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RINGFIELD

A NOVEL

BY

S. F. HARRISON,

"SERANUS"

[Transcriber's note: Author's full name is Susie Frances Harrison]

AUTHOR OF "THE FOREST OF BOURG-MARIE," "PINE, ROSE AND FLEURE DE LIS,"
"CROWDED OUT, AND OTHER SKETCHES," "THE CANADIAN BIRTHDAY BOOK," ETC.

TORONTO

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CHAPTER I

THE HOLY WATERS

"..... the sounding cataract Haunted me like a passion."

In a country of cascades, a land of magnificent waterfalls, that watery hemisphere which holds Niagara and reveals to those who care to travel so far north the unhackneyed splendours of the Labrador, the noble fall of St. Ignace, though only second or third in size, must ever rank first in all that makes for majestic and perfect beauty.

It is not alone the wondrous sweep and curve of tumbling brown water that descends by three horseshoe ledges to a swirl of sparkling spray. It is not alone the great volume of the dark river above sent over, thrust down, nor the height from which the olive is hurled to the white below. So, too, plunge and sweep other falls—the Grand Loup in Terrebonne, the Petit Loup in Joliette, the Pleureuse, the Grand Lorette, the Tuque, the big and little Shawenigan, the half-dozen or so "Chaudière," the Montmorenci or La Vache, but none of these can equal the St. Ignace in point of dignified, unspoiled approach and picturesque surroundings. For a mile above the cataract the river runs, an inky ribbon, between banks of amazing solitariness; no clearing is there, no sign of human habitation, hardly any vestige of animal life. The trees stand thick along the edges, are thick towards the high rocky table-land that lies on either side; it is, in short, a river flowing through a forest. And when it drops, it drops to meet the same impassable wooded banks; it is now a cataract in a forest. Rocks are turbulently heaped upon one hand; upon the other, the three great ledges meet the shock of the descending waters and define the leap by boldly curved thick masses of olive, topaz, and greenish jelly. Where it is brown, it is nearest the rocky bed; where olive, more water is going over; and where green, it is so solid that twice a yard measure alone will penetrate the reach of rock beneath. The white of its flowing spray is whiter than the summer cloud, and the dark green of the pines framing it, shows often black against the summer blue. Its voice—roar as of wind or steady thunder—calling always—has silenced other voices. Birds do not build, nor squirrels climb too near that deep reverberating note, although the blue heron, fearless, frequently stands in summer on the spray-washed rock and seems to listen. Below the filmy smoke of rainbowed arches there is quiet black water, with circles, oily, ominous, moving stealthily along, and below these—a quarter of a mile down—the rapids, swift, impetuous, flashing, ushering in the latter half of the St. Ignace, here at last the river of life and motion, bearing stout booms of great chained logs, with grassy clearings and little settlements at each side, curving into liliated bays, or breaking musically upon yellow beaches, a River of Life indeed, and no longer a river of Death and Negation!

For in the countryside, the *paroisse* of Juchereau de St. Ignace, the upper part or inky ribbon of the river was frequently called by that gloomy name; a Saguenay in miniature, icy cold, black, solitary, silent, River of Death, who shall live in sight of your blackness? Who may sing aloud at his toil, whether he dig, or plant, or plough, or trap, or fish? Beautiful though the grand sweep and headlong rush of the fall, the people of the settlement avoid its sombre majesty and farms were none and smaller clearings few along the upper St. Ignace. A quarter of a mile back from the fall lay the village, holding a cluster of poor houses, a shop or two, a blacksmith's forge, a large and well-conducted summer hotel patronized for the fishing, a sawmill, depending for power on the Rivière Bois Clair, a brighter, gayer stream than the St. Ignace, and lastly a magnificent stone church capable of containing 1500 people, with a Presbytère attached and quarters for some Recollet brothers.

Such was and is still, doubtless, with a few modifications, the hamlet of St. Ignace, fair type of the primitive Lower Canadian settlement, dominated by the church, its twin spires recalling the towers of Notre Dame, its tin roof shining like silver, the abode of contented ignorance and pious conservatism, the home of those who are best described as a patient peasantry earning a monotonous but steady livelihood, far removed from all understanding of society or the State as a whole. With each other, with Nature, and with the Church they had to do—and thought it enough to keep the peace with all three.

Yet change was in the air, destiny or fate inevitable. The moving on process or progressive spirit was about to infect the obscure, remote, ignorant, contented little *paroisse* of Juchereau de St. Ignace when one April morning there stood upon the edge of rock nearest the great fall, still partly frozen into stiff angular masses, two men of entirely different aspects, tastes, and habits, yet both strongly agreed upon one essential point, the importance of religion, and, more particularly, the kind of religion practised and set forth by the Methodist Church.

The elder was Monsieur Amable Poussette, owner of the sawmill at Bois Clair and proprietor of the summer hotel, a French Canadian by birth and descent and in appearance, but in clothes, opinions, and

religious belief a curious medley of American and Canadian standards. Notwithstanding the variety of his occupations, one of which was supposed to debar him from joining the Methodist Church, he was an ardent member of that community. The younger man was a Methodist preacher, working as yet on the missionary circuit, and to him M. Poussette was holding forth with round black eyes rolling at the landscape and with gestures inimitably French.

"See, now," he was saying, standing perilously near the wet edge of rock, "there is no difficult thing! I own the ground. I give the money. I have it to give. My friend Romeo Desnoyers, of Three Rivers, he shall come at this place, at this point, and build the church. It will be for a great convenience, a great success. My guests, they will attend. I myself will see to that. I shall drive them over."

The younger man smiled faintly. It was necessary at times to restrain M. Poussette. He pulled him back now, but gently, from the slippery rock.

"In the summer—yes, of course, I see that. I see that it is needed then. The rest of the year——"

"The rest of the year! Bigosh—*excusez*,—I tell you, it is needed *all* the year round. Look at that big ugly barn full of bad pictures—yes, sir, I went to Mass regular, when I was a boy—*petit garçon*—well, every one was the same, sure. But now, ah!—excuse *me*. A seegar? Yes? You will thry one?"

The minister declined, but M. Poussette lit one of a large and overfragrant variety, while he frowned at the fall, rolled his large eyes around again and finally led the way through thick underbrush and across fallen logs to the deeply-rutted highroad where a horse and *caleche* awaited them. The prospective church builder took a long last look and then said:—

"And you—you shall preach the first sermon. How long does it take to build nice church, nice pretty Methodist church—not like that big stone barn I used to go to Mass in?"

At this the Reverend Joshua Ringfield did more than smile. He threw back his fine head and laughed heartily.

"Oh—Poussette!" he cried; "you're the funniest fellow, the funniest man alive! Ask somebody else how long it takes to build any kind of church—how should I know! But if you're in earnest, and I admire you for it if you are, and I wish there were more like you, I'll come and do the preaching with pleasure. You'll require a bigger man than I am, I'm afraid though."

"No, no," pronounced Poussette with fierce and friendly emphasis, driving away at a reckless pace. "See now, this is it. This is my affair. It will be my church, and my friend, Mister Romeo Desnoyers of Three Rivers, shall build it. Bigosh—*excusez*; I'll have only friends in it; you're my friend, I am good Methodist since I hear you preach, and Goddam,—well, *excusez* again, sir, I'll have you and no other. We'll say July, and you will have one, two, three months to get the sermon ready. Get on there, *m'rch donc, animal-l-l!* I am too long away from my business."

Ringfield, who was right in supposing that his friend and patron had tasted of the "viskey blanc" before starting, refrained from any criticism of the scheme, promising his services merely, should they be required, and that evening saw him depart for the west to attend a course of lectures at a theological college. Before many hours the tumbling, foaming Fall, the lonely river, the Bois Clair settlement and Poussette were almost forgotten. A camping trip with friendly Ontarians succeeded the lectures, then ensued a fortnight of hard reading and preparation for the essay or thesis which his Church demanded from him as token of his standing and progress, he being as yet a probationer, and thus the summer passed by until on the 6th of August a letter reached him from the Lower Province bidding him attend at the opening services of the new Methodist church recently built at St. Ignace through the enterprise and liberality of M. Amable Poussette. The letter, in Canadian French, had an English postscript; "I pay all expense. Me, Amable Poussette, of Juchereau de St. Ignace."

Ringfield put the letter away with a frown. He was busy, in demand, ambitious. Born in one of the Maritime Provinces, he owed all he was to Ontario, and now—Ontario claimed him. Return he might some day to the rapid rivers, the lonely hills, the great forests and the remote villages, but not now. Now, just as he was beginning to fill his place, to feel his power, to live and work, and above all preach, a man among men, a man for men, he resented any interruption in his plan of existence, in his scheme of self-consecration. The big bustling cities of Western Ontario and of the State of Ohio, where some of his holidays had been spent, were very far away from the hamlet of Juchereau de St. Ignace, a mere handful of souls—yes, Souls, and here Ringfield stopped and reconsidered. After all, there was his word, and Poussette, though rough, was not a bad fellow. It would take, say, three or four days out of his last week of recreation, but still, he was engaged, earnestly and sincerely engaged in the work of bringing souls to Christ, and, no small thing, his expenses would be paid. The better counsel, as it seemed, prevailed, and he went east the next night.

Meanwhile the energetic Poussette, mill owner of Bois Clair, rich man and patron of the countryside, had put his plan into execution, and in the space of three months a tract of rocky ground on the north side of the Fall had been cleared and a neat, convenient church erected from the native woods, furnished with benches, a table and chair for the minister, and a harmonium. St. Ignace was quite excited, for the thing seemed pure imbecility to the French, who were to a man true Catholics, but Poussette stoutly asserted his belief that before long conversions to Methodism would be numerous and for the present there were his "guests," a couple of families from Beaulac, the foreman of the mill—*voilà un congrégation très distingué!* Much, too, would depend upon the choice of a preacher, and Poussette was cherishing the hope that some inducement might be held out to retain Ringfield in their midst.

Of this the younger man was at first ignorant. Impatience at detention in such a place warred with strict conceptions of duty, yet his excellent training in subservience to his Church and a ready gift of oratory assisted him in a decision to do the best he could for the new *paroisse*, heretofore so distinctively Catholic, of Juchereau de St. Ignace. That M. Poussette's congregation was more *distingué* than numerous did not for a moment affect the preacher on the warm, rainy Sunday when he stood within sound of the great Fall and read from the forty-seventh chapter of the Prophet Ezekiel. Romeo Desnoyers, thin, keen, professional looking; Poussette and his wife, the latter an anaemic, slightly demented person who spoke no English; Mr. Patrick Maccartie, foreman of the mill, who likewise was ignorant of English, despite his name, and the Methodist contingent from Beaulac were planted along the front seats at markedly wide intervals, for Poussette had erected his church on a most generous scale. Summer visitors of all denominations trickled in out of the moist forest arcades, so that when Ringfield rose to conduct the service he was facing seventy or eighty people, far more than he or the architect had expected to see, although doubtless inferior in numbers to the great throngs existing in the imagination of M. Poussette.

The opening hymn and prayer over, the young man took his Bible and read in natural colloquial tones but with considerable emphasis as follows:—

"Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the fore-front of the house stood towards the east, and the waters came down from under, from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar".

A slight pause was here made by the reader and caused a rustling in the porch to be the more distinctly heard, as a late comer, a lady, evidently afraid of the weather because of cloak and veil, moved to a seat near the door and sat down. The reader, seeing only a female figure merge itself in the congregation, resumed.

"Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the outer gate by the way that looketh eastward; and behold, there ran out waters on the right side."

Again there was that slight pause, and again, too, a rustling as of silken feminine garments. Ringfield caught Poussette's eye, but it was somewhat vacant; evidently the analogy of the picture was lost upon him.

"And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a River that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a River that could not be passed over. And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river."

With the climactic force and aptness of the description his voice had grown louder till it completely filled the building. His fine head erect, his steady passionless blue-gray eyes fastened more on the dark sopping cedars outside the window than upon the people in front, his large but as yet undeveloped frame denoting strength, vigour, rude health—all testified to his unsullied manhood, to the perfection of sane mind in pure body which it was his highest joy and duty to retain.

There is an asceticism among Methodists of his class which does not differ greatly from that enforced by other religious orders. Thus Ringfield, handsome, healthy, with pulsing vitality, active senses and strong magnetic personality, was consecrated to preaching and to what was called "leading souls to Christ" as much as any severe, wedded-to-silence, befrosted and tonsured priest. And over and beyond this self-consecration there was the pleasure involved in fulfilling his mission, and herein perhaps he differed from the conventional and perfunctory Roman. The sound of his own voice, the knowledge that he was bound to interest, to convince, even to convert, the very attitude in which he stood, with chest inflated, head thrown back, hand uplifted, all these things delighted him, communicated to his lively

sentient side many delightful and varying sensations. As the *prima donna* among women so is the popular preacher among men.

"Now, when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then said he unto me, ... everything that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, ... And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it ... they shall be a place to spread forth nets: their fish shall be according to their kinds, exceeding many.... And by the river, upon the bank ... shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaves shall not fade, ... because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for a medicine."

This concluded the customary reading of a portion of Scripture, but when the second hymn had been sung and the preacher began his sermon he asked the congregation to let their minds revert for a moment to that Vision of the Holy Waters which he was about to take as a text. Yet, although throughout the sometimes flowery, sometimes didactic, but always eloquent address which followed, more than one present looked for a reference to the landscape outside, so markedly similar to that pictured by the prophet, nothing of the kind occurred. The four thousand years of religious growth, the spread of Gospel knowledge and counsel, the healing qualities of the Stream of Salvation flowing down the ages through a dark world of sin and affliction, the medicine for the soul of man and the spiritual food for his spiritual nature—these were the thoughts so warmly sketched and the lessons so skilfully drawn from the passage in question.

At the conclusion of the service, Ringfield was moving out quietly behind the others, with that sense of slight collapse upon him which frequently follows oratorical efforts, when Poussette and the architect, Desnoyers, turned back and shook hands with him.

Madame Poussette, standing irresolutely near the door, weak, vacant-eyed, badly dressed, was staring at another woman, the veiled and cloaked figure who had rustled in during the reading of Scripture, but the veil was lifted now and the cloak hanging over her arm. The face and form were undoubtedly those of a most attractive, youthful and well-dressed person, in fine, a lady, and Ringfield at once recollected her presence in the congregation. So mutual was their recognition, that, accustomed to being sought in this manner, he was about to inquire if she wished to speak with him, when Poussette came between them, taking his wife's arm, and the opportunity was lost. In a few moments they were driving along the road to Bois Clair, and the young minister, looking back, could discern no trace of the lady. So little did he connect her with the remote wildness of the place, so different did she appear even in a moment's glimpse from the natives and visitors alike, who had made up the morning assembly, that he did not ask M. Poussette for any information. As for the latter, no achievement had ever put him into such good humour with himself as the building of the new church; and the Sunday dinner at which M. Romeo Desnoyers and the Rev. Joshua Ringfield were guests of honour, was eaten with the utmost relish and hilarity. Cabbage soup, the French Canadian staple; young Beauport ducks, dressed plentifully with onions; deep pies in earthen bowls containing jointed chickens and liver cut in shapes; apples and pears baked in the oven with wine and cream; good butter, better bread, and indifferent ice cream, *crème d'office*, made up one of the characteristic meals for which "Poussette's" was famous, and it need not detract from Ringfield's high mental capacities to state that having partaken of this typical and satisfying fare, he was compelled, when he could escape the importunities of his French friends, to walk away by himself along the muddy highroad for the benefit of his health.

CHAPTER II

THE WHITE PEACOCK

"Nor shall the aerial powers
Dissolve that beauty—destined to endure
White, radiant, spotless, exquisitely pure,
Thro' all vicissitudes."

Rocky slabs and mounds of Laurentian gneiss, forest trees and a young wood interspersed with mats of juniper constituted the chief scenic attraction in the vicinity of the Fall, so that it might truly be said, all roads at St. Ignace lead to the Fall—it was so much more directly beautiful. But Ringfield from

choice walked away from the river and struck inland by a miry sloppy path which was nevertheless beautiful too, bordered by splendid ferns, mossy trunks upholding miniature pines in their rich brown crevices, plants of aromatic teaberry, and at intervals shallow golden pools where the wild white arum bloomed alongside the pinkish purple of other water flowers.

His thoughts were not, however, upon all the lovely detail at his feet, for just at present he found himself more interesting than the landscape. A very unusual thing had occurred. Poussette, during the drive home, had anticipated a more serious proposal on the morrow by asking him briefly and to the point whether he would remain in the Province, at St. Ignace in fact, and become pastor of the new church. The small stipend which in all probability the Methodist Church would cheerfully pay was to be augmented by Poussette's own gift. Not content with presenting his favourite denomination with a building out of debt and ready for use, he proposed also to equip it with a pastor after his own heart, for he combined thoroughness with an impulsive nature in a manner peculiar to himself. This Poussette was indeed a character, an original. Very fat and with every indication of becoming fatter still, fond of tweed suits and white waistcoats, and quick at picking up English in a locality where the tongue was not prominent, he owed much of his progressive spirit to the teachings of a certain French Canadian named Magloire le Caron, born in the county of Yamachiche but latterly an American citizen. This Magloire or Murray Carson, as he was known in Topeka, Kansas, had numbered the young Poussette among his hearers some ten years before when on tour in his native country in the interests of a Socialistic order. The exodus of French Canadians to the neighbouring "States" is frequently followed by a change of name, so that, M. Lapierre or St. Pierre becomes Mr. Stone, M. Dupont Mr. Bridge, M. Leblanc Mr. White, M. Lenoir Mr. Black, Leroy, King, and so on.

Poussette was, to his credit, among those who gauged Le Caron's sentiments fairly correctly, and he had no wish either to leave his country or to change his name. Succeed he would—and did; make money above all, but make it just as well in St. Ignace or Bois Clair as in the States; learn English but not forget French, both were necessary; become "beeg man," "reech man," but marry and live where his name would be carried down most easily and quickly. As for his change of religion, it was a good evening's entertainment to "seet roun," in the bar and listen to Poussette's illustrated lecture entitled "How I became a Methodist"; the illustrations being repeated sips of whisky and water, imitations of different priests and anecdotes of indifferent preachers.

Most of this Ringfield was familiar with, but while Poussette as a sort of accepted "character," a chartered entertainer, was one thing, Poussette as a patron, importunate, slightly quarrelsome, and self-willed, was another. For a few months the arrangement might work well enough, but for the entire winter—he thought of the cold, of the empty church at service time, of the great snowdrifts lasting for weeks and weeks, and more than this too, he thought of his plans for self-improvement, the lectures he would miss, the professors and learned men he would not meet, the companionship of other students he must perforce renounce.

Reflections of this kind were continuing to occupy him when he suddenly saw through the trees on the right hand the gleam of open water. He had reached Five Mile Lake or Lac Calvaire, a spot he had heard of in connexion with fabulous catches of fish, and on the opposite side of the shining water he also discerned the roof of a large house, painted red, and somewhat unusual in shape. That is, unusual in the eyes of the person who saw it, for the steep, sloping roof, the pointed windows, the stone walls, and painted doors, are everyday objects in French Canada. The house at Lac Calvaire was a type of the superior farm-house built in the eighteenth century by thrifty and skilful fur-traders, manufacturers and lesser seigneurs, differing rather in appearance and construction from the larger chateaux or manoirs, a few of which at one time existed along the banks of the St. Laurent, but of which now only three well-preserved examples survive. As the size of the original grants of land or seigneuries varied, some eighteen, twenty and twenty-five miles long by six, eight, twelve miles wide, others less, certainly few larger, so the lesser properties, accounts of which are rare among works dealing with the state of society at the time, varied also. While numerous collections of facts pertaining to the original fiefs or seigneuries (usually called *cadastres*) exist, it is not so common to meet with similar attempts to define and describe the exact position of others in the early colony beside the seigneurs. The large land-holder figures prominently in colonial documents, but the rise of the trader, the merchant, the notary, the teacher, the journalist, is difficult to follow. Very often the seigneur was also the merchant; to be *grand marchand de Canada* in the new colony signified solid pecuniary success.

As far back as the year 1682 the *Sieur de la Chinay et autres marchands de Canada* equipped, it is presumed at their own expense, several ships, and proceeded to Port Nelson, raiding and burning the Hudson Bay Post, and carrying away sixteen subjects of His Majesty. The *Sieur de Caen* gave his name to the Society of Merchants still farther back, in 1627. Henry, in 1598, and Francis, in 1540, each granted letters patent and edicts confirming certain Court favourites and nobles in possession of the great fur-bearing districts of Hochelaga, Terres Neuves, and also of "*La Baye du Nord de Canada oui a été depuis appelée Hudson est comprise*". It is plain that commerce had as much to do with early

colonization as the love of conquest, ecclesiastical ambition, or the desire on the part of jaded adventurers and needy nobles for pastures new. From the Sieur de Roberval to the merchant princes of Montreal is an unbroken line of resolute men of business enterprise, bearing in mind only that what the French began, the English, or rather the Scotch, "lifted" with increasing vigour. In 1677 royal permission was given to open mines in Canada in favour of the Sieur de Lagny. The "Compagnie du Castor de Canada," carried on what even at this day would be regarded as an immense trade in beaver skins. "La Manon," wrecked about 1700, carried beaver skins amounting to 107,000,587 livres. The Sieur Guigne, known as the Farmer of the Western Domain, paid at one time the sum of 75,000 livres per annum on account of beavers.

In lesser degree the same was true of moose skins and of the finer furs for apparel and ornament, and thus for many a long year honourable names and well-descended families were found among those who bought and sold and quarrelled and went to law in the spacious marketplace of Le Bas Canada, with the wide and only partially known or understood Atlantic rolling between them and the final court of appeal—His Most Christian *Matie* in France.

Nothing, it is certain, of this was in Ringfield's mind as he looked at the steep roof and the stone walls of the house at Lac Calvaire. The dwelling, like the country surrounding it, held little attraction, still less what is called romance or glamour for him, for his was not a romantic nature. Yet neither was he dull, and therefore the aspect of the house moved him, out of curiosity alone, to skirt the banks of the reed-fringed lake and find a nearer view of what struck him as unusual. This was not difficult, as the lake was a short oval in shape, and before he walked five or six hundred yards he came to the low stone wall or fence which appeared to completely surround the manor and over which he soon was desultorily leaning. The garden grew in front of him somewhat fantastically, with irregular beds marked out with white stones, and directly facing him was a badly hewn, clumsily scooped fountain half filled with weeds and dirty water. Behind the house were trim rows of dark poplars, and there appeared to be a long chain of barns and other farm buildings extending into the very heart of a dense plantation of pine. As he looked, still leaning on the low wall, the place kindled into life and activity. Pigeons came from some point near and settled on the rim of the fountain. From a door at the side issued an old woman with a dish in her hand, followed by a couple of dogs and four cats. These all disappeared among the barns. A minute later a wagon came lazily along the road, driven by a dark-eyed, habitant-hatted man who turned in at a gate without taking much notice of the loiterer. Two plump, dark-eyed servant girls and a little boy came round the corner of the largest barn; they were apparently dressed in their best, carried prayer-books, and were evidently on their way to evening service at St. Ignace, in the handsome church designated by the heretic Pousette as a "big stone barn full of bad pictures". Finally there emerged upon the scene, proceeding in a deliberate, dainty, mincing manner along the garden walk, now rapidly drying in a burst of fierce August sunshine, the most wonderful, the most imposing, yet the most exquisite and delicate object Ringfield's eyes had ever beheld. If a moment before he had thought of retracing his steps and turning away from a house too full of people on a hot Sunday afternoon to permit of further lingering in its vicinity, now, he found it impossible to move, fascinated by the beauty of the rare creature slowly coming towards him. For this was a white peacock, tempted by the sudden radiance out to take the air. It paused for an instant as if to consider the effect and stood, displaying a colossal fan of snowy feathers, tipped with glittering frost-like filaments. Perhaps it intuitively knew that Ringfield had never seen one of its kind before. It continued to stand, while he continued to gaze, and two or three times it shook that resplendent wheel of shining downy plumes, trembling in each sensitive fibre with pride and glorification in its beauty. With each shake, there fell upon the ear the tinkle as of some faint and far-distant fairy bell; it was the friction of the spear-shaped sparkling tips as they met in air.

Ringfield thought it the whitest thing he had ever seen. It was like snow, or sugar, so finely spun and glistening. Then its air of arrogance captivated him—the creature was so fully aware of its charms. He spoke to it and the bird came on nonchalantly; then gracefully executed a wide turn, carrying that shining palpitating tail with it and walked back to the house. At the same moment the old woman with the dish reappeared and commenced driving the bird before her.

"O don't do that!" exclaimed Ringfield, forgetting that probably she knew no English. "The rain is over for a while. Let it have its walk. I've never seen one like it before."

The old woman was smiling as if to encourage him, but he saw directly that she did not understand him. He was answered however, and by a voice from the doorway. The lady he had seen that morning at church was addressing him. Laughing lightly, she came out to the garden and Ringfield advanced to meet her. Thus they had the bird between them.

"I am speaking to the Reverend Mr. Ringfield?" said she pleasantly, and the young man was reassured. This new acquaintance, whether *châtelaine* of the curious house or stranger, spoke excellent English.

"I saw you in church this morning," responded he. So much of a mutual introduction was easy and necessary; after that, with a dignified withdrawal of the peacock, conversation naturally turned to the subject of the morning service.

"I do not think I can ask you inside," she said presently, "for like many old houses, particularly those built of stone, ours is cold in winter and hot or rather close in summer. We might walk toward the poplar grove there, I should so like to speak to you about that sermon."

Ringfield assented with a pleased brightness.

"And what are your conclusions as to the sermon?" he said, when they were seated in an old and crumbling arbour looking upon the lake. "I am afraid I did not give myself quite enough time on this important occasion. Preparation is everything."

"I do not allude exactly to the sermon, not the devotional part of it. Sermons are not much in my line. I meant rather the reading you gave, that wonderful description of the river, the fall, the waters issuing from under the sanctuary—you see I have remembered the words—the trees for medicine and healing, even the fish,—why I never thought there could be anything like that in the Bible! You chose it purposely, of course?" The young man did not reply for an instant. A hint of flippancy in the speech of his companion seemed to create a barrier between them.

"Purposely! Well, yes, I suppose I did. Purpose, intention, design, must, should enter into all earnest preaching, and whatever may be the faults of mine I endeavour at least to be that, to be earnest. But I am glad you were struck with the parallel; not many in that congregation would be at all likely to."

"You might have dwelt more upon that parallel in the sermon. I expected you would."

"Well, no, there are canons of good taste, good form, as the world puts it, in preaching as in other matters. It was sufficient to indicate the parallel; people could then look up chapter and verse for themselves. As no doubt you have done."

"Quite impossible. I do not possess a Bible."

Ringfield turned a reproachful eye upon her.

"We are Catholics, you see, or supposed to be. I have a 'Key of Heaven' and five other devotional works. But I never read them."

The other was silent. Looking for the first time with serious interest at the lady whose ease of manner and cultured speech were remarkable for the place, he perceived that in a moment she had revealed much. How few people, how few women in particular, would display a spirit of utter frankness towards a stranger on so important a topic as religious belief! And how quick she had been to appreciate the literary side at least of his quotations from Ezekiel! What more was striking or unusual about her he could not then take time to consider, for people so recently complete strangers cannot, it is conceded, discuss each other or a situation as they may after several days or weeks of intimacy. He was conscious of feeling that in a certain sense he had met with as clever a brain as his own and with some one in whose personal history or life story there was an element of romance, of the unexpected, the unconventional, absolutely foreign to his own experience of life. He therefore hastened to change the subject.

"It may be that you have heard. If not, I may tell you that Mr. Poussette has offered me the new church at St. Ignace. I took this long walk out here to-day to think it over. I—well, frankly, I hardly know what to say."

"In your profession you are not supposed to consult your own wishes, but rather the general good. Is not that the case?"

Ringfield smiled, but also shot a look at his companion.

"I suppose I may put it that I have had a 'call'. A call to the new, flourishing and highly attractive 'parish,' as our friends the Anglicans call it, I should say, the 'mission,' of St. Ignace. I am not speaking satirically, I might do worse."

"You are considering it, now, this afternoon?"

He paused for a mere fraction of a moment. "I was."

"In the meantime, you have another service this evening and I am detaining you here when you should be on your way back to the Fall and the village."

It was true. Ringfield was forgetting the time.

"Had it not been for the bird—" he began, and from that point the conversation, at one time strongly personal and introspective, became ordinary. Ringfield closed the gate behind him, lifted his hat and turned back along the road without having ascertained the name of the lady or her condition in life. The service hour arrived, so did the small but enthusiastic congregation. The rain had entirely ceased and the air was perceptibly cooler. The preacher had prepared a sermon of more florid style than the one delivered in the morning, and he appeared to have the absorbed attention of those who understood the language, while the French contingent listened respectfully. The passage of Scripture to be read aloud had been chosen since the morning, since the afternoon walk in fact, but there was no one present from the house at Lac Calvaire to hear and understand part of the thirty-eighth chapter of Job, beginning with the verse, "By what way is the light parted, which scattereth the east wind upon the earth?" and ending with the thirteenth verse of the succeeding chapter, "Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks?"

CHAPTER III

THE MAN IN THE CHAIR

"From out the crumbling ruins of fallen pride
And chambers of transgression, now forlorn."

The house at Lac Calvaire was, as stated, a fair specimen of the dwellings erected in the first half of the eighteenth century by those Canadians who, living frugally though comfortably, felt that affection for the soil, for the natural features of the wild but picturesque country, even for its severe and strenuous climate, which in many cases prompted them to make homes and found families. In the year 1729, a Clairville, rich trader in furs and skins, built the house five miles from the majestic and lonely Fall. This Clairville was the grandson of a certain François Gaillard, body servant and faithful follower of the Sieur de Clairville—Antoine-Louis-Onesime—who came to New France in 1664. The nobleman in question led a truly chequered life in the gay garrisons of the new world, varied by a couple of voyages to the gayer Court he had left behind, but through all the reckless episodes of his long and stirring career, François was by his side, patient, adroit, silent when necessary, at other times a madcap for freak and fantasy. Faith of a gentleman—François Gaillard was everything his noble master should have been, and that master too often such as the poorest lackey might have been ashamed to be, yet—faith of a gentleman—De Clairville atoned for much ere he died. François, his foster-brother, received at his master's death a gift of land under the Crown to him and his heirs for ever, the name Gaillard to be abandoned for that of Clairville. In 1684 the Sieur de Clairville died; François survived him twenty years, leaving one son and two daughters. These became *Clairvilles*; there were no De Clairvilles. The son prospered, as did *his* son, another François, who built the strong stone farm-house and planted the poplars and laid the foundation of a well-known name, respected and quoted far and near in the community. Both house and family seemed to bear charmed lives. Canada was lost to France and in that losing many fine manor-houses and farms were destroyed, but Clairville and Clairville Manor went untouched. For this, the peculiar situation of the house, so far back from the Fall, its existence almost undreamt of by English soldiery, ignorant of the country, was, of course, responsible. A Clairville went to France at the close of the Revolution, made himself useful and remained in some post under the Government. Another went up to Quebec, became a sound lawyer, and batonnier of his district. Both of these individuals, however, died unmarried, and the next owner of the manor neither distinguished himself nor contributed to the glory of his line. That glory, such as it was, for the ignoble François was the founder of it, gradually departed. The Clairvilles deteriorated, sold off large parcels of their land, married undesirable persons, till, in the present generation, the culmination of domestic ruin seemed probable. For the Clairville now inhabiting the manor was not only reduced in purse and delicate in health but suspiciously weak in intellect.

When Ringfield woke on the Monday following his inaugural service, the sun was shining brightly into his room at Poussette's, and it is a fact that in his mind he saw a picture of a dazzling fan of foamy white feathers waving proudly in that sunlight. It really was the bird and not the lady that intercepted other and more pertinent reflections having to do with his future movements. He loitered about all morning, fished, lunched with his guide, made a pencil sketch of the Fall, and then about three o'clock in the afternoon walked out to Lac Calvaire. He neared the house; at first he saw no one, it was the middle-day siesta. No peacock was visible, no lady. Then he saw a face at a window and it stared at

him. Ringfield, taken by surprise, returned the stare. To the stare succeeded a weak smile, then a beckoning finger, then an insistent tapping. The window was closed, with a roughly crocheted curtain half-drawn back on a string. The young man had no cause to hesitate, for he knew nothing of what lay inside the house. He was also a clergyman, which means much. It means, if you rightly understand your office, that you must be always ready to go anywhere, to do anything, that may be of the smallest benefit to your fellow-man. It means, that because of that high office, there is nothing really beneath your attention, too insignificant for your study, and yet you are so far above the rest of mankind, the mere lay portion of the world, that, like a God in courage and in calm, you may indeed enter where Angel and Devil alike fear to tread. At least, that is the old and orthodox conception of the clerical profession, and although it might be sometimes foolishly and conceitedly pushed to extremes by other men, there was nothing in Ringfield of the mere fussy moralist and pulpit egoist. After all, as he entered the house and, guided by the voice of its owner, found his way to the room looking on the dusty country road, he saw nothing very terrible, only a thinnish, fair, middle-aged man, wearing a black skull-cap and clad in a faded and greasy but rather handsome theatrical-looking dressing-gown and seated in a worn arm-chair. As for the room itself, he suppressed an exclamation of mingled surprise and impatient remonstrance, for, although of large proportions and not badly lighted, it was so littered with books, papers, maps, and pamphlets, so overgrown with piles of dusty blue-books, reports, dictionaries and works of reference, thick and antiquated, thin and modern, local and foreign, standing on end, on tables, on the mantel-shelf, extending into the old-fashioned cupboards minus doors, taking up a ragged sofa, a couple of arm-chairs, and a dilapidated *armoire*, and even the greater portion of a bed, that almost every gleam of sunlight was obscured, and upon this warm damp August afternoon the air was heavy and close with a suggestion of staler odours still.

"I saw you yesterday," said the man in the chair, "from this window, but you did not see me, eh? You were greatly interested in the bird."

He paused, and a weak smile changed to a haughty air, accompanied by a flourish of the hand.

"It is without doubt rare, a great curiosity. But there have been white peacocks at Clairville a long time, many years, many years."

"Clairville! That is your name, the name of the young lady, the name of this place?"

"Of this house. Also the estate. This house is, or should be, the Manoir of the Clairvilles, of the *De Clairvilles*. You are some kind of clergyman?"

"I am. I am a Methodist."

"Have you read much?"

Ringfield, looking around somewhat whimsically at so many books, on a pile of which he was obliged to sit, felt unusual ignorance. He was probably in the presence of some famous scholar.

"Not much. Not anything like what you must have read if you have even gone through a quarter of all these!"

"Ah!"

The strange man, savant, scientist, bibliophile, whatever he was, drew his dirty dressing-gown around him with another flourish of complacent self-admiration.

"I am—you are quite right, Mr. Clergyman—a great reader. I have read every book in this room two, three, many times over. You were—surprised—to see all this book, all this document, all this pamphlette—here, at this place, eh?"

Ringfield, as yet only partly guessing at the peculiarities of his host, assented politely.

"My name is Ringfield," he said, noting for the first time the strong broken accent of the other and his use of French idiom. "I am a Methodist minister, spending some time at St. Ignace, and yesterday I encountered a lady, who, I believe, lives here. At least, I—"

The other cut him short.

"Ringfield? That is your name? *Anneau, champ*—no the other way, Champanneau. We have not this name with us. Yet, I do not know, it may be a good name."

The young man was superior to the slighting tone because he belonged to the class which lives by work, and which has not traced or kept track of its genealogy. He was so far removed from aristocratic tendencies, ideas of caste, traditions of birth, that he scarcely apprehended the importance of such

subjects in the mind of anyone.

"The English name, Champney," continued the man in the chair, "you know that—might derive from it, might derive. But I am not so well acquainted with the English names as with the French. You *comprenez pour quoi, sans doute*. I am derive—myself, from a great French name, a great family."

The satisfaction with which he repeated this oracular statement continued to amuse Ringfield, a son of the people, his friends of the people, but it did not amuse the third person who heard it, the lady who, advancing into the dark stuffy room, received a pleased glance from the minister and a half-fearful, half-defiant scowl from the man in the chair.

"Henry!" exclaimed she, with great volubility and a kind of fierce disgust, "how is this? What can you mean by so disobeying me? This is no place to bring strangers! Nor do I want strangers brought into any part of this house at any time of the day! It is suffocating here. Do you not find it very heavy, very close in here?" she added, to Ringfield, who had risen and slightly changed countenance as she pronounced the word "stranger".

He looked from the lady to the man in the chair in astonishment, for he saw the former in a new and painful light. So dark was the frown upon her usually serene countenance, so angry the light in her fine hazel eyes, so anxious and perturbed her entire being, that she appeared almost ugly. Not only so, but added to impatience and anger there seemed something like repugnance, disgust, directed at the miserable pedant who under the fires of womanly wrath blinked and smiled, but had no defence ready.

"It is altogether my fault that I am here," said Ringfield quietly; "I took another walk in this direction, hoping for a sight of the peacock."

"And you saw something else instead! Ah!—there is much I must explain to you, you who come among us not knowing, not understanding. You see only the outside. But I suppose I must tell you who we are. This is my brother, my only brother, in fact my only living relative, Henry Clairville. I am Miss—Mademoiselle Clairville."

Ringfield bowed to her and to the man in the chair.

"We are the last of what—of what it pleases him to call our Line. It is all most foolish, most absurd. But I cannot tell you here. Since chance has brought you our way again, and as you may take up your residence in the neighbourhood—have you decided yet?—I feel I must make some explanation of how you find us, my brother and myself. Can you row? or paddle?"

Her manner, gradually changing and growing easier every moment, made it easy for Ringfield, who answered her with a smile.

"Of course."

"I asked, because some clergymen are so useless in some directions while good enough in others."

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSE OF CLAIRVILLE

"High instincts, before which our mortal nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised."

The hall through which they passed was sufficiently dark to prevent the masculine eye of Ringfield noting that long and systematic neglect marked every inch of the wall, every foot of flooring, every window, door, stair, sill and sash. Nothing was clean, nothing was orderly, and as the books and papers contained in the invalid's room had overflowed into the halls, lying on the steps and propped up on chairs and in corners, the dirt and confusion was indescribable. Hideous wallpapers were peeling off the damp and cracking wall, tattered shreds showing, by the accumulation on their fly-specked yellow edges of thick dust, how long they had waved upon the close air of this uncared-for house. All the woodwork was rough and horrid to the touch by reason of the millions of similar fly-specks; had nothing ever been washed here? Cats were alarmingly abundant. Three lay about in the hall; four were stretched on the grass in front of the door, and Ringfield saw two more—so large and brown and with

such huge tigers' heads, prowling under the trees, that he scarcely took them for cats. The chain of barns, farm-buildings and sheds was all in the same dilapidated, dirty condition, and it was hardly strange that the vision of that white loveliness—the peacock—which had tempted him in this direction, crossed his mind as they proceeded to the landing-place. And yet the Clairvilles were not without servants. Mademoiselle, having regained a measure of her wonted serenity, began to describe her retainers, proving that servants were almost as numerous as cats in that neighbourhood. The elderly woman, the man, the two girls and the boy, were all one family, and living "about" as their mistress carelessly put it, in the barns and out-buildings, divided the work among them. The woman's husband, Xavier Archambault, employed at the Fall as assistant to look after the bridge and dam, helped at odd moments in the business of the estate, thus making in all six servants, a rather large contingent for a dwindling concern; and Ringfield, listening to these wonders, could not fail to observe that their united wages must reach a high figure.

"Oh—they are not paid!" exclaimed mademoiselle, "at least, not in money. My brother, who is, as I was going to tell you, a person of stronger character than you might imagine, has never paid a cent of wages to anyone in his life. He has managed to infect all his work-people, and, indeed, many in the village, with his own belief that it is an honour to labour for him and his, he being a De Clairville and the highest in rank in this part of the country. Of course you, having lived in the West, and knowing so much of the world, must see how foolish this is, how it involves us—my brother and myself—in many unpleasant and difficult situations."

A note of challenge in her voice led Ringfield, who had taken off his coat and was paddling, to stop sharply and observe her.

"Pray be careful!" she cried in sudden alarm. "When I was at home all the time I could stand any kind of behaviour in a canoe, but lately I seem to be losing my nerve. I suppose you *must* kneel?"

"Certainly. Much the easier, therefore the safer way."

"Therefore! All easy things—safe?"

He was clumsy at this kind of refined innuendo, and considered before replying.

"No, perhaps not. But I give you my word not to disturb the equilibrium again."

The lake, a basin of clear water, small as Lower Canadian lakes go, and framed with thick foliage reaching to the edge, was absolutely silent, absolutely deserted, on this warm afternoon. Ringfield found it almost too hot to talk, but his companion seemed to enjoy the unburdening of various confidences, and as she had such a willing listener she had every opportunity, of taking her own time, and of delivering herself in her own way, of a remarkable tale.

That, within two days of his enforced sojourn at St. Ignace, the young preacher found himself thus—floating on a silent desolate lake in one of the remotest parishes of Quebec, listening to a family history of mediaeval import from the lips of a woman, young too, cultivated, self-possessed to the degree of hauteur, whose Christian name was as yet unknown to him, was in itself remarkable.

Ringfield, ardent, gifted, good, inherited directness of aim, purity of ideals, and narrowness of vision, from the simple working stock from which he had sprung, and it would have been easy for a man of the world to foresee the limitations existing in such a nature. When mademoiselle therefore began the Clairville history by relating some circumstances in the flighty career of the Sieur De Clairville, hinting at certain deflections and ridiculing uncertain promises of reformation, of reparation—for even the seventeenth century had its cant—the matter was far from being either real or relevant to her listener. What had he to do with a bundle of old-world memoirs, even when edited and brought up to date by an interesting woman! What to him was the spotless character of the ignoble François, son of a butcher, created a Clairville for his plebeian virtues, or the lives of each succeeding descendant of François, growing always a little richer, a little more polished, till in time the wheel turned and the change came in the fortunes of the house which culminated in the present! All these were mere abstractions, dull excerpts from some period of remote and unfamiliar history, because that system which gave him his secular education did not include knowledge of his country from an historical standpoint.

Macaulay and Alison, Gibbon and Grote, Motley and Bancroft—but not yet Garneau or Parkman. The lady might have romanced indeed, with glib falseness gilding picturesque invention, and he would not have detected it.

As it was, the truth remained sufficiently high coloured. He listened, he apprehended, but he could not see that it mattered.

"So now," remarked mademoiselle, trailing her large firm white hand through the water and knitting

her firm black brows still closer, "I have brought the story up to the appearance on the scene of my brother, whom you have met, no doubt pondered over, perhaps shrunk from."

"No, no!" cried Ringfield. "You mistake. I was conscious only of having no right to enter."

"Ah—I could see, I could see. Poor Henry! He is the victim of many delusions. One—that he is a great invalid and cannot leave his room, that room you saw him in to-day. Another—that we are properly De Clairvilles, but that we have somehow lost the prefix, the 'De,' in course of years, and that a Bill may have to pass in Parliament to permit us using it legally. There has been already in this antiquated province a case very similar to ours, but it was a genuine case, which ours is not. My brother owns the largest collection of old French and old French-Canadian memoirs and books in the country, I believe, and it may be that out of constant poring over them has come this ruling passion, this dominant idea, to prove himself a seigneur, and more, a noble, *grand seigneur de France!* Voilà! but I forget, Mr. Ringfield hardly speaks French, and I—hate the sound of it, only it crops out sometimes."

"But why—and you—how do *you* speak such good English? I have been wondering over that much more than over the case of your brother."

Ringfield, as he asked the question, stopped paddling and sat down cautiously opposite his companion. Her dark brows clouded even more and the warm colouring of her face went white; she again resembled the fury who had lectured the unfortunate pedant in the arm-chair.

"I knew you would ask that. Every one does. I suppose it is to be expected. Well then, my mother was English and I was educated at a mixed school, ladies' school at Sorel, not a convent. I was quick at the language—*voilà!*"

"Perhaps it was rude in me to ask. I believe I am deficient in manners; my friends often tell me so. But you spoke such *good* English; better far than mine."

"That would not be difficult. You have the accent strange to me, that of the West. Then I have studied for the stage, in fact, and now I suppose I shall frighten you altogether and make you upset the canoe when I tell you that I am *on* the stage."

It only needed some such declaration to convince Ringfield that, still floating on this silent, desolate lake he was indeed removed from all his usual convictions, prejudices and preferences. What had he to do with the stage! To the Methodist of his day the Stage was deliberately ignored in the study of social conditions. It was too evil to be redeemed. Its case was hopeless. Then let it alone and let us pretend it does not exist. This in effect was his actual state of mind.

"I have never been to the theatre," he said simply. "They say that at some future day we, as Methodists, may have to take up the question of amusements and consider the theatre seriously. It may be that we shall have to face other facts—the craving in this age of people, especially our young people, for greater liberty of thought, and I suppose, corresponding liberty of action. But so far these questions have not come very much before me, and I must plead entire ignorance of all matters connected with the profession to which you belong."

Mademoiselle Clairville's brow was now completely serene; a laugh was on her lips and a smile in her eyes as she listened to the staid phrases of her new friend.

"You and your young people!" she cried. "How old are you yourself, pray? Twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty—no, hardly twenty-seven. You may tell me your age quite frankly, for I will tell you mine. I am twenty-nine. Do you not think that I look much younger?"

He was in truth a good deal surprised, for to his age—twenty-six, as she had correctly guessed—twenty-nine seems old for a woman.

Before he could frame a clumsy allusion to her youthful appearance she had continued with a change of manner:—

"But sometimes I look older, yes, old enough. Tell me, you who preach your English sermons, so long, so much longer than our Catholic ones, about trees and rivers and *fish*—do you never preach too about men and women and their faults and vices and tempers? Ah! there, *Monsieur le p'tit curé*, you should know that I am a good subject for a sermon, I and my temper! For I have a temper. Oh, yes, indeed I have."

There being no instinct—at least not as yet developed—of gallantry in Ringfield's composition, he did not seek to weakly deny her self-imputed charge. Had he not already seen a proof of the truth of it in her treatment of Henry Clairville? Was there not even now a curious malicious gleam in her dark eye, a

frown upon her forehead, a kind of puckered and contemptuous smile upon her lips? Handsome and probably clever, even good she might be, and yet remain—unamiable.

"I am afraid you have not had a happy life," said he, very gently, and the simplicity and kindness of his manner smote upon her stormy countenance, so that it melted and all the ugly hardness and latent shrewishness died away.

"I have not, I have not!" she cried. "You see my situation here, my surroundings. Henry, my poor unfortunate brother; the old house, which might be so comfortable, falling to pieces for lack of money to keep it up; these terrible people, the Archambaults, pretending to work, but living on me and eating up everything on the place; the village, with none in it to know or speak to that I care about; the lonely country all around, cold in winter, hot in summer; the conviction that Henry will get worse; the fear of—the fear of—." She stopped.

"The fear of what?" said Ringfield quietly. "You need have no fear whatever of anything. You are one of God's children. Perfect love casteth out fear. Dear Miss Clairville, so recently a stranger, but rapidly becoming so well known to me, never mind about sermons and conversions. Never mind about Catholic or Protestant, bond or free, English Church or Methodist. Just think of one thing. Just cling to one thought. You are in God's hands. He will not try you too far." Very impressively he repeated this, bending forward till he could look into her troubled eyes. "I believe, and you must believe too, that in His infinite goodness He will not try you too far."

A shiver passed over her frame. She lowered her eyes, her mouth twitched once or twice, then she remained silent and passive while Ringfield, thinking he had said enough, resumed his paddling. It was some minutes before conversation recommenced and then Mademoiselle Clairville requested him to return.

"Do not think," said she, "that I am offended at your preaching to me," and now a mild sadness had succeeded to her wilder mood, "but one of the servants is signalling to me from the shore; my brother probably is in need of me. You will come to see us, to see me again, and I shall hope to hear that you will remain at St. Ignace for the winter at least. Here is one patient of the soul, and we may soon find another."

"If it would make any difference to you,——" he began, still without any trace of innuendo or latent gallantry, but she interrupted him with some flashing out of former merriment:—

"How could it, when I am away nearly all the time or try to be? I am now, like you, considering an offer, and may say adieu to St. Ignace, the Fall, and Henry, any day. But even if I go, some fascination will draw me back. It always does."

As he left her at her own gate the face at the window was still blinking at them. Dimly the ardent young Methodist began to discern some contingencies in life of which he had never dreamed. And how admirably he had perjured himself in the interview! Had he not forgotten the particular sect to which he belonged? Had he not besought his hearer to forget whether she was Catholic or Protestant? Had he not, in short, for the first time in his ministerial experience, fulfilled the plain duty of a true Christian without stopping to think of ways and means and artifices? Looking back, he was amazed to remember how earnest he had been and how sudden but genuine was his sympathy with this lonely woman. Apprehensive for her safety and content of mind, stimulated as he had never been before by her frank, original presence, he mentally resolved to remain at St. Ignace for her sake, or if her protracted absence ensued, as she hoped, to manage to return when she did.

He had arrived at this decision when, on drawing near Poussette's, he perceived that individual himself in little straw hat and large white apron standing at the door engaged in critically examining an enormous catch of fish—black bass and lunge, just brought in by the guides. Ringfield asked the time, for he began to realize how long he had been absent. It was nearly seven o'clock and the evening meal was over.

Poussette at first tried to be angry. He declared that there was nothing left. Ringfield smiled and strode to the fish lying in glittering silver heaps on the grass. He lifted up the biggest bass and carried it into the house, and the coolness of the deed appeased Poussette.

"That is all right, Mr. Ringfield," said he, slapping him quite affectionately on the back. "You shall have a good tea, a good tea, after which you shall hear what we have to say. Mister Desnoyers, Patrick, myself, all wait for you and all shall be arrange, eh? Every one round come in, come in and drink *bon santé* in something good I got on Saturday. Ah—you shall see, you shall see!"

As Ringfield went in to his "good tea" Madame Poussette came out. Rather to his astonishment, she sang to herself in passing, and although her sad vacant eyes were not bent on him, he felt as if the

words were intended for his ear. What were those words?

His knowledge of French was limited, but still he could make out a kind of rhyming refrain—

"Derrière
Chez mon père
Il-y-avait un grand oiseau."

He stopped and tried to catch more as Madame went down the walk singing low to herself.

"Derrière
Chez mon père
Il-y-avait un grand oiseau.
la, la, la, la—
C'était beau ça, c'était beau."

CHAPTER V

THE UNSEEN HAND

"The procession of our Fate, howe'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power."

Had Ringfield continued his conversation with the *châtelaine* of Clairville he would in all probability have asked a few questions about her theatrical career, placing it in his imagination in one of the large American centres to which in the seventies or eighties all Canadian artists gravitated. In this he would have been wrong.

In a back street in the purely French quarter of Montreal stood a pillared and placarded building once known as the home of an ambitious coterie, the *Cercle Littéraire*, which met fortnightly to discuss in rapid incisive Canadian French such topics as "Our National Literature," "The Destiny of Canada," and "The Dramatists of France," from which all *politique* was supposed to be eliminated. The building had originally been a house and private bank belonging to a courtly descendant of an old family, a De Lotbinière, who grew French walnut and cherry trees, lettuces and herbs in the back garden. When the banker died the *Cercle Littéraire* bought the house for a small sum, comparatively, seeing that it was built of good grey stone, had many bright green shutters and an imposing façade of four pillars, and from one part of it issued once a month the extremely high-class journal—organ of the society—called "Le Flambeau," the other part which comprised a fair-sized hall, retiring rooms, and secretary's office and quarters, being altered to suit the needs of the *Cercle Littéraire*. But in time the glories of the exclusive and classically minded coterie faded, its leading spirits died or disappeared, the superior monthly organ—torch for all the country—burnt itself out, lost subscribers—in fact the whole business was declared insolvent, and the nervous, gifted, but too sanguine editor-in-chief (there were three editors), M. Anselme-Ferdinand Placide De Lery, *avocat*, and the devoted, conscientious, but unprogressive secretary, old Amédée Laframboise, scientific grubber and admirable violinist, had to get out of Rue St. Dominique as best they could and go back to the law and the local orchestra. For several years the house was vacant, and then at last it held a still more gifted, more numerous, and, all things considered, more successful coterie within its walls than "Le Flambeau" had been able to procure for it. A certain travelling organization, a company of good actors and actresses direct from Paris, which had landed in America the previous year, giving comedies and pretty domestic pieces in New York and other cities, not meeting with the success it expected, came to French Canada in the hope of reaping substantial profits in a congenial atmosphere. Ah—what a mistake was this! To think that if in Philadelphia or Boston "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" or "La Joie Fait Peur" did not make money, either play would do so in the Montreal of thirty years ago! It was a mistake, certainly, from the monetary point of view; on the other hand, many friends were made, much good feeling and admiration prevailed and, in short, the company, stranded in a Canadian town, found living cheap and easily earned, plenty of good fellows—French—and settled down as a local stock affair, fitting up at no great expense the banker's house with the walnut-trees and bright green shutters under the name of the Théâtre des Nouveautés.

This was the playhouse in which Mlle. Clairville acted. This was the clever company which, secure in New France from blasé critics, produced the comedies and tragedies of Molière, Corneille, Dumas, Halévy, Mme. de Genlis, as well as serving up adaptations like "Le Vieux Oncle Tom," "Le Prince de Danemarque," "Le Condamné," "L'étranger," also attacking with superb, delicious confidence the then popular operas of "La Grande Duchesse," "La Belle Hélène," and "Il Trovatore." What acting it was, so vigorous, dashing, resourceful! How Mme. d'Estarre jumped easily from a *Précieuse* to Eva, and from Gertrude, a dark-eyed *bourgeoise* Queen with frizzed hair and train of cotton velvet, to Camille—wickedest play known at that time! Then when Mlle. Pauline-Archange-Emma-Louise de Clairville joined the company, what a Hamlet she made with her fine figure and her remarkably firm, white hands, what a Phedre, once when the actor was ill, what an "Oncle Tom"! What a Duchess of Gerolstein later, when the company discovered that it could sing, collectively at least, and what a Helen, in flowing Greek costume, fillet of gold braid, and sandals!

This was indeed Acting—to merge mannerisms, to defy fate and the jeers of any sober English reporter who strayed into the Theatre of Novelties! When Mme. d'Estarre found that she had to return to France unexpectedly, on account of the ill health of her children, left behind in a provincial town, she was given a grand benefit, and although the public (who were getting a little tired of madame, she was over fifty) did not respond as gallantly as might have been expected, the members of the company with true Gallic chivalry made up the large amount necessary to carry her across, bring her back and provide in the interim for the afflicted children. This was Pauline's opportunity; she naturally succeeded to the position of leading lady, and kept it until her faults of temper developed and she had the pleasurable excitement of a fierce quarrel with her manager. Thus, while her talent was conceded, her stormy temperament prevented her achieving anything like permanent success, and every few months she would reappear at St. Ignace, live drearily in the dingy house, lecture the servants, abuse and weep over her brother, when suddenly tiring of this she would return and have to begin again at the foot of the ladder.

Ignorant of these cloudy and strenuous careers, Ringfield saw only an impulsive and unhappy woman old enough to fascinate him by her unusual command of language and imperiousness of conduct, and young enough for warm ripe brunette beauty. To be plain, first love was already working in him, but he did not recognize its signs and portents; he only knew that an ardent wish to remain at St. Ignace had suddenly taken the place of the tolerant and amused disdain with which he had once considered Poussette's offer.

A couple of days later he had returned from a long afternoon on the river when a man around the place named Crabbe came to him with a letter. Opening it, he found it to contain another offer from a prominent citizen of Radford, a large and thriving Western town, to fill a certain pulpit of some distinction during the absence of the pastor in Europe. The time mentioned was ten months and Ringfield sat down at once to consider the importance of this offer. He would be at last in a cultivated community. Much would be expected of him and he would have every chance to put forth what was best in him. For several years he had been labouring on the missionary circuit and the work was hard indeed, with slender results. Here was sufficient remuneration, comfortable housing in a more sympathetic climate, and the prospect of receiving a still more important call in the future should he make his mark. Such considerations, if mundane, need not also be mercenary; each man is worthy of his hire and his pulse beat in pleased excitement as he viewed the rosy outlook.

But—Miss Clairville! A vague foreboding of the truth flitted through his brain; men wiser in love and affairs of the affections than our young Methodist minister have been self-deceived, and although he sternly put her image away he dimly avowed to himself that she was already occupying far too much of his thought. Here was a clear way opened, or so he imagined, referring each move as it occurred to the guidance and knowledge of the Higher Power, and he could find no other than an affirmative answer to the letter which he kept turning over in his pocket, and still kept reading through the evening in the general room. He had excused himself from the already over-convivial group on the front verandah, and being provided with paper, sat at the table composing his reply.

The lineaments of his singularly fine and noble countenance were easily seen through the window where the guides, M. Desnoyers and Poussette were sitting, and the vision of the black-coated, serious young scribe inditing what he had informed them was a very "important" letter, subdued the incipient revelry.

Poussette was uneasy. He had not yet received any direct answer from Ringfield to his own offer, and for many reasons he preferred to attach and retain him rather than any other "Parson" he had ever encountered. But Ringfield was wrapped in his own thoughts and quite unconscious of the highly improving spectacle he made, lifting his eyes only to nod pleasantly to Mme. Poussette who had glided in and was sitting by the window. His letters were three: one to Mr. Beddoe who had invited him to Radford, another to his relatives on the farm at Grand River, and a third to Miss Clairville. He had not

hesitated to write to her, for short as their intercourse had been, her emotional nature had manifested itself so warmly and their talk had been so completely out of the ordinary, that higher things than convention must always govern their friendship. His conscientious side held itself responsible for a slightly superfluous act of sudden interest and attachment, and the mentor's tone in which he pleaded with her, to ask herself whether the theatre must be her goal, would have deceived anybody unaccustomed to cold analysis of motives. He gave her, in short, good advice in the guise of kindly sentiments, ending by avowing himself her "friend in Christ" and protesting that her true welfare and happiness would always be of interest to him.

The letter written, he leant back, resolving not to send it by post but by some ignorant, unsuspecting hand (therein was the new-found subtlety and shyness of the true lover), and the change in attitude confused the watchers outside who guiltily resumed their smoking and conversation. And the strange, silent woman at the window, supposing Ringfield to be in want of something—paper, stamp or ink—rose and stood by his side. Thus she saw two envelopes addressed and ready for the mail, and a third as yet innocent of any inscription. That she could read English he doubted, yet he felt an objection to letting her look over his shoulder. He rose, and going to the office, where Poussette hastily preceded him, gave in the two letters for Ontario, and then informed him of his decision.

The Frenchman's disappointment was genuine and comic, partaking of tragedy and despair. Desnoyers was called in; also the guests and the two guides, with servants forming a picturesque and interested background, so that Ringfield suddenly found himself the centre of an admiring, friendly, but inclining-to-be quarrelsome crowd. Nothing occurred, however, to alter his decision, and, true to his idea of duty, he set off two mornings later, having committed the letter for Miss Clairville to the man called Crabbe, a slouching sort of Englishman who occasionally served as guide, ran a small open-air general store, and about whom there seemed to be some mystery, his accent and grammar being out of the common.

Forty-eight hours after, Ringfield arrived at his destination, and walking up from the train to the house of Mr. Beddoe, the gentleman who had written to him, was shown into a small parlour to wait a few minutes. Voices came from across the hall for a while, then he heard a visitor depart and the next moment Mr. Beddoe himself entered the room.

The surprise of this individual on perceiving Ringfield was genuine and complete; his countenance fell and he stood gazing.

"You did not expect me so soon, I see," said the young man easily. "Well, I was in rather a quandary, something else having offered, so I decided quickly, hating indecision. You got my note of acceptance all right, I hope? It should have reached you *at the latest* yesterday."

"Yes, yes," murmured Mr. Beddoe, "but, sit down, Mr. Ringfield, sit down—the truth is—a rather peculiar thing has occurred. I—ah—I may as well make you acquainted with it at once. Our pastor, who, without being mentally weakened to any extent by a troublesome and obstinate illness, for which, as you know, we have sent him abroad for a trip, was extremely absent-minded in many little ways, and it has transpired that before his departure he wrote himself to the Rev. Mr. Steers of Bradford, arranging with him to take the pulpit for the time he should be away. He neglected to inform us of the fact, but Mr. Steers came in just after we had written to you, and as he is a married man with a family, and as he certainly expected the duty and the remuneration for a period, I felt that you would have to reconsider our offer. I sent you a telegram embodying all this."

"I never got it. Telegraphic facilities are uncertain in that part of Quebec. For example, St. Ignace is the village, but Bois Clair the name of the post office, and there is no telegraph at either place. Montmagny—"

"That was where we telegraphed," broke in Mr. Beddoe, "but probably there was some delay in sending on the message and we did not look for you quite so soon. Mr. Steers has just left; he is a very reasonable sort of man, and if you think you are bound to keep us to our offer we will talk it over with him."

The young man had taken a chair at Mr. Beddoe's invitation, but he still clutched his florid and somewhat old-fashioned carpet-bag and he did not make any suggestions.

"Of course," exclaimed the other, uneasy at the silence, "you will remain here with us until the matter is settled, and I feel sure a satisfactory settlement can be made. You spoke of an alternative. Would that do for Mr. Steers?"

Ringfield roused himself to say that he did not think it would.

"It's not the place for a married man," he went on. "There are no houses such as you are accustomed to up here; the people are mostly French, the climate is extreme; it is, in short, only a mission, and as I've just come from there, and understand the place, I think I had better go back and leave Mr. Steers in possession of the field."

"Oh! But——" returned Mr. Beddoe, noticing a faint tinge of sarcasm in the tone of the speaker, "we do not ask you to do this. It's all most unfortunate! These great distances, so difficult to find a person—we did our best."

Ringfield rose; there was clearly no reason why he should remain in Radford whether he went back to St. Ignace or not, and just then the condition of his purse was extremely important. This detail was set right in time, in about two months; meanwhile a visit to his friends in the country would give him an opportunity to decide as to his future movements.

The sojourn on the farm occupied three days, at the end of which he did what he knew he would do from the moment of meeting Mr. Beddoe. He bought a ticket for Bois Clair with almost the last money he had in the world, and within ten days of leaving Poussette's the steamer plying on the river to St. Ignace deposited him at the familiar rickety wharf once more.

It was nine o'clock and dark, with a light rain falling. The passengers, mostly tourists, were stepping off in that timorous way peculiar to people unaccustomed to the primitive, by the light of a lantern waveringly but officially displayed by Crabbe, the surly guide to whom Ringfield had given his letter, and behind Crabbe, a little higher up on the bank, stood Poussette, whose costume as usual was characteristic. He wore a checked tweed suit of light brown, a straw hat, and an enormous chef's apron tied round his waist under his coat. Visions of fried bass or lunge, of potatoes *sauté*, and even of hot pancakes, danced before Ringfield's weary eyes, for he was both tired and cold, and accordingly he gaily pushed his way through the loiterers and fresh arrivals until he reached his host.

"Well, Poussette!" he cried, "I'm to be your man after all, it seems! They didn't want me in the West, I found, or rather I thought it wiser to come back and take advantage of your kind offer. I suppose you can put me up somewhere for to-night, and to-morrow we can talk the matter over."

The Frenchman had started violently on seeing Ringfield and a great change came over his manner. Where was the welcome the minister had looked for? On this fat, usually smiling countenance he could discern naught but astonishment, disappointment, anger!

What could have happened during that futile journey westward and back? Poussette vouchsafed no reply, no solution. He avoided the puzzled stare of the other man, and after giving some orders in French to Crabbe and the other guide, Martin, a very decent Indian, quickly went up to the house without greeting his guests.

Ringfield was suddenly seized with a sense of the ludicrous. He told himself that he managed to be *de trop* wherever he went, but he also firmly resolved that no temper, no caprice on his patron's part should affect him now. If possible he must remain at St. Ignace and ignore whatever had caused the singular change in Poussette's attitude. There was indeed fish for supper, but he fancied that the cunning touch of the chef was wanting, and he was right. Poussette had not entered the kitchen.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISSIONARY

"Nor is it a mean phase of rural life,
And solitude, that they do favour most,
Most frequently call forth and best sustain
These pure sensations."

The following day Ringfield's curiosity naturally ran high; he was entirely in the dark as to the peculiar treatment he had received at the hands of Poussette, and it followed that one strong idea shut out others. Miss Clairville's image for the time was obliterated, yet he remembered to ask Crabbe whether the letter had been safely delivered, to which the guide replied rather curtly in the affirmative. He supposed Pauline to be still at the manor-house, but the truth was, on the receipt of his letter a

sudden temper shook her; she wrote at once to M. Rochelle, her former manager in Montreal, requesting a place in his company, and the evening that brought Ringfield back to St. Ignace took her away.

There were symptoms of thaw stirring in Poussette, and the minister did his best to encourage them, but on the Saturday afternoon following his return, when it was necessary to hold some sustained business conversation with his patron, the latter could not be found. The bar was a model of Saturday cleanliness, damp and tidy, smelling equally of lager beer and yellow soap. Fresh lemons and newly-ironed red napkins adorned the tall glasses ranged in front of Sir John A. Macdonald's lithograph, and the place was dark and tenantless, save for Plouffe, a lazy retriever, stretched at the door. The dining-room was abandoned, the general room was full of children engaged in some merry game, but otherwise the place wore that air of utter do-nothingness which characterizes a warm afternoon in the country. Yet Ringfield persevered and at last heard familiar accents from the "store" across the road, a kind of shack in which a miscellaneous collection of groceries, soft drinks, hardware and fishing appliances were presided over by the man called Crabbe. Ringfield crossed, and found the two men lolling on chairs; Poussette slightly drunk and Crabbe to all appearances decidedly so. The place was of the roughest description; it had no windows but an open space occupied by a board counter on which were boxes of cigars, bottles, a saucer of matches and the mail, duly sorted out for the inhabitants by Crabbe, who was supposed to be a person of some importance and education, and postmaster as well as guide. As Ringfield paused at this aboriginal place of barter, not far removed from the rough shelter up the road under the trees where some Indians held camp and displayed their grass and quill wares on planks supported by barrels, he was struck by the sight of his own name. There in front of him lay the missing telegram which Mr. Beddoe had dispatched to Montmagny nearly a fortnight before. He took the folded yellow paper up and put it in his pocket—no need to open it there and then.

"How long has this been here?" he asked, but Crabbe only moved uneasily in his chair, reaching sideways in a pretence of arranging boxes underneath the improvised counter, his hands shaking so that the goods tumbled out of them.

Poussette laughed and swore, yet a gleam of good nature seemed to illumine his puffy face, and Ringfield, catching at this ray of kindness, hoped he had come at the right moment.

"Why, Poussette!" he said. "I'm sorry to see you neglecting a good business like yours in this manner.—Get up, man, and walk along the road with me. Where is the fun, or glory, or enjoyment of this muddling and tipping—I am ashamed of you! Come on, I say!"

But Poussette was hard to move; Crabbe, on the other hand, rose and shuffled out of doors in the direction of the forest; Ringfield thought he saw Madame Poussette's skimp skirts behind a tree; presently she emerged and stood talking to the guide.

"Come now, Poussette! There's your wife. Don't let her see you like this. Then there's Father Rielle."

"Where?" Poussette rose, superstitious fears of the village *curé* giving him strength and aiding his resolution.

"Nowhere at present. But he's coming to tea. The cook told me he was."

"What cook? I'm the cook!"—with great dignity.

"No, no. You are cook extraordinary, when you wish it. I mean Frank, who gets the wood and keeps the fire going, who cooks under you—you know well enough whom I mean. Now, are you coming?"

Poussette allowed himself to be hauled out of the shack and presently he and Ringfield were walking up the road.

"I've got to get you sober for to-morrow, you see. To-morrow's Sunday and I want to know about the music. If we are going to introduce our hymns to St. Ignace, you must help me to find some one to play the harmonium. Better be a lady. Do you know any one?"

But Poussette was not following. The mention of the priest had awakened a flood of memory.

"Father Rielle—I don't know if I like that one or not. One's enough, you're enough, Mr. Ringfield. Give Father Rielle a drink and let him go."

"I'm not talking about Father Rielle at all just now. I'm talking about our church and some one to play for us. And look here, Poussette, this returning of mine wasn't my own doing. I want you to know this. The man who wrote to me telegraphed afterwards—here's the message in my pocket—and you see I never got it. I'm here now and we must make the best of things. That fellow Crabbe mislaid the

message or detained it knowingly, I can't tell which, and I don't like him, Poussette, I don't like his looks at all. He's a low fellow, always drunk, and if I were you I wouldn't be seen going about with him. I'm astonished at you, Poussette, with such a good business, two good businesses, you may say, well-to-do and prosperous as you are, keeping such a fellow on the premises. For I suppose he rents the shack from you. Well, I know I wouldn't have him round the place at all."

Poussette wagged his head in imbecile accord.

"Low fellow—Crabbe—*marche donc*—get off, *animal*, don' come my place 'tall."

"You know I'm talking *right*, Poussette. Get rid of Crabbe. And sober up now, man; don't let folks see you like this."

Ringfield put his arm through the other's and led him aside under a thick canopy of trees as a party of fishermen and Martin came along.

"Look here—I'll make a pillow for you, here, out of these balsam twigs! You lie down—that's it—and get a good sound sleep. Got a cigar? And a light? That's all right. Now, you sleep—yes, don't bother about the smoke now—just go to sleep and when you wake up, have your smoke, clear your head, shake yourself and show up at tea-time, straight and sober as I am! You'd better! Father Rielle's over for tea. You wouldn't like him to see you like this!"

Poussette collapsed on the improvised balsam couch, but managed to remark that he would not get up on account of Father Rielle, nor give him anything good to eat.

"Why, I thought you liked him! Liked his good opinion, anyway!"

"Beeg liar! Beeg rascal! I like you, Mr. Ringfield, when you don' take away my girl. You leave my bes' girl alone and I like you—first rate. Bigosh—excuses, I'll just go to sleep—for—while."

Ringfield rose from the ground and sighed. He earned his livelihood pretty hard when such scenes came into his life. Pastoral slumming, one might term it, for he had only just laid Poussette respectably to rest when he encountered Crabbe, lurching dully along the road, and at the sight of him Poussette's extraordinary remark about his "best girl" came back. What possible connexion could have suggested itself to Poussette between the faded sickly creature he called his wife and the visitor from Ontario? Ringfield thought it not unlikely that Poussette was confusing him with Crabbe, for to-day was not the first time he had seen the woman wandering in the proximity of the shack. However, Crabbe gave him no opportunity for ministerial argument or reasoning, for as soon as he perceived the other he turned, and straightening in his walk very considerably, soon disappeared in the forest.

Ringfield was thus thrown on his own resources after all, and in thinking over the question of the Sunday music, not unnaturally was led to associate Miss Clairville with it. He did not know her to be exactly musical, but he gathered that she could sing; at all events, she was the only person he had met in St. Ignace capable of making arrangements for a decorous and attractive service, and he resolved to see her and ask for her co-operation. Thus again he was drawn by inclination and by a steady march of events along the road that led to Lac Calvaire. Arrived at the *métairie* he was told of Pauline's departure for Montreal, and also that Henry Clairville was confined to his bed by a severe cold. Some new awkwardness led Ringfield over the threshold; the old Archambault woman who had attended the front door threw open another on her left hand, and the next moment he found himself in what must have been once the *salon* of the family. The furniture was of faded tapestry; a spinning-wheel, an armoire of dark mahogany, miniatures, one very old and very ugly oil painting of some mythological subject, cracked with age, the gilt frame thick with fly-specks; a suit of Court clothes hung ostentatiously on a common nail—these were the impressions he received as he sat waiting to hear whether the Sieur would see him.

Suddenly he started. The woman had closed the door, the room had been empty when he entered it and yet—there were three cats in front of his chair! Where had they come from? The window was closed, how had they got in? Watching, Ringfield saw what greatly astonished him, for presently the cats walked towards the door and a miracle appeared to happen! They not only walked towards it but through it, and he was ignorant of the apparent cause of the miracle until observing the door very closely he discovered a little door down at the bottom, a cat door through which they were in the habit of calmly passing back and forth at will. Another cat door appeared in the hall where he stood a minute later before being shown out, for Mr. Clairville would not receive him, and nothing more impressed him with the idea of being in a strange house given over to strange people than the knowledge of a system of little doors cut in the big ones for the use of a dozen cats.

Once more on the road, Ringfield experienced that sense of frustration inseparable from first love. He had been so confident of seeing Miss Clairville once again, and now, as he learned from the servant, it

might be Christmas before she would return, and despite his resolutions, he knew he should be very lonely indeed, without any congenial soul in the village, for a period of four months. He roused himself, however, to think of the morrow's duties, particularly of the music, and at tea that evening he found the person he wanted through the kind offices of Father Rielle, who was a very liberal Catholic, well acquainted with the whole countryside and who could ask, as he said, in eloquent broken English, nothing better than co-operation in good works with his young Methodist *confrère*. Poussette was present at the evening meal, rather pale and subdued and pointing with the pride of a true *chef* to the omelettes which were his alone to make by special dispensation, and after supper Ringfield walked out to the great Fall, remaining till it was dark and late—so late that he knew no one would pass that way. Then he knelt on a slab of rock and lifted up his voice in this wise:—

"O Lord," he began, "look down on Thine unworthy servant. Help him and guide his footsteps aright. He has returned to this place and to this people. Assist him to preach the truth of the Gospel in the wilderness and to those who know Thee not. Make him kind and keep him humble. Give him light and understanding that he may be acceptable in this place and that he may witness for Thee and for the Gospel, and that his labours may be blessed and the harvest thereof indeed be great." He paused, his eyes opening on the white wilderness of the Fall. Knowing that the roar of its foaming waters would drown his voice he did not scruple to use his fine, sonorous tones to the full, and went on again: "Strip from Thy servant, O God Most High, all that savours of self. Strike at sin if it lodgeth in him; cause him to remember now his Creator in the days of his youth. Grant him wisdom in dealing with the froward, and may Thy Holy Spirit descend in this solemn evening hour and be with him now through the watches of the night and to-morrow when he rises to plead Thy righteous cause. For Christ's sake, Amen."

The mixture of the orthodox circuit style with an occasional direct and colloquial abruptness made this prayer worthy of record, and after silent meditation under the dark, swaying pine-trees, Ringfield, braced by temporary abandonment of self, returned to Poussette's. As he rose from his knees, however, something rolled down several ledges of rock and he promptly went after it and picked it up. It proved to be a book, not very large, and opening easily, but there was no light to view it by, and it was not until he came near the village windows that he discovered it to be, much to his astonishment, a well-worn copy of Tennyson's Poems. On the fly-leaf were the initials "E. C. H." and underneath, the word "Oxford" and date "1873". Ringfield took it up to his room; some tourist had probably dropped it, and it was safer with him than with Poussette. But when had an Oxford man passed that way?

CHAPTER VII

THE OXFORD MAN

"Here Nature was my guide,
The Nature of the dissolute; but Thee,
O fostering Nature! I rejected..."

Ringfield, now committed to his duty at St. Ignace, was experiencing that reaction which must always follow upon a sudden change in the affairs of life when the person concerned has a tendency towards the reflective. The absence from the manor house of that interesting personality, Miss Clairville, threw him altogether on the society of the village, but, apart from Poussette, who had become mysteriously friendly again, the two individuals most in need of his ministrations were Mme. Poussette and the shambling guide, Edmund Crabbe, in whom were the dregs of a being originally more than the preacher's equal. Old world distinctions would seem to be of small account in such a hamlet as St. Ignace and yet questions of caste were felt even there.

Crabbe, the owner of the "Tennyson," was that melancholy wraith of breeding, a deteriorated gentleman, spoken of in whispers as an "Oxford man," slouching along the winding country road, more or less in liquor, with the gait and air of a labourer, yet once known as the youngest son of a good county family. Few would have recognized in the whiskered bear-eyed, stumbling creature an educated Englishman of more than middle-class extraction. In drink an extraordinary thing occurred. He then became sober, knew himself, and quoted from the classics; when sober, he was the sullen loafer, the unmannerly cad, and his service as guide alone redeemed him from starvation and neglect. Ringfield, who had seen him, as he supposed, drunk on the Saturday afternoon when Miss Clairville's departure had been made known, concluded to call upon him at his shack a few days later, and was considerably surprised to find the place roughly boarded up, while sounds of talking came from a shanty at the back. The latter was on the plumed edge of an odorous hemlock wood; squirrels and

chipmunks ran, chattering, hither and thither in quest of food, and a muskrat, sitting on a log near the water, looked unconcernedly at Ringfield as he stood, hesitating, for a few seconds. While he thus remained, a boy came along, looked at the "store" and scudded away; then came a little girl, and, finally, one of the maidservants from Poussette's. Muttering her annoyance, she too waited for a while and was on the point of going away, when the door of the cabin opened, and Crabbe looked out. He held himself erect, he had shaved, his faded *negligé* shirt was clean and laced with blue—a colour that matched his eyes, and his voice had a certain expressive and even authoritative drawl in it.

"No supplies to-day, my good people," he said, affecting to suppose Ringfield a customer. "Call to-morrow, or—ah—the next day. Sorry to inconvenience you, but I've had to take a few hours off, writing letters to the Old Country, asking about my remittance and so forth. So I can't attend to business."

In these polite if slightly satirical cadences there was the element of superiority; the woman and the girl faded away, while Ringfield hardly knew how to proceed.

"I have come over just for a chat," he finally said, "if you are not too much engaged. I have a good deal of time on my hands, and I'm trying to get to know the people around. I am speaking to Mr. Crabbe, I think?"

"You are not sure, eh? Want to apologize for calling me a low fellow to mine host Poussette, I expect! Well, come in and have your chat. I'm not much in favour of clergymen, but then—you're only a Methodist, I hear. You don't count."

He shut the door, after piloting the other in, and led the way into a sort of dining and living room, in the middle of which was a long, narrow table covered with white oilcloth, graced by a monster bouquet of wild-flowers, grasses and ferns at the end; at the other end was a tumbler and a bottle and Ringfield saw clearly enough that it held whisky. Yet he did not comprehend that Crabbe was drunk, while the bold, blue eyes, the erect stature and the loud voice did not make a single suspicion. Indeed, surprise and pity worked in him a kind of false modesty.

"I certainly should never have used that expression. My defence is, that Poussette, though a good fellow, is rough, and difficult to impress in English, you understand, especially when he is about half-tipsy himself!"

Looking around, the sight of faded photographs of English scenes on the wall, of a large lithograph of Tennyson and of many well-bound books and other evidences of refinement, led Ringfield to say, in vague apology, "If I had known——"

"Known what?" said Crabbe in loud, dictatorial, dangerous tones, all shiftiness gone. "That I was a gentleman, eh? Well, gentle is as gentle does, I suppose, and I've never scored anywhere, so here I am, here I *am*, Ringfield (bringing his hand down on the table) that's your name, I believe—and I've not worn so badly all these years. From Oxford to Manitoba; then robbed and ruined by a shark of a farming agent, damn him, down here to this wilderness and hole of a Quebec Province for a change. For keeps, I imagine."

He went round the table and poured out some whisky, drank it off raw, and still Ringfield did not understand. He thought this was the sober phase, the other, the drunken one, and feeling his way, ventured on general topics.

"Well, I'm here too by a curious twist of circumstances. I'm a 'varsity' man—Toronto, you know—and might look for something different from St. Ignace."

"You're a what?" cried the other. "O Lord!" and a strange kind of rude contempt filled the rich cadences with which he spoke, so different from the surly repression of his ordinary tone.

"O I see!" he drawled presently. "I'm an Oxford man myself—worse luck—and much good it's done me; hope you've benefited more thereby. What disgusting rot, Ringfield, filling us up with Horace and Virgil, and then sending us out to a land like this! I'm the youngest of five; there was nothing left for me at home, and then there was fuss about a woman—there always is."

"Is there?" echoed the other sweetly, determined not to be annoyed. "Don't lay everything at their door. Our mothers, Crabbe, our sisters——"

The Englishman suddenly ran amuck, as it were.

"In God's name, Ringfield, drop that! I can see you know nothing about it, nothing about life or women—God, Ringfield, women are the Devil! If I thought you'd listen and not preach——"

The other's hand, which had been lifted in horror and deprecation, came down again.

"I don't care to listen," he said, "but I can gather your meaning—all the same! Don't take any more of that vile stuff, you'll make yourself drunk. Here——" and then, with sudden fury, the preacher grabbed the bottle, threw it out of the window among the debris of rotting fruit and rusty cans and faced the Englishman.

For a moment Crabbe looked, spat, and swore like a fiend; then he collapsed into his chair, though still gazing at Ringfield with those full, rolling eyes and that hateful, superior smile.

"I'll hear anything you have to tell about yourself," continued Ringfield, "but I won't listen to tales of other people, men or women. And what's the use of telling me about yourself? That won't do any good. Put it all back in the past, man; put it all away. Now is your accepted time, now is your day of salvation, right here, this moment. But I won't preach to you. I won't vindicate my calling and talk religion, as you'd call it, in this place and at this hour, because I see you're not ready. I thought you were sober. Now I see my mistake, and now, I don't know *how* to talk to you. I don't know how to begin! I've never tasted the stuff myself—not even a glass of wine has ever passed my lips, and my mother, Crabbe, used to make home-made wine and give it to us—all but me. I wouldn't taste it. If I understood the fascination of it, if I could follow the process, if I could sympathize at all with you, then I might appreciate the difficulty and realize the force of the temptation. But I can't! Other vices, take theft or treachery, or cowardice, or insubordination; the seed of hatred suffered to grow till the black Death Flower of Murder be born; covetousness, sins of temper, all these I understand. And in some degree those other temptations to which you have alluded."

A slight wave of colour surged in the young minister's cheeks. Crabbe was apparently beyond impressing. He sat and whistled, looking wisely at his nails. The loss of the whisky did not trouble him, for he remembered where he had a second bottle hidden, and a small quantity yet remained at the bottom of the tumbler, unnoticed by Ringfield. But presently he broke out again.

"As for women," he cried thickly, as if he had not heard the other's latest speech. "I've had enough of them, too much, as I said before. You be warned, Ringfield! You keep out of trouble! I wouldn't swear that I did not take to drink on account of them, and then, look here—the trouble followed me out to this country, even to St. Ignace, even to this hut and hole. What d'ye think of that?"

"Why, who is there here?" exclaimed Ringfield, but as he spoke he had a vision; the foolish wife of Poussette seemed to come along the path, chanting as she came some minor French refrain and tapping at the uncared for window as she passed. She might have been attractive once, and Crabbe was not a very young man now. Some graces she must have had; a way of catching at the side of her skirt, suggesting a curtsy; plenty of fair hair and a child's smile playing at the corners of her mouth—not so foolish then. But wise or foolish, she had been another man's wife, unless he had encountered her in her maiden days, which seemed improbable.

"I cannot think," went on Ringfield, striving to shut this vision out, "how women, any woman, plain or fair, sane or mad, could bring herself to care for you,—and not because,—hear me, Crabbe, you are beyond caring about. God forbid!—but because your form of vice must ever be so distasteful to a woman. And then you are all wrong about your surroundings. You are, you have been, at least, a man of education, and yet you call this a hut and a hole. It is you who make it so! You vilify, where you might ennoble. You defile where you should enrich and keep pure. You are set here, in the midst of the most beautiful scenes of Nature, scenes that cannot be matched anywhere in the world, and yet you despise them and use them for your own undoing and that of others. Nature lies at your door and you are answerable for your treatment other."

Crabbe laughed surlily. "She's no business lying—where'd you say—at my door. Nature, always Nature! Much good it's done me, Nature, and all that rubbish. I hate it, I hate and abhor it, Ringfield. That's what makes me drink. Too much Nature's been my ruin. I'd be sober enough in a big town with lively streets and bustle and riot and row. I wouldn't drink there. I'd show them the pace, I'd go it myself once more and be d——d to all this rot and twaddle about Nature! Nature doesn't care for me. So careful of the type she seems, but so careless of the single life. She doesn't bother her head about me, or you, or Henry Clairville or Pauline!"

He paused, and Ringfield shivered with sudden poignancy of recollection. What right had this miserable scion of good family, so fallen from grace, so shaken and so heartless, to call the lady of Clairville Manor by her Christian name?

"Or Mme. Poussette!" said the minister hurriedly, but with meaning, as he pronounced the name, his voice trembling in spite of himself. "Nature, it is true, does not care for any of us. Nature will let you starve, get drunk, go mad. Therefore, we need a greater than Nature. Therefore, having this committed

unto us we speak as——"

"O Mme. Poussette!" interrupted Crabbe, pouring the contents of the tumbler down his throat. "Shall I get you some? No? Well, I don't blame you, don't blame you. Mme. Poussette, poor creature! I have heard she was pretty once. That was before I came, before—God's truth this, Ringfield—before I taught her husband to drink deep."

"I might have known!" escaped from the other. "Our own people rarely drink—like you."

"He was no innocent! He tumbled, tumbled. Then I came along and set up my sign, Edmund Crabbe Hawtree, Esquire; no, we'll drop the last and stick to E. Crabbe without the Esquire, d——n it! Lord! what a mess I've made of it, and this rankles, Ringfield. Listen. Over at Argosy Island there's a slabsided, beastly, canting Methodist Yankee who has a shop too. Must copy the Britisher, you see. Must emulate—gentleman."

His sentences were beginning to be less clear now. His head was falling forward. "Well! then—this fine fellow does well out of *his* shop; sets up another down the river and yet another over at Beausoley. He's made money! He's rich, married, and has a big family. Why don't I make money, Ringfield, and get away from here? Why don't you make money and not go about preaching? Eh? So careless of the single life! Who said that? Whoever said that, knew what—was talking about. I know what I'm talking about. I'm a gentleman, that's what I am, Ringfield, and yet I can't make money."

The wagging head toppled—he fell over on the table. The fire and youth Ringfield had observed were gone and in their place were the decrepit tone and the surly animalism which one associated with the guide. Here, then, thought the young and impressionable minister, is the living result of two corroding vices; the man is a sot, but something beside the lust for liquor has helped to make him one. He has followed after sin in the shape of his neighbour's wife, and perhaps the latter's decline may be traced to the working of remorse and the futile longing after a better life.

As he was thus thinking, the vision of his thought actually flitted past the window without turning her head. Still with those thin hands picking at her shabby skirts and with that tremulous smile she emerged from the wood and Ringfield heard her singing long after the rustling of the closely arched branches had ceased. Crabbe seemed to be dropping asleep when Ringfield touched him on the arm and tried again to reason with him.

"Tell me, I ask it for your own good and for that of the poor unfortunate woman who has just gone by, tell me what there is between you, how far the matter went, how long ago it was. Tell me, and I will help you perhaps to get away, leave this place and all in it. That would be the best thing. Come, Crabbe, I'll believe in you if you've lost belief in yourself. Can I, can anyone, do more than that?"

The Englishman rallied, passed a hand across his brow, then rose unsteadily to his feet, looking around the cabin. Habit called for a drink at this juncture and he saw nothing to drink. Anger awoke in him; he grew maniacal, dangerous, and the late September shadows filled the room.

"What woman do you mean?" he cried. "*In vino veritas!* You thought I was sober. So I was. Sober enough before you, the preacher, to know that I'm getting drunk rapidly, beastly drunk too, and being so, and the gentleman I am, or meant to be, I don't thank you for interference in my affairs. What woman are you thinking of? What woman passed my window?"

"Mme. Poussette."

The guide's face stared, then broke into unmistakable and contemptuous laughter.

"Didn't I tell you I was a gentleman? You've made a big mistake, Ringfield. Even in my deterioration" (he had difficulty with this word) "I remember who I am, and I don't go after married women. Matrimony's one of the Church's sacraments, Ringfield, isn't it? Perhaps not; I have forgotten. Anyway, Mme. Poussette is the wife of my best friend, my best friend I tell you, and whoever cares for her faded hair and finicking ways it isn't I. Sweeter pastures once were mine. Have I named the lady of my choice or have I not? The gay Pauline, the witty Pauline, the handsome Pauline! Ah! You admire her yourself. You wrote her a letter. I gave it to her and we read it together and laughed at it. 'Yours in Christ.' Ha-ha! We laughed at it, Ringfield."

Even in his foolish insults he paused, for an awful expression appeared for a moment on the other's face. In that moment Ringfield realized what Miss Clairville had become to him. No one can bear to hear his love traduced, and he believed that in his cups this villain, Crabbe, was lying. They faced each other and Ringfield was not the cooler nor the saner of the two.

"Pauline! Miss Clairville! What can she be to you? Hanger on of womanly footsteps," burst from him,

scarcely knowing what words formed in his brain and emptied themselves upon the darkening air of the cabin. "Stealthy and gloating admirer of her beauty, even the despised companion and disloyal friend of her brother—all these you may be, but surely nothing more to her."

"What I am to her I know well enough and can tell you easily enough. She's done with me, hates and fears me, won't have anything to do with me, and yet she belongs to me and I'm not likely to forget it. And I belong to her. That's another reason why I wouldn't go after Mme. Poussette."

"You mean—that she is, that you are—oh! impossible! You mean—what do you mean? Not that you are married to her?"

Extreme agony and repulsion gave shrillness to Ringfield's voice. To have met and loved, to have coveted and dreamed of that warm, imperious yet womanly presence, and to hear this dreadful truth concerning her—if it were the truth.

"Well, you've guessed it. Yes, married to her, by heaven!" said Crabbe, and he lurched forward and fell.

Ringfield saw and heard him fall, but he was already out of the shack and speeding through the forest paths; dim arcades of larch and pine met over his head while upon the river and the great Fall were stealing long bars of bright silvery light from the level sun. Soon the silver would mellow to gold as the daily marvel of the sunset was accomplished, but Ringfield was beyond such matters now. Nature could do no more for him in this crisis than it had done for Edmund Crabbe, and the virginity, the silence and fragrance of the noble wood, brought him no solace. Yet as he sped he could not choose but breathe and the air filled his breast and then fed his mind so that presently coming upon a glade or opening in which was a large slab of grey lichened rock he lay down at length to think. And that Nature which could do nothing for him spiritually in this hour of trial conspired to comfort and restore him physically. He could not pray. His accustomed resources had failed him; instead, as it grew quite dark around, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

THE "PIC"

"How dreadful the dominion of the impure!"

The September days gave place to October ones and still Miss Clairville remained away. The tourists had departed and Ringfield could judge more accurately of the mental and moral status of the countryside. The congregation of Sunday scarcely numbered two score, but Amable Poussette and wife were always present and the rule seemed to be that any who had tired of Father Rielle came to Ringfield whether they understood him or not; poor Catholics were thus in danger of becoming even worse Methodists, and he exerted all his faculties and talents in general directions concerning conduct and character. The beautiful skies and water, the rocks and great Fall, were as impressive as before, but they no longer filled so much space in the mind of the young preacher, who now saw all things in the visible universe from the standpoint and through the jaundiced eye of the disappointed and unhappy lover. All Nature mocked him and it would go hard indeed with him should religion, too, fail him in such a juncture, but the spirit of work and priestly endeavour kept him as yet from sheer wretchedness; he prayed daily to think less of the world and more of his calling and it seemed as if the fate which brought him back to St. Ignace to love and suffer in loving would spare him further, since there was no sign of Miss Clairville's return. His preaching could not fail, because he brought to it a fine original gift and an automatic precision and certainty resulting from the excellent training of his Church, but between Sundays the time dragged. His labours among the few scattered and uneducated families of conflicting race and origin seemed unconvincing and empty, and a new shyness possessed him; he disliked hearing any mention of the Clairvilles, for Crabbe's story he had come to accept as true without a word of questioning; indeed, Miss Clairville's own words came back to him as a proof.

"Another patient of the soul," she had said. Also, she had referred to something dark and of sinister import, fatal yet compelling, which always drew her back from livelier and more congenial places, and, as he judged, from a sphere of work which paid, to the house at Lac Calvaire. That the society of her brother was the attraction, Ringfield could not admit, and what other ties or friends had she? So far as he could learn—none, and thus he read her story; growing up unprotected and motherless, without any

standard to judge by, she must have accepted the attentions and fallen under the spell of a man who probably appealed to her pity and also to her intellect. Crabbe had been the only man in the neighbourhood capable of understanding her cultivated allusions; the remnants of the mixed education she had drawn from the school at Sorel and the pedantic dreary associations of the manor house. But in the contemplation of such a thing as her marriage to such a man Ringfield's fancy failed. The whole plan of creation was altered and blackened. He did not wish to know on what terms Pauline and this man now met. He tried to shut out all the images such a story conveyed, and thus he asked no questions nor did he hear any gossip, proving that the affair was old, and if once known to the country people, accepted and forgotten. Why could he not treat it in the same fashion? His faith was not shaken in the sense of belief in a Supreme Being, but he no longer lived so much for and by his faith; Nature and God were put back in the past, as he had said to Crabbe, and all his thought was for the duty of the hour and for the guidance and sustenance of others. He imagined he had lowered his own dignity by writing, on the first impulse of desperate first love, the letter which Crabbe had read with Pauline, and he strove to regain that clerical calm and judicial bearing that had suffered so violent a shock. But when six weeks of this repressed existence had sped and autumnal winds were sweeping down from the glacial north of Terrebonne, bringing cold rains and occasional snow flurries with them, he felt that he must at least call at the manor to inquire after Henry Clairville. Little at any time was heard of the latter except when "Ma'amselle" returned to her native heath, at which times the Archambaults were whipped into work and obedience by the forcible tongue and stormy temper of their mistress. Messages and parcels then passed between the domain and the village; Father Rielle made his call and the whole village and *paroisse* quickened with energy under Pauline's determined sway. Crabbe—this Ringfield heard from Poussette—was also sent about his business; he was no longer encouraged to play cards and drink with Henry, who fared as he might at the hands of the tyrant family swarming all over the estate.

On a chilly October day, Ringfield once again traversed the muddy road leading to Lac Calvaire, his heart sore over the revelation that had reached him, and he could not repress a painful sigh as he came in sight of the *métairie*. The lake was dull grey, the maples were shedding their leaves without painting them red and yellow, and the pines looked unusually sombre against a pale and cheerless sky. A pair of kingfishers were flying from side to side of the road, and a forked object sailing high up in the air proclaimed itself a bird, otherwise there was no sign of life till, approaching the front of the *métairie*, he observed the peacock taking its airing in a neglected garden.

Nothing had affected the pose and splendour of this radiant creature as it paraded up and down, gently swaying its lustrous and shimmering tail; the drooping fortunes of the house were not reflected in its mien or expression, and it was not until Ringfield was met by four lean cats prowling about him in evident expectation of food and petting that he descried unusual neglect in the appearance of house and garden. Three ugly blotched and snorting pigs ran out from under some bushes and followed him. He saw no smoke arising, no face at any window, heard no lively bustle in the farm-yard, no amusing and contentious chatter in Canadian French from the barns and out-buildings which sheltered the various members of the Archambault family. A curious feeling rushed over him and with it a conviction—the place was deserted. He went at once to the chain of farm buildings and examined them all; all were empty, with every sign of hurried and agitated flight rather than of orderly and complacent departure. The horses were gone, the two wagons and buggy, the buckboard. Traces of fright and apprehension were met at every step; a dirty hairbrush dropped on the ground; a clock abandoned on a bench outside the door as if too heavy; tins opened and rifled of their contents; a tub half full of soiled clothes in foul water. All these he saw, scarcely taking in their meaning, until returning to the manor he opened the front door and went in. There in the usual place he found Henry Clairville, alive, and no more. Still clad in the greasy dressing-gown and still seated in the tattered arm-chair, the unfortunate man was clearly very ill. Patches appeared on his face, which was both pallid and flushed; his neck showed red and sore and his body hung down limply over the side of the chair. Evidently he had tried to get to his bed which stood in a corner, and failed. His eyes were staring and full, yet glassy; sense and recognition alike were wanting, while the delirious accents which escaped now and then from his parched lips were altogether in French. In short, Ringfield, though unaccustomed to disease, knew that the man before him was very ill, of what did not enter his head, although there came to his mind a description of the plague in a boy's story-book. He did what he could, singlehanded, which was to snatch some warm clothing from the bed, cover up the sufferer so that draughts might not reach him, fetch water and leave it on the table near the chair and see that all animals were excluded. He then quickly sought for a secluded spot near the lake, hung his own clothes about on branches to air, and took a plunge into the clean, cool water, after which he was ready to return to St. Ignace and get assistance.

Dr. Renaud, the village practitioner, drove out at once, taking a woman with him, who, as soon as she learned she had to deal with the "Pic" ran screaming from the house, thus clearing up the mystery of the Archambaults.

"They knew," said Ringfield, "and I didn't. But I guessed something of the kind and took the only precaution open to me. I washed in pure water. And now what are we to do? Has M. Clairville no one belonging to him but his sister?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Dr. Renaud, who spoke good English, "and we do not wish her to return."

"Certainly not."

"Then I can only think of one person in the village."

"A nurse?"

"Not a professional nurse, but, as I say, the only person I know of close at hand who can do what is necessary until we get a nurse, if the man lives to require one. A male nurse would be better, but who is there here? No. I am thinking of the right one if I can only get her, if I can only get her?"

"She lives in the village?" Ringfield was curious; he thought he had met every one in the village, yet here was some paragon of female skill, virtue and strength with whom he was not acquainted.

"You must have met her. Of course you know her. I speak of Mme. Poussette. Ah! You shall smile and you shall frown, but you shall see what a miracle she can work! You shall yet envy this sick seigneur. Madame is noted for her care of the sick and dying. You are surprised? Yes?"

"I cannot help it. Anyone would be. She looks so frail, so delicate, and surely she is also what we call afflicted, peculiar. Is she a fit and sensible person for a case like this?"

"Ah! Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the doctor with a slight impatience. "These afflicted ones, these peculiar ones—they are still capable of something. Many times have I seen it; the old, old tottering *grandmère*, the crazy aunt, the bad-tempered husband, even the inebriate, can find, when they are guided, work which suits and maintains them. Even when the mind is shaken, if it is only a little, just a little, to care for others, a bird or a cat, or a sick person, this will keep the wits steady. A case like this moreover!" repeated Dr. Renaud, laying his finger to his nose. He was round, jolly, bow-legged, and brusque, with pronounced features overstrong for his height, merry eyes, and a red birthmark. "This is the case. We are, you and I and presently Father Rielle, responsible for M. Clairville. He must not be moved except to his bed; he is too far gone for more. The wife of Poussette is, to my knowledge, the only person we can get to sit here, administer drink and medicine, make him comfortable. Well, not even she can do that but—you *comprenez*. And she is capable, I know her well. She is as she is" (and the doctor made the sign of the Cross), "yet she is worth ten saner women, for she has no nerves, no fears, no imagination. Tell her what to do, place her here to do it, and she will not fail; I have seen her a dozen times in the village nursing sick women and their babies. She's as good as most doctors and better than most nurses. Yes, yes, we will get madame to him at once."

"But she may take it!"

"I think not. Her body like her mind is purged of all evil humours, *mon ami*. She is already more than half spirit and waits in peace for old age and quiet decay."

Ringfield got into the doctor's buggy in silent surprise.

"Besides, if she did take it, and it killed her, I cannot see any great calamity. I will tell you her history. She was well educated at a good convent near Montreal; her father was a doctor, as I am, but a far cleverer one. Yes, I lift the *chapeau* to that one, that old Dr. Pacquette as regards the great art and science of medicine. But as a father—ah! God pity him where he is now, according to our belief, in purgatory for many long years to come. *Bien!* Dr. Pacquette had lost his wife, and his daughter, a fairy thing, was allowed, even encouraged, to grow up as she pleases. They have grand friends in Montreal, her father's people still live on Rue St. Denis, great rich people; if you go there, drive out over the mountain and you shall see her old home, the Pacquette Château. Well, this Mme. Poussette when she is a girl (Natalie-Elmire-Alexandre, I don't give you all her name) she is very pretty, and the old doctor wish her to make a grand marriage, and he has every one up to the house and make a big time for them, and introduce her to all the young men, all the *rich* young men. But while she has been at that convent she has met with Amable Poussette, who was not so stout then, had a good figure and a lively tongue, and the end is, they are married at Ancien Lorette by a young priest, who might have known better. Some months after, she goes home to her father to be taken in and forgiven and nursed, for she has by this time a young infant about six weeks old. Well, you can perhaps imagine *le vieux* Pacquette when it is all explained. He is enraged, he drives her from his door, she passes all one long, cold night

in the snow outside the *château* on Cote des Neiges hill and when she is found by the servants two days later, she is as you see her, monsieur, and the baby is dead! Never again the bright little Natalie-Elmire, but instead, a pale, faded, vacant-eyed, timid woman. Ah! If I ever meet *le vieux* Pacquette in the next world!"

The doctor nodded his bald head sagaciously; as for Ringfield, he was thinking that here was the opportunity for which he unconsciously had been waiting, to ask for and probably receive Miss Clairville's equally dramatic story, when he beheld another buggy coming around a corner of the road driven recklessly by one of the Archambault boys and in the buggy sat mademoiselle herself. Her attire, always so different from village modes, was true on this occasion to her theatrical calling, for to Ringfield's eye at least she appeared like some Oriental personage, caught and brought home in native garb, coupled with a very bad temper. Red and black was her habit and black and red her eyes and angry compressed lips.

The doctor stood up in his buggy and Miss Clairville in hers, and, as for a quarter of an hour the excited talk was in rapid French, Ringfield could only gather that the doctor was endeavouring to restrain her from going to see her brother. At last, turning away from Renaud with an imperious wave of the hand, she addressed herself to the minister in English.

"I understand it is to you the doctor owes his knowledge of my poor brother's sickness. I only heard of it myself last night on the stage at eleven o'clock, but I came at once—look at me in all this sinful finery, I can see you are calling it! Oh, yes, you are. Well, now that I have come and thrown up my part and my place in the company in Montreal, he will not allow me to finish my journey and go on to Clairville!"

"Certainly, you must not think of going!" cried Ringfield. "On no account must you do such a thing. Do you know what is the matter with him?"

"Oh, the 'Pic' I suppose, but I'm not afraid of it."

"Yet you have not been vaccinated, I fear!"

"Who told you that? Dr. Renaud, I suppose. Of course. No! No one is ever vaccinated here, no good Catholics at any rate. Good orthodox ones, like myself."

The doctor frowned, for he disliked the tone of bravado in which these words were uttered.

"It's no question of faith. It's a question of common sense and precaution. I have charge of the case and I will not permit you or anyone else to cross the threshold of Clairville Manor."

"You would class me then with the Archambaults! My own people, who eat and drink at my expense and who turn their backs on me in the hour of trial! Poor Henry, it will finish him, I fear, yet I and none other must be there to nurse him. *Mon Dieu*, but it is a shame!"

"Silly girl!" snapped Renaud. "There is no nursing for you in this case. Assuredly, Mlle. Pauline, you do not enter the house, I cannot allow it. Besides, mademoiselle, you return home too late. If you remained at Clairville longer, and had the place cleaned out, and saw to it that it was kept clean, your brother might escape these sicknesses, but poor girl, poor girl, I find it hard to blame you. Antoine! turn back and drive to the village. Mademoiselle goes now along with us."

His allusions if they pained did not soften her, but it was at Ringfield she continued to look.

"I shall have no place to stay," she said poutingly.

"It's a pity you came at all," said the doctor. "They can find you a room at Poussette's."

"I will die sooner than go to that man's house. It is a common place, not fit for me."

"Come, come, you are excited. We know Poussette's weakness for a pretty face and a fine figure, but here is our new and true friend to look after you."

"Mine is not a pretty face, Dr. Renaud, and I prefer to look after myself. You do not understand, I am out of a position by coming here. I only heard last night that Henry was ill and I came at once, expecting to be in my own home; I did not know what was the sickness he had; I have left the theatre to come here and now I have nowhere to go."

Ringfield spoke at last.

"There need be no difficulty at all about your going to Poussette's, Miss Clairville. You will oblige me by taking my room, which is the largest and best in the house. As for me, I can do with anything. If you

wish I will go back to your house, sleep there in place of the servants, and keep you aware of all that goes on, of your brother's progress at least."

"Quite unnecessary," broke in the doctor testily. "I am in charge of this case, and one patient at one time is all I care for. Drive back, Antoine, to Poussette's, where you will leave ma'amselle. Drive quick, too, for I wish to see the carpenter, Alexis Gagnon, next door to M. Poussette, where I think a room can be got for Mr. Ringfield. Allons! we have wasted one good half-hour already!"

"You blame me of course for that!" said Pauline, still gazing at Ringfield, but talking to the doctor.

"Faith, I do," said the latter grimly, and she said no more.

In the Maison Pension of Alexis Gagnon, the village wag, carpenter and undertaker, Ringfield was accommodated with a room which had a balcony at the back looking on a square of Arctic garden, where amid circles and triangles of whitewashed stones the tobacco plant and some sunflowers lasted into the autumn. The news of monsieur's serious illness had now filtered through the parish, and Poussette's was full of men discussing the affair, as Pauline, looking like an outraged and defeated savage queen, passed into the hall, trailing her cheap red silken draperies up to Ringfield's room. The door to the bar was partly open; whisky was going round as supposed to be good to ward off the "Pic," and prominent in the noisy crowd was the shambling figure of Crabbe, who did not appear to notice Pauline, nor she him, and Ringfield, observing them both, could hardly bring himself to believe their extraordinary story. The brilliant if wayward actress, with her fine carriage and white hands, could never have belonged to that derelict of a man, lower even than the rough Frenchmen from the rafts and chantiers now demanding more "visky blanc". Yet in youth many things are possible, and the recital of Mme. Poussette's history seemed to prepare the way for Pauline's. Meanwhile Dr. Renaud had spoken to madame, and within an hour she was ready, and, being driven to Lac Calvaire, entered upon her labours without qualm or protest.

CHAPTER IX

PAULINE

"A conspicuous flower,
Whom he had sensibility to love,
Ambition to attempt and skill to win."

Thus the next day and for many days to come Ringfield met the lady of his dreams at breakfast and at dinner; her third meal was served privately to her in her own room at a quarter to seven, and he wondered why until he remembered her vocation. Though at present not acting she evidently retained the habits of the profession, and for the first few days she continued to wear the scarlet silken and spangled drapery in which she had left the theatre, modified by different wraps and scarves; then a trunk arrived and she appeared more discreetly and soberly clad. One evening it became unusually warm for the season, and stepping out on his balcony he perceived her seated on hers; he returned her gracious and encouraging salutation, wholly different from the self-conscious manner she affected at the dining-table, and he hoped now to be able to take up the acquaintance where it had been dropped. For his part he meant to ignore that miserable story of Crabbe's; he would treat her as the lady she was and the sincere, much-tried creature he thought her. Her mood just now chanced to be charming, and as she rose, again wearing the gay dress of the theatre, which showed her throat and elbows in their perfection, Ringfield, even with his slight experience, knew that she was beautiful. That same Nature which was so forced upon his notice in his new resting-place was strong within him this evening, and he could not refuse to harbour certain natural impulses of admiration and delight, especially as she was unusually animated in voice, expression and gesture.

"Do you not think it dreadful, Mr. Ringfield, that poor Mme. Poussette is alone with my brother all this time? Should I not be there too and take my share in some way? Oh, not in this dress of course; I understand your look. I have only put this on because it is cooler than any other I have with me. See—I have pinned up the train around me! I must not scandalize the country-folk! I may tell you this—the people of the village think me very peculiar. In their opinion I might mend my manners."

"Oh, *their* opinion!" came from Ringfield with a smile.

"Well, even here, even in St. Ignace, there is a standard, you see."

"Of manners? Yes, I suppose so. And of morality, let us hope."

"You are not certain? What have you found out, what departure from the standard in other places? *Mon—Dieu!* I hope not—you are thinking of Montreal and the Hotel-Champlain!"

"The chief vice I have encountered here," returned Ringfield firmly, "is drink, and as a result other things connected with it, ensuing naturally."

Miss Clairville sat down suddenly, and as she did so her draperies whorled about her till she looked like some crimson flower with her dark head for its centre. "Oh!" she said under her breath, "surely there are worse things than drink!" Some latent emotion betrayed itself in her voice; small wonder, he thought, if Crabbe were really anything to her.

"Certainly there are, but they are easier to deal with. There is my difficulty, for I know I am going to find it very difficult to make an impression, to work any lasting reform here."

"And you wish to?"

"I wish to if I can."

"I thought at first you were only a preacher."

He laughed. "Only a preacher! That conveys a great deal. You must have but a poor idea of my vocation, of the saving grace and special power of all true religion."

"Religion! But if religion can do so much, why would not Father Rielle succeed as well as you?"

"Ah! there you have a problem, I admit. Perhaps, however, he has been here too long; perhaps he is accustomed to the situation and is not so deeply impressed by it. Besides, I am not so much concerned with the habits of the rough fellows we see about here; as far as I can judge, the lumbermen, mill-hands, labourers, and people of the village are remarkably sober, considering the temptations and loneliness of the life and certain contingencies which prevail. For example, when you take two or three dozen uneducated men and isolate them for months in a lumber camp, or a mine, or send them to work on remote booms and rafts, depriving them of all family ties and Christian influences, and removing them from all standards of conduct and character, what wonder that you are confronted by this grave problem?"

"But I was not thinking of such cases. I was thinking rather of a successful man like Poussette, good-hearted, respected by all who know him, and yet so weak! So weak in this respect that he neglects his business and allows himself to be led into disgrace and humiliation by——"

"I never knew Mr. Poussette drank!" exclaimed Miss Clairville hurriedly. "I am quite surprised. He is such a kind man and a friend of Henry's, and Father Rielle thinks highly of him, although he no longer attends his church."

Ringfield was now satisfied that she had broken into his speech purposely to avoid the mention of the Englishman's name, but he determined to stand his ground.

"I was about to say that while I blame Poussette for his weakness I blame still more the individual who in my opinion has led him on. Living in the neighbourhood so long you must recognize the man I mean."

Her attitude did not in the least change, nor was her gay mood impaired, but she did not reply, and the silence was a challenge to him.

"I mean the unfortunate Englishman who runs that grocery and liquor shack across the road, who calls himself a gentleman, Crabbe, the guide. You know him?"

"I have seen him."

"You *know* him?"

Surprised, she answered less brightly: "Yes, I know him."

"You knew him better perhaps years ago? You knew him when he was master of himself, when he first came here. He is, he tells me, an English university man, and in the course of our conversation one day he quoted from 'In Memoriam' in the intervals of a semi-drunken confession."

He now had all her attention; she tried to maintain her proud air, but something was working in her to the exclusion of all coquetry, all dissimulation.

"If you know him so well, why—why come to me for information? Of course any one living here, as you say, must have met him."

"But he has spoken to me of you as if he knew you very well, as if——" He could not continue, and even in her own uneasiness she felt a pity and tenderness for him.

"Why do you bother yourself about us—about him, I mean? Or me. I shall be going away soon, I hope; you will not remain all your life in such a little place as St. Ignace; try and forget what he has said."

"I cannot. It is with me day and night. Tell me if it is true!"

"Why should I tell you?"

"Because I must know. Because, if a lie, such a tale must be traced back from where it came—the black imagination of a depraved and incorrigible villain. Because if true, if true——" his voice failed him, and although it was now quite dark, Miss Clairville could detect great excitement in his usually calm and pleasantly austere manner.

She leant to him over the balcony.

"But I cannot tell you here! I cannot go to you; will you then come to me? There will be none upstairs at this hour in this house; they are all gone to see the boat come in at the wharf. There is her whistle now! Would you mind coming very much, Mr. Ringfield? Do you think it wrong of me to ask you?"

"Wrong, Miss Clairville?"

"Improper, I mean. Even here there are the *convenances*, the proprieties."

"Proprieties! When we are talking of our immortal souls and of our hopes of salvation! When truth is at stake, your character, your future perhaps—think if that had been told to anyone else!" he exclaimed half to himself.

"Then you will come?" Miss Clairville's tone was full of a radiant incredulity. She leant still farther towards him, and her eyes burned into the surrounding darkness of the night.

"I will come at once. I—if I meet anyone I can say that I am calling on you to hear about your brother."

She smiled, then frowned, in the dark. Would it be her lot to teach a good man subtlety? Should she tell the truth? She had not long to wait or think about it, for in five minutes Ringfield was knocking at her door. Nothing subtle as yet looked forth from his earnest eyes, and the grasp with which he took and held her hand was that of the pastor rather than that of the lover, but the night was dark and heavily warm, and although there were stars in the sky he did not look at them. Jupiter was just rising, giving a large mellow light like a house lamp, round and strong, and casting a shadow, but the fall of a sable lock on Miss Clairville's white neck was already more to him. They were soon seated side by side on the balcony. She had regained something other usual manner.

"You must not think that I am ungrateful for your interest in me," she said. "I believe that you are a good man, a Christian I suppose you call yourself, outside and above all creed, all ritual, the first I have ever met. No, I am not forgetting Father Rielle. He did the best he could for me, and Henry and others, but I could never follow the rules of the Romish Church, although born and bred a Catholic. With grand music one might stay in that communion, but not as our service is rendered here. And then, the confession! That is all right when you have nothing to confess, but not for me! Oh—Mr. Ringfield, why is it I cannot confess to Father Rielle, but that I can or could to you?"

"Then that story is true?"

"What was the story? What did he say?"

They talked now in whispers, and Ringfield told her in four short and to him abhorrent words. "He said—you were his wife."

Great was his relief when Pauline, starting from her seat, almost screamed aloud her agitated reply.

"No, it is not true! I never married him. That is—at least—no, I entirely deny it. I am *not* his wife. I am *not* married to him."

In his state of mind and inexperience he failed to notice the equivocal nature of this denial. He heard the impassioned negatives; he saw fear, resentment, and a sort of womanly repulsion in the frightened gesture she flung upon the air, and what he wished to hear and prayed to hear, that he heard. Crabbe then had deliberately lied perhaps, considering his condition, he had only boastfully invented.

"Thank God!" he ejaculated, standing up and taking Miss Clairville's finely formed white hand in both of his own. "Thank God!" he repeated, and, with restored confidence and renewed enthusiasm in all good works, he seized the opportunity to speak of what was in his heart. "Now you must listen to me. I believe, I honestly believe, that by His all-wise and all-knowing ruling I have been sent here to help you and be your friend. That letter I wrote to you—you received it I know, for I heard about it. I went West from a sense of duty. I was not required, and again the sense of duty brought me back to St. Ignace and—you."

"Oh, not only me! You would have come back in any case. You say it was Duty, not,—not—" Not Desire? If this were thought in some vague and unapprehended shape, it was not spoken. Ringfield gave her hand a strong and kindly pressure and let it fall.

"It was duty, yes, duty revealed to me by my Maker, to serve and obey whom is not only my duty but my whole desire and pleasure."

"You really mean what you say in telling me this? It sounds like things we read, like the little books they gave us at Sorel-en-haut. *Mon Dieu!* but those little books! And one big one there was, a story-book about a girl, all about a girl. A girl called Ellen, Ellen something, I have forgotten."

"That must have been 'The Wide, Wide World'. And you read that while you were at school!"

"Yes, when I was a young girl. I am afraid it didn't do me much good."

These interchanges of simple talk marked the progress of their friendship. Any fact about her past or present life, no matter how trivial, was of astonishing interest to him. And to her, the knowledge that she was already and swiftly, passionately, purely dear to a being of Ringfield's earnest mould and serious mien, so different to the other man who had come into her life, gave a sense of delicious triumph and joy. They continued to talk thus, in accents growing momentarily more tender, of many things connected with her youth and his calling, and the fact that they kept their voices down so intimately lent additional zest and delight to the situation. Only when Ringfield alluded directly to Edmund Crabbe did she show uneasiness.

"You must give me the right to settle this affair with him," said her visitor. "We cannot risk such statements being made to people of the village, to such a man as Poussette, for example."

"Oh—Poussette!" Miss Clairville found it possible and even pleasant now to laugh. "Do you not know then all about Mr. Poussette? He is in love with me, too, or so he says. Yes, I have had a great deal of bother with him. That poor Mme. Poussette! It is not enough that one is faded and worn and has lost one's only little child, but one must also be *wished dead*, out of the way by one's husband. Ah—you are startled, *mais c'est la belle vérité!* It is a good thing to be a clergyman, like you, Mr. Ringfield; you are removed from all these *bêtises*, all these foolish imaginings. You do your work and look neither to the right nor the left. How I wish I were like you! I only pray, for I do pray sometimes, that no thought of me will ever darken your young and ardent life; I only hope that no care for me will ever turn you aside from your plain duty."

"Do not, please," broke in Ringfield, pushing back his chair so loudly that she was obliged to beg more caution, "use that tone to me. Twenty-six is not so very young. I should have spoken and felt as I feel and as I speak when I was twenty. So Poussette is added to your list of admirers! Will it be Father Rielle himself next, I wonder? Oh, Miss Clairville—I was right! The theatre is no place for you. I ask you to leave it, to forsake it for ever. This your opportunity. Do not go back to it. I do not, it is true, know anything about it from actual experience, but I can gather that it presents, must present, exceptional temptations. Will you not be guided by me? Will you not take and act upon my advice?"

"But the special troubles that beset me are here, not within the theatre! If Poussette is silly, with his ridiculous attentions when he thinks his wife is not looking, if the other person, if—"

"You mean this man Crabbe?"

She inclined her head; at the mention of the name all spirit seemed to die out of her.

"If he maligns me, slanders and lies about me, that is here—here at St. Ignace, and not at the theatre. Why, then, do you expect me to return here for good? I come back too often as it is. I should leave here altogether, but that some influence, some fate, always draws me back."

"Whose influence? for with fate I will have nothing to do. God and a man's self—with these we front the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Crabbe's evil influence still! You knew him when he called himself by another name?"

"Yes, Mr. Edmund Hawtree. We, we—— I suppose you would call it a flirtation. He was very different then, as you may believe."

Jealousy leapt into Ringfield's breast, the first he had ever known, and a common retort sprang to his lips.

"I should hope so! I cannot bear to think of your having known him well under any circumstances. The man is low! Whether drunk or sober he has nothing to commend him, and I believe him to be utterly irreclaimable and lost."

"In this world perhaps. But not necessarily in the next? Do you decline, then, to continue the work of reformation?"

He winced, and upon recalling what he had said saw his error. "No, I retract that. He is human, therefore a soul to be saved, as one of God's creatures, but whether the man can be reinstated in society is a doubtful matter. You are right to defend him, and I am sad only when I grudge you those memories of him. You knew him then so very well?"

She understood the pleading tone and she endeavoured to be candid, but how explain certain things to a man of Ringfield's calibre? To another, a glance, a smile, the inflection of a word, of a syllable, and all would be clear. How was she to frame an explanation which should receive his tacit and grave but unenlightened approval? How far he could conjecture, disassociate, dissect, limit and analyse, weigh and deduct, the various progresses in a crude amalgamation people call Love, she did not know, and there lay her difficulty.

"I will tell you what I can. I was quite young when I met Mr. Hawtree, 'Crabbe,' as he is now known. It is his second name. He had been unfortunate in money affairs, I understood, and had not been trained to any kind of work. It was after I returned from Sorel that I found him here. He frequently came to visit Henry; they described themselves as gentlemen together, and I suppose they were not wise company for one another, but at first I did not take any notice. He fell in love with me, and talked a great deal to me, improving my English as he called it, and you can understand how little opportunity I had had of reading or continuing my studies. I have no talent for the *ménage*; besides, Henry's methods had been long in practice, and I could not unchange them, at the age of nineteen! Mr. Hawtree and I were thus thrown very much together, yet one thing kept occurring which made me very miserable. I found out that he was drinking, and Henry too! Then another thing—my bad temper. Ah! how I suffered, suffered, in those days with that man, Mr. Ringfield!"

"I can well believe it."

"And he with me! Perhaps some other kind of woman would have suited him better, a timid, angelic, gentle little being who would have appealed to him more. When we quarrelled he grew like all you English, haughty and sneering—ah! when I think of it! And I changed to a fury—the Clairville temper—and gave back even more, even worse, than I got. But do not let us talk any more about it! You have discovered what I would have hidden, and for my part I get on better when I make myself forget it and him altogether."

He was silent; new and conflicting ideas clashed in his brain, while very close to him in the warm, fragrant night sat this alluring, sorely tried and lonely creature, who soon found the silence insupportable. To keep talking was safe; to be long silent impossible, since they seemed to draw nearer and nearer with every moment, and soon it would either be Ringfield's hand upon that dark lock he perceived adorning her white neck, or her head with its crown of hair stealing tenderly towards his shoulder. From such a precipitation of events they were saved by timely recollection of their position and the sounds which reached them from the road. The boat was leaving again, and they knew they had been thus together for an hour. Ringfield rose.

"There is now only the man himself to be seen and made to understand that such stories about you must cease. I shall speak to him at once, to-night perhaps, certainly to-morrow."

At this she quailed and could not control herself; she laid her hands on his arm and all the delicate art of the actress was called upon to assist her pleading.

"Oh!" she cried, "do you not see that it is better left alone? You take my word—you take my word of honour with you this night—I was never married to that man. Let it rest there. Do not speak with him about me. I could not bear it! I should be so ill, so worried, so unhappy. We scarcely see each other

now; let it all be dropped and forgotten. He—he—exaggerated, forgets— Oh! I do not know how to put it, but you must not speak of it. He did not know what he was saying, you know that yourself."

"That was what I thought at first, certainly."

They remained standing; eye on eye and her firm hands still clasping his arm. "You will promise me?"

He reflected a moment and then gave her his promise.

"On this condition, that if he speaks of it again, to my knowledge, to anyone, anywhere, I must then confront him and prove it a lie on your own showing."

Miss Clairville, only too glad to have gained her point, readily acceded, and Ringfield at once withdrew, fortunately without meeting anyone on the stairs or verandah. And now once more for him prospects were partly fair. Pauline's denial satisfied him; easily deceived on such a score, he knew nothing of intermediate stages of unlicensed and unsanctified affection. In his opinion women were either good or bad, married or unmarried, and to find this coveted one free was enough. The problem was how to manage the future; whether he would ever be in a position to marry, for it had come to that, and whether Miss Clairville would consent to leave the stage; as far as he was concerned the sooner the better.

CHAPTER X

THE PICNIC

".... The charm
Of pious sentiment diffused afar
And human charity and social love."

There is an idea which prevails among many thoughtful people, but which is nevertheless a good deal of a fallacy, that in the complex and congested life of cities greater opportunities for observation of character can be found than in the country. Ringfield, for example, would have combated this idea, feeling that he might have left college and taken up his work in some large Western town, preaching every Sunday to a numerous and flourishing congregation, and continued thus for several years without encountering the strongly marked types he had met within a few weeks at St. Ignace. It may be said in general of life in cities of the new world that dwellers in such populous centres are apt to undergo considerable change of character; their natural traits become altered or turned aside, dissimulation and caution are engendered by force of circumstances, while conformity to usage and imitation enter largely into daily conduct. Thus, environment becomes stronger than heredity; respectability at least is demanded, individualities disappear, and the natural man is outwardly vanquished. In the village, family failings, vices and virtues remain on exhibition, as it were, for years, known to all about. The blend here and there is recognized; individuals are often remarkable for peculiarities or defects of moral and physical construction, and heredity is strong. The simplicity of surrounding life supplies an impressive background for the elemental passions which reveal themselves in primitive or aboriginal force. Absence of standards, absence of amusements, the lack of contrast, these are a few of the causes that contribute towards the self-centred existence led by most inhabitants of rural communities. To prove this, one has but to think of a cripple, or a dwarf, or a drunken man, or a maniac; also, to revert to pleasanter images, of an unusual flower or animal, or of convincing and conspicuous personal beauty. What is a cripple in the city? He is passed by without a glance, for there are, alas! many like him. What is a dwarf? He only suggests the unnatural or unpleasant; the last circus or a fairy-book. What is a drunken man in a city? Or what a poor maniac? Officers of the police, and places of correction, physicians and nurses are at hand; the suffering and the evildoer are taken away and we know them no more.

But if we change a little part of speech and write the cripple, and proceed to think of the cripple in a village, or the dwarf, or the drunken man or the maniac, we instantly perceive how their presence must greatly colour the limited society in which they exist; how they must either amuse or disgust, arouse sympathy or create fear, as the case may be, and although a calla lily and a red-blooming cactus, a parrot or Persian kitten, are scarcely regarded as curiosities or rarities in the city, they may easily come to be regarded as such in the village.

From uninteresting and unimpersonal generalizations and aggregations such as dwarfs, cripples, lunatics, cats and parrots, we turn to the individuals of the species and behold—it is now The Cripple, The Dwarf, The Maniac, and so on, and how profoundly important the appearance and conduct, habits and dwellings of these—our companions—immediately become. We cannot get away from them, nor they from us. And the beautiful young girl! She is often safer in the city, where a kind of dove-like wisdom soon informs and protects, than in the lonely and silent places of the wilderness. The beauty that was fatally conspicuous in the village finds its rival and its level in the town.

Ringfield had certainly had his full share of ministering to the decadent and the unhappy at St. Ignace, and he was therefore very pleased one day to be called on by the Rev. Mr. Abercorn, incumbent of St Basil's at Hawthorne, the latter a small settlement, about nine miles distant, in which the English element predominated. Once a year the congregation of St. Basil's gave a picnic tea, when members of surrounding denominations met tranquilly on common ground and neutral territory. Macaulay's description of the peculiar position of the Church of England is nowhere truer than in some isolated districts like these Lower Canadian hamlets. She does, indeed, occupy a happy middle place between the unadorned wooden temples with whitewashed windows of the sects, and the large, aggressive stone churches of the Romish faith. Were her clergy as alive to the situation and the peculiar wants of the *peuple gentil-homme* as they ought to be, one would meet with greater numbers of adherents to the Episcopal ritual.

Mr. and Mrs. Abercorn were fully in sympathy with the countryside, and acted themselves as runners and scouts in connexion with the picnic tea, the lady seconding her husband in the most able and sagacious manner, the latter bringing to his duties all those charms of culture and presence which ministers of the Episcopal Church so often possess, even when not too richly dowered with profound theological learning or magnetic gifts of oratory. Moral and social wisdom, tact and experience of the world, often atone for intellectual shortcomings, especially in rural districts, and Ringfield was compelled to admit that he was not the only worker in the neighbourhood capable of understanding the wants of the people. Mr. Abercorn was about fifty, but as enthusiastic and energetic as a much younger man.

"I knew something of French life and character before I came out here. My wife is a native of Jersey. Our severe climate with its long, rigorous winter and short but hot summer has helped to form the national character; also the scenery. I mean that the beauty of the place, of all these fine but lonely, austere rivers and forests creates a melancholy, reflective tendency, and this makes it difficult in the matter of recreation, which last is what so many of our people require, particularly the French. I would have amusements going all the time if I could afford it, but that, of course, is not feasible; the *joie de vivre* is only to be arrived at modestly, and in our small way we try to make our picnic tea a success. We hope you will come over and join us on that occasion. We shall be having it later than usual this year, one reason for this being the fact that such serious illness exists in your own parish. I refer to Mr. Henry Clairville. It would not do to have much visiting between the parishes. And how is he getting on, for I suppose you hear all about him from time to time."

Ringfield, as it happened, knew very little of what was transpiring at the Manor House, but remarked that the worst was over, that the wife of Poussette was still absent from her home, and that Miss Clairville had not returned to her vocation.

"Ah," ejaculated Mr. Abercorn thoughtfully, "a peculiar family, a peculiar family indeed; but they are very fortunate in having you here. Oh, yes, I am not in the least bigoted, you know,—can't afford to be down here,—and I only hope you'll stay and make a great success of the new church. If everything goes well, we'll hold our picnic on the 1st of November, sort of Harvest Festival and Thanksgiving all in one, and either I or Mrs. Abercorn will drive over for you, as I suppose you will not be setting up a horse just yet."

On the day appointed Ringfield was sitting dully enough in his room over the carpenter's shop. Pauline was lingering on at Poussette's, partly because she had no other place to go, and partly because Ringfield was near. Their relations had not outwardly progressed since the evening on her balcony; several other meetings had taken place, but once assured that she was free, Ringfield settled to his work, preferring to put the whole episode from him for a while, until he could feel satisfied that she might be approached on the subject of the theatre. Thus their feelings were like Tennyson's wood, all in a mist of green with nothing perfect; meanwhile only a couple of planks separated them at this very instant, and, as usual, his thoughts were hovering about her at this hour, about half-past one o'clock, when he heard his name called by a younger member of the Gagnon family (a numerous one of five boys and four little girls), and descended to meet Mrs. Abercorn. This lady was taking the opportunity, in her rôle of auxiliary parson and general parochial assistant, of putting in a good word for Hawthorne and St. Basil's as she sat in her buggy at the door, surrounded by Poussette, Martin, and eight or ten children.

An intractable little mare pawed and shuffled in an uncertain frame of mind, apparently viewing with special disfavour the fiddling of Antoine Archambault, who had been hanging around the village ever since Pauline's return. Glancing consciously up, Ringfield thought he perceived a white hand and gleaming bracelet at the window of his old room.

"We have a rough drive before us, with a bad four miles in one place," said Mrs. Abercorn, "so we'll get away at once. You haven't been over to Hawthorne yet, Mr. Ringfield, how is that? But never mind, you'll be one of us after this afternoon at any rate. Do you play croquet?"

Looking rather astonished, Ringfield said "*No*," and the emphasis led Mrs. Abercorn to smile as she observed him more closely. She herself was one of those people of good birth who instinctively ask, no matter where they are placed, of everybody they meet, "Is she a *lady*?" "Is he a *gentleman*?" but who, in spite of this inherent and clannish trait, manage to make friends with the mammon of No-Family. She was literally as broad as she was high; short hair, turning grey, was fantastically curled about her clever, dark eyes; she had two hats, one for summer and one for winter, the latter a man's old seal cap; her skirts and jackets were skimp and dowdy, and her features and complexion unattractive, yet the authority and ease, the whole manner of the true lady made her a delightful companion, and she would have been equally diverting and diverted at a Royal Audience in Buckingham Palace or at a bean-feast on an Indian reserve. She displayed ornaments that were not precisely jewels, the value of which was of genealogical order; thus, she wore her grandfather's fobs and seals, her mother's bracelets of bog-oak and lava, and her brooch contained the hair of her only child, long deceased. She had had one dinner-dress for ten years of black "uncrushable grenadine," cut square, and it was quite true that she was the niece of an earl and the daughter of an admiral, and that she had eloped with the Rev. Marcus Abercorn eighteen years ago.

Ringfield had never met any one like her before, but in spite of her accent, so extremely English that in the Canadian country it was almost certain to be dubbed "affected," and in spite of a bright worldliness he found unusual in a clergyman's wife, he liked her very much and watched her manipulation of the mare—Flora Macdonald—with great interest, and not a little apprehension.

The bad four miles turned out to consist of alternate patches of ancient corduroy road, the logs exposed for a foot or so above the soil, and a long hogs-back of dyke-veined limestone, the ridges of spar and quartz cutting deep into the rock.

Mrs. Abercorn sighed eloquently for the lanes of Old England as the mare pranced, and the buggy flew over the various obstructions, bumping and swinging in a reckless manner Ringfield had never seen equalled.

"We are a little late," said his aristocratic charioteer, her hat crooked and her mouth quite as vicious as Flora's when touched up with a ragged whip, "but we'll be in time for a game of croquet before tea. We have the tea at five, because it's beginning to darken so early, and then we have a nice little show in the school-house: Marcus and I both believe in amusing the people. So you see it's not exactly a picnic, but quite a lot of things put together. You'll see presently."

And he did. Father and mother of their people, Mr. and Mrs. Abercorn had instituted a remarkable series of "events," as they say on regatta programmes—nautical, terpsichorean, athletic, musical and histrionic—grouped under the head of "games" and the large and delighted crowd drawn from several parishes rewarded their cheerful and untiring efforts. The Rector was not only all things to all men but to many women and numerous children as well, and Ringfield noted that, unlike the West, the men assembled were nearly all old men; there was a marked scarcity of boys and youths, and these old men appeared to be many years older than they had any right to appear. Many of them possessed but a couple of sound teeth apiece, others had retained the lower set more or less horribly intact, while a single tusk adorned the upper gum. Absence of regular visits to the dentist, or indeed of any visits at all, had wrought this ruin in faces also wrinkled and weather-beaten by exposure to the strenuous climate. The women showed to better advantage than the men, and the French were more prepossessing and better preserved than the English, especially in the matter of teeth, owing probably to a steady diet of onions and comparative lack of meat.

Diversity among the ladies included the fat, motherly looking ones, several of whom were spinsters; the young, too-smartly dressed daughters of farmers, possessing very little beauty, but of good height and figure; one person clothed entirely in black silk and very conscious of a new kind of watch, of gold and colours and small, pinned to her left bosom; and last, a couple of conventional Englishwomen staying at the Rectory.

It was natural that Mrs. Abercorn should desire to present to her friends and a few of the "quality" so good-looking a young man as Ringfield, and as soon as the buggy had been tied up under a grove of maples, he was led about by the energetic queen of the feast, whose attire, weird enough while driving,

had now culminated in a highly rational although unusual aspect. Everything upon her partook of an unpleasing and surely unnecessary brevity; thus her figure was too short for her breadth, and her skirts too short for her figure; her jacket was too short over her hips, and her gloves too short over her wrists; her hair was too short on her neck and her veil too short over her nose. Yet the rakish hat settled, and the fobs and seals shaken out, she appeared mentally fresh and charming, and the rich cadences of her cultivated voice gave Ringfield pleasure, slightly recalling Miss Clairville's accents, and he was happy in experiencing for the first time in his life that amiable naturalness, inimitable airiness, ease and adaptability, which characterize the Anglican clergy and their method of doing things. Attenuated tennis, Lilliputian Badminton, swings, a greased pole, potato and sack races, fiddling, and dancing on a platform, for the French, all these he passed in review with Mrs. Abercorn and the English ladies, presently participating in a merry game of croquet on a rocky, uneven, impossible kind of ground. The Rev. Marcus, and the person in black silk joined in this game of croquet, the latter so exclusive that it gave Ringfield the feeling that people must have when they are chosen for a *quadrille d'honneur*.

Without relief or intermission the amusements held sway till about half-past four, when even the quality tired of their croquet; the day, though bright, was cold, and a bonfire on the rocks was greatly patronized by the very old and very young, while distant preparations for tea were viewed, at first with stealthy, half-reluctant admiration, and then with open restlessness. The patriarchs—toothless and wrinkled, yet not a man of them over fifty-eight—stood around in expectant silent clusters, and also in their best clothes, of which a great deal of faded red neck-tie and pepper and salt trousers seemed chiefly to strike the eye.

The tea was to be served in the large barn adjoining the church, surrounded on two sides by tall plantations of Indian corn, a rough kind known as horse corn, and not used at table. Very soon those engaged in the games fell away by twos and threes, and the rector and his wife gaily beating the covers afforded by forest and grove, all gradually converged to the meeting point outside the big doors of the barn, through which were now passing the wives and daughters of the plough, bearing coarse bedroom jugs of tea and coffee, plates of cakes, pies, and sandwiches. The people waiting thus in patient content at the doors were orderly and sober, and none ventured to enter till their rector, having unearthed even the remotest and shyest member of his flock, advanced in florid hurry and taking his wife and Ringfield with him, passed under the hanging branches of maize, asparagus, fern and crabapples which decorated the great door. The floor of the barn, although partially cleared, was still half full of straw, and flecks of it flew through the air as the people trooped in, decently awed but amused too, for the ripple of lowered laughter and pleased hum of voices resounded throughout the building. The walls, draped with flags and coloured curtains, held sheaves of grasses and several lamps in brackets at the sides, and the food, good, plain, with plenty of it, adorned the two long tables that ran down the middle. Ringfield, at the head of a table, was comparing the scene with some Harvest Homes of his youth, and wondering who would start the Doxology, when he heard the rector say, standing a long way off at the end of the other table:—

"We have the Rev. Mr. Ringfield of St. Ignace with us this afternoon, and I have no doubt that he is already as anxious as the rest of you for a share of the good things we see here before us, so I am going to ask him to say—ah—Grace, then we can fall to. Mr. Ringfield, will you be kind enough to ask the blessing?"

There was a pause, not because Ringfield was unready on these occasions nor because of any fear lest his special kind of intercessory gastronomic prayer might fail to carry conviction with it, but on account of the intrusion of two belated arrivals down by the door. He could not distinguish very clearly, but there seemed to be some one either invalided or very young in a basket-chair, wheeled in by a young woman of twenty-two or twenty-three, who entering brusquely, on a run, and laughing, was silenced, and the chair and its occupant pushed back against the wall. This slight but untimely interruption over, Ringfield gazed solemnly around—it was already growing a little dim in the barn—and spoke as follows, with head thrown back, and closed eyes:—

"O Lord, the giver of all good things, who sendest seed-time and harvest, rain and sun on the fruits of the earth and crownest the year with fatness, look down on us at this time and bless us." At this point the Anglicans present sat down under the impression that the "grace" was over. They rose again in confusion as Ringfield continued:—

"We thank Thee for these, Thy temporal blessings vouchsafed unto us as a people. We have Thy pledge in the book of Thy Holy Word, that while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest shall not fail. We thank Thee for the fields white with harvest. We thank Thee for our great and beautiful country; for its beneficent laws, its opportunities, its great and unequalled privileges, and we pray for our rulers, for all in authority, for all engaged in the ministry of whatever denomination, for the Queen and the Royal Family. We pray for him whose duty it is to go in and out before this assembly; grant him wisdom and spiritual strength; bless also the partner of his life work, and may their united labours

prevail and resound to Thy glory and the honour of Thy name, and while we remember at this time to thank Thee with full hearts for these temporal gifts, let us be swift to remember also Thy choicer, greater, holier gift of Free Salvation; Mercy, Pardon, Peace, and glorious relief from sin and its thralldom—these may be ours for the asking. O Lord, if any sinner lurk among us, if any poor sinner be at this board to-night, search him, O Lord, and purge his mortal body, try it with Thy true refiner's fire. As our snows are pure, so let us be pure. As our waters are deep yet clear, let our minds be clear of evil, and rid of all offence; and for all who by reason of sin, or pain, or sickness, or any other infirmity either of body or of mind cannot be with us at this time, we pray that Thou wilt comfort, uplift, forgive and relieve them. All—for Christ's sake—Amen."

CHAPTER XI

"ANGEEL!"

"Like a sheep enthralled
'Mid thorns and brambles."

On the conclusion of this address, which was Ringfield's idea of a "grace" and which was modelled on the Methodist formula customary on such occasions, the people, whose appetites had been held over-long in check, took their seats with expressions of relief and in some cases with audible grunts and whispers of annoyance. The truth was, Ringfield had exhibited a want of tact in expatiating in an eloquent prayer on things better left alone, from the village point of view. It was bad enough to occupy so much time when already it was darkening and soon the lamps would have to be lighted; it was bad enough to pray in public for the rector and his wife; it was entirely inexcusable to hint at the presence of a sinner in their midst, at the very board now covered with the home-made dainties cooked and sent in by the ladies of Hawthorne. In itself perhaps the prayer, though trite and redundant (Ringfield was not in his best vein, no longer single-minded), was eloquent and pointed, and the reference to the snows and rivers of the country extremely poetic and suggestive, yet it was not in accordance with the best taste, although prompted by the best feeling. The rector and his wife, ignoring their own sentiments, made haste to smooth away the little difficulty that had thus unexpectedly arisen, and in a few minutes all was in a pleasant clatter and babble with the pouring of tea, cutting of huge three-decker cakes, and passing of large, solid plates holding pyramids of equally large and solid sandwiches. Ringfield, devoting himself to the English visitors and the person in black silk, who was the widow of a deceased lumber king correctly reputed to have left an enormous fortune, was by the nature of things the last to perceive that he had wounded the delicate sensibilities of the company, and therefore he made a good meal, unconscious of the comments lower down his table and also around the rector.

"It's always the way with them Methodists," said one speaker in a careful undertone, a venerable body of fifty or so, with four teeth left in his head, bent, bald and wrinkled. "They pride themselves on what they call 'extem-pore' speaking." He gave the word only three syllables of course. "Why, it's mostly out of the Prayer Book anyway! He said 'any other infirmity,' did you notice? And we say, 'any other adversity,' don't we? Well, where's the difference?"

"The tairms are not precisely in the nature of synonyms," remarked the schoolmaster, a Scotchman of sandy and freckled appearance, who was cutting a sandwich into small pieces with his penknife and then frugally conveying them to his mouth with the aid of the same useful implement. "But in a sairtain sense ye can *call* them synonyms."

"It's out of course and all irregular like to pray for the Queen and the Royal Family on a day like this. 'Twould be best keep that for Sundays where it belongs," said the wife of the ancient who had spoken first.

"What can ye expect, ma'am, when they come to it without their notes? Stands to reason, if any man's going to preach earnest, *earnest*, mind you, he'll require some notes or heads jotted down, clear and easy to be got at, before him." This was the opinion of another elderly man, but of a fat and comfortable if blustering variety, who had come out from the English provinces thirty years before as cook with a regiment, and was now the Hawthorne butcher and general store-keeper, also accounted a rich man.

"But that's not the point," he went on with husky and stertorous fervour. "The point is not whether what he said was well said or ill said; the point is, he should never have spoke them words at all. Point? To almost point the finger at us sitting around this hospitable board declaring we were all sinners! So

we are, all of us. The Litany says so, don't it? Don't it say, 'miserable sinners'?"

"It does, it does," murmured a sympathetic female engaged in feeding two out of eleven kinds of cake to a child on her lap.

"And the rector leaves it there, where it ought to be left. In my opinion, ma'am, it don't do no good to pray nor preach too direct. It's casting a stone, that's what it is, it's casting a stone."

"Perhaps he was nervous, poor young man, at seeing so many people," said the young mother of the child who was crumbling the cake all over its mouth and fingers and dress without swallowing any, having previously been regaled with maple sugar and molasses candy outside, and consequently not feeling very hungry. "Perhaps he has heard about Angeel."

The latter was the common pronunciation of Angele, the name of the little girl in the basket-chair who was engaged like the rest in eating and drinking in company with her nurse not far from Mr. Abercorn.

At the word "Angeel" several warning coughs around her, winks, nudges and a kick under the table, made the young woman so flurried that she slapped the child for not eating properly, and the child immediately beginning to cry, a diversion was created, but not before Ringfield had overheard a few remarks touching his recent prayer, not exactly flattering to his self-esteem. Soon the conversation lapsed as the piles of cake, custard and pumpkin pies and jugs of tea were depleted; and Mr. Abercorn, upon whom the quiet and gathering gloom had a depressing effect, jumped up and asked for volunteers to assist in lighting the lamps.

"We usually get through without artificial aid to our eyes and our mouths, but that is when the picnic tea is held in October. We are at least a fortnight late this year. We shall want the tall men for this—Jacobs, Enderby, Anselme—you take these three lamps on the other side while I find somebody to help me with mine."

"On the score of height, at least," said Ringfield pleasantly, leaving his seat and striding down the centre of the barn, "I can offer my services. Which are the ones to be lighted? These two and the one just over our heads?"

"Very good of you, I'm sure," responded the rector briefly. "They are quite steady on their brackets, I suppose, men? Now shut those doors; we don't want any draught. Be careful with the matches, everybody!"

The others had got to work first, and along their side of the wall, Anselme, Jacobs, and Enderby, the butcher, slowly lit their three lamps, when, Ringfield, busy over a refractory wick and just in the act of applying a match, in turning his head, saw directly beneath him the basket-chair and its occupant as well as the young woman in charge of it.

The shock of perceiving what was in reality more of a Thing than a person, being an unfortunate child of about nine years of age, otherwise well formed, but with a weak and hanging head enlarged very much beyond its normal size and yet with a pair of shrewd eyes and a smiling mouth, told upon his nerves. He started, leant too heavily on the bracket, and in a second the lighted lamp, as yet without a chimney, fell on the floor.

In another second the straw and decorations were all in a blaze, the barn full of smoke and commotion; and he was conscious only of himself and the rector wildly stamping, grovelling, and pushing with might and main for what seemed hours of fear and suspense. The men tore the great doors open; there were, happily, no corridors to tread, no stairs to descend; the women and children first, and then their husbands and fathers, rushed out, mostly uninjured, into the cool twilight air, and when Ringfield came to himself he found that in some way he too was outside the barn, holding on to the basket-chair, nearly hysterical from the fright he had sustained, but still endeavouring to calm the dreadful child and its nurse, both of whom were shrieking wildly.

"Angeel! Angeel!" cried the girl, and then in French: "Oh, what would they say to me if anything happened to you! It doesn't matter about me, only you, Angeel, only you!"

Ringfield looked around, dazed. The comfort, jollity, and abandon of the picnic tea were things of the past. The barn had been saved and the fire was out, but the groups of excited, tearful women and coatless, dishevelled men, the rector with one hand badly burnt, Mrs. Abercorn loudly deploring the loss of her hat and an antique bracelet—all was forlorn, changed, miserable! And all this was his fault, his doing, the result of his carelessness! He could scarcely frame the words with which to deeply lament the unfortunate accident, but his very genuine contrition softened the rector's heart even while he felt some resentment at the sudden fatality which had spoiled the day and in his own case was

destined to leave a very unpleasant remembrance.

"The question is," said Mr. Abercorn, talking to Enderby and the schoolmaster, "whether we are to go on with the rest of the programme. I'm the only one, happy to say, at all injured, and already the pain is better. Plunge in, men, and get out all the burnt stuff and tidy the tables. It might have been worse; thank God, none were hurt! And we mustn't let Mr. Ringfield feel badly about it. The bracket was weak, I'm sure it was weak, and he's a stranger among us. What are you saying, Enderby? A judgment on him? Nonsense. I thought you had more sense. Ask him to remain for the evening and everything shall go on as we intended to have it."

But Ringfield did not care to stay. Everything was against him; for the first time in his life he felt himself a failure,—in the way. How had he come to be so careless? Well he knew, for the face of the dreadful child, in spite of its deformity, evinced a strong, strong, insistent resemblance to a face he knew. The dark hair and eyes, the shape of the forehead, the way the hair grew on the forehead—where had he seen it all reproduced not so very long ago? Miss Clairville's expression, colouring, and animated play of gesture lived again in this mysterious child.

About seven o'clock, just as Mrs. Abercorn's "nice little show" was beginning, he took his way home. The path lay along the darkest road he had ever seen; there was neither moon nor stars, and the blackness of a country road bordered by dense forests can only be understood by those who have travelled at such a time, and for the nine miles that he plodded stupidly along—for he declined to wait to be driven—given up to sombre and sinister thoughts, he was a most unhappy man.

CHAPTER XII

THE HEART OF POUSSETTE

"Yet is the creature rational—endowed
With foresight, hears too, every Sabbath day,
The Christian promise with attentive ear,
Nor disbelieves the tidings which he hears, ..."

About a week later, Ringfield was descending the hilly road behind Poussette's at four o'clock in the afternoon, when he discerned a new arrival at the wharf, and as the tourist season was over, the boat only making a few occasional trips, he was curious concerning the lady who, showily if neither correctly nor expensively attired, was looking about her in disappointment and consternation. Poussette himself hurried out in his character of host; his manner was more than usually warm and familiar as he took her bag and umbrella, and Ringfield soon learnt that she was Miss Sadie Cordova from Montreal, although originally from New York, a member of the Theatre of Novelties, who had come to pay Miss Clairville a visit. This new acquisition to St. Ignace society was more consistently lively than Pauline, not being troubled with moods, and she brightened the place up very considerably in various directions; she did not share Pauline's room, for Poussette gallantly led her to the apartment vacated by Mme. Poussette, but the two friends were constantly together, and Ringfield at first rejoiced in the advent of the gay Cordova, as it intimated a sensible enjoyment of life on Pauline's part in place of moping and brooding, and as it also appeared to keep Edmund Crabbe off the premises. But these two good ends were gained at the expense of a third, for the constant and animated, even tender attentions of the host were altogether too obvious, although at first no complaint could be made, since so much feminine society served to keep Poussette also steady and sober. Still, card-playing in the mornings, noisy operatic music in the afternoons (there was no piano, only an old American organ, in the house) and coquettish scufflings, dancing, and conscious giggling *tête-à-têtes* in the hall every long, lamp-lit evening soon became wearisome, and Ringfield, made vaguely uneasy, took on himself to reprove Poussette.

The place was the bar—always the most attractive spot in the house, for the Indian guide, a sober, worthy man, kept it absolutely clean and tidy, and there were comfortable *habitant* chairs and a wide hearth for logs. These were burning brightly now, as the first November snows were falling, and while Ringfield expostulated with Poussette, the latter spread out his fat hands to the blaze. Upon the little finger of the left hand sat a square seal ring of pale cornelian, and as Ringfield looked he clearly saw the capital letter "C" picked out in red upon the white. New and hateful pangs, suspicions, jealousies, assailed him; he was sure that this must be Pauline's ring, although he had never noticed her wearing

it, and the thoughts thereby engendered did not tend to make him listen calmly to Poussette's line of defence. So far from being offended at the clerical interest in his affairs, the Frenchman was immensely flattered and encouraged to speak out.

"And are you quite sure," said Ringfield in conclusion, "are you perfectly certain that Miss Cordova knows you are a married man? In my opinion there is small harm in the lady! the poor, thoughtless creature is too much occupied with her silly clothes and music and trivial passing of the time to work lasting mischief, but I remember that she follows a godless calling—she is an actress and has been one longer than Miss Clairville. You must be careful. It is time Mme. Poussette was relieved from her charge and came home."

"But how—come home? Come at this place again? Bigosh—but that will not do, Mr. Ringfield—at all, sir! Beeg fuss, sure—my wife come at this place so soon after leave nurse Henry Clairville! Dr. Renaud will tell you that. No, sir,—Madame is come no more on me, on St. Ignace at all. When she leave me, go nurse seeck man down with the 'Pic,' she is no more for me. *Voyez*—m'sieu, I am tired of my wife. I shall try get a divorce."

Ringfield was astounded. "You, Poussette! A divorce! From that poor, unhappy woman who has done you no harm, and will have nothing to live upon? How can you do such a thing? Why, you must not let your mind dwell on such a thing for an instant! I do not believe in divorce, or at least only in rare and exceptional cases, and yours is not one of these. You understand me—your wife may be delicate, even afflicted, but no man puts his wife away for these reasons. All the more you must cherish her, comfort her, keep her by you. If she grew worse you would be justified in putting her, as we say, under restraint, or in the care of those best fitted to look after her, but even then you would remain her husband. That is the unwritten law of our and of all true religion."

Poussette spat into the fire and considered. Father Rielle had told him this in almost the same words many times over; he had left the Catholic communion for that reason, and had hoped for better things from the young minister.

"Don't Methodists divorce?" said this nineteenth-century rural Henry the Eighth.

Ringfield moved uneasily in his chair. "They may—they can—they do—but as I have told you, the causes must be exceptional ones. Bitter tragedy—abhorrent false conduct, you understand me?"

The other nodded. "My wife—nothing like that the matter with her. All the contree, all the reever know Mme. Natalie Poussette—good woman, sure. No—but see now, m'sieu, now I am talking, and I tell you my trouble. I'm not so bad *garçon*, you know; kind of fond of drink now and then—I 'pologize, 'pologize, m'sieu, for you see me a leetle bit dhrunk. Now—understand. I'm by nature a most loving kind of man, and I'm fond of leetle children. Yes, sir, bigosh, *excusez* a leetle bit of swear—but that is my nature, that is me, and I would like, sir, some leetle babee of my own. I make quite a bit of monee, m'sieu, with the 'otel and the mill, and a leetle bet and a leetle horses. *Bien*—what you say? Very well. What must I do with this monee—while I live, and if I die? 'Give it to the Church,' Father Rielle, he say. 'No, sir,' I say!"

And Poussette jammed a couple of smouldering logs with his heel; they instantly knit together and sent out a big crackling shower of sparks that caused both men to retire their chairs farther from the hearth.

A suspicion crossed Ringfield's mind. "Did you send your wife to nurse Henry Clairville or did she go of her own accord?"

"*Certainement*—my wife go herself. Dr. Renaud—come for her. She will not take the 'pic'. She will take nothing. She will nevaire die, that woman!"

The remark was saved from being distasteful to the listener by the fact that it was given with a melancholy despairing gesture, which to a less serious person than Ringfield might have been amusing. But his sense of humour, originally meagre, was not developing at St. Ignace as fast as it might, and he saw nothing humorous in this view of madame's immunity from disease. Before he could frame a reply, Poussette went on:—

"So you see, I like you, Mr. Ringfield, and I'm going to pay you good monee, and I believe you—good Christian man, and I want you to help me get a divorce. Mme. Poussette (you can say like this to the Government)—Mme. Natalie Poussette, poor woman—she is so delicate, so fonny, so—so ill, she cannot have any leetle babee; no leetle children play round their fader—that's me, Amable Poussette, beeg man, rich man, good Methodist, built a fine church on top of the Fall. So this Mister Poussette after many years live with his wife, after long time he wants to marry another woman and have plenty small babee, play round in the summertime (here Poussette hushed his voice) under the beeg trees, and in

the water, learn to swim in the reever, splash like old duck, old feesh! Many a time I feel like go on the dhrunk. Well sir, nice, bright, young wife, sing, act, dance—we'd have beeg tam together, and I'd dhrink nothing but tea, sure! Go to Morréall, buy *tiquette* on the theatre, ride on the street car, make transfer to Hochelaga Park, get out, have nice glass beer—just one, m'sieu—go on the *boutiques*, buy nice bonnett, eh? I have monee to do like that, but [with the national shrug] I have no wife. I am tole there is everything very fonny there all year round, but me—I have only been there two, three tam; no good go alone, meet bad company, get on the dhrunk then, sure. Bigosh—*excusez*, Mr. Ringfield, there's nothing like young, handsome wife and plenty babee keep their father straight. Eh? So I tell you what I want to do. I will be for selling this place; get three thousand dollar for it; go to Morréall every winter; perhaps go on that Hotel Champlain or some other nice *maison pension* and have big tam—what do you say? That's no bad thing—" Poussette was very earnest here—"for me—to wish young wife, clever wife, and leetle babee play round! Before I have the hairs gray, or lose what I have. *Regardez un peu, m'sieu!*"

And Ringfield could not refuse to examine the fine head of black hair thrust towards him. He was touched in spite of clerical scruples.

"No, no, certainly not a bad thing," he said gently, "not at all an unnatural thing. I think I understand, Poussette, I can see—" and Ringfield seemed to feel something in his throat, at any rate he coughed and hesitated. "I can see that your position has its difficulties and its—its trials. But, Poussette, we all have those. We all have to deny ourselves in some way, in some unexpected quarter. We cannot always have what we want, that is, in fact, at the root of all religious feeling, and, if I am not mistaken, at the root of all religious belief as well. If the great Creator of the universe has had to suffer and deny Himself, as we know, in the past, has He not still to suffer as He looks on at the wickedness and sinful passions of the sons of men? The universe is not absolutely happy, perfect—would that it were! And so this law of suffering runs through everything and assails everybody. None can hope to escape. We—ministers of the Gospel—we do not question this; we recognize that it is so, and all we can do is to impress it upon you who listen to us. I have tried to do this; I have preached upon this—that to each individual man, woman and child, there comes—there must and will come a time, when material success, health, wealth and happiness are non-important, and when moral issues, when duty, character and conduct are the great essential facts of life to be met and grappled with. You—Poussette—have been no exception to this rule in the past—you know the habit of life to which I refer—and now here is this new trial, this new difficulty about your wife. Even were I able to do anything for you—because it is a lawyer, a notary you require, not a minister—I could have nothing to do with your marrying again. That—I must tell you plainly—is out of the question. It is not good for man—some men—to live alone; my Church, my Bible tell me this, and may be I am learning to know it from experience of such cases as yours; but once married, and married to one in whom there is no fault, you must not seek to lightly undo what God and the sacraments of the Church in which you were united have wrought. I fear, Poussette, that in leaving Father Rielle and coming to me, you were not acting honestly, openly."

Poussette, in admiration of his hero's beautiful pastoral diction, felt no resentment and exhibited no temper. "No fault!" he exclaimed. "Ah, but there—that is not so, Mr. Ringfield. Look, sir, look now, there is fault enough—beeg fault—what I have said. That is enough, and I have plenty monee to make it more than enough."

"Money—money!" Ringfield exclaimed in his turn, "The root of many kinds of evil. How much money have you, my friend? You are accounted rich, as it goes in St. Ignace, at Bois Clair, in Hawthorne, but in Quebec, in Three Rivers, in Montreal—no! You would soon find the difference. The rich man of the country might easily become the poor man of the town; living is expensive there—you might find your business here—I mean the mill—not pay so well with you absent; in short, Poussette, you would be foolish to change your way of life! It is not worth your while to leave St. Ignace, but I know who ought to go, to be sent to the right about pretty quickly too, and that is—this man, Edmund Crabbe. What do you think of helping me to get him away? He's a public nuisance in spite of his education, and we should all do better without him."

Ringfield was always torn by painful, shameful jealousy when he thought of the Englishman, and his entire nature appeared to change. He could not have called him "Hawtree" or "Mr." for his life; that savoured of gentility and the fervid past when the man was perhaps a picturesque figure, quoting the English classics in the guise of an unfortunate exile. Besides, if he fathomed Poussette's feelings correctly, the latter in his own jealousy of Crabbe might be found a powerful ally. The plain truth was—three men wanted the same woman; and vaguely, it seemed to Ringfield as if he—the worthiest—had chief right to her; he feared not Poussette, the married and the marred, the uneducated, the inferior one of her own race, but he still feared the perversely cultured, doubtlessly gifted, decadent "Oxford man," the social superior of every one in the village.

Poussette again reflected. Any latent jealousy he had entertained of the minister tended to disappear

under the fire of these inquisitorial interviews, and Ringfield might always be credited with having fine command over his features.

"Ah, well, m'sieu," said the Frenchman, sagaciously nodding, "Crabbe is no harm. You get me my divorce; let me marry Ma'amselle Pauline, live with her at the beeg house, and I'll promise—*parole d'honneur*, m'sieu—to see no more that man."

"The Manor House! It will be a long time before any one can live there, I should think!" said Ringfield impatiently, concealing the spasm of tortured pride that passed over him as he heard Poussette's tactics defined. "And what if she will not marry you? Mlle. Clairville is wedded to the theatre, she tells me, and although of that I cannot approve, it would not be so bad as marrying a divorced person."

"But we are great friends, sir! Many a tam I have kept that house, many, many months, m'sieu, supply well with food—the meat and the dhrink, the chickenne and the wine. Her brother is *fou*—mad, he has not one cent monee. How then shall mademoiselle fare? I am good tenant of her brother, the Sieur, Seigneur of St. Ignace, and I send my peep there with good things to eat; he will tell you, sir, of the old tam and all about the *corvée* when every one in the *paroisse* do same thing; one man feesh, another man beeg chickenne or turkey, another patackes, another flour from the mill. Why, sir, if it was not that I, Amable Poussette, was good friend there, I don't know, I don't *know*, m'sieu, how they get along 'tall! Those Archambault—all bad peep—all bad together; the old woman, the old man, the girl, the boy—all the same, sure."

"Who pays them?—You?"

"No, m'sieu; do better things with my monee."

"But they don't believe in the *corvée*, surely?"

"It is like this." And Poussette tapped the other's knee with his fat fingers, thereby displaying the cornelian ring to much advantage, and Ringfield saw with satisfaction that on top of the large "C" was cut a little "S". Had the relations between Poussette and Miss Cordova so quickly progressed and of what nature were they? The eye of the Frenchman gave a comprehensive wink. "It is all right, Mr. Ringfield, all right, sir, Mees Cordova—she put the ring on my finger herself; she was just fooling last night and I like to be good friends with her; then she speak for me to Mees Clairville, and so—*vous comprenez*, sir. But no—I pay no money to these Archambault. It is like this. There have been Clairville many years at St. Ignace; there have also been Archambault too a long tam. They say once one was married with another, but I do not know; I would not ask M'sieu Clairville, and I would not ask Ma'amselle Pauline. This is a long tam ago, I only speak of what I hear. I know this, m'sieu—it is not a nice place, not a nice life for a lady like Mees Clairville. Have you not seen her on the theatre? You would like to see her at that?"

"No, decidedly not. I have never seen a play. I do not approve of the life she leads, and trust that when her brother is better she will not return to her vocation."

"But how—she must make some leetle monee of her own, and it is for why she goes on the theatre. I have seen her act and sing."

"Can she sing?"

"Ah, you shall hear. She will sing for me, m'sieu, and bigosh—*excusez*, Mr. Ringfield—I'll get her sing to-night. And if I do that, will you, sir, do one great thing for me?"

Ringfield smiled. "I won't promise, Poussette. You're a deeper character than I thought you were. At any rate, I'll do nothing about a divorce—make sure of that, man!"

Poussette, with large, noble gestures, waved the divorce away.

"I say nothing. I will do nothing. But if you will be so kind, sir, as to speak of me to Mees Clairville, should my wife, Mme. Natalie—die! Tell her, sir, how I am good man, *au fond*, sir, by my nature; how I love the leetle babee, plenty small babee; how I am kind, jolly man, by my nature, sir; how I would like to marry with her, give her good tam. You tell her this, Mr. Ringfield, for me, and make me your best friend, sure?"

Half-laughing, half-shocked, and for the moment forgetting his own views and dreams concerning her, Ringfield acceded to the unusual request.

"And remember, m'sieu—tell her I go no more on the dhrunk after I marry with her—no, sir, go no more 'tall. If we live in Morréall, tell her I'll go no more on that Hotel Champlain neither; a friend of mine, Napoleon Legendre, he has a temperance 'otel in Craig Street; I go there, sir, and never touch

even one glass of beer. Tell her that. And tell her I am for selling this place, and p'raps buy Clairville Château. Tell her——"

"Enough, enough, my good Poussette!" cried Ringfield, jumping up as he heard feminine voices nearing their retreat. "Your virtuous resolutions do you credit, and may you be enabled to perform and carry them through—if not to the letter at least in the spirit."

"And you don't think me *bad, low* kind of *garçon*, eh?"

"I do not, indeed."

"Say"—and Poussette's hand instinctively moved towards the counter—"you will dhrink a leetle glass beer, just one, sir, on that with me?"

"Poussette!"

With an injured expression, and a rapidity amazing for so fat a man, Poussette slipped round behind the counter and brought out two bottles of ginger ale; in a twinkling the tall tumblers were ready and he offered one to Ringfield with a deep and exaggerated bow.

"Ah—I see. I beg your pardon, Poussette. I thought you meant the other kind. Of course I will drink with you and with pleasure."

The glasses were placed side by side, each taking one and looking intently at one another. In that moment all selfishness died out of Ringfield; he felt the importance of the opportunity.

"Will you shake hands first, Poussette?"

"*Mais oui*, m'sieu! *Certainement*, but wait, sir, one moment!"

With repeated rubbings on the clean roller-towel behind him, turning back of cuffs and a general straightening of the person and freshening of the attire, the Frenchman at length proffered his fat hand, and Ringfield clasped it with a firm, bold grasp; his muscles were twice as strong as those of the Frenchman, for while the one had been chiefly employed in the kitchen, at a rude desk, and had rusted in long loafing and idling intervals, the other had maintained his rowing and paddling and his interest in other athletic pursuits; even a half-dozen lessons in boxing had he laid to his credit.

"Now I've got you," said he, smiling, as the fat hand lay tightly imprisoned in the lean one, "and I'm not going to let you go till you make me a promise. See here—Poussette—promise me now—not to touch a drop of liquor again for a whole year. We'll let it go at that; I won't say anything about beer. By degrees, man, we'll fight the Devil and all his works. By degrees, and by prayer, and by every argument in favour of right living that I can bring before you—we'll fight this thing out together, you and I. Don't wait for some hysterical occasion, but do your plain duty now, while I hold your hand in mine. If you should marry again, Poussette, and should ever have those little children playing about you—what then? You'd want to lead a straight life then—and before, I know you would. Come—make me the promise now—and if you break it, as you may do, come to me and tell me of it; make it a second time and so—each interval may be longer, do you see—if you 'take the pledge' as it is called, it is likely to be in public, and your friends and fellow-drinkers hear about it, and ridicule you and laugh at the idea, and so you are driven to drink again. What do you say, Poussette?"

"It is then—just between you and me, sir?"

"That's the idea. Of course I shall say nothing about it to a third person. Come—you promise!"

Poussette seemed uneasy.

"But—m'sieu—just you and me? That seems, sir, just same thing as go confess to Father Rielle. Beg pardon, Mr. Ringfield, but bigosh, sir—that is same sure as go on the confession."

Ringfield saw the point.

"I understand, Poussette. You are right. We must not be ashamed of trying to be good. Nothing done in the corner, eh? Well, then, you tell—anybody you like."

"The new lady—Mees Cordova! Will that be all right, sir?"

"Why Miss Cordova? Oh, well—never mind! So long as I've got your word, Poussette, the word of an honest man, eh?"

"I'll thry, sir."

"That's good. That's all right. You're a *man*, Poussette."

The Frenchman wiped the tumblers thoughtfully and gazed intently into space. Perhaps he saw there the future small Poussettes playing out of doors; perhaps too, he saw the faded, weary woman who bore his name, still watching the sick man in the old manor house.

"You see, m'sieu," he said impressively, "if Mme. Poussette was to come right, if she come again on me here, feex up things around the house, be well and jolly, I would not send her away, I would not thry get this divorce. Fonny things happens—but I don't know about my wife. Dr. Renaud think she will always be the same. It is hard for me, Mr. Ringfield, sir—me, jolly kind of man—have a wife go like silly person all over the place, sing and walk by herself, make up songs, fonny *chansons*. Ah, you don't know how I have hard tam with that one! But, I'll wait till I see how she is in two, three weeks; the doctor—he say Henry Clairville almost well now."

"And it is understood you will leave Miss Clairville alone—and Miss Cordova. Remember, Poussette, you have engaged me to preach in your church and to minister here in this parish. I must refuse to do either if you offend against common decency and morality. Besides—Miss Clairville will never, I am positive, listen to you. You must see as well as I do, her pride in her family connexions, however worthless these are to-day."

"*Bien*," said Poussette jauntily, "if not Mees Clairville, then Mees Cordova. That is for why I wear her ring. I can persuade, sir—bigosh, *excusez* m'sieu, I can persuade!"

"So it seems," said the other drily, and would have continued his lecture had not the two ladies, who had been in the hall laughing and smiling around the bar door, now appeared boldly on the scene, and Ringfield made his escape, not before he had promised to look in that evening during an improvised concert at which Miss Sadie Cordova would dance, and Miss Clairville act and sing.

CHAPTER XIII

A SICK SEIGNEUR

"He sits alone
On stormy waters in a little boat
That holds but him and can contain no more!"

Meanwhile the house of Clairville was undergoing drastic changes at the hands of Mme. Poussette. The patient, propped up in his ancient and tattered bed, was now strong enough to look at books; many hours he passed in this way while madame roamed over the doleful house, setting in order and cleaning as well as she could. Her strength, patience and endurance were remarkable; she could dust, sweep, scrub, hammer, all day long and never experience fatigue; walls were rubbed down, windows opened and washed, furniture drawn forth from dusty armoires and cupboards raked out—and still the work went on, each day bringing to light some dark, unfamiliar nook, some unexplored room or closet. At Poussette's she never worked at all; sensitiveness to strangers and fear of the servants mastered her; at Clairville she worked incessantly, and when her nursing was done, entered upon her labours in this Augean house with steady passionless activity.

Clairville was badly pitted and every remnant of good looks had left him, yet on the first day that he could put his feet to the floor he would have sent madame into the front room, saying:—

"Bring me the suit of clothes you will see hanging on a nail in the wall".

She stared at him, knowing his weakness of body better than he knew it himself.

"What for, m'sieu?"

"What for? What are clothes for, idiot of a woman! To put on, to wear. I shall habit myself as a gentleman. Faith—it is time, too!"

"But, m'sieu—!"

"Bring me that suit, I say."

Madame hesitated, because she had removed the suit in question a week before to an old trunk in an empty room—she was not very clear which one—and it would take her some minutes to find it.

"If m'sieu will get back into his bed——"

"I will do nothing so foolish. I was thinking of getting up. I *am* up and should be holding a levee—How do you do, my Lord Marquis?—pray enter. M. le Chevalier de Repentigny; open there for my friend, the Intendant! Gentlemen, I greet you. You perceive me at my toilet—but these lackeys are too slow! Fetch me my clothes, I say! Ah—misery! I cannot stand! I cannot—cannot even sit! Help me to bed, you woman there—help me, quick!"

And madame, instead of running for the suit of Court clothes, managed to lay Henry Clairville down again before he fainted. However, the next day he was slightly stronger and the next and the next, so that on the fifth day he was nearly as well as ever, and again demanding the suit, she went to the room upstairs and hunted for it. Its colour was a faded claret, and lacings of dingy silver appeared on the front and round the stiffened skirt that stood out from the waist—a kind of cut to make even a meagre man look well among his fellows; a three-cornered hat went with it, and into this relic of strenuous days, madame soon assisted her charge.

"How does it fit?" he inquired anxiously

"It is without doubt large at present for m'sieu, but m'sieu has been ill. After a while it will fit better."

"And how do you think I look in it?" he continued, gazing with fringeless expressionless eyes on her vacant but concerned countenance. "You see, to meet these gentlemen I must at least try to appear as well as they do. A Sieur de Clairville must guard the appearance at all costs! Where is my sister, Pauline-Archange—why does she not come and assist me in the entertainment of the Court? Of the Court, do I say?"

Here Clairville drew himself up as well as he could, and winking at his nurse gravely informed her that the most Christian King, Louis of France, being in North America for the good of his health, might call at the manor to see its master at any moment.

"If you will be very secret, my good woman, I will tell you this further, but it must be between us only—His Most Christian Majesty of France is just recovering from the 'Pic'. But do not alarm yourself; I have not been with him much. Fear not, madame, neither for yourself nor me."

Madame clasped her hands and looked upwards; she seemed to be crying, and yet she shed no tears. She knew there was something wrong. *She* was wrong. The Sieur de Clairville was wrong. The old habit of prayer, fervid, poetic, Catholic prayer, asserted itself and accordingly the mystic rosary of Our Lady returned to her.

"Priez pour nous, sainte Mère de Dieu. Mère aimable, priez pour nous. Mère adorable, priez pour nous. Vierge puissante, priez! Vierge fidèle, priez pour nous. Rose mystérieuse, priez pour nous. Maison d'or, Etoile du matin, priez pour nous. Santé des infirmes, priez pour nous."

Henry Clairville listened. Gradually he sank into the chair, and the tears, the slow, painful, smarting tears of weak mind and middle age—coursed down his thin, pitted cheeks. Madame sat down too and sobbed.

"Oh, have I offended you, m'sieu? Why did I pray? What makes us pray at all? Is there One who hears a poor woman like me? But she might hear you, m'sieu, a grand gentleman like you—and so I prayed."

"A grand gentleman! Thank you—madame, thank you," said he, trembling. "I believe I am that, or I was once. I have been very ill, I see. You must not take any notice if I go a little out of my head; it is nothing; Pauline is well accustomed to it, and so may you be if you remain here long. Only be lively with me, be always lively and pray aloud no more. I do not like these prayers. But why are you here? Where are my servants—Maman Archambault, Antoine, and the rest?"

"The servants of m'sieu left when m'sieu was taken sick."

"And you are doing their work?"

"As well as I can, m'sieu, when I can leave you. Just a little work I do, to amuse me, keep me from thinking."

Clairville trembled again and could not lift his eyes to this afflicted patient creature.

"I recollect now," he murmured, "you were always a kind woman. It was you who took the child

away?"

"It was I, m'sieu."

"Eight years ago, was it not?"

"Nine, m'sieu."

"Nine, then. It was the year of the great snow. Does she—does my sister ever go to see it?"

"I cannot tell, m'sieu. She is not in St. Ignace often, and m'sieu knows that when ma'amselle goes abroad it is to Montreal and to the theatre."

"But you—you know about it, if it lives, if it is well, and has—has its mind?"

"It lives—yes, truly, m'sieu—it is never ill and it has its mind!"

"Mon Dieu!" muttered Henry Clairville. "*That* has its mind and I—I am sometimes bereft of mine. And you—you—" he pointed to madame, and though innocent and unoffending she quailed before the seigneurial finger. "You even—you woman there—you have not always your mind! Oh—it is dreadful to think of it! I would be ill again and forget. Tell me—is there, is there any resemblance? Say no, madame, say no!"

"I never go to Hawthorne, m'sieu, I cannot tell you. But I do not think so. I have never heard. They are nearly all English in that parish; they would not concern themselves much about that—the poor *bébé*, the poor Angéle. God made her too, m'sieu. Perhaps some day she will be taken away by mademoiselle to a place where such children are cared for. That is why Mademoiselle Pauline works so hard at the theatre to make much money."

"She would need to!" burst from Henry Clairville. "What she does with the money she makes I do not know, it never comes this way! I cannot make money. She ought to remember me sometimes, so that I could establish this place afresh, find new servants, for example. Alas—what shall I do without them?"

He raised his voice and the old peevish tone rang out.

"Be tranquil, m'sieu. It is I—I myself, nursing you, who shall do all that is required."

He sighed heavily, then a sudden fire leapt into his eyes. "Let us see how far I can walk. Open that door, I wish to see if I can cross the hall."

"After so long, m'sieu! It is not possible. May St. Anne give you courage, for it is assuredly six or seven years since m'sieu has left his apartment."

"Nine—nine!" said he impatiently. "The year the child came into this world. I vowed then and all St. Ignace knows I have kept the vow—I would never leave my room again."

"M'sieu, all know, it is true, of the vow, but none know the reason for it. I have kept my faith, m'sieu."

"But she, my sister, she is so flighty, so excitable—she may have told a thousand times!"

"I think not, m'sieu."

"Father Rielle is unsuspecting; likewise Dr. Renaud. Well, well, who gains by considering evil? Not one so weak and battered as I. Nevertheless, I will walk, madame. I will conquer this fear and this weakness and will show the strength and temper of a Clairville, of a De Clairville, I should say. Open then, madame."

Thus with his black skull-cap on his bald head, and the faded claret and silver habit upon his shrunken limbs, he tottered over the threshold of his disorderly, uncared for room which he had occupied without one moment's intermission, night and day, summer and winter, for eight years, ten months and four days, and madame, preceding him, watched in an agony of fear but also of hope—yonder was a new field for her powers of cleansing and purifying. Dust in thick rolls, cobwebs in floating black triangular and looped clusters, stale odours and rubbish—the apartment which had served as bedroom, dining-room, *salon* and study so long, would naturally be in a disgraceful condition. Henry Clairville's ghost it was that passed from that room to the hall, but the ghost walked—more than Henry Clairville had done for nine years.

The door of the chief *salon* was open, and he entered, Mme. Poussette assisting him, still with clasped hands and awestruck eyes, and, although all the changes which had been wrought by her indefatigable fingers could not be appreciated by him, as it was so long since he had seen the room, he missed

something. The suit, hanging for years upon its common nail, till it was encrusted with flyspecks, riddled with moth-holes, and tarnished, rusty and faded, now covered his meagre frame, but the other things he looked for he failed to find. He gazed at the walls, perceiving the one old, cracked and discoloured painting.

"Where are the others?" he demanded piteously. "There were four others, all valuable, all of great value."

"There was but this one when I came, m'sieu."

"Then Pauline has sold them—to keep that wretched child alive, to pay for its board and keep and *tendresse—tendresse*, perhaps, on part of some one while I—I have been neglected and kept short of the things I might have had—the wine, the comforts, the fruits! Ah—but I am a most unfortunate man, I who should be seigneur of the parish! Is it not so, madame? Here have I been starving and yet—there was money, you see—my sister had money all the time!"

Madame's lips moved; she said nothing. Far from having suffered privation during her stay at Clairville, she had been able to provide both for herself and the invalid, food and drink of the best quality procurable in that part—the Archambaults having hoarded large quantities of the supplies sent up by Poussette's "peep". The love of acquisition for its own sake had spread even among the youngest members of the family, and had one demanded suddenly of any of them the simplest meal, one would have been met by violent protestations that there was nothing in the house! To such an extent had this smuggling and hoarding spread that in looking through the kitchen and cellars madame had encountered a great store of provisions, mostly in good condition; sacks and barrels full of vegetables, apples, winter pears and nuts; tins full of bread and cakes, some mouldy, some fresh, and various kegs and bottles full of wine and spirits.

"Then," he continued, "where are my choice books, my *éditions de luxe*? There were some splendid volumes here, rare, you understand, worth money. She must have sold them also. I recollect when she begged me to let her take them out of my room. And a violin—of the most superb—that is gone! You know nothing of all these?"

"I know nothing—truly—m'sieu."

"And my cats? Who has dared to interfere with my cats, my dear friends? Le Cid—Chateaubriand—Phédre—Montcalm—eh? What has been done with them? And the doors, the little doors I had made for them—nailed up, I see! Ah—ah, madame—this is your work! You have killed them! Say then, am I not right? Miserable wretch of a woman!"

He was staggering now about the room between weakness and temper and she assisted him to a chair.

"You have killed them!" he gasped repeatedly.

"No, m'sieu, not one. Indeed, m'sieu, I speak the truth. The cats of m'sieu were fourteen; how could I kill so many? No, but I fed them and put them away in the barns—yes—and nailed up the little doors, it is true, for I could not do my work with the cats of m'sieu always between the feet. I spoke of them once to you, because there were two who wished to enter your room, lie on the bed——"

"Yes, yes! Le Cid and Montcalm. Good cats, good friends!"

"Lie on the bed, but I could not allow them. Thus, for three days they sat outside the door of m'sieu."

"And the peacock? Is it that I shall find him banished also when I walk forth from my house? Mlle. Pauline has rid herself of him?"

"Not so, m'sieu. I have cared for the bird and indeed for all the animals."

Clairville, quieter now, was thinking.

"Did some one sing to me about cats as I lay there on my bed?"

Madame reddened.

"Yes, m'sieu—it was I who made a song about the 'Cats of Clairville'. To amuse myself only, m'sieu, I often do like that."

He looked at her, then down at his speckled, bony hands.

"We are both mad, I think," he said in the most matter-of-fact way, "but you, of course, more so than I

am. Well, to-day I have walked in here. To-morrow I shall walk all over this house, and next week, madame, next week I shall walk to the village—well, half-way. Some day I may even go to church. Oh—you shall see, you shall see!"

And with that, natural fatigue, engendered by the wholly unusual exercise intervened; his nurse moved a sofa into the hall, and there he slept for many hours, while she routed out his room as well as she could; his physical recovery from that day was miraculously rapid, and in a fortnight he was as quick and light upon his feet and as much given to the open air and walking as he had been previously doggedly convinced that he could not use his legs and that the least breath or whiff of fresh air would destroy him. So much for the after-effects of the "Pic" and the sweet uses of adversity.

The fine November days that followed were the days that Canada can give in wonderful perfection—when the thick canopy of leaves has been caught up, shrivelled, and disappeared, when a great expanse of sky, forest and river lies before the enraptured vision, with every twig and branch, every stump and hollow in the ground, every undulation and hillock of withered grass, showing as clearly cut and sharply defined as in winter, while the air is frequently warmer than in June and a singular mellow haze fills all the forest paths. Now can be closely seen the different forms of the trees, each trunk and each limb no less interesting than the brilliant foliage which lately enveloped them; the abandoned nests are bare, some on the ground transfixed between the bushes, or pendant from the branches of tall trees. The evergreens of various kinds supply the note of colour which alone gives hope and promises relief from neutral brown and grey, and underneath what once was a leafy forest arcade are all the roots of spring—the spotted erythronium, the hepatica, the delicate uvularia, the starry trientalis. Through such spacious aisles and along such paths of promise Henry Clairville walked every day while the fine weather lasted, wearing the ancient suit and the black skull-cap, and often attended as far as Lac Calvaire by the white peacock and two cats, and always watched from window or door by the faithful Mme. Poussette. Fear of contagion kept the Archambaults away, all save Antoine, who, constituting himself a bodyguard for Pauline in the village, took messages to and fro the Manor House.

When M. Clairville had seen the stores and provisions in his cellar, sufficient, with a few additions, for the entire winter months at least, he demanded of madame if she would remain with him and manage his house, and the poor woman assented with delight. Poussette did not want her; she had no place in the world, no ties; only occasionally was she required to nurse sick people in the village; here was a comfortable remote haven where she might be of use, busied in exercising those faculties remaining to her, which at Poussette's were rotting and rusting away. She remained therefore, to cook and wait upon him; a new existence sprang up for both, and it was when this sort of thing had lasted for a month that the parish priest, Father Rielle, thought it his duty to call.

CHAPTER XIV

FATHER RIELLE

"—his moods Of pain were keen as those of better men, Nay, keener, as his fortitude was less."

The writer has elsewhere stated that the Roman Catholic clergy in this part of the world are easily divided into two classes, the rotund, rosy and jolly, and the thin, ascetic and reserved; the *curé* of St. Ignace belonged to the latter, and possessed a strongly marked characteristic face, the droop of his bitter mouth and the curve of his chiselled nose being almost Dantesque in effect. He had conserved a type of feature which, common enough up to the present, seems to be in danger of extinction; the passing of the aquiline, the slow disappearance of the Roman nose, are facts patent to thoughtful observers of national traits. Any contemporaneous collection of portraits of representative men in the higher walks of life reveals the fact that this fine racial curve is rapidly becoming extinct. From the Duke of Wellington down, this nose has been associated with men prominent in military and naval affairs, in literature (notably poetry and criticism) and in finance and diplomacy, until the possession of such a significant organ has become almost the *sine qua non* of an individual destined to be famous or successful. Varieties of course existed, such as when combined with beetling brows and sunken eyes one recognized the professor or arch-critic of his generation. Or, when taken with the square forehead, thin mouth and visionary eyes of the military genius, one saw some great general. Or simply existing in some silly scion of good family, and meaning nothing whatever, in this case usually over-high at the thin bridge, and in profile far too strong for the weak rest of the face. In women of gentle extraction this

nose was found beautifully proportioned. In belles of the mid-Victorian era were the lineaments of Caesar clearly revealed, associated with the delicacy of colouring and rounded chin and cheek which redeemed them from hard masculinity, so that fifty years ago in any representative gathering of England's fairest and noblest the observer would note a similarity of feature, especially in profile, between peers and peeresses, poets and poetesses, statesmen and the *grandes dames* of society. Caricatured, it lived in the drawings of Leech and Du Maurier. Taken seriously, it inspired creative artists both of pen and brush when dealing with the heroic. Superficial writers confused it with the Hebraic nose, and in prints of criminal and depraved characters one frequently found it distorted and wrenched to conditions of ugliness. Tennyson and the latest murderer apparently owned the same facial angle, if one corrected the droop of the eyebrow, the curve of the nostril, the set of the ear. Thus the Roman or aquiline nose made itself and its possessor known to the world. Other noses might, if they liked, take a back seat! this nose never. Sala, Lamb, Kingsley—all had varieties of the nose. The American variant is seen in hundreds of nineteenth century writers, preachers, New England farmers, old Cape Cod characters, Gloucester fishermen, actors, especially of tragic mould; showmen, lecturers, bankers—the nose has prospered in the new world. The significance of the feature is matched by its endurance, by the persistency with which it appears in every decade up to the present.

For with the opening of a new century the nose, aquiline in its purest state, equine with its accompaniment of cruel gums and sharp teeth in its worst, seems on the point of disappearing. The contemporary portraits of great men and beautiful women no longer display it. There is a new nose. It is to be hoped that it retains the powers with which the organ was originally endowed; for example, we suppose that it still can detect and appreciate, repulse and define odours. But as a sign-post showing the path to glory, as an index of force of character or intellect, it is practically useless. The new nose is modest, retiring, seeketh not its own, is never puffed up. You would know it for a nose, certainly, but its ample and aristocratic proportions are wanting; it lacks a bridge, is spineless, immature, unfinished. Yet it is set in the faces of many eminent thinkers and workers among the younger men; it is already allied to keenness of vision and talent, and may or may not be associated with birth and good breeding. The query is—is it a new nose, or only one that has always been with us, but is now gradually supplanting the old one? Did the nose aquiline largely represent class, and does the phenomenon of the new semi-straight, semi-nothing nose represent the intrusion of mass? Against this timid and, it may be, spurious generalization, one may pit the working-man with the nose of a duke, and the young colonial ruler with the unformed, delicate feature of a school-girl. So we accept the fact that in our own day types are passing.

The English face is going. It has served its turn, perhaps. Infusion of American and colonial blood will help to change it. The high-nosed country gentleman or landed noble, with Berserk or Viking blood in his veins, finds that, like Alice in Wonderland, it takes all he can do to keep where he is, and the work entailed takes something, a good deal, out of him. One thing goes, then another; finally, he casts away his birthright, the arch or bridge of his nose, and his son and the younger members of his family appear shorn of that important feature. The plebeian nose, so long as it is neither pug nor pig, is safer, better. Men are not afraid of it. Syndicates and boards breathe more freely when the barriers of nose are broken down, and a good mediocrity of feature may yet avert a war or preserve a treaty. At all events, a study of our chief contemporaries will bear out a considerable portion of this reasoning. The beauties of society and the stage have a leaning to noses tiptilted like the petals of a flower, or to a nose which is a kind of modification of the Greek, frequently found among Americans. For instance, in Canada there is fast growing up a new type of head, clean-shaven, firm, expressionless young faces, who bring their thick, straight dark hair and blue-grey eyes from the country to the town. They are forsaking the plough and the roadside school for the warehouse and the pestle and mortar. It is not openly reported of such that they would rather wear a black coat and starve than wear fustian and do well, to quote Thomas Hardy, but the stress of things drives them. The rural communities are dull; amusements are lacking; there seems nothing to live for outside work. Nature poets and wild-animal delineators are not among these set, earnest, straight-featured faces. The former are more likely to be denizens of cities. In this slightly dour Canadian face there are but few aquiline noses, and yet such is the danger of generalizing that perhaps the first people readers of this page meet after perusing it might be a group of students, none with Celtic hair and eyes and all with Roman contours. Likewise, on opening the current number of a leading musical journal, the long, high, prominent nasal organ of Sir Edward Elgar confronts us, whose peculiar cast of thought confirms the impression that spirituality, fine artistic conception and capacity to achieve are still the dower of those possessing this fast-disappearing feature. Ringfield belonged to the tribe of straight-nosed, grey-eyed thinkers—a finished contrast to Father Rielle, whose worn profile suggested the wormwood and the gall. Looks, however, not being in all cases indications of the character within, the priest was an exceedingly simple and earnest man, constitutionally timid, and physically frail; thus, he passed for what is known as a "deep" man, when he was nothing of the sort, and although it may be a mooted point whether in a Catholic community the local priest has or has not the entire conscience of that community at his mercy by means of the confessional, it was certain that there were a few things that Father Rielle did not know. Had he been social, convivial, fond, like

most of his brother priests, of a game of cards, of good living and long drinking, he might have worked more reforms in the countryside, and holding the reins of priestly government stern and tight prevented some lapses from the moral code. That is to say, a worse man might have achieved better results, but as it was not in his nature to haunt Poussette's, make friends with the guides and call at unconventional hours upon his parishioners, he missed several revelations that fell to Ringfield's share. Crabbe was not upon his visiting list, nor Pauline of late years; for Henry Clairville he entertained a certain sad respect, as for a gentleman and landed proprietor fallen from grace indeed, but by the Will of God rather than by personal shortcomings. His tendency to fatalism was Calvinistic in its intensity, and he trod his accustomed path baptizing, marrying, burying, with the sour curve of his thin profile growing sourer every day. Thus this silent, censorious-looking priest presented a strong contrast to the optimistic young Ontarian, yet one emotion was common to them both—Father Rielle had for years nursed a hopeless passion for Miss Clairville.

It happened that the knowledge of Mme. Poussette's remaining on at Clairville as housekeeper to its master came to Father Rielle as something of a shock. Certain things are right and certain things are wrong in certain places; some things are right and some things are wrong in all places. Madame had a husband who, although plainly tired of her, had not yet openly neglected her; she also had a good home, and in her condition of mind it was not wise, according to the priest, that she should leave her husband and home to live with Henry Clairville. Dr. Renaud was questioned, but as medical men are everywhere less concerned with the conventions than are lawyers or priests, he only intimated that madame was probably happier at Clairville than in her own home, and that he saw no reason for disturbing the arrangement.

"But," said Father Rielle in their common tongue, "is it because the wife of Poussette is a little afflicted, light of head while sad of heart, that rules and customs no longer apply to her? I take it—it will make a scandal in the village and every man who is sick must expect some other man's wife to come in and care for him, and finally live in his house and take care of it. Our society may be small, but in some matters it is best conducted as are large communities. I think M. de Clairville should be instructed that his conduct is wrong."

"You call him 'de' Clairville, I see," replied the doctor from his buggy outside Gagnon's carpenter shop. "Well, it does not matter! Faith—he is both vicious and mad enough to be in truth the seigneur of all the parish as he styles himself—as nobles and seigneurs used to go. I have little knowledge of such myself! I am a plain man! my father was Renaud the harness-maker of Three Rivers. First I was fond of horses, then I was fond of gathering herbs and flowers, then I was fond of mixing medicines and quacking my friends when they were ill; then my mother saved some money and sent me to college and then one fine day I awoke, and I am Dr. Renaud! And you—you are one of the three Rielle brothers, likewise from Three Rivers; one is a notary, one a priest—yourself—and the youngest keeps the Hôtel Jacques Cartier at Sorel-en-haut. That is funny, that! You should have made him something else."

"It is true," replied the priest mildly, "I am not in love with his calling, but people who travel must be lodged. I use his place myself once or twice a year; it is the Will of God that such places must be; it is clean, and his wife, at the age of seventeen, already cooks well; he is lately married at the age of thirty-five. I myself am four years older. But of M. de Clairville I would say—that he must be brought to see that he is doing this poor Mme. Poussette a wrong, and I was going to ask you if you would drive me out to visit him this afternoon. That is, if, as I hear, it is quite safe to go there now."

"It would afford me pleasure indeed, *mon père*," said Dr. Renaud, "but unfortunately I am waiting here for the young man who has charge of the new church by the river,—Poussette's fancy, Mr. Ringfield."

"You are driving him to Clairville?" A quick jealousy animated the priest's eager question.

"I am, but we can make room for you. Certainly, my friend, we are neither of us so very stout and you are thin; you shall sit in our laps—oh yes, I take no denial! You shall come with us, Father Rielle, and we three shall descend upon this sick seigneur of yours and his housekeeper and see what they are doing. Drive her back in the evening, if you like."

While the priest hesitated, Ringfield and Poussette appeared at the door, and the instant the latter heard of the expedition he also wished to go.

"I cannot see why!" cried Dr. Renaud angrily. "One *charrette* will not hold us all; it is going to snow and I must get back before dark. I'm calling here to leave an order for Gagnon about a coffin for old Telesphore Tremblay who died yesterday, and I have promised to see his poor wife to-night."

"Then I shall take my own buggy and Mr. Ringfield can go with me. The *curé* can go with you, sir."

"Well, if the whole village wishes to pay its respects to a crazy man all at the same time, let them come!" roared the irascible doctor. "You didn't care to go till you saw us going. But put your horse in, put him in; we will wait for you."

"*Bien*, M'sieu! I have three hams and a sack of potatoes; they shall go too."

This dialogue had been overheard by Pauline, sitting at cards with Miss Cordova in the front room, and with her natural impetuosity she jumped up, declaring that if Henry were well enough to see "these others," he was well enough to see her. Her impulsive movements sent the cards and counters flying up through the air, and one card hit Miss Cordova on the left eye directly over the pupil. As lightly as if flicked by a clever finger, but as unerringly as if deliberately and viciously aimed at her, one of the four sharp points of cardboard selected her dark eye for its target, and with a scream she too sprang up, overturning the table and seizing Pauline by the shoulder. The pain and distress were considerable, and Miss Clairville, opening the window, called for Dr. Renaud, who came at once to look at the eye and recommended bathing, bandages and complete rest. The exquisite tenderness of the inflamed organ gave Miss Cordova so much annoyance that after ten minutes she retired to her room, and the doctor again proposed himself ready to start for Lac Calvaire. The weather, fine and mild for so long, was changing now with every hour, and it was becoming strangely dark overhead.

"Whoever comes with me must prepare for a storm," said he, glancing at the blackening sky, "only a few flurries of snow, perhaps, but one cannot tell—it may prove more."

"You are sure there can be no danger of infection?" asked Ringfield, with an anxious glance at Pauline, who had raced to her room, stuck imitation solitaires in her ears, donned a worn-out but well-fitting seal jacket and muff and a dashing black and scarlet hat, and now stood in the village street—the embodiment of piquant French womanhood—quite conscious of her charms and insufferably weary of having no audience to show them off to! A certain disdain sprang into her treatment of Ringfield at this time, and it was a question with her, should he ever ask her to be his wife, whether she would not inevitably tire of the high aims and lofty ideals he no doubt would impose upon her.

"You don't suppose I'd be going if there were, do you?" she remarked in English tartly, curving her arching black brows at him; "how many are we—five? That's three too many, in my opinion. Father Rielle—I go with you in Mr. Poussette's buggy; you others there, you three messieurs—you can go how you please."

The priest flushed, then a sudden glance passed between him and Ringfield, and in that look each knew what the other wished and hated him for it! Still, Father Rielle followed Pauline instantly, and there was no opposition as she lightly leapt into Poussette's buggy, and with a wave of her muff, adorned by a bright scarlet bow, two of the five were soon out of sight.

CHAPTER XV

THE STORM

"Snow is at the door
Assaulting and defending, and the wind,
A sightless labourer, whistles at his work."

Dr. Renaud now called on the minister and Poussette to make haste; he had been delayed by the accident to Miss Cordova and already large flat flakes were falling.

"Just the size of half-dollars, eh? The idea is, Poussette, to bring madame home; that is to say, the *curé's* idea, but he's gone off with another woman. I suppose you are jealous now, of this one I mean, not the other."

"Not me, much. Father Rielle, he's no harm. He cannot marry mademoiselle nor any one else; besides, he has no money. Mlle. Pauline—she is for the money."

"Ah—ha, I believe you. We used to read or sing, I forget which, at college, about 'Les beaux yeux de sa Casette'. I do not know the origin of the quotation, but you understand, Mr. Ringfield, what it means, and our young lady in front there has learnt in a bitter school the value of money. *Casette*—*casette*—cash-box; you will see, if she ever settles down, it will be, as our friend Poussette says, for the

money."

Ringfield's throat was dry, he did not speak; his stern gaze, directed at the leafless landscape over which the first slow snows were falling, gave no indication of the tumult within; besides, the aspect of the road and condition of the elements were calculated to banish personal emotions, for even Poussette's hilarity was silenced by the increasing velocity of the wind and the darkness dropping upon them. It was only five miles to the *métairie*, but at the end of the second mile the sky was absolutely blank and the snow so thick that heaps of it lay on the horse's flanks and on their own laps and hands. It kept increasing at such magical rate that the roadway was obscured and twice Dr. Renaud found himself out on the rocky plateau at the left, instead of the middle path. The priest and Miss Clairville had vanished in front, but the three men could hear the sound of a horse on the slabs of rock behind them, coming very swiftly too, and in a few minutes a second buggy dashed madly by. The horse was running away, no doubt badly frightened by the violence of the storm, and Ringfield recognized Mr. and Mrs. Abercorn in the agonized couple holding bravely on, while the excitable little mare dashed through the snow.

"My hands are freezing!" cried Dr. Renaud. "This is a big surprise—a regular blizzard. We'll have to stop somewhere till it's over. I never beheld such darkness—at three o'clock in the afternoon—nor such sudden heaps of snow. Lucky for us if it does not turn to hail." He had scarcely uttered the words when the snow flagged, ceased to fall, then the hail began. Colder and colder grew the air with a strange, unnatural feel in it as if in the proximity of icebergs, or of the hour closest on dawn, and the hail, at first small and round, pretty and harmless, came gently chattering about the horse's ears and back, came faster and larger, came at last too fast and too large, came as stones come that are flung by enemies and rioting mobs of people anxious for vengeance. The doctor was afraid for his horse; one ear was cut and bleeding and the animal could no longer face the blinding streams of hail; he was covered and the men all got out, burying their heads in their coats; but Ringfield, the worst off, since he had come without gloves or muffler, was for ever casting anxious glances ahead, which Poussette and the doctor understood.

"I *bette* you!" cried the former; "Mr. Ringfield, sir, the *curé*—he don't know what to do with Miss Clairville. He'll never get her home, sure. He's no good with a horse—my horse too—I guess we better go after him, eh?"

"Stay where you are!" shouted the doctor. "Farther along the forest begins again, and these hailstones are snapping off the branches as if they had been slashed with axes. I can hear. You may be killed. Surely this cannot last long!"

But there seemed no diminution of the hail; it lay a foot deep in pieces the size of marbles or of small apples, and the autumnal grasses and bushes of juniper and sumach were beaten flat with the rocky ground from which they derived scant sustenance.

The three men were by this time suffering greatly from the sudden and unexpected cold, and as it was impossible to continue the drive to Calvaire in face of the biting hail, they were about to attempt to return to St. Ignace when the darkness partly lifted, the air grew gradually milder, and streams of steady rain came pouring down; overhead the clouds met, charged, and thunder raged at intervals.

Ringfield, now greatly alarmed and fancying he heard noises from the wood in front, even cries of distress, could no longer be detained, but bidding farewell to the others strode forward in the direction of the forest, slipping as he walked and already drenched to the skin, his clothes freezing upon him and clogging his difficult steps. Fortunately, for one who did not know the locality well, the daylight had partly returned. He judged that by keeping to the road he ran no risk of losing his way, but when a turn revealed another road, he was naturally perplexed, as the face of the country had greatly changed since he had made his last visit to the Manor House. Afraid to stand long, for trees were thick about him and the lightning still flashing, he went on again up the new road, and after a few minutes running saw a deserted barn in a hollow and made for it. In this dell or glade the trees had been thinned out, either by forest fires or by the owner, but one tall pine remained beside the forlorn and ruined barn as if for companionship—a lonely sentinel.

Ringfield, wet and shivering, rushed up to the barn door, and finding it half-open had nearly flung himself through it when he was arrested by voices within, or rather a voice—that of a woman. He did not immediately think of Miss Clairville, for no horse nor conveyance were outside, but, had he listened more carefully, he would have recognized her educated accents; as it was, in a moment or two she herself came to the door, and upon seeing Ringfield started, but asked him to enter.

The barn contained some old boxes and rusty tools, a short ladder led to a loft above full of dry hay, and there Miss Clairville explained she had taken refuge when the hail first began.

"But Father Rielle——" said Ringfield looking vaguely around.

"Oh, you shall not meet with him here. He left me and said he would try to go on to Clairville, get a fresh horse—Poussette's was badly cut—and come back for me. You have not met him?"

"No, then you are alone?"

"Of course, and neither wet nor frightened, while you appear to be both!" said she, gaily at first, but catching her breath as she observed his stern, anxious gaze.

Ringfield, drawing a deep sigh, suddenly lost his self-control.

"Oh, how you torture me!" he cried, extending his arms as if to enfold her, then dropping them as he recollected his condition.

"Torture you? You—Mr. Ringfield, so calm and self-contained, the Reverend Mr. Ringfield of St. Ignace! I torture YOU! Why what have I done to-day, then? Have I made the weather or caused the storm? Is it MY snow or MY rain, or MY hail, and *écoutez bien*—MY thunder and MY lightning raging there?"

"No—no—but to run off like that, and with that poor priest—poor fellow—I saw how it was with him! You are sure he is not here now?" Ringfield cast an eye up at the loft.

"Certainly not! Would he let you talk like that about him? But listen to this fearful storm! How can we think of anything else—and you—you so wet—wet and tired! It seems a little calmer now; perhaps you had better try again and walk on to Clairville. There you may fall in with the *curé* or Dr. Renaud and then come back for me."

"I will not leave you in this desolate place for a moment! Yet I feel as if we were surrounded by people—why is it—I cannot understand why! To whom were you talking while I was outside?"

"Ah, there, *tais-toi, mon ami!*"

Miss Clairville pushed him down on one of the boxes and tried to draw off his stiff and dripping coat, but he restrained her; their hands meeting sent him beside himself, and, seizing one, he pressed a warm, lingering kiss upon it. Adept in these matters, Pauline kept up a gay chatter, and as she drew her hand away seemed only uneasy—neither fluttered nor deeply moved.

"I assure you," she exclaimed brightly, "I am quite safe here. I am not in the least wet, my old coat has done me good service—*voyez*—my feet are dry, and all I would ask is a light to cheer me while you are absent, but that I cannot have and I must be content. Although that unnatural dark is over, the shades of the true night will soon be falling and it is lonely here. So the sooner you go the better."

"But where can I go? Will it not be better to remain here with you until Father Rielle returns?"

"I think not—he is slow—that priest! See—if you go now, you will surely overtake him. Keep to your right after regaining the road and you will soon find the lake."

"Well, then, I will go," said Ringfield rising. "But if I might speak to you now, might tell you all I hope and fear and think almost continually, if I might ask you, too, to think about it, and tell me—tell me—it is so difficult for me to say what I wish to—you seem so gay, so satisfied, so——" His voice broke off, for her face changed ominously, and the strongest argument he could have adduced, the folding of her to his heart, the silent embrace which should make her his, was still denied him. To the outsider there might have been a touch of humour in the situation, but not so to either person concerned. She echoed his last words.

"Satisfied! Me! You think I am that? My God, yes, I have to say it in English—it means more! I—satisfied! Happy—you will say next, I suppose. Me—happy and satisfied. I'm the most miserable woman on God's earth! I have had ideals, aspirations—but how could I fulfil, achieve them, living in this place and with my temper, my heredity. Look at Henry. I tell you he is mad—mad and worse! Think of having lived with him! Think of Clairville! You do not know half of what I have gone through!"

A dreadful thought, a dreadful question occurred to Ringfield as he marked the dark wave of hair on Miss Clairville's brow, and again he saw the child in the basket chair at Hawthorne, but he frantically stifled the thought and forbore to question, and the next moment she was weeping and pushing him towards the door.

"Go now," she sobbed. "Go before it gets darker. You might lose your way. Go—go."

He went out at once, pulling the door after him as well as he could and ran through the hollow till he

reached the road, where it seemed brighter. The rain gave signs of falling less steadily, when, as often occurs after a protracted storm, there came a lull, followed by one terrific and astounding burst and explosion of thunder, accompanied by a vivid blue and orange blaze and afterwards complete silence and a great calm. The storm now rolled onward, having spent itself in that locality; but knowing from the sound that some place or object had been struck, Ringfield stopped, stepped behind a mass of boulders and juniper bushes and looked back down into the little hollow. The barn was apparently uninjured but the noble pine had suffered. The ripping, tearing sound he had heard was explained by the sight of a broad orange-coloured strip or band that ran longitudinally from the top of the tree to the bottom, indicating where the bark had been peeled off by the force of the fierce current. As he stood gazing thus at the seared and stricken pine, the door opened from the side of the barn and Miss Clairville slowly stepped out, followed by a man in whom, with an exclamation of extremest repulsion and surprise, Ringfield clearly recognized Edmund Crabbe.

The shock of this and the full meaning of it set Ringfield's nerves and pulses tingling, and he stepped farther back into the shade as he watched them. They advanced to the great pine, examined it, and he could see that Crabbe's arm went around her waist. The guide himself seemed, even at that distance, to be more neatly dressed than usual, he wore a tweed cap with coat to match and did not look as if he had been drinking, but as with him that was the sign that he was about at his worst, Ringfield could only turn away in disgust and pursue his way to Clairville. It was not a pleasant thought that Crabbe must have been in the loft, while a somewhat tender scene had been enacted, and he suddenly felt a contempt and pity for the woman who could play two men at the same time in such barefaced fashion. Then, as lovers will, he rebuked himself for this; perhaps Crabbe had taken refuge in the loft without her knowledge, and the great final crash had brought him down; perhaps she had known he was there, but was ashamed of producing him in a semi-drunken condition, perhaps—then Ringfield saw the distant lights of the Manor House and hastened towards them. A little farther on he overtook the priest, leading Poussette's horse and buggy, and it was not long before they were able to take off their wet clothes at madame's fire and exchange confidences about the storm.

In the large kitchen were also Mr. and Mrs. Abercorn, Dr. Renaud and Poussette, and the priest, who was naturally held accountable for Pauline's safety, reported her as resting comfortably in the barn.

Ringfield did not say much; of Crabbe no mention was made by the others, and it was probable that nobody had seen him, or dreamt of his being out in the neighbourhood on such a day.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE BARN

"Poor now in tranquil pleasure, he gave way
To thoughts of troubled pleasure."

Pauline had yielded to an erratic but harmless impulse in driving off recklessly with the priest; her nature, so long restrained by residence in a dull, circumscribed village instead of a lively town, needed some such prank to reanimate and amuse it. She seized the reins dramatically, insisted upon driving, and Father Rielle was nothing loath since he did not care about nor understand horses very well, and since it was dangerously novel and bitterly pleasant to sit and watch Miss Clairville. Her fine features and splendid colouring showed well against the dull background of sky and forest; the ribbon on which her muff was slung, tied moreover in a dashing bow, was a bit of true scarlet matching some rosettes in her hat. As she looked behind for a wilful instant she caught sight of Ringfield sitting up stiffly on the two fat laps provided by Amable Poussette and the doctor, and her laugh rang musically in the priest's ear.

"Poussette's is the fastest horse in the village!" cried she. "See—I will give him a little of the whip. *Voilà*—now he will think he has his master behind him. *March-ch, donc, animal*. Get up—bigosh, *excusez, mon père*. That's it! Watch him now! I'm not an actress for nothing. See now—he'll be galloping presently, but trotting is all we care for, my good beast! So you are going to bring Mme. Poussette back with you, I understand,—tear the fair lady from my poor brother!"

"Who has told you that *canard*?" said the priest, folding his arms and leaning back as far as the little *calèche* would allow. "No, I did not think of doing so to-day; you doubtless heard me talking of the

matter to Dr. Renaud. I cannot tell what you think of it, but in the absence of all servants it seems to me that Poussette's wife should return to her home while you both make new arrangements for managing his house. But perhaps you intend remaining there to-night, mademoiselle?"

"I have no such intention, *mon père*, I assure you. I am glad Henry has recovered; I shall see him once or twice, of course, and then I shall return to Montreal and not come back here for years—if I can help it. But look at the snow! It is coming faster and faster and growing darker and darker. The wolf's throat is sunshine compared to this. Shall we turn back?"

"No!" said the *curé* with his sour face steadily turned toward her. "I do not mind the snow nor shall you. I would drive so—like this—beside you and looking at you, to the end of the world, of life. Drive faster, faster yet, till we leave those others behind. Take that opening there on your left. I know of a shelter that will serve—Leduc's barn—you may remember it. Arrived there, you must hear me."

Pauline, irritated though not greatly surprised, stooped, and making a small hard ball of the wet snow lying thickly around their feet, flung it backwards into the priest's face; he caught her left wrist, held it in a tight grip, and although she was a strong woman, he was the stronger, being a man, and she could not escape. The darkness closed down upon them, the snow came down in blinding, tickling clouds, and in her anger and distress she could not drive properly. Poussette's horse being accustomed to being driven to the barn, went in that direction of his own accord, and thus they arrived in a whirlwind of snow—the priest still holding her wrist with something else than sourness showing in his thin features—a few minutes before the hail commenced falling. Pauline, dragging herself as she descended to the ground from an over-zealous admirer, ran into the shelter and tried to fasten the door, but the other, leaving Poussette's horse and *voiture* to fare as best they might, was quick upon her heels and followed her inside the barn.

Thus they escaped the worst portion of the storm, but the darkness endured; they remained standing looking at one another, and Pauline, though she was both cold and frightened, managed to give her habitual laugh.

"Because you are 'Father Rielle,'" she exclaimed, "you think you are entitled to pursue a recreant sheep of the flock even over here! Oh! it is not on account of the storm—I know that—that you follow me! I have seen this coming for some time, and I have feared it!"

The priest staggered, passed his hands over his eyes and made a hasty sign of the cross. Opportunity, propinquity, a sudden temptation—these had assailed him and for one moment all the devils of hell were let loose in this good man's brain and heart. The silence seemed eternal that followed on his movement; as the air lightened around them she fancied his countenance distorted by suffering, and his averted eyes spoke of his shame and contrition.

"My daughter," he said at length, "fear what you will but never again fear me. You witness my remorse, my tears—yes, behold, my daughter—and you know, you tell yourself that I cannot, will not harm you—nor any woman. But now you would hear what I would say, because you must not refuse. You have left our Holy Catholic communion, you are no longer daughter of the true Church, is it not so, my daughter?"

An old habit asserting itself, Pauline automatically answered; "*Oui, mon père.*"

"You have gone on the stage, you have developed into a brilliant but wayward coquette; you have for your friend a woman who has left her husband and thinks about marrying another. Is this not so, my daughter?"

And again, despite her experience of his singular lapse from conduct, Pauline's lips answered: "*Oui, mon père.*"

"Worst of all, you have set yourself to fascinate and wound this young man, this stranger among us, and you are leading him on to think of you night and day, I suppose, as I do!"

"*Mon père*—do not confess it!"

"Why not? You will not use your knowledge of my secret since you will not be believed. I—thanks to my training and the example of my glorious Church—can choke, can bridle, can conceal this passion—but not so this other. Can you deny that you have been with him, encouraged him?"

Pauline would have answered hotly, her rudimentary fear of the *curé* disappearing before the mention of Ringfield, when her eyes fell upon a book that lay at the foot of the ladder, a small green book that she knew well by sight, having read in it with Edmund Crabbe years before, when he was known as "Mr. Hawtree" and had been her lover. The book was a collection of poems by Edwin Arnold,

and back into her memory stole those passionate lines:—

The one prize I have longed for
Was once to find the goal of those dear lips;
Then I could rest, not else; but had you frowned
And bade me go, and barred your door upon me,
Oh, Sweet! I think I should have come with lamps
And axes, and have stolen you like gold!

She stood staring at the cover, for upon it lay three or four large spreading dark patches; were these wet spots caused by the snow? Her eyes, then traversing the ladder, noticed footprints, and cakes of blackened snow upon the steps. To whom belonged these tell-tale signs of occupation? Glancing farther up she saw the end of a stick protruding from the loose piles of straw that trickled over the top of the ladder, and she recognized the stick, a stout one with a peculiar ferule that also belonged to Crabbe. He must be in the loft, either sleeping or keeping silence, and now she found herself in the most uncomfortable position a woman can possibly occupy; to her already crowded list of lovers had been added another, and as the quarry of four strongly contrasted men, each possessing more than average persistence of character, she must have excited pity and sympathy in the breasts of women less fatally attractive, but scarcely one thrill of envy. She recognized in the priest potentially the fiercest lover of them all; a man of only two or three ideas, this one of cruel, hopeless, unattainable passion for herself would easily dominate him and render him, fresh to the emotions and therefore ignorant of how to control and deal with them, utterly unreasonable, even it might be violent and offensive. What wonder then if her thoughts like her eyes turned toward the loft above her. Despite her flighty tendencies, her town and theatre friendships and quarrels, her impulsive and emotional nature, Crabbe was the only man who had gained an ascendancy over her; for him she had forsaken prudence, but for him only, and strongest of associations, closest of ties—he alone had appealed to and satisfied her physical side. She had given him much but not all, and now in this moment of hatred of the *curé*, of herself, and a moving disgust at the conflicting facts of her difficult life, she thought of the Englishman as a desired refuge. There came crowding into her mind those small delicate acts and gestures which make as we say "the gentleman." She recollected Crabbe as he was when he first presented himself at the *métairie*, the self-possession of his easy manner, subtly tintured with that dose of romance necessary to her imagination; the unconscious way, to do him justice, in which his talk of blight and exile and ruined fortunes had aroused all her dormant sympathies.

"Oh," she cried, hoping that if in the loft he would hear, "all this is so dreadful, so different from the life I meant to lead, from the life I believe I was intended to lead! Hear me, Father Rielle: all men I hate and abhor, all, save one, and not the one you are thinking of! Hear me again: if I can find the money I will leave Clairville as I said, for good, for ever. I shall leave the theatre in Montreal, leave Canada, and I will go where my talents shall be understood and requited. It is true I have a temper and a tongue. It is true I am hard to teach and hard to get on with, and how do I know—perhaps there lurks in me a trace of that I fear so in Henry—yet I am resolved to try. If you mean what you say, and are not mad in your turn, will you help me to carry this out? I would leave at once, make my way abroad, study and become the actress I know I could if I got my chance. Perhaps in another country, perhaps if I could reach Paris, where I am not known, where it is not known, where——"

She stopped, following the priest's gaze so that both saw now what happened, the heap of straw at the top of the ladder was dislodged, the stick belonging to Crabbe slid down to the floor of the barn and the moment after he himself appeared. His face was somewhat red and swollen but his attire was neater than usual, and the step with which he descended the ladder almost normally steady, besides, he appeared on the side of morality, and as champion of feminine rights made a better figure than one would have deemed possible in so broken a man.

"Sorry to interrupt this *tête-à-tête*," said he, stopping to pick bits of straw off himself, "but it seemed about time that somebody interfered. I perceive Miss Clairville is rather tired, and—look here, Father Rielle—I give you two minutes by this old turnip or hour-glass of mine—it was with me on the prairie and may not keep very good time, but it ticks—I give you two minutes to apologize to mademoiselle for your—ah—detention of her, and then you may leave us for the Arctic regions outside. Polar, by Heaven, hail falling as big as walnuts!"

It was true; the darkness still reigned and a terrific noise, caused by the large stones rattling on the roof and splintering the distant forest branches. The priest on hearing that authoritative drawl behind him, cowered, his fear of personal violence from Crabbe, who bore a bad name, mastering his ecclesiastical dignity; but as he perceived that the guide was fairly sober he gathered courage and replied in rapid French:—

"You will not I hope be so evil-minded, monsieur, as to misunderstand my sentiments towards

Mademoiselle Clairville, whom I have known from her childhood. I am only saying to her what I have felt for a long time—I would be the means of saving her from herself, from such friends as you, and from the ills attendant on the profession she has chosen. My affection for her is solely that of the parish priest who has watched her career and felt saddened by it, yet who would reward evil by good."

"How would you reward her? By making love to her?"

"I have been in communication with the Mother Superior of a convent near Three Rivers, my birthplace. There is a fine appointment there, waiting for a person of talent—gifted—to instruct in elocution and possibly music. I thought——"

"You thought it would suit me!" cried Pauline, in a frenzy of disgust and irritation. "Me! For the stage and its triumphs a convent with simpering nuns! For Paris with its gay shops and drives, the town of Three Rivers, Province of Quebec, *dans le Bas Canada*! Oh! I see myself, thank you, in that *galère*, I assure you! No—no—that honourable extinction is not for me yet awhile. *Après, mon pere, après—après*, I may return and be glad of the haven, but not now."

"The two minutes are up," said Crabbe laconically. "I'm sorry to turn you out in such an afternoon, Father Rielle, but it is best for you and for mademoiselle. The hail's not quite so big as it was. I advise you to go at once."

The priest, divining some understanding between Crabbe and Pauline, and gradually calling to mind certain episodes of several years back, glanced from one to the other.

"I am not sure that I am not myself in the way," he said grimly. "Such rapid and excessive sensitiveness on behalf of Mlle. Clairville is creditable, but scarcely, I should think, its own reward."

"Do you deny that your being here is a menace to Miss Clairville's peace and that you—you a frocked and tonsured priest—have addressed words of love to her? If I did not utterly despise you, I should kick you out into the storm."

"You need do neither. I do not deny that I love Miss Clairville; I deny only that I have menaced or threatened her in any form. I say this to you—man of unclean, unholy habits—the priest is human. He is as God made him. He lives or dies, loves or hates by the will of God. When I look at Miss Clairville, I think of her as the possible helpmeet of my life, had it been spent in the service of this world instead of in the service of God. I think of her, monsieur, even reverently, purely, as the possible mother of my children."

This astonishing speech had much effect upon Pauline, who commenced weeping; the priest's voice—always a beautiful one—had dropped with a mournful cadence on the four last words, and Crabbe did not reply.

"Who can do more than that?" resumed the *curé*. "But that I cannot offer. Such care and worship, such devotion and tenderness I may not give. What then! I can at least be the instrument which shall shape her future career. I can point the way and deliver her from all these temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil. I do so now. I ask her to renounce the world now, at this moment, and to enter upon a new life to which it shall be my high and glorious privilege to introduce her."

The subtlety of the priest saved him. The noble melancholy of his words and gestures was abundantly convincing, and suddenly the situation, at one time threatening to become unpleasantly melodramatic, became normal. The reversion to the light commonplaces and glib phrases of society was felt in Crabbe's careless tones as he spoke of the weather, adding:—

"'Tis never too late to be polite. I'm putting my watch back into my pocket, and I'll go with you, Father Rielle. My refuge—a temporary one—is no longer needed, it's lightening very considerably, and I suppose you'll be going on to Clairville."

"But what am I to do?" exclaimed Pauline. "I would rather not be left here alone!"

"I am afraid you must make up your mind to that. Poussette's horse is hardly fit to be driven. Let Father Rielle take him to the Manor House and then come back for you with one of the others."

This was agreed upon, the two men left at once and for the space of ten or fifteen minutes she was alone. At the end of that time she could hear footsteps on a rapid run, and soon Edmund Crabbe re-entered the barn. The cool air had invigorated him, and he flung off his cap and faced her.

"I could not leave you in that summary fashion, after so long," he said, "after so long, Pauline! Well—I have lived to be of some service to you—or so I think. Whether Platonic or not, you had better not encourage his reverence to that extent again, do you hear? A veritable Cassius of a man! And, by the

way, you are looking very well just now, lady dear. I never saw you handsomer, Pauline!"

Miss Clairville's colour, already high, leaped more redly in her cheeks and she trembled; the ancient power that this man held over her, the ring of his rich English inflections, the revival of habit and association made her weak as water, so that she suddenly sat down and could find nothing to say. But Crabbe was quite at his ease, the encounter with Father Rielle had sharpened his wits and given him a restored opinion of himself, and in Pauline he saw a very handsome and attractive, warm-hearted and talented woman, still young and once very dear to him. The dormant affection in both was near the surface and Crabbe, knowing from her silence and downcast eyes how she felt, put some check on himself.

"Small use to either of us," he sighed, "to renew those passionate scenes of our youth! But I can still admire you and wish with all my heart—my heart you doubtless think black and altogether corrupt, Pauline—that you were for me to win afresh and wear openly this time, and that I might offer you a future unsullied. I suppose that your Methodist parson is after you, too, and that he will be the lucky one! He's handsome, d—n him—and steady as mountains; he does thy work, O Duty, and knows it not. I have little doubt but that flowers bend before him in their beds, that fragrance in his footing treads, and that the most ancient heavens—what's the rest of it? But you know, Pauline, you know you'll never be happy with him!"

Miss Clairville murmured something he did not catch, and it was a marvel to see how completely she lost her gay, assertive air, her dashing theatrical address in the presence of the guide.

"He's been at me several times about reforming. Well, if I did what would there be for me here? A big, long purse, Pauline, that's what I want—a big, long purse, my girl, and then you and I might leave this place and all these old harrowing associations. What about that Hawthorne business? Do you ever hear?"

"Sometimes," whispered Miss Clairville. "Antoine, as you may have noticed, acts for me. I give him the money, but I never go myself. I could not bear to see it—to see her—and it is not necessary."

"Poor girl!" said Crabbe, with much feeling. "It's hard on you, damned hard, I know. What's the matter? Oh—the swearing! I'm sorry, live too much by myself—forget myself. But Pauline, almost I think Father Rielle's advice will have to be followed. It would be a haven—a haven—better than the stage. If I could reform, could change my skin and lose my spots—but no! Even the fulminations of your latest admirer cannot work that miracle—I'm incorrigible! When I think of what I was, of what I might have been, and of what I am, despair seizes on me and then I'm only fit for—the bottle! There's no help for me, I'm afraid. Why, Pauline, this is Heaven's truth—I'm not perfectly sober now."

As he spoke, again were heard footsteps on a run outside the barn.

"I know you're not," said Miss Clairville in agitation, "but I don't shrink from you as I used to do. Perhaps it was my fault. Oh—who can this be? Father Rielle returning?"

"Hardly. He was told to drive back for you. It's some one seeking shelter, like ourselves. Hark—the hail is stopping, and now the thunder and lightning and a good old-fashioned midwinter storm!"

"I know who it is," said she, still more hurriedly, and pushing Crabbe towards the ladder,—“it is Mr. Ringfield. You must go back to the loft. I could not have him meet you here. He thinks—he thinks—you know what he thinks."

"And he's not far wrong, either," said Crabbe complacently. "But perhaps I'd better do as you say; don't detain him now. When he's gone I'll get you out of this somehow."

Thus in a few minutes Ringfield entered the barn, found Pauline, as he supposed alone; but afterwards, watching from the high road, saw the guide emerge and noted the familiar relation in which they stood in front of the stricken pine.

More than simple religious feeling entered at this moment Ringfield's young and untried heart, his vanity was deeply wounded, and the thought that Miss Clairville could allow Edmund Crabbe to caress her was like irritating poison in his veins. Yet he was in this respect unfair and over-severe; the fact being that Pauline very soon observed, on coming into closer contact with the guide, the traces of liquor, and she then adroitly kept him at a distance, for in that moment of disenchantment Ringfield's image again came uppermost.

It was not possible for her to be wise either before or after the event; she had not sufficient coldness nor shrewdness of character to enable her to break with all these conflicting surroundings and begin life over again as she had eloquently described to the priest, for without money she could not leave St.

Ignace, and she could not raise the money without taking some situation which might unfit her for the stage and prolong the time of probation too far into middle life. Pauline might age early, and at thirty-five she saw herself maturing into a gaunt and grizzled dame, incapable of all poetic and youthful impersonations. To be thus crippled was torture to her lively imagination, and in this *danse macabre* of thought, a grim procession of blasted hopes, withered ideals and torturing ambitions, her mind gave itself first to one issue, then to another, while it was clear that her position at St. Ignace was fast growing untenable and that something would have to be done.

To live at Poussette's on the charity of its host was, although the sister of the seigneur, to invite insult. To yield a second time to the ingratiating addresses of the guide was to lose her self-respect, while to indulge in and encourage a pure affection for Ringfield was a waste of time. She recognized the truth of Crabbe's candid statement—how could she do the young man such an injustice as to marry him!

CHAPTER XVII

REVELRY BY NIGHT

"Two passions both degenerate, for they both
Began in honour, ..."

The scene in the kitchen of the Manor House presented a forcible contrast to the wild world without. The near approach of winter and the news that M. Clairville was convalescent and well enough to receive visitors had brought the Abercorns from Hawthorne to pay their somewhat belated respects—they had never called before—and their arrival at the *métairie* created much astonishment. The rate at which the mare had raced through the Turneresque "Hail, Snow and Rain" relaxed as she neared Lac Calvaire, and they were able to disembark (in the language of the country) in safety if not in comfort at the door opened by Mme. Poussette. The parishes being nine miles apart, one entirely French, the other mostly English, not much gossip penetrated, and the Rev. Marcus and his wife were startled to hear that Henry Clairville had left his room, walked all over his house and even reached half-way to the bridge one afternoon. But as they were both cold and fatigued, madame led them (and shortly after Dr. Renaud and Poussette as well), by dark and tortuous paths, to her kitchen, a large room built on the generous scale of the seventeenth century, with a deep overhanging fireplace, and thick, arched recesses serving as closets, and furnished with swinging shelves and numerous bins where the provisions sent in periodically by Poussette were safely stored, thus being well protected from the rigours of a Lower Canadian winter.

Mrs. Abercorn was glad to come to the fire, her short squat figure lost in the depths of a chair which Mme. Poussette had found in one of the disused rooms, padded and carved, but also torn and moth-eaten; nevertheless a comfortable refuge on such a day, and soon the reverend lady sank into a soothing slumber, while her husband read from a book he carried in his pocket.

It grew dark and madame was lighting a couple of lamps when the priest and Ringfield entered. Explanations were in order, but as neither of them mentioned Edmund Crabbe, Miss Clairville's true position was not made known, and it was arranged that as soon as somebody's clothes were sufficiently dried and somebody's horse rubbed down and fed, somebody should pick her up at Leduc's barn and so return with her to St. Ignace.

"Of course *you* will go, Dr. Renaud," said Mrs. Abercorn, waking up abruptly and joining in the conversation with her usual judicial air. "But take some supper first."

"Has not mademoiselle already waited overlong?" exclaimed Poussette. "It is nearly six o'clock and dark—shall I not return now, and bring her back with me?"

"I think not," said the doctor, who partly understood the situation. "She will not expect to reach Clairville at all to-night, and, as Mrs. Abercorn says, as soon as I have something to eat, and a little to wash it down with—I myself shall go for her. Here, Poussette—off with your coat! Stir yourself now, and bring us the best the manor affords. It's no secret that since Mme. Archambault and her tribe have cleared out, we are masters of all contained in these generous closets—these roomy cellars I have heard of so often. Madame—the cloth, if you please, the dishes, the plates! Poussette—the wine, the old liqueurs, the glasses!"

"But sir, consider the fate of ma'amselle!" cried Poussette piteously. "She is alone—oh, poor lady—in Leduc's barn, without light, without warmth, with nothing to eat or drink! How then—do you wish to desert her?"

"Not I," said the doctor composedly. "But I know mademoiselle, she is true Canadienne, not afraid of a little snow, a little storm! And the secret of my profession is—always to eat and always to drink when good food and good drink are going. Madame, make haste there!"

"If I could assist you,——" began Mr. Abercorn, but stopped, for his glance wandered to his wife, who had never approved of Miss Clairville.

"You must not dream of such a thing, Marcus. Leave me here in this strange house, and go back by yourself along that awful road? Certainly not. Perhaps Father Rielle is going that way sooner than you, Dr. Renaud. Are you not, sir, anxious to—what do you call it—*chercher* mademoiselle?" Despite her knowledge of French it was the way of this lady to address the inhabitants of the countryside in English, it "accustomed them to it" and, she fervently hoped, tended to bring about the ultimate "Anglifying of the Province," to borrow a term much used by that distinguished patriot, Louis Honore Papineau, previous to 1857.

The priest, who had as yet no intention of returning to the barn, preferring that others should encounter the uncertain temper of one so recently tried in uncommon and painful ways, professed much interest in her plight, remarking, however, that he feared he did not drive well enough to find his way over the plateau of rock which lay between the road and the shelter.

"Then there is only Mr. Ringfield left!" exclaimed Mrs. Abercorn, much as if she were marshalling people in to dinner. "Yes, yes—you shall go for her, poor thing, but probably she deserves it; living on your charity, I hear, Mr. Poussette, and the other woman too; shocking, I call it! And belonging to quite an old family, *quite* old, I believe."

The idea of Pauline not paying anything towards her board while staying at Poussette's was painfully new to Ringfield; he had never thought of the matter, but now recalled her chronic condition of impecuniosity, and he saw directly how humiliating this must be for her and why it was necessary that she should find something to do. Henry Clairville, her natural and proper protector, could not apparently help her, the Englishman was fully as impotent, and Ringfield at once decided, while listening to the conversation, to seek her again and offer her a part of his stipend, the first instalment of which had been paid over by Poussette that morning. Everything favoured his quiet withdrawal, for the heat of the fire, the stacks of celery, and the splendid cognac, smuggled from the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, and purchased by Poussette for twenty cents a bottle, were beginning to tell on both Mr. Abercorn and the doctor.

"Twenty cents, did you say?" hastily inquired the former, "I never heard anything like that! I think I must, I really must have a taste, just a drop, just a sip—thank you, Dr., thank you. My dear—a little for you too? No? Well, well, after all that exposure I do not believe, I really do *not* believe a little would hurt you. Ah! that's it, Dr., a small wineglassful for Mrs. Abercorn. There, my dear, I am sure you require it."

"Do you no harm," said Dr. Renaud. "'Tis fine stuff, the best French. Makes one feel like a boy." And he began to sing.

"Quand j'étais sur mon père,
Je n'avais rien à faire
Quand j'étais sui mon père
Qu'une femme a chercher.
A present j'en ai une,
A present j'en ai une
Qui me fait enragé.

"Change that to '*en roulant ma boule*' and I'm with you," said Mr. Abercorn, and the Doctor took him at his word; Mrs. Abercorn becoming very sleepy, was provided with rugs and pillows on a sofa in the hall, while the two gentlemen sipped cognac and munched celery till slumbers also overtook them.

Ringfield then moved. "Where is M. Clairville?" he asked Mme. Poussette, tilting his chair back as she passed.

"In his bed, M'sieu. He overwalked this morning and knows nothing of the storm, and after a *petit verre* of this good cognac he has gone to sleep. It is good for the brain—this cognac; will not M'sieu join the others?"

"No, thank you," he said, smiling, "You know I never touch these things. But I was thinking of going out to see the night. Surely the rain is almost over! Do I go this way?"

"The other door, if you please, M'sieu."

Poussette's anxiety as he noted Ringfield's departure was ludicrous. He overturned bottles, knocked down a chair, while he cast frightened glances at the priest sitting reading his breviary austere under the lamp. How could he escape? Ah—the horses—they had not been properly attended to! The next moment he was off, out of the kitchen and hastily rummaging in the large and dreary stables for a lantern. A whole row of these usually hung from the ceiling of a small outhouse close at hand, and Ringfield had already taken one, lighted it, and was a quarter of a mile along the road; Poussette, fearing this, made such insane haste, "raw haste, half-sister to Delay," that the blanketing of the horse and the other preliminaries took more time than usual, and he had hardly driven out of the gate when Father Rielle, who had changed his mind, also left the kitchen from where his sharp ears had caught these various sounds, and searching for a third lantern, found one, lighted it, and set off on foot behind Poussette in the buggy.

Thus—a little procession of three men and three lanterns was progressing along the slippery, lonely road towards the barn where Miss Clairville was awaiting rescue, the first of whom to arrive was Ringfield. Striding to the half-open door he boldly called her name, and shoving the lantern inside perceived her to be entirely alone.

"Oh—it is you then! I am so glad—it seems hours since you went away. I have not been exactly frightened, for I know these woods and there is nothing alive in them, but the position of this barn—so remote, so down by itself in the little hollow—if anything did attack me, my voice would never be heard."

"But you were not alone when I left you! You may not be alone now!"

"How did you find that out?" her face changed; she had not calculated on his having seen Crabbe.

"I think I knew all the time; your restlessness, your anxiety to get me away, your pushing me down on that box and changing the subject—why, when I saw him come out, and—and wind his arm around your waist, then I knew you had been lying to me! How could you do it!" He waved the lantern towards the loft but could see nothing there.

"He is gone, gone," said she earnestly; "he has gone to the village to get some rig or other and come back with it for me, but of course I would rather go with you."

"I cannot believe a word you say!" exclaimed Ringfield in an agony, setting the lantern down. "Not a word—not a word. Do you think you can play all your life like this with men? You cannot play with me at all events. There are forces here (he struck his breast), passions here, instincts here I never dreamed of, I never knew I possessed. It is not good, nor wise, nor necessary for me to love you, Pauline, but I do—I do! And you must fear them, you must respect them, these instincts, these forces, as much in me as you would do in other men."

"I do, I do! Only I do not like to see you and that other man together—I always feel something happening, I do not know what! but I will tell you all about it. Father Rielle drove me to this place; we got out, came in, and then he talked most foolishly, most wildly—hurt my wrist—see here! And while I was wondering how I could put him off, get rid of him, I discovered that the other man was in the loft. I saw his stick, then I heard him; and then he came down and he and Father Rielle went away together."

"But he came back—for I saw him, I saw you both. You went outside to look at the tree."

"Yes—he went away, but he came back, and while we were talking I heard you coming and so—and—so——"

"You got him out of the way in time! Then after I left he was here again with you?"

"For a little while, just a little while."

Ringfield suddenly snatched her hands and bent his stern offended gaze upon her.

"You have been hours with that man, hours—I know it. And to pretend to me that there was no one there, while you allowed me to open my mind and heart to you—the indignity of it, the smallness and vileness of it; oh!—can not you see how I suffer in my pride for myself as well as in my affection for you? As for the man, he knew no better, and I suppose he wished for nothing better, than to listen and look, to watch us, to spy——"

He choked with sorrowful wrath and temper; an access of jealous, injured fury entirely possessed him for an instant, then with a great effort, and an inward prayer, he partly regained his ministerial calm.

"You must see that I am right," he resumed; "he calls himself a gentleman—you call him one; but is that a gentlemanly thing to do? Gentleman? To stay here in hiding and let us talk on as we did! And what does it signify that he is or has been 'an Oxford man'—the term has no relevancy here, no meaning or sense whatever. Tell me this once more, for I have grave doubts—has he any legal right over you?"

Pauline resolved to answer this question truthfully. How would Ringfield accept the delicate distinction of a moral right involving only those ties, those obligations, known to themselves and not to the world?

"No," she said, firmly. Then a great burst of colour filled her face as she continued. "But he should have had. Now you know. Now you know all." And Ringfield, as almost any other man would have done, mistakenly concluded that she was the unfortunate mother of the unfortunate child in the distant parish, Angeel! In this, perhaps the crucial moment of his whole existence, his manhood, his innate simple strength, his reason and his faith, all wavered, tottered before him; this experience, this knowledge of evil at first hand in the person of one so dear, flamed round him like some hideous blast from the hot furnace of an accepted hell, and he realized the terrors of things he had read about and seen depicted—lost souls, dark and yet lurid pits of destruction, misshapen beasts and angry angels—the blood flowed from his arteries and from his stricken heart up to his frightened brain, and surged there while he stood, not raising his eyes to this ill-starred woman. It was child's play to read one's Bible; it was child's play to read about sin; it was bald and commonplace to receive converts after service, or to attend death-beds of repentance; here was that suffering entity, the Sinner, alone with him, weak in her strength and strong through her weakness, and with her delicate, guilty, perverted impulses he had to deal, and no longer with pulpit abstractions. But while they stood thus, another turn in the affairs which revolved around the lonely barn carried with it a new sound; a horse's trot was plainly heard, likewise the humorous lilt of a shanty song.

"It is Mr. Poussette!" whispered Pauline, rushing to the lantern and extinguishing it. "He is coming for me and I shall have to go with him. I can manage him—better than the priest—but you—what must I do with you? He is a gossip—that one—and it will work you harm in your religion, in your church, if he finds you here with me."

"Oh, why are you so impetuous!" returned Ringfield. "You should not have blown out the light! He knew doubtless that I was coming for you—there would be nothing in that. Where is the lantern—I will light it again."

"You cannot reach it, I have hidden it down behind those boxes. No, no—I could not have him find you here with me. The loft—the loft! There is the ladder!"

And in two minutes he found himself, after scrambling up in the dark, crawling about on his hands and knees in the same heap of straw that had served to conceal Edmund Crabbe a few hours before, and doomed, in his turn, to overhear the conversation of any who might be below.

In a few moments the horse came to a standstill, and Poussette approached, carrying his lantern, Miss Clairville receiving him with just that successful mixture of hauteur and coquetry, which kept him admiring but respectful. His delight at being the first, as he supposed, to reach her, was as absurd as it was genuine, but there was no delay, and she was soon comfortably wrapped up in Poussette's *voiture* and being rapidly driven to the manor-house. When he thought it was quite safe, Ringfield shook himself free from the hay and straw that encumbered him, and prepared to descend the ladder, but he had scarcely enjoyed the luxury of stretching his long limbs (for he could not stand upright in the loft) when he heard footsteps approaching, and looking down, he perceived Father Rielle enter the barn, lantern in hand, and with thin, high-nosed, sour countenance depicting intense surprise, eagerly explore the place for Pauline. Ringfield held his breath, but had enough sense to lie down again in the straw, and feign slumber; happily the priest did not concern himself with the loft, but the absence of the bird he had expected to find, caged and waiting, seemed to mystify him. He remained for several minutes lost in thought, then setting the lantern on one box, moved others around, strewed them with a thick layer of hay he found on the floor, and lying down with his cloak pulled well over him, settled to a night's rest. Ringfield, thus imprisoned, passed for his part a miserable night; he dared not move and his excited brain kept him from sleeping. Towards four o'clock the lantern flickered out; at six, while it was yet dark, the priest arose and went his way, and an hour later Ringfield also retraced his steps to the village. Like a man in an exceedingly unpleasant, but most distinct dream, he found himself bound in a net of intrigue from which there seemed no chance of escape. It was Sunday morning and at eleven he would have to take charge of the service and address the usual congregation as Father Rielle had already partly done, the early mass at St. Jean Baptiste-on-the-Hill being held at half past seven.

The road between the grim leafless trees was now swept clean of both snow and hail by the streams of heavy rain which had poured the previous night, and the air was mild. Much havoc had been wrought in places by the furious storm; the rocky ground was littered with branches and twigs of all sizes; rivers of yellow mud ran where the clay road should be, and against this desolation there glowed occasional plants of bright green, low along the ground, that had escaped the winter's rages of a high level. Crows were silhouetted against the pale blue sky laced with streamers of white, and spring seemed to be in the air rather than late autumn; the excited birds called to each other as they flew high over the forest, as if to hail this pleasant morning, a contrast to the stormy night. Suddenly the sun shone through those cloudy gossamers and irradiated the bright green ferns and orange lichens, drawing the eye to the cross of gold that topped Father Rielle's fine church. Ringfield went out of his way to look at the fall; it was much swollen from the rain and thundered over its brown rocks more loudly than he had ever heard it. Above the bridge were swaying large quantities of floating timber, washed down by the violence of the storm, and as he looked he saw three of these derelicts ride to the brink, and tumble over, and among them a little dog, that had got out there he could not tell how, which for a moment stood on a rolling tree whining piteously, and then fell with it down those ledges of furious frothing waters.

He ran close to the edge, and looked over, but there was no trace of the animal for fully five minutes; then he saw its poor little body emerge, battered, knocked about by stones and trees at the foot of the great cascade, and at the sight his good sense and right feeling seemed to return to him. He had temporarily, as he himself would have put it, forgotten his Creator in the days of his youth; now all came back to him; the duties of his position, its dignity and its obligations, and he strove hard, by prayer and concentration of mind, to be as he had been, and forget Miss Clairville and her tempestuous existence for a while, as he took upon himself the work of the sacred day. He preached later from the verse, "Yet in the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue," and his voice and magnetic delivery were not impaired. The little dog, the little dead dog, figured in the sermon; like the Ancient Mariner when he leaned over the rotting vessel's side and watched the beautiful living things moving in the waters, his heart gushed out with sympathy as the image of the dog, seeing his death, and recognizing no escape from it, remained with him. The eyes of the poor animal seemed ever before him; large, pathetic brown eyes, with soft patches of lighter brown fur above them, a quivering nose and trembling paws—could he not have saved it? No—for motion once given to those rolling logs, they would carry anything on with them, and it was already too late when he first perceived it—a small, shivering, unhappy little object—with fear shining in its large eyes, those eyes he had seen looking directly at him as if to say: "Help me, my brother, help me from this Death! Help me, for the love of God, as you believe in God and in His Omnipotence and Goodness!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A CONCERT DE LUXE

"—Consumed

And vexed and chafed by levity and scorn,
And fruitless indignation, galled by pride,
Made desperate by contempt."

Ringfield, who had confessed to a fixed and abiding ignorance of the stage, was also ignorant of music, except so far as he could recognize a few patriotic airs and old-country ballads. Of church music there was nothing worth speaking of or listening to in the Methodist conventicles of those days, so that he brought an absolutely open mind to a consideration of Miss Clairville's voice and method when he first heard her sing. That had been one evening in an impromptu and carelessly inadequate manner in company with Miss Cordova—whom, with her bleached hair, green eyes accentuated by badly-drawn, purplish-black eyebrows, and a shrill American accent, he was learning to dislike and avoid as much as possible; but now a better opportunity presented itself. A Grand Evening Concert, Concert de Luxe, was to be given at Poussette's for the survivors of Telesphore Tremblay, a woodcutter who lived at the edge of the forest of Fournier, and who had generously left behind him one of those long legacies of thriving sons and daughters for which French Canada is famous. The modest birth-rate of the province of Quebec is not in these days of "race suicide" a thing to be ungrateful for: many Tremblays remain, with their family of eighteen or twenty-four, of sturdy, healthy boys and girls, for the most part pure French,

with an occasional streak of Scotch or Irish, and a still rarer tincture of Indian. Frugal, sober, industrious, and intelligent along certain limited lines, the habitant sets an example of domestic bliss, which, in its unalterable and cheerful conviction of what are the duties of parents to the state and to the Church, tends to the eternal and unimpoverished perpetuation of the French Canadian race. The Tremblays were named as follows, and as some interest attaches to the choice of triple, and even quadruple, titles, largely chosen from the saints of the Roman Calendar, augmented by memories of heroes, queens, and great men in history, it is thought well to give them at length. Thus the sons, nine in number, were:—

Alexis Paul Abelard
Joseph Maurice Cleophas
Hector Jerome Panteleon Etienne
Jean Gabriel
Jules Alfred Napoleon
François-Xavier Hercule Narcisse
Patrick Zenophile
Pierre Joseph Louis-Felippe
Alphonse Arthur

while the daughters were:—

Minnie Archange
Emma Catherine Lucille
Victoria Cécile
Marie-Antoinette Colombe
Brigide Zenobie
Eugenie Louise Angelique
Bernardette Ste. Anne.

The dining-room at Poussette's was transformed for the occasion into a moderate sized concert hall, by the erection of a platform at one end by Antoine Archambault under Pauline's skilled directions, and by rows of planks crosswise over chairs, the people of the village joining forces with those at Poussette's, just as in towns others conspire together to hold fêtes and bazaars; but Ringfield stood afar off and would have nothing to say to it. Miss Clairville intercepted him that day after dinner and asked him to assist her.

"I cannot think," said she, "how you remain so narrow in one respect, while broad enough in others! I am sure that sermon yesterday about the widow and the fatherless was the most beautiful thing I ever heard, and that you have ever said. How then—is it wicked to get up a concert, act, sing, and amuse ourselves, and all for a good object, that we make money for the unfortunate? Ah—but I do not understand you at all!"

"No, I suppose I cannot expect you to do so," replied Ringfield sadly. "But I have never approved of similar practices in the city, and it seems to me that I must now include the country. Why not make a personal canvass from house to house, through the mill, and so on, and interest the members of our small community in the Tremblays—I believe you would raise more."

"Ah!" exclaimed Pauline, with a swift shrug of impatience; "see now—how we should quarrel always! Quarrel? I think it would be one grand, great long fight, if I—if I—" she faltered, and he noted with quick passion the drooping of her ordinarily flashing eyes.

"If you—" he repeated softly. "Oh—say the rest, or if you would rather not—I will say it for you. You mean, if you could make up your mind to leave all this, leave everything and everyone you have known, and come to me—is that it?"

They were for a moment completely alone, but as Antoine might approach at any instant, laden with boughs of evergreen for decoration purposes, conversation was of a stolen and hurried kind. Ringfield, in whom first love had rapidly modified all natural shyness of the sex, was no lukewarm lover; he took Pauline's hands, and bringing them to his lips, pressed ardent kisses upon them, urging her to at once decide in his favour and give him the right to guard her interests for ever. How or where they would live was no matter, her best impulses must surely move all her heart towards him, and at last he heard from her a soft answer, which was nevertheless a clear affirmative, and now, not only hands but lips joined in this rare moment, and Pauline, no longer estimating the minister as one unlearned in the subtle lists of love, felt happier than she had done for months. She had made, she told herself, the best choice offered her, and for the moment she swore resolutions of holy living and quiet dying, all in the character of Ringfield's wife. As for him, the kiss had sealed all and changed all.

"Now at last I shall live again, be a free agent, able to do my work! You can have no conception of what it has been for me to get up my sermons, for example, or to go about among the people here, thinking of you, wondering if you would ever come to me or not. I have pictured you going back to that other man, and I have hated you for it, hated you both!"

"Oh—hush, hush, be careful!" Miss Clairville, like all women, was now afraid of the passion she had awakened. "Let us get to work—some one may come in—you do not mind helping me now?"

"Not—if you mean what you say! Not—if this time you are telling me the truth!"

"You cannot forget that lapse of mine, it seems. Well, I do mean it, I do, I do! And you—you mean it too? You would take me even with my past, and that past unexplained, with my faults and my temper?"

"I have told you before that I would," he returned firmly. "No matter what has happened; no matter what you have done, what anyone else has done, I would, I will, I do take you! You are Heaven's choicest, dearest gift to me—and what am I but an erring man trying to walk straight and see straight!"

Miss Clairville's eyes sparkled with mischief, while her mouth remained solemn.

"Then you must not talk of hating. Love your enemies, Mr. Ringfield, and bless them that persecute you. That isn't in the Catholic Manual in those words perhaps, but I have seen it somewhere, I think in the Testament Nouveau. You see—I am always 'good Methodist' as our friend Poussette would say."

"You shall be a better one in the future," exclaimed Ringfield, tenderly, and as at that moment Poussette himself appeared, to lend assistance, the interview was at an end.

And now ensued a scene which a week earlier would have sorely tried Ringfield's patience, but which now sufficed to amuse him, so secure was he in Pauline's affection and so contented with her recent promises. The evergreens were brought to her, seated on the platform and wearing gloves to protect her hands; she cut off the branches, trimmed them, and sometimes handed them to Poussette, and sometimes to Ringfield, who then nailed them up at the back of the improvised dais to make a becoming background; she also twined the smaller pieces into festoons and ropes for the side of the room, and Poussette, who could not keep his admiration a secret, hovered about her, continually pressing her fingers as he received the greens, patting her back, offering her the scissors and the ball of twine much more frequently than she required them. It was a relief to the couple most concerned when Miss Cordova entered, wearing an elaborately pleated and not too clean violet dressing gown, over which she had put on a dark blue blanket coat and her host's fur cap to keep her warm. Thus from the ill-assorted trio was formed a comfortable *partie carrée*, for Poussette seemed careless as to which lady he attended and he still bore the cornelian ring upon his finger. Ringfield, forgetting his scruples, had promised to take the chair and introduce the artists; Antoine was door-keeper, and Poussette, clad in tweeds, a white waistcoat and tie of bright blue, would receive the guests in his own effusive way, seating the ladies carefully on the fresh yellow planks with great gallantry and address.

At eight o'clock the room began to fill, the village turning out well, and a few coming all the way from Hawthorne, among these Enderby, the Cockney butcher, and his wife and daughter, and as soon as Ringfield had made a few appropriate remarks, couched this time in safe and secular terms, the first number was given, consisting of an orchestral selection by four players belonging to St. Ignace and to the choir of Father Rielle's big church, St. Jean-Baptiste-on-the-Hill. A cornet, two fiddles and a flute rendered the music with good time and fair intonation, and as it was lighthearted, even gay in character, melodious and tripping, Ringfield thought it must be of operatic origin, but found later on to his intense surprise that it was a transcription of Mozart's Twelfth Mass, interpreted by Alexis Gagnon, the undertaker, as first violin, his eldest son, second violin, François Xavier Tremblay, one of the beneficiaries, on the cornet, and Adolphe Trudel, a little hunchback, on the flute.

This selection, performed with more gusto and enthusiasm than customary, gave so much satisfaction that it had to be repeated after noisy and prolonged applause, and then Miss Cordova appeared at the side of the platform, dressed in Spanish costume and carrying castanets. The opera of "Carmen," at that time quite new, had been performed in some small towns of the United States by a "scratch" company, including Pauline's acquaintance and—to show that Art is a reality, and some people born into it, at their best in it and unfit for anything else—the lady was greatly changed, not only in Ringfield's eyes, but in her own. The greenish-yellow hair looked dull gold by lamplight; her eyes gleamed blackly from their blue crystallized lids (the bath of indigo being a stage device known to all devotees of the art), and her dancing, which immediately commenced to her own castanets and a subdued "pizzicato" from the two violins, was original and graceful, and free from any taint of vulgarity. Her draperies of handsome black and yellow stuffs were high to the throat and reached to her ankles; her expression was dreamy, almost sad; one would have said she was figuring in some serious rite, so dignified her mien, so chaste and refined her gestures. If Bizet has idealized the heroine of Prosper-

Merimée's crude but strong little story, Sadie Cordova idealized in her turn the orthodox tempestuous, unhappy Carmen of the modern stage. The beauty of the music with its rhythmic measured beat, and the grace of her swaying changeful poses, riveted all eyes and ears, and Ringfield, to whom such an exhibition was altogether new, was absorbed in watching this woman he had endeavoured not to despise, and whom he certainly would have exhorted in his most earnest fashion to flee St. Ignace directly, had he known that she was a person who had experimented more than once in matrimony, not having waited for the death of her first husband before she married the second, and that she had two children living.

The next on the programme was a baritone solo from a young habitant, another of the Tremblay family, a portion of a Mass in which he was ill at ease, and over-weighted; this apparently not mattering to the populace, he was encored, and returned to sing, in his own simple fashion and without accompaniment, one of the many beautiful melodies known to him from his childhood—A Chanson Populaire.

Quand un Chrétien se determine
A voyager,
Faut bien penser qu'il se destine
A des dangers;
Mille fois a ses yeux la mort
Prend son image,
Mille fois il maudit son sort
Dans le cours du voyage.

Quand tu seras dans les portages,
Pauvre engagé,
Les sueurs te couleront dea visages
Pauvre affligé,
Loin de jurer, si tu me crois,
Dans ta colère,
Pense à Jesus portant sa croix—
Il a monté au Calvaire!

What words were these—to be sung at a mixed concert in a summer hotel in the primitive village of St. Ignace? Ringfield knew enough French to follow them, and as the minor plainsong of the melody floated through the hall, he saw Miss Clairville's eyes filling with tears where she sat in the front at one side awaiting her turn. She had often spoken to him of the beautiful national music of her province—this was the first time he had heard it. But quickly now followed Poussette with a solo on the concertina, in which his fat body laboured to and fro, and his fat hands plunged the instrument to one side, then to the other, while his broad smile and twinkling eyes first pleased, then convulsed the audience. After him came Miss Clairville, and Ringfield, nervously reading out the title of the song, did not observe how she was dressed until she had reached the platform and had greeted her audience. The black and scarlet garb so familiar to him was now accompanied by a smart little jacket of red worn rather queerly, since one arm only was thrust in and the empty sleeve caught up in some way he did not understand, while on her head she wore a kind of arch hussar's cap. It was evident that her selection was familiar to some in the audience, those who had seen her as "La Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein" in Montreal, and a few who had attended similar functions to the present.

"It's only an old turn of mine," she managed to whisper to Ringfield, "but they all like it. Le Sabre de Mon Père—I never tire singing it myself. You look stupid enough this minute to be my Fritz—but there—you do not understand!"

The accompaniment was played on the American organ, moved for that occasion up to the platform, but even that could not detract from the passionate pride and fire with which Miss Clairville rendered that spirited song, so far removed from opera "bouffe" or "comic" opera; indeed the noble character of the first strain was considerably enhanced by the church-like quality of the accompaniment. So far Ringfield was greatly surprised, for he had seen and heard nothing that failed to appeal to the artistic and elevated side of life, and Pauline threw additional vigour and life into her representation of the autocratic Duchess, half-acted, half-sung, as she observed her latest captive; new chains were being forged by the unexpected grandeur and beauty of her thrilling voice and all went breathlessly and well until the door at the end of the room opened and a startling figure appeared. This was Edmund Crabbe—but no longer Crabbe the guide, the dilatory postmaster, the drunken loafer; in his stead appeared Crabbe Hawtree, Esquire, the gentleman and "Oxford man," in his right mind and clothed—*mirabile dictu*—in full and correct evening dress. Piccadilly and Pall Mall need not have been ashamed of him; the regulation coat, waistcoat and trousers were there, a little worn, but still in fashion; the white tie

was there, the stiff collar and cuffs, the patent leather pumps, even a white silk handkerchief tucked inside the waistcoat, and some kind of sprig in the buttonhole. He paused, carefully shutting the door behind him, and stood while Pauline finished her song; at its conclusion he walked up through the rows of village people—shanty and mill hands, habitants and farmers—and presented the artist with a handsome bunch of florist's roses, quite in the accepted style of large cities, and her surprise was evident. She started, stared at him, faltered, and might have spoken but for the impassive and nonchalant air with which he faced her. As for Ringfield, a great anger and distress filled his mind. What spasm of reform had animated this fallen, worthless creature to create an impression which could not, in the nature of things, lead to systematic rehabilitation? To ape the garb of worthy men, to stand thus, tricked out in the dress of a remote civilization from which he had thrust himself forever, before the woman he perhaps had wronged, and with so easy and disdainful a bearing, seemed to Ringfield the summit of senseless folly and contemptible weakness. Subjected during the rest of the evening to the cynical, amused and imperturbable gaze of this man, whom, in spite of his Christianity, he hated, Ringfield made but a sorry chairman. His French stuck in his throat; he cast dark and angry looks at the noisy flirtation going on between Poussette and Miss Cordova, and it was with relief that he heard the patriotic strains of "God Save the Queen" from the strength of the company, in which the hoarse bass of the transplanted cockney, Enderby, the Hawthorne butcher, was paramount.

Crabbe was waiting for Pauline and gave her his arm down from the platform.

"Well," said he, openly displaying his admiration, "you gave us a Gregorian Grand Duchess to-night, but I, for one, will not quarrel with you for that. All the old time vivacity and charm were there, I assure you, and I do not find as much alteration in your style and appearance as I expected from hearing that you had joined the Methodists!"

Pauline glanced quickly from Crabbe to Ringfield; she foresaw an open and unseemly quarrel, and as one could never tell when Crabbe was sober, she rather feared than welcomed the bright audacity of his manner, the amiable ease with which he held the situation. In the presence of the guide Ringfield always lost his austere calm; his manners underwent deterioration and he stood now with a rigid *gaucherie* spoiling his fine presence, and a pitiful nervousness prompting him to utter and do the wrong thing.

"I'm not saying there's anything wrong with Methodists all the same, you know," continued Crabbe, giving her arm a final and caressing pat as he released her, "but still I've seen better chairmen." Crabbe was now leaning lazily against the wall and occasionally moved his arm across Miss Clairville's back, as if he might at any moment fold it around her waist as he had done outside the barn.

"Your French needs polishing up a bit. How would a course at one of our theological colleges down here do for you? It's a pity you couldn't have six months even at Laval—but, of course, Sabrevois and the long procession of colporteurs is more in your line. But in spite of such small defects you remain a man of cheerful yesterdays, and we may presume—equally confident tomorrows, and therefore, to be envied."

The three stood comparatively alone, the people having passed out and Poussette and Enderby talking apart in a corner. Every vestige of healthy colour fled from the minister's face, and his hands clasped and unclasped with peculiar and unnatural tension. In his brain a prayer had formed. "My Dear God—" he kept saying to himself—"my Dear God—help me from myself! Protect me now lest I offend Thee, and be forever cast from Thy Holy Presence. Remove this temptation from me, or give me strength to meet it and endure, and so rise triumphant."

His lips moved and the word "God" made itself faintly heard. Pauline went closer to him and saw the set strain of his face and watched the tightening fingers.

"Oh, you are right—we torture you, he and I, with our foolish ways that you do not understand!"

"I understand well enough," he returned below his breath; "I understand better than you think. But come now, come away with me!"

"Come—where? I am living here, remember!"

"Come away—away!"

A new recklessness animated Ringfield; he was now the one to dash aside convention and make a bold attempt for mastery. "It is not yet very late. The snow is dry and hard—we can walk for half an hour."

Crabbe smiled in a slow infuriating way.

"I claim, I demand the lady for something better than a walk, under dreary midnight skies, over cold and inhospitable winter snows! Like a man in a certain chronicle I have made a supper and would bid you both attend—one at least."

"A supper? But whom——" Pauline stopped, although glad of the diversion Crabbe's words offered. She had seen him hand a couple of bills towards the Tremblay fund; she now recollected preparations towards extra cooking during that day, which she had set down to Poussette's mania for treating and feeding people, but which now must be attributed to the guide, and in her hand were the forced roses sent from Montreal—there was no nearer place. Crabbe must be out of his senses, for never before even in the old days when his remittance came to hand had she seen him so lavish. He read her meaning.

"Who pays, eh! Is that it, my lady? Well, I do on this occasion, and the fact is—well, I'll tell you all about it at supper."

Pauline, still incredulous but extremely curious, took small notice of Ringfield after this, and as Enderby was approaching, and she particularly avoided meeting anyone from Hawthorne on all occasions, she departed with the guide. There was a very attractive supper ready for her in a private room, where Miss Cordova was also present in her Spanish costume, a giddy chaperone who soon retired and left the two together, and Pauline could hardly credit the fact that Crabbe was genuinely sober, clad in his irreproachable evening suit, his hair neatly brushed with a kind of military cut, and his features composed and pleased, recalling much of what he had been when first they met; and she also observed with much surprise that Poussette was present at the feast altogether in the character of menial and inferior, with his coat off, bustling about with the glasses, corkscrews and towels. Instead of hobnobbing with the guide, he waited upon him with discretion and assiduity, and Pauline even fancied that towards herself there was a grain more of respect than of admiration in the hotel keeper's bearing.

CHAPTER XIX

REHABILITATION

"Cast from the pedestal of pride with shocks."

All through the little supper, made gay by the brilliant dresses of the ladies and the bunches of roses in the middle of the table, a restlessness marked the guide's manner; he was clearly anxious to have it over, get rid of Poussette and Miss Cordova, and be alone with Pauline.

It was a quarter to twelve when this was arrived at, and Crabbe took the precaution of closing the door securely after the Frenchman, and of seeing that the blind was sufficiently lowered over the one window which looked on the side of the cleared yard nearer the river, but he did not think of looking out of the window. Perhaps if he had he would not have recognized Ringfield in the straight dark shadow that kept walking up and down, up and down, as long as the light shone from that room. When he at last found himself secure and alone, the Englishman's stoicism, pride, and remorse, all came forth at one bound. He sat down and swept the dishes away from him, reached for Pauline's hand, and bent his head down over it upon the table, smothering different ejaculations, which, warm and earnest enough, were totally removed from his usual style of impassioned speech—he uttered nothing profane. But he sobbed—sobbed.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Miss Clairville in alarm. "What has happened? I never saw you like this before. It frightens me—why you sound as if you were crying, but that would be impossible. Oh, tell me, tell me!"

He grew calmer, lifted his head and felt for his handkerchief. "Yes, it's quite possible! I believe I have shed a tear or two. The first in how many years, Pauline? Ah—that I could not, would not wish to compute, but it's over now, I——"

He stopped, released her hand and began settling his clothes with the familiar touches she remembered so well. "I—well; Pauline, it's this; I've come into money. Now you know. Now you understand. And another thing—I know how to make money—what's more. Nothing succeeds like success, you see, and by Heaven—one thing followed on another till I could have gambled for luck, lost all, and won all back! Oh—I don't know what I'm saying, but I mean that one thing would have been

enough, and there came two, two at once, here in the middle of this gloomy wood, this Inferno of a place I have hated so well and so long. Gad—it isn't half bad to-night though! I feel like a gentleman, I hope I look like one; I can act like one at least: pay my way, pay for this little spread, pay for your roses—what did you think when you saw them?"

Pauline did not take her eyes off him. She was alarmed, not believing a word he said, and she did not answer with her usual spirit.

"I thought them very wonderful of course in this out-of-the-way place. Did you send for them?"

"My lady is cautious. New for her. Where is our Gallic zeal and impetuosity gone? You're afraid of me! I see it. You think I'm drunk?"

She shook her head, but her smile was somewhat wan.

"Here, I'll convince you. Take my hands, both of them. Both of them, I say. At once, madam."

She did so and he drew her near, nearer, till their knees were touching.

"Now you answer me. Are they steady?"

"Yes."

"Very reluctantly given. Are they quite steady and firm like your own or like those of your parson friend?"

"Oh, don't, don't! Yes—quite firm, quite steady."

"You see! Now look at my eyes, look into them, lady dear. At once, madam. You find that trying, do you, but persevere. Well—what do you find? Are they wild, bloodshot, glazed, glaring? No? Only your image therein. And by God, Pauline, there never was and never will be any image half so beautiful, half so dear. That you must and will believe. Well, then—no, don't draw your hands away—about this money, for I'm perfectly sober and desirous of telling you the truth. You have the right to know. One thing led to another, but the first of it was like this. I've always been a scribbler in my lazy moments, as you know, but perhaps you can't be expected to know that I have put care and strong thought, art and heart both, into some verse that I occasionally would take out and look over, and then lock away again. How could I, forlorn and degraded, an outcast from society, hope to effect anything in literature! Yet I never destroyed any of these pet lucubrations of mine, and one day, a few months ago, I picked out a poem, copied it fair when my hand wasn't shaking, and sent it to a magazine in England. They took it—and I was so surprised that I went on a good long drunk. But when I got straight again I found a handsome cheque awaiting me and the hope, very warmly expressed by the way, that I would let him, the editor, have many more in the same vein. Many more, mind you, with cheques to match, so long as my industry holds out and I can find enough to say. Now consider for a moment what that signifies to a man like me, fallen so low, I confess it, ostracized and exiled, cut off from all old associations and without hope of overcoming my fault sufficiently to enable me to make a fresh start. It meant not only money, but employment, and congenial employment. It meant that after all, these years of leanness have not been wasted, that I have something to say if I can only retain the knack, the trick, of saying it in the way people will like, the public like. This alone would be much, but with it goes, you see, some money, so, as I said, one thing brings another; and money after all, Pauline, is what many a man as lost as I am mostly requires. It isn't as if I'd *had* money, squandered it and lost it; I never had it—I never had it."

He paused, and for a moment there had sounded that high dangerous ring in his voice she knew so well, and Miss Clairville drew her hands away.

"But that was not all," she said coldly. "You spoke of something else, of two things that had happened. What was the other?"

"The second grew out of the first, out of what I have told you. The poems—they were a couple of ranch episodes,—I'll let you see them presently—were signed by my full name, Edmund Crabbe Hawtree. I never supposed any one I knew would see them, or seeing them trouble their heads about the writer; in fact, I never thought about the matter. But somebody did see them and did remember me, and did take the trouble to find out who I was, and where I was, and I've had within the last fortnight two letters from a well known firm of lawyers in London informing me that I am without doubt the man they have been searching for during the past year, and that quite a respectable little fortune awaits me. There have been a few deaths in the family; I am next of kin and so that's all there is about it. Simple as

you like, but true beyond a doubt, and so I thought I'd celebrate the event to-night with you, Pauline, and perhaps confer with you—you woman of the world, with your knowledge of life and of me—of me, alas! Me at my worst, Pauline, but let us hope really my worst."

He rose and walked around the room, unconscious of the dark shadow that also walked austere outside the window. "This money—it is a great thing that has happened to me. It is difficult to realize. Don't mind my walking up and down; it soothes me and I'm excited too, I think."

Pauline seemed dazed.

"Is there a title? Is it much—the money that has been left you, I mean? Very much?"

"A good deal, but no title." And Crabbe could not and did not try to suppress the satisfied smile which told how he had gained in self-respect during the last few days.

"I expect you'll think it a good deal. Of course in England it will be different. There must be two houses with it; a town house—no, that was sold a long while ago, I believe; anyway, there would be more to do with it over there than on this side. I wonder how soon I ought to go."

"Go! You are going! But how much is it?"

"Oh! Didn't I say? About ten thousand; pounds you know, Pauline, pounds, not dollars."

"Ten thousand pounds!"

"A nice little sum, lady dear?"

"All that money yours?"

"Yes, and not a penny too much, not a penny too much. I have to revenge myself on fate, or Providence, or whatever you call it, for these years of misery. I have to think of what I might have done and lose no time in doing it. Pauline, I must think of you."

A softer mood held him now and he dropped upon his knee and laid his head upon her lap, but she could not follow his swift changes of emotion; the mention of the money had obliterated every other thought, and whether it was the woman in her or the potential miserliness of her race—the Clairvilles were traditionally stingy—she seemed unable to get away from the mere image of the ten thousand pounds.

"But, *Mon Dieu*, what a great change there will be! You will be everything and I shall be nothing! A poor actress, a doubtful lady! Oh! I shall be nothing to you, I can see, I can see! *Mon Dieu*, but this is only to bring more trouble upon me!"

Crabbe, as he will still be called, was at this much astonished. To do him justice he had for some time, ever since Ringfield's advent in the village in fact, found himself wishing that he might sincerely reform and offer Pauline the honour of marriage, and with it some hopes of a respectable competence.

"What nonsense are you saying?" he returned angrily. "Isn't money what we both require, what we have always required? And here it is now, as much as we want, and more, a great deal more, than we deserve or we expected! Why, I'll marry you now, Pauline, and you'll keep me steady; you and the travel and all the strangeness and the glory of it. You don't need any educating, any furbishing up—thank Heaven you were always a lady!—but we'll go abroad, of course, for a while and I'll show you Paris, Pauline, Paris, where you told Father Rielle you wanted to go and act; and you shall buy all you want at the shops, and I'll take you to the Louvre. Oh, yes, and you must go and see Mme. Bernhardt if she is acting; you might have been her rival if you'd begun earlier, with your moods and fancies and tempers. Then we'll come back to London, and I'll take you for a day to my old lodgings in Jermyn St., just to square up things. Then we'll progress quietly to the Towers, Langmere, Suffolk; that's the estate; not the most interesting of counties, but everything will be new and equally interesting to you, and thus we'll sober down to the regulation old English married couple. Dost like the picture, my lady of St. Ignace, my *châtelaine* of Clairville?"

"Always Clairville, always St. Ignace." She clasped her hands above her head in weariness. "If something could happen like what you describe, but no—it is impossible. They say that Henry's sight is going now, that very soon he will not be able to walk about by himself at all, that he is better in body but worse in mind, that he is forgetting all caution and speaking openly of the child—what is to be the end of it?"

"If anything could happen! Something *has* happened. What I am telling you is true. I am rich, able to take care of you, to put an end to this sordid existence; you shall be taken away from Henry and the

child, and the old associations. Don't you believe me?"

"I should like to; but it's too much, too sudden, too good to be true."

"But it *is* true; here are the letters; here is money, a little of what is due, and here are the poems. You see, even if there were any mistake, any hitch about the estate, I still have a career open to me. There's an old manuscript novel of mine lying about somewhere; I believe I can get that taken; and I feel, I know there's something in it,—life, truth, suffering! But there's no hitch, no mistake, I swear it to you, Pauline; and whenever you're ready, I am; and we will, in melodramatic language, fly together from these dreary wilds. Fortunately residence at St. Ignace doesn't imply creditors. I've taken a room here at Poussette's, and I shall live in comfort for the short time that may elapse before we start. One thing, I hope, I hope, I shall keep sober. Would you take me if you thought I wouldn't, lady dear?"

He sat, stooping forward, his hair slightly disarranged, his blue eyes no longer choleric but gently smiling. She realized that he was still goodlooking, still a gentleman, a man of culture and even talent, young enough to move the world, and almost as young in appearance as herself; for mental anxiety and care of any kind always showed directly in her mobile features, and she was already beginning to track a few grey hairs and a few unbecoming wrinkles.

"There's another reason," she said evasively. "You have no idea how persistent this young man, the minister, has become. I have warned him, I have told him—not everything, of course, but a great deal—yet still he follows me, and to-day, I cannot remember what I said; but I have certainly led him to expect that I shall marry him."

"What! The parson! I thought you had more sense. Never do, never in the world. And now in the light of my proposals, see what you would be throwing away."

"But he is very earnest, very determined. He may keep me to my word. He may not get over it if I refuse, if I manage to leave St. Ignace with you."

Crabbe laughed and kissed her lightly on the ear. He said nothing, but produced first letters and papers from his pocket and then a small case. Pauline opened it; a pair of beautiful ear-rings flashed in the lamp light. In her ears were the imitation ones; she thought no longer of anything but whisking these out and putting on the others. Together they studied the papers and read the letters; and before they parted for the rest of the night she had promised to be ready in a month to marry him wherever he would prefer to have the ceremony performed, and to go abroad with him. She was to say that he had certainly come into some money but not to say how much; she was to busy herself with making arrangements for her brother's future comfort, as in all probability the pair would never revisit St. Ignace; and she was to make in particular a visit of a few days to Hawthorne on special and private business connected with the child Angeel.

CHAPTER XX

A RURAL AUTOCRAT

"The discipline of slavery is unknown
Amongst us—hence the more do we require
The discipline of virtue."

The presence of Enderby at the Tremblay concert had not been altogether due to the excellence of the programme or the merit of the beneficiaries; he had in fact driven over with the intention of speaking to Ringfield on a subject of some importance—the future of the child in the basket chair. This excellent but domineering storekeeper was the leader of society at Hawthorne; the settlement was not rich in old families, either English or French, and very early in his career he and his wife had taken the helm and continued to hold it, preserving strict notions of etiquette and maintaining a decorous state which would have become the Lieut.-Governor of a Province. Large, stern and florid, he was always the same in manner whether serving behind his counter or taking up the money on Sundays: shining example of intelligence, thrift, and British insularity, such a man as Clarence Enderby carries the love of British institutions all over the globe, and one forgives his syntax for the sake of his sincerity. He had always been a fiery conservative and a staunch member of the Church of England; and two or three months before Ringfield's arrival he had organized what was known to all beholders passing his shop

by a japanned sign hanging outside as the "Public Library," a collection of forty-seven volumes of mixed fiction in which the charming and highly illuminative works of E. P. Roe were chiefly conspicuous, reposing in a select corner of the establishment, somewhat towards the centre, and equidistant from the dry goods, rubbers, hardware and hammocks, and from the candies, groceries, fancy jewellery and sheet music. The proprietors of these country "general stores" are great men in their way: years ago they rolled up fortunes for themselves in their district; potential Whiteleys and Wanamakers, they were the true pioneers in the departmental store business, and on a lilliputian scale "Enderby's" would have compared very well with the Army and Navy Stores of London. Absence of competition creates a monopoly, and Enderby's was the best store in a large district including Hawthorne, St. Ignace, Beauscley, his only rival being the Yankee referred to by Crabbe, who did not, however, bear a very good character, having been detected in smuggling some of those old French brandies and liqueurs, although he was outwardly a teetotaller and his place had no licence. Enderby, on the other hand, always drank a glass of beer with his Sunday dinner; indeed, the arrival of the malt of which his wife and daughter also partook, was a part of Sunday observance, while on birthdays and other anniversaries wine or toddy made their appearance. But extreme regularity and temperance in all things was a strong feature of his character, and he was therefore exceedingly jealous of the honour and good moral standing of the village, and the harbouring of Angeel had been for a long time a matter involving much worry. At the picnic Ringfield's ill-timed allusion to "sinners" had hurt him most particularly, and the more he thought of it the more he grew convinced that the minister could throw some light on the origin of the child and the manner in which it had come to be living at Hawthorne; for up to the present time almost complete ignorance prevailed. This was in itself extraordinary since the area was so small and the population so settled, but shrewd guessers were nearly hitting the mark when they supposed, from certain memories, inferences, and coincidences, that the child belonged to Miss Clairville, and this was precisely the point which offended the store-keeper; had the affair originated in his own parish, no matter how disreputably, he would have guarded the secret, striven to make the best of it, or, if the case abounded in direct violations of morality by those above him in station, all the more he would have preserved an absolutely rigid silence. His contention was—that the business belonged to some other parish, probably that of St. Ignace, and that when strangers, ignorant of this, visited Hawthorne, they took it for granted that Angeel was part of the village, thus bringing undeserved slur and unmerited obloquy upon an innocent community, and he took advantage of the concert to ask for a few words with Ringfield. The latter had just been compelled to witness the desertion of Pauline as she went off with Crabbe and Miss Cordova when he turned to find Enderby waiting to speak to him. Poussette had withdrawn.

"I hardly know, sir, just how I ought to introduce the subject," said the butcher, in his loftiest manner, eyeing the minister up and down. "For I have hardly ever spoke to a clergyman of your denomination before."

Ringfield with a somewhat constrained smile assured the speaker that he was mortal and fairly rational, although he was a Methodist.

"Yes, of course, I know that, and there is those who might have found great enjoyment in that there prayer you gave us, sir, some time back, great profit I may say, without fear of exaggeration."

"Prayer?" repeated the other, for a moment forgetting the incident alluded to. "Oh, yes, I know what you mean; it was, I understand, a trifle long for the occasion, a trifle long perhaps, but I spoke from my heart and with my heart, and I forgot probably that you were all waiting, and the viands were kept waiting too and so forth. I shan't offend again, I hope."

"I 'ope not, sir, I 'ope not. Now this evening you did it all to perfection, and all were very much obliged to you."

"Thank you, thank you very much," said Ringfield, his gaze wandering off to the hall where glimpses of drapery and musical clinking of bangles and bracelets assailed his senses. Miss Clairville was never without earrings and other jewelry, and if the proper idea of ornament is to attract attention to the parts thus graced, in her case there was reason for her wearing such, since she possessed both beautifully shaped ears and fine hands and arms.

"But, sir, the length of prayers is not all! Some of us could—I say this without fear of exaggeration—could go through the entire Litany and the Apostles' Creed backwards, which would take a man some time, and yet what would be the good of it? Stands to reason, sir, there must be something more than length, mere length of time in prayers."

"Of course, of course. You are quite right, Enderby."

"There must be appropriateness and truth and feeling, but none of it must bear too direct, says you—on the parties present or the occasion, be it wedding or funeral, or christening, or a mere social affair

like the Harvest Home yonder. I see how it is with you; you can't always help it, for you can't always control your thoughts and likewise your words, not having no notes."

"But what did I say amiss on that occasion?" began Ringfield, nervously divining that this lecture was but the prelude to the statement that in some way he had offended. "I am quite sure, I am positively certain, that I had no intention of using words or phrases which were the reverse of appropriate or true, yet you seem to think that I was thus unfortunate."

Enderby gave a great sigh. "If you don't remember you mustn't find fault with my remembering, for it made quite a stir at the time. It quite took my wife's appetite away, sir."

"What did?" said Ringfield shortly.

"Your saying in that grieved, yet bold way, that we were all sinners, and that sinners were sitting even then at that very board."

"Was that all?" exclaimed the minister with sudden relief, and an uncontrollable smile. "Surely you are accustomed to that. Surely you do not consider yourselves in Hawthorne to be so perfect, so infallible, as to be beyond criticism and impatient of censure! If so, all I can say is I am very glad I used those terms, and I should say, I should think, that no matter what Church you belong to, you, Enderby, would see the absurdity of rating me for offering a prayer couched in the language most natural to me, and of which I am not ashamed. Do you deny that we are all sinners?"

"I do not, sir, and that is just what my wife and others complains of. You did not content yourself with saying we were *all* sinners; you said 'if any sinners lurked at the board,' as if pointing the finger, and it is for an explanation of that I have come to you to-night, sir. We all felt that the presence at the feast of the unfortunate little girl you of course observed, must 'ave 'ad something to do with it, and I think you ought to know, coming among us as you did, and may do again, just how we felt about it. I'll tell you all I know, and then I'd be obliged if you, sir, would tell me what you know."

Ringfield looked helplessly around but there was no hope of diverting Enderby's attention; he must go through with it and only trust that he might be believed, and once again that slight sense of the ludicrous came upon him. Tragedy was in the air; yet, as often happens in real life, it was being pushed to comedy point, and he grudged even the shadow of a jest at this important crisis in his dealings with Miss Clairville, who was now sitting at supper with the new edition of Crabbe.

"You had better take a chair, Enderby," he said, setting the example.

"Thank you, sir, and I 'ope I am not detaining you. I wish to say, sir, that now for eight years the constant presence of the child and its nurse in our little village has been a source of much trouble and talk. We are a united and respectable, most respectable community, sir."

The sternness with which this remark was given led Ringfield to say soothingly, "I am sure you are—it is, I mean. I am quite sure you are."

"Not only respectable, and has always been so, but superior."

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"And therefore it goes against our grain to 'ave 'arbour'd the maid—that's what we used to call them in England—and the time has come, I think, to do something about it."

"I see. Yes, the position is a difficult one. How did she come to the village in the first place? She was not born there, then?"

"No, sir, I am thankful to say, unless greatly and cruelly deceived. The manner of her coming, or rather of her being found, was this; the young person who has charge of her, who is now about twenty-three by all counts, has always been light headed, and cannot or will not, explain clearly who she is or where she comes from. All we know of her is that she came here with the child one stormy night in the middle of winter, just like the stage or a story book, appearing at the Rectory and carrying an anonymous letter begging for shelter and charity. Mr. Abercorn found them—it was on Christmas Eve—and he took them in to his wife and she to the kitchen. The girl was a pretty dark-haired slip of fifteen or so, with the light manner and the gay laugh you may have noticed, gay but empty, and could give no account of herself; the child not as bad as she has since grown to be, but already strange looking, and some thought as stupid as the girl."

An exclamation of dismay escaped from Ringfield.

"Better if it had been!" he cried.

"Well, I may say that I agree with you, sir. The rector and his wife got a home for them in the village, and although we have learned something about them it is very little, and as the money for their support comes from here, I thought it time, sir, to look more thoroughly into the affair."

"From here? You are sure?"

Ringfield was ready to defend, even shield, Miss Clairville if necessary.

"It was brought or sent by one of the servants at the Manor House out by the lake. Without fear of exaggeration, sir, I may state that we 'ave long known this to be the case; Antoine Archambault, the young man around this room not ten minutes ago, is the bearer, and he, I suppose, knows all about it—the girl is apparently his sister, or in some way related to him—but I wouldn't care to talk to him about it and so, sir, I come to you."

"But I know nothing!" exclaimed Ringfield, rising. "Nothing whatever, not nearly as much as you do. It is no use speaking to me upon the matter. I cannot assist you in the least. What do you propose to do?"

"Why," said Enderby, flushing a darker red and rising ponderously, "this is what we propose to do, for we're tired of the affair, as isn't ours, and never was by right. The child will soon be grown up, if it lives, and it's getting stronger on its legs every day and will soon be playing with the other children. We don't want it—we don't want it any longer at Hawthorne, and we propose to find the parents and bestow it again upon those to whom it originally belonged. That's what we propose, and we look to you, sir, to help us."

"Whom do you suspect, or have you direct proof and knowledge?" Ringfield, to whom the situation was full of anguish, could hardly frame his sentences. "Pray recollect," he continued, "that in these unhappy cases it is not always wise, not always necessary, to press the matter home. I am a strong believer in the natural expiation that people undergo who allow themselves to err in these directions; the mere fact that the person or persons responsible for Angeel have had her removed to a distant parish while still caring for her shows how deeply the affair has been felt. I would not advise you to be hasty."

"Asty—says you—'asty? After a matter of eight years? I'm sorry I didn't begin before this," cried the exasperated storekeeper, holding the virtues and morals of all Hawthorne as it were in his hand. "You ask me if I suspect any one and I answer—that I do," and he huskily whispered Miss Clairville's name.

Knowing what would be expected of him, Ringfield strove to appear even more greatly shocked than he was, and retreated a step or two in consternation.

"Be very careful," he managed to say sternly, "be extremely careful how you thus refer to a lady who bears, I am told, a very high character in her native place, even if she has been obliged to seek the town and the theatre for her living."

"You 'ave not heard this mentioned before?"

"Never."

"But Miss Clairville attends your church?"

"She certainly has attended a few of the services, but I do not think she has ever openly made a profession of the faith; she remains at heart, I think, a Catholic. Perhaps," said Ringfield, lamely, "you might see Father Rielle about this. As parish priest and as a friend of her brother's he would be the proper person to advise you. And now, having assured you that I know nothing more than I have learnt in the last few moments from yourself, you must excuse me if I leave you. It is late, and I perceive your wife and daughter are growing restless in the hall. Are you driving back to Hawthorne to-night?"

"I am," returned Enderby, hastily looking at his watch; "but I shall come over again, sir, and see what can be done. In the meantime, will you not assist me in some way—by speaking to Antoine, who has picked up a little English, or by conferring with the priest?"

Ringfield hesitated.

"The question is," he replied, "whether as this affair is now practically inside another parish and another village, I have any business to interest myself in it at all. Well,—I will think about it, Enderby, I will think about it, and possibly I may be able to help you. You would like to get the child away? I see the propriety, even the need of that."

He suddenly thought of something which had not occurred to him before. "How would it be if I were

to assume control of the affair for you? Supposing that without much trouble, I and Father Rielle look into the matter and endeavour to remove the child from her present home and have her admitted to some institution? Would you still insist on its being done in such a way that parentage and—and so on, must all be made clear?"

Enderby was silent, but the angry flushing of his face had subsided a little. Ringfield saw his chance and pressed it home.

"Try and see if that would not be the better way—to let me control the matter and quietly take the child away without any fuss and scandal and naming of names. In the meantime I can make my inquiries and communicate with you. Dr. Renaud now—he will be able to advise us, and I should think your own rector and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Abercorn, for I hear the lady has done a great deal of the parish work; but if you think it better to leave it entirely to me, I will see what can be done."

"The rector, sir, is easy, terrible easy in his ways; he would let anything go on for any length of time to save trouble. Well—good-night to you, sir, and you may expect to see me again soon."

"Good-night, Enderby, good-night. We have had a very successful entertainment, I think.—Here is Poussette going to turn us out; it's after eleven!"

An unusual hauteur in the Frenchman's demeanour did not escape the minister, who was not, however, disposed to ask any questions. The truth was—the unexpected turn in Crabbe's fortunes had been partially explained to the host, but to no one else, and secrecy had been impressed upon him. The ex-guide had displayed a wealth of money, had received and dispatched letters and telegrams full of suggestive mysteries, and—most wonderful of all—had not called for drinks. Poussette was so far keeping his own vow made to Ringfield and Miss Cordova, but at any moment an outbreak might occur, for excitement breeds thirst even in sober individuals.

Outside the lighted window walked Ringfield to and fro, waiting till the Englishman should emerge and go to his shack, but as the reader knows this did not happen. He saw the light carried about, then it entirely disappeared, and afterwards two lights appeared upstairs, but in opposite ends of the house; Crabbe had escorted Pauline to her door and then betaken himself to the small room at one side which coincided with that occupied by Miss Cordova at the other. It was not long before everything was dark and quiet, and Ringfield, extremely baffled and uneasy, turned to go home. But Alexis Gagnon, supposing the minister upstairs and asleep, had locked the door, and now the only mode of entrance possible was the undignified one of climbing the rude fence and scaling the well-remembered balcony which led to his room. This brought him very close to Pauline's chamber, looking on the familiar balcony, but he could detect nothing wrong or unusual; Poussette was wrapped in sleep and even Martin, the Indian guide and choreman, had evidently long gone his rounds and entered the house.

Ringfield could not be expected to understand the sudden change in Crabbe's fortunes, and he spent the rest of that night in dreary and bitter speculations as to the probable causes which had led Pauline to desert him openly for the Englishman. Why had he not the power, the audacity, the social courage which the guide undoubtedly possessed, to seize her and bear her off bodily on these occasions? This—a relic of savagery—would alone overcome the ease with which Crabbe confronted him, and despite vices and faults usually carried off the palm. As one progressed the other retrograded; the Englishman, dreaming of a good name and character restored, lay peacefully beneath Poussette's roof, not worrying about Pauline, for he knew that, short of the marriage ceremony, he had the strongest right and authority any man could have over her; while Ringfield, distrusting and suspecting every one around him, tossed and sighed all night, wondering what stability there was in her mind and what worth he might set upon her promises. Some deterioration, some loss of fine simplicity, some decrease in his healthy optimism, was already visible in his look and bearing; he in his turn was discovering the impotence of Nature to heal, sooth, or direct, and it might have been said of him that he began to go in and out without noting the objects so suggestive and inspiring—the sky, the thundering flood, the noble wood, the lonely river. As Crabbe had cried to him in utter desolation of soul—what had Nature to do with a man's heart and self and life? Nature mocked him, passed him by, viewed him coldly. Poetry—did not Crabbe quote poetry? The bitterness of Job, the pessimism of Solomon, began to colour his attitude of mind, and thus by slow degrees his physical powers declined from their original high level. He did not get enough sleep, he did not eat enough food, he took long walks with his eyes on the ground, he found visiting a bore and preaching a stumblingblock. Nothing saps the strength like the rotting virus of jealousy; nothing so alters the face and vilifies the expression as living in a state of perpetual dislike and suspicion of any person or persons; as Crabbe's countenance cleared, as his eye brightened and his complexion lost its dissipated blotchy hue, Ringfield suffered by comparison. He seemed to fail in some mysterious indefinable way; his thick hair looked thinner on his temples, his eyes were larger and the set of his mouth reminded one of Father Rielle in its slow, new writhing smile. If this were Love—how should any escape? But not only Love, but Hate, and Doubt, and Fear, were all

warring in a good man's breast.

CHAPTER XXI

THE NATURAL MAN

"Wretched at home, he gained no peace abroad;
Asked comfort of the open air, and found
No quiet in the darkness of the night,
No pleasure in the beauty of the day."

Pauline, on retiring to her room, was naturally in a whirl of excited feelings; never had she dreamt of escape from her surroundings under such auspices as these. The new affection she had been nursing for several months speedily melted as she lived over again the extraordinary sensations of the past hour. Crabbe came in for some of the glory; she congratulated herself on partly belonging to him, and with characteristic quickness she amused herself, being too wide awake for bed just then, in turning out her drawers and boxes and in tying up the Grand Duchess costume and other accessories in a bundle which she intended to leave as a present for Sadie Cordova.

"I shall never require those again, thank Heaven!" said she to herself as she moved about the plain little room, "or these stage paints and other 'fixings' as Sadie calls them."

The imitation earrings went into the bundle; her old sealskin coat and muff and some photographs of herself and associates in theatrical costume. It was a case of "on with the new life" carried out with that conviction and sincerity that distinguished all Miss Clairville's actions. If she was to marry a rich Englishman, and go to England with him, travel and keep a maid, she would do it thoroughly; the stage as well as "Poussette's," the Hotel Champlain as well as Henry and Angeel must be completely blotted out, else there could be no happiness for her. Yet at moments there survived, along with this directness of upward aims, a curious sense of caution, of dislike to part with certain relics of value, or anything that had figured in her theatrical life; the Clairville instinct was atavistically working against the new creature, Pauline; heredity asserting itself in the midst of new and promising environment.

The next few days brought remarkable changes, veiled by great care and deliberation on Crabbe's part. He gave up the shack to Martin and had a bonfire of his effects. He read the Montreal advertisements of clothing, and sent for a complete wardrobe and two large trunks, yet his manner to the few at Poussette's was sufficiently repressed to discourage curiosity. Every hour Pauline expected him to leave her, be mysteriously lost, then reappear sullen and sodden, but nothing of the kind occurred. The news of his rehabilitation had spread, but the community was too small and the place too remote to understand it thoroughly; meanwhile, the virtuous aspect of both himself and Amable Poussette was almost enough to drive a man to drink, so depressing was the atmosphere of the bar—that place once so cheerful! The lemons grew dry and crinkled one by one; the lager glasses gradually came to require dusting; the spirit bottles were discreetly put behind almanacs and large advertisements of "Fall Fairs"; over all was settling a blight born of conversion and sobriety. Pitiful to relate—the person who should have been most pleased and interested in this moral spectacle was bitterly dubious; Ringfield would not, at this stage, consent to believe in Crabbe's reformation, but winced and shied at reports of altered prospects. The subject was easily of first importance to all at Poussette's, but the Englishman's disdain of explanations and Pauline's fine-lady air precluded much reference to the matter; the minister could only accept the position.

And what was the position? Had not Miss Clairville given him a certain soft and memorably tender answer, turning away all his jealous wrath; and filling his soul with "Comfort and Joy, Comfort and Joy"? Had not his lips pressed hers, his embrace enveloped her yielding form, her eyes, melting and languorous, drooped before his fiery ones? Were these things nothing to her, while to him they almost constituted a marriage? Even with daily evidence of the strongest, he could not bring himself to believe that she was anything but true.

Once they met in the wood, face to face, and there could be no excuse on her part, no elegant evasion of the relations between them, as with those chilling superior accents she persevered in ignoring the past. Snow was again on the ground, every twig encased in a round tube of glassy ice through which showed the grey, brown, or black stem, for a wonderful glissade had followed the milder weather. The pendent branches were freighted with soft, white tufts and cushions, and just as Miss Clairville met

Ringfield, under his heavier tread there broke a large arm of larch stretched across the path. Thus he was compelled to halt; the rebound and crash had sent snow flying all over her face and clothes, and naturally he began to brush it off. She kept her hands in her muff—the old one after all, for Crabbe's purchase had not yet arrived—and regarded him, with some abatement, it is true, of the aristocratic hauteur she wore so loftily at Poussette's, but still with an air far removed from the intimate and sympathetic self she had revealed in their first meetings.

"I believe you would have passed me!" said he bitterly, forcing that raw and unpleasant smile. "If it had been a street, I mean, with anyone about, or coming out of church! Surely nothing that has happened can justify you in avoiding me like this!"

"Avoiding you?" She opened her large eyes in haughty incredulity. "Why, I have been waiting for an opportunity like this to meet you and talk it over! tell you something about myself, rather. What odd ideas you get, *bizarre, mon ami!* Have you heard about my friend, Mr. Hawtree?"

Ringfield answered unintelligibly, looking away from her.

"Have you not? Oh—you have! I thought it very likely. Well, he has come into a little money; more than a little, indeed, but I am not to tell. How then—do you think I shall be able to keep the secret? I am the bad one at that, sure,—as Mr. Poussette would say."

By degrees her old racy manner returned, and looking over her muff she permitted her eloquent mischief-making eyes to speak. "What else have you heard?"

"That—you are going to marry him."

"Ah—and that, of course, you do not believe!"

"For the matter of that, I never believe anything you say. How can I, how can anyone? You promised me—you know, what—and here you coolly talk to me about this other man, this wreck of a man, this sot, this Crabbe! And he is not the only one, I daresay Poussette gets his pay sometimes, and perhaps the priest as well!"

"Gets his—pay! *Mon Dieu*, but it is you, you, to insult a woman! Yes, to insult me!"

"I am not intending it, I am not aiming insult, but I know whereof I speak. I impute no more than this; no man works for nothing. If Poussette harbours you, as he does, he must exact something, if only silly songs and smiles, the faculty of amusing him now that he has dropped drinking, and must feed his lower senses in some manner. I impute no more—no more than frivolity and waste of time, the abasement of impulses noble enough in themselves."

"Oh—what a creed, what a creed! I deny such a charge, such an imputation. I sing and act before Mr. Poussette as I would before you, and Miss Cordova too. We are artists—do you know what that means, Mr. Ringfield? And suppose we do not pay—what is that? Mr. Poussette is agreeable to the arrangement, it is a plentiful house, and always more than enough in it to eat and drink. I am Ma'amselle de Clairville and Sadie Cordova is my friend. We take our holiday here—that is all. *Ma foy*, but why must every one anger me? Why do you purposely misunderstand?"

She stamped her foot and trembled.

"I have only one thing to ask you. Do you intend to—my God, that I should have to ask it—to marry him?"

"*Certainement.*" A return to her natural manner was characterized by more French than she customarily used. "I am considering it, thinking of it, as you did when coming to St. Ignace."

"Considering it! And when—when—is it likely to be?"

"Oh—that is for him, for Mr. Hawtree to decide, but I think it will be at Noël, Christmas time, and in Montreal. Next week I pay some visits; after that I go to the Hotel Champlain, in Jacques Cartier Square, to prepare myself for my new *rôle*, you see."

"Your new *rôle*? But are you not then leaving the theatre? Oh—I understand now, I see what you mean. And you think this is your duty, to end your life thus by consenting to marry this man?"

"To end my life? to begin it rather. Believe me—it is better for me so."

Great distress showed in Ringfield's voice and bearing; he was in that state of mind when it became necessary to insist upon his sufferings, to rehearse his wrongs, and thus an hour wore away in the petty

strife which in his case was characterized by ceaseless strivings to win again that place in her heart filched from him by her old lover; on her part the quarrel and the cold weather acted equally in stimulating her to fresh coquetries. Farther and farther they withdrew into the heart of the snowy wood, till, when quite remote, they sat down on a fallen log, beautiful in summer with mosses, lichen and waving ferns, now converted to a long white cylinder, softly rounded at either end. Here Ringfield's ardour and his conscientious feelings for her future broke out in a long and impassioned speech in which he implored her to change her mind while there was time and to remember her warm promises to himself. He did not embrace her, and throughout his discourse, for such it might aptly be termed, he was more the saviour of souls than the lover.

"And although I claim no reward for the fact," he concluded sternly, "it is due me, when I tell you that I know all about that poor child at Hawthorne, poor Angeel, and that I am going to take the whole matter on myself and remove her to a more suitable home and surroundings."

Miss Clairville flushed an angry red. "You—you know all?" she repeated. "But how—how did you find out? You have seen Henry, perhaps—oh! you have been talking to him, my poor brother!"

"No," returned Ringfield. "You forget that people talk to me, bring these stories to me, make me the recipient of confessions. I have seen and I have heard, therefore I know. But I will do as I have said. I shall write to the proper people to look after Angeel, and I shall see that she is removed before long from Hawthorne."

"Where to?"

"Perhaps to a hospital; that of the Incarnation at Lalurette."

"But that is a Catholic institution!"

"So much the better."

"This is extremely kind, extremely generous of you!" said she, in her most English, and therefore haughtiest manner. "But I myself have had the same intention. We can work together, I suppose!"

"No, I prefer that you leave this to me."

To this she replied sneeringly, and a new cause of recrimination ensued.

Pauline rose abruptly from the snowy mound and walked to the road, Ringfield following her, and they did not know that never again on this earth and during this life would they meet thus—part thus—alone, with full opportunity to say what they thought, what they wished.

Sadness fell on both as they shortly went different ways, but whereas the lively nature of one was soon occupied gaily at Poussette's with fresh purchases to look at and approve, in the other grief was succeeded by a gathering of all his forces, as he mentally resolved (swore, to rightly translate his indomitable mood) to prevent the marriage. For this was what he had arrived at; nothing more nor less, and how it might be done haunted him continually as he walked by night on the frozen road, or sat at meals within sound of Crabbe's cynical and lettered humour, and within sight of Pauline's white hands on which gleamed a couple of new and handsome rings.

She must not marry him! That became the burden of his thought, and the time-limit of three weeks, bringing it to Christmas Eve, was to him as the month before execution of the condemned criminal.

She must not marry him! What then, could or in all likelihood would, prevent this consummation? The hours flew by and he thought of no plan. The hard weather still held and grew harder, colder, until the great drifts blocked all the roads, and St. Ignace was cut off from the outside world. Still, any hour a thaw might set in and, at the worst, the railway was hardly ever impracticable for more than a couple of days. Delay there might be, but one could see that Crabbe would not refuse to welcome even delay; he sat at the head of the chief table clad in the regulation tweeds of the country gentleman, and with a kind of fierce and domineering inflation in his manner that subdued the irrepressible hilarity of Poussette, threatening to break out again, for by way of keeping his pledge as to liquor, he seemed to take more beer than was necessary or good for him. The Cordova, held as a willing witness and prospective bridesmaid, had to "learn her place" under the new *régime*, and felt fully as miserable as she looked, for now no longer revelry graced the night. Poussette's unnaturally long face matched with Pauline's hauteur and Crabbe's careless air of mastery; he, the sullen cad, the drunken loafer, having become the arbiter of manners, the final court of appeal. One day Ringfield had been lashed to even unusual distress and mortification by the offensive manner of the guide, who in the course of conversation at the table had allowed his natural dislike of Dissent and Dissenters to show; "damned Methodists," and all that sort of talk. The very terms annoyed Ringfield; they savoured of the Old

Country, not of Canada, where denominational hatred and bigotry should be less pronounced, and as he left the room Poussette joined him in the hall.

"Bigosh, Mr. Ringfield, sir—but I don't know how you stand that talk so long—no, sir, I don't know at all!" He patted the other on the back.

"Well, Poussette, I must do the best to stand it that I know how. You and I agree about a good many things. Tell me—do you believe that—that Mr.—that he is really a reformed man, really changed in his habits? And is he going to marry Miss Clairville? You are around with him a good deal; you are likely to know."

"The day is feex," returned Poussette without enthusiasm. "The day is feex, and I am bes' man."

"What do you think about it, though? Don't you think he'll break out again?"

Ringfield's anxious bitter inflections could not escape Poussette. "Ah-ha! Mr. Ringfield, sir—you remember that I wanted Miss Clairville for myself? Bigosh—but I have got over that, fine! Sir, I tell you this, me, a common man—you can get over anything if you make up the mind. Fony things happens—and now I snap the finger at Mlle. Pauline. Why? Because I feex up things with Mees Cordova even better."

"Mme. Poussette—" began Ringfield.

"Mme. Poussette is come no more here on me at all, I tell you. No more on St. Ignace at all."

"But you cannot *marry* Miss Cordova, Poussette!"

"I know very well that, Mr. Ringfield, sir. No. For that, sir, I will wait. My wife must die some day! Mees Cordova will wait too; she will *ménager* here for me, and I will threat her proper—oh! you shall see how I will threat that one!" Poussette seductively nodded his head. "I will threat her proper, sir, like a lady. Mme. Poussette—she may stay with Henry Clairville all the rest of her life! I would not take her back now, for she leave me to go nurse him, and not threat me right. No sir, not threat me, her husband, Amable Poussette, right at all."

"I'm in no mood for these difficult distinctions in morality!" cried Ringfield in exasperation. "What day is this wedding—tell me that!"

Poussette gave him the day and hour—eleven o'clock in a certain Episcopal church in Montreal on the 24th of December, and then they parted.

From this moment a steady pursuit of one idea characterized Ringfield's actions. Already charged to explosive point by pressure of emotions both worthy and the reverse, he immediately entered into correspondence with several charitable institutions with regard to Angeel, and he also wrote to Mr. Enderby and Mr. Abercorn. It was now the ninth of the month and the snow still held. Sobriety still held and long faces; the American organ was never opened, and Pauline and her satellite, Miss Cordova, were mostly buried in their bedrooms, concocting an impromptu trousseau.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TROUSSEAU OF PAULINE

"—the whole domain To some, too lightly minded, might appear A meadow carpet for the dancing hours."

"Tra-la!" sang Miss Clairville, as she pressed heavily on the folds of a purple cloth skirt which had once done service in the "Grand Duchess," but was now being transformed by hot irons, rows of black braid and gilt buttons into a highly respectable travelling dress.

"I thought at first of giving this old thing away, but see how well it's going to look, after all!"

The Cordova, busy heating an iron on the "drum" which stood in a corner of the room, looked at the skirt and at first said nothing.

"It's too dark for a bride's travelling-dress," she said after a while.

"Do you think so? But not for a dark bride," said the other with an uneasy frown. "Well, I'm not a girl, you see; besides, without a sewing machine you and I could never manufacture an entire costume. I meant to give it to you; in fact, I had it tied up in that bundle once, then I changed my mind—woman's prerogative—and here it is."

"Thank you, but I shouldn't care for it anyhow, purple's not my colour; it looks awful with my kind of hair."

Pauline glanced up coldly at the bleached head bending over the irons.

"Perhaps it does. Well—it's too late now even if you did care for it. I'll wear plenty of white around my neck and down the front; a cascade, *jabot* effect always suits me."

She wound a white scarf around her as she spoke, and bent an old black hat into a three-cornered shape on top of her head.

"There, my dear, there is the true French face, only you don't know it! If I could take you to my home, you would see—well, you would not see much beyond Henry and his eternal books, though they tell me he reads no more. I'm thinking of an old portrait I resemble."

Miss Clairville now sat on the bed, having relinquished the work of doing over the cloth skirt to her friend.

"Why are you keeping that red and black dress there, the theatre dress? You will never need that, travelling!"

"No, I suppose not, only——"

Pauline eyed the dress. The family trait of acquisitiveness combined with a love of hoarding was asserting itself, and she could scarcely make up her mind to part with things when the time came. Besides, this dress carried her back to meetings with Ringfield, and again she saw the passionate admiration in his eyes as they talked in whispers on her balcony.

"Oh—a fancy of mine! I look well in it. I wore it when Henry was taken ill with the 'pic'."

With a loud shriek Miss Cordova dropped an iron on the floor.

"What is it now? *Quelle bêtise!* Stupid—I wasn't with him! I meant—about that time. But if you want the dress, take it, take it! *Mon Dieu!* what a state your nerves must be in!"

"I'm much better than when I came here," said Miss Cordova quickly. "Say, Pauline,—did you know I thought of sending for the children?"

"Your children? To come here?"

"Yes. Now, Pauline, it sounds queer, I know, and worse than anything I've ever done, yet—it isn't as bad as it sounds. But, but—well, I may just as well out with it. Mr. Poussette has proposed!"

"To you?"

Miss Cordova stopped in her work. "Yes. He seems to be serious and I like it here, like him too, so I guess we'll fix it up somehow. Of course his wife's living, but she's not right in her head, so she don't count."

"And your two husbands are alive, but as one drinks and the other was married when he met you, *they* don't count." Miss Clairville was staring in front of her. "My dear girl—have you never heard of such a thing as bigamy? You're talking nonsense, and you must not allow Mr. Poussette to get you into trouble. You can't marry him, Sara!"

"Of course. I know that. But we are both willing to wait. Schenk can't last long; he's drinking harder than ever from last accounts, and Stanbury—well, perhaps I'd better stop short of saying anything about English swells, but Charlie Stanbury had no right to me in the first instance, and now I'm not going to let the faintest thought of him stop me in my last chance of a home and quiet, peaceful living. Oh—Pauline—I was never the same after I discovered how Stanbury wronged me! Nothing seemed to matter and I went from bad to worse. But since I've been here, I've seen things in a different light, and I'd like to stay here and bring the children away from New York and let them grow up where they'll never hear a word about their father or about me and Schenk."

She spoke with sad conviction, her eyes filling, her hands trembling as she worked on at Pauline's skirt.

"You'd give up the theatre and all the rest of it, and come and live at St. Ignace if you could?"

"Indeed I would, Pauline. Indeed, indeed I would."

"This is too droll! For here am I, pining to get away and be free of this place for ever! But that's because I belong here."

"Yes, and because you have no children to think about. If you had—you'd understand. While Schenk's alive he may find me any day in New York, but I don't believe he'd ever think of looking for me here. My mother'd know how to send the children along, I guess, and they'd always have enough to eat and drink, and fresh air and a place to play in, and I'm sure Mr. Poussette would be kind to them. You know he's a funny-talking man, but he's got a real good heart, and Maisie and Jack might have a good time here."

"Yes, I know, but——" Miss Clairville's aristocratic and sophisticated side was dubious.

"But what? It's all very well for you, just making a fresh start, getting married and going to Europe and wanting to see a little more of the world than the Champlain House and St. Ignace, but I've had enough of the world—too much! I want to bring up my children honest, honest and respectable, and I can't do it, Pauline, in one room on Sixth Ave. Maisie, now, wants to be out in the streets every evening; she'd rather—than stay with me at the theatre even."

"How old is Maisie?" asked Miss Clairville suddenly.

"Why, she's most eleven years of age, I reckon. Let's see! I met Stanbury in—seventy-seven; Maisie—yes, she's just eleven, and Jack's nine and half. Say—wasn't it a good thing that I didn't have any family to Schenk?"

"How can you be so very vulgar!" said Miss Clairville with a curling lip. "But I suppose it was a good thing—the Will of God—according to Father Rielle. Eleven! And Angeel's nine. Nearly ten."

"Angeel? Who's she? You don't mean to tell me that you——"

"What do you mean?" said Miss Clairville fiercely. "What right have you to imagine such things? I'll tell you some day about Angeel, but just now I prefer to discuss something pleasant. We will resume our packing, my dear. Here is this blanket coat. What am I to do with it?"

"Give it away, of course. You'll never wear it again, Pauline, where you're going!"

"I know I shan't," replied Miss Clairville, compressing her lips as she regarded with a critical eye the antiquated wine-red garment adorned with a white sash, and tuque to correspond. "But I look so well in this, too!"

"If you don't want it, let me have it for Maisie. Why—it would be just the thing for her, running around here all winter! Say, Pauline—ain't it funny to think she's the child of an English swell? Stanbury's from a real good family, I can tell you. I guess your Mr. Hawtree would be likely to know all about him. You might ask him. Then there's this white evening dress. My—it's dirty enough, goodness knows! It ought to be French cleaned, but who's to do it in this out-of-the-way place? Here are a lot of roses falling out of it—do they belong to it?"

"That's my Camille dress. The roses go around the skirt—see?—in garlands: same around the waist and on the hair. I might turn it into a *peignoir*, I suppose. But I think I will give it to you, Sara; you can keep it till Maisie grows up and do it—how do you say?—do it over for her. Is she fair or dark?"

"Dark—just like Stanbury. Say, won't you tell me about Angeel now?"

"No, no! *O—pour l'amour de Dieu*, don't drag her in at this time! Haven't I enough to worry me? What shall I do if Edmund breaks out again? I haven't seen him all day."

Miss Cordova was very thoughtful for an instant.

"Seems to me you ought to've had more under-clothes," she said solemnly, and Pauline laughed. "And what you have got are far too plain. My—the ones I saw just before I came away from New York! Say, Pauline—there was twenty-five yards of lace, honest, to one nightgown!"

"Was there? At Sorel we were not allowed one yard; frilly things, and too much lace and ribbons are

the mark of bad women. Did you ever hear that?"

"I guess my mother held some notions like those. She used to say—quality was the thing, and was never satisfied till she got the best lawn, soft as silk, but she never had much trimming on them. Cut plain and full, was almost always her directions. Well, now—yes, I guess you'll have to wait till you go to Paree before you replenish that side of your wardrobe. Is your Mr. Hawtree free with his money?"

"Yes, yes!" rejoined Pauline hurriedly. The fact being that after the initial flourish and purchase of a few pieces of jewellery and other trinkets Crabbe had tightened his purse-strings, as it were, not from miserliness, but because it was necessary to use caution until they reached London, when larger sums would be paid over on due recognition of his identity. "Free enough for the present. As for me, I have saved nothing, nothing! How could I, with this need for ready money hanging over me? So I do not like to ask too much, just now, and, like a man, he provides me with diamond earrings while I lack proper shoes and an umbrella."

"Take mine!" said Miss Cordova earnestly. "It's real silk and it won't matter if there's an 'S' on the handle. It was his—Stanbury's."

"My dear girl," cried Pauline, "I couldn't! You'll need it yourself. See—it's silver mounted and valuable!"

"I know it, and that's why I want you should have it. We've been good friends, Pauline, even if there is a difference in our education, and I'd like to give you some little thing. Do please take the umbrella."

All Miss Clairville's latent womanliness sprang to the surface as she jumped off the bed and enfolded her friend in a warm embrace.

"God knows, you will never be forgotten by me, Sara! We've struggled together too long for that. You have a sweet temper and a kind heart, and *le bon Dieu* takes note of that. I wish now you *could* marry Mr. Poussette, for I see that you'll miss me when I'm gone, and that's not a bad idea about your children. I hope I'll never have any; I'd be afraid, I'd be afraid. Well, I'll accept the umbrella then, *in memoriam* if you like. And you take the white dress, and these long yellow gloves, and this sash for Maisie, and here's a *bijou* imitation watch and chain for Jack—eh? What's the matter?"

Miss Cordova leant heavily on her friend.

"They are calling us," she said.

"Who are?"

"I don't know. Listen! Some one's wanted. It's me. It's me. Perhaps Schenk's come! Pauline, what shall I do?"

"Absurd! No one can get here; you forget the roads and the snow. Schenk? He is miles away!"

"Then it's for you. Yes. They're coming up. Listen—it is you, 'Ma'amselle Clairville,' I hear them say!"

"But why be so alarmed?" cried Pauline, and she threw open the door.

Antoine Archambault and Poussette stood outside.

"Your brother the seigneur is dying, mademoiselle," said Poussette, "and desires to see you at once. There is no time to lose."

"What is it?" asked Miss Cordova, not comprehending the foreign tongue, and they told her.

Miss Clairville's face changed. She trembled visibly, made the sign of the cross—so potent is habit, so strong are traditions—but uttered nothing.

"She is ill!" said Miss Cordova, and she led her friend to a chair.

"No, no, I am not ill. But I do not want to go. *Je ne le veux pas*. I do not wish at all to go. I will not go, Sara!"

"It's hard, I guess," said the other woman sympathetically, "but it's natural he should want to see you before he dies. Of course, she'll go, Mr. Poussette, and I'll go with her."

"No, no!" said Pauline, starting up, "if I go it must be alone. But why should I go?"

She looked piteously from one to the other. "What good can I or anyone do to him if he is dying? Perhaps there is some mistake."

Antoine spoke in voluble French in accompaniment to Poussette's gestures, and at the words she drooped appallingly.

"Come, Pauline, perhaps it will not be so terrible after all. You were going to visit him this week anyway."

"I know, I know, but this is different, dreadful, startling. It makes me so—I cannot describe. Who is with him? Only Mlle. Poussette! Oh, why—why? It will spoil my marriage, Sara; perhaps it will prevent my marriage!"

"Nothing of the kind! No, no. You will be married the sooner, I daresay. Where is Mr. Hawtree? Why don't he come up and talk to you?"

"He is being driven with Alexis Tremblay to the station! A train may pass through this morning."

Pauline now recollected that he had gone to Montreal to make final preparations for the wedding; among other things, the drawing up of an antiquated contract according to the mixed law of the Province. A sudden wish woke in her to run away and join him and so evade the painful scene which must ensue if she obeyed her brother's commands.

"Death's a dreadful thing anyway, I guess," remarked Miss Cordova to fill in the silence, touching Pauline's thick loops of hair as she spoke. "I just know how you feel."

"*Mon Dieu*—be quiet, Sara! It isn't his death I mind so much as his dying. Do you not see—he will make me promise, he will bother me into something; dying people always do—I can't explain. If he would just die and have done with it!"

Even the men felt the unusual distress of mind which prompted this outburst of selfish candour, and Miss Cordova drew away.

"Seems to me your brother's in the hands of the Lord and I guess He's mightier than you are. My mother's a New England woman and was always afraid about my going on the stage, and I suppose I've gone wrong *some*, but I couldn't, like you, go back on a poor, dying creature. Say, Pauline, hadn't you better see a clergyman? Where's that young man? Where's Mr. Ringfield?"

"I do not require his services, thank you. But yes—you mean well. If I'm anything, I'm a Catholic, my dear—and now take all these things and put them away. I think I shall never *marier* with anyone in this world. I must go, I suppose. Antoine will drive, and I shall go alone."

Miss Cordova silently moved about the small room, not sharing in the gloomy views of the prospective bride, for she carefully went on packing the scanty trousseau which included badly mended *lingerie*, the red dinner dress, and three gay satin waists bought by Crabbe in the shops of St. Laurent, Main Street, one of canary and black lace, another of rose colour, and a third of apple-green. There were veils enough to stock a store, ties, collars, ribbons, small handkerchiefs and showy stockings in profusion, with a corresponding dearth of strong sensible clothing. The trousseau of Pauline was essentially French in its airiness; its cheap splendours attested to one side of her peculiar character and the sturdier and more sensible attributes of the *belle Canadienne* were for the time obliterated. The blanket coat and tuque and the Camille dress were tied up by Miss Cordova for Maisie, and within half an hour Pauline had departed with Antoine, and the others lapsed to the unsettled calm which overtakes a community when it is known that the inevitable must shortly occur. That unpleasant negative condition of waiting for a death was now shared by all at Poussette's as the news spread through St. Ignace. Father Rielle was seen to drive away, and Dr. Renaud was already at the Manor House, but Ringfield, shut up in his own room, reading and pondering, heard nothing of the matter for several hours. However, Poussette and Miss Cordova, to relieve tedium, went into the kitchen, where, secure from both Stanbury and Schenk, the ex-actress took a lesson in cooking, by tea-time producing pancakes so excellent that they rivalled if not excelled those of her instructor. Indeed, with this happily met couple, time flew by on feathered wings. Miss Cordova was quick on her feet, bright in her talk, and her vivacity and grace charmed the susceptible Frenchman, too long accustomed to the shrinking nervous figure of the absent Natalie. She stood on chairs and renewed her youth, looking into tins and boxes and bringing to light jams and biscuits the host had forgotten. She sang snatches of Offenbach and Verdi, she beat the eggs while Poussette made up his fire, and when he squeezed her hand or put his fat arm around her waist she did not prudishly push him away, but, gently resisting, rebuked him in such affectionate terms that he politely restrained those damaging caresses. In short, she managed Poussette instead of being persuaded by him, and this in itself pleased her and restored her self-respect; her previous relations with Stanbury and Schenk suffered by comparison, and if she secretly

hoped for the death or removal of Mme. Poussette it was with soft womanly compunction and pity, and with stern resolves not to overstep the mark of purity.

So—in this poor, obscure, half-educated soul, this Guinevere of lowly life, burnt the flame of natural goodness. Ignorant of ritual, she had long ago compiled a prayer for herself which ran; "O God—I wasn't a good girl, and I haven't been a good woman, but I've tried to be a good mother. Help me to be a Holy Saint after I die. Amen."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SEIGNEUR PASSES

"Mortality's last exercise and proof
Is undergone; the transit made that shows
The very soul, revealed as it departs."

Henry Clairville lay in the ancient and tattered bed which not even the activities of Mme. Poussette could render more than moderately decent. The sands of life were running out indeed; a great change was apparent in his pinched and freckled features, and his small colourless eyes had sunk entirely back into his head. Two large cats slept at his feet and three more lay under the bed; despite all madame could do to remove them, these five out of the fourteen persisted in returning again and again to the familiar habitat which custom or attachment had made necessary. Their brown tigery sides rose and fell peacefully in the sound slumber induced by the plentiful fare of Clairville, but no sleep came to their master. Occasionally he would stretch forth a withered hand to try and stroke one or other of his pets, but they had gradually slipped to the foot of the bed, their weight, which was considerable, having formed a deep pit in the lumpy feather mattress. Mme. Poussette sat in the room, Dr. Renaud across the hall in the faded *salon*, while the priest arranged the holy office of the Blessed Sacrament in a corner with his back turned, occasionally repeating aves and prayers under his breath.

Pauline's entrance, subdued from her native impetuosity to something chastened and severe, was still out of harmony with the shabby carpet, the patched counterpane, and the meagre daylight; she brought into the room an extraordinary sense of brightness, and yet she had taken some trouble to amend her costume and bring it within the range of things sorrowful and sober. Her side face, in particular, nothing could tame; the exquisite ear, defined by a diamond, showed youthfully against the dark hair looped thickly just behind it, the full chin and curved lips were always on the point, seemingly, of breaking into a smile, whereas the front face betrayed both age and agitation by the vertical lines of the forehead and by the strained expression of the eyes, oftener fiery and worried than calm and pleasing.

Mme. Poussette left her chair and approached the lady of the Manor, but nothing more than a fleeting contemptuous glance did the latter bestow. At the sight of Henry and the cats all her courage returned and a measure of her temper.

"I was sent for and I am here," she said, advancing to the middle of the room with not a shred of kindness in her manner. Was it not as it had always been—hateful, uncongenial, difficult? Why must she feign hypocritical interest and sympathy? "And I know why you sent for me, but I tell you, Henry, it is of no use. I will promise nothing."

The seigneur moved heavily from his side to his back and weakly opened his small eyes upon her. It was evident that he was clear in his mind.

"You were sent for and you are here," he repeated, "but you did not wish to come. Did not Nature work within you, bidding you come? Did not sisterly love, sweet kinship, weigh with you at all?"

"Not in the least," replied Miss Clairville coldly. She continued to stand, although the other woman proffered a chair, nor did she unfasten her fur coat or draw off her gloves. Her brother took note of this.

"You had better sit," he murmured.

"I will not! In this room—you know I have never sat here since——
You know the vow I made. And why."

"I know, my sister, I know. Nevertheless, sit now."

Father Rielle turned half round. "Sit, my daughter. It will not be for long."

And from Dr. Renaud came the sharp order: "Sit—at once."

Overruled, but with annoyance and aversion in every movement, Pauline took madame's chair.

"I cannot stay—I mean—I cannot stay long. Oh—Henry, why have you brought me here? I can do you no good, and the sight of you will do me harm, it always does!"

This outburst was more natural to her stormy temperament than her previous rigidity; her hands clasped and unclasped, while the frown between her eyes, almost the shape of a barred gate, broke up as a few wild tears fell upon her lap. Clairville, for his part, though a dying man, showed resolution and calm obstinacy.

"You ask that question—and yet you profess to know why I sent for you? If you do not come to me of your goodwill, I must send for you, that is clear. You are hearing nothing of me, for I have been too long a dead man to the world, but I continue to hear much of you. This marriage—is it true?"

"I was coming to you," she said hastily, and with evasion; "I had made arrangements so that when I leave Canada for good I shall have nothing to reproach myself for."

"I ask—and see that you answer—you are going to be married?"

With an uneasy glance at the priest, Miss Clairville murmured: "Yes". Then louder, as if in an effort to assert herself: "It is to Mr. Hawtree, an old friend, your friend. There is nothing new or surprising, nothing peculiar in that. Only what is new is this—that he will not have to work, that he has come into some money, that we can go away and live in other places; live indeed how or where we like. Henry—think what that will do for me! Think how it will change all my life and how at last I shall realize my dreams, if not fulfil my ambitions! And then I may be able to help you too, perhaps—and—and Angeel. That is—I am not sure of this, but I shall try and do so."

Clairville seemed to be endeavouring to look at his sister more closely.

"I cannot hear you very well. Will you approach the bed, Pauline? I am feeble, you see—I am——" Terrible coughing now interrupted him, and he called upon the doctor.

"Renaud!" he gasped. "Where is Renaud?"

"Not far off," replied the medical man, sauntering easily to the bedside. "Come then, Mlle. Pauline, do your best for your brother. Take his hand. Bend your face—so. Lower, if you please! Madame will go to the other side,—a good woman, mademoiselle, a good kind woman!"

"Have I said she was anything else?" returned Pauline, stiffly obeying the doctor's instructions, but with obvious dislike in every movement. She took the seigneur's hand, she forced herself to place her head almost upon his pillow.

"You are uncomfortable, my poor Pauline! You shrink from me, you would avoid this meeting, this last scene on earth, but remember, this hour, this scene comes to all, will come, must come to you. If you marry, if you have good loving children, when this hour comes, you shall not pray in vain nor weep, for they will surround you, but I, Pauline, I have only you, you and one other."

"But that other! You have not sent for her? She is not here."

"No, not yet. I spare you that, Pauline; she will arrive later, after—I am gone. Father Rielle knows at last; he never suspected. Renaud knows; speak to her, Renaud, tell her."

Another fit of coughing shook him, and the cats, disturbed in their sleep, stood up, arching their brown backs and yawning.

"Take them off, take them away!" moaned Pauline, her eyes closed, but the seigneur shook a menacing finger.

"They do no harm," said the doctor tersely. "Keep his feet warm, I daresay."

"Not even that, Renaud, not even that. But leave them—good cats, good friends."

The cats curled up again in conscious attitudes, while from under the vast and ancient bed came a loud and insistent purring, rising and falling with triumphant, happy cadences—the song of the mother-

cat, impervious to all save her immediate surroundings.

"If they were dogs," cried Miss Clairville, in fretful fear and mortification, "they would not sleep like that! They would know you were ill, dying, and they would keep watch and show affection. I always hated cats, and now I shall hate them more than ever."

"What are cats?" said the doctor with a yawn, which vanished as he glanced down at his patient. "Come, you are here to arrange a few details with monsieur your brother—make haste then. Madame, some water and a little brandy in it! So. Now, Mademoiselle, attend."

"There is not so much for me to say," said the sick man, pressing Pauline's hand with wistful entreaty, "as there is from me to hear from you yourself. I have confessed my fault, my sin, and yet, not my sin, Pauline. Angele is my child, by Artémise Archambault, as you have always known, but she is more, she is my daughter, legitimately begotten, in proper wedlock. This you did not know, my poor Pauline. She is a true Clairville, my sister, a De Clairville, I should say."

Pauline was now entirely overcome with a new emotion, that of intense surprise and consternation; instantly the consequences of legitimizing "Angeel" rushed at her. Instead of a low *liaison* there was marriage; the child and she were heirs alike; they were relations and should be friends, and what she had feared to hear timidly broached—some plan to keep the child near her—would now be insisted upon.

"Oh!" she cried, drawing away, "this is worse than anything I came prepared to hear! This is the worst, cruellest of all. Far better had she been nameless, far, far better. Perhaps—ah! yes—now I understand; he is ill, he wanders, he does not know what he is saying."

"Tell her, Renaud."

"It is all true, mademoiselle. Believe what he says, for he was never clearer in the head, not often so clear in life and health as now."

At this she broke down completely, sobbing aloud. The priest gently intervened.

"I cannot allow this, my daughter. You must respect the hour, the condition of monsieur, the place, the death-bed of a Christian, mademoiselle!"

Pauline's sudden sharp sobs were all that could be heard. She had never wept like this in her life before.

"What is it you want me to do? Not take her with me, not have her to live with me? I could not, Henry, I could not. Even if I could overcome my horror of her—poor innocent child, for it is not her fault she is as she is—I have no right to visit her on Edmund when we are married. Yes, yes—you must see that we shall be separated. Angele and her mother—oh! it is not possible—yet I must call her so since you say it, your wife, Henry, the Archambault girl, will live here. They will be comfortable, and if we do well where we are going, if Edmund comes into his money—"

Clairville interrupted her.

"It is of him, too, Hawtree, that I would speak. I fear, I fear—he is not what he should be, to be your husband, my poor Pauline. His talk—he has told me much of his past, of women, other women. Pauline—he has loved in many places."

"Yes, but I was the last—and best!" broke from Miss Clairville in a burst of self-pity. Her eager accents lent pathos to the triumphant declaration and she fancied the priest laughing in his corner! the doctor gave a snort of ridicule and even the lips of the impassive nurse seemed to contract with a contemptuous smile.

"He tells you so, he tells you so. Well, may it be so then, and Heaven bless you, Pauline. If I—if I——" his lean hand moved jerkily; it wandered in search of her head, but instead of those dark locks of hair it fell on the back of a cat. Pauline was swayed by extraordinary and clashing emotions. He—her hated and despised brother—was trying to bless her, to lay unsanctified and sinful yet yearning hands upon her, and it was a blow to her pride to learn forbearance in such a school and from such a teacher. But he had spoken almost his last words. He collapsed, groaning, and the doctor and Mme. Poussette each passed an arm under him. Father Rielle appeared at the bedside with the sacrament.

"Not for a minute or two," said Dr. Renaud. "He is still worried in his mind. It is you, mademoiselle, always you. He is uneasy about the child. I know what he wishes; that you will be friendly with her, treat her as your own blood, stay here with her, it may be, for a season. Promise, mademoiselle, and quickly."

"I cannot! I cannot!"

"Nonsense! Promise—and at once."

Father Rielle whispered in her ear: "Promise, my daughter."

"It will be useless. I should not keep such a promise."

"What does that matter? Promise—to soothe his dying moments, even if you break it afterwards. The Church thus orders, and the Church will make good, will console."

Thus hemmed in, Pauline bent and gave her promise; much shaken and still violently sobbing, she then left the room and Renaud accompanied her. The act was significant, the leech of the body withdrawing to make room for the leech of the soul. The door was softly drawn to by Mme. Poussette; the low sound of Father Rielle's voice was heard at intervals, then there was a silence. Ten minutes later the priest and nurse came out, throwing wide the door on the remains of Henry Clairville, just passed from this world to the next. At the same instant, a strange incongruous sound came from the room, and Pauline, wide-eyed and panting, stopped sobbing, and stood up with her hands pressed over her heart. It was the penetrating chant of three lusty kittens, new-born, blind and helpless, yet quick to scent their mother and grope towards her furry bosom.

Madame hastily re-entered, driving all the cats before her, including the outraged mother, who took this summary eviction with hoarse and angry cries, and the kittens, gathered roughly into madame's apron, continued to emit shrill, smothered squeals all the way to the kitchen. Dr. Renaud passed in to verify the death, and the incident of the cats was not lost upon him; indeed, it appealed to his professional instinct.

"In the midst of Death we are in Life," he remarked jocularly, stepping back into the hall to get ready for the drive homeward.

Miss Clairville glanced at these preparations, and speedily made up her mind. She had grown quiet and was already relieved at the prospect of leaving Clairville immediately.

"It cannot matter now whether I go or stay, surely! Dr. Renaud, I go with you, is it not so?"

"Faith—it doesn't matter any longer now, as you say. Quick with you then, for I have much in the village to arrange; a Clairville does not die every day. Madame has the young Antoine with her, she will not be afraid. I can send somebody out to sit with her, and you will be best at Poussette's."

The day was cold but bright and intensely sunny, and Pauline's relief and gratitude to the doctor brought back her colour; she sat up, casting her care behind her, and let him talk.

"Well, there was not much to be done with him; the 'pic' had weakened the system, and after so many years of incarceration in a sleeping-room the chest and lungs were delicate; hence the congestion and cause of death. Well, well—let me see—I remember your brother twenty-three years ago when I first came to St. Ignace. A strange, bookish, freakish character, but a gentleman, that goes without saying, Ma'amselle Pauline. And you, just a little black-haired girl, reciting French tragedy in the untidy garden! Ah—ah! I see it clearly—no father, no mother, save old Victoria Archambault, and yet you grew up a handsome young lady, always thinking of making your fortune, eh? And you cannot have made it yet or you would not be contemplating marriage with our friend the Englishman."

Pauline's face changed at this; the barred gate stood out over her eyes, and with ease and happiness fading from her mouth and expression she turned on Renaud.

"Who was there to help me make it or to care if I made it at all? Now that you know the truth and see what Henry is and was, how could I be anything or do anything in such a *milieu*! You taunt me, you—who profess to have known nothing of the Archambault affair all these years!"

"I give you the word of honour, mademoiselle, I swear it to you—I knew nothing! Recollect—your brother never would admit a doctor, you were strong and healthy and much away from Clairville; of the child I only heard from those at Hawthorne and I did not connect what I did hear with either you or the seigneur, as he liked to call himself. These afflicted ones, these peculiar ones—Mme. Poussette kept the secret well. But two days ago he sent for me and told me everything; how he was properly married in the parish of Sault au Recollet to Artémise Archambault, she, the half-witted, the empty-headed—God knows whether that was the charm or what—and of the birth of the child, he told me. What could you expect from the union of two such natures? If you marry, mademoiselle, mate neither with a bad temper nor an unbridled thirst."

"Ah, be quiet, Dr. Renaud! You are the blunt well-wisher, I suppose, a type I detest! How can I help

myself! I have chosen, and you know the Clairville character."

"Yes, I know, but count before you jump—'tis safer. Jestings aside, ma'amselle, and although I come from a death-bed I jest with a light heart as one who sees on the whole enough of life and never too much of death—you are still too young and too brilliant a woman to marry anything but well. But I have said, I have finished."

"And not too soon"—was Miss Clairville's inward thought, as with new fears pricking at her heart she kept silence, so unusual a thing with her that the garrulous Renaud observed it and endeavoured to correct his pessimism.

"Enough of Life and not too much of Death," he repeated, gaily flourishing his whip. "It has a queer sound, that, eh? But it is like this, ma'amselle; when I bring to life, when I usher into this world, I see the solemnity and the importance of life in front of me and I am sad; it makes me afraid. When I assist at the grave I am calm and happy, light-hearted even, because there our responsibility for one another ceases, so long as we keep the Masses going."

"The Masses! For their souls you mean, for his soul? How then—do you believe that, Dr. Renaud?"

"Eh? Believe—mademoiselle? Come, you take me at a disadvantage. Am I not a good Catholic then? Pardon me, but I never discuss these questions. Without the Church we should be much worse than we are, and faith—some of us are about as bad as we can be already."

Pauline, tired out, said no more, but leaning back fell into dreaming of her marriage and of the life before her. Her brother was gone, peacefully and honourably on the whole; of Angeel it was not necessary to think, and if Artémise were to remain at Clairville as its mistress, a very good way might be opened toward conciliating the neighbourhood and of managing the child for the future. The Archambaults would most likely all return, evict Mme. Natalie Poussette, who would return to her husband, and Clairville Manor again assume the lively air of a former period, with French retainers young and old overrunning the house and grounds.

Once more in thought Miss Clairville saw the culmination of her hopes all revolving around the interesting Hawtree, and once more she began in fancy to add to, sort over, and finally pack away the airy trousseau which must now be enriched by at least one sober black suit, hat and mourning veil.

CHAPTER XXIV

RELAPSE

"How shall I trace the change, how bear to tell
How he broke faith——"

The Hotel Champlain is a hostelry not on the list which promises the highest class of entertainment for the tourist; one has not to go there unless one is French or in some way connected with or interested in French life and character, yet the *cuisine* is excellent and the rooms clean and neat. The occasional presence of pompous Senators from the provinces on their way to the legislative halls of the capital ensures a certain average of cooking and attendance; at other times prevail the naturally comfortable instincts of the host and hostess, M. and Mme. Alphonse Prefontaine, a couple bearing the same initials as the Poussettes, the wife a Natalie too, but extremely different in ideals and character. Thus, monsieur, the host, had voyaged, been to "Paris, France," emphasized in case you should think he meant that village, Paris, Ontario; had written a brochure on his travels and was a great patron of such arts as at that time the French population of Montreal were privileged to offer. Madame, the wife, with well-frizzed black hair, strong features and kindly dark eyes, was handsome enough for a Lady Mayoress, had excellent if a little showy taste in dress and had reared a large and healthy family.

To their comfortable roof Crabbe repaired rather than to any English one, because he was not yet completely reinstated in his own self-respect, and to patronize places suited to him in a prosperous future might now invite too much criticism. The Prefontaines knew Miss Clairville well and had heard from her of the rich Englishman to whom she was about to be married, and Crabbe was therefore received with more than Gallic fervour, assigned one of the best rooms, and after seeing a clergyman and attending to other matters touching the approaching ceremony, shut himself up with certain

manuscripts that he wished to look over before mailing them to England. He had arrived at noon on the day of Henry Clairville's death and the next morning accordingly brought him the news in print. He grew thoughtful for a while, meant to dispatch a telegram of condolence to Pauline, then forgot it as he became interested in his work. Two poems in particular came in for much revision: "The Lay of an Exiled Englishman," and "Friends on the Astrachan Ranch," pleased him with their lines here and there, yet the general and final effect seemed disappointing to his fine critical side; like many another he saw and felt better than he could perform.

"A Tennysonian ring, I fear. Yet what man alive and writing now can resist it? It slides into the veins, it creeps along the nerves, it informs us as we speak and move and have our being. I'll read aloud—ghastly perhaps, but the only way to judge effect."

He began, and the long lines rose and fell with precision and academic monotony; he was no elocutionist, but read as authors read their own works, as Schubert played his own music, and as he read the snow fell in thick swirling masses outside his window and the cold grew more and more penetrating and intense. A knock at the door roused him. It was a servant of the house who spoke English. The host had sent to know whether the guest was warm.

"Well, come to think of it," said Crabbe, "I'm not too warm, by any means. You can tell them to fire up downstairs, certainly. What time is luncheon here?"

"Do you mean dinner, sir?"

"Oh, yes, dinner, of course. One o'clock? Very well."

"No order, sir? For the bar, I mean?"

Crabbe stared at the speaker then straightened himself and looked out of the window. Was it snowing at St. Ignace, and on Henry Clairville's grave? Would Pauline go into mourning?

"No, I think not. A bottle of Bass at my dinner—that's all."

The interruption over, he went back to his poetry, and this time read on until he had finished. Then he was silent, staring at the table with his legs straight out in front of him, and his hands in his pockets.

"What rot your own poetry can sound!" he finally observed with a frown.

"Verse certainly needs an audience, and there's a turn, a lilt that reminds me of Carleton occasionally—that won't do. Must go at it again. Must go at it again. Better have a smoke."

He found and lit his pipe, read over the stanzas, this time in his head, and the room grew steadily colder, until he could hardly stand it. He rang the bell.

"Look here! Tell Mr. Prefontaine his guests are freezing in this house. Get him to fire up, there's a good fellow—and—look here? How soon will dinner be ready?"

"Not for some time, sir. Perhaps, if you're cold, a hot Scotch——"

But Crabbe was again buried in his work. At one he dined, very much admired by Mme. Prefontaine and her three daughters; he had his innocent tippie and then went back to his room. By three o'clock it was growing dark and he rose to pull down the blind, when a step outside in the hall arrested him. The step seemed familiar, yet incongruous and uncongenial; it was followed by a knock, and, going forward, Crabbe opened the door to Ringfield.

Astonishment showed in the Englishman's face, but he spoke amiably enough and invited the young man inside. Ringfield's countenance wore its perennial grave aspect, but it could also be seen that at that moment he was suffering from the cold. He wore no muffler, and his hands were encased in mere woollen gloves; he had also the appearance of being a martyr to influenza, and Crabbe regarded him with his usual contemptuous familiarity.

"What's brought you to town this infernally cold day?" he said.
"You're not going to be married, you know."

The pleasantry did not apparently disconcert the other, but he looked carefully around as if searching for something before he answered.

"To be candid, I followed you here to have a talk with you."

"The deuce you did—white choker and all! You have a cheek, haven't you? Then you must be pretty flush, after all, even if you have not any expectations, like me, Ringfield. You've never congratulated

me, but let that pass. As you are here, what do you want to talk about?"

The two stood facing each other, with the paper-strewn table between them.

"I should almost think you could guess," murmured Ringfield with an effort to be easy. "But before I, at least, can do any talking I must get warm. I'm chilled—chilled to the bone." And indeed he looked it. His hollow eyes, his bluish lips, his red hands and white fingers indicated his condition, and he had also a short, spasmodic cough, which Crabbe had never noticed at St. Ignace. Suddenly in the guide there awoke the host, the patron, and he drew the blind, placed chairs and grumbled at the stove-pipe.

"Oh for an open fire!" he cried. "Eh, Ringfield? One of your little Canadian open stoves would do, a grate—anything to sit before! Why, man, I'm afraid you have got a touch of the ague, or something worse, perhaps pneumonia."

"Not as bad as that, surely," returned the other with his wry smile. "I walked from the station to save a cab, and I'm only a little chilled."

"A warm drink!" cried Crabbe, from the depths of his new and hospitable instincts. "Say the word, and I'll order it. By heaven, Ringfield,—you look poorly, and I've wanted one myself all day." His hand was on the bell.

"No, no! Don't make a fuss over me. I shall be all right after a while. Besides I never take anything of the kind you mean, I fancy. Some camphor—if you had that, or a cup of boiling hot tea. I'll go downstairs and ask for that. Or coffee."

"Tea! Good Lord! Tea, to a man sickening with pneumonia!"

"But I'm not—really I'm not. I'm feeling warmer already."

"I know better. 'A hot Scotch,'" he said. "Oh for some of the Clairville brandy now, eh? By the way, her brother's dead."

Ringfield shivered, but not this time on account of the cold. Some strange sensation always attacked him when Crabbe spoke of Pauline.

"Yes. I did not hear of it until she returned."

"She went to see him, then?"

"Yes."

"That must have been after I left. Poor girl! Well, was she very knocked up? Have you seen her?"

Ringfield shook his head and the guide attributed the action more to cold than to sympathy. His mind was made up; Ringfield must take something, must be warmed up and made fit, and whisky was the only means known to the Englishman, who did not own a "Manual of Homoeopathy". Whisky it must be. Again his hand went to the bell, and again Ringfield remonstrated, but his *gauche* utterances were of no avail in face of Crabbe's decision of character and natural lording of it. The boy appeared, the order was dispatched, and as Ringfield noticed the growing exaltation in the guide's manner, a sort of sickness stole upon him. Here, thrust into his hand, was the greatest opportunity yet given to him to preserve a human soul and to save the woman he loved, but he looked on, dazed, uncomfortable, half guilty.

"If this works you harm," he said, "it will be through me, through me. I'd rather not, Crabbe; I'd rather not."

But the word of the guide prevailed, and in three minutes a couple of hot strong glasses were on the table. Crabbe for his part was really curious. Could it be that this man, his visitor, had never tasted spirituous liquor? Wine, of course, he must have taken, being a clergyman. This thought immediately attracted him, and with a sense of its literary value he sought to question Ringfield as to the effect of the Communion wine upon a teetotal community. By this time there was no doubt the minister had suffered a severe chill and the temptation became very strong to try the hot glass that stood in front of him.

Crabbe jeered.

"What do you suppose will happen to you if you taste it, even if you drain it? What can one glass do? Nonsense. I've taken a whole bottle of Glenlivet in an evening—then you might talk!"

His hand played with the glasses, and watching him, Ringfield felt all the awful responsibility of his

office. Once before he had shattered a hateful bottle, once he had lifted up his voice in self-righteous denunciation of the sin of drink and the black fruit thereof, but now he appeared helpless, paralyzed.

At what moment the evil finally entered into him and conquered him does not signify; horrible visions of Pauline and this man going away together, laughing and chatting, embracing and caressing, swam before his jaundiced eyes. To delay, to prevent the marriage had been his dream for weeks, and now he saw one way to accomplish this wished-for hindrance to their union. Should Crabbe be made drunk, should he yield again after so long abstinence from liquor, who could say what the consequences might prove? A shred only of common compunction animated him as he said: "I tell you frankly I'm afraid of the stuff. And I'm afraid for you."

Yet all this time he was watching the guide's expression.

Already the steaming fumes were working upon him; the familiar, comforting, stimulating odour was there, his hand was clasping the glass, in another moment he would drain it, then what would happen!

"Afraid! Afraid? Of one glass! Ringfield—you're a fool, a prig, and a baby. Besides, the spirit is all burnt out by this time, evaporated, flown thence. Come—I'll set you the example. Drink first and preach afterwards."

And with the peculiar gloating eye, the expressively working, watering mouth that the drunkard sometimes shows, the Englishman led off. It was a long, hot drink, but he threw his head back and never paused till he had drained the last drop, and once again tipped the glass towards his throat. Ringfield, alarmed, fascinated, deeply brooding, watched the proceeding in silence, his nature so changed that there was no impulse to seize the offending glass, dash it on the ground or pour the contents on the floor, watched ardently, hungrily, for the sequel. Would Crabbe remain as he had been after the enlivening draught, or would he by rapid and violent stages decline to the low being of former days? While Ringfield thus watched the guide the latter stared back, broadly smiling.

"Still shaking!" he cried; "still 'chilled to the bone' and shivering? You are such an impossible fellow—you will not give my remedy a chance. Perhaps whisky doesn't suit you. I know—it was gin you wanted. 'The gin within the juniper began to make him merry.' Lots of people don't know that's Tennyson. Eh, Ringfield? Afraid? Afraid of imperilling your immortal soul? Nuisance—a soul. Great nuisance. Great mistake. Well—are you or are you not going to drink this other glass? I can't see good stuff wasted. I'm astonished at you. I'm—'stonished."

He leant forward and bent his elbows on the table; the papers fluttered in all directions, but he had forgotten about them. His gaze—wide, blue and choleric—was alternately bent on Ringfield and on the tumbler.

The minister went pale, his heart beat spasmodically and his fingers curled and tingled. No power, no wish to pray was left in him, no sense of responsibility; he was too far gone in jealous vindictiveness to be his own judge or critic, and he stared at the guide, saying: "If you get drunk it is your own fault. You'll be doing it yourself. I have nothing to do with it, nothing. I will not touch the stuff, you shall not make me."

Yet he did not attempt to remove the glass and Crabbe sniffed at the tempting fumes. His right hand embraced them, his hair fell over his forehead, his eyes and mouth worked strangely, and in a twinkling what the other had foreseen happened. With an unsteady, leering flourish Crabbe raised the coveted tumbler to his lips and drank it off.

Appalled and conscience-stricken, Ringfield fell back against the door, the room being small and contracted, and covered his face with his hands. In ten minutes the guide was coarsely drunk, but sensible enough to ring the bell and demand more whisky. Committed to his wrong course, the minister interfered no longer, and suffered a servant to deliver the stuff into his hands at the door, on the plea that the gentleman inside was not very well. Thus things went from bad to worse, Crabbe noisily reciting passages from English poets and the Greek anthology, and insisting on reading his lines to Ringfield after a third "go" of spirits.

"How does this strike you?" he cried, whipping a narrow piece of writing-paper out of his pocket; "I've written many an epitaph, but none that I liked better than this:—

"Chaste I was not, neither honourable, only kind;
And lo—the streets with mourners at my death were lined!"

And he added gravely that it was in the best Greek style. "I've got another, 'On a Woman Who Talked too Much,' but I can't remember it. Don't you write poetry? You don't? Oh! I remember now. You're the parson. Want to convert me, want to reform me, eh, Ringfield? You write something better than poetry

—sermons. Look here—Ringfield—did you know I was intended for the Church myself at one time? I was. Honour bright—before I came out to this blasted country—excuse freedom of speech—before I knew you, and before I met Henry Clairville and Pauline."

The name seemed to convey some understanding of his condition with it, and he stopped a minute in his talk. The other man was still leaning by the door; it might be expedient to keep people of the house from seeing Crabbe's condition.

"Now—don't you say this isn't your fault," continued the guide, shaking his head wisely. "You ordered the whisky, you know you did. You were 'chilled to the bone' and you ordered it. And you're a parson all the same, can't get over that, can't help yourself, can you, Ringfield? Remember meetin' you many years ago somewhere, there was whisky too on that occasion, and you c'ngratulated me, you know, on going to be married. But you were—premature, that's what you were, Ringfield—premature. Wonder where I met you before! Must have been in the Old Country; must have been at Oxford together."

He now raised his head, and drinking off the fourth and last strong tumblerful of spirit, smiled vacantly in the other's face, and collapsed upon the table.

Ringfield, ashamed and bitter, stood and watched this sad scene with folded arms and tightly drawn mouth. Was it true? Was this his work? This dishevelled, staring-eyed, sodden, incoherent creature, shrewdly wise in his cups, had taken the place of the elegant and easy English gentleman, the educated Oxford man, dabbler in high-class verse and prospective happy bridegroom, and what woman would care to have his arm around her now? With the thought came a wave of self-righteous indignation; he had partially effected what he had hoped to bring about in some other way, the gradual but sure alienation of Crabbe from Pauline, and with a half-guilty satisfaction driving out remorse he descended and found M. Prefontaine, having first locked the door and put the key in his pocket. Explanations of his friend's seizure were made, apparently in good faith, and much solicitude expressed.

"However, I think you had better leave him entirely alone this evening, and I can look in later," concluded Ringfield, whose serious mien and clerical garb commended him; "I am familiar with his attacks and I will also see him in the morning before I leave, in case he requires anything, although by that time he will very probably have quite recovered."

This sounding perfectly frank and natural, M. Prefontaine took no more thought of the guest in No. 9, and gave Ringfield the room opposite, No. 8, from which he could listen for his friend's "attacks" and render assistance if required.

At half-past ten, therefore, he unlocked Crabbe's door, and found the guide almost as he had left him, his head on the table and his legs stretched out underneath, but Ringfield, scanning the room with a careful eye as he had done earlier in the day, on his arrival, at length perceived what he had expected and desired to see—a travelling-flask of wicker and silver-plate half hidden on the dressing table behind a tall collar-box. Turning the gas low, but not completely out, he went away quietly, again locking the door behind him. What Poussette had told him then was true, and it was this, that before his departure for Montreal the guide had purchased enough spirit to fill a large flask, and whether shallow subterfuge or not, Crabbe certainly had a standing temptation at his elbow which he must have forgotten when Ringfield entered, cold and shivering and plainly in need of a stimulant. Poussette's theory—that the Englishman had absented himself in order to enjoy a deliberate "spree" as it is called, was incorrect. Crabbe had simply brought the stuff with him from force of habit, the conventional notion of preparing for a journey, particularly in such a climate. Therefore the burden of his recent fall certainly must be laid to Ringfield, who had lifted neither voice nor hand to hinder; for while pursuing an evil course the latter seemed powerless to cast out the emotions of blinding hate and jealousy that tore at his vitals and rendered him a changed and miserable creature. The next morning he visited Crabbe again and found him, as he had hoped, absolutely sodden and useless; his elasticity and nerve, his good looks, his air of authority, having all disappeared, and a wretched physical sickness begun. He knew his plight, but did not recognize his tempter, did not mention Pauline's name and seemed to wish to be left alone. Ringfield candidly and sorrowfully made further explanations to M. Prefontaine, who promised to say nothing of the matter and to look after Crabbe as soon as he was able.

"Mlle. Clairville has written to us of the gentleman, and we regret this should have happened. You will carry her our best regards and good wishes for her wedding. These Englishmen are sometimes great drinkers, but they recover quickly."

Ringfield paid his bill and walked out as he had walked in, with the same constrained, unhappy expression, and the same cold hand grasping a florid carpet-bag. He had told M. Prefontaine that he was returning to St. Ignace, but he had no such intention; he went along Jacques Cartier Square a few yards, and then disappearing around a corner, found a quiet back street, where, over antiquated shop-fronts, he saw several cards of *appartements à louer* and one with a similar legend in English. Here he

entered and secured a front room, so situated that its view commanded that side of the square on which stood the Hotel Champlain. He had made up his mind to remain there until he saw Crabbe emerge, when, if possible, he would again detain, hinder, or, in some unthought-out way, keep him from St. Ignace and Miss Clairville. Thus he passed the hours, patiently waiting at his narrow window in the Rue St. Dominique for a sight of his unfortunate rival.

Now M. Alphonse Prefontaine had a friend named Lalonde, a very clever man and a member of that useful profession which lives upon the lives and secrets and follies and crimes of others—in fine, a detective, and having quite recently lost his wife (a cousin of Mme. Prefontaine) he had given up his house and come to live at the Hotel Champlain. He had been present when Ringfield first appeared in the rotunda with his countrified carpet-bag, had heard him ask for his friend, had seen him again later in the afternoon, and also in the morning, and having naturally a highly-developed trait of curiosity, had sauntered out when Ringfield did, and discovered that, instead of returning to the country, the young man with the clergyman's tie and troubled face was lodging in the next street. To anyone else, even to the Prefontaines, this would have signified nothing, but Lalonde was good at his business, and the discovery at least interested him; he could say nothing more. He, too, knew Miss Clairville well, and was expecting to see her on her wedding-day, so that it was quite natural he should express a desire to meet Crabbe, even if the latter were scarcely in a condition to receive callers. M. Prefontaine accordingly took him up, but all they saw was an exceedingly stupid, fuddled, untidy wretch who was not yet conscious of the great mistake he had made in giving way to his deplorable appetite, and who did not realize the import of what was said to him. Lalonde was sufficiently curious to examine the flask and Crabbe's valise, but he retired satisfied that the guide had not been tampered with. Drunkenness and that alone had caused the present sad state of affairs.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TROUSSEAU AGAIN

"—the bitter language of the heart."

The shop over which Ringfield was lodging for the time was an emporium of Catholic books, pictures and images, one of those peculiarly Lower Canadian stores in the vicinity of the Rue Notre Dame, existing side by side with Indian curio shops, and rendering it possible for the emigrant and tourist to purchase maple sugar, moccasins, and birch bark canoes at the same time that he invested in purple ribbon bookmarks, gaily painted cards of the Virgin, and tiny religious valentines with rosy bleeding hearts, silver arrows and chubby kneeling infants. Amulets and crucifixes, Keys of Heaven and lives of the Blessed Saints, cheap vases of ruby and emerald glass, candles and rosaries, would at another time have afforded Ringfield much matter for speculation, but the fact was that almost as soon as he had deposited his bag on the table of the narrow bedroom assigned to him, the cold he had so long neglected caught him seriously, and for an entire day and a half he insisted on sitting at his window when he should have been in bed. On the next day his feverish symptoms increased to such an extent that the man who owned the room and who was a widower, managing for himself, sent for a nurse. Tossing on the bed, and frequently rising to look out of the window, Ringfield fretfully objected, but his landlord was firm, and sent a message at once to the Hospital of the Incarnation, the nearest charitable institution and the parent of several flourishing branches, among which was that at Lalurette where Ringfield had thought of placing Angeel. It was early on Thursday evening when the message was sent, and at ten o'clock Archibald Groom, the shopkeeper, came to say that a person recently arrived from the country was below, but that she spoke very little English. He was not answered, and bending over the bed he saw that his lodger was delirious, eyes glassy and staring and head rolling from side to side, with high colour and stertorous breathing.

To call the nurse, who was waiting in the shop, was the work of an instant; she came quickly and noiselessly up the dark stair and saw at once a case of brain fever, partly brought on by exposure and neglected cold, also recognizing in the sick man the well-known minister at St. Ignace and her husband's *protégé*.

Mme. Poussette, for it was she, possessed more discretion than sense, and more sense than wit; she looked calmly upon her patient as upon a stranger and set about her work in silence.

Meanwhile Edmund Crabbe, on partially recovering from his first fit of intemperance, sat up, and

perceiving the well-filled flask he had brought with him, seized it, and began afresh upon its contents. He had left St. Ignace on Monday morning, and it was now Thursday; Henry Clairville was dead and buried; the funeral obsequies being of a complex nature, shabby and ornate, dignified and paltry, leisurely and hurried, while the ceremony was at least well attended, since, as Dr. Renaud had said, a Seigneur did not die every day. Profuse in the matter of lappets, crucifixes, and in the number of voluble country-folk and stout serious-lipped priests, Father Rielle, who had charge of the proceedings, was compelled to accommodate himself to circumstances, or fate, or "the Will of God," in the shape of the Archambaults—who, as Pauline foresaw, had all returned, this time to claim their own.

The disappearance of Mme. Poussette occasioned no comment; for two days after the death of Henry Clairville no one spoke to her or thanked her for all she had done, and while the funeral was in progress she put her few things in a box, and counting a small store of money Poussette had given her from time to time, went with Antoine Archambault to the station at Bois Clair, and was no more seen at St. Ignace. Of all the characters in this simple history, none perhaps was so sincerely deserving as this unfortunate Mme. Poussette, and as she passes from the stormy little village in behind the gate of the serene but busy hospital, it is pleasant to contemplate the change there in store for her. To many women who are plain and unattractive in the ever-varying hat and gown of fashion, and who, if they try to hold their own, must sooner or later resort to artificial aids to attain even moderate good looks, there is yet a refuge, that of some severe and never-changing style of dress or uniform, which bestows upon them another kind of beauty. The kitchen dish or utensil has its charm as well as the sprigged china of the closet; the jug going to the well is as grateful to the eye as the prismatic beaker upon the table, and, in like manner, the banded or braided hair, the perfect cleanliness of fresh print or linen and the straight serviceable lines of skirt and waist often contribute to make a plain woman fully as attractive as her prettier sisters. Thus Mme. Poussette, about whom there was never anything repulsive or vulgar, presented new features to the world in her exquisitely neat hospital garb; more than this, she liked her work, and gradually her expression grew less vacant; she left off humming and whispering to herself, and we leave her thus, contented, respected and of use, and, therefore, almost happy.

Indeed, many there are beside Mme. Natalie Poussette who find as life slips by and the feverish quest of happiness dies within them, that they become happy almost without knowing it in the pursuit of other things once despised, such as work, friendship, the need of earning, or the love of an abstract subject. What a contrast then does this "afflicted," this "peculiar" one afford to the restless, imaginative, gifted but unstable Pauline, in whom the quest of happiness had so far only resulted in entanglement and riot of conflicting emotions!

As she remained much indoors at this time, awaiting Crabbe's return, she dwelt much on the past, words rising to utterance that she thought would never be heard on earth touching the problems of her lonely childhood, her meeting with Crabbe, her aversion to her brother; also, the brighter pictures of the future in which she already lived the life of a London beauty and belle, or crossed to Paris and continued buying for her trousseau. Miss Cordova, with the superior wisdom of a mother, let her friend talk and agreed with all she said; her own opinion of Pauline's choice in men was not in the guide's favour, but she saw it was too late to interfere. The story of Angeel was now cleared up and, had Ringfield remained in the village, he would have learnt as well as the rest of the unexpected parentage of that poor child, and of the turn in the affairs of the country-side which brought the Archambaults on top. However wasted and however dilapidated, the Clairville domain and Manor House was one of the oldest in the province, and it began to be rumoured that a considerable fortune existed in Henry's collection of books and memoirs, offers for which were already reaching the helpless widow and mother of Angeel.

Occupied with her own dreams, Miss Clairville took little notice of her home under a new regime, and day by day she watched instead for the return of her lover, bringing definite arrangements for the marriage. There seemed at least a diminution other natural active outlook on life as a whole, and if she feared from Crabbe's rather dilatory methods that their union was in danger from too long delay, she did not say so, even to her confidante. The latter was bent upon carrying through her project with regard to Maisie and Jack, but this could not be effected until the spring, and thus, without the stimulus of the Englishman's presence, and with the remembrance of death and agitation so recently in their midst, both women were quieter than usual.

As for Ringfield, no one missed him very acutely until Saturday morning, when, upon the receipt of a letter from Mme. Prefontaine, "Poussette's" was thrown into considerable excitement. Pauline, who could rarely keep anything to herself, read her letter aloud and immediately jumped up in terror.

"Why did not some one tell me they were together; together, at the Hotel Champlain? I tell you—something will happen!"

"To which of them?" asked Miss Cordova satirically. In spite of a good deal of nonsense in her

composition, there was an under-stratum of shrewd wisdom, inherited, no doubt, from her New England mother, and her admiration for her more brilliant friend did not blind her to certain irregularities of disposition and many weak points in Pauline's character, inseparable from her abnormal bringing up. "I wouldn't excite myself so much if I were you," continued the other. "I've learnt not to worry about men harming other men; it's when they come to harming women I think it's time to worry about them. Look at me—I don't know for certain whether Ned Stanbury's alive or not; I know Schenk's alive, although he may not last long, but I never worry about their meeting. But if Schenk came here to disturb me, or went to my mother's to get the children from her, then I might take on."

"But, my dear, everything's different in my case!" exclaimed Miss Clairville, fretfully pacing up and down the common room.

A village dressmaker, one of the numerous Tremblays, had, in a great hurry, made her a black dress; her face showed sallow against it now, and even her hands, always conspicuously well-kept and white, looked yellow and old as they hung down at the side of her tall, straight figure, or clasped and unclasped restlessly behind her. A key to much of her present unhappy mood lay in her last exclamation; family pride, another kind of pride in her personal knowledge of the world, in her consciousness of gifts and physical attractions, the feeling that she was in every way Miss Cordova's superior, all this rendered Pauline's affairs, in her own eyes, of vastly greater importance and intrinsic excellence and interest than those of her companion. A Clairville—there could be no doubt of this—was a lady, a gentlewoman, to use an incorruptible phrase, whereas, no matter how unsmirched the simple annals of Sadie Cordova, the small farm, the still smaller shop were behind the narrow beginnings of the painstaking and pious Yankee shoemaker who retired in middle life to the country and died there. Pauline's father and brother, both weakly degenerates, could nevertheless boast of a lineage not inconsiderable for older lands, of possessions identified with the same, such as portraits and books and furniture, of connexions through marriage with the law and the militia, and, above all, of having lived on their land for very many years without doing anything, most distinguished trait of all. Hence, Pauline's remark; how could Miss Cordova fully understand or properly sympathize with the altered conditions by which the daughter of the manor was now second in importance to one of a family of menials, the flighty, giggling, half-witted Artemise-Palmyre, whose marriage to Henry Clairville was an accepted fact.

"You cannot understand," Pauline had said for the tenth or eleventh time, and Miss Cordova listened, outwardly smiling and not immediately replying.

"Do you suppose your brother's marriage was legal and binding?" she said after a while, and Pauline stopped in her walk. The idea was not altogether new.

"I fancy it must have been," she managed to say carelessly. "Dr. Renaud and his Reverence know all about it, and even if it were not, where is the money to enable me to—how do you say—contest it?"

"Wouldn't Mr. Poussette lend it to you?"

"Oh, what an idea! Do you think I would take it from him, I, a Clairville?"

She had nearly used the once-despised prefix and called herself a De Clairville, for since Henry's death her intolerant view of his darling project had strangely altered; so many things were slipping from her grasp that she clutched at anything which promised well for the future.

"Well, I'm sure you deserve money, Pauline, from one quarter or another; you've worked hard enough for it, I know, and now I do hope your Mr. Hawtree will turn up soon and be all right, and that you'll be happily married to him and get away for a time from all these troubles. I want you should know, Pauline, that I think it was noble of you to work so hard to raise that money to keep little Angeel; yes, I call it noble, and I'm proud of you and sorry I ever thought——"

She paused and Pauline took up the unfinished phrase.

"Sorry you ever thought she was mine? I forgive you, my dear, but about my nobility, make no mistake. What I did I did, but I did it all coldly, passively, with nothing but hatred and loathing in my heart, with nothing but pride and selfishness setting me on to do it. I know this was wrong, but I could not get into any other frame of mind; I could never overcome my horror and repulsion of the whole matter. And now—it is just as bad—worse. If I thought I should have to live with her, with them, I could not stand it, Sara, I could not, I could not! Why must I be tried so, why must I suffer so? Oh, it is because I have a bad heart, a bad nature! Yes, yes, that must be it! I have a bad nature, Sara, a bad, bad nature!"

"No, no, Pauline!" said her friend soothingly, and the matter dropped.

Later they were sitting, towards evening, sewing at some item of the impalpable trousseau, Pauline alternating her spasmodic needle with reading over Mme. Prefontaine's letter and jumping up to listen down the stair.

"What do you expect's happened, anyhow?" cried Miss Cordova at last, in exasperation. "Mr. Ringfield's a clergyman! he's a perfectly moral man, and I guess that means something. What are you afraid of? Now if it was me and Schenk or Stanbury——"

Pauline's attitude and expression were alike tragic. In her cheap black dress her look of apprehensive despair was full of mournful intensity as she stood with one hand lifted and her expressive eyes fixed on shapes imaginary. Her friend's philosophy was equal to the occasion.

"Seems to me if you think so much about things that *might* happen but you ain't sure they *have* happened, you kind of *make* 'em happen. Sit down and be calm, for goodness sake, Pauline!"

"I can't, I can't! Oh, what's that now?"

With her hands over her heart she bounded to the top of the narrow stair.

"Reminds me of myself the other day when I thought Schenk was after me. Do you hear anything, Pauline—you look so wild?"

"Yes, yes! Some one has arrived. *Grand Dieu*—which of them? Sara—go and see!"

Miss Cordova rose and drew her friend back within the room.

"Maybe it's neither; only some one for M. Poussette."

"No, no, it is one of them and for me. I hear my name."

She sank upon a chair as footsteps were heard slowly, heavily, and somewhat unsteadily ascending the stair. The arrival was Edmund Crabbe, with the lurch of recent dissipation in his gait and his blue eyes still inflamed and bleared.

With a half-furtive, half-defiant air he advanced to Pauline, but before he could utter a word, either of justification or apology, she sprang at him with impetuous gestures and deeply frowning brows. To see her thus, in the common little room at Poussette's, clad in the plain garb of cheap mourning, yet with all the instinctive fire and grandeur of the emotional artist, was to recall her as many could, declaiming on the narrow stage of the Theatre of Novelties.

Je suis Romaine, hélas! puisque Horace est Romain.
J'ai reçu son titre en recevant sa main,

or again, in the diaphanous rose-garlanded skirts of Marguerite Gautier, laying bare the secrets of her heart to her adoring lover. Oblivious of Miss Cordova, Pauline rushed at her own lover but did not embrace him.

"Oh, where is he?" she cried. "What have you done to him?—or with him? I insist upon the truth; I must know, I must know all. He followed you!"

"He did, he did. He followed me, as you say, madam, but what of that?" Crabbe stood, greatly astonished and rather mortified. In the presence of Miss Cordova, for Pauline to display such concern for the other man was, to say the least, annoying. To be dignified in his resentment was to invite ridicule, for the drink still showed in his walk, but he managed to frown and in other ways show honest astonishment and wrath. "A nice welcome!" he went on, with difficulty repressing a certain thickness of utterance and steadying himself as well as he was able, the chairs being both occupied. "If you mean the parson, if these airs and sighs, these sulks and tender concerns are for him—you may spare yourself. He is all right. Though I beg pardon—you never sulk, Pauline, whatever you do. I'll swear to that, lady dear. 'Tis good and hot and strong while it lasts, and now I'm back, give it me, for I know I deserve it. I've been at it again, Pauline. Drink, I mean, my girl." Tears stood in his eyes.

"I understand. You need explain no further. But what do you mean about Mr. Ringfield—how is he all right? Where is he? I was afraid, afraid of something happening to one of you. Sara laughs, but she doesn't know how I feel."

"And never will!" said Crabbe, giving Pauline's shoulder a clumsy, caressing pat; "Miss Cordova has her points, but she is not Us, she is not We of the grand emotional parts! Just a bundle of emotions, nerves and impulses—that's all you are, madam!"

His affection, breaking through the still thick speech and weakened movements, was irresistible; Pauline sighed and smiled, shook off her tremors and allowed herself to descend with him to the dining-room, where over supper she listened to the recital of his adventure in Montreal.

"It was the cold then, that made you, that drove you to it again!" she said thoughtfully.

"Cold, and—and—loneliness. I was lonely, Pauline, and by Heaven—if you'll really take me, lady dear, the sooner we're married the better. If your parson were in the house at this moment I should order him to perform the ceremony."

"Oh—that would not suit me! Mr. Ringfield—of course, that could not be. We must leave as soon as possible, that is all, and as this is the nineteenth, and we have arranged for the twenty-fourth, that is only four days to wait."

"Four days! I'll keep straight, I promise you, Pauline."

"And was he—was Mr. Ringfield with you much at the Hotel Champlain? What did he do there? Why did he go?"

Crabbe, to tell the truth, was asking that same question of his brain, as he made heroic endeavours to recollect the details of his last debauch. He paused, and, with a trick characteristic of him, pushed away his plate and cup, although he had only begun his meal.

"That's what I'd like to know myself, Pauline. I was sitting at the table, smoking, and reading over some of my stuff—poor stuff it seems to me at times; however let that pass—when a knock came to the door, and I opened to our clerical friend! That's all I can remember."

"How did he look? How long did he stay? Do try and recollect. Try and answer."

Crabbe did try, but without avail.

"That's all I know, my dear girl. I must have been pretty bad."

"You must, indeed," said Miss Clairville, rising. A little of the hauteur Ringfield associated with her showed in her bearing, and as the guide drew his food again towards him, she eyed him almost with disfavour. "Then you do not know where he is, or what he went for, or how long he stayed."

"I do not, lady dear—I do not."

Pauline was deeply mystified, and perhaps her vanity was also touched; the mental spectacle of the two men fighting each other for possession of her had faded and a certain picturesqueness had gone from life. However, her marriage remained; she had four days, but only four, to make ready in anticipation of the great event which was to remove her at once and for ever from St. Ignace and Clairville, and in the light of which even Crabbe's backsliding seemed a trivial matter. She therefore returned to Sadie Cordova with restored equanimity, and Ringfield—his avowal and his present whereabouts and condition yielded to those prenuptial dreams and imaginings which pursued even so practised a coquette and talented woman of the world as the once brilliant Camille and Duchess of Gerolstein. Nevertheless, agitation was in the air. Poussette went to and fro in much and very voluble distress. The night closed in and brought no letter, no telegram from Ringfield; how then—who, who would conduct the service? It was the week of Christmas and a few more were already in the village, members of families from afar and two or three visitors.

The feast of Noël is full of importance to all of the Romish faith, and Poussette knew of great things in preparation for the stone church on the hill of St. Jean Baptiste in the way of candles, extra music and a kind of Passion-play in miniature representing the manger, with cows and horses, wagons and lanterns, the Mother and Child, all complete. Should Ringfield not return—even as he spoke the wooden clock in the kitchen pointed to ten; the last train had passed through Bois Clair and Poussette abandoned all hope, while in order to prove his intense and abject depression of mind, he broke his promise to the minister and helped himself to some whisky.

Thus, the absence of his mentor worked this unfortunate relapse, and should Crabbe find out, there looked to be an old-time celebration at Poussette's with Pauline and Pauline's rights entirely forgotten. As it was, Miss Cordova caught the culprit before he was quite lost, and mounting guard over the bar, entered upon those duties which, once shouldered, remained hers for a considerable length of time.

"Division of labour," she said smartly, and Poussette gave a foolish smile. "You take the kitchen and I'll take the bar. Then when Maisie and Jack arrive I can look after 'em. As like as not, Maisie'll be hanging round for a drop of lager—what she could get, that is, out of the glasses—I've seen her! And don't you fuss about Sunday, Mr. Poussette! We'll get on just as well as if we had a church to go to and

a sermon to listen to. Guess you won't be wanting to see yourself taking around the plate to-morrow, anyway."

Poussette, lying crumpled up in a reclining chair, watched his new friend with dawning reason and admiration.

"Fonny things happens," said he, wagging his head, "I'll go to sleep now and wake up—just in time—you'll see—to go to church, help Mr. Ringfield take roun' the money—oh—I'll show you, I'll show you, Miss Cordova."

"You'll show me, will you?" said the barkeeper, absently. "What'll you do if he don't come at all? He can't come now, and you know it."

"I tell you—fonny things happens! I'll preach myself, read from the Bible, sure."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GLISSADE

"The calm oblivious tendencies of nature."

Probably the most beautiful spectacle ever afforded by the natural world is that of a complete and far-reaching ice-storm, locally known as a glissade, transcending in delicate aerial fantasy the swiftly changing faint green panorama of early spring or the amber hazes of opulent autumn. A true and perfect glissade is comparatively rare; like a fine display of the auroral arches, another wonder in the visible universe, or the vast expanding and nobly symbolical rainbow, it does not often occur, nor when it does, is it always a spectacle of permanence as well as beauty. The conditions under which it develops may frequently exist in the upper atmosphere, but to ensure the magical and lovely effects which so singularly transform the plainest landscape, these conditions must remain unchanged for a certain length of time in order that the work of crystallization may be thoroughly carried out. The movements and fluctuating currents of the air do not often long maintain this tranquil and stationary poise, and consequently we may sometimes witness attempts on the part of Nature to create these distinctive and wondrous results which are quickly doomed to thaw and oblivion. In the next place it follows that what we see so seldom must greatly impress us because of its unfamiliarity and from the fact that its evanescence renders its loveliness more precious; the element of surprise increases our enjoyment, and all the more since the materials in use are the oldest and most familiar in the world. Then, to crown the work, there is not at any other season of the year or during any variation of a winter climate, anything more soothing, entrancing, more grateful and refreshing than the texture of the air itself, the feeling of the air during the period of suspended atmospheric action. It is not joyous, but it is better than joy. There is nothing violent, nothing extreme; there is no dust, no flurry, no glare. It is not cold but only pleasantly, smoothly cool, and the final impression is one of temporary transportation to some calm celestial region of infinite peace and purity.

Standing at the left of Poussette's church on the brink of the Fall, the eye, on the Monday following Crabbe's ignominious return, would have rested lovingly upon such a scene of enchantment. The great triple ledges of water which formed the cascade were only partially frozen, and the spray, still dashing in parts against the rocks and bare branches standing around them, seemed to congeal in mid-air, while the tall pines spreading on either hand were bending from their normal by weight of icy trappings. So much for the general effect—of a soft yet crystalline whiteness covering and outlining every object—but in detail, what a marvel of delicate tracery, what a miracle of intricate interlacing of frosted boughs! Every twig was encased in a transparent cylinder of flashing ice, every hillock crusted over with freshly fallen snow; the evergreens, in shape like giant algae, drooped wide fans to the earth, painted, spangled, and embroidered with glittering encrustations; the wires across the river from Bois Clair to Montmagny were harps of shining silver strings, the rough fences turned to graceful arabesques, the houses changed to domes and turrets and battlements of marble.

The sun was veiled as yet, but occasionally from behind the greyish-white of a cloudless spreading sky a pale yellow gleam stole forth, creating fires of prismatic rose and violet in each glassy twig and leaf. At these times, too, there woke and stirred a faint, faint wind, almost a warm wind, and then, here

and there, a little cushion or mat or flag of snow would fall, or an icy stem break off. The silence was absolute, animal life appeared suspended, the squirrels no longer ran chattering in quest of food, as on mild days they will near habitations, no bird was seen or heard. This state of coma or trance held all created things, and as with most Canadian scenery, small chance was there for sentiment; the shepherd of the Lake country or the mountaineer of Switzerland were not represented by any picturesque figure, although small spirals of smoke floated up from the straggling settlements, and a habitant wife sometimes looked out from a door or a window, her face dark and shrivelled for the most part, and with clumsy woollen wraps thrown around head and shoulders.

The absence of human interest and the silence intensified the serene splendours of the forest and great Fall on such a day as this, when growth and change had reached a standstill and when the cool brooding of the air recalled the moments before dawn or the remote and unnatural quiescence that marks an eclipse. To walk near the forest would mean to encounter huge mounds of snow hiding the levelled logs and boulders, stalactites of ponderous icicles depending from the tree trunks where the openings faced the light and the sun; farther in, and once safely past these glacial outposts, scarcely any signs of storm appeared; last year's leaves, still matted together underfoot, were tangled with the green vine of the creeping linnaea and a rare root of the lustrous winter-green. Here, beneath the thick canopy of branches not all devoid of their foliage since many larches and pines were to be found there, was another climate; coming from that bland whiteness which was not cold, these dark arcades of forest struck chills to the feet and face; damp odours rose from rotting mould and wood not protected by a snowy covering, and broad fallow fungi, wide enough to sit upon, looked of an unearthly tint in the drear half-light.

Naturally the sight of these glittering plains and frosted forests, unusual even in that land of snow and ice, called for sightseers, and at Poussette's every one had been up early to gaze on the outside world, among whom were Miss Clairville and Crabbe, the latter feeling his recent backsliding very keenly. Pauline had now finally packed her little trousseau and other belongings, and arrangements were being made to enable Poussette to leave his business and Miss Cordova her sewing; the party of four were to descend on the Hotel Champlain on Wednesday, the wedding would take place on Thursday, the married couple sailing at once for Liverpool.

Leaning on her lover's arm, Pauline therefore easily found warmth and words with which to admire the landscape spread before her, for was she not soon to leave it, exchanging these frigid and glacial glories for life in a European capital, and, once for all, abandoning all ideas of a career and relegating everything at St. Ignace and Clairville to a place in her memory? Beautiful, then, she found it, and gaily proposing a walk along the decorated road, suddenly remembered Angeel and resolved to visit her and say good-bye. Crabbe demurred.

"Why should you?" he said, with the nettled intolerance of a being angry with himself, and prone to visit his ill-temper on others.

"But I must, Edmund! I meant to before. If Henry had not died, or if we had never found out about the other matter, I would have gone!"

"I see no reason. The brat has its mother, hasn't it?"

"Oh, don't be so hard! Yes, yes, of course, but she might like to remember me, wish to see me once again,—it may be for the last time."

"Gad—I think it will. I'm not worth much, 'pon my soul, but I can take you away and save you from all this annoyance. I hate every hour of delay, I dislike this loafing about here now. I wish—by Heaven! I were leaving Poussette's this minute for good and all."

His eye roved discontentedly over the forest and road, and then came back wistfully to Pauline. It was evident that his affection was of a sincere and unselfish order, and that with her to shield and serve and with her lively handsome personality as his constant companion, he might yet recover lost ground and be the man he might have been.

"I keep telling you that we have not so long to wait," she said brightly, as she went indoors to get ready for the walk, and Crabbe, turning his gaze in the direction of the bridge, became interested in the aspect of the Fall, still thundering down in part over those mighty ledges, except where the ice held and created slippery glaciers at whose feet ran the cold brown river for a few hundred yards till it was again met by fields of shining ice. Two objects caught his eye, one, the golden cross on the church over at Montmagny, the only one of its kind in the valley and much admired, the other, a curious spot of reddish colour at the far end of the bridge. The cross he soon tired of, but the bit of red aroused his curiosity; it seemed almost square, like a large book or package, and was apparently propped up against the stonework that supported the bridge. What it was, he did not trouble to conjecture, and as

Miss Clairville came out with several parcels which he took from her, he forgot the circumstance as he turned and walked a few steps with her. Thus, her quicker brain was not directed to an explanation of the blot of red; had she seen it, and solved it, which was highly probable, the events of the day might have been vastly different.

"What are these things?" said Crabbe, fingering the parcels with a fretful note in his voice.

"Just some little presents, little trifles for her, Angeel. Nothing I cannot spare, Edmund. She belongs to me, after all. I shall never see her again, and I must not do less for her than for Maisie and Jack. You are coming with me? It is not worth while. I prefer to go alone, *mon ami*."

"Why not? A walk with you may keep me out of mischief, although with your theatrical friend mounting guard over Poussette I think I can promise you abstinence for the next few days."

Miss Clairville stopped in her brisk walk and searched his worn face.

"You are not well," she said suddenly, "you are not looking well."

He raised his arms, then dropped them with a kind of whimsical desperation. "How can I be well, or look well? My pride has suffered as well as my health. I'm ill, ashamed, and sorry. What'll we do, Pauline, if I can't keep sober?"

He had often said this to her, but never with such depth of sorrowful meaning as now.

"What shall we do, lady dear?" he repeated in a helpless, fretful murmur. "What shall we do?"

Her figure stiffened, she was again the tragic muse, the woman of the world with experience and authority behind her, and, woman-like, as he weakened, she grew stronger.

"You are not likely to," she cried with a fine encouraging gesture. "It is possible, I admit, but not probable. For you, Edmund, as well as for me, it is new places, new images, for the snows of this forlorn, this desolate, cold Canada; the boulevards of Paris, for the hermit's cell in the black funereal forest.—There goes your friend Martin now, *voilà! B'jour, Martin*."

"*B'jour, mademoiselle!*"

"Those apartments you spoke of in London, in German Street. Tell me—is that some colony where musicians, perhaps, gather, or the long-haired art students I have heard so much about?"

Crabbe stared.

"Students! Colony! Jermyn Street? Oh—I see—*German Street*—I see, I understand."

He laughed, but not quite freely—spontaneously. Indeed, so much did he feel some unaccustomed stress, he did not stop to set her right. What did her ignorance of a certain London locality matter? what did anything matter just now but the one leading uppermost thought—let nothing prevent our leaving this place together and leaving it soon, no failure of mine, no caprice of hers, no interference of another? New resolution showed in his features; he dropped her hand which he had been holding and turned back towards Poussette's.

"You are right, as usual," he said soberly. "There's no need for me to go with you. I'll turn home—along as they used to say in Devonshire, and try to do a little writing while I can, for after to-morrow I fear it will not be easy. So good-bye to you, lady dear, good-bye for an hour or two, good-bye!"

A little chilled by standing, in spite of that soft wind, Pauline ran lightly along towards Lac Calvaire, conscious always of her fine appearance and humming operatic snatches as she ran, bent upon an errand, which if not precisely one of mercy was yet one prompted by good-will and a belated sisterliness. The glowing prospects ahead opened her heart, not by nature a hard one, and happy in the character of *grande dame* and patron of the afflicted she went forth briskly on her long walk at first. She reflected that her thirtieth birthday was past, but that before a year had elapsed she would be firmly planted abroad enjoying plenty of money, change of scene, and variety of occupation, and even should Crabbe relapse, she saw herself rejuvenated and strong in hope, capable of studying fresh parts beneath a new and stimulating sky. Yet under these comforting reflections there lurked an uneasy fear; the Clairville streak in her made her suspicious of her present happiness, and as she perceived the well-known reddish gables of her home, through the surrounding pines and snow, a qualm of unrest shot through her. It was only a week since she had driven away with Dr. Renaud, and here she was, again drawn by irresistible force towards the detested Manor House of her fathers, now completely in the hands of the Archambaults, with the giggling, despised Artémise and the afflicted Angeel seated in possession, and this unrest, this fear, was intimately concerned with the future and the fate of

Ringfield.

She said to herself as if speaking to Miss Cordova:—

"You have not felt the force of that strong character pushing against your own, nor the terrible grip of that hand-pressure, nor the insistence of those caresses which hurt as well as delighted, so different from the lazy, careless little appropriations of my present lover,—pats and kisses he might give to a child."

Ringfield's arms had drawn her to him till she could have cried out with fear, his eyes had shudderingly gazed into hers as if determined to wrest any secret she possessed, his lips had pained her with the fierce anger and despair of those two long kisses he had pressed upon her own—how could she forget or belittle such wooing as that, so different from Crabbe's leisurely, complacent courting! She neither forgot nor underrated, but she had deliberately and cruelly left one for the other, and deep in her heart she knew that something sinister, something shocking and desperate, might yet befall, and what she feared to hear was of Ringfield's suicide, for she fancied him capable of this final act of self-pity and despair.

By the time she reached Clairville the sun was again shining and the beauty of the glissade beginning to wane. Dark-haired Archambaults flitted about behind dingy windows—and, wondrous sight on a mid-December day—the white peacock, tempted by the calm air, was taking a walk in the wintry garden. Pauline summoned up her courage to enter the house and was rewarded by the hysterical delight of Angeel, brought up to admire and adore this haughty relation, who was soon dispensing her small bounties in order to make the visit as short as possible.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CARPET-BAG

"... this solitude That seems by nature framed to be the seat
And very bosom of pure innocence."

The squarish spot of scarlet observed by Crabbe at the farther end of the bridge was the unaesthetic carpet-bag brought by Ringfield with him from the West; a field of glaring Turkey red, in design depicting a kind of colossal sunflower with a green heart instead of a black one. So contemptuous had always been the attitude of the guide towards his clerical rival that he had quite forgotten this bag although it was so conspicuous; such bags, moreover, were quite common at the time, and these facts rendered him unsuspecting. Therefore, as he neared the fall and looked along the bridge and still observed that flaming spot of vivid colour, it was natural that, in place of going to his work as he had told Miss Clairville he intended to do, he should turn off in the opposite direction and leisurely walk forth to examine the phenomenon.

The bridge was knee-deep in unbroken snow, for no vehicle had crossed since the late storm, and there had been no service at Poussette's church. Crabbe walked on, not without some difficulty, lifting his feet higher and higher as he neared the centre of the structure. Underneath roared and tumbled the savage fall, although just above the bridge on his right hand the river was partly frozen, and large cakes of ice, loosened by the milder weather, were going over the first of the brown ledges with a rapid, rocking plunge. Each side of the bridge was a network of icy spars, dazzling in the sunshine, now becoming much brighter, and Crabbe, turning to look on the wonderful scene around and beneath him, had forgotten his ultimate goal—the alluring carpet-bag—when a singular thing occurred. His right foot, as he put it down through the snow went through the snow and went beyond it; he felt the unexpected depth before he realized what had happened, that there was at this point a hole in the planks forming the footway and that probably from the weight of the snow and ice an old and rotting board had suddenly given way and dropped out. His leg had gone entirely through, and in the fright and concern of the moment he fancied the hole wearing larger and the rest of his body following, but this was not the case. He was in some peril, it was true, but the opening was not so large as he thought, the chief danger arising from the fact that in his struggles to pull himself up again he might bring about further loosening of the boards. If he had been watched by any one at Poussette's his relief was at hand, but he feared that at this time of day no one might be looking out, and this was the case. Besides, the bridge lay, not directly in front of the village and the hotel, but rather to one side; a large grove of pine-trees intercepted the view, and unless he could speedily succour himself there was slight prospect

of help from outside. Fortunately it was extremely mild.

He hesitated to call, because, as his nervousness subsided, he disliked to cut a poor figure, but at this point in his dilemma what he had feared actually happened; as he brought his leg and almost half of his body up through the hole another piece of planking came away and he was left clasping the edge of rotten wood in a state of collapse hardly to be described, his eyes alternately gazing at the sunny, unfeeling skies above and the gaping cavern immediately beneath. He was swaying now in mid-air and he found his voice and called repeatedly, but it was not likely that amid the surrounding tumult of angry waters his voice would be heard. With a great effort he pulled himself up, praying that the board might hold; he got on to one knee, then on to both, he swung out until he gripped the icy railings, and then with another wrench, he was free of the ugly hole and safe—safe after all and none the worse except in nervous tremors and a slight strain of the back for what must, however, remain in his memory as a thrilling and most alarming experience. Fear of Death for an instant had gripped him, and he saw himself, as do the drowning, engulfed in the rushing icy waters and shot down to a violent fate with Pauline's wild voice in his ears and Pauline's pale face before his eyes. Yet, the peril over, he breathed freely again, and carefully holding on by the rail all along the path lest some other treacherous pitfall should lurk beneath the snow, reached the end of the bridge in safety.

Then he saw the carpet-bag and remembered it, and in that instant a pang of horrid doubt and fear passed through him and he looked around for Ringfield. Escape from death gave him additional courage and sharpened his wits; his brain cleared now and did him good service, he felt himself a man, able to resist and proud to endure, and he hoped to meet the parson and demand explanations from him, for he could scarcely be blamed for divining some connexion between the deadly gap in the bridge and the carefully planted decoy—the carpet-bag. Yet in this induction he was wrong. The hole under the snow had not been known to Ringfield and the bag had been left by him in a certain position of safety while he was inside the little church—nothing more. Even as Crabbe was standing with growing wrath and gathering resolution in his expression and demeanour Ringfield walked out and confronted him.

Hatred, nothing less, looked forth from his lowering brows and bitter mouth, and he was met by answering hate, wedded to cruel scorn, in the guide. The latter spoke first.

"Do you know what has nearly happened?" he cried with a fine tempest of wrath kindling in his usually contemptuous manner. "I could have you arrested, more than that, my good sir, Mr. Methodist Parson!—convicted, perhaps worse, for the trap you led me into! You and your bag—confound you!"

Ringfield, who could hardly look more miserable on this accusation than he did already from illness and other causes, made some dumb motion with his hands and started as he perceived the traces of struggle about the other.

"My bag? The carpet-bag? What has that to do with you, with us? What are you talking of? What trap? I know nothing of any trap."

"Do you know nothing of a man caught there in the middle of the bridge where the footway has fallen out—do you know nothing of that man struggling to lift himself up from that cursed hole and crying for help? You know nothing, do you?"

Ringfield's surprise was genuine, as Crabbe was beginning to see.

"Certainly I know nothing, have heard nothing. I have been in the church some time, an hour I should think. A hole——"

Then he remembered.

"The dog!" he cried. "The little dead dog! Now I understand. He must have fallen through. I wondered at the time how he got out there under the bridge on top of those rolling logs that carried him over the fall. Once there, it was impossible to save him. I remember his eyes."

"What are you talking about now?" said the other angrily. "I'll swear you knew something of that hole and meant to see me go down through it."

Ringfield smiled with that slow, wry smile of his.

"I knew nothing of the hole. But I am not so sure that I would be sorry if I saw you go down through it this moment, so long as it was not my direct work. You and I can never be friends. You and I cannot expect tolerance of each other. We are enemies, we must always be enemies, to the death—to the death!"

Crabbe had, as usual, the upper hand in ease and coolness, and being now quite restored in physical

courage he began to note the signs of illness and misery in the other's face. He was almost sorry for him and said so.

"I'm sorry for all this, Ringfield, I really am. It's some misunderstanding, I suppose. I can't blame you for admiring Pauline. I don't blame you for it. You're a man, despite your calling, same as I am. And I have liked you better since you have shown me your rough side.—By Heaven, I have, Ringfield! Things have turned out in an unexpected way with me, and you have suffered on account, and if not in silence, as we might look for from you, why, it only proves you a man like the rest of us! You'll get over it, you know. She's to leave here for good with me the day after to-morrow; everything's settled and it's much the best thing that could happen for both of us. I wish you would be reasonable and understand this and make her going away easier."

This rambling speech was received at first in silence, then Ringfield spoke, his slow utterances affording a contrast to the half-jocular, half-querulous words of the ex-guide.

"That word reasonable! Be reasonable! You—you ask me to be reasonable! As if I were at fault, as if I were doing her the injury! God knows I have my own battle to fight, my own self to overcome, but that is beside the question. Do you see nothing unreasonable in your own relation to—to Miss Clairville? When I came here—and God knows I'm sorry at times I ever came or stayed—I met Miss Clairville. I talked to her and she to me. I learned her mind, or thought I did. I fathomed her heart, or she allowed me to think so, and thus I became acquainted with her story, the story that is concerned with her young life and with you. I was deeply affected, deeply moved, deeply interested—how could it be otherwise! And then to my eternal sorrow, as I fear, I grew to love her. She—she—returned it."

Crabbe made some indistinct remark, but Ringfield went on without caring to ask what it was.

"I tell you—she returned my affection and gave me proof of it. All that, whatever it was between us, is very sacred and I am not going to talk about it. Then you know what happened; you would not leave her alone, you followed and I believe annoyed and pestered her, using the power you have over her for her destruction and despair."

"The whole thing is monstrous," cried the other hotly. "You have cast your damned ugly, black shadow over this place too long as it is! Miss Clairville is no child; she knows, has always known, her own mind, and I do not grudge her a slight flirtation or two with any one she fancies; it is her way, a safe outlet for her strong yet variable temperament. You take things too seriously, that's all."

And the guide, slapping and shaking the snow from his clothing and adjusting his cap, walked down from the bridge to one side and sat upon a rock in sheer fatigue. It was the identical rock from which Poussette had been pulled back by Ringfield on that April day when the affairs of the parish had been discussed, and was no safer now than at that time, in fact, footing was precarious everywhere around the fall, for the same glassy covering, slowly melting and slippery, had spread to all objects in sight.

Ringfield, too, turned and stood a few yards behind the guide and again he kept that peculiar silence.

"Now consider," said Crabbe quietly, looking in his pocket for matches and holding his pipe comfortably in his hand. "I'm perfectly ready to sympathize with you. I know when you first saw me you cannot have been very pleasantly impressed, and all that, but that's all or nearly all over, and I'm going to try and turn over a new leaf, Ringfield. No more Nature for me, nor for her; we are to flee these dismal wilds and try a brighter clime,—a brighter clime! You must be generous and confess that I can do more for her than you can. It will be a new lease of life for us both, but candidly, Ringfield—lazy dog and worse that I have been—I think more of what it will mean for her than for myself."

"If you consider her happiness and her—her good name so much," said Ringfield, trembling and white, "why did you lie to me about your relations with her?"

"When did I lie to you?"

"You cannot have forgotten. That day in the shack, the first day I met you."

"That is easily explained." Crabbe continued to look at and think of his pipe, oblivious of the white countenance behind him. "I spoke after a fashion. The thing—I mean our relations—amounted virtually to a marriage. The difference was in your thought—in your mind. You pictured a ceremony, a religious rite, whereas I intended to convey the idea of a state, a mutual feeling——"

"You allowed me to think of a ceremony, you encouraged me to think of it."

"Nothing of the sort. Besides, I was not sober at the time. Make allowances, my Christian friend, always make allowances."

"Then what of the child? If you mentioned anything it should have been the child."

At this Crabbe turned, and so sudden was his movement that Ringfield retreated as if caught guiltily; in doing so he very nearly slipped on the icy rocks that sloped imperceptibly towards the rushing fall, and he was about to warn the guide, who was farther down the bank than himself when the latter, rising abruptly, cried:—

"The child? What child? There never was any child. Thank heaven, we were spared that complication!"

"You deny it? You deny it in the face of the likeness, of the stories of the village and the entire countryside; in face of the misery its existence has caused her—the mother, and of the proof in your own sodden, embruted condition, in face of her own admission——"

"Admission? It is impossible she can have admitted what never occurred. What did she say?"

"She implied—implied—made me think——"

"Made you think?" said the guide in disgust. "Made you think? That's what's been the matter with you all along;—you think too much. You wanted a bigger parish, Reverend Father, to occupy your time and mind. St. Ignace was too small."

This tone of banter was the one least calculated to appease the jealous and vindictive spirit holding Ringfield in its grasp. He became whiter, more agitated, and held up one hand as if to guard himself, yet there was nothing furious in Crabbe's manner; rather the contrary, for he was relieved at hearing of the natural misapprehension by which he had been looked upon as Angeel's father. But Ringfield was difficult to convince. No gossip had reached him where he lay at Archibald Groom's, with Madame Poussette watching him, nor at the Hotel Champlain where he had staggered the night before for a mad moment only, as he asked for news of Crabbe and was told that he gone back to St. Ignace; therefore he knew nothing of the *affaire Archambault*, as some of the provincial papers called it, and had heard only the bare facts of Henry Clairville's death and burial. To complete his ignorance, the charitable institutions to which he had written had neglected to answer his letters, for such an offer coming from such a source required time for consideration, and his brain, neither a subtly trained nor naturally cunning one, was incapable of those shifting drifts of thought which occupy themselves with idly fitting certain acts to certain individuals. His literal mind had always connected. Miss Clairville, from the day of the Hawthorne picnic, with Angeel, and to be told that they were not, as he had supposed, mother and child, was only to merge him in the absolutely crushing puzzle of a question—whose child then could she be? Might it not be—for here at last his mind gave a twist, fatal to its usual literal drift—her child by some one other than Crabbe? For who could mistake the eyes and their expression, the way the hair grew on the forehead, the shape of the hands, white and firm like Pauline's,—resemblances all made the stranger by association with the unnaturally formed head and shoulders of the unhappy child?

The two stood facing each other; the Christian minister, originally a being of blameless instincts and moral life, but now showing a countenance and owning a temper distorted to sinful conditions from the overshadowing of the great master passion; and the battered exile, genuine, however, in his dealings with himself, and sincere in the midst of degradation. So the Pharisee and the publican might have stood. So in all ages often stand those extreme types, the moral man who has avoided or by circumstances been free of temptation, and the sinner who yet keeps a universal kindness or other simple virtue in his heart. Anguish in one was met by cheerful contempt and growing pity in the other, and once more Crabbe essayed to reason with Ringfield.

"Believe me," he said, "I would give way to the better man, and you, of course, are he, if I thought Miss Clairville's future would thereby be benefited, but I cannot imagine anything more uncongenial than the life which you—pardon me—would be likely to offer her. She has no money and she loves money. She is tired of her home and all these surroundings; I can take her from them for ever. She is gifted, intelligent, and brilliant, and I can show her much that will interest and transform her. She runs a risk, certainly, in marrying me, but she knows my worst, and by Heaven—Ringfield, there's a power of comfort in that! No setting on a pedestal, no bowing to an idol—and then perhaps she will help in the working out of the tiger and the ape, make the beast within me die. How the old familiar lines come back to one here in this solitary place! I suppose I'll go down to Oxford some day and see my old rooms,—take Pauline. We'd like to keep in touch with you, Ringfield, send you a line now and then after you leave St. Ignace, for I don't figure you remaining here all your life at the beck and call of Poussette."

Ringfield's eyes were on the ground, for a deep mystification still possessed him; he had scarcely heard the latter part of Crabbe's speech, for there remained unanswered that question in his tortured mind—whose child was Angeel if not Pauline's, for he still saw the basket-chair with the dreadful face

in it as he looked down in the barn, and still heard those damaging whispers from Enderby the night of the concert.

A groan escaped him; he threw a pained and bitter glance at Crabbe and again studied the ground.

"I find it hard to believe you. Hard, hard. The people at Hawthorne all say it was—it was her's. Enderby told me."

"God help you for a silly lunatic if you listen to the tales of country people, Ringfield! They may have said so, they may have said all kinds of stuff—I never spoke of it to a living soul myself, even in my cups; I'll swear I left it alone even then."

"But now, now you can speak! The time has come to speak! If not you, then who, who could be that poor child's father!"

"Why, of course I can tell you that!" said Crabbe, coming a pace nearer. "I wonder you have not guessed by now. Her brother, Henry Clairville. It was a bad business, but he paid for it, as we all do, Ringfield, we all do."

With a fierce gesture of extreme astonishment the minister sprang forward and in his excitement struck the guide on the breast, a heavy blow. Startled into forgetting his dangerous position, Crabbe threw himself backward, seeing, as he thought, sudden madness in the other's eyes, and immediately his doom was sealed. He slipped, tripped, tried to save himself, rolled from one ice-covered boulder to another, was cast from one mighty cauldron of furious seething waters to another, and finally disappeared in the deeper pools that formed the lower and greater fall. His poor body, bruised and beaten, choked and maimed, had met the same fate as the little dog—and, strange to relate—he had uttered no cry as he sank backwards into the cold watery abysses from which there was no escape; his face only showed surprise and reproach as he looked his last on Ringfield and this world. When upon the bridge he had expected death, set his teeth and prayed, felt all vital force drop away, then by degrees flow back again, but now, when Death clutched him from behind and thrust him over those slippery precipices, to the last moment there was only a profound consternation in his staring blue eyes, as if he found it impossible to believe he was being sucked down, whirled down, to eternity. Such was the end of Edmund Crabbe Hawtree, Esquire, of Suffolk, England.

Ringfield had not moved since Crabbe had fallen. His face was horrible in the white intensity of its passion, and he continued to stare at the spot where a moment before the guide had been sitting without making the slightest endeavour to go to the rescue, or, by shouting for assistance, attract the attention of people on the inhabited side of the river. The image of the little dead dog merged into that of Crabbe and vice versa; he confused these images and saw unnatural shapes struggling in stormy waters, and thus the time wore on, ten, twenty, thirty minutes, before he perceived a man at the far end of the bridge. At first he thought it was Poussette, then it looked like Martin; finally he knew it for Father Rielle, and at this everything cleared and came back to him. He recollected the great hole spoken of by Crabbe and knew that he ought to call out or lift a hand in warning, yet he did neither. Father Rielle, however, was not too preoccupied to observe the hole; he walked around it instead of over or through it and had the presence of mind to pause, and after a few minutes' kneading and compressing lumps of the damp snow into a species of scarecrow, erected the clumsy squat figure of a misshapen man by the side of the yawning gap and passed on. The sun was radiantly bright by now and the ice beginning to melt off from twigs and wires; the red carpet-bag flamed forth more emphatically than ever, and presently the two men were not more than a few paces apart.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE HAVEN

"Stripp'd as I am of all the golden fruit
Of self-esteem; and by the cutting blasts
Of self-reproach familiarly assail'd."

Ringfield bared his head as the priest approached, standing with lowered eyes and heaving breast. Father Rielle stopped short in wonder as he noted the pale drawn face, the working hands, the averted

eyes and trembling lips.

"Can I do anything for you?" he cried in his excellent English.
"Monsieur is not well perhaps? This peculiar day, this air——"

"You are right. I am not well. I have been very ill, but that was nothing, only illness of the body. Yes, there is one thing you can do for me. Oh! man of God! What does it matter that I do not belong to your communion? It must not matter, it shall not matter. Father Rielle, I need your help very much, very, very much."

In still profounder astonishment the priest took a step forward.

"You are in trouble, trouble of the soul, some perplexity of the mind?
Tell me then how I can help?"

And Ringfield answered:—

"Father Rielle, I wish to confess to you. I wish you to hear a confession."

"Oh! Monsieur, think! We are not of the same communion. You have said so yourself. You would perhaps ridicule my holy office, my beloved Church!"

"No, no! I am too much in earnest."

"You wish me to hear a confession, you, a minister of another religious body not in sympathy with us, not a son of the only true Church? I do not care to receive this confession, Monsieur."

Ringfield's hand pressed heavily on the priest's arm and his agonized face came very close. Father Rielle's curiosity naturally ran high.

"Monsieur," he said nevertheless coldly, not choosing to display this desire to know too suddenly, as there darted into his mind the image of Miss Clairville, "it is true you have no right to demand absolution from me, a priest of the Holy Catholic Church, it is true I have no right to hear this confession and give or withhold absolution. Yet, monsieur, setting dogma and ritual aside, we both believe in the same Heavenly Father, in the same grand eternal hope. I will hear this confession, my brother, *in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, Amen. And may it bring peace to your soul."

There was a silence, and then Ringfield led the way to the little church. Father Rielle, who had never been inside the finished edifice before, although he had frequently walked through it while the builders were at work, entered respectfully and crossed himself in the porch.

"Ah!" he whispered or rather breathed in French as if disinclined to speak louder, "if you were but as I am, my brother, if you were but one of the true flock shepherded by the only Shepherd! Perhaps this is but the beginning. Perhaps you desire to cast away your inadequate faith and come to us, be one with us. My brother, I pray that this may be so. With us alone you shall have comfort to your soul and sweet solace in affliction, peace of mind, honesty of conviction, and after many a struggle, purity of life."

As he ceased, Ringfield, by some extraordinary instinct which mastered him, at once fell upon his knees at the side of Father Rielle, who had taken a seat not far from the door, where he might command a view of the bridge in case of interruption, and with that dangerous hole in the footway in his memory.

"If I say 'Holy Father,' will that be right?"

"Quite right, my son. Have no fear. Say on."

Ringfield bowed his head on his hands and began:—

"Holy Father——"

The priest waited quietly. His thin sensitive visage was transfigured and his whole being uplifted and dignified as he thus became the Mediator between Man and God.

"Holy Father, I know no form of word——"

"That does not matter. Whether you cry 'Peccavi' or 'Father, I have sinned,' it is all the same."

"Holy Father, I have sinned, sinned grievously before God and Heaven, before men and angels, but most of all have I sinned before my own ideals and conceptions of what I meant to be—a Christian clergyman. Hear my confession, Holy Father; with you to love, love a woman, would be sin; it was not

sin for me, and yet in loving a woman it became sin also with me, for it blotted out God and humanity. I not only loved—I also hated; I lived to hate. I hated while I was awake and while I slept, in walking, in eating, in drinking, so that my life became a burden to me and I forsook the throne of God in prayer."

The priest, in the moment's pause which had followed these words of self-abasement, had seen something across the river that claimed his attention, nevertheless he gravely encouraged the penitent.

"Keep nothing back, my son. Let me hear all."

What he had seen was a man running up and down in front of Poussette's, in some agitation as he fancied, presently to be joined by two or three others.

"Thus I lived, hating. I left this place, hating, and I followed him, you know whom I mean, hating. I met him there or rather I sought him out and helped him to fall, watched him drink strong liquor and did not intervene, did not stay his hand. I made him drunk—I left him drunk—I left him drunk. I went away and lied. I said he was ill and I locked the door and took the key. I went back again and saw him; he was still drunk and I was glad, because I thought 'This will keep him here, this will make her hate and avoid him, this will prevent the marriage'."

Father Rielle, though listening intently, still kept his gaze riveted on the peculiar actions of the men outside Poussette's. The running to and fro continued, but now suddenly an impulse prompted them to go in one direction; they pointed, gesticulated, and then with startling rapidity disappeared around the corner of the bridge. By this time the priest was convinced that something was transpiring of serious and uncommon import, yet he gave precedence to the wants of the penitent, kneeling with head on his hands.

"I vowed he should never marry her—you know of whom I am speaking, of both?"

"I know, my son."

"I say—I followed him. I took a room—I will tell you where, later—which enabled me to watch him should he go out. Then I fell ill myself and had to be kept in bed. O the torture, the pain, of knowing that I might miss him, that he might leave without my knowledge, I, from weakness, being unable to overtake him! And that happened, that came to pass, as I feared it would."

"You watched him go?"

"No. When I recovered sufficiently to walk, I went to find him. I went to that place where I had helped to make him drunk, but he was gone."

"What day was that?"

"I do not know. I have lost track of the days, lost track of the time."

Father Rielle was now more than professionally interested; he saw that the man before him was in a terrible state of incipient mental collapse.

"Surely you can tell me what day this is?" he cried.

"I cannot."

"Nor yesterday?"

"No."

"Yesterday was Sunday."

"Sunday? The word has no meaning."

"But at least you know where you are, where we both are at this instant."

"Yes, I know that. We are in the church built by M. Poussette."

"Yesterday was Sunday and there should have been a service here, but you were absent. How long have you been here? Were you waiting for me?"

"No."

"For him?"

"Yes."

"And he came? Over the bridge?"

In a flash the priest divined, as he thought, the fate of Crabbe.

"*Mon Dieu! M'tenant je comprends!* The hole I passed and all-but stumbled through! You cut that, you waited to see him fall through and drown! Perhaps he has ceased to struggle! Ah! that is why the crowd is gathering at Poussette's!"

Father Rielle rose to his feet and thrust aside the appealing hands of the other, but the strength exerted in this supreme moment was terrific and the priest could not escape.

"No, no," sobbed Ringfield, dry-eyed and trembling. "I know what you think—that I pushed him over, that I pushed him down, but I did not. I wished to kill him, I wished to put him out of the way, but I had not the courage. He crossed in safety, the hole was not my doing. He stood there on the rock and he lied to me about her, about Miss Clairville, and I struck him and he stumbled and fell."

"You pushed him, God forgive you, I know you pushed! You have killed him and now you are keeping me here. Let me go, let me go!"

"I did not push, I swear it! Only in my mind, only in my thoughts, did I kill him. I struck him and he fell. But it is true that I am guilty in thought, if not in deed, and I will take my punishment."

"What do you mean? What are you saying? One moment you are innocent of this man's death; the next you are saying you are guilty."

Ringfield at last removed his heavy clasp from the priest's arm and stood quietly waiting, it seemed, as if for condemnation or sentence.

"Before God, it was not my hand that sent him to his death, still, having come to my senses, I desire to suffer for my fault, and I will give myself up to take what punishment I deserve. I have disgraced my calling and my Church. I can never preach again, never live the life of a Christian minister again. Some shelter I must seek, some silence, some reparation I must make——"

He bent his eyes on the ground, his whole mien expressed the contrition of the sinner, but Father Rielle thought more of the affair from the standpoint of crime than from that of sin.

"What do you mean by punishment?" he said, torn between curiosity to know what had really become of the guide and a wish to hear everything Ringfield had to say. While the priest was thus hesitating to move along the road to the point where by making a slight detour among some pines he could cross farther down, a striking but wholly incongruous figure emerged from the trees. With shining top hat, fur-lined coat, gauntlets and cane, M. Lalonde, the Montreal detective, came forward with his professional conceit no whit impaired by juxtaposition with these glacial and solitary surroundings. He handed his card to the priest and bowed to them both.

"*Mon Dieu!*" muttered Father Rielle, "it is true then! You saw it all! You saw it all—I can see!"

"What there was to see, I certainly saw," returned M. Lalonde, with a careless glance of pity at the forlorn figure of Ringfield. "I not only saw, but I heard. I followed this gentleman from the Hotel Champlain as he followed—our late acquaintance—to this place. Permit me, monsieur, permit me, *monsieur le curé*, to testify if necessary that you are entirely guiltless of the death."

"In act, yes, but not in thought," groaned Ringfield in deepest anguish.

"The law cannot punish for sins of thought; we leave that to the Church. If, monsieur, you had but inquired further into what is known now in provincial annals as the Archambault affair, perhaps you might have been spared some misapprehension and much suffering. Mr. Henry Clairville left a wife."

"A wife!"

"You did not know that? Eh? A wife certainly, as well as a child. A daughter."

"But who——"

"I reciprocate your astonishment. The child's nurse is its mother; she, the empty-headed, the foolish Artémise. She was not of age, it is true, but there—it is done and who cares now, who will interfere or contest? The matter will drop out of sight completely in a few days; meanwhile, monsieur, I return as I came. The morning is fine and I shall enjoy my walk back to the station at Bois Clair. *Monsieur le curé*, you have my card. At any time in your *paroisse* should you have any more interesting family secrets to divulge, pray do not forget my address. *Allons!* I will walk with you to the scene of the tragedy, as we shall see it shortly described in the papers. As for you, monsieur, have courage and be tranquil. Rest,

monsieur, rest for awhile and leave these scenes of strife and unhappiness as soon as you can. I understand your case; my professional knowledge avails me here, but there are some who might not understand, and so make it hard for you."

The priest looked at Lalonde's card and then at Ringfield.

"Sinner, or worse," he cried, "I cannot, cannot stay. I must go where my duty calls me and see if I can be of use, see whether a man lives or has been shot down to death. Do nothing till I return; at least do nothing desperate. I will seek you as soon as I may. There will be a way out for you yet; I know a haven, a refuge. Only promise me; promise not to give up to remorse and contrition too deeply."

Ringfield stood pale and quiet and gave the promise, but Father Rielle and Lalonde ran along the road leading back from the fall until they reached a point where the river was sufficiently frozen to admit of walking across. Arrived at last among those who had left Poussette's a quarter of an hour before, they were just in time to view the body of the guide where it lay wedged between two large ice-covered boulders. In a few minutes Martin drew it forth; Dr. Renaud was speedily summoned, but life was surely quite extinct, and now the priest and physician met in consultation as to the task of breaking the tragic news to Miss Clairville. In a little while the whole of St. Ignace gathered upon the river-bank to discuss the accident in voluble and graphic French. It was seventeen years since any one had gone over the fall in such a manner and only the oldest present remembered it.

The body of the unfortunate Englishman was taken to Gagnon's establishment and placed in the room recently occupied by Ringfield, who went home with the priest and to whom he seemed to turn in ever-increasing confidence and respect.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WILL OF GOD

"I hope, said she, that Heaven
Will give me patience to endure the things
Which I behold at home...."

The glorious noonday sun was lighting up all the road to Clairville and making it possible for the peacock to revive his display of a glistening fan of feathers tipped with frosted filaments that were only rivalled by the pendant encrustations of the surrounding trees, and in a window of the manor Pauline was standing looking at the bird after showing Angeel the various little trifles she had brought with her. The child's infirmity did not prevent her from enjoying the good things of life; indeed, as frequently occurs in such cases, her senses were almost preternaturally acute and her faculties bright and sensitive in the extreme. In place of any system of general education, impossible during those sequestered years at Hawthorne in charge of her incapable mother, she had picked up one or two desultory talents which might yet stand her instead of mere bookishness; she was never without a pencil in her long white fingers and busied herself by the hour with little drawings and pictures of what she had seen in her limited experience, and some of these she had been exhibiting now to the person she held both in awe and adoration. Her kinship to this elegant, dark-haired lady had only recently been explained, and Pauline was trying to accustom herself to being addressed as "ma tante" and "tante chérie" with other endearing and embarrassing terms of regard.

But the time was going on and Miss Clairville turned from the window; a very little of Angeel was all she could stand just now.

"At this rate our beautiful view will soon disappear," she said, sitting down beside the basket-chair. "See then, *mon enfant*, how already the ice drips off the trees and all the pretty glass tubes are melting from the wires overhead! It is so warm too, like a day in spring. *Eh! bien*, I must go now back to my friends who are waiting for me. I have nothing more to show little girls. You have now the beads, the satin pincushion, and the little red coat that is called a Zouave jacket—see how gay! and you will find it warm and pleasant to wear when your kind *maman* makes it to fit you. And here too are the crayons to paint with and a new slate. *Soyez toujours bonne fille, p'tite*, and perhaps some day you will see your poor aunt again."

"Not my poor aunt! My rich, *rich* aunt."

"Ah—*tais toi, ma p'tite!* But you, too, are not poor any longer. That reminds me, I must have a little talk with your kind *maman*."

With some difficulty overcoming her dislike of the individual and aversion to the entire family arrangement, Pauline walked out to the hall which separated the faded *salon*, where she had been sitting, from the still untidy bedroom and called for Artémise. In a few moments the widow of Henry Clairville came in sight at the top of the staircase leading to the upper room, her bright black eyes dulled and frightened and her hands trembling visibly, for was not Mlle. Clairville her enemy, being not only a relative now by marriage but her late mistress, tyrant and superior? But the certainty of leaving the neighbourhood in a very few days put Pauline so much at her ease that she could afford to show her brightest and most amiable side to her sister-in-law, and thus she made a graceful if authoritative advance to the bottom of the staircase and stretched forth both her white hands, even going the length of imprinting a slow kiss on the other's sunburnt cheek. Few could at any time have resisted the mingled charms of so magnetic a personality, with something of the stage lingering in it, an audacity, an impulsiveness, rare among great ladies, and it must be remembered that in the limited society of St. Ignace, Miss Clairville passed as a great lady, and was one indeed in all minor traits. Then the touch of her skin was so soft, there always exhaled a delicate, elusive, but sweet perfume from her clothes and hair, and even in her mourning she had preserved the artistic touches necessary to please. No wonder that the poor Artémise should burst into weak tears and cry for pity and forgiveness as that soft kiss fell upon her cheek and those proud hands grasped her own.

"*Chut!*" cried Miss Clairville, drawing the other into the *salon*. "I am not angry with you, child! If Henry made you his wife it was very right of him and no one shall blame you nor complain. Only had I known—ah, well, it might not have made so much difference after all. You are going to be very comfortable here, Artémise, and I shall write to you from time to time—oh, have no fear! regularly, my dear! And Dr. Renaud and his Reverence are to see about selling Henry's books and papers, and it is possible that they bring you a nice sum of money. With that, there is one thing I should like you to do. Are you listening to me, Artémise?"

"*Bien, mademoiselle,*" answered Artémise, through her sobs. "I listen, I will do anything you say. I am sorry, *ma'amselle*. I should not be here, I know; it is you who should be here, here at Clairville, and be its mistress."

Still secure in her ideas of impending ease and happiness, and unaware of the course of tragic accident which was operating at that same moment against her visions of release and freedom and depriving her of the future she relied on, Pauline laughed musically at the notion.

"Oh, that—for me? No, thank you, my dear. In any case I had done with Clairville. If not marriage, then the stage. If not the stage—and there were times when it wearied and disgusted me, with the uneducated people one met and the vagaries of that man, Jean Rochelle—then a paid situation somewhere. The last—very difficult for me, a Clairville [and again she very nearly used the prefix, a tardy endorsing of Henry's pet project], and with my peculiar needs. To be sure, a religious house had offered me a good place, thanks to Father Rielle, at a good figure for Canada, but there are other countries, Artémise, there are other countries, and I am still young, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Mademoiselle will never be old. She has the air of a princess, the complexion—*d'une vierge!*"

Pauline was much amused and laughed once more with so thrilling a cadence in her rich voice that the child in the basket-chair clapped its hands and laughed too.

"So now, Artémise, try and understand what I tell you, for I shall not see you again before I leave, and these are my last wishes, to be faithfully carried out. I know the world, my dear, and I have had many trying, many sad experiences, and as you grow older, and I trust wiser, you will begin to realize what a charge Angeel will be. Are you attending, Artémise?"

"*Oui, oui, ma'amselle.*"

"Very well. I have told Dr. Renaud to come and see you often and advise you; he will be a kind of guardian for you both, and will attend you, as he did Henry, free of charge. The debts in the village and at Poussette's cannot possibly be paid, but I will speak to Maman Archambault about the future. The sale of Henry's effects will bring enough, I hope, to enable you to find, still through Dr. Renaud, some kind teacher for Angeel, and I wish, I particularly wish that this talent for drawing and painting shall be encouraged. Do you understand me?"

"*Oui, Ma'amselle.*" Pauline's bright eye had transfixed the wandering gaze of Artémise, who by almost superhuman efforts was trying to collect her thoughts and remember all these directions.

"She can never hope for companionship, nor—certainly not—for school advantages, nor yet marriage;

how then? She must amuse herself, fill in the time, be always occupied. Maman Archambault and you will sew for her, cook for her, and watch over her, and if at any time the money comes to an end— Artémise, listen, I tell you! Collect your wits and keep looking at me." For the girl's attention was clearly wandering now to something outside the house.

"*Oui, Mademoiselle, oui, oui.*"

Pauline stamped her foot in her annoyance.

"The creature is not following what I say!" she exclaimed. "Angeel—you can remember! You know what I have been saying. You are to learn to draw, perhaps to paint, to make little pictures, caricatures—oh, it will be so pleasant for you, and by and by people will pay you to do this for them. See, *petite*, you must be very wise for yourself, for the poor kind *maman* cannot be wise for you."

And Angeel's heavy head nodded sagely in swift discernment of this evident truth, for Artémise was now tired of the subject and of Pauline's endless farewells and preferred to look out of the window.

Rare sight on a December day, the peacock was still pacing to and fro, for the air was as mild and balmy as in June, and although the road ran water and the trees were rapidly losing their icy trappings the courtyard had been swept of snow and therefore remained almost dry. The beauty of the glissade was over. But Artémise looked only for a moment at the peacock. Along the road from the direction of the village were advancing two men, Dr. Renaud and the priest; behind them, a few steps, walked Martin, the Indian. They came near the stone fence, they stopped, all three, and seemed to confer, studying from time to time the front of the house. Absorbed in watching them, Artémise listened no longer at all to Miss Clairville's pronouncements and indeed very little was left to say. Pauline put on her gloves, slung her muff around her neck and submitted to a frantic embrace from the warm-hearted, lonely little girl, then turned to bid farewell to the mother.

"Two hours by my watch!" she cried gaily. "Which of us has been the gossip, the chatterbox, eh, Artémise! *Eh! bien*, I wish you a very sincere and a very long good-bye." Some emotion crept into her throat, into her voice. The child was her brother's. This poor girl, the mother, bore her own name, and she could not harden her heart entirely against the ill-starred couple, and why should she! She was bidding them both farewell, probably for ever, and the prospect so soothed her that she ejaculated, "Poor children!" and wiped away a tear.

"Take great care of yourself, Artémise, for Angeel's sake and mine, and for the sake of the name you bear and the place it has held in the country. But what are you looking at so intently? What is the matter out there, Artémise?"

At that instant the priest detached himself from the others and entering the domain walked slowly up to the door and knocked.

Pauline, not comprehending the nature of the visit, went herself and opened to Father Rielle. His long face told her nothing—was it not always long? The presence of Renaud and the guide, whom she also saw in the background, told her nothing; their being there was perhaps only a coincidence and they had not turned their faces as yet in her direction. Precisely as Crabbe had met his fate without seeing it arrive, although half an hour earlier he had foreseen death and prayed against it, she faced the priest with a smiling countenance, her tremors past, her conviction—that her lover was alive and well and able to take her away that instant if necessary—quite unaltered. Father Rielle had a difficult task to perform and he realized it.

Twice he essayed to speak and twice he stammered only unmeaning words. Pauline translated his incoherent and confused murmurs with characteristic and vigorous conceit; she believed him so anxious to make her a private farewell instead of a stereotyped adieu in public that she thought he had walked out from St. Ignace on purpose.

"It is all settled and therefore hopeless!" she began. "You cannot interfere or change me now."

The priest repeated the words after her. "Settled? Hopeless?" he uttered in a furtive manner as if anxious to escape.

"I mean my marriage," she went on gaily. "It has been discovered that I am no longer, if I was ever, a good Catholic, and there is consequently no hitch, no difficulty! I am supposed to be nothing at all, so we shall be just married in the one church, his church, you understand. And now you may absolve me, your Reverence, if you choose, for the last time."

"Mademoiselle," began the priest with a scared look at the bright face above him, "it is of that I must speak. Mademoiselle, this marriage, your marriage, it—it will not take place. It cannot take place."

The brilliant eyes hardened, the barred gate stood out upon her forehead.

"You think because I am a Catholic——"

"No, Mademoiselle, it has nothing to do with that. I came here to tell you, I was sent—there is something you must be told, that you must know—it is very difficult for me. Oh! Mademoiselle, I find it even more difficult than I thought, I must have help, I must ask some one else, I cannot—cannot."

His voice broke, stopped. The other men, turning at last towards the house, saw the priest's bowed head and Pauline's bright but angry face, and Dr. Renaud at once came to Father Rielle's rescue.

"Mademoiselle," he began, but Pauline, leaving the door open, rushed down the walk and met him at the gate. Her hands were pressed upon her bosom and her wild eyes sought his in alarm, for she knew now that something had happened, that something was wrong, although the mental picture of Crabbe lying dead or dying did not occur to her. She figured instead, some quibble, some legal matter, a money strait, a delay, but the doctor, quietly taking one of her hands in his, spoke as tenderly as was possible for a man of his bearing.

"Father Rielle is saddened, crushed. He cannot tell you, for he feels it too much. I feel it, too, but I must be brave and put away these feelings, this natural weakness. My dear lady, my dear Mademoiselle, your friend, your *fiancé*, the man you were about to marry, has met with a very bad accident."

"A bad accident."

"Yes, a very serious one. You must be prepared."

"He has been killed? Then I know who did it—I know."

"An accident, an accident only, mademoiselle, I assure you. But a very serious one, as I have said."

"Very serious? He—he—where is he? Take me to him. Oh! I knew something would happen, I am not surprised, I am not surprised. But it shall not prevent my seeing him, waiting on him. It shall not prevent our marriage."

The piteousness of her position softened the doctor's heart still further; he kept hold of her hand and modulated his voice.

"I am afraid it may. I am afraid you will have to prepare yourself for a great shock. Martin here—found him."

She did not yet understand.

"Martin, I say, was the one who found it."

The change of pronoun did not fully enlighten her.

"But he is alive! Yes, of course he is alive, only badly hurt. Then we can be married at once wherever he is. Any one can marry us—Father Rielle will tell you that. If we both wish, and we both believe in God, that is sufficient. Other things will not matter. Any one, any one can marry us. Take me to him."

Dr. Renaud, relinquishing her hand, stepped to the side of the priest and was followed by Martin. Artémise, always curious and flighty, ran out and overheard a word or two as the three men again conferred and fled back to the house, shrieking as she went.

"Dead! Dead! Another death! Within a week! You see I can count! You see I can count! Dead, drowned, and all in a week!"

The truth was now borne in upon Pauline, and she turned to meet the united gaze of the three men, reading confirmation of the awful news in their averted and sobered eyes. The shock told, her limbs shook, her sight left her, her throat grew sore and dry, but she did not faint.

"I am so cold," she said in English. And again in the same tongue. "I feel so cold. Why is it?"

Dr. Renaud hastened to her, supporting her with his arm.

"You have guessed?" he said hurriedly.

"I heard. Is it true?"

"Dear mademoiselle, I regret to say, quite true. He was carried over the Fall! there was no escape, no

hope. Come, let me take you back to the house for a moment where you may sit down." For she continued to tremble so violently that presently she sank upon the low fence, still pressing her hands over her heart. "Come, mademoiselle, let me take you into the house."

"Not that house! Not that house!"

"Faith—I know of no other! You cannot remain here."

"But I can go back, back to Poussette's."

"You must drive or be driven then. You cannot walk."

It was true. Pauline's breath was now very short, her articulation difficult, her throat contracted and relaxed by turns.

"It is true!" she gasped. "I cannot walk. I cannot even stand up. Oh, Dr. Renaud, this is more than weakness or fright. I am very sick, Doctor. Why cannot I stand up?"

Renaud tore off his coat, the priest and Martin did the same. Folding all three beside the fence where the snow was still thick and dry they laid Miss Clairville down and watched her. Martin fetched brandy while the entire Archambault family flocked out to see the sight, and stood gaping and chattering until rebuked by Father Rielle. The doctor knelt a long time at her side. Knowing her so well, he was secretly astonished at the weakness she had shown and he dealt with her most kindly. Tragedy had at last touched her too deeply; a latent tendency of the heart to abnormal action had suddenly developed under pressure of emotion and strain of shock, and he foresaw what she and the others did not—a long and tedious illness with periods of alarming collapse and weakness. For herself, so ill was she for the first time in her active life, she thought more about her own condition than of her loss; she imagined herself dying and following her lover on the same day to the grave. The image of Ringfield too was absent from her thoughts, which were now chiefly concentrated on her symptoms and sufferings.

"Am I not very ill?" she asked presently, after a little of the brandy had somewhat stilled the dreadful beating of her heart, the dreadful booming in her ears.

"Yes, mademoiselle. But you will recover."

"I have never been sick before."

"You are sure of that? Never had any nervous sensations, no tremors, no palpitations?"

"Ah, those! Yes, frequently, but I never thought much about them. They were part of my life, my emotional life, and natural to me. Shall I die?"

"I think not, mademoiselle. I believe not, but you may be ill for a while."

"Ill! For how long?"

"That I cannot tell you. You must have care and quiet, absolute quiet."

Pauline said no more. The distress of heart and nerves came on again; she moaned, being exceedingly troubled in spirit and her pallor was great.

"It is clear you must not remain out in the road any longer, mademoiselle. You must be put to bed and have warmth and rest and some kind woman to look after you. Ah! How we would welcome our good Mme. Poussette now, but she has flown, she has flown. So it will be Mme. Archambault perhaps, who knows all about sickness; has she not reared thirteen of her own, or fourteen, I forget which? Come, mademoiselle, we will lift you carefully. The door is open, the manor is hospitable and warm, its kitchen and larder well stocked, its cellars overflowing. Faith—you might do worse, and at Poussette's who would be there to nurse you?"

Pauline was too spent to utter the defiant objections that in health she would have hurled at the speaker. Tragedy indeed had touched her for once too deeply, and she submitted to be helped back into her old home, the house made hateful by a thousand painful associations of an unhappy youth, without uttering a single remonstrance. Some of her native courage knocked timidly at her frightened heart, clamouring to be reassured of days to come, of duties to be taken up, of life to be lived, for over and above her sense of cruel frustration and bereavement she dreaded death, not caring to die. The closing of the episode in which the guide figured so prominently appalled and stupefied her, yet her inherent vitality sprang up, already trying to assert itself.

"What a position is mine!" she thought, when a slight return of strength enabled her, leaning on the doctor's arm, to reach the room so long occupied by her brother. But her lips said nothing. There was no other place to put her; the salon did not contain a sofa, she could not be lodged with Artémise or Angeel, and meanwhile her weakness increased till she asked herself to be put to bed. Maman Archambault was sent for and in a few moments Pauline was lying on the lumpy tattered mattress which had served Henry Clairville for his last couch.

The course of tragic accident had brought her to this, and could she have foreseen the long, long weary time, first of illness, then of convalescence, and finally a physical change so marked as to unfit her for all but a narrow domestic life, it is likely that with her fierce and impatient temper she might have been tempted to end her existence. As one for whom the quest of happiness was ended as far as a prosperous marriage and removal from St. Ignace were involved, she now depended on herself again, and bitterly as she might mourn and lament the disappointment and chagrin which in a moment had permanently saddened her future, her grief and mortification would have been bitterer still could she have foreseen the long nights of half-delirious insomnia, the days of utter apathy and uselessness which stretched blankly before her.

Later that night, when she had tried to compose herself to sleep but without success, she called Maman Archambault into the room.

"Give me a light—for the love of God, a light!" she wailed, sitting up with all her dark hair pouring over the bed. "How dare you leave me without a light and I so ill!"

"But the doctor said——"

"What do I care what he said! In this room, in the dark, are all sorts of creatures, I hear them! Henry is here, or his ghost, and the Poussette woman is here, singing her silly songs, and rats are here, and cats, and worse things, moving and crawling all over me, in the walls, everywhere!"

The old woman set the lamp on the table. She was very angry.

"It is not so, mademoiselle. The room was cleaned. Maybe a ghost, *n'sais pas*. Maybe a cat or two. Yes, there's the white one now under your bed and her kittens! I'll drive them out."

Miss Clairville sank back and watched. So had her brother lain. So had the cats lain under the bed during his sickness. Maman Archambault went out to her *paillasse* in the hall, the night wore on, but without sleep for Pauline, and towards morning so intense were her sufferings that a messenger was sent for Dr. Renaud, who came as requested and was destined to come again and again for many a weary month.

CHAPTER XXX

THE QUEST OF HAPPINESS

"Ye wish for act and circumstance, that make
The individual known and understood;
And such as my best judgment could select
From what the place afforded, have been given."

The consistency of character or rather the defect of that virtue which had perhaps caused the aberration under which Ringfield had very nearly committed a crime without being, as we say, a depraved or vicious member of society, helped after the melancholy dénoûment of Crabbe's sudden death to determine a line of conduct for the future. His mind, restored to its natural bent, the study of the soul of man and its relation to the spiritual world, no longer dwelt on Miss Clairville nor on any other worldly matter, and therefore his next and as it proved final move was not so peculiar as seemed at first sight; he chose to enter a religious house and end his days there, as in the heat of remorseful and involuntary confession he had told Father Rielle. There was no chance for this last act of abnegation in his own community, hence the attention he now began to give to the personality and conversation of the priest, and hence the ultimate triumph of the Catholic Church. He still loved his own Church, but what was there for him within her narrow boundaries in the future? That Church said: "You must be good even if you are narrow, you must practise holiness, you must stand daily in the

fierce light of secular criticism, and you know you shall be found wanting," and at the voice he quailed, feeling his weakness. Then it was that Rome claimed him, showing him her unique position among the Churches. Never allowing or fostering modern doubt, immune against innovation, with myriad and labyrinthine channels of work for the different temperaments that entered within her gates, she presented at that time the spectacle of the only Church not divided against herself, and Ringfield suddenly yearned towards the cloister, the cross, the strange, hooded, cloaked men, the pale and grave, or red-cheeked merry nuns, the rich symbolism of even the simplest service, and he longed to hurl himself from the outside world to that beckoning world of monks and monastic quiet. As a Methodist, there was then no possible opening of the kind he wished for, whatever there may be at a later day, when hardly any religious body keeps itself to itself but is daily invaded by efforts and struggles, apings after something coveted and difficult of attainment, and when the term evangelical is a word signifying the loosening of all proper bonds and the admission of dangerous degrees and shades of doubtful moral unsteadfastness.

He felt an inward shame, a daily humiliation, when he considered his position; he had disgraced his own Church—would any other Church then receive him? Finally he sought the priest.

"If I am proved unworthy of the ministrations of the Church I was born and brought up in, am I not unworthy of yours? What is to become of me, for a God and a Church and a hiding-place I must have?"

And Father Rielle answered quietly:—

"There is no difficulty, my son. The sin, if sin it was, is past, and even if it were not, if it still lingered in you, we would take you in and help and restore you. We refuse no man, no woman; we do not question, we do not talk, we make no guesses, we are not curious. We will take you as we have taken, as our Church has taken, thousands of others—for the present and for the future—caring nothing for the past. We recognize that all men are not alike. Some will still preach, and you were one of these, but you will soon be content to preach no longer; for such as you it is but a weariness of the flesh, a disturber, a tempter. Others will still do parish work, like myself; regular work among the people that does not show, more or less successful, more or less uneventful. Others will pass in behind the high walls of a monastery and lead the ordered life prescribed for them; you are to be one of these and I foresee you gaining in self-restraint, calm, and growing in spiritual insight as you voluntarily forsake all worldly ties and sympathies and disappear from men for ever."

Ringfield moved uneasily. It seemed as if the priest took things too much for granted.

"How can I tell?" he faltered. "It attracts me, it moves before me night and day; the quiet hours told off by bells—are they not?"

"Yes, my brother."

"The cowled men working in the garden, at graves, I have heard. Is it not so?"

"Yes, yes, and at other things," said the priest indulgently.

"The prayers, said kneeling on the cold floors, the precision and solemnity of it all, the absence of all distractions. Oh, there surely I shall find rest unto my soul;—only if I joined, and found I could not stay, if the world again called me!"

Father Rielle closed his eyes and yawned with an indescribable air of mastery and insolence.

"There would always be your oath, my son. Do not forget that."

"My oath! An oath!"

"Certainly. There will be preparation necessary for many days before you can enter. But once a member, a sworn member of that community (I am thinking of our brothers at Oka), you have done with the world. You know the world no longer. It cannot call you."

"But if it did——"

"I say it cannot."

"But I might burst my bonds and seek it!"

"You might, but I do not think you will. Our Church can be loving and restful and harmonious and beautiful (thus the jargon of the heretic) but it can also be masterful and tyrannical and terrible, even cruel, so they say, although I do not go that far myself. And the call of it, the memory of it, the significance of it, the power and majesty and awfulness of it will draw you back. Oh! Have no fear,

monsieur! If I may charge myself with your conversion I will stake a great deal, a very great deal indeed, on the chances of your absolute and final surrender, with even temporary reversion an impossibility. You will decide quickly then, monsieur, although we do not ask for haste. We can wait."

And with emphasis in his thrilling voice the priest murmured again:
"The Church of Rome can always wait."

This statement and the other predictions concerning Ringfield were verified in course of time, for without seeing Pauline again he made instant preparation for the solemn and extraordinary step which closed his career in the world as we know it. Poor Pauline! The promise given to Henry Clairville on his death-bed was kept, it is needless to say, but only half kept, as she did not admit the child to her confidence, nor show it affection, and only kept at all because she could not help herself. Very gradually her strength returned after nearly two years of invalidism, and then the streaks of grey in her hair, her altered figure and expression, told part of her story to those who thought they knew all. Who at St. Ignace could enter into her feelings or offer her consolation?

"No one could be sorrier than I am for doing the young lady an injustice," was the loudly expressed opinion of Enderby. "Not but what there was grounds. There is, they tell me, often a more striking likeness between cousins, aunts, and such, than between mother and daughter and father and son. What I done any one might have done, and what I said I've long ago took back."

These remarks were made with characteristic magnanimity at the annual Hawthorne festival, a couple of years after the picnic tea at which Ringfield had assisted; held this year on 20th October, a warm sun flooded the valley, the women wore their lightest dresses, and Mrs. Abercorn was particularly gay in a flowered muslin, dating from the time of William the Fourth, with *honi soit qui mal y pense* on a blue ribbon worked into the design of the material; a garden hat was tied under her chin and a fur cape lay over her shoulders. No one was present from St. Ignace, but a good deal of talk might have been heard which signified that Miss Clairville was still the interesting central figure of the neighbourhood.

"She spends very little time, they tell me, with the child yonder, although it is her brother's own. The child sits in one room and her aunt in another; one draws pictures of every mortal thing, and some things not mortal, and the other looks out of window and rarely speaks. 'Tis a sad sight, they say, that members of one family are thus as far removed in feeling and ways of talking as—as—" the speaker paused in perplexity, vainly searching for a suitable and sufficiently strong simile.

"What can ye expect, ma'am?" said Enderby loftily, with his habitual consideration for the aristocracy. "Miss Clairville has been cruelly treated. Her brother to marry, to marry, look you, ma'am, with one of a menial family—'twas hard on one by nature so genteel, and the manner of her long sickness was not to be wondered at; had she only gone through the form of marriage with the one her heart was interested in and then lost him the next moment; I think I may say, without fear of exaggeration, she would then have had something to live for; she could have claimed his money. But no marriage, no man, no money—and in place of it all, sickness and poverty and the care of the unwelcome child—why, I've never known a harder thing!"

Crabbe's expectations had often been referred to among the villagers and had grown to astonishing dimensions in the minds of the simple, but the idea of Miss Clairville's share in them was new and afforded plenty of material for conjecture.

"Though what a lone thing like her would have done with all that money, I cannot think!" said Mrs. Enderby, who in company with Mrs. Abercorn had always harboured a suspicious and jealous dislike of the handsome and dashing Pauline.

"Cannot think!" echoed her husband. "Why, them's the ones to know what to do with any power of money coming to them. I'll warrant she has had plans enough, to keep the old place up, maybe, to dress herself and travel to foreign lands and never act no more. That would all take money, bless ye! Before I settled here, as some of ye know, I kept butcher shop in Blandville, a bigger place far, than this, all English and all so pleasant too, so—so equalizing like, that when parties did run into debt (and some were pretty deep in my books) you could almost forgive it to them, they were so plausible and polite about it. Eighty dollars a month was what one family took out in the best meats procurable and 'ow could you refuse it, knowing they were not going to run away owing it! 'Some day, Mr. Enderby,' they would say, 'you shall have it. You shall 'ave it, sir, some day.'"

"And did you ever get it?" said a thin woman, the Hawthorne milliner, edging to the front of the group in some anxiety. "Did you?"

"I did, ma'am. They owned considerable property round about there, and when they wanted anything

they would sell off a little, piece by piece. Just as they needed things they sold it, and by and by they came to me and my little account was paid off—honourable."

"All at once?" said the anxious woman, and Enderby nodded.

"What a state of things though!" remarked his wife. "I remember it quite distinctly. When they wanted to give a party they would sell off a piece of land, or when they needed a new carpet. 'Twould make me so nervous like."

"So it would me," said the milliner, "so it would me."

"Because you were not born to it. It's what you must expect from the gentry."

"Gentry? There's not many around here, but I recognize them when I meet them and the lady at the Manor House is one of them and I'm sorry for her, ma'am, in her disappointment and sickness."

"Who is that you are sorry for, Enderby?" said Mrs. Abercorn shrilly, having caught some of his remarks. "And how do you come to be talking about gentry of all things! My good man, if you are alluding to Miss Clairville, let me tell you she got just what she deserved."

And directly a chorus arose, chiefly from the feminine voices present:
"Just what she deserved. She got just what she deserved."

The state of affairs at Clairville was much as described; Pauline, during her long, dreary convalescence, gave no sign of temper or of suffering, but had apparently changed to a listless, weak, silent creature, occupied almost altogether with her own thoughts, by turns ignoring and passively tolerating her sister-in-law and the child. The latter grew brighter and stronger every day, and Dr. Renaud was of the opinion that she would live to womanhood and become physically fit in many ways, although retaining her deformity, and even achieve some professional success, as her talent for the pencil was of unusual order. Sadie Cordova and her children were firmly established at Poussette's, and this chronicle would be incomplete without a glance at the future of the good-hearted couple. Poussette, who had never meant any harm either in the case of Miss Clairville or Miss Cordova, appeared to be considerably impressed by the events of a certain winter, and after the arrival of Maisie and Jack treated them as his own and gave up the idea of a divorce. The pranks and escapades of two irresponsible, spoilt and active children kept him on the look-out a good deal of his time, and before very long he had decided that children after all were occasionally in the way, and like other good things on this earth, best had in moderation. Still, he never failed to treat them with all kindness, and towards their mother he remained to the last, upon hearing her story of two cruel husbands, one of whom might claim her any day, the very pattern of chivalrous honour. Who shall pronounce the final word as to happiness—the quest of it, the failure to find it, the rapture with which it sometimes announces itself attained! This is no morbid tale, after all, although we may have lingered at times over scenes neither pleasant nor cheerful, for behold!—Mme. Poussette is happy, in her hospital: Dr. Renaud is happy among his patients; Angeel is deliriously happy, with her crayons and paper; all the Archambaults are happy; Maisie and Jack, Poussette and Miss Cordova are all happy, happy in their rude health, with plenty of good food, fun and excitement; even Father Rielle is happy, in his work, having conquered his passion for Miss Clairville, and perhaps when a few years have flown and her health is restored the dweller against her will in the gloomy house of her fathers will emerge from her torpor and engage in some active work that will afford her restless spirit a measure of happiness. Often she cries in the dead of night:—

"Have I deserved this? Have I done wrong that I am punished like this?" and she answers herself, saying: "Yes, I did wrong, although not so wrong as others, and therefore am I punished." No other answer ever occurs to her, and all she knows is that she must work out her fate as best she can and try and be kinder to the child.

And Ringfield—is he happy, behind his high wall, listening for the solemn bell, kneeling on the cold floor, sleeping on the hard bed, working in the quiet garden? No one knows, for where he entered we do not enter, and if we did we should not be able to distinguish him from his brother monks, all clad alike, all silent, all concentrated on the duty of the moment.

The Church of Rome has him and she will keep him—we may be sure of that. *Ainsi soit-il.*

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