The Human Comedy
Scenes from Private Life
Part III

By

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LETTERS OF TWO BRIDES

FIRST PART

I. LOUISE DE CHAULIEU TO RENEE DE MAUCOMBE. PARIS, September.

Sweetheart, I too am free! And I am the first too, unless you have written to Blois, at our sweet tryst of letter-writing.

Raise those great black eyes of yours, fixed on my opening sentence, and keep this excitement for the letter which shall tell you of my first love. By the way, why always "first?" Is there, I wonder, a second love?

Don't go running on like this, you will say, but tell me rather how you made your escape from the convent where you were to take your vows. Well, dear, I don't know about the Carmelites, but the miracle of my own deliverance was, I can assure you, most humdrum. The cries of an alarmed conscience triumphed over the dictates of a stern policy—there's the whole mystery. The sombre melancholy which seized me after you left hastened the happy climax, my aunt did not want to see me die of a decline, and my mother, whose one unfailing cure for my malady was a novitiate, gave way before her.

So I am in Paris, thanks to you, my love! Dear Renee, could you have seen me the day I found myself parted from you, well might you have gloried in the deep impression you had made on so youthful a bosom. We had lived so constantly together, sharing our dreams and letting our fancy roam together, that I verily believe our souls had become welded together, like those two Hungarian girls, whose death we heard about from M. Beauvisage—poor misnamed being! Never surely was man better cut out by nature for the post of convent physician!

Tell me, did you not droop and sicken with your darling?

In my gloomy depression, I could do nothing but count over the ties which bind us. But it seemed as though distance had loosened them; I wearied of life, like a turtle-dove widowed of her mate. Death smiled sweetly on me, and I was proceeding quietly to die. To be at Blois, at the Carmelites, consumed by dread of having to take my vows there, a Mlle. de la Valliere, but without her prelude, and without my Renee! How could I not be sick—sick unto death?

How different it used to be! That monotonous existence, where every hour brings its duty, its prayer, its task, with such desperate regularity that you can

tell what a Carmelite sister is doing in any place, at any hour of the night or day; that deadly dull routine, which crushes out all interest in one's surroundings, had become for us two a world of life and movement. Imagination had thrown open her fairy realms, and in these our spirits ranged at will, each in turn serving as magic steed to the other, the more alert quickening the drowsy; the world from which our bodies were shut out became the playground of our fancy, which reveled there in frolicsome adventure. The very Lives of the Saints helped us to understand what was so carefully left unsaid! But the day when I was reft of your sweet company, I became a true Carmelite, such as they appeared to us, a modern Danaid, who, instead of trying to fill a bottomless barrel, draws every day, from Heaven knows what deep, an empty pitcher, thinking to find it full.

My aunt knew nothing of this inner life. How could she, who has made a paradise for herself within the two acres of her convent, understand my revolt against life? A religious life, if embraced by girls of our age, demands either an extreme simplicity of soul, such as we, sweetheart, do not possess, or else an ardor for self-sacrifice like that which makes my aunt so noble a character. But she sacrificed herself for a brother to whom she was devoted; to do the same for an unknown person or an idea is surely more than can be asked of mortals.

For the last fortnight I have been gulping down so many reckless words, burying so many reflections in my bosom, and accumulating such a store of things to tell, fit for your ear alone, that I should certainly have been suffocated but for the resource of letter-writing as a sorry substitute for our beloved talks. How hungry one's heart gets! I am beginning my journal this morning, and I picture to myself that yours is already started, and that, in a few days, I shall be at home in your beautiful Gemenos valley, which I know only through your descriptions, just as you will live that Paris life, revealed to you hitherto only in our dreams.

Well, then, sweet child, know that on a certain morning—a red-letter day in my life—there arrived from Paris a lady companion and Philippe, the last remaining of my grandmother's valets, charged to carry me off. When my aunt summoned me to her room and told me the news, I could not speak for joy, and only gazed at her stupidly.

"My child," she said, in her guttural voice, "I can see that you leave me without regret, but this farewell is not the last; we shall meet again. God has placed on your forehead the sign of the elect. You have the pride which leads to heaven or to hell, but your nature is too noble to choose the downward path. I know you better than you know yourself; with you, passion, I can see, will be very different from what it is with most women."

She drew me gently to her and kissed my forehead. The kiss made my flesh creep, for it burned with that consuming fire which eats away her life, which has turned to black the azure of her eyes, and softened the lines about them, has furrowed the warm ivory of her temples, and cast a sallow tinge over the beautiful face.

Before replying, I kissed her hands.

"Dear aunt," I said, "I shall never forget your kindness; and if it has not made your nunnery all that it ought to be for my health of body and soul, you may be sure nothing short of a broken heart will bring me back again—and that you would not wish for me. You will not see me here again till my royal lover has deserted me, and I warn you that if I catch him, death alone shall tear him from me. I fear no Montespan."

She smiled and said:

"Go, madcap, and take your idle fancies with you. There is certainly more of the bold Montespan in you than of the gentle la Valliere."

I threw my arms round her. The poor lady could not refrain from escorting me to the carriage. There her tender gaze was divided between me and the armorial bearings.

At Beaugency night overtook me, still sunk in a stupor of the mind produced by these strange parting words. What can be awaiting me in this world for which I have so hungered?

To begin with, I found no one to receive me; my heart had been schooled in vain. My mother was at the Bois de Boulogne, my father at the Council; my brother, the Duc de Rhetore, never comes in, I am told, till it is time to dress for dinner. Miss Griffith (she is not unlike a griffin) and Philippe took me to my rooms.

The suite is the one which belonged to my beloved grandmother, the Princess de Vauremont, to whom I owe some sort of a fortune which no one has ever told me about. As you read this, you will understand the sadness which came over me as I entered a place sacred to so many memories, and found the rooms just as she had left them! I was to sleep in the bed where she died.

Sitting down on the edge of the sofa, I burst into tears, forgetting I was not alone, and remembering only how often I had stood there by her knees, the better to hear her words. There I had gazed upon her face, buried in its brown laces, and worn as much by age as by the pangs of approaching death. The room seemed to me still warm with the heat which she kept up there. How comes it that Armande-Louise-Marie de Chaulieu must be like some peasant

girl, who sleeps in her mother's bed the very morrow of her death? For to me it was as though the Princess, who died in 1817, had passed away but yesterday.

I saw many things in the room which ought to have been removed. Their presence showed the carelessness with which people, busy with the affairs of state, may treat their own, and also the little thought which had been given since her death to this grand old lady, who will always remain one of the striking figures of the eighteenth century. Philippe seemed to divine something of the cause of my tears. He told me that the furniture of the Princess had been left to me in her will and that my father had allowed all the larger suites to remain dismantled, as the Revolution had left them. On hearing this I rose, and Philippe opened the door of the small drawing-room which leads into the reception-rooms.

In these I found all the well-remembered wreckage; the panels above the doors, which had contained valuable pictures, bare of all but empty frames; broken marbles, mirrors carried off. In old days I was afraid to go up the state staircase and cross these vast, deserted rooms; so I used to get to the Princess' rooms by a small staircase which runs under the arch of the larger one and leads to the secret door of her dressing-room.

My suite, consisting of a drawing-room, bedroom, and the pretty morning-room in scarlet and gold, of which I have told you, lies in the wing on the side of the Invalides. The house is only separated from the boulevard by a wall, covered with creepers, and by a splendid avenue of trees, which mingle their foliage with that of the young elms on the sidewalk of the boulevard. But for the blue-and-gold dome of the Invalides and its gray stone mass, you might be in a wood.

The style of decoration in these rooms, together with their situation, indicates that they were the old show suite of the duchesses, while the dukes must have had theirs in the wing opposite. The two suites are decorously separated by the two main blocks, as well as by the central one, which contained those vast, gloomy, resounding halls shown me by Philippe, all despoiled of their splendor, as in the days of my childhood.

Philippe grew quite confidential when he saw the surprise depicted on my countenance. For you must know that in this home of diplomacy the very servants have a reserved and mysterious air. He went on to tell me that it was expected a law would soon be passed restoring to the fugitives of the Revolution the value of their property, and that my father is waiting to do up his house till this restitution is made, the king's architect having estimated the damage at three hundred thousand livres.

This piece of news flung me back despairing on my drawing-room sofa. Could it be that my father, instead of spending this money in arranging a

marriage for me, would have left me to die in the convent? This was the first thought to greet me on the threshold of my home.

Ah! Renee, what would I have given then to rest my head upon your shoulder, or to transport myself to the days when my grandmother made the life of these rooms? You two in all the world have been alone in loving me—you away at Maucombe, and she who survives only in my heart, the dear old lady, whose still youthful eyes used to open from sleep at my call. How well we understood each other!

These memories suddenly changed my mood. What at first had seemed profanation, now breathed of holy association. It was sweet to inhale the faint odor of the powder she loved still lingering in the room; sweet to sleep beneath the shelter of those yellow damask curtains with their white pattern, which must have retained something of the spirit emanating from her eyes and breath. I told Philippe to rub up the old furniture and make the rooms look as if they were lived in; I explained to him myself how I wanted everything arranged, and where to put each piece of furniture. In this way I entered into possession, and showed how an air of youth might be given to the dear old things.

The bedroom is white in color, a little dulled with time, just as the gilding of the fanciful arabesques shows here and there a patch of red; but this effect harmonizes well with the faded colors of the Savonnerie tapestry, which was presented to my grandmother by Louis XV. along with his portrait. The timepiece was a gift from the Marechal de Saxe, and the china ornaments on the mantelpiece came from the Marechal de Richelieu. My grandmother's portrait, painted at the age of twenty-five, hangs in an oval frame opposite that of the King. The Prince, her husband, is conspicuous by his absence. I like this frank negligence, untinged by hypocrisy—a characteristic touch which sums up her charming personality. Once when my grandmother was seriously ill, her confessor was urgent that the Prince, who was waiting in the drawing-room, should be admitted.

"He can come in with the doctor and his drugs," was the reply.

The bed has a canopy and well-stuffed back, and the curtains are looped up with fine wide bands. The furniture is of gilded wood, upholstered in the same yellow damask with white flowers which drapes the windows, and which is lined there with a white silk that looks as though it were watered. The panels over the doors have been painted, by what artist I can't say, but they represent one a sunrise, the other a moonlight scene.

The fireplace is a very interesting feature in the room. It is easy to see that life in the last century centered largely round the hearth, where great events were enacted. The copper gilt grate is a marvel of workmanship, and the

mantelpiece is most delicately finished; the fire-irons are beautifully chased; the bellows are a perfect gem. The tapestry of the screen comes from the Gobelins and is exquisitely mounted; charming fantastic figures run all over the frame, on the feet, the supporting bar, and the wings; the whole thing is wrought like a fan.

Dearly should I like to know who was the giver of this dainty work of art, which was such a favorite with her. How often have I seen the old lady, her feet upon the bar, reclining in the easy-chair, with her dress half raised in front, toying with the snuff-box, which lay upon the ledge between her box of pastilles and her silk mits. What a coquette she was! to the day of her death she took as much pains with her appearance as though the beautiful portrait had been painted only yesterday, and she were waiting to receive the throng of exquisites from the Court! How the armchair recalls to me the inimitable sweep of her skirts as she sank back in it!

These women of a past generation have carried off with them secrets which are very typical of their age. The Princess had a certain turn of the head, a way of dropping her glance and her remarks, a choice of words, which I look for in vain, even in my mother. There was subtlety in it all, and there was good-nature; the points were made without any affectation. Her talk was at once lengthy and concise; she told a good story, and could put her meaning in three words. Above all, she was extremely free-thinking, and this has undoubtedly had its effect on my way of looking at things.

From seven years old till I was ten, I never left her side; it pleased her to attract me as much as it pleased me to go. This preference was the cause of more than one passage at arms between her and my mother, and nothing intensifies feeling like the icy breath of persecution. How charming was her greeting, "Here you are, little rogue!" when curiosity had taught me how to glide with stealthy snake-like movements to her room. She felt that I loved her, and this childish affection was welcome as a ray of sunshine in the winter of her life.

I don't know what went on in her rooms at night, but she had many visitors; and when I came on tiptoe in the morning to see if she were awake, I would find the drawing-room furniture disarranged, the card-tables set out, and patches of snuff scattered about.

This drawing-room is furnished in the same style as the bedroom. The chairs and tables are oddly shaped, with claw feet and hollow mouldings. Rich garlands of flowers, beautifully designed and carved, wind over the mirrors and hang down in festoons. On the consoles are fine china vases. The ground colors are scarlet and white. My grandmother was a high-spirited, striking brunette, as might be inferred from her choice of colors. I have found in the

drawing-room a writing-table I remember well; the figures on it used to fascinate me; it is plaited in graven silver, and was a present from one of the Genoese Lomellini. Each side of the table represents the occupations of a different season; there are hundreds of figures in each picture, and all in relief.

I remained alone for two hours, while old memories rose before me, one after another, on this spot, hallowed by the death of a woman most remarkable even among the witty and beautiful Court ladies of Louis XV.'s day.

You know how abruptly I was parted from her, at a day's notice, in 1816.

"Go and bid good-bye to your grandmother," said my mother.

The Princess received me as usual, without any display of feeling, and expressed no surprise at my departure.

"You are going to the convent, dear," she said, "and will see your aunt there, who is an excellent woman. I shall take care, though, that they don't make a victim of you; you shall be independent, and able to marry whom you please."

Six months later she died. Her will had been given into the keeping of the Prince de Talleyrand, the most devoted of all her old friends. He contrived, while paying a visit to Mlle. de Chargeboeuf, to intimate to me, through her, that my grandmother forbade me to take the vows. I hope, sooner or later, to meet the Prince, and then I shall doubtless learn more from him.

Thus, sweetheart, if I have found no one in flesh and blood to meet me, I have comforted myself with the shade of the dear Princess, and have prepared myself for carrying out one of our pledges, which was, as you know, to keep each other informed of the smallest details in our homes and occupations. It makes such a difference to know where and how the life of one we love is passed. Send me a faithful picture of the veriest trifles around you, omitting nothing, not even the sunset lights among the tall trees.

October 19th.

It was three in the afternoon when I arrived. About half-past five, Rose came and told me that my mother had returned, so I went downstairs to pay my respects to her.

My mother lives in a suite on the ground floor, exactly corresponding to mine, and in the same block. I am just over her head, and the same secret staircase serves for both. My father's rooms are in the block opposite, but are larger by the whole of the space occupied by the grand staircase on our side of the building. These ancestral mansions are so spacious, that my father and mother continue to occupy the ground-floor rooms, in spite of the social duties which have once more devolved on them with the return of the Bourbons, and

are even able to receive in them.

I found my mother, dressed for the evening, in her drawing-room, where nothing is changed. I came slowly down the stairs, speculating with every step how I should be met by this mother who had shown herself so little of a mother to me, and from whom, during eight years, I had heard nothing beyond the two letters of which you know. Judging it unworthy to simulate an affection I could not possibly feel, I put on the air of a pious imbecile, and entered the room with many inward qualms, which however soon disappeared. My mother's tack was equal to the occasion. She made no pretence of emotion; she neither held me at arm's-length nor hugged me to her bosom like a beloved daughter, but greeted me as though we had parted the evening before. Her manner was that of the kindliest and most sincere friend, as she addressed me like a grown person, first kissing me on the forehead.

"My dear little one," she said, "if you were to die at the convent, it is much better to live with your family. You frustrate your father's plans and mine; but the age of blind obedience to parents is past. M. de Chaulieu's intention, and in this I am quite at one with him, is to lose no opportunity of making your life pleasant and of letting you see the world. At your age I should have thought as you do, therefore I am not vexed with you; it is impossible you should understand what we expected from you. You will not find any absurd severity in me; and if you have ever thought me heartless, you will soon find out your mistake. Still, though I wish you to feel perfectly free, I think that, to begin with, you would do well to follow the counsels of a mother, who wishes to be a sister to you."

I was quite charmed by the Duchess, who talked in a gentle voice, straightening my convent tippet as she spoke. At the age of thirty-eight she is still exquisitely beautiful. She has dark-blue eyes, with silken lashes, a smooth forehead, and a complexion so pink and white that you might think she paints. Her bust and shoulders are marvelous, and her waist is as slender as yours. Her hand is milk-white and extraordinarily beautiful; the nails catch the light in their perfect polish, the thumb is like ivory, the little finger stands just a little apart from the rest, and the foot matches the hand; it is the Spanish foot of Mlle. de Vandenesse. If she is like this at forty, at sixty she will still be a beautiful woman.

I replied, sweetheart, like a good little girl. I was as nice to her as she to me, nay, nicer. Her beauty completely vanquished me; it seemed only natural that such a woman should be absorbed in her regal part. I told her this as simply as though I had been talking to you. I daresay it was a surprise to her to hear words of affection from her daughter's mouth, and the unfeigned homage of my admiration evidently touched her deeply. Her manner changed and became even more engaging; she dropped all formality as she said:

"I am much pleased with you, and I hope we shall remain good friends."

The words struck me as charmingly naive, but I did not let this appear, for I saw at once that the prudent course was to allow her to believe herself much deeper and cleverer than her daughter. So I only stared vacantly and she was delighted. I kissed her hands repeatedly, telling her how happy it made me to be so treated and to feel at my ease with her. I even confided to her my previous tremors. She smiled, put her arm round my neck, and drawing me towards her, kissed me on the forehead most affectionately.

"Dear child," she said, "we have people coming to dinner to-day. Perhaps you will agree with me that it is better for you not to make your first appearance in society till you have been in the dressmaker's hands; so, after you have seen your father and brother, you can go upstairs again."

I assented most heartily. My mother's exquisite dress was the first revelation to me of the world which our dreams had pictured; but I did not feel the slightest desire to rival her.

My father now entered, and the Duchess presented me to him.

He became all at once most affectionate, and played the father's part so well, that I could not but believe his heart to be in it. Taking my two hands in his, and kissing them, with more of the lover than the father in his manner, he said:

"So this is my rebel daughter!"

And he drew me towards him, with his arm passed tenderly round my waist, while he kissed me on the cheeks and forehead.

"The pleasure with which we shall watch your success in society will atone for the disappointment we felt at your change of vocation," he said. Then, turning to my mother, "Do you know that she is going to turn out very pretty, and you will be proud of her some day?—Here is your brother, Rhetore.—Alphonse," he said to a fine young man who came in, "here is your convent-bred sister, who threatens to send her nun's frock to the deuce."

My brother came up in a leisurely way and took my hand, which he pressed.

"Come, come, you may kiss her," said my father.

And he kissed me on both cheeks.

"I am delighted to see you," he said, "and I take your side against my father."

I thanked him, but could not help thinking he might have come to Blois when he was at Orleans visiting our Marquis brother in his quarters.

Fearing the arrival of strangers, I now withdrew. I tidied up my rooms, and laid out on the scarlet velvet of my lovely table all the materials necessary for writing to you, meditating all the while on my new situation.

This, my fair sweetheart, is a true and veracious account of the return of a girl of eighteen, after an absence of nine years, to the bosom of one of the noblest families in the kingdom. I was tired by the journey as well as by all the emotions I had been through, so I went to bed in convent fashion, at eight o'clock after supper. They have preserved even a little Saxe service which the dear Princess used when she had a fancy for taking her meals alone.

II. THE SAME TO THE SAME November 25th.

Next day I found my rooms done out and dusted, and even flowers put in the vases, by old Philippe. I began to feel at home. Only it didn't occur to anybody that a Carmelite schoolgirl has an early appetite, and Rose had no end of trouble in getting breakfast for me.

"Mlle. goes to bed at dinner-time," she said to me, "and gets up when the Duke is just returning home."

I began to write. About one o'clock my father knocked at the door of the small drawing-room and asked if he might come in. I opened the door; he came in, and found me writing to you.

"My dear," he began, "you will have to get yourself clothes, and to make these rooms comfortable. In this purse you will find twelve thousand francs, which is the yearly income I purpose allowing you for your expenses. You will make arrangements with your mother as to some governess whom you may like, in case Miss Griffith doesn't please you, for Mme. de Chaulieu will not have time to go out with you in the mornings. A carriage and man-servant shall be at your disposal."

"Let me keep Philippe," I said.

"So be it," he replied. "But don't be uneasy; you have money enough of your own to be no burden either to your mother or me."

"May I ask how much I have?"

"Certainly, my child," he said. "Your grandmother left you five hundred thousand francs; this was the amount of her savings, for she would not alienate a foot of land from the family. This sum has been placed in Government stock, and, with the accumulated interest, now brings in about forty thousand francs a year. With this I had purposed making an independence for your second

brother, and it is here that you have upset my plans. Later, however, it is possible that you may fall in with them. It shall rest with yourself, for I have confidence in your good sense far more than I had expected.

"I do not need to tell you how a daughter of the Chaulieus ought to behave. The pride so plainly written in your features is my best guarantee. Safeguards, such as common folk surround their daughters with, would be an insult in our family. A slander reflecting on your name might cost the life of the man bold enough to utter it, or the life of one of your brothers, if by chance the right should not prevail. No more on this subject. Good-bye, little one."

He kissed me on the forehead and went out. I cannot understand the relinquishment of this plan after nine years' persistence in it. My father's frankness is what I like. There is no ambiguity about his words. My money ought to belong to his Marquis son. Who, then, has had bowels of mercy? My mother? My father? Or could it be my brother?

I remained sitting on my grandmother's sofa, staring at the purse which my father had left on the mantelpiece, at once pleased and vexed that I could not withdraw my mind from the money. It is true, further speculation was useless. My doubts had been cleared up and there was something fine in the way my pride was spared.

Philippe has spent the morning rushing about among the various shops and workpeople who are to undertake the task of my metamorphosis. A famous dressmaker, by name Victorine, has come, as well as a woman for underclothing, and a shoemaker. I am as impatient as a child to know what I shall be like when I emerge from the sack which constituted the conventual uniform; but all these tradespeople take a long time; the corset-maker requires a whole week if my figure is not to be spoilt. You see, I have a figure, dear; this becomes serious. Janssen, the Operatic shoemaker, solemnly assures me that I have my mother's foot. The whole morning has gone in these weighty occupations. Even a glovemaker has come to take the measure of my hand. The underclothing woman has got my orders.

At the meal which I call dinner, and the others lunch, my mother told me that we were going together to the milliner's to see some hats, so that my taste should be formed, and I might be in a position to order my own.

This burst of independence dazzles me. I am like a blind man who has just recovered his sight. Now I begin to understand the vast interval which separates a Carmelite sister from a girl in society. Of ourselves we could never have conceived it.

During this lunch my father seemed absent-minded, and we left him to his thoughts; he is deep in the King's confidence. I was entirely forgotten; but,

from what I have seen, I have no doubt he will remember me when he has need of me. He is a very attractive man in spite of his fifty years. His figure is youthful; he is well made, fair, and extremely graceful in his movements. He has a diplomatic face, at once dumb and expressive; his nose is long and slender, and he has brown eyes.

What a handsome pair! Strange thoughts assail me as it becomes plain to me that these two, so perfectly matched in birth, wealth, and mental superiority, live entirely apart, and have nothing in common but their name. The show of unity is only for the world.

The cream of the Court and diplomatic circles were here last night. Very soon I am going to a ball given by the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, and I shall be presented to the society I am so eager to know. A dancing-master is coming every morning to give me lessons, for I must be able to dance in a month, or I can't go to the ball.

Before dinner, my mother came to talk about the governess with me. I have decided to keep Miss Griffith, who was recommended by the English ambassador. Miss Griffith is the daughter of a clergyman; her mother was of good family, and she is perfectly well bred. She is thirty-six, and will teach me English. The good soul is quite handsome enough to have ambitions; she is Scotch—poor and proud—and will act as my chaperon. She is to sleep in Rose's room. Rose will be under her orders. I saw at a glance that my governess would be governed by me. In the six days we have been together, she has made very sure that I am the only person likely to take an interest in her; while, for my part, I have ascertained that, for all her statuesque features, she will prove accommodating. She seems to me a kindly soul, but cautious. I have not been able to extract a word of what passed between her and my mother.

Another trifling piece of news! My father has this morning refused the appointment as Minister of State which was offered him. This accounts for his preoccupied manner last night. He says he would prefer an embassy to the worries of public debate. Spain in especial attracts him.

This news was told me at lunch, the one moment of the day when my father, mother, and brother see each other in an easy way. The servants then only come when they are rung for. The rest of the day my brother, as well as my father, spends out of the house. My mother has her toilet to make; between two and four she is never visible; at four o'clock she goes out for an hour's drive; when she is not dining out, she receives from six to seven, and the evening is given to entertainments of various kinds—theatres, balls, concerts, at homes. In short, her life is so full, that I don't believe she ever has a quarter of an hour to herself. She must spend a considerable time dressing in the

morning; for at lunch, which takes place between eleven and twelve, she is exquisite. The meaning of the things that are said about her is dawning on me. She begins the day with a bath barely warmed, and a cup of cold coffee with cream; then she dresses. She is never, except on some great emergency, called before nine o'clock. In summer there are morning rides, and at two o'clock she receives a young man whom I have never yet contrived to see.

Behold our family life! We meet at lunch and dinner, though often I am alone with my mother at this latter meal, and I foresee that still oftener I shall take it in my own rooms (following the example of my grandmother) with only Miss Griffith for company, for my mother frequently dines out. I have ceased to wonder at the indifference my family have shown to me. In Paris, my dear, it is a miracle of virtue to love the people who live with you, for you see little enough of them; as for the absent—they do not exist!

Knowing as this may sound, I have not yet set foot in the streets, and am deplorably ignorant. I must wait till I am less of the country cousin and have brought my dress and deportment into keeping with the society I am about to enter, the whirl of which amazes me even here, where only distant murmurs reach my ear. So far I have not gone beyond the garden; but the Italian opera opens in a few days, and my mother has a box there. I am crazy with delight at the thought of hearing Italian music and seeing French acting.

Already I begin to drop convent habits for those of society. I spend the evening writing to you till the moment for going to bed arrives. This has been postponed to ten o'clock, the hour at which my mother goes out, if she is not at the theatre. There are twelve theatres in Paris.

I am grossly ignorant and I read a lot, but quite indiscriminately, one book leading to another. I find the names of fresh books on the cover of the one I am reading; but as I have no one to direct me, I light on some which are fearfully dull. What modern literature I have read all turns upon love, the subject which used to bulk so largely in our thoughts, because it seemed that our fate was determined by man and for man. But how inferior are these authors to two little girls, known as Sweetheart and Darling—otherwise Renee and Louise. Ah! my love, what wretched plots, what ridiculous situations, and what poverty of sentiment! Two books, however, have given me wonderful pleasure—Corinne and Adolphe. Apropos of this, I asked my father one day whether it would be possible for me to see Mme. de Stael. My father, mother, and Alphonse all burst out laughing, and Alphonse said:

"Where in the world has she sprung from?"

To which my father replied:

"What fools we are! She springs from the Carmelites."

"My child, Mme. de Stael is dead," said my mother gently.

When I finished Adolphe, I asked Miss Griffith how a woman could be betrayed.

"Why, of course, when she loves," was her reply.

Renee, tell me, do you think we could be betrayed by a man?

Miss Griffith has at last discerned that I am not an utter ignoramus, that I have somewhere a hidden vein of knowledge, the knowledge we learned from each other in our random arguments. She sees that it is only superficial facts of which I am ignorant. The poor thing has opened her heart to me. Her curt reply to my question, when I compare it with all the sorrows I can imagine, makes me feel quite creepy. Once more she urged me not to be dazzled by the glitter of society, to be always on my guard, especially against what most attracted me. This is the sum-total of her wisdom, and I can get nothing more out of her. Her lectures, therefore, become a trifle monotonous, and she might be compared in this respect to the bird which has only one cry.

III. THE SAME TO THE SAME December.

My Darling,—Here I am ready to make my bow to the world. By way of preparation I have been trying to commit all the follies I could think of before sobering down for my entry. This morning, I have seen myself, after many rehearsals, well and duly equipped—stays, shoes, curls, dress, ornaments,—all in order. Following the example of duelists before a meeting, I tried my arms in the privacy of my chamber. I wanted to see how I would look, and had no difficulty in discovering a certain air of victory and triumph, bound to carry all before it. I mustered all my forces, in accordance with that splendid maxim of antiquity, "Know thyself!" and boundless was my delight in thus making my own acquaintance. Griffith was the sole spectator of this doll's play, in which I was at once doll and child. You think you know me? You are hugely mistaken.

Here is a portrait, then, Renee, of your sister, formerly disguised as a Carmelite, now brought to life again as a frivolous society girl. She is one of the greatest beauties in France—Provence, of course, excepted. I don't see that I can give a more accurate summary of this interesting topic.

True, I have my weak points; but were I a man, I should adore them. They arise from what is most promising in me. When you have spent a fortnight admiring the exquisite curves of your mother's arms, and that mother the Duchesse de Chaulieu, it is impossible, my dear, not to deplore your own angular elbows. Yet there is consolation in observing the fineness of the wrist,

and a certain grace of line in those hollows, which will yet fill out and show plump, round, and well modeled, under the satiny skin. The somewhat crude outline of the arms is seen again in the shoulders. Strictly speaking, indeed, I have no shoulders, but only two bony blades, standing out in harsh relief. My figure also lacks pliancy; there is a stiffness about the side lines.

Poof! There's the worst out. But then the contours are bold and delicate, the bright, pure flame of health bites into the vigorous lines, a flood of life and of blue blood pulses under the transparent skin, and the fairest daughter of Eve would seem a Negress beside me! I have the foot of a gazelle! My joints are finely turned, my features of a Greek correctness. It is true, madame, that the flesh tints do not melt into each other; but, at least, they stand out clear and bright. In short, I am a very pretty green fruit, with all the charm of unripeness. I see a great likeness to the face in my aunt's old missal, which rises out of a violet lily.

There is no silly weakness in the blue of my insolent eyes; the white is pure mother-of-pearl, prettily marked with tiny veins, and the thick, long lashes fall like a silken fringe. My forehead sparkles, and the hair grows deliciously; it ripples into waves of pale gold, growing browner towards the centre, whence escape little rebel locks, which alone would tell that my fairness is not of the insipid and hysterical type. I am a tropical blonde, with plenty of blood in my veins, a blonde more apt to strike than to turn the cheek. What do you think the hairdresser proposed? He wanted, if you please, to smooth my hair into two bands, and place over my forehead a pearl, kept in place by a gold chain! He said it would recall the Middle Ages.

I told him I was not aged enough to have reached the middle, or to need an ornament to freshen me up!

The nose is slender, and the well-cut nostrils are separated by a sweet little pink partition—an imperious, mocking nose, with a tip too sensitive ever to grow fat or red. Sweetheart, if this won't find a husband for a dowerless maiden, I'm a donkey. The ears are daintily curled, a pearl hanging from either lobe would show yellow. The neck is long, and has an undulating motion full of dignity. In the shade the white ripens to a golden tinge. Perhaps the mouth is a little large. But how expressive! what a color on the lips! how prettily the teeth laugh!

Then, dear, there is a harmony running through all. What a gait! what a voice! We have not forgotten how our grandmother's skirts fell into place without a touch. In a word, I am lovely and charming. When the mood comes, I can laugh one of our good old laughs, and no one will think the less of me; the dimples, impressed by Comedy's light fingers on my fair cheeks, will command respect. Or I can let my eyes fall and my heart freeze under my

snowy brows. I can pose as a Madonna with melancholy, swan-like neck, and the painters' virgins will be nowhere; my place in heaven would be far above them. A man would be forced to chant when he spoke to me.

So, you see, my panoply is complete, and I can run the whole gamut of coquetry from deepest bass to shrillest treble. It is a huge advantage not to be all of one piece. Now, my mother is neither playful nor virginal. Her only attitude is an imposing one; when she ceases to be majestic, she is ferocious. It is difficult for her to heal the wounds she makes, whereas I can wound and heal together. We are absolutely unlike, and therefore there could not possibly be rivalry between us, unless indeed we quarreled over the greater or less perfection of our extremities, which are similar. I take after my father, who is shrewd and subtle. I have the manner of my grandmother and her charming voice, which becomes falsetto when forced, but is a sweet-toned chest voice at the ordinary pitch of a quiet talk.

I feel as if I had left the convent to-day for the first time. For society I do not yet exist; I am unknown to it. What a ravishing moment! I still belong only to myself, like a flower just blown, unseen yet of mortal eye.

In spite of this, my sweet, as I paced the drawing-room during my self-inspection, and saw the poor cast-off school-clothes, a queer feeling came over me. Regret for the past, anxiety about the future, fear of society, a long farewell to the pale daisies which we used to pick and strip of their petals in light-hearted innocence, there was something of all that; but strange, fantastic visions also rose, which I crushed back into the inner depths, whence they had sprung, and whither I dared not follow them.

My Renee, I have a regular trousseau! It is all beautifully laid away and perfumed in the cedar-wood drawers with lacquered front of my charming dressing-table. There are ribbons, shoes, gloves, all in lavish abundance. My father has kindly presented me with the pretty gewgaws a girl loves—a dressing-case, toilet service, scent-box, fan, sunshade, prayer-book, gold chain, cashmere shawl. He has also promised to give me riding lessons. And I can dance! To-morrow, yes, to-morrow evening, I come out!

My dress is white muslin, and on my head I wear a garland of white roses in Greek style. I shall put on my Madonna face; I mean to play the simpleton, and have all the women on my side. My mother is miles away from any idea of what I write to you. She believes me quite destitute of mind, and would be dumfounded if she read my letter. My brother honors me with a profound contempt, and is uniformly and politely indifferent.

He is a handsome young fellow, but melancholy, and given to moods. I have divined his secret, though neither the Duke nor Duchess has an inkling of it. In spite of his youth and his title, he is jealous of his father. He has no

position in the State, no post at Court, he never has to say, "I am going to the Chamber." I alone in the house have sixteen hours for meditation. My father is absorbed in public business and his own amusements; my mother, too, is never at leisure; no member of the household practises self-examination, they are constantly in company, and have hardly time to live.

I should immensely like to know what is the potent charm wielded by society to keep people prisoner from nine every evening till two or three in the morning, and force them to be so lavish alike of strength and money. When I longed for it, I had no idea of the separations it brought about, or its overmastering spell. But, then, I forget, it is Paris which does it all.

It is possible, it seems, for members of one family to live side by side and know absolutely nothing of each other. A half-fledged nun arrives, and in a couple of weeks has grasped domestic details, of which the master diplomatist at the head of the house is quite ignorant. Or perhaps he does see, and shuts his eyes deliberately, as part of the father's role. There is a mystery here which I must plumb.

IV. THE SAME TO THE SAME December 15th.

Yesterday, at two o'clock, I went to drive in the Champs-Elysees and the Bois de Boulogne. It was one of those autumn days which we used to find so beautiful on the banks of the Loire. So I have seen Paris at last! The Place Louis XV. is certainly very fine, but the beauty is that of man's handiwork.

I was dressed to perfection, pensive, with set face (though inwardly much tempted to laugh), under a lovely hat, my arms crossed. Would you believe it? Not a single smile was thrown at me, not one poor youth was struck motionless as I passed, not a soul turned to look again; and yet the carriage proceeded with a deliberation worthy of my pose.

No, I am wrong, there was one—a duke, and a charming man—who suddenly reined in as we went by. The individual who thus saved appearances for me was my father, and he proclaimed himself highly gratified by what he saw. I met my mother also, who sent me a butterfly kiss from the tips of her fingers. The worthy Griffith, who fears no man, cast her glances hither and thither without discrimination. In my judgment, a young woman should always know exactly what her eye is resting on.

I was mad with rage. One man actually inspected my carriage without noticing me. This flattering homage probably came from a carriage-maker. I have been quite out in the reckoning of my forces. Plainly, beauty, that rare

gift which comes from heaven, is commoner in Paris than I thought. I saw hats doffed with deference to simpering fools; a purple face called forth murmurs of, "It is she!" My mother received an immense amount of admiration. There is an answer to this problem, and I mean to find it.

The men, my dear, seemed to me generally very ugly. The very few exceptions are bad copies of us. Heaven knows what evil genius has inspired their costume; it is amazingly inelegant compared with those of former generations. It has no distinction, no beauty of color or romance; it appeals neither to the senses, nor the mind, nor the eye, and it must be very uncomfortable. It is meagre and stunted. The hat, above all, struck me; it is a sort of truncated column, and does not adapt itself in the least to the shape of the head; but I am told it is easier to bring about a revolution than to invent a graceful hat. Courage in Paris recoils before the thought of appearing in a round felt; and for lack of one day's daring, men stick all their lives to this ridiculous headpiece. And yet Frenchmen are said to be fickle!

The men are hideous anyway, whatever they put on their heads. I have seen nothing but worn, hard faces, with no calm nor peace in the expression; the harsh lines and furrows speak of foiled ambition and smarting vanity. A fine forehead is rarely seen.

"And these are the product of Paris!" I said to Miss Griffith.

"Most cultivated and pleasant men," she replied.

I was silent. The heart of a spinster of thirty-six is a well of tolerance.

In the evening I went to the ball, where I kept close to my mother's side. She gave me her arm with a devotion which did not miss its reward. All the honors were for her; I was made the pretext for charming compliments. She was clever enough to find me fools for my partners, who one and all expatiated on the heat and the beauty of the ball, till you might suppose I was freezing and blind. Not one failed to enlarge on the strange, unheard-of, extraordinary, odd, remarkable fact—that he saw me for the first time.

My dress, which dazzled me as I paraded alone in my white-and-gold drawing-room, was barely noticeable amidst the gorgeous finery of most of the married women. Each had her band of faithful followers, and they all watched each other askance. A few were radiant in triumphant beauty, and amongst these was my mother. A girl at a ball is a mere dancing-machine—a thing of no consequence whatever.

The men, with rare exceptions, did not impress me more favorably here than at the Champs-Elysees. They have a used-up look; their features are meaningless, or rather they have all the same meaning. The proud, stalwart bearing which we find in the portraits of our ancestors—men who joined

moral to physical vigor—has disappeared. Yet in this gathering there was one man of remarkable ability, who stood out from the rest by the beauty of his face. But even he did not rouse in me the feeling which I should have expected. I do not know his works, and he is a man of no family. Whatever the genius and the merits of a plebeian or a commoner, he could never stir my blood. Besides, this man was obviously so much more taken up with himself than with anybody else, that I could not but think these great brain-workers must look on us as things rather than persons. When men of intellectual power love, they ought to give up writing, otherwise their love is not the real thing. The lady of their heart does not come first in all their thoughts. I seemed to read all this in the bearing of the man I speak of. I am told he is a professor, orator, and author, whose ambition makes him the slave of every bigwig.

My mind was made up on the spot. It was unworthy of me, I determined, to quarrel with society for not being impressed by my merits, and I gave myself up to the simple pleasure of dancing, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I heard a great deal of inept gossip about people of whom I know nothing; but perhaps it is my ignorance on many subjects which prevents me from appreciating it, as I saw that most men and women took a lively pleasure in certain remarks, whether falling from their own lips or those of others. Society bristles with enigmas which look hard to solve. It is a perfect maze of intrigue. Yet I am fairly quick of sight and hearing, and as to my wits, Mlle. de Maucombe does not need to be told!

I returned home tired with a pleasant sort of tiredness, and in all innocence began describing my sensations to my mother, who was with me. She checked me with the warning that I must never say such things to any one but her.

"My dear child," she added, "it needs as much tact to know when to be silent as when to speak."

This advice brought home to me the nature of the sensations which ought to be concealed from every one, not excepting perhaps even a mother. At a glance I measured the vast field of feminine duplicity. I can assure you, sweetheart, that we, in our unabashed simplicity, would pass for two very wide-awake little scandal-mongers. What lessons may be conveyed in a finger on the lips, in a word, a look! All in a moment I was seized with excessive shyness. What! may I never again speak of the natural pleasure I feel in the exercise of dancing? "How then," I said to myself, "about the deeper feelings?"

I went to bed sorrowful, and I still suffer from the shock produced by this first collision of my frank, joyous nature with the harsh laws of society. Already the highway hedges are flecked with my white wool! Farewell, beloved.

V. RENEE DE MAUCOMBE TO LOUISE DE CHAULIEU October.

How deeply your letter moved me; above all, when I compare our widely different destinies! How brilliant is the world you are entering, how peaceful the retreat where I shall end my modest career!

In the Castle of Maucombe, which is so well known to you by description that I shall say no more of it, I found my room almost exactly as I left it; only now I can enjoy the splendid view it gives of the Gemenos valley, which my childish eyes used to see without comprehending. A fortnight after my arrival, my father and mother took me, along with my two brothers, to dine with one of our neighbors, M. de l'Estorade, an old gentleman of good family, who has made himself rich, after the provincial fashion, by scraping and paring.

M. de l'Estorade was unable to save his only son from the clutches of Bonaparte; after successfully eluding the conscription, he was forced to send him to the army in 1813, to join the Emperor's bodyguard. After Leipsic no more was heard of him. M. de Montriveau, whom the father interviewed in 1814, declared that he had seen him taken by the Russians. Mme. de l'Estorade died of grief whilst a vain search was being made in Russia. The Baron, a very pious old man, practised that fine theological virtue which we used to cultivate at Blois—Hope! Hope made him see his son in dreams. He hoarded his income for him, and guarded carefully the portion of inheritance which fell to him from the family of the late Mme. de l'Estorade, no one venturing to ridicule the old man.

At last it dawned upon me that the unexpected return of this son was the cause of my own. Who could have imagined, whilst fancy was leading us a giddy dance, that my destined husband was slowly traveling on foot through Russia, Poland, and Germany? His bad luck only forsook him at Berlin, where the French Minister helped his return to his native country. M. de l'Estorade, the father, who is a small landed proprietor in Provence, with an income of about ten thousand livres, has not sufficient European fame to interest the world in the wandering Knight de l'Estorade, whose name smacks of his adventures.

The accumulated income of twelve thousand livres from the property of Mme. de l'Estorade, with the addition of the father's savings, provides the poor guard of honor with something like two hundred and fifty thousand livres, not counting house and lands—quite a considerable fortune in Provence. His worthy father had bought, on the very eve of the Chevalier's return, a fine but badly-managed estate, where he designs to plant ten thousand mulberry-trees,

raised in his nursery with a special view to this acquisition. The Baron, having found his long-lost son, has now but one thought, to marry him, and marry him to a girl of good family.

My father and mother entered into their neighbor's idea with an eye to my interests so soon as they discovered that Renee de Maucombe would be acceptable without a dowry, and that the money the said Renee ought to inherit from her parents would be duly acknowledged as hers in the contract. In a similar way, my younger brother, Jean de Maucombe, as soon as he came of age, signed a document stating that he had received from his parents an advance upon the estate equal in amount to one-third of whole. This is the device by which the nobles of Provence elude the infamous Civil Code of M. de Bonaparte, a code which will drive as many girls of good family into convents as it will find husbands for. The French nobility, from the little I have been able to gather, seem to be divided on these matters.

The dinner, darling, was a first meeting between your sweetheart and the exile. The Comte de Maucombe's servants donned their old laced liveries and hats, the coachman his great top-boots; we sat five in the antiquated carriage, and arrived in state about two o'clock—the dinner was for three—at the grange, which is the dwelling of the Baron de l'Estorade.

My father-in-law to be has, you see, no castle, only a simple country house, standing beneath one of our hills, at the entrance of that noble valley, the pride of which is undoubtedly the Castle of Maucombe. The building is quite unpretentious: four pebble walls covered with a yellowish wash, and roofed with hollow tiles of a good red, constitute the grange. The rafters bend under the weight of this brick-kiln. The windows, inserted casually, without any attempt at symmetry, have enormous shutters, painted yellow. The garden in which it stands is a Provencal garden, enclosed by low walls, built of big round pebbles set in layers, alternately sloping or upright, according to the artistic taste of the mason, which finds here its only outlet. The mud in which they are set is falling away in places.

Thanks to an iron railing at the entrance facing the road, this simple farm has a certain air of being a country-seat. The railing, long sought with tears, is so emaciated that it recalled Sister Angelique to me. A flight of stone steps leads to the door, which is protected by a pent-house roof, such as no peasant on the Loire would tolerate for his coquettish white stone house, with its blue roof, glittering in the sun. The garden and surrounding walks are horribly dusty, and the trees seem burnt up. It is easy to see that for years the Baron's life has been a mere rising up and going to bed again, day after day, without a thought beyond that of piling up coppers. He eats the same food as his two servants, a Provencal lad and the old woman who used to wait on his wife. The rooms are scantily furnished.

Nevertheless, the house of l'Estorade had done its best; the cupboards had been ransacked, and its last man beaten up for the dinner, which was served to us on old silver dishes, blackened and battered. The exile, my darling pet, is like the railing, emaciated! He is pale and silent, and bears traces of suffering. At thirty-seven he might be fifty. The once beautiful ebon locks of youth are streaked with white like a lark's wing. His fine blue eyes are cavernous; he is a little deaf, which suggests the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance.

Spite of all this, I have graciously consented to become Mme. de l'Estorade and to receive a dowry of two hundred and fifty thousand livres, but only on the express condition of being allowed to work my will upon the grange and make a park there. I have demanded from my father, in set terms, a grant of water, which can be brought thither from Maucombe. In a month I shall be Mme. de l'Estorade; for, dear, I have made a good impression. After the snows of Siberia a man is ready enough to see merit in those black eyes, which according to you, used to ripen fruit with a look. Louis de l'Estorade seems well content to marry the fair Renee de Maucombe—such is your friend's splendid title.

Whilst you are preparing to reap the joys of that many-sided existence which awaits a young lady of the Chaulieu family, and to queen it in Paris, your poor little sweetheart, Renee, that child of the desert, has fallen from the empyrean, whither together we had soared, into the vulgar realities of a life as homely as a daisy's. I have vowed to myself to comfort this young man, who has never known youth, but passed straight from his mother's arms to the embrace of war, and from the joys of his country home to the frosts and forced labor of Siberia.

Humble country pleasures will enliven the monotony of my future. It shall be my ambition to enlarge the oasis round my house, and to give it the lordly shade of fine trees. My turf, though Provencal, shall be always green. I shall carry my park up the hillside and plant on the highest point some pretty kiosque, whence, perhaps, my eyes may catch the shimmer of the Mediterranean. Orange and lemon trees, and all choicest things that grow, shall embellish my retreat; and there will I be a mother among my children. The poetry of Nature, which nothing can destroy, shall hedge us round; and standing loyally at the post of duty, we need fear no danger. My religious feelings are shared by my father-in-law and by the Chevalier.

Ah! darling, my life unrolls itself before my eyes like one of the great highways of France, level and easy, shaded with evergreen trees. This century will not see another Bonaparte; and my children, if I have any, will not be rent from me. They will be mine to train and make men of—the joy of my life. If you also are true to your destiny, you who ought to find your mate amongst the great ones of the earth, the children of your Renee will not lack a zealous

protectress.

Farewell, then, for me at least, to the romances and thrilling adventures in which we used ourselves to play the part of heroine. The whole story of my life lies before me now; its great crises will be the teething and nutrition of the young Masters de l'Estorade, and the mischief they do to my shrubs and me. To embroider their caps, to be loved and admired by a sickly man at the mouth of the Gemenos valley—there are my pleasures. Perhaps some day the country dame may go and spend a winter in Marseilles; but danger does not haunt the purlieus of a narrow provincial stage. There will be nothing to fear, not even an admiration such as could only make a woman proud. We shall take a great deal of interest in the silkworms for whose benefit our mulberry-leaves will be sold! We shall know the strange vicissitudes of life in Provence, and the storms that may attack even a peaceful household. Quarrels will be impossible, for M. de l'Estorade has formally announced that he will leave the reins in his wife's hands; and as I shall do nothing to remind him of this wise resolve, it is likely he may persevere in it.

You, my dear Louise, will supply the romance of my life. So you must narrate to me in full all your adventures, describe your balls and parties, tell me what you wear, what flowers crown your lovely golden locks, and what are the words and manners of the men you meet. Your other self will be always there—listening, dancing, feeling her finger-tips pressed—with you. If only I could have some fun in Paris now and then, while you played the house-mother at La Crampade! such is the name of our grange. Poor M. de l'Estorade, who fancies he is marrying one woman! Will he find out there are two?

I am writing nonsense now, and as henceforth I can only be foolish by proxy, I had better stop. One kiss, then, on each cheek—my lips are still virginal, he has only dared to take my hand. Oh! our deference and propriety are quite disquieting, I assure you. There, I am off again.... Good-bye, dear.

P. S.—I have just opened your third letter. My dear, I have about one thousand livres to dispose of; spend them for me on pretty things, such as we can't find here, nor even at Marseilles. While speeding on your own business, give a thought to the recluse of La Crampade. Remember that on neither side have the heads of the family any people of taste in Paris to make their purchases. I shall reply to your letter later.

VI. DON FELIPE HENAREZ TO DON FERNAND PARIS, September.

The address of this letter, my brother, will show you that the head of your house is out of reach of danger. If the massacre of our ancestors in the Court of Lions made Spaniards and Christians of us against our will, it left us a legacy of Arab cunning; and it may be that I owe my safety to the blood of the Abencerrages still flowing in my veins.

Fear made Ferdinand's acting so good, that Valdez actually believed in his protestations. But for me the poor Admiral would have been done for. Nothing, it seems, will teach the Liberals what a king is. This particular Bourbon has been long known to me; and the more His Majesty assured me of his protection, the stronger grew my suspicions. A true Spaniard has no need to repeat a promise. A flow of words is a sure sign of duplicity.

Valdez took ship on an English vessel. For myself, no sooner did I see the cause of my beloved Spain wrecked in Andalusia, than I wrote to the steward of my Sardinian estate to make arrangements for my escape. Some hardy coral fishers were despatched to wait for me at a point on the coast; and when Ferdinand urged the French to secure my person, I was already in my barony of Macumer, amidst brigands who defy all law and all avengers.

The last Hispano-Moorish family of Granada has found once more the shelter of an African desert, and even a Saracen horse, in an estate which comes to it from Saracens. How the eyes of these brigands—who but yesterday had dreaded my authority—sparkled with savage joy and pride when they found they were protecting against the King of Spain's vendetta the Duc de Soria, their master and a Henarez—the first who had come to visit them since the time when the island belonged to the Moors. More than a score of rifles were ready to point at Ferdinand of Bourbon, son of a race which was still unknown when the Abencerrages arrived as conquerors on the banks of the Loire.

My idea had been to live on the income of these huge estates, which, unfortunately, we have so greatly neglected; but my stay there convinced me that this was impossible, and that Queverdo's reports were only too correct. The poor man had twenty-two lives at my disposal, and not a single real; prairies of twenty thousand acres, and not a house; virgin forests, and not a stick of furniture! A million piastres and a resident master for half a century would be necessary to make these magnificent lands pay. I must see to this.

The conquered have time during their flight to ponder their own case and that of their vanquished party. At the spectacle of my noble country, a corpse for monks to prey on, my eyes filled with tears; I read in it the presage of Spain's gloomy future.

At Marseilles I heard of Riego's end. Painfully did it come home to me that my life also would henceforth be a martyrdom, but a martyrdom protracted

and unnoticed. Is existence worthy the name, when a man can no longer die for his country or live for a woman? To love, to conquer, this twofold form of the same thought, is the law graven on our sabres, emblazoned on the vaulted roofs of our palaces, ceaselessly whispered by the water, which rises and falls in our marble fountains. But in vain does it nerve my heart; the sabre is broken, the palace in ashes, the living spring sucked up by the barren sand.

Here, then, is my last will and testament.

Don Fernand, you will understand now why I put a check upon your ardor and ordered you to remain faithful to the rey netto. As your brother and friend, I implore you to obey me; as your master, I command. You will go to the King and will ask from him the grant of my dignities and property, my office and titles. He will perhaps hesitate, and may treat you to some regal scowls; but you must tell him that you are loved by Marie Heredia, and that Marie can marry none but a Duc de Soria. This will make the King radiant. It is the immense fortune of the Heredia family which alone has stood between him and the accomplishment of my ruin. Your proposal will seem to him, therefore, to deprive me of a last resource, and he will gladly hand over to you my spoils.

You will then marry Marie. The secret of the mutual love against which you fought was no secret to me, and I have prepared the old Count to see you take my place. Marie and I were merely doing what was expected of us in our position and carrying out the wishes of our fathers; everything else is in your favor. You are beautiful as a child of love, and are possessed of Marie's heart. I am an ill-favored Spanish grandee, for whom she feels an aversion to which she will not confess. Some slight reluctance there may be on the part of the noble Spanish girl on account of my misfortunes, but this you will soon overcome.

Duc de Soria, your predecessor would neither cost you a regret nor rob you of a maravedi. My mother's diamonds, which will suffice to make me independent, I will keep, because the gap caused by them in the family estate can be filled by Marie's jewels. You can send them, therefore, by my nurse, old Urraca, the only one of my servants whom I wish to retain. No one can prepare my chocolate as she does.

During our brief revolution, my life of unremitting toil was reduced to the barest necessaries, and these my salary was sufficient to provide. You will therefore find the income of the last two years in the hands of your steward. This sum is mine; but a Duc de Soria cannot marry without a large expenditure of money, therefore we will divide it. You will not refuse this wedding-present from your brigand brother. Besides, I mean to have it so.

The barony of Macumer, not being Spanish territory, remains to me. Thus I

have still a country and a name, should I wish to take up a position in the world again.

Thank Heaven, this finishes our business, and the house of Soria is saved!

At the very moment when I drop into simple Baron de Macumer, the French cannon announce the arrival of the Duc d'Angouleme. You will understand why I break off....

October.

When I arrived here I had not ten doubloons in my pocket. He would indeed be a poor sort of leader who, in the midst of calamities he has not been able to avert, has found means to feather his own nest. For the vanquished Moor there remains a horse and the desert; for the Christian foiled of his hopes, the cloister and a few gold pieces.

But my present resignation is mere weariness. I am not yet so near the monastery as to have abandoned all thoughts of life. Ozalga had given me several letters of introduction to meet all emergencies, amongst these one to a bookseller, who takes with our fellow-countrymen the place which Galignani holds with the English in Paris. This man has found eight pupils for me at three francs a lesson. I go to my pupils every alternate day, so that I have four lessons a day and earn twelve francs, which is more than I require. When Urraca comes I shall make some Spanish exile happy by passing on to him my connection.

I lodge in the Rue Hillerin-Bertin with a poor widow, who takes boarders. My room faces south and looks out on a little garden. It is perfectly quiet; I have green trees to look upon, and spend the sum of one piastre a day. I am amazed at the amount of calm, pure pleasure which I enjoy in this life, after the fashion of Dionysius at Corinth. From sunrise until ten o'clock I smoke and take my chocolate, sitting at my window and contemplating two Spanish plants, a broom which rises out of a clump of jessamine—gold on a white ground, colors which must send a thrill through any scion of the Moors. At ten o'clock I start for my lessons, which last till four, when I return for dinner. Afterwards I read and smoke till I go to bed.

I can put up for a long time with a life like this, compounded of work and meditation, of solitude and society. Be happy, therefore, Fernand; my abdication has brought no afterthoughts; I have no regrets like Charles V., no longing to try the game again like Napoleon. Five days and nights have passed since I wrote my will; to my mind they might have been five centuries. Honor, titles, wealth, are for me as though they had never existed.

Now that the conventional barrier of respect which hedged me round has fallen, I can open my heart to you, dear boy. Though cased in the armor of

gravity, this heart is full of tenderness and devotion, which have found no object, and which no woman has divined, not even she who, from her cradle, has been my destined bride. In this lies the secret of my political enthusiasm. Spain has taken the place of a mistress and received the homage of my heart. And now Spain, too, is gone! Beggared of all, I can gaze upon the ruin of what once was me and speculate over the mysteries of my being.

Why did life animate this carcass, and when will it depart? Why has that race, pre-eminent in chivalry, breathed all its primitive virtues—its tropical love, its fiery poetry—into this its last offshoot, if the seed was never to burst its rugged shell, if no stem was to spring forth, no radiant flower scatter aloft its Eastern perfumes? Of what crime have I been guilty before my birth that I can inspire no love? Did fate from my very infancy decree that I should be stranded, a useless hulk, on some barren shore! I find in my soul the image of the deserts where my fathers ranged, illumined by a scorching sun which shrivels up all life. Proud remnant of a fallen race, vain force, love run to waste, an old man in the prime of youth, here better than elsewhere shall I await the last grace of death. Alas! under this murky sky no spark will kindle these ashes again to flame. Thus my last words may be those of Christ, My God, Thou hast forsaken me! Cry of agony and terror, to the core of which no mortal has ventured yet to penetrate!

You can realize now, Fernand, what a joy it is to me to live afresh in you and Marie. I shall watch you henceforth with the pride of a creator satisfied in his work. Love each other well and go on loving if you would not give me pain; any discord between you would hurt me more than it would yourselves.

Our mother had a presentiment that events would one day serve her wishes. It may be that the longing of a mother constitutes a pact between herself and God. Was she not, moreover, one of those mysterious beings who can hold converse with Heaven and bring back thence a vision of the future? How often have I not read in the lines of her forehead that she was coveting for Fernand the honors and the wealth of Felipe! When I said so to her, she would reply with tears, laying bare the wounds of a heart, which of right was the undivided property of both her sons, but which an irresistible passion gave to you alone.

Her spirit, therefore, will hover joyfully above your heads as you bow them at the altar. My mother, have you not a caress for your Felipe now that he has yielded to your favorite even the girl whom you regretfully thrust into his arms? What I have done is pleasing to our womankind, to the dead, and to the King; it is the will of God. Make no difficulty then, Fernand; obey, and be silent.

P. S. Tell Urraca to be sure and call me nothing but M. Henarez. Don't say

a word about me to Marie. You must be the one living soul to know the secrets of the last Christianized Moor, in whose veins runs the blood of a great family, which took its rise in the desert and is now about to die out in the person of a solitary exile.

Farewell.

VII. LOUISE DE CHAULIEU TO RENEE DE MAUCOMBE

WHAT! To be married so soon. But this is unheard of. At the end of a month you become engaged to a man who is a stranger to you, and about whom you know nothing. The man may be deaf—there are so many kinds of deafness!—he may be sickly, tiresome, insufferable!

Don't you see, Renee, what they want with you? You are needful for carrying on the glorious stock of the l'Estorades, that is all. You will be buried in the provinces. Are these the promises we made each other? Were I you, I would sooner set off to the Hyeres islands in a caique, on the chance of being captured by an Algerian corsair and sold to the Grand Turk. Then I should be a Sultana some day, and wouldn't I make a stir in the harem while I was young —yes, and afterwards too!

You are leaving one convent to enter another. I know you; you are a coward, and you will submit to the yoke of family life with a lamblike docility. But I am here to direct you; you must come to Paris. There we shall drive the men wild and hold a court like queens. Your husband, sweetheart, in three years from now may become a member of the Chamber. I know all about members now, and I will explain it to you. You will work that machine very well; you can live in Paris, and become there what my mother calls a woman of fashion. Oh! you needn't suppose I will leave you in your grange!

Monday.

For a whole fortnight now, my dear, I have been living the life of society; one evening at the Italiens, another at the Grand Opera, and always a ball afterwards. Ah! society is a witching world. The music of the Opera enchants me; and whilst my soul is plunged in divine pleasure, I am the centre of admiration and the focus of all the opera-glasses. But a single glance will make the boldest youth drop his eyes.

I have seen some charming young men there; all the same, I don't care for any of them; not one has roused in me the emotion which I feel when I listen to Garcia in his splendid duet with Pellegrini in Otello. Heavens! how jealous Rossini must have been to express jealousy so well! What a cry in "Il mio cor

si divide!" I'm speaking Greek to you, for you never heard Garcia, but then you know how jealous I am!

What a wretched dramatist Shakespeare is! Othello is in love with glory; he wins battles, he gives orders, he struts about and is all over the place while Desdemona sits at home; and Desdemona, who sees herself neglected for the silly fuss of public life, is quite meek all the time. Such a sheep deserves to be slaughtered. Let the man whom I deign to love beware how he thinks of anything but loving me!

For my part, I like those long trials of the old-fashioned chivalry. That lout of a young lord, who took offence because his sovereign-lady sent him down among the lions to fetch her glove, was, in my opinion, very impertinent, and a fool too. Doubtless the lady had in reserve for him some exquisite flower of love, which he lost, as he well deserved—the puppy!

But here am I running on as though I had not a great piece of news to tell you. My father is certainly going to represent our master the King at Madrid. I say our master, for I shall make part of the embassy. My mother wishes to remain here, and my father will take me so as to have some woman with him.

My dear, this seems to you, no doubt, very simple, but there are horrors behind it, all the same: in a fortnight I have probed the secrets of the house. My mother would accompany my father to Madrid if he would take M. de Canalis as a secretary to the embassy. But the King appoints the secretaries; the Duke dare neither annoy the King, who hates to be opposed, nor vex my mother; and the wily diplomat believes he has cut the knot by leaving the Duchess here. M. de Canalis, who is the great poet of the day, is the young man who cultivates my mother's society, and who no doubt studies diplomacy with her from three o'clock to five. Diplomacy must be a fine subject, for he is as regular as a gambler on the Stock Exchange.

The Duc de Rhetore, our elder brother, solemn, cold, and whimsical, would be extinguished by his father at Madrid, therefore he remains in Paris. Miss Griffith has found out also that Alphonse is in love with a ballet-girl at the Opera. How is it possible to fall in love with legs and pirouettes? We have noticed that my brother comes to the theatre only when Tullia dances there; he applauds the steps of this creature, and then goes out. Two ballet-girls in a family are, I fancy, more destructive than the plague. My second brother is with his regiment, and I have not yet seen him. Thus it comes about that I have to act as the Antigone of His Majesty's ambassador. Perhaps I may get married in Spain, and perhaps my father's idea is a marriage there without dowry, after the pattern of yours with this broken-down guard of honor. My father asked if I would go with him, and offered me the use of his Spanish master.

"Spain, the country for castles in the air!" I cried. "Perhaps you hope that it

may mean marriages for me!"

For sole reply he honored me with a meaning look. For some days he has amused himself with teasing me at lunch; he watches me, and I dissemble. In this way I have played with him cruelly as father and ambassador in petto. Hadn't he taken me for a fool? He asked me what I thought of this and that young man, and of some girls whom I had met in several houses. I replied with quite inane remarks on the color of their hair, their faces, and the difference in their figures. My father seemed disappointed at my crassness, and inwardly blamed himself for having asked me.

"Still, father," I added, "don't suppose I am saying what I really think: mother made me afraid the other day that I had spoken more frankly than I ought of my impressions."

"With your family you can speak quite freely," my mother replied.

"Very well, then," I went on. "The young men I have met so far strike me as too self-centered to excite interest in others; they are much more taken up with themselves than with their company. They can't be accused of lack of candor at any rate. They put on a certain expression to talk to us, and drop it again in a moment, apparently satisfied that we don't use our eyes. The man as he converses is the lover; silent, he is the husband. The girls, again, are so artificial that it is impossible to know what they really are, except from the way they dance; their figures and movements alone are not a sham. But what has alarmed me most in this fashionable society is its brutality. The little incidents which take place when supper is announced give one some idea—to compare small things with great—of what a popular rising might be. Courtesy is only a thin veneer on the general selfishness. I imagined society very different. Women count for little in it; that may perhaps be a survival of Bonapartist ideas."

"Armande is coming on extraordinarily," said my mother.

"Mother, did you think I should never get beyond asking to see Mme. de Stael?"

My father smiled, and rose from the table.

Saturday.

My dear, I have left one thing out. Here is the tidbit I have reserved for you. The love which we pictured must be extremely well hidden; I have seen not a trace of it. True, I have caught in drawing-rooms now and again a quick exchange of glances, but how colorless it all is! Love, as we imagined it, a world of wonders, of glorious dreams, of charming realities, of sorrows that waken sympathy, and smiles that make sunshine, does not exist. The

bewitching words, the constant interchange of happiness, the misery of absence, the flood of joy at the presence of the beloved one—where are they? What soil produces these radiant flowers of the soul? Which is wrong? We or the world?

I have already seen hundreds of men, young and middle-aged; not one has stirred the least feeling in me. No proof of admiration and devotion on their part, not even a sword drawn in my behalf, would have moved me. Love, dear, is the product of such rare conditions that it is quite possible to live a lifetime without coming across the being on whom nature has bestowed the power of making one's happiness. The thought is enough to make one shudder; for if this being is found too late, what then?

For some days I have begun to tremble when I think of the destiny of women, and to understand why so many wear a sad face beneath the flush brought by the unnatural excitement of social dissipation. Marriage is a mere matter of chance. Look at yours. A storm of wild thoughts has passed over my mind. To be loved every day the same, yet with a difference, to be loved as much after ten years of happiness as on the first day!—such a love demands years. The lover must be allowed to languish, curiosity must be piqued and satisfied, feeling roused and responded to.

Is there, then, a law for the inner fruits of the heart, as there is for the visible fruits of nature? Can joy be made lasting? In what proportion should love mingle tears with pleasures? The cold policy of the funereal, monotonous, persistent routine of the convent seemed to me at these moments the only real life; while the wealth, the splendor, the tears, the delights, the triumph, the joy, the satisfaction, of a love equal, shared, and sanctioned, appeared a mere idle vision.

I see no room in this city for the gentle ways of love, for precious walks in shady alleys, the full moon sparkling on the water, while the suppliant pleads in vain. Rich, young, and beautiful, I have only to love, and love would become my sole occupation, my life; yet in the three months during which I have come and gone, eager and curious, nothing has appealed to me in the bright, covetous, keen eyes around me. No voice has thrilled me, no glance has made the world seem brighter.

Music alone has filled my soul, music alone has at all taken the place of our friendship. Sometimes, at night, I will linger for an hour by my window, gazing into the garden, summoning the future, with all it brings, out of the mystery which shrouds it. There are days too when, having started for a drive, I get out and walk in the Champs-Elysees, and picture to myself that the man who is to waken my slumbering soul is at hand, that he will follow and look at me. Then I meet only mountebanks, vendors of gingerbread, jugglers, passers-

by hurrying to their business, or lovers who try to escape notice. These I am tempted to stop, asking them, "You who are happy, tell me what is love."

But the impulse is repressed, and I return to my carriage, swearing to die an old maid. Love is undoubtedly an incarnation, and how many conditions are needful before it can take place! We are not certain of never quarreling with ourselves, how much less so when there are two? This is a problem which God alone can solve.

I begin to think that I shall return to the convent. If I remain in society, I shall do things which will look like follies, for I cannot possibly reconcile myself to what I see. I am perpetually wounded either in my sense of delicacy, my inner principles, or my secret thoughts.

Ah! my mother is the happiest of women, adored as she is by Canalis, her great little man. My love, do you know I am seized sometimes with a horrible craving to know what goes on between my mother and that young man? Griffith tells me she has gone through all these moods; she has longed to fly at women, whose happiness was written in their face; she has blackened their character, torn them to pieces. According to her, virtue consists in burying all these savage instincts in one's innermost heart. But what then of the heart? It becomes the sink of all that is worst in us.

It is very humiliating that no adorer has yet turned up for me. I am a marriageable girl, but I have brothers, a family, relations, who are sensitive on the point of honor. Ah! if that is what keeps men back, they are poltroons.

The part of Chimene in the Cid and that of the Cid delight me. What a marvelous play! Well, good-bye.

VIII. THE SAME TO THE SAME January.

Our master is a poor refugee, forced to keep in hiding on account of the part he played in the revolution which the Duc d'Angouleme has just quelled —a triumph to which we owe some splendid fetes. Though a Liberal, and doubtless a man of the people, he has awakened my interest: I fancy that he must have been condemned to death. I make him talk for the purpose of getting at his secret; but he is of a truly Castilian taciturnity, proud as though he were Gonsalvo di Cordova, and nevertheless angelic in his patience and gentleness. His pride is not irritable like Miss Griffith's, it belongs to his inner nature; he forces us to civility because his own manners are so perfect, and holds us at a distance by the respect he shows us. My father declares that there is a great deal of the nobleman in Senor Henarez, whom, among ourselves, he

calls in fun Don Henarez.

A few days ago I took the liberty of addressing him thus. He raised his eyes, which are generally bent on the ground, and flashed a look from them that quite abashed me; my dear, he certainly has the most beautiful eyes imaginable. I asked him if I had offended him in any way, and he said to me in his grand, rolling Spanish:

"I am here only to teach you Spanish."

I blushed and felt quite snubbed. I was on the point of making some pert answer, when I remembered what our dear mother in God used to say to us, and I replied instead:

"It would be a kindness to tell me if you have anything to complain of."

A tremor passed through him, the blood rose in his olive cheeks; he replied in a voice of some emotion:

"Religion must have taught you, better than I can, to respect the unhappy. Had I been a don in Spain, and lost everything in the triumph of Ferdinand VII., your witticism would be unkind; but if I am only a poor teacher of languages, is it not a heartless satire? Neither is worthy of a young lady of rank."

I took his hand, saying:

"In the name of religion also, I beg you to pardon me."

He bowed, opened my Don Quixote, and sat down.

This little incident disturbed me more than the harvest of compliments, gazing and pretty speeches on my most successful evening. During the lesson I watched him attentively, which I could do the more safely, as he never looks at me.

As the result of my observations, I made out that the tutor, whom we took to be forty, is a young man, some years under thirty. My governess, to whom I had handed him over, remarked on the beauty of his black hair and of his pearly teeth. As to his eyes, they are velvet and fire; but he is plain and insignificant. Though the Spaniards have been described as not a cleanly people, this man is most carefully got up, and his hands are whiter than his face. He stoops a little, and has an extremely large, oddly-shaped head. His ugliness, which, however, has a dash of piquancy, is aggravated by smallpox marks, which seam his face. His forehead is very prominent, and the shaggy eyebrows meet, giving a repellent air of harshness. There is a frowning, plaintive look on his face, reminding one of a sickly child, which owes its life to superhuman care, as Sister Marthe did. As my father observed, his features are a shrunken reproduction of those of Cardinal Ximenes. The natural dignity

of our tutor's manners seems to disconcert the dear Duke, who doesn't like him, and is never at ease with him; he can't bear to come in contact with superiority of any kind.

As soon as my father knows enough Spanish, we start for Madrid. When Henarez returned, two days after the reproof he had given me, I remarked by way of showing my gratitude:

"I have no doubt that you left Spain in consequence of political events. If my father is sent there, as seems to be expected, we shall be in a position to help you, and might be able to obtain your pardon, in case you are under sentence."

"It is impossible for any one to help me," he replied.

"But," I said, "is that because you refuse to accept any help, or because the thing itself is impossible?"

"Both," he said, with a bow, and in a tone which forbade continuing the subject.

My father's blood chafed in my veins. I was offended by this haughty demeanor, and promptly dropped Senor Henarez.

All the same, my dear, there is something fine in this rejection of any aid. "He would not accept even our friendship," I reflected, whilst conjugating a verb. Suddenly I stopped short and told him what was in my mind, but in Spanish. Henarez replied very politely that equality of sentiment was necessary between friends, which did not exist in this case, and therefore it was useless to consider the question.

"Do you mean equality in the amount of feeling on either side, or equality in rank?" I persisted, determined to shake him out of this provoking gravity.

He raised once more those awe-inspiring eyes, and mine fell before them. Dear, this man is a hopeless enigma. He seemed to ask whether my words meant love; and the mixture of joy, pride, and agonized doubt in his glance went to my heart. It was plain that advances, which would be taken for what they were worth in France, might land me in difficulties with a Spaniard, and I drew back into my shell, feeling not a little foolish.

The lesson over, he bowed, and his eyes were eloquent of the humble prayer: "Don't trifle with a poor wretch."

This sudden contrast to his usual grave and dignified manner made a great impression on me. It seems horrible to think and to say, but I can't help believing that there are treasures of affection in that man.

IX. MME. DE L'ESTORADE TO MLLE. DE CHAULIEU. December.

All is over, my dear child, and it is Mme. de l'Estorade who writes to you. But between us there is no change; it is only a girl the less.

Don't be troubled; I did not give my consent recklessly or without much thought. My life is henceforth mapped out for me, and the freedom from all uncertainty as to the road for me to follow suits my mind and disposition. A great moral power has stepped in, and once for all swept what we call chance out of my life. We have the property to develop, our home to beautify and adorn; for me there is also a household to direct and sweeten and a husband to reconcile to life. In all probability I shall have a family to look after, children to educate.

What would you have? Everyday life cannot be cast in heroic mould. No doubt there seems, at any rate at first sight, no room left in this scheme of life for that longing after the infinite which expands the mind and soul. But what is there to prevent me from launching on that boundless sea our familiar craft? Nor must you suppose that the humble duties to which I dedicate my life give no scope for passion. To restore faith in happiness to an unfortunate, who has been the sport of adverse circumstances, is a noble work, and one which alone may suffice to relieve the monotony of my existence. I can see no opening left for suffering, and I see a great deal of good to be done. I need not hide from you that the love I have for Louis de l'Estorade is not of the kind which makes the heart throb at the sound of a step, and thrills us at the lightest tones of a voice, or the caress of a burning glance; but, on the other hand, there is nothing in him which offends me.

What am I to do, you will ask, with that instinct for all which is great and noble, with those mental energies, which have made the link between us, and which we still possess? I admit that this thought has troubled me. But are these faculties less ours because we keep them concealed, using them only in secret for the welfare of the family, as instruments to produce the happiness of those confided to our care, to whom we are bound to give ourselves without reserve? The time during which a woman can look for admiration is short, it will soon be past; and if my life has not been a great one, it will at least have been calm, tranquil, free from shocks.

Nature has favored our sex in giving us a choice between love and motherhood. I have made mine. My children shall be my gods, and this spot of earth my Eldorado.

I can say no more to-day. Thank you much for all the things you have sent me. Give a glance at my needs on the enclosed list. I am determined to live in

an atmosphere of refinement and luxury, and to take from provincial life only what makes its charm. In solitude a woman can never be vulgarized—she remains herself. I count greatly on your kindness for keeping me up to the fashion. My father-in-law is so delighted that he can refuse me nothing, and turns his house upside down. We are getting workpeople from Paris and renovating everything.

X. MLLE. DE CHAULIEU TO MME. DE L'ESTORADE January.

Oh! Renee, you have made me miserable for days! So that bewitching body, those beautiful proud features, that natural grace of manner, that soul full of priceless gifts, those eyes, where the soul can slake its thirst as at a fountain of love, that heart, with its exquisite delicacy, that breadth of mind, those rare powers—fruit of nature and of our interchange of thought—treasures whence should issue a unique satisfaction for passion and desire, hours of poetry to outweigh years, joys to make a man serve a lifetime for one gracious gesture,—all this is to be buried in the tedium of a tame, commonplace marriage, to vanish in the emptiness of an existence which you will come to loath! I hate your children before they are born. They will be monsters!

So you know all that lies before you; you have nothing left to hope, or fear, or suffer? And supposing the glorious morning rises which will bring you face to face with the man destined to rouse you from the sleep into which you are plunging!... Ah! a cold shiver goes through me at the thought!

Well, at least you have a friend. You, it is understood, are to be the guardian angel of your valley. You will grow familiar with its beauties, will live with it in all its aspects, till the grandeur of nature, the slow growth of vegetation, compared with the lightning rapidity of thought, become like a part of yourself; and as your eye rests on the laughing flowers, you will question your own heart. When you walk between your husband, silent and contented, in front, and your children screaming and romping behind, I can tell you beforehand what you will write to me. Your misty valley, your hills, bare or clothed with magnificent trees, your meadow, the wonder of Provence, with its fresh water dispersed in little runlets, the different effects of the atmosphere, this whole world of infinity which laps you round, and which God has made so various, will recall to you the infinite sameness of your soul's life. But at least I shall be there, my Renee, and in me you will find a heart which no social pettiness shall ever corrupt, a heart all your own.

Monday.

My dear, my Spaniard is quite adorably melancholy; there is something calm, severe, manly, and mysterious about him which interests me profoundly. His unvarying solemnity and the silence which envelops him act like an irritant on the mind. His mute dignity is worthy of a fallen king. Griffith and I spend our time over him as though he were a riddle.

How odd it is! A language-master captures my fancy as no other man has done. Yet by this time I have passed in review all the young men of family, the attaches to embassies, and the ambassadors, generals, and inferior officers, the peers of France, their sons and nephews, the court, and the town.

The coldness of the man provokes me. The sandy waste which he tries to place, and does place, between us is covered by his deeprooted pride; he wraps himself in mystery. The hanging back is on his side, the boldness on mine. This odd situation affords me the more amusement because the whole thing is mere trifling. What is a man, a Spaniard, and a teacher of languages to me? I make no account of any man whatever, were he a king. We are worth far more, I am sure, than the greatest of them. What a slave I would have made of Napoleon! If he had loved me, shouldn't he have felt the whip!

Yesterday I aimed a shaft at M. Henarez which must have touched him to the quick. He made no reply; the lesson was over, and he bowed with a glance at me, in which I read that he would never return. This suits me capitally; there would be something ominous in starting an imitation Nouvelle Heloise. I have just been reading Rousseau's, and it has left me with a strong distaste for love. Passion which can argue and moralize seems to me detestable.

Clarissa also is much too pleased with herself and her long, little letter; but Richardson's work is an admirable picture, my father tells me, of English women. Rousseau's seems to me a sort of philosophical sermon, cast in the form of letters.

Love, as I conceive it, is a purely subjective poem. In all that books tell us about it, there is nothing which is not at once false and true. And so, my pretty one, as you will henceforth be an authority only on conjugal love, it seems to me my duty—in the interest, of course, of our common life—to remain unmarried, and have a grand passion, so that we may enlarge our experience.

Tell me every detail of what happens to you, especially in the first few days, with that strange animal called a husband. I promise to do the same for you if ever I am loved.

Farewell, poor martyred darling.

XI. MME. DE L'ESTORADE TO MLLE. DE CHAULIEU La Crampade.

Your Spaniard and you make me shudder, my darling. I write this line to beg of you to dismiss him. All that you say of him corresponds with the character of those dangerous adventurers who, having nothing to lose, will take any risk. This man cannot be your husband, and must not be your lover. I will write to you more fully about the inner history of my married life when my heart is free from the anxiety your last letter has roused in it.

XII. MLLE. DE CHAULIEU TO MME. DE L'ESTORADE February.

At nine o'clock this morning, sweetheart, my father was announced in my rooms. I was up and dressed. I found him solemnly seated beside the fire in the drawing-room, looking more thoughtful than usual. He pointed to the armchair opposite to him. Divining his meaning, I sank into it with a gravity, which so well aped his, that he could not refrain from smiling, though the smile was dashed with melancholy.

"You are quite a match for your grandmother in quick-wittedness," he said.

"Come, father, don't play the courtier here," I replied; "you want something from me."

He rose, visibly agitated, and talked to me for half an hour. This conversation, dear, really ought to be preserved. As soon as he had gone, I sat down to my table and tried to recall his words. This is the first time that I have seen my father revealing his inner thoughts.

He began by flattering me, and he did not do it badly. I was bound to be grateful to him for having understood and appreciated me.

"Armande," he said, "I was quite mistaken in you, and you have agreeably surprised me. When you arrived from the convent, I took you for an average young girl, ignorant and not particularly intelligent, easily to be bought off with gewgaws and ornaments, and with little turn for reflection."

"You are complimentary to young girls, father."

"Oh! there is no such thing as youth nowadays," he said, with the air of a diplomat. "Your mind is amazingly open. You take everything at its proper worth; your clear-sightedness is extraordinary, there is no hoodwinking you. You pass for being blind, and all the time you have laid your hand on causes, while other people are still puzzling over effects. In short, you are a minister in petticoats, the only person here capable of understanding me. It follows, then, that if I have any sacrifice to ask from you, it is only to yourself I can turn for

help in persuading you.

"I am therefore going to explain to you, quite frankly, my former plans, to which I still adhere. In order to recommend them to you, I must show that they are connected with feelings of a very high order, and I shall thus be obliged to enter into political questions of the greatest importance to the kingdom, which might be wearisome to any one less intelligent than you are. When you have heard me, I hope you will take time for consideration, six months if necessary. You are entirely your own mistress; and if you decline to make the sacrifice I ask, I shall bow to your decision and trouble you no further."

This preface, my sweetheart, made me really serious, and I said:

"Speak, father."

Here, then, is the deliverance of the statesman:

"My child, France is in a very critical position, which is understood only by the King and a few superior minds. But the King is a head without arms; the great nobles, who are in the secret of the danger, have no authority over the men whose co-operation is needful in order to bring about a happy result. These men, cast up by popular election, refuse to lend themselves as instruments. Even the able men among them carry on the work of pulling down society, instead of helping us to strengthen the edifice.

"In a word, there are only two parties—the party of Marius and the party of Sulla. I am for Sulla against Marius. This, roughly speaking, is our position. To go more into details: the Revolution is still active; it is embedded in the law and written on the soil; it fills people's minds. The danger is all the greater because the greater number of the King's counselors, seeing it destitute of armed forces and of money, believe it completely vanquished. The King is an able man, and not easily blinded; but from day to day he is won over by his brother's partisans, who want to hurry things on. He has not two years to live, and thinks more of a peaceful deathbed than of anything else.

"Shall I tell you, my child, which is the most destructive of all the consequences entailed by the Revolution? You would never guess. In Louis XVI. the Revolution has decapitated every head of a family. The family has ceased to exist; we have only individuals. In their desire to become a nation, Frenchmen have abandoned the idea of empire; in proclaiming the equal rights of all children to their father's inheritance, they have killed the family spirit and created the State treasury. But all this has paved the way for weakened authority, for the blind force of the masses, for the decay of art and the supremacy of individual interests, and has left the road open to the foreign invader.

"We stand between two policies—either to found the State on the basis of

the family, or to rest it on individual interest—in other words, between democracy and aristocracy, between free discussion and obedience, between Catholicism and religious indifference. I am among the few who are resolved to oppose what is called the people, and that in the people's true interest. It is not now a question of feudal rights, as fools are told, nor of rank; it is a question of the State and of the existence of France. The country which does not rest on the foundation of paternal authority cannot be stable. That is the foot of the ladder of responsibility and subordination, which has for its summit the King.

"The King stands for us all. To die for the King is to die for oneself, for one's family, which, like the kingdom, cannot die. All animals have certain instincts; the instinct of man is for family life. A country is strong which consists of wealthy families, every member of whom is interested in defending a common treasure; it is weak when composed of scattered individuals, to whom it matters little whether they obey seven or one, a Russian or a Corsican, so long as each keeps his own plot of land, blind, in their wretched egotism, to the fact that the day is coming when this too will be torn from them.

"Terrible calamities are in store for us, in case our party fails. Nothing will be left but penal or fiscal laws—your money or your life. The most generous nation on the earth will have ceased to obey the call of noble instincts. Wounds past curing will have been fostered and aggravated, an all pervading jealousy being the first. Then the upper classes will be submerged; equality of desire will be taken for equality of strength; true distinction, even when proved and recognized, will be threatened by the advancing tide of middle-class prejudice. It was possible to choose one man out of a thousand, but, amongst three millions, discrimination becomes impossible, when all are moved by the same ambitions and attired in the same livery of mediocrity. No foresight will warn this victorious horde of that other terrible horde, soon to be arrayed against them in the peasant proprietors; in other words, twenty million acres of land, alive, stirring, arguing, deaf to reason, insatiable of appetite, obstructing progress, masters in their brute force——"

"But," said I, interrupting my father, "what can I do to help the State. I feel no vocation for playing Joan of Arc in the interests of the family, or for finding a martyr's block in the convent."

"You are a little hussy," cried my father. "If I speak sensibly to you, you are full of jokes; when I jest, you talk like an ambassadress."

"Love lives on contrasts," was my reply.

And he laughed till the tears stood in his eyes.

"You will reflect on what I have told you; you will do justice to the large and confiding spirit in which I have broached the matter, and possibly events may assist my plans. I know that, so far as you are concerned, they are injurious and unfair, and this is the reason why I appeal for your sanction of them less to your heart and your imagination than to your reason. I have found more judgment and commonsense in you than in any one I know——"

"You flatter yourself," I said, with a smile, "for I am every inch your child!"

"In short," he went on, "one must be logical. You can't have the end without the means, and it is our duty to set an example to others. From all this I deduce that you ought not to have money of your own till your younger brother is provided for, and I want to employ the whole of your inheritance in purchasing an estate for him to go with the title."

"But," I said, "you won't interfere with my living in my own fashion and enjoying life if I leave you my fortune?"

"Provided," he replied, "that your view of life does not conflict with the family honor, reputation, and, I may add, glory."

"Come, come," I cried, "what has become of my excellent judgment?"

"There is not in all France," he said with bitterness, "a man who would take for wife a daughter of one of our noblest families without a dowry and bestow one on her. If such a husband could be found, it would be among the class of rich parvenus; on this point I belong to the eleventh century."

"And I also," I said. "But why despair? Are there no aged peers?"

"You are an apt scholar, Louise!" he exclaimed.

Then he left me, smiling and kissing my hand.

I received your letter this very morning, and it led me to contemplate that abyss into which you say that I may fall. A voice within seemed to utter the same warning. So I took my precautions. Henarez, my dear, dares to look at me, and his eyes are disquieting. They inspire me with what I can only call an unreasoning dread. Such a man ought no more to be looked at than a frog; he is ugly and fascinating.

For two days I have been hesitating whether to tell my father point-blank that I want no more Spanish lessons and have Henarez sent about his business. But in spite of all my brave resolutions, I feel that the horrible sensation which comes over me when I see that man has become necessary to me. I say to myself, "Once more, and then I will speak."

His voice, my dear, is sweetly thrilling; his speaking is just like la Fodor's

singing. His manners are simple, entirely free from affectation. And what teeth!

Just now, as he was leaving, he seemed to divine the interest I take in him, and made a gesture—oh! most respectfully—as though to take my hand and kiss it; then checked himself, apparently terrified at his own boldness and the chasm he had been on the point of bridging. There was the merest suggestion of all this, but I understood it and smiled, for nothing is more pathetic than to see the frank impulse of an inferior checking itself abashed. The love of a plebeian for a girl of noble birth implies such courage!

My smile emboldened him. The poor fellow looked blindly about for his hat; he seemed determined not to find it, and I handed it to him with perfect gravity. His eyes were wet with unshed tears. It was a mere passing moment, yet a world of facts and ideas were contained in it. We understood each other so well that, on a sudden, I held out my hand for him to kiss.

Possibly this was equivalent to telling him that love might bridge the interval between us. Well, I cannot tell what moved me to do it. Griffith had her back turned as I proudly extended my little white paw. I felt the fire of his lips, tempered by two big tears. Oh! my love, I lay in my armchair, nerveless, dreamy. I was happy, and I cannot explain to you how or why. What I felt only a poet could express. My condescension, which fills me with shame now, seemed to me then something to be proud of; he had fascinated me, that is my one excuse.

Friday.

This man is really very handsome. He talks admirably, and has remarkable intellectual power. My dear, he is a very Bossuet in force and persuasiveness when he explains the mechanism, not only of the Spanish tongue, but also of human thought and of all language. His mother tongue seems to be French. When I expressed surprise at this, he replied that he came to France when quite a boy, following the King of Spain to Valencay.

What has passed within this enigmatic being? He is no longer the same man. He came, dressed quite simply, but just as any gentleman would for a morning walk. He put forth all his eloquence, and flashed wit, like rays from a beacon, all through the lesson. Like a man roused from lethargy, he revealed to me a new world of thoughts. He told me the story of some poor devil of a valet who gave up his life for a single glance from a queen of Spain.

"What could he do but die?" I exclaimed.

This delighted him, and he looked at me in a way which was truly alarming.

In the evening I went to a ball at the Duchesse de Lenoncourt's. The Prince de Talleyrand happened to be there; and I got M. de Vandenesse, a charming young man, to ask him whether, among the guests at his country-place in 1809, he remembered any one of the name of Henarez. Vandenesse reported the Prince's reply, word for word, as follows:

"Henarez is the Moorish name of the Soria family, who are, they say, descendants of the Abencerrages, converted to Christianity. The old Duke and his two sons were with the King. The eldest, the present Duke de Soria, has just had all his property, titles, and dignities confiscated by King Ferdinand, who in this way avenges a long-standing feud. The Duke made a huge mistake in consenting to form a constitutional ministry with Valdez. Happily, he escaped from Cadiz before the arrival of the Duc d'Angouleme, who, with the best will in the world, could not have saved him from the King's wrath."

This information gave me much food for reflection. I cannot describe to you the suspense in which I passed the time till my next lesson, which took place this morning.

During the first quarter of an hour I examined him closely, debating inwardly whether he were duke or commoner, without being able to come to any conclusion. He seemed to read my fancies as they arose and to take pleasure in thwarting them. At last I could endure it no longer. Putting down my book suddenly, I broke off the translation I was making of it aloud, and said to him in Spanish:

"You are deceiving us. You are no poor middle-class Liberal. You are the Duke de Soria!"

"Mademoiselle," he replied, with a gesture of sorrow, "unhappily, I am not the Duc de Soria."

I felt all the despair with which he uttered the word "unhappily." Ah! my dear, never should I have conceived it possible to throw so much meaning and passion into a single word. His eyes had dropped, and he dared no longer look at me.

"M. de Talleyrand," I said, "in whose house you spent your years of exile, declares that any one bearing the name of Henarez must either be the late Duc de Soria or a lacquey."

He looked at me with eyes like two black burning coals, at once blazing and ashamed. The man might have been in the torture-chamber. All he said was:

"My father was in truth the servant of the King of Spain."

Griffith could make nothing of this sort of lesson. An awkward silence

followed each question and answer.

"In one word," I said, "are you a nobleman or not?"

"You know that in Spain even beggars are noble."

This reticence provoked me. Since the last lesson I had given play to my imagination in a little practical joke. I had drawn an ideal portrait of the man whom I should wish for my lover in a letter which I designed giving to him to translate. So far, I had only put Spanish into French, not French into Spanish; I pointed this out to him, and begged Griffith to bring me the last letter I had received from a friend of mine.

"I shall find out," I thought, from the effect my sketch has on him, "what sort of blood runs in his veins."

I took the paper from Griffith's hands, saying:

"Let me see if I have copied it rightly."

For it was all in my writing. I handed him the paper, or, if you will, the snare, and I watched him while he read as follows:

"He who is to win my heart, my dear, must be harsh and unbending with men, but gentle with women. His eagle eye must have power to quell with a single glance the least approach to ridicule. He will have a pitying smile for those who would jeer at sacred things, above all, at that poetry of the heart, without which life would be but a dreary commonplace. I have the greatest scorn for those who would rob us of the living fountain of religious beliefs, so rich in solace. His faith, therefore, should have the simplicity of a child, though united to the firm conviction of an intelligent man, who has examined the foundations of his creed. His fresh and original way of looking at things must be entirely free from affectation or desire to show off. His words will be few and fit, and his mind so richly stored, that he cannot possibly become a bore to himself any more than to others.

"All his thoughts must have a high and chivalrous character, without alloy of self-seeking; while his actions should be marked by a total absence of interested or sordid motives. Any weak points he may have will arise from the very elevation of his views above those of the common herd, for in every respect I would have him superior to his age. Ever mindful of the delicate attentions due to the weak, he will be gentle to all women, but not prone lightly to fall in love with any; for love will seem to him too serious to turn into a game.

"Thus it might happen that he would spend his life in ignorance of true love, while all the time possessing those qualities most fitted to inspire it. But if ever he find the ideal woman who has haunted his waking dreams, if he

meet with a nature capable of understanding his own, one who could fill his soul and pour sunlight over his life, could shine as a star through the mists of this chill and gloomy world, lend fresh charm to existence, and draw music from the hitherto silent chords of his being—needless to say, he would recognize and welcome his good fortune.

"And she, too, would be happy. Never, by word or look, would he wound the tender heart which abandoned itself to him, with the blind trust of a child reposing in its mother's arms. For were the vision shattered, it would be the wreck of her inner life. To the mighty waters of love she would confide her all!

"The man I picture must belong, in expression, in attitude, in gait, in his way of performing alike the smallest and the greatest actions, to that race of the truly great who are always simple and natural. He need not be good-looking, but his hands must be beautiful. His upper lip will curl with a careless, ironic smile for the general public, whilst he reserves for those he loves the heavenly, radiant glance in which he puts his soul."

"Will mademoiselle allow me," he said in Spanish, in a voice full of agitation, "to keep this writing in memory of her? This is the last lesson I shall have the honor of giving her, and that which I have just received in these words may serve me for an abiding rule of life. I left Spain, a fugitive and penniless, but I have to-day received from my family a sum sufficient for my needs. You will allow me to send some poor Spaniard in my place."

In other words, he seemed to me to say, "This little game must stop." He rose with an air of marvelous dignity, and left me quite upset by such unheard-of delicacy in a man of his class. He went downstairs and asked to speak with my father.

At dinner my father said to me with a smile:

"Louise, you have been learning Spanish from an ex-minister and a man condemned to death."

"The Duc de Soria," I said.

"Duke!" replied my father. "No, he is not that any longer; he takes the title now of Baron de Macumer from a property which still remains to him in Sardinia. He is something of an original, I think."

"Don't brand with that word, which with you always implies some mockery and scorn, a man who is your equal, and who, I believe, has a noble nature."

"Baronne de Macumer?" exclaimed my father, with a laughing glance at me.

Pride kept my eyes fixed on the table.

"But," said my mother, "Henarez must have met the Spanish ambassador on the steps?"

"Yes," replied my father, "the ambassador asked me if I was conspiring against the King, his master; but he greeted the ex-grandee of Spain with much deference, and placed his services at his disposal."

All this, dear, Mme. de l'Estorade, happened a fortnight ago, and it is a fortnight now since I have seen the man who loves me, for that he loves me there is not a doubt. What is he about? If only I were a fly, or a mouse, or a sparrow! I want to see him alone, myself unseen, at his house. Only think, a man exists, to whom I can say, "Go and die for me!" And he is so made that he would go, at least I think so. Anyhow, there is in Paris a man who occupies my thoughts, and whose glance pours sunshine into my soul. Is not such a man an enemy, whom I ought to trample under foot? What? There is a man who has become necessary to me—a man without whom I don't know how to live! You married, and I—in love! Four little months, and those two doves, whose wings erst bore them so high, have fluttered down upon the flat stretches of real life!

Sunday.

Yesterday, at the Italian Opera, I could feel some one was looking at me; my eyes were drawn, as by a magnet, to two wells of fire, gleaming like carbuncles in a dim corner of the orchestra. Henarez never moved his eyes from me. The wretch had discovered the one spot from which he could see me—and there he was. I don't know what he may be as a politician, but for love he has a genius.

Behold, my fair Renee, where our business now stands,

as the great Corneille has said.

XIII. MME. DE L'ESTORADE TO MLLE. DE CHAULIEU LA CRAMPADE, February.

My dear Louise,—I was bound to wait some time before writing to you; but now I know, or rather I have learned, many things which, for the sake of your future happiness, I must tell you. The difference between a girl and a married woman is so vast, that the girl can no more comprehend it than the married woman can go back to girlhood again.

I chose to marry Louis de l'Estorade rather than return to the convent; that at least is plain. So soon as I realized that the convent was the only alternative

to marrying Louis, I had, as girls say, to "submit," and my submission once made, the next thing was to examine the situation and try to make the best of it.

The serious nature of what I was undertaking filled me at first with terror. Marriage is a matter concerning the whole of life, whilst love aims only at pleasure. On the other hand, marriage will remain when pleasures have vanished, and it is the source of interests far more precious than those of the man and woman entering on the alliance. Might it not therefore be that the only requisite for a happy marriage was friendship—a friendship which, for the sake of these advantages, would shut its eyes to many of the imperfections of humanity? Now there was no obstacle to the existence of friendship between myself and Louis de l'Estorade. Having renounced all idea of finding in marriage those transports of love on which our minds used so often, and with such perilous rapture, to dwell, I found a gentle calm settling over me. "If debarred from love, why not seek for happiness?" I said to myself. "Moreover, I am loved, and the love offered me I shall accept. My married life will be no slavery, but rather a perpetual reign. What is there to say against such a situation for a woman who wishes to remain absolute mistress of herself?"

The important point of separating marriage from marital rights was settled in a conversation between Louis and me, in the course of which he gave proof of an excellent temper and a tender heart. Darling, my desire was to prolong that fair season of hope which, never culminating in satisfaction, leaves to the soul its virginity. To grant nothing to duty or the law, to be guided entirely by one's own will, retaining perfect independence—what could be more attractive, more honorable?

A contract of this kind, directly opposed to the legal contract, and even to the sacrament itself, could be concluded only between Louis and me. This difficulty, the first which has arisen, is the only one which has delayed the completion of our marriage. Although, at first, I may have made up my mind to accept anything rather than return to the convent, it is only in human nature, having got an inch, to ask for an ell, and you and I, sweet love, are of those who would have it all.

I watched Louis out of the corner of my eye, and put it to myself, "Has suffering had a softening or a hardening effect on him?" By dint of close study, I arrived at the conclusion that his love amounted to a passion. Once transformed into an idol, whose slightest frown would turn him white and trembling, I realized that I might venture anything. I drew him aside in the most natural manner on solitary walks, during which I discreetly sounded his feelings. I made him talk, and got him to expound to me his ideas and plans for our future. My questions betrayed so many preconceived notions, and went so straight for the weak points in this terrible dual existence, that Louis has

since confessed to me the alarm it caused him to find in me so little of the ignorant maiden.

Then I listened to what he had to say in reply. He got mixed up in his arguments, as people do when handicapped by fear; and before long it became clear that chance had given me for adversary one who was the less fitted for the contest because he was conscious of what you magniloquently call my "greatness of soul." Broken by sufferings and misfortune, he looked on himself as a sort of wreck, and three fears in especial haunted him.

First, we are aged respectively thirty-seven and seventeen; and he could not contemplate without quaking the twenty years that divide us. In the next place, he shares our views on the subject of my beauty, and it is cruel for him to see how the hardships of his life have robbed him of youth. Finally, he felt the superiority of my womanhood over his manhood. The consciousness of these three obvious drawbacks made him distrustful of himself; he doubted his power to make me happy, and guessed that he had been chosen as the lesser of two evils.

One evening he tentatively suggested that I only married him to escape the convent.

"I cannot deny it," was my grave reply.

My dear, it touched me to the heart to see the two great tears which stood in his eyes. Never before had I experienced the shock of emotion which a man can impart to us.

"Louis," I went on, as kindly as I could, "it rests entirely with you whether this marriage of convenience becomes one to which I can give my whole heart. The favor I am about to ask from you will demand unselfishness on your part, far nobler than the servitude to which a man's love, when sincere, is supposed to reduce him. The question is, Can you rise to the height of friendship such as I understand it?

"Life gives us but one friend, and I wish to be yours. Friendship is the bond between a pair of kindred souls, united in their strength, and yet independent. Let us be friends and comrades to bear jointly the burden of life. Leave me absolutely free. I would put no hindrance in the way of your inspiring me with a love similar to your own; but I am determined to be yours only of my own free gift. Create in me the wish to give up my freedom, and at once I lay it at your feet.

"Infuse with passion, then, if you will, this friendship, and let the voice of love disturb its calm. On my part I will do what I can to bring my feelings into accord with yours. One thing, above all, I would beg of you. Spare me the annoyances to which the strangeness of our mutual position might give rise to

our relations with others. I am neither whimsical nor prudish, and should be sorry to get that reputation; but I feel sure that I can trust to your honor when I ask you to keep up the outward appearance of wedded life."

Never, dear, have I seen a man so happy as my proposal made Louis. The blaze of joy which kindled in his eyes dried up the tears.

"Do not fancy," I concluded, "that I ask this from any wish to be eccentric. It is the great desire I have for your respect which prompts my request. If you owe the crown of your love merely to the legal and religious ceremony, what gratitude could you feel to me later for a gift in which my goodwill counted for nothing? If during the time that I remained indifferent to you (yielding only a passive obedience, such as my mother has just been urging on me) a child were born to us, do you suppose that I could feel towards it as I would towards one born of our common love? A passionate love may not be necessary in marriage, but, at least, you will admit that there should be no repugnance. Our position will not be without its dangers; in a country life, such as ours will be, ought we not to bear in mind the evanescent nature of passion? Is it not simple prudence to make provision beforehand against the calamities incident to change of feeling?"

He was greatly astonished to find me at once so reasonable and so apt at reasoning; but he made me a solemn promise, after which I took his hand and pressed it affectionately.

We were married at the end of the week. Secure of my freedom, I was able to throw myself gaily into the petty details which always accompany a ceremony of the kind, and to be my natural self. Perhaps I may have been taken for an old bird, as they say at Blois. A young girl, delighted with the novel and hopeful situation she had contrived to make for herself, and may have passed for a strong-minded female.

Dear, the difficulties which would beset my life had appeared to me clearly as in a vision, and I was sincerely anxious to make the happiness of the man I married. Now, in the solitude of a life like ours, marriage soon becomes intolerable unless the woman is the presiding spirit. A woman in such a case needs the charm of a mistress, combined with the solid qualities of a wife. To introduce an element of uncertainty into pleasure is to prolong illusion, and render lasting those selfish satisfactions which all creatures hold, and should shroud a woman in expectancy, crown her sovereign, and invest her with an exhaustless power, a redundancy of life, that makes everything blossom around her. The more she is mistress of herself, the more certainly will the love and happiness she creates be fit to weather the storms of life.

But, above all, I have insisted on the greatest secrecy in regard to our domestic arrangements. A husband who submits to his wife's yoke is justly

held an object of ridicule. A woman's influence ought to be entirely concealed. The charm of all we do lies in its unobtrusiveness. If I have made it my task to raise a drooping courage and restore their natural brightness to gifts which I have dimly descried, it must all seem to spring from Louis himself.

Such is the mission to which I dedicate myself, a mission surely not ignoble, and which might well satisfy a woman's ambition. Why, I could glory in this secret which shall fill my life with interest, in this task towards which my every energy shall be bent, while it remains concealed from all but God and you.

I am very nearly happy now, but should I be so without a friendly heart in which to pour the confession? For how make a confidant of him? My happiness would wound him, and has to be concealed. He is sensitive as a woman, like all men who have suffered much.

For three months we remained as we were before marriage. As you may imagine, during this time I made a close study of many small personal matters, which have more to do with love than is generally supposed. In spite of my coldness, Louis grew bolder, and his nature expanded. I saw on his face a new expression, a look of youth. The greater refinement which I introduced into the house was reflected in his person. Insensibly I became accustomed to his presence, and made another self of him. By dint of constant watching I discovered how his mind and countenance harmonize. "The animal that we call a husband," to quote your words, disappeared, and one balmy evening I discovered in his stead a lover, whose words thrilled me and on whose arm I leant with pleasure beyond words. In short, to be open with you, as I would be with God, before whom concealment is impossible, the perfect loyalty with which he had kept his oath may have piqued me, and I felt a fluttering of curiosity in my heart. Bitterly ashamed, I struggled with myself. Alas! when pride is the only motive for resistance, excuses for capitulation are soon found.

We celebrated our union in secret, and secret it must remain between us. When you are married you will approve this reserve. Enough that nothing was lacking either of satisfaction for the most fastidious sentiment, or of that unexpectedness which brings, in a sense, its own sanction. Every witchery of imagination, of passion, of reluctance overcome, of the ideal passing into reality, played its part.

Yet, in spite of all this enchantment, I once more stood out for my complete independence. I can't tell you all my reasons for this. To you alone shall I confide even as much as this. I believe that women, whether passionately loved or not, lose much in their relation with their husbands by not concealing their feelings about marriage and the way they look at it.

My one joy, and it is supreme, springs from the certainty of having brought

new life to my husband before I have borne him any children. Louis has regained his youth, strength, and spirits. He is not the same man. With magic touch I have effaced the very memory of his sufferings. It is a complete metamorphosis. Louis is really very attractive now. Feeling sure of my affection, he throws off his reserve and displays unsuspected gifts.

To be the unceasing spring of happiness for a man who knows it and adds gratitude to love, ah! dear one, this is a conviction which fortifies the soul, even more than the most passionate love can do. The force thus developed—at once impetuous and enduring, simple and diversified—brings forth ultimately the family, that noble product of womanhood, which I realize now in all its animating beauty.

The old father has ceased to be a miser. He gives blindly whatever I wish for. The servants are content; it seems as though the bliss of Louis had let a flood of sunshine into the household, where love has made me queen. Even the old man would not be a blot upon my pretty home, and has brought himself into line with all my improvements; to please me he has adopted the dress, and with the dress, the manners of the day.

We have English horses, a coupe, a barouche, and a tilbury. The livery of our servants is simple but in good taste. Of course we are looked on as spendthrifts. I apply all my intellect (I am speaking quite seriously) to managing my household with economy, and obtaining for it the maximum of pleasure with the minimum of cost.

I have already convinced Louis of the necessity of getting roads made, in order that he may earn the reputation of a man interested in the welfare of his district. I insist too on his studying a great deal. Before long I hope to see him a member of the Council General of the Department, through the influence of my family and his mother's. I have told him plainly that I am ambitious, and that I was very well pleased his father should continue to look after the estate and practise economies, because I wished him to devote himself exclusively to politics. If we had children, I should like to see them all prosperous and with good State appointments. Under penalty, therefore, of forfeiting my esteem and affection, he must get himself chosen deputy for the department at the coming elections; my family would support his candidature, and we should then have the delight of spending all our winters in Paris. Ah! my love, by the ardor with which he embraced my plans, I can gauge the depth of his affection.

To conclude here is a letter he wrote me yesterday from Marseilles, where he had gone to spend a few hours:

"MY SWEET RENEE,—When you gave me permission to love you, I began to believe in happiness; now, I see it unfolding endlessly before me. The

past is merely a dim memory, a shadowy background, without which my present bliss would show less radiant. When I am with you, love so transports me that I am powerless to express the depth of my affection; I can but worship and admire. Only at a distance does the power of speech return. You are supremely beautiful, Renee, and your beauty is of the statuesque and regal type, on which time leaves but little impression. No doubt the love of husband and wife depends less on outward beauty than on graces of character, which are yours also in perfection; still, let me say that the certainty of having your unchanging beauty, on which to feast my eyes, gives me a joy that grows with every glance. There is a grace and dignity in the lines of your face, expressive of the noble soul within, and breathing of purity beneath the vivid coloring. The brilliance of your dark eyes, the bold sweep of your forehead, declare a spirit of no common elevation, sound and trustworthy in every relation, and well braced to meet the storms of life, should such arise. The keynote of your character is its freedom from all pettiness. You do not need to be told all this; but I write it because I would have you know that I appreciate the treasure I possess. Your favors to me, however slight, will always make my happiness in the far-distant future as now; for I am sensible how much dignity there is in our promise to respect each other's liberty. Our own impulse shall with us alone dictate the expression of feeling. We shall be free even in our fetters. I shall have the more pride in wooing you again now that I know the reward you place on victory. You cannot speak, breathe, act, or think, without adding to the admiration I feel for your charm both of body and mind. There is in you a rare combination of the ideal, the practical, and the bewitching which satisfies alike judgment, a husband's pride, desire, and hope, and which extends the boundaries of love beyond those of life itself. Oh! my loved one, may the genius of love remain faithful to me, and the future be full of those delights by means of which you have glorified all that surrounds me! I long for the day which shall make you a mother, that I may see you content with the fulness of your life, may hear you, in the sweet voice I love and with the thoughts, bless the love which has refreshed my soul and given new vigor to my powers, the love which is my pride, and whence I have drawn, as from a magic fountain, fresh life. Yes, I shall be all that you would have me. I shall take a leading part in the public life of the district, and on you shall fall the rays of a glory which will owe its existence to the desire of pleasing you."

So much for my pupil, dear! Do you suppose he could have written like this before? A year hence his style will have still further improved. Louis is now in his first transport; what I look forward to is the uniform and continuous sensation of content which ought to be the fruit of a happy marriage, when a man and woman, in perfect trust and mutual knowledge, have solved the problem of giving variety to the infinite. This is the task set before every true wife; the answer begins to dawn on me, and I shall not rest till I have made it

mine.

You see that he fancies himself—vanity of men!—the chosen of my heart, just as though there were no legal bonds. Nevertheless, I have not yet got beyond that external attraction which gives us strength to put up with a good deal. Yet Louis is lovable; his temper is wonderfully even, and he performs, as a matter of course, acts on which most men would plume themselves. In short, if I do not love him, I shall find no difficulty in being good to him.

So here are my black hair and my black eyes—whose lashes act, according to you, like Venetian blinds—my commanding air, and my whole person, raised to the rank of sovereign power! Ten years hence, dear, why should we not both be laughing and gay in your Paris, whence I shall carry you off now and again to my beautiful oasis in Provence?

Oh! Louise, don't spoil the splendid future which awaits us both! Don't do the mad things with which you threaten me. My husband is a young man, prematurely old; why don't you marry some young-hearted graybeard in the Chamber of Peers? There lies your vocation.

XIV. THE DUC DE SORIA TO THE BARON DE MACUMER MADRID.

MY DEAR BROTHER,—You did not make me Duc de Soria in order that my actions should belie the name. How could I tolerate my happiness if I knew you to be a wanderer, deprived of the comforts which wealth everywhere commands? Neither Marie nor I will consent to marry till we hear that you have accepted the money which Urraca will hand over to you. These two millions are the fruit of your own savings and Marie's.

We have both prayed, kneeling before the same altar—and with what earnestness, God knows!—for your happiness. My dear brother, it cannot be that these prayers will remain unanswered. Heaven will send you the love which you seek, to be the consolation of your exile. Marie read your letter with tears, and is full of admiration for you. As for me, I consent, not for my own sake, but for that of the family. The King justified your expectations. Oh! that I might avenge you by letting him see himself, dwarfed before the scorn with which you flung him his toy, as you might toss a tiger its food.

The only thing I have taken for myself, dear brother, is my happiness. I have taken Marie. For this I shall always be beholden to you, as the creature to the Creator. There will be in my life and in Marie's one day not less glorious than our wedding day—it will be the day when we hear that your heart has

found its mate, that a woman loves you as you ought to be, and would be, loved. Do not forget that if you live for us, we also live for you.

You can write to us with perfect confidence under cover to the Nuncio, sending your letters via Rome. The French ambassador at Rome will, no doubt, undertake to forward them to Monsignore Bemboni, at the State Secretary's office, whom our legate will have advised. No other way would be safe. Farewell, dear exile, dear despoiled one. Be proud at least of the happiness which you have brought to us, if you cannot be happy in it. God will doubtless hear our prayers, which are full of your name.

XV. LOUISE DE CHAULIEU TO MME. DE L'ESTORADE March.

Ah! my love, marriage is making a philosopher of you! Your darling face must, indeed, have been jaundiced when you wrote me those terrible views of human life and the duty of women. Do you fancy you will convert me to matrimony by your programme of subterranean labors?

Alas! is this then the outcome for you of our too-instructed dreams! We left Blois all innocent, armed with the pointed shafts of meditation, and, lo! the weapons of that purely ideal experience have turned against your own breast! If I did not know you for the purest and most angelic of created beings, I declare I should say that your calculations smack of vice. What, my dear, in the interest of your country home, you submit your pleasures to a periodic thinning, as you do your timber. Oh! rather let me perish in all the violence of the heart's storms than live in the arid atmosphere of your cautious arithmetic!

As girls, we were both unusually enlightened, because of the large amount of study we gave to our chosen subjects; but, my child, philosophy without love, or disguised under a sham love, is the most hideous of conjugal hypocrisies. I should imagine that even the biggest of fools might detect now and again the owl of wisdom squatting in your bower of roses—a ghastly phantom sufficient to put to flight the most promising of passions. You make your own fate, instead of waiting, a plaything in its hands.

We are each developing in strange ways. A large dose of philosophy to a grain of love is your recipe; a large dose of love to a grain of philosophy is mine. Why, Rousseau's Julie, whom I thought so learned, is a mere beginner to you. Woman's virtue, quotha! How you have weighed up life! Alas! I make fun of you, and, after all, perhaps you are right.

In one day you have made a holocaust of your youth and become a miser before your time. Your Louis will be happy, I daresay. If he loves you, of

which I make no doubt, he will never find out, that, for the sake of your family, you are acting as a courtesan does for money; and certainly men seem to find happiness with them, judging by the fortunes they squander thus. A keen-sighted husband might no doubt remain in love with you, but what sort of gratitude could he feel in the long run for a woman who had made of duplicity a sort of moral armor, as indispensable as her stays?

Love, dear, is in my eyes the first principle of all the virtues, conformed to the divine likeness. Like all other first principles, it is not a matter of arithmetic; it is the Infinite in us. I cannot but think you have been trying to justify in your own eyes the frightful position of a girl, married to a man for whom she feels nothing more than esteem. You prate of duty, and make it your rule and measure; but surely to take necessity as the spring of action is the moral theory of atheism? To follow the impulse of love and feeling is the secret law of every woman's heart. You are acting a man's part, and your Louis will have to play the woman!

Oh! my dear, your letter has plunged me into an endless train of thought. I see now that the convent can never take the place of mother to a girl. I beg of you, my grand angel with the black eyes, so pure and proud, so serious and so pretty, do not turn away from these cries, which the first reading of your letter has torn from me! I have taken comfort in the thought that, while I was lamenting, love was doubtless busy knocking down the scaffolding of reason.

It may be that I shall do worse than you without any reasoning or calculations. Passion is an element in life bound to have a logic not less pitiless than yours.

Monday.

Yesterday night I placed myself at the window as I was going to bed, to look at the sky, which was wonderfully clear. The stars were like silver nails, holding up a veil of blue. In the silence of the night I could hear some one breathing, and by the half-light of the stars I saw my Spaniard, perched like a squirrel on the branches of one of the trees lining the boulevard, and doubtless lost in admiration of my windows.

The first effect of this discovery was to make me withdraw into the room, my feet and hands quite limp and nerveless; but, beneath the fear, I was conscious of a delicious undercurrent of joy. I was overpowered but happy. Not one of those clever Frenchmen, who aspire to marry me, has had the brilliant idea of spending the night in an elm-tree at the risk of being carried off by the watch. My Spaniard has, no doubt, been there for some time. Ah! he won't give me any more lessons, he wants to receive them—well, he shall have one. If only he knew what I said to myself about his superficial ugliness! Others can philosophize besides you, Renee! It was horrid, I argued, to fall in

love with a handsome man. Is it not practically avowing that the senses count for three parts out of four in a passion which ought to be super-sensual?

Having got over my first alarm, I craned my neck behind the window in order to see him again—and well was I rewarded! By means of a hollow cane he blew me in through the window a letter, cunningly rolled round a leaden pellet.

Good Heavens! will he suppose I left the window open on purpose?

But what was to be done? To shut it suddenly would be to make oneself an accomplice.

I did better. I returned to my window as though I had seen nothing and heard nothing of the letter, then I said aloud:

"Come and look at the stars, Griffith."

Griffith was sleeping as only old maids can. But the Moor, hearing me, slid down, and vanished with ghostly rapidity.

He must have been dying of fright, and so was I, for I did not hear him go away; apparently he remained at the foot of the elm. After a good quarter of an hour, during which I lost myself in contemplation of the heavens, and battled with the waves of curiosity, I closed my widow and sat down on the bed to unfold the delicate bit of paper, with the tender touch of a worker amongst the ancient manuscripts at Naples. It felt redhot to my fingers. "What a horrible power this man has over me!" I said to myself.

All at once I held out the paper to the candle—I would burn it without reading a word. Then a thought stayed me, "What can he have to say that he writes so secretly?" Well, dear, I did burn it, reflecting that, though any other girl in the world would have devoured the letter, it was not fitting that I—Armande-Louise-Marie de Chaulieu—should read it.

The next day, at the Italian opera, he was at his post. But I feel sure that, ex-prime minister of a constitutional government though he is, he could not discover the slightest agitation of mind in any movement of mine. I might have seen nothing and received nothing the evening before. This was most satisfactory to me, but he looked very sad. Poor man! in Spain it is so natural for love to come in at the window!

During the interval, it seems, he came and walked in the passages. This I learned from the chief secretary of the Spanish embassy, who also told the story of a noble action of his.

As Duc de Soria he was to marry one of the richest heiresses in Spain, the young princess Marie Heredia, whose wealth would have mitigated the bitterness of exile. But it seems that Marie, disappointing the wishes of the

fathers, who had betrothed them in their earliest childhood, loved the younger son of the house of Soria, to whom my Felipe, gave her up. Allowing himself to be despoiled by the King of Spain.

"He would perform this piece of heroism quite simply," I said to the young man.

"You know him then?" was his ingenuous reply.

My mother smiled.

"What will become of him, for he is condemned to death?" I asked.

"Though dead to Spain, he can live in Sardinia."

"Ah! then Spain is the country of tombs as well as castles?" I said, trying to carry it off as a joke.

"There is everything in Spain, even Spaniards of the old school," my mother replied.

"The Baron de Macumer obtained a passport, not without difficulty, from the King of Sardinia," the young diplomatist went on. "He has now become a Sardinian subject, and he possesses a magnificent estate in the island with full feudal rights. He has a palace at Sassari. If Ferdinand VII. were to die, Macumer would probably go in for diplomacy, and the Court of Turin would make him ambassador. Though young, he is—"

"Ah! he is young?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle... though young, he is one of the most distinguished men in Spain."

I scanned the house meanwhile through my opera-glass, and seemed to lend an inattentive ear to the secretary; but, between ourselves, I was wretched at having burnt his letter. In what terms would a man like that express his love? For he does love me. To be loved, adored in secret; to know that in this house, where all the great men of Paris were collected, there was one entirely devoted to me, unknown to everybody! Ah! Renee, now I understand the life of Paris, its balls, and its gaieties. It all flashed on me in the true light. When we love, we must have society, were it only to sacrifice it to our love. I felt a different creature—and such a happy one! My vanity, pride, self-love,—all were flattered. Heaven knows what glances I cast upon the audience!

"Little rogue!" the Duchess whispered in my ear with a smile.

Yes, Renee, my wily mother had deciphered the hidden joy in my bearing, and I could only haul down my flag before such feminine strategy. Those two words taught me more of worldly wisdom than I have been able to pick up in a year—for we are in March now. Alas! no more Italian opera in another month.

How will life be possible without that heavenly music, when one's heart is full of love?

When I got home, my dear, with determination worthy of a Chaulieu, I opened my window to watch a shower of rain. Oh! if men knew the magic spell that a heroic action throws over us, they would indeed rise to greatness! a poltroon would turn hero! What I had learned about my Spaniard drove me into a very fever. I felt certain that he was there, ready to aim another letter at me.

I was right, and this time I burnt nothing. Here, then, is the first love-letter I have received, madame logician: each to her kind:—

"Louise, it is not for your peerless beauty I love you, nor for your gifted mind, your noble feeling, the wondrous charm of all you say and do, nor yet for your pride, your queenly scorn of baser mortals—a pride blent in you with charity, for what angel could be more tender?—Louise, I love you because, for the sake of a poor exile, you have unbent this lofty majesty, because by a gesture, a glance, you have brought consolation to a man so far beneath you that the utmost he could hope for was your pity, the pity of a generous heart. You are the one woman whose eyes have shone with a tenderer light when bent on me.

"And because you let fall this glance—a mere grain of dust, yet a grace surpassing any bestowed on me when I stood at the summit of a subject's ambition—I long to tell you, Louise, how dear you are to me, and that my love is for yourself alone, without a thought beyond, a love that far more than fulfils the conditions laid down by you for an ideal passion.

"Know, then, idol of my highest heaven, that there is in the world an offshoot of the Saracen race, whose life is in your hands, who will receive your orders as a slave, and deem it an honor to execute them. I have given myself to you absolutely and for the mere joy of giving, for a single glance of your eye, for a touch of the hand which one day you offered to your Spanish master. I am but your servitor, Louise; I claim no more.

"No, I dare not think that I could ever be loved; but perchance my devotion may win for me toleration. Since that morning when you smiled upon me with generous girlish impulse, divining the misery of my lonely and rejected heart, you reign there alone. You are the absolute ruler of my life, the queen of my thoughts, the god of my heart; I find you in the sunshine of my home, the fragrance of my flowers, the balm of the air I breathe, the pulsing of my blood, the light that visits me in sleep.

"One thought alone troubled this happiness—your ignorance. All unknown to you was this boundless devotion, the trusty arm, the blind slave, the silent

tool, the wealth—for henceforth all I possess is mine only as a trust—which lay at your disposal; unknown to you, the heart waiting to receive your confidence, and yearning to replace all that your life (I know it well) has lacked —the liberal ancestress, so ready to meet your needs, a father to whom you could look for protection in every difficulty, a friend, a brother. The secret of your isolation is no secret to me! If I am bold, it is because I long that you should know how much is yours.

"Take all, Louise, and is so doing bestow on me the one life possible for me in this world—the life of devotion. In placing the yoke on my neck, you run no risk; I ask nothing but the joy of knowing myself yours. Needless even to say you will never love me; it cannot be otherwise. I must love you from afar, without hope, without reward beyond my own love.

"In my anxiety to know whether you will accept me as your servant, I have racked my brain to find some way in which you may communicate with me without any danger of compromising yourself. Injury to your self-respect there can be none in sanctioning a devotion which has been yours for many days without your knowledge. Let this, then, be the token. At the opera this evening, if you carry in your hand a bouquet consisting of one red and one white camellia—emblem of a man's blood at the service of the purity he worships—that will be my answer. I ask no more; thenceforth, at any moment, ten years hence or to-morrow, whatever you demand shall be done, so far as it is possible for man to do it, by your happy servant,

"FELIPE HENAREZ."

P. S.—You must admit, dear, that great lords know how to love! See the spring of the African lion! What restrained fire! What loyalty! What sincerity! How high a soul in low estate! I felt quite small and dazed as I said to myself, "What shall I do?"

It is the mark of a great man that he puts to flight all ordinary calculations. He is at once sublime and touching, childlike and of the race of giants. In a single letter Henarez has outstripped volumes from Lovelace or Saint-Preux. Here is true love, no beating about the bush. Love may be or it may not, but where it is, it ought to reveal itself in its immensity.

Here am I, shorn of all my little arts! To refuse or accept! That is the alternative boldly presented me, without the ghost of an opening for a middle course. No fencing allowed! This is no longer Paris; we are in the heart of Spain or the far East. It is the voice of Abencerrage, and it is the scimitar, the horse, and the head of Abencerrage which he offers, prostrate before a Catholic Eve! Shall I accept this last descendant of the Moors? Read again and again his Hispano-Saracenic letter, Renee dear, and you will see how love makes a clean sweep of all the Judaic bargains of your philosophy.

Renee, your letter lies heavy on my heart; you have vulgarized life for me. What need have I for finessing? Am I not mistress for all time of this lion whose roar dies out in plaintive and adoring sighs? Ah! how he must have raged in his lair of the Rue Hillerin-Bertin! I know where he lives, I have his card: F., Baron de Macumer.

He has made it impossible for me to reply. All I can do is to fling two camellias in his face. What fiendish arts does love possess—pure, honest, simple-minded love! Here is the most tremendous crisis of a woman's heart resolved into an easy, simple action. Oh, Asia! I have read the Arabian Nights, here is their very essence: two flowers, and the question is settled. We clear the fourteen volumes of Clarissa Harlowe with a bouquet. I writhe before this letter, like a thread in the fire. To take, or not to take, my two camellias. Yes or No, kill or give life! At last a voice cries to me, "Test him!" And I will test him.

XVI. THE SAME TO THE SAME March.

I am dressed in white—white camellias in my hair, and another in my hand. My mother has red camellias; so it would not be impossible to take one from her—if I wished! I have a strange longing to put off the decision to the last moment, and make him pay for his red camellia by a little suspense.

What a vision of beauty! Griffith begged me to stop for a little and be admired. The solemn crisis of the evening and the drama of my secret reply have given me a color; on each cheek I sport a red camellia laid upon a white!

1 A. M.

Everybody admired me, but only one adored. He hung his head as I entered with a white camellia, but turned pale as the flower when, later, I took a red one from my mother's hand. To arrive with the two flowers might possibly have been accidental; but this deliberate action was a reply. My confession, therefore, is fuller than it need have been.

The opera was Romeo and Juliet. As you don't know the duet of the two lovers, you can't understand the bliss of two neophytes in love, as they listen to this divine outpouring of the heart.

On returning home I went to bed, but only to count the steps which resounded on the sidewalk. My heart and head, darling, are all on fire now. What is he doing? What is he thinking of? Has he a thought, a single thought, that is not of me? Is he, in very truth, the devoted slave he painted himself? How to be sure? Or, again, has it ever entered his head that, if I accept him, I

lay myself open to the shadow of a reproach or am in any sense rewarding or thanking him? I am harrowed by the hair-splitting casuistry of the heroines in Cyrus and Astraea, by all the subtle arguments of the court of love.

Has he any idea that, in affairs of love, a woman's most trifling actions are but the issue of long brooding and inner conflicts, of victories won only to be lost! What are his thoughts at this moment? How can I give him my orders to write every evening the particulars of the day just gone? He is my slave whom I ought to keep busy. I shall deluge him with work!

Sunday Morning.

Only towards morning did I sleep a little. It is midday now. I have just got Griffith to write the following letter:

"To the Baron de Macumer.

"Mademoiselle de Chaulieu begs me, Monsieur le Baron, to ask you to return to her the copy of a letter written to her by a friend, which is in her own handwriting, and which you carried away.—

Believe me, etc.,

"GRIFFITH."

My dear, Griffith has gone out; she has gone to the Rue Hillerin-Bertin; she had handed in this little love-letter for my slave, who returned to me in an envelope my sweet portrait, stained with tears. He has obeyed. Oh! my sweet, it must have been dear to him! Another man would have refused to send it in a letter full of flattery; but the Saracen has fulfilled his promises. He has obeyed. It moves me to tears.

XVII. THE SAME TO THE SAME April 2nd.

Yesterday the weather was splendid. I dressed myself like a girl who wants to look her best in her sweetheart's eyes. My father, yielding to my entreaties, has given me the prettiest turnout in Paris—two dapple-gray horses and a barouche, which is a masterpiece of elegance. I was making a first trial of this, and peeped out like a flower from under my sunshade lined with white silk.

As I drove up the avenue of the Champs-Elysees, I saw my Abencerrage approaching on an extraordinarily beautiful horse. Almost every man nowadays is a finished jockey, and they all stopped to admire and inspect it. He bowed to me, and on receiving a friendly sign of encouragement, slackened his horse's pace so that I was able to say to him:

"You are not vexed with me for asking for my letter; it was no use to you." Then in a lower voice, "You have already transcended the ideal. ... Your horse makes you an object of general interest," I went on aloud.

"My steward in Sardinia sent it to me. He is very proud of it; for this horse, which is of Arab blood, was born in my stables."

This morning, my dear, Henarez was on an English sorrel, also very fine, but not such as to attract attention. My light, mocking words had done their work. He bowed to me and I replied with a slight inclination of the head.

The Duc d'Angouleme has bought Macumer's horse. My slave understood that he was deserting the role of simplicity by attracting the notice of the crowd. A man ought to be remarked for what he is, not for his horse, or anything else belonging to him. To have too beautiful a horse seems to me a piece of bad taste, just as much as wearing a huge diamond pin. I was delighted at being able to find fault with him. Perhaps there may have been a touch of vanity in what he did, very excusable in a poor exile, and I like to see this childishness.

Oh! my dear old preacher, do my love affairs amuse you as much as your dismal philosophy gives me the creeps? Dear Philip the Second in petticoats, are you comfortable in my barouche? Do you see those velvet eyes, humble, yet so eloquent, and glorying in their servitude, which flash on me as some one goes by? He is a hero, Renee, and he wears my livery, and always a red camellia in his buttonhole, while I have always a white one in my hand.

How clear everything becomes in the light of love! How well I know my Paris now! It is all transfused with meaning. And love here is lovelier, grander, more bewitching than elsewhere.

I am convinced now that I could never flirt with a fool or make any impression on him. It is only men of real distinction who can enter into our feelings and feel our influence. Oh! my poor friend, forgive me. I forgot our l'Estorade. But didn't you tell me you were going to make a genius of him? I know what that means. You will dry nurse him till some day he is able to understand you.

Good-bye. I am a little off my head, and must stop.

XVIII. MME. DE L'ESTORADE TO LOUISE DE CHAULIEU April.

My angel—or ought I not rather to say my imp of evil?—you have, without meaning it, grieved me sorely. I would say wounded were we not one

soul. And yet it is possible to wound oneself.

How plain it is that you have never realized the force of the word indissoluble as applied to the contract binding man and woman! I have no wish to controvert what has been laid down by philosophers or legislators—they are quite capable of doing this for themselves—but, dear one, in making marriage irrevocable and imposing on it a relentless formula, which admits of no exceptions, they have rendered each union a thing as distinct as one individual is from another. Each has its own inner laws which differ from those of others. The laws regulating married life in the country, for instance, cannot be the same as those regulating a household in town, where frequent distractions give variety to life. Or conversely, married life in Paris, where existence is one perpetual whirl, must demand different treatment from the more peaceful home in the provinces.

But if place alters the conditions of marriage, much more does character. The wife of a man born to be a leader need only resign herself to his guidance; whereas the wife of a fool, conscious of superior power, is bound to take the reins in her own hand if she would avert calamity.

You speak of vice; and it is possible that, after all, reason and reflection produce a result not dissimilar from what we call by that name. For what does a woman mean by it but perversion of feeling through calculation? Passion is vicious when it reasons, admirable only when it springs from the heart and spends itself in sublime impulses that set at naught all selfish considerations. Sooner or later, dear one, you too will say, "Yes! dissimulation is the necessary armor of a woman, if by dissimulation be meant courage to bear in silence, prudence to foresee the future."

Every married woman learns to her cost the existence of certain social laws, which, in many respects, conflict with the laws of nature. Marrying at our age, it would be possible to have a dozen children. What is this but another name for a dozen crimes, a dozen misfortunes? It would be handing over to poverty and despair twelve innocent darlings; whereas two children would mean the happiness of both, a double blessing, two lives capable of developing in harmony with the customs and laws of our time. The natural law and the code are in hostility, and we are the battle ground. Would you give the name of vice to the prudence of the wife who guards her family from destruction through its own acts? One calculation or a thousand, what matter, if the decision no longer rests with the heart?

And of this terrible calculation you will be guilty some day, my noble Baronne de Macumer, when you are the proud and happy wife of the man who adores you; or rather, being a man of sense, he will spare you by making it himself. (You see, dear dreamer, that I have studied the code in its bearings on

conjugal relations.) And when at last that day comes, you will understand that we are answerable only to God and to ourselves for the means we employ to keep happiness alight in the heart of our homes. Far better is the calculation which succeeds in this than the reckless passion which introduces trouble, heart-burnings, and dissension.

I have reflected painfully on the duties of a wife and mother of a family. Yes, sweet one, it is only by a sublime hypocrisy that we can attain the noblest ideal of a perfect woman. You tax me with insincerity because I dole out to Louis, from day to day, the measure of his intimacy with me; but is it not too close an intimacy which provokes rupture? My aim is to give him, in the very interest of his happiness, many occupations, which will all serve as distractions to his love; and this is not the reasoning of passion. If affection be inexhaustible, it is not so with love: the task, therefore, of a woman—truly no light one—is to spread it out thriftily over a lifetime.

At the risk of exciting your disgust, I must tell you that I persist in the principles I have adopted, and hold myself both heroic and generous in so doing. Virtue, my pet, is an abstract idea, varying in its manifestations with the surroundings. Virtue in Provence, in Constantinople, in London, and in Paris bears very different fruit, but is none the less virtue. Each human life is a substance compacted of widely dissimilar elements, though, viewed from a certain height, the general effect is the same.

If I wished to make Louis unhappy and to bring about a separation, all I need do is to leave the helm in his hands. I have not had your good fortune in meeting with a man of the highest distinction, but I may perhaps have the satisfaction of helping him on the road to it. Five years hence let us meet in Paris and see! I believe we shall succeed in mystifying you. You will tell me then that I was quite mistaken, and that M. de l'Estorade is a man of great natural gifts.

As for this brave love, of which I know only what you tell me, these tremors and night watches by starlight on the balcony, this idolatrous worship, this deification of woman—I knew it was not for me. You can enlarge the borders of your brilliant life as you please; mine is hemmed in to the boundaries of La Crampade.

And you reproach me for the jealous care which alone can nurse this modest and fragile shoot into a wealth of lasting and mysterious happiness! I believed myself to have found out how to adapt the charm of a mistress to the position of a wife, and you have almost made me blush for my device. Who shall say which of us is right, which is wrong? Perhaps we are both right and both wrong. Perhaps this is the heavy price which society exacts for our furbelows, our titles, and our children.

I too have my red camellias, but they bloom on my lips in smiles for my double charge—the father and the son—whose slave and mistress I am. But, my dear, your last letters made me feel what I have lost! You have taught me all a woman sacrifices in marrying. One single glance did I take at those beautiful wild plateaus where you range at your sweet will, and I will not tell you the tears that fell as I read. But regret is not remorse, though it may be first cousin to it.

You say, "Marriage has made you a philosopher!" Alas! bitterly did I feel how far this was from the truth, as I wept to think of you swept away on love's torrent. But my father has made me read one of the profoundest thinkers of these parts, the man on whom the mantle of Boussuet has fallen, one of those hard-headed theorists whose words force conviction. While you were reading Corinne, I conned Bonald; and here is the whole secret of my philosophy. He revealed to me the Family in its strength and holiness. According to Bonald, your father was right in his homily.

Farewell, my dear fancy, my friend, my wild other self.

XIX. LOUISE DE CHAULIEU TO MME. DE L'ESTORADE

Well, my Renee, you are a love of a woman, and I quite agree now that we can only be virtuous by cheating. Will that satisfy you? Moreover, the man who loves us is our property; we can make a fool or a genius of him as we please; only, between ourselves, the former happens more commonly. You will make yours a genius, and you won't tell the secret—there are two heroic actions, if you will!

Ah! if there were no future life, how nicely you would be sold, for this is martyrdom into which you are plunging of your own accord. You want to make him ambitious and to keep him in love! Child that you are, surely the last alone is sufficient.

Tell me, to what point is calculation a virtue, or virtue calculation? You won't say? Well, we won't quarrel over that, since we have Bonald to refer to. We are, and intend to remain, virtuous; nevertheless at this moment I believe that you, with all your pretty little knavery, are a better woman than I am.

Yes, I am shockingly deceitful. I love Felipe, and I conceal it from him with an odious hypocrisy. I long to see him leap from his tree to the top of the wall, and from the wall to my balcony—and if he did, how I should wither him with my scorn! You see, I am frank enough with you.

What restrains me? Where is the mysterious power which prevents me

from telling Felipe, dear fellow, how supremely happy he has made me by the outpouring of his love—so pure, so absolute, so boundless, so unobtrusive, and so overflowing?

Mme. de Mirbel is painting my portrait, and I intend to give it to him, my dear. What surprises me more and more every day is the animation which love puts into life. How full of interest is every hour, every action, every trifle! and what amazing confusion between the past, the future, and the present! One lives in three tenses at once. Is it still so after the heights of happiness are reached? Oh! tell me, I implore you, what is happiness? Does it soothe, or does it excite? I am horribly restless; I seem to have lost all my bearings; a force in my heart drags me to him, spite of reason and spite of propriety. There is this gain, that I am better able to enter into your feelings.

Felipe's happiness consists in feeling himself mine; the aloofness of his love, his strict obedience, irritate me, just as his attitude of profound respect provoked me when he was only my Spanish master. I am tempted to cry out to him as he passes, "Fool, if you love me so much as a picture, what will it be when you know the real me?"

Oh! Renee, you burn my letters, don't you? I will burn yours. If other eyes than ours were to read these thoughts which pass from heart to heart, I should send Felipe to put them out, and perhaps to kill the owners, by way of additional security.

Monday.

Oh! Renee, how is it possible to fathom the heart of man? My father ought to introduce me to M. Bonald, since he is so learned; I would ask him. I envy the privilege of God, who can read the undercurrents of the heart.

Does he still worship? That is the whole question.

If ever, in gesture, glance, or tone, I were to detect the slightest falling off in the respect he used to show me in the days when he was my instructor in Spanish, I feel that I should have strength to put the whole thing from me. "Why these fine words, these grand resolutions?" you will say. Dear, I will tell you.

My fascinating father, who treats me with the devotion of an Italian cavaliere servente for his lady, had my portrait painted, as I told you, by Mme. de Mirbel. I contrived to get a copy made, good enough to do for the Duke, and sent the original to Felipe. I despatched it yesterday, and these lines with it:

"Don Felipe, your single-hearted devotion is met by a blind confidence. Time will show whether this is not to treat a man as more than human."

It was a big reward. It looked like a promise and—dreadful to say—a challenge; but—which will seem to you still more dreadful—I quite intended that it should suggest both these things, without going so far as actually to commit me. If in his reply there is "Dear Louise!" or even "Louise," he is done for!

Tuesday.

No, he is not done for. The constitutional minister is perfect as a lover. Here is his letter:—

"Every moment passed away from your sight has been filled by me with ideal pictures of you, my eyes closed to the outside world and fixed in meditation on your image, which used to obey the summons too slowly in that dim palace of dreams, glorified by your presence. Henceforth my gaze will rest upon this wondrous ivory— this talisman, might I not say?—since your blue eyes sparkle with life as I look, and paint passes into flesh and blood. If I have delayed writing, it is because I could not tear myself away from your presence, which wrung from me all that I was bound to keep most secret.

"Yes, closeted with you all last night and to-day, I have, for the first time in my life, given myself up to full, complete, and boundless happiness. Could you but see yourself where I have placed you, between the Virgin and God, you might have some idea of the agony in which the night has passed. But I would not offend you by speaking of it; for one glance from your eyes, robbed of the tender sweetness which is my life, would be full of torture for me, and I implore your clemency therefore in advance. Queen of my life and of my soul, oh! that you could grant me but one- thousandth part of the love I bear you!

"This was the burden of my prayer; doubt worked havoc in my soul as I oscillated between belief and despair, between life and death, darkness and light. A criminal whose verdict hangs in the balance is not more racked with suspense than I, as I own to my temerity. The smile imaged on your lips, to which my eyes turned ever and again, and alone able to calm the storm roused by the dread of displeasing you. From my birth no one, not even my mother, has smiled on me. The beautiful young girl who was designed for me rejected my heart and gave hers to my brother. Again, in politics all my efforts have been defeated. In the eyes of my king I have read only thirst for vengeance; from childhood he has been my enemy, and the vote of the Cortes which placed me in power was regarded by him as a personal insult.

"Less than this might breed despondency in the stoutest heart. Besides, I have no illusion; I know the gracelessness of my person, and am well aware how difficult it is to do justice to the heart within so rugged a shell. To be loved had ceased to be more than a dream to me when I met you. Thus when I bound myself to your service I knew that devotion alone could excuse my

passion.

"But, as I look upon this portrait and listen to your smile that whispers of rapture, the rays of a hope which I had sternly banished pierced the gloom, like the light of dawn, again to be obscured by rising mists of doubt and fear of your displeasure, if the morning should break to day. No, it is impossible you should love me yet—I feel it; but in time, as you make proof of the strength, the constancy, and depth of my affection, you may yield me some foothold in your heart. If my daring offends you, tell me so without anger, and I will return to my former part. But if you consent to try and love me, be merciful and break it gently to one who has placed the happiness of his life in the single thought of serving you."

My dear, as I read these last words, he seemed to rise before me, pale as the night when the camellias told their story and he knew his offering was accepted. These words, in their humility, were clearly something quite different from the usual flowery rhetoric of lovers, and a wave of feeling broke over me; it was the breath of happiness.

The weather has been atrocious; impossible to go to the Bois without exciting all sorts of suspicions. Even my mother, who often goes out, regardless of rain, remains at home, and alone.

Wednesday evening.

I have just seen him at the Opera, my dear; he is another man. He came to our box, introduced by the Sardinian ambassador.

Having read in my eyes that this audacity was taken in good part, he seemed awkwardly conscious of his limbs, and addressed the Marquise d'Espard as "mademoiselle." A light far brighter than the glare of the chandeliers flashed from his eyes. At last he went out with the air of a man who didn't know what he might do next.

"The Baron de Macumer is in love!" exclaimed Mme. de Maufrigneuse.

"Strange, isn't it, for a fallen minister?" replied my mother.

I had sufficient presence of mind myself to regard with curiosity Mmes. de Maufrigneuse and d'Espard and my mother, as though they were talking a foreign language and I wanted to know what it was all about, but inwardly my soul sank in the waves of an intoxicating joy. There is only one word to express what I felt, and that is: rapture. Such love as Felipe's surely makes him worthy of mine. I am the very breath of his life, my hands hold the thread that guides his thoughts. To be quite frank, I have a mad longing to see him clear every obstacle and stand before me, asking boldly for my hand. Then I should know whether this storm of love would sink to placid calm at a glance from

me.

Ah! my dear, I stopped here, and I am still all in a tremble. As I wrote, I heard a slight noise outside, and rose to see what it was. From my window I could see him coming along the ridge of the wall at the risk of his life. I went to the bedroom window and made him a sign, it was enough; he leaped from the wall—ten feet—and then ran along the road, as far as I could see him, in order to show me that he was not hurt. That he should think of my fear at the moment when he must have been stunned by his fall, moved me so much that I am still crying; I don't know why. Poor ungainly man! what was he coming for? what had he to say to me?

I dare not write my thoughts, and shall go to bed joyful, thinking of all that we would say if we were together. Farewell, fair silent one. I have not time to scold you for not writing, but it is more than a month since I have heard from you! Does this mean that you are at last happy? Have you lost the "complete independence" which you were so proud of, and which to-night has so nearly played me false?

XX. RENEE DE L'ESTORADE TO LOUISE DE CHAULIEU May.

If love be the life of the world, why do austere philosophers count it for nothing in marriage? Why should Society take for its first law that the woman must be sacrificed to the family, introducing thus a note of discord into the very heart of marriage? And this discord was foreseen, since it was to meet the dangers arising from it that men were armed with new-found powers against us. But for these, we should have been able to bring their whole theory to nothing, whether by the force of love or of a secret, persistent aversion.

I see in marriage, as it at present exists, two opposing forces which it was the task of the lawgiver to reconcile. "When will they be reconciled?" I said to myself, as I read your letter. Oh! my dear, one such letter alone is enough to overthrow the whole fabric constructed by the sage of Aveyron, under whose shelter I had so cheerfully ensconced myself! The laws were made by old men —any woman can see that—and they have been prudent enough to decree that conjugal love, apart from passion, is not degrading, and that a woman in yielding herself may dispense with the sanction of love, provided the man can legally call her his. In their exclusive concern for the family they have imitated Nature, whose one care is to propagate the species.

Formerly I was a person, now I am a chattel. Not a few tears have I gulped down, alone and far from every one. How gladly would I have exchanged

them for a consoling smile! Why are our destinies so unequal? Your soul expands in the atmosphere of a lawful passion. For you, virtue will coincide with pleasure. If you encounter pain, it will be of your own free choice. Your duty, if you marry Felipe, will be one with the sweetest, freest indulgence of feeling. Our future is big with the answer to my question, and I look for it with restless eagerness.

You love and are adored. Oh! my dear, let this noble romance, the old subject of our dreams, take full possession of your soul. Womanly beauty, refined and spiritualized in you, was created by God, for His own purposes, to charm and to delight. Yes, my sweet, guard well the secret of your heart, and submit Felipe to those ingenious devices of ours for testing a lover's metal. Above all, make trial of your own love, for this is even more important. It is so easy to be misled by the deceptive glamour of novelty and passion, and by the vision of happiness.

Alone of the two friends, you remain in your maiden independence; and I beseech you, dearest, do not risk the irrevocable step of marriage without some guarantee. It happens sometimes, when two are talking together, apart from the world, their souls stripped of social disguise, that a gesture, a word, a look lights up, as by a flash, some dark abyss. You have courage and strength to tread boldly in paths where others would be lost.

You have no conception in what anxiety I watch you. Across all this space I see you; my heart beats with yours. Be sure, therefore, to write and tell me everything. Your letters create an inner life of passion within my homely, peaceful household, which reminds me of a level highroad on a gray day. The only event here, my sweet, is that I am playing cross-purposes with myself. But I don't want to tell you about it just now; it must wait for another day. With dogged obstinacy, I pass from despair to hope, now yielding, now holding back. It may be that I ask from life more than we have a right to claim. In youth we are so ready to believe that the ideal and the real will harmonize!

I have been pondering alone, seated beneath a rock in my park, and the fruit of my pondering is that love in marriage is a happy accident on which it is impossible to base a universal law. My Aveyron philosopher is right in looking on the family as the only possible unit in society, and in placing woman in subjection to the family, as she has been in all ages. The solution of this great—for us almost awful—question lies in our first child. For this reason, I would gladly be a mother, were it only to supply food for the consuming energy of my soul.

Louis' temper remains as perfect as ever; his love is of the active, my tenderness of the passive, type. He is happy, plucking the flowers which bloom for him, without troubling about the labor of the earth which has

produced them. Blessed self-absorption! At whatever cost to myself, I fall in with his illusions, as a mother, in my idea of her, should be ready to spend herself to satisfy a fancy of her child. The intensity of his joy blinds him, and even throws its reflection upon me. The smile or look of satisfaction which the knowledge of his content brings to my face is enough to satisfy him. And so, "my child" is the pet name which I give him when we are alone.

And I wait for the fruit of all these sacrifices which remain a secret between God, myself, and you. On motherhood I have staked enormously; my credit account is now too large, I fear I shall never receive full payment. To it I look for employment of my energy, expansion of my heart, and the compensation of a world of joys. Pray Heaven I be not deceived! It is a question of all my future and, horrible thought, of my virtue.

XXI. LOUISE DE CHAULIEU TO RENEE DE L'ESTORADE June.

Dear wedded sweetheart,—Your letter has arrived at the very moment to hearten me for a bold step which I have been meditating night and day. I feel within me a strange craving for the unknown, or, if you will, the forbidden, which makes me uneasy and reveals a conflict in progress in my soul between the laws of society and of nature. I cannot tell whether nature in me is the stronger of the two, but I surprise myself in the act of meditating between the hostile powers.

In plain words, what I wanted was to speak with Felipe, alone, at night, under the lime-trees at the bottom of our garden. There is no denying that this desire beseems the girl who has earned the epithet of an "up-to-date young lady," bestowed on me by the Duchess in jest, and which my father has approved.

Yet to me there seems a method in this madness. I should recompense Felipe for the long nights he has passed under my window, at the same time that I should test him, by seeing what he thinks of my escapade and how he comports himself at a critical moment. Let him cast a halo round my folly—behold in him my husband; let him show one iota less of the tremulous respect with which he bows to me in the Champs-Elysees—farewell, Don Felipe.

As for society, I run less risk in meeting my lover thus than when I smile to him in the drawing-rooms of Mme. de Maufrigneuse and the old Marquise de Beauseant, where spies now surround us on every side; and Heaven only knows how people stare at the girl, suspected of a weakness for a grotesque, like Macumer.

I cannot tell you to what a state of agitation I am reduced by dreaming of this idea, and the time I have given to planning its execution. I wanted you badly. What happy hours we should have chattered away, lost in the mazes of uncertainty, enjoying in anticipation all the delights and horrors of a first meeting in the silence of night, under the noble lime-trees of the Chaulieu mansion, with the moonlight dancing through the leaves! As I sat alone, every nerve tingling, I cried, "Oh! Renee, where are you?" Then your letter came, like a match to gunpowder, and my last scruples went by the board.

Through the window I tossed to my bewildered adorer an exact tracing of the key of the little gate at the end of the garden, together with this note:

"Your madness must really be put a stop to. If you broke your neck, you would ruin the reputation of the woman you profess to love. Are you worthy of a new proof of regard, and do you deserve that I should talk with you under the limes at the foot of the garden at the hour when the moon throws them into shadow?"

Yesterday at one o'clock, when Griffith was going to bed, I said to her:

"Take your shawl, dear, and come out with me. I want to go to the bottom of the garden without anyone knowing."

Without a word, she followed me. Oh! my Renee, what an awful moment when, after a little pause full of delicious thrills of agony, I saw him gliding along like a shadow. When he had reached the garden safely, I said to Griffith:

"Don't be astonished, but the Baron de Macumer is here, and, indeed, it is on that account I brought you with me."

No reply from Griffith.

"What would you have with me?" said Felipe, in a tone of such agitation that it was easy to see he was driven beside himself by the noise, slight as it was, of our dresses in the silence of the night and of our steps upon the gravel.

"I want to say to you what I could not write," I replied.

Griffith withdrew a few steps. It was one of those mild nights, when the air is heavy with the scent of flowers. My head swam with the intoxicating delight of finding myself all but alone with him in the friendly shade of the lime-trees, beyond which lay the garden, shining all the more brightly because the white facade of the house reflected the moonlight. The contrast seemed, as it were, an emblem of our clandestine love leading up to the glaring publicity of a wedding. Neither of us could do more at first than drink in silently the ecstasy of a moment, as new and marvelous for him as for me. At last I found tongue to say, pointing to the elm-tree:

"Although I am not afraid of scandal, you shall not climb that tree again.

We have long enough played schoolboy and schoolgirl, let us rise now to the height of our destiny. Had that fall killed you, I should have died disgraced..."

I looked at him. Every scrap of color had left his face.

"And if you had been found there, suspicion would have attached either to my mother or to me..."

"Forgive me," he murmured.

"If you walk along the boulevard, I shall hear your step; and when I want to see you, I will open my window. But I would not run such a risk unless some emergency arose. Why have you forced me by your rash act to commit another, and one which may lower me in your eyes?"

The tears which I saw in his eyes were to me the most eloquent of answers.

"What I have done to-night," I went on with a smile, "must seem to you the height of madness..."

After we had walked up and down in silence more than once, he recovered composure enough to say:

"You must think me a fool; and, indeed, the delirium of my joy has robbed me of both nerve and wits. But of this at least be assured, whatever you do is sacred in my eyes from the very fact that it seemed right to you. I honor you as I honor only God besides. And then, Miss Griffith is here."

"She is here for the sake of the others, not for us," I put in hastily.

My dear, he understood me at once.

"I know very well," he said, with the humblest glance at me, "that whether she is there or not makes no difference. Unseen of men, we are still in the presence of God, and our own esteem is not less important to us than that of the world."

"Thank you, Felipe," I said, holding out my hand to him with a gesture which you ought to see. "A woman, and I am nothing, if not a woman, is on the road to loving the man who understands her. Oh! only on the road," I went on, with a finger on my lips. "Don't let your hopes carry you beyond what I say. My heart will belong only to the man who can read it and know its every turn. Our views, without being absolutely identical, must be the same in their breadth and elevation. I have no wish to exaggerate my own merits; doubtless what seem virtues in my eyes have their corresponding defects. All I can say is, I should be heartbroken without them."

"Having first accepted me as your servant, you now permit me to love you," he said, trembling and looking in my face at each word. "My first prayer has been more than answered."

"But," I hastened to reply, "your position seems to me a better one than mine. I should not object to change places, and this change it lies with you to bring about."

"In my turn, I thank you," he replied. "I know the duties of a faithful lover. It is mine to prove that I am worthy of you; the trials shall be as long as you choose to make them. If I belie your hopes, you have only—God! that I should say it—to reject me."

"I know that you love me," I replied. "So far," with a cruel emphasis on the words, "you stand first in my regard. Otherwise you would not be here."

Then we began to walk up and down as we talked, and I must say that so soon as my Spaniard had recovered himself he put forth the genuine eloquence of the heart. It was not passion it breathed, but a marvelous tenderness of feeling which he beautifully compared to the divine love. His thrilling voice, which lent an added charm to thoughts, in themselves so exquisite, reminded me of the nightingale's note. He spoke low, using only the middle tones of a fine instrument, and words flowed upon words with the rush of a torrent. It was the overflow of the heart.

"No more," I said, "or I shall not be able to tear myself away."

And with a gesture I dismissed him.

"You have committed yourself now, mademoiselle," said Griffith.

"In England that might be so, but not in France," I replied with nonchalance. "I intend to make a love match, and am feeling my way—that is all."

You see, dear, as love did not come to me, I had to do as Mahomet did with the mountain.

Friday.

Once more I have seen my slave. He has become very timid, and puts on an air of pious devotion, which I like, for it seems to say that he feels my power and fascination in every fibre. But nothing in his look or manner can rouse in these society sibyls any suspicion of the boundless love which I see. Don't suppose though, dear, that I am carried away, mastered, tamed; on the contrary, the taming, mastering, and carrying away are on my side...

In short, I am quite capable of reason. Oh! to feel again the terror of that fascination in which I was held by the schoolmaster, the plebeian, the man I kept at a distance!

The fact is that love is of two kinds—one which commands, and one which obeys. The two are quite distinct, and the passion to which the one gives rise is

not the passion of the other. To get her full of life, perhaps a woman ought to have experience of both. Can the two passions ever co-exist? Can the man in whom we inspire love inspire it in us? Will the day ever come when Felipe is my master? Shall I tremble then, as he does now? These are questions which make me shudder.

He is very blind! In his place I should have thought Mlle. de Chaulieu, meeting me under the limes, a cold, calculating coquette, with starched manners. No, that is not love, it is playing with fire. I am still fond of Felipe, but I am calm and at my ease with him now. No more obstacles! What a terrible thought! It is all ebb-tide within, and I fear to question my heart. His mistake was in concealing the ardor of his love; he ought to have forced my self-control.

In a word, I was naughty, and I have not got the reward such naughtiness brings. No, dear, however sweet the memory of that half-hour beneath the trees, it is nothing like the excitement of the old time with its: "Shall I go? Shall I not go? Shall I write to him? Shall I not write?"

Is it thus with all our pleasures? Is suspense always better than enjoyment? Hope than fruition? Is it the rich who in very truth are the poor? Have we not both perhaps exaggerated feeling by giving to imagination too free a rein? There are times when this thought freezes me. Shall I tell you why? Because I am meditating another visit to the bottom of the garden—without Griffith. How far could I go in this direction? Imagination knows no limit, but it is not so with pleasure. Tell me, dear be-furbelowed professor, how can one reconcile the two goals of a woman's existence?

XXII. LOUISE TO FELIPE

I am not pleased with you. If you did not cry over Racine's Berenice, and feel it to be the most terrible of tragedies, there is no kinship in our souls; we shall never get on together, and had better break off at once. Let us meet no more. Forget me; for if I do not have a satisfactory reply, I shall forget you. You will become M. le Baron de Macumer for me, or rather you will cease to be at all.

Yesterday at Mme. d'Espard's you had a self-satisfied air which disgusted me. No doubt, apparently, about your conquest! In sober earnest, your self-possession alarms me. Not a trace in you of the humble slave of your first letter. Far from betraying the absent-mindedness of a lover, you polished epigrams! This is not the attitude of a true believer, always prostrate before his

divinity.

If you do not feel me to be the very breath of your life, a being nobler than other women, and to be judged by other standards, then I must be less than a woman in your sight. You have roused in me a spirit of mistrust, Felipe, and its angry mutterings have drowned the accents of tenderness. When I look back upon what has passed between us, I feel in truth that I have a right to be suspicious. For know, Prime Minister of all the Spains, that I have reflected much on the defenceless condition of our sex. My innocence has held a torch, and my fingers are not burnt. Let me repeat to you, then, what my youthful experience taught me.

In all other matters, duplicity, faithlessness, and broken pledges are brought to book and punished; but not so with love, which is at once the victim, the accuser, the counsel, judge, and executioner. The cruelest treachery, the most heartless crimes, are those which remain for ever concealed, with two hearts alone for witness. How indeed should the victim proclaim them without injury to herself? Love, therefore, has its own code, its own penal system, with which the world has no concern.

Now, for my part, I have resolved never to pardon a serious misdemeanor, and in love, pray, what is not serious? Yesterday you had all the air of a man successful in his suit. You would be wrong to doubt it; and yet, if this assurance robbed you of the charming simplicity which sprang from uncertainty, I should blame you severely. I would have you neither bashful nor self-complacent; I would not have you in terror of losing my affection—that would be an insult—but neither would I have you wear your love lightly as a thing of course. Never should your heart be freer than mine. If you know nothing of the torture that a single stab of doubt brings to the soul, tremble lest I give you a lesson!

In a single glance I confided my heart to you, and you read the meaning. The purest feelings that ever took root in a young girl's breast are yours. The thought and meditation of which I have told you served only to enrich the mind; but if ever the wounded heart turns to the brain for counsel, be sure the young girl would show some kinship with the demon of knowledge and of daring.

I swear to you, Felipe, if you love me, as I believe you do and if I have reason to suspect the least falling off in the fear, obedience, and respect which you have hitherto professed, if the pure flame of passion which first kindled the fire of my heart should seem to me any day to burn less vividly, you need fear no reproaches. I would not weary you with letters bearing any trace of weakness, pride, or anger, nor even with one of warning like this. But if I spoke no words, Felipe, my face would tell you that death was near. And yet I

should not die till I had branded you with infamy, and sown eternal sorrow in your heart; you would see the girl you loved dishonored and lost in this world, and know her doomed to everlasting suffering in the next.

Do not therefore, I implore you, give me cause to envy the old, happy Louise, the object of your pure worship, whose heart expanded in the sunshine of happiness, since, in the words of Dante, she possessed,

Senza brama, sicura ricchezza!

I have searched the Inferno through to find the most terrible punishment, some torture of the mind to which I might link the vengeance of God.

Yesterday, as I watched you, doubt went through me like a sharp, cold dagger's point. Do you know what that means? I mistrusted you, and the pang was so terrible, I could not endure it longer. If my service be too hard, leave it, I would not keep you. Do I need any proof of your cleverness? Keep for me the flowers of your wit. Show to others no fine surface to call forth flattery, compliments, or praise. Come to me, laden with hatred or scorn, the butt of calumny, come to me with the news that women flout you and ignore you, and not one loves you; then, ah! then you will know the treasures of Louise's heart and love.

We are only rich when our wealth is buried so deep that all the world might trample it under foot, unknowing. If you were handsome, I don't suppose I should have looked at you twice, or discovered one of the thousand reasons out of which my love sprang. True, we know no more of these reasons than we know why it is the sun makes the flowers to bloom, and ripens the fruit. Yet I could tell you of one reason very dear to me.

The character, expression, and individuality that ennoble your face are a sealed book to all but me. Mine is the power which transforms you into the most lovable of men, and that is why I would keep your mental gifts also for myself. To others they should be as meaningless as your eyes, the charm of your mouth and features. Let it be mine alone to kindle the beacon of your intelligence, as I bring the lovelight into your eyes. I would have you the Spanish grandee of old days, cold, ungracious, haughty, a monument to be gazed at from afar, like the ruins of some barbaric power, which no one ventures to explore. Now, you have nothing better to do than to open up pleasant promenades for the public, and show yourself of a Parisian affability!

Is my ideal portrait, then, forgotten? Your excessive cheerfulness was redolent of your love. Had it not been for a restraining glance from me, you would have proclaimed to the most sharp-sighted, keen-witted, and unsparing of Paris salons, that your inspiration was drawn from Armande-Louise-Marie de Chaulieu.

I believe in your greatness too much to think for a moment that your love is ruled by policy; but if you did not show a childlike simplicity when with me, I could only pity you. Spite of this first fault, you are still deeply admired by LOUISE DE CHAULIEU.

XXIII. FELIPE TO LOUISE

When God beholds our faults, He sees also our repentance. Yes, my beloved mistress, you are right. I felt that I had displeased you, but knew not how. Now that you have explained the cause of your trouble, I find in it fresh motive to adore you. Like the God of Israel, you are a jealous deity, and I rejoice to see it. For what is holier and more precious than jealousy? My fair guardian angel, jealousy is an ever-wakeful sentinel; it is to love what pain is to the body, the faithful herald of evil. Be jealous of your servant, Louise, I beg of you; the harder you strike, the more contrite will he be and kiss the rod, in all submission, which proves that he is not indifferent to you.

But, alas! dear, if the pains it cost me to vanquish my timidity and master feelings you thought so feeble were invisible to you, will Heaven, think you, reward them? I assure you, it needed no slight effort to show myself to you as I was in the days before I loved. At Madrid I was considered a good talker, and I wanted you to see for yourself the few gifts I may possess. If this were vanity, it has been well punished.

Your last glance utterly unnerved me. Never had I so quailed, even when the army of France was at the gates of Cadiz and I read peril for my life in the dissembling words of my royal master. Vainly I tried to discover the cause of your displeasure, and the lack of sympathy between us which this fact disclosed was terrible to me. For in truth I have no wish but to act by your will, think your thoughts, see with your eyes, respond to your joy and suffering, as my body responds to heat and cold. The crime and the anguish lay for me in the breach of unison in that common life of feeling which you have made so fair.

"I have vexed her!" I exclaimed over and over again, like one distraught. My noble, my beautiful Louise, if anything could increase the fervor of my devotion or confirm my belief in your delicate moral intuitions, it would be the new light which your words have thrown upon my own feelings. Much in them, of which my mind was formerly but dimly conscious, you have now made clear. If this be designed as chastisement, what can be the sweetness of your rewards?

Louise, for me it was happiness enough to be accepted as your servant. You have given me the life of which I despaired. No longer do I draw a useless breath, I have something to spend myself for; my force has an outlet, if only in suffering for you. Once more I say, as I have said before, that you will never find me other than I was when first I offered myself as your lowly bondman. Yes, were you dishonored and lost, to use your own words, my heart would only cling the more closely to you for your self-sought misery. It would be my care to staunch your wounds, and my prayers should importune God with the story of your innocence and your wrongs.

Did I not tell you that the feelings of my heart for you are not a lover's only, that I will be to you father, mother, sister, brother—ay, a whole family—anything or nothing, as you may decree? And is it not your own wish which has confined within the compass of a lover's feeling so many varying forms of devotion? Pardon me, then, if at times the father and brother disappear behind the lover, since you know they are none the less there, though screened from view. Would that you could read the feelings of my heart when you appear before me, radiant in your beauty, the centre of admiring eyes, reclining calmly in your carriage in the Champs-Elysees, or seated in your box at the Opera! Then would you know how absolutely free from selfish taint is the pride with which I hear the praises of your loveliness and grace, praises which warm my heart even to the strangers who utter them! When by chance you have raised me to elysium by a friendly greeting, my pride is mingled with humility, and I depart as though God's blessing rested on me. Nor does the joy vanish without leaving a long track of light behind. It breaks on me through the clouds of my cigarette smoke. More than ever do I feel how every drop of this surging blood throbs for you.

Can you be ignorant how you are loved? After seeing you, I return to my study, and the glitter of its Saracenic ornaments sinks to nothing before the brightness of your portrait, when I open the spring that keeps it locked up from every eye and lose myself in endless musings or link my happiness to verse. From the heights of heaven I look down upon the course of a life such as my hopes dare to picture it! Have you never, in the silence of the night, or through the roar of the town, heard the whisper of a voice in your sweet, dainty ear? Does no one of the thousand prayers that I speed to you reach home?

By dint of silent contemplation of your pictured face, I have succeeded in deciphering the expression of every feature and tracing its connection with some grace of the spirit, and then I pen a sonnet to you in Spanish on the harmony of the twofold beauty in which nature has clothed you. These sonnets you will never see, for my poetry is too unworthy of its theme, I dare not send it to you. Not a moment passes without thoughts of you, for my whole being is bound up in you, and if you ceased to be its animating principle, every part

would ache.

Now, Louise, can you realize the torture to me of knowing that I had displeased you, while entirely ignorant of the cause? The ideal double life which seemed so fair was cut short. My heart turned to ice within me as, hopeless of any other explanation, I concluded that you had ceased to love me. With heavy heart, and yet not wholly without comfort, I was falling back upon my old post as servant; then your letter came and turned all to joy. Oh! might I but listen for ever to such chiding!

Once a child, picking himself up from a tumble, turned to his mother with the words "Forgive me." Hiding his own hurt, he sought pardon for the pain he had caused her. Louise, I was that child, and such as I was then, I am now. Here is the key to my character, which your slave in all humility places in your hands.

But do not fear, there will be no more stumbling. Keep tight the chain which binds me to you, so that a touch may communicate your lightest wish to him who will ever remain your slave, FELIPE.

XXIV. LOUISE DE CHAULIEU TO RENEE DE L'ESTORADE October.

My dear friend,—How is it possible that you, who brought yourself in two months to marry a broken-down invalid in order to mother him, should know anything of that terrible shifting drama, enacted in the recesses of the heart, which we call love—a drama where death lies in a glance or a light reply?

I had reserved for Felipe one last supreme test which was to be decisive. I wanted to know whether his love was the love of a Royalist for his King, who can do no wrong. Why should the loyalty of a Catholic be less supreme?

He walked with me a whole night under the limes at the bottom of the garden, and not a shadow of suspicion crossed his soul. Next day he loved me better, but the feeling was as reverent, as humble, as regretful as ever; he had not presumed an iota. Oh! he is a very Spaniard, a very Abencerrage. He scaled my wall to come and kiss the hand which in the darkness I reached down to him from my balcony. He might have broken his neck; how many of our young men would do the like?

But all this is nothing; Christians suffer the horrible pangs of martyrdom in the hope of heaven. The day before yesterday I took aside the royal ambassador-to-be at the court of Spain, my much respected father, and said to him with a smile:

"Sir, some of your friends will have it that you are marrying your dear Armande to the nephew of an ambassador who has been very anxious for this connection, and has long begged for it. Also, that the marriage-contract arranges for his nephew to succeed on his death to his enormous fortune and his title, and bestows on the young couple in the meantime an income of a hundred thousand livres, on the bride a dowry of eight hundred thousand francs. Your daughter weeps, but bows to the unquestioned authority of her honored parent. Some people are unkind enough to say that, behind her tears, she conceals a worldly and ambitious soul.

"Now, we are going to the gentleman's box at the Opera to-night, and M. le Baron de Macumer will visit us there."

"Macumer needs a touch of the spur then," said my father, smiling at me, as though I were a female ambassador.

"You mistake Clarissa Harlowe for Figaro!" I cried, with a glance of scorn and mockery. "When you see me with my right hand ungloved, you will give the lie to this impertinent gossip, and will mark your displeasure at it."

"I may make my mind easy about your future. You have no more got a girl's headpiece than Jeanne d'Arc had a woman's heart. You will be happy, you will love nobody, and will allow yourself to be loved."

This was too much. I burst into laughter.

"What is it, little flirt?" he said.

"I tremble for my country's interests..."

And seeing him look quite blank, I added:

"At Madrid!"

"You have no idea how this little nun has learned, in a year's time, to make fun of her father," he said to the Duchess.

"Armande makes light of everything," my mother replied, looking me in the face.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Why, you are not even afraid of rheumatism on these damp nights," she said, with another meaning glance at me.

"Oh!" I answered, "the mornings are so hot!"

The Duchess looked down.

"It's high time she were married," said my father, "and it had better be before I go."

"If you wish it," I replied demurely.

Two hours later, my mother and I, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse and Mme. d'Espard, were all four blooming like roses in the front of the box. I had seated myself sideways, giving only a shoulder to the house, so that I could see everything, myself unseen, in that spacious box which fills one of the two angles at the back of the hall, between the columns.

Macumer came, stood up, and put his opera-glasses before his eyes so that he might be able to look at me comfortably.

In the first interval entered the young man whom I call "king of the profligates." The Comte Henri de Marsay, who has great beauty of an effeminate kind, entered the box with an epigram in his eyes, a smile upon his lips, and an air of satisfaction over his whole countenance. He first greeted my mother, Mme. d'Espard, and the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, the Comte d'Esgrignon, and M. de Canalis; then turning to me, he said:

"I do not know whether I shall be the first to congratulate you on an event which will make you the object of envy to many."

"Ah! a marriage!" I cried. "Is it left for me, a girl fresh from the convent, to tell you that predicted marriages never come off."

M. de Marsay bent down, whispering to Macumer, and I was convinced, from the movement of his lips, that what he said was this:

"Baron, you are perhaps in love with that little coquette, who has used you for her own ends; but as the question is one not of love, but of marriage, it is as well for you to know what is going on."

Macumer treated this officious scandal-monger to one of those glances of his which seem to me so eloquent of noble scorn, and replied to the effect that he was "not in love with any little coquette." His whole bearing so delighted me, that directly I caught sight of my father, the glove was off.

Felipe had not a shadow of fear or doubt. How well did he bear out my expectations! His faith is only in me, society cannot hurt him with its lies. Not a muscle of the Arab's face stirred, not a drop of the blue blood flushed his olive cheek.

The two young counts went out, and I said, laughing, to Macumer:

"M. de Marsay has been treating you to an epigram on me."

"He did more," he replied. "It was an epithalamium."

"You speak Greek to me," I said, rewarding him with a smile and a certain look which always embarrasses him.

My father meantime was talking to Mme. de Maufrigneuse.

"I should think so!" he exclaimed. "The gossip which gets about is scandalous. No sooner has a girl come out than everyone is keen to marry her, and the ridiculous stories that are invented! I shall never force Armande to marry against her will. I am going to take a turn in the promenade, otherwise people will be saying that I allowed the rumor to spread in order to suggest the marriage to the ambassador; and Caesar's daughter ought to be above suspicion, even more than his wife—if that were possible."

The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse and Mme. d'Espard shot glances first at my mother, then at the Baron, brimming over with sly intelligence and repressed curiosity. With their serpent's cunning they had at last got an inkling of something going on. Of all mysteries in life, love is the least mysterious! It exhales from women, I believe, like a perfume, and she who can conceal it is a very monster! Our eyes prattle even more than our tongues.

Having enjoyed the delightful sensation of finding Felipe rise to the occasion, as I had wished, it was only in nature I should hunger for more. So I made the signal agreed on for telling him that he might come to my window by the dangerous road you know of. A few hours later I found him, upright as a statue, glued to the wall, his hand resting on the balcony of my window, studying the reflections of the light in my room.

"My dear Felipe," I said, "You have acquitted yourself well to-night; you behaved exactly as I should have done had I been told that you were on the point of marrying."

"I thought," he replied, "that you would hardly have told others before me."

"And what right have you to this privilege?"

"The right of one who is your devoted slave."

"In very truth?"

"I am, and shall ever remain so."

"But suppose this marriage was inevitable; suppose that I had agreed..."

Two flashing glances lit up the moonlight—one directed to me, the other to the precipice which the wall made for us. He seemed to calculate whether a fall together would mean death; but the thought merely passed like lightning over his face and sparkled in his eyes. A power, stronger than passion, checked the impulse.

"An Arab cannot take back his word," he said in a husky voice. "I am your slave to do with as you will; my life is not mine to destroy."

The hand on the balcony seemed as though its hold were relaxing. I placed mine on it as I said:

"Felipe, my beloved, from this moment I am your wife in thought and will. Go in the morning to ask my father for my hand. He wishes to retain my fortune; but if you promise to acknowledge receipt of it in the contract, his consent will no doubt be given. I am no longer Armande de Chaulieu. Leave me at once; no breath of scandal must touch Louise de Macumer."

He listened with blanched face and trembling limbs, then, like a flash, had cleared the ten feet to the ground in safety. It was a moment of agony, but he waved his hand to me and disappeared.

"I am loved then," I said to myself, "as never woman was before." And I fell asleep in the calm content of a child, my destiny for ever fixed.

About two o'clock next day my father summoned me to his private room, where I found the Duchess and Macumer. There was an interchange of civilities. I replied quite simply that if my father and M. Henarez were of one mind, I had no reason to oppose their wishes. Thereupon my mother invited the Baron to dinner; and after dinner, we all four went for a drive in the Bois de Boulogne, where I had the pleasure of smiling ironically to M. de Marsay as he passed on horseback and caught sight of Macumer sitting opposite to us beside my father.

My bewitching Felipe has had his cards reprinted as follows:

HENAREZ

(Baron de Macumer, formerly Duc de Soria.)

Every morning he brings me with his own hands a splendid bouquet, hidden in which I never fail to find a letter, containing a Spanish sonnet in my honor, which he has composed during the night.

Not to make this letter inordinately large, I send you as specimens only the first and last of these sonnets, which I have translated for your benefit, word for word, and line for line:—

FIRST SONNET

Many a time I've stood, clad in thin silken vest,

Drawn sword in hand, with steady pulse,

Waiting the charge of a raging bull,

And the thrust of his horn, sharper-pointed than Phoebe's crescent.

I've scaled, on my lips the lilt of an Andalusian dance,

The steep redoubt under a rain of fire;

I've staked my life upon a hazard of the dice

Careless, as though it were a gold doubloon.

My hand would seek the ball out of the cannon's mouth,

But now meseems I grow more timid than a crouching hair,

Or a child spying some ghost in the curtain's folds.

For when your sweet eye rests on me,

Any icy sweat covers my brow, my knees give way,

I tremble, shrink, my courage gone.

SECOND SONNET

Last night I fain would sleep to dream of thee,

But jealous sleep fled my eyelids,

I sought the balcony and looked towards heaven,

Always my glance flies upward when I think of thee.

Strange sight! whose meaning love alone can tell,

The sky had lost its sapphire hue,

The stars, dulled diamonds in their golden mount,

Twinkled no more nor shed their warmth.

The moon, washed of her silver radiance lily-white,

Hung mourning over the gloomy plain, for thou hast robbed

The heavens of all that made them bright.

The snowy sparkle of the moon is on thy lovely brow,

Heaven's azure centres in thine eyes,

Thy lashes fall like starry rays.

What more gracious way of saying to a young girl that she fills your life? Tell me what you think of this love, which expends itself in lavishing the treasures alike of the earth and of the soul. Only within the last ten days have I grasped the meaning of that Spanish gallantry, so famous in old days.

Ah me! dear, what is going on now at La Crampade? How often do I take a stroll there, inspecting the growth of our crops! Have you no news to give of our mulberry trees, our last winter's plantations? Does everything prosper as

you wish? And while the buds are opening on our shrubs—I will not venture to speak of the bedding-out plants—have they also blossomed in the bosom of the wife? Does Louis continue his policy of madrigals? Do you enter into each other's thoughts? I wonder whether your little runlet of wedding peace is better than the raging torrent of my love! Has my sweet lady professor taken offence? I cannot believe it; and if it were so, I should send Felipe off at once, post-haste, to fling himself at her knees and bring back to me my pardon or her head. Sweet love, my life here is a splendid success, and I want to know how it fares with life in Provence. We have just increased our family by the addition of a Spaniard with the complexion of a Havana cigar, and your congratulations still tarry.

Seriously, my sweet Renee, I am anxious. I am afraid lest you should be eating your heart out in silence, for fear of casting a gloom over my sunshine. Write to me at once, naughty child! and tell me your life in its every minutest detail; tell me whether you still hold back, whether your "independence" still stands erect, or has fallen on its knees, or is sitting down comfortably, which would indeed be serious. Can you suppose that the incidents of your married life are without interest for me? I muse at times over all that you have said to me. Often when, at the Opera, I seem absorbed in watching the pirouetting dancers, I am saying to myself, "It is half-past nine, perhaps she is in bed. What is she about? Is she happy? Is she alone with her independence? or has her independence gone the way of other dead and castoff independences?"

A thousand loves.

XXV. RENEE DE L'ESTORADE TO LOUISE DE CHAULIEU

Saucy girl! Why should I write? What could I say? Whilst your life is varied by social festivities, as well as by the anguish, the tempers, and the flowers of love—all of which you describe so graphically, that I might be watching some first-rate acting at the theatre—mine is as monotonous and regular as though it were passed in a convent.

We always go to bed at nine and get up with daybreak. Our meals are served with a maddening punctuality. Nothing ever happens. I have accustomed myself without much difficulty to this mapping out of the day, which perhaps is, after all, in the nature of things. Where would the life of the universe be but for that subjection to fixed laws which, according to the astronomers, so Louis tells me, rule the spheres! It is not order of which we weary.

Then I have laid upon myself certain rules of dress, and these occupy my time in the mornings. I hold it part of my duty as a wife to look as charming as possible. I feel a certain satisfaction in it, and it causes lively pleasure to the good old man and to Louis. After lunch, we walk. When the newspapers arrive, I disappear to look after my household affairs or to read—for I read a great deal—or to write to you. I come back to the others an hour before dinner; and after dinner we play cards, or receive visits, or pay them. Thus my days pass between a contented old man, who has done with passions, and the man who owes his happiness to me. Louis' happiness is so radiant that it has at last warmed my heart.

For women, happiness no doubt cannot consist in the mere satisfaction of desire. Sometimes, in the evening, when I am not required to take a hand in the game, and can sink back in my armchair, imagination bears me on its strong wings into the very heart of your life. Then, its riches, its changeful tints, its surging passions become my own, and I ask myself to what end such a stormy preface can lead. May I not swallow up the book itself? For you, my darling, the illusions of love are possible; for me, only the facts of homely life remain. Yes, your love seems to me a dream!

Therefore I find it hard to understand why you are determined to throw so much romance over it. Your ideal man must have more soul than fire, more nobility and self-command than passion. You persist in trying to clothe in living form the dream ideal of a girl on the threshold of life; you demand sacrifices for the pleasure of rewarding them; you submit your Felipe to tests in order to ascertain whether desire, hope, and curiosity are enduring in their nature. But, child, behind all your fantastic stage scenery rises the altar, where everlasting bonds are forged. The very morrow of your marriage the graceful structure raised by your subtle strategy may fall before that terrible reality which makes of a girl a woman, of a gallant a husband. Remember that there is not exemption for lovers. For them, as for ordinary folk like Louis and me, there lurks beneath the wedding rejoicings the great "Perhaps" of Rabelais.

I do not blame you, though, of course, it was rash, for talking with Felipe in the garden, or for spending a night with him, you on your balcony, he on his wall; but you make a plaything of life, and I am afraid that life may some day turn the tables. I dare not give you the counsel which my own experience would suggest; but let me repeat once more from the seclusion of my valley that the viaticum of married life lies in these words—resignation and self-sacrifice. For, spite of all your tests, your coyness, and your vigilance, I can see that marriage will mean to you what it has been to me. The greater the passion, the steeper the precipice we have hewn for our fall—that is the only difference.

Oh! what I would give to see the Baron de Macumer and talk with him for

an hour or two! Your happiness lies so near my heart.

XXVI. LOUISE DE MACUMER TO RENEE DE L'ESTORADE March.

As Felipe has carried out, with a truly Saracenic generosity, the wishes of my father and mother in acknowledging the fortune he has not received from me, the Duchess has become even more friendly to me than before. She calls me little sly-boots, little woman of the world, and says I know how to use my tongue.

"But, dear mamma," I said to her the evening before the contract was signed, "you attribute to cunning and smartness on my part what is really the outcome of the truest, simplest, most unselfish, most devoted love that ever was! I assure you that I am not at all the 'woman of the world' you do me the honor of believing me to be."

"Come, come, Armande," she said, putting her arm on my neck and drawing me to her, in order to kiss my forehead, "you did not want to go back to the convent, you did not want to die an old maid, and, like a fine, noble-hearted Chaulieu, as you are, you recognized the necessity of building up your father's family. (The Duke was listening. If you knew, Renee, what flattery lies for him in these words.) I have watched you during the whole winter, poking your little nose into all that goes on, forming very sensible opinions about men and the present state of society in France. And you have picked out the one Spaniard capable of giving you the splendid position of a woman who reigns supreme in her own house. My little girl, you treated him exactly as Tullia treats your brother."

"What lessons they give in my sister's convent!" exclaimed my father.

A glance at my father cut him short at once; then, turning to the Duchess, I said:

"Madame, I love my future husband, Felipe de Soria, with all the strength of my soul. Although this love sprang up without my knowledge, and though I fought it stoutly when it first made itself felt, I swear to you that I never gave way to it till I had recognized in the Baron de Macumer a character worthy of mine, a heart of which the delicacy, the generosity, the devotion, and the temper are suited to my own."

"But, my dear," she began, interrupting me, "he is as ugly as..."

"As anything you like," I retorted quickly, "but I love his ugliness."

"If you love him, Armande," said my father, "and have the strength to

master your love, you must not risk your happiness. Now, happiness in marriage depends largely on the first days—"

"Days only?" interrupted my mother. Then, with a glance at my father, she continued, "You had better leave us, my dear, to have our talk together."

"You are to be married, dear child," the Duchess then began in a low voice, "in three days. It becomes my duty, therefore, without silly whimpering, which would be unfitting our rank in life, to give you the serious advice which every mother owes to her daughter. You are marrying a man whom you love, and there is no reason why I should pity you or myself. I have only known you for a year; and if this period has been long enough for me to learn to love you, it is hardly sufficient to justify floods of tears at the idea of losing you. Your mental gifts are even more remarkable than those of your person; you have gratified maternal pride, and have shown yourself a sweet and loving daughter. I, in my turn, can promise you that you will always find a staunch friend in your mother. You smile? Alas! it too often happens that a mother who has lived on excellent terms with her daughter, as long as the daughter is a mere girl, comes to cross purposes with her when they are both women together.

"It is your happiness which I want, so listen to my words. The love which you now feel is that of a young girl, and is natural to us all, for it is woman's destiny to cling to a man. Unhappily, pretty one, there is but one man in the world for a woman! And sometimes this man, whom fate has marked out for us, is not the one whom we, mistaking a passing fancy for love, choose as husband. Strange as what I say may appear to you, it is worth noting. If we cannot love the man we have chosen, the fault is not exclusively ours, it lies with both, or sometimes with circumstances over which we have no control. Yet there is no reason why the man chosen for us by our family, the man to whom our fancy has gone out, should not be the man whom we can love. The barriers which arise later between husband and wife are often due to lack of perseverance on both sides. The task of transforming a husband into a lover is not less delicate than that other task of making a husband of the lover, in which you have just proved yourself marvelously successful.

"I repeat it, your happiness is my object. Never allow yourself, then, to forget that the first three months of your married life may work your misery if you do not submit to the yoke with the same forbearance, tenderness, and intelligence that you have shown during the days of courtship. For, my little rogue, you know very well that you have indulged in all the innocent pleasures of a clandestine love affair. If the culmination of your love begins with disappointment, dislike, nay, even with pain, well, come and tell me about it. Don't hope for too much from marriage at first; it will perhaps give you more discomfort than joy. The happiness of your life requires at least as patient cherishing as the early shoots of love.

"To conclude, if by chance you should lose the lover, you will find in his place the father of your children. In this, my dear child, lies the whole secret of social life. Sacrifice everything to the man whose name you bear, the man whose honor and reputation cannot suffer in the least degree without involving you in frightful consequences. Such sacrifice is thus not only an absolute duty for women of our rank, it is also their wisest policy. This, indeed, is the distinctive mark of great moral principles, that they hold good and are expedient from whatever aspect they are viewed. But I need say no more to you on this point.

"I fancy you are of a jealous disposition, and, my dear, if you knew how jealous I am! But you must not be stupid over it. To publish your jealousy to the world is like playing at politics with your cards upon the table, and those who let their own game be seen learn nothing of their opponents'. Whatever happens, we must know how to suffer in silence."

She added that she intended having some plain talk about me with Macumer the evening before the wedding.

Raising my mother's beautiful arm, I kissed her hand and dropped on it a tear, which the tone of real feeling in her voice had brought to my eyes. In the advice she had given me, I read high principle worthy of herself and of me, true wisdom, and a tenderness of heart unspoilt by the narrow code of society. Above all, I saw that she understood my character. These few simple words summed up the lessons which life and experience had brought her, perhaps at a heavy price. She was moved, and said, as she looked at me:

"Dear little girl, you've got a nasty crossing before you. And most women, in their ignorance or their disenchantment, are as wise as the Earl of Westmoreland!"

We both laughed; but I must explain the joke. The evening before, a Russian princess had told us an anecdote of this gentleman. He had suffered frightfully from sea-sickness in crossing the Channel, and turned tail when he got near Italy, because he had heard some one speak of "crossing" the Alps. "Thank you; I've had quite enough crossings already," he said.

You will understand, Renee, that your gloomy philosophy and my mother's lecture were calculated to revive the fears which used to disturb us at Blois. The nearer marriage approached, the more did I need to summon all my strength, my resolution, and my affection to face this terrible passage from maidenhood to womanhood. All our conversations came back to my mind, I re-read your letters and discerned in them a vague undertone of sadness.

This anxiety had one advantage at least; it helped me to the regulation expression for a bride as commonly depicted. The consequence was that on

the day of signing the contract everybody said I looked charming and quite the right thing. This morning, at the Mairie, it was an informal business, and only the witnesses were present.

I am writing this tail to my letter while they are putting out my dress for dinner. We shall be married at midnight at the Church of Sainte-Valere, after a very gay evening. I confess that my fears give me a martyr-like and modest air to which I have no right, but which will be admired—why, I cannot conceive. I am delighted to see that poor Felipe is every whit as timorous as I am; society grates on him, he is like a bat in a glass shop.

"Thank Heaven, the day won't last for ever!" he whispered to me in all innocence.

In his bashfulness and timidity he would have liked to have no one there.

The Sardinian ambassador, when he came to sign the contract, took me aside in order to present me with a pearl necklace, linked together by six splendid diamonds—a gift from my sister-in-law, the Duchess de Soria. Along with the necklace was a sapphire bracelet, on the under side of which were engraved the words, "Though unknown, beloved." Two charming letters came with these presents, which, however, I could not accept without consulting Felipe.

"For," I said, "I should not like to see you wearing ornaments that came from any one but me."

He kissed my hand, quite moved, and replied:

"Wear them for the sake of the inscription, and also for the kind feeling, which is sincere."

Saturday evening.

Here, then, my poor Renee, are the last words of your girlfriend. After the midnight Mass, we set off for an estate which Felipe, with kind thought for me, has bought in Nivernais, on the way to Provence. Already my name is Louise de Macumer, but I leave Paris in a few hours as Louise de Chaulieu. However I am called, there will never be for you but one Louise.

XXVII. THE SAME TO THE SAME October.

I have not written to you, dear, since our marriage, nearly eight months ago. And not a line from you! Madame, you are inexcusable.

To begin with, we set off in a post-chaise for the Castle of Chantepleurs,

the property which Macumer has bought in Nivernais. It stands on the banks of the Loire, sixty leagues from Paris. Our servants, with the exception of my maid, were there before us, and we arrived, after a very rapid journey, the next evening. I slept all the way from Paris to beyond Montargis. My lord and master put his arm round me and pillowed my head on his shoulder, upon an arrangement of handkerchiefs. This was the one liberty he took; and the almost motherly tenderness which got the better of his drowsiness, touched me strangely. I fell asleep then under the fire of his eyes, and awoke to find them still blazing; the passionate gaze remained unchanged, but what thoughts had come and gone meanwhile! Twice he had kissed me on the forehead.

At Briare we had breakfast in the carriage. Then followed a talk like our old talks at Blois, while the same Loire we used to admire called forth our praises, and at half-past seven we entered the noble long avenue of lime-trees, acacias, sycamores, and larches which leads to Chantepleurs. At eight we dined; at ten we were in our bedroom, a charming Gothic room, made comfortable with every modern luxury. Felipe, who is thought so ugly, seemed to me quite beautiful in his graceful kindness and the exquisite delicacy of his affection. Of passion, not a trace. All through the journey he might have been an old friend of fifteen years' standing. Later, he has described to me, with all the vivid touches of his first letter, the furious storms that raged within and were not allowed to ruffle the outer surface.

"So far, I have found nothing very terrible in marriage," I said, as I walked to the window and looked out on the glorious moon which lit up a charming park, breathing of heavy scents.

He drew near, put his arm again round me, and said:

"Why fear it? Have I ever yet proved false to my promise in gesture or look? Why should I be false in the future?"

Yet never were words or glances more full of mastery; his voice thrilled every fibre of my heart and roused a sleeping force; his eyes were like the sun in power.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "what a world of Moorish perfidy in this attitude of perpetual prostration!"

He understood, my dear.

So, my fair sweetheart, if I have let months slip by without writing, you can now divine the cause. I have to recall the girl's strange past in order to explain the woman to myself. Renee, I understand you now. Not to her dearest friend, not to her mother, not, perhaps, even to herself, can a happy bride speak of her happiness. This memory ought to remain absolutely her own, an added rapture—a thing beyond words, too sacred for disclosure!

Is it possible that the name of duty has been given to the delicious frenzy of the heart, to the overwhelming rush of passion? And for what purpose? What malevolent power conceived the idea of crushing a woman's sensitive delicacy and all the thousand wiles of her modesty under the fetters of constraint? What sense of duty can force from her these flowers of the heart, the roses of life, the passionate poetry of her nature, apart from love? To claim feeling as a right! Why, it blooms of itself under the sun of love, and shrivels to death under the cold blast of distaste and aversion! Let love guard his own rights!

Oh! my noble Renee! I understand you now. I bow to your greatness, amazed at the depth and clearness of your insight. Yes, the woman who has not used the marriage ceremony, as I have done, merely to legalize and publish the secret election of her heart, has nothing left but to fly to motherhood. When earth fails, the soul makes for heaven!

One hard truth emerges from all that you have said. Only men who are really great know how to love, and now I understand the reason of this. Man obeys two forces—one sensual, one spiritual. Weak or inferior men mistake the first for the last, whilst great souls know how to clothe the merely natural instinct in all the graces of the spirit. The very strength of this spiritual passion imposes severe self-restraint and inspires them with reverence for women. Clearly, feeling is sensitive in proportion to the calibre of the mental powers generally, and this is why the man of genius alone has something of a woman's delicacy. He understands and divines woman, and the wings of passion on which he raises her are restrained by the timidity of the sensitive spirit. But when the mind, the heart, and the senses all have their share in the rapture which transports us—ah! then there is no falling to earth, rather it is to heaven we soar, alas! for only too brief a visit.

Such, dear soul, is the philosophy of the first three months of my married life. Felipe is angelic. Without figure of speech, he is another self, and I can think aloud with him. His greatness of soul passes my comprehension. Possession only attaches him more closely to me, and he discovers in his happiness new motives for loving me. For him, I am the nobler part of himself. I can foresee that years of wedded life, far from impairing his affection, will only make it more assured, develop fresh possibilities of enjoyment, and bind us in more perfect sympathy. What a delirium of joy!

It is part of my nature that pleasure has an exhilarating effect on me; it leaves sunshine behind, and becomes a part of my inner being. The interval which parts one ecstasy from another is like the short night which marks off our long summer days. The sun which flushed the mountain tops with warmth in setting finds them hardly cold when it rises. What happy chance has given me such a destiny? My mother had roused a host of fears in me; her forecast,

which, though free from the alloy of vulgar pettiness, seemed to me redolent of jealousy, has been falsified by the event. Your fears and hers, my own—all have vanished in thin air!

We remained at Chantepleurs seven months and a half, for all the world like a couple of runaway lovers fleeing the parental warmth, while the roses of pleasure crowned our love and embellished our dual solitude. One morning, when I was even happier than usual, I began to muse over my lot, and suddenly Renee and her prosaic marriage flashed into my mind. It seemed to me that now I could grasp the inner meaning in your life. Oh! my sweet, why do we speak a different tongue? Your marriage of convenience and my love match are two worlds, as widely separated as the finite from infinity. You still walk the earth, whilst I range the heavens! Your sphere is human, mine divine! Love crowned me queen, you reign by reason and duty. So lofty are the regions where I soar, that a fall would shiver me to atoms.

But no more of this. I shrink from painting to you the rainbow brightness, the profusion, the exuberant joy of love's springtime, as we know it.

For ten days we have been in Paris, staying in a charming house in the Rue du Bac, prepared for us by the architect to whom Felipe intrusted the decoration of Chantepleurs. I have been listening, in all the full content of an assured and sanctioned love, to that divine music of Rossini's, which used to soothe me when, as a restless girl, I hungered vaguely after experience. They say I am more beautiful, and I have a childish pleasure in hearing myself called "Madame."

Friday morning.

Renee, my fair saint, the happiness of my own life pulls me for ever back to you. I feel that I can be more to you than ever before, you are so dear to me! I have studied your wedded life closely in the light of my own opening chapters; and you seem to me to come out of the scrutiny so great, so noble, so splendid in your goodness, that I here declare myself your inferior and humble admirer, as well as your friend. When I think what marriage has been to me, it seems to me that I should have died, had it turned out otherwise. And you live! Tell me what your heart feeds on! Never again shall I make fun of you. Mockery, my sweet, is the child of ignorance; we jest at what we know nothing of. "Recruits will laugh where the veteran soldier looks grave," was a remark made to me by the Comte de Chaulieu, that poor cavalry officer whose campaigning so far has consisted in marches from Paris to Fontainebleau and back again.

I surmise, too, my dear love, that you have not told me all. There are wounds which you have hidden. You suffer; I am convinced of it. In trying to make out at this distance and from the scraps you tell me the reasons of your

conduct, I have weaved together all sorts of romantic theories about you. "She has made a mere experiment in marriage," I thought one evening, "and what is happiness for me had proved only suffering to her. Her sacrifice is barren of reward, and she would not make it greater than need be. The unctuous axioms of social morality are only used to cloak her disappointment." Ah! Renee, the best of happiness is that it needs no dogma and no fine words to pave the way; it speaks for itself, while theory has been piled upon theory to justify the system of women's vassalage and thralldom. If self-denial be so noble, so sublime, what, pray, of my joy, sheltered by the gold-and-white canopy of the church, and witnessed by the hand and seal of the most sour-faced of mayors? Is it a thing out of nature?

For the honor of the law, for her own sake, but most of all to make my happiness complete, I long to see my Renee content. Oh! tell me that you see a dawn of love for this Louis who adores you! Tell me that the solemn, symbolic torch of Hymen has not alone served to lighten your darkness, but that love, the glorious sun of our hearts, pours his rays on you. I come back always, you see, to this midday blaze, which will be my destruction, I fear.

Dear Renee, do you remember how, in your outbursts of girlish devotion, you would say to me, as we sat under the vine-covered arbor of the convent garden, "I love you so, Louise, that if God appeared to me in a vision, I would pray Him that all the sorrows of life might be mine, and all the joy yours. I burn to suffer for you"? Now, darling, the day has come when I take up your prayer, imploring Heaven to grant you a share in my happiness.

I must tell you my idea. I have a shrewd notion that you are hatching ambitious plans under the name of Louis de l'Estorade. Very good; get him elected deputy at the approaching election, for he will be very nearly forty then; and as the Chamber does not meet till six months later, he will have just attained the age necessary to qualify for a seat. You will come to Paris—there, isn't that enough? My father, and the friends I shall have made by that time, will learn to know and admire you; and if your father-in-law will agree to found a family, we will get the title of Comte for Louis. That is something at least! And we shall be together.

XXVIII. RENEE DE L'ESTORADE TO LOUISE DE MACUMER
December.

My thrice happy Louise, your letter made me dizzy. For a few moments I held it in my listless hands, while a tear or two sparkled on it in the setting sun. I was alone beneath the small barren rock where I have had a seat placed;

far off, like a lance of steel, the Mediterranean shone. The seat is shaded by aromatic shrubs, and I have had a very large jessamine, some honeysuckle, and Spanish brooms transplanted there, so that some day the rock will be entirely covered with climbing plants. The wild vine has already taken root there. But winter draws near, and all this greenery is faded like a piece of old tapestry. In this spot I am never molested; it is understood that here I wish to be alone. It is named Louise's seat—a proof, is it not, that even in solitude I am not alone here?

If I tell you all these details, to you so paltry, and try to describe the vision of green with which my prophetic gaze clothes this bare rock—on which top some freak of nature has set up a magnificent parasol pine—it is because in all this I have found an emblem to which I cling.

It was while your blessed lot was filling me with joy and—must I confess it?—with bitter envy too, that I felt the first movement of my child within, and this mystery of physical life reacted upon the inner recesses of my soul. This indefinable sensation, which partakes of the nature at once of a warning, a delight, a pain, a promise, and a fulfilment; this joy, which is mine alone, unshared by mortal, this wonder of wonders, has whispered to me that one day this rock shall be a carpet of flowers, resounding to the merry laughter of children, that I shall at last be blessed among women, and from me shall spring forth fountains of life. Now I know what I have lived for! Thus the first certainty of bearing within me another life brought healing to my wounds. A joy that beggars description has crowned for me those long days of sacrifice, in which Louis had already found his.

Sacrifice! I said to myself, how far does it excel passion! What pleasure has roots so deep as one which is not personal but creative? Is not the spirit of Sacrifice a power mightier than any of its results? Is it not that mysterious, tireless divinity, who hides beneath innumerable spheres in an unexplored centre, through which all worlds in turn must pass? Sacrifice, solitary and secret, rich in pleasures only tasted in silence, which none can guess at, and no profane eye has ever seen; Sacrifice, jealous God and tyrant, God of strength and victory, exhaustless spring which, partaking of the very essence of all that exists, can by no expenditure be drained below its own level;—Sacrifice, there is the keynote of my life.

For you, Louise, love is but the reflex of Felipe's passion; the life which I shed upon my little ones will come back to me in ever-growing fulness. The plenty of your golden harvest will pass; mine, though late, will be but the more enduring, for each hour will see it renewed. Love may be the fairest gem which Society has filched from Nature; but what is motherhood save Nature in her most gladsome mood? A smile has dried my tears. Love makes my Louis happy, but marriage has made me a mother, and who shall say I am not happy

also?

With slow steps, then, I returned to my white grange, with the green shutters, to write you these thoughts.

So it is, darling, that the most marvelous, and yet the simplest, process of nature has been going on in me for five months; and yet—in your ear let me whisper it—so far it agitates neither my heart nor my understanding. I see all around me happy; the grandfather-to-be has become a child again, trespassing on the grandchild's place; the father wears a grave and anxious look; they are all most attentive to me, all talk of the joy of being a mother. Alas! I alone remain cold, and I dare not tell you how dead I am to all emotion, though I affect a little in order not to damp the general satisfaction. But with you I may be frank; and I confess that, at my present stage, motherhood is a mere affair of the imagination.

Louis was to the full as much surprised as I. Does not this show how little, unless by his impatient wishes, the father counts for in this matter? Chance, my dear, is the sovereign deity in child-bearing. My doctor, while maintaining that this chance works in harmony with nature, does not deny that children who are the fruit of passionate love are bound to be richly endowed both physically and mentally, and that often the happiness which shone like a radiant star over their birth seems to watch over them through life. It may be then, Louise, that motherhood reserves joys for you which I shall never know. It may be that the feeling of a mother for the child of a man whom she adores, as you adore Felipe, is different from that with which she regards the offspring of reason, duty, and desperation!

Thoughts such as these, which I bury in my inmost heart, add to the preoccupation only natural to a woman soon to be a mother. And yet, as the family cannot exist without children, I long to speed the moment from which the joys of family, where alone I am to find my life, shall date their beginning. At present I live a life all expectation and mystery, except for a sickening physical discomfort, which no doubt serves to prepare a woman for suffering of a different kind. I watch my symptoms; and in spite of the attentions and thoughtful care with which Louis' anxiety surrounds me, I am conscious of a vague uneasiness, mingled with the nausea, the distaste for food, and abnormal longings common to my condition. If I am to speak candidly, I must confess, at the risk of disgusting you with the whole business, to an incomprehensible craving for rotten fruit. My husband goes to Marseilles to fetch the finest oranges the world produces—from Malta, Portugal, Corsica—and these I don't touch. Then I hurry there myself, sometimes on foot, and in a little back street, running down to the harbor, close to the Town Hall, I find wretched, half-putrid oranges, two for a sou, which I devour eagerly. The bluish, greenish shades on the mouldy parts sparkle like diamonds in my eyes, they are flowers

to me; I forget the putrid odor, and find them delicious, with a piquant flavor, and stimulating as wine. My dear, they are the first love of my life! Your passion for Felipe is nothing to this! Sometimes I can slip out secretly and fly to Marseilles, full of passionate longings, which grow more intense as I draw near the street. I tremble lest the woman should be sold out of rotten oranges; I pounce on them and devour them as I stand. It seems to me an ambrosial food, and yet I have seen Louis turn aside, unable to bear the smell. Then came to my mind the ghastly words of Obermann in his gloomy elegy, which I wish I had never read, "Roots slake their thirst in foulest streams." Since I took to this diet, the sickness has ceased, and I feel much stronger. This depravity of taste must have a meaning, for it seems to be part of a natural process and to be common to most women, sometimes going to most extravagant lengths.

When my situation is more marked, I shall not go beyond the grounds, for I should not like to be seen under these circumstances. I have the greatest curiosity to know at what precise moment the sense of motherhood begins. It cannot possibly be in the midst of frightful suffering, the very thought of which makes me shudder.

Farewell, favorite of fortune! Farewell, my friend, in whom I live again, and through whom I am able to picture to myself this brave love, this jealousy all on fire at a look, these whisperings in the ear, these joys which create for women, as it were, a new atmosphere, a new daylight, fresh life! Ah! pet, I too understand love. Don't weary of telling me everything. Keep faithful to our bond. I promise, in my turn, to spare you nothing.

Nay—to conclude in all seriousness—I will not conceal from you that, on reading your letter a second time, I was seized with a dread which I could not shake off. This superb love seems like a challenge to Providence. Will not the sovereign master of this earth, Calamity, take umbrage if no place be left for him at your feast? What mighty edifice of fortune has he not overthrown? Oh! Louise, forget not, in all this happiness, your prayers to God. Do good, be kind and merciful; let your moderation, if it may be, avert disaster. Religion has meant much more to me since I left the convent and since my marriage; but your Paris news contains no mention of it. In your glorification of Felipe it seems to me you reverse the saying, and invoke God less than His saint.

But, after all, this panic is only excess of affection. You go to church together, I do not doubt, and do good in secret. The close of this letter will seem to you very primitive, I expect, but think of the too eager friendship which prompts these fears—a friendship of the type of La Fontaine's, which takes alarms at dreams, at half-formed, misty ideas. You deserve to be happy, since, through it all, you still think of me, no less than I think of you, in my monotonous life, which, though it lacks color, is yet not empty, and, if uneventful, is not unfruitful. God bless you, then!

XXIX. M. DE L'ESTORADE TO THE BARONNE DE MACUMER
December 1825.

Madame,—It is the desire of my wife that you should not learn first from the formal announcement of an event which has filled us with joy. Renee has just given birth to a fine boy, whose baptism we are postponing till your return to Chantepleurs. Renee and I both earnestly hope that you may then come as far as La Crampade, and will consent to act as godmother to our firstborn. In this hope, I have had him placed on the register under the name of Armand-Louis de l'Estorade.

Our dear Renee suffered much, but bore it with angelic patience. You, who know her, will easily understand that the assurance of bringing happiness to us all supported her through this trying apprenticeship to motherhood.

Without indulging in the more or less ludicrous exaggerations to which the novel sensation of being a father is apt to give rise, I may tell you that little Armand is a beautiful infant, and you will have no difficulty in believing it when I add that he has Renee's features and eyes. So far, at least, this gives proof of intelligence.

The physician and accoucheur assure us that Renee is now quite out of danger; and as she is proving an admirable nurse—Nature has endowed her so generously!—my father and I are able to give free rein to our joy. Madame, may I be allowed to express the hope that this joy, so vivid and intense, which has brought fresh life into our house, and has changed the face of existence for my dear wife, may ere long be yours?

Renee has had a suite of rooms prepared, and I only wish I could make them worthy of our guests. But the cordial friendliness of the reception which awaits you may perhaps atone for any lack of splendor.

I have heard from Renee, madame, of your kind thought in regard to us, and I take this opportunity of thanking you for it, the more gladly because nothing could now be more appropriate. The birth of a grandson has reconciled my father to sacrifices which bear hardly on an old man. He has just bought two estates, and La Crampade is now a property with an annual rental of thirty thousand francs. My father intends asking the King's permission to form an entailed estate of it; and if you are good enough to get for him the title of which you spoke in your last letter, you will have already done much for your godson.

For my part, I shall carry out your suggestions solely with the object of

bringing you and Renee together during the sessions of the Chamber. I am working hard with the view of becoming what is called a specialist. But nothing could give me greater encouragement in my labors than the thought that you will take an interest in my little Armand. Come, then, we beg of you, and with your beauty and your grace, your playful fancy and your noble soul, enact the part of good fairy to my son and heir. You will thus, madame, add undying gratitude to the respectful regard of Your very humble, obedient servant, LOUIS DE L'ESTORADE.

XXX. LOUISE DE MACUMER TO RENEE DE L'ESTORADE January 1826.

Macumer has just wakened me, darling, with your husband's letter. First and foremost—Yes. We shall be going to Chantepleurs about the end of April. To me it will be a piling up of pleasure to travel, to see you, and to be the godmother of your first child. I must, please, have Macumer for godfather. To take part in a ceremony of the Church with another as my partner would be hateful to me. Ah! if you could see the look he gave me as I said this, you would know what store this sweetest of lovers sets on his wife!

"I am the more bent on our visiting La Crampade together, Felipe," I went on, "because I might have a child there. I too, you know, would be a mother!... And yet, can you fancy me torn in two between you and the infant? To begin with, if I saw any creature—were it even my own son—taking my place in your heart, I couldn't answer for the consequences. Medea may have been right after all. The Greeks had some good notions!"

And he laughed.

So, my sweetheart, you have the fruit without the flowers; I the flowers without the fruit. The contrast in our lives still holds good. Between the two of us we have surely enough philosophy to find the moral of it some day. Bah! only ten months married! Too soon, you will admit, to give up hope.

We are leading a gay, yet far from empty life, as is the way with happy people. The days are never long enough for us. Society, seeing me in the trappings of a married woman, pronounces the Baronne de Macumer much prettier than Louise de Chaulieu: a happy love is a most becoming cosmetic. When Felipe and I drive along the Champs-Elysees in the bright sunshine of a crisp January day, beneath the trees, frosted with clusters of white stars, and face all Paris on the spot where last year we met with a gulf between us, the contrast calls up a thousand fancies. Suppose, after all, your last letter should

be right in its forecast, and we are too presumptuous!

If I am ignorant of a mother's joys, you shall tell me about them; I will learn by sympathy. But my imagination can picture nothing to equal the rapture of love. You will laugh at my extravagance; but, I assure you, that a dozen times in as many months the longing has seized me to die at thirty, while life was still untarnished, amidst the roses of love, in the embrace of passion. To bid farewell to the feast at its brightest, before disappointment has come, having lived in this sunshine and celestial air, and well-nigh spent myself in love, not a leaf dropped from my crown, not an illusion perished in my heart, what a dream is there! Think what it would be to bear about a young heart in an aged body, to see only cold, dumb faces around me, where even strangers used to smile; to be a worthy matron! Can Hell have a worse torture?

On this very subject, in fact, Felipe and I have had our first quarrel. I contended that he ought to have sufficient moral strength to kill me in my sleep when I have reached thirty, so that I might pass from one dream to another. The wretch declined. I threatened to leave him alone in the world, and, poor child, he turned white as a sheet. My dear, this distinguished statesman is neither more nor less than a baby. It is incredible what youth and simplicity he contrived to hide away. Now that I allow myself to think aloud with him, as I do with you, and have no secrets from him, we are always giving each other surprises.

Dear Renee, Felipe and Louise, the pair of lovers, want to send a present to the young mother. We would like to get something that would give you pleasure, and we don't share the popular taste for surprises; so tell me quite frankly, please, what you would like. It ought to be something which would recall us to you in a pleasant way, something which you will use every day, and which won't wear out with use. The meal which with us is most cheerful and friendly is lunch, and therefore the idea occurred to me of a special luncheon service, ornamented with figures of babies. If you approve of this, let me know at once; for it will have to be ordered immediately if we are to bring it. Paris artists are gentlemen of far too much importance to be hurried. This will be my offering to Lucina.

Farewell, dear nursing mother. May all a mother's delights be yours! I await with impatience your first letter, which will tell me all about it, I hope. Some of the details in your husband's letter went to my heart. Poor Renee, a mother has a heavy price to pay. I will tell my godson how dearly he must love you. No end of love, my sweet one.

XXXI. RENEE DE L'ESTORADE TO LOUISE DE MACUMER

It is nearly five months now since baby was born, and not once, dear heart, have I found a single moment for writing to you. When you are a mother yourself, you will be more ready to excuse me, than you are now; for you have punished me a little bit in making your own letters so few and far between. Do write, my darling! Tell me of your pleasures; lay on the blue as brightly as you please. It will not hurt me, for I am happy now, happier than you can imagine.

I went in state to the parish church to hear the Mass for recovery from childbirth, as is the custom in the old families of Provence. I was supported on either side by the two grandfathers—Louis' father and my own. Never had I knelt before God with such a flood of gratitude in my heart. I have so much to tell you of, so many feelings to describe, that I don't know where to begin; but from amidst these confused memories, one rises distinctly, that of my prayer in the church.

When I found myself transformed into a joyful mother, on the very spot where, as a girl, I had trembled for my future, it seemed to my fancy that the Virgin on the altar bowed her head and pointed to the infant Christ, who smiled at me! My heart full of pure and heavenly love, I held out little Armand for the priest to bless and bathe, in anticipation of the regular baptism to come later. But you will see us together then, Armand and me.

My child—come see how readily the word comes, and indeed there is none sweeter to a mother's heart and mind or on her lips—well, then, dear child, during the last two months I used to drag myself wearily and heavily about the gardens, not realizing yet how precious was the burden, spite of all the discomforts it brought! I was haunted by forebodings so gloomy and ghastly, that they got the better even of curiosity; in vain did I picture the delights of motherhood. My heart made no response even to the thought of the little one, who announced himself by lively kicking. That is a sensation, dear, which may be welcome when it is familiar; but as a novelty, it is more strange than pleasing. I speak for myself at least; you know I would never affect anything I did not really feel, and I look on my child as a gift straight from Heaven. For one who saw in it rather the image of the man she loved, it might be different.

But enough of such sad thoughts, gone, I trust, for ever.

When the crisis came, I summoned all my powers of resistance, and braced myself so well for suffering, that I bore the horrible agony—so they tell me—quite marvelously. For about an hour I sank into a sort of stupor, of the nature of a dream. I seemed to myself then two beings—an outer covering racked and tortured by red-hot pincers, and a soul at peace. In this strange state the pain formed itself into a sort of halo hovering over me. A gigantic rose seemed to spring out of my head and grow ever larger and larger, till it enfolded me in its

blood-red petals. The same color dyed the air around, and everything I saw was blood-red. At last the climax came, when soul and body seemed no longer able to hold together; the spasms of pain gripped me like death itself. I screamed aloud, and found fresh strength against this fresh torture. Suddenly this concert of hideous cries was overborne by a joyful sound—the shrill wail of the newborn infant. No words can describe that moment. It was as though the universe took part in my cries, when all at once the chorus of pain fell hushed before the child's feeble note.

They laid me back again in the large bed, and it felt like paradise to me, even in my extreme exhaustion. Three or four happy faces pointed through tears to the child. My dear, I exclaimed in terror:

"It's just like a little monkey! Are you really and truly certain it is a child?"

I fell back on my side, miserably disappointed at my first experience of motherly feeling.

"Don't worry, dear," said my mother, who had installed herself as nurse. "Why, you've got the finest baby in the world. You mustn't excite yourself; but give your whole mind now to turning yourself as much as possible into an animal, a milch cow, pasturing in the meadow."

I fell asleep then, fully resolved to let nature have her way.

Ah! my sweet, how heavenly it was to waken up from all the pain and haziness of the first days, when everything was still dim, uncomfortable, confused. A ray of light pierced the darkness; my heart and soul, my inner self —a self I had never known before—rent the envelope of gloomy suffering, as a flower bursts its sheath at the first warm kiss of the sun, at the moment when the little wretch fastened on my breast and sucked. Not even the sensation of the child's first cry was so exquisite as this. This is the dawn of motherhood, this is the Fiat lux!

Here is happiness, joy ineffable, though it comes not without pangs. Oh! my sweet jealous soul, how you will relish a delight which exists only for ourselves, the child, and God! For this tiny creature all knowledge is summed up in its mother's breast. This is the one bright spot in its world, towards which its puny strength goes forth. Its thoughts cluster round this spring of life, which it leaves only to sleep, and whither it returns on waking. Its lips have a sweetness beyond words, and their pressure is at once a pain and a delight, a delight which by every excess becomes pain, or a pain which culminates in delight. The sensation which rises from it, and which penetrates to the very core of my life, baffles all description. It seems a sort of centre whence a myriad joy-bearing rays gladden the heart and soul. To bear a child is nothing; to nourish it is birth renewed every hour.

Oh! Louise, there is no caress of lover with half the power of those little pink hands, as they stray about, seeking whereby to lay hold on life. And the infant glances, now turned upon the breast, now raised to meet our own! What dreams come to us as we watch the clinging nursling! All our powers, whether of mind or body, are at its service; for it we breathe and think, in it our longings are more than satisfied! The sweet sensation of warmth at the heart, which the sound of his first cry brought to me—like the first ray of sunshine on the earth—came again as I felt the milk flow into his mouth, again as his eyes met mine, and at this moment I have felt it once more as his first smile gave token of a mind working within—for he has laughed, my dear! A laugh, a glance, a bite, a cry—four miracles of gladness which go straight to the heart and strike chords that respond to no other touch. A child is tied to our heart-strings, as the spheres are linked to their creator; we cannot think of God except as a mother's heart writ large.

It is only in the act of nursing that a woman realizes her motherhood in visible and tangible fashion; it is a joy of every moment. The milk becomes flesh before our eyes; it blossoms into the tips of those delicate flower-like fingers; it expands in tender, transparent nails; it spins the silky tresses; it kicks in the little feet. Oh! those baby feet, how plainly they talk to us! In them the child finds its first language.

Yes, Louise, nursing is a miracle of transformation going on before one's bewildered eyes. Those cries, they go to your heart and not your ears; those smiling eyes and lips, those plunging feet, they speak in words which could not be plainer if God traced them before you in letters of fire! What else is there in the world to care about? The father? Why, you could kill him if he dreamed of waking the baby! Just as the child is the world to us, so do we stand alone in the world for the child. The sweet consciousness of a common life is ample recompense for all the trouble and suffering—for suffering there is. Heaven save you, Louise, from ever knowing the maddening agony of a wound which gapes afresh with every pressure of rosy lips, and is so hard to heal—the heaviest tax perhaps imposed on beauty. For know, Louise, and beware! it visits only a fair and delicate skin.

My little ape has in five months developed into the prettiest darling that ever mother bathed in tears of joy, washed, brushed, combed, and made smart; for God knows what unwearied care we lavish upon those tender blossoms! So my monkey has ceased to exist, and behold in his stead a baby, as my English nurse says, a regular pink-and-white baby. He cries very little too now, for he is conscious of the love bestowed on him; indeed, I hardly ever leave him, and I strive to wrap him round in the atmosphere of my love.

Dear, I have a feeling now for Louis which is not love, but which ought to be the crown of a woman's love where it exists. Nay, I am not sure whether

this tender fondness, this unselfish gratitude, is not superior to love. From all that you have told me of it, dear pet, I gather that love has something terribly earthly about it, whilst a strain of holy piety purifies the affection a happy mother feels for the author of her far-reaching and enduring joys. A mother's happiness is like a beacon, lighting up the future, but reflected also on the past in the guise of fond memories.

The old l'Estorade and his son have moreover redoubled their devotion to me; I am like a new person to them. Every time they see me and speak to me, it is with a fresh holiday joy, which touches me deeply. The grandfather has, I verily believe, turned child again; he looks at me admiringly, and the first time I came down to lunch he was moved to tears to see me eating and suckling the child. The moisture in these dry old eyes, generally expressive only of avarice, was a wonderful comfort to me. I felt that the good soul entered into my joy.

As for Louis, he would shout aloud to the trees and stones of the highway that he has a son; and he spends whole hours watching your sleeping godson. He does not know, he says, when he will grow used to it. These extravagant expressions of delight show me how great must have been their fears beforehand. Louis has confided in me that he had believed himself condemned to be childless. Poor fellow! he has all at once developed very much, and he works even harder than he did. The father in him has quickened his ambition.

For myself, dear soul, I grow happier and happier every moment. Each hour creates a fresh tie between the mother and her infant. The very nature of my feelings proves to me that they are normal, permanent, and indestructible; whereas I shrewdly suspect love, for instance, of being intermittent. Certainly it is not the same at all moments, the flowers which it weaves into the web of life are not all of equal brightness; love, in short, can and must decline. But a mother's love has no ebb-tide to fear; rather it grows with the growth of the child's needs, and strengthens with its strength. Is it not at once a passion, a natural craving, a feeling, a duty, a necessity, a joy? Yes, darling, here is woman's true sphere. Here the passion for self-sacrifice can expend itself, and no jealousy intrudes.

Here, too, is perhaps the single point on which society and nature are at one. Society, in this matter, enforces the dictates of nature, strengthening the maternal instinct by adding to it family spirit and the desire of perpetuating a name, a race, an estate. How tenderly must not a woman cherish the child who has been the first to open up to her these joys, the first to call forth the energies of her nature and to instruct her in the grand art of motherhood! The right of the eldest, which in the earliest times formed a part of the natural order and was lost in the origins of society, ought never, in my opinion, to have been questioned. Ah! how much a mother learns from her child! The constant protection of a helpless being forces us to so strict an alliance with virtue, that

a woman never shows to full advantage except as a mother. Then alone can her character expand in the fulfilment of all life's duties and the enjoyment of all its pleasures. A woman who is not a mother is maimed and incomplete. Hasten, then, my sweetest, to fulfil your mission. Your present happiness will then be multiplied by the wealth of my delights.

23rd.

I had to tear myself from you because your godson was crying. I can hear his cry from the bottom of the garden. But I would not let this go without a word of farewell. I have just been reading over what I have said, and am horrified to see how vulgar are the feelings expressed! What I feel, every mother, alas! since the beginning must have felt, I suppose, in the same way, and put into the same words. You will laugh at me, as we do at the naive father who dilates on the beauty and cleverness of his (of course) quite exceptional offspring. But the refrain of my letter, darling, is this, and I repeat it: I am as happy now as I used to be miserable. This grange—and is it not going to be an estate, a family property?—has become my land of promise. The desert is past and over. A thousand loves, darling pet. Write to me, for now I can read without a tear the tale of your happy love. Farewell.

XXXII. MME. DE MACUMER TO MME. DE L'ESTORADE March 1826.

Do you know, dear, that it is more than three months since I have written to you or heard from you? I am the more guilty of the two, for I did not reply to your last, but you don't stand on punctilio surely?

Macumer and I have taken your silence for consent as regards the baby-wreathed luncheon service, and the little cherubs are starting this morning for Marseilles. It took six months to carry out the design. And so when Felipe asked me to come and see the service before it was packed, I suddenly waked up to the fact that we had not interchanged a word since the letter of yours which gave me an insight into a mother's heart.

My sweet, it is this terrible Paris—there's my excuse. What, pray, is yours? Oh! what a whirlpool is society! Didn't I tell you once that in Paris one must be as the Parisians? Society there drives out all sentiment; it lays en embargo on your time; and unless you are very careful, soon eats away your heart altogether. What an amazing masterpiece is the character of Celimene in Moliere's Le Misanthrope! She is the society woman, not only of Louis XIV.'s time, but of our own, and of all, time.

Where should I be but for my breastplate—the love I bear Felipe? This very morning I told him, as the outcome of these reflections, that he was my salvation. If my evenings are a continuous round of parties, balls, concerts, and theatres, at night my heart expands again, and is healed of the wounds received in the world by the delights of the passionate love which await my return.

I dine at home only when we have friends, so-called, with us, and spend the afternoon there only on my day, for I have a day now—Wednesday—for receiving. I have entered the lists with Mmes. d'Espard and de Maufrigneuse, and with the old Duchesse de Lenoncourt, and my house has the reputation of being a very lively one. I allowed myself to become the fashion, because I saw how much pleasure my success gave Felipe. My mornings are his; from four in the afternoon till two in the morning I belong to Paris. Macumer makes an admirable host, witty and dignified, perfect in courtesy, and with an air of real distinction. No woman could help loving such a husband even if she had chosen him without consulting her heart.

My father and mother have left for Madrid. Louis XVIII. being out of the way, the Duchess had no difficulty in obtaining from our good-natured Charles X. the appointment of her fascinating poet; so he is carried off in the capacity of attache.

My brother, the Duc de Rhetore, deigns to recognize me as a person of mark. As for my younger brother, The Comte de Chaulieu, this buckram warrior owes me everlasting gratitude. Before my father left, he spent my fortune in acquiring for the Count an estate of forty thousand francs a year, entailed on the title, and his marriage with Mlle. de Mortsauf, an heiress from Touraine, is definitely arranged. The King, in order to preserve the name and titles of the de Lenoncourt and de Givry families from extinction, is to confer these, together with the armorial bearings, by patent on my brother. Certainly it would never have done to allow these two fine names and their splendid motto, Faciem semper monstramus, to perish. Mlle. de Mortsauf, who is granddaughter and sole heiress of the Duc de Lenoncourt-Givry, will, it is said, inherit altogether more than one hundred thousand livres a year. The only stipulation my father has made is that the de Chaulieu arms should appear in the centre of the de Lenoncourt escutcheon. Thus my brother will be Duc de Lenoncourt. The young de Mortsauf, to whom everything would otherwise go, is in the last stage of consumption; his death is looked for every day. The marriage will take place next winter when the family are out of mourning. I am told that I shall have a charming sister-in-law in Mlle. de Mortsauf.

So you see that my father's reasoning is justified. The outcome of it all has won me many compliments, and my marriage is explained to everybody's satisfaction. To complete our success, the Prince de Talleyrand, out of

affection for my grandmother, is showing himself a warm friend to Macumer. Society, which began by criticising me, has now passed to cordial admiration.

In short, I now reign a queen where, barely two years ago, I was an insignificant item. Macumer finds himself the object of universal envy, as the husband of "the most charming woman in Paris." At least a score of women, as you know, are always in that proud position. Men murmur sweet things in my ear, or content themselves with greedy glances. This chorus of longing and admiration is so soothing to one's vanity, that I confess I begin to understand the unconscionable price women are ready to pay for such frail and precarious privileges. A triumph of this kind is like strong wine to vanity, self-love, and all the self-regarding feelings. To pose perpetually as a divinity is a draught so potent in its intoxicating effects, that I am no longer surprised to see women grow selfish, callous, and frivolous in the heart of this adoration. The fumes of society mount to the head. You lavish the wealth of your soul and spirit, the treasures of your time, the noblest efforts of your will, upon a crowd of people who repay you in smiles and jealousy. The false coin of their pretty speeches, compliments, and flattery is the only return they give for the solid gold of your courage and sacrifices, and all the thought that must go to keep up without flagging the standard of beauty, dress, sparkling talk, and general affability. You are perfectly aware how much it costs, and that the whole thing is a fraud, but you cannot keep out of the vortex.

Ah! my sweetheart, how one craves for a real friend! How precious to me are the love and devotion of Felipe, and how my heart goes out to you! Joyfully indeed are we preparing for our move to Chantepleurs, where we can rest from the comedy of the Rue de Bac and of the Paris drawing-rooms. Having just read your letter again, I feel that I cannot better describe this demoniac paradise than by saying that no woman of fashion in Paris can possibly be a good mother.

Good-bye, then, for a short time, dear one. We shall stay at Chantepleurs only a week at most, and shall be with you about May 10th. So we are actually to meet again after more than two years! What changes since then! Here we are, both matrons, both in our promised land—I of love, you of motherhood.

If I have not written, my sweetest, it is not because I have forgotten you. And what of the monkey godson? Is he still pretty and a credit to me? He must be more than nine months' old now. I should dearly like to be present when he makes his first steps upon this earth; but Macumer tells me that even precocious infants hardly walk at ten months.

We shall have some good gossips there, and "cut pinafores," as the Blois folk say. I shall see whether a child, as the saying goes, spoils the pattern.

P. S.—If you deign to reply from your maternal heights, address to

Chantepleurs. I am just off.

XXXIII. MME. DE L'ESTORADE TO MME. DE MACUMER

My child,—If ever you become a mother, you will find out that it is impossible to write letters during the first two months of your nursing. Mary, my English nurse, and I are both quite knocked up. It is true I had not told you that I was determined to do everything myself. Before the event I had with my own fingers sewn the baby clothes and embroidered and edged with lace the little caps. I am a slave, my pet, a slave day and night.

To begin with, Master Armand-Louis takes his meals when it pleases him, and that is always; then he has often to be changed, washed, and dressed. His mother is so fond of watching him sleep, of singing songs to him, of walking him about in her arms on a fine day, that she has little time left to attend to herself. In short, what society has been to you, my child—our child—has been to me!

I cannot tell you how full and rich my life has become, and I long for your coming that you may see for yourself. The only thing is, I am afraid he will soon be teething, and that you will find a peevish, crying baby. So far he has not cried much, for I am always at hand. Babies only cry when their wants are not understood, and I am constantly on the lookout for his. Oh! my sweet, my heart has opened up so wide, while you allow yours to shrink and shrivel at the bidding of society! I look for your coming with all a hermit's longing. I want so much to know what you think of l'Estorade, just as you no doubt are curious for my opinion of Macumer.

Write to me from your last resting-place. The gentlemen want to go and meet our distinguished guests. Come, Queen of Paris, come to our humble grange, where love at least will greet you!

XXXIV. MME. DE MACUMER TO THE VICOMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE April 1826.

The name on this address will tell you, dear, that my petition has been granted. Your father-in-law is now Comte de l'Estorade. I would not leave Paris till I had obtained the gratification of your wishes, and I am writing in the presence of the Keeper of the Seals, who has come to tell me that the patent is signed.

Good-bye for a short time!

XXXV. THE SAME TO THE SAME MARSEILLES, July.

I am ashamed to think how my sudden flight will have taken you by surprise. But since I am above all honest, and since I love you not one bit the less, I shall tell you the truth in four words: I am horribly jealous!

Felipe's eyes were too often on you. You used to have little talks together at the foot of your rock, which were a torture to me; and I was fast becoming irritable and unlike myself. Your truly Spanish beauty could not fail to recall to him his native land, and along with it Marie Heredia, and I can be jealous of the past too. Your magnificent black hair, your lovely dark eyes, your brow, where the peaceful joy of motherhood stands out radiant against the shadows which tell of past suffering, the freshness of your southern skin, far fairer than that of a blonde like me, the splendid lines of your figure, the breasts, on which my godson hangs, peeping through the lace like some luscious fruit,—all this stabbed me in the eyes and in the heart. In vain did I stick cornflowers in my curls, in vain set off with cherry-colored ribbons the tameness of my pale locks, everything looked washed out when Renee appeared—a Renee so unlike the one I expected to find in your oasis.

Then Felipe made too much of the child, whom I found myself beginning to hate. Yes, I confess it, that exuberance of life which fills your house, making it gay with shouts and laughter—I wanted it for myself. I read a regret in Macumer's eyes, and, unknown to him, I cried over it two whole nights. I was miserable in your house. You are too beautiful as a woman, too triumphant as a mother, for me to endure your company.

Ah! you complained of your lot. Hypocrite! What would you have? L'Estorade is most presentable; he talks well; he has fine eyes; and his black hair, dashed with white, is very becoming; his southern manners, too, have something attractive about them. As far as I can make out, he will, sooner or later, be elected deputy for the Bouches-du-Rhone; in the Chamber he is sure to come to the front, for you can always count on me to promote your interests. The sufferings of his exile have given him that calm and dignified air which goes half-way, in my opinion, to make a politician. For the whole art of politics, dear, seems to me to consist in looking serious. At this rate, Macumer, as I told him, ought certainly to have a high position in the state.

And so, having completely satisfied myself of your happiness, I fly off contented to my dear Chantepleurs, where Felipe must really achieve his

aspirations. I have made up my mind not to receive you there without a fine baby at my breast to match yours.

Oh! I know very well I deserve all the epithets you can hurl at me. I am a fool, a wretch, an idiot. Alas! that is just what jealousy means. I am not vexed with you, but I was miserable, and you will forgive me for escaping from my misery. Two days more, and I should have made an exhibition of myself; yes, there would have been an outbreak of vulgarity.

But in spite of the rage gnawing at my heart, I am glad to have come, glad to have seen you in the pride of your beautiful motherhood, my friend still, as I remain yours in all the absorption of my love. Why, even here at Marseilles, only a step from your door, I begin to feel proud of you and of the splendid mother that you will make.

How well you judged your vocation! You seem to me born for the part of mother rather than of lover, exactly as the reverse is true of me. There are women capable of neither, hard-favored or silly women. A good mother and a passionately loving wife have this in common, that they both need intelligence and discretion ever at hand, and an unfailing command of every womanly art and grace. Oh! I watched you well; need I add, sly puss, that I admired you too! Your children will be happy, but not spoilt, with your tenderness lapping them round and the clear light of your reason playing softly on them.

Tell Louis the truth about my going away, but find some decent excuse for your father-in-law, who seems to act as steward for the establishment; and be careful to do the same for your family—a true Provencal version of the Harlowe family. Felipe does not know why I left, and he will never know. If he asks, I shall contrive to find some colorable pretext, probably that you were jealous of me! Forgive me this little conventional fib.

Good-bye. I write in haste, as I want you to get this at lunch-time; and the postilion, who has undertaken to convey it to you, is here, refreshing himself while he waits.

Many kisses to my dear little godson. Be sure you come to Chantepleurs in October. I shall be alone there all the time that Macumer is away in Sardinia, where he is designing great improvements in his estate. At least that is his plan for the moment, and his pet vanity consists in having a plan. Then he feels that he has a will of his own, and this makes him very uneasy when he unfolds it to me. Good-bye!

XXXVI. THE VICOMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE TO THE BARONNE DE MACUMER

Dear,—no words can express the astonishment of all our party when, at luncheon, we were told that you had both gone, and, above all, when the postilion who took you to Marseilles handed me your mad letter. Why, naughty child, it was of your happiness, and nothing else, that made the theme of those talks below the rock, on the "Louise" seat, and you had not the faintest justification for objecting to them. Ingrata! My sentence on you is that you return here at my first summons. In that horrid letter, scribbled on the inn paper, you did not tell me what would be your next stopping place; so I must address this to Chantepleurs.

Listen to me, dear sister of my heart. Know first, that my mind is set on your happiness. Your husband, dear Louise, commands respect, not only by his natural gravity and dignified expression, but also because he somehow impresses one with the splendid power revealed in his piquant plainness and in the fire of his velvet eyes; and you will understand that it was some little time before I could meet him on those easy terms which are almost necessary for intimate conversation. Further, this man has been Prime Minister, and he idolizes you; whence it follows that he must be a profound dissembler. To fish up secrets, therefore, from the rocky caverns of this diplomatic soul is a work demanding a skilful hand no less than a ready brain. Nevertheless, I succeeded at last, without rousing my victim's suspicions, in discovering many things of which you, my pet, have no conception.

You know that, between us two, my part is rather that of reason, yours of imagination: I personify sober duty, you reckless love. It has pleased fate to continue in our lives this contrast in character which was imperceptible to all except ourselves. I am a simple country vicountess, very ambitious, and making it her task to lead her family on the road to prosperity. On the other hand, Macumer, late Duc de Soria, has a name in the world, and you, a duchess by right, reign in Paris, where reigning is no easy matter even for kings. You have a considerable fortune, which will be doubled if Macumer carries out his projects for developing his great estates in Sardinia, the resources of which are matter of common talk at Marseilles. Deny, if you can, that if either has the right to be jealous, it is not you. But, thank God, we have both hearts generous enough to place our friendship beyond reach of such vulgar pettiness.

I know you, dear; I know that, ere now, you are ashamed of having fled. But don't suppose that your flight will save you from a single word of discourse which I had prepared for your benefit to-day beneath the rock. Read carefully then, I beg of you, what I say, for it concerns you even more closely than Macumer, though he also enters largely into my sermon.

Firstly, my dear, you do not love him. Before two years are over, you will

be sick of adoration. You will never look on Felipe as a husband; to you he will always be the lover whom you can play with, for that is how all women treat their lovers. You do not look up to him, or reverence, or worship him as a woman should the god of her idolatry. You see, I have made a study of love, my sweet, and more than once have I taken soundings in the depth of my own heart. Now, as the result of a careful diagnosis of your case, I can say with confidence, this is not love.

Yes, dear Queen of Paris, you cannot escape the destiny of all queens. The day will come when you long to be treated as a light-o'-love, to be mastered and swept off your feet by a strong man, one who will not prostrate himself in adoration before you, but will seize your arm roughly in a fit of jealousy. Macumer loves you too fondly ever to be able either to resist you or find fault with you. A single glance from you, a single coaxing word, would melt his sternest resolution. Sooner or later, you will learn to scorn this excessive devotion. He spoils you, alas! just as I used to spoil you at the convent, for you are a most bewitching woman, and there is no escaping your siren-like charms.

Worse than all, you are candid, and it often happens that our happiness depends on certain social hypocrisies to which you will never stoop. For instance, society will not tolerate a frank display of the wife's power over her husband. The convention is that a man must no more show himself the lover of his wife, however passionately he adores her, than a married woman may play the part of a mistress. This rule you both disregard.

In the first place, my child, from what you have yourself told me, it is clear that the one unpardonable sin in society is to be happy. If happiness exists, no one must know of it. But this is a small point. What seems to me important is that the perfect equality which reigns between lovers ought never to appear in the case of husband and wife, under pain of undermining the whole fabric of society and entailing terrible disasters. If it is painful to see a man whom nature has made a nonentity, how much worse is the spectacle of a man of parts brought to that position? Before very long you will have reduced Macumer to the mere shadow of a man. He will cease to have a will and character of his own, and become mere clay in your hands. You will have so completely moulded him to your likeness, that your household will consist of only one person instead of two, and that one necessarily imperfect. You will regret it bitterly; but when at last you deign to open your eyes, the evil will be past cure. Do what we will, women do not, and never will, possess the qualities which are characteristic of men, and these qualities are absolutely indispensable to family life. Already Macumer, blinded though he is, has a dim foreshadowing of this future; he feels himself less a man through his love. His visit to Sardinia is a proof to me that he hopes by this temporary separation to succeed in recovering his old self.

You never scruple to use the power which his love has placed in your hand. Your position of vantage may be read in a gesture, a look, a tone. Oh! darling, how truly are you the mad wanton your mother called you! You do not question, I fancy, that I am greatly Louis' superior. Well, I would ask you, have you ever heard me contradict him? Am I not always, in the presence of others, the wife who respects in him the authority of the family? Hypocrisy! you will say. Well, listen to me. It is true that if I want to give him any advice which I think may be of use to him, I wait for the quiet and seclusion of our bedroom to explain what I think and wish; but, I assure you, sweetheart, that even there I never arrogate to myself the place of mentor. If I did not remain in private the same submissive wife that I appear to others, he would lose confidence in himself. Dear, the good we do to others is spoilt unless we efface ourselves so completely that those we help have no sense of inferiority. There is a wonderful sweetness in these hidden sacrifices, and what a triumph for me in your unsuspecting praises of Louis! There can be no doubt also that the happiness, the comfort, the hope of the last two years have restored what misfortune, hardship, solitude, and despondency has robbed him of.

This, then, is the sum-total of my observations. At the present moment you love in Felipe, not your husband, but yourself. There is truth in your father's words; concealed by the spring-flowers of your passion lies all the great lady's selfishness. Ah! my child, how I must love you to speak such bitter truths!

Let me tell you, if you will promise never to breathe a word of this to the Baron, the end of our talk. We had been singing your praises in every key, for he soon discovered that I loved you like a fondly-cherished sister, and having insensibly brought him to a confidential mood, I ventured to say:

"Louise has never yet had to struggle with life. She has been the spoilt child of fortune, and she might yet have to pay for this were you not there to act the part of father as well as lover."

"Ah! but is it possible?..." He broke off abruptly, like a man who sees himself on the edge of a precipice. But the exclamation was enough for me. No doubt, if you had stayed, he would have spoken more freely later.

My sweet, think of the day awaiting you when your husband's strength will be exhausted, when pleasure will have turned to satiety, and he sees himself, I will not say degraded, but shorn of his proper dignity before you. The stings of conscience will then waken a sort of remorse in him, all the more painful for you, because you will feel yourself responsible, and you will end by despising the man whom you have not accustomed yourself to respect. Remember, too, that scorn with a woman is only the earliest phase of hatred. You are too noble and generous, I know, ever to forget the sacrifices which Felipe has made for you; but what further sacrifices will be left for him to make when he has, so to

speak, served up himself at the first banquet? Woe to the man, as to the woman, who has left no desire unsatisfied! All is over then. To our shame or our glory—the point is too nice for me to decide—it is of love alone that women are insatiable.

Oh! Louise, change yet, while there is still time. If you would only adopt the same course with Macumer that I have done with l'Estorade, you might rouse the sleeping lion in your husband, who is made of the stuff of heroes. One might almost say that you grudge him his greatness. Would you feel no pride in using your power for other ends than your own gratification, in awakening the genius of a gifted man, as I in raising to a higher level one of merely common parts?

Had you remained with us, I should still have written this letter, for in talking you might have cut me short or got the better of me with your sharp tongue. But I know that you will read this thoughtfully and weigh my warnings. Dear heart, you have everything in life to make you happy, do not spoil your chances; return to Paris, I entreat you, as soon as Macumer comes back. The engrossing claims of society, of which I complained, are necessary for both of you; otherwise you would spend your life in mutual self-absorption. A married woman ought not to be too lavish of herself. The mother of a family, who never gives her household an opportunity of missing her, runs the risk of palling on them. If I have several children, as I trust for my own sake I may, I assure you I shall make a point of reserving to myself certain hours which shall be held sacred; even to one's children one's presence should not be a matter of daily bread.

Farewell, my dear jealous soul! Do you know that many women would be highly flattered at having roused this passing pang in you? Alas! I can only mourn, for what is not mother in me is your dear friend. A thousand loves. Make what excuse you will for leaving; if you are not sure of Macumer, I am of Louis.

XXXVII. THE BARONNE DE MACUMER TO THE VICOMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE Genoa.

My beloved beauty,—I was bitten with the fancy to see something of Italy, and I am delighted at having carried off Macumer, whose plans in regard to Sardinia are postponed.

This country is simple ravishing. The churches—above all, the chapels—have a seductive, bewitching air, which must make every female Protestant

yearn after Catholicism. Macumer has been received with acclamation, and they are all delighted to have made an Italian of so distinguished a man. Felipe could have the Sardinian embassy at Paris if I cared about it, for I am made much of at court.

If you write, address your letters to Florence. I have not time now to go into any details, but I will tell you the story of our travels whenever you come to Paris. We only remain here a week, and then go on to Florence, taking Leghorn on the way. We shall stay a month in Tuscany and a month at Naples, so as to reach Rome in November. Thence we return home by Venice, where we shall spend the first fortnight of December, and arrive in Paris, via Milan and Turin, for January.

Our journey is a perfect honeymoon; the sight of new places gives fresh life to our passion. Macumer did not know Italy at all, and we have begun with that splendid Cornice road, which might be the work of fairy architects.

Good-bye, darling. Don't be angry if I don't write. It is impossible to get a minute to oneself in traveling; my whole time is taken up with seeing, admiring, and realizing my impressions. But not a word to you of these till memory has given them their proper atmosphere.

XXXVIII. THE VICOMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE TO THE BARONNE DE MACUMER

September.

My dear,—There is lying for you at Chantepleurs a full reply to the letter you wrote me from Marseilles. This honeymoon journey, so far from diminishing the fears I there expressed, makes me beg of you to get my letter sent on from Nivernais.

The Government, it is said, are resolved on dissolution. This is unlucky for the Crown, since the last session of this loyal Parliament would have been devoted to the passing of laws, essential to the consolidation of its power; and it is not less so for us, as Louis will not be forty till the end of 1827. Fortunately, however, my father has agreed to stand, and he will resign his seat when the right moment arrives.

Your godson has found out how to walk without his godmother's help. He is altogether delicious, and begins to make the prettiest little signs to me, which bring home to one that here is really a thinking being, not a mere animal or sucking machine. His smiles are full of meaning. I have been so successful in my profession of nurse that I shall wean Armand in December. A year at the

breast is quite enough; children who are suckled longer are said to grow stupid, and I am all for popular sayings.

You must make a tremendous sensation in Italy, my fair one with the golden locks. A thousand loves.

XXXIX. THE BARONNE DE MACUMER TO THE VICOMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE

Your atrocious letter has reached me here, the steward having forwarded it by my orders. Oh! Renee... but I will spare you the outburst of my wounded feelings, and simply tell you the effect your letter produced.

We had just returned from a delightful reception given in our honor by the ambassador, where I appeared in all my glory, and Macumer was completely carried away in a frenzy of love which I could not describe. Then I read him your horrible answer to my letter, and I read it sobbing, at the risk of making a fright of myself. My dear Arab fell at my feet, declaring that you raved. Then he carried me off to the balcony of the palace where we are staying, from which we have a view over part of the city; there he spoke to me words worthy of the magnificent moonlight scene which lay stretched before us. We both speak Italian now, and his love, told in that voluptuous tongue, so admirably adapted to the expression of passion, sounded in my ears like the most exquisite poetry. He swore that, even were you right in your predictions, he would not exchange for a lifetime a single one of our blessed nights or charming mornings. At this reckoning he has already lived a thousand years. He is content to have me for his mistress, and would claim no other title than that of lover. So proud and pleased is he to see himself every day the chosen of my heart, that were Heaven to offer him the alternative between living as you would have us to for another thirty years with five children, and five years spent amid the dear roses of our love, he would not hesitate. He would take my love, such as it is, and death.

While he was whispering this in my ear, his arm round me, my head resting on his shoulder, the cries of a bat, surprised by an owl, disturbed us. This death-cry struck me with such terror that Felipe carried me half-fainting to my bed. But don't be alarmed! Though this augury of evil still resounds in my soul, I am quite myself this morning. As soon as I was up, I went to Felipe, and, kneeling before him, my eyes fixed on his, his hands clasped in mine, I said to him:—

"My love, I am a child, and Renee may be right after all. It may be only

your love that I love in you; but at least I can assure you that this is the one feeling of my heart, and that I love you as it is given me to love. But if there be aught in me, in my lightest thought or deed, which jars on your wishes or conception of me, I implore you to tell me, to say what it is. It will be a joy to me to hear you and to take your eyes as the guiding-stars of my life. Renee has frightened me, for she is a true friend."

Macumer could not find voice to reply, tears choked him.

I can thank you now, Renee. But for your letter I should not have known the depths of love in my noble, kingly Macumer. Rome is the city of love; it is there that passion should celebrate its feast, with art and religion as confederates.

At Venice we shall find the Duc and Duchesse de Soria. If you write, address now to Paris, for we shall leave Rome in three days. The ambassador's was a farewell party.

P. S.—Dear, silly child, your letter only shows that you knew nothing of love, except theoretically. Learn then that love is a quickening force which may produce fruits so diverse that no theory can embrace or co-ordinate them. A word this for my little Professor with her armor of stays.

XL. THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE TO THE BARONNE DE MACUMER January 1827.

My father has been elected to the Chamber, my father-in-law is dead, and I am on the point of my second confinement; these are the chief events marking the end of the year for us. I mention them at once, lest the sight of the black seal should frighten you.

My dear, your letter from Rome made my flesh creep. You are nothing but a pair of children. Felipe is either a dissembling diplomat or else his love for you is the love a man might have for a courtesan, on whom he squanders his all, knowing all the time that she is false to him. Enough of this. You say I rave, so I had better hold my tongue. Only this would I say, from the comparison of our two very different destinies I draw this harsh moral—Love not if you would be loved.

My dear, when Louis was elected to the provincial Council, he received the cross of the Legion of Honor. That is now nearly three years ago; and as my father—whom you will no doubt see in Paris during the course of the session—has asked the rank of Officer of the Legion for his son-in-law, I want to know if you will do me the kindness to take in hand the bigwig, whoever he

may be, to whom this patronage belongs, and to keep an eye upon the little affair. But, whatever you do, don't get entangled in the concerns of my honored father. The Comte de Maucombe is fishing for the title of Marquis for himself; but keep your good services for me, please. When Louis is a deputy —next winter that is—we shall come to Paris, and then we will move heaven and earth to get some Government appointment for him, so that we may be able to save our income by living on his salary. My father sits between the centre and the right; a title will content him. Our family was distinguished even in the days of King Rene, and Charles X. will hardly say no to a Maucombe; but what I fear is that my father may take it into his head to ask some favor for my younger brother. Now, if the marquisate is dangled out of his reach, he will have no thoughts to spare from himself.

January 15th.

Ah! Louise, I have been in hell. If I can bear to tell you of my anguish, it is because you are another self; even so, I don't know whether I shall ever be able to live again in thought those five ghastly days. The mere word "convulsions" makes my very heart sick. Five days! to me they were five centuries of torture. A mother who has not been through this martyrdom does not know what suffering is. So frenzied was I that I even envied you, who never had a child!

The evening before that terrible day the weather was close, almost hot, and I thought my little Armand was affected by it. Generally so sweet and caressing, he was peevish, cried for nothing, wanted to play, and then broke his toys. Perhaps this sort of fractiousness is the usual sign of approaching illness with children. While I was wondering about it, I noticed Armand's cheeks flush, but this I set down to teething, for he is cutting four large teeth at once. So I put him to bed beside me, and kept constantly waking through the night. He was a little feverish, but not enough to make me uneasy, my mind being still full of the teething. Towards morning he cried "Mamma!" and asked by signs for something to drink; but the cry was spasmodic, and there were convulsive twitchings in the limbs, which turned me to ice. I jumped out of bed to fetch him a drink. Imagine my horror when, on my handing him the cup, he remained motionless, only repeating "Mamma!" in that strange, unfamiliar voice, which was indeed by this time hardly a voice at all. I took his hand, but it did not respond to my pressure; it was quite stiff. I put the cup to his lips; the poor little fellow gulped down three or four mouthfuls in a convulsive manner that was terrible to see, and the water made a strange sound in his throat. He clung to me desperately, and I saw his eyes roll, as though some hidden force within were pulling at them, till only the whites were visible; his limbs were turning rigid. I screamed aloud, and Louis came.

"A doctor! quick!... he is dying," I cried.

Louis vanished, and my poor Armand again gasped, "Mamma! Mamma!" The next moment he lost all consciousness of his mother's existence. The pretty veins on his forehead swelled, and the convulsions began. For a whole hour before the doctors came, I held in my arms that merry baby, all lilies and roses, the blossom of my life, my pride, and my joy, lifeless as a piece of wood; and his eyes! I cannot think of them without horror. My pretty Armand was a mere mummy—black, shriveled, misshapen.

A doctor, two doctors, brought from Marseilles by Louis, hovered about like birds of ill omen; it made me shudder to look at them. One spoke of brain fever, the other saw nothing but an ordinary case of convulsions in infancy. Our own country doctor seemed to me to have the most sense, for he offered no opinion. "It's teething," said the second doctor.—"Fever," said the first. Finally it was agreed to put leeches on his neck and ice on his head. It seemed to me like death. To look on, to see a corpse, all purple or black, and not a cry, not a movement from this creature but now so full of life and sound—it was horrible!

At one moment I lost my head, and gave a sort of hysterical laugh, as I saw the pretty neck which I used to devour with kisses, with the leeches feeding on it, and his darling head in a cap of ice. My dear, we had to cut those lovely curls, of which we were so proud and with which you used to play, in order to make room for the ice. The convulsions returned every ten minutes with the regularity of labor pains, and then the poor baby writhed and twisted, now white, now violet. His supple limbs clattered like wood as they struck. And this unconscious flesh was the being who smiled and prattled, and used to say Mamma! At the thought, a storm of agony swept tumultuously over my soul, like the sea tossing in a hurricane. It seemed as though every tie which binds a child to its mother's heart was strained to rending. My mother, who might have given me help, advice, or comfort, was in Paris. Mothers, it is my belief, know more than doctors do about convulsions.

After four days and nights of suspense and fear, which almost killed me, the doctors were unanimous in advising the application of a horrid ointment, which would produce open sores. Sores on my Armand! who only five days before was playing about, and laughing, and trying to say "Godmother!" I would not have it done, preferring to trust in nature. Louis, who believes in doctors, scolded me. A man remains the same through everything. But there are moments when this terrible disease takes the likeness of death, and in one of these it seemed borne in upon me that this hateful remedy was the salvation of Armand. Louise, the skin was so dry, so rough and parched, that the ointment would not act. Then I broke into weeping, and my tears fell so long and so fast, that the bedside was wet through. And the doctors were at dinner!

Seeing myself alone with the child, I stripped him of all medical

appliances, and seizing him like a mad woman, pressed him to my bosom, laying my forehead against his, and beseeching God to grant him the life which I was striving to pass into his veins from mine. For some minutes I held him thus, longing to die with him, so that neither life nor death might part us. Dear, I felt the limbs relaxing; the writhings ceased, the child stirred, and the ghastly, corpselike tints faded away! I screamed, just as I did when he was taken ill; the doctors hurried up, and I pointed to Armand.

"He is saved!" exclaimed the oldest of them.

What music in those words! The gates of heaven opened! And, in fact, two hours later Armand came back to life; but I was utterly crushed, and it was only the healing power of joy which saved me from a serious illness. My God! by what tortures do you bind a mother to her child! To fasten him to our heart, need the nails be driven into the very quick? Was I not mother enough before? I, who wept tears of joy over his broken syllables and tottering steps, who spent hours together planning how best to perform my duty, and fit myself for the sweet post of mother? Why these horrors, these ghastly scenes, for a mother who already idolized her child?

As I write, our little Armand is playing, shouting, laughing. What can be the cause of this terrible disease with children? Vainly do I try to puzzle it out, remembering that I am again with child. Is it teething? Is it some peculiar process in the brain? Is there something wrong with the nervous system of children who are subject to convulsions? All these thoughts disquiet me, in view alike of the present and the future. Our country doctor holds to the theory of nervous trouble produced by teething. I would give every tooth in my head to see little Armand's all through. The sight of one of those little white pearls peeping out of the swollen gum brings a cold sweat over me now. The heroism with which the little angel bore his sufferings proves to me that he will be his mother's son. A look from him goes to my very heart.

Medical science can give no satisfactory explanation as to the origin of this sort of tetanus, which passes off as rapidly as it comes on, and can apparently be neither guarded against nor cured. One thing alone, as I said before, is certain, that it is hell for a mother to see her child in convulsions. How passionately do I clasp him to my heart! I could walk for ever with him in my arms!

To have suffered all this only six weeks before my confinement made it much worse; I feared for the coming child. Farewell, my dear beloved. Don't wish for a child—there is the sum and substance of my letter!

XLI. THE BARONNE DE MACUMER TO THE VICOMTESSE DE

L'ESTORADE Paris.

Poor sweet,—Macumer and I forgave you all your naughtiness when we heard of your terrible trouble. I thrilled with pain as I read the details of the double agony, and there seem compensations now in being childless.

I am writing at once to tell you that Louis has been promoted. He can now wear the ribbon of an officer of the Legion. You are a lucky woman, Renee, and you will probably have a little girl, since that used to be your wish!

The marriage of my brother with Mlle. de Mortsauf was celebrated on our return. Our gracious King, who really is extraordinarily kind, has given my brother the reversion of the post of first gentleman of the chamber, which his father-in-law now fills, on the one condition that the scutcheon of the Mortsaufs should be placed side by side with that of the Lenoncourts.

"The office ought to go with the title," he said to the Duc de Lenoncourt-Givry.

My father is justified a hundred-fold. Without the help of my fortune nothing of all this could have taken place. My father and mother came from Madrid for the wedding, and return there, after the reception which I give to-morrow for the bride and bridegroom.

The carnival will be a very gay one. The Duc and Duchesse de Soria are in Paris, and their presence makes me a little uneasy. Marie Heredia is certainly one of the most beautiful women in Europe, and I don't like the way Felipe looks at her. Therefore I am doubly lavish of sweetness and caresses. Every look and gesture speak the words which I am careful my lips should not utter, "She could not love like this!" Heaven knows how lovely and fascinating I am! Yesterday Mme. de Maufrigneuse said to me:

"Dear child, who can compete with you?"

Then I keep Felipe so well amused, that his sister-in-law must seem as lively as a Spanish cow in comparison. I am the less sorry that a little Abencerrage is not on his way, because the Duchess will no doubt stay in Paris over her confinement, and she won't be a beauty any longer. If the baby is a boy, it will be called Felipe, in honor of the exile. An unkind chance has decreed that I shall, a second time, serve as godmother.

Good-bye, dear, I shall go to Chantepleurs early this year, for our Italian tour was shockingly expensive. I shall leave about the end of March, and retire to economize in Nivenais. Besides, I am tired of Paris. Felipe sighs, as I do, after the beautiful quiet of the park, our cool meadows, and our Loire, with its sparkling sands, peerless among rivers. Chantepleurs will seem delightful to

me after the pomps and vanities of Italy; for, after all, splendor becomes wearisome, and a lover's glance has more beauty than a capo d'opera or a bel quadro!

We shall expect you there. Don't be afraid that I shall be jealous again. You are free to take what soundings you please in Macumer's heart, and fish up all the interjections and doubts you can. I am supremely indifferent. Since that day at Rome Felipe's love for me has grown. He told me yesterday (he is looking over my shoulder now) that his sister-in-law, the Princess Heredia, his destined bride of old, the dream of his youth, had no brains. Oh! my dear, I am worse than a ballet-dancer! If you knew what joy that slighting remark gave me! I have pointed out to Felipe that she does not speak French correctly. She says esemple for exemple, sain for cinq, cheu for je. She is beautiful of course, but quite without charm or the slightest scintilla of wit. When a compliment is paid her, she looks at you as though she didn't know what to do with such a strange thing. Felipe, being what he is, could not have lived two months with Marie after his marriage. Don Fernand, the Duc de Soria, suits her very well. He has generous instincts, but it's easy to see he has been a spoilt child. I am tempted to be naughty and make you laugh; but I won't draw the long bow. Ever so much love, darling.

XLII. RENEE TO LOUISE

My little girl is two months old. She is called Jeanne-Athenais, and has for godmother and godfather my mother, and an old grand-uncle of Louis'.

As soon as I possibly can, I shall start for my visit to Chantepleurs, since you are not afraid of a nursing mother. Your godson can say your name now; he calls it Matoumer, for he can't say c properly. You will be quite delighted with him. He has got all his teeth, and eats meat now like a big boy; he is all over the place, trotting about like a little mouse; but I watch him all the time with anxious eyes, and it makes me miserable that I cannot keep him by me when I am laid up. The time is more than usually long with me, as the doctors consider some special precautions necessary. Alas! my child, habit does not inure one to child-bearing. There are the same old discomforts and misgivings. However (don't show this to Felipe), this little girl takes after me, and she may yet cut out your Armand.

My father thought Felipe looking very thin, and my dear pet also not quite so blooming. Yet the Duc and Duchesse de Soria have gone; not a loophole for jealousy is left! Is there any trouble which you are hiding from me? Your letter is neither so long nor so full of loving thoughts as usual. Is this only a whim of

my dear whimsical friend?

I am running on too long. My nurse is angry with me for writing, and Mlle. Athenais de l'Estorade wants her dinner. Farewell, then; write me some nice long letters.

XLIII. MME. DE MACUMER TO THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE

For the first time in my life, my dear Renee, I have been alone and crying. I was sitting under a willow, on a wooden bench by the side of the long Chantepleurs marsh. The view there is charming, but it needs some merry children to complete it, and I wait for you. I have been married nearly three years, and no child! The thought of your quiver full drove me to explore my heart.

And this is what I find there. "Oh! if I had to suffer a hundred-fold what Renee suffered when my godson was born; if I had to see my child in convulsions, even so would to God that I might have a cherub of my own, like your Athenais!" I can see her from here in my mind's eye, and I know she is beautiful as the day, for you tell me nothing about her—that is just like my Renee! I believe you divine my trouble.

Each time my hopes are disappointed, I fall a prey for some days to the blackest melancholy. Then I compose sad elegies. When shall I embroider little caps and sew lace edgings to encircle a tiny head? When choose the cambric for the baby-clothes? Shall I never hear baby lips shout "Mamma," and have my dress pulled by a teasing despot whom my heart adores? Are there to be no wheelmarks of a little carriage on the gravel, no broken toys littered about the courtyard? Shall I never visit the toy-shops, as mothers do, to buy swords, and dolls, and baby-houses? And will it never be mine to watch the unfolding of a precious life—another Felipe, only more dear? I would have a son, if only to learn how a lover can be more to one in his second self.

My park and castle are cold and desolate to me. A childless woman is a monstrosity of nature; we exist only to be mothers. Oh! my sage in woman's livery, how well you have conned the book of life! Everywhere, too, barrenness is a dismal thing. My life is a little too much like one of Gessner's or Florian's sheepfolds, which Rivarol longed to see invaded by a wolf. I too have it in me to make sacrifices! There are forces in me, I feel, which Felipe has no use for; and if I am not to be a mother, I must be allowed to indulge myself in some romantic sorrow.

I have just made this remark to my belated Moor, and it brought tears to his

eyes. He cannot stand any joking on his love, so I let him off easily, and only called him a paladin of folly.

At times I am seized with a desire to go on pilgrimage, to bear my longings to the shrine of some madonna or to a watering-place. Next winter I shall take medical advice. I am too much enraged with myself to write more. Good-bye.

XLIV. THE SAME TO THE SAME Paris, 1829.

A whole year passed, my dear, without a letter! What does this mean? I am a little hurt. Do you suppose that your Louis, who comes to see me almost every alternate day, makes up for you? It is not enough to know that you are well and that everything prospers with you; for I love you, Renee, and I want to know what you are feeling and thinking of, just as I say everything to you, at the risk of being scolded, or censured, or misunderstood. Your silence and seclusion in the country, at the time when you might be in Paris enjoying all the Parliamentary honors of the Comte de l'Estorade, cause me serious anxiety. You know that your husband's "gift of gab" and unsparing zeal have won for him quite a position here, and he will doubtless receive some very good post when the session is over. Pray, do you spend your life writing him letters of advice? Numa was not so far removed from his Egeria.

Why did you not take this opportunity of seeing Paris? I might have enjoyed your company for four months. Louis told me yesterday that you were coming to fetch him, and would have your third confinement in Paris—you terrible mother Gigogne! After bombarding Louis with queries, exclamations, and regrets, I at last defeated his strategy so far as to discover that his grand-uncle, the godfather of Athenais, is very ill. Now I believe that you, like a careful mother, would be quite equal to angling with the member's speeches and fame for a fat legacy from your husband's last remaining relative on the mother's side. Keep your mind easy, my Renee—we are all at work for Louis, Lenoncourts, Chaulieus, and the whole band of Mme. de Macumer's followers. Martignac will probably put him into the audit department. But if you won't tell me why you bury yourself in the country, I shall be cross.

Tell me, are you afraid that the political wisdom of the house of l'Estorade should seem to centre in you? Or is it the uncle's legacy? Perhaps you were afraid you would be less to your children in Paris? Ah! what I would give to know whether, after all, you were not simply too vain to show yourself in Paris for the first time in your present condition! Vain thing! Farewell.

XLV. RENEE TO LOUISE

You complain of my silence; have you forgotten, then, those two little brown heads, at once my subjects and my tyrants? And as to staying at home, you have yourself hit upon several of my reasons. Apart from the condition of our dear uncle, I didn't want to drag with me to Paris a boy of four and a little girl who will soon be three, when I am again expecting my confinement. I had no intention of troubling you and upsetting your husband with such a party. I did not care to appear, looking my worst, in the brilliant circle over which you preside, and I detest life in hotels and lodgings.

When I come to spend the session in Paris, it will be in my own house. Louis' uncle, when he heard of the rank his grand-nephew had received, made me a present of two hundred thousand francs (the half of his savings) with which to buy a house in Paris, and I have charged Louis to find one in your neighborhood. My mother has given me thirty thousand francs for the furnishing, and I shall do my best not to disgrace the dear sister of my election —no pun intended.

I am grateful to you for having already done so much at Court for Louis. But though M. de Bourmont and M. de Polignac have paid him the compliment of asking him to join their ministry, I do not wish so conspicuous a place for him. It would commit him too much; and I prefer the Audit Office because it is permanent. Our affairs here are in very good hands; so you need not fear; as soon as the steward has mastered the details, I will come and support Louis.

As for writing long letters nowadays, how can I. This one, in which I want to describe to you the daily routine of my life, will be a week on the stocks. Who can tell but Armand may lay hold of it to make caps for his regiments drawn up on my carpet, or vessels for the fleets which sail his bath! A single day will serve as a sample of the rest, for they are all exactly alike, and their characteristics reduce themselves to two—either the children are well, or they are not. For me, in this solitary grange, it is no exaggeration to say that hours become minutes, or minutes hours, according to the children's health.

If I have some delightful hours, it is when they are asleep and I am no longer needed to rock the one or soothe the other with stories. When I have them sleeping by my side, I say to myself, "Nothing can go wrong now." The fact is, my sweet, every mother spends her time, so soon as her children are out of her sight, in imagining dangers for them. Perhaps it is Armand seizing the razors to play with, or his coat taking fire, or a snake biting him, or he might tumble in running and start an abscess on his head, or he might drown himself in a pond. A mother's life, you see, is one long succession of dramas,

now soft and tender, now terrible. Not an hour but has its joys and fears.

But at night, in my room, comes the hour for waking dreams, when I plan out their future, which shines brightly in the smile of the guardian angel, watching over their beds. Sometimes Armand calls me in his sleep; I kiss his forehead (without rousing him), then his sister's feet, and watch them both lying in their beauty. These are my merry-makings! Yesterday, it must have been our guardian angel who roused me in the middle of the night and summoned me in fear to Athenais' cradle. Her head was too low, and I found Armand all uncovered, his feet purple with cold.

"Darling mother!" he cried, rousing up and flinging his arms round me.

There, dear, is one of our night scenes for you.

How important it is for a mother to have her children by her side at night! It is not for a nurse, however careful she may be, to take them up, comfort them, and hush them to sleep again, when some horrid nightmare has disturbed them. For they have their dreams, and the task of explaining away one of those dread visions of the night is the more arduous because the child is scared, stupid, and only half awake. It is a mere interlude in the unconsciousness of slumber. In this way I have come to sleep so lightly, that I can see my little pair and see them stirring, through the veil of my eyelids. A sigh or a rustle wakens me. For me, the demon of convulsions is ever crouching by their beds.

So much for the nights; with the first twitter of the birds my babies begin to stir. Through the mists of dispersing sleep, their chatter blends with the warblings that fill the morning air, or with the swallows' noisy debates—little cries of joy or woe, which make their way to my heart rather than my ears. While Nais struggles to get at me, making the passage from her cradle to my bed on all fours or with staggering steps, Armand climbs up with the agility of a monkey, and has his arms round me. Then the merry couple turn my bed into a playground, where mother lies at their mercy. The baby-girl pulls my hair, and would take to sucking again, while Armand stands guard over my breast, as though defending his property. Their funny ways, their peals of laughter, are too much for me, and put sleep fairly to flight.

Then we play the ogress game; mother ogress eats up the white, soft flesh with hugs, and rains kisses on those rosy shoulders and eyes brimming over with saucy mischief; we have little jealous tiffs too, so pretty to see. It has happened to me, dear, to take up my stockings at eight o'clock and be still bare-footed at nine!

Then comes the getting up. The operation of dressing begins. I slip on my dressing-gown, turn up my sleeves, and don the mackintosh apron; with

Mary's assistance, I wash and scrub my two little blossoms. I am sole arbiter of the temperature of the bath, for a good half of children's crying and whimpering comes from mistakes here. The moment has arrived for paper fleets and glass ducks, since the only way to get children thoroughly washed is to keep them well amused. If you knew the diversions that have to be invented before these despotic sovereigns will permit a soft sponge to be passed over every nook and cranny, you would be awestruck at the amount of ingenuity and intelligence demanded by the maternal profession when one takes it seriously. Prayers, scoldings, promises, are alike in requisition; above all, the jugglery must be so dexterous that it defies detection. The case would be desperate had not Providence to the cunning of the child matched that of the mother. A child is a diplomatist, only to be mastered, like the diplomatists of the great world, through his passions! Happily, it takes little to make these cherubs laugh; the fall of a brush, a piece of soap slipping from the hand, and what merry shouts! And if our triumphs are dearly bought, still triumphs they are, though hidden from mortal eye. Even the father knows nothing of it all. None but God and His angels—and perhaps you—can fathom the glances of satisfaction which Mary and I exchange when the little creatures' toilet is at last concluded, and they stand, spotless and shining, amid a chaos of soap, sponges, combs, basins, blotting-paper, flannel, and all the nameless litter of a true English "nursery."

For I am so far a convert as to admit that English women have a talent for this department. True, they look upon the child only from the point of view of material well-being; but where this is concerned, their arrangements are admirable. My children must always be bare-legged and wear woollen socks. There shall be no swaddling nor bandages; on the other hand, they shall never be left alone. The helplessness of the French infant in its swaddling-bands means the liberty of the nurse—that is the whole explanation. A mother, who is really a mother, is never free.

There is my answer to your question why I do not write. Besides the management of the estate, I have the upbringing of two children on my hands.

The art of motherhood involves much silent, unobtrusive self-denial, an hourly devotion which finds no detail too minute. The soup warming before the fire must be watched. Am I the kind of woman, do you suppose, to shirk such cares? The humblest task may earn a rich harvest of affection. How pretty is a child's laugh when he finds the food to his liking! Armand has a way of nodding his head when he is pleased that is worth a lifetime of adoration. How could I leave to any one else the privilege and delight, as well as the responsibility, of blowing on the spoonful of soup which is too hot for my little Nais, my nursling of seven months ago, who still remembers my breast? When a nurse has allowed a child to burn its tongue and lips with

scalding food, she tells the mother, who hurries up to see what is wrong, that the child cried from hunger. How could a mother sleep in peace with the thought that a breath, less pure than her own, has cooled her child's food—the mother whom Nature has made the direct vehicle of food to infant lips. To mince a chop for Nais, who has just cut her last teeth, and mix the meat, cooked to a turn, with potatoes, is a work of patience, and there are times, indeed, when none but a mother could succeed in making an impatient child go through with its meal.

No number of servants, then, and no English nurse can dispense a mother from taking the field in person in that daily contest, where gentleness alone should grapple with the little griefs and pains of childhood. Louise, the care of these innocent darlings is a work to engage the whole soul. To whose hand and eyes, but one's own, intrust the task of feeding, dressing, and putting to bed? Broadly speaking, a crying child is the unanswerable condemnation of mother or nurse, except when the cry is the outcome of natural pain. Now that I have two to look after (and a third on the road), they occupy all my thoughts. Even you, whom I love so dearly, have become a memory to me.

My own dressing is not always completed by two o'clock. I have no faith in mothers whose rooms are in apple-pie order, and who themselves might have stepped out of a bandbox. Yesterday was one of those lovely days of early April, and I wanted to take my children for a walk, while I was still able —for the warning bell is in my ears. Such an expedition is quite an epic to a mother! One dreams of it the night before! Armand was for the first time to put on a little black velvet jacket, a new collar which I had worked, a Scotch cap with the Stuart colors and cock's feathers; Nais was to be in white and pink, with one of those delicious little baby caps; for she is a baby still, though she will lose that pretty title on the arrival of the impatient youngster, whom I call my beggar, for he will have the portion of a younger son. (You see, Louise, the child has already appeared to me in a vision, so I know it is a boy.)

Well, caps, collars, jackets, socks, dainty little shoes, pink garters, the muslin frock with silk embroidery,—all was laid out on my bed. Then the little brown heads had to be brushed, twittering merrily all the time like birds, answering each other's call. Armand's hair is in curls, while Nais' is brought forward softly on the forehead as a border to the pink-and-white cap. Then the shoes are buckled; and when the little bare legs and well-shod feet have trotted off to the nursery, while two shining faces (clean, Mary calls them) and eyes ablaze with life petition me to start, my heart beats fast. To look on the children whom one's own hand has arrayed, the pure skin brightly veined with blue, that one has bathed, laved, and sponged and decked with gay colors of silk or velvet—why, there is no poem comes near to it! With what eager, covetous longing one calls them back for one more kiss on those white necks,

which, in their simple collars, the loveliest woman cannot rival. Even the coarsest lithograph of such a scene makes a mother pause, and I feast my eyes daily on the living picture!

Once out of doors, triumphant in the result of my labors, while I was admiring the princely air with which little Armand helped baby to totter along the path you know, I saw a carriage coming, and tried to get them out of the way. The children tumbled into a dirty puddle, and lo! my works of art are ruined! We had to take them back and change their things. I took the little one in my arms, never thinking of my own dress, which was ruined, while Mary seized Armand, and the cavalcade re-entered. With a crying baby and a soaked child, what mind has a mother left for herself?

Dinner time arrives, and as a rule I have done nothing. Now comes the problem which faces me twice every day—how to suffice in my own person for two children, put on their bibs, turn up their sleeves, and get them to eat. In the midst of these ever-recurring cares, joys, and catastrophes, the only person neglected in the house is myself. If the children have been naughty, often I don't get rid of my curl-papers all day. Their tempers rule my toilet. As the price of a few minutes in which I write you these half-dozen pages, I have had to let them cut pictures out of my novels, build castles with books, chessmen, or mother-of-pearl counters, and give Nais my silks and wools to arrange in her own fashion, which, I assure you, is so complicated, that she is entirely absorbed in it, and has not uttered a word.

Yet I have nothing to complain of. My children are both strong and independent; they amuse themselves more easily then you would think. They find delight in everything; a guarded liberty is worth many toys. A few pebbles —pink, yellow, purple, and black, small shells, the mysteries of sand, are a world of pleasure to them. Their wealth consists in possessing a multitude of small things. I watch Armand and find him talking to the flowers, the flies, the chickens, and imitating them. He is on friendly terms with insects, and never wearies of admiring them. Everything which is on a minute scale interests them. Armand is beginning to ask the "why" of everything he sees. He has come to ask what I am saying to his godmother, whom he looks on as a fairy. Strange how children hit the mark!

Alas! my sweet, I would not sadden you with the tale of my joys. Let me give you some notion of your godson's character. The other day we were followed by a poor man begging—beggars soon find out that a mother with her child at her side can't resist them. Armand has no idea what hunger is, and money is a sealed book to him; but I have just bought him a trumpet which had long been the object of his desires. He held it out to the old man with a kingly air, saying:

"Here, take this!"

What joy the world can give would compare with such a moment?

"May I keep it?" said the poor man to me. "I too, madame, have had children," he added, hardly noticing the money I put into his hand.

I shudder when I think that Armand must go to school, and that I have only three years and a half more to keep him by me. The flowers that blossom in his sunny childhood will fall before the scythe of a public school system; his gracious ways and bewitching candor will lose their spontaneity. They will cut the curls that I have brushed and smoothed and kissed so often! What will they do with the thinking being that is Armand?

And what of you? You tell me nothing of your life. Are you still in love with Felipe? For, as regards the Saracen, I have no uneasiness. Good-bye; Nais has just had a tumble, and if I run on like this, my letter will become a volume.

XLVI. MME. DE MACUMER TO THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE 1829.

My sweet, tender Renee, you will have learned from the papers the terrible calamity which has overwhelmed me. I have not been able to write you even a word. For twenty days I never left his bedside; I received his last breath and closed his eyes; I kept holy watch over him with the priests and repeated the prayers for the dead. The cruel pangs I suffered were accepted by me as a rightful punishment; and yet, when I saw on his calm lips the smile which was his last farewell to me, how was it possible to believe that I had caused his death!

Be it so or not, he is gone, and I am left. To you, who have known us both so well, what more need I say? These words contain all. Oh! I would give my share of Heaven to hear the flattering tale that my prayers have power to bring him back to life! To see him again, to have him once more mine, were it only for a second, would mean that I could draw breath again without mortal agony. Will you not come soon and soothe me with such promises? Is not your love strong enough to deceive me?

But stay! it was you who told me beforehand that he would suffer through me. Was it so indeed? Yes, it is true, I had no right to his love. Like a thief, I took what was not mine, and my frenzied grasp has crushed the life out of my bliss. The madness is over now, but I feel that I am alone. Merciful God! what torture of the damned can exceed the misery in that word?

When they took him away from me, I lay down on the same bed and hoped to die. There was but a door between us, and it seemed to me I had strength to force it! But, alas! I was too young for death; and after forty days, during which, with cruel care and all the sorry inventions of medical science, they slowly nursed me back to life, I find myself in the country, seated by my window, surrounded with lovely flowers, which he made to bloom for me, gazing on the same splendid view over which his eyes have so often wandered, and which he was so proud to have discovered, since it gave me pleasure. Ah! dear Renee, no words can tell how new surroundings hurt when the heart is dead. I shiver at the sight of the moist earth in my garden, for the earth is a vast tomb, and it is almost as though I walked on him! When I first went out, I trembled with fear and could not move. It was so sad to see his flowers, and he not there!

My father and mother are in Spain. You know what my brothers are, and you yourself are detained in the country. But you need not be uneasy about me; two angels of mercy flew to my side. The Duc and the Duchesse de Soria hastened to their brother in his illness, and have been everything that heart could wish. The last few nights before the end found the three of us gathered, in calm and wordless grief, round the bed where this great man was breathing his last, a man among a thousand, rare in any age, head and shoulders above the rest of us in everything. The patient resignation of my Felipe was angelic. The sight of his brother and Marie gave him a moment's pleasure and easing of his pain.

"Darling," he said to me with the simple frankness which never deserted him, "I had almost gone from life without leaving to Fernand the Barony of Macumer; I must make a new will. My brother will forgive me; he knows what it is to love!"

I owe my life to the care of my brother-in-law and his wife; they want to carry me off to Spain!

Ah! Renee, to no one but you can I speak freely of my grief. A sense of my own faults weighs me to the ground, and there is a bitter solace in pouring them out to you, poor, unheeded Cassandra. The exactions, the preposterous jealousy, the nagging unrest of my passion wore him to death. My love was the more fraught with danger for him because we had both the same exquisitely sensitive nature, we spoke the same language, nothing was lost on him, and often the mocking shaft, so carelessly discharged, went straight to his heart. You can have no idea of the point to which he carried submissiveness. I had only to tell him to go and leave me alone, and the caprice, however wounding to him, would be obeyed without a murmur. His last breath was spent in blessing me and in repeating that a single morning alone with me was more precious to him than a lifetime spent with another woman, were she even

the Marie of his youth. My tears fall as I write the words.

This is the manner of my life now. I rise at midday and go to bed at seven; I linger absurdly long over meals; I saunter about slowly, standing motionless, an hour at a time, before a single plant; I gaze into the leafy trees; I take a sober and serious interest in mere nothings; I long for shade, silence, and night; in a word, I fight through each hour as it comes, and take a gloomy pleasure in adding it to the heap of the vanquished. My peaceful park gives me all the company I care for; everything there is full of glorious images of my vanished joy, invisible for others but eloquent to me.

"I cannot away with you Spaniards!" I exclaimed one morning, as my sister-in-law flung herself on my neck. "You have some nobility that we lack."

Ah! Renee, if I still live, it is doubtless because Heaven tempers the sense of affliction to the strength of those who have to bear it. Only a woman can know what it is to lose a love which sprang from the heart and was genuine throughout, a passion which was not ephemeral, and satisfied at once the spirit and the flesh. How rare it is to find a man so gifted that to worship him brings no sense of degradation! If such supreme fortune befall us once, we cannot hope for it a second time. Men of true greatness, whose strength and worth are veiled by poetic grace, and who charm by some high spiritual power, men made to be adored, beware of love! Love will ruin you, and ruin the woman of your heart. This is the burden of my cry as I pace my woodland walks.

And he has left me no child! That love so rich in smiles, which rained perpetual flowers and joy, has left no fruit. I am a thing accursed. Can it be that, even as the two extremes of polar ice and torrid sand are alike intolerant of life, so the very purity and vehemence of a single-hearted passion render it barren as hate? Is it only a marriage of reason, such as yours, which is blessed with a family? Can Heaven be jealous of our passions? There are wild words.

You are, I believe, the one person whose company I could endure. Come to me, then; none but Renee should be with Louise in her sombre garb. What a day when I first put on my widow's bonnet! When I saw myself all arrayed in black, I fell back on a seat and wept till night came; and I weep again as I recall that moment of anguish.

Good-bye. Writing tires me; thoughts crowd fast, but I have no heart to put them into words. Bring your children; you can nurse baby here without making me jealous; all that is gone, he is not here, and I shall be very glad to see my godson. Felipe used to wish for a child like little Armand. Come, then, come and help me to bear my woe.

XLVII. RENEE TO LOUISE 1829.

My darling,—When you hold this letter in your hands, I shall be already near, for I am starting a few minutes after it. We shall be alone together. Louis is obliged to remain in Provence because of the approaching elections. He wants to be elected again, and the Liberals are already plotting against his return.

I don't come to comfort you; I only bring you my heart to beat in sympathy with yours, and help you to bear with life. I come to bid you weep, for only with tears can you purchase the joy of meeting him again. Remember, he is traveling towards Heaven, and every step forward which you take brings you nearer to him. Every duty done breaks a link in the chain that keeps you apart.

Louise, in my arms you will once more raise your head and go on your way to him, pure, noble, washed of all those errors, which had no root in your heart, and bearing with you the harvest of good deeds which, in his name, you will accomplish here.

I scribble these hasty lines in all the bustle of preparation, and interrupted by the babies and by Armand, who keeps saying, "Godmother, godmother! I want to see her," till I am almost jealous. He might be your child!

*

SECOND PART

XLVIII. THE BARONNE DE MACUMER TO THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE October 15,1833.

Yes, Renee, it is quite true; you have been correctly informed. I have sold my house, I have sold Chantepleurs, and the farms in Seine-et-Marne, but no more, please! I am neither mad nor ruined, I assure you.

Let us go into the matter. When everything was wound up, there remained to me of my poor Macumer's fortune about twelve hundred thousand francs. I will account, as to a practical sister, for every penny of this.

I put a million in the Three per Cents when they were at fifty, and so I have got an income for myself of sixty thousand francs, instead of the thirty thousand which the property yielded. Then, only think what my life was. Six months of the year in the country, renewing leases, listening to the grumbles of

the farmers, who pay when it pleases them, and getting as bored as a sportsman in wet weather. There was produce to sell, and I always sold it at a loss. Then, in Paris, my house represented a rental of ten thousand francs; I had to invest my money at the notaries; I was kept waiting for the interest, and could only get the money back by prosecuting; in addition I had to study the law of mortgage. In short, there was business in Nivernais, in Seine-et-Marne, in Paris—and what a burden, what a nuisance, what a vexing and losing game for a widow of twenty-seven!

Whereas now my fortune is secured on the Budget. In place of paying taxes to the State, I receive from it, every half-year, in my own person, and free from cost, thirty thousand francs in thirty notes, handed over the counter to me by a dapper little clerk at the Treasury, who smiles when he sees me coming!

Supposing the nation went bankrupt? Well, to begin with:

'Tis not mine to see trouble so far from my door.

At the worst, too, the nation would not dock me of more than half my income, so I should still be as well off as before my investment, and in the meantime I shall be drawing a double income until the catastrophe arrives. A nation doesn't become bankrupt more than once in a century, so I shall have plenty of time to amass a little capital out of my savings.

And finally, is not the Comte de l'Estorade a peer of this July semi-republic? Is he not one of those pillars of royalty offered by the "people" to the King of the French? How can I have qualms with a friend at Court, a great financier, head of the Audit Department? I defy you to arraign my sanity! I am almost as good at sums as your citizen king.

Do you know what inspires a woman with all this arithmetic? Love, my dear!

Alas! the moment has come for unfolding to you the mysteries of my conduct, the motives of which have baffled even your keen sight, your prying affection, and your subtlety. I am to be married in a country village near Paris. I love and am loved. I love as much as a woman can who knows love well. I am loved as much as a woman ought to be by the man she adores.

Forgive me, Renee, for keeping this a secret from you and from every one. If your friend evades all spies and puts curiosity on a false track, you must admit that my feeling for poor Macumer justified some dissimulation. Besides, de l'Estorade and you would have deafened me with remonstrances, and plagued me to death with your misgivings, to which the facts might have lent some color. You know, if no one else does, to what pitch my jealousy can go, and all this would only have been useless torture to me. I was determined to

carry out, on my own responsibility, what you, Renee, will call my insane project, and I would take counsel only with my own head and heart, for all the world like a schoolgirl giving the slip to her watchful parents.

The man I love possesses nothing but thirty thousand francs' worth of debts, which I have paid. What a theme for comment here! You would have tried to make Gaston out an adventurer; your husband would have set detectives on the dear boy. I preferred to sift him for myself. He has been wooing me now close on two years. I am twenty-seven, he is twenty-three. The difference, I admit, is huge when it is on the wrong side. Another source of lamentation!

Lastly, he is a poet, and has lived by his trade—that is to say, on next to nothing, as you will readily understand. Being a poet, he has spent more time weaving day-dreams, and basking, lizard-like, in the sun, than scribing in his dingy garret. Now, practical people have a way of tarring with the same brush of inconstancy authors, artists, and in general all men who live by their brains. Their nimble and fertile wit lays them open to the charge of a like agility in matters of the heart.

Spite of the debts, spite of the difference in age, spite of the poetry, an end is to be placed in a few days to a heroic resistance of more than nine months, during which he has not been allowed even to kiss my hand, and so also ends the season of our sweet, pure love-making. This is not the mere surrender of a raw, ignorant, and curious girl, as it was eight years ago; the gift is deliberate, and my lover awaits it with such loyal patience that, if I pleased, I could postpone the marriage for a year. There is no servility in this; love's slave he may be, but the heart is not slavish. Never have I seen a man of nobler feeling, or one whose tenderness was more rich in fancy, whose love bore more the impress of his soul. Alas! my sweet one, the art of love is his by heritage. A few words will tell his story.

My friend has no other name than Marie Gaston. He is the illegitimate son of the beautiful Lady Brandon, whose fame must have reached you, and who died broken-hearted, a victim to the vengeance of Lady Dudley—a ghastly story of which the dear boy knows nothing. Marie Gaston was placed by his brother Louis in a boarding-school at Tours, where he remained till 1827. Louis, after settling his brother at school, sailed a few days later for foreign parts "to seek his fortune," to use the words of an old woman who had played the part of Providence to him. This brother turned sailor used to write him, at long intervals, letters quite fatherly in tone, and breathing a noble spirit; but a struggling life never allowed him to return home. His last letter told Marie that he had been appointed Captain in the navy of some American republic, and exhorted him to hope for better days.

Alas! since then three years have passed, and my poor poet has never heard again. So dearly did he love his brother, that he would have started to look for him but for Daniel d'Arthez, the well-known author, who took a generous interest in Marie Gaston, and prevented him carrying out his mad impulse. Nor was this all; often would he give him a crust and a corner, as the poet puts it in his graphic words.

For, in truth, the poor lad was in terrible straits; he was actually innocent enough to believe—incredible as it seems—that genius was the shortest road to fortune, and from 1828 to 1833 his one aim has been to make a name for himself in letters. Naturally his life was a frightful tissue of toil and hardships, alternating between hope and despair. The good advice of d'Arthez could not prevail against the allurements of ambition, and his debts went on growing like a snowball. Still he was beginning to come into notice when I happened to meet him at Mme. d'Espard's. At first sight he inspired me, unconsciously to himself, with the most vivid sympathy. How did it come about that this virgin heart has been left for me? The fact is that my poet combines genius and cleverness, passion and pride, and women are always afraid of greatness which has no weak side to it. How many victories were needed before Josephine could see the great Napoleon in the little Bonaparte whom she had married.

Poor Gaston is innocent enough to think he knows the measure of my love! He simply has not an idea of it, but to you I must make it clear; for this letter, Renee, is something in the nature of a last will and testament. Weigh well what I am going to say, I beg of you.

At this moment I am confident of being loved as perhaps not another women on this earth, nor have I a shadow of doubt as to the perfect happiness of our wedded life, to which I bring a feeling hitherto unknown to me. Yes, for the first time in my life, I know the delight of being swayed by passion. That which every woman seeks in love will be mine in marriage. As poor Felipe once adored me, so do I now adore Gaston. I have lost control of myself, I tremble before this boy as the Arab hero used to tremble before me. In a word, the balance of love is now on my side, and this makes me timid. I am full of the most absurd terrors. I am afraid of being deserted, afraid of becoming old and ugly while Gaston still retains his youth and beauty, afraid of coming short of his hopes!

And yet I believe I have it in me, I believe I have sufficient devotion and ability, not only to keep alive the flame of his love in our solitary life, far from the world, but even to make it burn stronger and brighter. If I am mistaken, if this splendid idyl of love in hiding must come to an end—an end! what am I saying?—if I find Gaston's love less intense any day than it was the evening before, be sure of this, Renee, I should visit my failure only on myself; no

blame should attach to him. I tell you now it would mean my death. Not even if I had children could I live on these terms, for I know myself, Renee, I know that my nature is the lover's rather than the mother's. Therefore before taking this vow upon my soul, I implore you, my Renee, if this disaster befall me, to take the place of mother to my children; let them be my legacy to you! All that I know of you, your blind attachment to duty, your rare gifts, your love of children, your affection for me, would help to make my death—I dare not say easy—but at least less bitter.

The compact I have thus made with myself adds a vague terror to the solemnity of my marriage ceremony. For this reason I wish to have no one whom I know present, and it will be performed in secret. Let my heart fail me if it will, at least I shall not read anxiety in your dear eyes, and I alone shall know that this new marriage-contract which I sign may be my death warrant.

I shall not refer again to this agreement entered into between my present self and the self I am to be. I have confided it to you in order that you might know the full extent of your responsibilities. In marrying I retain full control of my property; and Gaston, while aware that I have enough to secure a comfortable life for both of us, is ignorant of its amount. Within twenty-four hours I shall dispose of it as I please; and in order to save him from a humiliating position, I shall have stock, bringing in twelve thousand francs a year, assigned to him. He will find this in his desk on the eve of our wedding. If he declined to accept, I should break off the whole thing. I had to threaten a rupture to get his permission to pay his debts.

This long confession has tired me. I shall finish it the day after to-morrow; I have to spend to-morrow in the country.

October 20th.

I will tell you now the steps I have taken to insure secrecy. My object has been to ward off every possible incitement to my ever-wakeful jealousy, in imitation of the Italian princess, who, like a lioness rushing on her prey, carried it off to some Swiss town to devour in peace. And I confide my plans to you because I have another favor to beg; namely, that you will respect our solitude and never come to see us uninvited.

Two years ago I purchased a small property overlooking the ponds of Ville d'Avray, on the road to Versailles. It consists of twenty acres of meadow land, the skirts of a wood, and a fine fruit garden. Below the meadows the land has been excavated so as to make a lakelet of about three acres in extent, with a charming little island in the middle. The small valley is shut in by two graceful, thickly-wooded slopes, where rise delicious springs that water my park by means of channels cleverly disposed by my architect. Finally, they fall into the royal ponds, glimpses of which can be seen here and there, gleaming

in the distance. My little park has been admirably laid out by the architect, who has surrounded it by hedges, walls, or ha-has, according to the lie of the land, so that no possible point of view may be lost.

A chalet has been built for me half-way up the hillside, with a charming exposure, having the woods of the Ronce on either side, and in front a grassy slope running down to the lake. Externally the chalet is an exact copy of those which are so much admired by travelers on the road from Sion to Brieg, and which fascinated me when I was returning from Italy. The internal decorations will bear comparison with those of the most celebrated buildings of the kind.

A hundred paces from this rustic dwelling stands a charming and ornamental house, communicating with it by a subterranean passage. This contains the kitchen, and other servants' rooms, stables, and coach-houses. Of all this series of brick buildings, the facade alone is seen, graceful in its simplicity, against a background of shrubbery. Another building serves to lodge the gardeners and masks the entrance to the orchards and kitchen-gardens.

The entrance gate to the property is so hidden in the wall dividing the park from the wood as almost to defy detection. The plantations, already well grown, will, in two or three years, completely hide the buildings, so that, except in winter, when the trees are bare, no trace of habitation will appear to the outside world, save only the smoke visible from the neighboring hills.

The surroundings of my chalet have been modeled on what is called the King's Garden at Versailles, but it has an outlook on my lakelet and island. The hills on every side display their abundant foliage—those splendid trees for which your new civil list has so well cared. My gardeners have orders to cultivate new sweet-scented flowers to any extent, and no others, so that our home will be a fragrant emerald. The chalet, adorned with a wild vine which covers the roof, is literally embedded in climbing plants of all kinds—hops, clematis, jasmine, azalea, copaea. It will be a sharp eye which can descry our windows!

The chalet, my dear, is a good, solid house, with its heating system and all the conveniences of modern architecture, which can raise a palace in the compass of a hundred square feet. It contains a suite of rooms for Gaston and another for me. The ground-floor is occupied by an ante-room, a parlor, and a dining room. Above our floor again are three rooms destined for the nurseries. I have five first-rate horses, a small light coupe, and a two-horse cabriolet. We are only forty-minutes' drive from Paris; so that, when the spirit moves us to hear an opera or see a new play, we can start after dinner and return the same night to our bower. The road is a good one, and passes under the shade of our green dividing wall.

My servants—cook, coachman, groom, and gardeners, in addition to my maid—are all very respectable people, whom I have spent the last six months in picking up, and they will be superintended by my old Philippe. Although confident of their loyalty and good faith, I have not neglected to cultivate self-interest; their wages are small, but will receive an annual addition in the shape of a New Year's Day present. They are all aware that the slightest fault, or a mere suspicion of gossiping, might lose them a capital place. Lovers are never troublesome to their servants; they are indulgent by disposition, and therefore I feel that I can reckon on my household.

All that is choice, pretty, or decorative in my house in the Rue du Bac has been transported to the chalet. The Rembrandt hangs on the staircase, as though it were a mere daub; the Hobbema faces the Rubens in his study; the Titian, which my sister-in-law Mary sent me from Madrid, adorns the boudoir. The beautiful furniture picked up by Felipe looks very well in the parlor, which the architect has decorated most tastefully. Everything at the chalet is charmingly simple, with the simplicity which can't be got under a hundred thousand francs. Our ground-floor rests on cellars, which are built of millstone and embedded in concrete; it is almost completely buried in flowers and shrubs, and is deliciously cool without a vestige of damp. To complete the picture, a fleet of white swans sail over my lake!

Oh! Renee, the silence which reigns in this valley would bring joy to the dead! One is awakened by the birds singing or the breeze rustling in the poplars. A little spring, discovered by the architect in digging the foundations of the wall, trickles down the hillside over silvery sand to the lake, between two banks of water-cress, hugging the edge of the woods. I know nothing that money can buy to equal it.

May not Gaston come to loathe this too perfect bliss? I shudder to think how complete it is, for the ripest fruits harbor the worms, the most gorgeous flowers attract the insects. Is it not ever the monarch of the forest which is eaten away by the fatal brown grub, greedy as death? I have learned before now that an unseen and jealous power attacks happiness which has reached perfection. Besides, this is the moral of all your preaching, and you have been proved a prophet.

When I went, the day before yesterday, to see whether my last whim had been carried out, tears rose to my eyes; and, to the great surprise of my architect, I at once passed his account for payment.

"But, madame," he exclaimed, "your man of business will refuse to pay this; it is a matter of three hundred thousand francs." My only reply was to add the words, "To be paid without question," with the bearing of a seventeenth-century Chaulieu.

"But," I said, "there is one condition to my gratitude. No human being must hear from you of the park and buildings. Promise me, on your honor, to observe this article in our contract—not to breathe to a soul the proprietor's name."

Now, can you understand the meaning of my sudden journeys, my mysterious comings and goings? Now, do you know whither those beautiful things, which the world supposes to be sold, have flown? Do you perceive the ultimate motive of my change of investment? Love, my dear, is a vast business, and they who would succeed in it should have no other. Henceforth I shall have no more trouble from money matters; I have taken all the thorns out of my life, and done my housekeeping work once for all with a vengeance, so as never to be troubled with it again, except during the daily ten minutes which I shall devote to my old major-domo Philippe. I have made a study of life and its sharp curves; there came a day when death also gave me harsh lessons. Now I want to turn all this to account. My one occupation will be to please him and love him, to brighten with variety what to common mortals is monotonously dull.

Gaston is still in complete ignorance. At my request he has, like myself, taken up his quarters at Ville d'Avray; to-morrow we start for the chalet. Our life there will cost but little; but if I told you the sum I am setting aside for my toilet, you would exclaim at my madness, and with reason. I intend to take as much trouble to make myself beautiful for him every day as other women do for society. My dress in the country, year in, year out, will cost twenty-four thousand francs, and the larger portion of this will not go in day costumes. As for him, he can wear a blouse if he pleases! Don't suppose that I am going to turn our life into an amorous duel and wear myself out in devices for feeding passion; all that I want is to have a conscience free from reproach. Thirteen years still lie before me as a pretty woman, and I am determined to be loved on the last day of the thirteenth even more fondly than on the morrow of our mysterious nuptials. This time no cutting words shall mar my lowly, grateful content. I will take the part of servant, since that of mistress throve so ill with me before.

Ah! Renee, if Gaston has sounded, as I have, the heights and depths of love, my happiness is assured! Nature at the chalet wears her fairest face. The woods are charming; each step opens up to you some fresh vista of cool greenery, which delights the soul by the sweet thoughts it wakens. They breathe of love. If only this be not the gorgeous theatre dressed by my hand for my own martyrdom!

In two days from now I shall be Mme. Gaston. My God! is it fitting a Christian so to love mortal man?

"Well, at least you have the law with you," was the comment of my man of business, who is to be one of my witnesses, and who exclaimed, on discovering why my property was to be realized, "I am losing a client!"

And you, my sweetheart (whom I dare no longer call my loved one), may you not cry, "I am losing a sister?"

My sweet, address when you write in future to Mme. Gaston, Poste Restante, Versailles. We shall send there every day for letters. I don't want to be known to the country people, and we shall get our provisions from Paris. In this way I hope we may guard the secret of our lives. Nobody has been seen in the place during the years spent in preparing our retreat; and the purchase was made in the troubled period which followed the revolution of July. The only person who has shown himself here is the architect; he alone is known, and he will not return.

Farewell. As I write this word, I know not whether my heart is fuller of grief or joy. That proves, does it not, that the pain of losing you equals my love for Gaston?

XLIX. MARIE GASTON TO DANIEL D'ARTHEZ October 1833.

My Dear Daniel,—I need two witnesses for my marriage. I beg of you to come to-morrow evening for this purpose, bringing with you our worthy and honored friend, Joseph Bridau. She who is to be my wife, with an instinctive divination of my dearest wishes, has declared her intention of living far from the world in complete retirement. You, who have done so much to lighten my penury, have been left in ignorance of my love; but you will understand that absolute secrecy was essential.

This will explain to you why it is that, for the last year, we have seen so little of each other. On the morrow of my wedding we shall be parted for a long time; but, Daniel, you are of stuff to understand me. Friendship can subsist in the absence of the friend. There may be times when I shall want you badly, but I shall not see you, at least not in my own house. Here again she has forestalled our wishes. She has sacrificed to me her intimacy with a friend of her childhood, who has been a sister to her. For her sake, then, I also must relinquish my comrade!

From this fact alone you will divine that ours is no mere passing fancy, but love, absolute, perfect, godlike; love based upon the fullest knowledge that can bind two hearts in sympathy. To me it is a perpetual spring of purest delight.

Yet nature allows of no happiness without alloy; and deep down, in the

innermost recess of my heart, I am conscious of a lurking thought, not shared with her, the pang of which is for me alone. You have too often come to the help of my inveterate poverty to be ignorant how desperate matters were with me. Where should I have found courage to keep up the struggle of life, after seeing my hopes so often blighted, but for your cheering words, your tactful aid, and the knowledge of what you had come through? Briefly, then, my friend, she freed me from that crushing load of debt, which was no secret to you. She is wealthy, I am penniless. Many a time have I exclaimed, in one of my fits of idleness, "Oh for some great heiress to cast her eye on me!" And now, in presence of this reality, the boy's careless jest, the unscrupulous cynicism of the outcast, have alike vanished, leaving in their place only a bitter sense of humiliation, which not the most considerate tenderness on her part, nor my own assurance of her noble nature, can remove. Nay, what better proof of my love could there exist, for her or for myself, than this shame, from which I have not recoiled, even when powerless to overcome it? The fact remains that there is a point where, far from protecting, I am the protected.

This is my pain which I confide to you.

Except in this one particular, dear Daniel, my fondest dreams are more than realized. Fairest and noblest among women, such a bride might indeed raise a man to giddy heights of bliss. Her gentle ways are seasoned with wit, her love comes with an ever-fresh grace and charm; her mind is well informed and quick to understand; in person, she is fair and lovely, with a rounded slimness, as though Raphael and Rubens had conspired to create a woman! I do not know whether I could have worshiped with such fervor at the shrine of a dark beauty; a brunette always strikes me as an unfinished boy. She is a widow, childless, and twenty-seven years of age. Though brimful of life and energy, she has her moods also of dreamy melancholy. These rare gifts go with a proud aristocratic bearing; she has a fine presence.

She belongs to one of those old families who make a fetich of rank, yet loves me enough to ignore the misfortune of my birth. Our secret passion is now of long standing; we have made trial, each of the other, and find that in the matter of jealousy we are twin spirits; our thoughts are the reverberation of the same thunderclap. We both love for the first time, and this bewitching springtime has filled its days for us with all the images of delight that fancy can paint in laughing, sweet, or musing mood. Our path has been strewn with the flowers of tender imaginings. Each hour brought its own wealth, and when we parted, it was to put our thoughts in verse. Not for a moment did I harbor the idea of sullying the brightness of such a time by giving the rein to sensual passion, however it might chafe within. She was a widow and free; intuitively, she realized all the homage implied in this constant self-restraint, which often moved her to tears. Can you not read in this, my friend, a soul of noble

temper? In mutual fear we shunned even the first kiss of love.

"We have each a wrong to reproach ourselves with," she said one day.

"Where is yours?" I asked.

"My marriage," was her reply.

Daniel, you are a giant among us and you love one of the most gifted women of the aristocracy, which has produced my Armande; what need to tell you more? Such an answer lays bare to you a woman's heart and all the happiness which is in store for your friend, MARIE GASTON.

L. MME. DE L'ESTORADE TO MME. DE MACUMER

Louise, can it be that, with all your knowledge of the deep-seated mischief wrought by the indulgence of passion, even within the heart of marriage, you are planning a life of wedded solitude? Having sacrificed your first husband in the course of a fashionable career, would you now fly to the desert to consume a second? What stores of misery you are laying up for yourself!

But I see from the way you have set about it that there is no going back. The man who has overcome your aversion to a second marriage must indeed possess some magic of mind and heart; and you can only be left to your illusions. But have you forgotten your former criticism on young men? Not one, you would say, but has visited haunts of shame, and has besmirched his purity with the filth of the streets. Where is the change, pray—in them or in you?

You are a lucky woman to be able to believe in happiness. I have not the courage to blame you for it, though the instinct of affection urges me to dissuade you from this marriage. Yes, a thousand times, yes, it is true that nature and society are at one in making war on absolute happiness, because such a condition is opposed to the laws of both; possibly, also, because Heaven is jealous of its privileges. My love for you forebodes some disaster to which all my penetration can give no definite form. I know neither whence nor from whom it will arise; but one need be no prophet to foretell that the mere weight of a boundless happiness will overpower you. Excess of joy is harder to bear than any amount of sorrow.

Against him I have not a word to say. You love him, and in all probability I have never seen him; but some idle day I hope you will send me a sketch, however slight, of this rare, fine animal.

If you see me so resigned and cheerful, it is because I am convinced that,

once the honeymoon is over you will both with one accord, fall back into the common track. Some day, two years hence, when we are walking along this famous road, you will exclaim, "Why, there is the chalet which was to be my home for ever!" And you will laugh your dear old laugh, which shows all your pretty teeth!

I have said nothing yet to Louis; it would be too good an opening for his ridicule. I shall tell him simply that you are going to be married, and that you wish it kept secret. Unluckily, you need neither mother nor sister for your bridal evening. We are in October now; like a brave woman, you are grappling with winter first. If it were not a question of marriage, I should say you were taking the bull by the horns. In any case, you will have in me the most discreet and intelligent of friends. That mysterious region, known as the centre of Africa, has swallowed up many travelers, and you seem to me to be launching on an expedition which, in the domain of sentiment, corresponds to those where so many explorers have perished, whether in the sands or at the hands of natives. Your desert is, happily, only two leagues from Paris, so I can wish you quite cheerfully, "A safe journey and speedy return."

LI. THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE TO MME. MARIE GASTON 1835.

What has come to you, my dear? After a silence of two years, surely Renee has a right to feel anxious about Louise. So this is love! It brushes aside and scatters to the winds a friendship such as ours! You must admit that, devoted as I am to my children—more even perhaps than you to your Gaston—a mother's love has something expansive about it which does not allow it to steal from other affections, or interfere with the claims of friendship. I miss your letters, I long for a sight of your dear, sweet face. Oh! Louise, my heart has only conjecture to feed upon!

As regards ourselves, I will try and tell you everything as briefly as possible.

On reading your last letter but one, I find some stinging comments on our political situation. You mocked at us for keeping the post in the Audit Department, which, as well as the title of Count, Louis owed to the favor of Charles X. But I should like to know, please, how it would be possible out of an income of forty thousand livres, thirty thousand of which go with the entail, to give a suitable start in life to Athenais and my poor little beggar Rene. Was it not a duty to live on our salary and prudently allow the income of the estate to accumulate? In this way we shall, in twenty years, have put together about

six hundred thousand francs, which will provide portions for my daughter and for Rene, whom I destine for the navy. The poor little chap will have an income of ten thousand livres, and perhaps we may contrive to leave him in cash enough to bring his portion up to the amount of his sister's.

When he is Captain, my beggar will be able to make a wealthy marriage, and take a position in society as good as his elder brother's.

These considerations of prudence determined the acceptance in our family of the new order of things. The new dynasty, as was natural, raised Louis to the Peerage and made him a grand officer of the Legion of Honor. The oath once taken, l'Estorade could not be half-hearted in his services, and he has since then made himself very useful in the Chamber. The position he has now attained is one in which he can rest upon his oars till the end of his days. He has a good deal of adroitness in business matters; and though he can hardly be called an orator, speaks pleasantly and fluently, which is all that is necessary in politics. His shrewdness and the extent of his information in all matters of government and administration are fully appreciated, and all parties consider him indispensable. I may tell you that he was recently offered an embassy, but I would not let him accept it. I am tied to Paris by the education of Armand and Athenais—who are now respectively thirteen and nearly eleven—and I don't intend leaving till little Rene has completed his, which is just beginning.

We could not have remained faithful to the elder branch of the dynasty and returned to our country life without allowing the education and prospects of the three children to suffer. A mother, my sweet, is hardly called on to be a Decius, especially at a time when the type is rare. In fifteen years from now, l'Estorade will be able to retire to La Crampade on a good pension, having found a place as referendary for Armand in the Audit Department.

As for Rene, the navy will doubtless make a diplomatist of him. The little rogue, at seven years old, has all the cunning of an old Cardinal.

Oh! Louise, I am indeed a happy mother. My children are an endless source of joy to me.

Senza brama sicura ricchezza.

Armand is a day scholar at Henry IV.'s school. I made up my mind he should have a public-school training, yet could not reconcile myself to the thought of parting with him; so I compromised, as the Duc d'Orleans did before he became—or in order that he might become—Louis Philippe. Every morning Lucas, the old servant whom you will remember, takes Armand to school in time for the first lesson, and brings him home again at half-past four. In the house we have a private tutor, an admirable scholar, who helps Armand with his work in the evenings, and calls him in the morning at the school hour.

Lucas takes him some lunch during the play hour at midday. In this way I am with my boy at dinner and until he goes to bed at night, and I see him off in the morning.

Armand is the same charming little fellow, full of feeling and unselfish impulse, whom you loved; and his tutor is quite pleased with him. I still have Nais and the baby—two restless little mortals—but I am quite as much a child as they are. I could not bring myself to lose the darlings' sweet caresses. I could not live without the feeling that at any moment I can fly to Armand's bedside and watch his slumbers or snatch a kiss.

Yet home education is not without its drawbacks, to which I am fully alive. Society, like nature, is a jealous power, and will have not her rights encroached on, or her system set at naught. Thus, children who are brought up at home are exposed too early to the fire of the world; they see its passions and become at home with its subterfuges. The finer distinctions, which regulate the conduct of matured men and women, elude their perceptions, and they take feeling and passion for their guide instead of subordinating those to the code of society; whilst the gay trappings and tinsel which attract so much of the world's favor blind them to the importance of the more sober virtues. A child of fifteen with the assurance of a man of the world is a thing against all nature; at twenty-five he will be prematurely old, and his precocious knowledge only unfits him for the genuine study on which all solid ability must rest. Life in society is one long comedy, and those who take part in it, like other actors, reflect back impressions which never penetrate below the surface. A mother, therefore, who wishes not to part from her children, must resolutely determine that they shall not enter the gay world; she must have courage to resist their inclinations, as well as her own, and keep them in the background. Cornelia had to keep her jewels under lock and key. Shall I do less for the children who are all the world to me?

Now that I am thirty, the heat of the day is over, the hardest bit of the road lies behind me. In a few years I shall be an old woman, and the sense of duty done is an immense encouragement. It would almost seem as though my trio can read my thoughts and shape themselves accordingly. A mysterious bond of sympathy unites me to these children who have never left my side. If they knew the blank in my life which they have to fill, they could not be more lavish of the solace they bring.

Armand, who was dull and dreamy during his first three years at school, and caused me some uneasiness, has made a sudden start. Doubtless he realized, in a way most children never do, the aim of all this preparatory work, which is to sharpen the intelligence, to get them into habits of application and accustom them to that fundamental principle of all society—obedience. My dear, a few days ago I had the proud joy of seeing Armand crowned at the

great interscholastic competition in the crowded Sorbonne, when your godson received the first prize for translation. At the school distribution he got two first prizes—one for verse, and one for an essay. I went quite white when his name was called out, and longed to shout aloud, "I am his mother!" Little Nais squeezed my hand till it hurt, if at such a moment it were possible to feel pain. Ah! Louise, a day like this might outweigh many a dream of love!

His brother's triumphs have spurred on little Rene, who wants to go to school too. Sometimes the three children make such a racket, shouting and rushing about the house, that I wonder how my head stands it. I am always with them; no one else, not even Mary, is allowed to take care of my children. But the calling of a mother, if taxing, has so many compensating joys! To see a child leave its play and run to hug one, out of the fulness of its heart, what could be sweeter?

Then it is only in being constantly with them that one can study their characters. It is the duty of a mother, and one which she can depute to no hired teacher, to decipher the tastes, temper, and natural aptitudes of her children from their infancy. All home-bred children are distinguished by ease of manner and tact, two acquired qualities which may go far to supply the lack of natural ability, whereas no natural ability can atone for the loss of this early training. I have already learned to discriminate this difference of tone in the men whom I meet in society, and to trace the hand of a woman in the formation of a young man's manners. How could any woman defraud her children of such a possession? You see what rewards attend the performance of my tasks!

Armand, I feel certain, will make an admirable judge, the most upright of public servants, the most devoted of deputies. And where would you find a sailor bolder, more adventurous, more astute than my Rene will be a few years hence? The little rascal has already an iron will, whatever he wants he manages to get; he will try a thousand circuitous ways to reach his end, and if not successful then, will devise a thousand and first. Where dear Armand quietly resigns himself and tries to get at the reason of things, Rene will storm, and strive, and puzzle, chattering all the time, till at last he finds some chink in the obstacle; if there is room for the blade of a knife to pass, his little carriage will ride through in triumph.

And Nais? Nais is so completely a second self that I can hardly realize her as distinct from my own flesh and blood. What a darling she is, and how I love to make a little lady of her, to dress her curly hair, tender thoughts mingling the while with every touch! I must have her happy; I shall only give her to the man who loves her and whom she loves. But, Heavens! when I let her put on her little ornaments, or pass a cherry-colored ribbon through her hair, or fasten the shoes on her tiny feet, a sickening thought comes over me. How can one

order the destiny of a girl? Who can say that she will not love a scoundrel or some man who is indifferent to her? Tears often spring to my eyes as I watch her. This lovely creature, this flower, this rosebud which has blossomed in one's heart, to be handed over to a man who will tear it from the stem and leave it bare! Louise, it is you—you, who in two years have not written three words to tell me of your welfare—it is you who have recalled to my mind the terrible possibilities of marriage, so full of anguish for a mother wrapped up, as I am, in her child. Farewell now, for in truth you don't deserve my friendship, and I hardly know how to write. Oh! answer me, dear Louise.

LII. MME. GASTON TO MME. DE L'ESTORADE The Chalet.

So, after a silence of two years, you are pricked by curiosity, and want to know why I have not written. My dear Renee, there are no words, no images, no language to express my happiness. That we have strength to bear it sums up all I could say. It costs us no effort, for we are in perfect sympathy. The whole two years have known no note of discord in the harmony, no jarring word in the interchange of feeling, no shade of difference in our lightest wish. Not one in this long succession of days has failed to bear its own peculiar fruit; not a moment has passed without being enriched by the play of fancy. So far are we from dreading the canker of monotony in our life, that our only fear is lest it should not be long enough to contain all the poetic creations of a love as rich and varied in its development as Nature herself. Of disappointment not a trace! We find more pleasure in being together than on the first day, and each hour as it goes by discloses fresh reason for our love. Every day as we take our evening stroll after dinner, we tell each other that we really must go and see what is doing in Paris, just as one might talk of going to Switzerland.

"Only think," Gaston will exclaim, "such and such a boulevard is being made, the Madeleine is finished. We ought to see it. Let us go to-morrow."

And to-morrow comes, and we are in no hurry to get up, and we breakfast in our bedroom. Then midday is on us, and it is too hot; a siesta seems appropriate. Then Gaston wishes to look at me, and he gazes on my face as though it were a picture, losing himself in this contemplation, which, as you may suppose, is not one-sided. Tears rise to the eyes of both as we think of our love and tremble. I am still the mistress, pretending, that is, to give less than I receive, and I revel in this deception. To a woman what can be sweeter than to see passion ever held in check by tenderness, and the man who is her master stayed, like a timid suitor, by a word from her, within the limits that she chooses?

You asked me to describe him; but, Renee, it is not possible to make a portrait of the man we love. How could the heart be kept out of the work? Besides, to be frank between ourselves, we may admit that one of the dire effects of civilization on our manners is to make of man in society a being so utterly different from the natural man of strong feeling, that sometimes not a single point of likeness can be found between these two aspects of the same person. The man who falls into the most graceful operatic poses, as he pours sweet nothings into your ear by the fire at night, may be entirely destitute of those more intimate charms which a woman values. On the other hand, an ugly, boorish, badly-dressed figure may mark a man endowed with the very genius of love, and who has a perfect mastery over situations which might baffle us with our superficial graces. A man whose conventional aspect accords with his real nature, who, in the intimacy of wedded love, possesses that inborn grace which can be neither given nor acquired, but which Greek art has embodied in statuary, that careless innocence of the ancient poets which, even in frank undress, seems to clothe the soul as with a veil of modesty—this is our ideal, born of our own conceptions, and linked with the universal harmony which seems to be the reality underlying all created things. To find this ideal in life is the problem which haunts the imagination of every woman —in Gaston I have found it.

Ah! dear, I did not know what love could be, united to youth, talent, and beauty. Gaston has no affectations, he moves with an instinctive and unstudied grace. When we walk alone together in the woods, his arm round my waist, mine resting on his shoulder, body fitting to body, and head touching head, our step is so even, uniform, and gentle, that those who see us pass by night take the vision for a single figure gliding over the graveled walks, like one of Homer's immortals. A like harmony exists in our desires, our thoughts, our words. More than once on some evening when a passing shower has left the leaves glistening and the moist grass bright with a more vivid green, it has chanced that we ended our walk without uttering a word, as we listened to the patter of falling drops and feasted our eyes on the scarlet sunset, flaring on the hilltops or dyeing with a warmer tone the gray of the tree trunks.

Beyond a doubt our thoughts then rose to Heaven in silent prayer, pleading as it were, for our happiness. At times a cry would escape us at the moment when some sudden bend on the path opened up fresh beauties. What words can tell how honey-sweet, how full of meaning, is a kiss half-timidly exchanged within the sanctuary of nature—it is as though God had created us to worship in this fashion.

And we return home, each more deeply in love than ever.

A love so passionate between old married people would be an outrage on society in Paris; only in the heart of the woods, like lovers, can we give scope

to it.

To come to particulars, Gaston is of middle height—the height proper to all men of purpose. Neither stout nor thin, his figure is admirably made, with ample fulness in the proportions, while every motion is agile; he leaps a ditch with the easy grace of a wild animal. Whatever his attitude, he seems to have an instinctive sense of balance, and this is very rare in men who are given to thought. Though a dark man, he has an extraordinarily fair complexion; his jet-black hair contrasts finely with the lustreless tints of the neck and forehead. He has the tragic head of Louis XIII. His moustache and tuft have been allowed to grow, but I made him shave the whiskers and beard, which were getting too common. An honorable poverty has been his safeguard, and handed him over to me, unsoiled by the loose life which ruins so many young men. His teeth are magnificent, and he has a constitution of iron. His keen blue eyes, for me full of tenderness, will flash like lightning at any rousing thought.

Like all men of strong character and powerful mind, he has an admirable temper; its evenness would surprise you, as it did me. I have listened to the tale of many a woman's home troubles; I have heard of the moods and depression of men dissatisfied with themselves, who either won't get old or age ungracefully, men who carry about through life the rankling memory of some youthful excess, whose veins run poison and whose eyes are never frankly happy, men who cloak suspicion under bad temper, and make their women pay for an hour's peace by a morning of annoyance, who take vengeance on us for a beauty which is hateful to them because they have ceased themselves to be attractive,—all these are horrors unknown to youth. They are the penalty of unequal unions. Oh! my dear, whatever you do, don't marry Athenais to an old man!

But his smile—how I feast on it! A smile which is always there, yet always fresh through the play of subtle fancy, a speaking smile which makes of the lips a storehouse for thoughts of love and unspoken gratitude, a smile which links present joys to past. For nothing is allowed to drop out of our common life. The smallest works of nature have become part and parcel of our joy. In these delightful woods everything is alive and eloquent of ourselves. An old moss-grown oak, near the woodsman's house on the roadside, reminds us how we sat there, wearied, under its shade, while Gaston taught me about the mosses at our feet and told me their story, till, gradually ascending from science to science, we touched the very confines of creation.

There is something so kindred in our minds that they seem to me like two editions of the same book. You see what a literary tendency I have developed! We both have the habit, or the gift, of looking at every subject broadly, of taking in all its points of view, and the proof we are constantly giving

ourselves of the singleness of our inward vision is an ever-new pleasure. We have actually come to look on this community of mind as a pledge of love; and if it ever failed us, it would mean as much to us as would a breach of fidelity in an ordinary home.

My life, full as it is of pleasures, would seem to you, nevertheless, extremely laborious. To begin with, my dear, you must know that Louise-Armande-Marie de Chaulieu does her own room. I could not bear that a hired menial, some woman or girl from the outside, should become initiated—literary touch again!—into the secrets of my bedroom. The veriest trifles connected with the worship of my heart partake of its sacred character. This is not jealousy; it is self-respect. Thus my room is done out with all the care a young girl in love bestows on her person, and with the precision of an old maid. My dressing-room is no chaos of litter; on the contrary, it makes a charming boudoir. My keen eye has foreseen all contingencies. At whatever hour the lord and master enters, he will find nothing to distress, surprise, or shock him; he is greeted by flowers, scents, and everything that can please the eye.

I get up in the early dawn, while he is still sleeping, and, without disturbing him, pass into the dressing-room, where, profiting by my mother's experience, I remove the traces of sleep by bathing in cold water. For during sleep the skin, being less active, does not perform its functions adequately; it becomes warm and covered with a sort of mist or atmosphere of sticky matter, visible to the eye. From a sponge-bath a woman issues ten years younger, and this, perhaps, is the interpretation of the myth of Venus rising from the sea. So the cold water restores to me the saucy charm of dawn, and, having combed and scented my hair and made a most fastidious toilet, I glide back, snake-like, in order that my master may find me, dainty as a spring morning, at his wakening. He is charmed with this freshness, as of a newly-opened flower, without having the least idea how it is produced.

The regular toilet of the day is a matter for my maid, and this takes place later in a larger room, set aside for the purpose. As you may suppose, there is also a toilet for going to bed. Three times a day, you see, or it may be four, do I array myself for the delight of my husband; which, again, dear one, is suggestive of certain ancient myths.

But our work is not all play. We take a great deal of interest in our flowers, in the beauties of the hothouse, and in our trees. We give ourselves in all seriousness to horticulture, and embosom the chalet in flowers, of which we are passionately fond. Our lawns are always green, our shrubberies as well tended as those of a millionaire. And nothing I assure you, can match the beauty of our walled garden. We are regular gluttons over our fruit, and watch with tender interest our Montreuil peaches, our hotbeds, our laden trellises,

and pyramidal pear-trees.

But lest these rural pursuits should fail to satisfy my beloved's mind, I have advised him to finish, in the quiet of this retreat, some plays which were begun in his starvation days, and which are really very fine. This is the only kind of literary work which can be done in odd moments, for it requires long intervals of reflection, and does not demand the elaborate pruning essential to a finished style. One can't make a task-work of dialogue; there must be biting touches, summings-up, and flashes of wit, which are the blossoms of the mind, and come rather by inspiration than reflection. This sort of intellectual sport is very much in my line. I assist Gaston in his work, and in this way manage to accompany him even in the boldest flights of his imagination. Do you see now how it is that my winter evenings never drag?

Our servants have such an easy time, that never once since we were married have we had to reprimand any of them. When questioned about us, they have had wit enough to draw on their imaginations, and have given us out as the companion and secretary of a lady and gentleman supposed to be traveling. They never go out without asking permission, which they know will not be refused; they are contented too, and see plainly that it will be their own fault if there is a change for the worse. The gardeners are allowed to sell the surplus of our fruits and vegetables. The dairymaid does the same with the milk, the cream, and the fresh butter, on condition that the best of the produce is reserved for us. They are well pleased with their profits, and we are delighted with an abundance which no money and no ingenuity can procure in that terrible Paris, where it costs a hundred francs to produce a single fine peach.

All this is not without its meaning, my dear. I wish to fill the place of society to my husband; now society is amusing, and therefore his solitude must not be allowed to pall on him. I believed myself jealous in the old days, when I merely allowed myself to be loved; now I know real jealousy, the jealousy of the lover. A single indifferent glance unnerves me. From time to time I say to myself, "Suppose he ceased to love me!" And a shudder goes through me. I tremble before him, as the Christian before his God.

Alas! Renee, I am still without a child. The time will surely come—it must come—when our hermitage will need a father's and a mother's care to brighten it, when we shall both pine to see the little frocks and pelisses, the brown or golden heads, leaping, running through our shrubberies and flowery paths. Oh! it is a cruel jest of Nature's, a flowering tree that bears no fruit. The thought of your lovely children goes through me like a knife. My life has grown narrower, while yours has expanded and shed its rays afar. The passion of love is essentially selfish, while motherhood widens the circle of our feelings. How well I felt this difference when I read your kind, tender letter! To see you thus

living in three hearts roused my envy. Yes, you are happy; you have had wisdom to obey the laws of social life, whilst I stand outside, an alien.

Children, dear and loving children, can alone console a woman for the loss of her beauty. I shall soon be thirty, and at that age the dirge within begins. What though I am still beautiful, the limits of my woman's reign are none the less in sight. When they are reached, what then? I shall be forty before he is; I shall be old while he is still young. When this thought goes to my heart, I lie at his feet for an hour at a time, making him swear to tell me instantly if ever he feels his love diminishing.

But he is a child. He swears, as though the mere suggestion were an absurdity, and he is so beautiful that—Renee, you understand—I believe him.

Good-bye, sweet one. Shall we ever again let years pass without writing? Happiness is a monotonous theme, and that is, perhaps, the reason why, to souls who love, Dante appears even greater in the Paradiso than in the Inferno. I am not Dante; I am only your friend, and I don't want to bore you. You can write, for in your children you have an ever-growing, every-varying source of happiness, while mine... No more of this. A thousand loves.

LIII. MME. DE L'ESTORADE TO MME. GASTON

My dear Louise,—I have read and re-read your letter, and the more deeply I enter into its spirit, the clearer does it become to me that it is the letter, not of a woman, but of a child. You are the same old Louise, and you forget, what I used to repeat over and over again to you, that the passion of love belongs rightly to a state of nature, and has only been purloined by civilization. So fleeting is its character, that the resources of society are powerless to modify its primitive condition, and it becomes the effort of all noble minds to make a man of the infant Cupid. But, as you yourself admit, such love ceases to be natural.

Society, my dear abhors sterility; but substituting a lasting sentiment for the mere passing frenzy of nature, it has succeeded in creating that greatest of all human inventions—the family, which is the enduring basis of all organized society. To the accomplishment of this end, it has sacrificed the individual, man as well as woman; for we must not shut our eyes to the fact that a married man devotes his energy, his power, and all his possession to his wife. Is it not she who reaps the benefit of all his care? For whom, if not for her, are the luxury and wealth, the position and distinction, the comfort and the gaiety of the home?

Oh! my sweet, once again you have taken the wrong turning in life. To be adored is a young girl's dream, which may survive a few springtimes; it cannot be that of the mature woman, the wife and mother. To a woman's vanity it is, perhaps, enough to know that she can command adoration if she likes. If you would live the life of a wife and mother, return, I beg of you, to Paris. Let me repeat my warning: It is not misfortune which you have to dread, as others do —it is happiness.

Listen to me, my child! It is the simple things of life—bread, air, silence—of which we do not tire; they have no piquancy which can create distaste; it is highly-flavored dishes which irritate the palate, and in the end exhaust it. Were it possible that I should to-day be loved by a man for whom I could conceive a passion, such as yours for Gaston, I would still cling to the duties and the children, who are so dear to me. To a woman's heart the feelings of a mother are among the simple, natural, fruitful, and inexhaustible things of life. I can recall the day, now nearly fourteen years ago, when I embarked on a life of self-sacrifice with the despair of a shipwrecked mariner clinging to the mast of his vessel; now, as I invoke the memory of past years, I feel that I would make the same choice again. No other guiding principle is so safe, or leads to such rich reward. The spectacle of your life, which, for all the romance and poetry with which you invest it, still remains based on nothing but a ruthless selfishness, has helped to strengthen my convictions. This is the last time I shall speak to you in this way; but I could not refrain from once more pleading with you when I found that your happiness had been proof against the most searching of all trials.

And one more point I must urge on you, suggested by my meditations on your retirement. Life, whether of the body or the heart, consists in certain balanced movements. Any excess introduced into the working of this routine gives rise either to pain or to pleasure, both of which are a mere fever of the soul, bound to be fugitive because nature is not so framed as to support it long. But to make of life one long excess is surely to choose sickness for one's portion. You are sick because you maintain at the temperature of passion a feeling which marriage ought to convert into a steadying, purifying influence.

Yes, my sweet, I see it clearly now; the glory of a home consists in this very calm, this intimacy, this sharing alike of good and evil, which the vulgar ridicule. How noble was the reply of the Duchesse de Sully, the wife of the great Sully, to some one who remarked that her husband, for all his grave exterior, did not scruple to keep a mistress. "What of that?" she said. "I represent the honor of the house, and should decline to play the part of a courtesan there."

But you, Louise, who are naturally more passionate than tender, would be at once the wife and the mistress. With the soul of a Heloise and the passions

of a Saint Theresa, you slip the leash on all your impulses, so long as they are sanctioned by law; in a word, you degrade the marriage rite. Surely the tables are turned. The reproaches you once heaped on me for immorally, as you said, seizing the means of happiness from the very outset of my wedded life, might be directed against yourself for grasping at everything which may serve your passion. What! must nature and society alike be in bondage to your caprice? You are the old Louise; you have never acquired the qualities which ought to be a woman's; self-willed and unreasonable as a girl, you introduce withal into your love the keenest and most mercenary of calculations! Are you sure that, after all, the price you ask for your toilets is not too high? All these precautions are to my mind very suggestive of mistrust.

Oh, dear Louise, if only you knew the sweetness of a mother's efforts to discipline herself in kindness and gentleness to all about her! My proud, self-sufficing temper gradually dissolved into a soft melancholy, which in turn has been swallowed up by those delights of motherhood which have been its reward. If the early hours were toilsome, the evening will be tranquil and clear. My dread is lest the day of your life should take the opposite course.

When I had read your letter to a close, I prayed God to send you among us for a day, that you might see what family life really is, and learn the nature of those joys, which are lasting and sweeter than tongue can tell, because they are genuine, simple, and natural. But, alas! what chance have I with the best of arguments against a fallacy which makes you happy? As I write these words, my eyes fill with tears. I had felt so sure that some months of honeymoon would prove a surfeit and restore you to reason. But I see that there is no limit to your appetite, and that, having killed a man who loved you, you will not cease till you have killed love itself. Farewell, dear misguided friend. I am in despair that the letter which I hoped might reconcile you to society by its picture of my happiness should have brought forth only a paean of selfishness. Yes, your love is selfish; you love Gaston far less for himself than for what he is to you.

LIV. MME. GASTON TO THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE May 20th.

Renee, calamity has come—no, that is no word for it—it has burst like a thunderbolt over your poor Louise. You know what that means; calamity for me is doubt; certainty would be death.

The day before yesterday, when I had finished my first toilet, I looked everywhere for Gaston to take a little turn with me before lunch, but in vain. I

went to the stable, and there I saw his mare all in a lather, while the groom was removing the foam with a knife before rubbing her down.

"Who in the world has put Fedelta in such a state?" I asked.

"Master," replied the lad.

I saw the mud of Paris on the mare's legs, for country mud is quite different; and at once it flashed through me, "He has been to Paris."

This thought raised a swarm of others in my heart, and it seemed as though all the life in my body rushed there. To go to Paris without telling me, at the hour when I leave him alone, to hasten there and back at such speed as to distress Fedelta. Suspicion clutched me in its iron grip, till I could hardly breathe. I walked aside a few steps to a seat, where I tried to recover my self-command.

Here Gaston found me, apparently pale and fluttered, for he immediately exclaimed, "What is wrong?" in a tone of such alarm, that I rose and took his arm. But my muscles refused to move, and I was forced to sit down again. Then he took me in his arms and carried me to the parlor close by, where the frightened servants pressed after us, till Gaston motioned them away. Once left to ourselves, I refused to speak, but was able to reach my room, where I shut myself in, to weep my fill. Gaston remained something like two hours at my door, listening to my sobs and questioning with angelic patience his poor darling, who made no response.

At last I told him that I would see him when my eyes were less red and my voice was steady again.

My formal words drove him from the house. But by the time I had bathed my eyes in iced water and cooled my face, I found him in our room, the door into which was open, though I had heard no steps. He begged me to tell him what was wrong.

"Nothing," I said; "I saw the mud of Paris on Fedelta's trembling legs; it seemed strange that you should go there without telling me; but, of course, you are free."

"I shall punish you for such wicked thoughts by not giving any explanation till to-morrow," he replied.

"Look at me," I said.

My eyes met his; deep answered to deep. No, not a trace of the cloud of disloyalty which, rising from the soul, must dim the clearness of the eye. I feigned satisfaction, though really unconvinced. It is not women only who can lie and dissemble!

The whole of the day we spent together. Ever and again, as I looked at him, I realized how fast my heart-strings were bound to him. How I trembled and fluttered within when, after a moment's absence, he reappeared. I live in him, not in myself. My cruel sufferings gave the lie to your unkind letter. Did I ever feel my life thus bound up in the noble Spaniard, who adored me, as I adore this heartless boy? I hate that mare! Fool that I was to keep horses! But the next thing would have been to lame Gaston or imprison him in the cottage. Wild thoughts like these filled my brain; you see how near I was to madness! If love be not the cage, what power on earth can hold back the man who wants to be free?

I asked him point-blank, "Do I bore you?"

"What needless torture you give yourself!" was his reply, while he looked at me with tender, pitying eyes. "Never have I loved you so deeply."

"If that is true, my beloved, let me sell Fedelta," I answered.

"Sell her, by all means!"

The reply crushed me. Was it not a covert taunt at my wealth and his own nothingness in the house? This may never have occurred to him, but I thought it had, and once more I left him. It was night, and I would go to bed.

Oh! Renee, to be alone with a harrowing thought drives one to thoughts of death. These charming gardens, the starry night, the cool air, laden with incense from our wealth of flowers, our valley, our hills—all seemed to me gloomy, black, and desolate. It was as though I lay at the foot of a precipice, surrounded by serpents and poisonous plants, and saw no God in the sky. Such a night ages a woman.

Next morning I said:

"Take Fedelta and be off to Paris! Don't sell her; I love her. Does she not carry you?"

But he was not deceived; my tone betrayed the storm of feeling which I strove to conceal.

"Trust me!" he replied; and the gesture with which he held out his hand, the glance of his eye, were so full of loyalty that I was overcome.

"What petty creatures women are!" I exclaimed.

"No, you love me, that is all," he said, pressing me to his heart.

"Go to Paris without me," I said, and this time I made him understand that my suspicions were laid aside.

He went; I thought he would have stayed. I won't attempt to tell you what I

suffered. I found a second self within, quite strange to me. A crisis like this has, for the woman who loves, a tragic solemnity that baffles words; the whole of life rises before you then, and you search in vain for any horizon to it; the veriest trifle is big with meaning, a glance contains a volume, icicles drift on uttered words, and the death sentence is read in a movement of the lips.

I thought he would have paid me back in kind; had I not been magnanimous? I climbed to the top of the chalet, and my eyes followed him on the road. Ah! my dear Renee, he vanished from my sight with an appalling swiftness.

"How keen he is to go!" was the thought that sprang of itself.

Once more alone, I fell back into the hell of possibilities, the maelstrom of mistrust. There were moments when I would have welcomed any certainty, even the worst, as a relief from the torture of suspense. Suspense is a duel carried on in the heart, and we give no quarter to ourselves.

I paced up and down the walks. I returned to the house, only to tear out again, like a mad woman. Gaston, who left at seven o'clock, did not return till eleven. Now, as it only takes half an hour to reach Paris through the park of St. Cloud and the Bois de Boulogne, it is plain that he must have spent three hours in town. He came back radiant, with a whip in his hand for me, an india-rubber whip with a gold handle.

For a fortnight I had been without a whip, my old one being worn and broken.

"Was it for this you tortured me?" I said, as I admired the workmanship of this beautiful ornament, which contains a little scent-box at one end.

Then it flashed on me that the present was a fresh artifice. Nevertheless I threw myself at once on his neck, not without reproaching him gently for having caused me so much pain for the sake of a trifle. He was greatly pleased with his ingenuity; his eyes and his whole bearing plainly showed the restrained triumph of the successful plotter; for there is a radiance of the soul which is reflected in every feature and turn of the body. While still examining the beauties of this work of art, I asked him at a moment when we happened to be looking each other in the face:

"Who is the artist?"

"A friend of mine."

"Ah! I see it has been mounted by Verdier," and I read the name of the shop printed on the handle.

Gaston is nothing but a child yet. He blushed, and I made much of him as a reward for the shame he felt in deceiving me. I pretended to notice nothing,

and he may well have thought the incident was over.

May 25th.

The next morning I was in my riding-habit by six o'clock, and by seven landed at Verdier's, where several whips of the same pattern were shown to me. One of the men serving recognized mine when I pointed it out to him.

"We sold that yesterday to a young gentleman," he said. And from the description I gave him of my traitor Gaston, not a doubt was left of his identity. I will spare you the palpitations which rent my heart during that journey to Paris and the little scene there, which marked the turning-point of my life.

By half-seven I was home again, and Gaston found me, fresh and blooming, in my morning dress, sauntering about with a make-believe nonchalance. I felt confident that old Philippe, who had been taken into my confidence, would not have betrayed my absence.

"Gaston," I said, as we walked by the side of the lake, "you cannot blind me to the difference between a work of art inspired by friendship and something which has been cast in a mould."

He turned white, and fixed his eyes on me rather than on the damaging piece of evidence I thrust before them.

"My dear," I went on, "this is not a whip; it is a screen behind which you are hiding something from me."

Thereupon I gave myself the gratification of watching his hopeless entanglement in the coverts and labyrinths of deceit and the desperate efforts he made to find some wall he might scale and thus escape. In vain; he had perforce to remain upon the field, face to face with an adversary, who at last laid down her arms in a feigned complacence. But it was too late. The fatal mistake, against which my mother had tried to warm me, was made. My jealousy, exposed in all its nakedness, had led to war and all its stratagems between Gaston and myself. Jealousy, dear, has neither sense nor decency.

I made up my mind now to suffer in silence, but to keep my eyes open, until my doubts were resolved one way or another. Then I would either break with Gaston or bow to my misfortune: no middle course is possible for a woman who respects herself.

What can he be concealing? For a secret there is, and the secret has to do with a woman. Is it some youthful escapade for which he still blushes? But if so, what? The word what is written in letters of fire on all I see. I read it in the glassy water of my lake, in the shrubbery, in the clouds, on the ceilings, at table, in the flowers of the carpets. A voice cries to me what? in my sleep.

Dating from the morning of my discovery, a cruel interest has sprung into our lives, and I have become familiar with the bitterest thought that can corrode the heart—the thought of treachery in him one loves. Oh! my dear, there is heaven and hell together in such a life. Never had I felt this scorching flame, I to whom love had appeared only in the form of devoutest worship.

"So you wished to know the gloomy torture-chamber of pain!" I said to myself. Good, the spirits of evil have heard your prayer; go on your road, unhappy wretch!

May 30th.

Since that fatal day Gaston no longer works with the careless ease of the wealthy artist, whose work is merely pastime; he sets himself tasks like a professional writer. Four hours a day he devotes to finishing his two plays.

"He wants money!"

A voice within whispered the thought. But why? He spends next to nothing; we have absolutely no secrets from each other; there is not a corner of his study which my eyes and my fingers may not explore. His yearly expenditure does not amount to two thousand francs, and I know that he has thirty thousand, I can hardly say laid by, but scattered loose in a drawer. You can guess what is coming. At midnight, while he was sleeping, I went to see if the money was still there. An icy shiver ran through me. The drawer was empty.

That same week I discovered that he went to Sevres to fetch his letters, and these letters he must tear up immediately; for though I am a very Figaro in contrivances, I have never yet seen a trace of one. Alas! my sweet, despite the fine promises and vows by which I bound myself after the scene of the whip, an impulse, which I can only call madness, drove me to follow him in one of his rapid rides to the post-office. Gaston was appalled to be thus discovered on horseback, paying the postage of a letter which he held in his hand. He looked fixedly at me, and then put spurs to Fedelta. The pace was so hard that I felt shaken to bits when I reached the lodge gate, though my mental agony was such at the time that it might well have dulled all consciousness of bodily pain. Arrived at the gate, Gaston said nothing; he rang the bell and waited without a word. I was more dead than alive. I might be mistaken or I might not, but in neither case was it fitting for Armande-Louise-Marie de Chaulieu to play the spy. I had sunk to the level of the gutter, by the side of courtesans, opera-dancers, mere creatures of instinct; even the vulgar shop-girl or humble seamstress might look down on me.

What a moment! At last the door opened; he handed his horse to the groom, and I also dismounted, but into his arms, which were stretched out to

receive me. I threw my skirt over my left arm, gave him my right, and we walked on—still in silence. The few steps we thus took might be reckoned to me for a hundred years of purgatory. A swarm of thoughts beset me as I walked, now seeming to take visible form in tongues of fire before my eyes, now assailing my mind, each with its own poisoned dart. When the groom and the horses were far away, I stopped Gaston, and, looking him in the face, said, as I pointed, with a gesture that you should have seen, to the fatal letter still in his right hand:

"May I read it?"

He gave it to me. I opened it and found a letter from Nathan, the dramatic author, informing Gaston that a play of his had been accepted, learned, rehearsed, and would be produced the following Saturday. He also enclosed a box ticket.

Though for me this was the opening of heaven's gates to the martyr, yet the fiend would not leave me in peace, but kept crying, "Where are the thirty thousand francs?" It was a question which self-respect, dignity, all my old self in fact, prevented me from uttering. If my thought became speech, I might as well throw myself into the lake at once, and yet I could hardly keep the words down. Dear friend, was not this a trial passing the strength of woman?

I returned the letter, saying:

"My poor Gaston, you are getting bored down here. Let us go back to Paris, won't you?"

"To Paris?" he said. "But why? I only wanted to find out if I had any gift, to taste the flowing bowl of success!"

Nothing would be easier than for me to ransack the drawer sometime while he is working and pretend great surprise at finding the money gone. But that would be going half-way to meet the answer, "Oh! my friend So-and-So was hard up!" etc., which a man of Gaston's quick wit would not have far to seek.

The moral, my dear, is that the brilliant success of this play, which all Paris is crowding to see, is due to us, though the whole credit goes to Nathan. I am represented by one of the two stars in the legend: Et M * *. I saw the first night from the depths of one of the stage boxes.

July 1st.

Gaston's work and his visits to Paris shall continue. He is preparing new plays, partly because he wants a pretext for going to Paris, partly in order to make money. Three plays have been accepted, and two more are commissioned.

Oh! my dear, I am lost, all is darkness around me. I would set fire to the

house in a moment if that would bring light. What does it all mean? Is he ashamed of taking money from me? He is too high-minded for so trumpery a matter to weigh with him. Besides, scruples of the kind could only be the outcome of some love affair. A man would take anything from his wife, but from the woman he has ceased to care for, or is thinking of deserting, it is different. If he needs such large sums, it must be to spend them on a woman. For himself, why should he hesitate to draw from my purse? Our savings amount to one hundred thousand francs!

In short, my sweetheart, I have explored a whole continent of possibilities, and after carefully weighing all the evidence, am convinced I have a rival. I am deserted—for whom? At all costs I must see the unknown.

July 10th.

Light has come, and it is all over with me. Yes, Renee, at the age of thirty, in the perfection of my beauty, with all the resources of a ready wit and the seductive charms of dress at my command, I am betrayed—and for whom? A large-boned Englishwoman, with big feet and thick waist—a regular British cow! There is no longer room for doubt. I will tell you the history of the last few days.

Worn out with suspicions, which were fed by Gaston's guilty silence (for, if he had helped a friend, why keep it a secret from me?), his insatiable desire for money, and his frequent journeys to Paris; jealous too of the work from which he seemed unable to tear himself, I at last made up my mind to take certain steps, of such a degrading nature that I cannot tell you about them. Suffice it to say that three days ago I ascertained that Gaston, when in Paris, visits a house in the Rue de la Ville l'Eveque, where he guards his mistress with jealous mystery, unexampled in Paris. The porter was surly, and I could get little out of him, but that little was enough to put an end to any lingering hope, and with hope to life. On this point my mind was resolved, and I only waited to learn the whole truth first.

With this object I went to Paris and took rooms in a house exactly opposite the one which Gaston visits. Thence I saw him with my own eyes enter the courtyard on horseback. Too soon a ghastly fact forced itself on me. This Englishwoman, who seems to me about thirty-six, is known as Mme. Gaston. This discovery was my deathblow.

I saw him next walking to the Tuileries with a couple of children. Oh! my dear, two children, the living images of Gaston! The likeness is so strong that it bears scandal on the face of it. And what pretty children! in their handsome English costumes! She is the mother of his children. Here is the key to the whole mystery.

The woman herself might be a Greek statue, stepped down from some monument. Cold and white as marble, she moves sedately with a mother's pride. She is undeniably beautiful but heavy as a man-of-war. There is no breeding or distinction about her; nothing of the English lady. Probably she is a farmer's daughter from some wretched and remote country village, or, it may be, the eleventh child of some poor clergyman!

I reached home, after a miserable journey, during which all sorts of fiendish thoughts had me at their mercy, with hardly any life left in me. Was she married? Did he know her before our marriage? Had she been deserted by some rich man, whose mistress she was, and thus thrown back upon Gaston's hands? Conjectures without end flitted through my brain, as though conjecture were needed in the presence of the children.

The next day I returned to Paris, and by a free use of my purse extracted from the porter the information that Mme. Gaston was legally married.

His reply to my question took the form, "Yes, Miss."

July 15th.

My dear, my love for Gaston is stronger than ever since that morning, and he has every appearance of being still more deeply in love. He is so young! A score of times it has been on my lips, when we rise in the morning, to say, "Then you love me better than the lady of the Rue de la Ville l'Eveque?" But I dare not explain to myself why the words are checked on my tongue.

"Are you very fond of children?" I asked.

"Oh, yes!" was his reply; "but children will come!"

"What makes you think so?"

"I have consulted the best doctors, and they agree in advising me to travel for a couple of months."

"Gaston," I said, "if love in absence had been possible for me, do you suppose I should ever have left the convent?"

He laughed; but as for me, dear, the word "travel" pierced my heart. Rather, far rather, would I leap from the top of the house than be rolled down the staircase, step by step.—Farewell, my sweetheart. I have arranged for my death to be easy and without horrors, but certain. I made my will yesterday. You can come to me now, the prohibition is removed. Come, then, and receive my last farewell. I will not die by inches; my death, like my life, shall bear the impress of dignity and grace.

Good-bye, dear sister soul, whose affection has never wavered nor grown weary, but has been the constant tender moonlight of my soul. If the intensity

of passion has not been ours, at least we have been spared its venomous bitterness. How rightly you have judged of life! Farewell.

LV. THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE TO MME. GASTON July 16th.

My dear Louise,—I send this letter by an express before hastening to the chalet myself. Take courage. Your last letter seemed to me so frantic, that I thought myself justified, under the circumstances, in confiding all to Louis; it was a question of saving you from yourself. If the means we have employed have been, like yours, repulsive, yet the result is so satisfactory that I am certain you will approve. I went so far as to set the police to work, but the whole thing remains a secret between the prefect, ourselves and you.

In one word, Gaston is a jewel! But here are the facts. His brother, Louis Gaston, died at Calcutta, while in the service of a mercantile company, when he was on the very point of returning to France, a rich, prosperous, married man, having received a very large fortune with his wife, who was the widow of an English merchant. For ten years he had worked hard that he might be able to send home enough to support his brother, to whom he was devotedly attached, and from whom his letters generously concealed all his trials and disappointments.

Then came the failure of the great Halmer house; the widow was ruined, and the sudden shock affected Louis Gaston's brain. He had no mental energy left to resist the disease which attacked him, and he died in Bengal, whither he had gone to try and realize the remnants of his wife's property. The dear, good fellow had deposited with a banker a first sum of three hundred thousand francs, which was to go to his brother, but the banker was involved in the Halmer crash, and thus their last resource failed them.

Louis' widow, the handsome woman whom you took for your rival, arrived in Paris with two children—your nephews—and an empty purse, her mother's jewels having barely sufficed to pay for bringing them over. The instructions which Louis Gaston had given the banker for sending the money to his brother enabled the widow to find your husband's former home. As Gaston had disappeared without leaving any address, Mme. Louis Gaston was directed to d'Arthez, the only person who could give any information about him.

D'Arthez was the more ready to relieve the young woman's pressing needs, because Louis Gaston, at the time of his marriage four years before, had written to make inquiries about his brother from the famous author, whom he knew to be one of his friends. The Captain had consulted d'Arthez as to the

best means of getting the money safely transferred to Marie, and d'Arthez had replied, telling him that Gaston was now a rich man through his marriage with the Baronne de Macumer. The personal beauty, which was the mother's rich heritage to her sons, had saved them both—one in India, the other in Paris—from destitution. A touching story, is it not?

D'Arthez naturally wrote, after a time, to tell your husband of the condition of his sister-in-law and her children, informing him, at the same time, of the generous intentions of the Indian Gaston towards his Paris brother, which an unhappy chance had frustrated. Gaston, as you may imagine, hurried off to Paris. Here is the first ride accounted for. During the last five years he had saved fifty thousand francs out of the income you forced him to accept, and this sum he invested in the public funds under the names of his two nephews, securing them each, in this way, an income of twelve hundred francs. Next he furnished his sister-in-law's rooms, and promised her a quarterly allowance of three thousand francs. Here you see the meaning of his dramatic labors and the pleasure caused him by the success of his first play.

Mme. Gaston, therefore, is no rival of yours, and has every right to your name. A man of Gaston's sensitive delicacy was bound to keep the affair secret from you, knowing as he did, your generous nature. Nor does he look on what you give him as his own. D'Arthez read me the letter he had from your husband, asking him to be one of the witnesses at his marriage. Gaston in this declares that his happiness would have been perfect but for the one drawback of his poverty and indebtedness to you. A virgin soul is at the mercy of such scruples. Either they make themselves felt or they do not; and when they do, it is easy to imagine the conflict of feeling and embarrassment to which they give rise. Nothing is more natural than Gaston's wish to provide in secret a suitable maintenance for the woman who is his brother's widow, and who had herself set aside one hundred thousand francs for him from her own fortune. She is a handsome woman, warm-hearted, and extremely well-bred, but not clever. She is a mother; and, you may be sure, I lost my heart to her at first sight when I found her with one child in her arms, and the other dressed like a little lord. The children first! is written in every detail of her house.

Far from being angry, therefore, with your beloved husband, you should find in all this fresh reason for loving him. I have met him, and think him the most delightful young fellow in Paris. Yes! dear child, when I saw him, I had no difficulty in understanding that a woman might lose her head about him; his soul is mirrored in his countenance. If I were you, I should settle the widow and her children at the chalet, in a pretty little cottage which you could have built for them, and adopt the boys!

Be at peace, then, dear soul, and plan this little surprise, in your turn, for Gaston.

LVI. MME. GASTON TO THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE

Ah! my dear friend, what can I say in answer except the cruel "It is too late" of that fool Lafayette to his royal master? Oh! my life, my sweet life, what physician will give it back to me. My own hand has dealt the deathblow. Alas! have I not been a mere will-o'-the-wisp, whose twinkling spark was fated to perish before it reached a flame? My eyes rain torrents of tears—and yet they must not fall when I am with him. I fly to him, and he seeks me. My despair is all within. This torture Dante forgot to place in his Inferno. Come to see me die!

LVII. THE COMTESSE DE L'ESTORADE TO THE COMTE DE L'ESTORADE THE CHALET, August 7th.

My love,—Take the children away to Provence without me; I remain with Louise, who has only a few days yet to live. I cannot leave either her or her husband, for whose reason I fear.

You know the scrap of letter which sent me flying to Ville d'Avray, picking up the doctors on my way. Since then I have not left my darling friend, and it has been impossible to write to you, for I have sat up every night for a fortnight.

When I arrived, I found her with Gaston, in full dress, beautiful, laughing, happy. It was a heroic falsehood! They were like two lovely children together in their restored confidence. For a moment I was deceived, like Gaston, by the effrontery; but Louise pressed my hand, whispering:

"He must not know; I am dying."

An icy chill fell over me as I felt her burning hand and saw the red spots on her cheeks. I congratulated myself on my prudence in leaving the doctors in the wood till they should be sent for.

"Leave us for a little," she said to Gaston. "Two women who have not met for five years have plenty of secrets to talk over, and Renee, I have no doubt, has things to confide in me."

Directly we were alone, she flung herself into my arms, unable longer to restrain her tears.

"Tell me about it," I said. "I have brought with me, in case of need, the best surgeon and the best physician from the hospital, and Bianchon as well; there are four altogether."

"Ah!" she cried, "have them in at once if they can save me, if there is still time. The passion which hurried me to death now cries for life!"

"But what have you done to yourself?"

"I have in a few days brought myself to the last stage of consumption."

"But how?"

"I got myself into a profuse perspiration in the night, and then ran out and lay down by the side of the lake in the dew. Gaston thinks I have a cold, and I am dying!"

"Send him to Paris; I will fetch the doctors myself," I said, as I rushed out wildly to the spot where I had left them.

Alas! my love, after the consultation was over, not one of the doctors gave me the least hope; they all believe that Louise will die with the fall of the leaves. The dear child's constitution has wonderfully helped the success of her plan. It seems she has a predisposition to this complaint; and though, in the ordinary course, she might have lived a long time, a few days' folly has made the case desperate.

I cannot tell you what I felt on hearing this sentence, based on such clear explanations. You know that I have lived in Louise as much as in my own life. I was simply crushed, and could not stir to escort to the door these harbingers of evil. I don't know how long I remained lost in bitter thoughts, the tears running down my cheeks, when I was roused from my stupor by the words:

"So there is no hope for me!" in a clear, angelic voice.

It was Louise, with her hand on my shoulder. She made me get up, and carried me off to her small drawing-room. With a beseeching glance, she went on:

"Stay with me to the end; I won't have doleful faces round me. Above all, I must keep the truth from him. I know that I have the strength to do it. I am full of youth and spirit, and can die standing! For myself, I have no regrets. I am dying as I wished to die, still young and beautiful, in the perfection of my womanhood.

"As for him, I can see very well now that I should have made his life miserable. Passion has me in its grips, like a struggling fawn, impatient of the toils. My groundless jealousy has already wounded him sorely. When the day came that my suspicions met only indifference—which in the long run is the

rightful meed of all jealousy—well, that would have been my death. I have had my share of life. There are people whose names on the muster-roll of the world show sixty years of service, and yet in all that time they have not had two years of real life, whilst my record of thirty is doubled by the intensity of my love.

"Thus for him, as well as for me, the close is a happy one. But between us, dear Renee, it is different. You lose a loving sister, and that is a loss which nothing can repair. You alone here have the right to mourn my death."

After a long pause, during which I could only see her through a mist of tears, she continued:

"The moral of my death is a cruel one. My dear doctor in petticoats was right; marriage cannot rest upon passion as its foundation, nor even upon love. How fine and noble is your life! keeping always to the one safe road, you give your husband an ever-growing affection; while the passionate eagerness with which I threw myself into wedded life was bound in nature to diminish. Twice have I gone astray, and twice has Death stretched forth his bony hand to strike my happiness. The first time, he robbed me of the noblest and most devoted of men; now it is my turn, the grinning monster tears me from the arms of my poet husband, with all his beauty and his grace.

"Yet I would not complain. Have I not known in turn two men, each the very pattern of nobility—one in mind, the other in outward form? In Felipe, the soul dominated and transformed the body; in Gaston, one could not say which was supreme—heart, mind, or grace of form. I die adored—what more could I wish for? Time, perhaps, in which to draw near the God of whom I may have too little thought. My spirit will take its flight towards Him, full of love, and with the prayer that some day, in the world above, He will unite me once more to the two who made a heaven of my life below. Without them, paradise would be a desert to me.

"To others, my example would be fatal, for mine was no common lot. To meet a Felipe or a Gaston is more than mortals can expect, and therefore the doctrine of society in regard to marriage accords with the natural law. Woman is weak, and in marrying she ought to make an entire sacrifice of her will to the man who, in return, should lay his selfishness at her feet. The stir which women of late years have created by their whining and insubordination is ridiculous, and only shows how well we deserve the epithet of children, bestowed by philosophers on our sex."

She continued talking thus in the gentle voice you know so well, uttering the gravest truths in the prettiest manner, until Gaston entered, bringing with him his sister-in-law, the two children, and the English nurse, whom, at Louise's request, he had been to fetch from Paris.

"Here are the pretty instruments of my torture," she said, as her nephews approached. "Was not the mistake excusable? What a wonderful likeness to their uncle!"

She was most friendly to Mme. Gaston the elder and begged that she would look upon the chalet as her home; in short, she played the hostess to her in her best de Chaulieu manner, in which no one can rival her.

I wrote at once to the Duc and Duchesse de Chaulieu, the Duc de Rhetore, and the Duc de Lenoncourt-Givry, as well as to Madeleine. It was time. Next day, Louise, worn out with so much exertion, was unable to go out; indeed, she only got up for dinner. In the course of the evening, Madeleine de Lenoncourt, her two brothers, and her mother arrived. The coolness which Louise's second marriage had caused between herself and her family disappeared. Every day since that evening, Louise's father and both her brothers have ridden over in the morning, and the two duchesses spend all their evenings at the chalet. Death unites as well as separates; it silences all paltry feeling.

Louise is perfection in her charm, her grace, her good sense, her wit, and her tenderness. She has retained to the last that perfect tact for which she has been so famous, and she lavishes on us the treasures of her brilliant mind, which made her one of the queens of Paris.

"I should like to look well even in my coffin," she said with her matchless smile, as she lay down on the bed where she was to linger for a fortnight.

Her room has nothing of the sick-chamber in it; medicines, ointments, the whole apparatus of nursing, is carefully concealed.

"Is not my deathbed pretty!" she said to the Sevres priest who came to confess her.

We gloated over her like misers. All this anxiety, and the terrible truths which dawned on him, have prepared Gaston for the worst. He is full of courage, but the blow has gone home. It would not surprise me to see him follow his wife in the natural course. Yesterday, as we were walking round the lake, he said to me:

"I must be a father to those two children," and he pointed to his sister-in-law, who was taking the boys for a walk. "But though I shall do nothing to hasten my end, I want your promise that you will be a second mother to them, and will persuade your husband to accept the office of guardian, which I shall depute to him in conjunction with my sister-in-law."

He said this quite simply, like a man who knows he is not long for this world. He has smiles on his face to meet Louise's, and it is only I whom he

does not deceive. He is a mate for her in courage.

Louise has expressed a wish to see her godson, but I am not sorry he should be in Provence; she might want to remember him generously, and I should be in a great difficulty.

Good-bye, my love.

August 25th (her birthday).

Yesterday evening Louise was delirious for a short time; but her delirium was the prettiest babbling, which shows that even the madness of gifted people is not that of fools or nobodies. In a mere thread of a voice she sang some Italian airs from I Puritani, La Sonnambula, Moise, while we stood round the bed in silence. Not one of us, not even the Duc de Rhetore, had dry eyes, so clear was it to us all that her soul was in this fashion passing from us. She could no longer see us! Yet she was there still in the charm of the faint melody, with its sweetness not of this earth.

During the night the death agony began. It is now seven in the morning, and I have just myself raised her from bed. Some flicker of strength revived; she wished to sit by her window, and asked for Gaston's hand. And then, my love, the sweetest spirit whom we shall ever see on this earth departed, leaving us the empty shell.

The last sacrament had been administered the evening before, unknown to Gaston, who was taking a snatch of sleep during this agonizing ceremony; and after she was moved to the window, she asked me to read her the De Profundis in French, while she was thus face to face with the lovely scene, which was her handiwork. She repeated the words after me to herself, and pressed the hands of her husband, who knelt on the other side of the chair.

August 26th.

My heart is broken. I have just seen her in her winding-sheet; her face is quite pale now with purple shadows. Oh! I want my children! my children! Bring me my children!

THE END

THE MESSAGE

I have always longed to tell a simple and true story, which should strike terror into two young lovers, and drive them to take refuge each in the other's heart, as two children cling together at the sight of a snake by a woodside. At

the risk of spoiling my story and of being taken for a coxcomb, I state my intention at the outset.

I myself played a part in this almost commonplace tragedy; so if it fails to interest you, the failure will be in part my own fault, in part owing to historical veracity. Plenty of things in real life are superlatively uninteresting; so that it is one-half of art to select from realities those which contain possibilities of poetry.

In 1819 I was traveling from Paris to Moulins. The state of my finances obliged me to take an outside place. Englishmen, as you know, regard those airy perches on the top of the coach as the best seats; and for the first few miles I discovered abundance of excellent reasons for justifying the opinion of our neighbors. A young fellow, apparently in somewhat better circumstances, who came to take the seat beside me from preference, listened to my reasoning with inoffensive smiles. An approximate nearness of age, a similarity in ways of thinking, a common love of fresh air, and of the rich landscape scenery through which the coach was lumbering along,—these things, together with an indescribable magnetic something, drew us before long into one of those short-lived traveller's intimacies, in which we unbend with the more complacency because the intercourse is by its very nature transient, and makes no implicit demands upon the future.

We had not come thirty leagues before we were talking of women and love. Then, with all the circumspection demanded in such matters, we proceeded naturally to the topic of our lady-loves. Young as we both were, we still admired "the woman of a certain age," that is to say, the woman between thirty-five and forty. Oh! any poet who should have listened to our talk, for heaven knows how many stages beyond Montargis, would have reaped a harvest of flaming epithet, rapturous description, and very tender confidences. Our bashful fears, our silent interjections, our blushes, as we met each other's eyes, were expressive with an eloquence, a boyish charm, which I have ceased to feel. One must remain young, no doubt, to understand youth.

Well, we understood one another to admiration on all the essential points of passion. We had laid it down as an axiom at the very outset, that in theory and practice there was no such piece of driveling nonsense in this world as a certificate of birth; that plenty of women were younger at forty than many a girl of twenty; and, to come to the point, that a woman is no older than she looks.

This theory set no limits to the age of love, so we struck out, in all good faith, into a boundless sea. At length, when we had portrayed our mistresses as young, charming, and devoted to us, women of rank, women of taste, intellectual and clever; when we had endowed them with little feet, a satin,

nay, a delicately fragrant skin, then came the admission—on his part that Madame Such-an-one was thirty-eight years old, and on mine that I worshiped a woman of forty. Whereupon, as if released on either side from some kind of vague fear, our confidences came thick and fast, when we found that we were in the same confraternity of love. It was which of us should overtop the other in sentiment.

One of us had traveled six hundred miles to see his mistress for an hour. The other, at the risk of being shot for a wolf, had prowled about her park to meet her one night. Out came all our follies in fact. If it is pleasant to remember past dangers, is it not at least as pleasant to recall past delights? We live through the joy a second time. We told each other everything, our perils, our great joys, our little pleasures, and even the humors of the situation. My friend's countess had lighted a cigar for him; mine made chocolate for me, and wrote to me every day when we did not meet; his lady had come to spend three days with him at the risk of ruin to her reputation; mine had done even better, or worse, if you will have it so. Our countesses, moreover, were adored by their husbands; these gentlemen were enslaved by the charm possessed by every woman who loves; and, with even supererogatory simplicity, afforded us that just sufficient spice of danger which increases pleasure. Ah! how quickly the wind swept away our talk and our happy laughter!

When we reached Pouilly, I scanned my new friend with much interest, and truly, it was not difficult to imagine him the hero of a very serious love affair. Picture to yourselves a young man of middle height, but very well proportioned, a bright, expressive face, dark hair, blue eyes, moist lips, and white and even teeth. A certain not unbecoming pallor still overspread his delicately cut features, and there were faint dark circles about his eyes, as if he were recovering from an illness. Add, furthermore, that he had white and shapely hands, of which he was as careful as a pretty woman should be; add that he seemed to be very well informed, and was decidedly clever, and it should not be difficult for you to imagine that my traveling companion was more than worthy of a countess. Indeed, many a girl might have wished for such a husband, for he was a Vicomte with an income of twelve or fifteen thousand livres, "to say nothing of expectations."

About a league out of Pouilly the coach was overturned. My luckless comrade, thinking to save himself, jumped to the edge of a newly-ploughed field, instead of following the fortunes of the vehicle and clinging tightly to the roof, as I did. He either miscalculated in some way, or he slipped; how it happened, I do not know, but the coach fell over upon him, and he was crushed under it.

We carried him into a peasant's cottage, and there, amid the moans wrung from him by horrible sufferings, he contrived to give me a commission—a

sacred task, in that it was laid upon me by a dying man's last wish. Poor boy, all through his agony he was torturing himself in his young simplicity of heart with the thought of the painful shock to his mistress when she should suddenly read of his death in a newspaper. He begged me to go myself to break the news to her. He bade me look for a key which he wore on a ribbon about his neck. I found it half buried in the flesh, but the dying boy did not utter a sound as I extricated it as gently as possible from the wound which it had made. He had scarcely given me the necessary directions—I was to go to his home at La Charite-sur-Loire for his mistress' love-letters, which he conjured me to return to her—when he grew speechless in the middle of a sentence; but from his last gesture, I understood that the fatal key would be my passport in his mother's house. It troubled him that he was powerless to utter a single word to thank me, for of my wish to serve him he had no doubt. He looked wistfully at me for a moment, then his eyelids drooped in token of farewell, and his head sank, and he died. His death was the only fatal accident caused by the overturn.

"But it was partly his own fault," the coachman said to me.

At La Charite, I executed the poor fellow's dying wishes. His mother was away from home, which in a manner was fortunate for me. Nevertheless, I had to assuage the grief of an old woman-servant, who staggered back at the tidings of her young master's death, and sank half-dead into a chair when she saw the blood-stained key. But I had another and more dreadful sorrow to think of, the sorrow of a woman who had lost her last love; so I left the old woman to her prosopopeia, and carried off the precious correspondence, carefully sealed by my friend of the day.

The Countess' chateau was some eight leagues beyond Moulins, and then there was some distance to walk across country. So it was not exactly an easy matter to deliver my message. For divers reasons into which I need not enter, I had barely sufficient money to take me to Moulins. However, my youthful enthusiasm determined to hasten thither on foot as fast as possible. Bad news travels swiftly, and I wished to be first at the chateau. I asked for the shortest way, and hurried through the field paths of the Bourbonnais, bearing, as it were, a dead man on my back. The nearer I came to the Chateau de Montpersan, the more aghast I felt at the idea of my strange self-imposed pilgrimage. Vast numbers of romantic fancies ran in my head. I imagined all kinds of situations in which I might find this Comtesse de Montpersan, or, to observe the laws of romance, this Juliette, so passionately beloved of my traveling companion. I sketched out ingenious answers to the questions which she might be supposed to put to me. At every turn of a wood, in every beaten pathway, I rehearsed a modern version of the scene in which Sosie describes the battle to his lantern. To my shame be it said, I had thought at first of nothing but the part that I was to play, of my own cleverness, of how I should

demean myself; but now that I was in the country, an ominous thought flashed through my soul like a thunderbolt tearing its way through a veil of gray cloud.

What an awful piece of news it was for a woman whose whole thoughts were full of her young lover, who was looking forward hour by hour to a joy which no words can express, a woman who had been at a world of pains to invent plausible pretexts to draw him to her side. Yet, after all, it was a cruel deed of charity to be the messenger of death! So I hurried on, splashing and bemiring myself in the byways of the Bourbonnais.

Before very long I reached a great chestnut avenue with a pile of buildings at the further end—the Chateau of Montpersan stood out against the sky like a mass of brown cloud, with sharp, fantastic outlines. All the doors of the chateau stood open. This in itself disconcerted me, and routed all my plans; but I went in boldly, and in a moment found myself between a couple of dogs, barking as your true country-bred animal can bark. The sound brought out a hurrying servant-maid; who, when informed that I wished to speak to Mme. la Comtesse, waved a hand towards the masses of trees in the English park which wound about the chateau with "Madame is out there——"

"Many thanks," said I ironically. I might have wandered for a couple of hours in the park with her "out there" to guide me.

In the meantime, a pretty little girl, with curling hair, dressed in a white frock, a rose-colored sash, and a broad frill at the throat, had overheard or guessed the question and its answer. She gave me a glance and vanished, calling in shrill, childish tones:

"Mother, here is a gentleman who wishes to speak to you!"

And, along the winding alleys, I followed the skipping and dancing white frill, a sort of will-o'-the-wisp, that showed me the way among the trees.

I must make a full confession. I stopped behind the last shrub in the avenue, pulled up my collar, rubbed my shabby hat and my trousers with the cuffs of my sleeves, dusted my coat with the sleeves themselves, and gave them a final cleansing rub one against the other. I buttoned my coat carefully so as to exhibit the inner, always the least worn, side of the cloth, and finally had turned down the tops of my trousers over my boots, artistically cleaned in the grass. Thanks to this Gascon toilet, I could hope that the lady would not take me for the local rate collector; but now when my thoughts travel back to that episode of my youth, I sometimes laugh at my own expense.

Suddenly, just as I was composing myself, at a turning in the green walk, among a wilderness of flowers lighted up by a hot ray of sunlight, I saw Juliette—Juliette and her husband. The pretty little girl held her mother by the

hand, and it was easy to see that the lady had quickened her pace somewhat at the child's ambiguous phrase. Taken aback by the sight of a total stranger, who bowed with a tolerably awkward air, she looked at me with a coolly courteous expression and an adorable pout, in which I, who knew her secret, could read the full extent of her disappointment. I sought, but sought in vain, to remember any of the elegant phrases so laboriously prepared.

This momentary hesitation gave the lady's husband time to come forward. Thoughts by the myriad flitted through my brain. To give myself a countenance, I got out a few sufficiently feeble inquiries, asking whether the persons present were really M. le Comte and Mme. la Comtesse de Montpersan. These imbecilities gave me time to form my own conclusions at a glance, and, with a perspicacity rare at that age, to analyze the husband and wife whose solitude was about to be so rudely disturbed.

The husband seemed to be a specimen of a certain type of nobleman, the fairest ornaments of the provinces of our day. He wore big shoes with stout soles to them. I put the shoes first advisedly, for they made an even deeper impression upon me than a seedy black coat, a pair of threadbare trousers, a flabby cravat, or a crumpled shirt collar. There was a touch of the magistrate in the man, a good deal more of the Councillor of the Prefecture, all the self-importance of the mayor of the arrondissement, the local autocrat, and the soured temper of the unsuccessful candidate who has never been returned since the year 1816. As to countenance—a wizened, wrinkled, sunburned face, and long, sleek locks of scanty gray hair; as to character—an incredible mixture of homely sense and sheer silliness; of a rich man's overbearing ways, and a total lack of manners; just the kind of husband who is almost entirely led by his wife, yet imagines himself to be the master; apt to domineer in trifles, and to let more important things slip past unheeded—there you have the man!

But the Countess! Ah, how sharp and startling the contrast between husband and wife! The Countess was a little woman, with a flat, graceful figure and enchanting shape; so fragile, so dainty was she, that you would have feared to break some bone if you so much as touched her. She wore a white muslin dress, a rose-colored sash, and rose-colored ribbons in the pretty cap on her head; her chemisette was moulded so deliciously by her shoulders and the loveliest rounded contours, that the sight of her awakened an irresistible desire of possession in the depths of the heart. Her eyes were bright and dark and expressive, her movements graceful, her foot charming. An experienced man of pleasure would not have given her more than thirty years, her forehead was so girlish. She had all the most transient delicate detail of youth in her face. In character she seemed to me to resemble the Comtesse de Lignolles and the Marquise de B——, two feminine types always fresh in the memory of any young man who has read Louvet's romance.

In a moment I saw how things stood, and took a diplomatic course that would have done credit to an old ambassador. For once, and perhaps for the only time in my life, I used tact, and knew in what the special skill of courtiers and men of the world consists.

I have had so many battles to fight since those heedless days, that they have left me no time to distil all the least actions of daily life, and to do everything so that it falls in with those rules of etiquette and good taste which wither the most generous emotions.

"M. le Comte," I said with an air of mystery, "I should like a few words with you," and I fell back a pace or two.

He followed my example. Juliette left us together, going away unconcernedly, like a wife who knew that she can learn her husband's secrets as soon as she chooses to know them.

I told the Count briefly of the death of my traveling companion. The effect produced by my news convinced me that his affection for his young collaborator was cordial enough, and this emboldened me to make reply as I did.

"My wife will be in despair," cried he; "I shall be obliged to break the news of this unhappy event with great caution."

"Monsieur," said I, "I addressed myself to you in the first instance, as in duty bound. I could not, without first informing you, deliver a message to Mme. la Comtesse, a message intrusted to me by an entire stranger; but this commission is a sort of sacred trust, a secret of which I have no power to dispose. From the high idea of your character which he gave me, I felt sure that you would not oppose me in the fulfilment of a dying request. Mme. la Comtesse will be at liberty to break the silence which is imposed upon me."

At this eulogy, the Count swung his head very amiably, responded with a tolerably involved compliment, and finally left me a free field. We returned to the house. The bell rang, and I was invited to dinner. As we came up to the house, a grave and silent couple, Juliette stole a glance at us. Not a little surprised to find her husband contriving some frivolous excuse for leaving us together, she stopped short, giving me a glance—such a glance as women only can give you. In that look of hers there was the pardonable curiosity of the mistress of the house confronted with a guest dropped down upon her from the skies and innumerable doubts, certainly warranted by the state of my clothes, by my youth and my expression, all singularly at variance; there was all the disdain of the adored mistress, in whose eyes all men save one are as nothing; there were involuntary tremors and alarms; and, above all, the thought that it was tiresome to have an unexpected guest just now, when, no doubt, she had

been scheming to enjoy full solitude for her love. This mute eloquence I understood in her eyes, and all the pity and compassion in me made answer in a sad smile. I thought of her, as I had seen her for one moment, in the pride of her beauty; standing in the sunny afternoon in the narrow alley with the flowers on either hand; and as that fair wonderful picture rose before my eyes, I could not repress a sigh.

"Alas, madame, I have just made a very arduous journey——, undertaken solely on your account."

"Sir!"

"Oh! it is on behalf of one who calls you Juliette that I am come," I continued. Her face grew white.

"You will not see him to-day."

"Is he ill?" she asked, and her voice sank lower.

"Yes. But for pity's sake, control yourself.... He intrusted me with secrets that concern you, and you may be sure that never messenger could be more discreet nor more devoted than I."

"What is the matter with him?"

"How if he loved you no longer?"

"Oh! that is impossible!" she cried, and a faint smile, nothing less than frank, broke over her face. Then all at once a kind of shudder ran through her, and she reddened, and she gave me a wild, swift glance as she asked:

"Is he alive?"

Great God! What a terrible phrase! I was too young to bear that tone in her voice; I made no reply, only looked at the unhappy woman in helpless bewilderment.

"Monsieur, monsieur, give me an answer!" she cried.

"Yes, madame."

"Is it true? Oh! tell me the truth; I can hear the truth. Tell me the truth! Any pain would be less keen than this suspense."

I answered by two tears wrung from me by that strange tone of hers. She leaned against a tree with a faint, sharp cry.

"Madame, here comes your husband!"

"Have I a husband?" and with those words she fled away out of sight.

"Well," cried the Count, "dinner is growing cold.—Come, monsieur."

Thereupon I followed the master of the house into the dining-room. Dinner was served with all the luxury which we have learned to expect in Paris. There were five covers laid, three for the Count and Countess and their little daughter; my own, which should have been HIS; and another for the canon of Saint-Denis, who said grace, and then asked:

"Why, where can our dear Countess be?"

"Oh! she will be here directly," said the Count. He had hastily helped us to the soup, and was dispatching an ample plateful with portentous speed.

"Oh! nephew," exclaimed the canon, "if your wife were here, you would behave more rationally."

"Papa will make himself ill!" said the child with a mischievous look.

Just after this extraordinary gastronomical episode, as the Count was eagerly helping himself to a slice of venison, a housemaid came in with, "We cannot find madame anywhere, sir!"

I sprang up at the words with a dread in my mind, my fears written so plainly in my face, that the old canon came out after me into the garden. The Count, for the sake of appearances, came as far as the threshold.

"Don't go, don't go!" called he. "Don't trouble yourselves in the least," but he did not offer to accompany us.

We three—the canon, the housemaid, and I—hurried through the garden walks and over the bowling-green in the park, shouting, listening for an answer, growing more uneasy every moment. As we hurried along, I told the story of the fatal accident, and discovered how strongly the maid was attached to her mistress, for she took my secret dread far more seriously than the canon. We went along by the pools of water; all over the park we went; but we neither found the Countess nor any sign that she had passed that way. At last we turned back, and under the walls of some outbuildings I heard a smothered, wailing cry, so stifled that it was scarcely audible. The sound seemed to come from a place that might have been a granary. I went in at all risks, and there we found Juliette. With the instinct of despair, she had buried herself deep in the hay, hiding her face in it to deaden those dreadful cries—pudency even stronger than grief. She was sobbing and crying like a child, but there was a more poignant, more piteous sound in the sobs. There was nothing left in the world for her. The maid pulled the hay from her, her mistress submitting with the supine listlessness of a dying animal. The maid could find nothing to say but "There! madame; there, there——"

"What is the matter with her? What is it, niece?" the old canon kept on exclaiming.

At last, with the girl's help, I carried Juliette to her room, gave orders that she was not to be disturbed, and that every one must be told that the Countess was suffering from a sick headache. Then we came down to the dining-room, the canon and I.

Some little time had passed since we left the dinner-table; I had scarcely given a thought to the Count since we left him under the peristyle; his indifference had surprised me, but my amazement increased when we came back and found him seated philosophically at table. He had eaten pretty nearly all the dinner, to the huge delight of his little daughter; the child was smiling at her father's flagrant infraction of the Countess' rules. The man's odd indifference was explained to me by a mild altercation which at once arose with the canon. The Count was suffering from some serious complaint. I cannot remember now what it was, but his medical advisers had put him on a very severe regimen, and the ferocious hunger familiar to convalescents, sheer animal appetite, had overpowered all human sensibilities. In that little space I had seen frank and undisguised human nature under two very different aspects, in such a sort that there was a certain grotesque element in the very midst of a most terrible tragedy.

The evening that followed was dreary. I was tired. The canon racked his brains to discover a reason for his niece's tears. The lady's husband silently digested his dinner; content, apparently, with the Countess' rather vague explanation, sent through the maid, putting forward some feminine ailment as her excuse. We all went early to bed.

As I passed the door of the Countess' room on the way to my night's lodging, I asked the servant timidly for news of her. She heard my voice, and would have me come in, and tried to talk, but in vain—she could not utter a sound. She bent her head, and I withdrew. In spite of the painful agitation, which I had felt to the full as youth can feel, I fell asleep, tired out with my forced march.

It was late in the night when I was awakened by the grating sound of curtain rings drawn sharply over the metal rods. There sat the Countess at the foot of my bed. The light from a lamp set on my table fell full upon her face.

"Is it really true, monsieur, quite true?" she asked. "I do not know how I can live after that awful blow which struck me down a little while since; but just now I feel calm. I want to know everything."

"What calm!" I said to myself as I saw the ghastly pallor of her face contrasting with her brown hair, and heard the guttural tones of her voice. The havoc wrought in her drawn features filled me with dumb amazement.

Those few hours had bleached her; she had lost a woman's last glow of

autumn color. Her eyes were red and swollen, nothing of their beauty remained, nothing looked out of them save her bitter and exceeding grief; it was as if a gray cloud covered the place through which the sun had shone.

I gave her the story of the accident in a few words, without laying too much stress on some too harrowing details. I told her about our first day's journey, and how it had been filled with recollections of her and of love. And she listened eagerly, without shedding a tear, leaning her face towards me, as some zealous doctor might lean to watch any change in a patient's face. When she seemed to me to have opened her whole heart to pain, to be deliberately plunging herself into misery with the first delirious frenzy of despair, I caught at my opportunity, and told her of the fears that troubled the poor dying man, told her how and why it was that he had given me this fatal message. Then her tears were dried by the fires that burned in the dark depths within her. She grew even paler. When I drew the letters from beneath my pillow and held them out to her, she took them mechanically; then, trembling from head to foot, she said in a hollow voice:

"And I burned all his letters!—I have nothing of him left!—Nothing! nothing!"

She struck her hand against her forehead.

"Madame——" I began.

She glanced at me in the convulsion of grief.

"I cut this from his head, this lock of his hair."

And I gave her that last imperishable token that had been a very part of him she loved. Ah! if you had felt, as I felt then, her burning tears falling on your hands, you would know what gratitude is, when it follows so closely upon the benefit. Her eyes shone with a feverish glitter, a faint ray of happiness gleamed out of her terrible suffering, as she grasped my hands in hers, and said, in a choking voice:

"Ah! you love! May you be happy always. May you never lose her whom you love."

She broke off, and fled away with her treasure.

Next morning, this night-scene among my dreams seemed like a dream; to make sure of the piteous truth, I was obliged to look fruitlessly under my pillow for the packet of letters. There is no need to tell you how the next day went. I spent several hours of it with the Juliette whom my poor comrade had so praised to me. In her lightest words, her gestures, in all that she did and said, I saw proofs of the nobleness of soul, the delicacy of feeling which made her what she was, one of those beloved, loving, and self-sacrificing natures so

rarely found upon this earth.

In the evening the Comte de Montpersan came himself as far as Moulins with me. There he spoke with a kind of embarrassment:

"Monsieur, if it is not abusing your good-nature, and acting very inconsiderately towards a stranger to whom we are already under obligations, would you have the goodness, as you are going to Paris, to remit a sum of money to M. de —— (I forget the name), in the Rue du Sentier; I owe him an amount, and he asked me to send it as soon as possible."

"Willingly," said I. And in the innocence of my heart, I took charge of a rouleau of twenty-five louis d'or, which paid the expenses of my journey back to Paris; and only when, on my arrival, I went to the address indicated to repay the amount to M. de Montpersan's correspondent, did I understand the ingenious delicacy with which Juliette had obliged me. Was not all the genius of a loving woman revealed in such a way of lending, in her reticence with regard to a poverty easily guessed?

And what rapture to have this adventure to tell to a woman who clung to you more closely in dread, saying, "Oh, my dear, not you! You must not die!"

****

GOBSECK

It was one o'clock in the morning, during the winter of 1829-30, but in the Vicomtesse de Grandlieu's salon two persons stayed on who did not belong to her family circle. A young and good-looking man heard the clock strike, and took his leave. When the courtyard echoed with the sound of a departing carriage, the Vicomtesse looked up, saw that no one was present save her brother and a friend of the family finishing their game of piquet, and went across to her daughter. The girl, standing by the chimney-piece, apparently examining a transparent fire-screen, was listening to the sounds from the courtyard in a way that justified certain maternal fears.

"Camille," said the Vicomtesse, "if you continue to behave to young Comte de Restaud as you have done this evening, you will oblige me to see no more of him here. Listen, child, and if you have any confidence in my love, let me guide you in life. At seventeen one cannot judge of past or future, nor of certain social considerations. I have only one thing to say to you. M. de Restaud has a mother, a mother who would waste millions of francs; a woman of no birth, a Mlle. Goriot; people talked a good deal about her at one time. She behaved so badly to her own father, that she certainly does not deserve to

have so good a son. The young Count adores her, and maintains her in her position with dutifulness worthy of all praise, and he is extremely good to his brother and sister.—But however admirable his behavior may be," the Vicomtesse added with a shrewd expression, "so long as his mother lives, any family would take alarm at the idea of intrusting a daughter's fortune and future to young Restaud."

"I overheard a word now and again in your talk with Mlle. de Grandlieu," cried the friend of the family, "and it made me anxious to put in a word of my own.—I have won, M. le Comte," he added, turning to his opponent. "I shall throw you over and go to your niece's assistance."

"See what it is to have an attorney's ears!" exclaimed the Vicomtesse. "My dear Derville, how could you know what I was saying to Camille in a whisper?"

"I knew it from your looks," answered Derville, seating himself in a low chair by the fire.

Camille's uncle went to her side, and Mme. de Grandlieu took up her position on a hearth stool between her daughter and Derville.

"The time has come for telling a story, which should modify your judgment as to Ernest de Restaud's prospects."

"A story?" cried Camille. "Do begin at once, monsieur."

The glance that Derville gave the Vicomtesse told her that this tale was meant for her. The Vicomtesse de Grandlieu, be it said, was one of the greatest ladies in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, by reason of her fortune and her ancient name; and though it may seem improbable that a Paris attorney should speak so familiarly to her, or be so much at home in her house, the fact is nevertheless easily explained.

When Mme. de Grandlieu returned to France with the Royal family, she came to Paris, and at first lived entirely on the pension allowed her out of the Civil List by Louis XVIII.—an intolerable position. The Hotel de Grandlieu had been sold by the Republic. It came to Derville's knowledge that there were flaws in the title, and he thought that it ought to return to the Vicomtesse. He instituted proceedings for nullity of contract, and gained the day. Encouraged by this success, he used legal quibbles to such purpose that he compelled some institution or other to disgorge the Forest of Liceney. Then he won certain lawsuits against the Canal d'Orleans, and recovered a tolerably large amount of property, with which the Emperor had endowed various public institutions. So it fell out that, thanks to the young attorney's skilful management, Mme. de Grandlieu's income reached the sum of some sixty thousand francs, to say nothing of the vast sums returned to her by the law of indemnity. And

Derville, a man of high character, well informed, modest, and pleasant in company, became the house-friend of the family.

By his conduct of Mme. de Grandlieu's affairs he had fairly earned the esteem of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and numbered the best families among his clients; but he did not take advantage of his popularity, as an ambitious man might have done. The Vicomtesse would have had him sell his practice and enter the magistracy, in which career advancement would have been swift and certain with such influence at his disposal; but he persistently refused all offers. He only went into society to keep up his connections, but he occasionally spent an evening at the Hotel de Grandlieu. It was a very lucky thing for him that his talents had been brought into the light by his devotion to Mme. de Grandlieu, for his practice otherwise might have gone to pieces. Derville had not an attorney's soul. Since Ernest de Restaud had appeared at the Hotel de Grandlieu, and he had noticed that Camille felt attracted to the young man, Derville had been as assiduous in his visits as any dandy of the Chausee-d'Antin newly admitted to the noble Faubourg. At a ball only a few days before, when he happened to stand near Camille, and said, indicating the Count:

"It is a pity that yonder youngster has not two or three million francs, is it not?"

"Is it a pity? I do not think so," the girl answered. "M. de Restaud has plenty of ability; he is well educated, and the Minister, his chief, thinks well of him. He will be a remarkable man, I have no doubt. 'Yonder youngster' will have as much money as he wishes when he comes into power."

"Yes, but suppose that he were rich already?"

"Rich already?" repeated Camille, flushing red. "Why all the girls in the room would be quarreling for him," she said, glancing at the quadrilles.

"And then," retorted the attorney, "Mlle. de Grandlieu might not be the one towards whom his eyes are always turned? That is what that red color means! You like him, do you not? Come, speak out."

Camille suddenly rose to go.

"She loves him," Derville thought.

Since that evening, Camille had been unwontedly attentive to the attorney, who approved of her liking for Ernest de Restaud. Hitherto, although she knew well that her family lay under great obligations to Derville, she had felt respect rather than real friendship for him, their relation was more a matter of politeness than of warmth of feeling; and by her manner, and by the tones of her voice, she had always made him sensible of the distance which socially lay

between them. Gratitude is a charge upon the inheritance which the second generation is apt to repudiate.

"This adventure," Derville began after a pause, "brings the one romantic event in my life to my mind. You are laughing already," he went on; "it seems so ridiculous, doesn't it, that an attorney should speak of a romance in his life? But once I was five-and-twenty, like everybody else, and even then I had seen some queer things. I ought to begin at the beginning by telling you about some one whom it is impossible that you should have known. The man in question was a usurer.

"Can you grasp a clear notion of that sallow, wan face of his? I wish the Academie would give me leave to dub such faces the lunar type. It was like silver-gilt, with the gilt rubbed off. His hair was iron-gray, sleek, and carefully combed; his features might have been cast in bronze; Talleyrand himself was not more impassive than this money-lender. A pair of little eyes, yellow as a ferret's, and with scarce an eyelash to them, peered out from under the sheltering peak of a shabby old cap, as if they feared the light. He had the thin lips that you see in Rembrandt's or Metsu's portraits of alchemists and shrunken old men, and a nose so sharp at the tip that it put you in mind of a gimlet. His voice was so low; he always spoke suavely; he never flew into a passion. His age was a problem; it was hard to say whether he had grown old before his time, or whether by economy of youth he had saved enough to last him his life.

"His room, and everything in it, from the green baize of the bureau to the strip of carpet by the bed, was as clean and threadbare as the chilly sanctuary of some elderly spinster who spends her days in rubbing her furniture. In winter time, the live brands of the fire smouldered all day in a bank of ashes; there was never any flame in his grate. He went through his day, from his uprising to his evening coughing-fit, with the regularity of a pendulum, and in some sort was a clockwork man, wound up by a night's slumber. Touch a wood-louse on an excursion across your sheet of paper, and the creature shams death; and in something the same way my acquaintance would stop short in the middle of a sentence, while a cart went by, to save the strain to his voice. Following the example of Fontenelle, he was thrifty of pulse-strokes, and concentrated all human sensibility in the innermost sanctuary of Self.

"His life flowed soundless as the sands of an hour-glass. His victims sometimes flew into a rage and made a great deal of noise, followed by a great silence; so is it in a kitchen after a fowl's neck has been wrung.

"Toward evening this bill of exchange incarnate would assume ordinary human shape, and his metals were metamorphosed into a human heart. When he was satisfied with his day's business, he would rub his hands; his inward

glee would escape like smoke through every rift and wrinkle of his face;—in no other way is it possible to give an idea of the mute play of muscle which expressed sensations similar to the soundless laughter of Leather Stocking. Indeed, even in transports of joy, his conversation was confined to monosyllables; he wore the same non-committal countenance.

"This was the neighbor Chance found for me in the house in the Rue de Gres, where I used to live when as yet I was only a second clerk finishing my third year's studies. The house is damp and dark, and boasts no courtyard. All the windows look on the street; the whole dwelling, in claustral fashion, is divided into rooms or cells of equal size, all opening upon a long corridor dimly lit with borrowed lights. The place must have been part of an old convent once. So gloomy was it, that the gaiety of eldest sons forsook them on the stairs before they reached my neighbor's door. He and his house were much alike; even so does the oyster resemble his native rock.

"I was the one creature with whom he had any communication, socially speaking; he would come in to ask for a light, to borrow a book or a newspaper, and of an evening he would allow me to go into his cell, and when he was in the humor we would chat together. These marks of confidence were the results of four years of neighborhood and my own sober conduct. From sheer lack of pence, I was bound to live pretty much as he did. Had he any relations or friends? Was he rich or poor? Nobody could give an answer to these questions. I myself never saw money in his room. Doubtless his capital was safely stowed in the strong rooms of the Bank. He used to collect his bills himself as they fell due, running all over Paris on a pair of shanks as skinny as a stag's. On occasion he would be a martyr to prudence. One day, when he happened to have gold in his pockets, a double napoleon worked its way, somehow or other, out of his fob and fell, and another lodger following him up the stairs picked up the coin and returned it to its owner.

"'That isn't mine!' said he, with a start of surprise. 'Mine indeed! If I were rich, should I live as I do!'

"He made his cup of coffee himself every morning on the cast-iron chafing dish which stood all day in the black angle of the grate; his dinner came in from a cookshop; and our old porter's wife went up at the prescribed hour to set his room in order. Finally, a whimsical chance, in which Sterne would have seen predestination, had named the man Gobseck. When I did business for him later, I came to know that he was about seventy-six years old at the time when we became acquainted. He was born about 1740, in some outlying suburb of Antwerp, of a Dutch father and a Jewish mother, and his name was Jean-Esther Van Gobseck. You remember how all Paris took an interest in that murder case, a woman named La belle Hollandaise? I happened to mention it to my old neighbor, and he answered without the slightest symptom of interest

or surprise, 'She is my grandniece.'

"That was the only remark drawn from him by the death of his sole surviving next of kin, his sister's granddaughter. From reports of the case I found that La belle Hollandaise was in fact named Sara Van Gobseck. When I asked by what curious chance his grandniece came to bear his surname, he smiled:

"'The women never marry in our family.'

"Singular creature, he had never cared to find out a single relative among four generations counted on the female side. The thought of his heirs was abhorrent to him; and the idea that his wealth could pass into other hands after his death simply inconceivable.

"He was a child, ten years old, when his mother shipped him off as a cabin boy on a voyage to the Dutch Straits Settlements, and there he knocked about for twenty years. The inscrutable lines on that sallow forehead kept the secret of horrible adventures, sudden panic, unhoped-for luck, romantic cross events, joys that knew no limit, hunger endured and love trampled under foot, fortunes risked, lost, and recovered, life endangered time and time again, and saved, it may be, by one of the rapid, ruthless decisions absolved by necessity. He had known Admiral Simeuse, M. de Lally, M. de Kergarouet, M. d'Estaing, le Bailli de Suffren, M. de Portenduere, Lord Cornwallis, Lord Hastings, Tippoo Sahib's father, Tippoo Sahib himself. The bully who served Mahadaji Sindhia, King of Delhi, and did so much to found the power of the Mahrattas, had had dealings with Gobseck. Long residence at St. Thomas brought him in contact with Victor Hughes and other notorious pirates. In his quest of fortune he had left no stone unturned; witness an attempt to discover the treasure of that tribe of savages so famous in Buenos Ayres and its neighborhood. He had a personal knowledge of the events of the American War of Independence. But if he spoke of the Indies or of America, as he did very rarely with me, and never with anyone else, he seemed to regard it as an indiscretion and to repent of it afterwards. If humanity and sociability are in some sort a religion, Gobseck might be ranked as an infidel; but though I set myself to study him, I must confess, to my shame, that his real nature was impenetrable up to the very last. I even felt doubts at times as to his sex. If all usurers are like this one, I maintain that they belong to the neuter gender.

"Did he adhere to his mother's religion? Did he look on Gentiles as his legitimate prey? Had he turned Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Mahometan, Brahmin, or what not? I never knew anything whatsoever about his religious opinions, and so far as I could see, he was indifferent rather than incredulous.

"One evening I went in to see this man who had turned himself to gold; the usurer, whom his victims (his clients, as he styled them) were wont to call

Daddy Gobseck, perhaps ironically, perhaps by way of antiphrasis. He was sitting in his armchair, motionless as a statue, staring fixedly at the mantel-shelf, where he seemed to read the figures of his statements. A lamp, with a pedestal that had once been green, was burning in the room; but so far from taking color from its smoky light, his face seemed to stand out positively paler against the background. He pointed to a chair set for me, but not a word did he say.

"'What thoughts can this being have in his mind?' said I to myself. 'Does he know that a God exists; does he know there are such things as feeling, woman, happiness?' I pitied him as I might have pitied a diseased creature. But, at the same time, I knew quite well that while he had millions of francs at his command, he possessed the world no less in idea—that world which he had explored, ransacked, weighed, appraised, and exploited.

"'Good day, Daddy Gobseck,' I began.

"He turned his face towards me with a slight contraction of his bushy, black eyebrows; this characteristic shade of expression in him meant as much as the most jubilant smile on a Southern face.

"'You look just as gloomy as you did that day when the news came of the failure of that bookseller whose sharpness you admired so much, though you were one of his victims.'

"'One of his victims?' he repeated, with a look of astonishment.

"'Yes. Did you not refuse to accept composition at the meeting of creditors until he undertook privately to pay you your debt in full; and did he not give you bills accepted by the insolvent firm; and then, when he set up in business again, did he not pay you the dividend upon those bills of yours, signed as they were by the bankrupt firm?'

"'He was a sharp one, but I had it out of him.'

"'Then have you some bills to protest? To-day is the 30th, I believe.'

"It was the first time I had spoken to him of money. He looked ironically up at me; then in those bland accents, not unlike the husky tones which the tyro draws from a flute, he answered, 'I am amusing myself.'

"'So you amuse yourself now and again?'

"'Do you imagine that the only poets in the world are those who print their verses?' he asked, with a pitying look and shrug of the shoulders.

"'Poetry in that head!' thought I, for as yet I knew nothing of his life.

"'What life could be as glorious as mine?' he continued, and his eyes lighted up. 'You are young, your mental visions are colored by youthful blood,

you see women's faces in the fire, while I see nothing but coals in mine. You have all sorts of beliefs, while I have no beliefs at all. Keep your illusions—if you can. Now I will show you life with the discount taken off. Go wherever you like, or stay at home by the fireside with your wife, there always comes a time when you settle down in a certain groove, the groove is your preference; and then happiness consists in the exercise of your faculties by applying them to realities. Anything more in the way of precept is false. My principles have been various, among various men; I had to change them with every change of latitude. Things that we admire in Europe are punishable in Asia, and a vice in Paris becomes a necessity when you have passed the Azores. There are no such things as hard-and-fast rules; there are only conventions adapted to the climate. Fling a man headlong into one social melting pot after another, and convictions and forms and moral systems become so many meaningless words to him. The one thing that always remains, the one sure instinct that nature has implanted in us, is the instinct of self-interest. If you had lived as long as I have, you would know that there is but one concrete reality invariable enough to be worth caring about, and that is—GOLD. Gold represents every form of human power. I have traveled. I found out that there were either hills or plains everywhere: the plains are monotonous, the hills a weariness; consequently, place may be left out of the question. As to manners; man is man all the world over. The same battle between the poor and the rich is going on everywhere; it is inevitable everywhere; consequently, it is better to exploit than to be exploited. Everywhere you find the man of thews and sinews who toils, and the lymphatic man who torments himself; and pleasures are everywhere the same, for when all sensations are exhausted, all that survives is Vanity—Vanity is the abiding substance of us, the I in us. Vanity is only to be satisfied by gold in floods. Our dreams need time and physical means and painstaking thought before they can be realized. Well, gold contains all things in embryo; gold realizes all things for us.

"'None but fools and invalids can find pleasure in shuffling cards all evening long to find out whether they shall win a few pence at the end. None but driveling idiots could spend time in inquiring into all that is happening around them, whether Madame Such-an-One slept single on her couch or in company, whether she has more blood than lymph, more temperament than virtue. None but the dupes, who fondly imagine that they are useful to their like, can interest themselves in laying down rules for political guidance amid events which neither they nor any one else foresees, nor ever will foresee. None but simpletons can delight in talking about stage players and repeating their sayings; making the daily promenade of a caged animal over a rather larger area; dressing for others, eating for others, priding themselves on a horse or a carriage such as no neighbor can have until three days later. What is all this but Parisian life summed up in a few phrases? Let us find a higher

outlook on life than theirs. Happiness consists either in strong emotions which drain our vitality, or in methodical occupation which makes existence like a bit of English machinery, working with the regularity of clockwork. A higher happiness than either consists in a curiosity, styled noble, a wish to learn Nature's secrets, or to attempt by artificial means to imitate Nature to some extent. What is this in two words but Science and Art, or passion or calm?—Ah! well, every human passion wrought up to its highest pitch in the struggle for existence comes to parade itself before me—as I live in calm. As for your scientific curiosity, a kind of wrestling bout in which man is never uppermost, I replace it by an insight into all the springs of action in man and woman. To sum up, the world is mine without effort of mine, and the world has not the slightest hold on me. Listen to this,' he went on, 'I will tell you the history of my morning, and you will divine my pleasures.'

"He got up, pushed the bolt of the door, drew a tapestry curtain across it with a sharp grating sound of the rings on the rod, then he sat down again.

"'This morning,' he said, 'I had only two amounts to collect; the rest of the bills that were due I gave away instead of cash to my customers yesterday. So much saved, you see, for when I discount a bill I always deduct two francs for a hired brougham—expenses of collection. A pretty thing it would be, would it not, if my clients were to set me trudging all over Paris for half-a-dozen francs of discount, when no man is my master, and I only pay seven francs in the shape of taxes?

"'The first bill for a thousand francs was presented by a young fellow, a smart buck with a spangled waistcoat, and an eyeglass, and a tilbury and an English horse, and all the rest of it. The bill bore the signature of one of the prettiest women in Paris, married to a Count, a great landowner. Now, how came that Countess to put her name to a bill of exchange, legally not worth the paper it was written upon, but practically very good business; for these women, poor things, are afraid of the scandal that a protested bill makes in a family, and would give themselves away in payment sooner than fail? I wanted to find out what that bill of exchange really represented. Was it stupidity, imprudence, love or charity?

"'The second bill, bearing the signature "Fanny Malvaut," came to me from a linen-draper on the highway to bankruptcy. Now, no creature who has any credit with a bank comes to me. The first step to my door means that a man is desperately hard up; that the news of his failure will soon come out: and, most of all, it means that he has been everywhere else first. The stag is always at bay when I see him, and a pack of creditors are hard upon his track. The Countess lived in the Rue du Helder, and my Fanny in the Rue Montmartre. How many conjectures I made as I set out this morning! If these two women were not able to pay, they would show me more respect than they would show

their own fathers. What tricks and grimaces would not the Countess try for a thousand francs! She would be so nice to me, she would talk to me in that ingratiating tone peculiar to endorsers of bills, she would pour out a torrent of coaxing words, perhaps she would beg and pray, and I...' (here the old man turned his pale eyes upon me)—'and I not to be moved, inexorable!' he continued. 'I am there as the avenger, the apparition of Remorse. So much for hypotheses. I reached the house.

"'"Madame la Comtesse is asleep," says the maid.

"'"When can I see her?"

"'"At twelve o'clock."

"'"Is Madame la Comtesse ill?"

"'"No, sir, but she only came home at three o'clock this morning from a ball."

"'"My name is Gobseck, tell her that I shall call again at twelve o'clock," and I went out, leaving traces of my muddy boots on the carpet which covered the paved staircase. I like to leave mud on a rich man's carpet; it is not petty spite; I like to make them feel a touch of the claws of Necessity. In the Rue Montmartre I thrust open the old gateway of a poor-looking house, and looked into a dark courtyard where the sunlight never shines. The porter's lodge was grimy, the window looked like the sleeve of some shabby wadded gown—greasy, dirty, and full of holes.

"'"Mlle. Fanny Malvaut?"

"'"She has gone out; but if you have come about a bill, the money is waiting for you."

"'"I will look in again," said I.

"'As soon as I knew that the porter had the money for me, I wanted to know what the girl was like; I pictured her as pretty. The rest of the morning I spent in looking at the prints in the shop windows along the boulevard; then, just as it struck twelve, I went through the Countess' ante-chamber.

"'"Madame has just this minute rung for me," said the maid; "I don't think she can see you yet."

"'"I will wait," said I, and sat down in an easy-chair.

"'Venetian shutters were opened, and presently the maid came hurrying back.

"'"Come in, sir."

"'From the sweet tone of the girl's voice, I knew that the mistress could not

be ready to pay. What a handsome woman it was that I saw in another moment! She had flung an Indian shawl hastily over her bare shoulders, covering herself with it completely, while it revealed the bare outlines of the form beneath. She wore a loose gown trimmed with snowy ruffles, which told plainly that her laundress' bills amounted to something like two thousand francs in the course of a year. Her dark curls escaped from beneath a bright Indian handkerchief, knotted carelessly about her head after the fashion of Creole women. The bed lay in disorder that told of broken slumber. A painter would have paid money to stay a while to see the scene that I saw. Under the luxurious hanging draperies, the pillow, crushed into the depths of an eider-down quilt, its lace border standing out in contrast against the background of blue silk, bore a vague impress that kindled the imagination. A pair of satin slippers gleamed from the great bear-skin rug spread by the carved mahogany lions at the bed-foot, where she had flung them off in her weariness after the ball. A crumpled gown hung over a chair, the sleeves touching the floor; stockings which a breath would have blown away were twisted about the leg of an easy-chair; while ribbon garters straggled over a settee. A fan of price, half unfolded, glittered on the chimney-piece. Drawers stood open; flowers, diamonds, gloves, a bouquet, a girdle, were littered about. The room was full of vague sweet perfume. And—beneath all the luxury and disorder, beauty and incongruity, I saw Misery crouching in wait for her or for her adorer, Misery rearing its head, for the Countess had begun to feel the edge of those fangs. Her tired face was an epitome of the room strewn with relics of past festival. The scattered gewgaws, pitiable this morning, when gathered together and coherent, had turned heads the night before.

"'What efforts to drink of the Tantalus cup of bliss I could read in these traces of love stricken by the thunderbolt remorse—in this visible presentment of a life of luxury, extravagance, and riot. There were faint red marks on her young face, signs of the fineness of the skin; but her features were coarsened, as it were, and the circles about her eyes were unwontedly dark. Nature nevertheless was so vigorous in her, that these traces of past folly did not spoil her beauty. Her eyes glittered. She looked like some Herodias of da Vinci's (I have dealt in pictures), so magnificently full of life and energy was she; there was nothing starved nor stinted in feature or outline; she awakened desire; it seemed to me that there was some passion in her yet stronger than love. I was taken with her. It was a long while since my heart had throbbed; so I was paid then and there—for I would give a thousand francs for a sensation that should bring me back memories of youth.

"'"Monsieur," she said, finding a chair for me, "will you be so good as to wait?"

"'"Until this time to-morrow, madame," I said, folding up the bill again. "I

cannot legally protest this bill any sooner." And within myself I said—"Pay the price of your luxury, pay for your name, pay for your ease, pay for the monopoly which you enjoy! The rich have invented judges and courts of law to secure their goods, and the guillotine—that candle in which so many lie in silk, under silken coverlets, there is remorse, and grinding of teeth beneath a smile, and those fantastical lions' jaws are gaping to set their fangs in your heart."

"'"Protest the bill! Can you mean it?" she cried, with her eyes upon me; "could you have so little consideration for me?"

"'"If the King himself owed money to me, madame, and did not pay it, I should summons him even sooner than any other debtor."

"'While we were speaking, somebody tapped gently at the door.

"'"I cannot see any one," she cried imperiously.

"'"But, Anastasie, I particularly wish to speak to you."

"'"Not just now, dear," she answered in a milder tone, but with no sign of relenting.

"'"What nonsense! You are talking to some one," said the voice, and in came a man who could only be the Count.

"'The Countess gave me a glance. I saw how it was. She was thoroughly in my power. There was a time, when I was young, and might perhaps have been stupid enough not to protest the bill. At Pondicherry, in 1763, I let a woman off, and nicely she paid me out afterwards. I deserved it; what call was there for me to trust her?

"'"What does this gentleman want?" asked the Count.

"'I could see that the Countess was trembling from head to foot; the white satin skin of her throat was rough, "turned to goose flesh," to use the familiar expression. As for me, I laughed in myself without moving a muscle.

"'"This gentleman is one of my tradesmen," she said.

"'The Count turned his back on me; I drew the bill half out of my pocket. After that inexorable movement, she came over to me and put a diamond into my hands. "Take it," she said, "and be gone."

"'We exchanged values, and I made my bow and went. The diamond was quite worth twelve hundred francs to me. Out in the courtyard I saw a swarm of flunkeys, brushing out their liveries, waxing their boots, and cleaning sumptuous equipages.

"'"This is what brings these people to me!" said I to myself. "It is to keep

up this kind of thing that they steal millions with all due formalities, and betray their country. The great lord, and the little man who apes the great lord, bathes in mud once for all to save himself a splash or two when he goes afoot through the streets."

"'Just then the great gates were opened to admit a cabriolet. It was the same young fellow who had brought the bill to me.

"'"Sir," I said, as he alighted, "here are two hundred francs, which I beg you to return to Mme. la Comtesse, and have the goodness to tell her that I hold the pledge which she deposited with me this morning at her disposition for a week."

"'He took the two hundred francs, and an ironical smile stole over his face; it was as if he had said, "Aha! so she has paid it, has she? ... Faith, so much the better!" I read the Countess' future in his face. That good-looking, fair-haired young gentleman is a heartless gambler; he will ruin himself, ruin her, ruin her husband, ruin the children, eat up their portions, and work more havoc in Parisian salons than a whole battery of howitzers in a regiment.

"'I went back to see Mlle. Fanny in the Rue Montmartre, climbed a very steep, narrow staircase, and reached a two-roomed dwelling on the fifth floor. Everything was as neat as a new ducat. I did not see a speck of dust on the furniture in the first room, where Mlle. Fanny was sitting. Mlle. Fanny herself was a young Parisian girl, quietly dressed, with a delicate fresh face, and a winning look. The arrangement of her neatly brushed chestnut hair in a double curve on her forehead lent a refined expression to blue eyes, clear as crystal. The broad daylight streaming in through the short curtains against the window pane fell with softened light on her girlish face. A pile of shaped pieces of linen told me that she was a sempstress. She looked like a spirit of solitude. When I held out the bill, I remarked that she had not been at home when I called in the morning.

"'"But the money was left with the porter's wife," said she.

"'I pretended not to understand.

"'"You go out early, mademoiselle, it seems."

"'"I very seldom leave my room; but when you work all night, you are obliged to take a bath sometimes."

"'I looked at her. A glance told me all about her life. Here was a girl condemned by misfortune to toil, a girl who came of honest farmer folk, for she had still a freckle or two that told of country birth. There was an indefinable atmosphere of goodness about her; I felt as if I were breathing sincerity and frank innocence. It was refreshing to my lungs. Poor innocent

child, she had faith in something; there was a crucifix and a sprig or two of green box above her poor little painted wooden bedstead; I felt touched, or somewhat inclined that way. I felt ready to offer to charge no more than twelve per cent, and so give something towards establishing her in a good way of business.

"'"But maybe she has a little youngster of a cousin," I said to myself, "who would raise money on her signature and sponge on the poor girl."

"'So I went away, keeping my generous impulses well under control; for I have frequently had occasion to observe that when benevolence does no harm to him who gives it, it is the ruin of him who takes. When you came in I was thinking that Fanny Malvaut would make a nice little wife; I was thinking of the contrast between her pure, lonely life and the life of the Countess—she has sunk as low as a bill of exchange already, she will sink to the lowest depths of degradation before she has done!'—I scrutinized him during the deep silence that followed, but in a moment he spoke again. 'Well,' he said, 'do you think that it is nothing to have this power of insight into the deepest recesses of the human heart, to embrace so many lives, to see the naked truth underlying it all? There are no two dramas alike: there are hideous sores, deadly chagrins, love scenes, misery that soon will lie under the ripples of the Seine, young men's joys that lead to the scaffold, the laughter of despair, and sumptuous banquets. Yesterday it was a tragedy. A worthy soul of a father drowned himself because he could not support his family. To-morrow is a comedy; some youngster will try to rehearse the scene of M. Dimanche, brought up to date. You have heard the people extol the eloquence of our latter day preachers; now and again I have wasted my time by going to hear them; they produced a change in my opinions, but in my conduct (as somebody said, I can't recollect his name), in my conduct—never!—Well, well; these good priests and your Mirabeaus and Vergniauds and the rest of them, are mere stammering beginners compared with these orators of mine.

"'Often it is some girl in love, some gray-headed merchant on the verge of bankruptcy, some mother with a son's wrong-doing to conceal, some starving artist, some great man whose influence is on the wane, and, for lack of money, is like to lose the fruit of all his labors—the power of their pleading has made me shudder. Sublime actors such as these play for me, for an audience of one, and they cannot deceive me. I can look into their inmost thoughts, and read them as God reads them. Nothing is hidden from me. Nothing is refused to the holder of the purse-strings to loose and to bind. I am rich enough to buy the consciences of those who control the action of ministers, from their office boys to their mistresses. Is not that power?—I can possess the fairest women, receive their softest caresses; is not that Pleasure? And is not your whole social economy summed up in terms of Power and Pleasure?

"'There are ten of us in Paris, silent, unknown kings, the arbiters of your destinies. What is life but a machine set in motion by money? Know this for certain—methods are always confounded with results; you will never succeed in separating the soul from the senses, spirit from matter. Gold is the spiritual basis of existing society.—The ten of us are bound by the ties of common interest; we meet on certain days of the week at the Cafe Themis near the Pont Neuf, and there, in conclave, we reveal the mysteries of finance. No fortune can deceive us; we are in possession of family secrets in all directions. We keep a kind of Black Book, in which we note the most important bills issued, drafts on public credit, or on banks, or given and taken in the course of business. We are the Casuists of the Paris Bourse, a kind of Inquisition weighing and analyzing the most insignificant actions of every man of any fortune, and our forecasts are infallible. One of us looks out over the judicial world, one over the financial, another surveys the administrative, and yet another the business world. I myself keep an eye on eldest sons, artists, people in the great world, and gamblers—on the most sensational side of Paris. Every one who comes to us lets us into his neighbor's secrets. Thwarted passion and mortified vanity are great babblers. Vice and disappointment and vindictiveness are the best of all detectives. My colleagues, like myself, have enjoyed all things, are sated with all things, and have reached the point when power and money are loved for their own sake.

"'Here,' he said, indicating his bare, chilly room, 'here the most high-mettled gallant, who chafes at a word and draws swords for a syllable elsewhere will entreat with clasped hands. There is no city merchant so proud, no woman so vain of her beauty, no soldier of so bold a spirit, but that they entreat me here, one and all, with tears of rage or anguish in their eyes. Here they kneel—the famous artist, and the man of letters, whose name will go down to posterity. Here, in short' (he lifted his hand to his forehead), 'all the inheritances and all the concerns of all Paris are weighed in the balance. Are you still of the opinion that there are no delights behind the blank mask which so often has amazed you by its impassiveness?' he asked, stretching out that livid face which reeked of money.

"I went back to my room, feeling stupefied. The little, wizened old man had grown great. He had been metamorphosed under my eyes into a strange visionary symbol; he had come to be the power of gold personified. I shrank, shuddering, from life and my kind.

"'Is it really so?' I thought; 'must everything be resolved into gold?'

"I remember that it was long before I slept that night. I saw heaps of gold all about me. My thoughts were full of the lovely Countess; I confess, to my shame, that the vision completely eclipsed another quiet, innocent figure, the figure of the woman who had entered upon a life of toil and obscurity; but on

the morrow, through the clouds of slumber, Fanny's sweet face rose before me in all its beauty, and I thought of nothing else."

"Will you take a glass of eau sucree?" asked the Vicomtesse, interrupting Derville.

"I should be glad of it."

"But I can see nothing in this that can touch our concerns," said Mme. de Grandlieu, as she rang the bell.

"Sardanapalus!" cried Derville, flinging out his favorite invocation. "Mademoiselle Camille will be wide awake in a moment if I say that her happiness depended not so long ago upon Daddy Gobseck; but as the old gentleman died at the age of ninety, M. de Restaud will soon be in possession of a handsome fortune. This requires some explanation. As for poor Fanny Malvaut, you know her; she is my wife."

"Poor fellow, he would admit that, with his usual frankness, with a score of people to hear him!" said the Vicomtesse.

"I would proclaim it to the universe," said the attorney.

"Go on, drink your glass, my poor Derville. You will never be anything but the happiest and the best of men."

"I left you in the Rue du Helder," remarked the uncle, raising his face after a gentle doze. "You had gone to see a Countess; what have you done with her?"

"A few days after my conversation with the old Dutchman," Derville continued, "I sent in my thesis, and became first a licentiate in law, and afterwards an advocate. The old miser's opinion of me went up considerably. He consulted me (gratuitously) on all the ticklish bits of business which he undertook when he had made quite sure how he stood, business which would have seemed unsafe to any ordinary practitioner. This man, over whom no one appeared to have the slightest influence, listened to my advice with something like respect. It is true that he always found that it turned out very well.

"At length I became head-clerk in the office where I had worked for three years and then I left the Rue des Gres for rooms in my employer's house. I had my board and lodging and a hundred and fifty francs per month. It was a great day for me!

"When I went to bid the usurer good-bye, he showed no sign of feeling, he was neither cordial nor sorry to lose me, he did not ask me to come to see him, and only gave me one of those glances which seemed in some sort to reveal a power of second-sight.

"By the end of a week my old neighbor came to see me with a tolerably thorny bit of business, an expropriation, and he continued to ask for my advice with as much freedom as if he paid for it.

"My principal was a man of pleasure and expensive tastes; before the second year (1818-1819) was out he had got himself into difficulties, and was obliged to sell his practice. A professional connection in those days did not fetch the present exorbitant prices, and my principal asked a hundred and fifty thousand francs. Now an active man, of competent knowledge and intelligence, might hope to pay off the capital in ten years, paying interest and living respectably in the meantime—if he could command confidence. But I as the seventh child of a small tradesman at Noyon, I had not a sou to my name, nor personal knowledge of any capitalist but Daddy Gobseck. An ambitious idea, and an indefinable glimmer of hope, put heart into me. To Gobseck I betook myself, and slowly one evening I made my way to the Rue des Gres. My heart thumped heavily as I knocked at his door in the gloomy house. I recollected all the things that he used to tell me, at a time when I myself was very far from suspecting the violence of the anguish awaiting those who crossed his threshold. Now it was I who was about to beg and pray like so many others.

"'Well, no, not that,' I said to myself; 'an honest man must keep his self-respect wherever he goes. Success is not worth cringing for; let us show him a front as decided as his own.'

"Daddy Gobseck had taken my room since I left the house, so as to have no neighbor; he had made a little grated window too in his door since then, and did not open until he had taken a look at me and saw who I was.

"'Well,' said he, in his thin, flute notes, 'so your principal is selling his practice?'

"'How did you know that?' said I; 'he has not spoken of it as yet except to me.'

"The old man's lips were drawn in puckers, like a curtain, to either corner of his mouth, as a soundless smile bore a hard glance company.

"'Nothing else would have brought you here,' he said drily, after a pause, which I spent in confusion.

"'Listen to me, M. Gobseck,' I began, with such serenity as I could assume before the old man, who gazed at me with steady eyes. There was a clear light burning in them that disconcerted me.

"He made a gesture as if to bid me 'Go on.' 'I know that it is not easy to work on your feelings, so I will not waste my eloquence on the attempt to put

my position before you—I am a penniless clerk, with no one to look to but you, and no heart in the world but yours can form a clear idea of my probable future. Let us leave hearts out of the question. Business is business, and business is not carried on with sentimentality like romances. Now to the facts. My principal's practice is worth in his hands about twenty thousand francs per annum; in my hands, I think it would bring in forty thousand. He is willing to sell it for a hundred and fifty thousand francs. And here,' I said, striking my forehead, 'I feel that if you would lend me the purchase-money, I could clear it off in ten years' time.'

"'Come, that is plain speaking,' said Daddy Gobseck, and he held out his hand and grasped mine. 'Nobody since I have been in business has stated the motives of his visit more clearly. Guarantees?' asked he, scanning me from head to foot. 'None to give,' he added after a pause, 'How old are you?'

"'Twenty-five in ten days' time,' said I, 'or I could not open the matter.'

"'Precisely.'

"'Well?'

"'It is possible.'

"'My word, we must be quick about it, or I shall have some one buying over my head.'

"'Bring your certificate of birth round to-morrow morning, and we will talk. I will think it over.'

"'Next morning, at eight o'clock, I stood in the old man's room. He took the document, put on his spectacles, coughed, spat, wrapped himself up in his black greatcoat, and read the whole certificate through from beginning to end. Then he turned it over and over, looked at me, coughed again, fidgeted about in his chair, and said, 'We will try to arrange this bit of business.'

"I trembled.

"'I make fifty per cent on my capital,' he continued, 'sometimes I make a hundred, two hundred, five hundred per cent.'

"I turned pale at the words.

"'But as we are acquaintances, I shall be satisfied to take twelve and a half per cent per—(he hesitated)—'well, yes, from you I would be content to take thirteen per cent per annum. Will that suit you?'

"'Yes,' I answered.

"'But if it is too much, stick up for yourself, Grotius!' (a name he jokingly gave me). 'When I ask you for thirteen per cent, it is all in the way of business;

look into it, see if you can pay it; I don't like a man to agree too easily. Is it too much?'

"'No,' said I, 'I will make up for it by working a little harder.'

"'Gad! your clients will pay for it!' said he, looking at me wickedly out of the corner of his eyes.

"'No, by all the devils in hell!' cried I, 'it shall be I who will pay. I would sooner cut my hand off than flay people.'

"'Good-night,' said Daddy Gobseck.

"'Why, fees are all according to scale,' I added.

"'Not for compromises and settlements out of Court, and cases where litigants come to terms,' said he. 'You can send in a bill for thousands of francs, six thousand even at a swoop (it depends on the importance of the case), for conferences with So-and-so, and expenses, and drafts, and memorials, and your jargon. A man must learn to look out for business of this kind. I will recommend you as a most competent, clever attorney. I will send you such a lot of work of this sort that your colleagues will be fit to burst with envy. Werbrust, Palma, and Gigonnet, my cronies, shall hand over their expropriations to you; they have plenty of them, the Lord knows! So you will have two practices—the one you are buying, and the other I will build up for you. You ought almost to pay me fifteen per cent on my loan.'

"'So be it, but no more,' said I, with the firmness which means that a man is determined not to concede another point.

"Daddy Gobseck's face relaxed; he looked pleased with me.

"'I shall pay the money over to your principal myself,' said he, 'so as to establish a lien on the purchase and caution-money.'

"'Oh, anything you like in the way of guarantees.'

"'And besides that, you will give me bills for the amount made payable to a third party (name left blank), fifteen bills of ten thousand francs each.'

"'Well, so long as it is acknowledged in writing that this is a double——'

"'No!' Gobseck broke in upon me. 'No! Why should I trust you any more than you trust me?'

"I kept silence.

"'And furthermore,' he continued, with a sort of good humor, 'you will give me your advice without charging fees as long as I live, will you not?'

"'So be it; so long as there is no outlay.'

"'Precisely,' said he. "Ah, by the by, you will allow me to go to see you?' (Plainly the old man found it not so easy to assume the air of good-humor.)

"'I shall always be glad.'

"'Ah! yes, but it would be very difficult to arrange of a morning. You will have your affairs to attend to, and I have mine.'

"'Then come in the evening.'

"'Oh, no!' he answered briskly, 'you ought to go into society and see your clients, and I myself have my friends at my cafe.'

"'His friends!' thought I to myself.—'Very well,' said I, 'why not come at dinner-time?'

"'That is the time,' said Gobseck, 'after 'Change, at five o'clock. Good, you will see me Wednesdays and Saturdays. We will talk over business like a pair of friends. Aha! I am gay sometimes. Just give me the wing of a partridge and a glass of champagne, and we will have our chat together. I know a great many things that can be told now at this distance of time; I will teach you to know men, and what is more—women!'

"'Oh! a partridge and a glass of champagne if you like.'

"'Don't do anything foolish, or I shall lose my faith in you. And don't set up housekeeping in a grand way. Just one old general servant. I will come and see that you keep your health. I have capital invested in your head, he! he! so I am bound to look after you. There, come round in the evening and bring your principal with you!'

"'Would you mind telling me, if there is no harm in asking, what was the good of my birth certificate in this business?' I asked, when the little old man and I stood on the doorstep.

"Jean-Esther Van Gobseck shrugged his shoulders, smiled maliciously, and said, 'What blockheads youngsters are! Learn, master attorney (for learn you must if you don't mean to be taken in), that integrity and brains in a man under thirty are commodities which can be mortgaged. After that age there is no counting on a man.'

"And with that he shut the door.

"Three months later I was an attorney. Before very long, madame, it was my good fortune to undertake the suit for the recovery of your estates. I won the day, and my name became known. In spite of the exorbitant rate of interest, I paid off Gobseck in less than five years. I married Fanny Malvaut, whom I loved with all my heart. There was a parallel between her life and mine, between our hard work and our luck, which increased the strength of

feeling on either side. One of her uncles, a well-to-do farmer, died and left her seventy thousand francs, which helped to clear off the loan. From that day my life has been nothing but happiness and prosperity. Nothing is more utterly uninteresting than a happy man, so let us say no more on that head, and return to the rest of the characters.

"About a year after the purchase of the practice, I was dragged into a bachelor breakfast-party given by one of our number who had lost a bet to a young man greatly in vogue in the fashionable world. M. de Trailles, the flower of the dandyism of that day, enjoyed a prodigious reputation."

"But he is still enjoying it," put in the Comte de Born. "No one wears his clothes with a finer air, nor drives a tandem with a better grace. It is Maxime's gift; he can gamble, eat, and drink more gracefully than any man in the world. He is a judge of horses, hats, and pictures. All the women lose their heads over him. He always spends something like a hundred thousand francs a year, and no creature can discover that he has an acre of land or a single dividend warrant. The typical knight errant of our salons, our boudoirs, our boulevards, an amphibian half-way between a man and a woman—Maxime de Trailles is a singular being, fit for anything, and good for nothing, quite as capable of perpetrating a benefit as of planning a crime; sometimes base, sometimes noble, more often bespattered with mire than besprinkled with blood, knowing more of anxiety than of remorse, more concerned with his digestion than with any mental process, shamming passion, feeling nothing. Maxime de Trailles is a brilliant link between the hulks and the best society; he belongs to the eminently intelligent class from which a Mirabeau, or a Pitt, or a Richelieu springs at times, though it is more wont to produce Counts of Horn, Fouquier-Tinvilles, and Coignards."

"Well," pursued Derville, when he had heard the Vicomtesse's brother to the end, "I had heard a good deal about this individual from poor old Goriot, a client of mine; and I had already been at some pains to avoid the dangerous honor of his acquaintance, for I came across him sometimes in society. Still, my chum was so pressing about this breakfast-party of his that I could not well get out of it, unless I wished to earn a name for squeamishness. Madame, you could hardly imagine what a bachelor's breakfast-party is like. It means superb display and a studied refinement seldom seen; the luxury of a miser when vanity leads him to be sumptuous for a day.

"You are surprised as you enter the room at the neatness of the table, dazzling by reason of its silver and crystal and linen damask. Life is here in full bloom; the young fellows are graceful to behold; they smile and talk in low, demure voices like so many brides; everything about them looks girlish. Two hours later you might take the room for a battlefield after the fight. Broken glasses, serviettes crumpled and torn to rags lie strewn about among

the nauseous-looking remnants of food on the dishes. There is an uproar that stuns you, jesting toasts, a fire of witticisms and bad jokes; faces are empurpled, eyes inflamed and expressionless, unintentional confidences tell you the whole truth. Bottles are smashed, and songs trolled out in the height of a diabolical racket; men call each other out, hang on each other's necks, or fall to fisticuffs; the room is full of a horrid, close scent made up of a hundred odors, and noise enough for a hundred voices. No one has any notion of what he is eating or drinking or saying. Some are depressed, others babble, one will turn monomaniac, repeating the same word over and over again like a bell set jangling; another tries to keep the tumult within bounds; the steadiest will propose an orgy. If any one in possession of his faculties should come in, he would think that he had interrupted a Bacchanalian rite.

"It was in the thick of such a chaos that M. de Trailles tried to insinuate himself into my good graces. My head was fairly clear, I was upon my guard. As for him, though he pretended to be decently drunk, he was perfectly cool, and knew very well what he was about. How it was done I do not know, but the upshot of it was that when we left Grignon's rooms about nine o'clock in the evening, M. de Trailles had thoroughly bewitched me. I had given him my promise that I would introduce him the next day to our Papa Gobseck. The words 'honor,' 'virtue,' 'countess,' 'honest woman,' and 'ill-luck' were mingled in his discourse with magical potency, thanks to that golden tongue of his.

"When I awoke next morning, and tried to recollect what I had done the day before, it was with great difficulty that I could make a connected tale from my impressions. At last, it seemed to me that the daughter of one of my clients was in danger of losing her reputation, together with her husband's love and esteem, if she could not get fifty thousand francs together in the course of the morning. There had been gaming debts, and carriage-builders' accounts, money lost to Heaven knows whom. My magician of a boon companion had impressed it upon me that she was rich enough to make good these reverses by a few years of economy. But only now did I begin to guess the reasons of his urgency. I confess, to my shame, that I had not the shadow of a doubt but that it was a matter of importance that Daddy Gobseck should make it up with this dandy. I was dressing when the young gentleman appeared.

"'M. le Comte,' said I, after the usual greetings, 'I fail to see why you should need me to effect an introduction to Van Gobseck, the most civil and smooth-spoken of capitalists. Money will be forthcoming if he has any, or rather, if you can give him adequate security.'

"'Monsieur,' said he, 'it does not enter into my thoughts to force you to do me a service, even though you have passed your word.'

"'Sardanapalus!' said I to myself, 'am I going to let that fellow imagine that

I will not keep my word with him?'

"'I had the honor of telling you yesterday,' said he, 'that I had fallen out with Daddy Gobseck most inopportunely; and as there is scarcely another man in Paris who can come down on the nail with a hundred thousand francs, at the end of the month, I begged of you to make my peace with him. But let us say no more about it——'

"M. de Trailles looked at me with civil insult in his expression, and made as if he would take his leave.

"'I am ready to go with you,' said I.

"When we reached the Rue de Gres, my dandy looked about him with a circumspection and uneasiness that set me wondering. His face grew livid, flushed, and yellow, turn and turn about, and by the time that Gobseck's door came in sight the perspiration stood in drops on his forehead. We were just getting out of the cabriolet, when a hackney cab turned into the street. My companion's hawk eye detected a woman in the depths of the vehicle. His face lighted up with a gleam of almost savage joy; he called to a little boy who was passing, and gave him his horse to hold. Then we went up to the old bill discounter.

"'M. Gobseck,' said I, 'I have brought one of my most intimate friends to see you (whom I trust as I would trust the Devil,' I added for the old man's private ear). 'To oblige me you will do your best for him (at the ordinary rate), and pull him out of his difficulty (if it suits your convenience).'

"M. de Trailles made his bow to Gobseck, took a seat, and listened to us with a courtier-like attitude; its charming humility would have touched your heart to see, but my Gobseck sits in his chair by the fireside without moving a muscle, or changing a feature. He looked very like the statue of Voltaire under the peristyle of the Theatre-Francais, as you see it of an evening; he had partly risen as if to bow, and the skull cap that covered the top of his head, and the narrow strip of sallow forehead exhibited, completed his likeness to the man of marble.

"'I have no money to spare except for my own clients,' said he.

"'So you are cross because I may have tried in other quarters to ruin myself?' laughed the Count.

"'Ruin yourself!' repeated Gobseck ironically.

"'Were you about to remark that it is impossible to ruin a man who has nothing?' inquired the dandy. 'Why, I defy you to find a better stock in Paris!' he cried, swinging round on his heels.

"This half-earnest buffoonery produced not the slightest effect upon

Gobseck.

"'Am I not on intimate terms with the Ronquerolles, the Marsays, the Franchessinis, the two Vandenesses, the Ajuda-Pintos,—all the most fashionable young men in Paris, in short? A prince and an ambassador (you know them both) are my partners at play. I draw my revenues from London and Carlsbad and Baden and Bath. Is not this the most brilliant of all industries!'

"'True.'

"'You make a sponge of me, begad! you do. You encourage me to go and swell myself out in society, so that you can squeeze me when I am hard up; but you yourselves are sponges, just as I am, and death will give you a squeeze some day.'

"'That is possible.'

"'If there were no spendthrifts, what would become of you? The pair of us are like soul and body.'

"'Precisely so.'

"'Come, now, give us your hand, Grandaddy Gobseck, and be magnanimous if this is "true" and "possible" and "precisely so."'

"'You come to me,' the usurer answered coldly, 'because Girard, Palma, Werbrust, and Gigonnet are full up of your paper; they are offering it at a loss of fifty per cent; and as it is likely they only gave you half the figure on the face of the bills, they are not worth five-and-twenty per cent of their supposed value. I am your most obedient! Can I in common decency lend a stiver to a man who owes thirty thousand francs, and has not one farthing?' Gobseck continued. 'The day before yesterday you lost ten thousand francs at a ball at the Baron de Nucingen's.'

"'Sir,' said the Count, with rare impudence, 'my affairs are no concern of yours,' and he looked the old man up and down. 'A man has no debts till payment is due.'

"'True.'

"'My bills will be duly met.'

"'That is possible.'

"'And at this moment the question between you and me is simply whether the security I am going to offer is sufficient for the sum I have come to borrow.'

"'Precisely.'

"A cab stopped at the door, and the sound of wheels filled the room.

"'I will bring something directly which perhaps will satisfy you,' cried the young man, and he left the room.

"'Oh! my son,' exclaimed Gobseck, rising to his feet, and stretching out his arms to me, 'if he has good security, you have saved my life. It would be the death of me. Werbrust and Gigonnet imagined that they were going to play off a trick on me; and now, thanks to you, I shall have a good laugh at their expense to-night.'

"There was something frightful about the old man's ecstasy. It was the one occasion when he opened his heart to me; and that flash of joy, swift though it was, will never be effaced from my memory.

"'Favor me so far as to stay here,' he added. 'I am armed, and a sure shot. I have gone tiger-hunting, and fought on the deck when there was nothing for it but to win or die; but I don't care to trust yonder elegant scoundrel.'

"He sat down again in his armchair before his bureau, and his face grew pale and impassive as before.

"'Ah!' he continued, turning to me, 'you will see that lovely creature I once told you about; I can hear a fine lady's step in the corridor; it is she, no doubt;' and, as a matter of fact, the young man came in with a woman on his arm. I recognized the Countess, whose levee Gobseck had described for me, one of old Goriot's two daughters.

"The Countess did not see me at first; I stayed where I was in the window bay, with my face against the pane; but I saw her give Maxime a suspicious glance as she came into the money-lender's damp, dark room. So beautiful she was, that in spite of her faults I felt sorry for her. There was a terrible storm of anguish in her heart; her haughty, proud features were drawn and distorted with pain which she strove in vain to disguise. The young man had come to be her evil genius. I admired Gobseck, whose perspicacity had foreseen their future four years ago at the first bill which she endorsed.

"'Probably,' said I to myself, 'this monster with the angel face controls every possible spring of action in her: rules her through vanity, jealousy, pleasure, and the current of life in the world.'"

The Vicomtesse de Grandlieu broke in on the story.

"Why, the woman's very virtues have been turned against her," she exclaimed. "He has made her shed tears of devotion, and then abused her kindness and made her pay very dearly for unhallowed bliss."

Derville did not understand the signs which Mme. de Grandlieu made to him.

"I confess," he said, "that I had no inclination to shed tears over the lot of this unhappy creature, so brilliant in society, so repulsive to eyes that could read her heart; I shuddered rather at the sight of her murderer, a young angel with such a clear brow, such red lips and white teeth, such a winning smile. There they stood before their judge, he scrutinizing them much as some fifteenth-century Dominican inquisitor might have peered into the dungeons of the Holy Office while the torture was administered to two Moors.

"The Countess spoke tremulously. 'Sir,' she said, 'is there any way of obtaining the value of these diamonds, and of keeping the right of repurchase?' She held out a jewel-case.

"'Yes, madame,' I put in, and came forwards.

"She looked at me, and a shudder ran through her as she recognized me, and gave me the glance which means, 'Say nothing of this,' all the world over.

"'This,' said I, 'constitutes a sale with faculty of redemption, as it is called, a formal agreement to transfer and deliver over a piece of property, either real estate or personalty, for a given time, on the expiry of which the previous owner recovers his title to the property in question, upon payment of a stipulated sum.'

"She breathed more freely. The Count looked black; he had grave doubts whether Gobseck would lend very much on the diamonds after such a fall in their value. Gobseck, impassive as ever, had taken up his magnifying glass, and was quietly scrutinizing the jewels. If I were to live for a hundred years, I should never forget the sight of his face at that moment. There was a flush in his pale cheeks; his eyes seemed to have caught the sparkle of the stones, for there was an unnatural glitter in them. He rose and went to the light, holding the diamonds close to his toothless mouth, as if he meant to devour them; mumbling vague words over them, holding up bracelets, sprays, necklaces, and tiaras one after another, to judge their water, whiteness, and cutting; taking them out of the jewel-case and putting them in again, letting the play of the light bring out all their fires. He was more like a child than an old man; or, rather, childhood and dotage seemed to meet in him.

"'Fine stones! The set would have fetched three hundred thousand francs before the Revolution. What water! Genuine Asiatic diamonds from Golconda or Visapur. Do you know what they are worth? No, no; no one in Paris but Gobseck can appreciate them. In the time of the Empire such a set would have cost another two hundred thousand francs!'

"He gave a disgusted shrug, and added:

"'But now diamonds are going down in value every day. The Brazilians have swamped the market with them since the Peace; but the Indian stones are

a better color. Others wear them now besides court ladies. Does madame go to court?'

"While he flung out these terrible words, he examined one stone after another with delight which no words can describe.

"'Flawless!' he said. 'Here is a speck!... here is a flaw!... A fine stone that!'

"His haggard face was so lighted up by the sparkling jewels, that it put me in mind of a dingy old mirror, such as you see in country inns. The glass receives every luminous image without reflecting the light, and a traveler bold enough to look for his face in it beholds a man in an apoplectic fit.

"'Well?' asked the Count, clapping Gobseck on the shoulder.

"The old boy trembled. He put down his playthings on his bureau, took his seat, and was a money-lender once more—hard, cold, and polished as a marble column.

"'How much do you want?'

"'One hundred thousand francs for three years,' said the Count.

"'That is possible,' said Gobseck, and then from a mahogany box (Gobseck's jewel-case) he drew out a faultlessly adjusted pair of scales!

"He weighed the diamonds, calculating the value of stones and setting at sight (Heaven knows how!), delight and severity struggling in the expression of his face the meanwhile. The Countess had plunged in a kind of stupor; to me, watching her, it seemed that she was fathoming the depths of the abyss into which she had fallen. There was remorse still left in that woman's soul. Perhaps a hand held out in human charity might save her. I would try.

"'Are the diamonds your personal property, madame?' I asked in a clear voice.

"'Yes, monsieur,' she said, looking at me with proud eyes.

"'Make out the deed of purchase with power of redemption, chatterbox,' said Gobseck to me, resigning his chair at the bureau in my favor.

"'Madame is without doubt a married woman?' I tried again.

"She nodded abruptly.

"'Then I will not draw up the deed,' said I.

"'And why not?' asked Gobseck.

"'Why not?' echoed I, as I drew the old man into the bay window so as to speak aside with him. 'Why not? This woman is under her husband's control; the agreement would be void in law; you could not possibly assert your

ignorance of a fact recorded on the very face of the document itself. You would be compelled at once to produce the diamonds deposited with you, according to the weight, value, and cutting therein described.'

"Gobseck cut me short with a nod, and turned towards the guilty couple.

"'He is right!' he said. 'That puts the whole thing in a different light. Eighty thousand francs down, and you leave the diamonds with me,' he added, in the husky, flute-like voice. 'In the way of property, possession is as good as a title.'

"'But——' objected the young man.

"'You can take it or leave it,' continued Gobseck, returning the jewel-case to the lady as he spoke.

"'I have too many risks to run.'

"'It would be better to throw yourself at your husband's feet,' I bent to whisper in her ear.

"The usurer doubtless knew what I was saying from the movement of my lips. He gave me a cool glance. The Count's face grew livid. The Countess was visibly wavering. Maxime stepped up to her, and, low as he spoke, I could catch the words:

"'Adieu, dear Anastasie, may you be happy! As for me, by to-morrow my troubles will be over.'

"'Sir!' cried the lady, turning to Gobseck. 'I accept your offer.'

"'Come, now,' returned Gobseck. 'You have been a long time in coming to it, my fair lady.'

"He wrote out a cheque for fifty thousand francs on the Bank of France, and handed it to the Countess.

"'Now,' continued he with a smile, such a smile as you will see in portraits of M. Voltaire, 'now I will give you the rest of the amount in bills, thirty thousand francs' worth of paper as good as bullion. This gentleman here has just said, "My bills will be met when they are due,"' added he, producing certain drafts bearing the Count's signature, all protested the day before at the request of some of the confraternity, who had probably made them over to him (Gobseck) at a considerably reduced figure.

"The young man growled out something, in which the words 'Old scoundrel!' were audible. Daddy Gobseck did not move an eyebrow. He drew a pair of pistols out of a pigeon-hole, remarking coolly:

"'As the insulted man, I fire first.'

"'Maxime, you owe this gentleman an explanation,' cried the trembling

Countess in a low voice.

"'I had no intention of giving offence,' stammered Maxime.

"'I am quite sure of that,' Gobseck answered calmly; 'you had no intention of meeting your bills, that was all.'

"The Countess rose, bowed, and vanished, with a great dread gnawing her, I doubt not. M. de Trailles was bound to follow, but before he went he managed to say:

"'If either of you gentlemen should forget himself, I will have his blood, or he will have mine.'

"'Amen!' called Daddy Gobseck as he put his pistols back in their place; 'but a man must have blood in his veins though before he can risk it, my son, and you have nothing but mud in yours.'

"When the door was closed, and the two vehicles had gone, Gobseck rose to his feet and began to prance about.

"'I have the diamonds! I have the diamonds!' he cried again and again, 'the beautiful diamonds! such diamonds! and tolerably cheaply. Aha! aha! Werbrust and Gigonnet, you thought you had old Papa Gobseck! Ego sum papa! I am master of the lot of you! Paid! paid, principal and interest! How silly they will look to-night when I shall come out with this story between two games of dominoes!'

"The dark glee, the savage ferocity aroused by the possession of a few water-white pebbles, set me shuddering. I was dumb with amazement.

"'Aha! There you are, my boy!' said he. 'We will dine together. We will have some fun at your place, for I haven't a home of my own, and these restaurants, with their broths, and sauces, and wines, would poison the Devil himself.'

"Something in my face suddenly brought back the usual cold, impassive expression to his.

"'You don't understand it,' he said, and sitting down by the hearth, he put a tin saucepan full of milk on the brazier.—'Will you breakfast with me?' continued he. 'Perhaps there will be enough here for two.'

"'Thanks,' said I, 'I do not breakfast till noon.'

"I had scarcely spoken before hurried footsteps sounded from the passage. The stranger stopped at Gobseck's door and rapped; there was that in the knock which suggested a man transported with rage. Gobseck reconnoitred him through the grating; then he opened the door, and in came a man of thirty-five or so, judged harmless apparently in spite of his anger. The newcomer,

who was quite plainly dressed, bore a strong resemblance to the late Duc de Richelieu. You must often have met him, he was the Countess' husband, a man with the aristocratic figure (permit the expression to pass) peculiar to statesmen of your faubourg.

"'Sir,' said this person, addressing himself to Gobseck, who had quite recovered his tranquillity, 'did my wife go out of this house just now?'

"'That is possible.'

"'Well, sir? do you not take my meaning?'

"'I have not the honor of the acquaintance of my lady your wife,' returned Gobseck. 'I have had a good many visitors this morning, women and men, and mannish young ladies, and young gentlemen who look like young ladies. I should find it very hard to say——'

"'A truce to jesting, sir! I mean the woman who has this moment gone out from you.'

"'How can I know whether she is your wife or not? I never had the pleasure of seeing you before.'

"'You are mistaken, M. Gobseck,' said the Count, with profound irony in his voice. 'We have met before, one morning in my wife's bedroom. You had come to demand payment for a bill—no bill of hers.'

"'It was no business of mine to inquire what value she had received for it,' said Gobseck, with a malignant look at the Count. 'I had come by the bill in the way of business. At the same time, monsieur,' continued Gobseck, quietly pouring coffee into his bowl of milk, without a trace of excitement or hurry in his voice, 'you will permit me to observe that your right to enter my house and expostulate with me is far from proven to my mind. I came of age in the sixty-first year of the preceding century.'

"'Sir,' said the Count, 'you have just bought family diamonds, which do not belong to my wife, for a mere trifle.'

"'Without feeling it incumbent upon me to tell you my private affairs, I will tell you this much M. le Comte—if Mme. la Comtesse has taken your diamonds, you should have sent a circular around to all the jewelers, giving them notice not to buy them; she might have sold them separately.'

"'You know my wife, sir!' roared the Count.

"'True.'

"'She is in her husband's power.'

"'That is possible.'

"'She had no right to dispose of those diamonds——'

"'Precisely.'

"'Very well, sir?'

"'Very well, sir. I knew your wife, and she is in her husband's power; I am quite willing, she is in the power of a good many people; but—I—do—not—know—your diamonds. If Mme. la Comtesse can put her name to a bill, she can go into business, of course, and buy and sell diamonds on her own account. The thing is plain on the face of it!'

"'Good-day, sir!' cried the Count, now white with rage. 'There are courts of justice.'

"'Quite so.'

"'This gentleman here,' he added, indicating me, 'was a witness of the sale.'

"'That is possible.'

"The Count turned to go. Feeling the gravity of the affair, I suddenly put in between the two belligerents.

"'M. le Comte,' said I, 'you are right, and M. Gobseck is by no means in the wrong. You could not prosecute the purchaser without bringing your wife into court, and the whole of the odium would not fall on her. I am an attorney, and I owe it to myself, and still more to my professional position, to declare that the diamonds of which you speak were purchased by M. Gobseck in my presence; but, in my opinion, it would be unwise to dispute the legality of the sale, especially as the goods are not readily recognizable. In equity our contention would lie, in law it would collapse. M. Gobseck is too honest a man to deny that the sale was a profitable transaction, more especially as my conscience, no less than my duty, compels me to make the admission. But once bring the case into a court of law, M. le Comte, the issue would be doubtful. My advice to you is to come to terms with M. Gobseck, who can plead that he bought the diamonds in all good faith; you would be bound in any case to return the purchase money. Consent to an arrangement, with power to redeem at the end of seven or eight months, or a year even, or any convenient lapse of time, for the repayment of the sum borrowed by Mme. la Comtesse, unless you would prefer to repurchase them outright and give security for repayment.'

"Gobseck dipped his bread into the bowl of coffee, and ate with perfect indifference; but at the words 'come to terms,' he looked at me as who should say, 'A fine fellow that! he has learned something from my lessons!' And I, for my part, riposted with a glance, which he understood uncommonly well. The business was dubious and shady; there was pressing need of coming to terms. Gobseck could not deny all knowledge of it, for I should appear as a witness.

The Count thanked me with a smile of good-will.

"In the debate which followed, Gobseck showed greed enough and skill enough to baffle a whole congress of diplomatists; but in the end I drew up an instrument, in which the Count acknowledged the receipt of eighty-five thousand francs, interest included, in consideration of which Gobseck undertook to return the diamonds to the Count.

"'What waste!' exclaimed he as he put his signature to the agreement. 'How is it possible to bridge such a gulf?'

"'Have you many children, sir?' Gobseck asked gravely.

"The Count winced at the question; it was as if the old money-lender, like an experienced physician, had put his finger at once on the sore spot. The Comtesse's husband did not reply.

"'Well,' said Gobseck, taking the pained silence for answer, 'I know your story by heart. The woman is a fiend, but perhaps you love her still; I can well believe it; she made an impression on me. Perhaps, too, you would rather save your fortune, and keep it for one or two of your children? Well, fling yourself into the whirlpool of society, lose that fortune at play, come to Gobseck pretty often. The world will say that I am a Jew, a Tartar, a usurer, a pirate, will say that I have ruined you! I snap my fingers at them! If anybody insults me, I lay my man out; nobody is a surer shot nor handles a rapier better than your servant. And every one knows it. Then, have a friend—if you can find one—and make over your property to him by a fictitious sale. You call that a fidei commissum, don't you?' he asked, turning to me.

"The Count seemed to be entirely absorbed in his own thoughts.

"'You shall have your money to-morrow,' he said, 'have the diamonds in readiness,' and he went.

"'There goes one who looks to me to be as stupid as an honest man,' Gobseck said coolly when the Count had gone.

"'Say rather stupid as a man of passionate nature.'

"'The Count owes you your fee for drawing up the agreement!' Gobseck called after me as I took my leave."

"One morning, a few days after the scene which initiated me into the terrible depths beneath the surface of the life of a woman of fashion, the Count came into my private office.

"'I have come to consult you on a matter of grave moment,' he said, 'and I begin by telling you that I have perfect confidence in you, as I hope to prove to you. Your behavior to Mme. de Grandlieu is above all praise,' the Count

went on. (You see, madame, that you have paid me a thousand times over for a very simple matter.)

"I bowed respectfully, and replied that I had done nothing but the duty of an honest man.

"'Well,' the Count went on, 'I have made a great many inquiries about the singular personage to whom you owe your position. And from all that I can learn, Gobseck is a philosopher of the Cynic school. What do you think of his probity?'

"'M. le Comte,' said I, 'Gobseck is my benefactor—at fifteen per cent,' I added, laughing. 'But his avarice does not authorize me to paint him to the life for a stranger's benefit.'

"'Speak out, sir. Your frankness cannot injure Gobseck or yourself. I do not expect to find an angel in a pawnbroker.'

"'Daddy Gobseck,' I began, 'is intimately convinced of the truth of the principle which he takes for a rule of life. In his opinion, money is a commodity which you may sell cheap or dear, according to circumstances, with a clear conscience. A capitalist, by charging a high rate of interest, becomes in his eyes a secured partner by anticipation. Apart from the peculiar philosophical views of human nature and financial principles, which enable him to behave like a usurer, I am fully persuaded that, out of his business, he is the most loyal and upright soul in Paris. There are two men in him; he is petty and great—a miser and a philosopher. If I were to die and leave a family behind me, he would be the guardian whom I should appoint. This was how I came to see Gobseck in this light, monsieur. I know nothing of his past life. He may have been a pirate, may, for anything I know, have been all over the world, trafficking in diamonds, or men, or women, or State secrets; but this I affirm of him—never has human soul been more thoroughly tempered and tried. When I paid off my loan, I asked him, with a little circumlocution of course, how it was that he had made me pay such an exorbitant rate of interest; and why, seeing that I was a friend, and he meant to do me a kindness, he should not have yielded to the wish and made it complete.—"My son," he said, "I released you from all need to feel any gratitude by giving you ground for the belief that you owed me nothing."—So we are the best friends in the world. That answer, monsieur, gives you the man better than any amount of description.'

"'I have made up my mind once and for all,' said the Count. 'Draw up the necessary papers; I am going to transfer my property to Gobseck. I have no one but you to trust to in the draft of the counter-deed, which will declare that this transfer is a simulated sale, and that Gobseck as trustee will administer my estate (as he knows how to administer), and undertakes to make over my

fortune to my eldest son when he comes of age. Now, sir, this I must tell you: I should be afraid to have that precious document in my own keeping. My boy is so fond of his mother, that I cannot trust him with it. So dare I beg of you to keep it for me? In case of death, Gobseck would make you legatee of my property. Every contingency is provided for.'

"The Count paused for a moment. He seemed greatly agitated.

"'A thousand pardons,' he said at length; 'I am in great pain, and have very grave misgivings as to my health. Recent troubles have disturbed me very painfully, and forced me to take this great step.'

"'Allow me first to thank you, monsieur,' said I, 'for the trust you place me in. But I am bound to deserve it by pointing out to you that you are disinheriting your—other children. They bear your name. Merely as the children of a once-loved wife, now fallen from her position, they have a claim to an assured existence. I tell you plainly that I cannot accept the trust with which you propose to honor me unless their future is secured.'

"The Count trembled violently at the words, and tears came into his eyes as he grasped my hand, saying, 'I did not know my man thoroughly. You have made me both glad and sorry. We will make provision for the children in the counter-deed.'

"I went with him to the door; it seemed to me that there was a glow of satisfaction in his face at the thought of this act of justice.

"Now, Camille, this is how a young wife takes the first step to the brink of a precipice. A quadrille, a ballad, a picnic party is sometimes cause sufficient of frightful evils. You are hurried on by the presumptuous voice of vanity and pride, on the faith of a smile, or through giddiness and folly! Shame and misery and remorse are three Furies awaiting every woman the moment she oversteps the limits——"

"Poor Camille can hardly keep awake," the Vicomtesse hastily broke in. —"Go to bed, child; you have no need of appalling pictures to keep you pure in heart and conduct."

Camille de Grandlieu took the hint and went.

"You were going rather too far, dear M. Derville," said the Vicomtesse, "an attorney is not a mother of daughters nor yet a preacher."

"But any newspaper is a thousand times——"

"Poor Derville!" exclaimed the Vicomtesse, "what has come over you? Do you really imagine that I allow a daughter of mine to read the newspapers?—Go on," she added after a pause.

"Three months after everything was signed and sealed between the Count and Gobseck——"

"You can call him the Comte de Restaud, now that Camille is not here," said the Vicomtesse.

"So be it! Well, time went by, and I saw nothing of the counter-deed, which by rights should have been in my hands. An attorney in Paris lives in such a whirl of business that with certain exceptions which we make for ourselves, we have not the time to give each individual client the amount of interest which he himself takes in his affairs. Still, one day when Gobseck came to dine with me, I asked him as we left the table if he knew how it was that I had heard no more of M. de Restaud.

"'There are excellent reasons for that,' he said; 'the noble Count is at death's door. He is one of the soft stamp that cannot learn how to put an end to chagrin, and allow it to wear them out instead. Life is a craft, a profession; every man must take the trouble to learn that business. When he has learned what life is by dint of painful experiences, the fibre of him is toughened, and acquires a certain elasticity, so that he has his sensibilities under his own control; he disciplines himself till his nerves are like steel springs, which always bend, but never break; given a sound digestion, and a man in such training ought to live as long as the cedars of Lebanon, and famous trees they are.'

"'Then is the Count actually dying?' I asked.

"'That is possible,' said Gobseck; 'the winding up of his estate will be a juicy bit of business for you.'

"I looked at my man, and said, by way of sounding him:

"'Just explain to me how it is that we, the Count and I, are the only men in whom you take an interest?'

"'Because you are the only two who have trusted me without finessing,' he said.

"Although this answer warranted my belief that Gobseck would act fairly even if the counter-deed were lost, I resolved to go to see the Count. I pleaded a business engagement, and we separated.

"I went straight to the Rue du Helder, and was shown into a room where the Countess sat playing with her children. When she heard my name, she sprang up and came to meet me, then she sat down and pointed without a word to a chair by the fire. Her face wore the inscrutable mask beneath which women of the world conceal their most vehement emotions. Trouble had withered that face already. Nothing of its beauty now remained, save the

marvelous outlines in which its principal charm had lain.

"'It is essential, madame, that I should speak to M. le Comte——"

"'If so, you would be more favored than I am,' she said, interrupting me. 'M. de Restaud will see no one. He will hardly allow his doctor to come, and will not be nursed even by me. When people are ill, they have such strange fancies! They are like children, they do not know what they want.'

"'Perhaps, like children, they know very well what they want.'

"The Countess reddened. I almost repented a thrust worthy of Gobseck. So, by way of changing the conversation, I added, 'But M. de Restaud cannot possibly lie there alone all day, madame.'

"'His oldest boy is with him,' she said.

"It was useless to gaze at the Countess; she did not blush this time, and it looked to me as if she were resolved more firmly than ever that I should not penetrate into her secrets.

"'You must understand, madame, that my proceeding is no way indiscreet. It is strongly to his interest—' I bit my lips, feeling that I had gone the wrong way to work. The Countess immediately took advantage of my slip.

"'My interests are in no way separate from my husband's, sir,' said she. 'There is nothing to prevent your addressing yourself to me——'

"'The business which brings me here concerns no one but M. le Comte,' I said firmly.

"'I will let him know of your wish to see him.'

"The civil tone and expression assumed for the occasion did not impose upon me; I divined that she would never allow me to see her husband. I chatted on about indifferent matters for a little while, so as to study her; but, like all women who have once begun to plot for themselves, she could dissimulate with the rare perfection which, in your sex, means the last degree of perfidy. If I may dare to say it, I looked for anything from her, even a crime. She produced this feeling in me, because it was so evident from her manner and in all that she did or said, down to the very inflections of her voice, that she had an eye to the future. I went.

"Now, I will pass on to the final scenes of this adventure, throwing in a few circumstances brought to light by time, and some details guessed by Gobseck's perspicacity or by my own.

"When the Comte de Restaud apparently plunged into the vortex of dissipation, something passed between the husband and wife, something which remains an impenetrable secret, but the wife sank even lower in the

husband's eyes. As soon as he became so ill that he was obliged to take to his bed, he manifested his aversion for the Countess and the two youngest children. He forbade them to enter his room, and any attempt to disobey his wishes brought on such dangerous attacks that the doctor implored the Countess to submit to her husband's wish.

"Mme. de Restaud had seen the family estates and property, nay, the very mansion in which she lived, pass into the hands of Gobseck, who appeared to play the fantastic ogre so far as their wealth was concerned. She partially understood what her husband was doing, no doubt. M. de Trailles was traveling in England (his creditors had been a little too pressing of late), and no one else was in a position to enlighten the lady, and explain that her husband was taking precautions against her at Gobseck's suggestion. It is said that she held out for a long while before she gave the signature required by French law for the sale of the property; nevertheless the Count gained his point. The Countess was convinced that her husband was realizing his fortune, and that somewhere or other there would be a little bunch of notes representing the amount; they had been deposited with a notary, or perhaps at the bank, or in some safe hiding-place. Following out her train of thought, it was evident that M. de Restaud must of necessity have some kind of document in his possession by which any remaining property could be recovered and handed over to his son.

"So she made up her mind to keep the strictest possible watch over the sick-room. She ruled despotically in the house, and everything in it was submitted to this feminine espionage. All day she sat in the salon adjoining her husband's room, so that she could hear every syllable that he uttered, every least movement that he made. She had a bed put there for her of a night, but she did not sleep very much. The doctor was entirely in her interests. Such wifely devotion seemed praiseworthy enough. With the natural subtlety of perfidy, she took care to disguise M. de Restaud's repugnance for her, and feigned distress so perfectly that she gained a sort of celebrity. Strait-laced women were even found to say that she had expiated her sins. Always before her eyes she beheld a vision of the destitution to follow on the Count's death if her presence of mind should fail her; and in these ways the wife, repulsed from the bed of pain on which her husband lay and groaned, had drawn a charmed circle round about it. So near, yet kept at a distance; all-powerful, but in disgrace, the apparently devoted wife was lying in wait for death and opportunity; crouching like the ant-lion at the bottom of his spiral pit, ever on the watch for the prey that cannot escape, listening to the fall of every grain of sand.

"The strictest censor could not but recognize that the Countess pushed maternal sentiment to the last degree. Her father's death had been a lesson to

her, people said. She worshiped her children. They were so young that she could hide the disorders of her life from their eyes, and could win their love; she had given them the best and most brilliant education. I confess that I cannot help admiring her and feeling sorry for her. Gobseck used to joke me about it. Just about that time she had discovered Maxime's baseness, and was expiating the sins of the past in tears of blood. I was sure of it. Hateful as were the measures which she took for regaining control of her husband's money, were they not the result of a mother's love, and a desire to repair the wrongs she had done her children? And again, it may be, like many a woman who has experienced the storm of lawless love, she felt a longing to lead a virtuous life again. Perhaps she only learned the worth of that life when she came to reap the woeful harvest sown by her errors.

"Every time that little Ernest came out of his father's room, she put him through a searching examination as to all that his father had done or said. The boy willingly complied with his mother's wishes, and told her even more than she asked in her anxious affection, as he thought.

"My visit was a ray of light for the Countess. She was determined to see in me the instrument of the Count's vengeance, and resolved that I should not be allowed to go near the dying man. I augured ill of all this, and earnestly wished for an interview, for I was not easy in my mind about the fate of the counter-deed. If it should fall into the Countess' hands, she might turn it to her own account, and that would be the beginning of a series of interminable lawsuits between her and Gobseck. I knew the usurer well enough to feel convinced that he would never give up the property to her; there was room for plenty of legal quibbling over a series of transfers, and I alone knew all the ins and outs of the matter. I was minded to prevent such a tissue of misfortune, so I went to the Countess a second time.

"I have noticed, madame," said Derville, turning to the Vicomtesse, and speaking in a confidential tone, "certain moral phenomena to which we do not pay enough attention. I am naturally an observer of human nature, and instinctively I bring a spirit of analysis to the business that I transact in the interest of others, when human passions are called into lively play. Now, I have often noticed, and always with new wonder, that two antagonists almost always divine each other's inmost thoughts and ideas. Two enemies sometimes possess a power of clear insight into mental processes, and read each other's minds as two lovers read in either soul. So when we came together, the Countess and I, I understood at once the reason of her antipathy for me, disguised though it was by the most gracious forms of politeness and civility. I had been forced to be her confidant, and a woman cannot but hate the man before whom she is compelled to blush. And she on her side knew that if I was the man in whom her husband placed confidence, that husband had not as yet

given up his fortune.

"I will spare you the conversation, but it abides in my memory as one of the most dangerous encounters in my career. Nature had bestowed on her all the qualities which, combined, are irresistibly fascinating; she could be pliant and proud by turns, and confiding and coaxing in her manner; she even went so far as to try to subjugate me. It was a failure. As I took my leave of her, I caught a gleam of hate and rage in her eyes that made me shudder. We parted enemies. She would fain have crushed me out of existence; and for my own part, I felt pity for her, and for some natures pity is the deadliest of insults. This feeling pervaded the last representations I put before her; and when I left her, I left, I think, dread in the depths of her soul, by declaring that, turn which way she would, ruin lay inevitably before her.

"'If I were to see M. le Comte, your children's property at any rate would ____'

"'I should be at your mercy,' she said, breaking in upon me, disgust in her gesture.

"Now that we had spoken frankly, I made up my mind to save the family from impending destitution. I resolved to strain the law at need to gain my ends, and this was what I did. I sued the Comte de Restaud for a sum of money, ostensibly due to Gobseck, and gained judgment. The Countess, of course, did not allow him to know of this, but I had gained on my point, I had a right to affix seals to everything on the death of the Count. I bribed one of the servants in the house—the man undertook to let me know at any hour of the day or night if his master should be at the point of death, so that I could intervene at once, scare the Countess with a threat of affixing seals, and so secure the counter-deed.

"I learned later on that the woman was studying the Code, with her husband's dying moans in her ears. If we could picture the thoughts of those who stand about a deathbed, what fearful sights should we not see? Money is always the motive-spring of the schemes elaborated, of all the plans that are made and the plots that are woven about it! Let us leave these details, nauseating in the nature of them; but perhaps they may have given you some insight into all that this husband and wife endured; perhaps too they may unveil much that is passing in secret in other houses.

"For two months the Comte de Restaud lay on his bed, alone, and resigned to his fate. Mortal disease was slowly sapping the strength of mind and body. Unaccountable and grotesque sick fancies preyed upon him; he would not suffer them to set his room in order, no one could nurse him, he would not even allow them to make his bed. All his surroundings bore the marks of this last degree of apathy, the furniture was out of place, the daintiest trifles were

covered with dust and cobwebs. In health he had been a man of refined and expensive tastes, now he positively delighted in the comfortless look of the room. A host of objects required in illness—rows of medicine bottles, empty and full, most of them dirty, crumpled linen, and broken plates, littered the writing-table, chairs, and chimney-piece. An open warming-pan lay on the floor before the grate; a bath, still full of mineral water had not been taken away. The sense of coming dissolution pervaded all the details of an unsightly chaos. Signs of death appeared in things inanimate before the Destroyer came to the body on the bed. The Comte de Restaud could not bear the daylight, the Venetian shutters were closed, darkness deepened the gloom in the dismal chamber. The sick man himself had wasted greatly. All the life in him seemed to have taken refuge in the still brilliant eyes. The livid whiteness of his face was something horrible to see, enhanced as it was by the long dank locks of hair that straggled along his cheeks, for he would never suffer them to cut it. He looked like some religious fanatic in the desert. Mental suffering was extinguishing all human instincts in this man of scarce fifty years of age, whom all Paris had known as so brilliant and so successful.

"One morning at the beginning of December 1824, he looked up at Ernest, who sat at the foot of his bed gazing at his father with wistful eyes.

"'Are you in pain?' the little Vicomte asked.

"'No,' said the Count, with a ghastly smile, 'it all lies here and about my heart!'

"He pointed to his forehead, and then laid his wasted fingers on his hollow chest. Ernest began to cry at the sight.

"'How is it that M. Derville does not come to me?' the Count asked his servant (he thought that Maurice was really attached to him, but the man was entirely in the Countess' interest)—'What! Maurice!' and the dying man suddenly sat upright in his bed, and seemed to recover all his presence of mind, 'I have sent for my attorney seven or eight times during the last fortnight, and he does not come!' he cried. 'Do you imagine that I am to be trifled with? Go for him, at once, this very instant, and bring him back with you. If you do not carry out my orders, I shall get up and go myself.'

"'Madame,' said the man as he came into the salon, 'you heard M. le Comte; what ought I to do?'

"'Pretend to go to the attorney, and when you come back tell your master that his man of business is forty leagues away from Paris on an important lawsuit. Say that he is expected back at the end of the week.—Sick people never know how ill they are,' thought the Countess; 'he will wait till the man comes home.'

"The doctor had said on the previous evening that the Count could scarcely live through the day. When the servant came back two hours later to give that hopeless answer, the dying man seemed to be greatly agitated.

"'Oh God!' he cried again and again, 'I put my trust in none but Thee.'

"For a long while he lay and gazed at his son, and spoke in a feeble voice at last.

"'Ernest, my boy, you are very young; but you have a good heart; you can understand, no doubt, that a promise given to a dying man is sacred; a promise to a father... Do you feel that you can be trusted with a secret, and keep it so well and so closely that even your mother herself shall not know that you have a secret to keep? There is no one else in this house whom I can trust to-day. You will not betray my trust, will you?'

"'No, father.'

"'Very well, then, Ernest, in a minute or two I will give you a sealed packet that belongs to M. Derville; you must take such care of it that no one can know that you have it; then you must slip out of the house and put the letter into the post-box at the corner.'

"'Yes, father.'

"'Can I depend upon you?'

"'Yes, father.'

"'Come and kiss me. You have made death less bitter to me, dear boy. In six or seven years' time you will understand the importance of this secret, and you will be well rewarded then for your quickness and obedience, you will know then how much I love you. Leave me alone for a minute, and let no one —no matter whom—come in meanwhile.'

"Ernest went out and saw his mother standing in the next room.

"'Ernest,' said she, 'come here.'

"She sat down, drew her son to her knees, and clasped him in her arms, and held him tightly to her heart.

"'Ernest, your father said something to you just now.'

"'Yes, mamma.'

"'What did he say?'

"'I cannot repeat it, mamma.'

"'Oh, my dear child!' cried the Countess, kissing him in rapture. 'You have kept your secret; how glad that makes me! Never tell a lie; never fail to keep

your word—those are two principles which should never be forgotten.'

"'Oh! mamma, how beautiful you are! You have never told a lie, I am quite sure.'

"'Once or twice, Ernest dear, I have lied. Yes, and I have not kept my word under circumstances which speak louder than all precepts. Listen, my Ernest, you are big enough and intelligent enough to see that your father drives me away, and will not allow me to nurse him, and this is not natural, for you know how much I love him.'

"'Yes, mamma.'

"The Countess began to cry. 'Poor child!' she said, 'this misfortune is the result of treacherous insinuations. Wicked people have tried to separate me from your father to satisfy their greed. They mean to take all our money from us and to keep it for themselves. If your father were well, the division between us would soon be over; he would listen to me; he is loving and kind; he would see his mistake. But now his mind is affected, and his prejudices against me have become a fixed idea, a sort of mania with him. It is one result of his illness. Your father's fondness for you is another proof that his mind is deranged. Until he fell ill you never noticed that he loved you more than Pauline and Georges. It is all caprice with him now. In his affection for you he might take it into his head to tell you to do things for him. If you do not want to ruin us all, my darling, and to see your mother begging her bread like a pauper woman, you must tell her everything——'

"'Ah!' cried the Count. He had opened the door and stood there, a sudden, half-naked apparition, almost as thin and fleshless as a skeleton.

"His smothered cry produced a terrible effect upon the Countess; she sat motionless, as if a sudden stupor had seized her. Her husband was as white and wasted as if he had risen out of his grave.

"'You have filled my life to the full with trouble, and now you are trying to vex my deathbed, to warp my boy's mind, and make a depraved man of him!' he cried, hoarsely.

"The Countess flung herself at his feet. His face, working with the last emotions of life, was almost hideous to see.

"'Mercy! mercy!' she cried aloud, shedding a torrent of tears.

"'Have you shown me any pity?' he asked. 'I allowed you to squander your own money, and now do you mean to squander my fortune, too, and ruin my son?'

"'Ah! well, yes, have no pity for me, be merciless to me!' she cried. 'But the children? Condemn your widow to live in a convent; I will obey you; I will do

anything, anything that you bid me, to expiate the wrong I have done you, if that so the children may be happy! The children! Oh, the children!'

"'I have only one child,' said the Count, stretching out a wasted arm, in his despair, towards his son.

"'Pardon a penitent woman, a penitent woman!...' wailed the Countess, her arms about her husband's damp feet. She could not speak for sobbing; vague, incoherent sounds broke from her parched throat.

"'You dare to talk of penitence after all that you said to Ernest!' exclaimed the dying man, shaking off the Countess, who lay groveling over his feet. —'You turn me to ice!' he added, and there was something appalling in the indifference with which he uttered the words. 'You have been a bad daughter; you have been a bad wife; you will be a bad mother.'

"The wretched woman fainted away. The dying man reached his bed and lay down again, and a few hours later sank into unconsciousness. The priests came and administered the sacraments.

"At midnight he died; the scene that morning had exhausted his remaining strength, and on the stroke of midnight I arrived with Daddy Gobseck. The house was in confusion, and under cover of it we walked up into the little salon adjoining the death-chamber. The three children were there in tears, with two priests, who had come to watch with the dead. Ernest came over to me, and said that his mother desired to be alone in the Count's room.

"'Do not go in,' he said; and I admired the child for his tone and gesture; 'she is praying there.'

"Gobseck began to laugh that soundless laugh of his, but I felt too much touched by the feeling in Ernest's little face to join in the miser's sardonic amusement. When Ernest saw that we moved towards the door, he planted himself in front of it, crying out, 'Mamma, here are some gentlemen in black who want to see you!'

"Gobseck lifted Ernest out of the way as if the child had been a feather, and opened the door.

"What a scene it was that met our eyes! The room was in frightful disorder; clothes and papers and rags lay tossed about in a confusion horrible to see in the presence of Death; and there, in the midst, stood the Countess in disheveled despair, unable to utter a word, her eyes glittering. The Count had scarcely breathed his last before his wife came in and forced open the drawers and the desk; the carpet was strewn with litter, some of the furniture and boxes were broken, the signs of violence could be seen everywhere. But if her search had at first proved fruitless, there was that in her excitement and attitude

which led me to believe that she had found the mysterious documents at last. I glanced at the bed, and professional instinct told me all that had happened. The mattress had been flung contemptuously down by the bedside, and across it, face downwards, lay the body of the Count, like one of the paper envelopes that strewed the carpet—he too was nothing now but an envelope. There was something grotesquely horrible in the attitude of the stiffening rigid limbs.

"The dying man must have hidden the counter-deed under his pillow to keep it safe so long as life should last; and his wife must have guessed his thought; indeed, it might be read plainly in his last dying gesture, in the convulsive clutch of his claw-like hands. The pillow had been flung to the floor at the foot of the bed; I could see the print of her heel upon it. At her feet lay a paper with the Count's arms on the seals; I snatched it up, and saw that it was addressed to me. I looked steadily at the Countess with the pitiless clear-sightedness of an examining magistrate confronting a guilty creature. The contents were blazing in the grate; she had flung them on the fire at the sound of our approach, imagining, from a first hasty glance at the provisions which I had suggested for her children, that she was destroying a will which disinherited them. A tormented conscience and involuntary horror of the deed which she had done had taken away all power of reflection. She had been caught in the act, and possibly the scaffold was rising before her eyes, and she already felt the felon's branding iron.

"There she stood gasping for breath, waiting for us to speak, staring at us with haggard eyes.

"I went across to the grate and pulled out an unburned fragment. 'Ah, madame!' I exclaimed, 'you have ruined your children! Those papers were their titles to their property.'

"Her mouth twitched, she looked as if she were threatened by a paralytic seizure.

"'Eh! eh!' cried Gobseck; the harsh, shrill tone grated upon our ears like the sound of a brass candlestick scratching a marble surface.

"There was a pause, then the old man turned to me and said quietly:

"'Do you intend Mme. la Comtesse to suppose that I am not the rightful owner of the property sold to me by her late husband? This house belongs to me now.'

"A sudden blow on the head from a bludgeon would have given me less pain and astonishment. The Countess saw the look of hesitation in my face.

"'Monsieur,' she cried, 'Monsieur!' She could find no other words.

"'You are a trustee, are you not?' I asked.

"'That is possible.'

"'Then do you mean to take advantage of this crime of hers?'

"'Precisely.'

"I went at that, leaving the Countess sitting by her husband's bedside, shedding hot tears. Gobseck followed me. Outside in the street I separated from him, but he came after me, flung me one of those searching glances with which he probed men's minds, and said in the husky flute-tones, pitched in a shriller key:

"'Do you take it upon yourself to judge me?'"

"From that time forward we saw little of each other. Gobseck let the Count's mansion on lease; he spent the summers on the country estates. He was a lord of the manor in earnest, putting up farm buildings, repairing mills and roadways, and planting timber. I came across him one day in a walk in the Jardin des Tuileries.

"'The Countess is behaving like a heroine,' said I; 'she gives herself up entirely to the children's education; she is giving them a perfect bringing up. The oldest boy is a charming young fellow——'

"'That is possible.'

"'But ought you not to help Ernest?' I suggested.

"'Help him!' cried Gobseck. 'Not I. Adversity is the greatest of all teachers; adversity teaches us to know the value of money and the worth of men and women. Let him set sail on the seas of Paris; when he is a qualified pilot, we will give him a ship to steer.'

"I left him without seeking to explain the meaning of his words.

"M. de Restaud's mother has prejudiced him against me, and he is very far from taking me as his legal adviser; still, I went to see Gobseck last week to tell him about Ernest's love for Mlle. Camille, and pressed him to carry out his contract, since that young Restaud is just of age.

"I found the old bill-discounter had been kept to his bed for a long time by the complaint of which he was to die. He put me off, saying that he would give the matter his attention when he could get up again and see after his business; his idea being no doubt that he would not give up any of his possessions so long as the breath was in him; no other reason could be found for his shuffling answer. He seemed to me to be much worse than he at all suspected. I stayed with him long enough to discern the progress of a passion which age had converted into a sort of craze. He wanted to be alone in the house, and had taken the rooms one by one as they fell vacant. In his own room he had

changed nothing; the furniture which I knew so well sixteen years ago looked the same as ever; it might have been kept under a glass case. Gobseck's faithful old portress, with her husband, a pensioner, who sat in the entry while she was upstairs, was still his housekeeper and charwoman, and now in addition his sick-nurse. In spite of his feebleness, Gobseck saw his clients himself as heretofore, and received sums of money; his affairs had been so simplified, that he only needed to send his pensioner out now and again on an errand, and could carry on business in his bed.

"After the treaty, by which France recognized the Haytian Republic, Gobseck was one of the members of the commission appointed to liquidate claims and assess repayments due by Hayti; his special knowledge of old fortunes in San Domingo, and the planters and their heirs and assigns to whom the indemnities were due, had led to his nomination. Gobseck's peculiar genius had then devised an agency for discounting the planters' claims on the government. The business was carried on under the names of Werbrust and Gigonnet, with whom he shared the spoil without disbursements, for his knowledge was accepted instead of capital. The agency was a sort of distillery, in which money was extracted from doubtful claims, and the claims of those who knew no better, or had no confidence in the government. As a liquidator, Gobseck could make terms with the large landed proprietors; and these, either to gain a higher percentage of their claims, or to ensure prompt settlements, would send him presents in proportion to their means. In this way presents came to be a kind of percentage upon sums too large to pass through his control, while the agency bought up cheaply the small and dubious claims, or the claims of those persons who preferred a little ready money to a deferred and somewhat hazy repayment by the Republic. Gobseck was the insatiable boa constrictor of the great business. Every morning he received his tribute, eyeing it like a Nabob's prime minister, as he considers whether he will sign a pardon. Gobseck would take anything, from the present of game sent him by some poor devil or the pound's weight of wax candles from devout folk, to the rich man's plate and the speculator's gold snuff-box. Nobody knew what became of the presents sent to the old money-lender. Everything went in, but nothing came out.

"'On the word of an honest woman,' said the portress, an old acquaintance of mine, 'I believe he swallows it all and is none the fatter for it; he is as thin and dried up as the cuckoo in the clock.'

"At length, last Monday, Gobseck sent his pensioner for me. The man came up to my private office.

"'Be quick and come, M. Derville,' said he, 'the governor is just going to hand in his checks; he has grown as yellow as a lemon; he is fidgeting to speak with you; death has fair hold of him; the rattle is working in his throat.'

"When I entered Gobseck's room, I found the dying man kneeling before the grate. If there was no fire on the hearth, there was at any rate a monstrous heap of ashes. He had dragged himself out of bed, but his strength had failed him, and he could neither go back nor find the voice to complain.

"'You felt cold, old friend,' I said, as I helped him back to his bed; 'how can you do without a fire?'

"'I am not cold at all,' he said. 'No fire here! no fire! I am going, I know not where, lad,' he went on, glancing at me with blank, lightless eyes, 'but I am going away from this.—I have carpology,' said he (the use of the technical term showing how clear and accurate his mental processes were even now). 'I thought the room was full of live gold, and I got up to catch some of it.—To whom will all mine go, I wonder? Not to the crown; I have left a will, look for it, Grotius. La belle Hollandaise had a daughter; I once saw the girl somewhere or other, in the Rue Vivienne, one evening. They call her "La Torpille," I believe; she is as pretty as pretty can be; look her up, Grotius. You are my executor; take what you like; help yourself. There are Strasburg pies, there, and bags of coffee, and sugar, and gold spoons. Give the Odiot service to your wife. But who is to have the diamonds? Are you going to take them, lad? There is snuff too—sell it at Hamburg, tobaccos are worth half as much again at Hamburg. All sorts of things I have in fact, and now I must go and leave them all.—Come, Papa Gobseck, no weakness, be yourself!'

"He raised himself in bed, the lines of his face standing out as sharply against the pillow as if the profile had been cast in bronze; he stretched out a lean arm and bony hand along the coverlet and clutched it, as if so he would fain keep his hold on life, then he gazed hard at the grate, cold as his own metallic eyes, and died in full consciousness of death. To us—the portress, the old pensioner, and myself—he looked like one of the old Romans standing behind the Consuls in Lethiere's picture of the Death of the Sons of Brutus.

"'He was a good-plucked one, the old Lascar!' said the pensioner in his soldierly fashion.

"But as for me, the dying man's fantastical enumeration of his riches still sounding in my ears, and my eyes, following the direction of his, rested on that heap of ashes. It struck me that it was very large. I took the tongs, and as soon as I stirred the cinders, I felt the metal underneath, a mass of gold and silver coins, receipts taken during his illness, doubtless, after he grew too feeble to lock the money up, and could trust no one to take it to the bank for him.

"'Run for the justice of the peace,' said I, turning to the old pensioner, 'so that everything can be sealed here at once.'

"Gobseck's last words and the old portress' remarks had struck me. I took the keys of the rooms on the first and second floor to make a visitation. The first door that I opened revealed the meaning of the phrases which I took for mad ravings; and I saw the length to which covetousness goes when it survives only as an illogical instinct, the last stage of greed of which you find so many examples among misers in country towns.

"In the room next to the one in which Gobseck had died, a quantity of eatables of all kinds were stored—putrid pies, mouldy fish, nay, even shell-fish, the stench almost choked me. Maggots and insects swarmed. These comparatively recent presents were put down, pell-mell, among chests of tea, bags of coffee, and packing-cases of every shape. A silver soup tureen on the chimney-piece was full of advices of the arrival of goods consigned to his order at Havre, bales of cotton, hogsheads of sugar, barrels of rum, coffees, indigo, tobaccos, a perfect bazaar of colonial produce. The room itself was crammed with furniture, and silver-plate, and lamps, and vases, and pictures; there were books, and curiosities, and fine engravings lying rolled up, unframed. Perhaps these were not all presents, and some part of this vast quantity of stuff had been deposited with him in the shape of pledges, and had been left on his hands in default of payment. I noticed jewel-cases, with ciphers and armorial bearings stamped upon them, and sets of fine table-linen, and weapons of price; but none of the things were docketed. I opened a book which seemed to be misplaced, and found a thousand-franc note in it. I promised myself that I would go through everything thoroughly; I would try the ceilings, and floors, and walls, and cornices to discover all the gold, hoarded with such passionate greed by a Dutch miser worthy of a Rembrandt's brush. In all the course of my professional career I have never seen such impressive signs of the eccentricity of avarice.

"I went back to his room, and found an explanation of this chaos and accumulation of riches in a pile of letters lying under the paper-weights on his desk—Gobseck's correspondence with the various dealers to whom doubtless he usually sold his presents. These persons had, perhaps, fallen victims to Gobseck's cleverness, or Gobseck may have wanted fancy prices for his goods; at any rate, every bargain hung in suspense. He had not disposed of the eatables to Chevet, because Chevet would only take them of him at a loss of thirty per cent. Gobseck haggled for a few francs between the prices, and while they wrangled the goods became unsalable. Again, Gobseck had refused free delivery of his silver-plate, and declined to guarantee the weights of his coffees. There had been a dispute over each article, the first indication in Gobseck of the childishness and incomprehensible obstinacy of age, a condition of mind reached at last by all men in whom a strong passion survives the intellect.

"I said to myself, as he had said, 'To whom will all these riches go?' ... And then I think of the grotesque information he gave me as to the present address of his heiress, I foresee that it will be my duty to search all the houses of ill-fame in Paris to pour out an immense fortune on some worthless jade. But, in the first place, know this—that in a few days time Ernest de Restaud will come into a fortune to which his title is unquestionable, a fortune which will put him in a position to marry Mlle. Camille, even after adequate provision has been made for his mother the Comtesse de Restaud and his sister and brother."