

The House of the White Shadows

Vol.I

By

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CHAPTER I

ONLY A FLOWERGIRL.

The feverish state of excitement into which Geneva was thrown was not caused by a proclamation of war, a royal visit, a social revolution, a religious wave, or an avalanche. It was simply that a man was on his trial for murder.

There is generally in Geneva a rational if not a philosophic foundation for a social upheaving; unlike the people of most other countries, the population do not care to play a blind game of follow my leader. They prefer to think for themselves, and their leaders must be men of mark. Intellect is passionately welcomed; pretenders find their proper level.

What, then, in a simple trial for murder, had caused the excitement? Had the accused moved in a high station, was he a poet, a renowned soldier, a philanthropist, a philosopher, or a priest loved for his charities, and the purity of his life? None of these; he was Gautran, a woodman, and a vagabond of the lowest type. It would be natural, therefore, to seek for an explanation in the social standing of his victim. A princess, probably, or at least a lady of quality? On the contrary. A common flowergirl, who had not two pair of shoes to her feet.

Seldom had a trial taken place in which the interest manifested had been so absorbing. While it was proceeding, the questions which men and women asked freely of each other were:

"What news from the courthouse?"

"How many days longer is it likely to last?"

"Has the monster confessed?"

"What will the verdict be?"

"Do you think it possible he can escape?"

"Why did the famous Advocate undertake the defence?"

In fashionable assemblies, and in cafés where the people drank their lager and red wine; in clubs and workshops; on steamboats and diligences; in the fields and vineyards; on highroads and byeroads the trial of Gautran formed the principal topic of conversation and debate, to the almost utter exclusion of trade, and science, and politics, and of a new fashion in hats which was setting the women of adjacent countries crazy. So animated were the discussions that the girl lying in her grave might have been supposed to be closely related to half the inhabitants of Geneva, instead of having been, as she was, a comparative stranger in the town, with no claim upon any living Genevese on the score of kinship. The evidence against the prisoner was overwhelming, and it appeared as though a spirit of personal hatred had guided its preparation. With deadly patience and skill the prosecution had blocked every loophole of escape. Gautran was fast in the meshes, and it was observed that his counsel, the Advocate, in the line he adopted, elicited precisely the kind of evidence which in the judgment of those who listened to him now for the first time strengthened the case against the man he was defending.

"Ah," said those observers, "this great Advocate shares the horror of the murderer and his crime, and has undertaken the defence for the purpose of ensuring a conviction."

A conclusion which could only occur to uninformed minds.

There were others among them the prosecuting counsel, the judge, and the members of the legal profession who thronged the court who, with a better knowledge of the Advocate's marvellous resources, and the subtle quality of his intellect, were inspired with the gravest doubts as to the result of the trial. This remarkable man, who gazed before him with calm, thoughtful eyes, whose face was a mask upon which no trace of inward emotion could be detected, was to them at once a source of perplexity and admiration. Instances were cited of trials in which he had been engaged, in the course of which he had seemed to play so directly into the hands of his antagonists that defeat was not dreamt of until they were startled by the discovery that he had led them into an ambush where, at the supreme moment, victory was snatched from their grasp. And, when it was too late to repair their error, they were galled by the reflection that the Advocate had so blinded their judgment, and so cloaked his designs, that he had compelled them to contribute largely to their own discomfiture.

It was in the acknowledgment of these extraordinary powers that the doubt arose whether Gautran would not slip through the hands of justice. Every feature of the case and the proceedings, whether picturesque or horrible, that afforded scope for illustration by pen and pencil was pressed into the service of the public whose appetite for such fare is regarded as immoderate and not overnice by special correspondents and artists. Descriptions and sketches of the river and its banks, of the poor home of the unfortunate flowergirl, of the room in which she had slept, of her habits and demeanour,

of her dress, of her appearance alive and dead; and, as a contrast, of Gautran and his vile surroundings not a detail was allowed to escape. It was impossible, without favour or influence, to obtain admission to the court in which the trial was held, and, could seats have been purchased, a higher price would willingly have been paid for them than the most celebrated actress or prima donna could have commanded. Murders are common enough, but this crime had feverishly stirred the heart of the community, and its strangest feature was that the excitement was caused, not so much by the murder itself, as by an accidental connection which imparted to it its unparalleled interest.

The victim was a young girl seventeen years of age, who, until a few months before her cruel and untimely death, had been a stranger in the neighbourhood. Nothing was known of the story of her life. When she first appeared in the suburbs of Geneva she was accompanied by a woman much older than herself, and two facts made themselves immediately apparent. That a strong attachment existed between the newcomers, and that they were very poor. The last circumstance was regarded as a sufficient indication that they belonged to the lower classes. The name of the younger of the women was Madeline, the name of the elder Pauline.

That they became known simply by these names, Madeline and Pauline, was not considered singular by those with whom they consorted; as they presented themselves, so they were accepted. Some said they came from the mountains, some from the plains, but this was guesswork. Their dress did not proclaim their canton, and they brought nothing with them to betray them.

To the question asked of them, "What are you?" Pauline replied, "Cannot you see? We are common working people."

They hired a room in a small cottage for three francs a month, and paid the first month's rent in advance, and their landlady was correct in her surmise that these three francs constituted nearly the whole of their wealth. She was curious to know how they were going to live, for although they called themselves working people, the younger of the two did not seem to be fitted for hard work, or to be accustomed to it.

For a few days they did nothing, and then their choice of avocation was made. They sold flowers in the streets and cafés of Geneva, and gained no more than a scanty living thereby.

The woman in whose cottage they lived said she was surprised that they did not make a deal of money, as much because of Madeline's beauty as of their exquisite skill in arranging their posies.

Had Pauline traded alone it is likely that failure would have attended her, for notwithstanding that she was both comely and straightmade, there was always in her eyes the watchful look of one who mistrusts honeyed words from strangers, and sees a snare in complimentary phrases.

It was otherwise with Madeline, in whose young life Nature's fairest season was opening, and it would have been strange indeed if her smiling face and winning manners had not attracted custom. This smiling face and these winning manners were not an intentional part of the trade she followed; they were natural gifts.

Admiration pursued her, not only from those in her own station in life, but from some who occupied a higher, and many an insidious proposal was whispered in her ear whose poisonous flattery would have beguiled her to her ruin. If she had not had in Pauline a staunch and devoted protector, it is hard to say whether she could have resisted temptation, for her nature was singularly gentle and confiding; but her faithful companion was ever on the alert, and no false wooer could hope to win his way to Madeline's heart while Pauline was near.

One gave gold for flowers, and was about to depart with a smile at the success of his first move, when Pauline, with her hand on his sleeve, stopped his way.

"You have made a mistake," she said, tendering the gold; "the flowers you have taken are worth but halfafranc."

"There is no mistake," he said airily; "the gold is yours for beauty's sake."

"I prefer silver," she said, gazing steadily at him, "for fair dealing's sake."

He took back his gold and gave her silver, with a taunting remark that she was a poor hand at her trade. She made no reply to this, but there was a world of meaning in her eyes as she turned to Madeline with a look of mingled anxiety and tenderness. And yet she desired money, yearningly desired it, for the sake of her young charge; but she would only earn it honestly, or receive it from those of whom she had a right to ask.

She guarded Madeline as a mother guards her young, and their affection for each other grew into a proverb. Certainly no harm could befall the young flowergirl while Pauline was by her side. Unhappily a day arrived when the elder of the women was called away for a while. They parted with tears and kisses, never to meet again!

CHAPTER II

THE ARRIVAL OF THE ADVOCATE

Among those whom Madeline's beauty had attracted was a man in a common way of life, Gautran, a woodman, who followed her with dogged persistence. That his company was distasteful to this bright young creature could not be doubted, but he was not to be shaken off, and his ferocity of character deterred others from approaching the girl when he was present. Many times had he been heard to say, "Madeline belongs to me; let me see who is bold enough to dispute it." And again and again that it would go hard with the man who stepped between him and the girl he loved. Even Pauline was loth to anger him, and seemed to stand in fear of him. This was singular enough, for when he and Madeline were seen together, people would say, "There go the wolf and the lamb."

This wretch it was who stood accused of the murder of the pretty flowergirl.

Her body had been found in the River Rhone, with marks of violence upon it, and a handkerchief tightly twisted round its neck. The proofs of a cruel murder were incontestable, and suspicion fell immediately upon Gautran, who was the last person known to be in Madeline's company. Evidence of his guilt was soon forthcoming. He was madly, brutally in love with her, and madly, brutally jealous of her. On the night of the murder they had been seen walking together on the bank of the river; Gautran had been heard to speak in a high tone, and his exclamation, "I will kill you! I will kill you!" was sworn to by witnesses; and the handkerchief round her neck belonged to him. A thousand damning details were swiftly accumulated, all pointing to the wretch's guilt, and it was well for him that he did not fall into the hands of the populace. So incensed were they against him that they would have torn him to pieces.

Not in all Geneva could there be found a man or a woman who, by the holding up of a finger, would have besought mercy for him. Regret was openly expressed that the death punishment for murder was not lawful, some satisfaction, however, being derived from the reflection that in times gone by certain heinous crimes had brought upon the criminals a punishment more terrible than death.

"They should chain the monster by the waist," said a man, "so that he cannot lie down, and can only move one step from the stake. Gautran deserves worse than that."

But while he lay in prison, awaiting the day of trial, there arrived in Geneva an Advocate of renown, who had travelled thither with his wife in search of much needed repose from years of continuous mental toil. This man was famous in many countries; he was an indefatigable and earnest worker, and so important were his services deemed that phenomenal fees were frequently paid to secure them. But notwithstanding the exceeding value of his time he had been known to refuse large sums of money in cases offered to him, in order to devote himself to others which held out no prospect of pecuniary reward.

Wealthy, and held in almost exaggerated esteem, both for his abilities and the cold purity of his life, it was confidently predicted that the highest honours of the state were in store for him, and it was ungrudgingly admitted so far above his peers did he stand that the loftiest office would be dignified by association with his name. The position he had attained was due as much to his intense enthusiasm in the cause he championed as to his wondrous capacity for guiding it to victory. As leader of a forlorn hope he was unrivalled. He had an insatiable appetite for obstacles; criminal cases of great moment, in which life and liberty were in imminent peril, and in which there was a dark mystery to be solved, possessed an irresistible fascination for him. Labour such as this was a labour of love, and afforded him the keenest pleasure. The more intricate the task the closer his study of it; the deeper the mystery the greater his patience in the unravelling of it; the more powerful the odds against him the more determined his exertions to win the battle. His microscopic, penetrating mind detected the minutest flaw, seized the smallest detail likely to be of advantage to him, and frequently from the most trivial thread he spun a strand so strong as to drag the ship that was falling to pieces to a safe and secure haven. His satisfaction at these achievements was unbounded, but he rarely allowed an expression of exultation to escape him. His outward tranquillity, even in supreme crises, was little less than marvellous. His nerve was of iron, and to his most intimate associates his inner life was a sealed book.

Accompanied by his wife, the Advocate entered Geneva, and alighted at one of the principal hotels, four days before that on which the trial of Gautran was to commence.

CHAPTER III

THE ADVOCATE'S WIFE INSISTS UPON HAVING HER WAY

Their arrival was expected. The moment they were shown into a private room the proprietor of the hotel waited upon them, and with obsequious bows welcomed them to Geneva.

"A letter has been awaiting my lord," said this magnate, the whiteness of whose linen was dazzling; he had been considering all the morning whether he should address the great Advocate as "your lordship," or "your eminence," or "your highness," and had decided upon the first, "since yesterday evening."

The Advocate in silence received the letter, in silence read it, then handed it to his wife, who also read it, with a careless and supercilious air which deeply impressed the landlord.

"Will my lord and my lady," said this official, "honour us by remaining long in our town? The best rooms in the establishment are at their disposal."

The Advocate glanced at his wife, who answered for him:

"We shall remain for a few hours only."

Despair was expressed in the landlord's face as he left the room, overwhelmed with the desolation caused by this announcement.

The letter which he had delivered to the Advocate ran as follows:

"Comrade, whom I have never seen, but intimately know, Welcome. Were it not that I am a cripple, and physically but half a man represented, fortunately, by the upper moiety of my body I should come in person to shake you by the hand. As it is, I must wait till you take up your quarters in Christian Almer's villa in our quiet village, where I spend my days and nights, extracting what amusement I can from the foibles and weaknesses of my neighbours. My father was steward to Christian Almer's father, and I succeeded him, for the reason that the office, during the latter years and after the death of the elder Almer, was a sinecure. Otherwise, another steward would have had to be found, for my labours lay elsewhere. But since the day on which I became a mere bit of animated lumber, unable of my own will to move about, and confined within the narrow limits of this sleepy valley, I have regarded the sinecure as an important slice of good fortune, albeit there was nothing whatever to do except to cause myself to be wheeled past Christian Almer's villa on fine days, for the purpose of satisfying myself that no thief had run away with its rusty gates. Then came an urgent letter from young Almer, whom I have not beheld since he was a lad of nine or ten, begging of me to put the house in

order for you and your lady, to whom I, as an old gallant, am already in spirit devoted. And when I heard that it was for you the work was to be done, doubly did I deem myself fortunate in not having thrown up the stewardship in my years of active life. All, then, is ready in the old house, which will be the more interesting to you from the fact of its not having been inhabited for nearly a generation. Comedies and tragedies have been enacted within its walls, as you doubtless know. Does Christian Almer come with you, and has he grown into the likeness of his father? Your servant and brother,

"Pierre Lamont."

"Who is this Pierre Lamont?" asked his wife.

"Once a famous lawyer," replied the Advocate; "compelled some years ago to relinquish the pursuit of his profession by reason of an accident which crippled him for life. You do not wish to stop in Geneva, then?"

"No," said the beautiful woman who stood before him, his junior by five and twenty years; "there is nothing new to be seen here, and I am dying with impatience to take possession of Mr. Almer's villa. I have been thinking of nothing else for the last week."

"Captivated by the name it bears."

"Perhaps. The House of White Shadows! Could anything be more enticing? Why was it so called?"

"I cannot tell you. Until lately, indeed when this holiday was decided upon" he sighed as he uttered the word "holiday"; an indication that he was not accepting it in a glad spirit "I was not aware that Almer owned a villa hereabouts. Do not forget, Adelaide, that he cautioned you against accepting an offer made in a rash moment."

"What more was needed to set me longing for it? 'Here is a very beautiful book,' said Mr. Almer, 'full of wonderful pictures; it is yours, if you like but, beware, you must not open it.' Think of saying that to a woman!"

"You are a true daughter of Eve. Almer's offer was unwise; his caution still more unwise."

"The moment he warned me against the villa, I fell in love with it. I shall discover a romance there."

"I, too, would warn you against it"

"You are but whetting my curiosity," she interrupted playfully.

"Seriously, though. Master Lamont, in his letter, says that the house has not been inhabited for nearly a generation"

"There must be ghosts there," she said, again interrupting him. "It will be delightful."

"And Master Lamont's remark," continued the Advocate, "that there have been comedies and tragedies enacted within its walls is not a recommendation."

"I have heard you say, Edward, that they are enacted within the walls of the commonest houses."

"But this particular house has been for so long a time deserted! I am in ignorance of the stories attached to it; that they are in some sense unpleasant is proved by Almer's avoidance of the place. What occurs to me is that, were it entirely desirable, Almer would not have made it a point to shun it."

"Christian Almer is different from other men; that is your own opinion of him."

"True; he is a man dominated by sentiment; yet there appears to be something deeper than mere sentiment in his consistent avoidance of the singularly named House of White Shadows."

"According to Master Lamont's letter he has been to some trouble to make it agreeable to us. Indeed, Edward, you cannot argue me out of having my own way."

"If the house is gloomy, Adelaide"

"I will brighten it. Can I not?" she asked in a tone so winning that it brought a light into his grave face.

"You can, for me, Adelaide," he replied; "but I am not thinking of myself. I would not willingly sadden a heart as joyous as yours. You must promise, if you are not happy there, to seek with me a more cheerful retreat."

"You can dismiss your fears, Edward. I shall be happy there. All last night I was dreaming of white shadows. Did they sadden me? No. I woke up this morning in delightful spirits. Is that an answer to your forebodings?"

"When did you not contrive to have your own way? I have some banking business to do in Geneva, and I must leave you for an hour." She nodded and smiled at him. Before he reached the door he turned and said: "Are you still resolved to send your maid away? She knows your wants so well, and you are so accustomed to her, that her absence might put you to inconvenience. Had you not better keep her with you till you see whether you are likely to be suited at Almer's house?"

"Edward," she said gaily, "have I not told you a hundred times, and have you not found out for yourself a hundred and a hundred times again, that your wife is a very wilful woman? I shall love to be inconvenienced; it will set my wits to work. But indeed I happen to know that there is a pretty girl in the villa, the old housekeeper's granddaughter, who was born to do everything I wish done in just the way I wish it done."

"Child of impulse and fancy," he said, kissing her hand, and then her lips, in response to a pouting invitation, "it is well for you that you have a husband as serious as myself to keep guard and watch over you. What is the thought that has suddenly entered your head?"

"Can you read a woman's thoughts?" she asked in her lightest manner.

"I can judge by signs. What was your thought, Adelaide?"

"A foolish thought. To keep guard and watch over me, you said. The things are so different. The first is a proof of love, the second of suspicion."

"A logician, too," he said with a pleased smile; "the air here agrees with you." So saying he left her, and the moment he was beyond the reach of her personal influence his native manner asserted itself, and his features assumed their usual grave expression. As he was descending the stairs of the hotel he was accosted by a woman, the maid he had advised his wife to keep.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said; "but may I ask why I am discharged?"

"Certainly not of me," he replied stiffly; "you are my wife's servant. She has her reasons."

"She has not made me acquainted with them," said the woman discontentedly. "Will you?"

He saw that she was in an illtemper, and although he was not a man to tolerate insolence, he was attentive to trifles.

"I do not interfere with my wife's domestics. She engages whom she pleases, and discharges whom she pleases."

"But to do right, sir, that is everyone's affair. I am discharged suddenly, without notice, and without having committed a fault. Until this morning I am perfection; no one can dress my lady like me, no one can arrange her hair so admirably. That is what she says to me continually. Why, then, am I discharged? I ask my lady why, and she says, for her convenience."

"She has paid you, has she not?"

"Oh yes, and has given me money to return home. But it is not that. It is that it hurts me to be suddenly discharged. It is to my injury when I seek another situation. I shall be asked why I left my last. To speak the truth, I must say that I did not leave, that I was discharged. I shall be asked why, and I shall not be able to say."

"Has she not given you a character?"

"Yes; it is not that I complain of; it is being suddenly discharged."

"I cannot interfere, mistress. You have no reasonable cause for complaint. You have a character, and you are well paid; that should content you."

He turned from her, and she sent her parting words after him:

"My lady has her reasons! I hope they will be found to be good ones, and that you will find them so. Do you hear?that you will find them so!"

He paid no further heed to her, and entering his carriage drove to the Rue de la Corraterie, to the business house of Jacob Hartrich, and was at once admitted to the banker's private room.

CHAPTER IV

JACOB HARTRICH, THE BANKER, GIVES HIS REASONS FOR BELIEVING GAUTRAN THE WOODMAN GUILTY OF THE MURDER OF MADELINE

Jacob Hartrich, by birth a Jew, had reached his sixtieth year, and was as hale and strong as a man of forty. His face was bland and fullfleshed, his eyes bright and, at times, joyous, his voice mellow, his hands fat and finelyshaped, and given to a caressing petting of each other, denoting satisfaction with themselves and the world in general. His manners were easy and selfpossessed a characteristic of his race. He was a gentleman and a man of education.

He gazed at the Advocate with admiration; he had an intense respect for men who had achieved fame by force of intellect.

"Mr. Almer," he said, "prepared me for your arrival, and is anxious that I should forward your views in every possible way. I shall be happy to do so, and, if it is in my power, to contribute to the pleasure of your visit."

"I thank you," said the Advocate, with a courteous inclination of his head. "When did you last see Mr. Almer?"

"He called upon me this day three weeks for a few minutes only, and only concerning your business."

"He is always thoughtful and considerate. I suppose he was on his road to Paris when he called upon you."

"No; he had no intention of going to Paris. I believe he had been for some time in the neighbourhood of Geneva before he favoured me with a visit. He is still here."

"Here!" exclaimed the Advocate, in a tone of pleasure and surprise.

"At least in Switzerland."

"In what part?"

"I cannot inform you, but from the remarks he let fall, I should say in the mountains, where tourists are not likely to penetrate." He paused a moment before he continued: "Mr. Almer spoke of you, in terms it was pleasant to hear, as his closest, dearest friend."

"We are friends in the truest sense of the word."

"Then I may speak freely to you. During the time he was with me I was impressed by an unusual strangeness in him. He was restless and ill at ease; his manner denoted that he was either dissatisfied with himself or was under some evil influence. I expressed my

surprise to him that he had been for some time in this neighbourhood without calling upon me, but he did not offer any explanation of his neglect. He told me, however, that he was tired of the light, the gaiety, and the bustle of cities, and that it was his intention to seek some solitude to endeavour to rid himself of a terror which had taken possession of him. No sooner had he made this strange declaration than he strove, in hurried words, to make light of it, evidently anxious that it should leave no impression upon my mind. I need scarcely say he did not succeed. I have frequently thought of that declaration and of Christian Almer in connection with it."

The Advocate smiled and shook his head.

"Mr. Almer is given to fantastic expression. If you knew him as well as I do you would be aware that he is prone to magnify trifles, and likely to raise ghosts of the conscience for the mere pleasure of laying them. His nature is of that order which suffers keenly, but I am not disposed on that account to pity him. There are men who would be most unhappy unless they suffered."

"My dear sir," said Jacob Hartrich, "I have known Christian Almer since he was a child. I knew his father, a gentleman of great attainments, and his mother, a refined and exquisitely beautiful woman. His childhood probably made a sad impression upon him, but he has mixed with the world, and there is a bridge of twenty years between then and now. A great change has taken place in him, and not for the better. There is certainly something on his mind."

"There is something on most men's minds. I have remarked no change in Mr. Almer to cause me uneasiness. He is the same highminded gentleman I have ever known him to be. He is exquisitely sensitive, responsive to the lightest touch; those who are imbued with such qualities suffer keenly and enjoy keenly."

"The thought occurred to me that he might have sustained a monetary loss, but I dismissed it."

"A monetary loss would rather exalt than depress him. He is rich; it would have been a great happiness for him if he had been poor. What are termed misfortunes are sometimes real blessings; many fine natures are made to halt on their way by worldly prosperity. Had Christian Almer been born in the lower classes he would have found a worthy occupation; he would have made a name for himself, and in all probability would have won a wife who would have idolised him. He is a man whom a woman might worship."

"You have given me a clue," said Jacob Hartrich; "he has met with a disappointment in love."

"I think not; had he met with such a disappointment I should most surely have heard of it from his own lips."

Interesting as this conversation was to both the speakers it had now come to a natural break, and Jacob Hartrich, diverging from it, inquired whether the Advocate's visit was likely to be a long one.

"I have pledged myself," said the Advocate somewhat wearily, "to remain here for at least three months."

"Rest is a necessary medicine." The Advocate nodded absently. "Pray excuse me while I attend to your affairs. Here are the local and other papers."

He left the room, and returning soon afterwards found the Advocate engaged in the perusal of a newspaper in which he appeared to be deeply interested.

"Your business," said Jacob Hartrich, "will occupy about twenty minutes. There are some trifling formalities to be gone through with respect to signatures and stamps. If you are pressed for time I will send to you at your hotel."

"With your permission I will wait," said the Advocate, laying aside the paper with a thoughtful air.

Jacob Hartrich glanced at the paper, and saw the heading of the column which the Advocate had perused, "The Murder of Madeline the Flowergirl."

"You have been reading the particulars of this shocking deed."

"I have read what is there written."

"But you are familiar with the particulars; everybody has read them."

"I am the exception, then. I have seen very few newspapers lately."

"It was a foul and wicked murder."

"It appears so, from this bare recital."

"The foulest and most horrible within my remembrance. Ah! where will not the passions of men lead them?"

"A wide contemplation. Were men to measure the consequences of their acts before they committed them, certain channels of human events which are now exceedingly wide and turbulent would become narrow and peaceful. It was a girl who was murdered?"

"Yes."

"Young?"

"Barely seventeen."

"Pretty?"

"Very pretty."

"Had she no father to protect her?"

"No."

"Nor mother?"

"No as far as is known."

"A flowergirl, I gather from the account."

"Yes. I have occasionally bought a posy of her poor child!"

"Did she trade alone?"

"She had a companion, an elderly woman, who, unhappily, left her a few days before the murder."

"Deserted her?"

"No; it was an amicable parting, intended to last but a short time, I believe. It is not known what called her away."

"This young flowergirl was she virtuous?"

"Undoubtedly, in my belief. She was most modest and childlike."

"But susceptible to flattery. You hesitate. Why? Do you not judge human passions by human standards? She was young, pretty, in humble circumstances; her very opposite would be susceptible to flattery; therefore, she."

"Why, yes, of course; I hesitated because it would pain me to say anything concerning her which might be construed into a reproach."

"In such matters there is but one goal to steer for the truth. I perceive that a man, Gautran, is in prison, charged with the murder."

"A man?" exclaimed Jacob Hartrich, with indignant warmth. "A monster, rather! Some refined punishment should be devised to punish him for his crime."

"His crime! I have, then, been reading an old paper." The Advocate referred to the date. "No it is this morning's."

"I see your point, but the proofs of the monster's guilt are irrefragable."

"What proofs? The statements of newspaper reporters the idle and mischievous tattle of persons who cannot be put into the witness box?"

"It is well that you express yourself to me privately on this matter. In public it would not be credited that you were in earnest."

"Then the facts are lost sight of that the man has to be tried, that his guilt or innocence has yet to be established."

"The law cannot destroy facts."

"The law establishes facts, which are often in danger of being perverted by man's sympathies and prejudices. Are you acquainted with this Gautran?"

"I have no knowledge of him except from report."

"And having no knowledge of him, except from report, you form an opinion upon hearsay, and condemn him offhand. It is justice itself, therefore, that is on its trial, not a man accused of a frightful deed. He is already judged. It is stated in the newspaper that the man's appearance is repulsive."

"He is hideous."

"Then you have seen him."

"No."

"Calmly consider what value can be placed upon your judgment under the circumstances. You say the girl was pretty. Her engaging manners have tempted you to buy posies of her, not always when you needed them. In making this statement of a fact which, trivial as it appears to be, is of importance, I judge a human action by a human standard. Thus, beauty on one side, and a forbidding countenance on the other, may be the means of contributing nay, of leading to a direct miscarriage of justice. This should be prevented; justice must have a clear course, which must not be blocked and choked up by passion and prejudice. The opinion you express of Gautran's guilt may be entertained by others to whom he is also a stranger."

"My opinion is universal."

"The man, therefore, is universally condemned before he is called upon to answer the charge brought against him. Amidst this storm, in the wild fury of which reason has lost its proper functions, where shall a jury be found to calmly weigh the evidence on either side, and to judge, with ordinary fairness, a miserable wretch accused of a foul crime?"

"Gautran is a vagabond," said Jacob Hartrich feebly, feeling as though the ground were giving way under his feet, "of the lowest type."

"He is poor."

"Necessarily."

"And cannot afford to pay for independent legal aid."

"It is fortunate. He will meet with his deserts more surely and swiftly."

"You can doubtless call to mind instances of innocent persons being accused of crimes they did not commit, and being made to suffer."

"There is no fear in the case of Gautran."

"Let us hope not," said the Advocate, whose voice during the conversation had been perfectly passionless, "and in the meantime, do not lose sight of this principle. Were

Gautran the meanest creature that breathes, were he the most repulsive being on earth, he is an innocent man until he is declared guilty by the law. Equally so were he a man gifted with exceeding beauty of person, and bearing an honoured name. And of those two extremes, supposing both were found guilty of equal crimes, it is worthy of consideration, whether he who walks the gutters be not better entitled to a merciful sentence than he who lives on the heights."

At this moment a clerk brought some papers into the room. Jacob Hartrich looked over them, and handed them, with a roll of notes, to the Advocate, who rose and prepared to go.

"Have you a permanent address?" asked the banker. "We take up our quarters at once," replied the Advocate, "at the House of White Shadows."

Jacob Hartrich gazed at him in consternation. "Christian Almer's villa! He made no mention of it to me."

"It was an arrangement entered into some time since. I have a letter from Master Pierre Lamont informing me that the villa is ready for us."

"It has been uninhabited for years, except by servants who have been kept there to preserve it from falling into decay. There are strange stories connected with that house."

"I have heard as much, but have not inquired into them. The probability is that they arise from credulity or ignorance, the foundation of all superstition."

With that remark the Advocate took his leave.

CHAPTER V

FRITZ THE FOOL

As the little wooden clock in the parlour of the inn of The Seven Liars struck the hour of five, Fritz the Fool ran through the open door, from which an array of bottles and glasses could be seen, and cried:

"They are comingthey are comingthe great Advocate and his ladyand will arrive before the cook can toss me up an omelette!"

And having thus delivered himself, Fritz ran out of the inn to the House of White Shadows, and swinging open the gates, cried still more loudly:

"Mother Denise! Dionetta, my pearl of pearls! Hastehaste! They are on the road, and will be here a lifetime before old Martin can straighten his crooked back!"

Within five minutes of this summons, there stood at the door of the inn of The Seven Liars, the customers who had been tippling therein, the host and hostess and their three children; and ten yards off, at the gates of the villa. Mother Denise, her pretty granddaughter, Dionetta, and old Martin, whose breathing came short and quick at the haste he had made to be in time to welcome the Advocate and his lady. The refrain of the breakingup song sung in the little village school was dying away, and the children trooped out, and waited to witness the arrival. The schoolmaster was also there, with a look of relief on his face, and stood with his hand on the head of his favourite pupil. The news had spread quickly, and when the carriage made its appearance at the end of the lane, which shelved downward to the House of White Shadows, a number of villagers had assembled, curious to see the great lord and lady who intended to reside in the haunted house.

As the carriage drove up at the gates, the courier jumped down from his seat next to the driver, and opened the carriage door. The villagers pressed forward, and gazed in admiration at the beautiful lady, and in awe at the sternfaced gentleman who had selected the House of White Shadows for a holiday residence. There were those among them who, poor as they were, would not have undertaken to sleep in any one of the rooms in the villa for the value of all the watches in Geneva. There were, however, three persons in the small concourse of people who had no fears of the house. These were Mother Denise, the old housekeeper, her husband Martin, and Fritz the Fool.

Mother Denise, the oldest servant of the house, had been born there, and was ghost and shadow proof; so was her husband, now in his eightyfifth year, whose body was like a bent bow stretched for the flight of the arrow, his soul. Not for a single night in sixtyeight years had Mother Denise slept outside the walls of the House of White Shadows; nothing did she know of the great world beyond, and nothing did she care; a staunch, faithful servant of the Almer family, conversant with its secret history, her duty

was sufficient for her, and she had no desire to travel beyond the space which encompassed it. For fortythree years her husband had kept her company, and to neither, as they had frequently declared, had a supernatural visitant ever appeared. They had no belief whatever in the ghostly gossip.

Fool Fritz, on the contrary, averred that there was no mistake about the spiritual visitants; they appeared to him frequently, but he had no fear of them; indeed, he appeared to rather enjoy them. "They may come, and welcome," he said. "They don't strike, they don't bite, they don't burn. They reveal secrets which you would like nobody to find out. If it had not been for them, how should I have known about Karl and Mina kissing and courting at the back of the schoolhouse when everybody was asleep, or about Dame Walther and her sly bottle, or about Wolf Constans coming home at three in the morning with a dead lamb on his backah, and about many things you try and keep to yourselves? I don't mind the shadows, not I." There was little in the village that Fritz did not know; all the scandal, all the lovemaking, all the family quarrels, all the secret doingsit was hard to keep anything from him; and the mystery was how he came to the knowledge of these matters. "He is in affinity with the spirits," said the village schoolmaster; "he is himself a ghost, with a fleshly embodiment. That is why the fool is not afraid." Truly Fritz the Fool was ghostlike in appearance, for his skin was singularly white, and his head was covered with shaggy white hair which hung low down upon his shoulders. From a distance he looked like an old man, but he had not reached his thirtieth year, and so clear were his eyes and complexion that, on a closer observance, he might have passed for a lad of half the years he bore. A shrewd knave, despite his title of fool.

Pretty Dionetta did not share his defiance of ghostly visitors. The House of White Shadows was her home, and many a night had she awoke in terror and listened with a beating heart to soft footsteps in the passage outside her room, and buried her head in the sheets to shut out the light of the moon which shone in at her window. Fritz alone sympathised with her. "Two hours before midnight," he would say to her; "then it was you heard them creeping past your door. You were afraid, of coursewhen one is all alone; I can prescribe a remedy for thatnot yet, Dionetta, byandby. Till then, keep all men at a distance; avoid them; there is danger in them. If they look at you, frown, and lower your eyes. And tonight, when you go to bed, lock your door tight, and listen. If the spirits come again, I will charm them away; shortly after you hear their footsteps, I will sing a stave outside to trick them from your door. Then sleep in peace, and rely on Fritz the Fool."

Very timid and fearful of the supernatural was this country beauty, whom all the louts in the neighbourhood wanted to marry, and she alone, of those who lived in the House of White Shadows, welcomed the Advocate and his wife with genuine delight. Fool Fritz

thought of secretly enjoyed pleasures which might now be disturbed, Martin was too old not to dislike change, and Mother Denise was by no means prepared to rejoice at the arrival of strangers; she would have been better pleased had they never shown their faces at the gates.

The Advocate and his wife stood looking around them, he with observant eyes and in silence, she with undisguised pleasure and admiration. She began to speak the moment she alighted.

"Charming! beautiful! I am positively in love with it. This morning it was but a fancy picture, now it is real. Could anything be more perfect? So peaceful, and quaint, and sweet! Look at those children peeping from behind their mother's gowns she can be no other than their mother dirty, but how picturesque! and the woman herself, how original! It is worth while being a woman like that, to stand as she does, with her children clinging to her. Why does Mr. Almer not like to live here? It is inexplicable, quite inexplicable. I could be happy here for ever, for ever! Do you catch the perfume of the limes? It is delicious delicious! It comes from the grounds; there must be a lime tree walk there. And you," she said to the pretty girl at the gates, "you are Dionetta."

"Yes, my lady," said Dionetta, and marvelled how her name could have become known to the beautiful woman, whose face was more lovely than the face of the Madonna over the altar of the tiny chapel in which she daily prayed. It was not difficult to divine her thought, for Dionetta was Nature's child.

"You wonder who told me your name," said the Advocate's wife, smiling, and patting the girl's cheek with her gloved hand.

"Yes, my lady."

"It was a little bird, Dionetta."

"A little bird, my lady!" exclaimed Dionetta, her wonderment and admiration growing fast into worship. The lady's graceful figure, her pink and white face, her pearly teeth, her lovely laughing mouth, her eyes, blue as the most beautiful summer's cloud Dionetta had never seen the like before.

"You," said the Advocate's wife, turning to the grandmother, "are Mother Denise."

"Yes, my lady," said the old woman; "this is my husband, Martin. Come forward, Martin, come forward. He is not as young as he was, my lady."

"I know, I know; my little bird was very communicative. You are Fritz."

"The Fool," said the whitehaired young man, approaching closer to the lady, and consequently closer to Dionetta, "Fritz the Fool. But that needn't tell against me, unless you please. I can be useful, if I care to be, and faithful, too, if I care to be."

"It depends upon yourself, then," said the lady, accepting the independent speech in good part, "not upon others."

"Mainly upon myself; but I have springs that can be set in motion, if one can only find out how to play upon them. I was told you were coming."

"Indeed!" with an air of pleasant surprise. "By whom, and when?"

"By whom? The white shadows. When? In my dreams."

"The white shadows! They exist then! Edward, do you hear?"

"It is not so, my lady," interposed Mother Denise, in illhumour at the turn the conversation was taking; "the shadows do not exist, despite what people say. Fritz is overfond of fooling."

"It is my trade," retorted Fritz. "I know what I know, grandmother."

"Is Fritz your grandson, then?" asked the Advocate's wife, of Mother Denise.

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Mother Denise.

"What is not," remarked Fritz sententiously, "may be. Bear that in mind, grandmother; I may remind you of it one day."

The Advocate, upon whom not a word that had passed had been lost, fixed his eyes upon Fritz, and said:

"A delusion can be turned to profit. You make use of these shadows."

"The saints forbid! They would burn me in brimstone. Yet," with a look both sly and vacant, "it would be a pity to waste them."

"You like to be called a fool. It pleases you."

"Why not?"

"Why, rather?"

"I might answer in your own words, that it can be turned to profit. But I am too great a fool to see in what way."

"You answer wisely. Why do you close your eyes?"

"I can see in the dark what I choose to see. When my eyes are open, I am their slave. When they are closed, they are mine unless I dream."

The Advocate gazed for a moment or two in silence upon the white face with its closed eyes raised to his, and then said to his wife:

"Come, Adelaide, we will look at the house."

They passed into the grounds, accompanied by Mother Denise, Martin, and Dionetta. Fritz remained outside the gate, with his eyes still closed, and a smile upon his lips.

"Fritz," said the host of the inn of The Seven Liars, "do you know anything of the great man?"

Fritz rubbed his brows softly and opened his eyes.

"Take the advice of a fool, Peter Schelt. Speak low when you speak of him."

"You think he can hear us. Why, he is a hundred yards off by this time!"

Fritz pointed with a waving finger to the air above him.

"There are magnetic lines, neighbours, connecting him with everything he once sets eyes on. He can see without seeing, and hear without hearing."

"You speak in riddles, Fritz."

"Put it down to your own dulness, Peter Schelt, that you cannot understand me. Master Lamont, now what would you say about him? That he lacks brains?"

"A long way from it. Master Lamont is the cleverest man in the valley."

"Not now," said Fritz, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder in the direction taken by the Advocate; "his master has come. Master Lamont is a great lawyer, but we have now a greater, one who is a more skilful cobbler with his tongue than Hans here is with his awl; he can so patch an old boot as to make it better than a new one, and look as close as you may, you will not see the seams. Listen, Master Schelt. When I stood there with my eyes shut I had a dream of a stranger who was found murdered in your house. An awful dream, Peter. Gather round, neighbours, gather round. There lay the stranger dead on his bed, and over him stood you, Peter Schelt, with a bloody knife in your hand. People say you murdered him for his money, and it really seemed so, for a purse stuffed with gold and notes was found in your possession; you had the stranger's silver watch, too. Suspicious, was it not? It was looking so black against you that you begged the great man who has come among us to plead for you at your trial. You were safe enough, then. He told a rare tale. Forty years ago the stranger robbed your father; suddenly he was struck with remorse, and seeking you out, gave you back the money, and his silver watch in the bargain. He proved to everybody's satisfaction that, though you committed the murder, it was impossible you could be guilty. Don't be alarmed, Madame Schelt, it was only a dream."

"But are you sure I did it?" asked Peter Schelt, in no way disturbed by the bad light in which he was placed by Fritz's fancies.

"What matters? The great man got you off, and that is all you cared for. Look here, neighbours; if any of you have black goats that you wish changed into white, go to him; he can do it for you. Or an old hen that cackles and won't lay, go to him; she will cackle less, and lay you six eggs a day. He is, of all, the greatest."

"Ah," said a neighbour, "and what do you know of his lady wife?"

"What all of you should know, but cannot see, though it stares you in the face."

"Let us have it, Fritz."

"She is too fair. Christine," to a stout young woman close to him, "give thanks to the Virgin tonight that you were sent into the world with a cast in your eye, and that your legs grow thicker and crooked every day. You will never drive a man out of his senses with your beauty."

Fritz was compelled to beat a swift retreat, for Christine's arms were as thick as her legs, and they were raised to smite. Up the lane flew the fool, and Christine after him, amid the laughter of the villagers.

CHAPTER VI

MISTRESS AND MAID

In the meantime the Advocate and his wife strolled through the grounds. Although it was evident that much labour had been bestowed upon them, there were signs of decay

here and there which showed the need of a master mind; but as these traces were only to be met with at some distance from the villa itself, it was clear that they would not interfere with the comfort of the new arrivals. The house lay low, and the immediate grounds surrounding it were in good condition. There were orchards stocked with fruit-trees, and gardens bright with flowers. At a short distance from the house was an old *châlet* which had been built with great taste; it was newly painted, and much care had been bestowed upon a covered pathway which led to it from a side entrance to the House of White Shadows. The principal room in this *châlet* was a large studio, the walls of which were black. On the left wall letters which once were white, but which had grown yellow with age, were inscribed the legend, "The Grave of Honour."

"How singular!" exclaimed the Advocate's wife. "'The Grave of Honour!' What can be the meaning of it?"

But Mother Denise did not volunteer an explanation.

Near the end of the studio was an alcove, the space beyond being screened by a dead crimson curtain. Holding back the curtain, a large number of pictures were seen piled against the walls.

"Family pictures?" asked the Advocate's wife, of Mother Denise.

"No, my lady," was the reply; "they were painted by an artist, who resided and worked here for a year or so in the lifetime of the old master."

By the desire of the lady the housekeeper brought a few of the pictures into the light. One represented a pleasure party of ladies and gentlemen dallying in summer woods; another, a lady lying in a hammock and reaching out her arm to pluck some roses; two were companion pictures, the first subject being two persons who might have been lovers, standing among strewn flowers in the sunshine, the second subject showing the same figures in a different aspect; a cold grey sea divided them, on the near shore of which the man stood in an attitude of despair gazing across the waters to the opposite shore, on which stood the woman with a pale, grief-stricken face.

"The sentiment is strained," observed the Advocate, "but the artist had talent."

"A story could be woven out of them," said his wife; "I feel as if they were connected with the house."

Upon leaving the *châlet* they continued their tour through the grounds. Already the Advocate felt the beneficial effects of a healthy change. His eyes were clearer, his back

straighter, he moved with a brisker step. Mother Denise walked in front, pointing out this and that, Martin hobbled behind, and Dionetta, encouraged thereto, walked by her new mistress's side.

"Dionetta," said the Advocate's wife, "do you know that you have the prettiest name in the world?"

"Have I, my lady? I have never thought of it, but it is, if you say so."

"But perhaps," said the Advocate's wife, with a glance at the girl's bright face, "a man would not think of your name when he looked at you."

"I am sure I cannot say, my lady; he would not think of me at all."

"You little simpleton! I wish I had such a name; they ought to wait till we grow up, so that we might choose our own names. I should not have chosen Adelaide for myself."

"Is that your name, my lady?"

"Yesthey could not have given me an uglier."

"Nay," said Dionetta, raising her eyes in mute appeal for forgiveness for the contradiction, "it is very sweet."

"Repeat it, then. Adelaide."

"May I, my lady?"

"Of course you may, if I wish you to. Let me hear you speak it."

"Adelaide! Adelaide!" murmured Dionetta softly. The permission was as precious as the gift of a silver chain would have been. "My lady, it is pretty."

"Shall we change?" asked the Advocate's wife gaily.

"Can we?" inquired Dionetta in a solemn tone. "I would not mind if you wish it, and if it is right. I will ask the priest."

"No, do not trouble. Would you really like to change?"

"It would be so strangeand it might be a sin! If we cannot, it is of no use thinking of it."

"There is no sin in thinking of things; if there were, the world would be full of sin, and I fear me, how much I should have to answer for! I should not like everyone to know my thoughts. What a quiet life you must live here, Dionetta!"

"Yes, my lady, it is quiet."

"Would you not prefer to live in a city?"

"I should be frightened, my lady. I have been only twice to Geneva, and there was no room in the streets to move about. I was glad to get back."

"No room to move about, simplicity! That is the delight of it. There are theatres, and music, and light, and life. You would not be frightened if you were with me?"

"Oh, no, my lady; that would be happiness."

"Are you not happy here?"

"Oh, yes, very happy."

"But you wish for something?"

"No, my lady; I have everything I want."

"Everything positively everything?"

"Yes, my lady."

"There is one thing you must want, Dionetta, if you have it not already."

"May I know what it is?"

"Yes, child. Love."

Dionetta blushed crimson from forehead to throat, and the Advocate's wife laughed, and tapped her cheek.

"You are very pretty, Dionetta; it is right you should have a pretty name. Do you mean to tell me you have not a lover?"

"I have been asked, my lady," said the girl, in a tone so low that it could only just be heard.

"And you said 'yes'? Little one, I have caught you."

"My lady, I did not say 'yes.'"

"And the men were contented? They must be dolts. Really and truly, you have not a lover?"

"What can I say, my lady?" murmured Dionetta, her head bent down. "There are some who say they love me."

"But you do not love them?"

"No, my lady."

"You would like to have one you could love?"

"One day, my lady, if I am so fortunate."

"I promise you," said the Advocate's wife with a blithe laugh, "that one day you will be so fortunate. Women were made for love and men, too, or where would be the use? It is the only thing in life worth living for. Blushing again! I would give my jewelcase to be able to blush like you."

"I cannot help it, my lady. My face often grows red when I am quite alone."

"And thinking of love," added the Advocate's wife; "for what else should make it red? So you do think of things! I can see, Dionetta, that you and I are going to be great friends."

"You are very good, my lady, but I am only a poor peasant. I will serve you as well as I can."

"You knew, before I came, that you were to be my maid?"

"Yes, my lady. Master Lamont said it was likely. Grandmother did not seem to care that it should be so, but I wished for it, and now that she has seen you she must be glad for me to serve you."

"Why should she be glad, Dionetta?"

"My lady, it could not be otherwise," said Dionetta very earnestly; "you are so good and beautiful."

"Flatterer! Master Lamonthe is an old man?"

"Yes, my lady."

"There are some old men who are very handsome."

"He is not. He is small, and thin, and shrivelled up."

"Those are not the men for us, are they, little one?"

"But he has a voice like honey. I have heard many say so."

"That is something in his favour or would be, if women were blind. So from this day you are my maid. You will be faithful, I am sure, and will keep my secrets. Mind that, Dionetta. You must keep my secrets."

"Have you any?" said Dionetta, "and shall you tell them to me?"

"Every woman in the world has secrets, and every woman in the world must have someone to whom she can whisper them. You will find that out for yourself in time. Yes, child, I have secrets one, a very precious one. If ever you guess it without my telling you, keep it buried in your heart, and do not speak of it to a living soul."

"I would not dare, my lady."

They walked a little apart from the others during this dialogue. The concluding words brought them to the steps of the House of White Shadows.

"Edward," said the Advocate's wife to him, as they entered the house, "I have found a treasure. My new maid is charming."

"I am pleased to hear it. She has an ingenuous face, but you will be able to judge better when you know more of her."

"You do not trust many persons, Edward."

"Not many, Adelaide."

"Me?" she asked archly.

"Implicitly."

"And another, I think."

"Certainly, one other."

"I should not be far out if I were to name Christian Almer."

"It is to him I refer."

"I have sometimes wondered," she said, with an artless look, "why you should be so partial to him. He is so unlike you."

"We are frequently drawn to our unlikes; but Almer and I have one quality in common with each other."

"What quality, Edward?"

"The quality of the dogfaithfulness. Almer's friendship is precious to me, and mine to him, because we are each to the other faithful."

"The quality of the dog! How odd that sounds! Though when one thinks of it there is really something noble in it. And friendship it is almost as if you placed it higher than love."

"It is far higher. Love too frequently changes, as the seasons change. Friendship is, of the two, the more likely to endure, being less liable to storms. But even a faithful friendship is rare."

"And faithful love much rarer, according to your ideas. Yet, Mr. Almer, having this quality of the dog, would be certain, you believe, to be faithful both in love and friendship."

"To the death."

"You are thorough in your opinions, Edward."

"I do not believe in halfheartedness, Adelaide."

The arrangements within the house were complete and admirable. For the Advocate's wife, a boudoir and receptionrooms into which new fashions had been introduced with judgment so good as not to jar with the old furnishings which had adorned them for many generations. For the Advocate a study, with a library which won from him cordial approval; a spacious and commodious apartment, neither overloaded with furniture nor oppressive with bare spaces; with an outlook from one window to the snow regions of Mont Blanc, from another to the city of Geneva, which was now bathed in a soft, mellow light. This tender evidence of departing day was creeping slowly downwards into the valleys from mount and city, a moving picture of infinite beauty.

They visited the study last; Adelaide had been loud in her praises of the house and its arrangement, commending this and that, and declaring that everything was perfect. While she was examining the furniture in the study the Advocate turned to the principal writingtable, upon which lay a pile of newspapers. He took up the first of these, and instinctively searched for the subject which had not left his mind since his visit to the banker, Jacob Hartrichthe murder of Madeline the flowergirl. He was deep in the perusal of fresh details, confirmatory of Gautran's guilt, when he was aroused by a stifled cry of alarm from Adelaide. With the newspaper still in his hand, he looked up and asked what had alarmed her. She laughed nervously, and pointed to an old sideboard upon which a number of hideous faces were carved. To some of the faces bodies were attached, and the whole of this ancient work of art was extravagant enough to have had for its inspiration the imaginings of a madman's brain.

"I thought I saw them moving," said Adelaide. The Advocate smiled, and said:

"It is the play of light over the figures that created the delusion; they are harmless, Adelaide."

The glow of sunset shone through a painted window upon the faces, which to a nervous mind might have seemed to be animated with living colour.

"Look at that frightful head," said Adelaide; "it is really stained with blood."

"And now," observed the Advocate, "the bloodstain fades away, and in the darker light the expression grows sad and solemn."

"I should be frightened of this room at night," said Adelaide, with a slight shiver; "I should fancy those hideous beings were only waiting an opportunity to steal out upon me for an evil purpose."

A noise in the passage outside diverted their attention.

"Gently, Fritz, gently," cried a voice, "unless you wish to make holes in the sound part of me."

The Advocate moved to the door, and opened it. A strange sight came into view.

CHAPTER VII

A VISIT FROM PIERRE LAMONTDREAMS OF LOVE

At the door stood Fritz the Fool, carrying in his arms what in the gathering dusk looked like a bundle. This bundle was humana man who was but half a man. Embracing Fritz, with one arm tightly clutching the Fool's neck, the figure commenced to speak the moment the door was opened.

"I only am to blame; learning that you were in the study, I insisted upon being brought here immediately; carry me in gently, Fool, and set me in that chair."

The chair indicated was close to the writingtable, by which the Advocate was standing.

"Fritz made me acquainted with your arrival," continued the intruder, "and I hastened here without delay. When I tell you that I live two miles off, eight hundred feet above the level of this valley, you will realise the jolting I have had in my wheeled chair. Fritz, you can leave us; but be within call, as you must help to get me home again. Is there any need for me to introduce myself?" he asked.

"Master Lamont," said the Advocate.

"As much as is left of me; but I manage to exist. I have proved that a man can live without legs. You received my letter?"

"Yes; and I thank you for your attention. My wife," said the Advocate, introducing Adelaide. Attracted by the dulcet voice of Pierre Lamont, she had come out of the deeper shadows of the room. Dionetta had spoken truly; this thin, shrivelled wreck of mortality had a voice as sweet as honey.

"I cannot rise to pay my respects to you," said Pierre Lamont, his lynx eyes resting with profound admiration upon the beautiful woman, "but I beg you to believe that I am your devoted slave." Adelaide bent her head gracefully, and smiled upon the old lawyer. "One of my great anxieties is to know whether I have arranged the villa to your satisfaction. Christian Almer was most desirous that the place should be made pleasant and attractive, and I have endeavoured to carry out his instructions."

"We owe you a debt of gratitude," said Adelaide; "everything has been charmingly done."

"I am repaid for my labour," said Pierre Lamont gallantly. "You must be fatigued after your journey. Do not let me detain you. I shall remain with the Advocate but a very few minutes, and I trust you will allow me to make another and a longer visit."

"We shall always be happy to see you," said Adelaide, as she bowed and left the room.

"You are fortunate, comrade," said Pierre Lamont, "both in love and war. Your lady is the most beautiful I have ever beheld. I am selfishly in hopes that you will make a long stay with us; it will put some life into this sleepy valley. Is Christian Almer with you?"

"No; but I may induce him to come. It is to you," said the Advocate, pointing to the pile of newspapers, "that I am indebted for these."

"I thought you would find something in them to interest you. I see you have one of the papers in your hand, and that you were reading it before I intruded upon you. May I look at it? Ah! you have caught up the scent. It was the murder of the flowergirl I meant."

"Have you formed an opinion upon the case?"

"Scarcely yet; it is so surrounded with mystery. In my enforced retirement I amuse myself by taking up any important criminal case that occurs; and trying it in my solitude, acting at once the parts of judge and counsel for the prosecution and defence. A poor substitute for the reality; but I make it serve not to my satisfaction, I confess, although I may show ingenuity in some of my conclusions. But I miss the cream, which lies in the personality of the persons concerned. This case of Gautran interests and perplexes me; were I able to take an active part, it is not unlikely I should move in it. I envy you, brother; I should feel proud if I could break a lance with you; but we do not live in an age of miracles, so I must be content, perforce, with my hermit life. What I read does not always please me; points are missed almost wilfully missed, as it seems to me strong links allowed to fall, disused, false inferences drawn, and, in the end, a verdict and sentence which half make me believe that justice limps on crutches. 'Fools, fools, fools!' I cry; 'if I were among you this should not be.' But what can an old cripple do? Grumble? Yes; and extract a morsel of satisfaction from his discontent which tickles his vanity. That men's deserts are not meted out to them troubles me more now than it used to do. The times are too lenient of folly and crime. I would have the old law revived. 'To the doer as he hath done' thus saith the thrice ancient word so runs the 'Agamemnon.' If my neighbour kill my ass, I would knock his on the head. And this Gautran, if he be guilty, deserves the death; if he be innocent, deserves to live and be set free. But to allow a poor wretch to be judged by public passions Heaven send us a beneficent change!"

The voice of the speaker was so sweet, and the arguments so palatable to the Advocate, and so much in accordance with his own views, that he listened with pleasure to this outburst. He recognised in the cripple huddled up in the chair one whose preeminence in his craft had been worthily attained.

"I am pleased we have met," he said, and the eyes of Pierre Lamont glistened.

He soon brought his visit to a close, and while Fritz the Fool was being summoned, he said that in the morning he would send the Advocate all the papers he could gather which might help to throw a light on the case of Gautran.

"You have spoken with Fritz, he tells me."

"I have; he appears to me worth studying."

"There is salt in the knave; he has occasionally managed to overreach me. Fool as he is, he has a head with brains in it. Farewell."

Now, although the old lawyer, while he was with the Advocate, seemed to think of nothing but his more celebrated legal brother, it was far different as he was carried in his wheeled chair to his home on the heights. He had his own servant to propel him; Fritz walked by his side.

"You were right, Fritz, you were right," said Pierre Lamont, and he smacked his lips, and his eyes kindled with the fire of youth, "she is a rare piece of flesh and blood as fair as a lily, as ripe as a peach ready to drop from the wall. With passions of her own, Fritz; her veins are warm. To live in the heart of such a woman would be to live a perpetual summer. What say you, Fritz?"

"Nothing."

"That is a fool's answer."

"Then the fools are the real wise men, for there is wisdom in silence. But I say nothing because I am thinking."

"A mouse in labour. Beware of bringing forth a mountain; it will rend you to pieces."

Fritz softly hummed a tune as they climbed the hills. Only once did he speak till they arrived at Pierre Lamont's house; it was in reply to the old lawyer, who said:

"It is easier going up the hills than coming down."

"That depends," said Fritz, "upon whether it is the mule or the man on his back."

Pierre Lamont laughed quietly; he had a full enjoyment of Fritz's humour.

"I have been thinking," said Fritz when the journey was completed

"Ah, ah!" interrupted Pierre Lamont; "now for the mountain."

"Upon the reason that made so fair a lady young, and warm, and ripe marry an icicle."

"There is hidden fire, Fritz; you may get it from a stone."

"I forgot," said Fritz, with a sly chuckle, "that I was speaking to an old man."

"Rogue!" cried Pierre Lamont, raising his stick.

"Never stretch out your hand," said Fritz, darting away, "for what you cannot reach."

"Fritz, Fritz, come here!"

"You will not strike?"

"No."

"I will trust you. There are lawyers I would not, though every word they uttered was framed in gold."

"So, you have been thinking of the reason that made so fair a lady marry an icicle?"

"Yes."

"The icicle is celebrated."

"That is of no account."

"He is rich."

"That is good."

"He is much older than she. He may die, and leave her a young widow."

"That is better."

"Then she may marry again a younger man."

"That is best Master Lamont, you have a head."

"And your own loveaffair, Fritz, is that flourishing, eh? Have the pretty red lips kissed a 'Yes' yet?"

"The pretty red lips have not been asked. I bide my time. My peach is not as ripe as the icicle's. I'll go and look after it, Master Lamont. It needs careful watching; there are poachers about."

Fritz departed to look after his peach, and Pierre Lamont was carried into his study, where he sat until late in the night, surrounded by books and papers.

The Advocate was also in his study until two hours past midnight, searching newspaper after newspaper for particulars and details of the murder of the unfortunate girl whose body had been found in the wildly rushing Rhone. And while he pondered and mused, and oftentimes paced the room with thoughtful face, his wife lay sleeping in her holiday home, with smiles on her lips, and joy in her heart, for she was dreaming of one far away. And her dream was of love.

And Dionetta, the pretty maid, also slept, with her hands clasped at the back of her head; and her lady was saying to her: "Really and truly, Dionetta, you have not a lover? Women are made for love. It is the only thing in life worth living for." And a blush, even in her sleep, stole over her fair face and bosom. For her dream was of love.

And Pierre Lamont lived over again the days of his youth, and smirked and languished, and made fine speeches, and moved amidst a paradise of fair faces, all of which bore the likeness of one whom he had but just seen for the first time. And, old as he was, his dream was of love.

And Fritz the Fool tossed in his bed, and muttered:

"Too fair! too fair! If I were rich she might tempt me to be false to one, and make me vow I would lay down my life for her. It is a good thing for me that I am a fool."

And Gautran in his prison cell writhed upon his hard bed in the midst of the darkness; for by his side lay the phantom of the murdered girl, and his despair was deep and awful.

And in the mountains, two hundred miles distant from the House of White Shadows, roamed Christian Almer in the moonlight, struggling with all his mental might with a terror which possessed him. The spot he had flown to was ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, and his sleepingroom was in the hut of a peasant, mountainborn and

mountainreared, who lived a life of dull contentment with his goats, and wife, and children. Far away in the heights immense forests of firtrees were grouped in dark, solemn masses. Not a branch stirred; a profound repose reigned within their depths, while the sleepless waterfalls in the lower heights, leaping, and creeping, and dashing over chasm and precipice, proclaimed the eternal wakefulness of Nature. The solitary man gazed upon these majestic signs in awe and despair.

"There is no such thing as oblivion," he muttered; "there is no such thing as forgetfulness. These solitudes, upon which no living creature but myself is to be seen, are full of accusing voices. My God! to die and be blotted out for ever and ever were better than this agony! I strive and strive, and cannot rid myself of the sin. I will conquer itI willI willI will!"

But even as he spoke there gleamed upon him from a laughing cascade the vision of a face so beautiful as to force a groan from his lips. He turned from the vision, and it shone upon him with a tender wooing in every waterfall that met his sight. Trembling with the force of a passion he found it impossible to resist, he walked to his mountain home, and threw himself upon his couch. He was exhausted with sleepless nights, and in a short time he fell into a deep slumber. And a calm stole over his troubled soul, for his dreams were of love!

CHAPTER VIII

THE INTERVIEW IN THE PRISON

"Arise, Gautran."

At this command Gautran rose slowly from the floor of his prisoncell, upon which he had been lying at full length, and shaking himself like a dog, stood before the gaoler.

"Can't you let me alone?" he asked, in a coarse, savage voice.

"Scum of the gutter!" replied the gaoler. "Speak civilly while you have the power, and be thankful your tongue is not dragged out by the roots."

"You would do it if you dared."

"Ayand a thousand honest men would rejoice to help me."

"Is it to tell me this you disturbed me?"

"No, murderer!"

"What do you want of me?"

The gaoler laughed at him in mockery. "You look more like beast than man."

"That's how I've been treated," growled Gautran.

"Better than you deserve. So, you have influential friends, it seems."

"Have I?" with a venomous flash at the taunt.

"One will be here to see you directly."

"Let him keep from me. I care to see no one."

"That may be, but the choice is not yours. This gentleman is not to be denied."

"A gentleman, eh?" exclaimed Gautran, with some slight show of interest.

"Yes, a gentleman."

"Who is he, and what is his business with me?"

"He is a great lawyer, who has sent murderers to their doom"

"Ah!" and Gautran drew a long vindictive breath through closed teeth.

"And has set some free, I've heard."

"Is he going to do that for me?" asked Gautran, and a light of fierce hope shone in his eyes.

"He will earn Heaven's curse if he does, and man's as well. Here he is. Silence."

The door was opened, and the Advocate entered the cell.

"This is Gautran?" he asked of the gaoler.

"This is he," replied the gaoler.

"Leave me alone with him."

"It is against my orders, sir."

"Here is your authority."

He handed to the gaoler a paper, which gave him permission to hold free and uninterrupted converse with Gautran, accused of the murder of Madeline the flowergirl. The interview not to last longer than an hour.

The gaoler prepared to depart, but before he left the cell he said in an undertone:

"Be careful of the man; he is a savage, and not to be trusted."

"There is nothing to fear," said the Advocate.

The gaoler lingered a moment, and then retired.

The cell was but dimly lighted, and the Advocate, coming into it from the full sunlight of a bright day, could not see clearly for a little while. On the other hand. Gautran, whose eyes were accustomed to the gloom, had a distinct view of the Advocate, and in a furtive, hangdog fashion he closely inspected the features of his visitor. The man who stood before him could obtain his condemnation or his acquittal. Dullwitted as he was, this conviction was as much an intuition as an impression gained from the gaoler's remarks.

"You are a woodman?" said the Advocate.

"Aye, a woodman. It is well known."

"Have you parents?"

"They are dead."

"Any brothers or sisters?"

"None. I was the only one."

"Friends?"

"No."

"Have you wife or children?"

"Neither."

"How much money have you?"

"Not a sou."

"What about this murder?" asked the Advocate abruptly.

"What about it, then?" demanded Gautran. The questions asked by the Advocate were more judicial than friendly, and he assumed an air of defiance.

"Speak in a different tone. I am here to assist you, if I see my way. You have no lawyer to defend you?"

"How should I get one? What lawyer works without pay, and where should I find the money to pay him?"

"Heed what I say. I do not ask you if you are innocent or guilty of the crime of which you stand charged, for that is a formula and, guilty or not guilty, you would return but one answer. Have you anything to tell me?"

"I can't think of anything."

"You have led an evil life."

"Not my fault. Can a man choose his own parents and his country? The life I have led I was born into; and that is to stand against me."

"Are there any witnesses who would come forward and speak in your favour?"

"None that I know of."

"Is it true that you were walking with the girl on the night she was murdered?"

"No man has heard me deny it," said Gautran, shuddering.

"Why do you shudder?"

"Master, you asked me just now whether I had a wife, and I told you I had none. This girl was to have been my wife. I loved her, and we were to have been married."

"That is disputed."

"Everything is disputed that would tell in my favour. The truth is of no use to a poor devil caught in a trap as I am. Have you heard any good of me, master?"

"Not any; all that I have heard is against you."

"That is the way of it. Well, then, judge for yourself."

"Can you indicate anyone who would be likely to murder the girl? You shudder again."

"I cannot help it. Master, put yourself in this cell, as I am put, without light, without hope, without money, without a friend. You would need a strong nerve to stand it. You want to know if I can point out anyone who could have done the deed but me? Well, if I were free, and came face to face with him, I might. Not that I could say anything, or swear to anything for certain, for I did not see it done. No, master, I will not lie to you. Where would be the use? You are clever enough to find me out. But I had good reason to suspect, aye, to know, that the girl had other lovers, who pressed her hard, I dare say; some who were rich, while I was poor; some who were almost mad for her. She was followed by a dozen and more. She told me so herself, and used to laugh about it; but she never mentioned a name to me. You know something of women, master; they like the men to follow them the best of them do ladies as well as peasants. They were sent into the world to drive us to perdition. I was jealous of her, yes, I was jealous. Am I guilty because of that? How could I help being jealous when I loved her? It is in a man's blood. Well, then, what more can I say?"

In his intent observance of Gautran's manner the Advocate seemed to weigh every word that fell from the man's lips.

"At what time did you leave the girl on the last night you saw her alive?"

"At ten o'clock."

"She was alone at that hour?"

"Yes."

"Did you see her again after that?"

"No."

"Did you have reason to suspect that she was to meet any other man on that night?"

"If I had thought it, I should have stopped with her."

"For what purpose?"

"To see the man she had appointed to meet."

"And having seen him?"

"He would have had to answer to me. I am hotblooded, master, and can stand up for my rights."

"Would you have harmed the girl?"

"No, unless she had driven me out of my senses."

"Were you in that state on the night of her death?"

"No I knew what I was about."

"You were heard to quarrel with her."

"I don't deny it."

"You were heard to say you would kill her."

"True enough. I told her if ever I found out that she was false to me, I would kill her."

"Had she bound herself to marry you?"

"She had sworn to marry me."

"The handkerchief round her neck, when her body was discovered in the river, is proved to have been yours."

"It was mine; I gave it to her. I had not much to give."

"When you were arrested you were searched?"

"Yes."

"Was anything taken from you?"

"My knife."

"Had you and the girl's secret loversupposing she had onemet on that night, you might have used your knife."

"That is speaking beforehand. I can't say what might have happened."

"Come here into the light. Let me look at your hands."

"What trick are you going to play me, master?" asked Gautran, in a suspicious tone.

"No trick," replied the Advocate sternly. "Obey me, or I leave you."

Gautran debated with himself in silence for a full minute; then, with an impatient movement, as though it could not matter one way or another, he moved into the light, and held out his hands.

The Advocate, taking a powerful glass from his pocket, examined the prisoner's fingers and nails and wrists with the utmost minuteness, Gautran, the while, wrapped in wonder at the strange proceeding.

"Now," said the Advocate, "hold your head back, so that the light may shine on your face."

Gautran obeyed, warily holding himself in readiness to spring upon the Advocate in case of an attack. By the aid of his glass the Advocate examined Gautran's face and neck with as much care as he had bestowed upon the hands, and then said:

"That will do."

"What is it all for, master?" asked Gautran.

"I am here to ask questions, not to answer them. Since your arrest, have you been examined as I have examined you?"

"No, master."

"Has any examination whatever been made of you by doctors or gaolers or lawyers?"

"None at all."

"How long had you known the girl?"

"Ever since she came into the neighbourhood."

"Were you not acquainted with her before?"

"No."

"From what part of the country did she come?"

"I can't say."

"Not knowing?"

"Not knowing."

"But being intimate with her, you could scarcely avoid asking her the question."

"I did ask her, and I was curious to find out. She would not satisfy me; and when I pressed her, she said the other one Pauline had made her promise not to tell."

"You don't know, then, where she was born?"

"No."

"Her refusal to tell you was it lightly or seriously uttered?"

"Seriously."

"As though there was a secret in her life she wished to conceal?"

"I never thought of it in that way, but I can see now it must have been so."

"Something discreditable, then?"

"Most likely. Master, you go deeper than I do."

"What relationship existed between Pauline and Madeline?"

"Some said they were sisters, but there was a big difference in their ages. Others said that Pauline was her mother, but I don't believe it, for they never spoke together in that way. Master, I don't know what to say about it; it used to puzzle me; but it was no business of mine."

"Did you never hear Pauline address Madeline as her child?"

"Never."

"They addressed each other by their Christian names?"

"Yes."

"Did they resemble each other in feature?"

"There was something of a likeness between them."

"Why did Pauline leave the girl?"

"No one knew."

"That is all you can tell me?"

"That is all."

Then after a slight pause, the Advocate asked:

"Do you value your liberty?"

"Yes, master," replied Gautran excitedly.

"Let no person know what has passed between us, and do not repeat one word I have said to you."

"I understand; you may depend upon me. But master, will you not tell me something more? Am I to be set free or not?"

"You are to be tried; what is brought against you at your trial will establish either your innocence or your guilt."

He knocked at the door of the prison cell, and the gaoler opened it for him and let him out.

"Well, Gautran?" said the gaoler, but Gautran, wrapped in contemplation of the door through which the Advocate had taken his departure, paid no attention to him. "Do you hear me?" cried the gaoler, shaking his prisoner with no gentle hand.

"What now?"

"Is the great lawyer going to defend you?"

"You want to know too much," said Gautran, and refused to speak another word on the subject.

During the whole of the day there were but two figures in his mind those of the Advocate and the murdered girl. The latter presented itself in various accusing aspects, and he vainly strove to rid himself of the spectre. Its hair hung in wild disorder over neck and bosom, its white lips moved, its mournful eyes struck terror to his soul. The figure of the Advocate presented itself in far different aspects; it was always terrible, Satanic, and damning in its suggestions.

"What matter," muttered Gautran, "if he gets me off? I can do as I please then."

In the evening, when the small window in his cell was dark, the gaoler heard him crying out loudly. He entered, and demanded what ailed the wretch.

"Lightlight!" implored Gautran; "give me light!"

"Beast in human shape," said the gaoler; "you have light enough. You'll get no more. Stop your howling, or I'll stop it for you!"

"Light! light! light!" moaned Gautran, clasping his hands over his eyes. But he could not shut out the phantom of the murdered girl, which from that moment never left him. So he lay and writhed during the night, and would have dashed his head against the wall to put an end to his misery had he not been afraid of death.

CHAPTER IX

THE ADVOCATE UNDERTAKES A STRANGE TASK.

It was on the evening of this day, the third since the arrival of the Advocate in Geneva, that he said to his wife over the dinnertable:

"I shall in all likelihood be up the whole of tonight in my study. Do not let me be disturbed."

"Who should disturb you?" asked Adelaide languidly. "There are only you and I in the villa; of course I would not venture to intrude upon you without permission."

"You misunderstand me, Adelaide; it is because we are in a strange house that I thought it best to tell you."

"As if there were anything unusual in your shutting yourself up all night in your study! Our notions of the way to lead an agreeable life are so different! Take your own course, Edward; you are older and wiser than I; but you must not wonder that I think it strange. You come to the country for rest, and you are as hard at work as ever."

"I cannot live without work; aimless days would send me to my grave. If you are lonely, Adelaide"

"Oh, no, I am not," she cried vivaciously, "at least, not yet. There is so much in the neighbourhood that is interesting. Dionetta and I have been out all day seeing the sights. On the road to Master Lamont's house there is the loveliest rustic bridge. And the wild flowers are the most beautiful I have ever seen. We met a priest, Father Capel, a gentlelooking man, with the kindest face! He said he intended to call upon you, and hoped to be permitted. I said, of course, you would be charmed. I had a good mind to visit Master Lamont, but his house was too far up the hills. Fool Fritz joined us; he is very amusing, with his efforts to be wise. I was delighted everywhere with the people. I went into some of their cottages, and the women were very respectful; and the children upon my word, Edward, they stare at me as if I were a picture."

The Advocate looked up at this, and regarded his wife with fond admiration. In his private life two influences were dominant love for his wife, and friendship for Christian Almer. He had love for no other woman, and friendship for no other man, and his trust in both was a perfect trust.

"I do not wonder that the children stare at you," he said; "you must be a new and pleasant experience to them."

"I believe they take me for a saint," she said, laughing gaily; "and I need not tell you that I am very far from being one."

"You are, as we all are, human; and very beautiful, Adelaide."

She gazed at him in surprise.

"It is not often you pay me compliments."

"Do you need them from me? To be sure of my affection is not that sufficient?"

"But I am fond of compliments."

"I must commence a new study, then," he said gravely; it was difficult for him to indulge in light themes for many minutes together. "So you are making yourself acquainted with the neighbours. I hope you will not soon tire of them."

"When I do I must seek out some other amusement. You have also discovered something since you came here in which you appear to be wonderfully interested."

"Yes; a criminal case"

"A criminal case!" she echoed pettishly.

"In which there is a great mystery. I do not trouble you with these law matters; long ago you expressed weariness of such themes."

Her humour changed again.

"A mystery!" she exclaimed with childlike vivacity, "in a place where news is so scarce! It must be delightful. What is it about? There is a woman in it, of course. There always is."

"Yes; a young woman, whose body was found in the Rhone."

"Murdered?"

"Murdered, as it at present seems."

"The wretch! Have they caught him? For of course it is a man who committed the dreadful deed."

"One is in prison, charged with the crime. I visited him today."

"Surely you are not going to defend him?"

"It is probable. I shall decide tonight."

"But why, Edward, why? If the man is guilty, should he not be punished?"

"Undoubtedly he should. And if he is innocent, he should not be made to suffer. He is poor and friendless; it will be a relief for me to take up the case, should I believe him to be unjustly accused."

"Is he young and handsome and was it done through jealousy?"

"I have told you the case is shrouded in mystery. As for the man charged with the crime, he is very common and repulsive looking."

"And you intend to defend such a creature?"

"Most likely."

She shrugged her shoulders with a slight gesture of contempt. She had no understanding of his motives, no sympathy in his labours, no pride in his victories.

When he retired to his study he did not immediately proceed to the investigation of the case of Gautran, as it was set forth in the numerous papers which lay on the table. These papers, in accordance with the given promise, had been sent to him by Pierre Lamont, and it was his intention to employ the hours of the night in a careful study of the details of the affair, and of the conjectures and opinions of editors and correspondents.

But he held his purpose back for a while, and for nearly half an hour paced the floor slowly in deep thought. Suddenly he went out, and sought his wife's private room.

"It did not occur to me before," he said, "to tell you that a friend of Christian Almer's, Mr. Hartrich, the banker, in a conversation I had with him, expressed his belief that Almer was suffering."

"Ill!" she cried in an agitated tone.

"In mind, not in body. You have received letters from him lately, I believe?"

"Yes, three or four the last fortnight ago."

"Does he say he is unwell?"

"No; but now I think of it, he does not write in his usual good spirits."

"You have his address?"

"Yes; he is in Switzerland, you know."

"So Mr. Hartrich informed mesomewhere in the mountains, endeavouring to extract peace of mind from silence and solitude. That is well enough for a few days, and intellectual men are always grateful for such a change; but, if it is prolonged, there is danger of its bringing a mental disease of a serious and enduring nature upon a man brooding upon unhealthy fancies. I value Almer too highly to lose sight of him, or to allow him to drift. He has no family ties, and is in a certain sense a lonely man. Why should he not come and remain with us during our stay in the village? I had an idea that he himself would have proposed doing so."

"He might have considered it indelicate," said Adelaide with a bright colour in her face, "the house being his. As if he had a right to be here."

"It is by no means likely," said the Advocate, shaking his head, "that Almer would ever be swayed by other than generous and largeminded considerations. Write to him tonight, and ask him to leave his solitude, and make his home with us. He will be company for you, and your bright and cheerful ways will do him good. The prospect of his visit has already excited you, I see. I am afraid," he said, with a regretful pathos in his voice, "that my society affords you but poor enjoyment; yet I never thought otherwise, when you honoured me by accepting my proposal of marriage, than that you loved me."

"I hope you do not think otherwise now," she said in a low tone.

"Why, no," he said with a sigh of relief; "what reason have I to think otherwise? We had time to study each other's characters, and I did not present myself in a false light. But we are forgetting Almer. Can you divine any cause for unusual melancholy in him?"

She seemed to consider, and answered:

"No, she could not imagine why he should be melancholy."

"Mr. Hartrich," continued the Advocate, "suggested that he might have experienced a disappointment in love, but I could not entertain the suggestion. Almer and I have for

years exchanged confidences in which much of men's inner natures is revealed, and had he met with such a disappointment, he would have confided in me. I may be mistaken, however; your opinion would be valuable here; in these delicate matters, women are keen observers."

"Mr. Hartrich's suggestion is absurd; I am convinced Mr. Almer has not met with a disappointment in love. He is so bright and attractive"

"That any woman," said the Advocate, taking up the thread, for Adelaide seemed somewhat at a loss for words, "might be proud to win him. That is your thought, Adelaide."

"Yes."

"I agree with you. I have never in my life known a man more likely to inspire love in a woman's heart than Christian Almer, and I have sometimes wondered that he had not met with one to whom he was drawn; it would be a powerful influence over him for good. Of an impure passion I believe him incapable. Write to him tonight, and urge him to come to us."

"If you wrote to him, also, it would be as well."

"I will do so; you can enclose my letter in yours. How does your new maid suit you?"

"Admirably. She is perfection."

"Which does not exist."

"If I could induce her grandmother to part with her, I should like to keep her with me always."

"Do not tempt her, Adelaide. For a simple maid a country life is the happiest and bestindeed, for any maid, or any man, young or old."

"How seldom practice and precept agree! Why do you not adopt a country life?"

"Too late. A man must follow his star. I should die of inaction in the country; and youI smile when I think what would become of you were I to condemn you to it."

"You are not always right. I adore the country!"

"For an hour and a day. Adelaide, you could not exist out of society."

Until the Alpine peaks were tipped with the fire of the rising sun, the Advocate remained in his study, investigating and considering the case of Gautran. Only once did he leave it to give his wife the letter he wrote to Christian Almer. Newspaper after newspaper was read and laid aside, until the long labour came to its end. Then the Advocate rose, with no trace of fatigue on his countenance, and according to his wont, walked slowly up and down in deep thought. His eyes rested occasionally upon the grotesque and hideous figures carved on the old sideboard, which, had they been sentient and endowed with the power of speech, might have warned him that he had already, within the past few hours, woven one tragic link in his life, and have held him back from weaving another. But he saw no warning in their fantastic faces, and before he retired to rest he had formed his resolve. On the following day all Geneva was startled by the news that the celebrated Advocate, who had travelled thither for rest from years of arduous toil, had undertaken the defence of a wretch upon whose soul, in the opinion of nearly every thinking man and woman, the guilt of blood lay heavily. The trial of Gautran was instantly invested with an importance which elevated it into an absorbing theme with every class of society.

CHAPTER X

TWO LETTERS FROM FRIEND TO FRIEND, FROM LOVER TO LOVER

"My Dear Almer, We have been here three days, and are comfortably established in your singularly named villa, the House of White Shadows. It is a perfect country residence, and the scenery around it is, I am told, charming. As you are aware, I have no eyes for the beauties of Nature; human nature and human motive alone interest me, and my impressions of the neighbourhood are derived from the descriptions of my wife, who enjoys novelty with the impulsive enjoyment of a child. It appears that she was enchanted when she heard from your lips that your house was supposed to be haunted by shadows, and although you cautioned her immediately afterwards, she was not to be deterred from accepting your invitation. Up to this time, no ghost has appeared to her, nor has my composure been disturbed by supernatural visions. I am a nonbeliever in visions from the spiritual world; she is only too ready to believe. It is the human interest attached to such fancies for which, of course, there must be some foundation which fascinates and arrests the general attention. There, for me, the interest ends; I do not travel beyond reality.

"I am supposed to have come for rest and repose. The physicians who laid this burden upon me know little of my nature; idleness is more irksome, and I believe more injurious, to me than the severest labour; and it is a relief, therefore, to me to find myself interested in a startling criminal case which is shortly coming on for trial in Geneva. It is a case of murder, and a man is in prison, charged with its commission. He has no friends, he has no means, he is a vicious creature of the commonest and lowest type. There is nothing in him to recommend him to favour; he is a being to be avoided but these are not the points to be considered. Is the man guilty or not guilty? He is pronounced guilty by universal public opinion, and the jury which will be empanelled to try him will be ready to convict upon the slightest evidence, or, indeed, without evidence. The trial will be a mockery of justice unless the accused is defended by one who is not influenced by passion and prejudice. There is a feature in the case which has taken powerful possession of me, and which, as far as I can judge, has not occurred to others. I intend to devote the whole of tonight to a study of the details of the crime, and it is likely that I shall undertake the defence of this repulsive creature no doubt much to his astonishment. I have, with this object in view, already had an interview with him in his prison cell, and the trouble I had to obtain permission to see him is a sufficient indication of the popular temper. When, therefore, you hear in the mountain fastness in which you are intrenched, you have the opportunity of hearing any news at all from the world at your feet that I have undertaken the defence of a man named Gautran, accused of the murder of a flower girl named Madeline, do not be surprised.

"What is most troubling me at the present moment is what is my wife to do, how is she to occupy her time, during our stay in the House of White Shadows? At present she is full

of animation and delight; the new faces and scenery by which she is surrounded are very attractive to her; but the novelty will wear off and then she will grow dull. Save me from selfreproach and uneasiness by taking up your residence with us, if not for the whole of the time we remain here, which I should much prefer, at least for a few weeks. By so doing you will confer a service upon us all. My wife enjoys your society; you know the feeling I entertain for you; and personal association with sincere friends will be of real benefit to you. I urge it earnestly upon you, for I have an impression that you are brooding over unhealthy fancies, and that you have sought solitude for the purpose of battling with one of those ordinary maladies of the mind to which sensitive natures are prone. If it be so, Christian, you are committing a grave error; the battle is unequal; silence and seclusion will not help you to a victory over yourself. Come and unbosom yourself to me, if you have anything to unbosom, and do not fear that I shall intrude either myself or my advice upon you against your inclination. If you have a grief, meet it in the society of those who love you. There is a medicine in a friendly smile, in a friendly word, which you cannot find in solitude. One needs sometimes, not the sunshine of fair weather, but the sunshine of the soul. Here it awaits you, and should you bring dark vapours with you I promise you they will soon be dispelled. I am disposed out of purest friendliness to insist upon your coming, and to be so uncharitable as to accept it as an act of weakness if you refuse me. When the case of Gautran is at an end I shall be an idle man; you, and only you, can avert the injurious effect idleness will have upon me. We will find occupation together, and create reminiscences for future pleasant thought. It may be a long time, if ever, before another opportunity so favourable occurs for passing a few weeks in each other's society, undisturbed by professional cares and duties. You see I am taking a selfish view of the matter. Add an inestimable value to your hospitality by coming here at once and sweetening my leisure.

"Your friend,

"Edward."

II

"My Own, My husband is uneasy about you, and has imposed a task upon me. You shall judge for yourself whether it is a disagreeable one. I am to write to you immediately, to insist upon your coming to us without an hour's delay. You have not the option of

refusal. The Advocate insists upon it, and I also insist upon it. You must come. Upon the receipt of this letter you will pack up your portmanteau, and travel hither in the swiftest possible way, by the shortest possible route. Be sure that you do not disobey me. You are to come instantly, without an hour's delay, without a moment's delay. If you fail I will not answer for the consequences, and upon you will rest the responsibility of all that follows. For what reason, do you suppose, did I accept the offer of your villa in this strangely quiet valley, unless it was in the hope and the belief that we should be near each other? And now that I am here, pledged to remain, unable to leave without an exhibition of the most dreadful vacillation which would not matter were I to have my own way, and were everything to be exactly as I wish it you are bound to fly swiftly to the side of one who entertains for you the very sincerest affection. Do not be angry with me for my disregard of your caution to be careful in my manner of writing to you. I cannot help it. I think of you continually, and if you wish me not to write what you fear other eyes than ours might see, you must come and talk to me. I shall count the minutes till you are here. The Advocate is uneasy about you, and is, indeed and indeed, most anxious that you should be with us. He seems to have an idea that you have some cause for melancholy, and that you are brooding over it. Could anything be more absurd? Cause for melancholy! Just as if you were alone in the world! You do not need to be told that there is one being who will care for you till she is an old, old woman. Think of me as I shall be then. An old woman, with white hair, walking with a crutchstick, as they do on the stage. If you are sad, it is a just punishment upon you. There was nothing in the world to prevent your travelling with us. What do you think a friend of yours, a banker in Geneva, suggested to the Advocate? He said that it was probable that you had experienced a disappointment in love. Now, this sets me thinking. Why have you chosen to hide yourself in the mountains, a hundred and a hundred miles away? Have you been there before? Is there some pretty girl to attract you, from whom you find it impossible to tear yourself? If it is so, let her beware of me. You have no idea of what I should be capable if you gave me cause for jealousy. What is her disposition pensive or gay? She is younger than I am, I suppose though I am not so old, sir! with hands Ah, I am easier in my mind; her hands must be coarse, for she is a peasant. I am almost reconciled; you could never fall in love with a peasant. They may be pretty and fresh for a month or two, but they cannot help being coarse, and I know how anything coarse grates upon you. But a peasant girl might fall in love with you there are more unlikely things than that. Shall I tell you what the Advocate said of you this evening? It will make you vain, but never mind. 'I have never in my life known a man more likely to inspire love in a woman's heart than Christian Almer.' There, sir, his very words. How true they are! Ah, how cruel was the chance that separated us from each other, and brought us together again when I was another man's wife! Oh, if I had only known! If some kind fairy had told me that the man who, when I was a child, enthralled me with his beautiful fancies, and won my heart, and who then, as it seemed, passed out of my life if I had suspected that, after many years, he would return home from his wanderings with the resolve to seek out the child and make her his

wife, do you for one moment suppose I would not have waited for him? Do you think it possible I could ever have accepted the hand of another man? No, it could not have been, for even as a child I used to dream of you, and held you in my heart above all other human beings. But you were gone I never thought of seeing you again and I was so young that I could have had no foreshadowing of what was to come.

"Have you ever considered how utterly different my life might have been had you not crossed it? Not that I reproach you do not think that; but how strangely things turn out, without the principal actor having anything to do with them! It is exactly like sitting down quietly by yourself, and seeing all sorts of wonderful things happen in which you have no hand, though if you were not in existence they could never have occurred. Just think for a moment. If it had not happened that you knew me when I was a child, and was fond of me then, as you have told me I don't know how many times if it had not happened that your restless spirit drove you abroad where you remained for years and years and years if it had not happened that, tired of leading a wandering life, you resolved to come home and seek out the child you used to pet and make love to (but she did not know the meaning of love then) if it had not happened that, entirely ignorant of what was passing in your mind, the child, grown into a pretty woman (I think I may say that, without vanity), was persuaded by her friends that to refuse an offer of marriage made to her by a great lawyer, famous and rich, was something too shocking to contemplate if it had not happened that she, knowing nothing of her own heart, knowing nothing of the world, allowed herself to be guided by these cold calculating friends to accept a man utterly unsuited to her, and with whom she has never had an hour's real happiness if it had not happened by the strangest chance, that this man and you were friends There, my dear, follow it out for yourself, and reflect how different our lives might have been if everything had happened in the way it ought to have done. I was cheated and tricked into a marriage with a man whose heart has room for only one sentiment ambition. I am bound to him for life, but I am yours till death although the bond which unites us is, as you have taught me, but a spiritual bond.

"Are you angry with me for putting all this on paper? You must not be, for I cannot help it if I am not wise. Wisdom belongs to men. Come, then, and give me wise counsel, and prevent me from committing indiscretions. For I declare to you, upon my heart and honour, if you do not very soon present yourself at the House of White Shadows, I will steal from it in the night and make my way to the mountains to see what wonderful attraction it is that separates us. What food for scandal! What wagging and shaking of heads! How the women's tongues would run! I can imagine it all. Save me from exposure as you are a true man.

"You have made the villa beautiful. As I walk about the house and grounds I am filled with delight to think that you have effected such a magic change for my sake. Master

Lamont has shown really exquisite taste. What a singular old man he is. I can't decide whether I like him or not. But how strange that you should have had it all done by deputy, and that you have not set foot in the house since you were a child. You see I know a great deal. Who tells me? My new maid Dionetta. Do you remember, in one of the letters you showed me from your steward, that he spoke about the old housekeeper, Mother Denise, and a pretty granddaughter? I made up my mind at the time that the pretty granddaughter should be my maid. And she is, and her name is Dionetta. Is it not pretty?but not prettier than the owner. Will that tempt you? I have sent my town maid away, much to her displeasure; she spoke to the Advocate in complaint, but he did not mention it to me; I found it out for myself. He is as close as the grave. So I am here absolutely alone, with none but strangers around me.

"I am very much interested in the pictures in the studio of the old châlet, especially in a pair which represents, the first, two lovers with the sun shining on them; the second, the lovers parted by a cold grey sea. They stand on opposite shores, gazing despairingly at each other. He must have been a weakminded man indeed; he should have taken a boat, and rowed across to her; and if he was afraid to do that, she should have gone to him. That would have been the most sensible thing.

"I could continue my gossip till daylight breaks, but I have already lost an hour of my beauty sleep, and I want you, upon your arrival, to see me at my best.

"My heart goes with this letter; bring it swiftly back to me."

"Yours for ever,

"Adelaide."

CHAPTER XI

FIRE AND SNOWFOOL FRITZ INFORMS PIERRE LAMONT WHERE ACTUAL LOVE COMMENCES

"News, Master Lamont, news!"

"Of what nature, Fritz?"

"Of a diabolical nature. Satan is busy."

"He is never idle for which the priests, if they have any gratitude in them, should be thankful."

"You are not fond of the priests, Master Lamont."

"I do not hate them."

"Still you are not fond of them."

"I do not love them. Your news, fool concerning whom?"

"A greater than you, or you do not speak the truth."

"The Advocate, then?"

"The same. You are a good guesser."

"Fritz, your news is stale."

"I am unlucky; I thought to be the first. You have heard the news?"

"Not I."

"You have read a letter, informing you of it."

"You are a bad guesser. I have neither received nor read a letter today."

"You have heard nothing, you have read nothing; and yet you know."

"As surely as you stand before me. Fritz, you are not a scholar, but I will give you a sum any fool can do. Add one to one what do you make of it?"

"Why, that is easy enough, Master Lamont."

"The answer then, fool?"

"One."

"Good. You shall smart for it, in the most vulnerable part of man. You receive from me, every week, one franc. I owe you, for last week, one franc; I owe you, for this, one."

"That is so."

"Last week, one; this week, one. I discharge the liability." And Pierre Lamont handed a franc to Fritz.

Fritz weighed the coin in the palm of his hand, spun it in the air and smiled.

"Master Lamont, here is a fair challenge. If I prove to you that one and one are one, this franc you have given me shall not count off what you owe me."

"I agree."

"When one man and one woman are joined in matrimony, they become one flesh. Therefore, one and one are one."

"You have earned the franc, fool. Here are the two I owe you."

"Now, perhaps, you will tell me what I came here to tell you."

"The Advocate intends to defend Gautran, who stands charged with the murder of the flowergirl."

"You are a master worth serving. I have half a mind to give you back your franc."

"Make it a whole mind, Fritz."

"No; second thoughts are best. My pockets are not as warm as yours. They are not so well lined. How did you guess, Master Lamont?"

"By means of a golden rule, an infallible rule, by the Rule of Onewhich, intelligibly interpreted to shallow mindsno offence, Fritz, I hope"

"Don't mind me, Master Lamont; I am a fool and used to hard knocks."

"Then by the Rule of One, which means the rule of human natureas, for example, that makes the drunkard stagger to the wineshop and the sluggard to his bedI guessed that the Advocate could not withstand so tempting a chance to prove the truth of the scriptural words that all men are liars. What will be palatable information to me is the manner in which the news has been received."

"Heaven keep me from ever being so received! The Advocate has not added to the number of his friends. People are gazing at each other in amazement, and asking for reasons which none are able to give."

"And his wife, Fritz, his wife?"

"Takes as much interest in his doings as a bee does in the crawling of a snail."

"Rogue, you have cheated me! How about one and one being one?"

"There are marriages and marriages. This was not made in Heaven; when it came about there was a confusion in the pairing, and another couple are as badly off. There will be a natural end to both."

"How brought about, fool?"

"By your own rule, the rule of human nature."

"When a jumper jumps, he first measures his distance with his eye. Do they quarrel?"

"No."

"Does she look coldly upon him, or he upon her?"

"No."

"Is there silence between them?"

"No."

"You are a bad jumper, Fritz. You have not measured your distance."

"See, Master Lamont, I will prove it to you by a figure of speech. There travels from the south a flame of fire. There travels from the north a lump of snow. They meet. What

happens? Either that the snow extinguishes the fire and it dies, or that the fire puts an end to the snow."

"Fairly illustrated, Fritz. Fire and snow! Truly a most unfortunate conjunction."

"She was in the mood to visit you yesterday had you lived a mile nearer the valley."

"You were out together."

"She and Dionetta were walking, and I met them and accompanied them. She spoke graciously to the villagers, and went into the cottages, and drank more than one cup of milk. She was sweeter than sugar, Master Lamont, and won the hearts of some of the women and of all the men. As for the children, they would have followed her to the world's end, I do believe, out of pure admiration. They carry now in their little heads the vision of the beautiful lady. Even Father Capel was struck by her beauty."

"Priests are mortals, Fritz. On which side did you walk next to my lady or Dionetta?"

"I should be wrecked in a tempest. I sail only in quiet lakes."

"And the maid did she object to your walking close to her? for you are other than I take you to be if you did not walk close."

"Why should she object? Am I not a man? Women rather like fools."

"How stands the pretty maid with her new mistress?"

"In high favour, if one can judge from fingers."

"Fritz, your wit resembles a tide that is for ever flowing. Favour me with your parable."

"It is a delicate point to decide where actual love commences. Have you ever considered it, Master Lamont?"

"Not deeply, fool. In my young days I was a madbrain; you are a philosopher. Like a bee, I took what fell in my way, and did not puzzle myself or the flower with questions. Where love commences? In the heart."

"No."

"In the brain."

"No."

"In the eye."

"No."

"Where, then?"

"In the fingertips. Dionetta and I, walking side by side, shoulder to shoulder, our arms hanging down, brought into close contact our fingertips. What wonder that they touched!"

"Natural magnetism, Fritz."

"With our fingertips touching, we walked along, and if her heart palpitated as mine did, she must have experienced an inward commotion. Master Lamont, this is a confession for your ears only. I should be base and ungrateful to hide it from you."

"Your confidence shall be respected."

"It leads to an answer to your question as to how Dionetta stands with her new mistress. First the fingertips, then the fingers, and her little hand was clasped in mine. It was then I felt the ring upon her finger."

"Ah!"

"Now, Dionetta never till yesterday owned a ring. I felt it, as a man who is curious would do, and suddenly her hand was snatched from mine. A moment or two afterwards, her hand was in mine again, but the ring was gone. A fine piece of conjuring. A man is no match for a woman in these small ways. Today I saw her for about as long as I could count three. 'Who gave you the ring?' I asked. 'My lady,' she answered. 'Don't tell grandmother that I have got a ring.' Therefore, Master Lamont, Dionetta stands well with her mistress."

"Logically carried out, Fritz. The saints prosper your wooing."

CHAPTER XII

THE STRUGGLE OF LOVE AND DUTY

In his lonely room in the mountain hut in which he had taken up his quarters, Christian Almer sat writing. It was early morning; he had risen before the sun. During the past week he had struggled earnestly with the terror which oppressed him; his suffering had been great, but he believed he was conquering. The task he had imposed upon himself of setting his duty before him in clear terms afforded him consolation. The book in which he was writing contained the record of a love which had filled him with unrest, and threatened to bring dishonor into his life

"I thank Heaven," he wrote, "that I am calmer than I have been for several days. Separation has proved an inestimable blessing. The day may come when I shall look upon my love as dead, and shall be able to think of it as one thinks of a beloved being whom death has snatched away.

"Even now, as I think of her, there is no fever in the thought. I have not betrayed my friend.

"How would he regard me if he were acquainted with my mad passion if he knew that the woman he adored looked upon him with aversion, and gave her love to the friend whom he trusted as a brother?

"There was the error. To listen to her confession of love, and to make confession of my own.

"That a man should so forget himself should be so completely the slave of his passions!

"How came it about? When were the first words spoken?

"She sat by my side, radiant and beautiful. Admiring glances from every part of the theatre were cast upon her. In a corner of the box sat her husband, silent and thoughtful, heedless of the brilliant scene before him, heedless of her, as it seemed, heedless of the music and the singers.

"Royalty was there, immediately facing us, and princes levelled their opera glasses at her.

"There are moments of intoxication when reason and conscience desert us.

"We were stepping into the carriage when a note was delivered to him. He read it, and said, 'I cannot go with you; I am called away. You will not miss me, as I do not dance. I will join you in a couple of hours.'

"So we went alone, we two together, and her hand rested lightly upon mine. And in the dance the words were spokenwords never to be recalled.

"What demon prompted them? Why did not an angel whisper to me, 'Remember. There is a tomorrow.'

"But in the present the morrow is forgotten. A false sense of security shuts out all thoughts of the consequences of our actions. A selfish delight enthrals us, and we do not see the figure of Retribution hovering above us.

"It is only when we are alone with our conscience that this figure is visible. Then it is that we tremble; then it is that we hear words which appal us.

"Again and again has this occurred to me, and I have vowed to myself that I would tear myself from her vow as worthless as the gambler's resolve to play no more. Drawn irresistibly forward, and finding in every meeting a shameful justification in the delusion that I was seeing her for the last time; and leaving her with a promise to come again soon. Incredible infatuation! But to listen to the recital of her sorrows and unhappiness without sympathising with her was not possible; and to hear her whisper, 'I love you, and only you,' without being thrilled by the confession a man would need to be made of stone.

"How often has she said to me, when speaking of her husband, 'He has no heart!'

"Can I then, ever with any semblance of honesty that I have not betrayed my friend? Basely have I betrayed him.

"If I were sure that she would not suffer if I were sure that she would forget me! Coldness, neglect, indifference they are sharp weapons, but I deserve to bleed.

"Still, I cry out against my fate. I have committed no crime. Love came to me and tortured me. But a man must perform a man's duty. I will strive to perform mine. Then in years to come I may be able to think of the past without shame, even with pride at having conquered.

"I have destroyed her portrait. I could not look upon her face and forget her."

A voice from an adjoining room caused him to lay aside his pen. It was the peasant, the master of the hut, calling to him, and asking if he was ready. He went out to the man.

"I heard you stirring," said the peasant, "and my young ones are waiting to show you where the edelweiss can be found."

The children, a boy and a girl, looked eagerly at Christian Almer. It had been arranged on the previous day that the three should go for a mountain excursion in search of the flower that brings good luck and good fortune to the finder. The children were sturdilylimbed and ruddyfaced, and were impatient to be off.

"Breakfast first," said Christian Almer, pinching the little girl's cheek.

Brown bread, honey, goat's milk, and an omelette were on the table, and the stranger, who had been as a godsend to the poor family, enjoyed the homely fare. The peasant had already calculated that if his lodger lived a year in the hut, they could save five hundred francsa fortune. Christian Almer had been generous to the children, in whose eyes he was something more than mortal. Money is a magic power.

"Will the day be fine?" asked Christian.

"Yes," said the peasant; "but there will be a change in the evening. The little ones will knowyou can trust to them."

Young as they were, they could read the signs on Nature's face, and could teach their gentleman friend wise things, great and rich as he was.

The father accompanied them for a couple of miles; he was a goatherd, and, unlike others of his class, was by no means a silent man.

"You live a happy life here," said Christian Almer.

"Why, yes," said the peasant; "it is happy enough. We have to eat, but not to spare; there is the trouble. Still, God be thanked. The children are strong and healthy; that is another reason for thankfulness."

"Is your wife, as you are, mountain born?"

"Yes; and could tell you stories. And there," said the peasant, pointing upwards afar off, "as though it knew my wife were being talked of, there is the lämmergeier."

An enormous vulture, which seemed to have suddenly grown out of the air, was suspended in the clouds. So motionless was it that it might have been likened to a sculptured work, wrought by an angel's hand, and fixed in heaven as a sign. It could not

have measured less than ten feet from wing to wing. Its colour was brown, with bright edges and white quills, and its fiery eyes were encircled by broad orangeshaded rings.

"My wife," said the peasant, "has reason to remember the lämmergeier. When she was three years old her father took her to a part of the mountains where they were haymaking, and not being able to work and attend to her at the same time, he set her down by the side of a hut. It was a fine sunny day, and Anna fell asleep. Her father, seeing her sleeping calmly, covered her face with a straw hat, and continued his work. Two hours afterwards he went to the spot, and Anna was gone. He searched for her everywhere, and all the haymakers assisted in the search, but Anna was nowhere to be found. My father and I was a mere lad at the time, five years older than Anna were walking towards a mountain stream, three miles from where Anna had been sleeping, when I heard the cry of a child. It came from a precipice, and above this precipice a vulture was flying. We went in the direction of the cry, and found Anna lying on the edge of the precipice, clinging to the roots with her little hand. She was slipping down, and would have slipped to certain death had we been three minutes later. It was a difficult task to rescue her as it was, but we managed it, and carried her to her father. She had no cap to her head, and no shoes or stockings on her feet; she had lost them in her flight through the air in the vulture's beak. She has a scar on her left arm to this day as a remembrance of her acquaintance with the lämmergeier. So it fell out afterwards, when she was a young woman, that I married her."

Ever and again, as they walked onwards, Christian Almer turned to look upon the vulture, which remained perfectly still, with its wings outstretched, until it was hid from his sight by the peculiar formation of the valleys they were traversing.

Hitherto their course had lain amidst masses of the most beautiful flowers; gentians with purple bells, others spotted and yellow, with brilliant whorls of bloom, the lilacflowered campanula, the anemone, the blue columbine and starwort, the lovely forgetmenot which Christian Almer mentally likened to bits of heaven dropped down and the Alpine rose, the queen of Alpine flowers. Now all was changed. The track was bare of foliage; not a blade of grass peeped up from the barren rocks.

"There is good reason for it," said the peasant; "here, long years ago, a man killed his brother in cold blood. Since that day no flowers will grow upon the spot. There are nights on which the spirit of the murderer wanders mournfully about these rocks; a black dog accompanies him, whose bark you can sometimes hear. This valley is accursed."

Soon afterwards the peasant left Christian Almer to the guidance of the children, and with them the young man spent the day, sharing contentedly with them the black bread

and hard sausage they had brought for dinner. This midday meal was eaten as they sat beside a lake, in the waters of which there was not a sign of life, and Christian Almer noticed that, as the children ate, they watched the bosom of this lake with a strange and singular interest.

"What are you gazing at?" he asked, curious to learn.

"For the dead white trout," answered the boy. "Whenever a priest dies it floats upon the lake."

In the lower heights, where the firtrees stretched their feathery tips to the clouds, they found the flower they were in search of, and the children were wild with delight. The sun was setting when they returned to the hut, tired and gratified with their day's wanderings. The peasant's wife smiled as she saw the edelweiss.

"A lucky loveflower," she said to Christian Almer.

These simple words proved to him how hard was the lesson of forgetfulness he was striving to learn; he was profoundly agitated by them.

Night fell, and the clouds grew black.

"The wind is rising," said the peasant; "an ill night for travellers. Here is one coming towards us."

It proved to be a guide who lived in the nearest post village, and who, duly commissioned for the service, brought to Christian Almer the letters of the Advocate and his wife.

"A storm is gathering," said the guide; "I must find shelter on the heights tonight."

In his lonely room Christian Almer broke the seals, and by the dull light of a single candle read the lines written by friend to friend, by lover to lover.

The thunder rolled over the mountains; the lightning flashed through the small window; the storm was upon him.

He read the letters once only, but every word was impressed clearly upon his brain. For an hour he sat in silence, gazing vacantly at the edelweiss on the table, the lucky loveflower.

The peasant's wife called to him, and asked if he wanted anything.

"Nothing," he replied, in a voice that sounded strange to him.

"I will leave the bread and milk on the table," she said. "Goodnight."

He did not answer her, nor did he respond to the children's goodnight. Their voices, the children's especially, seemed to his ears to come from a great distance.

A drop of rain fell from the roof upon the candle, and extinguished the light. For a long while he remained in darkness, until all in the hut were sleeping; then he went out into the wild night, clutching the letters tight in his hand.

He staggered almost blindly onwards, and in the course of half an hour found himself standing on a narrow and perilous bridge, from which the few travellers who passed that way could obtain a view of a torrent which dashed with sublime and terrific force over a precipice upon the rocks below, a thousand feet down.

"If I were to grow dizzy now!" he muttered, with a reckless laugh; and he tempted fate by leaning over the narrow bridge, and gazing downwards into the dark depths.

Indistinct shapes grew out of the mighty and eternal waterfall. Of hosts of angry men battling with each other; of rushing horses; of armies of vultures swooping down for prey; of accusing and beautiful faces; of smiling mouths and white teeth flashing; and, amidst the whirl, sounds of shrieks and laughter.

Suddenly he straightened himself, and tearing Adelaide's letter into a thousand pieces, flung the evidence of a treacherous love into the furious torrent of waters; and as he did so he thought that there were times in a man's life when death were the best blessing which Heaven could bestow upon him!

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRIAL OF GAUTRAN

The trial of Gautran was proceeding, and the court was thronged with an excited gathering of men and women, upon whom not a word in the story of the tragic drama was thrown away. Impressed by the great powers of the Advocate who had undertaken to appear for the accused, the most effective measures had been adopted to prove Gautran's guilt, and obtain a conviction.

It was a legal battle, fought with all the subtle weapons at the disposal of the law.

Gautran's prosecutors fought with faces unmasked, and with their hands displayed; the Advocate, on the contrary, was pursuing a course which none could fathom; nor did he give a clue to it. Long before the case was closed the jury were ready to deliver their verdict; but, calm and unmoved, the Advocate, with amazing patience, followed out his secret theory, the revelation of which was awaited, by those who knew him best and feared him most, with intense and painful curiosity.

Every disreputable circumstance in Gautran's life was raked up to display the odiousness of his character; his infamous career was tracked from his childhood to the hour of his arrest. A creature more debased, with features more hideous, it would have been difficult to drag forward from the worst haunts of crime and shame. Degraded he was born, degraded he had lived, degraded he stood before his judges. It was a horror to gaze upon his face as he stood in the dock, convulsively clutching the rails.

For eight days had he so stood, execrated and condemned by all. For eight days he had endured the anguish of a thousand deaths, of a myriad agonising fears. His soul had been harrowed by the most awful visionsvisions of which none but himself had any conception. In his cell with the gaolers watching his every movement; in the court with the glare of daylight upon him; in the dusky corridors he traversed morning and evening he saw the phantom of the girl with whose murder he was charged, and by her side the phantom of himself standing on the threshold of a future in which there was no mercy or pity.

No communication passed between him and the lawyer who was fighting for him; not once did the Advocate turn to the prisoner or address a word to him; it was as though he were battling for a victory in which Gautran was in no wise concerned. But if indeed he desired to win, he adopted the strangest tactics to accomplish his desire. Not a question he asked the witnesses, not an observation he made to the judge, but tended to fix more surely the prisoner's degradation, and gradually there stole into Gautran's heart a deadly hatred and animosity against his defender.

"He defends me to ruin me," this was Gautran's thought; "he is seeking to destroy me, body and soul."

His own replies to the questions put to him by the judge were sufficient to convict him. He equivocated and lied in the most barefaced manner, and when he was exposed and reproved, evinced no shamepreserving either a dogged silence, or obstinately exclaiming that the whole world was leagued against him. Apart from the question whether he was lying or speaking the truth, there was a certain consistency in his method which would have been of service to him had his cause been good. This was especially noticeable when he was being interrogated with respect to his relations with the murdered girl.

"You insist," said the judge, "that Madeline accepted you as her lover?"

"Yes," replied Gautran, "I insist upon it."

"Evidence will be brought forward to prove that it was not so. What, then, will you answer?"

"That whoever denies it is a liar."

"And if a dozen or twenty deny it?"

"They lie, the lot of them."

"What should make them speak falsely instead of truly?"

"Because they are all against me."

"There is no other evidence except your bare statement that Madeline and you were affianced."

"That is my misfortune. If she were alive she could speak for me."

"It is a safe remark, the poor child being in her grave. It is the rule for young girls to love men whose appearance is not repulsive."

"Is this," cried Gautran, smiting his face with his fist, "to stand as a witness against me, too?"

"No; but a girl has generally a cause for falling in love. If the man be not attractive in appearance, it is almost certain he will possess some other quality to attract her. He may be clever, and this may win her."

"I do not pretend to be clever."

"His manners may be engaging. His nature may be kind and affectionate, and she may have had proof of it."

"My nature is kind and affectionate. It may have been that, if you are determined upon having a reason for her fondness for me."

"She was fond of you?"

"Aye."

"Did she tell you so, and when?"

"Always when we were alone."

"We cannot have Madeline's evidence as to the feelings she entertained for you; but we can have the evidence of others who knew you both. Are you acquainted with Katherine Scherrer?"

"Not too well; we were never very intimate."

"She is a young woman a few years older than Madeline, and she warned Madeline against you. She herself had received instances of your brutality. Before you saw Madeline you made advances towards Katherine Scherrer."

"False. She made advances towards me. She asked me to be her lover, and now she speaks against me out of revenge."

"She has not spoken yet, but she will. Madeline told her that she trembled at the sight of you, and had entreated you not to follow her; but that you would not be shaken off."

"It is my way; I will never be baulked."

"It is true, therefore; you paid no attention to this poor girl's entreaties because it is your way not to allow yourself to be baulked."

"I did not mean that; I was thinking of other matters."

"Katherine Scherrer has a mother."

"Yes; a woman of no account."

"Some time ago this mother informed you, if you did not cease to pester Katherine with your insulting proposals, that she would have you beaten."

"I should like to see the man who would have attempted it."

"That is savagely spoken for one whose nature is kind and affectionate."

"May not a man defend himself? I don't say I am kind and affectionate to men; but I am to women."

"The murdered girl found you so. Hearing from her daughter that Madeline was frightened of you, and did not wish you to follow her, Katherine's mother desired you to let the girl alone."

"She lies."

"They all lie who utter a word against you?"

"Every one of them."

"You never courted Katherine Scherrer?"

"Never."

"Her mother never spoke to you about either her daughter or Madeline?"

"Never."

"Do you know the Widow Joseph?"

"No."

"Madeline lodged in her house."

"What is that to me?"

"Did she never speak to you concerning Madeline?"

"Never."

"Attend. Four nights before Madeline met her death you were seen prowling outside Widow Joseph's house."

"I was not there."

"The Widow Joseph came out and asked you what you wanted."

"She did not."

"You said you must see Madeline. The Widow Joseph went into the house, and returned with the message that Madeline would not see you. Upon that you tried to force your way into the house, and struck the woman because she prevented you. Madeline came down, alarmed at the sounds of the struggle, and begged you to go away, and you said you would, now that you had seen her, as you had made up your mind to. What have you to say to this?"

"A batch of lies. Twenty women could not have prevented me getting into the house."

"You think yourself a match for twenty women?"

"Aye."

"And for as many men?"

"For one man, whoever he may be. Give me the chance of proving it."

"Do you know Heinrich Heitz?"

"No."

"He is, like yourself, a woodcutter."

"There are thousands of woodcutters."

"Did you and he not work together as partners?"

"We did not."

"Were you not continually quarrelling, and did he not wish to break the partnership?"

"No."

"In consequence of this, did you not threaten to murder him?"

"No."

"Did you not strike him with a weapon, and cut his forehead open?"

"No."

"How many women have you loved?"

"One."

"Her name?"

"Madeline."

"You never loved another?"

"Never."

"Have you been married?"

"No."

"Have you ever lived with a woman who should have been your wife?"

"Never."

"Did you not continually beat this poor woman until her life became a burden to her, and she was compelled to fly from you to another part of the country?"

"No."

"Do you expect to be believed in the answers you have given?"

"No."

"It is said that you possess great strength."

"It has served me in good stead."

"That you are a man of violent passions."

"I have my feelings. I would never submit to be trampled on."

"You were always kind to Madeline?"

"Always."

"On the night of her murder?"

"Yes."

"Witnesses will prove that you were heard to say, 'I will kill you! I will kill you!' Do you deny saying so?"

"No."

"How does that cruel threat accord with a mild and affectionate nature?"

"I was asking her whether she had another lover, and I said if she had, and encouraged him, that I would kill her."

"The handkerchief found round her neck was yours."

"I gave it to her as a lovegift."

"A terrible lovegift. It was not wound loosely round her neck; it was tight, almost to strangulation."

"She must have made it so in her struggles, or"

"Or?"

"The man who killed her must have attempted to strangle her with it."

"That is your explanation?"

"Yes."

"Your face is bathed in perspiration; your eyes glare wildly."

"Change places with me, and see how you would feel."

"Such signs, then, are the signs of innocence?"

"What else should they be?"

During this long examination, Gautran's limbs trembled violently, and there passed over his face the most frightful expressions.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EVIDENCE OF WITNESSES

Among the first witnesses called was Heinrich Heitz, a woodcutter, who had been for some time in partnership with Gautran, and of whom Gautran had denied any knowledge whatever.

On his forehead was the red scar of a wound inflicted some time before.

"Look at the prisoner. Do you know him?"

"I have reason to."

"His name?"

"Gautran."

"How did he get his living?"

"By woodcutting."

"You and he were comrades for a time?"

"We were."

"For how long?"

"For three years; we were partners."

"During the time you worked with him, did he know you as Heinrich Heitz?"

"By no other name. I never bore another."

"Was the partnership an agreeable one?"

"Not to me; it was infernally disagreeable. I never want another partner like him."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want another savage beast for a partner."

"You did not get along well with him?"

"Quite the reverse."

"For what reasons?"

"Well, for one, I am a hardworking man; he is an indolent bully. The master he works for once does not want to employ him again. When we worked together on a task, the profits of which were to be equally divided between us, he shirked his share of the work, and left me to do the lot."

"Did you endeavour to separate from him?"

"I did; and he swore he would murder me; and once, when I was more than usually determined, he marked me on my forehead. You can see the scar; I shall never get rid of it."

"Did he use a weapon against you?"

"Yes; a knife."

"His temper is ungovernable?"

"He has not the slightest control over it."

"He is a man of great strength?"

"He is very powerful."

"Possessed with an idea which he was determined to carry out, is it likely that anything would soften him?"

"Nothing could soften him."

"How would opposition affect him?"

"It would infuriate him. I have seen him, when crossed, behave as if he were a mad tiger instead of a human being."

"At such times, would it be likely that he would show any coolness or cunning?"

"He would have no time to think; he would be carried away by his passion."

"You were acquainted with him when he was a lad?"

"I was."

"Was he noted for his cruel disposition in his childhood?"

"He was; it was the common talk."

"Did he take a pleasure in inflicting physical pain upon those weaker than himself?"

"He did."

"And in prolonging that pain?"

"Yes."

"In his paroxysms of fury would not an appeal to his humanity have a softening effect upon him?"

"He has no humanity."

"You were acquainted with Madeline?"

"I was."

"Was she an amiable girl?"

"Most amiable."

"She was very gentle?"

"As gentle as a child."

"But she was capable of being aroused?"

"Of course she was."

"She had many admirers?"

"I have heard so."

"You yourself admired her?"

"I did."

"You made love to her?"

"I suppose I did."

"Did she encourage you?"

"I cannot say she did."

"Did you ever attempt to embrace her?"

The witness did not reply to this question, and upon its being repeated, still preserved silence. Admonished by the judge, and ordered to reply, he said:

"Yes, I have attempted to embrace her."

"On more than one occasion."

"Only on one occasion."

"Did she permit the embrace?"

"No."

"She resisted you?"

"Yes."

"There must have been a struggle. Did she strike you?"

"She scratched my face."

"She resisted you successfully?"

"Yes."

"Gentle as she was, she possessed strength?"

"Oh yes, more than one would have supposed."

"Strength which she would exert to protect herself from insult?"

"Yes."

"Her disposition was a happy one?"

"That was easy to see. She was always singing to herself, and smiling."

"You believe she was fond of life?"

"Why yeswho is not?"

"And would not have welcomed a violent and sudden death?"

"Certainly not. What a question!"

"Threatened with such a fate, she would have resisted?"

"Aye, with all her strength. It would be but natural."

"Knowing Madeline somewhat intimately, you must have known Pauline?"

"Yes, I knew her."

"It is unfortunate and inexplicable that we cannot call her as a witness, and are ignorant of the reason why she left Madeline alone. Can you furnish any clue, even the slightest, which might enable us to find her?"

"I cannot; I do not know where she has gone."

"Were they sisters, or mother and daughter?"

"I cannot say."

"Do you know where they came from?"

"I do not."

"Reflect. During your intimacy, was any chance word or remark made by either of the women which, followed up, might furnish the information?"

"I can remember none. But something was said, a few days before Pauline left, which surprised me."

"Relate it, and do not fear to weary the court. Omit nothing."

"I made love to Madeline, as I have said, and she did not encourage me. Then, for perhaps a month or two, I said nothing more to her than goodmorning or goodevening. But afterwards, when I was told that Gautran was following her up, I thought to myself, 'I am better than he; why should I be discouraged because she said "No" to me once?' Well, then it was that I mustered up courage to speak to Pauline, thinking to win her to my side. I did not, though. Pauline was angry and impatient with me, and as much as told me that when Madeline married it would be to a better man than I was. I was angry, also, because it seemed as if she looked down on me. 'You think she will marry a gentleman,' said I. 'It might be so,' she answered. 'A fine idea that,' said I, 'for a peasant. But perhaps she isn't a peasant: perhaps she is a lady in disguise.' I suppose I spoke scornfully, for Pauline fired up, and asked whether Madeline was not good enough, and pretty enough, and gentle enough for a lady; and said, too, that those who believed her to be a peasant might one day find out their mistake. And then all at once she stopped suddenly, with red fire in her face, and I saw she had said that which she had rather left unspoken."

This last piece of evidence supplied a new feature of interest in the case. It furnished a clue to a tempting mystery as to the social position of Pauline and Madeline; but it was a clue which could not be followed to a satisfactory result, although another unexpected revelation was made in the course of the trial which appeared to have some connection with it. Much of the evidence given by Heinrich Heitz was elicited by the Advocate especially those particulars which related to Gautran's strength and ferocity, and to Madeline's love of life and the way in which she met an insult. It was not easy to see what good could be done for Gautran by the stress which the Advocate laid upon these points.

Katherine Scherrer was called and examined. She testified that Gautran had made advances towards her, and had pressed her to become his wife; that she refused him, and that he threatened her; that as he persisted in following her, her mother had spoken to him, and had warned him, if he did not cease persecuting her daughter, that she would have him beaten. This evidence was corroborated by Katherine's mother, who

testified that she had cautioned Gautran not to persecute Madeline with his attentions and proposals. Madeline had expressed to both these women her abhorrence of Gautran and her fear of him, but nothing could induce him to relinquish his pursuit of her. The only evidence elicited from these witnesses by the Advocate related to Gautran's strength and ferocity.

Following Katherine Scherrer and her mother came a witness whose appearance provoked murmurs of compassion. It was a poor, wretched woman, half demented, who had lived with Gautran in another part of the country, and who had been so brutally treated by him that her reason had become impaired. If her appearance provoked compassion, the story of her wrongs, as it was skilfully drawn from her by kindly examination, stirred the court into strong indignation, and threw a lurid light upon the character of the man arraigned at the bar of justice. In the presence of this poor creature the judge interrogated Gautran.

"You denied having ever lived with a woman who should have been your wife. Do you still deny it?"

"Yes."

"Shameless obstinacy! Look at this poor woman, whom your cruelty has reduced to a state of imbecility. Do you not know her?"

"I know nothing of her."

"You never lived with her?"

"Never."

"You will even go so far as to declare that you never saw her before today?"

"Yes; I never saw her before today."

"To question you farther would be useless. You have shown yourself in your true colours."

To which Gautran made answer: "I can't help my colours. They're not of my choosing."

The Widow Joseph was next called.

CHAPTER XV

THE WIDOW JOSEPH GIVES EVIDENCE RESPECTING A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

The appearance of this woman was looked forward to by the spectators with lively curiosity, and her evidence was listened to with deep attention.

"Your name is Joseph?"

"That was my husband's first name. While he lived I was known as Mistress Joseph; since his death I have been called the Widow Joseph."

"The poor child, Madeline, and her companion, Pauline, lived in your house?"

"Yes, from the first day they came into this part of the country. 'We have come a great distance,' said Pauline to me, 'and want a room to sleep in.' I showed her the room, and said it would be twelve francs a month. She paid me twelve francs, and remained with me till she left to go on a journey."

"Did you ask her where she came from?"

"Yes; and she answered that it was of no consequence."

"Did she pay the rent regularly?"

"Yes; and always without being asked for it."

"Did she tell you she was poor?"

"She said she had but little money."

"Did they have any settled plan of gaining a livelihood?"

"I do not think they had at first. Pauline asked me whether I thought it likely they could earn a living by selling flowers. I looked at Madeline, and said that I thought they were certain to do well."

"You looked at Madeline. Why?"

"She was a very pretty girl."

"And you thought, because she was very pretty, that she would have a greater chance of disposing of her flowers."

"Yes. Gentlemen like to buy of pretty girls."

"That is not said to Madeline's disparagement?"

"No. Madeline was a good girl. She was full of gaiety, but it was innocent gaiety."

"What were your impressions of them? As to their social position? Did you believe them to be humbly born?"

"Pauline certainly; she was a peasant the same as myself. But there was something superior about Madeline which puzzled me."

"How? In what way?"

"It was only an impression. Yet there were signs. Pauline's hands were hard and coarse; and from remarks she made from time to time I knew that she was peasantborn. Madeline's hands were soft and delicate, and she had not been accustomed to toil, which all peasants are, from their infancy almost."

"From this do you infer that they were not related to each other?"

"I am sure they were related to each other. Perhaps few had the opportunities of judging as well as I could. When they were in a quiet mood I have seen expressions upon their faces so exactly alike as to leave no doubt that they were closely related."

"Sisters?"

"I cannot say."

"Or mother and daughter?"

"I wish to tell everything I know, but to say nothing that might be turned into a reproach against them."

"We have every confidence in you. Judgment can be formed from the bearing of persons towards each other. Pauline loved Madeline?"

"Devotedly."

"There is a distinctive quality in the attachment of a loving mother for her child which can scarcely be mistaken; it is far different, in certain visible manifestations especially on occasions where there is any slight disagreement between sisters. Distinctive, also, is the tenderness which accompanies the exercise of a mother's authority. Bearing this in mind, and recalling to the best of your ability those particulars of their intercourse which came within your cognisance, which hypothesis would you be the more ready to believe that they were sisters or mother and child?"

"That they were mother and child."

"We recognise your anxiety to assist us. Pauline's hands, you say, were coarse, while Madeline's were soft and delicate. Ordinarily, a peasant woman brings up her child as a peasant, with no false notions; in this instance, however, Pauline brought Madeline up with some idea that the young girl was superior to her own station in life. Else why the unusual care of the child? Supposing this line of argument to be correct, it appears not to be likely that the attentions of a man like Gautran would be encouraged."

"They were not encouraged."

"Do you know that they were not encouraged from statements made to you by Pauline and Madeline?"

"Yes."

"Then Gautran's declaration that he was Madeline's accepted lover is false?"

"Quite false."

"He speaks falsely when he says that Madeline promised to marry him?"

"It is impossible."

"Four nights before Madeline met her death, was Gautran outside your house?"

"Yes; he was prowling about there with his evil face, for a long time."

"Did you go to him, and ask him what he wanted?"

"Yes."

"Did he tell you that he must see Madeline?"

"Yes, and I went into the house, and informed the girl. She said she would not see him, and I went down to Gautran and told him so. He then tried to force himself into the house, and I stood in his way. He struck me, and Madeline, frightened by my cries, ran to the door, and begged him to go away."

"It is a fact that he was often seen in Madeline's company?"

"Yes; do what they would, they could not get rid of him; and they were frightened, if they angered him too much, that he would commit an act of violence."

"As he did?"

"As he did. It is written on Madeline's grave."

"Had the poor girl any other lovers?"

"None that I should call lovers. But she was greatly admired."

"Was any one of these lovers especially favoured?"

"Not that I knew of."

"Did any of them visit the house?"

"Nobut may I speak?"

"Certainly."

"It was not what I should call a visit. A gentleman came once to the door, and before I could get there, Pauline was with him. All that I heard was this: 'It is useless,' Pauline said to him; 'I will not allow you to see her, and if you persecute us with your attentions I will appeal for help to those who will teach you a lesson.' 'What is your objection to me?' he asked, and he was smiling all the time he spoke. 'Am I not a gentleman?' 'Yes,' she answered; 'and it is because of that, that I will not permit you to address her. Gentlemen! I have had enough of gentlemen!' 'You are a foolish woman,' he said, and he went away. That is all, and that is the only time except when I saw Pauline in conversation with a man. He might have been a gentleman, but his clothes were not the clothes of one; neither were they the clothes of a peasant. They were conversing at a

little distance from the house. I did not hear what they said, not a word, and half an hour afterwards Pauline came home. There was a look on her face such as I had never observed a look of triumph and doubt. But she made no remark to me, nor I to her."

"Where was Madeline at this time?"

"In the house."

"Did you see this man again?"

"A second time, two evenings after. A third time, within the same week. He and Pauline spoke together very earnestly, and when anyone approached them always moved out of hearing. During the second week he came to the house, and inquired for Pauline. She ran downstairs and accompanied him into the open road. This occurred to my knowledge five or six times, until Pauline said to me, 'Tomorrow I am going on a journey. Before long I may be able to reward you well for the kindness you have shown us.' The following day she left, and I have not seen her since."

"Did she say how long she would be likely to be away?"

"I understood not longer than three weeks."

"That time has passed, and still she does not appear. Since she left, have you seen the man who was so frequently with her?"

"No."

"He has not been to the house to make inquiries?"

"No."

"Is it not possible that he may have been Pauline's lover?"

"There was nothing of the lover in his manner towards her."

"There was, however, some secret between them?"

"Evidently."

"And Madeline was she acquainted with it?"

"It is impossible to say."

"You have no reason to suppose, when Pauline went away, that she had no intention of returning?"

"I am positive she intended to return."

"And with good news, for she promised to reward you for your kindness?"

"Yes, she did so."

"Is it not probable that she, also, may have met with foul play?"

"It is probable; but Heaven alone knows!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE CONCLUSION OF THE PROSECUTION

It length the case for the prosecution was concluded, with an expression of regret on the part of counsel at the absence of Pauline, who might have been able to supply additional evidence, if any were needed, of the guilt of the prisoner.

"Every effort has been made," said counsel, "to trace and produce this woman, but when she parted from the murdered girl no person knew whither she was directing her steps; even the Widow Joseph, the one living person besides the mysterious male visitor who was in frequent consultation with her, can furnish us with no clue. The victim of this foul and horrible crime could most likely have told us, but her lips are sealed by the murderer's hand, the murderous wretch who stands before you.

"It has been suggested that Pauline has met with foul play. It may be so; otherwise, it is humanly impossible to divine the cause that could keep her from this trial.

"Neither have we been able to trace the man who was in her confidence, and between whom and herself a secret of a strange nature existed.

"In my own mind I do not doubt that this secret related to Madeline, but whether it did do so or not cannot affect the issue of this trial; neither can the absence of Pauline and her mysterious friend affect it. The proofs of the cruel, ruthless murder are complete and irrefragable, and nothing is wanting, not a link, in the chain of evidence to enable you to return a verdict which will deprive of the opportunity of committing further crime a wretch as infamous as ever walked the earth. He declares his innocence; if the value of that declaration is to be gauged by the tissue of falsehoods he has uttered, by his shameless effrontery and denials, by his revolting revelations of the degradation of his nature, he stands selfconvicted.

"But it needs not that; had he not spoken, the issue would be the same; for painful and shocking as is the spectacle, you have but to glance at him to assure yourself of his guilt. If that is not sufficient to move you unhesitatingly to your duty, cast him from your thoughts and weigh only the evidence of truth which has been laid unfolded to you.

"As I speak, a picture of that terrible night, in the darkness of which the fearful deed was committed, rises before me.

"I see the river's bank in a mist of shadows; I see two forms moving onward, one a monster in human shape, the other that of a child who had never wronged a fellow

creature, a child whose spirit was joyous and whose amiable disposition won every heart.

"It is not with her willing consent that this monster is in her company. He has followed her stealthily until he finds an opportunity to be alone with her, at a time when she is least likely to have friends near her; and in a place where she is entirely at his mercy. He forces his attentions upon her; she repulses him. She turns towards her home; he thrusts her roughly back. Enraged at her obstinacy, he threatens to kill her; his threats are heard by persons returning home along the river's bank, and, until the sound of their footsteps has died away and they are out of hearing, he keeps his victim silent by force.

"Being alone with her once more, he renews his infamous suit. She still repulses him, and then commences a struggle which must have made the angels weep to witness.

"In vain his victim pleads, in vain she struggles; she clings to him and begs for her life in tones that might melt the stoniest heart; but this demon has no heart. He winds his handkerchief round her neck, he beats and tears her, as is proved by the bruises on her poor body. The frightful struggle ends, and the deed is accomplished which condemns the wretch to lifelong torture in this world and to perdition in the next.

"Do not lose sight of this picture and of the evidence which establishes it; and let me warn you not to be diverted by sophistry or specious reasoning from the duty which you are here to perform.

"A most vile and horrible crime has been committed; the life of a child has been cruelly, remorselessly, wickedly sacrificed; her blood calls for justice on her murderer; and upon you rests the solemn responsibility of not permitting the escape of a wretch whose guilt has been proven by evidence so convincing as to leave no room for doubt in the mind of any human being who reasons in accordance with facts.

"I cannot refrain from impressing upon you the stern necessity of allowing no other considerations than those supplied by a calm judgment to guide you in the delivery of your verdict. I should be wanting in my duty if I did not warn you that there have been cases in which the guilty have unfortunately escaped by the raising of side issues which had but the remotest bearing upon the crimes of which they stood accused. It is not by specious logic that a guilty man can be proved innocent. Innocence can only be established by facts, and the facts laid before you are fatal in the conclusion to be deduced from them. Bear these facts in mind, and do not allow your judgment to be clouded even by the highest triumphs of eloquence. I know of no greater reproach from which men of sensibility can suffer than that which proceeds from the consciousness that, in an unguarded moment, they have allowed themselves to be turned aside from

the performance of a solemn duty. May you have no cause for such a reproach! May you have no cause to lament that you have allowed your judgment to be warped by a display of passionate and fevered oratory! Let a sense of justice alone be your guide. Justice we all desire, nothing more and nothing less. The law demands it of you; society demands it of you. The safety of your fellow citizens, the honour of young girls, of your sisters, your daughters, and others dear to you, depend upon your verdict. For if wretches like the prisoner are permitted to walk in our midst, to pursue their savage courses, to live their evil lives, unchecked, life and honour are in fatal peril. The duty you have to perform is a sacred duty; see that you perform it righteously and conscientiously, and bear in mind that the eyes of the Eternal are upon you."

This appeal, delivered with intense earnestness, produced a profound impression. In the faces of the jury was written the fate of Gautran. They looked at each other with stern resolution. Under these circumstances, when the result of the trial appeared to be a foregone conclusion, it might have been expected, the climax of interest having apparently been reached, that the rising of the Advocate to speak for the defence would have attracted but slight attention. It was not so. At that moment the excitement reached a painful pitch, and every person in the court, with the exception of the jury and the judges, leant forward with eager and absorbed expectation.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ADVOCATES DEFENCE THE VERDICT

He spoke in a calm and passionless voice, the clear tones of which had an effect resembling that of a current of cold air through an overheated atmosphere. The audience had been led to expect a display of fevered and passionate oratory; but neither in the Advocate's speech nor in his manner of delivering it was there any fire or passion; it was chiefly remarkable for earnestness and simplicity.

His first words were a panegyric of justice, the right of dispensing which had been placed in mortal hands by a Supreme Power which watched its dispensation with a jealous eye. He claimed for himself that the leading principle of his life, not only in his judicial, but in his private career, had been a desire for justice, in small matters as well as in great, for the lowliest equally with the loftiest of human beings. Before the bar of justice, prince and peasant, the most ignorant and the most highly cultured, the meanest and the most noble in form and feature, were equal. They had been told that justice was demanded from them by law and by society. He would supply a strange omission in this appeal, and he would tell them that, primarily and before every other consideration, the prisoner it was who demanded justice from them.

"That an innocent girl has been done to death," said the Advocate, "is most unfortunately true, and as true that a man who inspires horror is charged with her murder. You have been told that you have but to glance at him to assure yourself of his guilt. These are lamentable words to be used in an argument of accusation. The facts that the victim was of attractive, and that the accused is of repulsive appearance, should not weigh with you, even by a hair's weight, to the prejudice of the prisoner. If it does, I call upon you to remember that justice is blind to external impressions. And moreover, if in your minds you harbour a feeling such as exists outside this court against the degraded creature who stands before you, I charge you to dismiss it.

"All the evidence presented to you which bears directly upon the crime is circumstantial. A murder has been committed no person saw it committed. The last person proved to have been in the murdered girl's company, is Gautran, her lover, as he declares himself to have been.

"And here I would say that I do not expect you to place the slightest credence upon the statements of this man. His unblushing, astonishing falsehoods prove that in him the moral sense is deadened, if indeed it ever existed. But his own statement that, after the manner of his brutal nature, he loved the girl, may be accepted as probable. It has been sufficiently proved that the girl had other lovers, who were passionately enamoured of her. She was left to herself, deprived of the protection and counsel of a devoted woman,

who, unhappily, was absent at the fatal crisis in her life. She was easily persuaded and easily led. Who can divine by what influences she was surrounded, by what temptations she was beset, temptations and influences which may have brought upon her an untimely death?

"Gautran was heard to say, 'I will kill you! I will kill you!' He had threatened her before, and she lived to speak of it to her companions, and to permit him, without break or interruption in their intimacy, to continue to associate with her. What more probable than that this was one of his usual threats in his moments of passion, when he jealously believed that a rival was endeavouring to supplant him in her affections?

"The handkerchief found about her neck belonged to Gautran. The gift of a handkerchief among the lower classes is not uncommon, and it is frequently worn round the neck. Easy, then, for any murderer to pull it tight during the commission of the crime. But apart from this, the handkerchief does not fix the crime of murder upon Gautran or any other accused, for you have had it proved that the girl did not die by strangulation, but by drowning. These are bare facts, and I present them to you in bare form, without needless comment. I do not base my defence upon them, but upon what I am now about to say.

"If in a case of circumstantial evidence there is reasonable cause to believe that the evidence furnished is of insufficient weight to convict; and if on the other side, on the side of the accused, evidence is adduced which directly proves, according to the best judgment we are enabled to form of human action in supreme moments, as to the course it would take and the manner in which it would be displayed, that it is almost beyond the bounds of possibility and nature that the person can have committed the deed, you have no option, unless you yourselves are bent upon judicial murder, than to acquit that person, however vile his character may be, however degraded his career and antecedents. It is evidence of this description which I intend to submit to you at the conclusion of my remarks.

"The character of Gautran has been exposed and laid bare in all its vileness; the minuteness of the evidence is surprising; not the smallest detail has been overlooked or omitted to complete the picture of a ferocious, ignorant, and infamous being. Guilty, he deserves no mercy; innocent, he is not to be condemned because he is vile.

"In the world's history there are records of countries and times in which it was the brutal fashion to bring fourfooted animals to the bar of justice, there solemnly to try them for witchcraft and evil deeds; and you will find upon examination of those records of man's incredible folly and ignorance, that occasionally even these beasts of the earth, pigs and suchlike, have been declared innocent of the crimes of which they have been charged. I

ask no more for Gautran than the principle involved in these trials. Judge him, if you will, as you would an animal, but judge him in accordance with the principles of justice, which neither extenuates nor maliciously and unreasonably condemns.

"The single accusation of the murder of Madeline, a flowergirl, is the point to be determined, and you must not travel beyond it to other crimes and other misdeeds of which Gautran may have been guilty.

"It has been proved that the prisoner is possessed of great strength, that he is violent in his actions, uncontrollable in his passions, and fond of inflicting pain and prolonging it. He has not a redeeming feature in his coarse, animal nature. Thwarted, he makes the person who thwarts him suffer without mercy. An appeal to his humanity would be uselesshe has no humanity; when crossed, he has been seen to behave like a wild beast. All this is in evidence, and has been strongly dwelt upon as proof of guilt. Most important is this evidence, and I charge you not for one moment to lose sight of it.

"I come now to the depiction of the murdered girl, as it has been presented to you. Pretty, admired, gentle in her manners, and poor. Although the fact of a person being poor is no proof of morality, we may accept it in this instance as a proof of the girl's virtue. She was fond of life: her disposition was a happy one; she was in the habit of singing to herself.

"Thus we have the presentment of a young girl whose nature was joyous, and to whom life was sweet.

"Another important piece of evidence must be borne in mind. She possessed strength, greater strength than would have been supposed in a form so slight. This strength she would use to protect herself from injury: it has been proved that she used it successfully to protect herself from insult. In the whole of this case nothing has been more forcibly insisted upon than that she resisted her murder, and that there was a long and horrible struggle in which she received many injuries, wounds, bruises, and scratches, and in which her clothes were rent and torn.

"This struggle, in the natural order of things, could not have been a silent one; accompanying the conflict there must have been outcries, frenzied appeals for mercy, screams of terror and anguish. No witness has been called who heard such sounds, and therefore it must be a fact that the murder must have been committed some time after Gautran's threat, 'I will kill you, I will kill you!' was heard by persons who passed along the bank of the river in the darkness of that fatal night. Time enough for Gautran to have left her; time enough for anotherlover or strangerto meet her; time enough for murder

by another hand than that of the prisoner who stands charged with the commission of the crime.

"I assert, with all the force of my experience of human nature, that it is impossible that Gautran could have committed the deed. There was a long and terrible struggle in which the murdered girl's clothes were torn, in which her face, her hands, her arms, her neck, her sides were bruised and wounded in a hundred cruel ways. Can you for one moment entertain the belief that, in this desperate fight in which two persons were engaged, only one should bear the marks of a contest so horrible? If you bring yourselves to this belief it must be by the aid of prejudice, not of reason. Attend to what follows.

"On the very morning after the murder, within four hours of the body being discovered in the river, Gautran was arrested. He wore the same clothes he had worn for months past, the only clothes he possessed. In these clothes there was not a rent or tear, nor any indication of a recent rent having been mended. How, then, could this man have been engaged in a violent and prolonged hand-to-hand conflict? It is manifestly impossible, opposed to all reasonable conjecture, that his garments could have escaped some injury, however slight, at the hands of a girl to whom life was very sweet, who was strong and capable of resistance, and who saw before her the shadow of an awful fate.

"Picture to yourselves this struggle already so vividly painted, so graphically portrayed. The unhappy girl clung to her destroyer, she clutched his dress, his hands, his body in her wild despair a despair which inspired her with strength beyond her ordinary capacity. And of still greater weight is the fact that there was not to be found on any part of Gautran's body a scratch, a wound, or a bruise of any description.

"What, then, becomes of the evidence of a terrible life and death struggle in which it is said he was engaged? Upon this point alone the entire theory of the prosecution breaks down. The absence from Gautran's clothes and person of any mark or identification of a physical contest is the strongest testimony of his innocence of this ruthless, diabolical crime; and, wretched and degraded as is the spectacle he presents, justice demands from you his acquittal.

"Still one other proof of his innocence remains to be spoken of; I will touch upon it lightly, but it bears a very strange aspect, as though the prosecution were fearful that its introduction would fatally injure their case.

"When Gautran was searched a knife was found upon him the knife, without doubt, with which he inflicted upon the face of a comrade a wound which he will bear to the grave. Throughout the whole of the evidence for the prosecution I waited and looked for the

production of that knife; I expected to see upon it a blood proof of guilt. But it was not produced; no mention has been made of it. Why? Because there is upon its blade no mark of blood.

"Do you believe that a ruffian like Gautran would have refrained from using his knife upon the body of his victim, to shorten the terrible struggle? Even in light quarrels men in his condition of life threaten freely with their knives, and use them recklessly. To suppose that with so swift and sure a means at hand to put an end to the horrible affair, Gautran, in the heat and fury of the time, refrained from availing himself of it, is to suppose a thing contrary and opposed to reason.

"Remember the answer given by one of the witnesses who knows the nature of the man well, when I asked him whether in his passionate moods Gautran would be likely to show coolness or cunning. 'He would have no time to think; he would be carried away by his passion.' His is the nature of a brute, governed by brute laws. You are here to try, not the prisoner's general character, not his repulsive appearance, not his brutish nature, but a charge of murder of which he is accused, and of which, in the clear light of human motive and action, it is impossible he can be guilty."

The Advocate's speech, of which this is but a brief and imperfect summary, occupied seven hours, and was delivered throughout with a cold impressive earnestness and with an absence of passion which gradually and effectually turned the current which had set so fatally against the prisoner. The disgust and abhorrence he inspired were in no wise modified, but the Advocate had instilled into the minds of his auditors the strongest doubts of Gautran's guilt.

Two witnesses were called, one a surgeon of eminence, the other a nurse in an hospital. They deposed that there were no marks of an encounter upon the prisoner's person, that upon his skin was no abrasion, that his clothes exhibited no traces of recent tear or repair, and that it was scarcely possible he could have been engaged in a violent personal struggle.

Upon the conclusion of this evidence, which crossexamination did not shake, the jury asked that Gautran should be examined by independent experts. This was done by thoroughly qualified men, whose evidence strengthened that of the witnesses for the defence. The jury asked, also, that the knife found upon Gautran should be produced. It was brought into court, and carefully examined, and it was found that its blade was entirely free from bloodstain.

The jury, astounded at the turn the affair had taken, listened attentively to the speech of the judge, who dwelt with great care upon every feature in the case. The court sat late to give its decision, and when the verdict was pronounced, Gautran was a free man.

Free, to enjoy the sunlight, and the seasons as they passed; free, to continue his life of crime and shame; free, to murder again!

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