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A
DEAD WOMAN'S
WISH
EMILY 2017

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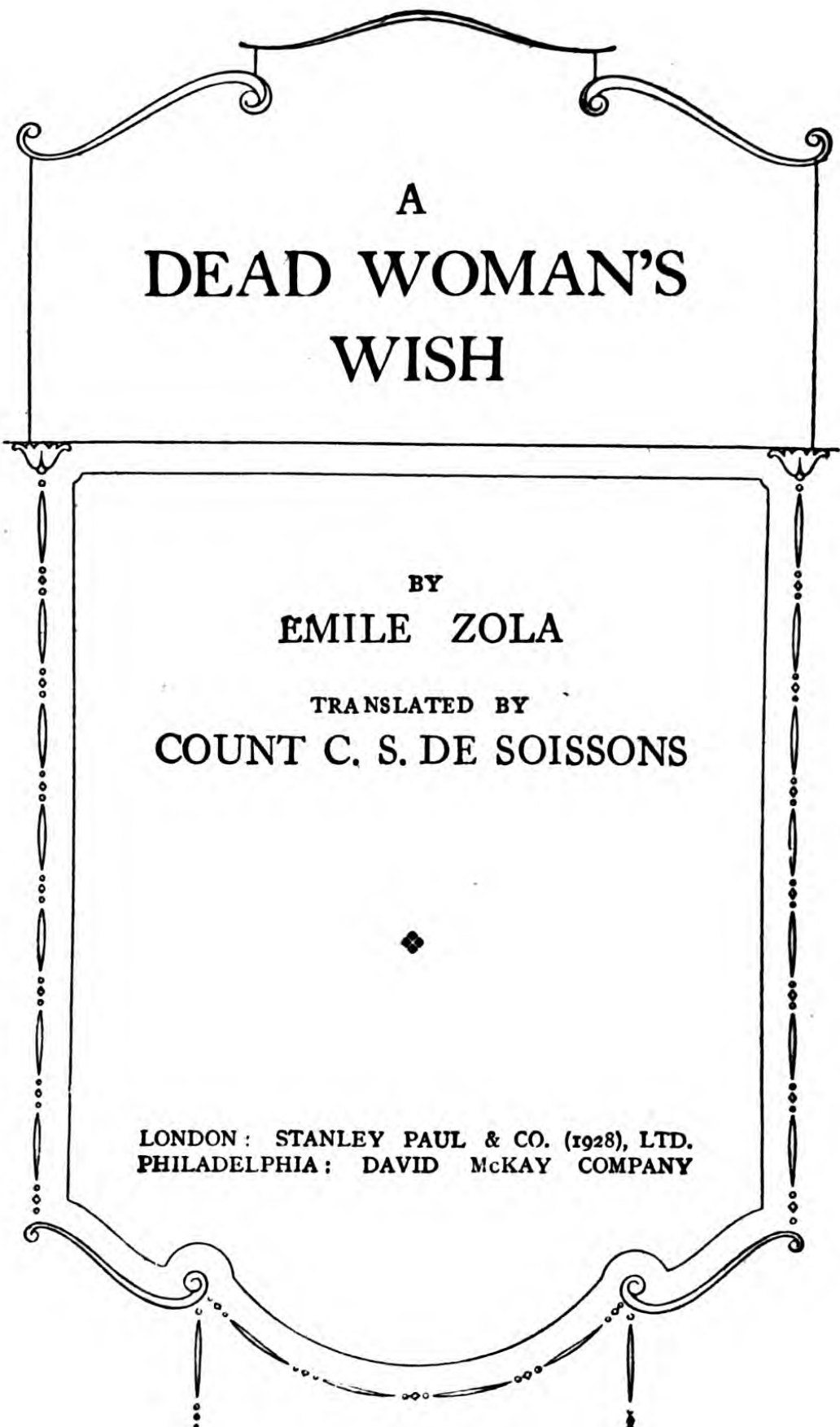




A DEAD WOMAN'S WISH



EMILÉ ZOLA



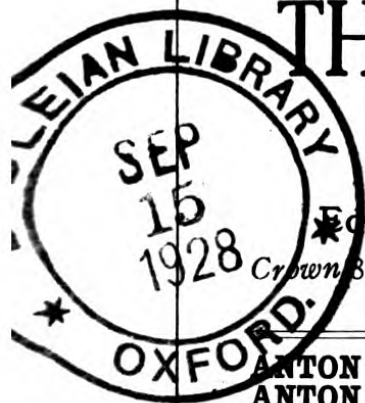
A
DEAD WOMAN'S
WISH

BY
EMILE ZOLA

TRANSLATED BY
COUNT C. S. DE SOISSONS

◆

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A FOREWORD

READERS of Emile Zola during the last three decades will not find this work in the least like those which practically made his name as a realist. These books—the large series of histories of particular families—were written after the success of “*Therese Raquin*” in 1867; indeed they began to appear after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Many of these “studies,” however much we may admire the craftsmanship, were revolting in the extreme and exposed the most abominable and degrading side of the baser part of human nature—French—and detailed immorality and worse in their blackest aspects. It was through his association with the Naturalist School that Zola adopted “*Les Rougon-Macquart*” style of human, and many think perverted, analysis, when he identified himself in the later years of the Empire with Flaubert, Daudet, the de Goncourts, and Turgeneff. Previously when quite a young man—he was born in 1840, by the way—when he failed both as essayist and critic, as well as in the dramatic world, he wrote most charming short stories, and his delicate talent was shown in the *Contes à Ninon*, issued in 1864, and again in *Nouveaux Contes à Ninon* in 1874; with

other collections of his youthful and optimistic days, published later under the titles of *Le Capitaine Burle*, *Nais Micoulin*, and the beautiful *Attaque du Moulin*. The present work, "A Dead Woman's Wish," *Le Vœu d'une Morte*—so admirably translated by the Count de Soissons—belongs to the happy period of his life. It is a splendid study of real character—of human nature at its best and noblest—the dying woman, the youth Daniel to whom she makes her last confession and desires, are beautiful creations; while in strong contrast are the selfish husband M. de Rionne, his sister, and her donkey of a spouse as obstinate as a pig and almost as ignorant. But the whole small gallery of *dramatis personæ* are drawn direct from life with a fine yet sympathetic hand and a keen insight into the goodness, the badness of the follies and the foibles of his fellow-creatures. Jeanne is a victim of her surroundings, but she is truly presented and in the end proves what good qualities she possessed had they been properly and purely developed. The "Paris Sketches" at the end of this volume show undoubted indications of Zola's later methods and outlook. They are forerunners of what was longing to fix itself in his mind. These stories are quite French—and Paris at that—including "A Dead Woman's Wish," and they must be read from that point of view. Once you grasp the French character and the conditions of life on the other side of the channel, then you will fully appreciate and enjoy this early work of the giant Zola.

S. J. A. F.

PROLOGUE

TOWARDS the end of 1831, in the *Semaphore* of Marseilles, the following paragraph might have been read :—

“ Last night a great fire destroyed several houses in the little village of St. Henri. The glare of the flames, whose reflection reddened the sea, was seen from this town, and all who happened to be on the Edoumè rocks were enabled to be present at a spectacle at once frightful and sublime.

“ Exact details have not yet reached us. Several remarkable instances of bravery are, however, recorded. To-day we are only able to record one heart-stirring incident of this catastrophe.

“ The flames spread so rapidly in the lower rooms of one house that it was impossible to give the least help to the inmates. These miserable people were heard uttering piercing cries of terror and distress. Suddenly a woman was seen at one of the windows, holding a young child in her arms. From below, it was noticed that her dress had caught fire. With terror-stricken face and dishevelled hair she stared wildly in front of her, as if smitten with madness.

“ The flames ran rapidly along her skirts, and soon

she was a blaze of light. Closing her eyes and pressing the child tightly to her breast, she hurled herself frantically through the window. When the people rushed to lift them up they found that the mother's skull was crushed, but the child still lived. It stretched out its little hands and cried, as if it wished to escape from the fearful pressure of the dead woman's arms.

“We are informed that this child, having no relations whatever in the world, has just been adopted by quite a young girl, whose name is unknown to us, but who belongs to the nobility of the neighbourhood. Such an action has no need of praise. It speaks for itself.”



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A Dead Woman's Wish

CHAPTER I

THE room was dimly lit by the faint glimmer of twilight.

The window curtains, partly drawn aside, allowed the higher branches of the trees to be seen, all tinted red by the last rays of the sun. Below on the Boulevard des Invalides children were playing, and the shrill sound of their laughter floating upward fell soft and pleasing.

The spring following the dreadful cold of February is often very chilly and sharp. The evenings of May frequently retain some of the freshness of winter in the air. Cold breezes stirred the curtains now, and carried the distant rumble of carriages to the ear.

Within the house all was gloom. The various articles of furniture, barely perceptible in the obscurity, looked like black spots against the bright wallpaper, while the blue carpet grew, little by little, darker and darker. Night had already crept over the ceiling and the corners of the room. Soon, as the darkness fell, scarcely anything was to be seen but a long white streak which, starting from one of the

windows, lighted with a pale glimmer the bed on which Madame de Rionne lay in the agony of death.

At that last hour, in that newly-born sweetness of spring, in this room where a young woman lay dying, there was engendered a mournful feeling of pity. The obscurity became transparent, the stillness assumed an unspeakable sadness, the sounds from without changed into murmurs of regret, and one seemed to hear lamenting voices in the air.

Blanche de Rionne, sitting propped up by pillows on her bed, was gazing into the gloom with wide-open eyes. The dim light shone on her poor face, wasted by illness ; her arms were stretched out on the sheets ; her hands, nervously restless, were unconsciously twisting them. Her lips were parted, yet she said nothing, while her body shook with prolonged shivering fits, and she lay and meditated whilst waiting for death, slowly rolling her head from side to side, as dying people do.

She was barely thirty years of age. Ever a frail creature, her illness had made her still more delicate. This woman undoubtedly possessed courage of a high order ; she must have been good-hearted, kind, and sensitive to a supreme degree. Death is the great test, and only in the last agony can one judge truly of men's courage. And yet one felt there was some spirit of rebellion in her still. At moments her lips quivered, and her hands twisted the sheets more violently than ever. Anguish contracted her face, and big tears trickled down her cheeks, which, however, were immediately dried by the fever raging

within her. She seemed to be waging a fierce battle with death, striving to stave it off with all the force of her determined will.

Then bending over the bedside, she gazed earnestly at a little girl of six sitting on the carpet and playing with the fringe of the bed-covering. From time to time the child raised her head, seized with a sudden fear and ready to cry without knowing why ; then, when about to cry, she changed in a moment and laughed, as she saw her mother smiling sweetly upon her, she turned again to her play, prattling to one of the corners of the sheet of which she had made a doll.

Nothing could be more sad than the smile of the dying woman. Wishing to keep Jeanne with her to the last, she defied pain and concealed her suffering as well as she could that she might not frighten the child. She watched her playing, listened to her childish prattle, and grew absorbed in the contemplation of that fair little head, forgetting almost that she must die and leave her dear little love. Then, suddenly remembering that her end was near, she seemed to feel already cold in death, and terror seized her once more, for the sole cause of her despair was quitting this poor little creature.

Illness had been an implacable foe to her. One evening, as she was about to retire to bed, she had been seized, and not a fortnight had elapsed before she was in the last stages of agony. She rose from her bed no more, and was dying without being able to make any certain provision for her child. She told herself that she was leaving her without means of

support and with her father alone as her guide, and, she trembled at the idea, knowing what sort of guide he would make for her daughter.

Suddenly Blanche felt that she was sinking rapidly. She believed death was at hand. Her strength failing her, she lay back on her pillows.

“Jeanne,” she said, feebly, “go and tell your father I want to see him.”

Then, when the child had left the room, she again began to roll her head slowly from side to side. With eyes wide open and lips tightly compressed, she fought with all the energy of her will against death, unwilling to give up her life till she had set her heart at rest.

The laughter of the children on the boulevard below could no longer be heard, and the trees stood out in dark masses in the pale grey of the sky. The city noise floated up more faintly and the silence grew more profound ; broken only by the slow breathing of the expiring woman and by stifled sobs which came from the recesses of the window.

There, hidden by the curtains, and weeping bitter tears, was a young man of eighteen—Daniel Raimbault—who had just entered the room, but had not dared to approach the bed. The nurse being away, he forgot himself by weeping as he stood.

Daniel was a pitiful-looking creature, whom one would take to be about fifteen years of age. His lean, short limbs were clad in a fantastical manner, while his fair, almost yellow, hair fell in lank wisps round a long face, with a big mouth

and projecting teeth. Notwithstanding, when you came to look at his high, broad forehead, and his eyes full of kindness, you could not help feeling some sympathy for him. Young girls laughed when he passed, for his manner was awkward, and all his poor frame seemed to quiver with shame.

Madame de Rionne had been the good fairy of his life. She had heaped benefits upon him without revealing herself, and when at last he saw her and was allowed to thank his benefactress, he found she was dying.

And now he stood behind the curtain, unable to repress his grief. Blanche heard his stifled sobs, and she raised herself partly up, trying to see who it was that was crying.

“Who is there?” asked she. “Who is crying near me?”

Then Daniel came and knelt down by the bedside, and Blanche recognised him.

“So it is you, Daniel,” she said. “Get up, my friend, and do not cry.”

Daniel at once forgot his timidity and awkwardness. His heart was on his lips, and he held out his hands to her, beseechingly.

“Oh, madame!” he cried in broken accents, “do let me kneel; do let me weep! I came to see you; despair seized me, and I could not hold back my tears. Now I am here and no one is near, I must tell you how good you are, and how I love you. For more than ten years I have understood everything; for more than ten years I have kept silence,

and been suffused with gratitude and affection. You must let me weep. You understand this, do you not? Often I have dreamt of the blessed time when I could kneel down thus before you. That was my dream, which soothed me in the bitterness of my childhood. I took delight in imagining the smallest details of our meeting. I told myself that I should see you beautiful and smiling; that you would have such and such a look, would use such and such a gesture. And now, alas! what do I see? . . . I never thought until to-day that one could be an orphan twice."

His voice broke. Blanche, in the last glimmerings of light, looked at him and took a little fresh life, face to face with this worship and despair. In that supreme hour she was rewarded for her good work; she felt her agony softened by this love she would leave behind her.

Daniel continued:

"I owe you everything, and I have only my tears at present to prove my devotion. I looked on myself, so to speak, as made by you, and I wished your work to be good and beautiful. Throughout my whole life, I determined to show my gratitude; I wanted to make you proud of me. And now I have only a few minutes in which to thank you. You will look on me as ungrateful, for I feel my tongue is powerless to express what is in my heart. I have lived alone—I don't know how to speak. . . . What will become of me if God does not take pity on you and me?"

Madame de Rionne listened to these disjointed

words, and a sweet happiness came to her from them. She took Daniel's hand.

"My friend," said she, "I know you are not ungrateful. I have watched over you, and I have learned how deep is your gratitude. There is no need for you to seek words in which to thank me, for your tears alone assuage my suffering."

Daniel kept back his sobs with difficulty. There was a short silence.

"When I summoned you to Paris," continued the dying woman, "I was still strong. I hoped to be able to help you to pursue your studies. Then illness came upon me before I could make the future sure for you. You came too late. In leaving this life I shall take with me the regret of not having finished my task."

"You have done a pious work," interrupted Daniel. "You owe me nothing, and I owe you my whole life. The benefit is too great already. Look at me, and see the poor creature that you have adopted and protected. When I learned that I was awkward, when people laughed at me, I wept tears of shame for your sake. Forgive me an unworthy thought. I often feared lest my face should be displeasing to you. I trembled lest I should meet you. I was afraid my ugliness would deprive me of some of your kind feeling towards me. And only to think that you received me as a son! You, who are so beautiful! You have held out your hand to a wretched child whom no one cared for, but rather despised. The more I was railed at, the more I felt

ugly and weak, and the more I worshipped you, for I understand what goodness you must possess to stoop down to me. I ardently wished to be good-looking, that I might be pleasing in your sight."

Blanche smiled. Such youthful, ingenuous adoration, such flattering humility, made her forget death for a moment.

"What a child you are!" she said.

Then she pondered a while. She was endeavouring to see Daniel's face in the gloom. The blood flowed more rapidly in her veins, and she thought of herself and the time when she was young.

Then she went on :

"You are impulsive, and life will be hard for you. I can only at this last hour tell you to remember me—think of me as a safeguard. Though I have not been permitted to make any provision for your future, I have at least been able to put you in the way of gaining your livelihood, of walking in a straightforward and manly way through life ; and this thought consoles me a little in my compulsory desertion of you. Think of me sometimes ; love me and try to please me when I am dead as you have loved and pleased me during my lifetime."

She said this in such sweet, moving tones that Daniel began to weep again.

"No," said he, "do not leave me like this ; give me some task to perform. My existence will henceforth be a blank if you vanish suddenly from it. During the past ten years I have had no other idea than that of pleasing you and obeying all your wishes.

I only wished to become a little worthy in your eyes. You have been my goddess. If I can work no longer for you I shall feel like a coward. Of what use will life be to me? For what shall I strive? Think of something, I beseech you, for me to do to prove my devotion, that I may still testify my gratitude when you are no more."

While Daniel was speaking a sudden inspiration lit up the pale face of Madame de Rionne; she drew herself up to a sitting posture, rallying her strength and fighting against her pain.

"You are right," said she; "I have a mission to entrust you with. God Himself has set you there on your knees by my death-bed. Heaven made me give you a helping hand in order that you in your turn might one day help me. Rise up, my friend, for I now beg of you to console and support me."

And when Daniel had risen and sat down, she said:

"Listen, my time is short; I must tell you all. I besought God that a good angel might come to me—I am willing to believe that you are the angel whom He sends me. I believe in you for I have seen you weep."

And then she hastily poured out to him all she had in her heart. She forgot she was speaking to a child. This poor soul, torn with anxiety, opened her heart and consoled herself by revealing in death what she had hidden in life.

The young man's ardent and humble reverence had softened the woman's stoic courage. She was happy in making her confession at last, to be able,

before leaving the world, to confide in someone all the bitterness of her past life. She did not complain ; she simply unburdened her heart.

“ I spent my life,” she said, “ in loneliness and tears. I must tell you these things, my friend, in order that you may understand my sufferings. You pictured me as a joyous being ; you have set me on a pinnacle of glory and happiness. Alas ! I am only a poor woman who, during long, weary years, has inured herself to misery. And, though I am shedding tears, I call to mind the joys of my youth. What a blessed thing was my childhood there, in Provence ! At that time I was proud ; I had determined to fight the battle of life bravely, but only emerged from the fight with a bleeding heart.”

Daniel listened, barely understanding her, believing that the delirium of the death agony was creeping over her.

“ I married a man,” she exclaimed, “ whom I could not love, and who soon drove me back to the solitude of my young days. Henceforth I had to stifle my feelings. Very soon Monsieur de Rionne took to his bachelor ways. I met him now and then at meals. I knew his daily life was an insult to me. And so I shut myself up with my little girl in a corner of the house ; I looked upon it as my convent, and I vowed to live as if I were really cloistered there. At times my whole being was in revolt, and I could only appear serene and victorious at the price of much hidden suffering.”

“ What ! ” thought Daniel, “ is this what life

really is? My saint has indeed suffered! She, whom I delighted to contemplate as a superior being, quite happy, quite divine, was all the time weeping with misery, while I adored her as one above all pain. Is there nothing, then, in the world but sorrow? Does heaven not even spare such souls as are worthy of it? What a terrifying world is ours! When I thought of my benefactress, I imagined her in joy and peace, sheltered from evil by her goodness; she seemed to me serene, like those holy women who have halos round their heads and peaceful smiles on their lips. But what do I find? Only that she weeps, because she has cause, and her heart bleeds like mine, and she is my sister in suffering."

His heart was wounded. He was silent, terrified at the sad picture which rose up before him. For this was the first step he made in the knowledge of life; all the ignorance of his being revolted when first face to face with the injustice of evil. He would not have shuddered thus for anyone less beloved; but the cruel reality had been revealed, wounding his inmost feelings. A shivering fear, as it were, seized him, for he felt that from that time forward he must face the sternest facts of life. Notwithstanding, his desire for self-sacrifice impelled him to listen intently to this last confession. He considered that he was receiving solemn commands, and so he waited for his duty to be prescribed for him.

His continued silence compelled Madame de Rionne to understand what was passing through his mind. She felt him tremble like a timid child, and

she almost regretted that she had troubled this hither to tranquil heart. A kind of coquetry came upon her, and she almost wished that he should always think of her as a noble and upright soul rather than as one who had been subject like others to human weakness.

“ I am speaking to you of sad things,” she continued, “ and I know not even if you understand me thoroughly. However, I must speak out, and you must forgive me. I am confessing to you as to a priest—a priest has, so to speak, no age ; he is only a soul that listens. You are now merely a child, and my words terrify you. When you are a man you will recollect them. They will teach you what a woman can suffer ; they will tell you what I expect of your devotion.”

At this point Daniel interrupted her.

“ Do you think I am a coward ? ” he asked. “ I am only ignorant. Life frightens me because I do not know it, and it appears all black to me. But I will enter it with a firm will if you are concerned in its purpose. Speak ! What is my mission to be ? ”

Blanche drew him near her and in a low voice, as if she was afraid of being overheard, she said :

“ You have seen my little girl, my poor Jeanne, who was playing here just now. She has just turned six. I am going away without knowing her, so to speak, without being able to tell whether there is good or bad in her. This uncertainty doubles my sufferings and makes death indeed awful to me. And I say to myself : I am leaving this child quite alone. I reflect that perhaps, like me, she will be wounded

by hard-hearted people, and maybe she will not have the courage to face life as I have faced it."

With a wave of her hand, the dying woman seemed to drive away a disturbing vision.

"I said to myself," she continued, "I should always be near her, preparing a happy life for her, training her heart. When I felt death coming I sought for someone to fill my place and I found none. My parents are dead. I have led a cloistered life. I have made no friends, and Monsieur de Rionne has only one sister, given up to luxury, in whom Jeanne would find a bad example, and I am terrified at the very thought of my husband taking charge of her. I have told you enough for you to understand the fear that seizes me when I contemplate my little girl falling into his hands. I wish to protect my child from him."

Once again she paused and then added :

"You see now, my friend, what your mission is. The task I give you is to watch over my child. I desire you to be as a guardian angel to her."

Daniel knelt down, and he trembled with emotion. He was unable to speak, and the only answer he could give, the only thanks he could give utterance to, was to kiss Madame de Rionne's hand.

"It is a hard task," she said as she went on, "I am imposing upon you. Death presses me close, and I must hurry on without knowing how much you will be able to accomplish. I dare not think of difficulties in store for you, or the strange part you will have to play. Heaven has been good in sending you here,

and in granting this consolation to my heart. And heaven will still be kind, and help you in your trust, and guard you in your perils. Only, remember my last wish, and walk firmly on. I trust to your devotion."

At last Daniel, full of emotion, was able to speak.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" he exclaimed. "Now I shall truly live. How good of you to have thought of me, to have had confidence in me! You shower benefits upon me even to the last."

A motion from Blanche interrupted him.

"Let me finish. My pride prevented me from withholding my money from my husband; what he asked me for I granted him. At the present moment I have no idea how we stand. No doubt my daughter will be poor, and it is almost pleasant for me to think so. I only regret that I cannot leave you any money."

"Regret nothing," cried Daniel. "I will work. Heaven will provide for all."

The dying woman was failing fast. Her head slid on to the pillow; but, speaking with difficulty, she continued:

"So all goes well. I have opened my heart to you; now I feel calm, now I can die content. You will watch over Jeanne; you will be a friend to her; you must protect her against the world. Follow her, step by step, as closely as possible; keep her from danger, awaken every good quality of her heart. But, above all, marry her to a worthy man; then your task will be accomplished. When a woman marries a bad man, as I know to my cost, the solitude of

desertion is fearful, and it requires great determination not to make a mistake and fall. Whatever happens, do not forsake her. Remember constantly that your good angel, on her death-bed, besought you to be faithful to your mission. Do you swear it ? ”

“ I swear it,” murmured Daniel, ’midst suffocating sobs.

Blanche closed her eyes like a child going to sleep, then she slowly opened them again.

“ All this is terrible, my child,” she murmured. “ I know not what the future has in store for you ; I foresee, however, great obstacles. But, nevertheless, heaven, as you said, will provide for everything. . . . Kiss me.”

Daniel, confused, bent over her and set his quivering lips on the pale forehead of Madame de Rionne. The poor woman, with closed eyes, smiled faintly, while receiving that solemn kiss of devotion and love.

Night had now quite set in ; the stars could be seen twinkling in the clear sky. A sound of footsteps was heard and a chambermaid entered, bearing a lamp ; she drew near the dying woman.

“ Here is your husband, madame,” said she.

And as Daniel returned to his place in the window recess, Monsieur de Rionne came in, terror-stricken.

CHAPTER II

BLANCHE was born in the south near Marseilles. At twenty-three years of age she married Monsieur de Rionne. She had a noble heart, and with a foreknowledge of the miseries of the world she made a rigid and lofty rule of conduct for herself. Her strength lay in her upright principles, and fully-determined will. She married to comply with her father's wish, without seeking to know Monsieur de Rionne, saying to herself, with a sort of innocent pride, that she would, if necessary, learn how to suffer patiently and keep her self-respect ; and she did so. Her husband was indeed a fascinating man, wonderfully polite and elegant, but really a miserable creature, who might have been good, but who preferred remaining bad.

He had a deplorable weakness : a profound cowardice with respect to vice. Yet with all that, his sentiments were the most beautiful in the world, and his heart was open to every kind of pity. He did evil with full consciousness, without any shame, and he knew equally well how to do good, when he chose. But doing good had no interest for him.

He toyed at first with his wife, as he would have toyed with a mistress. She was charming ; she had

about her a perfume of virtue and modesty that he inhaled for the first time in his life. Afterwards his wife palled upon him. In this delicate creature he found so strong a will and such calm nobility that in the end he grew almost to be afraid of her. In the cowardice of his heart he began to hate this unconquerable courage. So as not to appear weak before Blanche, he avoided her more and more ; he set up hard comparisons in his conscience with the beautiful character of his wife ; and there was nothing he dreaded so much as the disagreeable voice of remorse which constantly disturbed him in his gaieties. He resumed his old habits of frivolity and pursuit of loose pleasures, forgetting as quickly as possible that he had a family, and ties that should bind him close.

Blanche had certainly loved this man, even though it had been but for a brief period. Afterwards she despised him, and the wound in her heart had, as it were, been seared by a hot iron. Nothing but deep regret was left. She had reckoned on her courage, and her courage gave her heart nothing but a terrible feeling of emptiness. She still remained high-principled, above the shameful things which surrounded her ; but her heart bled in that severe loneliness, and she often longed to begin her life again.

Three years after her marriage her father and mother died and she was left an orphan. She no longer had a single relation who could render her any help. Then she endured a bitter loneliness, and took a kind of pleasure in shutting herself up with her

year-old daughter. This child brought her, under another form, all the tender joys of love. One object of affection is enough to fill an existence, and for her the dear little one was the necessary and consoling object of affection.

For five years she lived this solitary life, alone with Jeanne. She allowed no one to come near her child, wishing to be her servant and friend, and in every way her guide. She took her out walking, played with her, gave her her first lessons, and so developed her mind and heart. Her own life practically dead, she only existed for and by her child.

What happy dreams she had during those long hours of voluntary solitude! Whilst Jeanne played at her feet she studied her in her first lispings. Naturally she wished her to be sincere at heart. She looked forward to being always able to help her, and to be for ever by her side as a counsellor and exemplar.

Then, her imagination taking flight, she saw her married and happy. She then transferred her dreams of happiness in thought to her daughter. She had never once thought that death could come and separate them. Oh, those happy days! And now death was about to take her, and Jeanne would remain alone. Her dreams had been false to her. She would not be able to let her gain by her own experience. Now she would not be able to develop her intelligence or guide her heart. To-morrow Jeanne would pass into the hands of her father—into the hands of a reckless, unreliable man, who cared not one iota for the legacy of the dead woman, his wife.

It thus happened that her soul was tranquilised in dictating to Daniel the testament of her love.

Whilst Madame de Rionne was dying, her husband was with Mademoiselle Julia, a ravishing creature, not the least wearisome, but wickedly pleasant withal. He knew full well that his wife was ill ; but in order that he himself should not suffer too much, he tried to consider the disease which was to carry her off as a slight indisposition, and he had succeeded in persuading himself that he could live his usual life without worrying himself in any way about her.

Such was the nature of this man, this good fellow, whose purse was always open. He would give a sovereign to a poor man, perhaps, but at the same time he would not have sacrificed any of his pleasures. He avoided all emotion, and cheated himself with that sophisticated conceit which makes all cowards and egotists self-deceivers. He had seen the doctor that morning, and repented that he had asked some questions, for the doctor told him frankly that death might come at any moment. At this blunt announcement he felt a dreadful chill flow through his blood. Death terrified him ; he could not bear to hear it spoken of without shuddering. Then the thought of his wife's death had rudely shown him all the vexations which would result from the mourning. It is true he would regain his liberty, but what a lot of worry and fuss there would be ; first the funeral, then compulsory abstention from all pleasure, and all the rest of it ! The dreaded idea of being pitied ; he trembled at the thought of any privation. His wife

could not die like that ; he said it was only a fortnight since she was well. He uttered these things in a dry, anxious, rapid tone, seeking to recover that happy equilibrium they wanted to rob him of.

At last, towards evening, he hurried to see Julia. Yet he was not perfectly reassured, and every now and then he turned round as if someone was there, bringing him bad news. However, at the end of half an hour he recovered his selfish serenity. His mistress's little blue drawing-room was a quiet corner where he could be at his ease. He went there as a dog goes to his kennel—because it was snug and warm.

But this day Julia was nervous, and in a capricious humour. She received him very coldly. He cared little for this, for what he loved in her were the faint perfumes from her body, her loosely-hanging clothes, her freedom of speech and caresses, and the disorder that reigned in her apartment. He joked with her, made himself at home, and forgot everything unpleasant. Notwithstanding, however, she continued to sulk. He spoke of taking a private box for her for the first night of a play at the theatre. He was about to shake off his feeling of *ennui* when a parlour-maid came in and said he was wanted as quickly as possible at home. Monsieur de Rionne was stupified. A violent remorse seized his heart. He dared not embrace his mistress, and hurried off after merely shaking hands. But on the staircase he thought to himself he might just as well have embraced her. The truth was, he was afraid he had offended her, and

that he would not be able to go back later when he should have done with this deplorable business.

Below he found Louis, his *valet-de-chambre*—a great, fair, frigid fellow, whom he had made his tool. Louis had the merit of never showing any emotion outwardly, never speaking, and never hearing anything he was not wanted to. He was a most excellent machine, which worked when it was wound up. But, looked at closely, there was a suspicion of a smirk on his lips, which showed that the machine had certain secret wheels working on their own account.

Louis simply informed his master that he had heard Mademoiselle Jeanne running about the house calling for her father. He had thought madame was dying, and he had also thought he might come and disturb him.

Monsieur de Rionne felt quite upset; tears of fear and pain welled into his eyes. It was a selfish, personal suffering which tortured him. Had he been questioned he would have exposed the truth that grief for his wife had no place in the depths of his despair.

However, in good faith, he lied to himself: he had the consolation of thinking that he was really weeping at Blanche's approaching death, and thus he arrived home, suffering but rebellious.

When he entered the room where the sick woman lay in agony, he was seized with faintness. His brain no longer retained a vision of Julia's little blue room, but his flesh had kept a remembrance of it, and having just left that perfumed retreat, it quivered in

this great gloomy apartment through which was passing the cold breath of death.

He drew near the bed, and when he saw the pale face of the dying woman he burst into tears. He thought of Julia out there in her big armchair, sulking 'midst her waving curls, with a look half-cross, half-smiling. Here in the soft dim light, he saw Blanche, her head resting on her pillow, her eyes closed, and her features already contracted by the cold finger of death. She lay and looked like a marble figure.

Monsieur de Rionne stood one moment speechless before that motionless face, which yet had a significant and terrible eloquence for him. Then, thinking that some sign of life would calm his anguish—he longed to see her part her tightened lips—he bent over her in a trembling voice and said :

“Blanche ! Do you hear me ? Speak to me, I beg of you.”

The face of the dying woman twitched slightly, and she raised her eyelids. Her eyes, unnaturally bright, wandered here and there. They looked about in a dazed kind of way, resting at length on Monsieur de Rionne. He had never seen anyone die, and, as he had never known genuine sorrow—sorrow that drives one to frantically embrace the corpse of a loved one—he analysed the horror of death. He was thinking of himself, reflecting that he too would die one day, and that he would be like that.

Blanche fixed her eyes on her husband, and recognised him. She sighed, and tried to smile.

In that last hour an idea of forgiveness was taking possession of her. Yet she was battling with herself. The bitterness of her married life was recalled to her, and in order to be gentle with him, she was obliged to fancy that she was already dead, that earthly miseries no longer weighed her down. Moreover, she did not remember asking anyone to summon her husband.

At one moment, finding no one in whom to confide, she had the idea of exacting a vow from him. Now that she had poured out her heart, and been able to set a guardian over her daughter, she no longer felt the need of this reassurance.

Her husband was there, and she was rather surprised at it. She looked on him without rancour, as a person whom one knows, and on whom one smiles before departing on a journey.

Then, as sensibility gradually returned, she recollected herself and almost pitied this man, rendered so unworthy by cowardice. She became full of compassion for him.

"My friend," said she, and her words came in a faint whisper, "you did well to come. I shall die more at peace."

Monsieur de Rionne, much affected by this gentle remark, wept afresh.

Blanche continued without noticing :

"Do not despair. I no longer suffer. I am at peace. I am happy. I have only one wish, and that is to wipe out all dissension that may have existed between us. I do not wish to carry away with me ill thoughts of you, and I do not desire you to have

the least remorse when I am gone. If I have caused you offence, forgive me, as I have forgiven you."

These words acted very sensibly on Monsieur de Rionne's nerves, and his heart felt as if it would for the moment break. His impatience of grief was over for the time. "I have nothing to forgive you," he stammered. "You are good. I regret that the difference of our characters should have separated us from each other. You see I weep. I am in despair."

Blanche looked at him as he struggled to address her. He seemed to her a pitiful object. This man could not find one word of condemnation for himself. He besought her in no way to grant him forgiveness. He was simply intoxicated with fear.

She realised that if God had spared her, by a miracle, the very next day he would have resumed his old way of life, and deserted her afresh. But she was dying, and her death taught him no lesson; it was merely a lamentable accident at which he was obliged to assist.

She began smiling again, looking him full in the face, subduing him by her will.

"Bid me good-bye," she said. "I have no ill-will towards you; I swear it. Later this assurance will perhaps be a consolation to you. I trust it will."

And as she ceased speaking—"What are your last wishes?" asked Monsieur de Rionne.

"I have none," she answered, quietly. "I have nothing to ask of you, nothing to give you advice about. Act according to the dictates of your own heart."

She would not speak to him of their daughter.

She thought it might be unfair to extract vows from him which he would not keep. So then, in a still softer voice she repeated, "Good-bye—do not distress yourself," and with a motion of her hand waved him slowly away, closing her eyes in order not to see him any more. He retired to the foot of the bed, powerless to withdraw his looks from such a terrible sight.

The servants had gone to fetch the doctor, and he had just arrived, knowing, however, that his attendance would be of no avail. An old priest, who had ministered to the dying woman in the morning, had also arrived. He knelt down, and was reciting in quiet tones the prayers for the dying.

Blanche grew weaker and weaker. The end was near. But she raised herself up abruptly and asked for her daughter. As Monsieur de Rionne did not stir, Daniel, who had remained silent, keeping back his tears, ran and fetched Jeanne, who was in the midst of her games in the next room. The poor mother, with distended eyes, as if she were out of her mind, gazed at her daughter, and endeavoured to hold out her arms to her. But she failed to raise them, and Daniel was obliged to hold Jeanne up, with her feet resting on the wooden sides of the bed.

The child did not cry. She looked at her mother's disordered face with a sort of innocent astonishment. Then, as that face grew calmer—it seemed to fill with heavenly joy, and shone with tenderness—the little girl recognised her sweet smile, and she also began to smile, holding out her little hands.

So Blanche died, a smile on her own face and on that of her child. She fixed her last look on Daniel—a look at once of supplication and command. He was supporting Jeanne ; his mission had begun.

Monsieur de Rionne knelt down by the body of his wife, remembering that it was the custom on such occasions. The doctor had just left, and one of the watchers hastened to light two candles. The priest, who had risen to offer the crucifix to Blanche's lips, resumed his prayers.

Daniel kept Jeanne in his arms, and as the atmosphere of the room became stifling, he took up his position by the window of a neighbouring room. There he wept in silence, whilst the child amused herself by watching the rapidly passing lamps of the carriages on the boulevard.

The air outside was still. In the distance the clarions of the Ecole Militaire could be heard sounding the tattoo.

CHAPTER III

TOWARDS morning Daniel again went up to his room. This big fellow of eighteen had the heart of a child. The peculiar circumstances under which he found himself had deeply stirred his affectionate disposition. He made himself laughable by his youth and devotion.

It will, no doubt, have been recognised by this time that he was the orphan mentioned in the *Semaphore*. Blanche de Rionne, the young unknown protector, had had him educated, and when he grew older, put him to the Lycée at Marseilles. She made it a rule not to see him often, wishing that he should barely know her, and should only, so to speak, have Providence to thank for his position.

When she married she did not even speak to Monsieur de Rionne of her adopted child. This was one of her many secret good works.

At the Lycée Daniel's awkward manners, joined to the timidity of an orphan, drew upon him the ridicule of his companions, and he was deeply wounded at being treated as a pariah. Then his gait became yet more ungainly. He was left alone, and thus he kept all his early innocence. He escaped all those first lessons in vice that youths of fifteen

and upwards, in France particularly, impart to each other.

He was ignorant of everything, and had no knowledge of life whatever. In the loneliness created by his awkwardness an ardent love of study had seized him.

His quick and emotional intellect, which should have made him a poet, drove him, by a seeming contradiction, to the study of science, for in his nature there was a deep desire for truth.

He discovered a profound joy in seeking step by step the solution of some intricate problem in mathematics, and thus in a way he made poetry. He withdrew into himself and Nature, and circumstances led him to a life of meditation.

He was at home in science, for in its pursuit he had nothing to do with men ; he had nothing to do with schoolmates, who laughed at his yellow hair. All human society terrified him ; he loved better to live higher up in the regions of pure speculation, of absolute truth. There he could theorise poetically at his ease ; he was no longer encumbered by his awkwardness of person. These scholars—these aged children of timid manners whom one meets in the streets—are sometimes great poets.

Railed at by his companions, his nerves always highly strung, Daniel hid away his affections in the recesses of his heart. All he had to love in this world was that unknown mother who watched over him, and he had loved her with all the intensity of passion which is centred on one object alone. Side

by side with the poet-mathematician there was the passionate adorer, with an affection which grew in warmth the more it was repulsed. Daniel's adoration of the good fairy had grown with years and made his existence sweet for him. The obscurity in which she kept herself made her all the more saintly to him. He knew her face thoroughly from having met her two or three times, and he spoke of her as he would of something wonderful and sacred.

One day, when he was almost eighteen, as he was leaving the Lycée, he was told that Madame de Rionne had sent for him to be with her in Paris. He nearly went out of his mind with joy, for now he would be able to see her freely, to thank and love her, at his ease.

The wild dream of his youth was about to be realised ; the good fairy, the saint, his providence, was admitting him into the heaven where she dwelt, and so he started in all haste.

He arrived and found Madame de Rionne in her bed, dying. Every evening, for eight days, he went down to the rooms she occupied ; he gazed at her from a distance and wept. He thus awaited the terrible end, intoxicated with grief, unable to understand how it happened that saints could be mortal and die.

Then at last he had knelt down at her bedside and solemnly promised the dying woman that her last wish should be carried out.

He passed the night near the body, in the company of the watcher. Monsieur de Rionne had

remained on his knees an hour, and afterwards discreetly retired.

Whilst the priest prayed and the watcher rested in an easy chair, Daniel was in dreamland, with dry eyes, unable to weep. He felt crushed, but was in that quiet, tranquil state, without pain, similar to the light drowsiness that precedes sleep. He grasped nothing distinctly, and every now and then his thoughts wandered. For nearly ten hours one idea alone filled his brain : Blanche was dead, and henceforth little Jeanne would be the saint whom he would love, to whom he would give his devotion.

But, unconsciously, during that long, mournful night his courage was rapidly maturing ; he was becoming a man indeed.

The terrible scene at which he had assisted, the despair which had so deeply shaken him, all this stern education in suffering had killed the timidity of childhood in him. In his oppression he dimly felt this working of sorrow ; he yielded to the force which was transforming him, and ripening, in a few hours, his heart and mind.

In the morning, when he went back to his room, he was like a drunken man who could not recognise the place he lived in. The long, narrow room had only a window which opened in the slanting roof, whence one could see the tops of the trees of the esplanade, like a lake of verdure ; further on, to the left, could be seen the heights of Passy. The window had remained open, a bright light filled the room, and it felt almost cold.

Daniel sat down on the edge of his bed. He was ready to drop with fatigue, but did not dream of going to rest. He remained thus a long time, forgetting himself, whilst staring at the furniture, asking himself now and then what he was doing there, and suddenly remembering all.

At times he listened, astonished, wondering why he did not hear himself weeping. Then he went and stood at the window, and the air refreshed him. Not a sound came up from the house. Below, in the little garden, there were people silently hurrying about. On the boulevard the carriages rolled along as if nothing sorrowful had taken place in the night.

Paris was slowly awakening, and now a pale sunlight whitened the topmost leaves of the trees. The joyful aspect of the sky, the heedlessness of the city, saddened Daniel profoundly, and gave him an excuse to weep again. It was a salutary crisis, which made his head feel lighter. He remained at the window in the fresh air, trying to reflect as to what he should do.

Then he understood that as yet nothing rational would come to his brain, and decided to occupy himself mechanically. He moved several objects from one place to another, ferreted in his trunk, took out some clothes, which he put back again directly afterwards.

His head began to grow less painful. When night came once more he was quite surprised. He could have sworn the day had only just begun. He had remained shut up, pondering on one idea only,

and that long day of suffering seemed quite short. He left his room and tried to eat ; then he wished to see Madame de Rionne once more. He could not, however, gain admittance to the death chamber. So, going up again to his own room, he fell into a heavy sleep, which overpowered him till very late the next day.

When he awoke he heard a suppressed murmur of voices. The funeral carriages were about to leave the house. He hastily dressed himself and went downstairs. On the way he met the coffin, which four men could just manage. It gave out a dull sound at every concussion.

At the start there was some confusion on the boulevard. The followers were numerous, and the procession was only slowly organised.

Monsieur de Rionne put himself at the head of it, accompanied by his brother-in-law. His sister, a young woman, whose eyes wandered freely over the crowd, entered another carriage. Immediately behind Monsieur de Rionne came the frequenters of the house, the servants, and Daniel took up his place amongst the latter. Then the remainder of the followers came in groups, in irregular file.

Thus S. Clothilde—the church, surrounded by flowers and verdure—was reached. The nave filled up, and the choir began chanting.

Daniel knelt down in a corner near a chapel. He was calm now and could pray. But he could not follow the priest's prayers ; his lips remained closed—his prayer was only a passionate cry of the heart.

At one moment he felt faint, and was obliged to go out. The odour of the wax, the plaintive melody of the chants, oppressed and suffocated him. Outside he walked slowly about on the sandy paths of the little plot of ground which surrounds the church. Every now and then he stopped and gazed at the verdure-clad masonry. His heart, however, still wept, and sent forth its ardent prayer. When the hearse and carriages started on the last journey he went and placed himself among the servants again.

The procession reached the boulevards, and took the direction of the cemetery of Mont Parnasse.

The morning air was soft, and the sun, shining on the early leaves of the great elms, painted them green. The horizon was clearly defined in the fresh, limpid atmosphere. One might say that the winter rains had so washed the earth that now it radiated freshness and cleanliness.

Those who followed the body of Madame de Rionne to the grave that bright morning had for the most part forgotten that they were assisting at a funeral. Smiles were seen on many of the faces. One would have said they were merely taking a stroll and basking in the sun, enjoying the sweetness of spring.

The procession slowly advanced in groups, growing yet more irregular, and the uneven sounds of footsteps and the increasing hum of conversation was heard.

Everyone talked with his neighbour of his private affairs, and gradually all breathed more freely and grew cheerful.

Daniel, his eyes fixed on the ground, bareheaded, stricken dumb with grief, was dreaming of the mother whom he had just lost ; he was recalling memories of his childhood, conjuring up the most minute details of the night of her death ; to him it was a sad, profound vision, in which he lost himself.

And yet his ears, in spite of himself, heard what the servants were talking about. . . . His brain took in the brutally plain words. . . . He did not want to listen, but not one word escaped him. Whilst his poor heart was bleeding, whilst he was giving himself over wholly to despair at the solemn farewell he had taken of one whom he adored, he was compelled to overhear the cynical conversation of the valets and coachmen. Just behind him there happened to be two servants carrying on an animated discussion. One sided with monsieur, one with madame.

“ Pooh ! ” said the latter ; “ the best thing the poor woman could do was to die. She ought to be happy in her coffin. She had a hard life with monsieur.”

“ What do you know about it ? ” asked the former. “ She was always smiling. Her husband did not beat her. She was proud, and posed as a victim in order to make others suffer.”

“ I know what I know. I have seen her crying bitterly. Her husband did not beat her, certainly, but he kept mistresses ; and see here, she most assuredly died of grief, because he no longer loved her.”

“ If he left her it was because she wearied him. Madame was not amusing. I could not live with a woman like that. She was quite short, but so serious that she seemed quite tall. I would wager that she herself spread the report that monsieur kept mistresses.”

“ Have you seen them—these mistresses—yourself? ”

“ I have seen one of them. I delivered a letter to her. A fair, untidy baggage. She laughed in my face. She dug me in the ribs familiarly, and that made me understand very well what she was. And all the answer she gave me was, ‘ Do not forget to tell your master not to send your stupid carcass here again.’ ”

The other servant set off giggling. No doubt, he found the fair baggage very amusing. “ Well, after all, what is the damage? ” added he. “ It is the privilege of rich men to have mistresses. At my last place, as the master went out too often, the wife had taken a lover, and the whole establishment got on comfortably. Why should not madame have done as much instead of dying? ”

“ That does not suit everyone. For my own part I could not have cared for madame.”

“ For myself I believe I could have loved her. She was very sweet, and had an appearance which gained on one. She was indeed a mistress, attractive in a very different way from monsieur’s fair one.”

Daniel could not endure any more of this. He

turned sharply round, and his irritated look frightened the chatterers, who began talking of other things.

But the young man had noticed at his side the immovable face of Louis, the valet. He alone kept up a decent demeanour. He had certainly overheard the conversation of the two servants, and had remained dignified, his lips slightly curled with his mysterious smile.

Daniel resumed his sad dreamings. Now he remembered the hidden suffering of which Madame de Rionne had spoken, and he began to understand what that suffering must have been. The words he had just heard explained what in his child-like innocence had been obscure to him before, and he bowed his head in shame at the infamy, as if he had himself committed it. He told himself inwardly that it was enough to make her indignant, even in her coffin.

What wounded him above all was the outrageous freedom of speech of these men. Her body was barely cold, it was being carried to its last resting place, and here were men who seemed to delight in besmirching her. Nothing was more cruel to him than this first lesson in the world's viciousness and vice, received at the burial of his beloved saint.

As he pondered on these things the hearse and carriages entered the cemetery.

The family of Rionne had a marble vault in the form of a Gothic chapel. This tomb was situated in a part where the monuments almost touched each other, leaving room only for narrow paths between.

The attendance of people was much smaller than that at the church, but those who had the courage to come so far made a circle round the grave.

Monsieur de Rionne drew near, and the priests recited the prayers for the departed. Then the body was lowered into the grave. The sorrowing husband had burst into tears at the sight of the little Gothic chapel. When quite a child he had followed his father and mother there, and it had always been a terrifying object to him, which came back and haunted him in his dark moments. He knew it was there that his body would come to crumble and decay, and the idea made the sight of it terrible to him.

He gave a sigh of relief when he was again seated in the carriage. The funeral ceremony was over at last, and he would now be able to forget all about it. Not that anyone would really confess to such thoughts, but nevertheless they are there at the bottom of every coward's heart. The rest of the followers had gone away, but Daniel still stood before the grave. He wished to remain last, that he might be alone with the dear dead one, to bid farewell to her without the intervening crowd between her and himself. He stood perfectly still for a long time, conversing in spirit with the soul of the angel who had fled.

Then he left the cemetery and returned to the house. He fancied he noticed the porter looking at him in a peculiar way. One might have imagined that he was hesitating whether he should admit him, and was on the point of asking him his name, as if he were a stranger.

In the little garden situated between the gate and the mansion, the servants, still dressed in mourning, were gossiping ; in front of the stables, a groom, who had not been at the funeral, was washing a carriage with a big sponge. Daniel, who from timidity avoided passing up the big path, made a round and advanced to the group of servants. On seeing him the conversation suddenly ceased, and he saw every eye turned on him. Malicious sneers showed themselves on cloddish faces ; some of them cackled and pointed at the poor boy, who reddened without knowing why. As he drew near, he instinctively felt their hostility towards him. The two men on whom he had imposed silence at the funeral by his irritated looks were there also among their companions, and speaking in a low voice to each other as if stirring up the others. This sudden silence was quickly followed, however, by raised voices and a storm of words uttered in an aggrieved tone.

Daniel, red with shame, stopped and asked himself if he should not retreat ; then the thought of Madame de Rionne came to him, and he walked bravely on. As he passed he heard ironical laughter, and cruel words lashed him, so to speak, in the face. Everyone had their say.

“ Look at the handsome page-boy madame had there ! ”

“ And that creature has been well educated ! Whilst we have to toil like niggers this barefooted rascal does nothing for his living. ”

“ Yes, we have been obliged to wait on his lordship, but this is all at an end.”

“ Chuck him out, the beggar ! ”

And as Daniel passed before the man who was washing the carriage, the man called out : “ Hi, mate, come and give us a paw ! ” The whole crowd burst out laughing.

Daniel had passed by, shuddering. These men recalled the schoolmates who insulted him. He felt himself deserted, as of old, and hastened to take refuge in solitude. His delicate sensitiveness was cut to the quick by the brutal words of these wretches, who, thinking they could do so with impunity, satisfied their base rancour. Then, seized with indignation, he retraced his footsteps, and looked these insolent fellows straight in the face. The men began to fear they had gone a little too far, they were silent, and rather embarrassed, ready to cringe even, if necessary. The young man fixed them thus, in silence, with an open, straightforward look. Then he walked on and, almost fainting after that moment's energetic action, slowly ascended the staircase.

On the second landing he met Monsieur de Rionne coming down. He drew back against the wall. The master of the house, who barely knew him, stared at him, wondering what this strange youth wanted in his house.

Daniel did not mistake that look. He understood its dumb enquiry ; and, if he did not speak, it was because his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and besides, he could find nothing to say.

Monsieur de Rionne, who seemed very disturbed himself, did not stop, and Daniel hastened to go up to his room.

When there a grievous fact presented itself to him—how could he possibly remain in the house? He had not thought of that, and the idea of leaving was very painful. He laughed a melancholy laugh when he considered the matter, and felt he was certainly very simple-minded. His dear angel-mother was no longer there, and he would certainly be forcibly put out at the door if he refused to leave with a good grace.

Out there in the garden he could still hear the laughter of the servants, and a damp sweat broke out on his forehead. He made up his mind to go away at once.

He sat down in a dream. He was not thinking about himself, and gave no heed as to where he should sleep that night, or what he would do on the morrow. He cared little: he had all the courageous heedlessness of childhood.

Not knowing life, he proposed going right forward, always right forward. Then he thought of Jeanne, and with bitterness asked himself of what assistance he could be to her when he left the house for good. Necessity was driving him out, whilst the dead woman's wish seemed to keep him here 'midst offence and ignominy. Then he understood that it could not be. Madame de Rionne had commanded him to walk with head erect, and ever dignified. Above all, he must get away, and after that he would seek means to accomplish his task. Then he got up.

His trunk was open, showing his clothes and linen that he had not yet had time to put in the cupboard. The table was covered with books and papers, and on a corner of the mantelpiece lay a purse containing a little money.

He disarranged nothing—took nothing with him. The words of the insolent servants still rang in his ears, and now these things did not seem to belong to him. He would have looked on himself as a thief if he had taken away the smallest object.

He went out quite quietly, taking nothing but the clothes he stood up in, leaving the key in the lock of the door.

As he crossed the garden he perceived little Jeanne playing on the path, and was unable to resist the temptation of embracing her before leaving.

The child was frightened, and drew back. Then he asked her if she remembered him. She looked at him without answering. That strange-looking being smiling at her astonished her exceedingly, and no doubt she was trying to call him to mind. Then, as it seemed to worry her, she showed signs of getting up and running away as quickly as possible. Daniel held her gently back.

“As you do not recognise me,” said he, “take a good look at me. Believe me, I love you very much, and it would make me very happy if you could love me ever so little. I wish to be your friend.”

Jeanne could not understand much of this serious speech, but the tenderness of his voice reassured her. She began to laugh happily.

“ You must always recognise me now,” added Daniel, laughing also. “ I am about to go away, but I shall come back. I shall have all sorts of beautiful things to tell you about if you are good. Will you kiss me, as you kissed your mother ? ”

He bent down ; but the little one, when she heard her mother spoken of, began to cry. She pushed Daniel away with childish anger, and called, “ Mamma ! mamma ! ” as loud as her tears would let her. The poor young man stood petrified, but as a servant came out of the house he moved away, deeply wounded at thus leaving the child to whose happiness he was about to devote his whole life.

He found himself in the street stripped of everything, with a heavy task before him to accomplish. His affection and devotion alone sustained him. It was four o'clock in the afternoon.

CHAPTER IV

As the gates of the mansion closed behind Daniel they made a dull, grinding noise. He looked about him without seeing anything, and then began to walk with bowed head, musing, and not knowing where his steps would lead him. The crying of Jeanne and the noise of the closing gates still echoed in his ears. He kept on saying to himself that the child neither recognised nor loved him, and that the gates groaned in a most extraordinary way as he left.

So far grief had filled his whole being ; reason had fled. Now reason was returning, was speaking, and he could judge clearly, his position appeared to him in its true light at last. A painful astonishment seized him at the reality. He put himself boldly face to face with his task. He saw himself on one side, mean and wretched, on the other with the delicate mission he had to carry out, and he trembled.

His mission was this : He had the charge of a soul in his hands, he had to fight against the world and conquer it, he had to watch over a woman's heart and secure her happiness. To do that, he would go everywhere his protégée went ; he would

keep near her constantly so that he might defend her against others and against herself.

He must therefore rise to her level and even put himself above her level. He would live in the same house as she did, or at least would be admitted as a guest in the house she frequented. He would be a man of the world and thus would he be able to fight the world advantageously for her.

Then he thought of himself and judged himself. He was ugly, timid, awkward, poor. He was now in the streets, without relations and without friends ; he did not even know where he should go to eat and sleep that night. The servants were right to treat him as a beggar, for when hunger drove him he might perhaps have to make up his mind and beg for alms. He saw himself tramping along and laughed at the pitiable figure he would cut, so ridiculous did he seem to himself.

And this was he, this vagabond, this child of misery and sorrow, he who was to be the protector of this little girl, clothed in silk, living in luxury and elegance. He told himself he must be dreaming, that he was out of his mind, that Madame de Rionne never could have entrusted her child to a poor devil like himself, and that, in any case, he would not attempt this absurd task.

Yet, thinking these things, he all the time ardently sought means to keep the vow he had made to the dying woman. Then his ideas took a new direction. Devotion and affection spoke louder in him than reason ; he lost sight of himself and became once

more a visionary. He regretted having left the mansion. Now he had come away, he knew not how to get in again. The noise of those gates had resounded in the depths of his heart, and he felt abashed.

He made a thousand extravagant projects, as children and lovers do. He found out measures to gain his end, but they were measures that could never be realised ; fixing on some new idea that surged in his brain, rejecting one impossible plan to immediately form one still more impossible.

But what recurred to his mind again and again was the bitter regret that he had not quietly carried off Jeanne in his arms. In his mind's eye he saw her once more playing on the gravel path, and persuaded himself that he could easily have stolen her. And, in the fullest simplicity, he constructed a romance out of this abduction. He saw himself flying with the child, pressing her to his bosom, and only stopping to take breath when far from the accursed house whence he had snatched her.

Then his face grew radiant. How sweet and easy became his sacrifice ! He saw himself living with Jeanne, he working and she entirely dependent on him ; he calling her his daughter and she calling him father. In the poverty, in the obscurity of that life, he pictured himself bestowing on her every virtue, making her upright and self-respecting. And he seemed to hear the passionate thanks of his good saint.

Suddenly Daniel paused, and a terrible idea

occurred to him : his mission was an outrageous one. Was it fit that a youth of his age should watch over a young girl ?

Truly, the passers-by would have laughed if they had known what was passing through his simple but kindly mind at that moment. The terrors of his school days were taking hold of him once more. What ! Must he always be a pariah ? There he was at the threshold of life, burdened with an extraordinary task, which would add still more to his gawkiness.

But this was a wicked thought, a quick insight into life as it really was, which could not long prevail with him. Little by little the expression of his face softened ; his thoughts grew more composed ; he became again the ignorant child he was before. He saw Madame de Rionne smiling, he heard her speaking, and forgetting everyone else, forgetting himself, he had nothing left but an ardent desire to be good and do good.

This flood of contradictory ideas which had rushed through his mind, this fierce strife had wearied his brain, and he could not obtain a clear grasp of things. So he rested on the firm conviction that he should act according to the true dictates of his heart, and that his work could not fail to be good, and so he left all else to Providence.

After that he came out of himself ; he became interested in outward objects ; he looked at the passers-by, and enjoyed the sweet freshness of the evening. Human life once more engaged his thoughts,

and he began to ask himself where he was going and what he ought to do.

Chance had led him in front of one of the Luxembourg gates, those which face the Rue Bonaparte. He entered the gardens and looked for a seat, for he was overpowered with fatigue.

Under the chestnut trees children were playing, running about and screaming. The nurses in their white dresses stood chatting together ; some of them were sitting down, and smiled as they listened to some men who were whispering to them.

All the little world of the public gardens came and went in the cool of the evening, strolling leisurely along and speaking in subdued voices. A dim greenish, transparent light flickered through the trees ; the canopy of leaves was low down, concealing the sky ; here and there the white statues could be seen glistening through the openings of the branches.

Daniel had great difficulty in finding an unoccupied seat. He ended by discovering one in an out-of-the-way corner, and he sat down with a sigh of satisfaction. At the other end of the seat a young man was reading. He raised his head, looked at the new-comer, and they exchanged a smile.

As the darkness increased the young man closed his book, and cast a careless look about him. Daniel, seized with sympathy, forgot his own affairs in order to follow every movement of his neighbour.

He was a fine young fellow, with a good figure and rather a stern-looking face. His eyes, opened to the full, looked straight ahead ; his determined lips had

about them an undefinable strength of loyalty, and one could read in his high forehead that he was a noble-hearted youth. He seemed to be about twenty. His white hands, his plain dress, and his serious demeanour indicated a laborious student.

After a few minutes he turned his head and fixed his straightforward and penetrating eyes on Daniel, who looked down, expecting to find on the other's face the mocking expression with which everyone greeted him. He felt the young man's curiosity burdensome, and expected to see a sneering expression on his lips. Then he grew bolder, and, looking up, saw nothing on his neighbour's face but a kind, friendly smile of encouragement.

Full of gratitude, he ventured to draw near and say to this unknown friend that it was a fine evening—that the Luxembourg garden was a delightful place for tired strollers.

Oh, those happy chats which spring out of a stray meeting, and sometimes end in life-long friendship! You meet once, chance brings you face to face, and then you are pouring out your heart in a sudden, unreflecting burst of confidence. You experience the fullest enjoyment in these accidental confessions; you find much sweetness in thus letting yourself go, as it were, in thus allowing a stranger to have a sudden insight into the recesses of your heart.

In a few minutes the two young men knew each other as if they had been together from infancy; they ended by sitting close together on the seat and laughing like brothers. Sympathy arises both from

similarity and dissimilarity of disposition. Daniel's new friend had, no doubt, been attracted towards him by his anxious-looking face, by his awkwardness, his gentle and strange looks. He who was strong and good-looking took pleasure in being kind to a pitiful creature.

And then, after having conversed together, they felt they were brothers for life. Both were orphans ; both had chosen to take up the bitter search for truth by the path of science ; both could only depend on their own resources. In this they were alike, and the ideas of the one awakened similar notions in the spirit of the other.

Daniel, in the course of conversation, related his story, taking care, however, not to speak of the task for which he was henceforth to live. Besides he had no need to do violence to himself ; he had stored away his devotion at the bottom of his heart and he kept it there far from everyone's sight.

He learned that his companion was struggling bravely with poverty. Having arrived in Paris without a sou, this youth of manly heart and powerful intellect determined to become one of the distinguished men of the age. Whilst waiting for an opportunity to distinguish himself, however, he endeavoured to gain a livelihood ; he earned a little money by doing menial work ; then in the evening he studied, sometimes even right through the night.

Whilst the two young men, with the freedom of youth, made confidants of one another, the darkness under the chestnut trees became deeper. Nothing

could be discerned but the white patches made by the caps and aprons of the nursery maids. Faint murmurings, mingled with laughter, floated through the twilight from the recesses of the garden.

Then the drums began to beat and the last stragglers made for the gates. Daniel and his companion rose up and, conversing as they went along, directed their steps towards the little gate which then faced the Royez-Collard Street.

Having reached the pavement of the Rue d'Enfer, they stopped a moment to continue their confidential talk. In the midst of a sentence the young man interrupted himself and enquired of his companion :

“ Where are you going ? ”

“ I do not know,” quietly answered Daniel.

“ How ? You have no home ; you do not know where to sleep ? ”

“ No.”

“ At least you have had food ? ”

“ I have not.”

They both burst out laughing. Daniel seemed to be very pleased.

Then the other said simply :

“ Come with me.”

And he conducted him to a little restaurant where he took his meals. The remains of a stew were made hot, and Daniel devoured it ravenously ; he had not eaten for two days.

Then his companion led him to the little room he occupied in the passage, Number 7 St. Dominique d'Enfer. The house no longer exists at the present

day. It was a huge lodging-house, with wide staircases and high narrow windows, that had formerly been used as a convent ; the garrets at the back overlooked large gardens with beautiful trees.

The two young people sat at the open window, looking at the dark shadows of the elms, and finished their mutual confidences. At midnight they were still talking earnestly together.

Daniel lay down to rest on a little couch, the covering of which was in tatters. When the lamp was put out his friend said :

“ By the by, my name is George Raymond. What is yours ? ”

“ Mine,” said he, “ mine is Daniel Raimbault.”

CHAPTER V

IN the morning George presented Daniel to a sort of author-editor for whom he worked, and gained him admission as a fellow-helper in the compiling of an Encyclopædic Dictionary that some thirty young men were engaged upon. They were there under the title of clerks ; they were, in fact, hacks and ghosts. They compiled work for ten hours per day, and received eighty to a hundred francs a month, according to their rate of progress. The chief walked about the offices with the air of a schoolmaster overlooking his pupils ; he did not even read the manuscripts, but merely signed his name at the foot of everything. This profession of overseer of galley slaves brought him in about twenty thousand francs a year.

Daniel accepted with joy and gratitude the brute labour offered him. George, who had advanced some little money, all his savings indeed, opened an account for him at the little restaurant, and hired a small room close by his own for him in the house of the " Impasse St. Dominique d'Enfer."

During the first fortnight Daniel was, as it were, crushed by the new life he was leading, for he was not used to such work. In the evening his head was full

of what he had been doing in the day. He no longer had any thoughts of his own.

One Sunday morning, as he had a free day all to himself, he was seized with an ardent longing to see Jeanne again. The night before he had dreamt of the poor dead one, and all his enthusiasm had come back to him.

He went out secretly, without giving George warning, and directed his steps towards the Boulevard des Invalides. He proceeded gaily along. His limbs had become stiff during the fortnight he had passed seated on a chair, turning over the pages of old books; he seemed to be taking a holiday like a schoolboy who must return to school on the morrow.

He cared little he said to himself. He was going to see Jeanne, and, like a child, he enjoyed the fresh air and exercise. Along the route from the Impasse St. Dominique d'Enfer to the Boulevard des Invalides everything presented a joyous aspect. There was not the least sadness, the slightest anxiety.

When he came to the gate of the mansion of Jeanne's father a sudden fear seized him. He asked himself what he should do when there, what he should say, and what they would say to him in return. He became faint-hearted. His difficulty above all was how to explain his visit. But, however, he would not stay for reflection, for he felt his courage oozing away, and he rang the bell boldly, though inwardly he was quaking all the time.

The gate opened, he crossed the garden, and, feeling that he had never looked more awkward, he

stopped at the first of the house steps. When he had taken his breath, he ventured to raise his eyes.

A violent noise of hammers was heard coming from the house. Workmen were repairing the door of the vestibule, and painters were fastened to the front of the house scraping the walls.

Daniel, astonished, perhaps even rather pleased, went up to a workman and asked him where Monsieur de Rionne was. The workman sent him to the porter, who informed him that Monsieur de Rionne had just sold the mansion, and that he now lived in the Rue de Provence.

The day after his wife's death the widower had begun to detest this abode of mourning. The odours of death still lingered in the rooms, and he shivered as he went downstairs, always imagining he heard the sound of the coffin bumping against the banisters. So he decided to move to another house as quickly as possible.

Then he reflected that the sale of the mansion would place a good round sum in his hands. Moreover, he was not sorry to leave the Boulevard des Invalides, and go and live in more fashionable quarters. So he hired the whole of a first floor and moved.

Daniel took down the new address, and, driven by his desire to see Jeanne, he proceeded towards the Rue de Provence.

But during his long walk his heart did not sing so gaily. The difficulties of his task, the uncertainties of life, rose up before him more threateningly than ever. A shower obliged him to take refuge in a doorway.

He resumed his journey through muddy streets and when he went up the sumptuous staircase of the house where Monsieur de Rionne lived, he noticed with horror that he had terribly dirty boots.

It was Louis who opened the door for him. His immovable face did not express the least surprise. One would have said that he did not recognise the young man, but there, in the corner of his lips, was that nearly imperceptible smile which never left him.

He informed Daniel politely that monsieur was out, but that he would not be long before he returned ; and he showed him into a magnificent drawing-room, where he left him.

Daniel did not dare to sit down. His feet made great stains on the carpet, and he remained planted there in one spot, afraid to take one step forward, for his heart failed him at each new mark he left behind him. Raising his eyes he saw himself full length in a big mirror. Nothing seemed more strange to him than his own person, and it almost made him light-hearted again.

Really he was almost delighted at the turn things were taking. He was by no means anxious to see Monsieur de Rionne, and hoped that he would be able to embrace Jeanne, and then go quickly away before her father came in. He listened anxiously, and if he had by chance heard the child's laughter he would quietly have made his way to her.

Whilst his eyes were thus on the alert the bell rang, and he heard the rustling of a silk dress in the ante-chamber. There was a woman's laugh, and the

newcomer began talking in low tones to Louis. The exact words did not reach the young man.

At the expiration of a minute or two the silk dress was heard lightly rustling again, the drawing-room door opened and a young woman came in. It was Julia. She was ravishingly dressed in light grey, with white lace and ribbons of pale blue. Her little head, with its sharp, bold features was attractively surrounded by fair hair. The powder and paint with which she had covered her face gave her a kind of wicked charm. Her hat consisted of tresses of straw with blue flowers inserted.

Julia was in difficulties. They were about to sell up her furniture, and she had remembered Monsieur de Rionne, whom she had not seen for a fortnight. Driven by necessity she had run to him for assistance, and it had made her furious.

She advanced, and when she was in the middle of the drawing-room in front of Daniel, the effort she made to restrain herself from bursting into laughter nearly suffocated her. This hulking fellow, with the long face and yellow hair, who stood there with legs apart, quite dumbfounded, seemed to her an object of the utmost absurdity and strangeness. She was choking with amusement.

She hurried into an adjacent room where Daniel heard her laughing as if she were mad. Then came the sound of another bell ; this time it was Monsieur de Rionne coming in. He exchanged a few words with Louis ; then suddenly he flew into a passion. He opened the door of the drawing-room violently.

Daniel shrunk back out of sight, whilst asking himself the terrible question : What should he say, and what would be the answer? He had taken refuge in a corner, in an agony of suspense. Monsieur de Rionne did not see him. He hastily crossed the room and went into the adjoining apartment, to Julia. For the moment he was truly indignant at her audacity. His wife's body seemed to be still in the house and he made a virtue of his mourning.

Daniel, without wishing to listen, overheard these words pronounced in a high pitch :

"What do you want here?" demanded Monsieur de Rionne, in a furious tone of voice.

"I have come to pay you a visit," quietly answered Julia.

"You know I have forbidden you to come here ; you ought to come here less than ever, considering that I am in mourning."

"Would you like me to go away?"

Monsieur de Rionne appeared not to have heard her. He raised his voice still more.

"Your presence here is totally out of place. I thought you had more feeling and more common-sense than to come at such a time."

"Well, I will be off," and she began to move as if to go away, giving little taps on her skirt with her parasol. Meanwhile Monsieur de Rionne grew more enraged, and kept on repeating over and over again that she ought not to have shown herself at his house, whilst she kept on offering to go. He did not cease abusing her, but she did not go away.

Then their voices calmed down, their sentences became longer, their voices softer ; soon there was nothing but a murmur. Daniel at last heard the slight noise of a kiss.

He wished to remain no longer. He went back to the ante-chamber, where he found Louis, who said to him in a dignified way, without a smile on his face :

“ I do not think monsieur will receive you to-day.”

Daniel had already opened the door.

“ Is Mademoiselle Jeanne at home ? ” asked he.

Louis was so astonished at this question that he very nearly lost his imperturbable calm.

“ Oh, no ! she is with her aunt, Madame Tellier.”

And when Daniel asked him that lady's address he gave it him. She was residing in the Rue d'Amsterdam.

Monsieur de Rionne felt that he could not possibly keep his daughter near him. Besides, he was not sorry to be rid of a witness of his movements, who might afterwards have been in his way. So he left her to take her chance with his sister, without troubling himself about her future.

“ She will be better off with you,” he said to Madame Tellier ; “ a woman is necessary to the education of a girl. If I had had a boy I would have looked after him myself.” But he was lying ; what he fervently wished for was full freedom to do as he pleased.

Daniel went away, repeating to himself the address just given him. He was dying of fatigue and hunger, but he would not rest a moment, and hurried on to the Rue d'Amsterdam.

The shower had cleared the air, a bright sun was shining, and the pavements were dry again. The young man rubbed the mud off his boots and the bottom of his trousers, and wiped away the marks of rain on his hat.

Madame Tellier lived in one of those big new houses, with wide, plain fronts, ornamented with sculpture. The high, narrow carriage entrance opened on to a courtyard, where there was just room for a bed of flowers.

Daniel boldly advanced up the carriage entrance. But as he was passing through he was very nearly crushed by a landau, which suddenly came out with a clattering noise, and he only just had time to take refuge on the narrow path.

In the landau he noticed a lady of between twenty-five and thirty, who looked at him with contemptuous indifference. She was wonderfully dressed in a rich and elaborate costume. She resembled Julia, or at least tried to resemble her, in her fascinating look and the way she was bedecked.

Daniel went up to a parlourmaid who lingered on the doorsteps, watching the carriage driving away, and asked for Madame Tellier.

"She has gone out," answered the girl; "you saw her pass in her carriage."

Daniel stood confused. So, thought he, that extraordinarily-dressed lady is Jeanne's new mother; and at this thought he experienced a sickening sensation of fear.

At sixteen Monsieur de Rionne's sister had been a

very ambitious and decided young person, desirous of extracting every possible enjoyment out of existence. She had set the question of marriage before her like an arithmetical problem, and she had solved the problem with all the precision of a mathematician. With a clear brain she saw distinctly where her own interests lay. The world of morality was non-existent for her, and in no way guided her heart. She was thoroughly stupid about any matter of passion or sentiment, but very clever over the disposal of her person and fortune.

She had early grown to detest the nobility, the class in which she was born. She used to say that among such people the men simply devour everything, and the women very soon have no more than a miserable twenty dresses to put on. She looked down on her brother's establishment with a pitying condescension, and thought what a fool poor Blanche had been to marry a man who kept all the pleasures of life for himself. She had boldly married a tradesman, knowing full well that such a man would toil for her, and that she would be the only one to dip into his purse. And she did dip her hand into it deeply, knowing that it was practically inexhaustible. Her calculation turned out exact at all points. Monsieur Tellier kept his *parvenu* habits; he increased the common store without diminishing it himself. His wife, when she was in good humour, was quite convinced that she was the de Rionne of the family.

She had one anxiety, however. The tradesman was gradually turning into the politician, and spoke

of going into Parliament. At heart she would have preferred that he should keep on quietly as he was.

She had become the queen of fashion, but the title cost her dear. She had a delightful notoriety for extravagance ; she took up anything *outré*, and immediately transformed it into supreme elegance.

She nourished a terrible hatred against Julia and her kind, for she was frequently obliged to copy them ; but she discovered a way of exaggerating their style when copying them—of going beyond them, and so appearing to set them the fashion, instead of following it. She had thus reached the stage of madness with respect to dress, and all the fashionable women in Paris vied with her in folly.

One day at the races she had been insulted by a man who mistook her for a loose woman. She pretended to be furious, wept, made herself known and demanded an apology. But at heart she was delighted.

Daniel, as she passed, had a rapid intuition of all this, and stood before the servant, not daring to ask her any questions.

But she was a good sort of girl, and, seeing her smile, he asked :

“ I beg your pardon, but is Mademoiselle de Rionne at home ? ”

“ Oh, no ! ” answered she. “ She was always at madame’s heels, and madame is far too nervous to endure a child perpetually round her.”

“ And where is she now ? ”

“ She was taken to a convent a week ago.”

Daniel stood thunderstruck. Hesitatingly he added :

“ Will she stay long in the convent ? When will she come back ? ”

“ Oh ! but how do I know ? ” answered the servant girl, who was beginning to be irritated. “ I really believe madame intends leaving her there quite twelve years. ”

CHAPTER VI

TWELVE years passed away. During that long space of time there was no special event in Daniel's life. Day succeeded day calmly and evenly, and memories of former times were kept awake in him ; years seemed like months.

He lived within himself, isolating himself, happy in the constant thought which guided him in the world. Jeanne was ever before him in all his actions, in all his thoughts. A kind of monomania sustained him in a region of peace, far from the shame and misery of the world. He was held up at every step by the vision of that fair girl, whom he always thought of as a child, with the sweet smile of an angel.

And this curious kind of ecstasy gave him a solemn look, as of the priest passing through the streets with God in his heart. When he was suddenly appealed to, his thoughts always seemed to come down from above, as if he was struggling to adapt them to earthly things.

He was no longer the gawky youth, with a wild look, who did not know what to do with his arms and legs ; he had developed into a gentle-looking man, slightly eccentric, making one forget his ugliness by the charm of his smile.

However, women did not care for him, for he did not know what to say to them, and their mere presence was sufficient to revive all his old awkwardness.

For eight years he had worked at the Encyclopædic Dictionary. This anonymous work pleased him. Alone in a corner of the office, he enjoyed a species of delight in reminding himself that he was at peace and unknown there. He preferred waiting for the day when the battle of life should claim him again. At times he raised his head and plunged into dreamland. He pictured the time when Jeanne would come out of her convent and he would be able to see her once more.

That was his great recreation—these were his delicious and consoling moments. The remainder of his time he worked like a machine. In order to leave his mind quite free, he had disciplined his body to carry out his literary labours like clockwork.

The nominal editor or author of the Dictionary very soon saw what he could do with this youth, who worked like a nigger, without complaining, and with a smile of happiness on his face. For some time past he had been wondering how he could earn his twenty thousand francs without even coming to the office. He was tired of keeping guard over his prisoners. Daniel was a precious treasure to him. Little by little he entrusted him with the superintendence of the whole business, the distribution of work, the revision of manuscripts, and special researches ; and at the cost of only two hundred francs a month, he solved the difficult problem of being

the author of a monumental work without ever touching a pen.

Daniel joyfully allowed himself to be loaded with work. His companions, not having the terrible author at their backs, compiled as little as possible, and Daniel actually found himself doing a part of their task as well. He thus acquired a mass of knowledge ; his powerful mind retained and classified all the different sciences for which he was obliged to make research, and this Encyclopædia which he was compiling himself was thus graven on his brain. Those eight years of incessant research made him one of the most learned young men in France. From a humble perfunctory clerk he became a scholar of the first order.

He delighted, above all, in the study of mathematical truths. He kept the scientific part of the work for himself, and in the evening when he got home he still went on with his work, passionately poring over scientific formulas. In the chaste solitude in which he lived, his head wrapped up in reminiscences of the child of six, he dearly loved to analyse himself, to study the impulses of his ardent soul.

Several times George Raymond had tried to make him resign this thankless employment. He desired them to work together at an important work on which he was now engaged.

But Daniel did not want his freedom ; he was quite satisfied with his state of slavery, which gave him what he most desired—incessant and furious toil. George was no longer the poor wretch who could

enjoy reading a book in the Luxembourg gardens. He worked so hard to gain a living that he put by enough to devote himself entirely to literary work. He began to be known in the scientific world for some very remarkable essays on certain points of natural history.

However, at last Daniel decided to give up his employment and accept George's offer. The Encyclopædic Dictionary was very nearly finished ; all that was wanting for its full publication was a few extracts, for which the material was ready.

The two young men did not leave each other again. They had never ceased living in the closest intimacy since their first meeting. They used their brains for a common object, and wrote several essays on their researches, which made a great stir. Daniel agreed to divide the profits, but he would never put his name to the manuscripts. He looked on all this period of his life as time lost, reserving himself for his true work, which was to look after Jeanne's happiness. He did not wish to become famous ; but worked on steadily—just to avoid being idle.

George having become well-known, even celebrated, had gone to live in an apartment in the Rue Soufflot. Daniel would not leave the old house in the Impasse St. Dominique d'Enfer. He felt at home there in that out-of-the-way corner, far from the noises of the city. His heart expanded the moment he mounted the broken steps of the wide staircase. His narrow room, with its high ceiling, that felt almost like a tomb, pleased him. He shut himself up in it,

and wished for nothing, except to see Jeanne. He loved the sight of the sky and the trees through the window because, very often in his hours of meditation, he had looked at them and thought of his dear little girl.

For twelve years he remained thus in that silent room. It was so full of his one cherished idea, that he experienced a great sadness at the mere thought of leaving it. It seemed to him that nowhere else would he have seen Jeanne in every object before him.

Sometimes in the evening George accompanied Daniel as far as his lodgings. Then they had a good long chat on the first years of their friendship, when both of them lodged in the house.

So they lived on now almost alone, only now and then seeing a few friends. And in this solitude their sympathy had developed into a deep affection founded on esteem. They learned to love each other, reason and heart thus going hand in hand. Daniel had quite the feeling of a brother for George. He rested on the loyalty of his character ; he knew well his strength and gentleness. George was the third person he had loved in his life, and sometimes he asked himself what would become of him if he had not met him.

When he asked himself this question, he was not thinking of the material assistance his friend had given him ; no, it was that eternal want of the human heart to love and be loved that stirred him, and he thanked Providence for having sent him this great friendship which gave zest to life.

George was more reserved, and not so effusive as

Daniel. He still treated Daniel as a child and loved him as an elder brother. He had quickly discerned the deep affection of his heart ; he knew well what a self-sacrificing spirit was hidden in that ungainly body, and ended by no longer seeing Daniel's ugly face. When people laughed at his friend he was astonished ; he could not understand why the whole world did not admire his high and delicate intelligence.

He had noticed that Daniel had a secret hidden away in the depths of his heart ; yet he never questioned him and never tried to force his confidence. He knew Daniel was an orphan, that a pious woman had adopted and educated him, and that this woman was dead. That was enough for him. He felt convinced that his friend could only be hiding some good intention in his heart.

During the twelve years that passed Daniel went every month to the Rue d'Amsterdam, but he did not go in. He only walked up and down in front of the house ; but at times he ventured to ask for news of Jeanne. On those days he rose early and went there on foot, a good three miles. He walked quickly, happy to be in the streets alone in the midst of crowds, without even George by his side ; and there was, moreover, in a corner of his heart a secret hope of at last seeing his child once more.

When he reached the convent he strolled up and down the pavement for a long time, backwards and forwards, looking from a distance at the gates of her home. Then he went nearer and waited for a servant to come out, if he saw no one of whom he could make

enquiries. At times he went home sad and cast down ; at others he used to decide to go in and speak to the doorkeeper, who received him very sharply and with mistrustful looks.

But how happy he was when he could stop someone belonging to the house and make enquiries at his leisure. Now he had grown very cunning. He made up all kinds of stories, and he drew Mademoiselle de Rionne's name in quite naturally, and waited anxiously to hear what answer he should get. When they said to him : " She is in good health, she is tall and pretty," he wanted to thank the speaker as if he had congratulated him on the graces of his own child.

And then, light-hearted and happy, he went away, elbowing the passers-by like a drunken man, repressing with difficulty his desire to sing aloud. He went up the faubourgs again, building all kinds of castles in the air. He turned down a side street, had some food in a little restaurant, laughing all the time, covered with mud and dust, and half-dead with fatigue and happiness, only reaching the Impasse St. Dominique d'Enfer in the evening.

George was used to these little trips. The first few times when his friend came in he joked him and almost scolded him, but as the truant kept a sullen silence now he only merely smiled after every fresh excursion, thinking to himself : " Well, I suppose my friend has been to pay a visit to his mistress."

One day, as the young man reached home out of breath and with a radiant countenance, he took hold of his hand and risked saying, " She is pretty, of course,"

Daniel, without answering, looked at him with such an astonished and wounded air that George's conscience smote him for his folly, and from that time he religiously respected his friend's secret. Thenceforth, after each day of Daniel's absence, without knowing the reason, he loved him more and more.

Thus they lived on, side by side, day after day, admitting no one to their confidences. At first they received a neighbour, a young man of the name of Lorin, who was anxious to make a fortune. They admitted him, as they did not know very well how to shut the door in his face, but his bilious countenance and shifty eyes displeased and irritated them.

Lorin was a dealer in herbs, and he was watching for his opportunity, quite ready to take advantage of any good chance fate might bring him. He would constantly say that a straight course in life is the longest one. Nothing seemed to him more ill-advised than to take up a career—medicine or law, for instance, for doctors and lawyers could only hope to scrape together sufficient for a very poor living. For his part he must gain his ends more quickly than that, so he kept a sharp look-out, and swore that he would make his fortune at one stroke.

And, sure enough, he made it, as he said he would. He talked of his winnings at play, of stock exchange speculations, and what not. No one ever knew exactly what to believe. Then he plunged into business, invested his money in trade, and in a few years, luck still helping him, became mightily rich.

Daniel and George, who had heard unpleasant

rumours about him, were delighted at not seeing him any more. He lived now in the Rue Taitbout and hated the very idea of the Impasse St. Dominique d'Enfer.

He came one night, however, to pay them a visit, to display his wealth and fine appearance. In satisfying his ambition, he had assumed a very smart appearance. Money had given him assurance and the bilious look had departed from his face. However, the two friends received him very coldly, and he never called again.

Daniel and George found their own company enough. They loved each other and were bound together by their intelligence. Nor did either of them think that they could ever be separated.

CHAPTER VII

ONE morning Daniel went to the Rue d'Amsterdam, and on coming home he informed George that he would leave, perhaps never to return.

He had learnt during the day that Jeanne had finally come out of the convent and was living with her aunt. This news nearly drove him mad. He had now only one thought : to gain admittance and establish himself in the house with the dear object of his affection.

He schemed, plotted, and laid his plans, and ended by finding out that Monsieur Tellier, who had at last entered Parliament, needed a secretary. It was enough. He decided at once. He obtained a recommendation from the author of the Dictionary, who was still grateful to him, and spoke to Monsieur Tellier in his favour. He was to present himself on the morrow, and was certain to be accepted.

George, painfully surprised, stared at Daniel, unable to say a word. At last he opened his lips and protested : " But we cannot separate thus. We have work in hand to occupy us for several years. I reckoned on you. I have need of your assistance. Where are you going? What do you propose doing? "

"I am about to become a secretary to a deputy," quietly answered Daniel.

"You a deputy's secretary!" and George began to laugh. "You are joking, surely. You cannot really be thinking of sacrificing the fine career which is opening out before you for a place like that. Reflect well; our success is a certainty!"

Daniel shrugged his shoulders with perfect indifference, smiling almost contemptuously. What mattered celebrity to him? Was not his future the happiness of Jeanne? He gave up everything for her without a regret. He lowered himself; he accepted an inferior position in order to watch over the child who had been entrusted to him.

"So you do not intend to work at your masterpiece any more?" persisted George again.

"My masterpiece is elsewhere," gently answered Daniel. "I am leaving you to go and work at it. Ask me no questions; I will tell you all some day, when my task is done. Above all, do not bewail my lot. I am happy, for during the past twelve years I have been waiting for the joy which is mine for the first time. You know me; you know that I am incapable of a foolish or shameful action. Do not be anxious, therefore. Understand, my friend, that my heart is full of joy, and that I am about to accomplish the 'task' of my life."

George pressed his hand. Now he understood that the parting was a necessity, he felt the noble ardour of his friend and divined the limitless sacrifice of this sudden departure.

On the morrow Daniel left him. He had spent the whole night setting everything in his room in order, bidding a solemn farewell to the walls which he probably would never see again. His heart beat violently and there was an indefinable sadness upon him, that sadness which the warm-hearted feel when leaving a home in which they have experienced both hope and sorrow. In the street he detained George a moment.

“If I can,” he said, “I shall come and see you. Do not be vexed with me, but go on and do the work of two.”

And he was off, hurrying away, as he had no wish that his friend should accompany him.

Such a flood of thought passed through his brain that he arrived at the Rue d'Amsterdam without any consciousness of the road he had taken. He was full of the past and future. He saw once again Madame de Rionne dying, and distinctly recalled everything that had happened since then, and at the same time he sought to foresee the events which were about to follow.

One figure stood out supreme in his meditation—that of Jeanne—Jeanne, quite a little girl, such as he had left her on the gravel path in the Boulevard des Invalides ; and he felt a scorching flame in his breast, a burning affection in his heart.

This little girl belonged to him. She was his as an inheritance of love, he explained to himself. He was quite astonished that she had been stolen from him for so long a time. He rebelled, then was

appeared when he came to remember that she was to be restored to him. She would be his, wholly his. He would love her as he had loved her mother, worship her as a saint ; and wild notions rushed through his brain, and the madness of self-sacrifice began to fill his whole being. His love was overflowing ; it suffocated him. During all these years he had firmly repressed the inmost feelings of his heart ; he had made himself a mere machine ; he had waited coldly, passively, without a word. The awakening had come—a terrible awakening of passion. A hidden, unceasing work had been going on in his heart ; his faculty for love, from the want of expansion, had been intensified to the highest degree, and so he had come to have one fixed idea. His affection had become an exaggeration : he could no longer think of Jeanne without being tempted to worship her image.

Suddenly he found himself in Monsieur Tellier's private room, without knowing how he came there. He heard a servant saying to him : " Please to be seated ; monsieur will be with you directly," and he sat down trying to keep calm.

Those few minutes by himself did him good. If he had found his future master there he would have stammered through nervousness and agitation. He got up and took a turn round the study, examining the library and the many different objects with which the articles of furniture and the bureau were loaded. All these things, although luxurious, seemed to him in very poor taste. On a stand there was a pretty

statuette of Liberty in white marble, which Daniel was inclined to take for a Venus, till he noticed the Phrygian cap which was coquettishly set on her curly hair.

The young man was examining this object with curiosity, wondering how it came to be there, when he heard the sound of a slight cough.

Monsieur Tellier came in. He was a big, stout man, with round, bright eyes. He carried his head erect. When speaking he gesticulated with his right hand always in the same manner.

Daniel briefly explained to him who he was and what he had come about.

“ Oh, well,” he answered, “ I have heard of you, and I think we shall be able to come to an understanding. Pray take a seat.” And he himself sat down in the armchair in front of the bureau.

Monsieur Tellier was far from being a bad man, and he had given proof at times of much intelligence. When certain topics were touched on, three or four fixed ideas wandered through his brain like those little dolls which turn round in Barbary organs. When these ideas slept, his conversation revealed a blank in his brain that was perfectly appalling.

He had only one vice—that of thinking himself a profound politician. He laid down the law in politics with the greatest gravity. He would have ruled States as doorkeepers in large mansions rule their lodgers—repeating the same phrases, wrapping up his few ideas in a deluge of words. Nevertheless he was thoroughly sincere, and lived at peace in his folly.

From childhood he had prated of the people and "liberty" with overwhelming solemnity. Later, when in full prosperity and having under him crowds of workmen, he went on with his philanthropical discourses, never dreaming that he would do far better to talk less and raise his workmen's wages. But to him, the people and "liberty" were abstract things that must be loved platonically.

When he amassed a colossal fortune he set his mind on living only for that which afforded him the greatest pleasure. He managed to be made a "deputy" (member of Parliament). He experienced a childlike joy when he repaired to the Chamber. He listened religiously to the great speeches, the long empty sentences that he loved, and every night when he got home he felt quite sure that he had just saved France from utter ruin! In his own eyes he acquired a considerable importance. He thought he was, so to speak, the necessary bulwark against the invasion of tyranny. He was astonished that the people as he passed through the streets did not bow before him as before the father of his country.

Sometimes he did make a speech in the Legislative Assembly, reading endless discourses. On one occasion he had gone into an industrial question, and he handled it very well, for there he was in his element. But his vanity dreamt of grand discussions of patriotic principles, and then he lost himself miserably.

His wife did all she could to prevent him from entering the Chamber. Her only ambition being luxury, she would have preferred that her husband

should keep quite away from public life. But he held his ground, and informed her that he left her full liberty to pursue her own pleasures, and therefore, for his part, he intended to amuse himself as he liked, and do as he pleased. So they each went their own ways. His wife, exasperated at his obstinacy, decked herself out in the most eccentric toilettes, and threw her money about in all directions, while the husband declaimed against luxury, eulogised the wholesome simplicity of republics, and displayed the empty rhetoric of his pet subject—the good of the masses. When you came to examine these two, the wife and husband, their follies were, after all, about on a par. From the moment he became a deputy Monsieur Tellier's ambition knew no bounds, and there was nothing he desired more than to be called an "author." He undertook a vast work on political economy, in which he was very soon completely at sea; and it was at this time that he felt the need of a secretary.

Daniel showed himself modest and willing. He accepted all the conditions Monsieur Tellier chose to impose upon him; but really he barely listened to them, for he was all anxiety to be established in the house. Just as a complete understanding was on the point of being arrived at, the deputy said:

"Ah! I was forgetting, since we shall have to live together there must be no misunderstanding between us. You are quite free to believe in what you like, and I would not ask you to make the least concession to your conscience. But what are your political opinions?"

“ My opinions ! ” echoed Daniel, bewildered ; “ oh ! liberal ; I could not be more so , ” the young man hastened to answer, happily remembering the marble statue, and he turned instinctively towards the pedestal on which it stood.

“ Have you seen it ? ” said Monsieur Tellier, much struck. He rose and took the little image in his fingers, speaking very emphatically. “ It is the great Mother, the Human Virgin whose office is to regenerate the nation . ”

A look of perplexity came into Daniel's face, and he was very much astonished to hear such big words made use of with respect to so small a thing. The deputy gazed lovingly at the piece of marble with the look of a big child playing with a doll.

It happened one day, long before, that his plaything disappeared, and he was searching for it several hours ; it was Jeanne, who, having come out of the convent for a holiday, had taken it and was nursing Liberty in her little arms, thinking she was nursing a doll.

Gazing at the deeply-moved expression of Monsieur Tellier's face, Daniel saw clearly that this little image was, to him, an exact representation of the goddess in her strength and power. That liberty which he clamoured for so loudly was in reality nothing more than this smiling and attractive grisette in marble. In other words it was merely a liberty you could put in your pocket.

Monsieur Tellier then took it into his head to sit down again in his armchair. He definitely accepted

Daniel's services, and plunged into political questions of the most intricate kind. The poor young man was beginning his apprenticeship as an obedient piece of furniture.

In the midst of a long diatribe the orator was most disagreeably interrupted by peals of laughter which issued from a neighbouring room.

"Uncle, uncle!" cried a young voice, and the door immediately opened.

A tall young girl came in boisterously, and running to Monsieur Tellier she showed him two birds shut up in a gilt cage that she was holding in her hand.

"Oh, do look, uncle!" said she; "do look how pretty they are, with their red breasts, their yellow wings, and their black aigrettes! Someone has just made me a present of them." And she laughed, with her head thrown back in order to see the little captives better, her movements displaying the most charming grace.

Tall girl as she was, she had still the manner of a child. She seemed to fill the gloomy study with light and air; her white skirt shed a soft clear brilliancy around her; her face shone like a vermilion star. She flitted about with the cage in her hand, taking possession of the whole room, leaving behind her the fresh perfume of youth and beauty. Then she drew herself up, became serious and proud-looking, with her broad forehead and deep eyes in haughty and ignorant maidenhood.

It was little Jeanne—his little Jeanne! Daniel

had risen trembling, gazing at his dear daughter with a kind of respectful terror. He had never dreamt that she could have grown up. He had always pictured her just as he had left her, and he expected when he saw her again he would have to stoop down to kiss her on the forehead.

And now here she was—tall, beautiful, and proud-looking. She seemed to him very much the same as those other women that laughed at him. Not for anything in the world would he have gone up and kissed her. At the thought that she would soon see him he felt quite faint.

Surely a stranger had been substituted for his little girl. He wanted a child, not a young lady. He would not dare even to speak to this grand and beautiful person, who laughed so gaily, and seemed so proud. In the first moment of surprise he scarcely understood what he was doing there ; he had forgotten what the dead woman had said to him. He took refuge in a corner, standing bolt upright and not knowing what to do with his hands. But notwithstanding his nervousness, he could not keep his eyes off the young girl ; he was considering how like she was to her mother and he felt a delicious warmth creeping into his heart.

Jeanne, who was attending to her uncle's remonstrances, did not even see him. Monsieur Tellier, vexed at being interrupted, looked at her severely, half inclined to be angry. These outbursts of the young girl were not pleasing to him, as they disturbed him in his reflections.

“ Good Heavens ! ” said he, “ you come in like a whirlwind ; you are no longer at school now. Try and be a little more considerate.”

Jeanne, much hurt, became serious, and a scarcely perceptible smile of disdain was noticeable on her rosy lips ; she looked as though she were suppressing a feeling of rebellion. Her clear vision had certainly penetrated all her uncle's folly, and her eyes, twinkling with malicious fun, alone protested against the seriousness he wanted to impose upon her.

“ All the more considerate,” pompously added Monsieur Tellier, “ that I have company at the present moment.”

Jeanne turned round to see where the company was, and perceived Daniel in his corner. She looked at him with curiosity for a second or two, then she pouted a little with disappointment. She had never got nearer loving anything but the images of the saints at her convent ; and the lanky youth, with plain features, who stood awkwardly there, by no means recalled those saints, with their clear-cut profiles and silky looking beards.

Daniel had lowered his eyes when she turned to look at him. He was blushing and he felt unhappy. He could never have thought that this meeting, so ardently longed for during many years, would be so painful to him. He remembered the emotion which agitated him when he came to the Rue d'Amsterdam ; he had a vision of himself in the street, delirious with excitement and dreaming of taking Jeanne in his arms and carrying her off. Now he was there,

trembling before the young girl, with not a word to say for himself.

A hidden force, however, seemed to be driving him towards Jeanne. After the first few moments of timidity, he was tempted to kneel at her feet. It was not Monsieur Tellier's presence which restrained him, for he had quite forgotten where he was ; but the crushing sense of the truth rivetted him to the spot. He saw clearly that Jeanne did not recognise him. He had caught sight of the young girl's pout, and a deep shame filled his heart with bitterness. She did not love him—she never would—he could never be as a father to her and she could never be as a daughter to him.

Whilst he thus meditated, Jeanne advanced, took up the cage, and tripped away, without answering a single word to her uncle's remonstrances. When she had left the room Monsieur Tellier said :

“ My young friend, I broke off at the theoretical question of association. Put two workmen together . . . ”

And so he rambled on for a whole hour. Daniel kept nodding his head as a sign of approval, without listening. He was surreptitiously looking towards the door by which Jeanne had disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII

THE next day Daniel was settled at Monsieur Tellier's. He was to occupy a rather big room on the fourth story, in which the windows looked out on the courtyard. He had to work in the mornings from eight o'clock to midday in the study. His work consisted in writing a few letters, and listening to the interminable orations of the deputy, who seemed to be trying the effect of his speeches on his secretary. Then in the afternoon Daniel spent his time in arranging the mass of papers which Monsieur Tellier invariably left about. In the evening he was free.

Daniel had expressed a desire to have his meals in his own room, and for the first few days the servants of the establishment did not even know of his presence there. He proceeded straight to the study very quietly. Then he shut himself up, and was seen and heard no more.

One night, however, he went out to see George. His friend found him careworn and anxious looking. He did not say a word of the life he was now leading. He talked feverishly of the past. George understood that he was seeking consolation in its memories. After some hesitation he proposed to him to come

back and lodge with him, and take up their common task again. But Daniel refused, almost angrily.

During those sad first days at Monsieur Tellier's he had only had one idea—to fathom Jeanne's heart, and find out how they had managed to change his dear little daughter. She was restored to him but she was not the same Jeanne. He asked himself who this grand young lady with the disdainful smile could be.

He turned himself into a sort of private detective. He spied on Jeanne's actions, taking note of her slightest movements, her slightest word. He was angry because he could not at once become her friend. All he saw of her was just when she was passing through a room ; all he heard of her was just a laugh when she was saying a few hurried words. He dared not approach her more closely. She seemed to him unapproachable, surrounded by a blinding halo. When she was before him in the dazzling brightness of her beauty and youth, he felt overpowered as if by the presence of a divinity.

Every afternoon towards four o'clock, when it was fine, he took up his place at the window. Below in the courtyard a carriage was nearly always waiting for Madame Tellier and Jeanne, to take them to the Bois de Boulogne. The two ladies slowly descended the doorsteps with trailing skirts, but Daniel had eyes only for the young girl. He studied her least movements. She leant back on the cushions of the carriage with a careless ease that was most distasteful to him. Her toilettes, too,

shocked him ; he felt that it was all these ribbons and laces that intimidated him and kept him at a distance from her.

The carriage started and Daniel was alone again at his window above the courtyard. The great gulf between him and her seemed blacker and more desolate than ever. He stared sorrowfully at the blank walls, and pondered bitterly over the beautiful dreams he had woven about her whilst gazing at the elms in the Impasse St. Dominique d'Enfer.

He concluded that Jeanne had a bad disposition, and that the poor dead woman had reason to be afraid for her future. He argued in this way from vexation, angry because he could not understand what he saw going on about him. The transition he had undergone was too abrupt. He had lived, himself, as austere as a Benedictine monk in his cell ; he knew only the miseries, and rough side of life. This big, simple scholar had a holy horror of luxury, and knew absolutely nothing of a woman's heart. And all of a sudden he found himself face to face with this life of riches and selfish ease ; he had to set himself the task of deciphering the mystery of a young girl's heart. If Jeanne had merely come forward in a friendly way and held out her hand, as George had lately held out his, he would have thought such an action quite natural, for he had no experience of the ways of society. He could not get beyond those terrifying furbelows, and he imagined that her heart was spoiled.

Kept in a convent till the age of eighteen, Jeanne



had preserved all the infantile ways of early childhood. Her heart and mind had been wrapped up in the gossip of her little friends, and far off, at a distance, life seemed to her a dazzling fairyland which she would enter later. Her days were filled by the thousand and one pretty follies of the education that is given to girls in France. So she had become an excitable child—a doll that was to be prepared for fashion and distinction. She had only a vague memory of her mother. No one spoke to her about her, and she herself only thought of her when she saw the mothers of other girls come into the parlour. She did then feel that there was something lacking in her heart, but she could not tell what it was. As she grew up she became accustomed to the solitude of her life. Her heart had recoiled into itself. She became reckless, almost wicked. Her spirit stirred in her; a mocking, aggressive spirit; and she acquired the terrible reputation of being a scoffer. All the tenderness of her affectionate nature went to sleep, so to speak, in the depths of her heart. Even a kiss might perhaps have made a loving, self-sacrificing woman of this sarcastic girl. But then there was no one to give her this kiss.

Then she left the convent and came under the deplorable influence of Madame Tellier. There was more than one distinct nature in her: the young maiden of mocking spirit, the disdainful rebellious child, and the good-hearted girl who ignored self, and showed, at times, by a mere look, a deeply affectionate disposition. Now she plunged headlong into

luxury and gaiety ; she satisfied all the feverish desires of her young days, which she had been unable to satisfy. It was a frenzy. At times she felt all the emptiness of the life she led with her aunt, but then she laughed and told herself that she had everything she wanted, and accused herself of longing for things which had no existence. And, truly, love had so far no existence for her. After that, she gave herself up wholly to pleasure. She endeavoured to satisfy herself with vanity ; she extracted all the happiness she possibly could from the rustling of her beautiful silks, from the admiration of the crowd, from comfort and wealth ; and she thought she was enjoying real life.

The foolish Daniel in his blindness could not penetrate the recesses of that intricate heart. He saw clearly her contemptuous looks, but he did not perceive a tender light in the depths of her eyes. He heard well enough her sharp mocking words, but he did not discern the hidden tears under the bursts of laughter ; so he made up his mind that Jeanne had an evil disposition, and suffered terribly at this unpleasant discovery. Consequently he decided not to make himself known, at least at present. He wished to play the part of an invisible guardian, and not that of an irksome protector. Besides, he foresaw that Jeanne's haughty temperament would shake off the yoke, however light it was. Then how to tell the truth ? He would never have found either the courage or necessary words to do so, if he had been compelled to confess to the young girl who he was,

and with what mission Madame de Rionne had entrusted him.

What astonished him was to feel his devotion and affection for Jeanne growing, instead of diminishing, since he had decided that she had a bad nature. He experienced for her a mixture of anger and adoration. When he saw her in a mocking humour, when he saw her putting her happiness in a dress or a trinket, he ran and shut himself up in his room ; and there he found her again in his mind's eye such as she had been before—stately, beautiful, and good. Then he vowed he would keep his love for her awake, to be able to worship her unrestrainedly.

So far he could not clearly discover what position the young girl held at her aunt's. He remembered that Madame de Rionne had spoken to him of impending ruin, and for the last twelve years the father must have been consummating his ruin pretty rapidly. He made some discreet inquiries, and learnt that this fast liver was getting down to his last louis.

And Jeanne—she probably had no fortune at all. From that moment Daniel was astonished at the generous hospitality extended by Madame Tellier to her niece.

The truth was that Madame Tellier had well understood from the first that, in a way, she was adopting her brother's daughter ; and it was for this reason that she left her as long as possible at the convent. Then, when she was getting near her fortieth year, a despondency settled on her from some

secret disappointment. She recollected Jeanne at her convent and sent for her, with the idea of getting distraction in seeking a husband for her. Besides, the expenses she incurred for the young girl were mostly for her own pleasures at the same time. She was always the practical woman. In decking out Jeanne she was decking her out for her own sake ; she was satisfying her own love of luxury and her own vanity. As her niece must appear in her drawing-rooms, she would not have allowed her to be there unless she had been thoroughly and smartly dressed.

There might perhaps have been another feeling in her heart. She was probably delighted to spend the last years of her beauty in flirtations. She engaged in a species of rivalry with this young girl ; she was quite delighted when her guests neglected Jeanne to come and pay their court to her. It was a new recreation for her to tell everyone that her niece had no dowry, and when the men who were courting Jeanne grew cool, she laughed.

Perhaps even she reckoned on the disastrous effect Jeanne's rich toilettes produced on her suitors when they learned that this lovely young lady had not a sou. They looked on her niece as a rare but dangerous flower—one that would be too costly to keep. She thus placed Jeanne out of the reach of all, enjoying her own fun immensely. Moreover, she expected to find her a simpleton ; but Jeanne's sharp, reserved and sarcastic character had given her an agreeable surprise. She had taken quite a fancy

to this scoffer ; she entertained her vastly, so she stirred her up and urged her on to mischievousness, without thinking that she was doing any harm. Not possessing that quality herself, which should have awakened the dormant goodness in her niece's heart, the aunt really believed she was conferring a true benefit on Jeanne by giving her a worldly training.

Both lived the same life—the aunt without a qualm, the niece with secret misgivings. In Paris they were received, one as the queen of fashion, the other as an aspirant who one day or other might be queen.

When Daniel, from his bedroom window, saw them enter the same carriage he was seized with fits of anger. He recollected the words of the dying woman, who foresaw the evil influences her husband's sister would have upon her daughter, and he wondered how he could counteract the evil.

One morning Monsieur Tellier, who had taken a great liking to his secretary, invited him to a soiree he was having that evening. Daniel's first terrified thought was to refuse. The idea of finding himself in a drawing-room, in the full blaze of many candles, in the midst of a fashionable crowd, was insupportable to him.

Then he heard a voice—the vanished voice of Madame de Rionne—saying to him inwardly : “ Everywhere she goes, you must go ; you must shield her from the world.” And he accepted Monsieur Tellier's invitation, in fear and trembling

In the evening he spent over an hour in his room before his glass at his toilet.

The poor young man had not a spark of vanity in him, but he was afraid of looking ridiculous before Jeanne. He managed to dress himself in as quiet a fashion as possible, so as not to attract anyone's attention. Then he went down and slipped into the drawing-room.

On entering Daniel experienced that feeling of suffocation and blindness which a swimmer feels when he plunges his head under water : the lights had advanced before his eyes, the sound of the guests' voices buzzed in his ears, and he could hardly breathe. For one moment he stood motionless, overwhelmed, fighting against the uncomfortable feeling which oppressed him.

No one had noticed him when he came in. Little by little the weight which crushed him diminished, and he breathed freely again. He could observe the scene he had before him quite clearly—the large drawing-room in white and gold, resplendent with the light of many candles ; the gilt bronzes brightly shining, and the walls covered with mirrors, giving out reflections which made the eyes blink.

A close tepid atmosphere gradually pervaded the room from the odour of bouquets mixed with the perfume from bare shoulders.

Daniel noticed that the women sat together at one end of the room, whilst the men were huddled together near the windows and doors. All these people were thus disseminated in small groups—

the black coats standing, the silk skirts displayed on the sofas and armchairs. Nothing could be heard but a slight murmur of voices, in which every now and then a little laughter mingled.

A sort of instinctive respect had taken possession of Daniel. He looked at those serious men and those elegant youths, and he was honestly ready to admire them. Never had he been at such a gathering before. It all came upon him as a surprise ; he felt as if he were suddenly transported to a world of light, where everything must be good and beautiful. The rows of armchairs where the ladies, with smiling faces, showed their bare necks and arms covered in jewelry, fascinated him particularly. And then in the midst of them all he perceived Jeanne, proud, triumphant, surrounded by admirers—worshippers rather—and there was the sacred place for him whence every glory radiated.

He wanted to enjoy the conversation of these superior beings, and so he discreetly drew near one group, in which Monsieur Tellier seemed to be discussing some grave matter. This is what he heard :

“ I have had a rather bad cold since yesterday,” solemnly said the deputy.

“ You must nurse it,” rejoined an old gentleman.

“ Bah ! it will go away as it came. . . .”

Daniel did not listen to more, and he regretted having forgotten what he had known for a fortnight, that Monsieur Tellier was a conceited idiot. He went a little further and found himself behind a young man and a young woman.

The languid young woman was bending slightly forward, with a smile on her lips, and seemed to be listening to the music of angels, to be living far from the earth, in an ideal world. The young man, resting his arms lightly on the back of the armchair, looked like a cherubim clothed in black.

Daniel thought that he would hear words of love, such as one reads of in poetry.

"What abominable weather we have had to-day," quietly murmured the young man.

"Oh, do not speak of it," answered the young woman with emotion; "the rain makes me depressed, and I must be looking very plain to-night."

"You are adorably lovely!"

"Have you noticed that when it rains the hair comes out of curl?"

"Certainly."

"I was obliged to have my head dressed three times, and see how straight it is now."

"In such a case I myself use gum mixed with powder."

"Really! . . . I am much obliged for the recipe."

Daniel thought he must have come across a hair-dresser, and he hurried off so as not to intrude on such tender, confidential talk.

Then he drew near two tall young men who were conversing apart. He thought that these, having no woman to amuse, must be talking sensibly like men. As a matter of fact they were talking like grooms. Daniel only partly understood their language. Drawing-room jargon was a new tongue

to him, and at first he thought they must be foreigners. Then he recognised a few French words, and he guessed they were talking of women and horses, without very well knowing which expressions they were applying to the women and which to the horses, for they spoke of them both with the same affection and the same vulgarity.

Then Daniel looked boldly round the room. He began to understand that he had been the dupe of outward form. He now saw all the platitudes and frivolous speeches he had heard, in their clear, naked aspect, like those rags of dialogue which drag so miserably in pantomimes, in the midst of the splendid scenery. He grasped at once that there was nothing before him but the light playing on the jewels and costly dresses. These heads, young and old, were empty, and had become empty from politeness and would-be gentility. All these men were comedians in whom one could neither distinguish heart nor brain ; all these women were so many dolls exposing their shoulders, set on chairs like porcelain statuettes set on mantel-boards. And Daniel experienced an intense pride, for at this moment he was proud even of his awkwardness and his ignorance of the world. He no longer feared being seen. Holding his head erect he marched into the centre of the room. Unpolished as he was, he considered himself so superior to these people that their laughter had no effect on him. He had, as it were, a reawakening of pride, and he quietly took up again the place that was his by right, in the full blaze of light.

He had not yet dared to approach the group in the midst of which Jeanne was enthroned as a queen. Now he marched straight up to this group, and, keeping at the back of the others, waited for a favourable moment to pass to the front row.

Jeanne seemed absent-minded. She scarcely attended to the men who were paying her court. She knew all their set phrases by heart, and their frivolity wearied her to-night. She was nervously pulling out the petals of a rose ; her bare shoulders had an imperceptible movement of contempt. Daniel was ill at ease when he saw his dear girl so *décolleté*, and he felt a kind of strange warmth coursing from his heart all through his veins.

He found the young girl most deliciously beautiful, now that he was really seeing her for the first time. She was very much like her mother, and he remembered the pale, thin face of Madame de Rionne reclining on the pillow. In this case the cheeks were rosy, the eyes were bright with the quick fire of life, and the light breath of the mouth delicately opened the lips.

In front of Jeanne there was a young man who every now and then bent over her, partly hiding her from view. Daniel was irritated by this young man, whose face he could not see ; he felt, in fact, that he hated him. Why did this unknown man approach the young girl so closely ? What did he want of her ? By what right did he put himself between her and him ? Then the young man turned round and Daniel recognised Lorin, who, on his side,

having observed Daniel, advanced with outstretched hand and a smile on his lips.

Lorin was an *habitué* of the house. Whilst he was making his fortune he had entrusted various sums to Monsieur Tellier, and the merchant having invested these sums had made them yield enormous profits for both. Hence their friendship. Mischievous tongues said the young man had other motives in going to the house, and that for a long time he had come to talk of business with the husband and of love with the wife. Whatever the case may have been, since Jeanne's arrival, Lorin had neglected Madame Tellier.

He now took Daniel's arm and crossed the room, talking to him confidentially.

"What!" said he, "you here? How pleased I am to meet you again!"

"I am extremely obliged, I am sure," answered Daniel drily, annoyed at this meeting.

"How is Raymond?"

"First-rate."

"So you allowed yourself to be drawn out of your cell and go astray in this world's paradise?"

"Oh, I shall get back there. I know my way all right."

"You come, perhaps, after that young lady, whom you are devouring with such greedy eyes?"

"Me!" exclaimed Daniel, in a strange voice. And he looked Lorin in the face, trembling at the idea of having allowed this man to see into his heart.

"Well, is that anything to be wondered at?"

added Lorin. "We all love her. She has magnificent eyes and red, tempting lips. Then she is full of fun, and one could not possibly be dull with her."

This praise of Jeanne from such a mouth angered Daniel extremely; yet he concealed his wrath, and tried to assume an air of indifference.

"But no money, my dear fellow," went on Lorin; "not a fraction! Madame Tellier, who is well disposed towards me, had the kindness to warn me. The little girl is as beautiful as an angel, but she is one of those angels who is not satisfied with the clothing her wings give her, but goes to a frightful expense in silks and satins. She would make a charming wife; the worst of it is, she would be abominably dear."

After that he was silent a moment or two and seemed to be reflecting. Then suddenly he said:

"Raimbault, would you marry a woman who had not a sou?"

"I do not know," answered Daniel, astonished at this abrupt question; "I have never considered the matter. I believe I should marry the woman I loved."

"Perhaps you would be right," slowly answered Lorin. "As far as I am concerned, I should think I was committing an act of egregious folly." Then, hesitating, he stopped.

"Pooh!" exclaimed he at last. "Follies are committed every day." And he changed the subject. He boasted of his fortune. Then he noticed

that Madame Tellier had entered the room, quickly surrounded by a circle of admirers.

"Would you like," he asked Daniel, "to be introduced to the queen of these regions?"

"There is no need to introduce me," answered the other; "she is already acquainted with me."

"But I have never seen you here."

"It is the first time I have come downstairs. I live in the house. I have been Monsieur Tellier's secretary the last fortnight."

Those three short, dry sentences had a most disagreeable effect on Lorin.

"You have?" said he.

And this "you have" in his mouth meant distinctly, "Why the devil did you not inform me of this sooner? I would not have strolled about with you so long."

He gently dropped Daniel's arm, and went to join the group round Madame Tellier. The moment he found out his old comrade was only a secretary, a paid servant, he considered it compromising to be seen with him.

Daniel smiled contemptuously, and regretted that he had not spoken out sooner, and so more quickly disposed of his obnoxious presence. He also, in turn, approached Madame Tellier, keeping, however, a few steps away.

The lady was most elaborately and carefully rejuvenated, having aimed at a youthful appearance, although her face already bore traces of wrinkles. From time to time she cast a furtive look towards

Jeanne, and was overjoyed at noticing that she herself was still surrounded by the largest circle, and was still the most courted. She merely pitied the young girl who thus reassured her against the first signs of old age.

Lorin was there, attentive and gallant. He had far too much hypocritical diplomacy to break off suddenly with a power. He loved and admired the niece, but recollected that the aunt might be useful to him.

Madame Tellier, vain as she was, was yet by no means deceived as to the young man's inmost thoughts. At the end of a few minutes she said to him in a mischievous, mocking way :

“ Monsieur Lorin, pray go and entertain my niece a little ; she seems rather dull out there by herself.”

The moment she had spoken, she was sorry. Lorin, annoyed at her guessing his thoughts, bowed and went across to Jeanne. He was followed by some other young men, who hastened to take Madame Tellier's words literally. A circle was formed round the young girl. Daniel succeeded in gaining the first row.

Jeanne was no longer absent-minded or indifferent. Her eyes brightened and her mouth assumed a mocking expression. She entered feverishly into the worldly gossip carried on around her, stirring up the flippant talk with all the vivacity of her active spirit. Her heart had no share in it. Daniel listened in pained silence. He thought that she was not foolish like the others, but had all their hardness of

heart. Then he remembered the dying woman's words, and began to feel that the room was suffocating, and that his heart must soon cease beating.

Jeanne railed on like a spoiled child. She had taken Lorin apart and was saying to him: "So you are quite sure that I am adorable?"

"Most adorable," emphatically repeated Lorin.

"Would you dare confess this before my aunt?"

"She herself has sent me to tell you so."

"I am much obliged for her kindness, but I am merciful, and I warn you you are running a great risk."

"What risk, may I ask?"

"That I might take you seriously; think you meant what you said only as a compliment. . . . You must know that I am about to set keepers near me."

"Keepers! For what reason?" asked Lorin, for her vivacity had cut him to the quick.

Jeanne shrugged her shoulders, laughing merrily.

"Can you not guess?" added she. "To prevent fools from falling into the dark pit dug for them by a dowerless girl."

"I do not understand you," muttered Lorin.

The young girl looked him in the face and made him lower his eyes.

"All the better," said she. "Then you must have told me a falsehood; you do not find me adorable." And she began speaking of other things.

"Have you heard of the terrible accident that

took place yesterday at the 'de la Marche' races?" suddenly asked Lorin.

"No," answered Jeanne. "What happened?"

"A jockey broke his ribs in taking the third obstacle. The wretched man uttered groans of agony, and the worst of it was that the horse behind also broke its leg."

"I was there," joined in a young man. "I never saw a more dreadful sight."

A slight shudder contracted Jeanne's calm face. A pang of pain shot through her form, and then she quietly said: "He must have been an awkward fellow. One ought never to fall off a horse."

Daniel, so far, had listened in silence. The young girl's last words made his heart bound in his breast. Now he said: "Pardon me, these gentlemen do not know the whole story."

Everyone turned towards the interrupter, who spoke with emotion.

"This morning," continued he, "I read a full account of the accident in the paper. The awkward fellow, who committed the folly of getting killed, was carried, covered in blood, to his mother. This woman, a poor old thing of sixty, went mad with despair. At the present moment her son's corpse is still unburied; and there is, in a little cell of the 'Salpêtrière' (lunatic asylum), a shrieking, lamenting mother."

Lorin thought his former comrade's sally in very bad taste, and considered the barbarian was decidedly incorrigible.

Whilst Daniel was speaking, Jeanne was looking fixedly at him. When he had finished, "I thank you, monsieur," she simply said, and two tears trickled slowly down her cheeks that had become pale.

Daniel gazed at those falling tears with the most profound joy.

CHAPTER IX

SINCE the night when he made her cry, Daniel only lived for Jeanne. She, on her part, felt that he was very different from those who were usually about her ; but to tell the truth, he repelled her more than he attracted her. This serious, sad-looking young man, who was strangely ugly, almost terrified her. But she knew that he was there in the house, and that he followed her every movement with the greatest interest.

When she went out in the carriage, although she had vowed she would never do so, she raised her eyes and saw him at the window. This look, however, spoiled all her drive. She wondered what grudge he could have against her. She began to cross-examine herself, fearing she had committed some error.

Daniel, on his side, understood that the battle had begun, and he played his dumb part of preceptor more or less well, longing all the time to throw himself down on his knees before the young girl and beg her forgiveness for the severity he seemed to be practising. He guessed he was displeasing her, and he feared making her thoroughly angry with him. And, indeed, when he saw her looking so

beautiful, he felt seized with the most tender affection, and it seemed a crime to disturb her in her happiness.

But his duty spoke with inexorable voice. He had sworn to watch over Jeanne's happiness, and this feverish worldliness which had taken possession of the young girl could only be a little voluptuousness, which would leave her afterwards repentant and cast down. He wished to withdraw her from these empty pleasures, and in the attempt he was constantly obliged to wound her in her gaieties and in her pride.

So he became a sort of nightmare to Jeanne and Madame Tellier. He dressed himself completely in black. He was always on the spot, putting himself like a barrier between these women and the unworthy life they were leading. He managed his time so that he could follow them wherever they went, to protest, by his presence, against the frivolity of their amusements.

Nothing was more extraordinary than to see this curious young man taking a walk in the fashionable world of Paris. He had been nicknamed "The Black Knight," and he could have had many love affairs if he had chosen.

One day Jeanne was to do the *quête* in a church. Daniel, who had already saved some money, placed himself where the *quêteuse* must pass.

The young girl was advancing with a pleasant smile, thinking much more of the elegance of her toilette than of the misery of the poor. She was

there, as if in a drawing-room, with a half-mocking, half-smiling look on her face ; at last she came in front of Daniel.

“ For the poor, if you please,” she said, without looking at him.

The large amount of his offering made her raise her head, and when she recognised the young man she began to blush, without knowing why. She continued her *quête*, but there were tears in her eyes.

On another occasion she was present at a theatre at the representation of a rather risky piece, and she was laughing at, without, however, understanding, the actor's jokes. As she turned round she noticed Daniel, who seemed to be looking at her reproachfully. This look went to her heart ; she feared at once she was doing wrong since the Black Knight was angry. She laughed no more, and during the *entr'acte*, she went and hid herself at the back of the box.

But what struck her most was Daniel's intervention in an unpleasant experience she and her aunt had one day. Madame Tellier had formerly, when alone, met with an insult, and this deplorable adventure was repeated on this particular occasion. Two young men, doubtless very much elevated after a superabundant lunch, mistook them for women of doubtful reputation, for the ladies were most showily dressed, and seemed to promise an easy conquest. One young man even pretended that he knew them.

“ Hullo ! Pomponette ! ” he exclaimed, addressing Jeanne. And as the young girl stared at him,

terrified and speechless : " Are you going to do the proud ? " he went on. But he suddenly felt himself seized by the arm. Daniel held him in a close grasp.

" Monsieur," said he, " you have made a mistake. . . . Be quick and make your excuses to these ladies." And he dragged him to the carriage door. The young man stammered.

" Your pardon, monsieur, but if respectable women are dressed like the others, how do you expect people to distinguish between them ? "

Daniel allowed him to depart, and entered the carriage of Madame Tellier, at her request. The coachman was told to return to the Rue d'Amsterdam. He drove off, giggling and cracking his whip.

The carriage was crossing the Place de la Concorde when Daniel perceived a queen of the *demi-monde* passing by, laughing immoderately. He pointed her out to Jeanne and quietly said :

" Mademoiselle, there is Pomponette ! "

The young girl looked at the creature for whom she had just been mistaken, and she blushed when she saw that they were dressed in exactly the same style. There was the same extremity of fashion and the same reckless luxury. Directly she reached home she went up to her room to weep without being disturbed, and thus get over the wicked temper she felt against Daniel.

But Madame Tellier henceforth hated her husband's secretary cordially. For his action in the last adventure she could only thank him, but she was singularly irritated by the forwardness of this young

man, who formed, she said, a dark blot on her establishment.

On several occasions she had tried to have him dismissed, but the deputy clung to Daniel, for he had made himself indispensable. He could give full fling to his folly since he paid a brain to be intelligent for him, and he felt so thoroughly at home in his folly that he took great care not to deprive himself of that commodity. He received his wife's complaints with condescending superiority; he sent her off to her furbelows, telling her that as he was tolerant to her toilettes, she, for her part, ought to tolerate his secretary. So long as he had been the mere tradesman he had shown himself tractable enough, but since he had become a deputy he had taken the attitude of a master, and intended to rule all around him.

Daniel was perfectly ignorant of the disturbance he caused or had caused in the household. He went blindly on, straight to his goal, as a man strong in the righteousness of his intentions. As a matter of fact, he went awkwardly to work at his task. Madame de Rionne could not have found anyone with a more whole-hearted devotion and more profound affection; but she probably expected him to display more tact in the accomplishment of his painful task.

The young man was passionately fulfilling his mission of love. His ignorance, his brusque kind-heartedness should even have raised him in anyone's estimation.

If he found himself a stranger to the world in which

circumstances compelled him to live, still he was the representative of plighted faith, of self-sacrifice. The dead woman, with the clear foresight of the dying, had judged Daniel rightly, however. Whilst Monsieur de Rionne was consummating his own downfall, without even remembering that he had a daughter, whilst Madame Tellier selfishly wrought harm to Jeanne, Daniel, having no other tie but that of gratitude, watched over the young girl, and bitterly regretted that he could invoke no human answer to his love. He had ended by understanding that he gave her daily offence. Jeanne must have asked herself by what right he thus followed her about everywhere, looking at her all the while with his serious eyes. All he was to her, he told himself, was a simple employé—a poor devil, with difficulty gaining his daily bread. Out of sheer pity she did not want him to be dismissed. Poor Daniel, his heart almost failed him at times ; he felt that Jeanne's disdainful manner was crushing him, and an immeasurable bitterness took possession of him.

If, however, he had studied more carefully the haughty but timid looks the young girl cast upon him, he would have experienced a joy that would have somewhat consoled him. He excited in her an emotion she could not define ; the affection that lay dormant in the depths of her nature was imperceptibly stirred ; she mistook for anger what was only the nervous awakening of her true self. Daniel developed in her a remorse she had not yet acknowledged even to herself. When he was near her she

felt a sort of shame, and this was what made her angry with him.

Daniel every day fully persuaded himself that he had made a great mistake in not abducting her when she was quite a little thing. This was a perpetual source of despair to him. In the place of this hare-brained, mocking girl, he pictured to himself the gentle, good young girl whom he would have brought up. His child's heart had been spoiled, and now he could not educate her over again ; he must look on with anguish at the frivolities, the mischievousness of this poor lost soul, of whom he had promised to make a good, loving, true woman.

One day Jeanne went to Monsieur Tellier's study to look for a book and took a malicious pleasure in walking round and round Daniel, thinking to embarrass him. She had noticed that the Black Knight was only stern before the world, and that he became extremely timid when he found himself alone with her. And she was right. He felt like a coward before the young girl. He had never dreamt of trying to explain to himself the sudden blushes, the trembling which seized him in her presence when alone together. He dreaded seeing her, hearing her speak, face to face, because then he became for the time being nothing but a little boy, and then she triumphed over him.

Jeanne on this day, despairing of making him lift his head up, was about to withdraw, when her skirt caught on the sharp corner of a piece of furniture and was torn with a rasping noise. At the crackling

of the stuff he looked up and saw Jeanne smiling quietly at him, whilst disengaging her dress.

He felt the necessity of speaking, and he said something idiotic.

“There is a dress done for,” he muttered.

Jeanne cast at him a surprised look which clearly signified “What business is it of yours?” Then, with a mischievous smile, she asked: “Do you happen to be a tailor by any chance, that you can thus estimate the amount of damage done?”

“I am poor,” replied Daniel, more firmly than before. “I do not like to see expensive things destroyed. Pray forgive me.”

The young girl was touched with the emotion he had put in these few words. She blamed herself for saying what she did.

“You hate luxury, do you not, Monsieur Daniel?” added she.

“I do not hate it,” answered the young man; “I fear it.”

“Do you, then, frequent places where the fashionable world congregates, in order to test your courage? I fancy I have seen you in very good company sometimes.”

Daniel did not answer at first.

“I fear luxury,” he repeated, adding, however, afterwards, “because it is dangerous for the soul as well as the mind.”

Jeanne was hurt at the look with which he accompanied these words.

“You are not very polite,” she concluded, drily.

And she went out of the room, irritated, leaving the poor creature in despair at his want of tact and his rudeness.

He realised that she had escaped him, and he condemned himself for not knowing how to give her good advice gently but profitably. The moment he succeeded in touching her feelings, in getting rid of the mocking smile on her lips, that moment he spoiled all by telling her truths so bluntly that she was offended and angered.

The fact was that he could not fight advantageously against the all-powerful influences which surrounded Jeanne. She belonged to the world ; she lived in a constant state of excitement which prevented her hearing the suppressed sorrow at her heart. The emotions often excited by Daniel's words were quickly stifled by the continual dissipation in the midst of which she found herself.

The scene of the torn dress was renewed in other forms on several occasions. Daniel often had the opportunity of moralising to her, and each time he felt he was losing ground with her instead of gaining it. He always found her colder and more disdainful at their next meeting. She must have argued that this poor wretch meddled with what did not concern him, and he could not say to her as he longed to : " You are my beloved child ; I only live for you. You are the precious legacy of her to whom I owe all. Your kind words fill me with delight ; your malicious laughter wounds and crushes me. In pity be kind that I may be kind in return, I implore you ! I am

working solely for your good and for your happiness."

For a time he had had a serious fear, from which he was now happily delivered. He trembled lest Monsieur de Rionne should remember his daughter and seek her out. But since he lived at the Tellier's he had never yet seen anything of her father, the man whose cowardice and vice horrified him.

Monsieur de Rionne absolutely forgot his daughter's very existence. He had come to see her once after she left the convent, solely in order to beg his sister on no account ever to bring her to see him. "You understand," he had said, with a faint smile, "I only receive men, and Jeanne would be quite out of place at my house."

And he went off feeling sure that he would never be disturbed, happy at the precautions he had just taken. He never went there again, fearing he should have to submit to some caprice of his daughter.

But now Daniel often came across someone in the house whose presence there gave him great anxiety. Lorin was for ever there. He was a good talker, and made himself most agreeable; and, in fact, he was always pleasant. And Jeanne seemed to like to see and hear him. He knew how to amuse her. When she showed herself mischievous he allowed himself with good grace to serve as a butt for her wit. So he became almost indispensable to her.

Daniel, perplexed with terror, wondered what this man's aim was. The scrap of conversation which he had had with him filled him with anxiety. Since that day he had never lost sight of him; he

even sought to question him, but he learnt nothing which could confirm his suspicions. Nevertheless, he had misgivings, and longed ardently to withdraw Jeanne from the influences which were poisoning her mind. He felt convinced that he would always be powerless as long as she lived among the giddy pleasures of the world. He wished he could carry her away far from the crowd to a calm solitude.

His dream came true—this dream-hope in a way was realised. One morning Monsieur Tellier informed him that in a week he should start with his wife and Jeanne to go and spend the spring and summer in the country. He reckoned upon taking his secretary with him, and there passing their time together at his great work, which was, so far, only making slow progress.

Daniel went up to his room, delirious with joy. He had passed a terrible winter, living a life which was killing him, and now at last he would be able to breathe freely again under the open sky near his well-beloved Jeanne. There, in the sweet peace of spring, he would try to accomplish the wish of the dead.

The following week he was in Normandy on an estate belonging to Monsieur Tellier on the banks of the Seine.

CHAPTER X

MONSIEUR TELLIER'S property, Mesuil Rouge, as it was called, was situated on the gentle slope of a hill which descended to the Seine. The château was one of those great irregular houses to which each fresh owner adds a block, and which ends by looking like a group of little villages with roofs of every shape and height. In the midst of that medley of buildings the eye could only with difficulty distinguish the original house, built in brick, with two side wings. The high and narrow windows opened on to a lawn which sloped down to the river.

At the back of the château there was a large park which extended over the entire summit of the hill. The trees with their foliage, the greenness of which looked darker as the sky was bluer, formed a huge curtain drawn over the horizon.

Then on the other side of the Seine a wide plain stretched away out of sight. Here and there could be seen the grey patches of villages in the midst of surrounding trees. The cultivated portions formed great squares of a pale hue, intersected by black lines of poplars, while the Seine made long windings in and out of the whole. The house was bordered by trees which partly hid it from view.

In front of Mesuil Rouge the river rushed down more rapidly and was studded with islets which divided it into rivulets. The vegetation ran wild on these islets, the grass grew very high, and the trees rose up in their lofty pride. The rest of the country was deserted and the people only went into it once a year to drive the crows from their nests. It was a charming verdant retreat, partly run wild, where nothing could be heard but the rippling of the waters and the cries of the kingfishers and wood-pigeons.

Nothing could be more enchanting than the narrow rivulets which separated the islets. The trees stretched out their branches, forming secluded avenues bordered by foliage. Through the openings one could get peeps of the blue sky. One could walk there under an arch of verdure high as the nave of a cathedral in a quiet, subdued light and a most refreshing coolness. There could be heard the flapping of wings, and the singing of the waters between the submerged trunks of the trees as they plashed with a light and monotonous chant.

At the end of the avenues round patches of sky could be seen, and as one advanced these patches grew larger, and the distant hills appeared, bathed in a subdued purple mist.

Then one could see glistening in the sun the Seine with its wooded banks, reflecting dark shadows in its waters. The vast, flat landscape was stretched out under the wide expanse of sky, dotted with little fleecy clouds.

One could have imagined that a flood of milk had passed over fruitful nature. The earth without upheavals, without rocks, yielded life in abundance to the trees which grew straight and strong, like vigorous children. And the rows of willows, in their sweet freshness, bathed their long grey branches in the limpid waters.

When the sun rose during the hot months of July the whole landscape was enveloped in a shining, white mist. Only the poplars were seen as dark streaks against the white sky. A sweet and peaceful country scene, in which the heart felt at peace and rest once more.

When Jeanne, the day after her arrival, opened her window and looked out on the vast plain before her the tears welled up to her eyes, and she hurried down to enjoy the fresh air, which caused her bosom to swell with an unknown joy. She became a child again. The feverish existence she had led during the last winter, the evening receptions in hot rooms, the life full of turmoil which had passed over her as a storm, agitating her body but not penetrating her soul, was past for the present at least. In the quiet freshness of spring she immediately recovered all the gaiety and tranquility of her school-days. She seemed to be back once more at her convent where, as a little girl, she ran merrily about under the trees of the garden. And here the garden was the wide country, the lawn and the park, the islets and the lands which gradually disappeared in the haze of the horizon. It was a rugged fairyland to her.

She was so light-hearted that she longed to play hide-and-seek between the trunks of the gnarled old oaks. It was such a re-awakening of youth. Her eighteen years, whose high spirits were suppressed in drawing-rooms for fear of rumpling her laces, sang their happy song to her in this enchanting spot. She felt the life-blood coursing through her veins anew, and she was carried away by sudden impulses which drove her to the freedom of vagabondage, and made her laugh like a boy. This rush of youthful blood, however, was only physical, for her heart did not beat any faster in the peacefulness of the fields ; she was simply giving herself up to the ardent life which burned within her.

Madame Tellier looked at her and shrugged her shoulders. As far as she was concerned Mesuil Rouge was a place of exile, where fashions compelled her to remain during the summer months. She was aristocratically bored there, passing her days in yawning and counting the weeks which must elapse before the autumn and winter should come round again. When a pining for Paris seized her too violently, she made an effort to be interested in the trees, and she went down to the borders of the Seine to watch the river flow by. But she always came back deeply dejected ; nothing seemed more stupid to her, or more dirty, than a river ; and when she heard people eulogising the pleasures of the country, she was filled with the utmost astonishment.

When the subject of green trees and running streams was mentioned in her drawing-room she

certainly pretended to have the same love of these things as the others, but at heart she entertained a ferocious hatred against the grass, which soiled her dress, and against the sun, which burned her skin and freckled her face.

Her longest walks were round the lawns. She always went forward very cautiously, never letting her eyes wander from the path for fear of accidents. Withered leaves dropping terrified her, and one day she uttered piercing screams because a thorn had slightly scratched her hand.

When Jeanne ran about in all directions she gazed at her with an air of pity and grief. She had hoped for better things of this child, who had all the winter played her rôle of coquette so well.

“ Good heavens ! Jeanne,” she cried, “ how vulgar you have grown. Really, one would think you were positively amusing yourself. Oh, heavens ! here is a big hole full of water. Come quickly and give me a hand.”

And the young girl, wishing to stimulate the distinguished airs of her aunt, also began to utter little cries of fright. She was not frightened at all, but was simply imitating Madame Tellier, whom she looked upon as a queen in a matter of taste. Then, little by little, her feet itched to run about again ; she hurried her steps, walking right through the mud, and this made her laugh heartily ; then she started off running again.

The only distraction the Telliers enjoyed was the arrival of a visitor. On those days Madame Tellier

was radiant. She drew the curtains so as to shut out the view of the trees, and fancied herself in Paris, talking the old, vapid, worldly gossip, intoxicating herself in imagination with the distant perfumes of the drawing-rooms.

At times, when she forgot to have the curtains drawn, and if she happened, in the midst of her gossip, to cast her eyes on the wide horizon, a real terror seized her ; she felt how little she was in all that immensity, and her woman's pride suffered.

Jeanne herself was not insensible to these reminders of Paris ; and she remained in the great reception-room at Mesuil Rogue, questioned the visitors, and resumed her rôle as a mocking beauty. On those days she forgot the sweetness of the air, the loveliness of the sky, and the refreshing coolness of the streams. She was no longer the tomboy who tore about the alleys, but became once more that beautiful, disdainful young lady who terrified Daniel so much. Daniel, on these occasions, shut himself up in the little room on the top story, just above a kind of pigeon-house, where he could see miles away into space. In his disgust he toiled away at the deputy's work, or else he crossed over all alone to an island, and there, lying among the tall grass, waited angrily for the visitors' departure that he might have his dear daughter restored to him.

This simple, gentle spirit experienced a veritable delight in living thus in the open air, revelling amid the freedom of nature. He had found at Mesuil Rouge exactly the kind of life that suited him ; for

the first time in his existence he was learning how to be happy. His life thus far had been passed in prison cells, so to speak, and he knew nothing of a free life. This peace, therefore, now came to him, and an immense hope entered and pervaded his whole system. On dull days—that is to say, when Mesuil Rouge was empty of visitors—Jeanne belonged to him.

Little by little intimacy had sprung up between them. During the first days the young girl looked at the islets with the longing of a child. Her imagination was at work; she wanted very much to know what was going on behind those impenetrable leaves.

But her uncle was far too pompous to risk his solemnity among the briars, and her aunt had an aversion to bushes planted in the water, for she declared that they must be full of serpents and horrid beasts.

Then it was that Daniel seemed to Jeanne like a worthy young man who could do her a great service. Every morning she saw him take the little boat and disappear in the dark shade of the tiny rivulet, and one day she mustered up courage to ask him to take her with him. She did it in all innocence, to satisfy her curiosity, without even dreaming that Daniel was a man.

For his part he only felt confused, and explained his confusion to himself by the joy he felt. And from that day Jeanne very often accompanied him on his excursions.

Madame Tellier, who looked on Daniel merely as a servant, did not see the slightest harm in these exploring expeditions. She was only astonished at Jeanne's bad taste in caring for such explorations, especially as she usually came back with her dress covered with mud. The deputy, it may be remarked, had come to have a true respect for his secretary, for, if he had few talents himself, he could recognise ability in others.

These trips became quite an infatuation with the young people. They started towards evening, an hour before twilight, and the moment the rowing boat reached one of the little branches of the river, Daniel lifted out the oars, and they glided gently along with the current. They rarely spoke a word to each other. Jeanne, partly reclining in the boat, was lost in day-dreams, watching the ripples made by her fingers dragging through the water, while he was content to sit and watch her. Thus they went along in the green transparent twilight, in the midst of a stillness which would make many people shudder. Then they would land on one of the little islands, and there give themselves up to childlike laughter and mad scamperings.

When they had discovered a small opening among the bushes they stopped to take breath, chatting like old comrades. But she noticed that Daniel would never sit down. Whilst his companion rested a few minutes he kept standing. He had practised climbing the trees to look for birds' nests. But if Jeanne took compassion on the poor little things' fate, he climbed

up again and replaced them in their nests in the high branches.

The return home was delightful. They lingered under the arches of the leaves where it was quite dark. The freshness of the air became penetrating; the leaves of the willows softly rustled as they brushed against their clothes. The calm water was like a mirror of brown steel. And Daniel, when he had prolonged the journey as long as possible, wanted at last to leave the island.

Then, as the Seine stretched out before them, white as silver, for there was generally some daylight still left—a pale light of a soft, melancholy kind—Jeanne, seated at the bottom of the boat, would gaze over the surface of the water. The river seemed to her like another sky, into which the trees plunged their shadows. As the country round lay sleeping in a deep peace there would come, one knew not whence, a sound as of soft chanting, and all was solemn and tranquilising.

In this calm life he was leading a supreme peace had come to Daniel, and he forgot himself. He felt convinced that he was not born for preaching, and that the rôle of tutor did not suit him in any way. He knew how to love, that was all. When he called to mind that horrible winter when he had played such a ridiculous part, he suffered terribly. How happy he was now, living in hope and the solace of his affection.

In this manner he occupied himself neither with the past nor the future. It sufficed him to see Jeanne running about among the grass, delighting in the

solitude of the islets, showing him at all times an open-hearted friendship. In his opinion all was going well ; the present time was good ; the young girl was forgetting the evil excitements of the past. The pure country air had made him feel younger again himself, for round about him he saw, as it were, a vast expanse of love.

All through the summer he lived in a glorious confidence. He had not a word of rebuke for Jeanne, not even a harsh look. In his eyes all she did was well done, and he discovered pretexts as excuses for her bad moments. The truth was that the mere presence of the young girl threw him into such ecstasies that the preception of the real state of things was taken away from him.

When she was there in the boat he was filled with a delicious sense of happiness in the depths of his being. He longed ardently for the hour when they started out on their expeditions ; and in order to keep her near him for long he discovered lengthy excursions that they ought to make. At that time he found her so lovely and good that he felt bitter remorse at having tormented her so. Never again would he scold her.

So the summer went by in hope. Not once had he given up his part of indefatigable and foreseeing protector and guide ; and she had ended by accepting him merely as a playmate, whose good nature she could impose upon with the tyranny of a child.

The day before their departure for Paris Daniel and Jeanne wished to go and bid good-bye to the island. They started off together and wandered in and out of

the little arms of the river. The autumn had set in ; yellow leaves gently glided down the stream, and the wind sighed in a melancholy way through the denuded branches. It was a sad excursion. It was beginning to get cold. The young girl drew a shawl she had thrown over her shoulders, more tightly about her ; she did not talk but gazed at the poor reddened foliage and found it very ugly. Daniel, still confident, gave himself up freely to the charm of this last excursion, without even a thought to that terrible Paris, looming straight before him.

When they left the islets, they perceived in the distance three persons who were waiting for them on the banks. They recognised Monsieur Tellier by the enormous black shadow he cast on the green lawn. The other two persons were doubtless visitors, whose features they could not yet distinguish. Then as the boat drew near the shore, great uneasiness took possession of Daniel. He recognised the visitors and wondered what they could want at Mesuil Rouge. Jeanne, jumping lightly out on to the grass, exclaimed : " Why, if it is not Monsieur Lorin and my father ! "

She went and embraced Monsieur de Rionne, and then directed her steps towards the château in the company of Lorin, who made her laugh boisterously with his Paris news.

Daniel remained alone on the banks, desolate, with tears in his eyes, clearly seeing that his happiness was dead.

In the evening, after dinner, Lorin accosted him, and with a mocking air of superiority, said to him :

“How well you row, my dear fellow. I should never have thought, to look at you, that you had such strong arms. I am much obliged to you for having taken Jeanne out all the summer season.”

And as Daniel looked at him with surprise, on the point of rejecting his thanks: “You do not yet know,” added he in a whisper, “that I have quite decided to commit the folly I spoke to you of.”

“What folly?” asked Daniel, in a suffocating voice.

“Oh, a lovely and good folly. . . . She has not a sou, and she will dip terribly into my purse. . . . I am marrying Jeanne.”

Daniel looked at him, stupified. Then he went up to his room without finding a word to say.

CHAPTER XI

LORIN had been anxiously meditating during the past ten months whether he ought to marry Jeanne or not. It was in this way that this clever man committed his gross follies.

He was not precisely in love, but the young girl had captivated him, and turned his head by her proud grace and amusing raillery. He believed that such a wife would do him honour, setting aside the fact that she would open the doors of good society for him. He pictured her on his arm, and his vanity was most deliciously tickled. Then, without his heart having any part in the matter, he began to have a selfish longing for her.

However, he felt he would have to pay a high price to gratify that longing, and he had fought against it for some time. Little by little he came to calculating what expense he should be put to—how much he could get in return for such a purchase. He put down every detail in figures, he covered a whole sheet of paper with additions and multiplications, and the total horrified him.

After that he pondered a little. He cut down the figures, and ended by convincing himself that Jeanne, dear as she must cost him, was yet within reach of his

purse. He waited another full month, hesitating and pondering as to whether it would not be better to seek a wife who would enrich instead of impoverish, may be, his exchequer. Love born of vanity only is just as tenacious as that springing from the heart. Lorin, feeling that he was growing weaker in his resistance, made excuses on the ground that, after all, he had a sufficient fortune, and that he could very well afford to please his fancy. He argued with himself that he must be mad, yet all the time he was railing at himself, he went off to find Monsieur de Rionne. He well knew that gentleman was ruined, but the die was cast.

“Monsieur,” he explained on arrival, “I am come to see you about an important matter. I trust you will be pleased to accede to my request.”

Monsieur de Rionne thought he smelt a creditor. He brought forward an armchair, with a look of enquiry on his face.

“This is the whole business,” said Lorin; “Madame Tellier is kind enough to receive me as a friend at her house, and I have had the opportunity of meeting Mademoiselle Jeanne de Rionne there. I have the honour of asking you for her hand in marriage.”

The father, surprised that he had a daughter to give in marriage, could not find an answer at the moment, and Lorin took advantage of his silence to tell him who he was, and inform him of the amount of his fortune. While he was speaking, Monsieur de Rionne's face brightened and his manner became one

of extreme politeness. He would not be asked for money ; very likely he might receive some.

They had a quiet talk.

Monsieur de Rionne was on the verge of poverty. Juila had eaten up what play had spared him. His debts were becoming pressing, he could no longer obtain any credit and, as age crept on him, shame drove him to some attempt to save himself going further down the hill. He was distracted with a hundred thoughts as to what would become of him and where he should go and lodge when obliged to leave his apartments. He did not dare to think of his sister, for he knew she would crush him under all her contempt as a practical woman of the world.

He had still a little pride, however, left in him, when a fresh desertion took away the last vestige. Louis, his valet, always imperturbable, had remained faithful to him so long as he could rob him at his ease ; but when he found there was nothing more left for him to plunder he went off one fine morning to enjoy his ill-gotten hoard *en bourgeois*. His mysterious smile was at last explained. This humble, precise human machine was laughing up his sleeve when the gold pieces which went astray found their way—by attraction—into his pocket. Moralists say that even in this world evil will find its own punishment. Louis, who had acquired the habit of stealing, was idiotic enough to steal Julia from his master. One day Monsieur de Rionne, when he came to pay his mistress a visit, had the door shut in his face by his valet.

He had sunk to these depths when Lorin came to ask Jeanne of him in marriage. It had never yet entered his head that he could make any capital out of his daughter, and the young man's petition was a revelation to him. He was seeking a refuge in every direction, and now the refuge was found. He was about to secure a sure retreat, where he could grow old peacefully and in luxury. And, in a vague sort of way, he hoped he should be able to get a large enough allowance from the young couple, so that perhaps he need not spend such a very dull life after all. He played the part of the dignified father pretty well. His manner was neither too eager nor too frigid. Inwardly he was quaking lest the marriage should not come off. Lorin assured him that Jeanne loved him. That allayed his anxiety, and he became more outspoken. He talked of his daughter with an emotion truly paternal ; all he wished for, he said, was her happiness. It was decided that they should both start the next day for Mesuil Rouge, in order that all the arrangements for the marriage might be made before Jeanne came back to Paris. Lorin was not sorry to hasten matters, for he had still some hesitation and he argued that once the folly was committed he must needs put up with the consequences. Directly after their arrival the question of the wedding was raised, and the young girl was consulted.

Daniel did not close an eye all night. His brain was in such a jumble that he did not know what to believe. One moment he was convinced that Lorin was lying ; that Jeanne would never marry him.

Then a terrible fear seized him, and he feared that the marriage would take place. Uppermost in him was a burning sensation of pain in his heart. When he depicted Jeanne and Lorin in his mind, side by side, he had furious bursts of rage. When daylight came he tried to calm himself. After all, he said, he only had Lorin's word for all this despair and irritation. Nothing, perhaps, was settled. He must wait and see ; and having gone downstairs, he tried to find out the truth from the expression of the faces round him.

Monsieur Tellier had his everyday look ; nothing in the way of emotion could ever be seen on that massive face. Monsieur de Rionne was manifestly delighted ; he paid all sorts of little attentions to his daughter, for he looked on her as a precious object that one is afraid to lose.

Madame Tellier was laughing nervously. She, also, seemed to have passed a bad night. The fact was that Lorin's proposal had exasperated her, and she had to reason with herself for a long time, to avoid an outbreak of passion. She knew that Jeanne was becoming a dangerous rival, and the best thing she could do would be to get rid of her as soon as possible. It would be at the cost of an admirer—she called Lorin her admirer—but it was better to sacrifice one of the number, she thought, than to keep this little girl always near her with her clear, ringing, and dangerous laugh. She tried in this way to be content, but she was really beside herself with anger.

Lorin was paying his court to Jeanne. With his

heart free he played the part of a lover to perfection. Moreover, he appreciated his full value, and had no ridiculous affectation of eagerness about him.

But the face that Daniel studied with the greatest anxiety was that of Jeanne herself. The young girl had resumed her Parisian coquetry, and was happy in being courted. She willingly allowed it. If she did not show too lively a joy, yet she seemed charmed with Lorin's attentions, and talked of Paris as a school-girl talks of a ball.

Then Daniel, with terror, understood how cowardly he had been in forgetting himself in the sweet voluptuousness of Mesuil Rouge. During those long excursions he ought to have made his position known to her ; whilst they were there, the young girl and himself, in the silence and freshness of the islets, far from the world, he ought to have opened his heart to her. And now the world stood between them once more.

Jeanne, during that period, had simply amused herself in playing about like a big child. Now, Lorin's presence was sufficient to bring back her evil spirit. He seemed to her to be a good enough fellow, rather foolish, but otherwise very well behaved.

When she was made acquainted with his proposal—which she expected, by the way—she recklessly accepted it, only seeing in the marriage the means of having an establishment of her own : otherwise she knew nothing.

Daniel had an instinct of what was passing through that young head, and he vowed with ungovernable

anger that he could never allow such a marriage to take place. It was revolting to him. In fact, he had forgotten his mission ; he no longer sought simply to conform to the wish of the dead woman ; his whole being was urging him to snatch Jeanne from Lorin's arms.

In the evening, after a long day of agony, he stopped the young girl on the banks of the Seine.

"Are you going to be married?" he asked her, abruptly.

"Yes," she answered, amazed at the emotion he betrayed.

"Do you know Monsieur Lorin well?"

"Most decidedly."

"But it is twelve years since I first met him, and I have not the least respect for him."

Jeanne drew herself up haughtily. She was about to answer him when Daniel violently stayed her, saying :

"Not a word ! Believe me, the marriage is an impossible one. I will not allow you to marry this man."

He spoke as a master, an angered father who intends to be obeyed. Jeanne looked at him with an expression of contemptuous stupefaction.

For one instant Daniel thought of telling her everything, and of commanding her in the name of her mother to dismiss Lorin. He, however, deferred the confession, and only added in a more gentle voice : "For pity's sake, reflect, and do not drive me to desperation."

Jeanne set off laughing. The astonishing audacity of the secretary disarmed her. She merely said : " Monsieur Daniel, do you then happen to be in love with me ? "

Then, as if warned of the devotion and affection of the poor young man, she added, in a milder voice : " Come, my friend, do not talk foolishly. We must not part in anger."

When she had gone Daniel stood there motionless, crushed, mechanically repeating the young girl's words : " Do you then happen to be in love with me ? " There was, as it were, a great buzzing in his head which prevented him from hearing himself ; and suddenly he fled towards the park, muttering as he went : " She has said it, she has said it. I am in love."

A fire seemed to be raging within him, and he staggered like a drunken man. A fine, cold rain began to fall, and he went out into the dark night, deliriously weeping, seeing at last clearly the true state of things.

He loved Jeanne, poor wretched youth that he was, and he repeated it to himself a dozen times in deep despair. What ! had he succeeded in lying to himself ? Was all this self-sacrifice nothing but love ? He only wished to protect the young girl from Lorin, because he wanted to keep her for himself. At this thought he was ready to sink with shame, for he realised that he would not have the courage to fight for her any more.

After all, what was he to Jeanne ? Not even a

friend. What right had he to come and speak like a master in this family, and of what account would his orders be to them? His powerlessness and mean position were always crushing him.

If he asserted that Lorin was a dishonourable man, he had no proof; if he spoke of the mission he had to accomplish, they would look on him as a madman, they would laugh at him, drive him out of the house, and tell him plainly that he was jealous and in love.

And they would be right. He loved Jeanne when she was only six years of age. He quite realised it now. In the Impasse St. Dominique d'Enfer he had loved the sweet image his heart had formed of the child. Later he had begun to adore the young girl. He had in truth grown jealous, and wickedly followed her everywhere, dreading lest her heart should be snatched away from him.

After that he went on to think of their excursions to the islets, of all the tender solace he then felt in his love. How happy he was when he did not know himself! How good it was to watch over the dear object of his affection, and think that all his sentiments were only those of a father!

Now he knew all! And, while remorse tortured him, passion gnawed at his heart, he sank to the ground and lay shivering under the falling rain. In his agony, in the abuse he heaped on himself, in his shame and suffering, a thought came unceasingly to his mind—an implacable, bitter thought. It was that Jeanne would belong to another. He strove desperately to drive away this image. He desired to

kill his passion. He recalled with despair the memory of his good saint. But Jeanne and Lorin were always there mockingly before him, young and smiling. Then his head throbbed as if ready to burst, and he saw everything blood-red.

In this way he spent a greater part of the night. An overwhelming despondency succeeded this crisis of self-abnegation and shame. In the morning he felt that he had no longer any business or right at the Tellier's, that the battle was finished, and that he was beaten. He gave way faint-heartedly before what he considered accomplished facts ; the whole of his sorrow-stricken being clamoured for peace. He determined to go away by himself, and reach Paris some hours before the household from the Mesuil Rouge arrived.

He went to George's lodgings. The latter abstained from asking any questions, and he spent several months there in a state of utter prostration. Only once he betook himself to the Rue d'Amsterdam to bid farewell to the deputy. An irresistible longing, which he would not confess even to himself, drove him to the house. He felt a desire to know the exact date of the celebration of the marriage ; the uncertainty tortured him. But when he had satisfied his curiosity he suffered still more. He counted the days, and every fresh hour which brought him nearer to the fatal date became more burdensome.

He had sworn not to be present at the ceremony, but the night before the fateful day a fever seized him which drove him irresistibly to the church. There

he passed through all the horrors of death. He hid himself behind a pillar, shuddering, thinking it was all some hideous nightmare.

When he reached home again George imagined he was drunk, and put him to bed as though he were a child.

But the next day, notwithstanding the fever which was upon him, Daniel got up and declared that he was leaving Paris, that he would be off and go back to Saint-Henri by the seaside, where he had lived so peacefully in olden times. George was unwilling to let him leave. He saw that his friend was extremely feeble, but in the face of Daniel's fierce determination he could only beseech him to at least allow him to accompany him. Daniel grew angry and refused all consolation. He had a longing for solitude.

He went, leaving George in despair and ignorant of everything that had happened to his friend.

When Daniel saw the great blue ocean stretched out before him he felt calmer, but he still suffered a profound sadness. He hired a room, of which the window looked on to the sea, and there he lived a whole year doing nothing, not finding it irksome, though he was eating up, day by day, the little saving he had hoarded up. For whole days he remained perfectly motionless, facing the sea. The sound of the waves had, as it were, an echo in his bosom and allowed him to nurse his thoughts. He sat down at a corner of the rocks, turning his back to the world of the living, absorbed in the infinite. And he was only happy when the waves had put his memory to sleep,

and he could sit there inert, in an ecstasy, sleeping, so to speak, with his eyes wide open.

Then a strange hallucination haunted him. He imagined himself the sport of the waves, he thought the sea had risen to seize him, and was now rocking him—rocking him gently to and fro. It was in this unceasing contemplation, in this absorption of mind, that he brought peace to his heart. A moment came when he suffered no longer, and no longer thought of Jeanne as a sweetheart. His wound was closed, and only a dull heaviness was left. He thought himself cured. Little by little his active habits returned to him. He ran about the rocks ; he relaxed his limbs that had been stiffened during his long period of despondency. All his old thoughts were awakened one by one. He wrote to George, and asked him what was going on in Paris ; but he dared not yet leave the seaside, which had kept him from despair, and more.

This new inrush of vitality worried him, for he did not know what to do with his renewed vigour. He almost wished to begin the fight all over again, to suffer once more, and recommence loving and weeping. Now that the fever of love troubled him no longer, he felt indignant with himself at his idleness ; all he asked for was an active, stirring life, even at the price of being beaten again.

One morning, as he lay partly awake and partly asleep in his bed, he heard a voice he had heard in days long gone by—the voice of a dying woman—saying to him : “ If she marries a man with a bad

disposition you will still have to fight for her, still have to protect her ; solitude is burdensome for a wife, and she must have a great deal of moral resolution and strength not to go astray. Whatever happens, never desert her."

The next day Daniel left for Paris. He was going to finish his task. He felt now an invincible courage, a firm hope.

CHAPTER XII

ON reaching Paris Daniel took up his quarters with George.

“ What, you ! ” cried his friend, not expecting him in the least. But he received him like a prodigal son, with all kinds of marks of goodwill and the deepest joy.

He dared not ask him any questions for fear of hearing of a new and early departure. Daniel reassured him by telling him that he had come to set to work again at their common task. Their sweet life of former days was about to begin once more. During the journey to Paris he had considered the course of life he should pursue. He decided to resume his interrupted labours, to try for fame once again. As of old, Jeanne was his goal. When necessity demanded it he had sacrificed the pursuit of science and a brilliant future for her sake ; he had taken up a mean occupation solely to live near her. To-day the position was changed. He must be a simple employé no longer, for he had to ascend the social scale, to become celebrated, and to make the doors of the fashionable world open to him because of his own position. And he determined to set to work again and hasten the hour that should enable him to meet her on an equal footing.

George and he took up their labours once more with ardour. They dedicated several essays to the Institute, which drew upon them the attention of the world of learning.

Daniel now consented to inscribe his name on their essays, and the names of the two friends were always seen side by side, uniting them in the same renown. At last the great work at which they had been labouring ever since they had lived in the Impasse St. Dominique d'Enfer was completed and published. It caused a lively sensation and any amount of discussion. And a most unusual thing happened for a scientific work; the report of it even reached the heart of the fashionable world. Daniel, who had more especially taken charge of its compiling, had set his whole soul on that.

The two young authors had become celebrated; they found themselves received everywhere with open arms. George, who had attained the end he had aspired to, lived in a state of serene happiness. Daniel, on the contrary, seemed to be conscientiously acquitting himself of a task whose accomplishment left him unmoved.

One day George invited him to an evening reception given by some great personage, and Daniel went, driven there by a presentiment—such as we all have at times. The first person he met on entering the drawing-room was Jeanne, on the arm of Lorin. He had only just had a glimpse of her once or twice since his return to Paris, and he felt anxious at the look of sadness on her face. She no longer laughed

with the light, disdainful air of a young girl. The smile had faded from her lips ; tears had made her eyelids heavy and grey.

Lorin perceived his old acquaintances and rushed to meet them. He was delighted at being able to shake hands with them in full view of the crowd.

“ At last, I see you once more ! ” he said, in such a loud voice that everyone could hear him. “ For a whole month I have been hunting for you. I really must scold you for deserting your old comrade in this way.”

George stared at him, scarcely knowing whether to laugh or be angry. Daniel, who was considering Jeanne, hastened to answer.

“ Our time is very much taken up ; besides, we did not wish to intrude upon you.”

“ Oh, come now,” interposed Lorin with emphasis ; “ you know very well you are always welcome. I will take no excuse, but shall expect you at the first opportunity. Do you know that you are two notabilities who are in everybody’s mouth just now. You must be earning a vast amount of money.” Then, remembering that he had his wife on his arm, he added : “ My dear, I wish to present to you Monsieur Daniel Raimbault and Monsieur George Raymond, our young and illustrious scholars.”

Jeanne bowed slightly, and looking at Daniel, she said : “ I already know this gentleman.”

“ By jove, yes, I was forgetting,” exclaimed Lorin, laughing heartily ; “ he took you out often enough on the Seine.”

“ Ah, my dear Daniel, you have indeed done well in becoming a celebrity ! It pained me deeply to see you the secretary of Monsieur Tellier. You know that he died lately, some say from apoplexy, others from a speech that had been ill received. I was told yesterday that his wife was about to retire into a convent. These queens of fashion always end in that way.”

Jeanne was pained at this speech. The loud voice of her husband irritated her. Her lips trembled, and she turned her head aside as if to escape the unpleasantness of being on the arm of such a man.

Lorin was no longer the young gallant who played the part of a lover so gracefully. Little by little his old instincts had taken hold of him again ; he was once more the rough, hard trader. Directly he was married he no longer felt any necessity to make himself agreeable to his wife.

Daniel noticed even that Lorin's general appearance was not as elegant as formerly, and he felt a great pity for Jeanne.

“ Very well, depend on our coming,” he said, “and at an early date.”

And he moved off, taking George with him, who had not as yet opened his lips, but had gazed at Jeanne with admiring and sympathetic eyes. When they were a short distance off, George asked :

“ You know Lorin's wife, then ? ”

“ Yes,” quietly answered Daniel ; “ she is the niece of the deputy in whose house I worked.”

“ I am sorry for her, with all my heart,” said

George, "for her clumsy clown of a husband must cause her great unhappiness. Do you intend to go and see them?"

"Most decidedly."

"I will accompany you. . . . That poor young woman, with her great, sad eyes, has moved my heart wonderfully."

Daniel changed the conversation as soon as he could. He also was very much moved, and he rebuked himself with a kind of bitter joy that misery had most probably commenced what his affection could not do. He saw very well that Jeanne's heart was at last awakened, and that now she suffered.

Every evening, for nearly a week, George said to him:

"Well, are we going to Lorin's to-morrow?"

Daniel began to feel timid of going to see Jeanne. It seemed as if the fever of love was again about to take possession of him. Since the evening "At Home," when he had met her, she was always before his eyes, looking at him with a melancholy, sad smile; and every now and then he felt his heart beating, and mad hopes entered his brain. At last he made up his mind to go. One evening George and he fulfilled their promise. It just happened that it was a reception night. The drawing-room, when they arrived, was already full of people, and Lorin pointed them out to his guests as lions of the day. The evening was a most distressing one for Daniel. He saw all, he understood all.

He found Jeanne nervous and restless. She was no longer the heedless young girl who queened it in

her ignorance ; she was a broken woman, whose heart had expanded only to bleed. As long as her affections had been dormant she had remained a mere coquettish doll, who lived quietly on in her mocking frigidity. But now her heart had spoken loudly ; she wanted love, and she found no one to love. A rebellion arose within her, and she accused herself bitterly of letting her heart sleep too long.

The awakening had been cruel for Jeanne. Two or three months after her marriage she found out she had a soul which she had known nothing about hitherto. Her husband, with his low instincts, his crooked and wicked nature, caused her a revulsion of feeling that suddenly opened her eyes. His coarseness repelled her. When she discovered what manner of man it was she had married, all her woman's pride and instinct revolted. Her mother spoke in her ; her inner being grew ; dominated, and drove out the outer being that circumstances alone had created. And the veil was torn aside.

Then she saw herself in the hands of Lorin, tied to him for ever, and terror and anger seized her. She had wilfully brought this untoward fate upon herself ; she had prepared her own sufferings, all unwitting, with a light heart. The outlook was dark indeed. Now that she had an imperative desire to love some one, she could not satisfy her desire, for she despised the only man to whom it was necessary that she should give her affections. At these thoughts she was seized with unknown, unspeakable pangs of misery, and as she wept gave up all hope of happiness.

Then cowardice followed. She feared that she would never have the strength to live on thus. The prospect of a lonely, loveless life scared her. Then she began inwardly to battle against herself. When her heart, crying with anguish, drove her to love a man other than her husband, then her duty as a wife spoke loudly and her self-respect asserted itself.

Some days she managed to prove to herself that after all love is free, and that human laws could not restore her to a young girl's ignorant pride. But the next day duty once again raised her solemn voice, and she recoiled before the sin, accepting her martyrdom as a punishment for her blindness.

For nearly six months this inward battle lasted, and she showed many outward marks of it. Every morning, notwithstanding the resistance her self-respect made, she advanced one step nearer the gulf. She made desperate efforts, strove hard to hold back, but her head was in a whirl, and little by little her passions began to yield altogether and drag her down. She was on the point of falling when Daniel came once more across her path in life.

The young man, when he saw the burning eyes of the young woman, partly guessed the tortures she was undergoing. He saw Lorin turning to folly and fatness. For a moment the thought came to him of calling him out and killing him, so that his wife might be rid of him. Then he cross-examined himself, and, with terror, came to the conclusion that love was once more asserting its sway over him.

His eyes never left Jeanne during the whole evening he spent there. He took an infinite delight in watching her every movement ; her voice, her every action gave him pleasure, and he forgot himself dangerously in this contemplation. He noticed that Jeanne's eyes were constantly directed towards the door. Undoubtedly she was expecting someone ; and he felt a burning sensation shoot across his breast. Certainly Jeanne was in a fever ; she shivered, she was making her last stand before yielding. Then he drew near and spoke to her of Mesuil Rouge.

"Do you remember," he said, "those delicious evenings and those lovely twilights? How fresh and cool it was under the trees, and what a deep calm reigned all around !"

Jeanne smiled at these sweet memories of peace.

"I went again to Mesuil Rouge after that," she answered, "and I thought of you. I had no one then to take me to the islets."

Suddenly she looked towards the drawing-room door. Daniel again felt that burning sensation in his chest ; he also turned round, and in the doorway he saw a tall, smiling young man who was casting a searching look across the room.

This young man perceived Lorin and went and shook hands with him, with an exaggerated and forced warmth of manner. He joked with him for a minute or two, then turned towards Jeanne. The young wife shuddered.

Daniel drew back and took stock of the newcomer.

He judged him at first sight. Here was a de Rionne who had evidently not yet quite gone down the hill of ruin. Jeanne was no doubt taken with the elegance and brilliant talk of this man. They exchanged a few words of politeness, but she was nervous and anxious, as if she were impatiently waiting for words that did not come. Daniel, without dreaming that he ought to have moved away, remained where he was, being suspicious. He also was waiting for something, fixing looks of desperation upon her meanwhile.

The young man paid no attention whatever to this stranger, whose suppressed wrath he did not even notice. He bent quickly down, and said in a low voice :

“ Madame, am I to come to-morrow ? ”

Jeanne, pale as death, was about to answer, when, raising her eyes, she perceived Daniel before her, severity and anxiety depicted on his face. Her lips trembled ; she drew back, hesitated a moment, then retired without a word. The young man turned on his heel, muttering between his teeth :

“ Oh, well, the fruit is not yet ripe. I must wait a little longer.”

Daniel had heard all, and understood all. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. He was like a man who has just escaped a great danger and who breathes again, looking round about him to see if the danger is really and completely over. He was choking ; he felt the need of breathing freely, and as he could not reflect calmly in the stifling air of

the drawing-room, he sought out George and drew him away into the street.

George was by no means pleased at being dragged off. He was very happy in this house, with that sad young woman who had so moved him. If Lorin had not been there as a kill-joy to his feelings, he would willingly have lost himself in the contemplation of Jeanne's melancholy beauty.

"Why the deuce do you run away like this?" he asked his friend, when in the street.

"I do not like Lorin," stammered Daniel.

"Oh, as to that, I do not like him any better than you do; but I wanted to find out what makes his wife look as if she were pining . . . We shall go there again, shall we not?"

"Oh, yes."

They walked home together silently. George was meditating, and at moments, feelings hitherto unknown to him caused a warm, quick flow of blood to mount to his head; he gave himself up to a sweet dream that was quite new to him. Daniel strode moodily along, with his head bowed, hurrying over the ground, in haste to be alone.

When he reached his room he sat down and shuddered. He shook all over; he accused himself of returning to Paris too late. He felt sure indeed that Jeanne had not yet fully committed herself, but he did not know what course to take to bring about an immediate and violent reaction in her feelings. The dead woman's words recurred to his mind. "When you are a man," she had said, "remember

my words ; they will tell you what a woman can suffer. I know what a burden a lonely life is, and how much determination is required not to fall." And here was Jeanne in her loneliness wanting in determination—here she was ready to fall.

Daniel had already suffered too much to lie to himself again. He felt that his love was gnawing at his entrails afresh, and that it was only from shame, from cowardice, that he did not speak only of it. At Mesuil Rouge he had a similar attack one dark night when a cold rain was falling. Then in a jealous fury he had wished to tear Jeanne away from Lorin. To-day he was seeking to protect her against herself, to prevent her from taking a lover, and he was enduring the utmost agony, with the same cries of agony and suffering.

To deceive himself, to excuse his actions, he pretended that it was only his mission to the dead woman that urged him on, and that he was accomplishing a sacred task. This time it was a question of the young woman's honour, of her remaining calm and proud in her virtue, or of her suffering the remorse of sin. The strife had never been sharper nor more decisive. Then he laughed at himself in mockery, for he knew full well that he was lying again, and that it was his love alone which drove him to desire Jeanne's happiness. His heart lay bare before him. The honourable guardian had become the passionate lover, who no longer watched over the woman entrusted to him for any other reason except that of jealousy.

And he put his face between his hands and wept, seeking with anguish a means of saving her, and of saving himself at the same time. Then, as he could think of none, he took a sheet of notepaper and began to write to Jeanne. The tears dried on his cheeks, and all the fever passed into his hand, so rapidly did he write.

For two hours he never raised his head ; he was gaining consolation. His letter was an effusion of love, a flood of affection breaking down all obstacles, and spreading far and wide. All the accumulated adoration of years found an issue in that confession. This poor wretch let himself go, so to speak, and told her all. He even had no consciousness of this outpouring of his feelings ; he simply yielded to that inner force that controlled him. He opened his heart to her because he was suffocating and wanted breathing space.

When he felt calmer he stopped. He did not even read over what he had written. He avoided betraying his personality in his letter, and wrote it anonymously. The next day he sent it on to Jeanne. He did not know what effect the letter would have on her. He merely lived in hope.

CHAPTER XIII

THIS is what Daniel wrote to Jeanne :

Forgive me, I can no longer keep silence ; I must open my heart to you. You will never know who I am. This is the confession of an unknown, who is cowardly and has not the courage to love you without telling you so. I ask for nothing ; I only wish you to read this letter in order that you may know that, in the background, there is a man on his knees praying, weeping when you weep. Sorrow is less bitter when shared with another ; I, who shed lonely tears, feel how hard a lonely life is to grief-stricken hearts.

I have no desire to be consoled, I am resigned to living on in the bitterness of sorrow ; but I wish, if I can, to make your life one of supreme happiness, and give you the peace which kind and good hearts enjoy.

And I am writing to tell you I love you, that you are not deserted, and must not give way to despair. You have never known the bitter joys of a lonely and retired life. It seems to me that I love you in another life, and that you are mine in the vast regions of dreamland. And no one has penetrated my secret. I hoard up my love as a miser hoards his gold. I am alone in loving you, and the only one that knows that I love you.

You seemed to me sad the other night, and I cannot work for your happiness. I am nothing to you ; I dare not pray you even to exist in the dream I have of you. Ascend higher—still higher ! Tell yourself that you will never see me and love me. And above, in those regions of dreamland, you will discover the world I live in.

I have striven to stifle the feelings of my heart, but it refused to be stifled. Then I knelt down before you—in spirit—as before a saint, adoring you in an ecstasy.

I do not know why I was born, except it was to love you—to tell you of my love, and yet I must keep silence, for ever silent. I wish I was one of the objects you make use of—the dust even that you tread under your foot.

But I am weeping, weeping with shame and sorrow. I know you are suffering, that you are battling with your own heart. I, myself, am alone here, trembling with agony, shuddering at the thought that you are about to shake the faith which makes me worship you. You understand me, do you not ? My heart, my religion are at stake.

I was living so happily up above in dreamland in silent adoration. It would be so grand for us both to ascend there together, to love each other in the depths of infinity.

And Daniel went on writing in this strain, repeating continually the same ideas and the same words. One single thought, in fact, pervaded his brain ; he loved Jeanne, and Jeanne was on the point of loving

another. His letter contained but this one sentiment, expressed in different forms in the midst of the most ardent supplications. It was an act of faith and love.

Jeanne had at times received scented *billets-doux*, in which some gentleman or other laid his heart at her feet. As a rule, after reading the first few lines, she at once destroyed these so-called declarations of affection. They did not even make her laugh. Daniel's letter reached her in the midst of that sadness that the suffering creature feels on awakening, obliged once more to take up for a whole day its burden of anguish at the point it had left it behind the day before. The young woman was deeply moved whilst reading the first lines of this letter. The paper shook in her hands, and tears rose to her eyes.

She could not explain to herself the singular feeling of sweetness and peace which came over all her being. She read on to the end with delight without asking herself whether she was doing right or wrong.

The fact was that this letter had taken life, so to speak, in her hands. In short, it spoke to her of passion ; it revealed to her love in its fulness. Jeanne was no longer merely reading ; she believed she actually heard this unknown lover declaring his passion in a voice broken by sobs. The paper was to her as if saturated with blood and tears, and she felt a heart's throb in every sentence, in every word. Her body shivered and her thoughts wandered far away. Her soul was answering this appeal sent from

above. She was ascending to that peaceful region from which the voice of Daniel reached her. And thus she was elevated and purified in the religion of superhuman affection and self-sacrifice.

Then, ashamed of her cowardice, she determined to accept this solitude, in which she would be no longer alone. A passionate desire to act rightly had taken hold of her ; it seemed to her as if the breath of one who loved her was passing over her forehead with caressing warmth. In any case she would now have one thought, one aspiration, always with her that would sustain her in her weak moments. They might make her weep, but her tears would no longer sear her soul, for now peace and hope reigned in her bosom.

She comforted herself with infinite joy, for she felt she was loved—that her heart would not die of weariness. The world at this moment seemed very far off. She saw, as through the darkness of night, men in black coats moving across her drawing-room, like spectres of the past. She was wrapped up in her vision, in the thought of that lover who wept far from her, who sent her words full of passion and consolation.

This lover had no body. She contemplated him as in a vision ; she could fix no outlines to his dear soul. As yet he was only love itself. He had come as a breath of wind, wafting her to the light, and she suffered herself to be carried away without seeking to understand what the power was which raised her thus towards heaven.

Daniel, for a whole week, dare not revisit Lorin's house. A thousand chimeras passed through his brain. He feared to find Jeanne still with the love fever, and if such were the case all that would be left him then would be to die.

At last he did decide to go there. It was quite a festal day for George who accompanied him. This time they had the good luck to choose a day when Jeanne happened to be alone. Lorin had been called to England on business which caused him grave anxiety. The young wife received them with bright smiles and charming cordiality in a little blue boudoir.

From the first look a deep joy had penetrated Daniel's heart. Jeanne appeared to him transfigured. She was wearing a white cashmere dress. Her face was once more calm and restful. Her lips no longer quivered, and Daniel felt that peace had come over her soul.

The young woman detained the two friends a long time, made them at home, and the three together had one of those delightful talks which make the hours pass so quickly.

Daniel saw that he had not been detected as the writer of the anonymous letter. He therefore thoroughly rejoiced at the peaceful expression which had come into Jeanne's face. In the inflections of her voice he perceived a caress for the unknown lover ; he noticed a softened light in her eyes, and tasted an infinite pleasure in the signs of love that belonged to him, that unknown one.

He vowed to himself to be content with this happiness. The thought of her finding out the facts terrified him ; the idea of making himself known caused him to shudder, for he feared that Jeanne then would no longer love him.

But all this was in the future, and he was absorbed in the present. Jeanne was there before him, good and charming, full of the radiant dream he had created for her, and he lost himself in contemplating her.

George, too, was charmed. The young woman talked with him particularly, for Daniel feared that if he talked much his dream would vanish. While he therefore remained silent, Jeanne questioned George about his literary works, and a lively sympathy sprang up between them.

At last it was necessary to take leave of the little blue boudoir. The two friends promised to come again. Both left their hearts behind them in that pleasant little retreat.

During the next three months Daniel led an existence full of heavenly bliss. He lived as in a dream ; he lived elsewhere, up above, far off from the work-a-day world. All his fits of anger had passed away ; he no longer wept, no longer had any wishes but the one of remaining for ever in this paradise of love, a love unrecognised but satisfied.

He had not long been able to resist the temptation of writing again to Jeanne, and his letters were now written in a tender and peace-giving strain. " Let us live thus," he said to her ; " let me simply be to you what man is in the sight of the Deity : a prayer,

a worship, a humble breath." Then he showed her heaven open, and led her away from this wicked world.

Jeanne obeyed this pure spirit whom love for a mortal had taken hold of. She accepted him as a guardian, an invisible stay, to keep her from evil.

Daniel often betook himself to Jeanne's house, and he had a bitter satisfaction, as it were, in the extraordinary situation he had created. After every fresh letter, he went to read on Jeanne's face the emotions she had experienced from it. He studied with ecstasy the progress that love made in her. He never gave a thought to the awakening. She loved him, she was full of him—that was sufficient. If he revealed his name, if he tore away the veil that hid him, she would perhaps recoil from him. He was still nothing but a timid child, sensitive to a degree, and afraid of the full light of day. The only love that suited him happened to be this secret passion.

He now would beg of George to accompany him to Jeanne. He no longer dared to remain alone with her; he would have stammered and blushed when he spoke, thinking that she read through him. Besides, when George was there he could remain silent; his friend amused Jeanne whilst he dreamed of his love.

During the space of these three months George, notwithstanding that he struggled against his infatuation, had yielded to the temptation of loving the young woman with the deep passion that grows in meditative natures. He hid the state of his heart from

everyone, even Daniel; above all, from Jeanne. When he found out the truth, there was no time for flight. So he gave way, having no courage to renounce his first love; he continued going to the little blue boudoir, spending some delicious moments there, not caring to ask himself what the end would be.

At times Jeanne looked him full in the face without wavering. She seemed to wish to penetrate the depths of his being and seek some hidden thought there. Under her questioning glance he grew troubled, and then on the lips of the young wife he saw a smile, which was tender but discreet.

One day when the two friends presented themselves at her house they were greeted with most unexpected news. Lorin had just died suddenly in London. They went home very much upset. They could not mourn for Lorin; all they thought of was that the little blue boudoir would be closed to them for some time to come. This death, which gave the woman whom they both loved her freedom, gave them more fear than hope. They found themselves very well as they were, and dreaded any change in what their hearts were accustomed to. No reciprocal confidences had passed between them. They led the same life, but now they both had their own secret and they deferred till later their mutual confession. They let a few weeks pass by; then they ventured to go again to Jeanne's. Nothing seemed changed. The young widow, looking rather pale perhaps, received them with her usual cordiality and only showed herself more reserved to George.

It was Daniel this time who was obliged to keep the conversation going.

Lorin, having made some disastrous speculation, had left his wife only a remnant of his fortune.

Monsieur de Rionne, who lived at his daughter's like a parasite, was delighted at his son-in-law's death. He had ended by conceiving a downright hatred for the man who kept such a tight hold of his money. He could never drag a sou from him, and all he received was board and lodging. When Lorin was dead he demanded money right out, from Jeanne. She willingly surrendered to him the remains of a fortune that burdened her, only keeping sufficient for herself to live on quietly.

Daniel, who was made acquainted with these matters, loved Jeanne all the more for her conduct. Every day she grew in his esteem; he rejoiced at seeing the dead woman's wish at last fulfilled. One evening, as the fever of love was on him, he wrote another letter.

The next day he was stupefied on receiving a note from Jeanne, asking him to come to her at once. He started, without saying anything to George, and rushed there like a madman, his head all in a whirl. The young widow no longer lived in the vast flat she had occupied with her husband. She now resided on the second story of a house of humble exterior, and she received Daniel in a little bright room, furnished unpretentiously. She did not even notice his wild look. He could hardly breathe, and was unable to find a word to say. When she had

made him sit down, she said to him, with touching familiarity :

“ You are my best, my only friend. I am sorry that I have overlooked your affection so long. Will you forgive me ? ”

And she took his hand, looking at him with tears in her eyes. Then, without giving him time to answer, she continued :

“ You love me, I know. I have a secret to confide to you, and a service to ask of you.”

Daniel became very pale. His wretched awkwardness was returning. He imagined that the young widow had found out everything, and was on the point of speaking to him of his letters.

“ I am listening,” he murmured, in a broken voice.

“ I have been receiving letters for several months,” she said. “ You must know who wrote them. I depend on you to tell me the truth.”

Daniel felt ready to faint. A rush of blood flew to his face.

“ You do not answer,” continued Jeanne. “ You do not wish to betray your friend’s trust. Well, I myself then will speak out. These letters are from Monsieur George Raymond. Do not deny it ; I know all ! I have read his love in his looks ; I have thought of everyone about me, and I have found that no one but he could write to me thus.”

She stopped, thinking what she would say next. Daniel, utterly dumbfounded, stared at her aghast.

“ I consider you as a brother,” she said, in a slower tone. “ I wished to unburden my heart to

you. . . . Your friend wrote to me again yesterday. He must not continue doing so, for his letters are useless now. I tell you again, I know all ; the joke would become cruel and ridiculous if carried any further. Tell your friend to come. . . . Come with him." And her looks of emotion completed her confession—Jeanne loved George.

Daniel, frozen up, had suddenly recovered an awful calm. It seemed to him that his soul had departed, and only his body continued to live.

In a quiet voice he conversed of George with Jeanne ; he promised to fulfil the part of a brother with which she entrusted him.

Then he found himself in the street, and went home. After that the animal side of his nature awoke in him, and he had a frightful access of despair and folly.

Daniel, at last, had rebelled. His body wept ; his heart refused the sacrifice. He could not make up his mind to efface himself thus. He had always kept in the background, living in the shade, condemning himself to silence. But now he must have a supreme reward ; he did not feel he had enough virtue to sacrifice himself again, to die without declaring his love and abnegation.

What ! he had been able to deceive himself to such a point. He laughed idiotically, with rage and shame. During long months he had selfishly enjoyed a love that did not belong to him ; he had lost himself in the contemplation and worship of Jeanne, and Jeanne's heart was full of the thought of another.

He pictured himself once more in that little blue room, studying the young woman's face, taking to himself her affectionate looks, her tender smiles, and he called to mind his ecstasy, his hopes, his unlimited confidence. All a lie, a cruel jest, an atrocious deceit ! Those affectionate looks, those tender smiles, were all for George ; he it was whom Jeanne loved, he it was who made her so sweet and kind. " Well," she had said, " I have thought of everyone about me, and I have found no one but George who could write to me thus." He, Daniel, had no existence for her ; he was there simply as an accompaniment, a background. He had been robbed of his devotion, robbed of his love ; he was being despoiled still more, and there was nothing left to him, nothing but his tears and his solitude.

Above all, it was he to whom Jeanne had chosen to confess her love ; he whom she entrusted to give her to another ! Verily, there was needed nothing more but this additional suffering, this last mockery. Did they think, then, that he was too ugly, too despicable to have a heart ? They made use of him like a devoted machine, and had not the least suspicion that this machine could have life and love on its own account. So, then, he was never to live, never to love.

The thought of Madame de Rionne was far off at this moment. Daniel was wearied of his part—ever a brother, never a lover. The idea was repulsive to him.

The crisis lasted a long time. The blow had been too heavy, too unforeseen. Never could Daniel have

believed that George and Jeanne had come to an understanding to make him suffer thus. In the whole world they were all he had to love, and they were torturing him to madness. Only a day ago he was so happy, and now ! The year that had just passed had given him the only happiness he was to know in this world. He was being precipitated from the heights of bliss, and he was dashed to pieces with his fall. And he recognised that, unknowingly, it was the hands of George and Jeanne who had hurled him down.

At moments he was calmer. Then his sobs choked him again ; the rebellious spirit within him awoke burning and tumultuous thoughts of crime. He questioned himself as to what he should do. The wild beast bounding within him turned furiously in its rage against itself, not knowing on whom to spring.

Then a deep shame took possession of him. He bowed his head, sitting motionless, and thinking more gently, he heard the slow, melancholy beating of his heart softly complaining, and he waited for this crisis of the blood and nerves to pass away.

Daniel pulled the curtains to ; the daylight hurt him. Then in the silence he remained motionless, staring into the darkness. His tears no longer fell ; the feverish shiverings had passed away. He was allowing himself to calm down.

Who could analyse what next took place in this soul ? Daniel tore himself away from humanity and re-ascended to the heights of passionless love. There

he found again all virtue, all self-sacrifice. A deep gentleness entered his heart; his body seemed to become lighter, and his soul thanked it for freedom. He no longer reflected; he let himself drift, for he understood that the true, pure love was penetrating him, and accomplishing a great work in him. And when this great work was completed, Daniel began to smile sadly. He was dead to all the follies of the world. Now that the flesh was conquered, he felt that the soul would not long delay her departure.

Little by little Madame de Rionne's image had come back to him, and he felt himself ready to fulfil the dead woman's wish. His eyes had now a profound and bright look, and his mind saw matters clearly. His soul impelled him to consummate the sacrifice.

He rose and went to find George. He accosted him with a kind smile, and his hand did not shake as it took that of his friend. No chord vibrated any longer in his numbed faculties. He was all soul.

He knew that George loved Jeanne passionately. The veil was torn away, and he was conscious of a thousand little facts whose meaning he did not grasp before. He spoke in a decided tone, quietly, and affectionately. He was about to finish killing his love—himself.

"My dear friend," said he to George, "I can now confess to you the secret of my life."

And he related to him his story of self-sacrifice in a modest way. He told him that he had been to Jeanne a father, a brother. He recalled to him those

abrupt absences during the time they lived in the Impasse St. Dominique d'Enfer, his rôle as secretary at Monsieur Tellier's, his tortures at the marriage of his dear daughter with Lorin. And he explained all this by his gratitude to Madame de Rionne. He put himself in the light of a disinterested guardian, as a protector, who was accomplishing his task without any human weaknesses. Then, with a gentle gaiety, he continued :

“ To-day my mission is fulfilled. I am about to marry off my daughter ; I am going to give her to a man worthy of her, and all I shall have to do will be to retire. . . . Do you guess whom I have selected ? ”

George, who had listened to his friend with deep emotion, began to tremble with joy.

“ Finish my task,” continued Daniel ; “ give her every happiness. I bequeath to you my mission. You love our dear Jeanne, and it is for you to grant rest and peace to the soul of the poor dead one. . . . My daughter waits for you.”

George was ecstatic, mad with joy. He could not utter a word. Daniel seemed to him really as if he were the father of the young lady, and he contemplated him with admiration and respect, for he felt as if there were something in him more than human.

Daniel was astonished at not suffering more. He found a sweet consolation in his sublime lie—his self-abnegating extinction of the passion of his life. He spoke to George of letters he had addressed to Jeanne ; but he spoke of them in a vague kind of way. His heart no longer throbbed, and he put

away the thought of those burning words he had written, of which he had no longer even an exact knowledge.

George suspected nothing. He gave himself up to a child's joy. His friend was too affectionate and too calm for him to have any idea of the terrible crisis of misery through which he had passed. Then he spoke with adoration of Jeanne. He vowed to Daniel to make her happy, and drew a vivid picture of the pleasures he should give and enjoy with her. He dwelt much on his coming happiness, describing it in passionate terms.

Daniel listened, smiling. He feared, however, that he would not have sufficient strength to assist at the final sacrifice. When, therefore, they had talked together for some time, he said to George :

“ Now that all is arranged, I will go and take a rest. I will return to Saint-Henri.” And as George demurred, anxious for him to take part in his happiness, he added : “ No, I shall be in the way. Lovers like to be alone. Let me go. You must come and pay me a visit.”

The next day he departed. He felt great weakness in his heart, and his whole being was sinking away in that peace only felt by the dying.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Daniel had gone, George, without acknowledging it to himself, breathed more freely. He found himself alone with his love, alone with Jeanne, and it seemed to him that he was at the same time her lover and her brother. Now she had no longer anyone to watch over her, he took a delicate pride in not going at once and casting himself at her feet. For two days he abstained from seeing her, and dreamt of the first words he should address to her, and the first look she would give him.

The interview at first was constrained but charming. They were both in love for the first time. They were full of a delicious confusion, which made them, for fully ten minutes, exchange only small talk. Then their hearts opened. Everything was arranged during this conversation. Jeanne, who had to complete her time of mourning, wished to defer the marriage for a few more months. George showed himself tractable. He was happy when she told him that she had no fortune at all, for he felt he could not accept any of Lorin's money.

How far from their minds was poor Daniel! They talked of him for a moment, just as one talks

of a far distant friend whose face will never be seen again. They had all the egoism of lovers ; they lived for the present and the future in themselves.

For nearly six weeks they lived in this loving, fancy fairyland. They loved, and that was enough. They did not give a thought even to the circumstances which had brought them together.

One day Jeanne tremblingly spoke to George of the letters he had written her. It was a memory of the past which occurred to her in the midst of their love gossip.

At her questions George experienced a terrible anguish. Daniel's image rose up abruptly before him. He made no answer, and regretted not having asked his friend about this correspondence which made his *fiancée* tremble in this way.

She would not desist. She reminded him of certain passages, and recited even whole sentences to him. George had a suspicion. He asked her if she had preserved the letters. She smiled and brought them to him.

"Here they are," she said. "You love me so much now that no doubt you do not recollect having loved me in former days. . . . Listen."

And she read a page of one of the love letters. George was gazing at her with a bewildered look that made her laugh. Then he took the letters and went through them feverishly. He understood all.

Daniel had fled, without even dreaming that he had left behind him proofs of his passion and devotion. In the crisis of despair he had gone through,

one single thought had filled his mind—that of departure, immediate departure.

At last George could read the depths of that great heart. He held in his hands the whole secret, and he would not be outdone by this sublime courage. His love cried aloud in his breast, but he imposed silence on it.

He took Jeanne's hand in his.

“We pretend to love each other,” he said, “and all the time we are only children. We have not yet given one thought to the man who gave us to one another. He suffers far from us, whilst we are here passing tender moments with the selfishness of lovers. You must know all, Jeanne, for we must not be among those who have bad hearts. These letters have just taught me the truth. . . . Listen to the history of Daniel's life.”

And, quite simply, he told Jeanne what his friend had confided to him. He related to her the story of that noble life, full of self-sacrifice and love. He depicted Daniel to her kneeling by the bed of her dying mother. And then she began to weep. She became conscious of her cruel behaviour in the past ; she saw once more that guardian who had supported her through each perilous hour of her life.

But George kept on without stopping, relating the long martyrdom slowly and tenderly. He emphasised each particular ; he laid bare the poor creature's miseries and sufferings. He dwelt first on those twelve years of solitude and adoration, during which Jeanne was at the convent ; then afterwards he dilated

upon Daniel's whole-hearted and complete self-sacrifice, his work at Monsieur Tellier's, his jealous supervision of her in the midst of the feverish frivolities of the world, and then came the excursions at Mesuil Rouge. As he proceeded he saw the whole story in a clearer light himself; he saw an explanation for all that had happened; he found out what his friend had kept secret from him. His voice shook and his eyes became moist. Lastly George spoke of the letters. He confessed the truth, depicted Daniel's love, and disclosed the depths of that bleeding heart to Jeanne. And it was they who had broken that heart without knowing it! In reward for his devotion they had just imposed on him another supreme, a god-like sacrifice.

When he had finished George felt calmer. He raised his head and fixed his eyes on the woman he loved, who had drawn herself up, trembling.

She remembered the last conversation she had with Daniel, and she was horrified at the sufferings she must have inflicted upon him. She had learned as in a flash of lightning, the life of that miserable young man. She felt the deepest pity for him, and a need to seek his forgiveness.

"We cannot allow this murder," she said in a rapid voice. "We too must know how to sacrifice ourselves. We should be miserable, you know, if our happiness were bought at the cost of so many tears, so much anguish."

"What do you suggest we should do?" asked George.

“What you would do in my place? Dictate my duty to me yourself.”

George looked her full in the face, and said softly :
“Let us go and find Daniel.”

In the evening he received a letter from his friend which made him anxious. This feverishly written letter seemed like a last farewell. Daniel said he found himself slightly indisposed. He had tried to be cheerful, but notwithstanding all his courage complaints would escape him.

Jeanne and George grew frightened, and hastened their departure.

Daniel, when he left Paris, hoped that he had done with sorrow, but despondency seized him during the journey. He no longer suffered poignantly. His very thoughts floated in a kind of dim, healing twilight. His life was wrecked ; he was growing weaker, and gave himself up joyfully to this final engulfment.

On arrival at Saint-Henri he hired his old room, where he had suffered a great deal on a former occasion. He opened the window and gazed out over the sea. The sea, from some strange cause, appeared to him to be quite small, the reason being that he inwardly felt a void—a void still more immense. He listened to the sound of the waves, and it seemed to him that they beat on the rocks with a noise as of thunder. Passion no longer raised her voice complainingly in his veins, and he heard the wash of the waves in the great silence of his being. He once more took his walks along the beach ; but he only dragged along now—his breath failed him at every

step. He was quite astonished to find the line of horizon changed ; at times he fancied he was walking in some far-off and unknown country. He was changed from that being with a burning heart who threw sobs to the winds of heaven. He was no longer feverish with the depths of his anguish, and infinity was veiled in a mist.

Soon it became impossible for him to go out. He remained sitting at the windows of his room for whole days together, watching the breaking waters. He acquired quite a fresh love for the sea. He gazed upon it affectionately. He knew that it was hastening his death, for its dull, melancholy roar, re-echoing in his heart, continually increased his despondency.

Afterwards he was consoled by losing himself in the immensity of the ocean and the infinity of the sky. This great purity of sky, air, water, charmed his delicacy in his sickness. Nothing offended his weakened eyes in that enormous azure gulf, which seemed to open on the next world. Right down in the depths of the sky he saw at times a blinding light in which he longed, so to speak, to be annihilated. Soon he was obliged to keep to his bed. He had nothing now before his eyes but the white ceiling and the crude wall-paper. The whole day long he only gazed at the hard, cold-looking plaster. It seemed to him that he was dead already, and he fancied himself buried deep down in the cold earth.

Every now and then he was seized with sadness. In silence and solitude memory awoke. He recalled his life. He shut his eyes, and all his existence

passed before him. From that moment the ceiling faded from his view, and he looked within and examined himself. These were hours without bitterness, in which, indeed, he found solace, for there was no remorse in his conscience.

His meditations always brought the smiling faces of George and Jeanne before him. That sight, far from re-awakening his love-fever, consoled and delighted him. He pictured to himself that their happiness was of his making ; he was departing gladly, in having united for ever the only beings he loved in the world.

With the clear-sightedness of the dying, he felt that his mission had been such as it ought to have been. He realised that he had now fully accomplished the wish of the dead woman. In his last hours he felt that his very love must needs have entered into his task. He would not have watched over Jeanne with such jealous care if he had not loved her. When she was dying, Madame de Rionne must have foreseen the future ; she must have said to herself that Daniel would love her daughter, that he would watch over her as a lover, and that, when it was necessary, he would be ready to sacrifice himself and die.

One day a doubt came into Daniel's mind. He nearly relapsed into his old agony. He asked himself whether the dead woman had not had a secret thought, had not given him Jeanne for a wife. Perhaps, after all, he was not fulfilling her last wishes, in dying, in marrying her dear daughter to one other

than himself. His heart began to throb ; he felt fresh life coming back to him.

But he at once perceived that this thought was a cowardly one, an expiring cry of his love-passion. A melancholy smile came to his lips when he remembered his ugliness ; he knew too well, from bitter experience, that he was born to be for ever loving others and never being loved himself. He had acted with wisdom ; he had had courage and sense. And peace and silence came to him anew. He was dying—grand, noble, and victorious.

The end drew near. One morning the death-agony set in. An old neighbour came and established herself at his bedside to close his eyes when he was dead.

Daniel had not a word of complaint to make. He still heard the sound of the waves, and liked to fancy that the sea was mourning for him, and this was a sweet consolation.

As he opened his eyes to see the light for the last time, he observed two figures, George and Jeanne, at his bedside, gazing at him and weeping bitterly. He was not astonished to see them there. He smiled, and said to them, in a feeble voice :

“ How good of you to come to me ! I scarcely dared hope to bid you farewell. . . . You see I did not want to disturb you nor sadden you in your joy. . . . But I am very happy to see you, and to thank you.”

Jeanne contemplated him with poignant grief. She looked at his pale countenance, beautified by

coming death. It seemed to her as if there was a halo round that wide forehead. The eyes were sunk in a soft limpidity ; the lips had a divine smile. And the young widow thought she had never seen a face in which she could read such high nobility and such deep affection.

"Daniel," she asked gently, "why have you deceived us?"

The dying man raised himself up. He looked at his friends reproachfully.

"Do not say that, Jeanne," he answered ; "I cannot understand you."

"We know all. . . . We do not want you to die ; we come to bring you happiness."

"Then, if you know all, do not spoil my work."

And Daniel fell back again on the pillow. The little blood left in him rushed to his cheeks. Even in death he remained the untutored child, with hidden self-sacrifice and silent worship.

George drew near him.

"In pity, listen to me, my friend ; do not burden me with remorse. We have lived eighteen years together ; we have been like brothers. I do not wish you to suffer. . . . You see I am calm. . . ."

"I am calmer than you, my poor George," resumed Daniel, smiling. "I am about to die. All ends well. . . . I regret now that you came, for I see you are not going to be reasonable. You say you know all, and you know nothing, for you do not know that I die happy and peaceful, that I am well

satisfied to end my life thus, looking at you both. . . . It is I who should ask your pardon, for I have had many moments of weakness."

And as George wept on hearing these words, Daniel took his hand in his and said, in a feeble voice :

"You will love her well, will you not? Don't grieve, for I am going to rest; I am so weary."

Then he looked at Jeanne with affectionate sweetness, and continued :

"You know all? Then, know that your mother was a saint, and that I worshipped her memory. You were quite a little girl when she died; you were playing on the carpet, I remember. I took you up in my arms and you did not cry; indeed, you began to smile. . . ."

"Forgive me," murmured Jeanne, in the midst of her sobs; "I have been ignorant and cruel."

"I have nothing to forgive you; I have only to thank you for the joy I have experienced in loving you. . . . My gratitude could not equal the benefits your mother showered on me. You, my dear, have been good in bearing with a poor creature like myself. What long, blissful hours I have passed in looking at you! There, you cannot know how largely you have rewarded me. I have no regrets; I die full of peace and full of bliss."

His eyes began to grow dim, his voice was nearly inaudible. He was slowly expiring. He gazed at Jeanne with a wondrous expression, passing away with a last look of adoration.

"But you cannot die thus, for I love you—I love you!" madly cried the young woman.

Daniel had a sudden revival. His eyes opened wide again, he rose up on his bed and spoke again in a strange, frightened voice:

"Do not say that; you give me pain—you are cruel. Have mercy on me!"

"I love you, I love you!" repeated Jeanne, more passionately still.

"No, no; it cannot be. You forget; you think I am suffering and you wish to console me. I tell you I am happy. . . . You see that the end is near. . . . You should not have said that."

He calmed himself and smiled anew. A white light seemed to shine on his face. He stretched out his poor, thin arms and said:

"Come close to me. . . . Give me your hands; I wish it."

And when Jeanne and George were in front of him, he took their right hands and joined them together. He held them thus locked in his till the sacrifice was complete, till he was dead.

And as he expired, as he stood on the threshold of eternity, from the depths of the blinding light into which he was passing, he heard a well-known voice, a joyful voice, saying to him: "You will marry her to a man worthy of her, and your task will be accomplished. . . . Come to me."



THE END

