The Human Comedy
Philosophical Studies II

By

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THE ALKAHEST
(THE HOUSE OF CLAES)

CHAPTER I

There is a house at Douai in the rue de Paris, whose aspect, interior arrangements, and details have preserved, to a greater degree than those of other domiciles, the characteristics of the old Flemish buildings, so naively adapted to the patriarchal manners and customs of that excellent land. Before describing this house it may be well, in the interest of other writers, to explain the necessity for such didactic preliminaries,—since they have roused a protest from certain ignorant and voracious readers who want emotions without undergoing the generating process, the flower without the seed, the child without gestation. Is Art supposed to have higher powers than Nature?

The events of human existence, whether public or private, are so closely allied to architecture that the majority of observers can reconstruct nations and individuals, in their habits and ways of life, from the remains of public monuments or the relics of a home. Archaeology is to social nature what comparative anatomy is to organized nature. A mosaic tells the tale of a society, as the skeleton of an ichthyosaurus opens up a creative epoch. All things are linked together, and all are therefore deducible. Causes suggest effects, effects lead back to causes. Science resuscitates even the warts of the past ages.

Hence the keen interest inspired by an architectural description, provided the imagination of the writer does not distort essential facts. The mind is enabled by rigid deduction to link it with the past; and to man, the past is singularly like the future; tell him what has been, and you seldom fail to show him what will be. It is rare indeed that the picture of a locality where lives are lived does not recall to some their dawning hopes, to others their wasted faith. The comparison between a present which disappoints man’s secret wishes and a future which may realize them, is an inexhaustible source of sadness or of placid content.

Thus, it is almost impossible not to feel a certain tender sensibility over a picture of Flemish life, if the accessories are clearly given. Why so? Perhaps, among other forms of existence, it offers the best conclusion to man’s uncertainties. It has its social festivities, its family ties, and the easy affluence which proves the stability of its comfortable well-being; it does not lack repose amounting almost to beatitude; but, above all, it expresses the calm

monotony of a frankly sensuous happiness, where enjoyment stifles desire by anticipating it. Whatever value a passionate soul may attach to the tumultuous life of feeling, it never sees without emotion the symbols of this Flemish nature, where the throbbings of the heart are so well regulated that superficial minds deny the heart's existence. The crowd prefers the abnormal force which overflows to that which moves with steady persistence. The world has neither time nor patience to realize the immense power concealed beneath an appearance of uniformity. Therefore, to impress this multitude carried away on the current of existence, passion, like a great artist, is compelled to go beyond the mark, to exaggerate, as did Michael Angelo, Bianca Capello, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, Beethoven, and Paganini. Far-seeing minds alone disapprove such excess, and respect only the energy represented by a finished execution whose perfect quiet charms superior men. The life of this essentially thrifty people amply fulfils the conditions of happiness which the masses desire as the lot of the average citizen.

A refined materialism is stamped on all the habits of Flemish life. English comfort is harsh in tone and arid in color; whereas the old-fashioned Flemish interiors rejoice the eye with their mellow tints, and the feelings with their genuine heartiness. There, work implies no weariness, and the pipe is a happy adaptation of Neapolitan "far-niente." Thence comes the peaceful sentiment in Art (its most essential condition), patience, and the element which renders its creations durable, namely, conscience. Indeed, the Flemish character lies in the two words, patience and conscience; words which seem at first to exclude the richness of poetic light and shade, and to make the manners and customs of the country as flat as its vast plains, as cold as its foggy skies. And yet it is not so. Civilization has brought her power to bear, and has modified all things, even the effects of climate. If we observe attentively the productions of various parts of the globe, we are surprised to find that the prevailing tints from the temperate zones are gray or fawn, while the more brilliant colors belong to the products of the hotter climates. The manners and customs of a country must naturally conform to this law of nature.

Flanders, which in former times was essentially dun-colored and monotonous in tint, learned the means of irradiating its smoky atmosphere through its political vicissitudes, which brought it under the successive dominion of Burgundy, Spain, and France, and threw it into fraternal relations with Germany and Holland. From Spain it acquired the luxury of scarlet dyes and shimmering satins, tapestries of vigorous design, plumes, mandolins, and courtly bearing. In exchange for its linen and its laces, it brought from Venice that fairy glass-ware in which wine sparkles and seems the mellower. From Austria it learned the ponderous diplomacy which, to use a popular saying, takes three steps backward to one forward; while its trade with India poured into it the grotesque designs of China and the marvels of Japan.

And yet, in spite of its patience in gathering such treasures, its tenacity in parting with no possession once gained, its endurance of all things, Flanders was considered nothing more than the general storehouse of Europe, until the day when the discovery of tobacco brought into one smoky outline the scattered features of its national physiognomy. Thenceforth, and notwithstanding the parcelling out of their territory, the Flemings became a people homogeneous through their pipes and beer.

After assimilating, by constant sober regulation of conduct, the products and the ideas of its masters and its neighbors, this country of Flanders, by nature so tame and devoid of poetry, worked out for itself an original existence, with characteristic manners and customs which bear no signs of servile imitation. Art stripped off its ideality and produced form alone. We may seek in vain for plastic grace, the swing of comedy, dramatic action, musical genius, or the bold flight of ode and epic. On the other hand, the people are fertile in discoveries, and trained to scientific discussions which demand time and the midnight oil. All things bear the ear-mark of temporal enjoyment. There men look exclusively to the thing that is: their thoughts are so scrupulously bent on supplying the wants of this life that they have never risen, in any direction, above the level of this present earth. The sole idea they have ever conceived of the future is that of a thrifty, prosaic statecraft: their revolutionary vigor came from a domestic desire to live as they liked, with their elbows on the table, and to take their ease under the projecting roofs of their own porches.

The consciousness of well-being and the spirit of independence which comes of prosperity begot in Flanders, sooner than elsewhere, that craving for liberty which, later, permeated all Europe. Thus the compactness of their ideas, and the tenacity which education grafted on their nature made the Flemish people a formidable body of men in the defence of their rights. Among them nothing is half-done,—neither houses, furniture, dikes, husbandry, nor revolutions; and they hold a monopoly of all that they undertake. The manufacture of linen, and that of lace, a work of patient agriculture and still more patient industry, are hereditary like their family fortunes. If we were asked to show in human form the purest specimen of solid stability, we could do no better than point to a portrait of some old burgomaster, capable, as was proved again and again, of dying in a commonplace way, and without the incitements of glory, for the welfare of his Free-town.

Yet we shall find a tender and poetic side to this patriarchal life, which will come naturally to the surface in the description of an ancient house which, at the period when this history begins, was one of the last in Douai to preserve the old-time characteristics of Flemish life.

Of all the towns in the Departement du Nord, Douai is, alas, the most modernized: there the innovating spirit has made the greatest strides, and the love of social progress is the most diffused. There the old buildings are daily disappearing, and the manners and customs of a venerable past are being rapidly obliterated. Parisian ideas and fashions and modes of life now rule the day, and soon nothing will be left of that ancient Flemish life but the warmth of its hospitality, its traditional Spanish courtesy, and the wealth and cleanliness of Holland. Mansions of white stone are replacing the old brick buildings, and the cosy comfort of Batavian interiors is fast yielding before the capricious elegance of Parisian novelties.

The house in which the events of this history occurred stands at about the middle of the rue de Paris, and has been known at Douai for more than two centuries as the House of Claes. The Van Claes were formerly one of the great families of craftsmen to whom, in various lines of production, the Netherlands owed a commercial supremacy which it has never lost. For a long period of time the Claes lived at Ghent, and were, from generation to generation, the syndics of the powerful Guild of Weavers. When the great city revolted under Charles V., who tried to suppress its privileges, the head of the Claes family was so deeply compromised in the rebellion that, foreseeing a catastrophe and bound to share the fate of his associates, he secretly sent wife, children, and property to France before the Emperor invested the town. The syndic’s forebodings were justified. Together with other burghers who were excluded from the capitulation, he was hanged as a rebel, though he was, in reality, the defender of the liberties of Ghent.

The death of Claes and his associates bore fruit. Their needless execution cost the King of Spain the greater part of his possessions in the Netherlands. Of all the seed sown in the earth, the blood of martyrs gives the quickest harvest. When Philip the Second, who punished revolt through two generations, stretched his iron sceptre over Douai, the Claes preserved their great wealth by allying themselves in marriage with the very noble family of Molina, whose elder branch, then poor, thus became rich enough to buy the county of Nourho which they had long held titularly in the kingdom of Leon.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, after vicissitudes which are of no interest to our present purpose, the family of Claes was represented at Douai in the person of Monsieur Balthazar Claes-Molina, Comte de Nourho, who preferred to be called simply Balthazar Claes. Of the immense fortune amassed by his ancestors, who had kept in motion over a thousand looms, there remained to him some fifteen thousand francs a year from landed property in the arrondissement of Douai, and the house in the rue de Paris, whose furniture in itself was a fortune. As to the family possessions in Leon, they had been in litigation between the Molinas of Douai and the branch of the

family which remained in Spain. The Molinas of Leon won the domain and assumed the title of Comtes de Nourho, though the Claes alone had a legal right to it. But the pride of a Belgian burgher was superior to the haughty arrogance of Castile: after the civil rights were instituted, Balthazar Claes cast aside the ragged robes of his Spanish nobility for his more illustrious descent from the Ghent martyr.

The patriotic sentiment was so strongly developed in the families exiled under Charles V. that, to the very close of the eighteenth century, the Claes remained faithful to the manners and customs and traditions of their ancestors. They married into none but the purest burgher families, and required a certain number of aldermen and burgomasters in the pedigree of every bride-elect before admitting her to the family. They sought their wives in Bruges or Ghent, in Liege or in Holland; so that the time-honored domestic customs might be perpetuated around their hearthstones. This social group became more and more restricted, until, at the close of the last century, it mustered only some seven or eight families of the parliamentary nobility, whose manners and flowing robes of office and magisterial gravity (partly Spanish) harmonized well with the habits of their life.

The inhabitants of Douai held the family in a religious esteem that was well-nigh superstition. The sturdy honesty, the untainted loyalty of the Claes, their unfailing decorum of manners and conduct, made them the objects of a reverence which found expression in the name,—the House of Claes. The whole spirit of ancient Flanders breathed in that mansion, which afforded to the lovers of burgher antiquities a type of the modest houses which the wealthy craftsmen of the Middle Ages constructed for their homes.

The chief ornament of the facade was an oaken door, in two sections, studded with nails driven in the pattern of a quineunx, in the centre of which the Claes pride had carved a pair of shuttles. The recess of the doorway, which was built of freestone, was topped by a pointed arch bearing a little shrine surmounted by a cross, in which was a statuette of Sainte-Genevieve plying her distaff. Though time had left its mark upon the delicate workmanship of portal and shrine, the extreme care taken of it by the servants of the house allowed the passers-by to note all its details.

The casing of the door, formed by fluted pilasters, was dark gray in color, and so highly polished that it shone as if varnished. On either side of the doorway, on the ground-floor, were two windows, which resembled all the other windows of the house. The casing of white stone ended below the sill in a richly carved shell, and rose above the window in an arch, supported at its apex by the head-piece of a cross, which divided the glass sashes in four unequal parts; for the transversal bar, placed at the height of that in a Latin cross, made the lower sashes of the window nearly double the height of the

upper, the latter rounding at the sides into the arch. The coping of the arch was ornamented with three rows of brick, placed one above the other, the bricks alternately projecting or retreating to the depth of an inch, giving the effect of a Greek moulding. The glass panes, which were small and diamond-shaped, were set in very slender leading, painted red. The walls of the house, of brick jointed with white mortar, were braced at regular distances, and at the angles of the house, by stone courses.

The first floor was pierced by five windows, the second by three, while the attic had only one large circular opening in five divisions, surrounded by a freestone moulding and placed in the centre of the triangular pediment defined by the gable-roof, like the rose-window of a cathedral. At the peak was a vane in the shape of a weaver’s shuttle threaded with flax. Both sides of the large triangular pediment which formed the wall of the gable were dentelled squarely into something like steps, as low down as the string-course of the upper floor, where the rain from the roof fell to right and left of the house through the jaws of a fantastic gargoyle. A freestone foundation projected like a step at the base of the house; and on either side of the entrance, between the two windows, was a trap-door, clamped by heavy iron bands, through which the cellars were entered,—a last vestige of ancient usages.

From the time the house was built, this facade had been carefully cleaned twice a year. If a little mortar fell from between the bricks, the crack was instantly filled up. The sashes, the sills, the copings, were dusted oftener than the most precious sculptures in the Louvre. The front of the house bore no signs of decay; notwithstanding the deepened color which age had given to the bricks, it was as well preserved as a choice old picture, or some rare book cherished by an amateur, which would be ever new were it not for the blistering of our climate and the effect of gases, whose pernicious breath threatens our own health.

The cloudy skies and humid atmosphere of Flanders, and the shadows produced by the narrowness of the street, sometimes diminished the brilliancy which the old house derived from its cleanliness; moreover, the very care bestowed upon it made it rather sad and chilling to the eye. A poet might have wished some leafage about the shrine, a little moss in the crevices of the freestone, a break in the even courses of the brick; he would have longed for a swallow to build her nest in the red coping that roofed the arches of the windows. The precise and immaculate air of this facade, a little worn by perpetual rubbing, gave the house a tone of severe propriety and estimable decency which would have driven a romanticist out of the neighborhood, had he happened to take lodgings over the way.

When a visitor had pulled the braided iron wire bell-cord which hung from the top of the pilaster of the doorway, and the servant-woman, coming from

within, had admitted him through the side of the double-door in which was a small grated loop-hole, that half of the door escaped from her hand and swung back by its own weight with a solemn, ponderous sound that echoed along the roof of a wide paved archway and through the depths of the house, as though the door had been of iron. This archway, painted to resemble marble, always clean and daily sprinkled with fresh sand, led into a large court-yard paved with smooth square stones of a greenish color. On the left were the linen-rooms, kitchens, and servants' hall; to the right, the wood-house, coal-house, and offices, whose doors, walls, and windows were decorated with designs kept exquisitely clean. The daylight, threading its way between four red walls chequered with white lines, caught rosy tints and reflections which gave a mysterious grace and fantastic appearance to faces, and even to trifling details.

A second house, exactly like the building on the street, and called in Flanders the "back-quarter," stood at the farther end of the court-yard, and was used exclusively as the family dwelling. The first room on the ground-floor was a parlor, lighted by two windows on the court-yard, and two more looking out upon a garden which was of the same size as the house. Two glass doors, placed exactly opposite to each other, led at one end of the room to the garden, at the other to the court-yard, and were in line with the archway and the street door; so that a visitor entering the latter could see through to the greenery which draped the lower end of the garden. The front building, which was reserved for receptions and the lodging-rooms of guests, held many objects of art and accumulated wealth, but none of them equalled in the eyes of a Claes, nor indeed in the judgment of a connoisseur, the treasures contained in the parlor, where for over two centuries the family life had glided on.

The Claes who died for the liberties of Ghent, and who might in these days be thought a mere ordinary craftsman if the historian omitted to say that he possessed over forty thousand silver marks, obtained by the manufacture of sail-cloth for the all-powerful Venetian navy,—this Claes had a friend in the famous sculptor in wood, Van Huysum of Bruges. The artist had dipped many a time into the purse of the rich craftsman. Some time before the rebellion of the men of Ghent, Van Huysum, grown rich himself, had secretly carved for his friend a wall-decoration in ebony, representing the chief scenes in the life of Van Artevelde,—that brewer of Ghent who, for a brief hour, was King of Flanders. This wall-covering, of which there were no less than sixty panels, contained about fourteen hundred principal figures, and was held to be Van Huysum's masterpiece. The officer appointed to guard the burghers whom Charles V. determined to hang when he re-entered his native town, proposed, it is said, to Van Claes to let him escape if he would give him Van Huysum's great work; but the weaver had already despatched it to Douai.

The parlor, whose walls were entirely panelled with this carving, which

Van Huysum, out of regard for the martyr's memory, came to Douai to frame in wood painted in lapis-lazuli with threads of gold, is therefore the most complete work of this master, whose least carvings now sell for nearly their weight in gold. Hanging over the fire-place, Van Claes the martyr, painted by Titian in his robes as president of the Court of Parchons, still seemed the head of the family, who venerated him as their greatest man. The chimney-piece, originally in stone with a very high mantle-shelf, had been made over in marble during the last century; on it now stood an old clock and two candlesticks with five twisted branches, in bad taste, but of solid silver. The four windows were draped by wide curtains of red damask with a flowered black design, lined with white silk; the furniture, covered with the same material, had been renovated in the time of Louis XIV. The floor, evidently modern, was laid in large squares of white wood bordered with strips of oak. The ceiling, formed of many oval panels, in each of which Van Huysum had carved a grotesque mask, had been respected and allowed to keep the brown tones of the native Dutch oak.

In the four corners of this parlor were truncated columns, supporting candelabra exactly like those on the mantle-shelf; and a round table stood in the middle of the room. Along the walls card-tables were symmetrically placed. On two gilded consoles with marble slabs there stood, at the period when this history begins, two glass globes filled with water, in which, above a bed of sand and shells, red and gold and silver fish were swimming about. The room was both brilliant and sombre. The ceiling necessarily absorbed the light and reflected none. Although on the garden side all was bright and glowing, and the sunshine danced upon the ebony carvings, the windows on the court-yard admitted so little light that the gold threads in the lapis-lazuli scarcely glittered on the opposite wall. This parlor, which could be gorgeous on a fine day, was usually, under the Flemish skies, filled with soft shadows and melancholy russet tones, like those shed by the sun on the tree-tops of the forests in autumn.

It is unnecessary to continue this description of the House of Claes, in other parts of which many scenes of this history will occur: at present, it is enough to make known its general arrangement.

CHAPTER II

Towards the end of August, 1812, on a Sunday evening after vespers, a woman was sitting in a deep armchair placed before one of the windows looking out upon the garden. The sun's rays fell obliquely upon the house and

athwart the parlor, breaking into fantastic lights on the carved panellings of the wall, and wrapping the woman in a crimson halo projected through the damask curtains which draped the window. Even an ordinary painter, had he sketched this woman at this particular moment, would assuredly have produced a striking picture of a head that was full of pain and melancholy. The attitude of the body, and that of the feet stretched out before her, showed the prostration of one who loses consciousness of physical being in the concentration of powers absorbed in a fixed idea: she was following its gleams in the far future, just as sometimes on the shores of the sea, we gaze at a ray of sunlight which pierces the clouds and draws a luminous line to the horizon.

The hands of this woman hung nerveless outside the arms of her chair, and her head, as if too heavy to hold up, lay back upon its cushions. A dress of white cambric, very full and flowing, hindered any judgment as to the proportions of her figure, and the bust was concealed by the folds of a scarf crossed on the bosom and negligently knotted. If the light had not thrown into relief her face, which she seemed to show in preference to the rest of her person, it would still have been impossible to escape riveting the attention exclusively upon it. Its expression of stupefaction, which was cold and rigid despite hot tears that were rolling from her eyes, would have struck the most thoughtless mind. Nothing is more terrible to behold than excessive grief that is rarely allowed to break forth, of which traces were left on this woman’s face like lava congealed about a crater. She might have been a dying mother compelled to leave her children in abysmal depths of wretchedness, unable to bequeath them to any human protector.

The countenance of this lady, then about forty years of age and not nearly so far from handsome as she had been in her youth, bore none of the characteristics of a Flemish woman. Her thick black hair fell in heavy curls upon her shoulders and about her cheeks. The forehead, very prominent, and narrow at the temples, was yellow in tint, but beneath it sparkled two black eyes that were capable of emitting flames. Her face, altogether Spanish, dark skinned, with little color and pitted by the small-pox, attracted the eye by the beauty of its oval, whose outline, though slightly impaired by time, preserved a finished elegance and dignity, and regained at times its full perfection when some effort of the soul restored its pristine purity. The most noticeable feature in this strong face was the nose, aquiline as the beak of an eagle, and so sharply curved at the middle as to give the idea of an interior malformation; yet there was an air of indescribable delicacy about it, and the partition between the nostrils was so thin that a rosy light shone through it. Though the lips, which were large and curved, betrayed the pride of noble birth, their expression was one of kindliness and natural courtesy.

The beauty of this vigorous yet feminine face might indeed be questioned,

but the face itself commanded attention. Short, deformed, and lame, this woman remained all the longer unmarried because the world obstinately refused to credit her with gifts of mind. Yet there were men who were deeply stirred by the passionate ardor of that face and its tokens of ineffable tenderness, and who remained under a charm that was seemingly irreconcilable with such personal defects.

She was very like her grandfather, the Duke of Casa-Real, a grandee of Spain. At this moment, when we first see her, the charm which in earlier days despotically grasped the soul of poets and lovers of poesy now emanated from that head with greater vigor than at any former period of her life, spending itself, as it were, upon the void, and expressing a nature of all-powerful fascination over men, though it was at the same time powerless over destiny.

When her eyes turned from the glass globes, where they were gazing at the fish they saw not, she raised them with a despairing action, as if to invoke the skies. Her sufferings seemed of a kind that are told to God alone. The silence was unbroken save for the chirp of crickets and the shrill whirr of a few locusts, coming from the little garden then hotter than an oven, and the dull sound of silver and plates, and the moving of chairs in the adjoining room, where a servant was preparing to serve the dinner.

At this moment, the distressed woman roused herself from her abstraction and listened attentively; she took her handkerchief, wiped away her tears, attempted to smile, and so resolutely effaced the expression of pain that was stamped on every feature that she presently seemed in the state of happy indifference which comes with a life exempt from care. Whether it were that the habit of living in this house to which infirmities confined her enabled her to perceive certain natural effects that are imperceptible to the senses of others, but which persons under the influence of excessive feeling are keen to discover, or whether Nature, in compensation for her physical defects, had given her more delicate sensations than better organized beings,—it is certain that this woman had heard the steps of a man in a gallery built above the kitchens and the servants' hall, by which the front house communicated with the "back-quarter." The steps grew more distinct. Soon, without possessing the power of this ardent creature to abolish space and meet her other self, even a stranger would have heard the foot-fall of a man upon the staircase which led down from the gallery to the parlor.

The sound of that step would have startled the most heedless being into thought; it was impossible to hear it coolly. A precipitate, headlong step produces fear. When a man springs forward and cries, "Fire!" his feet speak as loudly as his voice. If this be so, then a contrary gait ought not to cause less powerful emotion. The slow approach, the dragging step of the coming man might have irritated an unreflecting spectator; but an observer, or a nervous

person, would undoubtedly have felt something akin to terror at the measured tread of feet that seemed devoid of life, and under which the stairs creaked loudly, as though two iron weights were striking them alternately. The mind recognized at once either the heavy, undecided step of an old man or the majestic tread of a great thinker bearing the worlds with him.

When the man had reached the lowest stair, and had planted both feet upon the tiled floor with a hesitating, uncertain movement, he stood still for a moment on the wide landing which led on one side to the servants' hall, and on the other to the parlor through a door concealed in the panelling of that room,—as was another door, leading from the parlor to the dining-room. At this moment a slight shudder, like the sensation caused by an electric spark, shook the woman seated in the armchair; then a soft smile brightened her lips, and her face, moved by the expectation of a pleasure, shone like that of an Italian Madonna. She suddenly gained strength to drive her terrors back into the depths of her heart. Then she turned her face to the panel of the wall which she knew was about to open, and which in fact was now pushed in with such brusque violence that the poor woman herself seemed jarred by the shock.

Balthazar Claes suddenly appeared, made a few steps forward, did not look at the woman, or if he looked at her did not see her, and stood erect in the middle of the parlor, leaning his half-bowed head on his right hand. A sharp pang to which the woman could not accustom herself, although it was daily renewed, wrung her heart, dispelled her smile, contracted the sallow forehead between the eyebrows, indenting that line which the frequent expression of excessive feeling scores so deeply; her eyes filled with tears, but she wiped them quickly as she looked at Balthazar.

It was impossible not to be deeply impressed by this head of the family of Claes. When young, he must have resembled the noble family martyr who had threatened to be another Artevelde to Charles V.; but as he stood there at this moment, he seemed over sixty years of age, though he was only fifty; and this premature old age had destroyed the honorable likeness. His tall figure was slightly bent,—either because his labors, whatever they were, obliged him to stoop, or that the spinal column was curved by the weight of his head. He had a broad chest and square shoulders, but the lower parts of his body were lank and wasted, though nervous; and this discrepancy in a physical organization evidently once perfect puzzled the mind which endeavored to explain this anomalous figure by some possible singularities of the man's life.

His thick blond hair, ill cared-for, fell over his shoulders in the Dutch fashion, and its very disorder was in keeping with the general eccentricity of his person. His broad brow showed certain protuberances which Gall identifies with poetic genius. His clear and full blue eyes had the brusque vivacity which may be noticed in searchers for occult causes. The nose, probably perfect in

early life, was now elongated, and the nostrils seemed to have gradually opened wider from an involuntary tension of the olfactory muscles. The cheek-bones were very prominent, which made the cheeks themselves, already withered, seem more sunken; his mouth, full of sweetness, was squeezed in between the nose and a short chin, which projected sharply. The shape of the face, however, was long rather than oval, and the scientific doctrine which sees in every human face a likeness to an animal would have found its confirmation in that of Balthazar Claes, which bore a strong resemblance to a horse's head. The skin clung closely to the bones, as though some inward fire were incessantly drying its juices. Sometimes, when he gazed into space, as if to see the realization of his hopes, it almost seemed as though the flames that devoured his soul were issuing from his nostrils.

The inspired feelings that animate great men shone forth on the pale face furrowed with wrinkles, on the brow haggard with care like that of an old monarch, but above all they gleamed in the sparkling eye, whose fires were fed by chastity imposed by the tyranny of ideas and by the inward consecration of a great intellect. The cavernous eyes seemed to have sunk in their orbits through midnight vigils and the terrible reaction of hopes destroyed, yet ceaselessly reborn. The zealous fanaticism inspired by an art or a science was evident in this man; it betrayed itself in the strange, persistent abstraction of his mind expressed by his dress and bearing, which were in keeping with the anomalous peculiarities of his person.

His large, hairy hands were dirty, and the nails, which were very long, had deep black lines at their extremities. His shoes were not cleaned and the shoe-strings were missing. Of all that Flemish household, the master alone took the strange liberty of being slovenly. His black cloth trousers were covered with stains, his waistcoat was unbuttoned, his cravat awry, his greenish coat ripped at the seams,—completing an array of signs, great and small, which in any other man would have betokened a poverty begotten of vice, but which in Balthazar Claes was the negligence of genius.

Vice and Genius too often produce the same effects; and this misleads the common mind. What is genius but a long excess which squanders time and wealth and physical powers, and leads more rapidly to a hospital than the worst of passions? Men even seem to have more respect for vices than for genius, since to the latter they refuse credit. The profits accruing from the hidden labors of the brain are so remote that the social world fears to square accounts with the man of learning in his lifetime, preferring to get rid of its obligations by not forgiving his misfortunes or his poverty.

If, in spite of this inveterate forgetfulness of the present, Balthazar Claes had abandoned his mysterious abstractions, if some sweet and companionable meaning had revisited that thoughtful countenance, if the fixed eyes had lost

their rigid strain and shone with feeling, if he had ever looked humanly about him and returned to the real life of common things, it would indeed have been difficult not to do involuntary homage to the winning beauty of his face and the gracious soul that would then have shone from it. As it was, all who looked at him regretted that the man belonged no more to the world at large, and said to one another: “He must have been very handsome in his youth.” A vulgar error! Never was Balthazar Claes’s appearance more poetic than at this moment. Lavater, had he seen him, would fain have studied that head so full of patience, of Flemish loyalty, and pure morality,—where all was broad and noble, and passion seemed calm because it was strong.

The conduct of this man could not be otherwise than pure; his word was sacred, his friendships seemed undeviating, his self-devotedness complete: and yet the will to employ those qualities in patriotic service, for the world or for the family, was directed, fatally, elsewhere. This citizen, bound to guard the welfare of a household, to manage property, to guide his children towards a noble future, was living outside the line of his duty and his affections, in communion with an attendant spirit. A priest might have thought him inspired by the word of God; an artist would have hailed him as a great master; an enthusiast would have taken him for a seer of the Swedenborgian faith.

At the present moment, the dilapidated, uncouth, and ruined clothes that he wore contrasted strangely with the graceful elegance of the woman who was sadly admiring him. Deformed persons who have intellect, or nobility of soul, show an exquisite taste in their apparel. Either they dress simply, convinced that their charm is wholly moral, or they make others forget their imperfections by an elegance of detail which diverts the eye and occupies the mind. Not only did this woman possess a noble soul, but she loved Balthazar Claes with that instinct of the woman which gives a foretaste of the communion of angels. Brought up in one of the most illustrious families of Belgium, she would have learned good taste had she not possessed it; and now, taught by the desire of constantly pleasing the man she loved, she knew how to clothe herself admirably, and without producing incongruity between her elegance and the defects of her conformation. The bust, however, was defective in the shoulders only, one of which was noticeably much larger than the other.

She looked out of the window into the court-yard, then towards the garden, as if to make sure she was alone with Balthazar, and presently said, in a gentle voice and with a look full of a Flemish woman’s submissiveness,—for between these two love had long since driven out the pride of her Spanish nature:—

“Balthazar, are you so very busy? this is the thirty-third Sunday since you have been to mass or vespers.”

Claes did not answer; his wife bowed her head, clasped her hands, and waited: she knew that his silence meant neither contempt nor indifference, only a tyrannous preoccupation. Balthazar was one of those beings who preserve deep in their souls and after long years all their youthful delicacy of feeling; he would have thought it criminal to wound by so much as a word a woman weighed down by the sense of physical disfigurement. No man knew better than he that a look, a word, suffices to blot out years of happiness, and is the more cruel because it contrasts with the unfailing tenderness of the past: our nature leads us to suffer more from one discord in our happiness than pleasure coming in the midst of trouble can bring us joy.

Presently Balthazar appeared to waken; he looked quickly about him, and said,—

“Vespers? Ah, yes! the children are at vespers.”

He made a few steps forward, and looked into the garden, where magnificent tulips were growing on all sides; then he suddenly stopped short as if brought up against a wall, and cried out,—

“Why should they not combine within a given time?”

“Is he going mad?” thought the wife, much terrified.

To give greater interest to the present scene, which was called forth by the situation of their affairs, it is absolutely necessary to glance back at the past lives of Balthazar Claes and the granddaughter of the Duke of Casa-Real.

Towards the year 1783, Monsieur Balthazar Claes-Molina de Nourho, then twenty-two years of age, was what is called in France a fine man. He came to finish his education in Paris, where he acquired excellent manners in the society of Madame d’Egmont, Count Horn, the Prince of Aremberg, the Spanish ambassador, Helvetius, and other Frenchmen originally from Belgium, or coming lately thence, whose birth or wealth won them admittance among the great seigneurs who at that time gave the tone to social life. Young Claes found several relations and friends ready to launch him into the great world at the very moment when that world was about to fall. Like other young men, he was at first more attracted by glory and science than by the vanities of life. He frequented the society of scientific men, particularly Lavoisier, who at that time was better known to the world for his enormous fortune as a “fermier-general” than for his discoveries in chemistry,—though later the great chemist was to eclipse the man of wealth.

Balthazar grew enamored of the science which Lavoisier cultivated, and became his devoted disciple; but he was young, and handsome as Helvetius, and before long the Parisian women taught him to distil wit and love exclusively. Though he had studied chemistry with such ardor that Lavoisier

commended him, he deserted science and his master for those mistresses of fashion and good taste from whom young men take finishing lessons in knowledge of life, and learn the usages of good society, which in Europe forms, as it were, one family.

The intoxicating dream of social success lasted but a short time. Balthazar left Paris, weary of a hollow existence which suited neither his ardent soul nor his loving heart. Domestic life, so calm, so tender, which the very name of Flanders recalled to him, seemed far more fitted to his character and to the aspirations of his heart. No gilded Parisian salon had effaced from his mind the harmonies of the panelled parlor and the little garden where his happy childhood had slipped away. A man must needs be without a home to remain in Paris,—Paris, the city of cosmopolitans, of men who wed the world, and clasp her with the arms of Science, Art, or Power.

The son of Flanders came back to Douai, like La Fontaine's pigeon to its nest; he wept with joy as he re-entered the town on the day of the Gayant procession,—Gayant, the superstitious luck of Douai, the glory of Flemish traditions, introduced there at the time the Claes family had emigrated from Ghent. The death of Balthazar's father and mother had left the old mansion deserted, and the young man was occupied for a time in settling its affairs. His first grief over, he wished to marry; he needed the domestic happiness whose every religious aspect had fastened upon his mind. He even followed the family custom of seeking a wife in Ghent, or at Bruges, or Antwerp; but it happened that no woman whom he met there suited him. Undoubtedly, he had certain peculiar ideas as to marriage; from his youth he had been accused of never following the beaten track.

One day, at the house of a relation in Ghent, he heard a young lady, then living in Brussels, spoken of in a manner which gave rise to a long discussion. Some said that the beauty of Mademoiselle de Temninck was destroyed by the imperfections of her figure; others declared that she was perfect in spite of her defects. Balthazar's old cousin, at whose house the discussion took place, assured his guests that, handsome or not, she had a soul that would make him marry her were he a marrying man; and he told how she had lately renounced her share of her parents' property to enable her brother to make a marriage worthy of his name; thus preferring his happiness to her own, and sacrificing her future to his interests,—for it was not to be supposed that Mademoiselle de Temninck would marry late in life and without property when, young and wealthy, she had met with no aspirant.

A few days later, Balthazar Claes made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de Temninck; with whom he fell deeply in love. At first, Josephine de Temninck thought herself the object of a mere caprice, and refused to listen to Monsieur Claes; but passion is contagious; and to a poor girl who was lame

and ill-made, the sense of inspiring love in a young and handsome man carries with it such strong seduction that she finally consented to allow him to woo her.

It would need a volume to paint the love of a young girl humbly submissive to the verdict of a world that calls her plain, while she feels within herself the irresistible charm which comes of sensibility and true feeling. It involves fierce jealousy of happiness, freaks of cruel vengeance against some fancied rival who wins a glance,—emotions, terrors, unknown to the majority of women, and which ought, therefore, to be more than indicated. The doubt, the dramatic doubt of love, is the keynote of this analysis, where certain souls will find once more the lost, but unforgotten, poetry of their early struggles; the passionate exaltations of the heart which the face must not betray; the fear that we may not be understood, and the boundless joy of being so; the hesitations of the soul which recoils upon itself, and the magnetic propulsions which give to the eyes an infinitude of shades; the promptings to suicide caused by a word, dispelled by an intonation; trembling glances which veil an inward daring; sudden desires to speak and act that are paralyzed by their own violence; the secret eloquence of common phrases spoken in a quivering voice; the mysterious workings of that pristine modesty of soul and that divine discernment which lead to hidden generosities, and give so exquisite a flavor to silent devotion; in short, all the loveliness of young love, and the weaknesses of its power.

Mademoiselle Josephine de Temninck was coquettish from nobility of soul. The sense of her obvious imperfections made her as difficult to win as the handsomest of women. The fear of some day displeasing the eye roused her pride, destroyed her trustfulness, and gave her the courage to hide in the depths of her heart that dawning happiness which other women delight in making known by their manners,—wearing it proudly, like a coronet. The more love urged her towards Balthazar, the less she dared to express her feelings. The glance, the gesture, the question and answer as it were of a pretty woman, so flattering to the man she loves, would they not be in her case mere humiliating speculation? A beautiful woman can be her natural self,—the world overlooks her little follies or her clumsiness; whereas a single criticising glance checks the noblest expression on the lips of an ugly woman, adds to the ill-grace of her gesture, gives timidity to her eyes and awkwardness to her whole bearing. She knows too well that to her alone the world condones no faults; she is denied the right to repair them; indeed, the chance to do so is never given. This necessity of being perfect and on her guard at every moment, must surely chill her faculties and numb their exercise? Such a woman can exist only in an atmosphere of angelic forbearance. Where are the hearts from which forbearance comes with no alloy of bitter and stinging pity.

These thoughts, to which the codes of social life had accustomed her, and the sort of consideration more wounding than insult shown to her by the world,—a consideration which increases a misfortune by making it apparent,—oppressed Mademoiselle de Temninck with a constant sense of embarrassment, which drove back into her soul its happiest expression, and chilled and stiffened her attitudes, her speech, her looks. Loving and beloved, she dared to be eloquent or beautiful only when alone. Unhappy and oppressed in the broad daylight of life, she might have been enchanting could she have expanded in the shadow. Often, to test the love thus offered to her, and at the risk of losing it, she refused to wear the draperies that concealed some portion of her defects, and her Spanish eyes grew entrancing when they saw that Balthazar thought her beautiful as before.

Nevertheless, even so, distrust soiled the rare moments when she yielded herself to happiness. She asked herself if Claes were not seeking a domestic slave,—one who would necessarily keep the house? whether he had himself no secret imperfection which obliged him to be satisfied with a poor, deformed girl? Such perpetual misgivings gave a priceless value to the few short hours during which she trusted the sincerity and the permanence of a love which was to avenge her on the world. Sometimes she provoked hazardous discussions, and probed the inner consciousness of her lover by exaggerating her defects. At such times she often wrung from Balthazar truths that were far from flattering; but she loved the embarrassment into which he fell when she had led him to say that what he loved in a woman was a noble soul and the devotion which made each day of life a constant happiness; and that after a few years of married life the handsomest of women was no more to a husband than the ugliest. After gathering up what there was of truth in all such paradoxes tending to reduce the value of beauty, Balthazar would suddenly perceive the ungraciousness of his remarks, and show the goodness of his heart by the delicate transitions of thought with which he proved to Mademoiselle de Temninck that she was perfect in his eyes.

The spirit of devotion which, it may be, is the crown of love in a woman, was not lacking in this young girl, who had always despaired of being loved; at first, the prospect of a struggle in which feeling and sentiment would triumph over actual beauty tempted her; then, she fancied a grandeur in giving herself to a man in whose love she did not believe; finally, she was forced to admit that happiness, however short its duration might be, was too precious to resign.

Such hesitations, such struggles, giving the charm and the unexpectedness of passion to this noble creature, inspired Balthazar with a love that was well-nigh chivalric.

CHAPTER III

The marriage took place at the beginning of the year 1795. Husband and wife came to Douai that the first days of their union might be spent in the patriarchal house of the Claes,—the treasures of which were increased by those of Mademoiselle de Temninck, who brought with her several fine pictures of Murillo and Velasquez, the diamonds of her mother, and the magnificent wedding-gifts, made to her by her brother, the Duke of Casa-Real.

Few women were ever happier than Madame Claes. Her happiness lasted for fifteen years without a cloud, diffusing itself like a vivid light into every nook and detail of her life. Most men have inequalities of character which produce discord, and deprive their households of the harmony which is the ideal of a home; the majority are blemished with some littleness or meanness, and meanness of any kind begets bickering. One man is honorable and diligent, but hard and crabbed; another kindly, but obstinate; this one loves his wife, yet his will is arbitrary and uncertain; that other, preoccupied by ambition, pays off his affections as he would a debt, bestows the luxuries of wealth but deprives the daily life of happiness,—in short, the average man of social life is essentially incomplete, without being signally to blame. Men of talent are as variable as barometers; genius alone is intrinsically good.

For this reason unalloyed happiness is found at the two extremes of the moral scale. The good-natured fool and the man of genius alone are capable—the one through weakness, the other by strength—of that equanimity of temper, that unvarying gentleness, which soften the asperities of daily life. In the one, it is indifference or stolidity; in the other, indulgence and a portion of the divine thought of which he is the interpreter, and which needs to be consistent alike in principle and application. Both natures are equally simple; but in one there is vacancy, in the other depth. This is why clever women are disposed to take dull men as the small change for great ones.

Balthazar Claes carried his greatness into the lesser things of life. He delighted in considering conjugal love as a magnificent work; and like all men of lofty aims who can bear nothing imperfect, he wished to develop all its beauties. His powers of mind enlivened the calm of happiness, his noble nature marked his attentions with the charm of grace. Though he shared the philosophical tenets of the eighteenth century, he installed a chaplain in his home until 1801 (in spite of the risk he ran from the revolutionary decrees), so that he might not thwart the Spanish fanaticism which his wife had sucked in with her mother’s milk: later, when public worship was restored in France, he accompanied her to mass every Sunday. His passion never ceased to be that of

a lover. The protecting power, which women like so much, was never exercised by this husband, lest to that wife it might seem pity. He treated her with exquisite flattery as an equal, and sometimes mutinied against her, as men will, as though to brave the supremacy of a pretty woman. His lips wore a smile of happiness, his speech was ever tender; he loved his Josephine for herself and for himself, with an ardor that crowned with perpetual praise the qualities and the loveliness of a wife.

Fidelity, often the result of social principle, religious duty, or self-interest on the part of a husband, was in this case involuntary, and not without the sweet flatteries of the spring-time of love. Duty was the only marriage obligation unknown to these lovers, whose love was equal; for Balthazar Claes found the complete and lasting realization of his hopes in Mademoiselle de Temninck; his heart was satisfied but not wearied, the man within him was ever happy.

Not only did the daughter of Casa-Real derive from her Spanish blood the intuition of that science which varies pleasure and makes it infinite, but she possessed the spirit of unbounded self-devotion, which is the genius of her sex as grace is that of beauty. Her love was a blind fanaticism which, at a nod, would have sent her joyously to her death. Balthazar's own delicacy had exalted the generous emotions of his wife, and inspired her with an imperious need of giving more than she received. This mutual exchange of happiness which each lavished upon the other, put the mainspring of her life visibly outside of her personality, and filled her words, her looks, her actions, with an ever-growing love. Gratitude fertilized and varied the life of each heart; and the certainty of being all in all to one another excluded the paltry things of existence, while it magnified the smallest accessories.

The deformed woman whom her husband thinks straight, the lame woman whom he would not have otherwise, the old woman who seems ever young—are they not the happiest creatures of the feminine world? Can human passion go beyond it? The glory of a woman is to be adored for a defect. To forget that a lame woman does not walk straight may be the glamour of a moment, but to love her because she is lame is the deification of her defects. In the gospel of womanhood it is written: "Blessed are the imperfect, for theirs is the kingdom of Love." If this be so, surely beauty is a misfortune; that fugitive flower counts for too much in the feeling that a woman inspires; often she is loved for her beauty as another is married for her money. But the love inspired or bestowed by a woman disinherited of the frail advantages pursued by the sons of Adam, is true love, the mysterious passion, the ardent embrace of souls, a sentiment for which the day of disenchantment never comes. That woman has charms unknown to the world, from whose jurisdiction she withdraws herself: she is beautiful with a meaning; her glory lies in making her imperfections

forgotten, and thus she constantly succeeds in doing so.

The celebrated attachments of history were nearly all inspired by women in whom the vulgar mind would have found defects,—Cleopatra, Jeanne de Naples, Diane de Poitiers, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, Madame de Pompadour; in fact, the majority of the women whom love has rendered famous were not without infirmities and imperfections, while the greater number of those whose beauty is cited as perfect came to some tragic end of love.

This apparent singularity must have a cause. It may be that man lives more by sentiment than by sense; perhaps the physical charm of beauty is limited, while the moral charm of a woman without beauty is infinite. Is not this the moral of the fable on which the Arabian Nights are based? An ugly wife of Henry VIII. might have defied the axe, and subdued to herself the inconstancy of her master.

By a strange chance, not inexplicable, however, in a girl of Spanish origin, Madame Claes was uneducated. She knew how to read and write, but up to the age of twenty, at which time her parents withdrew her from a convent, she had read none but ascetic books. On her first entrance into the world, she was eager for pleasure and learned only the flimsy art of dress; she was, moreover, so deeply conscious of her ignorance that she dared not join in conversation; for which reason she was supposed to have little mind. Yet, the mystical education of a convent had one good result; it left her feelings in full force and her natural powers of mind uninjured. Stupid and plain as an heiress in the eyes of the world, she became intellectual and beautiful to her husband. During the first years of their married life, Balthazar endeavored to give her at least the knowledge that she needed to appear to advantage in good society: but he was doubtless too late, she had no memory but that of the heart. Josephine never forgot anything that Claes told her relating to themselves; she remembered the most trifling circumstances of their happy life; but of her evening studies nothing remained to her on the morrow.

This ignorance might have caused much discord between husband and wife, but Madame Claes’s understanding of the passion of love was so simple and ingenuous, she loved her husband so religiously, so sacredly, and the thought of preserving her happiness made her so adroit, that she managed always to seem to understand him, and it was seldom indeed that her ignorance was evident. Moreover, when two persons love one another so well that each day seems for them the beginning of their passion, phenomena arise out of this teeming happiness which change all the conditions of life. It resembles childhood, careless of all that is not laughter, joy, and merriment. Then, when life is in full activity, when its hearths glow, man lets the fire burn without thought or discussion, without considering either the means or the

end.

No daughter of Eve ever more truly understood the calling of a wife than Madame Claes. She had all the submission of a Flemish woman, but her Spanish pride gave it a higher flavor. Her bearing was imposing; she knew how to command respect by a look which expressed her sense of birth and dignity: but she trembled before Claes; she held him so high, so near to God, carrying to him every act of her life, every thought of her heart, that her love was not without a certain respectful fear which made it keener. She proudly assumed all the habits of a Flemish bourgeoisie, and put her self-love into making the home life liberally happy,—preserving every detail of the house in scrupulous cleanliness, possessing nothing that did not serve the purposes of true comfort, supplying her table with the choicest food, and putting everything within those walls into harmony with the life of her heart.

The pair had two sons and two daughters. The eldest, Marguerite, was born in 1796. The last child was a boy, now three years old, named Jean-Balthazar. The maternal sentiment in Madame Claes was almost equal to her love for her husband; and there rose in her soul, especially during the last days of her life, a terrible struggle between those nearly balanced feelings, of which the one became, as it were, an enemy of the other. The tears and the terror that marked her face at the moment when this tale of a domestic drama then lowering over the quiet house begins, were caused by the fear of having sacrificed her children to her husband.

In 1805, Madame Claes's brother died without children. The Spanish law does not allow a sister to succeed to territorial possessions, which follow the title; but the duke had left her in his will about sixty thousand ducats, and this sum the heirs of the collateral branch did not seek to retain. Though the feeling which united her to Balthazar Claes was such that no thought of personal interest could ever sully it, Josephine felt a certain pleasure in possessing a fortune equal to that of her husband, and was happy in giving something to one who had so nobly given everything to her. Thus, a mere chance turned a marriage which worldly minds had declared foolish, into an excellent alliance, seen from the standpoint of material interests. The use to which this sum of money should be put became, however, somewhat difficult to determine.

The House of Claes was so richly supplied with furniture, pictures, and objects of art of priceless value, that it was difficult to add anything worthy of what was already there. The tastes of the family through long periods of time had accumulated these treasures. One generation followed the quest of noble pictures, leaving behind it the necessity of completing a collection still unfinished; and thus the taste became hereditary in the family. The hundred pictures which adorned the gallery leading from the family building to the reception-rooms on the first floor of the front house, as well as some fifty

others placed about the salons, were the product of the patient researches of three centuries. Among them were choice specimens of Rubens, Ruysdael, Vandyke, Terburg, Gerard Dow, Teniers, Mieris, Paul Potter, Wouvermans, Rembrandt, Hobbema, Cranach, and Holbein. French and Italian pictures were in a minority, but all were authentic and masterly.

Another generation had fancied Chinese and Japanese porcelains: this Claes was eager after rare furniture, that one for silver-ware; in fact, each and all had their mania, their passion,—a trait which belongs in a striking degree to the Flemish character. The father of Balthazar, a last relic of the once famous Dutch society, left behind him the finest known collection of tulips.

Besides these hereditary riches, which represented an enormous capital, and were the choice ornament of the venerable house,—a house that was simple as a shell outside but, like a shell, adorned within by pearls of price and glowing with rich color,—Balthazar Claes possessed a country-house on the plain of Orchies, not far from Douai. Instead of basing his expenses, as Frenchmen do, upon his revenues, he followed the old Dutch custom of spending only a fourth of his income. Twelve hundred ducats a year put his costs of living at a level with those of the richest men of the place. The promulgation of the Civil Code proved the wisdom of this course. Compelling, as it did, the equal division of property, the Title of Succession would some day leave each child with limited means, and disperse the treasures of the Claes collection. Balthazar, therefore, in concert with Madame Claes, invested his wife’s property so as to secure to each child a fortune eventually equal to his own. The house of Claes still maintained its moderate scale of living, and bought woodlands somewhat the worse for wars that had laid waste the country, but which in ten years’ time, if well-preserved, would return an enormous value.

The upper ranks of society in Douai, which Monsieur Claes frequented, appreciated so justly the noble character and qualities of his wife that, by tacit consent she was released from those social duties to which the provinces cling so tenaciously. During the winter season, when she lived in town, she seldom went into society; society came to her. She received every Wednesday, and gave three grand dinners every month. Her friends felt that she was more at ease in her own house; where, indeed, her passion for her husband and the care she bestowed on the education of her children tended to keep her.

Such had been, up to the year 1809, the general course of this household, which had nothing in common with the ordinary run of conventional ideas, though the outward life of these two persons, secretly full of love and joy, was like that of other people. Balthazar Claes’s passion for his wife, which she had known how to perpetuate, seemed, to use his own expression, to spend its inborn vigor and fidelity on the cultivation of happiness, which was far better

than the cultivation of tulips (though to that he had always had a leaning), and dispensed him from the duty of following a mania like his ancestors.

At the close of this year, the mind and the manners of Balthazar Claes underwent a fatal change,—a change which began so gradually that at first Madame Claes did not think it necessary to inquire the cause. One night her husband went to bed with a mind so preoccupied that she felt it incumbent on her to respect his mood. Her womanly delicacy and her submissive habits always led her to wait for Balthazar's confidence; which, indeed, was assured to her by so constant an affection that she had never had the slightest opening for jealousy. Though certain of obtaining an answer whenever she should make the inquiry, she still retained enough of the earlier impressions of her life to dread a refusal. Besides, the moral malady of her husband had its phases, and only came by slow degrees to the intolerable point at which it destroyed the happiness of the family.

However occupied Balthazar Claes might be, he continued for several months cheerful, affectionate, and ready to talk; the change in his character showed itself only by frequent periods of absent-mindedness. Madame Claes long hoped to hear from her husband himself the nature of the secret employment in which he was engaged; perhaps, she thought, he would reveal it when it developed some useful result; many men are led by pride to conceal the nature of their efforts, and only make them known at the moment of success. When the day of triumph came, surely domestic happiness would return, more vivid than ever when Balthazar became aware of this chasm in the life of love, which his heart would surely disavow. Josephine knew her husband well enough to be certain that he would never forgive himself for having made his Pepita less than happy during several months.

She kept silence therefore, and felt a sort of joy in thus suffering by him for him: her passion had a tinge of that Spanish piety which allows no separation between religion and love, and believes in no sentiment without suffering. She waited for the return of her husband's affection, saying daily to herself, "To-morrow it may come,"—treating her happiness as though it were an absent friend.

During this stage of her secret distress, she conceived her last child. Horrible crisis, which revealed a future of anguish! In the midst of her husband's abstractions love showed itself on this occasion an abstraction even greater than the rest. Her woman's pride, hurt for the first time, made her sound the depths of the unknown abyss which separated her from the Claes of earlier days. From that time Balthazar's condition grew rapidly worse. The man formerly so wrapped up in his domestic happiness, who played for hours with his children on the parlor carpet or round the garden paths, who seemed able to exist only in the light of his Pepita's dark eyes, did not even perceive

her pregnancy, seldom shared the family life, and even forgot his own.

The longer Madame Claes postponed inquiring into the cause of his preoccupation the less she dared to do so. At the very idea, her blood ran cold and her voice grew faint. At last the thought occurred to her that she had ceased to please her husband, and then indeed she was seriously alarmed. That fear now filled her mind, drove her to despair, then to feverish excitement, and became the text of many an hour of melancholy reverie. She defended Balthazar at her own expense, calling herself old and ugly; then she imagined a generous though humiliating consideration for her in this secret occupation by which he secured to her a negative fidelity; and she resolved to give him back his independence by allowing one of those unspoken divorces which make the happiness of many a marriage.

Before bidding farewell to conjugal life, Madame Claes made some attempt to read her husband's heart, and found it closed. Little by little, she saw him become indifferent to all that he had formerly loved; he neglected his tulips, he cared no longer for his children. There could be no doubt that he was given over to some passion that was not of the heart, but which, to a woman's mind, is not less withering. His love was dormant, not lost: this might be a consolation, but the misfortune remained the same.

The continuance of such a state of things is explained by one word,—hope, the secret of all conjugal situations. It so happened that whenever the poor woman reached a depth of despair which gave her courage to question her husband, she met with a few brief moments of happiness when she was able to feel that if Balthazar was indeed in the clutch of some devilish power, he was permitted, sometimes at least, to return to himself. At such moments, when her heaven brightened, she was too eager to enjoy its happiness to trouble him with importunate questions: later, when she endeavored to speak to him, he would suddenly escape, leave her abruptly, or drop into the gulf of meditation from which no word of hers could drag him.

Before long the reaction of the moral upon the physical condition began its ravages,—at first imperceptibly, except to the eyes of a loving woman following the secret thought of a husband through all its manifestations. Often she could scarcely restrain her tears when she saw him, after dinner, sink into an armchair by the corner of the fireplace, and remain there, gloomy and abstracted. She noted with terror the slow changes which deteriorated that face, once, to her eyes, sublime through love: the life of the soul was retreating from it; the structure remained, but the spirit was gone. Sometimes the eyes were glassy, and seemed as if they had turned their gaze and were looking inward. When the children had gone to bed, and the silence and solitude oppressed her, Pepita would say, "My friend, are you ill?" and Balthazar would make no answer; or if he answered, he would come to himself with a

quiver, like a man snatched suddenly from sleep, and utter a “No” so harsh and grating that it fell like a stone on the palpitating heart of his wife.

Though she tried to hide this strange state of things from her friends, Madame Claes was obliged sometimes to allude to it. The social world of Douai, in accordance with the custom of provincial towns, had made Balthazar’s aberrations a topic of conversation, and many persons were aware of certain details that were still unknown to Madame Claes. Disregarding the reticence which politeness demanded, a few friends expressed to her so much anxiety on the subject that she found herself compelled to defend her husband’s peculiarities.

“Monsieur Claes,” she said, “has undertaken a work which wholly absorbs him; its success will eventually redound not only to the honor of the family but to that of his country.”

This mysterious explanation was too flattering to the ambition of a town whose local patriotism and desire for glory exceed those of other places, not to be readily accepted, and it produced on all minds a reaction in favor of Balthazar.

The supposition of his wife was, to a certain extent, well-founded. Several artificers of various trades had long been at work in the garret of the front house, where Balthazar went early every morning. After remaining, at first, for several hours, an absence to which his wife and household grew gradually accustomed, he ended by being there all day. But—unexpected shock!—Madame Claes learned through the humiliating medium of some women friends, who showed surprise at her ignorance, that her husband constantly imported instruments of physical science, valuable materials, books, machinery, etc., from Paris, and was on the highroad to ruin in search of the Philosopher’s Stone. She ought, so her kind friends added, to think of her children, and her own future; it was criminal not to use her influence to draw Monsieur Claes from the fatal path on which he had entered.

Though Madame Claes, with the tone and manner of a great lady, silenced these absurd speeches, she was inwardly terrified in spite of her apparent confidence, and she resolved to break through her present system of silence and resignation. She brought about one of those little scenes in which husband and wife are on an equal footing; less timid at such a moment, she dared to ask Balthazar the reason for his change, the motive of his constant seclusion. The Flemish husband frowned, and replied:—

“My dear, you could not understand it.”

Soon after, however, Josephine insisted on being told the secret, gently complaining that she was not allowed to share all the thoughts of one whose

life she shared.

“Very well, since it interests you so much,” said Balthazar, taking his wife upon his knee and caressing her black hair, “I will tell you that I have returned to the study of chemistry, and I am the happiest man on earth.”

CHAPTER IV

Two years after the winter when Monsieur Claes returned to chemistry, the aspect of his house was changed. Whether it were that society was affronted by his perpetual absent-mindedness and chose to think itself in the way, or that Madame Claes’s secret anxieties made her less agreeable than before, certain it is that she no longer saw any but her intimate friends. Balthazar went nowhere, shut himself up in his laboratory all day, sometimes stayed there all night, and only appeared in the bosom of his family at dinner-time.

After the second year he no longer passed the summer at his country-house, and his wife was unwilling to live there alone. Sometimes he went to walk and did not return till the following day, leaving Madame Claes a prey to mortal anxiety during the night. After causing a fruitless search for him through the town, whose gates, like those of other fortified places, were closed at night, it was impossible to send into the country, and the unhappy woman could only wait and suffer till morning. Balthazar, who had forgotten the hour at which the gates closed, would come tranquilly home next day, quite unmindful of the tortures his absence had inflicted on his family; and the happiness of getting him back proved as dangerous an excitement of feeling to his wife as her fears of the preceding night. She kept silence and dared not question him, for when she did so on the occasion of his first absence, he answered with an air of surprise:—

“Well, what of it? Can I not take a walk?”

Passions never deceive. Madame Claes’s anxieties corroborated the rumors she had taken so much pains to deny. The experience of her youth had taught her to understand the polite pity of the world. Resolved not to undergo it a second time, she withdrew more and more into the privacy of her own house, now deserted by society and even by her nearest friends.

Among these many causes of distress, the negligence and disorder of Balthazar’s dress, so degrading to a man of his station, was not the least bitter to a woman accustomed to the exquisite nicety of Flemish life. At first Josephine endeavored, in concert with Balthazar’s valet, Lemulquinier, to repair the daily devastation of his clothing, but even that she was soon forced

to give up. The very day when Balthazar, unaware of the substitution, put on new clothes in place of those that were stained, torn, or full of holes, he made rags of them.

The poor wife, whose perfect happiness had lasted fifteen years, during which time her jealousy had never once been roused, was apparently and suddenly nothing in the heart where she had lately reigned. Spanish by race, the feelings of a Spanish woman rose within her when she discovered her rival in a Science that allured her husband from her: torments of jealousy preyed upon her heart and renewed her love. What could she do against Science? Should she combat that tyrannous, unyielding, growing power? Could she kill an invisible rival? Could a woman, limited by nature, contend with an Idea whose delights are infinite, whose attractions are ever new? How make head against the fascination of ideas that spring the fresher and the lovelier out of difficulty, and entice a man so far from this world that he forgets even his dearest loves?

At last one day, in spite of Balthazar's strict orders, Madame Claes resolved to follow him, to shut herself up in the garret where his life was spent, and struggle hand to hand against her rival by sharing her husband's labors during the long hours he gave to that terrible mistress. She determined to slip secretly into the mysterious laboratory of seduction, and obtain the right to be there always. Lemulquinier alone had that right, and she meant to share it with him; but to prevent his witnessing the contention with her husband which she feared at the outset, she waited for an opportunity when the valet should be out of the way. For a while she studied the goings and comings of the man with angry impatience; did he not know that which was denied to her—all that her husband hid from her, all that she dared not inquire into? Even a servant was preferred to a wife!

The day came; she approached the place, trembling, yet almost happy. For the first time in her life she encountered Balthazar's anger. She had hardly opened the door before he sprang upon her, seized her, threw her roughly on the staircase, so that she narrowly escaped rolling to the bottom.

"God be praised! you are still alive!" he cried, raising her.

A glass vessel had broken into fragments over Madame Claes, who saw her husband standing by her, pale, terrified, and almost livid.

"My dear, I forbade you to come here," he said, sitting down on the stairs, as though prostrated. "The saints have saved your life! By what chance was it that my eyes were on the door when you opened it? We have just escaped death."

"Then I might have been happy!" she exclaimed.

“My experiment has failed,” continued Balthazar. “You alone could I forgive for that terrible disappointment. I was about to decompose nitrogen. Go back to your own affairs.”

Balthazar re-entered the laboratory and closed the door.

“Decompose nitrogen!” said the poor woman as she re-entered her chamber, and burst into tears.

The phrase was unintelligible to her. Men, trained by education to have a general conception of everything, have no idea how distressing it is for a woman to be unable to comprehend the thought of the man she loves. More forbearing than we, these divine creatures do not let us know when the language of their souls is not understood by us; they shrink from letting us feel the superiority of their feelings, and hide their pain as gladly as they silence their wishes: but, having higher ambitions in love than men, they desire to wed not only the heart of a husband, but his mind.

To Madame Claes the sense of knowing nothing of a science which absorbed her husband filled her with a vexation as keen as the beauty of a rival might have caused. The struggle of woman against woman gives to her who loves the most the advantage of loving best; but a mortification like this only proved Madame Claes’s powerlessness and humiliated the feelings by which she lived. She was ignorant; and she had reached a point where her ignorance parted her from her husband. Worse than all, last and keenest torture, he was risking his life, he was often in danger—near her, yet far away, and she might not share, nor even know, his peril. Her position became, like hell, a moral prison from which there was no issue, in which there was no hope. Madame Claes resolved to know at least the outward attractions of this fatal science, and she began secretly to study chemistry in the books. From this time the family became, as it were, cloistered.

Such were the successive changes brought by this dire misfortune upon the family of Claes, before it reached the species of atrophy in which we find it at the moment when this history begins.

The situation grew daily more complicated. Like all passionate women, Madame Claes was disinterested. Those who truly love know that considerations of money count for little in matters of feeling and are reluctantly associated with them. Nevertheless, Josephine did not hear without distress that her husband had borrowed three hundred thousand francs upon his property. The apparent authenticity of the transaction, the rumors and conjectures spread through the town, forced Madame Claes, naturally much alarmed, to question her husband’s notary and, disregarding her pride, to reveal to him her secret anxieties or let him guess them, and even ask her the humiliating question,—

“How is it that Monsieur Claes has not told you of this?”

Happily, the notary was almost a relation,—in this wise: The grandfather of Monsieur Claes had married a Pierquin of Antwerp, of the same family as the Pierquins of Douai. Since the marriage the latter, though strangers to the Claes, claimed them as cousins. Monsieur Pierquin, a young man twenty-six years of age, who had just succeeded to his father’s practice, was the only person who now had access to the House of Claes.

Madame Balthazar had lived for several months in such complete solitude that the notary was obliged not only to confirm the rumor of the disasters, but to give her further particulars, which were now well known throughout the town. He told her that it was probably that her husband owed considerable sums of money to the house which furnished him with chemicals. That house, after making inquiries as to the fortune and credit of Monsieur Claes, accepted all his orders and sent the supplies without hesitation, notwithstanding the heavy sums of money which became due. Madame Claes requested Pierquin to obtain the bill for all the chemicals that had been furnished to her husband.

Two months later, Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, manufacturers of chemical products, sent in a schedule of accounts rendered, which amounted to over one hundred thousand francs. Madame Claes and Pierquin studied the document with an ever-increasing surprise. Though some articles, entered in commercial and scientific terms, were unintelligible to them, they were frightened to see entries of precious metals and diamonds of all kinds, though in small quantities. The large sum total of the debt was explained by the multiplicity of the articles, by the precautions needed in transporting some of them, more especially valuable machinery, by the exorbitant price of certain rare chemicals, and finally by the cost of instruments made to order after the designs of Monsieur Claes himself.

The notary had made inquiries, in his client’s interest, as to Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, and found that their known integrity was sufficient guarantee as to the honesty of their operations with Monsieur Claes, to whom, moreover, they frequently sent information of results obtained by chemists in Paris, for the purpose of sparing him expense. Madame Claes begged the notary to keep the nature of these purchases from the knowledge of the people of Douai, lest they should declare the whole thing a mania; but Pierquin replied that he had already delayed to the very last moment the notarial deeds which the importance of the sum borrowed necessitated, in order not to lessen the respect in which Monsieur Claes was held. He then revealed the full extent of the evil, telling her plainly that if she could not find means to prevent her husband from thus madly making way with his property, in six months the patrimonial fortune of the Claes would be mortgaged to its full value. As for himself, he said, the remonstrances he had already made to his cousin, with all

the consideration due to a man so justly respected, had been wholly unavailing. Balthazar had replied, once for all, that he was working for the fame and the fortune of his family.

Thus, to the tortures of the heart which Madame Claes had borne for two years—one following the other with cumulative suffering—was now added a dreadful and ceaseless fear which made the future terrifying. Women have presentiments whose accuracy is often marvellous. Why do they fear so much more than they hope in matters that concern the interests of this life? Why is their faith given only to religious ideas of a future existence? Why do they so ably foresee the catastrophes of fortune and the crises of fate? Perhaps the sentiment which unites them to the men they love gives them a sense by which they weigh force, measure faculties, understand tastes, passions, vices, virtues. The perpetual study of these causes in the midst of which they live gives them, no doubt, the fatal power of foreseeing effects in all possible relations of earthly life. What they see of the present enables them to judge of the future with an intuitive ability explained by the perfection of their nervous system, which allows them to seize the lightest indications of thought and feeling. Their whole being vibrates in communion with great moral convulsions. Either they feel, or they see.

Now, although separated from her husband for over two years, Madame Claes foresaw the loss of their property. She fully understood the deliberate ardor, the well-considered, inalterable steadfastness of Balthazar; if it were indeed true that he was seeking to make gold, he was capable of throwing his last crust into the crucible with absolute indifference. But what was he really seeking? Up to this time maternal feeling and conjugal love had been so mingled in the heart of this woman that the children, equally beloved by husband and wife, had never come between them. Suddenly she found herself at times more mother than wife, though hitherto she had been more wife than mother. However ready she had been to sacrifice her fortune and even her children to the man who had chosen her, loved her, adored her, and to whom she was still the only woman in the world, the remorse she felt for the weakness of her maternal love threw her into terrible alternations of feeling. As a wife, she suffered in heart; as a mother, through her children; as a Christian, for all.

She kept silence, and hid the cruel struggle in her soul. Her husband, sole arbiter of the family fate, was the master by whose will it must be guided; he was responsible to God only. Besides, could she reproach him for the use he now made of his fortune, after the disinterestedness he had shown to her for many happy years? Was she to judge his purposes? And yet her conscience, in keeping with the spirit of the law, told her that parents were the depositaries and guardians of property, and possessed no right to alienate the material

welfare of the children. To escape replying to such stern questions she preferred to shut her eyes, like one who refuses to see the abyss into whose depths he knows he is about to fall.

For more than six months her husband had given her no money for the household expenses. She sold secretly, in Paris, the handsome diamond ornaments her brother had given her on her marriage, and placed the family on a footing of the strictest economy. She sent away the governess of her children, and even the nurse of little Jean. Formerly the luxury of carriages and horses was unknown among the burgher families, so simple were they in their habits, so proud in their feelings; no provision for that modern innovation had therefore been made at the House of Claes, and Balthazar was obliged to have his stable and coach-house in a building opposite to his own house: his present occupations allowed him no time to superintend that portion of his establishment, which belongs exclusively to men. Madame Claes suppressed the whole expense of equipages and servants, which her present isolation from the world rendered unnecessary, and she did so without pretending to conceal the retrenchment under any pretext. So far, facts had contradicted her assertions, and silence for the future was more becoming: indeed the change in the family mode of living called for no explanation in a country where, as in Flanders, any one who lives up to his income is considered a madman.

And yet, as her eldest daughter, Marguerite, approached her sixteenth birthday, Madame Claes longed to procure for her a good marriage, and to place her in society in a manner suitable to a daughter of the Molinas, the Van Ostron-Temnincks, and the Casa-Reals. A few days before the one on which this story opens, the money derived from the sale of the diamonds had been exhausted. On the very day, at three o’clock in the afternoon, as Madame Claes was taking her children to vespers, she met Pierquin, who was on his way to see her, and who turned and accompanied her to the church, talking in a low voice of her situation.

“My dear cousin,” he said, “unless I fail in the friendship which binds me to your family, I cannot conceal from you the peril of your position, nor refrain from begging you to speak to your husband. Who but you can hold him back from the gulf into which he is plunging? The rents from the mortgaged estates are not enough to pay the interest on the sums he has borrowed. If he cuts the wood on them he destroys your last chance of safety in the future. My cousin Balthazar owes at this moment thirty thousand francs to the house of Protez and Chiffreville. How can you pay them? What will you live on? If Claes persists in sending for reagents, retorts, voltaic batteries, and other such playthings, what will become of you? Your whole property, except the house and furniture, has been dissipated in gas and carbon; yesterday he talked of mortgaging the house, and in answer to a remark of mine, he cried out, ‘The

devil!’ It was the first sign of reason I have known him show for three years.”

Madame Claes pressed the notary’s arm, and said in a tone of suffering, “Keep it secret.”

Overwhelmed by these plain words of startling clearness, the poor woman, pious as she was, could not pray; she sat still on her chair between her children, with her prayer-book open, but not turning its leaves; her mind was sunk in meditations as absorbing as those of her husband. The Spanish sense of honor, the Flemish integrity, resounded in her soul with a peal louder than any organ. The ruin of her children was accomplished! Between them and their father’s honor she must no longer hesitate. The necessity of a coming struggle with her husband terrified her; in her eyes he was so great, so majestic, that the mere prospect of his anger made her tremble as at a vision of the divine wrath. She must now depart from the submission she had sacredly practised as a wife. The interests of her children compelled her to oppose, in his most cherished tastes, the man she idolized. Must she not daily force him back to common matters from the higher realms of Science; drag him forcibly from a smiling future and plunge him into a materialism hideous to artists and great men? To her, Balthazar Claes was a Titan of science, a man big with glory; he could only have forgotten her for the riches of a mighty hope. Then too, was he not profoundly wise? she had heard him talk with such good sense on every subject that he must be sincere when he declared he worked for the glory and prosperity of his family. His love for his wife and family was not only vast, it was infinite. That feeling could not be extinct; it was magnified, and reproduced in another form.

Noble, generous, timid as she was, she prepared herself to ring into the ears of this noble man the word and the sound of money, to show him the sores of poverty, and force him to hear cries of distress when he was listening only for the melodious voice of Fame. Perhaps his love for her would lessen! If she had had no children, she would bravely and joyously have welcomed the new destiny her husband was making for her. Women who are brought up in opulence are quick to feel the emptiness of material enjoyments; and when their hearts, more wearied than withered, have once learned the happiness of a constant interchange of real feelings, they feel no shrinking from reduced outward circumstances, provided they are still acceptable to the man who has loved them. Their wishes, their pleasures, are subordinated to the caprices of that other life outside of their own; to them the only dreadful future is to lose him.

At this moment, therefore, her children came between Pepita and her true life, just as Science had come between herself and Balthazar. And thus, when she reached home after vespers, and threw herself into the deep armchair before the window of the parlor, she sent away her children, directing them to

keep perfectly quiet, and despatched a message to her husband, through Lemulquinier, saying that she wished to see him. But although the old valet did his best to make his master leave the laboratory, Balthazar scarcely heeded him. Madame Claes thus gained time for reflection. She sat thinking, paying no attention to the hour nor the light. The thought of owing thirty thousand francs that could not be paid renewed her past anguish and joined it to that of the present and the future. This influx of painful interests, ideas, and feelings overcame her, and she wept.

As Balthazar entered at last through the panelled door, the expression of his face seemed to her more dreadful, more absorbed, more distracted than she had yet seen it. When he made her no answer she was magnetized for a moment by the fixity of that blank look emptied of all expression, by the consuming ideas that issued as if distilled from that bald brow. Under the shock of this impression she wished to die. But when she heard the callous voice, uttering a scientific wish at the moment when her heart was breaking, her courage came back to her; she resolved to struggle with that awful power which had torn a lover from her arms, a father from her children, a fortune from their home, happiness from all. And yet she could not repress a trepidation which made her quiver; in all her life no such solemn scene as this had taken place. This dreadful moment—did it not virtually contain her future, and gather within it all the past?

Weak and timid persons, or those whose excessive sensibility magnifies the smallest difficulties of life, men who tremble involuntarily before the masters of their fate, can now, one and all, conceive the rush of thoughts that crowded into the brain of this woman, and the feelings under the weight of which her heart was crushed as her husband slowly crossed the room towards the garden-door. Most women know that agony of inward deliberation in which Madame Claes was writhing. Even one whose heart has been tried by nothing worse than the declaration to a husband of some extravagance, or a debt to a dress-maker, will understand how its pulses swell and quicken when the matter is one of life itself.

A beautiful or graceful woman might have thrown herself at her husband’s feet, might have called to her aid the attitudes of grief; but to Madame Claes the sense of physical defects only added to her fears. When she saw Balthazar about to leave the room, her impulse was to spring towards him; then a cruel thought restrained her—she should stand before him! would she not seem ridiculous in the eyes of a man no longer under the glamour of love—who might see true? She resolved to avoid all dangerous chances at so solemn a moment, and remained seated, saying in a clear voice,

“Balthazar.”

He turned mechanically and coughed; then, paying no attention to his wife, he walked to one of the little square boxes that are placed at intervals along the wainscoting of every room in Holland and Belgium, and spat in it. This man, who took no thought of other persons, never forgot the inveterate habit of using those boxes. To poor Josephine, unable to find a reason for this singularity, the constant care which her husband took of the furniture caused her at all times an unspeakable pang, but at this moment the pain was so violent that it put her beside herself and made her exclaim in a tone of impatience, which expressed her wounded feelings,—

“Monsieur, I am speaking to you!”

“What does that mean?” answered Balthazar, turning quickly, and casting a look of reviving intelligence upon his wife, which fell upon her like a thunderbolt.

“Forgive me, my friend,” she said, turning pale. She tried to rise and put out her hand to him, but her strength gave way and she fell back. “I am dying!” she cried in a voice choked by sobs.

At the sight Balthazar had, like all abstracted persons, a vivid reaction of mind; and he divined, so to speak, the secret cause of this attack. Taking Madame Claes at once in his arms, he opened the door upon the little antechamber, and ran so rapidly up the ancient wooden staircase that his wife’s dress having caught on the jaws of one of the griffins that supported the balustrade, a whole breadth was torn off with a loud noise. He kicked in the door of the vestibule between their chambers, but the door of Josephine’s bedroom was locked.

He gently placed her on a chair, saying to himself, “My God! the key, where is the key?”

“Thank you, dear friend,” said Madame Claes, opening her eyes. “This is the first time for a long, long while that I have been so near your heart.”

“Good God!” cried Claes, “the key!—here come the servants.”

Josephine signed to him to take a key that hung from a ribbon at her waist. After opening the door, Balthazar laid his wife on a sofa, and left the room to stop the frightened servants from coming up by giving them orders to serve the dinner; then he went back to Madame Claes.

“What is it, my dear life?” he said, sitting down beside her, and taking her hand and kissing it.

“Nothing—now,” she answered. “I suffer no longer. Only, I would I had the power of God to pour all the gold of the world at thy feet.”

“Why gold?” he asked. He took her in his arms, pressed her to him and

kissed her once more upon the forehead. “Do you not give me the greatest of all riches in loving me as you do love me, my dear and precious wife?”

“Oh! my Balthazar, will you not drive away the anguish of our lives as your voice now drives out the misery of my heart? At last, at last, I see that you are still the same.”

“What anguish do you speak of, dear?”

“My friend, we are ruined.”

“Ruined!” he repeated. Then, with a smile, he stroked her hand, holding it within his own, and said in his tender voice, so long unheard: “To-morrow, dear love, our wealth may perhaps be limitless. Yesterday, in searching for a far more important secret, I think I found the means of crystallizing carbon, the substance of the diamond. Oh, my dear wife! in a few days’ time you will forgive me all my forgetfulness—I am forgetful sometimes, am I not? Was I not harsh to you just now? Be indulgent for a man who never ceases to think of you, whose toils are full of you—of us.”

“Enough, enough!” she said, “let us talk of it all to-night, dear friend. I suffered from too much grief, and now I suffer from too much joy.”

“To-night,” he resumed; “yes, willingly: we will talk of it. If I fall into meditation, remind me of this promise. To-night I desire to leave my work, my researches, and return to family joys, to the delights of the heart—Pepita, I need them, I thirst for them!”

“You will tell me what it is you seek, Balthazar?”

“Poor child, you cannot understand it.”

“You think so? Ah! my friend, listen; for nearly four months I have studied chemistry that I might talk of it with you. I have read Fourcroy, Lavoisier, Chaptal, Nollet, Rouelle, Berthollet, Gay-Lussac, Spallanzani, Leuwenhoek, Galvani, Volta,—in fact, all the books about the science you worship. You can tell me your secrets, I shall understand you.”

“Oh! you are indeed an angel,” cried Balthazar, falling at her feet, and shedding tears of tender feeling that made her quiver. “Yes, we will understand each other in all things.”

“Ah!” she cried, “I would throw myself into those hellish fires which heat your furnaces to hear these words from your lips and to see you thus.” Then, hearing her daughter’s step in the anteroom, she sprang quickly forward. “What is it, Marguerite?” she said to her eldest daughter.

“My dear mother, Monsieur Pierquin has just come. If he stays to dinner we need some table-linen; you forgot to give it out this morning.”

Madame Claes drew from her pocket a bunch of small keys and gave them to the young girl, pointing to the mahogany closets which lined the ante-chamber as she said:

“My daughter, take a set of the Graindorge linen; it is on your right.”

“Since my dear Balthazar comes back to me, let the return be complete,” she said, re-entering her chamber with a soft and arch expression on her face. “My friend, go into your own room; do me the kindness to dress for dinner, Pierquin will be with us. Come, take off this ragged clothing; see those stains! Is it muratic or sulphuric acid which left these yellow edges to the holes? Make yourself young again,—I will send you Mulquinier as soon as I have changed my dress.”

Balthazar attempted to pass through the door of communication, forgetting that it was locked on his side. He went out through the anteroom.

“Marguerite, put the linen on a chair, and come and help me dress; I don’t want Martha,” said Madame Claes, calling her daughter.

Balthazar had caught Marguerite and turned her towards him with a joyous action, exclaiming: “Good-evening, my child; how pretty you are in your muslin gown and that pink sash!” Then he kissed her forehead and pressed her hand.

“Mamma, papa has kissed me!” cried Marguerite, running into her mother’s room. “He seems so joyous, so happy!”

“My child, your father is a great man; for three years he has toiled for the fame and fortune of his family: he thinks he has attained the object of his search. This day is a festival for us all.”

“My dear mamma,” replied Marguerite, “we shall not be alone in our joy, for the servants have been so grieved to see him unlike himself. Oh! put on another sash, this is faded.”

“So be it; but make haste, I want to speak to Pierquin. Where is he?”

“In the parlor, playing with Jean.”

“Where are Gabriel and Felicie?”

“I hear them in the garden.”

“Run down quickly and see that they do not pick the tulips; your father has not seen them in flower this year, and he may take a fancy to look at them after dinner. Tell Mulquinier to go up and assist your father in dressing.”

CHAPTER V

As Marguerite left the room, Madame Claes glanced at the children through the windows of her chamber, which looked on the garden, and saw that they were watching one of those insects with shining wings spotted with gold, commonly called “darning-needles.”

“Be good, my darlings,” she said, raising the lower sash of the window and leaving it up to air the room. Then she knocked gently on the door of communication, to assure herself that Balthazar had not fallen into abstraction. He opened it, and seeing him half-dressed, she said in joyous tones:—

“You won’t leave me long with Pierquin, will you? Come as soon as you can.”

Her step was so light as she descended that a listener would never have supposed her lame.

“When monsieur carried madame upstairs,” said the old valet, whom she met on the staircase, “he tore this bit out of her dress, and he broke the jaw of that griffin; I’m sure I don’t know who can put it on again. There’s our staircase ruined—and it used to be so handsome!”

“Never mind, my poor Mulquinier; don’t have it mended at all—it is not a misfortune,” said his mistress.

“What can have happened?” thought Lemulquinier; “why isn’t it a misfortune, I should like to know? has the master found the Absolute?”

“Good-evening, Monsieur Pierquin,” said Madame Claes, opening the parlor door.

The notary rushed forward to give her his arm; as she never took any but that of her husband she thanked him with a smile and said,—

“Have you come for the thirty thousand francs?”

“Yes, madame; when I reached home I found a letter of advice from Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, who have drawn six letters of exchange upon Monsieur Claes for five thousand francs each.”

“Well, say nothing to Balthazar to-day,” she replied. “Stay and dine with us. If he happens to ask why you came, find some plausible pretext, I entreat you. Give me the letter. I will speak to him myself about it. All is well,” she added, noticing the lawyer’s surprise. “In a few months my husband will probably pay off all the sums he has borrowed.”

Hearing these words, which were said in a low voice, the notary looked at Mademoiselle Claes, who was entering the room from the garden followed by

Gabriel and Felicie, and remarked,—

“I have never seen Mademoiselle Marguerite as pretty as she is at this moment.”

Madame Claes, who was sitting in her armchair with little Jean upon her lap, raised her head and looked at her daughter, and then at the notary, with a pretended air of indifference.

Pierquin was a man of middle height, neither stout nor thin, with vulgar good looks, a face that expressed vexation rather than melancholy, and a pensive habit in which there was more of indecision than thought. People called him a misanthrope, but he was too eager after his own interests, and too extortionate towards others to have set up a genuine divorce from the world. His indifferent demeanor, his affected silence, his habitual custom of looking, as it were, into the void, seemed to indicate depth of character, while in fact they merely concealed the shallow insignificance of a notary busied exclusively with earthly interests; though he was still young enough to feel envy. To marry into the family of Claes would have been to him an object of extreme desire, if an instinct of avarice had not underlain it. He could seem generous, but for all that he was a keen reckoner. And thus, without explaining to himself the motive for his change of manner, his behavior was harsh, peremptory, and surly, like that of an ordinary business man, when he thought the Claes were ruined; accommodating, affectionate, and almost servile, when he saw reason to believe in a happy issue to his cousin’s labors. Sometimes he beheld an infanta in Margeurite Claes, to whom no provincial notary might aspire; then he regarded her as any poor girl too happy if he deigned to make her his wife. He was a true provincial, and a Fleming; without malevolence, not devoid of devotion and kindheartedness, but led by a naive selfishness which rendered all his better qualities incomplete, while certain absurdities of manner spoiled his personal appearance.

Madame Claes recollected the curt tone in which the notary had spoken to her that afternoon in the porch of the church, and she took note of the change which her present reply had wrought in his demeanor; she guessed its meaning and tried to read her daughter’s mind by a penetrating glance, seeking to discover if she thought of her cousin; but the young girl’s manner showed complete indifference.

After a few moments spent in general conversation on the current topics of the day, the master of the house came down from his bedroom, where his wife had heard with inexpressible delight the creaking sound of his boots as he trod the floor. The step was that of a young and active man, and foretold so complete a transformation, that the mere expectation of his appearance made Madame Claes quiver as he descended the stairs. Balthazar entered, dressed in

the fashion of the period. He wore highly polished top-boots, which allowed the upper part of the white silk stockings to appear, blue kerseymere small-clothes with gold buttons, a flowered white waistcoat, and a blue frock-coat. He had trimmed his beard, combed and perfumed his hair, pared his nails, and washed his hands, all with such care that he was scarcely recognizable to those who had seen him lately. Instead of an old man almost decrepit, his children, his wife, and the notary saw a Balthazar Claes who was forty years old, and whose courteous and affable presence was full of its former attractions. The weariness and suffering betrayed by the thin face and the clinging of the skin to the bones, had in themselves a sort of charm.

“Good-evening, Pierquin,” said Monsieur Claes.

Once more a husband and a father, he took his youngest child from his wife’s lap and tossed him in the air.

“See that little fellow!” he exclaimed to the notary. “Doesn’t such a pretty creature make you long to marry? Take my word for it, my dear Pierquin, family happiness consoles a man for everything. Up, up!” he cried, tossing Jean into the air; “down, down! up! down!”

The child laughed with all his heart as he went alternately to the ceiling and down to the carpet. The mother turned away her eyes that she might not betray the emotion which the simple play caused her,—simple apparently, but to her a domestic revolution.

“Let me see how you can walk,” said Balthazar, putting his son on the floor and throwing himself on a sofa near his wife.

The child ran to its father, attracted by the glitter of the gold buttons which fastened the breeches just above the slashed tops of his boots.

“You are a darling!” cried Balthazar, kissing him; “you are a Claes, you walk straight. Well, Gabriel, how is Pere Morillon?” he said to his eldest son, taking him by the ear and twisting it. “Are you struggling valiantly with your themes and your construing? have you taken sharp hold of mathematics?”

Then he rose, and went up to the notary with the affectionate courtesy that characterized him.

“My dear Pierquin,” he said, “perhaps you have something to say to me.” He took his arm to lead him to the garden, adding, “Come and see my tulips.”

Madame Claes looked at her husband as he left the room, unable to repress the joy she felt in seeing him once more so young, so affable, so truly himself. She rose, took her daughter round the waist and kissed her, exclaiming:—

“My dear Marguerite, my darling child! I love you better than ever to-day.”

“It is long since I have seen my father so kind,” answered the young girl.

Lemulquinier announced dinner. To prevent Pierquin from offering her his arm, Madame Claes took that of her husband and led the way into the next room, the whole family following.

The dining-room, whose ceiling was supported by beams and decorated with paintings cleaned and restored every year, was furnished with tall oaken side-boards and buffets, on whose shelves stood many a curious piece of family china. The walls were hung with violet leather, on which designs of game and other hunting objects were stamped in gold. Carefully arranged here and there above the shelves, shone the brilliant plumage of strange birds, and the lustre of rare shells. The chairs, which evidently had not been changed since the beginning of the sixteenth century, showed the square shape with twisted columns and the low back covered with a fringed stuff, common to that period, and glorified by Raphael in his picture of the Madonna della Sedia. The wood of these chairs was now black, but the gilt nails shone as if new, and the stuff, carefully renewed from time to time, was of an admirable shade of red.

The whole life of Flanders with its Spanish innovations was in this room. The decanters and flasks on the dinner-table, with their graceful antique lines and swelling curves, had an air of respectability. The glasses were those old goblets with stems and feet which may be seen in the pictures of the Dutch or Flemish school. The dinner-service of faience, decorated with raised colored figures, in the manner of Bernard Palissy, came from the English manufactory of Wedgwood. The silver-ware was massive, with square sides and designs in high relief,—genuine family plate, whose pieces, in every variety of form, fashion, and chasing, showed the beginnings of prosperity and the progress towards fortune of the Claes family. The napkins were fringed, a fashion altogether Spanish; and as for the linen, it will readily be supposed that the Claes’s household made it a point of honor to possess the best.

All this service of the table, silver, linen, and glass, were for the daily use of the family. The front house, where the social entertainments were given, had its own especial luxury, whose marvels, being reserved for great occasions, wore an air of dignity often lost to things which are, as it were, made common by daily use. Here, in the home quarter, everything bore the impress of patriarchal use and simplicity. And—for a final and delightful detail—a vine grew outside the house between the windows, whose tendrilled branches twined about the casements.

“You are faithful to the old traditions, madame,” said Pierquin, as he received a plate of that celebrated thyme soup in which the Dutch and Flemish cooks put little force-meat balls and dice of fried bread. “This is the Sunday

soup of our forefathers. Your house and that of my uncle des Racquets are the only ones where we still find this historic soup of the Netherlands. Ah! pardon me, old Monsieur Savaron de Savarus of Tournai makes it a matter of pride to keep up the custom; but everywhere else old Flanders is disappearing. Now-a-days everything is changing; furniture is made from Greek models; wherever you go you see helmets, lances, shields, and bows and arrows! Everybody is rebuilding his house, selling his old furniture, melting up his silver dishes, or exchanging them for Sevres porcelain,—which does not compare with either old Dresden or with Chinese ware. Oh! as for me, I'm Flemish to the core; my heart actually bleeds to see the coppersmiths buying up our beautiful inlaid furniture for the mere value of the wood and the metal. The fact is, society wants to change its skin. Everything is being sacrificed, even the old methods of art. When people insist on going so fast, nothing is conscientiously done. During my last visit to Paris I was taken to see the pictures in the Louvre. On my word of honor, they are mere screen-painting,—no depth, no atmosphere; the painters were actually afraid to put colors on their canvas. And it is they who talk of overturning our ancient school of art! Ah, bah!—"

"Our old masters," replied Balthazar, "studied the combination of colors and their endurance by submitting them to the action of sun and rain. You are right enough, however; the material resources of art are less cultivated in these days than formerly."

Madame Claes was not listening to the conversation. The notary's remark that porcelain dinner-services were now the fashion, gave her the brilliant idea of selling a quantity of heavy silver-ware which she had inherited from her brother,—hoping to be able thus to pay off the thirty thousand francs which her husband owed.

"Ha! ha!" Balthazar was saying to Pierquin when Madame Claes's mind returned to the conversation, "so they are discussing my work in Douai, are they?"

"Yes," replied the notary, "every one is asking what it is you spend so much money on. Only yesterday I heard the chief-justice deploring that a man like you should be searching for the Philosopher's stone. I ventured to reply that you were too wise not to know that such a scheme was attempting the impossible, too much of a Christian to take God's work out of his hands; and, like every other Claes, too good a business man to spend your money for such befooling quackeries. Still, I admit that I share the regret people feel at your absence from society. You might as well not live here at all. Really, madame, you would have been delighted had you heard the praises showered on Monsieur Claes and on you."

"You acted like a faithful friend in repelling imputations whose least evil is

to make me ridiculous," said Balthazar. "Ha! so they think me ruined? Well, my dear Pierquin, two months hence I shall give a fete in honor of my wedding-day whose magnificence will get me back the respect my dear townsmen bestow on wealth."

Madame Claes colored deeply. For two years the anniversary had been forgotten. Like madmen whose faculties shine at times with unwonted brilliancy, Balthazar was never more gracious and delightful in his tenderness than at this moment. He was full of attention to his children, and his conversation had the charms of grace, and wit, and pertinence. This return of fatherly feeling, so long absent, was certainly the truest fete he could give his wife, for whom his looks and words expressed once more that unbroken sympathy of heart for heart which reveals to each a delicious oneness of sentiment.

Old Lemulquinier seemed to renew his youth; he came and went about the table with unusual liveliness, caused by the accomplishment of his secret hopes. The sudden change in his master's ways was even more significant to him than to Madame Claes. Where the family saw happiness he saw fortune. While helping Balthazar in his experiments he had come to share his beliefs. Whether he really understood the drift of his master's researches from certain exclamations which escaped the chemist when expected results disappointed him, or whether the innate tendency of mankind towards imitation made him adopt the ideas of the man in whose atmosphere he lived, certain it is that Lemulquinier had conceived for his master a superstitious feeling that was a mixture of terror, admiration, and selfishness. The laboratory was to him what a lottery-office is to the masses,—organized hope. Every night he went to bed saying to himself, "To-morrow we may float in gold"; and every morning he woke with a faith as firm as that of the night before.

His name proved that his origin was wholly Flemish. In former days the lower classes were known by some name or nickname derived from their trades, their surroundings, their physical conformation, or their moral qualities. This name became the patronymic of the burgher family which each established as soon as he obtained his freedom. Sellers of linen thread were called in Flanders, "mulquiniers"; and that no doubt was the trade of the particular ancestor of the old valet who passed from a state of serfdom to one of burgher dignity, until some unknown misfortune had again reduced his present descendant to the condition of a serf, with the addition of wages. The whole history of Flanders and its linen-trade was epitomized in this old man, often called, by way of euphony, Mulquinier. He was not without originality, either of character or appearance. His face was triangular in shape, broad and long, and seamed by small-pox which had left innumerable white and shining patches that gave him a fantastic appearance. He was tall and thin; his whole

demeanor solemn and mysterious; and his small eyes, yellow as the wig which was smoothly plastered on his head, cast none but oblique glances.

The old valet's outward man was in keeping with the feeling of curiosity which he everywhere inspired. His position as assistant to his master, the depositary of a secret jealously guarded and about which he maintained a rigid silence, invested him with a species of charm. The denizens of the rue de Paris watched him pass with an interest mingled with awe; to all their questions he returned sibylline answers big with mysterious treasures. Proud of being necessary to his master, he assumed an annoying authority over his companions, employing it to further his own interests and compel a submission which made him virtually the ruler of the house. Contrary to the custom of Flemish servants, who are deeply attached to the families whom they serve, Mulquinier cared only for Balthazar. If any trouble befell Madame Claes, or any joyful event happened to the family, he ate his bread and butter and drank his beer as phlegmatically as ever.

Dinner over, Madame Claes proposed that coffee should be served in the garden, by the bed of tulips which adorned the centre of it. The earthenware pots in which the bulbs were grown (the name of each flower being engraved on slate labels) were sunk in the ground and so arranged as to form a pyramid, at the summit of which rose a certain dragon's-head tulip which Balthazar alone possessed. This flower, named "tulipa Claesiana," combined the seven colors; and the curved edges of each petal looked as though they were gilt. Balthazar's father, who had frequently refused ten thousand florins for this treasure, took such precautions against the theft of a single seed that he kept the plant always in the parlor and often spent whole days in contemplating it. The stem was enormous, erect, firm, and admirably green; the proportions of the plant were in harmony with the proportions of the flower, whose seven colors were distinguishable from each other with the clearly defined brilliancy which formerly gave such fabulous value to these dazzling plants.

"Here you have at least thirty or forty thousand francs' worth of tulips," said the notary, looking alternately at Madame Claes and at the many-colored pyramid. The former was too enthusiastic over the beauty of the flowers, which the setting sun was just then transforming into jewels, to observe the meaning of the notary's words.

"What good do they do you?" continued Pierquin, addressing Balthazar; "you ought to sell them."

"Bah! am I in want of money?" replied Claes, in the tone of a man to whom forty thousand francs was a matter of no consequence.

There was a moment's silence, during which the children made many exclamations.

“See this one, mamma!”

“Oh! here’s a beauty!”

“Tell me the name of that one!”

“What a gulf for human reason to sound!” cried Balthazar, raising his hands and clasping them with a gesture of despair. “A compound of hydrogen and oxygen gives off, according to their relative proportions, under the same conditions and by the same principle, these manifold colors, each of which constitutes a distinct result.”

His wife heard the words of his proposition, but it was uttered so rapidly that she did not seize its exact meaning; and Balthazar, as if remembering that she had studied his favorite science, made her a mysterious sign, saying,—

“You do not yet understand me, but you will.”

Then he apparently fell back into the absorbed meditation now habitual to him.

“No, I am sure you do not understand him,” said Pierquin, taking his coffee from Marguerite’s hand. “The Ethiopian can’t change his skin, nor the leopard his spots,” he whispered to Madame Claes. “Have the goodness to remonstrate with him later; the devil himself couldn’t draw him out of his cogitation now; he is in it for to-day, at any rate.”

So saying, he bade good-bye to Claes, who pretended not to hear him, kissed little Jean in his mother’s arms, and retired with a low bow.

When the street-door clanged behind him, Balthazar caught his wife round the waist, and put an end to the uneasiness his feigned reverie was causing her by whispering in her ear,—

“I knew how to get rid of him.”

Madame Claes turned her face to her husband, not ashamed to let him see the tears of happiness that filled her eyes: then she rested her forehead against his shoulder and let little Jean slide to the floor.

“Let us go back into the parlor,” she said, after a pause.

Balthazar was exuberantly gay throughout the evening. He invented games for the children, and played with such zest himself that he did not notice two or three short absences made by his wife. About half-past nine, when Jean had gone to bed, Marguerite returned to the parlor after helping her sister Felicie to undress, and found her mother seated in the deep armchair, and her father holding his wife’s hand as he talked to her. The young girl feared to disturb them, and was about to retire without speaking, when Madame Claes caught sight of her, and said:—

“Come in, Marguerite; come here, dear child.” She drew her down, kissed her tenderly on the forehead, and said, “Carry your book into your own room; but do not sit up too late.”

“Good-night, my darling daughter,” said Balthazar.

Marguerite kissed her father and mother and went away. Husband and wife remained alone for some minutes without speaking, watching the last glimmer of the twilight as it faded from the trees in the garden, whose outlines were scarcely discernible through the gathering darkness. When night had almost fallen, Balthazar said to his wife in a voice of emotion,—

“Let us go upstairs.”

Long before English manners and customs had consecrated the wife’s chamber as a sacred spot, that of a Flemish woman was impenetrable. The good housewives of the Low Countries did not make it a symbol of virtue. It was to them a habit contracted from childhood, a domestic superstition, rendering the bedroom a delightful sanctuary of tender feelings, where simplicity blended with all that was most sweet and sacred in social life. Any woman in Madame Claes’s position would have wished to gather about her the elegances of life, but Josephine had done so with exquisite taste, knowing well how great an influence the aspect of our surroundings exerts upon the feelings of others. To a pretty creature it would have been mere luxury, to her it was a necessity. No one better understood the meaning of the saying, “A pretty woman is self-created,”—a maxim which guided every action of Napoleon’s first wife, and often made her false; whereas Madame Claes was ever natural and true.

Though Balthazar knew his wife’s chamber well, his forgetfulness of material things had lately been so complete that he felt a thrill of soft emotion when he entered it, as though he saw it for the first time. The proud gaiety of a triumphant woman glowed in the splendid colors of the tulips which rose from the long throats of Chinese vases judiciously placed about the room, and sparkled in the profusion of lights whose effect can only be compared to a joyous burst of martial music. The gleam of the wax candles cast a mellow sheen on the coverings of pearl-gray silk, whose monotony was relieved by touches of gold, soberly distributed here and there on a few ornaments, and by the varied colors of the tulips, which were like sheaves of precious stones. The secret of this choice arrangement—it was he, ever he! Josephine could not tell him in words more eloquent that he was now and ever the mainspring of her joys and woes.

The aspect of that chamber put the soul deliciously at ease, cast out sad thoughts, and left a sense of pure and equable happiness. The silken coverings, brought from China, gave forth a soothing perfume that penetrated the system

without fatiguing it. The curtains, carefully drawn, betrayed a desire for solitude, a jealous intention of guarding the sound of every word, of hiding every look of the reconquered husband. Madame Claes, wearing a dressing-robe of muslin, which was trimmed by a long pelerine with falls of lace that came about her throat, and adorned with her beautiful black hair, which was exquisitely glossy and fell on either side of her forehead like a raven's wing, went to draw the tapestry portiere that hung before the door and allowed no sound to penetrate the chamber from without.

CHAPTER VI

At the doorway Josephine turned, and threw to her husband, who was sitting near the chimney, one of those gay smiles with which a sensitive woman whose soul comes at moments into her face, rendering it beautiful, gives expression to irresistible hopes. Woman's greatest charm lies in her constant appeal to the generosity of man by the admission of a weakness which stirs his pride and wakens him to the nobler sentiments. Is not such an avowal of weakness full of magical seduction? When the rings of the portiere had slipped with a muffled sound along the wooden rod, she turned towards Claes, and made as though she would hide her physical defects by resting her hand upon a chair and drawing herself gracefully forward. It was calling him to help her. Balthazar, sunk for a moment in contemplation of the olive-tinted head, which attracted and satisfied the eye as it stood out in relief against the soft gray background, rose to take his wife in his arms and carry her to her sofa. This was what she wanted.

"You promised me," she said, taking his hand which she held between her own magnetic palms, "to tell me the secret of your researches. Admit, dear friend, that I am worthy to know it, since I have had the courage to study a science condemned by the Church that I might be able to understand you. I am curious; hide nothing from me. Tell me first how it happened, that you rose one morning anxious and oppressed, when over night I had left you happy."

"Is it to hear me talk of chemistry that you have made yourself so coquettishly delightful?"

"Dear friend, a confidence which puts me in your inner heart is the greatest of all pleasures for me; is it not a communion of souls which gives birth to the highest happiness of earth? Your love comes back to me not lessened, pure; I long to know what dream has had the power to keep it from me so long. Yes, I am more jealous of a thought than of all the women in the world. Love is vast, but it is not infinite, while Science has depths unfathomed, to which I will not

let you go alone. I hate all that comes between us. If you win the glory for which you strive, I must be unhappy; it will bring you joy, while I—I alone—should be the giver of your happiness."

"No, my angel, it was not an idea, not a thought; it was a man that first led me into this glorious path."

"A man!" she cried in terror.

"Do you remember, Pepita, the Polish officer who stayed with us in 1809?"

"Do I remember him!" she exclaimed; "I am often annoyed because my memory still recalls those eyes, like tongues of fire darting from coals of hell, those hollows above the eyebrows, that broad skull stripped of hair, the upturned moustache, the angular, worn face!—What awful impassiveness in his bearing! Ah! surely if there had been a room in any inn I would never have allowed him to sleep here."

"That Polish gentleman," resumed Balthazar, "was named Adam de Wierzchownia. When you left us alone that evening in the parlor, we happened by chance to speak of chemistry. Compelled by poverty to give up the study of that science, he had become a soldier. It was, I think, by means of a glass of sugared water that we recognized each other as adepts. When I ordered Mulquinier to bring the sugar in pieces, the captain gave a start of surprise. 'Have you studied chemistry?' he asked. 'With Lavoisier,' I answered. 'You are happy in being rich and free,' he cried; then from the depths of his bosom came the sigh of a man,—one of those sighs which reveal a hell of anguish hidden in the brain or in the heart, a something ardent, concentrated, not to be expressed in words. He ended his sentence with a look that startled me. After a pause, he told me that Poland being at her last gasp he had taken refuge in Sweden. There he had sought consolation for his country's fate in the study of chemistry, for which he had always felt an irresistible vocation. 'And I see you recognize as I do,' he added, 'that gum arabic, sugar, and starch, reduced to powder, each yield a substance absolutely similar, with, when analyzed, the same qualitative result.'

"He paused again; and then, after examining me with a searching eye, he said confidentially, in a low voice, certain grave words whose general meaning alone remains fixed on my memory; but he spoke with a force of tone, with fervid inflections, with an energy of gesture, which stirred my very vitals, and struck my imagination as the hammer strikes the anvil. I will tell you briefly the arguments he used, which were to me like the live coal laid by the Almighty upon Isaiah's tongue; for my studies with Lavoisier enabled me to understand their full bearing.

"'Monsieur,' he said, 'the parity of these three substances, in appearance so

distinct, led me to think that all the productions of nature ought to have a single principle. The researches of modern chemistry prove the truth of this law in the larger part of natural effects. Chemistry divides creation into two distinct parts,—organic nature, and inorganic nature. Organic nature, comprising as it does all animal and vegetable creations which show an organization more or less perfect,—or, to be more exact, a greater or lesser motive power, which gives more or less sensibility,—is, undoubtedly, the more important part of our earth. Now, analysis has reduced all the products of this nature to four simple substances, namely: three gases, nitrogen, hydrogen, and oxygen, and another simple substance, non-metallic and solid, carbon. Inorganic nature, on the contrary, so simple, devoid of movement and sensation, denied the power of growth (too hastily accorded to it by Linnaeus), possesses fifty-three simple substances, or elements, whose different combinations make its products. Is it probable that means should be more numerous where a lesser number of results are produced?

"'My master's opinion was that these fifty-three primary bodies have one originating principle, acted upon in the past by some force the knowledge of which has perished to-day, but which human genius ought to rediscover. Well, then, suppose that this force does live and act again; we have chemical unity. Organic and inorganic nature would apparently then rest on four essential principles,—in fact, if we could decompose nitrogen which we ought to consider a negation, we should have but three. This brings us at once close upon the great Ternary of the ancients and of the alchemists of the Middle Ages, whom we do wrong to scorn. Modern chemistry is nothing more than that. It is much, and yet little,—much, because the science has never recoiled before difficulty; little, in comparison with what remains to be done. Chance has served her well, my noble Science! Is not that tear of crystallized pure carbon, the diamond, seemingly the last substance possible to create? The old alchemists, who thought that gold was decomposable and therefore creatable, shrank from the idea of producing the diamond. Yet we have discovered the nature and the law of its composition.

"'As for me,' he continued, 'I have gone farther still. An experiment proved to me that the mysterious Ternary, which has occupied the human mind from time immemorial, will not be found by physical analyses, which lack direction to a fixed point. I will relate, in the first place, the experiment itself.

"'Sow cress-seed (to take one among the many substances of organic nature) in flour of brimstone (to take another simple substance). Sprinkle the seed with distilled water, that no unknown element may reach the product of the germination. The seed germinates, and sprouts from a known environment, and feeds only on elements known by analysis. Cut off the stalks from time to time, till you get a sufficient quantity to produce after burning them enough

ashes for the experiment. Well, by analyzing those ashes, you will obtain silicic acid, aluminium, phosphate and carbonate of lime, carbonate of magnesia, the sulphate and carbonate of potassium, and oxide of iron, precisely as if the cress had grown in ordinary earth, beside a brook. Now, those elements did not exist in the brimstone, a simple substance which served for soil to the cress, nor in the distilled water with which the plant was nourished, whose composition was known. But since they are no more to be found in the seed itself, we can explain their presence in the plant only by assuming the existence of a primary element common to all the substances contained in the cress, and also to all those by which we environed it. Thus the air, the distilled water, the brimstone, and the various elements which analysis finds in the cress, namely, potash, lime, magnesia, aluminium, etc., should have one common principle floating in the atmosphere like light of the sun.

"'From this unimpeachable experiment,' he cried, 'I deduce the existence of the Alkahest, the Absolute,—a substance common to all created things, differentiated by one primary force. Such is the net meaning and position of the problem of the Absolute, which appears to me to be solvable. In it we find the mysterious Ternary, before whose shrine humanity has knelt from the dawn of ages,—the primary matter, the medium, the product. We find that terrible number THREE in all things human. It governs religions, sciences, and laws.

"'It was at this point,' he went on, 'that poverty put an end to my researches. You were the pupil of Lavoisier, you are rich, and master of your own time, I will therefore tell you my conjectures. Listen to the conclusions my personal experiments have led me to foresee. The PRIME MATTER must be the common principle in the three gases and in carbon. The MEDIUM must be the principle common to negative and positive electricity. Proceed to the discovery of the proofs that will establish those two truths; you will then find the explanation of all phenomenal existence.

"'Oh, monsieur!' he cried, striking his brow, 'when I know that I carry here the last word of Creation, when intuitively I perceive the Unconditioned, is it LIVING to be dragged hither and thither in the ruck of men who fly at each other's throats at the word of command without knowing what they are doing? My actual life is an inverted dream. My body comes and goes and acts; it moves amid bullets, and cannon, and men; it crosses Europe at the will of a power I obey and yet despise. My soul has no consciousness of these acts; it is fixed, immovable, plunged in one idea, rapt in that idea, the Search for the Alkahest,—for that principle by which seeds that are absolutely alike, growing in the same environments, produce, some a white, others a yellow flower. The same phenomenon is seen in silkworms fed from the same leaves, and apparently constituted exactly alike,—one produces yellow silk, another

white; and if we come to man himself, we find that children often resemble neither father nor mother. The logical deduction from this fact surely involves the explanation of all the phenomena of nature.

"'Ah, what can be more in harmony with our ideas of God than to believe that he created all things by the simplest method? The Pythagorean worship of ONE, from which come all other numbers, and which represented Primal Matter; that of the number TWO, the first aggregation and the type of all the rest; that of the number THREE, which throughout all time has symbolized God,—that is to say, Matter, Force, and Product,—are they not an echo, lingering along the ages, of some confused knowledge of the Absolute? Stahl, Becker, Paracelsus, Agrippa, all the great Searchers into occult causes took the Great Triad for their watchword,—in other words, the Ternary. Ignorant men who despise alchemy, that transcendent chemistry, are not aware that our work is only carrying onward the passionate researches of those great men. Had I found the Absolute, the Unconditioned, I meant to have grappled with Motion. Ah! while I am swallowing gunpowder and leading men uselessly to their death, my former master is piling discovery upon discovery! he is soaring towards the Absolute, while I—I shall die like a dog in the trenches!'

"When this poor grand man recovered his composure, he said, in a touching tone of brotherhood, 'If I see cause for a great experiment I will bequeath it to you before I die.'—My Pepita," cried Balthazar, taking his wife's hands, "tears of anguish rolled down his hollow cheeks, as he cast into my soul the fiery arguments that Lavoisier had timidly recognized without daring to follow them out—"

"Oh!" cried Madame Claes, unable to refrain from interrupting her husband, "that man, passing one night under our roof, was able to deprive us of your love, to destroy with a phrase, a word, the happiness of a family! Oh, my dear Balthazar, did he make the sign of the cross? did you examine him? The Tempter alone could have had that flaming eye which sent forth the fire of Prometheus. Yes, none but the devil could have torn you from me. From that day you have been neither husband, nor father, nor master of your family."

"What!" exclaimed Balthazar, springing to his feet and casting a piercing glance at his wife, "do you blame your husband for rising above the level of other men that he may lay at your feet the divine purple of his glory, as a paltry offering in exchange for the treasures of your heart! Ah, my Pepita," he cried, "you do not know what I have done. In these three years I have made giant strides—"

His face seemed to his wife at this moment more transfigured under the fires of genius than she had ever seen it under the fires of love; and she wept as she listened to him.

“I have combined chlorine and nitrogen; I have decomposed many substances hitherto considered simple; I have discovered new metals. Why!” he continued, noticing that his wife wept, “I have even decomposed tears. Tears contain a little phosphate of lime, chloride of sodium, mucin, and water.”

He went on speaking, without observing the spasm of pain that contracted Josephine’s features; he was again astride of Science, which bore him with outspread wings far away from material existence.

“This analysis, my dear,” he went on, “is one of the most convincing proofs of the theory of the Absolute. All life involves combustion. According to the greater or the lesser activity of the fire on its hearth is life more or less enduring. In like manner, the destruction of mineral bodies is indefinitely retarded, because in their case combustion is nominal, latent, or imperceptible. In like manner, again, vegetables, which are constantly revived by combinations producing dampness, live indefinitely; in fact, we still possess certain vegetables which existed before the period of the last cataclysm. But each time that nature has perfected an organism and then, for some unknown reason, has introduced into it sensation, instinct, or intelligence (three marked stages of the organic system), these three agencies necessitate a combustion whose activity is in direct proportion to the result obtained. Man, who represents the highest point of intelligence, and who offers us the only organism by which we arrive at a power that is semi-creative—namely, THOUGHT—is, among all zoological creations, the one in which combustion is found in its most intense degree; whose powerful effects may in fact be seen to some extent in the phosphates, sulphates, and carbonates which a man’s body reveals to our analysis. May not these substances be traces left within him of the passage of the electric fluid which is the principle of all fertilization? Would not electricity manifest itself by a greater variety of compounds in him than in any other animal? Should not he have faculties above those of all other created beings for the purpose of absorbing fuller portions of the Absolute principle? and may he not assimilate that principle so as to produce, in some more perfect mechanism, his force and his ideas? I think so. Man is a retort. In my judgment, the brain of an idiot contains too little phosphorous or other product of electro-magnetism, that of a madman too much; the brain of an ordinary man has but little, while that of a man of genius is saturated to its due degree. The man constantly in love, the street-porter, the dancer, the large eater, are the ones who disperse the force resulting from their electrical apparatus. Consequently, our feelings—”

“Enough, Balthazar! you terrify me; you commit sacrilege. What, is my love—”

“An ethereal matter disengaged, an emanation, the key of the Absolute.

Conceive if I—I, the first, should find it, find it, find it!”

As he uttered the words in three rising tones, the expression of his face rose by degrees to inspiration. “I shall make metals,” he cried; “I shall make diamonds, I shall be a co-worker with Nature!”

“Will you be the happier?” she asked in despair. “Accursed science! accursed demon! You forget, Claes, that you commit the sin of pride, the sin of which Satan was guilty; you assume the attributes of God.”

“Oh! oh! God!”

“He denies Him!” she cried, wringing her hands. “Claes, God wields a power that you can never gain.”

At this argument, which seemed to discredit his beloved Science, he looked at his wife and trembled.

“What power?” he asked.

“Primal force—motion,” she replied. “This is what I learn from the books your mania has constrained me to read. Analyze fruits, flowers, Malaga wine; you will discover, undoubtedly, that their substances come, like those of your water-cress, from a medium that seems foreign to them. You can, if need be, find them in nature; but when you have them, can you combine them? can you make the flowers, the fruits, the Malaga wine? Will you have grasped the inscrutable effects of the sun, of the atmosphere of Spain? Ah! decomposing is not creating.”

“If I discover the magistral force, I shall be able to create.”

“Will nothing stop him?” cried Pepita. “Oh! my love, my love! it is killed! I have lost him!”

She wept bitterly, and her eyes, illumined by grief and by the sanctity of the feelings that flooded her soul, shone with greater beauty than ever through her tears.

“Yes,” she resumed in a broken voice, “you are dead to all. I see it but too well. Science is more powerful within you than your own self; it bears you to heights from which you will return no more to be the companion of a poor woman. What joys can I still offer you? Ah! I would fain believe, as a wretched consolation, that God has indeed created you to make manifest his works, to chant his praises; that he has put within your breast the irresistible power that has mastered you—But no; God is good; he would keep in your heart some thoughts of the woman who adores you, of the children you are bound to protect. It is the Evil One alone who is helping you to walk amid these fathomless abysses, these clouds of outer darkness, where the light of faith does not guide you,—nothing guides you but a terrible belief in your own

faculties! Were it otherwise, would you not have seen that you have wasted nine hundred thousand francs in three years? Oh! do me justice, you, my God on earth! I reproach you not; were we alone I would bring you, on my knees, all I possess and say, ‘Take it, fling it into your furnace, turn it into smoke’; and I should laugh to see it float away in vapor. Were you poor, I would beg without shame for the coal to light your furnace. Oh! could my body yield your hateful Alkahest, I would fling myself upon those fires with joy, since your glory, your delight is in that unfound secret. But our children, Claes, our children! what will become of them if you do not soon discover this hellish thing? Do you know why Pierquin came to-day? He came for thirty thousand francs, which you owe and cannot pay. I told him that you had the money, so that I might spare you the mortification of his questions; but to get it I must sell our family silver.”

She saw her husband’s eyes grow moist, and she flung herself despairingly at his feet, raising up to him her supplicating hands.

“My friend,” she cried, “refrain awhile from these researches; let us economize, let us save the money that may enable you to take them up hereafter,—if, indeed, you cannot renounce this work. Oh! I do not condemn it; I will heat your furnaces if you ask it; but I implore you, do not reduce our children to beggary. Perhaps you cannot love them, Science may have consumed your heart; but oh! do not bequeath them a wretched life in place of the happiness you owe them. Motherhood has sometimes been too weak a power in my heart; yes, I have sometimes wished I were not a mother, that I might be closer to your soul, your life! And now, to stifle my remorse, must I plead the cause of my children before you, and not my own?”

Her hair fell loose and floated over her shoulders, her eyes shot forth her feelings as though they had been arrows. She triumphed over her rival. Balthazar lifted her, carried her to the sofa, and knelt at her feet.

“Have I caused you such grief?” he said, in the tone of a man waking from a painful dream.

“My poor Claes! yes, and you will cause me more, in spite of yourself,” she said, passing her hand over his hair. “Sit here beside me,” she continued, pointing to the sofa. “Ah! I can forget it all now, now that you come back to us; all can be repaired—but you will not abandon me again? say that you will not! My noble husband, grant me a woman’s influence on your heart, that influence which is so needful to the happiness of suffering artists, to the troubled minds of great men. You may be harsh to me, angry with me if you will, but let me check you a little for your good. I will never abuse the power if you will grant it. Be famous, but be happy too. Do not love Chemistry better than you love us. Hear me, we will be generous; we will let Science share your

heart; but oh! my Claes, be just; let us have our half. Tell me, is not my disinterestedness sublime?”

She made him smile. With the marvellous art such women possess, she carried the momentous question into the regions of pleasantry where women reign. But though she seemed to laugh, her heart was violently contracted and could not easily recover the quiet even action that was habitual to it. And yet, as she saw in the eyes of Balthazar the rebirth of a love which was once her glory, the full return of a power she thought she had lost, she said to him with a smile:—

“Believe me, Balthazar, nature made us to feel; and though you may wish us to be mere electrical machines, yet your gases and your ethereal disengaged matters will never explain the gift we possess of looking into futurity.”

“Yes,” he exclaimed, “by affinity. The power of vision which makes the poet, the power of deduction which makes the man of science, are based on invisible affinities, intangible, imponderable, which vulgar minds class as moral phenomena, whereas they are physical effects. The prophet sees and deduces. Unfortunately, such affinities are too rare and too obscure to be subjected to analysis or observation.”

“Is this,” she said, giving him a kiss to drive away the Chemistry she had so unfortunately reawakened, “what you call an affinity?”

“No; it is a compound; two substances that are equivalents are neutral, they produce no reaction—”

“Oh! hush, hush,” she cried, “you will make me die of grief. I can never bear to see my rival in the transports of your love.”

“But, my dear life, I think only of you. My work is for the glory of my family. You are the basis of all my hopes.”

“Ah, look me in the eyes!”

The scene had made her as beautiful as a young woman; of her whole person Balthazar saw only her head, rising from a cloud of lace and muslin.

“Yes, I have done wrong to abandon you for Science,” he said. “If I fall back into thought and preoccupation, then, my Pepita, you must drag me from them; I desire it.”

She lowered her eyes and let him take her hand, her greatest beauty,—a hand that was both strong and delicate.

“But I ask more,” she said.

“You are so lovely, so delightful, you can obtain all,” he answered.

“I wish to destroy that laboratory, and chain up Science,” she said, with fire in her eyes.

“So be it—let Chemistry go to the devil!”

“This moment effaces all!” she cried. “Make me suffer now, if you will.”

Tears came to Balthazar’s eyes, as he heard these words.

“You were right, love,” he said. “I have seen you through a veil; I have not understood you.”

“If it concerned only me,” she said, “willingly would I have suffered in silence, never would I have raised my voice against my sovereign. But your sons must be thought of, Claes. If you continue to dissipate your property, no matter how glorious the object you have in view the world will take little account of it, it will only blame you and yours. But surely, it is enough for a man of your noble nature that his wife has shown him a danger he did not perceive. We will talk of this no more,” she cried, with a smile and a glance of coquetry. “To-night, my Claes, let us not be less than happy.”

CHAPTER VII

On the morrow of this evening so eventful for the Claes family, Balthazar, from whom Josephine had doubtless obtained some promise as to the cessation of his researches, remained in the parlor, and did not enter his laboratory. The succeeding day the household prepared to move into the country, where they stayed for more than two months, only returning to town in time to prepare for the fete which Claes determined to give, as in former years, to commemorate his wedding-day. He now began by degrees to obtain proof of the disorder which his experiments and his indifference had brought into his business affairs.

Madame Claes, far from irritating the wound by remarking on it, continually found remedies for the evil that was done. Of the seven servants who customarily served the family, there now remained only Lemulquinier, Josette the cook, and an old waiting-woman, named Martha, who had never left her mistress since the latter left her convent. It was of course impossible to give a fete to the whole society of Douai with so few servants, but Madame Claes overcame all difficulties by proposing to send to Paris for a cook, to train the gardener’s son as a waiter, and to borrow Pierquin’s manservant. Thus the pinched circumstances of the family passed unnoticed by the community.

During the twenty days of preparation for the fete, Madame Claes was cleverly able to outwit her husband's listlessness. She commissioned him to select the rarest plants and flowers to decorate the grand staircase, the gallery, and the salons; then she sent him to Dunkerque to order one of those monstrous fish which are the glory of the burgher tables in the northern departments. A fete like that the Claes were about to give is a serious affair, involving thought and care and active correspondence, in a land where traditions of hospitality put the family honor so much at stake that to servants as well as masters a grand dinner is like a victory won over the guests. Oysters arrived from Ostend, grouse were imported from Scotland, fruits came from Paris; in short, not the smallest accessory was lacking to the hereditary luxury.

A ball at the House of Claes had an importance of its own. The government of the department was then at Douai, and the anniversary fete of the Claes usually opened the winter season and set the fashion to the neighborhood. For fifteen years, Balthazar had endeavored to make it a distinguished occasion, and had succeeded so well that the fete was talked of throughout a circumference of sixty miles, and the toilettes, the guests, the smallest details, the novelties exhibited, and the events that took place, were discussed far and wide. These preparations now prevented Claes from thinking, for the time being, of the Alkahest. Since his return to social life and domestic bliss, the servant of science had recovered his self-love as a man, as a Fleming, as the master of a household, and he now took pleasure in the thought of surprising the whole country. He resolved to give a special character to this ball by some exquisite novelty; and he chose, among all other caprices of luxury, the loveliest, the richest, and the most fleeting,—he turned the old mansion into a fairy bower of rare plants and flowers, and prepared choice bouquets for all the ladies.

The other details of the fete were in keeping with this unheard-of luxury, and nothing seemed likely to mar the effect. But the Twenty-ninth Bulletin and the news of the terrible disasters of the grand army in Russia, and at the passage of the Beresina, were made known on the afternoon of the appointed day. A sincere and profound grief was felt in Douai, and those who were present at the fete, moved by a natural feeling of patriotism, unanimously declined to dance.

Among the letters which arrived that day in Douai, was one for Balthazar from Monsieur de Wierzchownia, then in Dresden and dying, he wrote, from wounds received in one of the late engagements. He remembered his promise, and desired to bequeath to his former host several ideas on the subject of the Absolute, which had come to him since the period of their meeting. The letter plunged Claes into a reverie which apparently did honor to his patriotism; but his wife was not misled by it. To her, this festal day brought a double

mourning: and the ball, during which the House of Claes shone with departing lustre, was sombre and sad in spite of its magnificence, and the many choice treasures gathered by the hands of six generations, which the people of Douai now beheld for the last time.

Marguerite Claes, just sixteen, was the queen of the day, and on this occasion her parents presented her to society. She attracted all eyes by the extreme simplicity and candor of her air and manner, and especially by the harmony of her form and countenance with the characteristics of her home. She was the embodiment of the Flemish girl whom the painters of that country loved to represent,—the head perfectly rounded and full, chestnut hair parted in the middle and laid smoothly on the brow, gray eyes with a mixture of green, handsome arms, natural stoutness which did not detract from her beauty, a timid air, and yet, on the high square brow an expression of firmness, hidden at present under an apparent calmness and docility. Without being sad or melancholy, she seemed to have little natural enjoyment. Reflectiveness, order, a sense of duty, the three chief expressions of Flemish nature, were the characteristics of a face that seemed cold at first sight, but to which the eye was recalled by a certain grace of outline and a placid pride which seemed the pledges of domestic happiness. By one of those freaks which physiologists have not yet explained, she bore no likeness to either father or mother, but was the living image of her maternal great-grandmother, a Conyncks of Bruges, whose portrait, religiously preserved, bore witness to the resemblance.

The supper gave some life to the ball. If the military disasters forbade the delights of dancing, every one felt that they need not exclude the pleasures of the table. The true patriots, however, retired early; only the more indifferent remained, together with a few card players and the intimate friends of the family. Little by little the brilliantly lighted house, to which all the notabilities of Douai had flocked, sank into silence, and by one o’clock in the morning the great gallery was deserted, the lights were extinguished in one salon after another, and the court-yard, lately so bustling and brilliant, grew dark and gloomy,—prophetic image of the future that lay before the family. When the Claes returned to their own appartement, Balthazar gave his wife the letter he had received from the Polish officer: Josephine returned it with a mournful gesture; she foresaw the coming doom.

From that day forth, Balthazar made no attempt to disguise the weariness and the depression that assailed him. In the mornings, after the family breakfast, he played for awhile in the parlor with little Jean, and talked to his daughters, who were busy with their sewing, or embroidery or lace-work; but he soon wearied of the play and of the talk, and seemed at last to get through with them as a duty. When his wife came down again after dressing, she always found him sitting in an easy-chair looking blankly at Marguerite and

Felicie, quite undisturbed by the rattle of their bobbins. When the newspaper was brought in, he read it slowly like a retired merchant at a loss how to kill the time. Then he would get up, look at the sky through the window panes, go back to his chair and mend the fire drearily, as though he were deprived of all consciousness of his own movements by the tyranny of ideas.

Madame Claes keenly regretted her defects of education and memory. It was difficult for her to sustain an interesting conversation for any length of time; perhaps this is always difficult between two persons who have said everything to each other, and are forced to seek for subjects of interest outside the life of the heart, or the life of material existence. The life of the heart has its own moments of expansion which need some stimulus to bring them forth; discussions of material life cannot long occupy superior minds accustomed to decide promptly; and the mere gossip of society is intolerable to loving natures. Consequently, two isolated beings who know each other thoroughly ought to seek their enjoyments in the higher regions of thought; for it is impossible to satisfy with paltry things the immensity of the relation between them. Moreover, when a man has accustomed himself to deal with great subjects, he becomes unamusable, unless he preserves in the depths of his heart a certain guileless simplicity and unconstraint which often make great geniuses such charming children; but the childhood of the heart is a rare human phenomenon among those whose mission it is to see all, know all, and comprehend all.

During these first months, Madame Claes worked her way through this critical situation, by unwearying efforts, which love or necessity suggested to her. She tried to learn backgammon, which she had never been able to play, but now, from an impetus easy to understand, she ended by mastering it. Then she interested Balthazar in the education of his daughters, and asked him to direct their studies. All such resources were, however, soon exhausted. There came a time when Josephine’s relation to Balthazar was like that of Madame de Maintenon to Louis XIV.; she had to amuse the unamusable, but without the pomps of power or the wiles of a court which could play comedies like the sham embassies from the King of Siam and the Shah of Persia. After wasting the revenues of France, Louis XIV., no longer young or successful, was reduced to the expedients of a family heir to raise the money he needed; in the midst of his grandeur he felt his impotence, and the royal nurse who had rocked the cradles of his children was often at her wit’s end to rock his, or soothe the monarch now suffering from his misuse of men and things, of life and God. Claes, on the contrary, suffered from too much power. Stifling in the clutch of a single thought, he dreamed of the pomps of Science, of treasures for the human race, of glory for himself. He suffered as artists suffer in the grip of poverty, as Samson suffered beneath the pillars of the temple. The result was the same for the two sovereigns; though the intellectual monarch

was crushed by his inward force, the other by his weakness.

What could Pepita do, singly, against this species of scientific nostalgia? After employing every means that family life afforded her, she called society to the rescue, and gave two “cafes” every week. Cafes at Douai took the place of teas. A cafe was an assemblage which, during a whole evening, the guests sipped the delicious wines and liqueurs which overflow the cellars of that ever-blessed land, ate the Flemish dainties and took their “cafe noir” or their “cafe au lait frappe,” while the women sang ballads, discussed each other’s toilettes, and related the gossip of the day. It was a living picture by Mieris or Terburg, without the pointed gray hats, the scarlet plumes, or the beautiful costumes of the sixteenth century. And yet, Balthazar’s efforts to play the part of host, his constrained courtesy, his forced animation, left him the next day in a state of languor which showed but too plainly the depths of the inward ill.

These continual fetes, weak remedies for the real evil, only increased it. Like branches which caught him as he rolled down the precipice, they retarded Claes’s fall, but in the end he fell the heavier. Though he never spoke of his former occupations, never showed the least regret for the promise he had given not to renew his researches, he grew to have the melancholy motions, the feeble voice, the depression of a sick person. The ennui that possessed him showed at times in the very manner with which he picked up the tongs and built fantastic pyramids in the fire with bits of coal, utterly unconscious of what he was doing. When night came he was evidently relieved; sleep no doubt released him from the importunities of thought: the next day he rose wearily to encounter another day,—seeming to measure time as the tired traveller measures the desert he is forced to cross.

If Madame Claes knew the cause of this languor she endeavored not to see the extent of its ravages. Full of courage against the sufferings of the mind, she was helpless against the generous impulses of the heart. She dared not question Balthazar when she saw him listening to the laughter of little Jean or the chatter of his girls, with the air of a man absorbed in secret thoughts; but she shuddered when she saw him shake off his melancholy and try, with generous intent, to seem cheerful, that he might not distress others. The little coquetries of the father with his daughters, or his games with little Jean, moistened the eyes of the poor wife, who often left the room to hide the feelings that heroic effort caused her,—a heroism the cost of which is well understood by women, a generosity that well-nigh breaks their heart. At such times Madame Claes longed to say, “Kill me, and do what you will!”

Little by little Balthazar’s eyes lost their fire and took the glaucous opaque tint which overspreads the eyes of old men. His attentions to his wife, his manner of speaking, his whole bearing, grew heavy and inert. These symptoms became more marked towards the end of April, terrifying Madame

Claes, to whom the sight was now intolerable, and who had all along reproached herself a thousand times while she admired the Flemish loyalty which kept her husband faithful to his promise.

At last, one day when Balthazar seemed more depressed than ever, she hesitated no longer; she resolved to sacrifice everything and bring him back to life.

“Dear friend,” she said, “I release you from your promise.”

Balthazar looked at her in amazement.

“You are thinking of your researches, are you not?” she continued.

He answered by a gesture of startling eagerness. Far from remonstrating, Madame Claes, who had had leisure to sound the abyss into which they were about to fall together, took his hand and pressed it, smiling.

“Thank you,” she said; “now I am sure of my power. You sacrificed more than your life to me. In future, be the sacrifices mine. Though I have sold some of my diamonds, enough are left, with those my brother gave me, to get the necessary money for your experiments. I intended those jewels for my daughters, but your glory shall sparkle in their stead; and, besides, you will some day replace them with other and finer diamonds.”

The joy that suddenly lighted her husband’s face was like a death-knell to the wife: she saw, with anguish, that the man’s passion was stronger than himself. Claes had faith in his work which enabled him to walk without faltering on a path which, to his wife, was the edge of a precipice. For him faith, for her doubt,—for her the heavier burden: does not the woman ever suffer for the two? At this moment she chose to believe in his success, that she might justify to herself her connivance in the probable wreck of their fortunes.

“The love of all my life can be no recompense for your devotion, Pepita,” said Claes, deeply moved.

He had scarcely uttered the words when Marguerite and Felicie entered the room and wished him good-morning. Madame Claes lowered her eyes and remained for a moment speechless in presence of her children, whose future she had just sacrificed to a delusion; her husband, on the contrary, took them on his knees, and talked to them gaily, delighted to give vent to the joy that choked him.

From this day Madame Claes shared the impassioned life of her husband. The future of her children, their father’s credit, were two motives as powerful to her as glory and science were to Claes. After the diamonds were sold in Paris, and the purchase of chemicals was again begun, the unhappy woman never knew another hour’s peace of mind. The demon of Science and the

frenzy of research which consumed her husband now agitated her own mind; she lived in a state of continual expectation, and sat half-lifeless for days together in the deep armchair, paralyzed by the very violence of her wishes, which, finding no food, like those of Balthazar, in the daily hopes of the laboratory, tormented her spirit and aggravated her doubts and fears. Sometimes, blaming herself for compliance with a passion whose object was futile and condemned by the Church, she would rise, go to the window on the courtyard and gaze with terror at the chimney of the laboratory. If the smoke were rising, an expression of despair came into her face, a conflict of thoughts and feelings raged in her heart and mind. She beheld her children's future fleeing in that smoke, but—was she not saving their father's life? was it not her first duty to make him happy? This last thought calmed her for a moment.

She obtained the right to enter the laboratory and remain there; but even this melancholy satisfaction was soon renounced. Her sufferings were too keen when she saw that Balthazar took no notice of her, or seemed at times annoyed by her presence; in that fatal place she went through paroxysms of jealous impatience, angry desires to destroy the building,—a living death of untold miseries. Lemulquinier became to her a species of barometer: if she heard him whistle as he laid the breakfast-table or the dinner-table, she guessed that Balthazar's experiments were satisfactory, and there were prospects of a coming success; if, on the other hand, the man were morose and gloomy, she looked at him and trembled,—Balthazar must surely be dissatisfied. Mistress and valet ended by understanding each other, notwithstanding the proud reserve of the one and the reluctant submission of the other.

Feeble and defenceless against the terrible prostrations of thought, the poor woman at last gave way under the alternations of hope and despair which increased the distress of the loving wife, and the anxieties of the mother trembling for her children. She now practised the doleful silence which formerly chilled her heart, not observing the gloom that pervaded the house, where whole days went by in that melancholy parlor without a smile, often without a word. Led by sad maternal foresight, she trained her daughters to household work, and tried to make them skilful in womanly employments, that they might have the means of living if destitution came. The outward calm of this quiet home covered terrible agitations. Towards the end of the summer Balthazar had used the money derived from the diamonds, and was twenty thousand francs in debt to Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville.

In August, 1813, about a year after the scene with which this history begins, although Claes had made a few valuable experiments, for which, unfortunately, he cared but little, his efforts had been without result as to the real object of his researches. There came a day when he ended the whole

series of experiments, and the sense of his impotence crushed him; the certainty of having fruitlessly wasted enormous sums of money drove him to despair. It was a frightful catastrophe. He left the garret, descended slowly to the parlor, and threw himself into a chair in the midst of his children, remaining motionless for some minutes as though dead, making no answer to the questions his wife pressed upon him. Tears came at last to his relief, and he rushed to his own chamber that no one might witness his despair.

Josephine followed him and drew him into her own room, where, alone with her, Balthazar gave vent to his anguish. These tears of a man, these broken words of the hopeless toiler, these bitter regrets of the husband and father, did Madame Claes more harm than all her past sufferings. The victim consoled the executioner. When Balthazar said to her in a tone of dreadful conviction: “I am a wretch; I have gambled away the lives of my children, and your life; you can have no happiness unless I kill myself,”—the words struck home to her heart; she knew her husband’s nature enough to fear he might at once act out the despairing wish: an inward convulsion, disturbing the very sources of life itself, seized her, and was all the more dangerous because she controlled its violent effects beneath a deceptive calm of manner.

“My friend,” she said, “I have consulted, not Pierquin, whose friendship does not hinder him from feeling some secret satisfaction at our ruin, but an old man who has been as good to me as a father. The Abbe de Solis, my confessor, has shown me how we can still save ourselves from ruin. He came to see the pictures. The value of those in the gallery is enough to pay the sums you have borrowed on your property, and also all that you owe to Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, who have no doubt an account against you.”

Claes made an affirmative sign and bowed his head, the hair of which was now white.

“Monsieur de Solis knows the Happe and Duncker families of Amsterdam; they have a mania for pictures, and are anxious, like all parvenus, to display a luxury which ought to belong only to the old families: he thinks they will pay the full value of ours. By this means we can recover our independence, and out of the purchase money, which will amount to over one hundred thousand ducats, you will have enough to continue the experiments. Your daughters and I will be content with very little; we can fill up the empty frames with other pictures in course of time and by economy; meantime you will be happy.”

Balthazar raised his head and looked at his wife with a joy that was mingled with fear. Their roles were changed. The wife was the protector of the husband. He, so tender, he, whose heart was so at one with his Pepita’s, now held her in his arms without perceiving the horrible convulsion that made her palpitate, and even shook her hair and her lips with a nervous shudder.

“I dared not tell you,” he said, “that between me and the Unconditioned, the Absolute, scarcely a hair’s breadth intervenes. To gasify metals, I only need to find the means of submitting them to intense heat in some centre where the pressure of the atmosphere is nil,—in short, in a vacuum.”

Madame Claes could not endure the egotism of this reply. She expected a passionate acknowledgment of her sacrifices—she received a problem in chemistry! The poor woman left her husband abruptly and returned to the parlor, where she fell into a chair between her frightened daughters, and burst into tears. Marguerite and Felicie took her hands, kneeling one on each side of her, not knowing the cause of her grief, and asking at intervals, “Mother, what is it?”

“My poor children, I am dying; I feel it.”

The answer struck home to Marguerite’s heart; she saw, for the first time on her mother’s face, the signs of that peculiar pallor which only comes on olive-tinted skins.

“Martha, Martha!” cried Felicie, “come quickly; mamma wants you.”

The old duenna ran in from the kitchen, and as soon as she saw the livid hue of the dusky skin usually high-colored, she cried out in Spanish,—

“Body of Christ! madame is dying!”

Then she rushed precipitately back, told Josette to heat water for a footbath, and returned to the parlor.

“Don’t alarm Monsieur Claes; say nothing to him, Martha,” said her mistress. “My poor dear girls,” she added, pressing Marguerite and Felicie to her heart with a despairing action; “I wish I could live long enough to see you married and happy. Martha,” she continued, “tell Lemulquinier to go to Monsieur de Solis and ask him in my name to come here.”

The shock of this attack extended to the kitchen. Josette and Martha, both devoted to Madame Claes and her daughters, felt the blow in their own affections. Martha’s dreadful announcement,—“Madame is dying; monsieur must have killed her; get ready a mustard-bath,”—forced certain exclamations from Josette, which she launched at Lemulquinier. He, cold and impassive, went on eating at the corner of a table before one of the windows of the kitchen, where all was kept as clean as the boudoir of a fine lady.

“I knew how it would end,” said Josette, glancing at the valet and mounting a stool to take down a copper kettle that shone like gold. “There’s no mother could stand quietly by and see a father amusing himself by chopping up a fortune like his into sausage-meat.”

Josette, whose head was covered by a round cap with crimped borders,

which made it look like a German nut-cracker, cast a sour look at Lemulquinier, which the greenish tinge of her prominent little eyes made almost venomous. The old valet shrugged his shoulders with a motion worthy of Mirobeau when irritated; then he filled his large mouth with bread and butter sprinkled with chopped onion.

“Instead of thwarting monsieur, madame ought to give him more money,” he said; “and then we should soon be rich enough to swim in gold. There’s not the thickness of a farthing between us and—”

“Well, you’ve got twenty thousand francs laid by; why don’t you give ‘em to monsieur? he’s your master, and if you are so sure of his doings—”

“You don’t know anything about them, Josette. Mind your pots and pans, and heat the water,” remarked the old Fleming, interrupting the cook.

“I know enough to know there used to be several thousand ounces of silver-ware about this house which you and your master have melted up; and if you are allowed to have your way, you’ll make ducks and drakes of everything till there’s nothing left.”

“And monsieur,” added Martha, entering the kitchen, “will kill madame, just to get rid of a woman who restrains him and won’t let him swallow up everything he’s got. He’s possessed by the devil; anybody can see that. You don’t risk your soul in helping him, Mulquinier, because you haven’t got any; look at you! sitting there like a bit of ice when we are all in such distress; the young ladies are crying like two Magdalens. Go and fetch Monsieur l’Abbe de Solis.”

“I’ve got something to do for monsieur. He told me to put the laboratory in order,” said the valet. “Besides, it’s too far—go yourself.”

“Just hear the brute!” cried Martha. “Pray who is to give madame her foot-bath? do you want her to die? she has got a rush of blood to the head.”

“Mulquinier,” said Marguerite, coming into the servants’ hall, which adjoined the kitchen, “on your way back from Monsieur de Solis, call at Dr. Pierquin’s house and ask him to come here at once.”

“Ha! you’ve got to go now,” said Josette.

“Mademoiselle, monsieur told me to put the laboratory in order,” said Lemulquinier, facing the two women and looking them down, with a despotic air.

“Father,” said Marguerite, to Monsieur Claes who was just then descending the stairs, “can you let Mulquinier do an errand for us in town?”

“Now you’re forced to go, you old barbarian!” cried Martha, as she heard

Monsieur Claes put Mulquinier at his daughter’s bidding.

The lack of good-will and devotion shown by the old valet for the family whom he served was a fruitful cause of quarrel between the two women and Lemulquinier, whose cold-heartedness had the effect of increasing the loyal attachment of Josette and the old duenna.

This dispute, apparently so paltry, was destined to influence the future of the Claes family when, at a later period, they needed succor in misfortune.

CHAPTER VIII

Balthazar was again so absorbed that he did not notice Josephine’s condition. He took Jean upon his knee and trotted him mechanically, pondering, no doubt, the problem he now had the means of solving. He saw them bring the footbath to his wife, who was still in the parlor, too weak to rise from the low chair in which she was lying; he gazed abstractedly at his daughters now attending on their mother, without inquiring the cause of their tender solicitude. When Marguerite or Jean attempted to speak aloud, Madame Claes hushed them and pointed to Balthazar. Such a scene was of a nature to make a young girl think; and Marguerite, placed as she was between her father and mother, was old enough and sensible enough to weigh their conduct.

There comes a moment in the private life of every family when the children, voluntarily or involuntarily, judge their parents. Madame Claes foresaw the dangers of that moment. Her love for Balthazar impelled her to justify in Marguerite’s eyes conduct that might, to the upright mind of a girl of sixteen, seem faulty in a father. The very respect which she showed at this moment for her husband, making herself and her condition of no account that nothing might disturb his meditation, impressed her children with a sort of awe of the paternal majesty. Such self-devotion, however infectious it might be, only increased Marguerite’s admiration for her mother, to whom she was more particularly bound by the close intimacy of their daily lives. This feeling was based on the intuitive perception of sufferings whose causes naturally occupied the young girl’s mind. No human power could have hindered some chance word dropped by Martha, or by Josette, from enlightening her as to the real reasons for the condition of her home during the last four years. Notwithstanding Madame Claes’s reserve, Marguerite discovered slowly, thread by thread, the clue to the domestic drama. She was soon to be her mother’s active confidante, and later, under other circumstances, a formidable judge.

Madame Claes's watchful care now centred upon her eldest daughter, to whom she endeavored to communicate her own self-devotion towards Balthazar. The firmness and sound judgment which she recognized in the young girl made her tremble at the thought of a possible struggle between father and daughter whenever her own death should make the latter mistress of the household. The poor woman had reached a point where she dreaded the consequences of her death far more than death itself. Her tender solicitude for Balthazar showed itself in the resolution she had this day taken. By freeing his property from encumbrance she secured his independence, and prevented all future disputes by separating his interests from those of her children. She hoped to see him happy until she closed her eyes on earth, and she studied to transmit the tenderness of her own heart to Marguerite, trusting that his daughter might continue to be to him an angel of love, while exercising over the family a protecting and conservative authority. Might she not thus shed the light of her love upon her dear ones from beyond the grave? Nevertheless, she was not willing to lower the father in the eyes of his daughter by initiating her into the secret dangers of his scientific passion before it became necessary to do so. She studied Marguerite's soul and character, seeking to discover if the girl's own nature would lead her to be a mother to her brothers and her sister, and a tender, gentle helpmeet to her father.

Madame Claes's last days were thus embittered by fears and mental disquietudes which she dared not confide to others. Conscious that the recent scene had struck her death-blow, she turned her thoughts wholly to the future. Balthazar, meanwhile, now permanently unfitted for the care of property or the interests of domestic life, thought only of the Absolute.

The heavy silence that reigned in the parlor was broken only by the monotonous beating of Balthazar's foot, which he continued to trot, wholly unaware that Jean had slid from his knee. Marguerite, who was sitting beside her mother and watching the changes on that pallid, convulsed face, turned now and again to her father, wondering at his indifference. Presently the street-door clanged, and the family saw the Abbe de Solis leaning on the arm of his nephew and slowly crossing the court-yard.

"Ah! there is Monsieur Emmanuel," said Felicie.

"That good young man!" exclaimed Madame Claes; "I am glad to welcome him."

Marguerite blushed at the praise that escaped her mother's lips. For the last two days a remembrance of the young man had stirred mysterious feelings in her heart, and wakened in her mind thoughts that had lain dormant. During the visit made by the Abbe de Solis to Madame Claes on the occasion of his examining the pictures, there happened certain of those imperceptible events

which wield so great an influence upon life; and their results were sufficiently important to necessitate a brief sketch of the two personages now first introduced into the history of this family.

It was a matter of principle with Madame Claes to perform the duties of her religion privately. Her confessor, who was almost unknown in the family, now entered the house for the second time only; but there, as elsewhere, every one was impressed with a sort of tender admiration at the aspect of the uncle and his nephew.

The Abbe de Solis was an octogenarian, with silvery hair, and a withered face from which the vitality seemed to have retreated to the eyes. He walked with difficulty, for one of his shrunken legs ended in a painfully deformed foot, which was cased in a species of velvet bag, and obliged him to use a crutch when the arm of his nephew was not at hand. His bent figure and decrepit body conveyed the impression of a delicate, suffering nature, governed by a will of iron and the spirit of religious purity. This Spanish priest, who was remarkable for his vast learning, his sincere piety, and a wide knowledge of men and things, had been successively a Dominican friar, the “grand penitencier” of Toledo, and the vicar-general of the archbishopric of Malines. If the French Revolution had not intervened, the influence of the Casa-Real family would have made him one of the highest dignitaries of the Church; but the grief he felt for the death of the young duke, Madame Claes’s brother, who had been his pupil, turned him from active life, and he now devoted himself to the education of his nephew, who was made an orphan at an early age.

After the conquest of Belgium, the Abbe de Solis settled at Douai to be near Madame Claes. From his youth up he had professed an enthusiasm for Saint Theresa which, together with the natural bent of his mind, led him to the mystical time of Christianity. Finding in Flanders, where Mademoiselle Bourignon and the writings of the Quietists and Illuminati made the greatest number of proselytes, a flock of Catholics devoted to those ideas, he remained there,—all the more willingly because he was looked up to as a patriarch by this particular communion, which continued to follow the doctrines of the Mystics notwithstanding the censures of the Church upon Fenelon and Madame Guyon. His morals were rigid, his life exemplary, and he was believed to have visions. In spite of his own detachment from the things of life, his affection for his nephew made him careful of the young man’s interests. When a work of charity was to be done, the old abbe put the faithful of his flock under contribution before having recourse to his own means; and his patriarchal authority was so well established, his motives so pure, his discernment so rarely at fault, that every one was ready to answer his appeal. To give an idea of the contrast between the uncle and the nephew, we may

compare the old man to a willow on the borders of a stream, hollowed to a skeleton and barely alive, and the young man to a sweet-brier clustering with roses, whose erect and graceful stems spring up about the hoary trunk of the old tree as if they would support it.

Emmanuel de Solis, rigidly brought up by his uncle, who kept him at his side as a mother keeps her daughter, was full of delicate sensibility, of half-dreamy innocence,—those fleeting flowers of youth which bloom perennially in souls that are nourished on religious principles. The old priest had checked all sensuous emotions in his pupil, preparing him for the trials of life by constant study and a discipline that was almost cloisteral. Such an education, which would launch the youth unstained upon the world and render him happy, provided he were fortunate in his earliest affections, had endowed him with a purity of spirit which gave to his person something of the charm that surrounds a maiden. His modest eyes, veiling a strong and courageous soul, sent forth a light that vibrated in the soul as the tones of a crystal bell sound their undulations on the ear. His face, though regular, was expressive, and charmed the eye with its clear-cut outline, the harmony of its lines, and the perfect repose which came of a heart at peace. All was harmonious. His black hair, his brown eyes and eyebrows, heightened the effect of a white skin and a brilliant color. His voice was such as might have been expected from his beautiful face; and something feminine in his movements accorded well with the melody of its tones and with the tender brightness of his eyes. He seemed unaware of the charm he exercised by his modest silence, the half-melancholy reserve of his manner, and the respectful attentions he paid to his uncle.

Those who saw the young man as he watched the uncertain steps of the old abbe, and altered his own to suit their devious course, looking for obstructions that might trip his uncle’s feet and guiding him to a smoother way, could not fail to recognize in Emmanuel de Solis the generous nature which makes the human being a divine creation. There was something noble in the love that never criticised his uncle, in the obedience that never cavilled at the old man’s orders; it seemed as though there were prophecy in the gracious name his godmother had given him. When the abbe gave proof of his Dominican despotism, in their own home or in the presence of others, Emmanuel would sometimes lift his head with so much dignity, as if to assert his metal should any other man assail him, that men of honor were moved at the sight like artists before a glorious picture; for noble sentiments ring as loudly in the soul from living incarnations as from the imagery of art.

Emmanuel had accompanied his uncle when the latter came to examine the pictures of the House of Claes. Hearing from Martha that the Abbe de Solis was in the gallery, Marguerite, anxious to see so celebrated a man, invented an excuse to join her mother and gratify her curiosity. Entering hastily, with the

heedless gaiety young girls assume at times to hide their wishes, she encountered near the old abbe, clothed in black and looking decrepit and cadaverous, the fresh, delightful face of a young man. The naive glances of the youthful pair expressed their mutual astonishment. Marguerite and Emmanuel had no doubt seen each other in their dreams. Both lowered their eyes and raised them again with one impulse; each, by the action, made the same avowal. Marguerite took her mother’s arm, and spoke to her to cover her confusion and find shelter under the maternal wing, turning her neck with a swan-like motion to keep sight of Emmanuel, who still supported his uncle on his arm. The light was cleverly arranged to give due value to the pictures, and the half-obscurity of the gallery encouraged those furtive glances which are the joy of timid natures. Neither went so far, even in thought, as the first note of love; yet both felt the mysterious trouble which stirs the heart, and is jealously kept secret in our youth from fastidiousness or modesty.

The first impression which forces a sensibility hitherto suppressed to overflow its borders, is followed in all young people by the same half-stupefied amazement which the first sounds of music produce upon a child. Some children laugh and think; others do not laugh till they have thought; but those whose hearts are called to live by poetry or love, listen stilly and hear the melody with a look where pleasure flames already, and the search for the infinite begins. If, from an irresistible feeling, we love the places where our childhood first perceived the beauties of harmony, if we remember with delight the musician, and even the instrument, that taught them to us, how much more shall we love the being who reveals to us the music of life? The first heart in which we draw the breath of love,—is it not our home, our native land? Marguerite and Emmanuel were, each to each, that Voice of music which wakes a sense, that hand which lifts the misty veil, and reveals the distant shores bathed in the fires of noonday.

When Madame Claes paused before a picture by Guido representing an angel, Marguerite bent forward to see the impression it made upon Emmanuel, and Emmanuel looked at Marguerite to compare the mute thought on the canvas with the living thought beside him. This involuntary and delightful homage was understood and treasured. The old abbe gravely praised the picture, and Madame Claes answered him, but the youth and the maiden were silent.

Such was their first meeting: the mysterious light of the picture gallery, the stillness of the old house, the presence of their elders, all contributed to trace upon their hearts the delicate lines of this vaporous mirage. The many confused thoughts that surged in Marguerite’s mind grew calm and lay like a limpid ocean traversed by a luminous ray when Emmanuel murmured a few farewell words to Madame Claes. That voice, whose fresh and mellow tone

sent nameless delights into her heart, completed the revelation that had come to her,—a revelation which Emmanuel, were he able, should cherish to his own profit; for it often happens that the man whom destiny employs to waken love in the heart of a young girl is ignorant of his work and leaves it unfinished. Marguerite bowed confusedly; her true farewell was in the glance which seemed unwilling to lose so pure and lovely a vision. Like a child she wanted her melody. Their parting took place at the foot of the old staircase near the parlor; and when Marguerite re-entered the room she watched the uncle and the nephew till the street-door closed upon them.

Madame Claes had been so occupied with the serious matters which caused her conference with the abbe that she did not on this occasion observe her daughter's manner. When Monsieur de Solis came again to the house on the occasion of her illness, she was too violently agitated to notice the color that rushed into Marguerite's face and betrayed the tumult of a virgin heart conscious of its first joy. By the time the old abbe was announced, Marguerite had taken up her sewing and appeared to give it such attention that she bowed to the uncle and nephew without looking at them. Monsieur Claes mechanically returned their salutation and left the room with the air of a man called away by his occupations. The good Dominican sat down beside Madame Claes and looked at her with one of those searching glances by which he penetrated the minds of others; the sight of Monsieur Claes and his wife was enough to make him aware of a catastrophe.

"My children," said the mother, "go into the garden; Marguerite, show Emmanuel your father's tulips."

Marguerite, half abashed, took Felicie's arm and looked at the young man, who blushed and caught up little Jean to cover his confusion. When all four were in the garden, Felicie and Jean ran to the other side, leaving Marguerite, who, conscious that she was alone with young de Solis, led him to the pyramid of tulips, arranged precisely in the same manner year after year by Lemulquinier.

"Do you love tulips?" asked Marguerite, after standing for a moment in deep silence,—a silence Emmanuel seemed little disposed to break.

"Mademoiselle, these flowers are beautiful, but to love them we must perhaps have a taste of them, and know how to understand their beauties. They dazzle me. Constant study in the gloomy little chamber in which I live, close to my uncle, makes me prefer those flowers that are softer to the eye."

Saying these words he glanced at Marguerite; but the look, full as it was of confused desires, contained no allusion to the lily whiteness, the sweet serenity, the tender coloring which made her face a flower.

“Do you work very hard?” she asked, leading him to a wooden seat with a back, painted green. “Here,” she continued, “the tulips are not so close; they will not tire your eyes. Yes, you are right, those colors are dazzling; they give pain.”

“Do I work hard?” replied the young man after a short silence, as he smoothed the gravel with his foot. “Yes; I work at many things. My uncle wished to make me a priest.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Marguerite, naively.

“I resisted; I felt no vocation for it. But it required great courage to oppose my uncle’s wishes. He is so good, he loves me so much! Quite recently he bought a substitute to save me from the conscription—me, a poor orphan!”

“What do you mean to be?” asked Marguerite; then, immediately checking herself as though she would unsay the words, she added with a pretty gesture, “I beg your pardon; you must think me very inquisitive.”

“Oh, mademoiselle,” said Emmanuel, looking at her with tender admiration, “except my uncle, no one ever asked me that question. I am studying to be a teacher. I cannot do otherwise; I am not rich. If I were principal of a college-school in Flanders I should earn enough to live moderately, and I might marry some single woman whom I could love. That is the life I look forward to. Perhaps that is why I prefer a daisy in the meadows to these splendid tulips, whose purple and gold and rubies and amethysts betoken a life of luxury, just as the daisy is emblematic of a sweet and patriarchal life,—the life of a poor teacher like me.”

“I have always called the daisies marguerites,” she said.

Emmanuel colored deeply and sought an answer from the sand at his feet. Embarrassed to choose among the thoughts that came to him, which he feared were silly, and disconcerted by his delay in answering, he said at last, “I dared not pronounce your name”—then he paused.

“A teacher?” she said.

“Mademoiselle, I shall be a teacher only as a means of living: I shall undertake great works which will make me nobly useful. I have a strong taste for historical researches.”

“Ah!”

That “ah!” so full of secret thoughts added to his confusion; he gave a foolish laugh and said:—

“You make me talk of myself when I ought only to speak of you.”

“My mother and your uncle must have finished their conversation, I think,”

said Marguerite, looking into the parlor through the windows.

“Your mother seems to me greatly changed,” said Emmanuel.

“She suffers, but she will not tell us the cause of her sufferings; and we can only try to share them with her.”

Madame Claes had, in fact, just ended a delicate consultation which involved a case of conscience the Abbe de Solis alone could decide. Foreseeing the utter ruin of the family, she wished to retain, unknown to Balthazar who paid no attention to his business affairs, part of the price of the pictures which Monsieur de Solis had undertaken to sell in Holland, intending to hold it secretly in reserve against the day when poverty should overtake her children. With much deliberation, and after weighing every circumstance, the old Dominican approved the act as one of prudence. He took his leave to prepare at once for the sale, which he engaged to make secretly, so as not to injure Monsieur Claes in the estimation of others.

The next day Monsieur de Solis despatched his nephew, armed with letters of introduction, to Amsterdam, where Emmanuel, delighted to do a service to the Claes family, succeeded in selling all the pictures in the gallery to the noted bankers Happe and Duncker for the ostensible sum of eighty-five thousand Dutch ducats and fifteen thousand more which were paid over secretly to Madame Claes. The pictures were so well known that nothing was needed to complete the sale but an answer from Balthazar to the letter which Messieurs Happe and Duncker addressed to him. Emmanuel de Solis was commissioned by Claes to receive the price of the pictures, which were thereupon packed and sent away secretly, to conceal the sale from the people of Douai.

Towards the end of September, Balthazar paid off all the sums that he had borrowed, released his property from encumbrance, and resumed his chemical researches; but the House of Claes was deprived of its noblest ornament. Blinded by his passion, the master showed no regret; he felt so sure of repairing the loss that in selling the pictures he reserved the right of redemption. In Josephine’s eyes a hundred pictures were as nothing compared to domestic happiness and the satisfaction of her husband’s mind; moreover, she refilled the gallery with other paintings taken from the reception-rooms, and to conceal the gaps which these left in the front house, she changed the arrangement of the furniture.

When Balthazar’s debts were all paid he had about two hundred thousand francs with which to carry on his experiments. The Abbe de Solis and his nephew took charge secretly of the fifteen thousand ducats reserved by Madame Claes. To increase that sum, the abbe sold the Dutch ducats, to which the events of the Continental war had given a commercial value. One hundred

and sixty-five thousand francs were buried in the cellar of the house in which the abbe and his nephew resided.

Madame Claes had the melancholy happiness of seeing her husband incessantly busy and satisfied for nearly eight months. But the shock he had lately given her was too severe; she sank into a state of languor and debility which steadily increased. Balthazar was now so completely absorbed in science that neither the reverses which had overtaken France, nor the first fall of Napoleon, nor the return of the Bourbons, drew him from his laboratory; he was neither husband, father, nor citizen,—solely chemist.

Towards the close of 1814 Madame Claes declined so rapidly that she was no longer able to leave her bed. Unwilling to vegetate in her own chamber, the scene of so much happiness, where the memory of vanished joys forced involuntary comparisons with the present and depressed her, she moved into the parlor. The doctors encouraged this wish by declaring the room more airy, more cheerful, and therefore better suited to her condition. The bed in which the unfortunate woman ended her life was placed between the fireplace and a window looking on the garden. There she passed her last days, sacredly occupied in training the souls of her young daughters, striving to leave within them the fire of her own. Conjugal love, deprived of its manifestations, allowed maternal love to have its way. The mother now seemed the more delightful because her motherhood had blossomed late. Like all generous persons, she passed through sensitive phases of feeling that she mistook for remorse. Believing that she had defrauded her children of the tenderness that should have been theirs, she sought to redeem those imaginary wrongs; bestowing attentions and tender cares which made her precious to them; she longed to make her children live, as it were, within her heart; to shelter them beneath her feeble wings; to cherish them enough in the few remaining days to redeem the time during which she had neglected them. The sufferings of her mind gave to her words and her caresses a glowing warmth that issued from her soul. Her eyes caressed her children, her voice with its yearning intonations touched their hearts, her hand showered blessings on their heads.

CHAPTER IX

The good people of Douai were not surprised that visitors were no longer received at the House of Claes, and that Balthazar gave no more fetes on the anniversary of his marriage. Madame Claes’s state of health seemed a sufficient reason for the change, and the payment of her husband’s debts put a stop to the current gossip; moreover, the political vicissitudes to which

Flanders was subjected, the war of the Hundred-days, and the occupation of the Allied armies, put the chemist and his researches completely out of people's minds. During those two years Douai was so often on the point of being taken, it was so constantly occupied either by the French or by the enemy, so many foreigners came there, so many of the country-people sought refuge within its walls, so many lives were in peril, so many catastrophes occurred, that each man thought only of himself.

The Abbe de Solis and his nephew, and the two Pierquins, doctor and lawyer, were the only persons who now visited Madame Claes; for whom the winter of 1814-1815 was a long and dreary death-scene. Her husband rarely came to see her. It is true that after dinner he remained some hours in the parlor, near her bed; but as she no longer had the strength to keep up a conversation, he merely said a few words, invariably the same, sat down, spoke no more, and a dreary silence settled down upon the room. The monotony of this existence was broken only on the days when the Abbe de Solis and his nephew passed the evening with Madame Claes.

While the abbe played backgammon with Balthazar, Marguerite talked with Emmanuel by the bedside of her mother, who smiled at their innocent joy, not allowing them to see how painful and yet how soothing to her wounded spirit were the fresh breezes of their virgin love, murmuring in fitful words from heart to heart. The inflection of their voices, to them so full of charm, to her was heart-breaking; a glance of mutual understanding surprised between the two threw her, half-dead as she was, back to the young and happy past which gave such bitterness to the present. Emmanuel and Marguerite with intuitive delicacy of feeling repressed the sweet half-childish play of love, lest it should hurt the saddened woman whose wounds they instinctively divined.

No one has yet remarked that feelings have an existence of their own, a nature which is developed by the circumstances that environ them, and in which they are born; they bear a likeness to the places of their growth, and keep the imprint of the ideas that influenced their development. There are passions ardently conceived which remain ardent, like that of Madame Claes for her husband: there are sentiments on which all life has smiled; these retain their spring-time gaiety, their harvest-time of joy, seasons that never fail of laughter or of fetes; but there are other loves, framed in melancholy, circled by distress, whose pleasures are painful, costly, burdened by fears, poisoned by remorse, or blackened by despair. The love in the heart of Marguerite and Emmanuel, as yet unknown to them for love, the sentiment that budded into life beneath the gloomy arches of the picture-gallery, beside the stern old abbe, in a still and silent moment, that love so grave and so discreet, yet rich in tender depths, in secret delights that were luscious to the taste as stolen grapes snatched from a corner of the vineyard, wore in coming years the sombre

browns and grays that surrounded the hour of its birth.

Fearing to give expression to their feelings beside that bed of pain, they unconsciously increased their happiness by a concentration which deepened its imprint on their hearts. The devotion of the daughter, shared by Emmanuel, happy in thus uniting himself with Marguerite and becoming by anticipation the son of her mother, was their medium of communication. Melancholy thanks from the lips of the young girl supplanted the honeyed language of lovers; the sighing of their hearts, surcharged with joy at some interchange of looks, was scarcely distinguishable from the sighs wrung from them by the mother's sufferings. Their happy little moments of indirect avowal, of unuttered promises, of smothered effusion, were like the allegories of Raphael painted on a black ground. Each felt a certainty that neither avowed; they knew the sun was shining over them, but they could not know what wind might chase away the clouds that gathered about their heads. They doubted the future; fearing that pain would ever follow them, they stayed timidly among the shadows of the twilight, not daring to say to each other, "Shall we end our days together?"

The tenderness which Madame Claes now testified for her children nobly concealed much that she endeavored to hide from herself. Her children caused her neither fear nor passionate emotion: they were her comforters, but they were not her life: she lived by them; she died through Balthazar. However painful her husband's presence might be to her, lost as he was for hours together in depths of thought from which he looked at her without seeing her, it was only during those cruel moments that she forgot her griefs. His indifference to the dying woman would have seemed criminal to a stranger, but Madame Claes and her daughters were accustomed to it; they knew his heart and they forgave him. If, during the daytime, Josephine was seized by some sudden illness, if she were worse and seemed near dying, Claes was the only person in the house or in the town who remained ignorant of it. Lemulquinier knew it, but neither the daughters, bound to silence by their mother, nor Josephine herself let Balthazar know the danger of the being he had once so passionately loved.

When his heavy step sounded in the gallery as he came to dinner, Madame Claes was happy—she was about to see him! and she gathered up her strength for that happiness. As he entered, the pallid face blushed brightly and recovered for an instant the semblance of health. Balthazar came to her bedside, took her hand, saw the misleading color on her cheek, and to him she seemed well. When he asked, "My dear wife, how are you to-day?" she answered, "Better, dear friend," and made him think she would be up and recovered on the morrow. His preoccupation was so great that he accepted this reply, and believed the illness of which his wife was dying a mere

indisposition. Dying to the eyes of the world, in his alone she was living.

A complete separation between husband and wife was the result of this year. Claes slept in a distant chamber, got up early in the morning, and shut himself into his laboratory or his study. Seeing his wife only in presence of his daughters or of the two or three friends who came to visit them, he lost the habit of communicating with her. These two beings, formerly accustomed to think as one, no longer, unless at rare intervals, enjoyed those moments of communion, of passionate unreserve which feed the life of the heart; and finally there came a time when even these rare pleasures ceased. Physical suffering was now a boon to the poor woman, helping her to endure the void of separation, which might have killed her had she been truly living. Her bodily pain became so great that there were times when she was joyful in the thought that he whom she loved was not a witness of it. She lay watching Balthazar in the evening hours, and knowing him happy in his own way, she lived in the happiness she had procured for him,—a shadowy joy, and yet it satisfied her. She no longer asked herself if she were loved, she forced herself to believe it; and she glided over that icy surface, not daring to rest her weight upon it lest it should break and drown her soul in a gulf of awful nothingness.

No events stirred the calm of this existence; the malady that was slowly consuming Madame Claes added to the household stillness, and in this condition of passive gloom the House of Claes reached the first weeks of the year 1816. Pierquin, the lawyer, was destined, at the close of February, to strike the death-blow of the fragile woman who, in the words of the Abbe de Solis, was well-nigh without sin.

“Madame,” said Pierquin, seizing a moment when her daughters could not hear the conversation, “Monsieur Claes has directed me to borrow three hundred thousand francs on his property. You must do something to protect the future of your children.”

Madame Claes clasped her hands and raised her eyes to the ceiling; then she thanked the notary with a sad smile and a kindly motion of her head which affected him.

His words were the stab that killed her. During that day she had yielded herself up to sad reflections which swelled her heart; she was like the wayfarer walking beside a precipice who loses his balance and a mere pebble rolls him to the depth of the abyss he had so long and so courageously skirted. When the notary left her, Madame Claes told Marguerite to bring writing materials; then she gathered up her remaining strength to write her last wishes. Several times she paused and looked at her daughter. The hour of confidence had come.

Marguerite’s management of the household since her mother’s illness had amply fulfilled the dying woman’s hopes that Madame Claes was able to look

upon the future of the family without absolute despair, confident that she herself would live again in this strong and loving angel. Both women felt, no doubt, that sad and mutual confidences must now be made between them; the daughter looked at the mother, the mother at the daughter, tears flowing from their eyes. Several times, as Madame Claes rested from her writing, Marguerite said: “Mother?” then she dropped as if choking; but the mother, occupied with her last thoughts, did not ask the meaning of the interrogation. At last, Madame Claes wished to seal the letter; Marguerite held the taper, turning aside her head that she might not see the superscription.

“You can read it, my child,” said the mother, in a heart-rending voice.

The young girl read the words, “To my daughter Marguerite.”

“We will talk to each other after I have rested awhile,” said Madame Claes, putting the letter under her pillow.

Then she fell back as if exhausted by the effort, and slept for several hours. When she woke, her two daughters and her two sons were kneeling by her bed and praying. It was Thursday. Gabriel and Jean had been brought from school by Emmanuel de Solis, who for the last six months was professor of history and philosophy.

“Dear children, we must part!” she cried. “You have never forsaken me, never! and he who—”

She stopped.

“Monsieur Emmanuel,” said Marguerite, seeing the pallor on her mother’s face, “go to my father, and tell him mamma is worse.”

Young de Solis went to the door of the laboratory and persuaded Lemulquinier to make Balthazar come and speak to him. On hearing of the urgent request of the young man, Claes answered, “I will come.”

“Emmanuel,” said Madame Claes when he returned to her, “take my sons away, and bring your uncle here. It is time to give me the last sacraments, and I wish to receive them from his hand.”

When she was alone with her daughters she made a sign to Marguerite, who understood her and sent Felicie away.

“I have something to say to you myself, dear mamma,” said Marguerite who, not believing her mother so ill as she really was, increased the wound Pierquin had given. “I have had no money for the household expenses during the last ten days; I owe six months’ wages to the servants. Twice I have tried to ask my father for money, but did not dare to do so. You don’t know, perhaps, that all the pictures in the gallery have been sold, and all the wines in the cellar?”

“He never told me!” exclaimed Madame Claes. “My God! thou callest me to thyself in time! My poor children! what will become of them?”

She made a fervent prayer, which brought the fires of repentance to her eyes.

“Marguerite,” she resumed, drawing the letter from her pillow, “here is a paper which you must not open or read until a time, after my death, when some great disaster has overtaken you; when, in short, you are without the means of living. My dear Marguerite, love your father, but take care of your brothers and your sister. In a few days, in a few hours perhaps, you will be the head of this household. Be economical. Should you find yourself opposed to the wishes of your father,—and it may so happen, because he has spent vast sums in searching for a secret whose discovery is to bring glory and wealth to his family, and he will no doubt need money, perhaps he may demand it of you,—should that time come, treat him with the tenderness of a daughter, strive to reconcile the interests of which you will be the sole protector with the duty which you owe to a father, to a great man who sacrificed his happiness and his life to the glory of his family; he can only do wrong in act, his intentions are noble, his heart is full of love; you will see him once more kind and affectionate—YOU! Marguerite, it is my duty to say these words to you on the borders of the grave. If you wish to soften the anguish of my death, promise me, my child, to take my place beside your father; to cause him no grief; never to reproach him; never to condemn him. Be a gentle, considerate guardian of the home until—his work accomplished—he is again the master of his family.”

“I understand you, dear mother,” said Marguerite, kissing the swollen eyelids of the dying woman. “I will do as you wish.”

“Do not marry, my darling, until Gabriel can succeed you in the management of the property and the household. If you married, your husband might not share your feelings, he might bring trouble into the family and disturb your father’s life.”

Marguerite looked at her mother and said, “Have you nothing else to say to me about my marriage?”

“Can you hesitate, my child?” cried the dying woman in alarm.

“No,” the daughter answered; “I promise to obey you.”

“Poor girl! I did not sacrifice myself for you,” said the mother, shedding hot tears. “Yet I ask you to sacrifice yourself for all. Happiness makes us selfish. Be strong; preserve your own good sense to guard others who as yet have none. Act so that your brothers and your sister may not reproach my memory. Love your father, and do not oppose him—too much.”

She laid her head on her pillow and said no more; her strength was gone; the inward struggle between the Wife and the Mother had been too violent.

A few moments later the clergy came, preceded by the Abbe de Solis, and the parlor was filled by the children and the household. When the ceremony was about to begin, Madame Claes, awakened by her confessor, looked about her and not seeing Balthazar said quickly,—

“Where is my husband?”

Those words—summing up, as it were, her life and her death—were uttered in such lamentable tones that all present shuddered. Martha, in spite of her great age, darted out of the room, ran up the staircase and through the gallery, and knocked loudly on the door of the laboratory.

“Monsieur, madame is dying; they are waiting for you, to administer the last sacraments,” she cried with the violence of indignation.

“I am coming,” answered Balthazar.

Lemulquinier came down a moment later, and said his master was following him. Madame Claes’s eyes never left the parlor door, but her husband did not appear until the ceremony was over. When at last he entered, Josephine colored and a few tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Were you trying to decompose nitrogen?” she said to him with an angelic tenderness which made the spectators quiver.

“I have done it!” he cried joyfully; “Nitrogen contains oxygen and a substance of the nature of imponderable matter, which is apparently the principle of—”

A murmur of horror interrupted his words and brought him to his senses.

“What did they tell me?” he demanded. “Are you worse? What is the matter?”

“This is the matter, monsieur,” whispered the Abbe de Solis, indignant at his conduct; “your wife is dying, and you have killed her.”

Without waiting for an answer the abbe took the arm of his nephew and went out followed by the family, who accompanied him to the court-yard. Balthazar stood as if thunderstruck; he looked at his wife, and a few tears dropped from his eyes.

“You are dying, and I have killed you!” he said. “What does he mean?”

“My husband,” she answered, “I only lived in your love, and you have taken my life away from me; but you knew not what you did.”

“Leave us,” said Claes to his children, who now re-entered the room.

“Have I for one moment ceased to love you?” he went on, sitting down beside his wife, and taking her hands and kissing them.

“My friend, I do not blame you. You made me happy—too happy, for I have not been able to bear the contrast between our early married life, so full of joy, and these last days, so desolate, so empty, when you are not yourself. The life of the heart, like the life of the body, has its functions. For six years you have been dead to love, to the family, to all that was once our happiness. I will not speak of our early married days; such joys must cease in the after-time of life, but they ripen into fruits which feed the soul,—confidence unlimited, the tender habits of affection: you have torn those treasures from me! I go in time: we live together no longer; you hide your thoughts and actions from me. How is it that you fear me? Have I ever given you one word, one look, one gesture of reproach? And yet, you have sold your last pictures, you have sold even the wine in your cellar, you are borrowing money on your property, and have said no word to me. Ah! I go from life weary of life. If you are doing wrong, if you delude yourself in following the unattainable, have I not shown you that my love could share your faults, could walk beside you and be happy, though you led me in the paths of crime? You loved me too well,—that was my glory; it is now my death. Balthazar, my illness has lasted long; it began on the day when here, in this place where I am about to die, you showed me that Science was more to you than Family. And now the end has come; your wife is dying, and your fortune lost. Fortune and wife were yours,—you could do what you willed with your own; but on the day of my death my property goes to my children, and you cannot touch it; what will then become of you? I am telling you the truth; I owe it to you. Dying eyes see far; when I am gone will anything outweigh that cursed passion which is now your life? If you have sacrificed your wife, your children will count but little in the scale; for I must be just and own you loved me above all. Two millions and six years of toil you have cast into the gulf,—and what have you found?”

At these words Claes grasped his whitened head in his hands and hid his face.

“Humiliation for yourself, misery for your children,” continued the dying woman. “You are called in derision ‘Claes the alchemist’; soon it will be ‘Claes the madman.’ For myself, I believe in you. I know you great and wise; I know your genius: but to the vulgar eye genius is mania. Fame is a sun that lights the dead; living, you will be unhappy with the unhappiness of great minds, and your children will be ruined. I go before I see your fame, which might have brought me consolation for my lost happiness. Oh, Balthazar! make my death less bitter to me, let me be certain that my children will not want for bread—Ah, nothing, nothing, not even you, can calm my fears.”

“I swear,” said Claes, “to—”

“No, do not swear, that you may not fail of your oath,” she said, interrupting him. “You owed us your protection; we have been without it seven years. Science is your life. A great man should have neither wife nor children; he should tread alone the path of sacrifice. His virtues are not the virtues of common men; he belongs to the universe, he cannot belong to wife or family; he sucks up the moisture of the earth about him, like a majestic tree —and I, poor plant, I could not rise to the height of your life, I die at its feet. I have waited for this last day to tell you these dreadful thoughts: they came to me in the lightnings of desolation and anguish. Oh, spare my children! let these words echo in your heart. I cry them to you with my last breath. The wife is dead, dead; you have stripped her slowly, gradually, of her feelings, of her joys. Alas! without that cruel care could I have lived so long? But those poor children did not forsake me! they have grown beside my anguish, the mother still survives. Spare them! Spare my children!”

“Lemulquinier!” cried Claes in a voice of thunder.

The old man appeared.

“Go up and destroy all—instruments, apparatus, everything! Be careful, but destroy all. I renounce Science,” he said to his wife.

“Too late,” she answered, looking at Lemulquinier. “Marguerite!” she cried, feeling herself about to die.

Marguerite came through the doorway and uttered a piercing cry as she saw her mother’s eyes now glazing.

“MARGUERITE!” repeated the dying woman.

The exclamation contained so powerful an appeal to her daughter, she invested that appeal with such authority, that the cry was like a dying bequest. The terrified family ran to her side and saw her die; the vital forces were exhausted in that last conversation with her husband.

Balthazar and Marguerite stood motionless, she at the head, he at the foot of the bed, unable to believe in the death of the woman whose virtues and exhaustless tenderness were known fully to them alone. Father and daughter exchanged looks freighted with meaning: the daughter judged the father, and already the father trembled, seeing in his daughter an instrument of vengeance. Though memories of the love with which his Pepita had filled his life crowded upon his mind, and gave to her dying words a sacred authority whose voice his soul must ever hear, yet Balthazar knew himself helpless in the grasp of his attendant genius; he heard the terrible mutterings of his passion, denying him the strength to carry his repentance into action: he feared himself.

When the grave had closed upon Madame Claes, one thought filled the

minds of all,—the house had had a soul, and that soul was now departed. The grief of the family was so intense that the parlor, where the noble woman still seemed to linger, was closed; no one had the courage to enter it.

CHAPTER X

Society practises none of the virtues it demands from individuals: every hour it commits crimes, but the crimes are committed in words; it paves the way for evil actions with a jest; it degrades nobility of soul by ridicule; it jeers at sons who mourn their fathers, anathematizes those who do not mourn them enough, and finds diversion (the hypocrite!) in weighing the dead bodies before they are cold.

The evening of the day on which Madame Claes died, her friends cast a few flowers upon her memory in the intervals of their games of whist, doing homage to her noble qualities as they sorted their hearts and spades. Then, after a few lachrymal phrases,—the fi, fo, fum of collective grief, uttered in precisely the same tone, and with neither more nor less of feeling, at all hours and in every town in France,—they proceeded to estimate the value of her property. Pierquin was the first to observe that the death of this excellent woman was a mercy, for her husband had made her unhappy; and it was even more fortunate for her children: she was unable while living to refuse her money to the husband she adored; but now that she was dead, Claes was debarred from touching it. Thereupon all present calculated the fortune of that poor Madame Claes, wondered how much she had laid by (had she, in fact, laid by anything?), made an inventory of her jewels, rummaged in her wardrobe, peeped into her drawers, while the afflicted family were still weeping and praying around her death-bed.

Pierquin, with an appraising eye, stated that Madame Claes's possessions in her own right—to use the notarial phrase—might still be recovered, and ought to amount to nearly a million and a half of francs; basing this estimate partly on the forest of Waignies,—whose timber, counting the full-grown trees, the saplings, the primeval growths, and the recent plantations, had immensely increased in value during the last twelve years,—and partly on Balthazar's own property, of which enough remained to "cover" the claims of his children, if the liquidation of their mother's fortune did not yield sufficient to release him. Mademoiselle Claes was still, in Pierquin's slang, "a four-hundred-thousand-franc girl." "But," he added, "if she doesn't marry,—a step which would of course separate her interests and permit us to sell the forest and auction, and so realize the property of the minor children and reinvest it

where the father can’t lay hands on it,—Claes is likely to ruin them all.”

Thereupon, everybody looked about for some eligible young man worthy to win the hand of Mademoiselle Claes; but none of them paid the lawyer the compliment of suggesting that he might be the man. Pierquin, however, found so many good reasons to reject the suggested matches as unworthy of Marguerite’s position, that the confabulators glanced at each other and smiled, and took malicious pleasure in prolonging this truly provincial method of annoyance. Pierquin had already decided that Madame Claes’s death would have a favorable effect upon his suit, and he began mentally to cut up the body in his own interests.

“That good woman,” he said to himself as he went home to bed, “was as proud as a peacock; she would never gave given me her daughter. Hey, hey! why couldn’t I manage matters now so as to marry the girl? Pere Claes is drunk on carbon, and takes no care of his children. If, after convincing Marguerite that she must marry to save the property of her brothers and sister, I were to ask him for his daughter, he will be glad to get rid of a girl who is likely to thwart him.”

He went to sleep anticipating the charms of the marriage contract, and reflecting on the advantages of the step and the guarantees afforded for his happiness in the person he proposed to marry. In all the provinces there was certainly not a better brought-up or more delicately lovely young girl than Mademoiselle Claes. Her modesty, her grace, were like those of the pretty flower Emmanuel had feared to name lest he should betray the secret of his heart. Her sentiments were lofty, her principles religious, she would undoubtedly make him a faithful wife: moreover, she not only flattered the vanity which influences every man more or less in the choice of a wife, but she gratified his pride by the high consideration which her family, doubly ennobled, enjoyed in Flanders,—a consideration which her husband of course would share.

The next day Pierquin extracted from his strong-box several thousand-franc notes, which he offered with great friendliness to Balthazar, so as to relieve him of pecuniary annoyance in the midst of his grief. Touched by this delicate attention, Balthazar would, he thought, praise his goodness and his personal qualities to Marguerite. In this he was mistaken. Monsieur Claes and his daughter thought it was a very natural action, and their sorrow was too absorbing to let them even think of the lawyer.

Balthazar’s despair was indeed so great that persons who were disposed to blame his conduct could not do otherwise than forgive him,—less on account of the Science which might have excused him, than for the remorse which could not undo his deeds. Society is satisfied by appearances: it takes what it

gives, without considering the intrinsic worth of the article. To the world real suffering is a show, a species of enjoyment, which inclines it to absolve even a criminal; in its thirst for emotions it acquits without judging the man who raises a laugh, or he who makes it weep, making no inquiry into their methods.

Marguerite was just nineteen when her father put her in charge of the household; and her brothers and sister, whom Madame Claes in her last moments exhorted to obey their elder sister, accepted her authority with docility. Her mourning attire heightened the dewy whiteness of her skin, just as the sadness of her expression threw into relief the gentleness and patience of her manner. From the first she gave proofs of feminine courage, of inalterable serenity, like that of angels appointed to shed peace on suffering hearts by a touch of their waving palms. But although she trained herself, through a premature perception of duty, to hide her personal grief, it was none the less bitter; her calm exterior was not in keeping with the deep trouble of her thoughts, and she was destined to undergo, too early in life, those terrible outbursts of feeling which no heart is wholly able to subdue: her father was to hold her incessantly under the pressure of natural youthful generosity on the one hand, and the dictates of imperious duty on the other. The cares which came upon her the very day of her mother’s death threw her into a struggle with the interests of life at an age when young girls are thinking only of its pleasures. Dreadful discipline of suffering, which is never lacking to angelic natures!

The love which rests on money or on vanity is the most persevering of passions. Pierquin resolved to win the heiress without delay. A few days after Madame Claes’s death he took occasion to speak to Marguerite, and began operations with a cleverness which might have succeeded if love had not given her the power of clear insight and saved her from mistaking appearances that were all the more specious because Pierquin displayed his natural kindheartedness,—the kindliness of a notary who thinks himself loving while he protects a client’s money. Relying on his rather distant relationship and his constant habit of managing the business and sharing the secrets of the Claes family, sure of the esteem and friendship of the father, greatly assisted by the careless inattention of that servant of science who took no thought for the marriage of his daughter, and not suspecting that Marguerite could prefer another,—Pierquin unguardedly enabled her to form a judgment on a suit in which there was no passion except that of self-interest, always odious to a young soul, and which he was not clever enough to conceal. It was he who on this occasion was naively above-board, it was she who dissimulated,—simply because he thought he was dealing with a defenceless girl, and wholly misconceived the privileges of weakness.

“My dear cousin,” he said to Marguerite, with whom he was walking about

the paths of the little garden, “you know my heart, you understand how truly I desire to respect the painful feelings which absorb you at this moment. I have too sensitive a nature for a lawyer; I live by my heart only, I am forced to spend my time on the interests of others when I would fain let myself enjoy the sweet emotions which make life happy. I suffer deeply in being obliged to talk to you of subjects so discordant with your state of mind, but it is necessary. I have thought much about you during the last few days. It is evident that through a fatal delusion the fortune of your brothers and sister and your own are in jeopardy. Do you wish to save your family from complete ruin?”

“What must I do?” she asked, half-frightened by his words.

“Marry,” answered Pierquin.

“I shall not marry,” she said.

“Yes, you will marry,” replied the notary, “when you have soberly thought over the critical position in which you are placed.”

“How can my marriage save—”

“Ah! I knew you would consider it, my dear cousin,” he exclaimed, interrupting her. “Marriage will emancipate you.”

“Why should I be emancipated?” asked Marguerite.

“Because marriage will put you at once into possession of your property, my dear little cousin,” said the lawyer in a tone of triumph. “If you marry you take your share of your mother’s property. To give it to you, the whole property must be liquidated; to do that, it becomes necessary to sell the forest of Waignies. That done, the proceeds will be capitalized, and your father, as guardian, will be compelled to invest the fortune of his children in such a way that Chemistry can’t get hold of it.”

“And if I do not marry, what will happen?” she asked.

“Well,” said the notary, “your father will manage your estate as he pleases. If he returns to making gold, he will probably sell the timber of the forest of Waignies and leave his children as naked as the little Saint Johns. The forest is now worth about fourteen hundred thousand francs; but from one day to another you are not sure your father won’t cut it down, and then your thirteen hundred acres are not worth three hundred thousand francs. Isn’t it better to avoid this almost certain danger by at once compelling the division of property on your marriage? If the forest is sold now, while Chemistry has gone to sleep, your father will put the proceeds into the Grand-Livre. The Funds are at 59; those dear children will get nearly five thousand francs a year for every fifty thousand francs: and, inasmuch as the property of minors cannot be sold out,

your brothers and sister will find their fortunes doubled in value by the time they come of age. Whereas, in the other case,—faith, no one knows what may happen: your father has already impaired your mother's property; we shall find out the deficit when we come to make the inventory. If he is in debt to her estate, you will take a mortgage on his, and in that way something may be recovered—"

"For shame!" said Marguerite. "It would be an outrage on my father. It is not so long since my mother uttered her last words that I have forgotten them. My father is incapable of robbing his children," she continued, giving way to tears of distress. "You misunderstand him, Monsieur Pierquin."

"But, my dear cousin, if your father gets back to chemistry—"

"We are ruined; is that what you mean?"

"Yes, utterly ruined. Believe me, Marguerite," he said, taking her hand which he placed upon his heart, "I should fail of my duty if I did not persist in this matter. Your interests alone—"

"Monsieur," said Marguerite, coldly withdrawing her hand, "the true interests of my family require me not to marry. My mother thought so."

"Cousin," he cried, with the earnestness of a man who sees a fortune escaping him, "you commit suicide; you fling your mother's property into a gulf. Well, I will prove the devotion I feel for you: you know not how I love you. I have admired you from the day of that last ball, three years ago; you were enchanting. Trust the voice of love when it speaks to you of your own interests, Marguerite." He paused. "Yes, we must call a family council and emancipate you—without consulting you," he added.

"But what is it to be emancipated?"

"It is to enjoy your own rights."

"If I can be emancipated without being married, why do you want me to marry? and whom should I marry?"

Pierquin tried to look tenderly at his cousin, but the expression contrasted so strongly with his hard eyes, usually fixed on money, that Marguerite discovered the self-interest in his improvised tenderness.

"You would marry the person who—pleases you—the most," he said. "A husband is indispensable, were it only as a matter of business. You are now entering upon a struggle with your father; can you resist him all alone?"

"Yes, monsieur; I shall know how to protect my brothers and sister when the time comes."

"Pshaw! the obstinate creature," thought Pierquin. "No, you will not resist

him," he said aloud.

"Let us end the subject," she said.

"Adieu, cousin, I shall endeavor to serve you in spite of yourself; I will prove my love by protecting you against your will from a disaster which all the town foresees."

"I thank you for the interest you take in me," she answered; "but I entreat you to propose nothing and to undertake nothing which may give pain to my father."

Marguerite stood thoughtfully watching Pierquin as he departed; she compared his metallic voice, his manners, flexible as a steel spring, his glance, servile rather than tender, with the mute melodious poetry in which Emmanuel's sentiments were wrapped. No matter what may be said, or what may be done, there exists a wonderful magnetism whose effects never deceive. The tones of the voice, the glance, the passionate gestures of a lover may be imitated; a young girl can be deluded by a clever comedian; but to succeed, the man must be alone in the field. If the young girl has another soul beside her whose pulses vibrate in unison with hers, she is able to distinguish the expressions of a true love. Emmanuel, like Marguerite, felt the influence of the chords which, from the time of their first meeting had gathered ominously about their heads, hiding from their eyes the blue skies of love. His feeling for the Elect of his heart was an idolatry which the total absence of hope rendered gentle and mysterious in its manifestations. Socially too far removed from Mademoiselle Claes by his want of fortune, with nothing but a noble name to offer her, he saw no chance of ever being her husband. Yet he had always hoped for certain encouragements which Marguerite refused to give before the failing eyes of her dying mother. Both equally pure, they had never said to one another a word of love. Their joys were solitary joys tasted by each alone. They trembled apart, though together they quivered beneath the rays of the same hope. They seemed to fear themselves, conscious that each only too surely belonged to the other. Emmanuel trembled lest he should touch the hand of the sovereign to whom he had made a shrine of his heart; a chance contact would have roused hopes that were too ardent, he could not then have mastered the force of his passion. And yet, while neither bestowed the vast, though trivial, the innocent and yet all-meaning signs of love that even timid lovers allow themselves, they were so firmly fixed in each other's hearts that both were ready to make the greatest sacrifices, which were, indeed, the only pleasures their love could expect to taste.

Since Madame Claes's death this hidden love was shrouded in mourning. The tints of the sphere in which it lived, dark and dim from the first, were now black; the few lights were veiled by tears. Marguerite's reserve changed to

coldness; she remembered the promise exacted by her mother. With more freedom of action, she nevertheless became more distant. Emmanuel shared his beloved's grief, comprehending that the slightest word or wish of love at such a time transgressed the laws of the heart. Their love was therefore more concealed than it had ever been. These tender souls sounded the same note: held apart by grief, as formerly by the timidities of youth and by respect for the sufferings of the mother, they clung to the magnificent language of the eyes, the mute eloquence of devoted actions, the constant unison of thoughts, —divine harmonies of youth, the first steps of a love still in its infancy. Emmanuel came every morning to inquire for Claes and Marguerite, but he never entered the dining-room, where the family now sat, unless to bring a letter from Gabriel or when Balthazar invited him to come in. His first glance at the young girl contained a thousand sympathetic thoughts; it told her that he suffered under these conventional restraints, that he never left her, he was always with her, he shared her grief. He shed the tears of his own pain into the soul of his dear one by a look that was marred by no selfish reservation. His good heart lived so completely in the present, he clung so firmly to a happiness which he believed to be fugitive, that Marguerite sometimes reproached herself for not generously holding out her hand and saying, "Let us at least be friends."

Pierquin continued his suit with an obstinacy which is the unreflecting patience of fools. He judged Marguerite by the ordinary rules of the multitude when judging of women. He believed that the words marriage, freedom, fortune, which he had put into her mind, would geminate and flower into wishes by which he could profit; he imagined that her coldness was mere dissimulation. But surround her as he would with gallant attentions, he could not hide the despotic ways of a man accustomed to manage the private affairs of many families with a high hand. He discoursed to her in those platitudes of consolation common to his profession, which crawl like snails over the suffering mind, leaving behind them a trail of barren words which profane its sanctity. His tenderness was mere wheedling. He dropped his feigned melancholy at the door when he put on his overshoes, or took his umbrella. He used the tone his long intimacy authorized as an instrument to work himself still further into the bosom of the family, and bring Marguerite to a marriage which the whole town was beginning to foresee. The true, devoted, respectful love formed a striking contrast to its selfish, calculating semblance. Each man's conduct was homogenous: one feigned a passion and seized every advantage to gain the prize; the other hid his love and trembled lest he should betray his devotion.

Some time after the death of her mother, and, as it happened, on the same day, Marguerite was enabled to compare the only two men of whom she had any opportunity of judging; for the social solitude to which she was

condemned kept her from seeing life and gave no access to those who might think of her in marriage. One day after breakfast, a fine morning in April, Emmanuel called at the house just as Monsieur Claes was going out. The aspect of his own house was so unendurable to Balthazar that he spent part of every day in walking about the ramparts. Emmanuel made a motion as if to follow him, then he hesitated, seemed to gather up his courage, looked at Marguerite and remained. The young girl felt sure that he wished to speak with her, and asked him to go into the garden; then she sent Felicie to Martha, who was sewing in the antechamber on the upper floor, and seated herself on a garden-seat in full view of her sister and the old duenna.

“Monsieur Claes is as much absorbed by grief as he once was by science,” began the young man, watching Balthazar as he slowly crossed the court-yard. “Every one in Douai pities him; he moves like a man who has lost all consciousness of life; he stops without a purpose, he gazes without seeing anything.”

“Every sorrow has its own expression,” said Marguerite, checking her tears. “What is it you wish to say to me?” she added after a pause, coldly and with dignity.

“Mademoiselle,” answered Emmanuel in a voice of feeling, “I scarcely know if I have the right to speak to you as I am about to do. Think only of my desire to be of service to you, and give me the right of a teacher to be interested in the future of a pupil. Your brother Gabriel is over fifteen; he is in the second class; it is now necessary to direct his studies in the line of whatever future career he may take up. It is for your father to decide what that career shall be: if he gives the matter no thought, the injury to Gabriel would be serious. But then, again, would it not mortify your father if you showed him that he is neglecting his son’s interests? Under these circumstances, could you not yourself consult Gabriel as to his tastes, and help him to choose a career, so that later, if his father should think of making him a public officer, an administrator, a soldier, he might be prepared with some special training? I do not suppose that either you or Monsieur Claes would wish to bring Gabriel up in idleness.”

“Oh, no!” said Marguerite; “when my mother taught us to make lace, and took such pains with our drawing and music and embroidery, she often said we must be prepared for whatever might happen to us. Gabriel ought to have a thorough education and a personal value. But tell me, what career is best for a man to choose?”

“Mademoiselle,” said Emmanuel, trembling with pleasure, “Gabriel is at the head of his class in mathematics; if he would like to enter the Ecole Polytechnique, he could there acquire the practical knowledge which will fit

him for any career. When he leaves the Ecole he can choose the path in life for which he feels the strongest bias. Thus, without compromising his future, you will have saved a great deal of time. Men who leave the Ecole with honors are sought after on all sides; the school turns out statesmen, diplomats, men of science, engineers, generals, sailors, magistrates, manufacturers, and bankers. There is nothing extraordinary in the son of a rich or noble family preparing himself to enter it. If Gabriel decides on this course I shall ask you to—will you grant my request? Say yes!"

"What is it?"

"Let me be his tutor," he answered, trembling.

Marguerite looked at Monsieur de Solis; then she took his hand, and said, "Yes"—and paused, adding presently in a broken voice:—

"How much I value the delicacy which makes you offer me a thing I can accept from you. In all that you have said I see how much you have thought for us. I thank you."

Though the words were simply said, Emmanuel turned away his head not to show the tears that the delight of being useful to her brought to his eyes.

"I will bring both boys to see you," he said, when he was a little calmer; "to-morrow is a holiday."

He rose and bowed to Marguerite, who followed him into the house; when he had crossed the court-yard he turned and saw her still at the door of the dining-room, from which she made him a friendly sign.

After dinner Pierquin came to see Monsieur Claes, and sat down between father and daughter on the very bench in the garden where Emmanuel had sat that morning.

"My dear cousin," he said to Balthazar, "I have come to-night to talk to you on business. It is now forty-two days since the decease of your wife."

"I keep no account of time," said Balthazar, wiping away the tears that came at the word "decease."

"Oh, monsieur!" cried Marguerite, looking at the lawyer, "how can you?"

"But, my dear Marguerite, we notaries are obliged to consider the limits of time appointed by law. This is a matter which concerns you and your co-heirs. Monsieur Claes has none but minor children, and he must make an inventory of his property within forty-five days of his wife's decease, so as to render in his accounts at the end of that time. It is necessary to know the value of his property before deciding whether to accept it as sufficient security, or whether we must fall back on the legal rights of minors."

Marguerite rose.

“Do not go away, my dear cousin,” continued Pierquin; “my words concern you—you and your father both. You know how truly I share your grief, but to-day you must give your attention to legal details. If you do not, every one of you will get into serious difficulties. I am only doing my duty as the family lawyer.”

“He is right,” said Claes.

“The time expires in two days,” resumed Pierquin; “and I must begin the inventory to-morrow, if only to postpone the payment of the legacy-tax which the public treasurer will come here and demand. Treasurers have no hearts; they don’t trouble themselves about feelings; they fasten their claws upon us at all seasons. Therefore for the next two days my clerk and I will be here from ten till four with Monsieur Raparlier, the public appraiser. After we get through the town property we shall go into the country. As for the forest of Waignies, we shall be obliged to hold a consultation about that. Now let us turn to another matter. We must call a family council and appoint a guardian to protect the interests of the minor children. Monsieur Conyncks of Bruges is your nearest relative; but he has now become a Belgian. You ought,” continued Pierquin, addressing Balthazar, “to write to him on this matter; you can then find out if he has any intention of settling in France, where he has a fine property. Perhaps you could persuade him and his daughter to move into French Flanders. If he refuses, then I must see about making up the council with the other near relatives.”

“What is the use of an inventory?” asked Marguerite.

“To put on record the value and the claims of the property, its debts and its assets. When that is all clearly scheduled, the family council, acting on behalf of the minors, makes such dispositions as it sees fit.”

“Pierquin,” said Claes, rising from the bench, “do all that is necessary to protect the rights of my children; but spare us the distress of selling the things that belonged to my dear—” he was unable to continue; but he spoke with so noble an air and in a tone of such deep feeling that Marguerite took her father’s hand and kissed it.

“To-morrow, then,” said Pierquin.

“Come to breakfast,” said Claes; then he seemed to gather his scattered senses together and exclaimed: “But in my marriage contract, which was drawn under the laws of Hainault, I released my wife from the obligation of making an inventory, in order that she might not be annoyed by it: it is very probable that I was equally released—”

“Oh, what happiness!” cried Marguerite. “It would have been so distressing to us.”

“Well, I will look into your marriage contract to-morrow,” said the notary, rather confused.

“Then you did not know of this?” said Marguerite.

This remark closed the interview; the lawyer was far too much confused to continue it after the young girl’s comment.

“The devil is in it!” he said to himself as he crossed the court-yard. “That man’s wandering memory comes back to him in the nick of time,—just when he needed it to hinder us from taking precautions against him! I have cracked my brains to save the property of those children. I meant to proceed regularly and come to an understanding with old Conyncks, and here’s the end of it! I shall lose ground with Marguerite, for she will certainly ask her father why I wanted an inventory of the property, which she now sees was not necessary; and Claes will tell her that notaries have a passion for writing documents, that we are lawyers above all, above cousins or friends or relatives, and all such stuff as that.”

He slammed the street door violently, railing at clients who ruin themselves by sensitiveness.

Balthazar was right. No inventory could be made. Nothing, therefore, was done to settle the relation of the father to the children in the matter of property.

CHAPTER XI

Several months went by and brought no change to the House of Claes. Gabriel, under the wise management of his tutor, Monsieur de Solis, worked studiously, acquired foreign languages, and prepared to pass the necessary examinations to enter the Ecole Polytechnique. Marguerite and Felicie lived in absolute retirement, going in summer to their father’s country place as a measure of economy. Monsieur Claes attended to his business affairs, paid his debts by borrowing a considerable sum of money on his property, and went to see the forest at Waignies.

About the middle of the year 1817, his grief, slowly abating, left him a prey to solitude and defenceless under the monotony of the life he was leading, which heavily oppressed him. At first he struggled bravely against the allurements of Science as they gradually beset him; he forbade himself even to think of Chemistry. Then he did think of it. Still, he would not actively take it

up, and only gave his mind to his researches theoretically. Such constant study, however, swelled his passion which soon became exacting. He asked himself whether he was really bound not to continue his researches, and remembered that his wife had refused his oath. Though he had pledged his word to himself that he would never pursue the solution of the great Problem, might he not change that determination at a moment when he foresaw success? He was now fifty-nine years old. At that age a predominant idea contracts a certain peevish fixedness which is the first stage of monomania.

Circumstances conspired against his tottering loyalty. The peace which Europe now enjoyed encouraged the circulation of discoveries and scientific ideas acquired during the war by the learned of various countries, who for nearly twenty years had been unable to hold communication. Science was making great strides. Claes found that the progress of chemistry had been directed, unknown to chemists themselves, towards the object of his researches. Learned men devoted to the higher sciences thought, as he did, that light, heat, electricity, galvanism, magnetism were all different effects of the same cause, and that the difference existing between substances hitherto considered simple must be produced by varying proportions of an unknown principle. The fear that some other chemist might effect the reduction of metals and discover the constituent principle of electricity,—two achievements which would lead to the solution of the chemical Absolute,—increased what the people of Douai called a mania, and drove his desires to a paroxysm conceivable to those who devote themselves to the sciences, or who have ever known the tyranny of ideas.

Thus it happened that Balthazar was again carried away by a passion all the more violent because it had lain dormant so long. Marguerite, who watched every evidence of her father’s state of mind, opened the long-closed parlor. By living in it she recalled the painful memories which her mother’s death had caused, and succeeded for a time in re-awaking her father’s grief, and retarding his plunge into the gulf to the depths of which he was, nevertheless, doomed to fall. She determined to go into society and force Balthazar to share in its distractions. Several good marriages were proposed to her, which occupied Claes’s mind, but to all of them she replied that she should not marry until after she was twenty-five. But in spite of his daughter’s efforts, in spite of his remorseful struggles, Balthazar, at the beginning of the winter, returned secretly to his researches. It was difficult, however, to hide his operations from the inquisitive women in the kitchen; and one morning Martha, while dressing Marguerite, said to her:—

“Mademoiselle, we are as good as lost. That monster of a Mulquinier—who is a devil disguised, for I never saw him make the sign of the cross—has gone back to the garret. There’s monsieur on the high-road to hell. Pray God

he mayn’t kill you as he killed my poor mistress.”

“It is not possible!” exclaimed Marguerite.

“Come and see the signs of their traffic.”

Mademoiselle Claes ran to the window and saw the light smoke rising from the flue of the laboratory.

“I shall be twenty-one in a few months,” she thought, “and I shall know how to oppose the destruction of our property.”

In giving way to his passion Balthazar necessarily felt less respect for the interests of his children than he formerly had felt for the happiness of his wife. The barriers were less high, his conscience was more elastic, his passion had increased in strength. He now set forth in his career of glory, toil, hope, and poverty, with the fervor of a man profoundly trustful of his convictions. Certain of the result, he worked night and day with a fury that alarmed his daughters, who did not know how little a man is injured by work that gives him pleasure.

Her father had no sooner recommenced his experiments than Marguerite retrenched the superfluities of the table, showing a parsimony worthy of a miser, in which Josette and Martha admirably seconded her. Claes never noticed the change which reduced the household living to the merest necessaries. First he ceased to breakfast with the family; then he only left his laboratory when dinner was ready; and at last, before he went to bed, he would sit some hours in the parlor between his daughters without saying a word to either of them; when he rose to go upstairs they wished him good-night, and he allowed them mechanically to kiss him on both cheeks. Such conduct would have led to great domestic misfortunes had Marguerite not been prepared to exercise the authority of a mother, and if, moreover, she were not protected by a secret love from the dangers of so much liberty.

Pierquin had ceased to come to the house, judging that the family ruin would soon be complete. Balthazar’s rural estates, which yielded sixteen thousand francs a year, and were worth about six hundred thousand, were now encumbered by mortgages to the amount of three hundred thousand francs; for, in order to recommence his researches, Claes had borrowed a considerable sum of money. The rents were exactly enough to pay the interest of the mortgages; but, with the improvidence of a man who is the slave of an idea, he made over the income of his farm lands to Marguerite for the expenses of the household, and the notary calculated that three years would suffice to bring matters to a crisis, when the law would step in and eat up all that Balthazar had not squandered. Marguerite’s coldness brought Pierquin to a state of almost hostile indifference. To give himself an appearance in the eyes of the

world of having renounced her hand, he frequently remarked of the Claes family in a tone of compassion:—

“Those poor people are ruined; I have done my best to save them. Well, it can’t be helped; Mademoiselle Claes refused to employ the legal means which might have rescued them from poverty.”

Emmanuel de Solis, who was now principal of the college-school in Douai, thanks to the influence of his uncle and to his own merits which made him worthy of the post, came every evening to see the two young girls, who called the old duenna into the parlor as soon as their father had gone to bed. Emmanuel’s gentle rap at the street-door was never missing. For the last three months, encouraged by the gracious, though mute gratitude with which Marguerite now accepted his attentions, he became at his ease, and was seen for what he was. The brightness of his pure spirit shone like a flawless diamond; Marguerite learned to understand its strength and its constancy when she saw how inexhaustible was the source from which it came. She loved to watch the unfolding, one by one, of the blossoms of his heart, whose perfume she had already breathed. Each day Emmanuel realized some one of Marguerite’s hopes, and illumined the enchanted regions of love with new lights that chased away the clouds and brought to view the serene heavens, giving color to the fruitful riches hidden away in the shadow of their lives. More at his ease, the young man could display the seductive qualities of his heart until now discreetly hidden, the expansive gaiety of his age, the simplicity which comes of a life of study, the treasures of a delicate mind that life has not adulterated, the innocent joyousness which goes so well with loving youth. His soul and Marguerite’s understood each other better; they went together to the depths of their hearts and found in each the same thoughts,—pearls of equal lustre, sweet fresh harmonies like those the legends tell of beneath the waves, which fascinate the divers. They made themselves known to one another by an interchange of thought, a reciprocal introspection which bore the signs, in both, of exquisite sensibility. It was done without false shame, but not without mutual coquetry. The two hours which Emmanuel spent with the sisters and old Martha enabled Marguerite to accept the life of anguish and renunciation on which she had entered. This artless, progressive love was her support. In all his testimonies of affection Emmanuel showed the natural grace that is so winning, the sweet yet subtile mind which breaks the uniformity of sentiment as the facets of a diamond relieve, by their many-sided fires, the monotony of the stone,—adorable wisdom, the secret of loving hearts, which makes a woman pliant to the artistic hand that gives new life to old, old forms, and refreshes with novel modulations the phrases of love. Love is not only a sentiment, it is an art. Some simple word, a trifling vigilance, a nothing, reveals to a woman the great, the divine artist who shall touch her heart and yet not blight it. The more Emmanuel was free to utter himself, the

more charming were the expressions of his love.

“I have tried to get here before Pierquin,” he said to Marguerite one evening. “He is bringing some bad news; I would rather you heard it from me. Your father has sold all the timber in your forest at Waignies to speculators, who have resold it to dealers. The trees are already felled, and the logs are carried away. Monsieur Claes received three hundred thousand francs in cash as a first instalment of the price, which he has used towards paying his bills in Paris; but to clear off his debts entirely he has been forced to assign a hundred thousand francs of the three hundred thousand still due to him on the purchase-money.”

Pierquin entered at this moment.

“Ah! my dear cousin,” he said, “you are ruined. I told you how it would be; but you would not listen to me. Your father has an insatiable appetite. He has swallowed your woods at a mouthful. Your family guardian, Monsieur Conyncks, is just now absent in Amsterdam, and Claes has seized the opportunity to strike the blow. It is all wrong. I have written to Monsieur Conyncks, but he will get here too late; everything will be squandered. You will be obliged to sue your father. The suit can’t be long, but it will be dishonorable. Monsieur Conyncks has no alternative but to institute proceedings; the law requires it. This is the result of your obstinacy. Do you now see my prudence, and how devoted I was to your interests?”

“I bring you some good news, mademoiselle,” said young de Solis in his gentle voice. “Gabriel has been admitted to the Ecole Polytechnique. The difficulties that seemed in the way have all been removed.”

Marguerite thanked him with a smile as she said:—

“My savings will now come in play! Martha, we must begin to-morrow on Gabriel’s outfit. My poor Felicie, we shall have to work hard,” she added, kissing her sister’s forehead.

“To-morrow you shall have him at home, to remain ten days,” said Emmanuel; “he must be in Paris by the fifteenth of November.”

“My cousin Gabriel has done a sensible thing,” said the lawyer, eyeing the professor from head to foot; “for he will have to make his own way. But, my dear cousin, the question now is how to save the honor of the family: will you listen to what I say this time?”

“No,” she said, “not if it relates to marriage.”

“Then what will you do?”

“I?—nothing.”

“But you are of age.”

“I shall be in a few days. Have you any course to suggest to me,” she added, “which will reconcile our interests with the duty we owe to our father and to the honor of the family?”

“My dear cousin, nothing can be done till your uncle arrives. When he does, I will call again.”

“Adieu, monsieur,” said Marguerite.

“The poorer she is the more airs she gives herself,” thought the notary. “Adieu, mademoiselle,” he said aloud. “Monsieur, my respects to you”; and he went away, paying no attention to Felicie or Martha.

“I have been studying the Code for the last two days, and I have consulted an experienced old lawyer, a friend of my uncle,” said Emmanuel, in a hesitating voice. “If you will allow me, I will go to Amsterdam to-morrow and see Monsieur Conyncks. Listen, dear Marguerite—”

He uttered her name for the first time; she thanked him with a smile and a tearful glance, and made a gentle inclination of her head. He paused, looking at Felicie and Martha.

“Speak before my sister,” said Marguerite. “She is so docile and courageous that she does not need this discussion to make her resigned to our life of toil and privation; but it is best that she should see for herself how necessary courage is to us.”

The two sisters clasped hands and kissed each other, as if to renew some pledge of union before the coming disaster.

“Leave us, Martha.”

“Dear Marguerite,” said Emmanuel, letting the happiness he felt in conquering the lesser rights of affection sound in the inflections of his voice, “I have procured the names and addresses of the purchasers who still owe the remaining two hundred thousand francs on the felled timber. To-morrow, if you give consent, a lawyer acting in the name of Monsieur Conyncks, who will not disavow the act, will serve an injunction upon them. Six days hence, by which time your uncle will have returned, the family council can be called together, and Gabriel put in possession of his legal rights, for he is now eighteen. You and your brother being thus authorized to use those rights, you will demand your share in the proceeds of the timber. Monsieur Claes cannot refuse you the two hundred thousand francs on which the injunction will have been put; as to the remaining hundred thousand which is due to you, you must obtain a mortgage on this house. Monsieur Conyncks will demand securities for the three hundred thousand belonging to Felicie and Jean. Under these

circumstances your father will be obliged to mortgage his property on the plain of Orchies, which he has already encumbered to the amount of three hundred thousand francs. The law gives a retrospective priority to the claims of minors; and that will save you. Monsieur Claes's hands will be tied for the future; your property becomes inalienable, and he can no longer borrow on his own estates because they will be held as security for other sums. Moreover, the whole can be done quietly, without scandal or legal proceedings. Your father will be forced to greater prudence in making his researches, even if he cannot be persuaded to relinquish them altogether."

"Yes," said Marguerite, "but where, meantime, can we find the means of living? The hundred thousand francs for which, you say, I must obtain a mortgage on this house, would bring in nothing while we still live here. The proceeds of my father's property in the country will pay the interest on the three hundred thousand francs he owes to others; but how are we to live?"

"In the first place," said Emmanuel, "by investing the fifty thousand francs which belong to Gabriel in the public Funds you will get, according to present rates, more than four thousand francs' income, which will suffice to pay your brother's board and lodging and all his other expenses in Paris. Gabriel cannot touch the capital until he is of age, therefore you need not fear that he will waste a penny of it, and you will have one expense the less. Besides, you will have your own fifty thousand."

"My father will ask me for them," she said in a frightened tone; "and I shall not be able to refuse him."

"Well, dear Marguerite, even so, you can evade that by robbing yourself. Place your money in the Grand-Livre in Gabriel's name: it will bring you twelve or thirteen thousand francs a year. Minors who are emancipated cannot sell property without permission of the family council; you will thus gain three years' peace of mind. By that time your father will either have solved his problem or renounced it; and Gabriel, then of age, will reinvest the money in your own name."

Marguerite made him explain to her once more the legal points which she did not at first understand. It was certainly a novel sight to see this pair of lovers poring over the Code, which Emmanuel had brought with him to show his mistress the laws which protected the property of minors; she quickly caught the meaning of them, thanks to the natural penetration of women, which in this case love still further sharpened.

Gabriel came home to his father's house on the following day. When Monsieur de Solis brought him up to Balthazar and told of his admission to the Ecole Polytechnique, the father thanked the professor with a wave of his hand, and said:—

“I am very glad; Gabriel may become a man of science.”

“Oh, my brother,” cried Marguerite, as Balthazar went back to his laboratory, “work hard, waste no money; spend what is necessary, but practise economy. On the days when you are allowed to go out, pass your time with our friends and relations; contract none of the habits which ruin young men in Paris. Your expenses will amount to nearly three thousand francs, and that will leave you a thousand francs for your pocket-money; that is surely enough.”

“I will answer for him,” said Emmanuel de Solis, laying his hand on his pupil’s shoulder.

A month later, Monsieur Conyncks, in conjunction with Marguerite, had obtained all necessary securities from Claes. The plan so wisely proposed by Emmanuel de Solis was fully approved and executed. Face to face with the law, and in presence of his cousin, whose stern sense of honor allowed no compromise, Balthazar, ashamed of the sale of the timber to which he had consented at a moment when he was harassed by creditors, submitted to all that was demanded of him. Glad to repair the almost involuntary wrong that he had done to his children, he signed the deeds in a preoccupied way. He was now as careless and improvident as a Negro who sells his wife in the morning for a drop of brandy, and cries for her at night. He gave no thought to even the immediate future, and never asked himself what resources he would have when his last ducat was melted up. He pursued his work and continued his purchases, apparently unaware that he was now no more than the titular owner of his house and lands, and that he could not, thanks to the severity of the laws, raise another penny upon a property of which he was now, as it were, the legal guardian.

The year 1818 ended without bringing any new misfortune. The sisters paid the costs of Jean’s education and met all the expenses of the household out of the thirteen thousand francs a year from the sum placed in the Grand-Livre in Gabriel’s name, which he punctually remitted to them. Monsieur de Solis lost his uncle, the abbe, in December of that year.

Early in January Marguerite learned through Martha that her father had sold his collection of tulips, also the furniture of the front house, and all the family silver. She was obliged to buy back the spoons and forks that were necessary for the daily service of the table, and these she now ordered to be stamped with her initials. Until that day Marguerite had kept silence towards her father on the subject of his depredations, but that evening after dinner she requested Felicie to leave her alone with him, and when he seated himself as usual by the corner of the parlor fireplace, she said:—

“My dear father, you are the master here, and can sell everything, even your children. We are ready to obey you without a murmur; but I am forced to

tell you that we are without money, that we have barely enough to live on, and that Felicie and I are obliged to work night and day to pay for the schooling of little Jean with the price of the lace dress we are now making. My dear father, I implore you to give up your researches."

"You are right, my dear child; in six weeks they will be finished; I shall have found the Absolute, or the Absolute will be proved undiscoverable. You will have millions—"

"Give us meanwhile the bread to eat," replied Marguerite.

"Bread? is there no bread here?" said Claes, with a frightened air. "No bread in the house of a Claes! What has become of our property?"

"You have cut down the forest of Waignies. The ground has not been cleared and is therefore unproductive. As for your farms at Orchies, the rents scarcely suffice to pay the interest of the sums you have borrowed—"

"Then what are we living on?" he demanded.

Marguerite held up her needle and continued:—

"Gabriel's income helps us, but it is insufficient; I can make both ends meet at the close of the year if you do not overwhelm me with bills that I do not expect, for purchases you tell me nothing about. When I think I have enough to meet my quarterly expenses some unexpected bill for potash, or zinc, or sulphur, is brought to me."

"My dear child, have patience for six weeks; after that, I will be judicious. My little Marguerite, you shall see wonders."

"It is time you should think of your affairs. You have sold everything,—pictures, tulips, plate; nothing is left. At least, refrain from making debts."

"I don't wish to make any more!" he said.

"Any more?" she cried, "then you have some?"

"Mere trifles," he said, but he dropped his eyes and colored.

For the first time in her life Marguerite felt humiliated by the lowering of her father's character, and suffered from it so much that she dared not question him.

A month after this scene one of the Douai bankers brought a bill of exchange for ten thousand francs signed by Claes. Marguerite asked the banker to wait a day, and expressed her regret that she had not been notified to prepare for this payment; whereupon he informed her that the house of Protez and Chiffreville held nine other bills to the same amount, falling due in consecutive months.

“All is over!” cried Marguerite, “the time has come.”

She sent for her father, and walked up and down the parlor with hasty steps, talking to herself:—

“A hundred thousand francs!” she cried. “I must find them, or see my father in prison. What am I to do?”

Balthazar did not come. Weary of waiting for him, Marguerite went up to the laboratory. As she entered she saw him in the middle of an immense, brilliantly-lighted room, filled with machinery and dusty glass vessels: here and there were books, and tables encumbered with specimens and products ticketed and numbered. On all sides the disorder of scientific pursuits contrasted strongly with Flemish habits. This litter of retorts and vaporizers, metals, fantastically colored crystals, specimens hooked upon the walls or lying on the furnaces, surrounded the central figure of Balthazar Claes, without a coat, his arms bare like those of a workman, his breast exposed, and showing the white hair which covered it. His eyes were gazing with horrible fixity at a pneumatic trough. The receiver of this instrument was covered with a lens made of double convex glasses, the space between the glasses being filled with alchohol, which focussed the light coming through one of the compartments of the rose-window of the garret. The shelf of the receiver communicated with the wire of an immense galvanic battery. Lemulquinier, busy at the moment in moving the pedestal of the machine, which was placed on a movable axle so as to keep the lens in a perpendicular direction to the rays of the sun, turned round, his face black with dust, and called out,—

“Ha! mademoiselle, don’t come in.”

The aspect of her father, half-kneeling beside the instrument, and receiving the full strength of the sunlight upon his head, the protuberances of his skull, its scanty hairs resembling threads of silver, his face contracted by the agonies of expectation, the strangeness of the objects that surrounded him, the obscurity of parts of the vast garret from which fantastic engines seemed about to spring, all contributed to startle Marguerite, who said to herself, in terror,—

“He is mad!”

Then she went up to him and whispered in his ear, “Send away Lemulquinier.”

“No, no, my child; I want him: I am in the midst of an experiment no one has yet thought of. For the last three days we have been watching for every ray of sun. I now have the means of submitting metals, in a complete vacuum, to concentrated solar fires and to electric currents. At this very moment the most powerful action a chemist can employ is about to show results which I alone —”

“My father, instead of vaporizing metals you should employ them in paying your notes of hand—”

“Wait, wait!”

“Monsieur Merkstus has been here, father; and he must have ten thousand francs by four o’clock.”

“Yes, yes, presently. True, I did sign a little note which is payable this month. I felt sure I should have found the Absolute. Good God! If I could only have a July sun the experiment would be successful.”

He grasped his head and sat down on an old cane chair; a few tears rolled from his eyes.

“Monsieur is quite right,” said Lemulquinier; “it is all the fault of that rascally sun which is too feeble,—the coward, the lazy thing!”

Master and valet paid no further attention to Marguerite.

“Leave us, Mulquinier,” she said.

“Ah! I see a new experiment!” cried Claes.

“Father, lay aside your experiments,” said his daughter, when they were alone. “You have one hundred thousand francs to pay, and we have not a penny. Leave your laboratory; your honor is in question. What will become of you if you are put in prison? Will you soil your white hairs and the name of Claes with the disgrace of bankruptcy? I will not allow it. I shall have strength to oppose your madness; it would be dreadful to see you without bread in your old age. Open your eyes to our position; see reason at last!”

“Madness!” cried Balthazar, struggling to his feet. He fixed his luminous eyes upon his daughter, crossed his arms on his breast, and repeated the word “Madness!” so majestically that Marguerite trembled.

“Ah!” he cried, “your mother would never have uttered that word to me. She was not ignorant of the importance of my researches; she learned a science to understand me; she recognized that I toiled for the human race; she knew there was nothing sordid or selfish in my aims. The feelings of a loving wife are higher, I see it now, than filial affection. Yes, Love is above all other feelings. See reason!” he went on, striking his breast. “Do I lack reason? Am I not myself? You say we are poor; well, my daughter, I choose it to be so. I am your father, obey me. I will make you rich when I please. Your fortune? it is a pittance! When I find the solvent of carbon I will fill your parlor with diamonds, and they are but a scintilla of what I seek. You can well afford to wait while I consume my life in superhuman efforts.”

“Father, I have no right to ask an account of the four millions you have

already engulfed in this fatal garret. I will not speak to you of my mother whom you killed. If I had a husband, I should love him, doubtless, as she loved you; I should be ready to sacrifice all to him, as she sacrificed all for you. I have obeyed her orders in giving myself wholly to you; I have proved it in not marrying and compelling you to render an account of your guardianship. Let us dismiss the past and think of the present. I am here now to represent the necessity which you have created for yourself. You must have money to meet your notes—do you understand me? There is nothing left to seize here but the portrait of your ancestor, the Claes martyr. I come in the name of my mother, who felt herself too feeble to defend her children against their father; she ordered me to resist you. I come in the name of my brothers and my sister; I come, father, in the name of all the Claes, and I command you to give up your experiments, or earn the means of pursuing them hereafter, if pursue them you must. If you arm yourself with the power of your paternity, which you employ only for our destruction, I have on my side your ancestors and your honor, whose voice is louder than that of chemistry. The Family is greater than Science. I have been too long your daughter."

"And you choose to be my executioner," he said, in a feeble voice.

Marguerite turned and fled away, that she might not abdicate the part she had just assumed: she fancied she heard again her mother's voice saying to her, "Do not oppose your father too much; love him well."

CHAPTER XII

"Mademoiselle has made a pretty piece of work up yonder," said Lemulquinier, coming down to the kitchen for his breakfast. "We were just going to put our hands on the great secret, we only wanted a scrap of July sun, for monsieur,—ah, what a man! he's almost in the shoes of the good God himself!—was almost within THAT," he said to Josette, clicking his thumbnail against a front tooth, "of getting hold of the Absolute, when up she came, slam bang, screaming some nonsense about notes of hand."

"Well, pay them yourself," said Martha, "out of your wages."

"Where's the butter for my bread?" said Lemulquinier to the cook.

"Where's the money to buy it?" she answered, sharply. "Come, old villain, if you make gold in that devil's kitchen of yours, why don't you make butter? 'Twouldn't be half so difficult, and you could sell it in the market for enough to make the pot boil. We all eat dry bread. The young ladies are satisfied with dry bread and nuts, and do you expect to be better fed than your masters?

Mademoiselle won’t spend more than one hundred francs a month for the whole household. There’s only one dinner for all. If you want dainties you’ve got your furnaces upstairs where you fricassee pearls till there’s nothing else talked of in town. Get your roast chickens up there.”

Lemulquinier took his dry bread and went out.

“He will go and buy something to eat with his own money,” said Martha; “all the better,—it is just so much saved. Isn’t he stingy, the old scarecrow!”

“Starve him! that’s the only way to manage him,” said Josette. “For a week past he hasn’t rubbed a single floor; I have to do his work, for he is always upstairs. He can very well afford to pay me for it with the present of a few herrings; if he brings any home, I shall lay hands on them, I can tell him that.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Martha, “I hear Mademoiselle Marguerite crying. Her wizard of a father would swallow the house at a gulp without asking a Christian blessing, the old sorcerer! In my country he’d be burned alive; but people here have no more religion than the Moors in Africa.”

Marguerite could scarcely stifle her sobs as she came through the gallery. She reached her room, took out her mother’s letter, and read as follows:—

My Child,—If God so wills, my spirit will be within your heart when you read these words, the last I shall ever write; they are full of love for my dear ones, left at the mercy of a demon whom I have not been able to resist. When you read these words he will have taken your last crust, just as he took my life and squandered my love. You know, my darling, if I loved your father: I die loving him less, for I take precautions against him which I never could have practised while living. Yes, in the depths of my coffin I shall have kept a resource for the day when some terrible misfortune overtakes you. If when that day comes you are reduced to poverty, or if your honor is in question, my child, send for Monsieur de Solis, should he be living,—if not, for his nephew, our good Emmanuel; they hold one hundred and seventy thousand francs which are yours and will enable you to live.

If nothing shall have subdued his passion; if his children prove no stronger barrier than my happiness has been, and cannot stop his criminal career,—leave him, leave your father, that you may live. I could not forsake him; I was bound to him. You, Marguerite, you must save the family. I absolve you for all you may do to defend Gabriel and Jean and Felicie. Take courage; be the guardian angel of the Claes. Be firm,—I dare not say be pitiless; but to repair the evil already done you must keep some means at hand. On the day when you read this letter, regard yourself as ruined already, for nothing will stay the fury of that passion which has torn all things from me.

My child, remember this: the truest love is to forget your heart. Even

though you be forced to deceive your father, your dissimulation will be blessed; your actions, however blamable they may seem, will be heroic if taken to protect the family. The virtuous Monsieur de Solis tells me so; and no conscience was ever purer or more enlightened than his. I could never have had the courage to speak these words to you, even with my dying breath.

And yet, my daughter, be respectful, be kind in the dreadful struggle. Resist him, but love him; deny him gently. My hidden tears, my inward griefs will be known only when I am dead. Kiss my dear children in my name when the hour comes and you are called upon to protect them.

May God and the saints be with you!

Josephine.

To this letter was added an acknowledgment from the Messieurs de Solis, uncle and nephew, who thereby bound themselves to place the money entrusted to them by Madame Claes in the hands of whoever of her children should present the paper.

“Martha,” cried Marguerite to the duenna, who came quickly; “go to Monsieur Emmanuel de Solis, and ask him to come to me.—Noble, discreet heart! he never told me,” she thought; “though all my griefs and cares are his, he never told me!”

Emmanuel came before Martha could get back.

“You have kept a secret from me,” she said, showing him her mother’s letter.

Emmanuel bent his head.

“Marguerite, are you in great trouble?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered; “be my support,—you, whom my mother calls ‘our good Emmanuel.’” She showed him the letter, unable to repress her joy in knowing that her mother approved her choice.

“My blood and my life were yours on the morrow of the day when I first saw you in the gallery,” he said; “but I scarcely dared to hope the time might come when you would accept them. If you know me well, you know my word is sacred. Forgive the absolute obedience I have paid to your mother’s wishes; it was not for me to judge her intentions.”

“You have saved us,” she said, interrupting him, and taking his arm to go down to the parlor.

After hearing from Emmanuel the origin of the money entrusted to him, Marguerite confided to him the terrible straits in which the family now found themselves.

“I must pay those notes at once,” said Emmanuel. “If Merkstus holds them all, you can at least save the interest. I will bring you the remaining seventy thousand francs. My poor uncle left me quite a large sum in ducats, which are easy to carry secretly.”

“Oh!” she said, “bring them at night; we can hide them when my father is asleep. If he knew that I had money, he might try to force it from me. Oh, Emmanuel, think what it is to distrust a father!” she said, weeping and resting her forehead against the young man’s heart.

This sad, confiding movement, with which the young girl asked protection, was the first expression of a love hitherto wrapped in melancholy and restrained within a sphere of grief: the heart, too full, was forced to overflow beneath the pressure of this new misery.

“What can we do; what will become of us? He sees nothing, he cares for nothing,—neither for us nor for himself. I know not how he can live in that garret, where the air is stifling.”

“What can you expect of a man who calls incessantly, like Richard III., ‘My kingdom for a horse’?” said Emmanuel. “He is pitiless; and in that you must imitate him. Pay his notes; give him, if you will, your whole fortune; but that of your sister and of your brothers is neither yours nor his.”

“Give him my fortune?” she said, pressing her lover’s hand and looking at him with ardor in her eyes; “you advise it, you!—and Pierquin told a hundred lies to make me keep it!”

“Alas! I may be selfish in my own way,” he said. “Sometimes I long for you without fortune; you seem nearer to me then! At other times I want you rich and happy, and I feel how paltry it is to think that the poor grandeurs of wealth can separate us.”

“Dear, let us not speak of ourselves.”

“Ourselves!” he repeated, with rapture. Then, after a pause, he added: “The evil is great, but it is not irreparable.”

“It can be repaired only by us: the Claes family has now no head. To reach the stage of being neither father nor man, to have no consciousness of justice or injustice (for, in defiance of the laws, he has dissipated—he, so great, so noble, so upright—the property of the children he was bound to defend), oh, to what depths must he have fallen! My God! what is this thing he seeks?”

“Unfortunately, dear Marguerite, wrong as he is in his relation to his family, he is right scientifically. A score of men in Europe admire him for the very thing which others count as madness. But nevertheless you must, without scruple, refuse to let him take the property of his children. Great discoveries

have always been accidental. If your father ever finds the solution of the problem, it will be when it costs him nothing; in a moment, perhaps, when he despairs of it."

"My poor mother is happy," said Marguerite; "she would have suffered a thousand deaths before she died: as it was, her first encounter with Science killed her. Alas! the strife is endless."

"There is an end," said Emmanuel. "When you have nothing left, Monsieur Claes can get no further credit; then he will stop."

"Let him stop now, then," cried Marguerite, "for we are without a penny!"

Monsieur de Solis went to buy up Claes's notes and returned, bringing them to Marguerite. Balthazar, contrary to his custom, came down a few moments before dinner. For the first time in two years his daughter noticed the signs of a human grief upon his face: he was again a father, reason and judgment had overcome Science; he looked into the court-yard, then into the garden, and when he was certain he was alone with his daughter, he came up to her with a look of melancholy kindness.

"My child," he said, taking her hand and pressing it with persuasive tenderness, "forgive your old father. Yes, Marguerite, I have done wrong. You spoke truly. So long as I have not FOUND I am a miserable wretch. I will go away from here. I cannot see Van Claes sold," he went on, pointing to the martyr's portrait. "He died for Liberty, I die for Science; he is venerated, I am hated."

"Hated? oh, my father, no," she cried, throwing herself on his breast; "we all adore you. Do we not, Felicie?" she said, turning to her sister who came in at the moment.

"What is the matter, dear father?" said his youngest daughter, taking his hand.

"I have ruined you."

"Ah!" cried Felicie, "but our brothers will make our fortune. Jean is always at the head of his class."

"See, father," said Marguerite, leading Balthazar in a coaxing, filial way to the chimney-piece and taking some papers from beneath the clock, "here are your notes of hand; but do not sign any more, there is nothing left to pay them with—"

"Then you have money?" whispered Balthazar in her ear, when he recovered from his surprise.

His words and manner tortured the heroic girl; she saw the delirium of joy

and hope in her father's face as he looked about him to discover the gold.

"Father," she said, "I have my own fortune."

"Give it to me," he said with a rapacious gesture; "I will return you a hundred-fold."

"Yes, I will give it to you," answered Marguerite, looking gravely at Balthazar, who did not know the meaning she put into her words.

"Ah, my dear daughter!" he cried, "you save my life. I have thought of a last experiment, after which nothing more is possible. If, this time, I do not find the Absolute, I must renounce the search. Come to my arms, my darling child; I will make you the happiest woman upon earth. You give me glory; you bring me back to happiness; you bestow the power to heap treasures upon my children—yes! I will load you with jewels, with wealth."

He kissed his daughter's forehead, took her hands and pressed them, and testified his joy by fondling caresses which to Marguerite seemed almost obsequious. During the dinner he thought only of her; he looked at her eagerly with the assiduous devotion displayed by a lover to his mistress: if she made a movement, he tried to divine her wish, and rose to fulfil it; he made her ashamed by the youthful eagerness of his attentions, which were painfully out of keeping with his premature old age. To all these cajoleries, Marguerite herself presented the contrast of actual distress, shown sometimes by a word of doubt, sometimes by a glance along the empty shelves of the sideboards in the dining-room.

"Well, well," he said, following her eyes, "in six months we shall fill them again with gold, and marvellous things. You shall be like a queen. Bah! nature herself will belong to us, we shall rise above all created beings—through you, you my Marguerite! Margarita," he said, smiling, "thy name is a prophecy. 'Margarita' means a pearl. Sterne says so somewhere. Did you ever read Sterne? Would you like to have a Sterne? it would amuse you."

"A pearl, they say, is the result of a disease," she answered; "we have suffered enough already."

"Do not be sad; you will make the happiness of those you love; you shall be rich and all-powerful."

"Mademoiselle has got such a good heart," said Lemulquinier, whose seamed face stretched itself painfully into a smile.

For the rest of the evening Balthazar displayed to his daughters all the natural graces of his character and the charms of his conversation. Seductive as the serpent, his lips, his eyes, poured out a magnetic fluid; he put forth that power of genius, that gentleness of spirit, which once fascinated Josephine and

now drew, as it were, his daughters into his heart. When Emmanuel de Solis came he found, for the first time in many months, the father and the children reunited. The young professor, in spite of his reserve, came under the influence of the scene; for Claes's manners and conversation had recovered their former irresistible seduction!

Men of science, plunged though they be in abysses of thought and ceaselessly employed in studying the moral world, take notice, nevertheless, of the smallest details of the sphere in which they live. More out of date with their surroundings than really absent-minded, they are never in harmony with the life about them; they know and forget all; they prejudge the future in their own minds, prophesy to their own souls, know of an event before it happens, and yet they say nothing of all this. If, in the hush of meditation, they sometimes use their power to observe and recognize that which goes on around them, they are satisfied with having divined its meaning; their occupations hurry them on, and they frequently make false application of the knowledge they have acquired about the things of life. Sometimes they wake from their social apathy, or they drop from the world of thought to the world of life; at such times they come with well-stored memories, and are by no means strangers to what is happening.

Balthazar, who joined the perspicacity of the heart to that of the brain, knew his daughter's whole past; he knew, or he had guessed, the history of the hidden love that united her with Emmanuel: he now showed this delicately, and sanctioned their affection by taking part in it. It was the sweetest flattery a father could bestow, and the lovers were unable to resist it. The evening passed delightfully,—contrasting with the griefs which threatened the lives of these poor children. When Balthazar retired, after, as we may say, filling his family with light and bathing them with tenderness, Emmanuel de Solis, who had shown some embarrassment of manner, took from his pockets three thousand ducats in gold, the possession of which he had feared to betray. He placed them on the work-table, where Marguerite covered them with some linen she was mending; and then he went to his own house to fetch the rest of the money. When he returned, Felicie had gone to bed. Eleven o'clock struck; Martha, who sat up to undress her mistress, was still with Felicie.

"Where can we hide it?" said Marguerite, unable to resist the pleasure of playing with the gold ducats,—a childish amusement which proved disastrous.

"I will lift this marble pedestal, which is hollow," said Emmanuel; "you can slip in the packages, and the devil himself will not think of looking for them there."

Just as Marguerite was making her last trip but one from the work-table to the pedestal, carrying the gold, she suddenly gave a piercing cry, and let fall

the packages, the covers of which broke as they fell, and the coins were scattered about the room. Her father stood at the parlor door; the avidity of his eyes terrified her.

“What are you doing,” he said, looking first at his daughter, whose terror nailed her to the floor, and then at the young man, who had hastily sprung up, —though his attitude beside the pedestal was sufficiently significant. The rattle of the gold upon the ground was horrible, the scattering of it prophetic.

“I could not be mistaken,” said Balthazar, sitting down; “I heard the sound of gold.”

He was not less agitated than the young people, whose hearts were beating so in unison that their throbs might be heard, like the ticking of a clock, amid the profound silence which suddenly settled on the parlor.

“Thank you, Monsieur de Solis,” said Marguerite, giving Emmanuel a glance which meant, “Come to my rescue and help me to save this money.”

“What gold is this?” resumed Balthazar, casting at Marguerite and Emmanuel a glance of terrible clear-sightedness.

“This gold belongs to Monsieur de Solis, who is kind enough to lend it to me that I may pay our debts honorably,” she answered.

Emmanuel colored and turned as though to leave the room: Balthazar caught him by the arm.

“Monsieur,” he said, “you must not escape my thanks.”

“Monsieur, you owe me none. This money belongs to Mademoiselle Marguerite, who borrows it from me on the security of her own property,” Emmanuel replied, looking at his mistress, who thanked him with an almost imperceptible movement of her eyelids.

“I shall not allow that,” said Claes, taking a pen and a sheet of paper from the table where Felicie did her writing, and turning to the astonished young people. “How much is it?” His eager passion made him more astute than the wiliest of rascally bailiffs: the sum was to be his. Marguerite and Monsieur de Solis hesitated.

“Let us count it,” he said.

“There are six thousand ducats,” said Emmanuel.

“Seventy thousand francs,” remarked Claes.

The glance which Marguerite threw at her lover gave him courage.

“Monsieur,” he said, “your note bears no value; pardon this purely technical term. I have to-day lent Mademoiselle Claes one hundred thousand

francs to redeem your notes of hand which you had no means of paying: you are therefore unable to give me any security. These one hundred and seventy thousand francs belong to Mademoiselle Claes, who can dispose of them as she sees fit; but I have lent them on a pledge that she will sign a deed securing them to me on her share of the now denuded land of the forest of Waignies."

Marguerite turned away her head that her lover might not see the tears that gathered in her eyes. She knew Emmanuel's purity of soul. Brought up by his uncle to the practice of the sternest religious virtues, the young man had an especial horror of falsehood: after giving his heart and life to Marguerite Claes he now made her the sacrifice of his conscience.

"Adieu, monsieur," said Balthazar, "I thought you had more confidence in a man who looked upon you with the eyes of a father."

After exchanging a despairing look with Marguerite, Emmanuel was shown out by Martha, who closed and fastened the street-door.

The moment the father and daughter were alone Claes said,—

"You love me, do you not?"

"Come to the point, father. You want this money: you cannot have it."

She began to pick up the coins; her father silently helped her to gather them together and count the sum she had dropped; Marguerite allowed him to do so without manifesting the least distrust. When two thousand ducats were piled on the table, Balthazar said, with a desperate air,—

"Marguerite, I must have that money."

"If you take it, it will be robbery," she replied coldly. "Hear me, father: better kill us at one blow than make us suffer a hundred deaths a day. Let it now be seen which of us must yield."

"Do you mean to kill your father?"

"We avenge our mother," she said, pointing to the spot where Madame Claes died.

"My daughter, if you knew the truth of the matter, you would not use those words to me. Listen, and I will endeavor to exlain the great problem—but no, you cannot comprehend me," he cried in accents of despair. "Come, give me the money; believe for once in your father. Yes, I know I caused your mother pain: I have dissipated—to use the word of fools—my own fortune and injured yours; I know my children are sacrificed for a thing you call madness; but my angel, my darling, my love, my Marguerite, hear me! If I do not now succeed, I will give myself up to you; I will obey you as you are bound to obey me; I will do your will; you shall take charge of all my property; I will no longer be

the guardian of my children; I pledge myself to lay down my authority. I swear by your mother's memory!" he cried, shedding tears.

Marguerite turned away her head, unable to bear the sight. Claes, thinking she meant to yield, flung himself on his knees beside her.

"Marguerite, Marguerite! give it to me—give it!" he cried. "What are sixty thousand francs against eternal remorse? See, I shall die, this will kill me. Listen, my word is sacred. If I fail now I will abandon my labors; I will leave Flanders,—France even, if you demand it; I will go away and toil like a day-laborer to recover, sou by sou, the fortunes I have lost, and restore to my children all that Science has taken from them."

Marguerite tried to raise her father, but he persisted in remaining on his knees, and continued, still weeping:—

"Be tender and obedient for this last time! If I do not succeed, I will myself declare your hardness just. You shall call me a fool; you shall say I am a bad father; you may even tell me that I am ignorant and incapable. And when I hear you say those words I will kiss your hands. You may beat me, if you will, and when you strike I will bless you as the best of daughters, remembering that you have given me your blood."

"If it were my blood, my life's blood, I would give it to you," she cried; "but can I let Science cut the throats of my brothers and sister? No. Cease, cease!" she said, wiping her tears and pushing aside her father's caressing hands.

"Sixty thousand francs and two months," he said, rising in anger; "that is all I want: but my daughter stands between me and fame and wealth. I curse you!" he went on; "you are no daughter of mine, you are not a woman, you have no heart, you will never be a mother or a wife!—Give it to me, let me take it, my little one, my precious child, I will love you forever,"—and he stretched his hand with a movement of hideous energy towards the gold.

"I am helpless against physical force; but God and the great Claes see us now," she said, pointing to the picture.

"Try to live, if you can, with your father's blood upon you," cried Balthazar, looking at her with abhorrence. He rose, glanced round the room, and slowly left it. When he reached the door he turned as a beggar might have done and implored his daughter with a gesture, to which she replied by a negative motion of her head.

"Farewell, my daughter," he said, gently, "may you live happy!"

When he had disappeared, Marguerite remained in a trance which separated her from earth; she was no longer in the parlor; she lost

consciousness of physical existence; she had wings, and soared amid the immensities of the moral world, where Thought contracts the limits both of Time and Space, where a divine hand lifts the veil of the Future. It seemed to her that days elapsed between each footfall of her father as he went up the stairs; then a shudder of dread went over her as she heard him enter his chamber. Guided by a presentiment which flashed into her soul with the piercing keenness of lightning, she ran up the stairway, without light, without noise, with the velocity of an arrow, and saw her father with a pistol at his head.

“Take all!” she cried, springing towards him.

She fell into a chair. Balthazar, seeing her pallor, began to weep as old men weep; he became like a child, he kissed her brow, he spoke in disconnected words, he almost danced with joy, and tried to play with her as a lover with a mistress who has made him happy.

“Enough, father, enough,” she said; “remember your promise. If you do not succeed now, you pledge yourself to obey me?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, mother!” she cried, turning towards Madame Claes’s chamber, “YOU would have given him all—would you not?”

“Sleep in peace,” said Balthazar, “you are a good daughter.”

“Sleep!” she said, “the nights of my youth are gone; you have made me old, father, just as you slowly withered my mother’s heart.”

“Poor child, would I could re-assure you by explaining the effects of the glorious experiment I have now imagined! you would then comprehend the truth.”

“I comprehend our ruin,” she said, leaving him.

The next morning, being a holiday, Emmanuel de Solis brought Jean to spend the day.

“Well?” he said, approaching Marguerite anxiously.

“I yielded,” she replied.

“My dear life,” he said, with a gesture of melancholy joy, “if you had withstood him I should greatly have admired you; but weak and feeble, I adore you!”

“Poor, poor Emmanuel; what is left for us?”

“Leave the future to me,” cried the young man, with a radiant look; “we love each other, and all is well.”

CHAPTER XIII

Several months went by in perfect tranquillity. Monsieur de Solis made Marguerite see that her petty economies would never produce a fortune, and he advised her to live more at ease, by taking all that remained of the sum which Madame Claes had entrusted to him for the comfort and well-being of the household.

During these months Marguerite fell a prey to the anxieties which beset her mother under like circumstances. However incredulous she might be, she had come to hope in her father's genius. By an inexplicable phenomenon, many people have hope when they have no faith. Hope is the flower of Desire, faith is the fruit of Certainty. Marguerite said to herself, "If my father succeeds, we shall be happy." Claes and Lemulquinier alone said: "We shall succeed." Unhappily, from day to day the Searcher's face grew sadder. Sometimes, when he came to dinner he dared not look at his daughter; at other times he glanced at her in triumph. Marguerite employed her evenings in making young de Solis explain to her many legal points and difficulties. At last her masculine education was completed; she was evidently preparing herself to execute the plan she had resolved upon if her father were again vanquished in his duel with the Unknown (X).

About the beginning of July, Balthazar spend a whole day sitting on a bench in the garden, plunged in gloomy meditation. He gazed at the mound now bare of tulips, at the windows of his wife's chamber; he shuddered, no doubt, as he thought of all that his search had cost him: his movements betrayed that his thoughts were busy outside of Science. Marguerite brought her sewing and sat beside him for a while before dinner.

"You have not succeeded, father?"

"No, my child."

"Ah!" said Marguerite, in a gentle voice. "I will not say one word of reproach; we are both equally guilty. I only claim the fulfilment of your promise; it is surely sacred to you—you are a Claes. Your children will surround you with love and filial respect; but you now belong to me; you owe me obedience. Do not be uneasy; my reign will be gentle, and I will endeavor to bring it quickly to an end. Father, I am going to leave you for a month; I shall be busy with your affairs; for," she said, kissing him on his brow, "you are now my child. I take Martha with me; to-morrow Felicie will manage the household. The poor child is only seventeen, and she will not know how to

resist you; therefore be generous, do not ask her for money; she has only enough for the barest necessaries of the household. Take courage: renounce your labors and your thoughts for three or four years. The great problem may ripen towards discovery; by that time I shall have gathered the money that is necessary to solve it,—and you will solve it. Tell me, father, your queen is clement, is she not?"

"Then all is not lost?" said the old man.

"No, not if you keep your word."

"I will obey you, my daughter," answered Claes, with deep emotion.

The next day, Monsieur Conyncks of Cambrai came to fetch his great-niece. He was in a travelling-carriage, and would only remain long enough for Marguerite and Martha to make their last arrangements. Monsieur Claes received his cousin with courtesy, but he was obviously sad and humiliated. Old Conyncks guessed his thoughts, and said with blunt frankness while they were breakfasting:—

"I have some of your pictures, cousin; I have a taste for pictures,—a ruinous passion, but we all have our manias."

"Dear uncle!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"The world declares that you are ruined, cousin; but the treasure of a Claes is there," said Conyncks, tapping his forehead, "and here," striking his heart; "don't you think so? I count upon you: and for that reason, having a few spare ducats in my wallet, I put them to use in your service."

"Ah!" cried Balthazar, "I will repay you with treasures—"

"The only treasures we possess in Flanders are patience and labor," replied Conyncks, sternly. "Our ancestor has those words engraved upon his brow," he said, pointing to the portrait of Van Claes.

Marguerite kissed her father and bade him good-bye, gave her last directions to Josette and to Felicie, and started with Monsieur Conyncks for Paris. The great-uncle was a widower with one child, a daughter twelve years old, and he was possessed of an immense fortune. It was not impossible that he would take a wife; consequently, the good people of Douai believed that Mademoiselle Claes would marry her great-uncle. The rumor of this marriage reached Pierquin, and brought him back in hot haste to the House of Claes.

Great changes had taken place in the ideas of that clever speculator. For the last two years society in Douai had been divided into hostile camps. The nobility formed one circle, the bourgeoisie another; the latter naturally inimical to the former. This sudden separation took place, as a matter of fact, all over France, and divided the country into two warring nations, whose

jealous squabbles, always augmenting, were among the chief reasons why the revolution of July, 1830, was accepted in the provinces. Between these social camps, the one ultra-monarchical, the other ultra-liberal, were a number of functionaries of various kinds, admitted, according to their importance, to one or the other of these circles, and who, at the moment of the fall of the legitimate power, were neutral. At the beginning of the struggle between the nobility and the bourgeoisie, the royalist “cafes” displayed an unheard-of splendor, and eclipsed the liberal “cafes” so brilliantly that these gastronomic fetes were said to have cost the lives of some of their frequenters who, like ill-cast cannon, were unable to withstand such practice. The two societies naturally became exclusive.

Pierquin, though rich for a provincial lawyer, was excluded from aristocratic circles and driven back upon the bourgeoisie. His self-love must have suffered from the successive rebuffs which he received when he felt himself insensibly set aside by people with whom he had rubbed shoulders up to the time of this social change. He had now reached his fortieth year, the last epoch at which a man who intends to marry can think of a young wife. The matches to which he was able to aspire were all among the bourgeoisie, but ambition prompted him to enter the upper circle by means of some creditable alliance.

The isolation in which the Claes family were now living had hitherto kept them aloof from these social changes. Though Claes belonged to the old aristocracy of the province, his preoccupation of mind prevented him from sharing the class antipathies thus created. However poor a daughter of the Claes might be, she would bring to a husband the dower of social vanity so eagerly desired by all parvenus. Pierquin therefore returned to his allegiance, with the secret intention of making the necessary sacrifices to conclude a marriage which should realize all his ambitions. He kept company with Balthazar and Felicie during Marguerite’s absence; but in so doing he discovered, rather late in the day, a formidable competitor in Emmanuel de Solis. The property of the deceased abbe was thought to be considerable, and to the eyes of a man who calculated all the affairs of life in figures, the young heir seemed more powerful through his money than through the seductions of the heart—as to which Pierquin never made himself uneasy. In his mind the abbe’s fortune restored the de Solis name to all its pristine value. Gold and nobility of birth were two orbs which reflected lustre on one another and doubled the illumination.

The sincere affection which the young professor testified for Felicie, whom he treated as a sister, excited Pierquin’s spirit of emulation. He tried to eclipse Emmanuel by mingling a fashionable jargon and sundry expressions of superficial gallantry with anxious elegies and business airs which sat more

naturally on his countenance. When he declared himself disenchanted with the world he looked at Felicie, as if to let her know that she alone could reconcile him with life. Felicie, who received for the first time in her life the compliments of a man, listened to this language, always sweet however deceptive; she took emptiness for depth, and needing an object on which to fix the vague emotions of her heart, she allowed the lawyer to occupy her mind. Envious perhaps, though quite unconsciously, of the loving attentions with which Emmanuel surrounded her sister, she doubtless wished to be, like Marguerite, the object of the thoughts and cares of a man.

Pierquin readily perceived the preference which Felicie accorded him over Emmanuel, and to him it was a reason why he should persist in his attentions; so that in the end he went further than he at first intended. Emmanuel watched the beginning of this passion, false perhaps in the lawyer, artless in Felicie, whose future was at stake. Soon, little colloquies followed, a few words said in a low voice behind Emmanuel's back, trifling deceptions which give to a look or a word a meaning whose insidious sweetness may be the cause of innocent mistakes. Relying on his intimacy with Felicie, Pierquin tried to discover the secret of Marguerite's journey, and to know if it were really a question of her marriage, and whether he must renounce all hope; but, notwithstanding his clumsy cleverness in questioning them, neither Balthazar nor Felicie could give him any light, for the good reason that they were in the dark themselves: Marguerite in taking the reins of power seemed to have followed its maxims and kept silence as to her projects.

The gloomy sadness of Balthazar and his great depression made it difficult to get through the evenings. Though Emmanuel succeeded in making him play backgammon, the chemist's mind was never present; during most of the time this man, so great in intellect, seemed simply stupid. Shorn of his expectations, ashamed of having squandered three fortunes, a gambler without money, he bent beneath the weight of ruin, beneath the burden of hopes that were betrayed rather than annihilated. This man of genius, gagged by dire necessity and upbraiding himself, was a tragic spectacle, fit to touch the hearts of the most unfeeling of men. Even Pierquin could not enter without respect the presence of that caged lion, whose eyes, full of baffled power, now calmed by sadness and faded from excess of light, seemed to proffer a prayer for charity which the mouth dared not utter. Sometimes a lightning flash crossed that withered face, whose fires revived at the conception of a new experiment; then, as he looked about the parlor, Balthazar's eyes would fasten on the spot where his wife had died, a film of tears rolled like hot grains of sand across the arid pupils of his eyes, which thought had made immense, and his head fell forward on his breast. Like a Titan he had lifted the world, and the world fell on his breast and crushed him.

This gigantic grief, so manfully controlled, affected Pierquin and Emmanuel powerfully, and each felt moved at times to offer this man the necessary money to renew his search,—so contagious are the convictions of genius! Both understood how it was that Madame Claes and Marguerite had flung their all into this gulf; but reason promptly checked the impulse of their hearts, and their emotion was spent in efforts at consolation which still further embittered the anguish of the doomed Titan.

Claes never spoke of his eldest daughter, and showed no interest in her departure nor any anxiety as to her silence in not writing either to him or to Felicie. When de Solis or Pierquin asked for news of her he seemed annoyed. Did he suspect that Marguerite was working against him? Was he humiliated at having resigned the majestic rights of paternity to his own child? Had he come to love her less because she was now the father, he the child? Perhaps there were many of these reasons, many of these inexpressible feelings which float like vapors through the soul, in the mute disgrace which he laid upon Marguerite. However great may be the great men of earth, be they known or unknown, fortunate or unfortunate in their endeavors, all have likenesses which belong to human nature. By a double misfortune they suffer through their greatness not less than through their defects; and perhaps Balthazar needed to grow accustomed to the pangs of wounded vanity. The life he was leading, the evenings when these four persons met together in Marguerite's absence, were full of sadness and vague, uneasy apprehensions. The days were barren like a parched-up soil; where, nevertheless, a few flowers grew, a few rare consolations, though without Marguerite, the soul, the hope, the strength of the family, the atmosphere seemed misty.

Two months went by in this way, during which Balthazar awaited the return of his daughter. Marguerite was brought back to Douai by her uncle who remained at the house instead of returning to Cambrai, no doubt to lend the weight of his authority to some coup d'etat planned by his niece. Marguerite's return was made a family fete. Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis were invited to dinner by Felicie and Balthazar. When the travelling-carriage stopped before the house, the four went to meet it with demonstrations of joy. Marguerite seemed happy to see her home once more, and her eyes filled with tears as she crossed the court-yard to reach the parlor. When embracing her father she colored like a guilty wife who is unable to dissimulate; but her face recovered its serenity as she looked at Emmanuel, from whom she seemed to gather strength to complete a work she had secretly undertaken.

Notwithstanding the gaiety which animated all present during the dinner, father and daughter watched each other with distrust and curiosity. Balthazar asked his daughter no questions as to her stay in Paris, doubtless to preserve his parental dignity. Emmanuel de Solis imitated his reserve; but Pierquin,

accustomed to be told all family secrets, said to Marguerite, concealing his curiosity under a show of liveliness:—

“Well, my dear cousin, you have seen Paris and the theatres—”

“I have seen little of Paris,” she said; “I did not go there for amusement. The days went by sadly, I was so impatient to see Douai once more.”

“Yes, if I had not been angry about it she would not have gone to the Opera; and even there she was uneasy,” said Monsieur Conyncks.

It was a painful evening; every one was embarrassed and smiled vaguely with the artificial gaiety which hides such real anxieties. Marguerite and Balthazar were a prey to cruel, latent fears which reacted on the rest. As the hours passed, the bearing of the father and daughter grew more and more constrained. Sometimes Marguerite tried to smile, but her motions, her looks, the tones of her voice betrayed a keen anxiety. Messieurs Conyncks and de Solis seemed to know the meaning of the secret feelings which agitated the noble girl, and they appeared to encourage her by expressive glances. Balthazar, hurt at being kept from a knowledge of the steps that had been taken on his behalf, withdrew little by little from his children and friends, and pointedly kept silence. Marguerite would no doubt soon disclose what she had decided upon for his future.

To a great man, to a father, the situation was intolerable. At his age a man no longer dissimulates in his own family; he became more and more thoughtful, serious, and grieved as the hour approached when he would be forced to meet his civil death. This evening covered one of those crises in the inner life of man which can only be expressed by imagery. The thunderclouds were gathering in the sky, people were laughing in the fields; all felt the heat and knew the storm was coming, but they held up their heads and continued on their way. Monsieur Conyncks was the first to leave the room, conducted by Balthazar to his chamber. During the latter’s absence Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis went away. Marguerite bade the notary good-night with much affection; she said nothing to Emmanuel, but she pressed his hand and gave him a tearful glance. She sent Felicie away, and when Claes returned to the parlor he found his daughter alone.

“My kind father,” she said in a trembling voice, “nothing could have made me leave home but the serious position in which we found ourselves; but now, after much anxiety, after surmounting the greatest difficulties, I return with some chances of deliverance for all of us. Thanks to your name, and to my uncle’s influence, and to the support of Monsieur de Solis, we have obtained for you an appointment under government as receiver of customs in Bretagne; the place is worth, they say, eighteen to twenty thousand francs a year. Our uncle has given bonds as your security. Here is the nomination,” she added,

drawing a paper from her bag. “Your life in Douai, in this house, during the coming years of privation and sacrifice would be intolerable to you. Our father must be placed in a situation at least equal to that in which he has always lived. I ask nothing from the salary you will receive from this appointment; employ it as you see fit. I will only beg you to remember that we have not a penny of income, and that we must live on what Gabriel can give us out of his. The town shall know nothing of our inner life. If you were still to live in this house you would be an obstacle to the means my sister and I are about to employ to restore comfort and ease to the home. Have I abused the authority you gave me by putting you in a position to remake your own fortune? In a few years, if you so will, you can easily become the receiver-general.”

“In other words, Marguerite,” said Balthazar, gently, “you turn me out of my own house.”

“I do not deserve that bitter reproach,” replied the daughter, quelling the tumultuous beatings of her heart. “You will come back to us in a manner becoming to your dignity. Besides, father, I have your promise. You are bound to obey me. My uncle has stayed here that he might himself accompany you to Bretagne, and not leave you to make the journey alone.”

“I shall not go,” said Balthazar, rising; “I need no help from any one to restore my property and pay what I owe to my children.”

“It would be better, certainly,” replied Marguerite, calmly. “But now I ask you to reflect on our respective situations, which I will explain in a few words. If you stay in this house your children will leave it, so that you may remain its master.”

“Marguerite!” cried Balthazar.

“In that case,” she said, continuing her words without taking notice of her father’s anger, “it will be necessary to notify the minister of your refusal, if you decide not to accept this honorable and lucrative post, which, in spite of our many efforts, we should never have obtained but for certain thousand-franc notes my uncle slipped into the glove of a lady.”

“My children leave me!” he exclaimed.

“You must leave us or we must leave you,” she said. “If I were your only child, I should do as my mother did, without murmuring against my fate; but my brothers and sister shall not perish beside you with hunger and despair. I promised it to her who died there,” she said, pointing to the place where her mother’s bed had stood. “We have hidden our troubles from you; we have suffered in silence; our strength is gone. My father, we are not on the edge of an abyss, we are at the bottom of it. Courage is not sufficient to drag us out of it; our efforts must not be incessantly brought to nought by the caprices of a

passion.”

“My dear children,” cried Balthazar, seizing Marguerite’s hand, “I will help you, I will work, I—”

“Here is the means,” she answered, showing him the official letter.

“But, my darling, the means you offer me are too slow; you make me lose the fruits of ten years’ work, and the enormous sums of money which my laboratory represents. There,” he said, pointing towards the garret, “are our real resources.”

Marguerite walked towards the door, saying:—

“Father, you must choose.”

“Ah! my daughter, you are very hard,” he replied, sitting down in an armchair and allowing her to leave him.

The next morning, on coming downstairs, Marguerite learned from Lemulquinier that Monsieur Claes had gone out. This simple announcement turned her pale; her face was so painfully significant that the old valet remarked hastily:—

“Don’t be troubled, mademoiselle; monsieur said he would be back at eleven o’clock to breakfast. He didn’t go to bed all night. At two in the morning he was still standing in the parlor, looking through the window at the laboratory. I was waiting up in the kitchen; I saw him; he wept; he is in trouble. Here’s the famous month of July when the sun is able to enrich us all, and if you only would—”

“Enough,” said Marguerite, divining the thoughts that must have assailed her father’s mind.

A phenomenon which often takes possession of persons leading sedentary lives had seized upon Balthazar; his life depended, so to speak, on the places with which it was identified; his thought was so wedded to his laboratory and to the house he lived in that both were indispensable to him,—just as the Bourse becomes a necessity to a stock-gambler, to whom the public holidays are so much lost time. Here were his hopes; here the heavens contained the only atmosphere in which his lungs could breathe the breath of life. This alliance of places and things with men, which is so powerful in feeble natures, becomes almost tyrannical in men of science and students. To leave his house was, for Balthazar, to renounce Science, to abandon the Problem,—it was death.

Marguerite was a prey to anxiety until the breakfast hour. The former scene in which Balthazar had meant to kill himself came back to her memory, and she feared some tragic end to the desperate situation in which her father was

placed. She came and went restlessly about the parlor, and quivered every time the bell or the street-door sounded.

At last Balthazar returned. As he crossed the courtyard Marguerite studied his face anxiously and could see nothing but an expression of stormy grief. When he entered the parlor she went towards him to bid him good-morning; he caught her affectionately round the waist, pressed her to his heart, kissed her brow, and whispered,—

“I have been to get my passport.”

The tones of his voice, his resigned look, his feeble movements, crushed the poor girl’s heart; she turned away her head to conceal her tears, and then, unable to repress them, she went into the garden to weep at her ease. During breakfast, Balthazar showed the cheerfulness of a man who had come to a decision.

“So we are to start for Bretagne, uncle,” he said to Monsieur Conyncks. “I have always wished to go there.”

“It is a place where one can live cheaply,” replied the old man.

“Is our father going away?” cried Felicie.

Monsieur de Solis entered, bringing Jean.

“You must leave him with me to-day,” said Balthazar, putting his son beside him. “I am going away to-morrow, and I want to bid him good-bye.”

Emmanuel glanced at Marguerite, who held down her head. It was a gloomy day for the family; every one was sad, and tried to repress both thoughts and tears. This was not an absence, it was an exile. All instinctively felt the humiliation of the father in thus publicly declaring his ruin by accepting an office and leaving his family, at Balthazar’s age. At this crisis he was great, while Marguerite was firm; he seemed to accept nobly the punishment of faults which the tyrannous power of genius had forced him to commit. When the evening was over, and father and daughter were again alone, Balthazar, who throughout the day had shown himself tender and affectionate as in the first years of his fatherhood, held out his hand and said to Marguerite with a tenderness that was mingled with despair,—

“Are you satisfied with your father?”

“You are worthy of HIM,” said Marguerite, pointing to the portrait of Van Claes.

The next morning Balthazar, followed by Lemulquinier, went up to the laboratory, as if to bid farewell to the hopes he had so fondly cherished, and which in that scene of his toil were living things to him. Master and man

looked at each other sadly as they entered the garret they were about to leave, perhaps forever. Balthazar gazed at the various instruments over which his thoughts so long had brooded; each was connected with some experiment or some research. He sadly ordered Lemulquinier to evaporate the gases and the dangerous acids, and to separate all substances which might produce explosions. While taking these precautions, he gave way to bitter regrets, like those uttered by a condemned man before going to the scaffold.

“Here,” he said, stopping before a china capsule in which two wires of a voltaic pile were dipped, “is an experiment whose results ought to be watched. If it succeeds—dreadful thought!—my children will have driven from their home a father who could fling diamonds at their feet. In a combination of carbon and sulphur,” he went on, speaking to himself, “carbon plays the part of an electro-positive substance; the crystallization ought to begin at the negative pole; and in case of decomposition, the carbon would crop into crystals—”

“Ah! is that how it would be?” said Lemulquinier, contemplating his master with admiration.

“Now here,” continued Balthazar, after a pause, “the combination is subject to the influence of the galvanic battery, which may act—”

“If monsieur wishes, I can increase its force.”

“No, no; leave it as it is. Perfect stillness and time are the conditions of crystallization—”

“Confound it, it takes time enough, that crystallization,” cried the old valet impatiently.

“If the temperature goes down, the sulphide of carbon will crystallize,” said Balthazar, continuing to give forth shreds of indistinct thoughts which were parts of a complete conception in his own mind; “but if the battery works under certain conditions of which I am ignorant—it must be watched carefully—it is quite possible that—Ah! what am I thinking of? It is no longer a question of chemistry, my friend; we are to keep accounts in Bretagne.”

Claes rushed precipitately from the laboratory, and went downstairs to take a last breakfast with his family, at which Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis were present. Balthazar, hastening to end the agony Science had imposed upon him, bade his children farewell and got into the carriage with his uncle, all the family accompanying him to the threshold. There, as Marguerite strained her father to her breast with a despairing pressure, he whispered in her ear, “You are a good girl; I bear you no ill-will”; then she darted through the court-yard into the parlor, and flung herself on her knees upon the spot where her mother had died, and prayed to God to give her strength to accomplish the hard task

that lay before her. She was already strengthened by an inward voice, sounding in her heart the encouragement of angels and the gratitude of her mother, when her sister, her brother, Emmanuel, and Pierquin came in, after watching the carriage until it disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV

“And now, mademoiselle, what do you intend to do!” said Pierquin.

“Save the family,” she answered simply. “We own nearly thirteen hundred acres at Waignies. I intend to clear them, divide them into three farms, put up the necessary buildings, and then let them. I believe that in a few years, with patience and great economy, each of us,” motioning to her sister and brother, “will have a farm of over four-hundred acres, which may bring in, some day, a rental of nearly fifteen thousand francs. My brother Gabriel will have this house, and all that now stands in his name on the Grand-Livre, for his portion. We shall then be able to redeem our father’s property and return it to him free from all encumbrance, by devoting our incomes, each of us, to paying off his debts.”

“But, my dear cousin,” said the lawyer, amazed at Marguerite’s understanding of business and her cool judgment, “you will need at least two hundred thousand francs to clear the land, build your houses, and purchase cattle. Where will you get such a sum?”

“That is where my difficulties begin,” she said, looking alternately at Pierquin and de Solis; “I cannot ask it from my uncle, who has already spent much money for us and has given bonds as my father’s security.”

“You have friends!” cried Pierquin, suddenly perceiving that the demoiselles Claes were “four-hundred-thousand-franc girls,” after all.

Emmanuel de Solis looked tenderly at Marguerite. Pierquin, unfortunately for himself, was a notary still, even in the midst of his enthusiasm, and he promptly added,—

“I will lend you these two hundred thousand francs.”

Marguerite and Emmanuel consulted each other with a glance which was a flash of light to Pierquin; Felicie colored highly, much gratified to find her cousin as generous as she desired him to be. She looked at her sister, who suddenly guessed the fact that during her absence the poor girl had allowed herself to be caught by Pierquin’s meaningless gallantries.

“You shall only pay me five per cent interest,” went on the lawyer, “and

refund the money whenever it is convenient to do so; I will take a mortgage on your property. And don’t be uneasy; you shall only have the outlay on your improvements to pay; I will find you trustworthy farmers, and do all your business gratuitously, so as to help you like a good relation.”

Emmanuel made Marguerite a sign to refuse the offer, but she was too much occupied in studying the changes of her sister’s face to perceive it. After a slight pause, she looked at the notary with an amused smile, and answered of her own accord, to the great joy of Monsieur de Solis:—

“You are indeed a good relation,—I expected nothing less of you; but an interest of five per cent would delay our release too long. I shall wait till my brother is of age, and then we will sell out what he has in the Funds.”

Pierquin bit his lip. Emmanuel smiled quietly.

“Felicie, my dear child, take Jean back to school; Martha will go with you,” said Marguerite to her sister. “Jean, my angel, be a good boy; don’t tear your clothes, for we shall not be rich enough to buy you as many new ones as we did. Good-bye, little one; study hard.”

Felicie carried off her brother.

“Cousin,” said Marguerite to Pierquin, “and you, monsieur,” she said to Monsieur de Solis, “I know you have been to see my father during my absence, and I thank you for that proof of friendship. You will not do less I am sure for two poor girls who will be in need of counsel. Let us understand each other. When I am at home I shall receive you both with the greatest of pleasure, but when Felicie is here alone with Josette and Martha, I need not tell you that she ought to see no one, not even an old friend or the most devoted of relatives. Under the circumstances in which we are placed, our conduct must be irreproachable. We are vowed to toil and solitude for a long, long time.”

There was silence for some minutes. Emmanuel, absorbed in contemplation of Marguerite’s head, seemed dumb. Pierquin did not know what to say. He took leave of his cousin with feelings of rage against himself; for he suddenly perceived that Marguerite loved Emmanuel, and that he, Pierquin, had just behaved like a fool.

“Pierquin, my friend,” he said, apostrophizing himself in the street, “if a man said you were an idiot he would tell the truth. What a fool I am! I’ve got twelve thousand francs a year outside of my business, without counting what I am to inherit from my uncle des Racquets, which is likely to double my fortune (not that I wish him dead, he is so economical), and I’ve had the madness to ask interest from Mademoiselle Claes! I know those two are jeering at me now! I mustn’t think of Marguerite any more. No. After all,

Felicie is a sweet, gentle little creature, who will suit me much better. Marguerite's character is iron; she would want to rule me—and—she would rule me. Come, come, let's be generous; I wish I was not so much of a lawyer: am I never to get that harness off my back? Bless my soul! I'll begin to fall in love with Felicie, and I won't budge from that sentiment. She will have a farm of four hundred and thirty acres, which, sooner or later, will be worth twelve or fifteen thousand francs a year, for the soil about Waignies is excellent. Just let my old uncle des Racquets die, poor dear man, and I'll sell my practice and be a man of leisure, with fifty—thou—sand—francs—a—year. My wife is a Claes, I'm allied to the great families. The deuce! we'll see if those Courtevilles and Magalhens and Savaron de Savarus will refuse to come and dine with a Pierquin-Claes-Molina-Nourho. I shall be mayor of Douai; I'll obtain the cross, and get to be deputy—in short, everything. Ha, ha! Pierquin, my boy, now keep yourself in hand; no more nonsense, because—yes, on my word of honor—Felicie—Mademoiselle Felicie Van Claes—loves you!"

When the lovers were left alone Emmanuel held out his hand to Marguerite, who did not refuse to put her right hand into it. They rose with one impulse and moved towards their bench in the garden; but as they reached the middle of the parlor, the lover could not resist his joy, and, in a voice that trembled with emotion, he said,—

"I have three hundred thousand francs of yours."

"What!" she cried, "did my poor mother entrust them to you? No? then where did you get them?"

"Oh, my Marguerite! all that is mine is yours. Was it not you who first said the word 'ourselves'?"

"Dear Emmanuel!" she exclaimed, pressing the hand which still held hers; and then, instead of going into the garden, she threw herself into a low chair.

"It is for me to thank you," he said, with the voice of love, "since you accept all."

"Oh, my dear beloved one," she cried, "this moment effaces many a grief and brings the happy future nearer. Yes, I accept your fortune," she continued, with the smile of an angel upon her lips, "I know the way to make it mine."

She looked up at the picture of Van Claes as if calling him to witness. The young man's eyes followed those of Marguerite, and he did not notice that she took a ring from her finger until he heard the words:—

"From the depths of our greatest misery one comfort rises. My father's indifference leaves me the free disposal of myself," she said, holding out the ring. "Take it, Emmanuel. My mother valued you—she would have chosen

you.”

The young man turned pale with emotion and fell on his knees beside her, offering in return a ring which he always wore.

“This is my mother’s wedding-ring,” he said, kissing it. “My Marguerite, am I to have no other pledge than this?”

She stooped a little till her forehead met his lips.

“Alas, dear love,” she said, greatly agitated, “are we not doing wrong? We have so long to wait!”

“My uncle used to say that adoration was the daily bread of patience,—he spoke of Christians who love God. That is how I love you; I have long mingled my love for you with my love for Him. I am yours as I am His.”

They remained for a few moments in the power of this sweet enthusiasm. It was the calm, sincere effusion of a feeling which, like an overflowing spring, poured forth its superabundance in little wavelets. The events which separated these lovers produced a melancholy which only made their happiness the keener, giving it a sense of something sharp, like pain.

Felicie came back too soon. Emmanuel, inspired by that delightful tact of love which discerns all feelings, left the sisters alone,—exchanging a look with Marguerite to let her know how much this discretion cost him, how hungry his soul was for that happiness so long desired, which had just been consecrated by the betrothal of their hearts.

“Come here, little sister,” said Marguerite, taking Felicie round the neck. Then, passing into the garden they sat down on the bench where generation after generation had confided to listening hearts their words of love, their sighs of grief, their meditations and their projects. In spite of her sister’s joyous tone and lively manner, Felicie experienced a sensation that was very like fear. Marguerite took her hand and felt it tremble.

“Mademoiselle Felicie,” said the elder, with her lips at her sister’s ear. “I read your soul. Pierquin has been here often in my absence, and he has said sweet words to you, and you have listened to them.” Felicie blushed. “Don’t defend yourself, my angel,” continued Marguerite, “it is so natural to love! Perhaps your dear nature will improve his; he is egotistical and self-interested, but for all that he is a good man, and his defects may even add to your happiness. He will love you as the best of his possessions; you will be a part of his business affairs. Forgive me this one word, dear love; you will soon correct the bad habit he has acquired of seeing money in everything, by teaching him the business of the heart.”

Felicie could only kiss her sister.

“Besides,” added Marguerite, “he has property; and his family belongs to the highest and the oldest bourgeoisie. But you don’t think I would oppose your happiness even if the conditions were less prosperous, do you?”

Felicie let fall the words, “Dear sister.”

“Yes, you may confide in me,” cried Marguerite, “sisters can surely tell each other their secrets.”

These words, so full of heartiness, opened the way to one of those delightful conversations in which young girls tell all. When Marguerite, expert in love, reached an understanding of the real state of Felicie’s heart, she wound up their talk by saying:—

“Well, dear child, let us make sure he truly loves you, and—then—”

“Ah!” cried Felicie, laughing, “leave me to my own devices; I have a model before my eyes.”

“Saucy child!” exclaimed Marguerite, kissing her.

Though Pierquin belonged to the class of men who regard marriage as the accomplishment of a social duty and the means of transmitting property, and though he was indifferent to which sister he should marry so long as both had the same name and the same dower, he did perceive that the two were, to use his own expression, “romantic and sentimental girls,” adjectives employed by commonplace people to ridicule the gifts which Nature sows with grudging hand along the furrows of humanity. The lawyer no doubt said to himself that he had better swim with the stream; and accordingly the next day he came to see Marguerite, and took her mysteriously into the little garden, where he began to talk sentiment,—that being one of the clauses of the primal contract which, according to social usage, must precede the notarial contract.

“Dear cousin,” he said, “you and I have not always been of one mind as to the best means of bringing your affairs to a happy conclusion; but you do now, I am sure, admit that I have always been guided by a great desire to be useful to you. Well, yesterday I spoiled my offer by a fatal habit which the legal profession forces upon us—you understand me? My heart did not share in the folly. I have loved you well; but I have a certain perspicacity, legal perhaps, which obliges me to see that I do not please you. It is my own fault; another has been more successful than I. Well, I come now to tell you, like an honest man, that I sincerely love your sister Felicie. Treat me therefore as a brother; accept my purse, take what you will from it,—the more you take the better you prove your regard for me. I am wholly at your service—WITHOUT INTEREST, you understand, neither at twelve nor at one quarter per cent. Let me be thought worthy of Felicie, that is all I ask. Forgive my defects; they come from business habits; my heart is good, and I would fling myself into the

Scarpe sooner than not make my wife happy."

"This is all satisfactory, cousin," answered Marguerite; "but my sister's choice depends upon herself and also on my father's will."

"I know that, my dear cousin," said the lawyer, "but you are the mother of the whole family; and I have nothing more at heart than that you should judge me rightly."

This conversation paints the mind of the honest notary. Later in life, Pierquin became celebrated by his reply to the commanding officer at Saint-Omer, who had invited him to be present at a military fete; the note ran as follows: "Monsieur Pierquin-Claes de Molina-Nourho, mayor of the city of Douai, chevalier of the Legion of honor, will have THAT of being present, etc."

Marguerite accepted the lawyer's offer only so far as it related to his professional services, so that she might not in any degree compromise either her own dignity as a woman, or her sister's future, or her father's authority.

The next day she confided Felicie to the care of Martha and Josette (who vowed themselves body and soul to their young mistress, and seconded all her economies), and started herself for Waignies, where she began operations, which were judiciously overlooked and directed by Pierquin. Devotion was now set down as a good speculation in the mind of that worthy man; his care and trouble were in fact an investment, and he had no wish to be niggardly in making it. First he contrived to save Marguerite the trouble of clearing the land and working the ground intended for the farms. He found three young men, sons of rich farmers, who were anxious to settle themselves in life, and he succeeded, through the prospect he held out to them of the fertility of the land, in making them take leases of the three farms on which the buildings were to be constructed. To gain possession of the farms rent-free for three years the tenants bound themselves to pay ten thousand francs a year the fourth year, twelve thousand the sixth year, and fifteen thousand for the remainder of the term; to drain the land, make the plantations, and purchase the cattle. While the buildings were being put up the farmers were to clear the land.

Four years after Balthazar Claes's departure from his home Marguerite had almost recovered the property of her brothers and sister. Two hundred thousand francs, lent to her by Emmanuel, had sufficed to put up the farm buildings. Neither help nor counsel was withheld from the brave girl, whose conduct excited the admiration of the whole town. Marguerite superintended the buildings, and looked after her contracts and leases with the good sense, activity, and perseverance, which women know so well how to call up when they are actuated by a strong sentiment. By the fifth year she was able to apply

thirty thousand francs from the rental of the farms, together with the income from the Funds standing in her brother's name, and the proceeds of her father's property, towards paying off the mortgages on that property, and repairing the devastation which her father's passion had wrought in the old mansion of the Claes. This redemption went on more rapidly as the interest account decreased. Emmanuel de Solis persuaded Marguerite to take the remaining one hundred thousand francs of his uncle's bequest, and by joining to it twenty thousand francs of his own savings, pay off in the third year of her management a large slice of the debts. This life of courage, privation, and endurance was never relaxed for five years; but all went well,—everything prospered under the administration and influence of Marguerite Claes.

Gabriel, now holding an appointment under government as engineer in the department of Roads and Bridges, made a rapid fortune, aided by his great-uncle, in a canal which he was able to construct; moreover, he succeeded in pleasing his cousin Mademoiselle Conyncks, the idol of her father, and one of the richest heiresses in Flanders. In 1824 the whole Claes property was free, and the house in the rue de Paris had repaired its losses. Pierquin made a formal application to Balthazar for the hand of Felicie, and Monsieur de Solis did the same for that of Marguerite.

At the beginning of January, 1825, Marguerite and Monsieur Conyncks left Douai to bring home the exiled father, whose return was eagerly desired by all, and who had sent in his resignation that he might return to his family and crown their happiness by his presence. Marguerite had often expressed a regret at not being able to replace the pictures which had formerly adorned the gallery and the reception-rooms, before the day when her father would return as master of his house. In her absence Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis plotted with Felicie to prepare a surprise which should make the younger sister a sharer in the restoration of the House of Claes. The two bought a number of fine pictures, which they presented to Felicie to decorate the gallery. Monsieur Conyncks had thought of the same thing. Wishing to testify to Marguerite the satisfaction he had taken in her noble conduct and in the self-devotion with which she had fulfilled her mother's dying mandate, he arranged that fifty of his fine pictures, among them several of those which Balthazar had formerly sold, should be brought to Douai in Marguerite's absence, so that the Claes gallery might once more be complete.

During the years that had elapsed since Balthazar Claes left his home, Marguerite had visited her father several times, accompanied by her sister or by Jean. Each time she had found him more and more changed; but since her last visit old age had come upon Balthazar with alarming symptoms, the gravity of which was much increased by the parsimony with which he lived that he might spend the greater part of his salary in experiments the results of

which forever disappointed him. Though he was only sixty-five years of age, he appeared to be eighty. His eyes were sunken in their orbits, his eyebrows had whitened, only a few hairs remained as a fringe around his skull; he allowed his beard to grow, and cut it off with scissors when its length annoyed him; he was bent like a field-laborer, and the condition of his clothes had reached a degree of wretchedness which his decrepitude now rendered hideous. Thought still animated that noble face, whose features were scarcely discernible under its wrinkles; but the fixity of the eyes, a certain desperation of manner, a restless uneasiness, were all diagnostics of insanity, or rather of many forms of insanity. Sometimes a flash of hope gave him the look of a monomaniac; at other times impatient anger at not seizing a secret which flitted before his eyes like a will o' the wisp brought symptoms of madness into his face; or sudden bursts of maniacal laughter betrayed his irrationality: but during the greater part of the time, he was sunk in a state of complete depression which combined all the phases of insanity in the cold melancholy of an idiot. However fleeting and imperceptible these symptoms may have been to the eye of strangers, they were, unfortunately, only too plain to those who had known Balthazar Claes sublime in goodness, noble in heart, stately in person,—a Claes of whom, alas, scarcely a vestige now remained.

Lemulquinier, grown old and wasted like his master with incessant toil, had not, like him, been subjected to the ravages of thought. The expression of the old valet's face showed a singular mixture of anxiety and admiration for his master which might easily have misled an onlooker. Though he listened to Balthazar's words with respect, and followed his every movement with tender solicitude, he took charge of the servant of science very much as a mother takes care of her child, and even seemed to protect him, because in the vulgar details of life, to which Balthazar gave no thought, he actually did protect him. These old men, wrapped in one idea, confident of the reality of their hope, stirred by the same breath, the one representing the shell, the other the soul of their mutual existence, formed a spectacle at once tender and distressing.

When Marguerite and Monsieur Conyncks arrived, they found Claes living at an inn. His successor had not been kept waiting, and was already in possession of his office.

CHAPTER XV

Through all the preoccupations of science, the desire to see his native town, his house, his family, agitated Balthazar's mind. His daughter's letters had told him of the happy family events; he dreamed of crowning his career by

a series of experiments that must lead to the solution of the great Problem, and he awaited Marguerite's arrival with extreme impatience.

The daughter threw herself into her father's arms and wept for joy. This time she came to seek a recompense for years of pain, and pardon for the exercise of her domestic authority. She seemed to herself criminal, like those great men who violate the liberties of the people for the safety of the nation. But she shuddered as she now contemplated her father and saw the change which had taken place in him since her last visit. Monsieur Conyncks shared the secret alarm of his niece, and insisted on taking Balthazar as soon as possible to Douai, where the influence of his native place might restore him to health and reason amid the happiness of a recovered domestic life.

After the first transports of the heart were over,—which were far warmer on Balthazar's part than Marguerite had expected,—he showed a singular state of feeling towards his daughter. He expressed regret at receiving her in a miserable inn, inquired her tastes and wishes, and asked what she would have to eat, with the eagerness of a lover; his manner was even that of a culprit seeking to propitiate a judge.

Marguerite knew her father so well that she guessed the motive of this solicitude; she felt sure he had contracted debts in the town which he wished to pay before his departure. She observed him carefully for a time, and saw the human heart in all its nakedness. Balthazar had dwindled from his true self. The consciousness of his abasement, and the isolation of his life in the pursuit of science made him timid and childish in all matters not connected with his favorite occupations. His daughter awed him; the remembrance of her past devotion, of the energy she had displayed, of the powers he had allowed her to take away from him, of the wealth now at her command, and the indefinable feelings that had preyed upon him ever since the day when he had abdicated a paternity he had long neglected,—all these things affected his mind towards her, and increased her importance in his eyes. Conyncks was nothing to him beside Marguerite; he saw only his daughter, he thought only of her, and seemed to fear her, as certain weak husbands fear a superior woman who rules them. When he raised his eyes and looked at her, Marguerite noticed with distress an expression of fear, like that of a child detected in a fault. The noble girl was unable to reconcile the majestic and terrible expression of that bald head, denuded by science and by toil, with the puerile smile, the eager servility exhibited on the lips and countenance of the old man. She suffered from the contrast of that greatness to that littleness, and resolved to use her utmost influence to restore her father's sense of dignity before the solemn day on which he was to reappear in the bosom of his family. Her first step when they were alone was to ask him,—

"Do you owe anything here?"

Balthazar colored, and replied with an embarrassed air:—

“I don’t know, but Lemulquinier can tell you. That worthy fellow knows more about my affairs than I do myself.”

Marguerite rang for the valet: when he came she studied, almost involuntarily, the faces of the two old men.

“What does monsieur want?” asked Lemulquinier.

Marguerite, who was all pride and dignity, felt an oppression at her heart as she perceived from the tone and manner of the servant that some mortifying familiarity had grown up between her father and the companion of his labors.

“My father cannot make out the account of what he owes in this place without you,” she said.

“Monsieur,” began Lemulquinier, “owes—”

At these words Balthazar made a sign to his valet which Marguerite intercepted; it humiliated her.

“Tell me all that my father owes,” she said.

“Monsieur owes, here, about three thousand francs to an apothecary who is a wholesale dealer in drugs; he has supplied us with pearl-ash and lead, and zinc and the reagents—”

“Is that all?” asked Marguerite.

Again Balthazar made a sign to Lemulquinier, who replied, as if under a spell,—

“Yes, mademoiselle.”

“Very good,” she said, “I will give them to you.”

Balthazar kissed her joyously and said,—

“You are an angel, my child.”

He breathed at his ease and glanced at her with eyes that were less sad; and yet, in spite of this apparent joy, Marguerite easily detected the signs of deep anxiety upon his face, and felt certain that the three thousand francs represented only the pressing debts of his laboratory.

“Be frank with me, father,” she said, letting him seat her on his knee; “you owe more than that. Tell me all, and come back to your home without an element of fear in the midst of the general joy.”

“My dear Marguerite,” he said, taking her hands and kissing them with a grace that seemed a memory of her youth, “you would scold me—”

“No,” she said.

“Truly?” he asked, giving way to childish expressions of delight. “Can I tell you all? will you pay—”

“Yes,” she said, repressing the tears which came into her eyes.

“Well, I owe—oh! I dare not—”

“Tell me, father.”

“It is a great deal.”

She clasped her hands, with a gesture of despair.

“I owe thirty thousand francs to Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville.”

“Thirty thousand francs,” she said, “is just the sum I have laid by. I am glad to give it to you,” she added, respectfully kissing his brow.

He rose, took his daughter in his arms, and whirled about the room, dancing her as though she were an infant; then he placed her in the chair where she had been sitting, and exclaimed:—

“My darling child! my treasure of love! I was half-dead: the Chiffrevilles have written me three threatening letters; they were about to sue me,—me, who would have made their fortune!”

“Father,” said Marguerite in accents of despair, “are you still searching?”

“Yes, still searching,” he said, with the smile of a madman, “and I shall FIND. If you could only understand the point we have reached—”

“We? who are we?”

“I mean Mulquinier: he has understood me, he loves me. Poor fellow! he is devoted to me.”

Conyncks entered at the moment and interrupted the conversation. Marguerite made a sign to her father to say no more, fearing lest he should lower himself in her uncle’s eyes. She was frightened at the ravages thought had made in that noble mind, absorbed in searching for the solution of a problem that was perhaps insoluble. Balthazar, who saw and knew nothing outside of his furnaces, seemed not to realize the liberation of his fortune.

On the morrow they started for Flanders. During the journey Marguerite gained some confused light upon the position in which Lemulquinier and her father stood to each other. The valet had acquired an ascendancy over his master such as common men without education are able to obtain over great minds to whom they feel themselves necessary; such men, taking advantage of concession after concession, aim at complete dominion with the persistency

that comes of a fixed idea. In this case the master had contracted for the man the sort of affection that grows out of habit, like that of a workman for his creative tool, or an Arab for the horse that gives him freedom. Marguerite studied the signs of this tyranny, resolving to withdraw her father from its humiliating yoke if it were real.

They stopped several days in Paris on the way home, to enable Marguerite to pay off her father's debts and request the manufacturers of chemical products to send nothing to Douai without first informing her of any orders given by Claes. She persuaded her father to change his style of dress and buy clothes that were suitable to a man of his station. This corporal restoration gave Balthazar a certain physical dignity which augured well for a change in his ideas; and Marguerite, joyous in the thought of all the surprises that awaited her father when he entered his own house, started for Douai.

Nine miles from the town Balthazar was met by Felicie on horseback, escorted by her two brothers, Emmanuel, Pierquin, and some of the nearest friends of the three families. The journey had necessarily diverted the chemist's mind from its habitual thoughts; the aspect of his own Flanders acted on his heart; when, therefore, he saw the joyous company of his family and friends gathering about him his emotion was so keen that the tears came to his eyes, his voice trembled, his eyelids reddened, and he held his children in so passionate an embrace, seeming unable to release them, that the spectators of the scene were moved to tears.

When at last he saw the House of Claes he turned pale, and sprang from the carriage with the agility of a young man; he breathed the air of the court-yard with delight, and looked about him at the smallest details with a pleasure that could express itself only in gestures: he drew himself erect, and his whole countenance renewed its youth. The tears came into his eyes when he entered the parlor and noticed the care with which his daughter had replaced the old silver candelabra that he formerly had sold,—a visible sign that all the other disasters had been repaired. Breakfast was served in the dining-room, whose sideboards and shelves were covered with curios and silver-ware not less valuable than the treasures that formerly stood there. Though the family meal lasted a long time, it was still too short for the narratives which Balthazar exacted from each of his children. The reaction of his moral being caused by this return to his home wedded him once more to family happiness, and he was again a father. His manners recovered their former dignity. At first the delight of recovering possession kept him from dwelling on the means by which the recovery had been brought about. His joy therefore was full and unalloyed.

Breakfast over, the four children, the father and Pierquin went into the parlor, where Balthazar saw with some uneasiness a number of legal papers

which the notary's clerk had laid upon a table, by which he was standing as if to assist his chief. The children all sat down, and Balthazar, astonished, remained standing before the fireplace.

"This," said Pierquin, "is the guardianship account which Monsieur Claes renders to his children. It is not very amusing," he added, laughing after the manner of notaries who generally assume a lively tone in speaking of serious matters, "but I must really oblige you to listen to it."

Though the phrase was natural enough under the circumstances, Monsieur Claes, whose conscience recalled his past life, felt it to be a reproach, and his brow clouded.

The clerk began the reading. Balthazar's amazement increased as little by little the statement unfolded the facts. In the first place, the fortune of his wife at the time of her decease was declared to have been sixteen hundred thousand francs or thereabouts; and the summing up of the account showed clearly that the portion of each child was intact and as well-invested as if the best and wisest father had controlled it. In consequence of this the House of Claes was free from all lien, Balthazar was master of it; moreover, his rural property was likewise released from encumbrance. When all the papers connected with these matters were signed, Pierquin presented the receipts for the repayment of the moneys formerly borrowed, and releases of the various liens on the estates.

Balthazar, conscious that he had recovered the honor of his manhood, the life of a father, the dignity of a citizen, fell into a chair, and looked about for Marguerite; but she, with the distinctive delicacy of her sex, had left the room during the reading of the papers, as if to see that all the arrangements for the fete were properly prepared. Each member of the family understood the old man's wish when the failing humid eyes sought for the daughter,—who was seen by all present, with the eyes of the soul, as an angel of strength and light within the house. Gabriel went to find her. Hearing her step, Balthazar ran to clasp her in his arms.

"Father," she said, at the foot of the stairs, where the old man caught her and strained her to his breast, "I implore you not to lessen your sacred authority. Thank me before the family for carrying out your wishes, and be the sole author of the good that has been done here."

Balthazar lifted his eyes to heaven, then looked at his daughter, folded his arms, and said, after a pause, during which his face recovered an expression his children had not seen upon it for ten long years,—

"Pepita, why are you not here to praise our child!"

He strained Marguerite to him, unable to utter another word, and went back to the parlor.

“My children,” he said, with the nobility of demeanor that in former days had made him so imposing, “we all owe gratitude and thanks to my daughter Marguerite for the wisdom and courage with which she has fulfilled my intentions and carried out my plans, when I, too absorbed by my labors, gave the reins of our domestic government into her hands.”

“Ah, now!” cried Pierquin, looking at the clock, “we must read the marriage contracts. But they are not my affair, for the law forbids me to draw up such deeds between my relations and myself. Monsieur Raparlier is coming.”

The friends of the family, invited to the dinner given to celebrate Claes’s return and the signing of the marriage contracts, now began to arrive; and their servants brought in the wedding-presents. The company quickly assembled, and the scene was imposing as much from the quality of the persons present as from the elegance of the toilettes. The three families, thus united through the happiness of their children, seemed to vie with each other in contributing to the splendor of the occasion. The parlor was soon filled with the charming gifts that are made to bridal couples. Gold shimmered and glistened; silks and satins, cashmere shawls, necklaces, jewels, afforded as much delight to those who gave as to those who received; enjoyment that was almost childlike shone on every face, and the mere value of the magnificent presents was lost sight of by the spectators,—who often busy themselves in estimating it out of curiosity.

The ceremonial forms used for generations in the Claes family for solemnities of this nature now began. The parents alone were seated, all present stood before them at a little distance. To the left of the parlor on the garden side were Gabriel and Mademoiselle Conyncks, next to them stood Monsieur de Solis and Marguerite, and farther on, Felicie and Pierquin. Balthazar and Monsieur Conyncks, the only persons who were seated, occupied two armchairs beside the notary who, for this occasion, had taken Pierquin’s duty. Jean stood behind his father. A score of ladies elegantly dressed, and a few men chosen from among the nearest relatives of the Pierquins, the Conyncks, and the Claes, the mayor of Douai, who was to marry the couples, the twelve witnesses chosen from among the nearest friends of the three families, all, even the curate of Saint-Pierre, remained standing and formed an imposing circle at the end of the parlor next the court-yard. This homage paid by the whole assembly to Paternity, which at such a moment shines with almost regal majesty, gave to the scene a certain antique character. It was the only moment for sixteen long years when Balthazar forgot the Alkahest.

Monsieur Raparlier went up to Marguerite and her sister and asked if all the persons invited to the ceremony and to the dinner had arrived; on receiving

an affirmative reply, he returned to his station and took up the marriage contract between Marguerite and Monsieur de Solis, which was the first to be read, when suddenly the door of the parlor opened and Lemulquinier entered, his face flaming.

“Monsieur! monsieur!” he cried.

Balthazar flung a look of despair at Marguerite, then, making her a sign, he drew her into the garden. The whole assembly were conscious of a shock.

“I dared not tell you, my child,” said the father, “but since you have done so much, you will save me, I know, from this last trouble. Lemulquinier lent me all his savings—the fruit of twenty years’ economy—for my last experiment, which failed. He has come no doubt, finding that I am once more rich, to insist on having them back. Ah! my angel, give them to him; you owe him your father; he alone consoled me in my troubles, he alone has had faith in me,—without him I should have died.”

“Monsieur! monsieur!” cried Lemulquinier.

“What is it?” said Balthazar, turning round.

“A diamond!”

Claes sprang into the parlor and saw the stone in the hands of the old valet, who whispered in his ear,—

“I have been to the laboratory.”

The chemist, forgetting everything about him, cast a terrible look on the old Fleming which meant, “You went before me to the laboratory!”

“Yes,” continued Lemulquinier, “I found the diamond in the china capsule which communicated with the battery which we left to work, monsieur—and see!” he added, showing a white diamond of octahedral form, whose brilliancy drew the astonished gaze of all present.

“My children, my friends,” said Balthazar, “forgive my old servant, forgive me! This event will drive me mad. The chance work of seven years has produced—without me—a discovery I have sought for sixteen years. How? My God, I know not—yes, I left sulphide of carbon under the influence of a Voltaic pile, whose action ought to have been watched from day to day. During my absence the power of God has worked in my laboratory, but I was not there to note its progressive effects! Is it not awful? Oh, cursed exile! cursed chance! Alas! had I watched that slow, that sudden—what can I call it?—crystallization, transformation, in short that miracle, then, then my children would have been richer still. Though this result is not the solution of the Problem which I seek, the first rays of my glory would have shone from that diamond upon my native country, and this hour, which our satisfied affections

have made so happy, would have glowed with the sunlight of Science."

Every one kept silence in the presence of such a man. The disconnected words wrung from him by his anguish were too sincere not to be sublime.

Suddenly, Balthazar drove back his despair into the depths of his own being, and cast upon the assembly a majestic look which affected the souls of all; he took the diamond and offered it to Marguerite, saying,—

"It is thine, my angel."

Then he dismissed Lemulquinier with a gesture, and motioned to the notary, saying, "Go on."

The two words sent a shudder of emotion through the company such as Talma in certain roles produced among his auditors. Balthazar, as he reseated himself, said in a low voice,—

"To-day I must be a father only."

Marguerite hearing the words went up to him and caught his hand and kissed it respectfully.

"No man was ever greater," said Emmanuel, when his bride returned to him; "no man was ever so mighty; another would have gone mad."

After the three contracts were read and signed, the company hastened to question Balthazar as to the manner in which the diamond had been formed; but he could tell them nothing about so strange an accident. He looked through the window at his garret and pointed to it with an angry gesture.

"Yes, the awful power resulting from a movement of fiery matter which no doubt produces metals, diamonds," he said, "was manifested there for one moment, by one chance."

"That chance was of course some natural effect," whispered a guest belonging to the class of people who are ready with an explanation of everything. "At any rate, it is something saved out of all he has wasted."

"Let us forget it," said Balthazar, addressing his friends; "I beg you to say no more about it to-day."

Marguerite took her father's arm to lead the way to the reception-rooms of the front house, where a sumptuous fete had been prepared. As he entered the gallery, followed by his guests, he beheld it filled with pictures and garnished with choice flowers.

"Pictures!" he exclaimed, "pictures!—and some of the old ones!"

He stopped short; his brow clouded; for a moment grief overcame him; he felt the weight of his wrong-doing as the vista of his humiliation came before

his eyes.

“It is all your own, father,” said Marguerite, guessing the feelings that oppressed his soul.

“Angel, whom the spirits in heaven watch and praise,” he cried, “how many times have you given life to your father?”

“Then keep no cloud upon your brow, nor the least sad thought in your heart,” she said, “and you will reward me beyond my hopes. I have been thinking of Lemulquinier, my darling father; the few words you said a little while ago have made me value him; perhaps I have been unjust to him; he ought to remain your humble friend. Emmanuel has laid by nearly sixty thousand francs which he has economized, and we will give them to Lemulquinier. After serving you so well the man ought to be made comfortable for his remaining years. Do not be uneasy about us. Monsieur de Solis and I intend to lead a quiet, peaceful life,—a life without luxury; we can well afford to lend you that money until you are able to return it.”

“Ah, my daughter! never forsake me; continue to be thy father’s providence.”

When they entered the reception-rooms Balthazar found them restored and furnished as elegantly as in former days. The guests presently descended to the dining-room on the ground-floor by the grand staircase, on every step of which were rare plants and flowering shrubs. A silver service of exquisite workmanship, the gift of Gabriel to his father, attracted all eyes to a luxury which was surprising to the inhabitants of a town where such luxury is traditional. The servants of Monsieur Conyncks and of Pierquin, as well as those of the Claes household, were assembled to serve the repast. Seeing himself once more at the head of that table, surrounded by friends and relatives and happy faces beaming with heartfelt joy, Balthazar, behind whose chair stood Lemulquinier, was overcome by emotions so deep and so imposing that all present kept silence, as men are silent before great sorrows or great joys.

“Dear children,” he cried, “you have killed the fatted calf to welcome home the prodigal father.”

These words, in which the father judged himself (and perhaps prevented others from judging him more severely), were spoken so nobly that all present shed tears; they were the last expression of sadness, however, and the general happiness soon took on the merry, animated character of a family fete.

Immediately after dinner the principal people of the city began to arrive for the ball, which proved worthy of the almost classic splendor of the restored House of Claes. The three marriages followed this happy day, and gave

occasion to many fetes, and balls, and dinners, which involved Balthazar for some months in the vortex of social life. His eldest son and his wife removed to an estate near Cambrai belonging to Monsieur Conyncks, who was unwilling to separate from his daughter. Madame Pierquin also left her father's house to do the honors of a fine mansion which Pierquin had built, and where he desired to live in all the dignity of rank; for his practise was sold, and his uncle des Racquets had died and left him a large property scraped together by slow economy. Jean went to Paris to finish his education, and Monsieur and Madame de Solis alone remained with their father in the House de Claes. Balthazar made over to them the family home in the rear house, and took up his own abode on the second floor of the front building.

CHAPTER XVI

Marguerite continued to keep watch over her father's material comfort, aided in the sweet task by Emmanuel. The noble girl received from the hands of love that most envied of all garlands, the wreath that happiness entwines and constancy keeps ever fresh. No couple ever afforded a better illustration of the complete, acknowledged, spotless felicity which all women cherish in their dreams. The union of two beings so courageous in the trials of life, who had loved each other through years with so sacred an affection, drew forth the respectful admiration of the whole community. Monsieur de Solis, who had long held an appointment as inspector-general of the University, resigned those functions to enjoy his happiness more freely, and remained at Douai where every one did such homage to his character and attainments that his name was proposed as candidate for the Electoral college whenever he should reach the required age. Marguerite, who had shown herself so strong in adversity, became in prosperity a sweet and tender woman.

Throughout the following year Claes was grave and preoccupied; and yet, though he made a few inexpensive experiments for which his ordinary income sufficed, he seemed to neglect his laboratory. Marguerite restored all the old customs of the House of Claes, and gave a family fete every month in honor of her father, at which the Pierquins and the Conyncks were present; and she also received the upper ranks of society one day in the week at a "cafe" which became celebrated. Though frequently absent-minded, Claes took part in all these assemblages and became, to please his daughter, so willingly a man of the world that the family were able to believe he had renounced his search for the solution of the great problem.

Three years went by. In 1828 family affairs called Emmanuel de Solis to

Spain. Although there were three numerous branches between himself and the inheritance of the house of Solis, yellow fever, old age, barrenness, and other caprices of fortune, combined to make him the last lineal descendant of the family and heir to the titles and estates of his ancient house. Moreover, by one of those curious chances which seem impossible except in a book, the house of Solis had acquired the territory and titles of the Comtes de Nourho. Marguerite did not wish to separate from her husband, who was to stay in Spain long enough to settle his affairs, and she was, moreover, curious to see the castle of Casa-Real where her mother had passed her childhood, and the city of Granada, the cradle of the de Solis family. She left Douai, consigning the care of the house to Martha, Josette, and Lemulquinier. Balthazar, to whom Marguerite had proposed a journey into Spain, declined to accompany her on the ground of his advanced age; but certain experiments which he had long meditated, and to which he now trusted for the realization of his hopes were the real reason of his refusal.

The Comte and Comtesse de Solis y Nourho were detained in Spain longer than they intended. Marguerite gave birth to a son. It was not until the middle of 1830 that they reached Cadiz, intending to embark for Italy on their way back to France. There, however, they received a letter from Felicie conveying disastrous news. Within a few months, their father had completely ruined himself. Gabriel and Pierquin were obliged to pay Lemulquinier a monthly stipend for the bare necessaries of the household. The old valet had again sacrificed his little property to his master. Balthazar was no longer willing to see any one, and would not even admit his children to the house. Martha and Josette were dead. The coachman, the cook, and the other servants had long been dismissed; the horses and carriages were sold. Though Lemulquinier maintained the utmost secrecy as to his master’s proceedings, it was believed that the thousand francs supplied by Gabriel and Pierquin were spent chiefly on experiments. The small amount of provisions which the old valet purchased in the town seemed to show that the two old men contented themselves with the barest necessaries. To prevent the sale of the House of Claes, Gabriel and Pierquin were paying the interest of the sums which their father had again borrowed on it. None of his children had the slightest influence upon the old man, who at seventy years of age displayed extraordinary energy in bending everything to his will, even in matters that were trivial. Gabriel, Conyncks, and Pierquin had decided not to pay off his debts.

This letter changed all Marguerite’s travelling plans, and she immediately took the shortest road to Douai. Her new fortune and her past savings enabled her to pay off Balthazar’s debts; but she wished to do more, she wished to obey her mother’s last injunction and save him from sinking dishonored to the grave. She alone could exercise enough ascendancy over the old man to keep him from completing the work of ruin, at an age when no fruitful toil could be

expected from his enfeebled faculties. But she was also anxious to control him without wounding his susceptibilities,—not wishing to imitate the children of Sophocles, in case her father neared the scientific result for which he had sacrificed so much.

Monsieur and Madame de Solis reached Flanders in the last days of September, 1831, and arrived at Douai during the morning. Marguerite ordered the coachman to drive to the house in the rue de Paris, which they found closed. The bell was loudly rung, but no one answered. A shopkeeper left his door-step, to which he had been attracted by the noise of the carriages; others were at their windows to enjoy a sight of the return of the de Solis family to whom all were attached, enticed also by a vague curiosity as to what would happen in that house on Marguerite's return to it. The shopkeeper told Monsieur de Solis's valet that old Claes had gone out an hour before, and that Monsieur Lemulquinier was no doubt taking him to walk on the ramparts.

Marguerite sent for a locksmith to force the door,—glad to escape a scene in case her father, as Felicie had written, should refuse to admit her into the house. Meantime Emmanuel went to meet the old man and prepare him for the arrival of his daughter, despatching a servant to notify Monsieur and Madame Pierquin.

When the door was opened, Marguerite went directly to the parlor. Horror overcame her and she trembled when she saw the walls as bare as if a fire had swept over them. The glorious carved panellings of Van Huysum and the portrait of the great Claes had been sold. The dining-room was empty: there was nothing in it but two straw chairs and a common deal table, on which Marguerite, terrified, saw two plates, two bowls, two forks and spoons, and the remains of a salt herring which Claes and his servant had evidently just eaten. In a moment she had flown through her father's portion of the house, every room of which exhibited the same desolation as the parlor and dining-room. The idea of the Alkahest had swept like a conflagration through the building. Her father's bedroom had a bed, one chair, and one table, on which stood a miserable pewter candlestick with a tallow candle burned almost to the socket. The house was so completely stripped that not so much as a curtain remained at the windows. Every object of the smallest value,—everything, even the kitchen utensils, had been sold.

Moved by that feeling of curiosity which never entirely leaves us even in moments of misfortune, Marguerite entered Lemulquinier's chamber and found it as bare as that of his master. In a half-opened table-drawer she found a pawnbroker's ticket for the old servant's watch which he had pledged some days before. She ran to the laboratory and found it filled with scientific instruments, the same as ever. Then she returned to her own appartement and ordered the door to be broken open—her father had respected it!

Marguerite burst into tears and forgave her father all. In the midst of his devastating fury he had stopped short, restrained by paternal feeling and the gratitude he owed to his daughter! This proof of tenderness, coming to her at a moment when despair had reached its climax, brought about in Marguerite's soul one of those moral reactions against which the coldest hearts are powerless. She returned to the parlor to wait her father's arrival, in a state of anxiety that was cruelly aggravated by doubt and uncertainty. In what condition was she about to see him? Ruined, decrepit, suffering, enfeebled by the fasts his pride compelled him to undergo? Would he have his reason? Tears flowed unconsciously from her eyes as she looked about the desecrated sanctuary. The images of her whole life, her past efforts, her useless precautions, her childhood, her mother happy and unhappy,—all, even her little Joseph smiling on that scene of desolation, all were parts of a poem of unutterable melancholy.

Marguerite foresaw an approaching misfortune, yet she little expected the catastrophe that was to close her father's life,—that life at once so grand and yet so miserable.

The condition of Monsieur Claes was no secret in the community. To the lasting shame of men, there were not in all Douai two hearts generous enough to do honor to the perseverance of this man of genius. In the eyes of the world Balthazar was a man to be condemned, a bad father who had squandered six fortunes, millions, who was actually seeking the philosopher's stone in the nineteenth century, this enlightened century, this sceptical century, this century!—etc. They calumniated his purposes and branded him with the name of "alchemist," casting up to him in mockery that he was trying to make gold. Ah! what eulogies are uttered on this great century of ours, in which, as in all others, genius is smothered under an indifference as brutal a that of the gate in which Dante died, and Tasso and Cervantes and "tutti quanti." The people are as backward as kings in understanding the creations of genius.

These opinions on the subject of Balthazar Claes filtered, little by little, from the upper society of Douai to the bourgeoisie, and from the bourgeoisie to the lower classes. The old chemist excited pity among persons of his own rank, satirical curiosity among the others,—two sentiments big with contempt and with the "vae victis" with which the masses assail a man of genius when they see him in misfortune. Persons often stopped before the House of Claes to show each other the rose window of the garret where so much gold and so much coal had been consumed in smoke. When Balthazar passed along the streets they pointed to him with their fingers; often, on catching sight of him, a mocking jest or a word of pity would escape the lips of a working-man or some mere child. But Lemulquinier was careful to tell his master it was homage; he could deceive him with impunity, for though the old man's eyes

retained the sublime clearness which results from the habit of living among great thoughts, his sense of hearing was enfeebled.

To most of the peasantry, and to all vulgar and superstitious minds, Balthazar Claes was a sorcerer. The noble old mansion, once named by common consent “the House of Claes,” was now called in the suburbs and the country districts “the Devil’s House.” Every outward sign, even the face of Lemulquinier, confirmed the ridiculous beliefs that were current about Balthazar. When the old servant went to market to purchase the few provisions necessary for their subsistence, picking out the cheapest he could find, insults were flung in as make-weights,—just as butchers slip bones into their customers’ meat,—and he was fortunate, poor creature, if some superstitious market-woman did not refuse to sell him his meagre pittance lest she be damned by contact with an imp of hell.

Thus the feelings of the whole town of Douai were hostile to the grand old man and to his attendant. The neglected state of their clothes added to this repulsion; they went about clothed like paupers who have seen better days, and who strive to keep a decent appearance and are ashamed to beg. It was probable that sooner or later Balthazar would be insulted in the streets. Pierquin, feeling how degrading to the family any public insult would be, had for some time past sent two or three of his own servants to follow the old man whenever he went out, and keep him in sight at a little distance, for the purpose of protecting him if necessary,—the revolution of July not having contributed to make the citizens respectful.

By one of those fatalities which can never be explained, Claes and Lemulquinier had gone out early in the morning, thus evading the secret guardianship of Monsieur and Madame Pierquin. On their way back from the ramparts they sat down to sun themselves on a bench in the place Saint-Jacques, an open space crossed by children on their way to school. Catching sight from a distance of the defenceless old men, whose faces brightened as they sat basking in the sun, a crowd of boys began to talk of them. Generally, children’s chatter ends in laughter; on this occasion the laughter led to jokes of which they did not know the cruelty. Seven or eight of the first-comers stood at a little distance, and examined the strange old faces with smothered laughter and remarks which attracted Lemulquinier’s attention.

“Hi! do you see that one with a head as smooth as my knee?”

“Yes.”

“Well, he was born a Wise Man.”

“My papa says he makes gold,” said another.

The youngest of the troop, who had his basket full of provisions and was

devouring a slice of bread and butter, advanced to the bench and said boldly to Lemulquinier,—

“Monsieur, is it true you make pearls and diamonds?”

“Yes, my little man,” replied the valet, smiling and tapping him on the cheek; “we will give you some of you study well.”

“Ah! monsieur, give me some, too,” was the general exclamation.

The boys all rushed together like a flock of birds, and surrounded the old men. Balthazar, absorbed in meditation from which he was drawn by these sudden cries, made a gesture of amazement which caused a general shout of laughter.

“Come, come, boys; be respectful to a great man,” said Lemulquinier.

“Hi, the old harlequin!” cried the lads; “the old sorcerer! you are sorcerers! sorcerers! sorcerers!”

Lemulquinier sprang to his feet and threatened the crowd with his cane; they all ran to a little distance, picking up stones and mud. A workman who was eating his breakfast near by, seeing Lemulquinier brandish his cane to drive the boys away, thought he had struck them, and took their part, crying out,—

“Down with the sorcerers!”

The boys, feeling themselves encouraged, flung their missiles at the old men, just as the Comte de Solis, accompanied by Pierquin’s servants, appeared at the farther end of the square. The latter were too late, however, to save the old man and his valet from being pelted with mud. The shock was given. Balthazar, whose faculties had been preserved by a chastity of spirit natural to students absorbed in a quest of discovery that annihilates all passions, now suddenly divined, by the phenomenon of introsusception, the true meaning of the scene: his decrepit body could not sustain the frightful reaction he underwent in his feelings, and he fell, struck with paralysis, into the arms of Lemulquinier, who brought him to his home on a shutter, attended by his sons-in-law and their servants. No power could prevent the population of Douai from following the body of the old man to the door of his house, where Felicie and her children, Jean, Marguerite, and Gabriel, whom his sister had sent for, were waiting to receive him.

The arrival of the old man gave rise to a frightful scene; he struggled less against the assaults of death than against the horror of seeing that his children had entered the house and penetrated the secret of his impoverished life. A bed was at once made up in the parlor and every care bestowed upon the stricken man, whose condition, towards evening, allowed hopes that his life might be

preserved. The paralysis, though skilfully treated, kept him for some time in a state of semi-childhood; and when by degrees it relaxed, the tongue was found to be especially affected, perhaps because the old man's anger had concentrated all his forces upon it at the moment when he was about to apostrophize the children.

This incident roused a general indignation throughout the town. By a law, up to that time unknown, which guides the affects of the masses, this event brought back all hearts to Monsieur Claes. He became once more a great man; he excited the admiration and received the good-will that a few hours earlier were denied to him. Men praised his patience, his strength of will, his courage, his genius. The authorities wished to arrest all those who had a share in dealing him this blow. Too late,—the evil was done! The Claes family were the first to beg that the matter might be allowed to drop.

Marguerite ordered furniture to be brought into the parlor, and the denuded walls to be hung with silk; and when, a few days after his seizure, the old father recovered his faculties and found himself once more in a luxurious room surrounded by all that makes life easy, he tried to express his belief that his daughter Marguerite had returned. At that moment she entered the room. When Balthazar caught sight of her he colored, and his eyes grew moist, though the tears did not fall. He was able to press his daughter's hand with his cold fingers, putting into that pressure all the thoughts, all the feelings he no longer had the power to utter. There was something holy and solemn in that farewell of the brain which still lived, of the heart which gratitude revived. Worn out by fruitless efforts, exhausted in the long struggle with the gigantic problem, desperate perhaps at the oblivion which awaited his memory, this giant among men was about to die. His children surrounded him with respectful affection; his dying eyes were cheered with images of plenty and the touching picture of his prosperous and noble family. His every look—by which alone he could manifest his feelings—was unchangeably affectionate; his eyes acquired such variety of expression that they had, as it were, a language of light, easy to comprehend.

Marguerite paid her father's debts, and restored a modern splendor to the House of Claes which removed all outward signs of decay. She never left the old man's bedside, endeavoring to divine his every thought and accomplish his slightest wish.

Some months went by with those alternations of better and worse which attend the struggle of life and death in old people; every morning his children came to him and spent the day in the parlor, dining by his bedside and only leaving him when he went to sleep for the night. The occupation which gave him most pleasure, among the many with which his family sought to enliven him, was the reading of newspapers, to which the political events then

occurring gave great interest. Monsieur Claes listened attentively as Monsieur de Solis read them aloud beside his bed.

Towards the close of the year 1832, Balthazar passed an extremely critical night, during which Monsieur Pierquin, the doctor, was summoned by the nurse, who was greatly alarmed at the sudden change which took place in the patient. For the rest of the night the doctor remained to watch him, fearing he might at any moment expire in the throes of inward convulsion, whose effects were like those of a last agony.

The old man made incredible efforts to shake off the bonds of his paralysis; he tried to speak and moved his tongue, unable to make a sound; his flaming eyes emitted thoughts; his drawn features expressed an untold agony; his fingers writhed in desperation; the sweat stood out in drops upon his brow. In the morning when his children came to his bedside and kissed him with an affection which the sense of coming death made day by day more ardent and more eager, he showed none of his usual satisfaction at these signs of their tenderness. Emmanuel, instigated by the doctor, hastened to open the newspaper to try if the usual reading might not relieve the inward crisis in which Balthazar was evidently struggling. As he unfolded the sheet he saw the words, “DISCOVERY OF THE ABSOLUTE,”—which startled him, and he read a paragraph to Marguerite concerning a sale made by a celebrated Polish mathematician of the secret of the Absolute. Though Emmanuel read in a low voice, and Marguerite signed to him to omit the passage, Balthazar heard it.

Suddenly the dying man raised himself by his wrists and cast on his frightened children a look which struck like lightning; the hairs that fringed the bald head stirred, the wrinkles quivered, the features were illumined with spiritual fires, a breath passed across that face and rendered it sublime; he raised a hand, clenched in fury, and uttered with a piercing cry the famous word of Archimedes, “EUREKA!”—I have found.

He fell back upon his bed with the dull sound of an inert body, and died, uttering an awful moan,—his convulsed eyes expressing to the last, when the doctor closed them, the regret of not bequeathing to Science the secret of an Enigma whose veil was rent away,—too late!—by the fleshless fingers of Death.

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MELMOTH RECONCILED

There is a special variety of human nature obtained in the Social Kingdom

by a process analogous to that of the gardener's craft in the Vegetable Kingdom, to wit, by the forcing-house—a species of hybrid which can be raised neither from seed nor from slips. This product is known as the Cashier, an anthropomorphous growth, watered by religious doctrine, trained up in fear of the guillotine, pruned by vice, to flourish on a third floor with an estimable wife by his side and an uninteresting family. The number of cashiers in Paris must always be a problem for the physiologist. Has any one as yet been able to state correctly the terms of the proportion sum wherein the cashier figures as the unknown x? Where will you find the man who shall live with wealth, like a cat with a caged mouse? This man, for further qualification, shall be capable of sitting boxed in behind an iron grating for seven or eight hours a day during seven-eighths of the year, perched upon a cane-seated chair in a space as narrow as a lieutenant's cabin on board a man-of-war. Such a man must be able to defy anchylosis of the knee and thigh joints; he must have a soul above meanness, in order to live meanly; must lose all relish for money by dint of handling it. Demand this peculiar specimen of any creed, educational system, school, or institution you please, and select Paris, that city of fiery ordeals and branch establishment of hell, as the soil in which to plant the said cashier. So be it. Creeds, schools, institutions and moral systems, all human rules and regulations, great and small, will, one after another, present much the same face that an intimate friend turns upon you when you ask him to lend you a thousand francs. With a dolorous dropping of the jaw, they indicate the guillotine, much as your friend aforesaid will furnish you with the address of the money-lender, pointing you to one of the hundred gates by which a man comes to the last refuge of the destitute.

Yet nature has her freaks in the making of a man's mind; she indulges herself and makes a few honest folk now and again, and now and then a cashier.

Wherefore, that race of corsairs whom we dignify with the title of bankers, the gentry who take out a license for which they pay a thousand crowns, as the privateer takes out his letters of marque, hold these rare products of the incubations of virtue in such esteem that they confine them in cages in their counting-houses, much as governments procure and maintain specimens of strange beasts at their own charges.

If the cashier is possessed of an imagination or of a fervid temperament; if, as will sometimes happen to the most complete cashier, he loves his wife, and that wife grows tired of her lot, has ambitions, or merely some vanity in her composition, the cashier is undone. Search the chronicles of the counting-house. You will not find a single instance of a cashier attaining a position, as it is called. They are sent to the hulks; they go to foreign parts; they vegetate on a second floor in the Rue Saint-Louis among the market gardens of the Marais.

Some day, when the cashiers of Paris come to a sense of their real value, a cashier will be hardly obtainable for money. Still, certain it is that there are people who are fit for nothing but to be cashiers, just as the bent of a certain order of mind inevitably makes for rascality. But, oh marvel of our civilization! Society rewards virtue with an income of a hundred louis in old age, a dwelling on a second floor, bread sufficient, occasional new bandana handkerchiefs, an elderly wife and her offspring.

So much for virtue. But for the opposite course, a little boldness, a faculty for keeping on the windward side of the law, as Turenne outflanked Montecuculi, and Society will sanction the theft of millions, shower ribbons upon the thief, cram him with honors, and smother him with consideration.

Government, moreover, works harmoniously with this profoundly illogical reasoner—Society. Government levies a conscription on the young intelligence of the kingdom at the age of seventeen or eighteen, a conscription of precocious brain-work before it is sent up to be submitted to a process of selection. Nurserymen sort and select seeds in much the same way. To this process the Government brings professional appraisers of talent, men who can assay brains as experts assay gold at the Mint. Five hundred such heads, set afire with hope, are sent up annually by the most progressive portion of the population; and of these the Government takes one-third, puts them in sacks called the Ecoles, and shakes them up together for three years. Though every one of these young plants represents vast productive power, they are made, as one may say, into cashiers. They receive appointments; the rank and file of engineers is made up of them; they are employed as captains of artillery; there is no (subaltern) grade to which they may not aspire. Finally, when these men, the pick of the youth of the nation, fattened on mathematics and stuffed with knowledge, have attained the age of fifty years, they have their reward, and receive as the price of their services the third-floor lodging, the wife and family, and all the comforts that sweeten life for mediocrity. If from among this race of dupes there should escape some five or six men of genius who climb the highest heights, is it not miraculous?

This is an exact statement of the relations between Talent and Probity on the one hand and Government and Society on the other, in an age that considers itself to be progressive. Without this prefatory explanation a recent occurrence in Paris would seem improbable; but preceded by this summing up of the situation, it will perhaps receive some thoughtful attention from minds capable of recognizing the real plague-spots of our civilization, a civilization which since 1815 as been moved by the spirit of gain rather than by principles of honor.

About five o’clock, on a dull autumn afternoon, the cashier of one of the largest banks in Paris was still at his desk, working by the light of a lamp that

had been lit for some time. In accordance with the use and wont of commerce, the counting-house was in the darkest corner of the low-ceiled and far from spacious mezzanine floor, and at the very end of a passage lighted only by borrowed lights. The office doors along this corridor, each with its label, gave the place the look of a bath-house. At four o'clock the stolid porter had proclaimed, according to his orders, "The bank is closed." And by this time the departments were deserted, wives of the partners in the firm were expecting their lovers; the two bankers dining with their mistresses. Everything was in order.

The place where the strong boxes had been bedded in sheet-iron was just behind the little sanctum, where the cashier was busy. Doubtless he was balancing his books. The open front gave a glimpse of a safe of hammered iron, so enormously heavy (thanks to the science of the modern inventor) that burglars could not carry it away. The door only opened at the pleasure of those who knew its password. The letter-lock was a warden who kept its own secret and could not be bribed; the mysterious word was an ingenious realization of the "Open sesame!" in the Arabian Nights. But even this was as nothing. A man might discover the password; but unless he knew the lock's final secret, the ultima ratio of this gold-guarding dragon of mechanical science, it discharged a blunderbuss at his head.

The door of the room, the walls of the room, the shutters of the windows in the room, the whole place, in fact, was lined with sheet-iron a third of an inch in thickness, concealed behind the thin wooden paneling. The shutters had been closed, the door had been shut. If ever man could feel confident that he was absolutely alone, and that there was no remote possibility of being watched by prying eyes, that man was the cashier of the house of Nucingen and Company, in the Rue Saint-Lazare.

Accordingly the deepest silence prevailed in that iron cave. The fire had died out in the stove, but the room was full of that tepid warmth which produces the dull heavy-headedness and nauseous queasiness of a morning after an orgy. The stove is a mesmerist that plays no small part in the reduction of bank clerks and porters to a state of idiocy.

A room with a stove in it is a retort in which the power of strong men is evaporated, where their vitality is exhausted, and their wills enfeebled. Government offices are part of a great scheme for the manufacture of the mediocrity necessary for the maintenance of a Feudal System on a pecuniary basis—and money is the foundation of the Social Contract. (See Les Employes.) The mephitic vapors in the atmosphere of a crowded room contribute in no small degree to bring about a gradual deterioration of intelligences, the brain that gives off the largest quantity of nitrogen asphyxiates the others, in the long run.

The cashier was a man of five-and-forty or thereabouts. As he sat at the table, the light from a moderator lamp shining full on his bald head and glistening fringe of iron-gray hair that surrounded it—this baldness and the round outlines of his face made his head look very like a ball. His complexion was brick-red, a few wrinkles had gathered about his eyes, but he had the smooth, plump hands of a stout man. His blue cloth coat, a little rubbed and worn, and the creases and shininess of his trousers, traces of hard wear that the clothes-brush fails to remove, would impress a superficial observer with the idea that here was a thrifty and upright human being, sufficient of the philosopher or of the aristocrat to wear shabby clothes. But, unluckily, it is easy to find penny-wise people who will prove weak, wasteful, or incompetent in the capital things of life.

The cashier wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor at his button-hole, for he had been a major of dragoons in the time of the Emperor. M. de Nucingen, who had been a contractor before he became a banker, had had reason in those days to know the honorable disposition of his cashier, who then occupied a high position. Reverses of fortune had befallen the major, and the banker out of regard for him paid him five hundred francs a month. The soldier had become a cashier in the year 1813, after his recovery from a wound received at Studzianka during the Retreat from Moscow, followed by six months of enforced idleness at Strasbourg, whither several officers had been transported by order of the Emperor, that they might receive skilled attention. This particular officer, Castanier by name, retired with the honorary grade of colonel, and a pension of two thousand four hundred francs.

In ten years’ time the cashier had completely effaced the soldier, and Castanier inspired the banker with such trust in him, that he was associated in the transactions that went on in the private office behind his little counting-house. The baron himself had access to it by means of a secret staircase. There, matters of business were decided. It was the bolting-room where proposals were sifted; the privy council chamber where the reports of the money market were analyzed; circular notes issued thence; and finally, the private ledger and the journal which summarized the work of all the departments were kept there.

Castanier had gone himself to shut the door which opened on to a staircase that led to the parlor occupied by the two bankers on the first floor of their hotel. This done, he had sat down at his desk again, and for a moment he gazed at a little collection of letters of credit drawn on the firm of Watschildine of London. Then he had taken up the pen and imitated the banker’s signature on each. Nucingen he wrote, and eyed the forged signatures critically to see which seemed the most perfect copy.

Suddenly he looked up as if a needle had pricked him. “You are not

alone!” a boding voice seemed to cry in his heart; and indeed the forger saw a man standing at the little grated window of the counting-house, a man whose breathing was so noiseless that he did not seem to breathe at all. Castanier looked, and saw that the door at the end of the passage was wide open; the stranger must have entered by that way.

For the first time in his life the old soldier felt a sensation of dread that made him stare open-mouthed and wide-eyed at the man before him; and for that matter, the appearance of the apparition was sufficiently alarming even if unaccompanied by the mysterious circumstances of so sudden an entry. The rounded forehead, the harsh coloring of the long oval face, indicated quite as plainly as the cut of his clothes that the man was an Englishman, reeking of his native isles. You had only to look at the collar of his overcoat, at the voluminous cravat which smothered the crushed frills of a shirt front so white that it brought out the changeless leaden hue of an impassive face, and the thin red line of the lips that seemed made to suck the blood of corpses; and you can guess at once at the black gaiters buttoned up to the knee, and the half-puritanical costume of a wealthy Englishman dressed for a walking excursion. The intolerable glitter of the stranger’s eyes produced a vivid and unpleasant impression, which was only deepened by the rigid outlines of his features. The dried-up, emaciated creature seemed to carry within him some gnawing thought that consumed him and could not be appeased.

He must have digested his food so rapidly that he could doubtless eat continually without bringing any trace of color into his face or features. A tun of Tokay vin de succession would not have caused any faltering in that piercing glance that read men’s inmost thoughts, nor dethroned the merciless reasoning faculty that always seemed to go to the bottom of things. There was something of the fell and tranquil majesty of a tiger about him.

“I have come to cash this bill of exchange, sir,” he said. Castanier felt the tones of his voice thrill through every nerve with a violent shock similar to that given by a discharge of electricity.

“The safe is closed,” said Castanier.

“It is open,” said the Englishman, looking round the counting-house. “To-morrow is Sunday, and I cannot wait. The amount is for five hundred thousand francs. You have the money there, and I must have it.”

“But how did you come in, sir?”

The Englishman smiled. That smile frightened Castanier. No words could have replied more fully nor more peremptorily than that scornful and imperial curl of the stranger’s lips. Castanier turned away, took up fifty packets each containing ten thousand francs in bank-notes, and held them out to the

stranger, receiving in exchange for them a bill accepted by the Baron de Nucingen. A sort of convulsive tremor ran through him as he saw a red gleam in the stranger's eyes when they fell on the forged signature on the letter of credit.

"It... it wants your signature..." stammered Castanier, handing back the bill.

"Hand me your pen," answered the Englishman.

Castanier handed him the pen with which he had just committed forgery. The stranger wrote John Melmoth, then he returned the slip of paper and the pen to the cashier. Castanier looked at the handwriting, noticing that it sloped from right to left in the Eastern fashion, and Melmoth disappeared so noiselessly that when Castanier looked up again an exclamation broke from him, partly because the man was no longer there, partly because he felt a strange painful sensation such as our imagination might take for an effect of poison.

The pen that Melmoth had handled sent the same sickening heat through him that an emetic produces. But it seemed impossible to Castanier that the Englishman should have guessed his crime. His inward qualms he attributed to the palpitation of the heart that, according to received ideas, was sure to follow at once on such a "turn" as the stranger had given him.

"The devil take it; I am very stupid. Providence is watching over me; for if that brute had come round to see my gentleman to-morrow, my goose would have been cooked!" said Castanier, and he burned the unsuccessful attempts at forgery in the stove.

He put the bill that he meant to take with him in an envelope, and helped himself to five hundred thousand francs in French and English bank-notes from the safe, which he locked. Then he put everything in order, lit a candle, blew out the lamp, took up his hat and umbrella, and went out sedately, as usual, to leave one of the two keys of the strong room with Madame de Nucingen, in the absence of her husband the Baron.

"You are in luck, M. Castanier," said the banker's wife as he entered the room; "we have a holiday on Monday; you can go into the country, or to Soizy."

"Madame, will you be so good as to tell your husband that the bill of exchange on Watschildine, which was behind time, has just been presented? The five hundred thousand francs have been paid; so I shall not come back till noon on Tuesday."

"Good-bye, monsieur; I hope you will have a pleasant time."

"The same to you, madame," replied the old dragoon as he went out. He

glanced as he spoke at a young man well known in fashionable society at that time, a M. de Rastignac, who was regarded as Madame de Nucingen's lover.

"Madame," remarked this latter, "the old boy looks to me as if he meant to play you some ill turn."

"Pshaw! impossible; he is too stupid."

"Piquoizeau," said the cashier, walking into the porter's room, "what made you let anybody come up after four o'clock?"

"I have been smoking a pipe here in the doorway ever since four o'clock," said the man, "and nobody has gone into the bank. Nobody has come out either except the gentlemen——"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, upon my word and honor. Stay, though, at four o'clock M. Werbrust's friend came, a young fellow from Messrs. du Tillet & Co., in the Rue Joubert."

"All right," said Castanier, and he hurried away.

The sickening sensation of heat that he had felt when he took back the pen returned in greater intensity. "Mille diables!" thought he, as he threaded his way along the Boulevard de Gand, "haven't I taken proper precautions? Let me think! Two clear days, Sunday and Monday, then a day of uncertainty before they begin to look for me; altogether, three days and four nights' respite. I have a couple of passports and two different disguises; is not that enough to throw the cleverest detective off the scent? On Tuesday morning I shall draw a million francs in London before the slightest suspicion has been aroused. My debts I am leaving behind for the benefit of my creditors, who will put a 'P' * on the bills, and I shall live comfortably in Italy for the rest of my days as the Conte Ferraro. [*Protested.] I was alone with him when he died, poor fellow, in the marsh of Zembin, and I shall slip into his skin.... Mille diables! the woman who is to follow after me might give them a clue! Think of an old campaigner like me infatuated enough to tie myself to a petticoat tail!... Why take her? I must leave her behind. Yes, I could make up my mind to it; but—I know myself—I should be ass enough to go back to her. Still, nobody knows Aquilina. Shall I take her or leave her?"

"You will not take her!" cried a voice that filled Castanier with sickening dread. He turned sharply, and saw the Englishman.

"The devil is in it!" cried the cashier aloud.

Melmoth had passed his victim by this time; and if Castanier's first impulse had been to fasten a quarrel on a man who read his own thoughts, he was so much torn up by opposing feelings that the immediate result was a

temporary paralysis. When he resumed his walk he fell once more into that fever of irresolution which besets those who are so carried away by passion that they are ready to commit a crime, but have not sufficient strength of character to keep it to themselves without suffering terribly in the process. So, although Castanier had made up his mind to reap the fruits of a crime which was already half executed, he hesitated to carry out his designs. For him, as for many men of mixed character in whom weakness and strength are equally blended, the least trifling consideration determines whether they shall continue to lead blameless lives or become actively criminal. In the vast masses of men enrolled in Napoleon's armies there are many who, like Castanier, possessed the purely physical courage demanded on the battlefield, yet lacked the moral courage which makes a man as great in crime as he could have been in virtue.

The letter of credit was drafted in such terms that immediately on his arrival he might draw twenty-five thousand pounds on the firm of Watschildine, the London correspondents of the house of Nucingen. The London house had already been advised of the draft about to be made upon them, he had written to them himself. He had instructed an agent (chosen at random) to take his passage in a vessel which was to leave Portsmouth with a wealthy English family on board, who were going to Italy, and the passage-money had been paid in the name of the Conte Ferraro. The smallest details of the scheme had been thought out. He had arranged matters so as to divert the search that would be made for him into Belgium and Switzerland, while he himself was at sea in the English vessel. Then, by the time that Nucingen might flatter himself that he was on the track of his late cashier, the said cashier, as the Conte Ferraro, hoped to be safe in Naples. He had determined to disfigure his face in order to disguise himself the more completely, and by means of an acid to imitate the scars of smallpox. Yet, in spite of all these precautions, which surely seemed as if they must secure him complete immunity, his conscience tormented him; he was afraid. The even and peaceful life that he had led for so long had modified the morality of the camp. His life was stainless as yet; he could not sully it without a pang. So for the last time he abandoned himself to all the influences of the better self that strenuously resisted.

"Pshaw!" he said at last, at the corner of the Boulevard and the Rue Montmartre, "I will take a cab after the play this evening and go out to Versailles. A post-chaise will be ready for me at my old quartermaster's place. He would keep my secret even if a dozen men were standing ready to shoot him down. The chances are all in my favor, so far as I see; so I shall take my little Naqui with me, and I will go."

"You will not go!" exclaimed the Englishman, and the strange tones of his voice drove all the cashier's blood back to his heart.

Melmoth stepped into a tilbury which was waiting for him, and was whirled away so quickly, that when Castanier looked up he saw his foe some hundred paces away from him, and before it even crossed his mind to cut off the man's retreat the tilbury was far on its way up the Boulevard Montmartre.

"Well, upon my word, there is something supernatural about this!" said he to himself. "If I were fool enough to believe in God, I should think that He had set Saint Michael on my tracks. Suppose that the devil and the police should let me go on as I please, so as to nab me in the nick of time? Did any one ever see the like! But there, this is folly..."

Castanier went along the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, slackening his pace as he neared the Rue Richer. There on the second floor of a block of buildings which looked out upon some gardens lived the unconscious cause of Castanier's crime—a young woman known in the quarter as Mme. de la Garde. A concise history of certain events in the cashier's past life must be given in order to explain these facts, and to give a complete presentment of the crisis when he yielded to temptation.

Mme. de la Garde said that she was a Piedmontese. No one, not even Castanier, knew her real name. She was one of those young girls, who are driven by dire misery, by inability to earn a living, or by fear of starvation, to have recourse to a trade which most of them loathe, many regard with indifference, and some few follow in obedience to the laws of their constitution. But on the brink of the gulf of prostitution in Paris, the young girl of sixteen, beautiful and pure as the Madonna, had met with Castanier. The old dragoon was too rough and homely to make his way in society, and he was tired of tramping the boulevard at night and of the kind of conquests made there by gold. For some time past he had desired to bring a certain regularity into an irregular life. He was struck by the beauty of the poor child who had drifted by chance into his arms, and his determination to rescue her from the life of the streets was half benevolent, half selfish, as some of the thoughts of the best of men are apt to be. Social conditions mingle elements of evil with the promptings of natural goodness of heart, and the mixture of motives underlying a man's intentions should be leniently judged. Castanier had just cleverness enough to be very shrewd where his own interests were concerned. So he concluded to be a philanthropist on either count, and at first made her his mistress.

"Hey! hey!" he said to himself, in his soldierly fashion. "I am an old wolf, and a sheep shall not make a fool of me. Castanier, old man, before you set up housekeeping, reconnoitre the girl's character for a bit, and see if she is a steady sort."

This irregular union gave the Piedmontese a status the most nearly

approaching respectability among those which the world declines to recognize. During the first year she took the nom de guerre of Aquilina, one of the characters in Venice Preserved which she had chanced to read. She fancied that she resembled the courtesan in face and general appearance, and in a certain precocity of heart and brain of which she was conscious. When Castanier found that her life was as well regulated and virtuous as was possible for a social outlaw, he manifested a desire that they should live as husband and wife. So she took the name of Mme. de la Garde, in order to approach, as closely as Parisian usages permit, the conditions of a real marriage. As a matter of fact, many of these unfortunate girls have one fixed idea, to be looked upon as respectable middle-class women, who lead humdrum lives of faithfulness to their husbands; women who would make excellent mothers, keepers of household accounts, and menders of household linen. This longing springs from a sentiment so laudable, that society should take it into consideration. But society, incorrigible as ever, will assuredly persist in regarding the married woman as a corvette duly authorized by her flag and papers to go on her own course, while the woman who is a wife in all but name is a pirate and an outlaw for lack of a document. A day came when Mme. de la Garde would fain have signed herself “Mme. Castanier.” The cashier was put out by this.

“So you do not love me well enough to marry me?” she said.

Castanier did not answer; he was absorbed by his thoughts. The poor girl resigned herself to her fate. The ex-dragoon was in despair. Naqui’s heart softened towards him at the sight of his trouble; she tried to soothe him, but what could she do when she did not know what ailed him? When Naqui made up her mind to know the secret, although she never asked him a question, the cashier dolefully confessed to the existence of a Mme. Castanier. This lawful wife, a thousand times accursed, was living in a humble way in Strasbourg on a small property there; he wrote to her twice a year, and kept the secret of her existence so well, that no one suspected that he was married. The reason of this reticence? If it is familiar to many military men who may chance to be in a like predicament, it is perhaps worth while to give the story.

Your genuine trooper (if it is allowable here to employ the word which in the army signifies a man who is destined to die as a captain) is a sort of serf, a part and parcel of his regiment, an essentially simple creature, and Castanier was marked out by nature as a victim to the wiles of mothers with grown-up daughters left too long on their hands. It was at Nancy, during one of those brief intervals of repose when the Imperial armies were not on active service abroad, that Castanier was so unlucky as to pay some attention to a young lady with whom he danced at a ridotto, the provincial name for the entertainments often given by the military to the townsfolk, or vice versa, in garrison towns.

A scheme for inveigling the gallant captain into matrimony was immediately set on foot, one of those schemes by which mothers secure accomplices in a human heart by touching all its motive springs, while they convert all their friends into fellow-conspirators. Like all people possessed by one idea, these ladies press everything into the service of their great project, slowly elaborating their toils, much as the ant-lion excavates its funnel in the sand and lies in wait at the bottom for its victim. Suppose that no one strays, after all, into that carefully constructed labyrinth? Suppose that the ant-lion dies of hunger and thirst in her pit? Such things may be, but if any heedless creature once enters in, it never comes out. All the wires which could be pulled to induce action on the captain's part were tried; appeals were made to the secret interested motives that always come into play in such cases; they worked on Castanier's hopes and on the weaknesses and vanity of human nature. Unluckily, he had praised the daughter to her mother when he brought her back after a waltz, a little chat followed, and then an invitation in the most natural way in the world. Once introduced into the house, the dragoon was dazzled by the hospitality of a family who appeared to conceal their real wealth beneath a show of careful economy. He was skilfully flattered on all sides, and every one extolled for his benefit the various treasures there displayed. A neatly timed dinner, served on plate lent by an uncle, the attention shown to him by the only daughter of the house, the gossip of the town, a well-to-do sub-lieutenant who seemed likely to cut the ground from under his feet—all the innumerable snares, in short, of the provincial ant-lion were set for him, and to such good purpose, that Castanier said five years later, "To this day I do not know how it came about!"

The dragoon received fifteen thousand francs with the lady, who after two years of marriage, became the ugliest and consequently the most peevish woman on earth. Luckily they had no children. The fair complexion (maintained by a Spartan regimen), the fresh, bright color in her face, which spoke of an engaging modesty, became overspread with blotches and pimples; her figure, which had seemed so straight, grew crooked, the angel became a suspicious and shrewish creature who drove Castanier frantic. Then the fortune took to itself wings. At length the dragoon, no longer recognizing the woman whom he had wedded, left her to live on a little property at Strasbourg, until the time when it should please God to remove her to adorn Paradise. She was one of those virtuous women who, for want of other occupation, would weary the life out of an angel with complainings, who pray till (if their prayers are heard in heaven) they must exhaust the patience of the Almighty, and say everything that is bad of their husbands in dovelike murmurs over a game of boston with their neighbors. When Aquilina learned all these troubles she clung still more affectionately to Castanier, and made him so happy, varying with woman's ingenuity the pleasures with which she filled his life, that all

unwittingly she was the cause of the cashier’s downfall.

Like many women who seem by nature destined to sound all the depths of love, Mme. de la Garde was disinterested. She asked neither for gold nor for jewelry, gave no thought to the future, lived entirely for the present and for the pleasures of the present. She accepted expensive ornaments and dresses, the carriage so eagerly coveted by women of her class, as one harmony the more in the picture of life. There was absolutely no vanity in her desire not to appear at a better advantage but to look the fairer, and moreover, no woman could live without luxuries more cheerfully. When a man of generous nature (and military men are mostly of this stamp) meets with such a woman, he feels a sort of exasperation at finding himself her debtor in generosity. He feels that he could stop a mail coach to obtain money for her if he has not sufficient for her whims. He will commit a crime if so he may be great and noble in the eyes of some woman or of his special public; such is the nature of the man. Such a lover is like a gambler who would be dishonored in his own eyes if he did not repay the sum he borrowed from a waiter in a gaming-house; but will shrink from no crime, will leave his wife and children without a penny, and rob and murder, if so he may come to the gaming-table with a full purse, and his honor remain untarnished among the frequenters of that fatal abode. So it was with Castanier.

He had begun by installing Aquiline is a modest fourth-floor dwelling, the furniture being of the simplest kind. But when he saw the girl’s beauty and great qualities, when he had known inexpressible and unlooked-for happiness with her, he began to dote upon her; and longed to adorn his idol. Then Aquilina’s toilette was so comically out of keeping with her poor abode, that for both their sakes it was clearly incumbent on him to move. The change swallowed up almost all Castanier’s savings, for he furnished his domestic paradise with all the prodigality that is lavished on a kept mistress. A pretty woman must have everything pretty about her; the unity of charm in the woman and her surroundings singles her out from among her sex. This sentiment of homogeneity indeed, though it has frequently escaped the attention of observers, is instinctive in human nature; and the same prompting leads elderly spinsters to surround themselves with dreary relics of the past. But the lovely Piedmontese must have the newest and latest fashions, and all that was daintiest and prettiest in stuffs for hangings, in silks or jewelry, in fine china and other brittle and fragile wares. She asked for nothing; but when she was called upon to make a choice, when Castanier asked her, “Which do you like?” she would answer, “Why, this is the nicest!” Love never counts the cost, and Castanier therefore always took the “nicest.”

When once the standard had been set up, there was nothing for it but everything in the household must be in conformity, from the linen, plate, and

crystal through a thousand and one items of expenditure down to the pots and pans in the kitchen. Castanier had meant to “do things simply,” as the saying goes, but he gradually found himself more and more in debt. One expense entailed another. The clock called for candle sconces. Fires must be lighted in the ornamental grates, but the curtains and hangings were too fresh and delicate to be soiled by smuts, so they must be replaced by patent and elaborate fireplaces, warranted to give out no smoke, recent inventions of the people who are so clever at drawing up a prospectus. Then Aquilina found it so nice to run about barefooted on the carpet in her room, that Castanier must have soft carpets laid everywhere for the pleasure of playing with Naqui. A bathroom, too, was built for her, everything to the end that she might be more comfortable.

Shopkeepers, workmen, and manufacturers in Paris have a mysterious knack of enlarging a hole in a man’s purse. They cannot give the price of anything upon inquiry; and as the paroxysm of longing cannot abide delay, orders are given by the feeble light of an approximate estimate of cost. The same people never send in the bills at once, but ply the purchaser with furniture till his head spins. Everything is so pretty, so charming; and every one is satisfied.

A few months later the obliging furniture dealers are metamorphosed, and reappear in the shape of alarming totals on invoices that fill the soul with their horrid clamor; they are in urgent want of the money; they are, as you may say on the brink of bankruptcy, their tears flow, it is heartrending to hear them! And then——the gulf yawns, and gives up serried columns of figures marching four deep, when as a matter of fact they should have issued innocently three by three.

Before Castanier had any idea of how much he had spent, he had arranged for Aquilina to have a carriage from a livery stable when she went out, instead of a cab. Castanier was a gourmand; he engaged an excellent cook; and Aquilina, to please him, had herself made the purchases of early fruit and vegetables, rare delicacies, and exquisite wines. But, as Aquilina had nothing of her own, these gifts of hers, so precious by reason of the thought and tact and graciousness that prompted them, were no less a drain upon Castanier’s purse; he did not like his Naqui to be without money, and Naqui could not keep money in her pocket. So the table was a heavy item of expenditure for a man with Castanier’s income. The ex-dragoon was compelled to resort to various shifts for obtaining money, for he could not bring himself to renounce this delightful life. He loved the woman too well to cross the freaks of the mistress. He was one of those men who, through self-love or through weakness of character, can refuse nothing to a woman; false shame overpowers them, and they rather face ruin than make the admissions: “I

cannot——” “My means will not permit——” “I cannot afford——”

When, therefore, Castanier saw that if he meant to emerge from the abyss of debt into which he had plunged, he must part with Aquilina and live upon bread and water, he was so unable to do without her or to change his habits of life, that daily he put off his plans of reform until the morrow. The debts were pressing, and he began by borrowing money. His position and previous character inspired confidence, and of this he took advantage to devise a system of borrowing money as he required it. Then, as the total amount of debt rapidly increased, he had recourse to those commercial inventions known as accommodation bills. This form of bill does not represent goods or other value received, and the first endorser pays the amount named for the obliging person who accepts it. This species of fraud is tolerated because it is impossible to detect it, and, moreover, it is an imaginary fraud which only becomes real if payment is ultimately refused.

When at length it was evidently impossible to borrow any longer, whether because the amount of the debt was now so greatly increased, or because Castanier was unable to pay the large amount of interest on the aforesaid sums of money, the cashier saw bankruptcy before him. On making this discovery, he decided for a fraudulent bankruptcy rather than an ordinary failure, and preferred a crime to a misdemeanor. He determined, after the fashion of the celebrated cashier of the Royal Treasury, to abuse the trust deservedly won, and to increase the number of his creditors by making a final loan of the sum sufficient to keep him in comfort in a foreign country for the rest of his days. All this, as has been seen, he had prepared to do.

Aquilina knew nothing of the irksome cares of this life; she enjoyed her existence, as many a woman does, making no inquiry as to where the money came from, even as sundry other folk will eat their buttered rolls untroubled by any restless spirit of curiosity as to the culture and growth of wheat; but as the labor and miscalculations of agriculture lie on the other side of the baker’s oven, so beneath the unappreciated luxury of many a Parisian household lie intolerable anxieties and exorbitant toil.

While Castanier was enduring the torture of the strain, and his thoughts were full of the deed that should change his whole life, Aquilina was lying luxuriously back in a great armchair by the fireside, beguiling the time by chatting with her waiting-maid. As frequently happens in such cases the maid had become the mistress’ confidant, Jenny having first assured herself that her mistress’ ascendency over Castanier was complete.

“What are we to do this evening? Leon seems determined to come,” Mme. de la Garde was saying, as she read a passionate epistle indited upon a faint gray notepaper.

“Here is the master!” said Jenny.

Castanier came in. Aquilina, nowise disconcerted, crumpled up the letter, took it with the tongs, and held it in the flames.

“So that is what you do with your love-letters, is it?” asked Castanier.

“Oh goodness, yes,” said Aquilina; “is it not the best way of keeping them safe? Besides, fire should go to fire, as water makes for the river.”

“You are talking as if it were a real love-letter, Naqui——”

“Well, am I not handsome enough to receive them?” she said, holding up her forehead for a kiss. There was a carelessness in her manner that would have told any man less blind than Castanier that it was only a piece of conjugal duty, as it were, to give this joy to the cashier, but use and wont had brought Castanier to the point where clear-sightedness is no longer possible for love.

“I have taken a box at the Gymnase this evening,” he said; “let us have dinner early, and then we need not dine in a hurry.”

“Go and take Jenny. I am tired of plays. I do not know what is the matter with me this evening; I would rather stay here by the fire.”

“Come, all the same though, Naqui; I shall not be here to bore you much longer. Yes, Quiqui, I am going to start to-night, and it will be some time before I come back again. I am leaving everything in your charge. Will you keep your heart for me too?”

“Neither my heart nor anything else,” she said; “but when you come back again, Naqui will still be Naqui for you.”

“Well, this is frankness. So you would not follow me?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Eh! why, how can I leave the lover who writes me such sweet little notes?” she asked, pointing to the blackened scrap of paper with a mocking smile.

“Is there any truth in it?” asked Castanier. “Have you really a lover?”

“Really!” cried Aquilina; “and have you never given it a serious thought, dear? To begin with, you are fifty years old. Then you have just the sort of face to put on a fruit stall; if the woman tried to see you for a pumpkin, no one would contradict her. You puff and blow like a seal when you come upstairs; your paunch rises and falls like a diamond on a woman’s forehead! It is pretty plain that you served in the dragoons; you are a very ugly-looking old man.

Fiddle-de-dee. If you have any mind to keep my respect, I recommend you not to add imbecility to these qualities by imagining that such a girl as I am will be content with your asthmatic love, and not look for youth and good looks and pleasure by way of a variety——”

“Aquilina! you are laughing, of course?”

“Oh, very well; and are you not laughing too? Do you take me for a fool, telling me that you are going away? ‘I am going to start to-night!’” she said, mimicking his tones. “Stuff and nonsense! Would you talk like that if you were really going from your Naqui? You would cry, like the booby that you are!”

“After all, if I go, will you follow?” he asked.

“Tell me first whether this journey of yours is a bad joke or not.”

“Yes, seriously, I am going.”

“Well, then, seriously, I shall stay. A pleasant journey to you, my boy! I will wait till you come back. I would sooner take leave of life than take leave of my dear, cozy Paris——”

“Will you not come to Italy, to Naples, and lead a pleasant life there—a delicious, luxurious life, with this stout old fogy of yours, who puffs and blows like a seal?”

“No.”

“Ungrateful girl!”

“Ungrateful?” she cried, rising to her feet. “I might leave this house this moment and take nothing out of it but myself. I shall have given you all the treasures a young girl can give, and something that not every drop in your veins and mine can ever give me back. If, by any means whatever, by selling my hopes of eternity, for instance, I could recover my past self, body and soul (for I have, perhaps, redeemed my soul), and be pure as a lily for my lover, I would not hesitate a moment! What sort of devotion has rewarded mine? You have housed and fed me, just as you give a dog food and a kennel because he is a protection to the house, and he may take kicks when we are out of humor, and lick our hands as soon as we are pleased to call him. And which of us two will have been the more generous?”

“Oh! dear child, do you not see that I am joking?” returned Castanier. “I am going on a short journey; I shall not be away for very long. But come with me to the Gymnase; I shall start just before midnight, after I have had time to say good-bye to you.”

“Poor pet! so you are really going, are you?” she said. She put her arms

round his neck, and drew down his head against her bodice.

“You are smothering me!” cried Castanier, with his face buried in Aquilina’s breast. That damsel turned to say in Jenny’s ear, “Go to Leon, and tell him not to come till one o’clock. If you do not find him, and he comes here during the leave-taking, keep him in your room.—Well,” she went on, setting free Castanier, and giving a tweak to the tip of his nose, “never mind, handsomest of seals that you are. I will go to the theatre with you this evening? But all in good time; let us have dinner! There is a nice little dinner for you—just what you like.”

“It is very hard to part from such a woman as you!” exclaimed Castanier.

“Very well then, why do you go?” asked she.

“Ah! why? why? If I were to begin to begin to explain the reasons why, I must tell you things that would prove to you that I love you almost to madness. Ah! if you have sacrificed your honor for me, I have sold mine for you; we are quits. Is that love?”

“What is all this about?” said she. “Come, now, promise me that if I had a lover you would still love me as a father; that would be love! Come, now, promise it at once, and give us your fist upon it.”

“I should kill you,” and Castanier smiled as he spoke.

They sat down to the dinner table, and went thence to the Gymnase. When the first part of the performance was over, it occurred to Castanier to show himself to some of his acquaintances in the house, so as to turn away any suspicion of his departure. He left Mme. de la Garde in the corner box where she was seated, according to her modest wont, and went to walk up and down in the lobby. He had not gone many paces before he saw the Englishman, and with a sudden return of the sickening sensation of heat that once before had vibrated through him, and of the terror that he had felt already, he stood face to face with Melmoth.

“Forger!”

At the word, Castanier glanced round at the people who were moving about them. He fancied that he could see astonishment and curiosity in their eyes, and wishing to be rid of this Englishman at once, he raised his hand to strike him—and felt his arm paralyzed by some invisible power that sapped his strength and nailed him to the spot. He allowed the stranger to take him by the arm, and they walked together to the green-room like two friends.

“Who is strong enough to resist me?” said the Englishman, addressing him. “Do you not know that everything here on earth must obey me, that it is in my power to do everything? I read men’s thoughts, I see the future, and I know the

past. I am here, and I can be elsewhere also. Time and space and distance are nothing to me. The whole world is at my beck and call. I have the power of continual enjoyment and of giving joy. I can see through walls, discover hidden treasures, and fill my hands with them. Palaces arise at my nod, and my architect makes no mistakes. I can make all lands break forth into blossom, heap up their gold and precious stones, and surround myself with fair women and ever new faces; everything is yielded up to my will. I could gamble on the Stock Exchange, and my speculations would be infallible; but a man who can find the hoards that misers have hidden in the earth need not trouble himself about stocks. Feel the strength of the hand that grasps you; poor wretch, doomed to shame! Try to bend the arm of iron! try to soften the adamantine heart! Fly from me if you dare! You would hear my voice in the depths of the caves that lie under the Seine; you might hide in the Catacombs, but would you not see me there? My voice could be heard through the sound of thunder, my eyes shine as brightly as the sun, for I am the peer of Lucifer!”

Castanier heard the terrible words, and felt no protest nor contradiction within himself. He walked side by side with the Englishman, and had no power to leave him.

“You are mine; you have just committed a crime. I have found at last the mate whom I have sought. Have you a mind to learn your destiny? Aha! you came here to see a play, and you shall see a play—nay, two. Come. Present me to Mme. de la Garde as one of your best friends. Am I not your last hope of escape?”

Castanier, followed by the stranger, returned to his box; and in accordance with the order he had just received, he hastened to introduce Melmoth to Mme. de la Garde. Aquilina seemed to be not in the least surprised. The Englishman declined to take a seat in front, and Castanier was once more beside his mistress; the man’s slightest wish must be obeyed. The last piece was about to begin, for, at that time, small theatres gave only three pieces. One of the actors had made the Gymnase the fashion, and that evening Perlet (the actor in question) was to play in a vaudeville called Le Comedien d’Etampes, in which he filled four different parts.

When the curtain rose, the stranger stretched out his hand over the crowded house. Castanier’s cry of terror died away, for the walls of his throat seemed glued together as Melmoth pointed to the stage, and the cashier knew that the play had been changed at the Englishman’s desire.

He saw the strong-room at the bank; he saw the Baron de Nucingen in conference with a police-officer from the Prefecture, who was informing him of Castanier’s conduct, explaining that the cashier had absconded with money taken from the safe, giving the history of the forged signature. The information

was put in writing; the document signed and duly despatched to the Public Prosecutor.

“Are we in time, do you think?” asked Nucingen.

“Yes,” said the agent of police; “he is at the Gymnase, and has no suspicion of anything.”

Castanier fidgeted on his chair, and made as if he would leave the theatre, but Melmoth’s hand lay on his shoulder, and he was obliged to sit and watch; the hideous power of the man produced an effect like that of nightmare, and he could not move a limb. Nay, the man himself was the nightmare; his presence weighed heavily on his victim like a poisoned atmosphere. When the wretched cashier turned to implore the Englishman’s mercy, he met those blazing eyes that discharged electric currents, which pierced through him and transfixed him like darts of steel.

“What have I done to you?” he said, in his prostrate helplessness, and he breathed hard like a stag at the water’s edge. “What do you want of me?”

“Look!” cried Melmoth.

Castanier looked at the stage. The scene had been changed. The play seemed to be over, and Castanier beheld himself stepping from the carriage with Aquilina; but as he entered the courtyard of the house on the Rue Richer, the scene again was suddenly changed, and he saw his own house. Jenny was chatting by the fire in her mistress’ room with a subaltern officer of a line regiment then stationed at Paris.

“He is going, is he?” said the sergeant, who seemed to belong to a family in easy circumstances; “I can be happy at my ease! I love Aquilina too well to allow her to belong to that old toad! I, myself, am going to marry Mme. de la Garde!” cried the sergeant.

“Old toad!” Castanier murmured piteously.

“Here come the master and mistress; hide yourself! Stay, get in here Monsieur Leon,” said Jenny. “The master won’t stay here for very long.”

Castanier watched the sergeant hide himself among Aquilina’s gowns in her dressing-room. Almost immediately he himself appeared upon the scene, and took leave of his mistress, who made fun of him in “asides” to Jenny, while she uttered the sweetest and tenderest words in his ears. She wept with one side of her face, and laughed with the other. The audience called for an encore.

“Accursed creature!” cried Castanier from his box.

Aquilina was laughing till the tears came into her eyes.

“Goodness!” she cried, “how funny Perlet is as the Englishwoman!... Why don’t you laugh? Every one else in the house is laughing. Laugh, dear!” she said to Castanier.

Melmoth burst out laughing, and the unhappy cashier shuddered. The Englishman’s laughter wrung his heart and tortured his brain; it was as if a surgeon had bored his skull with a red-hot iron.

“Laughing! are they laughing!” stammered Castanier.

He did not see the prim English lady whom Perlet was acting with such ludicrous effect, nor hear the English-French that had filled the house with roars of laughter; instead of all this, he beheld himself hurrying from the Rue Richer, hailing a cab on the Boulevard, bargaining with the man to take him to Versailles. Then once more the scene changed. He recognized the sorry inn at the corner of the Rue de l’Orangerie and the Rue des Recollets, which was kept by his old quartermaster. It was two o’clock in the morning, the most perfect stillness prevailed, no one was there to watch his movements. The post-horses were put into the carriage (it came from a house in the Avenue de Paris in which an Englishman lived, and had been ordered in the foreigner’s name to avoid raising suspicion). Castanier saw that he had his bills and his passports, stepped into the carriage, and set out. But at the barrier he saw two gendarmes lying in wait for the carriage. A cry of horror burst from him but Melmoth gave him a glance, and again the sound died in his throat.

“Keep your eyes on the stage, and be quiet!” said the Englishman.

In another moment Castanier saw himself flung into prison at the Conciergerie; and in the fifth act of the drama, entitled The Cashier, he saw himself, in three months’ time, condemned to twenty years of penal servitude. Again a cry broke from him. He was exposed upon the Place du Palais-de-Justice, and the executioner branded him with a red-hot iron. Then came the last scene of all; among some sixty convicts in the prison yard of the Bicetre, he was awaiting his turn to have the irons riveted on his limbs.

“Dear me! I cannot laugh any more!...” said Aquilina. “You are very solemn, dear boy; what can be the matter? The gentleman has gone.”

“A word with you, Castanier,” said Melmoth when the piece was at an end, and the attendant was fastening Mme. de la Garde’s cloak.

The corridor was crowded, and escape impossible.

“Very well, what is it?”

“No human power can hinder you from taking Aquilina home, and going next to Versailles, there to be arrested.”

“How so?”

“Because you are in a hand that will never relax its grasp,” returned the Englishman.

Castanier longed for the power to utter some word that should blot him out from among living men and hide him in the lowest depths of hell.

“Suppose that the Devil were to make a bid for your soul, would you not give it to him now in exchange for the power of God? One single word, and those five hundred thousand francs shall be back in the Baron de Nucingen’s safe; then you can tear up the letter of credit, and all traces of your crime will be obliterated. Moreover, you would have gold in torrents. You hardly believe in anything perhaps? Well, if all this comes to pass, you will believe at least in the Devil.”

“If it were only possible!” said Castanier joyfully.

“The man who can do it all gives you his word that it is possible,” answered the Englishman.

Melmoth, Castanier, and Mme. de la Garde were standing out in the Boulevard when Melmoth raised his arm. A drizzling rain was falling, the streets were muddy, the air was close, there was thick darkness overhead; but in a moment, as the arm was outstretched, Paris was filled with sunlight; it was high noon on a bright July day. The trees were covered with leaves; a double stream of joyous holiday makers strolled beneath them. Sellers of liquorice water shouted their cool drinks. Splendid carriages rolled past along the streets. A cry of terror broke from the cashier, and at that cry rain and darkness once more settled down upon the Boulevard.

Mme. de la Garde had stepped into the carriage. “Do be quick, dear!” she cried; “either come in or stay out. Really you are as dull as ditch-water this evening——”

“What must I do?” Castanier asked of Melmoth.

“Would you like to take my place?” inquired the Englishman.

“Yes.”

“Very well, then; I will be at your house in a few moments.”

“By the by, Castanier, you are rather off your balance,” Aquilina remarked. “There is some mischief brewing: you were quite melancholy and thoughtful all through the play. Do you want anything that I can give you, dear? Tell me.”

“I am waiting till we are at home to know whether you love me.”

“You need not wait till then,” she said, throwing her arms round his neck. “There!” she said, as she embraced him, passionately to all appearance, and plied him with the coaxing caresses that are part of the business of such a life

as hers, like stage action for an actress.

“Where is the music?” asked Castanier.

“What next? Only think of your hearing music now!”

“Heavenly music!” he went on. “The sounds seem to come from above.”

“What? You have always refused to give me a box at the Italiens because you could not abide music, and are you turning music-mad at this time of day? Mad—that you are! The music is inside your own noddle, old addle-pate!” she went on, as she took his head in her hands and rocked it to and fro on her shoulder. “Tell me now, old man; isn’t it the creaking of the wheels that sings in your ears?”

“Just listen, Naqui! If the angels make music for God Almighty, it must be such music as this that I am drinking in at every pore, rather than hearing. I do no know how to tell you about it; it is as sweet as honey-water!”

“Why, of course, they have music in heaven, for the angels in all the pictures have harps in their hands. He is mad, upon my word!” she said to herself, as she saw Castanier’s attitude; he looked like an opium-eater in a blissful trance.

They reached the house. Castanier, absorbed by the thought of all that he had just heard and seen, knew not whether to believe it or not; he was like a drunken man, and utterly unable to think connectedly. He came to himself in Aquilina’s room, whither he had been supported by the united efforts of his mistress, the porter, and Jenny; for he had fainted as he stepped from the carriage.

“He will be here directly! Oh, my friends, my friends,” he cried, and he flung himself despairingly into the depths of a low chair beside the fire.

Jenny heard the bell as he spoke, and admitted the Englishman. She announced that “a gentleman had come who had made an appointment with the master,” when Melmoth suddenly appeared, and deep silence followed. He looked at the porter—the porter went; he looked at Jenny—and Jenny went likewise.

“Madame,” said Melmoth, turning to Aquilina, “with your permission, we will conclude a piece of urgent business.”

He took Castanier’s hand, and Castanier rose, and the two men went into the drawing-room. There was no light in the room, but Melmoth’s eyes lit up the thickest darkness. The gaze of those strange eyes had left Aquilina like one spellbound; she was helpless, unable to take any thought for her lover; moreover, she believed him to be safe in Jenny’s room, whereas their early return had taken the waiting-woman by surprise, and she had hidden the

officer in the dressing-room. It had all happened exactly as in the drama that Melmoth had displayed for his victim. Presently the house-door was slammed violently, and Castanier reappeared.

“What ails you?” cried the horror-struck Aquilina.

There was a change in the cashier’s appearance. A strange pallor overspread his once rubicund countenance; it wore the peculiarly sinister and stony look of the mysterious visitor. The sullen glare of his eyes was intolerable, the fierce light in them seemed to scorch. The man who had looked so good-humored and good-natured had suddenly grown tyrannical and proud. The courtesan thought that Castanier had grown thinner; there was a terrible majesty in his brow; it was as if a dragon breathed forth a malignant influence that weighed upon the others like a close, heavy atmosphere. For a moment Aquilina knew not what to do.

“What has passed between you and that diabolical-looking man in those few minutes?” she asked at length.

“I have sold my soul to him. I feel it; I am no longer the same. He has taken my self, and given me his soul in exchange.”

“What?”

“You would not understand it at all.... Ah! he was right,” Castanier went on, “the fiend was right! I see everything and know all things.—You have been deceiving me!”

Aquilina turned cold with terror. Castanier lighted a candle and went into the dressing-room. The unhappy girl followed him with dazed bewilderment, and great was her astonishment when Castanier drew the dresses that hung there aside and disclosed the sergeant.

“Come out, my boy,” said the cashier; and, taking Leon by a button of his overcoat, he drew the officer into his room.

The Piedmontese, haggard and desperate, had flung herself into her easy-chair. Castanier seated himself on a sofa by the fire, and left Aquilina’s lover in a standing position.

“You have been in the army,” said Leon; “I am ready to give you satisfaction.”

“You are a fool,” said Castanier drily. “I have no occasion to fight. I could kill you by a look if I had any mind to do it. I will tell you what it is, youngster; why should I kill you? I can see a red line round your neck—the guillotine is waiting for you. Yes, you will end in the Place de Greve. You are the headsman’s property! there is no escape for you. You belong to a vendita, of the Carbonari. You are plotting against the Government.”

“You did not tell me that,” cried the Piedmontese, turning to Leon.

“So you do not know that the Minister decided this morning to put down your Society?” the cashier continued. “The Procureur-General has a list of your names. You have been betrayed. They are busy drawing up the indictment at this moment.”

“Then was it you who betrayed him?” cried Aquilina, and with a hoarse sound in her throat like the growl of a tigress she rose to her feet; she seemed as if she would tear Castanier in pieces.

“You know me too well to believe it,” Castanier retorted. Aquilina was benumbed by his coolness.

“Then how do you know it?” she murmured.

“I did not know it until I went into the drawing-room; now I know it—now I see and know all things, and can do all things.”

The sergeant was overcome with amazement.

“Very well then, save him, save him, dear!” cried the girl, flinging herself at Castanier’s feet. “If nothing is impossible to you, save him! I will love you, I will adore you, I will be your slave and not your mistress. I will obey your wildest whims; you shall do as you will with me. Yes, yes, I will give you more than love; you shall have a daughter’s devotion as well as... Rodolphe! why will you not understand! After all, however violent my passions may be, I shall be yours for ever! What should I say to persuade you? I will invent pleasures... I... Great heavens! one moment! whatever you shall ask of me—to fling myself from the window for instance—you will need to say but one word, ‘Leon!’ and I will plunge down into hell. I would bear any torture, any pain of body or soul, anything you might inflict upon me!”

Castanier heard her with indifference. For an answer, he indicated Leon to her with a fiendish laugh.

“The guillotine is waiting for him,” he repeated.

“No, no, no! He shall not leave this house. I will save him!” she cried. “Yes; I will kill any one who lays a finger upon him! Why will you not save him?” she shrieked aloud; her eyes were blazing, her hair unbound. “Can you save him?”

“I can do everything.”

“Why do you not save him?”

“Why?” shouted Castanier, and his voice made the ceiling ring.—“Eh! it is my revenge! Doing evil is my trade!”

“Die?” said Aquilina; “must he die, my lover? Is it possible?”

She sprang up and snatched a stiletto from a basket that stood on the chest of drawers and went to Castanier, who now began to laugh.

“You know very well that steel cannot hurt me now——”

Aquilina’s arm suddenly dropped like a snapped harp string.

“Out with you, my good friend,” said the cashier, turning to the sergeant, “and go about your business.”

He held out his hand; the other felt Castanier’s superior power, and could not choose but to obey.

“This house is mine; I could send for the commissary of police if I chose, and give you up as a man who has hidden himself on my premises, but I would rather let you go; I am a fiend, I am not a spy.”

“I shall follow him!” said Aquilina.

“Then follow him,” returned Castanier.—“Here, Jenny——”

Jenny appeared.

“Tell the porter to hail a cab for them.—Here Naqui,” said Castanier, drawing a bundle of bank-notes from his pocket; “you shall not go away like a pauper from a man who loves you still.”

He held out three hundred thousand francs. Aquilina took the notes, flung them on the floor, spat on them, and trampled upon them in a frenzy of despair.

“We will leave this house on foot,” she cried, “without a farthing of your money.—Jenny, stay where you are.”

“Good-evening!” answered the cashier, as he gathered up the notes again. “I have come back from my journey.—Jenny,” he added, looking at the bewildered waiting-maid, “you seem to me to be a good sort of girl. You have no mistress now. Come here. This evening you shall have a master.”

Aquilina, who felt safe nowhere, went at once with the sergeant to the house of one of her friends. But all Leon’s movements were suspiciously watched by the police, and after a time he and three of his friends were arrested. The whole story may be found in the newspapers of that day.

Castanier felt that he had undergone a mental as well as a physical transformation. The Castanier of old no longer existed—the boy, the young Lothario, the soldier who had proved his courage, who had been tricked into a marriage and disillusioned, the cashier, the passionate lover who had committed a crime for Aquilina’s sake. His inmost nature had suddenly

asserted itself. His brain had expanded, his senses had developed. His thoughts comprehended the whole world; he saw all the things of earth as if he had been raised to some high pinnacle above the world.

Until that evening at the play he had loved Aquilina to distraction. Rather than give her up he would have shut his eyes to her infidelities; and now all that blind passion had passed away as a cloud vanishes in the sunlight.

Jenny was delighted to succeed to her mistress' position and fortune, and did the cashier's will in all things; but Castanier, who could read the inmost thoughts of the soul, discovered the real motive underlying this purely physical devotion. He amused himself with her, however, like a mischievous child who greedily sucks the juice of the cherry and flings away the stone. The next morning at breakfast time, when she was fully convinced that she was a lady and the mistress of the house, Castanier uttered one by one the thoughts that filled her mind as she drank her coffee.

"Do you know what you are thinking, child?" he said, smiling. "I will tell you: 'So all that lovely rosewood furniture that I coveted so much, and the pretty dresses that I used to try on, are mine now! All on easy terms that Madame refused, I do no know why. My word! if I might drive about in a carriage, have jewels and pretty things, a box at the theatre, and put something by! with me he should lead a life of pleasure fit to kill him if he were not as strong as a Turk! I never saw such a man!'—Was not that just what you were thinking," he went on, and something in his voice made Jenny turn pale. "Well, yes, child; you could not stand it, and I am sending you away for your own good; you would perish in the attempt. Come, let us part good friends," and he coolly dismissed her with a very small sum of money.

The first use that Castanier had promised himself that he would make of the terrible power brought at the price of his eternal happiness, was the full and complete indulgence of all his tastes.

He first put his affairs in order, readily settled his accounts with M. de Nucingen, who found a worthy German to succeed him, and then determined on a carouse worthy of the palmiest days of the Roman Empire. He plunged into dissipation as recklessly as Belshazzar of old went to that last feast in Babylon. Like Belshazzar, he saw clearly through his revels a gleaming hand that traced his doom in letters of flame, not on the narrow walls of the banqueting-chamber, but over the vast spaces of heaven that the rainbow spans. His feast was not, indeed, an orgy confined within the limits of a banquet, for he squandered all the powers of soul and body in exhausting all the pleasures of earth. The table was in some sort earth itself, the earth that trembled beneath his feet. His was the last festival of the reckless spendthrift who has thrown all prudence to the winds. The devil had given him the key of

the storehouse of human pleasures; he had filled and refilled his hands, and he was fast nearing the bottom. In a moment he had felt all that that enormous power could accomplish; in a moment he had exercised it, proved it, wearied of it. What had hitherto been the sum of human desires became as nothing. So often it happens that with possession the vast poetry of desire must end, and the thing possessed is seldom the thing that we dreamed of.

Beneath Melmoth's omnipotence lurked this tragical anticlimax of so many a passion, and now the inanity of human nature was revealed to his successor, to whom infinite power brought Nothingness as a dowry.

To come to a clear understanding of Castanier's strange position, it must be borne in mind how suddenly these revolutions of thought and feeling had been wrought; how quickly they had succeeded each other; and of these things it is hard to give any idea to those who have never broken the prison bonds of time, and space, and distance. His relation to the world without had been entirely changed with the expansion of his faculties.

Like Melmoth himself, Castanier could travel in a few moments over the fertile plains of India, could soar on the wings of demons above African desert spaces, or skim the surface of the seas. The same insight that could read the inmost thoughts of others, could apprehend at a glance the nature of any material object, just as he caught as it were all flavors at once upon his tongue. He took his pleasure like a despot; a blow of the axe felled the tree that he might eat its fruits. The transitions, the alternations that measure joy and pain, and diversify human happiness, no longer existed for him. He had so completely glutted his appetites that pleasure must overpass the limits of pleasure to tickle a palate cloyed with satiety, and suddenly grown fastidious beyond all measure, so that ordinary pleasures became distasteful. Conscious that at will he was the master of all the women that he could desire, knowing that his power was irresistible, he did not care to exercise it; they were pliant to his unexpressed wishes, to his most extravagant caprices, until he felt a horrible thirst for love, and would have love beyond their power to give.

The world refused him nothing save faith and prayer, the soothing and consoling love that is not of this world. He was obeyed—it was a horrible position.

The torrents of pain, and pleasure, and thought that shook his soul and his bodily frame would have overwhelmed the strongest human being; but in him there was a power of vitality proportioned to the power of the sensations that assailed him. He felt within him a vague immensity of longing that earth could not satisfy. He spent his days on outspread wings, longing to traverse the luminous fields of space to other spheres that he knew afar by intuitive perception, a clear and hopeless knowledge. His soul dried up within him, for

he hungered and thirsted after things that can neither be drunk nor eaten, but for which he could not choose but crave. His lips, like Melmoth's, burned with desire; he panted for the unknown, for he knew all things.

The mechanism and the scheme of the world was apparent to him, and its working interested him no longer; he did not long disguise the profound scorn that makes of a man of extraordinary powers a sphinx who knows everything and says nothing, and sees all things with an unmoved countenance. He felt not the slightest wish to communicate his knowledge to other men. He was rich with all the wealth of the world, with one effort he could make the circle of the globe, and riches and power were meaningless for him. He felt the awful melancholy of omnipotence, a melancholy which Satan and God relieve by the exercise of infinite power in mysterious ways known to them alone. Castanier had not, like his Master, the inextinguishable energy of hate and malice; he felt that he was a devil, but a devil whose time was not yet come, while Satan is a devil through all eternity, and being damned beyond redemption, delights to stir up the world, like a dung heap, with his triple fork and to thwart therein the designs of God. But Castanier, for his misfortune, had one hope left.

If in a moment he could move from one pole to the other as a bird springs restlessly from side to side in its cage, when, like the bird, he has crossed his prison, he saw the vast immensity of space beyond it. That vision of the Infinite left him for ever unable to see humanity and its affairs as other men saw them. The insensate fools who long for the power of the Devil gauge its desirability from a human standpoint; they do not see that with the Devil's power they will likewise assume his thoughts, and that they will be doomed to remain as men among creatures who will no longer understand them. The Nero unknown to history who dreams of setting Paris on fire for his private entertainment, like an exhibition of a burning house on the boards of a theatre, does not suspect that if he had the power, Paris would become for him as little interesting as an ant-heap by the roadside to a hurrying passer-by. The circle of the sciences was for Castanier something like a logogriph for a man who does not know the key to it. Kings and Governments were despicable in his eyes. His great debauch had been in some sort a deplorable farewell to his life as a man. The earth had grown too narrow for him, for the infernal gifts laid bare for him the secrets of creation—he saw the cause and foresaw its end. He was shut out from all that men call "heaven" in all languages under the sun; he could no longer think of heaven.

Then he came to understand the look on his predecessor's face and the drying up of the life within; then he knew all that was meant by the baffled hope that gleamed in Melmoth's eyes; he, too, knew the thirst that burned those red lips, and the agony of a continual struggle between two natures

grown to giant size. Even yet he might be an angel, and he knew himself to be a fiend. His was the fate of a sweet and gentle creature that a wizard's malice has imprisoned in a mis-shapen form, entrapping it by a pact, so that another's will must set it free from its detested envelope.

As a deception only increases the ardor with which a man of really great nature explores the infinite of sentiment in a woman's heart, so Castanier awoke to find that one idea lay like a weight upon his soul, an idea which was perhaps the key to loftier spheres. The very fact that he had bartered away his eternal happiness led him to dwell in thought upon the future of those who pray and believe. On the morrow of his debauch, when he entered into the sober possession of his power, this idea made him feel himself a prisoner; he knew the burden of the woe that poets, and prophets, and great oracles of faith have set forth for us in such mighty words; he felt the point of the Flaming Sword plunged into his side, and hurried in search of Melmoth. What had become of his predecessor?

The Englishman was living in a mansion in the Rue Ferou, near Saint-Sulpice—a gloomy, dark, damp, and cold abode. The Rue Ferou itself is one of the most dismal streets in Paris; it has a north aspect like all the streets that lie at right angles to the left bank of the Seine, and the houses are in keeping with the site. As Castanier stood on the threshold he found that the door itself, like the vaulted roof, was hung with black; rows of lighted tapers shone brilliantly as though some king were lying in state; and a priest stood on either side of a catafalque that had been raised there.

"There is no need to ask why you have come, sir," the old hall porter said to Castanier; "you are so like our poor dear master that is gone. But if you are his brother, you have come too late to bid him good-bye. The good gentleman died the night before last."

"How did he die?" Castanier asked of one of the priests.

"Set your mind at rest," said the old priest; he partly raised as he spoke the black pall that covered the catafalque.

Castanier, looking at him, saw one of those faces that faith has made sublime; the soul seemed to shine forth from every line of it, bringing light and warmth for other men, kindled by the unfailing charity within. This was Sir John Melmoth's confessor.

"Your brother made an end that men may envy, and that must rejoice the angels. Do you know what joy there is in heaven over a sinner that repents? His tears of penitence, excited by grace, flowed without ceasing; death alone checked them. The Holy Spirit dwelt in him. His burning words, full of lively faith, were worthy of the Prophet-King. If, in the course of my life, I have

never heard a more dreadful confession than from the lips of this Irish gentleman, I have likewise never heard such fervent and passionate prayers. However great the measures of his sins may have been, his repentance has filled the abyss to overflowing. The hand of God was visibly stretched out above him, for he was completely changed, there was such heavenly beauty in his face. The hard eyes were softened by tears; the resonant voice that struck terror into those who heard it took the tender and compassionate tones of those who themselves have passed through deep humiliation. He so edified those who heard his words, that some who had felt drawn to see the spectacle of a Christian's death fell on their knees as he spoke of heavenly things, and of the infinite glory of God, and gave thanks and praise to Him. If he is leaving no worldly wealth to his family, no family can possess a greater blessing than this that he surely gained for them, a soul among the blessed, who will watch over you all and direct you in the path to heaven."

These words made such a vivid impression upon Castanier that he instantly hurried from the house to the Church of Saint-Sulpice, obeying what might be called a decree of fate. Melmoth's repentance had stupefied him.

At that time, on certain mornings in the week, a preacher, famed for his eloquence, was wont to hold conferences, in the course of which he demonstrated the truths of the Catholic faith for the youth of a generation proclaimed to be indifferent in matters of belief by another voice no less eloquent than his own. The conference had been put off to a later hour on account of Melmoth's funeral, so Castanier arrived just as the great preacher was epitomizing the proofs of a future existence of happiness with all the charm of eloquence and force of expression which have made him famous. The seeds of divine doctrine fell into a soil prepared for them in the old dragoon, into whom the Devil had glided. Indeed, if there is a phenomenon well attested by experience, is it not the spiritual phenomenon commonly called "the faith of the peasant"? The strength of belief varies inversely with the amount of use that a man has made of his reasoning faculties. Simple people and soldiers belong to the unreasoning class. Those who have marched through life beneath the banner of instinct are far more ready to receive the light than minds and hearts overwearied with the world's sophistries.

Castanier had the southern temperament; he had joined the army as a lad of sixteen, and had followed the French flag till he was nearly forty years old. As a common trooper, he had fought day and night, and day after day, and, as in duty bound, had thought of his horse first, and of himself afterwards. While he served his military apprenticeship, therefore, he had but little leisure in which to reflect on the destiny of man, and when he became an officer he had his men to think of. He had been swept from battlefield to battlefield, but he had never thought of what comes after death. A soldier's life does not demand

much thinking. Those who cannot understand the lofty political ends involved and the interests of nation and nation; who cannot grasp political schemes as well as plans of campaign, and combine the science of the tactician with that of the administrator, are bound to live in a state of ignorance; the most boorish peasant in the most backward district in France is scarcely in a worse case. Such men as these bear the brunt of war, yield passive obedience to the brain that directs them, and strike down the men opposed to them as the woodcutter fells timber in the forest. Violent physical exertion is succeeded by times of inertia, when they repair the waste. They fight and drink, fight and eat, fight and sleep, that they may the better deal hard blows; the powers of the mind are not greatly exercised in this turbulent round of existence, and the character is as simple as heretofore.

When the men who have shown such energy on the battlefield return to ordinary civilization, most of those who have not risen to high rank seem to have acquired no ideas, and to have no aptitude, no capacity, for grasping new ideas. To the utter amazement of a younger generation, those who made our armies so glorious and so terrible are as simple as children, and as slow-witted as a clerk at his worst, and the captain of a thundering squadron is scarcely fit to keep a merchant’s day-book. Old soldiers of this stamp, therefore being innocent of any attempt to use their reasoning faculties, act upon their strongest impulses. Castanier’s crime was one of those matters that raise so many questions, that, in order to debate about it, a moralist might call for its “discussion by clauses,” to make use of a parliamentary expression.

Passion had counseled the crime; the cruelly irresistible power of feminine witchery had driven him to commit it; no man can say of himself, “I will never do that,” when a siren joins in the combat and throws her spells over him.

So the word of life fell upon a conscience newly awakened to the truths of religion which the French Revolution and a soldier’s career had forced Castanier to neglect. The solemn words, “You will be happy or miserable for all eternity!” made but the more terrible impression upon him, because he had exhausted earth and shaken it like a barren tree; because his desires could effect all things, so that it was enough that any spot in earth or heaven should be forbidden him, and he forthwith thought of nothing else. If it were allowable to compare such great things with social follies, Castanier’s position was not unlike that of a banker who, finding that his all-powerful millions cannot obtain for him an entrance into the society of the noblesse, must set his heart upon entering that circle, and all the social privileges that he has already acquired are as nothing in his eyes from the moment when he discovers that a single one is lacking.

Here is a man more powerful than all the kings on earth put together; a man who, like Satan, could wrestle with God Himself; leaning against one of

the pillars in the Church of Saint-Sulpice, weighed down by the feelings and thoughts that oppressed him, and absorbed in the thought of a Future, the same thought that had engulfed Melmoth.

“He was very happy, was Melmoth!” cried Castanier. “He died in the certain knowledge that he would go to heaven.”

In a moment the greatest possible change had been wrought in the cashier’s ideas. For several days he had been a devil, now he was nothing but a man; an image of the fallen Adam, of the sacred tradition embodied in all cosmogonies. But while he had thus shrunk he retained a germ of greatness, he had been steeped in the Infinite. The power of hell had revealed the divine power. He thirsted for heaven as he had never thirsted after the pleasures of earth, that are so soon exhausted. The enjoyments which the fiend promises are but the enjoyments of earth on a larger scale, but to the joys of heaven there is no limit. He believed in God, and the spell that gave him the treasures of the world was as nothing to him now; the treasures themselves seemed to him as contemptible as pebbles to an admirer of diamonds; they were but gewgaws compared with the eternal glories of the other life. A curse lay, he thought, on all things that came to him from this source. He sounded dark depths of painful thought as he listened to the service performed for Melmoth. The Dies irae filled him with awe; he felt all the grandeur of that cry of a repentant soul trembling before the Throne of God. The Holy Spirit, like a devouring flame, passed through him as fire consumes straw.

The tears were falling from his eyes when—“Are you a relation of the dead?” the beadle asked him.

“I am his heir,” Castanier answered.

“Give something for the expenses of the services!” cried the man.

“No,” said the cashier. (The Devil’s money should not go to the Church.)

“For the poor!”

“No.”

“For repairing the Church!”

“No.”

“The Lady Chapel!”

“No.”

“For the schools!”

“No.”

Castanier went, not caring to expose himself to the sour looks that the

irritated functionaries gave him.

Outside, in the street, he looked up at the Church of Saint-Sulpice. “What made people build the giant cathedrals I have seen in every country?” he asked himself. “The feeling shared so widely throughout all time must surely be based upon something.”

“Something! Do you call God something?” cried his conscience. “God! God! God!...”

The word was echoed and re-echoed by an inner voice, til it overwhelmed him; but his feeling of terror subsided as he heard sweet distant sounds of music that he had caught faintly before. They were singing in the church, he thought, and his eyes scanned the great doorway. But as he listened more closely, the sounds poured upon him from all sides; he looked round the square, but there was no sign of any musicians. The melody brought visions of a distant heaven and far-off gleams of hope; but it also quickened the remorse that had set the lost soul in a ferment. He went on his way through Paris, walking as men walk who are crushed beneath the burden of their sorrow, seeing everything with unseeing eyes, loitering like an idler, stopping without cause, muttering to himself, careless of the traffic, making no effort to avoid a blow from a plank of timber.

Imperceptibly repentance brought him under the influence of the divine grace that soothes while it bruises the heart so terribly. His face came to wear a look of Melmoth, something great, with a trace of madness in the greatness—a look of dull and hopeless distress, mingled with the excited eagerness of hope, and, beneath it all, a gnawing sense of loathing for all that the world can give. The humblest of prayers lurked in the eyes that saw with such dreadful clearness. His power was the measure of his anguish. His body was bowed down by the fearful storm that shook his soul, as the tall pines bend before the blast. Like his predecessor, he could not refuse to bear the burden of life; he was afraid to die while he bore the yoke of hell. The torment grew intolerable.

At last, one morning, he bethought himself how that Melmoth (now among the blessed) had made the proposal of an exchange, and how that he had accepted it; others, doubtless, would follow his example; for in an age proclaimed, by the inheritors of the eloquence of the Fathers of the Church, to be fatally indifferent to religion, it should be easy to find a man who would accept the conditions of the contract in order to prove its advantages.

“There is one place where you can learn what kings will fetch in the market; where nations are weighed in the balance and systems appraised; where the value of a government is stated in terms of the five-franc piece; where ideas and beliefs have their price, and everything is discounted; where God Himself, in a manner, borrows on the security of His revenue of souls, for

the Pope has a running account there. Is it not there that I should go to traffic in souls?”

Castanier went quite joyously on ‘Change, thinking that it would be as easy to buy a soul as to invest money in the Funds. Any ordinary person would have feared ridicule, but Castanier knew by experience that a desperate man takes everything seriously. A prisoner lying under sentence of death would listen to the madman who should tell him that by pronouncing some gibberish he could escape through the keyhole; for suffering is credulous, and clings to an idea until it fails, as the swimmer borne along by the current clings to the branch that snaps in his hand.

Towards four o’clock that afternoon Castanier appeared among the little knots of men who were transacting private business after ‘Change. He was personally known to some of the brokers; and while affecting to be in search of an acquaintance, he managed to pick up the current gossip and rumors of failure.

“Catch me negotiating bills for Claparon & Co., my boy. The bank collector went round to return their acceptances to them this morning,” said a fat banker in his outspoken way. “If you have any of their paper, look out.”

Claparon was in the building, in deep consultation with a man well known for the ruinous rate at which he lent money. Castanier went forthwith in search of the said Claparon, a merchant who had a reputation for taking heavy risks that meant wealth or utter ruin. The money-lender walked away as Castanier came up. A gesture betrayed the speculator’s despair.

“Well, Claparon, the Bank wants a hundred thousand francs of you, and it is four o’clock; the thing is known, and it is too late to arrange your little failure comfortably,” said Castanier.

“Sir!”

“Speak lower,” the cashier went on. “How if I were to propose a piece of business that would bring you in as much money as you require?”

“It would not discharge my liabilities; every business that I ever heard of wants a little time to simmer in.”

“I know of something that will set you straight in a moment,” answered Castanier; “but first you would have to——”

“Do what?”

“Sell your share of paradise. It is a matter of business like anything else, isn’t it? We all hold shares in the great Speculation of Eternity.”

“I tell you this,” said Claparon angrily, “that I am just the man to lend you

a slap in the face. When a man is in trouble, it is no time to pay silly jokes on him."

"I am talking seriously," said Castanier, and he drew a bundle of notes from his pocket.

"In the first place," said Claparon, "I am not going to sell my soul to the Devil for a trifle. I want five hundred thousand francs before I strike——"

"Who talks of stinting you?" asked Castanier, cutting him short. "You shall have more gold than you could stow in the cellars of the Bank of France."

He held out a handful of notes. That decided Claparon.

"Done," he cried; "but how is the bargain to be make?"

"Let us go over yonder, no one is standing there," said Castanier, pointing to a corner of the court.

Claparon and his tempter exchanged a few words, with their faces turned to the wall. None of the onlookers guessed the nature of this by-play, though their curiosity was keenly excited by the strange gestures of the two contracting parties. When Castanier returned, there was a sudden outburst of amazed exclamation. As in the Assembly where the least event immediately attracts attention, all faces were turned to the two men who had caused the sensation, and a shiver passed through all beholders at the change that had taken place in them.

The men who form the moving crowd that fills the Stock Exchange are soon known to each other by sight. They watch each other like players round a card-table. Some shrewd observers can tell how a man will play and the condition of his exchequer from a survey of his face; and the Stock Exchange is simply a vast card-table. Every one, therefore, had noticed Claparon and Castanier. The latter (like the Irishman before him) had been muscular and powerful, his eyes were full of light, his color high. The dignity and power in his face had struck awe into them all; they wondered how old Castanier had come by it; and now they beheld Castanier divested of his power, shrunken, wrinkled, aged, and feeble. He had drawn Claparon out of the crowd with the energy of a sick man in a fever fit; he had looked like an opium-eater during the brief period of excitement that the drug can give; now, on his return, he seemed to be in the condition of utter exhaustion in which the patient dies after the fever departs, or to be suffering from the horrible prostration that follows on excessive indulgence in the delights of narcotics. The infernal power that had upheld him through his debauches had left him, and the body was left unaided and alone to endure the agony of remorse and the heavy burden of sincere repentance. Claparon's troubles every one could guess; but Claparon reappeared, on the other hand, with sparkling eyes, holding his head high with

the pride of Lucifer. The crisis had passed from the one man to the other.

“Now you can drop off with an easy mind, old man,” said Claparon to Castanier.

“For pity’s sake, send for a cab and for a priest; send for the curate of Saint-Sulpice!” answered the old dragoon, sinking down upon the curbstone.

The words “a priest” reached the ears of several people, and produced uproarious jeering among the stockbrokers, for faith with these gentlemen means a belief that a scrap of paper called a mortgage represents an estate, and the List of Fundholders is their Bible.

“Shall I have time to repent?” said Castanier to himself, in a piteous voice, that impressed Claparon.

A cab carried away the dying man; the speculator went to the bank at once to meet his bills; and the momentary sensation produced upon the throng of business men by the sudden change on the two faces, vanished like the furrow cut by a ship’s keel in the sea. News of the greatest importance kept the attention of the world of commerce on the alert; and when commercial interests are at stake, Moses might appear with his two luminous horns, and his coming would scarcely receive the honors of a pun, the gentlemen whose business it is to write the Market Reports would ignore his existence.

When Claparon had made his payments, fear seized upon him. There was no mistake about his power. He went on ‘Change again, and offered his bargain to other men in embarrassed circumstances. The Devil’s bond, “together with the rights, easements, and privileges appertaining thereunto,”—to use the expression of the notary who succeeded Claparon, changed hands for the sum of seven hundred thousand francs. The notary in his turn parted with the agreement with the Devil for five hundred thousand francs to a building contractor in difficulties, who likewise was rid of it to an iron merchant in consideration of a hundred thousand crowns. In fact, by five o’clock people had ceased to believe in the strange contract, and purchasers were lacking for want of confidence.

At half-past five the holder of the bond was a house-painter, who was lounging by the door of the building in the Rue Feydeau, where at that time stockbrokers temporarily congregated. The house-painter, simple fellow, could not think what was the matter with him. He “felt all anyhow”; so he told his wife when he went home.

The Rue Feydeau, as idlers about town are aware, is a place of pilgrimage for youths who for lack of a mistress bestow their ardent affection upon the whole sex. On the first floor of the most rigidly respectable domicile therein dwelt one of those exquisite creatures whom it has pleased heaven to endow

with the rarest and most surpassing beauty. As it is impossible that they should all be duchesses or queens (since there are many more pretty women in the world than titles and thrones for them to adorn), they are content to make a stockbroker or a banker happy at a fixed price. To this good-natured beauty, Euphrasia by name, an unbounded ambition had led a notary's clerk to aspire. In short, the second clerk in the office of Maitre Crottat, notary, had fallen in love with her, as youth at two-and-twenty can fall in love. The scrivener would have murdered the Pope and run amuck through the whole sacred college to procure the miserable sum of a hundred louis to pay for a shawl which had turned Euphrasia's head, at which price her waiting-woman had promised that Euphrasia should be his. The infatuated youth walked to and fro under Madame Euphrasia's windows, like the polar bears in their cage at the Jardin des Plantes, with his right hand thrust beneath his waistcoat in the region of the heart, which he was fit to tear from his bosom, but as yet he had only wrenched at the elastic of his braces.

"What can one do to raise ten thousand francs?" he asked himself. "Shall I make off with the money that I must pay on the registration of that conveyance? Good heavens! my loan would not ruin the purchaser, a man with seven millions! And then next day I would fling myself at his feet and say, 'I have taken ten thousand francs belonging to you, sir; I am twenty-two years of age, and I am in love with Euphrasia—that is my story. My father is rich, he will pay you back; do not ruin me! Have not you yourself been twenty-two years old and madly in love?' But these beggarly landowners have no souls! He would be quite likely to give me up to the public prosecutor, instead of taking pity upon me. Good God! if it were only possible to sell your soul to the Devil! But there is neither a God nor a Devil; it is all nonsense out of nursery tales and old wives' talk. What shall I do?"

"If you have a mind to sell your soul to the Devil, sir," said the house-painter, who had overheard something that the clerk let fall, "you can have the ten thousand francs."

"And Euphrasia!" cried the clerk, as he struck a bargain with the devil that inhabited the house-painter.

The pact concluded, the frantic clerk went to find the shawl, and mounted Madame Euphrasia's staircase; and as (literally) the devil was in him, he did not come down for twelve days, drowning the thought of hell and of his privileges in twelve days of love and riot and forgetfulness, for which he had bartered away all his hopes of a paradise to come.

And in this way the secret of the vast power discovered and acquired by the Irishman, the offspring of Maturin's brain, was lost to mankind; and the various Orientalists, Mystics, and Archaeologists who take an interest in these

matters were unable to hand down to posterity the proper method of invoking the Devil, for the following sufficient reasons:

On the thirteenth day after these frenzied nuptials the wretched clerk lay on a pallet bed in a garret in his master's house in the Rue Saint-Honore. Shame, the stupid goddess who dares not behold herself, had taken possession of the young man. He had fallen ill; he would nurse himself; misjudged the quantity of a remedy devised by the skill of a practitioner well known on the walls of Paris, and succumbed to the effects of an overdose of mercury. His corpse was as black as a mole's back. A devil had left unmistakable traces of its passage there; could it have been Ashtaroth?

"The estimable youth to whom you refer has been carried away to the planet Mercury," said the head clerk to a German demonologist who came to investigate the matter at first hand.

"I am quite prepared to believe it," answered the Teuton.

"Oh!"

"Yes, sir," returned the other. "The opinion you advance coincides with the very words of Jacob Boehme. In the forty-eighth proposition of The Threefold Life of Man he says that 'if God hath brought all things to pass with a LET THERE BE, the FIAT is the secret matrix which comprehends and apprehends the nature which is formed by the spirit born of Mercury and of God.'"

"What do you say, sir?"

The German delivered his quotation afresh.

"We do not know it," said the clerks.

"Fiat?..." said a clerk. "Fiat lux!"

"You can verify the citation for yourselves," said the German. "You will find the passage in the Treatise of the Threefold Life of Man, page 75; the edition was published by M. Migneret in 1809. It was translated into French by a philosopher who had a great admiration for the famous shoemaker."

"Oh! he was a shoemaker, was he?" said the head clerk.

"In Prussia," said the German.

"Did he work for the King of Prussia?" inquired a Boeotian of a second clerk.

"He must have vamped up his prose," said a third.

"That man is colossal!" cried the fourth, pointing to the Teuton.

That gentleman, though a demonologist of the first rank, did not know the

amount of devilry to be found in a notary's clerk. He went away without the least idea that they were making game of him, and fully under the impression that the young fellows regarded Boehme as a colossal genius.

"Education is making strides in France," said he to himself.

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THE HATED SON

PART I. HOW THE MOTHER LIVED

CHAPTER I. A BEDROOM OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

On a winter's night, about two in the morning, the Comtesse Jeanne d'Herouville felt such violent pains that in spite of her inexperience, she was conscious of an approaching confinement; and the instinct which makes us hope for ease in a change of posture induced her to sit up in her bed, either to study the nature of these new sufferings, or to reflect on her situation. She was a prey to cruel fears,—caused less by the dread of a first lying-in, which terrifies most women, than by certain dangers which awaited her child.

In order not to awaken her husband who was sleeping beside her, the poor woman moved with precautions which her intense terror made as minute as those of a prisoner endeavoring to escape. Though the pains became more and more severe, she ceased to feel them, so completely did she concentrate her own strength on the painful effort of resting her two moist hands on the pillow and so turning her suffering body from a posture in which she could find no ease. At the slightest rustling of the huge green silk coverlet, under which she had slept but little since her marriage, she stopped as though she had rung a bell. Forced to watch the count, she divided her attention between the folds of the rustling stuff and a large swarthy face, the moustache of which was brushing her shoulder. When some noisier breath than usual left her husband's lips, she was filled with a sudden terror that revived the color driven from her cheeks by her double anguish.

The prisoner reached the prison door in the dead of night and trying to noiselessly turn the key in a pitiless lock, was never more timidly bold.

When the countess had succeeded in rising to her seat without awakening her keeper, she made a gesture of childlike joy which revealed the touching naivete of her nature. But the half-formed smile on her burning lips was

quickly suppressed; a thought came to darken that pure brow, and her long blue eyes resumed their sad expression. She gave a sigh and again laid her hands, not without precaution, on the fatal conjugal pillow. Then—as if for the first time since her marriage she found herself free in thought and action—she looked at the things around her, stretching out her neck with little darting motions like those of a bird in its cage. Seeing her thus, it was easy to divine that she had once been all gaiety and light-heartedness, but that fate had suddenly mown down her hopes, and changed her ingenuous gaiety to sadness.

The chamber was one of those which, to this day octogenarian porters of old chateaus point out to visitors as “the state bedroom where Louis XIII. once slept.” Fine pictures, mostly brown in tone, were framed in walnut, the delicate carvings of which were blackened by time. The rafters of the ceiling formed compartments adorned with arabesques in the style of the preceding century, which preserved the colors of the chestnut wood. These decorations, severe in tone, reflected the light so little that it was difficult to see their designs, even when the sun shone full into that long and wide and lofty chamber. The silver lamp, placed upon the mantel of the vast fireplace, lighted the room so feebly that its quivering gleam could be compared only to the nebulous stars which appear at moments through the dun gray clouds of an autumn night. The fantastic figures crowded on the marble of the fireplace, which was opposite to the bed, were so grotesquely hideous that she dared not fix her eyes upon them, fearing to see them move, or to hear a startling laugh from their gaping and twisted mouths.

At this moment a tempest was growling in the chimney, giving to every puff of wind a lugubrious meaning,—the vast size of the flute putting the hearth into such close communication with the skies above that the embers upon it had a sort of respiration; they sparkled and went out at the will of the wind. The arms of the family of Herouville, carved in white marble with their mantle and supporters, gave the appearance of a tomb to this species of edifice, which formed a pendant to the bed, another erection raised to the glory of Hymen. Modern architects would have been puzzled to decide whether the room had been built for the bed or the bed for the room. Two cupids playing on the walnut headboard, wreathed with garlands, might have passed for angels; and columns of the same wood, supporting the tester were carved with mythological allegories, the explanation of which could have been found either in the Bible or Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Take away the bed, and the same tester would have served in a church for the canopy of the pulpit or the seats of the wardens. The married pair mounted by three steps to this sumptuous couch, which stood upon a platform and was hung with curtains of green silk covered with brilliant designs called “ramages”—possibly because the birds of gay plumage there depicted were supposed to sing. The folds of these

immense curtains were so stiff that in the semi-darkness they might have been taken for some metal fabric. On the green velvet hanging, adorned with gold fringes, which covered the foot of this lordly couch the superstition of the Comtes d'Herouville had affixed a large crucifix, on which their chaplain placed a fresh branch of sacred box when he renewed at Easter the holy water in the basin at the foot of the cross.

On one side of the fireplace stood a large box or wardrobe of choice woods magnificently carved, such as brides receive even now in the provinces on their wedding day. These old chests, now so much in request by antiquaries, were the arsenals from which women drew the rich and elegant treasures of their personal adornment,—laces, bodices, high collars and ruffs, gowns of price, alms-purses, masks, gloves, veils,—in fact all the inventions of coquetry in the sixteenth century.

On the other side, by way of symmetry, was another piece of furniture, somewhat similar in shape, where the countess kept her books, papers, and jewels. Antique chairs covered with damask, a large and greenish mirror, made in Venice, and richly framed in a sort of rolling toilet-table, completed the furnishings of the room. The floor was covered with a Persian carpet, the richness of which proved the gallantry of the count; on the upper step of the bed stood a little table, on which the waiting-woman served every night in a gold or silver cup a drink prepared with spices.

After we have gone some way in life we know the secret influence exerted by places on the condition of the soul. Who has not had his darksome moments, when fresh hope has come into his heart from things that surrounded him? The fortunate, or the unfortunate man, attributes an intelligent countenance to the things among which he lives; he listens to them, he consults them—so naturally superstitious is he. At this moment the countess turned her eyes upon all these articles of furniture, as if they were living beings whose help and protection she implored; but the answer of that sombre luxury seemed to her inexorable.

Suddenly the tempest redoubled. The poor young woman could augur nothing favorable as she listened to the threatening heavens, the changes of which were interpreted in those credulous days according to the ideas or the habits of individuals. Suddenly she turned her eyes to the two arched windows at the end of the room; but the smallness of their panes and the multiplicity of the leaden lines did not allow her to see the sky and judge if the world were coming to an end, as certain monks, eager for donations, affirmed. She might easily have believed in such predictions, for the noise of the angry sea, the waves of which beat against the castle wall, combined with the mighty voice of the tempest, so that even the rocks appeared to shake. Though her sufferings were now becoming keener and less endurable, the countess dared

not awaken her husband; but she turned and examined his features, as if despair were urging her to find a consolation there against so many sinister forebodings.

If matters were sad around the poor young woman, that face, notwithstanding the tranquillity of sleep, seemed sadder still. The light from the lamp, flickering in the draught, scarcely reached beyond the foot of the bed and illumined the count's head capriciously; so that the fitful movements of its flash upon those features in repose produced the effect of a struggle with angry thought. The countess was scarcely reassured by perceiving the cause of that phenomenon. Each time that a gust of wind projected the light upon the count's large face, casting shadows among its bony outlines, she fancied that her husband was about to fix upon her his two insupportably stern eyes.

Implacable as the war then going on between the Church and Calvinism, the count's forehead was threatening even while he slept. Many furrows, produced by the emotions of a warrior life, gave it a vague resemblance to the vermiculated stone which we see in the buildings of that period; his hair, like the whitish lichen of old oaks, gray before its time, surrounded without grace a cruel brow, where religious intolerance showed its passionate brutality. The shape of the aquiline nose, which resembled the beak of a bird of prey, the black and crinkled lids of the yellow eyes, the prominent bones of a hollow face, the rigidity of the wrinkles, the disdain expressed in the lower lip, were all expressive of ambition, despotism, and power, the more to be feared because the narrowness of the skull betrayed an almost total absence of intelligence, and a mere brute courage devoid of generosity. The face was horribly disfigured by a large transversal scar which had the appearance of a second mouth on the right cheek.

At the age of thirty-three the count, anxious to distinguish himself in that unhappy religious war the signal for which was given on Saint-Bartholomew's day, had been grievously wounded at the siege of Rochelle. The misfortune of this wound increased his hatred against the partisans of what the language of that day called "the Religion," but, by a not unnatural turn of mind, he included in that antipathy all handsome men. Before the catastrophe, however, he was so repulsively ugly that no lady had ever been willing to receive him as a suitor. The only passion of his youth was for a celebrated woman called La Belle Romaine. The distrust resulting from this new misfortune made him suspicious to the point of not believing himself capable of inspiring a true passion; and his character became so savage that when he did have some successes in gallantry he owed them to the terror inspired by his cruelty. The left hand of this terrible Catholic, which lay on the outside of the bed, will complete this sketch of his character. Stretched out as if to guard the countess, as a miser guards his hoard, that enormous hand was covered with hair so

thick, it presented such a network of veins and projecting muscles, that it gave the idea of a branch of birch clasped with a growth of yellowing ivy.

Children looking at the count's face would have thought him an ogre, terrible tales of whom they knew by heart. It was enough to see the width and length of the space occupied by the count in the bed, to imagine his gigantic proportions. When awake, his gray eyebrows hid his eyelids in a way to heighten the light of his eye, which glittered with the luminous ferocity of a wolf skulking on the watch in a forest. Under his lion nose, with its flaring nostrils, a large and ill-kept moustache (for he despised all toilet niceties) completely concealed the upper lip. Happily for the countess, her husband's wide mouth was silent at this moment, for the softest sounds of that harsh voice made her tremble. Though the Comte d'Herouville was barely fifty years of age, he appeared at first sight to be sixty, so much had the toils of war, without injuring his robust constitution, dilapidated him physically.

The countess, who was now in her nineteenth year, made a painful contrast to that large, repulsive figure. She was fair and slim. Her chestnut locks, threaded with gold, played upon her neck like russet shadows, and defined a face such as Carlo Dolce has painted for his ivory-toned madonnas,—a face which now seemed ready to expire under the increasing attacks of physical pain. You might have thought her the apparition of an angel sent from heaven to soften the iron will of the terrible count.

"No, he will not kill us!" she cried to herself mentally, after contemplating her husband for a long time. "He is frank, courageous, faithful to his word—faithful to his word!"

Repeating that last sentence in her thoughts, she trembled violently, and remained as if stupefied.

To understand the horror of her present situation, we must add that this nocturnal scene took place in 1591, a period when civil war raged throughout France, and the laws had no vigor. The excesses of the League, opposed to the accession of Henri IV., surpassed the calamities of the religious wars. License was so universal that no one was surprised to see a great lord kill his enemy in open day. When a military expedition, having a private object, was led in the name of the King or of the League, one or other of these parties applauded it. It was thus that Blagny, a soldier, came near becoming a sovereign prince at the gates of France. Sometime before Henri III.'s death, a court lady murdered a nobleman who made offensive remarks about her. One of the king's minions remarked to him:—

"Hey! vive Dieu! sire, she daggered him finely!"

The Comte d'Herouville, one of the most rabid royalists in Normandy, kept

the part of that province which adjoins Brittany under subjection to Henri IV. by the rigor of his executions. The head of one of the richest families in France, he had considerably increased the revenues of his great estates by marrying seven months before the night on which this history begins, Jeanne de Saint-Savin, a young lady who, by a not uncommon chance in days when people were killed off like flies, had suddenly become the representative of both branches of the Saint-Savin family. Necessity and terror were the causes which led to this union. At a banquet given, two months after the marriage, to the Comte and Comtesse d'Herouville, a discussion arose on a topic which in those days of ignorance was thought amusing: namely, the legitimacy of children coming into the world ten months after the death of their fathers, or seven months after the wedding day.

"Madame," said the count brutally, turning to his wife, "if you give me a child ten months after my death, I cannot help it; but be careful that you are not brought to bed in seven months!"

"What would you do then, old bear?" asked the young Marquis de Verneuil, thinking that the count was joking.

"I should wring the necks of mother and child!"

An answer so peremptory closed the discussion, imprudently started by a seigneur from Lower Normandy. The guests were silent, looking with a sort of terror at the pretty Comtesse d'Herouville. All were convinced that if such an event occurred, her savage lord would execute his threat.

The words of the count echoed in the bosom of the young wife, then pregnant; one of those presentiments which furrow a track like lightning through the soul, told her that her child would be born at seven months. An inward heat overflowed her from head to foot, sending the life's blood to her heart with such violence that the surface of her body felt bathed in ice. From that hour not a day had passed that the sense of secret terror did not check every impulse of her innocent gaiety. The memory of the look, of the inflections of voice with which the count accompanied his words, still froze her blood, and silenced her sufferings, as she leaned over that sleeping head, and strove to see some sign of a pity she had vainly sought there when awake.

The child, threatened with death before its life began, made so vigorous a movement that she cried aloud, in a voice that seemed like a sigh, "Poor babe!"

She said no more; there are ideas that a mother cannot bear. Incapable of reasoning at this moment, the countess was almost choked with the intensity of a suffering as yet unknown to her. Two tears, escaping from her eyes, rolled slowly down her cheeks, and traced two shining lines, remaining suspended at

the bottom of that white face, like dewdrops on a lily. What learned man would take upon himself to say that the child unborn is on some neutral ground, where the emotions of its mother do not penetrate during those hours when soul clasps body and communicates its impressions, when thought permeates blood with healing balm or poisonous fluids? The terror that shakes the tree, will it not hurt the fruit? Those words, “Poor babe!” were they dictated by a vision of the future? The shuddering of this mother was violent; her look piercing.

The bloody answer given by the count at the banquet was a link mysteriously connecting the past with this premature confinement. That odious suspicion, thus publicly expressed, had cast into the memories of the countess a dread which echoed to the future. Since that fatal gala, she had driven from her mind, with as much fear as another woman would have found pleasure in evoking them, a thousand scattered scenes of her past existence. She refused even to think of the happy days when her heart was free to love. Like as the melodies of their native land make exiles weep, so these memories revived sensations so delightful that her young conscience thought them crimes, and sued them to enforce still further the savage threat of the count. There lay the secret of the horror which was now oppressing her soul.

Sleeping figures possess a sort of suavity, due to the absolute repose of both body and mind; but though that species of calmness softened but slightly the harsh expression of the count’s features, all illusion granted to the unhappy is so persuasive that the poor wife ended by finding hope in that tranquillity. The roar of the tempest, now descending in torrents of rain, seemed to her no more than a melancholy moan; her fears and her pains both yielded her a momentary respite. Contemplating the man to whom her life was bound, the countess allowed herself to float into a reverie, the sweetness of which was so intoxicating that she had no strength to break its charm. For a moment, by one of those visions which in some way share the divine power, there passed before her rapid images of a happiness lost beyond recall.

Jeanne in her vision saw faintly, and as if in a distant gleam of dawn, the modest castle where her careless childhood had glided on; there were the verdant lawns, the rippling brook, the little chamber, the scenes of her happy play. She saw herself gathering flowers and planting them, unknowing why they wilted and would not grow, despite her constancy in watering them. Next, she saw confusedly the vast town and the vast house blackened by age, to which her mother took her when she was seven years old. Her lively memory showed her the old gray heads of the masters who taught and tormented her. She remembered the person of her father; she saw him getting off his mule at the door of the manor-house, and taking her by the hand to lead her up the stairs; she recalled how her prattle drove from his brow the judicial cares he

did not always lay aside with his black or his red robes, the white fur of which fell one day by chance under the snipping of her mischievous scissors. She cast but one glance at the confessor of her aunt, the mother-superior of a convent of Poor Clares, a rigid and fanatical old man, whose duty it was to initiate her into the mysteries of religion. Hardened by the severities necessary against heretics, the old priest never ceased to jangle the chains of hell; he told her of nothing but the vengeance of Heaven, and made her tremble with the assurance that God's eye was on her. Rendered timid, she dared not raise her eyes in the priest's presence, and ceased to have any feeling but respect for her mother, whom up to that time she had made a sharer in all her frolics. When she saw that beloved mother turning her blue eyes towards her with an appearance of anger, a religious terror took possession of the girl's heart.

Then suddenly the vision took her to the second period of her childhood, when as yet she understood nothing of the things of life. She thought with an almost mocking regret of the days when all her happiness was to work beside her mother in the tapestried salon, to pray in the church, to sing her ballads to a lute, to read in secret a romance of chivalry, to pluck the petals of a flower, discover what gift her father would make her on the feast of the Blessed Saint-John, and find out the meaning of speeches repressed before her. Passing thus from her childish joys through the sixteen years of her girlhood, the grace of those softly flowing years when she knew no pain was eclipsed by the brightness of a memory precious though ill-fated. The joyous peace of her childhood was far less sweet to her than a single one of the troubles scattered upon the last two years of her childhood,—years that were rich in treasures now buried forever in her heart.

The vision brought her suddenly to that morning, that ravishing morning, when in the grand old parlor panelled and carved in oak, which served the family as a dining-room, she saw her handsome cousin for the first time. Alarmed by the seditions in Paris, her mother's family had sent the young courtier to Rouen, hoping that he could there be trained to the duties of the magistracy by his uncle, whose office might some day devolve upon him. The countess smiled involuntarily as she remembered the haste with which she retired on seeing this relation whom she did not know. But, in spite of the rapidity with which she opened and shut the door, a single glance had put into her soul so vigorous an impression of the scene that even at this moment she seemed to see it still occurring. Her eye again wandered from the violet velvet mantle embroidered with gold and lined with satin to the spurs on the boots, the pretty lozenges slashed into the doublet, the trunk-hose, and the rich collaret which gave to view a throat as white as the lace around it. She stroked with her hand the handsome face with its tiny pointed moustache, and "royale" as small as the ermine tips upon her father's hood.

In the silence of the night, with her eyes fixed on the green silk curtains which she no longer saw, the countess, forgetting the storm, her husband, and her fears, recalled the days which seemed to her longer than years, so full were they,—days when she loved, and was beloved!—and the moment when, fearing her mother's sternness, she had slipped one morning into her father's study to whisper her girlish confidences on his knee, waiting for his smile at her caresses to say in his ear, "Will you scold me if I tell you something?" Once more she heard her father say, after a few questions in reply to which she spoke for the first time of her love, "Well, well, my child, we will think of it. If he studies well, if he fits himself to succeed me, if he continues to please you, I will be on your side."

After that she had listened no longer; she had kissed her father, and, knocking over his papers as she ran from the room, she flew to the great linden-tree where, daily, before her formidable mother rose, she met that charming cousin, Georges de Chaverny.

Faithfully the youth promised to study law and customs. He laid aside the splendid trappings of the nobility of the sword to wear the sterner costume of the magistracy.

"I like you better in black," she said.

It was a falsehood, but by that falsehood she comforted her lover for having thrown his dagger to the winds. The memory of the little schemes employed to deceive her mother, whose severity seemed great, brought back to her the soulful joys of that innocent and mutual and sanctioned love; sometimes a rendezvous beneath the linden, where speech could be freer than before witnesses; sometimes a furtive clasp, or a stolen kiss,—in short, all the naive instalments of a passion that did not pass the bounds of modesty. Reliving in her vision those delightful days when she seemed to have too much happiness, she fancied that she kissed, in the void, that fine young face with the glowing eyes, that rosy mouth that spoke so well of love. Yes, she had loved Chaverny, poor apparently; but what treasures had she not discovered in that soul as tender as it was strong!

Suddenly her father died. Chaverny did not succeed him. The flames of civil war burst forth. By Chaverny's care she and her mother found refuge in a little town of Lower Normandy. Soon the deaths of other relatives made her one of the richest heiresses in France. Happiness disappeared as wealth came to her. The savage and terrible face of Comte d'Herouville, who asked her hand, rose before her like a thunder-cloud, spreading its gloom over the smiling meadows so lately gilded by the sun. The poor countess strove to cast from her memory the scenes of weeping and despair brought about by her long resistance.

At last came an awful night when her mother, pale and dying, threw herself at her daughter’s feet. Jeanne could save Chaverny’s life by yielding; she yielded. It was night. The count, arriving bloody from the battlefield was there; all was ready, the priest, the altar, the torches! Jeanne belonged henceforth to misery. Scarcely had she time to say to her young cousin who was set at liberty:—

“Georges, if you love me, never see me again!”

She heard the departing steps of her lover, whom, in truth, she never saw again; but in the depths of her heart she still kept sacred his last look which returned perpetually in her dreams and illumined them. Living like a cat shut into a lion’s cage, the young wife dreaded at all hours the claws of the master which ever threatened her. She knew that in order to be happy she must forget the past and think only of the future; but there were days, consecrated to the memory of some vanished joy, when she deliberately made it a crime to put on the gown she had worn on the day she had seen her lover for the first time.

“I am not guilty,” she said, “but if I seem guilty to the count it is as if I were so. Perhaps I am! The Holy Virgin conceived without—”

She stopped. During this moment when her thoughts were misty and her soul floated in a region of fantasy her naivete made her attribute to that last look with which her lover transfixed her the occult power of the visitation of the angel to the Mother of her Lord. This supposition, worthy of the days of innocence to which her reverie had carried her back, vanished before the memory of a conjugal scene more odious than death. The poor countess could have no real doubt as to the legitimacy of the child that stirred in her womb. The night of her marriage reappeared to her in all the horror if its agony, bringing in its train other such nights and sadder days.

“Ah! my poor Chaverny!” she cried, weeping, “you so respectful, so gracious, YOU were always kind to me.”

She turned her eyes to her husband as if to persuade herself that that harsh face contained a promise of mercy, dearly brought. The count was awake. His yellow eyes, clear as those of a tiger, glittered beneath their tufted eyebrows and never had his glance been so incisive. The countess, terrified at having encountered it, slid back under the great counterpane and was motionless.

“Why are you weeping?” said the count, pulling away the covering which hid his wife.

That voice, always a terror to her, had a specious softness at this moment which seemed to her of good augury.

“I suffer much,” she answered.

“Well, my pretty one, it is no crime to suffer; why did you tremble when I looked at you? Alas! what must I do to be loved?” The wrinkles of his forehead between the eyebrows deepened. “I see plainly you are afraid of me,” he added, sighing.

Prompted by the instinct of feeble natures the countess interrupted the count by moans, exclaiming:—

“I fear a miscarriage! I clambered over the rocks last evening and tired myself.”

Hearing those words, the count cast so horribly suspicious a look upon his wife, that she reddened and shuddered. He mistook the fear of the innocent creature for remorse.

“Perhaps it is the beginning of a regular childbirth,” he said.

“What then?” she said.

“In any case, I must have a proper man here,” he said. “I will fetch one.”

The gloomy look which accompanied these words overcame the countess, who fell back in the bed with a moan, caused more by a sense of her fate than by the agony of the coming crisis; that moan convinced the count of the justice of the suspicions that were rising in his mind. Affecting a calmness which the tones of his voice, his gestures, and looks contradicted, he rose hastily, wrapped himself in a dressing-gown which lay on a chair, and began by locking a door near the chimney through which the state bedroom was entered from the reception rooms which communicated with the great staircase.

Seeing her husband pocket that key, the countess had a presentiment of danger. She next heard him open the door opposite to that which he had just locked and enter a room where the counts of Herouville slept when they did not honor their wives with their noble company. The countess knew of that room only by hearsay. Jealousy kept her husband always with her. If occasionally some military expedition forced him to leave her, the count left more than one Argus, whose incessant spying proved his shameful distrust.

In spite of the attention the countess now gave to the slightest noise, she heard nothing more. The count had, in fact, entered a long gallery leading from his room which continued down the western wing of the castle. Cardinal d’Herouville, his great-uncle, a passionate lover of the works of printing, had there collected a library as interesting for the number as for the beauty of its volumes, and prudence had caused him to build into the walls one of those curious inventions suggested by solitude or by monastic fears. A silver chain set in motion, by means of invisible wires, a bell placed at the bed’s head of a faithful servitor. The count now pulled the chain, and the boots and spurs of

the man on duty sounded on the stone steps of a spiral staircase, placed in the tall tower which flanked the western corner of the chateau on the ocean side.

When the count heard the steps of his retainer he pulled back the rusty bolts which protected the door leading from the gallery to the tower, admitting into the sanctuary of learning a man of arms whose stalwart appearance was in keeping with that of his master. This man, scarcely awakened, seemed to have walked there by instinct; the horn lantern which he held in his hand threw so feeble a gleam down the long library that his master and he appeared in that visible darkness like two phantoms.

“Saddle my war-horse instantly, and come with me yourself.”

This order was given in a deep tone which roused the man’s intelligence. He raised his eyes to those of his master and encountered so piercing a look that the effect was that of an electric shock.

“Bertrand,” added the count laying his right hand on the servant’s arm, “take off your cuirass, and wear the uniform of a captain of guerrillas.”

“Heavens and earth, monseigneur! What? disguise myself as a Leaguer! Excuse me, I will obey you; but I would rather be hanged.”

The count smiled; then to efface that smile, which contrasted with the expression of his face, he answered roughly:—

“Choose the strongest horse there is in the stable and follow me. We shall ride like balls shot from an arquebuse. Be ready when I am ready. I will ring to let you know.”

Bertrand bowed in silence and went away; but when he had gone a few steps he said to himself, as he listened to the howling of the storm:—

“All the devils are abroad, jarnidieu! I’d have been surprised to see this one stay quietly in his bed. We took Saint-Lo in just such a tempest as this.”

The count kept in his room a disguise which often served him in his campaign stratagems. Putting on the shabby buff-coat that looked as thought it might belong to one of the poor horse-soldiers whose pittance was so seldom paid by Henri IV., he returned to the room where his wife was moaning.

“Try to suffer patiently,” he said to her. “I will founder my horse if necessary to bring you speedy relief.”

These words were certainly not alarming, and the countess, emboldened by them, was about to make a request when the count asked her suddenly:—

“Tell me where you keep your masks?”

“My masks!” she replied. “Good God! what do you want to do with

them?”

“Where are they?” he repeated, with his usual violence.

“In the chest,” she said.

She shuddered when she saw her husband select from among her masks a “touret de nez,” the wearing of which was as common among the ladies of that time as the wearing of gloves in our day. The count became entirely unrecognizable after he had put on an old gray felt hat with a broken cock’s feather on his head. He girded round his loins a broad leathern belt, in which he stuck a dagger, which he did not wear habitually. These miserable garments gave him so terrifying an air and he approached the bed with so strange a motion that the countess thought her last hour had come.

“Ah! don’t kill us!” she cried, “leave me my child, and I will love you well.”

“You must feel yourself very guilty to offer as the ransom of your faults the love you owe me.”

The count’s voice was lugubrious and the bitter words were enforced by a look which fell like lead upon the countess.

“My God!” she cried sorrowfully, “can innocence be fatal?”

“Your death is not in question,” said her master, coming out of a sort of reverie into which he had fallen. “You are to do exactly, and for love of me, what I shall now tell you.”

He flung upon the bed one of the two masks he had taken from the chest, and smiled with derision as he saw the gesture of involuntary fear which the slight shock of the black velvet wrung from his wife.

“You will give me a puny child!” he cried. “Wear that mask on your face when I return. I’ll have no barber-surgeon boast that he has seen the Comtesse d’Herouville.”

“A man!—why choose a man for the purpose?” she said in a feeble voice.

“Ho! ho! my lady, am I not master here?” replied the count.

“What matters one horror the more!” murmured the countess; but her master had disappeared, and the exclamation did her no injury.

Presently, in a brief lull of the storm, the countess heard the gallop of two horses which seemed to fly across the sandy dunes by which the castle was surrounded. The sound was quickly lost in that of the waves. Soon she felt herself a prisoner in the vast apartment, alone in the midst of a night both silent and threatening, and without succor against an evil she saw approaching

her with rapid strides. In vain she sought for some stratagem by which to save that child conceived in tears, already her consolation, the spring of all her thoughts, the future of her affections, her one frail hope.

Sustained by maternal courage, she took the horn with which her husband summoned his men, and, opening a window, blew through the brass tube feeble notes that died away upon the vast expanse of water, like a bubble blown into the air by a child. She felt the uselessness of that moan unheard of men, and turned to hasten through the apartments, hoping that all the issues were not closed upon her. Reaching the library she sought in vain for some secret passage; then, passing between the long rows of books, she reached a window which looked upon the courtyard. Again she sounded the horn, but without success against the voice of the hurricane.

In her helplessness she thought of trusting herself to one of the women,—all creatures of her husband,—when, passing into her oratory, she found that the count had locked the only door that led to their apartments. This was a horrible discovery. Such precautions taken to isolate her showed a desire to proceed without witnesses to some horrible execution. As moment after moment she lost hope, the pangs of childbirth grew stronger and keener. A presentiment of murder, joined to the fatigue of her efforts, overcame her last remaining strength. She was like a shipwrecked man who sinks, borne under by one last wave less furious than others he has vanquished. The bewildering pangs of her condition kept her from knowing the lapse of time. At the moment when she felt that, alone, without help, she was about to give birth to her child, and to all her other terrors was added that of the accidents to which her ignorance exposed her, the count appeared, without a sound that let her know of his arrival. The man was there, like a demon claiming at the close of a compact the soul that was sold to him. He muttered angrily at finding his wife’s face uncovered; then after masking her carefully, he took her in his arms and laid her on the bed in her chamber.

CHAPTER II. THE BONESETTER

The terror of that apparition and hasty removal stopped for a moment the physical sufferings of the countess, and so enabled her to cast a furtive glance at the actors in this mysterious scene. She did not recognize Bertrand, who was there disguised and masked as carefully as his master. After lighting in haste some candles, the light of which mingled with the first rays of the sun which were reddening the window panes, the old servitor had gone to the embrasure of a window and stood leaning against a corner of it. There, with

his face towards the wall, he seemed to be estimating its thickness, keeping his body in such absolute immobility that he might have been taken for a statue. In the middle of the room the countess beheld a short, stout man, apparently out of breath and stupefied, whose eyes were blindfolded and his features so distorted with terror that it was impossible to guess at their natural expression.

“God’s death! you scamp,” said the count, giving him back his eyesight by a rough movement which threw upon the man’s neck the bandage that had been upon his eyes. “I warn you not to look at anything but the wretched woman on whom you are now to exercise your skill; if you do, I’ll fling you into the river that flows beneath those windows, with a collar round your neck weighing a hundred pounds!”

With that, he pulled down upon the breast of his stupefied hearer the cravat with which his eyes had been bandaged.

“Examine first if this can be a miscarriage,” he continued; “in which case your life will answer to me for the mother’s; but, if the child is living, you are to bring it to me.”

So saying, the count seized the poor operator by the body and placed him before the countess, then he went himself to the depths of a bay-window and began to drum with his fingers upon the panes, casting glances alternately on his serving-man, on the bed, and at the ocean, as if he were pledging to the expected child a cradle in the waves.

The man whom, with outrageous violence, the count and Bertrand had snatched from his bed and fastened to the crupper of the latter’s horse, was a personage whose individuality may serve to characterize the period,—a man, moreover, whose influence was destined to make itself felt in the house of Herouville.

Never in any age were the nobles so little informed as to natural science, and never was judicial astrology held in greater honor; for at no period in history was there a greater general desire to know the future. This ignorance and this curiosity had led to the utmost confusion in human knowledge; all things were still mere personal experience; the nomenclatures of theory did not exist; printing was done at enormous cost; scientific communication had little or no facility; the Church persecuted science and all research which was based on the analysis of natural phenomena. Persecution begat mystery. So, to the people as well as to the nobles, physician and alchemist, mathematician and astronomer, astrologer and necromancer were six attributes, all meeting in the single person of the physician. In those days a superior physician was supposed to be cultivating magic; while curing his patient he was drawing their horoscopes. Princes protected the men of genius who were willing to reveal the future; they lodged them in their palaces and pensioned them. The

famous Cornelius Agrippa, who came to France to become the physician of Henri II., would not consent, as Nostradamus did, to predict the future, and for this reason he was dismissed by Catherine de' Medici, who replaced him with Cosmo Ruggiero. The men of science, who were superior to their times, were therefore seldom appreciated; they simply inspired an ignorant fear of occult sciences and their results.

Without being precisely one of the famous mathematicians, the man whom the count had brought enjoyed in Normandy the equivocal reputation which attached to a physician who was known to do mysterious works. He belonged to the class of sorcerers who are still called in parts of France "bonesetters." This name belonged to certain untutored geniuses who, without apparent study, but by means of hereditary knowledge and the effect of long practice, the observations of which accumulated in the family, were bonesetters; that is, they mended broken limbs and cured both men and beasts of certain maladies, possessing secrets said to be marvellous for the treatment of serious cases. But not only had Maitre Antoine Beauvouloir (the name of the present bonesetter) a father and grandfather who were famous practitioners, from whom he inherited important traditions, he was also learned in medicine, and was given to the study of natural science. The country people saw his study full of books and other strange things which gave to his successes a coloring of magic. Without passing strictly for a sorcerer, Antoine Beauvouloir impressed the populace through a circumference of a hundred miles with respect akin to terror, and (what was far more really dangerous for himself) he held in his power many secrets of life and death which concerned the noble families of that region. Like his father and grandfather before him, he was celebrated for his skill in confinements and miscarriages. In those days of unbridled disorder, crimes were so frequent and passions so violent that the higher nobility often found itself compelled to initiate Maitre Antoine Beauvouloir into secrets both shameful and terrible. His discretion, so essential to his safety, was absolute; consequently his clients paid him well, and his hereditary practice greatly increased. Always on the road, sometimes roused in the dead of night, as on this occasion by the count, sometimes obliged to spend several days with certain great ladies, he had never married; in fact, his reputation had hindered certain young women from accepting him. Incapable of finding consolation in the practice of his profession, which gave him such power over feminine weakness, the poor bonesetter felt himself born for the joys of family and yet was unable to obtain them.

The good man's excellent heart was concealed by a misleading appearance of joviality in keeping with his puffy cheeks and rotund figure, the vivacity of his fat little body, and the frankness of his speech. He was anxious to marry that he might have a daughter who should transfer his property to some poor noble; he did not like his station as bonesetter and wished to rescue his family

name from the position in which the prejudices of the times had placed it. He himself took willingly enough to the feasts and jovialities which usually followed his principal operations. The habit of being on such occasions the most important personage in the company, had added to his natural gaiety a sufficient dose of serious vanity. His impertinences were usually well received in crucial moments when it often pleased him to perform his operations with a certain slow majesty. He was, in other respects, as inquisitive as a nightingale, as greedy as a hound, and as garrulous as all diplomatists who talk incessantly and betray no secrets. In spite of these defects developed in him by the endless adventures into which his profession led him, Antoine Beauvouloir was held to be the least bad man in Normandy. Though he belonged to the small number of minds who are superior to their epoch, the strong good sense of a Norman countryman warned him to conceal the ideas he acquired and the truths he from time to time discovered.

As soon as he found himself placed by the count in presence of a woman in childbirth, the bonesetter recovered his presence of mind. He felt the pulse of the masked lady; not that he gave it a single thought, but under cover of that medical action he could reflect, and he did reflect on his own situation. In none of the shameful and criminal intrigues in which superior force had compelled him to act as a blind instrument, had precautions been taken with such mystery as in this case. Though his death had often been threatened as a means of assuring the secrecy of enterprises in which he had taken part against his will, his life had never been so endangered as at that moment. He resolved, before all things, to find out who it was who now employed him, and to discover the actual extent of his danger, in order to save, if possible, his own little person.

“What is the trouble?” he said to the countess in a low voice, as he placed her in a manner to receive his help.

“Do not give him the child—”

“Speak loud!” cried the count in thundering tones which prevented Beauvouloir from hearing the last word uttered by the countess. “If not,” added the count who was careful to disguise his voice, “say your ‘In manus.’”

“Complain aloud,” said the leech to the lady; “cry! scream! Jarnidieu! that man has a necklace that won’t fit you any better than me. Courage, my little lady!”

“Touch her lightly!” cried the count.

“Monsieur is jealous,” said the operator in a shrill voice, fortunately drowned by the countess’s cries.

For Maitre Beauvouloir’s safety Nature was merciful. It was more a

miscarriage than a regular birth, and the child was so puny that it caused little suffering to the mother.

“Holy Virgin!” cried the bonesetter, “it isn’t a miscarriage, after all!”

The count made the floor shake as he stamped with rage. The countess pinched Beauvouloir.

“Ah! I see!” he said to himself. “It ought to be a premature birth, ought it?” he whispered to the countess, who replied with an affirmative sign, as if that gesture were the only language in which to express her thoughts.

“It is not all clear to me yet,” thought the bonesetter.

Like all men in constant practice, he recognized at once a woman in her first trouble as he called it. Though the modest inexperience of certain gestures showed him the virgin ignorance of the countess, the mischievous operator exclaimed:—

“Madame is delivered as if she knew all about it!”

The count then said, with a calmness more terrifying than his anger:—

“Give me the child.”

“Don’t give it him, for the love of God!” cried the mother, whose almost savage cry awoke in the heart of the little man a courageous pity which attached him, more than he knew himself, to the helpless infant rejected by his father.

“The child is not yet born; you are counting your chicken before it is hatched,” he said, coldly, hiding the infant.

Surprised to hear no cries, he examined the child, thinking it dead. The count, seeing the deception, sprang upon him with one bound.

“God of heaven! will you give it to me?” he cried, snatching the hapless victim which uttered feeble cries.

“Take care; the child is deformed and almost lifeless; it is a seven months’ child,” said Beauvouloir clinging to the count’s arm. Then, with a strength given to him by the excitement of his pity, he clung to the father’s fingers, whispering in a broken voice: “Spare yourself a crime, the child cannot live.”

“Wretch!” replied the count, from whose hands the bonesetter had wrenched the child, “who told you that I wished to kill my son? Could I not caress it?”

“Wait till he is eighteen years old to caress him in that way,” replied Beauvouloir, recovering the sense of his importance. “But,” he added, thinking of his own safety, for he had recognized the Comte d’Herouville, who in his

rage had forgotten to disguise his voice, “have him baptized at once and do not speak of his danger to the mother, or you will kill her.”

The gesture of satisfaction which escaped the count when the child’s death was prophesied, suggested this speech to the bonesetter as the best means of saving the child at the moment. Beauvouloir now hastened to carry the infant back to its mother who had fainted, and he pointed to her condition reprovingly, to warn the count of the results of his violence. The countess had heard all; for in many of the great crises of life the human organs acquire an otherwise unknown delicacy. But the cries of the child, laid beside her on the bed, restored her to life as if by magic; she fancied she heard the voices of angels, when, under cover of the whimperings of the babe, the bonesetter said in her ear:—

“Take care of him, and he’ll live a hundred years. Beauvouloir knows what he is talking about.”

A celestial sigh, a silent pressure of the hand were the reward of the leech, who had looked to see, before yielding the frail little creature to its mother’s embrace, whether that of the father had done no harm to its puny organization. The half-crazed motion with which the mother hid her son beside her and the threatening glance she cast upon the count through the eye-holes of her mask, made Beauvouloir shudder.

“She will die if she loses that child too soon,” he said to the count.

During the latter part of this scene the lord of Herouville seemed to hear and see nothing. Rigid, and as if absorbed in meditation, he stood by the window drumming on its panes. But he turned at the last words uttered by the bonesetter, with an almost frenzied motion, and came to him with uplifted dagger.

“Miserable clown!” he cried, giving him the opprobrious name by which the Royalists insulted the Leaguers. “Impudent scoundrel! your science which makes you the accomplice of men who steal inheritances is all that prevents me from depriving Normandy of her sorcerer.”

So saying, and to Beauvouloir’s great satisfaction, the count replaced the dagger in its sheath.

“Could you not,” continued the count, “find yourself for once in your life in the honorable company of a noble and his wife, without suspecting them of the base crimes and trickery of your own kind? Kill my son! take him from his mother! Where did you get such crazy ideas? Am I a madman? Why do you attempt to frighten me about the life of that vigorous child? Fool! I defy your silly talk—but remember this, since you are here, your miserable life shall answer for that of the mother and the child.”

The bonesetter was puzzled by this sudden change in the count's intentions. This show of tenderness for the infant alarmed him far more than the impatient cruelty and savage indifference hitherto manifested by the count, whose tone in pronouncing the last words seemed to Beauvouloir to point to some better scheme for reaching his infernal ends. The shrewd practitioner turned this idea over in his mind until a light struck him.

"I have it!" he said to himself. "This great and good noble does not want to make himself odious to his wife; he'll trust to the vials of the apothecary. I must warn the lady to see to the food and medicine of her babe."

As he turned toward the bed, the count who had opened a closet, stopped him with an imperious gesture, holding out a purse. Beauvouloir saw within its red silk meshes a quantity of gold, which the count now flung to him contemptuously.

"Though you make me out a villain I am not released from the obligation of paying you like a lord. I shall not ask you to be discreet. This man here," (pointing to Bertrand) "will explain to you that there are rivers and trees everywhere for miserable wretches who chatter of me."

So saying the count advanced slowly to the bonesetter, pushed a chair noisily toward him, as if to invite him to sit down, as he did himself by the bedside; then he said to his wife in a specious voice:—

"Well, my pretty one, so we have a son; this is a joyful thing for us. Do you suffer much?"

"No," murmured the countess.

The evident surprise of the mother, and the tardy demonstrations of pleasure on the part of the father, convinced Beauvouloir that there was some incident behind all this which escaped his penetration. He persisted in his suspicion, and rested his hand on that of the young wife, less to watch her condition than to convey to her some advice.

"The skin is good, I fear nothing for madame. The milk fever will come, of course; but you need not be alarmed; that is nothing."

At this point the wily bonesetter paused, and pressed the hand of the countess to make her attentive to his words.

"If you wish to avoid all anxiety about your son, madame," he continued, "never leave him; suckle him yourself, and beware of the drugs of apothecaries. The mother's breast is the remedy for all the ills of infancy. I have seen many births of seven months' children, but I never saw any so little painful as this. But that is not surprising; the child is so small. You could put him in a wooden shoe! I am certain he doesn't weight more than sixteen

ounces. Milk, milk, milk. Keep him always on your breast and you will save him.”

These last words were accompanied by a significant pressure of the fingers. Disregarding the yellow flames flashing from the eyeholes of the count’s mask, Beauvouloir uttered these words with the serious imperturbability of a man who intends to earn his money.

“Ho! ho! bonesetter, you are leaving your old felt hat behind you,” said Bertrand, as the two left the bedroom together.

The reasons of the sudden mercy which the count had shown to his son were to be found in a notary’s office. At the moment when Beauvouloir arrested his murderous hand avarice and the Legal Custom of Normandy rose up before him. Those mighty powers stiffened his fingers and silenced the passion of his hatred. One cried out to him, “The property of your wife cannot belong to the house of Herouville except through a male child.” The other pointed to a dying countess and her fortune claimed by the collateral heirs of the Saint-Savins. Both advised him to leave to nature the extinction of that hated child, and to wait the birth of a second son who might be healthy and vigorous before getting rid of his wife and first-born. He saw neither wife nor child; he saw the estates only, and hatred was softened by ambition. The mother, who knew his nature, was even more surprised than the bonesetter, and she still retained her instinctive fears, showing them at times openly, for the courage of mothers seemed suddenly to have doubled her strength.

CHAPTER III. THE MOTHER’S LOVE

For several days the count remained assiduously beside his wife, showing her attentions to which self-interest imparted a sort of tenderness. The countess saw, however, that she alone was the object of these attentions. The hatred of the father for his son showed itself in every detail; he abstained from looking at him or touching him; he would rise abruptly and leave the room if the child cried; in short, he seemed to endure it living only through the hope of seeing it die. But even this self-restraint was galling to the count. The day on which he saw that the mother’s intelligent eye perceived, without fully comprehending, the danger that threatened her son, he announced his departure on the morning after the mass for her churching was solemnized, under pretext of rallying his forces to the support of the king.

Such were the circumstances which preceded and accompanied the birth of Etienne d’Herouville. If the count had no other reason for wishing the death of

this disowned son poor Etienne would still have been the object of his aversion. In his eyes the misfortune of a rickety, sickly constitution was a flagrant offence to his self-love as a father. If he execrated handsome men, he also detested weakly ones, in whom mental capacity took the place of physical strength. To please him a man should be ugly in face, tall, robust, and ignorant. Etienne, whose debility would bow him, as it were, to the sedentary occupations of knowledge, was certain to find in his father a natural enemy. His struggle with that colossus began therefore from his cradle, and his sole support against that cruel antagonist was the heart of his mother whose love increased, by a tender law of nature, as perils threatened him.

Buried in solitude after the abrupt departure of the count, Jeanne de Saint-Savin owed to her child the only semblance of happiness that consoled her life. She loved him as women love the child of an illicit love; obliged to suckle him, the duty never wearied her. She would not let her women care for the child. She dressed and undressed him, finding fresh pleasures in every little care that he required. Happiness glowed upon her face as she obeyed the needs of the little being. As Etienne had come into the world prematurely, no clothes were ready for him, and those that were needed she made herself,—with what perfection, you know, ye mothers, who have worked in silence for a treasured child. The days had never hours long enough for these manifold occupations and the minute precautions of the nursing mother; those days fled by, laden with her secret content.

The counsel of the bonesetter still continued in the countess’s mind. She feared for her child, and would gladly not have slept in order to be sure that no one approached him during her sleep; and she kept his cradle beside her bed. In the absence of the count she ventured to send for the bonesetter, whose name she had caught and remembered. To her, Beauvouloir was a being to whom she owed an untold debt of gratitude; and she desired of all things to question him on certain points relating to her son. If an attempt were made to poison him, how should she foil it? In what way ought she to manage his frail constitution? Was it well to nurse him long? If she died, would Beauvouloir undertake the care of the poor child’s health?

To the questions of the countess, Beauvouloir, deeply touched, replied that he feared, as much as she did, an attempt to poison Etienne; but there was, he assured her, no danger as long as she nursed the child; and in future, when obliged to feed him, she must taste the food herself.

“If Madame la comtesse,” he said, “feels anything strange upon her tongue, a prickly, bitter, strong salt taste, reject the food. Let the child’s clothes be washed under her own eye and let her keep the key of the chest which contains them. Should anything happen to the child send instantly to me.”

These instructions sank deep into Jeanne’s heart. She begged Beauvouloir to regard her always as one who would do him any service in her power. On that the poor man told her that she held his happiness in her hands.

Then he related briefly how the Comte d’Herouville had in his youth loved a courtesan, known by the name of La Belle Romaine, who had formerly belonged to the Cardinal of Lorraine. Abandoned by the count before very long, she had died miserably, leaving a child named Gertrude, who had been rescued by the Sisters of the Convent of Poor Clares, the Mother Superior of which was Mademoiselle de Saint-Savin, the countess’s aunt. Having been called to treat Gertrude for an illness, he, Beauvouloir, had fallen in love with her, and if Madame la comtesse, he said, would undertake the affair, she should not only more than repay him for what she thought he had done for her, but she would make him grateful to her for life. The count might, sooner or later, be brought to take an interest in so beautiful a daughter, and might protect her indirectly by making him his physician.

The countess, compassionate to all true love, promised to do her best, and pursued the affair so warmly that at the birth of her second son she did obtain from her husband a “dot” for the young girl, who was married soon after to Beauvouloir. The “dot” and his savings enabled the bonesetter to buy a charming estate called Forcalier near the castle of Herouville, and to give his life the dignity of a student and man of learning.

Comforted by the kind physician, the countess felt that to her were given joys unknown to other mothers. Mother and child, two feeble beings, seemed united in one thought, they understood each other long before language could interpret between them. From the moment when Etienne first turned his eyes on things about him with the stupid eagerness of a little child, his glance had rested on the sombre hangings of the castle walls. When his young ear strove to listen and to distinguish sounds, he heard the monotonous ebb and flow of the sea upon the rocks, as regular as the swinging of a pendulum. Thus places, sounds, and things, all that strikes the senses and forms the character, inclined him to melancholy. His mother, too, was doomed to live and die in the clouds of melancholy; and to him, from his birth up, she was the only being that existed on the earth, and filled for him the desert. Like all frail children, Etienne’s attitude was passive, and in that he resembled his mother. The delicacy of his organs was such that a sudden noise, or the presence of a boisterous person gave him a sort of fever. He was like those little insects for whom God seems to temper the violence of the wind and the heat of the sun; incapable, like them, of struggling against the slightest obstacle, he yielded, as they do, without resistance or complaint, to everything that seemed to him aggressive. This angelic patience inspired in the mother a sentiment which took away all fatigue from the incessant care required by so frail a being.

Soon his precocious perception of suffering revealed to him the power that he had upon his mother; often he tried to divert her with caresses and make her smile at his play; and never did his coaxing hands, his stammered words, his intelligent laugh fail to rouse her from her reverie. If he was tired, his care for her kept him from complaining.

“Poor, dear, little sensitive!” cried the countess as he fell asleep tired with some play which had driven the sad memories from her mind, “how can you live in this world? who will understand you? who will love you? who will see the treasures hidden in that frail body? No one! Like me, you are alone on earth.”

She sighed and wept. The graceful pose of her child lying on her knees made her smile sadly. She looked at him long, tasting one of those pleasures which are a secret between mothers and God. Etienne’s weakness was so great that until he was a year and a half old she had never dared to take him out of doors; but now the faint color which tinted the whiteness of his skin like the petals of a wild rose, showed that life and health were already there.

One morning the countess, giving herself up to the glad joy of all mothers when their first child walks for the first time, was playing with Etienne on the floor when suddenly she heard the heavy step of a man upon the boards. Hardly had she risen with a movement of involuntary surprise, when the count stood before her. She gave a cry, but endeavored instantly to undo that involuntary wrong by going up to him and offering her forehead for a kiss.

“Why not have sent me notice of your return?” she said.

“My reception would have been more cordial, but less frank,” he answered bitterly.

Suddenly he saw the child. The evident health in which he found it wrung from him a gesture of surprise mingled with fury. But he repressed his anger, and began to smile.

“I bring good news,” he said. “I have received the governorship of Champagne and the king’s promise to be made duke and peer. Moreover, we have inherited a princely fortune from your cousin; that cursed Huguenot, Georges de Chaverny is killed.”

The countess turned pale and dropped into a chair. She saw the secret of the devilish smile on her husband’s face.

“Monsieur,” she said in a voice of emotion, “you know well that I loved my cousin Chaverny. You will answer to God for the pain you inflict upon me.”

At these words the eye of the count glittered; his lips trembled, but he

could not utter a word, so furious was he; he flung his dagger on the table with such violence that the metal resounded like a thunder-clap.

“Listen to me,” he said in his strongest voice, “and remember my words. I will never see or hear the little monster you hold in your arms. He is your child, and not mine; there is nothing of me in him. Hide him, I say, hide him from my sight, or—”

“Just God!” cried the countess, “protect us!”

“Silence!” said her husband. “If you do not wish me to throttle him, see that I never find him in my way.”

“Then,” said the countess gathering strength to oppose her tyrant, “swear to me that if you never meet him you will do nothing to injure him. Can I trust your word as a nobleman for that?”

“What does all this mean?” said the count.

“If you will not swear, kill us now together!” cried the countess, falling on her knees and pressing her child to her breast.

“Rise, madame. I give you my word as a man of honor to do nothing against the life of that cursed child, provided he lives among the rocks between the sea and the house, and never crosses my path. I will give him that fisherman’s house down there for his dwelling, and the beach for a domain. But woe betide him if I ever find him beyond those limits.”

The countess began to weep.

“Look at him!” she said. “He is your son.”

“Madame!”

At that word, the frightened mother carried away the child whose heart was beating like that of a bird caught in its nest. Whether innocence has a power which the hardest men cannot escape, or whether the count regretted his violence and feared to plunge into despair a creature so necessary to his pleasures and also to his worldly prosperity, it is certain that his voice was as soft as it was possible to make it when his wife returned.

“Jeanne, my dear,” he said, “do not be angry with me; give me your hand. One never knows how to trust you women. I return, bringing you fresh honors and more wealth, and yet, tete-Dieu! you receive me like an enemy. My new government will oblige me to make long absences until I can exchange it for that of Lower Normandy; and I request, my dear, that you will show me a pleasant face while I am here.”

The countess understood the meaning of the words, the feigned softness of which could no longer deceive her.

“I know my duty,” she replied in a tone of sadness which the count mistook for tenderness.

The timid creature had too much purity and dignity to try, as some clever women would have done, to govern the count by putting calculation into her conduct,—a sort of prostitution by which noble souls feel degraded. Silently she turned away, to console her despair with Etienne.

“Tete-Dieu! shall I never be loved?” cried the count, seeing the tears in his wife’s eyes as she left the room.

Thus incessantly threatened, motherhood became to the poor woman a passion which assumed the intensity that women put into their guilty affections. By a species of occult communion, the secret of which is in the hearts of mothers, the child comprehended the peril that threatened him and dreaded the approach of his father. The terrible scene of which he had been a witness remained in his memory, and affected him like an illness; at the sound of the count’s step his features contracted, and the mother’s ear was not so alert as the instinct of her child. As he grew older this faculty created by terror increased, until, like the savages of America, Etienne could distinguish his father’s step and hear his voice at immense distances. To witness the terror with which the count inspired her thus shared by her child made Etienne the more precious to the countess; their union was so strengthened that like two flowers on one twig they bent to the same wind, and lifted their heads with the same hope. In short, they were one life.

When the count again left home Jeanne was pregnant. This time she gave birth in due season, and not without great suffering, to a stout boy, who soon became the living image of his father, so that the hatred of the count for his first-born was increased by this event. To save her cherished child the countess agreed to all the plans which her husband formed for the happiness and wealth of his second son, whom he named Maximilien. Etienne was to be made a priest, in order to leave the property and titles of the house of Herouville to his younger brother. At that cost the poor mother believed she ensured the safety of her hated child.

No two brothers were ever more unlike than Etienne and Maximilien. The younger’s taste was all for noise, violent exercises, and war, and the count felt for him the same excessive love that his wife felt for Etienne. By a tacit compact each parent took charge of the child of their heart. The duke (for about this time Henri IV. rewarded the services of the Seigneur d’Herouville with a dukedom), not wishing, he said, to fatigue his wife, gave the nursing of the youngest boy to a stout peasant-woman chosen by Beauvouloir, and announced his determination to bring up the child in his own manner. He gave him, as time went on, a holy horror of books and study; taught him the

mechanical knowledge required by a military career, made him a good rider, a good shot with an arquebuse, and skilful with his dagger. When the boy was big enough he took him to hunt, and let him acquire the savage language, the rough manners, the bodily strength, and the vivacity of look and speech which to his mind were the attributes of an accomplished man. The boy became, by the time he was twelve years old, a lion-cub ill-trained, as formidable in his way as the father himself, having free rein to tyrannize over every one, and using the privilege.

Etienne lived in the little house, or lodge, near the sea, given to him by his father, and fitted up by the duchess with some of the comforts and enjoyments to which he had a right. She herself spent the greater part of her time there. Together the mother and child roamed over the rocks and the shore, keeping strictly within the limits of the boy's domain of beach and shells, of moss and pebbles. The boy's terror of his father was so great that, like the Lapp, who lives and dies in his snow, he made a native land of his rocks and his cottage, and was terrified and uneasy if he passed his frontier.

The duchess, knowing her child was not fitted to find happiness except in some humble and retired sphere, did not regret the fate that was thus imposed upon him; she used this enforced vocation to prepare him for a noble life of study and science, and she brought to the chateau Pierre de Sebonde as tutor to the future priest. Nevertheless, in spite of the tonsure imposed by the will of the father, she was determined that Etienne's education should not be wholly ecclesiastical, and took pains to secularize it. She employed Beauvouloir to teach him the mysteries of natural science; she herself superintended his studies, regulating them according to her child's strength, and enlivening them by teaching him Italian, and revealing to him little by little the poetic beauties of that language. While the duke rode off with Maximilien to the forest and the wild-boars at the risk of his life, Jeanne wandered with Etienne in the milky way of Petrarch's sonnets, or the mighty labyrinth of the Divina Comedia. Nature had endowed the youth, in compensation for his infirmities, with so melodious a voice that to hear him sing was a constant delight; his mother taught him music, and their tender, melancholy songs, accompanied by a mandolin, were the favorite recreation promised as a reward for some more arduous study required by the Abbe de Sebonde. Etienne listened to his mother with a passionate admiration she had never seen except in the eyes of Georges de Chaverny. The first time the poor woman found a memory of her girlhood in the long, slow look of her child, she covered him with kisses; and she blushed when Etienne asked her why she seemed to love him better at that moment than ever before. She answered that every hour made him dearer to her. She found in the training of his soul, and in the culture of his mind, pleasures akin to those she had tasted in feeding him with her milk. She put all her pride and self-love into making him superior to herself, and not in ruling

him. Hearts without tenderness covet dominion, but a true love treasures abnegation, that virtue of strength. When Etienne could not at first comprehend a demonstration, a theme, a theory, the poor mother, who was present at the lessons, seemed to long to infuse knowledge, as formerly she had given nourishment at the child's least cry. And then, what joy suffused her eyes when Etienne's mind seized the true sense of things and appropriated it. She proved, as Pierre de Sebonde said, that a mother is a dual being whose sensations cover two existences.

"Ah, if some woman as loving as I could infuse into him hereafter the life of love, how happy he might be!" she often thought.

But the fatal interests which consigned Etienne to the priesthood returned to her mind, and she kissed the hair that the scissors of the Church were to shear, leaving her tears upon them. Still, in spite of the unjust compact she had made with the duke, she could not see Etienne in her visions of the future as priest or cardinal; and the absolute forgetfulness of the father as to his first-born, enabled her to postpone the moment of putting him into Holy Orders.

"There is time enough," she said to herself.

The day came when all her cares, inspired by a sentiment which seemed to enter into the flesh of her son and give it life, had their reward. Beauvouloir—that blessed man whose teachings had proved so precious to the child, and whose anxious glance at that frail idol had so often made the duchess tremble—declared that Etienne was now in a condition to live long years, provided no violent emotion came to convulse his delicate body. Etienne was then sixteen.

At that age he was just five feet, a height he never passed. His skin, as transparent and satiny as that of a little girl, showed a delicate tracery of blue veins; its whiteness was that of porcelain. His eyes, which were light blue and ineffably gentle, implored the protection of men and women; that beseeching look fascinated before the melody of his voice was heard to complete the charm. True modesty was in every feature. Long chestnut hair, smooth and very fine, was parted in the middle of his head into two bandeaus which curled at their extremity. His pale and hollow cheeks, his pure brow, lined with a few furrows, expressed a condition of suffering which was painful to witness. His mouth, always gracious, and adorned with very white teeth, wore the sort of fixed smile which we often see on the lips of the dying. His hands, white as those of a woman, were remarkably handsome. The habit of meditation had taught him to droop his head like a fragile flower, and the attitude was in keeping with his person; it was like the last grace that a great artist touches into a portrait to bring out its latent thought. Etienne's head was that of a delicate girl placed upon the weakly and deformed body of a man.

Poesy, the rich meditations of which make us roam like botanists through

the vast fields of thought, the fruitful comparison of human ideas, the enthusiasm given by a clear conception of works of genius, came to be the inexhaustible and tranquil joys of the young man's solitary and dreamy life. Flowers, ravishing creatures whose destiny resembled his own, were his loves. Happy to see in her son the innocent passions which took the place of the rough contact with social life which he never could have borne, the duchess encouraged Etienne's tastes; she brought him Spanish "romanceros," Italian "motets," books, sonnets, poems. The library of Cardinal d'Herouville came into Etienne's possession, the use of which filled his life. These readings, which his fragile health forbade him to continue for many hours at a time, and his rambles among the rocks of his domain, were interspersed with naive meditations which kept him motionless for hours together before his smiling flowers—those sweet companions!—or crouching in a niche of the rocks before some species of algae, a moss, a seaweed, studying their mysteries; seeking perhaps a rhythm in their fragrant depths, like a bee its honey. He often admired, without purpose, and without explaining his pleasure to himself, the slender lines on the petals of dark flowers, the delicacy of their rich tunics of gold or purple, green or azure, the fringes, so profusely beautiful, of their calyxes or leaves, their ivory or velvet textures. Later, a thinker as well as a poet, he would detect the reason of these innumerable differences in a single nature, by discovering the indication of unknown faculties; for from day to day he made progress in the interpretation of the Divine Word writing upon all things here below.

These constant and secret researches into matters occult gave to Etienne's life the apparent somnolence of meditative genius. He would spend long days lying upon the shore, happy, a poet, all-unconscious of the fact. The sudden irruption of a gilded insect, the shimmering of the sun upon the ocean, the tremulous motion of the vast and limpid mirror of the waters, a shell, a crab, all was event and pleasure to that ingenuous young soul. And then to see his mother coming towards him, to hear from afar the rustle of her gown, to await her, to kiss her, to talk to her, to listen to her gave him such keen emotions that often a slight delay, a trifling fear would throw him into a violent fever. In him there was nought but soul, and in order that the weak, debilitated body should not be destroyed by the keen emotions of that soul, Etienne needed silence, caresses, peace in the landscape, and the love of a woman. For the time being, his mother gave him the love and the caresses; flowers and books entranced his solitude; his little kingdom of sand and shells, algae and verdure seemed to him a universe, ever fresh and new.

Etienne imbibed all the benefits of this physical and absolutely innocent life, this mental and moral life so poetically extended. A child by form, a man in mind, he was equally angelic under either aspect. By his mother's influence his studies had removed his emotions to the region of ideas. The action of his

life took place, therefore, in the moral world, far from the social world which would either have killed him or made him suffer. He lived by his soul and by his intellect. Laying hold of human thought by reading, he rose to thoughts that stirred in matter; he felt the thoughts of the air, he read the thoughts on the skies. Early he mounted that ethereal summit where alone he found the delicate nourishment that his soul needed; intoxicating food! which predestined him to sorrow whenever to these accumulated treasures should be added the riches of a passion rising suddenly in his heart.

If, at times, Jeanne de Saint-Savin dreaded that coming storm, he consoled herself with a thought which the otherwise sad vocation of her son put into her mind,—for the poor mother found no remedy for his sorrows except some lesser sorrow.

“He will be a cardinal,” she thought; “he will live in the sentiment of Art, of which he will make himself the protector. He will love Art instead of loving a woman, and Art will not betray him.”

The pleasures of this tender motherhood were incessantly held in check by sad reflections, born of the strange position in which Etienne was placed. The brothers had passed the adolescent age without knowing each other, without so much as even suspecting their rival existence. The duchess had long hoped for an opportunity, during the absence of her husband, to bind the two brothers to each other in some solemn scene by which she might enfold them both in her love. This hope, long cherished, had now faded. Far from wishing to bring about an intercourse between the brothers, she feared an encounter between them, even more than between the father and son. Maximilien, who believed in evil only, might have feared that Etienne would some day claim his rights, and, so fearing, might have flung him into the sea with a stone around his neck. No son had ever less respect for a mother than he. As soon as he could reason he had seen the low esteem in which the duke held his wife. If the old man still retained some forms of decency in his manners to the duchess, Maximilien, unrestrained by his father, caused his mother many a grief.

Consequently, Bertrand was incessantly on the watch to prevent Maximilien from seeing Etienne, whose existence was carefully concealed. All the attendants of the castle cordially hated the Marquis de Saint-Sever (the name and title borne by the younger brother), and those who knew of the existence of the elder looked upon him as an avenger whom God was holding in reserve.

Etienne’s future was therefore doubtful; he might even be persecuted by his own brother! The poor duchess had no relations to whom she could confide the life and interests of her cherished child. Would he not blame her when in his violet robes he longed to be a father as she had been a mother?

These thoughts, and her melancholy life so full of secret sorrows were like a mortal illness kept at bay for a time by remedies. Her heart needed the wisest management, and those about her were cruelly inexpert in gentleness. What mother’s heart would not have been torn at the sight of her eldest son, a man of mind and soul in whom a noble genius made itself felt, deprived of his rights, while the younger, hard and brutal, without talent, even military talent, was chosen to wear the ducal coronet and perpetuate the family? The house of Herouville was discarding its own glory. Incapable of anger the gentle Jeanne de Saint-Savin could only bless and weep, but often she raised her eyes to heaven, asking it to account for this singular doom. Those eyes filled with tears when she thought that at her death her cherished child would be wholly orphaned and left exposed to the brutalities of a brother without faith or conscience.

Such emotions repressed, a first love unforgotten, so many sorrows ignored and hidden within her,—for she kept her keenest sufferings from her cherished child,—her joys embittered, her griefs unrelieved, all these shocks had weakened the springs of life and were developing in her system a slow consumption which day by day was gathering greater force. A last blow hastened it. She tried to warn the duke as to the results of Maximilien’s education, and was repulsed; she saw that she could give no remedy to the shocking seeds which were germinating in the soul of her second child. From this moment began a period of decline which soon became so visible as to bring about the appointment of Beauvouloir to the post of physician to the house of Herouville and the government of Normandy.

The former bonesetter came to live at the castle. In those days such posts belonged to learned men, who thus gained a living and the leisure necessary for a studious life and the accomplishment of scientific work. Beauvouloir had for some time desired the situation, because his knowledge and his fortune had won him numerous bitter enemies. In spite of the protection of a great family to whom he had done great services, he had recently been implicated in a criminal case, and the intervention of the Governor of Normandy, obtained by the duchess, had alone saved him from being brought to trial. The duke had no reason to repent this protection given to the old bonesetter. Beauvouloir saved the life of the Marquis de Saint-Sever in so dangerous an illness that any other physician would have failed in doing so. But the wounds of the duchess were too deep-seated and dated too far back to be cured, especially as they were constantly kept open in her home. When her sufferings warned this angel of many sorrows that her end was approaching, death was hastened by the gloomy apprehensions that filled her mind as to the future.

“What will become of my poor child without me?” was a thought renewed every hour like a bitter tide.

Obliged at last to keep her bed, the duchess failed rapidly, for she was then unable to see her son, forbidden as he was by her compact with his father to approach the house. The sorrow of the youth was equal to that of the mother. Inspired by the genius of repressed feeling, Etienne created a mystical language by which to communicate with his mother. He studied the resources of his voice like an opera-singer, and often he came beneath her windows to let her hear his melodiously melancholy voice, when Beauvouloir by a sign informed him she was alone. Formerly, as a babe, he had consoled his mother with his smiles, now, become a poet, he caressed her with his melodies.

“Those songs give me life,” said the duchess to Beauvouloir, inhaling the air that Etienne’s voice made living.

At length the day came when the poor son’s mourning began. Already he had felt the mysterious correspondences between his emotions and the movements of the ocean. The divining of the thoughts of matter, a power with which his occult knowledge had invested him, made this phenomenon more eloquent to him than to all others. During the fatal night when he was taken to see his mother for the last time, the ocean was agitated by movements that to him were full of meaning. The heaving waters seemed to show that the sea was working intestinally; the swelling waves rolled in and spent themselves with lugubrious noises like the howling of a dog in distress. Unconsciously, Etienne found himself saying:—

“What does it want of me? It quivers and moans like a living creature. My mother has often told me that the ocean was in horrible convulsions on the night when I was born. Something is about to happen to me.”

This thought kept him standing before his window with his eyes sometimes on his mother’s windows where a faint light trembled, sometimes on the ocean which continued to moan. Suddenly Beauvouloir knocked on the door of his room, opened it, and showed on his saddened face the reflection of some new misfortune.

“Monseigneur,” he said, “Madame la duchesse is in so sad a state that she wishes to see you. All precautions are taken that no harm shall happen to you in the castle; but we must be prudent; to see her you will have to pass through the room of Monseigneur the duke, the room where you were born.”

These words brought the tears to Etienne’s eyes, and he said:—

“The Ocean did speak to me!”

Mechanically he allowed himself to be led towards the door of the tower which gave entrance to the private way leading to the duchess’s room. Bertrand was awaiting him, lantern in hand. Etienne reached the library of the Cardinal d’Herouville, and there he was made to wait with Beauvouloir while

Bertrand went on to unlock the other doors, and make sure that the hated son could pass through his father's house without danger. The duke did not awake. Advancing with light steps, Etienne and Beauvouloir heard in that immense chateau no sound but the plaintive groans of the dying woman. Thus the very circumstances attending the birth of Etienne were renewed at the death of his mother. The same tempest, same agony, same dread of awaking the pitiless giant, who, on this occasion at least, slept soundly. Bertrand, as a further precaution, took Etienne in his arms and carried him through the duke's room, intending to give some excuse as to the state of the duchess if the duke awoke and detected him. Etienne's heart was horribly wrung by the same fears which filled the minds of these faithful servants; but this emotion prepared him, in a measure, for the sight that met his eyes in that signorial room, which he had never re-entered since the fatal day when, as a child, the paternal curse had driven him from it.

On the great bed, where happiness never came, he looked for his beloved, and scarcely found her, so emaciated was she. White as her own laces, with scarcely a breath left, she gathered up all her strength to clasp Etienne's hand, and to give him her whole soul, as heretofore, in a look. Chaverny had bequeathed to her all his life in a last farewell. Beauvouloir and Bertrand, the mother and the sleeping duke were all once more assembled. Same place, same scene, same actors! but this was funereal grief in place of the joys of motherhood; the night of death instead of the dawn of life. At that moment the storm, threatened by the melancholy moaning of the sea since sundown, suddenly burst forth.

"Dear flower of my life!" said the mother, kissing her son. "You were taken from my bosom in the midst of a tempest, and in a tempest I am taken from you. Between these storms all life has been stormy to me, except the hours I have spent with you. This is my last joy, mingled with my last pangs. Adieu, my only love! adieu, dear image of two souls that will soon be reunited! Adieu, my only joy—pure joy! adieu, my own beloved!"

"Let me follow thee!" cried Etienne.

"It would be your better fate!" she said, two tears rolling down her livid cheeks; for, as in former days, her eyes seemed to read the future. "Did any one see him?" she asked of the two men.

At this instant the duke turned in his bed; they all trembled.

"Even my last joy is mingled with pain," murmured the duchess. "Take him away! take him away!"

"Mother, I would rather see you a moment longer and die!" said the poor lad, as he fainted by her side.

At a sign from the duchess, Bertrand took Etienne in his arms, and, showing him for the last time to his mother, who kissed him with a last look, he turned to carry him away, awaiting the final order of the dying mother.

“Love him well!” she said to the physician and Bertrand; “he has no protectors but you and Heaven.”

Prompted by an instinct which never misleads a mother, she had felt the pity of the old retainer for the eldest son of a house, for which his veneration was only comparable to that of the Jews for their Holy City, Jerusalem. As for Beauvouloir, the compact between himself and the duchess had long been signed. The two servitors, deeply moved to see their mistress forced to bequeath her noble child to none but themselves, promised by a solemn gesture to be the providence of their young master, and the mother had faith in that gesture.

The duchess died towards morning, mourned by the servants of the household, who, for all comment, were heard to say beside her grave, “She was a comely woman, sent from Paradise.”

Etienne’s sorrow was the most intense, the most lasting of sorrows, and wholly silent. He wandered no more among his rocks; he felt no strength to read or sing. He spent whole days crouched in the crevice of a rock, caring nought for the inclemency of the weather, motionless, fastened to the granite like the lichen that grew upon it; weeping seldom, lost in one sole thought, immense, infinite as the ocean, and, like that ocean, taking a thousand forms, —terrible, tempestuous, tender, calm. It was more than sorrow; it was a new existence, an irrevocable destiny, dooming this innocent creature to smile no more. There are pangs which, like a drop of blood cast into flowing water, stain the whole current instantly. The stream, renewed from its source, restores the purity of its surface; but with Etienne the source itself was polluted, and each new current brought its own gall.

Bertrand, in his old age, had retained the superintendence of the stables, so as not to lose the habit of authority in the household. His house was not far from that of Etienne, so that he was ever at hand to watch over the youth with the persistent affection and simple wiliness characteristic of old soldiers. He checked his roughness when speaking to the poor lad; softly he walked in rainy weather to fetch him from his reverie in his crevice to the house. He put his pride into filling the mother’s place, so that her child might find, if not her love, at least the same attentions. This pity resembled tenderness. Etienne bore, without complaint or resistance, these attentions of the old retainer, but too many links were now broken between the hated child and other creatures to admit of any keen affection at present in his heart. Mechanically he allowed himself to be protected; he became, as it were, an intermediary creature

between man and plant, or, perhaps one might say, between man and God. To what shall we compare a being to whom all social laws, all the false sentiments of the world were unknown, and who kept his ravishing innocence by obeying nought but the instincts of his heart?

Nevertheless, in spite of his sombre melancholy, he came to feel the need of loving, of finding another mother, another soul for his soul. But, separated from civilization by an iron wall, it was well-nigh impossible to meet with a being who had flowered like himself. Instinctively seeking another self to whom to confide his thoughts and whose life might blend with his life, he ended in sympathizing with his Ocean. The sea became to him a living, thinking being. Always in presence of that vast creation, the hidden marvels of which contrast so grandly with those of earth, he discovered the meaning of many mysteries. Familiar from his cradle with the infinitude of those liquid fields, the sea and the sky taught him many poems. To him, all was variety in that vast picture so monotonous to some. Like other men whose souls dominate their bodies, he had a piercing sight which could reach to enormous distances and seize, with admirable ease and without fatigue, the fleeting tints of the clouds, the passing shimmer of the waters. On days of perfect stillness his eyes could see the manifold tints of the ocean, which to him, like the face of a woman, had its physiognomy, its smiles, ideas, caprices; there green and sombre; here smiling and azure; sometimes uniting its brilliant lines with the hazy gleams of the horizon, or again, softly swaying beneath the orange-tinted heavens. For him all-glorious fetes were celebrated at sundown when the star of day poured its red colors on the waves in a crimson flood. For him the sea was gay and sparkling and spirited when it quivered in repeating the noonday light from a thousand dazzling facets; to him it revealed its wondrous melancholy; it made him weep whenever, calm or sad, it reflected the dun-gray sky surcharged with clouds. He had learned the mute language of that vast creation. The flux and reflux of its waters were to him a melodious breathing which uttered in his ear a sentiment; he felt and comprehended its inward meaning. No mariner, no man of science, could have predicted better than he the slightest wrath of the ocean, the faintest change on that vast face. By the manner of the waves as they rose and died away upon the shore, he could foresee tempests, surges, squalls, the height of tides, or calms. When night had spread its veil upon the sky, he still could see the sea in its twilight mystery, and talk with it. At all times he shared its fecund life, feeling in his soul the tempest when it was angry; breathing its rage in its hissing breath; running with its waves as they broke in a thousand liquid fringes upon the rocks. He felt himself intrepid, free, and terrible as the sea itself; like it, he bounded and fell back; he kept its solemn silence; he copied its sudden pause. In short, he had wedded the sea; it was now his confidant, his friend. In the morning when he crossed the glowing sands of the beach and came upon his

rocks, he divined the temper of the ocean from a single glance; he could see landscapes on its surface; he hovered above the face of the waters, like an angel coming down from heaven. When the joyous, mischievous white mists cast their gossamer before him, like a veil before the face of a bride, he followed their undulations and caprices with the joy of a lover. His thought, married with that grand expression of the divine thought, consoled him in his solitude, and the thousand outlooks of his soul peopled its desert with glorious fantasies. He ended at last by divining in the motions of the sea its close communion with the celestial system; he perceived nature in its harmonious whole, from the blade of grass to the wandering stars which seek, like seeds driven by the wind, to plant themselves in ether.

Pure as an angel, virgin of those ideas which degrade mankind, naive as a child, he lived like a sea-bird, a gull, or a flower, prodigal of the treasures of poetic imagination, and possessed of a divine knowledge, the fruitful extent of which he contemplated in solitude. Incredible mingling of two creations! sometimes he rose to God in prayer; sometimes he descended, humble and resigned, to the quiet happiness of animals. To him the stars were the flowers of night, the birds his friends, the sun was a father. Everywhere he found the soul of his mother; often he saw her in the clouds; he spoke to her; they communicated, veritably, by celestial visions; on certain days he could hear her voice and see her smile; in short, there were days when he had not lost her. God seemed to have given him the power of the hermits of old, to have endowed him with some perfected inner senses which penetrated to the spirit of all things. Unknown moral forces enabled him to go farther than other men into the secrets of the Immortal labor. His yearnings, his sorrows were the links that united him to the unseen world; he went there, armed with his love, to seek his mother; realizing thus, with the sublime harmonies of ecstasy, the symbolic enterprise of Orpheus.

Often, when crouching in the crevice of some rock, capriciously curled up in his granite grotto, the entrance to which was as narrow as that of a charcoal kiln, he would sink into involuntary sleep, his figure softly lighted by the warm rays of the sun which crept through the fissures and fell upon the dainty seaweeds that adorned his retreat, the veritable nest of a sea-bird. The sun, his sovereign lord, alone told him that he had slept, by measuring the time he had been absent from his watery landscapes, his golden sands, his shells and pebbles. Across a light as brilliant as that from heaven he saw the cities of which he read; he looked with amazement, but without envy, at courts and kings, battles, men, and buildings. These daylight dreams made dearer to him his precious flowers, his clouds, his sun, his granite rocks. To attach him the more to his solitary existence, an angel seemed to reveal to him the abysses of the moral world and the terrible shocks of civilization. He felt that his soul, if torn by the throng of men, would perish like a pearl dropped from the crown

of a princess into mud.

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PART II. HOW THE SON DIED

CHAPTER IV. THE HEIR

In 1617, twenty and some years after the horrible night during which Etienne came into the world, the Duc d'Herouville, then seventy-six years old, broken, decrepit, almost dead, was sitting at sunset in an immense arm-chair, before the gothic window of his bedroom, at the place where his wife had so vainly implored, by the sounds of the horn wasted on the air, the help of men and heaven. You might have thought him a body resurrected from the grave. His once energetic face, stripped of its sinister aspect by old age and suffering, was ghastly in color, matching the long meshes of white hair which fell around his bald head, the yellow skull of which seemed softening. The warrior and the fanatic still shone in those yellow eyes, tempered now by religious sentiment. Devotion had cast a monastic tone upon the face, formerly so hard, but now marked with tints which softened its expression. The reflections of the setting sun colored with a faintly ruddy tinge the head, which, in spite of all infirmities, was still vigorous. The feeble body, wrapped in brown garments, gave, by its heavy attitude and the absence of all movement, a vivid impression of the monotonous existence, the terrible repose of this man once so active, so enterprising, so vindictive.

"Enough!" he said to his chaplain.

That venerable old man was reading aloud the Gospel, standing before the master in a respectful attitude. The duke, like an old menagerie lion which has reached a decrepitude that is still full of majesty, turned to another white-haired man and said, holding out a fleshless arm covered with sparse hairs, still sinewy, but without vigor:—

"Your turn now, bonesetter. How am I to-day?"

"Doing well, monseigneur; the fever has ceased. You will live many years yet."

"I wish I could see Maximilien here," continued the duke, with a smile of satisfaction. "My fine boy! He commands a company in the King's Guard. The Marechal d'Ancre takes care of my lad, and our gracious Queen Marie thinks of allying him nobly, now that he is created Duc de Nivron. My race will be

worthily continued. The lad performed prodigies of valor in the attack on—”

At this moment Bertrand entered, holding a letter in his hand.

“What is this?” said the old lord, eagerly.

“A despatch brought by a courier sent to you by the king,” replied Bertrand.

“The king, and not the queen-mother!” exclaimed the duke. “What is happening? Have the Huguenots taken arms again? Tete-Dieu!” cried the old man, rising to his feet and casting a flaming glance at his three companions, “I’ll arm my soldiers once more, and, with Maximilien at my side, Normandy shall—”

“Sit down, my good seigneur,” said Beauvouloir, uneasy at seeing the duke give way to an excitement that was dangerous to a convalescent.

“Read it, Maitre Corbineau,” said the old man, holding out the missive to his confessor.

These four personages formed a tableau full of instruction upon human life. The man-at-arms, the priest, and the physician, all three standing before their master, who was seated in his arm-chair, were casting pallid glances about them, each presenting one of those ideas which end by possessing the whole man on the verge of the tomb. Strongly illumined by a last ray of the setting sun, these silent men composed a picture of aged melancholy fertile in contrasts. The sombre and solemn chamber, where nothing had been changed in twenty-five years, made a frame for this poetic canvas, full of extinguished passions, saddened by death, tinctured by religion.

“The Marechal d’Ancre has been killed on the Pont du Louvre by order of the king, and—O God!”

“Go on!” cried the duke.

“Monsieur le Duc de Nivron—”

“Well?”

“Is dead!”

The duke dropped his head upon his breast with a great sigh, but was silent. At those words, at that sigh, the three old men looked at each other. It seemed to them as though the illustrious and opulent house of Herouville was disappearing before their eyes like a sinking ship.

“The Master above,” said the duke, casting a terrible glance at the heavens, “is ungrateful to me. He forgets the great deeds I have performed for his holy cause.”

“God has avenged himself!” said the priest, in a solemn voice.

“Put that man in the dungeon!” cried the duke.

“You can silence me far more easily than you can your conscience.”

The duke sank back in thought.

“My house to perish! My name to be extinct! I will marry! I will have a son!” he said, after a long pause.

Though the expression of despair on the duke’s face was truly awful, the bonesetter could not repress a smile. At that instant a song, fresh as the evening breeze, pure as the sky, equable as the color of the ocean, rose above the murmur of the waves, to cast its charm over Nature herself. The melancholy of that voice, the melody of its tones shed, as it were, a perfume rising to the soul; its harmony rose like a vapor filling the air; it poured a balm on sorrows, or rather it consoled them by expressing them. The voice mingled with the gurgle of the waves so perfectly that it seemed to rise from the bosom of the waters. That song was sweeter to the ears of those old men than the tenderest word of love on the lips of a young girl; it brought religious hope into their souls like a voice from heaven.

“What is that?” asked the duke.

“The little nightingale is singing,” said Bertrand; “all is not lost, either for him or for us.”

“What do you call a nightingale?”

“That is the name we have given to monseigneur’s eldest son,” replied Bertrand.

“My son!” cried the old man; “have I a son?—a son to bear my name and to perpetuate it!”

He rose to his feet and began to walk about the room with steps in turn precipitate and slow. Then he made an imperious gesture, sending every one away from him except the priest.

The next morning the duke, leaning on the arm of his old retainer Bertrand, walked along the shore and among the rocks looking for the son he had so long hated. He saw him from afar in a recess of the granite rocks, lying carelessly extended in the sun, his head on a tuft of mossy grass, his feet gracefully drawn up beneath him. So lying, Etienne was like a swallow at rest. As soon as the tall old man appeared upon the beach, the sound of his steps mingling faintly with the voice of the waves, the young man turned his head, gave the cry of a startled bird, and disappeared as if into the rock itself, like a mouse darting so quickly into its hole that we doubt if we have even seen it.

“Hey! tete-Dieu! where has he hid himself?” cried the duke, reaching the rock beside which his son had been lying.

“He is there,” replied Bertrand, pointing to a narrow crevice, the edges of which had been polished smooth by the repeated assaults of the high tide.

“Etienne, my beloved son!” called the old man.

The hated child made no reply. For hours the duke entreated, threatened, implored in turn, receiving no response. Sometimes he was silent, with his ear at the cleft of the rock, where even his enfeebled hearing could detect the beating of Etienne’s heart, the quick pulsations of which echoed from the sonorous roof of his rocky hiding-place.

“At least he lives!” said the old man, in a heartrending voice.

Towards the middle of the day, the father, reduced to despair, had recourse to prayer:—

“Etienne,” he said, “my dear Etienne, God has punished me for disowning you. He has deprived me of your brother. To-day you are my only child. I love you more than I love myself. I see the wrong I have done; I know that you have in your veins my blood with that of your mother, whose misery was my doing. Come to me; I will try to make you forget my cruelty; I will cherish you for all that I have lost. Etienne, you are the Duc de Nivron, and you will be, after me, the Duc d’Herouville, peer of France, knight of the Orders and of the Golden Fleece, captain of a hundred men-at-arms, grand-bailiff of Bessin, Governor of Normandy, lord of twenty-seven domains counting sixty-nine steeples, Marquis de Saint-Sever. You shall take to wife the daughter of a prince. Would you have me die of grief? Come! come to me! or here I kneel until I see you. Your old father prays you, he humbles himself before his child as before God himself.”

The hated son paid no heed to this language bristling with social ideas and vanities he did not comprehend; his soul remained under the impressions of unconquerable terror. He was silent, suffering great agony. Towards evening the old seigneur, after exhausting all formulas of language, all resources of entreaty, all repentant promises, was overcome by a sort of religious contrition. He knelt down upon the sand and made a vow:—

“I swear to build a chapel to Saint-Jean and Saint-Etienne, the patrons of my wife and son, and to found one hundred masses in honor of the Virgin, if God and the saints will restore to me the affection of my son, the Duc de Nivron, here present.”

He remained on his knees in deep humility with clasped hands, praying. Finding that his son, the hope of his name, still did not come to him, great

tears rose in his eyes, dry so long, and rolled down his withered cheeks. At this moment, Etienne, hearing no further sounds, glided to the opening of his grotto like a young adder craving the sun. He saw the tears of the stricken old man, he recognized the signs of a true grief, and, seizing his father's hand, he kissed him, saying in the voice of an angel:—

"Oh, mother! forgive me!"

In the fever of his happiness the old duke lifted his feeble offspring in his arms and carried him, trembling like an abducted girl, toward the castle. As he felt the palpitation of his son's body he strove to reassure him, kissing him with all the caution he might have shown in touching a delicate flower; and speaking in the gentlest tones he had ever in his life used, in order to soothe him.

"God's truth! you are like my poor Jeanne, dear child!" he said. "Teach me what would give you pleasure, and I will give you all you can desire. Grow strong! be well! I will show you how to ride a mare as pretty and gentle as yourself. Nothing shall ever thwart or trouble you. Tete-Dieu! all things bow to me as the reeds to the wind. I give you unlimited power. I bow to you myself as the god of the family."

The father carried his son into the lordly chamber where the mother's sad existence had been spent. Etienne turned away and leaned against the window from which his mother was wont to make him signals announcing the departure of his persecutor, who now, without his knowing why, had become his slave, like those gigantic genii which the power of a fairy places at the order of a young prince. That fairy was Feudality. Beholding once more the melancholy room where his eyes were accustomed to contemplate the ocean, tears came into those eyes; recollections of his long misery, mingled with melodious memories of the pleasures he had had in the only love that was granted to him, maternal love, all rushed together upon his heart and developed there, like a poem at once terrible and delicious. The emotions of this youth, accustomed to live in contemplations of ecstasy as others in the excitements of the world, resembled none of the habitual emotions of mankind.

"Will he live?" said the old man, amazed at the fragility of his heir, and holding his breath as he leaned over him.

"I can live only here," replied Etienne, who had heard him, simply.

"Well, then, this room shall be yours, my child."

"What is that noise?" asked the young man, hearing the retainers of the castle who were gathering in the guard-room, whither the duke had summoned them to present his son.

“Come!” said the father, taking him by the hand and leading him into the great hall.

At this epoch of our history, a duke and peer, with great possessions, holding public offices and the government of a province, lived the life of a prince; the cadets of his family did not revolt at serving him. He had his household guard and officers; the first lieutenant of his ordnance company was to him what, in our day, an aide-de-camp is to a marshal. A few years later, Cardinal de Richelieu had his body-guard. Several princes allied to the royal house—Guise, Conde, Nevers, and Vendome, etc.—had pages chosen among the sons of the best families,—a last lingering custom of departed chivalry. The wealth of the Duc d’Herouville, and the antiquity of his Norman race indicated by his name (“herus villoe”), permitted him to imitate the magnificence of families who were in other respects his inferiors,—those, for instance, of Epernon, Luynes, Balagny, d’O, Zamet, regarded as parvenus, but living, nevertheless, as princes. It was therefore an imposing spectacle for poor Etienne to see the assemblage of retainers of all kinds attached to the service of his father.

The duke seated himself on a chair of state placed under a “solium,” or dais of carved word, above a platform raised by several steps, from which, in certain provinces, the great seigneurs still delivered judgment on their vassals, —a vestige of feudality which disappeared under the reign of Richelieu. These thrones, like the warden’s benches of the churches, have now become objects of collection as curiosities. When Etienne was placed beside his father on that raised platform, he shuddered at feeling himself the centre to which all eyes turned.

“Do not tremble,” said the duke, bending his bald head to his son’s ear; “these people are only our servants.”

Through the dusky light produced by the setting sun, the rays of which were reddening the leaded panes of the windows, Etienne saw the bailiff, the captain and lieutenant of the guard, with certain of their men-at-arms, the chaplain, the secretaries, the doctor, the majordomo, the ushers, the steward, the huntsmen, the game-keeper, the grooms, and the valets. Though all these people stood in respectful attitudes, induced by the terror the old man inspired in even the most important persons under his command, a low murmur, caused by curiosity and expectation, made itself heard. That sound oppressed the bosom of the young man, who felt for the first time in his life the influence of the heavy atmosphere produced by the breath of many persons in a closed hall. His senses, accustomed to the pure and wholesome air from the sea, were shocked with a rapidity that proved the super-sensitiveness of his organs. A horrible palpitation, due no doubt to some defect in the organization of his heart, shook him with reiterated blows when his father, showing himself to the

assemblage like some majestic old lion, pronounced in a solemn voice the following brief address:—

“My friends, this is my son Etienne, my first-born son, my heir presumptive, the Duc de Nivron, to whom the king will no doubt grant the honors of his deceased brother. I present him to you that you may acknowledge him and obey him as myself. I warn you that if you, or any one in this province, over which I am governor, does aught to displease the young duke, or thwart him in any way whatsoever, it would be better, should it come to my knowledge, that that man had never been born. You hear me. Return now to your duties, and God guide you. The obsequies of my son Maximilien will take place here when his body arrives. The household will go into mourning eight days hence. Later, we shall celebrate the accession of my son Etienne here present.”

“Vive monseigneur! Long live the race of Herouville!” cried the people in a roar that shook the castle.

The valets brought in torches to illuminate the hall. That hurrah, the sudden lights, the sensations caused by his father’s speech, joined to those he was already feeling, overcame the young man, who fainted completely and fell into a chair, leaving his slender womanly hand in the broad palm of his father. As the duke, who had signed to the lieutenant of his company to come nearer, saying to him, “I am fortunate, Baron d’Artagnon, in being able to repair my loss; behold my son!” he felt an icy hand in his. Turning round, he looked at the new Duc de Nivron, and, thinking him dead, he uttered a cry of horror which appalled the assemblage.

Beauvouloir rushed to the platform, took the young man in his arms, and carried him away, saying to his master, “You have killed him by not preparing him for this ceremony.”

“He can never have a child if he is like that!” cried the duke, following Beauvouloir into the seignorial chamber, where the doctor laid the young heir upon the bed.

“Well, what think you?” asked the duke presently.

“It is not serious,” replied the old physician, showing Etienne, who was now revived by a cordial, a few drops of which he had given him on a bit of sugar, a new and precious substance which the apothecaries were selling for its weight in gold.

“Take this, old rascal!” said the duke, offering his purse to Beauvouloir, “and treat him like the son of a king! If he dies by your fault, I’ll burn you myself on a gridiron.”

“If you continue to be so violent, the Duc de Nivron will die by your own act,” said the doctor, roughly. “Leave him now; he will go to sleep.”

“Good-night, my love,” said the old man, kissing his son upon the forehead.

“Good-night, father,” replied the youth, whose voice made the father—thus named by Etienne for the first time—quiver.

The duke took Beauvouloir by the arm and led him to the next room, where, having pushed him into the recess of a window, he said:—

“Ah ca! old rascal, now we will understand each other.”

That term, a favorite sign of graciousness with the duke, made the doctor, no longer a mere bonesetter, smile.

“You know,” said the duke, continuing, “that I wish you no harm. You have twice delivered my poor Jeanne, you cured my son Maximilien of an illness, in short, you are a part of my household. Poor Maximilien! I will avenge him; I take upon myself to kill the man who killed him. The whole future of the house of Herouville is now in your hands. You alone can know if there is in that poor abortion the stuff that can breed a Herouville. You hear me. What think you?”

“His life on the seashore has been so chaste and so pure that nature is sounder in him than it would have been had he lived in your world. But so delicate a body is the very humble servant of the soul. Monseigneur Etienne must himself choose his wife; all things in him must be the work of nature and not of your will. He will love artlessly, and will accomplish by his heart’s desire that which you wish him to do for the sake of your name. But if you give your son a proud, ungainly woman of the world, a great lady, he will flee to his rocks. More than that; though sudden terror would surely kill him, I believe that any sudden emotion would be equally fatal. My advice therefore is to leave Etienne to choose for himself, at his own pleasure, the path of love. Listen to me, monseigneur; you are a great and powerful prince, but you understand nothing of such matters. Give me your entire confidence, your unlimited confidence, and you shall have a grandson.”

“If I obtain a grandson by any sorcery whatever, I shall have you ennobled. Yes, difficult as it may be, I’ll make an old rascal into a man of honor; you shall be Baron de Forcalier. Employ your magic, white or black, appeal to your witches’ sabbath or the novenas of the Church; what care I how ‘tis done, provided my line male continues?”

“I know,” said Beauvouloir, “a whole chapter of sorcerers capable of destroying your hopes; they are none other than yourself, monseigneur. I know

you. To-day you want male lineage at any price; to-morrow you will seek to have it on your own conditions; you will torment your son."

"God preserve me from it!"

"Well, then, go away from here; go to court, where the death of the marechal and the emancipation of the king must have turned everything topsy turvy, and where you certainly have business, if only to obtain the marshal's baton which was promised to you. Leave Monseigneur Etienne to me. But give me your word of honor as a gentleman to approve whatever I may do for him."

The duke struck his hand into that of his physician as a sign of complete acceptance, and retired to his own apartments.

When the days of a high and mighty seigneur are numbered, the physician becomes a personage of importance in the household. It is, therefore, not surprising to see a former bonesetter so familiar with the Duc d'Herouville. Apart from the illegitimate ties which connected him, by marriage, to this great family and certainly militated in his favor, his sound good sense had so often been proved by the duke that the old man had now become his master's most valued counsellor. Beauvouloir was the Coyctier of this Louis XI. Nevertheless, and no matter how valuable his knowledge might be, he never obtained over the government of Normandy, in whom was the ferocity of religious warfare, as much influence as feudality exercised over that rugged nature. For this reason the physician was confident that the prejudices of the noble would thwart the desires and the vows of the father.

CHAPTER V. GABRIELLE

Great physician that he was, Beauvouloir saw plainly that to a being so delicately organized as Etienne marriage must come as a slow and gentle inspiration, communicating new powers to his being and vivifying it with the fires of love. As he had said to the father, to impose a wife on Etienne would be to kill him. Above all it was important that the young recluse should not be alarmed at the thought of marriage, of which he knew nothing, or be made aware of the object of his father's wishes. This unknown poet conceived as yet only the beautiful and noble passion of Petrarch for Laura, of Dante for Beatrice. Like his mother he was all pure love and soul; the opportunity to love must be given to him, and then the event should be awaited, not compelled. A command to love would have dried within him the very sources of his life.

Maitre Antoine Beauvouloir was a father; he had a daughter brought up under conditions which made her the wife for Etienne. It was so difficult to foresee the events which would make a son, disowned by his father and destined to the priesthood, the presumptive heir of the house of Herouville that Beauvouloir had never until now noticed the resemblance between the fate of Etienne and that of Gabrielle. A sudden idea which now came to him was inspired more by his devotion to those two beings than by ambition.

His wife, in spite of his great skill, had died in child-bed leaving him a daughter whose health was so frail that it seemed as if the mother had bequeathed to her fruit the germs of death. Beauvouloir loved his Gabrielle as old men love their only child. His science and his incessant care had given factitious life to this frail creature, which he cultivated as a florist cultivates an exotic plant. He had kept her hidden from all eyes on his estate of Forcalier, where she was protected against the dangers of the time by the general good-will felt for a man to whom all owed gratitude, and whose scientific powers inspired in the ignorant minds of the country-people a superstitious awe.

By attaching himself to the house of Herouville, Beauvouloir had increased still further the immunity he enjoyed in the province, and had thwarted all attempts of his enemies by means of his powerful influence with the governor. He had taken care, however, in coming to reside at the castle, not to bring with him the flower he cherished in secret at Forcalier, a domain more important for its landed value than for the house then upon it, but with which he expected to obtain for his daughter an establishment in conformity with his views. While promising the duke a posterity and requiring his master’s word of honor to approve his acts, he thought suddenly of Gabrielle, of that sweet child whose mother had been neglected and forgotten by the duke as he had also neglected and forgotten his son Etienne.

He awaited the departure of his master before putting his plan into execution; foreseeing that, if the duke became aware of it, the enormous difficulties in the way would be from the first insurmountable.

Beauvouloir’s house at Forcalier had a southern exposure on the slope of one of those gentle hills which surround the vales of Normandy; a thick wood shielded it from the north; high walls and Norman hedges and deep ditches made the enclosure inviolable. The garden, descending by an easy incline to the river which watered the valley, had a thick double hedge at its foot, forming an natural embankment. Within this double hedge wound a hidden path, led by the sinuosities of the stream, which the willows, oaks, and beeches made as leafy as a woodland glade. From the house to this natural rampart stretched a mass of verdure peculiar to that rich soil; a beautiful green sheet bordered by a fringe of rare trees, the tones of which formed a tapestry of exquisite coloring: there, the silvery tints of a pine stood forth against the

darker green of several alders; here, before a group of sturdy oaks a slender poplar lifted its palm-like figure, ever swaying; farther on, the weeping willows drooped their pale foliage between the stout, round-headed walnuts. This belt of trees enabled the occupants of the house to go down at all hours to the river-bank fearless of the rays of the sun.

The facade of the house, before which lay the yellow ribbon of a gravelled terrace, was shaded by a wooden gallery, around which climbing plants were twining, and tossing in this month of May their various blossoms into the very windows of the second floor. Without being really vast, this garden seemed immense from the manner in which its vistas were cut; points of view, cleverly contrived through the rise and fall of the ground, married themselves, as it were, to those of the valley, where the eye could rove at will. Following the instincts of her thought, Gabrielle could either enter the solitude of a narrow space, seeing naught but the thick green and the blue of the sky above the tree-tops, or she could hover above a glorious prospect, letting her eyes follow those many-shaded green lines, from the brilliant colors of the foreground to the pure tones of the horizon on which they lost themselves, sometimes in the blue ocean of the atmosphere, sometimes in the cumuli that floated above it.

Watched over by her grandmother and served by her former nurse, Gabrielle Beauvouloir never left this modest home except for the parish church, the steeple of which could be seen at the summit of the hill, whither she was always accompanied by her grandmother, her nurse, and her father’s valet. She had reached the age of seventeen in that sweet ignorance which the rarity of books allowed a girl to retain without appearing extraordinary at a period when educated women were thought phenomenal. The house had been to her a convent, but with more freedom, less enforced prayer,—a retreat where she had lived beneath the eye of a pious old woman and the protection of her father, the only man she had ever known. This absolute solitude, necessitated from her birth by the apparent feebleness of her constitution, had been carefully maintained by Beauvouloir.

As Gabrielle grew up, such constant care and the purity of the atmosphere had gradually strengthened her fragile youth. Still, the wise physician did not deceive himself when he saw the pearly tints around his daughter’s eyes soften or darken or flush according to the emotions that overcame her; the weakness of the body and the strength of the soul were made plain to him in that one indication which his long experience enabled him to understand. Besides this, Gabrielle’s celestial beauty made him fearful of attempts too common in times of violence and sedition. Many reasons had thus induced the good father to deepen the shadows and increase the solitude that surrounded his daughter, whose excessive sensibility alarmed him; a passion, an assault, a shock of any kind might wound her mortally. Though she seldom deserved blame, a mere

word of reproach overcame her; she kept it in the depths of her heart, where it fostered a meditative melancholy; she would turn away weeping, and wept long.

Thus the moral education of the young girl required no less care than her physical education. The old physician had been compelled to cease telling stories, such as all children love, to his daughter; the impressions she received were too vivid. Wise through long practice, he endeavored to develop her body in order to deaden the blows which a soul so powerful gave to it. Gabrielle was all of life and love to her father, his only heir, and never had he hesitated to procure for her such things as might produce the results he aimed for. He carefully removed from her knowledge books, pictures, music, all those creations of art which awaken thought. Aided by his mother he interested Gabrielle in manual exercises. Tapestry, sewing, lace-making, the culture of flowers, household cares, the storage of fruits, in short, the most material occupations of life, were the food given to the mind of this charming creature. Beauvouloir brought her beautiful spinning-wheels, finely-carved chests, rich carpets, pottery of Bernard de Palissy, tables, prie-dieus, chairs beautifully wrought and covered with precious stuffs, embroidered line and jewels. With an instinct given by paternity, the old man always chose his presents among the works of that fantastic order called arabesque, which, speaking neither to the soul nor the senses, addresses the mind only by its creations of pure fantasy.

Thus—singular to say!—the life which the hatred of a father had imposed on Etienne d'Herouville, paternal love had induced Beauvouloir to impose on Gabrielle. In both these children the soul was killing the body; and without an absolute solitude, ordained by cruelty for one and procured by science for the other, each was likely to succumb,—he to terror, she beneath the weight of a too keen emotion of love. But, alas! instead of being born in a region of gorse and moor, in the midst of an arid nature of hard and angular shapes, such as all great painters have given as backgrounds to their Virgins, Gabrielle lived in a rich and fertile valley. Beauvouloir could not destroy the harmonious grouping of the native woods, the graceful upspringing of the wild flowers, the cool softness of the grassy slopes, the love expressed in the intertwining growth of the clustering plants. Such ever-living poesies have a language heard, rather than understood by the poor girl, who yielded to vague misery among the shadows. Across the misty ideas suggested by her long study of this beautiful landscape, observed at all seasons and through all the variations of a marine atmosphere in which the fogs of England come to die and the sunshine of France is born, there rose within her soul a distant light, a dawn which pierced the darkness in which her father kept her.

Beauvouloir had never withdrawn his daughter from the influence of

Divine love; to a deep admiration of nature she joined her girlish adoration of the Creator, springing thus into the first way open to the feelings of womanhood. She loved God, she loved Jesus, the Virgin and the saints; she loved the Church and its pomps; she was Catholic after the manner of Saint Teresa, who saw in Jesus an eternal spouse, a continual marriage. Gabrielle gave herself up to this passion of strong souls with so touching a simplicity that she would have disarmed the most brutal seducer by the infantine naivete of her language.

Whither was this life of innocence leading Gabrielle? How teach a mind as pure as the water of a tranquil lake, reflecting only the azure of the skies? What images should be drawn upon that spotless canvas? Around which tree must the tendrils of this bind-weed twine? No father has ever put these questions to himself without an inward shudder.

At this moment the good old man of science was riding slowly on his mule along the roads from Herouville to Ourscamp (the name of the village near which the estate of Forcalier was situated) as if he wished to keep that way unending. The infinite love he bore his daughter suggested a bold project to his mind. One only being in all the world could make her happy; that man was Etienne. Assuredly, the angelic son of Jeanne de Saint-Savin and the guileless daughter of Gertrude Marana were twin beings. All other women would frighten and kill the heir of Herouville; and Gabrielle, so Beauvouloir argued, would perish by contact with any man in whom sentiments and external forms had not the virgin delicacy of those of Etienne. Certainly the poor physician had never dreamed of such a result; chance had brought it forward and seemed to ordain it. But, under, the reign of Louis XIII., to dare to lead a Duc d’Herouville to marry the daughter of a bonesetter!

And yet, from this marriage alone was it likely that the lineage imperiously demanded by the old duke would result. Nature had destined these two rare beings for each other; God had brought them together by a marvellous arrangement of events, while, at the same time, human ideas and laws placed insuperable barriers between them. Though the old man thought he saw in this the finger of God, and although he had forced the duke to pass his word, he was seized with such fear, as his thoughts reverted to the violence of that ungovernable nature, that he returned upon his steps when, on reaching the summit of the hill above Ourscamp, he saw the smoke of his own chimneys among the trees that enclosed his home. Then, changing his mind once more, the thought of the illegitimate relationship decided him; that consideration might have great influence on the mind of his master. Once decided, Beauvouloir had confidence in the chances and changes of life; it might be that the duke would die before the marriage; besides, there were many examples of such marriage; a peasant girl in Dauphine, Francoise Mignot, had

lately married the Marechal d'Hopital; the son of the Connetable Anne de Montmorency had married Diane, daughter of Henri II. and a Piedmontese lady named Philippa Duc.

During this mental deliberation in which paternal love measured all probabilities and discussed both the good and the evil chances, striving to foresee the future and weighing its elements, Gabrielle was walking in the garden and gathering flowers for the vases of that illustrious potter, who did for glaze what Benvenuto Cellini did for metal. Gabrielle had put one of these vases, decorated with animals in relief, on a table in the middle of the hall, and was filling it with flowers to enliven her grandmother, and also, perhaps, to give form to her own ideas. The noble vase, of the pottery called Limoges, was filled, arranged, and placed upon the handsome table-cloth, and Gabrielle was saying to her grandmother, "See!" when Beauvouloir entered. The young girl ran to her father's arms. After this first outburst of affection she wanted him to admire her bouquet; but the old man, after glancing at it, cast a long, deep look at his daughter, which made her blush.

"The time has come," he said to himself, understanding the language of those flowers, each of which had doubtless been studied as to form and as to color, and given its true place in the bouquet, where it produced its own magical effect.

Gabrielle remained standing, forgetting the flower begun on her tapestry. As he looked at his daughter a tear rolled from Beauvouloir's eyes, furrowed his cheeks which seldom wore a serious aspect, and fell upon his shirt, which, after the fashion of the day, his open doublet exposed to view above his breeches. He threw off his felt hat, adorned with an old red plume, in order to rub his hand over his bald head. Again he looked at his daughter, who, beneath the brown rafters of that leather-hung room, with its ebony furniture and portieres of silken damask, and its tall chimney-piece, the whole so softly lighted, was still his very own. The poor father felt the tears in his eyes and hastened to wipe them. A father who loves his daughter longs to keep her always a child; as for him who can without deep pain see her fall under the dominion of another man, he does not rise to worlds superior, he falls to lowest space.

"What ails you, my son?" said his old mother, taking off her spectacles, and seeking the cause of his silence and of the change in his usually joyous manner.

The old physician signed to the old mother to look at his daughter, nodding his head with satisfaction as if to say, "How sweet she is!"

What father would not have felt Beauvouloir's emotion on seeing the young girl as she stood there in the Norman dress of that period? Gabrielle

wore the corset pointed before and square behind, which the Italian masters give almost invariably to their saints and their madonnas. This elegant corselet, made of sky-blue velvet, as dainty as that of a dragon-fly, enclosed the bust like a guimpe and compressed it, delicately modelling the outline as it seemed to flatten; it moulded the shoulders, the back, the waist, with the precision of a drawing made by an able draftsman, ending around the neck in an oblong curve, adorned at the edges with a slight embroidery in brown silks, leaving to view as much of the bare throat as was needed to show the beauty of her womanhood, but not enough to awaken desire. A full brown skirt, continuing the lines already drawn by the velvet waist, fell to her feet in narrow flattened pleats. Her figure was so slender that Gabrielle seemed tall; her arms hung pendent with the inertia that some deep thought imparts to the attitude. Thus standing, she presented a living model of those ingenuous works of statuary a taste for which prevailed at that period,—works which obtained admiration for the harmony of their lines, straight without stiffness, and for the firmness of a design which did not exclude vitality. No swallow, brushing the window-panes at dusk, ever conveyed the idea of greater elegance of outline.

Gabrielle’s face was thin, but not flat; on her neck and forehead ran bluish threads showing the delicacy of a skin so transparent that the flowing of the blood through her veins seemed visible. This excessive whiteness was faintly tinted with rose upon the cheeks. Held beneath a little coif of sky-blue velvet embroidered with pearls, her hair, of an even tone, flowed like two rivulets of gold from her temples and played in ringlets on her neck, which it did not hide. The glowing color of those silky locks brightened the dazzling whiteness of the neck, and purified still further by its reflections the outlines of the face already so pure. The eyes, which were long and as if pressed between their lids, were in harmony with the delicacy of the head and body; their pearl-gray tints were brilliant without vivacity, candid without passion. The line of the nose might have seemed cold, like a steel blade, without two rosy nostrils, the movements of which were out of keeping with the chastity of that dreamy brow, often perplexed, sometimes smiling, but always of an august serenity. An alert little ear attracted the eye, peeping beneath the coif and between two curls, and showing a ruby ear-drop, the color of which stood vigorously out on the milky whiteness of the neck. This was neither Norman beauty, where flesh abounds, nor French beauty, as fugitive as its own expressions, nor the beauty of the North, cold and melancholy as the North itself—it was the deep seraphic beauty of the Catholic Church, supple and rigid, severe but tender.

“Where could one find a prettier duchess?” thought Beauvouloir, contemplating his daughter with delight. As she stood there slightly bending, her neck stretched out to watch the flight of a bird past the windows, he could only compare her to a gazelle pausing to listen for the ripple of the water where she seeks to drink.

“Come and sit here,” said Beauvouloir, tapping his knee and making a sign to Gabrielle, which told her he had something to whisper to her.

Gabrielle understood him, and came. She placed herself on his knee with the lightness of a gazelle, and slipped her arm about his neck, ruffling his collar.

“Tell me,” he said, “what were you thinking of when you gathered those flowers? You have never before arranged them so charmingly.”

“I was thinking of many things,” she answered. “Looking at the flowers made for us, I wondered whom we were made for; who are they who look at us? You are wise, and I can tell you what I think; you know so much you can explain all. I feel a sort of force within me that wants to exercise itself; I struggle against something. When the sky is gray I am half content; I am sad, but I am calm. When the day is fine, and the flowers smell sweet, and I sit on my bench down there among the jasmine and honeysuckles, something rises in me, like waves which beat against my stillness. Ideas come into my mind which shake me, and fly away like those birds before the windows; I cannot hold them. Well, when I have made a bouquet in which the colors blend like tapestry, and the red contrasts with white, and the greens and the browns cross each other, when all seems so abundant, the breeze so playful, the flowers so many that their fragrance mingles and their buds interlace,—well, then I am happy, for I see what is passing in me. At church when the organ plays and the clergy respond, there are two distinct songs speaking to each other,—the human voice and the music. Well, then, too, I am happy; that harmony echoes in my breast. I pray with a pleasure which stirs my blood.”

While listening to his daughter, Beauvouloir examined her with sagacious eyes; those eyes seemed almost stupid from the force of his rushing thoughts, as the water of a cascade seems motionless. He raised the veil of flesh which hid the secret springs by which the soul reacts upon the body; he studied the diverse symptoms which his long experience had noted in persons committed to his care, and he compared them with those contained in this frail body, the bones of which frightened him by their delicacy, as the milk-white skin alarmed him by its want of substance. He tried to bring the teachings of his science to bear upon the future of that angelic child, and he was dizzy in so doing, as though he stood upon the verge of an abyss; the too vibrant voice, the too slender bosom of the young girl filled him with dread, and he questioned himself after questioning her.

“You suffer here!” he cried at last, driven by a last thought which summed up his whole meditation.

She bent her head gently.

“By God’s grace!” said the old man, with a sigh, “I will take you to the Chateau d’Herouville, and there you shall take sea-baths to strengthen you.”

“Is that true, father? You are not laughing at your little Gabrielle? I have so longed to see the castle, and the men-at-arms, and the captains of monseigneur.”

“Yes, my daughter, you shall really go there. Your nurse and Jean shall accompany you.”

“Soon?”

“To-morrow,” said the old man, hurrying into the garden to hide his agitation from his mother and his child.

“God is my witness,” he cried to himself, “that no ambitious thought impels me. My daughter to save, poor little Etienne to make happy,—those are my only motives.”

If he thus interrogated himself it was because, in the depths of his consciousness, he felt an inextinguishable satisfaction in knowing that the success of his project would make Gabrielle some day the Duchesse d’Herouville. There is always a man in a father. He walked about a long time, and when he came in to supper he took delight for the rest of the evening in watching his daughter in the midst of the soft brown poesy with which he had surrounded her; and when, before she went to bed, they all—the grandmother, the nurse, the doctor, and Gabrielle—knelt together to say their evening prayer, he added the words,—

“Let us pray to God to bless my enterprise.”

The eyes of the grandmother, who knew his intentions, were moistened with what tears remained to her. Gabrielle’s face was flushed with happiness. The father trembled, so much did he fear some catastrophe.

“After all,” his mother said to him, “fear not, my son. The duke would never kill his grandchild.”

“No,” he replied, “but he might compel her to marry some brute of a baron, and that would kill her.”

The next day Gabrielle, mounted on an ass, followed by her nurse on foot, her father on his mule, and a valet who led two horses laden with baggage, started for the castle of Herouville, where the caravan arrived at nightfall. In order to keep this journey secret, Beauvouloir had taken by-roads, starting early in the morning, and had brought provisions to be eaten by the way, in order not to show himself at hostelries. The party arrived, therefore, after dark, without being noticed by the castle retinue, at the little dwelling on the seashore, so long occupied by the hated son, where Bertrand, the only person

the doctor had taken into his confidence, awaited them. The old retainer helped the nurse and valet to unload the horses and carry in the baggage, and otherwise establish the daughter of Beauvouloir in Etienne's former abode. When Bertrand saw Gabrielle, he was amazed.

"I seem to see madame!" he cried. "She is slim and willowy like her; she has madame's coloring and the same fair hair. The old duke will surely love her."

"God grant it!" said Beauvouloir. "But will he acknowledge his own blood after it has passed through mine?"

"He can't deny it," replied Bertrand. "I often went to fetch him from the door of the Belle Romaine, who lived in the rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine. The Cardinal de Lorraine was compelled to give her up to monseigneur, out of shame at being insulted by the mob when he left her house. Monseigneur, who in those days was still in his twenties, will remember that affair; bold he was, —I can tell it now—he led the insulters!"

"He never thinks of the past," said Beauvouloir. "He knows my wife is dead, but I doubt if he remembers I have a daughter."

"Two old navigators like you and me ought to be able to bring the ship to port," said Bertrand. "After all, suppose the duke does get angry and seize our carcasses; they have served their time."

CHAPTER VI. LOVE

Before starting for Paris, the Duc d'Herouville had forbidden the castle servants under heavy pains and penalties to go upon the shore where Etienne had passed his life, unless the Duc de Nivron took any of them with him. This order, suggested by Beauvouloir, who had shown the duke the wisdom of leaving Etienne master of his solitude, guaranteed to Gabrielle and her attendants the inviolability of the little domain, outside of which he forbade them to go without his permission.

Etienne had remained during these two days shut up in the old seignorial bedroom under the spell of his tenderest memories. In that bed his mother had slept; her thoughts had been confided to the furnishings of that room; she had used them; her eyes had often wandered among those draperies; how often she had gone to that window to call with a cry, a sign, her poor disowned child, now master of the chateau. Alone in that room, whither he had last come secretly, brought by Beauvouloir to kiss his dying mother, he fancied that she lived again; he spoke to her, he listened to her, he drank from that spring that

never faileth, and from which have flowed so many songs like the “Super flumina Babylonis.”

The day after Beauvouloir’s return he went to see his young master and blamed him gently for shutting himself up in a single room, pointing out to him the danger of leading a prison life in place of his former free life in the open air.

“But this air is vast,” replied Etienne. “The spirit of my mother is in it.”

The physician prevailed, however, by the gentle influence of affection, in making Etienne promise that he would go out every day, either on the seashore, or in the fields and meadows which were still unknown to him. In spite of this, Etienne, absorbed in his memories, remained yet another day at his window watching the sea, which offered him from that point of view aspects so various that never, as he believed, had he seen it so beautiful. He mingled his contemplations with readings in Petrarch, one of his most favorite authors,—him whose poesy went nearest to the young man’s heart through the constancy and the unity of his love. Etienne had not within him the stuff for several passions. He could love but once, and in one way only. If that love, like all that is a unit, were intense, it must also be calm in its expression, sweet and pure like the sonnets of the Italian poet.

At sunset this child of solitude began to sing, in the marvellous voice which had entered suddenly, like a hope, into the dullest of all ears to music,—those of his father. He expressed his melancholy by varying the same air, which he repeated, again and again, like the nightingale. This air, attributed to the late King Henri IV., was not the so-called air of “Gabrielle,” but something far superior as art, as melody, as the expression of infinite tenderness. The admirers of those ancient tunes will recognize the words, composed by the great king to this air, which were taken, probably, from some folk-song to which his cradle had been rocked among the mountains of Bearn.

“Dawn, approach,

I pray thee;

It gladdens me to see thee;

The maiden

Whom I love

Is rosy, rosy like thee;

The rose itself,

Dew-laden,

Has not her freshness;

Ermine has not

Her pureness;

Lilies have not

Her whiteness.”

After naively revealing the thought of his heart in song, Etienne contemplated the sea, saying to himself: “There is my bride; the only love for me!” Then he sang too other lines of the canzonet,—

“She is fair

Beyond compare,”—

repeating it to express the imploring poesy which abounds in the heart of a timid young man, brave only when alone. Dreams were in that undulating song, sung, resung, interrupted, renewed, and hushed at last in a final modulation, the tones of which died away like the lingering vibrations of a bell.

At this moment a voice, which he fancied was that of a siren rising from the sea, a woman’s voice, repeated the air he had sung, but with all the hesitations of a person to whom music is revealed for the first time. He recognized the stammering of a heart born into the poesy of harmony. Etienne, to whom long study of his own voice had taught the language of sounds, in which the soul finds resources greater than speech to express its thoughts, could divine the timid amazement that attended these attempts. With what religious and subtile admiration had that unknown being listened to him! The stillness of the atmosphere enabled him to hear every sound, and he quivered at the distant rustle of the folds of a gown. He was amazed,—he, whom all emotions produced by terror sent to the verge of death—to feel within him the healing, balsamic sensation which his mother’s coming had formerly brought to him.

“Come, Gabrielle, my child,” said the voice of Beauvouloir, “I forbade you to stay upon the seashore after sundown; you must come in, my daughter.”

“Gabrielle,” said Etienne to himself. “Oh! the pretty name!”

Beauvouloir presently came to him, rousing his young master from one of those meditations which resemble dreams. It was night, and the moon was rising.

“Monseigneur,” said the physician, “you have not been out to-day, and it is not wise of you.”

“And I,” replied Etienne, “can I go on the seashore after sundown?”

The double meaning of this speech, full of the gentle playfulness of a first desire, made the old man smile.

“You have a daughter, Beauvouloir.”

“Yes, monseigneur,—the child of my old age; my darling child. Monseigneur, the duke, your father, charged me so earnestly to watch your precious health that, not being able to go to Forcalier, where she was, I have brought her here, to my great regret. In order to conceal her from all eyes, I have placed her in the house monseigneur used to occupy. She is so delicate I fear everything, even a sudden sentiment or emotion. I have never taught her anything; knowledge would kill her.”

“She knows nothing!” cried Etienne, surprised.

“She has all the talents of a good housewife, but she has lived as the plants live. Ignorance, monseigneur, is as sacred a thing as knowledge. Knowledge and ignorance are only two ways of living, for the human creature. Both preserve the soul and envelop it; knowledge is your existence, but ignorance will save my daughter’s life. Pearls well-hidden escape the diver, and live happy. I can only compare my Gabrielle to a pearl; her skin has the pearl’s translucence, her soul its softness, and until this day Forcalier has been her fostering shell.”

“Come with me,” said Etienne, throwing on a cloak. “I want to walk on the seashore, the air is so soft.”

Beauvouloir and his master walked in silence until they reached a spot where a line of light, coming from between the shutters of a fisherman’s house, had furrowed the sea with a golden rivulet.

“I know not how to express,” said Etienne, addressing his companion, “the sensations that light, cast upon the water, excites in me. I have often watched it streaming from the windows of that room,” he added, pointing back to his mother’s chamber, “until it was extinguished.”

“Delicate as Gabrielle is,” said Beauvouloir, gaily, “she can come and walk with us; the night is warm, and the air has no dampness. I will fetch her; but be prudent, monseigneur.”

Etienne was too timid to propose to accompany Beauvouloir into the house; besides, he was in that torpid state into which we are plunged by the influx of ideas and sensations which give birth to the dawn of passion. Conscious of more freedom in being alone, he cried out, looking at the sea now gleaming in the moonlight,—

“The Ocean has passed into my soul!”

The sight of the lovely living statuette which was now advancing towards

him, silvered by the moon and wrapped in its light, redoubled the palpitations of his heart, but without causing him to suffer.

“My child,” said Beauvouloir, “this is monseigneur.”

In a moment poor Etienne longed for his father’s colossal figure; he would fain have seemed strong, not puny. All the vanities of love and manhood came into his heart like so many arrows, and he remained in gloomy silence, measuring for the first time the extent of his imperfections. Embarrassed by the salutation of the young girl, he returned it awkwardly, and stayed beside Beauvouloir, with whom he talked as they paced along the shore; presently, however, Gabrielle’s timid and deprecating countenance emboldened him, and he dared to address her. The incident of the song was the result of mere chance. Beauvouloir had intentionally made no preparations; he thought, wisely, that between two beings in whom solitude had left pure hearts, love would arise in all its simplicity. The repetition of the air by Gabrielle was a ready text on which to begin a conversation.

During this promenade Etienne was conscious of that bodily buoyancy which all men have felt at the moment when a first love transports their vital principle into another being. He offered to teach Gabrielle to sing. The poor lad was so glad to show himself to this young girl invested with some slight superiority that he trembled with pleasure when she accepted his offer. At that moment the moonlight fell full upon her, and enabled Etienne to note the points of her resemblance to his mother, the late duchess. Like Jeanne de Saint-Savin, Beauvouloir’s daughter was slender and delicate; in her, as in the duchess, sadness and suffering conveyed a mysterious charm. She had that nobility of manner peculiar to souls on whom the ways of the world have had no influence, and in whom all is noble because all is natural. But in Gabrielle’s veins there was also the blood of “la belle Romaine,” which had flowed there from two generations, giving to this young girl the passionate heart of a courtesan in an absolutely pure soul; hence the enthusiasm that sometimes reddened her cheek, sanctified her brow, and made her exhale her soul like a flash of light, and communicated the sparkle of flame to all her motions. Beauvouloir shuddered when he noticed this phenomenon, which we may call in these days the phosphorescence of thought; the old physician of that period regarded it as the precursor of death.

Hidden beside her father, Gabrielle endeavored to see Etienne at her ease, and her looks expressed as much curiosity as pleasure, as much kindliness as innocent daring. Etienne detected her in stretching her neck around Beauvouloir with the movement of a timid bird looking out of its nest. To her the young man seemed not feeble, but delicate; she found him so like herself that nothing alarmed her in this sovereign lord. Etienne’s sickly complexion, his beautiful hands, his languid smile, his hair parted in the middle into two

straight bands, ending in curls on the lace of his large flat collar, his noble brow, furrowed with youthful wrinkles,—all these contrasts of luxury and weakness, power and pettiness, pleased her; perhaps they gratified the instinct of maternal protection, which is the germ of love; perhaps, also, they stimulated the need that every woman feels to find distinctive signs in the man she is prompted to love. New ideas, new sensations were rising in each with a force, with an abundance that enlarged their souls; both remained silent and overcome, for sentiments are least demonstrative when most real and deep. All durable love begins by dreamy meditation. It was suitable that these two beings should first see each other in the softer light of the moon, that love and its splendors might not dazzle them too suddenly; it was well that they met by the shores of the Ocean,—vast image of the vastness of their feelings. They parted filled with one another, fearing, each, to have failed to please.

From his window Etienne watched the lights of the house where Gabrielle was. During that hour of hope mingled with fear, the young poet found fresh meanings in Petrarch’s sonnets. He had now seen Laura, a delicate, delightful figure, pure and glowing like a sunray, intelligent as an angel, feeble as a woman. His twenty years of study found their meaning, he understood the mystic marriage of all beauties; he perceived how much of womanhood there was in the poems he adored; in short, he had so long loved unconsciously that his whole past now blended with the emotions of this glorious night. Gabrielle’s resemblance to his mother seemed to him an order divinely given. He did not betray his love for the one in loving the other; this new love continued HER maternity. He contemplated that young girl, asleep in the cottage, with the same feelings his mother had felt for him when he was there. Here, again, was a similitude which bound this present to the past. On the clouds of memory the saddened face of his mother appeared to him; he saw once more her feeble smile, he heard her gentle voice; she bowed her head and wept. The lights in the cottage were extinguished. Etienne sang once more the pretty canzonet, with a new expression, a new meaning. From afar Gabrielle again replied. The young girl, too, was making her first voyage into the charmed land of amorous ecstasy. That echoed answer filled with joy the young man’s heart; the blood flowing in his veins gave him a strength he never yet had felt, love made him powerful. Feeble beings alone know the voluptuous joy of that new creation entering their life. The poor, the suffering, the ill-used, have joys ineffable; small things to them are worlds. Etienne was bound by many a tie to the dwellers in the City of Sorrows. His recent accession to grandeur had caused him terror only; love now shed within him the balm that created strength; he loved Love.

The next day Etienne rose early to hasten to his old house, where Gabrielle, stirred by curiosity and an impatience she did not acknowledge to herself, had already curled her hair and put on her prettiest costume. Both

were full of the eager desire to see each other again,—mutually fearing the results of the interview. As for Etienne, he had chosen his finest lace, his best-embroidered mantle, his violet-velvet breeches; in short, those handsome habiliments which we connect in all memoirs of the time with the pallid face of Louis XIII., a face oppressed with pain in the midst of grandeur, like that of Etienne. Clothes were certainly not the only point of resemblance between the king and the subject. Many other sensibilities were in Etienne as in Louis XIII.,—chastity, melancholy, vague but real sufferings, chivalrous timidities, the fear of not being able to express a feeling in all its purity, the dread of too quickly approaching happiness, which all great souls desire to delay, the sense of the burden of power, that tendency to obedience which is found in natures indifferent to material interests, but full of love for what a noble religious genius has called the “astral.”

Though wholly inexpert in the ways of the world, Gabrielle was conscious that the daughter of a doctor, the humble inhabitant of Forcalier, was cast at too great a distance from Monseigneur Etienne, Duc de Nivron and heir to the house of Herouville, to allow them to be equal; she had as yet no conception of the ennobling of love. The naive creature thought with no ambition of a place where every other girl would have longed to seat herself; she saw the obstacles only. Loving, without as yet knowing what it was to love, she only felt herself distant from her pleasure, and longed to get nearer to it, as a child longs for the golden grapes hanging high above its head. To a girl whose emotions were stirred at the sight of a flower, and who had unconsciously foreseen love in the chants of the liturgy, how sweet and how strong must have been the feelings inspired in her breast the previous night by the sight of the young seigneur’s feebleness, which seemed to reassure her own. But during the night Etienne had been magnified to her mind; she had made him a hope, a power; she had placed him so high that now she despaired of ever reaching him.

“Will you permit me to sometimes enter your domain?” asked the duke, lowing his eyes.

Seeing Etienne so timid, so humble,—for he, on his part, had magnified Beauvouloir’s daughter,—Gabrielle was embarrassed with the sceptre he placed in her hands; and yet she was profoundly touched and flattered by such submission. Women alone know what seduction the respect of their master and lover has for them. Nevertheless, she feared to deceive herself, and, curious like the first woman, she wanted to know all.

“I thought you promised yesterday to teach me music,” she answered, hoping that music might be made a pretext for their meetings.

If the poor child had known what Etienne’s life really was, she would have

spared him that doubt. To him his word was the echo of his mind, and Gabrielle's little speech caused him infinite pain. He had come with his heart full, fearing some cloud upon his daylight, and he met a doubt. His joy was extinguished; back into his desert he plunged, no longer finding there the flowers with which he had embellished it. With that prescience of sorrows which characterizes the angel charged to soften them—who is, no doubt, the Charity of heaven—Gabrielle instantly divined the pain she had caused. She was so vividly aware of her fault that she prayed for the power of God to lay bare her soul to Etienne, for she knew the cruel pang a reproach or a stern look was capable of causing; and she artlessly betrayed to him these clouds as they rose in her soul,—the golden swathings of her dawning love. One tear which escaped her eyes turned Etienne's pain to pleasure, and he inwardly accused himself of tyranny. It was fortunate for both that in the very beginning of their love they should thus come to know the diapason of their hearts; they avoided henceforth a thousand shocks which might have wounded them.

Etienne, impatient to entrench himself behind an occupation, led Gabrielle to a table before the little window at which he himself had suffered so long, and where he was henceforth to admire a flower more dainty than all he had hitherto studied. Then he opened a book over which they bent their heads till their hair touched and mingled.

These two beings, so strong in heart, so weak in body, but embellished by all the graces of suffering, were a touching sight. Gabrielle was ignorant of coquetry; a look was given the instant it was asked for, the soft rays from the eyes of each never ceasing to mingle, unless from modesty. The young girl took the joy of telling Etienne what pleasure his voice gave her as she listened to his song; she forgot the meaning of his words when he explained to her the position of the notes or their value; she listened to HIM, leaving melody for the instrument, the idea for the form; ingenuous flattery! the first that true love meets. Gabrielle thought Etienne handsome; she would have liked to stroke the velvet of his mantle, to touch the lace of his broad collar. As for Etienne he was transformed under the creative glance of those earnest eyes; they infused into his being a fruitful sap, which sparkled in his eyes, shone on his brow, remade him inwardly, so that he did not suffer from this new play of his faculties; on the contrary they were strengthened by it. Happiness is the mother's milk of a new life.

As nothing came to distract them from each other, they stayed together not only this day but all days; for they belonged to one another from the first hour, passing the sceptre from one to the other and playing with themselves as children play with life. Sitting, happy and content, upon the golden sands, they told each other their past, painful for him, but rich in dreams; dreamy for her, but full of painful pleasure.

“I never had a mother,” said Gabrielle, “but my father has been good as God himself.”

“I never had a father,” said the hated son, “but my mother was all of heaven to me.”

Etienne related his youth, his love for his mother, his taste for flowers. Gabrielle exclaimed at his last words. Questioned why, she blushed and avoided answering; then when a shadow passed across that brow which death seemed to graze with its pinion, across that visible soul where the young man’s slightest emotions showed, she answered:—

“Because I too love flowers.”

To believe ourselves linked far back in the past by community of tastes, is not that a declaration of love such as virgins know how to give? Love desires to seem old; it is a coquetry of youth.

Etienne brought flowers on the morrow, ordering his people to find rare ones, as his mother had done in earlier days for him. Who knows the depths to which the roots of a feeling reach in the soul of a solitary being thus returning to the traditions of mother-love in order to bestow upon a woman the same caressing devotion with which his mother had charmed his life? To him, what grandeur in these nothings wherein were blended his only two affections. Flowers and music thus became the language of their love. Gabrielle replied to Etienne’s gifts by nosegays of her own,—nosegays which told the wise old doctor that his ignorant daughter already knew enough. The material ignorance of these two lovers was like a dark background on which the faintest lines of their all-spiritual intercourse were traced with exquisite delicacy, like the red, pure outlines of Etruscan figures. Their slightest words brought a flood of ideas, because each was the fruit of their long meditations. Incapable of boldly looking forward, each beginning seemed to them an end. Though absolutely free, they were imprisoned in their own simplicity, which would have been disheartening had either given a meaning to their confused desires. They were poets and poem both. Music, the most sensual of arts for loving souls, was the interpreter of their ideas; they took delight in repeating the same harmony, letting their passion flow through those fine sheets of sound in which their souls could vibrate without obstacle.

Many loves proceed through opposition; through struggles and reconciliations, the vulgar struggle of mind and matter. But the first wing-beat of true love sends it far beyond such struggles. Where all is of the same essence, two natures are no longer to be distinguished; like genius in its highest expression, such love can sustain itself in the brightest light; it grows beneath the light, it needs no shade to bring it into relief. Gabrielle, because she was a woman, Etienne, because he had suffered much and meditated

much, passed quickly through the regions occupied by common passions and went beyond it. Like all enfeebled natures, they were quickly penetrated by Faith, by that celestial glow which doubles strength by doubling the soul. For them their sun was always at its meridian. Soon they had that divine belief in themselves which allows of neither jealousy nor torment; abnegation was ever ready, admiration constant.

Under these conditions, love could have no pain. Equal in their feebleness, strong in their union, if the noble had some superiority of knowledge and some conventional grandeur, the daughter of the physician eclipsed all that by her beauty, by the loftiness of her sentiments, by the delicacy she gave to their enjoyments. Thus these two white doves flew with one wing beneath their pure blue heaven; Etienne loved, he was loved, the present was serene, the future cloudless; he was sovereign lord; the castle was his, the sea belonged to both of them; no vexing thought troubled the harmonious concert of their canticle; virginity of mind and senses enlarged for them the world, their thoughts rose in their minds without effort; desire, the satisfactions of which are doomed to blast so much, desire, that evil of terrestrial love, had not as yet attacked them. Like two zephyrs swaying on the same willow-branch, they needed nothing more than the joy of looking at each other in the mirror of the limpid waters; immensity sufficed them; they admired their Ocean, without one thought of gliding on it in the white-winged bark with ropes of flowers, sailed by Hope.

Love has its moment when it suffices to itself, when it is happy in merely being. During this springtime, when all is budding, the lover sometimes hides from the beloved woman, in order to enjoy her more, to see her better; but Etienne and Gabrielle plunged together into all the delights of that infantine period. Sometimes they were two sisters in the grace of their confidences, sometimes two brothers in the boldness of their questionings. Usually love demands a slave and a god, but these two realized the dream of Plato,—they were but one being deified. They protected each other. Caresses came slowly, one by one, but chaste as the merry play—so graceful, so coquettish—of young animals. The sentiment which induced them to express their souls in song led them to love by the manifold transformations of the same happiness. Their joys caused them neither wakefulness nor delirium. It was the infancy of pleasure developing within them, unaware of the beautiful red flowers which were to crown its shoots. They gave themselves to each other, ignorant of all danger; they cast their whole being into a word, into a look, into a kiss, into the long, long pressure of their clasping hands. They praised each other’s beauties ingenuously, spending treasures of language on these secret idylls, inventing soft exaggerations and more diminutives than the ancient muse of Tibullus, or the poesies of Italy. On their lips and in their hearts love flowed ever, like the liquid fringes of the sea upon the sands of the shore,—all alike,

all dissimilar. Joyous, eternal fidelity!

If we must count by days, the time thus spent was five months only; if we may count by the innumerable sensations, thoughts, dreams, glances, opening flowers, realized hopes, unceasing joys, speeches interrupted, renewed, abandoned, frolic laughter, bare feet dabbling in the sea, hunts, childlike, for shells, kisses, surprises, clasping hands,—call it a lifetime; death will justify the word. There are existences that are ever gloomy, lived under ashen skies; but suppose a glorious day, when the sun of heaven glows in the azure air,—such was the May of their love, during which Etienne had suspended all his griefs,—griefs which had passed into the heart of Gabrielle, who, in turn, had fastened all her joys to come on those of her lord. Etienne had had but one sorrow in his life,—the death of his mother; he was to have but one love—Gabrielle.

CHAPTER VII. THE CRUSHED PEARL

The coarse rivalry of an ambitious man hastened the destruction of this honeyed life. The Duc d'Herouville, an old warrior in wiles and policy, had no sooner passed his word to his physician than he was conscious of the voice of distrust. The Baron d'Artagnon, lieutenant of his company of men-at-arms, possessed his utmost confidence. The baron was a man after the duke's own heart,—a species of butcher, built for strength, tall, virile in face, cold and harsh, brave in the service of the throne, rude in his manners, with an iron will in action, but supple in manoeuvres, withal an ambitious noble, possessing the honor of a soldier and the wiles of a politician. He had the hand his face demanded,—large and hairy like that of a guerrilla; his manners were brusque, his speech concise. The duke, in departing, gave to this man the duty of watching and reporting to him the conduct of Beauvouloir toward the new heir-presumptive.

In spite of the secrecy which surrounded Gabrielle, it was difficult to long deceive the commander of a company. He heard the singing of two voices; he saw the lights at night in the dwelling on the seashore; he guessed that Etienne's orders, repeated constantly, for flowers concerned a woman; he discovered Gabrielle's nurse making her way on foot to Forcalier, carrying linen or clothes, and bringing back with her the work-frame and other articles needed by a young lady. The spy then watched the cottage, saw the physician's daughter, and fell in love with her. Beauvouloir he knew was rich. The duke would be furious at the man's audacity. On those foundations the Baron d'Artagnon erected the edifice of his fortunes. The duke, on learning that his

son was falling in love, would, of course, instantly endeavor to detach him from the girl; what better way than to force her son into a marriage with a noble like himself, giving his son to the daughter of some great house, the heiress of large estates. The baron himself had no property. The scheme was excellent, and might have succeeded with other natures than those of Etienne and Gabrielle; with them failure was certain.

During his stay in Paris the duke had avenged the death of Maximilien by killing his son's adversary, and he had planned for Etienne an alliance with the heiress of a branch of the house of Grandlieu,—a tall and disdainful beauty, who was flattered by the prospect of some day bearing the title of Duchesse d'Herouville. The duke expected to oblige his son to marry her. On learning from d'Artagnon that Etienne was in love with the daughter of a miserable physician, he was only the more determined to carry out the marriage. What could such a man comprehend of love,—he who had let his own wife die beside him without understanding a single sigh of her heart? Never, perhaps, in his life had he felt such violent anger as when the last despatch of the baron told him with what rapidity Beauvouloir's plans were advancing,—the baron attributing them wholly to the bonesetter's ambition. The duke ordered out his equipages and started for Rouen, bringing with him the Comtesse de Grandlieu, her sister the Marquise de Noirmoutier, and Mademoiselle de Grandlieu, under pretext of showing them the province of Normandy.

A few days before his arrival a rumor was spread about the country—by what means no one seemed to know—of the passion of the young Duc de Nivron for Gabrielle Beauvouloir. People in Rouen spoke of it to the Duc d'Herouville in the midst of a banquet given to celebrate his return to the province; for the guests were glad to deliver a blow to the despot of Normandy. This announcement excited the anger of the governor to the highest pitch. He wrote to the baron to keep his coming to Herouville a close secret, giving him certain orders to avert what he considered to be an evil.

It was under these circumstances that Etienne and Gabrielle unrolled their thread through the labyrinth of love, where both, not seeking to leave it, thought to dwell. One day they had remained from morn to evening near the window where so many events had taken place. The hours, filled at first with gentle talk, had ended in meditative silence. They began to feel within them the wish for complete possession; and presently they reached the point of confiding to each other their confused ideas, the reflections of two beautiful, pure souls. During these still, serene hours, Etienne's eyes would sometimes fill with tears as he held the hand of Gabrielle to his lips. Like his mother, but at this moment happier in his love than she had been in hers, the hated son looked down upon the sea, at that hour golden on the shore, black on the horizon, and slashed here and there with those silvery caps which betoken a

coming storm. Gabrielle, conforming to her friend's action, looked at the sight and was silent. A single look, one of those by which two souls support each other, sufficed to communicate their thoughts. Each loved with that love so divinely like unto itself at every instant of its eternity that it is not conscious of devotion or sacrifice or exaction, it fears neither deceptions nor delay. But Etienne and Gabrielle were in absolute ignorance of satisfactions, a desire for which was stirring in their souls.

When the first faint tints of twilight drew a veil athwart the sea, and the hush was interrupted only by the soughing of the flux and reflux on the shore, Etienne rose; Gabrielle followed his motion with a vague fear, for he had dropped her hand. He took her in one of his arms, pressing her to him with a movement of tender cohesion, and she, comprehending his desire, made him feel the weight of her body enough to give him the certainty that she was all his, but not enough to be a burden on him. The lover laid his head heavily on the shoulder of his friend, his lips touched the heaving bosom, his hair flowed over the white shoulders and caressed her throat. The girl, ingenuously loving, bent her head aside to give more place for his head, passing her arm about his neck to gain support. Thus they remained till nightfall without uttering a word. The crickets sang in their holes, and the lovers listened to that music as if to employ their senses on one sense only. Certainly they could only in that hour be compared to angels who, with their feet on earth, await the moment to take flight to heaven. They had fulfilled the noble dream of Plato's mystic genius, the dream of all who seek a meaning in humanity; they formed but one soul, they were, indeed, that mysterious Pearl destined to adorn the brow of a star as yet unknown, but the hope of all!

"Will you take me home?" said Gabrielle, the first to break the exquisite silence.

"Why should we part?" replied Etienne.

"We ought to be together always," she said.

"Stay with me."

"Yes."

The heavy step of Beauvouloir sounded in the adjoining room. The doctor had seen these children at the window locked in each other's arms, but he found them separated. The purest love demands its mystery.

"This is not right, my child," he said to Gabrielle, "to stay so late, and have no lights."

"Why wrong?" she said; "you know we love each other, and he is master of the castle."

“My children,” said Beauvouloir, “if you love each other, your happiness requires that you should marry and pass your lives together; but your marriage depends on the will of monseigneur the duke—”

“My father has promised to gratify all my wishes,” cried Etienne eagerly, interrupting Beauvouloir.

“Write to him, monseigneur,” replied the doctor, “and give me your letter that I may enclose it with one which I, myself, have just written. Bertrand is to start at once and put these despatches into monseigneur’s own hand. I have learned to-night that he is now in Rouen; he has brought the heiress of the house of Grandlieu with him, not, as I think, solely for himself. If I listened to my presentiments, I should take Gabrielle away from here this very night.”

“Separate us?” cried Etienne, half fainting with distress and leaning on his love.

“Father!”

“Gabrielle,” said the physician, holding out to her a smelling-bottle which he took from a table signing to her to make Etienne inhale its contents, —“Gabrielle, my knowledge of science tells me that Nature destined you for each other. I meant to prepare monseigneur the duke for a marriage which will certainly offend his ideas, but the devil has already prejudiced him against it. Etienne is Duc de Nivron, and you, my child, are the daughter of a poor doctor.”

“My father swore to contradict me in nothing,” said Etienne, calmly.

“He swore to me also to consent to all I might do in finding you a wife,” replied the doctor; “but suppose that he does not keep his promises?”

Etienne sat down, as if overcome.

“The sea was dark to-night,” he said, after a moment’s silence.

“If you could ride a horse, monseigneur,” said Beauvouloir, “I should tell you to fly with Gabrielle this very evening. I know you both, and I know that any other marriage would be fatal to you. The duke would certainly fling me into a dungeon and leave me there for the rest of my days when he heard of your flight; and I should die joyfully if my death secured your happiness. But alas! to mount a horse would risk your life and that of Gabrielle. We must face your father’s anger here.”

“Here!” repeated Etienne.

“We have been betrayed by some one in the chateau who has stirred your father’s wrath against us,” continued Beauvouloir.

“Let us throw ourselves together into the sea,” said Etienne to Gabrielle,

leaning down to the ear of the young girl who was kneeling beside him.

She bowed her head, smiling. Beauvouloir divined all.

“Monseigneur,” he said, “your mind and your knowledge can make you eloquent, and the force of your love may be irresistible. Declare it to monseigneur the duke; you will thus confirm my letter. All is not lost, I think. I love my daughter as well as you love her, and I shall defend her.”

Etienne shook his head.

“The sea was very dark to-night,” he repeated.

“It was like a sheet of gold at our feet,” said Gabrielle in a voice of melody.

Etienne ordered lights, and sat down at a table to write to his father. On one side of him knelt Gabrielle, silent, watching the words he wrote, but not reading them; she read all on Etienne’s forehead. On his other side stood old Beauvouloir, whose jovial countenance was deeply sad,—sad as that gloomy chamber where Etienne’s mother died. A secret voice cried to the doctor, “The fate of his mother awaits him!”

When the letter was written, Etienne held it out to the old man, who hastened to give it to Bertrand. The old retainer’s horse was waiting in the courtyard, saddled; the man himself was ready. He started, and met the duke twelve miles from Herouville.

“Come with me to the gate of the courtyard,” said Gabrielle to her friend when they were alone.

The pair passed through the cardinal’s library, and went down through the tower, in which was a door, the key of which Etienne had given to Gabrielle. Stupefied by the dread of coming evil, the poor youth left in the tower the torch he had brought to light the steps of his beloved, and continued with her toward the cottage. A few steps from the little garden, which formed a sort of flowery courtyard to the humble habitation, the lovers stopped. Emboldened by the vague alarm which oppressed them, they gave each other, in the shades of night, in the silence, that first kiss in which the senses and the soul unite, and cause a revealing joy. Etienne comprehended love in its dual expression, and Gabrielle fled lest she should be drawn by that love—whither she knew not.

At the moment when the Duc de Nivron reascended the staircase to the castle, after closing the door of the tower, a cry of horror, uttered by Gabrielle, echoed in his ears with the sharpness of a flash of lightning which burns the eyes. Etienne ran through the apartments of the chateau, down the grand staircase, and along the beach towards Gabrielle’s house, where he saw lights.

When Gabrielle, quitting her lover, had entered the little garden, she saw, by the gleam of a torch which lighted her nurse's spinning-wheel, the figure of a man sitting in the chair of that excellent woman. At the sound of her steps the man arose and came toward her; this had frightened her, and she gave the cry. The presence and aspect of the Baron d'Artagnon amply justified the fear thus inspired in the young girl's breast.

"Are you the daughter of Beauvouloir, monseigneur's physician?" asked the baron when Gabrielle's first alarm had subsided.

"Yes, monsieur."

"I have matters of the utmost importance to confide to you. I am the Baron d'Artagnon, lieutenant of the company of men-at-arms commanded by Monseigneur the Duc d'Herouville."

Gabrielle, under the circumstances in which she and her lover stood, was struck by these words, and by the frank tone with which the soldier said them.

"Your nurse is here; she may overhear us. Come this way," said the baron.

He left the garden, and Gabrielle followed him to the beach behind the house.

"Fear nothing!" said the baron.

That speech would have frightened any one less ignorant than Gabrielle; but a simple young girl who loves never thinks herself in peril.

"Dear child," said the baron, endeavoring to give a honeyed tone to his voice, "you and your father are on the verge of an abyss into which you will fall to-morrow. I cannot see your danger without warning you. Monseigneur is furious against your father and against you; he suspects you of having seduced his son, and he would rather see him dead than see him marry you; so much for his son. As for your father, this is the decision monseigneur has made about him. Nine years ago your father was implicated in a criminal affair. The matter related to the secretion of a child of rank at the time of its birth which he attended. Monseigneur, knowing that your father was innocent, guaranteed him from prosecution by the parliament; but now he intends to have him arrested and delivered up to justice to be tried for the crime. Your father will be broken on the wheel; though perhaps, in view of some services he has done to his master, he may obtain the favor of being hanged. I do not know what course monseigneur has decided on for you; but I do know that you can save Monseigneur de Nivron from his father's anger, and your father from the horrible death which awaits him, and also save yourself."

"What must I do?" said Gabrielle.

"Throw yourself at monseigneur's feet, and tell him that his son loves you

against your will, and say that you do not love him. In proof of this, offer to marry any man whom the duke himself may select as your husband. He is generous; he will dower you handsomely."

"I can do all except deny my love."

"But if that alone can save your father, yourself, and Monseigneur de Nivron?"

"Etienne," she replied, "would die of it, and so should I."

"Monseigneur de Nivron will be unhappy at losing you, but he will live for the honor of his house; you will resign yourself to be the wife of a baron only, instead of being a duchess, and your father will live out his days," said the practical man.

At this moment Etienne reached the house. He did not see Gabrielle, and he uttered a piercing cry.

"He is here!" cried the young girl; "let me go now and comfort him."

"I shall come for your answer to-morrow," said the baron.

"I will consult my father," she replied.

"You will not see him again. I have received orders to arrest him and send him in chains, under escort, to Rouen," said d'Artagnon, leaving Gabrielle dumb with terror.

The young girl sprang to the house, and found Etienne horrified by the silence of the nurse in answer to his question, "Where is she?"

"I am here!" cried the young girl, whose voice was icy, her step heavy, her color gone.

"What has happened?" he said. "I heard you cry."

"Yes, I hurt my foot against—"

"No, love," replied Etienne, interrupting her. "I heard the steps of a man."

"Etienne, we must have offended God; let us kneel down and pray. I will tell you afterwards."

Etienne and Gabrielle knelt down at the prie-dieu, and the nurse recited her rosary.

"O God!" prayed the girl, with a fervor which carried her beyond terrestrial space, "if we have not sinned against thy divine commandments, if we have not offended the Church, not yet the king, we, who are one and the same being, in whom love shines with the light that thou hast given to the pearl of the sea, be merciful unto us, and let us not be parted either in this world or in

that which is to come."

"Mother!" added Etienne, "who art in heaven, obtain from the Virgin that if we cannot—Gabrielle and I—be happy here below we may at least die together, and without suffering. Call us, and we will go to thee."

Then, having recited their evening prayers, Gabrielle related her interview with Baron d'Artagnon.

"Gabrielle," said the young man, gathering strength from his despair, "I shall know how to resist my father."

He kissed her on the forehead, but not again upon the lips. Then he returned to the castle, resolved to face the terrible man who had weighed so fearfully on his life. He did not know that Gabrielle's house would be surrounded and guarded by soldiers the moment that he quitted it.

The next day he was struck down with grief when, on going to see her, he found her a prisoner. But Gabrielle sent her nurse to tell him she would die sooner than be false to him; and, moreover, that she knew a way to deceive the guards, and would soon take refuge in the cardinal's library, where no one would suspect her presence, though she did not as yet know when she could accomplish it. Etienne on that returned to his room, where all the forces of his heart were spent in the dreadful suspense of waiting.

At three o'clock on the afternoon of that day the equipages of the duke and suite entered the courtyard of the castle. Madame la Comtesse de Grandlieu, leaning on the arm of her daughter, the duke and Marquise de Noirmoutier mounted the grand staircase in silence, for the stern brow of the master had awed the servants. Though Baron d'Artagnon now knew that Gabrielle had evaded his guards, he assured the duke she was a prisoner, for he trembled lest his own private scheme should fail if the duke were angered by this flight. Those two terrible faces—his and the duke's—wore a fierce expression that was ill-disguised by an air of gallantry imposed by the occasion. The duke had already sent to his son, ordering him to be present in the salon. When the company entered it, d'Artagnon saw by the downcast look on Etienne's face that as yet he did not know of Gabrielle's escape.

"This is my son," said the old duke, taking Etienne by the hand and presenting him to the ladies.

Etienne bowed without uttering a word. The countess and Mademoiselle de Grandlieu exchanged a look which the old man intercepted.

"Your daughter will be ill-matched—is that your thought?" he said in a low voice.

"I think quite the contrary, my dear duke," replied the mother, smiling.

The Marquise de Noirmoutier, who accompanied her sister, laughed significantly. That laugh stabbed Etienne to the heart; already the sight of the tall lady had terrified him.

“Well, Monsieur le duc,” said the duke in a low voice and assuming a lively air, “have I not found you a handsome wife? What do you say to that slip of a girl, my cherub?”

The old duke never doubted his son’s obedience; Etienne, to him, was the son of his mother, of the same dough, docile to his kneading.

“Let him have a child and die,” thought the old man; “little I care.”

“Father,” said the young man, in a gentle voice, “I do not understand you.”

“Come into your own room, I have a few words to say to you,” replied the duke, leading the way into the state bedroom.

Etienne followed his father. The three ladies, stirred with a curiosity that was shared by Baron d’Artagnon, walked about the great salon in a manner to group themselves finally near the door of the bedroom, which the duke had left partially open.

“Dear Benjamin,” said the duke, softening his voice, “I have selected that tall and handsome young lady as your wife; she is heiress to the estates of the younger branch of the house of Grandlieu, a fine old family of Bretagne. Therefore make yourself agreeable; remember all the love-making you have read of in your books, and learn to make pretty speeches.”

“Father, is it not the first duty of a nobleman to keep his word?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, on the day when I forgave you the death of my mother, dying here through her marriage with you, did you not promise me never to thwart my wishes? ‘I will obey you as the family god,’ were the words you said to me. I ask nothing of you, I simply demand my freedom in a matter which concerns my life and myself only,—namely, my marriage.”

“I understood,” replied the old man, all the blood in his body rushing into his face, “that you would not oppose the continuation of our noble race.”

“You made no condition,” said Etienne. “I do not know what love has to do with race; but this I know, I love the daughter of your old friend Beauvouloir, and the granddaughter of your friend La Belle Romaine.”

“She is dead,” replied the old colossus, with an air both savage and jeering, which told only too plainly his intention of making away with her.

A moment of deep silence followed.

The duke saw, through the half-opened door, the three ladies and d’Artagnon. At that crucial moment Etienne, whose sense of hearing was acute, heard in the cardinal’s library poor Gabrielle’s voice, singing, to let her lover know she was there,—

“Ermine hath not

Her pureness;

The lily not her whiteness.”

The hated son, whom his father’s horrible speech had flung into a gulf of death, returned to the surface of life at the sound of that voice. Though the emotion of terror thus rapidly cast off had already in that instant, broken his heart, he gathered up his strength, looked his father in the face for the first time in his life, gave scorn for scorn, and said, in tones of hatred:—

“A nobleman ought not to lie.”

Then with one bound he sprang to the door of the library and cried:—

“Gabrielle!”

Suddenly the gentle creature appeared among the shadows, like the lily among its leaves, trembling before those mocking women thus informed of Etienne’s love. As the clouds that bear the thunder project upon the heavens, so the old duke, reaching a degree of anger that defies description, stood out upon the brilliant background produced by the rich clothing of those courtly dames. Between the destruction of his son and a mesalliance, every other father would have hesitated, but in this uncontrollable old man ferocity was the power which had so far solved the difficulties of life for him; he drew his sword in all cases, as the only remedy that he knew for the gordian knots of life. Under present circumstances, when the convulsion of his ideas had reached its height, the nature of the man came uppermost. Twice detected in flagrant falsehood by the being he abhorred, the son he cursed, cursing him more than ever in this supreme moment when that son’s despised, and to him most despicable, weakness triumphed over his own omnipotence, infallible till then, the father and the man ceased to exist, the tiger issued from its lair. Casting at the angels before him—the sweetest pair that ever set their feet on earth—a murderous look of hatred,—

“Die, then, both of you!” he cried. “You, vile abortion, the proof of my shame—and you,” he said to Gabrielle, “miserable strumpet with the viper tongue, who has poisoned my house.”

These words struck home to the hearts of the two children the terror that already surcharged them. At the moment when Etienne saw the huge hand of his father raising a weapon upon Gabrielle he died, and Gabrielle fell dead in

striving to retain him.

The old man left them, and closed the door violently, saying to Mademoiselle de Grandlieu:—

“I will marry you myself!”

“You are young and gallant enough to have a fine new lineage,” whispered the countess in the ear of the old man, who had served under seven kings of France.