But next morning!—after a servant had come to call me, and had brought me hot water, and while I was washing and dressing myself and trying in vain to find the things that I wanted in my trunk, from which I extracted, pell-mell, only a lot of things that were of no use whatever, what a joy it was to me, thinking already of the delights of luncheon and of a walk along the shore, to see in the window, and in all the glass fronts of the bookcases as in the portholes of a ship's cabin, the open sea, naked, unshadowed, and yet with half of its expanse in shadow, bounded by a thin and fluctuant line, and to follow with my eyes the waves that came leaping towards me, one behind another, like divers along a springboard. Every other moment, holding in one hand the starched, unyielding towel, with the name of the hotel printed upon it, with which I was making futile efforts to dry myself, I returned to the window to gaze once more upon that vast amphitheatre, dazzling, mountainous, and upon the snowy crests of its emerald waves, here and there polished and translucent, which with a placid violence, a leonine bending of the brows, let their steep fronts, to which the sun now added a smile without face or features, run forward to their goal, totter and melt and be no more. Window in which I was, henceforward, to plant myself every morning, as at the pane of a mail coach in which one has slept, to see whether, in the night, a long sought mountain-chain has come nearer or withdrawn—only here it was those hills of the sea which, before they come dancing back towards us, are apt to retire so far that often it was only at the end of a long and sandy plain that I would distinguish, miles it seemed away, their first undulations upon a background transparent, vaporous, bluish, like the glaciers that one sees in the backgrounds of the Tuscan Primitives. On other mornings it was quite close at hand that the sun was smiling upon those waters of a green as tender as that preserved in Alpine pastures (among mountains on which the sun spreads himself here and there like a lazy giant who may at any moment come leaping gaily down their craggy sides) less by the moisture of their soil than by the liquid mobility of their light. Anyhow, in that breach which shore and water between them drive through all the rest of the world, for the passage, the accumulation there of light, it is light above all, according to the direction from which it comes and along which our eyes follow it, it is light that shifts and fixes the undulations of the sea. Difference of lighting modifies no less the orientation of a place, constructs no less before our eyes new goals which it inspires in us the yearning to attain, than would a distance in space actually traversed in the course of a long journey. When, in the morning, the sun came from behind the hotel, disclosing to me the sands bathed in light as far as the first bastions of the sea, it seemed to be shewing me another side of the picture, and to be engaging me on the pursuit, along the winding path of its rays, of a journey motionless but ever varied amid all the fairest scenes of the diversified landscape of the hours. And on this first morning the sun

pointed out to me far off with a jovial finger those blue peaks of the sea, which bear no name upon any geographer's chart, until, dizzy with its sublime excursion over the thundering and chaotic surface of their crests and avalanches, it came back to take shelter from the wind in my bedroom, swaggering across the unmade bed and scattering its riches over the splashed surface of the basin-stand, and into my open trunk, where by its very splendour and ill-matched luxury it added still further to the general effect of disorder. Alas, that wind from the sea; an hour later, in the great dining-room—while we were having our luncheon, and from the leathern gourd of a lemon were sprinkling a few golden drops on to a pair of soles which presently left on our plates the plumes of their picked skeletons, curled like stiff feathers and resonant as citherns,—it seemed to my grandmother a cruel deprivation not to be able to feel its life-giving breath on her cheek, on account of the window, transparent but closed, which like the front of a glass case in a museum divided us from the beach while allowing us to look out upon its whole extent, and into which the sky entered so completely that its azure had the effect of being the colour of the windows and its white clouds only so many flaws in the glass. Imagining that I was "seated upon the mole" or at rest in the "boudoir" of which Baudelaire speaks I asked myself whether his "Sun's rays upon the sea" were not—a very different thing from the evening ray, simple and superficial as the wavering stroke of a golden pencil—just what at that moment was scorching the sea topaz-brown, fermenting it, turning it pale and milky like foaming beer, like milk, while now and then there hovered over it great blue shadows which some god seemed, for his pastime, to be shifting to and fro by moving a mirror in the sky. Unfortunately, it was not only in its outlook that it differed from our room at Combray, giving upon the houses over the way, this dining-room at Balbec, bare-walled, filled with a sunlight green as the water in a marble font, while a few feet away the full tide and broad daylight erected as though before the gates of the heavenly city an indestructible and moving rampart of emerald and gold. At Combray, since we were known to everyone, I took heed of no one. In life at the seaside one knows only one's own party. I was not yet old enough, I was still too sensitive to have outgrown the desire to find favour in the sight of other people and to possess their hearts. Nor had I acquired the more noble indifference which a man of the world would have felt, with regard to the people who were eating their luncheon in the room, nor to the boys and girls who strolled past the window, with whom I was pained by the thought that I should never be allowed to go on expeditions, though not so much pained as if my grandmother, contemptuous of social formalities and concerned about nothing but my health, had gone to them with the request, humiliating for me to overhear, that they would consent to let me accompany them. Whether they were returning to some villa beyond my ken, or had emerged from it, racquet in hand, on

their way to some lawn-tennis court, or were mounted on horses whose hooves trampled and tore my heart, I gazed at them with a passionate curiosity, in that blinding light of the beach by which social distinctions are altered, I followed all their movements through the transparency of that great bay of glass which allowed so much light to flood the room. But it intercepted the wind, and this seemed wrong to my grandmother, who, unable to endure the thought that I was losing the benefit of an hour in the open air, surreptitiously unlatched a pane and at once set flying, with the bills of fare, the newspapers, veils and hats of all the people at the other tables; she herself, fortified by the breath of heaven, remained calm and smiling like Saint Blandina, amid the torrent of invective which, increasing my sense of isolation and misery, those scornful, dishevelled, furious visitors combined to pour on us.

To a certain extent—and this, at Balbec, gave to the population, as a rule monotonously rich and cosmopolitan, of that sort of smart and "exclusive" hotel, a quite distinctive local character—they were composed of eminent persons from the departmental capitals of that region of France, a chief magistrate from Caen, a leader of the Cherbourg bar, a big solicitor from Le Mans, who annually, when the holidays came round, starting from the various points over which, throughout the working year, they were scattered like snipers in a battle or draughtsmen upon a board, concentrated their forces upon this hotel. They always reserved the same rooms, and with their wives, who had pretensions to aristocracy, formed a little group, which was joined by a leading barrister and a leading doctor from Paris, who on the day of their departure would say to the others:

"Oh, yes, of course; you don't go by our train. You are fortunate, you will be home in time for luncheon."

"Fortunate, do you say? You, who live in the Capital, in 'Paris, the great town', while I have to live in a wretched county town of a hundred thousand souls (it is true, we managed to muster a hundred and two thousand at the last census, but what is that compared to your two and a half millions?) going back, too, to asphalt streets and all the bustle and gaiety of Paris life."

They said this with a rustic burring of their 'r's, but without bitterness, for they were leading lights each in his own province, who could like other people have gone to Paris had they chosen—the chief magistrate of Caen had several times been offered a judgeship in the Court of Appeal—but had preferred to stay where they were, from love of their native towns or of obscurity or of fame, or because they were reactionaries, and enjoyed being on friendly terms with the country houses of the neighbourhood. Besides several of them were not going back at once to their county towns.

For—inasmuch as the Bay of Balbec was a little world apart in the midst of a great world, a basketful of the seasons in which were clustered in a ring good days and bad, and the months in their order, so that not only, on days when one could make out Rivebelle, which was in itself a sign of coming storms, could one see the sunlight on the houses there while Balbec was plunged in darkness, but later on, when the cold weather had reached Balbec, one could be certain of finding on that opposite shore two or three supplementary months of warmth—those of the regular visitors to the Grand Hotel whose holidays began late or lasted long, gave orders, when rain and fog came and Autumn was in the air, for their boxes to be packed and embarked, and set sail across the Bay to find summer again at Rivebelle or Costedor. This little group in the Balbec hotel looked with distrust upon each new arrival, and while affecting to take not the least interest in him, hastened, all of them, to ply with questions their friend the head waiter. For it was the same head waiter—Aimé—who returned every year for the season, and kept their tables for them; and their good ladies, having heard that his wife was "expecting", would sit after meals working each at one of the "little things", stopping only to put up their glasses and stare at us, my grandmother and myself, because we were eating hard-boiled eggs in salad, which was considered common, and was, in fact, "not done" in the best society of Alençon. They affected an attitude of contemptuous irony with regard to a Frenchman who was called "His Majesty" and had indeed proclaimed himself King of a small island in the South Seas, inhabited by a few savages. He was staying in the hotel with his pretty mistress, whom, as she crossed the beach to bathe, the little boys would greet with "Three cheers for the Queen!" because she would reward them with a shower of small silver. The chief magistrate and the barrister went so far as to pretend not to see her, and if any of their friends happened to look at her, felt bound to warn him that she was only a little shop-girl.

"But I was told that at Ostend they used the royal bathing machine."

"Well, and why not? It's on hire for twenty francs. You can take it yourself, if you care for that sort of thing. Anyhow, I know for a fact that the fellow asked for an audience, when he was there, with the King, who sent back word that he took no cognisance of any Pantomime Princes."

"Really, that's interesting! What queer people there are in the world, to be sure!"

And I dare say it was all quite true: but it was also from resentment of the thought that, to many of their fellow-visitors, they were themselves simply respectable but rather common people who did not know this King and Queen so prodigal with their small change, that the solicitor, the magistrate, the barrister, when what they were pleased

to call the "Carnival" went by, felt so much annoyance, and expressed aloud an indignation that was quite understood by their friend the head waiter who, obliged to shew proper civility to these generous if not authentic Sovereigns, still, while he took their orders, would dart from afar at his old patrons a covert but speaking glance. Perhaps there was also something of the same resentment at being erroneously supposed to be less and unable to explain that they were more smart, underlining the "fine specimen" with which they qualified a young "blood", the consumptive and dissipated son of an industrial magnate, who appeared every day in a new suit of clothes with an orchid in his buttonhole, drank champagne at luncheon, and then strolled out of the hotel, pale, impassive, a smile of complete indifference on his lips, to the casino to throw away at the baccarat table enormous sums, "which he could ill afford to lose," as the solicitor said with a resigned air to the chief magistrate, whose wife had it "on good authority" that this "detrimental" young man was bringing his parents' grey hair in sorrow to the grave.

On the other hand, the barrister and his friends could not exhaust their flow of sarcasm on the subject of a wealthy old lady of title, because she never moved any where without taking her whole household with her. Whenever the wives of the solicitor and the magistrate saw her in the dining-room at meal-times they put up their glasses and gave her an insolent scrutiny, as minute and distrustful as if she had been some dish with a pretentious name but a suspicious appearance which, after the negative result of a systematic study, must be sent away with a lofty wave of the hand and a grimace of disgust.

No doubt by this behaviour they meant only to shew that, if there were things in the world which they themselves lacked—in this instance, certain prerogatives which the old lady enjoyed, and the privilege of her acquaintance—it was not because they could not, but because they did not choose to acquire them. But they had succeeded in convincing themselves that this really was what they felt; and it was the suppression of all desire for, of all curiosity as to forms of life which were unfamiliar, of all hope of pleasing new people (for which, in the women, had been substituted a feigned contempt, an artificial brightness) that had the awkward result of obliging them to label their discontent satisfaction, and lie everlastingly to themselves, for which they were greatly to be pitied. But everyone else in the hotel was no doubt behaving in a similar fashion, though his behaviour might take a different form, and sacrificing, if not to self-importance, at any rate to certain inculcated principles and mental habits the thrilling delight of mixing in a strange kind of life. Of course, the atmosphere of the microcosm in which the old lady isolated herself was not poisoned with virulent bitterness, as was that of the group in which the wives of the solicitor and

magistrate sat chattering with impotent rage. It was indeed embalmed with a delicate and old world fragrance which, however, was none the less artificial. For at heart the old lady would probably have found in attracting, in attaching to herself (and, with that object, recreating herself) the mysterious sympathy of new friends a charm which is altogether lacking from the pleasure that is to be derived from mixing only with the people of one's own world, and reminding oneself that, one's own being the best of all possible worlds, the ill-informed contempt of "outsiders" may be disregarded. Perhaps she felt that—were she to arrive *incognito* at the Grand Hotel, Balbec, she would, in her black stuff gown and old-fashioned bonnet, bring a smile to the lips of some old reprobate, who from the depths of his rocking chair would glance up and murmur, "What a scarecrow!" or, still worse, to those of some man of repute who had, like the magistrate, kept between his pepper-and-salt whiskers a rosy complexion and a pair of sparkling eyes such as she liked to see, and would at once bring the magnifying lens of the conjugal glasses to bear upon so quaint a phenomenon; and perhaps it was in unconfessed dread of those first few minutes, which, though one knows that they will be but a few minutes, are none the less terrifying, like the first plunge of one's head under water, that this old lady sent down in advance a servant, who would inform the hotel of the personality and habits of his mistress, and, cutting short the manager's greetings, made, with an abruptness in which there was more timidity than pride, for her room, where her own curtains, substituted for those that draped the hotel windows, her own screens and photographs set up so effectively between her and the outside world, to which otherwise she would have had to adapt herself, the barrier of her private life that it was her home (in which she had comfortably stayed) that travelled rather than herself.

Thenceforward, having placed between herself, on the one hand, and the staff of the hotel and its decorators on the other the servants who bore instead of her the shock of contact with all this strange humanity, and kept up around their mistress her familiar atmosphere, having set her prejudices between herself and the other visitors, indifferent whether or not she gave offence to people whom her friends would not have had in their houses, it was in her own world that she continued to live, by correspondence with her friends, by memories, by her intimate sense of and confidence in her own position, the quality of her manners, the competence of her politeness. And every day, when she came downstairs to go for a drive in her own carriage, the lady's maid who came after her carrying her wraps, the footman who preceded her seemed like sentries who, at the gate of an embassy, flying the flag of the country to which she belonged, assured to her upon foreign soil the privilege of extra-territoriality. She did not leave her room until late in the afternoon on the day

following our arrival, so that we did not see her in the dining-room, into which the manager, since we were strangers there, conducted us, taking us under his wing, as a corporal takes a squad of recruits to the master-tailor, to have them fitted; we did see however, a moment later, a country gentleman and his daughter, of an obscure but very ancient Breton family, M. and Mlle. de Stermaria, whose table had been allotted to us, in the belief that they had gone out and would not be back until the evening. Having come to Balbec only to see various country magnates whom they knew in that neighbourhood, they spent in the hotel dining-room, what with the invitations they accepted and the visits they paid, only such time as was strictly unavoidable. It was their stiffness that preserved them intact from all human sympathy, from interesting at all the strangers seated round about them, among whom M. de Stermaria kept up the glacial, preoccupied, distant, rude, punctilious and distrustful air that we assume in a railway refreshment-room, among fellow-passengers whom we have never seen before and will never see again, and with whom we can conceive of no other relations than to defend from their onslaught our "portion" of cold chicken and our corner seat in the train. No sooner had we begun our luncheon than we were asked to leave the table, on the instructions of M. de Stermaria who had just arrived and, without the faintest attempt at an apology to us, requested the head waiter, in our hearing to "see that such a mistake did not occur again," for it was repugnant to him that "people whom he did not know" should have taken his table.

And certainly into the feeling which impelled a young actress (better known, though, for her smart clothes, her smart sayings, her collection of German porcelain, than in the occasional parts that she had played at the Odéon), her lover, an immensely rich young man for whose sake she had acquired her culture, and two sprigs of aristocracy at that time much in the public eye to form a little band apart, to travel only together, to come down to luncheon—when at Balbec—very late, after everyone had finished; to spend the whole day in their sitting-room playing cards, there entered no sort of ill-humour against the rest of us but simply the requirements of the taste that they had formed for a certain type of conversation, for certain refinements of good living, which made them find pleasure in spending their time, in taking their meals only by themselves, and would have rendered intolerable a life in common with people who had not been initiated into those mysteries. Even at a dinner or a card-table, each of them had to be certain that, in the diner or partner who sat opposite to him, there was, latent and not yet made use of, a certain brand of knowledge which would enable him to identify the rubbish with which so many houses in Paris were littered as genuine mediaeval or renaissance "pieces" and, whatever the subject of discussion, to apply the critical standards common to all their party whereby they distinguished good work

from bad. Probably it was only—at such moments—by some infrequent, amusing interruption flung into the general silence of meal or game, or by the new and charming frock which the young actress had put on for luncheon or for poker, that the special kind of existence in which these four friends desired, above all things, to remain plunged was made apparent. But by engulfing them thus in a system of habits which they knew by heart it sufficed to protect them from the mystery of the life that was going on all round them. All the long afternoon, the sea was suspended there before their eyes only as a canvas of attractive colouring might hang on the wall of a wealthy bachelor's flat and it was only in the intervals between the "hands" that one of the players, finding nothing better to do, raised his eyes to it to seek from it some indication of the weather or the time, and to remind the others that tea was ready. And at night they did not dine in the hotel, where, hidden springs of electricity flooding the great dining-room with light, it became as it were an immense and wonderful aquarium against whose wall of glass the working population of Balbec, the fishermen and also the tradesmen's families, clustering invisibly in the outer darkness, pressed their faces to watch, gently floating upon the golden eddies within, the luxurious life of its occupants, a thing as extraordinary to the poor as the life of strange fishes or molluscs (an important social question, this; whether the wall of glass will always protect the wonderful creatures at their feasting, whether the obscure folk who watch them hungrily out of the night will not break in some day to gather them from their aquarium and devour them). Meanwhile there may have been, perhaps, among the gazing crowd, a motionless, formless mass there in the dark, some writer, some student of human ichthyology who, as he watched the jaws of old feminine monstrosities close over a mouthful of food which they proceeded then to absorb, was amusing himself by classifying them according to their race, by their innate characteristics as well as by those acquired characteristics which bring it about that an old Serbian lady whose buccal protuberance is that of a great sea-fish, because from her earliest years she has moved in the fresh waters of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, eats her salad for all the world like a La Rochefoucauld.

At that hour one could see the three young men in dinner-jackets, waiting for the young woman, who was as usual late but presently, wearing a dress that was almost always different and one of a series of scarves, chosen to gratify some special instinct in her lover, after having from her landing rung for the lift, would emerge from it like a doll coming out of its box. And then all four, because they found that the international phenomenon of the "Palace", planted on Balbec soil, had blossomed there in material splendour rather than in food that was fit to eat, bundled into a carriage and went to dine, a mile off, in a little restaurant that was well spoken of, where they held with the

cook himself endless discussions of the composition of their meal and the cooking of its various dishes. During their drive, the road bordered with apple-trees that led out of Balbec was no more to them than the distance that must be traversed—barely distinguishable in the darkness from that which separated their homes in Paris from the Café Anglais or the Tour d'Argent—before they could arrive at the fashionable little restaurant where, while the young man's friends envied him because he had such a smartly dressed mistress, the latter's scarves were spread about the little company like a fragrant, flowing veil, but one that kept it apart from the outer world.

Alas for my peace of mind, I had none of the detachment that all these people shewed. To many of them I gave constant thought; I should have liked not to pass unobserved by a man with a receding brow and eyes that dodged between the blinkers of his prejudices and his education, the great nobleman of the district, who was none other than the brother-in-law of Legrandin, and came every now and then to see somebody at Balbec and on Sundays, by reason of the weekly garden-party that his wife and he gave, robbed the hotel of a large number of its occupants, because one or two of them were invited to these entertainments and the others, so as not to appear to have been not invited, chose that day for an expedition to some distant spot. He had had, as it happened, an exceedingly bad reception at the hotel on the first day of the season, when the staff, freshly imported from the Riviera, did not yet know who or what he was. Not only was he not wearing white flannels, but, with old-fashioned French courtesy and in his ignorance of the ways of smart hotels, on coming into the hall in which there were ladies sitting, he had taken off his hat at the door, the effect of which had been that the manager did not so much as raise a finger to his own in acknowledgment, concluding that this must be some one of the most humble extraction, what he called "sprung from the ordinary." The solicitor's wife, alone, had felt herself attracted by the stranger, who exhaled all the starched vulgarity of the really respectable, and had declared, with the unerring discernment and the indisputable authority of a person from whom the highest society of Le Mans held no secrets, that one could see at a glance that one was in the presence of a gentleman of great distinction, of perfect breeding, a striking contrast to the sort of people one usually saw at Balbec, whom she condemned as impossible to know so long as she did not know them. This favourable judgment which she had pronounced on Legrandin's brother-in-law was based perhaps on the spiritless appearance of a man about whom there was nothing to intimidate anyone; perhaps also she had recognised in this gentleman farmer with the gait of a sacristan the Masonic signs of her own inveterate clericalism.

It made no difference my knowing that the young fellows who went past the hotel every day on horseback were the sons of the questionably solvent proprietor of a linen-drapery to whom my father would never have dreamed of speaking; the glamour of "seaside life" exalted them in my eyes to equestrian statues of demi-gods, and the best thing that I could hope for was that they would never allow their proud gaze to fall upon the wretched boy who was myself, who left the hotel dining-room only to sit humbly upon the sands. I should have been glad to arouse some response even from the adventurer who had been king of a desert island in the South Seas, even of the young consumptive, of whom I liked to think that he was hiding beneath his insolent exterior a shy and tender heart, which would perhaps have lavished on me, and on me alone, the treasures of its affection. Besides (unlike what one generally says of the people one meets when travelling) just as being seen in certain company can invest us, in a watering-place to which we shall return another year, with a coefficient that has no equivalent in our true social life, so there is nothing—not which we keep so resolutely at a distance, but—which we cultivate with such assiduity after our return to Paris as the friendships that we have formed by the sea. I was anxious about the opinion that might be held of me by all these temporary or local celebrities whom my tendency to put myself in the place of other people and to reconstruct what was in their minds had made me place not in their true rank, that which they would have held in Paris, for instance, and which would have been quite low, but in that which they must imagine to be, and which indeed was their rank at Balbec, where the want of a common denominator gave them a sort of relative superiority and an individual interest. Alas, none of these people's contempt for me was so unbearable as that of M. de Stermaria.

For I had noticed his daughter, the moment she came into the room, her pretty features, her pallid, almost blue complexion, what there was peculiar in the carriage of her tall figure, in her gait, which suggested to me—and rightly—her long descent, her aristocratic upbringing, all the more vividly because I knew her name, like those expressive themes composed by musicians of genius which paint in splendid colours the glow of fire, the rush of water, the peace of fields and woods, to audiences who, having first let their eyes run over the programme, have their imaginations trained in the right direction. The label "Centuries of Breeding", by adding to Mlle. de Stermaria's charms the idea of their origin, made them more desirable also, advertising their rarity as a high price enhances the value of a thing that has already taken our fancy. And its stock of heredity gave to her complexion, in which so many selected juices had been blended, the savour of an exotic fruit or of a famous vintage.

And then mere chance put into our hands, my grandmother's and mine, the means of giving ourselves an immediate distinction in the eyes of all the other occupants of the hotel. On that first afternoon, at the moment when the old lady came downstairs from her room, producing, thanks to the footman who preceded her, the maid who came running after her with a book and a rug that had been left behind, a marked effect upon all who beheld her and arousing in each of them a curiosity from which it was evident that none was so little immune as M. de Stermaria, the manager leaned across to my grandmother and, from pure kindness of heart (as one might point out the Shah, or Queen Ranavalo to an obscure onlooker who could obviously have no sort of connexion with so mighty a potentate, but might be interested, all the same, to know that he had been standing within a few feet of one) whispered in her ear, "The Marquise de Villeparisis!" while at the same moment the old lady, catching sight of my grandmother, could not repress a start of pleased surprise.

It may be imagined that the sudden appearance, in the guise of a little old woman, of the most powerful of fairies would not have given me so much pleasure, destitute as I was of any means of access to Mlle. de Stermaria, in a strange place where I knew no one: no one, that is to say, for any practical purpose. Aesthetically the number of types of humanity is so restricted that we must constantly, wherever we may be, have the pleasure of seeing people we know, even without looking for them in the works of the old masters, like Swann. Thus it happened that in the first few days of our visit to Balbec I had succeeded in finding Legrandin, Swann's hall porter and Mme. Swann herself, transformed into a waiter, a foreign visitor whom I never saw again and a bathing superintendent. And a sort of magnetism attracts and retains so inseparably, one after another, certain characteristics, facial and mental, that when nature thus introduces a person into a new body she does not mutilate him unduly. Legrandin turned waiter kept intact his stature, the outline of his nose, part of his chin; Mme. Swann, in the masculine gender and the calling of a bathing superintendent, had been accompanied not only by familiar features, but even by the way she had of speaking. Only, she could be of little if any more use to me, standing upon the beach there in the red sash of her office, and hoisting at the first gust of wind the flag which forbade us to bathe (for these superintendents are prudent men, and seldom know how to swim) than she would have been in that fresco of the *Life of Moses* in which Swann had long ago identified her in the portrait of Jethro's Daughter. Whereas this Mme. de Villeparisis was her real self, she had not been the victim of an enchantment which had deprived her of her power, but was capable, on the contrary, of putting at the service of my power an enchantment which would multiply it an hundred fold, and thanks to which, as though I had been swept through the air on the wings of a fabulous

bird, I was to cross in a few moments the infinitely wide (at least, at Balbec) social gulf which separated me from Mlle. de Stermaria.

Unfortunately, if there was one person in the world who, more than anyone else, lived shut up in a little world of her own, it was my grandmother. She would not, indeed, have despised me, she would simply not have understood what I meant had she been told that I attached importance to the opinions, that I felt an interest in the persons of people the very existence of whom she had never noticed and would, when the time came to leave Balbec, retain no impression of their names. I dared not confess to her that if these same people had seen her talking to Mme. de Villeparisis, I should have been immensely gratified, because I felt that the Marquise counted for much in the hotel and that her friendship would have given us a position in the eyes of Mlle. de Stermaria. Not that my grandmother's friend represented to me, in any sense of the word, a member of the aristocracy: I was too well used to her name, which had been familiar to my ears before my mind had begun to consider it, when as a child I had heard it occur in conversation at home: while her title added to it only a touch of quaintness—as some uncommon Christian name would have done, or as in the names of streets, among which we can see nothing more noble in the Rue Lord Byron, in the plebeian and even squalid Rue Rochechouart, or in the Rue Grammont than in the Rue Léonce Reynaud or the Rue Hippolyte Lebas. Mme. de Villeparisis no more made me think of a person who belonged to a special world than did her cousin MacMahon, whom I did not clearly distinguish from M. Carnot, likewise President of the Republic, or from Raspail, whose photograph Françoise had bought with that of Pius IX. It was one of my grandmother's principles that, when away from home, one should cease to have any social intercourse, that one did not go to the seaside to meet people, having plenty of time for that sort of thing in Paris, that they would make one waste on being merely polite, in pointless conversation, the precious time which ought all to be spent in the open air, beside the waves; and finding it convenient to assume that this view was shared by everyone else, and that it authorised, between old friends whom chance brought face to face in the same hotel, the fiction of a mutual incognito, on hearing her friend's name from the manager she merely looked the other way, and pretended not to see Mme. de Villeparisis, who, realising that my grandmother did not want to be recognised, looked also into the void. She went past, and I was left in my isolation like a shipwrecked mariner who has seen a vessel apparently coming towards him which has then, without lowering a boat, vanished under the horizon.

She, too, had her meals in the dining-room, but at the other end of it. She knew none of the people who were staying in the hotel, or who came there to call, not even M. de

Cambremer; in fact, I noticed that he gave her no greeting, one day when, with his wife, he had accepted an invitation to take luncheon with the barrister, who drunken with the honour of having the nobleman at his table avoided his friends of every day, and confined himself to a distant twitch of the eyelid, so as to draw their attention to this historic event but so discreetly that his signal could not be interpreted by them as an invitation to join the party.

"Well, I hope you've got on your best clothes; I hope you feel smart enough," was the magistrate's wife's greeting to him that evening.

"Smart? Why should I?" asked the barrister, concealing his rapture in an exaggerated astonishment. "Because of my guests, do you mean?" he went on, feeling that it was impossible to keep up the farce any longer. "But what is there smart about having a few friends in to luncheon? After all, they must feed somewhere!"

"But it is smart! They are the de Cambremers, aren't they? I recognised them at once. She is a Marquise. And quite genuine, too. Not through the females."

"Oh, she's a very simple soul, she is charming, no stand-offishness about her. I thought you were coming to join us. I was making signals to you. . . . I would have introduced you!" he asserted, tempering with a hint of irony the vast generosity of the offer, like Ahasuerus when he says to Esther:

Of all my Kingdom must I give you half!

"No, no, no, no! We lie hidden, like the modest violet."

"But you were quite wrong, I assure you," replied the barrister, growing bolder now that the danger point was passed. "They weren't going to eat you. I say, aren't we going to have our little game of bezique?"

"Why, of course! We were afraid to suggest it, now that you go about entertaining Marquises."

"Oh, get along with you; there's nothing so very wonderful about them. Why, I'm dining there to-morrow. Would you care to go instead of me? I mean it. Honestly, I'd just as soon stay here."

"No, no! I should be removed from the bench as a Reactionary," cried the chief magistrate, laughing till the tears stood in his eyes at his own joke. "But you go to Féterne too, don't you?" he went on, turning to the solicitor.

"Oh, I go there on Sundays—in at one door and out at the other. But I don't have them here to luncheon, like the Leader."

M. de Stermaria was not at Balbec that day, to the barrister's great regret. But he managed to say a word in season to the head waiter:

"Aimé, you can tell M. de Stermaria that he's not the only nobleman you've had in here. You saw the gentleman who was with me to-day at luncheon? Eh? A small moustache, looked like a military man. Well, that was the Marquis de Cambremer!"

"Was it indeed? I'm not surprised to hear it."

"That will shew him that he's not the only man who's got a title. That will teach him! It's not a bad thing to take 'em down a peg or two, those noblemen. I say, Aimé, don't say anything to him unless you like: I mean to say, it's no business of mine; besides, they know each other already."

And next day M. de Stermaria, who remembered that the barrister had once held a brief for one of his friends, came up and introduced himself.

"Our friends in common, the de Cambremers, were anxious that we should meet; the days didn't fit; I don't know quite what went wrong—" stammered the barrister, who, like most liars, imagined that other people do not take the trouble to investigate an unimportant detail which, for all that, may be sufficient (if chance puts you in possession of the humble facts of the case, and they contradict it) to shew the liar in his true colours and to inspire a lasting mistrust.

Then as at all times, but more easily now that her father had left her and was talking to the barrister, I was gazing at Mlle. de Stermaria. No less than the bold and always graceful originality of her attitudes, as when, leaning her elbows on the table, she raised her glass in both hands over her outstretched arms, the dry flame of a glance at once extinguished, the ingrained, congenital hardness that one could feel, ill-concealed by her own personal inflexions, in the sound of her voice, which had shocked my grandmother; a sort of atavistic starting-point to which she recoiled whenever, by glance or utterance, she had succeeded in expressing a thought of her own; all of these qualities carried the mind of him who watched her back to the line of ancestors who had bequeathed to her that inadequacy of human sympathy, those blanks in her sensibility, that short measure of humanity which was at every moment running out. But from a certain look which flooded for a moment the wells—instantly dry again—of her eyes, a look in which I could discern that almost obsequious docility which the predominance of a taste for sensual pleasures gives to the proudest of women, who will soon come to recognise but one form of personal distinction, that namely which any man enjoys who can make her feel those pleasures, an actor, an acrobat even, for whom, perhaps, she will one day leave her husband;—from a certain

rosy tint, warm and sensual, which flushed her pallid cheeks, like the colour that stained the hearts of the white water-lilies in the Vivonne, I thought I could discern that she would readily have consented to my coming to seek in her the savour of that life of poetry and romance which she led in Brittany, a life to which, whether from over-familiarity or from innate superiority, or from disgust at the penury or the avarice of her family, she seemed not to attach any great value, but which, for all that, she held enclosed in her body. In the meagre stock of will-power that had been transmitted to her, and gave an element of weakness to her expression, she would not perhaps have found the strength to resist. And, crowned by a feather that was a trifle old-fashioned and pretentious, the grey felt hat which she invariably wore at meals made her all the more attractive to me, not because it was in harmony with her pearly or rosy complexion, but because, by making me suppose her to be poor, it brought her closer to myself. Obliged by her father's presence to adopt a conventional attitude, but already bringing to the perception and classification of the people who passed before her eyes other principles than his, perhaps she saw in me not my humble rank, but the right sex and age. If one day M. de Stermaria had gone out leaving her behind, if, above all, Mme. de Villeparisis, by coming to sit at our table, had given her an opinion of me which might have emboldened me to approach her, perhaps then we might have contrived to exchange a few words, to arrange a meeting, to form a closer tie. And for a whole month during which she would be left alone, without her parents, in her romantic Breton castle, we should perhaps have been able to wander by ourselves at evening, she and I together in the dusk which would shew in a softer light above the darkening water pink briar roses, beneath oak trees beaten and stunted by the hammering of the waves. Together we should have roamed that isle impregnated with so intense a charm for me because it had enclosed the everyday life of Mlle. de Stermaria and lay at rest in her remembering eyes. For it seemed to me that I should not really have possessed her save there, when I should have traversed those regions which enveloped her in so many memories—a veil which my desire sought to tear apart, one of those veils which nature interposes between woman and her pursuers (with the same intention as when, for all of us, she places the act of reproduction between ourselves and our keenest pleasure, and for insects, places before the nectar the pollen which they must carry away with them) in order that, tricked by the illusion of possessing her thus more completely, they may be forced to occupy first the scenes among which she lives, and which, of more service to their imagination than sensual pleasure can be, yet would not without that pleasure have had the power to attract them.

But I was obliged to take my eyes from Mlle. de Stermaria, for already, considering no doubt that making the acquaintance of an important person was a brief, inquisitive act which was sufficient in itself, and to bring out all the interest that was latent in it required only a handshake and a penetrating stare, without either immediate conversation or any subsequent relations, her father had taken leave of the barrister and returned to sit down facing her, rubbing his hands like a man who has just made a valuable acquisition. As for the barrister, once the first emotion of this interview had subsided, then, as on other days, he could be heard every minute addressing the head waiter:

"But I am not a king, Aimé; go and attend to the king! I say, Chief, those little trout don't look at all bad, do they? We must ask Aimé to let us have some. Aimé, that little fish you have over there looks to me highly commendable: will you bring us some, please, Aimé, and don't be sparing with it."

He would repeat the name "Aimé" all day long, one result of which was that when he had anyone to dinner the guest would remark "I can see, you are quite at home in this place," and would feel himself obliged to keep on saying "Aimé" also, from that tendency, combining elements of timidity, vulgarity and silliness, which many people have, to believe that it is smart and witty to copy to the letter what is said by the company in which they may happen to be. The barrister repeated the name incessantly, but with a smile, for he felt that he was exhibiting at once the good terms on which he stood with the head waiter and his own superior station. And the head waiter, whenever he caught the sound of his own name, smiled too, as though touched and at the same time proud, shewing that he was conscious of the honour and could appreciate the pleasantry.

Terrifying as I always found these meals, in the vast restaurant, generally full, of the mammoth hotel, they became even more terrifying when there arrived for a few days the Proprietor (or he may have been only the General Manager, appointed by a board of directors) not only of this "palace" but of seven or eight more besides, situated at all the four corners of France, in each of which, travelling continuously, he would spend a week now and again. Then, just after dinner had begun, there appeared every evening in the doorway of the dining-room this small man with white hair and a red nose, astonishingly neat and impassive, who was known, it appeared, as well in London as at Monte Carlo, as one of the leading hotelkeepers in Europe. Once when I had gone out for a moment at the beginning of dinner, as I came in again I passed close by him, and he bowed to me, but with a coldness in which I could not distinguish whether it should be attributed to the reserve of a man who could never forget what he was, or to his contempt for a customer of so little importance. To those whose importance was

considerable the Managing Director would bow, with quite as much coldness but more deeply, lowering his eyelids with a reverence that was almost offended modesty, as though he had found himself confronted, at a funeral, with the father of the deceased or with the Blessed Sacrament. Except for these icy and infrequent salutations, he made not the slightest movement, as if to shew that his glittering eyes, which appeared to be starting out of his head, saw everything, controlled everything, assured to us in the "Hotel dinner" perfection in every detail as well as a general harmony. He felt, evidently, that he was more than the producer of a play, than the conductor of an orchestra, nothing less than a general in supreme command. Having decided that a contemplation carried to its utmost intensity would suffice to assure him that everything was in readiness, that no mistake had been made which could lead to disaster,—to invest him, in a word, with full responsibility, he abstained not merely from any gesture but even from moving his eyes, which, petrified by the intensity of their gaze, took in and directed everything that was going on. I felt that even the movements of my spoon did not escape him, and were he to vanish after the soup, for the whole of dinner the review that he had held would have taken away my appetite. His own was exceedingly good, as one could see at luncheon, which he took like an ordinary guest of the hotel at a table that anyone else might have had in the public dining-room. His table had this peculiarity only, that by his side, while he was eating, the other manager, the resident one, remained standing all the time to make conversation. For being subordinate to this Managing Director he was anxious to please a man of whom he lived in constant fear. My fear of him diminished during these luncheons, for being then lost in the crowd of visitors he would exercise the discretion of a general sitting in a restaurant where there are also private soldiers, in not seeming to take any notice of them. Nevertheless when the porter, from among a cluster of pages, announced to me: "He leaves to-morrow morning for Dinard. Then he's going down to Biarritz, and after that to Cannes," I began to breathe more freely.

My life in the hotel was rendered not only dull because I had no friends there but uncomfortable because Françoise had made so many. It might be thought that they would have made things easier for us in various respects. Quite the contrary. The proletariat, if they succeeded only with great difficulty in being treated as people she knew by Françoise, and could not succeed at all unless they fulfilled the condition of shewing the utmost politeness to her, were, on the other hand, once they had reached the position, the only people who "counted". Her time-honoured code taught her that she was in no way bound to the friends of her employers, that she might, if she was busy, shut the door without ceremony in the face of a lady who had come to call on my grandmother. But towards her own acquaintance, that is to say, the select handful of

the lower orders whom she admitted to an unconquerable intimacy, her actions were regulated by the most subtle and most stringent of protocols. Thus Françoise having made the acquaintance of the man in the coffee-shop and of a little maid who did dressmaking for a Belgian lady, no longer came upstairs immediately after luncheon to get my grandmother's things ready, but came an hour later, because the coffee man had wanted to make her a cup of coffee or a tisane in his shop, or the maid had invited her to go and watch her sew, and to refuse either of them would have been impossible, and one of the things that were not done. Moreover, particular attention was due to the little sewing-maid, who was an orphan and had been brought up by strangers to whom she still went occasionally for a few days' holiday. Her unusual situation aroused Françoise's pity, and also a benevolent contempt. She, who had a family, a little house that had come to her from her parents, with a field in which her brother kept his cows, how could she regard so uprooted a creature as her equal? And since this girl hoped, on Assumption Day, to be allowed to pay her benefactors a visit, Françoise kept on repeating: "She does make me laugh! She says, 'I hope to be going home for the Assumption.' 'Home!' says she! It isn't just that it's not her own place, they're people who took her in from nowhere, and the creature says 'home' just as if it really was her home. Poor girl! What a wretched state she must be in, not to know what it is to have a home." Still, if Françoise had associated only with the ladies'-maids brought to the hotel by other visitors, who fed with her in the "service" quarters and, seeing her grand lace cap and her handsome profile, took her perhaps for some lady of noble birth, whom "reduced circumstances", or a personal attachment had driven to serve as companion to my grandmother, if in a word Françoise had known only people who did not belong to the hotel, no great harm would have been done, since she could not have prevented them from doing us any service, for the simple reason that in no circumstances, even without her knowledge, would it have been possible for them to serve us at all. But she had formed connexions also with one of the wine waiters, with a man in the kitchen, and with the head chambermaid of our landing. And the result of this in our every day life was that Françoise, who on the day of her arrival, when she still did not know anyone, would set all the bells jangling for the slightest thing, at an hour when my grandmother and I would never have dared to ring, and if we offered some gentle admonition answered: "Well, we're paying enough for it, aren't we?" as though it were she herself that would have to pay; nowadays, since she had made friends with a personage in the kitchen, which had appeared to us to augur well for our future comfort, were my grandmother or I to complain of cold feet, Françoise, even at an hour that was quite normal, dared not ring; she assured us that it would give offence because they would have to light the furnace again, or because it would interrupt the servants' dinner and they would be annoyed. And she ended with

a formula that, in spite of the ambiguous way in which she uttered it, was none the less clear, and put us plainly in the wrong: "The fact is . . ." We did not insist, for fear of bringing upon ourselves another, far more serious: "It's a matter . . .!" So that it amounted to this, that we could no longer have any hot water because Françoise had become a friend of the man who would have to heat it.

In the end we too formed a connexion, in spite of but through my grandmother, for she and Mme. de Villeparisis came in collision one morning in a doorway and were obliged to accost each other, not without having first exchanged gestures of surprise and hesitation, performed movements of recoil and uncertainty, and finally uttered protestations of joy and greeting, as in some of Molière's plays, where two actors who have been delivering long soliloquies from opposite sides of the stage, a few feet apart, are supposed not to have seen each other yet, and then suddenly catch sight of each other, cannot believe their eyes, break off what they are saying and finally address each other (the chorus having meanwhile kept the dialogue going) and fall into each other's arms. Mme. de Villeparisis was tactful, and made as if to leave my grandmother to herself after the first greetings, but my grandmother insisted on her staying to talk to her until luncheon, being anxious to discover how her friend managed to get her letters sent up to her earlier than we got ours, and to get such nice grilled things (for Mme. de Villeparisis, a great epicure, had the poorest opinion of the hotel kitchen which served us with meals that my grandmother, still quoting Mme. de Sévigné, described as "of a magnificence to make you die of hunger.") And the Marquise formed the habit of coming every day, until her own meal was ready, to sit down for a moment at our table in the dining-room, insisting that we should not rise from our chairs or in any way put ourselves out. At the most we would linger, as often as not, in the room after finishing our luncheon, to talk to her, at that sordid moment when the knives are left littering the tablecloth among crumpled napkins. For my own part, so as to preserve (in order that I might be able to enjoy Balbec) the idea that I was on the uttermost promontory of the earth I compelled myself to look farther afield, to notice only the sea, to seek in it the effects described by Baudelaire and to let my gaze fall upon our table only on days when there was set on it some gigantic fish, some marine monster, which unlike the knives and forks was contemporary with the primitive epochs in which the Ocean first began to teem with life, in the Cimmerians' time, a fish whose body with its numberless vertebrae, its blue veins and red, had been constructed by nature, but according to an architectural plan, like a polychrome cathedral of the deep.

As a barber, seeing an officer whom he is accustomed to shave with special deference and care recognise a customer who has just entered the shop and stop for a moment

to talk to him, rejoices in the thought that these are two men of the same social order, and cannot help smiling as he goes to fetch the bowl of soap, for he knows that in his establishment, to the vulgar routine of a mere barber's shop, are being added social, not to say aristocratic pleasures, so Aimé, seeing that Mme. de Villeparisis had found in us old friends, went to fetch our finger-bowls with precisely the smile, proudly modest and knowingly discreet, of a hostess who knows when to leave her guests to themselves. He suggested also a pleased and loving father who looks on, without interfering, at the happy pair who have plighted their troth at his hospitable board. Besides, it was enough merely to utter the name of a person of title for Aimé to appear pleased, unlike Françoise, before whom you could not mention Count So-and-so without her face darkening and her speech becoming dry and sharp, all of which meant that she worshipped the aristocracy not less than Aimé but far more. But then Françoise had that quality which in others she condemned as the worst possible fault; she was proud. She was not of that friendly and good-humoured race to which Aimé belonged. They feel, they exhibit an intense delight when you tell them a piece of news which may be more or less sensational but is at any rate new, and not to be found in the papers. Françoise declined to appear surprised. You might have announced in her hearing that the Archduke Rudolf—not that she had the least suspicion of his having ever existed—was not, as was generally supposed, dead, but "alive and kicking"; she would have answered only "Yes," as though she had known it all the time. It may, however, have been that if even from our own lips, from us whom she so meekly called her masters, who had so nearly succeeded in taming her, she could not, without having to check an angry start, hear the name of a noble, that was because the family from which she had sprung occupied in its own village a comfortable and independent position, and was not to be threatened in the consideration which it enjoyed save by those same nobles, in whose households, meanwhile, from his boyhood, an Aimé would have been domiciled as a servant, if not actually brought up by their charity. Of Françoise, then, Mme. de Villeparisis must ask pardon, first, for her nobility. But (in France, at any rate) that is precisely the talent, in fact the sole occupation of our great gentlemen and ladies. Françoise, following the common tendency of servants, who pick up incessantly from the conversation of their masters with other people fragmentary observations from which they are apt to draw erroneous inductions, as the human race generally does with respect to the habits of animals, was constantly discovering that somebody had "failed" us, a conclusion to which she was easily led, not so much, perhaps, by her extravagant love for us, as by the delight that she took in being disagreeable to us. But having once established, without possibility of error, the endless little attentions paid to us, and paid to herself also by Mme. de Villeparisis, Françoise forgave her for being a Marquise, and, as she had never ceased to be proud

of her because she was one, preferred her thenceforward to all our other friends. It must be added that no one else took the trouble to be so continually nice to us. Whenever my grandmother remarked on a book that Mme. de Villeparisis was reading, or said she had been admiring the fruit which some one had just sent to our friend, within an hour the footman would come to our rooms with book or fruit. And the next time we saw her, in response to our thanks, she would say only, seeming to seek some excuse for the meagreness of her present in some special use to which it might be put: "It's nothing wonderful, but the newspapers come so late here, one must have something to read." Or, "It is always wiser to have fruit one can be quite certain of, at the seaside."—"But I don't believe I've ever seen you eating oysters," she said to us, increasing the sense of disgust which I felt at that moment, for the living flesh of the oyster revolted me even more than the gumminess of the stranded jellyfish defiled for me the beach at Balbec; "they are delicious down here! Oh, let me tell my maid to fetch your letters when she goes for mine. What, your daughter writes *every day?* But what on earth can you find to say to each other?" My grandmother was silent, but it may be assumed that her silence was due to scorn, in her who used to repeat, when she wrote to Mamma, the words of Mme. de Sévigné: "As soon as I have received a letter, I want another at once; I cannot breathe until it comes. There are few who are worthy to understand what I mean." And I was afraid of her applying to Mme. de Villeparisis the conclusion: "I seek out those who are of the chosen few, and I avoid the rest." She fell back upon praise of the fruit which Mme. de Villeparisis had sent us the day before. And this had been, indeed, so fine that the manager, in spite of the jealousy aroused by our neglect of his official offerings, had said to me: "I am like you; I'm madder about fruit than any other kind of dessert." My grandmother told her friend that she had enjoyed them all the more because the fruit which we got in the hotel was generally horrid. "I cannot," she went on, "say, like Mme. de Sévigné, that if we should take a sudden fancy for bad fruit we should be obliged to order it from Paris." "Oh yes, of course, you read Mme. de Sévigné. I saw you with her letters the day you came." (She forgot that she had never officially seen my grandmother in the hotel until their collision in the doorway.) "Don't you find it rather exaggerated, her constant anxiety about her daughter? She refers to it too often to be really sincere. She is not natural." My grandmother felt that any discussion would be futile, and so as not to be obliged to speak of the things she loved to a person incapable of understanding them, concealed by laying her bag upon them the *Mémoires de Mme. de Beausergent*.

Were she to encounter Françoise at the moment (which Françoise called "the noon") when, wearing her fine cap and surrounded with every mark of respect, she was coming downstairs to "feed with the service", Mme. Villeparisis would stop her to ask

after us. And Françoise, when transmitting to us the Marquise's message: "She said to me, 'You'll be sure and bid them good day,' she said," counterfeited the voice of Mme. de Villeparisis, whose exact words she imagined herself to be quoting textually, whereas she was really corrupting them no less than Plato corrupts the words of Socrates or Saint John the words of Jesus. Françoise, as was natural, was deeply touched by these attentions. Only she did not believe my grandmother, but supposed that she must be lying in the interest of her class (the rich always combining thus to support one another) when she assured us that Mme. de Villeparisis had been lovely as a young woman. It was true that of this loveliness only the faintest trace remained, from which no one—unless he happened to be a great deal more of an artist than Françoise—would have been able to restore her ruined beauty. For in order to understand how beautiful an elderly woman can once have been one must not only study but interpret every line of her face.

"I must remember, some time, to ask her whether I'm not right, after all, in thinking that there is some connexion with the Guermantes," said my grandmother, to my great indignation. How could I be expected to believe in a common origin uniting two names which had entered my consciousness, one through the low and shameful gate of experience, the other by the golden gate of imagination?

We had several times, in the last few days, seen driving past us in a stately equipage, tall, auburn, handsome, with a rather prominent nose, the Princesse de Luxembourg, who was staying in the neighbourhood for a few weeks. Her carriage had stopped outside the hotel, a footman had come in and spoken to the manager, had gone back to the carriage and had reappeared with the most amazing armful of fruit (which combined in a single basket, like the bay itself, different seasons) with a card: "La Princesse de Luxembourg", on which were scrawled a few words in pencil. For what princely traveller sojourning here incognito, could they be intended, those glaucous plums, luminous and spherical as was at that moment the circumfluent sea, transparent grapes clustering on a shrivelled stick, like a fine day in autumn, pears of a heavenly ultramarine? For it could not be on my grandmother's friend that the Princess had meant to pay a call. And yet on the following evening Mme. de Villeparisis sent us the bunch of grapes, cool, liquid, golden; plums too and pears which we remembered, though the plums had changed, like the sea at our dinner-hour, to a dull purple, and on the ultramarine surface of the pears there floated the forms of a few rosy clouds. A few days later we met Mme. de Villeparisis as we came away from the symphony concert that was given every morning on the beach. Convinced that the music to which I had been listening (the Prelude to *Lohengrin*, the Overture to *Tannhäuser* and suchlike) expressed the loftiest of truths, I was trying to

elevate myself, as far as I could, so as to attain to a comprehension of them, I was extracting from myself so as to understand them, and was attributing to them, all that was best and most profound in my own nature at that time.

Well, as we came out of the concert, and, on our way back to the hotel, had stopped for a moment on the front, my grandmother and I, for a few words with Mme. de Villeparisis who told us that she had ordered some *croque-monsieurs* and a dish of creamed eggs for us at the hotel, I saw, a long way away, coming in our direction, the Princesse de Luxembourg, half leaning upon a parasol in such a way as to impart to her tall and wonderful form that slight inclination, to make it trace that arabesque dear to the women who had been beautiful under the Empire, and knew how, with drooping shoulders, arched backs, concave hips and bent limbs, to make their bodies float as gently as a silken scarf about the rigidity of the invisible stem which might be supposed to have been passed diagonally through them. She went out every morning for a turn on the beach almost at the time when everyone else, after bathing, was climbing home to luncheon, and as hers was not until half past one she did not return to her villa until long after the hungry bathers had left the scorching "front" a desert. Mme. de Villeparisis presented my grandmother and would have presented me, but had first to ask me my name, which she could not remember. She had, perhaps, never known it, or if she had must have forgotten years ago to whom my grandmother had married her daughter. My name, when she did hear it, appeared to impress Mme. de Villeparisis considerably. Meanwhile the Princesse de Luxembourg had given us her hand and, now and again, while she conversed with the Marquise, turned to bestow a kindly glance on my grandmother and myself, with that embryonic kiss which we put into our smiles when they are addressed to a baby out with its "Nana". Indeed, in her anxiety not to appear to be a denizen of a higher sphere than ours, she had probably miscalculated the distance there was indeed between us, for by an error in adjustment she made her eyes beam with such benevolence that I could see the moment approaching when she would put out her hand and stroke us, as if we were two nice beasts and had poked our heads out at her through the bars of our cage in the Gardens. And, immediately, as it happened, this idea of caged animals and the Bois de Boulogne received striking confirmation. It was the time of day at which the beach is crowded by itinerant and clamorous vendors, hawking cakes and sweets and biscuits. Not knowing quite what to do to shew her affection for us, the Princess hailed the next that came by; he had nothing left but one rye-cake, of the kind one throws to the ducks. The Princess took it and said to me: "For your grandmother." And yet it was to me that she held it out, saying with a friendly smile, "You shall give it to her yourself!" thinking that my pleasure would thus be more complete if there were no

intermediary between myself and the animals. Other vendors came up; she stuffed my pockets with everything that they had, tied up in packets, comfits, sponge-cakes, sugar-sticks. "You will eat some yourself," she told me, "and give some to your grandmother," and she had the vendors paid by the little negro page, dressed in red satin, who followed her everywhere and was a nine days' wonder upon the beach. Then she said good-bye to Mme. de Villeparisis and held out her hand to us with the intention of treating us in the same way as she treated her friend, as people whom she knew, and of bringing herself within our reach. But this time she must have reckoned our level as not quite so low in the scale of creation, for her and our equality was indicated by the Princess to my grandmother by that tender and maternal smile which a woman gives a little boy when she says good-bye to him as though to a grown-up person. By a miraculous stride in evolution, my grandmother was no longer a duck or an antelope, but had already become what the anglophil Mme. Swann would have called a "baby". Finally, having taken leave of us all, the Princess resumed her stroll along the basking "front", curving her splendid shape which, like a serpent coiled about a wand, was interlaced with the white parasol patterned in blue which Mme. de Luxembourg held, unopened, in her hand. She was my first Royalty—I say my first, for strictly speaking Princesse Mathilde did not count. The second, as we shall see in due course, was to astonish me no less by her indulgence. One of the ways in which our great nobles, kindly intermediaries between commoners and kings, can befriend us was revealed to me next day when Mme. de Villeparisis reported: "She thought you quite charming. She is a woman of the soundest judgment, the warmest heart. Not like so many Queens and people! She has real merit." And Mme. de Villeparisis went on in a tone of conviction, and quite thrilled to be able to say it to us: "I am sure she would be delighted to see you again."

But on that previous morning, after we had parted from the Princesse de Luxembourg, Mme. de Villeparisis said a thing which impressed me far more and was not prompted merely by friendly feeling.

"Are you," she had asked me, "the son of the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry? Indeed! I am told your father is a most charming man. He is having a splendid holiday just now."

A few days earlier we had heard, in a letter from Mamma, that my father and his friend M. de Norpois had lost their luggage.

"It has been found; as a matter of fact, it was never really lost, I can tell you what happened," explained Mme. de Villeparisis, who, without our knowing how, seemed to be far better informed than ourselves of the course of my father's travels. "I think your

father is now planning to come home earlier, next week, in fact, as he will probably give up the idea of going to Algeçiras. But he is anxious to devote a day longer to Toledo; it seems, he is an admirer of a pupil of Titian,—I forget the name—whose work can only be seen properly there."

I asked myself by what strange accident, in the impartial glass through which Mme. de Villeparisis considered, from a safe distance, the bustling, tiny, purposeless agitation of the crowd of people whom she knew, there had come to be inserted at the spot through which she observed my father a fragment of prodigious magnifying power which made her see in such high relief and in the fullest detail everything that there was attractive about him, the contingencies that were obliging him to return home, his difficulties with the customs, his admiration for El Greco, and, altering the scale of her vision, shewed her this one man so large among all the rest quite small, like that Jupiter to whom Gustave Moreau gave, when he portrayed him by the side of a weak mortal, a superhuman stature.

My grandmother bade Mme. de Villeparisis good-bye, so that we might stay and imbibe the fresh air for a little while longer outside the hotel, until they signalled to us through the glazed partition that our luncheon was ready. There were sounds of tumult. The young mistress of the King of the Cannibal Island had been down to bathe and was now coming back to the hotel.

"Really and truly, it's a perfect plague: it's enough to make one decide to emigrate!" cried the barrister, who had happened to cross her path, in a towering rage.

Meanwhile the solicitor's wife was following the bogus Queen with eyes that seemed ready to start from their sockets.

"I can't tell you how angry Mme. Blandais makes me when she stares at those people like that," said the barrister to the chief magistrate, "I feel I want to slap her. That is just the way to make the wretches appear important; and of course that's the very thing they want, that people should take an interest in them. Do ask her husband to tell her what a fool she's making of herself. I swear I won't go out with them again if they stop and gape at those masqueraders."

As to the coming of the Princesse de Luxembourg, whose carriage, on the day on which she left the fruit, had drawn up outside the hotel, it had not passed unobserved by the little group of wives, the solicitor's, the barrister's and the magistrate's, who had for some time past been most concerned to know whether she was a genuine Marquise and not an adventuress, that Mme. de Villeparisis whom everyone treated with so much respect, which all these ladies were burning to hear that she did not

deserve. Whenever Mme. de Villeparisis passed through the hall the chief magistrate's wife, who scented irregularities everywhere, would raise her eyes from her "work" and stare at the intruder in a way that made her friends die with laughter.

"Oh, well, you know," she explained with lofty condescension, "I always begin by believing the worst. I will never admit that a woman is properly married until she has shewn me her birth certificate and her marriage lines. But there's no need to alarm yourselves; just wait till I've finished my little investigation."

And so, day after day the ladies would come together, and, laughingly, ask one another: "Any news?"

But on the evening after the Princesse de Luxembourg's call the magistrate's wife laid a finger on her lips.

"I've discovered something."

"Oh, isn't Mme. Poncin simply wonderful? I never saw anyone. . . . But do tell us! What has happened?"

"Just listen to this. A woman with yellow hair and six inches of paint on her face and a carriage like a—you could *smell* it a mile off; which only a creature like that would dare to have—came here to-day to call on the Marquise, by way of!"

"Oh-yow-yow! Tut-tut-tut-tut. Did you ever! Why, it must be that woman we saw—you remember, Leader,—we said at the time we didn't at all like the look of her, but we didn't know that it was the 'Marquise' she'd come to see. A woman with a nigger-boy, you mean?"

"That's the one."

"D'you mean to say so? You don't happen to know her name?"

"Yes, I made a mistake on purpose; I picked up her card; she *trades* under the name of the 'Princesse de Luxembourg'! Wasn't I right to have my doubts about her? It's a nice thing to have to mix promiscuously with a Baronne d'Ange like that?" The barrister quoted Mathurin Régnier's *Macette* to the chief magistrate.

It must not, however, be supposed that this misunderstanding was merely temporary, like those that occur in the second act of a farce to be cleared up before the final curtain. Mme. de Luxembourg, a niece of the King of England and of the Emperor of Austria, and Mme. de Villeparisis, when one called to take the other for a drive, did look like nothing but two "old trots" of the kind one has always such difficulty in avoiding at a watering-place. Nine tenths of the men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain

appear to the average man of the middle class simply as alcoholic wasters (which, individually, they not infrequently are) whom, therefore, no respectable person would dream of asking to dinner. The middle class fixes its standard, in this respect, too high, for the feelings of these men would never prevent their being received with every mark of esteem in houses which it, the middle class, may never enter. And so sincerely do they believe that the middle class knows this that they affect a simplicity in speaking of their own affairs and a tone of disparagement of their friends, especially when they are "at the coast", which make the misunderstanding complete. If, by any chance, a man of the fashionable world is kept in touch with "business people" because, having more money than he knows what to do with, he finds himself elected chairman of all sorts of important financial concerns, the business man who at last sees a nobleman worthy, he considers, to rank with "big business", would take his oath that such a man can have no dealings with the Marquis ruined by gambling whom the said business man supposes to be all the more destitute of friends the more friendly he makes himself. And he cannot get over his surprise when the Duke, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the colossal undertaking, arranges a marriage for his son with the daughter of that very Marquis, who may be a gambler but who bears the oldest name in France, just as a Sovereign would sooner see his son marry the daughter of a dethroned King than that of a President still in office. That is to say, the two worlds take as fantastic a view of one another as the inhabitants of a town situated at one end of Balbec Bay have of the town at the other end: from Rivebelle you can just see Marcouville l'Orgueilleuse; but even that is deceptive, for you imagine that you are seen from Marcouville, where, as a matter of fact, the splendours of Rivebelle are almost wholly invisible.

PART II

PLACE-NAMES: THE PLACE (continued)

The Balbec doctor, who had been called in to cope with a sudden feverish attack, having given the opinion that I ought not to stay out all day on the beach, in the blazing sun, without shelter, and having written out various prescriptions for my use, my grandmother took his prescriptions with a show of respect in which I could at once discern her firm resolve not to have any of them "made up", but did pay attention to his advice on the matter of hygiene, and accepted an offer from Mme. de Villeparisis to take us for drives in her carriage. After this I would spend the mornings, until

luncheon, going to and fro between my own room and my grandmother's. Hers did not look out directly upon the sea, as mine did, but was lighted from three of its four sides—with views of a strip of the "front", of a well inside the building, and of the country inland, and was furnished differently from mine, with armchairs upholstered in a metallic tissue with red flowers from which seemed to emanate the cool and pleasant odour that greeted me when I entered the room. And at that hour when the sun's rays, coming from different aspects and, as it were, from different hours of the day, broke the angles of the wall, thrust in a reflexion of the beach, made of the chest of drawers a festal altar, variegated as a bank of field-flowers, attached to the wall the wings, folded, quivering, warm, of a radiance that would, at any moment, resume its flight, warmed like a bath a square of provincial carpet before the window overlooking the well, which the sun festooned and patterned like a climbing vine, added to the charm and complexity of the room's furniture by seeming to pluck and scatter the petals of the silken flowers on the chairs, and to make their silver threads stand out from the fabric, this room in which I lingered for a moment before going to get ready for our drive suggested a prism in which the colours of the light that shone outside were broken up, or a hive in which the sweet juices of the day which I was about to taste were distilled, scattered, intoxicating, visible, a garden of hope which dissolved in a quivering haze of silver threads and rose leaves. But before all this I had drawn back my own curtains, impatient to know what Sea it was that was playing that morning by the shore, like a Nereid. For none of those Seas ever stayed with us longer than a day. On the morrow there would be another, which sometimes resembled its predecessor. But I never saw the same one twice.

There were some that were of so rare a beauty that my pleasure on catching sight of them was enhanced by surprise. By what privilege, on one morning rather than another, did the window on being uncurtained disclose to my wondering eyes the nymph Glauconome, whose lazy beauty, gently breathing, had the transparence of a vaporous emerald beneath whose surface I could see teeming the ponderable elements that coloured it? She made the sun join in her play, with a smile rendered languorous by an invisible haze which was nought but a space kept vacant about her translucent surface, which, thus curtailed, became more appealing, like those goddesses whom the sculptor carves in relief upon a block of marble, the rest of which he leaves unchiselled. So, in her matchless colour, she invited us out over those rough terrestrial roads, from which, seated beside Mme. de Villeparisis in her barouche, we should see, all day long and without ever reaching it, the coolness of her gentle palpitation.

Mme. de Villeparisis used to order her carriage early, so that we should have time to reach Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, or the rocks of Quetteholme, or some other goal which, for a somewhat lumbering vehicle, was far enough off to require the whole day. In my joy at the long drive we were going to take I would be humming some tune that I had heard recently as I strolled up and down until Mme. de Villeparisis was ready. If it was Sunday hers would not be the only carriage drawn up outside the hotel; several hired flies would be waiting there, not only for the people who had been invited to Féterne by Mme. de Cambremer, but for those who, rather than stay at home all day, like children in disgrace, declared that Sunday was always quite impossible at Balbec and started off immediately after luncheon to hide themselves in some neighbouring watering-place or to visit one of the "sights" of the district. And indeed whenever (which was often) anyone asked Mme. Blandais if she had been to the Cambremers', she would answer peremptorily: "No; we went to the Falls of the Bec," as though that were the sole reason for her not having spent the day at Féterne. And the barrister would be charitable, and say:

"I envy you. I wish I had gone there instead; they must be well worth seeing."

Beside the row of carriages, in front of the porch in which I stood waiting, was planted, like some shrub of a rare species, a young page who attracted the eye no less by the unusual and effective colouring of his hair than by his plant-like epidermis. Inside, in the hall, corresponding to the narthex, or Church of the Catechumens in a primitive basilica, through which persons who were not staying in the hotel were entitled to pass, the comrades of this "outside" page did not indeed work much harder than he but did at least execute certain drilled movements. It is probable that in the early morning they helped with the cleaning. But in the afternoon they stood there only like a Chorus who, even when there is nothing for them to do, remain upon the stage in order to strengthen the cast. The General Manager, the same who had so terrified me, reckoned on increasing their number considerably next year, for he had "big ideas". And this prospect greatly afflicted the manager of the hotel, who found that all these boys about the place only "created a nuisance", by which he meant that they got in the visitors' way and were of no use to anyone. But between luncheon and dinner at least, between the exits and entrances of the visitors, they did fill an otherwise empty stage, like those pupils of Mme. de Maintenon who, in the garb of young Israelites, carry on the action whenever Esther or Joad "goes off". But the outside page, with his delicate tints, his tall, slender, fragile trunk, in proximity to whom I stood waiting for the Marquise to come downstairs, preserved an immobility into which a certain melancholy entered, for his elder brothers had left the hotel for more brilliant careers elsewhere, and he felt keenly his isolation upon this alien soil. At last Mme. de

Villeparisis appeared. To stand by her carriage and to help her into it ought perhaps to have been part of the young page's duties. But he knew on the one hand that a person who brings her own servants to an hotel expects them to wait on her and is not as a rule lavish with her "tips", and that generally speaking this was true also of the nobility of the old Faubourg Saint-Germain. Mme. de Villeparisis was included in both these categories. The arborescent page concluded therefore that he need expect nothing from her, and leaving her own maid and footman to pack her and her belongings into the carriage, he continued to dream sadly of the enviable lot of his brothers and preserved his vegetable immobility.

We would start off; some time after rounding the railway station, we came into a country road which soon became as familiar to me as the roads round Combray, from the bend where, like a fish-hook, it was baited with charming orchards, to the turning at which we left it, with tilled fields upon either side. Among these we could see here and there an apple-tree, stripped it was true of its blossom, and bearing no more now than a fringe of pistils, but sufficient even so to enchant me since I could imagine, seeing those inimitable leaves, how their broad expanse, like the ceremonial carpet spread for a wedding that was now over, had been but the other day swept by the white satin train of their blushing flowers.

How often in Paris, during the May of the following year, was I to bring home a branch of apple-blossom from the florist, and to stay all night long before its flowers in which bloomed the same creamy essence that powdered besides and whitened the green unfolding leaves, flowers between whose snowy cups it seemed almost as though it had been the salesman who had, in his generosity towards myself, out of his wealth of invention too and as an effective contrast, added on either side the supplement of a becoming crimson bud: I sat gazing at them, I grouped them in the light of my lamp—for so long that I was often still there when the dawn brought to their whiteness the same flush with which it must at that moment have been tingeing their sisters on the Balbec road—and I sought to carry them back in my imagination to that roadside, to multiply them, to spread them out, so as to fill the frame prepared for them, on the canvas, all ready, of those closes the outline of which I knew by heart, which I so longed to see—which one day I must see again, at the moment when, with the exquisite fervour of genius, spring was covering their canvas with its colours.

Before getting into the carriage I had composed the seascape for which I was going to look out, which I had hoped to see with the "sun radiant", upon it, and which at Balbec I could distinguish only in too fragmentary a form, broken by so many vulgar intromissions that had no place in my dream, bathers, dressing-boxes, pleasure yachts. But when, Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage having reached high ground, I caught

a glimpse of the sea through the leafy boughs of trees, then no doubt at such a distance those temporal details which had set the sea, as it were, apart from nature and history disappeared, and I could as I looked down towards its waves make myself realise that they were the same which Leconte de Lisle describes for us in his *Orestie*, where "like a flight of birds of prey, before the dawn of day" the long-haired warriors of heroic Hellas "with oars an hundred thousand sweep the huge resounding deep." But on the other hand I was no longer near enough to the sea which seemed to me not a living thing now, but fixed; I no longer felt any power beneath its colours, spread like those of a picture among the leaves, through which it appeared as inconsistent as the sky and only of an intenser blue.

Mme. de Villeparisis, seeing that I was fond of churches, promised me that we should visit one one day and another another, and especially the church at Carqueville "quite buried in all its old ivy", as she said with a wave of the hand which seemed tastefully to be clothing the absent front in an invisible and delicate screen of foliage. Mme. de Villeparisis would often, with this little descriptive gesture, find just the right word to define the attraction and the distinctive features of an historic building, always avoiding technical terms, but incapable of concealing her thorough understanding of the things to which she referred. She appeared to seek an excuse for this erudition in the fact that one of her father's country houses, the one in which she had lived as a girl, was situated in a district in which there were churches similar in style to those round Balbec, so that it would have been unaccountable if she had not acquired a taste for architecture, this house being, incidentally, one of the finest examples of that of the Renaissance. But as it was also a regular museum, as moreover Chopin and Liszt had played there, Lamartine recited poetry, all the most famous artists for fully a century had inscribed "sentiments", scored melodies, made sketches in the family album, Mme. de Villeparisis ascribed, whether from delicacy, good breeding, true modesty or want of intelligence, only this purely material origin to her acquaintance with all the arts, and had come, apparently, to regard painting, music, literature and philosophy as the appanage of a young lady brought up on the most aristocratic lines in an historic building that was catalogued and starred. You would have said, listening to her, that she knew of no pictures that were not heirlooms. She was pleased that my grandmother liked a necklace which she wore, and which fell over her dress. It appeared in the portrait of an ancestress of her own by Titian which had never left the family. So that one could be certain of its being genuine. She would not listen to a word about pictures bought, heaven knew where, by a Croesus, she was convinced before you spoke that they were forgeries, and had no desire to see them. We knew that she herself painted flowers in water-colour, and my grandmother, who had heard

these praised, spoke to her of them. Mme. de Villeparisis modestly changed the subject, but without shewing either surprise or pleasure more than would an artist whose reputation was established and to whom compliments meant nothing. She said merely that it was a delightful pastime because, even if the flowers that sprang from the brush were nothing wonderful, at least the work made you live in the company of real flowers, of the beauty of which, especially when you were obliged to study them closely in order to draw them, you could never grow tired. But at Balbec Mme. de Villeparisis was giving herself a holiday, so as to spare her eyes.

We were astonished, my grandmother and I, to find how much more "Liberal" she was than even the majority of the middle class. She did not understand how anyone could be scandalised by the expulsion of the Jesuits, saying that it had always been done, even under the Monarchy, in Spain even. She took up the defence of the Republic, and against its anti-clericalism had no more to say than: "I should be equally annoyed whether they prevented me from hearing mass when I wanted to, or forced me to hear it when I didn't!" and even startled us with such utterances as: "Oh! the aristocracy in these days, what does it amount to?" "To my mind, a man who doesn't work doesn't count!"—perhaps only because she felt that they gained point and flavour, became memorable, in fact, on her lips.

When we heard these advanced opinions—though never so far advanced as to amount to Socialism, which Mme. de Villeparisis held in abhorrence—expressed so frequently and with so much frankness precisely by one of those people in consideration of whose intelligence our scrupulous and timid impartiality would refuse to condemn outright the ideas of the Conservatives, we came very near, my grandmother and I, to believing that in the pleasant companion of our drives was to be found the measure and the pattern of truth in all things. We took her word for it when she appreciated her Titians, the colonnade of her country house, the conversational talent of Louis-Philippe. But—like those mines of learning who hold us spell-bound when we get them upon Egyptian paintings or Etruscan inscriptions, and yet talk so tediously about modern work that we ask ourselves whether we have not been overestimating the interest of the sciences in which they are versed since there is not apparent in their treatment of them the mediocrity of mind which they must have brought to those studies just as much as to their fatuous essays on Baudelaire—Mme. de Villeparisis, questioned by me about Chateaubriand, about Balzac, about Victor Hugo, each of whom had in his day been the guest of her parents, and had been seen and spoken to by her, smiled at my reverence, told amusing anecdotes of them, such as she had a moment ago been telling us of dukes and statesmen, and severely criticised those writers simply because they had been lacking in that modesty, that

self-effacement, that sober art which is satisfied with a single right line, and lays no stress on it, which avoids more than anything else the absurdity of grandiloquence, in that opportuneness, those qualities of moderation, of judgment and simplicity to which she had been taught that real greatness aspired and attained: it was evident that she had no hesitation in placing above them men who might after all, perhaps, by virtue of those qualities, have had the advantage of a Balzac, a Hugo, a Vigny in a drawing-room, an academy, a cabinet council, men like Molé, Fontanes, Vitroles, Bersot, Pasquier, Lebrun, Salvandy or Daru.

"Like those novels of Stendhal, which you seem to admire. You would have given him a great surprise, I assure you, if you had spoken to him in that tone. My father, who used to meet him at M. Mérimée's—now he was a man of talent, if you like—often told me that Beyle (that was his real name) was appallingly vulgar, but quite good company at dinner, and never in the least conceited about his books. Why, you can see for yourself how he just shrugged his shoulders at the absurdly extravagant compliments of M. de Balzac. There at least he shewed that he knew how to behave like a gentleman." She possessed the autographs of all these great men, and seemed, when she put forward the personal relations which her family had had with them, to assume that her judgment of them must be better founded than that of young people who, like myself, had had no opportunity of meeting them. "I'm sure I have a right to speak, for they used to come to my father's house; and as M. Sainte-Beuve, who was a most intelligent man, used to say, in forming an estimate you must take the word of people who saw them close, and were able to judge more exactly of their real worth."

Sometimes as the carriage laboured up a steep road through tilled country, making the fields more real, adding to them a mark of authenticity like the precious flower with which certain of the old masters used to sign their pictures, a few hesitating cornflowers, like the Combray cornflowers, would stream in our wake. Presently the horses outdistanced them, but a little way on we would catch sight of another which while it stayed our coming had pricked up to welcome us amid the grass its azure star; some made so bold as to come and plant themselves by the side of the road, and the impression left in my mind was a nebulous blend of distant memories and of wild flowers grown tame.

We began to go down hill; and then met, climbing on foot, on a bicycle, in a cart or carriage, one of those creatures—flowers of a fine day but unlike the flowers of the field, for each of them secretes something that is not to be found in another, with the result that we can never satisfy upon any of her fellows the desire which she has brought to birth in us—a farm-girl driving her cow or half-lying along a waggon, a shopkeeper's daughter taking the air, a fashionable young lady erect on the back-seat

of a landau, facing her parents. Certainly Bloch had been the means of opening a new era and had altered the value of life for me on the day when he had told me that the dreams which I had entertained on my solitary walks along the Méséglise way, when I hoped that some peasant girl might pass whom I could take in my arms, were not a mere fantasy which corresponded to nothing outside myself, but that all the girls one met, whether villagers or "young ladies", were alike ready and willing to give ear to such prayers. And even if I were fated, now that I was ill and did not go out by myself, never to be able to make love to them, I was happy all the same, like a child born in a prison or a hospital, who, having always supposed that the human organism was capable of digesting only dry bread and "physic", has learned suddenly that peaches, apricots and grapes are not simply part of the decoration of the country scene but delicious and easily assimilated food. Even if his gaoler or his nurse does not allow him to pluck those tempting fruits, still the world seems to him a better place and existence in it more clement. For a desire seems to us more attractive, we repose on it with more confidence, when we know that outside ourself there is a reality which conforms to it, even if, for us, it is not to be realised. And we think with more joy of a life in which (on condition that we eliminate for a moment from our mind the tiny obstacle, accidental and special, which prevents us personally from doing so) we can imagine ourself to be assuaging that desire. As to the pretty girls who went past, from the day on which I had first known that their cheeks could be kissed, I had become curious about their souls. And the universe had appeared to me more interesting.

Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage moved fast. Scarcely had I time to see the girl who was coming in our direction; and yet—as the beauty of people is not like the beauty of things, as we feel that it is that of an unique creature, endowed with consciousness and free-will—as soon as her individuality, a soul still vague, a will unknown to me, presented a tiny picture of itself, enormously reduced but complete, in the depths of her indifferent eyes, at once, by a mysterious response of the pollen ready in me for the pistils that should receive it, I felt surging through me the embryo, as vague, as minute, of the desire not to let this girl pass without forcing her mind to become conscious of my person, without preventing her desires from wandering to some one else, without coming to fix myself in her dreams and to seize and occupy her heart. Meanwhile our carriage rolled away from her, the pretty girl was already left behind, and as she had—of me—none of those notions which constitute a person in one's mind, her eyes which had barely seen me had forgotten me already. Was it because I had caught but a fragmentary glimpse of her that I had found her so attractive? It may have been. In the first place, the impossibility of stopping when I came to her, the risk of not meeting her again another day, give at once to such a girl the same charm as a

place derives from the illness or poverty that prevents us from visiting it, or the so unadventurous days through which we should otherwise have to live from the battle in which we shall doubtless fall. So that, if there were no such thing as habit, life must appear delightful to those of us who would at every moment be threatened with death—that is to say, to all mankind. Then, if our imagination is set going by the desire for what we may not possess, its flight is not limited by a reality completely perceived, in these casual encounters in which the charms of the passing stranger are generally in direct ratio to the swiftness of our passage. If only night is falling and the carriage is moving fast, whether in town or country, there is not a female torso, mutilated like an antique marble by the speed that tears us away and the dusk that drowns it, but aims at our heart, from every turning in the road, from the lighted interior of every shop, the arrows of Beauty, that Beauty of which we are sometimes tempted to ask ourselves whether it is, in this world, anything more than the complementary part that is added to a fragmentary and fugitive stranger by our imagination over-stimulated by regret.

Had I been free to stop, to get down from the carriage and to speak to the girl whom we were passing, should I perhaps have been disillusioned by some fault in her complexion which from the carriage I had not distinguished? (After which every effort to penetrate into her life would have seemed suddenly impossible. For beauty is a sequence of hypotheses which ugliness cuts short when it bars the way that we could already see opening into the unknown.) Perhaps a single word which she might have uttered, a smile would have furnished me with a key, a clue that I had not expected, to read the expression of her face, to interpret her bearing, which would at once have ceased to be of any interest. It is possible, for I have never in real life met any girls so desirable as on days when I was with some serious person from whom, despite the myriad pretexts that I invented, I could not tear myself away: some years after that in which I went for the first time to Balbec, as I was driving through Paris with a friend of my father, and had caught sight of a woman walking quickly along the dark street, I felt that it was unreasonable to forfeit, for a purely conventional scruple, my share of happiness in what may very well be the only life there is, and jumping from the carriage without a word of apology I followed in quest of the stranger; lost her where two streets crossed; caught her up again in a third, and arrived at last, breathless, beneath a street lamp, face to face with old Mme. Verdurin whom I had been carefully avoiding for years, and who, in her delight and surprise, exclaimed: "But how very nice of you to have run all this way just to say how d'ye do to me!"

That year at Balbec, at the moments of such encounters, I would assure my grandmother and Mme. de Villeparisis that I had so severe a headache that the best thing for me would be to go home alone on foot. But they would never let me get out of

the carriage. And I must add that the pretty girl (far harder to find again than an historic building, for she was nameless and had the power of locomotion) to the collection of all those whom I promised myself that I would examine more closely at a later date. One of them, however, happened to pass more than once before my eyes in circumstances which allowed me to believe that I should be able to get to know her when I chose. This was a milk-girl who came from a farm with an additional supply of cream for the hotel. I fancied that she had recognised me also; and she did, in fact, look at me with an attentiveness which was perhaps due only to the surprise which my attentiveness caused her. And next day, a day on which I had been resting all morning, when Françoise came in about noon to draw my curtains, she handed me a letter which had been left for me downstairs. I knew no one at Balbec. I had no doubt that the letter was from the milk-girl. Alas, it was only from Bergotte who, as he happened to be passing, had tried to see me, but on hearing that I was asleep had scribbled a few charming lines for which the lift-boy had addressed an envelope which I had supposed to have been written by the milk-girl. I was bitterly disappointed, and the thought that it was more difficult, and more flattering to myself to get a letter from Bergotte did not in the least console me for this particular letter's not being from her. As for the girl, I never came across her again any more than I came across those whom I had seen only from Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage. Seeing and then losing them all thus increased the state of agitation in which I was living, and I found a certain wisdom in the philosophers who recommend us to set a limit to our desires (if, that is, they refer to our desire for people, for that is the only kind that ends in anxiety, having for its object a being at once unknown and unconscious. To suppose that philosophy could refer to the desire for wealth would be too silly.) At the same time I was inclined to regard this wisdom as incomplete, for I said to myself that these encounters made me find even more beautiful a world which thus caused to grow along all the country roads flowers at once rare and common, fleeting treasures of the day, windfalls of the drive, of which the contingent circumstances that would never, perhaps, recur had alone prevented me from taking advantage, and which gave a new zest to life.

But perhaps in hoping that, one day, with greater freedom, I should be able to find on other roads girls much the same, I was already beginning to falsify and corrupt what there is exclusively individual in the desire to live in the company of a woman whom one has found attractive, and by the mere fact that I admitted the possibility of making this desire grow artificially, I had implicitly acknowledged my illusion.

The day on which Mme. de Villeparisis took us to Carqueville, where there was that church, covered in ivy, of which she had spoken to us, a church that, built upon rising

ground, dominated both its village and the river that flowed beneath it, and had kept its own little bridge from the middle ages, my grandmother, thinking that I would like to be left alone to study the building at my leisure, suggested to her friend that they should go on and wait for me at the pastry-cook's, in the village square which was clearly visible from where we were and, in its mellow bloom in the sunshine, seemed like another part of a Whole that was all mediaeval. It was arranged that I should join them there later. In the mass of verdure before which I was left standing I was obliged, if I was to discover the church, to make a mental effort which involved my grasping more intensely the idea "Church"; in fact, as happens to schoolboys who gather more fully the meaning of a sentence when they are made, by translating or by paraphrasing it, to divest it of the forms to which they are accustomed, this idea of "Church", which as a rule I scarcely needed when I stood beneath steeples that were recognisable in themselves, I was obliged perpetually to recall so as not to forget, here that the arch in this clump of ivy was that of a pointed window, there that the projection of the leaves was due to the swelling underneath of a capital. Then came a breath of wind, and sent a tremor through the mobile porch, which was overrun by eddies that shot and quivered like a flood of light; the pointed leaves opened one against another; and, shuddering, the arboreal front drew after it green pillars, undulant, caressed and fugitive.

As I came away from the church I saw by the old bridge a cluster of girls from the village who, probably because it was Sunday, were standing about in their best clothes, rallying the young men who went past. Not so well dressed as the others, but seeming to enjoy some ascendancy over them—for she scarcely answered when they spoke to her—with a more serious and a more determined air, there was a tall one who, hoisted upon the parapet of the bridge with her feet hanging down, was holding on her lap a small vessel full of fish which she had presumably just been catching. She had a tanned complexion, gentle eyes but with a look of contempt for her surroundings, a small nose, delicately and attractively modelled. My eyes rested upon her skin; and my lips, had the need arisen, might have believed that they had followed my eyes. But it was not only to her body that I should have liked to attain, there was also her person, which abode within her, and with which there is but one form of contact, namely to attract its attention, but one sort of penetration, to awaken an idea in it.

And this inner self of the charming fisher-girl seemed to be still closed to me, I was doubtful whether I had entered it, even after I had seen my own image furtively reflect itself in the twin mirrors of her gaze, following an index of refraction that was as unknown to me as if I had been placed in the field of vision of a deer. But just as it

would not have sufficed that my lips should find pleasure in hers without giving pleasure to them also, so I should have wished that the idea of me which was to enter this creature, was to fasten itself in her, should attract to me not merely her attention but her admiration, her desire, and should compel her to keep me in her memory until the day when I should be able to meet her again. Meanwhile I could see, within a stone's-throw, the square in which Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage must be waiting for me. I had not a moment to lose; and already I could feel that the girls were beginning to laugh at the sight of me thus held suspended before them. I had a five-franc piece in my pocket. I drew it out, and, before explaining to the girl the errand on which I proposed to send her, so as to have a better chance of her listening to me, I held the coin for a moment before her eyes:

"Since you seem to belong to the place," I said to her, "I wonder if you would be so good as to take a message for me. I want you to go to a pastry-cook's—which is apparently in a square, but I don't know where that is—where there is a carriage waiting for me. One moment! To make quite sure, will you ask if the carriage belongs to the Marquise de Villeparisis? But you can't miss it; it's a carriage and pair."

That was what I wished her to know, so that she should regard me as someone of importance. But when I had uttered the words "Marquise" and "carriage and pair", suddenly I had a great sense of calm. I felt that the fisher-girl would remember me, and I felt vanishing, with my fear of not being able to meet her again, part also of my desire to meet her. It seemed to me that I had succeeded in touching her person with invisible lips, and that I had pleased her. And this assault and capture of her mind, this immaterial possession had taken from her part of her mystery, just as physical possession does.

We came down towards Hudimesnil; suddenly I was overwhelmed with that profound happiness which I had not often felt since Combray; happiness analogous to that which had been given me by—among other things—the steeples of Martinville. But this time it remained incomplete. I had just seen, standing a little way back from the steep ridge over which we were passing, three trees, probably marking the entrance to a shady avenue, which made a pattern at which I was looking now not for the first time; I could not succeed in reconstructing the place from which they had been, as it were, detached, but I felt that it had been familiar to me once; so that my mind having wavered between some distant year and the present moment, Balbec and its surroundings began to dissolve and I asked myself whether the whole of this drive were not a make-believe, Balbec a place to which I had never gone save in imagination, Mme. de Villeparisis a character in a story and the three old trees the reality which one recaptures on raising one's eyes from the book which one has been

reading and which describes an environment into which one has come to believe that one has been bodily transported.

I looked at the three trees; I could see them plainly, but my mind felt that they were concealing something which it had not grasped, as when things are placed out of our reach, so that our fingers, stretched out at arm's length, can only touch for a moment their outer surface, and can take hold of nothing. Then we rest for a little while before thrusting out our arm with refreshed vigour, and trying to reach an inch or two farther. But if my mind was thus to collect itself, to gather strength, I should have to be alone. What would I not have given to be able to escape as I used to do on those walks along the Guermantes way, when I detached myself from my parents! It seemed indeed that I ought to do so now. I recognised that kind of pleasure which requires, it is true, a certain effort on the part of the mind, but in comparison with which the attractions of the inertia which inclines us to renounce that pleasure seem very slight. That pleasure, the object of which I could but dimly feel, that pleasure which I must create for myself, I experienced only on rare occasions, but on each of these it seemed to me that the things which had happened in the interval were of but scant importance, and that in attaching myself to the reality of that pleasure alone I could at length begin to lead a new life. I laid my hand for a moment across my eyes, so as to be able to shut them without Mme. de Villeparisis's noticing. I sat there, thinking of nothing, then with my thoughts collected, compressed and strengthened I sprang farther forward in the direction of the trees, or rather in that inverse direction at the end of which I could see them growing within myself. I felt again behind them the same object, known to me and yet vague, which I could not bring nearer. And yet all three of them, as the carriage moved on, I could see coming towards me. Where had I looked at them before? There was no place near Combray where an avenue opened off the road like that. The site which they recalled to me, there was no room for it either in the scenery of the place in Germany where I had gone one year with my grandmother to take the waters. Was I to suppose, then, that they came from years already so remote in my life that the landscape which accompanied them had been entirely obliterated from my memory, and that, like the pages which, with sudden emotion, we recognise in a book which we imagined that we had never read, they surged up by themselves out of the forgotten chapter of my earliest infancy? Were they not rather to be numbered among those dream landscapes, always the same, at least for me in whom their unfamiliar aspect was but the objectivation in my dreams of the effort that I had been making while awake either to penetrate the mystery of a place beneath the outward appearance of which I was dimly conscious of there being something more, as had so often happened to me on the Guermantes way, or to succeed in bringing mystery back to a

place which I had longed to know and which, from the day on which I had come to know it, had seemed to me to be wholly superficial, like Balbec? Or were they but an image freshly extracted from a dream of the night before, but already so worn, so altered that it seemed to me to come from somewhere far more distant? Or had I indeed never seen them before; did they conceal beneath their surface, like the trees, like the tufts of grass that I had seen beside the Guermantes way, a meaning as obscure, as hard to grasp as is a distant past, so that, whereas they were pleading with me that I would master a new idea, I imagined that I had to identify something in my memory? Or again were they concealing no hidden thought, and was it simply my strained vision that made me see them double in time as one occasionally sees things double in space? I could not tell. And yet all the time they were coming towards me; perhaps some fabulous apparition, a ring of witches or of norns who would propound their oracles to me. I chose rather to believe that they were phantoms of the past, dear companions of my childhood, vanished friends who recalled our common memories. Like ghosts they seemed to be appealing to me to take them with me, to bring them back to life. In their simple, passionate gesticulation I could discern the helpless anguish of a beloved person who has lost the power of speech, and feels that he will never be able to say to us what he wishes to say and we can never guess. Presently, at a cross-roads, the carriage left them. It was bearing me away from what alone I believed to be true, what would have made me truly happy; it was like my life.

I watched the trees gradually withdraw, waving their despairing arms, seeming to say to me: "What you fail to learn from us to-day, you will never know. If you allow us to drop back into the hollow of this road from which we sought to raise ourselves up to you, a whole part of yourself which we were bringing to you will fall for ever into the abyss." And indeed if, in the course of time, I did discover the kind of pleasure and of disturbance which I had just been feeling once again, and if one evening—too late, but then for all time—I fastened myself to it, of those trees themselves I was never to know what they had been trying to give me nor where else I had seen them. And when, the road having forked and the carriage with it, I turned my back on them and ceased to see them, with Mme. de Villeparisis asking me what I was dreaming about, I was as wretched as though I had just lost a friend, had died myself, had broken faith with the dead or had denied my God.

It was time to be thinking of home. Mme. de Villeparisis, who had a certain feeling for nature, colder than that of my grandmother but capable of recognising, even outside museums and noblemen's houses, the simple and majestic beauty of certain old and venerable things, told her coachman to take us back by the old Balbec road, a road little used but planted with old elm-trees which we thought quite admirable.

Once we had got to know this road, for a change we would return—that is, if we had not taken it on the outward journey—by another which ran through the woods of Chantereine and Canteloup. The invisibility of the numberless birds that took up one another's song close beside us in the trees gave me the same sense of being at rest that one has when one shuts one's eyes. Chained to my back-seat like Prometheus on his rock I listened to my Oceanides. And when it so happened that I caught a glimpse of one of those birds as it passed from one leaf to another, there was so little apparent connexion between it and the songs that I heard that I could not believe that I was beholding their cause in that little body, fluttering, startled and unseeing.

This road was like many others of the same kind which are to be found in France, climbing on a fairly steep gradient to its summit and then gradually falling for the rest of the way. At the time, I found no great attraction in it, I was only glad to be going home. But it became for me later on a frequent source of joy by remaining in my memory as a lodestone to which all the similar roads that I was to take, on walks or drives or journeys, would at once attach themselves without breach of continuity and would be able, thanks to it, to communicate directly with my heart. For as soon as the carriage or the motor-car turned into one of these roads that seemed to be merely the continuation of the road along which I had driven with Mme. de Villeparisis, the matter to which I found my consciousness directly applying itself, as to the most recent event in my past, would be (all the intervening years being quietly obliterated) the impressions that I had had on those bright summer afternoons and evenings, driving round Balbec, when the leaves smelt good, a mist rose from the ground, and beyond the village close at hand one could see through the trees the sun setting as though it had been merely some place farther along the road, a forest place and distant, which we should not have time to reach that evening. Harmonised with what I was feeling now in another place, on a similar road, surrounded by all the accessory sensations of breathing deep draughts of air, of curiosity, indolence, appetite, lightness of heart which were common to them both, and excluding all others, these impressions would be reinforced, would take on the consistency of a particular type of pleasure, and almost of a setting of life which, as it happened, I rarely had the luck to come across, but in which these awakened memories placed, amid the reality that my senses could perceive, no small part of a reality suggested, dreamed, unseizable, to give me, among those regions through which I was passing, more than an aesthetic feeling, a transient but exalted ambition to stay there and to live there always. How often since then, simply because I could smell green leaves, has not being seated on a back-seat opposite Mme. de Villeparisis, meeting the Princesse de Luxembourg who waved a greeting to her from her own carriage, coming back to dinner at the Grand Hotel

appeared to me as one of those indescribable happinesses which neither the present nor the future can restore to us, which we may taste once only in a lifetime.

Often dusk would have fallen before we reached the hotel. Timidly I would quote to Mme. de Villeparisis, pointing to the moon in the sky, some memorable expression of Chateaubriand or Vigny or Victor Hugo: "Shedding abroad that ancient secret of melancholy" or "Weeping like Diana by the brink of her streams" or "The shadows nuptial, solemn and august."

"And so you think that good, do you?" she would ask, "inspired, as you call it. I must confess that I am always surprised to see people taking things seriously nowadays which the friends of those gentlemen, while doing ample justice to their merits, were the first to laugh at. People weren't so free then with the word 'inspired' as they are now, when if you say to a writer that he has mere talent he thinks you're insulting him. You quote me a fine passage from M. de Chateaubriand about moonlight. You shall see that I have my own reasons for being refractory. M. de Chateaubriand used constantly to come to see my father. He was quite a pleasant person when you were alone with him, because then he was simple and amusing, but the moment he had an audience he would begin to pose, and then he became absurd; when my father was in the room, he pretended that he had flung his resignation in the King's face, and that he had controlled the voting in the Conclave, forgetting that it was my father whom he had asked to beg the King to take him back, and that my father had heard him make the most idiotic forecasts of the Papal election. You ought to have heard M. de Blacas on that famous Conclave; he was a very different kind of man from M. de Chateaubriand. As to his fine phrases about the moon, they became part of our regular programme for entertaining our guests. Whenever there was any moonlight about the house, if there was anyone staying with us for the first time he would be told to take M. de Chateaubriand for a stroll after dinner. When they came in, my father would take his guest aside and say: 'Well, and was M. de Chateaubriand very eloquent?'—'Oh, yes.' 'He's been talking about the moon?'—'Yes, how did you know?'—'One moment, didn't he say——' and then my father would quote the passage. 'He did; but how in the world . . .?'—'And he spoke to you of the moonlight on the Roman Campagna?'—'But, my dear sir, you're a magician.' My father was no magician, but M. de Chateaubriand had the same little speech about the moon which he served up every time."

At the mention of Vigny she laughed: "The man who said: 'I am the Comte Alfred de Vigny!' One either is a Comte or one isn't; it is not of the slightest importance." And then perhaps she discovered that it was after all, of some slight importance, for she went on: "For one thing I am by no means sure that he was, and in any case he was of

the humblest origin, that gentleman who speaks in his verses of his 'Esquire's crest'. In such charming taste, is it not, and so interesting to his readers! Like Musset, a plain Paris cit, who laid so much stress on 'The golden falcon that surmounts my helm'. As if you would ever hear a real gentleman say a thing like that! And yet Musset had some talent as a poet. But except *Cinq-Mars* I have never been able to read a thing by M. de Vigny. I get so bored that the book falls from my hands. M. Molé, who had all the cleverness and tact that were wanting in M. de Vigny, put him properly in his place when he welcomed him to the Academy. Do you mean to say you don't know the speech? It is a masterpiece of irony and impertinence." She found fault with Balzac, whom she was surprised to see her nephews admire, for having pretended to describe a society "in which he was never received" and of which his descriptions were wildly improbable. As for Victor Hugo, she told us that M. de Bouillon, her father, who had friends among the young leaders of the Romantic movement, had been taken by some of them to the first performance of *Hernani*, but that he had been unable to sit through it, so ridiculous had he found the lines of that talented but extravagant writer who had acquired the title of "Major Poet" only by virtue of having struck a bargain, and as a reward for the not disinterested indulgence that he shewed to the dangerous errors of the Socialists.

We had now come in sight of the hotel, with its lights, so hostile that first evening, on our arrival, now protecting and kind, speaking to us of home. And when the carriage drew up outside the door, the porter, the pages, the lift-boy, attentive, clumsy, vaguely uneasy at our lateness, were numbered, now that they had grown familiar, among those beings who change so many times in the course of our life, as we ourself change, but by whom, when they are for the time being the mirror of our habits, we find something attractive in the feeling that we are being faithfully reflected and in a friendly spirit. We prefer them to friends whom we have not seen for some time, for they contain more of what we actually are. Only the outside page, exposed to the sun all day, had been taken indoors for protection from the cold night air and swaddled in thick woollen garments which, combined with the orange effulgence of his locks and the curiously red bloom of his cheeks, made one, seeing him there through the glass front of the hall, think of a hot-house plant muffled up for protection from the frost. We got out of the carriage, with the help of a great many more servants than were required, but they were conscious of the importance of the scene and each felt obliged to take some part in it. I was always very hungry. And so, often, so as not to keep dinner waiting, I would not go upstairs first to the room which had succeeded in becoming so really mine that to catch sight of its long violet curtains and low bookcases was to find myself alone again with that self of which things, like people,

gave me a reflected image; but we would all wait together in the hall until the head waiter came to tell us that our dinner was ready. And this gave us another opportunity of listening to Mme. de Villeparisis.

"But you must be tired of us by now," protested my grandmother.

"Not at all! Why, I am delighted, what could be nicer?" replied her friend with a winning smile, drawing out, almost intoning her words in a way that contrasted markedly with her customary simplicity of speech.

And indeed at such moments as this she was not natural, her mind reverted to her early training, to the aristocratic manner in which a great lady is supposed to shew common people that she is glad to see them, that she is not at all stiff. And her one and only failure in true politeness lay in this excess of politeness; which it was easy to identify as one of the professional "wrinkles" of a lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, who, always seeing in her humbler friends the latent discontent that she must one day arouse in their bosoms, greedily seizes every opportunity on which she can possibly, in the ledger in which she keeps her social account with them, write down a credit balance which will allow her to enter presently on the opposite page the dinner or reception to which she will not invite them. And so, having long ago taken effect in her once and for all, and ignoring the fact that now both the circumstances and the people concerned were different, that in Paris she hoped to see us often come to her house, the spirit of her caste was urging Mme. de Villeparisis on with feverish ardour, and as if the time that was allowed her for being kind to us was limited, to multiply, while we were still at Balbec, her gifts of roses and melons, loans of books, drives in her carriage and verbal effusions. And for that reason, quite as much as the dazzling glories of the beach, the many-coloured flamboyance and subaqueous light of the rooms, as much even as the riding-lessons by which tradesmen's sons were deified like Alexander of Macedon, the daily kindnesses shewn us by Mme. de Villeparisis and also the unaccustomed, momentary, holiday ease with which my grandmother accepted them have remained in my memory as typical of life at a watering-place.

"Give them your cloaks to take upstairs."

My grandmother handed hers to the manager, and because he had been so nice to me I was distressed by this want of consideration, which seemed to pain him.

"I think you've hurt his feelings," said the Marquise. "He probably fancies himself too great a gentleman to carry your wraps. I remember so well the Duc de Nemours, when I was still quite little, coming to see my father who was living then on the top floor of the Bouillon house, with a fat parcel under his arm of letters and newspapers. I can

see the Prince now, in his blue coat, framed in our doorway, which had such pretty woodwork round it—I think it was Bagard made it—you know those fine laths that they used to cut, so supple that the joiner would twist them sometimes into little shells and flowers, like the ribbons round a nosegay. 'Here you are, Cyrus,' he said to my father, 'look what your porter's given me to bring you. He said to me: Since you're going up to see the Count, it's not worth my while climbing all those stairs; but take care you don't break the string.'" "Now that you have got rid of your things, why don't you sit down; look, sit in this seat," she said to my grandmother, taking her by the hand.

"Oh, if you don't mind, not in that one! There is not room for two, and it's too big for me by myself; I shouldn't feel comfortable."

"You remind me, for it was exactly like this, of a seat that I had for many years until at last I couldn't keep it any longer because it had been given to my mother by the poor Duchesse de Praslin. My mother, though she was the simplest person in the world, really, had ideas that belonged to another generation, which even in those days I could scarcely understand; and at first she had not been at all willing to let herself be introduced to Mme. de Praslin, who had been plain Mlle. Sebastiani, while she, because she was a Duchess, felt that it was not for her to be introduced to my mother. And really, you know," Mme. de Villeparisis went on, forgetting that she herself did not understand these fine shades of distinction, "even if she had just been Mme. de Choiseul, there was a good deal to be said for her claim. The Choiseuls are everything you could want; they spring from a sister of Louis the Fat; they were ruling princes down in Basigny. I admit that we beat them in marriages and in distinction, but the precedence is pretty much the same. This little difficulty gave rise to several amusing incidents, such as a luncheon-party which was kept waiting a whole hour or more before one of these ladies could make up her mind to let herself be introduced to the other. In spite of which they became great friends, and she gave my mother a seat like that, in which people always refused to sit, just as you did, until one day my mother heard a carriage drive into the courtyard. She asked a young servant we had, who it was. 'The Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, ma'am.' 'Very well, say that I am at home.' A quarter of an hour passed; no one came. 'What about the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld?' my mother asked, 'where is she?' 'She's on the stairs, ma'am, getting her breath,' said the young servant, who had not been long up from the country, where my mother had the excellent habit of getting all her servants. Often she had seen them born. That's the only way to get really good ones. And they're the rarest of luxuries. And sure enough the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld had the greatest difficulty in getting upstairs, for she was an enormous woman, so enormous, indeed, that when she did come into the room my mother was quite at a loss for a moment to know where to put

her. And then the seat that Mme. de Praslin had given her caught her eye. 'Won't you sit down?' she said, bringing it forward. And the Duchess filled it from side to side. She was quite a pleasant woman, for all her massiveness. 'She still creates an effect when she comes in,' one of our friends said once. 'She certainly creates an effect when she goes out,' said my mother, who was rather more free in her speech than would be thought proper nowadays. Even in Mme. de La Rochefoucauld's own drawing-room people weren't afraid to make fun of her to her face (at which she was always the first to laugh) over her ample proportions. 'But are you all alone?' my grandmother once asked M. de La Rochefoucauld, when she had come to pay a call on the Duchess, and being met at the door by him had not seen his wife who was at the other end of the room. 'Is Mme. de La Rochefoucauld not at home? I don't see her.'—'How charming of you!' replied the Duke, who had about the worst judgment of any man I have ever known, but was not altogether lacking in humour."

After dinner, when I had retired upstairs with my grandmother, I said to her that the qualities which attracted us in Mme. de Villeparisis, her tact, her shrewdness, her discretion, her modesty in not referring to herself, were not, perhaps, of very great value since those who possessed them in the highest degree were simply people like Molé and Loménie, and that if the want of them can make our social relations unpleasant yet it did not prevent from becoming Chateaubriand, Vigny, Hugo, Balzac, a lot of foolish fellows who had no judgment, at whom it was easy to mock, like Bloch. . . . But at the name of Bloch, my grandmother cried out in protest. And she began to praise Mme. de Villeparisis. As we are told that it is the preservation of the species which guides our individual preferences in love, and, so that the child may be constituted in the most normal fashion, sends fat men in pursuit of lean women and *vice versa*, so in some dim way it was the requirements of my happiness threatened by my disordered nerves, by my morbid tendency to melancholy, to solitude, that made her allot the highest place to the qualities of balance and judgment, peculiar not only to Mme. de Villeparisis but to a society in which our ancestors saw blossom the minds of a Doudan, a M. de Rémusat, not to mention a Beausergent, a Joubert, a Sévigné, a type of mind that invests life with more happiness, with greater dignity than the converse refinements which brought a Baudelaire, a Poe, a Verlaine, a Rimbaud to sufferings, to a disrepute such as my grandmother did not wish for her daughter's child. I interrupted her with a kiss and asked her if she had noticed some expression which Mme. de Villeparisis had used and which seemed to point to a woman who thought more of her noble birth than she was prepared to admit. In this way I used to submit my impressions of life to my grandmother, for I was never certain what degree of respect was due to anyone until

she had informed me. Every evening I would come to her with the mental sketches that I had made during the day of all those non-existent people who were not her. Once I said to her: "I shouldn't be able to live without you." "But you mustn't speak like that;" her voice was troubled. "We must harden our hearts more than that, you know. Or what would become of you if I went away on a journey? But I hope that you would be quite sensible and quite happy."

"I could manage to be sensible if you went away for a few days, but I should count the hours."

"But if I were to go away for months . . ." (at the bare suggestion of such a thing my heart was wrung.) ". . . for years . . . for . . ."

We both remained silent. We dared not look one another in the face. And yet I was suffering more keenly from her anguish than from my own. And so I walked across to the window, and said to her, with a studied clearness of tone but with averted eyes:

"You know what a creature of habit I am. For the first few days after I have been parted from the people I love best, I am wretched. But though I go on loving them just as much, I grow used to their absence; life becomes calm, bearable, pleasant; I could stand being parted from them for months, for years . . ."

I was obliged to stop, and looked straight out of the window. My grandmother went out of the room for something. But next day I began to talk to her about philosophy, and, speaking in a tone of complete indifference, but at the same time taking care that my grandmother should pay attention to what I was saying, I remarked what a curious thing it was that, according to the latest scientific discoveries, the materialist position appeared to be crumbling, and the most likely thing to be, once again, the survival of the soul and reunion in a life everlasting.

Mme. de Villeparisis gave us warning that presently she would not be able to see so much of us. A young nephew who was preparing for Saumur, and was meanwhile stationed in the neighbourhood, at Doncières, was coming to spend a few weeks' furlough with her, and she would be devoting most of her time to him. In the course of our drives together she had boasted to us of his extreme cleverness, and above all of his goodness of heart; already I was imagining that he would have an instinctive feeling for me, that I was to be his best friend; and when, before his arrival, his aunt gave my grandmother to understand that he had unfortunately fallen into the clutches of an appalling woman with whom he was quite infatuated and who would never let him go, since I believed that that sort of love was doomed to end in mental aberration, crime and suicide, thinking how short the time was that was set apart for our

friendship, already so great in my heart, although I had not yet set eyes on him, I wept for that friendship and for the misfortunes that were in store for it, as we weep for a person whom we love when some one has just told us that he is seriously ill and that his days are numbered.

One afternoon of scorching heat I was in the dining-room of the hotel, which they had plunged in semi-darkness, to shield it from the glare, by drawing the curtains which the sun gilded, while through the gaps between them I caught flashing blue glimpses of the sea, when along the central gangway leading inland from the beach to the high road I saw, tall, slender, his head held proudly erect upon a springing neck, a young man go past with searching eyes, whose skin was as fair and his hair as golden as if they had absorbed all the rays of the sun. Dressed in a clinging, almost white material such as I could never have believed that any man would have the audacity to wear, the thinness of which suggested no less vividly than the coolness of the dining-room the heat and brightness of the glorious day outside, he was walking fast. His eyes, from one of which a monocle kept dropping, were of the colour of the sea. Everyone looked at him with interest as he passed, knowing that this young Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray was famed for the smartness of his clothes. All the newspapers had described the suit in which he had recently acted as second to the young Duc d'Uzès in a duel. One felt that this so special quality of his hair, his eyes, his skin, his figure, which would have marked him out in a crowd like a precious vein of opal, azure-shot and luminous, embedded in a mass of coarser substance, must correspond to a life different from that led by other men. So that when, before the attachment which Mme. de Villeparisis had been deploring, the prettiest women in society had disputed the possession of him, his presence, at a watering-place for instance, in the company of the beauty of the season to whom he was paying court, not only made her conspicuous, but attracted every eye fully as much to himself. Because of his "tone", of his impertinence befitting a young "lion", and especially of his astonishing good looks, some people even thought him effeminate, though without attaching any stigma, for everyone knew bow manly he was and that he was a passionate "womaniser". This was Mme. de Villeparisis's nephew of whom she had spoken to us. I was overcome with joy at the thought that I was going to know him and to see him for several weeks on end, and confident that he would bestow on me all his affection. He strode rapidly across the hotel, seeming to be in pursuit of his monocle, which kept darting away in front of him like a butterfly. He was coming from the beach, and the sea which filled the lower half of the glass front of the hall gave him a background against which he was drawn at full length, as in certain portraits whose painters attempt, without in any way falsifying the most accurate observation of contemporary

life, but by choosing for their sitter appropriate surroundings, a polo ground, golf links, a race-course, the bridge of a yacht, to furnish a modern equivalent of those canvases on which the old masters used to present the human figure in the foreground of a landscape. A carriage and pair was waiting for him at the door; and, while his monocle resumed its gambollings in the air of the sunlit street, with the elegance and mastery which a great pianist contrives to display in the simplest piece of execution, where it has not appeared possible that he could shew himself superior to a performer of the second class, Mme. de Villeparisis's nephew, taking the reins that were handed him by the groom, jumped on to the box seat by his side and, while he opened a letter which the manager of the hotel sent out after him, made his horses start.

What a disappointment was mine on the days that followed, when, each time that I met him outside or in the hotel—his head erect, perpetually balancing the movements of his limbs round the fugitive and dancing monocle which seemed to be their centre of gravity—I was forced to admit that he had evidently no desire to make our acquaintance, and saw that he did not bow to us although he must have known that we were friends of his aunt. And calling to mind the friendliness that Mme. de Villeparisis, and before her M. de Norpois had shewn me, I thought that perhaps they were only of a bogus nobility, and that there might be a secret section in the laws that govern the aristocracy which allowed women, perhaps, and certain diplomats to discard, in their relations with plebeians, for a reason which was beyond me, the stiffness which must, on the other hand, be pitilessly maintained by a young Marquis. My intelligence might have told me the opposite. But the characteristic feature of the silly phase through which I was passing—a phase by no means irresponsive, indeed highly fertile—is that we do not consult our intelligence and that the most trivial attributes of other people seem to us then to form an inseparable part of their personality. In a world thronged with monsters and with gods, we are barely conscious of tranquillity. There is hardly one of the actions which we performed in that phase which we would not give anything, in later life, to be able to erase from our memory. Whereas what we ought to regret is that we no longer possess the spontaneity which made us perform them. In later life we look at things in a more practical way, in full conformity with the rest of society, but youth was the only time in which we learned anything.

This insolence which I surmised in M. de Saint-Loup, and all that it implied of ingrained severity, received confirmation from his attitude whenever he passed us, his body as inflexibly erect, his head always held as high, his gaze as impassive, or rather, I should say, as implacable, devoid of that vague respect which one has for the rights of other people, even if they do not know one's aunt, one example of which was that I

did not look in quite the same way at an old lady as at a gas lamp. These frigid manners were as far removed from the charming letters which, but a few days since, I had still been imagining him as writing to tell me of his regard for myself, as is removed from the enthusiasm of the Chamber and of the populace which he has been picturing himself as rousing by an imperishable speech, the humble, dull, obscure position of the dreamer who, after pondering it thus by himself, for himself, aloud, finds himself, once the imaginary applause has died away, just the same Tom, Dick or Harry as before. When Mme. de Villeparisis, doubtless in an attempt to counteract the bad impression that had been made on us by an exterior indicative of an arrogant and evil nature, spoke to us again of the inexhaustible goodness of her great-nephew (he was the son of one of her nieces, and a little older than myself), I marvelled how the world, with an utter disregard of truth, ascribes tenderness of heart to people whose hearts are in reality so hard and dry, provided only that they behave with common courtesy to the brilliant members of their own sets. Mme. de Villeparisis herself confirmed, though indirectly, my diagnosis, which was already a conviction, of the essential points of her nephew's character one day when I met them both coming along a path so narrow that there was nothing for it but to introduce me to him. He seemed not to hear that a person's name was being repeated to him, not a muscle of his face moved; his eyes, in which there shone not the faintest gleam of human sympathy, shewed merely in the insensibility, in the inanity of their gaze an exaggeration failing which there would have been nothing to distinguish them from lifeless mirrors. Then fastening on me those hard eyes, as though he wished to make sure of me before returning my salute, by an abrupt release which seemed to be due rather to a reflex action of his muscles than to an exercise of will, keeping between himself and me the greatest possible interval, he stretched his arm out to its full extension and, at the end of it, offered me his hand. I supposed that it must mean, at the very least, a duel when, next day, he sent me his card. But he spoke to me only of literature, declared after a long talk that he would like immensely to spend several hours with me every day. He had not only, in this encounter, given proof of an ardent zest for the things of the spirit, he had shewn a regard for myself which was little in keeping with his greeting of me the day before. After I had seen him repeat the same process whenever anyone was introduced to him, I realised that it was simply a social usage peculiar to his branch of the family, to which his mother, who had seen to it that he should be perfectly brought up, had moulded his limbs; he went through those motions without thinking, any more than he thought about his beautiful clothes or hair; they were a thing devoid of the moral significance which I had at first ascribed to them, a thing purely acquired like that other habit that he had of at once demanding an introduction to the family of anyone whom he knew, which had become so

instinctive in him that, seeing me again the day after our talk, he fell upon me and without asking how I did begged me to make him known to my grandmother, who was with me, with the same feverish haste as if the request had been due to some instinct of self-preservation, like the act of warding off a blow, or of shutting one's eyes to avoid a stream of boiling water, without which precautions it would have been dangerous to stay where one was a moment longer.

The first rites of exorcism once performed, as a wicked fairy discards her outer form and endues all the most enchanting graces, I saw this disdainful creature become the most friendly, the most considerate young man that I had ever met. "Good," I said to myself, "I've been mistaken about him once already; I was taken in by a mirage; but I have corrected the first only to fall into a second, for he must be a great gentleman who has grown sick of his nobility and is trying to hide it." As a matter of fact it was not long before all the exquisite breeding, all the friendliness of Saint-Loup were indeed to let me see another creature but one very different from what I had suspected.

This young man who had the air of a scornful, sporting aristocrat had in fact no respect, no interest save for and in the things of the spirit, and especially those modern manifestations of literature and art which seemed so ridiculous to his aunt; he was imbued, moreover, with what she called "Socialistic spoutings," was filled with the most profound contempt for his caste and spent long hours in the study of Nietzsche and Proudhon. He was one of those intellectuals, quick to admire what is good, who shut themselves up in a book, and are interested only in pure thought. Indeed in Saint-Loup the expression of this highly abstract tendency, which removed him so far from my customary preoccupations, while it seemed to me touching, also annoyed me not a little. I may say that when I realised properly who had been his father, on days when I had been reading memoirs rich in anecdotes of that famous Comte de Marsantes, in whom were embodied the special graces of a generation already remote, the mind full of speculation—anxious to obtain fuller details of the life that M. de Marsantes had led, it used to infuriate me that Robert de Saint-Loup, instead of being content to be the son of his father, instead of being able to guide me through the old-fashioned romance of what had been that father's existence, had trained himself to enjoy Nietzsche and Proudhon. His father would not have shared my regret. He had been himself a man of brains, who had transcended the narrow confines of his life as a man of the world. He had hardly had time to know his son, but had hoped that his son would prove a better man than himself. And I really believe that, unlike the rest of the family, he would have admired his son, would have rejoiced at his abandoning what had been his own small diversions for austere meditations, and without saying a word, in his modesty as a great gentleman endowed with brains,

he would have read in secret his son's favourite authors in order to appreciate how far Robert was superior to himself.

There was, however, this rather painful consideration: that if M. de Marsantes, with his extremely open mind, would have appreciated a son so different from himself, Robert de Saint-Loup, because he was one of those who believe that merit is attached only to certain forms of art and of life, had an affectionate but slightly contemptuous memory of a father who had spent all his time hunting and racing, who yawned at Wagner and raved over Offenbach. Saint-Loup had not the intelligence to see that intellectual worth has nothing to do with adhesion to any one aesthetic formula, and had for the intellectuality of M. de Marsantes much the same sort of scorn as might have been felt for Boieldieu or Labiche by a son of Boieldieu or Labiche who had become adepts in the most symbolic literature and the most complex music. "I scarcely knew my father," he used to say. "He seems to have been a charming person. His tragedy was the deplorable age in which he lived. To have been born in the Faubourg Saint-Germain and to have to live in the days of La Belle Hélène would be enough to wreck any existence. Perhaps if he'd been some little shopkeeper mad about the Ring he'd have turned out quite different. Indeed they tell me that he was fond of literature. But that can never be proved, because literature to him meant such utterly god-forsaken books." And in my own case, if I found Saint-Loup a trifle earnest, he could not understand why I was not more earnest still. Never judging anything except by the weight of the intelligence that it contained, never perceiving the magic appeal to the imagination that I found in things which he condemned as frivolous, he was astonished that I—I, to whom he imagined himself to be so utterly inferior—could take any interest in them.

From the first Saint-Loup made a conquest of my grandmother, not only by the incessant acts of kindness which he went out of his way to shew to us both, but by the naturalness which he put into them as into everything. For naturalness—doubtless because through the artifice of man it allows a feeling of nature to permeate—was the quality which my grandmother preferred to all others, whether in gardens, where she did not like there to be, as there had been in our Combray garden, too formal borders, or at table, where she detested those dressed-up dishes in which you could hardly detect the foodstuff's that had gone to make them, or in piano-playing, which she did not like to be too finicking, too laboured, having indeed had a special weakness for the discords, the wrong notes of Rubinstein. This naturalness she found and enjoyed even in the clothes that Saint-Loup wore, of a pliant elegance, with nothing swagger, nothing formal about them, no stiffness or starch. She appreciated this rich young man still more highly for the free and careless way that he had of living in luxury

without "smelling of money", without giving himself airs; she even discovered the charm of this naturalness in the incapacity which Saint-Loup had kept, though as a rule it is outgrown with childhood, at the same time as certain physiological peculiarities of that period, for preventing his face from at once reflecting every emotion. Something, for instance, that he wanted to have but had not expected, were it no more than a compliment, reacted in him in a burst of pleasure so quick, so burning, so volatile, so expansive that it was impossible for him to contain and to conceal it; a grin of delight seized irresistible hold of his face; the too delicate skin of his cheeks allowed a vivid glow to shine through them, his eyes sparkled with confusion and joy; and my grandmother was infinitely touched by this charming show of innocence and frankness, which, incidentally, in Saint-Loup—at any rate at the period of our first friendship—was not misleading. But I have known another person, and there are many such, in whom the physiological sincerity of that fleeting blush in no way excluded moral duplicity; as often as not it proves nothing more than the vivacity with which pleasure is felt—so that it disarms them and they are forced publicly to confess it—by natures capable of the vilest treachery. But where my grandmother did really adore Saint-Loup's naturalness was in his way of admitting, without any evasion, his affection for me, to give expression to which he found words than which she herself, she told me, could not have thought of any more appropriate, more truly loving, words to which "Sévigné and Beausergent" might have set their signatures. He was not afraid to make fun of my weaknesses—which he had discerned with an acuteness that made her smile—but as she herself would have done, lovingly, at the same time extolling my good qualities with a warmth, an impulsive freedom that shewed no sign of the reserve, the coldness by means of which young men of his age are apt to suppose that they give themselves importance. And he shewed in forestalling every discomfort, however slight, in covering my legs if the day had turned cold without my noticing it, in arranging (without telling me) to stay later with me in the evening if he thought that I was depressed or felt unwell, a vigilance which, from the point of view of my health, for which a more hardening discipline would perhaps have been better, my grandmother found almost excessive, though as a proof of his affection for myself she was deeply touched by it.

It was promptly settled between us that he and I were to be great friends for ever, and he would say "our friendship" as though he were speaking of some important and delightful thing which had an existence independent of ourselves, and which he soon called—not counting his love for his mistress—the great joy of his life. These words made me rather uncomfortable and I was at a loss for an answer, for I did not feel when I was with him and talked to him—and no doubt it would have been the same

with everyone else—any of that happiness which it was, on the other hand, possible for me to experience when I was by myself. For alone, at times, I felt surging from the depths of my being one or other of those impressions which gave me a delicious sense of comfort. But as soon as I was with some one else, when I began to talk to a friend, my mind at once "turned about", it was towards the listener and not myself that it directed its thoughts, and when they followed this outward course they brought me no pleasure. Once I had left Saint-Loup, I managed, with the help of words, to put more or less in order the confused minutes that I had spent with him; I told myself that I had a good friend, that a good friend was a rare thing, and I tasted, when I felt myself surrounded by "goods" that were difficult to acquire, what was precisely the opposite of the pleasure that was natural to me, the opposite of the pleasure of having extracted from myself and brought to light something that was hidden in my inner darkness. If I had spent two or three hours in conversation with Saint-Loup, and he had expressed his admiration of what I had said to him, I felt a sort of remorse, or regret, or weariness at not having been left alone and ready, at last, to begin my work. But I told myself that one is not given intelligence for one's own benefit only, that the greatest of men have longed for appreciation, that I could not regard as wasted hours in which I had built up an exalted idea of myself in the mind of my friend; I had no difficulty in persuading myself that I ought to be happy in consequence, and I hoped all the more anxiously that this happiness might never be taken from me simply because I had not yet been conscious of it. We fear more than the loss of everything else the disappearance of the "goods" that have remained beyond our reach, because our heart has not taken possession of them. I felt that I was capable of exemplifying the virtues of friendship better than most people (because I should always place the good of my friends before those personal interests to which other people were devoted but which did not count for me), but not of finding happiness in a feeling which, instead of multiplying the differences that there were between my nature and those of other people—as there are among all of us—would cancel them. At the same time my mind was distinguishing in Saint-Loup a personality more collective than his own, that of the "noble"; which like an indwelling spirit moved his limbs, ordered his gestures and his actions; then, at such moments, although in his company, I was as much alone as I should have been gazing at a landscape the harmony of which I could understand. He was no more then than an object the properties of which, in my musing contemplations, I sought to explore. The perpetual discovery in him of this pre-existent, this aeonial creature, this aristocrat who was just what Robert aspired not to be, gave me a keen delight, but one that was intellectual and not social. In the moral and physical agility which gave so much grace to his kindnesses, in the ease with which he offered my grandmother his carriage and made her get into it, in the

alacrity with which he sprang from the box, when he was afraid that I might be cold, to spread his own cloak over my shoulders, I felt not only the inherited litheness of the mighty hunters who had been for generations the ancestors of this young man who made no pretence save to intellectuality, their scorn of wealth which, subsisting in him side by side with his enjoyment of it simply because it enabled him to entertain his friends more lavishly, made him so carelessly shower his riches at their feet; I felt in him especially the certainty or the illusion in the minds of those great lords of being "better than other people", thanks to which they had not been able to hand down to Saint-Loup that anxiety to shew that one is "just as good", that dread of seeming inferior, of which he was indeed wholly unconscious, but which mars with so much ugliness, so much awkwardness, the most sincere overtures of a plebeian. Sometimes I found fault with myself for thus taking pleasure in my friend as in a work of art, that is to say in regarding the play of all the parts of his being as harmoniously ordered by a general idea from which they depended but which he did not know, so that it added nothing to his own good qualities, to that personal value, intellectual and moral, to which he attached so high a price.

And yet that idea was to a certain extent their determining cause. It was because he was a gentleman that that mental activity, those socialist aspirations, which made him seek the company of young students, arrogant and ill-dressed, connoted in him something really pure and disinterested which was not to be found in them. Looking upon himself as the heir of an ignorant and selfish caste, he was sincerely anxious that they should forgive in him that aristocratic origin which they, on the contrary, found irresistibly attractive and on account of which they sought to know him, though with a show of coldness and indeed of insolence towards him. He was thus led to make advances to people from whom my parents, faithful to the sociological theories of Combray, would have been stupefied at his not turning away in disgust. One day when we were sitting on the sands, Saint-Loup and I, we heard issuing from a canvas tent against which we were leaning a torrent of imprecation against the swarm of Israelites that infested Balbec. "You can't go a yard without meeting them," said the voice. "I am not in principle irremediably hostile to the Jewish nation, but here there is a plethora of them. You hear nothing but, 'I thay, Apraham, I've chust theen Chacop.' You would think you were in the Rue d'Aboukir." The man who thus inveighed against Israel emerged at last from the tent; we raised our eyes to behold this antisemite. It was my old friend Bloch. Saint-Loup at once begged me to remind him that they had met before the Board of Examiners, when Bloch had carried off the prize of honour, and since then at a popular university course.

At the most I may have smiled now and then, to discover in Robert the marks of his Jesuit schooling, in the awkwardness which the fear of hurting people's feelings at once created in him whenever one of his intellectual friends made a social error, did something silly to which Saint-Loup himself attached no importance but felt that the other would have blushed if anybody had noticed it. And it was Robert who used to blush as though it had been he that was to blame, for instance on the day when Bloch, after promising to come and see him at the hotel, went on:

"As I cannot endure to be kept waiting among all the false splendour of these great caravanserais, and the Hungarian band would make me ill, you must tell the 'lighft-boy' to make them shut up, and to let you know at once."

Personally, I was not particularly anxious that Bloch should come to the hotel. He was at Balbec not by himself, unfortunately, but with his sisters, and they in turn had innumerable relatives and friends staying there. Now this Jewish colony was more picturesque than pleasant. Balbec was in this respect like such countries as Russia or Rumania, where the geography books teach us that the Israelite population does not enjoy anything approaching the same esteem and has not reached the same stage of assimilation as, for instance, in Paris. Always together, with no blend of any other element, when the cousins and uncles of Bloch or their coreligionists male or female repaired to the Casino, the ladies to dance, the gentlemen branching off towards the baccarat-tables, they formed a solid troop, homogeneous within itself, and utterly dissimilar to the people who watched them go past and found them there again every year without ever exchanging a word or a sign with them, whether these were on the Cambremers' list, or the presiding magistrate's little group, professional or "business" people, or even simple corn-chandlers from Paris, whose daughters, handsome, proud, derisive and French as the statues at Rheims, would not care to mix with that horde of ill-bred tomboys, who carried their zeal for "seaside fashions" so far as to be always apparently on their way home from shrimping or out to dance the tango. As for the men, despite the brilliance of their dinner-jackets and patent-leather shoes, the exaggeration of their type made one think of what people call the "intelligent research" of painters who, having to illustrate the Gospels or the Arabian Nights, consider the country in which the scenes are laid, and give to Saint Peter or to Ali-Baba the identical features of the heaviest "punter" at the Balbec tables. Bloch introduced his sisters, who, though he silenced their chatter with the utmost rudeness, screamed with laughter at the mildest sallies of this brother, their blindly worshipped idol. So that it is probable that this set of people contained, like every other, perhaps more than any other, plenty of attractions, merits and virtues. But in order to experience these, one had first to penetrate its enclosure. Now it was not popular; it could feel

this; it saw in its unpopularity the mark of an anti-semitism to which it presented a bold front in a compact and closed phalanx into which, as it happened, no one ever dreamed of trying to make his way.

At his use of the word "lighft" I had all the less reason to be surprised in that, a few days before, Bloch having asked me why I had come to Balbec (although it seemed to him perfectly natural that he himself should be there) and whether it had been "in the hope of making grand friends", when I had explained to him that this visit was a fulfilment of one of my earliest longings, though one not so deep as my longing to see Venice, he had replied: "Yes, of course, to sip iced drinks with the pretty ladies, while you pretend to be reading the *Stones of Venighce*, by Lord John Ruskin, a dreary shaver, in fact one of the most garrulous old barbers that you could find." So that Bloch evidently thought that in England not only were all the inhabitants of the male sex called "Lord", but the letter 'i' was invariably pronounced 'igh'. As for Saint-Loup, this mistake in pronunciation seemed to him all the less serious inasmuch as he saw in it pre-eminently a want of those almost "society" notions which my new friend despised as fully as he was versed in them. But the fear lest Bloch, discovering one day that one says "Venice" and that Ruskin was not a lord, should retrospectively imagine that Robert had been laughing at him, made the latter feel as guilty as if he had been found wanting in the indulgence with which, as we have seen, he overflowed, so that the blush which would no doubt one day dye the cheek of Bloch on the discovery of his error, Robert already, by anticipation and reflex action, could feel mounting to his own. For he fully believed that Bloch attached more importance than he to this mistake. Which Bloch proved to be true some time later, when he heard me pronounce the word "lift", by breaking in with:

"Oh, you say 'lift', do you?" And then, in a dry and lofty tone: "Not that it is of the slightest importance." A phrase that is like a reflex action of the body, the same in all men whose self-esteem is great, in the gravest circumstances as well as in the most trivial, betraying there as clearly as on this occasion how important the thing in question seems to him who declares that it is of no importance; a tragic phrase at times, the first to escape (and then how heart-breaking) the lips of every man at all proud from whom we have just taken the last hope to which he still clung by refusing to do him a service. "Oh, well, it's not of the slightest importance; I shall make some other arrangement:" the other arrangement which it is not of the slightest importance that he should be driven to adopt being often suicide.

Apart from this, Bloch made me the prettiest speeches. He was certainly anxious to be on the best of terms with me. And yet he asked me: "Is it because you've taken a fancy to raise yourself to the peerage that you run after de Saint-Loup-en-Bray? You

must be going through a fine crisis of snobbery. Tell me, are you a snob? I think so, what?" Not that his desire to be friendly had suddenly changed. But what is called, in not too correct language, "ill breeding" was his defect, and therefore the defect which he was bound to overlook, all the more that by which he did not believe that other people could be shocked. In the human race the frequency of the virtues that are identical in us all is not more wonderful than the multiplicity of the defects that are peculiar to each one of us. Undoubtedly, it is not common sense that is "the commonest thing in the world"; but human kindness. In the most distant, the most desolate ends of the earth, we marvel to see it blossom of its own accord, as in a remote valley a poppy like the poppies in the world beyond, poppies which it has never seen as it has never known aught but the wind that, now and again, stirring the folds of its scarlet cloak, disturbs its solitude. Even if this human kindness, paralysed by self-interest, is not exercised, it exists none the less, and whenever any inconstant egoist does not restrain its action, when, for example, he is reading a novel or a newspaper, it will bud, blossom, grow, even in the heart of him who, cold-blooded in real life, has retained a tender heart, as a lover of fiction, for the weak, the righteous and the persecuted. But the variety of our defects is no less remarkable than the similarity of our virtues. Each of us has his own, so much so that to continue loving him we are obliged not to take them into account but to ignore them and look only to the rest of his character. The most perfect person in the world has a certain defect which shocks us or makes us angry. One man is of rare intelligence, sees everything from an exalted angle, never speaks evil of anyone, but will pocket and forget letters of supreme importance which it was he himself who asked you to let him post for you, and will then miss a vital engagement without offering you any excuse, with a smile, because he prides himself upon never knowing the time. Another is so refined, so gentle, so delicate in his conduct that he never says anything about you before your face except what you are glad to hear; but you feel that he refrains from uttering, that he keeps buried in his heart, where they grow bitter, very different opinions, and the pleasure that he derives from seeing you is so dear to him that he will let you faint with exhaustion sooner than leave you to yourself. A third has more sincerity, but carries it so far that he feels bound to let you know, when you have pleaded the state of your health as an excuse for not having been to see him, that you were seen going to the theatre and were reported to be looking well, or else that he has not been able to profit entirely by the action which you have taken on his behalf, which, by the way, three other of his friends had already offered to take, so that he is only moderately indebted to you. In similar circumstances the previous friend would have pretended not to know that you had gone to the theatre, or that other people could have done him the same service. But this last friend feels himself obliged to repeat or to reveal to

somebody the very thing that is most likely to give offence; is delighted with his own frankness and tells you, emphatically: "I am like that." While others infuriate you by their exaggerated curiosity, or by a want of curiosity so absolute that you can speak to them of the most sensational happenings without their grasping what it is all about; and others again take months to answer you if your letter has been about something that concerns yourself and not them, or else, if they write that they are coming to ask you for something and you dare not leave the house for fear of missing them, do not appear, but leave you in suspense for weeks because, not having received from you the answer which their letter did not in the least "expect", they have concluded that you must be cross with them. And others, considering their own wishes and not yours, talk to you without letting you get a word in if they are in good spirits and want to see you, however urgent the work you may have in hand, but if they feel exhausted by the weather or out of humour, you cannot get a word out of them, they meet your efforts with an inert languor and no more take the trouble to reply, even in monosyllables, to what you say to them than if they had not heard you. Each of our friends has his defects so markedly that to continue to love him we are obliged to seek consolation for those defects—in the thought of his talent, his goodness, his affection for ourself—or rather to leave them out of account, and for that we need to display all our good-will. Unfortunately our obliging obstinacy in refusing to see the defect in our friend is surpassed by the obstinacy with which he persists in that defect, from his own blindness to it or the blindness that he attributes to other people. For he does not notice it himself, or imagines that it is not noticed. Since the risk of giving offence arises principally from the difficulty of appreciating what does and what does not pass unperceived, we ought, at least, from prudence, never to speak of ourself, because that is a subject on which we may be sure that other people's views are never in accordance with our own. If we find as many surprises as on visiting a house of plain exterior which inside is full of hidden treasures, torture-chambers, skeletons, when we discover the true lives of other people, the real beneath the apparent universe, we are no less surprised if, in place of the image that we have made of ourself with the help of all the things that people have said to us, we learn from the terms in which they speak of us in our absence what an entirely different image they have been carrying in their own minds of us and of our life. So that whenever we have spoken about ourself, we may be sure that our inoffensive and prudent words, listened to with apparent politeness and hypocritical approbation, have given rise afterwards to the most exasperated or the most mirthful, but in either case the least favourable criticism. The least risk that we run is that of irritating people by the disproportion that there is between our idea of ourself and the words that we use, a disproportion which as a rule makes people's talk about themselves as ludicrous as the performances of

those self-styled music-lovers who when they feel the need to hum a favourite melody compensate for the inadequacy of their inarticulate murmurings by a strenuous mimicry and a look of admiration which is hardly justified by all that they let us hear. And to the bad habit of speaking about oneself and one's defects there must be added, as part of the same thing, that habit of denouncing in other people defects precisely analogous to one's own. For it is always of those defects that people speak, as though it were a way of speaking about oneself, indirectly, which added to the pleasure of absolution that of confession. Besides it seems that our attention, always attracted by what is characteristic of ourself, notices that more than anything else in other people. One short-sighted man says of another: "But he can scarcely open his eyes!"; a consumptive has his doubts as to the pulmonary integrity of the most robust; an unwashed man speaks only of the baths that other people do not take; an evil-smelling man insists that other people smell; a cuckold sees cuckolds everywhere, a light woman light women, a snob snobs. Then, too, every vice, like every profession, requires and trains a special knowledge which we are never loath to display. The invert detects and denounces inverts; the tailor asked out to dine, before he has begun to talk to you, has passed judgment on the cloth of your coat, which his fingers are itching to feel, and if after a few words of conversation you were to ask a dentist what he really thought of you, he would tell you how many of your teeth wanted filling. To him nothing appears more important, nor more absurd to you who have noticed his own. And it is not only when we speak of ourselves that we imagine other people to be blind; we behave as though they were. On every one of us there is a special god in attendance who hides from him or promises him the concealment from other people of his defect, just as he stops the eyes and nostrils of people who do not wash to the streaks of dirt which they carry in their ears and the smell of sweat which emanates from their armpits, and assures them that they can with impunity carry both of these about a world that will notice nothing. And those who wear artificial pearls, or give them as presents, imagine that people will take them to be genuine. Bloch was ill-bred, neurotic, a snob, and, since he belonged to a family of little repute, had to support, as on the floor of ocean, the incalculable pressure that was imposed on him not only by the Christians upon the surface but by all the intervening layers of Jewish castes superior to his own, each of them crushing with its contempt the one that was immediately beneath it. To carve his way through to the open air by raising himself from Jewish family to Jewish family would have taken Bloch many thousands of years. It was better worth his while to seek an outlet in another direction.

When Bloch spoke to me of the crisis of snobbery through which I must be passing, and bade me confess that I was a snob, I might well have replied: "If I were, I should

not be going about with you." I said merely that he was not being very polite. Then he tried to apologise, but in the way that is typical of the ill-bred man who is only too glad to hark back to whatever it was if he can find an opportunity to aggravate his offence. "Forgive me," he used now to plead, whenever we met, "I have vexed you, tormented you; I have been wantonly mischievous. And yet—man in general and your friend in particular is so singular an animal—you cannot imagine the affection that I, I who tease you so cruelly, have for you. It carries me often, when I think of you, to tears." And he gave an audible sob.

What astonished me more in Bloch than his bad manners was to find how the quality of his conversation varied. This youth, so hard to please that of authors who were at the height of their fame he would say: "He's a gloomy idiot; he's a sheer imbecile," would every now and then tell, with immense gusto, stories that were simply not funny or would instance as a "really remarkable person" some man who was completely insignificant. This double scale of measuring the wit, the worth, the interest of people continued to puzzle me until I was introduced to M. Bloch, senior.

I had not supposed that we should ever be allowed to know him, for Bloch junior had spoken ill of me to Saint-Loup and of Saint-Loup to me. In particular, he had said to Robert that I was (always) a frightful snob. "Yes, really, he is overjoyed at knowing M. LLLLegrandin." This trick of isolating a word, was, in Bloch, a sign at once of irony and of learning. Saint-Loup, who had never heard the name of Legrandin, was bewildered. "But who is he?" "Oh, he's a bit of all right, he is!" Bloch laughed, thrusting his hands into his pockets as though for warmth, convinced that he was at that moment engaged in contemplation of the picturesque aspect of an extraordinary country gentleman compared to whom those of Barbey d'Aurevilly were as nothing. He consoled himself for his inability to portray M. Legrandin by giving him a string of capital 'L's, smacking his lips over the name as over a wine from the farthest bin. But these subjective enjoyments remained hidden from other people. If he spoke ill of me to Saint-Loup he made up for it by speaking no less ill of Saint-Loup to me. We had each of us learned these slanders in detail, the next day, not that we repeated them to each other, a thing which would have seemed to us very wrong, but to Bloch appeared so natural and almost inevitable that in his natural anxiety, in the certainty moreover that he would be telling us only what each of us was bound sooner or later to know, he preferred to anticipate the disclosure and, taking Saint-Loup aside, admitted that he had spoken ill of him, on purpose, so that it might be repeated to him, swore to him "by Zeus Kronion, binder of oaths" that he loved him dearly, that he would lay down his life for him; and wiped away a tear. The same day, he contrived to see me alone, made his confession, declared that he had acted in my interest, because he felt that a

certain kind of social intercourse was fatal to me and that I was "worthy of better things." Then, clasping me by the hand, with the sentimentality of a drunkard, albeit his drunkenness was purely nervous: "Believe me," he said, "and may the black Ker seize me this instant and bear me across the portals of Hades, hateful to men, if yesterday, when I thought of you, of Combray, of my boundless affection for you, of afternoon hours in class which you do not even remember, I did not lie awake weeping all night long. Yes, all night long, I swear it, and alas, I know—for I know the human soul—you will not believe me." I did indeed "not believe" him, and to his words which, I felt, he was making up on the spur of the moment, and expanding as he went on, his swearing "by Ker" added no great weight, the Hellenic cult being in Bloch purely literary. Besides, whenever he began to grow sentimental and wished his hearer to grow sentimental over a falsehood, he would say: "I swear it", more for the hysterical satisfaction of lying than to make people think that he was speaking the truth. I did not believe what he was saying, but I bore him no ill-will for that, for I had inherited from my mother and grandmother their incapacity for resentment even of far worse offenders, and their habit of never condemning anyone.

Besides, he was not altogether a bad youth, this Bloch; he could be, and was at times quite charming. And now that the race of Combray, the race from which sprang creatures absolutely unspoiled like my grandmother and mother, seems almost extinct, as I have hardly any choice now save between honest brutes, insensible and loyal, in whom the mere sound of their voices shews at once that they take absolutely no interest in one's life—and another kind of men who so long as they are with one understand one, cherish one, grow sentimental even to tears, take their revenge a few hours later by making some cruel joke at one's expense, but return to one, always just as comprehending, as charming, as closely assimilated, for the moment, to oneself, I think that it is of this latter sort that I prefer if not the moral worth at any rate the society.

"You cannot imagine my grief when I think of you," Bloch went on. "When you come to think of it, it is a rather Jewish side of my nature," he added ironically, contracting his pupils as though he had to prepare for the microscope an infinitesimal quantity of "Jewish blood", and as might (but never would) have said a great French noble who among his ancestors, all Christian, might nevertheless have included Samuel Bernard, or further still, the Blessed Virgin from whom, it is said, the Lévy family claim descent, "coming out. I rather like," he continued "to find room among my feelings for the share (not that it is more than a very tiny share) which may be ascribed to my Jewish origin." He made this statement because it seemed to him at once clever and courageous to speak the truth about his race, a truth which at the same time he

managed to water down to a remarkable extent, like misers who decide to pay their debts but have not the courage to pay more than half. This kind of deceit which consists in having the boldness to proclaim the truth, but only after mixing with it an ample measure of lies which falsify it, is commoner than people think, and even among those who do not habitually practise it certain crises in life, especially those in which love is at stake, give them an opportunity of taking to it.

All these confidential diatribes by Bloch to Saint-Loup against me and to me against Saint-Loup ended in an invitation to dinner. I am by no means sure that he did not first make an attempt to secure Saint-Loup by himself. It would have been so like Bloch to do so that probably he did; but if so success did not crown his effort, for it was to myself and Saint-Loup that Bloch said one day: "Dear master, and you, O horseman beloved of Ares, de Saint-Loup-en-Bray, tamer of horses, since I have encountered you by the shore of Amphitrite, resounding with foam, hard by the tents of the swift-shipped Méniers, will both of you come to dinner any day this week with my illustrious sire, of blameless heart?" He proffered this invitation because he desired to attach himself more closely to Saint-Loup who would, he hoped, secure him the right of entry into aristocratic circles. Formed by me for myself, this ambition would have seemed to Bloch the mark of the most hideous snobbishness, quite in keeping with the opinion that he already held of a whole side of my nature which he did not regard—or at least had not hitherto regarded—as its most important side; but the same ambition in himself seemed to him the proof of a finely developed curiosity in a mind anxious to carry out certain social explorations from which he might perhaps glean some literary benefit. M. Bloch senior, when his son had told him that he was going to bring one of his friends in to dinner, and had in a sarcastic but satisfied tone enunciated the name and title of that friend: "The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray", had been thrown into great commotion. "The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray! I'll be jiggered!" he had exclaimed, using the oath which was with him the strongest indication of social deference. And he cast at a son capable of having formed such an acquaintance an admiring glance which seemed to say: "Really, it is astounding. Can this prodigy be indeed a child of mine?" which gave my friend as much pleasure as if his monthly allowance had been increased by fifty francs. For Bloch was not in his element at home and felt that his father treated him like a lost sheep because of his lifelong admiration for Leconte de Lisle, Heredia and other "Bohemians". But to have got to know Saint-Loup-en-Bray, whose father had been chairman of the Suez Canal board ("I'll be jiggered!") was an indisputable "score". What a pity, indeed, that they had left in Paris, for fear of its being broken on the journey, the stereoscope. Alone among men, M. Bloch senior had the art, or at least the right to exhibit it. He did this,

moreover, on rare occasions only, and then to good purpose, on evenings when there was a full-dress affair, with hired waiters. So that from these exhibitions of the stereoscope there emanated, for those who were present, as it were a special distinction, a privileged position, and for the master of the house who gave them a reputation such as talent confers on a man—which could not have been greater had the photographs been taken by M. Bloch himself and the machine his own invention. "You weren't invited to Solomon's yesterday?" one of the family would ask another. "No! I was not one of the elect. What was on?" "Oh, a great how-d'ye-do, the stereoscope, the whole box of tricks!" "Indeed! If they had the stereoscope I'm sorry I wasn't there; they say Solomon is quite amazing when he works it."—"It can't be helped;" said M. Bloch now to his son, "it's a mistake to let him have everything at once; that would leave him nothing to look forward to." He had actually thought, in his paternal affection and in the hope of touching his son's heart, of sending for the instrument. But there was not time, or rather they had thought there would not be; for we were obliged to put off the dinner because Saint-Loup could not leave the hotel, where he was waiting for an uncle who was coming to spend a few days with Mme. de Villeparisis. Since—for he was greatly addicted to physical culture, and especially to long walks—it was largely on foot, spending the night in wayside farms, that this uncle was to make the journey from the country house in which he was staying, the precise date of his arrival at Balbec was by no means certain. And Saint-Loup, afraid to stir out of doors, even entrusted me with the duty of taking to Incauville, where the nearest telegraph-office was, the messages that he sent every day to his mistress. The uncle for whom we were waiting was called Palamède, a name that had come down to him from his ancestors the Princes of Sicily. And later on when I found, as I read history, belonging to this or that Podestà or Prince of the Church, the same Christian name, a fine renaissance medal—some said, a genuine antique—that had always remained in the family, having passed from generation to generation, from the Vatican cabinet to the uncle of my friend, I felt the pleasure that is reserved for those who, unable from lack of means to start a case of medals, or a picture gallery, look out for old names (names of localities, instructive and picturesque as an old map, a bird's eye view, a sign-board or a return of customs; baptismal names, in which rings out and is plainly heard, in their fine French endings, the defect of speech, the intonation of a racial vulgarity, the vicious pronunciation by which our ancestors made Latin and Saxon words undergo lasting mutilations which in due course became the august law-givers of our grammar books) and, in short, by drawing upon their collections of ancient and sonorous words, give themselves concerts like the people who acquire viols da gamba and viols d'amour so as to perform the music of days gone by upon old-fashioned instruments. Saint-Loup told me that even in the most exclusive aristocratic

society his uncle Palamède had the further distinction of being particularly difficult to approach, contemptuous, double-dyed in his nobility, forming with his brother's wife and a few other chosen spirits what was known as the Phoenix Club. There even his insolence was so much dreaded that it had happened more than once that people of good position who had been anxious to meet him and had applied to his own brother for an introduction had met with a refusal: "Really, you mustn't ask me to introduce you to my brother Palamède. My wife and I, we would all of us do our best for you, but it would be no good. Besides, there's always the danger of his being rude to you, and I shouldn't like that." At the Jockey Club he had, with a few of his friends, marked a list of two hundred members whom they would never allow to be introduced to them. And in the Comte de Paris's circle he was known by the nickname of "The Prince" because of his distinction and his pride.

Saint-Loup told me about his uncle's early life, now a long time ago. Every day he used to take women to a bachelor establishment which he shared with two of his friends, as good-looking as himself, on account of which they were known as "The Three Graces".

"One day, a man who just now is very much in the eye, as Balzac would say, of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but who at a rather awkward period of his early life displayed odd tastes, asked my uncle to let him come to this place. But no sooner had he arrived than it was not to the ladies but to my uncle Palamède that he began to make overtures. My uncle pretended not to understand, made an excuse to send for his two friends; they appeared on the scene, seized the offender, stripped him, thrashed him till he bled, and then with twenty degrees of frost outside kicked him into the street where he was found more dead than alive; so much so that the police started an inquiry which the poor devil had the greatest difficulty in getting them to abandon. My uncle would never go in for such drastic methods now, in fact you can't conceive the number of men of humble position that he, who is so haughty with people in society, has shewn his affection, taken under his wing, even if he is paid for it with ingratitude. It may be a servant who has looked after him in a hotel, for whom he will find a place in Paris, or a farm-labourer whom he will pay to have taught a trade. That is really the rather nice side of his character, in contrast to his social side." Saint-Loup indeed belonged to that type of young men of fashion, situated at an altitude at which it has been possible to cultivate such expressions as: "What is really rather nice about him", "His rather nice side", precious seeds which produce very rapidly a way of looking at things in which one counts oneself as nothing and the "people" as everything; the exact opposite, in a word, of plebeian pride. "It seems, it is quite impossible to imagine how he set the tone, how he laid down the law for the

whole of society when he was a young man. He acted entirely for himself; in any circumstances he did what seemed pleasing to himself, what was most convenient, but at once the snobs would start copying him. If he felt thirsty at the play, and sent out from his box for a drink, the little sitting-rooms behind all the boxes would be filled, a week later, with refreshments. One wet summer, when he had a touch of rheumatism, he ordered an ulster of a loose but warm vicuna wool, which is used only for travelling rugs, and kept the blue and orange stripes shewing. The big tailors at once received orders from all their customers for blue and orange ulsters of rough wool. If he had some reason for wishing to keep every trace of ceremony out of a dinner in a country house where he was spending the day, and to point the distinction had come without evening clothes and sat down to table in the suit he had been wearing that afternoon, it became the fashion, when you were dining in the country, not to dress. If he was eating some special sweet and instead of taking his spoon used a knife, or a special implement of his own invention which he had had made for him by a silversmith, or his fingers, it at once became wrong to eat it in any other way. He wanted once to hear some Beethoven quartets again (for with all his preposterous ideas he is no fool, mind, he has great gifts) and arranged for some musicians to come and play them to him and a few friends once a week. The ultra-fashionable thing that season was to give quite small parties, with chamber music. I should say he's not done at all badly out of life. With his looks, he must have had any number of women! I can't tell you exactly whom, for he is very discreet. But I do know that he was thoroughly unfaithful to my poor aunt. Not that that prevented his being always perfectly charming to her, and her adoring him; he was in mourning for her for years. When he is in Paris, he still goes to the cemetery nearly every day."

The morning after Robert had told me all these things about his uncle, while he waited for him (and waited, as it happened, in vain), as I was coming by myself past the Casino on my way back to the hotel, I had the sensation of being watched by somebody who was not far off. I turned my head and saw a man of about forty, very tall and rather stout, with a very dark moustache, who, nervously slapping the leg of his trousers with a switch, kept fastened upon me a pair of eyes dilated with observation. Every now and then those eyes were shot through by a look of intense activity such as the sight of a person whom they do not know excites only in men to whom, for whatever reason, it suggests thoughts that would not occur to anyone else—madmen, for instance, or spies. He trained upon me a supreme stare at once bold, prudent, rapid and profound, like a last shot which one fires at an enemy at the moment when one turns to flee, and, after first looking all round him, suddenly adopting an absent and lofty air, by an abrupt revolution of his whole body turned to

examine a playbill on the wall in the reading of which he became absorbed, while he hummed a tune and fingered the moss-rose in his buttonhole. He drew from his pocket a note-book in which he appeared to be taking down the title of the performance that was announced, looked two or three times at his watch, pulled down over his eyes a black straw hat the brim of which he extended with his hand held out over it like a visor, as though to see whether some one were at last coming, made the perfunctory gesture of annoyance by which people mean to shew that they have waited long enough, although they never make it when they are really waiting, then pushing back his hat and exposing a scalp cropped close except at the sides where he allowed a pair of waved "pigeon's-wings" to grow quite long, he emitted the loud panting breath that people give who are not feeling too hot but would like it to be thought that they were. He gave me the impression of a "hotel crook" who had been watching my grandmother and myself for some days, and while he was planning to rob us had just discovered that I had surprised him in the act of spying; to put me off the scent, perhaps he was seeking only, by his new attitude, to express boredom and detachment, but it was with an exaggeration so aggressive that his object appeared to be—at least as much as the dissipating of the suspicions that I must have had of him—to avenge a humiliation which quite unconsciously I must have inflicted on him, to give me the idea not so much that he had not seen me as that I was an object of too little importance to attract his attention. He threw back his shoulders with an air of bravado, bit his lips, pushed up his moustache, and in the lens of his eyes made an adjustment of something that was indifferent, harsh, almost insulting. So effectively that the singularity of his expression made me take him at one moment for a thief and at another for a lunatic. And yet his scrupulously ordered attire was far more sober and far more simple than that of any of the summer visitors I saw at Balbec, and gave a reassurance to my own suit, so often humiliated by the dazzling and common-place whiteness of their holiday garb. But my grandmother was coming towards me, we took a turn together, and I was waiting for her, an hour later, outside the hotel into which she had gone for a moment, when I saw emerge from it Mme. de Villeparisis with Robert de Saint-Loup and the stranger who had stared at me so intently outside the Casino. Swift as a lightning-flash his look shot through me, just as at the moment when I first noticed him, and returned, as though he had not seen me, to hover, slightly lowered, before his eyes, dulled, like the neutral look which feigns to see nothing without and is incapable of reporting anything to the mind within, the look which expresses merely the satisfaction of feeling round it the eyelids which it cleaves apart with its sanctimonious roundness, the devout, the steeped look that we see on the faces of certain hypocrites, the smug look on those of certain fools. I saw that he had changed his clothes. The suit he was wearing was darker even than the other; and no

doubt this was because the true distinction in dress lies nearer to simplicity than the false; but there was something more; when one came near him one felt that if colour was almost entirely absent from these garments it was not because he who had banished it from them was indifferent to it but rather because for some reason he forbade himself the enjoyment of it. And the sobriety which they displayed seemed to be of the kind that comes from obedience to a rule of diet rather than from want of appetite. A dark green thread harmonised, in the stuff of his trousers, with the clock on his socks, with a refinement which betrayed the vivacity of a taste that was everywhere else conquered, to which this single concession had been made out of tolerance for such a weakness, while a spot of red on his necktie was imperceptible, like a liberty which one dares not take.

"How are you? Let me introduce my nephew, the Baron de Guermantes," Mme. de Villeparisis greeted me, while the stranger without looking at me, muttering a vague "Charmed!" which he followed with a "H'm, h'm, h'm" to give his affability an air of having been forced, and doubling back his little finger, forefinger and thumb, held out to me his middle and ring fingers, the latter bare of any ring, which I clasped through his suede glove; then, without lifting his eyes to my face, he turned towards Mme. de Villeparisis.

"Good gracious; I shall be forgetting my own name next!" she exclaimed. "Here am I calling you Baron de Guermantes. Let me introduce the Baron de Charlus. After all, it's not a very serious mistake," she went on, "for you're a thorough Guermantes whatever else you are."

By this time my grandmother had reappeared, and we all set out together. Saint-Loup's uncle declined to honour me not only with a word, with so much as a look, even, in my direction. If he stared strangers out of countenance (and during this short excursion he two or three times hurled his terrible and searching scrutiny like a sounding lead at insignificant people of obviously humble extraction who happened to pass), to make up for that he never for a moment, if I was to judge by myself, looked at the people whom he did know, just as a detective on special duty might except his personal friends from his professional vigilance. Leaving them, my grandmother, Mme. de Villeparisis and him to talk to one another, I fell behind with Saint-Loup.

"Tell me, am I right in thinking I heard Mme. de Villeparisis say just now to your uncle that he was a Guermantes?"

"Of course he is; Palamède de Guermantes."

"Not the same Guermantes who have a place near Combray, and claim descent from Geneviève de Brabant?"

"Most certainly: my uncle, who is the very last word in heraldry and all that sort of thing, would tell you that our 'cry', our war-cry, that is to say, which was changed afterwards to 'Passavant' was originally 'Combraysis'," he said, smiling so as not to appear to be priding himself on this prerogative of a "cry", which only the semi-royal houses, the great chiefs of feudal bands enjoyed. "It's his brother who has the place now."

And so she was indeed related, and quite closely, to the Guermantes, this Mme. de Villeparisis who had so long been for me the lady who had given me a duck filled with chocolates, when I was little, more remote then from the Guermantes way than if she had been shut up somewhere on the Méséglise, less brilliant, less highly placed by me than was the Combray optician, and who now suddenly went through one of those fantastic rises in value, parallel to the depreciations, no less unforeseen, of other objects in our possession, which—rise and fall alike—introduce in our youth and in those periods of our life in which a trace of youth persists changes as numerous as the Metamorphoses of Ovid.

"Haven't they got, down there, the busts of all the old lords of Guermantes?"

"Yes; and a lovely sight they are!" Saint-Loup was ironical. "Between you and me, I look on all that sort of thing as rather a joke. But they have got at Guermantes, what is a little more interesting, and that is quite a touching portrait of my aunt by Carrière. It's as fine as Whistler or Velasquez," went on Saint-Loup, who in his neophyte zeal was not always very exact about degrees of greatness. "There are also some moving pictures by Gustave Moreau. My aunt is the niece of your friend Mme. de Villeparisis; she was brought up by her, and married her cousin, who was a nephew, too, of my aunt Villeparisis, the present Duc de Guermantes."

"Then who is this uncle?"

"He bears the title of Baron de Charlus. Properly speaking, when my great-uncle died, my uncle Palamède ought to have taken the title of Prince des Laumes, which his brother used before he became Duc de Guermantes, for in that family they change their names as you'ld change your shirt. But my uncle has peculiar ideas about all that sort of thing. And as he feels that people are rather apt to overdo the Italian Prince and Grandee of Spain business nowadays, though he had half-a-dozen titles of 'Prince' to choose from, he has remained Baron de Charlus, as a protest, and with an apparent simplicity which really covers a good deal of pride. 'In these days', he says, 'everybody

is Prince something-or-other; one really must have a title that will distinguish one; I shall call myself Prince when I wish to travel incognito.' According to him there is no older title than the Charlus barony; to prove to you that it is earlier than the Montmorency title, though they used to claim, quite wrongly, to be the premier barons of France when they were only premier in the Ile-de-France, where their fief was, my uncle will explain to you for hours on end and enjoy doing it, because, although he's a most intelligent man, really gifted, he regards that sort of thing as quite a live topic of conversation," Saint-Loup smiled again. "But as I am not like him, you mustn't ask me to talk pedigrees; I know nothing more deadly, more perishing; really, life is not long enough."

I now recognised in the hard look which had made me turn round that morning outside the Casino the same that I had seen fixed on me at Tansonville, at the moment when Mme. Swann called Gilberte away.

"But, I say, all those mistresses that, you told me, your uncle M. de Charlus had had, wasn't Mme. Swann one of them?"

"Good lord, no! That is to say, my uncle's a great friend of Swann, and has always stood up for him. But no one has ever suggested that he was his wife's lover. You would make a great sensation in Paris society if people thought you believed that."

I dared not reply that it would have caused an even greater sensation in Combray society if people had thought that I did not believe it.

My grandmother was delighted with M. de Charlus. No doubt he attached an extreme importance to all questions of birth and social position, and my grandmother had remarked this, but without any trace of that severity which as a rule embodies a secret envy and the annoyance of seeing some one else enjoy an advantage which one would like but cannot oneself possess. As on the other hand my grandmother, content with her lot and never for a moment regretting that she did not move in a more brilliant sphere, employed only her intellect in observing the eccentricities of M. de Charlus, she spoke of Saint-Loup's uncle with that detached, smiling, almost affectionate kindness with which we reward the object of our disinterested study for the pleasure that it has given us, all the more that this time the object was a person with regard to whom she found that his if not legitimate, at any rate picturesque pretensions shewed him in vivid contrast to the people whom she generally had occasion to see. But it was especially in consideration of his intelligence and sensibility, qualities which it was easy to see that M. de Charlus, unlike so many of the people in society whom Saint-Loup derided, possessed in a marked degree, that my grandmother had so readily forgiven him his aristocratic prejudice. And yet this had not been sacrificed by the

uncle, as it was by the nephew, to higher qualities. Rather, M. de Charlus had reconciled it with them. Possessing, by virtue of his descent from the Ducs de Nemours and Princes de Lamballe, documents, furniture, tapestries, portraits painted for his ancestors by Raphael, Velasquez, Boucher, justified in saying that he was visiting a museum and a matchless library when he was merely turning over his family relics at home, he placed in the rank from which his nephew had degraded it the whole heritage of the aristocracy. Perhaps also, being less metaphysical than Saint-Loup, less satisfied with words, more of a realist in his study of men, he did not care to neglect a factor that was essential to his prestige in their eyes and, if it gave certain disinterested pleasures to his imagination, could often be a powerfully effective aid to his utilitarian activities. No agreement can ever be reached between men of his sort and those who obey the ideal within them which urges them to strip themselves bare of such advantages so that they may seek only to realise that ideal, similar in that respect to the painters, the writers who renounce their virtuosity, the artistic peoples who modernise themselves, warrior peoples who take the initiative in a move for universal disarmament, absolute governments which turn democratic and repeal their harsh laws, though as often as not the sequel fails to reward their noble effort; for the men lose their talent, the nations their secular predominance; "pacificism" often multiplies wars and indulgence criminality. If Saint-Loup's efforts towards sincerity and emancipation were only to be commended as most noble, to judge by their visible result, one could still be thankful that they had failed to bear fruit in M. de Charlus, who had transferred to his own home much of the admirable panelling from the Guermantes house, instead of substituting, like his nephew, a "modern style" of decoration, employing Lebourg or Guillaumin. It was none the less true that M. de Charlus's ideal was highly artificial, and, if the epithet can be applied to the word ideal, as much social as artistic. In certain women of great beauty and rare culture whose ancestresses, two centuries earlier, had shared in all the glory and grace of the old order, he found a distinction which made him take pleasure only in their society, and no doubt the admiration for them which he had protested was sincere, but countless reminiscences, historical and artistic, called forth by their names, entered into and formed a great part of it, just as suggestions of classical antiquity are one of the reasons for the pleasure which a booklover finds in reading an Ode of Horace that is perhaps inferior to poems of our own day which would leave the same booklover cold. Any of these women by the side of a pretty commoner was for him what are, hanging beside a contemporary canvas representing a procession or a wedding, those old pictures the history of which we know, from the Pope or King who ordered them, through the hands of people whose acquisition of them, by gift, purchase, conquest or inheritance, recalls to us some event or at least some alliance of historic interest, and

consequently some knowledge that we ourselves have acquired, gives it a fresh utility, increases our sense of the richness of the possessions of our memory or of our erudition. M. de Charlus might be thankful that a prejudice similar to his own, by preventing these several great ladies from mixing with women whose blood was less pure, presented them for his veneration unspoiled, in their unaltered nobility, like an eighteenth-century house-front supported on its flat column of pink marbles, in which the passage of time has wrought no change.

M. de Charlus praised the true "nobility" of mind and heart which characterised these women, playing upon the word in a double sense by which he himself was taken in, and in which lay the falsehood of this bastard conception, of this medley of aristocracy, generosity and art, but also its seductiveness, dangerous to people like my grandmother, to whom the less refined but more innocent prejudice of a nobleman who cared only about quarterings and took no thought for anything besides would have appeared too silly for words, whereas she was defenceless as soon as a thing presented itself under the externals of a mental superiority, so much so, indeed, that she regarded Princes as enviable above all other men because they were able to have a Labruyère, a Fénelon as their tutors. Outside the Grand Hotel the three Guermantes left us; they were going to luncheon with the Princesse de Luxembourg. While my grandmother was saying good-bye to Mme. de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup to my grandmother, M. de Charlus who, so far, had not uttered a word to me, drew back a little way from the group and, when he reached my side, said: "I shall be taking tea this evening after dinner in my aunt Villeparisis's room; I hope that you will give me the pleasure of seeing you there, and your grandmother." With which he rejoined the Marquise.

Although it was Sunday there were no more carriages waiting outside the hotel now than at the beginning of the season. The solicitor's wife, in particular, had decided that it was not worth the expense of hiring one every time simply because she was not going to the Cambremers', and contented herself with staying in her room.

"Is Mme. Blandais not well?" her husband was asked. "We haven't seen her all day."

"She has a slight headache; it's the heat, there's thunder coming. The least thing upsets her; but I expect you will see her this evening; I've told her she ought to come down. It can't do her any harm."

I had supposed that in thus inviting us to take tea with his aunt, whom I never doubted that he would have warned that we were coming, M. de Charlus wished to make amends for the impoliteness which he had shewn me during our walk that morning. But when, on our entering Mme. de Villeparisis's room, I attempted to greet her

nephew, even although I walked right round him, while in shrill accents he was telling a somewhat spiteful story about one of his relatives, I did not succeed in catching his eye; I decided to say "Good evening" to him, and fairly loud, to warn him of my presence; but I realised that he had observed it, for before ever a word had passed my lips, just as I began to bow to him, I saw his two fingers stretched out for me to shake without his having turned to look at me or paused in his story. He had evidently seen me, without letting it appear that he had, and I noticed then that his eyes, which were never fixed on the person to whom he was speaking, strayed perpetually in all directions, like those of certain animals when they are frightened, or those of street hawkers who, while they are bawling their patter and displaying their illicit merchandise, keep a sharp lookout, though without turning their heads, on the different points of the horizon, from any of which may appear, suddenly, the police. At the same time I was a little surprised to find that Mme. de Villeparisis, while glad to see us, did not seem to have been expecting us, and I was still more surprised to hear M. de Charlus say to my grandmother: "Ah! that was a capital idea of yours to come and pay us a visit; charming of them, is it not, my dear aunt?" No doubt he had noticed his aunt's surprise at our entry and thought, as a man accustomed to set the tone, to strike the right note, that it would be enough to transform that surprise into joy were he to shew that he himself felt it, that it was indeed the feeling which our arrival there ought to have prompted. In which he calculated wisely; for Mme. de Villeparisis, who had a high opinion of her nephew and knew how difficult it was to please him, appeared suddenly to have found new attractions in my grandmother and continued to make much of her. But I failed to understand how M. de Charlus could, in the space of a few hours, have forgotten the invitation—so curt but apparently so intentional, so premeditated—which he had addressed to me that same morning, or why he called a "capital idea" on my grandmother's part an idea that had been entirely his own. With a scruple of accuracy which I retained until I had reached the age at which I realised that it is not by asking him questions that one learns the truth of what another man has had in his mind, and that the risk of a misunderstanding which will probably pass unobserved is less than that which may come from a purblind insistence: "But, sir," I reminded him, "you remember, surely, that it was you who asked me if we would come in this evening?" Not a sound, not a movement betrayed that M. de Charlus had so much as heard my question. Seeing which I repeated it, like a diplomat, or like young men after a misunderstanding who endeavour, with untiring and unrewarded zeal, to obtain an explanation which their adversary is determined not to give them. Still M. de Charlus answered me not a word. I seemed to see hovering upon his lips the smile of those who from a great height pass judgment on the characters and breeding of their inferiors.

Since he refused to give any explanation, I tried to provide one for myself, but succeeded only in hesitating between several, none of which could be the right one. Perhaps he did not remember, or perhaps it was I who had failed to understand what he had said to me that morning. . . . More probably, in his pride, he did not wish to appear to have sought to attract people whom he despised, and preferred to cast upon them the responsibility for their intrusion. But then, if he despised us, why had he been so anxious that we should come, or rather that my grandmother should come, for of the two of us it was to her alone that he spoke that evening, and never once to me. Talking with the utmost animation to her, as also to Mme. de Villeparisis, hiding, so to speak, behind them, as though he were seated at the back of a theatre-box, he contented himself, turning from them every now and then the exploring gaze of his penetrating eyes, with fastening it on my face, with the same gravity, the same air of preoccupation as if my face had been a manuscript difficult to decipher.

No doubt, if he had not had those eyes, the face of M. de Charlus would have been similar to the faces of many good-looking men. And when Saint-Loup, speaking to me of various other Guermantes, on a later occasion, said: "Gad, they've not got that thoroughbred air, of being gentlemen to their finger-tips, that uncle Palamède has!" confirming my suspicion that a thoroughbred air and aristocratic distinction were not anything mysterious and new but consisted in elements which I had recognised without difficulty and without receiving any particular impression from them, I was to feel that another of my illusions had been shattered. But that face, to which a faint layer of powder gave almost the appearance of a face on the stage, in vain might M. de Charlus hermetically seal its expression; his eyes were like two crevices, two loopholes which alone he had failed to stop, and through which, according to where one stood or sat in relation to him, one felt suddenly flash across one the glow of some internal engine which seemed to offer no reassurance even to him who without being altogether master of it must carry it inside him, at an unstable equilibrium and always on the point of explosion; and the circumspect and unceasingly restless expression of those eyes, with all the signs of exhaustion which, extending from them to a pair of dark rings quite low down upon his cheeks, were stamped on his face, however carefully he might compose and regulate it, made one think of some incognito, some disguise assumed by a powerful man in danger, or merely by a dangerous—but tragic—person. I should have liked to divine what was this secret which other men did not carry in their breasts and which had already made M. de Charlus's gaze so enigmatic to me when I had seen him that morning outside the Casino. But with what I now knew of his family I could no longer believe that they were the eyes of a thief, nor, after what I had heard of his conversation, could I say that they

were those of a madman. If he was cold with me, while making himself agreeable to my grandmother, that arose perhaps not from a personal antipathy for, generally speaking, just as he was kindly disposed towards women, of whose faults he used to speak without, as a rule, any narrowing of the broadest tolerance, so he shewed with regard to men, and especially young men, a hatred so violent as to suggest that of certain extreme misogynists for women. Two or three "carpet-knights", relatives or intimate friends of Saint-Loup who happened to mention their names, M. de Charlus, with an almost ferocious expression, in sharp contrast to his usual coldness, called: "Little cads!" I gathered that the particular fault which he found in the young men of the period was their extreme effeminacy. "They're absolute women," he said with scorn. But what life would not have appeared effeminate beside that which he expected a man to lead, and never found energetic or virile enough? (He himself, when he walked across country, after long hours on the road would plunge his heated body into frozen streams.) He would not even allow a man to wear a single ring. But this profession of virility did not prevent his having also the most delicate sensibilities. When Mme. de Villeparisis asked him to describe to my grandmother some country house in which Mme. de Sévigné had stayed, adding that she could not help feeling that there was something rather "literary" about that lady's distress at being parted from "that tiresome Mme. de Grignan":

"On the contrary," he retorted, "I can think of nothing more true. Besides, it was a time in which feelings of that sort were thoroughly understood. The inhabitant of Lafontaine's Monomotapa, running to see his friend who had appeared to him in a dream, and had looked sad, the pigeon finding that the greatest of evils is the absence of the other pigeon, seem to you perhaps, my dear aunt, as exaggerated as Mme. de Sévigné's impatience for the moment when she will be alone with her daughter. It is so fine what she says when she leaves her: 'This parting gives a pain to my soul which I feel like an ache in my body. In absence one is liberal with the hours. One anticipates a time for which one is longing.'" My grandmother was in ecstasies at hearing the Letters thus spoken of, exactly as she would have spoken of them herself. She was astonished that a man could understand them so thoroughly. She found in M. de Charlus a delicacy, a sensibility that were quite feminine. We said to each other afterwards, when we were by ourselves and began to discuss him together, that he must have come under the strong influence of a woman, his mother, or in later life his daughter if he had any children. "A mistress, perhaps," I thought to myself, remembering the influence that Saint-Loup's seemed to have had over him, which enabled me to realise the point to which men can be refined by the women with whom they live.