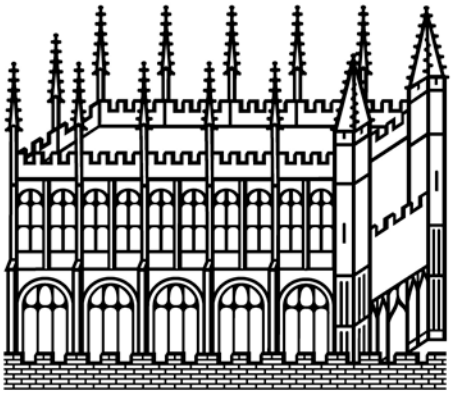

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TALES FROM MANY SOURCE

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VOL. III.

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CONTENTS.

THE PROFESSOR AND THE HARPY.

CHAPTER I.

MOTHER Church, who in bygone ages sheltered all the learning of the land beneath her broad wings, and who, even after this monopoly had passed away from her, continued to provide for learners and learned in a munificent fashion, has in these latter times been sadly shorn of wealth and patronage by the relentless march of progress and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Yet there is balm in Gilead. Here and there a sinecure has been suffered to remain for the benefit of those whose work is not altogether of the tangible kind so dear to the nineteenth century; here and there a Reverend Jack Horner, putting his thumb into the diminished pie of Church preferment, can pull out a plum, and, sitting down under the shadow of some grey cathedral tower, can draw soothing deductions after the manner of his juvenile prototype. A bishopric may no longer be a post of dignified ease, archdeacons may be men doomed to perpetual hurry and worry, wealthy pluralists may have become an extinct class, but a Canon of

Lichbury Cathedral is still a personage whose comfortable dwelling and comfortable income are rather the acknowledgment of past distinction than the equivalent of any present labor. Not, of course, that the Dean and Chapter of Lichbury are a body of worn-out pensioners. It is by no means in that light that they are accustomed to regard themselves; nor, indeed, are they so regarded by any, except the ignorant and irreverent. If repose and competence have been bestowed upon them, it is not only because they have already enriched the world with the results of literary research, but that they may have more leisure to continue doing so. Some of them have achieved renown as authors of theological treatises, others are deeply versed in classical lore; while some, like Canon Stanwick, hold university professorships.

The latter divine was understood to owe his canonry (which had been conferred upon him at a comparatively early age) to that celebrated work, "The Life and Times of the Emperor Julian," in which an interesting character and an interesting period of history had been so exhaustively and impartially treated of as to leave no room for further exploration of the same ground. Whether, as his admirers declared, the Professor had surpassed Gibbon as triumphantly in the handling of his subject as Gibbon surpassed Voltaire and other earlier writers, and whether in the course of his well-weighed observations he had made out as good a case for the church which he represented as was

possible and desirable, are questions which need not be discussed here. One consequence, at all events, of his accomplished task had been to place him in the front rank of living historians, and another had been his appointment to a vacant stall in Lichbury Cathedral.

This last reward of merit should have been especially grateful to him, for he was a bachelor of retired habits, whose life had been spent among his books, and to whom life had little left to offer in the way of attraction save increased opportunities for study; and, in fact, he was, as a general thing, very well satisfied with his lot. Nevertheless, as he paced up and down his smooth lawn one morning in August, he was in a less contented frame of mind than usual. The whispering of the summer breeze in the old elms, the cawing of the rooks, the occasional deliberate ding-dong of the cathedral clock far overhead, checking off the slumberous quarters and half-hours—all these familiar sounds had failed to produce upon him that sense of calm which is so conducive to thought; he had been compelled to lay aside the opening chapter of his new work, "The Rise of the Papacy," and to take to walking to and fro in the garden, with his hands behind his back, and his grey head sunk beneath shoulders which were somewhat prematurely bowed.

The truth was that the Professor, like other professors, had once been young, and that the days of his youth had been vividly and unexpectedly brought back to him the night before. This is

always a disturbing thing to happen to a man ; and what made it particularly so in Canon Stanwick's case was that his youth had been marked by a trouble which he had taken terribly to heart at the time of its occurrence. To be jilted is no such rare experience, and to get over it with great rapidity is the ordinary lot of the jilted one ; but some few strangely constituted mortals there are who never get over it, and of these Canon Stanwick happened to be one. Certainly, at the age of fifty-five he had long ceased to think with any bitterness of the shallow-hearted Julia to whom he had become engaged immediately after taking orders, and who had thrown him over in favour of a man of much greater wealth and higher position ; he had, indeed, ceased to think about her at all. But not the less was it her conduct which had shaped the course of his life. By it he had been driven into deep study, into an Oxford professorship, and finally into a canonry ; by it also he had been driven out of society, and especially out of female society, for which the treachery of one member of the sex had imbued him with a strong repugnance. At Oxford, where he had resided up to the time of his recent preferment, the ladies had quite given him up. It had been understood there that he did not care for the relaxation of dinner parties and tea parties ; and it was a somewhat singular coincidence that, having from a sense of duty consented to break through his long-standing rule and dine with the Dean of Lichbury, he should have found

himself seated opposite to his old love, whom, by another odd coincidence, he had wooed, won, and lost in that very neighbourhood so long before.

This chance meeting had upset the worthy man a good deal. In the grey-haired but vivacious Mrs. Annesley who had claimed acquaintance with him across the table, he had scarcely recognised the heroine of his buried romance, nor had he either the wish or the power to resuscitate the tender feelings with which he had once regarded her; but the sight of her had stirred up old memories within him, and these had haunted him through the night, had prevented the Papacy from rising satisfactorily in the morning, and finally, as aforesaid, had sent him out into the open air, a prey to vague regrets.

So that elderly lady was Julia Annesley! And she had grown-up sons and daughters, about whom she talked a great deal; and her husband was dead —the husband for whom she had never cared, and whom she made little pretence of regretting. To all appearance, she regretted nothing. Why should she, when she had all that a woman could wish to have? Perhaps, thought the Professor, it might be a better thing to be a father of sons and daughters, when one was growing old, than to be the author of an unrivalled monograph on the merits and demerits of Julian the Apostate. To be sure, there was no reason why one shouldn't be both. And then he fell to wondering whether that ambition which had been the chief cause of Julia's infidelity could have been satisfied with such fame and social

standing as an historian, a professor, and a canon may lay claim to. Only, if he had married Julia, he would probably have begun and ended as a country parson. He smiled at himself for indulging in such nonsensical fancies at his time of life; but he went on dreaming all the same until he was startled by the opening of a gate which connected his house with the Precincts.

Somebody strode with a brisk, ringing step up the brick pathway to the front door, singing loudly,—

> "I love her, *and* she might have been
> The happiest *in* the land;
> But she fancied a foreigner who played the clarinet
> In the middle of a Ger-man band."

Then came a vigorous pull at the bell, followed by subdued whistling of the air of this apposite but vulgar ditty. It was not after so indecorous a fashion that the Professor's visitors were wont to approach him, and he could not resist the temptation to steal softly across the turf past the library windows and see who might be the author of all this disturbance. His curiosity was rewarded by a full-length view of a handsome, merry-looking young fellow in undress cavalry uniform, who himself happened to be peeping round the corner at that moment, and who at once advanced, saying: "Oh, how do you do? Canon Stanwick, isn't it? My mother asked me to leave this note for you as I

passed—Mrs. Annesley, you know. She says you and she are old friends."

"I am much obliged to you, sir," said the Professor in his grave voice, taking the note. "Pray come in."

"Can't, thanks," answered the other; "I must be off to barracks. See you this afternoon on the cricket-ground though, I hope. We've got a great match on—garrison against the county. We shall be awfully licked, of course; but everybody will be up there, and it's something to do. Very glad to see you if you'll come to our tent. You'll find my mother there; the note's to tell you all about it. Good-bye for the present."

And with that this unceremonious young man clanked away, leaving the Professor, who had not looked on at a cricket match for a matter of thirty years, much amused. The note ran as follows:

Deanery, Lichbury: Thursday.

"DEAR CANON STANWICK,—I hope, if you are disengaged this afternoon, you will join our party on the cricket-ground, and give me the opportunity, which I sought in vain last night, of having a little talk with you. I am obliged to leave to-morrow morning, and I am so very anxious to have a few words with you before I go *about my son*, who is quartered here. Do come, and

"Believe me most sincerely yours,

"JULIA ANNESLEY."

"Oh, by all means," said the Professor, who had

a solitary man's habit of thinking aloud. "I shall feel rather like a fish out of water among all those people; but never mind, I'll go. Only I can't think why you should want to talk to me about your son."

Perhaps the Professor was still a little in the dark as to this point, even after a long interview with Mrs. Annesley; though he certainly could not complain of any want of candour upon the lady's part. The Lichbury cricket-ground is justly celebrated both for its extent and for the beauty of its situation, and the numerous matches of which it is the scene during the summer season are always well attended. The Professor made his way through a double line of carriages and drags, feeling and looking very much like a man who has suddenly emerged from a dark room upon a crowded thoroughfare. The confused din raised by a large concourse of people, mingled with the strains of the military band which was in attendance, and the shouts of eager partisans of garrison or county, bewildered him; and it was only after repeated inquiries that he succeeded in reaching the entrance of the cavalry tent, where he stood for a minute blinking in the sunshine, and trying with short-sighted eyes to distinguish among the assemblage of gaily dressed ladies seated there the one of whom he was in search. But if he did not see her, she very soon saw him, and came forward, holding out a tiny pair of beautifully gloved hands.

"*How* good of you to come!" she exclaimed.

"Suppose we take a turn round the ground; then we can talk quietly."

She was a bright, alert little woman, her grey hair, which was drawn straight up from her forehead, contrasting oddly with her still youthful complexion, and giving her somewhat of the appearance of an eighteenth-century *marquise*. The Professor was not quite sure whether he ought to offer her his arm or not, but finally deciding that this was unnecessary, made a grab at his shapeless felt hat, and muttered, "Delighted, I'm sure." He was a little embarrassed in the presence of his former love, whose first words showed that she, for her part, had no such foolish feeling.

"Is it not strange that we should meet again at Lichbury after all these years?" she began. "I have often thought of you, and often felt sorry." She paused and sighed. "One does not expect men to take things so seriously—generally, you know, it is the men who forget, and the women who suffer; but I suppose you are different. And I have spoilt your life!"

The Professor smiled. He was thinking that most people would hardly describe his life as having been a spoilt one; he was thinking, too, that the Julia who had caused him so much mental anguish in years gone by was quite another person from the complacent little lady who was trying to make apologies for her. He rather wished she would drop the subject; but he said nothing, and Mrs. Annesley resumed:

"You ought to hate me—I quite feel that; but doesn't some clever person say somewhere that we never hate those who have injured us, only those whom we have injured? I have injured you dreadfully; but for all that, I want to make friends—and to ask a favour of you into the bargain." She concluded her sentence with a little laugh and a side glance from eyes which had done much execution in their day.

"I am sure I shall be very glad if I can serve you in any way," said the Professor simply; "and I think we may very well agree to let bygones be bygones. It was something about your son, you said?"

"Ah, yes, poor fellow!" sighed Mrs. Annesley; "I can't tell you how anxious and distressed I am about him. He is quartered here with his regiment, the 27th Lancers, and he absolutely refuses to leave the service; though, as of course you know, he succeeded to a very large property when he came of age."

"He is still very young," remarked the Professor. "I should think another year or two of soldiering would do him no harm."

"But it is absurd for a man with three large country houses to live in barracks. I want him to marry and settle down. I want him—only this is strictly between ourselves—to marry Violet Cecil. She is such a charming girl, and so pretty—don't you think so?"

"Is she?" asked the Professor. "I scarcely know her."

"But you and Mr. Cecil were always such great friends, I thought."

"We had not met for many years until I came down here, and I have only seen Miss Cecil once. I did not notice her particularly."

"How funny of you! But I remember that you were never very observant. Well, I was going to tell you about poor Bob—oh! there he is. I should like so much to introduce him to you."

"He introduced himself to me this morning," observed the Professor, smiling.

"Oh, did he? Well, I could not introduce him *now*, at any rate," said Mrs. Annesley, meaningly.

The Professor adjusted his glasses, and following the direction of her gaze, made out his visitor of the morning, who had exchanged his uniform for a suit of cricketing flannels, and who was pacing along by the side of a tall, fine-looking woman with dark hair. The young man wore a downcast look, and his evident unwillingness to raise his eyes seemed to show that he was conscious of his mother's vicinity.

"Oh, I see!" said the Professor, with a perspicacity which did him credit.

"Yes; isn't it dreadful? What any man can find to admire in such a woman I can't conceive."

"She is handsome and—very well dressed," hazarded the Professor, after another survey of the lady's retreating form.

"Well dressed!" ejaculated Mrs. Annesley, throwing up her hands. "If you can say that, you

would say anything. Pale blue satin and imitation lace—good gracious! But of course you don't understand these things."

"Certainly," the Professor agreed, "I am no judge of such matters. But who is this lady?"

"Ah, who indeed? That is exactly what nobody knows. She is a Mrs. Harrington—at least, that is what she calls herself; and I believe she is one of those dreadful harpies who follow regiments about all over the world and ruin poor young men—or rather, rich young men. She is not exactly disreputable, I am told; I only wish she were!—No, I didn't mean that—I forgot you were a clergyman. I beg your pardon, I'm sure."

"Don't mind me," said the Professor. "And so you are afraid that she will marry your son?"

"I can't bear to say so; but it does look terribly like it, and I am so powerless. I have no influence over Bob, and it is impossible for me to remain down here; I have all my other children to look after, you know. Of course it would never do to breathe a word to the Cecils; otherwise they might be able to save him, for I am sure he is really fond of Violet. It struck me that perhaps you might give me a helping hand."

"I will most gladly, if I can," replied the Professor; "but I confess I don't at present see what I can do."

"I am sure you could influence him in a quiet way; and then you might try to throw him as much as possible with the Cecils. You will have plenty

of opportunities of doing that, if you look for them. And perhaps you would be very kind and write me a line every now and then to tell me now matters are going."

The Professor shook his head, and said he feared Mrs. Annesley was leaning upon a broken reed. Nevertheless, he promised to do his best; and promises with him always meant a good deal. For the sake of old days he was willing to do Mrs. Annesley a kindness; for the young man's own sake he would gladly have disappointed the harpy; finally, he thought he would be rendering no small service to his friend Cecil if he could bring about a marriage between the daughter of that not very wealthy country gentlemen and one of the richest bachelors in England. The only question was how to set about achieving so desirable a result. He debated this problem for some time after Mrs. Annesley had been called away from his side by other acquaintances, and he was still standing with his hands behind his back, frowning meditatively, when Mr. Cecil, a fresh-coloured squire, who lived within a few miles of Lichbury, caught sight of him and greeted him warmly.

"Hallo, Stanwick! who'd have thought of seeing you on the cricket-ground? This is an unexpected honour for the club."

"I didn't come here to look at the cricket; I came to see a very old friend of yours and mine—Mrs. Annesley," the Professor explained.

"Ah, to be sure! How time does go on! Do

you remember what a pretty girl she was, and how desperately in love we all were with her? You were as hard hit as any of us, if I recollect rightly. In fact, I believe she was engaged to you in a sort of a way, wasn't she?"

"In a sort of a way—yes."

"And then she threw you over because she wanted to be rich and fashionable and all that. Well, well! she has had her reward. Have you seen her often since those days?"

"Never until yesterday."

"You don't say so! You can hardly have recognised one another, did you? Both you and she have got on in life and got on in the world since you parted. Julia is a leader of society, and mixes freely with duchesses, which satisfies her soul; and you are one of the celebrities of the day. It now only remains for me to get a prize for my pig, and then we shall all three have reached the highest distinctions attainable in our respective walks in life."

"Yes, yes," murmured the Professor dreamily; and presently he quoted in an undertone, 'What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!'"

"I'll be hanged if anybody shall call my pig a shadow!" returned Mr. Cecil, laughing, as he walked away. And then the Professor strolled slowly back to the quiet Precincts and "The Rise of the Papacy."

CHAPTER II.

A MAN may be a learned historian and a dignitary of the Church, and yet retain a good deal of that diffidence which is more becoming than common among his juniors. Canon Stanwick, for one, carried modesty almost to the dimensions of a vice. He was very shy of young men; he did not know what to say to them; he felt convinced—possibly not without reason—that they must find him an old bore; and how to ingratiate himself with a dashing young cavalry officer was a puzzle beyond the compass of his imagination to solve. However, he had pledged his word that he would do this, and accordingly, on the day after the cricket match, he asked a few friends to dinner, and invited Mr. Annesley to join the party.

The young man came, and made himself so agreeable to the old ladies and gentlemen whom he met that they were delighted with him, and allowed him to monopolise the lion's share of the conversation. Which thing they would assuredly not have permitted in the case of any ordinary lancer or hussar; for in Lichbury the Church is disposed to look a trifle askance at the Army, and to stand upon its dignity with the representatives of the latter, who are overmuch given to riot and unseemly pranks. But about this particular lancer there was a perfect simplicity of thought and language which, combined with a touch of military swagger, was

quite irresistible ; and so it came to pass that Canon Stanwick's first dinner party proved the merriest that had been given in the Precincts for many a long day. As for the Professor, he began to feel a *quasi*-fatherly interest in the son of his former flame, and when the rest of the guests had departed, ventured to detain him.

"Do you ever—er—smoke a cigar before you go to bed?" he asked hesitatingly.

"I should be precious sorry to go to bed *without* smoking a cigar," answered the other laughing.

"Oh," said the Professor. "Well, I have formed the same habit myself, and if you had nothing better to do, and cared to keep me company for half an hour in my study, I could offer you a tolerably good cigar, I think ; and—and I believe you'll find some soda-water and brandy on the table."

So presently this oddly matched pair were seated opposite to one another in the spacious room which served its present owner as library and study, the busts of Roman emperors and Greek philosophers looking down upon them from above the bookcases with an air of grave surprise. The Professor was a little timid and awkward at first, but the younger man soon set him at his ease, and when he had received a good deal of amusing information about the inhabitants of Lichbury and its neighbourhood, he thought he might feel his way towards the subject which he was determined to broach.

"I know very few people in these parts," he remarked ; "I have not been here long, and am

generally much occupied. But I have a long-standing acquaintance with the Cecils, who I think are also friends of yours."

"Oh, rather!" responded the young man heartily. "Known them all my life. Awfully jolly people—awfully good old chap, old Cecil. And Mrs. Cecil—she's awfully jolly too."

Bob Annesley's vocabulary of adjectives made up in emphasis what it lacked in variety.

"And Miss Cecil?" the Professor said. "I have only been fortunate enough to meet her once, but I am told that she is a singularly beautiful and charming young lady."

This leading observation elicited a somewhat less cordial assent from Bob, who murmured, "There's no question about that," and looked rather grave for a few seconds.

"I was thinking," went on the wily Professor, "that I should very much like to see more of her, her father having been such an intimate friend of mine in former years; but I hesitate to ask young people into my dull house unless I can provide some sort of amusement for them. Do you think there would be room for a lawn-tennis court in the garden?"

"Oh, Lord bless your soul, yes!" answered the young man, rising to the fly most satisfactorily; "heaps of room! I'll tell you what: if you'd like me to mark out the court for you, I'll do it to-morrow with the greatest of pleasure, and I could make up a four any day that suited you and Miss Cecil."

"I should be very much obliged to you. Let me see; you would want another lady, wouldn't you?" said the Professor, with some fear that his accommodating guest might offer to bring Mrs. Harrington.

He was relieved to find that no such indiscretion was contemplated. The young man said there were the Dean's daughters, or failing them, there was Mrs. Green, the wife of one of his brother officers, who was a first rate player and a friend of the Cecils. He could easily get her and her husband to come, and he was sure the Professor would like them.

So far, so good. There would apparently be no difficulty in bringing the young people together; and as for the harpy, perhaps the moment had hardly yet come for declaring war upon her. In the course of the few following days the Professor tried to find out more about this mysterious lady; but the canons knew nothing of her, and the canons' wives sniffed and said that she was a person whom nobody visited, although, upon being pressed, they admitted that there was nothing definite against her. Possibly, after all, she might prove less formidable than Mrs. Annesley had supposed, and the Professor was confirmed in this hope by the evident admiration with which Bob regarded Miss Cecil. That young lady willingly consented to drink tea and play tennis in the Precincts, and closer inspection showed that her personal attractions had been in no way exaggerated.

Not only did she possess a quantity of golden-brown hair, and eyes of the darkest blue, shaded by long curved lashes, but her features, complexion, and figure were all perfect, and she had an enchanting smile. If any young man could prefer the vulgar charms of a Mrs. Harrington to these, he must be a very extraordinary young man indeed; and the Professor watching the tennis-players from his cane arm-chair in the shade, smiled as he thought to himself that Bob Annesley had none of the outward and visible signs of an extraordinary young man. Furthermore, he noticed that Annesley and Miss Cecil remained partners throughout; and though this might be a trivial basis on which to build conclusions, there was surely some significance in the fact that after each game these two sauntered away together, leaving Captain and Mrs. Green to entertain their host with polite conversation.

When play was over for the day, a renewal of the contest at an early date was agreed upon, and after three such meetings the Professor felt justified in despatching a consolatory note to Mrs. Annesley. "I really think you may make your mind quite easy," he wrote. "I have had your boy and Cecil's girl playing tennis in my garden several times; and even so inexperienced a looker-on as myself cannot fail to perceive that if ever two people were in love with each other, they are. The 'harpy' I have not yet met, nor am I likely to do so; but Captain Green of your son's regiment tells me that she is

what is called a *garrison hack*—a term not known to me, but which I take to mean broadly that she is ready to flirt with all, and is consequently dangerous to none."

The folly of generalisation was one to which the Professor was fully alive in dealing with matters of historical interest; and had the question before him been of that kind, he would have been the first to point out that, though this lady might not be dangerous *qua* garrison hack, there was no sure ground for assuming that she was not dangerous *qua* Mrs. Harrington. Mrs. Annesley's grateful reply to his letter did not reach him before he had begun to repent of his haste in communicating with her.

It was upon the occasion of an afternoon party, given by the officers of the 27th Lancers, that Canon Stanwick was privileged to make Mrs. Harrington's acquaintance. Had he been left to consult his own inclinations, he would not have been present at this entertainment; but the Cecils, who had driven in from the country to attend it, invited themselves to luncheon with him, and then carried him away by main force, alleging that it would do him good to see more of his neighbours. As a matter of fact, however, he was not benefited in this particular way, for the cathedral dignitaries seldom showed themselves at the barracks, and he searched the mess-room and ante-room in vain for any familiar face. He remained beside the Cecils, and presently accompanied them to the lawn in front of

the building, where some younger members of the assemblage were playing tennis. Then it was that he became aware of Mrs. Harrington, attended by young Annesley, and was able to scrutinise her a little more nearly than he had done on the cricket-ground. She was a tall, striking-looking woman, not in her first youth. No doubt she was rather over-dressed, and the Professor noticed that she was more anxious to appear at her ease than successful in doing so. He noticed, besides, that the other ladies fought shy of her, and that his friend Bob, who stood by her side, looked anything but happy.

After a time the couple drew near to the spot where the Cecil family were seated, and from the expression of despair visible upon the young man's face, and the mixture of triumph and defiance exhibited by the lady, it was easy to guess what was going to happen next. The Professor, from living so much alone, had got out of the habit of repressing his emotions; and when he realised that this daring woman had demanded an introduction to Mrs. Cecil, he gave vent to a loud, abrupt chuckle, which caused everybody to turn and look at him and overwhelm him with consequent confusion. Thus he missed the actual formality which had moved him to mirth by anticipation; but he recovered himself in time to see that it had taken place, that Mr. and Miss Cecil were looking grave and annoyed, and that Mrs. Cecil had assumed that stony demeanour with which she was wont to cow the presumptuous.

Mrs. Cecil was not a lady with whom it was advisable to take liberties. A great liberty had been taken with her now, and, while holding in reserve the punishment of the chief offender, she made things very uncomfortable for his accomplice. Having bowed to Mrs. Harrington, she became absorbed in some distant object of interest, and failed to hear the bland remarks addressed to her by her new acquaintance. A deep silence had fallen upon the surrounding group. Mrs. Cecil was still seated; the other lady was standing in front of her chair, and the Professor, looking on from the background, thought to himself that, if he were in Mrs. Harrington's shoes, he would run away.

But it was Bob Annesley, and not Mrs. Harrington, who adopted that pusillanimous course. That intrepid woman remained firm, and, with a determined smile upon her pale face, forced Mrs. Cecil to speak to her.

"I asked Mr. Annesley to introduce me to you," she was saying, "because I think we ought to know each other, being both of us so intimate with him."

"Oh, I didn't know," replied Mrs. Cecil coldly. Perhaps she would have liked to say that she was not so very intimate with Mr. Annesley; but when one has a daughter whom one is naturally anxious to marry well, one is apt to be debarred from indiscriminate retorts. After a pause, she asked, without removing her eyes from the distant

view, "Are you staying any time at Lichbury, Mrs.—er—?"

"Harrington," replied the other. "Well, I don't quite know. It will depend a good deal upon the regiment. I always like to be where the 27th are."

"*Really!*" exclaimed Mrs. Cecil; and the amount of astonishment, contempt and disgust which she managed to condense into that one word was quite an achievement in its way.

"Oh yes," Mrs. Harrington went on cheerfully, "I follow the drum. My object is to get as much fun out of life as possible, and I don't know any better way of doing that than living in a garrison town."

"Violet," said Mrs. Cecil, "I think I see some vacant places on the other side of the lawn. We will go over and sit there." And so saying, she arose, and swept majestically away, leaving Mrs. Harrington surrounded by a number of silent persons who appeared anxious to stare her out of countenance while at the same time resolutely ignoring her.

The poor woman's position was really a cruel one, and signs that she felt it to be so were not wanting. She flushed for a moment, then turned pale again, and stood, not unlike a hunted animal, while those merciless ladies enjoyed her discomfiture. The Professor, who knew what agony he himself would have suffered under such treatment, could not help being sorry for her. So sincere was

his compassion, and so strongly did he disapprove of the base practice of hitting those who are down, that he was moved at last to do an unusually bold thing. He advanced abruptly to the side of the unfortunate pariah, upsetting a chair on his passage, and said in a nervous, hesitating way, "What a beautiful afternoon, is it not?"

Mrs. Harrington turned a pair of astonished and rather angry eyes upon him. Most likely, at the first moment, she took this queer-looking cleric for an emissary of the enemy; but a glance at his face must have reassured her, for a quick change of expression came over her own, and the Professor was rewarded by a singularly pleasant smile, and a word spoken without any of that harshness of intonation which had been noticeable in Mrs. Harrington's voice a few minutes before. Having thus entered his little protest against bullying, he would gladly have retired from so conspicuous a position, but he was a man who was wholly unable to extricate himself from any position, conspicuous or other, without help, and so he went on conversing with Mrs. Harrington for a matter of five minutes, at the end of which time he mentally qualified her as a very intelligent and agreeable person. "I wonder," thought he, "why she chose to speak in such an objectionable manner just now." And then, with his unlucky habit of thinking aloud, he said musingly, "I suppose she wanted to shock Mrs. Cecil. Well, I can't blame her."

Mrs. Harrington laughed. "You are quite

right," she observed; "that was what I wanted to do. But you ought to blame me, for it was not at all worth while to shock Mrs. Cecil, and I brought her rudeness upon myself."

The Professor, in great distress, began to stammer out an apology, which he was not permitted to finish. "There is no need to beg my pardon," Mrs. Harrington interrupted: "you only said what you thought, and it is not often that one has the good fortune to hear any one do that. I wish you would go on. I should like to hear what you think of me, for instance—or rather, no; that would not be very interesting. I should prefer hearing what you think of Mrs. Cecil."

"The Cecils are old friends of mine," said the Professor, with a slight accent of reproof.

"Then you need not hesitate to say what you think of them, for one does not, as a rule, think badly of one's friends. I am interested in them on Mr. Annesley's account. He is a great deal at their house, is he not?"

"Yes, I believe so," answered the Professor, stroking his chin pensively. A strong desire to come to the point prompted him to add, with some audacity, "People say that he is likely to become engaged to Miss Cecil, but that may be only an idle report."

Mrs. Harrington's large black eyes had a considerable store of latent fire in them. It flashed out now upon her companion with a suddenness which made him start; but in an instant she had recov-

ered her composure. "It is an idle report," she said quietly. "There is no truth in it."

"Indeed? Is it not a little difficult to speak with certainty upon such points?"

Mrs. Harrington made no verbal reply, but stepping slightly aside, so as to see and be seen by a group of which Miss Cecil was one, and Bob Annesley another, she beckoned to the young man, who responded by an almost imperceptible shake of the head. Thereupon she repeated her signal more peremptorily, and he, with obvious reluctance, obeyed it.

"I want you to see me home," she said as soon as he was within speaking distance.

"Oh, all right," answered Annesley; "but couldn't you wait a little bit?"

"No," returned Mrs. Harrington; "I want to go now. I am tired."

Then, with a gracious bow to her late interlocutor, she moved away, Bob Annesley walking somewhat shamefacedly by her side.

It was thus that the Professor was made aware that Mrs. Harrington was indeed dangerous, though not precisely in the manner which he had ventured to disclaim on her behalf.

CHAPTER III.

BOB ANNESLEY was one of those deservedly popular persons who can be understood at once by the least experienced students of character. Good nature was his dominant quality, and when you had said that he was good-natured, you had said very nearly all that there was to be said about him. The Professor, who had not lived for so many years at Oxford without discovering what is the ordinary destiny of young men thus gifted or afflicted, had no difficulty in casting Bob's horoscope. "That woman has got a hold upon the poor boy, don't you see?" said he, addressing himself to the busts in his library. "He was in love with her once, and he is tired of her now; but he will never have the courage to tell her so. The question, therefore, is, how are his friends to get him out of her clutches?"

But the busts continued to stare straight before them, without making any reply, and the Professor, not being fertile in expedients, could think of no better course of treatment than renewed doses of Miss Cecil and lawn-tennis. He was prepared, if driven to extremities, to make a direct appeal to Mrs. Harrington, for he conceived that her nature had a side which might be appealed to with success; but he shrank from employing so drastic a remedy until all others should have proved unavailing, and he lost no time in endeavouring to arrange another of those meetings which had already produced, or had seemed to produce, a hopeful result.

In this well-meant attempt he was foiled by the recalcitration of both the parties concerned. Mrs. Cecil, desirous though she might be to see her daughter make an unexceptionable match, was not likely to fall into the error of openly pursuing her quarry, and the young lady herself was probably offended by what had taken place at the barracks. However this may be, the Cecils regretted their inability to avail themselves of Canon Stanwick's repeated invitations ; while Bob, if his own account was to be believed, was at this time perpetually on duty. Thus several weeks elapsed, during which it was impossible to report progress to Mrs. Annesley, who wrote impatiently, complaining that her son never told her anything, and entreating that she might not be kept needlessly in the dark. Had it not been for these letters, the Professor, whose mind, after all, was occupied with other matters than matchmaking, might have washed his hands of the whole business ; but he was reminded by them that he had promised to do his best, and so, when at length he chanced to encounter Mrs. and Miss Cecil and Bob Annesley in the same room, he profited by the opportunity, and engaged the whole three of them to lunch with him before they had time to make excuse.

Everyone who has ever tried to set the affairs of his neighbours straight for them must be aware that those who pursue this course lay themselves open not only to ingratitude, but to positive contumely. When, on the day appointed, the Cecils duly made

their appearance, and when at the last moment a card was brought from Bob Annesley, on which was scribbled, "Very sorry, can't possibly come to luncheon, but will turn up for tennis afterwards"—when, I say, this untoward incident occurred, the Professor was at once made to feel how blameworthy had been his conduct. Mrs. Cecil was so cross and snappish that a less submissive man would have turned upon her in the first five minutes; and even Violet, whose disposition was naturally sweet, was silent and pre-occupied, and made no effort to soften down her mother's uncivil speeches. And what was still worse was that, after luncheon was over, and Captain and Mrs. Green had arrived with their racquets in their hands, that wretched Bob failed to redeem his promise. They waited an hour for him in vain, and then, as it was evident that no set could be made up, the Cecils went away in a huff, while the Professor, quite upset, betook himself to the cathedral, where, being in residence, he had to read the evening lessons, and where, in his agitation he made St. Paul say, "Bobs, love your wives," before he could stop himself.

Passing through the cloisters after the conclusion of the service, he saw dimly a male and a female figure walking before him, and his ears caught the sound of what appeared to be an altercation. By the time he had got his glasses settled upon his nose and had approached a little nearer to the disputants, they wheeled round and revealed themselves as no other than Bob and Mrs. Harrington. Both of

them started, and Mrs. Harrington, with a bow, turned abruptly and walked away. Bob, looking rather sheepish, stood his ground and began to mumble some apology for having broken his engagement, but the Professor cut him short.

"Annesley," said he, "will you come into my house for a few minutes? I wish to speak to you."

The Professor, albeit of mild temper, had been a don, and knew how to assume an aspect of sternness when necessary. Bob Annesley, on the other hand, was both by nature and training prone towards obedience. Presently, therefore, the two men were closeted in the Professor's study, where the following dialogue ensued.

"I want to know what you mean by this, Annesley?"

"Mean by what?"

"Why, by making love to two women at the same time. Don't tell me you haven't made love to them; I have seen you. And don't tell me to mind my own business either, because a great deal of this —this trifling—has gone on in my garden, and I feel myself in a measure responsible for the consequences. I cannot," continued the Professor, warming with his subject, "allow the hearts of young ladies to be broken within sight of my library windows: and I am bound to tell you, Annesley, that I consider your conduct highly discreditable."

Bob shook his head sorrowfully, but did not offer to defend himself, so the Professor had to go on scolding.

"Were I you, I should be ashamed of such unmanly vacillation. It is very plain that you either do not know your own mind, or that, knowing it, you are afraid to declare it. You will not, I suppose, deny that you have entangled yourself with one lady while you wish to marry the other."

No answer.

"Tell me, at least one thing; are you, or are you not, in love with Miss Cecil?"

"Oh, come—I say—hang it, you know!" exclaimed Bob; but the Professor paying no heed to this incoherent remonstrance, repeated his question in a very determined manner.

"Very well, then—*yes!*" called out the young man despairingly. "I am in love with her—and I can't marry her. Now I hope you're satisfied."

The Professor said, "Far from it." On the contrary, that bare statement was eminently unsatisfactory, and required explanation. He could well understand that there might be obstacles in the way of a marriage which appeared to be desirable and desired, but let us hear what those obstacles were, and try what could be done towards removing them.

Bob, however, was obdurate, declaring that he couldn't and wouldn't say another word about the matter, except that the obstacles referred to were irremovable. He was the most unfortunate beggar that ever stepped, but talking about it wouldn't make it any better. "And I don't think you have the least right to blow me up like this," he added,

as he rose and made for the door. "You asked me to come here and meet her, and I came. Flesh and blood couldn't resist that. I've kept away for the last three weeks though, as you know, and I shall keep away in future. I dare say you have meant kindly, but you shouldn't be in such a deuce of a hurry to jump to conclusions."

With that he made good his retreat, while the Professor, left to himself, looked up at Marcus Aurelius and murmured sadly, "It doesn't do, you see. The human animal in his lower stages of development must be guided by patience and kindness, and by these means alone."

CHAPTER IV.

WHETHER in Bob Annesley's case kindness would have proved more effectual than harshness was a question which the Professor was unable to bring to the test of experience; for a few days after the interview just described Mrs. and Miss Cecil left home, and did not return until late in the autumn.

During their absence, of which Mrs. Annesley was duly apprised, the Professor had a respite. He received no more importunate letters, he saw little of the misguided young lancer, and he employed himself agreeably in writing that brilliant chapter upon Pope Boniface VIII. and the bull *Ausculta, fili*, which has since been so justly praised by the

critics. Absorbed in these congenial studies, and feeling that, for the time being, it was vastly more important to arrive at the truth with regard to the instructions given by Philippe le Bel to Nogaret than to unravel any contemporary mystery, the good man almost forgot Mrs. Harrington's existence, and it was not until the month of October, when Captain Green, whom he chanced to meet one day, informed him that she had left Lichbury for some destination unknown, that his interest in her revived, and he began to wonder whether anything could have caused her to relinquish her prey.

Shortly afterwards he caught sight of Bob Annesley, clanking down the High Street in full war-paint and feathers, and crossed the road on purpose to say, "So Mrs. Harrington has gone away, I hear."

"Yes," answered the young man gloomily; "but she is coming back again."

The Professor passed on. He foresaw that there was going to be trouble, but he did not want to meet it halfway. "Time enough for that when the Cecils come home," thought he as he regained his quiet dwelling, and dived once more into the dark recesses of the thirteenth century.

The Cecils came home early in November; but Bob and Violet met no more in the Precincts, the excuse of lawn-tennis being, indeed, no longer available at that season. That they met elsewhere the Professor had ocular proof, for he saw them several times riding together; moreover, the Dean's

wife informed him that everybody said it was to be an engagement. The Professor held his peace, remembering one person who had said with some confidence that it would never be anything of the sort; and when that person reappeared suddenly upon the scene, it seemed clear that the tug of war was at hand. The first intimation of coming unpleasantness which reached the Professor took the form of a visit from Mr. Cecil, who said he wished to have his old friend's candid opinion about young Annesley.

"He has been a good deal up at my place of late; and though of course one is very glad to see him, and all that, one would like to know a little more of him. Mrs. Cecil will have it that he is ambitious of becoming our son-in-law. Well, that may or may not be so, and I don't think it necessary to repeat to her all that I hear in the town about him and Mrs. Harrington; but I may confess to you, Stanwick, that I feel uneasy on Violet's account. What do you think I ought to do?"

"Ask him his intentions," answered the Professor promptly.

"Oh, my dear fellow, I can't possibly do that. I would as soon bring an action for a breach of promise against a man as ask him his intentions."

"Yet you want to know them, I suppose?"

"That is quite another thing. One wants to know a great deal that one can't ask about. I want to know who this Mrs. Harrington is, for instance, and what *her* intentions are."

"Well," said the Professor, with a sigh, "I dare say I might be able to help you there. At all events, I'll try."

He perceived that the time had come when he must have recourse to that direct appeal to the harpy which he had contemplated some months before. The necessity was grievous to him; but he faced it like the courageous old gentleman that he was, and having found out Mrs. Harrington's address from the stationer in the market-place, set out to call upon her that same afternoon.

Mrs. Harrington occupied lodgings on the first floor of a small house near the cavalry barracks. The dreary shabbiness of her little drawing-room was accentuated by some of those attempts at decoration with which a woman of scanty means and no taste commonly surrounds herself. The faded curtains were drawn back through loops of equally faded ribbon; the walls were adorned with a few staring chromo-lithographs; the mantel-piece and the rickety table had borders of blue satin and coffee-colored lace; the back of the piano was swathed in spotted muslin over blue calico, like a toilet table, and upon it stood a leather screen for photographs, from which various heavily moustached warriors, in and out of uniform, gazed forth vacantly.

These and other details were lost upon the Professor, who only wished to say his say and be gone. He had rehearsed the probable course of the interview beforehand, and was ready with a remark

which should at once render the object of his errand unmistakable; but he had omitted to make allowance for the unforeseen, and therefore he was completely thrown out on discovering two long-legged officers seated beside Mrs. Harrington's tea-table.

It is safe to conclude that that lady was a good deal astonished when Canon Stanwick was announced, but she rose to the level of the occasion and introduced him immediately to her other visitors. "Canon Stanwick, Captain White—Mr. Brown. And now let me give you all some tea."

The Professor would have liked to say that he would call again some other time, but felt that he had not the requisite effrontery; so he sat down, took a cup of tea, and wished for the end. He was very awkward and confused, feeling sure that the two officers must be laughing at him; but in this he was mistaken. Those gentlemen, if not remarkable for intellect, had perfectly good manners, and would wait until they reached the barrack square before permitting themselves to burst into that hilarity which the notion of Polly Harrington closeted with a parson must naturally provoke. In the meantime, they did not do much towards lightening the labor of keeping up conversation. This duty fell chiefly upon Mrs. Harrington, who acquitted herself of it as creditably as any one could have done, and who established a claim upon the Professor's gratitude by talking with as much propriety as if she had been herself a canoness. His

preconceived idea was that propriety of language was about the last thing that could be expected from such ladies as Mrs. Harrington, when, so to speak, in the regimental circle. Nevertheless, he did not find himself able to second her efforts towards promoting a general feeling of cordiality, and the next quarter of an hour passed away very slowly. At length it flashed across Captain White that the old gentleman meant to sit him out, and as soon as he had made this brilliant discovery he rose with great deliberation, pulled down his waistcoat, pulled up his collar, and said he was sorry that he must be going now. Thereupon Mr. Brown went through precisely the same performance, and intimated a similar regret. Mrs. Harrington did not offer to detain them. She accompanied them to the door, talking as she went, kept them for a minute or two on the threshold while she arranged to ride with them to the meet on the following day, and then returned, smiling, to hear what Canon Stanwick might have to say for himself.

Now she knew as well as anybody to what she owed the honour of the Professor's visit ; but she did not see why she should make his path smooth for him. Therefore she smiled and held her tongue, while he, after some introductory commonplaces, managed to drag Bob Annesley's name, without much rhyme or reason, into the current of his remarks.

" A promising young fellow," he said ; " but, like other young fellows, he gives his friends some

anxiety at times. His mother, poor thing, is feeling very uneasy about him just now."

"Mothers," observed Mrs. Harrington, "generally do feel uneasy about their sons. That is because they have such difficulty in realising that their sons may be old enough to take care of themselves."

"But they can't take care of themselves," rejoined the Professor eagerly. "At least, *he* can't take care of himself. His position, as no doubt you are aware, differs in some respects from that of his brother officers, and I think that if you or I were in his mother's place, we should wish, as she does, that he should leave the army, live upon his property, and—and make a suitable marriage."

"Yes," said Mrs. Harrington; "and why is his mother uneasy?—because he won't leave the army, or because he won't make a suitable marriage?"

"Well, for both reasons, I believe. I think I mentioned to you some time ago that there was a talk of his marrying Violet Cecil, and I have since ascertained that his own feelings incline him towards a match which would give great satisfaction to all those who are interested in him; but unfortunately it appears that he is hampered by some previous entanglement with—with——"

"With an unsuitable person?" suggested Mrs. Harrington, still smiling.

The Professor paused. He wanted to enlist Mrs. Harrington's sympathies, and to arouse the generosity which he was convinced that she possessed.

Under the circumstances, was it politic to begin by telling her that she was unsuitable? However, he reflected very sensibly that there would be no getting on at all unless that much were either said or implied; and he felt, besides, that he was already in so uncomfortable a predicament that nothing could very well make it worse. This gave him courage to reply,—

"I fear we must pronounce her so. All other considerations apart, the fact that he no longer wishes to make her his wife should be conclusive. He might feel—and I don't say that he ought not to feel—bound in honour to her; but it seems to me that she is equally bound in honour to release him from his engagement."

"Oh, you think she is bound to release him?"

"I do," answered the Professor firmly. "Yes; I may say without any hesitation that that is what I think."

"I am not quite sure that I agree with you," said Mrs. Harrington. "I can't, of course, form any guess as to who the person to whom you allude may be; but let us put an entirely imaginary case, and see how it looks from the lady's point of view. Because, you know, even unsuitable women have their point of view, and some of them might be disposed to think their happiness almost as important as Mrs. Annesley's. Let us take the case of a woman with whom life has gone very hardly—a woman who was married young to a husband who ill-treated her, deserted her, and left her at his

death with a mere pittance to live upon. Well, this imaginary woman is not very wise, let us say, although she has no great harm in her. She is fond of amusement, she likes riding, she likes dancing, and we won't disguise that she likes flirting too. She has no near relations; so, instead of taking lodgings in a suburb of London, or hiring a cottage in the depths of the country, as no doubt she ought to do, she attaches herself to a cavalry regiment in which she has friends, and she rides her friends' horses, and dances at their balls, and has great fun for a time. Perhaps it serves her right that this way of going on causes her to be cut by all the ladies, wherever she betakes herself; perhaps she doesn't care a straw for that at first, and perhaps she cares a great deal as she grows older. Perhaps she sees no way of escape from a kind of existence which she has learnt to hate, and perhaps that serves her right again. What do you think, Canon Stanwick?"

The Professor's honesty compelled him to reply, "I should not blame her for seizing any opportunity of escape from it that offered."

"Yet most people would blame her; she would have to make up her mind to that. We are supposing, you know, that Mr. Annesley is the way of escape that offers itself, and when this forlorn woman seizes him ecstatically she must expect his friends and relations to tear their hair and call her bad names. I dare say that would trouble her very little. After knocking about the world for so

many years, she wouldn't be over and above sensitive, and she would know perfectly well that, when once she was married and had plenty of money, everybody, including her husband's relations, would be civil enough to her. But now, just as she is exulting in the prospect of peace and plenty, lo and behold! the miserable young man goes and falls in love with somebody else. What is she to do? You, in an off-hand sort of way, answer, 'Oh, let him go free, of course,' but I, on the side of the poor disappointed woman, venture to say that she should be guided by circumstances. Suppose she knew this good-natured Bob Annesley to be a man who couldn't break his heart about anything or anybody if he tried ever so hard? Suppose she knew that she was quite as well able to make him happy as Miss Cecil? Mightn't she in that case be justified in thinking a little bit about her own interests, and holding him to his promise?"

"I can't answer positively," said the Professor, sighing. "Justification must depend entirely upon the standard by which we judge. All I know is, that if such a woman as you describe resolved to sacrifice her worldly prospects she would err upon the safe side."

"Such a woman as I describe would probably differ from you there," observed Mrs. Harrington.

"No!" exclaimed the Professor, suddenly, bringing his stick down upon the floor with an emphatic thump. "You may say that, but I don't believe it. I believe her to be a good-hearted and

high-minded woman, in spite of all that she may have gone through. I believe that she has a conscience, and I believe that she will end by obeying it, no matter at what cost."

"You must know a great deal about her," said Mrs. Harrington, raising her eyebrows. "Are you not forgetting that she is a purely imaginary person?"

The Professor was about to reply, but what he was going to say will never be known, for at this inopportune juncture the door opened, and who should walk in but Bob Annesley himself! The three persons thus unexpectedly confronted with one another all lost their presence of mind a little, and the Professor could not afterwards have given any coherent account of what happened next, or of how long an interval elapsed before he found himself in the street again; but as he wended his way homeward, he astonished more than one passer-by by calling out in a loud, distinct voice, "She'll let him go! mark my words, sir, she'll let him go!" And when he had reached the privacy of his own study, he added confidentially, "And, between ourselves, I'm not by any means sure that she isn't worth a dozen of the other."

CHAPTER V.

IT is one thing to make a sudden and enthusiastic profession of faith in a prodigy, and it is quite another to reiterate that profession in cold blood the next morning. The Professor did not find himself able to accomplish the latter feat. Calmer reflection showed him that he had given Mrs. Harrington credit for the most extreme disinterestedness, not because of any single thing that she had said or done, but simply from an instinctive feeling that her nature was nobler than it appeared to be upon the surface. Now instinctive feelings do not ordinarily commend themselves as a sound foundation for faith to sober philosophers on the shady side of fifty ; and the Professor, while maintaining the high opinion which he had formed of the harpy, wished that he had not been interrupted just when he was upon the point of asking her in plain terms whether she intended to marry Bob Annesley or not. It is possible that he might have called again and repaired the admission, had he not at this time found it necessary to consult certain authorities at the British Museum ; and when once he was in town a variety of accidents detained him there. After that he had to go down to Oxford, so that, what with one thing and another, it was very nearly a month before he was in Lichbury again.

Almost the first person whom he saw after his return was Bob Annesley, and Bob's round face wore an air of such profound dejection that even a

short-sighted and absent-minded man could not help noticing it.

"All well here, I hope?" said the Professor interrogatively. "Have you seen our friends the Cecils lately?"

Bob shook his head. "Never go there now." He added, with something of an effort, "I shall never go there any more; I shall be out of this before long. Sent in my papers last week."

"What!" exclaimed the Professor, rather startled. And then, as they were near his door, "Come in," he said, "and tell me all about it."

The young man obeyed listlessly. "You may as well be told all about it now," he remarked; "everybody will have to know soon."

The professor was greatly perturbed, feeling that he had been somehow to blame in absenting himself at a critical time. He did not ask for further explanations, but having preceded his young friend into the library, began at once: "This must not be allowed to go on, Annesley. I am sincerely sorry for Mrs. Harrington, but I can't think it right that two people should be made miserable in order that she may be provided with a large income. I am disappointed in her, I confess. I had hoped—but no matter. Since she won't break with you, you must break with her; and possibly some sort of compensation might be offered in a delicate manner——"

"I can't break with her," interrupted Bob quietly. "We were married three weeks ago."

The professor's consternation was too great to be expressed in any vehement fashion. He could only murmur under his breath, "Dear, dear! what a sad pity!"

"There was no help for it," said Bob. "I promised her ages ago that I would marry her if her husband died, and I couldn't go back from my word when the time came."

"Her husband!" ejaculated the Professor. "This is worse than I thought. Do I understand you that she has had a husband alive all this time?"

"Well, he died a month or two ago—when she was away in the summer, you know. He had behaved awfully badly to her—deserted her soon after they were married. It was no fault of hers."

"It was certainly a fault of hers to receive another man's addresses while she was still a married woman," said the Professor severely.

"Oh, well, if you like to call it so; but I suppose I was as much in the wrong as she was. Anyhow, I was bound to her. I told her about—about Violet, you know, but she didn't seem to think that made much difference. So, you see, there was no getting out of it," concluded Bob simply.

"There is no getting out of it now," remarked the Professor, with a rueful face; "and I don't think you have improved matters by getting married in this hole-and-corner way. What was your object in doing that?"

"She thought it would be better," answered the young man indifferently; "and, as far as that goes, I agreed with her. It has saved us a good deal of bother with my people; besides which, I didn't care to let all the fellows in the regiment hear about it before I left."

The Professor groaned. He saw that the only course open to him, or to any of Bob's friends, was to make the best of a bad business; but for the moment he could think of nothing except what a very bad business it was, and after promising to keep the secret until it should be a secret no longer, he allowed the young man to depart without offering him a word of consolation. Why he should have felt moved, some hours later, to walk over to the lodgings which were still occupied by the bride, he would have been puzzled to explain. She could not undo what she had done, nor was there anything to be gained by upbraiding her. Perhaps it was rather a strong feeling of curiosity than anything else that led him to her door.

Having learned that she was at home and alone, he followed the servant upstairs, and was presently in the shabby little drawing-room so well known to the officers of the 27th. Mrs. Harrington—to call her by the name which she had not yet formally resigned—rose from the chair in which she had been sitting by the fireside, and turned a curiously altered countenance towards her visitor. The Professor was at once struck by her extreme pallor, and by her air of weary despondency. To look at

her, one would have thought that she had just sustained a crushing defeat, instead of having gained a victory.

"You have seen Bob!" she began.

"Ah!" sighed the Professor, speaking out his thought without ceremony, "I fear you have made a terrible mistake, both of you."

"Yes," she answered, and said no more, though he waited some time for her to explain herself.

"What made you do it?" he exclaimed at length. "You must have known that you were laying up an endless store of wretchedness for your husband and yourself; and I can hardly believe that you were influenced only by the motives that you mentioned when I was here last."

"There was one motive which I didn't mention," said Mrs. Harrington. "You hardly know enough about me to be amused by it; but I have no doubt that the regiment would consider it an exquisite joke if I were to assert that I had married Bob Annesley because I loved him. And yet it isn't very odd that I should love him. He was crazily in love with me once; he was kind to me when no one else was kind; he treated me like a lady; while other men, who were by way of being my friends, were insulting me, more or less directly, every day. Oh, I know what you are saying to yourself. You are saying that if I had really cared for him at all, I should not have married him against his will. But I thought I might reckon without his will—he has so little of it. That has always been Bob's defect;

and I don't mind saying so, because it is the only defect that I have ever discovered in him. I believed that I could win him back, and that when once we were married, he would forget his fancy for Miss Cecil, as he has forgotten other fancies before. Now that it is too late, I have found out that I was wrong. If I had known three weeks ago as much as I know now, I would have died a thousand times rather than have married him. He hates me, and I am rightly punished for my blindness and obstinacy."

She had spoken quietly at first, then with a good deal of excitement ; but now her voice dropped to a whisper as she crouched down over the fire, muttering, "Yes, I am punished—I am punished !"

The Professor frowned. He disliked melodrama, and had no great belief in a repentance which could be evidenced only by words. "Perhaps money and lands may afford you some consolation," he observed rather cruelly.

Mrs. Harrington did not notice the sneer. "Why did you go away and leave me alone with my temptation ?" she cried suddenly. "You might have prevented this."

"I cannot flatter myself," answered the Professor coldly, "that my influence with you would have been sufficiently strong for that."

"It was stronger than you think. I liked you ; you had been kind to me, and I was ready to listen to you. I have not forgotten how you stood by me that day when Mrs. Cecil turned her back upon me ; women in my position don't forget such things.

But you went away just when I most needed a friend, and so I allowed myself to be deceived by my vain hopes."

"If any words of mine could have caused you to think twice before you took this irrevocable step," returned the Professor, "I can only regret most sincerely that business should have called me away at so important a moment; but there is little use in discussing what might have been. The only thing for you and your husband to do now is frankly to accept a situation from which you cannot escape."

"Unless by means of an over-dose of chloral," suggested Mrs. Harrington, with a faint smile.

The Professor got up. "Mrs. Harrington," said he, "you may yet prove yourself an excellent wife and make your husband happy; but you can hardly expect to do this easily or immediately. And if I were you, I would not begin by making speeches which are silly if they are insincere, and wicked if they are not."

Thereupon he left the room without further leave-taking, while she, still bending over the fire, appeared unconscious alike of his rebuke and of his exit. The Professor, as he walked home, felt that he had been very severe, yet not unwarrantably so. "She is a foolish, theatrical woman," he said to himself; "and I strongly suspect that all that exaggerated penitence was assumed for a purpose. Of course her chief object now will be to conciliate her mother-in-law, and she probably imagines that my report of her may carry some weight in that

quarter. But she makes a mistake, because I shan't report anything about her—good, bad, or indifferent. No more meddling with other people's business for me!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE Professor would undoubtedly have felt confirmed in the harsh judgment which he had passed upon Bob Annesley's wife if he could have seen her at the meet on the following morning. Mrs. Harrington was a finished horse-woman, and never looked to so great advantage as in the saddle. Upon the present occasion she rode a fidgety chestnut mare, the property of Captain White, and the ease with which she managed her rather troublesome mount won her a great deal of admiration from the local members of the hunt. As for the officers of the 27th, they were too well accustomed to Polly Harrington's dexterity to pay her any compliments on that score; but they clustered round her as usual, and smiled amiably at her smart sayings, and told her that she was in rare form that morning. Bob hovered in the background, looking woebegone.

The neighbourhood of Lichbury does not bear a very high character among hunting men, blank days being of by no means rare occurrence thereabouts, but there is always a fox at Lingham Gorse,

and it was at Lingham Gorse that a fox was found on the particular morning with which we are concerned. The whole crowd got away together, and kept together for the first five minutes, going at racing speed across the short turf of the downs at the foot of which Lichbury stands. On this the northern side, the gradual slopes of these hills form as good and safe galloping ground as anyone could wish for; but their southern face is very different, falling away in precipitous chalk quarries and sharp declivities unwelcome to timid riders, and it was after crossing the backbone of the ridge that the field began to scatter right and left, only a few adventurous spirits riding straight ahead and trusting in Providence.

Among these was Mrs. Harrington. She was followed by Annesley and Captain White, the latter of whom was watching her headlong progress a little anxiously, and wishing, perhaps, that his chestnut mare were safe in her stable. It was not, however, any fear on the mare's account that caused him to rein in suddenly and ejaculate "Good God!" About a furlong ahead, a row of posts and rails had come into view, immediately beyond which—as every one who knew the country was well aware—was a chalk cliff some two hundred feet in depth. It seemed incredible that any human being, whether familiar with the country or not, should ride at such a fence, for there was nothing but sky visible upon the other side of it; but Mrs. Harrington was making straight for it now, and it was the discovery that

she was doing so that called forth Captain White's exclamation. He raised his hand to his mouth and sent a warning shout after her, and Bob, who saw the danger at the same moment, shouted too; but Mrs. Harrington did not appear to hear either of them, and, indeed, it was already too late for warnings to be of any avail. For an instant horse and rider rose dark against the grey sky, then vanished; and to those who waited there, helpless and horror-struck, it seemed as if some minutes elapsed before the dull crash came which told them that poor Polly Harrington had taken her last leap.

"Awful thing!—most shocking sight I ever saw in my life!" Captain White said, describing the catastrophe, some months afterwards, to an old brother officer. "But she must have been killed like a flash of lightning—there's some comfort in that. And, though I wouldn't say so to any one else, I can't help thinking that the poor woman's death was about the best thing that could have happened. Fancy her having got Bob Annesley to marry her on the sly! Only shows what fools fellows are, eh? You've heard that he's engaged to that pretty Miss Cecil now, haven't you? It isn't given out yet, of course, and I suppose they'll have to let a year go by before they announce it formally; but everybody knows about it down in these parts."

Probably many less plain-spoken persons than Captain White agreed with him in thinking the unfortunate harpy's death the best thing that

could have happened ; but it may be hoped that Bob Annesley was not consciously among the number. The suddenness and the ghastly nature of the calamity gave him a shock from which his elastic spirits took a long time to recover ; but he began to be more cheerful again after meeting Canon Stanwick, and putting into words a dread which he had not liked to mention to other friends.

"I say," he asked hesitatingly, and keeping his eyes upon the ground, "do you believe—do you believe that—*she did it on purpose?*"

The Professor evaded the question so cleverly that his interrogator quite imagined that he had answered it.

"I do not think," he said gravely, "that we have any right whatever to cast such an aspersion as that upon her memory."

THE MARQUIS JEANNE HYACINTH DE ST. PALAYE.

CHAPTER I.

In one of the mountainous districts of the south of France, which in the last century were covered with forests, the highway ran up through the rocky valley by the side of a roaring torrent. On the right hand and on the left the massive foliage descended to the banks, and filled up the small and intervening ravines with a bosky shade. Here and there a lofty crag broke out from the sea of green leaves, and now and then the pointed roofs of a château or the spire of a village church witnessed to the existence of man, and gave an interest and a charm to the beautiful scene.

It was a day in the late autumn of the year 1760. The departing smile of nature, which in another hour would be lost in death, was upon every tree and leaf. The loveliest tints and shades, so delicate that at the moment of their perfection they trembled into nothingness, rested upon the woodlands on every side. A soft wind whispered

through the rustling leaves laden with mellow odours and with the pleasing sadness that comes with the falling leaf. The latest flowers of the year with unconscious resignation wasted, as it might seem, tints which would not have disgraced the warmest hues of summer upon heaps of withered leaves, and dry moss, and rotting wood. The loveliest hour of the year was the last.

The highway crossed an ancient bridge of great height with a cunningly pointed arch. Just beyond the bridge a smaller path turned up on the left hand as you ascended the valley. It wound its way up the wooded valleys as though with no definite end, yet it was smooth and well kept, more so indeed than the highway itself, and doubtless led to some château, by the orders of whose lord the peasantry kept the road in good repair. Let us follow this road on an evening at the end of October in the year we have already mentioned, for we shall meet with a pretty sight.

Some distance up the road on the left was a small cottage, built to mark and protect the path to a natural terrace formed, as far as art had had a hand in the proceeding, by some former lord of the domain to command a view of the neighbouring mountains and country. Several of these terraces existed in the wood. At the point where the path entered the private road to the château the wood receded on every side, and left a wide glade or savannah across which the sunshine lay in broad and flickering rays. Down this path there came a boy

and girl, for they were little more, though their dress and the rank of life they held gave an appearance of maturity greater than their years. The lady was of supreme beauty even for a heroine of romance, and was dressed with a magnificence which at any other period of the world would have been fantastic in a wood. She was clinging to the arm of a handsome boy of some two-and-twenty years of age, whose dress by his scarf and some other slight peculiarities marked the officer of those days. His face was very handsome, and the expression on the whole was good, but there was something about the eyes and the curve of the lips which spoke of violent passions as yet unsubdued.

The girl came down the path clinging to his arm, her lovely face upraised to him, and the dark and reckless expression of his face was soothed and chastened into a look of intense fondness as he looked down upon it. Rarely could a lovely autumn afternoon receive its finishing touch from the passing of so lovely a pair.

The valley was perfectly solitary: not a single sound was heard, nor living creature seemed astir. It was as if nature understood, and held her breath to further the purposes of their lonely walk. Only for a moment however. At the instant they left the path and entered upon the grassy verge that bordered the way to the château, they both started, and the girl gazed before her with an expression of wild alarm, while the young man's face grew darker, and a fierce and cruel look came into his eyes.

But what they saw would seem at first sight to give little cause for such emotion. A few yards before them, walking leisurely across the grass from the direction of the road, appeared a gentleman of some twenty-eight or thirty years of age, of whom at first sight there could be no question that he was one of the most distinguished and handsomest men of his day. He was carefully dressed in a style which only men of exceptional figure can wear without extravagance, but which in their case seems only fitting and right. He wore a small walking sword, so hung as not to interfere in the least with the contour of his form, with which his dress also evidently harmonized. His features were faultlessly cut, and the expression, though weary and perhaps almost insolent, bore slight marks of dissipation, and the glance of his eyes was serene and even kindly. He saw the pair before him and instantly stopped. It is probable that the incident was equally embarrassing on both sides, but the visible effect was very different. The two young people stood utterly silent and aghast. The lady was evidently frightened and distressed, while her companion seemed prepared to strike the intruder to the earth. On the other hand, the Marquis, for such was his rank, showed no signs of embarrassment.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," he said; "I perceive that I have committed a *gaucherie*. Growing tired of the hunt, I returned to the château, and hearing from the servants that Mademoiselle had gone down

into the forest to visit her old nurse at the cottage by the terrace, I thought how pleasant it would be to go to meet her and accompany her home. I had even presumed to think," he continued, smiling, and as he spoke he turned to the young man with a gesture of perfect courtesy—"I even presumed to think that my presence might be some small protection to the Mademoiselle in the wilds of the forest. I was unaware, of course, that she was guarded with such loyal and efficient care." He paused for a moment, and then continued with greater dignity and kindliness of expression, "I need not add, Mademoiselle, as a gentleman whose name hitherto, I believe, has been free from taint, I need not add that Mademoiselle need fear no embarrassment in the future from this chance encounter."

It was perhaps strange, but it seemed that the politeness and even friendliness of the Marquis, so far from soothing, irritated the young man. He remained silent, but kept his black and angry glance fixed upon the other.

But the girl seemed differently affected. She hesitated for a moment, and then took a step forward, speaking with her clasped hands before her, with a winning and beseeching gesture.

"You see before you, Monsieur le Marquis," she said, "two as miserable young creatures as, I hope, exist upon the earth. Let me present to you Monsieur le Chevalier de Grissolles, of the regiment of Flanders."

The gentlemen bowed.

"— Who has known me all my life," continued the girl, speaking rapidly; "who has loved me—whom I love. We meet to-day for the last time. We should not have told you—I should not have mentioned this to you—because I know—we know—that it is useless to contend against what is fixed for us—what is decreed. We meet to-day for the last time; the fleeting moments are running past—ah! how quickly—in another moment they will be gone." . . . .

Here the emotion that overpowered her choked her utterance. She stopped, and to prevent herself from falling, she clung to the Chevalier's arm.

The Marquis looked at her in silence, and his face became perfectly beautiful with its expression of pity. A marble statue, indeed, might almost have been expected to show emotion at the sight of such beauty in such distress. There was a pause. Then the Marquis spoke.

"I am most honoured," he said, "to be permitted to make the acquaintance of Monsieur le Chevalier, whose name, if I mistake not, is already, though that of so young an officer, mentioned with distinction in the despatches of Monsieur de Broglie. For what you have said to me, Mademoiselle—and what you have condescended to confide to me has torn my spirit—I fear I can offer you but little consolation. Your good sense has already assured you that these things are settled for us. They are inevitable. And in the present case there are cir-

cumstances which make it absolutely essential to the interests of Monsieur le Comte, your father, that these espousals, at any rate, should take place at once. Even were I"—here he turned to the Chevalier with a smile—"even were I to pick a quarrel with your friend, and a few seconds sooner than in the natural course of events it probably would, allow his sword to pass through my heart, I fear the result would be simply to substitute another in my place, another who, I, with perhaps a natural vanity, may fancy, would not place matters in a happier light. But let us not look at things too gloomily. You say that this is your last hour of happiness; that is not necessary. It is true that the espousals must take place at once. The interests of your father require this. But there is no need that Mademoiselle's feelings should not be consulted with regard to the final consummation of the nuptials. These need not be hurried. Monsieur le Chevalier may have other opportunities of making his adieux. And I hope that my influence, which, in after years, may be greater than it is at present, will enable me to further any views he may have with regard to higher commands in the service of his majesty."

The words were those of ordinary compliment, yet the manner of the Marquis was so winning that had it been possible it would have affected even the Chevalier himself; but if a highwayman is threatening your life it is not much consolation that he offers to return you a franc piece.

The Chevalier remained cold and gloomy.

The Marquis looked at him for a moment; then he continued, addressing himself to the girl—

"But I am intruding myself on Mademoiselle. I will continue my walk to the terrace, the afternoon is delightfully fine. As you are aware, Monsieur le Comte is hunting in the valleys to the west. All the *piqueurs* are withdrawn to that side of the forest. I should hope that Mademoiselle will not again be interrupted in her walk."

Then without another word he courteously saluted the young people, and continued his walk up the path. He never turned his head, indeed he would have allowed himself to be broken on the wheel rather than have done anything of the kind, but the others were not so reticent; several times they stopped and looked back at the Marquis as he paused every now and then as if to admire the beauties of the scene. At last he reached the corner of the cottage and disappeared from their view.

The beauties of the scene, however, did not entirely occupy the mind of the Marquis. At the most enchanting point, where opening valley and stream and mountain and distant tower burst upon his view, he paused, and murmured to himself, "Some men, now, might have made mischief out of this. Let us wait and see."

CHAPTER II.

THE Chateau de Frontênac was built upon a natural terrace half way up the slope of the forest with the craggy ravines clothed with foliage surrounding it on every side. It consisted of two courts, the oldest of which had been built in the earliest days of French domestic architecture, when the detached buildings of the mediæval castle were first brought together into a compact block. In accordance with the singular notion of those days that the south and west were unhealthy aspects, the principal rooms of this portion of the château faced the north and east. They consisted of vast halls and saloons succeeding each other with apparently purposeless extension, and above them a suite of bed chambers of solemn and funereal aspect. These saloons and bed chambers had been left unaltered for centuries, and the furniture must have been antique in the reign of Henri Quatre. The other court had been built much more recently, and, in accordance with more modern notions, the chief apartments faced the south and west. From its windows, terraced gardens descended into the ravine, and spread themselves along the side of the hill. The architecture had probably, when first the court had been added to the château, contrasted unpleasantly with the sombre pile beyond; but the lapse of centuries with their softening hand had blended the whole into a unity of form and color, and adventurous plants creeping silently over the

carved stone work of the straggling fronts wrought a soft veil of nature's handiwork over the artificial efforts of man.

The saloons in this part of the château were furnished more or less in the modern taste with cabinets of ebony and ivory of the days of Louis Quatorze, and buhl work of the eighteenth century; but as the modern articles were added sparingly, the effect on the whole was quiet and pleasing. The De Frontênacs, while enjoying the more convenient portion of their abode, prided themselves upon the antique apartments, and kept them in scrupulous repair. In these vast and mysterious halls all the solemn meetings and ceremonies of the family had place. Here when death had touched his own, the De Frontênacs lay in state; here the infant heir was baptised; here the important compacts of marriage were signed; here the feast of *Noël* was held. It is true that for the last century or so these ideas had been growing weaker, and the usages of modern life and the fascinations of the capital, had broken in upon these ancient habits, and weakened the attachments and associations from which they sprang; but the De Frontênacs were a fierce and haughty race, and never entirely lost the characteristics of their forefathers. Now and again, at some distaste of court life, or some fancied slight on the part of the monarch, they would retire to their forest home, and resume for a time at least the life and habits of a nobler and a prouder day.

In the largest of these old saloons, the day after the meeting in the forest, the whole household of the château was assembled. At a long table were seated several gentlemen well known in Paris as among the highest of the *noblesse de la robe*, and rolls of parchment and masses of writing, with great seals hanging from their corners, covered the table. The walls of the saloon were hung with portraits of several epochs of art, including the works of artists then alive ; for it was a peculiarity of the De Frontênacs that venerating, as they did, the antique portion of their château, they invariably hung the portraits of the family as they were painted in these old and faded rooms, reserving for the modern apartments the landscapes and fancy pictures which from time to time they purchased.

When the moment had arrived at which the contracts were to be signed, there was a movement in the room, and Mademoiselle de Frontênac, accompanied by her mother, entered and advanced towards the table. She was perfectly collected, and bowed to the Marquis with an unembarrassed grace. No one ignorant of the circumstances of the case would have supposed that anything approaching to a tragedy was being enacted in that room.

The Marquis signed more than one document, and as he stepped back from the table he ran his eyes carelessly over the room, with which he was unacquainted. Fronting him, above a massive sideboard with the full light of the opposite window

upon it, was the portrait of a young man in the cuirass of an officer of cavalry of a previous century, whose eyes were fixed upon the Marquis with a stern and threatening glance. It seemed that, stepping from the canvas, there confronted him, as a few hours before he had met him in the forest, the Chevalier de Grissolles, whom he had found with Mademoiselle de Frontênac.

Nothing probably could have made the Marquis start, but he gazed upon the portrait with interest not unmixed with surprise, and as soon as Mademoiselle had retired, which she did when her signatures had been obtained, he turned to the Count with a courteous gesture.

"These apartments, Monsieur le Comte," he said, "are certainly as fine as anything of the kind in Europe. I have seldom, indeed, seen anything that can be compared to them. And doubtless the portraits upon the walls are of exceptional interest. By your leave, I will glance round them;" and, accompanied by the Count, he passed through several of the rooms, listening attentively to the descriptions and anecdotes which the different portraits required and suggested. There was somewhat of sameness perhaps in the story, for the French nobility had little scope of action other than the battle-field, and the collection lacked the pleasing variety of an English portrait gallery, where the variety of costumes, here a soldier, there a divine, now a lawyer or judge, and then a courtier, charms the eye and excites the fancy. The Marquis

came back perhaps all the sooner to the great saloon.

The saloon was empty, and the lawyers and rolls of parchment were gone. The Marquis went straight to the portrait which had attracted his attention, and stood facing it without saying a word: the Count, after glancing carelessly round the room, followed his guest's example.

The vast hall was perfectly empty. The tables had been pushed aside into the windows, and the superb figure of the Marquis, standing upon the polished floor, would have been of itself sufficient to furnish the scene, but in proportion as the interest which the portrait had excited was manifested in the attitude of the Marquis, so much the more the figure on the wall seemed to gather life and intensity, and to answer look for look with its living opposite.

"That painting," said the Count, after a moment's pause, "is the portrait of a cadet of my family, or rather, I should say, of a female branch of it, a Chevalier de Grissolles. He was a youth of great promise, a favourite and aide-de-camp, of the great Prince de Condé; and he fell at Jarnac by his master's side. Enough of him," and the Count's manner changed as he glanced round the chamber, and advanced confidentially to the side of the Marquis. "Enough of him; but I am not sorry your attention has been directed towards his portrait, because it enables me to introduce, with somewhat less embarrassment, a subject to which I

have hitherto shrunk from alluding. I am sorry to say, Monsieur le Marquis," continued the Count, with an uneasy smile, "that the chevalier whose portrait you see before you, was not the last of his race. There have been others who have borne the name, and there is one now. He is a lad in the regiment of Flanders, and was brought up in my family. Unfortunately he was allowed to attend Mademoiselle de Frontênac in her recreations, and a boy and girl attachment was formed between them, from which harmless child's play no one foreboded any evil. The young fool is constantly breaking away from his regiment, in which he is a great favourite, and is hanging about my daughter; and from what Madame la Comtesse tells me—I—I hardly like to say it, it is so absurd !—she is positively attached to him, seriously and devotedly attached. Positively I cannot sleep sometimes; this stupid affair had given me so much annoyance."

It did not increase the good humour of the Count, who was already in a sufficiently bad temper, to notice, as he could not help doing, that the Marquis did not seem in the least surprised at the information he had received, and what was still more irritating, that he seemed to regard it with perfect indifference. He appeared, in fact, to be much more interested in studying the portrait before him, probably admiring it as a work of art.

"My dear Monsieur le Comte," he said at length, "I am really sorry that you should allow yourself to

be so much annoyed over what seems to me to be a mere trifle. This marriage contract, so honourable to me, is now signed; at the present moment *messieurs de la robe* are engaged, I doubt not, in arranging those pecuniary matters which you explained to me were of so much importance: why, then, should we trouble ourselves? As to this little *pastorale* which it seems is being enacted as a sort of interlude to the more serious business of the stage, it is what I imagine invariably takes place. What would become of the poets and romancists, otherwise? We must think of our own youth, Comte, and not be too hard upon the young people. Positively I feel quite old when I think of those delightful days—that springtime of existence, those first loves," and the Marquis closed his eyes and sighed deeply, apparently from his heart.

The Count took a turn or two in the saloon, but it did not seem to soothe his temper.

"This is all very well, Monsieur le Marquis," he said, sharply, "and very witty; in delicate badinage we all know no one can equal Monsieur de St. Palaye, but I assure you, this is no laughing matter. This affair has grown beyond a joke. When my daughter has the honour—an honour I am well aware far higher than any she had a right to expect—of signing herself Madelêine, Marquise de St. Palaye, it will not be my place, of course, to say a word. Then her honour will be in her husband's keeping—her honour and his. But while she remains in my house she is my daughter, and in my

care, and I tell you plainly that this matter is past a joke."

A fleeting expression of extreme *ennui* passed over the Marquis's face, and he evidently suppressed an inclination to yawn. Then with more *bonhomie* than he had previously shown he put his hand on his companion's arm.

"Well, my dear Comte," he said, smilingly, "I will do anything you wish—anything, that is, short of unpleasantly hurrying the nuptials—that I cannot do. It would be—in fact it would be such wretched taste—tears !—a scene—a—an *esclandre* in general, my *dear* Count !"

Then linking his arm in that of the Count, he led him, still sulky and grumbling, out of the saloon, and into the modern court of the château ; and the long lines of ancestors on the walls followed them as they passed, with angry and vindictive looks, as though enraged that they could not descend from their places and join again in the turmoil of life.

CHAPTER III.

THE second morning after the contract had been signed, the Marquis was seated in his dressing-room, about an hour before *déjeuner*, reading, apparently with great entertainment, though not for the first time, *Le Taureau Blanc* of Monsieur de Voltaire. While he was thus agreeably occupied

the door was violently thrown open, and the Count, heated and excited, burst into the room.

"Marquis," he said, utterly regardless of any who might hear, "let me beg of you to get to horse at once and come with me. I have positive information that my daughter is at this moment giving an interview to that young scoundrel on one of the terraces in the wood. While we speak they may be planning an elopement—nay, even carrying it into effect. Let me beg of you to come at once!"

The Marquis laid down his book, crossed one knee over the other, and leaning back on his chair looked the Count in the face steadily for a second or two, as who would say "This man will be too much for me; I shall have to press forward the nuptials, I see, in self-defence." Then he sighed deeply and rose from his seat.

"Very well, my dear Count," he said, "I will be as quick as possible. Pierre, see that they bring some horses round; come into my closet yourself, and send Charles and Alphonso and all the men here at once. I will make haste, my dear Count, indeed I will."

Whether the Marquis did make haste as he said, or whether the number of valets impeded each other, it is certain that it was a long time before he descended to the court of the château, where he found the Count pacing up and down, fuming and cursing his delay. They got to horse as soon as possible, and rode down the forest road, but the Marquis reined his horse in so often, and made

such inappropriate remarks upon the beauty of the morning and of the view, that the Count could bear it no longer.

"Monsieur le Marquis," he said, "I am sorry I have disturbed you so much; I am very anxious to press forward, but I will not hurry you, I will ride forward at once."

"Pray do not delay a moment on my account," said the other; "I shall rejoin you anon."

The Count put spurs to his horse, and, followed by his servants, was lost to sight behind the windings of the path.

The moment he disappeared the Marquis drew his rein, and turning to his valet, said in a tone perfectly different from that which he had hitherto used :—

"On the north terrace, do you say?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis," replied the man, with a smile; "on the north terrace to the left; not on the old terrace, as the Count is wrongly advised. They have been there a long time; I should think they must be about parting."

The Marquis turned his horse, and, followed by his men, retraced his steps until they reached a scarcely perceptible path which now on their right hand, found its way down into the road. Here he dismounted, and taking his riding-whip with him in place of a cane, began leisurely to ascend the path. When he had gone a yard or two, however, he turned to the valet and said :

"Wait here with the horses, and should Monsieur

le Comte return, say to him that I have taken the opportunity of the fine morning to enjoy one of the numerous views on his delightful estate. Say that to him, neither more nor less."

When the Marquis reached the head of the path he found himself at the end of a long and grassy terrace, from which the path was screened by thick bushes. Standing, for a moment, so concealed, he became conscious of the presence of the two young lovers whom he had met some few days ago in the forest. Again he could see the face of the young girl, and again he was moved by the sight. He waited till they had reached the other end of the terrace, and then came forward, so as not to startle them by his sudden appearance. They met half way.

"I am sorry once again," said the Marquis, speaking simply, and without affectation, "to intercept Mademoiselle, especially as this time I have no excuse but have acted with prepense. Monsieur le Comte, your father, is ridden out in hot haste and temper upon some mischievous information he has received concerning Mademoiselle and Monsieur le Chevalier. I did what I could to delay him, and finally left him, having better information, it appears, than he had. But he will be here anon. I was compelled to leave my horses in the road below, and when he returns from his fruitless quest he will doubtless follow me here. Monsieur le Chevalier will doubtless see the propriety of avoiding an unpleasant meeting."

"I have to thank you, Monsieur le Marquis," said the young man, whose manner seemed compounded of an intense dislike, and a sense that politeness was due to one who, under similar circumstances had behaved in a more friendly manner than could have been looked for; "I have to thank you for previous courtesy, and for, I have no doubt, much consideration to-day. I will not linger any more."

He took the girl in his arms, and imprinted a kiss upon her lips, which, under the circumstances, was perhaps scarcely courteous; then, gloomily bowing to the Marquis, he plunged into the thickest of the wood and disappeared.

The Marquis took no notice of the warmth of his leave-taking, but, having his riding-whip and hat in one hand, he offered the other arm to the girl, saying—

"If Mademoiselle will honour me by taking a turn upon the terrace before her father's arrival I shall esteem it a favour, as it will give me the opportunity of saying a single word."

The girl took his arm willingly, and as she did so she said, with a winning and confiding gesture—

"Monsieur le Marquis, I think you are the best and kindest of men."

"I wish to put before Mademoiselle," said the Marquis, speaking gently, but very gravely, "one or two considerations; and I could wish that it were possible for her to regard it as the advice of an absolutely impartial friend. The first is one of

which I hesitate to speak, because it seems to cast a slur, in some manner, upon the character of Monsieur le Chevalier. But man is very weak, especially when exposed to such temptation as, fortunately for him, rarely in this world crosses his path. These shady groves and grassy banks are the places where the deceitful god delights to work his mischief—a mischief which is never repaired. I know, of course, that there are many who speak of these things lightly, and who even view these flowery, but dangerous paths with approbation; but I cannot think that Mademoiselle would tread them without violating the *bienséance* which alone makes life tolerable, or tainting the purity of those lustrous ranks of which she will be the brightest star. I pass, at once, to another thought which it is not impossible Monsieur le Chevalier has already suggested." He paused, as the tremor of the girl's hand upon his arm showed that he was not speaking in vain. "I mean," he continued, "the project of seeking in another land that happiness which I fear appears to Mademoiselle to be denied her in this. Could I see any permanent prospect of happiness in such a course I would not shrink, Quixotic as it might seem, from advising you to adopt it. But there appear to me insuperable objections to such a course. I do not see how it is possible for Mademoiselle so to elude the affectionate solicitude of her family as to obtain more than a couple of hours' start. Couriers on swift horses would be sent to the *Intendants* of the provinces, to the postmasters

on the great roads, and to the officers on the frontiers. After experiencing toil and hardships which it is pitiful to think of, Mademoiselle would probably be overtaken before she reached the frontier. But supposing that such was not the case; supposing that she succeeded by the skill of Monsieur le Chevalier and the swiftness of his horses in reaching a foreign land, the Chevalier is a sworn servant of the King of France. He would be arrested in any court and city of Europe: he would be brought back to France, and the Bastile, or some inferior prison, would be his home for life. When I add to this the hardships of life in a foreign land, of the rapture of family ties, of hatred and animosity where there should be nothing but serenity, of the failure of family schemes and hopes, and of the tie which binds persons of our rank all over the world to discountenance actions which are regarded as subversive of family order, and even life—I cannot, I say, when I think of such certain hardship, of such possible disgrace and misery—I cannot advise Mademoiselle to adopt such a course. The certainty that she would soon be separated from her friend seems to me to decide the matter."

The Marquis paused; but as the girl made no reply, he continued—

"For myself, I say nothing; it is my misfortune that I have been introduced to Mademoiselle under circumstances which render it impossible that I should make that impression which it would have been the ambition of my life to achieve; but this,

perhaps, I may say, that should Mademoiselle decide to let matters take their course, and as far as circumstances will permit, to repose in me her confidence, it would indeed seem a fatality no less strange than sad, should she prove the first who, in the long course of centuries, had reason to regret that they placed confidence in the word of a St. Palaye."

It seemed that something in the words of the Marquis, strange as they may appear to some people, or something in his manner as he spoke them, did not affect the girl unpleasantly, for she was in the act of saying, what indeed she had said before, but now with one slight but important modification—

"Marquis, you are the best and kindest of men" —when her father, heated with riding and with anger, burst through the trees at the end of the terrace, and overlooking in his fury what was before his eyes, exclaimed—

"Well, Marquis, I told you how it would be: I cannot find them! This wretched girl—" he stopped suddenly, open-mouthed, as straight before him, apparently on the most friendly terms, the girl hanging confidingly upon her companion's arm, stood the Marquis, and she of whom he was in such desperate chase. It was impossible for either to conceal a smile.

"My dear Comte," said the Marquis, "I am sorry you have had so much unnecessary trouble. The truth is that after you left me it occurred to

me that, in the little domestic scene you were anticipating, I should play an insignificant, not to say a somewhat ridiculous figure. Warm as is the interest which I must naturally feel in everything that concerns Mademoiselle, I think that these family matters are always best managed by the family itself. I therefore turned aside to enjoy perhaps the most beautiful of the many beautiful views to be found on this estate, and to my delight I found Mademoiselle engaged in a precisely similar occupation. It augurs well, I am sure, for our future happiness, that at this early period our tastes are found to be so similar."

The Count saw that he was being laughed at, and indeed it may as well be confessed at once that the Marquis erred in the manner in which he treated the Count. This, however, should be remembered in extenuation, that nothing could be more intolerable to him than the part of jealous husband and lover which the Count appeared determined to force him to play. It was not in human nature but that he should take a little quiet revenge.

"But did you see nothing of the Chevalier?" blundered out the Count.

"Really, my dear Count, I have not had time, had I possessed the power, to challenge my adversary to mortal combat, to run him through the heart, to cut him up into small bits, and to bury him beneath the sod. Besides, you will observe that the grass all around is perfectly undisturbed. I assure you solemnly, Monsieur le Comte," continued the

Marquis, apparently with the greatest earnestness, "that the Chevalier does not lie murdered beneath my feet."

The words were spoken in jest, but they were recalled to memory, afterwards, by more than one.

The Count turned sulkily away, and his daughter and the Marquis followed him back to the château.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days after these events the Count removed his family to Paris, travelling in several large carriages, and accompanied by numerous servants on horseback. The Marquis accompanied them, and, by what might appear a curious coincidence, on the very morning upon which they set out on their journey, the Chevalier received, at the little *Auberge* on the farther side of the forest, where he lodged, an imperative order to join his regiment without delay. Furious at the success of what he conceived to be the interference of the Marquis and the Count, he obeyed the order, resolved to return to Paris at the earliest opportunity.

The winter passed in Paris as winters in great cities usually do. The Chevalier stole up from the frontier more than once, and at the court balls, at the theatre, and at the private assemblies he succeeded in seeing Mademoiselle de Frontênac more often than he perhaps had expected, but though his

opportunities exceeded his hopes, the result was not proportionally favourable. Whether Mademoiselle had succumbed to the paternal influence, or whether the Marquis had succeeded in substituting his own attractions for those of the Chevalier, it was evident that her manner became colder and more reserved at each interview.

The winter at last was over, and one evening in summer, after a royal concert at Versailles, when the king's violins had performed such delicate and yet pathetic music of Monsieur Rousseau's that the court was ravished by it, the Chevalier met his mistress by appointment in one of the pavilions of the orangery. He had secret means of obtaining admission to the precincts of the palaces which were well understood by the courtiers of those days.

Mademoiselle de Frontênac was perfectly pale as she came into the pavilion, and she seemed to walk with difficulty ; she stopped immediately when within the door, and spoke at once, as though she were repeating a lesson.

"Do not come any nearer, Monsieur le Chevalier," she said, "I am the wife of another."

He stopped, therefore, where he was, on the other side of the small pavilion, and across the summer evening light that mingled with the shimmer of the candelabras, he saw her for the last time.

Neither spoke for a moment or two, and then she said, still as though conning a part—

"I have promised, Monsieur le Chevalier de

Grissolles, to be the wife of the Marquis de St. Palaye, and I will keep my word."

"You are not speaking your own words, Madeleine," he said eagerly; "let your own heart speak!" and coming forward across the pavilion, he was on the point of taking her hand.

Then the door by which she had entered opened again, and the Count de Frontênac, with a quiet and firm step, glided in, and stood by his daughter's side.

At this sight, which revealed to him as it seemed, the faithlessness of his mistress, and the plot which was woven around him on every side, the Chevalier lost his self-control.

"I was aware, Monsieur le Comte," he burst forth, "that in this *pays du diable* the privileges of parents were numerous and inalienable, but till this moment I did not know that eavesdropping was one of them."

The Count made no reply, except by raising his hat; and his daughter, bowing with a mechanical grace that was pitiful to see, said—

"I wish you farewell, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"Madeleine," said the young man, "I wish you farewell for ever; and I pray God, with what sincerity will be known when we stand, each of us, before His judgment bar, that you may not bitterly regret your words this night."

Then, perfectly pale, but more composed than before he had spoken, he too raised his hat courteously, and left the room.

That evening there were enacted within a stone's throw of each other, two very different scenes.

When the Marquis de St. Palaye returned to his hotel he was told that the family lawyer, Monsieur Cacotte, was waiting to see him, having at the first possible moment brought him some deeds which Monsieur le Marquis was very anxious should be completed.

The Marquis would see him at once, and, after a few minutes' delay, he entered the room in which the lawyer was seated at a table which was covered with parchments. The room was one in which the Marquis usually sat when the festivities of the day, whether at home or abroad, were over; it was richly furnished as a library, and upon the wide hearth there burned a fire of wood, though it was summer. Greeting the lawyer with great friendliness of manner, St. Palaye threw himself somewhat wearily into a chair, and gazed at the blazing wood-ashes.

A servant entered the room with wine.

"I am sorry, Monsieur le Marquis," said the lawyer, "to come to you at so unseasonable an hour; but your instructions were so precise that the moment this first will was ready it should be brought to you to sign, that I did not dare to wait till the morrow."

"You did quite right, Monsieur Cacotte," said the Marquis. "No one can tell what may happen before the morrow."

"I have indeed," continued the lawyer, "pre-

pared both wills, so that Monsieur can satisfy himself that they are both exactly alike. The one will be signed immediately after the marriage; the other at once. They both contain the same clauses, and especially the one upon which Monsieur le Marquis so much insisted: 'that the sum of fifty thousand louis d'or, charged upon the unsettled estates in Poitou and Auvergne, should be paid within three months of the death of the testator to Monsieur le Chevalier de Grissolles, for a purpose which he will appreciate and understand.' Those, I think, were the words Monsieur wished to have used."

"They seem quite correct," said the Marquis.

"I am sorry," continued the lawyer, "that this extra expense, which seems to me unnecessary, should be entailed."

"In that," said the Marquis, politely, "you only show, Monsieur Cacotte, that care and interest in the good of the family which you have always manifested both in the time of my father and of myself. My father, the late Marquis de St. Palaye, always expressed to me the obligation under which he conceived himself to be in this respect, and this obligation is, of course, much increased in my case."

"The obligation, Monsieur le Marquis," said the lawyer, "if such there be, has been too liberally repaid both by your father and yourself."

"To tell the truth, Monsieur Cacotte," said the Marquis, leaning back in his chair, with his feet

stretched out towards the fire, and speaking with an appearance of being perfectly at home with his companion, and desirous of confiding in him, "to tell the truth I am even in this age of science and encyclopædias somewhat superstitious, and I have a presentiment—the St. Palayes often had it—that I have not long to live. Do not suppose that I shrink from this prospect, though it is a singular statement for a man to make who is about to marry, and to marry such a bride as mine! Yet I do not mind confiding to you, Monsieur Cacotte, that I am somewhat wearied of life. The world grows very old, and it does not seem to mend."

"Monsieur le Marquis has been too long unmarried," said the lawyer. "I am not surprised that he should be wearied of the enjoyments which he has had the opportunity of tasting to such repletion. He will speak differently when he has a lovely woman by his side, and knows the felicity of wife and child."

"Ah, Monsieur Cacotte!" said the Marquis, smiling, "you speak as they all do of felicity. There is such a thing, believe me, as the intolerable weariness of a too constant felicity. When I hear even of the joy of the future, and of the bliss of heaven, it seems to me sometimes that the most blissful heaven is to cease to exist. Let me sign the deed."

A servant was called in as a witness, and the Marquis signed the first will. Then he said to Monsieur Cacotte—

"The marriage will take place in six weeks in Auvergne; I hope that Monsieur Cacotte will honour the ceremony with his presence. I can assure you from my own experience that you will have nothing to complain of in the hospitality of Monsieur le Comte."

. . . . . .

The Chevalier returned to his lodging about the same time that the Marquis entered his hotel. His valet awaited him that he might change his dress as usual before going into the town to spend the remainder of the evening. The man perceived at once that his master was excited and unhappy. He was an Italian by birth, and had accompanied the Chevalier into his campaigns, and in his secret visits to the Château de Frontênac. He saw that the crisis had arrived.

"Does Monsieur go down into Auvergne this autumn?" he said.

"We go down once more," said the Chevalier, gloomily. He had divested himself of his court dress, and was taking from his valet a suit of dark clothes somewhat resembling a hunting suit. "Yes, we go down once more: this cursed marriage will take place a month hence."

"Monsieur takes this marriage too much to heart," said the Italian—and as he spoke he handed the coat, which his master put on—"it may never take place. A month hence in the country they will begin to hunt—to hunt the boar. No doubt the party at the château will divert themselves in this

way while the nuptial ceremonies are arranged. It is a dangerous sport. Many accidents take place, many unfortunate shots — quite unintentional. Monsieur le Chevalier is a finished sportsman. He has a steady hand, and a sure eye. *C'est un fait accompli.*"

The Chevalier started : in the large glass before him he saw a terrible figure dressed as for the chase, but pale as a corpse, and trembling in every limb as with the palsy. He shuddered, and turned away.

CHAPTER V.

THE *piqueurs* sent up word to the château that a magnificent boar had been lodged in a copse at the foot of the forest road. An answer was sent down accordingly that the Marquis would drive him early in the morning, and that he should be turned if possible towards the château.

In the morning, therefore, very early, the whole household was astir. The ladies were mounted, and, divided into parties, cantered down the road and along the forest paths to those points where, according to the advice of their several attendant cavaliers, the hunt would most likely be seen to advantage. The Marquis, it was said, had been down at a still earlier hour to rouse the boar. Every now and then a distant horn sounding over

the waving autumn forest told that the sport had commenced.

The ladies were gay and delighted, and those of the gentlemen who, like Monsieur Cacotte, were not much accustomed to country life and scenes, shared their enjoyment to the full. And indeed it seemed a morning out of fairyland. From every branch and spray upon which the leaves, tinted with a thousand colours, were trembling already to their fall, hung sparkling festoons of fairy lace, the mysterious gossamer web which in a single night wreathes a whole forest with a magic covering which the first hour of sunlight as soon destroys. Yellows, browns, and purples formed the background of this dazzling network of fairy silver which crossed in all directions the forest rides.

But though the morning was so lovely the ladies grew tired of riding up and down waiting for the hunt. The horns became fainter and more distant, and it became evident that the chase had drifted to the eastward.

"Why do you stay here, Monsieur de Circassonne?" said Mademoiselle de Frontênac, smiling, to a young man, almost a boy, who had with the utmost devotion remained by the side of herself and a very pretty girl, her companion. "Why do you stay here? You are not wont to desert the chase. What can have happened to the Marquis and the rest?"

The boy looked somewhat sheepish, and replied to the latter part of the question only.

"I fancy that the boar has broken out, in spite of the *piqueurs*, and that the Marquis has failed to turn him. They have probably lost him in the forest."

"But is not that very dangerous?" said the pretty girl. "If they do not know where the boar is, he may burst out upon us at any moment."

The boy looked at her as though much pleased.

"That is quite true," he said. "It was one reason why I stayed."

Monsieur de Circassonne was not far wrong in his opinion. This is what had happened.

When the Marquis arrived at the cover, very soon after sunrise, he found that the boar, ungraciously refusing to wait his opponent's convenience, had broken cover, and wounding one of the *piqueurs*, who attempted to turn him, had gone down the valley. He was described as an unusually fine animal, and the dogs were on his track.

The course which the boar had taken lay through the thick of the forest. It was rugged and uneven, and he could only be pursued on foot. After some distance had been traversed, the scent was suddenly crossed by a large sow, who, as frequently happened, apparently with the express purpose of diverting the pursuit from her companion, crossed immediately in front of the dogs and went crashing down through the coppice to the right. Most of the hounds followed her, and the *piqueurs*, with few exceptions, followed the dogs. The Marquis, however, succeeded in calling off some of the oldest hounds, and, accompanied by two or three *piqueurs*,

followed the original chase. Some distance farther on, however, the boar had taken to the water, and the scent was lost. At the same time the horns sounding in the valley to the right showed that the deserters had come up with their quarry, and distracted the attention of both *piqueurs* and dogs. The former were of opinion that the boar had simply crossed the river, and taking the dogs across they made a cast on the opposite bank, where the dogs ran backwards and forwards baying disconsolately. The Marquis, however, believing that the boar had followed the course of the stream for at least some distance, kept on the left bank, and forcing his way round one or two craggy points, found at last the spot where the boar, apparently but a few moments before, had scrambled up the bank. He sounded his horn, but either from the baying of the dogs, or the noise and excitement in the valley below, he was disregarded, and pushing aside the branches before him, the Marquis found himself at the foot of a ravine down which a mountain torrent was rushing to join the river below. The bed of the ravine was composed of turf overstrewn with craggy rock, and on either side rugged cliffs, out of the fissures of which lofty oaks and chestnuts had grown for centuries, towered up towards the sky.

The Marquis waited for a moment, but hearing no reply to his horn, he entered the ravine alone.

As he did so, the strange shapes which the hanging roots and branches of the trees assumed

might seem to beckon and warn him back ; but, on the other hand, a thousand happy and pleasing objects spoke of life and joy. The sun shone brilliantly through the trembling leaves, birds of many colours flitted from spray to spray, butterflies and bright insects crossed the fretted work of light and shade. The chase was evidently before him—why should he turn back ?

Some fifty yards up the valley the rocks retreated on either side, leaving a wide and open grassy space, down which the torrent was rushing and over which fragments of basaltic rock, split from the wooded cliffs above, were strewn. At the summit of this grassy slope, standing beneath a bare escarpment of basalt, the Marquis saw the boar.

Its sides and legs were stained with mud and soil, but the chase had been very short, and the animal seemed to have turned to bay more out of curiosity and interest than from terror or exhaustion. It stood sniffing the air and panting with excitement, its hair bristling with anger, its white and polished tusks shining in the sun.

When the Marquis saw the superb creature standing above him on the turf, a glow of healthy and genuine pleasure passed over his face. He swung his horn round far out of reach behind his back, and drew his long and jewelled knife. The boar and he would try this issue alone.

For some seconds they stood facing each other. Then the posture of the Marquis changed inexplicably. He rose to his full height, his gaze was

fixed as if by fascination upon a long range of low rocks above him to the left, and an expression of surprise, which did not amount to anxiety even, came into his face. Then he dropped his knife, threw his arms up suddenly over his head, and falling backwards, rolled once over and lay motionless upon the uneven turf in an uneasy posture, his head lower than the limbs. A puff of white smoke rose from the rocks above, and the reverberating echo of a hunting piece struck the rocks and went on sounding alternately from side to side down the valley.

The boar, startled at the shot, and, still more, probably, by the sudden fall of his adversary, crept into a thicket, and, while a man might count sixty, an awful silence fell upon hill, and rock, and wood. The myriad happy creatures that filled the air with murmur and with life, became invisible and silent, and even the rushing torrent ceased to sound. Then a terrible figure, habited in the costume of the chase, but trembling in every limb as with a palsy, rose from behind the rocks upon the left. With tottering and uneven steps, it staggered down the grassy slope, and stood beside the fallen man. The Marquis opened his eyes, and when he saw this figure he tried to raise himself from the uneasy posture in which he had fallen. When he found it was impossible, a smile of indescribably serene courtesy formed itself upon his face.

"Ah, Chevalier," he said, speaking slowly, and at intervals, "that was scarcely fair! Make my regrets

to the Marquise. Monsieur Cacotte—will speak to you—about—my—will."

Then, the smile fading from the lips, his head fell back into the uneasy posture in which it had lain, and the Marquis Jeanne Hyacinth de St. Palaye rested in peace upon the blood-stained grass.

THE ROCK SCORPIONS.

THE screw steamer "Jenny Jones" was lying alongside a coal-hulk at Gibraltar, one October afternoon. By three o'clock her bunkers were nearly filled, and the captain was getting ready for casting off, when one of the natives came on board. Captain Hindhaugh looked about for something to throw at the visitor, and only the difficulty of selecting an efficient missile from a large and varied assortment prevented him from letting fly at once.

The "Scorpion" said: "Ah, no, no, Capeetan! No been throw nothing at myself. Beesiness!—I'se been com' for beesiness. Big thing, Capeetan!"

The last phrase was spoken with such a profound wink that Hindhaugh held his hand, and, addressing the man as one would an ill-conditioned dog, said: "Don't keep bowing and scraping there, you tastrel. Get it out, sharp!"

The "Scorpion" whispered: "No been talk up here. Keep ship one hour, two hour, three hour. You'se been com' with me, and I speak you somethin' myself."

Like many of his tribe, this interesting native spoke a kind of English which is not heard anywhere else on the Mediterranean shore. A few of the people on the Rock learn to talk very well to our men, but most of those who come about the ships use a picturesque lingo in which "myself" takes the place of quite a variety of parts of speech.

Hindhaugh invited the man below, and asked him to explain himself. The fellow leaned over the table and chattered on, throwing quick side glances at every few words.

"This been big thing, Capeetan. You get away a little; drop your anchor a little. Then three felucca com' alongside, and you'se been hoist bales. Then you'se go where agent say you. Very big thing. Five thousand sovereign."

"What is it? Tobacco?"

"That been it."

"Where for?"

"Huelva."

"I'm not going out of Portuguese waters at no price."

"Ah, no, no, Cheesu, Capeetan—no! Five mile. We have felucca there ready. I'se been see him myself."

"What's the figure? What's the money?"

"You com' shore and see agent with myself."

Hindhaugh put a revolver in his pocket and went on deck; the Scorpion got ashore and hung about with an air of innocence. The Captain was about

to follow, when the man in charge of the hulk called out, "Do you intend to keep bumping us like this all night? Why don't you cast off? You're knocking us all to flinders."

Hindhaugh beckoned. "Look here, my good chap, it won't matter to you for a couple of hours; let us lie till dusk, and then I'll get away. I've got important business ashore."

"That's very well, Captain. But look here; if there's anything on, I'm in it. You understand—I'm in it."

"You understand that, do you? Well, then, I'll tell you to keep your mouth shut just now, or never another ton of coal will you put aboard of us as long as I run here."

"All right, Captain. No need to be nasty. You'll do the square thing, I bet."

Then Hindhaugh went ashore, and the Scorpion walked on ahead, gazing on architectural beauties with easy interest. Presently the two men came to a narrow stairway, and the Englishman gripped his revolver. A dark-eyed Spaniard was waiting on a landing, and held up two fingers when the guide passed. The Scorpion knocked at a greasy door, and an ugly fellow, with a cowl on, looked out and nodded. Hindhaugh stepped into a room that reeked with garlic and decay. Two men sat in the steamy dusk at the far side. An oily gentleman rose and bowed. "I'm the interpreter, Captain. You and this merchant must do your business through me. What'll you take to drink?"

"Get through your business, Mister. I'm not wanting any drink."

In brief jerky sentences the interpreter explained what was wanted.

"You steam slowly till you're near the Fleet. Then put all your men on and get the stuff up. This man goes with you and he'll tell you where to go. Lie five miles off Huelva."

"I shan't go except to Portuguese waters."

"Good. Then the lighters will come and the men will discharge you."

"And now," said the Captain, "what about me? How much?"

"One hundred and twenty pounds."

"Can't be done. Make it two hundred and fifty."

After some haggling a bargain was made for two hundred and twenty. Then Hindhaugh went further: "I want one hundred and ten down before we start, and the balance before you take an ounce of tobacco out of us."

This was settled; the merchant bowed and the skipper went away, still keeping his hand on the revolver. Every cranny in the walls seemed fit to hide a murderer—seemed made for nothing else; and Hindhaugh thought what a fool he must have been to venture under that foul arch.

On getting aboard, the Captain sent for his brother, who sailed as mate with him. He said, "Now, Jack, I'm going to run some risk. You take this pistol, and get her oiled and put right. When you see three feluccas coming alongside, get all the

chaps on deck—the 'Dora's' crew as well as ours (Hindhaugh was taking home a shipwrecked crew, and he was very grateful just then for that accession of force)—"whack on everything you know, and get the bales up sharp. Tell the engineers to stand by for driving her, and leave the rest to me. If we're nailed, we'll be detained, and I don't know what may happen, so you'll have to look slippy."

Jack replied, "All right, sir!" Quarterdeck manners were punctiliously observed by one of the brothers.

The shadows fell low, and the crown of the Rock grew dim. The creeping wind stole over the Pearl Rock, and set the sinister ripples dancing; the bugles sang mysteriously through the gloom, and the mystery of the night was in the air. The "Jenny Jones" stole quietly towards the broad sheet of water where the vessels of the Fleet heaved up their shadowy bulk above the lapping flood. All the English sailors were stripped to the shirt, and a low hum of excited talk came from amidships. Suddenly the raking yard of a felucca started out from amid the haze; then came another, and another. A sailor slipped a cork fender over the side, and there was a muffled bump and a slight scrape. Jack, the mate, whispered, "Now, you cripples!" and a brief scene of wild hurry and violent labor ensued. Bale after bale was whisked aboard; the Englishmen worked as only English sailors can: and the Scorpions excelled themselves under the influence of fear and black wine. When the last bale was up,

Hindhaugh said to the man who first boarded him, "Who's got the money?"

"Me, Capeetan. All right. Honest man myself. You'se been have every dollar."

"Well, then, it's neck or nothing. We have half an hour to clear out into the Gut. Come below and shell out."

The Scorpion counted out one hundred pounds in gold, and then asked, "That be enough? Other money all right other end."

"Deuce a bit. Down with the other ten or I sliver you."

The Scorpion did not know what sliver meant, but the gleam of the skipper's cold eye was enough for him. He paid up and went on deck.

Hindhaugh had just said to the engineer, "Now, rive the soul out of her," when a low panting sound was heard, and a white shape appeared gliding over the water. The captain had let the feluccas go, and the "Jenny Jones" was moving. He waved for the mate. "It's all up. Here's a mess. You must go home overland—suppose you swim ashore. Steady the men down."

Jack performed one or two steps of a dance, and placed his finger against his nose. He rather enjoyed a scrape, did this frivolous chief officer. The white shape came nearer, and a sharp whistle sounded. Hindhaugh had known well enough that it was a steam launch that made the panting noise, and he got ready for the worst. The launch drew right across the bows of the steamer, and then the

throbbing of the little engines ceased. Again the whistle sounded ; the launch gave a bound forward ; then she struck away into the darkness, and Hindhaugh drew a long breath.

In an instant every possible ounce of steam was put on, and the " Jenny Jones " went away at eleven knots toward the Gut. All night long the firemen were kept hard at it, and before morning the Rock was far astern of the driving steamboat.

Three of the Scorpions had stayed aboard, and Captain Hindhaugh noticed that they carried their knives. He noticed, too, that the cringing manner which the fellows had shown before the Rock was cleared had given place to a sort of subdued swagger.

About noon the engines were slowed down almost to nothing, and the " Jenny Jones " crept gently on towards the shore. By four o'clock the vessel was well into Portuguese waters, and Hindhaugh was prepared to defy any quantity of Spanish coast-guards. When the sun had dipped low the Scorpion-in-chief came aft, and pointed mysteriously to the north-east.

" You'se been look where I point myself. Feluccas ! You'se follow them in and drop anchor."

Hindhaugh smiled. " Do you think you're talking to a fool ? Come you below there, and let me have that other money, sharp."

" Ah, Capeetan. Wait till agent's man come with felucca. I'se been have no money myself."

Hindhaugh was not a person to be trifled with.

He quietly took out his revolver. "Now, do you see that pretty thing? First shot for you. Look at that block forrad, and see how much chance you'll have if I fire at you." The pop of the revolver sounded, and then Hindhaugh went forward, pulling the Scorpion with him. "Do you see that hole, you image. How would you like if that was your gizzard? Now, no games, my joker."

The Scorpion begged for time, and Hindhaugh was so sure of his man that he made no further objection. He had another conference with Jack, and, to that worthy man's great delight, he expressed certain forebodings.

"We're going to have a fight over this job," said the skipper. "I'm dead sure of it. Go down and load the two muskets, and give them to the safest men. When the lighters *do* come, borrow the fireman's iron rods. I've lent the steward my bowie that I got at Charleston, and you can try and hold that old bull-dog straight. We mustn't show the least sign of funking."

Then Hindhaugh and his brother called for tea and fed solidly.

The Scorpion whispered down the companion, "They'se been com'," and the captain went on deck. Two large felucca-rigged lighters hove up slowly through the dusk, and the chief Scorpion's signal was answered. Hindhaugh saw both lighters draw near, he felt the usual scraping bump, and then he heard a sudden thunder of many feet. The second-mate sung out, "Here's half a hundred of these

devils, sir. They're all armed to the teeth." And sure enough a set of ferocious-looking rapscallions had boarded the steamer. They looked like low-class Irishmen, browned with walnut-juice. Each man had a heavy array of pistols in his sash, and all of them carried ugly knives. The Scorpion waved to the gang, and they arranged themselves around the pile of bales that stuck out through the after-hatch. Hindhaugh had fully discounted all the chances, and had made up his mind to one thing—he wouldn't be "done."

The Scorpion imperiously observed: "Come below, Capeetan," and Hindhaugh went. Then the defiant native of the Rock put his back against the cabin door, heaved out his chest in a manly way, and said: "Now, Capeetan, you no have more money. You speak much, and I'se been get your throat cut myself."

"You've got no money?"

"No; not a damn dollar."

"You won't keep to your bargain?"

"No. You come shore for your money, if you want him."

Hindhaugh made up his mind in a flash. In spite of his habit of wearing a frock-coat and tall hat, he was more than half a pirate, and he would have ruffled it, like his red-bearded ancestors, had fighting been still the usual employment of Norsemen. He marked his man's throat, and saw that the insolent hands could not get at a knife quickly. Then he sprang at the Scorpion, gripped him by

the windpipe, and swung him down. The fellow gurgled, but he couldn't cry out. Hindhaugh called the steward, and that functionary came out of his den with the long bowie. "Sit on him," said the captain. "If he stirs cut his throat. Now you; if you move a finger you're done." The steward straddled across the Scorpion, and held the knife up in a sarcastic way.

Hindhaugh went swiftly on deck, and stepped right among the jabbering Spaniards. He smiled as though nothing had happened, but when he saw one man lay hold of a bale, he pulled him back. "Tell them I'll shoot the first man that tries to lift a bale till I'm ready."

This message brought on a torrent of talk, which gave the captain time. He whispered to Jack, "Sneak you round through the engine-room. That lighter's made fast forrad; the second one's fast here. Get a hatchet from the carpenter, and set him alongside of the second rope. When I whistle twice both of you nick the ropes, and we'll jink these swindling swine." The engineer also received orders to go full speed ahead on the instant that the whistle sounded.

Hindhaugh kept up his air of good humor, although the full sense of the risk he ran was in his mind. His threat of shooting had made the Spaniards suspicious, although they were used to big talk of the kind. One peep into the cabin would have brought on a collision, and although the Englishmen might have fought, there was noth-

ing to gain by a fight. Everything depended on swiftness of action, and Hindhaugh determined grimly that if rapidity could do anything he would teach the "furriners" a lesson for trying to swindle him.

He said, very politely: "We're all ready now. You get your men aboard the lighters, and we'll soon rush your cargo over the side." This was transmitted to the smugglers, and immediately they swarmed aboard their own boats. They had rather expected a quarrel, and this pacific solution pleased them. As Jack afterwards said, "They blethered like a lot o' wild geese."

All the foreigners were gone but three. Hindhaugh stepped quietly up to the interpreter, and said, very low: "I'm covering you with my revolver from inside my pocket. Don't you stir. Is that other money going to be paid?"

The interpreter had been innocent of all knowledge of the wild work in the cabin. He stammered, "I thought by your way it was all right. Where's our man?"

"I've got him safe enough. Ask those fellows in the lighters if any of them can pay the freight for the job. If you tell them to fire they may miss me, and I can't miss you."

No one, not even the consignee's man, had any money; the smugglers meant to trick the Revenue and the English captain as well. Hindhaugh whistled; and then roared out, "Lie down all of you. Ram her ahead." The hatchets went crack,

crack; the steamer shuddered and plunged forward; and the lighters bumped swiftly astern.

"Over the side, you animals, or I'll take you out to sea and drown you."

The three Spaniards rushed to the side, and took flying leaps into the lighters; Hindhaugh stooped low and ran to the companion. "Let that beggar up," he shouted. The Scorpion scuttled on deck. "Now Mister, I'll let you see if you'll take me in. Over you go. Over the stern with you, and mind the propeller doesn't carve you." Two shots were fired, but they went wild. The Scorpion saw the whole situation; he poised for a second on the rail and then jumped for it, and Hindhaugh laughed loudly as his enemy came up blowing. Jack performed a triumphal war-dance on the steamer's bridge, and the "Jenny Jones" was soon far out of pistol range.

All that night Captain Hindhaugh did not sleep a wink. He was quite persuaded that he had acted the part of an exemplary Briton. What is the use of belonging to the ruling race if a mere foreigner is to do as he likes with you? But the adventurous skipper had landed himself in a pretty mess, and the full extent of his entanglement grew on him every minute. At twelve o'clock, when the watch was relieved, Jack came aft in a state of exultation that words cannot describe. He chuckled out, "Well, sir, we've made our fortunes this time." Hindhaugh damped his spirits by saying slowly, "Not too fast, that baccy's got to go overboard,

my boy." Jack's mental processes became confused. He had been measuring the cubic contents of the smuggled goods, and the thought of wasting such a gift of the gods fairly stunned him. Had it been cotton his imagination would not have been touched. But baccy! and overboard! It was too much and he groaned. He was ready with expedients at once.

"Why not run it to Holland?"

"Can't be done; where's our Bill of Lading?"

"Make up one yourself; you have plenty of forms."

"And suppose the luck goes the wrong way. What's to happen to me—and to you too for that matter?"

"Run to a tobacco port and warehouse the stuff in your own name."

"We're not bound for a tobacco port. What's to be done about the cargo of ore that we are carrying? No, John, the whole five thousand pounds must go over the side."

Next morning broke joyously. The sea looked merry with miles of brisk foam, and the little Portuguese schooners flew like butterflies hither and thither. Every cloud of spray plucked from the dancing crests flashed like white fire under the clear sun; it was one of the mornings when one cannot speak for gladness. But Hindhaugh's thoughts were fixed on material things. The rich bales lay there, and their presence affected him like a sarcasm. The men were called aft, and the

shovels used for trimming grain were brought up. Then the captain said, "Now each of you take a pound or two of this tobacco, and then break the bales and shovel the rest overboard." The precious packages were burst, and the sight of the beautiful leaf, the richness of the tender aroma, affected the sailors with remorse. It was like offering up a sacrifice. But the captain's orders were definite, so until near noon the shovels were plied smartly, and one hundredweight after another of admirable tobacco drifted away on the careless sea.

Hindhaugh watched grimly until at last his emotions overcame him. He growled, "Confound it, I can't do it. Belay there, men, I'll have another think over this job," and think he did, with business-like solemnity all day long. He saw that he might make a small fortune by risking his liberty, and the curious morality of the British sailor prevented him from seeing shades of right or wrong where contraband business was concerned. Had you told him that the tobacco was stolen he would have pitched you overboard : he felt his morality to be unimpeachable ; it was only the question of expediency that troubled him. For three days it was almost unsafe to go near him, so intently did he ponder and plan. On the fifth day he had worked his way through his perplexities, and was ready with a plan. A pilot cutter came in sight, and Hindhaugh signalled her. The pilot's boat was rowed alongside, and the bronzed and dignified chief swaggered up to the captain with much cor-

diality. No one is so cordial as a pilot who has secured a good ship. The two men exchanged news, and gradually slid into desultory talk. Suddenly Hindhaugh said, "Are you game for a bit of work? Do you ever *do* anything?" The pilot was virtuously agitated. He drew himself up and, taking care that the mate should hear, answered, "Me! Not for the wurr-rld, Cap'n. I've got a wife and children, sir."

"All right, Pilot, never mind; come down and have some tea."

Then Hindhaugh gradually drew his man out, until the pilot was absolutely confidential. The captain knew by the very excess of purity expressed in the pilot's first answer, that he was not dealing with a simpleton, but he carefully kept away from the main subject which was in his (and the pilot's) mind. At last the man leaned over and gave a masonic sign. "What was that job you was speaking about, Cap'n? We're near home now, you know. Better not go too near."

Hindhaugh played a large card. He smiled carelessly, "Fact is, I've just told the fellows to shy the stuff overboard; I shall risk no more."

"Mercy me, Cap'n. You're mad. How did I know who you were? I see all about it now, but I did not know what game you might have on with me. I'm in it, you know, if the dimes is right!"

"How?"

"Why, if the job's big enough; you stand off for

a day. Go down to the Sleeve, and hang round, and I'll find you a customer."

"If you do, I pay you three hundred pound as soon as his money's down."

"Done, then. My boat's not gone far. Whistle her and I'll go slap for Bristol. Never you mind for a day or two. How's your coals?"

"They're all right. You scoot now and fetch your man over this way. I'll go half-speed to the sou'-west for twelve hours, another twelve hours half-speed back. You'll find us."

In thirty-six hours the pilot-cutter came back, and a Hebrew gentleman boarded the "Jenny Jones" from her. After a long inspection the visitor said, "Now look here, I must have a hundred per cent. margin out of this. What's your figure?"

"Two thousand five hundred."

"Won't do. Say two thousand, and you pay the jackal out of that."

"Done. And how do you manage?"

"I'll split the lot up among three trawlers. You wait off and give the jackal an extra fifty for bringing the boats down. I risk the rest."

Another night passed, and the dawn was breaking coldly when the dirty sails of the trawlers came in sight. Ship after ship had hailed Hindhaugh, and offered to tow him if anything had happened to his engines. He knew he would be reported as lying off apparently disabled, and he was in a feverish state of excitement. The Hebrew speculator watched the last bale down the side, and then

handed over the money, had a glass of brandy with the pilot, and departed—whither, Hindlaugh neither knew nor cared. The "Jenny Jones" ran for her port. She had just slowed down, and the great waves of smoke from the town were pouring over her, when two large boats, heavily laden with men, came off to her. The men swarmed up the side, and the officer in command shouted, "Bring up the pickaxes, and go to work." The hatches were pulled off before the steamer had taken up her moorings, and the men went violently to work among the ore. Hindhaugh looked innocent and inquired, "What's all this about, officer?"

"Fact is, captain, we've got a telegram from Gibraltar to say you have contraband on board. You may save all trouble if you make a clean breast."

"Contraband! Who told you that?"

"Oh, we should have known without the wire. That gentleman on the quay there came overland, and he put us up to you."

Hindhaugh looked ashore, and saw a dark face that he knew well. He whistled and smiled. Then he said to the officer, "You may just as well stop those poor beggars from blistering their hands. You won't find anything here except what the men have in the forecastle. You're done this journey fairly. Come away down and liquor, and I'll tell you all about it." Then Hindhaugh gave an artistic account of the whole transaction, and put the matter in such a light that the Custom-house officer

cordially congratulated him on having escaped without a slit weasand.

The "Jenny Jones" went back to Gibraltar, and Captain Hindhaugh was very careful never to go ashore without a companion. One day he was passing a chandler's shop when a sunken glitter of dark eyes met him. His old acquaintance, the chief Scorpion, was looking stilettoes and poison at him. But Hindhaugh went by in his big, burly way, and contented himself with setting on three watchmen every night during his stay. To this day he is pleased with himself for having given the foreigners a lesson in the elements of morality, and he does not fear their knives one whit.

QUEEN TITA'S WAGER.

CHAPTER I.

FRANZISKA FAHLER.

It is a Christmas morning in Surrey—cold, still, and grey, with a frail glimmer of sunshine coming through the bare trees to melt the hoar-frost on the lawn. The postman has just gone out, swinging the gate behind him. A fire burns brightly in the breakfast-room; and there is silence about the house, for the children have gone off to climb Box-hill before being marched to church.

The small and gentle lady who presides over the household walks sedately in, and lifts the solitary letter that is lying on her plate. About three seconds suffice to let her run through its contents, and then she suddenly cries,

"I knew it! I said it! I told you two months ago she was only flirting with him; and now she has rejected him. And, oh! I am so glad of it! The poor boy!"

The other person in the room, who has been meekly waiting for his breakfast for half an hour,

ventures to point out that there is nothing to rejoice over in the fact of a young man having been rejected by a young woman.

"If it were final, yes! If these two young folks were not certain to go and marry somebody else, you might congratulate them both. But you know they will. The poor boy will go courting again in three months' time, and be vastly pleased with his condition."

"Oh, never, never!" she says; "he has had such a lesson. You know I warned him. I knew she was only flirting with him. Poor Charlie! Now I hope he will get on with his profession, and leave such things out of his head. And as for that creature——"

"I will do you the justice to say," observes her husband, who is still regarding the table with a longing eye, "that you did oppose this match, because you hadn't the making of it. If you had brought these two together they would have been married ere this. Never mind; you can marry him to somebody of your own choosing now."

"No," she says, with much decision, "he must not think of marriage. He cannot think of it. It will take the poor lad a long time to get over this blow."

"He will marry within a year."

"I will bet you whatever you like that he doesn't," she says triumphantly.

"Whatever I like! That is a big wager. If you lose, do you think you could pay? I should like,

for example, to have my own way in my own house."

"If I lose you shall," says the generous creature; and the bargain is concluded.

Nothing further is said about this matter for the moment. The children return from Box-hill, and are rigged out for church. Two young people, friends of ours, and recently married, having no domestic circle of their own, and having promised to spend the whole Christmas Day with us, arrived. Then we set out, trying as much as possible to think that Christmas Day is different from any other day, and pleased to observe that the younger folk, at least, cherish the delusion.

But just before reaching the church, I say to the small lady who got the letter in the morning, and whom we generally call Tita,

"When do you expect to see Charlie?"

"I don't know," she answers. "After this cruel affair he won't like to go about much."

"You remember that he promised to go with us to the Black Forest?"

"Yes; and I am sure it will be a pleasant trip for him."

"Shall we go to Hüferschingen?"

"I suppose so."

"Franziska is a pretty girl."

Now, you would not think that any great mischief could be done by the mere remark that Franziska was a pretty girl. Anybody who had seen Franziska Fahler, niece of the proprietor of the

"Goldenen Bock" in Hüferschingen, would admit that in a moment. But this is nevertheless true, that our important but diminutive Queen Tita was very thoughtful during the rest of our walk to this little church; and in church, too, she was thinking so deeply that she almost forgot to look at the effect of the decorations she had nailed up the day before. Yet nothing could have offended in the bare observation that Franziska was a pretty girl.

At dinner, in the evening, we had our two guests and a few young fellows from London who did not happen to have their families or homes there. Curiously enough, there was a vast deal of talk about travelling, and also about Baden, and more particularly about the southern districts of Baden. Tita said the Black Forest was the most charming place in the world; and as it was Christmas Day, and as we had been listening to a sermon all about charity, and kindness, and consideration for others, nobody was rude enough to contradict her. But our forbearance was put to a severe test, when, after dinner, she produced a photographic album and handed it round, and challenged everybody to say whether the young lady in the corner was not absolutely lovely. Most of them said that she was certainly very nice-looking; and Tita seemed a little disappointed.

I perceived that it would no longer do to say that Franziska was a pretty girl. We should henceforth have to swear by everything we held dear that she was absolutely lovely.

CHAPTER II.

ZUM "GOLDENEN BOCK."

We felt some pity for the lad when we took him abroad with us; but it must be confessed that at first he was not a very desirable travelling companion. There was a gloom about him. Despite the eight months that had elapsed, he professed that his old wound was still open. Tita treated him with the kindest maternal solicitude, which was a great mistake: tonics, not sweets, are required in such cases. Yet he was very grateful, and he said, with a blush, that, in any case, he would not rail against all women because of the badness of one. Indeed, you would not have fancied he had any great grudge against womankind. There were a great many English abroad that autumn, and we met whole batches of pretty girls at every station and at every *table-d'hôte* on our route. Did he avoid them, or glare at them savagely, or say hard things of them? Oh, no!—quite the reverse. He was a little shy at first: and when he saw a party of distressed damsels in a station with their bewildered father in vain attempting to make himself understood to a porter, he would assist them in a brief and business-like manner, as if it were a duty, lift his cap, and then march off, relieved. But by and by he began to make acquaintances in the hotel; and as he was a handsome, English-looking lad, who bore a certifi-

cate of honesty in his clear grey eyes and easy gait, he was rather made much of. Nor could any fault be decently found with his appetite.

So we passed on from Königswinter to Coblentz, and from Coblentz to Heidelberg, and from Heidelberg south to Freiburg, where we bade adieu to the last of the towns and laid hold of a trap with a pair of ancient and angular horses, and plunged into the Höllenthal, the first great gorge of the Black Forest mountains. From one point to another we slowly urged our devious course, walking the most of the day indeed, and putting the trap and ourselves up for the night at some quaint roadside hostelry, where we ate of roe-deer, and drank of Affenthaler, and endeavored to speak German with a pure Waldshut accent. And then one evening, when there was a clear green-and-gold sky overhead, and when the last rays of the sun were shining along the hills and touching the stems of the tall pines, we drove into a narrow valley and caught sight of a large brown building of wood. with projecting eaves and quaint windows, that stood close by the forest

"Here is my dear inn!" cried Tita, with a great glow of delight and affection in her face. "Here is *mein gutes Thal! Ich grüss' dich ein tausend Mal!* And here is old Peter come out to see us; and there is Franziska!"

"Oh! this is Franziska, is it?" said Charlie.

Yes, this was Franziska. She was a well built, handsome girl of nineteen or twenty, with a healthy,

sun-burnt complexion, and dark hair plaited into two long tails which were taken up and twisted into a knot behind. That you could see from a distance. But on nearer approach you found that Franziska had really fine and intelligent features, and a pair of frank, clear, big brown eyes that had a very straight look about them. They were something of the eyes of a deer, indeed; wide apart, soft, and apprehensive, yet looking with a certain directness and unconsciousness that overcame her natural girlish timidity. Tita simply flew at her and kissed her heartily, and asked her twenty questions at once. Franziska answered in very fair English, a little slow and formal, but quite grammatical. Then she was introduced to Charlie, and she shook hands with him in a simple and unembarrassed way, and then she turned to one of the servants and gave some directions about the luggage. Finally she begged Tita to go indoors and get off her travelling attire, which was done, leaving us two outside.

"She's a very pretty girl," Charlie said, carelessly. "I suppose she's sort of head cook and kitchen-maid here."

The impudence of these young men is something extraordinary.

"If you wish to have your head in your hands," I remarked to him, "just you repeat that remark at dinner. Why, Franziska is no end of a swell. She has two thousand pounds and the half of a mill. She has a sister married to the Geheimer-Ober-Hofbaurath of Hesse-Cassel. She has visited both

Paris and Munich ; and she has her dresses made in Freiburg."

"But why does such an illustrious creature bury herself in this valley, and in an old inn, and go about bareheaded ?"

"Because there are folks in the world without ambition, who like to live a quiet, decent, homely life. Every girl can't marry a Geheimer-Ober-Hofbaurath. Ziska, now, is much more likely to marry the young doctor here."

"Oh, indeed ! and live here all her days. She couldn't do better. Happy Franziska !"

We went indoors. It was a low, large, rambling place, with one immense room all hung round with roe-deers' horns, and with one lesser room fitted up with a billiard-table. The inn lay a couple of hundred yards back from Hüfferschingen, but it had been made the headquarters of the keepers, and just outside this room were a number of pegs for them to sling their guns and bags on when they came in of an evening to have a pipe and a chopin of white wine. Ziska's uncle and aunt were both large, stout, and somnolent people, very good-natured and kind, but a trifle dull. Ziska really had the management of the place, and she was not slow to lend a hand if the servants were remiss in waiting on us. But that, it was understood, was done out of compliment to our small Queen Tita.

By and by we sat down to dinner, and Franziska came to see that everything was going on straight.

It was a dinner "with scenery." You forgot to be particular about the soup, the venison, and the Affenthaler, when from the window at your elbow you could look across the narrow valley and behold a long stretch of the Black Forest shining in the red glow of the sunset. The lower the sun sank the more intense became the crimson light on the tall stems of the pines; and then you could see the line of shadow slowly rising up the side of the opposite hill until only the topmost trees were touched with the fire. Then these too, lost it, and all the forest around us seemed to have a pale blue mist stealing over it as the night fell and the twilight faded out of the sky overhead. Presently the long undulations of fir grew black, the stars came out, and the sound of the stream could be heard distantly in the hollow; and then, at Tita's wish, we went off for a last stroll in among the soft moss and under the darkness of the pines, now and again starting some great capercailzie and sending it flying and whirring down the glades.

When we returned from that prowl into the forest we found the inn dark. Such people as may have called in had gone home; but we suspected that Franziska had given the neighbours a hint not to overwhelm us on our first arrival. When we entered the big room, Franziska came in with candles; then she brought some matches, and also put on the table an odd little pack of cards, and went out. Her uncle and aunt had, even before we went out, come and bade us good night formally

and shaken hands all round. They are early folk in the Black Forest.

"Where has that girl gone now?" says Charlie. "Into that lonely billiard-room! Couldn't you ask her to come in here? Or shall we go and play billiards?"

Tita stares, and then demurely smiles; but it is with an assumed severity that she rebukes him for such a wicked proposal, and reminds him that he must start early next morning. He groans assent. Then she takes her leave.

The big young man was silent for a moment or two, with his hands in his pockets and his legs stretched out. I begin to think I am in for it—the old story of blighted hopes, and angry denunciation, and hypocritical joy, and all the rest of it. But suddenly Charlie looks up with a business-like air, and says:

"Who is that doctor fellow you were speaking about? Shall we see him to-morrow?"

"You saw him to-night. It was he who passed us on the road with the two beagles."

"What, that little fellow with the bandy legs and the spectacles?" he cries, with a great laugh.

"That little fellow," I observe to him, "is a person of some importance, I can tell you. He"——

"I suppose his sister married a Geheimer-Oberunder—what the dickens is it?" says this disrespectful young man.

"Dr. Krumm has got the Iron Cross."

"That won't make his legs any the straighter."

"He was at Weissenburg."

"I suppose he got that cast in the eye there."

"He can play the zither in a way that would astonish you. He has got a little money. Franziska and he would be able to live very comfortably together.

"Franziska and that fellow?" says Charlie; and then he rises with a sulky air, and proposes we should take our candles with us.

But he is not sulky very long; for Ziska, hearing our footsteps, comes to the passage and bids us a friendly good-night.

"Good night, Miss Fahler!" he says, in rather a shamefaced way; "and I am so awfully sorry we have kept you up so late. We shan't do it again."

You would have thought by his manner that it was two o'clock; whereas it was only half-past eleven!

CHAPTER III.

DR. KRUMM

THERE was no particular reason why Dr. Krumm should marry Franziska Fahler, except that he was the most important young man in Hüferschingen, and she was the most important young woman. People therefore thought they would make a good match; although Franziska certainly had the most to give in the way of good looks. Dr. Krumm was

a short, bandy-legged, sturdy young man, with long, fair hair, a tanned complexion, light blue eyes not quite looking the same way, spectacles, and a general air of industrious common-sense about him, if one may use such a phrase. There was certainly little of the lover in his manner towards Ziska, and as little in hers towards him. They were very good friends, though, and he called her Ziska, while she gave him his nickname of Fidelio, his real name being Fidele.

Now on this, the first morning of our stay in Hüferschingen, all the population had turned out at an early hour to see us start for the forest; and as the Ober-Förester had gone away to visit his parents in Bavaria, Dr. Krumm was appointed to superintend the operations of the day. And when everybody was busy renewing acquaintance with us, gathering in the straying dogs, examining guns and cartridge-belts, and generally aiding in the profound commotion of our setting out, Dr. Krumm was found to be talking in a very friendly and familiar manner with our pretty Franziska. Charlie eyed them askance. He began to say disrespectful things of Krumm. He thought Krumm a plain person. And then, when the bandy-legged Doctor had got all the dogs, keepers, and beaters together, we set off along the road, and presently plunged into the cool shade of the forest, where the thick moss suddenly silenced our footsteps, and where there was a moist and resinous smell in the air.

Well, the incidents of the forenoon's shooting,

picturesque as they were, and full of novelty to Tita's *protégé*, need not be described. At the end of the fourth drive, when we had got on nearly to luncheon-time, it appeared that Charlie had killed a handsome buck, and he was so pleased with this performance that he grew friendly with Dr. Krumm, who had, indeed, given him the *haupt-stelle*. But when, as we sat down to our sausages and bread and red wine, Charlie incidentally informed our commander-in-chief that, during one of the drives, a splendid yellow fox had come out of the underwood and stood and stared at him for three or four seconds, the Doctor uttered a cry of despair.

"I should have told you that," he said, in English that was not quite so good as Ziska's, "if I had remembered, yes! The English will not shoot the foxes; but they are very bad for us, they kill the young deer; we are glad to shoot them; and Franziska she told me she wanted a yellow fox for the skin to make something."

Charlie got very red in the face. He *had* missed a chance. If he had known that Franziska wanted a yellow fox, all the instinctive veneration for that animal that was in him would have gone clean out, and the fate of the animal—for Charlie was a smart shot—would have been definitely sealed.

"Are there many of them?" said he, gloomily.

"No; not many. But where there is one there are generally four or five. In the next drive we may come on them, yes! I will put you in a good place, sir; and you must not think of letting him

go away, for Franziska, who has waited two, three weeks, and not one yellow fox not anywhere, and it is for the variety of the skin in a—a—. I do not know what you call it."

"A rug, I suppose," said Charlie.

I subsequently heard that Charlie went to his post with a fixed determination to shoot anything of yellow color that came near him. His station was next to that of Dr. Krumm; but of course they were invisible to each other. The horns of the beaters sounded a warning; the gunners cocked their guns and stood on the alert; in the perfect silence each one waited for the first glimmer of a brown hide down the long green glades of young fir. Then, according to Charlie's account, by went two or three deer like lightning—all of them does. A buck came last, but swerved just as he came in sight, and backed and made straight for the line of beaters. Two more does, and then an absolute blank. One or two shots had been heard at a distance; either some of the more distant stations had been more fortunate, or one or other of the beaters had tried his luck. Suddenly there was a shot fired close to Charlie—he knew it must have been the Doctor. In about a minute afterwards he saw some pale yellow object slowly worming its way through the ferns; and here, at length, he made sure he was going to get his yellow fox. But just as the animal came within fair distance, it turned over, made a struggle or two, and lay still. Charlie rushed along to the spot: it was, indeed, a yellow

fox, shot in the head, and now as dead as a door-nail.

What was he to do? Let Dr. Krumm take home this prize to Franziska, after he had had such a chance in the forenoon? Never! Charlie fired a barrel into the air, and them calmly awaited the coming up of the beaters and the drawing together of the sportsmen.

Dr. Krumm, being at the next station, was the first to arrive. He found Charlie standing by the side of the slain fox.

"Ha!" he said, his spectacles fairly gleaming with delight, "you have shotted him. You have killed him! That is very good—that is excellent! Now, you will present the skin to Miss Franziska, if you do not wish to take it to England."

"Oh, no!" said Charlie, with a lordly indifference. "I don't care about it. Franziska may have it."

Charlie pulled me aside, and said, with a solemn wink,

"Can you keep a secret?"

"My wife and I can keep a secret. I am not allowed to have any for myself."

"Listen," said the unabashed young man, "Krumm shot that fox. Mind you don't say a word. I must have the skin to present to Franziska."

I stared at him; I had never known him guilty of a dishonest action. But when you do get a decent young English fellow condescending to do any

thing shabby, be sure it is a girl who is the cause. I said nothing, of course ; and in the evening a trap came for us, and we drove back to Hüferschingen.

Tita clapped her hands with delight : for Charlie was a favorite of hers, and now he was returning like a hero, with a sprig of fir in his cap to show that he had killed a buck.

" And here, Miss Franziska," he said, quite gaily, " here is a yellow fox for you. I was told that you wanted the skin of one."

Franziska fairly blushed for pleasure ; not that the skin of a fox was very valuable to her, but that the compliment was so open and marked. She came forward, in German fashion, and rather shyly shook hands with him, in token of her thanks.

When Tita was getting ready for dinner I told her about the yellow fox. A married man must have no secrets.

" He is not capable of such a thing," she says, with a grand air.

" But he did it," I point out. " What is more, he glories in it. What did he say when I remonstrated with him on the way home? ' *Why*,' says he, ' *I will put an end to Krumm! I will abolish Krumm! I will extinguish Krumm!*' Now, Madam, who is responsible for this ? Who has been praising Franziska night and day as the sweetest, gentlest, cleverest girl in the world, until this young man determines to have a flirtation with her and astonish you ? "

"A flirtation!" says Tita faintly. "Oh, no! Oh! I never meant that."

"Ask him just now, and he will tell you that women deserve no better. They have no hearts. They are treacherous. They have beautiful eyes, but no conscience. And so he means to take them as they are, and have his measure of amusement."

"Oh! I am sure he never said anything so abominably wicked," cries Tita, laying down the rose that Franziska had given her for her hair. "I know he could not say such things. But if he is so wicked—if he has said them—it is not too late to interfere. *I* will see about it."

She drew herself up as if Jupiter had suddenly armed her with his thunderbolts. If Charlie had seen her at this moment he would have quailed. He might, by chance, have told the truth, and confessed that all the wicked things he had been saying about woman's affection were only a sort of rhetoric; and that he had no sort of intention to flirt with poor Franziska, nor yet to extinguish and annihilate Dr. Krumm.

The heartbroken boy was in very good spirits at dinner. He was inclined to wink. Tita, on the contrary, maintained an impressive dignity of demeanour; and when Franziska's name happened to be mentioned she spoke of the young girl as her very particular friend, as though she would dare Charlie to attempt a flirtation with one who held that honour. But the young man was either blind or reckless, or acting a part for mere mischief. He

pointed the finger of scorn at Dr Krumm. He asked Tita if he should bring her a yellow fox next day He declared he wished he could spend the remainder of his life in a Black Forest inn, with a napkin over his arm, serving chopins. He said he would brave the wrath of the Fürst by shooting a capercailzie on the very first opportunity, to bring the shining feathers home to Franziska.

When Tita and I went upstairs at night the small and gentle creature was grievously perplexed.

"I cannot make it out," she said. "He is quite changed What is the matter with him?"

"You behold, madam, in that young man, the moral effects of vulpicide. A demon has entered into him. You remember, in 'Der Freischütz,' how"——

"Did you say vulpicide?" she asks, with a sweet smile. "I understood that Charlie's crime was that he did *not* kill the fox."

I allow her the momentary triumph. Who would grudge to a woman a little verbal victory of that sort? And, indeed, Tita's satisfaction did not last long. Her perplexity became visible on her face once more.

"We are to be here three weeks," she said, almost to herself, "and he talks of flirting with poor Franziska. Oh! I never meant that."

"But what did you mean?" I ask, with some innocent wonder.

Tita hangs down her head, and there is an end to that conversation; but one of us, at least, has some recollection of a Christmas wager.

CHAPTER IV.

CONFESSIO AMANTIS.

CHARLIE was not in such good spirits next morning. He was standing outside the inn in the sweet, resinous-scented air, watching Franziska coming and going, with her bright face touched by the early sunlight, and her frank and honest eyes lit up by a kindly look when she passed us. His conscience began to smite him for claiming that fox.

We spent the day in fishing a stream some few miles distant from Hüferschingen; and Franziska accompanied us. What need to tell of our success with the trout and the grayling, or of the beautiful weather, or of the attentive and humble manner in which the unfortunate youth addressed Franziska from time to time?

In the evening we drove back to Hüferschingen. It was a still and beautiful evening, with the silence of the twilight falling over the lonely valleys and the miles upon miles of darkening pines. Charlie has not much of a voice, but he made an effort to sing with Tita,

> The winds whistle cold and the stars glimmer red,
> The sheep are in fold and the cattle in shed;

and the fine old glee sounded fairly well as we drove through the gathering gloom of the forest. But Tita sang, in her low, sweet fashion, that Swedish bridal song that begins,

O welcome her so fair, with bright and flowing hair,
May Fate through life befriend her—love and smiles attend her,

and though she sang quietly, just as if she were singing to herself, we all listened with a great attention, and with great gratitude too. When we got to Hüferschingen the stars were out over the dark stretches of the forest, and the windows of the quaint old inn were burning brightly.

"And have you enjoyed the amusement of the day?" says Miss Fahler, rather shyly, to a certain young man who is emptying his creel of fish. He drops the basket to turn round and look at her face, and say earnestly,

"I have never spent so delightful a day. But it wasn't the fishing."

Things were becoming serious.

And next morning Charlie got hold of Tita, and said to her, in rather a shamefaced way,

"What am I to do about that fox? It was only a joke, you know; but if Miss Fahler gets to hear of it, she'll think it was rather shabby."

It was always Miss Fahler now; a couple of days before it was Franziska.

"For my part," says Tita, "I can't understand why you did it What honour is there in shooting a fox?"

"But I wanted to give the skin to her."

It was "her" by this time.

"Well, I think the best thing you can do is to go and tell her all about it; and also to go and apologise to Dr. Krumm."

Charlie started.

"I will go and tell her certainly; but as for apologising to Krumm, that is absurd!"

"As you please," says Tita.

By and by Franziska—or, rather, Miss Fahler—came out of the small garden and round by the front of the house.

"Oh! Miss Fahler," says Charlie, suddenly; and with that she stops, and blushes slightly; "I've got something to say to you. I am going to make a confession. Don't be frightened; it's only about a fox. The fox that was brought home the day before yesterday, Dr. Krumm shot that."

"Indeed," says Franziska, quite innocently, "I thought you shot it."

"Well, I let them imagine so. It was only a joke."

"But it is of no matter; there are many yellow foxes. Dr. Krumm can shoot them at another time. He is always here. Perhaps you will shoot one before you go."

With that Franziska passed into the house, carrying her fruit with her. Charlie was left to revolve her words in his mind. Dr. Krumm could shoot foxes when he chose; he was always here. He, Charlie, on the contrary, had to go away in little more than a fortnight. There was no Franziska in England—no pleasant driving through great pine woods in the gathering twilight—no shooting of yellow foxes, to be brought home in triumph and presented to a beautiful and grateful young woman.

Charlie walked along the white road and overtook Tita, who had just sat down on a little camp-stool, and got out the materials for taking a water-color sketch of the Hüferschingen valley. He sat down at her feet, on the warm grass.

"I suppose I shan't interrupt your painting by talking to you?" he says.

"Oh dear, no," is the reply: and then he begins, in a somewhat hesitating way, to ask indirect questions, and drop hints, and fish for answers, just as if this small creature, who was busy with her sepias and olive-greens, did not see through all this transparent cunning.

At last she said to him frankly:

"You want me to tell you whether Franziska would make a good wife for you. She would make a good wife for any man. But then you seem to think that I should intermeddle, and negotiate and become a go-between. How can I do that? My husband is always accusing me of trying to make up matches; and you know that isn't true."

"I know it isn't true," says the hypocrite. "But you might only this once. I believe all you say about this girl—I can see it for myself; and when shall I ever have such a chance again?"

"But, dear me!" says Tita, putting down the white pallet for a moment, "how can I believe you are in earnest? You have only known her three days."

"And that is quite enough," says Charlie, boldly, "to let you find out all you want to know about a

girl, if she is of the right sort. If she isn't, you won't find out in three years. Now, look at Franziska. Look at the fine, intelligent face and the honest eyes; you can have no doubt about her; and then I have all the guarantee of your long acquaintance with her."

"Oh," says Tita, "that is all very well. Franziska is an excellent girl, as I have told you often—frank, kind, well educated and unselfish. But you cannot have fallen in love with her in three days?—"

"Why not?" says this blunt-spoken young man.

"Because it is ridiculous. If I meddle in the affair I should probably find you had given up the fancy in other three days; or, if you did marry her and took her to England, you would get to hate me because I alone should know that you had married the niece of an innkeeper."

"Well, I like that!" says he, with a flush in his face. "Do you think I should care two straws whether my friends knew I had married the niece of an innkeeper? I should show them Franziska. Wouldn't that be enough? An innkeeper's niece! I wish the world had more of 'em, if they're like Franziska."

"And besides," says Tita, "have you any notion as to how Franziska herself would probably take this mad proposal?"

"No," says the young man humbly. "I wanted you to try and find out what she thought about me; and if, in time, something were said about this pro-

posal, you might put in a word or two, you know, just to—to give her an idea, you know, that you don't think it quite so mad, don't you know?"

"Give me your hand, Charlie," says Tita, with a sudden burst of kindness. "I'll do what I can for you; for I know she's a good girl, and she will make a good wife to the man who marries her."

You will observe that this promise was given by a lady who never, in any circumstances whatsoever, seeks to make up matches, who never speculates on possible combinations when she invites young people to her house in Surrey, and who is profoundly indignant, indeed, when such a charge is preferred against her. Had she not, on that former Christmas morning, repudiated with scorn the suggestion that Charley might marry before another year had passed? Had she not, in her wild confidence, staked on a wager that assumption of authority in her household and out of it without which life would be a burden to her? Yet no sooner was the name of Franziska mentioned—and no sooner had she been reminded that Charlie was going with us to Hüferschingen—than the nimble little brain set to work. Oftentimes it has occurred to one dispassionate spectator of her ways that this same Tita resembled the small object which, thrown into a a dish of some liquid chemical substance, suddenly produces a mass of crystals. The constituents of those beautiful combinations, you see, were there; but they wanted some little shock to hasten the slow process of crystallization. Now, in our social

circle we have continually observed groups of young people floating about in an amorphous and chaotic fashion—good for nothing but dawdling through dances, and flirting and carelessly separating again; but when you dropped Tita among them, then you would see how rapidly this jelly-fish sort of existence was abolished—how the groups got broken up—and how the sharp, business-like relations of marriage were precipitated and made permanent. But would she own to it? Never! She once went and married her dearest friend to a Prussian officer; and now she declares he was a selfish fellow to carry off the girl in that way, and rates him soundly because he won't bring her to stay with us more than three months out of the twelve. There are some of us get quite enough of this Prussian occupation of our territory.

"Well," says Tita to this long English lad, who is lying sprawling on the grass, "I can safely tell you this, that Franziska likes you very well."

He suddenly jumps up, and there is a great blush on his face.

"Has she said so?" he asks, eagerly.

"Oh, yes! in a way. She thinks you are good-natured. She likes the English, generally. She asked me if that ring you wear was an engaged ring."

These disconnected sentences were dropped with a tantalising slowness into Charlie's eager ears.

"I must go and tell her directly that it is not," said he; and he might probably have gone off at once had not Tita restrained him.

"You must be a great deal more cautious than that if you wish to carry off Franziska some day or other. If you were to ask her to marry you now she would flatly refuse you, and very properly; for how could the girl believe you were in earnest? But if you like, Charlie, I will say something to her that will give her a hint; and if she cares for you at all before you go away she won't forget you. I wish I was as sure of you as I am of her."

"Oh! I can answer for myself," says the young man, with a becoming bashfulness.

Tita was very happy and pleased all that day. There was an air of mystery and importance about her. I knew what it meant. I had seen it before.

Alas! poor Charlie.

CHAPTER V.

"GAB MIR EIN' RING DABEI."

UNDER the friendly instructions of Dr. Krumm, whom he no longer regarded as a possible rival, Charlie became a mighty hunter; and you may be sure that when he returned of an evening with sprigs of fur in his cap for the bucks he had slain, Franziska was not the last to come forward and shake hands with him, and congratulate him, as is the custom in these primitive parts. And then she was quite made one of the family when we sat down to dinner in the long, low-roofed room; and nearly

every evening, indeed, Tita would have her to dine with us and play cards with us.

You may suppose if these two young folk had any regard for each other, those evenings in the inn must have been a pleasant time for them. There were never two partners at whist who were so courteous to each other, so charitable to each other's blunders. Indeed, neither would ever admit that the other blundered. Charlie used to make some frightful mistakes occasionally that would have driven any other player mad; but you should have seen the manner in which Franziska would explain that he had no alternative but to take her king with his ace; that he could not know this, and was right in chancing that. We played three-penny points, and Charlie paid for himself and his partner, in spite of her entreaties. Two of us found the game of whist a profitable thing.

One day a registered letter came for Charlie. He seized it, carried it to a window, and then called Tita to him. Why need he have made any secret about it? It was nothing but a ring—a plain hoop with a row of rubies.

"Do you think she would take this thing?" he said, in a low voice.

"How can I tell?"

The young man blushed and stammered, and said,

"I don't want you to ask her to take the ring, but to get to know whether she would accept any present from me. And I would ask her myself,

plainly, only you have been frightening me so much about being in a hurry. And what am I to do? Three days hence we start."

Tita looked down with a smile and said, rather timidly,

"I think, if I were you, I would speak to her myself—but very gently."

We were going off that morning to a little lake some dozen miles off, to try for a jack or two. Franziska was coming with us. She was, indeed, already outside, superintending the placing in the trap of our rods and bags. When Charlie went out she said that everything was ready, and presently our peasant driver cracked his whip, and away we went.

Charlie was a little grave, and could only reply to Tita's fun with an effort. Franziska was mostly anxious about the fishing, and hoped that we might not go so far to find nothing.

We found few fish anyhow. The water was as still as glass and as clear ; the pike that would have taken our spinning bits of metal must have been very dull-eyed pike indeed. Tita sat at the bow of the long punt reading, while our boatman steadily and slowly plied his single oar. Franziska was for a time eagerly engaged in watching the progress of our fishing, until even she got tired of the excitement of rolling in an immense length of cord, only to find that our spinning-bait had hooked a bit of floating wood or weed. At length Charlie proposed that he should go ashore and look out for a

picturesque site for our picnic, and he hinted that perhaps Miss Franziska might also like a short walk, to relieve the monotony of the sailing. Miss Franziska said she would be very pleased to do that. We ran them in among the rushes, and put them ashore, and then once more started on our laborious career.

Tita laid down her book. She was a little anxious. Sometimes you could see Charlie and Franziska on the path by the side of the lake, at other times the thick trees by the water's side hid them.

The solitary oar dipped in the lake; the boat glided along the shores. Tita took up her book again. The space of time that passed may be inferred from the fact that, merely as an incident to it, we managed to catch a chub of four pounds. When the excitement over this event had passed, Tita said,

"We must go back to them. What do they mean by not coming on and telling us? It is most silly of them."

We went back by the same side of the lake, and we found both Franziska and her companion seated on the bank at the precise spot where we had left them. They said it was the best place for the picnic. They asked for the hamper in a business-like way. They pretended they had searched the shores of the lake for miles.

And while Tita and Franziska are unpacking the things, and laying the white cloth smoothly on the

grass, and pulling out the bottles for Charlie to cool in the lake, I observe that the younger of the two ladies rather endeavours to keep her left hand out of sight. It is a paltry piece of deception. Are we moles, and blinder than moles, that we should continually be made the dupes of these women? I say to her,

"Franziska, what is the matter with your left hand!"

"Leave Franziska's left hand alone," says Tita, severely.

"My dear," I reply, humbly, "I am afraid Franziska has hurt her left hand."

At this moment Charlie, having stuck the bottles among the reeds, comes back, and, hearing our talk, he says, in a loud and audacious way,

"Oh! do you mean the ring? It's a pretty little thing I had about me, and Franziska has been good enough to accept it. You can show it to them, Franziska."

Of course he had it about him. Young men always do carry a stock of ruby rings with them when they go fishing, to put in the noses of the fish. I have observed it frequently.

Franziska looks timidly at Tita, and then she raises her hand, that trembles a little. She is about to take the ring off to show it to us, when Charlie interposes:

"You needn't take it off, Franziska."

And with that, somehow, the girl slips away from among us, and Tita is with her, and we don't get a

glimpse of either of them until the solitude resounds with our cries for luncheon.

In due time Charlie returned to London, and to Surrey with us in very good spirits. He used to come down very often to see us; and one evening at dinner he disclosed the fact that he was going over to the Black Forest in the following week, although the November nights were chill just then.

"And how long do you remain?"

"A month," he says.

"Madam," I say to the small lady at the other end of the table, "a month from now will bring us to the 4th of December. You have lost the bet you made last Christmas morning; when will it please you to resign your authority?"

"Oh, bother the bet," says this unscrupulous person.

"But what do you mean?" says Charlie.

"Why," I say to him, "she laid a wager last Christmas Day that you would not be married within a year. And now you say you mean to bring Franziska over on the 4th of December next. Isn't it so?"

"Oh, no!" he says, "we don't get married till the Spring."

You should have heard the burst of low, delightful laughter with which Queen Tita welcomed this announcement. She had won her wager.

KING PEPIN AND SWEET CLIVE.

UPON arriving at the middle of the close the Dean stopped. He had been walking briskly, his chin from very custom a little tilted, but his eyes beaming with condescension and general good-will, while an indulgent smile playing about the lower part of his face relieved for the time its massive character. His walking-stick was swinging to and fro in a loose grasp, his feet trod the pavement of the precincts with the step of an owner, he felt the warmth of the sun, the balminess of the spring air dimly, and somewhere at the back of his mind he was conscious of a vacant bishopric, and of his being the husband of one wife. In fine, he presented the appearance of a contented, placid, unruffled dignitary, until he reached the middle of the close.

But there, alas! the ferule of his stick came to the ground with a mighty thud; the sweetness and light faded from his eyes as they rested upon Mr. Swainson's plot; the condescension and good-will

became conspicuous only by their absence. The Dean was undisguisedly angry; he disliked opposition as much as lesser men, and met with it more rarely. For Bicester is old-fashioned, and loves the church and state, but especially the former, and looks up to principalities and powers, and even now execrates the memory of a recreant Bicestrian, otherwise reputable, on account of a terrible mistake he made. It was a public dinner. "I remember," said this misguided man, "going in my young days to the old and beautiful cathedral in this city. [Great applause]. I was only a child then, and my head hardly reached above the top of the seat, but I remember I thought the Dean the greatest of living men. [Whirlwinds of applause.] Well"—smiling—"perhaps I don't think quite that now." [Dead silence.] And so dull at bottom may even a man be whose name is not unknown in half the capitals of Europe, that this degenerate fellow never could guess why the friends of his youth from that moment turned their backs upon him.

Such is the faith of Bicester, but even in Bicester there are heretics. To say that the Dean rarely met with opposition, is to say that he rarely met with Mr. Swainson, and that he seldom saw Mr. Swainson's plot. As a rule, when he crossed the close he averted his eyes by a happy impulse of custom, for he did not like Mr. Swainson, and as for the latter's plot, it was Anathema Maranatha to him. The Dean was tall, Mr. Swainson was taller; the Dean was stubborn, Mr. Swainson was obsti-

nate ; so there arose between them the antagonism that is born of similarity. On the other hand the Dean was stout and Mr. Swainson a scarecrow ; the Dean was comely and clerical, but not over-rich, Mr. Swainson was pallid, lantern-jawed, wealthy, and a lawyer, and hence the dislike born of difference. Moreover, years ago Mr. Swainson had been mayor of Bicester, when there was a little dispute between the chapter and the bishop, and he showed so much energy upon the one side as to earn the nickname of the " mayor of the palace." Finally Mr. Swainson delighted in opposition as a cat in milk, and cared to have a good reason for his antagonism no more than puss in the dairy about a sixty years' title to the cream-pan.

But a sixty years' title to his plot was the very thing which Mr. Swainson did claim to have. Exactly opposite his house—his father's and grandfather's house, too—in which, said his enemies, they had lived and grown fat upon cathedral patronage, lay this debateable land. His front windows commanded it, and upon such a morning as this he loved to stand upon his doorstep and gaze at it with the air of a dog watching the spot where his bone is buried. But if Mr. Swainson was right, that was just what was not buried there ; there were no bones there. True, the smoothly shorn surface of the little patch was divided from the green turf around the cathedral only by a slight iron railing, but, said Mr. Swainson, ponderously seizing upon his opponent's weapon and using it with telling

effect, it was of another sort altogether : of a very different nature indeed. It had never been consecrated, and close as it was to the sacred pile, being in fact separated from it on two sides but by a yard of sunk fence, it did not belong to it, it was not of it, quoth he ; it was private property, the property of Erasmus John Swainson, and the appanage of his substantial red-brick house just across the close.

And no one could refute him, though several tried their best, to his huge delight. It cannot now be exactly computed by how many years the discovery of his rights prolonged his life—not certainly by some. His liver demanded activity, namely a quarrel, and what a coil this was. If he had been given the choice of opponents, he would probably have preferred the Dean and Chapter, they were so substantial, wealthy, and all but formidable. And such a thorn in the side of those comfortable personages as these rights of his were like to be, he could hardly have imagined in his most sanguine dreams, or hoped for in his happiest moment.

It was great fun, stating his claim, flouting it in their faces, displaying it through the city, brandishing it in season and out of season ; but when it came to making a hole in the smooth turf hitherto so sacred, and setting up an unsightly post, and affixing to it a board with "Trespassers will be prosecuted. E. J. Swainson," the fun became furious. So did the Dean, so did the Chapter, so did every sidesman and verger. Bicester was torn in

pieces by the contending parties, but Mr. Swainson was firm. The only concession that could be wrung from him was the removal of the obnoxious board. Instead of it he placed a neat iron railing round his property, enclosing just thirty feet by fifteen. Such was the status in quo on this morning, and with it the Dean had for some time been obliged to rest content.

And yet, sooth to say, the greatest pleasure of the very reverend gentleman's life was gone with this accession to the roundness and fullness of Mr. Swainson's. No more with the thorough satisfaction of hitherto could he conduct the American traveller through the ancient crypt, or dilate upon the beauty of the quaint gargoyles to the Marquis of Bicester's visitors. No: indeed that railed-in spot was a plague-spot to him, ever itching, an eyesore even when invisible, a thing to be evaded and dodged and given the slip, as a Dean who is a Dean should scorn to evade anything mortal. He winced at the mere thought that the inquisitive sight-seer might touch upon it, might probe the matter with questions. He hurried him past it with averted finger and voluble tongue, nor recovered his air of kindly condescension, or polished ease—as the case might be—until he was safe within his own hall. Only in moments of forgetfulness could the Dean now walk in his own close of Bicester with the easy grace of old times.

But on this particular morning the sunshine was so pleasant, the wind so balmy, that he walked

half way across the close as if the river of Lethe flowed fathoms deep over Mr. Swainson's plot; then it chanced that his eyes in a heedless moment rested upon it; and he saw that a man was at work in the tiny enclosure, and he paused. The Dean knew Mr. Swainson by this time, and did not trust him. What was this? By the man's side lay a small heap of greyish-white things, and he was holding a short-handled mallet, and was using it deftly to drive one of the greyish-white things into the ground. From him the Dean's eyes travelled to a couple of parti-coloured sticks, one at each end of the plot. What was this? A horror so terrible that the Dean stood still, and that remarkable change came over him which we have described.

Great men rise to the occasion. It was only a moment he thus stood and looked. Then he turned and walked rapidly back to a house he had just passed. A tall, thin man was standing upon the steps, with a ghost of a smile upon his face. For a moment the Dean could only stammer. It was such a dreadful outrage.

"Is that," he said at last, "is that there, sir, being done by your authority?" With a shaking finger he pointed to Mr. Swainson's plot. The tall man in a leisurely manner settled a pair of eye-glasses upon his nose and looked in the direction indicated. "Ah, I see what you mean," he said at last with delicious coolness. "Certainly, Mr. Dean, certainly!"

"Are you aware, sir, what it is?" gasped the clergyman; "it is sacrilege!"

"Pooh, nothing of the kind, I assure you, my dear sir. It's croquet!"

The tone was one of explanation, and there was such an air of frankness, of putting an end to an unfounded error, that the veins upon the Dean's temples swelled and his face grew, if possible, redder than before.

"I won't stay to bandy words with you—"

"Bandy!" cried the tall man, intensely amused. "Ha, ha, ha! You thought it was hocky! Bandy! oh, no, you play it with hoops and a mallet. Drive the balls through—so!"

And to the intense delight of the close people, nine-tenths of whom were at their windows, Mr. Swainson executed an ungainly kind of gambade upon the steps. "Disgusting," the Dean called it afterwards, when talking to sympathetic ears. Now he merely put it away from him with a wave of the hand.

"I will not discuss it now, Mr. Swainson. If your own feelings of decency and of what is right and proper do not forbid this—this ribald profanity—I call it nothing else, sir—I have but one word to add: the Chapter shall prevent it."

"The Chapter!" replied the other in a tone of singular contempt, which changed to savageness as he continued, "you are well read in history, Mr. Dean, they tell me. Doubtless you remember what happened when the puissant King Canute bade the tide come no further. I am the tide, and you and the Chapter sit in the chair of Canute."

The Dean, it must be confessed, was a little taken aback by this terrible defiance. He was amazed. The two glared at one another, and the clergyman was the first to give way; baffled and disconcerted, yet still swelling with rage, he strode toward the deanery. His antagonist followed him with his eyes. Then looked more airily than ever at his plot and the progress being made there, considered the weather with his chin at the decanal angle, and with a flirt of his long coat-tails went into the house, a happy man and the owner of a vastly improved appetite.

But the Dean had more to go through yet. At the door of his garden he ran in his haste against some one coming out. Ordinarily, great man as he was, he was also a gentleman. But this was too much. That, when the father had insulted him, the son should almost prostrate him on his own threshold, was intolerable—at any rate at a moment when he was smarting with the sense of unacknowledged defeat.

"Good morning, Mr. Dean," said the young fellow, raising his hat with an evident desire to please that was the very antipodes of his sire's manner—only the Dean was in no mood to discriminate—"I have just been having a very pleasant game of croquet."

It is greatly to be regretted, but here a short hiatus in the narrative occurs. The minor canons, than whom no men are more wanting in reverence, say that the Dean's answer consisted of two words,

one of them very pithy, very full of meaning, but in the mouth of a Dean, however choleric, impossible—perfectly impossible. Accounting this as a gloss, and the original reading not being forthcoming, we are driven to conjecture that the Dean's answer expressed mild disapprobation of the game of croquet. Certain it is that young Swainson, surprised doubtless at so novel and original a sentiment, only said, "I beg your pardon."

"Hem! I mean to say that I do not approve of this. I will come to the point. I must ask you to discontinue your visits to my house." The young man stared as if he thought the excited divine had gone mad; the deanery was almost a home to him. "Your father," the Dean went on more coherently, "has taken a step so unseemly, so—so indecent, has used language so insulting to me, sir, that I cannot, at any rate at present, receive you here."

Young Swainson was a gentleman, and moreover, for a very good reason hereinafter appearing, the Dean failed to anger him. He raised his hat as respectfully as before, bowed slightly in token of acquiescence, and went on his way sorrowfully.

He had a singularly pleasant smile, this young gentleman, though this was not the time for displaying it. Mrs. Dean had once pronounced him a pippin grafted on a crab stock, and thereafter in certain circles he was known as King Pepin. He was tall and straight, and open-eyed, with faults enough, but of a generous, youthful kind, easily overlooked and more easily forgiven. Doubtless Mr.

Swainson would have had his son more practical, cool-headed and precise ; but the shoot did not grow in the same way as the parent tree. Old Swainson would not have been happy without an enemy, nor young Swainson happy with one : and if, as the former often said, the latter's worst enemy was himself, he was likely to have a tolerably prosperous life.

In a space of time inconceivably small the doings of the grim old lawyer and the Dean's remonstrance were all over Bicester. Nay, fast as the stone had rolled, it had gathered moss. It was gravely asserted by people who rapidly grew to be eye-witnesses, that Mr. Swainson had danced a hornpipe in the middle of his plot, snapping his fingers at the Dean the while the latter prodded him as well as he could over the railings with his umbrella ; and that only the arrival of Mr. Swainson's son put an end to this disgraceful exhibition.

Neither side wasted time. The Dean, the Canon in residence, and the Præcentor, an active young fellow, consulted their legal adviser, and talked largely of ejectment, title, and ceisin. Mr. Swainson, having nine points of the law in his favour, and as well acquainted with the tenth as his opponent's legal adviser, devoted himself to the lighter pursuit of the mallet and hoop. In a state of felicity undreamt of before, he played, or affected to play, croquet, his right hand against his left, the former giving the latter two hoops and a cage. He played with a cage and a bell ; it was more cheerful, not to say noisy.

Of course all Bicester found occasion to pass through the close and see this great sight, while every window in the precincts was raised, that the denizens thereof might hear the tap, tap of the sacrilegious mallet. The cathedral lawyer, urged to take some step, and well knowing the strength of the enemy's position, was fairly nonplussed. But while he pondered, with a certain grim amusement, over Mr. Swainson's crotchet, which did not present itself to his legal mind in so dreadful a light as it did to the mind clerical, some unknown person took action, and made it war to the knife.

"Who did it?" Bicester asked loudly when it awoke one morning, to find Mr. Swainson in a state of mind which seemed imperatively to call for a padded room and a strait waistcoat. During the night some one had thrown down the iron railings, taken up and broken his hoops, crushed his bell, and snapped his pegs; all this in the neatest possible manner, and with no damage to the turf. War to the knife indeed! Mr. Swainson, like the famous Widdrington, would have fought upon his stumps on such a provocation.

He expressed his opinion very hotly that this was the work of "that arrogant priest," and he should smart for it. A clergyman in this kind of context becomes a priest. This is common knowledge.

The Dean said, if hints were to go for anything, that it was a more or less direct interposition of Providence.

Young Swainson said nothing.

The Vergers followed his example, but smiled a good deal.

The Dean's lawyer said it was a very foolish act, whoever did it.

Mrs. Dean said she would like to give the man who did it five shillings. Perhaps her inclination mastered her.

The Deacon's daughter sighed.

And Bicester said everything except what young Swainson said.

I have not mentioned the Dean's daughter before. It is the popular belief that she was christened Sweet Clive Buxton, and if people are mistaken in this, and the name "Sweet" does not appear upon the highly-favoured register, what of that? It is but one proof the more of the utter and tremendous want of foresight of godfathers and godmothers. They send the future lounger in St. James's into the world handicapped with the name of Joseph or Zachary, and dub the country curate Tom or Jerry. No matter; Clive Buxton, whatever her name, could be nothing but sweet. She was not tall nor yet short. She was just as tall and just as short as she should have been, with a well-rounded figure and a grave carriage of the head. Her hair was wavy and brown, and sometimes it strayed over a white brow, on which a frown was so great a stranger that its right of entry was barred by the statute of limitations. There were a few freckles, etherealised dimples about her well-shaped nose. But these charms grew upon one gradually; at

first her suitors were only conscious of her great grey wide-open eyes, so kind and frank and trustful, and so wise withal, that they filled every young man upon whom she turned them with a certainty of her purity and goodness and loveableness, and sent him away with a frantic desire to make her his wife without loss of time. With all this, she overflowed with fun and happiness—except when she sighed—and she was just nineteen. Such was Sweet Clive Buxton then. If her picture were painted to-day, there would be this difference: she is older and more beautiful.

To return to our plot. Bicester watched with bated breath to see what Mr. Swainson would do. No culprit was forthcoming, and it seemed as if the day was going against him. He made no sign; only the broken hoops, the cage and battered bell, so lately the instruments and insignia of triumph, were cleared away, and, at the ex-mayor's strenuous request, taken in charge by the police. Even the iron railing was removed. The excitement in the close rose high. Once more the cathedral vicinage was undefiled by lay appropriation; but the Dean knew Mr. Swainson too well to rejoice. The ground was cleared, it is true, but only, as he well foresaw, that it might be used for some mysterious operations, of which the end and aim only—his own annoyance—were clear to him, and not the means. What would Mr. Swainson do?

The strange unnatural calm lasted several days. The cathedral dignitaries moved about in fear and

trembling. At length one night the dwellers in the close were aroused by a peculiar hammering. It was frequent, deep, and ominous, and came from the direction of Mr. Swainson's plot. To the nervous it seemed as the knocking of nails into an untimely coffin ; to the guilty—and this was very near the cathedral—like the noise of a rising scaffold ; to the brave and those with clear consciences, such as Clive Buxton, it more nearly resembled the knocking a hoarding together ; and indeed that was the very thing it was, and around Mr. Swainson's plot.

But what a hoarding ! When the light of day discovered it to people's eyes, the Dean's fearful anticipations seemed slight to him, as the boy's vision who has dreamed he is about to be flogged in gaol, awakes to find his father standing over him with a strap. It was so unsightly, so gaunt, so unpainted, so terrible ; the very stones of the cathedral seemed to blush a deeper red at discovering it, and the oldest houses to turn a darker purple. Had the Dean possessed the hundred tongues of fame—which in Bicester possessed many more—and the five hundred fingers of Briareus, he could not hope to prevent the Marquis's visitors asking questions about that, or to divert the attention of the least curious American. He recognised the truth at a glance, and formed his plan. Many generals have formed it before ; it was—retreat. He sent out his butler to borrow a continental Bradshaw from the Club, and shut himself up in his study. ' The truly great mind is never overwhelmed.

The Vergers alone inspected the monster unmoved. They eyed it with glances not only of curiosity, but of appreciative intelligence. Not so, however, later in the day. Then Mr. Swainson appeared, leading by a strong chain a brindled bull-dog, of the most ferocious description and about sixty pounds' weight. The animal contemplated the nearest Verger with much satisfaction, and licked his chops; it might be at some grateful memory. The Verger, who was in a small way a student of natural history, pronounced it however a lick of anticipation, and appeared not a little disconcerted. Mr. Swainson entered with the dog by a small door at the corner, and came out again without him. The other Vergers then left.

Their coming and going was nothing to Mr. Swainson. It was enough for him that he stood there the cynosure of every eye in the close; even Mrs. Dean was watching him from a distant garret window. In slow and measured fashion he walked to the steps of his own house, and, taking from them a board he had previously placed there, returned to the entrance of his plot, now enclosed to the height of about ten feet by this terrible hoarding. Above the door he carefully hung the board and drew back a few feet to take in the effect. Mrs. Dean sent down hastily for her opera glasses, but really there was no need of them, the legend, in huge black letters on a white ground, ran thus: "No admittance! Beware of the dog!!!"

A smile of content crept slowly over Mr. Swainson's face, and he said aloud,

"Trump that card, Mr. Dean, if you can."

As he turned—Mrs. Dean saw it distinctly and declared herself ready to swear to it in any court of justice—he snapped his fingers at the Deanery. And the dog howled!

It was the first of many howls, for he was a dog of great width of chest; and not even the surgeon of an insurance company, if he had lived twenty-four hours in Bicester close, would have found fault with his lungs. Why he howled during the night, for it was not the time of full moon, became the burning question of each morning. That he joined in the cathedral services with a zest and discrimination which rendered the organ almost superfluous, and drove the organist to the verge of resignation, was only to be expected. There was nothing strange in that, nor in his rivalry of the præcentor's best notes, whose voice was considered very fine in the litany. The voluntary, Tiger made his own; and of the sermon he expressed disapproval in so marked a manner that it was hard to say which swelled more with rage, the Dean within or the dog without. Their rage was equally impotent.

Things went so far that the Dean publicly wrung his hands at the breakfast table. "You could not hear the benediction this morning? And I was in good voice, too, my dear!" he wailed, with tears in his eyes.

"You should appeal to the Marquis," suggested his wife. It must be explained that the Marquis in Bicester ranks next to and little beneath Providence. But the Dean shook his head. He put no faith in the power even of the Marquis to handle Mr. Swainson. "I will lay it before the Bishop, my dear," he said humbly. And then, indeed, Mrs. Dean knew that the iron had entered into his soul, and that the hand of the Mayor of the palace was very heavy upon him; and her good, wifely heart grew so hot that she felt that she could have no more patience with her daughter.

For Clive's sympathies were no longer to be trusted. She was not the sweet Clive of a month ago, but a sadder and more sedate young person, who had a troublesome and annoying way of defending the absent foe, and of sighing in dark corners, that was more than provoking. Duty demanded that she should be an ocean, into which her father and mother might pour the streams of their indignation and meet with a sympathising flood-tide, and lo! this unfeeling girl declined to make herself useful in that way, and instead sent forth a "bore" of light jesting that made little of the enemy's enormities and a trifle of his outrages. More, she showed herself for the first time disobedient; she altogether refused to promise not to speak to King Pepin if opportunity should serve, and, clever girl as she was, laughed her father out of insisting upon it, and kissed her mother into being a not unwilling ally. A wise woman was her mother and clear-

sighted; she saw that Clive had a spirit, but no longer a heart of her own. Yet at such time as this, when her husband was wringing his hands, Clive's insensibility to the family grievances tried Mrs. Dean sorely. It was hard that the canon's sleepless night, the præcentor's peevishness, the singing man's influenza, and all the countless counts of the indictment against Mr. Swainson, should fail to awaken in the young lady's mind a tithe of the indignation shared by every other person at the Deanery, from the Dean himself to the scullery-maid. But then love is blind; for which most of us may thank heaven.

Day after day went by and the hoarding still reared its gaunt height, and the unclean beast of the Hebrews still made night hideous, and the day a time for the expression of strong feelings. At length the Dean met his legal adviser in the close —ay, and within a few feet of the obnoxious erection; he kept his back to it with ridiculous care, while they talked.

"We have come to something like a settlement at last," said the lawyer briskly;—"confusion take the dog! I can hardly hear myself speak.—We are to meet at the chapter-house at five, Mr. Dean, if that will suit you: Mr. Swainson, the Bishop, Canon Rowcliffe, and myself. I think he is inclined to be reasonable at last."

The Dean shook his head gloomily.

"Ah, you will see it turn out better than you expect. Let me whisper something to you. There

is an action commenced against him for shutting up a road across one of his farms at Middleton, and it will be fought stoutly. One suit at a time will be sufficient to satisfy even Mr. Swainson."

"You don't say so? This is good news!" cried the Dean, with unmistakable pleasure. "Certainly, I will be there."

"And, I am sure I need not hint at it. You will be ready to meet Mr. Swainson half-way?"

The Dean looked gloomy again. But at this moment a long, loud howl, more frenzied, more fiendish than any which had preceded it, seemed to proclaim that the dog knew his reign was menaced, and, like Sardanapalus, was determined to go out right royally. It was more than the Dean could stand. With an involuntary motion of his hands to his ears, he nodded and fled with unseemly haste to a place less exposed, where he could in a seemly and decanal manner relieve his feelings.

The best laid plans even of lawyers will go astray, and when they do so, the havoc is generally of a singularly wide-spread description. The meeting in the chapter-house proved stormy from the first, whether it was that the writ in the right-of-way case had not yet reached Mr. Swainson, and so he clung to his only split straw, or that the Dean was soured by want of sleep, or that the Bishop was not thorough enough. Whatever was the cause, the spirit of compromise was absent, and the discussion across the chapter-house table threatened to make matters worse and not better. Whether the Dean first

called Mr. Swainson's enclosure the "toadstool of a night," or Mr. Swainson took the initiative by styling the Dean the "mushroom of a day"—the Dean was not of old family—was a question afterwards much and hotly debated in Bicester circles. Be that as it may, the high powers at length rose from the table in dudgeon and much confusion.

There was behind the Dean at the end of the chapter-house, a large window. It looked directly down upon what he, in the course of the discussion, had more than once termed "the profanation," and since the eventful day of Mr. Swainson's match at croquet it had been, by the Dean's order, kept shuttered, to the intent that, when occupied in the chapter-house, the profanation might not be directly before his eyes. On this occasion the shutter was still closed; it may be that this phenomenon had weakened Mr. Swainson's not over-robust resolves on the side of amity.

The Dean was a choleric man. As the party rose, he stepped to this shutter and flung it back. He turned to the others and said excitedly,

"Look, sir; look, my lord! Is that a sight becoming the threshold of a cathedral? Is that a thing to be endured on consecrated ground?"

They stepped towards the window, a wide, low-browed Tudor one, and looked out. The Dean himself stood aside, grasping the shutter with a hand that shook with passion. He could see the others' faces. He expected little show of shame or

contrition on that of Mr. Swainson, but he did wish to bring this hideous thing home to the Bishop, who had not been as thorough in the matter as he should have been ; still, as a bishop, he could not see that thing there in its horrible reality and be unmoved.

No, he certainly could not. Slowly, and as if reluctantly, his lordship's face changed ; it broke into a smile that broadened and rippled wider and wider, second by second, as he looked. His color deepened until he became almost purple ! And Mr. Swainson ? His face was the picture of horror ; there could not be a doubt of that. Confusion and astonishment were stereotyped on every feature. The Dean could not believe his own eyes. He turned in perplexity to the lawyer, who was peeping between the others' heads. His shoulders were shaking and his face was puckered with laughter.

The Bishop stepped back. "Really, gentlemen, I think it is hardly fair of us to play the spy. This is no place for us." He was a kindly man ; there never was a more popular bishop in Bicester, and never will be.

At this the Canon and the lawyer lost all control over themselves, and their laughter, if not loud, was deep. The Dean was immensely puzzled, confused, perplexed, wholly angry. He did at last what he should have done at first, instead of striking an attitude with that shutter in his hand, he looked through the window himself. It was dusty, and he was somewhat near-sighted, but at length he saw ; and this was what he saw.

In the further corner of the ugly enclosure, a couple of lovers were billing and cooing ; about and around them Mr. Swainson's big dog performing uncouth gambols. Bad enough this ; but it was not all. The unsuspicious couple were Frank Swainson and the Dean's daughter. Frank's arm was around her, and as the Dean looked he stooped and kissed her. And Clive gazed with her brave eyes full of love into his and scarcely blushed.

When the Dean turned round he was alone.

Was it very wrong of them ? There was nowhere else, since this miserable fracas began, where, away from others' eyes, they could steal a kiss. But into Mr. Swainson's plot no window, save a shuttered one, could look ; the door, too, was close to one of the side doors of the cathedral, and you could pop in and out again unseen, and as for the big dog, Frank and Tiger were great friends. So if it was very wrong, it was very easy and very nice, and,— *Facilis Descensus Averni.*

For one hour the Dean remained shut up in his study. At the end of that time he put on his hat and walked across the close. He knocked at Mr. Swainson's door, and, upon its being opened, went in, and did not come out again for an hour and five minutes by Mrs. Canon Rowcliffe's watch. I have not the slightest idea of what passed there. More than two thousand different and distinct accounts of the interview were current next day in Bicester, but no one, and I have examined them all with care, seems to me to account for the undoubted results :—

Imprimis, the disappearance next day from Mr. Swainson's plot of the famous hoarding, which was not even replaced by the old iron railing. Secondly, the marriage six weeks later of King Pepin and Sweet Clive.

A FILM OF GOSSAMER.

A STORY OF THE CHESTNUT HARVEST.

Man sets the woof, and fortune throws the warp.
(L' uomo tesse, e la fortuna trama.)—*Tuscan Proverb.*

THE Italian October is a month which knows no half measures. It either brings an unbroken sequence of halcyon days, with cloudless blue, crystalline atmosphere, and sunshine brilliant yet not burning—weather, in short, scarce to be matched on this side of Paradise—or it ushers in the autumn rains with such uncompromising vigour that it seems as if the sluices of heaven were fairly opened, and the universal deluge about to set in once more. The chances are, however, in favour of the first alternative, and it is then the month of months for a sketching tour among the lower ridges of the Tuscan Apennines, as the hanging chestnut woods which clothe their steeps have by that time exchanged the somewhat crude monotony of their summer greenery for the warmer and more varied tones of russet and amber brought by the fall of the leaf.

It is the time set apart for the chestnut gathering, the holiday harvest of the year ; and those who, like me, are interested in the rural life of the country, may see it then at its merriest and brightest. From my point of view, artistic teaching would be very incomplete, even though intended for landscape painters exclusively, if it did not direct some attention to the varying moods of man, as well as of nature ; and, paradoxical as it may sound, human sympathy is as necessary in pourtraying the earth we live upon, as in limning the features of our fellow-men. I have, therefore, always tried to keep in view the moral, as well as the material aspects of my subjects ; thus endeavouring to avoid the artist's especial snare, the temptation to look at things from the outside alone.

But here I have wandered from the chestnut gathering into my favourite theories on art and artists, although they have nothing to do with my present subject. They led me, however, in my study of nature and human nature, to take up my quarters during a certain October in one of the loveliest and least known districts of Italy where the southern slopes of the Apennine dividing the territories of Lucca and Modena command a view of the great marble peaks of Carrara, across the blue distance of the Garfagnana valley. The scenery there derives its most special character from the singular sharpness of the lower heights and ridges ; the steepness of their sides, and narrowness of their summits rendering it possible (at

the cost of some stiff climbing) to cross several in an ordinary day's walk, and giving endless variety to the views from the number of winding valleys and keen crested ridges commanded by every tolerable elevation.

Tereglio, the village where I had taken up my abode, was a striking example of this peculiarity, as it occupied so completely the narrow crest of one of these razor-backed ridges, that the precipitous sides of the two ravines it thus overlooked fell sheer away from the external walls of the houses, to a depth of five or six hundred feet on either side of the narrow street. Thus astride upon the steep, it dominated all the long writhing folds of wooded slopes as far as the blanched and shattered pinnacles of Carrara; but to the north the view was barred by Titanic ramparts of sun-gilt granite, with amethystine shadows coursing over their flanks under each fleecy flock that sailed across the blue. The sky of Italy was above it—the light of Italy was upon and around it—and the tinted atmosphere, which every ascent among the Apennines interposes between the spectator and the world below, filled each valley and ravine with its depth of pellucid ultramarine.

Yet Tereglio, despite the scenery it commands, is unvisited by tourists—not the least of its advantages in my eyes—and its single narrow street, entered by a gate at each end, is impassable for any wheeled vehicle, except a hand-barrow. An old carriage-road did indeed once run past its walls, carried

some fifty feet below them, on a ledge artificially cut in the steep; but it is now abandoned and impracticable, safe for a pedestrian sufficiently sure-footed to cross a deep gully by a single ruinous parapet, which is, in some places, all that remains of the old bridges. This disused thoroughfare — the ancient highway from Modena to the Garfagnana— was my great attraction to the neighbourhood, as it facilitated excursions through some of the finest mountain scenery in the world. After scaling the steep of Tereglio, from the level of the watercourse below, by a series of sharp zig-zags through the chestnut woods, it continues to ascend as a cornice on the mountain side, to its culminating point, six thousand feet above the sea; and after crossing this magnificent pass called the Foce a Giogo, descends gradually the northern slope of the Apennines to the Emilia at their foot. Greater part of it is still passable for an ass or mule, and I was thus able to have my artistic apparatus easily transported to points which would have been otherwise inaccessible to the humble companion of my sketching expeditions.

I had selected for my dwelling a substantial farmhouse, just outside the gates, owned by one Vincenzo Contrucci, who, like many of these mountaineers, had emigrated to America early in life, and saved sufficient money to return at the end of ten or fifteen years and set up as a small proprietor in his native place. His subsequent prosperity was owing partly to his own industry and good conduct,

partly to the thrift and cleverness of Sora Nina his wife; and the result of their combined good, qualities was that he was now one of the most thriving farmers in the commune, owning considerable tracts of chestnut woods along the higher steeps, with vineyards and fields of beans and corn further down. He was a tall, stalwart peasant, with the broad brow and calm eyes of a Tuscan ox; slow of speech, though by no means dull of understanding, he was a complete contrast to the quick-witted, sharp-tongued little wife, who in minor matters governed him completely. Sora Nina was of lighter complexion than is common among those hills, and partly for that reason had been reckoned very pretty before she lost her youthful bloom. To an English eye, however, the glowing brunettes of the south are more striking than their paler sisters, whose colouring is at best but a compromise; for the Italian sun soon robs a fair skin of the delicate transparency which is its chief charm.

The only daughter, Assunta, was married, and living at some little distance; two sons, Massimo and Ferruccio, were gone to America as their father had done before them; and there remained at home only the eldest, Leandro, commonly called Andrino, according to the usual Tuscan fashion of inflecting proper names, by dropping the beginning and adding on a diminutive at the end. Andrino was a handsome young farmer of three-and-twenty, a perfect facsimile of his father, except in so far as the massive proportions of the elder Con-

trucci were modified in the younger to the lighter symmetry of early manhood. Like Vincenzo, too, he was somewhat slow of ideas and of speech ; but that he was neither dull nor sullen was proved by the ever ready smile, quick and bright as a sunbeam, with which he met those who addressed him.

The only other permanent member of the family with which I had taken up my abode for the time, was a tall, gaunt servant woman, Maddalena, a relative of Sora Nina's, who assisted her in the care of the house and poultry yard, besides helping in some of the lighter work of the farm. She scarcely ever spoke, but sometimes evinced her participation in what was going on by a sudden nervous laugh, instantly checked, however, if a reproving glance from Sora Nina happened to travel in her direction. She was the most willing, obliging creature I ever met, and unselfishly devoted to the interests of her employers.

But during my stay at Le Cascatelle (as Contrucci's farm was called, from a little rivulet that came leaping down the steep beside the house) its ordinary inmates were reinforced by three extra hands engaged to assist in gathering in the ripe chestnuts as they fell. Those employed in this way are generally young girls, whose services for forty days are repaid, according to the prevailing form of contract, by a bounty of two sacks of the *farina dolce*, or chestnut flour, at the end of the term, and their board and lodging during its continuance ; while in addition to their light labour by

day in the woods, they are expected in the evening to give the housewife the benefit of their industry, by spinning the hempen thread, which she will afterwards weave into stout homespun linen. It is a form of service eagerly sought for, and much enjoyed by the girls of the country; so much so that it is difficult at that season to procure any extra assistance for ordinary household work, and, like the vintage, it has to be looked forward to as a time when all superfluous undertakings have to be postponed for want of hands to assist in them.

Two of Sora Nina's handmaids, Bertuccia and Vannina, were handsome, dark-browed, gipsy-looking girls from the neighbourhood, daughters of small proprietors, whose services were not needed at home, and who were glad to come for the holiday month to the *Masseria Contrucci*. Not perhaps without a remote hope of establishing themselves there permanently through the opportunity afforded by daily intercourse for securing the good graces of the handsome young farmer. I must, however, do them the justice to say that, if it were so, they did not make it manifest by any unmaidenly overtures to the object of their aspirations, but behaved throughout, as regarded him, with a dignity that might sometimes be copied with advantage in higher spheres.

Poor little Ginevra had no such pretensions. She was not even pretty according to the standard of taste prevailing among her equals, for she was slender and undersized, looking, at seventeen, more a

child than a woman; and in point of physique seemed but an insignificant creature when put into competition with such specimens of well-developed, vigorous mountain beauty as she now domiciled with. Worst of all, she was but a *contadina*, that is to say, her father cultivated another man's land, on the *mezzeria* or half-produce system; and as in that country the farmers as a rule are proprietors of the soil they till, this inferiority of social standing naturally made her an object of contempt among her better born associates. I took an interest in her as an old acquaintance, for I had often sketched the Casa Morgante, the half ruinous old villa abandoned by its proprietors to the residence of her father, Lorenzo Giuliani, and had seen the little maiden grow into womanhood under my eyes. I had many a time watched her scutching hemp in front of the door, whisking the long sheaves under the chopper with a dexterous sweep of the arm, or tripping down the moss-grown terraces of the old garden with a pitcher on her head, filled at the spout of what had once been a fountain; where superannuated, lack lustre goldfish still swam in the silent basin, round the mutilated limbs of dilapidated tritons. I have often seen her too standing with her little pink feet in the chilly current of the Lima (for her home was in the valley), helping the laundresses to rinse out the linen in the pure water of the mountain stream, and had always known her a model of cheerful industry and patience. I was, therefore, glad to find she had such a pleas-

ant chance as the month's employment with the Contruccis. She owed it to Vincenzo's grateful recollection of some service rendered him in his early life by a brother of Lorenzo Giuliani's who had prospered in America, and for his sake he had always kept up a friendly interest in the family dispite his wife's disapproval of the intercourse. Sora Nina, who was as proud as though born in the purple, would have wished to keep in the background all recollections connected with the recent origin of her husband's fortune, and to persuade herself, and others if possible, that it had come to him by inheritance ; for in these mountain communes length of tenure of the soil is as great a boast as in English county society.

I have said that Ginevra was not even pretty, but it would be more correct to say that she had not been so till now ; for she was developing a dainty, wild-rose bloom of her own, a tardy flower of beauty, which had all the added charm of surprise, as it began to flush her pale face with a soft glow and tenderness, and give a new depth and brilliancy to the large grey eyes under their dark brows and lashes. One began to notice then how delicately turned were head and neck and ear under the carelessly knotted kerchief, and when it was thrown aside, what a wealth of nut-brown hair lay plaited coil on coil beneath it. She had a voice like a cuckoo too, and many a passer-by lingered under her father's garden wall to listen to the unseen song-bird who carolled forth the tuneful Tuscan

melodies among the pomegranate-trees aflame with bloom, and Cape jasmines studded with moon-like orbs breathing incense on the air.

I had not been many days domiciled in Casa Contrucci, before I discovered that it had another inmate, whose eyes were as little blind as my own to Ginevra's unsuspected attractions. During the day indeed I saw little of the household, who were all scattered to their different avocations before I came down to my morning repast, and whose mid-day meal I did not share, as I generally carried mine with me to the scene of my labours for the time being. At supper, however, I sat down to the common table, which was laid in the great farm kitchen in sufficiently civilised fashion, with coarse but clean homespun damask for cloth and napkins, and with a special dish provided for me by Sora Nina's attentive care. The general fare consisted sometimes of broth and *bouilli*, with salad of wild lettuce or endive, sometimes of a great smoking platter of macaroni stewed with onions, or beans cooked with herbs and oil. The invariable finale of the repast however was the emptying on a dish in the centre of the table of a vast pot of boiled chestnuts, to which everyone helped himself, eating them hot from the husk with a little salt, and continuing to do so at intervals throughout the evening.

After supper, Maddalena, who had sat down with the rest, cleared the table, and began washing the crockery in a remote corner, while the three girls and Sora Nina, seated in a row at one side of

the great blazing hearth, set to work at their spinning, an occupation, however, which by no means implied silence on their part. The men had their place at the other side, but the farmer generally strolled out to smoke his cigar on the threshing floor ; while Andrino, after taking a turn or two to look after the live stock, busied himself with some mechanical work, such as repairing quail nets, mending harness, tools, etc., cutting and trimming stakes for the vines, or other useful indoor tasks. While thus employed, he took little part in the feminine conversation going on at the other side of the fireplace, whistling almost inaudibly to himself over his work. I soon began to notice, however, as I too came and went about my own little preparations for the business of the morrow, that his eyes began to stray most frequently to the corner where Ginevra sat deftly plying her spindle, and sometimes remained so fixedly turned in that direction, that his own fingers forgot to busy themselves with their task. I thought I could see too that she on her part was not unconscious of the attention she was attracting, for if the young farmer's eyes rested longer than usual on her face, a warm glow would steal over it, tinging brow and ears and neck, as though she were overshadowed by a roseate cloud.

The first Saturday evening there was rather more bustle than usual, and the circle round the table at supper was increased by the arrival of old Menichina, who had done some errands for Sora Nina in the valley, and was hospitably bidden to

stay the night. She was a well-known character in the district, and was a native of La Cornice, a village standing on a still higher spur of the great Apennine Wall than that occupied by Tereglio, and forming a most picturesque object as seen from it against its mountain background. Reared in this fastness, Menichina, despite her seventy years, was as active as a chamois, and made her livelihood by fetching and carrying among the mountains for ten miles round ; in summer picking the Alpine fruits to sell in the plain, and at other times bringing up threads, tapes and such-like commodities, to retail among her neighbours at a small profit. In her itinerant way of life she naturally collected all the gossip that was to be gleaned in the country-side, so that her well-known face, wrinkled rather from exposure than from age, was a welcome apparition in the highland farm-houses, promising a pleasant break in the monotony of existence. Supper was scarcely over on the present occasion, when she began to open her budget.

"Have you heard," she said, when a pause in the business of the table presented a favourable opportunity for introducing her *pièce de résistance* in the way of gossip. "Have you heard of the grand wedding that is to be at the Mill of the Camajone at Christmas? The miller's Ghita is to be married to Sor Matteo's Pierino from beyond the Ponte della Maddalena, and on my way down she showed me the earrings and brooch that the *sposo* has given her."

At the beginning of this sentence Andrino's eyes had instinctively sought Ginevra's face with an involuntary significance in their glance, and Sora Nina now called out to her in a harsh voice, "Ginevra, I wish you would help Maddalena to clear the table, instead of gaping there like an unfledged sparrow!" Ginevra started and coloured at the stinging rebuke, but rose without a word and meekly obeyed, while the young man's face assumed a pained expression, and he looked after her with a gaze of wistful tenderness. He soon after left the room, and as he passed her on his way out, said something in a low voice that I could not hear.

I went upstairs myself shortly after, to fetch some canvasses that wanted straining, and when I returned all were busily at work, and Menichina, with a handful of chestnuts in her lap which she munched as she talked, was narrating a thrilling ghost-story. "Tonino di Maso of our village," she was saying, "was about nineteen, when his mother, whom he greatly loved, died, leaving him alone in the world. Now one winter evening soon after, as he returned home in the gloaming, he saw a figure all in white sitting by the hearth, and recognised the spirit of his mother. He was not afraid, for everyone knows that to see a white soul[1] is of good omen. He spoke to her and asked her what she wanted, and she bade him have a mass

[1] "Anima Bianca," so called from the sacred old dramas, in which the good souls were represented clad in white robes.

said and a pound of tapers burned at the chapel of the Hermitage of St. Anne, in accordance with a vow she had failed to fulfil in her lifetime. He promised, and she warned him that she was leaving him, and that he must beware of looking after her, for she was still a soul in pain, and no mortal could bear the sight without incurring some grievous misfortune. He therefore turned away and closed his eyes, but hearing a great noise behind him, could not refrain from looking round, when he saw his mother's soul enveloped in flames, and rapt away, as it were in a whirlwind of fire. So great was the shock he received that he sickened and died within a few days."

"I should have died on the spot," said Tuccia, twisting the yarn with a dexterous turn of her fingers, and various exclamations of horror broke from the little group. Ginevra resumed her spinning, but sat silent in her corner without joining in the conversation.

"And is it true, Menichina," said Vannina, "that the spirits of the Goths, whom the inhabitants of La Cornice massacred in the caves of the cliff opposite, after retaking their fortress and driving them out, are still heard on stormy nights, walking and lamenting in the bowels of the mountain?"

"Saints be good to us!" said Menichina, crossing herself, "it is not well to speak of these things, but I have often and often heard them with my own ears. And that is not all; but whoever, man or beast, passes the spot after nightfall, remains as if

of stone, and can neither move nor speak till day-break. The very asses cannot bray, but remain glued to the spot the whole night through."

"I should like to go there and try what it would feel like," said the daring Vannina, while Tuccia cried that worlds would not induce her to go near the place, and I formed a silent wish, that as regarded the braying of asses so beneficent a spell might be extended to less favoured localities. I, however, breathed no sceptical utterance as to the popular beliefs, and proceeded to contribute my quota to the entertainment of the company, by narrating some of the most approved English ghost-stories, which were of a kind unknown to Italian spectrology, if I may be allowed to coin a word for the occasion.

When it was time to go to bed, Sora Nina desired Maddalena to share her room with Menichina, and the girls, who occupied the attics, went out into the open air to reach the external staircase which alone communicated with them.

Ginevra was the last to pass out, and as she did, Andrino, who had stationed himself near the door, half obstructing the opening, fixed his eyes long and earnestly on her, as she stood opposite him for a moment. "Felice Notte, Ginevra," was all he said, but she crimsoned all over, and looked down for a second or two in indescribable confusion. Then, as if involuntarily, under the influence of some irresistible compulsion, her eyes were slowly raised until they met his with an instantaneous

flash of answering passion in their humid light. She tried to say the commonplace good-night, "Felicissima Notte, Sor Andrino," but the words died away in an inarticulate murmur, and with a movement like flight she brushed hastily past him, and ran out into the darkness.

I had been the sole witness of this little unspoken drama, which I knew, according to Italian feeling on such matters, had the force of a mutual plighting of troth and confession of attachment, from the understanding it established between the parties. Such a mute pledge would be held no less binding than a distinct verbal promise, and Andrino, though he might defer to a more convenient season the formal demand of Ginevra's hand from her parents, was as much pledged in his own eyes to prosecute the courtship thus begun, as if he had entered in a solemn act of betrothal. But I foresaw many difficulties in the path of the young couple before their vows could take effect, for I knew that Sora Nina was as proud and ambitious as a queen-mother, and regarded the little *contadina* much as King Cophetua's parents might have done the beggar-maid.

I heard her call after Ginevra on the stairs, to be ready to go with Maddalena to the five o'clock mass at Tereglio in the morning, that she might be back to assist her with the house-work during the day. Knowing what I knew, I was not at all surprised that Andrino should select the same hour for his devotions; and as I came down in the morning,

looking out of a certain staircase window that commanded the road to Tereglio, had no difficulty in identifying the couple who were walking along it, with steps that lagged, so as to protract the way as much as possible. Maddalena had been in some time, and when poor little Ginevra arrived, all flushed and dewy with happiness, Nina turned on her like a viper. "My faith," she cried ironically, "I hope you have not hurried yourself. How dare you trifle with me in this way, low peasant wench that you are! I will teach you your place another time." Her pale eyes glistened venomously, and she looked as if she could have gladly killed her on the spot.

Andrino here stepped in from the yard. "Mother," he said, "you must not scold her, it was my fault. I walked home with her, and the morning was fine—we came slowly."

"And who gave you leave?" she cried, turning on him in a white fury of jealousy and indignation, "to interfere between me and my maids? Are you master here already, that you can take upon you to order the household? As for you, unmaidenly, unmannerly interloper, I never wished you inside my doors, and the sooner——"

"St—st, wife," said Vincenzo, who had come in from the yard unobserved, "that is enough; the child meant no harm."

Nina was silenced in a moment, for she knew that the stalwart farmer, who seemed in every day matters the meekest and most amenable of men,

was not to be contradicted on any point on which he chose to assert his authority. Ginevra escaped to her own room, and Nina, before starting for church, secured her, as she believed, against holding any communication with her son in her absence.

I have said that the three girls slept in the attics, on a roomy, rambling floor next the roof, generally only used for storage and lumber. In one large room, on a cloth spread on the floor, various fruits and vegetables were spread to dry or ripen : there were sorb-apples, so tempting to the eye when first gathered in their painted beauty of carmine and gold, but so bitter to the taste until softened to a pulpy sweetness in semi-decay ; beside bunches of shrivelled grapes lay coral-red tomatoes wrinkling as they dried ; pale green gourds were mellowing to a riper tinge, purple *aubergines* glowing like dark red wine, and melon-seeds piled in little heaps here and there. On the walls were hung all manner of herbs—thyme and marjoram, sweet basil, sage, tansy and wormwood, which, with bunches of withered camomile flowers, sprigs of lavender, and posies of centaury, gentian, and other mountain simples, filled the air with a faint aromatic odour of decay. Against the farther wall of this herbarium stood a splendid heirloom, that might have sold in Wardour Street for thousands of francs—one of those massive chests of carved oaks in which the marriage outfit of the bride is generally stored, and which have remained in some of the good old peasant families for generations. This one was an admirable specimen

of Renaissance workmanship, and I had often knelt to admire the high relief of the Bacchanalian procession with which it was adorned like an antique sarcophagus. It was used, I knew, for storing the spare house-linen, and other supplies not in actual use, but I had never seen it opened ; and indeed, from the position in which it stood against the wall, it would have been impossible to lift the lid without first pushing it a little aside.

Off this lumber-room was the little closet now temporarily occupied by Ginevra, while the other two girls slept in another large attic across the passage.

These rooms opened on a *loggia*, or covered gallery with open arches, overlooking the flagged court or threshing-floor, and now festooned with bundles of chestnut leaves hung up to dry. They are used to wrap the *necci* or chestnut cakes when baking, imparting to them a peculiar smoky flavour much relished by Tuscan palates, but not equally agreeable to foreign taste. An external staircase leading from this *loggia* to the one below, and thence to the ground, was the only mode of access to the attic floor, so that Sora Nina, locking the little wooden gate at the head of this staircase, and taking the key in her pocket, believed she had her prisoner firmly secured against all communication with the lower world till her return.

In this, however, she was mistaken, for she had not been gone more than a few minutes when, Maddalena having disappeared into an outhouse, I

heard Andrino's voice below, calling softly to Ginevra to come down, and when she replied from above that she was locked in, it was but the work of a moment for the active young lover to stride up the stairs two or three steps at a time, swing himself over the little gate, and establish himself on the open *loggia* for a long, happy hour, secure from interruption. I heard his first hurried greeting, "Ginevra! Ginevrina mia." But after that their conversation was carried on in a series of low murmurs, until the inexorable march of time compelled Andrino to return as he had come, just soon enough to escape being surprised by the party returning from the church.

The household soon after sat down to dinner, the women arrayed in their Sunday best, Nina in a handsome new gown of dark stuff, with an embroidered muslin kerchief; her toilet completed by a splendid set of massive gold ornaments, earrings, pins for the hair, and a triple necklace of beads wrought by hand. Tuccia and Vannina, too, had their substantial holiday costumes with brooches and earrings of solid gold.

"Where is Ginevra?" said the farmer, as he took his seat.

"Upstairs," answered his wife shortly.

"I will fetch her down," said Vincenzo, resolutely, on which she silently handed him the key, and he went off, returning in a moment with the released culprit. Poor little Ginevra had no finery save a clean cotton frock, and her rich braids of

hair were her sole ornament. She took her place silently, and scarcely tasted anything put before her. In the afternoon all scattered again; Tuccia and Vannina to their respective homes, Sora Nina to vespers and a gossip with friends in Tereglio; Vincenzo and his son to the *café* for a game of billiards and a lounge. Ginevra was again left at home, but at large, and had a visit from her father, Lorenzo Giuliani, who brought her a little bundle of clean things, and carried home her soiled frock and linen for her mother to wash.

So Sunday passed, and Monday morning brought its usual routine of work. The chestnut gatherers were off to the woods at break of day, but Sora Nina stayed at home, saying that she had household matters to look after. I was on the upper *loggia*, setting some canvases to dry, when she came up with a quick step, holding something under her apron, and without seeing me passed into the lumber attic, and thence to Ginevra's little room. She remained some few minutes, and on coming out (this time with her hands free) gave a start of surprise at seeing me. "Scusi, Signor Pittore"—(this was my usual title in the household, except from Vincenzo, who, with a reminiscence of his American travel, always addressed me as "Mister")—"*'Scusi*, if I have interrupted you, but I thought you had gone out. I had to bring some of Ginevra's clothes, which she had left strewed about downstairs." Now this was a manifest falsehood, for I had seen Ginevra with my

own eyes bring up her little bundle without opening it ; but as it seemed a matter of little consequence, I kept my own counsel.

My way that morning led me through the chestnut woods. The path was an enchanting one, sometimes holding the keen crest of the ridge, sometimes dipping below it, and in swinging round it, to one side or the other, disclosing alternate glimpses of a vision to right and a vision to left—two separate panoramas, like, but different, while rivalling each other in loveliness. The steep on either hand was clothed with hanging chestnut forest, enlivened by busy groups shouting to one another under the trees, as they picked the plump shining nuts from the ground, and dropped them into large canvas sacks which they wore fastened round their waists. The trees are never shaken, but the chestnuts gathered from day to day as they fall, and the time of the harvest is fixed in each district by public proclamation of the Syndic, generally extending from Michaelmas (September 29) to Sts. Simon and Jude (October 28), but sometimes protracted by special request if the season be late. During that term proprietors have the right to shoot without mercy anyone seen trespassing, a provision which fortunately seems almost a dead letter ; but when it has expired the woods are free to the whole world, and are invaded by swarms of gleaners, eager to pick up belated chestnuts, which are the lawful prey of the first comer. The same rule applies to those that fall at any time on a carriage

road, and the poor have thus a little harvest of their own by the wayside.

When I reached Sor Vincenzo's woods, the gathering was actively going on. Ginevra and Andrino were within sight of each other, but holding no communication; while Tuccia and Vannina, on the higher ledge just below the path, were chattering as usual. "I am wondering all this time," the latter was saying as I came by, "how Sora Nina will pay off the score she owes La Ginevrina. Sooner or later she will find the way, for La Nina has a tongue which cuts and sews (*che taglia e cuce*)."

"You may trust her for that," said Tuccia, "and I, for one, shall not grudge the sly little upstart what she gets." Here she broke off, seeing me on the path above.

"Good morning, girls," I called out. "How goes the harvest?"

"Bravely, Signor Pittore. Are you come to help?"

I assented, and spent the next half-hour gathering the fallen chestnuts, and making a great pile for Tuccia and Vannina to put into their bags; after which I went my way about my own pursuits. I did not return till late that evening, when I found that a great commotion had occurred in Casa Contrucci. Ginevra was gone, Andrino looked dark as a thundercloud, Vincenzo was perturbed and downcast, Nina pale but triumphant. The three latter left the kitchen after supper, and the two girls, who were bursting with the news, told me what had occurred.

Sora Nina's cherished gold ornaments had been stolen out of the great *cassettone* in the attic, and Ginevra was the thief. Yes, I might shake my head and look incredulous, but in presence of them all her room had been searched, and the missing treasure found secreted in her bundle. She had, of course, protested her innocence, and, would I believe it, that credulous Andrino, who seemed perfectly infatuated about her, had stepped forward, declaring his unshaken faith in her, and his determination to make her his wife, even though his parents should refuse their consent, and he be compelled to go to America like his brothers. But Ginevra (still, no doubt, playing injured innocence) —thanked him, indeed, for his belief in her, but resolutely refused his offer, and declared that nothing would induce her to marry him while such a slur remained on her character, of which she doubted not Providence, in its own good time, would clear her. Then her fortitude had given way, and with the single exclamation "Ladra!" she covered her face with her apron, and burst into a storm of sobs. She had refused to let any one accompany her home, and started with her little bundle alone in the twilight. The last word they heard her say was, "Poor Babbo! But he will believe me at least."

Such was the story told me in breathless excitement by the two girls, whose spinning that evening added but little to Nina's hanks of yarn. I was still turning it over in my mind, side by side with

certain doubts of my own, when Andrino came in from the court, and touched me on the shoulder, saying, "Signor Pittore, I pray you to come out with me a moment, I want to speak to you."

I followed him, and when we were both outside in the starlight, he began abruptly, "You know what has happened, but surely you do not believe she did it?"

"I do not know, Andrino," I replied, for I could not broach to him the vague suspicions floating through my mind. "Appearances are against her, but I still hope the thing may be cleared up."

"I would not believe it," he exclaimed passionately, "though all the world swore to it! My little Ginevra is as white as a dove." I could say but little to comfort the poor young fellow, and could only remain with him in silent companionship, listening to his hopes and fears.

In truth my own mind was much disturbed, and I slept but little that night. I had a great regard for the girl, whom I had known from her childhood, and I grieved to think of the forlorn figure she must have presented, with her slender bundle, flying like a scared, hunted creature through the twilight, and reaching that poor home, whose inmates had no boast save their good name. I had an innate conviction of her innocence, but could not see my way to establishing it. I alone knew of Nina's secret visit to her room that day, carrying something carefully concealed from view, and with the glib falsehood with which she had accounted for her pres-

ence there ; but these circumstances, however strong a presumption of foul play they might afford to me who had witnessed them, would not be equally convincing to others, and I knew Nina's obstinate pride sufficiently well to be convinced that tortures would not wring a confession from her lips.

At break of day Lorenzo Giuliani arrived at the farm, haggard, wild, the picture of woe. Vincenzo poured out a tumbler of wine for him, and he gulped it down, before his parched lips could frame a word. "This is sad news," he then said, "about my little girl. She has always been the best of little girls to me, and as sweet and open as the day.—Is it likely she should take a crooked turn all of a sudden?"

"I would give half my crops this year, Lorenzo, that it had not happened," said the farmer, "and I would gladly give my best wheat field this moment to see it cleared up."

"What is there to clear up?" said Nina, sharply, from the fire where she was busy cooking. "There is no use crying over spilt milk, Lorenzo. The girl is no worse than other girls, who can never resist the sight of jewelry. It will be a lesson to me to lock up my handsome ornaments for the future when I have a *contadina* about the house."

"As for that, Sora Nina," said Lorenzo, "can you tell me how she could expect to wear such things without being asked how she came by them, or of what use they would be to a girl like her? and it is not the first time, nor yet the

second, that she has been in houses where gold and silver, ay, and jewels too, were to be seen in plenty, and those that trusted her never found cause to repent it."

"There is no use in talking about it any more, Lorenzo," said she, "and you may thank your stars that it has passed over so quietly."

"But I will talk about it!" said Lorenzo, his temper now fully roused by her contemptuous manner, "and hear how it happened, too."

"Then hear it from others, not from me," she said, flouncing out of the kitchen in a rage; "I wash my hands of it and you."

"Come, Lorenzo," said the farmer, "and I will show you where it occurred, and answer cheerfully as many questions as you like."

Nina's story was accordingly repeated to him as we went upstairs; how she had put the ornaments on Sunday night into the great oaken chest outside Ginevra's room, and going to it on Monday morning found them gone.

"There it is," said Vincenzo, pointing to the massive sarcophagus, before which the despairing father knelt down, while the farmer, his son, the two girls and I looked on, some in sympathy, some in curiosity. Suddenly we heard a rapturous exclamation from him, and thought the poor man's senses had given way under his misfortune.

"Praise be to Providence and all the saints! My little girl is cleared!"

Then, staggering to his feet with a sudden joy

illuminating his haggard, unshaven face, he pointed his forefinger to the chest and turned to us all. "Look at it!" he said, "but do not touch it! Let all the world see it! Oh, blessed creature of the good Creator, not one of your kind shall be harmed by me again, and I swear to cherish you henceforward as my own kith and kin!"

We looked where he pointed, and there, from the overhanging cornice of the lid of the great chest, to one of the curved pilasters at its corner, was expanded, in untouched filmy perfection, a venerable *spider's web!*

No other proof was needed of the falsity of Nina's story, for Solomon's seal itself could have as little been broken and restored since yestermorn, as that fine, frail tissue of gossamer!

I now took the farmer aside and told him gently what I had seen of his wife's movements, proving that she alone had planned and executed the vile plot against the poor girl who had excited her jealousy, on behalf of her son. I do not think Vincenzo was as much surprised as we were; such revelations are not always quite unexpected to the immediate family of the culprit. Nina, however, persisted in denial, and took refuge at last in obstinate silence.

It may be imagined that Lorenzo Giuliani lost no time in hastening home, and when Vincenzo and Andrino declared their intention of accompanying him, I could not resist the pleasure of being of the party. We flung ourselves headlong down the

deep descent, but the valley seemed long, and the way tedious through the interminable chestnut woods; though it was still early when we arrived at the Casa Morgante on the banks of the Lima. Ginevra was at work hackling hemp before the door, as we ascended the grass-grown steps of the grey old villa, and her face, which seemed to have shrunk since yesterday like a waning moon, and the large dark rings round her eyes, showed that she had shed many bitter tears since she had left the farm.

I am not sure but that she thought at first we had come to take her to prison, for she looked half scared as we approached, and the good news, when it was told, was almost too much for her after all she had gone through. When Sor Vincenzo then turned to her father, and said, the only compensation he could make for the wrong she had suffered, was to ask her hand in marriage for his son, "Particularly," he added with a smile, "as Andrino has made up his mind about it long ago," she burst into tears and ran away. She soon came back, however, all shy smiles and sunshine; and when Vincenzo and I returned to Tereglio, we left Andrino behind to enjoy a long holiday of courtship in the old garden, where Lorenzo's lemons were ripening their fairy gold on a southern wall, and hollyhocks and asters, and frail monthly roses, made a blaze of autumn glory in the October sun. The hard-worked mother, too, and the little brothers and sisters, had to take in all at once the wonder-

ful intelligence that Ginevra was not only cleared of all suspicion, but was also advanced to the dignity of *sposa*, with the future glory of a farm of her own in store for her.

If her meek little heart could feel a thrill of pride, I think it must have been when her uncle in America, on hearing of her engagement, sent home a goodly sum of money to purchase her outfit, and she found that she was not to go to her husband's home like a poor peasant girl, but with all the appurtenances of a well-to-do rustic bride. Not even the miller's Ghita, whose preparations had been the envy of the whole country-side, went forth with a better stocked marriage-chest—with fuller plenishing of fine homespun linen, of delicate embroided kerchiefs, of stout woollen stuffs, red and blue, ay, and of solid gold clasps and circlets too—than the little *contadina* of Casa Morgante.

I do not think Sora Nina profited much by the lesson she had received, for she seemed as hard and stiff-necked as before, and could never be brought to see the enormity of what she had done. She pretended for a long time to be ignorant of what was going on, but had to yield to circumstances in the end, and prepare to receive her daughter-in-law with as good grace as she might.

Nevertheless I do not think Ginevra's position was altogether a comfortable one during the first months of her married life, until her activity, sense, and usefulness were recognised by Sora Nina, who, thoroughly capable herself, and proud of her capa-

city, respected nothing so much as the same quality in others.

But Ginevra can never tell her children the story of the oaken chest, for it would alienate them for ever from their grandmamma.

E. M. CLERKE.

THE LAY FIGURE.

UPON one of my trips to Paris—and I am rather partial to running over there occasionally, as refreshing to both my eye and hand (for I am an artist, a painter of "genre" pictures, my subjects generally in fashionable life.) Upon one of these excursions I chanced to be in the neighbourhood of Mont St. Genevieve, in a long narrow lane going down-hill and occupied on both sides of the way by *bric-à-brac* shops and second-hand furniture dealers.

There were many articles I should have been glad to possess, such as carved cabinets and other furniture of the fifteenth century which had found their way to these curiosity-mongers from many old houses and châteaux ransacked by the Prussians; but, even could I have given the prices demanded for them, I should have found their weight incommodious and expensive for transit to England. All at once my glance chanced to fall on a lay figure exposed for sale—a very beautiful lay figure too, a female. It arrested me on the spot. The master and mistress of the shop immediately advanced,

inviting me to enter and inspect it, assuring me it was in perfect condition, and if I would take it I should have it at a bargain. "Cent vingt francs!" Five pounds! It was wonderful, a bargain indeed, if unbroken. Why, I had paid five-and-twenty pounds for mine at home, in every respect inferior to this. So I entered the shop and made a minute examination. The lay figure was tied up to the side wall with a strong cord, and it took some little time to unfasten it. The formation was perfect, quite a work of art, for it was a model of a beautiful woman of exquisite proportions cased in a fine elastic silk skin. All the joints worked well in their sockets, as easily as if recently oiled. The head turned gracefully on its slight neck, and its long, soft, black hair was worked into a scalp as only French hands could work it. The face was oval, of a fine enamelled surface, painted a pale creamy tint; the eyes were brown and different from any I had ever seen in lay figures, of glass like a doll's.

Here was a chance, a bargain indeed! I pulled out my purse to examine its contents. Alas! I found it seven francs deficient. I counted it again, and felt in my pockets, the dealer watching me. "N'importe," said the man, smiling with great *bonhomie*. "Monsieur is artiste-peintre; cela suffit; I have a great respect for his profession: he shall have it for his money." Wonderful! A Frenchman to be so liberal! Generally I found them rather difficult to treat with, but here was an excep-

tion. Now another obstacle presented itself. If I gave him the whole contents of my purse, how could I pay the fiacre in which I proposed to carry home my purchase? I demurred again. My generous dealer held up both his hands. "Pardon, was it not the duty of the seller to convey his goods to the purchaser? If Monsieur would wait two seconds, the boy Henri should wheel it on a truck to Monsieur's hotel." Here, then, we came to a settlement at last, and I emptied the contents of my purse into his hand, at which proceeding he smiled and made me a polite bow. The lay figure wore a loose grey linen wrapper; it was now carefully packed up in green baize and placed upon the truck wheeled by Henri, a lad of about fifteen. The dealer took off his cap and bowed to me as we parted; Madame made me a French bend, with a sweet "Adieu, Monsieur." Alas for the deceitfulness of Parisians! Happening to glance in a looking-glass at the door, I saw reflected therein the dealer winking his eye and Madame laughing derisively. Could it possibly be at *me?* Was I cheated? No. I had minutely examined my purchase; I suppose they were only indulging in a little spleen at "perfide Albion."

I lodged in the Rue de la Paix, so that it was rather a long distance for Henri to wheel the truck, I walking on the footpath, he beside me on the *pavé;* and all went well until we reached the Rue de Rivoli, when, without any previous notice, off rolled the lay figure at the feet of two sisters of St.

Joseph who were just crossing the road. Of course this caused an obstruction : carriages had to draw up, *sergents de ville* pounced down upon us, and, amid rather strong language and some laughter, the figure was readjusted and securely tied this time. " Monsieur is taking home his bride," cried a soldier.

On arriving at the door of my hotel the old concierge appeared horror-stricken ; she fancied there had been an accident. She was not much reassured on seeing my purchase unrolled—it was so exactly like a woman. It was unpacked in the yard, as the boy had to take back the baize with him. I ran up to my room to find him a few sous, and for these he was so grateful that he came up to me whispering confidentially, " Monsieur, excusez—but—keep your studio door locked at night ! " and ran away. No fear of having it stolen in London, thought I, but in Paris no doubt it might happen.

I then proceeded to carry my purchase up three flights of stairs to my rooms, taking it in my arms as I should have done a living person. It was heavy, of course, but so beautiful in its mechanism that it bent easily into a sitting position. I had placed its arms over my shoulders : they felt almost as soft as a woman's ; in my imagination they really appeared to press me, as if about to meet around my neck—an absurd fancy, of course. I put it down on the landing-place while I took the key from the lock on opening the door. Now, my impression was that I had placed the figure on its side, and I must confess

I felt a little surprised to find it turned over, lying on its back. "If it should be badly balanced and apt to roll over," I thought, "it will not prove such a bargain as I expected." In a day or two I was going home, and, as November days were short, there was little time to lose; therefore I went out immediately to buy a large packing-case for my purchase. An oblong-shaped box would never do, being too suggestive of a coffin, and likely to cause a fuss at the railway station. I was fortunate enough to find a square one ready labelled "Objets d'Art." As the figure was so flexible, it could be easily doubled in half, and so travel without exciting remark.

It was evening when I returned to my rooms. I had dined, and found the wine unusually good; but I deny having taken too much. As I ascended the stairs I was startled by hearing a smothered laugh —a peculiar laugh, a very unnatural and unpleasant one. I paused to listen. The rooms immediately under mine were occupied by a comtesse, a *dévote*; she had priests and nuns everlastingly coming to see her—a great amount of praying and not much laughter, I should imagine. All remaining quiet, I ascended the next flight, entered the room, and lighted the bougies. The lay figure sat exactly the same as I had left it; but let me advise people never to buy one with glass eyes; it really was a most unpleasant sensation to see them shining and glittering in that large half-illumined room; they appeared to be following all my movements, and I was silly enough

to dislike them so much as to throw the table-cover over the head and so shut them out. The following morning the packing-case arrived, the carpenter staying to assist me in placing the figure within it and to nail down the lid. The silly fellow appeared quite frightened, declaring it seemed half alive; but ignorant people are so superstitious. Another four-and-twenty hours saw me on the Chemin de Fer du Nord, homeward bound, my packing-case in the luggage van. The longest halt was at Amiens, where I alighted for a cup of coffee. Judge of my astonishment, on returning to the train, to find guards, porters, and soldiers hauling the contents of the luggage van out upon the platform—boxes, trunks, portmanteaux, pell-mell, one thing upon another—all the assistants talking at once, all in a state of excitement! What was the matter? Was there an accident? I got no answer. After completely emptying the van they examined its interior very carefully; then, amidst much swearing, they pitched everything back again in still greater haste, for fear of being behind time. I remember they were particularly abusive to the man who rode in the luggage department, who looked as white as a sheet.

"What's wrong with that man?" I asked, "is he ill?"

"No, monsieur," answered the guard; "he is only a fool. He declares that all the way from Paris there has been a groaning and knocking as if somebody were hidden behind or *in* one of the

boxes. Fool!" Here he slammed to the carriage door, and off we went at great speed to make up for the minute or two that had been lost.

Arriving at Boulogne, I and my luggage went on board the steamer at once; and a very bad, rough passage it was. Of course one does not expect the sea to be like a mill-pond in the month of November. On this occasion it was of a leaden-coloured hue, with larger waves than I had ever seen in the channel, and we made very little progress, one or the other of the paddles being always out of water. "Never see'd anything like it," said the steward, "except when we've got a dead body on board!" At last we reached Dover, and I do not think I ever felt so ill in my life—so giddy and faint that I determined to stay the night instead of proceeding to London.

The night was so cold, wet, and stormy, that I entered the first haven of rest, the "Lord Warden," or I should have proceeded to an hotel more in accordance with my means. My luggage was placed in a lobby at a side door which opened to a yard beside the railway platform, in readiness for my departure the next morning, and I went to bed and soon fell asleep. I think I must have slept for about four hours, when I was aroused by the sound of many feet running under my window. At first I thought little of it, but presently the occupier of a room adjoining mine threw up his window, and called out to those below, asking what was the matter.

"We think there's a haccident on the line, sir," was the answer.

Imitating my neighbour's example, I also raised my sash and took a survey of the scene underneath, where much confusion prevailed. It was the yard close to the station, for through an archway I saw the line, where porters and others appeared very busy among the empty carriages with lanterns; men were hurrying to and fro, talking excitedly.

"What is it?" I called out in my turn.

"When the last train come in, sir, we're feared it run over somebody; the crying and groaning is hawful now and then—there! don't you hear un?" replied a servant of the hotel. I listened, the wind every moment blowing in great gusts from the sea. But there were also short spasmodic cries, at no very great distance, as if from some one in pain.

"Here comes the station master!" said the man, as that official, who had been knocked up from his sleep, made his appearance.

"Who is hurt? Where—what is it?" cried he, all on the alert.

"We can't make out, sir," was the reply. "After the last train come in we heard smothered cries like, and we've all been looking on the line with lights, but can't see nothing."

"Just listen, sir," exclaimed another.

"Poor creature—somebody's got jammed," said the station master as a long wail was presently heard. "Here—bear a hand—run the carriages

down the metals—get the ambulance ready close by—give me a lantern—come with me!" and the good man sprang off the platform on to the line with alacrity. What followed I could not make out, for everybody disappeared; my neighbour grumbled about false alarms and being disturbed, closed his window with a bang, and went to bed again, I presume, as I soon after heard him snoring.

In about half an hour the domestics from the hotel re-entered the yard, and I called out, asking if they had found the poor creature.

"We've not found nobody nor nothing," answered a man. "Blest if any one knows who's hurt!"

"The crying an' groaning's stopped now, sir," said another. "You see the night-time is agin' us: we shall find out something dreadful at daybreak, depend on that."

But nothing was found out up to the time I left Dover, or afterwards either, so far as I heard, and I looked in the papers diligently to see if any mention of it were made.

The following morning there was much talk in the coffee room about the disturbance of the previous night; all those sleeping on my side of the house heard it.

"I think some one was playing a trick," said a waiter.

"If a hoax, who was the hoaxer?"

"Well, sir, just as I come in from the side door to the lobby where that there luggage of this here gent's is stowed—it was past two o'clock in the

morning then—I heard a smothered laugh like, as if some one was a-hiding behind the boxes and enjoying of the fun all to theirselves. I didn't see nobody; I was too tired to look, I can tell you; but take my word for it it was a hoax."

I reside with my mother in a villa at Kensington, and have a studio built out into the garden, very convenient for the entrance of frame-makers and models and for the egress of my pictures, as it is a door opening on to the road, quite private. At this door I was set down, my lay figure having come in its box on the top of the cab. How I longed to show it off to my brother artists!

"Whatever have you got in that great packing-case, George?" asked my mother. But I would not satisfy her, as I wished to give her a surprise.

What with relating Parisian news to her, and in return hearing the events that had happened in my absence, it was dark when we left the dining-room.

"And now, George, I want to see your purchase," said my mother.

I told Jane to bring a hammer and chisel; then entering my studio, I turned up the gas. After some little labour I got the lid off the case and lifted out the lay figure.

"Whatever is it?" exclaimed my mother, aghast.

"Ah-ah-a—!" screamed Jane.

"Don't be a fool!" I cried. "What are you screaming at?"

"Ah! ah-wha!" screamed Jane again, backing

up to the wall and standing with horrified, distended eyeballs fixed on the figure. "It's a woman, and she's alive! Look at her eyes!"

"You great silly!" I said angrily. "Don't you see it's a lay figure, like my old one in the corner there? You were never frightened at that."

"Oh, the old one is an innocent thing to what this is, sir. I'm sure she's alive."

"It's got glass eyes, like a doll, mother," I said. seeing that even she was looking at it askance. "Very unnecessary to put them, but it is a French freak, I suppose. Isn't it a beauty?" and to show off my purchase I screwed the head round on the neck.

"Ah-ah-a—!" screamed Jane again. "She's a-frowning—frowning awful at you, sir!"

"Jane," said I sternly, "leave the room this instant."

"What a foolish young woman she is, to be sure!" I observed as she scudded away.

"Well, to say the truth, George," replied my mother, putting on her glasses and peering into my lay figure's cream-coloured face, "I do not like the look of it myself. It's too beautifully made, too natural and like a real woman; unnecessarily so, I should say. Let us go away and leave it. See how the eyes seem staring at your old figure there in the corner."

"I hope they won't fight," I said in joke as we left the room, and I locked the studio door.

In the middle of the night we were aroused by the

noise of something falling down in the painting-room. My mother got up and came to my chamber all in a tremble. "My dear," she said, "I am afraid your new figure has fallen down. I do not think it can be housebreakers."

"All is quiet now, mother," I replied, listening. "I'm afraid that lay figure is not well balanced; it turned over once before. However, I shan't get up in the cold unless I hear more noises. We shall see what it is in the morning."

On entering the studio next day, there sat the figure as I had left it—but such a strange thing! My old battered English figure, which I had used for these twelve years past, lay overturned on the floor, stand and all! It really seemed as if the words I had spoken in jest were verified, and that the two figures *had* quarrelled.

My artist friends were all delighted with my purchase, and without exception wanted to borrow it. The joints were twisted and turned about in every conceivable manner. The mechanism and flexibility were pronounced unsurpassable in their workmanship. I promised to lend it to each by turn, and commenced with it myself, attiring it in a black velvet dress and train trimmed with ermine, for a picture I was painting of Mary, Queen of Scots.

I do not think I ever executed drapery so well in my life as I did when painting from that figure; the folds fell and clung so beautifully around its graceful form. But neither my mother nor Jane could get over their great dislike to it; indeed,

Jane declined to enter the studio at all, and, if obliged to bring me a letter, poked the tray in at the door, with her eyes fixed on the lay figure as if expecting it to pounce upon her. As she was a most excellent servant in other respects, and had been with us some time, we were obliged to humour her whims; so of course my studio was not too tidy.

My mother about this time declared she heard footsteps walking about the studio in the small hours of the morning. As for me, I generally slept too soundly to hear anything, unless it were unusually startling.

Now it is a remarkable fact that, though I painted hour after hour, and day after day, from that lay figure, I never could see anything repulsive about it, as others did. My frame-maker, for instance—a worthy, respectable tradesman—was one of those who could not look at it. A young curate occasionally called upon me for local subscriptions; *he* named it "The Witch of Endor." Dr. Hollis, who attended my mother for her neuralgia, examining it, said its anatomy was perfect; and his son, Jack Hollis, declared he should like to dissect it.

In the meantime I had sold my old lay figure to an artist residing at Liverpool, and did not allow myself to become prejudiced, by people who knew nothing about art, against my new one. Having finished the black velvet dress, I removed the figure to a corner of my studio.

Miss Lucy Hollis, daughter of the above-men-

tioned medical gentleman, had kindly given me sittings for the beautiful and unfortunate Queen. She was a lovely, brilliant brunette, and a charming girl as well. When I invited her to sit for my picture, I was only very slightly acquainted with her, but after about seven sittings, of two hours each in duration, we began to feel as if we had known each other intimately all our lives. In fact, it led to her ultimately accepting an artist husband. But that was later on, and has nothing to do with the history of my Parisian lay figure. On one occasion when Lucy was giving me a sitting, I was engaged in taking the measure of her pretty hand; I was scarcely aware of it, but perhaps I might have held it a trifle longer than was needful, when we were all startled by a deep, long-drawn sigh. "Good gracious!" cried Lucy, starting up, "whatever was that?"

"Was it not you, dear?" said my mother, who was seated near the fire knitting, looking up in surprise.

No, it was neither of us. I looked under the couches and other furniture, thinking that perhaps an animal might be asleep beneath one of them. No, there was nothing.

"How I do hate that horrid lay figure!" said my mother, shaking her knitting-needles at it.

Now comes a very strange part of my story. Early the next morning, as I was dressing preparatory to going down to breakfast, Jane came to my door, asking me to step into my mother's room, who appeared very ill.

"My dear mother," I cried, "what is the matter?" as I hurried in to her, to find her still in bed, looking very pale, faint, and ill.

"Shut the door, dear, and come here." I obeyed her. "My dearest George," she said, taking my hand, "I am sure that you love me, and that there are few things you would refuse me, for I have tried to be a tender parent to you, my dear boy."

"That is true," said I, stooping to kiss her cold brow and remembering her self-denial in my early life, when I would be an artist, and how she, a widow, had so economised that my masters should be of the best. "That is true, dearest mother; there are few things in which I could say you nay."

"I am about to make a serious request; it will entail a sacrifice on your part. I want you to get rid of that dreadful lay figure."

"Get rid of the lay figure? To be sure, easily enough. But why on earth should I get rid of it?" I exclaimed.

"Last night," continued my mother solemnly, "I awoke about three o'clock, I should imagine. My night light was burning as usual on the toilet table, when I saw my door, which you know I always leave ajar, slowly open and your lay figure enter. It advanced and stood at the side of the bed, looking at me in silence; but oh, George, the dreadful glitter of its eyes! They seemed to have a red flame behind them, and their expression was fiendish—fiendish! I was so overcome that I fainted. Destroy it, George, destroy it. Mark my words:

it is a demon!" My mother lay down again, quite overcome and trembling violently. She alarmed me, for ordinarily she was a person of good sense and not given to nervousness. That she had been much frightened was plain; but might she not have dreamt it? I wiped her damp forehead with my handkerchief.

"Dear boy," she continued, holding my hand, "do you remember me shaking my knitting-needles at it yesterday and calling it a "horrid thing?" Oh! I cannot rest with it in the house! George, did you lock your studio last night?"

I tried to remember, but could not recall whether I had done so or not—my head, you see, was occupied at that time by thinking of Lucy Hollis—so I ran down-stairs to see. No. Strange to say, I had *not* locked my studio door; in fact, it was partly open! I hurried into the room, but there was my lay figure in the corner, just as it was yesterday. I examined the black velvet drapery, which I had carefully pinned and arranged to paint from; it appeared to be undisturbed. My mother must have been dreaming. Still I could not retain the figure if it worried her, that was clear. It was vexatious, however, to part with such an acquisition, and be left without any figure at all for my use; it had been foolish of me to sell my old one; it was inconvenient and unpleasant. Yes, the figure must be sent out of the house, as it preyed on my mother's nerves. But I need not sell it at present; I would lend it about to my artist friends, who had been so

anxious to borrow it. So I wrote a line telling O'Kelly that I would lend it to him first, if he would come and fetch it. O'Kelly was of course an Irishman : he had studied beside me at the academy, and become a friend, always good-natured and pleasant, but rather too lively, being partial to playing silly practical jokes. He had private property, and took his profession easily, residing in handsome apartments in Harley Street, Cavendish Square. I had no doubt that if I ultimately made up my mind to sell my lay figure I should find a purchaser in him. He came over to Kensington directly he received my note, only too glad to get the loan of it. "You may as well leave on the black velvet dress, old fellow. I'm painting the last days of Sir Thomas More, and it will do for Margaret Roper."

"Very well," I said ; "only please to remember I've hired that dress of Levi Zerubbabel, and left a ten-pounds deposit on it."

"All right," said O'Kelly. We then rolled the figure up in a damask curtain, and he drove away with it in a four-wheeler with great glee.

My poor mother watched the departure from her bedroom window ; she thanked me most affectionately for acceding to her request. She had certainly had a great shake in some way or other, though I could not reconcile her story with common sense. At any rate from that moment she began to get better, and Jane was as brisk as a bee, even asking my permission to give the studio a good cleaning, which in her reluctance to enter it

had not received for some time. Everybody was satisfied except myself, who was left without anything to pose my drapery upon. I even wished for my old lay figure back again, clumsy though it was. Thereby hangs a moral: "Do not part with a tried friend who has grown old and shabby for an unknown showy one."

In the course of a few days I received a note from O'Kelly. He was painting in a very satisfactory manner, he said, from "Madame," as he called her; but his postscript rather puzzled me; it ran thus: "Do you think that lay figure is all right?"

What on earth did he mean? It was neither broken nor out of condition. Could it be that there really was something queer about it? My curiosity did not allow me to rest, so I drove over to Harley Street to see about it that same evening. My friend was at home, and smoking his everlasting meerschaum beside a splendid fire in the spacious drawing-room, which he made his painting-room. The lay figure, posed in a graceful attitude, stood in the centre of the apartment. O'Kelly was delighted to see me, bringing out his decanters with Irish hospitality.

"Your postscript about that figure brings me here, O'Kelly," said I.

"Did it surprise you, old boy? I'm glad you've come, any way; and Madame's pleased herself, bedad! I believe she's smiling at ye!" pointing to the figure with his pipe.

"Nonsense, O'Kelly!" I said, frowning. "I will not listen to any chaff; I am in earnest. What did you mean in your postscript? Is the figure broken?"

For reply O'Kelly got up, crossed the spacious room stealthily, opened the door noiselessly, and peeped out. Seeing the coast was clear, he returned in the same mysterious manner to his seat.

"Well, George, this is just the gist of the matter. My landlady, Mrs. Munro, is a Scotchwoman; to look at, she seems a plain, matter-of-fact body enough, but in reality she is as superstitious as the old jintleman himself. She is, sure! Unfortunately she saw me bring Madame home. She declared it was a lady, and alive. Of course I convinced her to the contrary, but she's never let me have a moment's peace since. What do you think? She will have it"—whispering—"that Madame walks about the house of a night!"

I cannot express how astonished I felt at having my mother's statement thus corroborated.

"Yes," continued O'Kelly, "she says she hears Madame walking about this room, and come up-stairs in the small hours of the mornings, and then descend again. Once she fancied in her sleep she saw her come into her room and stand at the foot of the bed. Twice she has opened her door, thinking to catch the figure as it passed. She did not see anything, but heard the footsteps going downstairs, and a horrid, wicked, smothered laugh, as if some one were enjoying her discomfiture. She

then hears this drawing-room door close. Strange, isn't it?"

"Why do you not lock the drawing-room door of a night?" I asked, remembering a similar laugh I had myself heard at the hôtel in the Rue de la Paix.

"There's niver a key," replied O'Kelly. "Bless ye! We're like a family party in this house; there's no occasion to lock up. What I fear is that Mrs. Munro will give me notice to quit unless I give up madame there. I'm so comfortable here that I don't want to leave, and that's a fact." And he took a long, melancholy pull at his pipe.

I was in a brown study: what could I say?

"If I were in your place, O'Kelly, I would finish off Margaret Roper's gown directly, and then let Daubrey have the figure, I promised him the loan of it after you."

"Well, if it must be it must; but it's really sorry I am!" sighed O'Kelly.

Now Daubrey was a fashionable portrait painter, always talking of the lovely countesses and marchionesses he was "doing." He was a great fop, but a nice fellow on the whole, and was only too delighted to receive "madame," black velvet dress and all, for he was going to "do" a dowager. Daubrey lived in Albion Street, Hyde Park, and thither the figure was speedily transferred. Just at that time he was absent on a visit to a country house. He was an agreeable, gay little fellow, singing drawing-room comic songs very well, full of

anecdote and conversation, which portrait painters often excel in. These items ensured him plenty of invitations in the winter time.

My mother and I, though living very quietly, occasionally entertained our friends at a small dinner or evening party, and always had a little dance on my birthday, the 6th of February. This year it was intended to be a very pleasant *réunion*, for sweet Lucy Hollis, with her father and brother, were to be of the guests. We had a cheerful fire in the studio; it was wretchedly cold weather, and the snow lay deep. The studio was to be the ball-room, and I decorated it tastefully with evergreens, artificial flowers, and a flag or two. I hired an Erard, and engaged a pianoforte player and a violinist to play for the dancing. It proved a very bad night: the atmosphere was raw and foggy; then it rained, converting the snow into a deep, muddy slush. This did not much signify, most of the company, with the exception of O'Kelly, resided within easy access of us. We had a delightful evening indoors; everybody came. My mother seemed to have recovered her spirits, and was quite herself again. Refreshments had been handed round, and we were in the middle of the lancers, the time being about half-past ten o'clock, when we heard several knocks at the side door of the studio, which, as I previously described, gave egress to the road. Thinking it was some mischievous boys, attracted by the brilliant light from the large windows, no attention was paid to it; the dancing con-

tinued. Presently the rapping recommenced, louder and more peremptorily. As I did not care to have the door unfastened and opened unnecessarily to let in the cold night air, I told Jane to go to the hall door and call out, "Who's there?" and ask what they wanted. Jane went, but, as there was no reply, we again set the interruption down to some mischievous persons, and finished the set of lancers.

Whether it was the comparative quiet that made the knocking seem louder, or whether it really was louder, I know not, but several violent raps were now heard on the panels, accompanied by sobs and sharp spasmodic cries. Of course we were all silenced. "Who's there? What do you want?" I called out from my side of the door. There was no answer, only sobbing.

"Some one had better go round outside and see who is there," said my mother. "Doubtless it is some poor houseless creature attracted by the lights and sounds of gaiety." But now authoritative hammering, accompanied by the loud voice of a man, was heard.

"Open the door directly: I'm a policeman."

Of course I unbolted the door directly, and was almost knocked down by a tall female form which fell upon me, and from me to the floor with a crash. I stooped to raise what appeared to be a mass of wet black velvet. To my dismay and utter astonishment I lifted my French lay figure!

"That poor thing's been a-crying and knocking

at your door ever so long. I think she's fainted at last," said the policeman.

"It's no poor thing at all!" I replied indignantly, turning the figure over on the floor with my foot, its glass eyes wide open and glistening in the light most unpleasantly as it lay on its back. "Somebody has been playing a senseless trick. This is a lay figure—a life-sized doll, that is, such as artists dress in drapery to paint from."

"Don't tell me," said the intelligent officer; "that there's a lady."

"Come in, then, and judge for yourself; only *do* shut the door and keep the night air out," said I. The man then entered, and holding his bull's eye close to the cream-coloured face, examined it, and seemed puzzled and scared.

"This is one of your jokes," I said to O'Kelly indignantly, "a very silly one; and let me tell you I consider it extremely bad taste as well."

O'Kelly strenuously denied all knowledge of the affair. I did not believe him.

"This pore thing's walked," said the policeman, who was going on with his examination. "Look at her stockings; look at the mud over her feet, no boots on; and what draggled skirts!"

We had all assembled round the recumbent figure, some holding candles, a merry party no longer, for this unexpected adventure had caused an uncomfortable break in our amusements and raised much curiosity.

"Look here," said the policeman, holding up the

velvet train, lined with what was once white fur; "I declare it's all bedraggled with mud and soaked with snow-water a yard deep. The pore thing's walked."

"What an obstinate man you are, to be sure!" cried I. "How can a wooden dummy walk?" and I began twisting the hands and feet about to prove my words.

"Well, I never could have believed anything could have been a-manufactured so natural-like—never!" said the policeman, who looked quite bewildered. "Any way she was a-standin' agin' the door, and I could have swore she was a-knocking and a-crying to be let in; only, you see, ladies and gents, if she's only a image she couldn't have done it; and you were making such a noise with music and dancing. I suppose I was mistaken."

"This is a shameful practical joke, Mr. O'Kelly," said I once more to the puzzled Irishman, who stood staring at the lay figure, from which the mud and rain still oozed off on to the floor. "You say you did not plan it, but no doubt you can give a good guess at who did. A shameful trick, especially as you were aware that I left ten pounds with Zerubbabel for a deposit on the velvet dress, which is quite spoilt."

"I'll pay the ten pounds, or twenty if you like," cried O'Kelly earnestly; "but, on the honour of a jintleman, I've had no more to do with it than you have had yourself."

"Now, my good man," said I to the policeman,

"if you have quite made up your mind that this is not a human being, perhaps you will be so good as to carry it round by the garden to the tool house by the side of the conservatory; then go to the kitchen and have some hot toddy and something to eat."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said the officer, taking the wet lay figure in his arms. "The cleverness and hingenueity of the present day is allowed to be surprisin', but this here figur caps Dolly!"

Though this speech of the policeman had the effect of raising our spirits a little, the whole episode threw a cloud over our enjoyment, and truly glad we were when supper was announced. My mother looked very pale; there was something so weird and unaccountable about the figure, in her opinion, that it unnerved her. Of course this joke of Daubrey's, as it was now set down to be, although he was not the kind of person to play jokes, was the one topic of conversation. O'Kelly, strange to say, had suddenly lost all his animation and become plunged in a brown study. Our party soon broke up; all took their departure save Dr. Hollis, his son, and O'Kelly, who remained at my whispered request, for it had occurred to me that as the lay figure must be thoroughly spoilt by the soaking it had received it was worthless, and we would *dissect* it, as once proposed by Jack Hollis, and find out of what it was composed.

Informing my mother that we were going to have a cigar, we withdrew, and when the house was per-

fectly quiet repaired to the tool-house and commenced undressing the figure. The dress was like a wet sponge, the outer silk and stocking-like skin the same. This we cut off with much trouble. Underneath was firm padding, formed exactly to the shape ; the principal muscles of the human body being imitated with wonderful accuracy. We tore off these paddings. What was this fine framework supporting it underneath? Nothing more or less than a *human skeleton!*

Even Dr. Hollis himself was appalled by such a discovery. It was a small-boned, exquisitely proportioned skeleton of a female. By some process known to the ingenious manufacturer it had been "vulcanised," and rendered of the consistence of iron. The joints were most beautifully substituted by wheels and sockets formed of fine steel and brass, resembling the work of a watchmaker, turning with ease in exact reproduction of a living person. The time, the toil, the ingenuity and patience this model —for such it was—must have taken to become what it was, was incredible. And for what purpose? The face, so finely enamelled, was the original cranium, upon which the scalp with the long black hair remained—the hair I had admired for being, as I thought, so artistically worked in! It was horrible. Had this work been done during the long months of the siege of Paris as an amusement or revenge? Had these bones belonged to a victim or a criminal? I shuddered. What demonology would explain such a mystery? Whence had my Parisian dealer

obtained it? That he knew well enough there was something sinister pertaining to the lay figure, as he called it, I was now certain, recalling the manner in which it had been corded to the wall, his jeering expression of face, and again the recommendation of the boy Henri to keep the studio door locked. Had a demon possessed it?

Dr. Hollis placed the head and bones, all now separated, in a box, and he and his son carried it away with them to his surgery. He afterwards arranged with the sexton of a neighbouring cemetery to bury it in a corner of consecrated ground. The exquisite steel and brass joints were all thrown into the Thames from Hammersmith suspension bridge. The padding was burnt by myself and O'Kelly in the tool-house before we separated the next morning.

We could not have taken more care had we been criminals bent on getting rid of a corpse.

THE COUNT OF ROCHMONT.

CHAPTER I.

In 1793–4 the great French Revolution approached its climax. The young Comte De Rochmont, up to the date at which this narrative commences, had enjoyed comparative immunity from the attacks of the revolutionists. He was well known to belong to the party of progress, represented by Mirabeau, and besides he was a distant relation of one of the judges of the High Tribunal of Justice, of which Fouquier-Tinville was the directing spirit. When, however, the reign of terror set in nobody was safe, not even a relation of the great leaders, for no leader was himself safe, as one after another the revolution swallowed up its own children.

Rochmont had two great estates, one at Lyons, and the other the Château de Rochmont, which was the cradle of his family. He usually resided at La Ferette, near Lyons, and considered his château in Provence rather as a winter residence than as his home, although the extensive vineyards which surrounded the old southern château produced the larger portion of his wealth.

During the progress of the revolution, he had conformed to the spirit of the times by dropping his title and reducing his establishment to that of a simple citizen, yet without sending adrift any of his old servants. He had discharged grooms, sold horses, put down carriages, given up liveries, and sent two old servants of the family to Rochmont under pretence of working his vineyards, but really to keep them out of the way until times should mend. The names of these servants were Jean and Françoise Solliers, and they were husband and wife.

At La Ferette he still kept his old butler, Marius Faucier, who, out of pure devotion to his master, was content not only to be called citizen, but also to attend meetings of the Jacobin club, solely, however, with a view to gain information for his master's safety. This man was of the old style of honest, loving, devoted dependents. Born and bred in the family, he felt himself one of its members in a humble way, nor did he desire anything better than to die at his post. It would have been better for the Count if, as prudence suggested, he had stopped here, but having been brought up in habits of luxury and refinement, he could not bring himself to give up one other servant, a Swiss valet, by name Collot Fournier. He was the less inclined so to do because Collot was a distant relation of the celebrated Collot D'Herbois, and might be expected to throw the shield of his name over a much suspected aristocrat: but on the other hand

he thoroughly distrusted the character of the man, and made a practice of concealing from him all his most private movements. No more fatal course could have been adopted, nor any means taken more certain to develop the evil tendency of a mind given to intrigue. Collot naturally felt hurt at his master's reserve, as well as goaded on to pry into matters whose very concealment gave them an air of mystery, at a time when mystery meant treason, and treason meant the guillotine.

That celebrated and sanguinary villain known to history under the name of Collot d'Herbois, had once been an actor and had been hissed off the stage at Lyons. When in the course of strange revolutionary events he was appointed by Robespierre Chief of the Revolutionary Committee, he thirsted for vengeance upon the poor Lyonnais, and got sent down to Lyons with a commission to purify the country. This he did by murdering about sixteen thousand of the people. The guillotine was not equal to the work, so he called in the soldiers and had the people shot down by hundreds at a time in the public streets.

Some time before the advent of this wretch, De Rochmont had sent away from La Ferette all his portable wealth. Very secretly, of course, but not so secretly as to avoid the observation of his valet, Collot Fournier, who took the very first opportunity after the arrival of his relation, Collot d'Herbois, to communicate the fact to him. D'Herbois expressed his intention of dealing sharply with De Rochmont

at one of the Jacobin reunions which Marius, the faithful butler, attended, who in his turn rushed home to his master, told him of his pressing danger, and advised instant flight. Together they talked the matter over, and finally decided that the best course would be for De Rochmont to go down south, taking the valet with him, and leaving Marius to do his best at La Ferette alone. Before dawn this plan was carried out. Collot was called out of bed, and under the eye of Marius, who never for a moment left him, packed his master's trunks, helped Marius to put them into a country carriage, and, driven by an old coachman, started with his master for le Château De Rochmont, without having had the opportunity of communicating with the tyrant d'Herbois. So far, so good; but, after all, the situation was almost desperate. It would require all the pilotage of one who knew rocks, shoals, and currents, to travel south in such company without shipwreck. In his great perplexity De Rochmont changed entirely his system with his valet. He made him his confidant; told him he was going to Provence to hide his treasure, and asked his friendly assistance with promises of future reward. Collot appeared delighted. On the road he most effectually screened the Count, and by dint of immense exertions got the party safely down to Provence.

He, too, was playing his game. He was not for an instant deceived by the change of manner of his master, nor did he intend that he should escape,

but his first object was to ascertain the extent of the treasure, and his next to be quite sure of the place of concealment.

Before leaving, De Rochmont had provided himself with a large iron safe, and tin cases which could be sealed up so as to resist damp; these he confided to the care of Collot, telling him that the first was for gold, and the others for bank notes and family titles. Collot was content with this information, which he felt must be true, as to his certain knowledge the Count had taken with him, or sent on all his valuables, knowing that La Ferette would be searched as soon as Collot d'Herbois heard of his flight.

When they reached Marseilles, De Rochmont told Collot to go on alone, as he wished to visit an estate which he possessed on the confines of the Basses Alpes, at a village called Besse. He promised however to be at the Château within two days. Collot was not alarmed at this proceeding, as he remained in charge of the articles of value which they had together brought from La Ferette. But this visit leads me to go back a little in my narrative in order to explain the position of the Count, and his reasons for the visit.

At the time of our narration, De Rochmont was an orphan, having lost his parents some three years before. His mother's sister had been twice married, first to a nobleman and afterwards to a propriétaire near Besse, with whom she had become acquainted during her visits to her sister. This second marriage

had always been considered by the Comtesse De Rochmont as a *mésalliance* and had stopped their friendly intercourse, but the young Count had not been forbidden, when he hunted or shot over her estate at Besse, to visit his aunt.

There he met his fate in the shape of Marguerite Mourel, his own cousin, a very beautiful girl some three years his junior. His suit was encouraged by his aunt, who, as the great lady, controlled the family affairs of M. Mourel, although she was entirely excluded from his political and public life. He allowed her to do much as she pleased at home, on condition that she allowed him to do just as he liked abroad, and what he liked was the revolution, and what he did was to get elected a member of the great Convention, and ultimately was appointed a judge of the Revolutionary Tribunal. This last promotion killed his aristocratic wife, who went to join her sister and brother-in-law some six months after their decease.

It would have been quite useless for the heir of the De Rochmonts to open his heart to his parents, for nothing would have induced them to listen to his pleadings; they did not participate in his liberal political ideas, nor did they consider a mere propriétaire as belonging to their social caste, besides having a special horror of M. Mourel as a revolutionist of the first water. As for their niece, they had never seen her. She was not to them a relation, but rather a disgrace. After their death De Rochmont openly proposed an alliance, which M.

Mourel willingly accepted, considering his future son-in-law as suitable in every respect, and not being unwilling, despite his Citizen this and Citizen that, to join hands with the old blood.

This M. Mourel was not by any means a bad man. He had read and thought himself into the belief that the monarchy had been so abused by Louis XIV. and Louis XV. that its abolition had become a necessity, if France was ever to attain the freedom which was enjoyed by England. He had even decided deliberately that Louis XVI. would be better out of the way, even if it should be necessary to chop off his head, for in those days men had become dreadfully familiar with and fearless of death. But he had never approved the fanatic schemes of Marat, or contemplated without horror the course of those proconsuls or prefects, who had been sent from Paris to levy open war upon peaceful citizens at Lyons, Nantes, and other great towns. His appointment as Judge had been made and accepted rather with a view to putting a break upon the ferocious cruelty of Collot d'Herbois and Fouquier-Tinville, than as a personal promotion suitable to his instincts. He had done his best to save some noble men and women, too often, alas! without success, as well as to arrest the bloody course of his colleagues, until at last his one great wish and desire was to escape from a post which had ceased to offer any chance of saving life; but alas! escape was impossible, except by the road of the public executioner. So that he sat and suffered and did his

little best, unknown and unappreciated, only to reap the curses of posterity. Such men have been forgotten and passed over by history, but they existed nevertheless.

It was late at night when De Rochmont arrived at Besse. M. Mourel was away at Paris. Marguerite had been left alone, under the care of faithful servants, in an old-fashioned manorial residence, which belonged to De Rochmont, as being more secure from sudden attack than the country home of the propriétaire. There the lovers met; one single day was at their disposal, to-morrow they must part, very probably for ever, since neither could count upon their friends being or continuing in power. To-day it was the turn of De Rochmont to fly, to-morrow it might be that of M. Mourel. Under such circumstances heart speaks to heart, and quickly too, minds flash out to minds, ideas start from feverish brains, all the faculties are quickened —as when men are engaged in battle, and death snatches up the laggard.

As they walked together in the gardens which drop down to a lake, small indeed, but so deep that even in thirsty Provence it has never been known to dry up, they hammered out scheme after scheme, first for the safety of him who was more immediately menaced, and then for a re-union beyond the fangs of the revolutionary adder.

The Count told how his valet had played him false, how, even now, he held him, so to speak, by the throat; and asked his love to use her woman's wit

to suggest the wisest course. He said that the treasure must be hidden, but that he did not know how to conceal it from Collot, nor did he know how long he could count upon being unmolested at his château. At last the conversation proceeded in the following manner.

"Well, my own love and darling, I almost feel that we shall never meet again in this life; there is a presentiment of evil pressing upon my soul. Yet I will do my best as a man while I can. If I do not succeed in saving my own life, I will at least endeavour to secure your future comfort. These bloody times cannot last. Your father, whose good intentions are and must remain unknown, will soon fall, and you will inherit his opprobrium without his wealth. Now listen to me. I will indeed bury the iron safe, not filled with plate, but with stones, with some few articles of plate on the top to deceive Collot, at the spot marked on this plan, which I give you in case you should ever desire to throw seekers off the scent, and I will throw a tin case with a full statement of my history down the well marked also in the plan, in case you should ever wish to vindicate my memory. The iron safe must be seen by Collot, but I have two tin cases, one of which, empty, I will openly throw down a well in the presence of Collot, the other I will secretly drop into the well marked on this plan Here is my real wealth. This gold, this money, has been secretly got together during three years. To you I entrust it. It is, as you see, safely wrapped up and will

suffer no injury under water. Here now, with you present, I let it fall into this deep spring beside the lake. No one will ever suspect me of this, nor will I make any plan, or keep any document about me to tell the tale. Collot—all the world—will remember my hiding treasures at Le Château de Rochmont; nobody will dream that I leave them here with you."

Marguerite looked for a moment at the spring, into which, suiting the action to the words, the count had dropped the treasure, then turned to her lover and said: "Robert, you have done well, because you have thought of me and not of yourself. I rejoice that, even at the brink of the precipice over which we both hang, I feel more safe with you than other women might upon the broad road of success. I too fear that we shall never meet again alive, but I feel also that we are joined for all eternity—that we shall meet and live together for ever. But do not mistake me. That money is nothing to me. If you die, I die. If you live, I live. It is not suicide I threaten, nothing so foolish. But I will think of you as you have thought of me, I will be your companion in life and death. Don't ask me how or what I mean to do. You know that one decides and acts in these feverish times suddenly. Say no more about our troubles, let us forget the Revolution, and spend a few hours as if this home and this lake were as quiet and untroubled as in those happy days when a young sportsman used to come up here to pay a visit to his aunt and

—cousin. It will freshen up both our intellects to remove from them, if but for an hour, this terrible strain."

The evening passed pleasantly away, and at midnight the Count started for home, being desirous of avoiding the patriots, who at that time thronged the streets or lived in front of the cafés. He arrived safely, to the infinite contentment of Collot, who was unable to deal with his supposed treasure alone, being associated in its guardianship with the old coachman, who had also let Jean and Françoise Solliers into the secret. Collot had fully made up his mind to send a message to D'Herbois as soon as the treasure was buried, not at all with the intention of handing it over to his relation, but with the view to the arrest of De Rochmont, which event would, as he calculated, leave him in sole possession of the secret.

By direction of the master three large excavations were made by Jean Solliers for the purpose of planting trees, while Collot was privately instructed to make a fourth at a distant corner of the estate, which he was to keep secret from everybody. When this was completed all the servants were requested to attend their master during the night for the purpose of burying his plate and cash. This they did. Boxes were placed in the several excavations, and all but the Count and Collot had retired to rest. About two A.M. these two went forth again alone, first to a certain well which lies behind the great wine-cellar, and then to the hole which Collot had dug during

the afternoon. Into the well the Count threw a tin box, which he explained to Collot contained bank-bills and family titles; in the hole they buried an iron safe, the upper part of which Collot had been called to help pack with articles of heavy plate. By three o'clock in the morning all was finished, and by way of precaution De Rochmont suggested to Collot that in case anybody should be awake, it would be better for them to enter separately. The valet was to enter by the back door, and after a few minutes spent in observing if all was quiet, he was to open the front door to let his master in.

After Collot had gone the Count passed rapidly into a little court-yard behind the stables, where was situated the kitchen well, and into that he dropped another tin box, then went to the front door, and finding all quiet was let in and went to bed.

Next morning two persons were actively at work, as actively as if they had spent the whole night in bed, instead of working with pickaxe and shovel. One of them was on his road to the post-office with a dispatch for Collot d'Herbois, the other was packing his things for immediate flight.

De Rochmont never doubted for an instant that his valet had written to Lyons; the valet never suspected for an instant that his master was playing him false.

About eight o'clock the Count rang for his valet; his summons was answered by Jean, who informed him that Collot had gone out an hour ago, and had

not yet returned. This news almost drove the Count to despair. He had indeed expected to be arrested, but had reckoned that he had some twelve or fourteen hours to spare for his preparations. He did not know that Collot had delayed writing until the treasure was concealed, and so imagined that he had gone out to fetch the gendarmes. The return of Collot reassured him. Looking at his face he thought he read signs of expected rather than assured triumph, so going out with Jean, he left Collot to complete the packing which he had himself begun.

As soon as they were beyond earshot he turned to Jean and told him all about the villany of the valet, explained to him that the treasure (which, however, he allowed him to think had been really buried) would be lost and all their lives endangered, unless he could immediately leave the place.

"But if you leave Collot behind," said Jean Solliers, "he will be sure to steal the valuables."

"True enough, my faithful friend, but I intend to take Collot with me."

"How will the Seigneur manage that? I should think that Collot has no such intention."

"Probably not, but he would hardly like to resist me alone. His plan is to put a good face upon the matter until his friends arrive to arrest me. Traitors are always cowards. My plan is to leave this before they can come, and he will submit, thinking to return as soon as he has placed me in custody. Go you at once to the stables, saddle three horses,

prepare to go with us, and let Françoise keep the house with Old Jacques the coachman. Even the emissaries of D'Herbois will hardly molest a lone woman and an old man, and even if they did they would be no worse off than they are with us, for we should all be arrested together. I believe that when they find us flown they will pay no attention to them, but hurry after us."

"May I ask where you propose to go?"

"We must make a rush for the mountains with a view to reaching the Swiss frontier. But you may stay behind if you wish. I know that we are in a desperate position, and I don't want to force even so faithful a servant as Jean Solliers to run a race with death."

Poor Jean burst into tears, caught hold of his master's hand, kissed it fervently, and at last stammered out: "What! Could Monsieur Le Comte doubt the fidelity, the devotion of his poor servant Jean? Did he think that his question concerned his own poor life? Did he not know that to die at his side would be the crowning honour of his life—unless, indeed, he could die in his stead, which would be better still?"

"I never doubted you, worthy old friend," replied the Count. "I never began to doubt you, but I hold it a point of honour to give all men a fair choice, when the question is one of life or death. Now you have decided, so act quickly and quietly, and let us have no scene with dear old Françoise, or our purpose might leak out."

Entering the château, De Rochmont sought his chamber, where he found Collot, apparently busy packing, but so slowly, so unwillingly, that it was evident he was thinking how he could delay or defeat the journey.

"Make haste, Collot," said De Rochmont; "we must be off after *déjeuner*, and ride for our lives. It has transpired that I brought a treasure down here, and within a few hours certain patriot citizens will be here to look about. The marks of the spade are too recent to escape their observation; they will find us out and come either alone at night, or with the authorities to hunt for it. We must throw them off the scent by getting away at once. I am not quite stripped bare yet. In my pocket-book I have ten thousand francs, which will keep us until we can steal back to recover the hidden treasure. Leave me to finish these saddle-bags, and go you to get your own affairs together."

Collot was completely taken aback by this speech. If the neighbours did come his hopes were vanished. If the authorities came, they also would ruin him. Going slowly along the corridor, he tried to think out the situation, but it was too much for him, too changing for a definite decision. He saw that he must go, and perhaps it was for the best. On the way he could make arrangements for the Count's arrest, and then he could return at his leisure. Yes, he had better put a good face on the matter, and appear to fall into his master's views.

CHAPTER II.

Le Château De Rochmont is in many respects a curious building. It was originally a mere hunting box, but grew with the times, each member of the family adding a wing or a room, a stable or a barn, until at last it became what it now is. Yet not exactly, for in 1793 it bore evidence of belonging to a noble family, whose armorial bearings were carved in stone upon an arched entrance gate at the end of a grove of cypress trees, which still grow and flourish, whereas the gate has since disappeared, together with other buildings and embellishments, and the whole place seems to have passed through a sort of revolution, which has changed it into a wild and in some respects a desolate-looking dwelling. Its original defects still remain. It has no front entrance. A pair of huge wooden folding gates give entrance into a courtyard, upon which a massive oak door opens near the middle of the back façade. Inside this door there is a small hall with doors leading into the principal apartments, and into another and larger hall, which runs through to the terrace in front. Opposite the great folding gates are the stables, farmers' houses, and famous wine cellar, with its huge butts and wine presses, still in working order, but alas ! since the advent of the phylloxera, empty. The original stone, where ladies mounted their palfreys, still lies at the gates, but ladies no longer touch it with their gentle feet,

nor have done for many a long year, since it passed from the propriétaire (who bought it for a song at the sale of the forfeited estates of the attainted nobles) to other bourgeois who have grown rich upon its vintages. From this courtyard at noon precisely issued three horsemen, already known to the reader, while a woman held herself half concealed to bid them adieu, lest her weeping should attract the notice of the grooms.

As the travelers passed under the archway at the end of the cypress grove, they came suddenly upon a concealed party of mounted gendarmes, who closed upon them so quickly as to make resistance impossible. They were four in number, well mounted and thoroughly armed. The leader was a young officer, who seemed to be suffering from a severe cold, for his voice was thick and almost inaudible, while his face was so muffled up in a thick woollen comforter that only his eyes and the tips of his moustache were visible. It was probably on this account that the brigadier or sergeant took upon himself to effect the arrest. With a loud voice he exclaimed, "Robert, Comte De Rochmont, I arrest you and these your attendants in the name of the Republic, and command you to yield up your arms at the peril of your lives." De Rochmont hesitated an instant, and then with a look of mingled resignation and despair, drew his sword out of his scabbard, and approaching the officer handed it to him without a word. Collot tugged his pistols out of their holster and gave them

up with alacrity. Only Jean seemed disposed to resist, but at a look from his master, he also complied. The officer took the sword of De Rochmont with courtesy, then bending forward as if to make himself audible, asked, "Do you give me your parole not to attempt an escape?"

"I do," replied the Count.

"Then take back your sword; it is that of a brave man in adversity. I do but execute an unpleasant duty."

De Rochmont started; he recognised the voice. The officer saw his start and quickly added: "Ah, you remember me? Yes, I am Pierre Châteaunon, who fought with you against the Prussians on the Rhine; we will talk over old times on the road. Brigadier, use no unnecessary violence; we accept the parole of these prisoners, and prefer passing quietly along the road to making a disturbance."

Without any delay the party set forward, at first slowly, then at a smart gallop. The officer kept well in front, followed by De Rochmont; after him came the other prisoners, and the gendarmes formed the rear-guard. Avoiding all large thoroughfares and villages, they made for the mountains, choosing byways and communal roads. About four o'clock a halt was called to rest the tired horses. It was winter time and nearly dark. While they rested the officer, approaching De Rochmont, spoke a few words to him aside, then called his brigadier, and after giving his orders rode off alone.

At this time they were in the mountains round

Cahors, a wild district which is not yet civilized, and was then mostly a confused mass of rocks and forests, sparsely inhabited by labouring people and vinedressers, who were so far removed from public affairs and politics that they only gazed with curiosity as the cavalcade went by, without even asking themselves who they might be.

After a short rest, they again mounted and pressed forward for an hour, until they reached a lonely farm-house, where the brigadier commanded a halt for the night. Within the house they found an old woman, who told the brigadier that his officer was upstairs and desired him to attend him immediately in company with his prisoner De Rochmont. She herself led the way, but once arrived at the door of the apartment, she made a sign to the Count to enter, while she herself and the brigadier drew back as if to await the result of the interview.

On opening the door the Count met—Marguerite, his affianced bride, who had laid aside her disguise to meet her lover. Without one word of explanation, they fell into one another's arms; tears ran down both of their cheeks; they had met once more despite their dark prognostications, they had met, but not as they parted. The weak girl had become a heroine, she had laid aside her feminine weakness, she had acted with amazing courage, she had undergone immense fatigue, and all this for him whom she loved better than she loved herself, whom she loved as he had proved he loved her when he flung his treasure at her feet.

Their embrace was short. Marguerite was the first to withdraw.

"Time presses, my Robert," she said; "you are yet within the reach of D'Herbois, and at your side is your traitorous valet. Listen to me. Let us waste no time in explanations. You knew my voice at the very first; I saw it, hence my quick reply. Let me tell you why I adopted this desperate scheme for your salvation. After you left me last night, your butler Marius Faucier arrived in pursuit of you. He said that, hearing of your flight, D'Herbois had searched your château, La Ferette, wrecked the furniture, and set fire to the buildings; and he had sent on an express for your immediate arrest at Le Château De Rochmont, and that his agents might be expected to arrive there about five o'clock this very evening—in fact, they must be there while we are talking. I knew that you would leave about noon, but I expected that you would not be aware how closely you were followed, and that you might be easily overtaken, in which case your life was lost, so I used all the resources placed at my disposition by my father for securing my own safety in case of a sudden danger. You know that this farm is his. You also know that the people are devoted to us. Here I have kept concealed all sorts of disguises, amongst others those of the gendarmes who effected your escape. The horses belong to the property. I took from my father's case a signed warrant, filled it up with your name in case of being questioned, called Marius and the

two servants who were at Besse, and drove on here within three hours of your departure. All were quickly disguised as gendarmes with myself as their officer. We left during the night, rode for very life to your château, concealed ourselves in the woods at day-break, and only came out when we saw you. The rest you know."

"Marguerite, you must be almost dead with fatigue. You have done wonders; but do not risk your dear life or health further. Go quietly home and rest. Be assured I will act prudently and well."

"Not so, my Robert. Am I tired? if I sit down I feel ready to drop off the chair; If I stand still my eyes close with sleep; but when I move I feel alive. There is some supernatural strength given to me for this one great effort of my life. In it I must succeed or die. Fear not if I succeed, the very joy will cure me; but if I fail—why—I shall die with you. Now to work again; no expostulations, no delay. I leave you here. I go back to Besse, fill up a pass for myself and maid-servant and two men as guardians, a pass and an order for post-horses for Paris. This will occupy me about four hours. The farmer is even now waiting for me hard by. He will drive our own horses to the first post town, then return to his duties here. A little way along the road you will meet my carriage, and you will yourself with our improvised gendarmes be my escort, until you reach the great forest beyond Brignolles. There you must escape or pretend to escape from your captors. Alas! that I

must leave this most critical movement to you and Marius, who acts as brigadier. I would I could be there to help—but time forbids. Leave me, my love, while I put on once more these soldier's clothes. I could not bear to appear before you in an unwomanly attire."

"I go, I go at once; yet did I think you more lovely in that red suit than ever I thought you before! It was to me your crown of glory! In it I saw nothing but a saint, a martyr, a more than modest maid, a very Joan of Arc! Marguerite, if we escape this dreadful hour, we have stored up oceans of love which no time or age can ever dry up."

One passionate kiss, and he was gone.

CHAPTER III.

It must be remembered that Collot, the valet, was always close to De Rochmont, which fact made him feel safe as to the disposal of the treasure. Moreover, he had not forgotten that the latter had confessed to having on his person some ten thousand francs when about to leave the château. While they rested at the farm-house, in the absence of his master and the brigadier, who remained upstairs even after the departure of the officer, Collot endeavoured to have a little conversation with the two gendarmes, who remained below to guard their prisoners. In this, however, he was entirely frus-

trated, for they not only refused to listen to him, but plainly told him that their orders were to enforce silence, and that if he opened his mouth again they would gag him. After a good supper they all wrapped themselves up in their cloaks and lay down on some straw which had been spread for them on the floor.

About midnight the brigadier joined them and ordered them to feed their horses a second time, as they must start in an hour and had a long stage before them. On leaving the farm-house, they took the high road until they neared Brignolles, where they overtook a travelling carriage, which they seemed to expect, as they at once constituted themselves its escort. The brigadier with De Rochmont rode ahead, leaving Jean and Collot with the other gendarmes behind. Thus removed beyond the sight and hearing of Collot, Marius had an opportunity of talking with the Count, and the result of their conversation was this. After conducting the carriage to Brignolles, they were to take a secluded and circuitous route through the forest, and at a certain point De Rochmont was to set spurs to his horse and escape. Pursuit was to be simulated up to a cross road, where if Collot, as was supposed, pressed forward, he was to be dealt with by De Rochmont; if on the other hand, he held back and behaved quietly, he was to be taken in hand by Marius and disposed of as seemed best. As arranged, so carried out. The Count dashed forward, followed by the whole troop up to a certain cross road, where

the gendarmes seemed disposed to draw rein, but Collot called them not to let the prisoner escape, and rode ahead to arrest the fugitive. De Rochmont leaped a ditch beside the road and dived into the woods; Collot followed, when, suddenly checking his horse and facing the traitor, the Count drew a pistol, and discharged it point-blank at his valet. Collot reeled and fell. De Rochmont immediately flung himself from his saddle, caught the bridle of Collot's horse, and then bent down to see whether he were really dead before he returned to the road. He lay motionless. The bullet had entered his lungs. He breathed indeed, but life seemed ebbing fast, and in a few seconds his pulse became so feeble that De Rochmont left him for dead.

De Rochmont had been a soldier, he had seen many men die, he was familiar with death, he was himself dodging death. That he had killed a fellow-being gave him no sort of concern; his only feeling was that he had crushed a serpent, and all he wished to do was to be quite certain that it could use its fangs no more. This he thought that he had done effectually, so leading the horses back to the road he rejoined his party. Jean, who had not been let into the secret, was startled at his reappearance; he thought that he must be mad, until Marius, removing a pair of false moustaches and eyebrows, spoke to him in his natural voice and told him who they were. Then indeed the poor fellow rejoiced. He even dismounted, and rushing to his master seized his hand, shook it and then kissed it, and fawned

like an affectionate hound. The brigadier, or rather Marius, as we must now call him, would not be satisfied that the traitor was disposed of until he had himself visited his body and found it rapidly getting cold. Then a short, sharp gallop brought them back to the high road, where they found the carriage with the farmer on the box, and Marguerite with her maid inside.

Telling Marius to lead his horse, De Rochmont got inside to hear the further plans of Marguerite. She told him that the farmer would at once return with the horses and disguises to his house, leaving Marius and her own coachman to accompany her in accordance with the conditions of her pass. The third man was to go back with the farmer, and then return before daylight to Besse, where he was to remain as guardian of the property. As for the Count, he must leave her there and then, and make the best of his way with poor faithful Jean to Paris. His escape would soon be known abroad, and the roads leading to the frontiers of Italy and Switzerland so closely watched that the chances were against him, whereas Paris was at once the centre of danger and of safety. No one would expect him there, no one would know him there if he kept in the background, and sooner or later he might get away to Belgium or England, or things might change for the better.

It were a mere waste of words to say more than that they parted with anxious and sorrowful hearts, yet was there more of hope than at their last parting ;

whether this hope was realized our history must tell. Yet one remark may be hazarded, and it is this. Our prognostications or sentiments are more often wrong than right, and yet if perchance once in a way they turn out correct, we proclaim them as fulfilled prophecies, as marvellous events, forgetting to balance them against our many errors, and forgetting also that if their fulfilment *is* a marvel that only proves that for the most part they are not fulfilled—the exception proves the rule.

Marguerite reached Paris safely without any very extraordinary adventures. Robert Comte De Rochmont also reached Paris after a month's journey, in which he went to all points of the compass to throw his enemies off his scent, and for some six weeks kept in such complete retirement that he never once attempted to visit Marguerite even in disguise.

After a few weeks' residence in Paris it became evident to Marguerite that her father was in the very deepest distress. He had been for years a friend of Robespierre, whose fortunes he had followed, from his open denunciation of the punishment of death, until dragged by the inexorable necessities of vanity, ambition and danger, he had waded through seas of blood, into the Reign of Terror.

M. Mourel had always been a kind-hearted man. His present position was the result of that sympathy with others' woes which it seemed most to deny. He had been led to join the revolution because it seemed to him to give liberty to slaves, and to

break the iron tyranny of the Court party. He had followed his friend Robespierre because he had expressed a hatred of blood-shedding, even that of condemned criminals, and he had been thrust into his post on the bloodiest tribunal which ever disgraced the sacred name of justice, in order to arrest its mad onward rush. Robespierre counted upon his doing for him what he could not do for himself. It was evident that unless the popular tiger-thirst for blood were allayed, all, yes all, must disappear before it. Robespierre stood on the engine as it dashed forward into the dark ; he seemed to be the engineer, only he had found it impossible to turn off the steam, or put on the break. The train had started with several guards, all of whom had been dashed to pieces, as the train, with ever increasing speed, tore along the rails. The engine had jolted off several other engineers who had for a time possessed some sort of a control over its movements. These had been carefully assisted overboard by Robespierre, whose ambition was to be not only chief but only driver of the engine of State, which ambition he had achieved, only to find out that as the engine had killed others so it would most likely kill him.

Under these circumstances Mourel was forced to take counsel with his daughter, whose intelligence astounded him. She advised him to seek an interview with Robespierre and to resign his post, let the consequences be what they might. This interview was appointed for the very next day.

It has been said that Mourel had done his best to save some of the victims of his own court of justice. It must now be explained that he had organised a service in connection with the prisons, which had on certain occasions favoured the escape of the condemned. Thus at one, and that one the largest of all, he had placed as gaoler a man of Besse named Roux, partly as a reward for services, and partly as his political agent. He had also procured the appointment of another friend as medical inspector of Paris prisons, who had, by giving certificates of illness, delayed the appearance of prisoners, until they dropped out of notice and escaped. When, however, the terror set in, these agents became impotent—none were ever let out of gaol. At first friends were permitted to visit the prisoners, although the experiment was always dangerous, owing to the savageness of the gaolers, who were apt to refuse to let them out again ; later on, all were permitted to enter who pleased, but only on condition of never going out again alive.

On the night in question, after Mourel's decision to see Robespierre had been taken at the suggestion of Marguerite, Roux was announced and admitted. He had taken advantage of a short leave, to run down to the Judge with the terrible news, that Comte Robert De Rochmont had been arrested and committed to his own prison on the denunciation of Collot Fournier, his ancient valet. Both Mourel and Marguerite were paralysed by this report. If the Count died, it seemed hardly worth while for

them to attempt to live. The Judge knew that the blow would be fatal to his daughter, and if fatal to her, fatal to him, she being the last link which bound him to earth. All else had gone. Home, friends, and political aspirations, the very dream of liberty had been drowned in blood.

Marguerite was the first to recover. She asked how Collot had come to life? How he had made his way to Paris? How he had met De Rochmont?

Roux was able to answer her questions, for Collots deeming him one absolutely devoted to the guillotine, had told him the whole history. It appeared that the wound, which had been considered fatal, had indeed been desperate, the bullet having entered the lung, but owing to the position of the parties it had taken an oblique direction and passed out, leaving a wound from which the blood poured copiously, instead of being confined within the lungs. When Collot lay on the ground face upwards, his body pressed upon the open wound; the cold winter's night, the wet earth, together coagulated the blood, until, after hours of swooning, he became sufficiently conscious to crawl back to the road, where he fell down unconscious, and so remained for three days, at the end of which he found himself in the cottage of a peasant woodcutter, who had picked him up. He passed a second time close to death's door in consequence of violent fever, but being of no sort of good on earth, he escaped the attentions of the doorkeeper of the infernal regions, and was told to move on, which in due time he did

to Paris, as being the most likely place to get employment and gather news, until he should be able to sneak back to le Château de Rochmont and recover the treasure. For this he dared not do until he found out what had become of the Count, and who had taken possession of the property. As chance would have it, he took up his quarters in the Quartier Latin, into which De Rochmont had dived as into a swarming hive, where no aristocrat could be supposed to lurk, and one day they met, at least Collot caught sight of his master, tracked him, and got him arrested. Roux, knowing the Count, had placed him in a separate apartment near the door; more he could not do without incurring the suspicion of the chief gaoler or captain of the prison, who was one of the most brutal of that brutal class.

It was a foregone conclusion that De Rochmont would be condemned the next day, and executed the day after. The prisons were so crowded, so many were arrested daily, that quick despatch had become the order of the day. Roux was told to come again the next night, when he would be told whether anything could be attempted on behalf of the captive. Meanwhile the doctor was called into council by means of an invitation to dinner, for it would have been dangerous even for M. Mourel to receive visits from officials except as invited friends. It was late when they sat down to table; Marius, the butler of De Rochmont, waited upon them. When the repast was over, the burning question as

to what could be done was brought forward, while Marius, after placing dessert and wine before them, stood behind the judge, instead of leaving the room as was his custom ; for despite political pretences, social caste and social customs prevailed even among those who seemed most opposed to them.

"If," said the doctor, "we could find a man ready to take the place of le Comte de Rochmont, such is the brutal, drunken, and bloodthirsty character of the governor and warders of the Conciergerie, that they would be content with killing or getting killed the appointed number without caring much as to their identity ; but this is impossible, for two reasons. The first, that no one would offer at any price ; the second, that such an one might enter as a visitor, but would most likely be detained and executed as an additional sacrifice to the guillotine, without securing the escape of his principal."

"But," said M. Mourel, "we could count upon Roux in that matter, if the hour were well chosen, and the sentinel well bribed. He would both let in and let out. Only, alas ! I am speaking as though such a substitute could be found, while I am sure that even were such a man to offer himself, De Rochmont would refuse the sacrifice."

Midnight struck ere they parted, without arriving at any decision, save that the judge was to postpone his visit to Robespierre until after the trial of their friend, so as to make an appeal to him if condemned.

When the doctor left the room he was conducted towards the street-door by Marius, who, however, led him into his own little chamber, and begging his pardon, thus addressed him: "This, doctor, being a question of life and death to us all, I need hardly ask you to excuse the liberty I have taken in detaining you, but will at once to my point. Can you give me a drug which will stupefy a man for say eight hours, without taking away the use of his legs for the first hour or so? I mean so that he might walk (or reel, if necessary, as a drunken man) to a certain spot where he would remain unconscious for the time I have named."

"Yes," replied the doctor, "that could be done; but to what purport?"

"I can hardly tell you my exact plan for the moment, but as you must aid me, I will ask you to give me such a drug, during the audience of the tribunal to-morrow, and I will further ask you to keep in view, not only after the audience, but during the whole evening, the man to whom you give that drug, as you will be wanted some time during the night. If such an one should linger in a café it would be well to follow him in disguise; if he should go towards the Conciergerie it would be necessary to give him your help, and if the doctor should be wanted to see a dying man it would be of the utmost consequence that he should be easily found."

"Well, Marius, I quite understand your drift, but I do not discover your scheme; perhaps it is better

so, as I might by over-consciousness impede my usefulness."

"Then it is understood that you will hand me such a medicine to-morrow in the court."

"Perfectly."

"Then, sir, I wish you good-night," and he officiously opened the hall-door.

. . . . . .

The bloody tribunal sat at the Luxembourg. Short and sharp were its decisions. Prisoner after prisoner walked through as it were—walked like the Venetians of old into the Council of the Ten to pass out by the staircase which descended beneath the Bridge of Sighs. Comte Robert de Rochmont claimed a little more time than his fellows, on account of some questions as to his political opinions which were put by one of the judges, which made it appear that he was of Liberal tendencies. These questions roused Fouquier-Tinville, who darted upon the same judge a look of dangerous scorn, and galled the chief witness, Collot Fournier, who deposed that his master had fled from Lyons carrying his treasures with him, which treasures he had made away with in a manner unknown to the deponent, with a view to escaping out of France and joining the emigrés; that he had been arrested on the order of Collot d'Herbois, but had got away in a wood by reason of the very culpable neglect of the gendarmes who had him in charge, while he, who had alone followed him with a view to his arrest, had been shot and left for dead by the

prisoner. Tinville turned from the witness to the jury and simply shrugged his shoulders. The verdict was instantaneous, and De Rochmont moved back to the Conciergerie, there to pass the last few hours of his life.

Collot left the Court alone. He might have posed with the *tricoteuses* as a hero, but he feared public approval, which has a knack of marking a man and keeping him in view; whereas he only wished to get away down south to a certain hidden treasure, now left at his absolute disposal. He therefore slunk away through the gardens of the Luxembourg into the Quartier Latin, and thence through several courts into the neighbourhood of the Odéon, where he entered a third-class restaurant and called for his dinner. It was a dark and dismal hole of a place, but large and full of people who had only twenty sous to spend on three courses and a dessert, wine included. Of course he did not notice—why should he?—two other men, who entered soon after himself, and sat down as he had done to their dinner, nor was he conscious of a third who sat at a table alone, very busy with the latest revolutionary journal. Collot was in no hurry to move. He had done his day's work and had no very particular occupation until to-morrow morning at eight A. M., when he hoped to assist at the last scene of a drama in which he had taken a rather prominent part. He called for another bottle of wine, lighted his pipe, rolled about in his chair with the air of a bon-vivant who saw his way to

many another dinner of a more sumptuous character. About 7 P. M. he paid his bill and went out to a neighbouring Jacobin Club with which he had become affiliated, and applauded with the best of them, all the while quite unconscious of certain citizens who, sitting a little behind, were as prodigal of applause as himself. The club broke up at about eleven at night, and Collot paced his way reluctantly towards his garret. Neither then was he aware of the interest which he excited, nor did he notice that ere he entered his abode, one dark form had glided in before him and pressed hastily up the stairs, nor did he see another pass in after him with noiseless tread, nor did it concern him at all that a third outside went in search of a cab as soon as he had entered. Only he was conscious as he reached his own door, and was in the act of turning the key in the darkness—for gas was not invented in those days—of a certain sledge-hammer-like blow on his head, which felled him down like an ox ; beyond this he was not conscious at all for at least half an hour after the event, when he awoke to find himself in the presence of two strangers, who seemed very kind to him, for one had brandy and a glass which he offered to him with many protestations against the violence of the times and the brutality of the man who had been arrested as he fled down stairs after dealing the citizen a blow. Collot asked him who he was, to which he replied that he was a police agent who had assisted to catch the fellow as he was escaping, and had now come in to see what he

could do. This quieted the sufferer, who immediately took a good draught of the brandy which the kindly samaritan offered him, and felt so much better that he could stand up, and began to sing facetious songs. He hardly knew how it happened, but he soon found himself tottering downstairs between the two police agents and seated in a cab on his way to make his deposition about the assault at the police station, which seemed to him a very imposing building, before which was posted a sentry, talking to another gentleman in official garments; nor was he very much astounded when the same official, producing a bunch of keys, opened the door into an immense hall, in which he dimly saw many men and women, and passed them rapidly into a little apartment where he supposed he was to meet the superintendent or night magistrate, only he felt very dizzy and tottery on account of his recent sledge-hammer experience. But he was excessively amazed, and thought his mind must be failing or his head much injured, when in that little room he stood face to face with his late master, Robert Comte De Rochmont. The door had been shut behind him. The shock gathered into a focus his dazed faculties, and he quite understood the awful words which that master addressed to him: "Collot, you were my servant; you owed me fidelity and service, you paid me with treachery and deceit. Now I reward you as all unfaithful servants will be rewarded in the last great day of judgment. I condemn you, as your judge, to die in my stead, on

the guillotine, and my only regret is that you will die under a great name instead of your own vile and cursed patronymic. Collot, to-morrow you will die in my stead ; you have testified against your own life, and may God have mercy on your soul." Then the light was extinguished, the door opened, and a fit of dizziness overtook the culprit from which he did not recover until a certain eventful moment which this history shall reveal.

As three men had entered, so three men left the Conciergerie by favour of the sentinel, and when no eyes were watching, somewhere about an hour after midnight. Next morning, punctually at 8 A. M., the governor appeared at the door of the great hall and called over the names of the unfortunates who one by one passed out to take their places in the tumbrils which were to carry them to that great political persuader of the day, commonly called the guillotine. When the name of the citizen Robert de Rochmont was called, no one answered, and there was a stir amongst the officials. Roux made his way to a little room near the door and called out that the prisoner seemed to be dead or dying, upon which the governor pressed in, and casting his blood-shot eyes upon a man lying with his face to the floor, dressed as the Count had been over night, gave the body a kick with his heavy boot, but it moved not, which seemed to put him in a passion.

" Curse the aristocrat, he shall not escape for all his dodges ; pitch him into the cart and tell Samson to cut off his head, dead or alive."

Roux without hesitation grasped the limp body, lifted it on his shoulder, and pitched it into the tumbril, where it fell among the legs of the other passengers and subsided into the dirty straw.

These poor wretches scarce noticed their companion, amidst the din and confusion of a strong military guard on the inside and a stronger population guard on the outside, which conducted them to the place of execution.

Before, however, they reached Samson's headquarters there was a stirring beneath their feet in the straw, and presently a head with a white face lifted itself up with a stare of mingled confusion and horror. The head turned round and round as if seeking to find out where it was, and at last, seeming to become conscious of its situation, cried out: "Where am I?"

"Alas! alas!" replied a poor fellow-sufferer, "You are in the death-tumbril on the way to the guillotine."

"Guillotine!" shrieked the head, "why, I am Collot Fournier, cousin of Collot d'Herbois; I have never been judged or condemned."

"Poor man," said the others, one to another, "poor Count, he has lost his senses."

"I am not a count, but a good citizen," again shrieked the head.

"Quiet there in the cart," replied the soldier nearest the head.

"But citizens, citizens," yelled the head, "I am being done to death by cheating."

"Quiet again, I say," was the reply of the soldier, and this time accompanied with a blow from the flat of his sabre which rolled the head into the straw again.

Then there came a halt, passengers were requested to alight. The head refused, clung to the benches, appealed to the populace.

"Samson, you had better take this one first: he makes most noise," said the soldier, which Samson did, assisting him up the steps and pushing his head under the knife with such celerity that the head rolled off in the very act of exclaiming that it was the head of Collot Fournier.

Next morning M. Mourel waited upon the tyrant Robespierre. He found him in a good humour, and rather disposed to listen to an old lriend. Yes, the tyrant listened while the judge told him of his heart-sickness and asked for the appointment of delegate to the States of Holland, then to be filled up. Nay, more, the tyrant granted his request and gave him his papers with passes for his secretary and two men-servants. That very night a carriage rolled out of Paris with an elderly gentleman and a very young secretary inside, and two men-servants in very sober dresses, one in front, and one behind. The elderly gentleman was M. Mourel, the ambassador, the secretary was his daughter in man's clothes, one man-servant was Comte Robert De Rochmont, and the other his butler, Marius Faucier.

Not until Napoleon had crushed the Republic did this party recross the frontier. His estates De

Rochmont could not recover, for his name was on the list of the guillotined. His money was safe, and what he valued far above that—he had become the husband of Marguerite.

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