir.

The tinkling of a little bell broke the deep silence, and the holy rite began. The priest moved slowly backwards and forwards in front of the gilded monstrance, genuflecting and chanting the preliminary prayers in a voice cracked and tremulous with age. When he paused, the whole choir, accompanied by the serpent, burst into song, and some of the worshippers in the body of the church joined in the singing, but in subdued and humble tones as became mere members of the congregation. Suddenly, issuing from the hearts

and lungs of all those present, *Kyrie eleison* rose to heaven in so tremendous an outburst that it actually shook down from the old vaulted roof dust and particles of worm-eaten wood. The sun beating down on the slate roof made the little church like a furnace. Deep emotion, trembling anticipation at the approach of the ineffable Mystery, overpowered the hearts of the children and of their mothers.

The priest rose from his seat and returned to the altar. Baring his silvery hair, he began with tremulous movements the act of divine sacrifice. Turning to the worshippers, he stretched out his hands towards them, exclaiming: "*Orate fratres*," "Pray my brethren." And the whole congregation obeyed. Then in a low voice he faltered the supreme and mystic words. The tinkling of the little bell was heard repeatedly; the kneeling throng invoked their God, and the children felt faint with unbearable suspense.

At that moment, Rosa, who was kneeling with her face buried in her hands, suddenly thought of her mother, of her own village church, and her own First Communion. It all came back to her. She felt a little girl again, lost in white draperies, and she began to cry. At first she wept quietly; the tears formed slowly on her eyelashes, but with her reviving memories, her emotion increased, until with swelling throat and heaving bosom, she began to sob aloud. She had taken out her pocket handkerchief and was mopping her eyes and pressing it to her mouth and nose, in a vain attempt to check her cries. A groan issued from her lips and was answered by two deep, heart-rending sighs from her two neighbours, Louise and Flora, who, likewise a prey to similar memories of the past, were completely overcome, dissolved in tears and moans.

Tears are infectious. Madame Tellier soon became

conscious that her own lids were wet, and glancing at her sister-in-law, she found that everyone in her pew was weeping.

The priest consummated the sacred mystery. No longer capable of thought, the children were prostrate on the stone pavement in an ecstasy of religious terror. Here and there, some woman, a sister or a mother, in the grip of that strange sympathy which is communicated by violent emotion, and overcome by the spectacle of all those fine ladies who were kneeling there, convulsed with sobs and shudders, began to cry into her check calico handkerchief, while she held her left hand pressed to her palpitating heart.

Like a spark, which sets fire to a whole field of ripe corn, the tears of Rosa and her companions had instantly spread to the entire congregation. Soon everyone was sobbing, men and women, even the old grandfathers and the lads in their new smocks. It was as if some supernatural essence were hovering above their heads, the emanation of a soul, the mighty breath of a Being, invisible and omnipotent.

Then, in the chancel, a small sharp sound broke the silence. The good Sister was tapping on her book as a signal to the Communicants to draw near to receive the Sacrament. Trembling with religious ecstasy, the children approached the sacred table. They all knelt down in a row. Holding in his hand the silver-gilt pyx, the aged priest passed along the line, presenting to them the Host, which the children received with closed eyes and pale faces, twitching with nervousness, and the long white linen cloth, draped over the railing, rippled like flowing water, as they held it up beneath their chins. A sudden frenzy spread like wild-fire through the church, the mutterings of a delirious crowd, a paroxysm of sobs and cries. It swept over the

worshippers like a gale that bends the trees of a forest. Paralysed with emotion, the priest stood rooted to the spot with the Host in his hand, murmuring:

"It is God, God Himself, who has come among us, God, who is manifesting Himself, who, at my voice, has descended upon His kneeling people."

And he faltered distracted prayers, the inarticulate prayers of the soul, in a rapturous transport of adoration. He administered the Sacrament to all the children in such a fervour of devotion that his limbs failed him, and when he himself had drunk of the Cup, he was overwhelmed by a veritable passion of thanksgiving.

By degrees the congregation regained their composure, and the precentors in all the dignity of their white surplices, resumed their singing, but in voices that still shook with tearful emotion. Even the serpent sounded husky, as if it, too, had been weeping. Then raising his hands the priest signed to all to be silent and he moved forward between the two ranks of communicants, who were still lost in ecstasies of bliss, until he reached the railing of the chancel. Vigorously wringing their handkerchiefs, the congregation pushed back their chairs noisily and resumed their seats. As soon as they saw the priest, there was silence. In a veiled voice, in low, hesitating tones, he addressed his flock:

"My dear brethren, my beloved children, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. It is to you I owe the greatest joy of my life. I have felt the presence of God, who at my invocation descended upon us. He came; He was here present; He filled your souls so that your eyes wept tears. I am the oldest priest in the diocese; I am also to-day the happiest. A miracle has been worked among us, a true, a great, a sublime miracle. Even as Christ entered for the first time into the bodies of these little ones, the Holy Spirit, the

Heavenly Dove, the breath of God, descended upon you, mastered and possessed you, and bent you like reeds shaken by the wind."

Addressing himself to the two pews occupied by the carpenter's guests, he raised his voice and added:

"More especially my thanks are due to you, my beloved sisters, who have come from far away, and who by your presence among us, by your manifest faith and ardent piety have afforded us an example of incalculable value. You have been a source of edification to my parish; your emotion has warmed our hearts. Had it not been for you, this memorable day might never have been crowned with so divine a manifestation. Often the presence of a single lamb from the true fold may move the Lord to descend upon His flock."

His voice failed him.

"Grace be with you," he added, "Amen."

He returned to the altar to bring the service to a close. By this time the congregation were eager to be gone. Even the children were fidgeting, over-taxed by the prolonged mental strain. They were hungry, too, and without waiting for the final gospel, the parents gradually slipped away to put the finishing touches to the dinner.

A crowd clustered around the church door, a vociferous crowd, raising a confused babel of sound, in which the Norman accent predominated. The congregation grouped themselves on either side of the porch, and as the children trooped out of church, each family swooped down upon its own offspring.

Constance found herself surrounded, hugged and kissed by all the women of her own household. Rosa seemed as if she would never weary of embracing her. At last, however, she took the child by one hand; Madame Tellier possessed herself of the other, while

Raphaele and Fernande held up her long muslin skirts to keep them out of the dust. Louise and Flora, with Madame Rivet, brought up the rear. And thus the little girl went on her way with her guard of honour, her own thoughts uplifted and her whole being penetrated with the divine mystery of which she had partaken.

The banquet was served in the workshop on a long trestle table. Echoes of the village rejoicing drifted in through the door opening on the street. Everyone was celebrating the occasion. Through every window people in their Sunday best could be seen seated at table, and sounds of revelry issued from every house. The peasants in their shirt sleeves were tossing off glass after glass of pure cider. Each party was centred around a pair of children, here two girls, there two boys, whose families had combined for the festive meal. Now and then, through the sultry heat of noon, a wagonette, drawn by an old jog-trotting pony, passed through the village, while the driver in his smock cast an envious glance at all this junketing.

At the carpenter's table, the merriment was somewhat subdued, as if still affected by the emotions of the morning. Rivet alone was in high spirits and was drinking to excess. Madame Tellier kept looking at the clock. Unless she was to lose two days' custom, she had to catch the three-fifty train, which reached Fécamp that evening.

The carpenter did his utmost to distract her attention in the hope of keeping his guests till the following day. But Madame Tellier was not to be put off. She never joked when it was a question of business. Directly after coffee she ordered her young women to get ready immediately, and turning to her brother she added :

" And you, Joseph, put the pony in at once."

She herself went upstairs to finish her packing. When she came down again, she found her sister-in-law waiting to talk to her about her little girl. They had a long conversation, which had, however, no definite result. The mother beat about the bush and made a great show of sentiment, but Madame Tellier, who held the child on her knees, would commit herself to nothing more definite than a vague promise that the child should not be forgotten, and the remark that there was plenty of time and there would be other family gatherings in the future.

There was still no sign either of the cart, or of the young women. The noise of a scuffle, mingled with shrieks and loud bursts of laughter and applause drifted down from the upper floor. Madame Rivet went along to the stable to see about the cart, and at last Madame Tellier proceeded upstairs. Rivet, very drunk, was making advances to Rosa, who was in convulsions of laughter. Shocked at such behaviour after the solemn ceremony of the morning, the two Pumps were holding him back by the arms and endeavouring to calm him. But Raphaele and Fernande, doubled up and holding their sides with mirth, kept egging him on with shrill screams of encouragement. Indignantly Madame Tellier seized her brother by the shoulders, and flung him out of the room with such violence that he fell against the wall.

A minute later he was heard pumping water over his head in the yard, and when he brought the cart round, he was quite sober again. They all got in and the little white pony set off at its former brisk, dancing trot. In the bright sunshine they recovered their spirits, which had been depressed during the meal. This time the young women found the jolting of the cart so diverting that they kept jogging their neighbours' chairs and

going off into shrieks of laughter. Rivet's amorous advances had put them all in high good humour. Over the landscape hovered a dazzling radiance, shimmering and dancing before the eyes. The wheels ploughed two furrows through the dust, which hung in clouds above the road long after the cart had passed by. Presently Fernande, who was fond of music, asked Rosa for a song, and Rosa gaily struck up "The Fat Priest of Mendon." But Madame Tellier stopped her at once. She felt that the song was hardly becoming on such a day as this.

"Sing us something of Béranger's instead," she added.

After a moment's pause, Rosa in her worn-out voice began to sing Grandmother's Song:

"Grandmamma sipping her wine,
Shaking her head white as snow:
'Lovers, how many were mine
In the glad days long ago!
Alas, my waist so slim,
And my dimpled arm,
My leg and ankle trim,
And every vanished charm.'"

And the young women, led by Madame Tellier herself, joined in the chorus:

"'Alas my waist so slim,
And my dimpled arm,
My leg and ankle trim,
And every vanished charm.'"

"That's something like," exclaimed Rivet, carried away by the tune. And Rosa continued:

"'To the winds all discretion you threw?'
Ah, those nights without sleep, how divine!
For at blushing fifteen well I knew,
What subtle enchantments were mine."

They all bawled the chorus. Rivet beat time with his foot on the shaft and with the reins on the back of the white pony. The pony itself seemed to be carried away by the rollicking rhythm; he broke into a gallop, a furious gallop, which precipitated all the ladies into a heap on the floor of the cart. Laughing like lunatics, they picked themselves up and went on yelling the song at the tops of their voices. Beneath the burning sky, over the ripening fields, their voices carried, while the pony raced on madly, bolting at each chorus, punctuating it with a gallop of a hundred yards, to the great delight of the travellers. Now and then a man who was breaking stones by the roadside would start up and stare through his wire spectacles at this wild cart-load of shrieking females, borne along in a cloud of dust.

When they reached the station Rivet sighed regretfully:

"What a pity you are going away! We might have had such larks."

"There is a time for everything," Madame Tellier replied judiciously. "One can't always be frivolling."

A brilliant idea occurred to the carpenter.

"I tell you what," he said. "I'll come and see you at Fécamp," and his shining eyes shot a sly and meaning glance at Rosa.

"You can come if you like," remarked Madame Tellier, "but you must behave yourself and not play the fool."

He made no reply, and as the whistle of the train was heard, he began to kiss them all good-bye. When it came to Rosa's turn he made violent efforts to reach her mouth, but laughing with compressed lips, she avoided him, turning her head quickly from side to side, and although he held her in his arms, he could not

attain his desire, being hindered by his big whip, which he still clutched in one hand and in his desperate struggles kept brandishing behind Rosa's back.

"Take your seats for Rouen," said the guard, and the ladies obeyed. The guard blew his whistle and immediately the engine began hissing violently, noisily letting off its first puffs of steam, while slowly and with effort the wheels began to turn.

Rivet left the station and hurried to the barriers for one last glimpse of Rosa. When the carriage with its human freight rushed past him, he began cracking his whip and shouting at the top of his voice:

"'Alas, my waist so slim,
And my dimpled arm,
My leg and ankle trim,
And every vanished charm.'"

Someone waved a white handkerchief and he watched it till it vanished in the distance.

III

They slept the sleep of a conscience at peace until they reached their destination. Rested, revived and ready for their evening duties, they entered the house, and Madame Tellier could not help exclaiming:

"I don't mind telling you, I was wearying for home already."

Supper was soon over, and when they had put on their war paint, they waited for their usual customers to arrive. Once more the lantern, the little votive lantern, burned above the door and announced to all who passed the house the return of the flock to the fold.

The news spread abroad like wildfire, no one knew how. Monsieur Phillippe, the banker's son, was prompted by his kindness of heart to send an express messenger to Tournevau, captive in the bosom of his family. The fish-curer always had several of his cousins to dinner on Sunday, and just as they were having coffee a man came in with a note. In great agitation Monsieur Tournevau tore open the envelope and turned pale. It contained nothing but these words in pencil :

" Cargo of cod. Ship now in harbour. Excellent opportunity for doing business. Come at once."

He fumbled in his pocket, gave the messenger a franc, and blushing up to the eyes he exclaimed :

" I'm afraid I shall have to leave you." He handed his wife the laconic and mysterious note, rang for the maid and demanded his overcoat and hat. Once in the street, he broke into a run, whistling as he went. He was in such a fever of impatience that the way seemed twice its usual length.

Madame Tellier's house wore a festive air. A deafening noise came from the sailors on the ground floor. Louise and Flora hardly knew which way to turn ; they drank first with one, then another, and more than ever earned their nickname. And all the time they were shouted for on every side, so that they were already quite unable to cope with the work in hand, and there was every prospect of a busy night.

By nine o'clock the society on the first floor had mustered a full attendance. Monsieur Vasse, the arbitrator, Madame Tellier's acknowledged but platonic admirer, was quietly chatting with her in a corner, and they were smiling at each other, as if on the verge of an understanding. Monsieur Poulin, the ex-mayor, had planted Rosa astride his knee ; her face was close to his and her dumpy hands were playing with the worthy

man's white whiskers. Her yellow silk skirt was turned up and revealed a glimpse of bare thigh, its whiteness contrasting with Monsieur Poulin's black trousers. Her red stockings were secured with a pair of blue garters, the offering of the commercial traveller.

Buxom Fernande lay at full length on the sofa with both feet on the lap of Monsieur Pimpesse, the tax-collector, while her head rested against Monsieur Phillippe's waistcoat. Her right arm was round his neck and her left held a cigarette.

Raphaele seemed to be parleying with Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, and she concluded by saying:

"Very well, my dear. I have no objection this evening."

Then waltzing all round the room by herself, she exclaimed:

"Anything anybody likes this evening."

The door burst open and Monsieur Tournevau appeared on the threshold. He was welcomed with shouts of delight:

"Three cheers for Tournevau!"

Raphaele, who was still gyrating about the room, fell on his neck. Without a word he caught her in a violent embrace, picked her up as if she were a feather, crossed the drawing-room with his living burden and vanished amidst loud applause through the door at the end, opening on to the staircase which led to the bedrooms.

Rosa, who was inflaming the passions of the ex-mayor with her incessant kisses, pulling him by both whiskers to keep his head straight, profited by this example:

"Come along," she said. "He has given us a lead."

The worthy man rose from his chair, pulled down his waistcoat and fumbling in the pocket where his money was reposing, he followed the young woman from the room. Fernande and Madame Tellier remained alone with the four other men.

"I'll stand champagne," cried Monsieur Phillippe. "Three bottles, please, Madame."

Fernande hugged him and whispered in his ear:

"Do play for us to dance, won't you?"

He rose from his chair. Seating himself at the ancient spinet which stood in the corner, he wrung from its wheezy interior a husky and plaintive waltz. Fernande and the tax-collector took the floor together, while Madame Tellier surrendered herself into the arms of Monsieur Vasse. The two couples revolved round the room, exchanging kisses with their partners as they danced. Monsieur Vasse, who had moved in good society, danced with an air, and Madame Tellier regarded him with fascinated eyes, eyes that answered "Yes," their silent acquiescence more discreet, more exquisite than any spoken word.

Frederick brought the champagne. As the first cork popped, Monsieur Phillippe struck up the opening bars of a quadrille. Bowing and curtsying with all the propriety, grace and dignity of high society, the two couples went through all the figures. When the quadrille was over, they began upon the champagne. Presently Monsieur Tournevau returned, comforted and radiant.

"I don't know what has come over Raphaele," he cried. "She's simply perfection this evening."

At one draught he drained the glass of champagne which was handed to him, exclaiming:

"This is real luxury, this is."

Monsieur Phillippe broke into a lively polka, and

Monsieur Tournevau whirled the fair Jewess away with her feet off the ground. Monsieur Pimpesse and Monsieur Vasse set off again with renewed vigour. Now and then one or other of the couples halted by the mantelpiece to toss off a glass of the sparkling wine. It seemed as if the dance would never end, when suddenly, red with excitement, Rosa in nightgown and slippers, with her hair down her back and a candle in her hand appeared at the half-open door.

"I want to dance," she cried.

"But where's your old man?" asked Raphaele.

"He? Oh he's asleep. He always goes to sleep at once."

She seized Monsieur Dupuis, who was sitting idly on the sofa, and the polka was resumed. By this time all the champagne bottles were empty.

"I'll pay for another," Monsieur Tournevau volunteered.

"So will I," exclaimed Monsieur Vasse.

"And so will I," echoed Monsieur Dupuis amid general applause.

The dance developed into a regular ball. Even Louise and Flora dashed upstairs now and then and snatched a hurried turn or two, leaving their clients fuming and fretting downstairs. Then reluctantly and sorrowfully they would tear themselves away and run back to the café.

Midnight came and they were still dancing. Now and then one of the young women would slip away, and when the others looked for her to make up a set, one of the men was invariably discovered to be missing, too.

"And where have you been?" asked Monsieur Phillippe playfully, as Monsieur Pimpesse re-entered the room with Fernande.

"Watching over Monsieur Poulin's slumbers," replied the tax-collector.

This witticism was highly successful. All of them in rotation went upstairs to watch Monsieur Poulin's slumbers; they were accompanied by one or other of the ladies, who on this occasion showed themselves singularly obliging. Madame Tellier shut her eyes to everything. She herself held long intimate conversations in corners with Monsieur Vasse, as if to discuss the details of an affair that was already concluded.

At last, at one o'clock, the two married men, Monsieur Tournevau and Monsieur Pimpesse, declared that it was time to go, and asked for the bill. Nothing was charged for except the champagne, and this was reckoned at six francs a bottle instead of ten, the usual price. And when her clients protested at such generosity, Madame Tellier replied with a radiant smile:

"It's a red letter day and they don't come often."

THE JEWELS

MONSIEUR LANTIN met her at an evening party at the house of the head-assistant of the departmental office in which he worked. She was still a girl and Monsieur Lantin fell head over ears in love with her. She was the daughter of a provincial tax-collector, who had died some years previously. She and her mother came to live in Paris, and the mother, in the hope of securing a husband for her daughter, cultivated the acquaintance of several middle-class families in the neighbourhood. Both mother and daughter were poor, but of good principles; quiet, agreeable people. The daughter seemed a perfect type of the thoroughly trustworthy woman, to whom a prudent youth would delight to confide his future. Her beauty and simplicity had the charm of angelic modesty, and the faint smile that hovered on her lips seemed an index of her heart. Her praises were sung by everyone, and her acquaintances were never weary of repeating,

"He will be a lucky man who gets her. There isn't a better girl anywhere."

Monsieur Lantin, who at that time was principal clerk in the Ministry of the Interior, at an annual salary of three thousand five hundred francs, asked her hand in marriage, and she became his wife.

His happiness with her was indescribable. She kept house for him with such skill and economy that they seemed to live in luxury. She lavished upon her husband every conceivable attention, consideration and endearment, and her personal charm was such, that six years from their first meeting, he was more in love with her than ever. She had only two weaknesses with which he was disposed to quarrel, a taste for the theatre and a liking for imitation jewellery. Amongst her friends were several ladies, the wives of officials of modest rank, who were always providing her with boxes for plays that were in vogue, or even for first nights, and she would drag her husband, willy-nilly, to these entertainments, which wore him to death after his day's work. He begged her, accordingly, to agree to go to the play with some lady of her acquaintance, who would bring her home afterwards. But she did not think this arrangement quite proper, and it was long before she gave way. At last, however, in order to please him, she yielded, and he was infinitely grateful to her.

Naturally this taste for theatre-going soon begot in her a desire for personal adornment. Her dresses retained their simplicity; they were in good taste but unostentatious, and from their very plainness, her sweet and irresistible grace of manner, so unpretentious and winning, gained an added charm. She acquired, however, the habit of wearing in her ears two great Rhine pebbles, resembling diamonds. She would also deck herself with necklaces of false pearls, bracelets of imitation gold, and combs set with bits of glass, coloured to resemble various jewels.

Her husband, whose taste was somewhat offended by this love of glitter, would remonstrate with her:

"My love, people who cannot afford genuine

jewellery should trust to their natural grace and beauty. These are the most precious of all jewels."

To this, with a gentle smile, she would rejoin :

" It can't be helped. I love these things. It is my little vice. Of course you are right. Still one is as one is made. If I had had real jewels, I should have adored them, too ! "

Then she would run her fingers through her pearl necklaces, or admire the sparkling of her cut pebbles, and say :

" Look how good the workmanship is. Anyone would swear it was genuine."

Then he would smile and declare that she had Bohemian tastes.

Occasionally when they were sitting alone together by the evening fire, she would bring to the table the morocco box in which she kept her " trumpery," as her husband called it. Then she would set herself to examine these imitation jewels of hers with passionate concentration, as if she derived from them some deep and secret joy. Sometimes she insisted on trying a necklace on her husband, and would then burst into peals of laughter.

" You funny old thing ! " she would exclaim, and throw herself into his arms and kiss him ardently.

One winter night she went to the Opera. When she returned she was shivering with cold. Next morning she had a cough. A week later she died of inflammation of the lungs.

Lantin came near to following her into the grave. His despair was so terrible that his hair turned white in a single month. He wept from morning till night. His soul was rent by intolerable anguish; he was haunted by the remembrance of the smile, the voice, all the charm of his departed wife. Nor did his grief at

all abate with time. Often during office hours when his colleagues happened to be discussing the topics of the moment, they would see his cheeks suddenly puff out and his eyes fill with tears; his face would contort horribly and he would burst into sobs. He kept his wife's room intact, and he shut himself up in it every day to think of her. Every article of furniture, and even her clothes, remained where they had been on the day of her death.

Life, however, became difficult for him. His salary, which, under his wife's management, had sufficed for all the requirements of the house, had now become inadequate for himself alone. He speculated with amazement as to how she had contrived to supply him with excellent wines and delicious food, which he could no longer procure with his limited resources.

He contracted debts here and there, and in the hunt for money had to employ all the shifts familiar to the impecunious. At last one morning, a whole week before pay-day, he found himself without a penny, and it occurred to him that he might sell something. Hard upon this came the idea that he might rid himself of his wife's "trumpery." In the depths of his heart, even before her death, he had always harboured a grudge against these shams. And now the mere sight of them daily rather spoilt for him the memory of his beloved.

After a long search through the pile of gew-gaws which she had left, for she had persisted unto the end in buying them, adding almost every evening some new object to her collection, he fixed upon the long necklace which seemed to be her favourite, and which might easily, he thought, be worth six or eight francs, the workmanship being really admirable for an imitation. He slipped it into his pocket, and on his way to the

office, went by the boulevards, keeping a look-out for some jeweller's shop that he could trust. At last he saw one and went in, feeling rather ashamed at having to expose his poverty by trying to sell a thing of such small value.

" Will you kindly let me know," he said to the jeweller, " what value you put on this article? "

The jeweller took the necklace in his hands, examined it, turned it over and over, tried the weight of it, inspected it through a magnifying glass, called his assistant and exchanged remarks with him in an undertone, laid the necklace on the counter and looked at it from a distance, the better to judge of the effect. Provoked by these ceremonies, Monsieur Lantin had it on the tip of his tongue to protest that he was quite aware that the thing was of no value, when the jeweller delivered his verdict :

" It is worth from twelve to fifteen thousand francs, but I cannot buy it, unless you let me know exactly how you came by it."

The widower opened his eyes to their full extent. His mouth gaped wide. At last he stammered out :

" You say . . . you are sure . . ."

Misinterpreting his amazement, the jeweller retorted dryly :

" Better try somewhere else, if you think you can get more. That's all it's worth to me. Fifteen thousand at the outside. If you find you can't do better than that, you can come back to me."

Completely dumbfounded, Monsieur Lantin picked up his necklace, and left the shop; he was constrained by a bewildered desire for solitary reflection. But the moment he found himself in the street again, he could hardly restrain his laughter.

" What an idiot ! " he said to himself. " What an

idiot! Suppose I had taken him at his word! Fancy a jeweller not knowing real from false!"

He tried another jeweller at the beginning of the Rue de la Paix. As soon as the second jeweller set eyes on the necklace, he exclaimed:

"Ah, to be sure. I recognize this. It came from my shop."

Greatly disturbed in mind, Monsieur Lantin asked what its value was.

"Well, sir, I sold it for twenty-five thousand, and I am ready to take it back for eighteen. But to satisfy the law, you must let me know how it came into your possession."

Paralysed with amazement, Monsieur Lantin dropped into a chair.

"But . . . but . . pray examine it carefully . . . I always believed it was . . . imitation."

"Will you give me your name, sir?" rejoined the jeweller.

"Certainly. My name is Lantin. I am in the Ministry of the Interior, and my address is 16 Rue des Martyrs."

The jeweller turned up his books, and after a search said:

"That's right. This necklace was sent to Madame Lantin at the address you mention, on the 20th July, 1876."

The two men looked hard at each other, Monsieur Lantin stricken with astonishment, the jeweller apprehending some knavery.

"Will you," the latter resumed, "leave this necklace in my charge for twenty-four hours only? I will give you a receipt for it."

Still stammering, Monsieur Lantin consented, and folding the receipt put it in his pocket. He crossed the

street, walked to the end of it, realized that he was going the wrong way, and regained the Champs-Elysées without a clear idea in his head. It was impossible for his wife to buy an article of such value. Absolutely impossible! It followed that the necklace must have been a gift. A gift? But from whom? And why?

He halted and stood still in the middle of the avenue, touched by the first breath of a horrible suspicion. She? His wife? And all the other jewels, too, must have been presents. The solid earth trembled beneath his feet. A tree in front of him swayed and fell; he stretched out his arms and collapsed, insensible. He regained consciousness in a chemist's shop, to which the passers-by had carried him. He had himself taken home, and there he shut himself up in his room. He wept frantically until nightfall, biting his handkerchief to keep himself from crying out loud. Broken with weariness and grief, he went to bed and slept heavily. Awakened by the morning sun, he rose and made himself ready to go to office. But it was hard to have to work after sustaining such a shock, and it occurred to him that he could write to his chief and excuse himself. This he did. Then he remembered that he had to go to the jeweller's, and he flushed with shame. He considered the question for a long time. But he could hardly leave the necklace with that man. So he put on his coat and went out.

It was a fine day, and the city seemed to smile beneath its canopy of blue sky. He watched men strolling along with their hands in their pockets, and as he saw them go past, he thought how lucky people were who had plenty of money. With money a man could shake off his sorrows, go where he pleased, travel about the world and never be bored. Oh, if only he were rich!

He had eaten nothing since the previous evening, and became conscious of the pangs of hunger. But his pockets were empty, and this fact made him remember the necklace. Eighteen thousand francs! Eighteen thousand francs! That was indeed a sum. Arrived at the Rue de la Paix he began to walk up and down on the pavement opposite the shop. Eighteen thousand francs! A score of times he was on the point of entering, but always his shame held him back. But then, there was his hunger, real hunger, and he had not a penny in his pocket. Suddenly he put an end to his vacillation. So as not to give himself time to think, he crossed the street at a run and plunged into the jeweller's shop.

The moment he saw Monsieur Lantin, the jeweller, with smiling courtesy, hastened to offer him a chair. The assistants stood by, casting side-glances at Lantin, and evidently bubbling over with merriment.

" I have made inquiries, Monsieur Lantin," said the jeweller, " and if you have not changed your mind I am prepared to pay you the sum I mentioned."

In a quivering voice, Lantin signified his agreement, and the jeweller took eighteen large bank-notes out of a drawer and handed them over. Lantin signed a receipt and put the notes in his pocket with a trembling hand.

As he was leaving the shop, he turned to the still smiling jeweller, and with eyes cast down, said:

" I have . . . I have other jewels . . . which I have inherited from the same estate. Would it suit you to buy these from me, too? "

With a bow, the jeweller expressed his readiness. One of the assistants left the shop, so that he could laugh without constraint. Another used his handkerchief violently. But Lantin, impassive and solemn,

merely flushed and said that he would bring the remaining jewels, and taking a cab he went home for them. When he returned an hour later, he had not yet broken his fast. The articles were examined and valued one by one. Nearly all of them had been originally bought at the same shop. Lantin was now challenging the valuations, and insisting eagerly on seeing the books of sales, and the larger grew the total, the louder he raised his voice. A pair of large diamond ear-rings fetched twenty thousand francs; bracelets, thirty-five thousand; brooches, rings and lockets, sixteen thousand; a setting of emeralds and sapphires, fourteen thousand; a gold necklace with single-stone pendant, forty thousand. The total reached the sum of one hundred and ninety-six thousand francs. With good-humoured raillery the goldsmith declared that the collection must have belonged to someone who put all his savings into jewellery, to which Lantin rejoined gravely that there were different kinds of investments and that this was one of them. On leaving, he agreed with the purchaser that they would have a check-valuation the next day.

Once in the street again, he looked at the Vendôme Column and wanted to climb it, as if it had been a greasy pole. He felt like playing leap-frog over the statue of the Emperor, perched up there in the sky. He lunched at Voison's and drank wine at twenty francs a bottle. Then he took a cab and went for a drive in the Bois. He looked at the other carriages with a certain disdain, obsessed by a desire to call out to all the passers-by that he, too, was rich. He had two hundred thousand francs!

Presently he remembered his work. He went to the Ministry, entered his chief's room with deliberation, and announced his news.

"I have come, sir, to hand in my resignation. I have inherited three hundred thousand francs."

Then he went and shook hands with all his old colleagues and communicated to them his new scheme of life. He dined that evening at the Café Anglais. Finding himself seated beside a distinguished-looking man, he could not resist the longing to confide in him, and he coyly informed him that he had just come in for four hundred thousand francs. For the first time in his life he went to the theatre without feeling bored, and he passed the night with some young women.

Six months later he married again. His second wife was a woman of sterling character, but not easy to live with, and she oppressed him horribly.

THE LADY OF THE TOMBS

FIVE friends had been dining together, five wealthy and experienced men of the world. Three were married and two had remained bachelors. For old time's sake they met once a month, and after dinner they always talked till two in the morning. They had remained close friends, and enjoyed one another's company, and these were perhaps the pleasantest evenings in their lives. Every topic that interested Paris society was discussed. Their conversation, as is the case in most drawing-rooms, was a recapitulation of what they had read in the morning papers. One of the merriest members of the party was Joseph de Bardon, a bachelor, who in his own whimsical fashion, enjoyed to the full the life of Paris. He was neither a rake nor a decadent, but a man of barely forty, full of vitality and still young enough to be interested in life. A man of the world in the widest and most favourable sense of the term, he was endowed with much acuteness without great depth, much desultory knowledge without real learning, keen understanding without profound insight. His observations and experiences furnished him with a stock of romantic stories in which wit and philosophy were blended, while his humorous comments earned for him a general reputation for intelligence. He was always the spokesman at dinner, and could be counted upon for

a story, which he would relate without waiting to be pressed. Seated there smoking with his elbows on the table and a half-emptied glass of liqueur brandy beside him, soothed by the atmosphere with its fragrance of tobacco, its aroma of hot coffee, he seemed in his element, like an individual in his own proper environment, a devotee in his chapel or a gold fish in its bowl. Between two puffs of smoke he began :

" A little while ago I had a curious experience."

" Tell us about it," they all cried as one man.

" With pleasure. You know my habit of prowling about Paris, like a collector who peers into the windows of curiosity shops. My hobby is watching people and events, everything that goes on, and everyone who goes by. One fine afternoon, about the beginning of September, I started out for a walk with no definite object in view. One often feels disposed to pay a visit to some pretty woman of one's acquaintance. One reviews one's gallery of fair ladies, compares their charms and the interest they inspire and selects one's hostess according to the mood of the moment. But on warm sunny days this inclination sometimes vanishes completely.

" Well, that particular day happened to be warm and sunny. I lighted a cigar and went for an aimless walk on the outer boulevards. As I was strolling along, the spirit moved me to go as far as the Montmartre cemetery and to look in there. Cemeteries have a great fascination for me. They have a restful and sobering influence, which I find very wholesome. And good friends of mine lie there, friends whom no one will ever see again, so I visit it now and then.

" In that particular cemetery of Montmartre I have buried a romance, a mistress who meant a great deal to me, a charming little woman, whose memory still

torments me, still stirs in me regrets . . . of every description. And I sometimes go and muse by her tomb. For her, everything is over.

"And cemeteries have for me yet another charm. They are cities, huge cities with a vast population. Think of all the dead that are confined in that small space, all the generations of the citizens of Paris, who are lodged there for ever, troglodytes to the end of time, each in his little cave, in his little hole in the ground, marked with a stone or a cross, while the living take up so much room and make so much noise, fools that they are.

"Again, cemeteries contain monuments almost as interesting as anything in museums. Without comparing the two, the tomb of Cavaignac reminds me of Jean Goujon's masterpiece, that effigy of Louis de Brézé in the subterranean chapel in the Rouen cathedral. It is the inspiration of all so-called modern and realistic art. That statue of Louis de Brézé is more true, more terrible, more genuine flesh and blood convulsed in the agony of death, than all the contorted corpses carved on the tombs of to-day. Admirable, too, is that monument of Bandin, which has a certain grandeur, and that of Gautier and of Murger, which I saw the other day adorned with a single poor little wreath of immortelles. Who had laid it there? The last of the grisettes, perhaps, an old woman now, wife of some hall-porter in the neighbourhood of Montmartre. Murger's monument is a charming statuette by Millet, but falling into ruin through neglect and dirt. Singer of youth, O Murger!

"So I entered the Montmartre cemetery and was seized at once by melancholy, a melancholy, however, that was not too oppressive, a melancholy, which if you are feeling well, prompts you to say to yourself:

'This is certainly not a cheerful spot, but it's not my turn yet.'

"The feeling of autumn in the warm, damp atmosphere, impregnated with the scent of dead leaves and illumined by the faint rays of a pale, declining sun, heightened and etherealized the definite impression of solitude and ultimate end which haunts this spot, so fraught with human mortality.

"I was wandering slowly up and down these streets of the dead, where the neighbours never call upon one another, never make love and never look at the newspapers. And I began reading the epitaphs. I assure you they are the most entertaining literature in the world. Neither Labiche nor Meilhac has ever made me laugh like some of these quaint effusions of obituary prose. Ah, there is nothing in the books of Paul de Kock to cure the spleen like these marble slabs and crosses on which the relations of the dead have recorded their regrets, their prayers for the happiness of the departed and their hope of joining him—humbugs that they are!

"But my favourite corner of the Montmartre cemetery is the old part, neglected and deserted, planted with tall yews and cypresses, and sacred to the dead of long ago. Soon it will be converted into the new quarter, and those green trees, fertilized with human bodies, will be cut down to make room for rows of fresh graves, each with its little slab of marble.

"When I had sufficiently refreshed my soul with these wanderings, I began to feel bored. It was time to pay my tribute of faithful devotion at my little friend's last resting-place. Heavy at heart I drew near her grave. Poor dear, how sweet she used to be, how loving, how white and desirable—and now—if one were to open that——

" Leaning over the iron railing, I whispered to her all my sorrow, but I do not think she heard. I was just turning away, when I caught sight of a woman in deep mourning, kneeling by the next grave. Her half-raised veil of crape revealed a charming little head with coils of fair hair, which had all the radiance of dawn beneath the night of her widow's weeds. I remained where I was.

" Evidently she was in deep affliction. With her face buried in her hands, she knelt there rigid as a statue, abandoning herself to her sorrow and telling over again her chaplet of memories in the darkness of her closed and hidden eyes. She was as one dead, mourning the dead. Suddenly I saw her back quiver, like a willow shuddering in the wind, and I knew that she was about to burst into tears. At first she wept quietly, then more passionately, her neck and shoulders trembling. All at once she drew her hands away from her eyes. They were very pretty eyes, brimming with tears, and she rolled them wildly, as if she had just awakened from a nightmare. She saw me looking at her, and as if in shame, she hid her face again in her hands. Then she broke into convulsive sobs and her head sank slowly downwards until it rested upon the marble tomb, while her floating veil spread like new mourning drapery over the corners of the white sepulchre that hid her beloved. I heard her groan. At last she collapsed and lay motionless and unconscious with her cheek against the marble slab. I sprang to her aid, slapped the palms of her hands, and blew on her eyelids. As I did so, I read the words of the simple epitaph :

" ' Here lies Louis Theodore Carrel, Captain of Marines, slain in battle in Tonkin. Pray for him.'

" It dated from a few months ago. I was moved

almost to tears, and redoubled my efforts. They were successful and she regained consciousness. My concern was obvious—I am not unpresentable, and I am still under forty. Her first glance gave me to understand that she was ready to show herself both grateful and courteous, as indeed she proved. With more tears and in broken words she told me her story. Her husband had been killed in Tonkin after they had been married a year; he had married her for love, she being an orphan with no more dowry than the regulation minimum. I did what I could to comfort her and attempted several times to raise her from the ground. At last I said:

"'You must not stay here. Come away.'

"'I cannot walk,' she murmured.

"'Lean on me.'

"'Thank you; you are very kind. Have you, too, come here to mourn some dear one?'

"'Yes.'

"'A woman?'

"'Yes.'

"'Your wife?'

"'No, a friend.'

"'A friend can be as dear as a wife. Passion knows no law.'

"'True.'

"Together we left the cemetery; she leaned on me so heavily that I had almost to carry her. As we turned out of the gate, she faltered, half swooning:

"'I think I am going to faint.'

"'Won't you come to a restaurant and have something to drink?'

"'Yes, please.'

"I noticed a restaurant, one of those establishments to which the friends of the deceased repair to drown the

memory of a disagreeable duty. We went in. I made her drink a cup of hot tea, and this seemed to revive her. A faint smile hovered about her lips, and she began to tell me about herself. It was so dreary, so terribly dreary to be all alone in life, all alone in one's house day and night, to have no one in whom to confide, no one on whom to bestow affection and sympathy. I felt touched by these lamentations, which sounded sincere and charming on her lips. She was very young, not more than twenty. I paid her compliments, which she accepted graciously. Then, as time was getting on, I offered to drive her home in a cab. She accepted my proposal, and during the drive we sat so close to each other that, through our clothes, the warmth of our bodies mingled—possibly the most disturbing sensation in the world.

"When the cab stopped at her house, she faltered:

"'I live on the fourth floor. You have been so kind. Would you mind giving me your arm as far as my door?'

"I agreed with alacrity. Slowly, panting for breath, she climbed the stairs. When we reached her door she exclaimed:

"'Do come in for a few minutes and let me thank you.'

"Needless to say I accepted her invitation.

"It was a small flat, furnished modestly, almost poorly, but with simplicity and taste. We sat down side by side on a little sofa, and she again complained of her lonely condition. Then she rang for her maid to order some refreshments for me. The maid, however, did not answer the bell, and I joyfully concluded that she only came in the mornings and was merely a charwoman.

"She had laid aside her hat. She was really very

pretty with her intent and limpid eyes—eyes so limpid, so intent, that I yielded to an overwhelming temptation that suddenly beset me. I caught her in my arms and upon her downcast eyelids I rained kiss after kiss, kiss after kiss. She struggled to free herself, exclaiming:

"'What next, I should like to know!'

"How was I to interpret her words? They were, to say the least, ambiguous. To silence her, I turned my attention from her eyes to her lips, and gave to her remark the meaning I preferred. She offered no violent resistance, and when our eyes met after this outrage to the memory of the late lamented Captain, she had about her a tender, languid air of resignation, which dispelled my apprehensions.

"I played the lover, the devoted and grateful lover, and after another hour or so of conversation I said to her:

"'Where do you generally dine?'

"'At a little restaurant round the corner.'

"'All alone?'

"'Why, yes.'

"'Won't you come and dine with me?'

"'Where?'

"'At a good restaurant on the boulevard.'

"She demurred, but I pressed her and at length she yielded, murmuring apologetically to herself:

"'It's so dreary, so terribly dreary.'

"Then she added:

"'I had better put on something less dismal,' and she withdrew to her bedroom, whence she presently emerged in half-mourning, slim and dainty and bewitching in a simple grey gown. Evidently she had two different sets of clothes, one for the cemetery and one for the town.

"Over dinner we grew very friendly, and after a

glass or two of champagne she became gay and sparkling. I went home with her.

"This liaison, which had originated among the tombs, lasted about three weeks. But after a while everything palls, especially women. I left her on the pretext of an urgent journey and I made my farewells with a generosity for which she thanked me effusively. She made me promise and vow that I would come back to her when I returned to Paris. Apparently she had a genuine liking for me.

"I followed the lure of other sirens, and a whole month passed during which I felt no temptation to pay another visit to my little friend of the tombs. But I did not forget her. The idea of her haunted me, like a mystery, a psychological problem, one of those baffling questions which we torment ourselves to solve. For some reason or other, I felt sure, one day, that I should see her again in the Montmartre cemetery, and I betook myself thither. For some time I walked up and down without meeting anyone but the usual visitors, mourners, who had not yet entirely broken off their relations with the dead. The marble tomb of the Captain slain in Tonkin was graced neither by mourner, flower, nor wreath. But as I was wandering in a different quarter of that great city of the dead, I saw coming towards me down a long path between rows of crosses, a man and a woman in deep mourning. Picture my amazement! As soon as they were near enough, I recognized her. It was the young woman herself. She saw me and coloured, and as I brushed against her in passing, she made a little sign, the merest flicker of an eyelid, which meant not only 'Do not betray me,' but 'Come and see me again, my dear.'

"Her companion was an officer of the Legion of

Honour, a presentable man of about fifty, who possessed both style and distinction. She was leaning on his arm, just as she had leant on mine. In amazement, profoundly impressed with what I had seen, I left the cemetery. I wondered how to class this strange being, who chose a cemetery for her hunting-ground. Was she merely a common street-walker, who had had the brilliant inspiration of capturing among the tombs grief-stricken men, still tortured by the memory of some woman, wife or mistress, still ravaged by that longing for the touch of a vanished hand? Was she a unique specimen or one of a band? Was it a recognized profession? Did they, a ghoulish sisterhood, walk the cemeteries, as others the streets? Or was it her own admirable idea, the outcome of a profound philosophy, this exploiting of the passionate regrets which are revived in these tragic haunts?

"I would have given much to know whose widow she was on this second occasion."

THE HAND

THE whole party had gathered in a circle round Monsieur Bermutier, the magistrate, who was giving his opinion on the mysterious St. Cloud affair, an inexplicable crime, which had been distracting Paris for a month. No one could make anything of it. Standing with his back to the fireplace, Monsieur Bermutier was discussing it, marshalling proofs, analysing theories, but arriving at no conclusion. Some of the ladies had risen from their chairs and had come nearer him. Clustering round him, they kept their eyes on the clean-shaven lips which uttered such weighty words. They shuddered and trembled, thrilled by that strange awe, that eager and insatiable craving for horrors, which haunts the mind of women and tortures them like the pangs of hunger. One of them, paler than the others, ventured to break a sudden silence:

"How ghastly! It has a touch of the supernatural. No one will ever find out the truth about it."

Monsieur Bermutier turned to her:

"That is likely enough. But as for your word, supernatural, it has no place in this affair. We are confronted with a crime, which was ably conceived and very ably executed. It is wrapped in such

profound mystery, that we cannot disengage it from the impenetrable circumstances surrounding it. Still, within my own experience, I had once to follow up a case that really appeared to have an element of the supernatural in it. We had eventually to give it up, for lack of means to elucidate it."

Several ladies exclaimed as with one voice:

"Oh, do tell us about it."

With the grave smile appropriate to an investigating magistrate, Monsieur Bermutier resumed:

"At all events pray do not imagine that I myself have for one instant attributed anything of the supernatural to this incident. I believe in normal causes only. It would be much better if we used the word 'inexplicable' instead of 'supernatural' to express things that we did not understand. In any case, what was striking in the affair I am going to tell you about was not so much the event itself as the circumstances that attended and led up to it. Now to the facts.

"At that time I was investigating magistrate at Ajaccio, a little town of white houses, situated on the edge of a wonderful bay surrounded on all sides by lofty mountains. My principal task there was the investigation of vendettas. Some of these vendettas are sublime, savage, heroic, inconceivably dramatic. In them, one comes across the finest themes of revenge imaginable; hatreds that have endured for centuries, lying for a time in abeyance, but never extinguished; detestable stratagems, assassinations that are mere butchery, others that are almost heroic deeds. For two years I had heard nothing discussed there but the price of blood; nothing but this terrible Corsican tradition, which obliges a man who has been wronged to wreak his revenge upon the man who has wronged him, or upon his descendants or his next-of-kin. Old men, children,

distant cousins, I had seen them all slaughtered, and my head was full of tales of vengeance.

" One day I was informed that an Englishman had just taken a lease for several years of a little villa at the far end of the bay. He had brought with him a French manservant, whom he had picked up while passing through Marseilles. It was not long before universal curiosity was excited by this eccentric person, who lived alone and never left his house except to go shooting or fishing. He spoke to no one, never came to the town and practised for an hour or two every morning with his pistol and carbine. All sorts of legends sprang up about him. He was said to be an exalted personage, who had fled his country for political reasons; to this succeeded a theory that he was in hiding because he had committed a horrible crime of which the most shocking details were given. In my official capacity, I was anxious to learn something about this man, but my inquiries were fruitless. The name he went by was Sir John Rowell. I had to be satisfied with keeping a close watch upon him, but I never really discovered anything suspicious about him. None the less the rumours never ceased, and they became so widespread that I determined to make an effort to see this stranger with my own eyes. I therefore took to shooting regularly in the neighbourhood of his property.

" My opportunity was long in arriving, but at length it presented itself in the form of a partridge, which I shot under the Englishman's very nose. My dog brought me the bird, but I took it immediately to Sir John Rowell, and begged him to accept it, at the same time making my apologies for my breach of good manners. He was a red-headed, red-bearded man, very tall and massive, a sort of easy-going, well-

mannered Hercules. He had none of the so-called British stiffness, and although his accent came from beyond the Channel, he thanked me warmly for my considerate behaviour. Before a month had elapsed we had conversed five or six times. One evening as I was passing his gate, I caught sight of him smoking his pipe. I greeted him and he invited me to come in and have a glass of beer. I accepted his invitation with alacrity. He received me with all the meticulous English courtesy; and although he made shocking mistakes in grammar he was full of the praises of France and Corsica and professed his affection for these countries. Very cautiously, and under the pretext of a lively interest, I began to question him about his life and his plans for the future. His replies were perfectly frank and he told me that he had travelled much in Africa, India and America.

" ' Oh yes, I have had plenty of adventures,' he added, laughing.

" Then I turned the conversation on sport and he gave me the most curious details about shooting hippopotamus, tiger, elephant, and even gorilla.

" ' These are all formidable brutes,' I said.

" ' Why no,' he said smiling. ' Man is the worst of all.'

" He laughed heartily, like a big, genial Englishman.

" ' I have done lots of man-hunting, too.'

" Then he talked about guns and invited me into his house to look at various makes. His drawing-room was hung with black silk, embroidered with golden flowers that shone like fire on the sombre background. It was Japanese work, he said.

" In the middle of the largest panel, a strange object attracted my attention; it stood out clearly

against a square of red velvet. I went up to examine it. It was a hand, the hand of a man. Not a clean, white skeleton hand, but a black, dried-up hand, with yellow nails, bared muscles, and showing old traces of blood, black blood, crusted round the bones, which had been cut clean through as with an axe, about the middle of the forearm. Round the wrist of this unclean object was riveted a powerful chain, which was attached to the wall by a ring strong enough to hold an elephant.

"'What is that?' I asked.

"'That is my worst enemy,' replied the Englishman calmly. 'He was an American. His hand was chopped off with a sabre. Then it was skinned with sharp flints, and after that it was dried in the sun for a week. It was a good job for me.'

"I touched this human relic. The man must have been a Colossus. The fingers were abnormally long and were attached by enormous tendons to which fragments of skin still adhered. It was a terrible sight, this hand, all flayed; it could not but suggest some savage act of vengeance.

"'He must have been a stout fellow,' I remarked.

"'Oh yes,' replied the Englishman in his gentle tones. 'He was strong, but I was stronger. I fixed that chain on his hand to keep it from escaping.'

"Thinking that he was joking, I replied:

"'The chain is hardly needed now; the hand can't run away.'

"Sir John answered gravely:

"'That hand is always trying to get away. The chain is necessary.'

"I cast a rapid, questioning glance at him, wondering whether he was mad or making an unpleasant joke. But his face retained its calm, impenetrable, benevolent expression. I changed the

subject and began to admire his guns. I noticed, however, that there were three loaded revolvers lying about on the chairs and tables. Apparently this man lived in constant dread of an attack.

"I went to see him several times, and then my visits ceased. People had become accustomed to his presence and took no further interest in him.

. . . . . .

"A whole year passed. One morning towards the end of November my servant woke me with the news that Sir John Rowell had been murdered during the night. Half an hour later I was in the Englishman's house. With me were the Superintendent of Police and the Captain of gendarmes. Sir John's manservant was weeping at the door of the house; he was distraught and desperate. At first I suspected him. He was, however, innocent. Nor was the murderer ever discovered.

"When I entered the drawing-room, the first thing to strike me was the sight of Sir John's corpse lying flat on its back in the middle of the floor. His waistcoat was torn; one sleeve of his coat was ripped off. There was every indication that a terrible struggle had taken place.

"Death had been caused by strangulation. Sir John's face was black, swollen, and terrifying. It bore an expression of hideous dread. His teeth were clenched on some object. In his neck, which was covered with blood, there were five holes, which might have been made by iron fingers. A doctor arrived. After a prolonged examination of the fingermarks in the flesh, he uttered these strange words:

"'It almost looks as if he had been strangled by a skeleton.'

"A shudder passed down my spine, and I cast a

glance at the wall, at the spot where I had been wont to see that horrible, flayed hand. The hand was no longer there. The chain had been broken and was hanging loose. I bent down close to the corpse and between his clenched teeth I found one of the fingers of that vanished hand. At the second joint it had been cut, or rather bitten, off by the dead man's teeth. An investigation was held, but without result. No door or window had been forced that night, no cupboard or drawer had been broken into. The watchdogs had not been disturbed. The substance of the servant's evidence can be given briefly. For a month past his master had seemed to have something on his mind. He had received many letters, which he had promptly burnt. Often he would snatch up a horse-whip and in a passion of rage, which suggested insanity, lash furiously at that withered hand, which had been riveted to the wall, and had mysteriously vanished at the very hour at which the crime was committed.

" Sir John, said the servant, went late to bed and locked himself carefully into his room. He always had firearms within reach. Often during the night he could be heard speaking in loud tones, as if he were wrangling with someone. On the night in question, however, he had made no sound, and it was only on coming to open the windows the next morning that the servant had discovered the murder. The witness suspected no one.

" I told the magistrates and police officers everything I knew about the deceased, and inquiries were made with scrupulous care throughout the whole island, but nothing was ever discovered.

" Well, one night, three months after the murder, I had a frightful nightmare. I thought I saw that hand, that ghastly hand, running like a scorpion or a

spider over my curtains and walls. Thrice I awoke, and thrice fell asleep again, and thrice did I see that hideous relic gallop around my room, with its fingers running along like the legs of an insect. The next day the hand itself was brought to me. It had been found in the cemetery on Sir John's tomb. He had been buried there, as no trace of his family was discoverable. The index finger of the hand was missing. Ladies, that is my story. That is all I know about it."

The ladies were horrified, pale and trembling. One of them protested:

"But the mystery is not solved. There is no explanation. We shall never be able to sleep if you don't tell us what you make of it yourself."

The magistrate smiled a little grimly:

"Well, ladies, I'm afraid I shall deprive you of your nightmares. My theory is the perfectly simple one that the rightful owner of that hand was not dead at all, and that he came looking for his severed member with the one that was left him. But as for explaining how he managed it, that is beyond me. It was a kind of vendetta."

Another lady protested.

"No, that can't be the real explanation."

Still smiling, the narrator rejoined:

"I told you it wouldn't satisfy you."

MOONLIGHT

THE Abbé Marignan's demeanour was not unworthy of one who bore the name of a battle. He was tall. lean and fanatical, with a fervour that never abated, a conscience that never relaxed, beliefs that never swerved a hair's breadth. It was his profound conviction that he understood the God whom he worshipped, and was able to fathom His designs, His wishes, His purposes.

As he vigorously paced the garden paths of his little country parsonage, a question would sometimes present itself to his mind:

"What were God's motives for such and such an act?"

He would put himself in God's place, reason the matter out pertinaciously, and, as a rule, successfully. Not for him were those transports of devout surrender, in which the faithful murmur:

"Lord, Thy ways are hid from me."

On the contrary, he argued that as God's servant he had a right to know his Master's reasons, and if he did not actually know them, he would do his best to guess them. In his eyes the whole scheme of creation seemed to have been devised with a logical symmetry, which was absolute and admirable. Question and answer were ever in perfect equipoise. The purpose of

dawn was to provide a glad awakening; of broad daylight to ripen the crops; of evening to dispose one to slumber; and of darkness to make one sleep sound. The course of the seasons coincided perfectly with the requirements of agriculture. Never can a suspicion have crossed his priestly mind that purpose cannot be attributed to nature; that, on the contrary, it is life that has had to adapt itself to the despotism of epochs, temperature and the laws of matter.

For woman he had an instinctive hatred and contempt.

"Woman," he would say, in the words of Christ, "what have I to do with thee?"

And he would further reflect,

"Surely God Himself can hardly have been pleased with this work of His."

Woman was indeed to him, as the poet has described her, "a child without a child's innocence."

She was the temptress, who had lured astray the first man and had never ceased from her work of damnation. Disturbing and unfathomable, she was, though feeble in herself, pregnant with danger to others. More even than her accursed flesh, he detested her unquenchable love of love. He had often felt her affection hovering around him, and although he knew himself proof against her, it angered him to see her perpetually quivering with this passionate hunger for love. To his mind, God had created woman merely as a trial and temptation, to be approached with defensive precautions, and to be shunned as one would shun a snare. In fact, a decoy was precisely what she was, luring a man with kisses and caresses.

The only women whom he regarded with tolerance were sisters of religion, who had been rendered innocuous by their vows, but he was hard with them

none the less, because he was conscious that in the depths of their enslaved and humbled hearts still lurked inextinguishable that never-dying tenderness, reaching out even to him, a priest. He read it in their eyes, which brimmed with devotion as those of a monk never did; he saw their sex intrude into their ecstasies, into their transports of love towards Christ, and he was indignant because he knew that this love was womanly and of the flesh. In their very docility, in their downcast eyes, in the gentleness of their voices when they spoke to him, in their tears of resignation when he reproved them harshly, in all this he discerned that same accursed sentiment. When he passed out of the convent doors, he would shake his cassock, and his strides would lengthen, as if he were fleeing from some danger.

He had a niece, who lived with her mother in a small house in the neighbourhood, and he had set his heart on making her a sister of charity. She was pretty, feather-brained and inclined to make fun of things. When the Abbé lectured her, she laughed; and when he was annoyed, she threw her arms round him and hugged him. He would make instinctive efforts to free himself from her embrace, and yet it gave him a tender joy and aroused in the depths of his nature that sense of fatherhood which lies dormant in all men. As he walked by her side along the field paths he would frequently speak to her about God as he conceived Him. But she hardly listened; she would gaze at the sky, the grass, the flowers, with the joy of life shining in her eyes. Sometimes she would dart away in pursuit of a butterfly, and when she had caught it she would exclaim:

"Look, uncle, how pretty it is. I could kiss it!"

And the priest was vexed, disturbed and shocked by

this craving of hers to kiss insects or lilac buds, discerning even here the ineradicable fondness that ever germinates in a woman's heart.

Then came a day when the sexton's wife, who kept house for the Abbé, gave him cautiously to understand that his niece had a lover. This information was a terrible shock to him, and he stood there choking, with his face all covered with soap, for he had been interrupted while shaving. When his powers of thought and speech returned to him, he exclaimed:

"You must be mistaken, Mélanie."

But his housekeeper laid her hand on her heart and said:

"May the good Lord judge me, if I'm not speaking the truth! As soon as your sister is in bed, off goes your niece every evening. They meet along the river bank. You have only to go there between ten o'clock and midnight."

He stopped scraping his chin, and began to walk violently up and down, as was his custom when he had something serious to consider. When he resumed his interrupted shave, he gashed himself thrice from nose to ear. Bursting with rage and indignation, he did not say one word all day. He felt the natural fury of a priest who has been defied by love the invincible; and, more than this, the chagrin of the moral instructor, the guardian, the spiritual guide, who has been deceived, tricked, made game of, by a child; the apoplectic vanity of parents, whose daughter informs them that she has, without them and in spite of them, made her own choice of a husband.

After dinner he tried to read a book, but could make nothing of it. Every hour saw his fury increase. On the stroke of ten he seized his walking-stick, a formidable oaken staff, which he used when he went out at night to

visit the sick. Smiling grimly, he grasped this stout cudgel in his strong peasant's hands, and twirled it in menacing circles. Then suddenly he raised it high in the air, and, gnashing his teeth, brought it down on a chair with such violence that the back of the chair broke off and fell on the floor.

Then he opened the front door to go out. But on the threshold he stopped, astounded by the lustrous moon which shone with a splendour such as is seldom witnessed. And inasmuch as he was endowed with the spirit of lofty imagination, such a spirit as must have possessed those poet-dreamers, the Fathers of the Church, he felt moved to the soul by the infinite, serene beauty of that radiant night. In this little garden, all flooded with soft moonlight, the budding, slender branches of his fruit trees cast their clear-cut shadows across the path, and the giant honeysuckle which clung to the wall of the house sent forth its balmy breath, pervading the mild, clear evening with a sweetness that seemed itself almost a soul.

He began to breathe deeply, drinking in the air as drunkards drink wine, and he set forth at a slow pace. He was ravished, awestruck. The thought of his niece had almost vanished from his mind. As soon as he was clear of the houses, he paused to gaze upon the great sweep of country, flooded by that caressing radiance, bathed in the tender, languishing charm of that serenely beautiful night. The frogs never ceased uttering their short metallic note. With the seduction of the moonlight, distant nightingales mingled strains of that linked sweetness which begets reverie rather than thought, that light, vibrant music, fit accompaniment for kisses.

Somehow, as he started on his walk again, the Abbé found his resolution failing. He was conscious of a sudden debility and lack of energy; he wanted to sit

down where he was and stay there and look about him and adore God in His works.

Down in the river valley a long line of poplars wound its way by the course of the meandering stream. Above its steep banks hovered a delicate, white vapour, which was transfused with silvery radiance by the moonbeams. It lay along the tortuous windings of the stream like a floating veil of filmy tissue. Again the priest came to a halt, moved to the depth of his soul by an increasing and irresistible emotion. He was attacked by a doubt, a vague disquietude; confronted by one of those questions which he sometimes put to himself. What was God's purpose in all this? Night is destined for sleep, unconsciousness, repose, oblivion. Why then had God made it more enchanting than day, fairer than dawn or sunset? How was it that that heavenly orb, moving so slowly, so seductively, more full of poetry than the sun itself, and destined, so discreet it seemed, to shed its radiance on things too delicate, too mysterious for common daylight, had such power to make the darkness luminous? How came it that the most brilliant singer of all the singing birds refused to seek repose like its mates, preferring to utter its music in a haunted shade? Why was this half-transparent veil cast across the earth? Whence these stirrings of the heart, this emotion of the soul, these languors of the body? All humanity was asleep. Why then this display of loveliness for men who were steeped in unconsciousness, for whom were intended the sublime spectacle, this wealth of poetry, scattered so lavishly by heaven upon the earth?

The Abbé could find no answer to his problem. But suddenly he caught sight of two shadowy figures, a youth and a maid, walking side by side on the edge of the fields. Above them, steeped in misty radiance,

arched the vault of the great trees. The youth was the taller of the two. He had his arm round his companion's shoulders, and every now and then he kissed her on the forehead. These two at once gave significance to the placid landscape that fitted them like a heavenly frame. They seemed, the two of them, like one being, the very being for whom this calm and silent night was intended, and as they came nearer to the priest they seemed in very truth the answer, the living answer, which his Master was giving to his questionings.

The Abbé stood there with beating heart, his mind in a whirl. Surely what he gazed upon was some scene from Holy Writ, the love of Ruth and Boaz, the fulfilment of God's will in one of those great dramatic effects that one reads of in the sacred books. In his head began to ring the verses of the Song of Songs; the ardent outpourings, the call of heart to heart, all the fervent poetry of that lyric of fire and love.

"It may be," he reflected, "that God has created nights like this in order to cast His divine veil over human loves."

Linked together, the youth and the maid came nearer, and the Abbé drew back. He recognized his niece, but now he was wondering whether he was not in danger of disobeying God. If God enveloped human love in this visible splendour, how could it be argued that He forbade it?

Completely bewildered, almost ashamed, as though he had penetrated a shrine which he had no right to enter, the Abbé fairly took to flight.

MAHOMMED FRIPOUILLE

"SHALL we have coffee on the roof?" asked Captain Marret.

"Certainly," I replied, and he rose from his chair.

It was already dark in the hall, which derived its light solely from the inner courtyard, as is usual in Moorish houses. Over the lofty pointed windows creepers drooped down from the wide roof-terrace on which the warm summer evenings were spent. The table had been cleared, except for fruit of different kinds: enormous African varieties, grapes, as big as plums, soft figs with purple pulp, yellow pears, long, plump bananas, and Tougourt dates in a basket of esparto grass. The mulatto, who was waiting on us, opened the door and I went up the staircase, its azure walls bathed in the soft glow of sunset. I breathed a deep sigh of delight when I found myself on the terrace, which commanded a view of Algiers, the port, the roadstead and the distant coasts.

Captain Marret's house was formerly an Arab dwelling, situated in the centre of the old town, in the midst of those labyrinthine alleys, which never cease to hum with the life and the strange population of the African coasts. Below us the flat rectangular roofs descended like giant steps, until they gave way to the sloping roofs of the European quarter. Beyond the

latter appeared the masts of anchored ships, and beyond that again the sea, the open sea, reflecting the peaceful azure of the vault of heaven. We stretched ourselves on mats, with cushions behind our heads, and while I slowly sipped the fragrant coffee they make in these parts, I watched the stars as they came out one by one in the darkening sky. They were barely visible, so far and faint they were; they hardly seemed fully alight. A mild warmth, delicate as the brushing of a bird's wing, caressed us, and sometimes, more ardent, less ethereal, from over the peaks of Atlas, came the breath of the desert, charged with the vague odour that speaks of Africa.

" What a country ! " said Captain Marret, as he lay on his back. " Life is sweet here. Repose has some special quality of exquisiteness. Such nights as this are made for dreaming."

For my part, with lazy yet alert interest, drowsy, but happy, I continued to watch the stars flash out one by one.

" You might tell me something of your life in the South," I suggested sleepily.

Marret was one of the oldest officers in our African army. He was a soldier of fortune, and it was to his trusty sword that he owed his rise from the ranks. Thanks to him and his friends and connections, I had been enabled to enjoy a splendid tour in the desert, and I had come that evening to express my gratitude to him before I returned to France.

" What sort of a story would you like? " he asked. " I have had many adventures during my twelve years in the desert, so many indeed that I can't remember a single one."

" Tell me about the Arab women," I rejoined.

He made no reply. Stretched at full length with his

arms thrown back and his hands behind his head, he was smoking a cigar of which every now and then I caught a fragrant whiff. Its smoke floated straight upwards in the still night air.

Marret suddenly broke into a laugh.

" Very well. I'll tell you a curious incident that occurred about the time I first came to this country. In those days we had in our African army some extraordinary types, such as one never sees nowadays. They don't make them any more. They would have interested you so much that you would have wanted to spend your whole life here.

" I was just a spahi, a young spahi of twenty, fair-haired, active and strong, a bit of a swaggerer, a regular Algerian swash-buckler. I was attached to the Boghar command. You know Boghar; it is called the amphitheatre of the South. From the highest point of the fort, you have seen the beginning of that burning land, wasted, barren, grim, covered with red rocks. It is in truth the antechamber of the desert, the superb and blazing frontier of those vast regions of sandy solitudes.

" Well, there were about forty of us spahis at Boghar and we were a merry company. Besides us, there was a squadron of African light-horse. News were brought to us that the tribe of Ouled-Berghi had murdered an English traveller, who had come from God knows where, for all these English have a devil.

" This crime perpetrated on a European had to be avenged. But the officer in command was reluctant to send out a whole column, being of opinion that one Englishman hardly justified such a demonstration. As he was discussing the matter with his captain and lieutenant, one of our sergeant-majors, who was present, suddenly volunteered to punish the tribe himself, if he were given a squad of six men. In the outposts, as you

are aware, the men enjoy greater freedom than in headquarters garrisons, and officers and common soldiers fraternize in a way that you do not find elsewhere.

" ' You, my man ? ' laughed the captain.

" ' Yes, sir. I'll bring back the whole tribe as prisoners if you like.'

" The major, however, who was no slave to tradition, took him at his word.

" ' You will start to-morrow morning with six men selected by yourself, and if you do not keep your word, look out for trouble.'

" The sergeant smiled beneath his moustache.

" ' Don't you be afraid, sir. The prisoners will be here by Wednesday at the latest.'

" This sergeant-major, whom we called Mahommed Fripouille, or Scallywag Mahommed, was a most surprising character. A pure-blooded Turk, he had enlisted in the French army after a much chequered, and doubtless not very reputable, career. He had travelled in Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, Palestine, and must have left a trail of misdeeds on his wanderings. He was a true Bashibazouk, bold, fond of a spree, fierce, and at the same time merry, but with the placid mirth of the Oriental. He was a great stout fellow, but as active as a monkey and a superb horseman. He had the thickest and longest moustaches you ever saw; they suggested to my mind something between a crescent moon and a scimitar. His hatred for the Arabs was intense, and he treated them with cunning and frightful cruelty, continually thinking out for their benefit new stratagems and calculated acts of horrible treachery. To all this he added prodigious strength and courage.

" ' Choose your men, my lad,' said the major.

" I was one of those chosen. Mahommed believed in me, and by choosing me he bound me to him, body

and soul. It gave me more pleasure than the *croix d'honneur*, which I won later.

" At dawn the next morning we set out, seven of us all told. My comrades were of the piratical, free-booter type, who plunder and roam in every land under the sun, and eventually enlist in some foreign legion or other. At that time our African army was full of these ruffians, first-rate soldiers, to be sure, but utterly unscrupulous. Mahommed had given each of us a dozen pieces of rope about a yard long to carry, and I, as the youngest and lightest, was entrusted besides with a single rope of a hundred yards. When he was asked what he meant to do with all this tackle, he replied in his sly, quiet way :

" ' We're going to fish for Arabs.'

" And he gave a knowing wink, an accomplishment he had learnt from an old African trooper, who hailed from Paris.

" With his head wrapped in the red turban, which he always wore in the field, he rode at the head of our troop. Under his enormous moustaches lurked a smile of ecstatic enjoyment. And he looked really splendid, this burly Turk, with his powerful frame, colossal shoulders and unruffled demeanour. He was riding a sturdy white charger of moderate height and seemed ten times too big for his mount.

" During our march along a rocky, treeless and sandy defile, which unites later with the valley of the Chélif, we discussed our expedition in every accent under the sun, my comrades including a Spaniard, two Greeks, an American and three Frenchmen. As for Mahommed, you never heard such a rolling of r's. The terrible Southern sun, of which one has no conception north of the Mediterranean, beat down on our backs, and we advanced at a walk, as is the custom in that country.

We marched all day without seeing either a tree or an Arab. About an hour after noon we halted by a little stream, which trickled among the rocks. There we opened our haversacks and ate our bread and dried mutton. After twenty minutes rest we set out on our march again. By our leader's orders we took a circuitous route which brought us, about six o'clock, within sight of an encampment which lay behind an eminence. The low brown tents stood out like dark splashes on the yellow sand, as though huge mushrooms had sprouted up at the foot of this sun-baked hill.

" They were the very tribe we were seeking. Their horses were tethered a little distance away and were browsing at the edge of a stretch of dark esparto grass.

" Mahommed gave the order to charge, and we swept like a hurricane into the midst of the encampment. The terror-stricken women, their tattered white clothing fluttering around them, fled cringing into the shelter of the tents, and crouched there, uttering cries like hunted animals. The men, however, came running from all directions, eager to defend their camp. We rode straight for the principal tent, that of the Agha. Following Mahommed's example, we kept our sabres in their scabbards. Our leader, as he galloped, was worthy of notice. He sat bolt upright in the saddle, as steady as a rock, while in spite of the weight he carried his little charger seemed as if possessed, his impetuosity contrasting curiously with the imperturbability of his rider.

" As we appeared in front of his tent, the Arab chief emerged. He was tall, lean and dark, with shining eyes beneath arched eyebrows and prominent forehead.

" ' What is your business? ' he cried in Arabic.

" Mahommed checked his horse, and replied in the same tongue.

" ' It was you who killed the English traveller? '

" 'I am not answerable to you,' retorted the Agha emphatically.

" All around us a sound arose like the muttering of a storm. The Arabs ran up from all directions, and pressed close about us, vociferating furiously. With their prominent, hooked noses, their lean faces and their ample robes flapping about them like wings, they resembled a flock of ferocious birds of prey. Mahommed, his turban awry, his eyes flashing, smiled, and his plump, lined, rather pendulous cheeks quivered with delight. In a voice of thunder, which quelled the surrounding clamour, he shouted:

" ' Death to him who has dealt death.'

" He pointed his revolver at the dark face of the Agha, a puff of smoke issued from the barrel, and a red froth of blood and brains spurted from the chief's forehead. He fell backwards as though struck by a thunderbolt, and as he fell he flung his arms abroad and his wide burnous opened out on either side of him, like the pinions of a bird.

" I thought that certainly my last hour had come, so shocking was the uproar that broke out around us. Mahommed had drawn his sabre, and we followed his example. He whirled his sabre round him, driving back those who pressed too near.

" ' I spare those who submit. Death to all who resist.'

" He seized the nearest Arab in his Herculean grasp, lifted him on to the saddle, tied his hands together and roared to us to do as he did and cut down every man who resisted. Within five minutes we had twenty Arabs bound firmly by the wrists. Then we pursued those who had run away. The crowd around us had fled headlong at the sight of our naked sabres. We brought in about thirty more of the men.

" The whole plain was covered with fleeing white figures. Dragging their children after them, the women scattered with shrill cries of terror. Yellow dogs, like jackals, circled around us, barking and showing their yellow fangs. Beside himself with glee, Mahommed leaped from his horse, and seizing the long rope which I had brought he shouted :

" ' Attention, my men, two of you dismount.'

" Then he did a thing which was both farcical and horrible. He made a string of prisoners, or rather a string of hanged men. Having fastened firmly the wrists of the first captive, he made a slip knot round his neck with the same rope, which he then passed first round the wrists, and then round the neck of the next man. Very soon our fifty prisoners found themselves tied together in such a fashion that if one of them made the least movement to break away, he strangled not only himself, but his two neighbours. Their slightest motion tightened the slip knot round their necks, and when they walked they had to keep the same step and the same distance from one another on pain of being brought down like noosed hares.

" When he had finished this extraordinary job, Mahommed began to laugh that silent laugh of his, which shook his whole body with noiseless mirth.

" ' There's your Arab chain,' said he.

" The rest of us were convulsed with amusement at the terrified and piteous faces of our prisoners.

" ' And now,' cried our leader, ' fix a stake at each end, my lads.'

" Accordingly a stake was fixed at each end of this string of captives, who looked like phantoms in their white robes. They stood as motionless as if they had been turned into stone.

" ' Now to dinner,' cried Mahommed.

" We lit a fire and roasted a sheep, which we tore to pieces with our fingers. Then we ate some dates and drank some milk, which we found in the tents, where we also picked up a few silver ornaments left behind by the fugitives.

" We were peacefully finishing our meal when I saw on the opposite slope a singular gathering consisting entirely of the women who had just escaped. They were coming towards us at a run. I pointed them out to Mahommed, who remarked with a smile:

" ' That's our dessert.'

" A queer sort of dessert it was.

" They charged madly down upon us, hurling volleys of stones at us without checking their advance, and we saw that they were armed with knives, tent stakes and old cooking pots.

" ' Mount,' ordered Mahommed, and not a moment too soon. The attack was desperate. Their object was to sever the rope and free the prisoners. Realizing our danger Mahommed furiously shouted to us to cut the women down. Not a man stirred. Seeing that we were taken aback by this new sort of warfare, and were hesitating to kill women, he charged our assailants single-handed.

" All alone he faced that tatterdemalion battalion of women, and the ruffian wielded his sabre with such insensate fury, with such mad rage, that at each stroke a white-robed figure sank to the earth. Such was the terror he inspired that the women fled in panic as swiftly as they had come, leaving behind them a dozen dead and wounded, whose blood stained their white garments red.

" Then, with face convulsed, Mahommed returned to us.

" ' Let's be off, my lads, they are sure to come back.'

" We beat a retreat at a slow walk, leading our

captives, who were paralysed by the fear of strangulation. It was noon on the following day when we arrived at Boghar with our chain of half-hanged men. Only six of them had died on the way, but every jerk threatened to choke a dozen prisoners, and we had to keep loosening the knots all along the line."

Captain Marret had finished his story. I made no remark. I thought what a strange country this was, in which such scenes could be witnessed, and I looked up into the dark sky and gazed upon the radiant phalanx of innumerable stars.

HIS WIFE

It was a men's dinner of old friends. All of them were married, but they met now and then without their wives, as in their bachelor days. They had dined well and the wine had flowed freely. They discussed every topic under the sun and revived old happy memories, those vivid memories that bring an involuntary smile to the lips and a throb to the heart.

"George, do you remember our expedition to St. Germain with those two little girls from Montmartre?" said one of them.

"I should think I did."

And they reminded one another of this and that, of all sorts of absurd trifles, which had never lost their charm. Then the talk turned on marriage, and each of them said with an air of conviction:

"Of course, if I had my chance over again . . ." And George Duportin added:

"It is extraordinary how easily one is caught. You make up your mind never to marry, and then one spring you go into the country. The weather is warm; it promises well for the summer; the meadows are full of flowers. You meet some girl at a friend's house. And it's all up with you. You come back married."

"Exactly what happened to me," cried Pierre

Létoile, "though in my case there were peculiar circumstances."

"You needn't complain. You have married the most charming woman in the world, pretty and agreeable and admirable in every respect. You have had the best luck of any of us."

"It wasn't my fault," the other retorted.

"What do you mean?"

"I admit that my wife is perfection. But I had no say in the matter."

"What nonsense!"

"It is perfectly true. Let me tell you the story. I was thirty-five and I had no more intention of getting married than of getting hanged. Girls seemed to me insipid creatures, and I lived entirely for pleasure.

"One May I was invited to Normandy to the wedding of my cousin Simon d'Erabel. It was a real Norman wedding. We sat down to table at five o'clock in the afternoon and at eleven o'clock we were still at it. My partner for the occasion was a Mademoiselle Dumoulin, daughter of a retired colonel. She was a dashing young woman of military bearing, with fair hair, a good figure and plenty to say for herself. She monopolized me all day, took me for walks in the park, insisted upon my dancing, and bored me to death.

"'I can stand one day of this,' I said to myself. 'But I'm off to-morrow. I have had enough.'

"About eleven o'clock the ladies retired to their rooms. The men stayed on to smoke and drink, or drink and smoke, whichever you please.

"The open windows afforded a view of a rustic ball. Peasants of both sexes were dancing in a round, shouting a primitive dance tune, to the feeble accompaniment of two violins and a clarinet. The musicians were perched on a large kitchen table, which served as a

stage. Sometimes the clamorous singing entirely drowned the instruments, but now and then broken snatches of music, a few disconnected notes, seemed to float down from the sky.

" Two huge casks, surrounded by flaming torches, had been broached, and two men were kept busy, rinsing bowls and glasses in a tub, then holding them under the taps, one of which dispensed red wine, the other pure golden cider. The thirsty dancers, girls bathed in perspiration and their more staid elders, crowded round, holding out their hands for cups of their favourite beverage, and with heads thrown back, they tossed them off. A table was spread with bread and butter, cheese and sausages, and everyone helped himself as he pleased. It was a pleasant sight, this rough, healthy merry-making beneath the light of the stars; it roused in the spectator a desire to drink of those great barrels and to eat a slice of plain bread and butter and a raw onion.

" An insane impulse seized me to join in these revels and I deserted my companions. I may have been slightly drunk already. Soon I was completely so. I seized a strapping, panting peasant lass by the hand and jumped her wildly up and down, till I was out of breath. I drank a glass of wine and seized another buxom damsel. Then I refreshed myself with a bowl of cider and continued to skip and leap like one possessed. I was an active young fellow. All the lads were in raptures and tried to imitate me, while all the girls wanted to dance with me, and they hopped and jigged with about as much grace as cows. In the end, towards two in the morning, thanks to alternate draughts of wine and cider between each round, I was so drunk that I could hardly stand. I was aware of my condition and tried to make my way back to my room. The manor

house slumbered, dark and silent. I had no matches, and everyone was in bed. As soon as I entered the hall I felt giddy. I had great difficulty in finding the staircase, but at length I felt my way to it and seated myself on the bottom step to try and collect my scattered wits.

" My room was on the second floor; the third door on the left, as I luckily remembered. Fortified by this conviction, I rose, not without difficulty, and began the ascent, step by step, clinging with my hands to the iron bars of the banisters to prevent myself from falling, and with the fixed idea in my head of making no noise. Not more than three or four times my foot missed a step and I fell on my knees, but thanks to my muscular arms and my determination, I avoided complete disaster. At last I reached the second floor and I ventured along the corridor, feeling my way along the wall. I came to a door.

" ' One,' I counted, but at that moment, in a sudden fit of giddiness I reeled away from the wall, and this had the curious result of bringing me up against the opposite wall of the corridor. I tried to return to my own side; it was a long and difficult journey. But at last I reached it, and carefully proceeded along it, until I came to another door. ' Two,' I said, counting aloud. Eventually I came to the third. ' Three,' I said, ' and that's mine.' I turned the handle. The door opened. Muddled as I was, I thought:

" ' This opens, so it must be mine.'

" I closed the door softly behind me and went forward into the darkness. I stumbled against some soft object. It was the sofa, and I lay down at once. In the condition in which I was, I was not going to trouble to hunt for the candle and matches. It would have taken me at least two hours to find them, and

another two to undress, and quite probably I should not have succeeded. So I gave it up.

"I contented myself with removing my boots, unbuttoning my uncomfortably tight waistcoat, and loosening my waistband. Then I slept like the dead.

"It must have been hours afterwards that I was sharply aroused by a sonorous voice exclaiming close to my ear:

"'Still in bed, lazy girl? Do you know it's ten o'clock?'

"'Already?' replied a feminine voice. 'I was so tired last night.'

"I was stupefied with amazement, wondering what could be the meaning of this dialogue. Where was I? What on earth had I been doing? My mind was still enveloped in a thick fog.

"'I'll draw back the curtains,' rejoined the first speaker.

"I heard footsteps approaching my sofa, and in great alarm I sat up. Then, feeling a hand on my head, I started violently.

"'Who's there?' a voice demanded fiercely.

"I took good care to hold my tongue. Someone laid violent hands upon me. I came to grips with my assailant and a desperate struggle ensued. We staggered about the room, upsetting the furniture and knocking up against the walls.

"Then the feminine voice cried out in terror: 'Help! help!'

"Servants, frantic ladies, and people from adjoining rooms, rushed in. The shutters were thrown open and the curtains drawn back. I found myself wrestling with Colonel Dumoulin.

"I had been sleeping by his daughter's bedside.

"They separated us, and utterly dumbfounded I fled

to my own room and locked myself in. Having left my boots in the young lady's room I sat down and put my feet up on a chair.

" The whole château was in an uproar. Doors were opened and shut. There was whispering and scurrying in all directions. Half an hour elapsed and I heard a knock at my door.

" ' Who is there? ' I called out.

" It was my uncle, father of the bride of the previous day. I let him in. He was white with rage and reproached me violently.

" ' You have abused my hospitality and behaved like a scoundrel. Do you hear? '

" Then he added, more gently :

" ' You silly ass, how could you let yourself be caught out at ten in the morning? You went to sleep like a log in the girl's room, instead of going away at once, as soon as . . .'

" ' My dear uncle,' I broke out, ' I assure you there's nothing in it. I was drunk and I mistook the door.'

" He shrugged his shoulders.

" ' Come now, don't talk nonsense.'

" ' I swear it on my honour,' said I, raising my hand.

" ' Oh, by all means,' replied my uncle. ' Of course you are bound to say that.'

" This made me so angry that I told him the whole story. Wide-eyed he gazed at me, hardly knowing what to believe. Then he left me and went to interview the Colonel. I was told that a sort of jury of matrons had been formed to consider the various aspects of the situation. In an hour's time my uncle returned, and assuming a judicial demeanour, he sat down and addressed me :

" ' Be the facts what they may, I can see no way out of it for you but to marry Mademoiselle Dumoulin.'

" I jumped out of my chair in horror.

" ' Not for anything in the world.'

" ' Then what do you propose to do? ' he asked gravely.

" ' Why, go away as soon as they let me have my boots,' I replied ingenuously.

" ' This is no laughing matter,' rejoined my uncle. ' The Colonel is determined to blow your brains out as soon as he sees you. And you can make up your mind that he means what he says. I suggested a duel, but he said " No, I tell you I'm going to blow his brains out." Now let us consider the question from another point of view. Either you have seduced the child, and in that case, all the worse for you, my boy. It isn't the thing to carry on with unmarried girls. Or, on the other hand, you were really drunk, as you say, and mistook the door. In that case again, all the worse for you. No one has any business to make such a fool of himself. The long and the short of it is that the poor girl's reputation is gone. Nobody will believe your story about being drunk. The real and only victim is the girl. Think it over.'

" As he left the room I shouted after him :

" ' You can say what you like. I won't marry her.'

" I was left to myself for another hour.

" And then it was my aunt's turn to pay me a visit. She wept. She exhausted every argument. No one believed my explanation. It was inconceivable that a girl should forget to lock her bedroom door in a house full of people. The Colonel had beaten her and she had been crying all the morning. The scandal was appalling, irreparable.

" ' And so,' my excellent aunt concluded, ' you must

just ask her in marriage. We may find a way out of it when we discuss settlements.'

"This prospect comforted me, and I agreed to make a formal offer in writing. An hour later I left for Paris. The next day I was informed that my proposal had been accepted. Within three weeks, no loophole of escape having presented itself, the banns were published, the invitations issued, the contract signed, and one Monday morning behold me in the brilliantly-lighted chancel of a church, standing beside a tearful young woman, whom I had just promised before the mayor to take for better, for worse . . . until death us did part.

"I had not seen her since that day, and I eyed her with sidelong glances of surprise and disgust. I had to admit, however, that she was not ugly, far from it.

"'The laugh won't be altogether on her side,' I reflected.

"She never looked at me once the whole day, nor did she say one word.

"About midnight I entered her room to tell her my intentions, for I was master now.

"She was seated in an armchair, fully dressed. She was pale and had been weeping. When I entered, she rose and came towards me and said solemnly:

"'I am ready to obey your orders. If you wish me to kill myself I shall do so.'

"She was inconceivably attractive, this soldier's daughter, playing her heroic rôle. I kissed her, having every right to do so. I was not long in discovering that I had made a good bargain. I have been married five years now, and have not regretted it for a moment."

Pierre Létoile ceased. His friends laughed, and one of them said:

" Marriage is a lottery. It's a mistake to choose your number. It is best left to luck."

Another summed up the case thus:

" Quite so. But don't forget that the god of drunkards chose Pierre's for him."

MISS HARRIET

THERE were seven of us in the brake, four ladies and three men, one of whom sat on the box beside the coachman. Our horses were slowly climbing the long, steep road that wound round the hill. We had left Etretat at dawn in order to visit the ruins of Tancarville. Drugged by the strong morning air, we were still half asleep, especially the ladies who were not accustomed to keep sportsmen's hours. Their eyelids kept drooping, their heads nodded, and they even yawned, all unconscious of the charm of the dawning day.

It was autumn. The harvest was in, and on either side of the road lay fields yellow with the stubble of oats and wheat, bristly like a badly-shaven chin. A mist, like steam, rose from the ground. High in the air larks were singing, and other birds were twittering in the thickets. At last before our eyes rose the sun, fiery red on the edge of the horizon. As it climbed higher, gaining in brightness minute by minute, the whole countryside seemed to awaken with a smile, to shake itself, and like a girl rising from her bed, to doff its vesture of white mist.

Count d'Etraille, who was on the box, exclaimed:

"Look, there's a hare," and he pointed to a field of clover on the left. The hare was stealing away, invisible except for its long ears; it crossed a stretch of ploughed land, then stopped short, galloped frantically first in

one direction then another, stopped again uneasily, on the alert for danger, and doubtful which way safety lay. At last it bounded off with all the impetus of its powerful hind quarters, until it disappeared in a big square field of beetroot. All the men roused themselves to watch its movements.

" We are not doing our duty by the ladies this morning," remarked René Lemanoir, glancing at his neighbour, the young Baroness de Sérennes, who was struggling to keep awake.

" You are thinking of your husband, Baroness," he said to her in an undertone. " Don't worry. He won't be back till Saturday. You have four more days."

" How silly you are," she replied with a sleepy smile. Then shaking off her drowsiness she added: " Tell us something amusing and make us laugh. Monsieur Chenal, you are supposed to have had more successes than the Duke of Richelieu himself. Give us the story of some love affair of yours, any one you please."

Léon Chenal was an old painter, who in his youth had been very handsome, very strong, very proud of his physique, and beloved of many ladies. He passed his hand over his long white beard and smiled. After a few moments' thought, however, he suddenly became grave.

" My story is not a cheerful one, ladies. I am going to tell you the most melancholy love affair of my life. May none of my friends ever inspire a passion so tragic ! "

I

" I was twenty-five, a strolling painter, exploring the coast of Normandy. By this I mean roaming, knapsack on back, from inn to inn, on the pretext of making sketches and studies from nature. I know nothing pleasanter than such random wanderings. You are free and unfettered, without a care in the world or a thought for the morrow. You choose what road you please, with no guide but your own fancy, and no counsellor but the pleasure of the eyes. When something attracts you, be it a brook or the pleasing smell of fried potatoes issuing from an inn, you halt. Sometimes it is the scent of clematis that determines your choice, sometimes an artless glance from the innkeeper's daughter. Such rustic flirtations are not to be despised. These girls, too, have souls and senses, smooth cheeks and rosy lips. Their rough kisses have the piquant savour of wild fruit, and love has always a value of its own, whatever its origin. A heart that beats at your coming, eyes that weep at your departure, these are things too dear, too rare, too precious, ever to be despised. I have kept tryst by ditches full of primroses, behind cowsheds, in hay-lofts that still retained the heat of the day. I can yet recall the feel of coarse grey calico, that covers robust and supple limbs. Still am I haunted by the memory of those frank, ingenuous kisses, more seductive in their brutal directness than all the subtle delights that are offered by gracious women of the world.

" But the chief charm of such rambles lies in the country itself, in its woods, its sunrises, its dusk, its moonlight. For a painter it is, as it were, a honeymoon

with nature. In this long and tranquil communion you are alone with her in the closest intimacy. You throw yourself down in a meadow full of marguerites and poppies, and with wide open eyes you gaze through the bright sunshine at the little village in the distance and its pointed belfry with the clock just striking noon. You sit on the edge of a spring that bubbles up from beneath the root of an oak tree, amid tall, delicate grasses vividly alive. You kneel down to drink the cold, clear water, which wets your moustache and nose, and you are conscious of a thrill of pleasure, as if, lip to lip, you were kissing the spring itself. Sometimes you come upon a pool in one of these slender rivulets, and in you plunge, stark naked, tingling from head to foot with the chill, delicious caress of the swift, dancing current. Gay on the hilltop, melancholy by the side of the lake, you are enraptured by the sight of the sun as it sinks down into a sea of bloodred clouds and suffuses the waters of the river with crimson light. And at night, when the moon rides high in the heavens, you are haunted by a thousand mystical thoughts, which would never visit you in the broad light of day.

" I was exploring this very district in which we are staying at present, and I came one evening to the little village of Bénouville, situated on the cliff between Yport and Etretat. I had come from Fécamp, along the coast, keeping to the lofty cliffs which rise like a perpendicular wall, broken by jutting rocks of chalk that fall sheer down to the sea. All that day I had been walking over the short turf, soft and springy as a carpet, which grows on the edge of the precipice in the salt wind from the ocean. Singing at the top of my voice, striding along lustily, and watching now the leisurely, wheeling flight of a gull, the curve of its white

wings silhouetted against the blue sky, now the brown sail of a fishing boat on the emerald sea. I had spent a glorious day of careless freedom.

" I was directed to a little farm where strangers could find a lodging. It was a sort of inn with the usual Norman courtyard and a double row of beech trees all around it. It was kept by a peasant woman. Leaving the cliff I made my way to the hamlet, nestling among its lofty trees, and I presented myself at Mother Lecacheur's house. She was old, wrinkled and grim, and seemed always to receive her customers with an air of reluctance and suspicion.

" It was the month of May. Flowering apple trees spread a canopy of scented blossom above the courtyard and rained a continual shower of fluttering rosy petals upon the grass and the passers-by.

" ' Well, Madame Lecacheur,' I said, ' can you let me have a room ? '

" Surprised to find that I knew her name, she replied :

" ' That's as may be. All my rooms are taken. But we'll see what we can do.'

" Five minutes later we had come to terms, and I deposited my knapsack on the floor of a rustic room containing a bed, two chairs, a table and a basin. It opened off a big, smoky kitchen, where the guests took their meals with the farm hands and the widowed landlady.

" After I had washed my hands I went into the kitchen. The old woman was fricasseing a chicken for dinner in the wide fireplace where a smoke-blackened pot hook was hanging.

" ' Then you have people staying here at present ? ' I asked.

" ' I have one lady,' she answered sourly. ' An elderly Englishwoman. She has the other room.'

" By paying an additional five sous a day I arranged to have my meals alone in the courtyard whenever it was fine. My table was laid outside the door, and I began to tackle the stringy limbs of the Norman hen to the accompaniment of sparkling cider and coarse white bread which, though four days old, was excellent none the less.

" Suddenly the wooden gate leading to the road was thrown open and a singular female figure advanced towards the house. She was very thin and tall and had wound a red plaid Scotch shawl so tightly round her that one would have supposed her without arms had not a long hand appeared at the height of her hips, holding one of those white umbrellas that tourists carry. She had a face like a mummy; it was framed in grey corkscrew curls which bobbed at each step she took, and she reminded me, I hardly know why, of a red herring with butterflies fluttering round it. She passed me swiftly with downcast eyes, and vanished into the house. I was amused at this odd-looking apparition. Doubtless she was my fellow-guest, the elderly Englishwoman of whom the landlady had spoken. I did not see her again that day. The following morning I settled down to paint at the end of that delightful valley, which you know, leading down to Etretat. Suddenly raising my eyes I caught sight of a curious object standing bolt upright on the brow of the hill, and looking like a dressed mast. It was the Englishwoman. As soon as she caught sight of me she disappeared.

" I returned home for luncheon and took my place at the common table, in order to make the acquaintance of this eccentric old maid. But she did not reply to my civilities and took no notice of my little attentions. Zealously I filled her glass with water; assiduously I passed her dishes. A slight, almost imperceptible,

movement of the head, an English word murmured too softly for me to catch, were all the thanks I received.

" In the end I ceased to bother about her, although the idea of her continued to haunt me. In three days I knew as much about her as Madame Lecacheur herself.

" She was called Miss Harriet. Searching for some quiet village in which to spend the summer, she had stopped at Bénouville six weeks before and seemed loath to leave it. She never spoke at table, and ate hurriedly, reading a little book of Protestant propaganda all the time. These books she distributed to everyone. Even the parish priest had received four copies, brought to him by a small boy for a bribe of two sous. Sometimes, without any preparation, she would suddenly say to the landlady in her atrocious French :

" ' I love the Lord above everything ; I worship Him in His creation ; I adore Him in all His works of nature ; I carry Him always in my heart.'

" And with these words she would bestow upon the bewildered countrywoman one of those tracts of hers, which were intended to convert the universe. She was not at all popular in the village. The schoolmaster had said :

" ' She is an atheist.'

" And from this pronouncement a sort of stigma rested upon her. But when Madame Lecacheur consulted the parish priest he replied :

" ' She is a heretic, but God desireth not the death of a sinner, and I believe her to be a person of blameless morality.'

" These words ' atheist and heretic,' of which they scarcely knew the meaning, roused dark suspicions in the minds of the villagers. It was rumoured, moreover, that the Englishwoman was wealthy, and that she spent her life travelling all over the world because her family

had turned her out. And for what reason had her family done so? Why, because of her impiety.

"She was, in truth, one of those bigoted fanatics, one of those stubborn Puritans, whom England breeds in such numbers, those pious and insupportable old maids, who haunt all the tables d'hôte in Europe, who ruin Italy, poison Switzerland and render the charming towns on the Riviera uninhabitable, introducing everywhere their weird manias, their manners of fossilized vestals; their indescribable wardrobes, and a peculiar odour of rubber, as if they were put away in a waterproof case every night. Whenever I saw one in an hotel I used to take to flight, like a bird that has seen a scarecrow in a field. But this particular specimen seemed to me so remarkable that I could not dislike her.

"Instinctively hostile to anything outside her peasant life, Madame Lecacheur's limited intelligence conceived a hatred for the old maid's transports. She had hit upon a phrase to describe her, a disparaging phrase to be sure, which had sprung to her lips I know not how, born of some confused and mysterious working of her mind.

"'She is a demoniac,' she declared. And this epithet, applied to that austere yet sentimental creature, seemed to me irresistibly droll. I never referred to her by any other name, and experienced a curious pleasure in uttering the word aloud, whenever I caught sight of her.

"'Well,' I would say to Madame Lecacheur, 'and what is our demoniac doing to-day?'

"In scandalized tones, my hostess would reply:

"'You'll never believe it, sir. She brought home a toad with a crushed leg, and put it in her basin and bandaged it as if it were human. Blasphemous I call it.'

" Another day, when she was walking on the beach, she had bought a big fish which had just been caught, simply for the sake of throwing it back into the sea. Although he had been well paid, the fisherman had abused her roundly, and felt more indignant than if she had taken his money out of his pocket. Even after a month had elapsed, he could not speak of the incident without flying into a rage and using insulting language about her. Yes, she was certainly a demoniac, Miss Harriet. Mother Lecacheur had had an inspiration of genius when she christened her thus.

" The stable boy, who was called Sapper because he had served in Africa in his young days, held a different opinion. He used to say slyly :

" ' She's an old bird. She has had her day.'

" What would she have said, poor soul, if she had known all this? Céleste, the little maid, disliked waiting on her, I could never discover why. Perhaps it was simply because she was a foreigner, alien in race, language and religion, in short, a demoniac.

" She spent her time wandering all over the countryside, seeking and worshipping God in His creation. One evening, attracted by a patch of red gleaming through the trees, I pushed aside the branches and came upon Miss Harriet on her knees in a thicket. Confused at having been caught in that attitude, she started to her feet, and fixed upon me the startled eyes of an owl surprised in broad daylight. Sometimes, when I was at work among the rocks, I would suddenly catch sight of her on the edge of the cliff, looking like a signal post. She stood there, gazing rapturously at the mighty ocean suffused with golden light; at the wide sky bathed in purple glow. Sometimes I espied her at the end of a valley, walking with her swift, elastic, English steps, and I went towards her, attracted, I hardly knew why,

by the mere sight of her transfigured face, that withered, indescribable face of hers, with its expression of inward joy. Often I would come upon her near some farm, seated on the grass in the shade of an apple tree, with her little book of devotions open on her knees, and her gaze on the distant prospect.

" I could not tear myself away from Bénouville. I felt myself linked to this peaceful countryside by a thousand ties of love—love for its wide enchanting landscapes. I was happy staying in this out-of-the-world farm, remote from mankind, close to the earth, to the bountiful, health-giving, fair green earth, which we shall some day enrich with our own bodies. And, I must confess, a faint stirring of curiosity detained me. I wanted to make friends with this strange Miss Harriet and to discover what goes on in the lonely souls of these elderly, wandering English ladies.

II

" We made friends in rather a curious way. I had just finished a picture, which seemed to me a beauty, as indeed it was. Fifteen years later it was sold for ten thousand francs. It was as simple as two and two make four, and it disregarded every academic rule. The entire right half of my canvas represented a rock, a huge rock, covered with seaweed, brown and yellow and red, with the light pouring over it like oil. The sun was at my back, but its radiance fell upon the rock and gilded it with fire. That was all. It had a dazzling foreground of flaming, glorious brightness, and on the left the sea, no blue slate coloured sea, but a sea of jade, greenish, milky and hard, under a dark

sky. Such was my delight over my work, that I danced with joy, as I carried it back to the inn. I should have liked everyone to see it immediately. I remember showing it to a cow by the roadside, and exclaiming:

"'Look at that, old girl. You won't often see one as good.'

"When I reached home, I shouted for the landlady at the top of my voice.

"'Hi, Mother Lecacheur, hi! Come here and take a look at this.'

"The old rustic came up and contemplated my work with dull, unseeing eyes, hardly knowing whether it represented a house or a cow.

"At that moment Miss Harriet entered, and passed behind me just as I was holding my picture at arm's length and exhibiting it to the landlady. I was careful to hold the canvas in such a way that the demoniac could not help seeing it. Petrified with amazement, she stopped short. This, it seemed, was her favourite rock, the one she always climbed in order to indulge in her daydreams.

"'Oh!' she murmured in her English accent.

"Such was the flattery in her voice, that I turned to her with a smile.

"'My latest picture, Miss Harriet.'

"With an expression of rapture, half ludicrous, half touching, she replied:

"'Your understanding of nature is thrilling.'

"I tell you I blushed at her praise as if it had been spoken by a queen. I was charmed; I was completely conquered. Upon my soul, I could have kissed her. At table I seated myself beside her as usual. For the first time, she spoke to me, still uttering her thoughts aloud:

" ' Oh, I do love Nature so.'

" I passed her bread, water, and wine; she now accepted my attentions with a faint and cadaverous smile. We rose from the meal together and walked across the yard. Then, attracted doubtless by the flaming splendour in which the setting sun had bathed the ocean, I opened the gate leading to the cliff, and we wandered off together, perfectly happy, like two people who have just discovered a common bond of sympathy.

" It was a soft, warm evening, one of those evenings when body and soul are content. All is rapture, all is charm. One breathes with delight the warm, balmy air, scented with seaweed and grass; the palate is stimulated by the savour of the sea, while the spirit is soothed by the penetrating sweetness of the hour. We were walking on the edge of the cliff, and looking down on the mighty ocean, which rippled three hundred feet below us. With parted lips we drew in deep breaths of the cool sea breeze, wafted gently from the ocean, and salt with the lingering kiss of the waves. Wrapped in her check shawl, my companion watched with open-mouthed ecstasy the huge disk of the sun as it sank down into the sea. Far away on the skyline, a three-master in full sail stood out against the flaming background, and a steamer passed across the foreground, leaving a trail of smoke like an endless wisp of cloud right across the sky.

" The red orb of day was sinking slowly to rest. Presently it touched the water, just behind the motionless ship, which seemed as if framed in fire, in the very middle of the glowing sphere. Lower and lower sank the sun, until it was gradually swallowed up by the ocean. It plunged into the water, and disappeared. It was all over. But the little ship still remained

silhouetted against the far-away golden background of the sky.

"With passionate delight, Miss Harriet watched the sumptuous close of day. She had a positively violent yearning to embrace the sky, and the sea and the whole prospect.

"'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'I love it, I love it, I love it.'

"I saw a tear sparkle in her eyes.

"'I wish I were a little bird,' she added, 'to fly away into the sky.'

"She stood there, as I had so often seen her, planted on the cliff, a patch of vivid colour in her scarlet shawl. I was longing to sketch her in my notebook. She would have passed for a caricature of ecstasy. I turned away to hide a smile.

"Then I began to talk about painting, as if to a brother artist, discussing tones and values and intensity, without avoiding technical terms. She listened attentively and intelligently, trying to divine the meaning of obscure phrases and to reach the thought that lay beneath.

"Every now and then she exclaimed:

"'Oh, I understand, I understand. It is very thrilling.'

"We went in.

"The next morning, as soon as she saw me, she held out her hand, and we were suddenly friends. She was a good creature, with a soul always on springs, ready to go off into ecstasies of enthusiasm. Like all old maids of fifty, she lacked balance. She seemed to be preserved in a kind of acid innocence, but her heart still retained something very youthful and passionate. She loved nature and animals with that exaggerated tenderness which ferments like wine that is kept too

long, with that sensual passion which had never been lavished upon a man. At the sight of a dog suckling her puppies, a mare with her colt, a nest full of cheeping, gaping baby birds with big heads and naked bodies, she quivered with excessive emotion.

" Poor solitary souls, wandering sadly from table-d'hôte to table-d'hôte, poor souls, absurd and pitiable, having known one of you, my heart goes out to you all!

" I soon guessed that she had something to say to me, but was too shy to speak, and I was amused at her timidity. When I left the inn in the morning, with my paint-box on my back, she accompanied me to the end of the village, silent, obviously perplexed and trying to make a beginning. Then she suddenly left me, and walked swiftly away with that elastic step of hers.

" At last one day she plucked up courage.

" ' I should like to see how you do your painting. May I? I am very curious.'

" And she blushed as if she had said something very daring.

" I took her with me to the end of the Petit-Val, where I was beginning a large picture. She stood behind me, watching every stroke with concentration. Presently, as if afraid of disturbing me, she thanked me and went away.

" After a while she gained confidence, and took an obvious pleasure in accompanying me every day. Under her arm she carried a folding stool, of which she would not allow me to relieve her, and she would seat herself beside me. She stayed there for hours, motionless and silent, her eyes watching every movement of my brush. When I slapped a great dab of paint on to the canvas with my palette knife, unexpectedly producing the right effect, she could not restrain a soft ' Oh! ' of astonishment and delight and admiration. She had

a tender respect for my canvases, a respect that was almost religious, for these human reproductions of the divine creation. They seemed to her almost like sacred pictures. Often she spoke to me of God, and endeavoured to convert me.

"He was a curious sort of fellow, this God of hers, a kind of rustic philosopher, without great resources or great power, for she imagined Him always grieving over the wrongs committed before His eyes—just as if He could not have prevented them. She was, it seemed, on excellent terms with Him, the confidante of His secrets, and of His disappointments. 'God wills,' or 'God does not will,' fell from her lips, as if she were a sergeant passing on the colonel's orders to a recruit. She deeply deplored my ignorance of the divine purpose, which she endeavoured to reveal to me, and every day I found in my pockets, in my hat, when I had left it on the ground, in my paint-box, in the shoes outside my door, some of those little pious tracts, which she doubtless received direct from Paradise.

"I treated her with frank cordiality, like an old friend. But presently I saw that her manner had changed, though it was some time before I noticed it. When I was working, deep in my valley or in some hollow lane, I would see her suddenly appear with her quick elastic step. Palpitating as if she had been running, or as if in the grip of some violent emotion, she would sit down abruptly, flushed with that curious tone of red, which is peculiar to the English. Then, without any apparent reason, she would turn a muddy white, as if on the verge of fainting. Gradually, however, I saw her resume her normal appearance, and she would begin talking to me, only to break off in the middle of a sentence, leap to her feet and dart away with such strange haste that I wondered what I could

have done to offend her. At last I came to the conclusion that this must be her usual behaviour, which she had, no doubt, slightly modified for my benefit in the early days of our acquaintance. After walking for hours on the wind-swept hill, she used to return to the farm with her long corkscrew curls, as lank and limp as if their springs were broken. In the early days of our acquaintance she had paid no heed to this, and had sat down to table without embarrassment, with her hair thus dishevelled by her sister, the wind. But now she always went to her room and rearranged what I called her chandelier drops. I often said to her with a friendly gallantry, which always shocked her:

"'You are radiant as a star to-day, Miss Harriet,' and at this a slight flush rose to her cheeks, the flush of a girl of fifteen.

"Presently she grew so shy that she no longer came to watch me paint. I thought to myself:

"'It is only a passing phase; she'll get over it.'

"But she did not get over it. Whenever I spoke to her now, she answered with affected indifference or with sulky petulance. She had fits of brusque impatience and attacks of nerves. I never saw her except at meals, and we no longer conversed. I came to the conclusion that I must have hurt her feelings in some way, and one evening I said to her:

"'Miss Harriet, why don't you treat me as you used to do? What have I done to vex you? You make me very unhappy.'

"With curious passion in her voice she replied:

"'It's not true. It's not true. I have always treated you the same,' and she escaped to her room.

"Sometimes I saw her watching me in a strange way. Since then I have often thought that a condemned person must wear just that same expression when

informed of the day of his execution. There was a look in her eyes, a look of insanity, of mysticism, of violence, and more than that, a fever, a frantic yearning, as if she were chafing at some secret thing she had not realized and could never realize. And it seemed to me that a struggle was going on within her, her heart matching itself against some unknown force, which she strove to vanquish, and perhaps there was something else. . . . Who knows? Who knows?

III

"The explanation of it all was strange enough. For some time I had been working every morning, from daybreak, at a picture, the subject of which was as follows.

"A deep, precipitous ravine, winding away into the distance between steep banks mantled with trees and brambles, lay bathed and veiled in that milky mist, that fleecy whiteness which floats above valleys at dawn. And through the depths of this dense yet transparent cloud, half seen, half divined, came a pair of lovers, a man and a maid, with their arms around each other, she raising her head towards him, he bending down to her, till their lips met. In the background, the sun's first ray, gliding through the branches, pierced the morning mist and suffused it with a rosy glow, irradiating the shadowy forms of the rustic lovers with silvery light. Upon my soul it was good, very good indeed.

"I was working on the hillside which slopes down to the little valley of Etretat. It so happened that morning, that the floating mist was just as I wanted it.

" Something rose before my sight like a phantom. It was Miss Harriet. As soon as she saw me, she tried to escape, but I called to her.

" ' Come here, Miss Harriet, come here. I have a little picture for you.'

" Reluctantly she drew near me, and I handed her my sketch. She made no comment, but stood quite still, gazing at it for a long time. Then suddenly she burst into tears. She wept convulsively as people do who have been suppressing their tears and have come to the end of their resistance, but still struggle against their emotion, even while they yield to it. Touched by this sorrow, which I did not understand, I sprang to my feet, and with an impulse of spontaneous affection, an impulse characteristic of a Frenchman, who acts before he thinks, I seized her hands. She left them in mine for a few moments, and I felt them tremble as if she were quivering in every nerve. Then she drew, or rather snatched them, abruptly away. But I had recognized that shudder of hers; it was not the first time I had felt it, and I could never mistake it. Ah, that shudder of a woman in love, be she fifteen or fifty, of humble or gentle birth, it goes so straight to my heart that I can never fail to understand it. Her whole unhappy person had trembled, quivered and collapsed. I understood. Before I could utter a word she went from me, leaving me astonished as at a miracle, and as wretched as if I had committed a crime.

" I did not return home for luncheon. I went for a walk round the cliffs, feeling as much disposed to cry as to laugh. The situation seemed to me as tragic as it was ludicrous. I felt ridiculous, and at the same time I realized that she was nearly mad with grief. I wondered what I ought to do, and came to the conclusion that my only course was to go away. This I decided

to do at once. Somewhat sad and thoughtful, I roamed about till dinner-time, and then returned home. We sat down to table as usual. Miss Harriet was present, solemnly eating her dinner, without talking to anyone or raising her eyes. Her appearance and behaviour were perfectly normal. I waited till the end of the meal. Then I turned to the landlady:

"'Well, Madame Lecacheur, I am going to leave you soon.'

"The good woman was surprised and distressed.

"'What do you say, my dear young gentleman?' she cried in her drawling voice. 'You're going to leave us, just when I had got used to you?'

"I stole a glance at Miss Harriet. Her face showed no sign of emotion. But Céleste, the little maid, raised her eyes to mine. She was a plump, fresh-faced, rosy-cheeked girl of eighteen, as strong as a horse and unusually clean in her person. I sometimes stole a kiss, when I caught her in a corner, as is the way with men of my roving habits. But that was all.

"After dinner I went into the yard and walked up and down under the apple trees, smoking my pipe. My meditations during the day, the extraordinary discovery of that grotesque and ardent passion which I had inspired, the memories, disturbing and charming, which this revelation had conjured up, and perhaps the little maid's glance when I announced my departure, the accumulation of all these mingled emotions and ideas put the devil into my bones, made my lips tingle with kisses, and infused into my veins that mysterious something which drives us to make fools of ourselves.

"Night fell, deepening the shadows beneath the trees. I caught sight of Céleste on her way to lock up the henhouse, which was on the other side of the enclosure. Stepping so lightly that she did not hear

me, I ran after her, and when she straightened herself after lowering the trapdoor of the henhouse, I caught her in my arms and covered her broad, plump face with kisses. She struggled, laughing all the time and accustomed to such episodes. What made me suddenly release her? Why did I turn round with a start? How was it that I felt someone behind me?

"It was Miss Harriet. Just as she was going indoors she had seen us and she stood there motionless, as if confronted by a ghost. Then she vanished into the night. Ashamed and troubled, I returned to the inn, more distressed at her having caught me playing the fool than if she had seen me committing a positive crime. I was overtired, haunted by gloomy thoughts, and I slept badly. I thought I heard a sound of weeping, but I may have been mistaken. Several times, too, I thought I heard someone moving about the house and opening the door leading into the yard. Towards daybreak I fell asleep, utterly worn out, and it was late when I awoke. I did not make my appearance until luncheon; I was still feeling ashamed of myself and hardly knew what face to put upon it.

"No one had seen Miss Harriet. We waited for her in vain. Mother Lecacheur looked into her room, but she had gone out. Doubtless she had left the house at dawn, as she often did, in order to see the sunrise. No concern was felt, and we sat silently down to our meal. It was very hot indeed, one of those heavy sultry days when not a leaf stirs. The table had been set out-of-doors under an apple tree, and we were so thirsty that Sapper was always running down to the cellar to replenish the cider jug. Céleste brought the dishes from the kitchen, mutton stew with potatoes and a hare sauté with salad. Then she placed on the table a dish of cherries, the first of the season. I wanted to

wash them and freshen them up and asked the maid to draw me a bucket of cold well water.

" In five minutes she returned and said that the well had dried up. She had let down the rope to its full length and the bucket had touched the bottom and come up empty. Mother Lecacheur went to see for herself and looked down the well. When she came back she declared that she could see something in the well, something that ought not to be there. Doubtless a neighbour had thrown in bundles of straw out of spite. Hoping to obtain a better view I leaned over the edge and had an indistinct glimpse of something white. What could it be? It occurred to me to lower a lantern by a rope. The yellow light flickered on the stone walls of the well, as the lantern sank gradually into the depths. All four of us, including Sapper and Céleste, were bending down over the opening. Suddenly the lantern stopped at a strange, indistinguishable mysterious mass of white and black.

" ' It's a horse,' cried Sapper. ' I can see its hoof. It must have strayed from the field last night and fallen in.'

" Suddenly I shuddered to the marrow of my bones. I recognized a human foot and leg projecting upwards, while the body and the other leg were submerged in the water. Trembling so violently that the lantern danced distractedly up and down above the shoe, I gasped in a broken whisper:

" ' It's a woman . . . a woman. . . . It's Miss Harriet.'

" Sapper did not move an eyelid. He had seen worse things in Africa. Uttering piercing screams, Mother Lecacheur and Céleste took to their heels. The dead body had to be recovered. I fastened a rope securely round the stable-boy's waist, lowered him

very slowly by means of the pulley, and watched him disappearing into the gloom with the lantern and a second rope in his hands. Presently, in a voice which seemed to come from the bowels of the earth, he cried:

"'Stop now,' and I saw him fishing something out of the water. It was the corpse's other leg. Then he tied both its feet together and called out:

"'Haul away!'

"I drew him up to the surface, though my arms felt so nerveless, my muscles so slack, that I was afraid of letting the rope slip and dropping my man back into the depths.

"'Well?' I said as soon as his head appeared above the brink, just as if I had expected him to give me news of her, who was down in that darkness. We both climbed on to the stone coping of the well, and bending down over the opening from opposite sides, we hoisted the body up.

"Hidden behind the wall of the house, Madame Lecacheur and Céleste were watching us. As soon as they saw the drowned woman's black shoes and white stockings emerge from the well they vanished.

"Sapper seized her by the ankles, and dragged her out. Her head was a terrible sight, all bruised and battered, and her long, grey hair hung loose and dishevelled, dripping with water and slime; the corkscrew curls were gone for ever.

"'Lord, isn't she skinny?' said Sapper contemptuously.

"We carried her into her room and as the two women did not return, with the help of the stable-boy I prepared the body for its final resting-place. I washed her poor distorted face. The touch of my finger caused one eye to open a little. It looked at me with that cold, wan glance, that frightful glance, with which the dead

regard us, as if from beyond the grave. I ordered her wild locks as best I could, my unskilled hands arranging them on her brow in a strange, new fashion. Then I stripped off her dripping clothes, revealing shamefacedly, as if committing an act of sacrilege, her shoulders and bosom and her long arms, as thin as sticks. Then I gathered poppies, marguerites and cornflowers and fragrant grasses, with which I decked her funeral couch.

" Being the only person acquainted with her, I had to see to the various formalities. I found a letter in her pocket expressing her wish to be buried in this village where she had spent the last days of her life. A terrible thought clutched at my heart. Was it not for my sake that she desired to remain in this spot?

" Towards evening all the old women in the village came to look at the dead, but I barred the door. I wished to remain alone, and I watched by her all night. By the light of the candles I gazed at this unhappy woman, whom no one knew, and who had perished thus miserably and far from home. Had she somewhere friends and kindred? Where had she spent her childhood and her subsequent existence? Whence had she come, all alone, homeless, forlorn like a dog driven from its dwelling? What secret suffering and despair were concealed beneath that forbidding exterior, that form, which she was doomed to carry with her all through life, that absurd mask, which alienated all love, all affection.

' What unhappy beings there are in the world! I was conscious of the eternal injustice of inexorable nature, which had weighed so heavily upon this poor human soul. All was over for her. Perhaps she had never known even that one hope, which sustains the most forlorn of mankind, the hope of being loved once at least in life. Why else should she have hidden herself

away and avoided her fellows? Why else had she lavished such passionate fondness on all things living, save mankind alone? I realized that she had indeed believed in God, and that she hoped to receive in another world full recompense for her sufferings here. And now her body would crumble into dust, and plants would spring from it. It would blossom in the sunshine; the cows would browse upon it; its seeds would be borne afar by the birds; in the flesh of cattle it would become part of a human body again. But that which we call the soul had perished in the dark bottom of the well. Its sufferings were over. She had exchanged her own life for the lives of those that would spring from the dust of her body.

"The hours of this sinister and silent vigil passed away. A faint light heralded the dawn. Then a red ray glided across the bed, resting like a bar of fire on the sheets and the dead woman's hands. This was the hour that she had always loved. The awakening birds were singing in the trees. I threw open the window and drew back the curtains, so that the whole sky beheld us. Bending above the ice-cold body I took her disfigured head in both hands, and slowly, without horror or disgust, I printed a kiss, a lingering kiss, upon those lips that had never yet received one."

. . . . . .

Léon Chenal fell silent. The ladies were all in tears, and Count d'Etraille on the box kept using his handkerchief. The coachman alone was dozing, and the horses, untouched by the whip, had slowed down and were pulling languidly. The brake hardly moved. It seemed suddenly as heavy as if it carried a load of sorrow.

IN THE SPRING

On the first sunny days of the year, when earth stirs in her sleep and clothes herself with green, when the balmy air caresses our cheeks, fills our lungs, and seems to penetrate to the very heart, a vague yearning for unknown joys steals over us, an impulse to run and leap, to roam at random in pursuit of adventure, and to drink deep draughts of the spring weather. After the severe winter of last year, the month of May inspired me with such longing to be free of all restraint, that it was like a fever in the blood or the swift flow of sap in my veins. When I woke up one morning I saw through my window, above the roofs of the neighbouring houses, the great blue vault of the sky, brilliant with sunshine. The canaries in their cages by the window were shrieking themselves hoarse. On every floor the maids were singing at their work. Cheerful sounds from the streets greeted my ears, and in holiday mood I escaped from the house without caring whither I went.

There were smiles on every face; spring, warm and radiant, had come again, and happiness was in the air. It was as if the whole town felt the caress of an amorous breeze. The young women, who passed by in their morning frocks, had a veiled tenderness in their glances, and in all their movements a languid grace which set my heart in a flutter. Half unconsciously I made my

way to the Seine. Steamers were leaving for Suresnes, and I was suddenly seized with an irresistible longing for the woods.

The deck of the little steamer was crowded, for, resist as you may, the first sunshine of the year lures you out of the house. Everyone is astir, coming and going and chatting to his neighbour.

My own neighbour happened to be a lady; a little work-girl, I judged her, with all the natural grace of the true-bred Parisian. She had a charming little head, hair like spun sunshine, clustering in curls round her temples, and rippling down to her ears and the nape of her neck, where it ended in golden down so soft and fine that you could hardly see it and yet you were burning to cover it with kisses. I stared at her so hard that she turned towards me; then she suddenly lowered her eyelids, while the corners of her mouth quivered with the merest suggestion of a smile, revealing on her upper-lip the same soft silken down, glinting faintly in the sun.

The river flowed smoothly between ever-widening banks. A warm peacefulness brooded in the atmosphere, and all space seemed full of murmurous life. My neighbour raised her eyes. Again they met mine, and this time she smiled deliberately. She was charming when she smiled and her swift glance revealed to me a thousand mysteries I had never before suspected. I discovered in her eyes unknown depths, all the joys of love, all the poetry that inspires our dreams, all the bliss we are eternally seeking. I was seized with a mad desire to clasp her in my arms and bear her away to some spot, where I could murmur in her ears the tender music of loving words.

I was just going to speak to her when someone touched me on the shoulder. I turned round in surprise

and saw an ordinary-looking man, neither young nor old, who was gazing at me with a melancholy expression on his face.

"I have something to say to you," he began. He must have noticed my expression of disgust, for he added:

"Something important."

I rose and followed him to the other end of the boat.

"My dear sir," he continued, "when winter comes, bringing with it cold and rain and snow, your doctor is always saying to you:

"'Keep your feet warm and beware of chills, colds, bronchitis and pleurisy.'

"And you take all sorts of precautions, wear flannel underclothing and thick overcoats and shoes. And for all that you sometimes find yourself laid up for a couple of months. But when spring comes with its leaves and flowers, its warm, enervating breezes, its scents of field and meadow, stirring in you a vague restlessness and inexplicable emotions, there is no one to say to you:

"'Beware of love! It is lurking everywhere, lying in wait for you at every corner. Its snares are set; its weapons sharpened; all its wiles are prepared for you. Beware of love, beware! It is more dangerous than colds, bronchitis, or pleurisy. It never forgives and it drives us all to irreparable acts of folly.' Yes, sir, I tell you Government ought to post huge placards upon the walls every year: 'Spring is here again. Citizens of France, beware of love,' just as one writes on the door of a house, 'Mind the paint.' Well, as Government neglects this duty, I take it upon myself to say to you:

"'Beware of love.' It is ready to pounce upon you, and I am bound to warn you, just as in Russia one

warns a passing stranger that his nose is threatened with frost-bite."

I was amazed at this extraordinary individual. Assuming an air of dignity I replied:

"It seems to me, sir, that you are interfering in a matter that does not concern you."

He made a deprecating gesture and replied:

"Oh, my dear sir, my dear sir, if I see a man in danger of drowning, am I to leave him to perish? Let me tell you my story and you will understand why I have ventured to speak to you like this. It was only last year, at this very season. I must begin by informing you that I am a clerk in the Admiralty, where the commissioners, our superiors, though mere office men, use their gold lace as warrant for treating us like common sailors. Oh, if all superior officers were civil —but I digress. From my office window I caught a glimpse of bright blue sky, where swallows were circling, and it made me feel like dancing among my black cardboard boxes. My longing for liberty rose to such a pitch that I screwed up my courage and went to see my own special slave-driver. He was a peevish little devil, always in a vile temper. I said I was feeling ill. He stared me in the face and said:

"'I don't believe a word of it. However, you can go. How do you think a man can run an office with clerks like you?'

"So I took myself off and went down to the Seine. It was just such weather as to-day and I boarded the steamer for St. Cloud.

"My dear sir, if only my chief had refused me leave! My whole nature seemed to expand in the sunshine. I was in love with everything, the steamer, the river, the trees, the houses, my neighbours. I was yearning for something to embrace, no matter what,

Love was laying its snares for me. At the Trocadero a girl came on board carrying a small parcel, and sat down opposite me. She was undoubtedly pretty, but it is extraordinary how much more attractive women appear to one in fine weather in the early spring. There is about them a heady charm, a mysterious something peculiar to themselves. It is like the taste of wine after cheese.

" I looked at her, and she, too, looked at me—but only now and then, like that girl of yours just now. At last I thought that we had advanced far enough with this exchange of glances to enter into conversation, so I spoke to her, and she replied. She was as charming as you please and she turned my head completely.

" She left the boat at St. Cloud, where she had a parcel to deliver—and I followed her. When she returned from her errand, the boat had gone. I walked beside her, and we sighed, both of us, affected by the balmy sweetness of the air.

" ' It would be lovely in the woods,' I said.

" ' Yes, wouldn't it? ' she agreed.

" ' Would you care to come for a stroll? ' I ventured.

" She stole a swift glance at me from beneath her eyelids, as if taking stock of me, and she hesitated a moment before she consented. Presently we were wandering side by side through the trees. The tall, thick grass, vividly green beneath the transparent shelter of the young leaves, was flooded with sunshine and swarming with tiny creatures, and they, too, were busy making love. Birds were singing in every bush. My companion suddenly began to skip and run, intoxicated with fresh air and the scents that rose from the earth. And I ran after her, frisking in the same ridiculous way. What a fool one does make of oneself sometimes!

" Wild with delight, she burst into a thousand ditties, airs from the operas, and that song of Musette. Oh, that song of Musette! How exquisitely poetic it seemed to me then! It moved me almost to tears. That's the sort of rubbish that turns one's head. Never take a girl into the country who sings, especially one who sings that song of Musette.

" Presently she was tired and sat down to rest on a green bank. I threw myself at her feet, and seized her hands, her little hands all covered with needle pricks. The sight of them went to my heart.

" 'These,' I said to myself, 'are the sacred marks of toil.'

" My dear sir, do you know what they really mean, these sacred marks of toil? They stand for all the gossip of the workroom, for whispered vulgarity, for minds polluted with obscene stories, for foolish tittle-tattle, for all the squalid usages of life, for all the narrow-mindedness inevitable to all women of the lower classes, but supreme with those whose finger-tips bear those sacred marks of toil.

" We gazed lingeringly into each other's eyes.

" Oh, those eyes of women! What power is theirs, to bewilder and obsess, to conquer and dominate! How infinite seems the promise within their depths! This practice is known as looking into each other's soul. Stuff and nonsense, my dear fellow! If one could really see into the soul, one would be far more discreet.

" To cut a long story short, a madness seized me, and losing my head I tried to clasp her in my arms.

" ' Hands off! ' she cried.

" At that I flung myself at her feet and poured out all the pent-up emotion of my heart. She seemed surprised at my changed demeanour and shot a sidelong glance at me, as if to say :

" 'So that's the sort of fool you are! Very well, my friend, we shall see.'

" In love, we men are the innocent customers, while women are the wide-awake shopkeepers. I might have done as I pleased with her. Later on I realized my stupidity. But what I was striving after was something immaterial, an ethereal, an idealized love. I sought the shadow when I might have gained the substance.

" When she was tired of my protestations, she rose and we returned to St. Cloud. We did not part until we reached Paris, and then she seemed so sad that I asked her the reason.

" 'I was thinking how few days like this there are in life,' she answered.

" My heart almost burst with emotion.

" We met again the following Sunday, and every succeeding Sunday. I took her to Bougival, Saint-Germain, Maisons-Laffitte, Poissy, to every haunt sacred to the suburban lover. The little minx led me on, pretending a passion for me. I lost my head entirely, and three months later I married her.

" I ask you, sir, what can a lone man do, a mere clerk, with no family to advise him? One thinks to oneself how happy life would be with one woman. And so one marries her. And then she scolds you from morning till night; you discover that she is stupid and ignorant. She keeps on bawling that song of Musette, that intolerable song of Musette. She wrangles with the coal man, relates to the porter's wife intimate domestic details, confides to the servant next door secrets of the most delicate nature, involves her husband in difficulties with the tradesmen, and her head is stuffed with such absurd stories, such idiotic superstitions, such grotesque notions, such outrageous prejudices, that one could weep with disgust, whenever one talks to her."

He was so deeply agitated that he had to pause for breath. I looked compassionately at this poor simple-minded devil, and was on the point of replying when the steamer stopped at St. Cloud. The girl who had attracted my attention rose from her seat to go ashore. She brushed past me, with a sidelong glance at me and a smile, at once furtive and seductive. Then she alighted on the pontoon.

I sprang up to follow her, when my neighbour seized me by the sleeve. I jerked myself free, but he caught me by the tails of my frock-coat and pulled me back.

"You shan't go, you shan't go," he cried in such loud tones that everyone turned round.

I heard a ripple of laughter on all sides, and I stood there, petrified and furious, but lacking the courage to face further ridicule and scandal.

And the steamer moved on.

The girl remained standing on the pontoon and watched me disappear with an air of disappointment, while my tormentor rubbed his hands together and whispered in my ear:

"There, young man, I have done you a real service."

MADAME HERMET

LUNATICS have a fascination for me; they dwell in a mysterious realm, haunted by grotesque dreams, in the impenetrable clouds of dementia, in which all that they have seen, all that they have loved, all that they have done on earth, repeats itself in an imaginary existence, uncontrolled by the laws that govern facts and human reason. For them nothing is impossible, nothing improbable. Their world is based on the fantastic, and their daily existence on the supernatural. Logic, reason and common sense, those ancient barriers and defences of the mind, are broken down and overthrown and crumble away before their imagination, which has burst its bonds, runs riot in that limitless land of fantasy and leaps unrestrained over every obstacle. For such as these, any event is possible; no event is impossible. They make no effort to wrestle with facts, to strive against difficulties, to overcome opposition. At a mere delusional caprice, they become princes, emperors, gods; they possess all the wealth of the world, all the delectable things of life, all its pleasures. They are ever strong, handsome, young, beloved. They alone have the power to be happy on this earth, because for them reality no longer exists. I love to gaze into the depths of their wandering intellects, as one gazes into a chasm at the bottom of which seethes some nameless torrent, sprung none knows whence, and bound none knows

whither. But it is of no avail to peer into these crevasses, for none will ever know the origin or destiny of that which lurks in their depths. Yet after all what is it but water, like that of a stream that flows open to the light of day? And if one could see it one would be little the wiser. Nor does it profit us to contemplate these deranged intellects, for their most fantastic notions are no more than commonplace ideas, made strange to us only because they are freed from the bonds of reason. We are amazed at their ebullitions, because we have not descried their origin. Doubtless a mere pebble dropped into their depths has sufficed to provoke all this sound and fury. None the less, lunatics have this curious fascination for me, and I come back to them again and again, attracted in spite of myself by this commonplace mystery of insanity.

One day when I was visiting an asylum, the doctor, who was taking me round, said:

"Now I will show you an interesting case."

He opened the door of a cell, where I saw a woman of about forty, who still retained her beauty. She was seated in an armchair, intently examining her face in a small hand-glass. On catching sight of us, she jumped up, ran to the far end of the room, snatched a veil from off a chair and proceeded carefully to cover up her face. Then she returned to us and bowed in acknowledgment of our greetings.

"Well," said the doctor, "how are you this morning?"

She uttered a deep sigh.

"Oh, very bad, very bad indeed, doctor. The marks grow worse every day."

"Not at all, not at all," he protested with conviction. "I assure you that you are mistaken."

But she came close to him and whispered:

"No. I am quite sure. I counted ten more pits this morning, three on the right cheek, four on the left and three on the forehead. It is frightful, frightful. I shall never dare show myself to anyone, not even to my son. No, not even to my son. I am lost. I am disfigured for ever."

She sank back into her armchair and began to sob.

The doctor took a chair beside her, and spoke to her in a gentle, soothing voice.

"Come, let me see. I assure you it is nothing. With just a little cauterization the marks will disappear entirely."

She shook her head, but made no reply. He tried to lift her veil; she clutched it so fiercely with both hands that her fingers tore the fabric. He continued to reason with her and to reassure her.

"Come, you know that I always take away those ugly pits. After I have attended to them, they don't show any more. But if you will not let me see them, I cannot cure you."

"I don't mind you," she replied in a low voice. "But I do not know this gentleman."

"He is also a doctor and cleverer than I."

At this she allowed him to remove the veil. But in her fear, her distress and shame at this exposure, she blushed all over her face and neck. She lowered her eyes and turned her face from side to side, to avoid our glances.

"Oh!" she gasped. "What agony it is to show myself like this. It is frightful, is it not, frightful?"

I gazed at her in astonishment, for she had no marks whatever on her face, not one spot, or blemish, or scar. Still with her eyes lowered she turned to me.

"I caught this terrible disease nursing my son. I saved his life, but I am disfigured. I sacrificed my

beauty for him, for my poor boy. I did my duty. My conscience is at rest. But God alone knows my sufferings."

The doctor took a little camel-hair brush from his pocket.

"Allow me," he said. "I will put it right for you."

She leaned her right cheek towards him and he touched it lightly with the brush, as if he were applying little dabs of colour. He did the same to the left cheek, the chin and the forehead. Then he exclaimed:

"Look, they have all gone, every one of them."

She took the hand-glass and scanned her image with passionate intensity and violent concentration.

"Yes," she said with a sigh. "They hardly show now. I can't thank you enough."

The doctor rose, bade her good-bye and followed me out of the room. When the door closed behind us he said:

"I must tell you the terrible story of this unhappy woman. Her name is Hermet, Madame Hermet. She was once very beautiful, very fond of admiration, very popular and full of the joy of life. She was one of those women who have nothing in the world to sustain them, guide them, and comfort them, except their beauty and their desire to captivate. All her time and thought was devoted to the care of her complexion, her face, hands, teeth, every visible portion of her person. Her husband died leaving her one son, who was brought up like other children of popular society women. At the same time she was very fond of him.

"As he grew up, she grew older. Did she foresee the fatal moment? Did she, like many another, gaze every morning, hour after hour, at her skin, once so smooth, so transparent, so clear, but now gradually

creasing a little under the eyes, showing a thousand signs of wear and tear, as yet almost imperceptible, but which will deepen day by day, month by month? Did she see the gradual lengthening of those creeping lines upon her forehead, slow, sure and inevitable? Did she undergo that torture, that hateful ordeal of the mirror, the little silver-handled mirror that one cannot bear to lay down, yet presently flings furiously away only to snatch up immediately in order to examine again, more and more minutely, those odious, insidious ravages of approaching age? Did she, ten or twenty times a day, escape from the company of her friends and lock herself in her room to look once more on the work of the destruction of the body, now past its prime and fading, to verify with anguish the stealthy advance of that malady, which others seem as yet not to notice, but of which she herself is so painfully conscious? She knows where the attack is severest, where the tooth of old age has bitten deep. And the mirror, the little round mirror in its chased silver frame, speaks to her of horrors. It seems to talk and mock and jeer, and prophesy all that will come to pass, the degeneration of her body, the agony of her mind, until the day of her death, which will seem to her a day of deliverance. Did she fall on her knees and bow her head in the dust, and pray with passionate tears to Him, who thus destroys all living beings, and gives them youth, only that old age may be the harder, and lends them beauty only to snatch it back from them? Did she implore Him to do for her what He has done for no one, to leave her till her dying day her charm, her youth, her grace? And when she realized how vain were her supplications to that inflexible Unknown, who orders the passing of the years, did she wring her hands, and writhe about the floor, dashing her head against chairs and tables, and

strangling her cries of agony? To judge from the sequel, she must have endured all these torments.

"When she was in her thirty-fifth year, her son, a boy of fifteen, was taken ill. He was put to bed, but the nature of his illness could not be immediately diagnosed. An abbé, who was his tutor, watched by his bedside and never left him, and twice a day his mother came for news of him. Every morning, smiling and fragrant, she entered his room in her dressing-gown, and standing at the door she would ask:

"'Well, George, how are we to-day?'

"And the boy, in the clutch of fever, his face flushed and swollen, would reply:

"'A little better, mother dear.'

"She remained a few moments in his room, made a face at his medicine bottles, and then exclaimed:

"'I have just remembered something very important,' and hurried from the room, leaving behind her a trail of delicate scent. In the evening she appeared in a low-cut dress, and as she was always late for everything her visit was still more perfunctory. She had only time to ask:

"'Well, what does the doctor say?'

"'He doesn't know yet,' replied the abbé.

"One evening, however, the Abbé rejoined:

"'The boy has smallpox.'

"With a loud cry of terror she rushed out of the door. When the maid entered her mistress's bedroom the next morning, she noticed immediately a strong smell of burnt sugar, and she saw Madame Hermet lying in bed, shaking with terror, her face pale with sleeplessness and her eyes wide open. As soon as the curtains were drawn back, Madame Hermet asked:

"'How is George?'

"'Oh, not at all well to-day, madam.'

" She did not rise till noon, when she had two eggs and a cup of tea, as if she were the invalid. Then she went out and consulted a chemist as to safeguards against smallpox. It was dinner-time when she returned home, laden with phials. She at once locked herself in her room and soaked herself in disinfectants. The abbé was waiting for her in the dining-room, and the moment she saw him she cried in a voice full of emotion :

" ' How is he? '

" ' No better. The doctor is very uneasy.'

" She burst into tears and was too much distressed to take any food.

" The next morning, as soon as it was light, she asked for news of George, but the report was no better. All that day she remained in her room, surrounded by small, smoking brasiers which diffused a powerful odour of disinfectants. Her maid declared that she could be heard groaning all the evening. A whole week passed in this manner. All she did was to go out for an hour or two about the middle of the afternoon, to take the air. But not an hour passed without her asking for news, and when the report was unfavourable she burst into sobs. On the morning of the eleventh day the abbé requested to see her, and came into her room with a pale, set face. Without taking the chair she offered him, he said :

" ' Your son is very ill and wants to see you.'

" She fell on her knees and cried out :

" ' Oh, my God, my God! I dare not. My God, my God, save me.'

" ' The doctor has very little hope,' resumed the abbé, ' and George is expecting you.'

" He left the room without another word.

" Two hours later the boy felt that he was dying,

and again asked for his mother. Once more the abbé went to her room. She was still on her knees, and weeping incessantly, saying over and over again:

"'I cannot . . . I cannot. I am afraid . . . I cannot.'

"He did his utmost to persuade her, to inspire her with courage, to force her to go to her son. The only result was a nervous crisis which lasted a long time and ended in hysterical screams. When the doctor came that evening he was told of her cowardice, and he vowed to fetch her by fair means or foul. After he had exhausted every argument, he seized her by the waist in an endeavour to carry her to her son's bedside. But she caught hold of the door and clung to it with such strength that he could not tear her away. When he released her, she fell at his feet and implored forgiveness for her cowardice.

"'Oh,' she cried, 'he must not die. Don't let him die, I beseech you. Tell him that I love him, that I adore him.'

"The boy was in his death agony. Realizing it, he besought his attendants to persuade his mother to come and bid him farewell. With the clear-sightedness of the dying, he had guessed and understood everything.

"'If she is afraid of being in my room,' he said, 'ask her to come along the balcony to my window, so that at least I may see her and bid her farewell with my eyes, since I may not kiss her.'

"Again the doctor and the abbé returned to the mother, assuring her that she would run no risk, as there would be a pane of glass between her and her son. She agreed, put a scarf over her head, took a bottle of smelling salts, and advanced three steps along the balcony. But suddenly she hid her face in her hands and moaned:

" ' No, no, I dare not look at him . . . I dare not . . . I am too much ashamed . . . too much afraid. . . . No, I cannot.'

" They tried to drag her along, but she clung with both hands to the railing and uttered such piercing screams that the passers-by in the street looked up.

" With his eyes fixed on the window, the dying boy waited, waited, loath to die until he had seen once more the sweet, the beloved, the sacred countenance of his mother. He waited a long, long time. Night fell, and he turned his face to the wall and never spoke again. By daybreak he was dead. And on the following day she went mad."

MADAME PARISSE

I

I HAD seated myself on the breakwater which protected the little harbour of Oberon, near the village of La Salis, to watch the sun set over Antibes. Never had I seen anything so astonishingly beautiful. Girt by Vauban's massive fortifications, the little town jutted out into the sea, midway along the shores of the imposing Gulf of Nice. Great rollers from the open sea broke at its foot, encircling it with a fringe of foam. Rising above the ramparts, the houses climbed one above the other up to the twin towers that stood out against the sky like the two horns of an ancient helmet, silhouetted against the milky whiteness of the Alps, those vast distant bastions of snow that bounded the horizon. Between the white foam at its feet and the white snow on the skyline, the radiant little town, in relief against the violet background of the foremost mountains, fronted the rays of the sinking sun like a pyramid of houses, of which the roofs were red, while the façades, white as the snow and the foam, had yet an infinite variety of tones in the evening light. Even the sky above the Alps was of a blue which was almost white, as if the paleness of the snow had touched it. A few silvery clouds hovered above the ghostly peaks, and on the other side of the Gulf lay

Nice, a white ribbon stretched out between the sea and the mountain. Two great lateen-sailed vessels, driven by a strong breeze, sped over the waves. I gazed on the scene with wonder and delight. It was one of those spectacles, so rare and so entrancing, that they penetrate to the heart, and linger there like happy memories. Through the medium of sight, one lives, thinks, suffers, feels and loves. To one who has this faculty, the contemplation of objects and persons brings the same pure, subtle, deep joy as a man experiences whose sensitive ear opens his soul to the ecstasies of music.

Turning to my companion, Monsieur Martini, a pure-blooded southerner, I remarked:

"This is one of the finest spectacles I have ever been privileged to enjoy. I have seen Mont St. Michel, that immense jewel wrought out of granite, springing up from the sands at daybreak. In the Sahara I have seen Lake Rainechergui, thirty-two miles long, shining in the light of a moon as brilliant as our northern sun, and from its surface I have seen a white mist, like a milky vapour, rising towards the moon. In the Lipari islands I have seen that fantastic, sulphurous crater of Volcanello, like a giant flower, emitting smoke and flame, an immense yellow blossom, blooming in the sea with a volcano for its stem. But I have never beheld anything more ravishing than Antibes at sunset, nestling at the foot of the Alps. I am haunted, I know not why, by echoes from antiquity. Lines from Homer are ringing in my ears. Antibes is a city of the East, of the classic past, of the Odyssey. It is Troy itself, though Troy was not a sea port."

Monsieur Martini drew a guide-book from his pocket, and read an extract:

"'This town was originally founded as a colony by Phoceans from Marseilles about 340 B.C. It received

the Greek name Antipolis, that is to say, "Opposite City," because it lay opposite Nice, which was also colonized from Marseilles. After the conquest of Gaul, the Romans made Antibes a municipality, conferring upon its inhabitants the rights of Roman citizenship. We learn from one of Martial's epigrams that in his time——' "

Here I interrupted him.

"I don't care what it was. I tell you I am looking at a town out of the Odyssey. Whether they were on the Asiatic or the European coast, these cities were very much alike, and there is not one of them on the other side of the Mediterranean which stirs in me the memory of the heroic age as this one does."

A sound of footsteps made me turn my head. A tall, dark woman was moving along the road which skirts the sea and leads to the cape.

"That's Madame Parisse, you know," whispered Monsieur Martini.

I was not aware of it, but this name that he uttered, the name of the Trojan shepherd, strengthened the illusion.

"Who is Madame Parisse?" I asked.

He seemed gratified that I did not know her history. I assured him of my complete ignorance, and my eyes followed the woman, who went her way as in a dream without seeing us, moving with slow, dignified tread, as doubtless moved the ladies of antiquity. She may have been thirty-five, but she retained her beauty, although she had lost the slimness of youth.

This was Monsieur Martini's story.

II

A year before the war of 1870 Madame Parisse, one of the Combelombes, had married Monsieur Parisse, a Government official. In those days she was a beautiful girl, as slender and sprightly as she is now melancholy and stout. She had reluctantly accepted Monsieur Parisse, who was a pot-bellied little man with short legs that tripped along in trousers too wide for them.

After the war, Antibes was occupied by a single line battalion, commanded by Monsieur Jean de Carmelin, a young officer who had been decorated for services in the field and had just received his fourth gold stripe. He was terribly bored in this fortress, this suffocating rat-trap with its double girdle of huge walls, and to relieve the monotony of his existence he would go for walks on the promontory, which was a sort of park or wood of pine trees, exposed to all the winds from the sea. There he met Madame Parisse, who also used to betake herself thither on summer evenings to enjoy the cool air under the trees. How did they come to fall in love with each other? Who can say? They met, they gazed, and when they were out of sight of each other, doubtless they were in each other's thoughts. The image of the brown-eyed girl with her black hair and ivory skin, her fresh southern beauty and flashing teeth, hovered before the young man's eyes, and he continued his walk, biting the end of his cigar instead of smoking it. And when Monsieur Parisse, unshaven, badly-dressed, short-legged and pot-bellied, came home for supper, doubtless his wife conjured up the image of the young officer, with his fair, curling moustache, his close-fitting, gold-laced tunic and red trousers.

They met so often that in the end perhaps they could not help smiling at each other, and soon they felt like old acquaintances. Doubtless he saluted her, and she, a little taken aback, responded with the slightest, the very slightest, bow, just sufficient to avoid discourtesy. But by the end of a fortnight she was acknowledging his salute from a distance before they actually met. At last he spoke to her—doubtless of the sunset. They admired it together but they looked for it in the depths of each other's eyes rather than on the horizon. And every evening for a fortnight they made this their usual and conventional pretext for a few minutes conversation. Presently they ventured to take a turn together, and while they discussed indifferent subjects, their eyes were already exchanging a thousand intimate secrets, the delightful mysteries that are reflected in a tender, passionate glance and set the heart beating, because they express the soul more eloquently than a spoken declaration. Then doubtless he took her hand and faltered words, whose meaning a woman divines, even while she seems not to hear them. And in this ethereal fashion they came to love each other. For her part she would have been content to linger at this stage of their passion, but he, her lover, was impatient for more. Each day he besought her more ardently to yield to his burning desire. She withstood him, resisted, and seemed resolved never to surrender. One evening, however, she said with a casual air:

"My husband has gone to Marseilles and will be away four days."

Jean de Carmelin threw himself at her feet, and implored her to open her door to him that night at eleven o'clock. But she turned a deaf ear to his entreaties and left him as if she were affronted.

The Major was in a fury all that evening. The next

morning he rose at dawn in a raging temper, made his rounds, flinging punishments to officers and men, like a man flinging stones into a crowd. But when he returned home for luncheon he found a note under his table napkin, containing these four words:

"Ten o'clock this evening."

And for no reason at all he gave his orderly five francs. The day seemed to him interminable. He spent part of the time curling his hair and scenting himself. As he was sitting down to dinner another envelope was brought to him with a telegram enclosed, which ran:

"My love. Business finished. Arrive this evening at nine.—PARISSE."

The Major swore so violently that the orderly dropped the soup tureen on the floor. What was to be done? At all costs, he wanted her that very evening, and have her he would by hook or by crook, even if he had to have her husband arrested and locked up. Suddenly a mad idea occurred to him, and he wrote a note.

"He shall not come home this evening, I swear it, and at ten o'clock I shall be you know where. Fear nothing. I will answer for everything, on my honour as an officer.

"JEAN DE CARMELIN."

About eight o'clock he sent for his second in command, Captain Gribois. Twisting Monsieur Parisse's crumpled telegram in his fingers, he said:

"I have just received a curious telegram, which I am not at liberty to show you. You will immediately

close all the town gates and place sentries on them, so that no one, no person whatever, you understand, can come in or go out before six to-morrow morning. You will have the streets patrolled, and all the inhabitants are to be within doors by nine o'clock. Anyone out of doors after that hour will be taken to his house by a guard. If any of your men meet me to-night, they will keep away from me and pretend not to recognize me. You understand? "

"Yes, sir."

"I shall hold you responsible for carrying out these orders."

"Very good, sir."

"Will you have some Chartreuse? "

"Yes, thank you."

They clinked glasses, drank the yellow liqueur, and Captain Gribois went away.

III

The train from Marseilles entered the station punctually at nine o'clock. Two travellers alighted and the train went on towards Nice. One of the passengers, Monsieur Saribe, who was an oil merchant, was tall and lean, while the other, Monsieur Parisse, was short and fat. Carrying their handbags, they set out together for the town, which was about a mile away. When they arrived at the harbour gate they were confronted by sentries, who crossed bayonets and ordered them to go back. Startled, amazed, discomfited, they retreated a little way to discuss the situation, and then cautiously returned in order to make their names known and to come to terms. But the soldiers clearly had strict orders, for they threatened to shoot, and the two

terrified travellers fled helter-skelter, abandoning their impedimenta. Then they circled the ramparts and presented themselves at the gate on the road to Cannes. This also they found closed and guarded by a sentry. Like prudent men, Monsieur Saribe and Monsieur Parisse did not press the point, but returned to the railway station to find shelter for the night. Loitering about the fortifications was unsafe after nightfall. Roused out of his bed the station-master gave them permission to spend the night in the waiting-room. Side by side, they sat there in the dark, too frightened even to think of sleep. The night seemed endless. About half-past six the next morning they were informed that the gates had been opened, and that they were at liberty to enter the town. They set off again, but failed to recover their abandoned baggage anywhere on the road.

Still a little uneasy, they were met at the gate of the town by Major de Carmelin, with a roguish twinkle in his eyes and the ends of his moustache twisted upwards. He had come in person to question and identify them. He saluted them politely and apologized for having caused them an uncomfortable night. But he had had to carry out his orders.

All Antibes was in consternation. Some spoke of a surprise attack by the Italians; others of a landing by the Prince Imperial; others again of an Orleanist conspiracy. The truth was not suspected until later, when it was known that the battalion had been transferred to a remote garrison and Major de Carmelin severely punished.

IV

Monsieur Martini had finished his story when Madame Parisse came back from her walk. She passed us with a dignified air. Her eyes were fixed on the Alpine summits, now rosy with the last rays of the setting sun. I had a strong desire to take off my hat to this sorrowful lady, whose thoughts doubtless never ceased to dwell on that night of love, now so remote, and that bold lover, who had dared for the sake of one kiss from her, to put a town in a state of siege, and to compromise his whole future. By this time he had doubtless forgotten her, unless, perhaps, over the wine, he told the story of this mad prank, this amorous extravagance. Had she ever seen him again? Did she still love him?

"Here," I reflected, "is a typical instance of modern love, grotesque and yet romantic. The Homer who would celebrate this Helen and the exploit of her lover, should possess the soul of a Paul de Kock. And yet the hero of this forsaken lady was gallant, dashing, handsome, strong as Achilles, more subtle than Ulysses."

AT A PRICE

A BRIGHT fire was burning on the hearth. On a Japanese table stood two cups, a teapot and a sugar basin, flanked by a small decanter of rum. Count de Sallure threw his hat, gloves and fur coat on a chair, while the Countess, who had already removed her opera cloak, was giving slight touches to her hair before the mirror, smiling at her own reflection, and patting the ringlets on her temples with slender fingers, which flashed with jewels. She turned to her husband, who had been looking at her for some moments. He seemed to hesitate, as if in some secret embarrassment. At last he broke the silence:

"Are you satisfied with the attentions you received this evening?"

She looked him straight in the eyes, with a light of triumph and challenge in her glance.

"I should be hard to please if I weren't."

She threw herself into a chair, and he sat down facing her, and began to crumble a cake in his fingers.

"Don't you think you made me look rather—foolish?"

"Are you trying to make a scene?" she asked. "Do you mean to reproach me?"

"No, my dear. All I say is that that fellow Burel

went perhaps a little too far. If—if I had the right, I should have been annoyed."

"Be honest, my dear. The truth is your ideas have changed since last year. When I discovered that you had a mistress, a mistress who monopolized your affections, you did not care whether anyone paid me attentions or not. I told you that I was distressed, and like you this evening, but with better cause, I said:

"'My dear, you are compromising Madame de Servy, and you are hurting me and making me ridiculous.'

"And what did you reply? You made it quite clear to me that I was free to do as I pleased; that between intelligent people marriage was merely an affair of common interests, a social, but not a moral, bond. Didn't you? You gave me to understand that your mistress was infinitely preferable to me, more fascinating, more feminine. Yes, more feminine was what you said. I admit that this was all veiled with the tact of a well-bred man; it was disguised with compliments and suggested with a delicacy I still appreciate. None the less I understood the situation perfectly.

"We agreed in future to live together, but virtually separated. Our child was the one link between us. I gathered from your hints that all you cared about was appearances and that if I liked I was welcome to take a lover, so long as nobody knew about it. You discoursed at great length and very eloquently on the subtlety of women, their adroitness in preserving the conventions, and so on. I understood you perfectly. At that time you were very much in love with Madame de Servy, and my conjugal affection bored you. No doubt I was rather a tax upon you. Since then we have lived apart. We go out together and come back together, and when we reach home we separate. But the last month or

two you have been assuming the airs of a jealous husband. What is the explanation? "

"My dear, I am not in the least jealous, but I am afraid of your compromising yourself. You are young and vivacious. Your taste for adventures . . ."

"Adventures? On that score I think I have every right to keep the balance even."

"Pray don't make a joke of it. I am speaking seriously, as a friend. Everything you have said is greatly exaggerated."

"Not in the least. You admitted your relations with Madame de Servy, which was equivalent to giving me permission to imitate you. I have not done so . . ."

"Permit me . . ."

"Pray allow me to continue. I have not done so. I have no lover at present . . . nor have I had one . . . yet. But I am only waiting . . . I am looking about me . . . but I can't find what I want. I must have someone out of the common, someone more attractive than yourself. I am paying you a compliment though you don't seem to realize it."

"My dear, all these jokes are utterly out of place."

"But I'm not joking, not in the very least. You discoursed to me about the eighteenth century and gave me to understand that you were of the Regency period. I haven't forgotten. The first day it suits me to cease to be what I am, whatever you may do, and whether you are aware of it or not, I shall . . . make a fool of you, like the others."

"How can you say such a thing? "

"How can I? Why, you were in fits of laughter when Madame de Gers said that Monsieur de Servy was like a man searching for a pair of horns."

"What may seem funny on the lips of Madame de Gers is unbecoming on yours."

" Not at all. You thought the expression very droll when it was a question of Monsieur de Servy, but you consider it very ugly when it is applied to yourself. It all depends on one's point of view. I don't care for it myself, and I only said it to see if you were ripe."

" Ripe . . . for what? "

" Ripe for that situation. If a man is angry when it is mentioned, it shows that he is getting warm, very warm indeed. In a couple of months you will be the first to laugh if I mention a man with those ornaments on his head. Because when you wear them you don't feel them."

" You are positively vulgar this evening. I have never known you like this before."

" Ah, yes, I have changed . . . for the worse. It's your fault."

" Come, my dear, let us talk seriously. I beg, I implore you, not to encourage, as you did this evening, Monsieur Burel's improper attentions."

" You are jealous, just as I said."

" Certainly not, certainly not. But I do not wish to be made ridiculous. I refuse to be made ridiculous. And if I see that fellow whispering down your neck . . . or worse . . ."

" He was looking for a speaking trumpet."

" I shall . . . I shall box his ears."

" You aren't by any chance in love with me? "

" Stranger things might happen."

" So that's it, is it? Unfortunately I am no longer in love with you."

The Count rose. Passing to the other side of the little table he stepped behind his wife's chair, and suddenly planted a kiss on the nape of her neck. She started up and looked deep into his eyes.

" Don't play those jokes on me, if you please. We

have agreed to live our own lives. We have done with that sort of thing."

"Come now, don't be angry. Lately I have begun to think you bewitching."

"I must have improved. And you, too, you think I am . . . ripe."

"I think you are charming, my dear. Your arms, your complexion, your shoulders . . ."

"Will enchant Monsieur Burel."

"How bitter you are! But it's perfectly true. I don't know any woman as fascinating as you."

"You must have been fasting."

"I beg your pardon."

"I said, you must have been fasting."

"What do you mean?"

"When you have been fasting you are hungry, and when you are hungry you are ready to eat things which at any other time you would not care for. I am a dish which you once despised, but to which you would not be sorry to help yourself this evening."

"Oh, Marguerite, who taught you to talk like that?"

"You did. Listen. Since your rupture with Madame de Servy, you have had, to my certain knowledge, four mistresses, four professionals, artists in their own line. At present I suppose there is an interlude. How else am I to explain your attentions this evening?"

"Let me speak with frank brutality, without polite euphemisms. I have fallen in love with you again, and to tell you the truth, quite desperately. There you are."

"Dear me. So you want to . . . make friends again."

"Yes."

"To-night?"

"Oh, Marguerite!"

"There. I have shocked you again. My dear, let us understand each other. We are nothing to each other now, are we? True, I am your wife, but a wife who has her freedom. I was on the point of making another engagement. You wish to come first. I consent . . . but on fair terms."

"I don't understand."

"Let me explain. Am I as attractive as your professionals? Be honest."

"A thousand times more so."

"More attractive than the best of them?"

"Yes, a thousand times."

"Well, what did the best of them cost you for three months?"

"I don't follow you."

"I said, what did she cost you, the best of your mistresses, for three months in money, jewellery, dinners, theatres and so on—in fact for her whole maintenance?"

"How on earth should I know?"

"You ought to know. At a moderate estimate, on an average, should you say five thousand francs a month?"

"Yes, about that."

"Well, my dear, give me five thousand francs on the spot, and I am at your disposal for one month beginning from this evening."

"You must be mad."

"If that's how you take it, good night."

Leaving him, the Countess passed into her bedroom. The bed was turned back; a vague perfume clung about its hangings. Standing in the doorway, the Count remarked:

"What a delicious scent!"

"Do you think so? It's the same as before. I always use *Peau d'Espagne*."

"Really, it's astonishing. Why it's delicious."

"I dare say. But will you have the kindness to remove yourself, as I am going to bed."

"Marguerite!"

"Go away."

He came right into the room and seated himself in an armchair.

"Oh, that's the idea, is it? So much the worse for you," said the Countess.

Slowly she took off her low-necked bodice, revealing her bare white arms. Raising them above her head, she began to loosen her hair before the mirror. Under filmy laces, twin rosebuds peeped above the edge of her black satin corset. The Count sprang to his feet with alacrity and advanced towards her.

"Don't come near me," exclaimed his wife, "or I shall be annoyed."

He threw his arms round her and sought her lips. Hastily stooping, she snatched from her toilet-table a glass of scented water and threw it over her shoulder right into her husband's face. Dripping with water, he started up, exclaiming wrathfully:

"What a silly thing to do!"

"I dare say. But you know my terms, five thousand francs."

"I call that idiotic."

"Why?"

"Why? A husband to pay for the privilege of sleeping with his own wife!"

"What vulgar expressions you use."

"I dare say. I tell you it would be absurd to give money to one's own wife, one's own legal wife."

" It's far more absurd to go paying away money to common women, when one has a wife of one's own."

" Perhaps so. But I decline to make myself ridiculous."

The Countess sank into a long chair, and began slowly to remove her stockings, peeling them off like the skin of a snake. Her rosy leg emerged from its mauve sheathe, and an exquisite little foot touched the carpet. The Count came a little nearer.

" That's an odd idea of yours," he said tenderly.

" What idea? "

" Asking me for five thousand francs."

" It's the most natural thing in the world. We are strangers, aren't we, and you want me? As we are married already, you can't marry me, so you must buy me. And you're paying rather less than you would for another woman. Now just think for a minute. This money, instead of going to some wretch, who would play ducks and drakes with it, will stay at home and be spent on your own comfort. Besides, to an intelligent man, what can be more amusing and original than to pay his own wife? Those random adventures don't amuse you unless they are very expensive. You will find that our —legal love will have a new value, a piquancy, a flavour of naughtiness, if you fix a market price on it. Don't you think so? "

Almost completely disrobed, the Countess rose and went towards her dressing-room.

" Now, sir, will you go away, or shall I ring for my maid? "

Perplexed and nettled, the Count stood there looking at her. Suddenly he tossed her his pocket-book.

" There, you minx. Take six thousand. But you understand . . ."

The Countess picked up the money and counted it.

" Understand what? " she asked calmly.

" Don't expect it every time."

She burst out laughing.

" Five thousand a month, my friend, or you can go back to your pretty ladies. And if I give satisfaction, I may raise my terms."

THE DEAR DEPARTED

I HAD loved her to distraction. Why is it that we love? What a strange thing it is to have eyes for one person only in all the world, to have one thought in one's mind, one desire in one's heart, and on one's tongue one name, which, like the waters of a spring, surges up from the depths of the soul, rises to the lips, which repeat it over and over again, at all times, in all places, as if they were murmuring a prayer.

I shall not tell you our story in detail, for love has only one story, which is always the same. We met and loved. That was all. For a year her affection, her embraces, her kisses, her glances, her gowns, her words were all the world to me. I was encompassed, fettered, enslaved by everything that was hers. So complete was this obsession that I no longer knew if it were day or night, if I were dead or alive, on our old earth or in some other sphere.

And lo, she was dead! I know not how. I cannot remember. One rainy evening she came home wet through and the next morning she had a cough, which continued all that week. She took to her bed. What happened then, I cannot remember. Doctors came, wrote prescriptions and went away. Remedies were brought; some woman made her drink them. Her

hands were hot, her forehead damp and burning, her eyes bright and pathetic. I spoke to her and she replied. What did we say to each other? I cannot remember. I have forgotten everything, everything. She died, and her last faint sigh still haunts me.

"Ah!" said the nurse. Nothing more, but I understood, I understood.

After that, everything is a blank; everything. I saw a priest, who alluded to her as my mistress, and that seemed to me an insult. Now that she was dead, no one had the right to know what she had been. I drove him away. Another priest came, who was very gentle and kind, and when he spoke to me of her, I wept. There were a thousand details to be arranged for the funeral. I do not recollect anything about them. But I vividly remember the coffin and the tap of the hammer when they nailed down the lid. Oh, heavens!

She was buried. Buried. She, my love. In that hole in the ground. Some of her friends were present. I fled from the spot. For long hours I wandered through the streets before returning home. The next day I embarked on a long journey.

Yesterday I returned to Paris. When I saw again my room, our room, our bed, our chairs and tables, the whole house in which remained all that can remain of the life of one who is dead, I was seized again by such a violent access of grief that I could hardly restrain myself from opening the window and flinging myself down into the street. I could not remain in these surroundings; hemmed in by these walls, which had harboured and sheltered her, these walls, which could not but preserve in their smallest crevices a thousand atoms that emanated from her body and her breath. I snatched up my hat to escape from the house. As I reached the hall door, I passed in front of the long looking-glass which

she had had placed there so that whenever she went out she could see herself at full length and assure herself that everything about her, from her shoes to her hat, was neat and pretty. I stopped dead in front of this mirror, which had so often reflected her—so often, so often, that surely it must have retained her image. I stood there trembling, with my eyes on its shining surface, gazing into the empty depths which had once held her as completely as my own passionate glances. I felt that I loved it. I touched it. It was cold. Oh, memory, memory! Oh, mirror, terrible, living mirror, agonizing, burning, what tortures dost thou inflict! Happy the man whose heart is as a mirror, where an image is reflected but leaves no trace; a heart that can forget all that it once held, all that once passed before it, all that once saw itself reflected in the glass of affection and love. Ah, the pangs I suffer!

I left the house, and unconsciously made my way to the cemetery. There I found her simple tombstone, a marble cross, bearing these words:

"She loved. She was loved. She died."

Under that stone she lay, crumbling into dust. Horrible thought! I bowed my head and sobbed aloud. I stayed there a long, long time. Then I saw that evening had come. I was seized by wild and fantastic desire, the mad desire of a distracted lover. I would spend a night, one last night, weeping upon her tomb. But if I were seen I should be turned away. What could I do? With the cunning of despair, I rose and wandered about that city of the dead. I wandered and wandered. How small it is, this town, compared with that other in which we live! And yet there are far more of the dead than of the living. We, who are alive, must have our lofty houses, our wide streets, all this space just for the four generations, who walk the earth together

drinking its water and its wine, and eating its bread. But to all these generations of the dead, that infinite procession of human beings, who have gone before, how little room is allotted. A single field is enough. Earth takes them to her bosom again; oblivion swallows them. Farewell!

Beyond the part of the cemetery in actual use, I came upon the abandoned portion, where the ancient dead mingle their dust with the soil, where the crosses are mouldering, and where to-morrow new graves will be dug. It is overgrown with luxuriant roses, and dark, vigorous cypresses; a garden with a melancholy grandeur, nourished with human flesh. I was alone, all alone, completely concealed by the deep, dense foliage of a tree. And there I waited, clinging to the trunk, like a ship-wrecked mariner to a spar.

When it was pitch dark, I left my refuge, and began to prowl with slow, stealthy steps about that dead man's acre. I wandered a long, long time, but failed to find her tomb again. With outstretched arms and wide-open eyes, I searched without success, knocking against tombstones with hands, feet, knees, chest and head. I felt my way like a blind man, groping amongst monuments, crosses, iron railings, glass wreaths, wreaths of faded flowers. I read the names by passing my fingers over the letters. What a night it was! What a night! I could not find her. There was no moon. What a night! Fear came upon me, terrible fear, in those narrow paths that ran between two rows of tombs. Tombs, tombs, nothing but tombs! To right, to left, in front of me, all around me, everywhere! My knees failed me; I could go no further and I seated myself on one of the graves. I could hear the beating of my heart. And there was yet another sound that struck my ears, a nameless, confused commotion. What could it be?

Was it within my own distracted brain, or somewhere in the impenetrable darkness, or under the mysterious earth, that seed plot of the corpses of men? I looked all round me. How long I stayed there, I cannot say. I was paralysed, delirious with terror, ready to scream, ready to die, with fear. And suddenly I thought I felt the marble slab on which I was resting stir beneath me. It moved as if someone were raising it. With one bound I sprang on to the adjoining tomb, and with my own eyes I saw the stone I had just quitted standing up on end, while the dead man emerged from his grave, a bare skeleton, heaving the stone up on his shoulders. Dark though the night was, I saw this with perfect clearness, and I could read the inscription on the cross.

"Here lies Jacques Olivant, aged fifty-one. He was a kind father and husband, a just and God-fearing man, and died in the peace of the Lord."

The dead man, too, was reading his own epitaph. Presently he picked up a small, pointed stone from the pathway, and began carefully to scratch out the inscription. He scraped away slowly until he had obliterated it entirely. Then he gazed with his eye sockets at the vacant space, and with the tip of the bone of the index finger he inscribed in luminous letters, like words scratched on a wall with a phosphorus match, the following epitaph:

"Here lies Jacques Olivant, aged fifty-one. By unkind treatment, he hastened the death of his father, whose property he desired to inherit. He was a tyrant to his wife and children; he defrauded his neighbours; he committed theft whenever possible, and died a worthless scoundrel."

When he had finished the inscription, he stood gazing at it. Looking around me, I saw that all the tombs were open and that all the corpses had come out

of their graves. They had obliterated the lies inscribed by their relations on their monuments and had substituted the truth. I perceived that all of them had behaved like brutes to their families. Malignant, shameless, hypocritical, lying, knavish, slanderous, jealous, they had stolen, cheated, committed every variety of disgraceful and abominable act, these loving fathers, faithful spouses, devoted sons, pure young girls, these upright dealers, these irreproachable men and women. And here they were, all with one accord writing on the threshold of their eternal dwelling the cruel, terrible, solemn truth, to which everyone on earth had been actually or apparently blind.

It flashed into my mind that she, too, must have written upon her tomb. My fears had vanished, and I set off at a run through the midst of these gaping coffins, these corpses and skeletons, towards her, convinced that I should find her at once. Though her face was hidden by the winding sheet, I recognized her from afar. The inscription which I had a little while before read upon the marble cross ran as follows:

"She loved. She was loved. She died."

What I now saw was this:

"She went out one day to deceive her lover, caught cold in the rain and died."

I am told that I was found at daybreak, lying senseless beside a tomb.

THE HAIRPIN

I DO not propose to tell you either the man's name or where he lives. It is a long way from here, a very long way; in a land of teeming soil and blazing sunshine.

Since the morning I had been following the line of the coast; the fields were gay with crops and the blue sea glittered in the sun. The waves rippled gently and sleepily, and flowers grew up to the very brink. The air was heavy with the soft warmth of moist and fertile soil; one seemed to be breathing vital essences.

I had been told that I could find hospitality that evening in the house of a Frenchman, who lived in an orange grove at the end of a promontory. His name was not mentioned. Ten years before he had arrived there one morning, had bought some land, sown field crops and had worked with a zeal amounting to passion. Enlarging his estate month by month and year by year, unceasingly cultivating the rich virgin soil, he had by dint of unwearied labour succeeded in amassing a fortune. In spite of this, his efforts did not relax. Rising at dawn he spent the whole day inspecting and making the round of his estate, and he seemed obsessed by one fixed idea, tortured by an insatiable thirst for wealth. There was every appearance now of his being very rich.

The sun was low when I reached his dwelling, which

stood, as I had been given to understand, in an orange grove on a cape. It was a large square house of simple design, and overlooked the sea. As I approached, a man with a long beard came to the door. I greeted him and asked if he could put me up for the night.

Smiling, he shook hands with me.

"Consider yourself at home."

He showed me a room, put a servant at my disposal, and bore himself with the perfect ease and well-bred friendliness of a man of the world. On leaving me he said:

"Dinner will be ready as soon as you come down."

We dined on a terrace overlooking the sea. At first I spoke to him about this country, so rich, so distant, so little known. He smiled and said absently:

"Yes, it is a fine country. But one cannot care for any place so far from the land one loves."

"Is it France that you regret?"

"Yes, Paris."

"Why don't you go back?"

"I shall some day."

Then we fell naturally into conversation about French society and the life on the boulevards of Paris. He asked the questions that a man who had once been part of it all would naturally put, and he mentioned all the well-known names one hears round about the Vaudeville.

"Whom do you meet at Tortoni's now?"

"The same old crowd, except for those who are dead."

Haunted by a vague recollection I gazed at him fixedly. I was sure I had seen him before. But when and where? Strong though he was he seemed weary, and melancholy for all his determination. His long

fair beard came down to his chest and now and then he would seize it just below his chin and slide his closed hand all the way down it. The hair on his head was a little thin, but he had thick eyebrows and a heavy moustache, which mingled with his whiskers. Behind us the sun was sinking into the sea, suffusing the whole coast with a fiery glow. The orange blossom shed upon the evening air its strong delicious scent. But he had eyes only for me. His piercing glance seemed to discern in my own eyes, in the depths of my soul, a far-away vision of that stretch of shady pavement that runs from the Madeleine to the Rue Drouot, which he knew and loved so well.

"Do you know Boutrelle?"

"Certainly."

"Has he changed much?"

"Yes, he is quite white now."

"And La Ridamie?"

"The same as ever."

"And the women. Tell me about the women. Let me see. Do you know Suzanne Verner?"

"Yes. She has grown stout. Her day is over."

"Ah! and Sophie Astier?"

"Dead."

"Poor girl! And what about—— Do you know——?"

He broke off and turned pale. In a changed voice he resumed:

"No, I had better not talk about that. It's torture to me."

Then, as if to change the trend of his thoughts, he rose.

"Shall we go in?"

"Certainly."

He led the way into the house. The rooms down-

stairs were very large and bare and dreary and seemed little used. The tables were littered with plates and glasses, left there by the dusky servants who glided about the rambling house.

Two guns were hanging on nails in the wall. Every corner held a miscellaneous collection of spades, fishing lines, dried palm leaves, and other objects, thrown down at the end of the day's work, and ready to hand whenever they should be required.

"It's the house, or the shanty rather, of an exile," remarked my host, with a smile. "But my own room is more comfortable. We will go there."

I felt at first as if I were entering a second-hand shop, the room was so crowded with various objects, odds and ends evidently kept for the sake of their associations. On the walls hung two charming pictures by famous artists, with tapestries, swords, pistols and other weapons, and in the centre of the largest panel there was a square of white satin in a gold frame. My curiosity was aroused. I went to examine it more closely and saw a single hairpin stuck right in the middle of the scrap of glossy silk. My host laid his hand on my shoulder.

"That," he said with a smile, "is the only thing I see in this place, the only thing I have seen for the last ten years. Monsieur Prudhomme declared, 'This sabre is the finest day of my life,' and I might say, 'This hairpin is my whole life.'"

I racked my brains for some appropriate commonplace, but all I could think of was:

"You were hard hit by some woman?"

"I was, and you may add that I am suffering agonies. . . . Come out on to the balcony. . . . Just now, as we were talking, there came to my lips a name which I dared not utter. For if you had answered

'Dead,' as you did when I mentioned Sophie Astier, I should have blown my brains out this very night."

We had stepped out upon the spacious balcony, which overlooked two bays, one on either side, each surrounded by high, grey mountains. It was the twilight hour. The sun had set, leaving the earth bathed in the reflected luminousness that still glowed in the sky.

"Is Jeanne de Limours still alive?" he continued, while his eyes, haunted by a shuddering terror, sought mine.

"Very much so," I replied with a smile, "and prettier than ever."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes."

He hesitated.

"Intimately?"

"No."

He seized my hand.

"Tell me about her."

"But there is nothing to tell. She is one of the most charming and sought after women, or courtesans rather, in the whole of Paris. She leads a life of pleasure and royal luxury. That's all I can tell you."

"I love her," he murmured. It was as if he had said, "I am dying."

"Ah!" he broke out. "For three years we led a life which was half bliss, half anguish. Half a dozen times I was on the point of killing her, and once she tried to blind me with that hairpin over there. You see that small white scar under my left eye? Ah, how we loved each other! How can I explain such a passion? You would never understand.

"There is, of course, the ordinary sort of love, the mutual attraction of two hearts and two souls. But

there is certainly another kind of love, merciless, cruel, torturing, the inextricable entanglement of two conflicting temperaments, two human beings, detesting and adoring each other at the same moment.

"In three years that woman ruined me. I had a fortune of four million francs, and she devoured it all with that calm, placid air of hers and that sweet smile, which her lips seem to have borrowed from her eyes. You know her. There is something irresistible about her. What it is I cannot say. Is it her grey eyes that pierce like gimlets and leave a barb like an arrow-head? Perhaps it is that smile of hers, so winsome and casual and seductive, which conceals her emotions like a mask. Her indolent grace takes gradual possession of you; emanates like a perfume from her slender figure, which scarcely sways as she moves, for she glides rather than walks; from her languorous charming accents, which are like the music to her smile; from her gestures, too —those gestures so restrained, so apt, so intoxicating in their harmony. For three years she was the only woman in the world for me. The agonies I suffered! Her infidelities were legion. And her motive? Merely the joy of being unfaithful to me. When I found her out and called her every name under the sun, she admitted everything calmly, and said:

"'I am not your wife, am I?'

"Since coming here I have thought about her so much that at last I understand her. She is Manon Lescaut reincarnated; Manon, with whom love and infidelity were inseparable; Manon, to whom love and pleasure and money were all part of the same thing."

After a few minutes he resumed.

"When I had spent my last farthing on her she said frankly:

"'My dear, you must realize that I cannot live on

air. I am very fond of you, fonder of you than of anyone else, but I must live. Poverty and I can never be bedfellows.'

"And yet I can never describe to you the terrible life she led me. When I looked at her I was as ready to kill her as to kiss her; I felt a frantic desire to take her in my arms, to clasp her to me and crush the life out of her. Lurking in the depths of her eyes lay something treacherous and elusive, which made me abominate her, and yet this was the very reason why I loved her so. In her the feminine, the hateful and maddening feminine, was more potent than in any other of her sex; she was full of it, brim full of it, as of an intoxicating and poisonous fluid. She was woman, more intensely woman than any other has ever been.

"And another thing. When I went out with her, her eyes rested on every man she met in such a way that she seemed to be surrendering herself with every glance. It infuriated me and yet bound me to her all the more closely. This woman had only to walk along the street to become the property of every male, and that in spite of me, in spite of herself, by the sheer fact of her nature, although her demeanour was all that was sweet and modest. Can you understand it?

"What torture it was! In theatres and restaurants she seemed to be unfaithful to me under my very eyes. And she was, in fact, unfaithful to me as soon as I left her alone.

"It is ten years since I saw her last, and I love her more than ever."

Night had sunk down upon the earth. The heady scent of orange blossom filled the air.

"Will you ever see her again?" I asked.

"See her again? Listen. I have now in land and

money between seven and eight hundred thousand francs. As soon as I have a million I shall sell everything and go back to her. I shall have enough for one year with her—one whole splendid year. And after that, farewell. My life will be over."

"And then?" I asked.

"I don't know. It will be the end. Perhaps I'll ask her to take me on as her body-servant."

GUILLEMOT ROCK

THE guillemots are nesting. Some time between the beginning of April and the end of May, before the arrival of the summer visitors from Paris, certain elderly gentlemen in top-boots and belted shooting-jackets, make their appearance at the little seaside resort of Etretat. After passing a few days at the Hôtel Hauville they go away again to return three weeks later. After a further stay they take their departure for good, and do not reappear until the following spring.

These are the last of the guillemot hunters, all that are left of them. Thirty or forty years ago there were a score of these fanatics, but now only a few of them survive.

The guillemot is a very rare migrant of curious habits. For the greater part of the year it frequents Newfoundland and the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. But every year in the mating season a flock of these migrants crosses the ocean and comes without fail to nest in the same spot—a rock, known as Guillemot Rock, near Etretat. These birds are found here, and here only. They have always come; people have always shot them, and yet they keep coming back and will do so for ever. As soon as they

have reared their young they vanish until the following year.

Why do they never nest elsewhere? Why do they choose no other point of all that long, unbroken stretch of white cliff between Pas de Calais and Havre? What force, what irresistible instinct, what age-long custom, impels these birds back to this spot? What early migration, or storm, perchance, first cast their ancestors upon this rock? And why have the offspring of these first comers persisted in returning? There are not very many of them, a hundred at the most; it is as if a single clan had preserved this tradition, the custom of this annual pilgrimage.

And every spring, as soon as this wandering flock has taken up its quarters on the rock, the same sportsmen make their appearance in the village. Time was that they were young; and now they are old. But they remain faithful to the annual tryst which they have kept for thirty or forty years. They would not miss it for anything in the world.

. . . . . .

One April, a year or two ago, three of these old guillemot hunters had arrived at Etretat. One of their number, however, Monsieur d'Arnelles, was missing. No one had heard from him or knew anything about him. And yet he could not be dead, like so many of their old companions, or they would have heard. At last, tired of waiting, the first arrivals sat down to dinner, and the meal was approaching its end when a carriage drew up in the courtyard of the inn and the belated sportsman appeared. He was in high spirits. Rubbing his hands he sat down and ate heartily. In reply to one of his friends, who expressed surprise at his being in a frock-coat, he said calmly:

"I hadn't time to change."

They went straight from table to bed, for, to catch the birds unawares, one has to start well before day-break. There is nothing more delightful than this sport and this early morning expedition. At three o'clock the sportsmen are awakened by sailors throwing sand at their window-panes. In a few minutes all are ready to start. Day has not yet begun to dawn, but the stars are paling. The waves are breaking on the shingle and the breeze is so keen that one shivers even in one's thick clothes.

The sailors run the two fishing smacks smartly down the sloping shingle with a noise like the ripping of cloth. As the boats toss on the inshore waves, the brown sails are hoisted, swell to a puff of wind, quiver, relapse, belly again in the wind, and the well-tarred vessels make for the wide harbour mouth, vaguely discernible in the darkness.

The sky clears, the darkness seems to melt away, but the coast line, that great white stretch of cliffs like a perpendicular wall, still remains in shadow. They sail through the Manne-Porte, that great archway through which even a big ship could pass. Rounding the point of La Courtine they sight the valley and cape of Antifer; then, suddenly, they behold a beach with hundreds of sea-gulls on it. And then comes the Guillemot Rock.

This rock is simply a small projection from the cliff, and perched on its narrow ledges, the birds raise their heads to look at the boats. They sit there motionless, waiting, not yet daring to leave the rock. Some of them, on the very edge, seem to be sitting up, and these look just like bottles, for their legs are so short that when they walk they seem to glide along as if on castors, and they cannot spring up from the ground to take to their wings, but are obliged to let themselves fall

from the cliff like stones, and in doing so they drop almost on to the heads of the waiting sportsmen. They are aware of this disability and of its danger, and are loath to quit their perches. But the sailors utter shouts and beat the gunwales with wooden tholes. One after another the startled birds let themselves drop into space, falling almost to the level of the water. Then, as fast as their wings can carry them, they make for the open sea, that is to say those that are not brought down by a hail of shot. For a whole hour the murderous fire continues. One after another the birds are driven from their refuge. Sometimes the nesting females cling desperately to their broods, and are riddled with charge after charge of shot. Their blood stains the white rock crimson, and the mother dies among the eggs she has refused to abandon.

. . . . . .

During the first day's sport Monsieur d'Arnelles exhibited his usual enthusiasm, but when the party set out for home about ten o'clock, under a brilliant sun, which filled the hollows in the cliff with great splashes of light, he seemed somewhat pensive, and inclined to brood, which was not his habit. As soon as they reached the village a man in black clothes, who looked like a servant, spoke to him in a low voice. After a moment's hesitation Monsieur d'Arnelles replied:

"No. To-morrow."

The next day the shooting was resumed. Monsieur d'Arnelles, however, kept missing his shots, although the birds were dropping down to the very muzzle of his gun. His friends rallied him and asked him if he were in love, or if some secret trouble were disturbing him. At last he confessed:

"The fact is I have to go away immediately and it annoys me very much."

"What? Going away? Why?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I have some business on hand and I can't stay any longer."

They let the matter drop.

Directly after luncheon the man in black made his appearance again. Monsieur d'Arnelles told him to put in the horses, and the man was just leaving the room when the three others protested vigorously. One of them said:

"Come now, surely this business of yours can't be so very serious. You have put it off for two days already."

Monsieur d'Arnelles was obviously torn by conflicting desires and in great perplexity, divided between pleasure and duty. Distressed and irresolute, he endeavoured to make up his mind. After long thought he said hesitatingly:

"The fact is . . . the fact is . . . I am not alone . . . I have my son-in-law here."

"Your son-in-law? But where is he?"

He suddenly blushed in confusion.

"Don't you know? Why . . . why . . . he is in the stable. He is dead."

A silence of stupefaction fell upon them all.

In increasing distress Monsieur d'Arnelles resumed:

"I had the misfortune to lose him, and as I was taking his body home to Briseville I went out of my way a little so as not to miss our annual meeting. But you will understand that I cannot wait much longer."

One of his friends, bolder than the others, remonstrated:

"Still . . . after all the man is dead. Surely he can wait another day."

"Of course he can," the others chimed in without hesitation.

A great weight seemed to be lifted from Monsieur d'Arnelle's shoulders, but he was still a little uneasy.

"You honestly think so?"

As one man his three friends replied:

"My dear fellow, in his condition two days more or less can't possibly matter."

His peace of mind now completely restored, the bereaved father-in-law turned to the undertaker's man:

"Very well, then, the day after to-morrow will do."

THE CONFESSION

MARGUERITE DE THÉRELLES was on her death bed. Although only fifty-six years of age she looked at least seventy-five as she lay there, gasping for breath, whiter than the sheets, shaken by violent fits of shuddering, her face distorted, her eyes staring as though they beheld some frightful apparition.

Her sister Suzanne, who was six years her senior, knelt sobbing by the bedside. A small table, covered with a napkin, stood by the dying woman's bed. Two lighted candles had been placed upon it in preparation for the priest, who was coming to administer Extreme Unction and the Last Sacrament.

The room had the forbidding aspect, the heart-breaking atmosphere of farewell, which characterizes death chambers. Medicine bottles lay strewn about, and a litter of linen had been swept or kicked into a corner. The chairs stood about in disorder, as if arrested in terror-stricken flight. And death, lurking and watching, brooded grimly over all.

The story of the two sisters was a moving one. It was widely known and had brought tears to many eyes. Once on a time the elder sister, Suzanne, had been loved to distraction by a young man, whose passion she returned. They were betrothed, and the wedding day was drawing near, when Henry de

Sampierre suddenly died. Suzanne was frantic with grief and vowed never to marry. She kept her word. She assumed widow's weeds, which she wore to the end of her days.

One morning Marguerite, who was then barely twelve, came and threw herself into the arms of her elder sister, exclaiming:

"Sister, I don't want you to be unhappy. I don't want you to cry all the rest of your life. I will never leave you, never, never, never. And I will never marry either. I will stay with you always, always."

Deeply touched by this childish devotion Suzanne kissed her little sister, though she put small faith in her vow. Nevertheless the child kept her word. In spite of the entreaties of her parents and her elder sister Marguerite never married. Yet she was very pretty and received many proposals from men who fell in love with her. But she would not leave her sister.

. . . . . .

They lived together all their days without once being parted. Inseparable companions, they went through life hand in hand. Marguerite, however, seemed always sad and depressed, more melancholy than her sister, as though crushed by her own sublime sacrifice. She aged more rapidly than Suzanne, began to go grey at thirty and was frequently ailing, as if consumed by some mysterious and gnawing malady. And now she was to be the first to die. For twenty-four hours she had not spoken, except to say, at the first break of dawn:

"My end is near. Send for the priest."

After that she lay on her back, convulsed with spasms, her lips moving, as if words of terror were struggling to escape from her heart; she seemed frantic with fear, a pitiable spectacle.

In agonies of grief her sister leaned her head against the bed and wept uncontrollably:

"Margot, my poor Margot, my child."

She had always called her "child," while Marguerite had always called her "sister."

Footsteps were heard on the staircase and the door opened. A choir boy entered, followed by the old priest in his surplice. As soon as she saw him the dying woman started and sat up; she muttered something and began plucking at the bed-clothes as if she were trying to make a hole. The priest went up to her, took her hand, kissed her on the forehead and said gently:

"God forgives you, my daughter. Be of good courage. I am ready. Speak."

Quivering from head to foot, so that the bed shook with the violence of her tremors, she faltered:

"Sit down, sister, and listen."

The priest raised Suzanne from her knees, put her into an armchair, and taking a hand of either sister, murmured:

"O Lord God, give them strength; shed on them Thy mercy."

Marguerite began her confession. One by one, hoarse, broken, feeble, the words forced their way out.

"Forgive me, sister, forgive me. Oh, if you only knew how I have dreaded this moment all my life!"

Suzanne faltered through her tears:

"What have I to forgive you for, child? You have sacrificed everything for me. You are an angel."

But Marguerite interrupted her.

"No, no! Let me speak. Do not hinder me. It is terrible . . . let me tell the whole truth . . . to the very end. Don't move. Listen. You remember . . . you remember Henry?"

Suzanne was startled and looked at her sister, who resumed:

"To understand, you must hear the whole story. I was twelve years old, only twelve. You remember, don't you? And I was spoilt, and did just as I pleased. You remember how spoilt I was? Listen. The first time he came he was wearing riding boots; he dismounted at the steps and apologized for his dress; he had ridden over with some news for Papa. You remember, don't you? Hush. . . . Listen. I thought him so handsome that I lost my heart to him on the spot. All the time he was talking I remained standing in a corner of the drawing-room. Children are strange . . . and terrible. Ah! I used to dream of him.

"He came again and again; I devoured him with my eyes, with my very soul. I was big for my age and far more cunning than anyone supposed. He came often. My thoughts were full of him. I kept saying to myself: 'Henry, Henry de Sampierre.'

"Then I heard that he was going to marry you. That was a bitter blow, sister, a bitter, bitter blow. I cried for three nights, and never slept. He used to come every day after luncheon . . . you remember, don't you? Don't speak. . . . Listen. You used to bake little cakes for him, with flour and butter and milk, and he was very fond of them. Oh, I remember exactly how you prepared them. I could bake them even now, if I had to. He used to make one bite of each; then he would have a glass of wine and say:

"'That was simply delicious!'

"Do you remember how he said it?

"I was jealous, jealous, jealous. Your wedding day drew near. It was only a fortnight away. I went mad. I swore that he should never marry you, never,

never. He should marry me when I grew up. I could never love anyone else like this. Then one evening, ten days before the ceremony, you were walking up and down with him in front of the house, in the moonlight. And there, under the pine tree, he took you in his arms and held you to him. You remember, don't you? It must have been the first time, I think, you were so pale when you came back to the drawing-room. I was watching you, there in the shrubbery, and I was in a fury. I could have killed you both. I swore that he should never marry you, never, or anyone else either. I could not bear it. And all of a sudden I was seized by a violent hatred for him.

"Then do you know what I did? Listen. I had seen the gardener making up little balls of poisoned meat to kill stray dogs. He pounded up a bottle with a stone, and put the powdered glass inside a lump of meat. So I took a small medicine bottle of Mamma's, pounded it up with a hammer, and hid the powdered glass in my pocket. I remember how it glittered. The next day, when you made your little cakes, I cut them open with a knife, and put in the powdered glass. He ate three of the cakes; one I ate myself, and the remaining six I threw into the pond. The two swans died three days later. . . . Do you remember? Oh, do not speak. Listen. Listen. I was the only one who did not die, but I have never been well since. Listen. He died . . . as you know. But that was nothing, nothing. It was afterwards . . . later . . . the terrible part. It has always haunted me. Listen.

"My life, my whole life has been one long torture. I swore to myself never to leave you, and to confess all to you on my death bed. There lay the agony. Since then, that moment of confession was ever in my thoughts, and now it has come. It is terrible, sister.

"Morning and evening, day and night I have been obsessed by the knowledge that in the end I must tell you all. I waited. Oh the agony of it! And now it is done. Don't speak. I am afraid, mortally afraid. Suppose I were to see him again, immediately, the moment I am dead. See him again! Can you imagine it? Before you have seen him! I dare not . . . and yet I must. I am dying. I must have your forgiveness, I must. I dare not face him without it. Oh, bid her pardon me, Father, I implore you. I cannot die without her forgiveness."

There was a silence. She lay, gasping for breath, her restless hands plucking at the bed-clothes.

Suzanne hid her face in her hands, and did not stir. She was thinking of the man with whom she might have spent so many years of love. How happy they could have been together! She beheld him again, in that distant past, in the old days that were gone beyond recall. Oh that kiss, his only kiss! She had treasured it in her soul. And after that, nothing, nothing, for ever and ever.

The priest rose to his full height and cried in a commanding voice:

"Mademoiselle Suzanne, your sister is dying."

Suzanne drew her hands away from her tear-stained face, caught her sister in her arms, kissed her passionately and faltered:

"I forgive you, child, I forgive you."

WHEN LOVE WAS KING

On the summit of a wooded hill, and nestling in the dark verdure of tall encircling trees, stands a château of olden times. The park surrounding it reveals long vistas, here through the depths of a forest, there over the neighbouring country. A few paces from the façade is an artificial basin of stone, with female figures in marble bathing in it, and at lower levels, right to the bottom of the hill are similar basins, fed by a spring which falls in cascades from one down to the other. From the manor house, with its graces of a coquette past her prime, down to the shell-incrusted grottos, haunted by the romances of a former generation, everything in this domain has preserved its air of the past, everything combines to speak of antique fashions in customs and manners, of gallantry of other days, and of the graceful trifling of ladies of a bygone age.

In a little Louis Quinze drawing-room of which the walls display the sentimentalities of shepherds and shepherdesses, of fair dames in panniers and gallant swains in curls, a very old lady is lying almost at full-length in a great armchair. Until she stirs, one would take her for dead. Her bony, mummy-like hands droop listlessly; she gazes as through a veil at the distant landscape; it is as though her eyes traversed the park in pursuit of the visions of her youth. Through the open window steals in from time to time a breath of

air laden with the aroma of herbs and the perfume of flowers, ruffling her white hair about her wrinkled forehead, and filling her thoughts with ancient memories.

Seated by her side, on a tapestry-covered footstool, a girl with her long fair hair in plaits, is engaged in embroidering an altar cloth. She has dreamy eyes; it is evident that her thoughts are busy while her nimble fingers ply the needle.

The grandmother turns towards her.

"Bertha, read me something from the newspaper. I sometimes like to know what is passing in this world."

The girl cast a glance over the journal.

"There is a great deal of politics. I needn't read that?"

"No, darling, no. Are there no love stories? Chivalry must be dead in France if there is nothing about elopements and adventures as of old."

After a long search the granddaughter replied:

"Here is one. It is called 'Drama of love.'"

The old lady smiled through her wrinkles.

"Yes, read me that."

Bertha began to read. It was one of those vitriol-throwing cases. A wife, in order to revenge herself on her husband's mistress, had burnt with acid her rival's face and eyes. On her trial she was acquitted, and left the court without a stain on her character amid general applause. The old lady moved restlessly in her chair.

"That is horrid, simply horrid. Find something else, my love."

Continuing her search in the law reports, Bertha discovered a "Sombre Drama." A shop girl of a certain age had fallen a victim to the charms of a youth. Her lover having proved fickle, she had revenged herself on him by shooting him with a revolver. The youth was permanently disabled. The jury, who were

men of high moral sense, sympathized with the lady in her irregular love affair and acquitted her honourably.

This time the old lady was thoroughly disgusted. In a trembling voice she broke out:

"Are you all mad nowadays? I believe you are. God in heaven gives you love, the only thing in life that is worth living for. To that, man adds gallantry, which again is the chief charm of our existence. And look! you go and mix it all up with vitriol and revolvers, like mixing filth in good Spanish wine."

Bertha failed to grasp the cause of her indignation.

"Don't you see, Grandmamma, the woman avenged herself. Only consider. She was married and her husband was false to her."

The old lady nearly jumped out of her chair.

"Where you girls get your ideas from nowadays I can't conceive."

"Well, Grandmamma, marriage is sacred after all."

The old lady's heart felt a shudder of revulsion; it was still faithful to that great period of gallantry in which it was born.

"It is love that is sacred," she retorted. "Listen, my dear girl. I am old. I have seen three generations. I know all about men and women. Marriage and love have nothing to do with each other. People marry in order to found a family; families are necessary for constituting society. Society, therefore, cannot dispense with marriage. If society is a chain, every family is a link in it. And you must solder these links with metals of a similar kind. Social conventions, means, breeding, must be all on a par, working in unison for the common interest, which is wealth and children. Marriage occurs once only, my dear, and that because it is expected of you. But love can come twenty times in a life, because nature has made us so. Marriage, you see, is a law,

whereas love is an instinct that may sway us hither and thither in any direction. We have made laws to keep our instincts in check. We had to. But instincts still remain the stronger, and it is wrong to resist them too much, because instincts come from God, whereas laws are made by man. If life were not perfumed with love, my darling, as much love as possible, just as one sweetens medicine for children, no one would care to take it as it is."

The startled Bertha opened her eyes wide.

"Oh, Grandmamma dear," she protested, "love only comes once."

The old lady raised her hands to heaven, as though to call back to life the defunct god of gallantry.

"You have become a race of ill-bred vulgarians," she ejaculated indignantly. "That is what people are nowadays. Since the Revolution the world has never been the same. You glorify commonplace acts with high-sounding words. There is not a corner of life that you don't spoil with your tiresome duty; you believe in equality and a love that lasts for ever. People write verses telling you that one can die of love. In my day they wrote verses bidding all men love all women. When a cavalier had found favour in our eyes, we sent a page to him with a message. And when we took a fancy to a new love, off went the old—unless we kept both of them."

The old lady smiled a subtle smile. Her grey eyes twinkled with the witty and sceptical cynicism of that race, which believed itself to be made of different clay from the rest of the world, that race which dwelt in a sphere raised far above the creeds that served common humanity.

Pale with emotion, her granddaughter protested.

"If that was so, then women had no honour."

The old lady stopped smiling. If she had retained something of the irony of Voltaire, she also had a little of the ardent philosophy of Rousseau.

"No honour! Because one loved and was not ashamed of it and even boasted of it? My dear, if any one of us, even the greatest lady of France, had been without a lover, the whole Court would have laughed at her. There was always the convent available for those who wanted a different sort of life. Perhaps you imagine that husbands never love any woman except their own wives. Upon my word, as if that were possible! I tell you, marriage is a necessary institution for the preservation of society. But marriage is contrary to the nature of our race, believe me. There is only one good thing in life, and that is love. And by your misconception of love, you spoil it; you turn it into a solemn thing, a sacrament, or else you make a transaction of it, as if you were buying a gown."

Bertha took the old lady's wrinkled hands in her own trembling clasp.

"Please, Grandmamma, don't say any more."

Kneeling, with tears in her eyes, she prayed heaven for one great passion, one only love that should last for ever, a love such as the modern poets dream of. But the old grandmother, still completely under the sway of that sane and charming logic with which the courtly *philosophes* seasoned the eighteenth century, kissed her granddaughter on the forehead and whispered:

"Take care, my poor darling. Foolish notions like yours will only make you unhappy."

A CONFIDENCE

You ask me, my friend, to recall for you the most vivid memories of my life. I am very old and have neither children nor other relatives. I am therefore at liberty to confide in you. But if you repeat my stories, you must promise never to divulge my name.

As you know, I have had many lovers, whose passion I often returned. I was very beautiful; if I may say so, now that all traces of beauty have vanished. Love was for me the life of the soul as air is that of the body. I would rather have died than live without love; without the consciousness that someone's thoughts were hovering around me. Women often contend that they can love once only with all the strength of their heart, but for my part, I have loved many times with such intensity that I believed my transports of affection could never end. And yet they always died a natural death, like an unreplenished fire. To-day I will tell you the first of my adventures. It was a perfectly innocent one, to be sure, but it contained the seed of all the others.

I had been married a year. My husband was Count Hervé de Ker——, a wealthy Breton of ancient family, for whom I had, I must tell you, no affection whatever. In my opinion, at least, love, true love, demands a combination of freedom and difficulties. Love which is prescribed and sanctioned by law, and blessed by the church, can you call that love? A lawful kiss has never the sweetness of a stolen one.

My husband was tall and well-built, and bore himself like a great nobleman. But he was devoid of intelligence. His conversation was bald, and his comments had the effect of cutting short all discussion. His mind was obviously packed with ready-made maxims, derived from his parents, who for their part had inherited them from their ancestors. He never hesitated. Whatever the subject, he was always ready with a prompt and bigoted opinion, which he pronounced without a shade of diffidence, without conceiving the possibility of another point of view. You felt that his head was impervious to those ideas which keep a mind fresh and wholesome, like the wind blowing through a house, through open doors and windows.

Our manor stood in a wild tract of country. The house was a great, gloomy building, framed in enormous trees, overgrown with moss, resembling an old man's beard. The grounds were almost a forest, and were surrounded by a deep, sunk fence; at the far end of the park, where it touched the moorland, there were two large lakes, full of reeds and water weeds. Between these lakes, on the edge of a stream that united them, my husband had had a little hut built, for duck shooting.

In addition to the ordinary household staff, we had a keeper, a sort of savage, who was devotedly attached to my husband, and my maid, who was passionately fond of me and almost like a friend. She was a foundling, whom I had brought with me from Spain five years before. You would have taken her for a gipsy with her tawny complexion, black eyes, and hair dark as a forest, hanging in wild elf locks over her forehead. She was then sixteen, but looked twenty.

It was early autumn, and the shooting season was

in full swing. Sometimes we shot over our neighbours' grounds, sometimes over our own. I was specially interested in Baron de C——, a young man whose visits to the manor became singularly frequent. But when they suddenly ceased, I thought no more about him. I noticed, however, that my husband's behaviour to me was changing. He seemed taciturn and preoccupied and he never kissed me. Although he never entered my room, which I occupied alone for the sake of a little privacy, I often used to hear at night a furtive step halt at my door, then steal away after a few minutes. My window being on the ground floor, I often fancied, too, that I heard someone prowling round the house in the darkness. I spoke to my husband about it, but after looking at me fixedly for a moment he replied:

"It's nothing. It is only the keeper."

. . . . . .

Well, one evening, towards the end of dinner, Hervé, who seemed in unusual spirits, tinged with a certain malevolence, said to me:

"Would you care to sit up two or three hours on the chance of killing a fox, who comes after my fowls every night?"

Surprised, I hesitated for a moment. But as he kept looking at me with singular persistence, I replied at last:

"Certainly, my dear."

I must tell you that I hunted wolves and wild boar like a man. So there was nothing out of the way in his suggestion. But he seemed of a sudden strangely perturbed, and kept restlessly moving about the whole evening.

About ten o'clock he asked me abruptly if I was ready, and I rose to accompany him.

"What shall I load with, ball or buck shot?" I asked.

He appeared to be surprised.

"Oh, buck shot will do, you may be sure," he replied, and presently he added in a peculiar tone:

"You are a cool hand, I must say."

"A cool hand?" I laughed. "Why so? What coolness is required for shooting a fox? What can you be thinking of, my dear?"

We set off noiselessly across the park. The whole house was asleep. The full moon shed its yellow radiance on the gloomy old building with its gleaming roof of slate. There were patches of light on the tops of the turrets at each end of the house. Not a sound disturbed the silence of the night, clear yet mournful, balmy yet oppressive, and quiet as the grave. There was no motion in the air. Not a toad croaked; not an owl screeched. All seemed weighed down under a depressing torpor.

Under the trees in the park I became aware of a sudden chill and the smell of fallen leaves. My husband said nothing, but he listened and peered into the darkness, as if scenting for game, possessed body and soul by the passion for sport.

Soon we came to the edge of the lakes. Their fringe of reeds never stirred. Not a breath passed over them, but the water quivered with almost imperceptible ripples. Now and then something touched the surface, which broke into delicate circles, like luminous wrinkles, spreading ever outwards.

When we reached the hut where we were to lie in wait, my husband made me enter first. Then, deliberately, he cocked his gun, and the sharp click of the lock affected me strangely. He felt me shudder.

" Perhaps this test is sufficient for you," he said. " If so, you can go."

" Not at all," I returned in great surprise. " I did not come here only to go home again. How odd you are this evening ! "

" Just as you please," he muttered.

We waited there motionless. In about half an hour, as no sound disturbed the sultry stillness of that radiant autumn night, I whispered :

" Are you quite sure it comes this way ? "

Hevré started as if I had bitten him. He put his lips close to my ear :

" Absolutely sure, I tell you."

Again we were plunged in silence.

I believe I was half asleep, when my husband clutched my arm.

" Do you see him, over there under the trees ? "

I strained my eyes in vain, but could distinguish nothing. Never taking his eyes off me, Hervé slowly brought his gun to his shoulder. I followed his example, when suddenly, about thirty paces away, a man stepped out into the full moonlight. He moved swiftly, with his body bent forward, as if he were running away.

I was so startled that I uttered a loud shriek, but before I could turn round, a flash passed before my eyes ; I was deafened by a loud report, and I saw the man writhing on the ground like a wolf with a bullet in it.

Out of my mind with horror, I uttered piercing screams. Suddenly my husband seized me savagely by the throat. He threw me to the ground, then caught me up in his strong arms. Still clutching me, he ran towards the body that lay stretched out on the grass, and hurled me down upon it furiously as if he meant to break my head. I gave myself up for lost. He was

going to kill me. And already he had raised his heel to crush my face, when he in his turn was seized in someone's arms and thrown to the ground before I realized what was happening.

I jumped to my feet, and I saw kneeling on him Paquita, my maid, who had flown at him tooth and nail, like an angry cat, and now, tense and desperate, was tearing at his beard and face.

Then as if suddenly possessed by a new idea, she leapt up, and throwing herself on the dead man, she clasped him in her arms, kissed his eyes and mouth, seeking there the breath of life and the ardent kisses of her lover.

My husband had risen to his feet, and was looking on. All at once he realized the truth and threw himself at my feet.

"Oh, forgive me, my darling. I suspected you, and I have killed this girl's lover. The keeper misled me."

As for me, I continued to gaze on the strange embraces of the dead and the living. I heard the woman's sobs, and I looked on her despairing convulsions of love. At that moment I realized that I could never remain true to my husband.

PLAYING WITH FIRE

THE little Marquise de Rennedon was still asleep in her snug perfumed bedroom. In her great, soft, low bed, between sheets of finest lawn, delicate as lace, caressing as a kiss, alone and in perfect tranquillity, she was plunged in the deep, the blissful slumber of a divorcée.

She was aroused by sounds of altercation from the little blue drawing-room, and recognized the voice of her best friend, the young Baroness de Grangerie, raised in argument with the maid, who was defending her mistress's door. At this the Marquise rose, drew back the bolts, unlocked the door, lifted the curtain, and put out her head, just her head with its cloud of fair hair.

"What has possessed you to come so early?" she asked. "It isn't nine o'clock yet."

The Baroness, who was pale and seemed feverishly excited, replied:

"I must speak to you. A terrible thing has happened to me."

"Come in, my dear."

She entered the room and the ladies kissed each other. Then the Marquise returned to bed, while her maid opened the windows and let in fresh air and daylight. When the maid had left the room, Madame de Rennedon said:

"Now tell me all about it."

Madame de Grangerie burst into tears, those crystal drops which add to a woman's charm. For fear of making her eyes red she refrained from drying them.

"Oh, my dear," she exclaimed, "I am in the most awful trouble. I haven't had a wink of sleep all night, not a wink. Just feel how my heart is beating."

Seizing her friend's hand she laid it on her bosom, that round, firm bosom, which encloses the heart of woman, and often so charms a man as to prevent him from seeking anything within. Her heart was certainly beating violently.

"It was yesterday afternoon, about four or half-past four, I can't say exactly. You know my flat and my little drawing-room on the first floor, where I always sit, overlooking the Rue St. Lazare. As you know, I have a passion for looking out of the window and watching people pass. It is so busy, so cheerful, so full of life, near a railway station. I simply adore it. Well, yesterday I was sitting in a low chair in the alcove by the open window, thinking of nothing in particular and enjoying the air. You remember what a lovely day it was yesterday.

"All at once I noticed on the opposite side of the road another woman at her window. She was in red and I was in mauve; you know that pretty mauve frock of mine. I did not know the woman; she was a newcomer and had not had the flat more than a few weeks, and as it rained all last month I had not seen her before. But I saw at once that she was a—you know what. At first I was shocked and disgusted at seeing her at the window just like myself. But presently, as I watched her, she began to interest me. She had her elbows on the window-sill and was looking out for men, and all the men, or nearly all of them, glanced up at her.

When they came near the house, it was just as if they had received some intimation; as if they winded her, like dogs winding game. Up went their heads and their glances crossed in a sort of freemasonry. Her eyes said: 'Will you?' And theirs replied: 'No time now,' or 'Another day,' or 'Dead broke,' or 'Go and hide yourself, you hussy.' It was the married men's eyes that made this last remark. You can't conceive how amusing it was watching her at her game, or, I should say, her business.

"Sometimes she shut the window sharply, and then I would see a man turn in at the door, caught, poor fellow, like a gudgeon by an angler. Then I looked at my watch. These men stayed a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, never longer. I assure you that spider-woman ended by getting me wildly excited. And she was by no means plain, the minx. I wondered what she did to make herself understood, so thoroughly and so quickly. Besides looking, did she make any sign with her head or her hand? I took my opera glasses to find out how the thing was done. It was simple enough. First a look, then a smile, then the tiniest little movement of the head, which meant 'Are you coming up?' But the gesture was so slight, so subtle, so discreet, that the woman must have been a real artist to succeed as she did.

"Could I do it as well myself, I wondered, that little toss of the head, bold and yet charming, for charming it certainly was. I went and tried it in front of the glass. My dear, I did it better than she, much better. I was enchanted and I returned to the window.

"She was not catching anybody now, poor girl, not a soul. She was not having any luck. When you come to think of it, what a terrible thing it must be to have to earn your living that way. But amusing, too,

sometimes; for some of the men you see in the streets are quite presentable. They were all passing along my pavement now, which was the sunny side, while hers was deserted. Along they came, one after the other, young, old, dark, fair, grey heads, white heads. And some of them were really charming, far more so than my husband, or yours either—your former husband, I should say, as you're divorced. You can take your choice now.

"Suppose, I said to myself, I made them a sign, would they understand me, a respectable married woman? And suddenly I was seized with a crazy desire to make the sign . . . a morbid, overwhelming desire . . . an appalling desire . . . the sort of impulse you simply cannot resist. I am sometimes taken that way. Silly, isn't it? I think we women have souls like monkeys; a doctor once told me that our brains are very like those of monkeys. We are always imitating someone. First it's our husbands, while we're still in love with them; and after that our lovers and friends and Father Confessors, if they are good-looking. We pick up their ways of speaking and thinking; we use their expressions and mannerisms and everything. It's simply absurd.

"As for me, I never resist temptation when it's too strong.

"So I said to myself that I would try it on one man, just to see. What harm could it do? We would exchange a smile, and that would be the end of it. I should never meet him. If I did, he would not recognize me; if he did recognize me, I should deny it.

"So I began choosing. I wanted someone really superior. At last I saw a tall, fair, very handsome young man coming along. As you know, I have a weakness for fair men. I looked at him; he looked

at me. And I made the movement, oh, the merest suggestion of it, but he nodded his head, and then, my dear, in he walked, straight into the house through the front door.

"You have no idea how I felt at that moment. I thought I should go mad. How frightened I was! Only think! He would speak to the servants, to Joseph, who is devoted to my husband. Joseph would certainly suppose that I had known him a long time.

"What was I to do? Tell me, what was I to do? In another minute, another second, he would be ringing the bell. What was I to do? It seemed to me that the best thing would be to run and meet him, to tell him he had made a mistake and to beseech him to go away. He would have mercy on a woman, a poor woman. So I rushed to the door, and opened it just as he was putting his hand on the bell.

"Quite beside myself I stammered:

"'Go away. Go away. You have made a mistake. I am a respectable married woman. It is a ghastly misunderstanding; I took you for a friend of mine, who is very like you. Have pity on me.'

"The wretch actually laughed, my dear.

"'Good afternoon, puss,' he said. 'I have heard that story before. As you are married, it will be two louis instead of one. You shall have them. Come along. Show me the way.'

"He pushed me in, closed the front door, and as I stood there petrified with horror, he kissed me, put his arm round my waist, and drew me through the open door into the drawing-room. Then he looked all round him like an auctioneer and said:

"'By Jove, your flat is charming, perfectly charming. You must be badly on the rocks to have to play the window game.'

"At this I began to implore him again.

"'Oh, do go away, please go away. My husband will be here immediately. It is just his time. I swear to you that it's all a mistake.'

"'Now, my dear,' he replied calmly, 'you have made enough fuss. If your husband comes I'll give him five francs to go and have a drink.'

"He caught sight of Raoul's photograph on the mantelpiece.

"'Is that your . . . husband?' he asked.

"'Yes.'

"'He does look a duffer. And who is this lady? A friend of yours?'

"It was your photograph, my dear, the one in evening dress. I hardly knew what I was saying.

"'Yes, she's a friend of mine,' I faltered.

"'She is charming. You must introduce me.'

"The clock struck five, and Raoul is always back by half-past. Suppose he came home before the other man had gone! Then . . . then . . . I lost my head completely. I thought . . . I thought . . . the best thing to do was to get rid of him . . . as soon as possible. The sooner it was over . . . you see . . . and as it had to be . . . and there was no way out of it . . . otherwise he would never have gone . . . well, I—I just locked the door. That's all."

Madame de Rennedon burst out laughing. Burying her head in the pillow she laughed wildly, while the whole bed shook under her. When she had recovered her composure she said:

"And was he really good-looking?"

"Yes, very."

"Then what are you complaining of?"

"Well, you see, my dear, the fact is . . . he said he would come back to-morrow . . . at the same time,

and I am simply terrified. You have no idea how determined he is . . . and how wilful. Tell me, what am I to do?"

Sitting up in bed Madame de Rennedon thought for a minute.

"Have him arrested!" she suddenly broke out.

Her friend was thunderstruck.

"What?" she faltered. "What did you say? What are you thinking of? Have him arrested? On what charge?"

"Oh that's quite simple. All you have to do is to go to the Commissaire of Police and tell him that a man has been following you for the last three months, that yesterday he had the insolence to come up to your flat, that he threatens to repeat his visit to-morrow, and that you demand the protection of the law. Then two policemen will be told off to arrest him."

"But, my dear, suppose he tells."

"No one will believe him, you silly, once you have put up a good story to the Commissaire. You are a society woman of blameless reputation. Of course you will be believed."

"Oh, I should never dare."

"If you don't dare, my dear, you are lost."

"But just think . . . what things he will say about me when he is arrested."

"Never mind that. You will have your witnesses and you will get him sentenced."

"Sentenced to what?"

"To pay damages. In a case like this you must have no mercy."

"Ah, damages! That reminds me. There is another thing that worries me . . . worries me very much. He left two louis on the mantelpiece."

"Two louis?"

"Yes."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"That wasn't much. I should feel insulted if I were you. Well?"

"Well, what am I to do with the money?"

After a little hesitation the Marquise de Rennedon said solemnly:

"My dear, you must . . . you must give your husband a little present. That is only fair."

LOVE

Pages from a Sportsman's Diary

AMONGST the miscellaneous items in the newspapers, I have just read an account of a tragic love affair, in which a lover killed first his sweetheart and then himself. Their personalities did not concern me. What interested me was the intensity of their passion, not because I was touched, or surprised, or thrilled, or saddened, but because it recalled to me a memory of my youth, a curious shooting incident, which was to me a revelation of love, like those visions of the Cross in the sky, which were granted to the early Christians.

By nature I have all the instincts and feelings of primitive man, though modified by the logic and the sensibilities of civilization. I am passionately devoted to shooting and hunting, and when I bring down a bird, the blood on its feathers and on my hands thrills my heart so that it almost stops beating.

One year, as autumn lingered towards its close, winter came suddenly upon us, and I was invited by my cousin Karl de Rauville to go duck shooting with him in the marshes at daybreak. My cousin was a jovial fellow of forty, ruddy, strong, full-bearded, a typical country gentleman, a genial and lively savage, with a share of that Gallic wit which lends a charm even

to mediocrity. He lived in a house, half farm, half manor, situated in a wide river valley. The slopes on either side were mantled with noble forest, whose magnificent trees harboured the rarest birds to be found in that part of France. Even eagles were sometimes shot there, and migrants, which seldom visit our over-peopled regions, almost invariably broke their journey in these ancient coverts, as if they knew, or recognized, that this small remnant of primeval forest had been spared to shelter them during their brief nocturnal halt. In the valley bottom lay broad meadows, watered by ditches and divided by hedges, and further down, the river, which was canalized up to this point, widened out into a vast marsh. This marsh was the finest shooting ground I have ever seen, and my cousin took the deepest interest in it, and tended it as if it were a park. Through the close ranks of the reeds—a multitudinous, shivering, whispering company—narrow channels had been cut, down which flat-bottomed punts were poled, stealing silently through the still water, brushing past the reeds, frightening the fish, which took refuge among the weeds, and the wild fowl, which dived, their black, pointed heads suddenly disappearing from sight.

I have an insensate passion for water; for the sea, though so vast, so restless, so beyond one's comprehension; for rivers, beautiful, yet fugitive and elusive; but especially for marshes, teeming with all that mysterious life of the creatures that haunt them. A marsh is a whole world within a world, a different world, with a life of its own, with its own permanent denizens, its passing visitors, its voices, its sounds, its own strange mystery. There are times when a marsh is the most haunting, disturbing, and terrifying of places. Whence this fear which broods above the

water-covered flats? Is it the vague whisper of the reeds, the weird will-o'-the-wisps, the profound hush of the stilly night, or the fantastic mists that trail their ghostly robes across the reeds, or that almost inaudible lapping of the water, so low, so gentle, and yet at times more unnerving than the artillery of man or heaven, investing the marsh with the atmosphere of a dream-land, an awe-inspiring region hiding some nameless and dreadful secret? No. There is another reason. In these thick mists hovers a deeper, more solemn mystery, the mystery of creation itself. Was it not in the stagnant mire, in the heavy humidity of swampy lands, steeped in the heat of the sun, that the first germ of life stirred, quivered, and awoke?

It was night, and freezing hard, when I arrived at my cousin's house. We dined in the great hall. On its sideboards, walls and ceilings, mounted with out-spread wings, or perched on branches secured with nails, were displayed all kinds of stuffed birds: hawks, herons, owls, goat-suckers, buzzards, kestrels, vultures, falcons. My cousin, looking himself like a strange animal from the Arctic regions in his sealskin coat, told me what arrangements he had made for that very night. We were to leave the house at half-past three in the morning so as to reach about half-past four the spot where we were to take up our stand. At this place a hut had been built with blocks of ice to shelter us from the biting wind which blows before dawn, that freezing wind, which rips the flesh like a saw, cuts like a knife, pierces like a poisoned goad, pinches as with pliers and burns as with fire.

My cousin rubbed his hands.

"I have never known such a frost. By six o'clock this evening we had twenty-one degrees."

Directly after dinner I went to bed and fell asleep

by the light of a huge wood fire. I was called on the stroke of three. I threw on a sheepskin coat; and my cousin was wearing a bearskin. Each of us swallowed two cups of scalding coffee, followed by two glasses of brandy, and we set out, accompanied by a keeper and our dogs, Plongeon and Pierrot.

A few steps in the open air sufficed to chill us to the bone. It was one of those nights when the earth seems to have died of cold. Not a breath stirs; the freezing air strikes the face like solid ice; it is congealed and motionless; it gnaws, penetrates, and parches; kills trees, plants and insects; even the little birds drop from the branches on to the iron ground and are frozen as hard as the soil itself.

The moon was in her last quarter, lying over on her side, even as if fainting in the midst of space, too weak to travel further, and gripped and paralysed by the icy rigour of the firmament. She shed upon the earth her lustreless, melancholy rays, that livid, sickly light of her decline.

With our hands in our pockets, and our guns under our arms, Karl and I slouched along side by side. We had wrapped woollen coverings round our boots, so that we might be able to walk over the frozen stream without slipping, and we marched noiselessly. The breath of our dogs rose in a white steam. Soon we reached the edge of the marsh and plunged into one of the passages cut through that miniature forest of dry reeds. Our elbows, brushing against the long, ribbon-like leaves, left in our wake a faint rustling, and I was seized as never before by that strange and potent emotion which marshes have the power of arousing in me. The marsh, it seemed, lay dead, dead of cold, and we were tramping over its corpse, between the ranks of its multitude of withered reeds.

Suddenly, at a bend in one of the passages, I caught sight of the ice hut built for our shelter. Entering it, and finding that we had almost an hour to pass before the flighting birds awoke, I wrapped myself in my sheepskin and endeavoured to get warm again. Lying on my back, I looked up at the moon, which, distorted by the vague transparency of the walls of this Arctic cabin, seemed to have four horns. But so intense was the cold from the frozen marsh, the icy walls, and the sky itself, that I began to cough. At this my cousin became uneasy.

"It will be a pity if we spoil our bag," he remarked, "but I don't want you to catch cold. We had better have a fire."

So he ordered the keeper to cut down some reeds. Our hut had a hole at the top to allow the smoke to escape; we piled up the reeds in the middle of the floor, and in the heat of the red flames the icy walls began to melt, but very gradually, as if breaking out into perspiration. Karl cried to me to come outside and look. I obeyed, and stood spell-bound. Our cone-shaped shelter looked like a gigantic diamond with a fiery heart, sprung up suddenly on the frozen waters of the marsh. Within were visible the fantastic forms of our two dogs, who were warming themselves by the fire.

A strange, forlorn, wandering cry passed through the air above our heads. The wild fowl were being roused by the light of our fire. Nothing thrills me like this first clamour of living creatures, as yet invisible, flying swift and far through the darkness, before the first wintry ray of light has illumined the horizon. That cry, that fugitive cry, borne upon the wings of a bird, in that icy hour of dawn is to me a sigh from the soul of the universe.

" Put out the fire," said Karl, " it is daybreak."

And to be sure, the sky was growing pale, and against it could be seen dark wedges of wild duck in flight, sweeping past us, and swiftly vanishing into the distance. A flash of light pierced the darkness. Karl had fired, and the two dogs set off to retrieve the game. Every minute now one or other of us was taking quick aim as soon as the shadow of a flight of birds appeared above the reeds. Panting and joyful, Pierrot and Plongeon brought in the blood-stained birds; some of them, not quite dead, looked at us.

It was now broad daylight, and a bright, clear morning. The sun was rising at the far end of the valley and we were thinking of going home, when two birds with necks outstretched and spreading wings, flew over our heads. I fired; one of them dropped almost at my feet. It was a silver-breasted teal. In the air above my head, there was a cry, the cry of a bird, a sharp, heart-rending, oft-repeated note. The other, the little creature that had escaped, began to wheel round and round in the blue sky, gazing down on its dead mate, which I was holding in my hands.

Kneeling with his gun to his shoulder, Karl watched the bird, waiting for it to come within range.

" You have killed the female," he said. " The male bird won't desert her."

And indeed it did not desert her. It wheeled above our heads, uttering its desolate cry. Never was my heart so wrung as by this despairing appeal; it was like the bitter reproach of this unhappy creature, left alone in the solitude of space. Sometimes, under the menace of my cousin's gun, it would fly a little distance away, as if making up its mind to continue all by itself its journey across the sky. But soon its resolution failed it, and it returned in search of its mate.

" Put the dead bird on the ground," said Karl, " and the other will soon come near it."

Reckless of danger, distracted by the love for a creature of its own kind, which I had killed, the male bird presently drew nearer. Karl fired. It was as if the bird had been hanging on a string, which had been suddenly cut. I saw a dark object falling; I heard it drop in the reeds, and Pierrot retrieved it for me. I put the two birds, already cold, in the same game bag, and I left that very day for Paris.

THE RELIC

To the Reverend Abbé Louis d'Ennemare at Soissons

My Dear Abbé,

My engagement to your cousin is broken off, and for the most ridiculous reason—all on account of a stupid joke, which I played on her almost involuntarily. I look to you, old friend, to help me out of this predicament. If you succeed I shall never forget it till my dying day.

You know Gilberte, or rather you think you do—but does one ever really know women? All their opinions, beliefs and ideas are incalculable. The whole sex is made up of shifts and subterfuges, surprises, elusive arguments, perverse logic, resolutions apparently inflexible, but which vanish, because a little bird has perched upon the window-sill.

I need hardly inform you that your cousin is extremely pious, brought up as she was by the Sisters, black or white, of Nancy. You know more about that than I do. What you probably have not discovered is that she is just as much an enthusiast on every other subject. She is carried away like a leaf fluttering in the wind, and she is more woman, or rather girl, than any other of her sex. She is suddenly moved to pity

or indignation, flying into raptures of love or hate and recovering equally rapidly from either emotion. And pretty she is . . . as you know, and more charming than words can say . . . and that you will never know.

Well, we became engaged. I adored her, as I still do, and she appeared to care for me. One evening I received a telegram, summoning me to Cologne for a consultation, likely to lead to a serious and difficult operation. As I had to leave the next morning, I hurried off to say good-bye to Gilberte and to explain why I could not dine with my future parents-in-law on Wednesday, but would have to postpone that pleasure till Friday, the day of my return. Oh, beware of Fridays! I assure you they are fatal.

When I told her of my journey, I saw a tear sparkle in her eyes, but as soon as I assured her of my speedy return, she clapped her hands and cried:

"How lovely! You must bring me back a present. Oh, nothing of any consequence, the merest trifle, some tiny souvenir, but it must be specially chosen for me. You must try to guess what will give me most pleasure, and I shall see whether you have any imagination."

She thought for a moment. Then she added:

"I forbid you to spend more than twenty francs on it. I don't care about its value. I want to appreciate it for its inner meaning and for your own ingenuity."

After another silence, she lowered her eyes and murmured:

"If it costs you little money, but is something very subtle and intriguing, I . . . I will give you a kiss."

The next day I arrived at Cologne. The case to which I had been summoned was a ghastly accident, which had reduced a whole household to a state of despair. An immediate amputation was necessary. The relations of the injured man put me up, and kept

me almost a prisoner. I saw no one except people dissolved in tears, who kept pestering me with questions. The operation had to be performed on a dying man, and he very nearly slipped through my fingers. I remained with him forty-eight hours. As soon as there was a gleam of hope, I took a cab to the railway station.

There I found that I had mistaken the time and that I had another hour to put in. My thoughts still busy with my unfortunate patient, I wandered about the streets, when a man came up and talked to me. I do not know German and he spoke no French, but eventually I made out that he had relics for sale. Gilberte at once flashed across my mind. I was aware of her passionate piety. I had chanced upon the very thing. I followed the man into a shop, where there were other objects of devotion for sale, and I selected "a small fragment of bone from the Eleven Thousand Virgins." The supposed relic was enclosed in a charming little locket of old silver, which determined my choice. I slipped it into my pocket and went off to catch my train.

When I arrived home, I wanted to examine my purchase. But when I took it out of my pocket, the locket was open and the relic had disappeared. I hunted through my pocket and turned it inside out, but the tiny fragment of bone, about half the size of a pin, had vanished.

As you are aware, my dear Abbé, my religious beliefs are not very strong. You have sufficient generosity and sufficient affection for me to bear with my indifference and to put your trust, as you say, in the future. In the relics sold by these traffickers in objects of religion, I have no faith whatever, and in this respect you share my scepticism. And so the loss

of this scrap of mutton bone did not afflict me deeply, and I had no difficulty in procuring a similar fragment, which I carefully glued inside the little silver case. Then I went to see my lady-love.

As soon as I entered the room, she sprang towards me, smiling and eager.

"What have you brought me?" she asked.

I pretended that I had forgotten her commands, but she refused to believe me. I teased her, allowed her to beg and entreat, until I saw that she was dying of curiosity. Then I presented her with the precious locket. She went into raptures of joy.

"Oh, a relic! a relic!" she cried, and kissed the little case passionately.

I felt ashamed of the fraud I had perpetrated. Then across her mind flashed a doubt that at once grew to an agonizing fear. She looked deep into my eyes.

"Are you quite, quite sure it is genuine?"

"Quite sure."

"How do you know?"

I was fairly caught. If I confessed that I had bought this relic from a peddler off the street, all would be lost. What could I say? An insane idea occurred to me. In low, mysterious tones I replied:

"I stole it for you."

She gazed at me in wide-eyed ecstasy.

"What, you stole it? Where?"

"In the cathedral. Actually out of the shrine of the Eleven Thousand Virgins."

Her heart beat fast; she was nearly fainting with rapture.

"Oh," she murmured. "And you did that . . . for me. Tell me . . . tell me all about it."

My doom was sealed. Retreat was impossible. I spun her a fantastic tale, full of precise and surprising

details. I had given the caretaker of the cathedral a bribe of a hundred francs to allow me to visit it by myself. The shrine was undergoing repairs, but I had chanced to hit on the luncheon hour of both workmen and clergy. Removing a panel, which I afterwards carefully glued into its place again, I had succeeded in possessing myself of a small, oh a very small bone from among a quantity of other bones. I said "a quantity," thinking of all the remains that the skeletons of Eleven Thousand Virgins would yield. Then I had gone to a goldsmith and bought a locket, worthy of the relic, and I casually let her know that the locket had cost five hundred francs. But she did not give a thought to that. Quivering with ecstasy, she listened to me. Then murmuring, "How I love you!" she sank into my arms.

Mark you, I had committed an act of sacrilege for her sake. I had robbed; I had violated a church; violated a shrine; robbed and violated holy relics. And because of this she adored me, thought me all that was devoted, perfect, divine. Such is woman, my dear Abbé, through and through.

For two months I was the most wonderful lover in the world. She turned her bedroom into a magnificent oratory, where she enshrined this fragment of mutton chop, for whose sake I had committed this glorious, love-inspired crime, and she worshipped it ecstatically morning and evening. I had sworn her to secrecy, for fear, as I said, of my being arrested, convicted and handed over to Germany. For a time she kept her word.

Early in the summer, however, she was seized with a frantic longing to gaze upon the scene of my exploit. She urged her father so earnestly and persuasively, without, however, confiding her real reason, that in

the end he took her to Cologne. By her request the expedition was kept secret from me.

I need hardly tell you that I have never seen the inside of the Cologne Cathedral. I do not know the whereabouts of the tomb—if there is a tomb—of the Eleven Thousand Virgins. But it seems, alas! that their sepulchre is inaccessible.

A week later I received from Gilberte half a dozen lines, releasing me from my engagement. They were accompanied by an explanatory letter from her father, in whom, somewhat late in the day, she had confided. When she saw the shrine, she had suddenly realized my fraud and falsehood, and, at the same time, my essential innocence. When she asked the keeper of the relics if there had ever been a robbery, he laughed and pointed out to her the impossibility of such an outrage. But the moment it appeared that I had not forced a holy place, nor thrust my profane hand into the midst of sacred relics, I was no longer worthy of my fair-haired, exquisite bride.

I was forbidden the house. Plead and entreat as I might, my fair zealot remained implacable.

I fretted myself ill.

Well, last week, Madame d'Arville, her cousin and yours, asked me to come to see her. I am to be pardoned on the following conditions. I am to procure a relic, a true, authentic relic, certified by the Holy Father himself, of some virgin martyr or other. I am nearly off my head with worry and anxiety. If necessary, I will go to Rome. But I cannot unceremoniously present myself before the Pope and relate to him my absurd predicament. Besides, I doubt whether real relics are ever entrusted to private individuals.

Could you not introduce me to some Italian dignitary of the church, or even to some French prelate,

who owns a few fragments of saint? Or what about yourself? Have you in your collection no precious object of the desired description?

Come to the rescue, my dear Abbé, and I promise to be converted ten years earlier. Madame d'Arville, who takes the matter very seriously, said to me:

"Poor Gilberte will never marry."

My dear fellow, will you let your cousin die, the victim of a stupid, practical joke? I implore you to do everything in your power to prevent the Eleven Thousand Virgins from becoming Eleven Thousand and One.

Pardon my flippancy. I send you my love and remain your devoted friend,

HENRI PONTAL.

A NEW YEAR'S GIFT

AFTER a solitary dinner, Jacques Randal sent his servant out and sat down to write some letters. It was his custom to spend the last night of the year alone, in writing and meditation. He passed in review the events of the expiring year, events that were dead and done with, and as the faces of his friends rose before his mind's eye, he would write each of them a line or two of cordial wishes for the New Year. Seating himself at his writing-table, he opened a drawer, took out a photograph of a woman, gazed at it for a few moments and kissed it. Then laying it down beside his notepaper, he began:

"MY DEAR IRENE,—Doubtless by this time you have received my little offering, my tribute to your sex. This evening I have shut myself up in order to tell you——"

He threw down his pen, rose from his chair, and began to pace the room.

For ten months he had had a mistress, no commonplace siren of many adventures, of the theatrical world or the streets, but a woman whom he loved, and whose heart he had won. Though still young in years, he had none of the giddiness of youth; he took a serious view of life, regarding it in a sober and practical spirit.

Accordingly he set himself to strike a balance in his love affair, just as every year he was wont to estimate his profits and losses in friendship, experiences, casual acquaintances. The early ardour of his passion had abated. With the precision of a business man making up his accounts, he attempted to ascertain the present state of his feelings towards his mistress, and to divine what it would be in the future. He found that he had for her a deep and strong affection, a blend of tenderness and gratitude and of the thousand subtle associations that go to make up a firm and lasting attachment.

He was startled by the ringing of the front door bell and hesitated whether to answer it or not. But he reflected that on New Year's Eve the door should always be opened—opened to the unknown, whatever it might be, that knocked to be let in. So he took a candle, crossed the hall, drew back the bolts, turned the key, and opened the door. He beheld his mistress standing there pale as a ghost and leaning her hands against the wall.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Are you alone?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Are the servants out?"

"Yes."

"You weren't going anywhere?"

"No."

She entered, as if she were at home there. As soon as the drawing-room door closed behind her, she collapsed on the sofa, hid her face in her hands and burst into passionate weeping. He knelt at her feet and endeavoured to draw away her hands, so as to see her eyes.

"Irene, Irene, what is the matter? I implore you to tell me."

"I cannot go on like this," she sobbed.

"Go on like this?" he echoed. "What do you mean?"

"I cannot stand things any longer . . . at home. You don't know . . . I have never told you. It is frightful. I cannot endure it. It is too terrible. He has just struck me."

"Who? Your husband?"

"Yes. My husband."

"Good heavens!"

He was thunderstruck. He had never supposed her husband capable of brutality. He was a man of the world, moving in the best society, belonging to a good club, a fine horseman and swordsman, with a weakness for actresses. He was universally known, talked of and admired, thanks to his courteous manners, his extremely commonplace mind, and a proper respect for all polite prejudices, coupled with that complete lack of real knowledge and intelligence, which qualifies a man to rank as a person of breeding. He appeared to pay his wife just as much attention as is correct among wealthy society people. He took a decent interest in her wishes, her health, her frocks, but in all other respects left her completely free. When Randal became Irene's friend, he acquired a right to the amicable handshake which every right-minded husband accords to his wife's intimates. Later, when the friend was merged in the lover, Jacques's relations with the husband grew, as was proper, more cordial still. He had never noticed, or had any reason to suspect, the existence of a stormy atmosphere in that household, and he was amazed at this unexpected revelation.

"Tell me how it happened," he said.

She poured out a long tale, the whole story of her life from the first day of her marriage, beginning with

the first disagreement arising out of a trifle, the rift that widened daily between two characters, out of sympathy with each other. To this had succeeded quarrels, and a separation, which, though kept secret, was none the less complete. At last her husband became tyrannical, suspicious, violent. And now he was jealous, jealous of Jacques, and that very day, after a painful scene, he had struck her.

"I will never go back to him," she added resolutely. "Do what you please with me."

Jacques had seated himself facing her, with his knees touching hers.

"My dear," he said, taking her hands, "what you are contemplating is an appalling, an irreparable act of folly. If you want to leave your husband, you must first put him so completely in the wrong that your own position as a society woman of blameless reputation will not be compromised."

She looked at him anxiously.

"Then what do you advise me to do?"

"Go home and put up with it until the day when you can secure either a separation or a divorce with all the honours of war."

"But isn't that rather cowardly, what you are advising?"

"No, it is right and reasonable. You have your position and your reputation to safeguard, your friends to keep, your family to consider. You must not forget this, and throw everything to the winds in a rash moment."

She sprang to her feet.

"No," she exclaimed vehemently. "I can't do it. I can't do it. This is the end."

Then she laid her hands on her lover's shoulders, and gazed deep into his eyes.

"Do you love me?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Really and truly?"

"Yes."

"Then keep me."

"Keep you?" he exclaimed. "Here, in my house? It would be madness. You would be ruined for ever, irretrievably ruined. It would be madness."

Solemnly and deliberately, like a woman weighing her words, she replied:

"Listen, Jacques. He has forbidden me to see you again, and I will never lend myself to the farce of coming to visit you in secret. You have either to take me now, or lose me for ever."

"In that case, my dear Irene, get your divorce, and I will marry you."

"Yes. . . . Marry me . . . in two years, at the earliest. Your love is very patient."

"Just think it over. If you remain here, he will fetch you back to-morrow, as he is your husband and has law and right on his side."

"I was not asking you to keep me in your house, Jacques, but to take me away somewhere. I thought you loved me enough for that. But I was mistaken. Good-bye."

She turned and made for the door so swiftly that he only stopped her on the threshold.

"Listen, Irene."

She struggled to free herself, and refused to hear him.

"Let me go. Let me go," she faltered, her eyes full of tears.

He made her sit down, and again knelt at her feet, bringing to bear every conceivable inducement and argument in his endeavour to make clear to her the

hideous danger and folly of her proposal. He omitted no consideration which might convince her, and sought for motives of persuasion even in their mutual affection. As she remained silent and frigid, he begged and implored her to listen to him, to believe him, and to follow his advice. When he had finished, she merely replied:

"Now will you kindly let me go? Release me. I wish to get up."

"Come, come, Irene."

"Kindly let me go."

"Irene, is your decision irrevocable?"

"Let me go, I say."

"Simply tell me one thing. Is this decision, this mad decision, which you will so bitterly regret, irrevocable?"

"Yes. Let me go."

"Then stay. You know that my house is yours. To-morrow morning we will go away together."

She had freed herself and risen to her feet.

"No," she said in a hard voice. "It is too late. I will accept no sacrifice, no surrender."

"Stay. I have done what I ought to do, and said what I ought to say. I have no further responsibility in the matter. My conscience is easy. Tell me your wishes and I shall obey you."

She resumed her seat, and after a long look at him said in a steady voice:

"Then will you explain?"

"What am I to explain?"

"Everything. All the thoughts that have made you change your mind like this. After that I shall know what I ought to do."

"I haven't been thinking at all. It was my duty to warn you that you were contemplating an act of folly.

Since you persist in it, I ask to take my share in it. I demand it, as a right."

"It is not natural to change one's mind so quickly."

"Listen, my love. Between you and me there is no question of sacrifice or surrender. The day when I found I loved you, I thought what every lover ought to think in the same circumstances.

"Any man who loves a woman and succeeds in winning her heart, contracts a solemn engagement, binding both on himself and on her. I am talking, of course, of a woman like you, not of a woman of easy affections.

"Marriage, which has great social and legal value, has in my opinion but little moral value, given the conditions in which it generally occurs. For example, when a woman, bound by this legal tie, does not and cannot love her husband, when her heart remains free, and she meets a man she can love, and gives herself to him, and when a man, a man without ties, is similarly attracted, I consider that they are far more closely bound by this free and mutual consent, than by any vows uttered before a registrar. I maintain that if they are both persons of honour, such a union should be more intimate, more binding, more wholesome, than if it had been sanctified by all the sacraments. Such a woman risks everything. And it is just because she is aware of this, because she gives all, her heart, her body, her soul, her honour, her very life; because she has foreseen all the trials, dangers and catastrophes; because she ventures on an act of courage and daring; because she is prepared to brave all, including her husband, who may kill her, and the world which may cast her off; it is for these reasons that she remains honourable in her conjugal dishonour. And on the same grounds, the lover, when he takes her, must likewise have a prevision

of all this, and must put her first, whatever may befall. That is all I have to say. At first I spoke as a prudent man, whose duty it was to warn you. But now there remains only the man who loves you. Command me, and I shall obey."

Radiant with joy, she silenced him with a kiss.

"It was not true, my love," she whispered. "There is nothing wrong. My husband has no suspicions. But I longed to test you; I longed to know what you would do. I wanted my New Year's gift straight from your heart . . . not a gift like the necklace you sent me. You have given me what I desired. Thank you. Thank you. Heavens, how happy I am!"

MY UNCLE SOSTHENES

To Paul Ginisty

My Uncle Sosthenes was a freethinker, like many others, who have not the wit to be anything else. There are those who are religious for the same reason. The sight of a priest would put my uncle in a towering passion; he shook his fist, made the sign against the evil eye, and touched iron behind his back, which actions, after all, implied belief of a kind. Now if it is a question of unreasonable beliefs, one should have all or none. I am a freethinker myself. By that I mean that I object to all dogmas that have their origin in the fear of death, but I have no particular quarrel with churches, be they Catholic, Apostolic, Roman, Protestant, Russian, Greek, Buddhist, Jewish or Mahommedan. Further, I have my own way of regarding and explaining them. To me a church is man's homage to the Unknown. With the broadening of thought, the Unknown dwindles, and the churches crumble to destruction. But instead of censers, I would place therein telescopes, microscopes and electrical apparatus. That is how it strikes me.

My uncle and I differed on almost every subject. He was a patriot, which I am not, because in my eyes patriotism is a form of religion. It is, moreover, the

egg from which wars are hatched. My uncle was a freemason. Now I hold that freemasons are even sillier than pious old women. That is my opinion, and I maintain it. If I must have a religion, give me the ancient faith. These nincompoops do nothing but ape the priests. Instead of a cross they have a triangle as their symbol. They have churches, which they call lodges, with a whole conglomeration of different rites, the Scotch, the French, the Oriental, a lot of tomfoolery fit to make you die of laughing. And what is the object of it all? Mutual assistance and tickling the palms of one another's hands. There is no harm in it that I can see. They are merely putting into practice the Christian precept to help one another. The only difference consists in the tickling. But why all this ceremony, merely to lend a poor devil five francs? The clergy to whom almsgiving and succour are a duty and a business, preface their letters with three initials, J.M.J. The freemasons put three dots after their signature. It's six of one, half a dozen of the other.

"Exactly," replied my uncle. "We set one religion against another. We use free thought as a weapon against clericalism. Freemasonry is the stronghold in which we enlist all iconoclasts."

"My dear uncle," I retorted ("Old stick-in-the-mud," I said to myself), "that's precisely my objection. Instead of demolishing, you organize competition. The sole effect of that is to lower prices. Again, if you admitted freethinkers only to your ranks, I could understand you. But you let in everybody. You have any number of Catholics, including their leading men. Pius IX was a freemason before he became Pope. If you call a society like that a stronghold against clericalism, I don't think much of your stronghold."

My uncle winked.

"Our true sphere of action, where we are really formidable, is politics. Slowly but surely we are sapping the monarchical spirit."

"Oh yes, you are clever fellows, aren't you?" I broke out. "If you tell me that freemasonry is an electioneering contrivance, I grant it you. That it is a machine for catching votes, and used by candidates of every shade of opinion, I shall never deny. That it has no function beyond hoaxing the simple-minded public, and making them line up at the polls, like soldiers sent under fire, I agree. That it is useful, and even indispensable, to all ambitious politicians, because it converts every one of its members into an electoral agent, is, I admit, clear as daylight. But if you pretend that it serves to sap the monarchical spirit, I simply laugh in your face. Just consider this vast, mysterious, democratic body which has for Grand Master, in Germany, the Crown Prince, in Russia the brother of the Czar, and boasts among its members King Humbert, the Prince of Wales, and all the crowned noddles in the world."

At this my uncle whispered confidentially:

"That is true, but all these princes are working for us without knowing it."

"That cuts both ways, doesn't it?"

("A pack of idiots," I said to myself.)

You should have seen Uncle Sosthenes entertaining another freemason. When they met they touched hands with an air of mystery which was highly diverting. It was obvious that they were exchanging a series of secret grips. Then my uncle would take his friend into a corner as if he had something really important to confide. And once seated opposite each other at table, they had a way of exchanging pregnant glances, and drinking to each other significantly, as if to say:

"We know all about it, you and I."

And to think that there are millions of men on this earth who amuse themselves with such buffoonery. I would rather be a Jesuit.

Now there lived in our town an old Jesuit, who was my uncle's pet aversion. Whenever he met him, or even caught sight of him from a distance, he muttered:

"Get out, you scoundrel."

Then he would seize me by the arm and confide to me:

"Some day, you'll see, that rascal will do me a bad turn. I feel it in my bones."

My uncle's presentiment was justified. I will tell you how the thing came about, and by my own fault.

Holy Week was upon us. My uncle took it into his head to give a meat dinner on Good Friday, a full-blown dinner with pork sausages and saveloys. I did my utmost to dissuade him.

"I shall have a meat dinner as usual," I said, "but I shall have it by myself at home. Your idea of a demonstration is absurd. Why should you object to people not eating meat?"

But my uncle stood firm. He invited three friends to dine with him at the best restaurant in the town. As he was standing the dinner, I did not refuse to join in the demonstration. By four o'clock we occupied a conspicuous place in the Penelope, the most popular café, and in a powerful voice Uncle Sosthenes recited the bill of fare.

At six o'clock we sat down to dinner. At ten we were still eating, and between the five of us we had drunk eighteen bottles of excellent wine, not counting four bottles of champagne. Then my uncle suggested what he called the "Archbishop's round." Six small glasses filled with different liqueurs were arranged in

a row in front of each man, and while one of the onlookers counted twenty, each glass had to be emptied in succession. It was, a silly business, but Uncle Sosthenes considered that the occasion demanded it. By eleven o'clock he was as drunk as a tinker. He had to be taken home in a cab and put to bed. It was evident that his anti-clerical demonstration would result in a terrible bout of indigestion.

I was drunk myself, but only sufficiently so to be feeling very merry. On my way home a Machiavellian idea, which appealed to all my cynical instincts, entered my head. Straightening my tie, and assuming an air of despair, I went and rang furiously at the old Jesuit's door. As he was deaf, he kept me waiting. But I kicked the door till the whole house shook, and at last he came to the window in his night-cap and asked what he could do for me.

"Quick, quick, Father, open the door. Someone who is desperately ill desires your holy ministrations."

The poor old gentleman slipped on his trousers and came down without his cassock. In breathless haste I told him that my uncle, the notorious freethinker, had been suddenly seized by a violent indisposition, which pointed to a very serious illness; that he was overcome by a terror of death, and desired to see the priest, to talk to him, receive his counsels and instructions, to reconcile himself to the Church, and, doubtless after confession and Communion, to cross the dread threshold in peace of mind.

"It is his wish," I added in sceptical tones. "After all, if it does him no good, it can do him no harm."

The old Jesuit was bewildered, but trembling with delight.

"Wait a minute, my son, I will come with you immediately."

" You must excuse me, Father, from accompanying you, but my convictions will not allow me. I actually refused to come and fetch you, and I must ask you not to let it be known that you have seen me, but to say that you were warned of my uncle's illness by a sort of revelation."

The worthy man fell in with my plan, and hurried away to ring my uncle's bell. The maid in charge of the invalid opened the door to him at once, and I saw his black cassock disappear into that stronghold of free-thought. I concealed myself in a neighbouring doorway to await the result. Had my uncle been feeling himself he would have beaten the Jesuit roundly, but I knew that he could not move hand or foot. Delirious with delight I wondered what fantastic scene would be enacted by these two antagonists. What contest, what explanations, what mystification, what confusion would result? What would be the outcome of this impossible situation, which would be rendered still more melodramatic by my uncle's indignation. Alone in my doorway I held my sides with laughter, and kept exclaiming half aloud:

" Oh, what a joke! What a joke! "

It was, however, cold, and the Jesuit seemed to be staying a very long time.

" They must be having it out with each other," I reflected.

An hour passed, followed by a second and a third, and still the reverend Father did not appear. What had happened to him? Had my uncle died of a stroke at the mere sight of him? Had he killed the man in the cassock? Or had they, perhaps, eaten each other up? This last theory seemed to me impossible. I judged that my uncle at that moment was quite incapable of absorbing another ounce of food.

Day dawned. Uneasy, yet not daring to enter the house, I remembered that a friend of mine lived just opposite. I went to him and told him the whole story, greatly to his surprise and amusement, and I ensconced myself behind one of his windows. At nine o'clock, he relieved me and I had a nap. At two o'clock I resumed my watch. By this time both of us were thoroughly uneasy. At six o'clock the Jesuit emerged from the house, with an air of complacency, and we saw him walk calmly away.

Thereupon, crestfallen and anxious, I rang my uncle's bell. The maid appeared, but I had not the courage to question her, and I went upstairs without saying a word.

Pale and wan and wasted, Uncle Sosthenes lay in bed, with lack-lustre eyes and listless limbs. I noticed a small, sacred picture pinned to the bed curtains.

"Well, uncle," I said. "So you are in bed. Aren't you well?"

"Oh, my dear boy," he replied in a voice of deep dejection, "I have been very ill. I nearly died."

"How was that, uncle?"

"I don't know. It's most mysterious. But the oddest thing of all is that that Jesuit Father, who has just left me, that worthy man whom I could not stand—well, he had a revelation concerning my condition and he came to see me."

I could hardly suppress my laughter.

"Not really?"

"Yes, indeed. He heard a voice, bidding him rise and come to me, because I was on the point of death. It was a revelation."

To prevent myself from exploding, I pretended to sneeze. Presently, in spite of my spasms of mirth, I replied with assumed indignation:

"And you actually allowed him in—you, a free-thinker, a freemason. You didn't throw him out."

"Just listen," he stammered in confusion. "It was so strange, so providential. Besides, he spoke to me about my father. He used to know him."

"Your father, uncle?"

"Yes. It seems he knew my father."

"But that's no reason for receiving a Jesuit."

"I am quite aware of that. But I was ill. Oh how ill I was! He devoted himself to me the whole night. I can't tell you how good he was. He saved my life. Those people all know something about medicine."

"Ah! So he looked after you all night. But you tell me he has only just left you."

"Yes, that's true. As he had been so kind to me I kept him to luncheon. He lunched at that little table by my bedside, while I had a cup of tea."

"A meat luncheon, uncle?"

My uncle made a gesture of annoyance, as if I had said something highly offensive.

"Don't make fun of him, Gaston. Some jokes are out of place. That priest did more for me than any relation, and I insist upon your showing respect for his convictions."

I was dumbfounded, but I made shift to reply.

"Certainly, uncle. And what did you do after luncheon?"

"We had a game of bézique. Then he said his breviary while I read a little book which he happened to have with him. It wasn't at all badly written."

"A book of devotion, uncle?"

"Yes and no. Or rather, no. It was a history of their mission in Central Africa, and more like a book of travels and adventures. They are doing very fine work out there, those fellows."

I began to perceive that things were taking an unfavourable turn for me. Rising to go, I said:

"Well, uncle, good-bye. I see you are exchanging freemasonry for religion. You are a renegade."

Still with a certain air of embarrassment he replied:

"But religion is a sort of freemasonry."

"And when is your Jesuit coming to see you again?"

"I . . . I don't know," my uncle answered hesitatingly. "Perhaps to-morrow. I'm not quite sure."

Absolutely stunned, I left the house.

My joke has turned out a sorry joke for me. My uncle's conversion is radical. As far as that goes, I do not care a straw. Churchman or freemason, it is as broad as it is long. But the worst of it is that he has just made his will. Yes, sir, made his will! And disinherited me in favour of that old Jesuit.

MADEMOISELLE FIFI

THE officer commanding the Prussian troops, Major Count von Falsberg, was finishing the perusal of his letters. He was lolling in the depths of a big, upholstered armchair with his boots on the fine marble mantelpiece, where during his three months' occupation of the Château d'Uville, his spurs had worn two well-marked grooves, which grew a little deeper every day. Beside him on a marqueterie stand steamed a cup of coffee. The graceful little table was stained with liqueurs, burned with cigar ends and scored with the penknife of the conquering hero, who would pause now and then, as he sharpened a pencil, to scratch on its surface figures and drawings according to his idle fancy.

When he had read his letters, and had skimmed the pages of the German newspapers which the regimental postman had brought him, he rose from his chair, threw on to the fire three or four huge billets of green wood from the park, which these gentlemen were gradually cutting down to keep themselves warm, and went to the window. Rain was falling in torrents, the driving rain of Normandy, which seems as if hurled upon the earth by the hand of a madman, a dense curtain of water, a wall of slanting lines, rain that stings and splashes and

drowns and is entirely characteristic of the surroundings of Rouen, that slop pail of France.

The Major stood gazing at the flooded lawns and the swollen Andelle, which was rising above its banks, and he drummed upon the window-panes a Rhineland waltz. A sound behind him made him turn his head, and he saw his second-in-command, Captain Baron von Kelweingstein

The Major was a broad-shouldered colossus with a long beard which spread out like a fan on his chest. His whole enormous person gave the idea of a peacock in uniform, a peacock which had its tail unfolded on its breast. He had mild, cold, blue eyes, and across one cheek ran a sabre cut, which he had received in the Austrian war. He had the reputation of being a good fellow and a gallant officer.

The Captain was a short, red-faced man, with a large stomach, and was tightly laced. He had flaming red hair, and although he was closely shaven, the short shining bristles gave to his face in certain lights such a curious glitter that it looked as if his skin had been rubbed with phosphorus. A night of dissipation had, he could not remember precisely how, cost him two teeth, and this gap made him splutter when he spoke and rendered his utterance thick and difficult to understand. On the top of his head he had a bald patch like a tonsure, surrounded with a shining fleece of short curly golden hair.

The Major shook hands with him, and then drank off his cup of coffee, the sixth since the morning, while his second-in-command made his daily report. Then they both turned to the window, and remarked that it was not very cheerful. The Major was a quiet man with a wife at home, and adapted himself to circumstances. The Captain, however, who was a man of pleasure, a

frequenter of low haunts and an insatiable woman-hunter, chafed under the forced asceticism of a three months' confinement in this God-forsaken post.

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in," cried the Major, and an orderly, one of their military automata, appeared on the threshold, silently signifying by his presence that luncheon was ready.

In the dining-room three officers of lower rank were waiting for them. They were Lieutenant Otto von Grossling and two second lieutenants, Fritz Scheunauburg and the Marquis Wilhelm von Eyrik, a fair-haired arrogant little martinet, brutal to his men, harsh to the conquered and as explosive as gunpowder.

Since his arrival in France, his brother officers never called him anything but Mademoiselle Fifi. He owed this nickname to the studied elegance of his dress, his slim figure, which looked as if it were corsetted, his pale face, which showed only a faint sign of a budding moustache, and his constant habit of expressing his sovereign contempt for people and things in general by the French expletive "Fi, fi donc," which he pronounced with a slight whistle.

The long dining-room of the Château d'Uville was an apartment of royal magnificence. But its crystal mirrors, starred with bullet marks, its long Flemish tapestries slashed with sabre cuts and hanging in tatters, bore witness to the diversions of Mademoiselle Fifi's idle hours. Three family portraits on the wall, a warrior in armour, a cardinal, and a president, were smoking long porcelain pipes, while in a gilded frame, tarnished with age, a noble lady in a tightly-laced bodice was wearing with a haughty air a pair of enormous moustaches done in charcoal.

Luncheon was a silent meal in this wreck of a room, rendered gloomier than ever by the rain. There was about it a depressing atmosphere of defeat, and the old parquet floor was now dingy as the earthen floor of a pot-house. After luncheon, over their tobacco and wine, the officers began to grumble as usual about the monotony of their existence. Brandy and liqueurs were passed round, and lolling back in their chairs they sipped glass after glass, without removing from their mouths the long bent pipe-stems with their egg-shaped china bowls, bedaubed with colours as if to captivate the eyes of Hottentots.

As soon as their glasses were empty, they replenished them with a gesture of weary resignation. But Mademoiselle Fifi kept breaking glass after glass, and a soldier immediately substituted a new one. They sat lost in a haze of pungent smoke, sinking into that cheerless, lethargic drunkenness of men who have nothing else to do.

Suddenly the Baron started up, seized by a violent revulsion.

"Good God!" he shouted. "We can't go on like this. We must think of something to do."

"But what, sir?" asked Lieutenant Otto and Second Lieutenant Fritz, both of whom had the heavy, solemn German cast of countenance.

The Baron thought for a few moments.

"Why," he presently replied, "we will give a party, with the Major's permission."

The Major removed his pipe from his mouth.

"What sort of a party?"

The Baron drew his chair nearer.

"I'll make all the arrangements, sir. I'll send Old Faithful into Rouen to fetch some ladies. I know where to go for them. We will have a supper-party.

We have all that's necessary, and at least we shall spend one festive evening."

Count von Falsberg smiled and shrugged his shoulders:

"You must be crazy, my dear fellow."

But all the other officers sprang from their chairs and surrounded the Major.

"Don't say no, sir," they pleaded. "It's so deadly dull here."

At last the Major gave in. The Baron sent for Old Faithful, a non-commissioned officer of long service, who had never been known to smile and who carried out with fanatical devotion all his officers' orders, no matter what they were.

Impassive as ever, Old Faithful received the Baron's instructions. He left the room and five minutes later a huge commissariat cart with a hood over it set off through the driving rain, drawn by four horses at a gallop. Immediately an awakening thrill seemed to stir the pulses of all the officers. They roused themselves from their languid postures; their faces brightened and they began to talk. Although the rain was pouring down with all its former violence, the Major observed that it was not so dark, and Lieutenant Otto declared with conviction that it was going to clear up. Mademoiselle Fifi seemed unable to keep still. He was for ever jumping up and sitting down again. His hard, keen eyes scanned the room, looking for something to destroy. Suddenly the young reprobate fixed his gaze on the lady with the moustaches and drew his revolver.

"At any rate, you shan't see it," he exclaimed, and without rising from his chair he took aim. With two successive shots he pierced both her eyes.

"And now we'll have a mine," he cried.

At this, conversation ceased at once, as if a new

and absorbing interest had presented itself. Springing mines was Mademoiselle Fifi's own invention, his own patent method of destruction and his favourite pastime. The rightful owner, Count Fernand d'Anoys d'Uville, had had to abandon his château so hastily that he had had no time to remove or hide any of his treasures, with the exception of the silver, which he concealed in a hole in the wall. He was a man of great wealth and magnificent tastes. Before his headlong flight, his great drawing-room, which opened off the dining-hall, had presented the aspect of a gallery in a museum. The walls were hung with oil paintings, drawings and valuable water colours. Tables, stands, and elegant glass cases displayed a thousand ornaments, vases of Japanese porcelain, statuettes, Chinese grotesques, ivory antiques, Venetian glass, so that the spacious apartment seemed thronged by a multitude of fantastic and precious denizens. Scarce one had survived. It was not that there had been any looting; this the Major would never have permitted. But, now and then Mademoiselle Fifi would spring a mine, and on these occasions all the officers really enjoyed themselves for quite five minutes.

The young Marquis strolled into the drawing-room to look for what he required. He returned with an exquisite little teapot of *famille rose*. This he filled with gunpowder, and through the spout he carefully inserted a long fuse, which he lighted. Then he ran back to the drawing-room to deposit his infernal machine. He returned hastily to the dining-room and closed the door behind him. The German officers stood waiting with a smile of childish expectation on their faces, and as soon as the explosion had reverberated through the château they made a rush for the drawing-room. Mademoiselle Fifi was the first to enter. He

clapped his hands in wild delight over a Venus in terra-cotta with its head blown off at last. His companions picked up fragments of porcelain, admiring the curious denticulations produced by the explosion, examined the fresh damage and debated whether this wreckage and that had not been caused by a previous mine. The Major cast a benevolent glance around the great drawing-room, ruined in this Nero-like fashion, and strewn with shattered treasures of art. As he led the way out, he remarked genially :

" That was a very successful effort."

The atmosphere in the dining-room was so thick with mingled fumes of gunpowder and tobacco that it was impossible to breathe. The Major threw open the window, and all the officers, who had come back for a final glass of brandy, gathered around it. The damp air rushed into the room in a fine spray which clung to their beards and moustaches and diffused a smell of sodden earth. They looked out at the tall trees, bowed beneath the deluge; at the wide valley shrouded in mists emanating from the water that poured from the low black clouds; at the distant belfry of the church, rising through the driving rain like a grey spike.

The church bell had never been rung since the first day of their occupation. The silence of this belfry, however, was the only form of resistance that the invaders had encountered throughout the district. The parish priest had in no way declined to receive or entertain the Prussian soldiers. On several occasions he had even gone so far as to drink a bottle of beer or Bordeaux with the Prussian commandant, who often employed him as a benevolent intermediary. But it was useless to ask him for even a single tinkle of his bell. He would have been shot rather than yield. This was his own special form of protest against the invasion; a

pacific, a silent, protest, the only protest proper for a priest, a man of peace and not a man of blood. For ten miles round everyone praised the firmness and heroism of Abbé Chantavoine, who dared to assert and proclaim the public mourning by the persistent silence of his belfry. Inspired by his example, the whole village was prepared to support its pastor to the utmost, and to dare the worst, deeming this tacit protest a safeguard of the national honour. It seemed to the peasants that they deserved better of their country than either Belfort or Strasbourg; that they had set as fine an example, and had won immortal honour for their hamlet. With this one reservation, they refused the Prussian conquerors nothing. The Major and his officers laughed together over this exhibition of harmless bravado, and as the whole village showed itself deferential and obliging towards the conquerors, they willingly tolerated this mute display of patriotism.

Only the young Marquis Wilhelm wanted to insist upon the bell being rung. The diplomatic condescension with which his superior officer treated the priest infuriated him, and every day he besought the Major to order a single ding-dong, just once, once only, for fun. He pleaded with the coaxing grace of a cat, the winning wiles of a woman, the wheedling tones of a mistress who has set her heart on something. But the Major would not give in, and Mademoiselle Fifi had to console himself with springing mines in the Château d'Uville.

For several minutes the five men remained grouped at the window, breathing the damp air. At last Lieutenant Fritz said with a husky laugh:

"I'm afraid those ladies won't have good weather for their drive."

Then they dispersed. Each man went off to his

work; the Captain, for his part, had a great many preparations to make for the supper-party.

Towards evening they met again, and they burst out laughing when they saw how spick and span they all were, each one of them as carefully perfumed and pomaded as if for a grand review. The Major's hair looked a shade less grey than in the morning. The Captain had shaved and had retained only his moustache, which lay like a line of flame on his upper lip. One or other of them kept going to the window, which had been left open in spite of the rain. At ten minutes past six the Baron announced that he heard a rumble of wheels in the distance. They all rushed to the door, and soon the heavy vehicle arrived at the château at a gallop, its four horses steaming and panting and splashed with mud up to the withers.

Five young women alighted on the perron, five handsome girls, carefully selected by a brother officer, to whom Old Faithful had delivered a note from the Captain. They had raised no objections. They were sure of being well paid, and thanks to their experiences of the last three months, they were used to Prussians. Philosophically they accepted men and things as they came.

"It's all in the day's work," they remarked during the drive, as if to quiet the secret qualms of such vestiges of conscience as still remained to them.

They were ushered at once into the dining-room. When it was lighted up it seemed drearier than ever in its pitiful condition of dilapidation. The table, laden with food, exquisite china, and the silver that had been unearthed from its hiding-place in the wall, gave it the appearance of a tavern full of bandits, supping after a successful raid. Wreathed in smiles, the Captain took possession of the ladies, viewing them with the air of

an expert, kissing them, breathing in their perfume and estimating them at their professional value. The junior officers were eager to appropriate a lady apiece, but he refused to allow this, authoritatively claiming the right to distribute the young women with due respect for rank and seniority. In order to avoid all arguments, disputes and accusations of partiality he ranged the five girls in a row according to height. Addressing the tallest one, he said in a voice of command:

"Your name?"

"Pamela," she replied in soldierly tones.

"Number one, name of Pamela, awarded to the Major."

Then the Captain kissed Blondine, the next in height, in token of ownership. Buxom Amanda was assigned to Lieutenant Otto; Eva the Tomato to Second Lieutenant Fritz, and to slim Wilhelm von Eyrik, the most junior of the officers, Rachel, the smallest girl, a young brunette with eyes as black as ink, a Jewess, whose turned-up nose served to prove the rule which attributes hooked noses to all her race. They were all sufficiently pretty and plump, with nothing particularly distinctive in their faces. In figure and complexion all conformed more or less to the same type, by virtue of their daily traffic and their common existence in houses of resort.

The three junior officers were anxious to carry off their young women at once on the pretext of lending them hair-brushes and soap. But the Captain very sensibly objected to this proposal. He declared that the ladies were quite tidy enough for dinner, and that if they took their partners to their rooms now they would only want to change them when they came down again, and would interfere with the other couples. They accepted the expert's advice and contented themselves

with innumerable kisses by way of a preliminary. All at once Rachel began to choke; she coughed till the tears came into her eyes, while smoke issued from her nostrils. Pretending that he wanted to kiss her, the Marquis had puffed tobacco smoke into her mouth. She did not fly into a rage, or utter a single reproach. She merely gazed fixedly at her owner with dawning anger in the depths of her dark eyes.

They sat down to dinner. Even the Major appeared to be enjoying himself. He placed Pamela on his right and Blondine on his left, remarking as he unfolded his table napkin:

"It was certainly an excellent idea of yours, Captain."

Lieutenant Otto and Lieutenant Fritz were as polite as if in the company of women of their own class, somewhat to the embarrassment of their neighbours. But Baron von Kelweingstein, radiant and revelling in his favourite vice, kept making unseemly jokes, while his halo of red hair appeared to blaze. He made love in his Rhenish French, expectorating his tap-room gallantries through the gap left by his two broken teeth. The women, however, could not understand him. They gave no sign of intelligence except when he spluttered out obscene words and gross expressions, which were mangled by his accent. At this they all went off into wild shrieks of laughter, falling on their neighbours' necks and mimicking the Baron, who kept purposely mispronouncing his words for the pleasure of hearing them repeat his coarse phrases. The first few bottles of wine had gone to the young women's heads. They poured out a flow of vile language and, once more their natural selves, they resumed all their usual habits, lavishing kisses right and left, pinching their neighbours' arms, uttering shrill cries, and drinking out of any-

body's glass. Now and then one of them would shout a verse or two of French, or a snatch of a German song picked up during her daily intercourse with the enemy.

Before very long, intoxicated with all this femininity within their reach, the men, too, lost their heads. They shouted and broke the plates, while behind their chairs the orderlies waited on them impassively. The Major alone preserved some degree of self-control.

Mademoiselle Fifi had taken Rachel on his knees. Sometimes in a gust of frigid passion he frantically kissed the ebony ringlets on her neck, and breathed in the warmth and fragrance of her person. Sometimes with savage ferocity he pinched her so violently through her dress that he made her cry out. Again, crushing her in his arms, he pressed his lips lingeringly to the Jewish girl's red mouth, kissing the breath out of her body. Suddenly he bit her so viciously that a trickle of blood flowed down her chin and on to her bodice. Once again she looked him in the face and, as she bathed the wound, she muttered:

"You shall pay for this."

"Oh, I'll pay for it," he replied with a hard laugh.

Champagne was served at dessert. The Major rose to his feet and in the tones in which he would have proposed the health of the Empress Augusta, he exclaimed:

"The ladies."

A series of toasts followed, toasts that smacked of their drunken gallantry, mingled with obscene jokes, rendered coarser than ever by their ignorance of the language. Each officer in turn sprang to his feet, and made a desperate attempt to be witty and amusing. Too drunk to stand, with vacant gaze and clammy lips, the women welcomed each sally with frantic applause.

Intending, doubtless, to lend to the orgy an atmosphere of gallantry, the Captain raised his glass again:

"To our victories over hearts!"

At this Lieutenant Otto, a rough sort of bear from the Black Forest, saturated and inflamed with alcohol, started to his feet:

"To our victories over France!"

Drunk though they were, the women were struck silent, and with a shudder Rachel turned and looked at him:

"I know some Frenchmen before whom you wouldn't dare say a thing like that."

The Marquis, who still held her on his knee, had drunk himself into a state of great hilarity. He burst out laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha! Personally I have never seen any Frenchmen. As soon as we come on the scene they take to their heels."

"Dirty liar!" the girl shouted furiously in his face.

For a moment he fixed her with his light eyes, just as he had done with the portrait of the lady before he had shot at it with his revolver.

"That's all very well, my beauty. But if they had had an ounce of pluck, should we be here?"

Excitedly he added:

"We are their masters. France is ours."

She jerked herself off his knees and dropped into her chair. The Marquis rose to his feet, and holding his glass half-way across the table he repeated:

"France is ours, and the French, and their woods, and their fields and their houses."

All the other men were suddenly inflamed with military ardour, with the enthusiasm of brutes. Seizing their glasses they shouted:

"Prussia for ever!" and emptied them at one draught.

The young women dared not protest. They sat cowed and silent. Even Rachel held her peace and did not venture to reply. Then the Marquis balanced his newly-filled glass of champagne on Rachel's head, exclaiming:

"And the women of France are ours, too."

At this Rachel sprang up so fiercely that she upset the glass, which emptied its yellow fluid as if in baptism all over her black hair. Then it fell to the ground and broke. Though her lips were trembling, her eyes braved the Prussian officer, who was still laughing. In a voice choking with passion she stammered:

"Oh, that's not true. At any rate that's not true. You will never have the women of France."

The Marquis sat down to give rein to his mirth and mimicking the accent of Paris:

"Isn't she funny? Isn't she funny? Then what are you doing here, my pretty dear?"

At first she was too much taken aback to reply. His meaning eluded her, but as soon as she grasped what he said, she burst out in vehement indignation:

"What am I doing here? I? I'm not a woman. I'm only a whore. And that's exactly what you Prussians deserve."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when the Marquis boxed her ears violently. He was raising his hand again in a fury, when she snatched up a small silver dessert knife from the table, and with a gesture so sudden that no one was aware of her intention, she drove it right into the hollow where the neck joins the chest. The word he was uttering was strangled in his throat, and he sat there with his mouth open and a terrible expression on his face.

A shout of horror burst from the whole party, and they all sprang to their feet in consternation. Rachel hurled her chair at the legs of Lieutenant Otto, who measured his length on the floor. Before anyone could stop her, she rushed to the window, flung it open, and plunged into the night and the rain.

Two minutes later Mademoiselle Fifi was dead.

At this Fritz and Otto drew their swords to cut down the women, who had thrown themselves on their knees. The Major had some difficulty in preventing this massacre. He shut up the four distracted girls in a room with two men to guard them. Then, as if he were disposing his soldiers for battle, he organized the pursuit, never doubting that the fugitive would be recaptured. Urged on by threats, fifty men were scattered all over the park. Two hundred more scoured the woods and searched every house in the valley.

In a moment the table was cleared. It served Mademoiselle Fifi for a bier. Suddenly sobered, the four remaining officers stood rigidly at the windows peering into the night with the set faces of soldiers on duty. And still the rain poured in torrents. Out of the darkness came a pattering sound, a vague gurgling of water, falling, flowing, dripping, splashing.

All at once a shot rang out, followed by another in the far distance. And during the next four hours more shots were heard, remote or near, with rallying cries and unknown words shouted in guttural voices, as the men called to one another. In the morning the search parties returned to the château. Two soldiers had been killed and three others wounded by their comrades in the heat and confusion of this nocturnal hunt.

Rachel had not been found.

A reign of terror ensued for the inhabitants. Their houses were ransacked; the entire neighbourhood was

scoured, searched, patrolled. But the young Jewess seemed to have vanished without leaving a single trace.

The affair was reported to the General, who ordered it to be hushed up, fearing the demoralizing effect of such an example on the army. He visited his displeasure on the Major, who in turn punished his subordinates.

The General remarked:

"You do not make war for pleasure, nor for the sake of amusing yourself with improper young women."

In his resentment Count von Falsberg resolved to revenge himself on the village. Seeking a pretext which would justify the utmost severity, he sent for the priest and ordered him to have the church bell rung at the Marquis von Eyrik's funeral. Contrary to his expectation the priest received his instructions with exemplary docility and deference. And when the body of Mademoiselle Fifi, borne by soldiers, and preceded, followed, and surrounded by yet more soldiers, all carrying loaded rifles, was conveyed from the château to the cemetery, the church bell spoke for the first time. It tolled the funeral knell with a certain blitheness, as if in response to the caress of a friendly hand. It rang again that evening, and the next day, and every succeeding day, chiming away to heart's content. And even during the night it sometimes began to oscillate all by itself and to utter a gentle tinkle through the darkness, as if possessed by a mysterious gaiety and vibrating under some secret influence. The peasants declared that it was bewitched, and no one except the priest and the sacristan ventured near the belfry.

The explanation, however, was simple. An unhappy girl was hiding there, in anguish and solitude, ministered to in secret by those two men. She remained there concealed till the departure of the German troops.

Then, one evening, the priest borrowed the baker's wagonette, and himself drove his captive as far as the gates of Rouen. There he kissed her, and she alighted. She made her way back to her old establishment, whose mistress had given her up for dead.

Some time afterwards she was rescued by a man whose patriotism outweighed his prejudices. Loving her first for her noble deed and afterwards for her own sake, he married her and made of her a lady, no less deserving than many another.