THE MYSTERIES OF PARIS

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BY

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Freeditorial

THE MYSTERIES OF PARIS

CHAPTER I

THE TAPIS-FRANC

It was on a cold and rainy night, towards the end of October, 1838, that a tall and powerful man, with an old broad-brimmed straw hat upon his head, and clad in a blue cotton carter's frock, which hung loosely over trousers of the same material, crossed the Pont au Change, and darted with a hasty step into the Cité, that labyrinth of obscure, narrow, and winding streets which extends from the Palais de Justice to Notre Dame.

Although limited in space, and carefully watched, this quarter serves as the lurking-place, or rendezvous, of a vast number of the very dregs of society in Paris, who flock to the tapis-franc. This word, in the slang of theft and murder, signifies a drinking-shop of the lowest class. A returned convict, who, in this foul phraseology, is called an "ogre," or a woman in the same degraded state, who is termed an "ogress," generally keep such "cribs," frequented by the refuse of the Parisian population; freed felons, thieves, and assassins are there familiar guests. If a crime is committed, it is here, in this filthy sewer, that the police throws its cast-net, and rarely fails to catch the criminals it seeks to take.

On the night in question, the wind howled fiercely in the dark and dirty gullies of the Cité; the blinking and uncertain light of the lamps which swung to and fro in the sudden gusts were dimly reflected in pools of black slush, which flowed abundantly in the midst of the filthy pavement.

The murky-coloured houses, which were lighted within by a few panes of glass in the worm-eaten casements, overhung each other so closely that the eaves of each almost touched its opposite neighbour, so narrow were the streets. Dark and noisome alleys led to staircases still more black and foul, and so perpendicular that they could hardly be ascended by the help of a cord fixed to the dank and humid walls by holdfasts of iron.

Stalls of charcoal-sellers, fruit-sellers, or venders of refuse meat occupied the ground floor of some of these wretched abodes. Notwithstanding the small value of their commodities, the fronts of nearly all these shops were protected by strong bars of iron,—a proof that the shopkeepers knew and dreaded the gentry who infested the vicinity.

The man of whom we have spoken, having entered the Rue aux Fêves, which is in the centre of the Cité, slackened his pace: he felt he was on his own soil. The night was dark, and strong gusts of wind, mingled with rain, dashed against the walls. Ten o'clock struck by the distant dial of the Palais de Justice. Women were huddled together under the vaulted arches, deep and dark, like caverns; some hummed popular airs in a low key; others conversed together in whispers; whilst some, dumb and motionless, looked on mechanically at the wet, which fell and flowed in torrents. The man in the carter's frock, stopping suddenly before one of these creatures, silent and sad as she gazed, seized her by the arm, and said, "Ha! good evening, La Goualeuse."

The girl receded, saying, in a faint and fearful tone, "Good evening, Chourineur. Don't hurt me."

This man, a liberated convict, had been so named at the hulks.

"Now I have you," said the fellow; "you must pay me the glass of 'tape' (eau d'aff), or I'll make you dance without music," he added, with a hoarse and brutal laugh.

"Oh, Heaven! I have no money," replied Goualeuse, trembling from head to foot, for this man was the dread of the district.

"If you're stumped, the ogress of the tapis-franc will give you tick for your pretty face."

"She won't; I already owe her for the clothes I'm wearing."

"What, you want to shirk it?" shouted the Chourineur, darting after La Goualeuse, who had hid herself in a gully as murk as midnight.

"Now, then, my lady, I've got you!" said the vagabond, after groping about for a few moments, and grasping in one of his coarse and powerful hands a slim and delicate wrist; "and now for the dance I promised you."

"No, it is you who shall dance!" was uttered by a masculine and deep voice.

"A man! Is't you, Bras Rouge? Speak, why don't you? and don't squeeze so hard. I am here in the entrance to your 'ken,' and you it must be."

"'Tis not Bras Rouge!" said the voice.

"Oh! isn't it? Well, then, if it is not a friend, why, here goes at you," exclaimed the Chourineur. "But whose bit of a hand is it I have got hold of? It must be a woman's!"

"It is the fellow to this," responded the voice.

And under the delicate skin of this hand, which grasped his throat with sudden ferocity, the Chourineur felt himself held by nerves of iron. The Goualeuse, who had sought refuge in this alley, and lightly ascended a few steps, paused for an instant, and said to her unknown defender, "Thanks, sir, for having taken my part. The Chourineur said he would strike me because I could not pay for his glass of brandy; but I think he only jested. Now I am safe, pray let him go. Take care of yourself, for he is the Chourineur."

"If he be the Chourineur, I am a bully boy who never knuckles down," exclaimed the unknown.

All was then silent for a moment, and then were heard for several seconds, in the midst of the pitchy darkness, sounds of a fierce struggle.

"Who the devil is this?" then said the ruffian, making a desperate effort to free himself from his adversary, whose extraordinary power astonished him. "Now, then, now you shall pay both for La Goualeuse and yourself!" he shouted, grinding his teeth.

"Pay! yes, I will pay you, but it shall be with my fists; and it shall be cash in full," replied the unknown.

"If," said the Chourineur, in a stifled voice, "you do but let go my neckcloth, I will bite your nose off."

"My nose is too small, my lad, and you haven't light enough to see it."

"Come under the 'hanging glim' there."

"That I will," replied the unknown, "for then we may look into the whites of each other's eyes."

He then made a desperate rush at the Chourineur, whom he still held by the throat, and forced him to the end of the alley, and then thrust him violently into the street, which was but dimly lighted by the suspended street-lamp. The bandit stumbled; but, rapidly recovering his feet, he threw himself furiously upon the unknown, whose slim and graceful form appeared to

belie the possession of the irresistible strength he had displayed. After a struggle of a few minutes, the Chourineur, although of athletic build, and a first-rate champion in a species of pugilism vulgarly termed the savate, found that he had got what they call his master. The unknown threw him twice with immense dexterity, by what is called, in wrestling, the leg-pass, or crook. Unwilling, however, to acknowledge the superiority of his adversary, the Chourineur, boiling with rage, returned again to the charge. Then the defender of La Goualeuse, suddenly altering his mode of attack, rained on the head and face of the bandit a shower of blows with his closed fist, as hard and heavy as if stricken by a steel gauntlet. These blows, worthy of the admiration of Jem Belcher, Dutch Sam, Tom Cribb, or any other celebrated English pugilist, were so entirely different from the system of the savate, that the Chourineur dropped like an ox on the pavement, exclaiming, as he fell, "I'm floored!" (Mon linge est lavé!)

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Have pity on him!" exclaimed La Goualeuse, who, during the contest, had ventured on the threshold of the alley, adding, with an air of astonishment, "But who are you, then? Except the Schoolmaster and Skeleton, there is no one, from the Rue Saint Eloi to Notre Dame, who can stand against the Chourineur. I thank you very, very much, sir, for, indeed, I fear that, without your aid, he would have beaten me."

The unknown, instead of replying, listened with much attention to the voice of this girl. Perhaps a tone more gentle, sweet, and silvery never fell on human ear. He endeavoured to examine the features of La Goualeuse; but the night was too dark, and the beams of the street-lamp too flickering and feeble. After remaining for some minutes quite motionless, the Chourineur shook his legs and arms, and then partly rose from the ground.

"Pray be on your guard!" exclaimed the Goualeuse, retreating again into the dark passage, and taking her champion by the arm; "take care, or he will have his revenge on you."

"Don't be frightened, my child; if he has not had enough, I have more ready for him."

The brigand heard these words.

"Thanks," he murmured; "I'm half throttled, and one eye is closed,—that is quite enough for one day. Some other time, perhaps, when we may meet again—"

"What! not content yet,—grumbling still?" said the unknown, with a menacing tone.

"No, no,—not at all; I do not grumble in the least. You have regularly served me out,—you are a lad of mettle," said the Chourineur, in a coarse tone, but still with that sort of deference which physical superiority always finds in persons of his grade. "You are the better man, that's clear. Well, except the Skeleton, who seems to have bones of iron, he is so thin and powerful, and the Schoolmaster, who could eat three Herculeses for his breakfast, no man living could boast of having put his foot on my neck."

"Well, and what then?"

"Why, now I have found my master, that's all; you will find yours some day sooner or later,—everybody does. One thing, however, is certain; now that you are a better man than the Chourineur, you may 'go your length' in the Cité. All the women will be your slaves; ogres and ogresses will give you credit, if it is only for fear; you may be a king in your way! But who and what are you? You 'patter flash' like a family man! If you are a 'prig' I'll have nothing to do with you. I have used the knife, it is true, because, when the blood comes into my eyes, I see red, and I must strike, in spite of myself; but I have paid for my slashing, by going to the hulks for fifteen years. My time is up, and I am free from surveillance. I can now live in the capital, without fear of the 'beaks;' and I have never prigged,—have I, La Goualeuse?"

"No, he was never a thief," said the girl.

"Come along, then, and let us have a glass of something together, and I'll tell you who I am," said the unknown. "Come, don't let us bear malice."

"Bear malice! Devil a bit! You are master,—I confess it. You do know how to handle your fists; I never knew anything like it. Thunder and lightning! how your thumps fell on my sconce,—I never felt anything like it. Yours is a new game, and you must teach it to me."

"I will recommence whenever you like."

"Not on me, though, thank ye,—not on me," exclaimed the Chourineur, laughing; "your blows fell as if from a sledge-hammer; I am still giddy from them. But do you know Bras Rouge, in whose passage you were?"

"Bras Rouge?" said the unknown, who appeared disagreeably surprised at the question; adding, however, with an indifferent air, "I do not know Bras Rouge. Is he the only person who inhabits this abode? It rained in torrents,

and I took shelter in the alley. You meant to beat this poor girl, and I have thrashed you,—that's all."

"You're right; I have nothing to do with your affairs. Bras Rouge has a room here, but does not occupy it often. He is usually at his estaminet in the Champs Elysées. But what's the good of talking about him?" Then turning to the Goualeuse, "On my word, you are a good wench, and I would not have beaten you; you know I would not harm a child,—it was only my joke. Never mind; it was very good of you not to set on this friend of yours against me when I was down, and at his mercy. Come and drink with us; he pays for all. By the way, my trump," said he to the unknown, "what say you, instead of going to tipple, shall we go and have a crust for supper with the ogress at the White Rabbit? It is a tapis-franc."

"With all my heart. I will pay for the supper. You'll come with us, Goualeuse?" inquired the unknown.

"Thanks, sir," she replied, "but, after having seen your struggle, it has made my heart beat so that I have no appetite."

"Pooh! pooh! one shoulder of mutton pokes the other down," said the Chourineur; "the cookery at the White Rabbit is first-rate."

The three personages then, in perfect amity, bent their steps together towards the tavern.

During the contest between the Chourineur and the unknown, a charcoal-seller, of huge size, ensconced in another passage, had contemplated with much anxiety the progress of the combat, but without attempting to offer the slightest assistance to either antagonist. When the unknown, the Chourineur, and the Goualeuse proceeded to the public-house, the charcoal-man followed them.

The beaten man and the Goualeuse first entered the tapis-franc; the unknown was following, when the charcoal-man accosted him, and said, in a low voice, in the German language, and in a most respectful tone of remonstrance, "Pray, your highness, be on your guard."

The unknown shrugged his shoulders, and rejoined his new companion. The charcoal-dealer did not leave the door of the cabaret, but listened attentively, and gazed from time to time through a small hole which had been accidentally made in the thick coat of whitening, with which the windows of such haunts as these are usually covered on the inside.

CHAPTER II

THE OGRESS

The White Rabbit is situated in the centre of the Rue aux Fêves. This tavern occupies the ground floor of a lofty house, the front of which is formed by two windows, which are styled "a guillotine." Hanging from the front of the door leading to a dark and arched passage, was an oblong lamp, on the cracked panes of which were written, in red letters, "Nightly Lodgings Here."

The Chourineur, the unknown, and the Goualeuse entered into a large but low apartment, with the ceiling smoked, and crossed by black rafters, just visible by the flickering light of a miserable suspended lamp. The cracked walls, formerly covered with plaster, were now ornamented in places with coarse drawings, or sentences of flash and obscenity.

The floor, composed of earth beaten together with saltpetre, was thick with dirt; an armful of straw—an apology for a carpet—was placed at the foot of the ogress's counter, which was at the right hand of the door, just beneath the dim lantern.

On each side of this room there were six tables, one end of each of which was nailed to the wall, as well as the benches on either side of them. At the farther end was a door leading to a kitchen; on the right, near the counter, was a passage which led into a den where persons slept for the night at three halfpence a head.

A few words will describe the ogress and her guests. The lady was called Mother Ponisse; her triple trade consisted in letting furnished apartments, keeping a public-house, and lending clothes to the miserable creatures who infest these foul streets.

The ogress was about forty years of age, bulky, fat, and heavy. She had a full colour, and strong symptoms of a beard. Her deep voice, her enormous arms, and coarse hands betokened uncommon strength. She wore on her cap a large red and yellow handkerchief; a shawl of rabbit-skin was crossed over her bosom, and tied behind; her woollen gown fell upon black wooden shoes, scorched almost black by the small stove at which she warmed her feet; and, to crown her beauty, she had a copper complexion, which the use of strong liquors had materially tended to heighten.

The counter, covered with lead, was decked with jugs with iron hoops, and various pewter measures. In an open cupboard, fastened to the wall, there were several flasks of glass, so fashioned as to represent the pedestrian

figure of the Emperor. These bottles contained sundry cordials, red and green in colour, and known by the names of "Drops for the Brave," "Ratafia of the Column," etc., etc.

A large black cat, with green eyes, was sitting near the ogress, and seemed the familiar demon of the place. Then, in strange contrast, a holy branch of boxwood, bought at church by the ogress, was suspended at the back of an old cuckoo clock.

Two marvellously ill-favoured fellows, with unshaven beards, and their garb all in tatters, hardly tasted of the pitcher of wine before them, and conversed together in low voices, and with uneasy aspect. One of the two, very pale and livid, pulled, from time to time, his shabby skull-cap over his brows, and concealed as much as possible his left hand, and, even when compelled to use it, he did so with caution.

Further on there was a young man, hardly sixteen years of age, with beardless chin, and a countenance wan, wrinkled, and heavy, his eye dull, and his long black hair straggling down his neck. This youthful rake, the emblem of precocious vice, was smoking a short black pipe. His back was resting against the wall, and his two hands were in the pockets of his blouse, and his legs stretched along the bench. He did not cease smoking for a moment, unless it was to drink from a cannikin of brandy placed before him.

The other inmates of the tapis-franc, men and women, presented no remarkable characteristics. There was the ferocious or embruted face,—the vulgar and licentious mirth; but from time to time there was a deep and dull silence. Such were the guests of the tapis-franc when the unknown, the Chourineur, and the Goualeuse entered.

These three persons play such important parts in our recital, that we must put them in relief.

The Chourineur was a man of lofty stature and athletic make, with hair of a pale brown, nearly white; thick eyebrows, and enormous whiskers of deep red. The sun's rays, misery, and the severe toil of the galleys had bronzed his skin to that deep and olive hue which is peculiar to convicts. In spite of his horrible nickname, his features did not express ferocity, but a sort of coarse familiarity and irrepressible audacity. We have said already that the Chourineur was clothed in trousers and frock of blue cotton, and on his head he had one of those large straw hats usually worn by workmen in timber-yards, and barge-emptiers.

The Goualeuse was, perhaps, about sixteen and a half years old. A forehead, of the purest and whitest, surmounted a face of perfect oval and angel-like expression; a fringe of eyelids, so long that they curled slightly, half veiled her large blue eyes, which had a melancholy expression. The down of early youth graced cheeks lightly coloured with a scarlet tinge. Her small and rosy mouth, which hardly ever smiled, her nose, straight, and delicately chiselled, her rounded chin, had, in their combined expression, a nobility and a sweetness such as we can only find in the most beautiful of Raphael's portraits. On each side of her fair temples was a band of hair, of the most splendid auburn hue, which descended in luxuriant ringlets half way down her cheeks, and was then turned back behind the ear, a portion of which—ivory shaded with carnation—was thus visible, and was then lost under the close folds of a large cotton handkerchief, with blue checks, tied, as it is called, en marmotte. Her graceful neck, of dazzling whiteness, was encircled by a small necklace of grains of coral. Her gown, of brown stuff, though much too large, could not conceal a charming form, supple and round as a cane; a worn-out small orange-coloured shawl, with green fringe, was crossed over her bosom.

The lovely voice of the Goualeuse had made a strong impression on her unknown defender, and, in sooth, that voice, so gentle, so deliciously modulated and harmonious, had an attraction so irresistible that the horde of villains and abandoned women, in the midst of whom this unfortunate girl lived, often begged her to sing, and listened to her with rapture.

The Goualeuse had another name, given, doubtless, to the maiden sweetness of her countenance,—she was also called Fleur-de-Marie.

The defender of La Goualeuse (we shall call the unknown Rodolph) appeared about thirty-six years of age; his figure, tall, graceful, and admirably proportioned, yet did not betoken the astonishing vigour which he had displayed in his rencounter with the Chourineur.

It would have been difficult to assign a decided character to the physiognomy of Rodolph. Certain wrinkles in his forehead betokened a man of meditation; and yet the firm expression of his mouth, the dignified and bold carriage of the head, assured us of the man of action, whose physical strength and presence of mind would always command an ascendancy over the multitude.

The Chourineur, Rodolph, and La Goualeuse

Etching by Adrian Marcel, after the drawing by Frank T. Merrill

In his struggle with the Chourineur, Rodolph had neither betrayed anger nor hatred. Confident in his own strength, his address, and agility, he had only shown a contempt for the brute beast which he subdued.

We will finish this bodily picture of Rodolph by saying that his features, regularly handsome, seemed too beautiful for a man. His eyes were large, and of a deep hazel, his nose aquiline, his chin rather projecting, his hair bright chestnut, of the same shade as his eyebrows, which were strongly arched, and his small moustache, which was fine and silky. Thanks to the manners and the language which he assumed with so much ease, Rodolph was exactly like the other guests of the ogress. Round his graceful neck, as elegantly modelled as that of the Indian Bacchus, he wore a black cravat, carelessly tied, the ends of which fell on the collar of his blue blouse. A double row of nails decorated his heavy shoes, and, except that his hands were of most aristocratic shape, nothing distinguished him from the other guests of the tapis-franc; though, in a moral sense, his resolute air, and what we may term his bold serenity, placed an immense distance between them.

On entering the tapis-franc, the Chourineur, laying one of his heavy hands on the shoulders of Rodolph, cried, "Hail the conqueror of the Chourineur! Yes, my boys, this springald has floored me; and if any young gentleman wishes to have his ribs smashed, or his 'nob in Chancery,' even including the Schoolmaster and the Skeleton, here is their man; I will answer for him, and back him!"

At these words, all present, from the ogress to the lowest ruffian of the tapis-franc, contemplated the victor of the Chourineur with respect and fear. Some, moving their glasses and jugs to the end of the table at which they were seated, offered Rodolph a seat, if he were inclined to sit near them; others approached the Chourineur, and asked him, in a low voice, for the particulars of this unknown, who had made his entrance into their world in so striking a manner.

Then the ogress, accosting Rodolph with one of her most gracious smiles,—a thing unheard of, and almost deemed fabulous, in the annals of the White Rabbit,—rose from the bar to take the orders of her guest, and know what he desired to have for the refreshment of his party,—an attention which she did not evince either to the Schoolmaster or the Skeleton, two fearful ruffians, who made even the Chourineur tremble.

One of the men with the villainous aspect, whom we have before described as being very pale, hiding his left hand, and continually pulling his cap over

his brows, leaned towards the ogress, who was carefully wiping the table where Rodolph had taken his seat, and said to her, in a hoarse tone, "Hasn't the Gros-Boiteux been here to-day?"

"No," said Mother Ponisse.

"Nor yesterday?"

"Yes, he came yesterday."

"Was Calebasse with him,—the daughter of Martial, who was guillotined? You know whom I mean,—the Martials of the Ile de Ravageur?"

"What! do you take me for a spy, with your questions? Do you think I watch my customers?" said the ogress, in a brutal tone.

"I have an appointment to-night with the Gros-Boiteux and the Schoolmaster," replied the fellow; "we have some business together."

"That's your affair,—a set of ruffians, as you are, altogether."

"Ruffians!" said the man, much incensed; "it is such ruffians you get your living by."

"Will you hold your jaw?" said the Amazon, with a threatening gesture, and lifting, as she spoke, the pitcher she held in her hand.

The man resumed his place, grumbling as he did so.

"The Gros-Boiteux has, perhaps, stayed to give that young fellow Germain, who lives in the Rue du Temple, his gruel," said he, to his companion.

"What, do they mean to do for him?"

"No, not quite, but to make him more careful in future. It appears he has 'blown the gaff' in the job at Nantes, so Bras Rouge declares."

"Why, that is Gros-Boiteux's affair; he has only just left prison, and has his hands full already."

Fleur-de-Marie had followed the Chourineur into the tavern of the ogress, and he, responding to a nod given to him by the young scamp with the jaded aspect, said, "Ah, Barbillon! what, pulling away at the old stuff?"

"Yes; I would rather fast, and go barefoot any day, than be without my drops for my throttle, and the weed for my pipe," said the rapscallion, in a thick, low, hoarse voice, without moving from his seat, and puffing out volumes of tobacco-smoke.

"Good evening, Fleur-de-Marie," said the ogress, looking with a prying eye on the clothes of the poor girl,—clothes which she had lent her. After her scrutiny, she said, in a tone of coarse satisfaction, "It's really a pleasure—so it is—to lend one's good clothes to you; you are as clean as a kitten, or else I would never have trusted you with that shawl. Such a beauty as that orange one is, I would never have trusted it to such gals as Tourneuse and Boulotte; but I have taken every care on you ever since you came here six weeks ago; and, if the truth must be said, there is not a tidier nor more nicer girl than you in all the Cité; that there ain't; though you be al'ays so sad like, and too particular."

The Goualeuse sighed, turned her head, and said nothing.

"Why, mother," said Rodolph to the old hag, "you have got some holy boxwood, I see, over your cuckoo," and he pointed with his finger to the consecrated bough behind the old clock.

"Why, you heathen, would you have us live like dogs?" replied the ogress. Then addressing Fleur-de-Marie, she added, "Come, now, Goualeuse, tip us one of your pretty little ditties" (goualantes).

"Supper, supper first, Mother Ponisse," said the Chourineur.

"Well, my lad of wax, what can I do for you?" said the ogress to Rodolph, whose good-will she was desirous to conciliate, and whose support she might, perchance, require.

"Ask the Chourineur; he orders, I pay."

"Well, then," said the ogress, turning to the bandit, "what will you have for supper, you 'bad lot?'"

"Two quarts of the best wine, at twelve sous, three crusts of wheaten bread, and a harlequin," said the Chourineur, after considering for a few moments what he should order.

"Ah! you are a dainty dog, I know, and as fond as ever of them harlequins."

"Well, now, Goualeuse," said the Chourineur, "are you hungry?"

"No, Chourineur."

"Would you like anything better than a harlequin, my lass?" said Rodolph.

"No, I thank you; I have no appetite."

"Come, now," said the Chourineur, with a brutal grin, "look my master in the face like a jolly wench. You have no objection, I suppose?"

The poor girl blushed, and did not look at Rodolph. A few moments afterwards, and the ogress herself placed on the table a pitcher of wine, bread, and a harlequin, of which we will not attempt to give an idea to the reader, but which appeared most relishing to the Chourineur; for he exclaimed, "Dieu de Dieu! what a dish! What a glorious dish! It is a regular omnibus; there is something in it to everybody's taste. Those who like fat can have it; so can they who like lean; as well as those who prefer sugar, and those who choose pepper. There's tender bits of chicken, biscuit, sausage, tarts, mutton-bones, pastry crust, fried fish, vegetables, woodcock's heads, cheese, and salad. Come, eat, Goualeuse, eat; it is so capital! You have been to a wedding breakfast somewhere this morning."

"No more than on other mornings. I ate this morning, as usual, my ha'porth of milk, and my ha'porth of bread."

The entrance of another personage into the cabaret interrupted all conversation for a moment, and everybody turned his head in the direction of the newcomer, who was a middle-aged man, active and powerful, wearing a loose coat and cap. He was evidently quite at home in the tapis-franc, and, in language familiar to all the guests, requested to be supplied with supper. He was so placed that he could observe the two ill-looking scoundrels who had asked after Gros-Boiteux and the Schoolmaster. He did not take his eyes off them; but in consequence of their position, they could not see that they were the objects of such marked and constant attention.

The conversation, momentarily interrupted, was resumed. In spite of his natural audacity, the Chourineur showed a deference for Rodolph, and abstained from familiarity.

"By Jove," said he to Rodolph, "although I have smarted for it, yet I am very glad to have met with you."

"What! because you relish the harlequin?"

"Why, may be so; but more because I am all on the fret to see you 'serve out' the Schoolmaster. To see him who has always crowed over me, crowed over in his turn would do me good."

"Do you suppose, then, that for your amusement I mean to spring at the Schoolmaster, and pin him like a bull-dog?"

"No, but he'll have at you in a moment, when he learns that you are a better man than he," replied the Chourineur, rubbing his hands.

"Well, I have coin enough left to pay him in full," said Rodolph, in a careless tone; "but it is horrible weather: what say you to a cup of brandy with sugar in it?"

"That's the ticket!" said the Chourineur.

"And, that we may be better acquainted, we will tell each other who we are," added Rodolph.

"The Albinos called the Chourineur a freed convict, worker at the wood that floats at St. Paul's Quay; frozen in the winter, scorched in the summer, from twelve to fifteen hours a day in the water; half man, half frog; that's my description," said Rodolph's companion, making him a military salute with his left hand. "Well, now, and you, my master, this is your first appearance in the Cité. I don't mean anything to offend; but you entered head foremost against my skull, and beating the drum on my carcass. By all that's ugly, what a rattling you made, especially with these blows with which you doubled me up! I never can forget them—thick as buttons—what a torrent! But you have some trade besides 'polishing off' the Chourineur?"

"I am a fan-painter, and my name is Rodolph."

"A fan-painter! Ah! that's the reason, then, that your hands are so white," added the Chourineur. "If all your fellow workmen are like you, there must be a tidy lot of you. But, as you are a workman, what brings you to a tapis-franc in the Cité, where there are only prigs, cracksmen or freed convicts like myself, and who only come here because we cannot go elsewhere? This is no place for you. Honest mechanics have their coffee-shops, and don't talk slang."

"I come here because I like good company."

"Gammon!" said the Chourineur, shaking his head with an air of doubt. "I found you in the passage of Bras Rouge. Well, man, never mind. You say you don't know him?"

"What do you mean with all your nonsense about your Bras Rouge? Let him go to the—"

"Stay, master of mine. You, perhaps, distrust me; but you are wrong, and if you like I will tell you my history; but that is on condition that you teach me how to give those precious thumps which settled my business so quickly. What say you?"

"I agree, Chourineur; tell me your story, and Goualeuse will also tell hers."

"Very well," replied the Chourineur; "it is not weather to turn a mangy cur out-of-doors, and it will be an amusement. Do you agree, Goualeuse?"

"Oh, certainly; but my story is a very short one," said Fleur-de-Marie.

"And you will have to tell us your history, comrade Rodolph," added the Chourineur.

"Well, then, I'll begin."

"Fan-painter!" said Goualeuse, "what a very pretty trade!"

"And how much can you earn if you stick close to work?" inquired the Chourineur.

"I work by the piece," responded Rodolph; "my good days are worth three francs, sometimes four, in summer, when the days are long."

"And you are idle sometimes, you rascal?"

"Yes, as long as I have money, though I do not waste it. First, I pay ten sous for my night's lodging."

"Your pardon, monseigneur; you sleep, then, at ten sous, do you?" said the Chourineur, raising his hand to his cap.

The word monseigneur, spoken ironically by the Chourineur, caused an almost imperceptible smile on the lips of Rodolph, who replied, "Oh, I like to be clean and comfortable."

"Here's a peer of the realm for you! a man with mines of wealth!" exclaimed the Chourineur; "he pays ten sous for his bed!"

"Well, then," continued Rodolph, "four sous for tobacco; that makes fourteen sous; four sous for breakfast, eighteen; fifteen sous for dinner; one or two sous for brandy; that all comes to about thirty-four or thirty-five sous a day. I have no occasion to work all the week, and so the rest of the time I amuse myself."

"And your family?" said the Goualeuse.

"Dead," replied Rodolph.

"Who were your friends?" asked the Goualeuse.

"Dealers in old clothes and marine stores under the pillars of the market-place."

"How did you spend what they left you?" inquired the Chourineur.

"I was very young, and my guardian sold the stock; and, when I came of age, he brought me in his debtor for thirty francs; that was my inheritance."

"And who is now your employer?" the Chourineur demanded.

"His name is Gauthier, in the Rue des Bourdonnais, a beast—brute—thief—miser! He would almost as soon lose the sight of an eye as pay his workmen. Now this is as true a description as I can give you of him; so let's have done with him. I learned my trade under him from the time when I was fifteen years of age; I have a good number in the Conscription, and my name is Rodolph Durand. My history is told."

"Now it's your turn, Goualeuse," said the Chourineur; "I keep my history till last, as a bonne bouche."

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF LA GOUALEUSE

"Let us begin at the beginning," said the Chourineur.

"Yes; your parents?" added Rodolph.

"I never knew them," said Fleur-de-Marie.

"The deuce!" said the Chourineur. "Well, that is odd, Goualeuse! you and I are of the same family."

"What! you, too, Chourineur?"

"An orphan of the streets of Paris like you, my girl."

"Then who brought you up, Goualeuse?" asked Rodolph.

"I don't know, sir. As far back as I can remember—I was, I think, about six or seven years old—I was with an old one-eyed woman, whom they call the Chouette, because she had a hooked nose, a green eye quite round, and was like an owl with one eye out."

"Ha! ha! ha! I think I see her, the old night-bird!" shouted the Chourineur, laughing.

"The one-eyed woman," resumed Fleur-de-Marie, "made me sell barley-sugar in the evenings on the Pont Neuf; but that was only an excuse for asking charity; and when I did not bring her in at least ten sous, the Chouette beat me instead of giving me any supper."

"Are you sure the woman was not your mother?" inquired Rodolph.

"Quite sure; for she often scolded me for being fatherless and motherless, and said she picked me up one day in the street."

"So," said the Chourineur, "you had a dance instead of a meal, if you did not pick up ten sous?"

"Yes. And after that I went to lie down on some straw spread on the ground; when I was cold—very cold."

"I do not doubt it, for the feather of beans (straw) is a very cold sort of stuff," said the Chourineur. "A dung-heap is twice as good; but then people don't like your smell, and say, 'Oh, the blackguard! where has he been?'"

This remark made Rodolph smile, whilst Fleur-de-Marie thus continued: "Next day the one-eyed woman gave me a similar allowance for breakfast as for supper, and sent me to Montfauçon to get some worms to bait for fish; for in the daytime the Chouette kept her stall for selling fishing-lines, near the bridge of Notre Dame. For a child of seven years of age, who is half dead with hunger and cold, it is a long way from the Rue de la Mortellerie to Montfauçon."

"But exercise has made you grow as straight as an arrow, my girl; you have no reason to complain of that," said the Chourineur, striking a light for his pipe.

"Well," said the Goualeuse, "I returned very, very tired; then, at noon, the Chouette gave me a little bit of bread."

"Ah, eating so little has kept your figure as fine as a needle, girl; you must not find fault with that," said Chourineur, puffing out a cloud of tobacco-smoke. "But what ails you, comrade—I mean, Master Rodolph? You seem quite down like; are you sorry for the girl and her miseries? Ah, we all have, and have had, our miseries!"

"Yes, but not such miseries as mine, Chourineur," said Fleur-de-Marie.

"What! not I, Goualeuse? Why, my lass, you were a queen to me! At least, when you were little you slept on straw and ate bread; I passed my most comfortable nights in the lime-kilns at Clichy, like a regular vagabond; I fed on cabbage-stumps and other refuse vegetables, which I picked up when and where I could; but very often, as it was so far to the lime-kilns at Clichy, and I was tired after my work, I slept under the large stones at the Louvre; and then, in winter, I had white sheets,—that is, whenever the snow fell."

"A man is stronger; but a poor little girl—" said Fleur-de-Marie. "And yet, with all that, I was as plump as a skylark."

"What! you remember that, eh?"

"To be sure I do. When the Chouette beat me I fell always at the first blow; then she stamped upon me, screaming out, 'Ah, the nasty little brute! she hasn't a farden's worth of strength,—she can't stand even two thumps!' And

then she called me Pegriotte (little thief). I never had any other name,—that was my baptismal name."

"Like me. I had the baptism of a dog in a ditch, and they called me 'Fellow,' or 'You, sir,' or 'Albino.' It is really surprising, my wench, how much we resemble each other!" said the Chourineur.

"That's true,—in our misery," said Fleur-de-Marie, who addressed herself to the Chourineur almost always, feeling, in spite of herself, a sort of shame at the presence of Rodolph, hardly venturing to raise her eyes to him, although in appearance he belonged to that class with whom she ordinarily lived.

"And when you had fetched the worms for the Chouette, what did you do?" inquired the Chourineur.

"Why, she made me beg until night; then, in the evening, she went to sell fried fish on the Pont Neuf. Oh, dear! at that time it was a long while to wait for my morsel of bread; and if I dared to ask the Chouette for something to eat, she beat me and said, 'Get ten sous, and then you shall have your supper.' Then I, being very hungry, and as she hurt me very much, cried with a very full heart and sore body. The Chouette tied my little basket of barley-sugar round my neck, and stationed me on the Pont Neuf, where, in winter, I was frozen to death. Yet sometimes, in spite of myself, I slept as I stood,—but not long; for the Chouette kicked me until I awoke. I remained on the bridge till eleven o'clock, my stock of barley-sugar hanging round my neck, and often crying heartily. The passengers, touched by my tears, sometimes gave me a sou; and then I gained ten and sometimes fifteen sous, which I gave to the Chouette, who searched me all over, and even looked in my mouth, to see if I had kept back anything."

"Well, fifteen sous was a good haul for a little bird like you."

"It was. And then the one-eyed woman seeing that—"

"With her one eye?" said the Chourineur, laughing.

"Of course, because she had but one. Well, then, she finding that when I cried I got most money, always beat me severely before she put me on the bridge."

"Brutal, but cunning."

"Well, at last I got hardened to blows; and as the Chouette got in a passion when I did not cry, why I, to be revenged upon her, the more she thumped me the more I laughed, although the tears came into my eyes with the pain."

"But, poor Goualeuse, did not the sticks of barley-sugar make you long for them?"

"Ah, yes, Chourineur; but I never tasted them. It was my ambition, and my ambition ruined me. One day, returning from Montfauçon, some little boys beat me and stole my basket. I came back, well knowing what was in store for me; and I had a shower of thumps and no bread. In the evening, before going to the bridge, the Chouette, savage because I had not brought in anything the evening before, instead of beating me as usual to make me cry, made me bleed by pulling my hair from the sides of the temples, where it is most tender."

"Tonnerre! that was coming it too strong," said the bandit, striking his fist heavily on the table, and frowning sternly. "To beat a child is no such great thing, but to ill-use one so—Heaven and earth!"

Rodolph had listened attentively to the recital of Fleur-de-Marie, and now looked at the Chourineur with astonishment: the display of such feeling quite surprised him.

"What ails you, Chourineur?" he inquired.

"What ails me? Ails me? Why, have you no feeling? That devil's dam of a Chouette who so brutally used this girl! Are you as hard as your own fists?"

"Go on, my girl," said Rodolph to Fleur-de-Marie, without appearing to notice the Chourineur's appeal.

"I have told you how the Chouette ill-used me to make me cry. I was then sent on to the bridge with my barley-sugar. The one-eyed was at her usual spot, and from time to time shook her doubled fist at me. However, as I had not broken my fast since the night before, and as I was very hungry, at the risk of putting the Chouette in a passion, I took a piece of barley-sugar, and began to eat it."

"Well done, girl!"

"I ate another piece—"

"Bravo! go it, my hearties!"

"I found it so good, not from daintiness, but real hunger. But then a woman, who sold oranges, cried out to the one-eyed woman, 'Look ye there, Chouette; Pegriotte is eating the barley-sugar!'"

"Oh, thunder and lightning!" said the Chourineur; "that would enrage her,—make her in a passion! Poor little mouse, what a fright you were in when the Chouette saw you!—eh?"

"How did you get out of that affair, poor Goualeuse?" asked Rodolph, with as much interest as the Chourineur.

"Why, it was a serious matter to me,—but that was afterwards; for the Chouette, although boiling over with rage at seeing me devour the barley-sugar, could not leave her stove, for the fish was frying."

"Ha! ha! ha! True, true,—that was a difficult position for her," said the Chourineur, laughing heartily.

"At a distance, the Chouette threatened me with her long iron fork; but when her fish was cooked, she came towards me. I had only collected three sous, and I had eaten six sous' worth. She did not say a word, but took me by the hand and dragged me away with her. At this moment, I do not know how it was that I did not die on the spot with fright. I remember it as well as if it was this very moment,—it was very near to New Year's day, and there were a great many shops on the Pont Neuf, all filled with toys, and I had been looking at them all the evening with the greatest delight,—beautiful dolls, little furnished houses,—you know how very amusing such things are for a child."

"You had never had any playthings, had you, Goualeuse?" asked the Chourineur.

"I? Mon Dieu! who was there to give me any playthings?" said the girl, in a sad tone. "Well, the evening passed. Although it was in the depth of winter, I only had on a little cotton gown, no stockings, no shift, and with wooden shoes on my feet: that was not enough to stifle me with heat, was it? Well, when the old woman took my hand, I burst out into a perspiration from head to foot. What frightened me most was, that, instead of swearing and storming as usual, she only kept on grumbling between her teeth. She never let go my hand, but made me walk so fast—so very fast—that I was obliged to run to keep up with her, and in running I had lost one of my wooden shoes; and as I did not dare to say so, I followed her with one foot naked on the bare stones. When we reached home it was covered with blood."

"A one-eyed old devil's kin!" said the Chourineur, again thumping the table in his anger. "It makes my heart quite cold to think of the poor little thing trotting along beside that cursed old brute, with her poor little foot all bloody!"

"We lived in a garret in the Rue de la Montellerie; beside the entrance to our alley there was a dram-shop, and there the Chouette went in, still dragging me by the hand. She then had a half pint of brandy at the bar."

"The deuce! Why, I could not drink that without being quite fuddled!"

"It was her usual quantity; perhaps that was the reason why she beat me of an evening. Well, at last we got up into our cock-loft; the Chouette double-locked the door; I threw myself on my knees, and asked her pardon for having eaten the barley-sugar. She did not answer me, but I heard her mumbling to herself, as she walked about the room, 'What shall I do this evening to this little thief, who has eaten all that barley-sugar? Ah, I see!' And she looked at me maliciously with her one green eye. I was still on my knees, when she suddenly went to a shelf and took down a pair of pincers."

"Pincers!" exclaimed the Chourineur.

"Yes, pincers."

"What for?"

"To strike you?" inquired Rodolph.

"To pinch you?" said the Chourineur.

"No, no," answered the poor girl, trembling at the very recollection.

"To pull out your hair?"

"No; to take out one of my teeth."

The Chourineur uttered a blasphemous oath, accompanied with such furious imprecations that all the guests in the tapis-franc looked at him with astonishment.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" asked Rodolph.

"The matter! the matter! I'll skin her alive, that infernal old hag, if I can catch her! Where is she? Tell me, where is she? Let me find her, and I'll throttle the old—"

"And did she really take out your tooth, my poor child,—that wretched monster in woman's shape?" demanded Rodolph, whilst the Chourineur was venting his rage in a volley of the most violent reproaches.

"Yes, sir; but not at the first pull. How I suffered! She held me with my head between her knees, where she held it as if in a vice. Then, half with her pincers, half with her fingers, she pulled out my tooth, and then said, 'Now I will pull out one every day, Pegriotte; and when you have not a tooth left I will throw you into the river, and the fish shall eat you.'"

"The old devil! To break and pull out a poor child's teeth in that way!" exclaimed the Chourineur, with redoubled fury.

"And how did you escape her then?" inquired Rodolph of the Goualeuse.

"Next day, instead of going to Montfauçon, I went on the side of the Champs Elysées, so frightened was I of being drowned by the Chouette. I would have run to the end of the world, rather than be again in the Chouette's hands. After walking and walking, I fairly lost myself; I had not begged a farthing, and the more I thought the more frightened did I become. At night I hid myself in a timber-yard, under some piles of wood. As I was very little, I was able to creep under an old door and hide myself amongst a heap of logs. I was so hungry that I tried to gnaw a piece of the bark, but I could not bite it,—it was too hard. At length I fell asleep. In the morning, hearing a noise, I hid myself still further back in the wood-pile. It was tolerably warm, and, if I had had something to eat, I could not have been better off for the winter."

"Like me in the lime-kiln."

"I did not dare to quit the timber-yard, for I fancied that the Chouette would seek for me everywhere, to pull out my teeth and drown me, and that she would be sure to catch me if I stirred from where I was."

"Stay, do not mention that old beast's name again,—it makes the blood come into my eyes! The fact is, that you have known misery,—bitter, bitter misery. Poor little mite! how sorry I am that I threatened to beat you just now, and frightened you. As I am a man, I did not mean to do it."

"Why, would you not have beaten me? I have no one to defend me."

"That's the very reason, because you are not like the others,—because you have no one to take your part,—that I would not have beaten you. When I say no one, I do not mean our comrade Rodolph; but his coming was a chance, and he certainly did give me my full allowance when we met."

"Go on, my child," said Rodolph. "How did you get away from the timber-yard?"

"Next day, about noon, I heard a great dog barking under the wood-pile. I listened, and the bark came nearer and nearer; then a deep voice exclaimed, 'My dog barks,—somebody is hid in the yard!' 'They are thieves,' said another voice; and the men then began to encourage the dog, and cry, 'Find 'em! find 'em, lad!' The dog ran to me, and, for fear of being bitten, I began to cry out with all my might and main. 'Hark!' said one of them; 'I hear the cry of a child.' They called back the dog; I came out from the pile of wood, and saw a gentleman and a man in a blouse. 'Ah, you little thief! what are you doing in my timber-yard?' said the gentleman, in a cross tone. I put my hands together and said, 'Don't hurt me, pray. I have had nothing to eat for two days, and I've run away from the Chouette, who pulled out my tooth, and said she would throw me over to the fishes. Not knowing where to sleep, I was passing before your door, and I slept for the night amongst these logs, under this heap, not thinking I hurt anybody.'

"'I'm not to be gammoned by you, you little hussy! You came to steal my logs. Go and call the watch,' said the timber-merchant to his man."

"Ah, the old vagabond! The old reprobate! Call the watch! Why didn't he send for the artillery?" said the Chourineur. "Steal his logs, and you only eight years old! What an old ass!"

"'Not true, sir,' his man replied. 'Steal your logs, master! How can she do that? She is not so big as the smallest piece!' 'You are right,' replied the timber-merchant; 'but if she does not come for herself, she does for others. Thieves have a parcel of children, whom they send to pry about and hide themselves to open the doors of houses. She must be taken to the commissary, and mind she does not escape.'"

"Upon my life, this timber-merchant was more of a log than any log in his own yard," said the Chourineur.

"I was taken to the commissary," resumed Goualeuse. "I accused myself of being a wanderer, and they sent me to prison. I was sent before the Tribunal, and sentenced, as a rogue and vagabond, to remain until I was

sixteen years of age in a house of correction. I thank the judges much for their kindness; for in prison I had food, I was not beaten, and it was a paradise after the cock-loft of the Chouette. Then, in prison I learned to sew; but, sad to say, I was idle: I preferred singing to work, and particularly when I saw the sun shine. Ah, when the sun shone on the walls of the prison I could not help singing; and then, when I could sing, I seemed no longer to be a prisoner. It was after I began to sing so much that they called me Goualeuse, instead of Pegriotte. Well, when I was sixteen, I left the gaol. At the door, I found the ogress here, and two or three old women, who had come to see my fellow prisoners, and who had always told me that when I left the prison they would find work for me."

"Yes, yes, I see," said the Chourineur.

"'My pretty little maid,' said the ogress and her old companions, 'come and lodge with us; we will give you good clothes, and then you may amuse yourself.' I didn't like them, and refused, saying to myself, 'I know how to sew very well, and I have two hundred francs in hand. I have been eight years in prison, I should like to enjoy myself a bit,—that won't hurt anybody; work will come when the money is spent.' And so I began to spend my two hundred francs. Ah, that was my mistake," added Fleur-de-Marie, with a sigh. "I ought first to have got my work; but I hadn't a soul on earth to advise me. At sixteen, to be thrown on the city of Paris, as I was, one is so lonely; and what is done is done. I have done wrong, and I have suffered for it. I began then to spend my money: first, I bought flowers to put in my room,—I do love flowers!—then I bought a gown, a nice shawl, and I took a walk in the Bois de Boulogne, and I went to St. Germains, Vincennes, and other country places. Oh, how I love the country!"

"With a lover by your side, my girl?" asked the Chourineur.

"Oh, mon Dieu! no! I like to be my own mistress. I had my little excursions with a friend who was in prison with me,—a good little girl as can be: they call her Rigolette, because she is always laughing."

"Rigolette! Rigolette! I don't know her," said the Chourineur, who appeared to be appealing to his memory.

"I didn't think you knew her. I am sure Rigolette was very well behaved in prison, and always so gay and so industrious, she took out with her when she left the prison at least four hundred francs that she had earned. And then she is so particular!—you should see her! When I say I had no one to advise me, I am wrong: I ought to have listened to her; for, after having had

a week's amusement together, she said to me, 'Now we have had such a holiday, we ought to try for work, and not spend our money in waste.' I, who was so happy in the fields and the woods,—it was just at the end of spring, this year,—I answered, 'Oh, I must be idle a little longer, and then I will work hard.' Since that time I have not seen Rigolette, but I heard a few days since that she was living near the Temple,—that she was a famous needlewoman, and earned at least twenty-five sous a-day, and has a small workroom of her own; but now I could not for the world see her again,—I should die with shame if I met her."

"So, then, my poor girl," said Rodolph, "you spent your money in the country,—you like the country, do you?"

"Like it? I love it! Oh, what would I not give to live there? Rigolette, on the contrary, prefers Paris, and likes to walk on the Boulevards; but she is so nice and so kind, she went into the country only to please me."

"And you did not even leave yourself a few sous to live upon whilst you found work?" said the Chourineur.

"Yes, I had reserved about fifty francs; but it happened that I had for my washerwoman a woman called Lorraine, a poor thing, with none but the good God to protect her. She was then very near her confinement, and yet was obliged all day long to be with her hands and feet in her washing-tubs. She fell sick, and, not being able to work, applied for admittance to a lying-in hospital, but there was no room. She could not work, and her time was very near at hand, and she had not a son to pay for the bed in a garret, from which they drove her. Fortunately, she met one day, at the end of the Pont Notre-Dame, with Goubin's wife, who had been hiding for four days in a cellar of a house which was being pulled down behind the Hôtel Dieu—"

"But why was Goubin's wife hiding?"

"To escape from her husband, who threatened to kill her; and she only went out at night to buy some bread, and it was then she met with the poor Lorraine, ill, and hardly able to drag herself along, for she was expecting to be brought to bed every hour. Well, it seems this Goubin's wife took her to the cellar where she was hiding,—it was just a shelter, and no more. There she shared her bread and straw with the poor Lorraine, who was confined in this cellar of a poor little infant; her only covering and bed was straw! Well, it seems that Goubin's wife could not bear it, and so, going out at all risks, even of being killed by her husband, who was looking for her everywhere, she left the cellar in open day, and came to me. She knew I had still a little

money left, and that I could assist her if I would; so, when Helmina had told me all about poor Lorraine, who was obliged to lie with her new-born babe on straw, I told her to bring them both to my room at once, and I would take a chamber for her next to mine. This I did; and, oh, how happy she was, poor Lorraine, when she found herself in a bed, with her babe beside her in a little couch which I had bought for her! Helmina and I nursed her until she was able to get about again, and then, with the rest of my money, I enabled her to return to her washing-tubs."

"And when all your money was spent on Lorraine and her infant, what did you do, my child?" inquired Rodolph.

"I looked out for work; but it was too late. I can sew very well, I have good courage, and thought that I had only to ask for work and get it. Ah! how I deceived myself! I went into a shop where they sell ready-made linen, and asked for employment, and as I would not tell a story, I said I had just left prison. They showed me the door, without making me any answer. I begged they would give me a trial, and they pushed me into the street as if I had been a thief. Then I remembered, too late, what Rigolette had told me. Little by little I sold my small stock of clothes and linen, and when all was gone they turned me out of my lodging. I had not tasted food for two days; I did not know where to sleep. At this moment I met the ogress and one of her old women who knew where I lodged, and was always coming about me since I left prison. They told me they would find me work, and I believed them. I went with them, so exhausted for want of food that my senses were gone. They gave me brandy to drink, and—and —here I am!" said the unhappy creature, hiding her face in her hands.

"Have you lived a long time with the ogress, my poor girl?" asked Rodolph, in accents of the deepest compassion.

"Six weeks, sir," replied Goualeuse, shuddering as she spoke.

"I see,—I see," said the Chourineur; "I know you now as well as if I were your father and mother, and you had never left my lap. Well, well, this is a confession indeed!"

"It makes you sad, my girl, to tell the story of your life," said Rodolph.

"Alas! sir," replied Fleur-de-Marie, sorrowfully, "since I was born this is the first time it ever happened to me to recall all these things at once, and my tale is not a merry one."

"Well," said the Chourineur, ironically, "you are sorry, perhaps, that you are not a kitchen-wench in a cook-shop, or a servant to some old brutes who think of no one but themselves."

"Ah!" said Fleur-de-Marie, with a deep sigh, "to be quite happy, we must be quite virtuous."

"Oh, what is your little head about now?" exclaimed the Chourineur, with a loud burst of laughter. "Why not count your rosary in honour of your father and mother, whom you never knew?"

"My father and mother abandoned me in the street like a puppy that is one too many in the house; perhaps they had not enough to feed themselves," said Goualeuse, with bitterness. "I want nothing of them,—I complain of nothing,—but there are lots happier than mine."

"Yours! Why, what would you have? You are as handsome as a Venus, and yet only sixteen and a half; you sing like a nightingale, behave yourself very prettily, are called Fleur-de-Marie, and yet you complain! What will you say, I should like to know, when you will have a stove under your 'paddlers,' and a chinchilla boa, like the ogress?"

"Oh, I shall never be so old as she is."

"Perhaps you have a charm for never growing any older?"

"No; but I could not lead such a life. I have already a bad cough."

"Ah, I see you already in the 'cold-meat box.' Go along, you silly child, you!"

"Do you often have such thoughts as these, Goualeuse?" said Rodolph.

"Sometimes. You, perhaps, M. Rodolph, understand me. In the morning, when I go to buy my milk from the milkwoman at the corner of Rue de la Vieille-Draperie, with the sous which the ogress gives me, and see her go away in her little cart drawn by her donkey, I do envy her so, and I say to myself, 'She is going into the country, to the pure air, to her home and her family;' and then I return alone into the garret of the ogress, where you cannot see plainly even at noonday."

"Well, child, be good—laugh at your troubles—be good," said the Chourineur.

"Good! mon Dieu! and how do you mean be good? The clothes I wear belong to the ogress, and I am in debt to her for my board and lodging. I can't stir from her; she would have me taken up as a thief. I belong to her, and I must pay her."

When she had uttered these last words, the unhappy girl could not help shuddering, and a tear trembled in her long eyelashes.

"Well, but remain as you are, and do not compare yourself to a country milkwoman," said the Chourineur. "Are you taking leave of your senses? Only think, you may yet cut a figure in the capital, whilst the milkwoman must boil the pot for her brats, milk her cows, gather grass for her rabbits, and, perhaps, after all, get a black eye from her husband when he comes home from the pot-house. Why, it is really ridiculous to hear you talk of envying her."

The Goualeuse did not reply; her eye was fixed, her heart was full, and the expression of her face was painfully distressed. Rodolph had listened to the recital, made with so painful a frankness, with deep interest. Misery, destitution, ignorance of the world, had weighed down this wretched girl, cast at sixteen years of age on the wide world of Paris!

Rodolph involuntarily thought of a beloved child whom he had lost,—a girl, dead at six years of age, and who, had she survived, would have been, like Fleur-de-Marie, sixteen years and a half old. This recollection excited the more highly his solicitude for the unhappy creature whose narration he had just heard.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHOURINEUR'S HISTORY

The reader has not forgotten the two guests at the tapis-franc who were watched so closely by the third individual who had come into the cabaret. We have said that one of these fellows, who had on a Greek cap, and concealed his left hand with much care, asked the ogress if the Schoolmaster and Gros-Boiteux had not arrived.

During the story of the Goualeuse, which they could not overhear, they had been constantly talking in a very low tone, throwing occasional hurried glances at the door. He who wore the Greek cap said to his comrade, "The Gros-Boiteux does not 'show,' nor the Schoolmaster."

"Perhaps the Skeleton has 'done for him,' and made off with the 'swag.'"

"A precious 'go' that would be for us, who 'laid the plant,' and look out for our 'snacks,'" replied the other.

The newcomer, who observed the two men, was seated too far off to hear a word they said, but, after having cautiously consulted a small paper concealed at the bottom of his cap, he appeared satisfied with his remarks, rose from the table, and said to the ogress, who was sleeping at the bar, with her feet on the stove, and her great cat on her knee:

"I say, Mother Ponisse, I shall soon be back again; take care of my pitcher and my plate; I don't want any one to make free with them."

"Make yourself easy, my fine fellow," said Mother Ponisse; "if your plate and pitcher are empty, no one will touch them."

The newcomer laughed loudly at the joke of the ogress, and then slipped out, so that his departure was unnoticed. At that moment when this man retired, and before the door could be shut, Rodolph saw the charcoal-dealer, whose black face and tall form we have already alluded to, and he had just time to manifest to him, by an impatient gesture, how much he disliked his watchful attendance; but the charcoal-man did not appear to heed this in the least, and still kept hanging about the tapis-franc. The countenance of the Goualeuse became still more saddened; with her back to the wall, her head drooping on her bosom, her full blue eyes gazing mechanically about her, the unfortunate being seemed bowed down with the weight of her oppressive thoughts. Two or three times, having met Rodolph's fixed look, she turned away, unable to account to herself for the singular impression

which the unknown had caused her. Weighed down and abashed at his presence, she almost regretted having made so candid a narrative to him of her unhappy life. The Chourineur, on the contrary, was quite in high spirits; he had devoured the whole harlequin without the least assistance; the wine and brandy had made him very communicative; the fact of his having found his master, as he called him, had been forgotten in the generous conduct of Rodolph; and he also detected so decided a physical superiority, that his humiliation had given way to a sentiment of admiration, mingled with fear and respect. This absence of rancour, and the savage pride with which he boasted of never having robbed, proved that the Chourineur was not as yet thoroughly hardened. This had not escaped the sagacity of Rodolph, and he awaited the man's recital with curiosity.

"Now, my boy," said he, "we are listening."

The Chourineur emptied his glass, and thus began:

"You, my poor girl, were at last taken to by the Chouette, whom the devil confound! You never had a shelter until the moment when you were imprisoned as a vagabond. I can never recollect having slept in what is called a bed before I was nineteen years of age,—a happy age!—and then I became a trooper."

"What, you have served, then, Chourineur?" said Rodolph.

"Three years; but you will hear all about it: the stones of the Louvre, the lime-kilns of Clichy, and the quarries of Montrouge, these were the hôtels of my youth. Then I had my house in Paris and in the country. Who but I—"

"And what was your trade?"

"Faith, master, I have a foggy recollection of having strolled about in my childhood with an old rag-picker, who almost thumped me to death; and it must be true, for I have never since met one of these old Cupids, with a wicker-work quiver, without a longing to pitch into him,—a proof that one of them must have thumped me when I was a child. My first employment was to help the knackers to cut the horses' throats at Montfauçon. I was about ten or twelve. When I began to slash (chouriner) these poor old beasts, it had quite an impression on me. At the month's end I thought no more about it; on the contrary, I began to like my trade. No one had his knife so sharpened and keen-edged as mine; and that made me rejoice in using it. When I had cut the animals' throats, they gave me for my trouble a piece of the thigh of some animal that had died of disease; for those that they slaughter are sold

to the 'cag-mag' shops near the School of Medicine, who convert it into beef, mutton, veal, or game, according to the taste of purchasers. However, when I got to my morsel of horse's flesh, I was as happy as a king! I went with it into the lime-kiln like a wolf to his lair, and then, with the leave of the lime-burners, I made a glorious fry on the ashes. When the burners were not at work, I picked up some dry wood at Romainville, set light to it, and broiled my steak under the walls of the bone-house. The meat certainly was bloody, and almost raw, but that made a change."

"And your name? What did they call you?" asked Rodolph.

"I had hair much more flaxen than now, and the blood was always in my eyes, and so they called me the 'Albino.' The Albinos are the white rabbits amongst men; they have red eyes," added the Chourineur, in a grave tone, and, as it were, with a physiological parenthesis.

"And your relations? your family?"

"My relations? Oh! they lodge at the same number as the Goualeuse's. Place of my birth? Why, the first corner of no-matter-what street, either on the right or left-hand side of the way, and either going up or coming down the kennel."

"Then you have cursed your father and mother for having abandoned you?"

"Why, that would not have set my leg if I had broken it! No matter; though it's true they played me a scurvy trick in bringing me into the world. But I should not have complained if they had made me as beggars ought to be made; that is to say, without the sense of cold, hunger, or thirst. Beggars who don't like thieving would find it greatly to their advantage."

"You were cold, thirsty, hungry, Chourineur, and yet you did not steal?"

"No; and yet I was horribly wretched. It's a fact, that I have often gone with an empty bread-basket (fasted) for two days at a time: that was more than my share; but I never stole."

"For fear of a gaol?"

"Pooh!" said the Chourineur, shrugging his shoulders, and laughing loudly, "I should then not have stolen bread, for fear of getting my allowance, eh? An honest man, I was famishing; a thief, I should have been supported in prison, and right well, too! But I did not steal, because—because—why, because the idea of stealing never came across me; so that's all about it!"

This reply, noble as it was in itself, but of the rectitude of which the Chourineur himself had no idea, perfectly astonished Rodolph. He felt that the poor fellow who had remained honest in the midst of the most cruel privations was to be respected twofold, since the punishment of the crime became a certain resource for him. Rodolph held out his hand to this ill-used savage of civilisation, whom misery had been unable wholly to corrupt. The Chourineur looked at his host in astonishment,—almost with respect; he hardly dared to touch the hand tendered to him. He felt impressed with some vague idea that there was a wide abyss between Rodolph and himself.

"'Tis well," said Rodolph to him, "you have heart and honour."

"Heart? honour? what, I? Come, now, don't chaff me," he replied, with surprise.

"To suffer misery and hunger rather than steal, is to have heart and honour," said Rodolph, gravely.

"Well, it may be," said the Chourineur, as if thinking, "it may be so."

"Does it astonish you?"

"It really does; for people don't usually say such things to me; they generally treat me as they would a mangy dog. It's odd, though, the effect what you say has on me. Heart! honour!" he repeated, with an air which was actually pensive.

"Well, what ails you?"

"I' faith, I don't know," replied the Chourineur, in a tone of emotion; "but these words, do you see, they quite make my heart beat; and I feel more flattered than if any one told me I was a 'better man' than either the Skeleton or the Schoolmaster. I never felt anything like it before. Be sure, though, that these words, and the blows of the fist at the end of my tussle,—you did lay 'em on like a good 'un,—not alluding to what you pay for the supper, and the words you have said—in a word," he exclaimed, bluntly, as if he could not find language to express his thoughts, "make sure that in life or death you may depend on the Chourineur."

Rodolph, unwilling to betray his emotion, replied in a tone as calm as he could assume, "How long did you go on as an amateur knacker?"

"Why, at first, I was quite sick of cutting up old worn-out horses, who could not even kick; but when I was about sixteen, and my voice began to get

rough, it became a passion—a taste—a relish—a rage—with me to cut and slash. I did not care for anything but that; not even eating and drinking. You should have seen me in the middle of my work! Except an old pair of woollen trousers, I was quite naked. When, with my large and well-whetted knife in my hand, I had about me fifteen or twenty horses waiting their turn, by Jupiter! when I began to slaughter them, I don't know what possessed me,—I was like a fury. My ears had singing in them, and I saw everything red,—all was red; and I slashed, and slashed, and slashed, until my knife fell from my hands! Thunder! what happiness! Had I had millions, I could have paid them to have enjoyed my trade!"

"It is that which has given you the habit of stabbing," said Rodolph.

"Very likely; but when I was turned of sixteen, the passion became so strong that when I once began slashing, I became mad; I spoiled my work; yes, I spoiled the skins, because I slashed and cut them across and across; for I was so furious that I could not see clearly. At last they turned me out of the yard. I wanted employment with the butchers, for I have always liked that sort of business. Well, they quite looked down upon me; they despised me as a shoemaker does a cobbler. Then I had to seek my bread elsewhere, and I didn't find it very readily; and this was the time when my bread-basket was so often empty. At length I got employment in the quarries at Montrouge; but, at the end of two years, I was tired of going always around like a squirrel in his cage, and drawing stone for twenty sous a day. I was tall and strong, and so I enlisted in a regiment. They asked my name, my age, and my papers. My name?—the Albino. My age?—look at my beard. My papers?—here's the certificate of the master quarryman. As I was just the fellow for a grenadier, they took me."

"With your strength, courage, and taste for chopping and slashing, you ought, in war-time, to have been made an officer."

"Thunder and lightning! what do you say? What! to cut up English or Prussians! Why, that would have been better than to cut up old horses; but, worse luck, there was no war, but a great deal of discipline. An apprentice tries to hit his master a thump; well, if he be the weaker, why, he gets the worst of it; if he be the stronger, he has the best of it; he is turned out-of-doors, perhaps put into the cage,—and that is all. In the army it is quite a different thing. One day our sergeant had bullied me a good deal, to make me more attentive,—he was right, for I was very slow; I did not like a poke he gave me, and I kicked at him; he pushed me again, I returned his poke; he collared me, and I gave him a punch of the head. They fell on me, and then my blood was up in my eyes, and I was enraged in a moment. I had my

knife in my hand—I belonged to the cookery—and I 'went it my hardest.' I cut, slashed,—slashed, chopped, as if I was in the slaughter-house. I made 'cold meat' of the sergeant, wounded two soldiers,—it was a real shambles; I gave the three eleven wounds,—yes, eleven. Blood flowed, flowed everywhere, blood, as though we were in the bone-house,—I swam in it—"

The brigand lowered his head with a sombre, sullen air, and was silent.

"What are you thinking of, Chourineur?" asked Rodolph, with interest.

"Nothing," he replied, abruptly; and then, with an air of brutish carelessness, he added, "At length they handcuffed me, and brought me before the 'big wigs,' and I was cast for death."

"You escaped, however?"

"True; but I had fifteen years at the galleys instead of being 'scragged.' I forgot to tell you that whilst in the regiment I had saved two of my comrades from drowning in the Marne, when we were quartered at Milan. At another time,—you will laugh, and say I am amphibious either in fire or water when saving men or women,—at another time, being in garrison at Rouen, all the wooden houses in one quarter were on fire, and burning like so many matches. I am the lad for a fire, and so I went to the place in an instant. They told me that there was an old woman who was bedridden, and could not escape from her room, which was already in flames. I went towards it, and, by Jove! how it did burn; it reminded me of the lime-kilns in my happy days. However, I saved the old woman, although I had the very soles of my feet scorched. Thanks to my having done these things, and the cunning of my advocate, my sentence was changed, and, instead of being 'scragged,' I was only sent to the hulks for fifteen years. When I found that my life would be spared, and I was to go to the galleys, I would have jumped upon the babbling fool, and twisted his neck, at the moment when he came to wish me joy, and to tell me he had saved my life, and be hanged to him! only they prevented me."

"Were you sorry, then, to have your sentence commuted?"

"Yes; for those who sport with the knife, the headsman's steel is the proper fate; for those who steal, the 'darbies' to their heels: each his proper punishment. But to force you to live amongst galley-slaves, when you have a right to be guillotined out of hand, is infamous; and, besides, my life, when I first went to the Bagne, was rather queer; one don't kill a man, and soon forget it, you must know."

"You feel some remorse, then, Chourineur?"

"Remorse? No; for I have served my time," said the savage; "but at first, a night did not pass but I saw—like a nightmare—the sergeant and soldiers whom I had slashed and slaughtered; that is, they were not alone," added the brigand, in a voice of terror; "these were in tens, and dozens, and hundreds, and thousands, each waiting his turn, in a kind of slaughter-house, like the horses whose throats I used to cut at Montfauçon, awaiting each his turn. Then, then, I saw red, and began to cut and slash away on these men as I used formerly to do on the horses. The more, however, I chopped down the soldiers, the faster the ranks filled up with others; and as they died, they looked at one with an air so gentle,—so gentle, that I cursed myself for killing 'em; but I couldn't help it. That was not all. I never had a brother; and yet it seemed as if every one of those whom I killed was my brother, and I loved all of them. At last, when I could bear it no longer, I used to wake covered all over with sweat, as cold as melting snow."

"That was a horrid dream, Chourineur!"

"It was; yes. That dream, do you see, was enough to drive one mad or foolish; so, twice, I tried to kill myself, once by swallowing verdigris, and another time by trying to choke myself with my chain; but, confound it, I am as strong as a bull. The verdigris only made me thirsty; and as for the twist of the chain round my neck, why, that only gave me a natural cravat of a blue colour. Afterwards, the desire of life came back to me, nay nightmare ceased to torment me, and I did as others did."

"At the Bagne, you were in a good school for learning how to thieve?"

"Yes, but it was not to my taste. The other 'prigs' bullied me; but I soon silenced them with a few thumps of my chain. It was in this way I first knew the Schoolmaster; and I must pay him the compliment due to his blows,—he paid me off as you did some little time ago."

"He is, then, a criminal who has served his time?"

"He was sentenced for life, but escaped."

"Escaped, and not denounced?"

"I'm not the man to denounce him. Besides, it would seem as if I were afraid of him."

"But how is it that the police do not detect him? Have they not got his description?"

"His description? Oh! yes, yes; but it is long since he has scraped out from his phiz what nature had placed there; now, none but the 'baker who puts the condemned in his oven' (the devil) could recognise him" (the Schoolmaster).

"What has he done to himself?"

"He began by destroying his nose, which was an ell long; he ate it off with vitriol."

"You jest."

"If he comes in this evening, you'll see. He had a nose like a parrot, and now it is as flat as in a death's head; to say nothing of his lips, which are as thick as your fist, and his face, which is as wrinkled as the waistcoat of a rag-picker."

"And so he is not recognised?"

"It is six months since he escaped from Rochefort, and the 'traps' have met him a hundred times without knowing him."

"Why was he at the Bagne?"

"For having been a forger, thief, and assassin. He is called the Schoolmaster because he wrote a splendid hand, and has had a good education."

"And is he much feared?"

"He will not be any longer, when you have given him such a licking as you gave me. Oh, by Jove, I am anxious to see it!"

"What does he do for a living?"

"He is associated with an old woman as bad as himself, and as deep as the 'old one;' but she is never seen, though he has told the ogress that some day or other he would bring his 'mot' (woman) with him."

"And this women helps him in his robberies?"

"Yes, and in his murders too. They say he brags of having already, with her assistance, 'done for' two or three persons; and, amongst others, three weeks ago, a cattle-dealer on the road to Poissy, whom they also robbed."

"He will be taken sooner or later."

"They must be very cunning, as well as powerful, to do that, for he always has under his blouse a brace of loaded pistols and a dagger. He says that Charlot (the executioner) waits for him, and he can only lose his head once, and so he will kill all he can kill to try and escape. Oh! he makes no mystery of it; and as he is twice as strong as you and I, they will have a tough job who take him."

"What did you do, Chourineur, when you left the Bagne?"

"I offered myself to the master-lighterman of the Quai St. Paul, and I get my livelihood there."

"But as you have never been a 'prig,' why do you live in the Cité?"

"Why, where else can I live? Who likes to be seen with a discharged criminal? I should be tired of always being alone, for I like company, and here I am with my equals. I have a bit of a row sometimes, and they fear me like fire in the Cité; but the police have nothing to say to me, except now and then for a 'shindy,' for which they give me, perhaps, twenty-four hours at the watch-house, and there's an end of that."

"What do you earn a day?"

"Thirty-five sous for taking in the river foot-baths, up to the stomach from twelve to fifteen hours a day, summer and winter; but let me be just, and tell the truth; so if, through having my toes in the water, I get the grenouille, I am allowed to break my arms in breaking up old vessels, and unloading timber on my back. I begin as a beast of burden, and end like a fish's tail. When I lose my strength entirely, I shall take a rake and a wicker basket, like the old rag-picker whom I see in the recollections of my childhood."

"And yet you are not unhappy."

"There are worse than I am; and without my dreams of the sergeant and soldiers with their throats cut,—for I have the dream still sometimes,—I could quietly wait for the moment when I should drop down dead at the corner of some dunghill, like that at which I was born; but the dream—the

dream—by heaven and earth! I don't like even to think of that," said the Chourineur, and he emptied his pipe at the corner of the table.

The Goualeuse had hardly listened to the Chourineur; she seemed wholly absorbed in a deep and melancholy reverie. Rodolph himself was pensive. A tragic incident occurred, which brought these three personages to a recollection of the spot in which they were.

CHAPTER V

THE ARREST

The man who had gone out for a moment, after having requested the ogress to look after his jug and plate, soon returned, accompanied by a tall, brawny man, to whom he said, "It was a chance to meet in this way, old fellow! Come in, and let us have a glass together."

The Chourineur said, in a low voice, to Rodolph and the Goualeuse, pointing to the newcomer, "We shall have a row. He's a 'trap.' Look out for squalls."

The two ruffians, one of whom, with the Greek skull-cap pulled over his brows, had inquired several times for the Schoolmaster and the Gros-Boiteux, exchanged rapid glances of the eye, and, rising suddenly from the table, went towards the door; but the two police officers, uttering a peculiar note, seized them. A fierce struggle ensued. The door of the tavern opened, and all of the policemen dashed into the room, whilst, outside, were seen the muskets of the gens-d'armes. Taking advantage of the tumult, the charcoal-seller, of whom we have spoken, advanced to the threshold of the tapis-franc, and, meeting the eye of Rodolph, he put to his lips the forefinger of his right hand. Rodolph, with a gesture as rapid as it was imperious, desired him to go, and then turned his attention to the scene before him. The man with the Greek skull-cap shrieked with rage, and, half extended on a table, struggled so desperately, that three men could scarcely hold him. His companion, enfeebled, dejected, with livid aspect and pale lips, his lower jaw fallen, and shaking convulsively, made no resistance, but held out his hands to be enclasped by the handcuffs. The ogress, seated at her bar, and used to such scenes, remained motionless, with her hands in the pockets of her apron.

"What have these fellows done, my dear M. Narcisse Borel?" inquired she of one of the policemen whom she knew.

"Killed an old woman yesterday in the Rue St. Christophe, and robbed her chamber. Before she died, the poor old thing said that she had bitten one of her murderers in the hand. We had our eyes on these two scoundrels; and my comrade, having come to make sure of his men, why, we have made free to take them."

"How lucky they paid me beforehand for their pint!" said the ogress. "Won't you take a dram o' nothin' 'short,' M. Narcisse? Just a 'go' of 'Ratifi' of the Column.'"

"Thanks, Mother Ponisse, but I must make sure of my game; one fellow shows fight still."

The assassin in the Greek cap was furious with rage, and when they tried to get him into a hackney-coach which was waiting in the street, he resisted so stoutly that they were obliged to carry him. His accomplice, seized with a nervous tremor, could hardly support himself, and his blue lips trembled as though he were speaking. They threw him, helpless and unresisting, into the vehicle. Before he left the tapis-franc, the head officer looked attentively at the other guests assembled, and said to the Chourineur, in a tone almost kind:

"What, you here, you bad lot? Why, it is a long time since we heard anything of you. What, no more rows? Are you growing steady?"

"Steady as a stone figure. Why, you know that now I never break a head, even if I am begged to do so!"

"Oh, I don't think that would cost you much trouble, strong as you are."

"Yet here is my master," said the Chourineur, laying his hand on Rodolph's shoulder.

"Stay, I do not know him," said the agent de police, looking steadfastly at Rodolph.

"And I do not think we shall form an acquaintance now," replied he.

"I hope not, for your sake, my fine fellow," said the agent; then, turning to the ogress, "Good night, Mother Ponisse; your tapis-franc is a regular mouse-trap; this is the third assassin I have taken here."

"I hope it won't be the last, M. Narcisse; it is quite at your service," said the ogress, making a very insinuating nod with her head.

After the departure of the police, the young vagabond with the haggard visage, who was smoking and drinking brandy, refilled his pipe, and said in a hoarse voice to the Chourineur:

"Didn't you 'twig' the 'cove' in the Greek cap? He's Boulotte's man. When I saw the traps walk in, I says to myself, says I, there's something up; and then, too, I saw him keep his hand always under the table."

"It's lucky for the Schoolmaster and Gros-Boiteux that they were not here," said the ogress; "Greek cap asked twice for him, and said they had business together; but I never turn 'nose' (informer) on any customer. If they take them, very well,—every one to his trade; but I never sell my friends. Oh, talk of the old gentleman, and you see his horns," added the hag, as at the moment a man and woman entered the cabaret; "here they are,—the Schoolmaster and his companion. Well, he was right not to show her, for I never see such an ugly creetur in my born days. She ought to be very much obliged to him for having taken up with such a face."

At the name of the Schoolmaster, a sort of shudder seemed to circulate amongst the guests of the tapis-franc. Rodolph, himself, in spite of his natural intrepidity, could not wholly subdue a slight emotion at the sight of this redoubtable ruffian, whom he contemplated for some seconds with a mixed feeling of curiosity and horror. The Chourineur had spoken truth when he said that the Schoolmaster was frightfully mutilated. Nothing can be imagined more horrible than the countenance of this man. His face was furrowed in all directions with deep, livid cicatrices; the corrosive action of the vitriol had puffed out his lips; the cartilages of his nose were divided, and two misshapen holes supplied the loss of nostrils. His gray eyes were bright, small, circular, and sparkled savagely; his forehead, as flat as a tiger's, was half hidden beneath a fur cap, with long yellow hair, looking like the crest of a monster.

The Schoolmaster was not more than five feet four or five; his head, which was disproportionately large, was buried between two shoulders, broad, powerful, and fleshy, displaying themselves even under the loose folds of his coarse cotton blouse; he had long, muscular arms, hands short, thick, and hairy to the very fingers' end, with legs somewhat bowed, whose enormous calves betokened his vast strength. This man presented, in fact, the exaggeration of what there is of short, thickset, and condensed, in the type of the Hercules Farnese. As to the expression of ferocity which suffused this hideous mask, and the restless, wild, and glaring look, more like a wild beast than a human being, it is impossible to describe them.

The woman who accompanied the Schoolmaster was old, and rather neatly dressed in a brown gown, with a plaid shawl, of red and black check, and a white bonnet. Rodolph saw her profile, and her green eye, hooked nose, skinny lips, peaked chin, and countenance at once wicked and cunning, reminded him involuntarily of La Chouette, that horrible old wretch who had made poor Fleur-de-Marie her victim. He was just on the point of saying this to the girl, when he saw her suddenly turn pale with fright, whilst looking at

the hideous companion of the Schoolmaster, and seizing the arm of Rodolph with a trembling hand, the Goualeuse said, in a low voice:

"Oh, the Chouette! the Chouette!—the one-eyed woman!"

At this moment the Schoolmaster, after having exchanged a few words in an undertone with Barbillon, came slowly towards the table where Rodolph, the Goualeuse, and the Chourineur were sitting, and addressing himself to Fleur-de-Marie, in a hoarse voice, said:

"Ah, my pretty, fair miss, you must quit these two 'muffs,' and come with me."

The Goualeuse made no reply, but clung to Rodolph, her teeth chattering with fright.

"And I shall not be jealous of my man, my little fourline" (a pet word for assassin), added the Chouette, laughing loudly. She had not yet recognised in Goualeuse "Pegriotte," her old victim.

"Well, my little white face, dost hear me?" said the monster, advancing. "If thou dost not come, I'll poke your eye out, and make you a match for the Chouette. And thou with the moustache," he said to Rodolph, "if thou dost not stand from between me and the wench, I'll crack thy crown."

"Defend me! oh, defend me!" cried Fleur-de-Marie to Rodolph, clasping her hands. Then, reflecting that she was about to expose him to great danger, she added, in a low voice, "No, no, do not move, Mister Rodolph; if he comes nearer, I will cry out for help, and for fear of the disturbance, which may call in the police, the ogress will take my part."

"Don't be alarmed, my child," said Rodolph, looking calmly at the Schoolmaster; "you are beside me,—don't stir; and as this ill-looking scoundrel makes you as well as myself feel uncomfortable, I will kick him out."

"Thou?" said the Schoolmaster.

"I!" said Rodolph. And, in spite of the efforts of the Goualeuse, he rose from the table. Despite his hardihood, the Schoolmaster retreated a step, so threatening were the looks, so commanding the deportment, of Rodolph. There are peculiar glances of the eye which are irresistible, and certain celebrated duellists are said to owe their bloody triumphs to this fascinating glance, which unmans, paralyses, and destroys their adversaries. The

Schoolmaster trembled, retreated a step, and, for once, distrustful of his giant strength, felt under his blouse for his long cut-and-thrust knife. A murder would have stained the tapis-franc, no doubt, if the Chouette, taking the Schoolmaster by the arm, had not screamed out:

"A minute, a minute, fourline,—let me say a word! You shall walk into these two 'muffs' all the same, presently."

The Schoolmaster looked at her with astonishment. For some minutes she had been looking at Fleur-de-Marie with fixed and increasing attention, as if trying to refresh her memory. At length no doubt remained, and she recognised the Goualeuse.

"Is it possible?" she cried, clasping her hands in astonishment. "It is Pegriotte, who stole my barley-sugar. But where do you come from? Is it the devil who sends you back?" and she shook her clenched hand at the young girl. "You won't come into my clutch again, eh? But be easy; if I do not pull out your teeth, I will have out of your eyes every tear in your body. Come, no airs and graces. You don't know what I mean. Why, I have found out the people who had the care of you before you were handed over to me. The Schoolmaster saw at the Pré (the galleys) the man who brought you to my 'crib' when you were a brat, and he has proofs that the people who had you first were 'gentry coves'" (rich people).

"My parents! Do you know them?" cried Fleur-de-Marie.

"Never mind whether I know them or not, you shall know nothing about it. The secret is mine and my fourline's, and I will tear out his tongue rather than he shall blab it. What! it makes you snivel, does it, Pegriotte?"

"Oh, no," said Goualeuse, with a bitterness of accent; "now I do not care ever to know my parents."

Whilst La Chouette was speaking, the Schoolmaster had resumed his assurance, for, looking at Rodolph, he could not believe that a young man of slight and graceful make could for a moment cope with him, and, confident in his brutal force, he approached the defender of Goualeuse, and said to the Chouette, in an imperious voice:

"Hold your jaw! I'll tackle with this swell, and then the fair lady may think me more to her fancy than he is."

With one bound Rodolph leaped on the table.

"Take care of my plates!" shouted the ogress.

The Schoolmaster stood on his guard, his two hands in front, his chest advanced, firmly planted on his legs, and arched, as it were, on his brawny legs, which were like balusters of stone. At the moment when Rodolph was springing at him, the door of the tapis-franc opened with violence, and the charcoal-man, of whom we have before spoken, and who was upwards of six feet high, dashed into the apartment, pushed the Schoolmaster on one side rudely, and coming up to Rodolph, said, in German, in his ear:

"Monseigneur, the countess and her brother—they are at the end of the street."

At these words Rodolph made an impatient and angry gesture, threw a louis d'or on the bar of the ogress, and made for the door in haste. The Schoolmaster attempted to arrest Rodolph's progress, but he, turning to him, gave him two or three rapid blows with his fists over the nose and eyes, and with such potent effect, that the beast staggered with very giddiness, and fell heavily against a table, which alone prevented his prostration on the floor.

"Vive la Charte! those are my blows,—I know them," cried the Chourineur; "two or three more lessons like that, and I shall know all about it."

Restored to himself after a few moments, the Schoolmaster darted off in pursuit of Rodolph, but he had disappeared with the charcoal-man in the dark labyrinth of the streets of the Cité, and the brigand found it useless to follow.

At the moment when the Schoolmaster had returned, foaming with rage, two persons, approaching from the opposite side to that by which Rodolph had disappeared, entered into the tapis-franc, hastily, and out of breath, as if they had been running far and fast. Their first impulse was to look around the room.

"How unfortunate!" said one of them; "he has gone,—another opportunity lost."

The two newcomers spoke in English. The Goualeuse, horror-struck at meeting with the Chouette, and dreading the threats of the Schoolmaster, took advantage of the tumult and confusion caused by the arrival of the two fresh guests in the tapis-franc, and, quietly gliding out by the half-opened door, left the cabaret.

CHAPTER VI

THOMAS SEYTON AND THE COUNTESS SARAH

The two persons who had just entered the tapis-franc were quite of another class from those who ordinarily frequented it. One, tall and erect, had hair almost white, black eyebrows and whiskers, a long and tanned face, with a stiff, formal air. His long frock coat was buttoned up to the throat, à la militaire. We shall call this individual Thomas Seyton. His companion was young, pale, and handsome, and appeared about thirty-one or two years of age. His hair, eyebrows, and eyes were of a deep black, which showed off the more fully the pure whiteness of his face. By his step, the smallness of his stature, and the delicacy of his features, it was easy to detect a woman in male habiliments. This female was the Countess Sarah Macgregor. We will hereafter inform our readers of the motives and events which had brought the countess and her brother into this cabaret of the Cité.

"Call for something to drink, Thomas, and ask the people here about him; perhaps they may give us some information," said Sarah, still speaking English.

The man with white hair and black eyebrows sat down at a table, whilst Sarah was wiping her forehead, and said to the ogress, in excellent French, "Madame, let us have something to drink, if you please."

The entrance of these two persons into the tapis-franc had excited universal attention. Their dress, their manners, all announced that they never frequented low drinking-shops, whilst, by their restless looks and disturbed countenances, it might be judged that some very powerful motives had led them hither. The Chourineur, the Schoolmaster, and the Chouette viewed them with increasing curiosity.

Startled by the appearance of such strange customers, the ogress shared in the general surprise. Thomas Seyton, a second time, and with an impatient tone, said, "We have called for something to drink, ma'am; pray let us have it."

Mother Ponisse, flattered by their courtesy of manner, left her bar, and, coming towards her new guests, leaned her arms on their table, and said, "Will you have a pint of wine in measure or a bottle?"

"A bottle of wine, glasses, and some water."

The ogress brought the supplies demanded, and Thomas Seyton threw her a five-franc piece, and refused the change which she offered to him.

"Keep it, my good woman, for yourself, and perhaps you will take a glass with us."

"You're uncommon purlite, sir," looking at the countess's brother with as much surprise as gratitude.

"But tell me, now," said he; "we had appointed to meet a friend in a cabaret in this street, and have, perhaps, mistaken the house in coming here."

"This is the 'White Rabbit,' at your service, sir."

"That's right enough, then," said Thomas, making a sign to Sarah; "yes, it was at the 'White Rabbit' that he was to give us the meeting."

"There are not two 'White Rabbits' in this street," said the ogress, with a toss of her head. "But what sort of a person was your friend?"

"Tall, slim, and with hair and moustaches of light chestnut," said Seyton.

"Exactly, exactly; that's the man who has just gone out. A charcoal-man, very tall and stout, came in and said a few words to him, and they left together."

"The very man we want to meet," said Tom.

"Were they alone here?" inquired Sarah.

"Why, the charcoal-man only came in for one moment; but your comrade supped here with the Chourineur and Goualeuse;" and with a nod of her head, the ogress pointed out the individual of the party who was left still in the cabaret.

Thomas and Sarah turned towards the Chourineur. After contemplating him for a few minutes, Sarah said, in English, to her companion, "Do you know this man?"

"No; Karl lost all trace of Rodolph at the entrance of these obscure streets. Seeing Murphy disguised as a charcoal-seller, keeping watch about this cabaret, and constantly peeping through the windows, he was afraid that something wrong was going on, and so came to warn us. Murphy, no doubt, recognised him."

During this conversation, held in a very low tone, and in a foreign tongue, the Schoolmaster said to the Chouette, looking at Tom and Sarah, "The swell has shelled out a 'bull' to the ogress. It is just twelve, rains and blows like the devil. When they leave the 'crib,' we will be on their 'lay,' and draw the 'flat' of his 'blunt.' As his 'mot' is with him, he'll hold his jaw."

If Tom and Sarah had heard this foul language, they would not have understood it, and would not have detected the plot against them.

"Be quiet, fourline," answered the Chouette; "if the 'cull' sings out for the 'traps,' I have my vitriol in my pocket, and will break the phial in his 'patter-box.' Nothing like a drink to keep children from crying," she added. "Tell me, darling, sha'n't we lay hands on Pegriotte the first time we meet with her? And only let me once get her to our place, and I'll rub her chops with my vitriol, and then my lady will no longer be proud of her fine skin."

"Well said, Chouette; I shall make you my wife some day or other," said the Schoolmaster; "you have no equal for skill and courage. On that night with the cattle-dealer, I had an opportunity of judging of you; and I said, 'Here's the wife for me; she works better than a man.'"

"And you said right, fourline; if the Skeleton had had a woman like me at his elbow, he would not have been nabbed with his gully in the dead man's weasand."

"He's done up, and now he will not leave the 'stone jug,' except to kiss the headsman's daughter, and be a head shorter."

"What strange language these people talk!" said Sarah, who had involuntarily heard the last few words of the conversation between the Schoolmaster and the Chouette. Then she added, pointing to the Chourineur, "If we ask this man some questions about Rodolph, perhaps he may be able to answer them."

"We can but try," replied Thomas, who said to the Chourineur, "Comrade, we expected to find in this cabaret a friend of ours; he supped with you, I find. Perhaps, as you know him, you will tell us which way he has gone?"

"I know him because he gave me a precious good hiding two hours ago, to prevent me from beating Goualeuse."

"And have you never seen him before?"

"Never; we met by chance in the alley which leads to Bras Rouge's house."

"Hostess, another bottle of the best," said Thomas Seyton.

Sarah and he had hardly moistened their lips, and their glasses were still full; but Mother Ponisse, doubtless anxious to pay proper respect to her own cellar, had frequently filled and emptied hers.

"And put it on the table where that gentleman sits, if he will permit," added Thomas, who, with Sarah, seated themselves beside the Chourineur, who was as much astonished as flattered by such politeness.

The Schoolmaster and the Chouette were talking over their own dark plans in low tones and "flash" language. The bottle being brought, and Sarah and her brother seated with the Chourineur and the ogress, who had considered a second invitation as superfluous, the conversation was resumed.

"You told us, my good fellow, that you met our comrade Rodolph in the house where Bras Rouge lives?" inquired Thomas Seyton, as he hob and nobbed with the Chourineur.

"Yes, my good fellow," replied he, as he emptied his glass at a gulp.

"What a singular name is Bras Rouge! What is this Bras Rouge?"

"Il pastique la maltouze" (smuggles), said the Chourineur, in a careless tone, and then added, "This is jolly good wine, Mother Ponisse!"

"If you think so, do not spare it, my fine fellow," said Seyton, and he filled the Chourineur's glass as he spoke.

"Your health, mate," said he, "and the health of your little friend, who—but mum. 'If my aunt was a man, she'd be my uncle,' as the proverb says. Ah! you sly rogue, I'm up to you!"

Sarah coloured slightly as her brother continued, "I did not quite understand what you meant about Bras Rouge. Rodolph came from his house, no doubt?"

"I told you that Bras Rouge pastique la maltouze."

Thomas regarded the Chourineur with an air of surprise.

"What do you mean by pastique la mal——What do you call it?"

"Pastiquer la maltouze. He smuggles, I suppose you would call it; but it seems you can't 'patter flash?'"

"My fine fellow, I don't understand one word you say."

"I see you can't talk slang like M. Rodolph."

"Slang?" said Thomas Seyton, looking at Sarah with an astonished air.

"Ah! you are yokels; but comrade Rodolph is an out-and-out pal, he is. Though only a fan-painter, yet he is as 'downy' in 'flash' as I am myself. Well, since you can't speak this very fine language, I tell you, in plain French, that Bras Rouge is a smuggler, and, besides that, has a small tavern in the Champs Elysées. I say, without breaking faith, that he is a smuggler, for he makes no secret of it, but owns it under the very nose of the custom-house officers. Find him out, though, if you can; Bras Rouge is a deep one."

"What could Rodolph want at the house of this man?" asked Sarah.

"Really, sir, or madam, which you please, I know nothing about anything, as true as I drink this glass of wine. I was chaffing to-night with the Goualeuse, who thought I was going to beat her, and she ran up Bras Rouge's alley, and I after her; it was as dark as the devil. Instead of hitting Goualeuse, however, I stumbled on Master Rodolph, who soon gave me better than I sent. Such thumps! and especially those infernal thwacks with his fist at last. My eyes! how hot and heavy they did fall! But he's promised to teach me, and to—"

"And Bras Rouge, what sort of a person is he?" asked Tom. "What goods does he sell?"

"Bras Rouge? Oh, by the Holy! he sells everything he is forbidden to sell, and does everything which it is forbidden to do. That's his line, ain't it, Mother Ponisse?"

"Oh! he's a boy with more than one string to his bow," answered the ogress. "He is, besides, principal occupier of a certain house in the Rue du Temple,—a rum sort of a house, to be sure; but mum," added she, fearing to have revealed too much.

"And what is the address of Bras Rouge in that street?" asked Seyton of the Chourineur.

"No. 13, sir."

"Perhaps we may learn something there," said Seyton, in a low voice, to his sister. "I will send Karl thither to-morrow."

"As you know M. Rodolph," said the Chourineur, "you may boast the acquaintance of a stout friend and a good fellow. If it had not been for the charcoal-man, he would have 'doubled up' the Schoolmaster, who is there in the corner with the Chouette. By the Lord! I can hardly contain myself, when I see that old hag, and know how she behaved to the Goualeuse,—but patience, 'a blow delayed is not a blow lost,' as the saying is."

The Hotel de Ville clock struck midnight; the lamp of the tavern only shed a dim and flickering light. Except the Chourineur and his two companions, the Schoolmaster, and the Screech-owl, all the guests of the tapis-franc had retired one after the other.

The Schoolmaster said, in an undertone, to the Chouette, "If we go and hide in the alley opposite, we shall see the swells come out, and know which road they take. If they turn to the left, we can double upon them at the turning of the Rue Saint Eloi; if to the right, we will wait for them by the ruins close to the tripe-market. There's a large hole close by, and I have a capital idea."

The Schoolmaster and the Chouette then went towards the door.

"You won't, then, take a 'drain' of nothin' to-night?" said the ogress.

"No, Mother Ponisse, we only came in to take shelter from the rain," said the Schoolmaster, as he and the Chouette went out.

CHAPTER VII

"YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE"

The noise which was made by the shutting of the door aroused Tom and Sarah from their reverie, and they rose, and, having thanked the Chourineur for the information he had given them, the fellow went out, the wind blowing very strongly, and the rain falling in torrents. The Schoolmaster and the Chouette, hidden in an alley opposite the tapis-franc, saw the Chourineur go down the street, in the direction of the street in which the house in ruins was situated. His steps, which were somewhat irregular, in consequence of the frequent libations of the evening, were soon unheard amidst the whistling of the storm and the sheets of rain which dashed against the walls. Sarah and Tom left the tavern in spite of the tempest, and took a contrary direction to the Chourineur.

"They're done for," said the Schoolmaster, in a low key, to the Chouette; "out with your vitriol, and mind your eye."

"Let us take off our shoes, and then they won't hear us as we follow," suggested the Chouette.

"You are right,—always right; let us tread like cats, my old darling."

The two monsters took off their shoes, and moved stealthily along, keeping in the shadows of the houses. By means of this stratagem they followed so closely, that, although within a few steps of Sarah and Tom, they did not hear them.

"Fortunately our hackney-coach is at the end of the street; the rain falls in torrents. Are you not cold, Sarah?"

"Perhaps we shall glean something from this smuggler,—this Bras Rouge," said Sarah, in a thoughtful tone, and not replying to her brother's inquiry.

He suddenly stopped, and said, "I have taken a wrong turning; I ought to have gone to the right when I left the tavern; we must pass by a house in ruins to reach the fiacre. We must turn back."

The Schoolmaster and the Chouette, who followed on the heels of their intended victims, retreated into the dark porch of a house close at hand, so that they might not be perceived by Tom and Sarah, who, in passing, almost touched them with their elbows.

"I am glad they have gone that way," said the Schoolmaster, "for if the 'cove' resists, I have my own idea."

Sarah and her brother, having again passed by the tapis-franc, arrived close to the dilapidated house, which was partly in ruins, and its opened cellars formed a kind of gulf, along which the street ran in that direction. In an instant, the Schoolmaster, with a leap resembling in strength and agility the spring of a tiger, seized Seyton with one hand by the throat, and exclaimed, "Your money, or I will fling you into this hole!"

Then the brigand, pushing Seyton backwards, shoved him off his balance, and with one hand held him suspended over the mouth of the deep excavation; whilst, with his other hand, he grasped the arm of Sarah, as if in a vice. Before Tom could make the slightest struggle, the Chouette had emptied his pockets with singular dexterity. Sarah did not utter a cry, nor try to resist; she only said, in a calm tone, "Give up your purse, brother;" and then accosting the robber, "We will make no noise; do not do us any injury."

The Chouette, having carefully searched the pockets of the two victims of this ambush, said to Sarah, "Let's see your hands, if you've got any rings. No," said the old brute, grumblingly, "no, not one ring. What a shame!"

Tom Seyton did not lose his presence of mind during this scene, rapidly and unexpectedly as it had occurred.

"Will you strike a bargain? My pocketbook contains papers quite useless to you; return it to me, and to-morrow I will give you twenty-five louis d'ors," said Tom to the Schoolmaster, whose hand relaxed something of its fierce gripe.

"Oh! ah! to lay a trap to catch us," replied the thief. "Be off, without looking behind you, and be thankful that you have escaped so well."

"One moment," said the Chouette; "if he behaves well, he shall have his pocketbook. There is a way." Then, addressing Thomas Seyton, "You know the plain of St. Denis?"

"I do."

"Do you know where St. Ouen is?"

"Yes."

"Opposite St. Ouen, at the end of the road of La Revolte, the plain is wide and open. Across the fields, one may see a long way. Come there to-morrow, quite alone, with your money in your hand; you will find me and the pocketbook ready. Hand me the cash, and I will hand you the pocketbook."

"But he'll trap you, Chouette."

"Oh, no, he won't; I'm up to him or any of his dodges. We can see a long way off. I have only one eye, but that is a piercer; and if the 'cove' comes with a companion, he won't find anybody; I shall have 'mizzled.'"

A sudden idea seemed to strike Sarah, and she said to the brigand, "Will you like to gain some money?"

"Yes."

"Did you see, in the cabaret we have just left—for I know you again—the man whom the charcoal-man came to seek?"

"A dandy with moustaches? Yes, I would have stuck it into the fellow, but he did not give me time. He stunned me with two blows of his fists, and upset me on the table,—for the first time that any man ever did so. Curses on him! but I will be revenged."

"He is the man I mean," said Sarah.

"He?" cried the Schoolmaster, "a thousand francs, and I'll kill him."

"Wretch! I do not seek his life," replied Sarah to the Schoolmaster.

"What, then, would you have?"

"Come to-morrow to the plain of St. Denis; you will there find my companion," she replied; "you will see that he is alone, and he will tell you what to do. I will not give you one thousand, but two thousand, francs, if you succeed."

"Fourline," said the Chouette, in a low tone, to the Schoolmaster, "there's 'blunt' to be had; these are a 'swell' lot, who want to be revenged on an enemy, and that enemy is the beggar that you wished to 'floor.' Let's go and meet him. I would go, if I were you. Fire and smoke! Old boy, it will pay for looking after."

"Well, my wife shall be there," said the Schoolmaster; "you will tell her what you want, and I shall see—"

"Be it so; to-morrow at one."

"At one o'clock."

"In the plain of St. Denis?"

"In the plain of St. Denis."

"Between St. Ouen and the road of La Revolte, at the end of the road?"

"Agreed."

"I will bring your pocketbook."

"And you shall have the five hundred francs I promised you, and we will agree in the other matter, if you are reasonable."

"Now, you go to the right, and we to the left hand. Do not follow us, or else—"

The Schoolmaster and the Chouette hurried off, whilst Tom and the countess went in the other direction, towards Notre Dame.

A concealed witness had been present at this transaction; it was the Chourineur, who had entered the cellars of the house to get shelter from the rain. The proposal which Sarah made to the brigand respecting Rodolph deeply interested the Chourineur, who, alarmed for the perils which appeared about to beset his new friend, regretted that he could not warn him of them. Perhaps his detestation of the Schoolmaster and the Chouette might have something to do with this feeling.

The Chourineur resolved to inform Rodolph of the danger which threatened him; but how? He had forgotten the address of the self-styled fan-painter. Perhaps Rodolph would never again come to the tapis-franc, and then how could he warn him? Whilst he was conning all this over in his mind, the Chourineur had mechanically followed Tom and Sarah, and saw them get into a coach which awaited them near Notre Dame.

The fiacre started. The Chourineur got up behind, and at one o'clock it stopped on the Boulevard de l'Observatoire, and Thomas and Sarah went down a narrow entrance, which was close at hand. The night was pitch

dark, and the Chourineur, that he might know the next day the place where he then was, drew from his pocket his clasp-knife, and cut a deep notch in one of the trees at the corner of the entrance, and then returned to his resting-place, which was at a considerable distance.

For the first time for a very long while, the Chourineur enjoyed in his den a comfortable sleep, which was not once interrupted by the horrible vision of the "Sergeant's slaughter-house," as, in his coarse language, he styled it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WALK

On the day after the evening on which the various events we have described had passed, a bright autumnal sun shone from a pure sky; the darkness of the night had wholly disappeared. Although always shaded by the height of the houses, the disreputable neighbourhood into which the reader has followed us seemed less horrible when viewed in the light of open day.

Whether Rodolph no longer feared meeting with the two persons whom he had evaded the over-night, or did not care whether he faced them or not, about eleven o'clock in the morning he entered the Rue aux Fêves, and directed his steps towards the tavern of the ogress.

Rodolph was still in a workman's dress; but there was a decided neatness in his costume. His new blouse, open on his chest, showed a red woollen shirt, closed by several silver buttons; whilst the collar of another shirt, of white cotton, fell over a black silk cravat, loosely tied around his neck. From under his sky blue velvet cap, with a bright leather peak, several locks of chestnut hair were seen; and his boots, cleaned very brightly, and replacing the heavy iron shoes of the previous evening, showed off to advantage a well-formed foot, which seemed all the smaller from appearing out of a loose pantaloon of olive velveteen. The costume was well calculated to display the elegant shape and carriage of Rodolph, which combined so much grace, suppleness, and power. The ogress was airing herself at her door when Rodolph presented himself.

"Your servant, young man; you have come, no doubt, for your change of the twenty francs," she said, with some show of respect, not venturing to forget that the conqueror of the Chourineur had handed her a louis d'or the previous evening. "There is seventeen francs ten sous coming to you; but that's not all. There was somebody here asking after you last night,—a tall gent, well dressed, and with him a young woman in men's clothes. They drank my best wine along with the Chourineur."

"Oh, with the Chourineur, did they? And what could they have to say to him?"

"When I say they drank, I make a mistake; they only just sipped a drain or so, and—"

"But what did they say to the Chourineur?"

"Oh, they talked of all manner of things,—of Bras Rouge, and the rain, and fine weather."

"Do they know Bras Rouge?"

"Not by no means; the Chourineur told 'em all about him, and as how as you—"

"Well, well, that is not what I want to know."

"You want your change."

"Yes, and I want to take Goualeuse to pass the day in the country."

"Oh, that's impossible!"

"Why?"

"Why? Because she may never come back again. Her things belong to me, not including as she owes me a matter of ninety francs as a balance for her board and lodging, for the six weeks as she has lodged with me; and if I didn't know her to be as honest a gal as is, I should never let her go out of sight."

"Goualeuse owes you ninety francs?"

"Ninety francs ten sous; but what's that to you, my lad? Are you a-going to come 'my lord,' and pay it for her?"

"Yes," said Rodolph, throwing five louis on the ogress's bar, "and what's your price for the clothes she wears?"

The old hag, amazed, looked at the louis one after the other, with an air of much doubt and mistrust.

"What! do you think I have given you bad money? Send and get change for one of them; but make haste about it. I say, again, how much for the garments the poor girl is wearing?"

The ogress, divided between her desire to make a good harvest, her surprise to see a workman with so much money, the fear of being cheated, and the hopes of still greater gain, was silent for an instant, and then replied, "Oh, them things is well worth a hundred francs."

"What! those rags? Come, now, you shall keep the change from yesterday, and I'll give you another louis, and no more. If I give you all I have, I shall cheat the poor, who ought to get some alms out of me."

"Well, then, my fine fellow, I'll keep my things, and Goualeuse sha'n't go out. I have a right to sell my things for what I choose."

"May Lucifer one day fry you as you deserve! Here's your money; go and look for Goualeuse."

The ogress pocketed the gold, thinking that the workman had committed a robbery, or received a legacy, and then said, with a nasty leer, "Well, indeed! Why not go up-stairs, and find Goualeuse yourself; she'll be very glad to see you, for, on my life, she was much smitten with you yesterday?"

"Do you go and fetch her, and tell her I will take her into the country; that's all you need say; not a word about my having paid you her debt."

"Why not?"

"What's that to you?"

"Oh, nothing; it's no matter to me; I would rather that she still believed herself in my clutch—"

"Will you hold your tongue, and do as I bid you?"

"Oh, what a cross creetur you are! I pity anybody who is under you. Well, I'm going, I'm going;" and the ogress went up-stairs.

After a few minutes she came down again.

"Goualeuse would not believe me, and really turned quite crimson when she knew you were here; and when I told her that I would give her leave to pass the day in the country, I thought she would have gone crazy,—for the first time in her life she was inclined to throw her arms about my neck."

"That was her delight at leaving you."

Fleur-de-Marie entered at this moment, dressed as she was the over-night, with her gown of brown stuff, her little orange shawl tied behind her, and her handkerchief of red checks over her head, leaving only two thick bands of light hair visible. She blushed when she saw Rodolph, and looked down with a confused air.

"Would you like to pass the day in the country with me, my lass?" asked Rodolph.

"Very much, indeed, M. Rodolph," said Goualeuse, "since madame gives me leave."

"Yes, yes, you may go, my little duck, because you're such a good gal. Come and kiss me afore you go."

And the old beldam offered her bloated lips to Fleur-de-Marie. The poor girl, overcoming her disgust, bent her forehead to the ogress, but Rodolph, giving a sudden push with his elbow, shoved the hag back on her seat, took Fleur-de-Marie's arm, and left the tapis-franc, amidst the loud maledictions of Mother Ponisse.

"Mind, M. Rodolph," said Goualeuse; "the ogress will, perhaps, throw something at you,—she is very spiteful."

"Oh, don't heed her, my girl. But what's the matter with you? You seem embarrassed, sad. Are you sorry for having come out with me?"

"Oh, dear, no; but—but—you give me your arm!"

"Well, and what of that?"

"You are a workman, and some one may tell your master that they met you with me, and harm may come of it; masters do not like their workmen to be unsteady." And Goualeuse gently removed her arm from that of Rodolph, adding, "Go on by yourself; I will follow you to the barrier; when we are once in the fields I can walk with you."

"Do not be uneasy," said Rodolph, touched by the poor girl's consideration, and taking her arm again; "my master does not live in this quarter, and we shall find a coach on the Quai aux Fleurs."

"As you please, M. Rodolph; I only said so that you might not get into trouble."

"I am sure of that, and thank you very much. But tell me, is it all the same to you what part of the country we go into?"

"Yes, quite so, M. Rodolph, so that it be the country. It is so fine and it is so nice to breathe the open air! Do you know that I have not been farther than

the flower-market for these six weeks? And now, if the ogress allows me to leave the Cité, she must have great confidence in me."

"And when you came here, was it to buy flowers?"

"Oh, no, I had no money; I only came to look at them, and breathe their beautiful smell. During the half-hour which the ogress allowed me to pass on the quay on market-days, I was so happy that I forgot everything else."

"And on returning to the ogress, and those filthy streets?"

"Oh, why, then I returned more sad than when I set out; but I wiped my eyes, that I might not be beaten for crying. Yet, at the market, what made me envious—oh, so envious!—was to see neat, clean little workwomen, who were going away so gaily with a beautiful pot of flowers in their hands."

"I am sure that if you had had but a few flowers in your own window, they would have kept you company."

"What you say is quite true, M. Rodolph. Only imagine, one day, on her birthday, the ogress, knowing my taste, gave me a little rose-tree. If you only knew how happy it made me,—I was never tired of looking at it,—my own rose-tree! I counted its leaves, its flowers; but the air of the Cité is bad, and it began to wither in two days. Then—but you'll laugh at me, M. Rodolph."

"No, no; go on."

"Well, then, I asked the ogress to let me go out, and take my rose-tree for a walk, as I would have taken a child out. Well, then, I carried it to the quay, thinking that to be with other flowers in the fresh and balmy air would do it good. I bathed its poor fading leaves in the clear waters of the fountain, and then to dry it I placed it for a full quarter of an hour in the sun. Dear little rose-tree! it never saw the sun in the Cité any more than I did, for in our street it never descends lower than the roof. At last I went back again, and I assure you, M. Rodolph, that, thanks to these walks, my rose-tree lived at least ten days longer than it would have done, had I not taken such pains with it."

"No doubt of it. But when it died, what a loss it must have been to you!"

"I cried heartily, for it grieved me very, very much; and you see, M. Rodolph,—for you know one loves flowers, although one hasn't any of one's own,—you see, I felt grateful to it, that dear rose-tree, for blooming so kindly for me, although I was so—"

Goualeuse bent her head, and blushed deeply.

"Unhappy child! With this feeling of your own position, you must often—"

"Have desired to end it, you mean, sir?" said Goualeuse, interrupting her companion. "Yes, yes, more than once. A month ago I looked over the parapet at the Seine; but then, when I looked at the flowers, and the sun, then I said, 'The river will be always there; I am but sixteen and a half,—who knows?'"

"When you said 'who knows,' you had hope?"

"Yes."

"And what did you hope?"

"To find some charitable soul who would get me work, so that I might be enabled to leave the ogress; and this hope comforted me. Then I said to myself, I am very wretched, but I have never injured anybody, and if I had any one to advise me I should not be as I am. This lightened my sorrow a little, though it had greatly increased at the loss of my rose-tree," added Goualeuse, with a sigh.

"Always so very sad."

"Yes; but look, here it is."

And Goualeuse took from her pocket a little bundle of wood trimmed very carefully, and tied with a rose-coloured bow.

"What, have you kept it?"

"I have, indeed; it is all I possess in the world."

"What, have you nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"This coral necklace?"

"Belongs to the ogress."

"And you have not a piece of riband, a cap, or handkerchief?"

"No, nothing,—nothing but the dead branches of my poor rose-tree; and that is why I love it so."

When Rodolph and Goualeuse had reached the Quai aux Fleurs, a coach was waiting there, into which Rodolph handed Goualeuse. He got in himself, saying to the driver:

"To St. Denis; I will tell you presently which road to take."

The coach went on. The sun was bright, and the sky cloudless, whilst the air, fresh and crisp, circulated freely through the open windows.

"Here is a woman's cloak!" said Goualeuse, remarking that she had seated herself on the garment without having at first noticed it.

"Yes, it is for you, my child; I brought it with me for fear you should be cold."

Little accustomed to such attention, the poor girl looked at Rodolph with surprise.

"Mon Dieu! M. Rodolph, how kind you are; I am really ashamed—"

"Because I am kind?"

"No; but you do not speak as you did yesterday; you appear quite another person."

"Tell me, then, Fleur-de-Marie, which do you like best,—the Rodolph of yesterday, or the Rodolph of to-day?"

"I like you better now; yet yesterday I seemed to be more your equal." Then, as if correcting herself, and fearing to have annoyed Rodolph, she said to him, "When I say your equal, M. Rodolph, I do not mean that I can ever be that."

"One thing in you astonishes me very much, Fleur-de-Marie."

"And what is that, M. Rodolph?"

"You appear to have forgotten that the Chouette said to you yesterday that she knew the persons who had brought you up."

"Oh! I have not forgotten it; I thought of it all night, and I cried bitterly; but I am sure it is not true; she invented this tale to make me unhappy."

"Yet the Chouette may know more than you think. If it were so, should you not be delighted to be restored to your parents?"

"Alas, sir! if my parents never loved me, what should I gain by discovering them? They would only see me and—But if they did ever love me, what shame I should bring on them! Perhaps I should kill them!"

"If your parents ever loved you, Fleur-de-Marie, they will pity, pardon, and still love you. If they have abandoned you, then, when they see the frightful destiny to which they have brought you, their shame and remorse will avenge you."

"What is the good of vengeance?"

"You are right; let us talk no more on the subject."

At this moment the carriage reached St. Ouen, where the road divides to St. Denis and the Revolte. In spite of the monotony of the landscape, Fleur-de-Marie was so delighted at seeing the fields, as she called them, that, forgetting the sad thoughts which the recollection of the Chouette had awakened in her, her lovely countenance grew radiant with delight. She leaned out of the window, clasping her hands, and crying:

"M. Rodolph, how happy I am! Grass! Fields! May I get out? It is so fine! I should so like to run in the meadows."

"Let us run, then, my child. Coachman, stop."

"What! You, too? Will you run, M. Rodolph?"

"I'm having a holiday."

"Oh! What pleasure!"

And Rodolph and Goualeuse, taking each other's hand, ran as fast as they could over a long piece of latter-grass, just mowed. It would be impossible to describe the leaps and exclamations of joy, the intense delight, of Fleur-de-Marie. Poor lamb! so long a prisoner, she inspired the free air with indescribable pleasure. She ran, returned, stopped, and then raced off again with renewed happiness. At the sight of the daisies and buttercups Goualeuse could not restrain her transport,—she did not leave one flower which she could gather. After having run about in this way for some time, she became rather tired, for she had lost the habit of exercise, and stopped

to take breath, sitting down on the trunk of a fallen tree which was lying at the edge of a deep ditch.

"She Proffered to Rodolph the Bouquet"

Etching by Mercier, after the drawing by Frank T. Merrill

The clear and white complexion of Fleur-de-Marie, generally rather pale, was now heightened by the brightest colour. Her large blue eyes sparkled brightly, her vermilion lips, partly opened to recover her breath, displayed two rows of liquid pearls; her bosom throbbed under her worn-out little orange shawl, and she placed one of her hands upon her heart, as if to restrain its quickened pulsation, whilst with the other hand she proffered to Rodolph the bouquet of field flowers which she had just gathered. Nothing could be more charming than the combination of innocence and pure joy which beamed on her expressive countenance. When Fleur-de-Marie could speak, she said to Rodolph, with an accent of supreme happiness and of gratitude, almost amounting to piety:

"How good is the great God to give us so fine a day!"

A tear came into Rodolph's eye when he heard this poor, forsaken, despised, lost creature utter a cry of happiness and deep gratitude to the Creator, because she enjoyed a ray of sunshine and the sight of a green field. He was roused from his reverie by an unexpected occurrence.

CHAPTER IX

THE SURPRISE

We have said that Goualeuse was sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, at the edge of a deep ditch. Suddenly a man, springing up from the bottom of this hollow, shook the rubbish from him under which he had concealed himself, and burst into a loud fit of laughter. Goualeuse turned around, screaming with alarm. It was the Chourineur.

"Don't be frightened, my girl," said the Chourineur, when he saw her extreme fear, and that she had sought protection from her companion. "Ah, Master Rodolph, here's a curious meeting, which I am sure neither you nor I expected." Then he added, in a serious tone, "Listen, master. People may say what they like, but there is something in the air,—there, up there, above our heads, very wonderful; which seems to say to a man, 'Go where I send you.' See how you two have been sent here. It is devilish wonderful!"

"What are you doing there?" said Rodolph, greatly surprised.

"I was on the lookout in a matter of yours, master; but, thunder and lightning! what a high joke that you should come at this particular moment into this very neighbourhood of my country-house! There's something in all this,—decidedly there is something."

"But again I ask you, what are you doing there?"

"All in good time, I'll tell you; only let me first look about me for a moment."

The Chourineur then ran towards the coach, which was some distance off, looked this way and that way over the plain with a keen and rapid glance, and then rejoined Rodolph, running quickly.

"Will you explain to me the meaning of all this?"

"Patience, patience, good master; one word more. What's o'clock?"

"Half past twelve," said Rodolph, looking at his watch.

"All right; we have time, then. The Chouette will not be here for the next half-hour."

"The Chouette!" cried Rodolph and the girl both at once.

"Yes, the Chouette; in two words, master, I'll tell you all. Yesterday, after you had left the tapis-franc, there came—"

"A tall man with a woman in man's attire, who asked for me; I know all about that, but then—"

"Then they paid for my liquor, and wanted to 'draw' me about you. I had nothing to tell them, because you had communicated nothing to me, except those fisticuffs which settled me. All I know is, that I learned something then which I shall not easily forget. But we are friends for life and death, Master Rodolph, though the devil burn me if I know why. I feel for you the regard which the bulldog feels for his master. It was after you told me that I had 'heart and honour;' but that's nothing, so there's an end of it. It is no use trying to account for it; so it is, and so let it be, if it's any good to you."

"Many thanks, my man; but go on."

"The tall man and the little lady in men's clothes, finding that they could get nothing out of me, left the ogress's, and so did I; they going towards the Palais de Justice, and I to Notre Dame. On reaching the end of the street I found it was raining pitchforks, points downward,—a complete deluge. There was an old house in ruins close at hand, and I said to myself, 'If this shower is to last all night, I shall sleep as well here as in my own "crib."' So I rolled myself into a sort of cave, where I was high and dry; my bed was an old beam, and my pillow a heap of lath and plaster, and there I slept like a king."

"Well, well, go on."

"We had drank together, Master Rodolph; I had drank, too, with the tall man and the little woman dressed in man's clothes, so you may believe my head was rather heavy, and, besides, nothing sends me off to sleep like a good fall of rain. I began then to snooze, but I had not been long asleep, I think, when, aroused by a noise, I sat up and listened. I heard the Schoolmaster, who was talking in a friendly tone with somebody. I soon made out that he was parleying with the tall man who came into the tapis-franc with the little woman dressed in man's clothes."

"They in conference with the Schoolmaster and the Chouette?" said Rodolph, with amazement.

"With the Schoolmaster and the Chouette; and they agreed to meet again on the morrow."

"That's to-day!" said Rodolph.

"At one o'clock."

"This very moment!"

"Where the road branches off to St. Denis and La Revolte."

"This very spot!"

"Just as you say, Master Rodolph, on this very spot."

"The Schoolmaster! Oh, pray be on your guard, M. Rodolph," exclaimed Fleur-de-Marie.

"Don't be alarmed, my child, he won't come; it's only the Chouette."

"How could the man who, with the female in disguise, sought me at the tapis-franc, come into contact with these two wretches?" said Rodolph.

"I'faith I don't know, and I think I only awoke at the end of the affair, for the tall man was talking of getting back his pocketbook, which the Chouette was to bring here in exchange for five hundred francs. I should say that the Schoolmaster had begun by robbing him, and that it was after that that they began to parley, and to come to friendly terms."

"It is very strange."

"Mon Dieu! it makes me quite frightened on your account, M. Rodolph," said Fleur-de-Marie.

"Master Rodolph is no chicken, girl; but as you say, there may be something working against him, and so I am here."

"Go on, my good fellow."

"The tall man and the little woman have promised two thousand francs to the Schoolmaster to do to you—I don't know what. The Chouette is to be here directly to return the pocketbook, and to know what is required from them, which she is to tell the Schoolmaster, who will undertake it."

Fleur-de-Marie started. Rodolph smiled disdainfully.

"Two thousand francs to do something to you, Master Rodolph; that makes me think that when I see a notice of a dog that has been lost (I don't mean to make a comparison), and the offer of a hundred francs reward for his discovery, I say to myself, 'Animal, if you were lost, no one would give a hundred farthings to find you.' Two thousand francs to do something to you! Who are you, then?"

"I'll tell you by and by."

"That's enough, master. When I heard this proposal, I said to myself, I must find out where these two dons live who want to set the Schoolmaster on the haunches of M. Rodolph; it may be serviceable. So when they had gone away, I got out of my hiding-place, and followed them quietly. I saw the tall man and little woman get into a coach near Notre Dame, and I got up behind, and we went on until we reached the Boulevard de l'Observatoire. It was as dark as the mouth of an oven, and I could not distinguish anything, so I cut a notch in a tree, that I might find out the place in the morning."

"Well thought of, my good fellow."

"This morning I went there, and about ten yards from the tree I saw a narrow entrance, closed by a gate. In the mud there were little and large footsteps, and at the end of the entrance a small garden-gate, where the traces ended; so the roosting-place of the tall man and the little woman must be there."

"Thanks, my worthy friend, you have done me a most essential piece of service, without knowing it."

"I beg your pardon, Master Rodolph, but I believed I was serving you, and that was the reason I did as I did."

"I know it, my fine fellow, and I wish I could recompense your service more properly than by thanks; but, unfortunately, I am only a poor devil of a workman, although you say they offer two thousand francs for something to be done against me. I will explain that to you."

"Yes, if you like, but not unless. Somebody threatens you with something, and I will come across them if I can; the rest is your affair."

"I know what they want. Listen to me. I have a secret for cutting fans in ivory by a mechanical process, but this secret does not belong to me alone. I am awaiting my comrade to go to work, and, no doubt, it is the model of the

machine which I have at home that they are desirous of getting from me at any price, for there is a great deal of money to be made by this discovery."

"The tall man and the little woman then are—"

"Work-people with whom I have been associated, and to whom I have refused my secret."

This explanation appeared satisfactory to the Chourineur, whose apprehension was not the clearest in the world, and he replied:

"Now I understand it all. The beggars! you see they have not the courage to do their dirty tricks themselves. But to come to the end of my story. I said to myself this morning, I know the rendezvous of the Chouette and the tall man; I will go there and wait for them; I have good legs, and my employer will wait for me. I came here and found this hole, and, taking an armful of stuff from the dunghill yonder, I hid myself here up to my nose, and waited for the Chouette. But, lo and behold! you came into the field, and poor Goualeuse came and sat down on the very edge of my park, and then I determined to have a bit of fun, and, jumping out of my lair, I called out like a man on fire."

"And now what do you propose to do?"

"To wait for the Chouette, who is sure to come first; to try and overhear what she and the tall man talk about, for that may be useful for you to know. There is nothing in the field but this trunk of a tree, and from here you may see all over the plain; it is as if it were made on purpose to sit down upon. The rendezvous of the Chouette is only four steps off at the cross-road, and I will lay a bet they come and sit here when they arrive. If I cannot hear anything, then, as soon as they separate, I will follow the Chouette, who is sure to stay last, and I'll pay her the old grudge I owe her for the Goualeuse's tooth; and I'll twist her neck until she tells me the name of the parents of the poor girl, for she says she knows them. What do you think of my idea, Master Rodolph?"

"I like it very well, my lad; but there is one part which you must alter."

"Oh, Chourineur, do not get yourself into any quarrel on my account. If you beat the Chouette, then the Schoolmaster—"

"Say no more, my lass. The Chouette shall not go scot free for me. Confound it! why, for the very reason that the Schoolmaster will defend her, I will double her dose."

"Listen, my man, to me; I have a better plan for avenging the Chouette's brutalities to Goualeuse, which I will tell you hereafter. Now," said Rodolph, moving a few paces from Goualeuse, and speaking low, "Now, will you render me a real service?"

"Name it, Master Rodolph."

"The Chouette does not know you?"

"I saw her yesterday for the first time at the tapis-franc."

"This is what you must do. Hide yourself first; but, when you see her come close to you, get out of this hole—"

"And twist her neck?"

"No, defer that for a time. To-day, only prevent her from speaking to the tall man. He, seeing some one with her, will not approach; and if he does, do not leave her alone for a moment. He cannot make his proposal before you."

"If the man thinks me curious, I know what to do; he is neither the Schoolmaster nor Master Rodolph. I will follow the Chouette like her shadow, and the man shall not say a word that I do not overhear. He will then be off, and after that I will have one little turn with the Chouette. I must have it; it will be such a sweet drop for me."

"Not yet; the one-eyed hag does not know whether you are a thief or not?"

"No, not unless the Schoolmaster has talked of me to her, and told her that I did not do business in that line."

"If he have, you must appear to have altered your ideas on that subject."

"I?"

"Yes."

"Ten thousand thunders! M. Rodolph, what do you mean? Indeed—truly—I don't like it; it does not suit me to play such a farce as that."

"You shall only do what you please; but you will not find that I shall suggest any infamous plan to you. The tall man once driven away, you must try and talk over the Chouette. As she will be very savage at having missed the good haul she expected, you must try and smooth her down by telling her that

you know of a capital bit of business which may be done, and that you are then waiting for your comrade, and that, if the Schoolmaster will join you, there is a lump of money to be made."

"Well, well."

"After waiting with her for an hour, you may say, 'My mate does not come, and so the job must be put off;' and then you may make an appointment with the Chouette and the Schoolmaster for to-morrow, at an early hour. Do you understand me?"

"Quite."

"And this evening, at ten o'clock, meet me at the corner of the Champs Elysées and the Allée des Veuves, and I will tell you more."

"If it is a trap, look out! The Schoolmaster is a scoundrel. You have beaten him, and, no doubt, he will kill you if he can."

"Have no fear."

"By Jove! it is a 'rum start;' but do as you like with me. I do not hesitate, for something tells me that there is a rod in pickle for the Schoolmaster and the Chouette. One word, though, if you please, M. Rodolph."

"Say it."

"I do not think you are the man to lay a trap, and set the police on the Schoolmaster. He is an arrant blackguard, who deserves a hundred deaths; but to have them arrested, that I will not have a hand in."

"Nor I, my boy; but I have a score to wipe off with him and the Chouette, because they are in a plot with others against me; but we two will baffle them completely, if you will lend me your assistance."

"Of course I will; and, if that is to be the game, I am your man. But quick, quick," cried the Chourineur, "down there I see the head of the Chouette. I know it is her bonnet. Go, go, and I will drop into my hole."

"To-night, then, at ten o'clock."

"At the corner of the Champs Elysées and the Allée des Veuves; all right."

Fleur-de-Marie had not heard a word of the latter part of the conversation between the Chourineur and Rodolph, and now entered again into the coach with her travelling companion.

CHAPTER X

CASTLES IN THE AIR

For some time after this conversation with the Chourineur, Rodolph remained preoccupied and pensive, while Fleur-de-Marie, too timid to break the silence, continued to gaze on him with saddened earnestness. At length Rodolph looked up, and, meeting her mournful look, smiled kindly on her, and said, "What are you thinking of, my child? I fear our rencontre with the Chourineur has made you uncomfortable, and we were so merry, too."

"Oh, no, M. Rodolph, indeed, I do not mind it at all; nay, I even believe the meeting with the Chourineur may be useful to you."

"Did not this man pass amongst the inhabitants of the tapis-franc as possessing some good points among his many bad ones?"

"Indeed, I know not, M. Rodolph; for although, previously to the scene of yesterday, I had frequently seen him, I had scarcely ever spoken to him. I always looked upon him as bad as all the rest."

"Well, well, do not let us talk any more about him, my pretty Fleur-de-Marie. I should be sorry, indeed, to make you sad,—I, who brought you out purposely that you might spend a happy day."

"Oh, I am happy. It is so very long since I have been out of Paris."

"Not since your grand doings with Rigolette."

"Yes, indeed, M. Rodolph; but that was in the spring. Yet, though it is now autumn, I enjoy it quite as much. How beautifully the sun shines! Only look at the gold-coloured clouds out there—there, I mean; and then that hill, with its pretty white houses half hid among the trees, and the leaves still so green, though we are in the middle of the month of October. Do not you think it is wonderful, M. Rodolph, they should so well preserve their verdure? In Paris, all the leaves wither so soon. Look! look at those pigeons! how many there are! and how high they fly! Now they are settling on that old mill. One is never tired in the open fields of looking at all these amusing sights."

"It, is, indeed, a pleasure to behold the delight you seem to take in all these trifling matters, Fleur-de-Marie; though they, in reality, constitute the charm of a landscape."

And Rodolph was right; for the countenance of his companion, while gazing upon the fair, calm scene before her, was lit up with an expression of the purest joy.

"See!" she exclaimed, after intently watching the different objects that unfolded themselves to her eager look, "see how beautifully the clear white smoke rises from those cottages, and ascends to the very clouds themselves; and there are some men ploughing the land. What a capital plough they have got, drawn by those two fine gray horses. Oh, if I were a man, how I should like to be a husbandman, to go out in the fields, and drive one's own plough; and then when you look to see the blue skies, and the green shiny leaves of the neighbouring forests,—such a day as to-day, for instance, when you feel half inclined to weep, without knowing why, and begin singing old and melancholy songs, like 'Geneviève de Brabant.' Do you know 'Geneviève de Brabant,' M. Rodolph?"

"No, my child; but I hope you will have the kindness to sing it to me before the day is over. You know our time is all our own."

At these words, which reminded the poor Goualeuse that her newly tasted happiness was fast fleeting away, and that, at the close of this, the brightest day that had ever shone on her existence, she must return to all the horrors of a corrupt city, her feelings broke through all restraint, she hid her face in her hands and burst into tears. Much surprised at her emotion, Rodolph kindly inquired its cause.

"What ails you, Fleur-de-Marie? What fresh grief have you found?"

"Nothing,—nothing indeed, M. Rodolph," replied the girl, drying her eyes and trying to smile. "Pray forgive me for being so sad, and please not to notice it. I assure you I have nothing at all to grieve about,—it is only a fancy; and now I am going to be quite gay, you will see."

"And you were as gay as could be a few minutes ago."

"Yes, I know I was; and it was my thinking how soon—" answered Fleur-de-Marie, naïvely, and raising her large, tearful blue eyes, with touching candour, to his face.

The look, the words, fully enlightened Rodolph as to the cause of her distress, and, wishing to dissipate it, he said, smilingly:

"I would lay a wager you are regretting your poor rose-tree, and are crying because you could not bring it out walking with you, as you used to do."

La Goualeuse fell into the good-natured scheme for regaining her cheerfulness, and by degrees the clouds of sadness cleared away from her fair young face; and once again she appeared absorbed in the pleasure of the moment, without allowing herself to recollect the future that would succeed it. The vehicle had by this time almost arrived at St. Denis, and the tall spires of the cathedral were visible.

"Oh, what a fine steeple!" exclaimed La Goualeuse.

"It is that of the splendid church of St. Denis: would you like to see it? We can easily stop our carriage."

Poor Fleur-de-Marie cast down her eyes. "From the hour I went to live with the ogress," said she, in a low tone, while deep blushes dyed her cheek, "I never once entered a church,—I durst not. When in prison, on the contrary, I used to delight in helping to sing the mass; and, against the Fête-Dieu, oh, I made such lovely bouquets for the altar!"

"But God is merciful and good; why, then, fear to pray to him, or to enter his holy church?"

"Oh, no, no, M. Rodolph! I have offended God deeply enough; let me not add impiety and sacrilege to my sins."

After a moment's silence, Rodolph again renewed the conversation, and, kindly taking the hand of La Goualeuse, said, "Fleur-de-Marie, tell me honestly, have you ever known what it is to love?"

"Never, M. Rodolph."

"And how do you account for this?"

"You saw the kind of persons who frequented the tapis-franc. And then, to love, the object should be good and virtuous—"

"Why do you think so?"

"Oh, because one's lover, or husband, would be all in all to us, and we should seek no greater happiness than devoting our life to him. But, M. Rodolph, if you please, we will talk of something else, for the tears will come into my eyes."

"Willingly, Fleur-de-Marie; let us change the conversation. And now tell me, why do you look so beseechingly at me with those large, tearful eyes? Have I done anything to displease you?"

"On the contrary, 'tis the excess of your goodness that makes me weep; indeed, I could almost fancy that you had brought me out solely for my individual pleasure and enjoyment, without thinking of yourself. Not content with your generous defence of me yesterday, you have to-day procured for me happiness such as I never hoped to enjoy."

"You are, then, truly and entirely happy?"

"Never, never shall I forget to-day."

"Happiness does not often attend us on earth," said Rodolph, sighing.

"Alas, no! Seldom, perhaps never."

"For my own part, to make up for a want of reality in its possession, I often amuse myself with pictures of what I would have if I could, saying to myself, this is how, and where, I should like to live,—this is the sort of income I should like to enjoy. Have you never, my little Fleur-de-Marie, amused yourself with building similar 'castles in the air?'"

"Yes, formerly, when I was in prison, before I went to live with the ogress,—then I used to do nothing all day but dance, sing, and build these fairy dreams; but I very seldom do so now. Tell me, M. Rodolph, if you could have any wish you liked, what should you most desire?"

"Oh, I should like to be rich, with plenty of servants and carriages; to possess a splendid hôtel, and to mix in the first circles of fashion; to be able to obtain any amusement I pleased, and to go to the theatres and opera whenever I chose."

"Well, then, you would be more unreasonable than I should. Now I will tell you exactly what would satisfy me in every respect: first of all, sufficient money to clear myself with the ogress, and to keep me till I could obtain work for my future support; then a pretty, little, nice, clean room, all to myself, from the window of which I could see the trees while I sat at my work."

"Plenty of flowers in your casement, of course?"

"Oh, certainly! And, if it could be managed, to live in the country always. And that, I think, is all I should want."

"Let me see: a little room, and work enough to maintain you,—those are positive necessaries; but, when one is merely wishing, there is no harm in adding a few superfluities. Should you not like such nice things as carriages, diamonds, and rich clothes?"

"Not at all! All I wish for is my free and undisturbed liberty,—a country life, and the certainty of not dying in a hospital. Oh, that idea is dreadful! Above all things, I would desire the certainty of its never being my fate. Oh, M. Rodolph, that dread often comes across me and fills me with terror."

"Alas! poor folks, such as we are, should not shrink from such things."

"'Tis not the dying in a charitable institution I dread, or the poverty that would send me into it, but the thoughts of what they do to your lifeless remains."

"What do they do that shocks you so much?"

"Is it possible, M. Rodolph, you have never been told what will become of you if you die in one of those places?"

"No, indeed, I have not; do you tell me."

"Well, then, I knew a young girl, who had been a sort of companion to me when I was in prison; she afterwards died in a hospital, and what do you think? Her body was given to the surgeons for dissection!" murmured the shuddering Fleur-de-Marie.

"That is, indeed, a frightful idea! And do these miserable anticipations often trouble you, my poor girl?"

"Ah, M. Rodolph, it surprises you that, after my unhappy life, I can feel any concern as to what becomes of my miserable remains! God knows, the feeling which makes me shrink from such an outrage to modesty is all my wretched fate has left me!"

The mournful tone in which these words were uttered, and the bitter feelings they contained, went to the heart of Rodolph; but his companion, quickly perceiving his air of dejection, and blaming herself for having caused it, said, timidly:

"M. Rodolph, I feel that I am behaving very ill and ungratefully towards you, who so kindly brought me out to amuse me and give me pleasure; in return for which I only keep talking to you about all the dull and gloomy things I can think of! I wonder how I can do so!—to be able even to recollect my misery, when all around me smiles and looks so gay! I cannot tell how it is, words seem to rise from my lips in spite of myself; and, though I feel happier to-day than I ever did before in my life, my eyes are continually filling with tears! You are not angry with me, are you, M. Rodolph? See, too, my sadness is going away as suddenly as it came. There now, it is all gone, and shall not return to vex you any more, I am determined. Look, M. Rodolph, just look at my eyes,—they do not show that I have been crying, do they?"

And here Fleur-de-Marie, having repeatedly closed her eyes to get rid of the rebellious tears that would gather there, opened them full upon Rodolph, with a look of most enchanting candour and sweetness.

"Put no restraint on yourself, I beseech you, Fleur-de-Marie: be gay, if you really feel so; or sad, if sadness most suits your present state of mind. I have my own hours of gloom and melancholy, and my sufferings would be much increased were I compelled to feign a lightness of heart I did not really possess."

"Can it be possible, M. Rodolph, that you are ever sad?"

"Quite possible, my child, and true. Alas! the prospect before me is but little brighter than your own. I, like you, am without friends or parents; what would become of me if I were to fall ill and be unable to earn my daily bread,—for I need scarcely tell you I live but from day to day, and spend my money quite as fast as I obtain it?"

"Oh, but that is wrong, M. Rodolph,—very, very wrong!" said La Goualeuse, in a tone of such deep and grave remonstrance as made him smile. "You should always lay by something. Look at me: why, all my troubles and misfortunes have happened because I did not save my money more carefully. If once a person can get a hundred francs beforehand, he need never fear falling into any one's power; generally, a difficulty about money puts very evil thoughts into our head."

"All that is very wise and very sensible, my frugal little friend; but a hundred francs!—that is a large sum; how could a man like myself ever amass so much?"

"Why, M. Rodolph, it is really very easy, if you will but consider a little. First of all, I think you said you could earn five francs a day?"

"Yes, so I can, when I choose to work."

"Ah! but you should work, constantly and regularly; and yours is such a pretty trade. To paint fans! how nice such work must be,—mere amusement, quite a recreation! I cannot think why you should ever be tired or dull. Indeed, M. Rodolph, I must tell you plainly I do not pity you at all; and, besides, really you talk like a mere child when you say you cannot save money out of such large earnings," added La Goualeuse, in a sweet, but, for her, severe tone. "Why, a workman may live well upon three francs a day; there remain forty sous; at the end of a month, if you manage prudently, you will have saved sixty francs. Think of that! There's a sum!—sixty francs in one month!"

"Oh, but one likes to show off sometimes, and to indulge in a little idleness."

"There now, M. Rodolph, I declare you make me quite angry to hear you talk so childishly! Pray let me advise you to be wiser."

"Come, then, my sage little monitress, I will be a good boy, and listen to all your careful advice. And your idea of saving, too, is a remarkably good one; I never thought of it before."

"Really!" exclaimed the poor girl, clapping her hands with joy. "Oh, if you knew how delighted I am to hear you say so! Then you will begin from to-day to lay by the forty sous we were talking about, will you? Will you, indeed?"

"I give you my honour that, from this very hour, I will resolve to follow up your most excellent plan, and save forty sous out of each day's pay."

"Are you quite, quite sure you will?"

"Nay, have I not promised you that I will?"

"You will see how proud and happy you will be with your first savings; and that is not all—ah, if you would promise not to be angry!"

"Do I look as though I could be so unkind, Fleur-de-Marie, as to find fault with anything you said?"

"Oh, no, indeed, that you do not; only I hardly know whether I ought—"

"You ought to tell me everything you think or feel, Fleur-de-Marie."

"Well, then, I was wondering how you, who, it is easily seen, are above your condition, can frequent such low cabarets as that kept by the ogress."

"Had I not done so, I should not have had the pleasure of wandering in the fields with you to-day, my dear Fleur-de-Marie."

"That is, indeed, true, M. Rodolph; but, still, it does not alter my first opinion. No, much as I enjoy to-day's treat, I would cheerfully give up all thoughts of ever passing such another if I thought it could in any way injure you."

"Injure me! Far from it! Think of the excellent advice you have been giving me."

"Which you have promised me to follow?"

"I have; and I pledge my word of honour to save henceforward at least forty sous a day." Thus speaking, Rodolph called out to the driver of their vehicle, who was passing the village of Sarcelles, "Take the first road to the right, cross Villiers to Bel, turn to the left, then keep along quite straight."

"Now," said Rodolph, turning to his companion, "that I am a good boy, and promised to do all you tell me, let us go back to our diversion of building castles in the air: that does not run away with much money. You will not object to such a method of amusing myself, will you?"

"Oh, no, build as many as you like, they are very cheaply raised, and very easily knocked down when you are tired of them. Now, then, you begin."

"Well, then—No! Fleur-de-Marie, you shall build up yours first."

"I wonder if you could guess what I should choose, if wishing were all, M. Rodolph."

"Let us try. Suppose that this road—I say this road, because we happen to be on it—"

"Yes, yes, of course; this road is as good as any other."

"Well, then, I say, I suppose that this road leads to a delightful little village, at a considerable distance from the highroad—"

"Oh, yes; that makes it so much more still and quiet!"

"It is built facing the south, and half surrounded by trees—"

"And close by flows a gentle river."

"Exactly!—a clear, gently flowing river. At the end of this village stands a pretty farm, with a nice orchard on one side of it, and a garden, filled with flowers, on the other—"

"That farm shall be called my farm, to which we will pretend we are now going."

"Just so."

"And where we know we shall get some delicious milk to drink after our journey!"

"Milk, indeed! Excellent cream, and newly laid eggs, if you please."

"And where we would be glad to stay all our lives!"

"All our lives! Quite right,—go on."

"And then we should go and see all the cows!"

"To be sure we should."

"And afterwards visit the dairy?"

"Visit the dairy! Yes."

"Then the pigeon-house?"

"Yes, so we should."

"Oh, how very, very nice, only to think of such things!"

"But let me finish the description of the farm—"

"Yes, pray do! I quite forgot that."

"Well, then, the ground floor contains two rooms; one, a large kitchen for the farm servants, and the other for the owner of the place."

"Make that room have green blinds, M. Rodolph,—do, pray; they are so cool, and look so pretty!"

"Yes, yes,—green blinds to the windows. I quite agree with you,—they do look uncommonly pretty, and set off a place so well! Of course, the person tenanting this farm is your aunt."

"Of course she is my aunt, and a very good, sensible, kind woman, M. Rodolph, is she not?"

"Particularly so, and loves you like her own child."

"Dear, good aunt! Oh, how delightful to have some one to love us!"

"And you return the tender affection she bears you?"

"Oh, with all my heart!" exclaimed Fleur-de-Marie, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes to heaven with an expression impossible to describe. "And I should help her to work, to attend to the family linen, to keep everything neat and clean, to store up the summer fruits against winter—oh, she would never have to complain that I was idle, I promise! First of all, in the morning—"

"Wait a bit, Fleur-de-Marie; you are in too great a hurry. I want to finish describing the house to you; never mind your aunt just yet."

"Ah, ha, Mr. Painter! All this is taken from some pretty landscape you have been painting on a fan. Now I know what makes you so expert at describing it!" said La Goualeuse, laughing merrily at her own little jest.

"You little chatterer, be quiet, will you?"

"Yes, I am a chatterer, indeed, to interrupt you so often, M. Rodolph; but pray go on, and I will not speak again till you have finished painting this dear farm."

"Your room is on the first floor—"

"My room! how charming! Oh, go on—go on, please, M. Rodolph, and describe all about it to me!" And the delighted girl opened her large laughing eyes, and pressed more closely against Rodolph, as if she expected to see the picture in his hand.

"Your chamber has two windows looking out upon the flower garden, and a small meadow, watered by the river we mentioned. On the opposite bank of the stream rises a small hill, planted with fine old chestnut-trees; and from amongst them peeps out the village church—"

"Oh, how beautiful,—how very beautiful, M. Rodolph! It makes one quite long to be there."

"Three or four fine cows are grazing in the meadow, which is only separated from the garden by a hedge of honeysuckle—"

"And from my windows I can see the cows?"

"Perfectly."

"And one among them ought to be my favourite, you know, M. Rodolph; and I ought to put a little bell round its neck, and use it to feed out of my hands!"

"Of course she would come when you called her. Let me see, what name shall we give her? Suppose we say, Musette. Do you like that? She shall be very young and gentle, and entirely white."

"Oh, what a pretty name! Musette! Ah, Musette, Musette, I shall be always feeding you and patting you to make you know me."

"Now we will finish the inside of your apartment, Fleur-de-Marie. The curtains and furniture are green, like the blinds; and outside the window grow an enormous rose-tree and honeysuckle, which entirely cover this side of the farm, and so surround your casements that you have only to stretch out your hand to gather a large bunch of roses and honeysuckle wet with the early morning dew."

"Ah, M. Rodolph, what a good painter you are!"

"Now this is the way you will pass your day—"

"Yes, yes, let us see how I shall employ myself all day."

"Early in the morning your good aunt wakes you with a tender kiss; she brings with her a bowl of new milk, just warm, which she prays you to drink, as she fancies you are delicate about the lungs, poor dear child! Well, you do as she wishes you; then rise, and take a walk around the farm; pay a

visit to Musette, the poultry, your pets the pigeons, the flowers in the garden, till nine o'clock, when your writing-master arrives—"

"My writing-master?"

"Why, you know, unless you learned such necessary things as reading, writing, and accounts, you would not be able to assist your aunt to keep her books relative to the produce of the farm."

"Oh, to be sure! How very stupid of me not to recollect that I must learn to write well, if I wished to help my aunt!" cried the young girl, so thoroughly absorbed in the picture of this peaceful life as to believe for the moment in its reality.

"After your lesson is concluded, you will occupy yourself in household matters, or embroider some pretty little article of dress for yourself; then you will practise your writing for an hour or two, and, when that is done, join your aunt in her round of visits to the different operations of the farm; in the summer, to see how the reapers get on in the hay field; in harvest-time, to observe the reapers, and afterwards to enjoy the delight with which the gleaners pick up the scattered ears of grain; by this time you will have almost tired yourself, and gathering a large handful of wild herbs, carefully selected by you as the known favourites of your dear Musette, you turn your steps homewards—"

"But we go back through the meadow, dear M. Rodolph, do we not?" inquired La Goualeuse, as earnestly as though every syllable her ears drank in was to be effectually brought to pass.

"Oh, yes! by all means; and there happens, fortunately, to be a nice little bridge, by which the river separating the farm-land from the meadow may be crossed. By the time you reach home, upon my word, it is seven o'clock; and, as the evenings begin to be a little chill, a bright, cheerful fire is blazing in the large farm kitchen; you go in there for a few minutes, just to warm yourself and to speak a few kind words to the honest labourers, who are enjoying a hearty meal after the day's toil is over. Then you sit down to dinner with your aunt; sometimes the curé, or a neighbouring farmer, is invited to share the meal. After dinner you read or work, while your aunt and her guest have a friendly game at piquet. At ten o'clock she dismisses you, with a kiss and a blessing, to your chamber; you retire to your room, offer prayers and thanksgivings to the Great Author of all your happiness, then sleep soundly till morning, when the same routine begins again."

"Oh, M. Rodolph, one might lead such a life as that for a hundred years, without ever knowing one moment's weariness."

"But that is not all. There are Sundays and fête-days to be thought of."

"Yes; and how should we pass those?"

"Why, you would put on your holiday dress, with one of those pretty little caps à la paysanne, which all admit you look so very nicely in, and accompany your aunt in her large old-fashioned chaise, driven by James the farm servant, to hear mass in the village church; after which, during summer, your kind relative would take you to the different fêtes given in the adjoining parishes. You, so gentle, so modest and good-looking, so tenderly beloved by your aunt, and so well spoken of by the curé for all the virtues and qualifications which make a good wife, will have no scarcity of offers for your hand in the dance,—indeed, all the principal young farmers will be anxious to secure you as a partner, by way of opening an acquaintance which shall last for life. By degrees you begin to remark one more than the others; you perceive his deep desire to attract your undivided attention, and so—" And here Rodolph, struck by the continued silence of La Goualeuse, looked up at her. Alas! the poor girl was endeavouring, though fruitlessly, to choke the deep sobs which almost suffocated her. For a brief period, carried away by the words of Rodolph, the bright future presented to her mental vision had effaced the horrible present; but too quickly did the hideous picture return, and sweep away for ever the dear delight of believing so sweet, so calm an existence could ever be hers.

"Fleur-de-Marie," asked Rodolph, in a kind and affectionate tone, "why is this? Why these tears?"

"Ah, M. Rodolph, you have unintentionally caused me much pain. Foolish girl that I was, I had listened to you till I quite fancied this paradise were a true picture."

"And so it is, my dear child! This paradise, as you call it, is no fiction."

"Stop, coachman!"

"Now look! see! observe where we are!"

As the carriage stopped, La Goualeuse, at Rodolph's bidding, mechanically raised her head,—they were on the summit of a little hill. What was her surprise, her astonishment, at the scene which revealed itself to her gaze! The pretty village, built facing the south, the farm, the meadow, the

beautiful cows, the little winding river, the chestnut grove, the church in the distance,—the whole picture, so vividly painted, was before her eyes. Nothing was wanting,—even the milk-white heifer, Musette, her future pet, was peacefully grazing as she had been described. The rich colouring of an October sun gilded the charming landscape, while the variegated tint of the chestnut-leaves, slightly tinged by the autumnal breezes, stood out in bold relief against the clear blue of the surrounding sky.

"Well, my little Fleur-de-Marie, what do you say to this? Am I a good painter, or not?"

La Goualeuse looked at him with a surprise in which a degree of uneasiness was mingled; all she saw and heard appeared to her to partake largely of the supernatural.

"M. Rodolph," she at length exclaimed, with a bewildered look, "how can this be? Indeed, indeed, I feel afraid to look at it,—it is so exactly alike. I cannot believe it is anything but a dream you have conjured up, and which will quickly pass away. Speak to me! pray do; and tell me what to believe."

"Calm yourself, my dear child! Nothing is more simple or true than what you behold here. The good woman who owns this farm was my nurse, and brought me up here; intending to give myself a treat, I sent to her early this morning to say I was coming to see her. You see I painted after nature."

"You are quite right, M. Rodolph," sighed La Goualeuse. "There is, indeed, nothing but what is quite natural in all this."

The farm to which Rodolph had conducted Fleur-de-Marie was situated at the outer extremity of the village of Bouqueval,—a small, isolated, and unknown hamlet, entirely surrounded by its own lands, and about two leagues' distance from Ecouen; the vehicle, following the directions of Rodolph, rapidly descended the hill, and entered a long avenue bordered with apple and cherry trees, while the wheels rolled noiselessly over the short fine grass with which the unfrequented road was overgrown.

Fleur-de-Marie, whose utmost efforts were unavailing to shake off the painful sensations she experienced, remained so silent and mournful that Rodolph reproached himself with having, by his well-intentioned surprise, been the cause of it. In a few moments more, the carriage, passing by the large entrance to the farm, entered a thick avenue of elm-trees, and stopped before a little rustic porch, half hidden by the luxuriant branches of the vine which clustered round it.

"Now, Fleur-de-Marie, here we are. Are you pleased with what you see?"

"Indeed I am, M. Rodolph. But how shall I venture before the good person you mentioned as living here? Pray do not let her see me,—I cannot venture to approach her."

"And why, my child?"

"True, M. Rodolph; I forget she does not know me, and will not guess how unworthy I am." And poor Fleur-de-Marie tried to suppress the deep sigh that would accompany her words.

The arrival of Rodolph had, no doubt, been watched for; the driver had scarcely opened the carriage door when a prepossessing female, of middle age, dressed in the style of wealthy landholders about Paris, and whose countenance, though melancholy, was also gentle and benevolent in its expression, appeared in the porch, and with respectful eagerness advanced to meet Rodolph.

Poor Goualeuse felt her cheeks flush and her heart beat as she timidly descended from the vehicle.

"Good day, good day, Madame Georges," said Rodolph, advancing towards the individual so addressed, "you see I am punctual." Then turning to the driver, and putting money into his hand, he said, "Here, my friend, there is no further occasion to detain you; you may return to Paris as soon as you please."

The coachman, a little, short, square-built man, with his hat over his eyes, and his countenance almost entirely concealed by the high collar of his driving-coat, pocketed the money without a word, remounted his seat, gave his horses the whip, and disappeared down the allée verte by which he had entered.

Fleur-de-Marie sprang to the side of Rodolph, and with an air of unfeigned alarm, almost amounting to distress, said, in a tone so low as not to be overheard by Madame Georges:

"M. Rodolph! M. Rodolph! pray do not be angry, but why have you sent away the carriage? Will it not return to fetch us away?"

"Of course not; I have quite done with the man, and therefore dismissed him."

"But the ogress!"

"What of her? Why do you mention her name?"

"Alas! alas! because I must return to her this evening; indeed, indeed, I must, or—or she will consider me a thief. The very clothes I have on are hers, and, besides, I owe her—"

"Make yourself quite easy, my dear child; it is my part to ask your forgiveness, not you mine."

"My forgiveness! Oh, for what can you require me to pardon you?"

"For not having sooner told you that you no longer owe the ogress anything; that it rests only with yourself to decide whether you will henceforward make this quiet spot your home, and cast off the garments you now wear for others my kind friend, Madame Georges, will furnish you with. She is much about your height, and can supply you with everything you require. She is all impatience to commence her part of 'aunt,' I can assure you."

Poor Fleur-de-Marie seemed utterly unable to comprehend the meaning of all she saw and heard, and gazed with wondering and perplexed looks from one companion to the other, as though fearing to trust either her eyes or ears.

"Do I understand you rightly?" she cried at length, half breathless with emotion. "Not go back to Paris? Remain here? And this lady will permit me to stay with her? Oh, it cannot be possible; I dare not hope it; that would, indeed, be to realise our 'castles in the air.'"

"Dear Fleur-de-Marie, your wishes are realised,—your dream a true one."

"No, no, you must be jesting; that would be too much happiness to expect, or even dare to hope for."

"Nay, Fleur-de-Marie, we should never find fault with an oversupply of happiness."

"Ah, M. Rodolph, for pity's sake deceive me not; you cannot believe the misery I should experience were you to tell me all this happiness was but a jest."

"My child, listen to me," said Rodolph, with a tone and manner which, although still affectionate, was mingled with a dignified accent and manner

Fleur-de-Marie had never previously remarked in him. "I repeat that, if you please, you may from this very hour lead here, with Madame Georges, that peaceful life whose description but a short time since so much delighted you. Though the kind lady with whom you will reside be not your aunt, she will feel for you the most lively and affectionate interest, and with the personages about the farm you will pass as being really and truly her niece, and this innocent deception will render your residence here more agreeable and advantageous. Once more I repeat to you, Fleur-de-Marie, you may now at your own pleasure realise the dream of our journey. As soon as you have assumed your village dress," said Rodolph, smilingly, "we will take you to see that milk-white heifer, Musette, who is to be your favourite henceforward, and who is only waiting for the pretty collar you designed to ornament her with; then we will go and introduce ourselves to your pets, the pigeons, afterwards visit the dairy, and so go on till we have been all over the farm. I mean to keep my promise in every respect, I assure you."

Fleur-de-Marie pressed her hands together with earnest gratitude. Surprise, joy, and the deepest thankfulness, mingled with respect, lit up her beautiful countenance, while, with eyes streaming with tears, she exclaimed:

"M. Rodolph, you are, you must be, one of those beneficent angels sent by the Almighty to do good upon earth, and to rescue poor fallen creatures, like myself, from shame and misery."

"My poor girl," replied Rodolph, with a smile of deep sadness and ineffable kindness, "though still young, I have already deeply suffered. I lost a dear child, who, if living, would now be about your age. Let that explain my deep sympathy with all who suffer, and for yourself particularly, Fleur-de-Marie, or, rather, Marie only. Now, go with Madame Georges, who will shew you the pretty chamber, with its clustering roses and honeysuckle to form your morning bouquets. Yes, Marie, henceforward let that name, simple and sweet as yourself, be your only appellation. Before my departure we will have some talk together, and then I shall quit you, most happy in the knowledge of your full contentment."

Fleur-de-Marie, without one word of reply, gracefully bent her knee, and, before Rodolph could prevent her, gently and respectfully raised his hand to her lips; then rising with an air of modest submission, followed Madame Georges, who eyed her with a profound interest, out of the room.

CHAPTER XI

MURPHY AND RODOLPH

Upon quitting the house, Rodolph bent his steps towards the farmyard, where he found the individual who, the preceding evening, disguised as a charcoal-man, had warned him of the arrival of Tom and Sarah. Murphy, which was the name of this personage, was about fifty years of age; his head, nearly bald, was still ornamented with a fringe of light brown hair at each side, which the hand of time had here and there slightly tinged with gray; his face was broad, open, and ruddy, and free from all appearance of hair, except very short whiskers, of a reddish colour, only reaching as low as the tip of the ear, from which it diverged, and stretched itself in a gentle curve across his rubicund cheeks. Spite of his years and embonpoint, Murphy was active and athletic; his countenance, though somewhat phlegmatic, was expressive of great resolution and kindliness of nature; he wore a white neck-handkerchief, a deep waistcoat, and a long black coat, with very wide skirts; his breeches, of an olive green colour, corresponded in material with the gaiters which protected his sturdy legs, without reaching entirely to the knee, but allowing the strings belonging to his upper garment to display themselves in long unstudied bows; in fact, the dress and whole tournure of Murphy exactly accorded with the idea of what in England is styled a "gentleman farmer." Now, the personage we are describing, though an English squire, was no farmer. At the moment of Rodolph'sappearance in the yard, Murphy was in the act of depositing, in the pocket of a small travelling caléche, a pair of small pistols he had just been carefully cleaning.

"What the devil are you going to do with those pistols?" inquired Rodolph.

"That is my business, my lord," replied Murphy, descending the carriage steps; "attend to your affairs, and I will mind mine."

"At what o'clock have you ordered the horses?"

"According to your directions,—at nightfall."

"You got here this morning, I suppose?"

"I did, at eight o'clock. Madame Georges has had ample time to make all the preparations you desired."

"What has gone wrong, Murphy? You seem completely out of humour. Have I done anything to offend you?"

"Can you not, my lord, accomplish your self-imposed task without incurring so much personal risk?"

"Surely, in order to lull all suspicion in the minds of the persons I seek to understand and fully appreciate, I cannot do better than, for a time, to adopt their garb, their language, and their customs."

"But all this did not prevent you, my lord, last night (in that abominable place where we went to unkennel Bras Rouge, in hopes of getting out of him some particulars relative to that unhappy son of Madame Georges), from being angry, and ready to quarrel with me, because I wished to aid in your tussle with the rascal you encountered in that horrid cut-throat alley."

"I suppose, then, Murphy, you do not think I am capable of defending myself, and you either doubt my courage or the strength of my arm?"

"Unfortunately, you have given me too many reasons to form a contrary opinion of both. Thank God! Flatman, the Bertrand of Germany, perfected you in the knowledge of fencing; Tom Cribb taught you to box; Lacour, of Paris, accomplished you in single-stick, wrestling, and slang, so as to render you fully provided for your venturesome excursions. You are bold as a lion, with muscles like iron, and, though so slight in form, I should have no more chance with you than a dray-horse would against a racer, were they to compete with each other. No mistake about that."

"Then what are you afraid of?"

"Why, I maintain, my lord, that it is not the right thing for you to throw yourself in the way of all these blackguards. I do not say that because of the nuisance it is to a highly respectable individual of my acquaintance to blacken his face with charcoal, and make himself look like a devil. No, God knows, spite of my age, my figure, and my gravity, I would disguise myself as a rope-dancer, if, by so doing, I could serve you. But I still stick to what I say, and—"

"Oh! I know all you would say, my excellent old fellow, and that when once you have taken an idea into your thick skull, the very devil himself could no more drive it out of you than he could, by all his arts, remove the fidelity and devotion implanted in your brave and valiant heart."

"Come, come, my lord, now you begin to flatter me, I suspect you are up to some fresh mischief."

"Think no such thing, Murphy; give yourself no uneasiness, but leave all to me."

"My lord, I cannot be easy; there is some new folly in hand, and I am sure of it."

"My good friend, you mean well; but you are choosing a very ill hour for your lectures; forbear, I beg."

"And why, my lord, can you not listen to me now, as well as any other time?"

"Because you are interfering with one of my short-lived moments of pride and happiness. I am here, in this dear spot!"

"Where you have done so much good. I know it. Your 'model farm,' as you term it, built by you to instruct, to encourage, and to reward deserving labourers, has been of incalculable service to this part of the country. Ordinary men think but of improving their cattle; you, more wisely and benevolently, have directed your exertions for the bettering your fellow creatures. Nothing can be better; and when you placed Madame Georges at the head of the establishment, you acted with the utmost wisdom and provident good sense. What a woman she is! No, she is an angel!—so good, so firm, so noble, and upright! I am not easily moved, my lord, as you know; but often have I felt my eyes grow moist, as her many trials and misfortunes rise to my recollection. But about your new protégée, however, my lord; if you please, we will not say much on that subject. 'The least said is soonest mended,' as the old proverb has it."

"Why not, Murphy?"

"My lord, you will do what you think proper."

"I do what is just," said Rodolph, with an air of impatience.

"What is just, according to your own interpretation."

"What is just before God and my own conscience," replied Rodolph, in a severe tone.

"Well, my lord, this is a point on which we cannot agree, and therefore let us speak no more about it."

"I desire you will continue to talk about it!" cried Rodolph, imperiously.

"I have never been so circumstanced that your royal highness should have to bid me hold my tongue, and I hope I shall not now be ordered to speak when I should be silent," said Murphy, proudly.

"Mr. Murphy!" said Rodolph, with a tone of increased irritation.

"My lord!"

"You know, sir, how greatly I detest anything like concealment."

"Your royal highness will excuse me, but it suits me to have certain concealments," said Murphy, bluntly.

"If I descend to familiarity with you, sir, it is on condition that you, at least, act with entire frankness towards me."

It is impossible to describe the extreme hauteur which marked the countenance of Rodolph as he uttered these words.

"I am fifty years of age, I am a gentleman, and your royal highness should not address me in such a tone."

"Be silent!"

"My lord!"

"Be silent! I say."

"Your royal highness does wrong in compelling a man of honour and feeling to recall the services he has rendered to you," said the squire, in a calm tone.

"Have I not repaid those services in a thousand ways?"

It should be stated that Rodolph had not attached to these bitter words the humiliating sense which could place Murphy in the light of a mercenary; but such, unfortunately, was the esquire's interpretation of them. He became purple with shame, lifted his two clenched hands to his forehead with an expression of deep grief and indignation, and then, in a moment, as by a sudden revulsion of feeling, throwing his eyes on Rodolph, whose noble countenance was convulsed by the violence of extreme disdain, he said, in a faltering voice, and stifling a sigh of the tenderest pity, "My lord, be yourself; you surpass the bounds of reason."

These words impelled Rodolph to the very height of irritation; his glance had even a savage glare in it; his lips were blanched; and, advancing towards Murphy with a threatening aspect, he exclaimed, "Dare you?"

Murphy retreated, and said, in a quick tone, and as if in spite of himself, "My lord, my lord, remember the thirteenth of January!"

These words produced a magical effect on Rodolph. His countenance, contracted by anger, now expanded. He looked at Murphy steadfastly, bowed his head, and then, after a moment's silence, murmured, in faltering accents, "Ah, sir, you are now cruel, indeed. I had thought that my repentance—my deep remorse—and yet it is you—you—"

Rodolph could not finish; his voice was stifled; he sunk, subdued, on a stone bench, and concealed his countenance with both his hands.

"My lord," said Murphy, in deep distress, "my good lord, forgive me! Forgive your old and faithful Murphy. It was only when driven to an extremity, and fearing, alas! not for myself, but for you, the consequences of your passion, that I uttered those words. I said them in spite of myself, and with sorrow. My lord, I was wrong to be so sensitive. Mon Dieu! who can know your character, your feelings, if I do not,—I, who have never left you from your childhood! Pray, oh, pray say that you forgive me for having called to your recollection that sad, sad day. Alas! what expiations have you not made—"

Rodolph raised his head; he was very pale, and said to his companion, in a gentle and saddened voice, "Enough, enough, my old friend; I thank you for having, by one word, checked my headlong passion. I make no apologies to you for the severe things I have said; you know well that 'it is a long way from the heart to the lips,' as the good people at home say. I was wrong; let us say no more on the subject."

"Alas! now we shall be out of spirits for a long time, as if I were not sufficiently unhappy! I only wished to see you roused from your low spirits, and yet I add to them by my foolish tenaciousness. Good Heaven! what's the use of being an honest man, and having gray hairs, if it does not enable us to endure reproaches which we do not deserve?"

"Be it so, be it so; we were both in the wrong, my good friend," said Rodolph, mildly; "let us forget it, and return to our former conversation. You approved entirely of my establishment of this farm, and the deep interest I have always felt in Madame Georges. You will allow, won't you, that she had merited it by her excellent qualities, her misfortunes, even if she did not

belong to the family of Harville,—a family to which my father had vowed eternal gratitude."

"I have always approved of the sentiments which your lordship has entertained for Madame Georges."

"But you are astonished at the interest I take in this poor girl, are you not?"

"Pray, pray, my lord, I was wrong; I was wrong."

"No, I can imagine that appearances have deceived you; but, as you know my life—all my life, and as you aid me always with as much fidelity as courage in my self-inflicted expiation, it is my duty, or, if you like the phrase better, my gratitude, to convince you that I am not acting from a frivolous impulse."

"Of that I am sure, my lord."

"You know my ideas on the subject of the good which a man ought to do who has the knowledge, the will, and the power. To succour unhappy, but deserving, fellow creatures is well; to seek after those who are struggling against misfortune with energy and honour, and to aid them, sometimes without their knowledge,—to prevent, in right time, misery and temptation, is better; to reinstate such perfectly in their own estimation,—-to lead back to honesty those who have preserved in purity some generous and ennobling sentiments in the midst of the contempt that withers them, the misery that eats into them, the corruption that encircles them, and, for that end, to brave, in person, this misery, this corruption, this contagion, is better still; to pursue, with unalterable hatred, with implacable vengeance, vice, infamy, and crime, whether they be trampling in the mud, or be clothed in purple and fine linen, that is justice; but to give aid inconsiderately to well-merited degradation, to prostitute and lavish charity and commiseration, by bestowing help on unworthy and undeserving objects, is most infamous; it is impiety,—very sacrilege! it is to doubt the existence of the Almighty; and so, he who acts thus ought to be made to understand."

"My lord, I pray you do not think that I would for a moment assert that you have bestowed your benefits unworthily."

"One word more, my old friend. You know well that the child whose death I daily deplore—that that daughter whom I should have loved the more, as her unworthy mother, Sarah, had shown herself so utterly indifferent about her—would have been sixteen years of age, like this unhappy girl. You know,

too, that I cannot prevent the deep, and almost painful, sympathy I feel for young girls of that age."

"True, my lord; and I ought so to have interpreted the interest you evince for your protégée. Besides, to succour the unfortunate is to honour God."

"It is, my friend, when the objects deserve it; and thus nothing is more worthy of compassion and respect than a woman like Madame Georges, who, brought up by a pious and good mother in the strict observance of all her duties, has never failed,—never! and has, moreover, courageously borne herself in the midst of the most severe trials. But is it not to honour God in the most acceptable way, to raise from the dust one of those beings of the finest mould, whom he has been pleased to endow richly? Does not she deserve compassion and respect,—yes, respect,—who, unhappy girl! abandoned to her own instinct,—who, tortured, imprisoned, degraded, sullied, has yet preserved, in holiness and pureness of heart, those noble germs of good first implanted by the Almighty? If you had but seen, poor child! how, at the first word of interest expressed for her,—the first mark of kindness and right feeling,—the most charming natural impulses, the purest tastes, the most refined thoughts, the most poetic ideas, developed themselves abundantly in her ingenuous mind, even as, in the early spring, a thousand wild flowers lift up their heads at the first rays of the sun! In a conversation of about an hour with Fleur-de-Marie, I have discovered treasures of goodness, worth, prudence,—yes, prudence, old Murphy. A smile came to my lips, and a tear in my eye, when, in her gentle and sensible prattle, she urged on me the necessity of saving forty sous a day, that I might be beyond want or evil temptations. Poor little creature! she said all this with so serious and persuasive a tone. She seemed so delighted to give me good advice, and experienced so extreme a pleasure in hearing me promise to follow it! I was moved even to tears; and you,—it affects you, my old friend."

"It does, my lord; the idea of making you lay by forty sous a day, thinking you a workman, instead of urging you to spend money on her; that does touch me."

"Hush; here are Madame Georges and Marie. Get all ready for our departure; we must be in Paris in good time."

Thanks to the care of Madame Georges, Fleur-de-Marie was no longer like her former self. A pretty peasant's cap, and two thick braids of light brown hair, encircled her charming face. A large handkerchief of white muslin crossed her bosom, and disappeared under the high fold of a small shot

taffetas apron, whose blue and red shades appeared to advantage over a dark nun's dress, which seemed expressly made for her. The young girl's countenance was calm and composed. Certain feelings of delight produce in the mind an unspeakable sadness,—a holy melancholy. Rodolph was not surprised at the gravity of Fleur-de-Marie; he had expected it. Had she been merry and talkative, she would not have retained so high a place in his good opinion. In the serious and resigned countenance of Madame Georges might easily be traced the indelible marks of long-suffering; but she looked at Fleur-de-Marie with a tenderness and compassion quite maternal, so much gentleness and sweetness did this poor girl evince.

"Here is my child, who has come to thank you for your goodness, M. Rodolph," said Madame Georges, presenting Goualeuse to Rodolph.

At the words, "my child," Goualeuse turned her large eyes slowly towards her protectress, and contemplated her for some moments with a look of unutterable gratitude.

"Thanks for Marie, my dear Madame Georges; she deserves this kind interest, and always will deserve it."

"M. Rodolph," said Goualeuse, with a trembling voice, "you understand, I know, I feel that you do, that I cannot find anything to say to you."

"Your emotion tells me all, my child."

"Oh, she feels deeply the good fortune that has come to her so providentially," said Madame Georges, deeply affected; "her first impulse on entering my room was to prostrate herself before my crucifix."

"Because now, thanks to you, M. Rodolph, I dare to pray," said Goualeuse.

Murphy turned away hastily; his pretensions to firmness would not allow of any one seeing to what extent the simple words of Goualeuse had touched him.

Rodolph said to her, "My child, I wish to have some conversation with Madame Georges. My friend Murphy will lead you over the farm, and introduce you to your future protégés. We will join you presently. Well, Murphy, Murphy, don't you hear me?"

The worthy gentleman turned his back, and pretended to blow his nose with a very loud noise, then put his handkerchief in his pocket, pulled his hat over his eyes, and, turning half around, offered his arm to Marie, managing

so skilfully that neither Rodolph nor Madame Georges could see his face. Taking the arm of Marie, he walked away with her towards the farm buildings, and so quickly, that, to keep up with him, Goualeuse was obliged to run, as in her infant days she ran beside the Chouette.

"Well, Madame Georges, what do you think of Marie?" inquired Rodolph.

"M. Rodolph, I have told you: she had scarcely entered my room, when, seeing the crucifix, she fell on her knees before it. It is impossible for me to tell you, to describe the spontaneous and naturally religious feeling that evidently dictated this. I saw in an instant that hers was no degraded soul. And then, M. Rodolph, the expression of her gratitude to you had nothing exaggerated in it; but it is not the less sincere. And I have another proof of how natural and potent is this religious instinct in her. I said to her, 'You must have been much astonished, and very happy, when M. Rodolph told you that you were to remain here for the future? What an effect it must have had on you!' 'Yes, oh, yes,' was her reply; 'when M. Rodolph told me so, I cannot describe what passed within me; but I felt that kind of holy happiness which I experience in going into a church. When I could go there,' she added, 'for you know, madame—' 'I know, my child, for I shall always call you my child (I could not let her go on when I saw her cover her face for shame), I know that you have suffered deeply; but God blesses those who love and fear him, those who have been unhappy, and those who repent.'"

"Then, my good Madame Georges, I am doubly happy at what I have done. This poor girl will greatly interest you, her disposition is so excellent, her instincts so right."

"What has besides affected me, M. Rodolph, is that she has not allowed one single question to escape her about you, although her curiosity must be so much excited. Struck with a reserve so full of delicacy, I wished to know what she felt. I said to her, 'You must be very curious to know who your mysterious benefactor is?' 'Know him!' she replied, with delightful simplicity; 'he is my benefactor.'"

"Then you will love her. Excellent woman! she will find some interest in your heart."

"Yes, I shall occupy my heart with her as I should with him," said Madame Georges, in a broken voice.

Rodolph took her hand.

"Do not be discouraged; come, come, if our search has been unsuccessful so far, yet one day, perhaps—"

Madame Georges shook her head sorrowfully, and said, in bitter accents, "My poor son would be now twenty years old!"

"Say he is that age—"

"God hear you, and grant it, M. Rodolph."

"He will hear, I fully believe. Yesterday I went (but in vain) to find a certain fellow called Bras Rouge who might, perhaps, have given me some information about your son. Coming away from this Bras Rouge's abode, after a struggle in which I was engaged, I met with this unfortunate girl—"

"Alas! but your kind endeavour in my behalf has thrown in your way another unfortunate being, M. Rodolph."

"You have no intelligence from Rochefort?"

"None," said Madame Georges, shuddering, and in a low voice.

"So much the better! We can no longer doubt but that the monster met his death in the attempt to escape from the—"

Rodolph hesitated to pronounce the horrible word.

"From the Bagne? Oh, say it!—the Bagne!" exclaimed the wretched woman with horror, and almost frantic as she spoke. "The father of my child! Ah! if the unhappy boy still lives—if, like me, he has not changed his name—oh, shame! shame! And yet it may be nothing: his father has, perhaps, carried out his horrid threat! What has he done with my boy? Why did he tear him from me?"

"That mystery I cannot fathom," said Rodolph, with a pensive air. "What could induce the wretch to carry off your son fifteen years ago, and when he was trying to escape into a foreign land? A child of that age could only embarrass his flight."

"Alas, M. Rodolph! when my husband" (the poor woman shuddered as she pronounced the word) "was arrested on the frontier and thrown into prison, where I was allowed to visit him, he said to me these horrible words: 'I took away the brat because you were fond of him, and it will be a means of compelling you to send me money, which may or may not be of service to

him,—that's my affair. Whether he lives or dies it is no matter to you; but if he lives, he will be in good hands: you shall drink as deep of the shame of the son as you have of the disgrace of the father!' Alas! a month afterwards my husband was condemned to the galleys for life; and since then all my entreaties, my prayers, and letters have been in vain. I have never been able to learn the fate of my boy. Ah, M. Rodolph! where is my child at this moment? These frightful words are always ringing in my ears: 'You shall drink as deep of the shame of the son as you have of the disgrace of the father!'"

"This atrocity is most inexplicable; why should he demoralise the unhappy child? Why carry him off?"

"I have told you, M. Rodolph,—to compel me to send him money; although he had nearly ruined me, yet I had still some small resources, but they at length were exhausted also. In spite of his wickedness, I could not believe but that he would employ, at least, a portion of this money in the bringing-up of this unhappy child."

"And your son had no sign, no mark, by which he could be recognised?"

"No other than that of which I have spoken to you, M. Rodolph,—a small Saint Esprit, sculptured in lapis lazuli, tied round his neck by a chain of silver: a sacred relic, blessed by the holy father."

"Courage, courage; God is all-powerful."

"Providence placed me in your path, M. Rodolph."

"Too late, Madame Georges; too late. I might have saved you many years of sorrow."

"Ah, M. Rodolph, how kind you have been to me!"

"In what way? I bought this farm; in time of your prosperity you were not idle, and now you have become my manager here, where—thanks to your excellent superintendence, intelligence, and activity—this establishment produces me—"

"Produces you, my lord?" said Madame Georges, interrupting Rodolph; "why, all the returns are employed, not only in ameliorating the condition of the labourers, who consider the occupation on this model farm as a great favour, but, moreover, to succour all the needy in the district; through the mediation of our good Abbé Laporte—"

"Ah, the dear abbé!" said Rodolph, desirous of escaping the praise of Madame Georges; "have you had the kindness to inform him of my arrival? I wish to recommend my protégée to him. He has had my letter?"

"Mr. Murphy gave it to him when he came this morning."

"In that letter I told our good curé, in a few words, the history of this poor girl. I was not sure that I should be able to come to-day myself, and if not, then Murphy would have conducted Marie—"

A labourer of the farm interrupted this conversation, which had been carried on in the garden.

"Madame, M. le Curé is waiting for you."

"Are the post-horses arrived, my lad?" inquired Rodolph.

"Yes, M. Rodolph; and they are putting to." And the man left the garden.

Madame Georges, the curé, and the inhabitants of the farm only knew Fleur-de-Marie's protector as M. Rodolph. Murphy's discretion was faultless; and although when in private he was very precise in "my-lording" Rodolph, yet before strangers he was very careful not to address him otherwise than as M. Rodolph.

"I forgot to mention, my dear Madame Georges," said Rodolph, when he returned to the house, "that Marie has, I fear, very weak lungs,—privations and misery have tried her health. This morning early I was struck with the pallor of her countenance, although her cheeks were of a deep rose colour; her eyes, too, seem to me to have a brilliancy which betokens a feverish system. Great care must be taken of her."

"Rely on me, M. Rodolph; but, thank God! there is nothing serious to apprehend. At her age, in the country, with pure air, rest, and quiet, she will soon be quite restored."

"I hope so; but I will not trust to your country doctors. I will desire Murphy to bring here my medical man,—a negro,—a very skilful person, who will tell you the best regimen to pursue. You must send me news of Marie very often. Some time hence, when she shall be better, and more at ease, we will talk about her future life; perhaps it would be best that she always remained with you, if you were pleased with her."

"I should like it greatly, M. Rodolph; she would supply the place of the child I have lost, and must for ever bewail."

"Let us still hope for you and for her."

At the moment when Rodolph and Madame Georges approached the farm, Murphy and Marie also entered. The worthy gentleman let go the arm of Goualeuse, and said to Rodolph in a low voice, and with an air of some confusion:

"This girl has bewitched me; I really do not know which interests me most, she or Madame Georges. I was a brute—a beast!"

"I knew, old Murphy, that you would do justice to my protégée," said Rodolph, smiling, and shaking hands with the squire.

Madame Georges, leaning on Marie's arm, entered with her into a small room on the ground floor, where the Abbé Laporte was waiting. Murphy went away, to see all ready for their departure. Madame Georges, Marie, Rodolph, and the curé remained together.

Plain, but very comfortable, this small apartment was fitted up with green hangings, like the rest of the house, as had been exactly described to Goualeuse by Rodolph. A thick carpet covered the floor, a good fire burnt in the grate, and two large nosegays of daisies of all colours, placed in two crystal vases, shed their agreeable odour throughout the room. Through the windows, with their green blinds, which were half opened, was to be seen the meadow, the little stream, and, beyond it, the bank planted with chestnut-trees.

The Abbé Laporte, who was seated near the fireplace, was upwards of eighty years of age, and had, ever since the last days of the Revolution, done duty in this small parish. Nothing can be imagined more venerable than his aged, withered, and somewhat melancholy countenance, shaded by long white locks, which fell on the collar of his black cassock, which was pieced in more places than one; the abbé liked better, as they said, to clothe one or two poor children in good warm broadcloth, than faire le muguet; that is, to wear his cassocks less than two or three years. The good abbé was so old, so very old, that his hands trembled continually, and when he occasionally lifted them up, when speaking, it might have been supposed that he was giving a benediction.

"M. l'Abbé," said Rodolph, respectfully, "Madame Georges has undertaken the guardianship of this young girl, for whom I also beg your kindness."

"She is entitled to it, sir, like all who come to us. The mercy of God is inexhaustible, my dear child, and he has evinced it in not abandoning you in most severe trials. I know all." And he took the hand of Marie in his own withered and trembling palms. "The generous man who has saved you has realised the words of Holy Writ, 'The Lord is near to all those who call upon him; he will fulfil the desire of those who fear him; he will hear their cries, and he will save them.' Now deserve his bounty by your conduct, and you will always find one ready to encourage and sustain you in the good path on which you have entered. You will have in Madame Georges a constant example, in me a careful adviser. The Lord will finish his work."

"And I will pray to him for those who have had compassion on me and have led me to him, father," said La Goualeuse, throwing herself on her knees before the priest. Her emotion overcame her; her sobs almost choked her. Madame Georges, Rodolph, and the abbé were all deeply affected.

"Rise, my dear child," said the curé; "you will soon deserve absolution from those serious faults of which you have rather been the victim than the criminal; for, in the words of the prophet, 'The Lord raises up all those who are ready to fall, and elevates those who are oppressed.'"

Murphy, at this moment, opened the door.

"M. Rodolph," he said, "the horses are ready."

"Adieu, father! adieu, Madame Georges! I commend your child to your care,—our child, I should say. Farewell, Marie; I will soon come and see you again."

The venerable pastor, leaning on the arms of Madame Georges and La Goualeuse, who supported his tottering steps, left the room to see Rodolph depart.

The last rays of the sun shed their light on this interesting yet sad group:

An old priest, the symbol of charity, pardon, and everlasting hope; a female, overwhelmed by every grief that can distress a wife and mother; a young girl, hardly out of her infancy, and but recently thrown into an abyss of vice through misery and the close contact with crime.

Rodolph got into the carriage, Murphy took his place by his side, and the horses set off at speed.

CHAPTER XII

THE RENDEZVOUS

The day after he had confided the Goualeuse to the care of Madame Georges, Rodolph, still dressed as a mechanic, was, at noon precisely, at the door of a cabaret with the sign of the Panier-Fleuri, not far from the barrier of Bercy.

The evening before, at ten o'clock, the Chourineur was punctual to the appointment which Rodolph had fixed with him. The result of this narrative will inform our readers of the particulars of the meeting. It was twelve o'clock, and the rain fell in torrents; the Seine, swollen by perpetual falls of rain, had risen very high, and overflowed a part of the quay. Rodolph looked from time to time, with a gesture of impatience, towards the barrier, and at last observed a man and woman, who were coming towards him under the shelter of an umbrella, and whom he recognised as the Chouette and the Schoolmaster.

These two individuals were completely metamorphosed. The ruffian had laid aside his ragged garments and his air of brutal ferocity. He wore a long frock coat of green cloth, and a round hat; whilst his shirt and cravat were remarkable for their whiteness. But for the hideousness of his features and the fierce glance of his eyes, always restless and suspicious, this fellow might have been taken, by his quiet and steady step, for an honest citizen.

The Chouette was also in her Sunday costume, wearing a large shawl of fine wool, with a large pattern, and held in her hand a capacious basket.

The rain having ceased for the moment, Rodolph, overcoming a sensation of disgust, went to meet the frightful pair. For the slang of the tapis-francthe Schoolmaster now substituted a style almost polished, and which betokened a cultivated mind, in strange contrast with his real character and crimes. When Rodolph approached, the brigand made him a polite bow, and the Chouette curtseyed respectfully.

"Sir, your humble servant," said the Schoolmaster. "I am delighted to pay my respects to you—delighted—or, rather, to renew our acquaintance; for the night before last you paid me two blows of the fist which were enough to have felled a rhinoceros. But not a word of that now; it was a joke on your part, I am sure,—merely done in jest. Let us not say another word about it, for serious business brings us now together. I saw the Chourineur yesterday, about eleven o'clock, at the tapis-franc, and appointed to meet

him here to-day, in case he chose to join us,—to be our fellow labourer; but it seems that he most decidedly refuses."

"You, then, accept the proposal?"

"Your name, sir, if you be so good?"

"Rodolph."

"M. Rodolph, we will go into the Panier-Fleuri,—neither myself nor madame has breakfasted,—and we will talk over our little matters whilst we are taking a crust."

"Most willingly."

"We can talk as we go on. You and the Chourineur certainly do owe some satisfaction to my wife and myself,—you have caused us to lose more than two thousand francs. Chouette had a meeting near St. Ouen with the tall gentleman in mourning, who came to ask for you at the tapis-franc. He offered us two thousand francs to do something to you. The Chourineur has told me all about this. But, Finette," said the fellow, "go and select a room at the Panier-Fleuri, and order breakfast,—some cutlets, a piece of veal, a salad, and a couple of bottles of vin de beaune, the best quality,—and we will join you there."

The Chouette, who had not taken her eye off Rodolph for a moment, went off after exchanging looks with the Schoolmaster, who then said:

"I say, M. Rodolph, that the Chourineur has edified me on the subject of the two thousand francs."

"What do you mean by edified you?"

"You are right,—the language is a little too refined for you. I would say that the Chourineur nearly told me all that the tall gentleman in mourning, with his two thousand francs, required."

"Good."

"Not so good, young man; for the Chourineur, having yesterday morning met the Chouette, near St. Ouen, did not leave her for one moment, when the tall gentleman in mourning came up, so that he could not approach and converse with her. You, then, ought to put us in the way of regaining our two thousand francs."

"Nothing easier; but let us 'hark back.' I had proposed a glorious job to the Chourineur, which he at first accepted, but afterwards refused to go on with."

"He always had very peculiar ideas."

"But whilst he refused he observed to me—"

"He made you observe—"

"Oh, diable! You are very grand with your grammar."

"It is my profession, as a schoolmaster."

"He made me, then, observe, that if he would not go on this 'lay,' he did not desire to discourage any other person, and that you would willingly lend a hand in the affair."

"May I, without impertinence, ask why you appointed a meeting with the Chourineur at St. Ouen yesterday, which gave him the advantage of meeting the Chouette? He was too much puzzled at my question to give me a clear answer."

Rodolph bit his lips imperceptibly, and replied, shrugging his shoulders:

"Very likely; for I only told him half my plan, you must know, not knowing if he had made up his mind."

"That was very proper."

"The more so as I had two strings to my bow."

"You are a careful man. You met the Chourineur, then, at St. Ouen, for—"

Rodolph, after a moment's hesitation, had the good luck to think of a story which would account for the want of address which the Chourineur had displayed, and said:

"Why, this it is. The attempt I propose is a famous one, because the person in question is in the country; all my fear was that he should return to Paris. To make sure, I went to Pierrefitte, where his country-house is situated, and there I learned that he would not be back again until the day after to-morrow."

"Well, but to return to my question; why did you appoint to meet the Chourineur at St. Ouen?"

"Why, you are not so bright as I took you for. How far is it from Pierrefitte to St. Ouen?"

"About a league."

"And from St. Ouen to Paris?"

"As much."

"Well, if I had not found any one at Pierrefitte,—that is, if there had been an empty house there,—why, there also would have been a good job; not so good as in Paris, but still well worth having. I went back to the Chourineur, who was waiting for me at St. Ouen. We should have returned then to Pierrefitte, by a cross-path which I know, and—"

"I understand. If, on the contrary, the job was to be done in Paris?"

"We should have gained the Barrier de l'Étoile by the road of the Rivolte, and thence to the Allée des Veuves—"

"Is but a step; that is plain enough. At St. Ouen you were well placed for either operation,—that was clear; and now I can understand why the Chourineur was at St. Ouen. So the house in the Allée des Veuves will be uninhabited until the day after to-morrow?"

"Uninhabited, except the porter."

"I see. And is it a profitable job?"

"Sixty thousand francs in gold in the proprietor's cabinet."

"And you know all the ways?"

"Perfectly."

"Silence, here we are; not a word before the vulgar. I do not know if you feel as I do, but the morning air has given me an appetite."

The Chouette was awaiting them at the door.

"This way; this way," she said. "I have ordered our breakfast."

Rodolph wished the brigand to pass in first, for certain reasons; but the Schoolmaster insisted on showing so much politeness, that Rodolph entered before him. Before he sat down, the Schoolmaster tapped lightly against each of the divisions of the wainscot, that he might ascertain their thickness and power of transmitting sounds.

"We need not be afraid to speak out," said he; "the division is not thin. We shall have our breakfast soon, and shall not be disturbed in our conversation."

A waiter brought in the breakfast, and before he shut the door Rodolph saw the charcoal-man, Murphy, seated with great composure at a table in a room close at hand.

The room in which the scene took place that we are describing was long and narrow, lighted by one window, which looked into the street, and was opposite to the door. The Chouette turned her back to this window, whilst the Schoolmaster was at one side of the table, and Rodolph on the other.

When the servant left the room, the brigand got up, took his plate, and seated himself beside Rodolph and between him and the door.

"We can talk better," he said, "and need not talk so loud."

"And then you can prevent me from going out," replied Rodolph, calmly.

The Schoolmaster gave a nod in the affirmative, and then, half drawing out of the pocket of his frock coat a stiletto, round and as thick as a goose's quill, with a handle of wood which disappeared in the grasp of his hairy fingers, said:

"You see that?"

"I do."

"Advice to amateurs!" And bringing his shaggy brows together, by a frown which made his wide and flat forehead closely resemble a tiger's, he made a significant gesture.

"And you may believe me," added the Chouette, "I have made the tool sharp."

Rodolph, with perfect coolness, put his hand under his blouse, and took out a double-barrelled pistol, which he showed to the Schoolmaster, and then put into his pocket.

"All right; and now we understand each other; but do not misunderstand me, I am only alluding to an impossibility. If they try to arrest me, and you have laid any trap for me, I will make 'cold meat' of you."

And he gave a fierce look at Rodolph.

"And I will spring upon him and help you, fourline," cried the Chouette.

Rodolph made no reply, but shrugged his shoulders, and, pouring out a glass of wine, tossed it off. His coolness deceived the Schoolmaster.

"I only put you on your guard."

"Well, then, put up your 'larding-pin' into your pocket; you have no chicken to lard now. I am an old cock, and know my game as well as most," said Rodolph. "But, to our business."

"Yes, let us talk of business; but do not speak against my 'larding-pin;' it makes no noise, and does not disturb anybody."

"And does its work as should be; doesn't it, fourline?" added the old beldam.

"By the way," said Rodolph to the Chouette, "do you really know the Goualeuse's parents?"

"My man has in his pocket two letters about it, but she shall never see them,—the little slut! I would rather tear her eyes out with my own hands. Oh, when I meet her again at the tapis-franc, won't I pay her off—"

"There, that'll do, Finette; we have other things to talk of, and so leave off your gossip."

"May we 'patter' before the 'mot?'" asked Rodolph.

"Most decidedly! She's true as steel, and is worth her weight in gold to watch for us, to get information or impressions of keys, to conceal stolen goods or sell them,—nothing comes amiss to her. She is a first-rate manager. Good Finette!" added the robber, extending his hand to the horrid hag. "You can have no idea of the services she has done me. Take off your shawl, Finette, or you'll be cold when you go out; put it on the chair with your basket."

The Chouette took off her shawl.

In spite of his presence of mind, and the command which he had over himself, Rodolph could not quite conceal his surprise when he saw suspended by a ring of silver, from a thick chain of metal which hung round the old creature's neck, a small Saint Esprit in lapis lazuli, precisely resembling that which the son of Madame Georges had round his neck when he was carried off.

At this discovery, a sudden idea flashed across the mind of Rodolph. According to the Chourineur's statement, the Schoolmaster had escaped from the Bagne six months ago, and had since defied all search after him by disfiguring himself as he had now; and six months ago the husband of Madame Georges had disappeared from the Bagne. Rodolph surmised that, very possibly, the Schoolmaster was the husband of that unhappy lady. If this were so, he knew the fate of the son she lamented,—he possessed, too, some papers relative to the birth of the Goualeuse. Rodolph had, then, fresh motives for persevering in his projects, and, fortunately, his absence of mind was not observed by the Schoolmaster, who was busy helping the Chouette.

"Morbleu! What a pretty chain you have!" said Rodolph to the one-eyed woman.

"Pretty, and not dear," answered the old creature, laughing. "It is only a sham till my man can afford to give me a real one."

"That will depend on this gentleman, Finette. If our job comes off well, why then—"

"It is astonishing how well it is imitated," continued Rodolph. "And what is that little blue thing at the end?"

"It is a present from my man, which I shall wear until he gives me a 'ticker.' Isn't it, fourline?"

Rodolph's suspicions were thus half confirmed, and he waited with anxiety for the reply of the Schoolmaster, who said:

"You must take care of that, notwithstanding the 'ticker,' Finette; it is a talisman, and brings good luck."

"A talisman!" said Rodolph, in a careless tone; "do you believe in talismans? And where the devil did you pick it up? Give me the address of the shop."

"They do not make them now; the shop is shut up. As you see it, that bit of jewelry has a very great antiquity,—three generations. I value it highly, for it is a family loom," added he, with a hideous grin; "and that's why I gave it to Finette, that she might have good fortune in the enterprises in which she so skilfully seconds me. Only see her at work! only see her! If we go into 'business' together, why—But let us now to our affair in hand. You say that in the Allée des Veuves—"

"At No. 17 there is a house inhabited by a rich man, whose name is—"

"I will not be guilty of the indiscretion of asking his name. You say there are sixty thousand francs in gold in a cabinet?"

"Sixty thousand francs in gold!" exclaimed the Chouette.

Rodolph nodded his head in the affirmative.

"And you know this house, and the people in it?" said the Schoolmaster.

"Quite well."

"Is the entry difficult?"

"A wall seven feet high on the side of the Allée des Veuves, a garden, windows down to the ground, and the house has only the ground floor throughout."

"And there is only the porter to guard this treasure?"

"Yes."

"And what, young man, is your proposed plan of proceeding?"

"Simple enough: to climb over the wall, pick the lock of the door, or force open a shutter or lock. What do you think of it?"

"I cannot answer you before I have examined it all myself,—that is, by the aid of my wife; but, if all you tell me is as you say, I think it would be the thing to do it at once this evening."

And the ruffian looked earnestly at Rodolph.

"This evening!—impossible!" replied he.

"Why, since the occupier does not return until the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, but I—I cannot this evening—"

"Really? Well, and I—I cannot to-morrow."

"Why not?"

"For the reason that prevents you this evening," said the robber, in a tone of mockery.

After a moment's reflection, Rodolph replied:

"Well, then, this evening be it. Where shall we meet?"

"We will not separate," said the Schoolmaster.

"Why not?"

"Why should we?"

"What is the use of separating? The weather has cleared up, and we will go and walk about, and give a look at the Allée des Veuves; you will see how my woman will work. When that is done, we will return and play a hand at piquet, and have a bit of something in a place in the Champs Elysées that I know, near the river; and, as the Allée des Veuves is deserted at an early hour, we will walk that way about ten o'clock."

"I will join you at nine o'clock."

"Do you or do you not wish that we should do this job together?"

"I do wish it."

"Well, then, we do not separate before evening, or else—"

"Or else?"

"I shall think that you are making 'a plant' for me, and that's the reason you wish to part company now."

"If I wished to set the 'traps' after you, what is to prevent my doing so this evening?"

"Why, everything. You did not expect that I should propose the affair to you so soon, and if you do not leave us you cannot put anybody up to it."

"You mistrust me, then?"

"Most extremely. But as what you propose may be quite true and honest, and the half of sixty thousand francs is worth a risk, I am willing to try for it; but this evening, or never; if never, I shall have my suspicions of you confirmed, and one day or other I will take care and let you dine off a dish of my cooking."

"And I will return your compliment, rely on it."

"Oh, this is all stuff and nonsense!" said the Chouette. "I think with fourline, to-night or never."

Rodolph was in a state of extreme anxiety; if he allowed this opportunity to escape of laying hands on the Schoolmaster, he might never again light on him. The ruffian would ever afterwards be on his guard, or if recognised, apprehended, and taken back to the Bagne, would carry with him that secret which Rodolph had so much interest in discovering. Confiding in his address and courage, and trusting to chance, he said to the Schoolmaster:

"Agreed, then; and we will not part company before evening."

"Then I'm your man. It is now two o'clock; it is some distance from here to the Allée des Veuves; it is raining again in torrents; let us pay the reckoning and take a coach."

"If we have a coach, I should like first to smoke a cigar."

"Why not?" said the Schoolmaster. "Finette does not mind the smell of tobacco."

"Well, then, I'll go and fetch some cigars," said Rodolph, rising.

"Pray don't give yourself that trouble," said the Schoolmaster, stopping him; "Finette will go."

Rodolph resumed his seat. The Schoolmaster had penetrated his design. The Chouette went out.

"What a clever manager I have, haven't I?" said the ruffian; "and so tractable, she would throw herself into the fire for me."

"Apropos of fire, it is not overwarm here," replied Rodolph, placing both his hands under his blouse; and then, continuing his conversation with the Schoolmaster, he took out a lead-pencil and a morsel of paper, which he had in his waistcoat pocket, without being detected, and wrote some words hastily, taking care to make his letters wide apart, so that they might be more legible; for he wrote under his blouse, and without seeing what he wrote.

This note escaped the penetration of the Schoolmaster; the next thing was to enable it to reach its address.

Rodolph rose and went listlessly towards the window, and began to hum a tune between his teeth, accompanying himself on the window glasses.

The Schoolmaster came up to the window and said to Rodolph:

"What tune are you playing?"

"I am playing 'Tu n'auras pas ma rose.'"

"And a very pretty tune it is. I should like to know if it would have the effect of making any of the passers-by turn round?"

"I had no such intention."

"You are wrong, young man; for you are playing the tambourine on that pane of glass with all your might. But I was thinking, the porter of this house in the Allée des Veuves is perhaps a stout fellow; if he resists, you have only your pistol, which is a noisy weapon, whilst a tool like this (and he showed Rodolph the handle of his poniard) makes no noise, and does not disturb anybody."

"Do you mean, then, to assassinate him?" exclaimed Rodolph. "If you have any such intention, let us give up the job altogether; I will have no hand in it,—so don't rely on me—"

"But if he wakes?"

"We will take to our heels."

"Well, just as you like; only it is better to come to a clear understanding beforehand. So, then, ours is simply a mere robbery with forcible entry—"

"Nothing more."

"That's very silly and contemptible; but so be it."

"And as I will not leave you for a second," thought Rodolph, "I will prevent you from shedding blood."

CHAPTER XIII

PREPARATIONS

The Chouette returned to the room, bringing the cigars with her.

"I don't think it rains now," said Rodolph, lighting his cigar. "Suppose we go and fetch the coach ourselves,—it will stretch our legs."

"What! not rain!" replied the Schoolmaster; "are you blind? Do you think I will expose Finette to the chance of catching cold, and exposing her precious life, and spoiling her new shawl?"

"You are right, old fellow; it rains cats and dogs. Let the servant come and we can pay him, and desire him to fetch us a coach," replied Rodolph.

"That's the most sensible thing you have said yet, young fellow; we may go and look about as we seek the Allée des Veuves."

The servant entered, and Rodolph gave her five francs.

"Ah, sir, it is really an imposition,—I cannot allow it," exclaimed the Schoolmaster.

"Oh, all right; your turn next time."

"Be it so, but on condition that I shall offer you something, by and by, in a little cabaret in the Champs Elysées,—a capital little snuggery that I know of."

"Just as you like."

The servant paid, and they left the room.

Rodolph wished to go last, out of politeness to the Chouette, but the Schoolmaster would not allow it, and followed close on his heels, watching his every movement.

The master of the house kept a wine-shop also, and amongst other drinkers, a charcoal-man, with his face blackened and his large hat flapping over his eyes, was paying his "shot" at the bar when these three personages appeared. In spite of the close lookout of the Schoolmaster and the one-eyed hag, Rodolph, who walked before the hideous pair, exchanged a rapid and unperceived glance with Murphy as he got into the hackney-coach.

"Which way am I to go, master?" asked the driver.

Rodolph replied, in a loud voice:

"Allée des—"

"Des Acacias, in the Bois de Boulogne," cried the Schoolmaster, interrupting him. Then he added, "And we will pay you well, coachman."

The door was shut.

"What the devil made you bawl out which way we were going before these people?" said the Schoolmaster. "If the thing were found out to-morrow, we might be traced and discovered. Young man,—young man, you are very imprudent!"

The coach was already in motion. Rodolph answered:

"True; I did not think of that. But with my cigar I shall smoke you like herrings; let us have a window open."

And, joining the action to the words, Rodolph, with much dexterity, let fall outside the window the morsel of paper, folded very small, on which he had hastily written a few words in pencil under his blouse. The Schoolmaster's glance was so quick, that, in spite of the calmness of Rodolph's features, the ruffian detected some expression of triumph, for, putting his head out of the window, he called out to the driver:

"Whip behind! whip behind! there is some one getting up at the back of the coach!"

The coach stopped, and the driver, standing on his seat, looked back, and said:

"No, master, there is no one there."

"Parbleu! I will look myself," replied the Schoolmaster, jumping out into the street.

Not seeing any person or anything (for since Rodolph had dropped the paper the coach had gone on several yards), the Schoolmaster thought he was mistaken.

"You will laugh at me," he said, as he resumed his seat, "but I don't know why I thought some one was following us."

The coach at this moment turned round a corner, and Murphy, who had not lost sight of it with his eyes, and had seen Rodolph's manœuvre, ran and picked up the little note, which had fallen into a crevice between two of the paving-stones.

At the end of a quarter of an hour the Schoolmaster said to the driver of the hackney-coach:

"My man, we have changed our minds; drive to the Place de la Madelaine."

Rodolph looked at him with astonishment.

"All right, young man; from hence we may go to a thousand different places. If they seek to track us hereafter, the deposition of the coachman will not be of the slightest service to them."

At the moment when the coach was approaching the barrier, a tall man, clothed in a long white riding-coat, with his hat drawn over his eyes, and whose complexion appeared of a deep brown, passed rapidly along the road, stooping over the neck of a high, splendid hunter, which trotted with extraordinary speed.

"A good horse and a good rider," said Rodolph, leaning forward to the door of the coach and following Murphy (for it was he) with his eyes. "What a pace that stout man goes! Did you see him?"

"Ma foi! he passed so very quickly," said the Schoolmaster, "that I did not remark him."

Rodolph calmly concealed his satisfaction; Murphy had, doubtless, deciphered the almost hieroglyphic characters of the note which he had dropped, and which had escaped the vigilance of the Schoolmaster. Certain that the coach was not followed, he had become more assured, and desirous of imitating the Chouette, who slept, or rather pretended to sleep, he said to Rodolph:

"Excuse me, young man, but the motion of the coach always produces a singular effect on me,—it sends me off to sleep like a child."

The ruffian, under the guise of assumed sleep, thought to examine whether the physiognomy of his companion betrayed any emotion; but Rodolph was on his guard, and replied:

"I rose so early that I feel sleepy, and will have a nap, too."

He shut his eyes, and very soon the hard breathing of the Schoolmaster and the Chouette, who snored in chorus, so completely deceived Rodolph, that, thinking his companions sound asleep, he half opened his eyes. The Schoolmaster and the Chouette, in spite of their loud snoring, had their eyes open, and were exchanging some mysterious signs by means of their fingers curiously placed or bent in the palms of their hands. In an instant this mute language ceased. The brigand no doubt perceived, by some almost imperceptible sign, that Rodolph was not asleep, and said, in a laughing tone:

"Ah, ah, comrade! what, you were trying your friends, were you?"

"That can't astonish you, who sleep with your eyes open."

"I, who—That's different, young man; I am a somnambulist."

The hackney-coach stopped in the Place de la Madelaine. The rain had ceased for a moment, but the clouds, driven by the violence of the wind, were so dark and so low, that it was almost night in appearance. Rodolph, the Chouette, and the Schoolmaster went towards the Cours la Reine.

"Young man, I have an idea, which is not a bad one," said the robber.

"What is it?"

"To ascertain if all that you have told us respecting the interior of the house in the Allée des Veuves is true."

"You surely will not go there now, under any circumstances? It would awaken suspicion."

"I am not such a flat as that, young fellow; but why have I a wife whose name is Finette?"

The Chouette drew up her head.

"Do you see her, young man? Why, she looks like a war-horse when he hears the blast of the trumpet!"

"You mean to send her as a lookout?"

"Precisely so."

"No. 17, Allée des Veuves, isn't it, my man?" cried the Chouette, impatiently. "Make yourself easy: I have but one eye, but that is a good one."

"Do you see, young man,—do you see she is all impatience to be at work?"

"If she manages cleverly to get into the house, I do not think your idea a bad one."

"Take the umbrella, fourline; in half an hour I will be here again, and you shall see what I will do," said the Chouette.

"One moment, Finette; we are going down to the Bleeding Heart,—only two steps from here. If the little Tortillard (cripple) is there, you had better take him with you; he will remain outside on the watch whilst you go inside the house."

"You are right,—little Tortillard is as cunning as a fox; he is not ten years of age, and yet it was he who the other day—"

A signal from the Schoolmaster interrupted the Chouette.

"What does the 'Bleeding Heart' mean? It is an odd sign for a cabaret," asked Rodolph.

"You must complain to the landlord."

"What is his name?"

"The landlord of the Bleeding Heart?"

"Yes."

"What is that to you? He never asks the names of his customers."

"But, still—"

"Call him what you like,—Peter, Thomas, Christopher, or Barnabas,—he will answer to any and all. But here we are, and it's time we were, for the rain is coming down again in floods; and how the river roars! It has almost become

a torrent! Why, look at it! Two more days of such rain, and the water will overflow the arches of the bridge."

"You say that we are there, but where the devil is the cabaret? I do not see any house here."

"Certainly not, if you look round about you."

"Where should I look, then?"

"At your feet."

"At my feet?"

"Yes."

"And whereabouts?"

"Here,—look; do you see the roof? Mind, and don't step upon it."

Rodolph had not remarked one of those subterraneans which used to be seen, some years since, in certain spots in the Champs Elysées, and particularly near the Cours la Reine.

A flight of steps, cut out of the damp and greasy ground, led to the bottom of this sort of deep ditch, against one end of which, cut perpendicularly, leaned a low, mean, dilapidated hovel; its roof, covered with moss-covered tiles, was scarcely so high as the ground on which Rodolph was standing; two or three out-buildings, constructed of worm-eaten planks, serving as cellar, wood-house, and rabbit-hutches, surrounded this wretched den.

A narrow path, which extended along this ditch, led from the stairs to the door of the hut; the rest of the ground was concealed under a mass of trellis-work, which sheltered two rows of clumsy tables, fastened to the ground. A worn-out iron sign swung heavily backwards and forwards on its creaking hinges, and through the rust that covered it might still be seen a red heart pierced with an arrow. The sign was supported by a post erected above this cave,—this real human burrow.

A thick and moist fog was added to the rain as night approached.

"What think you of this hôtel, young fellow?" inquired the Schoolmaster.

"Why, thanks to the torrents that have fallen for the last fortnight, it must be deliciously fresh. But come on."

"One moment,—I wish to know if the landlord is in. Hark!"

The ruffian then, thrusting his tongue forcibly against his palate, produced a singular noise,—a sort of guttural sound, loud and lengthened, something like P-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!!! A similar note came from the depths of the hovel.

"He's there," said the Schoolmaster. "Pardon me, young man,—respect to the ladies,—allow the Chouette to pass first; I follow you. Mind how you come,—it's slippery."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLEEDING HEART

The landlord of the Bleeding Heart, after having responded to the signal of the Schoolmaster, advanced politely to the threshold of his door.

This personage, whom Rodolph had been to see in the Cité, and whom he did not yet know under his true name, or, rather, his habitual surname, was Bras Rouge.

Lank, mean-looking, and feeble, this man might be fifty years of age. His countenance resembled both the weasel and the rat; his peaked nose, his receding chin, his high cheek-bones, his small eyes, black, restless, and keen, gave his features an indescribable expression of malice, cunning, and sagacity. An old brown wig, or, rather, as yellow as his bilious complexion, perched on the top of his head, showed the nape of the old fellow's withered neck. He had on a round jacket, and one of those long black aprons worn by the waiters at the wine shops.

Our three acquaintances had hardly descended the last step of the staircase when a child of about ten years of age, rickety, lame, and somewhat misshapen, came to rejoin Bras Rouge, whom he resembled in so striking a manner that there was no mistaking them for father and son. There was the same quick and cunning look, joined to that impudent, hardened, and knavish air, which is peculiar to the scamp (voyou) of Paris,—that fearful type of precocious depravity, that real 'hemp-seed' (graine de bagne), as they style it, in the horrible slang of the gaol. The forehead of the brat was half lost beneath a thatch of yellowish locks, as harsh and stiff as horse-hair. Reddish-coloured trousers and a gray blouse, confined by a leather girdle, completed Tortillard's costume, whose nickname was derived from his infirmity. He stood close to his father, standing on his sound leg like a heron by the side of a marsh.

"Ah, here is the darling one (môme)!" said the Schoolmaster. "Finette, night is coming on, and time is pressing; we must profit by the daylight which is left to us."

"You are right, my man; I will ask the father to spare his darling."

"Good day, old friend," said Bras Rouge, addressing the Schoolmaster, in a voice which was cracked, sharp, and shrill. "What can I do for you?"

"Why, if you could spare your 'small boy' to my mistress for a quarter of an hour, she has lost something which he could help her to look for."

Bras Rouge winked his eye and made a sign to the Schoolmaster, and then said to the child:

"Tortillard, go with madame."

The hideous brat hopped forward and took hold of the "one-eyed's" hand.

"Love of a bright boy, come along! There is a child!" said Finette. "And how like his father! He is not like Pegriotte, who always pretended to have a pain in her side when she came near me,—a little baggage!"

"Come, come away!—be off, Finette! Keep your weather-eye open, and bright lookout. I await you here."

"I won't be long. Go first, Tortillard."

The one-eyed hag and the little cripple went up the slippery steps.

"Finette, take the umbrella," the brigand called out.

"'Ah, Here is the 'Darling One'!'"

Original Etching by Adrian Marcel

"It would be in the way, my man," said the old woman, who quickly disappeared with Tortillard in the midst of the fog, which thickened with the twilight, and the hollow murmur of the wind as it moaned through the thick and leafless branches of the tall elms in the Champs Elysées.

"Let us go in," said Rodolph.

It was requisite to stoop in passing in at the door of the cabaret, which was divided into two apartments. In one was a bar and a broken-down billiard-table; in the other, tables and garden chairs, which had once been painted green. Two narrow windows, with their cracked panes festooned with spiders' webs, cast a dim but not religious light on the damp walls.

Rodolph was alone for one moment only, during which Bras Rouge and the Schoolmaster had time to exchange some words, rapidly uttered, and some mysterious signs.

"You'll take a glass of beer,—or brandy, perhaps,—whilst we wait for Finette?" said the Schoolmaster.

"No; I am not thirsty."

"Do as you like,—I am for a 'drain' of brandy," said the ruffian; and he seated himself on one of the little green tables in the second apartment.

Darkness came on to this den so completely, that it was impossible to see in one of the angles of this inner apartment the open mouth of one of those cellars which are entered by a door in two divisions, one of which was constantly kept open for the convenience of access. The table at which the Schoolmaster sat was close upon this dark and deep hole, and he turned his back upon it, so that it was entirely concealed from Rodolph's view.

He was looking through the window, in order to command his countenance and conceal the workings of his thoughts. The sight of Murphy speeding through the Allée des Veuves did not quite assure him; he was afraid that the worthy squire had not quite understood the full meaning of his note, necessarily so laconic, and containing only these words:

"This evening—ten o'clock. Be on your guard."

Resolved not to go to the Allée des Veuves before that moment, nor to lose sight of the Schoolmaster for an instant, he yet trembled at the idea of losing the only opportunity that might ever be afforded him of obtaining that secret which he was so excessively anxious to possess. Although he was powerful and well armed, yet he had to deal with an unscrupulous assassin, capable of any and every thing. Not desiring, however, that his thoughts should be detected, he seated himself at the table with the Schoolmaster, and, by way of seeming at his ease, called for a glass of something. Bras Rouge having exchanged a few words, in a low tone, with the brigand, looked at Rodolph with an air in which curiosity, distrust, and contempt were mingled.

"It is my advice, young man," said the Schoolmaster, "that if my wife informs us that the persons we wish to see are within, we had better make our call about eight o'clock."

"That will be two hours too soon," said Rodolph; "and that will spoil all."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Bah! amongst friends there should be no ceremony."

"I know them well, and I tell you that we must not think of going before ten o'clock."

"Are you out of your senses, young man?"

"I give you my opinion, and devil fetch me if I stir from here before ten o'clock."

"Don't disturb yourself,—I never close my establishment before midnight," said Bras Rouge, in his falsetto voice; "it is the time when my best customers drop in; and my neighbours never complain of the noise which is made in my house."

"I must agree to all you wish, young man," continued the Schoolmaster. "Be it so, then; we will not set out on our visit until ten o'clock."

"Here is the Chouette!" said Bras Rouge, hearing and replying to a warning cry similar to that which the Schoolmaster had uttered before he descended to the subterraneous abode.

A minute afterwards the Chouette entered the billiard-room alone.

"It is all right, my man,—I've done the trick!" cried the one-eyed hag, as she entered.

Bras Rouge discreetly withdrew, without asking a word about Tortillard, whom, perhaps, he did not expect to see return. The beldam sat with her face towards Rodolph and the brigand.

"Well?" said the Schoolmaster.

"The young fellow has told us all true, so far."

"Ah! you see I was right," exclaimed Rodolph.

"Let the Chouette tell her tale, young man. Come, tell us all about it, Finette."

"I went straight to No. 17, leaving Tortillard on the lookout and concealed in a corner. It was still daylight, and I rung at a side door which opens outwards, and here's about two inches of space between it and the sill; nothing else to notice. I rang; the porter opened. Before I pulled the bell I

had put my bonnet in my pocket, that I might look like a neighbour. As soon as I saw the porter I pretended to cry violently, saying that I had lost a pet parrot, Cocotte,—a little darling that I adored. I told him I lived in the Rue Marboeuf, and that I had pursued Cocotte from garden to garden, and entreated him to allow me to enter and try and find the bird."

"Ah!" said the Schoolmaster, with an air of proud satisfaction, pointing to Finette, "what a woman!"

"Very clever," said Rodolph. "And what then?"

"The porter allowed me to look for the creature, and I went trotting all around the garden, calling 'Cocotte! Cocotte!' and looked about me in every direction to scrutinise every thing. Inside the walls," continued the horrid old hag, going on with her description of the premises, "inside the walls, trellis-work all around,—a perfect staircase; at the left-hand corner of the wall a fir-tree, just like a ladder,—a lying-in woman might descend by it. The house has six windows on the ground floor, and has no upper story,—six small windows without any fastening. The windows of the ground floor close with shutters, having hooks below and staples in the upper part: press in the bottom, use your steel file—"

"A push," said the Schoolmaster, "and it is open."

The Chouette continued:

"The entrance has a glass door, two Venetian blinds outside—"

"Memorandum," said the ruffian.

"Quite correct; it is as precise as if we saw it," said Rodolph.

"On the left," resumed the Chouette, "near the courtyard, is a well; the rope may be useful (for at that particular spot there is no trellis against the wall), in case retreat should be cut off in the direction of the door. On entering into the house—"

"You got inside the house, then? Young man, she got inside the house!" said the Schoolmaster, with pride.

"To be sure I got in! Not finding Cocotte, I had made so much lamentation that I pretended I was quite out of breath; I begged the porter to allow me to sit down on the step of the door, and he very kindly asked me to step in, offering me a glass of wine and water. 'A glass of plain water,' I said; 'plain

water only, my good sir.' Then he made me go into the antechamber,—carpeted all over; good precaution,—footsteps or broken glass cannot be heard, if we must 'mill the glaze' (break a pane of glass); right and left, doors with sliding bolts, which open by a gentle push from the top. At the bottom was a strong door, locked,—it looked very like a money-chest. I had my wax in my basket—"

"She had her wax, young man! She never goes without her wax!" said the brigand.

The Chouette proceeded:

"It was necessary to approach the door which smelled so strongly of the cash, so I pretended that I was seized with a fit of coughing,—so violent, that I was compelled to lean against the wall for support. Hearing me cough, the porter said,'I'll fetch you a morsel of sugar to put in your water.' He probably looked for a spoon, for I heard plate chink,—plate in the room on the left-hand; don't forget that, fourline. Well, coughing and wheezing, I reached the door at the bottom,—I had my wax in the palm of my hand. I leaned against the lock as though accidentally, and here is the impression; we may not want it to-day, but another time it may be useful."

And the Chouette gave the brigand a bit of yellow wax, on which the print of the lock was perfectly impressed.

"You can tell us whether this is the door of the money-chest," said the Chouette.

"It is, and there is the cash," replied Rodolph; and then said to himself, "Has Murphy, then, been the dupe of this cursed old hag? Perhaps so, and he only expects to be assailed at ten o'clock; by that time every precaution will have been taken."

"But all the money is not there," continued the Chouette, and her one green eye sparkled. "As I approached the windows, still searching for my darling Cocotte, I saw in one of the chambers (door on the left) some bags of crown pieces, in a bureau. I saw them as plainly as I see you, my man; there were at least a dozen of them."

"Where is Tortillard?" said the Schoolmaster.

"In his hiding-place,—not more than two paces from the garden. He can see in the dark like a cat. There is only that one entrance to No. 17, so when we go he will tell us if any one has come or not."

"That's good—"

The Schoolmaster had scarcely uttered these words than he made a sudden rush at Rodolph, grappled him by the throat, and flung him violently down the cellar which was yawning behind the table.

The attack was so rapid, unexpected, and powerful, that Rodolph could neither foresee nor avoid it. The Chouette, alarmed, uttered a piercing shriek; for at the first moment she had not seen the result of the struggle. When the noise of Rodolph's body rolling down the steps had ceased, the Schoolmaster, who knew all the ways and windings of the underground vaults in the place, went down the stairs slowly, listening as he went.

"Fourline, be on your guard," cried the beldam, leaning over the opening of the trap; "draw your 'pinking iron.'"

The brigand disappeared without any reply. For a time nothing was heard, but at the end of a few moments the distant noise of a door shutting, which creaked on its rusty hinges, sounded harshly in the depths of the cavern; then all was again still as death. The darkness was complete. The Chouette fumbled in her basket, and then, producing a lucifer-match, lighted a wax taper, whose feeble ray made visible the darkness of this dreary den.

At this moment the monster-visage of the Schoolmaster appeared at the opening of the trap. The Chouette could not repress an exclamation of horror at the sight of his ghastly, seamed, mutilated, and fearful face, with eyes that gleamed like phosphorus, and seemed to glare on the ground even in the midst of the darkness which the lighted taper could not entirely dissipate. Having subdued her feeling of fright, the old hag exclaimed, in a tone of horrible flattery:

"You must be an awful man, fourline, for even I was frightened!—yes, I!"

"Quick, quick, for the Allée des Veuves!" said the ruffian, securely closing the double flap of the trap with a bar of iron. "In another hour, perhaps, it will be too late. If it is a trap, it is not yet baited; if it is not, why, we can do the job alone."

CHAPTER XV

THE VAULT

Stunned by his horrible fall, Rodolph lay senseless and motionless at the bottom of the stairs, down which he had been hurled. The Schoolmaster, dragging him to the entrance of a second and still deeper cavern, thrust him into its hideous recesses, and closing and securely bolting a massy iron-shod door, returned to his worthy confederate, the Chouette, who was waiting to join him in the proposed robbery (it might be murder) in the Allée des Veuves.

About the end of an hour Rodolph began, though slowly, to resume his consciousness. He found himself extended on the ground, in the midst of thick darkness; he extended his hand and touched the stone stairs descending to the vault; a sensation of extreme cold about his feet induced him to endeavour, by feeling the ground, to ascertain the cause: his fingers dabbled in a pool of water.

With a violent effort he contrived to seat himself on the lower step of the staircase; the giddiness arising from his fall subsided by degrees, and as he became able to extend his limbs he found, to his great joy, that, though severely shaken and contused, no bones were broken. He listened: the only sound that reached his ear was a low, dull, pattering, but continued noise, of which he was then far from divining the cause.

As his senses became more clear, so did the circumstances, to which he had been the unfortunate victim, return to his imagination; and just as he had recalled each particular, and was deeply considering the possible result of the whole, he became aware that his feet were wholly submerged in water; it had, indeed, risen above his ankle.

In the midst of the heavy gloom and deep silence which surrounded him, he heard still the same dull, trickling sound he had observed before; and now the matter was clear to him. Now, indeed, he comprehended all the horrors of his situation: the cave was filling with water, arising from the fearful and formidable overflowing of the Seine,—the dungeon in which he had been thrown was doubtless beneath the level of the river, and was chosen by his gaolers for that purpose, as offering a slow though certain means of destruction.

The conviction of his danger recalled Rodolph entirely to himself. Quick as lightning he made his way up the damp, slippery stairs; arrived at the top,

he came in contact with a thick door; he tried in vain to open it,—its massy hinges resisted his most vigorous efforts to force them.

At this moment of despair and danger, his first thought was for Murphy. "If he be not on his guard, those monsters will murder him!" cried he. "It will be I who shall have caused his death,—my good, my faithful Murphy!" This cruel thought nerved the arm of Rodolph with fresh vigour, and again he bent his most powerful energy to endeavour to force the ponderous door. Alas! the thickly plated iron with which it was covered mocked his utmost efforts; and sore, weary, and exhausted, he was compelled to relinquish the fruitless task. Again he descended into the cave, in hopes of obtaining something which might serve as a lever to force the hinges or wrench the fastenings. Groping against the slimy walls, he felt himself continually treading on some sort of round elastic bodies, which appeared to slip from under his feet, and to scramble for safety past him. They were rats, driven by the fast-rising water from their retreats. Groping about the place on all fours, with the water half way up his leg, Rodolph felt in all directions for the weapon he so much desired to find; nothing but the damp walls met his touch, however, and, in utter despair, he resumed his position at the top of the steps,—of the thirteen stairs which composed the flight, three were already under water.

Thirteen had ever been Rodolph's unlucky number. There are moments when the strongest minds are under the influence of superstitious ideas, and, at this juncture, Rodolph viewed the fatal amount of stairs as an ill augury. Again the possible fate of Murphy recurred to him, and, as if inspired by a fresh hope, he eagerly felt around the door to discover some slight chink, or opening, by which his cries for help might be heard. In vain; the dampness of the soil had swollen the wood, and joined it hermetically to the wet, slimy earth.

Rodolph next tried the powers of his voice, and shouted with the fullest expansion of his lungs, trusting that his cries for assistance might reach the adjoining cabaret; and then, tired and exhausted, sat down to listen. Nothing was to be heard, no sound disturbed the deep silence which reigned, but the drop, drop, drop, the dull, trickling, monotonous bubbling of the fast-increasing waters.

His last hope extinguished, Rodolph seated himself in gloomy despair, and, leaning his back against the door, bewailed the perilous situation of his faithful friend,—perhaps at that very moment struggling beneath the assassin's knife. Bitterly did he then regret his rash and venturesome projects, however good and generous the motives by which he had been

instigated; and severely did he reproach himself for having taken advantage of the devotion of Murphy, who, rich, honoured, and esteemed by all who knew him, had quitted a beloved wife and child, to assist Rodolph in the bold undertaking he had imposed on himself.

During these sorrowful reflections, the water was still rising rapidly, and five steps only now remained dry. Rodolph now found himself compelled to assume a standing position, though, in so doing, his forehead was brought in close contact with the very top of the vault. He calculated the probable duration of his mortal agony,—of the period which must elapse ere this slow, inch-like death would put a period to his misery; he bethought him of the pistol he carried with him, and, at the risk of injuring himself in the attempt, he determined to fire it off against the door, so as to disturb some of the fastenings by the concussion; but here, again, a disappointment awaited him,—the pistol was nowhere to be found, and he could but conclude it had fallen from his pocket during his struggle with the Schoolmaster. But for his deep concern on Murphy's account, Rodolph would have met his death unmoved,—his conscience acquitted him of all intentional offence; nay, it solaced him with the recollection of good actually performed, and much more meditated. To the decrees of an all-wise and inscrutable Providence he resigned himself, and humbly accepted his present punishment as the just reward for a criminal action as yet unexpiated.

A fresh trial of his fortitude awaited him. The rats, still pursued by the fast-gathering waters, finding no other means of escape, sought refuge from one step to another, ascending as fast as the rising flood rendered their position untenable; unable to scale the perpendicular walls or doors, they availed themselves of the vestments of Rodolph, whose horror and disgust rose to an indescribable degree, as he felt their cold, clammy paws, and wet, hairy bodies, crawling or clinging to him; in his attempts to repulse them, their sharp, cold bite inflicted on him a most acute agony, while his face and hands streamed with blood, from the multitude of wounds received. Again he called for help, shouted aloud, and almost screamed in his pain and wretchedness. Alas! the dull echo of the vault and the gurgling waters alone replied. A few short moments, and he would be bereft even of the power of calling upon God or man to help him; the rapidly rising flood had now reached his very throat, and ere long would have ascended to his lips.

The choked air began, too, to fail in the narrow space now left it, and the first symptoms of asphyxia began to oppress Rodolph; the arteries of his temples beat violently, his head became giddy, and the faint sickness of death seemed to make his chest heave convulsively. Already were the waters

gurgling in his ears; a dizziness of sight and a confusion of ideas had well-nigh deprived him of all powers of sight or sound; the last glimmer of reason was well-nigh shaken from her throne, when hasty steps and the sound of voices on the other side of the door were heard.

Hope recalled his expiring strength, and, making one powerful effort, Rodolph was able to distinguish the following words, after which all consciousness forsook him:

"Did I not tell you so? There, you see there is no one here!"

"Deuce take it! no more there is," replied the voice of the Chourineur, in a tone of vexation and disappointment. And the sounds died away.

Rodolph, utterly exhausted, had no longer power to sustain himself; his limbs sunk from under him, and he slid unresistingly down the stone steps.

All at once the door of the vault was abruptly opened from the other side, and the swelling masses contained in the inner vault, glad to find a further outlet, rushed onwards as though bursting through the gates of a sluice, and the Chourineur, whose opportune return shall be accounted for by and by, seized the two arms of Rodolph, who, half dead, had mechanically clung to the threshold of the door, and bore him from the black and rushing waters which had nigh proved his grave.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SICK-NURSE

Snatched by the Chourineur from a certain death, and removed to the house in the Allée des Veuves which had been reconnoitred by the Chouette, previously to the attempt on it by the Schoolmaster, Rodolph was placed in bed, in a comfortably furnished apartment; a cheerful fire was burning on the hearth. A lamp, placed on a neighbouring table, diffused a strong, clear light; while the bed of Rodolph, shaded by thick curtains of green damask, remained protected from the glare, and in the shadow of its deep recess.

A negro of middle stature, with white hair and eyebrows, wearing an orange and green riband at the buttonhole of his blue coat, sat by the bedside, holding in his right hand a seconds' watch, which he appeared to consult while counting with his left the beating of Rodolph's pulse. The expression of the negro's countenance was at once sad and pensive, and he continued from time to time to gaze on the sleeping man with the most tender solicitude.

The Chourineur, clad in rags and soiled with mud, stood motionless, with folded arms, at the foot of the bed; his red beard was long and matted, in disorder; his thick, bushy hair was tangled with mud and wet, which still dripped from it; while his hard, bronzed features were marked by the most profound pity for the patient: hardly venturing to breathe lest the heaving of his huge chest should disturb the invalid, he awaited with the most intense anxiety the result of the doctor's observations on the sick man's state; then, as though to while away the fearful apprehension of an unfavourable opinion, he continued to deliver his thoughts aloud, after the following manner:

"Who would think, now, to see him lying there so helpless, he could ever have been the man to give me such a precious drubbing as I got from him? I dare say, though, he will soon be up again, well and strong as ever. Don't you think so, M. le Docteur? Faith, I only wish he could drum himself well upon my back; I'd lend it him as long as he liked. But, perhaps, that would shake him too much, and overfatigue him; would it, sir?" addressing the negro, whose only reply was an impatient wave of the hand.

The Chourineur was instantly silent.

"The draught!" said the doctor.

The Chourineur, who had respectfully left his nailed shoes at the door, at these words arose, and walked towards the table indicated by the negro's finger; going on the very top of his toes, drawing up his legs, extending his arms, and swelling out his back and shoulders, in a manner so ludicrous as, under other circumstances, would have been highly diverting. The poor fellow seemed endeavouring to collect his whole weight, so that no portion of it should touch the floor; which, in spite of his energetic efforts to prevent it, groaned beneath his ponderous limbs as they moved towards the desired spot. Unfortunately, between his overanxiety to acquit himself well in his important mission, and his fear of dropping the delicate phial he was bringing so overcarefully, he grasped the slight neck so tightly in his huge hand that it shivered to atoms, and the precious liquid was expended on the carpet.

At the sight of this unfortunate mischance the Chourineur remained in mute astonishment, one of his huge legs in the air, his toes nervously contracted, and looking with a stupefied air alternately from the doctor to the fragments of the bottle, and from that to the morsel his thumb and finger were yet tightly holding.

"Awkward devil!" exclaimed the negro, impatiently.

"Yes, that I am!" responded the Chourineur, as though grateful for the sound of a voice to break the frightful bewilderment of his ideas.

"Ah!" cried the Æsculapius, observing the table attentively, "happily you took the wrong phial,—I wanted the other one."

"What, that little one with the red stuff?" inquired the unlucky sick-nurse, in a low and humble tone.

"Of course I mean that; why, there is no other left."

The Chourineur, turning quickly around upon his heels, after his old military fashion, crushed the fragments of glass which lay on the carpet beneath his feet. More delicate ones might have suffered severely from the circumstance, but the ex-débardeur had a pair of natural sandals, hard as the hoofs of a horse.

"Have a care!" cried the physician. "You will hurt yourself!"

To this caution the Chourineur paid no attention, but seemed wholly absorbed in so discharging his new mission as should effectually destroy all recollection of his late clumsiness. It was really beautiful to behold the

scrupulous delicacy and lightness of touch with which, spreading out his two first fingers, he seized the fragile crystal; avoiding all use of the unlucky thumb whose undue pressure, he rightly conceived, had brought about his previous accident, he kept so widely stretched from his forefinger that a butterfly might have passed between, with outspread wings, without losing one atom of its golden plumage. The black doctor trembled lest all this caution should lead to a second misadventure, but, happily, the phial reached its destination in safety. As the Chourineur approached the bed, he again smashed beneath his tread some of the fallen relics of the former potion.

"The deuce take you, man! Do you want to maim yourself for life?"

"Lame myself?" asked the eager nurse.

"Why, yes; you keep walking upon glass as though you were trying for it."

"Oh, bless you! never mind that; the soles of my feet are hard as iron; must be something sharper than glass could hurt them."

"A teaspoon—" said the doctor.

The Chourineur recommenced his évolutions sylphidiques, and returned with the article required.

After having swallowed a few spoonfuls of the mixture, Rodolph began to stir in his bed, and faintly moved his hands.

"Good! good! he is recovering from his stupor," said the doctor, speaking to himself. "That bleeding has relieved him; he is now out of danger."

"Saved? Bravo! Vive la Charte!" exclaimed the Chourineur, in the full burst of his joy.

"Hold your tongue! and pray be quiet!" said the negro, in a tone of command.

"To be sure I will, M. le Médécin."

"His pulse is becoming regular—very well, indeed—excellent—"

"And that poor friend of M. Rodolph's,—body and bones of me!—when he comes to know that—But, then, luckily—"

"Silence! I say."

"Certainly, M. le Docteur."

"And sit down."

"But, M. le—"

"Sit down, I tell you! You disturb me, twisting and fidgeting about in that manner,—you distract my attention. Come, sit down at once, and keep still."

"But, doctor, don't you perceive I am as dirty as a pile of floating wood just going to be unloaded?—all slime and wet, you see. I should spoil the furniture."

"Then sit down on the ground."

"I should soil the carpet."

"Do what you like, but, for heaven's sake, be quiet!" said the doctor, in a tone of impatience; then, throwing himself into an armchair, he leaned his head upon his clasped hands, and appeared lost in deep reflection.

After a moment of profound meditation, the Chourineur, less from any need he felt for repose than in obedience to the doctor's commands, took a chair with the utmost precaution, turned it upside down with an air of intense self-satisfaction at having at length devised a plan to act in strict conformity with the orders received, and yet avoid all risk of soiling the silken cushion; having laid the back on the ground, he proceeded, after all manner of delicate arrangements, to take his seat on the outer rails; but, unhappily, the Chourineur was entirely ignorant of the laws of the lever and the equilibrium of bodies, the chair overbalanced, and the luckless individual seated thereon, in endeavouring to save himself from falling, by an involuntary movement caught hold of a small stand, on which was a tray containing some tea-things.

At the formidable noise caused by so many falling articles clattering upon the head of the unfortunate cause of all this discord and havoc, the doctor sprung from his seat, while Rodolph, awaking with a start, raised himself on his elbow, looked about him with an anxious and perturbed glance, then, passing his hand over his brows, as though trying to arrange his ideas, he inquired:

"Where is Murphy?"

"Your royal highness need be under no apprehensions on his account," answered the negro, respectfully; "there is every hope of his recovery."

"Recovery! He is, then, wounded?"

"Unhappily, my lord, he is."

"Where is he? Let me see him!" And Rodolph endeavoured to rise, but fell back again, overcome by weakness and the intense pain he felt from his many and severe contusions. "Since I cannot walk," cried he, at length, "let me be instantly carried to Murphy,—this moment!"

"My lord, he sleeps at present; it would be highly dangerous, at this particular juncture, to expose him to the slightest agitation."

"You are deceiving me, and he is dead! He has been murdered! And I—I am the wretched cause of it!" cried Rodolph, in a tone of agony, raising his clasped hands towards heaven.

"My lord knows that his servant is incapable of a falsehood. I assert by my honour, that, although severely wounded, Murphy lives, and that his chance of recovery is all but certain."

"You say that but to prepare me for more disastrous tidings; he lies, doubtless, wounded past all hope; and he, my faithful friend, will die!"

"My lord—"

"Yes, you are seeking to deceive me till all is over. But I will see him,—I will judge for myself; the sight of a friend cannot be hurtful. Let me be instantly removed to his chamber."

"Once more, my lord, I pledge my solemn assurance, that, barring chances not likely to occur, Murphy will soon be convalescent."

"My dear David, may I indeed believe you?"

"You may, indeed, my lord."

"Hear me. You know the high opinion I entertain of your ability and knowledge, and that, from the hour in which you were attached to my household, you have possessed my most unbounded confidence,—never, for one instant, have I doubted your great skill and perfect acquaintance with your profession; but I conjure you, if a consultation be necessary—"

"My lord, that would have been my first thought, had I seen the slightest reason for such a step; but, up to the present moment, it would be both useless and unnecessary. And, besides, I should be somewhat tenacious of introducing strangers into the house until I knew whether your orders of yesterday—"

"But how has all this happened?" said Rodolph, interrupting the black. "Who saved me from drowning in that horrid cellar? I have a confused recollection of having heard the Chourineur's voice there; was I mistaken?"

"Not at all mistaken, my lord. But let the brave fellow, to whom all praise is due, relate the affair in which he was the principal actor himself."

"Where is he? Where is he?"

The doctor looked about for the recently elected sick-nurse, and at length found him, thoroughly silenced and shamed by his late tumble, ensconced behind the curtains of the bed.

"Here he is," said the doctor; "he looks somewhat shamefaced."

"Come forward, my brave fellow!" said Rodolph, extending his hand to his preserver.

The confusion of the poor Chourineur was still further increased from having, when behind his curtain, heard the black doctor address Rodolph continually as "my lord," or "your royal highness."

"Approach, my friend,—my deliverer!" said Rodolph, "and give me your hand."

"I beg pardon, sir,—I mean, my lord,—no, highness,—no—"

"Call me M. Rodolph, as you used to do; I like it better."

"And so do I,—it comes so much easier to one. But be so good as to excuse my hand; I have done so much work lately, that—"

"Your hand, I tell you,—your hand!"

Overcome by this kind and persevering command, the Chourineur timidly extended his black and horny palm, which Rodolph warmly shook.

"Now, then, sit down, and tell me all about it,—how you discovered the cellar. But I think I can guess. The Schoolmaster?"

"We have him in safety," said the black doctor.

"Yes, he and the Chouette, tied together like two rolls of tobacco. A pair of pretty creatures they look, as ever you would wish to see, and, I doubt not, sick enough of each other's company by this time."

"And my poor Murphy! What a selfish wretch must I be to think only of myself! Where is he wounded, David?"

"In the right side, my lord; but, fortunately, towards the lower false rib."

"Oh, I must have a deep and terrible revenge for this! David, I depend upon your assistance."

"My lord knows full well that I am wholly devoted to him, both body and soul," replied the negro, coldly.

"But how, my noble fellow, were you able to arrive here in time?" said Rodolph to the Chourineur.

"Why, if you please, my lor—no, sir—highness—Rodolph—I had better begin by the beginning—"

"Quite right. I am listening,—go on. But mind, you are only to call me M. Rodolph."

"Very well. You know that last night you told me, after you returned from the country, where you had gone with poor Goualeuse, 'Try and find the Schoolmaster in the Cité; tell him you know of a capital "put-up," that you have refused to join it, but that if he will take your place he has only to be to-morrow (that's to-day) at the barrier of Bercy, at the Panier-Fleuri, and there he will see the man who has "made the plant" (qui a nourri le poupard).'"

"Well."

"On leaving you, I pushed on briskly for the Cité. I goes to the ogress's,—no Schoolmaster; then to the Rue Saint Eloi; on to the Rue aux Fêves; then to the Rue de la Vieille Draperie,—couldn't find my man. At last I stumbled upon him and that old devil's kin, Chouette, in the front of Notre Dame, at the shop of a tailor, who is a 'fence' and thief; they were 'sporting the blunt'

which they had prigged from the tall gentleman in black, who wanted to do something to you; they bought themselves some toggery. The Chouette bargained for a red shawl,—an old monster! I told my tale to the Schoolmaster and he snapped at it, and said he would be at the rendezvous accordingly. So far so good. This morning, according to your orders, I ran here to bring you the answer. You said to me, 'My lad, return to-morrow before daybreak; you must pass the day in the house, and in the evening you will see something which will be worth seeing.' You did not let out more than that, but I was 'fly,' and said to myself, 'This is a "dodge" to catch the Schoolmaster to-morrow, by laying a right bait for him. He is a—— scoundrel; he murdered the cattle-dealer, and, as they say, another person besides, in the Rue du Roule. I see all about it—'"

"My mistake was not to have told you all, my good fellow; then this horrible result would not have occurred."

"That was your affair, M. Rodolph; all that concerned me was to serve you; for, truth to say, I don't know how or why, but, as I have told you before, I feel as if I were your bulldog. But that's enough. I said, then, 'M. Rodolph pays me for my time, so my time is his, and I will employ it for him.' Then an idea strikes me: the Schoolmaster is cunning, he may suspect a trap. M. Rodolph will propose to him the job for to-morrow, it is true, but the 'downy cove' is likely enough to come to-day and lurk about, and reconnoitre the ground, and if he is suspicious of M. Rodolph he will bring some other 'cracksman' (robber) with him, and do the trick on his own account. To prevent this, I said to myself, 'I must go and plant myself somewhere where I may get a view of the walls, the garden-gate,—there is no other entrance. If I find a snug corner, as it rains, I will remain there all day, perhaps all night, and to-morrow morning I shall be all right and ready to go to M. Rodolph's.' So I goes to the Allée des Veuves to place myself, and what should I see but a small tavern, not ten paces from your door! I entered and took my seat near the window, in a room on the ground floor. I called for a quart of drink and a quart of nuts, saying I expected some friends,—a humpbacked man and a tall woman. I chose them because it would appear more natural. I was very comfortably seated, and kept my eye on the door. It rained cats and dogs; no one passed; night came on—"

"But," interrupted Rodolph, "why did you not go at once to my house?"

"You told me to come the next day morning, M. Rodolph, and I didn't dare return there sooner; I should have looked like an intruder,—a sneak (brosseur), as the troopers call it. You understand? Well, there I was at the window of the wine-shop, cracking my nuts and drinking my liquor, when,

through the fog, I saw the Chouette approach, accompanied by Bras Rouge's brat, little Tortillard. 'Ah, ah!' said I to myself, 'now the farce begins!' Well, the little hound of a child hid himself in one of the ditches of the Allée, and was evidently on the lookout. As for that——, the Chouette, she takes off her bonnet, puts it into her pocket, and rings the gate-bell. Our poor friend, M. Murphy, opens the door, and the one-eyed mother of mischief tosses up her arms and makes her way into the garden. I could have kicked myself for not being able to make out what the Chouette was up to. At last out she comes, puts on her bonnet, says two words to Tortillard, who returns to his hole, and then 'cuts her stick.' I say to myself, 'Caution! no blunder now! Tortillard has come with the Chouette; then the Schoolmaster and M. Rodolph are at Bras Rouge's. The Chouette has come out to reconnoitre about the house; then, sure as a gun, they'll "try it on" this very night! If they do, M. Rodolph, who believes they will not go to work till to-morrow, is quite over-reached; and if he is over-reached, I ought to go to Bras Rouge's and see for him. True; but then suppose that the Schoolmaster arrives in the meantime,—that's to be thought of. Suppose I go to the house and see M. Murphy,—mind your eye! that urchin Tortillard is near the door; he will hear me ring the bell, see me, and give the word to the Chouette; and if she returns, that will spoil all; and the more particularly as perhaps M. Rodolph has, after all, made his arrangements for this evening.' Confound it! these yes and no bothered my brain tremendously. I was quite bewildered, and saw nothing clear before me. I didn't know what to do for the best, so I said, 'I'll walk out, and perhaps the clear air will brighten my thoughts a bit.' I went out, and the open air cleared my brain; so I took off my blouse and my neck-handkerchief, I went to the ditch where Tortillard lay, and taking the young devil's kin by the cuff of his neck,—how he did wriggle, and twist, and scuffle, and scratch!—I put him into my blouse, tying up one end with the sleeves and the bottom tightly with my cravat. He could breathe very well. Well, then I took the bundle under my arm, and passing a low, damp garden, surrounded by a little wall, I threw the brat Tortillard into the midst of a cabbage-bed. He squeaked like a sucking-pig, but nobody could hear him two steps off. I cut off; it was time. I climbed up one of the high trees in the Allée, just in front of your door, and over the ditch in which Tortillard had been stationed. Ten minutes afterwards I heard footsteps; it was raining still, and the night was very dark. I listened,—it was the Chouette. 'Tortillard! Tortillard!' says she, in a low voice. 'It rains, and the little brat is tired of waiting,' said the Schoolmaster, swearing; 'if I catch him, I'll skin him alive!' 'Fourline, take care!' replied the Chouette. 'Perhaps he has gone to warn us of something that has happened,—maybe, some trap for us. The young fellow would not make the attempt till ten o'clock.' 'That's the very reason,' replies the Schoolmaster; 'it is now only seven o'clock. You saw the

money,—nothing venture, nothing have. Give me the ripping chisel and the jemmy—'"

"What instruments are they?" asked Rodolph.

"They came from Bras Rouge's. Oh, he has a well-furnished house! In a crack the door is opened. 'Stay where you are,' said the Schoolmaster to the Chouette; 'keep a bright lookout, and give me the signal if you hear anything.' 'Put your "pinking-iron" in the buttonhole of your waistcoat, that you may have it handy,' said the old hag. The Schoolmaster entered the garden, and I instantly, coming down from the tree, fell on the Chouette. I silenced her with two blows of my fist,—my new style,—and she fell without a word. I ran into the garden, but, thunder and lightning, M. Rodolph! it was too late—"

"Poor Murphy!"

"He was struggling on the ground with the Schoolmaster at the entrance, and, although wounded, he held his voice and made no cry for help. Excellent man! he is like a good dog, bites, but doesn't bark. Well, I went bang, heads or tails, at it, hitting the Schoolmaster on the shoulder, which was the only place I could at the moment touch. 'Vive la Charte! it's I!' 'The Chourineur!' shouts M. Murphy. 'Ah, villain! where do you come from?' cries out the Schoolmaster, quite off his guard at that. 'What's that to you?' says I, fixing one of his legs between my knees, and grasping his 'fin' with my other hand; it was that in which he held his dagger. 'And M. Rodolph?' asked M. Murphy of me, whilst doing all in his power to aid me—"

"Worthy, kind-hearted creature!" murmured Rodolph, in a tone of deep distress.

"'I know nothing of him,' says I; 'this scoundrel, perhaps, has killed him.' And then I went with redoubled strength at the Schoolmaster, who tried to stick me with his larding-pin; but I lay with my breast on his arm, and so he only had his fist at liberty. 'You are, then, quite alone?' says I to M. Murphy, whilst we still struggled desperately with the Schoolmaster. 'There are people close at hand,' he replied; 'but they did not hear me cry out.' 'Is it far off?' 'They would be here in ten minutes.' 'Let us call out for help; there are passers-by who will come and help us.' 'No, as we have got him we must hold him here. But I am growing weak, I am wounded.' 'Thunder and lightning! then run and get assistance, if you have strength left; I will try and hold him.' M. Murphy then disengaged himself, and I was alone with the Schoolmaster. I don't want to brag, but, by Jove! these were moments when

I was not having a holiday. We were half on the ground, half on the bottom step of the flight. I had my arms round the neck of the villain, my cheek against his cheek; and he was puffing like a bull, I heard his teeth grind. It was dark, it rained pouring; the lamp left in the passage lighted us a little. I had twisted one of my legs around his, but, in spite of that, his loins were so powerful that he moved himself and me on to the bare ground. He tried to bite me, but couldn't; I never felt so strong. Thunder! my heart beat, but it was in the right place. I said, 'I am like a man who is grappling with a mad dog, to prevent him from fastening on some passer-by.' 'Let me go, and I will do you no harm,' said the Schoolmaster, in an exhausted voice. 'What! a coward?' says I to him. 'So, then, your pluck is in your strength? So you wouldn't have stabbed the cattle-dealer at Poissy, and robbed him, if he had only been as strong as me, eh?' 'No,' says he; 'but I will kill you as I did him.' And saying that, he made so violent a heave, and gave so powerful a jerk with his legs at the same time, that he half threw me over; if I had not kept a tight hold of his wrist which held the stiletto, I was done for. At this moment my left hand was seized with the cramp, and I was compelled to loosen my hold; that nearly spoiled all, and I said to myself, 'I am now undermost and he at top,—he'll kill me. Never mind, I had rather be in my place than his; M. Rodolph said that I had heart and honour.' I felt it was all over with me, and at that moment I saw the Chouette standing close by us, with her glaring eye and red shawl. Thunder and lightning! I thought I had the nightmare. 'Finette,' cries the Schoolmaster, 'I have let fall the knife; pick it up, there, there, under him, and strike him home, in the back, between the shoulders; quick! quick!' 'Only wait, only wait till I find it, till I see it, fourline.' And then the cursed Chouette turned and poked about us, like an old bird of mischief as she was. At last she found the dagger and sprung towards it, but as I was flat on my belly I gave her a kick in the stomach, which sent her neck over crop; she got up, and in a desperate rage. I could do no more; I still held on and struggled with the Schoolmaster, but he kept giving me such dreadful blows on my jaw that I was about to let go my hold, when I saw three or four armed men who came down the stairs, and M. Murphy, pale as ashes, and with difficulty supporting himself with the assistance of the doctor here. They seized hold of the Schoolmaster and the Chouette, and soon bound them hand and foot. That was not all, I still wanted M. Rodolph. I sprang at the Chouette; remembering the tooth of the poor dear Goualeuse, I grasped her arm and twisted it, saying, 'Where is M. Rodolph?' She bore it well, and silently. I took a second turn, and then she screeched out, 'At Bras Rouge's, in the vault at the Bleeding Heart!' All right! As I went, I meant to take Tortillard from his cabbage-bed, as it was on my road. I looked for him, but only found my blouse,—he had gnawed his way out with his teeth. I reached the Bleeding Heart, and I laid hold of Bras Rouge. 'Where is the young man who came here this evening with the

Schoolmaster?' 'Don't squeeze so hard, and I'll tell you. They wanted to play him a trick and shut him up in my cellar; we'll go now and let him out.' We went down, but there was no one to be seen. 'He must have gone out whilst my back was turned,' says Bras Rouge; 'you see plain enough he is not here.' I was going away sad enough, when, by the light of the lantern, I saw at the bottom of the cellar another door. I ran towards it and opened the door, and had, as it were, a pail of water thrown at me. I saw your two poor arms in the air. I fished you out and brought you here on my back, as there was nobody at hand to get a coach. That's all my tale, M. Rodolph; and I may say, without bragging, that I am satisfied with myself."

"My man, I owe my life to you; it is a heavy debt, but be assured I will pay it. David, will you go and learn how Murphy is," added Rodolph, "and return again instantly?"

The black went out.

"Where is the Schoolmaster, my good fellow?"

"In another room, with the Chouette. You will send for the police, M. Rodolph?"

"No."

"You surely will not let him go! Ah, M. Rodolph, none of that nonsensical generosity! I say again, he is a mad dog,—let the passengers look out!"

"He will never bite again, be assured."

"Then you are going to shut him up somewhere?"

"No; in half an hour he will leave this house."

"The Schoolmaster?"

"Yes."

"Without gens-d'armes?"

"Yes."

"He will go out from here, and free?"

"Free."

"And quite alone?"

"Quite alone."

"But he will go—"

"Wherever he likes," said Rodolph, interrupting the Chourineur with a meaning smile.

The black returned.

"Well, David, well, and how is Murphy?"

"He sleeps, my lord," said the doctor, despondingly; "his respiration is very difficult."

"Not out of danger?"

"His case is very critical, my lord; yet there is hope."

"Oh, Murphy! vengeance! vengeance!" exclaimed Rodolph, in a tone of concentrated rage. Then he added, "David, a word—"

And he whispered something in the ear of the black. He started back.

"Do you hesitate?" said Rodolph. "Yet I have often suggested this idea to you; the moment is come to put it into practice."

"I do not hesitate, my lord; the suggestion is well worthy the consideration of the most elevated jurists, for this punishment is at the same time terrible and yet fruitful for repentance. In this case it is most applicable. Without enumerating the crimes which have accumulated to send this wretch to the Bagne for his life, he has committed three murders,—the cattle-dealer, Murphy, and yourself; it is in his case justice—"

"He will have before him an unlimited horizon for expiation," added Rodolph. After a moment's silence he resumed: "And five thousand francs will suffice, David?"

"Amply, my lord."

"My good fellow," said Rodolph to the bewildered Chourineur, "I have two words to say to M. David; will you go into that chamber on the other side,

where you will see a large red pocketbook on a bureau; open it and take out five notes of a thousand francs each, and bring them to me."

"And," inquired the Chourineur, involuntarily, "who are those five thousand francs for?"

"For the Schoolmaster. And do you, at the same time, tell them to bring him in here."

CHAPTER XVII

THE PUNISHMENT

The scene we are about to describe took place in a room hung with red, and brilliantly lighted. Rodolph, clothed in a long dressing-gown of black velvet, which increased the pallor of his features, was seated before a large table covered with a green cloth. On this table was the Schoolmaster's pocketbook, the pinchbeck chain of the Chouette (to which was suspended the little Saint Esprit of lapis lazuli), the blood-stained stiletto with which Murphy had been stabbed, the crowbar with which the door had been forced, and the five notes of a thousand francs each, which the Chourineur had fetched out of the next apartment.

The negro doctor was seated at one side of the table, the Chourineur on the other. The Schoolmaster, tightly bound with cords, and unable to move a limb, was placed in a large armchair on casters, in the middle of the salon. The people who had brought in this man had withdrawn, and Rodolph, the doctor, the Chourineur, and the assassin were left alone. Rodolph was no longer out of temper, but calm, sad, and collected; he was about to discharge a solemn, self-imposed, and important duty. The doctor was lost in meditation. The Chourineur felt an indescribable fear; he could not take his eyes off Rodolph. The Schoolmaster's countenance was ghastly; he was in an agony of fear. The most profound silence reigned within; nothing was heard but the splash, splash of the rain without, as it fell from the roof on to the pavement. Rodolph addressed the Schoolmaster:

"Anselm Duresnel, you have escaped from the Bagne at Rochefort, where you were condemned for life for forgery, robbery, and murder!"

"It's false!" said the Schoolmaster, in a hollow voice, and looking about him with his restless and glaring glance.

"You are Anselm Duresnel, and you murdered and robbed a cattle-dealer on the road to Poissy—"

"It's a lie!"

"You shall confess it presently."

The scoundrel looked at Rodolph with an air of astonishment.

"This very night you came here to rob, and you have stabbed the master of this house—"

"It was you who suggested this robbery!" assuming an air of assurance. "I was attacked, and I defended myself."

"The man you stabbed did not attack you,—he was unarmed. True, I did suggest this robbery to you,—I'll tell you why. Last night only, after having robbed a man and woman in the Cité, you offered to kill me for a thousand francs—"

"I heard him," said the Chourineur.

The Schoolmaster darted at him a glance of deadliest hate.

Rodolph continued:

"You see there was no occasion to tempt you to do mischief."

"You are not my judge, and I will not answer you another question."

"Rodolph Addressed the Schoolmaster"

Etching by Mercier, after the drawing by Frank T. Merrill

"I'll tell you why I proposed this robbery to you. I knew you were a runaway convict,—you know the parents of the unfortunate girl, all whose misfortunes have been caused by your miserable accomplice, the Chouette. I wished to draw you here by the temptation of a robbery, because this was the only temptation that could avail with you. Once in my power, I leave you the choice of being handed over to the hands of justice, which will make you pay with your head the assassination of the cattle-dealer—"

"It is false! I did not commit that crime."

"Or of being conducted out of France, under my direction, to a place of perpetual confinement, where your lot will be less painful than at the Bagne; but I will only allow you this relaxation of punishment on condition that you give me the information which I desire to acquire. Condemned for life, you have broken away from your confinement, and by seizing upon you and placing you hereafter beyond the possibility of doing injury, I serve society; and from your confession I may, perhaps, find the means of restoring to her family a poor creature much more unfortunate than guilty. This was my first intention,—it was not legal; but your escape and your fresh crimes forbid any such course on my part now, and place you beyond all law. Yesterday, by a remarkable revelation, I discovered that you are Anselm Duresnel—"

"It's false! I am not called Duresnel."

Rodolph took from the table the chain of the Chouette, and pointing to the little Saint Esprit of lapis lazuli said, in a threatening voice:

"Sacrilege! You have prostituted to an infamous wretch this holy relic,—thrice holy, for your infant boy had this pious gift from his mother and grandmother!"

The Schoolmaster, dumfounded at this discovery, lowered his head and made no response.

"You carried off your child from his mother fifteen years ago, and you alone possess the secret of his existence. I had in this an additional motive for laying hands on you when I had detected who you were. I seek no revenge for what you have done to me personally, but to-night you have again shed blood without provocation. The man you have assassinated came to you in full confidence, not suspecting your sanguinary purpose. He asked you what you wanted: 'Your money or your life!' and you stabbed him with your poniard."

"So M. Murphy said when I first came to his aid," said the doctor.

"It's false! He lied!"

"Murphy never lies," said Rodolph, calmly. "Your crimes demand a striking reparation. You came into this garden forcibly; you stabbed a man that you might rob him; you have committed another murder; you ought to die on this spot; but pity, respect for your wife and son, they shall save you from the shame of a scaffold. It will be said that you were killed in a brawl with weapons in your hand. Prepare, the means for your punishment are at hand."

Rodolph's countenance was implacable. The Schoolmaster had remarked in the next room two men, armed with carbines. His name was known; he thought they were going to make away with him and bury in the shade his later crimes, and thus spare his family the new opprobrium. Like his fellows, this wretch was as cowardly as he was ferocious. Thinking his hour was come, he trembled, and cried "Mercy!"

"No mercy for you," said Rodolph. "If your brains are not blown out here, the scaffold awaits you—"

"I prefer the scaffold,—I shall live, at least, two or three months longer. Why, why should I be punished at once? Mercy! mercy!"

"But your wife—your son—they bear your name—"

"My name is dishonoured already. If only for eight days, let me live! in mercy do!"

"Not even that contempt of life which is sometimes displayed by the greatest criminals!" said Rodolph, with disgust.

"Besides, the law forbids any one to take justice into their own hands," said the Schoolmaster, with assurance.

"The law! the law!" exclaimed Rodolph. "Do you dare to invoke the law? you, who have always lived in open revolt and constant enmity against society?"

The ruffian bowed his head and made no answer; then added, in a more humble tone:

"At least, for pity's sake, spare my life!"

"Will you tell me where your son is?"

"Yes, yes, I will tell you all I know."

"Will you tell me who are the parents of the young girl whose childhood the Chouette made one scene of torture?"

"In my pocketbook there are papers which will put you on the track of the persons who gave her to the Chouette."

"Where is your son?"

"Will you let me live?"

"First make a full confession."

"And then, when I have told you all—" said the Schoolmaster with hesitation.

"You have killed him!"

"No, no! I have confided him to one of my accomplices, who, when I was apprehended, effected his escape."

"What did he do with him?"

"He brought him up, and gave him an education which fitted him to enter into a banking-house at Nantes, so that we might get information, manage an introduction to the banker, and so facilitate our plans. Although at Rochefort, and preparing for my escape, I arranged this plan and corresponded in cipher with my friend—"

"Oh, mon Dieu! his child! his son! This man appals me!" cried Rodolph, with horror, and hiding his head between his hands.

"But it was only of forgery that we thought," exclaimed the scoundrel; "and when my son was informed what was expected of him, he was indignant, told all to his employer, and quitted Nantes. You will find in my pocketbook notes of all the steps taken to discover his traces. The last place we ascertained he had lived in was the Rue du Temple, where he was known under the name of François Germain; the exact address is also in my pocketbook. You see I do not wish to conceal anything,—I have told you everything I know. Now keep your promise. I only ask you to have me taken into custody for this night's robbery."

"And the cattle-merchant at Poissy?"

"That affair can never be brought to light,—there are no proofs. I own it to you, in proof of the sincerity with which I am speaking, but before any other person I should deny all knowledge of the business."

"You confess it, then, do you?"

"I was destitute, without the smallest means of living,—the Chouette instigated me to do it; but now I sincerely repent ever having listened to her. I do, indeed. Ah! would you but generously save me from the hands of justice, I would promise you most solemnly to forsake all such evil practices for the future."

"Be satisfied, your life shall be spared; neither will I deliver you into the hands of the law."

"Do you, then, pardon me?" exclaimed the Schoolmaster, as though doubting what he heard. "Can it be? Can you be so generous as to forgive?"

"I both judge you and award your sentence," cried Rodolph, in a solemn tone. "I will not surrender you to the power of the laws, because they would condemn you to the galleys or the scaffold; and that must not be. No, for

many reasons. The galleys would but open a fresh field for the development of your brutal strength and villainy, which would soon be exercised in endeavouring to obtain domination over the guilty or unfortunate beings you would be associated with, to render yourself a fresh object of horror or of dread; for even crime has its ambition, and yours has long consisted in a preëminence in vicious deeds and monstrous vices, while your iron frame would alike defy the labours of the oar or the chastisement of those set over you. And the strongest chains may be broken, the thickest wall pierced through,—steep ramparts have been scaled before now,—and you might one day burst your yoke and be again let loose upon society, like an infuriated beast, marking your passage with murder and destruction; for none would be safe from your Herculean strength, or from the sharpness of your knife; therefore such consequences must be avoided. But since the galleys might fail to stop your infamous career, how is society to be preserved from your brutal violence? The scaffold comes next in consideration—"

"It is my life, then, you seek!" cried the ruffian. "My life! Oh, spare it!"

"Peace, coward! Hope not that I mean so speedy a termination to your just punishment. No; your eager craving after a wretched existence would prevent you from suffering the agony of anticipated death, and, far from dwelling upon the scaffold and the block, your guilty soul would be filled with schemes of escape and hopes of pardon; neither would you believe you were truly doomed to die till in the very grasp of the executioner; and even in that terrible moment it is probable that, brutalised by terror, you would be a mere mass of human flesh, offered up by justice as an expiatory offering to the manes of your victims. That mode of settling your long and heavy accounts will not half pay the debt. No; poor, wretched, trembling craven! we must devise a more terrific method of atonement for you. At the scaffold, I repeat, you would cling to hope while one breath remained within you; wretch that you are, you would dare to hope! you, who have denied all hope and mercy to so many unhappy beings! No, no! unless you repent, and that with all your heart, for the misdeeds of your infamous life, I would (in this world, at least) shut out from you the faintest glimmer of hope—"

"What man is this? What have I ever done to injure him?—whence comes he thus to torture me?—where am I?" asked the Schoolmaster, in almost incoherent tones, and nearly frantic with terror.

Rodolph continued:

"If even you could meet death with a man's courage, I would not have you ascend the scaffold; for you it would be merely the arena in which, like

many others, you would make a disgusting display of hardened ferocity; or, dying as you have lived, exhale your last sigh with an impious scoff or profane blasphemy. That must not be permitted. It is a bad example to set before a gazing crowd the spectacle of a condemned being making sport of the instrument of death, swaggering before the executioner, and yielding with an obscene jest the divine spark infused into man by the breath of a creating God. To punish the body is easily done; to save the soul is the great thing to be laboured for and desired. 'All sin may be forgiven,' said our blessed Saviour, but from the tribunal to the scaffold the passage is too short,—time and opportunity are required to repent and make atonement; this leisure you shall have. May God grant that you turn it to the right purpose!"

The Schoolmaster remained utterly bewildered; for the first time in his life a vague and confused dread of something more horrible far than death itself crossed his guilty mind,—he trembled before the suggestions of his own imagination.

Rodolph went on:

"Anselm Duresnel, I will not sentence you to the galleys, neither shall you die—"

"Then do you intend sending me to hell? or what are you going to do with me?"

"Listen!" said Rodolph, rising from his seat with an air of menacing authority. "You have wickedly abused the great bodily strength bestowed upon you,—I will paralyse that strength; the strongest have trembled before you,—I will make you henceforward shrink in the presence of the weakest of beings. Assassin! murderer! you have plunged God's creatures into eternal night; your darkness shall commence even in this life. Now—this very hour—your punishment shall be proportioned to your crimes. But," added Rodolph, with an accent of mournful pity, "the terrible judgment I am about to pronounce will, at least, leave the future open to your efforts for pardon and for peace. I should be guilty as you are were I, in punishing you, to seek only for vengeance, just as is my right to demand it; far from being unrelenting as death, your sentence shall bring forth good fruits for hereafter; far from destroying your soul, it shall help you to seek its salvation. If, to prevent you from further violating the commandments of your Maker, I for ever deprive you of the beauties of this outer world, if I plunge you into impenetrable darkness, with no other companion than the remembrance of your crimes, it is that you may incessantly contemplate

their enormity. Yes, separated for ever from this external world, your thoughts must needs revert to yourself, and your vision dwell internally upon the bygone scenes of your ill-spent life; and I am not without hope that such a mental and constantly presented picture will send the blush of shame even upon your hardened features, that your soul, deadened as it now is to every good and holy impulse, will become softened and tender by repentance. Your language, too, will be changed, and good and prayerful words take place of those daring and blasphemous expressions which now disgrace your lips. You are brutal and overbearing, because you are strong; you will become mild and gentle when you are deprived of that strength. Now your heart scoffs at the very mention of repentance, but the day will come when, bowed to the earth with deep contrition, you will bewail your victims in dust and ashes. You have degraded the intelligence placed within you by a supreme power,—you have reduced it to the brutal instincts of rapine and murder; from a man formed after the image of his Creator, you have made yourself a beast of prey: one day, as I trust and believe, that intelligence will be purified by remorse and rendered again guiltless through divine expiation. You, more inhuman than the beast which perisheth, have trampled on the tender feelings by which even animals are actuated,—you have been the destroyer of your partner and your offspring. After a long life, entirely devoted to the expiation of your crimes, you may venture to implore of the Almighty the great though unmerited happiness of obtaining the pardon of your wife and son, and dying in their presence."

As Rodolph uttered these last words his voice trembled with emotion, and he was obliged to conclude.

The Schoolmaster's terrors had, during this long discourse, entirely yielded to an opinion that he was only to be subjected to a long lecture on morality, and so forth, and then discharged upon his own promise of amendment; for the many mysterious words uttered by Rodolph he looked upon as mere vague expressions intended to alarm him,—nothing more. Still further reassured by the mild tone in which Rodolph had addressed him, the ruffian assumed his usually insolent air and manner as he said, bursting into a loud and vulgar laugh:

"Well done, upon my word! A very good sermon, and very well spoken! Only we must recollect where we leave off in our moral catechism, that we may begin all right next lesson day. Come, let us have something lively now. What do you say, master; will you guess a charade or two, just to enliven us a bit?"

Instead of replying, Rodolph addressed the black doctor:

"Proceed, David! And if I do wrong, may the Almighty punish me alone!"

The negro rang; two men entered. David pointed to a side door, which opened into an adjoining closet.

The chair in which the Schoolmaster remained bound, so as to be incapable of the smallest movement, was then rolled into the anteroom.

"Are you going to murder me, then? Mercy! mercy!" shrieked the wretched man, as he was being removed.

"Gag him!" cried the negro, entering the closet.

Rodolph and the Chourineur were left alone.

"M. Rodolph," said the Chourineur, pale and trembling, "M. Rodolph, what is going to be done? I never felt so frightened. Pray speak; I must be dreaming, surely. What have they done to the Schoolmaster? He does not cry out,—all is so silent; it makes me more fearful still!"

At this moment David issued from the cabinet; his complexion had that livid hue peculiar to the negro countenance, while his lips were ashy pale.

The men who had conveyed the Schoolmaster into the closet now replaced him, still bound in his chair, on the spot he had previously occupied in Rodolph's presence.

"Unbind him, and remove the gag!" exclaimed David.

There was a moment of fearful silence while the two attendants relieved the Schoolmaster of his gag and untied the cords which bound him to the chair. As the last ligature gave way, he sprang up, his hideous countenance expressing rage, horror, and alarm. He advanced one step with extended hands, then, falling back into the chair, he uttered a cry of unspeakable agony, and, raising his hands towards the ceiling, exclaimed, with maddened fury:

"Blind, by heaven!"

"Give him this pocketbook, David," said Rodolph.

The negro placed a small pocketbook in the trembling hands of the Schoolmaster.

"You will find in that pocketbook wherewithal to provide yourself with a home and the means of living for the remainder of your days. Go, seek out some safe and solitary dwelling, where, by humble repentance, you may seek to propitiate an offended God! You are free! Go and repent; the Lord is merciful, and his ears are ever open to such as truly repent."

"Blind! quite blind!" repeated the Schoolmaster, mechanically grasping the pocketbook.

"Open the doors,—let him depart!" said Rodolph.

"Blind! blind!" repeated the bewildered and discomfited ruffian.

"You are free; you have the means of providing for yourself; begone!"

"And whither am I to go?" exclaimed he, with the most unbounded rage. "You have taken away my sight; how, then, do I know in which direction to go? Call you not this a crime thus to abuse your power over one unhappily in your hands? Thus to—"

"To abuse my power!" repeated Rodolph, in a solemn voice. "And how have you employed the power granted to you? How used your superior strength?"

"O Death! how gladly would I now accept you!" cried the wretched man. "To be henceforward at every one's mercy,—to fear the weakest, the smallest object!—a child might now master me! Gracious God! what will become of me?"

"You have plenty of money."

"It will be taken from me!" cried the ruffian.

"Mark those words,—'It will be taken from me!' See how they fill you with fear and dread! You have plundered so many, unmindful of their helpless, destitute condition,—begone!"

"For the love of God," cried the Schoolmaster, in a suppliant tone, "let some person lead me forth! What will become of me in the streets? Oh, in mercy kill me! take my miserable life! but do not turn me out thus wretched, thus helpless! Kill, for pity's sake, and save me from being crushed beneath the first vehicle I encounter!"

"No! Live and repent."

"Repent!" shouted the Schoolmaster, in a fearful voice. "Never! I will live for vengeance,—for deep and fearful vengeance!" And again he threw himself from the chair, holding his clenched fists in a menacing attitude towards the ceiling, as though calling upon Heaven to witness the fixedness of his resolve. In an instant his step faltered; he again hesitated, as though fearful of a thousand dangers.

"Alas! alas! I cannot proceed,—I dare not move! And I, lately so strong and so dreaded by all,—look at me now! Yet no one pities me,—no one cares for me,—no hand is stretched out to help the wretched blind upon his lonely way!"

It is impossible to express the stupefaction and alarm expressed by the countenance of the Chourineur during this terrible scene. His rough features exhibited the deepest compassion for his fallen foe, and approaching Rodolph, he said, in a low tone:

"M. Rodolph, he was an accomplished villain, and has only got what he richly deserves; he wanted to murder me a little while ago, too. But he is now blind,—he does not even know how to find his way out of the house, and he may be crushed to death in the streets; may I lead him to some safe place, where, at least, he may remain quiet for a time?"

"Nobly said!" replied Rodolph, kindly pressing the hand of the Chourineur. "Go, my worthy fellow! Go with him, by all means!"

The Chourineur approached the Schoolmaster and laid his hand on his shoulder; the miserable villain started.

"Who touches me?" asked he, in a husky voice.

"It is I."

"I? Who? Who are you,—friend or foe?"

"The Chourineur."

"And you have come to avenge yourself now you find I am incapable of protecting myself, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort. Here, take my arm; you cannot find the way out by yourself; let me lead you—there—"

"You, Chourineur? You!"

"Yes, for all you doubt it; but you vex me by not seeming to like my help. Come, hold tight by me; I will see you all right before I leave you."

"Are you quite sure you do not mean me some harm? that you are only laying a trap to ensnare me?"

"I am not such a scoundrel as to take advantage of your misfortune. But let us begone. Come on, old fellow; it will be daylight directly."

"Day! which I shall never more behold! Day and night to me are henceforward all the same!" exclaimed the Schoolmaster, in such piteous tones that Rodolph, unable longer to endure this scene, abruptly retired, followed by David, who first dismissed his two assistants.

The Chourineur and the Schoolmaster remained alone. After a lengthened silence the latter spoke first, by inquiring whether it were really true that the pocketbook presented to him contained money.

"Yes, I can positively speak to its containing five thousand francs," replied the Chourineur, "since I put them in it with my own hand. With that sum you could easily place yourself to board with some quiet, good sort of people, who would look to you,—in some retired spot in the country, where you might pass your days happily. Or would you like me to take you to the ogress's?"

"She! she would not leave me a rap."

"Well, then, will you go to Bras Rouge?"

"No, no! He would poison me first and rob me afterwards."

"Well, then, where shall I take you?"

"I know not. Happily for both, you are no thief, Chourineur. Here, take my pocketbook, and conceal it carefully in my waistcoat, that La Chouette may not see it; she would plunder me of every sou."

"Oh, bless you! the Chouette is quite safe just now; she lies in the Hôpital Beaujon. While I was struggling with you both to-night I happened to dislocate her leg, so she's obliged to lie up for the present."

"But what, in heaven's name, shall I do with this black curtain continually before my eyes? In vain I try to push it away; it is still there, fixed, immovable; and on its surface I see the pale, ghastly features of those—"

He shuddered, and said in a low, hoarse voice, "Chourineur, did I quite do for that man last night?"

"No."

"So much the better," observed the robber. And then, after some minutes' silence, he exclaimed, under a fresh impulse of ungovernable fury, "And it is you I have to thank for all this! Rascal! scoundrel! I hate you! But for you, I should have 'stiffened' my man and walked off with his money. My very blindness I owe to you; my curses upon you for your meddling interference! But through you I should have had my blessed eyes to see my own way with. How do I know what devil's trick you are planning at this moment?"

"Try to forget all that is past,—it can't be helped now; and do not put yourself in such a terrible way,—it is really very bad for you. Come, come along—now, no nonsense—will you? yes or no?—because I am regularly done up, and must get a short snooze somewhere. I can tell you I have had a bellyful of such doings, and to-morrow I shall get back to my timber-pile, and earn an honest dinner before I eat it. I am only waiting to take you wherever you decide upon going, and then on goes my nightcap and I goes to sleep."

"But how can I tell you where to take me, when I do not know myself? My lodging—No, no, that will not do; I should be obliged to tell—"

"Well, then, hark ye. Will you, for a day or two, make shift with my crib? I may meet with some decent sort of people, who, not knowing who you really are, would receive you as a boarder; and we might say you were a confirmed invalid, and required great care and perfect retirement. Now I think of it, there is a person of my acquaintance, living at Port St. Nicolas, has a mother, a very worthy woman, but in humble circumstances, residing at St. Mandé: very likely she would be glad to take charge of you. What do you say,—will you come or not?"

"One may trust you, Chourineur. I am not at all fearful of going, money and all, to your place; happily you have kept yourself honest, amidst all the evil example others have set you."

"Ay, and even bore the taunts and jests you used to heap upon me, because I would not turn prig like yourself."

"Alas! who could foresee?"

"Now, you see, if I had listened to you, instead of trying to be of real service to you, I should clean you out of all your cash."

"True, true. But you are a downright good fellow, and have neither malice nor hatred in your heart," said the unhappy Schoolmaster, in a tone of deep dejection and humility. "You are a vast deal better to me than, I fear, I should have been to you under the same circumstances."

"I believe you, too. Why, M. Rodolph himself told me I had both heart and honour."

"But who the devil is this M. Rodolph?" exclaimed the Schoolmaster, breaking out fresh at the mention of his name. "He is not a man; he is a monster,—a fiend,—a—"

"Hold, hold!" cried the Chourineur. "Now you are going to have another fit, which is bad for you and very disagreeable to me, because it makes you abuse my friends. Come, are you ready? Shall we set forth on our journey?"

"We are going to your lodging, are we not, Chourineur?"

"Yes, yes, if you are agreeable."

"And you swear to me that you bear me no ill-will for the events of the last twelve hours?"

"Swear it? Of course I swear it. Why, I have no ill-will against you nor anybody."

"And you are certain that he (the man, I mean) is not dead?"

"I am as sure of it as that I am living myself."

"That will at least give me one crime the less to answer for. If they only knew—And that little old man of the Rue du Roule—and that woman of the Canal St. Martin—But it is useless thinking of all those things now; I have enough to occupy my thoughts without trying to recall past misfortunes. Blind! blind!" repeated the miserable wretch, as, leaning on the arm of the Chourineur, he slowly took his departure from the house in the Allée des Veuves.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ISLE-ADAM

A month has elapsed since the occurrence of the events we have just narrated. We now conduct the reader into the little town of the Isle-Adam, situated in a delightful locality on the banks of the Oise, and at the foot of a forest.

The least things become great events in the country; and so the idlers of Isle-Adam, who were on the morning before us walking in the square before the church, were very anxiously bestirring themselves to learn when the individual would arrive who had recently become the purchaser of the most eligible premises for a butcher in that town, and which were exactly opposite to the church.

One of those idlers, more inquisitive than his companions, went and asked the butcher-boy, who, with a merry face and active hands, was very busy in completing the arrangements of the shop. This lad replied that he did not know who was the new proprietor, for he had bought the property through an agent. At this moment two persons, who had come from Paris in a cabriolet, alighted at the door of the shop.

The one was Murphy, quite cured of his wound, and the other the Chourineur. At the risk of repeating a vulgar saying, we will assert that the impression produced by dress is so powerful, that the guest of the "cribs" of the Cité was hardly to be recognised in his present attire. His countenance had undergone the same change; he had put off, with his rags, his savage, coarse, and vulgar air; and to see him walk with both his hands in the pockets of his long and warm coat of dark broadcloth, he might have been taken for one of the most inoffensive citizens in the world.

"'Faith, my fine fellow, the way was long and the cold excessive; were they not?"

"Why, I really did not perceive it, M. Murphy; I am too happy, and joy keeps one warm. Besides, when I say happy, why—"

"What?"

"Yesterday you came to seek for me at the Port St. Nicolas, where I was unloading as hard as I could to keep myself warm. I had not seen you since the night when the white-haired negro had put out the Schoolmaster's eyes. By Jove! it quite shook me, that affair did. And M. Rodolph, what a

countenance!—he who looked so mild and gentle! I was quite frightened at that moment; I was, indeed—"

"Well, what then?"

"You said to me, 'Good day, Chourineur.' 'Good day, M. Murphy,' says I. 'What, you are up again, I see! So much the better,—so much the better. And M. Rodolph?' 'He was obliged to leave Paris some days after the affair of the Allée des Veuves, and he forgot you, my man.' 'Well, M. Murphy, I can only say that if M. Rodolph has forgotten me, why—I shall be very sorry for it, that's all.' 'I meant to say, my good fellow, that he had forgotten to recompense your services, but that he should always remember them.' So, M. Murphy, those words cheered me up again directly.Tonnerre! I—I shall never forget him. He told me I had heart and honour,—that's enough."

"Unfortunately, my lad, monseigneur left without giving any orders about you. I have nothing but what monseigneur gives me, and I am unable to repay as I could wish all that I owe you personally."

"Come, come, M. Murphy, you are jesting with me."

"But why the devil did you not come back again to the Allée des Veuves after that fatal night? Then monseigneur would not have left without thinking of you."

"Why, M. Rodolph did not tell me to do so, and I thought that perhaps he had no further occasion for me."

"But you might have supposed that he would, at least, desire to express his gratitude to you."

"Did you not tell me that M. Rodolph has not forgotten me, M. Murphy?"

"Well, well, don't let us say another word about it; only I have had a great deal of trouble to find you out. You do not now go to the ogress's?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Oh, from some foolish notions I have had."

"Very well. But to return to what you were telling me—"

"To what, M. Murphy?"

"You told me, I am glad I have found you, and still happy, perhaps—"

"Oh, yes, M. Murphy! Why, you see, when you came to where I was at work at the timber-yard, you said, 'My lad, I am not rich, but I can procure you a situation where your work will be easier than on the Quai, and where you will gain four francs a day.' Four francs a day! Vive la Charte! I could not believe it; 'twas the pay of an adjutant sub-officer! I replied, 'That's the very thing for me, M. Murphy!' but you said then that I must not look so like a beggar, as that would frighten the employer to whom you would take me. I answered, 'I have not the means of dressing otherwise.' You said to me, 'Come to the Temple.' I followed you. I chose the most spicy attire that Mother Hubart had,—you advanced me the money to pay her,—and in a quarter of an hour I was as smart as a landlord or a dentist. You appointed me to meet you this morning at the Porte St. Denis, at daybreak; I found you there in a cab, and here we are."

"Well, do you find anything to regret in all this?"

"Why, I'll tell you, M. Murphy. You see, to be dressed in this way spoils a fellow; and so, you see, when I put on again my old smock-frock and trousers, I sha'n't like it. And then, to gain four francs a day,—I, who never earned but two,—and that all at once! why, I seem to have made too great a start all of a sudden, and that it cannot last. I would rather sleep all my life on the wretched straw bed in my cock-loft, than sleep five or six nights only in a good bed. That's my view of the thing."

"And you are by no means peculiar in your view; but the best thing is to sleep always in a good bed."

"And no mistake; it is better to have a bellyful of victuals every day than to starve with hunger. Ah! here is a butchery here," said the Chourineur, as he listened to the blows of the chopper which the boy was using, and observed the quarters of beef through the curtains.

"Yes, my lad; it belongs to a friend of mine. Would you like to see it whilst the horse just recovers his wind?"

"I really should, for it reminds me of my boyish days, if it was only when I had Montfauçon for a slaughter-house and broken-down horses for cattle. It is droll, but if I had the means, a butcher's is the trade in which I should set up, for I like it. To go on a good nag to buy cattle at fairs,—to return home to one's own fireside, to warm yourself if cold, or dry yourself if wet,—to find

your housekeeper, or a good, jolly, plump wife, cheerful and pleasant, with a parcel of children to feel in your pockets to see if you have brought them home anything! And then, in the morning, in the slaughter-house, to seize an ox by the horns, particularly when he's fierce,—nom de nom! he must be fierce!—then to put on the ring, to cleave him down, cut him up, dress him,—Tonnerre! that would have been my ambition, as it was the Goualeuse's to suck barley-sugar when she was a little 'un. By the way, that poor girl, M. Murphy,—not seeing her any more at the ogress's, I supposed that M. Rodolph had taken her away from there. That's a good action, M. Murphy. Poor child! she never liked to do wrong,—she was so young! And then the habit! Ah, M. Rodolph has behaved quite right!"

"I am of your opinion. But will you come into the shop until our horse has rested awhile?"

The Chourineur and Murphy entered the shop, and then went to see the yard, where three splendid oxen and a score of sheep were fastened up; they then visited the stable, the chaise-house, the slaughter-house, the lofts, and the out-buildings of the house, which were all in excellent order, and kept with a cleanliness and care which bespoke regularity and easy circumstances.

When they had seen all but the up-stairs, Murphy said:

"You must own that my friend is a lucky fellow. This house and property are his, without counting a thousand crowns in hand to carry on his business with; and he is, besides, only thirty-eight, strong as a bull, with an iron constitution, and very fond of his business. The industrious and civil journeyman that you saw in the shop supplies his place, with much capability, when he goes to the fairs to purchase cattle. I say again, is he not a lucky fellow?"

"He is, indeed, M. Murphy. But, you see, there are lucky and unlucky people; and when I think that I am going to gain four francs a day, and know how many there are who only earn the half, or even less—"

"Will you come up and see the rest of the house?"

"With all my heart, M. Murphy."

"The person who is about to employ you is up-stairs."

"The person who is going to employ me?"

"Yes."

"Why, then, didn't you tell me that before?"

"I'll tell you—"

"One moment," said the Chourineur, with a downcast and embarrassed air, taking Murphy by the arm; "listen whilst I say a word to you, which perhaps M. Rodolph did not tell you, but which I ought not to conceal from the master who employs me, because, if he is offended by it—why then, you see—why, afterwards—"

"What do you mean to say?"

"I mean to say—"

"Well, what?"

"That I am a convict, who has served his time,—that I have been at the Bagne," said Chourineur, in a low voice.

"Indeed!" replied Murphy.

"But I never did wrong to any one," exclaimed the Chourineur; "and I would sooner die of hunger than rob; but I have done worse than rob," he added, bending his head down; "I have killed my fellow creature in a passion. But that is not all," he continued, after a moment's pause. "I will tell everything to my employer; I would rather be refused at first than detected afterwards. You know him, and if you think he would refuse me, why, spare me the refusal, and I will go as I came."

"Come along with me," said Murphy.

The Chourineur followed Murphy up the staircase; a door opened, and they were both in the presence of Rodolph.

"My good Murphy," said he, "leave us together awhile."

CHAPTER XIX

RECOMPENSE

"Vive la Charte!" cried the Chourineur. "How precious glad I am to see you again, M. Rodolph—or, rather, my lord!"

"Good day, my excellent friend. I am equally glad to see you."

"Oh, what a joker M. Murphy is! He told me you had gone away. But stay, my lord—"

"Call me M. Rodolph; I like that best."

"Well, then, M. Rodolph, I have to ask your pardon for not having been to see you after the night with the Schoolmaster. I see now that I was guilty of a great rudeness; but I do not suppose that you had any desire to see me?"

"I forgive you," said Rodolph, smiling; and then added, "Murphy has shown you all over the house?"

"Yes, M. Rodolph; and a fine house and fine shop it is,—all so neat and so comfortable! Talking of comfortable, I am the man that will be so, M. Rodolph! M. Murphy is going to put me in the way of earning four francs a day,—yes, four francs a day!"

"I have something better than that to propose to you, my good fellow."

"Better! It's unpolite to contradict you, but I think that would be difficult. Four francs a day!"

"I tell you I have something better: for this house, all that it contains, the shop, and a thousand crowns which are in this pocketbook,—all are yours."

The Chourineur smiled with a stupid air, flattened his long-napped hat between his knees, and squeezed it convulsively, evidently not understanding what Rodolph said to him, although his language was plain enough.

Rodolph, with much kindness, said to him:

"I can imagine your surprise; but I again repeat, this house and this money are yours,—they are your property."

The Chourineur became purple, passed his horny hand over his brow, which was bathed with perspiration, and stammered out, in a faltering voice:

"What!—eh!—that is—indeed—my property!"

"Yes, your property; for I bestow it all upon you. Do you understand? I give it to you."

The Chourineur rocked backwards and forwards on his chair, scratched his head, coughed, looked down on the ground, and made no reply. He felt that the thread of his ideas had escaped him. He heard quite well what Rodolph said to him, and that was the very reason he could not credit what he heard. Between the depth of misery, the degradation in which he had always existed, and the position in which Rodolph now placed him, there was an abyss so wide that the service he had rendered to Rodolph, important as it was, could not fill it up.

"Does what I give you, then, seem beyond your hopes?" inquired Rodolph.

"My lord," said the Chourineur, starting up suddenly, "you offer me this house and a great deal of money,—to tempt me; but I cannot take them; I never robbed in my life. It is, perhaps, to kill; but I have too often dreamed of the sergeant," added he, in a hoarse tone.

"Oh, the unfortunate!" exclaimed Rodolph, with bitterness. "The compassion evinced for them is so rare, that they can only explain liberality as a temptation to crime!"

Then addressing the Chourineur, in a voice full of gentleness:

"You judge me wrong,—you mistake: I shall require from you nothing but what is honourable. What I give you, I give because you have deserved it."

"I," said the Chourineur, whose embarrassments recommenced, "I deserve it! How?"

"I will tell you. Abandoned from your infancy, without any knowledge of right or wrong, left to your natural instinct, shut up for fifteen years in the Bagne with the most desperate villains, assailed by want and wretchedness, compelled by your own disgrace, and the opinion of honest men, to continue to haunt the low dens infested by the vilest malefactors, you have not only remained honest, but remorse for your crime has outlived the expiation which human justice had inflicted upon you."

This simple and noble language was a new source of astonishment for the Chourineur; he contemplated Rodolph with respect, mingled with fear and gratitude, but was still unable to convince himself that all he heard was reality.

"What, M. Rodolph, because you beat me, because, thinking you a workman, like myself, because you spoke 'slang' as if you had learned it from the cradle, I told you my history over two bottles of wine, and afterwards I saved you from being drowned,—you give me a house—money—I shall be master! Say really, M. Rodolph, once more, is it possible?"

"Believing me like yourself, you told me your history naturally and without concealment, without withholding either what was culpable or generous. I have judged you, and judged you well, and I have resolved to recompense you."

"But, M. Rodolph, it ought not to be; there are poor labourers who have been honest all their lives, and who—"

"I know it, and it may be I have done for many others more than I am doing for you; but, if the man who lives honestly in the midst of honest men, encouraged by their esteem, deserves assistance and support, he who, in spite of the aversion of good men, remains honest amidst the most infamous associates on earth,—he, too, deserves assistance and support. This is not all; you saved my life, you saved the life of Murphy, the dearest friend I have; and what I do for you is as much the dictate of personal gratitude as it is the desire to withdraw from pollution a good and generous nature, which has been perverted, but not destroyed. And that is not all."

"What else have I done, M. Rodolph?"

Rodolph took his hand, and, shaking it heartily, said:

"Filled with commiseration for the mischief which had befallen the very man who had tried just before to kill you, you even gave him an asylum in your humble dwelling,—No. 9, close to Notre Dame."

"You knew, then, where I lived, M. Rodolph?"

"If you forget the services you have done to me, I do not. When you left my house you were followed, and were seen to enter there with the Schoolmaster."

"But M. Murphy told me that you did not know where I lived, M. Rodolph."

"I was desirous of trying you still further; I wished to know if you had disinterestedness in your generosity, and I found that, after your courageous conduct, you returned to your hard daily labour, asking nothing, hoping for nothing, not even uttering a word of reproach for the apparent ingratitude with which I repaid your services; and when Murphy yesterday proposed to you employment a little more profitable than that of your habitual toil, you accepted it with joy, with gratitude."

"Why, M. Rodolph, do you see, sir, four francs a day are always four francs a day. As to the service I rendered you, why, it is rather I who ought to thank you."

"How so?"

"Yes, yes, M. Rodolph," he added, with a saddened air, "I do not forget that, since I knew you, it was you who said to me those two words,'You have both heart and honour!' It is astonishing how I have thought of that. They are only two little words, and yet those two words had that effect. But, in truth, sow two small grains of anything in the soil, and they will put forth shoots."

This comparison, just and almost poetical as it was, struck Rodolph. In sooth, two words, but two magic words for the heart that understood them, had almost suddenly developed the generous instincts which were inherent in this energetic nature.

"You placed the Schoolmaster at St. Mandé?" said Rodolph.

"Yes, M. Rodolph. He made me change his notes for gold, and buy a belt, which I sewed round his body, and in which I put his 'mopuses;' and then, good day! He boards for thirty sous a day with good people, to whom that sum is of much service. When I have time to leave my wood-piles, I shall go and see how he gets on."

"Your wood-piles! You forget your shop, and that you are here at home!"

"Come, M. Rodolph, do not amuse yourself by jesting with a poor devil like me; you have had your fun in 'proving' me, as you term it. My house and my shop are songs to the same tune. You said to yourself,'Let us see if this Chourineur is such a gulpin as to believe that I will make him such a present.' Enough, enough, M. Rodolph; you are a wag, and there's an end of the matter."

And he laughed long, loud, and heartily.

"But, once more, believe—"

"If I were to believe you, then you would say, 'Poor Chourineur! go! you are a trouble to me now.'"

Rodolph began to be really troubled how to convince the Chourineur, and said in a solemn, impressive, and almost severe tone:

"I never make sport of the gratitude and sympathy with which noble conduct inspires me. I have said this house and this establishment are yours, if they suit you, for the bargain is conditional. I swear to you, on my honour, all this belongs to you; and I make you a present of it, for the reasons I have already given."

The dignified and firm tone, and the serious expression of the features of Rodolph, at length convinced the Chourineur. For some moments he looked at his protector in silence, and then said, in a voice of deep emotion:

"I believe you, my lord, and I thank you much. A poor man like me cannot make fine speeches, but once more, indeed, on my word, I thank you very much. All I can say is, that I will never refuse assistance to the unhappy; because Hunger and Misery are ogresses of the same sort as those who laid hands on the poor Goualeuse; and, once in that sink, it is not every one that has the fist strong enough to pull you out again."

"My worthy fellow, you cannot prove your gratitude more than in speaking to me thus."

"So much the better, my lord; for else I should have a hard job to prove it."

"Come, now, let us visit your house; my good old Murphy has had the pleasure, and I should like it also."

Rodolph and the Chourineur came down-stairs. At the moment they reached the yard, the shopman, addressing the Chourineur, said to him, respectfully:

"Since you, sir, are to be my master, I beg to tell you that our custom is capital. We have no more cutlets or legs of mutton left, and we must kill a sheep or two directly."

"Parbleu!" said Rodolph to the Chourineur; "here is a capital opportunity for exercising your skill. I should like to have the first sample,—the open air has given me an appetite, and I will taste your cutlets."

"You are very kind, M. Rodolph," said the Chourineur, in a cheerful voice; "you flatter me, but I will do my best."

"Shall I bring two sheep to the slaughter-house, master?" asked the journeyman.

"Yes; and bring a well-sharpened knife, not too thin in the blade, and strong in the back."

"I have just what you want, master. There, you could shave with it. Take it—
"

"Tonnerre, M. Rodolph!" said the Chourineur, taking off his upper coat with haste, and turning up his shirtsleeves, which displayed a pair of arms like a prize-fighter's; "this reminds me of my boyish days and the slaughter-house. You shall see how I handle a knife! Nom de nom! I wish I was at it. The knife, lad! the knife! That's it; I see you know your trade. This is a blade! Who will have it? Tonnerre! with a tool like this I could face a wild bull."

And the Chourineur brandished his knife,—his eyes began to fill with blood; the beast was regaining the mastery; the instinct and thirst for blood reappeared in all the fullness of their fearful predominance.

The butchery was in the yard,—a vaulted, dark place, paved with stones, and lighted by a small, narrow opening at the top.

The man drove one of the sheep to the door.

"Shall I fasten him to the ring, master?"

"Fasten him! Tonnerre! and I with my knees at liberty? Oh, no; I will hold him here as fast as if in a vice. Give me the beast, and go back to the shop."

The journeyman obeyed. Rodolph was left alone with the Chourineur, and watched him attentively, almost anxiously.

"Now, then, to work!" said he.

"Oh, I sha'n't be long. Tonnerre! you shall see how I handle a knife! My hands burn, and I have a singing in my ears; my temples beat, as they used when I was going to 'see red.' Come here, thou—Ah, Madelon! let me stab you dead!"

Then his eyes sparkled with a fierce delight, and, no longer conscious of the presence of Rodolph, the Chourineur lifted the sheep without an effort; with one spring he carried it off as a wolf would do, bounding towards his lair with his prey.

Rodolph followed him, and leaned on one of the wings of the door, which he closed. The butchery was dark; one strong ray of light, falling straight down, lighted up, à la Rembrandt, the rugged features of the Chourineur, his light hair, and his red whiskers. Stooping low, holding in his teeth a long knife, which glittered in the "darkness visible," he drew the sheep between his legs, and, when he had adjusted it, took it by the head, stretched out its neck, and cut its throat.

At the instant when the sheep felt the keen blade, it gave one gentle, low, and pitiful bleat, and, raising its dying eyes to the Chourineur, two spurts of blood jetted forth into the face of its slayer. The cry, the look, the blood that spouted out, made a fearful impression on the man. His knife fell from his hands; his features grew livid, contracted, and horrible, beneath the blood that covered them; his eyes expanded, his hair stiffened; and then retreating, with a gesture of horror, he cried, in a suffocating voice, "Oh, the sergeant! the sergeant!"

Rodolph hastened to him: "Recover yourself, my good fellow!"

"There! there! the sergeant!" repeated the Chourineur, retreating step by step, with his eyes fixed and haggard, and pointing with his finger as if at some invisible phantom. Then uttering a fearful cry, as if the spectre had touched him, he rushed to the bottom of the butchery, into the darkest corner; and there, with his face, breast, and arms against the wall, as if he would break through it to escape from so horrible a vision, he repeated, in a hollow and convulsive tone, "Oh, the sergeant! the sergeant! the sergeant!"

CHAPTER XX

THE DEPARTURE

Thanks to the care of Murphy and Rodolph, who with difficulty calmed his agitation, the Chourineur was completely restored to himself, and was alone with the prince in one of the rooms on the first floor in the house.

"My lord," said he, despondingly, "you have been very kind, indeed, to me; but, hear me: I would rather be a thousand times more wretched than I have yet been than become a butcher."

"Yet reflect a little."

"Why, my lord, when I heard the cry of the poor animal which could not make the slightest resistance; when I felt its blood spring into my face,—hot blood, which seemed as coming from a living thing; you cannot imagine what I felt; then I had my dream all over again,—the sergeant and those poor young fellows whom I cut and stabbed, who made no defence, and died giving me a look so gentle, so gentle that they seemed as if they pitied me! My lord, it would drive me mad!"

And the poor fellow hid his face in his hands with a convulsive start.

"Come, come, calm yourself."

"Excuse me, my lord; but just now the sight of blood—of a knife—I could not bear; at every instant it would renew those dreams which I was beginning to forget. To have every day my hands and feet in blood, to cut the throats of poor animals who do not so much as make a struggle—oh, no, no! I could not for the world. I would rather lose my eyesight at once, like the Schoolmaster, than be compelled to follow such a business."

It is impossible to depict the energetic gesture, action, and countenance of the Chourineur, as he thus expressed himself. Rodolph was deeply affected by it, and satisfied with the horrible effect which the sight of the blood had caused to his protégé.

For a moment the savage feeling, the bloodthirsty instinct, had overcome the human being in the Chourineur; but remorse eventually overwhelmed the instinct. That was as it should be, and it was a fine lesson.

"Forgive me, my lord," said the Chourineur, in a faltering voice; "I make but a bad recompense for all your kindness to me, but—"

"Not at all, my good fellow; I told you that our bargain was conditional. I selected for you the business of a butcher, because your inclinations and taste seemed to lie in that direction—"

"Alas! my lord, that's true; and, had it not been for what you know of, that would have been the trade of all others I should have chosen. I was only saying so to M. Murphy a little while since."

"As it was just possible that your taste did not lie that way, I have thought of another arrangement for you. A person who has a large tract of property at Algiers will give me up, for you, one of the extensive farms he holds in that country. The lands belonging to it are very fertile, and in full bearing; but I will not conceal from you, this estate is situated on the boundaries of the Atlas mountains,—that is, near the outposts, and exposed to the frequent attacks of the Arabs, and one must be as much of a soldier as a husbandman: it is, at the same time, a redoubt and a farm. The man who occupies this dwelling in the absence of the proprietor will explain everything to you; they say he is honest and faithful, and you may retain him there as long as you like. Once established there, you will not only increase your means by your labour and ability, but render a real service to your country by your courage. The colonists have formed a militia, and the extent of your property, the number of your tenants who will depend on you, will make you the chief of a very considerable troop. Headed by your courage, this band may be extremely useful in protecting the properties which are throughout the plain. I repeat to you, that this prospect for you would please me very much, in spite of, or, rather, in consequence of the danger; because you could at the same time display your natural intrepidity; and because, having thus expiated, and, as I may say, ransomed yourself from a great crime, your restitution to society would be more noble, more complete, more heroic, if it were worked out, in the midst of perils in an unconquered clime, than in the midst of the quiet inhabitants of a little town. If I did not first offer you this, it was because it was probable that the other would suit you, and the latter is so hazardous that I would not expose you to it without giving you the choice. There is still time, and, if this proposition for Algiers does not suit you, tell me so frankly, and we will look out for something else; if not, to-morrow everything shall be signed, and you will start for Algiers with a person commissioned by the former proprietor of the farm to put you in full possession. Two years' rent will be due, and paid to you on your arrival. The land yields three thousand francs a year: work, improve it, be active, vigilant, and you will soon increase your comfort and the security of the colonists, whom you will aid and assist I am sure, for you will always be charitable and generous; and remember, too, to be rich implies that we should give much away. Although separated from you, I

shall not lose sight of you, and never forget that I and my best friend owe our lives to you. The only proof of attachment and gratitude I ask, is to learn to write and read as quickly as you can, that you may inform me regularly, once a week, what you do, and to address yourself to me direct if you need any advice or assistance."

It is useless to describe the extreme delight of the Chourineur. His disposition, his instincts, are already sufficiently known to the reader, so that he may understand that no proposal could have been made more acceptable to him.

Next day all was arranged, and the Chourineur set out for Algiers.

CHAPTER XXI

RESEARCHES

The house which Rodolph had in the Allée des Veuves was not his usual place of residence; he lived in one of the largest mansions in the Faubourg St. Germain, situated at the end of the Rue Plumet and the Boulevard des Invalides.

To avoid the honours due to his sovereign rank, the prince had preserved his incognito since his arrival in Paris, his chargé d'affaires at the court of France having announced that his master would pay his official and indispensable visits under the name and title of the Count de Duren. Thanks to this usage (a very common one in the Northern courts), a prince may travel with as much liberty as pleasure, and escape all the bore of ceremonious introductions. In spite of his slight incognito, Rodolph kept up in his mansion full state and etiquette. We will introduce the reader into the hôtel of the Rue Plumet, the day after the Chourineur had started for Algiers.

The clock had just struck ten, A.M. In the middle of a large salon on the ground floor and which formed the antechamber to Rodolph's business chamber, Murphy was seated before a bureau, and sealing several despatches. A groom of the chambers, dressed in black and wearing a silver chain around his neck, opened the folding-doors and announced:

"His Excellency M. le Baron de Graün."

Murphy, without ceasing from his employment, received the baron with a nod at once cordial and familiar.

"M. le Chargé d'Affaires," said he, smiling, "will you warm yourself at the fire? I will be at your service in one moment."

"M. the Private Secretary, I await your leisure," replied M. de Graün, gaily, and making, with mock respect, a low and respectful bow to the worthy squire.

The baron was about fifty years of age, with hair gray, thin, and lightly curled and powdered. His chin, rather projecting, was partly concealed in a high cravat of white muslin, starched very stiffly, and of unimpeachable whiteness. His countenance was expressive of great intelligence, and his carriage was distingué; whilst beneath his gold spectacles there beamed an eye as shrewd as it was penetrating. Although it was only ten o'clock in the

morning, M. de Graün wore a black coat,—that was etiquette,—and a riband, shot with several bright colours, was suspended from his buttonhole. He placed his hat on a chair and took his station near the fireplace, whilst Murphy continued his work.

"His royal highness, no doubt, was up the best part of the night, my dear Murphy, for your correspondence appears considerable?"

"Monseigneur went to bed at six o'clock this morning. He wrote, amongst other letters, one of eight pages to the Grand Marshal, and dictated to me one equally long to the Chief of the Upper Council, the Prince Herkhaüsen-Oldenzaal, his royal highness's cousin."

"You know that his son, Prince Henry, has entered as lieutenant in the guards in the service of his Majesty the Emperor of Austria?"

"Yes; monseigneur recommended him most warmly as his relation; and he really is a fine, excellent young man, handsome as an angel, and as good as gold."

"The fact is, my dear Murphy, that if the young Prince Henry had had his entrée to the grand ducal abbey of Ste. Hermenegilde, of which his aunt is the superior, the poor nuns—"

"Baron! baron! why—"

"My dear sir, the air of Paris—But let us talk seriously. Shall I await the rising of his royal highness to communicate all the particulars which I have procured?"

"No, my dear baron. Monseigneur has desired that he should not be called before two or three o'clock in the afternoon; he desires, also, that you send off this morning these despatches by a special courier, instead of waiting till Monday. You will entrust me with all the particulars you have acquired, and I will communicate them to monseigneur when he wakes. These are his orders."

"Nothing can be better, and I think his royal highness will be satisfied with what I have collected. But, my dear Murphy, I hope the despatch of the special courier is not a bad sign; the last despatches which I had the honour of sending to his royal highness—"

"Announced that all was going on well at home; and it is precisely because my lord is desirous of expressing as early as possible his entire satisfaction,

that he wishes a courier to be despatched this very day to Prince Herkhaüsen-Oldenzaal, Chief of the Supreme Council."

"That is so like his royal highness; were it to blame instead of commend, he would observe less haste."

"Nothing new has transpired with us, my dear baron,—nothing at all. Our mysterious adventures—"

"Are wholly unknown. You know that, since the arrival of his royal highness in Paris, his friends have become used to see him but little in public; it is understood that he prefers seclusion, and is in the habit of making frequent excursions to the environs of Paris, and, with the exception of the Countess Sarah Macgregor and her brother, no person is aware of the disguises assumed by his royal highness; and neither of the personages I have mentioned have the smallest interest in betraying the secret."

"Ah! my dear baron," exclaimed Murphy, heaving a deep sigh, "what an unfortunate thing it is that this accursed countess should be left a widow at this very important moment!"

"She was married, I think, in 1827 or 1828?"

"In 1827, shortly after the death of the unfortunate child, who would now be in her sixteenth or seventeenth year, and whose loss his royal highness seems daily more to deplore."

"Far more so, indeed, than he appears to feel for the loss of his legitimate offspring."

"And thus, my dear baron, we may account for the deep interest his royal highness takes in the poor Goualeuse, arising as it does from the fact that the daughter so deeply deplored would, had she lived, have been precisely the same age as this unfortunate young creature."

"It is, indeed, an unfortunate affair that the Countess Sarah, from whom we fancied we were for ever freed, should have become a widow exactly eighteen months after his royal highness had been deprived by death of the wife with whom he had passed years of wedded happiness. The countess, I am persuaded, looks upon this double freedom from all marriage vows as a signal intervention of Providence to further her views."

"And her impetuous passion has become more ardent than ever, though she is well aware that my lord feels for her the deepest aversion and well-merited

contempt. Was not her culpable indifference the cause of her child's death? Did she not cause—Ah, baron," said Murphy, leaving the sentence unfinished, "this woman is our evil genius. God grant she may not reappear amongst us laden with fresh misfortunes!"

"But still, under present circumstances, any views Countess Sarah may entertain must be absurd in the greatest degree; the death of the unfortunate child you just now alluded to has broken the last tie which might have attached my lord to this dangerous woman. She must be mad, as well as foolish, to persist in so hopeless a pursuit."

"If she be mad, there is a dangerous 'method in her madness;' her brother, you are aware, partakes of her ambitious schemes and obstinate opinions of ultimate success. Although this worthy pair have as much reason for utter despair as they had eighteen years since of entire success—"

"Eighteen years! What an accumulation of evil has been wrought during that period by the criminal compliance of that rascally Polidori!"

"By the way, talking of that miserable wretch, I have traced that he was here about a year or two ago, suffering, no doubt, from the most perfect destitution, or else subsisting by disgraceful and dishonourable practices."

"What a pity that a man so largely endowed with penetration, talent, deep learning, and natural intelligence, should sink so low!"

"The innate perversity of his character marred all these high qualities. It is to be hoped he and the countess will not meet; the junction of two such evil spirits is indeed to be feared, for what frightful consequences might there not result from it! Now, touching the facts you have been collecting, have you them about you?"

"Here," said the baron, drawing a paper from his pocket, "are the various particulars I have been enabled to collect touching the birth of a young girl known as La Goualeuse, and also of the now residence of an individual called François Germain, son of the Schoolmaster."

"Be kind enough to read me the result of your inquiries, my dear De Graün. I am well aware what are his royal highness's intentions in the matter; I shall be able to judge then whether the information you possess will be sufficient to enable him to carry them into effect. You have every reason to be satisfied with the agent you employ, I suppose?"

"Oh, he is a rare fellow! so precise, methodical, zealous, and intelligent! I am, indeed, sometimes obliged to moderate his energy; for I am well aware there are certain points, the clearing up of which his highness reserves for himself."

"And, of course, your agent is far from suspecting the deep interest his royal highness has in the matter?"

"Entirely so. My diplomatic position affords an excellent pretext for the inquiries I have undertaken. M. Badinot (for such is the name of the person I am speaking of) is a sharp, shrewd individual, having connections, either recognised or concealed, in every grade of society. He was formerly a lawyer, but compelled to quit his profession from some very serious breach of trust; he has, however, retained very accurate recollections touching the fortunes and situations of his old clients; he knows many a secret, which he boasts, with considerable effrontery, of having turned to a good account. By turns, rich and poor,—now successful, and then a ruined man,—he only ceased his speculations when none could be found to take part in them with him; reduced to live from day to day by expedients more or less illegal, he became a curious specimen of the Figaro school,—so long as his interest was concerned he would devote himself, soul and body, to his employer; and we are sure of his fidelity, for the simple reason that he has nothing to gain, though a great deal to lose, by deceiving us; and, besides, I make him careful of our interests, even unknown to himself."

"The particulars he has hitherto furnished us with have been very correct and satisfactory."

"Oh, he has a very straightforward manner of going to work! And I assure you, my dear Murphy, that M. Badinot is the very original type of one of those mysterious existences which are to be met with, and only possible, in Paris. He would greatly amuse his royal highness, if it were not necessary to avoid their being known to each other in this business."

"You can augment the pay of M. Badinot if you deem it necessary."

"Why, really, five hundred francs a month, and his expenses, amounting to nearly the same sum, appear to me quite sufficient; we shall see by and by."

"And does he not seem ashamed of the part he plays?"

"On the contrary, he is not a little vain of his employment, and when he brings me any particulars assumes a certain air of importance he would fain pass off as due to his diplomatic functions; for the fellow either thinks, or

feigns to do so, that he is deeply engaged in state affairs, and ventures to observe at times, in a sort of undertone, how very marvellous it is that such close and intimate relationship should be found to exist between every-day events and the destinies of kingdoms! Yes, really, he had the impudence to remark to me the other day, 'What complicated machinery is contained in the grand machine of state affairs! Who would think now, M. le Baron, those little humble notes collected by me will have their part to play in directing and regulating the affairs of Europe!'"

"Yes, yes, rascals generally seek to veil their mean and base practices beneath some high-sounding pretext. But the notes you are to give me, my dear baron, have you them with you?"

"Here they are, drawn up precisely from the accounts furnished by M. Badinot."

"Pray let me hear them; I am all attention."

M. de Graün then read as follows:

"Note relative to Fleur-de-Marie.—About the beginning of the year 1827, a man named Pierre Tournemine, then under sentence in the galleys at Rochefort for forgery, proposed to a woman named Gervais, but also known as La Chouette, to take perpetual charge of a little girl, then between five and six years of age, for a sum of one thousand francs paid down.

"The bargain being concluded, the child was delivered over to the woman, with whom she remained two years, when, unable longer to endure the cruelty shown her, the little girl disappeared; nor did the Chouette hear anything of her for several years, when she unexpectedly met with her at a small public-house in the Cité, nearly seven weeks ago. The infant, now grown into a young woman, then bore the appellation of La Goualeuse.

"A few days previously to this meeting, the above mentioned Tournemine, who had become acquainted with the Schoolmaster at the galleys of Rochefort, had sent to Bras Rouge (the regular, though concealed correspondent of every rogue and felon either in prison or out of it) a lengthened detail of every particular relative to the child formerly confided to the woman Gervais, otherwise the Chouette.

"From this account, and the declarations of the Chouette, it appeared that one Madame Séraphin, housekeeper to a notary named Jacques Ferrand, had in 1827 instructed Tournemine to find a person who, for the sum of one thousand francs, would be willing to take the entire charge of a child of from

five to six years of age whom it was desired to get rid of, as has before been mentioned.

"The Chouette accepted the proposition, and received both the child and the stipulated sum of money.

"The aim of Tournemine, in addressing these particulars to Bras Rouge, was to enable the latter to extort money from Madame Séraphin, whom Tournemine considered but as the agent of a third party, under a threat of revealing the whole affair unless well paid for silence.

"Bras Rouge entrusted the Chouette, long the established partner in all the Schoolmaster's schemes of villainy; and this explains how so important a document found its way to that monster's possession, and also accounts for the expression used by the Chouette at her rencontre with the Goualeuse in the cabaret of the White Rabbit, when, by way of tormenting her victim, she said, 'We have found out all about your parents, but you shall never know who or what they are.'

"The point to be decided was as to the veracity of the circumstances detailed by Tournemine in his letter to the Chouette.

"It has been ascertained that Madame Séraphin and the notary, Jacques Ferrand, are both living; the address of the latter is Rue du Sentier, No. 41, where he passes for a person of pious and austere life; at least, he is constant in his attendance at church,—his attention to his professional duties, close and severe, though some accuse him of following up the severity of the law with unnecessary rigour. In his mode of living he observes a parsimony bordering on avarice. Madame Séraphin still resides with him, as manager of his household; and M. Jacques Ferrand, spite of his original poverty, has invested thirty-five thousand francs in the funds, the greatest part of this sum having been supplied to him through a M. Charles Robert, a superior officer of the National Guard,—a young and handsome man, in high repute with a certain class of society. 'Tis true that some ill-natured persons are found to assert that, owing either to fortunate speculations or lucky hits upon the Stock Exchange, undertaken in partnership with the above mentioned Charles Robert, the worthy notary could now well afford to pay back the original loan with high interest; but the rigidly austere and self-denying life of this worthy man gives a flat denial to all such gossiping reports, and, spite of the incredulity with which he is occasionally listened to, he persists in styling himself a man struggling for a maintenance. There can be no manner of doubt but that Madame Séraphin, this worthy

gentleman's housekeeper, could, if she pleased, throw an entire light upon every circumstance connected with La Goualeuse."

"Bravo, my dear baron!" exclaimed Murphy; "nothing can be better. These declarations of Tournemine carry with them an appearance of truth, and it seems more than probable that we may, through Jacques Ferrand, obtain the right clue to discovering the parents of this unfortunate girl. Now tell me, have you been equally successful in the information collected touching the son of the Schoolmaster?"

"Perhaps, as regards him, I am not furnished with such minute particulars; but, upon the whole, I think the result of our inquiries very satisfactory."

"Upon my word, your M. Badinot is a downright treasure!"

"You see, Bras Rouge is the hinge upon which everything turns. M. Badinot, who has several acquaintances in the police, pointed him out to us as the go-between of several notorious felons, and knew the man directly he was set to discover what had become of the ill-fated son of Madame Georges Duresnel, the unfortunate wife of this atrocious Schoolmaster."

"And it was in going to search for Bras Rouge, in his den in the Cité (Rue aux Fêves, No. 13), that my lord fell in with the Chourineur and La Goualeuse. His royal highness hoped, too, that the opportunity now before him, of visiting these abodes of vice and wretchedness, might afford him the means of rescuing some unfortunate being from the depths of guilt and misery. His benevolent anticipations were gratified, but at what risk it is painful even to remember."

"Whatever dangers attended the scheme, you, at least, my dear Murphy, bravely bore your share in them."

"Was not I, for that very purpose, appointed charcoal-man in waiting upon his royal highness?" replied the squire, smilingly.

"Say, rather, his intrepid body-guard, my worthy friend. But to touch upon your courage and devotion is only to repeat what every one knows. I will, therefore, spare your modesty, and continue my relation. Here are the various particulars we have been able to glean concerning François Germain, son of Madame Georges and the Schoolmaster, properly called Duresnel:

"About eighteen months since, a young man, named François Germain, arrived in Paris from Nantes, where he had been employed in the banking-house of Noël and Co.

"It seems, both from the confession of the Schoolmaster as well as from several letters found upon him, that the scoundrel to whom he had entrusted his unfortunate offspring, for the purpose of perverting his young mind, and rendering him one day a worthy assistant to his unprincipled father in his nefarious schemes, proposed to the young man to join in a plot for robbing his employers, as well as to forge upon the firm to a considerable amount. This proposition was received by the youth with well-merited indignation, but, unwilling to denounce the man by whom he had been brought up, he first communicated anonymously to his master the designs projected against the bank, and then privately quitted Nantes, that he might avoid the rage and fury of those whose sinful practices his soul sickened and shuddered to think of, far less to bear the idea of participating in.

"These wretches, aware that they had betrayed themselves to the young man, and dreading the use he might make of his information, immediately upon finding he had quitted Nantes followed him to Paris, with the most sinister intentions of silencing him for ever. After long and persevering inquiries, they succeeded in discovering his address, but, happily for the persecuted object of their search, he had a few days previously encountered the villain who had first sought to corrupt his principles, and, well divining the motive which had brought him to Paris, lost no time in changing his abode; and so, for this time, the Schoolmaster's hapless son escaped his pursuers. Still, however, following up the scent, they succeeded in tracing the youth to his fresh abode, 17 Rue du Temple. One evening, however, he narrowly escaped falling into an ambush laid for him (the Schoolmaster concealed this circumstance from my lord), but again Providence befriended him, and he escaped, though too much alarmed to remain in his lodgings; he once more changed his abode, since which time all traces of him have been lost. And matters had reached thus far when the Schoolmaster received the just punishment of his crimes; since which period, by order of my lord, fresh inquiries have been instituted, of which the following is the result.

"François Germain lived for about three months at No. 17 Rue du Temple, a house rendered worthy of observation by the habits and ingenious practices of its inhabitants. Germain was a great favourite among them, by reason of his kind and amiable disposition, as well as for the frank gaiety of his temper. Although his means of livelihood appeared very slender, yet he had rendered the most generous assistance to an indigent family occupying the

garrets of the house. In vain has been every inquiry made in the Rue du Temple touching the present residence of François Germain, or the profession he was supposed to follow; every one in the house believed him to be employed in some counting-house, or office, as he went out early in the morning and never returned till late in the evening. The only person who really knows the present residence of the young man is a female, lodging in the house No. 17 Rue du Temple,—a young and pretty grisette, named Rigolette, between whom and Germain a very close acquaintance appears to have existed. She occupies the adjoining room to that which Germain tenanted, and which chamber, by the by, is still vacant; and it was under pretext of inquiring about it that these particulars were obtained."

"Rigolette!" exclaimed Murphy, after having been for several minutes apparently in deep thought. "Yes, I am sure I know her."

"You! Sir Walter Murphy," replied the baron, much amused. "You, most worthy and respectable father of a family! you know anything of pretty grisettes! And so the name of Mlle. Rigolette is familiar to you, is it? Fie, fie! Oh, positively I am ashamed of you!"

"'Pon my soul, my lord compelled me to have so many strange acquaintances, that such a mere trifle as this should pass for nothing. But wait a bit. Yes, now I recollect perfectly, that when my lord was relating the history of La Goualeuse, I could not help laughing at the very odd name of Rigolette, which, as far as I can call to mind, was the name of a prison acquaintance of that poor Fleur-de-Marie."

"Well, then, just at this particular juncture Mlle. Rigolette may be of the utmost service to us. Let me conclude my report:

"There might possibly be an advantage in engaging the vacant chamber recently belonging to Germain, in the Rue du Temple. We have no instructions to proceed further in our investigations, but, from some words which escaped the porteress, there is every reason to believe that not only would it be possible to find in this house certain indications of where the Schoolmaster's son may be heard of, through the means of Mlle. Rigolette, but the house itself would afford my lord an opportunity of studying human nature amid wants, difficulties, and misery, the very existence of which he is far from suspecting."

"Thus you see, my dear Murphy," said M. de Graün, finishing his report and presenting it to his companion, "you see evidently that it is from the notary, Jacques Ferrand, we must hope to obtain information respecting the

parentage of La Goualeuse, and that we must go to Mlle. Rigolette to trace the dwelling of François Germain. It seems to me a great point to have ascertained the direction in which to search."

"Undoubtedly, baron; you are quite right; and, besides, I am sure my lord will find a fine field for observation in the house of which you speak. But I have not yet done with you. Have you made any inquiries respecting the Marquis d'Harville?"

"I have; and, so far as concerns money matters, his royal highness's fears are wholly unfounded. M. Badinot affirms (and he is very likely to be well informed on the subject) that the fortune of the marquis has never been in a more prosperous condition, or better managed."

"Why, after having in vain exhausted every other conjecture as to the secret grief which is preying upon M. d'Harville, my lord imagined that it was just probable the marquis had some pecuniary difficulties; had it proved so, he would have removed them with that delicate assumption of mystery you know he so frequently employs to veil his munificence. But, since even this conjecture has failed, he must abandon all hope of guessing the enigma; and this he will do the more reluctantly, as his great desire to discover it arose out of his ardent friendship for M. d'Harville."

"A friendship which is founded on a grateful recollection of the important services rendered by the marquis's father to his own parent. Are you aware, my dear Murphy, that at the remodelling of the States in 1815, at the Germanic confederation, the father of his royal highness had a chance of being excluded, from his well-known attachment to Napoleon? Thanks to the friendship with which the Emperor Alexander honoured him, the deceased Marquis d'Harville was enabled to render most effectual service to the father of our patron. The emperor, whose warm regard for the late marquis had taken its date from the period of that nobleman's emigration to Russia, exerted his powerful influence in congress so successfully, that at the grand meeting to decide the destinies of the princes of Germany, the father of our noble employer was reinstated in all his pristine rights. As for the friendship now subsisting between the present marquis and his royal highness, I believe it commenced when, as mere boys, they met together on a visit paid by the then reigning grand duke to the late Marquis d'Harville."

"So I have heard; and they appear to have retained a most lively recollection of this happy period of their youth. Nor is this all I have to say on the subject of the interest our noble master takes in every matter concerning the house of D'Harville. So profound is his gratitude for the services rendered to

his father, that all bearing the honoured name of D'Harville, or belonging to the family, possess a powerful claim on the kindness of the prince. Thus, not alone to her virtues or her misfortunes does poor Madame Georges owe the increasing and unwearied goodness of my lord."

"Madame Georges!" exclaimed the astounded baron. "What, the wife of Duresnel, the felon known as the Schoolmaster?"

"And the mother of François Germain, the youth we are seeking for, and whom, I trust, we shall find."

"Is the relation of M. d'Harville?"

"She was his mother's cousin, and her most intimate friend; the old marquis entertained the most perfect friendship and esteem for Madame Georges."

"But how, for heaven's sake, my dear Murphy, did it ever come about that the D'Harville family ever permitted a descendant of theirs to marry such a monster as this Duresnel?"

"Why, thus it was. The father of this unfortunate woman was a M. de Lagny, who, previous to the Revolution, possessed considerable property in Languedoc, and who, having fortunately escaped the proscription so fatal to many, availed himself of the first tranquillity which succeeded these days of discord and anarchy to establish his only daughter in marriage. Among the various candidates for the hand of the young heiress was this Duresnel, the representative of a wealthy and respectable family, possessing powerful parliamentary influence, and concealing the depravity of his disposition beneath the most specious exterior. To this man was Mlle. de Lagny united, by desire of her father; but a very short time sufficed to strip the mask from his vicious character, and to display his natural propensities. A gambler, a spendthrift, and profligate, addicted to the lowest vices that can disgrace a human being, he quickly dissipated, not only his own fortune, but that of his wife also. Even the estate to which Madame Georges Duresnel had retired was involved in the general ruin occasioned by her worthless husband's passion for play, and his dissolute mode of life; and the unfortunate woman would have been left without a shelter for herself or infant son but for the kind affection of her relation, the Marquise d'Harville, whom she loved with the tenderness of a sister. With this valued friend Madame Duresnel found a welcome home, while her wretched husband, finding himself utterly ruined, plunged into the blackest crimes, and stopped at no means, however guilty and desperate, to supply his pleasures. He became the associate of thieves, murderers, pickpockets, and forgers,

and ere long, falling into the hands of the law, was sentenced to the galleys for the term of his natural life. Yet, while suffering the just punishment of his crimes, his base mind devised the double atrocity of tearing the child from its miserable mother, for the sake of breaking down every good principle it might have imbibed, and of training it up in vicious readiness to join his future schemes of villainy. You know the rest. After the condemnation of her husband, Madame Georges, without giving any reason for so doing, quitted the Marquise d'Harville, and went to hide her shame and her sorrows in Paris, where she soon fell into the utmost distress. It would occupy too much time to tell you by what train of events my lord became aware of the misfortunes of this excellent woman, as well as the ties which connect her with the D'Harville family; it is sufficient that he came most opportunely and generously to her assistance, induced her to quit Paris and establish herself at the farm at Bouqueval, where she now is, with the Goualeuse. In this peaceful retreat she has found tranquillity, if not happiness; and the overlooking and management of the farm may serve to recreate her thoughts, and prevent them from dwelling too deeply on her past sorrows. As much to spare the almost morbid sensibility of Madame Georges, as because he dislikes to blazon forth his good deeds, my lord has not even acquainted M. d'Harville with the fact of his having relieved his kinswoman from such severe distress."

"I comprehend now the twofold interest which my lord has in desiring to discover the traces of the son of this poor woman."

"You may also judge by that, my dear baron, of the affection which his royal highness bears to the whole family, and how deep is his vexation at seeing the young marquis so sad, with so many reasons to be happy."

"What can there be wanting to M. d'Harville? He unites all,—birth, fortune, wit, youth; his wife is charming, and as prudent as she is lovely."

"True, and his royal highness only had recourse to the inquiries we have been talking over after having in vain endeavoured to penetrate the cause of M. d'Harville's deep melancholy; he showed himself deeply affected by the kind attentions of monseigneur, but still has been entirely reserved on the subject of his low spirits. It may be some peine de cœur."

"Yet it is said that he is excessively fond of his wife, and she does not give him the least cause for jealousy. I often meet her in society, and, although she is constantly surrounded by admirers (as every young and lovely woman is), still her reputation is unsullied."

"The marquis is always speaking of her in the highest terms; he has had, however, one little discussion with her on the subject of the Countess Sarah Macgregor."

"Has she, then, seen her?"

"By a most unlucky chance, the father of the Marquis d'Harville knew Sarah Seyton of Halsburg, and her brother Tom, seventeen or eighteen years ago, during their residence in Paris, and when they were much noticed by the lady of the English ambassador. Learning that the brother and sister were going into Germany, the old marquis gave them letters of introduction to the father of our noble lord, with whom he kept up a constant correspondence. Alas! my dear De Graün, perhaps but for these introductions many misfortunes would have been avoided, for then monseigneur would not have known this woman. When the Countess Sarah returned hither, knowing the friendship of his royal highness for the marquis, she presented herself at the Hotel d'Harville, in the hope of meeting monseigneur; for she shows as much pertinacity in pursuing him as he evinces resolution to avoid her."

"Only imagine her disguising herself in male attire, and following him into the Cité! No woman but she would have dreamt of such a thing."

"She, perhaps, hoped by such a step to touch his royal highness and compel him to an interview, which he has always refused and avoided. To return to Madame d'Harville: her husband, to whom monseigneur has spoken of Sarah as she deserved, has begged his wife to see her as seldom as possible; but the young marquise, seduced by the hypocritical flatteries of the countess, has gone somewhat counter to the marquis's request. Some trifling differences have arisen, but not of sufficient importance to cause or explain the extreme dejection of the marquis."

"Oh, the women! the women! My dear Murphy, I am very sorry that Madame d'Harville should have formed any acquaintance with this Sarah. So young and charming a woman must suffer by the contact with such an infernal—"

"Talking of infernal creatures," said Murphy, "here is a communication relative to Cecily, the unworthy spouse of the excellent David."

"Between ourselves, my dear Murphy, this audacious métisse well deserves the terrible punishment that her husband, our dear black doctor, has inflicted on the Schoolmaster by monseigneur's order. She has also shed blood, and her unblushing infamy is astounding."

"Yet she is so very handsome,—so seductive! A perverted mind within an attractive outside always inspires me with twofold disgust."

"In this sense Cecily is doubly hateful. But I hope that this despatch annuls the last orders issued by monseigneur with regard to this wretched creature."

"On the contrary, baron."

"My lord, then, desires that her escape from the fortress in which she had been shut up for life may be effected?"

"Yes."

"And that her pretended ravisher should bring her to France,—to Paris?"

"Yes; and, besides, this despatch orders the arrangement to be carried out as soon as possible, and that Cecily be made to travel hither so speedily that she may arrive here in a fortnight."

"I am lost in astonishment! Monseigneur has always evinced such a horror of her!"

"And that horror he still experiences; if possible, stronger than ever."

"And yet he causes her to be sent to him! To be sure, it will always be easy to apprehend Cecily again, if she does not carry out what he requires of her. Orders are given to the son of the gaoler of the fortress of Gerolstein to carry her off, as if he were enamoured of her, and every facility will be given to him for effecting this purpose. Overjoyed at this opportunity of escaping, the métisse will follow her supposed ravisher, and reach Paris; then she will always have her sentence of condemnation hanging over her, always be but an escaped prisoner, and I shall be always ready, when it shall please his royal highness to desire, again to lay hands upon and incarcerate her."

"I should tell you, my dear baron, that when David learned from monseigneur of the proposed arrival of Cecily, he was absolutely petrified, and exclaimed, 'I hope that your royal highness will not compel me to see the monster?' 'Make yourself easy,' replied monseigneur; 'you shall not see her, but I may require her services for a particular purpose.' David felt relieved of an enormous weight off his mind. Nevertheless, I am sure that some very painful reminiscences were awakened in his mind."

"Poor negro! he loves her still. They say, too, that she is yet so lovely!"

"Charming!—too charming! It requires the pitiless eye of a creole to detect the mixed blood in the all but imperceptible shade which lightly tinges her rosy finger-nails. Our fresh and hale beauties of the North have not a more transparent complexion, nor a skin of more dazzling whiteness."

"I was in France when monseigneur returned from America, accompanied by David and Cecily, and I know that that excellent man was from that time attached to his royal highness by ties of the strongest gratitude; but I never learned how he became attached to the service of our master, and how he had married Cecily, whom I saw, for the first time, about a year after his marriage; and God knows the scandal that followed!"

"I can tell you every particular that you may wish to learn, my dear baron; I accompanied monseigneur in his voyage to America, when he rescued David and the métisse from the most awful fate."

"You are always most kind, my dear Murphy, and I am all attention," said the baron.

CHAPTER XXII

HISTORY OF DAVID AND CECILY

"Mr. Willis, a rich American planter, settled in Florida," said Murphy, "had discovered in one of his young black slaves, named David, who was employed in the infirmary attached to his dwelling, a very remarkable degree of intelligence, combined with a constant and deep commiseration for the sick poor, to whom he gave, with the utmost attention and care, the medicine ordered by the doctors, and, moreover, so strong a prepossession for the study of botany, as applied to medicine, that without any tuition he had composed and classified a sort of flora of the plants around the dwelling and the vicinity. The establishment of Mr. Willis, situated on the borders of the sea, was fifteen or twenty leagues from the nearest town; and the medical men of the district, ignorant as they were, gave themselves no great deal of care or trouble, in consequence of the long distance and the difficulty in procuring any means of conveyance. Desirous of remedying so extreme an inconvenience in a country subject to violent epidemics, and to have at hand at all times a skilful practitioner, the colonist made up his mind to send David to France to learn surgery and medicine. Enchanted at this offer, the young black set out for Paris, and the planter paid all the expenses of his course of study. David, having for eight years studied with great diligence and remarkable effect, received the degree of surgeon and physician with the most distinguished success, and then returned to America to place himself and his skill under the direction of his master."

"But David ought to have considered himself free and emancipated, in fact and in law, when he set foot in France."

"David's loyalty is very rare: he had promised Mr. Willis to return, and he did so. He did not consider as his own the instruction which he had acquired with his master's money; and, besides, he hoped to improve morally as well as physically the sufferings of the slaves, his former companions; he trusted to become not only their doctor, but their firm friend and defender with the colonist."

"He must, indeed, be imbued with the most unflinching probity and the most intense love for his fellow creatures to return to a master,—an owner,—after having spent eight years in the midst of the society of the most democratic young men in Europe."

"Judge of the man by this one trait. Well, he returned to Florida, and, truth to tell, was used by Mr. Willis with consideration and kindness, eating at his

table, sleeping under his roof. But this colonist was as stupid, malevolent, selfish, and despotic as most creoles are, and he thought himself very generous in giving David six hundred francs (24l.) a year salary. At the end of some months a terrible typhus fever broke out in the plantation. Mr. Willis was attacked by it, but soon restored through the careful attentions and efficacious remedies of David. Out of thirty negroes dangerously affected by this fatal disease, only two perished. Mr. Willis, much gratified by the services which David had so auspiciously rendered, raised his wages to twelve hundred francs, to the extreme gratification of the black doctor, whose fellows regarded him as a divinity amongst them, for he had, with much difficulty it is true, obtained from their master some few indulgences, and was hoping to procure still more. In the meanwhile, he consoledthese poor people, and exhorted them to patience; spake to them of God, who watches over the black and the white man with an equal eye; of another world not peopled with masters and slaves, but with the just and the unjust; of another life in eternity, where man was no longer the beast of burden,—the property,—the thing of his fellow man, but where the victims of this world were so happy that they prayed in heaven for their tormentors. What shall I tell you more? To those unhappy wretches who, contrary to other men, count with bitter joy the hours which bring them nearer to the tomb,—to those unfortunate creatures, who looked forward only to nothingness hereafter, David breathed the language and the hope of a free and happy immortality; and then their chains appeared less heavy and their toil less irksome. He was their idol. A year passed away in this manner. Amongst the handsomest of the female slaves at the house was a métisse, about fifteen years of age, named Cecily, and for this poor girl Mr. Willis took a fancy. For the first time in his life his advances were repulsed and obstinately resisted; Cecily was in love, and with David, who, during the late fearful distemper, had attended her with the most vigilant care. Afterwards a deep and mutual love repaid him the debt of gratitude. David's taste was too refined to allow him to boast of his happiness before the time when he should marry Cecily, which was to be when she had turned her sixteenth year. Mr. Willis, ignorant of their love, had thrown his handkerchief right royally at the pretty métisse, and she, in deep despair, sought David, and told him all the brutal attempts that she had been subjected to and with difficulty escaped. The black comforted her, and instantly went to Mr. Willis to request her hand in marriage."

"Diable! my dear Murphy, I can easily surmise the answer of the American sultan,—he refused?"

"He did. He said he had an inclination for the girl himself; that in his life before he had never experienced the repulse of a slave; he meant to possess

her, and he would. David might choose another wife or mistress, whichsoever might best suit his inclination; there were in the plantation ten capussesor métisses as pretty as Cecily. David talked of his love,—love so long and tenderly shared, and the planter shrugged his shoulders; David urged, but it was all in vain. The creole had the cool impudence to tell him that it was a bad 'example' to see a master concede to a slave, and that he would not set that 'example' to satisfy a caprice of David's! He entreated,—supplicated, and his master lost his temper. David, blushing to humiliate himself further, spake in a firm tone of his services and disinterestedness,—that he had been contented with a very slender salary. Mr. Willis was desperately enraged, and, telling him he was a contumacious slave, threatened him with the chain. David replied with a few bitter and violent words; and, two hours afterwards, bound to a stake, his skin was torn with the lash, whilst they bore Cecily to the harem of the planter in his sight."

"The conduct of the planter was brutal and horrible; it was adding absurdity to cruelty, for he must after that have required the man's services."

"Precisely so; for that very day the very fury into which he had worked himself, joined to the drunkenness in which the brute indulged every evening, brought on an inflammatory attack of the most dangerous description, the symptoms of which appeared with the rapidity peculiar to such affections. The planter was carried to his bed in a state of the highest fever. He sent off an express for a doctor, but he could not reach his abode in less than six and thirty hours."

"Really, this attack seems providential. The desperate condition of the man was quite deserved by him."

"The malady made fearful strides. David only could save the colonist, but Willis, distrustful, as all evil-doers are, imagined that the black would revenge himself by administering poison; for, after having scourged him with a rod, he had thrown him into prison. At last, horrified at the progress of his illness, broken down by bodily anguish, and thinking that, as death also stared him in the face, he had one chance left in trusting to the generosity of his slave, after many distrusting doubts, Willis ordered David to be unchained."

"And David saved the planter?"

"For five days and five nights he watched and tended him as if he had been his father, counteracting the disease, step by step, with great skill and perfect knowledge, until, at last, he succeeded in defeating it, to the extreme

surprise of the doctor who had been sent for, and who did not arrive until the second day."

"And, when restored to health at last, the colonist—"

"Not desiring to blush before his own slave, whose presence constantly oppressed him with the recollection of his excessive nobleness of conduct, the colonist made an enormous sacrifice to attach the doctor he had sent for to his establishment, and David was again conducted to his dungeon."

"Horrible, but by no means astonishing. David must have been in the eyes of his brutal master a complete living remorse."

"Such conduct was dictated alike by revenge and jealousy. The blacks of Mr. Willis loved David with all the warmth of gratitude, for he had saved them body and soul. They knew the care he had bestowed on him when he lay tossing with fever between life and death, and, shaking off the deadening apathy which ordinarily besets slavery, these unfortunate creatures evinced their indignation, or rather grief, most powerfully when they saw David lacerated by the whip. Mr. Willis, deeply exasperated, affected to discover in this manifestation the appearance of revolt, and, when he considered the influence which David had acquired over the slaves, he believed him capable of placing himself at the head of a rebellion to avenge himself of his wrongs. This fear was another motive with the colonist for using David in the most shameful manner, and entirely preventing him from effecting the malicious designs of which he suspected him."

"Considering him as actuated by an irrepressible amount of terror, this conduct seems less stupid, but quite as ferocious."

"A short time after these events we arrived in America. Monseigneur had freighted a Danish brig at St. Thomas's, and we visited incognito all the settlements of the American coast along which we were sailing. We were most hospitably received by Mr. Willis, who, the evening after our arrival, after he had been drinking, and as much from the excitement of wine as from a desire to boast, told us, in a horrid tone of brutal jesting, the history of David and Cecily. I forgot to say that, after having maltreated the girl, he had thrown her into a dungeon also, as a punishment for her disdain of him. His royal highness, on hearing Willis's fearful narration, thought the man was either drunk or a liar; but he was drunk,—it was no lie. To remove any and all doubt, the colonist rose from the table, and desired a slave to bear a lantern and conduct us to David's cell."

"Well, what followed?"

"In my life I never saw so distressing a spectacle. Pale, wan, meagre, half naked, and covered with wounds, David and the unhappy girl, chained by the middle of the body, one at one end and the other at the other end of the dungeon, looked like spectres. The lantern that lighted us threw over this scene a still more ghastly hue. David did not utter a word when he saw us; his gaze was fixed and fearful. The colonist said to him, with cruel irony, 'Well, doctor, how goes it? You, who are so clever, why don't you cure yourself?' The black replied by a noble word and a dignified gesture; he raised his right hand slowly, his forefinger pointed to the roof, and, without looking at the colonist, said in a solemn tone, 'God!' and then was silent. 'God?' replied the planter, bursting into a loud fit of laughter, 'tell him, then,—tell God to come and snatch you from my power! I defy him!' Then Willis, overcome by fury and intoxication, shook his fist to heaven, and said, in blasphemous language, 'Yes, I defy God to carry off my slaves before they are dead!'"

"The man was mad as well as brutal."

"We were utterly disgusted. Monseigneur did not say a word, and we left the cell. This dungeon was situated, as well as the house, on the seashore. We returned to our brig, which was moored a short distance off, and at one o'clock in the morning, when all in the building were plunged in profound sleep, monseigneur went on shore with eight men well armed, and, going straight to the prison, burst open the doors, and freed David and Cecily. The two victims were carried on board so quietly that they were not perceived; and then monseigneur and I went to the planter's house. Strange contrast! These men torture their slaves, and yet do not take any precaution against them, but sleep with doors and windows open. We easily got access to the sleeping-room of the planter, which was lighted on the inside by a small glass lamp. Monseigneur awakened the man, who sat upright in his bed, his brain still disturbed by the effect of his drunkenness. 'You have to-night defied God to carry off your two victims before their death, and he has taken them,' said monseigneur. Then taking a bag which I carried, and which contained twenty-five thousand francs in gold, he threw it on the fellow's bed, and added, 'This will indemnify you for the loss of your two slaves,—to your violence that destroys I oppose a violence that saves. God will judge between us.' We then retreated, leaving Mr. Willis stupefied, motionless, and believing himself under the influence of a dream. A few minutes later we were again on board the brig, which instantly set sail."

"It appears to me, my dear Murphy, that his royal highness overpaid this wretch for the loss of his slaves; for, in fact, David no longer belonged to him."

"We calculated, as nearly as we could, the expense which his studies had cost for eight years, and then the price, thrice over, of himself and Cecily as slaves. Our conduct was contrary to the rights of property, I know; but if you had seen in what a horrible state we found this unfortunate and half-dead couple, if you had heard the sacrilegious defiance almost cast in the face of the Almighty by this man, drunk with wine and ferocity, you would comprehend how monseigneur desired, as he said, on this occasion to act as it were in behalf of Providence."

"All this is as assailable and as justifiable as the punishment of the Schoolmaster, my worthy squire. And had not this adventure any consequences?"

"It could not. The brig was under Danish colours; the incognito of his royal highness was closely kept; we were taken for rich Englishmen. To whom could Willis have addressed his complaints, if he had any to make? In fact, he had told us himself, and the medical man of monseigneur declared it in a procès verbal, that the two slaves could not have lived eight days longer in this frightful dungeon. It required the greatest possible care to snatch David and Cecily from almost certain death. At last they were restored to life. From this period David has been attached to the suite of monseigneur as a medical man, and is most devotedly attached to him."

"David married Cecily, of course, on arriving in Europe?"

"This marriage, which ought to have been followed by results so happy, took place in the chapel of the palace of monseigneur; but, by a most extraordinary revulsion of conduct, hardly was she in the full enjoyment of an unhoped-for position, when, forgetting all that David had suffered for her and what she had suffered for him, blushing in the new world to be wedded to a black, Cecily, seduced by a man of most depraved morals, committed her first fault. It would seem as though the natural perversity of this abandoned woman, having till then slumbered, was suddenly awakened, and developed itself with fearful energy. You know the rest, and all the scandal of the adventures that followed. After having been two years a wife, David, whose confidence in her was only equalled by his love, learned the full extent of her infamy,—a thunderbolt aroused him from his blind security."

"They say he tried to kill his wife."

"Yes; but, through the interference of monseigneur, he consented to allow her to be immured for life in a prison, and it is thence that monseigneur now seeks to have her released,—to your great astonishment, as well as mine, my dear baron. But it is growing late, and his royal highness is anxious that your courier should start for Gerolstein with as little delay as possible."

"In two hours' time he shall be on the road. So now, my dear Murphy, farewell till the evening."

"Till the evening, adieu."

"Have you, then, forgotten that there is a grand ball at the —— Embassy, and that his royal highness will be present?"

"True. I have always forgotten that, since the absence of Colonel Verner and the Count d'Harneim, I have the honour to fulfil the functions of chamberlain and aide-de-camp."

"Ah, apropos of the count and the colonel, when may we expect their return? Will they have soon completed their respective missions?"

"You know that monseigneur will keep them away as long as possible, that he may enjoy more solitude and liberty. As to the errand on which his royal highness has employed each of them, as an ostensible motive for getting rid of them in a quiet way,—sending one to Avignon and the other to Strasbourg,—I will tell you all about it some day, when we are both in a dull mood; for I will defy the most hypochondriacal person in existence not to burst with laughter at the narrative, as well as with certain passages in the despatches of these worthy gentlemen, who have assumed their pretended missions with so serious an air."

"To tell the truth, I have never clearly understood why his royal highness attached the colonel and the count to his private person."

"Why, my dear fellow, is not Colonel Verner the accurate type of military perfection? Is there, in the whole Germanic confederation, a more elegant figure, more flourishing and splendid moustaches, and a more complete military figure? And when he is fully decorated, screwed in, uniformed, gold-laced, plumed, etc., etc., it is impossible to see a more glorious, self-satisfied, proud, handsome—animal."

"True, but it is his very good looks that prevent him from having the appearance of a man of refined and acute intellect."

"Well! and monseigneur says that, thanks to the colonel, he is in the habit of finding even the dullest people in the world bearable. Before certain audiences, which are of necessity, he shuts himself up with the colonel for a half-hour or so, and then leaves him, full of spirits and light as air, quite ready to meet bores and defy them."

"Just as the Roman soldier who, before a forced march, used to sole his sandals with lead, and so found all fatigue light by leaving them off. I now discover the usefulness of the colonel. But the Count d'Harneim?"

"Is also very serviceable to our dear lord; for, always hearing at his side the tinkling of this old cracked bell, shining and chattering,—continually seeing this soap-bubble so puffed up with nothingness, so magnificently variegated, and, as such, portraying the theatrical and puerile phase of sovereign power,—his royal highness feels the more sensibly the vanity of those barren pomps and glories of the world, and, by contrast, has often derived the most serious and happy ideas from the contemplation of his useless and pattering chamberlain."

"Well, well; but let us be just, my dear Murphy: tell me, in what court in the world would you find a more perfect model of a chamberlain? Who knows better than dear old D'Harneim the numberless rules and strict observances of etiquette? Who bears with more becoming demeanour an enamelled cross around his neck, or more majestically comports himself when the keys of office are suspended from his shoulders?"

"Apropos, baron; monseigneur declares that the shoulders of a chamberlain have a peculiar physiognomy: that is, he says, an appearance at once constrained and repulsive, which it is painful to look at; for, alas and alackaday! it is at the back of a chamberlain that the symbol of his office glitters, and, as monseigneur avers, the worthy D'Harneim always seems tempted to present himself backwards, that his importance may at once be seen, felt, and acknowledged."

"The fact is, that the incessant subject of the count's meditations is to ascertain by what fatal imagination and direction the chamberlain's key has been placed behind the chamberlain's back; for it is related of him that he said, with his accustomed good sense, and with a kind of bitter grief, 'What, the devil! one does not open a door with one's back, at all events!'"

"Baron, the courier! the courier!" said Murphy, pointing to the clock.

"Sad old reprobate, to make me chatter thus! It is your fault. Present my respects to his royal highness," said M. de Graün, taking his hat up in haste. "And now, adieu till the evening, my dear Murphy."

"Till the evening, my dear baron, fare thee well. It will be late before we meet, for I am sure that monseigneur will go this very day to pay a visit to the mysterious house in the Rue du Temple."

CHAPTER XXIII

A HOUSE IN THE RUE DU TEMPLE

In order to profit by the particulars furnished by Baron de Graün respecting La Goualeuse and Germain, the Schoolmaster's son, it became necessary for Rodolph to visit the house in the Rue du Temple, formerly the abode of that young man, whose retreat the prince likewise hoped to discover through the intervention of Mlle. Rigolette. Although prepared to find it a difficult task, inasmuch as it was more than probable, if the grisette were really sufficiently in Germain's confidence to be aware of his present abode, she also knew too well his anxiety to conceal it to be likely to give the desired information.

By renting the chamber lately occupied by the young man, Rodolph, besides being on the spot to follow up his researches, considered he should also be enabled to observe closely the different individuals inhabiting the rest of the house.

The same day on which the conversation passed between the Baron de Graün and Murphy, Rodolph, plainly and unpretendingly dressed, wended his way about three o'clock, on a gloomy November afternoon, towards the Rue du Temple.

Situated in a district of much business and dense population, the house in question had nothing remarkable in its appearance; it was composed of a ground floor, occupied by a man keeping a low sort of dram-shop, and four upper stories, surmounted by attics. A dark and narrow alley led to a small yard, or, rather, a species of square well, of about five or six feet in width, completely destitute of either air or light, and serving as a pestilential receptacle for all the filth thrown by the various occupants of the respective chambers from the unglazed sashes with which each landing-place was provided.

At the bottom of a damp, dismal-looking staircase, a glimmering light indicated the porter's residence, rendered smoky and dingy by the constant burning of a lamp, requisite, even at midday, to enlighten the gloomy hole, into which Rodolph entered for the purpose of asking leave to view the apartment then vacant.

A lamp, placed behind a glass globe filled with water, served as a reflector; and by its light might be seen, at the far end of the "lodge" (as in courtesy it was styled), a bed, covered with a sort of patchwork counterpane, exhibiting

a mingled mass of every known colour and material. A walnut-tree table graced the side of the room, bearing a variety of articles suited to the taste and ornamental notions of its owners. First in order appeared a little waxen Saint John, with a very fat lamb at his feet, and a large peruke of flowing white curls on his head, the whole enclosed in a cracked glass case, the joinings of which were ingeniously secured by slips of blue paper; secondly, a pair of old plated candlesticks, tarnished by time, and bearing, instead of lights, two gilded oranges,—doubtless an offering to the porteress on the last New Year's day; and, thirdly, two boxes, the one composed of variegated straw, the other covered with multitudinous shells, but both smelling strongly of the galleys or house of correction (let us hope, for the sake of the morality of the porteress in the Rue du Temple, that these precious specimens were not presented to her from the original owners and fabricators of them); and, lastly, between the two boxes, and just beneath a circular clock, was suspended a pair of red morocco dress-boots, small enough for the feet of fairies, but elaborately and skilfully designed and completed. This chef-d'œuvre, as the ancient masters of the craft would style them, joined to the fantastic designs sketched on the walls representing boots and shoes, abundantly indicated that the porter of this establishment devoted his time and his talents to the repairing of shoes and shoe leather.

At the instant when Rodolph ventured into the smoky den, M. Pipelet, the porter, temporarily absent, had left his better half, Madame Pipelet, as his representative. This individual was seated by the stove in the centre of the lodge, deeply engrossed in watching the boiling of a pot placed over it. The description of Madame Pipelet may be given in a few words. She was the most ugly, forbidding, wrinkled, toothless old hag one might meet in the course of a long life. Her dress was dirty, tawdry, and untidy; while her head-dress was composed of a Brutus wig, originally of a blond colour, but changed by time into every shade of red, brown, and yellow, the stiff ends of the perished hair standing out like the ears of wheat in a wheat-sheaf. Much did Madame Pipelet pride herself upon this tasteful covering to her sexagenarian skull; nor was it believed she ever laid it aside, whether sleeping or waking.

At the sight of Rodolph the porteress inquired, in a surly tone:

"Well, and pray what do you want?"

"I believe, madame," replied Rodolph, laying a profound emphasis on the word madame, "I believe there is an apartment to be let in this house?"

The deep respect implied in his voice and words somewhat mollified the porteress, who answered, rather less sourly:

"This Individual Was Seated by the Stove"

Original Etching by Adrian Marcel

"Yes, there is a room to let on the fourth floor, but you cannot see it now,—Alfred has gone out."

"You are speaking of your son, I presume, madame; may I take the liberty of asking whether he is expected in shortly?"

"I am not speaking of my son, but my husband. I suppose there is no act of parliament why my Pipelet should not be called 'Alfred.' Is there, pray?"

"None, certainly, madame, that I am aware of; but, with your kind permission, I will await his return. I am very desirous of taking the vacant chamber,—both the street and neighbourhood suit me; and the admirable order in which the house seems kept pleases me excessively. But, previously to viewing the lodging I am anxious to take, I should be very glad to ascertain whether you, madame, could do me the favour to take the management of my little housekeeping off my hands? I never like to have any one about me but the authorised housekeeper belonging to the house, when such arrangements meet with their approbation."

This proposition, so flatteringly expressed, and the word "housekeeper" completely won Madame Pipelet, who replied:

"With the greatest of pleasure, sir, I will attend to all you require. I am sure I shall be proud to wait upon such a gentleman; and, for the small charge of six francs a month, you shall be treated like a prince."

"Then for six francs a month, I may reckon upon your valuable services. Will you permit me to ask your name?"

"Pomona Fortunata Anastasia Pipelet."

"Well, then, Madame Pipelet, having agreed as to your own terms, will you be pleased to tell me those for the apartment I wish to engage?"

"With the adjoining small closet, one hundred and fifty francs a month,—not a farthing less. The principal lessee is a screw,—a regular skinflint."

"What is his name?"

"M. Bras Rouge."

This name, and the remembrances so unexpectedly presented by it, made Rodolph start.

"I think, Madame Pipelet, you were saying that the principal lessee of the house is——"

"M. Bras Rouge."

"And he lives——"

"Rue aux Fêves, No. 13. He also keeps an estaminet near the Champs Elysées."

All doubt was then at an end,—it was the Bras Rouge of infamous notoriety; and singular indeed did the circumstance of thus coming across him strike Rodolph.

"But though M. Bras Rouge is your principal lessee, he is not, I presume, the owner of the house; may I ask who is?"

"M. Bourdon; but I have never had communication with any one besides M. Bras Rouge."

With the design of still further ingratiating himself with the porteress, Rodolph resumed:

"My dear madame, this cold day would make a little of something warm and comfortable very acceptable. Might I venture to solicit the favour of your stepping as far as the spirit-shop, kept so conveniently at hand, and bring a bottle of cassia and two glasses? For I feel very tired, and the cold has quite seized me. Stay, madame, we will have three glasses, if you please; because I hope your husband will join us when he returns."

So saying, he placed a franc in the fat, dirty hand of the porteress.

"Ah, monsieur, you are determined to make us all fall in love with you!" cried Madame Pipelet, nodding her approval of the commission, and thereby sending the flush of pleasure into a face glowing with all the fiery honours of an excited Bacchante.

"To be sure! There is nothing like a drop of really good cordial such a day as this; and they do keep most excellent here at hand. I'll go,—of course I will; but I shall only bring a couple of glasses, for Alfred and I always drink out of the same glass. Poor old darling! he is so very nice and particular in showing all those sort of delicate attentions to women."

"Then go along, my good Madame Pipelet, and we will wait till Alfred comes."

"But, then, suppose any one wants me whilst I am out, who will mind the lodge?"

"Oh, I'll take care of the lodge."

The old woman departed on her agreeable errand.

At the termination of a few minutes the postman tapped at the lodge window, and putting his hand into the apartment, presented two letters, merely saying, "Three sous."

"Six sous, you mean, for two letters," replied Rodolph.

"One is free," answered the man.

Having paid and dismissed the postman, Rodolph mechanically examined the two letters thus committed to his charge; but at a further glance they seemed to him worthy a more attentive observation. The epistle addressed to Madame Pipelet exhaled through its hot-pressed envelope a strong odour of Russia leather; it bore, on a seal of red wax, the initials "C. R." surmounted by a helmet, and supported by a cross of the Legion of Honour. The direction was written in a firm, bold hand. The heraldic device of the commingled casque and cross made Rodolph smile, and confirmed him in the idea that the writer of the letter in question was not a female. Who was this scented, emblazoned correspondent of old Anastasia Pipelet? Rodolph felt an undefinable curiosity to know. The other epistle, written upon coarse and common paper, was united only by a common wafer, pricked over with the point of a pin, and was addressed to "M. César Bradamanti, Operating Dentist." Evidently disguised, the superscription was entirely composed of capital letters. Whether founded on a true or false presage, this letter seemed to Rodolph to wear a mournful look, as though evil or misery were contained within its shabby folds. He perceived that some of the letters in the direction were fainter than the others, and that the paper there seemed a little rumpled: a tear had evidently fallen upon it.

Madame Pipelet returned, bearing the bottle of cassia and two glasses.

"I have dawdled,—have I not, monsieur?" said she, gaily. "But let you once get into that good Père Joseph's shop, and it is hard work to get out again. Oh, that old man is a very insinuating——"

"Here, madame," interrupted Rodolph, "here are two letters the postman left while you were gone."

"Dear me! Two letters! Pray excuse me, monsieur. I suppose you paid for them?"

"I did."

"You are very good. I tell you what, then, we will settle that out of the first money you have to pay me; how much was it?"

"Three sous," answered Rodolph, much amused at the ingenious method of reimbursement employed by Madame Pipelet. "But may I, without offence, observe that one of the letters is addressed to you, and that you possess in the writer a correspondent whose billets-doux are marvellously well perfumed?"

"Let us see what it is about," said the porteress, taking the epistle in the scented envelope. "Yes, upon my word, it is scented up like a real billet-doux! Now, I should very much like to know who would dare write me a love-letter! He must be a villain!"

"And suppose it had fallen into your husband's hands, Madame Pipelet?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't mention that, or I shall faint away in your arms! But how stupid I am! Now I know all about it," replied the fat porteress, shrugging her shoulders. "To be sure! to be sure! it comes from the Commandant! Lord bless me, what a fright I have had! for Alfred is as jealous as a Turk."

"Here is another letter addressed to M. César Bradamanti."

"Ah! to be sure, the dentist on the third floor. I will put it in the letter-boot."

Rodolph fancied he had not caught the right words, but, to his astonishment, he saw Madame Pipelet gravely throw the letter alluded to into an old top-boot hanging up against the wall. He looked at her with surprise.

"Do you mean," said he at length, "to put the gentleman's letter in——"

"Oh, yes, that is all right," replied the porteress. "I have put it in the letter-boot,—there, you see. So now nobody's letters can be mislaid; and when the different lodgers return home, Alfred or myself turns the boot upside down,—we sort them out, and everybody gets his own."

So saying, the porteress proceeded to break the seal of the letter addressed to her; which having done, she turned it round and round, looked at it in every direction, then, after a short appearance of embarrassment and uncertainty, she said to Rodolph:

"Alfred generally reads my letters for me, because I do not happen to be able to read them myself; perhaps you would not mind just looking over this for me?"

"With the utmost pleasure!" quickly replied Rodolph, curious to dive into the mysteries of who Madame Pipelet's correspondent might be; and forthwith he read what follows, written upon hot-pressed paper, stamped in its right-hand corner with the helmet, the letters "C. R.," the heraldic supporters, and the cross of honour.

"To-morrow (Friday), about eleven o'clock, let there be a good (not an overfierce) fire lighted in both rooms; have everything well dusted, and remove the coverings from the furniture, taking especial care not to scratch the gilding, or to soil or burn the carpet while lighting the fires. If I should not be in about one o'clock, when a lady will arrive in a hackney-coach and inquire for me by the name of M. Charles, let her be shown up to the apartment; after which the key is to be taken down-stairs again, and kept till my arrival."

Spite of the want of finished composition displayed in this billet, Rodolph perfectly comprehended to whom and what it alluded, and merely added, after perusing it:

"Who lives on the first floor, then?"

The old woman placed her yellow, shrivelled finger upon her pendulous lip, and replied, by a half-malicious grin:

"Hush! There is a woman in the way,—silence!"

"Oh, my dear Madame Pipelet, I merely asked because, before living in a house, one likes to know a little."

"Yes, yes! Of course, everybody likes to know all they can; that is all fair enough; and I am sure I have no objection to tell you all I know myself, and that is but very little. Well, but to begin. About six weeks ago a carpet-maker came here to look at the first floor, which was then to let, and to ask the price, and other particulars about it. Next day he came again, accompanied by a young man of fair complexion, small moustaches, and wearing a cross of honour and very fine linen. The carpet-maker called him commandant."

"A military man, I suppose?" said Rodolph.

"Military!" exclaimed Madame Pipelet, with a chuckle. "Not he! Why, Alfred might as well call himself porter to a prince."

"How so?"

"Why, he is only in the National Guard! The carpet-maker only called him commandant to flatter him: just the same as it tickles up Alfred's vanity to be styled concierge instead of porter. So when the commandant (that is the only name we know him by) had looked over the rooms, he said to the upholsterer, his friend, 'Well, I think the place will do for me,—just see the landlord, and arrange all about it.' 'Yes, commandant,' says the other. And the very next day the upholsterer-man signed the lease with M. Bras Rouge (in his own name, mind you); and, further, paid six months in advance, because, he said, the gentleman did not wish to be bored about references. And such a power of fine furniture as was sent into the first floor!Sophesus (sarcophagus) curtains, all silk; glasses set in gold, and everything you can mention, all beautiful enough to astonish you; just, for all the world, like one of them grand cafes on the Boulevards! As for the carpets,—oh, you never trod on the like of them, I'll be bound. Put your foot on them, and you'd fancy you was stepping on velvet, and take it off again for fear of spoiling it. When everything was completed, the commandant came to look at it,—just to see if he could find out anything more he wanted; but he could not. So then he spoke to Alfred, and says he, 'Could you take charge of my rooms and keep them in nice order, light fires from time to time, and get them ready for me when I wish to occupy them? I shall not be here often,' says he, 'and would always write you a line before coming, to give you time to prepare them.' 'Yes, commandant, I can,' answers my flatterer of an Alfred. 'And what shall you charge?' 'Twenty francs a month, commandant.' 'Twenty francs!' exclaimed the commandant. 'Why, porter, you are jesting, surely!' And hereupon he began bating Alfred down in the most shabby manner, trying to squeeze poor people like us out of two or three miserable francs, when he had been squandering thousands in fitting up his grand apartments, which, after all, he did not mean to live in! However, after a deal

of battling, we got twelve francs a month out of him,—a paltry, pitiful, two-farthing captain! What a difference, now, between you and him!" added the porteress, addressing Rodolph with an admiring glance. "You don't call yourself fine names and titles,—you only look like a plain body,—you must be poor, or you would not perch yourself on the fourth floor; and yet you agreed with me for six francs, without attempting to bate me down!"

"And when did the commandant pay you his next visit?"

"I'll tell you,—and good fun it is, too. My gentleman must have been nicely choused by somebody. Three times did he write (same as to-day), ordering us to light a fire and have everything ready for the reception of a lady he expected would come. Come! Yes, I daresay he may expect a long time first, I rather think."

"Nobody came then?"

"Listen. The first time the commandant arrived, strutting and swelling like a turkey-cock, humming and singing, after his manner, all the gay tunes of the day, walking up and down his fine room with his hands stuck in his pockets, and occasionally stopping to arrange his hair before the glass,—we were watching him all the time. Well, this went on for two or three hours, when, I suppose, he knew it was no use waiting any longer; so he came down-stairs very softly, and with quite a different manner to the pride and consequence he had marched up with. By way of teasing him, Pipelet and I went out to him and said, 'Commandant, there has been no lady whatever to inquire for you,' 'Very well! Very well!' exclaimed he, half mad and half ashamed of being laughed at, and, buttoning up his coat, he walked off as fast as he could. The next time, before he came himself, a small note was brought here by a man, directed to M. Charles; I strongly suspected he was done again, and Pipelet and me were enjoying a hearty good laugh over it when the commandant arrived. 'Captain,' says I, putting the back of my hand up to my wig, by way of military salute, 'here is a letter for you, but I am afraid it contains news of a second countermarch against you.' He looked at me sour as a crab, snatched the letter from my hand, read it, turned scarlet as a boiled lobster, then walked off, pretending to whistle; but he was finely vexed,—ready to hang himself, I could see he was,—and it was rare nuts to me. 'Go, and swallow that pill, my two-farthing captain,' says I to myself; 'that serves you right for only giving twelve francs a month for minding your apartments.'"

"And the third time?"

"Ah, the third time I really thought it was all right. The commandant arrived more stuck up with pride than ever; his eyes staring with self-satisfied admiration at himself and the certainty of not being disappointed this time. Let me tell the truth about him; he really is a good-looking man, and dresses well, though he stinks of musk like a civet cat. Well, there was my gentleman arrayed in all his finery, and scarcely condescending to look at us poor folks; he seemed as though he conferred a favour on the earth by deigning to walk on it, and went, sticking his nose into the air, as if he meant to touch the clouds with it. He took the key, and said to us, as he passed up-stairs, in a jeering, self-complacent tone, as though to revenge himself for having been laughed at twice before, 'You will direct the lady to my apartments when she comes.' Well, Pipelet and I were so anxious to see the lady he expected, though we did not much reckon upon her keeping her appointment, even if she ever made one, that we went and hid ourselves behind the little door that belongs to the alley; and, behold! in a short time a blue hackney-coach, with its blinds drawn down, stopped at the entrance to the house. 'There she is!' says I to Alfred. 'There is his madame; let's keep back a bit for fear we frighten her away.' The coachman got off his box and opened the door. Then we saw a female, closely covered with a black veil, and carrying a muff; she had apparently been crying, for she kept her handkerchief to her face; for when the steps were let down, instead of alighting, she said some few words to the driver, who, much surprised, shut the door up again."

"Then the lady did not get out?"

"No! she threw herself back in the coach and pressed her handkerchief tightly to her eyes. I rushed out, and before the coachman had time to get on his seat again, I called out, 'Hallo, there, coachy! are you going back again?' 'Yes,' says he. 'Where?' says I. 'Where I came from,' answers he. 'And where did you come from?' asks I again. 'From the Rue St. Dominique, corner of the Rue Belle Chasse.'"

Rodolph started at these words. His dearest friend, the Marquis d'Harville, who, as elsewhere stated, had been for some time labouring under a deep melancholy none could penetrate, lived in the very place just mentioned by Madame Pipelet. Could this mysterious female in the blue fiacre be the Marquise d'Harville? And was it from the lightness and frivolity of her conduct that the mind of her excellent husband was bowed down by doubts and misgivings? These painful suggestions crowded on Rodolph's mind, but, although well acquainted with all the various guests received by the marquise, he could recollect no one answering the description of the commandant; added to which, any female might have taken a hackney-

coach from that spot without necessarily living in the street. There was really nothing to identify the unknown of the blue fiacre with Madame d'Harville, and yet a thousand vague fears and painful suspicions crossed his mind; his uneasy manner and deep abstraction did not escape the porteress.

"What are you thinking of, sir?" asked she at length.

"I was wondering what could have induced the lady, after coming to the very door, to change her mind so suddenly."

"There is no saying; some sudden thought,—dread or fear,—for we poor women are but weak, cowardly things," said the porteress, assuming a timid, frightened manner. "Well, I think if it had been myself now, coming secretly to visit Alfred, I should have had to try back a great many times before I could have screwed up my courage to venture in. But then, as for visiting your great dons in this kind of way, I never could have done such a thing. No, never! I am sure there is nobody under the face of heaven can say I ever give them the least freedom,—I should think not, indeed, while my poor dear old darling of a husband is left."

"No doubt,—no doubt, Madame Pipelet; but about the young person you were describing in the blue fiacre?"

"Oh! mind, I don't know whether she was young or old; I could not even catch a glimpse of the tip of her nose; all I can say is she went as she came, and that is all about it. As for Alfred and me, we were better pleased than if we had found ten francs."

"Why so?"

"By enjoying the rage and confusion of the commandant when he found himself a third time disappointed; but, instead of going and telling him at once that his 'madame' had been and gone, we allowed him to fume and fret for a whole hour. Then I went softly up-stairs with only my list slippers on. I reached his door, which I found half shut; as I pushed against it, it creaked; the staircase is as black as night, and the entrance to the apartment quite as obscure. Scarcely had I crept into the room, when the commandant caught me in his arms, saying, in a languishing voice, 'My dearest angel! what makes you so late?'"

Spite of the serious nature of the thoughts crowding upon his mind, Rodolph could not restrain a smile as he surveyed the grotesque periwig and hideously wrinkled, carbuncled visage of the heroine of this comic scene.

Madame Pipelet, however, resumed her narration with a mirthful chuckle that increased her ugliness:

"That was a go, wasn't it? But stop a bit. Well, I did not make the least reply, but, almost keeping in my breath, I waited to see what would be the end of this strange reception. For a minute or two the commandant kept hugging me up, then, all of a sudden, the brute pushed me away, exclaiming with as much disgust as though he had touched a toad, 'Who the devil are you?' 'Me, commandant,—the porteress,—Madame Pipelet; and, as such, I will thank you to keep your hands off my waist, and not to call me your angel, and scold me for being late. Suppose Alfred had heard you, a pretty business we should have made of it!' 'What the deuce brings you here?' cried he. 'Merely to let you know the lady in the hackney-coach has just arrived!' 'Well, then, you stupid old fool, show her up directly. Did I not tell you to do so?' 'Yes, commandant; you said I was to show her up.' 'Then why do you not obey me?' 'Because the lady—' 'Speak out, woman, if you can!' 'The lady has gone again.' 'Something you have said or done, then, to offend her, I am sure!' roared he in a perfect fury. 'Not at all, commandant. The lady did not alight, but when the coach stopped and the driver opened the door, she desired him to take her back to where she came from.' 'The vehicle cannot have got far by this time,' exclaimed the commandant, hastening towards the door. 'It has been gone upwards of an hour,' answered I, enjoying his fury and disappointment. 'An hour! an hour! and what, in the devil's name, hindered you from letting me know this sooner?' 'Because, commandant, Alfred and I thought we would spare you as long as we could the tidings of this third breakdown, which we fancied might be too much for you.' Come, thinks I, there is something to make you remember flinging me out of your arms, as though it made you sick to touch me. 'Begone!' bawled out the commandant. 'You hideous old hag! You can neither say nor do the thing that is right,' and with this he pulled off his dressing-gown and threw his beautiful Greek cap, made of velvet embroidered with gold, on the ground: it was a real shame, for the cap was a downright beauty; and as for the dressing-gown, oh, my! it would set anybody longing. Meanwhile the commandant kept pacing the room, with his eyes glaring like a wild beast and glowing like two glow-worms."

"But were you not afraid of losing his employ?"

"He knew too well what he was about for that; we had him in a fix, we knew where his 'madame' lived, and had he said anything to us, we should have threatened to expose the whole affair. And who do you think for his beggarly twelve francs would have undertaken to attend to his rooms,—a stranger? No! That we would have prevented; we would soon have made the place too

hot to hold any person he might appoint,—poor, shabby fellow that he is! What do you think? He actually had the meanness to examine his wood and put out the quantity he should allow to be burnt while he was away. He is nothing but an upstart, I am sure,—a nobody, who has suddenly tumbled into money he does not know how to spend properly,—a rich man's head and a beggar's body, who squanders with one hand and nips and pinches with the other. I do not wish him any harm, but it amuses me immensely to think how he has been befooled; and he will go on believing and expecting from day to day, because he is too vain to imagine he is being laughed at. At any rate, if the lady ever comes in reality, I will let my friend the oyster-woman next door know; she enjoys a joke as well as I do, and is quite as curious as myself to find out what sort of person she is, whether fair or dark, pretty or plain. And—who knows?—this woman may be cheating some easygoing simpleton of a husband for the sake of our two-penny-halfpenny of a commandant! Well, that is no concern of mine, but I am sorry, too, for the poor, dear, deceived individual, whoever he may be. Dear me! Dear me! My pot is boiling over,—excuse me a minute, I must just look to it. Ah, it is time Alfred was in, for dinner is quite ready, and tripe, you know, should never be kept waiting. This tripe is done to a turn. Do you prefer the thick or thin tripe? Alfred likes it thick. The poor darling has been sadly out of spirits lately, and I got this dainty dish to cheer him up a bit; for, as Alfred says himself, that for a bribe of good thick tripe he would betray France itself,—his beloved France. Yes, the dear old pet would change his country for such fine fat tripe as this, he would."

While Madame Pipelet was thus delivering her domestic harangue upon the virtues of tripe and the powerful influence it possessed over even the patriotism of her husband, Rodolph was buried in the deepest and most sombre reflections. The female, whose visits to the house had just been detailed, be she the Marquise d'Harville or any other individual, had evidently long struggled with her imprudence ere she had brought herself to grant a first and second rendezvous, and then, terrified at the probable consequences of her imprudence, a salutary remorse had, in all probability, prevented her from fulfilling her dangerous engagement. It might be that the fine person this M. Charles was described as possessing had captivated the senses of Madame d'Harville, whom Rodolph knew well as a woman of deep feeling, high intellect, and superior taste, of an elevated turn of mind, and a reputation unsullied by the faintest breath of slander. After long and mature consideration, he succeeded in persuading himself that the wife of his friend had nothing to do with the unknown female in the blue fiacre. Madame Pipelet, having completed her culinary arrangements, resumed her conversation with Rodolph.

"And who lives on the second floor?" inquired he of the porteress.

"Why, Mother Burette does,—a most wonderful woman at fortune-telling; bless you, she can read in your hand the same as a book, and many quite first-rate people come to her to have the cards consulted when they are anxious about any particular matter. She earns her weight in gold, and that is not a trifle, for she is a rare bundle of an old body. However, telling fortunes is only one of her means of gaining a livelihood."

"Why, what does she do besides?"

"She keeps what you would call a pawnbroker's shop upon a small scale."

"I see; your second-floor lodger lends out again the money she derives from her skill in foretelling events by reading the cards."

"Exactly so; only she is cheaper and more easy to deal with than the regular pawnbrokers: she does not confuse you with a heap of paper tickets and duplicates,—nothing of the sort. Now suppose: Some one brings Mother Burette a shirt worth three francs; well, she lends ten sous upon condition of being paid twenty at the end of the week, otherwise she keeps the shirt for ever. That is simple enough, is it not? Always in round figures, you see,—a child could understand it. And the odd things she has brought her as pledges you would scarcely believe. You can hardly guess what she sometimes is asked to lend upon. I saw her once advance money upon a gray parrot that swore like a trooper,—the blackguard did."

"A parrot? But to what amount did she advance money?"

"I'll tell you; the parrot was well known; it belonged to a Madame Herbelot, the widow of a factor, living close by, and it was also well understood that Madame Herbelot valued the parrot as much as she did her life. Well, Mother Burette said to her, 'I will lend you ten francs on your bird, but if by this day week at twelve o'clock I do not receive twenty francs with interest (it would amount to that in round numbers), if I am not paid my twenty francs, with the expenses of his keep, I shall give your Polly a trifling dose of arsenic mixed with his food.' She knew her customer well, bless you! However, by this threat Mother Burette received her twenty francs at the end of seven days, and Madame Herbelot got back her disagreeable, screaming parrot."

"Mother Burette has no other way of living besides the two you have named, I suppose?"

"Not that I know of. I don't know, however, what to say of some rather sly and secret transactions, carried on in a small room she never allows any one to enter, except M. Bras Rouge and an old one-eyed woman, called La Chouette."

Rodolph opened his eyes with unmixed astonishment as these names sounded on his ear, and the porteress, interpreting the surprise of her future lodger according to her own notions, said:

"That name would make any one stare with astonishment. Certainly La Chouette is uncommonly odd; is it not?"

"It is, indeed. Does the woman who is so styled come here frequently?"

"We saw her the day before yesterday, for the first time these six weeks. She was rather lame, I observed."

"And what do you suppose she wants with the fortune-telling woman?"

"That I do not know; at least, as to what takes place in the little room I was telling you of, where La Chouette alone is admitted with M. Bras Rouge and Mother Burette. I have, however, particularly observed that on those occasions the one-eyed woman always has a large bundle with her in her basket, and that M. Bras Rouge also carries a parcel of some size beneath his cloak, and that they always return empty-handed."

"And what can these packets contain?"

"The Lord above knows, for I don't; only they kick up the devil's own row with them, whatever they are. And then such whiffs of sulphur, charcoal, and melted lead, as you go up the stairs; and blow, blow, blow, like a smith's forge. I verily believe Mother Burette has dealings with the old one, and practises magic in this private apartment; leastways, that is what M. César Bradamanti, our third-floor lodger, said to me. A very clever individual is M. César. When I say an 'individual,' I mean an Italian, though he speaks as good French as you or me, excepting his accent, and that is nothing. Oh, he is very clever, indeed! knows all about physic; and pulls out teeth, not for the sake of the money but the honour of his profession,—yes, really, sir, for downright honour. Now, suppose you had six decayed teeth,—and he says the same thing to all who choose to listen to him,—well, then he will take out five for nothing, and only charge you for the sixth. Besides which, he sells all manner of remedies for all sorts of complaints,—diseases of the lungs, coughs, colds, every complaint you can name; but then he makes his own drugs, and he has for his assistant the son of our principal lessee, little

Tortillard. He says that his master is going to buy himself a horse and a red coat, and to sell his drugs in the market-places, and that young Tortillard is to be dressed like a page and be at the drum, to attract customers."

"This seems to me a very humble occupation for the son of your principal lessee."

"Why, his father says unless he gets a pretty strong hand over him, and a tolerably powerful taste of whipcord, in the way of a sound thrashing, every now and then, he is safe to come to the scaffold. And he is about the ugliest, most spiteful, ill-disposed young rascal one would wish to meet: he has played more than one abominable trick upon poor M. César Bradamanti, who is the best creature possible; for he cured Alfred of a rheumatic attack, and I promise you we have not forgotten it. Yet there are some people wicked enough to—But no, I will not tell you: it would make the hair of your head stand on end. As Alfred says, if it were true, it would send him to the galleys."

"Why, what do they accuse him of?"

"Oh, I really cannot tell you! I can't, indeed; for it is so—"

"Then we will drop the subject."

"And to say such things of a young man! Upon my life and soul, it is too bad."

"Pray, Madame Pipelet, do not give yourself the trouble of saying any more about it: let us speak of other matters."

"Why, I don't know but, as you are to live in the house, it is only fair and right to prepare you for any falsehoods you may hear. I suppose you are sufficiently well off to make the acquaintance of M. César Bradamanti, and unless you are put on your guard against these reports, they might lead to your breaking off with him. So, just put your ear down and I'll whisper what it is people say about him."

And the old woman, in a low tone, muttered a few words as Rodolph inclined his head; he started from her, with mingled disgust and horror.

"Impossible!" exclaimed he. "Surely human nature is not capable of such crimes!"

"Shocking! Is it not? But treat it as I do,—all scandal and lies. What, do you think the man who cured Alfred's rheumatism,—who draws five teeth out of six for nothing,—who has testimonies (testimonials) from every prince and king in the world,—and, above all, pays as he goes, down on the nail, would go for to do such things? Not he! I'll stake my blessed life upon it."

While Madame Pipelet thus vented her indignant opinion concerning the reports in circulation, Rodolph recalled to his memory the letter he had seen addressed to the quack dentist; he remembered the counterfeited writing and the coarse, common paper, stained with tears, which had well-nigh obliterated part of the address,—too well did he see in the mysterious grief-stained epistle the opening of a drama of deep and fearful import; and while these sad presages filled his mind, a powerful impression whispered within him that the dreadful doings ascribed to the Italian were not altogether unfounded.

"Oh, I declare, here comes Alfred!" exclaimed the porteress. "Now he will tell you his opinion of all these spiteful stories about poor M. Bradamanti. Bless you! Alfred thinks him as innocent as a lamb, ever since he cured his rheumatics."

M. Pipelet entered the lodge with a grave, magisterial air. He was about sixty years of age, comfortably fat, with a large, broad countenance, strongly resembling in its cast and style the faces carved upon the far-famed nutcrackers of Nuremberg; a nose, of more than ordinary proportions, helping to complete the likeness. An old and dingy-looking hat, with a very deep brim, surmounted the whole. Alfred, who adhered to this upper ornament as tenaciously as his wife did to her Brutus wig, was further attired in an ancient green coat, with immense flaps turned up with grease,—if so might be described the bright and shiny patches of long-accumulated dirt, which had given an entirely different hue to some portions of the garment. But, though clad in a hat and coat esteemed by Pipelet and his wife as closely resembling full dress, Alfred had not laid aside the modest emblem of his trade, but from his waist uprose the buff-coloured triangular front of his leathern apron, partly concealing a waistcoat boasting nearly as great a variety of colours as did the patchwork counterpane of Madame Pipelet.

The porter's recognition of Rodolph as he entered was gracious in the extreme; but, alas! he smiled a melancholy welcome, and his countenance and languid air marked a man of secret sorrow.

"Alfred," said Madame Pipelet, when she had introduced her two companions, "here is a gentleman after the apartment on the fourth floor, and we have only been waiting for you to drink a glass of cordial he sent for."

This delicate attention won for Rodolph the entire trust and confidence of the melancholy porter, who, touching the brim of his hat, said, in a deep bass voice worthy of being employed in a cathedral:

"We shall give the gentleman every satisfaction as porters, and, doubtless, he will act the same by us as a lodger; 'birds of a feather flock together,' as the proverb says." Then, interrupting himself, M. Pipelet anxiously added, "Providing, sir, you are not a painter!"

"No, I am not a painter, but a plain merchant's clerk."

"My most humble duty to you, sir. I congratulate you that Nature did not make you one of those monsters called artists."

"Artists, monsters!" returned Rodolph. "Tell me, pray, why you style them so."

Instead of replying, M. Pipelet elevated his clasped hands towards the ceiling, and allowed a heavy sound, between a grunt and a groan, to escape his overcharged breast.

"You must know, sir," said Madame Pipelet, in a low tone, to Rodolph, "that painters have embittered Alfred's life; they have worried my poor old dear almost out of his senses, and made him half stupefied, as you see him now." Then speaking loud, she added, in a caressing tone, "Oh, never mind the blackguard, there's a dear, but try and forget all about it, or you will be ill, and unable to eat the nice tripe I have got for your dinner."

"Let us hope I shall have courage and firmness enough for all things," replied M. Pipelet, with a dignified and resigned air; "but he has done me much harm; he has been my persecutor, almost my executioner,—long have I suffered, but now I despise him! Ah," said he, turning to Rodolph, "never allow a painter to enter your doors; they are the plague—the ruin—the destruction of a house!"

"You have, then, had a painter lodging with you, I presume?"

"Unhappily, sir, I did have one," replied M. Pipelet, with much bitterness, "and that one named Cabrion. Ah!"

At the recollections brought back by this name, the porter's declaration of courage and endurance utterly failed him, and again his clenched fists were raised, as though to invoke the vengeance he had so lately described himself as despising.

"And was this individual the last occupant of the chamber I am about engaging?" inquired Rodolph.

"No, no! The last lodger was an excellent young man named M. Germain. No, this Cabrion had the room before he came. Ah, sir, since Cabrion left, he has all but driven me stark staring mad!"

"Did you, then, so much regret him?" asked Rodolph.

"Regret him! Regret Cabrion!" screamed the astounded porter; "why, only imagine, M. Bras Rouge paid him two quarters' rent to induce him to quit the place, for, unluckily, he had taken his apartments for a term. What a scamp he was! You have no idea of the horrible tricks he played off upon all the lodgers as well as us. Why, just to give you one little proof of his villainy, there was hardly a single wind instrument he did not make use of as a sort of annoyance to the lodgers; from the French horn to the flageolet, he made use of all, and even carried his rascality so far as to play false and to keep blowing the same note for hours together; it was enough to worry one out of one's senses. Well, I suppose there were upwards of twenty different petitions sent to our chief lessee, M. Bras Rouge, to turn the beggar out; and, at last, he was only got rid of by paying him two quarters' rent,—rather droll, is it not, for a landlord to pay his lodger? But, bless you, the house was so upset by him that he might have had any price so he would but take himself off; however, he did go. And now you suppose we were clear of M. Cabrion? I'll tell you. Next night, about eleven o'clock, I was in bed, when rap, rap, rap, comes to the gate. I pulls up the string,—somebody walks up to my door, 'How do you do, porter?' says a voice; 'will you oblige me with a lock of your hair?' 'Somebody has mistaken the door,' says my wife. So I calls out to the stranger, 'You are wrong, friend, you want next door.' 'I think not,' returns the voice; 'this is No. 17, is it not, and the porter's name is Pipelet? I'm all right; so please to open the door and oblige me with a lock of your beautiful hair.' 'My name is Pipelet, certainly,' answers I. 'Well, then, friend Pipelet, Cabrion has sent me for a piece of your hair; he says he must and he will have it.'"

As Pipelet uttered the last words he gave his head a mournful shake, and, folding his arms, assumed an attitude of martyrlike resolution.

"Do you perceive, sir? He sends to me, his mortal enemy, whom he overwhelmed with insults and continually outraged in every way, to beg a lock of my hair,—a favour which even ladies have been known to refuse to a lover!"

"But, supposing this Cabrion had been as good a lodger as was M. Germain," replied Rodolph, with some difficulty preserving the gravity of countenance, "do you think you might have accorded him the favour?"

"Not to the best lodger that treads shoe-leather would I grant a similar request," replied the man in the flapped hat, waving it majestically over his brows as he spoke; "it is contrary to my principles and habits to give my hair to any one,—only I should have refused with the most scrupulous regard to politeness."

"That is not all," chimed in the porteress. "Only conceive, sir, the abominable conduct of that Cabrion, who, from morning to night, at all hours and at all times, sends a swarm of vagabonds like himself to ask Alfred for a lock of his hair,—always for Cabrion!"

"Ah, monsieur," sighed out poor Pipelet, "had I committed the most atrocious crimes, my sleep could not have been rendered more broken and unrefreshing; scarcely do I fall into a doze than I wake starting with the idea of being called by that cursed Cabrion! I suspect everybody,—in each person who approaches me I see an emissary from my persecutor come to request a lock of my hair. I am losing my good spirits, my temper, and becoming gloomy, suspicious, peevish, and ill-natured. This infernal Cabrion has murdered my whole life!"

And Pipelet heaved so profound a sigh that his hat, vibrating for some time from the consequences of the convulsive shake of the head occasioned thereby, fell forward and completely veiled his care-stricken features.

"I can well understand, now," said Rodolph, "that you are not particularly partial to painters; but I suppose the M. Germain you were praising so highly made up for the bad treatment you received from M. Cabrion?"

"Yes, yes, sir; as I told you, M. Germain was a delightful young man, so honourable and kind-hearted, open as the day, and ever ready to serve and oblige; he was cheerful and merry as need be, but then he always kept his high spirits within proper bounds instead of worrying people to death by his unmeaning hoaxes, like that Cabrion, who I wish was at the devil!"

"Come, come, my good M. Pipelet, I must not let you thus excite yourself; and who, now, is the person fortunate enough to possess such a pattern of a lodger as this M. Germain seems to have been?"

"That is more than I can tell you; no one knows whither he has gone, nor are they likely, except, indeed, through Mlle. Rigolette."

"And who is Mlle. Rigolette?" demanded Rodolph.

"Why, she is a needlewoman, also living on the fourth floor," cried Madame Pipelet; "another pattern lodger, always pays her rent in advance, and keeps her little chamber so nice and clean; then she is well behaved to every one, so merry and happy, like a bird, though, poor thing! very like a caged bird, obliged to work early and late to earn two francs a day, and often not half that, let her try ever so hard."

"How does it happen that Mlle. Rigolette should be the only person entrusted with the secret of M. Germain's present abode?"

"Why, when he was going away, he came to us and said," returned Madame Pipelet, "'I do not expect any letters; but if, by chance, any should come, please to give them to Mlle. Rigolette.' And she is well worthy of his confidence, if his letters were filled with gold; don't you think so, Alfred?"

"The fact is," said the porter, in a severe tone, "that I know no harm of Mlle. Rigolette, excepting her permitting herself to be wheedled over by that vile scamp, Cabrion."

"But you know, Alfred, that nothing more than a few harmless attentions passed between them," interrupted the porteress; "for, though Mlle. Rigolette is as merry as a kitten, she is as prudent and correct as I am myself. You should see the strong bolts she has inside her door; and if her next-door neighbour will make love to her, that is not her fault; it follows as a matter of course when people are so close to each other. It was just the same with the travelling-clerk we had here before Cabrion, and so it was when M. Germain took the room this abominable painter occupied. So, as I say, there is no blame to Mlle. Rigolette; it arises out of the two rooms joining one another so closely,—naturally that brings about a little flirtation, but nothing more."

"So, then, it becomes a matter of course, does it," said Rodolph, "that every one who occupies the apartment I am to have should make love to Mlle. Rigolette?"

"Why, of course, monsieur; how can you be good neighbours without it,—don't you see? Now, imagine yourself lodging in the very next room to a nice, pretty, obliging young person, like Mlle. Rigolette; well, then, young people will be young people,—sometimes you want a light, sometimes a few live coals to kindle up your fire, maybe a little water,—for one is sure always to find plenty of fresh spring water at Mlle. Rigolette's, she is never without it; it is her only luxury,—she is like a little duck, always dabbling in it; and if she does happen to have a little leisure, such a washing down of floors and cleaning of windows! Never the least soil or neglect about either herself or her apartment, and so you will find."

"And so M. Germain, by reason of his close proximity to Mlle. Rigolette, became what you style upon perfectly neighbourly terms with her?"

"Oh, bless you, yes! Why, the two seemed cut out for each other, so young and so good-looking! It was quite a pleasure to look at them as they came down-stairs of a Sunday to take the only walk, poor things! they could afford themselves throughout the week; she dressed in a smart little cap and a gown that cost, probably, not more than twenty-five sous the ell, but made by herself, and that so tastily that it became her as much as though it had been of satin; he, mind ye, dressed and looking like a regular gentleman."

"And M. Germain has not been to see Mlle. Rigolette, I suppose, since he quitted the house?"

"No, monsieur; unless on Sunday, for Mlle. Rigolette has no time during the other six days of the week to think of sweethearting. Why, the poor girl rises at five or six o'clock, and works incessantly till ten or eleven o'clock at night, never once leaving her room except for a few minutes in the morning, when she goes out to buy food for herself and her two canary-birds; and the three eat but very little, just a penn'orth of milk, a little bread, some chickweed, bird-seed, and clear fresh water, and the whole three of them sing away as merrily as though they fared ever so sumptuously. And Mlle. Rigolette is kind and charitable, too, as far as lies in her power; that is to say, she gives her time, her sleep, and her services; for, poor girl! she can scarcely manage to keep herself by working closely for twelve hours a day. Those poor, unfortunate creatures in the attics, whom M. Bras Rouge is going to turn into the streets in two or three days' time, if even he wait so long,—why, Mlle. Rigolette and M. Germain sat up with the children night after night!"

"You have a distressed family, then, here?"

"Distressed! Oh, God bless you, my good sir, I think we have, indeed. Why, there are five young children, an almost dying mother, an idiotic grandmother, and their only support a man who, though he slaves like a negro, cannot even get bread enough to eat,—and a capital workman he is, too; three hours' sleep out of the twenty-four is all he allows himself,—and what sleep it is! broken by his children crying for food, by the groans of his sick wife tossing on her miserable straw bed, or the idiotic screams of the poor bedridden old grandmother, who sometimes howls like a wolf,—from hunger, too,—for, poor creature! she has not sense or reason to know better, and when she gets very hungry you may hear cries and screams all down the staircase."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Rodolph, with a shudder; "and does no one afford them any assistance?"

"Truly, sir, we do all we can; we are but poor ourselves; however, since the commandant has allowed me his paltry twelve francs a month for looking after his apartments, I have managed once a week to make a little broth for these poor, unfortunate creatures. Mlle. Rigolette deprives herself of her night's rest, and sits up, poor girl (though it burns her candles), contriving out of one bit and the other of her cutting out, to make up a few clothes for the children; sometimes from the morsels left of her work she manages a small nightcap or gown; and M. Germain, who had not a franc more than he knew what to do with, used to pretend, from time to time, that he had received a present of a few bottles of wine from his friends; and Morel (that is the name of the workman with the sick family) was sure to be invited to share it with him; and it was really wonderful to see how refreshed and strengthened poor Morel used to seem after M. Germain had made him take a good pull at his wine, to put, as he used to say, a little life and soul into his half-exhausted body."

"And the surgeon-dentist, what did he do for this wretched family?"

"M. Bradamanti?" said the porter. "Ah! he cured my rheumatism, and I owe him my eternal gratitude; but from that day I said to my wife, 'Anastasia, M. Bradamanti'—hum!—hum!—did I not say so, Anastasia?"

"Exactly; that is precisely what you did say."

"But I want to know what this M. Bradamanti did to assist the poor starving beings in your garrets."

"Why, you see, monsieur, when I mentioned to M. Bradamanti the misery and utter destitution of poor Morel—by the way, he first began the conversation by complaining that the raving and screaming of the old idiot woman throughout the night for food prevented him from sleeping, and that he found it very unpleasant; however, he listened to my description of the state the whole family was in, and then he said, 'Well, if they are so much distressed, you may tell them that if they want any teeth drawn, I will excuse them paying even for the sixth.'"

"I tell you what, Madame Pipelet," said Rodolph, "I have a decidedly bad opinion of this man. And your female pawnbroker, was she more charitable?"

"Very much after the fashion of M. Bradamanti," said the porteress; "she lent a few sous upon their wretched clothes; every garment they had has passed into her hands, and even their last mattress; but they were not long coming to the last, for they never had but two."

"But she gave them no further aid?"

"Help them, poor creatures! Not she. Mother Burette is as great a brute in her way as her lover, M. Bras Rouge, is in his; for between you and I," added the porteress, with an uncommonly knowing wink of the eye and sagacious shake of the head, "there is something rather tender going on between these two."

"Really!" cried Rodolph.

"I think so,—I do, upon my life. And why not? Why, the folks in St. Martin are as loving as the rest of the world; are they not, my old pet?"

A melancholy shake of the head, which produced a corresponding motion in the huge black hat, was M. Pipelet's only answer. As for Madame Pipelet, since she had begun expressing sympathy for the poor sufferers in the attics, her countenance had ceased to strike Rodolph as repulsive, and he even thought it wore an agreeable expression.

"And what is this poor Morel's trade?"

"A maker of false jewelry; he works by the piece; but, dear me! that sort of work is so much imitated, and so cheaply got up that—For a man can butwork his best, and he cannot do more than he can; besides, when you have got to find bread for seven persons without reckoning yourself, it is

rather a hard job, I take it. And though his eldest daughter does her best to assist the family, she has but very little in her power."

"How old is this daughter?"

"About eighteen, and as lovely a young creature as you would see in a long summer's day. She lives as servant with an old miserly fellow, rich enough to buy and sell half Paris,—a notary, named M. Jacques Ferrand."

"M. Jacques Ferrand!" exclaimed Rodolph, surprised at the fresh coincidence which brought under his notice the very individual from whom, or from whose confidential housekeeper, he expected to glean so many particulars relative to La Goualeuse. "M. Jacques Ferrand, who lives in the Rue du Sentier, do you mean?" inquired he.

"The very same; are you acquainted with him?"

"Not at all; but he does the law business for the firm I belong to."

"Ah! then you must know that he is a regular money-grubbing old usurer; but then, let me do the man justice. He is strictly religious, and devout as a monk; never absent from mass or vespers, making his Easter offerings, and going regularly to confession. If he ever enjoys himself, it is only along with the priests, drinking holy water, and eating blessed bread. Oh, he is almost a saint in the strictness of his life; but, then, his heart is as hard as iron, and as stern and rigid towards others as he is severe towards himself. Why, poor Louise, daughter to our sick lodger, has been his only servant for the last eighteen months. And what a good girl she is! Gentle as a lamb in temper and disposition, but willing as a horse to work; and he only gives this poor thing, who slaves herself to death for him, eighteen francs a month,—not a farthing more, I give you my word; and out of this she only keeps back six francs for her own maintenance, and hands over the other twelve to her starving family; that has been all their dependence for some time past; but when seven persons have to live upon it, it does not go far."

"But what does the father earn,—I mean, provided he is industrious?"

"Industrious! God bless you, he has always overworked himself; he is the soberest, steadiest creature alive; and I verily believe that if he had the promise of obtaining any favour he liked to ask of Heaven, it would be that the day might be made doubly as long as it now is, that he might earn bread enough to stop the cries of his starving brats."

"Then the father cannot earn enough if he were to try ever so hard, it seems?"

"Why, the poor man was ill abed for three months, and that threw them all behind; his wife's health was quite ruined by the fatigue of nursing him and the severe want she experienced of common necessaries for herself and family. She now lies in a dying state; they have had nothing for all that period besides Louise's wages and what they could obtain from Mother Burette upon the few wretched articles they could dispose of. True, the master for whom Morel had worked advanced them a trifle, out of respect for a man he had always found punctual and honest when he could work. But, la! Eight people only to be found in bread, that is what I say,—just imagine how hard it must be to keep life and soul together upon such small means; and if you could only see the hole they are all huddled together in—But do not let us talk any more about that, monsieur, for our dinner is ready, and the very thought of their wretched garret turns my stomach. However, happily, M. Bras Rouge is going to clear the house of them,—when I say happily, I don't mean it ill-naturedly in the least; but since these poor Morels have fallen into such misery, and it is quite out of our power to help them, why let them go and be miserable elsewhere; it will be a heartache the less for us all."

"But, if they are turned out from here, where will they go to?"

"Truly, I don't know."

"And how much can this poor workman earn daily when in health, and without any calls upon his time or attention?"

"Why, if he had not to attend to his old mother, nurse his sick wife, and look after the five children, he could earn his three or four francs a day, because he works like a downright slave; but now that at least three-quarters of his time are taken up with the family, he can hardly manage to earn forty sous."

"That is little, indeed,—poor creatures!"

"Yes, it is easy to say poor creatures, but there are so many equally poor creatures, that, as we can do nothing for them, it is no use to worry ourselves about it,—is it, Alfred? And, talking of consoling ourselves, there stands the cassia, and we have never thought of tasting it."

"To tell you the truth, Madame Pipelet, after what I have just heard I have no inclination to partake of it. You and M. Pipelet must drink my health in it when I am gone."

"You are extremely kind, sir," said the porter; "but will you not like to see the rooms up-stairs?"

"I shall be glad to do so, if perfectly convenient; and, if they suit, I will engage them at once and leave a deposit."

The porter, followed by Rodolph, emerged from the gloomy lodge, and proceeded up-stairs.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FOUR STORIES

The damp, dark staircase looked still more gloomy through the fog of a November day. The entrance to each separate set of apartments in this house bore its own peculiar and distinctive character to the observant eye. Thus, the door conducting to those of the commandant bore evidences of having been recently painted in close imitation of ebony, being further set off with a brass knob rubbed up to a most dazzling brightness, while a gay-coloured bell-rope, finished by an enormous tassel of scarlet silk, contrasted strongly with the mean and shabby wall against which it hung.

The door of the flight above, where dwelt the female money-lender and dealer in divination, was singularly characterised by the appearance of that mystical symbol of deep wisdom and oracular knowledge, an owl, which, stuffed to resemble life as closely as the artist could contrive it, was nailed on a small bracket just above the doorway; while a sort of small wicket, latticed with wire-work, enabled all visitors to be duly scrutinised ere they were admitted.

The dwelling of the Italian charlatan, who was said to pursue such fearful avocations, had, likewise, its whimsical mode of designating the pursuits of its occupant, whose name, traced in large letters formed of horses' teeth upon a square black board, was nailed to the entrance-door; while, instead of adopting the classical agency of a deer's foot or a hare's pad for the handle of his bell, there hung dangling from the cord the hand and arm of a dried ape,—the withered limb, the shrivelled hand, with its five fingers, each so distinctly preserved, and the articulation of every joint so clearly defined, the tiny tips bearing the nails long and taper as those of a human creature, presented a close and hideous resemblance to the hand and arm of a child.

As Rodolph passed before a door so singularly indicative of all his worst suspicions, he fancied he could detect the sound of smothered sobs from within. Then rose up a cry so full of agony, of convulsive, irrepressible misery,—a cry as if wrung from a breaking heart or the last wail of expiring nature, that the whole house seemed to reëcho it. Rodolph started; then, by a movement more rapid than thought itself, he rushed to the door and violently pulled the bell.

"What is the matter, sir?" inquired the astonished porter.

"That cry!" said Rodolph; "did you not hear it?"

"Yes, yes, I heard it; I dare say it is some person whose teeth M. Bradamanti is taking out; perhaps he may be taking out several,—and it is painful!"

This explanation, though a probable one, did not satisfy Rodolph as to the horrid scream which still resounded in his ears. Though he had rung the bell with considerable violence, no person had as yet replied to his summons; he could distinctly hear the shutting of several doors, and then, behind a small oval glass let in beside the door, and on which Rodolph had mechanically kept his eyes fixed, he saw the haggard, cadaverous countenance of a human being; a mass of reddish hair strongly mixed with gray, and a long beard of the same hue, completed the hideous ensemble; the face was seen but for an instant, and vanished as quickly as though it had been a mere creation of fancy, leaving Rodolph in a state of perturbation impossible to describe.

Short as had been the period of this apparition's visit, he had yet in those brief instants recalled features precisely similar and for ever engraved on his memory,—the eyes shining with the colour and brilliancy of the aqua marina beneath their bushy sandy eyebrows, the livid complexion, the nose thin, projecting, and curving like an eagle's beak, with its nostrils so curiously expanded and carved out till they exposed a portion of the nasal cartilage, resembled closely a certain Polidori, whose name had been so unceremoniously committed by Murphy, in his conversation with Graün, to regions not mentionable to polite ears. Though Rodolph had not seen Polidori during the last sixteen or seventeen years, he had a thousand reasons for keeping every feature well in his remembrance. The only thing that told against the identity of the individual he believed existed under the disguised name of this quack dentist was the circumstance of his having red hair, while the Polidori of Rodolph's acquaintance had almost black. That Rodolph experienced no wonder (always supposing his conjectures as to the identity correct) at finding a man whose profound learning, rare talent, and vast intelligence he well knew, sunk to such a degradation,—it might even be infamy,—was because he knew equally well that all these high attainments and noble gifts were allied to such entire perversity, such wild and irregular passions, inclinations so corrupt, and, above all, an affected scorn and contempt for the opinion of the world, which might lead this man, when want and misery overtook him, to seek, from choice, the lowest and least honourable paths of subsistence, and to enjoy a sort of malevolent satisfaction in the idea of him, the talented, the learned, burying all these precious treasures beneath the ignoble calling to which he had devoted his vast powers of mind and body. Still, be it remembered that, spite of the close resemblance between the charlatan surgeon-dentist and the Polidori of bygone years, there still existed discrepancies so great that Rodolph

balanced, in deep uncertainty, respecting their proving to be one and the same person.

At length, turning to Pipelet, he inquired:

"How long has this M. Bradamanti been an inmate of this house?"

"About a year, sir, as nearly as I can remember,—yes, it is a year; I recollect he took the lodgings in the January quarter. Oh, he is a very regular and exact lodger; he cured me of a desperate attack of rheumatism."

"Madame Pipelet was telling me of the reports which are circulated of him."

"How could she be so foolish?"

"Nay, pray do not fear me! I assure you I may safely be trusted."

"But, really, sir," rejoined Pipelet, "I do not think there is the least dependence to be placed in such reports. I do not believe them, for one. I never can believe them; my modesty would not let me," added M. Pipelet, turning very red, and preceding his new lodger to the floor above.

The more resolved upon clearing up his doubts in proportion to the very great annoyance he felt that the residence of Polidori in the same house would prove to him, and becoming momentarily more disposed to affix a painful solution to the enigma of the piercing cry he had heard from the apartments of the Italian, Rodolph bound himself by a rigid promise to investigate the matter, so as to place it beyond the power of a doubt, and followed the porter to the upper floor, where was situated the chamber he was desirous of engaging.

It was easy to ascertain the abode of his next-door neighbour Mlle. Rigolette. Thanks to the charming gallantry of the painter, Pipelet's mortal foe, the door of her chamber was ornamented after the manner of Watteau, with a panel design representing about half a dozen fat little chubby Loves, grouped round a space painted sky blue, and on which was traced, in pink letters, "Mademoiselle Rigolette, Dressmaker." These plump little Cupids had all a task to perform besides encircling this important announcement. One held the thimble of Mlle. Rigolette upon his tiny finger; another held her scissors; a third was provided with a smoothing-iron for her use; whilst a fourth held up a mirror, as if to tempt the young sempstress to forsake her work for the more gratifying view of her own pretty countenance. The whole was surrounded with a well-chosen wreath of flowers, whose gay colours contrasted agreeably with the sea-green colour of the door; the whole

offering a very unfavourable contrast to the mean and shabby-looking staircase. At the risk of opening anew the bleeding wounds of Alfred, Rodolph ventured to observe, while pointing to the door of Mlle. Rigolette:

"This, I suppose, is the work of M. Cabrion?"

"It is; he destroyed the painting of the door by daubing it over with a parcel of fat, indecent children he called his loves. Had it not been for the entreaties of Mlle. Rigolette, and the weakness of M. Bras Rouge, I would have scratched it all off, as well as this palette filled with horrid monsters, with their equally abominable master, whom you can see drawn amongst them. You may know him by his steeple-crowned hat."

And there, sure enough, on the door of the room Rodolph was about to hire, might be seen a palette surrounded by all kinds of odd and whimsical creatures, the witty conceit of which might have done honour to Callot. Rodolph followed the porter into a tolerably good-sized room, accessible by a small entrance-closet, or antechamber, having two windows opening into the Rue du Temple. Some fantastic sketches from the pencil of M. Cabrion, on the second door, had been scrupulously respected by M. Germain. Rodolph saw too many reasons for desiring to obtain this lodging to hesitate further; therefore, modestly placing a couple of francs in the hand of the porter, he said:

"'This, I Suppose, Is the Work of M. Cabrion'"

Etching by Mercier, after the drawing by Frank T. Merrill

"This chamber will exactly suit me. Here is a deposit to complete the bargain. To-morrow I will send in my furniture; but let me beg of you not to destroy the merry creatures painted on the palette at the entrance. It is really very droll! Don't you think so?"

"Droll!" groaned poor Pipelet; "not I! Ah, sir, how would you like to dream night after night that you were being hunted by a legion of little ugly devils like these on the door, with Cabrion at their head urging them on, and then fancying you are trying to get away, and cannot? Oh, I have woke all in a perspiration from such dreams hundreds of times since that infamous Cabrion began persecuting me."

"Why, honestly speaking, I cannot say the chase would be a very agreeable one, even though but a dream. However, tell me, have I any need to see M. Bras Rouge—your great man here—about renting this apartment?"

"None whatever, sir. He rarely comes near the place, except when he has any private matters to arrange with Mother Burette. I am the only person to treat with about hiring apartments. I must beg the favour of your name."

"Rodolph."

"Rodolph what?"

"Plain Rodolph, M. Pipelet,—nothing more, if you please."

"Just as you please, sir. I did not ask from curiosity. Every man has a right to his own free will, as well as to decide upon the name he chooses to be called."

"What do you think, M. Pipelet, as to the propriety of my going to-morrow, as a new neighbour of Morel's, to inquire whether I can be of any service to them? Since my predecessor, M. Germain, was permitted to assist them according to his means, why should they not accept of what trifling help I can afford?"

"Why, sir, I see no harm in your going to call on the Morels, because it may please the poor things; but I hardly see much good it can do, as they are so shortly to be turned out of the house." Then, as if suddenly struck with a new idea, M. Pipelet exclaimed, winking at Rodolph with what he intended should be a very facetious and penetrating look, "I see, I see,—you mean to begin making acquaintance with the lodgers at the top of the house, that you may be able to work your way down to Mlle. Rigolette. Ah, I've found you out, you see,—pretty girl—"

"Well, I think you have discovered my intentions, so I will confess at once that I mean to try and be on friendly terms with my agreeable neighbour."

"There is no harm in that, sir,—it is customary; only all correct, all right and honourable,—you understand. Between you and me, I strongly suspect Mlle. Rigolette heard us coming up-stairs, and that she is watching to have a look as we go down. I will make a noise purposely in locking the door; if you look sharp, you will see her as we pass the landing." And, true to the porter's suspicions, the door so tastefully enlivened by the fat Cupids, à la Watteau, was seen to open gently, and Rodolph had a brief view of a little, turned-up nose, and a pair of large, staring black eyes, peeping through the narrow space; but, as he slacked his steps, the door was hastily shut. "I told you she was watching us," said the porter. Then added, "Excuse me one instant, sir; I want to step up to my warehouse."

"Where is that?"

"At the top of this ladder is the landing-place, on which the door of Morel's garret opens, and in the wainscoting of this landing is a small dark cupboard, where I keep my leather, and the wall is so full of cracks, that when I am in this hole I can see and hear everything, the same as if I was in Morel's room. Not that I wish to spy what the poor creatures are about, God knows,—quite the contrary. But please to excuse me for a few minutes, sir, whilst I fetch my bit of leather. If you will have the goodness to go down-stairs, I will rejoin you."

And, so saying, Pipelet commenced ascending the steep ladder communicating with his warehouse, as he styled it,—a somewhat perilous feat for a person of his age.

Rodolph, thus left alone, cast another glance towards the chambers of Mlle. Rigolette, remembering with deep interest all he had heard of her being the favourite companion of the poor Goualeuse, and recalling also the information she was said to possess touching the residence of the Schoolmaster's son, when the sound of some person quitting the apartments of the quack doctor below attracted his attention, and he could distinctly hear the light step of a female, with the rustling of a silk dress. Rodolph paused till the sounds had died away, and then descended the stairs. Something white had fallen about half-way down; it had evidently been dropped by the person who had just quitted Polidori. Rodolph picked it up, and carried it to one of the narrow windows which lighted the staircase. It was a pocket-handkerchief, of the finest cambric, trimmed with costly lace, and bearing in one corner the initials "L. N." beautifully embroidered, and surmounted with a ducal coronet. The handkerchief was literally soaked in tears.

Rodolph's first impulse was to follow the person from whose hand this mute evidence of deep woe had fallen, with the view of restoring it, but, reflecting that such a step might be mistaken for impertinent curiosity, he determined to preserve it carefully, as the first link in an adventure he found himself almost involuntarily engaged in, and from which he augured a painful and melancholy termination. As he returned to the porteress, he inquired whether a female had not just come down-stairs.

"A female! No indeed, sir,—it was a fine, tall, slender-looking lady, not a female, and covered over with a thick black veil. She has come from M. Bradamanti. Little Tortillard fetched a coach for her, and she has just driven away in it. What struck me was the impudence of that little beggar to seat

himself behind the coach. I dare say, though, it was to see where the lady went to, for he is as mischievous as a magpie, and as prying as a ferret, for all his club-foot."

"So, then," thought Rodolph, "the name and address of this unhappy lady will soon be known to this imposter, since it is, doubtless, by his directions she is followed and watched by this imp of an emissary."

"Well, sir, and what do you think of the apartment? Will it suit you?" inquired Madame Pipelet.

"Nothing could have suited me better. I have taken it, and to-morrow I shall send in my furniture."

"Well, then, thank God for a good lodger! I am sure it was a lucky chance for us sent you here."

"I hope you will find it so, madame. I think it is well understood between us that you undertake to manage all my little domestic matters for me. I shall come and superintend the removal of my goods. Adieu!"

So saying, Rodolph left the lodge. The results of his visit to the house in the Rue du Temple were highly important, both as regarded the solution of the deep mystery he so ardently desired to unravel, and also as affording a wide field for the exercise of his earnest endeavours to do good and to prevent evil. After mature calculation, he considered himself to have achieved the following results:

First, he had ascertained that Mlle. Rigolette was in possession of the address of Germain, the Schoolmaster's son. Secondly, a young female, who, from appearances, might unhappily be the Marquise d'Harville, had made an appointment with the commandant for the morrow,—perhaps to her own utter ruin and disgrace; and Rodolph had (as we have before mentioned) numerous reasons for wishing to preserve the honour and peace of one for whom he felt so lively an interest as he took in all concerning M. d'Harville. An honest and industrious artisan, crushed by the deepest misery, was, with his whole family, about to be turned into the streets through the means of Bras Rouge. Further, Rodolph had undesignedly caught a glimpse of an adventure in which the charlatan César Bradamanti (possibly Polidori) and a female, evidently of rank and fashion, were the principal actors. And, finally, La Chouette, having lately quitted the hospital, where she had been since the affair in the Allée des Veuves, had reappeared on the stage, and was

evidently engaged in some underhand proceedings with the fortune-teller and female money-lender who occupied the second floor of the house.

Having carefully noted down all these particulars, Rodolph returned to his house, Rue Plumet, deferring till the following day his visit to the notary, Jacques Ferrand.

It will be no doubt fresh in the memory of our readers, that on this same evening Rodolph was engaged to be present at a grand ball given by the ambassador of ——. Before following our hero in this new excursion, let us cast a retrospective glance on Tom and Sarah,—personages of the greatest importance in the development of this history.

CHAPTER XXV

TOM AND SARAH

Sarah Seyton, widow of Count Macgregor, and at this time thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age, was of an excellent Scotch family, daughter of a baronet, and a country gentleman. Beautiful and accomplished, an orphan at seventeen years old, she had left Scotland with her brother, Thomas Seyton of Halsbury. The absurd predictions of an old Highland nurse had excited almost to madness the two leading vices in Sarah's character,—pride and ambition; the destiny predicted for her, and in which she fully believed, was of the highest order,—in fact, sovereign rank. The prophecy had been so often repeated, that the young Scotch girl eventually fully credited its fulfilment; and she constantly repeated to herself, to bear out her ambitious dream, that a fortune-teller had thus promised a crown to the handsome and excellent creature who afterwards sat on the throne of France, and who was queen as much by her graces and her kind heart as others have been by their grandeur and majesty.

Strange to say, Thomas Seyton, as superstitious as his sister, encouraged her foolish hopes, and resolved on devoting his life to the realisation of Sarah's dream,—a dream as dazzling as it was deceptive. However, the brother and sister were not so blind as to believe implicitly in this Highland prophecy, and to look absolutely for a throne of the first rank in a splendid disdain of secondary royalties or reigning principalities; on the contrary, so that the handsome Scotch lassie should one day encircle her imperial forehead with a sovereign crown, the haughty pair agreed to condescend to shut their eyes to the importance of the throne they coveted. By the assistance of the Almanach de Gotha for the year of grace 1819, Seyton arranged, before he left Scotland, a sort of synopsis of the ages of all the kings and ruling powers in Europe then unmarried.

Although very ridiculous, yet the brother and sister's ambition was freed from all shameful modes; Seyton was prepared to aid his sister Sarah in snatching at the thread of the conjugal band by which she hoped eventually to fasten a crown upon her brows. He would be her participator in any and all stratagems which could tend to consummate this end; but he would rather have killed his sister than see her the mistress of a prince, even though the liaison should terminate in a marriage of reparation.

The matrimonial inventory that resulted from Seyton and Sarah's researches in the Almanach de Gotha was satisfactory. The Germanic Confederation furnished forth a numerous contingent of young presumptive sovereigns.

Seyton was not ignorant of the sort of German wedlock which is called a "left-handed marriage," to which, as being legitimate to a certain extent, he would, as a last resource, have resigned his sister. To Germany, then, it was resolved to bend their steps, in order to commence this search for the royal spouse.

If the project appears improbable, such hopes ridiculous, let us first reply by saying that unbridled ambition, excited by superstitious belief, rarely claims for itself the light of reason in its enterprises, and will dare the wildest impossibilities; yet, when we recall certain events, even in our own times, from high and most reputable morganatic marriages between sovereigns and female subjects, down to the loving elopement of Miss Penelope Smith and the Prince of Capua, we cannot refuse some chance of fortunate result to the imagination of Seyton and Sarah. Let us add that the lady united to a very lovely person, singular abilities and very varied talents; whilst there were added a power of seduction the more dangerous as it was united to a mind unbending and calculating, a disposition cunning and selfish, a deep hypocrisy, a stubborn and despotic will,—all covered by the outward show of a generous, warm, and impassioned nature.

In her appearance, there was as much deceit as in her mind. Her full and dark eyes, now sparkling, now languishing, beneath her coal black brow, could well dissimulate all the warmth of love and desire. Yet the burning impulses of love never throbbed beneath her icy bosom; no surprise of the heart or of the senses ever intervened to disturb the cold and pitiless calculations of this woman,—crafty, selfish, and ambitious. When she reached the Continent, she resolved, in accordance with her brother's advice, not to commence her conjugal and regal campaign until she had resided some time in Paris, where she determined to complete her education, and rub off the rust of her native country, by associating with a society which was embellished by all that was elegant, tasteful, and refined. Sarah was introduced into the best society and the highest circles, thanks to the letters of recommendation and considerate patronage of the English "ambassador's" lady and the old Marquis d'Harville, who had known Tom and Sarah's father in England.

Persons of deceitful, calculating, and cold dispositions acquire with great facility language and manners quite in opposition to their natural character, as with them all is outside, surface, appearance, varnish, bark; or they soon find that, if their real characters are detected, they are undone; so, thanks to the sort of instinct of self-preservation with which they are gifted, they feel all the necessity of the moral mask, and so paint and costume themselves with all the alacrity and skill of a practised comedian. Thus, after six

months' residence in Paris, Sarah was in a condition to contest with the most Parisian of Parisian women, as to the piquant finish of her wit, the charm of her liveliness, the ingenuousness of her flirtation, and the exciting simplicity of her looks, at once chaste and passionate.

Finding his sister in full panoply for his campaign, Seyton left with her for Germany, furnished with the best letters of introduction. The first state of the German Confederation which headed Sarah's "road-book" was the Grand Duchy of Gerolstein, thus styled in the diplomatic and infallibleAlmanach de Gotha for the year of grace 1819:

"Genealogy of the Sovereigns of Europe and their Families.

"GEROLSTEIN.

"Grand Duke: MAXIMILIAN RODOLPH, 10th December, 1764. Succeeded his father, CHARLES FREDERIC RODOLPH, 21st April, 1785. Widower January, 1808, by decease of his wife, LOUISA AMELIA, daughter of JOHN AUGUSTUS, Prince of BURGLEN.

"Son: GUSTAVUS RODOLPH, born 17th April, 1803.

"Mother: Dowager Grand Duchess Judith, widow of the Grand Duke, CHARLES FREDERIC RODOLPH, 21st April, 1785."

Seyton, with much practical good sense, had first noted down on his list the youngest princes whom he coveted as brothers-in-law, thinking that extreme youth is more easily seduced than ripened age. Moreover, we have already said that the brother and sister were particularly recommended to the reigning Duke of Gerolstein by the old Marquis d'Harville, caught, like the rest of the world, by Sarah, whose beauty, grace, and, above all, delightful manners, he could not sufficiently admire.

It is superfluous to say that the presumptive heir of the Grand Duchy of Gerolstein was Gustavus Rodolph: he was hardly eighteen when Tom and Sarah were presented to his father. The arrival of the young Scotch lady was an event in the German court, so quiet, simple, and almost patriarchal in its habits and observances. The Grand Duke, a most worthy gentleman, governed his states with wise firmness and paternal kindness. Nothing could exceed the actual and moral happiness of the principality, whose laborious and steady population, by their soberness and piety, presented a pure specimen of the German character. This excellent people enjoyed so much real felicity, and were so perfectly contented with their condition, that the enlightened care of the Grand Duke was not much called into action to

preserve them from the mania of constitutional innovations. As far as modern discovery went, and those practical suggestions which have a wholesome influence over the well-being and morals of his people, the Grand Duke was always anxious to acquire knowledge himself, and apply it invariably for the use and benefit of his people, his residents at the capitals of the different states of Europe having little else to occupy themselves whilst on their mission but to keep their master fully informed as to the rise and progress of science and all the arts which are connected with public welfare and public utility.

We have said that the Duke felt as much affection as gratitude for the old Marquis d'Harville, who, in 1815, had rendered him immense service; and so, thanks to his powerful recommendation, Sarah of Halsbury and her brother were received at the court of Gerolstein with every distinction, and with marked kindness. A fortnight after her arrival, the young Scotch girl, endued with so profound a spirit of observation, had easily penetrated the firm character and open heart of the Grand Duke. Before she began to seduce his son,—a thing of course,—she had wisely resolved to discover the disposition of the father. Although he had appeared to dote on his son, she was yet fully convinced that this father, with all his tenderness, would never swerve from certain principles, certain ideas as to the duty of princes, and would never consent to what he would consider a mésalliance for his son, and that not through pride, but from conscience, reason, and dignity. A man of this firm mould, and the more affectionate and good in proportion as he is firm and determined, never abates one jot of that which affects his conscience, his reason, and his dignity.

Sarah was on the point of renouncing her enterprise in the face of obstacles so insurmountable; but, reflecting that, as Rodolph was very young, and his gentleness and goodness, his character at once timid and meditative, were generally spoken of, she thought she might find compensation in the feeble and irresolute disposition of the young prince, and therefore persisted in her project, and again revived her hopes.

On this new essay, the management of herself and brother were most masterly. The young lady knew full well how to propitiate all around her, and particularly the persons who might have been jealous or envious of her accomplishments, and she caused her beauty and grace to be forgotten beneath the veil of modest simplicity with which she covered them. She soon became the idol, not only of the Grand Duke, but of his mother, the Dowager Grand Duchess Judith, who, in spite of, or through, her ninety years of age, loved to excess every thing that was young and charming.

Sarah and her brother often talked of their departure, but the sovereign of Gerolstein would never consent to it; and that he might completely attach the two to him, he pressed on Sir Thomas Seyton the acceptance of the vacant post of his "first groom of the chamber," and entreated Sarah not to quit the Grand Duchess Judith, as she could not do without her. After much hesitation, overcome by the most pressing entreaties, Sarah and Seyton accepted such brilliant offers, and decided on establishing themselves at the court of Gerolstein, where they had been for two months.

Sarah, who was an accomplished musician, knowing the taste of the Grand Duchess for the old masters, and, above all, for Gluck, sent for the chef-d'œuvre of this attractive composer, and fascinated the old princess by her unfailing complaisance, as well as the remarkable skill with which she sang those old airs, so beautiful in their melody, so expressive in their character.

As for Seyton, he knew how to make himself very useful in the occupation which had been conferred upon him. He was a good judge of horses, was orderly and firm in his conduct and arrangements, and so, in a short time, completely remodelled the stables of the Grand Duke, which, up to that time, had been neglected, and become disorganised.

The brother and sister were soon equally beloved, fêted, and admired in this court. The master's preference soon commands the preference of those below him. Sarah required, in aid of her future projects, too much aid not to employ her insinuating powers in acquiring partisans. Her hypocrisy, clothed in most attractive shapes, easily deluded the simple-hearted Germans, and the general feeling soon authorised the extreme kindness of the Grand Duke.

Thus, then, our designing pair were established at the court of Gerolstein, agreeably and securely placed without any reference to Rodolph. By a lucky chance, some days after the arrival of Sarah, the young prince had gone away to the inspection of troops, with an aide-de-camp and the faithful Murphy. This absence, doubly auspicious to the views of Sarah, allowed her to arrange at her ease the principal threads of the fillet she was weaving, without being deterred by the presence of the young prince, whose too open admiration might, perhaps, have awakened the suspicions of the Grand Duke. On the contrary, in the absence of his son, he did not, unfortunately, reflect that he was admitting into the closest intimacy a young girl of surpassing beauty, and of lively wit, as Rodolph must discover at every moment of the day.

Sarah was perfectly insensible to a reception so kind and generous,—to the full confidence with which she was introduced into the very heart of this sovereign family. Neither brother nor sister paused for a moment in their bad designs; they determined upon a principle to bring trouble and annoyance into this peaceable and happy court; they calmly calculated the probable results of the cruel divisions they should establish between a father and son, up to that period so tenderly united.

A few words concerning Rodolph's early days may be necessary. During his infancy, he had been extremely delicate. His father reasoned thereon in this strange manner: "English country gentlemen are generally remarkable for their robust health. This advantage results generally from their bodily training, which is simple, rural, and develops their full vigour. Rodolph must leave the hands of women; his temperament is delicate, and, perhaps, by accustoming this child to live like the son of an English farmer (with some few exceptions), I shall strengthen his constitution."

The Grand Duke sent to England for a man worthy of the trust, and capable of directing such a course of bodily culture, and Sir Walter Murphy, an athletic specimen, of a Yorkshire country gentleman, was entrusted with this important charge. The direction which he gave to the mind and body of the young prince were such as entirely coincided with the views and wishes of the Grand Duke. Murphy and his pupil lived for many years in a beautiful farmhouse, situated in the midst of woods and fields, some leagues from the capital of Gerolstein, and in a most picturesque and salubrious spot. Rodolph, free from all etiquette, and employed with Murphy in outdoor labour proportionate to his age, lived the sober, manly, and regular life of the country, having for his pleasure and amusement the violent exercises of wrestling, pugilism, riding on horseback, and hunting. In the midst of the pure air of the meadows, woods, and mountains, he underwent an entire change, and grew up as vigorous as a young oak; his pale cheek became suffused with the ruddy glow of health; always lithe and active, he underwent now the most severe fatigues, his address, energy, and courage supplying what was deficient in his muscular power; so that, when only in his fifteenth or sixteenth year, he was always the conqueror in his contests with young men his superiors in age.

His scientific education necessarily suffered from the preference given to his physical training, and Rodolph's knowledge was very limited; but the Grand Duke very wisely reflected that, to have a well-informed mind, it must be supported by a strong physical frame, and that, this acquired, the intellectual faculties would develop themselves the more rapidly.

The kind Walter Murphy was by no means a sage, and could only convey to Rodolph some primary instruction; but no one knew better than he how to inspire his pupil with the feeling of what is just, loyal, and generous, and a horror of every thing that was mean, low, and contemptible. These repugnances, these powerful and wholesome admonitions, took deep and lasting root in the very soul of Rodolph; and although, in after life, these principles were violently shaken by the storm of passions, yet they were never eradicated from his heart. The levin bolt strikes, splits, and rends the deeply planted tree; but the sap still maintains its hold in the roots, and a thousand green branches spring fresh from what was taken for a withered and dead tree.

Murphy, then, gave to Rodolph, if we may use the expression, health to both body and mind; he made him robust, active, and daring, with a love for all that was good and right, and a hatred for whatsoever was wicked and bad. Having fulfilled his task to admiration, the squire, called to England on very important business, left Germany for some time, to the great regret of Rodolph, who loved him extremely.

His son's health having been so satisfactorily established, the Grand Duke turned his most serious attention to the mental education of his dearly beloved son. A certain Doctor César Polidori, a renowned linguist, a distinguished chemist, learned historian, and deeply versed in the study of all the exact and physical sciences, was entrusted with the charge of cultivating and improving the rich but virgin soil so carefully and well prepared by Murphy. This time the Grand Duke's choice was a most unfortunate one, or, rather, his religious feelings were infamously imposed upon by the person who introduced the doctor to him, and caused him to think on Polidori as the preceptor of the young prince. Atheist, cheat, and hypocrite, full of stratagem and trick, concealing the most dangerous immorality, the most hardened scepticism, under an austere exterior, profoundly versed in the knowledge of human nature, or, rather, only having tried the worst side,—the disgraceful passions of humanity,—Doctor Polidori was the most hateful Mentor that could have been entrusted with the education of a young man.

Rodolph left with the deepest regrets the independent and animating life which he had hitherto led with Murphy to go and become pale with the study of books, and submit himself to the irksome ceremonies of his father's court, and he at once entertained a strong prejudice against his tutor. It could not be otherwise.

On quitting his young friend, the poor squire had compared him, and with justice, to a young wild colt, full of grace and fire, carried off from his native prairies, where he had dwelt, free as air, and joyous as a bird, to be bridled and spurred, that he might under that system learn how to moderate and economise those powers which, hitherto, he had only employed in running and leaping in any way he pleased.

Rodolph began by telling Polidori that he had no taste for study, but that he greatly preferred the free exercise of his arms and legs, to breathe the pure air of the fields, to traverse the woods and the mountains, and that a good horse and a good gun were preferable to all the books in the universe. The doctor was prepared for this antipathy, and was secretly delighted at it, for, in another way, the hopes of this man were as ambitious as those of Sarah. Although the grand duchy of Gerolstein was only a secondary state, Polidori indulged the idea of being one day its Richelieu, and of making Rodolph play the part of the do-nothing prince. But, desirous above all things of currying favour with his pupil, and of making him forget Murphy, by his own concession and compliance, he concealed from the Grand Duke the young prince's repugnance for study, and boasted of his application to, and rapid progress in, his studies; whilst some examinations arranged between himself and Rodolph, which had the air of being impromptu questions, confirmed the Grand Duke in his blind and implicit confidence. By degrees the dislike which Rodolph at first entertained for the doctor changed, on the young prince's part, into a cool familiarity, very unlike the real attachment he had for Murphy. By degrees, he found himself leagued with Polidori (although from very innocent causes) by the same ties that unite two guilty persons. Sooner or later, Rodolph was sure to despise a man of the age and character of the doctor, who so unworthily lied to excuse the idleness of his pupil. This Polidori knew; but he also knew that if we do not at once sever our connections with corrupt minds in disgust, by degrees, and in spite of our better reason, we become familiar with and too frequently admire them, until, insensibly, we hear without shame or reproach those things mocked at and vituperated which we formerly loved and revered. Besides, the doctor was too cunning all at once to shock certain noble sentiments and convictions which Rodolph had derived from the admirable lessons of Murphy. After having vented much raillery on the coarseness of the early occupations of his young pupil, the doctor, laying aside his thin mask of austerity, had greatly aroused the curiosity and heated the fancy of the young prince, by the exaggerated descriptions, strongly drawn and deeply coloured, of the pleasures and gallantries which had illustrated the reigns of Louis XIV., the Regent, and especially Louis XV., the hero of César Polidori. He assured the misled boy, who listened to him with a fatal earnestness, that pleasures, however excessive, far from demoralising a highly

accomplished prince, often made him merciful and generous, inasmuch as fine minds are never more predisposed to benevolence and clemency than when acted upon by their own enjoyments. Louis XV., the bien aimé, the well-beloved, was an unanswerable proof of this. And then, added the doctor, how entirely have the greatest men of all ages and all countries abandoned themselves to the most refined epicureanism,—from Alcibiades to Maurice of Saxony, from Anthony to the great Condé, from Cæsar to Vendome! Such conversations must make deep and dangerous impressions on a young, ardent, and virgin mind, and such theories could not be without their results.

In the midst of this well regulated and virtuous court, accustomed, after the example of its ruler, to honest pleasures and harmless amusements, Rodolph, instructed by Polidori, dreamt of the dissipated nights of Versailles, the orgies of Choisy, the attractive voluptuousness of the Parc-au-Cerfs, and also, from time to time, of some romantic amours contrasting with these. Neither had the doctor failed to prove to Rodolph that a prince of the Germanic Confederation should not have any military pretension beyond sending his contingent to the Diet. The feeling of the time was not warlike. According to the doctor, to pass his time delightfully and idly amongst women and the refinements of luxury,—to repose from time to time from the animation of sensual pleasures, amidst the delightful attractions of the fine arts,—to hunt occasionally, not as a Nimrod, but as an intelligent epicurean, and enjoy the transitory fatigues which make idleness and repose taste but the sweeter,—this, this was the only life which a prince should think of enjoying, who (and this was his height of happiness) could find a prime minister capable of devoting himself boldly to the distressing and overwhelming burden of state affairs.

Rodolph, in abandoning himself to ideas which were free from criminality, because they did not spring from the circle of fatal probabilities, resolved that when Providence should call to himself the Grand Duke, his father, he would devote himself to the life which César Polidori had painted to him under such brilliant and attractive colours, and to have as his prime minister one whose knowledge and understanding he admired, and whose blind complaisance he fully appreciated. It is useless to say that the young prince kept the most perfect silence upon the subject of those pernicious hopes which had been excited within him. Knowing that the heroes of the Grand Duke's admiration were Gustavus Adolphus, Charles XII., and the great Frederic (Maximilian Rodolph had the honour of belonging to the royal house of Brandenburg), Rodolph thought, reasonably enough, that the prince, his father, who professed so profound an admiration for these king-captains, always booted and spurred, continually mounted on their

chargers, and engaged in making war, would consider his son out of his senses if he believed him capable of wishing to displace the Tudescan gravity of his court by the introduction of the light and licentious manners of the Regency.

A year—eighteen months—passed away. At the end of this time Murphy returned from England, and wept for joy on again embracing his young pupil. After a few days, although unable to discover the reason of a change which so deeply afflicted him, the worthy squire found Rodolph chilled and constrained in his demeanour towards him, and almost rude when he recalled to him his sequestered and rural life. Assured of the natural kind heart of the young prince, and warned by a secret presentiment, Murphy thought him for a time perverted by the pernicious influence of Doctor Polidori, whom he instinctively abhorred, and resolved to watch very narrowly. The doctor, for his part, was very much annoyed by Murphy's return, for he feared his frankness, good sense, and keen penetration. He instantly resolved, therefore, cost what it might, to ruin the worthy Englishman in Rodolph's estimation. It was at this crisis that Seyton and Sarah were presented and received at the court of Gerolstein with such extreme distinction. We have said that Rodolph, accompanied by Murphy, had been absent from the court on a journey for some weeks. During this absence the doctor was by no means idle. It is said that intriguers discover and recognise each other by certain mysterious signs, which allow of them observing each other until their interests decide them to form a close alliance, or declare unremitting hostility.

Some days after the establishment of Sarah and her brother at the court of the Grand Duke, Polidori became a close ally of Seyton's. The doctor confessed to himself, with delectable cynicism, that he felt a natural affinity for rogues and villains, and so he said that without pretending to discover the end which Sarah and her brother desired to achieve, he was attracted towards them by a sympathy so strong as to lead him to imagine that they plotted some devilish purpose. Some questions of Seyton's as to the disposition and early life of Rodolph, questions which would have passed without notice with a person less awake to all that occurred than the doctor, in a moment enlightened him as to the ulterior aims of the brother and sister; all he doubted was, that the aspirations of the Scotch lady were at the same time honourable as well as ambitious. The arrival of this lovely young woman appeared to Polidori a godsend. Rodolph's mind was already inflamed with amorous imaginings; Sarah might become, or be made, the delicious reality which should substantiate so many glorious dreams. It was not to be doubted but that she would secure an immense influence over a heart submitted to the witching spell of a first love. The doctor instantly laid

his plan to direct and secure this influence, and to make it serve also as the means of destroying Murphy's power and reputation. Like a skilful intriguer, he soon informed the aspiring pair that they must come to an understanding with him, as he alone was responsible to the Grand Duke for the private life of the young prince.

Sarah and her brother understood him in a moment, although they had not told the doctor a syllable of their secret designs. On the return of Rodolph and Murphy, all three, combined by one common intent, tacitly leagued against the squire, their most redoubtable enemy.

What was to happen did happen. Rodolph saw Sarah daily after his return, and became desperately enamoured. She soon told him that she shared his love, although she foresaw that this love would create great trouble. He could never be happy; the distance that separated them was too wide! She then recommended to Rodolph the most profound discretion, for fear of arousing the Grand Duke's suspicions, as he would be inexorable, and deprive them of their only happiness,—that of seeing each other every day. The young prince promised to be cautious, and conceal his love. The Scotch maiden was too ambitious, too self-possessed, to compromise and betray herself in the eyes of the court; and Rodolph, perceiving the necessity of dissimulation, imitated Sarah's prudence. The lovers' secret was carefully preserved for some time; nor was it until the brother and sister saw the unbridled passion of their dupe reach its utmost excess, and that his infatuation, which he could hardly restrain, threatened to burst forth afresh, and destroy all, that they resolved on their final coup. The doctor's character authorising the confidence, besides the morality which invested it, Seyton opened to him on the necessity of a marriage between Rodolph and Sarah; otherwise, he added, with perfect sincerity, he and his sister would instantly leave Gerolstein. Sarah participated in the prince's affection, but, preferring death to dishonour, she could only be the wife of his highness.

This exalted flight of ambition stupefied the doctor, who had never imagined that Sarah's imagination soared so high. A marriage surrounded by numberless difficulties and dangers appeared impossible to Polidori, and he frankly told Seyton the reasons why the Grand Duke would never submit to such a union. Seyton agreed in the importance of the reasons, but proposed, as a mezzo termini which should meet all objections, a marriage, which, although secret, should be legal, and only avowed after the decease of the Grand Duke. Sarah was of a noble and ancient house, and such a union was not without precedent. Seyton gave the prince eight days to decide; his sister could not longer endure the cruel anguish of uncertainty, and, if she

must renounce Rodolph's love, she must act up to her painful resolve as promptly as might be.

Certain that he could not mistake Sarah's views, the doctor was sorely perplexed. He had three ways before him,—to inform the Grand Duke of the matrimonial project, to open Rodolph's eyes as to the manœuvres of Tom and Sarah, to lend himself to the marriage. But to inform the Grand Duke would be to alienate from him for ever the heir presumptive to the throne. To enlighten Rodolph on the interested views of Sarah was to exposehimself to the reception which a lover is sure to give when she whom he loves is depreciated in his eyes; and then, what a blow for the vanity or the heart of the young prince, to let him know that it was for his royal rank alone that the lady was desirous to wed him! On the other hand, by lending himself to this match, Polidori bound Rodolph and Sarah to him by a tie of the strongest gratitude, or, at least, by the complicity of a dangerous act. No doubt, all might be discovered, and the doctor exposed to the anger of the Grand Duke, but then the marriage would have been concluded, the union legal. The storm would blow over, and the future sovereign of Gerolstein would become the more bound to Polidori, in proportion as the doctor had undergone greater dangers in his service. After much consideration, therefore, he resolved on serving Sarah, but with a certain qualification, which we will presently refer to.

Rodolph's passion had reached a height almost of frenzy. Violently excited by constraint, and the skilful management of Sarah, who pretended to feel still more than he did the insurmountable obstacles which honour and duty placed between them and their liberty, in a few days more the young prince would have betrayed himself. Thus, when the doctor proposed that he must never see his enchantress again, or possess her by a secret marriage, Rodolph threw himself on Polidori's neck, called him his saviour, his friend, his father; he only wished that the temple and the priest were at hand, that he might marry her that instant. The doctor resolved (for reasons of his own) to undertake the management of all. He found a priest,—witnesses; and the union (all the formalities of which were carefully scrutinised and verified by Seyton) was secretly celebrated during a temporary absence of the Grand Duke at a conference of the German Diet. The prophecy of the Scotch soothsayer was fulfilled,—Sarah wedded the heir to a throne.

Without quenching the fire of his love, possession rendered Rodolph more circumspect, and cooled down that violence which might have compromised the secret of his passion for Sarah; but, directed by Seyton and the doctor, the young couple managed so well, and observed so much circumspection towards each other, that they eluded all detection.

An event, impatiently desired by Sarah, soon turned this calm into a tempest,—she was about to become a mother. It was then that this woman evinced all those exactions which were so new to, and so much astonished, Rodolph. She protested, with hypocritical tears streaming from her eyes, that she could no longer support the constraint in which she lived; a constraint rendered the more insupportable by her pregnancy. In this extremity she boldly proposed to the young prince to tell all to his father, who was, as well as the Dowager Grand Duchess, fonder than ever of her. No doubt, she added, he will be very angry, greatly enraged, at first, but he loves his son so tenderly, so blindly, and had for her (Sarah) so strong an affection, that his paternal anger would gradually subside, and she would at last take in the court of Gerolstein the rank which was due to her, she might say in a double sense, because she was about to give birth to a child, which would be the heir presumptive to the Grand Duke. These pretensions alarmed Rodolph: he knew the deep attachment which his father had for him, but he also well knew the inflexibility of his principles with regard to all the duties of a prince. To all these objections Sarah replied, unmoved:

"I am your wife in the presence of God and men. In a short time, I shall no longer be able to conceal my situation; and I ought not to blush at that of which I am, on the contrary, so proud, and would desire openly to acknowledge."

The expectation of posterity had redoubled Rodolph's tenderness for Sarah, and, placed between the desire to accede to her wishes and the dread of his father's wrath, he experienced the bitterest anguish. Seyton sided with his sister.

"The marriage is indissoluble," said he to his royal brother-in-law; "the Grand Duke may exile you from his court,—you and your wife,—nothing more; but he loves you too much to have recourse to such an extremity. He will endure what he cannot prevent."

These reasons, strong enough in themselves, did not soothe Rodolph's anxieties. At this juncture, Seyton was charged by the Grand Duke with an errand to visit several breeding studs in Austria. This mission, which he could not refuse, would only detain him a fortnight: he set out with much regret, and in a very important moment for his sister. She was chagrined, yet satisfied, at the departure of her brother; for she would lose his advice, but then he would be safe from the Grand Duke's anger if all were discovered. Sarah promised to keep Seyton fully informed, day by day, of the progress of events, so important to both of them; and, that they might correspond more surely and secretly, they agreed upon a cipher, of which

Polidori also held the key. This precaution alone proves that Sarah had other matters to tell her brother of besides her love for Rodolph. In truth, this selfish, cold, ambitious woman had not felt the ice of her heart melt even by the beams of the passionate love which had been breathed to her. Her maternity was only with her a means of acting more effectually on Rodolph, and had no softening effect on her iron soul. The youth, headlong love, and inexperience of the prince, who was hardly more than a child, and so perfidiously ensnared into an inextricable position, hardly excited an interest in the mind of this selfish creature; and, in her confidential communications with him, she complained, with disdain and bitterness, of the weakness of this young man, who trembled before the most paternal of German princes, who lived, however, very long! In a word, this correspondence between the brother and sister clearly developed their unbounded selfishness, their ambitious calculations, their impatience, which almost amounted to homicide, and laid bare the springs of that dark conspiracy crowned by the marriage of Rodolph. One of Sarah's letters to her brother was abstracted by Polidori, the channel of their mutual communications; for what purpose we shall see hereafter.

A few days after Seyton's departure, Sarah was at the evening court of the Dowager Grand Duchess. Many of the ladies present looked at her with an astonished air, and whispered to their neighbours. The Grand Duchess Judith, in spite of her ninety years, had a quick ear and a sharp eye, and this little whispering did not escape her. She made a sign to one of the ladies in waiting to come to her, and from her she learned that everybody was remarking that the figure of Miss Sarah Seyton of Halsbury was less slender, less delicate in its proportions than usual. The old princess adored her young protégée and would have answered to God himself for Sarah's virtue. Indignant at the malevolence of these remarks, she shrugged her shoulders, and said aloud, from the end of the saloon in which she was sitting:

"My dear Sarah, come here."

Sarah rose. It was requisite to cross the circle to reach the place where the princess was seated, who was anxious most kindly to destroy the rumour that was circulated, and, by the simple fact of thus crossing the room, confound her calumniators, and prove triumphantly that the fair proportions of her protégée had lost not one jot of their symmetry and delicacy. Alas! the most perfidious enemy could not have devised a better plan than that suggested by the worthy princess in her desire to defend her protégée. Sarah came towards her, and it required all the deep respect due to the Grand Duchess to repress the murmur of surprise and indignation

when the young lady crossed the room. The nearest-sighted persons saw what Sarah would no longer conceal, for her pregnancy might have been hidden longer had she but have chosen; but the ambitious woman had sought this display in order to compel Rodolph to declare his marriage. The Grand Duchess, who, however, would not be convinced in spite of her eyesight, said, in a low voice, to Sarah:

"My dear child, how very ill you have dressed yourself to-day,—you, whose shape may be spanned by ten fingers. I hardly know you again."

We will relate hereafter the results of this discovery, which led to great and terrible events. At this moment, we will content ourselves with stating, what the reader has no doubt already guessed, that Fleur-de-Marie was the fruit of the secret marriage of Rodolph and Sarah, and that they both believed their daughter dead.

It has not been forgotten that Rodolph, after having visited the house in the Rue du Temple, had returned home, and intended, in the evening, to be present at a ball given by the —— ambassadress. It was to this fête that we shall follow his royal highness, the reigning Grand Duke of Gerolstein, Gustavus Rodolph, travelling in France under the name of the Count de Duren.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BALL

As the eleventh hour of the night sounded from the different clocks in Paris, the gates of an hôtel in the Rue Plumet were thrown open by a Swiss in rich livery, and forthwith issued a magnificent dark blue Berlin carriage, drawn by two superb long-tailed gray horses; on the seat, which was covered by a rich hammercloth, trimmed with a mossy silk fringe, sat a portly-looking coachman, whose head was ornamented by a three-cornered hat, while his rotund figure looked still more imposing in his dress livery-coat of blue cloth, trimmed up the seams with silver lace, and thickly braided with the same material; the whole finished by a splendid sable collar and cuffs. Behind the carriage stood a tall powdered lacquey, dressed in a livery of blue turned up with yellow and silver; and by his side was a chasseur, whose fierce-looking moustaches, gaily embroidered dress and hat, half concealed by a waving plume of blue and yellow feathers, completed a most imposing coup-d'œil.

The bright light of the lamps revealed the costly satin lining of the interior of the vehicle we are describing, in which were seated Rodolph, having on his right hand the Baron de Graün, and opposite to him the faithful Murphy.

Out of deference for the sovereign represented by the ambassador to whose ball he was then proceeding, Rodolph wore no other mark of distinction than the diamond order of ——.

Round the neck of Sir Walter Murphy, and suspended by a broad orange riband, hung the enamelled cross of the grand commander of the Golden Eagle of Gerolstein; and a similar insignia decorated the Baron de Graün, amidst an infinite number of the crosses and badges of honour belonging to all countries, depending by a gold chain placed in the two full buttonholes of the diplomatist's coat.

"I am delighted," said Rodolph, "with the very favourable accounts I have received from Madame Georges respecting my poor little protégée at the farm of Bouqueval. David's care and attention have worked wonders. Apropos of La Goualeuse: what do you think, Sir Walter Murphy, any of your Cité acquaintances would say at seeing you so strangely disguised, as at present they would consider you, most valiant charcoal-man, to be? They would be somewhat astonished, I fancy."

"Much in the same degree as the surprise your royal highness would excite among your new acquaintances in the Rue du Temple, were you to proceed thither, as now attired, to pay a friendly visit to Madame Pipelet, and to inquire after the health of Cabrion's victim, the poor melancholy Alfred!"

"My lord has drawn so lively a sketch of Alfred, attired in his long-skirted green coat and bell-crowned hat," said the baron, "that I can well imagine him seated in magisterial dignity in his dark and smoky lodge. Let me hope that your royal highness's visit to the Rue du Temple has fully answered your expectations, and that you are in every way satisfied with the researches of my agent?"

"Perfectly so," answered Rodolph. "My success was even beyond my expectations."

Then, after a moment's painful silence, and to drive away the train of thought conjured up by the recollection of the probable guilt of Madame d'Harville, he resumed, in a tone more gay:

"I am almost ashamed to own to so much childishness, but I confess myself amused with the contrast between my treating Madame Pipelet in the morning to a glass of cordial, and then proceeding in the evening to a grand fête, with all the pomp and prestige of one of those privileged beings who, by the grace of God, 'reign over this lower world.' Some men of small fortune would speak of my revenues as those of a millionaire," added Rodolph, in a sort of parenthesis, alluding to the limited extent of his estates.

"And many millionaires, my lord, might not have the rare, the admirable good sense, of the man of narrow means."

"Ah, my dear De Graün, you are really too good, much too good! You really overwhelm me," replied Rodolph, with an ironical smile, while the baron glanced at Murphy with the consciousness of a man who has just discovered he has been saying a foolish thing.

"Really, my dear De Graün," resumed Rodolph, "I know not how to acknowledge the weight of your compliment, or how to repay such delicate flattery in its own way."

"My lord, let me entreat of you not to take the trouble," exclaimed the baron, who had for the instant forgotten that Rodolph, who detested every species of flattery, always revenged himself by the most unsparing raillery on those who, directly or indirectly, addressed it to him.

"Nay, baron, I cannot allow myself to remain in your debt. You have praised my understanding,—I will, in return, admire your countenance; for by my honour, as I sit beside you, you look like a youth of twenty. Antinous himself could not boast of finer features, or a more captivating expression."

"My lord! my lord! I cry your mercy!"

"Behold him, Murphy, and say whether Apollo could display more graceful limbs, more light, and youthful proportions!"

"I beseech you, my lord, to pardon me, from the recollection of how long it is since I have permitted myself to utter the slightest compliment to your royal highness."

"Observe, Murphy, this band of gold which restrains, without concealing, the locks of rich black hair flowing over this graceful neck, and—"

"My lord! my lord! for pity's sake spare me! I repent, most sincerely, of my involuntary fault," said the unfortunate baron, with an expression of comic despair on his countenance truly ludicrous.

It must not be forgotten that the original of this glowing picture was at least fifty years of age; his hair gray, frizzled and powdered; a stiff white cravat round his throat; a pale, withered countenance; and golden spectacles upon the horny bridge of his sharp, projecting nose.

"Pardon, my lord! pardon, for the baron," exclaimed the squire, laughing. "I beseech you not to overwhelm him beneath the weight of your mythological allusions. I will be answerable to your royal highness that my unlucky friend here will never again venture to utter a flattery, since so truth is translated in the new vocabulary of Gerolstein."

"What! old Murphy, too? Are you going to join in the rebellion against sincerity?"

"My lord, I am so sorry for the position of my unfortunate vis-à-vis, that—I beg I may divide his punishment with him."

"Charcoal-man in ordinary, your disinterested friendship does you honour. But seriously now, my dear De Graün, how have you forgotten that I only allow such fellows as D'Harneim and his train to flatter, for the simple reason that they know not how to speak the truth? That cuckoo-note of false praise belongs to birds of such feather as themselves, and the species they

claim relationship with; but for a person of your mind and good taste to descend to its usage—oh, fie! baron, fie!"

"It is all very well, my lord," said the baron, sturdily; "but I must be allowed to say (with all due apology for my boldness) that there is no small portion of pride in your royal highness's aversion to receive even a just compliment."

"Well said, baron! Come, I like you better now you speak plain truths. But tell me how you prove your assertion?"

"Why, just so, my lord; because you repudiate it upon the same principle that might induce a beautiful woman, well aware of her charms, to say to one of her most enthusiastic admirers, 'I know perfectly well how handsome I am, and therefore your approval is perfectly uncalled for and unnecessary. What is the use of reiterating what everybody knows? Is it usual to proclaim in the open streets that the sun shines, when all may see and feel certain of his midday brightness?'"

"Now, baron, you are shifting your ground, and becoming more dangerous as you become more adroit; and, by way of varying your punishment, I will only say that the infernal Polidori himself could not have more ingeniously disguised the poisonous draught of flattery, when seeking to persuade some poor victim to swallow it."

"My lord, I am now effectually silenced."

"Then," said Murphy (and this time with an air of real seriousness), "your royal highness has now no doubt as to its being really Polidori you encountered in the Rue du Temple?"

"I have ceased to have the least doubt on the subject, since I learned through you that he had been in Paris for some time past."

"I had forgotten, or, rather, purposely omitted to mention to your lordship," said Murphy in a sorrowing tone, "a name that never failed to awaken painful feelings; and knowing as I do how justly odious the remembrance of this man was to your royal highness, I studiously abstained from all reference to it."

The features of Rodolph were again overshadowed with gloom, and, plunged in deep reverie, he continued to preserve unbroken the silence which prevailed until the carriage stopped in the courtyard of the embassy. The windows of the hôtel were blazing with a thousand lights, which shone brightly through the thick darkness of the night, while a crowd of lacqueys,

in full-dress liveries, lined the entrance-hall, extending even to the salons of reception, where the grooms of the chamber waited to announce the different arrivals.

M. le Comte ——, the ambassador, with his lady, had purposely remained in the first reception-room until the arrival of Rodolph, who now entered, followed by Murphy and M. de Graün.

Rodolph was then in his thirty-sixth year, in the very prime and perfection of manly health and strength. His regular and handsome features, with the air of dignity pervading his whole appearance, would have rendered him, under any circumstances, a strikingly attractive man; but, combined with theéclat of high birth and exalted rank, he was a person of first-rate importance in every circle in which he presented himself, and whose notice was assiduously sought for. Dressed with the utmost simplicity, Rodolph wore a white waistcoat and cravat; a blue coat, buttoned up closely, on the right breast of which sparkled a diamond star, displayed to admiration the light yet perfect proportions of his graceful figure, while his well-fitting pantaloons, of black kerseymere, defined the finely formed leg and handsome foot in its embroidered stocking.

From the rareness of the Grand Duke's visits to the haut monde, his arrival produced a great sensation, and every eye was fixed upon him from the moment that, attended by Murphy and Baron de Graün, he entered the first salon at the embassy. An attaché, deputed to watch for his arrival, hastened immediately to appraise the ambassadress of the appearance of her illustrious guest. Her excellency instantly hurried, with her noble husband, to welcome their visitor, exclaiming:

"Your royal highness is, indeed, kind, thus to honour our poor entertainment."

"Nay, madame," replied Rodolph, gracefully bowing on the hand extended to him, "your ladyship is well aware of the sincere pleasure it affords to pay my compliments to yourself; and as for M. le Comte, he and I are two old friends, who are always delighted to meet. Are we not, my lord?"

"Your royal highness, in deigning to continue to me so flattering a place in your recollection, makes it still more impossible for me ever to forget your many acts of condescending kindness."

"I assure you, M. le Comte, that in my memory the past never dies; or, at least, the pleasant part of it; for I make it a strict rule never to preserve any reminiscences of my friends but such as are agreeable and gratifying."

"Your royal highness has found the secret of being happy in your thoughts, and rendering others so at the same time," rejoined the ambassador, smiling with gratified pride and pleasure at a conference so cordially carried on before a gathering crowd of admiring auditors.

"Thus, then, madame," replied Rodolph, "will your flattering reception of to-night live long in my memory; and I shall promise myself the happiness of recalling this evening's fête, with its tasteful arrangements and crowd of attending beauties. Ah, Madame la Comtesse, who like you can effect such a union of taste and elegance as now sparkles around us?"

"Your royal highness is too indulgent."

"But I have a very important question to ask you: Why is it that, lovely as are your fair guests, their charms are never seen to such perfection as when assembled beneath your hospitable roof?"

"Your royal highness is pleased to view our fair visitants through the same flattering medium with which you are graciously pleased to behold our poor endeavours for your and their amusement," answered the ambassador, with a deferential bow.

"Your pardon, count," replied Rodolph, "if I differ with you in opinion. According to my judgment, the cause proceeds wholly from our amiable hostess, Madame l'Ambassadrice."

"May I request of your royal highness to solve this enigma?" inquired the countess, smiling.

"That is easily given, madame, and may be found in the perfect urbanity and exquisite grace with which you receive your lovely guests, and whisper to each a few charming and encouraging words, which, if the least bit exceeding strict truth," said Rodolph, smiling with good-tempered satire, "renders those who are even praised above their merits more radiant in beauty from your kind commendations, while those whose charms admit of no exaggeration are no less radiant with the happiness of finding themselves so justly appreciated by you; thus each countenance, thanks to the gentle arts you practise, is made to exhibit the most smiling delight, for perfect content will set off even homely features. And thus I account for why it is that woman, all lovely as she is, never looks so much so as when seen

beneath your roof. Come, M. l'Ambassadeur, own that I have made out a good case, and that you entirely concur with me in opinion."

"Your royal highness has afforded me too many previous reasons to admire and adopt your opinions for me to hesitate in the present instance."

"And for me, my lord," said the countess, "at the risk of being included among those fair ladies who get a little more praise or flattery (which was it your highness styled it?) than they deserve, I accept your very flattering explanation with as much qualified pleasure as if it were really founded on truth."

"In order more effectually to convince you, madame, that nothing is more correct than all I have asserted, let us make a few observations touching the fine effect of praise in animating and lighting up the countenance."

"Ah, my lord, you are laying a very mischievous snare for me," said the countess, smiling.

"Well, then, I will abandon that idea; but upon one condition, that you honour me by taking my arm. I have been told wonderful things of a 'Winter Garden,'—a work from Fairyland. May I put up my humble petition to be allowed to see this new wonder of a 'hundred and one nights?'"

"Oh, my lord, with the utmost pleasure. But I see that your highness had received a most exaggerated account. Perhaps you will accompany me, and judge for yourself. Only in this instance I would fain hope that your habitual indulgence may induce you to feel as little disappointment as possible at finding how imperfectly the reality equals your expectations."

The ambassadress then took the offered arm of Rodolph, and proceeded with him to the other salons, while the count remained conversing with the Baron de Graün and Murphy, whom he had been acquainted with for some time.

And a more beautiful scene of enchantment never charmed the eye than that presented by the aspect of the winter garden, to which Rodolph had conducted his noble hostess. Let the reader imagine an enclosure of about forty feet in length, and thirty in width (leading out of a long and splendid gallery), surmounted by a glazed and vaulted roof, the building being securely covered in for about fifty feet. Round the parallelogram it described, the walls were concealed by an infinite number of mirrors, over which was placed a small and delicate trellis of fine green rushes, which, thanks to the strong light reflected on the highly polished glass, resembled an arbour, and

were almost entirely hidden by a thick row of orange-trees, as large as those of the Tuileries, mixed with camellias of equal size; while the golden fruit and verdant foliage of the one contrasted beautifully with the rich clusters of waxen flowers, of all colours, with which the other was loaded. The remainder of the garden was thus devised:

Five or six enormous clumps of trees, and Indian or other tropical shrubs, planted in immense cases filled with peat earth, were surrounded by alleys paved with a mosaic shell-work, and sufficiently wide for two or three persons to walk abreast. It is impossible to describe the wondrous effect produced by this rich display of tropical vegetation in the midst of a European winter, and almost in the very centre of a ballroom. Here might be seen gigantic bananas stretching their tall arms to the glass roof which covered them, and blending the vivid green of their palms with the lanceolated leaves of the large magnolias, some of which already displayed their matchless and odoriferous flowers with their bell-shaped calices, purple without and silvery white within, from which started forth the little gold-threaded stamens. At a little distance were grouped the palm and date-trees of the Levant; the red macaw, and fig-trees from India; all blooming in full health and vigour, and displaying their foliage in all its luxuriance, gave to the tout ensemble a mass of rich, brilliant tropical verdure, which, glittering among the thousand lights, sparkled with the colours of the emerald.

Along the trellising, between the orange-trees, and amid the clumps, were trained every variety of rare climbing plants; sometimes hanging their long wreaths of leaves and flowers in graceful festoons, then depending like blooming serpents from the tall boughs; now trailing at their roots, then ambitiously scaling the very walls, till they hung their united tresses round the transparent and vaulted roof, from which again they floated in mingled masses, waving in the pure, light breeze loaded with so many odours. The winged pomegranate, the passion-flower, with its large purple flowers striated with azure, and crowned with its dark violet tuft, waved in long spiral wreaths over the heads of the admiring crowd, then, as though fatigued with the sport, threw their colossal garlands of delicate flowers across the hard, prickly leaves of the gigantic aloes.

The bignonia of India, with its long, cup-shaped flower of dark sulphur colour, and slight, slender leaves, was placed beside the delicate flesh-coloured petals of the stephanotis, so justly appreciated for its exquisite perfume; the two stems mutually clinging to each other for support, and mingling their leaves and flowers in one confused mass, disposed them in elegant festoons of green fringe spangled with gold and silver spots, around

the immense velvet foliage of the Indian fig. Farther on, started forth, and then fell again in a sort of variegated and floral cascade, immense quantities of the stalks of the asclepias, whose leaves, large, umbellated, and in clusters of from fifteen to twenty star-shaped flowers, grew so thickly, so evenly, that they might have been mistaken for bouquets of pink enamel surrounded with leaves of fine green porcelain. The borders of the cases containing the orange sand camellias were filled with the choicest cape heaths, the tulips of Thol, the narcissus of Constantinople, the hyacinth, irides, and cyclamina of Persia; forming a sort of natural carpet, presenting one harmonious blending of the loveliest tints.

Chinese lanterns of transparent silk, some pale blue, others pink, partly concealed amid the foliage, threw a soft and gentle light over this enchanting scene; nor could a more ingenious idea have been resorted to than in the happy amalgamation of these two colours, by which a charming and almost unearthly light was produced combining the clear cerulean blue of a summer's night with the rose-coloured coruscations emitted from sparkling rays of an aurora borealis.

The entrance to this immense hothouse was from a long gallery glittering with gold, with mirrors, crystal vases filled with the choicest perfumes, and brilliantly lighted, and also raised a few steps above the fairy palace we have been endeavouring to describe. The dazzling brightness of the approach served as a sort of penumbra, in which were indistinctly traced out the gigantic exotics discernible through a species of arch, partly concealed by two crimson velvet curtains looped back with golden cords so as to give a dim and misty view of the enchanted land that lay beyond. An imaginative mind might easily have persuaded himself he stood near a huge window opening on some beautiful Asiatic landscape during the tranquillity of a summer's twilight.

The sounds of the orchestra, weakened by distance, and broken by the joyous hum proceeding from the gallery, died languidly away among the motionless foliage of the huge trees. Insensibly each fresh visitant to this enchanting spot lowered his voice until his words fell in whispers; for the light genuine air, embalmed with a thousand rich odours, appeared to cast a sort of somnolency over the senses; every breath seemed to speak of the clustering plants whose balmy sweetness filled the atmosphere. Certainly two lovers, seated in some corner of this Eden, could conceive no greater happiness to be enjoyed on earth, than thus dreamily to rest beneath the trees and flowers of this terrestrial paradise.

At the end of this winter garden were placed immense divans beneath canopies of leaves and flowers; the subdued light of the hothouse forming a powerful contrast with the gallery, the distance seemed filled with a species of gold-coloured, shining fog, in the midst of which glittered and flickered, like a living embroidery, the dazzling and varied robes of the ladies, combined with the prismatic scintillations of the congregated mass of diamonds and precious stones. Rodolph's first sensation upon arriving at this enchanting triumph of art over nature was that of most unfeigned surprise.

"This is, indeed, a wonderfully beautiful carrying out of a poetical idea," said he, almost involuntarily; then, turning to the ambassadress, he exclaimed, "Madame, till now, I had not deemed such wonders practicable. We have not in the scene before us a mere union of unbounded expense with the most exquisite taste, but you give us poetry in action. Instead of writing as a master poet, or painting as a first-rate artist, you create that which they would scarcely venture to dream of."

"Your royal highness is too indulgent."

"Nay, but candidly, all must agree that the mind which could so faithfully depict this ravishing scene, with its charm of colours and contrasts,—beyond us, the loud notes of joy and mirthful revelry, here the soft silence and sweet, gentle murmurs of distant voices, that lull the spirit into a fancied flight beyond this fitful existence,—surely, surely, without suspicion of flattery, it may be said of the planner and contriver of all this, such a one was born a poet and a painter combined."

"The praises of your royal highness are so much the more dangerous from the skill and cleverness with which they are uttered, and which makes us listen to them with delight, even in defiance of our sternest resolutions. But allow me to call your royal highness's attention to the very lovely person who is approaching us. I must have you admit that the Marquise d'Harville must shine preeminently beautiful any and every where. Is she not graceful? And does not the gentle elegance of her whole appearance acquire a fresh charm, from the contrast with the severe yet classic beauty by whom she is accompanied?"

The individuals thus alluded to were the Countess Sarah Macgregor and the Marquise d'Harville, who were at this moment descending the steps which led from the gallery to the winter garden. Neither was the panegyric bestowed by the ambassadress on Madame d'Harville at all exaggerated. No words can accurately describe the loveliness of her person, and the

Marquise d'Harville was then in the first bloom of youthful charms; but her beauty, delicate and fragile as it was, appeared less to belong to the strict regularity of her features than to the irresistible expression of sweetness and universal kindness, which imparted a charm to her countenance impossible to resist or to describe; and this peculiar charm served invariably to distinguish Madame d'Harville from all other fashionable beauties; for goodness of heart and kindliness of disposition are but rarely seen as the prevailing passions revealed in a face as fair, as young, high-born, and ardently worshipped by all, as was the Marquise d'Harville, who shone forth in all her lustre as the brightest star in the galaxy of fashion. Too wise, virtuous, and right-minded to listen to the host of flatterers by whom she was surrounded, Madame d'Harville smiled as gratefully on all as though she could have given them credit for speaking the truth, had not her own modest opinion of her just claims to such homage have forbidden her accepting of praise she never could have deserved. Wholly indifferent to flattery, yet sensibly alive to kindness, she perfectly distinguished between sympathy and insincerity. Her acute penetration, correct judgment, and lively wit, unmixed by the slightest ill-nature, made her wage an early, though good-tempered war with those vain and egotistical beings who crowd and oppress society with the view of monopolising general attention, and, blinded by their own self-love, expect one universal deference and submission.

"Those kind of persons," said Madame d'Harville one day, laughingly, "appear to me as if their whole lives were passed in dancing 'Le Cavalier Seul' before an invisible mirror."

An unassuming and unpretending person, however reserved and consequently unpopular he might be with others, was sure to find a steady friend and partial observer in Madame d'Harville.

This trifling digression is absolutely essential to the right understanding of facts of which we shall speak hereafter.

The complexion of Madame d'Harville was of the purest white, tinged with the most delicate carnation; her long tresses of bright chestnut hair floated over her beautifully formed shoulders, white and polished as marble. It would be an impossible task to describe her large dark gray eyes, fringed with their thick lashes, and beaming with angelic sweetness; her coral lips, with their gentle smile, gave to her eyes the indefinable charm that her affable and winning mode of expressing herself derived from their mild and angelic expression of approving goodness. We will not farther delay the reader by describing the perfection of her figure, nor dwell upon the

distinguished air which marked her whole appearance. She wore a white crape dress, trimmed with the natural flowers of the camellia, intermixed with its own rich green leaves. Here and there a diamond sparkled among the waxy petals, as if a dewdrop fresh from its native skies had fallen there. A garland of the same flowers, equally ornamented with precious stones, was placed with infinite grace upon her fair and open brow.

The peculiar style of the Countess Sarah Macgregor's beauty served to set off the fair feminine loveliness of her companion. Though turned thirty-five years of age, Sarah looked much younger. Nothing appears to preserve the body more effectually from all the attacks of sickness or decay than a cold-hearted, egotistical disregard of every one but ourselves; it encrusts the body with a cold, icy covering, which alike resists the inroads of bodily or mental wear and tear. To this cause may be ascribed the wonderful preservation of Countess Sarah's appearance.

The lady whose name we last mentioned wore a dress of pale amber watered silk, beneath a crape tunic of the same colour. A simple wreath of the dark leaves of the Pyrus Japonicus encircled her head, and harmonised admirably with the bandeaux of raven hair it confined. This classically severe mode of head-dress gave to the profile of this imperious woman the character and resemblance of an antique statue. Many persons, mistaking their real cast of countenance, imagine some peculiar vocation delineated in their traits. Thus one man, who fancies he possesses a warlike air, assumes the warrior; another imagines

"His eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,"

marks him out as a poet; instantly he turns down his shirt-collar, adopts poetical language, and writes himself poet. So the self-imagined conspirator wastes days and hours in pondering over mighty deeds he feels called upon to do. The politician, upon the same terms, bores the world and his friends with his perpetual outpourings upon political economy; and the man whose saintly turn of countenance persuades its owner into the belief of a corresponding character within, forthwith abjures the pomps and vanities of the world, and aims at reforming his brethren by his pulpit eloquence. Now, ambition being Sarah's ruling passion, and her noble and aristocratical features well assisting the delusion, she smiled as the word "diadem" crossed her thoughts, and lent a willing ear to the predictions of her Highland nurse, and firmly believed herself predestined to a sovereign destiny. Spite of the trifling embonpoint that gave to her figure (which, though fatter than Madame d'Harville's, was not less slender and nymph-like) a voluptuous gracefulness, Sarah boasted of all the freshness of early

youth, and few could long sustain the fire of her black and piercing eyes; her nose was aquiline; her finely formed mouth and rich ruby lips were expressive of the highest determination, haughtiness, and pride.

The marquise and Sarah had recognised Rodolph in the winter garden at the moment they were descending into it from the gallery; but the prince feigned not to observe their presence.

"The prince is so absorbed with the ambassadress," said Madame d'Harville to Sarah, "that he pays not the slightest attention to us."

"You are quite mistaken, my dear Clémence," rejoined the countess; "the prince saw us as quickly and as plainly as we saw him, but I frightened him away; you see he still bears malice with me."

"I am more than ever at a loss to understand the singular obstinacy with which he persists in shunning you,—you, formerly an old friend. 'Countess Sarah and myself are sworn enemies,' replied he to me once in a joking manner; 'I have made a vow never to speak to her; and you may judge how sacred must be the vow that hinders me from conversing with so charming a lady.' And, strange and unaccountable as was this reply, I had no alternative but to submit to it."

"And yet I can assure you that the cause of this deadly feud, half in jest, and half in earnest as it is, originates in the most simple circumstance. Were it not that a third party is implicated in it, I should have explained the whole to you long ago. But what is the matter, my dear child? You seem as though your thoughts were far from the present scene."

"Nothing, nothing, I assure you," replied the marquise, faintly; "but the gallery is so very hot, it gave me a violent headache. Let us sit down here for a minute or two. I hope and believe it will soon be better."

"You are right; see, here is a nice quiet corner, where you will be in perfect safety from the researches of those who are lamenting your absence," added Sarah, pronouncing the last words with marked emphasis.

The two ladies then seated themselves on a divan, almost concealed beneath the clustering shrubs and overhanging plants.

"I said those who would be lamenting your absence, my dear Clémence,—come, own that I deserve praise for so discreetly forming my speech."

The marquise blushed slightly, cast down her eyes, but spoke not.

"How unreasonable you are!" exclaimed Sarah, in a tone of friendly reproach. "Can you not trust me, my dear child?—yes, child; for am I not old enough to be your mother?"

"Not trust you?" uttered the marquise, sadly; "alas! have I not on the contrary confessed that to you which I should hardly have dared to own to myself?"

"Well, then, come, rouse yourself; now, let us have a little talk about him: and so you have really sworn to drive him to despair?"

"For the love of heaven," exclaimed Madame d'Harville, "think what you are saying!"

"I tell you I know him better than you do, my poor child; he is a man of cool and decided energy, who sets but little value on his life; he has had misfortunes enough to make him quite weary of it; and it really seems as if you daily found greater pleasure in tormenting him, and playing with his feelings."

"Is it possible you can really think so?"

"Indeed, in spite of myself, I cannot refrain from entertaining that opinion. Oh, if you but knew how over-susceptible some minds are rendered by a continuance of sorrows and afflictions,—just now I saw two large tears fall from his eyes, as he gazed on you."

"Are you quite sure of what you say?"

"Indeed, I am quite certain; and that, too, in a ballroom, at the risk of becoming an object of general derision, if this uncontrollable misery were perceived! Ah! let me tell you, a person must truly love to bear all this, and even to be careless about concealing his sufferings from the world."

"For the love of heaven, do not speak thus!" replied Madame d'Harville, in a voice trembling with emotion. "Alas! you have touched me nearly; I know too well what it is to struggle with a hidden grief, yet wear an outward expression of calmness and resignation. Alas! alas! 'tis the deep pity and commiseration I feel for him has been my ruin," added she, almost unconsciously.

"Nonsense! What an over-nice person you are, to talk of a little innocent flirtation being ruinous, and that, too, with a man so scrupulously guarded as to abstain from ever appearing in your husband's presence, for fear of

compromising you. You must admit that M. Charles Robert is a man of surprising honour, delicacy, and real feeling. I feel the more inclined to espouse his cause from the recollection that you have never met him elsewhere but at my house, and because I can answer for his principles, and that his devoted attachment to you can only be equalled by the deep respect he bears you."

"I have never doubted the many noble qualities you have so repeatedly assured me he possesses, but you know well that it is his long succession of bitter afflictions which have so warmly interested me in his favour."

"And well does he merit this interest, and most fully do his excellent qualities absolve you of all blame in thus bestowing it. Surely so fine and noble a countenance bespeaks a mind equally superior to all mankind. How completely are you reminded, while gazing on his tall and finely proportioned figure, of the preux chevaliers of bygone days,'sans peur et sans reproche.' I once saw him dressed in his uniform as commandant of the nationalguard, and, handsome as he is, I really think he looked surpassingly well, and I could but say to myself, that, if nobility were the award of inward merit and external beauty, M. Charles Robert, instead of being so called, would take precedence of nearly all our dukes and peers. Would he not be a fitting representative of any of the most distinguished families in France?"

"You know, my dear countess, how very little importance I attach to mere birth, and you yourself have frequently reproached me with being strongly inclined to republicanism," said Madame d'Harville, smiling gently.

"For my own part, I always thought, with you, that M. Charles Robert required not the aid of rank or titles to render him worthy of universal admiration. Then, what extreme talent he possesses! What a fine voice he has! And what delightful morning concerts we three have been able to achieve, owing to his all-powerful assistance! Ah, my dear Clémence, do you remember the first time you ever sang with him: what passionate expression did he not throw into the words of that beautiful duet, so descriptive of his love, and his fear of offending her who was the object of it, by revealing it?"

"Let me entreat of you," said Madame d'Harville, after a long silence, "to speak of something else; indeed I dare not listen further: what you but just now intimated of his depressed and unhappy appearance has caused me much pain."

"Nay, my dear friend, I meant not to grieve you, but merely to point out the probability that a man, rendered doubly sensitive by the succession of past misfortunes, might feel his courage insufficient to encounter the fresh trial of your rejection of his suit, and thus be induced to end his hopeless love and his life together."

"Oh, no more! no more!" almost shrieked Madame d'Harville, interrupting Sarah; "this fearful idea has glanced across my mind already." Then, after a second silence of some minutes, the marquise resumed, "Let us, as I said before, talk of somebody else,—of your mortal enemy, for instance," added she, with assumed gaiety of manner; "come, we will take the prince for a fresh theme of conversation; I had not seen him, previously to this evening, for a very long time. Do you know that I think he looks handsomer than ever? Though all but king, he has lost none of the winning sweetness and affability of his manner, and, spite of my republicanism, I must confess I have seldom, if ever, known so irresistible a person."

Sarah threw a side glance of deep and scrutinising hatred upon her unconscious rival, but, quickly recovering herself, she said, gaily:

"Now, my dear Clémence, you must confess to being a most capricious little lady; you have regular alternating paroxysms of admiration and violent dislike for the prince; why, a few months ago, I mean about his first arrival here, you were so captivated by him, that, between ourselves, I was half afraid you had lost your heart past all hope of recall."

"Thanks to you," replied Madame d'Harville, smiling, "my admiration was very short-lived; for so well did you act up to your character of the prince's sworn foe, and such fearful tales did you tell me of his profligacy and misconduct, that you succeeded in inspiring me with an aversion as powerful as had been the infatuation which led you to fear for the safety of my heart; which, by the way, I cannot think would ever have been placed in any danger from the attempts of your enemy to disturb its repose, since, shortly before you gave me those frightful particulars of the prince's character, he had quite ceased to honour me with his visits, although on the most intimate and friendly terms with my husband."

"Talking of your husband, pray is he here to-night?" inquired Sarah.

"No," replied Madame d'Harville, in a tone of embarrassment; "he preferred remaining at home."

"He seems to me to mix less and less in the world."

"He never liked what is called fashionable gaiety."

The marquise's agitation visibly increased; and Sarah, whose quick eye easily perceived it, continued:

"The last time I saw him he looked even paler than usual."

"He has been very much out of health lately."

"My dearest Clémence, will you permit me to speak to you without reserve?"

"Oh, yes, pray do!"

"How comes it that the least allusion to your husband always throws you into such a state of extraordinary alarm and uneasiness?"

"What an idea! Is it possible you can mean it seriously?" asked poor Madame d'Harville, trying to smile.

"Indeed, I am quite in earnest," rejoined her companion; "whenever you are speaking of him, your countenance assumes, even in spite of yourself,—but how shall I make myself understood?" and Sarah, with the tone and fixed gaze of one who wished to read the most secret thoughts of the person she addressed, slowly and emphatically added, "a look of mingled aversion and fear!"

The fixed pallid features of Madame d'Harville at first defied even Sarah's practised eye, but her keen gaze soon detected a slight convulsive working of the mouth, with a tremulous movement of the under lip of her victim; but feeling it unsafe to pursue the subject farther at this moment so as to awaken the marquise's mistrust of her friendly intentions, by way, therefore, of concealing her real suspicions, she continued:

"Yes, just that sort of dislike any woman would entertain for a peevish, jealous, ill-tempered—"

At this explanation of the countess's meaning, as regarded Madame d'Harville's imagined dislike for her husband, a heavy load seemed taken from her; the working of her lip ceased, and she replied:

"Let me assure you M. d'Harville is neither peevish nor jealous." Then, as if searching for some means of breaking a conversation so painful to her feelings, she suddenly exclaimed, "Ah! here comes that tiresome friend of my

husband's, the Duke de Lucenay. I hope he has not seen us. Where can he have sprung from? I thought he was a thousand miles off!"

"It was reported that he had gone somewhere in the East for a year or two, and behold, at the end of five months, here he is back again! His unexpected arrival must have sadly annoyed the Duchess de Lucenay, though poor De Lucenay is a very inoffensive creature," said Sarah, with an ill-natured smile. "Nor will Madame de Lucenay be the only one to feel vexation at his thus changing his mind; her friend, M. de St. Remy, will duly and affectionately sympathise in all her regrets on the subject."

"Come, come, my dear Sarah, I cannot allow you to scandalise; say that this return of M. de Lucenay is a nuisance to everybody; the duke is sufficiently disagreeable for you to generalise the regret his unexpected presence occasions."

"I do not slander, I merely repeat. It is also said that M. de St. Remy, the model of our young élégantes, whose splendid doings have filled all Paris, is all but ruined! 'Tis true, he has by no means reduced either his establishment or his expenditure; however, there are several ways of accounting for that; in the first place, Madame de Lucenay is immensely rich."

"What a horrible idea!"

"Still I only repeat what others say. There, the duke sees us; he is coming towards us; we must resign ourselves to our fate,—miserable, is it not? I know nothing so hard to bear as that man's company; he makes himself so very disagreeable, and then laughs so disgustingly loud at the silly things he says. Indeed, he is so boisterous that the bare idea of him makes one think of pretending to faint, or any other pretext, to avoid him. Talking of fainting, pray let me beg of you, if you have the least regard for your fan or essence-bottle, to beware how you allow him to handle either, for he has the unfortunate habit of breaking whatever he touches, and all with the most facetious self-satisfied air imaginable."

END OF VOLUME I.