Indeed this passion for a phrase of music seemed, in the first few months, to be bringing into Swann's life the possibility of a sort of rejuvenation. He had so long since ceased to direct his course towards any ideal goal, and had confined himself to the pursuit of ephemeral satisfactions, that he had come to believe, though without ever formally stating his belief even to himself, that he would remain all his life in that condition, which death alone could alter. More than this, since his mind no longer entertained any lofty ideals, he had ceased to believe in (although he could not have expressly denied) their reality. He had grown also into the habit of taking refuge in trivial considerations, which allowed him to set on one side matters of fundamental importance. Just as he had never stopped to ask himself whether he would not have done better by not going into society, knowing very well that if he had accepted an invitation he must put in an appearance, and that afterwards, if he did not actually call, he must at least leave cards upon his hostess; so in his conversation he took care never to express with any warmth a personal opinion about a thing, but instead would supply facts and details which had a value of a sort in themselves, and excused him from shewing how much he really knew. He would be extremely precise about the recipe for a dish, the dates of a painter's birth and death, and the titles of his works. Sometimes, in spite of himself, he would let himself go so far as to utter a criticism of a work of art, or of some one's interpretation of life, but then he would cloak his words in a tone of irony, as though he did not altogether associate himself with what he was saying. But now, like a confirmed invalid whom, all of a sudden, a change of air and surroundings, or a new course of treatment, or, as sometimes happens, an organic change in himself, spontaneous and unaccountable, seems to have so far recovered from his malady that he begins to envisage the possibility, hitherto beyond all hope, of starting to lead—and better late than never—a wholly different life, Swann found in himself, in the memory of the phrase that he had heard, in certain other sonatas which he had made people play over to him, to see whether he might not, perhaps, discover his phrase among them, the presence of one of those invisible realities in which he had ceased to believe, but to which, as though the music had had upon the moral barrenness from which he was suffering a sort of recreative influence, he was conscious once again of a desire, almost, indeed, of the power to consecrate his life. But, never having managed to find out whose work it was that he had heard played that evening, he had been unable to procure a copy, and finally had forgotten the quest. He had indeed, in the course of the next few days, encountered several of the people who had been at the party with him, and had questioned them; but most of them had either arrived after or left before the piece was played; some had indeed been in the house, but had gone into another room to talk, and those who had stayed to listen had no clearer impression than the rest. As for his hosts, they knew that it

was a recently published work which the musicians whom they had engaged for the evening had asked to be allowed to play; but, as these last were now on tour somewhere, Swann could learn nothing further. He had, of course, a number of musical friends, but, vividly as he could recall the exquisite and inexpressible pleasure which the little phrase had given him, and could see, still, before his eyes the forms that it had traced in outline, he was quite incapable of humming over to them the air. And so, at last, he ceased to think of it.

But to-night, at Mme. Verdurin's, scarcely had the little pianist begun to play when, suddenly, after a high note held on through two whole bars, Swann saw it approaching, stealing forth from underneath that resonance, which was prolonged and stretched out over it, like a curtain of sound, to veil the mystery of its birth—and recognised, secret, whispering, articulate, the airy and fragrant phrase that he had loved. And it was so peculiarly itself, it had so personal a charm, which nothing else could have replaced, that Swann felt as though he had met, in a friend's drawing-room, a woman whom he had seen and admired, once, in the street, and had despaired of ever seeing her again. Finally the phrase withdrew and vanished, pointing, directing, diligent among the wandering currents of its fragrance, leaving upon Swann's features a reflection of its smile. But now, at last, he could ask the name of his fair unknown (and was told that it was the *andante* movement of Vinteuil's sonata for the piano and violin), he held it safe, could have it again to himself, at home, as often as he would, could study its language and acquire its secret.

And so, when the pianist had finished, Swann crossed the room and thanked him with a vivacity which delighted Mme. Verdurin.

"Isn't he charming?" she asked Swann, "doesn't he just understand it, his sonata, the little wretch? You never dreamed, did you, that a piano could be made to express all that? Upon my word, there's everything in it except the piano! I'm caught out every time I hear it; I think I'm listening to an orchestra. Though it's better, really, than an orchestra, more complete."

The young pianist bent over her as he answered, smiling and underlining each of his words as though he were making an epigram: "You are most generous to me."

And while Mme. Verdurin was saying to her husband, "Run and fetch him a glass of orangeade; it's well earned!" Swann began to tell Odette how he had fallen in love with that little phrase. When their hostess, who was a little way off, called out, "Well! It looks to me as though some one was saying nice things to you, Odette!" she replied, "Yes, very nice," and he found her simplicity delightful. Then he asked for some information about this Vinteuil; what else he had done, and at what period in his life

he had composed the sonata;—what meaning the little phrase could have had for him, that was what Swann wanted most to know.

But none of these people who professed to admire this musician (when Swann had said that the sonata was really charming Mme. Verdurin had exclaimed, "I quite believe it! Charming, indeed! But you don't dare to confess that you don't know Vinteuil's sonata; you have no right not to know it!"—and the painter had gone on with, "Ah, yes, it's a very fine bit of work, isn't it? Not, of course, if you want something 'obvious,' something 'popular,' but, I mean to say, it makes a very great impression on us artists."), none of them seemed ever to have asked himself these questions, for none of them was able to reply.

Even to one or two particular remarks made by Swann on his favourite phrase, "D'you know, that's a funny thing; I had never noticed it; I may as well tell you that I don't much care about peering at things through a microscope, and pricking myself on pin-points of difference; no; we don't waste time splitting hairs in this house; why not? well, it's not a habit of ours, that's all," Mme. Verdurin replied, while Dr. Cottard gazed at her with open-mouthed admiration, and yearned to be able to follow her as she skipped lightly from one stepping-stone to another of her stock of ready-made phrases. Both he, however, and Mme. Cottard, with a kind of common sense which is shared by many people of humble origin, would always take care not to express an opinion, or to pretend to admire a piece of music which they would confess to each other, once they were safely at home, that they no more understood than they could understand the art of 'Master' Biche. Inasmuch as the public cannot recognise the charm, the beauty, even the outlines of nature save in the stereotyped impressions of an art which they have gradually assimilated, while an original artist starts by rejecting those impressions, so M. and Mme. Cottard, typical, in this respect, of the public, were incapable of finding, either in Vinteuil's sonata or in Biche's portraits, what constituted harmony, for them, in music or beauty in painting. It appeared to them, when the pianist played his sonata, as though he were striking haphazard from the piano a medley of notes which bore no relation to the musical forms to which they themselves were accustomed, and that the painter simply flung the colours haphazard upon his canvas. When, on one of these, they were able to distinguish a human form, they always found it coarsened and vulgarised (that is to say lacking all the elegance of the school of painting through whose spectacles they themselves were in the habit of seeing the people—real, living people, who passed them in the streets) and devoid of truth, as though M. Biche had not known how the human shoulder was constructed, or that a woman's hair was not, ordinarily, purple.

And yet, when the 'faithful' were scattered out of earshot, the Doctor felt that the opportunity was too good to be missed, and so (while Mme. Verdurin was adding a final word of commendation of Vinteuil's sonata) like a would-be swimmer who jumps into the water, so as to learn, but chooses a moment when there are not too many people looking on: "Yes, indeed; he's what they call a musician *di primo cartello*!" he exclaimed, with a sudden determination.

Swann discovered no more than that the recent publication of Vinteuil's sonata had caused a great stir among the most advanced school of musicians, but that it was still unknown to the general public.

"I know some one, quite well, called Vinteuil," said Swann, thinking of the old music-master at Combray who had taught my grandmother's sisters.

"Perhaps that's the man!" cried Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh, no!" Swann burst out laughing. "If you had ever seen him for a moment you wouldn't put the question."

"Then to put the question is to solve the problem?" the Doctor suggested.

"But it may well be some relative," Swann went on. "That would be bad enough; but, after all, there is no reason why a genius shouldn't have a cousin who is a silly old fool. And if that should be so, I swear there's no known or unknown form of torture I wouldn't undergo to get the old fool to introduce me to the man who composed the sonata; starting with the torture of the old fool's company, which would be ghastly."

The painter understood that Vinteuil was seriously ill at the moment, and that Dr. Potain despaired of his life.

"What!" cried Mme. Verdurin, "Do people still call in Potain?"

"Ah! Mme. Verdurin," Cottard simpered, "you forget that you are speaking of one of my colleagues—I should say, one of my masters."

The painter had heard, somewhere, that Vinteuil was threatened with the loss of his reason. And he insisted that signs of this could be detected in certain passages in the sonata. This remark did not strike Swann as ridiculous; rather, it puzzled him. For, since a purely musical work contains none of those logical sequences, the interruption or confusion of which, in spoken or written language, is a proof of insanity, so insanity diagnosed in a sonata seemed to him as mysterious a thing as the insanity of a dog or a horse, although instances may be observed of these.

"Don't speak to me about 'your masters'; you know ten times as much as he does!" Mme. Verdurin answered Dr. Cottard, in the tone of a woman who has the courage of her convictions, and is quite ready to stand up to anyone who disagrees with her. "Anyhow, you don't kill your patients!"

"But, Madame, he is in the Academy." The Doctor smiled with bitter irony. "If a sick person prefers to die at the hands of one of the Princes of Science... It is far more smart to be able to say, 'Yes, I have Potain.'"

"Oh, indeed! More smart, is it?" said Mme. Verdurin. "So there are fashions, nowadays, in illness, are there? I didn't know that.... Oh, you do make me laugh!" she screamed, suddenly, burying her face in her hands. "And here was I, poor thing, talking quite seriously, and never seeing that you were pulling my leg."

As for M. Verdurin, finding it rather a strain to start laughing again over so small a matter, he was content with puffing out a cloud of smoke from his pipe, while he reflected sadly that he could never again hope to keep pace with his wife in her Atalanta-flights across the field of mirth.

"D'you know; we like your friend so very much," said Mme. Verdurin, later, when Odette was bidding her good night. "He is so unaffected, quite charming. If they're all like that, the friends you want to bring here, by all means bring them."

M. Verdurin remarked that Swann had failed, all the same, to appreciate the pianist's aunt.

"I dare say he felt a little strange, poor man," suggested Mme. Verdurin. "You can't expect him to catch the tone of the house the first time he comes; like Cottard, who has been one of our little 'clan' now for years. The first time doesn't count; it's just for looking round and finding out things. Odette, he understands all right, he's to join us to-morrow at the Châtelet. Perhaps you might call for him and bring him."

"No, he doesn't want that."

"Oh, very well; just as you like. Provided he doesn't fail us at the last moment."

Greatly to Mme. Verdurin's surprise, he never failed them. He would go to meet them, no matter where, at restaurants outside Paris (not that they went there much at first, for the season had not yet begun), and more frequently at the play, in which Mme. Verdurin delighted. One evening, when they were dining at home, he heard her complain that she had not one of those permits which would save her the trouble of waiting at doors and standing in crowds, and say how useful it would be to them at first-nights, and gala performances at the Opera, and what a nuisance it had been, not

having one, on the day of Gambetta's funeral. Swann never spoke of his distinguished friends, but only of such as might be regarded as detrimental, whom, therefore, he thought it snobbish, and in not very good taste to conceal; while he frequented the Faubourg Saint-Germain he had come to include, in the latter class, all his friends in the official world of the Third Republic, and so broke in, without thinking: "I'll see to that, all right. You shall have it in time for the *Danicheff* revival. I shall be lunching with the Prefect of Police to-morrow, as it happens, at the Elysée."

"What's that? The Elysée?" Dr. Cottard roared in a voice of thunder.

"Yes, at M. Grévy's," replied Swann, feeling a little awkward at the effect which his announcement had produced.

"Are you often taken like that?" the painter asked Cottard, with mock-seriousness.

As a rule, once an explanation had been given, Cottard would say: "Ah, good, good; that's all right, then," after which he would shew not the least trace of emotion. But this time Swann's last words, instead of the usual calming effect, had that of heating, instantly, to boiling-point his astonishment at the discovery that a man with whom he himself was actually sitting at table, a man who had no official position, no honours or distinction of any sort, was on visiting terms with the Head of the State.

"What's that you say? M. Grévy? Do you know M. Grévy?" he demanded of Swann, in the stupid and incredulous tone of a constable on duty at the palace, when a stranger has come up and asked to see the President of the Republic; until, guessing from his words and manner what, as the newspapers say, 'it is a case of,' he assures the poor lunatic that he will be admitted at once, and points the way to the reception ward of the police infirmary.

"I know him slightly; we have some friends in common" (Swann dared not add that one of these friends was the Prince of Wales). "Anyhow, he is very free with his invitations, and, I assure you, his luncheon-parties are not the least bit amusing; they're very simple affairs, too, you know; never more than eight at table," he went on, trying desperately to cut out everything that seemed to shew off his relations with the President in a light too dazzling for the Doctor's eyes.

Whereupon Cottard, at once conforming in his mind to the literal interpretation of what Swann was saying, decided that invitations from M. Grévy were very little sought after, were sent out, in fact, into the highways and hedge-rows. And from that moment he never seemed at all surprised to hear that Swann, or anyone else, was 'always at the Elysée'; he even felt a little sorry for a man who had to go to luncheon-parties which, he himself admitted, were a bore.

"Ah, good, good; that's quite all right then," he said, in the tone of a customs official who has been suspicious up to now, but, after hearing your explanations, stamps your passport and lets you proceed on your journey without troubling to examine your luggage.

"I can well believe you don't find them amusing, those parties; indeed, it's very good of you to go to them!" said Mme. Verdurin, who regarded the President of the Republic only as a 'bore' to be especially dreaded, since he had at his disposal means of seduction, and even of compulsion, which, if employed to captivate her 'faithful,' might easily make them 'fail.' "It seems, he's as deaf as a post; and eats with his fingers."

"Upon my word! Then it can't be much fun for you, going there." A note of pity sounded in the Doctor's voice; and then struck by the number—only eight at table—"Are these luncheons what you would describe as 'intimate'?" he inquired briskly, not so much out of idle curiosity as in his linguistic zeal.

But so great and glorious a figure was the President of the French Republic in the eyes of Dr. Cottard that neither the modesty of Swann nor the spite of Mme. Verdurin could ever wholly efface that first impression, and he never sat down to dinner with the Verdurins without asking anxiously, "D'you think we shall see M. Swann here this evening? He is a personal friend of M. Grévy's. I suppose that means he's what you'd call a 'gentleman'?" He even went to the length of offering Swann a card of invitation to the Dental Exhibition.

"This will let you in, and anyone you take with you," he explained, "but dogs are not admitted. I'm just warning you, you understand, because some friends of mine went there once, who hadn't been told, and there was the devil to pay."

As for M. Verdurin, he did not fail to observe the distressing effect upon his wife of the discovery that Swann had influential friends of whom he had never spoken.

If no arrangement had been made to 'go anywhere,' it was at the Verdurins' that Swann would find the 'little nucleus' assembled, but he never appeared there except in the evenings, and would hardly ever accept their invitations to dinner, in spite of Odette's entreaties.

"I could dine with you alone somewhere, if you'd rather," she suggested.

"But what about Mme. Verdurin?"

"Oh, that's quite simple. I need only say that my dress wasn't ready, or that my cab came late. There is always some excuse."

"How charming of you."

But Swann said to himself that, if he could make Odette feel (by consenting to meet her only after dinner) that there were other pleasures which he preferred to that of her company, then the desire that she felt for his would be all the longer in reaching the point of satiety. Besides, as he infinitely preferred to Odette's style of beauty that of a little working girl, as fresh and plump as a rose, with whom he happened to be simultaneously in love, he preferred to spend the first part of the evening with her, knowing that he was sure to see Odette later on. For the same reason, he would never allow Odette to call for him at his house, to take him on to the Verdurins'. The little girl used to wait, not far from his door, at a street corner; Rémi, his coachman, knew where to stop; she would jump in beside him, and hold him in her arms until the carriage drew up at the Verdurins'. He would enter the drawing-room; and there, while Mme. Verdurin, pointing to the roses which he had sent her that morning, said: "I am furious with you!" and sent him to the place kept for him, by the side of Odette, the pianist would play to them—for their two selves, and for no one else—that little phrase by Vinteuil which was, so to speak, the national anthem of their love. He began, always, with a sustained tremolo from the violin part, which, for several bars, was unaccompanied, and filled all the foreground; until suddenly it seemed to be drawn aside, and—just as in those interiors by Pieter de Hooch, where the subject is set back a long way through the narrow framework of a half-opened door—infinitely remote, in colour quite different, velvety with the radiance of some intervening light, the little phrase appeared, dancing, pastoral, interpolated, episodic, belonging to another world. It passed, with simple and immortal movements, scattering on every side the bounties of its grace, smiling ineffably still; but Swann thought that he could now discern in it some disenchantment. It seemed to be aware how vain, how hollow was the happiness to which it shewed the way. In its airy grace there was, indeed, something definitely achieved, and complete in itself, like the mood of philosophic detachment which follows an outburst of vain regret. But little did that matter to him; he looked upon the sonata less in its own light—as what it might express, had, in fact, expressed to a certain musician, ignorant that any Swann or Odette, anywhere in the world, existed, when he composed it, and would express to all those who should hear it played in centuries to come—than as a pledge, a token of his love, which made even the Verdurins and their little pianist think of Odette and, at the same time, of himself—which bound her to him by a lasting tie; and at that point he had (whimsically entreated by Odette) abandoned the idea of getting some 'professional' to play over to him the whole sonata, of which he still knew no more than this one passage. "Why do you want the rest?" she had asked him. "Our little bit; that's all we need." He went

farther; agonised by the reflection, at the moment when it passed by him, so near and yet so infinitely remote, that, while it was addressed to their ears, it knew them not, he would regret, almost, that it had a meaning of its own, an intrinsic and unalterable beauty, foreign to themselves, just as in the jewels given to us, or even in the letters written to us by a woman with whom we are in love, we find fault with the 'water' of a stone, or with the words of a sentence because they are not fashioned exclusively from the spirit of a fleeting intimacy and of a 'lass unparalleled.'

It would happen, as often as not, that he had stayed so long outside, with his little girl, before going to the Verdurins' that, as soon as the little phrase had been rendered by the pianist, Swann would discover that it was almost time for Odette to go home. He used to take her back as far as the door of her little house in the Rue La Pérouse, behind the Arc de Triomphe. And it was perhaps on this account, and so as not to demand the monopoly of her favours, that he sacrificed the pleasure (not so essential to his well-being) of seeing her earlier in the evening, of arriving with her at the Verdurins', to the exercise of this other privilege, for which she was grateful, of their leaving together; a privilege which he valued all the more because, thanks to it, he had the feeling that no one else would see her, no one would thrust himself between them, no one could prevent him from remaining with her in spirit, after he had left her for the night.

And so, night after night, she would be taken home in Swann's carriage; and one night, after she had got down, and while he stood at the gate and murmured "Till to-morrow, then!" she turned impulsively from him, plucked a last lingering chrysanthemum in the tiny garden which flanked the pathway from the street to her house, and as he went back to his carriage thrust it into his hand. He held it pressed to his lips during the drive home, and when, in due course, the flower withered, locked it away, like something very precious, in a secret drawer of his desk.

He would escort her to her gate, but no farther. Twice only had he gone inside to take part in the ceremony—of such vital importance in her life—of 'afternoon tea.' The loneliness and emptiness of those short streets (consisting, almost entirely, of low-roofed houses, self-contained but not detached, their monotony interrupted here and there by the dark intrusion of some sinister little shop, at once an historical document and a sordid survival from the days when the district was still one of ill repute), the snow which had lain on the garden-beds or clung to the branches of the trees, the careless disarray of the season, the assertion, in this man-made city, of a state of nature, had all combined to add an element of mystery to the warmth, the flowers, the luxury which he had found inside.

Passing by (on his left-hand side, and on what, although raised some way above the street, was the ground floor of the house) Odette's bedroom, which looked out to the back over another little street running parallel with her own, he had climbed a staircase that went straight up between dark painted walls, from which hung Oriental draperies, strings of Turkish beads, and a huge Japanese lantern, suspended by a silken cord from the ceiling (which last, however, so that her visitors should not have to complain of the want of any of the latest comforts of Western civilisation, was lighted by a gas-jet inside), to the two drawing-rooms, large and small. These were entered through a narrow lobby, the wall of which, chequered with the lozenges of a wooden trellis such as you see on garden walls, only gilded, was lined from end to end by a long rectangular box in which bloomed, as though in a hothouse, a row of large chrysanthemums, at that time still uncommon, though by no means so large as the mammoth blossoms which horticulturists have since succeeded in making grow. Swann was irritated, as a rule, by the sight of these flowers, which had then been 'the rage' in Paris for about a year, but it had pleased him, on this occasion, to see the gloom of the little lobby shot with rays of pink and gold and white by the fragrant petals of these ephemeral stars, which kindle their cold fires in the murky atmosphere of winter afternoons. Odette had received him in a tea-gown of pink silk, which left her neck and arms bare. She had made him sit down beside her in one of the many mysterious little retreats which had been contrived in the various recesses of the room, sheltered by enormous palmtrees growing out of pots of Chinese porcelain, or by screens upon which were fastened photographs and fans and bows of ribbon. She had said at once, "You're not comfortable there; wait a minute, I'll arrange things for you," and with a titter of laughter, the complacency of which implied that some little invention of her own was being brought into play, she had installed behind his head and beneath his feet great cushions of Japanese silk, which she pummelled and buffeted as though determined to lavish on him all her riches, and regardless of their value. But when her footman began to come into the room, bringing, one after another, the innumerable lamps which (contained, mostly, in porcelain vases) burned singly or in pairs upon the different pieces of furniture as upon so many altars, rekindling in the twilight, already almost nocturnal, of this winter afternoon, the glow of a sunset more lasting, more roseate, more human—filling, perhaps, with romantic wonder the thoughts of some solitary lover, wandering in the street below and brought to a standstill before the mystery of the human presence which those lighted windows at once revealed and screened from sight—she had kept an eye sharply fixed on the servant, to see whether he set each of the lamps down in the place appointed it. She felt that, if he were to put even one of them where it ought not to be, the general effect of her drawing-room would be destroyed, and that her portrait, which rested upon a

sloping easel draped with plush, would not catch the light. And so, with feverish impatience, she followed the man's clumsy movements, scolding him severely when he passed too close to a pair of beaupots, which she made a point of always tidying herself, in case the plants should be knocked over—and went across to them now to make sure that he had not broken off any of the flowers. She found something 'quaint' in the shape of each of her Chinese ornaments, and also in her orchids, the cattleyas especially (these being, with chrysanthemums, her favourite flowers), because they had the supreme merit of not looking in the least like other flowers, but of being made, apparently, out of scraps of silk or satin. "It looks just as though it had been cut out of the lining of my cloak," she said to Swann, pointing to an orchid, with a shade of respect in her voice for so 'smart' a flower, for this distinguished, unexpected sister whom nature had suddenly bestowed upon her, so far removed from her in the scale of existence, and yet so delicate, so refined, so much more worthy than many real women of admission to her drawing-room. As she drew his attention, now to the fiery-tongued dragons painted upon a bowl or stitched upon a fire-screen, now to a fleshy cluster of orchids, now to a dromedary of inlaid silver-work with ruby eyes, which kept company, upon her mantelpiece, with a toad carved in jade, she would pretend now to be shrinking from the ferocity of the monsters or laughing at their absurdity, now blushing at the indecency of the flowers, now carried away by an irresistible desire to run across and kiss the toad and dromedary, calling them 'darlings.' And these affectations were in sharp contrast to the sincerity of some of her attitudes, notably her devotion to Our Lady of the Laghetto who had once, when Odette was living at Nice, cured her of a mortal illness, and whose medal, in gold, she always carried on her person, attributing to it unlimited powers. She poured out Swann's tea, inquired "Lemon or cream?" and, on his answering "Cream, please," went on, smiling, "A cloud!" And as he pronounced it excellent, "You see, I know just how you like it." This tea had indeed seemed to Swann, just as it seemed to her, something precious, and love is so far obliged to find some justification for itself, some guarantee of its duration in pleasures which, on the contrary, would have no existence apart from love and must cease with its passing, that when he left her, at seven o'clock, to go and dress for the evening, all the way home, sitting bolt upright in his brougham, unable to repress the happiness with which the afternoon's adventure had filled him, he kept on repeating to himself: "What fun it would be to have a little woman like that in a place where one could always be certain of finding, what one never can be certain of finding, a really good cup of tea." An hour or so later he received a note from Odette, and at once recognised that florid handwriting, in which an affectation of British stiffness imposed an apparent discipline upon its shapeless characters, significant, perhaps, to less intimate eyes than his, of an untidiness of mind, a fragmentary

education, a want of sincerity and decision. Swann had left his cigarette-case at her house. "Why," she wrote, "did you not forget your heart also? I should never have let you have that back."

More important, perhaps, was a second visit which he paid her, a little later. On his way to the house, as always when he knew that they were to meet, he formed a picture of her in his mind; and the necessity, if he was to find any beauty in her face, of fixing his eyes on the fresh and rosy protuberance of her cheekbones, and of shutting out all the rest of those cheeks which were so often languorous and sallow, except when they were punctuated with little fiery spots, plunged him in acute depression, as proving that one's ideal is always unattainable, and one's actual happiness mediocre. He was taking her an engraving which she had asked to see. She was not very well; she received him, wearing a wrapper of mauve *crêpe de Chine*, which draped her bosom, like a mantle, with a richly embroidered web. As she stood there beside him, brushing his cheek with the loosened tresses of her hair, bending one knee in what was almost a dancer's pose, so that she could lean without tiring herself over the picture, at which she was gazing, with bended head, out of those great eyes, which seemed so weary and so sullen when there was nothing to animate her, Swann was struck by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's Daughter, which is to be seen in one of the Sistine frescoes. He had always found a peculiar fascination in tracing in the paintings of the Old Masters, not merely the general characteristics of the people whom he encountered in his daily life, but rather what seems least susceptible of generalisation, the individual features of men and women whom he knew, as, for instance, in a bust of the Doge Loredan by Antonio Rizzo, the prominent cheekbones, the slanting eyebrows, in short, a speaking likeness to his own coachman Rémi; in the colouring of a Ghirlandaio, the nose of M. de Palancy; in a portrait by Tintoretto, the invasion of the plumpness of the cheek by an outcrop of whisker, the broken nose, the penetrating stare, the swollen eyelids of Dr. du Boulbon. Perhaps because he had always regretted, in his heart, that he had confined his attention to the social side of life, had talked, always, rather than acted, he felt that he might find a sort of indulgence bestowed upon him by those great artists, in his perception of the fact that they also had regarded with pleasure and had admitted into the canon of their works such types of physiognomy as give those works the strongest possible certificate of reality and trueness to life; a modern, almost a topical savour; perhaps, also, he had so far succumbed to the prevailing frivolity of the world of fashion that he felt the necessity of finding in an old masterpiece some such obvious and refreshing allusion to a person about whom jokes could be made and repeated and enjoyed to-day. Perhaps, on the other hand, he had retained enough of the artistic

temperament to be able to find a genuine satisfaction in watching these individual features take on a more general significance when he saw them, uprooted and disembodied, in the abstract idea of similarity between an historic portrait and a modern original, whom it was not intended to represent. However that might be, and perhaps because the abundance of impressions which he, for some time past, had been receiving—though, indeed, they had come to him rather through the channel of his appreciation of music—had enriched his appetite for painting as well, it was with an unusual intensity of pleasure, a pleasure destined to have a lasting effect upon his character and conduct, that Swann remarked Odette's resemblance to the Zipporah of that Alessandro de Mariano, to whom one shrinks from giving his more popular surname, now that 'Botticelli' suggests not so much the actual work of the Master as that false and banal conception of it which has of late obtained common currency. He no longer based his estimate of the merit of Odette's face on the more or less good quality of her cheeks, and the softness and sweetness—as of carnation-petals—which, he supposed, would greet his lips there, should he ever hazard an embrace, but regarded it rather as a skein of subtle and lovely silken threads, which his gazing eyes collected and wound together, following the curving line from the skein to the ball, where he mingled the cadence of her neck with the spring of her hair and the droop of her eyelids, as though from a portrait of herself, in which her type was made clearly intelligible.

He stood gazing at her; traces of the old fresco were apparent in her face and limbs, and these he tried incessantly, afterwards, to recapture, both when he was with Odette, and when he was only thinking of her in her absence; and, albeit his admiration for the Florentine masterpiece was probably based upon his discovery that it had been reproduced in her, the similarity enhanced her beauty also, and rendered her more precious in his sight. Swann reproached himself with his failure, hitherto, to estimate at her true worth a creature whom the great Sandro would have adored, and counted himself fortunate that his pleasure in the contemplation of Odette found a justification in his own system of aesthetic. He told himself that, in choosing the thought of Odette as the inspiration of his dreams of ideal happiness, he was not, as he had until then supposed, falling back, merely, upon an expedient of doubtful and certainly inadequate value, since she contained in herself what satisfied the utmost refinement of his taste in art. He failed to observe that this quality would not naturally avail to bring Odette into the category of women whom he found desirable, simply because his desires had always run counter to his aesthetic taste. The words 'Florentine painting' were invaluable to Swann. They enabled him (gave him, as it were, a legal title) to introduce the image of Odette into a world of dreams and fancies

which, until then, she had been debarred from entering, and where she assumed a new and nobler form. And whereas the mere sight of her in the flesh, by perpetually reviving his misgivings as to the quality of her face, her figure, the whole of her beauty, used to cool the ardour of his love, those misgivings were swept away and that love confirmed now that he could re-erect his estimate of her on the sure foundations of his aesthetic principles; while the kiss, the bodily surrender which would have seemed natural and but moderately attractive, had they been granted him by a creature of somewhat withered flesh and sluggish blood, coming, as now they came, to crown his adoration of a masterpiece in a gallery, must, it seemed, prove as exquisite as they would be supernatural.

And when he was tempted to regret that, for months past, he had done nothing but visit Odette, he would assure himself that he was not unreasonable in giving up much of his time to the study of an inestimably precious work of art, cast for once in a new, a different, an especially charming metal, in an unmatched exemplar which he would contemplate at one moment with the humble, spiritual, disinterested mind of an artist, at another with the pride, the selfishness, the sensual thrill of a collector.

On his study table, at which he worked, he had placed, as it were a photograph of Odette, a reproduction of Jethro's Daughter. He would gaze in admiration at the large eyes, the delicate features in which the imperfection of her skin might be surmised, the marvellous locks of hair that fell along her tired cheeks; and, adapting what he had already felt to be beautiful, on aesthetic grounds, to the idea of a living woman, he converted it into a series of physical merits which he congratulated himself on finding assembled in the person of one whom he might, ultimately, possess. The vague feeling of sympathy which attracts a spectator to a work of art, now that he knew the type, in warm flesh and blood, of Jethro's Daughter, became a desire which more than compensated, thenceforward, for that with which Odette's physical charms had at first failed to inspire him. When he had sat for a long time gazing at the Botticelli, he would think of his own living Botticelli, who seemed all the lovelier in contrast, and as he drew towards him the photograph of Zipporah he would imagine that he was holding Odette against his heart.

It was not only Odette's indifference, however, that he must take pains to circumvent; it was also, not infrequently, his own; feeling that, since Odette had had every facility for seeing him, she seemed no longer to have very much to say to him when they did meet, he was afraid lest the manner—at once trivial, monotonous, and seemingly unalterable—which she now adopted when they were together should ultimately destroy in him that romantic hope, that a day might come when she would make avowal of her passion, by which hope alone he had become and would remain her

lover. And so to alter, to give a fresh moral aspect to that Odette, of whose unchanging mood he was afraid of growing weary, he wrote, suddenly, a letter full of hinted discoveries and feigned indignation, which he sent off so that it should reach her before dinner-time. He knew that she would be frightened, and that she would reply, and he hoped that, when the fear of losing him clutched at her heart, it would force from her words such as he had never yet heard her utter: and he was right—by repeating this device he had won from her the most affectionate letters that she had, so far, written him, one of them (which she had sent to him at midday by a special messenger from the Maison Dorée—it was the day of the Paris-Murcie Fête given for the victims of the recent floods in Murcia) beginning "My dear, my hand trembles so that I can scarcely write——"; and these letters he had kept in the same drawer as the withered chrysanthemum. Or else, if she had not had time to write, when he arrived at the Verdurins' she would come running up to him with an "I've something to say to you!" and he would gaze curiously at the revelation in her face and speech of what she had hitherto kept concealed from him of her heart.

Even as he drew near to the Verdurins' door, and caught sight of the great lamp-lit spaces of the drawing-room windows, whose shutters were never closed, he would begin to melt at the thought of the charming creature whom he would see, as he entered the room, basking in that golden light. Here and there the figures of the guests stood out, sharp and black, between lamp and window, shutting off the light, like those little pictures which one sees sometimes pasted here and there upon a glass screen, whose other panes are mere transparencies. He would try to make out Odette. And then, when he was once inside, without thinking, his eyes sparkled suddenly with such radiant happiness that M. Verdurin said to the painter: "H'm. Seems to be getting warm." Indeed, her presence gave the house what none other of the houses that he visited seemed to possess: a sort of tactual sense, a nervous system which ramified into each of its rooms and sent a constant stimulus to his heart.

And so the simple and regular manifestations of a social organism, namely the 'little clan,' were transformed for Swann into a series of daily encounters with Odette, and enabled him to feign indifference to the prospect of seeing her, or even a desire not to see her; in doing which he incurred no very great risk since, even although he had written to her during the day, he would of necessity see her in the evening and accompany her home.

But one evening, when, irritated by the thought of that inevitable dark drive together, he had taken his other 'little girl' all the way to the Bois, so as to delay as long as possible the moment of his appearance at the Verdurins', he was so late in reaching

them that Odette, supposing that he did not intend to come, had already left. Seeing the room bare of her, Swann felt his heart wrung by sudden anguish; he shook with the sense that he was being deprived of a pleasure whose intensity he began then for the first time to estimate, having always, hitherto, had that certainty of finding it whenever he would, which (as in the case of all our pleasures) reduced, if it did not altogether blind him to its dimensions.

"Did you notice the face he pulled when he saw that she wasn't here?" M. Verdurin asked his wife. "I think we may say that he's hooked."

"The face he pulled?" exploded Dr. Cottard who, having left the house for a moment to visit a patient, had just returned to fetch his wife and did not know whom they were discussing.

"D'you mean to say you didn't meet him on the doorstep—the loveliest of Swanns?"

"No. M. Swann has been here?"

"Just for a moment. We had a glimpse of a Swann tremendously agitated. In a state of nerves. You see, Odette had left."

"You mean to say that she has gone the 'whole hog' with him; that she has 'burned her boats'?" inquired the Doctor cautiously, testing the meaning of his phrases.

"Why, of course not; there's absolutely nothing in it; in fact, between you and me, I think she's making a great mistake, and behaving like a silly little fool, which she is, incidentally."

"Come, come, come!" said M. Verdurin, "How on earth do you know that there's 'nothing in it'? We haven't been there to see, have we now?"

"She would have told me," answered Mme. Verdurin with dignity. "I may say that she tells me everything. As she has no one else at present, I told her that she ought to live with him. She makes out that she can't; she admits, she was immensely attracted by him, at first; but he's always shy with her, and that makes her shy with him. Besides, she doesn't care for him in that way, she says; it's an ideal love, 'Platonic,' you know; she's afraid of rubbing the bloom off—oh, I don't know half the things she says, how should I? And yet he's exactly the sort of man she wants."

"I beg to differ from you," M. Verdurin courteously interrupted. "I am only half satisfied with the gentleman. I feel that he 'poses.'"

Mme. Verdurin's whole body stiffened, her eyes stared blankly as though she had suddenly been turned into a statue; a device by means of which she might be

supposed not to have caught the sound of that unutterable word which seemed to imply that it was possible for people to 'pose' in her house, and, therefore, that there were people in the world who 'mattered more' than herself.

"Anyhow, if there is nothing in it, I don't suppose it's because our friend believes in her virtue. And yet, you never know; he seems to believe in her intelligence. I don't know whether you heard the way he lectured her the other evening about Vinteuil's sonata. I am devoted to Odette, but really—to expound theories of aesthetic to her—the man must be a prize idiot."

"Look here, I won't have you saying nasty things about Odette," broke in Mme. Verdurin in her 'spoiled child' manner. "She is charming."

"There's no reason why she shouldn't be charming; we are not saying anything nasty about her, only that she is not the embodiment of either virtue or intellect. After all," he turned to the painter, "does it matter so very much whether she is virtuous or not? You can't tell; she might be a great deal less charming if she were."

On the landing Swann had run into the Verdurins' butler, who had been somewhere else a moment earlier, when he arrived, and who had been asked by Odette to tell Swann (but that was at least an hour ago) that she would probably stop to drink a cup of chocolate at Prévost's on her way home. Swann set off at once for Prévost's, but every few yards his carriage was held up by others, or by people crossing the street, loathsome obstacles each of which he would gladly have crushed beneath his wheels, were it not that a policeman fumbling with a note-book would delay him even longer than the actual passage of the pedestrian. He counted the minutes feverishly, adding a few seconds to each so as to be quite certain that he had not given himself short measure, and so, possibly, exaggerated whatever chance there might actually be of his arriving at Prévost's in time, and of finding her still there. And then, in a moment of illumination, like a man in a fever who awakes from sleep and is conscious of the absurdity of the dream-shapes among which his mind has been wandering without any clear distinction between himself and them, Swann suddenly perceived how foreign to his nature were the thoughts which he had been revolving in his mind ever since he had heard at the Verdurins' that Odette had left, how novel the heartache from which he was suffering, but of which he was only now conscious, as though he had just woken up. What! all this disturbance simply because he would not see Odette, now, till to-morrow, exactly what he had been hoping, not an hour before, as he drove toward Mme. Verdurin's. He was obliged to admit also that now, as he sat in the same carriage and drove to Prévost's, he was no longer the same man, was no longer alone even—but that a new personality was there beside him, adhering to him,

amalgamated with him, a creature from whom he might, perhaps, be unable to liberate himself, towards whom he might have to adopt some such stratagem as one uses to outwit a master or a malady. And yet, during this last moment in which he had felt that another, a fresh personality was thus conjoined with his own, life had seemed, somehow, more interesting.

It was in vain that he assured himself that this possible meeting at Prévost's (the tension of waiting for which so ravished, stripped so bare the intervening moments that he could find nothing, not one idea, not one memory in his mind beneath which his troubled spirit might take shelter and repose) would probably, after all, should it take place, be much the same as all their meetings, of no great importance. As on every other evening, once he was in Odette's company, once he had begun to cast furtive glances at her changing countenance, and instantly to withdraw his eyes lest she should read in them the first symbols of desire and believe no more in his indifference, he would cease to be able even to think of her, so busy would he be in the search for pretexts which would enable him not to leave her immediately, and to assure himself, without betraying his concern, that he would find her again, next evening, at the Verdurins'; pretexts, that is to say, which would enable him to prolong for the time being, and to renew for one day more the disappointment, the torturing deception that must always come to him with the vain presence of this woman, whom he might approach, yet never dared embrace.

She was not at Prevost's; he must search for her, then, in every restaurant upon the boulevards. To save time, while he went in one direction, he sent in the other his coachman Rémi (Rizzo's Doge Loredan) for whom he presently—after a fruitless search—found himself waiting at the spot where the carriage was to meet him. It did not appear, and Swann tantalised himself with alternate pictures of the approaching moment, as one in which Rémi would say to him: "Sir, the lady is there," or as one in which Rémi would say to him: "Sir, the lady was not in any of the cafés." And so he saw himself faced by the close of his evening—a thing uniform, and yet bifurcated by the intervening accident which would either put an end to his agony by discovering Odette, or would oblige him to abandon any hope of finding her that night, to accept the necessity of returning home without having seen her.

The coachman returned; but, as he drew up opposite him, Swann asked, not "Did you find the lady?" but "Remind me, to-morrow, to order in some more firewood. I am sure we must be running short." Perhaps he had persuaded himself that, if Rémi had at last found Odette in some café, where she was waiting for him still, then his night of misery was already obliterated by the realisation, begun already in his mind, of a night of joy, and that there was no need for him to hasten towards the attainment of a

happiness already captured and held in a safe place, which would not escape his grasp again. But it was also by the force of inertia; there was in his soul that want of adaptability which can be seen in the bodies of certain people who, when the moment comes to avoid a collision, to snatch their clothes out of reach of a flame, or to perform any other such necessary movement, take their time (as the saying is), begin by remaining for a moment in their original position, as though seeking to find in it a starting-point, a source of strength and motion. And probably, if the coachman had interrupted him with, "I have found the lady," he would have answered, "Oh, yes, of course; that's what I told you to do. I had quite forgotten," and would have continued to discuss his supply of firewood, so as to hide from his servant the emotion that he had felt, and to give himself time to break away from the thraldom of his anxieties and abandon himself to pleasure.

The coachman came back, however, with the report that he could not find her anywhere, and added the advice, as an old and privileged servant, "I think, sir, that all we can do now is to go home."

But the air of indifference which Swann could so lightly assume when Rémi uttered his final, unalterable response, fell from him like a cast-off cloak when he saw Rémi attempt to make him abandon hope and retire from the quest.

"Certainly not!" he exclaimed. "We must find the lady. It is most important. She would be extremely put out—it's a business matter—and vexed with me if she didn't see me."

"But I do not see how the lady can be vexed, sir," answered Rémi, "since it was she that went away without waiting for you, sir, and said she was going to Prévost's, and then wasn't there."

Meanwhile the restaurants were closing, and their lights began to go out. Under the trees of the boulevards there were still a few people strolling to and fro, barely distinguishable in the gathering darkness. Now and then the ghost of a woman glided up to Swann, murmured a few words in his ear, asked him to take her home, and left him shuddering. Anxiously he explored every one of these vaguely seen shapes, as though among the phantoms of the dead, in the realms of darkness, he had been searching for a lost Eurydice.

Among all the methods by which love is brought into being, among all the agents which disseminate that blessed bane, there are few so efficacious as the great gust of agitation which, now and then, sweeps over the human spirit. For then the creature in whose company we are seeking amusement at the moment, her lot is cast, her fate and ours decided, that is the creature whom we shall henceforward love. It is not

necessary that she should have pleased us, up till then, any more, or even as much as others. All that is necessary is that our taste for her should become exclusive. And that condition is fulfilled so soon as—in the moment when she has failed to meet us—for the pleasure which we were on the point of enjoying in her charming company is abruptly substituted an anxious torturing desire, whose object is the creature herself, an irrational, absurd desire, which the laws of civilised society make it impossible to satisfy and difficult to assuage—the insensate, agonising desire to possess her.

Swann made Rémi drive him to such restaurants as were still open; it was the sole hypothesis, now, of that happiness which he had contemplated so calmly; he no longer concealed his agitation, the price he set upon their meeting, and promised, in case of success, to reward his coachman, as though, by inspiring in him a will to triumph which would reinforce his own, he could bring it to pass, by a miracle, that Odette—assuming that she had long since gone home to bed,—might yet be found seated in some restaurant on the boulevards. He pursued the quest as far as the Maison Dorée, burst twice into Tortoni's and, still without catching sight of her, was emerging from the Café Anglais, striding with haggard gaze towards his carriage, which was waiting for him at the corner of the Boulevard des Italiens, when he collided with a person coming in the opposite direction; it was Odette; she explained, later, that there had been no room at Prévost's, that she had gone, instead, to sup at the Maison Dorée, and had been sitting there in an alcove where he must have overlooked her, and that she was now looking for her carriage.

She had so little expected to see him that she started back in alarm. As for him, he had ransacked the streets of Paris, not that he supposed it possible that he should find her, but because he would have suffered even more cruelly by abandoning the attempt. But now the joy (which, his reason had never ceased to assure him, was not, that evening at least, to be realised) was suddenly apparent, and more real than ever before; for he himself had contributed nothing to it by anticipating probabilities,—it remained integral and external to himself; there was no need for him to draw on his own resources to endow it with truth—'twas from itself that there emanated, 'twas itself that projected towards him that truth whose glorious rays melted and scattered like the cloud of a dream the sense of loneliness which had lowered over him, that truth upon which he had supported, nay founded, albeit unconsciously, his vision of bliss. So will a traveller, who has come down, on a day of glorious weather, to the Mediterranean shore, and is doubtful whether they still exist, those lands which he has left, let his eyes be dazzled, rather than cast a backward glance, by the radiance streaming towards him from the luminous and unfading azure at his feet.

He climbed after her into the carriage which she had kept waiting, and ordered his own to follow.

She had in her hand a bunch of cattleyas, and Swann could see, beneath the film of lace that covered her head, more of the same flowers fastened to a swansdown plume. She was wearing, under her cloak, a flowing gown of black velvet, caught up on one side so as to reveal a large triangular patch of her white silk skirt, with an 'insertion,' also of white silk, in the cleft of her low-necked bodice, in which were fastened a few more cattleyas. She had scarcely recovered from the shock which the sight of Swann had given her, when some obstacle made the horse start to one side. They were thrown forward from their seats; she uttered a cry, and fell back quivering and breathless.

"It's all right," he assured her, "don't be frightened." And he slipped his arm round her shoulder, supporting her body against his own; then went on: "Whatever you do, don't utter a word; just make a sign, yes or no, or you'll be out of breath again. You won't mind if I put the flowers straight on your bodice; the jolt has loosened them. I'm afraid of their dropping out; I'm just going to fasten them a little more securely."

She was not used to being treated with so much formality by men, and smiled as she answered: "No, not at all; I don't mind in the least."

But he, chilled a little by her answer, perhaps, also, to bear out the pretence that he had been sincere in adopting the stratagem, or even because he was already beginning to believe that he had been, exclaimed: "No, no; you mustn't speak. You will be out of breath again. You can easily answer in signs; I shall understand. Really and truly now, you don't mind my doing this? Look, there is a little—I think it must be pollen, spilt over your dress,—may I brush it off with my hand? That's not too hard; I'm not hurting you, am I? I'm tickling you, perhaps, a little; but I don't want to touch the velvet in case I rub it the wrong way. But, don't you see, I really had to fasten the flowers; they would have fallen out if I hadn't. Like that, now; if I just push them a little farther down.... Seriously, I'm not annoying you, am I? And if I just sniff them to see whether they've really lost all their scent? I don't believe I ever smelt any before; may I? Tell the truth, now."

Still smiling, she shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, as who should say, "You're quite mad; you know very well that I like it."

He slipped his other hand upwards along Odette's cheek; she fixed her eyes on him with that languishing and solemn air which marks the women of the old Florentine's paintings, in whose faces he had found the type of hers; swimming at the brink of her

fringed lids, her brilliant eyes, large and finely drawn as theirs, seemed on the verge of breaking from her face and rolling down her cheeks like two great tears. She bent her neck, as all their necks may be seen to bend, in the pagan scenes as well as in the scriptural. And although her attitude was, doubtless, habitual and instinctive, one which she knew to be appropriate to such moments, and was careful not to forget to assume, she seemed to need all her strength to hold her face back, as though some invisible force were drawing it down towards Swann's. And Swann it was who, before she allowed her face, as though despite her efforts, to fall upon his lips, held it back for a moment longer, at a little distance between his hands. He had intended to leave time for her mind to overtake her body's movements, to recognise the dream which she had so long cherished and to assist at its realisation, like a mother invited as a spectator when a prize is given to the child whom she has reared and loves. Perhaps, moreover, Swann himself was fixing upon these features of an Odette not yet possessed, not even kissed by him, on whom he was looking now for the last time, that comprehensive gaze with which, on the day of his departure, a traveller strives to bear away with him in memory the view of a country to which he may never return.

But he was so shy in approaching her that, after this evening which had begun by his arranging her cattleyas and had ended in her complete surrender, whether from fear of chilling her, or from reluctance to appear, even retrospectively, to have lied, or perhaps because he lacked the audacity to formulate a more urgent requirement than this (which could always be repeated, since it had not annoyed her on the first occasion), he resorted to the same pretext on the following days. If she had any cattleyas pinned to her bodice, he would say: "It is most unfortunate; the cattleyas don't need tucking in this evening; they've not been disturbed as they were the other night; I think, though, that this one isn't quite straight. May I see if they have more scent than the others?" Or else, if she had none: "Oh! no cattleyas this evening; then there's nothing for me to arrange." So that for some time there was no change from the procedure which he had followed on that first evening, when he had started by touching her throat, with his fingers first and then with his lips, but their caresses began invariably with this modest exploration. And long afterwards, when the arrangement (or, rather, the ritual pretence of an arrangement) of her cattleyas had quite fallen into desuetude, the metaphor "Do a cattleya," transmuted into a simple verb which they would employ without a thought of its original meaning when they wished to refer to the act of physical possession (in which, paradoxically, the possessor possesses nothing), survived to commemorate in their vocabulary the long forgotten custom from which it sprang. And yet possibly this particular manner of saying "to make love" had not the precise significance of its synonyms. However

disillusioned we may be about women, however we may regard the possession of even the most divergent types as an invariable and monotonous experience, every detail of which is known and can be described in advance, it still becomes a fresh and stimulating pleasure if the women concerned be—or be thought to be—so difficult as to oblige us to base our attack upon some unrehearsed incident in our relations with them, as was originally for Swann the arrangement of the cattleyas. He trembled as he hoped, that evening, (but Odette, he told himself, if she were deceived by his stratagem, could not guess his intention) that it was the possession of this woman that would emerge for him from their large and richly coloured petals; and the pleasure which he already felt, and which Odette tolerated, he thought, perhaps only because she was not yet aware of it herself, seemed to him for that reason—as it might have seemed to the first man when he enjoyed it amid the flowers of the earthly paradise—a pleasure which had never before existed, which he was striving now to create, a pleasure—and the special name which he was to give to it preserved its identity—entirely individual and new.

The ice once broken, every evening, when he had taken her home, he must follow her into the house; and often she would come out again in her dressing-gown, and escort him to his carriage, and would kiss him before the eyes of his coachman, saying: "What on earth does it matter what people see?" And on evenings when he did not go to the Verdurins' (which happened occasionally, now that he had opportunities of meeting Odette elsewhere), when—more and more rarely—he went into society, she would beg him to come to her on his way home, however late he might be. The season was spring, the nights clear and frosty. He would come away from an evening party, jump into his victoria, spread a rug over his knees, tell the friends who were leaving at the same time, and who insisted on his going home with them, that he could not, that he was not going in their direction; then the coachman would start off at a fast trot without further orders, knowing quite well where he had to go. His friends would be left marvelling, and, as a matter of fact, Swann was no longer the same man. No one ever received a letter from him now demanding an introduction to a woman. He had ceased to pay any attention to women, and kept away from the places in which they were ordinarily to be met. In a restaurant, or in the country, his manner was deliberately and directly the opposite of that by which, only a few days earlier, his friends would have recognised him, that manner which had seemed permanently and unalterably his own. To such an extent does passion manifest itself in us as a temporary and distinct character, which not only takes the place of our normal character but actually obliterates the signs by which that character has hitherto been discernible. On the other hand, there was one thing that was, now, invariable, namely

that wherever Swann might be spending the evening, he never failed to go on afterwards to Odette. The interval of space separating her from him was one which he must as inevitably traverse as he must descend, by an irresistible gravitation, the steep slope of life itself. To be frank, as often as not, when he had stayed late at a party, he would have preferred to return home at once, without going so far out of his way, and to postpone their meeting until the morrow; but the very fact of his putting himself to such inconvenience at an abnormal hour in order to visit her, while he guessed that his friends, as he left them, were saying to one another: "He is tied hand and foot; there must certainly be a woman somewhere who insists on his going to her at all hours," made him feel that he was leading the life of the class of men whose existence is coloured by a love-affair, and in whom the perpetual sacrifice which they are making of their comfort and of their practical interests has engendered a spiritual charm. Then, though he may not consciously have taken this into consideration, the certainty that she was waiting for him, that she was not anywhere or with anyone else, that he would see her before he went home, drew the sting from that anguish, forgotten, it is true, but latent and ever ready to be reawakened, which he had felt on the evening when Odette had left the Verdurins' before his arrival, an anguish the actual cessation of which was so agreeable that it might even be called a state of happiness. Perhaps it was to that hour of anguish that there must be attributed the importance which Odette had since assumed in his life. Other people are, as a rule, so immaterial to us that, when we have entrusted to any one of them the power to cause so much suffering or happiness to ourselves, that person seems at once to belong to a different universe, is surrounded with poetry, makes of our lives a vast expanse, quick with sensation, on which that person and ourselves are ever more or less in contact. Swann could not without anxiety ask himself what Odette would mean to him in the years that were to come. Sometimes, as he looked up from his victoria on those fine and frosty nights of early spring, and saw the dazzling moonbeams fall between his eyes and the deserted streets, he would think of that other face, gleaming and faintly roseate like the moon's, which had, one day, risen on the horizon of his mind and since then had shed upon the world that mysterious light in which he saw it bathed. If he arrived after the hour at which Odette sent her servants to bed, before ringing the bell at the gate of her little garden, he would go round first into the other street, over which, at the ground-level, among the windows (all exactly alike, but darkened) of the adjoining houses, shone the solitary lighted window of her room. He would rap upon the pane, and she would hear the signal, and answer, before running to meet him at the gate. He would find, lying open on the piano, some of her favourite music, the *Valse des Roses*, the *Pauvre Fou* of Tagliafico (which, according to the instructions embodied in her will, was to be played at her funeral); but he would ask her, instead,

to give him the little phrase from Vinteuil's sonata. It was true that Odette played vilely, but often the fairest impression that remains in our minds of a favourite air is one which has arisen out of a jumble of wrong notes struck by unskilful fingers upon a tuneless piano. The little phrase was associated still, in Swann's mind, with his love for Odette. He felt clearly that this love was something to which there were no corresponding external signs, whose meaning could not be proved by any but himself; he realised, too, that Odette's qualities were not such as to justify his setting so high a value on the hours he spent in her company. And often, when the cold government of reason stood unchallenged, he would readily have ceased to sacrifice so many of his intellectual and social interests to this imaginary pleasure. But the little phrase, as soon as it struck his ear, had the power to liberate in him the room that was needed to contain it; the proportions of Swann's soul were altered; a margin was left for a form of enjoyment which corresponded no more than his love for Odette to any external object, and yet was not, like his enjoyment of that love, purely individual, but assumed for him an objective reality superior to that of other concrete things. This thirst for an untasted charm, the little phrase would stimulate it anew in him, but without bringing him any definite gratification to assuage it. With the result that those parts of Swann's soul in which the little phrase had obliterated all care for material interests, those human considerations which affect all men alike, were left bare by it, blank pages on which he was at liberty to inscribe the name of Odette. Moreover, where Odette's affection might seem ever so little abrupt and disappointing, the little phrase would come to supplement it, to amalgamate with it its own mysterious essence. Watching Swann's face while he listened to the phrase, one would have said that he was inhaling an anaesthetic which allowed him to breathe more deeply. And the pleasure which the music gave him, which was shortly to create in him a real longing, was in fact closely akin, at such moments, to the pleasure which he would have derived from experimenting with perfumes, from entering into contract with a world for which we men were not created, which appears to lack form because our eyes cannot perceive it, to lack significance because it escapes our intelligence, to which we may attain by way of one sense only. Deep repose, mysterious refreshment for Swann,—for him whose eyes, although delicate interpreters of painting, whose mind, although an acute observer of manners, must bear for ever the indelible imprint of the barrenness of his life,—to feel himself transformed into a creature foreign to humanity, blinded, deprived of his logical faculty, almost a fantastic unicorn, a chimaera-like creature conscious of the world through his two ears alone. And as, notwithstanding, he sought in the little phrase for a meaning to which his intelligence could not descend, with what a strange frenzy of intoxication must he strip bare his innermost soul of the whole armour of reason, and make it pass, unattended, through the straining vessel,

down into the dark filter of sound. He began to reckon up how much that was painful, perhaps even how much secret and unappeased sorrow underlay the sweetness of the phrase; and yet to him it brought no suffering. What matter though the phrase repeated that love is frail and fleeting, when his love was so strong! He played with the melancholy which the phrase diffused, he felt it stealing over him, but like a caress which only deepened and sweetened his sense of his own happiness. He would make Odette play him the phrase again, ten, twenty times on end, insisting that, while she played, she must never cease to kiss him. Every kiss provokes another. Ah, in those earliest days of love how naturally the kisses spring into life. How closely, in their abundance, are they pressed one against another; until lovers would find it as hard to count the kisses exchanged in an hour, as to count the flowers in a meadow in May. Then she would pretend to stop, saying: "How do you expect me to play when you keep on holding me? I can't do everything at once. Make up your mind what you want; am I to play the phrase or do you want to play with me?" Then he would become annoyed, and she would burst out with a laugh which was transformed, as it left her lips, and descended upon him in a shower of kisses. Or else she would look at him sulkily, and he would see once again a face worthy to figure in Botticelli's 'Life of Moses,' he would place it there, giving to Odette's neck the necessary inclination; and when he had finished her portrait in distemper, in the fifteenth century, on the wall of the Sixtine, the idea that she was, none the less, in the room with him still, by the piano, at that very moment, ready to be kissed and won, the idea of her material existence, of her being alive, would sweep over him with so violent an intoxication that, with eyes starting from his head and jaws that parted as though to devour her, he would fling himself upon this Botticelli maiden and kiss and bite her cheeks. And then, as soon as he had left the house, not without returning to kiss her once again, because he had forgotten to take away with him, in memory, some detail of her fragrance or of her features, while he drove home in his victoria, blessing the name of Odette who allowed him to pay her these daily visits, which, although they could not, he felt, bring any great happiness to her, still, by keeping him immune from the fever of jealousy—by removing from him every possibility of a fresh outbreak of the heart-sickness which had manifested itself in him that evening, when he had failed to find her at the Verdurins'—might help him to arrive, without any recurrence of those crises, of which the first had been so distressing that it must also be the last, at the termination of this strange series of hours in his life, hours almost enchanted, in the same manner as these other, following hours, in which he drove through a deserted Paris by the light of the moon: noticing as he drove home that the satellite had now changed its position, relatively to his own, and was almost touching the horizon; feeling that his love, also, was obedient to these immutable laws of nature, he asked

himself whether this period, upon which he had entered, was to last much longer, whether presently his mind's eye would cease to behold that dear countenance, save as occupying a distant and diminished position, and on the verge of ceasing to shed on him the radiance of its charm. For Swann was finding in things once more, since he had fallen in love, the charm that he had found when, in his adolescence, he had fancied himself an artist; with this difference, that what charm lay in them now was conferred by Odette alone. He could feel reawakening in himself the inspirations of his boyhood, which had been dissipated among the frivolities of his later life, but they all bore, now, the reflection, the stamp of a particular being; and during the long hours which he now found a subtle pleasure in spending at home, alone with his convalescent spirit, he became gradually himself again, but himself in thraldom to another.

He went to her only in the evenings, and knew nothing of how she spent her time during the day, any more than he knew of her past; so little, indeed, that he had not even the tiny, initial clue which, by allowing us to imagine what we do not know, stimulates a desire for knowledge. And so he never asked himself what she might be doing, or what her life had been. Only he smiled sometimes at the thought of how, some years earlier, when he still did not know her, some one had spoken to him of a woman who, if he remembered rightly, must certainly have been Odette, as of a 'tart,' a 'kept' woman, one of those women to whom he still attributed (having lived but little in their company) the entire set of characteristics, fundamentally perverse, with which they had been, for many years, endowed by the imagination of certain novelists. He would say to himself that one has, as often as not, only to take the exact counterpart of the reputation created by the world in order to judge a person fairly, when with such a character he contrasted that of Odette, so good, so simple, so enthusiastic in the pursuit of ideals, so nearly incapable of not telling the truth that, when he had once begged her, so that they might dine together alone, to write to Mme. Verdurin, saying that she was unwell, the next day he had seen her, face to face with Mme. Verdurin, who asked whether she had recovered, blushing, stammering, and, in spite of herself, revealing in every feature how painful, what a torture it was to her to act a lie; and, while in her answer she multiplied the fictitious details of an imaginary illness, seeming to ask pardon, by her suppliant look and her stricken accents, for the obvious falsehood of her words.

On certain days, however, though these came seldom, she would call upon him in the afternoon, to interrupt his musings or the essay on Vermeer to which he had latterly returned. His servant would come in to say that Mme. de Crécy was in the small drawing-room. He would go in search of her, and, when he opened the door, on

Odette's blushing countenance, as soon as she caught sight of Swann, would appear—changing the curve of her lips, the look in her eyes, the moulding of her cheeks—an all-absorbing smile. Once he was left alone he would see again that smile, and her smile of the day before, another with which she had greeted him sometime else, the smile which had been her answer, in the carriage that night, when he had asked her whether she objected to his rearranging her cattleyas; and the life of Odette at all other times, since he knew nothing of it, appeared to him upon a neutral and colourless background, like those sheets of sketches by Watteau upon which one sees, here and there, in every corner and in all directions, traced in three colours upon the buff paper, innumerable smiles. But, once in a while, illuminating a chink of that existence which Swann still saw as a complete blank, even if his mind assured him that it was not so, because he was unable to imagine anything that might occupy it, some friend who knew them both, and suspecting that they were in love, had not dared to tell him anything about her that was of the least importance, would describe Odette's figure, as he had seen her, that very morning, going on foot up the Rue Abbattucci, in a cape trimmed with skunks, wearing a Rembrandt hat, and a bunch of violets in her bosom. This simple outline reduced Swann to utter confusion by enabling him suddenly to perceive that Odette had an existence which was not wholly subordinated to his own; he burned to know whom she had been seeking to fascinate by this costume in which he had never seen her; he registered a vow to insist upon her telling him where she had been going at that intercepted moment, as though, in all the colourless life—a life almost nonexistent, since she was then invisible to him—of his mistress, there had been but a single incident apart from all those smiles directed towards himself; namely, her walking abroad beneath a Rembrandt hat, with a bunch of violets in her bosom.

Except when he asked her for Vinteuil's little phrase instead of the *Valse des Roses*, Swann made no effort to induce her to play the things that he himself preferred, nor, in literature any more than in music, to correct the manifold errors of her taste. He fully realised that she was not intelligent. When she said how much she would like him to tell her about the great poets, she had imagined that she would suddenly get to know whole pages of romantic and heroic verse, in the style of the Vicomte de Borelli, only even more moving. As for Vermeer of Delft, she asked whether he had been made to suffer by a woman, if it was a woman that had inspired him, and once Swann had told her that no one knew, she had lost all interest in that painter. She would often say: "I'm sure, poetry; well, of course, there'd be nothing like it if it was all true, if the poets really believed the things they said. But as often as not you'll find there's no one so mean and calculating as those fellows. I know something about poetry. I had a friend,

once, who was in love with a poet of sorts. In his verses he never spoke of anything but love, and heaven, and the stars. Oh! she was properly taken in! He had more than three hundred thousand francs out of her before he'd finished." If, then, Swann tried to shew her in what artistic beauty consisted, how one ought to appreciate poetry or painting, after a minute or two she would cease to listen, saying: "Yes... I never thought it would be like that." And he felt that her disappointment was so great that he preferred to lie to her, assuring her that what he had said was nothing, that he had only touched the surface, that he had not time to go into it all properly, that there was more in it than that. Then she would interrupt with a brisk, "More in it? What?... Do tell me!", but he did not tell her, for he realised how petty it would appear to her, and how different from what she had expected, less sensational and less touching; he was afraid, too, lest, disillusioned in the matter of art, she might at the same time be disillusioned in the greater matter of love.

With the result that she found Swann inferior, intellectually, to what she had supposed. "You're always so reserved; I can't make you out." She marvelled increasingly at his indifference to money, at his courtesy to everyone alike, at the delicacy of his mind. And indeed it happens, often enough, to a greater man than Swann ever was, to a scientist or artist, when he is not wholly misunderstood by the people among whom he lives, that the feeling in them which proves that they have been convinced of the superiority of his intellect is created not by any admiration for his ideas—for those are entirely beyond them—but by their respect for what they term his good qualities. There was also the respect with which Odette was inspired by the thought of Swann's social position, although she had no desire that he should attempt to secure invitations for herself. Perhaps she felt that such attempts would be bound to fail; perhaps, indeed, she feared lest, merely by speaking of her to his friends, he should provoke disclosures of an unwelcome kind. The fact remains that she had consistently held him to his promise never to mention her name. Her reason for not wishing to go into society was, she had told him, a quarrel which she had had, long ago, with another girl, who had avenged herself by saying nasty things about her. "But," Swann objected, "surely, people don't all know your friend." "Yes, don't you see, it's like a spot of oil; people are so horrid." Swann was unable, frankly, to appreciate this point; on the other hand, he knew that such generalisations as "People are so horrid," and "A word of scandal spreads like a spot of oil," were generally accepted as true; there must, therefore, be cases to which they were literally applicable. Could Odette's case be one of these? He teased himself with the question, though not for long, for he too was subject to that mental oppression which had so weighed upon his father, whenever he was faced by a difficult problem. In any event, that world of society

which concealed such terrors for Odette inspired her, probably, with no very great longing to enter it, since it was too far removed from the world which she already knew for her to be able to form any clear conception of it. At the same time, while in certain respects she had retained a genuine simplicity (she had, for instance, kept up a friendship with a little dressmaker, now retired from business, up whose steep and dark and fetid staircase she clambered almost every day), she still thirsted to be in the fashion, though her idea of it was not altogether that held by fashionable people. For the latter, fashion is a thing that emanates from a comparatively small number of leaders, who project it to a considerable distance—with more or less strength according as one is nearer to or farther from their intimate centre—over the widening circle of their friends and the friends of their friends, whose names form a sort of tabulated index. People 'in society' know this index by heart, they are gifted in such matters with an erudition from which they have extracted a sort of taste, of tact, so automatic in its operation that Swann, for example, without needing to draw upon his knowledge of the world, if he read in a newspaper the names of the people who had been guests at a dinner, could tell at once how fashionable the dinner had been, just as a man of letters, merely by reading a phrase, can estimate exactly the literary merit of its author. But Odette was one of those persons (an extremely numerous class, whatever the fashionable world may think, and to be found in every section of society) who do not share this knowledge, but imagine fashion to be something of quite another kind, which assumes different aspects according to the circle to which they themselves belong, but has the special characteristic—common alike to the fashion of which Odette used to dream and to that before which Mme. Cottard bowed—of being directly accessible to all. The other kind, the fashion of 'fashionable people,' is, it must be admitted, accessible also; but there are inevitable delays. Odette would say of some one: "He never goes to any place that isn't really smart."

And if Swann were to ask her what she meant by that, she would answer, with a touch of contempt, "Smart places! Why, good heavens, just fancy, at your age, having to be told what the smart places are in Paris! What do you expect me to say? Well, on Sunday mornings there's the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and round the lake at five o'clock, and on Thursdays the Eden-Théâtre, and the Hippodrome on Fridays; then there are the balls..."

"What balls?"

"Why, silly, the balls people give in Paris; the smart ones, I mean. Wait now, Herbinger, you know who I mean, the fellow who's in one of the jobbers' offices; yes, of course, you must know him, he's one of the best-known men in Paris, that great big fair-haired boy who wears such swagger clothes; he always has a flower in his buttonhole and a

light-coloured overcoat with a fold down the back; he goes about with that old image, takes her to all the first-nights. Very well! He gave a ball the other night, and all the smart people in Paris were there. I should have loved to go! but you had to shew your invitation at the door, and I couldn't get one anywhere. After all, I'm just as glad, now, that I didn't go; I should have been killed in the crush, and seen nothing. Still, just to be able to say one had been to Herbinger's ball. You know how vain I am! However, you may be quite certain that half the people who tell you they were there are telling stories.... But I am surprised that you weren't there, a regular 'tip-topper' like you."

Swann made no attempt, however, to modify this conception of fashion; feeling that his own came no nearer to the truth, was just as fatuous, devoid of all importance, he saw no advantage to be gained by imparting it to his mistress, with the result that, after a few months, she ceased to take any interest in the people to whose houses he went, except when they were the means of his obtaining tickets for the paddock at race-meetings or first-nights at the theatre. She hoped that he would continue to cultivate such profitable acquaintances, but she had come to regard them as less smart since the day when she had passed the Marquise de Villeparisis in the street, wearing a black serge dress and a bonnet with strings.

"But she looks like a pew-opener, like an old charwoman, darling! That a marquise! Goodness knows I'm not a marquise, but you'd have to pay me a lot of money before you'd get me to go about Paris rigged out like that!"

Nor could she understand Swann's continuing to live in his house on the Quai d'Orléans, which, though she dared not tell him so, she considered unworthy of him.

It was true that she claimed to be fond of 'antiques,' and used to assume a rapturous and knowing air when she confessed how she loved to spend the whole day 'rummaging' in second-hand shops, hunting for 'bric-à-brac,' and things of the 'right date.' Although it was a point of honour, to which she obstinately clung, as though obeying some old family custom, that she should never answer any questions, never give any account of what she did during the daytime, she spoke to Swann once about a friend to whose house she had been invited, and had found that everything in it was 'of the period.' Swann could not get her to tell him what 'period' it was. Only after thinking the matter over she replied that it was 'mediaeval'; by which she meant that the walls were panelled. Some time later she spoke to him again of her friend, and added, in the hesitating but confident tone in which one refers to a person whom one has met somewhere, at dinner, the night before, of whom one had never heard until then, but whom one's hosts seemed to regard as some one so celebrated and important that one hopes that one's listener will know quite well who is meant, and

will be duly impressed: "Her dining-room... is... eighteenth century!" Incidentally, she had thought it hideous, all bare, as though the house were still unfinished; women looked frightful in it, and it would never become the fashion. She mentioned it again, a third time, when she shewed Swann a card with the name and address of the man who had designed the dining-room, and whom she wanted to send for, when she had enough money, to see whether he could not do one for her too; not one like that, of course, but one of the sort she used to dream of, one which, unfortunately, her little house would not be large enough to contain, with tall sideboards, Renaissance furniture and fireplaces like the Château at Blois. It was on this occasion that she let out to Swann what she really thought of his abode on the Quai d'Orléans; he having ventured the criticism that her friend had indulged, not in the Louis XVI style, for, he went on, although that was not, of course, done, still it might be made charming, but in the 'Sham-Antique.'

"You wouldn't have her live, like you, among a lot of broken-down chairs and threadbare carpets!" she exclaimed, the innate respectability of the middle-class housewife rising impulsively to the surface through the acquired dilettantism of the 'light woman.'

People who enjoyed 'picking-up' things, who admired poetry, despised sordid calculations of profit and loss, and nourished ideals of honour and love, she placed in a class by themselves, superior to the rest of humanity. There was no need actually to have those tastes, provided one talked enough about them; when a man had told her at dinner that he loved to wander about and get his hands all covered with dust in the old furniture shops, that he would never be really appreciated in this commercial age, since he was not concerned about the things that interested it, and that he belonged to another generation altogether, she would come home saying: "Why, he's an adorable creature; so sensitive! I had no idea," and she would conceive for him a strong and sudden friendship. But, on the other hand, men who, like Swann, had these tastes but did not speak of them, left her cold. She was obliged, of course, to admit that Swann was most generous with his money, but she would add, pouting: "It's not the same thing, you see, with him," and, as a matter of fact, what appealed to her imagination was not the practice of disinterestedness, but its vocabulary.

Feeling that, often, he could not give her in reality the pleasures of which she dreamed, he tried at least to ensure that she should be happy in his company, tried not to contradict those vulgar ideas, that bad taste which she displayed on every possible occasion, which all the same he loved, as he could not help loving everything that came from her, which even fascinated him, for were they not so many more of those characteristic features, by virtue of which the essential qualities of the woman

emerged, and were made visible? And so, when she was in a happy mood because she was going to see the *Reine Topaze*, or when her eyes grew serious, troubled, petulant, if she was afraid of missing the flower-show, or merely of not being in time for tea, with muffins and toast, at the Rue Royale tea-rooms, where she believed that regular attendance was indispensable, and set the seal upon a woman's certificate of 'smartness,' Swann, enraptured, as all of us are, at times, by the natural behaviour of a child, or by the likeness of a portrait, which appears to be on the point of speaking, would feel so distinctly the soul of his mistress rising to fill the outlines of her face that he could not refrain from going across and welcoming it with his lips. "Oh, then, so little Odette wants us to take her to the flower-show, does she? she wants to be admired, does she? very well, we will take her there, we can but obey her wishes." As Swann's sight was beginning to fail, he had to resign himself to a pair of spectacles, which he wore at home, when working, while to face the world he adopted a single eyeglass, as being less disfiguring. The first time that she saw it in his eye, she could not contain herself for joy: "I really do think—for a man, that is to say—it is tremendously smart! How nice you look with it! Every inch a gentleman. All you want now is a title!" she concluded, with a tinge of regret in her voice. He liked Odette to say these things, just as, if he had been in love with a Breton girl, he would have enjoyed seeing her in her coif and hearing her say that she believed in ghosts. Always until then, as is common among men whose taste for the fine arts develops independently of their sensuality, a grotesque disparity had existed between the satisfactions which he would accord to either taste simultaneously; yielding to the seduction of works of art which grew more and more subtle as the women in whose company he enjoyed them grew more illiterate and common, he would take a little servant-girl to a screened box in a theatre where there was some decadent piece which he had wished to see performed, or to an exhibition of impressionist painting, with the conviction, moreover, that an educated, 'society' woman would have understood them no better, but would not have managed to keep quiet about them so prettily. But, now that he was in love with Odette, all this was changed; to share her sympathies, to strive to be one with her in spirit was a task so attractive that he tried to find satisfaction in the things that she liked, and did find a pleasure, not only in copying her habits but in adopting her opinions, which was all the deeper because, as those habits and opinions sprang from no roots in her intelligence, they suggested to him nothing except that love, for the sake of which he had preferred them to his own. If he went again to *Serge Panine*, if he looked out for opportunities of going to watch Olivier Métra conducting, it was for the pleasure of being initiated into every one of the ideas in Odette's mind, of feeling that he had an equal share in all her tastes. This charm of drawing him closer to her, which her favourite plays and pictures and places

possessed, struck him as being more mysterious than the intrinsic charm of more beautiful things and places, which appealed to him by their beauty, but without recalling her. Besides, having allowed the intellectual beliefs of his youth to grow faint, until his scepticism, as a finished 'man of the world,' had gradually penetrated them unawares, he held (or at least he had held for so long that he had fallen into the habit of saying) that the objects which we admire have no absolute value in themselves, that the whole thing is a matter of dates and castes, and consists in a series of fashions, the most vulgar of which are worth just as much as those which are regarded as the most refined. And as he had decided that the importance which Odette attached to receiving cards for a private view was not in itself any more ridiculous than the pleasure which he himself had at one time felt in going to luncheon with the Prince of Wales, so he did not think that the admiration which she professed for Monte-Carlo or for the Righi was any more unreasonable than his own liking for Holland (which she imagined as ugly) and for Versailles (which bored her to tears). And so he denied himself the pleasure of visiting those places, consoling himself with the reflection that it was for her sake that he wished to feel, to like nothing that was not equally felt and liked by her.

Like everything else that formed part of Odette's environment, and was no more, in a sense, than the means whereby he might see and talk to her more often, he enjoyed the society of the Verdurins. With them, since, at the heart of all their entertainments, dinners, musical evenings, games, suppers in fancy dress, excursions to the country, theatre parties, even the infrequent 'big evenings' when they entertained 'bores,' there were the presence of Odette, the sight of Odette, conversation with Odette, an inestimable boon which the Verdurins, by inviting him to their house, bestowed on Swann, he was happier in the little 'nucleus' than anywhere else, and tried to find some genuine merit in each of its members, imagining that his tastes would lead him to frequent their society for the rest of his life. Never daring to whisper to himself, lest he should doubt the truth of the suggestion, that he would always be in love with Odette, at least when he tried to suppose that he would always go to the Verdurins' (a proposition which, a priori, raised fewer fundamental objections on the part of his intelligence), he saw himself for the future continuing to meet Odette every evening; that did not, perhaps, come quite to the same thing as his being permanently in love with her, but for the moment while he was in love with her, to feel that he would not, one day, cease to see her was all that he could ask. "What a charming atmosphere!" he said to himself. "How entirely genuine life is to these people! They are far more intelligent, far more artistic, surely, than the people one knows. Mme. Verdurin, in spite of a few trifling exaggerations which are rather absurd, has a sincere love of

painting and music! What a passion for works of art, what anxiety to give pleasure to artists! Her ideas about some of the people one knows are not quite right, but then their ideas about artistic circles are altogether wrong! Possibly I make no great intellectual demands upon conversation, but I am perfectly happy talking to Cottard, although he does trot out those idiotic puns. And as for the painter, if he is rather unpleasantly affected when he tries to be paradoxical, still he has one of the finest brains that I have ever come across. Besides, what is most important, one feels quite free there, one does what one likes without constraint or fuss. What a flow of humour there is every day in that drawing-room! Certainly, with a few rare exceptions, I never want to go anywhere else again. It will become more and more of a habit, and I shall spend the rest of my life among them."

And as the qualities which he supposed to be an intrinsic part of the Verdurin character were no more, really, than their superficial reflection of the pleasure which had been enjoyed in their society by his love for Odette, those qualities became more serious, more profound, more vital, as that pleasure increased. Since Mme. Verdurin gave Swann, now and then, what alone could constitute his happiness; since, on an evening when he felt anxious because Odette had talked rather more to one of the party than to another, and, in a spasm of irritation, would not take the initiative by asking her whether she was coming home, Mme. Verdurin brought peace and joy to his troubled spirit by the spontaneous exclamation: "Odette! You'll see M. Swann home, won't you?"; since, when the summer holidays came, and after he had asked himself uneasily whether Odette might not leave Paris without him, whether he would still be able to see her every day, Mme. Verdurin was going to invite them both to spend the summer with her in the country; Swann, unconsciously allowing gratitude and self-interest to filter into his intelligence and to influence his ideas, went so far as to proclaim that Mme. Verdurin was "a great and noble soul." Should any of his old fellow-pupils in the Louvre school of painting speak to him of some rare or eminent artist, "I'd a hundred times rather," he would reply, "have the Verdurins." And, with a solemnity of diction which was new in him: "They are magnanimous creatures, and magnanimity is, after all, the one thing that matters, the one thing that gives us distinction here on earth. Look you, there are only two classes of men, the magnanimous, and the rest; and I have reached an age when one has to take sides, to decide once and for all whom one is going to like and dislike, to stick to the people one likes, and, to make up for the time one has wasted with the others, never to leave them again as long as one lives. Very well!" he went on, with the slight emotion which a man feels when, even without being fully aware of what he is doing, he says something, not because it is true but because he enjoys saying it, and listens to his

own voice uttering the words as though they came from some one else, "The die is now cast; I have elected to love none but magnanimous souls, and to live only in an atmosphere of magnanimity. You ask me whether Mme. Verdurin is really intelligent. I can assure you that she has given me proofs of a nobility of heart, of a loftiness of soul, to which no one could possibly attain—how could they?—without a corresponding loftiness of mind. Without question, she has a profound understanding of art. But it is not, perhaps, in that that she is most admirable; every little action, ingeniously, exquisitely kind, which she has performed for my sake, every friendly attention, simple little things, quite domestic and yet quite sublime, reveal a more profound comprehension of existence than all your textbooks of philosophy."

* * *

He might have reminded himself, all the same, that there were various old friends of his family who were just as simple as the Verdurins, companions of his early days who were just as fond of art, that he knew other 'great-hearted creatures,' and that, nevertheless, since he had cast his vote in favour of simplicity, the arts, and magnanimity, he had entirely ceased to see them. But these people did not know Odette, and, if they had known her, would never have thought of introducing her to him.

And so there was probably not, in the whole of the Verdurin circle, a single one of the 'faithful' who loved them, or believed that he loved them, as dearly as did Swann. And yet, when M. Verdurin said that he was not satisfied with Swann, he had not only expressed his own sentiments, he had unwittingly discovered his wife's. Doubtless Swann had too particular an affection for Odette, as to which he had failed to take Mme. Verdurin daily into his confidence; doubtless the very discretion with which he availed himself of the Verdurins' hospitality, refraining, often, from coming to dine with them for a reason which they never suspected, and in place of which they saw only an anxiety on his part not to have to decline an invitation to the house of some 'bore' or other; doubtless, also, and despite all the precautions which he had taken to keep it from them, the gradual discovery which they were making of his brilliant position in society—doubtless all these things contributed to their general annoyance with Swann. But the real, the fundamental reason was quite different. What had happened was that they had at once discovered in him a locked door, a reserved, impenetrable chamber in which he still professed silently to himself that the Princesse de Sagan was not grotesque, and that Cottard's jokes were not amusing; in a word (and for all that he never once abandoned his friendly attitude towards them all, or revolted from their dogmas), they had discovered an impossibility of imposing those dogmas upon him, of entirely converting him to their faith, the like of which they had never come

across in anyone before. They would have forgiven his going to the houses of 'bores' (to whom, as it happened, in his heart of hearts he infinitely preferred the Verdurins and all their little 'nucleus') had he consented to set a good example by openly renouncing those 'bores' in the presence of the 'faithful.' But that was an abjuration which, as they well knew, they were powerless to extort.

What a difference was there in a 'newcomer' whom Odette had asked them to invite, although she herself had met him only a few times, and on whom they were building great hopes—the Comte de Forcheville! (It turned out that he was nothing more nor less than the brother-in-law of Saniette, a discovery which filled all the 'faithful' with amazement: the manners of the old palaeographer were so humble that they had always supposed him to be of a class inferior, socially, to their own, and had never expected to learn that he came of a rich and relatively aristocratic family.) Of course, Forcheville was enormously the 'swell,' which Swann was not or had quite ceased to be; of course, he would never dream of placing, as Swann now placed, the Verdurin circle above any other. But he lacked that natural refinement which prevented Swann from associating himself with the criticisms (too obviously false to be worth his notice) that Mme. Verdurin levelled at people whom he knew. As for the vulgar and affected tirades in which the painter sometimes indulged, the bag-man's pleasantries which Cottard used to hazard,—whereas Swann, who liked both men sincerely, could easily find excuses for these without having either the courage or the hypocrisy to applaud them, Forcheville, on the other hand, was on an intellectual level which permitted him to be stupified, amazed by the invective (without in the least understanding what it all was about), and to be frankly delighted by the wit. And the very first dinner at the Verdurins' at which Forcheville was present threw a glaring light upon all the differences between them, made his qualities start into prominence and precipitated the disgrace of Swann.

There was, at this dinner, besides the usual party, a professor from the Sorbonne, one Brichot, who had met M. and Mme. Verdurin at a watering-place somewhere, and, if his duties at the university and his other works of scholarship had not left him with very little time to spare, would gladly have come to them more often. For he had that curiosity, that superstitious outlook on life, which, combined with a certain amount of scepticism with regard to the object of their studies, earn for men of intelligence, whatever their profession, for doctors who do not believe in medicine, for schoolmasters who do not believe in Latin exercises, the reputation of having broad, brilliant, and indeed superior minds. He affected, when at Mme. Verdurin's, to choose his illustrations from among the most topical subjects of the day, when he spoke of philosophy or history, principally because he regarded those sciences as no more,

really, than a preparation for life itself, and imagined that he was seeing put into practice by the 'little clan' what hitherto he had known only from books; and also, perhaps, because, having had drilled into him as a boy, and having unconsciously preserved, a feeling of reverence for certain subjects, he thought that he was casting aside the scholar's gown when he ventured to treat those subjects with a conversational licence, which seemed so to him only because the folds of the gown still clung.

Early in the course of the dinner, when M. de Forcheville, seated on the right of Mme. Verdurin, who, in the 'newcomer's' honour, had taken great pains with her toilet, observed to her: "Quite original, that white dress," the Doctor, who had never taken his eyes off him, so curious was he to learn the nature and attributes of what he called a "de," and was on the look-out for an opportunity of attracting his attention, so as to come into closer contact with him, caught in its flight the adjective '*blanche*' and, his eyes still glued to his plate, snapped out, "*Blanche*? Blanche of Castile?" then, without moving his head, shot a furtive glance to right and left of him, doubtful, but happy on the whole. While Swann, by the painful and futile effort which he made to smile, testified that he thought the pun absurd, Forcheville had shewn at once that he could appreciate its subtlety, and that he was a man of the world, by keeping within its proper limits a mirth the spontaneity of which had charmed Mme. Verdurin.

"What are you to say of a scientist like that?" she asked Forcheville. "You can't talk seriously to him for two minutes on end. Is that the sort of thing you tell them at your hospital?" she went on, turning to the Doctor. "They must have some pretty lively times there, if that's the case. I can see that I shall have to get taken in as a patient!"

"I think I heard the Doctor speak of that wicked old humbug, Blanche of Castile, if I may so express myself. Am I not right, Madame?" Brichot appealed to Mme. Verdurin, who, swooning with merriment, her eyes tightly closed, had buried her face in her two hands, from between which, now and then, escaped a muffled scream.

"Good gracious, Madame, I would not dream of shocking the reverent-minded, if there are any such around this table, *sub rosa*... I recognise, moreover, that our ineffable and Athenian—oh, how infinitely Athenian—Republic is capable of honouring, in the person of that obscurantist old she-Capet, the first of our chiefs of police. Yes, indeed, my dear host, yes, indeed!" he repeated in his ringing voice, which sounded a separate note for each syllable, in reply to a protest by M. Verdurin. "The Chronicle of Saint Denis, and the authenticity of its information is beyond question, leaves us no room for doubt on that point. No one could be more fitly chosen as Patron by a secularising proletariat than that mother of a Saint, who let him see some pretty fishy saints

besides, as Suger says, and other great St. Bernards of the sort; for with her it was a case of taking just what you pleased."

"Who is that gentleman?" Forcheville asked Mme. Verdurin. "He seems to speak with great authority."

"What! Do you mean to say you don't know the famous Brichot? Why, he's celebrated all over Europe."

"Oh, that's Bréchot, is it?" exclaimed Forcheville, who had not quite caught the name. "You must tell me all about him"; he went on, fastening a pair of goggle eyes on the celebrity. "It's always interesting to meet well-known people at dinner. But, I say, you ask us to very select parties here. No dull evenings in this house, I'm sure."

"Well, you know what it is really," said Mme. Verdurin modestly. "They feel safe here. They can talk about whatever they like, and the conversation goes off like fireworks. Now Brichot, this evening, is nothing. I've seen him, don't you know, when he's been with me, simply dazzling; you'd want to go on your knees to him. Well, with anyone else he's not the same man, he's not in the least witty, you have to drag the words out of him, he's even boring."

"That's strange," remarked Forcheville with fitting astonishment.

A sort of wit like Brichot's would have been regarded as out-and-out stupidity by the people among whom Swann had spent his early life, for all that it is quite compatible with real intelligence. And the intelligence of the Professor's vigorous and well-nourished brain might easily have been envied by many of the people in society who seemed witty enough to Swann. But these last had so thoroughly inculcated into him their likes and dislikes, at least in everything that pertained to their ordinary social existence, including that annex to social existence which belongs, strictly speaking, to the domain of intelligence, namely, conversation, that Swann could not see anything in Brichot's pleasantries; to him they were merely pedantic, vulgar, and disgustingly coarse. He was shocked, too, being accustomed to good manners, by the rude, almost barrack-room tone which this student-in-arms adopted, no matter to whom he was speaking. Finally, perhaps, he had lost all patience that evening as he watched Mme. Verdurin welcoming, with such unnecessary warmth, this Forcheville fellow, whom it had been Odette's unaccountable idea to bring to the house. Feeling a little awkward, with Swann there also, she had asked him on her arrival: "What do you think of my guest?"

And he, suddenly realising for the first time that Forcheville, whom he had known for years, could actually attract a woman, and was quite a good specimen of a man, had

retorted: "Beastly!" He had, certainly, no idea of being jealous of Odette, but did not feel quite so happy as usual, and when Brichot, having begun to tell them the story of Blanche of Castile's mother, who, according to him, "had been with Henry Plantagenet for years before they were married," tried to prompt Swann to beg him to continue the story, by interjecting "Isn't that so, M. Swann?" in the martial accents which one uses in order to get down to the level of an unintelligent rustic or to put the 'fear of God' into a trooper, Swann cut his story short, to the intense fury of their hostess, by begging to be excused for taking so little interest in Blanche of Castile, as he had something that he wished to ask the painter. He, it appeared, had been that afternoon to an exhibition of the work of another artist, also a friend of Mme. Verdurin, who had recently died, and Swann wished to find out from him (for he valued his discrimination) whether there had really been anything more in this later work than the virtuosity which had struck people so forcibly in his earlier exhibitions.

"From that point of view it was extraordinary, but it did not seem to me to be a form of art which you could call 'elevated,'" said Swann with a smile.

"Elevated... to the height of an Institute!" interrupted Cottard, raising his arms with mock solemnity. The whole table burst out laughing.

"What did I tell you?" said Mme. Verdurin to Forcheville. "It's simply impossible to be serious with him. When you least expect it, out he comes with a joke."

But she observed that Swann, and Swann alone, had not unbent. For one thing he was none too well pleased with Cottard for having secured a laugh at his expense in front of Forcheville. But the painter, instead of replying in a way that might have interested Swann, as he would probably have done had they been alone together, preferred to win the easy admiration of the rest by exercising his wit upon the talent of their dead friend.

"I went up to one of them," he began, "just to see how it was done; I stuck my nose into it. Yes, I don't think! Impossible to say whether it was done with glue, with soap, with sealing-wax, with sunshine, with leaven, with excrem..."

"And one make twelve!" shouted the Doctor, wittily, but just too late, for no one saw the point of his interruption.

"It looks as though it were done with nothing at all," resumed the painter. "No more chance of discovering the trick than there is in the 'Night Watch,' or the 'Regents,' and it's even bigger work than either Rembrandt or Hals ever did. It's all there,—and yet, no, I'll take my oath it isn't."

Then, just as singers who have reached the highest note in their compass, proceed to hum the rest of the air in falsetto, he had to be satisfied with murmuring, smiling the while, as if, after all, there had been something irresistibly amusing in the sheer beauty of the painting: "It smells all right; it makes your head go round; it catches your breath; you feel ticklish all over—and not the faintest clue to how it's done. The man's a sorcerer; the thing's a conjuring-trick, it's a miracle," bursting outright into laughter, "it's dishonest!" Then stopping, solemnly raising his head, pitching his voice on a double-bass note which he struggled to bring into harmony, he concluded, "And it's so loyal!"

Except at the moment when he had called it "bigger than the 'Night Watch,'" a blasphemy which had called forth an instant protest from Mme. Verdurin, who regarded the 'Night Watch' as the supreme masterpiece of the universe (conjointly with the 'Ninth' and the 'Samothrace'), and at the word "excrement," which had made Forcheville throw a sweeping glance round the table to see whether it was 'all right,' before he allowed his lips to curve in a prudish and conciliatory smile, all the party (save Swann) had kept their fascinated and adoring eyes fixed upon the painter.

"I do so love him when he goes up in the air like that!" cried Mme. Verdurin, the moment that he had finished, enraptured that the table-talk should have proved so entertaining on the very night that Forcheville was dining with them for the first time. "Hallo, you!" she turned to her husband, "what's the matter with you, sitting there gaping like a great animal? You know, though, don't you," she apologised for him to the painter, "that he can talk quite well when he chooses; anybody would think it was the first time he had ever listened to you. If you had only seen him while you were speaking; he was just drinking it all in. And to-morrow he will tell us everything you said, without missing a word."

"No, really, I'm not joking!" protested the painter, enchanted by the success of his speech. "You all look as if you thought I was pulling your legs, that it was just a trick. I'll take you to see the show, and then you can say whether I've been exaggerating; I'll bet you anything you like, you'll come away more 'up in the air' than I am!"

"But we don't suppose for a moment that you're exaggerating; we only want you to go on with your dinner, and my husband too. Give M. Biche some more sole, can't you see his has got cold? We're not in any hurry; you're dashing round as if the house was on fire. Wait a little; don't serve the salad just yet."

Mme. Cottard, who was a shy woman and spoke but seldom, was not lacking, for all that, in self-assurance when a happy inspiration put the right word in her mouth. She felt that it would be well received; the thought gave her confidence, and what she was

doing was done with the object not so much of shining herself, as of helping her husband on in his career. And so she did not allow the word 'salad,' which Mme. Verdurin had just uttered, to pass unchallenged.

"It's not a Japanese salad, is it?" she whispered, turning towards Odette.

And then, in her joy and confusion at the combination of neatness and daring which there had been in making so discreet and yet so unmistakable an allusion to the new and brilliantly successful play by Dumas, she broke down in a charming, girlish laugh, not very loud, but so irresistible that it was some time before she could control it.

"Who is that lady? She seems devilish clever," said Forcheville.

"No, it is not. But we will have one for you if you will all come to dinner on Friday."

"You will think me dreadfully provincial, sir," said Mme. Cottard to Swann, "but, do you know, I haven't been yet to this famous *Francillon* that everybody's talking about. The Doctor has been (I remember now, he told me what a very great pleasure it had been to him to spend the evening with you there) and I must confess, I don't see much sense in spending money on seats for him to take me, when he's seen the play already. Of course an evening at the Théâtre-Français is never wasted, really; the acting's so good there always; but we have some very nice friends," (Mme. Cottard would hardly ever utter a proper name, but restricted herself to "some friends of ours" or "one of my friends," as being more 'distinguished,' speaking in an affected tone and with all the importance of a person who need give names only when she chooses) "who often have a box, and are kind enough to take us to all the new pieces that are worth going to, and so I'm certain to see this *Francillon* sooner or later, and then I shall know what to think. But I do feel such a fool about it, I must confess, for, whenever I pay a call anywhere, I find everybody talking—it's only natural—about that wretched Japanese salad. Really and truly, one's beginning to get just a little tired of hearing about it," she went on, seeing that Swann seemed less interested than she had hoped in so burning a topic. "I must admit, though, that it's sometimes quite amusing, the way they joke about it: I've got a friend, now, who is most original, though she's really a beautiful woman, most popular in society, goes everywhere, and she tells me that she got her cook to make one of these Japanese salads, putting in everything that young M. Dumas says you're to put in, in the play. Then she asked just a few friends to come and taste it. I was not among the favoured few, I'm sorry to say. But she told us all about it on her next 'day'; it seems it was quite horrible, she made us all laugh till we cried. I don't know; perhaps it was the way she told it," Mme. Cottard added doubtfully, seeing that Swann still looked grave.

And, imagining that it was, perhaps, because he had not been amused by *Francillon*: "Well, I daresay I shall be disappointed with it, after all. I don't suppose it's as good as the piece Mme. de Crécy worships, *Serge Panine*. There's a play, if you like; so deep, makes you think! But just fancy giving a receipt for a salad on the stage of the Théâtre-Français! Now, *Serge Panine*—! But then, it's like everything that comes from the pen of M. Georges Ohnet, it's so well written. I wonder if you know the *Maître des Forges*, which I like even better than *Serge Panine*."

"Pardon me," said Swann with polite irony, "but I can assure you that my want of admiration is almost equally divided between those masterpieces."

"Really, now; that's very interesting. And what don't you like about them? Won't you ever change your mind? Perhaps you think he's a little too sad. Well, well, what I always say is, one should never argue about plays or novels. Everyone has his own way of looking at things, and what may be horrible to you is, perhaps, just what I like best."

She was interrupted by Forcheville's addressing Swann. What had happened was that, while Mme. Cottard was discussing *Francillon*, Forcheville had been expressing to Mme. Verdurin his admiration for what he called the "little speech" of the painter. "Your friend has such a flow of language, such a memory!" he had said to her when the painter had come to a standstill, "I've seldom seen anything like it. He'd make a first-rate preacher. By Jove, I wish I was like that. What with him and M. Bréchot you've drawn two lucky numbers to-night; though I'm not so sure that, simply as a speaker, this one doesn't knock spots off the Professor. It comes more naturally with him, less like reading from a book. Of course, the way he goes on, he does use some words that are a bit realistic, and all that; but that's quite the thing nowadays; anyhow, it's not often I've seen a man hold the floor as cleverly as that, 'hold the spittoon,' as we used to say in the regiment, where, by the way, we had a man he rather reminds me of. You could take anything you liked—I don't know what—this glass, say; and he'd talk away about it for hours; no, not this glass; that's a silly thing to say, I'm sorry; but something a little bigger, like the battle of Waterloo, or anything of that sort, he'd tell you things you simply wouldn't believe. Why, Swann was in the regiment then; he must have known him."

"Do you see much of M. Swann?" asked Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh dear, no!" he answered, and then, thinking that if he made himself pleasant to Swann he might find favour with Odette, he decided to take this opportunity of flattering him by speaking of his fashionable friends, but speaking as a man of the world himself, in a tone of good-natured criticism, and not as though he were

congratulating Swann upon some undeserved good fortune: "Isn't that so, Swann? I never see anything of you, do I?—But then, where on earth is one to see him? The creature spends all his time shut up with the La Trémoïlles, with the Laumes and all that lot!" The imputation would have been false at any time, and was all the more so, now that for at least a year Swann had given up going to almost any house but the Verdurins'. But the mere names of families whom the Verdurins did not know were received by them in a reproachful silence. M. Verdurin, dreading the painful impression which the mention of these 'bores,' especially when flung at her in this tactless fashion, and in front of all the 'faithful,' was bound to make on his wife, cast a covert glance at her, instinct with anxious solicitude. He saw then that in her fixed resolution to take no notice, to have escaped contact, altogether, with the news which had just been addressed to her, not merely to remain dumb but to have been deaf as well, as we pretend to be when a friend who has been in the wrong attempts to slip into his conversation some excuse which we should appear to be accepting, should we appear to have heard it without protesting, or when some one utters the name of an enemy, the very mention of whom in our presence is forbidden; Mme. Verdurin, so that her silence should have the appearance, not of consent but of the unconscious silence which inanimate objects preserve, had suddenly emptied her face of all life, of all mobility; her rounded forehead was nothing, now, but an exquisite study in high relief, which the name of those La Trémoïlles, with whom Swann was always 'shut up,' had failed to penetrate; her nose, just perceptibly wrinkled in a frown, exposed to view two dark cavities that were, surely, modelled from life. You would have said that her half-opened lips were just about to speak. It was all no more, however, than a wax cast, a mask in plaster, the sculptor's design for a monument, a bust to be exhibited in the Palace of Industry, where the public would most certainly gather in front of it and marvel to see how the sculptor, in expressing the unchallengeable dignity of the Verdurins, as opposed to that of the La Trémoïlles or Laumes, whose equals (if not, indeed, their betters) they were, and the equals and betters of all other 'bores' upon the face of the earth, had managed to invest with a majesty that was almost Papal the whiteness and rigidity of his stone. But the marble at last grew animated and let it be understood that it didn't do to be at all squeamish if one went to that house, since the woman was always tipsy and the husband so uneducated that he called a corridor a 'collidor'!

"You'd need to pay me a lot of money before I'd let any of that lot set foot inside my house," Mme. Verdurin concluded, gazing imperially down on Swann.

She could scarcely have expected him to capitulate so completely as to echo the holy simplicity of the pianist's aunt, who at once exclaimed: "To think of that, now! What

surprises me is that they can get anybody to go near them; I'm sure I should be afraid; one can't be too careful. How can people be so common as to go running after them?"

But he might, at least, have replied, like Forcheville: "Gad, she's a duchess; there are still plenty of people who are impressed by that sort of thing," which would at least have permitted Mme. Verdurin the final retort, "And a lot of good may it do them!" Instead of which, Swann merely smiled, in a manner which shewed, quite clearly, that he could not, of course, take such an absurd suggestion seriously. M. Verdurin, who was still casting furtive and intermittent glances at his wife, could see with regret, and could understand only too well that she was now inflamed with the passion of a Grand Inquisitor who cannot succeed in stamping out a heresy; and so, in the hope of bringing Swann round to a retractation (for the courage of one's opinions is always a form of calculating cowardice in the eyes of the 'other side'), he broke in:

"Tell us frankly, now, what you think of them yourself. We shan't repeat it to them, you may be sure."

To which Swann answered: "Why, I'm not in the least afraid of the Duchess (if it is of the La Trémoïlles that you're speaking). I can assure you that everyone likes going to see her. I don't go so far as to say that she's at all 'deep'—" he pronounced the word as if it meant something ridiculous, for his speech kept the traces of certain mental habits which the recent change in his life, a rejuvenation illustrated by his passion for music, had inclined him temporarily to discard, so that at times he would actually state his views with considerable warmth—"but I am quite sincere when I say that she is intelligent, while her husband is positively a bookworm. They are charming people."

His explanation was terribly effective; Mme. Verdurin now realised that this one state of unbelief would prevent her 'little nucleus' from ever attaining to complete unanimity, and was unable to restrain herself, in her fury at the obstinacy of this wretch who could not see what anguish his words were causing her, but cried aloud, from the depths of her tortured heart, "You may think so if you wish, but at least you need not say so to us."

"It all depends upon what you call intelligence." Forcheville felt that it was his turn to be brilliant. "Come now, Swann, tell us what you mean by intelligence."

"There," cried Odette, "that's one of the big things I beg him to tell me about, and he never will."

"Oh, but..." protested Swann.

"Oh, but nonsense!" said Odette.

"A water-butt?" asked the Doctor.

"To you," pursued Forcheville, "does intelligence mean what they call clever talk; you know, the sort of people who worm their way into society?"

"Finish your sweet, so that they can take your plate away!" said Mme. Verdurin sourly to Saniette, who was lost in thought and had stopped eating. And then, perhaps a little ashamed of her rudeness, "It doesn't matter; take your time about it; there's no hurry; I only reminded you because of the others, you know; it keeps the servants back."

"There is," began Brichot, with a resonant smack upon every syllable, "a rather curious definition of intelligence by that pleasing old anarchist Fénelon..."

"Just listen to this!" Mme. Verdurin rallied Forcheville and the Doctor. "He's going to give us Fénelon's definition of intelligence. That's interesting. It's not often you get a chance of hearing that!"

But Brichot was keeping Fénelon's definition until Swann should have given his own. Swann remained silent, and, by this fresh act of recreancy, spoiled the brilliant tournament of dialectic which Mme. Verdurin was rejoicing at being able to offer to Forcheville.

"You see, it's just the same as with me!" Odette was peevish. "I'm not at all sorry to see that I'm not the only one he doesn't find quite up to his level."

"These de La Trémouailles whom Mme. Verdurin has exhibited to us as so little to be desired," inquired Brichot, articulating vigorously, "are they, by any chance, descended from the couple whom that worthy old snob, Sévigné, said she was delighted to know, because it was so good for her peasants? True, the Marquise had another reason, which in her case probably came first, for she was a thorough journalist at heart, and always on the look-out for 'copy.' And, in the journal which she used to send regularly to her daughter, it was Mme. de La Trémouaille, kept well-informed through all her grand connections, who supplied the foreign politics."

"Oh dear, no. I'm quite sure they aren't the same family," said Mme. Verdurin desperately.

Saniette who, ever since he had surrendered his untouched plate to the butler, had been plunged once more in silent meditation, emerged finally to tell them, with a nervous laugh, a story of how he had once dined with the Duc de La Trémoïlle, the point of which was that the Duke did not know that George Sand was the pseudonym of a woman. Swann, who really liked Saniette, felt bound to supply him with a few facts illustrative of the Duke's culture, which would prove that such ignorance on his

part was literally impossible; but suddenly he stopped short; he had realised, as he was speaking, that Saniette needed no proof, but knew already that the story was untrue for the simple reason that he had at that moment invented it. The worthy man suffered acutely from the Verdurins' always finding him so dull; and as he was conscious of having been more than ordinarily morose this evening, he had made up his mind that he would succeed in being amusing, at least once, before the end of dinner. He surrendered so quickly, looked so wretched at the sight of his castle in ruins, and replied in so craven a tone to Swann, appealing to him not to persist in a refutation which was already superfluous, "All right; all right; anyhow, even if I have made a mistake that's not a crime, I hope," that Swann longed to be able to console him by insisting that the story was indubitably true and exquisitely funny. The Doctor, who had been listening, had an idea that it was the right moment to interject "*Se non è vero*," but he was not quite certain of the words, and was afraid of being caught out.

After dinner, Forcheville went up to the Doctor. "She can't have been at all bad looking, Mme. Verdurin; anyhow, she's a woman you can really talk to; that's all I want. Of course she's getting a bit broad in the beam. But Mme. de Crécy! There's a little woman who knows what's what, all right. Upon my word and soul, you can see at a glance she's got the American eye, that girl has. We are speaking of Mme. de Crécy," he explained, as M. Verdurin joined them, his pipe in his mouth. "I should say that, as a specimen of the female form—"

"I'd rather have it in my bed than a clap of thunder!" the words came tumbling from Cottard, who had for some time been waiting in vain until Forcheville should pause for breath, so that he might get in his hoary old joke, a chance for which might not, he feared, come again, if the conversation should take a different turn; and he produced it now with that excessive spontaneity and confidence which may often be noticed attempting to cover up the coldness, and the slight flutter of emotion, inseparable from a prepared recitation. Forcheville knew and saw the joke, and was thoroughly amused. As for M. Verdurin, he was unsparing of his merriment, having recently discovered a way of expressing it by a symbol, different from his wife's, but equally simple and obvious. Scarcely had he begun the movement of head and shoulders of a man who was 'shaking with laughter' than he would begin also to cough, as though, in laughing too violently, he had swallowed a mouthful of smoke from his pipe. And by keeping the pipe firmly in his mouth he could prolong indefinitely the dumb-show of suffocation and hilarity. So he and Mme. Verdurin (who, at the other side of the room, where the painter was telling her a story, was shutting her eyes preparatory to flinging her face into her hands) resembled two masks in a theatre, each representing Comedy, but in a different way.

M. Verdurin had been wiser than he knew in not taking his pipe out of his mouth, for Cottard, having occasion to leave the room for a moment, murmured a witty euphemism which he had recently acquired and repeated now whenever he had to go to the place in question: "I must just go and see the Duc d'Aumale for a minute," so drolly, that M. Verdurin's cough began all over again.

"Now, then, take your pipe out of your mouth; can't you see, you'll choke if you try to bottle up your laughter like that," counselled Mme. Verdurin, as she came round with a tray of liqueurs.

"What a delightful man your husband is; he has the wit of a dozen!" declared Forcheville to Mme. Cottard. "Thank you, thank you, an old soldier like me can never say 'No' to a drink."

"M. de Forcheville thinks Odette charming," M. Verdurin told his wife.

"Why, do you know, she wants so much to meet you again some day at luncheon. We must arrange it, but don't on any account let Swann hear about it. He spoils everything, don't you know. I don't mean to say that you're not to come to dinner too, of course; we hope to see you very often. Now that the warm weather's coming, we're going to have dinner out of doors whenever we can. That won't bore you, will it, a quiet little dinner, now and then, in the Bois? Splendid, splendid, that will be quite delightful....

"Aren't you going to do any work this evening, I say?" she screamed suddenly to the little pianist, seeing an opportunity for displaying, before a 'newcomer' of Forcheville's importance, at once her unfailing wit and her despotic power over the 'faithful.'

"M. de Forcheville was just going to say something dreadful about you," Mme. Cottard warned her husband as he reappeared in the room. And he, still following up the idea of Forcheville's noble birth, which had obsessed him all through dinner, began again with: "I am treating a Baroness just now, Baroness Putbus; weren't there some Putbuses in the Crusades? Anyhow they've got a lake in Pomerania that's ten times the size of the Place de la Concorde. I am treating her for dry arthritis; she's a charming woman. Mme. Verdurin knows her too, I believe."

Which enabled Forcheville, a moment later, finding himself alone with Mme. Cottard, to complete his favourable verdict on her husband with: "He's an interesting man, too; you can see that he knows some good people. Gad! but they get to know a lot of things, those doctors."

"D'you want me to play the phrase from the sonata for M. Swann?" asked the pianist.

"What the devil's that? Not the sonata-snake, I hope!" shouted M. de Forcheville, hoping to create an effect. But Dr. Cottard, who had never heard this pun, missed the point of it, and imagined that M. de Forcheville had made a mistake. He dashed in boldly to correct it: "No, no. The word isn't *serpent-à-sonates*, it's *serpent-à-sonnettes*!" he explained in a tone at once zealous, impatient, and triumphant.

Forcheville explained the joke to him. The Doctor blushed.

"You'll admit it's not bad, eh, Doctor?"

"Oh! I've known it for ages."

Then they were silenced; heralded by the waving tremolo of the violin-part, which formed a bristling bodyguard of sound two octaves above it—and as in a mountainous country, against the seeming immobility of a vertically falling torrent, one may distinguish, two hundred feet below, the tiny form of a woman walking in the valley—the little phrase had just appeared, distant but graceful, protected by the long, gradual unfurling of its transparent, incessant and sonorous curtain. And Swann, in his heart of hearts, turned to it, spoke to it as to a confidant in the secret of his love, as to a friend of Odette who would assure him that he need pay no attention to this Forcheville.

"Ah! you've come too late!" Mme. Verdurin greeted one of the 'faithful,' whose invitation had been only 'to look in after dinner,' "we've been having a simply incomparable Brichot! You never heard such eloquence! But he's gone. Isn't that so, M. Swann? I believe it's the first time you've met him," she went on, to emphasize the fact that it was to her that Swann owed the introduction. "Isn't that so; wasn't he delicious, our Brichot?"

Swann bowed politely.

"No? You weren't interested?" she asked dryly.

"Oh, but I assure you, I was quite enthralled. He is perhaps a little too peremptory, a little too jovial for my taste. I should like to see him a little less confident at times, a little more tolerant, but one feels that he knows a great deal, and on the whole he seems a very sound fellow."

The party broke up very late. Cottard's first words to his wife were: "I have rarely seen Mme. Verdurin in such form as she was to-night."

"What exactly is your Mme. Verdurin? A bit of a bad hat, eh?" said Forcheville to the painter, to whom he had offered a 'lift.' Odette watched his departure with regret; she

dared not refuse to let Swann take her home, but she was moody and irritable in the carriage, and, when he asked whether he might come in, replied, "I suppose so," with an impatient shrug of her shoulders. When they had all gone, Mme. Verdurin said to her husband: "Did you notice the way Swann laughed, such an idiotic laugh, when we spoke about Mme. La Trémoïlle?"

She had remarked, more than once, how Swann and Forcheville suppressed the particle 'de' before that lady's name. Never doubting that it was done on purpose, to shew that they were not afraid of a title, she had made up her mind to imitate their arrogance, but had not quite grasped what grammatical form it ought to take. Moreover, the natural corruptness of her speech overcoming her implacable republicanism, she still said instinctively "the de La Trémoïlles," or, rather (by an abbreviation sanctified by the usage of music-hall singers and the writers of the 'captions' beneath caricatures, who elide the 'de'), "the d'La Trémoïlles," but she corrected herself at once to "Madame La Trémoïlle.—The *Duchess*, as Swann calls her," she added ironically, with a smile which proved that she was merely quoting, and would not, herself, accept the least responsibility for a classification so puerile and absurd.

"I don't mind saying that I thought him extremely stupid."

M. Verdurin took it up. "He's not sincere. He's a crafty customer, always hovering between one side and the other. He's always trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. What a difference between him and Forcheville. There, at least, you have a man who tells you straight out what he thinks. Either you agree with him or you don't. Not like the other fellow, who's never definitely fish or fowl. Did you notice, by the way, that Odette seemed all out for Forcheville, and I don't blame her, either. And then, after all, if Swann tries to come the man of fashion over us, the champion of distressed Duchesses, at any rate the other man has got a title; he's always Comte de Forcheville!" he let the words slip delicately from his lips, as though, familiar with every page of the history of that dignity, he were making a scrupulously exact estimate of its value, in relation to others of the sort.

"I don't mind saying," Mme. Verdurin went on, "that he saw fit to utter some most venomous, and quite absurd insinuations against Brichot. Naturally, once he saw that Brichot was popular in this house, it was a way of hitting back at us, of spoiling our party. I know his sort, the dear, good friend of the family, who pulls you all to pieces on the stairs as he's going away."

"Didn't I say so?" retorted her husband. "He's simply a failure; a poor little wretch who goes through life mad with jealousy of anything that's at all big."

Had the truth been known, there was not one of the 'faithful' who was not infinitely more malicious than Swann; but the others would all take the precaution of tempering their malice with obvious pleasantries, with little sparks of emotion and cordiality; while the least indication of reserve on Swann's part, undraped in any such conventional formula as "Of course, I don't want to say anything—" to which he would have scorned to descend, appeared to them a deliberate act of treachery. There are certain original and distinguished authors in whom the least 'freedom of speech' is thought revolting because they have not begun by flattering the public taste, and serving up to it the commonplace expressions to which it is used; it was by the same process that Swann infuriated M. Verdurin. In his case as in theirs it was the novelty of his language which led his audience to suspect the blackness of his designs.

Swann was still unconscious of the disgrace that threatened him at the Verdurins', and continued to regard all their absurdities in the most rosy light, through the admiring eyes of love.

As a rule he made no appointments with Odette except for the evenings; he was afraid of her growing tired of him if he visited her during the day as well; at the same time he was reluctant to forfeit, even for an hour, the place that he held in her thoughts, and so was constantly looking out for an opportunity of claiming her attention, in any way that would not be displeasing to her. If, in a florist's or a jeweller's window, a plant or an ornament caught his eye, he would at once think of sending them to Odette, imagining that the pleasure which the casual sight of them had given him would instinctively be felt, also, by her, and would increase her affection for himself; and he would order them to be taken at once to the Rue La pérouse, so as to accelerate the moment in which, as she received an offering from him, he might feel himself, in a sense, transported into her presence. He was particularly anxious, always, that she should receive these presents before she went out for the evening, so that her sense of gratitude towards him might give additional tenderness to her welcome when he arrived at the Verdurins', might even—for all he knew—if the shopkeeper made haste, bring him a letter from her before dinner, or herself, in person, upon his doorstep, come on a little extraordinary visit of thanks. As in an earlier phase, when he had experimented with the reflex action of anger and contempt upon her character, he sought now by that of gratification to elicit from her fresh particles of her intimate feelings, which she had never yet revealed.

Often she was embarrassed by lack of money, and under pressure from a creditor would come to him for assistance. He enjoyed this, as he enjoyed everything which could impress Odette with his love for herself, or merely with his influence, with the extent of the use that she might make of him. Probably if anyone had said to him, at

the beginning, "It's your position that attracts her," or at this stage, "It's your money that she's really in love with," he would not have believed the suggestion, nor would he have been greatly distressed by the thought that people supposed her to be attached to him, that people felt them to be united by any ties so binding as those of snobbishness or wealth. But even if he had accepted the possibility, it might not have caused him any suffering to discover that Odette's love for him was based on a foundation more lasting than mere affection, or any attractive qualities which she might have found in him; on a sound, commercial interest; an interest which would postpone for ever the fatal day on which she might be tempted to bring their relations to an end. For the moment, while he lavished presents upon her, and performed all manner of services, he could rely on advantages not contained in his person, or in his intellect, could forego the endless, killing effort to make himself attractive. And this delight in being a lover, in living by love alone, of the reality of which he was inclined to be doubtful, the price which, in the long run, he must pay for it, as a dilettante in immaterial sensations, enhanced its value in his eyes—as one sees people who are doubtful whether the sight of the sea and the sound of its waves are really enjoyable, become convinced that they are, as also of the rare quality and absolute detachment of their own taste, when they have agreed to pay several pounds a day for a room in an hotel, from which that sight and that sound may be enjoyed.

One day, when reflections of this order had brought him once again to the memory of the time when some one had spoken to him of Odette as of a 'kept' woman, and when, once again, he had amused himself with contrasting that strange personification, the 'kept' woman—an iridescent mixture of unknown and demoniacal qualities, embroidered, as in some fantasy of Gustave Moreau, with poison-dripping flowers, interwoven with precious jewels—with that Odette upon whose face he had watched the passage of the same expressions of pity for a sufferer, resentment of an act of injustice, gratitude for an act of kindness, which he had seen, in earlier days, on his own mother's face, and on the faces of friends; that Odette, whose conversation had so frequently turned on the things that he himself knew better than anyone, his collections, his room, his old servant, his banker, who kept all his title-deeds and bonds;—the thought of the banker reminded him that he must call on him shortly, to draw some money. And indeed, if, during the current month, he were to come less liberally to the aid of Odette in her financial difficulties than in the month before, when he had given her five thousand francs, if he refrained from offering her a diamond necklace for which she longed, he would be allowing her admiration for his generosity to decline, that gratitude which had made him so happy, and would even be running the risk of her imagining that his love for her (as she saw its visible manifestations

grow fewer) had itself diminished. And then, suddenly, he asked himself whether that was not precisely what was implied by 'keeping' a woman (as if, in fact, that idea of 'keeping' could be derived from elements not at all mysterious nor perverse, but belonging to the intimate routine of his daily life, such as that thousand-franc note, a familiar and domestic object, torn in places and mended with gummed paper, which his valet, after paying the household accounts and the rent, had locked up in a drawer in the old writing-desk whence he had extracted it to send it, with four others, to Odette) and whether it was not possible to apply to Odette, since he had known her (for he never imagined for a moment that she could ever have taken a penny from anyone else, before), that title, which he had believed so wholly inapplicable to her, of 'kept' woman. He could not explore the idea further, for a sudden access of that mental lethargy which was, with him, congenital, intermittent and providential, happened, at that moment, to extinguish every particle of light in his brain, as instantaneously as, at a later period, when electric lighting had been everywhere installed, it became possible, merely by fingering a switch, to cut off all the supply of light from a house. His mind fumbled, for a moment, in the darkness, he took off his spectacles, wiped the glasses, passed his hands over his eyes, but saw no light until he found himself face to face with a wholly different idea, the realisation that he must endeavour, in the coming month, to send Odette six or seven thousand-franc notes instead of five, simply as a surprise for her and to give her pleasure.

In the evening, when he did not stay at home until it was time to meet Odette at the Verdurins', or rather at one of the open-air restaurants which they liked to frequent in the Bois and especially at Saint-Cloud, he would go to dine in one of those fashionable houses in which, at one time, he had been a constant guest. He did not wish to lose touch with people who, for all that he knew, might be of use, some day, to Odette, and thanks to whom he was often, in the meantime, able to procure for her some privilege or pleasure. Besides, he had been used for so long to the refinement and comfort of good society that, side by side with his contempt, there had grown up also a desperate need for it, with the result that, when he had reached the point after which the humblest lodgings appeared to him as precisely on a par with the most princely mansions, his senses were so thoroughly accustomed to the latter that he could not enter the former without a feeling of acute discomfort. He had the same regard—to a degree of identity which they would never have suspected—for the little families with small incomes who asked him to dances in their flats ("straight upstairs to the fifth floor, and the door on the left") as for the Princesse de Parme, who gave the most splendid parties in Paris; but he had not the feeling of being actually 'at the ball' when he found himself herded with the fathers of families in the bedroom of the lady

of the house, while the spectacle of wash-hand-stands covered over with towels, and of beds converted into cloak-rooms, with a mass of hats and great-coats sprawling over their counterpanes, gave him the same stifling sensation that, nowadays, people who have been used for half a lifetime to electric light derive from a smoking lamp or a candle that needs to be snuffed. If he were dining out, he would order his carriage for half-past seven; while he changed his clothes, he would be wondering, all the time, about Odette, and in this way was never alone, for the constant thought of Odette gave to the moments in which he was separated from her the same peculiar charm as to those in which she was at his side. He would get into his carriage and drive off, but he knew that this thought had jumped in after him and had settled down upon his knee, like a pet animal which he might take everywhere, and would keep with him at the dinner-table, unobserved by his fellow-guests. He would stroke and fondle it, warm himself with it, and, as a feeling of languor swept over him, would give way to a slight shuddering movement which contracted his throat and nostrils—a new experience, this,—as he fastened the bunch of columbines in his buttonhole. He had for some time been feeling neither well nor happy, especially since Odette had brought Forcheville to the Verdurins', and he would have liked to go away for a while to rest in the country. But he could never summon up courage to leave Paris, even for a day, while Odette was there. The weather was warm; it was the finest part of the spring. And for all that he was driving through a city of stone to immure himself in a house without grass or garden, what was incessantly before his eyes was a park which he owned, near Combray, where, at four in the afternoon, before coming to the asparagus-bed, thanks to the breeze that was wafted across the fields from Méséglise, he could enjoy the fragrant coolness of the air as well beneath an arbour of hornbeams in the garden as by the bank of the pond, fringed with forget-me-not and iris; and where, when he sat down to dinner, trained and twined by the gardener's skilful hand, there ran all about his table currant-bush and rose.

After dinner, if he had an early appointment in the Bois or at Saint-Cloud, he would rise from table and leave the house so abruptly—especially if it threatened to rain, and so to scatter the 'faithful' before their normal time—that on one occasion the Princesse des Laumes (at whose house dinner had been so late that Swann had left before the coffee came in, to join the Verdurins on the Island in the Bois) observed:

"Really, if Swann were thirty years older, and had diabetes, there might be some excuse for his running away like that. He seems to look upon us all as a joke."

He persuaded himself that the spring-time charm, which he could not go down to Combray to enjoy, he would find at least on the Ile des Cygnes or at Saint-Cloud. But as he could think only of Odette, he would return home not knowing even if he had

tasted the fragrance of the young leaves, or if the moon had been shining. He would be welcomed by the little phrase from the sonata, played in the garden on the restaurant piano. If there was none in the garden, the Verdurins would have taken immense pains to have a piano brought out either from a private room or from the restaurant itself; not because Swann was now restored to favour; far from it. But the idea of arranging an ingenious form of entertainment for some one, even for some one whom they disliked, would stimulate them, during the time spent in its preparation, to a momentary sense of cordiality and affection. Now and then he would remind himself that another fine spring evening was drawing to a close, and would force himself to notice the trees and the sky. But the state of excitement into which Odette's presence never failed to throw him, added to a feverish ailment which, for some time now, had scarcely left him, robbed him of that sense of quiet and comfort which is an indispensable background to the impressions that we derive from nature.

One evening, when Swann had consented to dine with the Verdurins, and had mentioned during dinner that he had to attend, next day, the annual banquet of an old comrades' association, Odette had at once exclaimed across the table, in front of everyone, in front of Forcheville, who was now one of the 'faithful,' in front of the painter, in front of Cottard:

"Yes, I know, you have your banquet to-morrow; I sha'n't see you, then, till I get home; don't be too late."

And although Swann had never yet taken offence, at all seriously, at Odette's demonstrations of friendship for one or other of the 'faithful,' he felt an exquisite pleasure on hearing her thus avow, before them all, with that calm immodesty, the fact that they saw each other regularly every evening, his privileged position in her house, and her own preference for him which it implied. It was true that Swann had often reflected that Odette was in no way a remarkable woman; and in the supremacy which he wielded over a creature so distinctly inferior to himself there was nothing that especially flattered him when he heard it proclaimed to all the 'faithful'; but since he had observed that, to several other men than himself, Odette seemed a fascinating and desirable woman, the attraction which her body held for him had aroused a painful longing to secure the absolute mastery of even the tiniest particles of her heart. And he had begun to attach an incalculable value to those moments passed in her house in the evenings, when he held her upon his knee, made her tell him what she thought about this or that, and counted over that treasure to which, alone of all his earthly possessions, he still clung. And so, after this dinner, drawing her aside, he took care to thank her effusively, seeking to indicate to her by the extent of his gratitude the corresponding intensity of the pleasures which it was in her power to

bestow on him, the supreme pleasure being to guarantee him immunity, for as long as his love should last and he remain vulnerable, from the assaults of jealousy.

When he came away from his banquet, the next evening, it was pouring rain, and he had nothing but his victoria. A friend offered to take him home in a closed carriage, and as Odette, by the fact of her having invited him to come, had given him an assurance that she was expecting no one else, he could, with a quiet mind and an untroubled heart, rather than set off thus in the rain, have gone home and to bed. But perhaps, if she saw that he seemed not to adhere to his resolution to end every evening, without exception, in her company, she might grow careless, and fail to keep free for him just the one evening on which he particularly desired it.

It was after eleven when he reached her door, and as he made his apology for having been unable to come away earlier, she complained that it was indeed very late; the storm had made her unwell, her head ached, and she warned him that she would not let him stay longer than half an hour, that at midnight she would send him away; a little while later she felt tired and wished to sleep.

"No cattleya, then, to-night?" he asked, "and I've been looking forward so to a nice little cattleya."

But she was irresponsive; saying nervously: "No, dear, no cattleya tonight. Can't you see, I'm not well?"

"It might have done you good, but I won't bother you."

She begged him to put out the light before he went; he drew the curtains close round her bed and left her. But, when he was in his own house again, the idea suddenly struck him that, perhaps, Odette was expecting some one else that evening, that she had merely pretended to be tired, that she had asked him to put the light out only so that he should suppose that she was going to sleep, that the moment he had left the house she had lighted it again, and had reopened her door to the stranger who was to be her guest for the night. He looked at his watch. It was about an hour and a half since he had left her; he went out, took a cab, and stopped it close to her house, in a little street running at right angles to that other street, which lay at the back of her house, and along which he used to go, sometimes, to tap upon her bedroom window, for her to let him in. He left his cab; the streets were all deserted and dark; he walked a few yards and came out almost opposite her house. Amid the glimmering blackness of all the row of windows, the lights in which had long since been put out, he saw one, and only one, from which overflowed, between the slats of its shutters, dosed like a wine-press over its mysterious golden juice, the light that filled the room within, a light

which on so many evenings, as soon as he saw it, far off, as he turned into the street, had rejoiced his heart with its message: "She is there—expecting you," and now tortured him with: "She is there with the man she was expecting." He must know who; he tiptoed along by the wall until he reached the window, but between the slanting bars of the shutters he could see nothing; he could hear, only, in the silence of the night, the murmur of conversation. What agony he suffered as he watched that light, in whose golden atmosphere were moving, behind the closed sash, the unseen and detested pair, as he listened to that murmur which revealed the presence of the man who had crept in after his own departure, the perfidy of Odette, and the pleasures which she was at that moment tasting with the stranger.

And yet he was not sorry that he had come; the torment which had forced him to leave his own house had lost its sharpness when it lost its uncertainty, now that Odette's other life, of which he had had, at that first moment, a sudden helpless suspicion, was definitely there, almost within his grasp, before his eyes, in the full glare of the lamp-light, caught and kept there, an unwitting prisoner, in that room into which, when he would, he might force his way to surprise and seize it; or rather he would tap upon the shutters, as he had often done when he had come there very late, and by that signal Odette would at least learn that he knew, that he had seen the light and had heard the voices; while he himself, who a moment ago had been picturing her as laughing at him, as sharing with that other the knowledge of how effectively he had been tricked, now it was he that saw them, confident and persistent in their error, tricked and trapped by none other than himself, whom they believed to be a mile away, but who was there, in person, there with a plan, there with the knowledge that he was going, in another minute, to tap upon the shutter. And, perhaps, what he felt (almost an agreeable feeling) at that moment was something more than relief at the solution of a doubt, at the soothing of a pain; was an intellectual pleasure. If, since he had fallen in love, things had recovered a little of the delicate attraction that they had had for him long ago—though only when a light was shed upon them by a thought, a memory of Odette—now it was another of the faculties, prominent in the studious days of his youth, that Odette had quickened with new life, the passion for truth, but for a truth which, too, was interposed between himself and his mistress, receiving its light from her alone, a private and personal truth the sole object of which (an infinitely precious object, and one almost impersonal in its absolute beauty) was Odette—Odette in her activities, her environment, her projects, and her past. At every other period in his life, the little everyday words and actions of another person had always seemed wholly valueless to Swann; if gossip about such things were repeated to him, he would dismiss it as insignificant, and while he listened it was only the lowest, the most

commonplace part of his mind that was interested; at such moments he felt utterly dull and uninspired. But in this strange phase of love the personality of another person becomes so enlarged, so deepened, that the curiosity which he could now feel aroused in himself, to know the least details of a woman's daily occupation, was the same thirst for knowledge with which he had once studied history. And all manner of actions, from which, until now, he would have recoiled in shame, such as spying, to-night, outside a window, to-morrow, for all he knew, putting adroitly provocative questions to casual witnesses, bribing servants, listening at doors, seemed to him, now, to be precisely on a level with the deciphering of manuscripts, the weighing of evidence, the interpretation of old monuments, that was to say, so many different methods of scientific investigation, each one having a definite intellectual value and being legitimately employable in the search for truth.

As his hand stole out towards the shutters he felt a pang of shame at the thought that Odette would now know that he had suspected her, that he had returned, that he had posted himself outside her window. She had often told him what a horror she had of jealous men, of lovers who spied. What he was going to do would be extremely awkward, and she would detest him for ever after, whereas now, for the moment, for so long as he refrained from knocking, perhaps even in the act of infidelity, she loved him still. How often is not the prospect of future happiness thus sacrificed to one's impatient insistence upon an immediate gratification. But his desire to know the truth was stronger, and seemed to him nobler than his desire for her. He knew that the true story of certain events, which he would have given his life to be able to reconstruct accurately and in full, was to be read within that window, streaked with bars of light, as within the illuminated, golden boards of one of those precious manuscripts, by whose wealth of artistic treasures the scholar who consults them cannot remain unmoved. He yearned for the satisfaction of knowing the truth which so impassioned him in that brief, fleeting, precious transcript, on that translucent page, so warm, so beautiful. And besides, the advantage which he felt—which he so desperately wanted to feel—that he had over them, lay perhaps not so much in knowing as in being able to shew them that he knew. He drew himself up on tiptoe. He knocked. They had not heard; he knocked again; louder; their conversation ceased. A man's voice—he strained his ears to distinguish whose, among such of Odette's friends as he knew, the voice could be—asked:

"Who's that?"

He could not be certain of the voice. He knocked once again. The window first, then the shutters were thrown open. It was too late, now, to retire, and since she must

know all, so as not to seem too contemptible, too jealous and inquisitive, he called out in a careless, hearty, welcoming tone:

"Please don't bother; I just happened to be passing, and saw the light. I wanted to know if you were feeling better."

He looked up. Two old gentlemen stood facing him, in the window, one of them with a lamp in his hand; and beyond them he could see into the room, a room that he had never seen before. Having fallen into the habit, when he came late to Odette, of identifying her window by the fact that it was the only one still lighted in a row of windows otherwise all alike, he had been misled, this time, by the light, and had knocked at the window beyond hers, in the adjoining house. He made what apology he could and hurried home, overjoyed that the satisfaction of his curiosity had preserved their love intact, and that, having feigned for so long, when in Odette's company, a sort of indifference, he had not now, by a demonstration of jealousy, given her that proof of the excess of his own passion which, in a pair of lovers, fully and finally dispenses the recipient from the obligation to love the other enough. He never spoke to her of this misadventure, he ceased even to think of it himself. But now and then his thoughts in their wandering course would come upon this memory where it lay unobserved, would startle it into life, thrust it more deeply down into his consciousness, and leave him aching with a sharp, far-rooted pain. As though this had been a bodily pain, Swann's mind was powerless to alleviate it; in the case of bodily pain, however, since it is independent of the mind, the mind can dwell upon it, can note that it has diminished, that it has momentarily ceased. But with this mental pain, the mind, merely by recalling it, created it afresh. To determine not to think of it was but to think of it still, to suffer from it still. And when, in conversation with his friends, he forgot his sufferings, suddenly a word casually uttered would make him change countenance as a wounded man does when a clumsy hand has touched his aching limb. When he came away from Odette, he was happy, he felt calm, he recalled the smile with which, in gentle mockery, she had spoken to him of this man or of that, a smile which was all tenderness for himself; he recalled the gravity of her head which she seemed to have lifted from its axis to let it droop and fall, as though against her will, upon his lips, as she had done on that first evening in the carriage; her languishing gaze at him while she lay nestling in his arms, her bended head seeming to recede between her shoulders, as though shrinking from the cold.

But then, at once, his jealousy, as it had been the shadow of his love, presented him with the complement, with the converse of that new smile with which she had greeted him that very evening,—with which, now, perversely, she was mocking Swann while she tendered her love to another—of that lowering of her head, but lowered now to fall

on other lips, and (but bestowed upon a stranger) of all the marks of affection that she had shewn to him. And all these voluptuous memories which he bore away from her house were, as one might say, but so many sketches, rough plans, like the schemes of decoration which a designer submits to one in outline, enabling Swann to form an idea of the various attitudes, aflame or faint with passion, which she was capable of adopting for others. With the result that he came to regret every pleasure that he tasted in her company, every new caress that he invented (and had been so imprudent as to point out to her how delightful it was), every fresh charm that he found in her, for he knew that, a moment later, they would go to enrich the collection of instruments in his secret torture-chamber.

A fresh turn was given to the screw when Swann recalled a sudden expression which he had intercepted, a few days earlier, and for the first time, in Odette's eyes. It was after dinner at the Verdurins'. Whether it was because Forcheville, aware that Saniette, his brother-in-law, was not in favour with them, had decided to make a butt of him, and to shine at his expense, or because he had been annoyed by some awkward remark which Saniette had made to him, although it had passed unnoticed by the rest of the party who knew nothing of whatever tactless allusion it might conceal, or possibly because he had been for some time looking out for an opportunity of securing the expulsion from the house of a fellow-guest who knew rather too much about him, and whom he knew to be so nice-minded that he himself could not help feeling embarrassed at times merely by his presence in the room, Forcheville replied to Saniette's tactless utterance with such a volley of abuse, going out of his way to insult him, emboldened, the louder he shouted, by the fear, the pain, the entreaties of his victim, that the poor creature, after asking Mme. Verdurin whether he should stay and receiving no answer, had left the house in stammering confusion and with tears in his eyes. Odette had looked on, impassive, at this scene; but when the door had closed behind Saniette, she had forced the normal expression of her face down, as the saying is, by several pegs, so as to bring herself on to the same level of vulgarity as Forcheville; her eyes had sparkled with a malicious smile of congratulation upon his audacity, of ironical pity for the poor wretch who had been its victim; she had darted at him a look of complicity in the crime, which so clearly implied: "That's finished him off, or I'm very much mistaken. Did you see what a fool he looked? He was actually crying," that Forcheville, when his eyes met hers, sobered in a moment from the anger, or pretended anger with which he was still flushed, smiled as he explained: "He need only have made himself pleasant and he'd have been here still; a good scolding does a man no harm, at any time."

One day when Swann had gone out early in the afternoon to pay a call, and had failed to find the person at home whom he wished to see, it occurred to him to go, instead, to Odette, at an hour when, although he never went to her house then as a rule, he knew that she was always at home, resting or writing letters until tea-time, and would enjoy seeing her for a moment, if it did not disturb her. The porter told him that he believed Odette to be in; Swann rang the bell, thought that he heard a sound, that he heard footsteps, but no one came to the door. Anxious and annoyed, he went round to the other little street, at the back of her house, and stood beneath her bedroom window; the curtains were drawn and he could see nothing; he knocked loudly upon the pane, he shouted; still no one came. He could see that the neighbours were staring at him. He turned away, thinking that, after all, he had perhaps been mistaken in believing that he heard footsteps; but he remained so preoccupied with the suspicion that he could turn his mind to nothing else. After waiting for an hour, he returned. He found her at home; she told him that she had been in the house when he rang, but had been asleep; the bell had awakened her; she had guessed that it must be Swann, and had run out to meet him, but he had already gone. She had, of course, heard him knocking at the window. Swann could at once detect in this story one of those fragments of literal truth which liars, when taken by surprise, console themselves by introducing into the composition of the falsehood which they have to invent, thinking that it can be safely incorporated, and will lend the whole story an air of verisimilitude. It was true that, when Odette had just done something which she did not wish to disclose, she would take pains to conceal it in a secret place in her heart. But as soon as she found herself face to face with the man to whom she was obliged to lie, she became uneasy, all her ideas melted like wax before a flame, her inventive and her reasoning faculties were paralysed, she might ransack her brain but would find only a void; still, she must say something, and there lay within her reach precisely the fact which she had wished to conceal, which, being the truth, was the one thing that had remained. She broke off from it a tiny fragment, of no importance in itself, assuring herself that, after all, it was the best thing to do, since it was a detail of the truth, and less dangerous, therefore, than a falsehood. "At any rate, this is true," she said to herself; "that's always something to the good; he may make inquiries; he will see that this is true; it won't be this, anyhow, that will give me away." But she was wrong; it was what gave her away; she had not taken into account that this fragmentary detail of the truth had sharp edges which could not be made to fit in, except to those contiguous fragments of the truth from which she had arbitrarily detached it, edges which, whatever the fictitious details in which she might embed it, would continue to shew, by their overlapping angles and by the gaps which she had forgotten to fill, that its proper place was elsewhere.